

LABIRINTH

Forget Simon Cowell, his rapper protege tells *loaded* about his restaurant empire, making music and why he's still loyal to *Pro Evo*

"I would say it's better than Jamie Oliver's", Labrinth proudly tells *loaded* about the London restaurant he owns, "but I wouldn't go as far as Gordon Ramsay." The record producer, plucked from obscurity by Simon Cowell, seems more keen to tell us about his skills as a food guru than his new album, but has clearly picked up some of his mentor's skills of self promotion – and savage put downs. "I have been to one of Jamie's restaurants... but I honestly felt it was a bit bland." Ouch.

You join *loaded* in a North London pub weeks after Labrinth's debut album, *Electronic Earth*, peaked at No. 2 in the album charts and some 18 months after his debut collaboration *Pass Out*, with pal Tinie Tempah, reached No. 2. He is also the only artist signed to the *X Factor* boss' label Syco to have not come from one of his talent shows, and his little restaurant side business, Mosaica, is making quite the name for itself – even if Lab is its biggest fan.

tasty

"Everybody that has been there comes back and keeps coming back," he insists. "If you can take somebody once and they go there for the rest of your life it's a good restaurant. There is European cuisine, risotto, halibut, venison, fish dishes, meat dishes... it is the flavour that gets everybody! I had a big party there and we had Gary Newman, Tinie Tempah and Emeli Sande turn up."

The 23-year-old, real name Timothy McKenzie [no wonder he changed it – Ed], has nine brothers and sisters and between causing havoc they were playing music. His new single, a cover of *Express Yourself*, was a song they used to play together while he

was growing up. "I produced the record because my brothers and sisters are all musicians, and when we were younger it was one of the songs we used to rehearse. My brother would be on the bass, I would be on guitar, my other brother would be on the piano and we'd just jam out these different types of tunes. It was like a little tribute." *loaded* wonders

how Labrinth coped growing up with Britain's answer to *The Waltons*. "It was crazy!" laughs Lab. "My mum is probably so happy because it's like music helped bring us up because my dad wasn't there when I was younger. I think it kept us cool. Nine kids is a lot of drama. You had your squabbles, you had your fights – people not wanting to wash their dishes or clean up the house. It was the norm with any family but we never got to that point where there were major fights... there was too much music going on. My brother used to play for Daniel Bedingfield, Jamiroquai, and loads of other artists. He taught me the way before I got in there. He used to take me for rehearsals and gigs and to see up-and-coming artists. It has been healthy to have people around me who have done it before."

pro evo

There is one point though that gets us very angry. "I'm a computer game nut. Music is a hobby and a job. I'm playing *Marvel vs Capcom* at the moment – a sick game – and I love *God Of War* too." But what about *Fifa*, the only game we play in the office? "I don't mind it but I'm still stuck on *Pro Evo!*" *loaded* reminds him that it's not 2006 anymore. "It's terrible, I should bow my head in shame. It was getting really bad with *Pro*, I can't lie they did spoil it. Maybe I need to become a *Fifa* believer like you."

We remind him that is not the kind of loyalty Cowell would show. "He's not a big softy... but he's not a prick in real life," Lab insists. "People think he's in your face and blunt. But Simon is honest about what he's into and what he likes. He's not as harsh as people think either. His comments on *X Factor* could end someone's life! He could cut someone with a knife with one of those sentences."

judge

But suddenly the roles could be reversed. So impressed is Simon with Labrinth's talent-spotting skills, he's handed him his own record label, Odd Child, to hire his own acts. "I've signed a singer called Etta Bond and producer called Raf Riley and they've come together to form a group called Emergency Room. I want anyone that is a free spirit and is making music. It doesn't matter what their style is, if it's healthy, solid, fresh music then I'm ready to sign it. Sometimes people come to me or I see them out and about and I can see something. I'm picking carefully because I don't want to take on too much. I'm doing it one at a time and seeing how it goes." Forget dancing dogs, Welsh choirs or fat opera singers – maybe Lab could give his boss a lesson in talent spotting. ■ *loaded*

Labrinth's new album, *Electronic Earth*, is out now. His new single, *Express Yourself*, is also out now.

"Simon Cowell's no softie, but he's not a prick in real life"

