

"I'm still serving," begins Ian. "Jon only left about eighteen months ago. We were both in Iraq in 2008. We used to go out on patrols and chat about bands that we loved. Jon had been in bands. I'd just been asked to join a band, and when we left Iraq and went our separate ways, we stayed in touch. In 2017 we were watching Guns N' Roses in Slain Castle in Dublin. We realised both our bands had fallen apart, so I just said, 'do you want to put all our songs together, and we'll make one band, Gallaher's Green?' Jon continues, "Ian's an indie kid. I love classic rock, Americana, and I'm a massive punk fan. Our drummer's got an eclectic mix, including Queen, Mike Oldfield, and XTC." "It's amazing how it all melts together," Ian comments. "Everyone seems to have a different opinion on who we sound like but nobody've been offended by yet."

Against the backdrop of those international conflict zones, and associated pressures, music is a unifier that brings good memories and camaraderie, as Jon explains: "I took a guitar to Afghanistan and started writing. Even if you're in zones like that, like I served in Cyprus, we were in cover bands. There's a lot of musicality within the forces." Ian agrees, "I was in Afghanistan two years ago and I managed to get my hands on a guitar, through the church that was set up. It was a tent, but it was a church. I started a band in the Falklands as well. People love live music wherever they go, even if it's just one guy with a guitar."

With their new musical project now in play, all that was needed was a name, and the inspiration came from Jon's Belfast homeland, rather than his colleague's surname, as he explains: "There was an old cigarette company in Northern Ireland, Gallaher's Tobacco Company, and they used to have two brands: Gallaher's Deluxe Blue and Gallaher's Deluxe Green. You'd hear old guys ordering twenty Gallaher's Green; it just stuck in my head." Ian laughs, "He told me he was naming the band after me. I just thought he'd spelt it wrong and I didn't have the heart to tell him."

The new album *'Dare To Dream'* is a high energy, melodic affair and captures the rockier, punkier side of their personalities. The melodies are

joyous and uplifting, but delve within and the subject matter captures some of the grittier experiences of life, as Ian shares: "People think our songs are really upbeat, and we sometimes ruin that when we start talking about what they're about, but we speed it up and put some nice melody in it so nobody ever notices. We get through our problems sometimes just by picking up the guitar and playing it. Where the words come from, you can't control it sometimes; it's whatever's going on inside your head. One of my biggest gripes about the music industry today is people are singing about absolutely nothing. At least we're coming from a place where there's some substance." Jon elaborates, "I think it's all those aspects of the human condition, because we're talking about grief, relationship breakdown, losing close family members, going to war, lost love. But people want to connect with it. On our first album, we've got a song called *'Feel So Real'* which was written about a very close friend I lost, more like a brother, but it's about Ian's sister as well. We were both going through the grieving process at the same time, and this song came out of it, but we didn't want it to be a melancholy. We wanted to be a celebration of their lives."

The album explores a multitude of darker subjects, including the song *'Memphis'* which the band released as a charity single to raise money for the RAF Benevolent Fund. The video also captures the realities of war, with footage of their friend Michael, who was injured on duty, as Jon passionately explains: "We got permission to use actual footage of our friend Michael, who was injured and lost his leg. He took part in a TV documentary, and it followed one of the commando brigades that Mick was attached to, and the footage of him lying on the stretcher and being taken away, that's real time. I was very nervous sending Michael the song in case it triggered any PTSD, but he said it's really helped him and his whole family. The money we raised helped two World War veterans with their winter fuel payments."

Listening to the album in depth, the subject matter is deeply personal in places and autobiographical in others. At one point Jon even suggested that anyone talking to him long enough might become a topic of his lyrics. That expression is never more evident than in the album title and track *'Dare To Dream'*. That phrase takes on a life of its own, and is symbolic of Ian and Jon's personal vision for Gallaher's Green. It also captures another set of personal experiences.

Jon begins, "We're a bit older, but we made this happen and dared to do it. It's quite symbolic of that, but the song itself is about my son and also Ian's young nephew. Both lads have had some knocks." Ian continues, "My nephew was born nearly three months early; the size of your hand. Nobody really thought he was going to survive, but he pulled through and now he's a sixteen-year-old strapping lad who I wouldn't want to punch off. I remember thinking, God, will he make it through? He's defeated all odds."

With two albums under their belt in quick succession, the future looks bright for the band. There's talk of a third album on the way, as well as live shows. Debut album *'Lucky 13'* will also be getting something of a refresh.

"Our lead guitarist has just left, so we've gone back to a three piece," Jon highlights. "We've got fifteen songs we're demoing, and it's varied. We've got *'Bloodshot Eyes'* on piano, with some lovely female harmonies. We've got punky numbers; one called *'Bad Apples'* which has a bit of a Green Day feel. I think we've got some bluesy rock numbers again, some more ballads, but a varied album with a touch of Americana in there. As for other stuff, we're waiting for confirmation on a couple of festivals, and we're also remixing and remastering the first album. We're going to get the guy that produced *'Dare To Dream'* to look at that. We're going to be re-releasing some singles and a deluxe remastered version. And we'll be out playing as much as we can."

*'Dare To Dream'* is out now: visit [www.gallahersgreen.com](http://www.gallahersgreen.com) to find out more.

When two RAF colleagues met on active duty in Iraq fifteen years ago, their mutual love of music formed a lifelong friendship, but it was not until 2017 that they would create Gallaher's Green. With their second album *'Dare To Dream'* exploring the human condition across a diverse expression of musical genres, the band are riding the crest of a wave.

Jon Olphert and Ian Gallagher  
talk to Mark Lacey



**GALLAHERS GREEN**