

As the playwright said to the rock violinist...

Tom Stoppard likes his rock'n'roll old-fashioned. Linzi, his bow-wielding daughter-in-law, didn't even know who he was. How do they feel about each other now?

Tom on Linzi

I grew up in a strait-laced, middle-class family. My mother and stepfather were not culturally adventurous, and they were comfortable with the values of middle-class morality. So, for me, rock was a glimpse of liberation. Not that I loaded it with great social significance at the time; that came later. It was just a very wonderful noise that changed my heartbeat. Music altered you in certain ways, some of which were shallow. It changed the way you dressed, the way you did your hair. It was instant. Bang. But the superficial was indicative of something deeper. I know it's deep, because years later, decades later, there are tracks that trigger the same response you had the first time. They move me as almost nothing else does. I can be considered a case of arrested development. I still play bands that came through when I was a lot younger, all the way back to 1960s pop occasionally, and on from there — the Beatles, obviously, and the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, U2, Guns N' Roses... you can see that I'm not really an explorer. I tend to latch on to bands after they become huge, sometimes long after.

More recently, I'd pick up on a band because I've read about it — the White Stripes, Arctic Monkeys — and that isn't exactly up-to-date either. Recently, I got slightly hooked on the Plastic People of the Universe, which is a sort of achievement for them and for me, because their lyrics are in Czech. The band is an offstage presence in my play *Rock'n'Roll*.

Mind you, understanding pop and rock lyrics isn't always a plus, and it gets worse when they're printed so you can read them. They can be pretty embarrassing, especially if you're a writer. This is a conundrum that I've never satisfied for myself. How do these seemingly flat words gain such latent emotion when sung to a guitar? But, of course, rock is full of great lyrics, too, and in a way being inarticulate is part of the energy. In 1965, my flatmate used to play the Who's *My Generation* on a loop, one of the most amazing singles ever. Roger Daltrey's stutter is one of the great accidents, manipulations or inspirations in the history of pop.

Most rock lyrics are simple, but rock can



Tom and Linzi Stoppard, shot at The Dorchester Hotel by Francesco Guidicini

to be at university rather than working out what sort of boy he was. He left after a term to roadie for a friend's band, later becoming an assistant in a recording studio. He's worked his way up from there, managing bands, songwriters and record producers. He called himself Will Lewis for a while when he joined the music business. I wasn't remotely hurt. He felt the name Stoppard clouded the picture; he was doing this by himself. Once he'd proved himself on his own terms, he didn't need to worry about being a Stoppard. It wasn't as though he was piggybacking.

One day it turned out he had a girlfriend who was a violinist. When I first heard Linzi perform, at a charity event, I had no idea what was coming. My idea of the violin in popular music was something like Stéphane Grappelli, or the string sections used to thicken the soup on a ballad. I'd never come across a rock violinist. I was thrilled. There was this girl in a beautiful gown with a violin-shaped thing, producing this incredibly loud sound. What I find different about Fuse — the duo Linzi formed with her fellow violinist Ben Lee, managed by Will — is that their music is a living thing. They sculpt influences and songs, melding them into something of their own. Yes, they are covers, but they're not covers in the 1960s sense. Fuse do a version of *Fix You*, the Coldplay song. After Will told me Linzi was keen for Chris Martin to hear Fuse's take on his work, I offered to employ a few connections. I had met Chris's wife, Gwyneth Paltrow, through working on *Shakespeare in Love*, so I arranged for Chris to get the album. Nothing has come of it so far, but we live in hope.

Will's mother, Miriam, once said that when you go to see a show, there is always someone in it you'd like to have dinner with afterwards. The nice thing about Fuse is that when I go to see them, it's my daughter-in-law I'd like to have dinner with.

Linzi on Tom

I met Will Stoppard, Tom's son, six years ago, when a friend asked him along to my birthday drinks. That friend joked to Will that he would get on with me so well, he'd probably end up marrying me. He did, six months later, in June 2004. He's also now the manager of my band, Fuse.

People have asked me whether I found it scary being drawn into the Stoppard clan. No, I didn't. It sounds awful, but I actually didn't know that much about either of Will's parents. In truth, I didn't have a clue. I knew his mum, Miriam, was some sort of agony

aunt, but that was all. And I have to confess that I thought Will's dad, Tom, was a poet. So, no, I wasn't fazed to start with. It was only really when friends and family started asking me what the Stoppard family were like that I twigged. I started to get nervous. It might sound like a nice problem to have, but being married into a high-achieving family like the Stoppards comes with its own sort of pressure. Everyone is at the top of their game — Miriam, Tom, Ed. Will's cousin is Oona King, the former MP for Bethnal Green and Bow. People outside the family expect so much of you.

My father was a professional poker player, with a highly mathematical brain. He played mostly in London, but also did poker tours. I used to go along to watch sometimes. It was fascinating. Dad, who's retired now, would play with all kinds of people — journalists, actors, showbiz types. If I inherited Dad's calculator genes, perhaps they helped me when I took up music. From the age of four, I learnt the violin with the Suzuki method, which is less regimented than other tuition. At eight, however, I went for more traditional teaching. By the time I got to my teens, though, I knew the classical thing wasn't for me. I was furtively going through my elder brother's rock albums when he was out. I followed real guitarist's guitarists, people like Joe Satriani, who's played with Brian May and Robert Fripp, and Steve Vai, who was in Whitesnake. My all-time favourite rock band is Guns 'N' Roses, a taste I share with Tom, who used Don't Cry in the West End production of *Rock'n'Roll*.

In my late teens, I was spotted by a couple of producers, Oliver Adams and Praga Khan, while doing session work. That led to me fronting a Belgian-American heavy metal group called *Tattoo of Pain*. Later, I was in *Babe Instinct*, who had a British Top 20 hit.

In my time, I've met some great people in music and entertainment, and I've met some real shockers, people who can't stop being rude and dismissive. The unpleasant ones are those who haven't quite made it, aren't going to make it or whose star is fading. The successful ones can usually afford to be nice.

Miriam tells the story of a girl who approached her in a lift and asked: "When did you first decide you wanted to be famous?" Of course, she never set out to do anything of the sort — she's a doctor and author. It's pathetic that teenagers think that's all there is and that their idea of a career progress is graduating from a minor reality TV show to the heights of *Big Brother*, with some hair extensions and a footballer boyfriend along the way. It can't go on like this. The next generation will turn against the whole contrived fame game and see it for the charade it is. That can't come too soon. ☐

Fuse's album, use, is released on May 29 on Edell; www.fuseofficial.com

be a literary turn-on nevertheless. When I write, I'll latch onto a track and play it to death. I don't actually write while playing music. I interrupt myself to listen, break off from pen and paper. It's as if the music releases a chemical that unclogs things, points you where you need to go.

I'm now an in-law of the rock world — twice. My son Ed's wife, Amie, is the daughter of Chris Stamp, the Who's manager in the 1960s. And in 2004, my son Will married Linzi, who plays rock violin. I was pleased as punch. Will went to Bristol University. God knows why. I blame myself for wishing him