

= Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire) =

Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire) is the seventh studio album by English rock band the Kinks , released in October 1969 . Kinks frontman Ray Davies constructed the concept album as the soundtrack to a Granada Television play and developed the storyline with novelist Julian Mitchell ; however , the television programme was cancelled and never produced . The rough plot revolved around Arthur Morgan , a carpet @-@ layer , who was based on Ray Davies ' brother @-@ in @-@ law Arthur Anning . A mono version was released in the UK , but not in the US . It is now available on the 2011 deluxe @-@ edition re @-@ issue .

Arthur was met with nearly unanimous acclaim upon release . It received generous coverage in the US rock press , with articles running in underground magazines such as Fusion and The Village Voice . It garnered back @-@ to @-@ back reviews by Mike Daly and Greil Marcus in Rolling Stone magazine 's lead section ; Daly rated it " the Kinks ' finest hour " , and Marcus ranked it " the best British album of 1969 " . Reviews in the UK were also positive . Although Arthur received a mixed review in New Musical Express , Disc & Music Echo praised the album 's musical integrity , and Melody Maker called it " Ray Davies ' finest hour ... beautifully British to the core " .

The album , although not very successful commercially , was a return to the charts in the US for the band . Their previous effort , The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society , received acclaim from critics but failed to chart in any country upon its 1968 release , with total US sales estimated at under 25 @,@ 000 copies . The Kinks returned to the Billboard charts in 1969 after a two @-@ year absence , with the lead single from the record , " Victoria " , peaking at number 62 . The album itself reached number 50 on the Record World charts , and number 105 on Billboard , their highest position since 1965 . It failed to chart in Britain . Arthur paved the way for the further success of their 1970 comeback album Lola Versus Powerman and the Moneygoround , Part One and its accompanying US Top 10 and UK Top 5 hit " Lola " .

= = Background = =

British production company Granada TV approached Ray Davies in early January 1969 , expressing interest in developing a movie or play for television . Davies was to collaborate with writer Julian Mitchell on the " experimental " programme , with a soundtrack by the Kinks to be released on an accompanying LP . Agreements were finalised on 8 January , but the project was not revealed until a press release on 10 March . Separately , the Kinks began work on the programme 's companion record , entitled Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire) . Development of Arthur occurred during a rough period for the band , due to the commercial failure of their previous album The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society and the subsequent single , " Plastic Man " , as well as the departure of founding member and bassist Pete Quaife . In early 1969 , Quaife had told the band he was quitting , though the other members did not take the remark seriously . When an article in the New Musical Express mentioned Maple Oak , the band that he had formed without the rest of the Kinks ' knowledge , Davies unsuccessfully asked Quaife to return for the upcoming sessions of Arthur . As a replacement , Davies called up bassist John Dalton , who had previously filled in for Quaife .

Davies travelled to United Recording Studios in Los Angeles , California on 11 April 1969 , to produce American pop band The Turtles ' LP Turtle Soup with engineer Chuck Britz . While in Los Angeles , Davies helped negotiate an end to the concert ban placed on the Kinks by the American Federation of Musicians in 1965 . Although neither the Kinks nor the union gave a specific reason for the ban , at the time it was widely attributed to their rowdy on @-@ stage behaviour . After negotiations with Davies , the Federation relented , opening up an opportunity for the group to return to touring in America . Once the main sessions for the Turtles LP were completed , Davies returned to England . While Davies was abroad , the other members of the band had been rehearsing and practising for the upcoming album , as well as lead guitarist Dave Davies ' solo album , nicknamed A Hole in the Sock of . When Ray returned , the Kinks regrouped at his house in Borehamwood , Hertfordshire , to rehearse the upcoming album Arthur .

= = Recording = =

The group turned to the recording proper on 1 May 1969 . The first tracks worked on were " Drivin ' " , intended as their next single release , and " Mindless Child Of Motherhood " , written by Dave Davies (the latter would eventually be used as the B @-@ side to " Drivin ' " , and was not included on the LP) . The Kinks began a two @-@ week series of focused sessions on 5 May , laying down an early version of the entire Arthur album . Recording was interrupted when the Kinks travelled to Beirut , Lebanon on 17 May to play three dates at the Melkart Hotel ; sessions for Arthur resumed the day after their return , and most of the recording for the album was finished by the end of the month . Mixing and dubbing began in early June , with arranger Lew Warburton handling string overdubs . The Kinks played a few small gigs in England throughout the remainder of the month , but devoted most of their time to finishing Dave Davies ' solo album .

Writing for the TV play progressed through May and June , and on 15 June mixing for Dave Davies ' solo LP was completed (tapes for this record were eventually delivered to Pye and Reprise Records , although it never saw official release) . A press release announced that the Arthur LP was scheduled for a late July release . As Davies and Mitchell completed their script , the Arthur TV play began to crystallise , and British filmmaker Leslie Woodhead was assigned the role of director . By early September production was scheduled to begin , with a planned broadcast of late September , but these plans were continually delayed . As problems with the TV play got progressively worse ? and , consequently , distracted the Kinks from completing the post @-@ production of the album ? the release dates for both projects were pushed further and further back . In early October Ray Davies moved from Boreham Wood back to his old family home on Fortis Green , in Muswell Hill , and travelled to Los Angeles , where he deposited the tapes at Reprise for Arthur 's American release . The album 's release date was finally set for 10 October , and the Kinks began gearing up for an upcoming US tour to support the album , for which they would depart on 17 October . Shooting for the TV play was eventually set for 1 December . Roy Stonehouse was hired as a designer , and the casting was completed ; however , the show was cancelled at the last minute when the producer was unable to secure financial backing . Davies and Mitchell were frustrated at an entire year 's work wasted ? Doug Hinman stated that Davies witnessed " his grand artistic visions once again dashed by bureaucracy and internal politics " .

= = Release = =

Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire) was released in the US and UK on 10 October 1969 , in both mono and stereo versions . The album set the stage for the Kinks ' return to touring the United States in late 1969 , and paved the way for even greater commercial success with the hit song " Lola " in 1970 .

= = = Singles and chart performance = = =

While the sessions for Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire) were nearing completion in June 1969 , the track " Drivin ' " was released as a single in the UK , backed with " Mindless Child of Motherhood " . For the first time since their breakthrough in 1964 , a Kinks single failed to make an impression on the UK charts ? Johnny Rogan notes that " This was the first of two pilot singles for ... Arthur and its failure did not augur well . " The group followed with another single in September , " Shangri @-@ La " , which again failed to chart in the UK . As with Village Green , the album itself failed to chart when released in October .

In the US , " Victoria " was chosen as the lead single , backed with the album track " Brainwashed " , and was released the same week as the LP . The single proved to be relatively successful , and reached number 62 on the Billboard Hot 100 ? their highest position since their Top 20 hit " Sunny Afternoon " in 1966 . The success of the single led to its release in the UK ; backed with " Mr. Churchill Says " , it reached a peak of number 30 . Arthur itself was a moderate commercial success

in the US , where it peaked at number 105 (the highest for a Kinks album since 1965) and remained on the charts for 20 weeks .

= = = Promotion = = =

Reprise Records , the Kinks ' US label , devised an elaborate , multi @-@ levelled promotional campaign for Arthur in early 1969 . The most famous branch of the programme involved a promo package entitled God Save The Kinks . The set featured various items , including a consumer 's guide to the band 's albums , a bag of " grass " from the " Daviesland village green " , and an LP entitled Then , Now and Inbetween . The set was accompanied by a positive letter from Hal Halverstadt of creative services at Warner / Reprise , part of which read , " ... [We are led] to believe that The Kinks may not have had it at all The Kinks are to be supported , encouraged , cheered . And saved . " The campaign was officially launched on 3 July , at a meeting between Ray Davies and Reprise executives in Burbank , California . Reprise considered seeding false stories in the press to create an " outlaw " image for the group as part of the campaign , including pieces about marijuana possession and income tax evasion . Ray called the idea " mad " , and the programme was dropped . Several pieces , however , were used in the press kit for Arthur 's release , with titles including " English Pop Group Arrested on Rape Rap " .

= = = Packaging and liner notes = = =

Artwork for Arthur was created by Bob Lawrie . The album was packaged in a gatefold sleeve , and included a shaped insert depicting Queen Victoria (holding a house containing Arthur Morgan) , with lyrics on the reverse . Liner notes in the UK were written by Geoffrey Cannon and Julian Mitchell ; in the US , notes by rock critic John Mendelsohn replaced Cannon 's .

= = Critical response = =

The album was critically acclaimed at the time of release , especially in the US rock press . It was favourably compared to contemporary works , namely Tommy by The Who , released earlier in the year . In Rolling Stone magazine , Arthur was spotlighted in its lead section , with back @-@ to @-@ back reviews by Mike Daly and Greil Marcus . Daly called it " an album that is a masterpiece on every level : Ray Davies ' finest hour , the Kinks ' supreme achievement " . Rolling Stone reviewer J.R. Young also praised the record , and said : " Less ambitious than Tommy , and far more musical ... Arthur is by all odds the best British album of 1969 . It shows that Pete Townshend still has worlds to conquer and that The Beatles have a lot of catching up to do . " A review by Sal Imam ran in Boston 's Fusion magazine read that " If Tommy was the greatest rock opera , then Arthur most surely is the greatest rock musical . " Writing in his Consumer Guide column of The Village Voice , Robert Christgau gave the record a positive review , saying , although Ray Davies ' lyrics could get " preachy at times " , that the album featured " excellent music and production " .

Reception in the UK was not as warm , although reviews were still generally positive . Disc & Music Echo commented that " Arthur works as a complete score because it is basic and simple and pleasing to the ear , and powerfully conjures up pictures in the eye . " Melody Maker seconded Mike Daly 's comments in Rolling Stone , again calling it " Ray Davies ' finest hour " , and adding that it was " beautifully British to the core " . Doug Hinman would later comment on the album 's reception in Britain : " In the British music press there [was] less celebration , and coverage [was] relatively routine , though everyone saw the rock opera angle . "

= = = Recent reception = = =

Today the album receives generally positive reviews . Stephen Thomas Erlewine of Allmusic stated that Arthur was " one of the most effective concept albums in rock history , as well as one of the best and most influential British pop records of its era " , and in 2003 Matt Golden of Stylus called it " the

best rock opera ever " . Switch magazine included Arthur on their " 100 Best Albums of the 20th Century " in 1999 , and in 2003 Mojo featured the album on their list of the " Top 50 Most Eccentric Albums " .

= = Story and theme = =

The story is partially inspired by the Davies brothers ' older sister Rose , who emigrated to Australia in 1964 with her husband Arthur Anning . Her departure devastated Ray Davies , and it inspired him to write the song " Rosie Won 't You Please Come Home " , included on the 1966 album Face to Face . The lead character in the album , the fictional Arthur Morgan ? modeled after Arthur Anning ? is a carpet layer whose family 's plight in the opportunity @-@ poor setting of post @-@ war England is depicted . Writer Julian Mitchell detailed the story line and characters in depth , explaining in the liner notes for the album 's LP release :

Arthur Morgan ... lives in a London suburb in a house called Shangri @-@ La , with a garden and a car and a wife called Rose and a son called Derek who 's married to Liz , and they have these two very nice kids , Terry and Marilyn . Derek and Liz and Terry and Marilyn are emigrating to Australia . Arthur did have another son , called Eddie . He was named for Arthur 's brother , who was killed in the battle of the Somme . Arthur 's Eddie was killed , too ? in Korea .

Davies would later comment in his autobiography , X @-@ Ray , that Arthur Anning later " told me that he ... knew it [Arthur] had been partly inspired by him ... [it] reminded him of home ... I told Arthur that I felt guilty for using him as a subject for a song , but he shrugged off my apology , saying that he was flattered . " With an underlying theme of nostalgia , the songs describe the England that Arthur once knew (" Victoria " , " Young and Innocent Days ") , the promise of life in Australia for one of his sons (" Australia ") , the emptiness of his superficially comfortable life in his home (" Shangri @-@ La ") , the resolve of the British people during the Second World War (" Mr. Churchill Says ") , the privations that marked the austerity period after the war (" She 's Bought a Hat Like Princess Marina ") , and the death of his brother in World War I (" Yes Sir , No Sir " , " Some Mother 's Son ") .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written by Ray Davies , except when noted .

= = Personnel = =

The Kinks

Mick Avory ? drums , percussion

John Dalton ? bass guitar , background vocals

Dave Davies ? lead guitar , background vocals , co @-@ lead vocal on " Australia " and " Arthur " , lead vocals on his own tracks

Ray Davies ? lead and background vocals , rhythm guitar , keyboards (harpsichord and piano) , production

Pete Quaife ? bass guitar , background vocals on bonus tracks : " Plastic Man " , " King Kong " , " This Man He Weeps Tonight " , " Lincoln County " , " Hold My Hand " and " Creeping Jean "

Production

Lew Warburton ? horn and string arrangements

Andrew Hendriksen ? engineering

Brian Humphries ? engineering on " Drivin ' "

Bob Lawrie ? album art

Austin Sneller ? credited as " album ' tester ' "

= = Chart tables = =

=== Album ===

=== Singles ===