

saturday

Jazz special
Juliette Gréco on Miles Davis; George Clooney's favourite trumpeter; plus Bird, Billie and Satchmo



Tim Minchin
Interview, page 3
Comedy's oddball musical maestro on Dawkins and Dahl



review

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& ideas

What's up with twentysomethings?

They stay at college for longer, leave home later and struggle to find jobs: they are the Harry Potter generation. But will extending adolescence blight their adult lives? Alex Clark finds out

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ince his first appearance 13 years ago, Harry Potter has loomed over a generation. In 1997, the year that Tony Blair took office and Diana, Princess of Wales, died, he was 11 years old — and so were legions of his devotees. The boy wizard, whose final adventures hit the screen next week in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I*, is still a teenager, but is there a sense in which his fans, now 24, are also finding it hard to grow up? With many young adults still living at home or remaining in education, sociologists have argued that the age of maturity is changing fast; that the current crop of twentysomethings is stuck.

Any attempt to define a generation will fail. But how much do we know about the people who made Harry Potter a superstar? Are they the überconfident, sex-savvy go-getters of advertising fantasy, or a cuckoo generation destined to remain in the family nest, devoid of career prospects or financial stability, sold out by the grown-ups who frittered away their future?

We can surely take it for granted that this group of people are more technologically literate and enthusiastic than any that has preceded them; recent data from the Office for National Statistics suggests that only 1 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds has never accessed the internet. But it's also common sense to assume that, while young people might revel in how easy it is to communicate with one another, they are likely to feel less confident in the current economic climate about their ability to access and afford education, to enter the job market, to get a foothold on the property ladder and to rely on the State to provide a safety net in times of trouble.

The Prince's Trust, which recently celebrated 20 years of its Team programme with a "Make A Change" week, simultaneously published research that pointed to increasing levels of isolation among young people, particularly those not in employ-



THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT? Twentysomethings Emily Batts, Elleeshea Brown, Raphael Blake, Michael Donkor and Thomas Viney are typical of the Harry Potter generation who are trying to carve out a living

ment, education or training (Neets). Next Wednesday the National Union of Students (NUS) and the University and College Union (UCU) will join forces in a national protest against the "savage and deeply painful" funding cuts and higher tuition fees. In the words of Aaron Porter,

Are they go-getters of advertising fantasy or a cuckoo generation destined to remain in the family nest?

the president of the NUS: "This is a spending review that looks an entire generation in the eye and says 'you're on your own'."

In short, young people are both more connected and more alone than ever. On one side they are awash in a sea of celebrity culture, in which young people such as Wayne Rooney can be materially rewarded beyond anybody's wildest dreams for the possession of a single skill, and the less gifted are briefly lauded on a television talent show before a long descent into obscurity. On the other, economic, environmental and geopolitical convulsions create a sense of collective catastrophe that seems to deflate the very idea of individual aspiration. So how does that make them feel?

At the offices of Livity, a Brixton-based

marketing company that exists, says Sam Conniff, its co-founder, "to benefit the lives of young people, particularly disadvantaged young people", you would be forgiven for thinking that the younger generation didn't have a care in the world. In a light-filled, wood-floored loft, with Warhol's Marilyn prints and banks of Apple Macs, a youthful team puts the finishing touches to *Live*, a quarterly magazine, while another group readies itself to go to Westminster to question Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister. Having flown in from Mexico, where he was promoting *Dubplate Drama*, Livity's ground-breaking interactive TV series, and about to head off to Bangladesh for discussions on microfinance, Conniff is tired but hardly world-weary as he

enthuses about the apprenticeships, mentoring schemes and youth-orientated campaigns that he and his team have pioneered over the past nine years.

But there is a spark of anger when he describes the growing number of kids failed by an education system that is all too quick to label them as troublemakers, to distort the reality of their lives and to consign them to an uncertain future. Livity aims to break the mould by opening its doors to 800 people a year, half of them from challenging backgrounds, with the aim of placing at least 200 in full-time employment or education. "Diversity," argues Conniff, "breeds innovation, and in this country we do not encourage diversity. We end up replicating ourselves."

The group of teenagers and twentysomethings that I meet have diverse backgrounds and interests, but they are united in one thing: Livity has given them opportunities that they are unlikely to have otherwise come across in their everyday lives. There's Paul, who spent nine months on the Music4Good scheme and is now setting up his own marketing consultancy; Shane, who tells me that the key to his new business, a cleaning company called EcoBoothe, are his fondness for bicarbonate of soda and his determination to pay his staff a living wage; and Bridget, whose involvement in international development projects has increased her awareness of global events. Elleeshea, on a placement at

Continued on page 2

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What's up, Harry Potter generation?

◀ **Continued from page 1**
Livvy from her Prince's Trust course, has written a piece about modern female identity; she juggles her work with looking after her three-year-old daughter. From Raphael, who spent a year at Sony on a placement and who tells me that "if there's an opportunity happening here, you can always get involved", to Albert, a creative writing enthusiast, who finds that "talking to people makes me fulfilled", these are youngsters bursting with commitment and determined to grab whatever is on offer. When I ask them what's worrying them most, they eventually settle on the fear that their travel costs are about to soar.

Livvy, of course, cannot accommodate every young person who wanders through its doors, and Conniff is clear that more similar organisations are needed. His sentiments are likely to be echoed by many, particularly those in the numerous agencies

Heroes and villains

Heroes

Steve Jobs
Julian Assange
Lady Gaga
Tinchy Stryder



Villains

Tony Blair
BP
Nick Clegg



Love

TED lectures
The Apprentice
Online dating
HBO boxed sets

Hate

The renewal of Trident
Unemployment
Themselves

focused on helping young people in difficult circumstances. Mel Smith, who works for the Youth Support Service as part of the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance, which was established to provide support for young adults in the criminal justice system, explains how some of the people she works with find that their age makes them even more vulnerable.

"It's a very difficult time, the very early twenties, because of the way that a lot of the support is set up," she says. "As they reach age milestones, they move from youth to adult services; they may find themselves moved to a different service just because they've had a birthday."

Many of those whom Smith encounters

'We're well informed because of different ways of accessing information but we don't feel powerful'

find that their problems are exacerbated by their circumstances — poverty, mental illness, drugs or a disrupted education — and that, against a backdrop of economic crisis and funding cuts, breaking down the barriers to social inclusion becomes even harder. But there is a wider cultural question: is there something about today's twentysomethings that — even in the absence of extreme social problems — finds it difficult to grow up?

When Thomas Viney, a 27-year-old graduate living in London, read a lengthy article in *The New York Times* arguing that the delayed adulthood experienced by many twentysomethings constituted a new developmental life stage, he felt the need

Twentysomethings are . . .

More likely to

- Campaign for Obama
- Tweet, text and e-mail
- Tweet David Lynch/Armando Iannucci their CV
- Run a start-up from their parents' spare room
- Watch a streamed film on their laptop
- Read the dailybeast, boingboing and platform.com
- Wear charity-shop clothes
- Find a flat to rent on gumtree
- Use a canvas bag
- Follow an author on twitter
- Vote for Aiden Grimshaw on *The X Factor*

Less likely to

- Join a British political party
- Call their friends
- Work as a runner
- Join a City graduate scheme
- Visit a multiplex
- Read broadsheets
- Wear "gap year" clothes
- Find a flat to rent through an estate agent
- Use a plastic bag
- Read a book
- Vote for Wagner on *The X Factor*



YOUNG AND RESTLESS The staff of Livity, a socially responsible youth communications agency in Brixton, South London, and below, students last week demonstrating against the Government's spending cuts

to respond. In "*Grow the F*** Up!*", a piece on Platform, the youth culture website, where he is an associate editor, he asked his readers: "Are you in your twenties?" If the answer is yes, he continued, "then you are almost certainly a dickhead." He wrote that by the time his parents were his age, they had established a household, had children, attained and maintained proper jobs, kick-started savings schemes and pension plans and, more generally, had learnt to look after themselves. By contrast, he had amassed little of any tangible value and his life, punctuated by amusing but random interactions with his mates, seemed more defined by aimlessness than purpose. When a girlfriend announced that she thought she was pregnant (she wasn't), the cold wave of responsibility was enough to sweep him completely off his feet.

Viney believes that his experience is not simply a typical twentysomething scenario but indicative of a far more damaging malaise. "A lot of people in my generation," he tells me, "were brought up to think that they were very special and that they had something to contribute to the world — not through hard work, but through the arts. I think we're lost; that we no longer think it's OK to knuckle down and apply ourselves, because that isn't the life that we were promised." His upbringing was middle class, rather than wealthy, but he feels that it took place against the backdrop of what he calls a time of "biblical" plenty and abundance. He also says that his generation has been "encouraged to enjoy ourselves", that there's something wrong with you if you don't and that there will be few consequences to a life of hedonism. As a result, he and his friends, with a couple of exceptions, have barely a serious job or stable domestic environment among them.



Viney himself, though, is taking a few tentative steps towards serious adulthood, working in publishing and writing in his spare time. What he has learnt, he says, is that for all that his parents had to sacrifice, they gained far more than they lost.

But if Thomas Viney's life didn't extend far beyond his sofa for much of his twenties, there are others for whom the world has become an arena of possibilities. Emily Batts, a 24-year-old who followed her degree in film and theatre with a variety of jobs, including theatre management and advertising, knew that she hadn't found quite the right path. A keen photographer, she landed a job with P&O, taking pictures on cruises around the world and seeing the sights of the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Baltics and Norway in her year on board. Now she is about to depart for Australia, where she plans to earn a living as a wedding photographer; she also hopes to set her camera loose on the country's diverse music festival scene. Like Viney, she feels a bit adrift, but she sees it as a positive rather than a negative. "I'm enjoying finding out what I'm good at," she says, and is excited at the thought of being able to travel anywhere, meeting up with her similarly footloose friends along the way. What particularly attracts her is that "there isn't that perfect ideal any more that you have to do everything in order"; for now, her priority is to indulge her passion for travel and for meeting other people.

Others prefer to find what they want to do and stick to it. For Michael Donkor, 25, the way wasn't immediately clear: he read English at Oxford and then got a job in publishing. Finding it a small, closed-off world, he took a year out to do an MA in creative writing at Royal Holloway, University of London, and then tried publishing once again. He still didn't like it. What he did enjoy, though, was teaching English literature to pupils at his old school. As a consequence, he's started a PCGE course, with a clear determination

“The Bird on a Wire documentary freeze-frames Leonard Cohen in his early 1970s prime: a magnetic cult figure thronged by swooning, long-haired acolytes”
Stephen Dalton, Film, page 4

JON ENOCH FOR THE TIMES; DAVID HOFFMAN/EVENING

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Generation tech

1997 The domain name google.com is registered. The site launches the following year

1999 Apple introduces wi-fi as an option on its iBook laptops. The free online music sharing site Napster is launched. American record companies soon file a lawsuit and in 2001 Napster's network is shut down

2001 Apple launches the first iPod. Its maximum capacity is 5GB, compared with 64GB today.

2002 Microsoft's Xbox goes on sale in Europe. The BlackBerry smartphone is released

2003 The iTunes store and MySpace are launched. Cameraphone sales overtake sales of digital cameras. 3G technology allows mobile internet use

2004 Facebook is launched by two Harvard students, Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin. Sales of song downloads overtake sales of physical singles

2005 iPod Shuffle and Nano are introduced

2006 The verb "to Google" is added to the Oxford English Dictionary. Nintendo releases the Wii video-game console.

2007 The iPhone and the Kindle e-reader are launched. More than half of homes in the United Kingdom have broadband internet access

2008 Facebook overtakes MySpace to become the world's most popular social-networking site. Global sales of laptop computers overtake sales of desktop computers for the first time

2009 Apple reaches one billion iPhone app downloads. Amazon e-book sales overtake print for the first time

2010 Smartphone sales increase by 78 per cent from the previous year, with Google's Android-powered devices on the rise.

Apple launches its iPad tablet

to teach in the state sector. "Hoarding knowledge," he says, "is useless."

Although Donkor is unlikely to make a fortune any time soon, he says that money is not the most pressing force in his life. For the time being, he and his friends are happy to live in rented accommodation, entertaining each other over dinner and at *Apprentice* and *X Factor* parties in one another's houses; home ownership, he reckons, is not the be-all and end-all that it once was. Given the clear social imperative behind his decision to teach, I ask if he and his friends are politically engaged. "We're not apathetic," he replies. "We're well informed because of different ways of accessing information, but we don't feel particu-

'They've abandoned any wild dreams. Now they're looking at more basic things. It's survival of the fittest'

larly powerful. It still feels like power lies in the hands of the generation before us."

Enter the previous generation, the parents who just missed out on having it so good themselves but might be about to see their own kids have it even worse. How are they faring?

Pete and Vicky have three sons, of 18, 21 and 24. The youngest is just starting further education, the middle one just finishing and the eldest, who has graduated, is out of work. All three still live with their parents. Brought up in the eastern hinterlands of London, they are well educated and pleasant to be around. But Pete, who works in the financial sector, fears that they are not going to have the golden future that he and his wife dreamed of for them. "I look at them and see a lost generation," he says. "There's no hope for them."

His eldest son applies for about 30 jobs most days, scouring local papers and the internet and sending off his well-presented CV. Then he waits for replies that never come. "I feel really sad for him," says Pete. "But he's one of the lucky ones. It must be bewildering for families at the edge of society. He can see that there's really not much hope. Our middle son is just about to finish his degree in marketing. He's clever and confident, but he's already told his mum, 'this isn't going to get me a job'. He's painfully aware of the problem. Recently he applied for jobs; there were literally hundreds of applicants for each one. He's at a loss to know how to break the circle."

The youngest, who his father describes as a natural worrier, told his mother that he wasn't sure if he should go to university because of his elder brothers' experience. He is also concerned about his father working all hours to pay for it. "But I wanted him to go. I told him to not let the fees be a worry."

Pete says that it is different from the past when kids got jobs and left home. "It's now fallen on my shoulders to look after them. We're fortunate. We love them and they've never given us any cause for real concern. So we're happy to have them and their friends around the house. But I have now effectively become the government of the household. I'm responsible for the purse strings of five adults. I'm the Treasury."

Pete is at pains to emphasise that his children enjoy their lives, partying with their friends, taking advantage of creature comforts such as Sky TV and an Xbox that allows them to hook up with people all over the world (the youngest has recently been playing *Call of Duty* with an American, a staff sergeant stationed in Afghanistan). But he also thinks that they have scaled back their ambitions. "Overall, I think they have had to abandon any wild dreams. Right now they're looking at more basic things — finding a decent woman, a house to live in, a reasonable life. And all that ecological stuff they used to worry about seems to have vanished. Now it's survival of the fittest."

The appearance of Harry Potter was not the only momentous event of 1997. One 24-year-old says: "I sometimes think that I was born then, so integral is it to how I think about my life. I tend to remember things by relating them to 1997, because that was the year that I started secondary school, started puberty, stayed up all night to watch Tony Blair elected and got woken up to hear about Diana, Princess of Wales. So when I try to think about what year a book, film or pop group was around, I start with 1997 and work backwards or forwards. My friends and I are the children of new Labour, of the panini, the internet and social networks — especially Facebook, which launched in the UK the year that we started university."

Facebook, as all but a Martian knows, was founded by a bunch of precocious youths. Apart from all the online games, groups, jokes and pokes, probably the single most recognisable feature of Facebook is the "status update". But what might the status update of this disparate bunch be? How would they encapsulate all the exuberance, anxiety, yearning and joyfulness that being twentysomething brings? Perhaps something like: "Status pending. Update to follow. Don't wait up."