

On the Set of Judd Apatow's New Comedy With Graham Parker and the Rumour

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Graham Parker

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On an early September morning at the Belasco Theatre in downtown Los Angeles, actor Paul Rudd has been introducing the same band for the past three hours. "For the first time in over 30 years, Graham Parker and the Rumour!" he says, each time with real enthusiasm. And each time, the band launches into classics like "Local Girls," "Soul Shoes" and "Nobody Hurt You," as well as songs like "Long Emotional Ride" and "Stop Cryin' About the Rain," off Parker and the Rumour's forthcoming reunion album, *Three Chords Good*.

Directly in front of Rudd are more than 100 extras (full disclosure: I had a very small cameo in a scene on another day) who are being paid to play fans of Parker and the Rumour, an acclaimed yet never massively popular band perhaps best remembered for 1979's classic *Squeezing Out Sparks* album. They've gathered at the behest of longtime Parker fan Judd

Apatow, who's shooting a still-untitled film to be released late next year that's a spinoff of his 2007 smash *Knocked Up*. In that film, Rudd plays Pete, an A&R man (though his professional life is only briefly touched on) married to Leslie Mann's Debbie. This new comedy, which also stars Albert Brooks, Megan Fox and Jason Segel, focuses on Pete and Debbie's marriage as the characters struggle with assorted mid-life crises, as well as with Pete's job as the founder of an independent record company called Unfiltered Records that improbably ends up banking on Graham Parker and the Rumour to save its bottom line.

Parker is taking his typecasting in stride. "As far as I can tell, I'm basically a metaphor for abject failure in Judd's movie – and I couldn't be more thrilled," Parker tells *Rolling Stone* during a lunch break. "This whole experience is proof of that old show business rule I did not think would ever apply to me – that if you stick around long enough, anything can happen. You can't write this stuff. Except Judd did."

Apatow says he's been a Parker fan since the late Seventies or early Eighties. "I always loved his music and appreciated his sense of humor," he says. "A lot of Graham's early songs were witty and a little mean, and that's usually a way in for me. We needed someone who's amazing – but also struggling to sell records. On top of that, we needed someone who has a great sense of humor. And Graham has been very funny as an actor – as I somehow knew he would be – and when he plays, he's better than ever. So now I actually get to see Graham Parker and the Rumour play together for my first time ever. And because it's my movie, I even get to help choose the set list."

The music business is more than just a metaphor for Apatow – his grandfather, Bob Shad, was a jazz producer who worked with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Diana Washington, and produced the first Janis Joplin record. "I saw the ups and downs of my grandfather having this eclectic label – Mainstream Records – that put out Ted Nugent and the Amboy Dukes, and Sarah Vaughan. He was a funny Jewish kid from New York who loved jazz. He busted his ass, and had a label. He died when I was in high school, but he inspired me that you could start your own thing and create your own destiny."

Apatow says he felt a sense of destiny when he took Parker out to lunch and the musician mentioned he was reuniting with the Rumour and producing a new album for the band with his own money. "I didn't even tell him I was thinking about casting him in this big part in the movie," Apatow explains. "I just said maybe we could use a song, but it was kind of a secret casting session."

Rudd – a confessed music geek who wears his own vintage Bob Mould, Pavement and Camper Van Beethoven T-shirts in the film – says he'd "been aware of Graham for years, and owned a few albums," though he wasn't the superfan that Apatow was. "This couldn't happen to a nicer group of guys," says Rudd, adding that he was struck that Rumour bassist Andrew Bodnar had to get time off from his job as a librarian to film the movie. "When Judd was talking about this movie and Graham Parker to be the musician, I thought that was interesting because my take is that he's someone that a lot of people don't actually know. There are even those who think he's Gram Parsons. I've pushed for a line about that in the movie – like someone telling Graham, 'Oh I'm a fan – I love the Flying Burrito Brothers.' But that's okay, because when they see this movie, they're going to discover who Graham is and that's he's fantastic."

Fortunately, the feeling is mutual. "I do think Paul Rudd is going to end up being my best A&R man yet," Parker says with a smile. "I think I may end up destroying his record company, but you know I've brought record companies to their knees before. And there's always the cutting room floor."