

# Pete Tong & Goldie

'Goldie was a handful – he bowled into the office for our first meeting with his pitbull terrier'

INTERVIEWS BY KATE BURT

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEAN GOLDSMITH

## Goldie 43

is a drum and bass musician and artist who lives in Hertfordshire, but 'commutes' to Montreal, where his partner lives

I met Pete in 1995 when he was an A&R guy at London Records. I thought A&R men were people paid far too much money by record companies to have long lunches, and I tarnished Pete with the same brush.

I practically barged into his office with a pit bull terrier, and said, "Sign [me] now." I'd taken [my track] "Timeless" [which is over 20 minutes long] to a few A&Rs and the test was when you would see them flinch after 10 minutes – but Pete sat through the whole thing, I thought, "That's the man for me."

I was pretty off the rails back then. I'd drive down to Pete's office, park in someone else's bay, ignore security asking me to move it, put my feet up on his desk... Everyone at the label would walk on eggshells. I was misunderstood – but Pete was my interface: he allowed me to be brought to the world in an acceptable way.

The first album [also called *Timeless*] went gold, though we missed out on the Mercury Prize. I was too crazy to even think about it – I was a young guy who'd been given a load of money – but Pete always said we'd been robbed.

I was the difficult one in the relationship. I could take his advice or leave it. Often I'd leave it and suffer for that. I've since learnt to listen to what someone else wants.

When it came to my second album, I think they'd been expecting *Timeless Part II*, but I'd made a record that was an hour long, with a 30-piece orchestra – and no one got it. We didn't really argue about it, I just said I wasn't prepared to change anything. Pete never said, "Don't do it," but he did say, "Mate, this isn't going to sell." Our friendship rolled away at that point, in quite a big way, and for about three years we didn't see each other at all.

Last summer we bumped into each other at an airport on the way to Ibiza, having both missed our flights. Typical Pete, it was no sweat. He got us rebooked, made sure I had money, looked after me. That was when he suggested working together again.

When I tell people, "That's the guy that signed me," they find it hard to believe. He was the quietest guy in the world. The first time I saw him on a magazine cover, I could not believe it – it was pretty weird seeing my old A&R man [in that position]. Now I'm really proud of him. He's become this

Club mates: Goldie (right) was given his first break by Tong; after years out of touch, Tong asked him to do artwork for his club night



great character. When I try to blow smoke up his arse he is very modest – he's always been that way. He's just a really nice guy.

## Pete Tong 47

is a Radio 1 DJ who lives in south-west London with his wife and ever-changing numbers of his six children and stepchildren. Goldie was being managed by someone I knew who said he was the next big thing, so I invited him in for a meeting. He bowled in the door and was, I suppose, kind of frightening: shaved head, loads of gold teeth, gold watches, gold chains, gold earrings, gold knuckle-dusters – and a pitbull.

The cliché is that someone will come in with a three-minute track, and before that's even up the A&R guy will be looking at his Rolodex. I wasn't like that, but to bring in a 20-minute track – then stare you out the whole time it's playing – it tells you a lot about what he was like. A handful. But it was just this amazing piece of music and something I immediately wanted to

do. We hadn't found our Massive Attack, our Soul II Soul, our success story. He caught me at the right time.

We launched him simultaneously all over the world and he made a lot of noise. We got on really well for a couple of years but then his fame started to exceed his success. He was in the papers every other day, with Meg Matthews and Noel Gallagher, Vinnie Jones, Björk or various supermodels. He started living it large.

He was like Icarus – he got too close to the sun but wasn't there for the right reasons. I wanted to pull him back and say, "Wait till you've sold a few million records because you will burn in this light." I felt helpless.

We spun into this classic second-album scenario where he was just too distracted and too mad to really deliver. We put him away in a residential studio. He went a bit bonkers and the album sounded like that.

Eventually we couldn't afford to keep him. How do you drop a friend from your label? It was difficult. Goldie took a few years to take any responsibility for it, and

went into a bit of a darker place – I lost track of him while he lost track of himself.

About four or five years ago, he came back up for air, a new kind of humbled Goldie. He's been through all that and come out a lot calmer – and he'd started painting again, while recuperating after a really bad water-skiing accident. I went along to the preview [of his exhibition] and I was blown away. I said, "I'm doing this thing in Ibiza – I need artwork for the club, and I want you to be involved."

It was great to be working together again. He's strong-minded but listens to me now. There's a mutual respect, which I find very comforting. He's a good mate, one of those blokes you can count on. I'm just happy that he's happy now. ■

*Pete Tong's new night Wonderland opened at Eden in Ibiza last month, and will run every Friday until September. 'Pete Tong Wonderland' the CD is out now on MOS. Goldie's compilation 'Watch The Ride' is out now on Harmless*