

The blooming of Flowers

Steve Armstrong on Kevin Greening, man of irony.

The problem with the Mike Flowers Pops version of 'Wonderwall' is that it proves us all to be far too ironic for our own good. How is it that 'Wonderwall' should be an acceptable cheesy hit while, say, Joe Dolce's 'Shaddap You Face' wasn't?

The man responsible for transforming the Mike Flowers Pops Orchestra from an amusing adjunct to Soho's dying lounge music scene into chart-topping sensations is Kevin Greening, Radio 1's weekend breakfast DJ.

Greening and his producer, Will Saunders, saw the boys at a gig and were much taken with their lounge-music covers of contemporary pop hits. They booked Mike Flowers to perform one cover a week on the early-morning show, the general consensus being that 'Wonderwall' should be first, followed by Black Grape's 'Kelly's Heroes'. Then Chris Evans heard 'Wonderwall', snapped it up for his Monday breakfast show and the rest, I believe it is traditional to say, is history.

In fact, the current version of 'Wonderwall' is the original cut for Greening's show, recorded in a Peckham bedroom one Thursday night. Sadly, Mike Flowers only managed to record one other song for the show - a version of the Beatles' 'Free As A Bird' complete with jingle bells - before the hectic schedule of pop stardom quilled him away.

Greening himself makes an unlikely star spotter. His show borders on the downright surreal, although Radio 1 recently clamped down on the more out-there elements. Characters like Raymond Sinclair, forever advertising bizarre products from the Blowchop range, and Eric the Gardener, whose macabre tales of village life were spread between three or four records, were consigned to the dustbin of history.



Greening soldiers on, however. He is ideally qualified to be a breakfast DJ since he hates getting up early in the morning. 'Before 10am I'm a terminal grouch,' he says. 'As a result the show is a bit of an anti-DJ show. It's quite deconstructionist, if I can use so pompous a word.'

Last week he stood in for Simon Mayo from 9am to 12am - the radio equivalent of John Peel presenting an edition of 'Cheggers Plays Pop' - and if he's not careful his Radio 1 career looks set to blossom. As to 'Wonderwall' and the state of the nation, Greening realises the conundrum of excessive irony. 'Somehow the song is not objectionable,' he says. 'I believe that's a tribute to the strength of Noel Gallagher's songwriting and the musicianship of the Mike Flowers Pops Orchestra. Having said that, I don't think we'll be hearing it on the radio in years to come.'