

= The Blackest Beautiful =

The Blackest Beautiful is the third studio album by American post @-@ hardcore band Letlive . It was released by Epitaph Records on July 9 , 2013 . Recorded between June 2012 and January 2013 , the album used four different drum sessions , and went through ten recording engineers before settling on Stephen George . The drums were recorded with session musician Christopher Crandall , in the absence of the band having a permanent drummer at the time . The album incorporated a variety of music styles based on its members , including punk rock , funk , and soul ; it was mastered and mixed to have a " more human " and " organic " sound .

Although the album was not expected to sell well because it was streamed for free prior to release , it still debuted in the United States at number 74 on the Billboard 200 and number six on the Hard Rock Albums chart , with nearly five thousand copies sold . The band toured the United Kingdom and Ireland to support the album , and joined other bands on tours across the United States . Critics welcomed the album , praising its crisp production and forward @-@ thinking sound within post @-@ hardcore , with Metacritic giving an aggregate rating of " universal acclaim " .

= = Background = =

Jason Aalon Butler , the band 's front @-@ man and remaining founding member , described the group 's first releases , extended play Exhaustion , Saltwater , And Everything In Between (2004) and debut album Speak Like You Talk (2005) , as " educational experiences " in writing whole songs rather than " cool bits " for songs . Music journalist Andrew Kelham wrote that the era these " raw hardcore punk " records were produced in was plagued by " potential [that] was never realised as an ever @-@ revolving door of musicians cause the band to limp through Jason 's late teens and early twenties . " With the second album , Fake History , the band felt they found their " signature sound " . In 2008 , when performing as a substitute opening support band for Bring Me the Horizon 's show in Los Angeles , they caught the attention of Brett Gurewitz , owner of Epitaph Records , who later signed the band and re @-@ released their second album in 2011 .

= = Recording , production = =

In 2010 , Letlive began writing on the third album . Butler said that their writing approach changed in comparison to their previous releases , as they were now doing most of it while on tour . During pre @-@ production , the band listened to styles and ideas that , according to Butler , changed the way they looked at the songs they had initially written . The styles were their most expansive to date , and came from the diversity of their members : Butler had involved himself in the punk rock skateboarding culture when he was eleven , but had also been influenced by his father , who was in a soul band .

When they began recording in studio in June 2012 , the band 's members felt little pressure to complete the album as they could deliver something similar to their previous album " if you 've delivered once already , why would it be a problem to do it again ? We are the band that made those records [...] so there 's really no problem in that regard . " Guitarist Jeff Sahyoun said he did not even think back on Fake History when they were producing The Blackest Beautiful . However , as they progressed through it , there were elements that were not clicking , and the performances lacked the same bite in comparison to their Fake History demos . Butler said that this " almost sent the band crazy " . He said he required a specific environment when he sings as his performance puts him in a vulnerable state .

During a tour where they supported Underoath in October , they brought their studio equipment with them , which allowed them to record on the road . Butler said " It was like we 'd have a pop up studio in a bathroom in South Florida or in the woods off the highway in Wyoming . " In December , the band felt they were done with recordings ; Butler said " there was absolutely nothing left to try " , and walked away from the project . The band had recorded the drums on four different occasions . They finished recording at a static studio in January 2013 .

Although there was increasing demand from fans , the band took their time with mixing and producing . Butler said the pressure was more rooted in giving the fans an album they deserve rather than meeting the expectations of the band . He said it was " one of the hardest processes I 've endured as a human being , not just as an artist , but ever . " Because Fake History was perceived by fans as sounding overproduced , the band strove for an " organic and authentic " sound that was " very human " and that reflected the sound of their live performances . They took " an analogue route " , where they used the test mix of the album as it " spoke to them " in its raw energy . After going through ten different sound engineers , they went with Stephen George , whom Sahyoun said " just added little diamonds and made it pop " , so the album sonically reminded them of their influences .

During the recording sessions , drummer Anthony Rivera left the band . Butler said the departure was an " amicable split " : " sometimes you simply need more than what the artist lifestyle gives you , and that 's fine " . Chris Crandall replaced Rivera for the studio sessions , and Loniel Robinson , a drum tech from the band Of Mice and Men replaced Crandall following the album release .

= = Artwork , packaging = =

When the band was creating the album art , they intended to create something provocative and captivating and so they experimented with how " black and white American flags could represent " a much bigger idea of the sterilization that we are experiencing . " The title is a play on the saying " Black is beautiful " and how it acts as an opposition to everything that society is saying otherwise .

= = Composition = =

= = = Music = = =

The Blackest Beautiful was described as a post @-@ hardcore record , much like its predecessors , from " screaming rage to tight , sophisticated harmonies to frenzied funky riffing to emotively melodic parts " . Mike Diver of Clash considered it a pop record with clear , melodic structure , while others grouped it with punk rock , soul , and funk , as well as displaying ' glimpses ' of other music styles including Afrobeat , electronica and jazz . The incorporation of funk music has been noted by critics . Stephen Hill described the album as " find [ing] the space between DC Hardcore and Stax funk " . James McMahon described the album as being " dragged through the civil rights movement , through 80s New York block parties , through the birth of hip @-@ hop , funk , jazz and soul . " Terry Bezer in Front found that the album has ' as much in common with funk as punk ' and wrote in Metal Hammer that the album features ' the musical dexterity and reckless abandon of razor @-@ edged funk ' . Letlive 's ferocity and use of dynamics have led critics to draw comparisons to rock bands Glassjaw , At the Drive @-@ in , Refused , Black Flag and Deftones . Bezer cited three albums as primary influences on the The Blackest Beautiful : Raised Fist 's Veil of Ignorance and its " tempo changes , fury and non @-@ stop fire " ; Prince 's Love Symbol Album and funk style ; and Public Enemy 's It Takes A Nation Of Millions for its confrontational and " fight for what 's right " lyrics . Butler said that there was a poetic play in their combination of melody and chaos on the album : " I think the best way for us as musicians to get people to listen is to appeal to them . Appeal to the natural rhythm of the head bob , the beating of the heart , the tap of the foot ; just find that area and utilize it properly and say something . "

The album 's lead single , " Banshee (Ghost Fame) " , was described as an " unholy collision of Refused and Rage Against the Machine " . " White America ? s Beautiful Black Market " was a " rock rap crossover affair " , a protest song about the relationship between the corporations and the United States government , as they are " sucking the dicks of corporations " . " Empty Elvis " was described as " condensing Glassjaw 's whole career into three mouth @-@ foamingly [sic] exciting minutes " . " That Fear Fever " fused rock , pop and metal . " Virgin Dirt " was described as a " post @-@ rock epic " . The tracks " Younger " and " The Dope Beat " were listed as examples of the

band 's " staggering dynamics , brain @-@ burrowing melodies and intelligent production tricks " . " Pheromone Cvlt " showed the band 's " blend of deranged hardcore and aching soul " ; Bezer wrote that the track possesses ' Prince levels of funky cool ' . " 27 Club " was a " blistering seven @-@ minute epic " about living life either selflessly or selfishly , with " rampages from Hendrix riffs to reggae " .

= = = Lyrics = = =

The album 's lyrics are described as ' politically , socially and personally conscious ' , incorporating themes such as corporate greed , racism and growing up in a broken home . Butler says it is " an ode to the disenfranchised and disaffected youth " and about accepting that we will never be perfect . Some of the lyrics reflect on his early life where he had to raise his sister and grow up at the same time . He added ambiguity to the lyrics to " facilitate " ideas for the listeners . Freeman said that the lyrics " reveal just how self @-@ aware he is , which is a good counterpoint to those who feel that his constant vocalizing equates to selfishness . "

" Banshee (Ghost Fame) " describes the differences between music as an art form and as an industry . " The Priest and Used Cars " talks about clockwork theory and how it put the fear of death into Butler when he was younger . " Pheromone Cvlt " was about how tired he was with women telling him how broken he is and how he needs to be fixed , and how he wants to find someone who wants to find someone who was not with him because he was a " fucking mess " . Butler commented how the lyrics of " 27 Club " focus on " when people assume I 'm pumped full of drugs or a Christian . I 'm misidentified all the time " .

= = Release and promotion = =

The album was initially announced in Rock Sound for a summer 2013 release ; later specified to be July 9 , 2013 . A few weeks prior to its release , the album was streamed online for free . Although Butler acknowledged that the strategy would mean the album would not sell well , he said " It 's not about how many people it reaches but that it makes them feel something . "

The band toured the United Kingdom and Ireland in October , playing songs from both Fake History and The Blackest Beautiful . Many of the dates were sold out ; London 's date was met with such high demand that it was upgraded to a larger venue from the Camden Underworld to the Electric Ballroom .

In November and December , the band returned to the United States where they supported Every Time I Die with Code Orange Kids .

In February and March 2014 , the band supported Bring Me the Horizon for their Sempiternal album , joining groups Of Mice & Men and Issues on The American Dream Tour . From April to May , they co @-@ headlined a tour with Architects for their album Lost Forever // Lost Together , with support from Glass Cloud and I The Mighty . On August 26 , they and Architects supported A Day To Remember at a postponed event at the Cardiff Motorpoint Arena .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical reception = = =

The album received an aggregate score of 86 / 100 at Metacritic , based on 12 reviews , signifying " universal acclaim " . Kerrang ! editor James McMahon gave the album five out of five " K " s , classing The Blackest Beautiful as a " classic " , praising the inclusion of producers Kit Walters and Stephen George . He wrote : " What The Blackest Beautiful certainly is , though , is the sound of letlive. right here and right now . And right now , letlive. sound amazing . Get Down . " Metal Hammer writer Stephen Hill gave the album a nine out of ten , saying " it 's hard to pick out highlights when every track sounds so fresh , joyous and casually rule @-@ book torching " and that

" this is the kind of album that changes people 's lives " . Chris Hidden of Rock Sound also gave a nine out of ten , calling it a " bold record " and highlighting its fusion of " staggering dynamics , brain @-@ burrowing melodies and intelligent production " .

Fred Thomas of Allmusic noted how the album is " technically dazzling and soulfully delivered aggression " . Tom Doyle of This Is Fake DIY wrote that the album is a " punch in the gut to whatever expectations you might have about letlive . " Channing Freeman of Sputnikmusic said while the songs lack the same immediacy in comparison to those on Fake History , they have more longevity . Although Mike Diver of Clash Music liked the album overall , he said that " Pheromone Cvlt " was " placid " and " Virgin Dirt " was " losing sting " .

However , Dave Simpson , writing for The Guardian , criticized the album 's " adolescent , cliched lyrics " , especially from the track ' The Priest and Used Cars ' .

= = = Media picks = = =

End of Year awards

= = Chart performance = =

The album debuted in the United States at number 74 on the Billboard 200 and number six on Hard Rock Albums , selling nearly five thousand copies . In the United Kingdom , the album debuted at number 62 .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by letlive .

= = Personnel = =

letlive .

Jason Aalon Butler ? lead vocals

Ryan Jay Johnson ? bass , backing vocals

Jean Francisco Nascimento ? guitar , keyboard

Jeff Sahyoun ? guitar , backing vocals

Additional personnel

Christopher Crandall ? drums , percussion

Staff

Kit Walters ? producer

Stephen George ? mixing

Jonathan Weiner ? Album artwork and layout

= = Chart performance = =