



Ed O'Brien

Edward John O'Brien (born 15 April 1968) is an English guitarist, songwriter, and member of the rock band Radiohead. He releases solo music under the name **EOB**.

O'Brien attended Abingdon School in Oxfordshire, England, where he formed Radiohead with schoolmates. O'Brien said his role was to "service the songs" and support the songwriter, Thom Yorke. He creates ambient sounds and textures, using effects, sustain units and the EBow, and provides backing vocals.

With musicians including the Radiohead drummer, Philip Selway, O'Brien toured and recorded with the 7 Worlds Collide project in the 2000s. His first solo album, *Earth*, was released in 2020. He began a North American tour in February 2020; a larger tour was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He has campaigned on topics including climate change and artist rights.

Rolling Stone named O'Brien among the greatest guitarists of all time in 2010 and 2023. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Radiohead in 2019.

Early life

O'Brien was born on April 15, 1968.^[1] His family comes from Ballyporeen, Ireland.^[2] As a child, O'Brien enjoyed cricket and theatre. His parents separated when he was 10; O'Brien said this was when music became his "refuge".^[3] He grew up listening to post-punk acts such as Siouxsie and the Banshees, Adam and the Ants, Depeche Mode, the Police and David Bowie. He said: "It was a very foetal [time] for music because people who went to art college or artists, or musicians, suddenly thought, 'Oh, I can be that.'"^[4]

Ed O'Brien



O'Brien in 2017

Background information

Birth name	Edward John O'Brien
Also known as	EOB
Born	<div>15 April 1968</div> <div> Oxford, England</div>
Genres	<u>Alternative rock</u> , <u>experimental rock</u> , <u>electronic</u>
Occupations	Musician • songwriter
Instruments	Guitar • vocals
Years active	1985–present
Labels	<u>XL</u> , <u>TBD</u> , <u>Capitol</u>
Member of	<u>Radiohead</u>
Formerly of	<u>7 Worlds Collide</u>

The members of Radiohead met while attending Abingdon School, an independent school for boys in Abingdon, Oxfordshire.^[5] While O'Brien was playing Lysander in a school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he met Thom Yorke, who was scoring the production.^[3] Yorke asked him to join him for a jam. According to O'Brien, "Before that, [life] was a bit confusing, a bit crap. And then suddenly ... I felt something very strong, almost like some kind of epiphany, almost like: 'This is it.'"^[6]

O'Brien was one school year below the drummer, Philip Selway, the year above Yorke and the bassist, Colin Greenwood, and four years above Colin's brother, the guitarist Jonny Greenwood.^[7] In 1985, they formed a band, On a Friday, the name referring to their usual rehearsal day in the school's music room.^[8] They continued to rehearse during holidays while the members attended university.^[9] O'Brien studied economics at the University of Manchester,^[1] where he took part in the Second Summer of Love.^[10]

Career

Radiohead

In 1991, On a Friday signed a record contract with EMI and changed their name to Radiohead.^[9] They found early success with their debut single, "Creep", from their debut album, *Pablo Honey* (1993).^[11] For their second album, *The Bends* (1995), the guitarists' roles were more divided, with Yorke generally playing rhythm, Greenwood lead and Ed O'Brien providing effects.^[12] *The Bends* received positive reviews and elevated Radiohead's profile.^[13]

Radiohead's third album, *OK Computer* (1997), brought them international fame and is often acclaimed as one of the best albums of all time.^{[14][15]} O'Brien used less distortion and more delay and other effects, creating a sound that was "more about textures".^[16] He became depressed during the extensive *OK Computer* tour, but focused on supporting Yorke.^[17] After the tour, he returned to Oxford, used large amounts of drugs and fell further into depression. He said: "I was single, on my own ... I was the lowest I've ever been. It was the irony as well – you're at the top, that old cliché."^[17]

Radiohead's next albums, *Kid A* (2000) and *Amnesiac* (2001), marked a dramatic change in sound, incorporating influences from electronic music, classical music, jazz and krautrock.^[18] O'Brien initially struggled with the change, saying: "It's scary – everyone feels insecure. I'm a guitarist and suddenly it's like, well, there are no guitars on this track, or no drums."^[19] He began using effects units more extensively to process his guitar, creating synthesiser-like sounds.^[20] O'Brien kept an online diary of Radiohead's progress during the recording.^[21]

During the sessions for *In Rainbows* (2007), O'Brien believed Radiohead might never record another album. He said later: "One of my mantras throughout the recording was, 'This is the last time I'm doing this. I'll never summon up the energy to do this again. So I'm going to put everything I can into it.'"^[22] He



O'Brien (left) performing with Radiohead in Amsterdam, May 2006

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Colin Greenwood, Jonny Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, and Phil Selway discussing *OK Computer* in 1997

was motivated by a desire to secure Radiohead's legacy as a great band, and said in 2008: "In my view, we've made three really great records, *The Bends*, *OK Computer* and *Kid A*. What we needed was another great record just to seal it."^[22]

By 2011, Radiohead had sold more than 30 million albums worldwide.^[23] They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March 2019; O'Brien and Selway attended the induction ceremony and gave speeches. O'Brien thanked his bandmates for their musicianship and friendship, saying that "some of the nights we have in the rehearsal studio [are] like transcendental moments".^[24] In 2020, O'Brien said his role in Radiohead was to "service the songs" and support Yorke. He said: "I've always been like his older brother ... I always say that he was like the dad of the band and I'm the mum. My job was to always put my arm around him, and his job was to be Thom."^[17] Radiohead's producer, Nigel Godrich, described O'Brien as "very much a diplomat".^[10]

Solo work

O'Brien releases solo music under the name EOB. After making demos with the producer Ian Davenport in 2014,^[25] he recorded with the producer Flood from late 2017 to early 2019.^[17] He had written songs for years, but lacked the confidence to bring them to Radiohead and felt they had a "distinct energy" that would be lost if they became a "hybrid product".^{[25][17]} He denied that he had ever felt "creatively stifled" in Radiohead.^[26]

O'Brien's debut solo work, the non-album track "Santa Teresa", was released on 4 October, 2019. Stereogum described it as a "haunting" ambient instrumental in the style of Brian Eno and Fennesz.^[27] His debut album, *Earth*, was released on 17 April 2020 on Capitol Records^[28] to positive reviews.^[29] It features the Radiohead bassist, Colin Greenwood, plus the drummer Omar Hakim, the Invisible members Nathan East and Dave Okumu, the folk singer Laura Marling, the Portishead guitarist Adrian Utley and the Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche.^[30] The music was inspired by O'Brien's time living in Brazil and attending Carnival, which he described as a "musical eureka moment".^[30] The first track, "Brasil", was released on 5 December 2019,^[31] followed by "Shangri-La" on 6 February.^[28] O'Brien said he intended *Earth* to be the first album in a trilogy.^[26]

O'Brien began a North American tour in February 2020;^[32] a larger tour was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^[33] He contributed a remix of Paul McCartney's song "Slidin'" to the 2021 remix album *McCartney III Imagined*.^[34] In January 2024, he said he was "deep into" recording his second album.^[35] It is set to feature Selway and the British musician Eska.^{[36][37]}

Other work

In 1999, O'Brien contributed to the soundtrack for the BBC drama series *Eureka Street*.^[38] He contributed guitar to the 2003 Asian Dub Foundation album *Enemy of the Enemy*.^[39] With Selway and other musicians, O'Brien toured and recorded with Neil Finn as part of the 7 Worlds Collide project. He provided guitar and backing vocals on their 2001 live album and the 2009 album *The Sun Came Out*.^{[40][41]}

In 2009, along with the musicians Dave Rowntree, Jazzie B, Billy Bragg, Mark Kelly, Master Shortie and Kate Nash, O'Brien co-founded the Featured Artists Coalition, a nonprofit organisation set up to protect the rights of featured musicians, particularly in the digital age.^[42] He appeared in a 2011 episode of the

BBC Radio 5 Live sports programme *Fighting Talk* in support of Record Shop Day.^[43] In 2013, O'Brien cofounded the Laundry, a workspace, restaurant and nightclub converted from a laundry in London Fields.^[44] In 2019, Hackney Council announced that the building would be demolished to make way for luxury flats.^[45]



O'Brien performing with 7 Worlds Collide, 2009

In 2014, O'Brien and Selway signed an open letter protesting a ban on guitars in British prisons and stating that music was important for rehabilitation.^[46] In 2018, O'Brien became an "informal patron" for the environmental pressure group Extinction Rebellion, which he described as "incredibly enlightened".^[3] In 2019, O'Brien joined the RSPB Let Nature Sing project, which aimed to get birdsong into the UK charts to raise awareness of the decline in Britain's birdlife.^[47]

In 2020, O'Brien contributed to Ear Opener, an online video course aimed at helping young people write music.^[48] That November, he gave evidence to a DCMS Committee inquiry into the impact of streaming on the music industry. He said he wanted to speak for less successful artists, who he felt were exploited.^[49] In February 2025, O'Brien spoke about climate change at São Paulo International Music Week.^[50] O'Brien was one of more than 1,000 musicians to support *Is This What We Want?*, an album of silence released on 25 February protesting the use of unlicensed copyrighted work to train AI.^[51] O'Brien criticised Israel following the outbreak of the Gaza war and expressed supported for Palestinians, calling for the release of hostages and a ceasefire.^{[35][52][53]}

Musicianship

While Jonny Greenwood plays most of Radiohead's lead guitar parts, O'Brien often creates ambient effects, making extensive use of effects units.^[54] He said of the technique: "It's a bit like you're creating a canvas. That would be in accompaniment with Thom playing chords on the piano — you're building up a cloud of effects behind."^[16] O'Brien said of his playing: "I literally learned to play my instrument within the band, so I started off very limited — and I'm *still* very limited. But I've been lucky, because I've been in a band that has not required you to be a virtuoso."^[55]

O'Brien usually plays Fender Stratocasters, including an Eric Clapton Stratocaster.^[55] He worked with Fender to design a signature model guitar, the EOB Stratocaster, which went on sale in November 2017. It features a tremolo bridge and a sustainer pickup.^[56] He also plays Gretsch and Rickenbacker guitars, including a twelve-string Rickenbacker.^[55] O'Brien also sings backing vocals, which *Pitchfork* described as Radiohead's "most consistent secret weapon".^[57]



O'Brien performing with Radiohead in 2006

O'Brien said in 2017 that his most used effects for Radiohead were distortion, an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man delay and a DigiTech Whammy pitch shifter.^[16] He described the Boss DD-5 delay pedal as "key to the sound of *The Bends* and *OK Computer* ... It's the only delay that can make those *OK Computer* sounds."^[58] In the *Kid A* sessions, at the suggestion of Michael Brook, the creator of the Infinite Guitar, O'Brien began using sustain units, which allow guitar notes to be sustained indefinitely. He combined these with looping and delay effects to create synthesiser-like sounds.^[20]

To create the high-pitched chiming sound that introduces "Lucky", O'Brien strums above the guitar nut.^[54] He creates the reverberating pops on the introduction of "2 + 2 = 5".^[54] On "Karma Police", O'Brien distorts his guitar by driving a delay effect to self-oscillation, then lowering the delay rate, creating a "melting" effect.^[59] The ambient track "Treefingers" was created by processing O'Brien's guitar loops.^[20] On "Dollars and Cents", O'Brien uses a pitch shifter pedal to shift his guitar chords from minor to major.^[60] For "All I Need", he used a sustain unit and a guitar strung with four bottom E strings, creating a thicker sound.^[16] O'Brien uses the EBow, an electronic sustaining device, on his guitar to generate drones and ambient leads on songs such as "My Iron Lung", "Talk Show Host", "Jigsaw Falling Into Place", "Where I End and You Begin" and "Nude".^[61] On *The King of Limbs* and *A Moon Shaped Pool*, he used a Klon Centaur overdrive pedal.^[62]

In 2010, the *Rolling Stone* journalist David Fricke named O'Brien the 59th-greatest guitarist of all time.^[54] In 2023, *Rolling Stone* named O'Brien and Greenwood the joint 43rd-greatest guitarists, writing that O'Brien was "possibly the most underrated guitarist in rock ... adding subtle textures that enhance each song and keeping the band grounded with his cheerful, up-for-anything vibe. You might not be able to name his best solo, but it's impossible to imagine Radiohead without him."^[63]

Influences

O'Brien's earliest guitar influence was Andy Summers of the Police, particularly his use of delay and chorus effects on "Walking on the Moon".^[16] His other influences include Peter Buck of R.E.M, Paul Weller of the Jam, Johnny Marr of the Smiths, John McGeoch of Magazine and Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Edge of U2 and Will Sergeant of Echo & the Bunnymen.^{[16][17]} O'Brien admired how these guitarists created "space" rather than playing conventional solos.^[4] He said: "They were great guitarists, but they weren't lead guitarists ... My favourite guitarists know when not to play. Then you make more of it when you do play. Make it count."^[16]

O'Brien cited the American band Phish as an influence on his solo shows, saying: "[They're] like a jazz band; they are willing to take risks for a moment of musical transcendence. That's what I'm after — I want to tap into that."^[64] He cited the music of Brazil, such as the music of Carnival and Jorge Ben, as an influence on *Earth*. Other influences included Earth, Wind & Fire, Arcade Fire, Underworld, Bill Withers, Talking Heads and the "Celtic, folky" music of Led Zeppelin.^[25]

Personal life

O'Brien lives in north London.^[65] With his wife, Susan Kobrin, he has a son, born in January 2004, and a daughter, born in 2006.^{[66][67]} Around 2000, O'Brien gave up alcohol, saying it was "fucking him up", and began practising meditation.^[68] The Smiths guitarist Johnny Marr helped him become sober and recover from depression.^[17] In 2011, O'Brien and his family moved to Brazil for a year, living on a farm

near Ubatuba.^[17] He is a cricket fan and once played a match against the musicians Richard Thompson and Chris Martin.^[68] In March 2020, O'Brien announced that he had contracted COVID-19 and was recovering in isolation.^[69]

Solo discography

Studio albums

List of studio albums, with selected chart positions and certifications

Title	Details	Peak chart positions			
		UK ^[70]	GER ^[71]	US Sales ^[72]	US Heat ^[73]
<i><u>Earth</u></i>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Released: 17 April 2020Label: <u>Capitol Records</u>Formats: LP, CD, cassette, download</div>	13	94	19	8

Singles

Title	Year	Peak chart positions	Album
		US AAA ^[74]	
"Santa Teresa"	2019	—	Non-album single
" <u>Brasil</u> "		—	<i><u>Earth</u></i>
"Shangri-La"	2020	5	
"Olympik"		—	
"Cloak of the Night"		—	
"Slidin' (EOB Remix)"	2021	—	<i><u>McCartney III Imagined</u></i>

See also

- List of Old Abingdonians

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