

# Cash For Questions

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THIS MONTH:

ALT-J

WORDS PAUL STOKES PHOTOGRAPHS ADAM LAWRENCE

## The boffin rock trio open up about hanging with Miley Cyrus, being on David Cameron's iPod and why they're against dishwashers...

**W**ith over 200,000 of the oldest books in Ireland – including precious medieval manuscript The Book Of Kells – Trinity College Dublin's The Long Room is one of the world's most impressive libraries. It seems a fitting location for alt-J, here to play in the grounds as part of a summer series of gigs. Having met at Leeds University, the trio have over three albums – 2012's Mercury Prize-winning *An Awesome Wave*, 2014's chart-topping *This Is All Yours* and this year's *Relaxer* – specialising in music of a more cerebral bent. A shape-shifting hybrid of indie, folk and electronica that takes in both Miley Cyrus samples and field recordings made at Ely Cathedral, their music has ranged in subject from French poet Alfred de Musset to the effects of watching John Hurt's chest burst open in *Alien*.

"I know being photographed in a library isn't a good place to play down our bookish image," jokes singer and keyboard player Gus Unger-Hamilton, flicking through books alongside drummer Thom Sonny Green and guitarist Joe Newman. "But I am wearing a leather jacket."

Perhaps a grilling from the Q readers might uncover some previously hidden rock'n'roll bad behaviour, then...

**People have criticised alt-J for being nerdy. To dispel that, tell us the worst trouble you got in at school.**

**Luke Goodachre, Stowmarket**

**Joe Newman:** I wasn't a troublemaker at all. I didn't like getting told off.

**Gus Unger-Hamilton:** I copied my friend's homework and denied it. It was a shitty thing to do. My friend and I were no good at Bach

Chorales in music so we got into our friend Josh's account and emailed ourselves his homework. We got busted. [Pauses] Yes, I am aware that has done nothing to dispel our nerdy image.

**When you were still called Δ what would you say if people asked you what your band was called?**

**Phil Saffer, Teignmouth**

**GU-H:** Technically we are still called Δ, I think. It was written as the "delta" sign and pronounced "alt-J" – in practice that was a bit stupid. We once played Kendal Calling and they mistakenly listed us as "The Triangle Band", which we were annoyed about, but then they trebled our fee, so we got £150!

**JN:** We were a bit naive with a lot of things early on, like not showing our faces in photos. Then we realised as we got a bit more popular we didn't want to be the band who were always being difficult.

**You said you'd spend your Mercury Prize money on taking your parents out for a slap-up meal after winning. Did you or are they all still waiting?**

**Paul Wright, via Q Mail**

**GU-H:** [Groans] They're still waiting. We're just trying to choose the right restaurant. It was all a bit of whirlwind after [the Awards]; we didn't get time to do anything except play gigs. I have taken them out since, though...

**Have you ever been recognised in public? Janet Felstead, Selsey**

**JN:** Ninety-nine per cent of the time we can walk through large crowds and it doesn't happen. I once had a weird encounter with some dude in a café near where I live who said: "It's Rhys, isn't it?" I looked up the names of the guys in *Royal Blood*, because I look like both of them, but neither of them are Rhys. Maybe, it was *The Horrors*. I don't think he really knew who I was.

**I heard an interview where you said you wanted your music to be like "chewing gum that doesn't lose its flavour." That's not very ambitious, is it?**

**Amy Tilson, Broughton**

**GU-H:** Well, Willy Wonka made a lot of money from chewing gum that didn't lose its flavour. I supposed it sounds quite prosaic when you put it like that. The idea was it was something you didn't get bored of. You keep chewing and it keeps tantalising your taste buds.

**Gus owns Dandy, a café in London. What's the worst café you've been to?**

**Eva Peters, via Q Mail**

**JN:** My worst café experience was at one I used to work in. Someone who started the same day as me got fired that lunchtime >>



"And the award for estate agents of the year goes to..." Alt-J (with ex-member Gwil Sainsbury, far right) win the Mercury Prize in 2012.

**“We played Kendal Calling and they mistakenly listed us as ‘The Triangle Band’.”**

**Gus Unger-Hamilton**



“Books? How quaint...” alt-J (from left, Gus Unger-Hamilton, Thom Sonny Green, Joe Newman), Trinity College Dublin, 11 July, 2017.