

February 20, 2005

Be a Junkie. Be a Thief. But Must You Date Kate Moss?



Yui Mok/European Pressphoto Agency

Chaos before the storm: the singer and guitarist Pete Doherty performing with his band Babyshambles in London in January.

By **DOMINIC PATTEN**

EVEN by the standards of the great rock-'n'-roll train wrecks, these have been rough times for Pete Doherty. Sure, the 25-year-old frontman of the band Babyshambles has had tremendous musical success. And sure, he has enjoyed the company - in parties and gossip columns - of the glamorous Kate Moss. But that was before he was arrested on Feb. 2 on charges of robbery and blackmail. After that he spent five very unglamorous days in the Pentonville Prison in London, suffering from a painful heroin withdrawal and wondering whether anyone could raise £150,000 (about \$280,230) for his bail.

No one could claim to be entirely surprised by his fall.

After gaining some attention in his teens as a poet, Mr. Doherty formed the Libertines with Carl Barat. With their street-urchin image and dark thrashy tunes of urban squalor, the band was described as "Britpop meets Baudelaire," and the two songwriters were compared to Morrissey and Johnny Marr of the Smiths. Their first album, "Up the Bracket," debuted in the British Top 20 in late 2002, and soon went platinum.

But in addition to his musical talent, Mr. Doherty demonstrated an effortless knack for getting himself in trouble. In June 2003 he entered the first of many stints in rehab, only to walk away days later. In September 2003 he spent more than a month in Wandsworth Prison for burglarizing Mr. Barat's apartment. Last year he received a four-month suspended sentence for carrying an illegal knife. The Libertine's self-titled second album - recorded with security guards in the studio to keep Mr. Doherty and Mr. Barat from coming to blows - went straight to No. 1 in Britain and won critical acclaim in the United States in September. But by then Mr. Doherty had been kicked out of the band.

Babyshambles, the band he started next, looked ready to repeat his former success. But it didn't quite work

out that way. During Babyshambles's British tour late last year, Mr. Doherty's drug use led to canceled shows, backstage overdoses, fights with hecklers and fan riots.

"It's become a self-perpetuating horror story, hasn't it?" said James Mullord, Mr. Doherty's remarkably candid - and by now unmistakably weary - manager. "The drugs, the missed shows, the law, all of it. That's not what it's supposed to be about. But it reached the point, even Pete says he sees it now, the point where it's just got completely out of hand."

In the last year hardly a week has gone by without another story of Mr. Doherty's excesses, and more recently his relationship with Ms. Moss, splashed across tabloids like The Daily Mirror or The Sun. Even the BBC current affairs show "Newsnight" has taken note of him. "The press here won't leave you alone," Mr. Mullord said, "but Pete does like the attention, it's true. He's his own worst enemy when it comes to getting the wrong type of attention."

This latest round of bad publicity started on Feb. 2, when the police were called to the Rookery Hotel in London. The filmmaker Max Carlish, who had sold photographs of Mr. Doherty smoking heroin to The Daily Mirror, claimed that the singer had demanded compensation. Mr. Carlish was taken to a hospital and treated for a black eye and other minor facial injuries; Mr. Doherty was charged with robbery and blackmail. Given his previous convictions, he faces a possible sentence of up to four years in prison.

On Feb. 8, with money cobbled together from record companies and publishing contracts, Mr. Mullord paid Mr. Doherty's bail, and placed him in a court-ordered rehabilitation clinic. Amid all this, Mr. Doherty found time for an interview with The Sun in which he explained that he thought he "was going to die" in prison, and how his love of Ms. Moss convinced him he had "to sort my life out."

His next court appearance, to determine whether the case goes to a jury trial, is scheduled for tomorrow.

Just off the phone with Mr. Doherty at the treatment center a few days ago, Mr. Mullord offered some good news: the physical addiction had been broken. "It's the psychological issues," he continued, "the stuff that makes him want to take the drugs, that'll have to be sorted out. I just want this thing over so we can get in the studio and record an album. The bail was all our money, everything."

What could it really mean to manage an unmanageable force like Pete Doherty? While celebrity gossip consumers puzzle over the latest slide in Mr. Doherty's fortunes, Mr. Mullord sounds as if he is still trying to figure out how it fell to him to answer the question. "Pete does breed chaos," he said. "It's just that simple. He's erratic, so as his manager, as his friend, I'm always adapting. But his family, his mum and his dad, are very private. They don't know a lot about drugs and that kind of life, so for them a lot of it right now is picking up the pieces."

Mr. Mullord knows whereof he speaks. He is still hopeful that Babyshambles, for whom he landed a contract with Rough Trade records and whose single, "Killamangiro," was a recent British Top 10 hit, will make it back to the studio.

Many listeners are hoping for the same thing. "I know fans of the Libertines," said Anthony Thornton, the reviews editor of the New Musical Express, "who saw Babyshambles live and started crying. And when I



Bruno Vincent/Getty Images

Pete Doherty leaves court in August after being charged with carrying an illegal knife.

asked them why, they said, 'Because they are so good,' and that meant the Libertines were really finished." (Which, as they recently announced, they indeed are.) And of course, all the controversy has only succeeded in endearing him to some of his most ardent admirers.

This year, Mr. Mullord said, the plan had been for Mr. Doherty to clean up his act. The band was going to rehearse some new songs and, in early February, go into Riverside Studios near Bath. Even the acrimonious departure of the drummer Gemma Clarke in mid-January couldn't derail the plan. "We lost," he said, "or got rid of Gemma, depending on who you ask, but we replaced her with a much better musician. The next part of the plan was we'd be mixing the next single, "Forever," right now, and then getting that out, finish up the album, get out on tour and, you know, do what we love doing, play some shows and see some interesting places."

But because Mr. Doherty was barely coherent for most of last year's Babyshambles tour, Mr. Mullord's refusal to give up hope marks him as one of pop music's great believers. He said he was confident, for example, that the charges relating to the Rookery Hotel were nonsense. As for the recent interview with *The Sun*, Mr. Mullord acknowledged that he approved it, but insisted that it was a matter of the band's basic economic necessity.

"But that's the last time we're getting involved in anything like that," he added. "You wouldn't believe the sort of money I've been offered for pictures of Pete and Kate - it's hundreds of thousands. And I've told Pete no, because from now on, once he's out of rehab and the case is hopefully thrown out of court, I've told him I don't want him to do any press for anything but his music."

Nonetheless, *The Sun* recently printed photos of the on-again-off-again lovers that were said to have come from the camera on Mr. Doherty's cellphone.

Just days from the appearance at Snaresbrook Crown Court that might determine Mr. Doherty's fate, Mr. Mullord sounded particularly wistful. "I love Pete," he said. As he spoke, another gossip report came on television in the background. "I just wish he would be a bit more compliant."