

= Blur (Blur album) =

Blur is the eponymous fifth studio album by the English rock band Blur , released on 10 February 1997 by Food Records . Blur had previously been broadly critical of American popular culture and their previous albums had become associated with the Britpop movement , particularly Parklife (1994) , which had helped them become one of Britain 's leading pop acts . After their previous album , The Great Escape , the band faced media backlash and relationships between the members became strained .

Under the suggestion of the band 's guitarist , Graham Coxon , the band underwent a stylistic change , becoming influenced by American indie rock bands such as Pavement and Sonic Youth . Recording took place in London as well as in Reykjavík , Iceland . Drummer Dave Rowntree described the music on the album as being more aggressive and emotional than their previous work . Producer Stephen Street claimed that lead singer @-@ songwriter Damon Albarn had started writing about more personal experiences while Coxon revealed that listening to his lyrics it was clear to him that " he 'd obviously gone off his head a bit more " .

Despite worries from Blur 's label , EMI , and the music press that the change in style would alienate the band 's predominantly teenage fanbase and that the album would flop as a result , Blur , as well as lead single , " Beetlebum " , reached the top of the UK charts and the album was certified platinum . The album also reached the top 20 in six other countries . The success of " Song 2 " led to Blur becoming the band 's most successful album in the US where the Britpop scene had been largely unsuccessful . The album received positive and mixed reviews from most music critics , many praising the stylistic change as well as Albarn 's improved songwriting .

= = Background = =

Despite Blur 's previous album , The Great Escape being released to positive reviews , and entering the UK charts at number one , the album 's success was left in the shadows compared to (What 's the Story) Morning Glory ? by Britpop rivals Oasis which went quadruple platinum in the US . Blur became perceived as an " inauthentic middle class pop band " in comparison to the " working class heroes " Oasis , which made lead singer @-@ songwriter , Damon Albarn feel " stupid and confused " . Bassist Alex James later summarised , " After being the People 's Hero , Damon was the People 's Prick for a short period ... basically , he was a loser ? very publicly . "

An early 1996 Q magazine interview revealed that relations between Blur members had become very strained ; journalist Adrian Deevoy wrote that he found them " on the verge of a nervous breakup " . Guitarist Graham Coxon , in particular , began to resent his bandmates ; James for his playboy lifestyle and Albarn for his control over Blur 's musical direction and public image . In February 1996 , when Coxon and James were absent for a lip @-@ synced Blur performance broadcast on Italian television , they were replaced by a cardboard cutout and a roadie , respectively . Blur biographer Stuart Maconie later wrote that , at the time , " Blur were sewn together very awkwardly . "

Coxon struggled with drinking problems and , in a rejection of the group 's former Britpop aesthetic , made a point of listening to noisy American alternative rock bands such as Pavement . In the 2010 documentary on the band , No Distance Left to Run , Coxon stated that he was getting more influenced by American guitarists as " a lot of them were doing very interesting stuff with guitars and I needed to be nourished . I suppose as a guitar player and there was none of that happening in English music although English music was now more popular [so] I started listening to more stuff from the States from smaller labels . "

Although he had previously dismissed it , Albarn grew to appreciate Coxon 's tastes in Lo @-@ fi and underground music , and recognised the need to significantly change Blur 's musical direction once again . " I can sit at my piano and write brilliant observational pop songs all day long but you 've got to move on " , he said . He subsequently approached Street , and argued for a more stripped @-@ down sound on the band 's next record . Coxon , recognising his own personal need to , as drummer Dave Rowntree put it , " work this band " , wrote a letter to Albarn , describing his desire

for their music " to scare people again . "

= = Recording = =

Recording sessions for the album started in June 1996 at Mayfair studios in London . After the initial sessions , the band left to record the rest of the album in Reykjavík , Iceland , away from the Britpop scene . It was in Iceland that the vocals to " Strange News from Another Star " , " Essex Dogs " , " Beetlebum " , and " On Your Own " were recorded . " We just recorded some vocals there , " Albarn revealed in an Addicted To Noise interview . " I have a house there and it 's the perfect place to write because of the light [The sun doesn 't rise until midday] . Not good during the summer because it 's sunshine all the time , 24 hours a day . "

Apart from a change in musical style , the band changed the way they recorded . " It was the first time we sort of jammed , " Coxon revealed . " We 've never really jammed before . We 've been quite white @-@ coaty , overall about recording , like in a laboratory . Yeah , we did actually feel our way through just playing whatever came to our minds and editing , which was really exciting . " " We just played together for two weeks in a way we hadn 't done since 1991 , " Dave recalls . " We wanted to purify the sound , to not have anything there not played by us . We reasoned that if we made small changes at the input end , we could effect large changes in the output . " According to producer Stephen Street , " Blur had decided that commercial pressures and writing hit singles wasn 't going to be the main consideration any more . The mood in the studio was very different to when I 'd first worked with them . " " In the studio , once we got past those first few days , where I felt everyone was treading on eggshells , there was a great atmosphere . I think it was because they didn 't want to be competing with anyone on this record , they wanted to make a record that would help keep the band together . " Street had acquired a new piece of hardware , described as " muso @-@ ish to talk about but really useful " which enabled him to sample loops and otherwise cut @-@ and @-@ paste entire sections of the band 's jam sessions .

= = Music = =

Rowntree stated that the band decided to give Coxon a much freer hand on Blur . Street also observed a change of Albarn 's writing style , as he " was much more prepared to write in the first person , rather than about interesting characters . I think [Albarn had] grown a bit and was prepared to start writing about his own experiences rather than transposing them on to a character like Tracy Jacks or Dan Abnormal . " Coxon agreed , and felt " Damon 's songs were revealing more to me than to him " and said that when he heard some of his home demos he realised " he 'd obviously gone off his head a bit more " . The album features the first song to appear on a studio album in which Coxon not only wrote the lyrics , but also sang lead vocal ? " You 're So Great " .

According to Mark Redfern of Under the Radar , Blur eschewed Britpop in favour of American indie rock . NME magazine similarly argued that it favoured lo @-@ fi and alternative rock over Britpop . By contrast , Margaret Moser of The Austin Chronicle characterised its music as " a punchy brand of muscular Brit @-@ pop " , while AllMusic 's Stephen Thomas Erlewine said it " may superficially appear to be a break from tradition " but is a " logical progression " from Britpop rather than an abandonment of it . Album opener " Beetlebum " has been described as a " Beatles tribute " by several publications ; Erlewine wrote that the song " [runs] through the White Album in the space of five minutes . " Q magazine 's Andrew Collins compared the song to The Auteurs as well as a " slightly menacing Free as a Bird " , due to " a slight drone undulating in the foreground " and a " sweet , elongated coda busied by what sounds like an invasion of turkeys . " Albarn admitted that " Beetlebum " was about heroin and the drug experiences he had with his then @-@ girlfriend , Justine Frischmann of Elastica . Albarn also stated that the song describes a complicated emotion , sort of " sleepy " and sort of " sexy " . The song 's title is a reference to the phrase " Chasing the beetle " which refers to inhaling the smoke from heated heroin , morphine , or opium that has been placed on a piece of tin @-@ foil . " Song 2 " is notable for its hook which features Albarn yelling " woo @-@ hoo ! " The song 's intro has been called Coxon 's " finest moment . "

Erlewine described "Country Sad Ballad Man" as a bizarrely affecting, strangled lo-fi psychedelia, whilst Collins claimed that "the seated intro is a rustic mess from which arises a simply beautiful, lazy riff." "M.O.R." was described by James Hunter of Rolling Stone as a homage to Mott the Hoople. The song borrows the chord progression from David Bowie's "Boys Keep Swinging" and "Fantastic Voyage", the latter of which was co-written by Brian Eno. "On Your Own" is notable for its usage of a Roland TR-606 Drumatix, a 1980s drum machine. Erlewine described the song as "an incredible slice of singalong pop spiked with winding, fluid guitar and synth eruptions." "There's a terrace singalong in here somewhere", Collins claimed, "undermined by its indistinct drum sound." "Theme From Retro" was described as "obligatory space-rock trip-hop" by The Austin Chronicle, whilst Collins claimed that it "presents Blur in dub", referring to it as "an unyielding, lovely row. Like, say, a Blur B-side." "You're So Great", performed only by Coxon, was described by Collins as "the most American of all" as "[Coxon's] voice? faraway badly recorded, wavering but heartfelt? belongs to anyone but Old Blur." Tom Sinclair of Entertainment Weekly described the song as recalling the "whacked-out plangency of Midwestern lo-fi heroes Guided By Voices."

Lindsay Zoladz's review of the album (as part of Blur 21) for Pitchfork claimed that "Death of a Party" is the album's highlight, speculating that it influenced Gorillaz, another musical project which features Albarn as the chief songwriter. Collins claimed that it sounded like Blur's "second homage" to The Specials' "Ghost Town", speculating that the lyrics, "Why did we bother? / Should've stayed away" reflected Blur's recent withdrawal from the public eye despite the song being written years before, and summarised the track as "a genuinely creepy piece." Sinclair described "Chinese Bombs" as sounding like a "Lower East Side mosh-pit den," while Zoladz felt that "I'm Just a Killer for Your Love" was "exquisitely bleary-eyed." In "Look Inside America", Albarn recalls the band waking up from a previous night's show, swigging Pepsi to find the energy to do a local TV show. Hunter called the song a "classic '90s road ballad." The song contains the refrain "Look inside America, she's all right; she's all right," which was said by Erlewine to "cleverly subvert the traditional Blur song, complete with strings." Collins described "Strange News From Another Star" as "Blur's Space Oddity", stating that the "acoustic guitar, quiet intro, nutty mood change into a darker passage [and] a melancholy report whose central thrust ("I don't believe in me") [express] further doubt from the troubled Albarn." Originally performed as a poem at the Albert Hall in July 1996, the studio version of "Essex Dogs" was described by Erlewine as a "six-minute slab of free verse and rattling guitar noise." Collins revealed that "here it's set to a starter motor riff so berserk even its author, Coxon, confesses to find it hard to listen to." Collins also described it as "a fitting ending (all eight exploratory minutes of it) to a challenging, barbed masterwork." The song is followed by "Interlude", a hidden track which was described by Collins as "a distressed instrumental sign-off that goes nowhere."

In a November 1996 video interview, Rowntree claimed, "It's a much more aggressive record in many ways as well as a more emotional record. I think the music we're making now is the music that we've always wanted to make but got distracted from in a way."

= = Artwork and packaging = =

The artwork for Blur, as well the album's associated singles, was designed by design company Yacht Associates, which consists of Chris Thomson and Richard Bull. The pair had also been involved in the design process for Blur's previous album covers as part of Stylorouge. The cover art depicts a patient being rushed into an emergency ward. Searching for an image which conveyed "both optimism and scariness", Yacht Associates chose the stock photo from Tony Stone Images, describing it as "an anaesthetic dream." In 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die, reviewer Mark Bennett speculates that the cover art represented the band's critical status prior to the album.

The back cover and inside sleeve by Paul Postle depict sulphur fields in Iceland, where much of the album was recorded. Postle also took photos of the band rehearsing for the gatefold. Blur is

also the group 's first album not to have lyrics and chords printed in the liner notes , instead having a composite photo of the band in the studio spread out over three panels . When questioned on this decision , Albarn revealed they " didn 't wanna have to go through explaining what the lyrics are about because they 're quite odd to explain , " although he stated that " ' Death of a Party ' and ' Strange News From Another Star ' are [both] pretty clear . "

= = Release and promotion = =

The music press predicted that the lo @-@ fi sonic experimentation would alienate Blur 's fan @-@ base . These fears were also shared by James who revealed that the front rows of the gigs that the band were performing at during the Britpop years were primarily attracting 15 @-@ year @-@ old girls and that he thought the change in style was a " fucking big balls move . " Andy Ross , who was running Food Records at the time , admitted that when he first heard it he was " taken aback . We 'd won Brits , we 'd won two consecutive Q magazine Albums of the Year and my initial reaction was it 's awkward and difficult . My immediate reaction was will you sell as many records ? Where 's my royalties ? Everyone 's first reaction to it was that it was a departure : that ? s clear from the artwork onwards . " Albarn dismissed the EMI 's concerns calling them " The usual thing ? ' It 's got no singles on it ' . Meanwhile , they 're giving Radiohead the full marketing works . That hurt for a while because we 've done so well for them . We were trying to be really brave . But it was all made up pretty quickly . " Parlophone MD Tony Wadsworth was enthusiastic however as Coxon recalls , " We played him " Song 2 " as a bit of a test of whether he was on our wavelength . We told him this was the second single . Course , we had no idea that it would be . He sat there , grinning ? ' Definitely ! Definitely a single ! ' "

Worries of " commercial suicide " were eased when the lead single , " Beetlebum " , debuted at number one on the UK Singles Chart . Blur topped the UK Albums Chart when it was released in February , knocking White on Blonde by Texas off the topspot . Blur eventually went on to be certified Platinum . Although the album could not match the sales of their previous albums in the UK , Blur became the band 's most successful internationally , reaching the Top Twenty in Switzerland , France , Norway , New Zealand , Sweden and Japan . In the US , the album peaked at number sixty @-@ one on the Billboard 200 , Blur 's highest charting album at the time , and was certified gold . The album 's US success has been attributed partially to the popularity of " Song 2 " , which peaked at number six on the Modern Rock chart . After " Song 2 " was licensed for use in soundtracks , advertisements and television shows ? it became the most @-@ recognisable Blur song in the US . After the success of Blur , the band embarked on a nine @-@ month world tour .

= = Critical reception = =

According to AllMusic , Blur received generally positive reviews from music critics but at the time of its release , according to Q , the reviews were mixed in the UK press . David Cavanagh reported that The Guardian praised it , whereas The Times was more " ambivalent " and The Independent was negative . Stephen Thomas Erlewine of AllMusic said the album highlights " the band 's rich eclecticism and sense of songcraft . Certainly , they are trying for new sonic territory , bringing in shards of white noise , gurgling electronics , raw guitars , and druggy psychedelia , but these are just extensions of previously hidden elements of Blur 's music . " Margaret Moser of The Austin Chronicle praised the album for " unveiling a punchy brand of muscular Brit @-@ pop that dances around raucous , Kinks @-@ like garage @-@ pop (" Movin ' On , " " M.O.R. ") , tender , Beatles @-@ like harmonies (" Beetlebum , " " Look Inside America ") , punky quirk (" Chinese Bombs ") , soulful balladry (" Country Sad Ballad Man ") , obligatory space @-@ rock trip @-@ hop (" Theme from Retro , " " I 'm Just a Killer for Your Love ") , and a raise @-@ yer @-@ mug singalong (" On Your Own ") . " Jonathan Bernstein of Spin also felt that , " despite their traitorous pronouncements , Blur 's highlights are consistently British @-@ bred . " James Hunter , writing for Rolling Stone , claimed that " what still makes [Blur] great is their deep grasp of style and genre . What they haven 't done on Blur is roll out of bed , strum a few chords and loudly free @-@ associate about the first

thing that pops into their heads . This is a record that inhabits current American rock biases as cogently and intelligently as Parklife corralled the last few decades of British rock . "

Many praised lyrics such as the ones in " Look inside America / She 's alright " , and noting Albarn 's " obligatory nod to Beck , [and promotion of] the new Pavement album as if paid to do so " , reviewers felt the band had come to accept American values during this time ? an about @-@ face of their attitude during the Britpop years . Erlewine wrote that " Blur might be self @-@ consciously eclectic , but Blur are at their best when they are trying to live up to their own pretensions , because of Damon Albarn 's exceptional sense of songcraft and the band 's knack for detailed arrangements that flesh out the songs to their fullest . " Alternative Press called it " a whirl of weird esotericism , precious , precocious and impressively " . Robert Christgau of The Village Voice was less enthusiastic and cited only " Song 2 " as a " choice cut " , indicating " a good song on an album that isn 't worth your time or money " .

At the 1998 NME Awards , Blur received a nomination for Best Album . However , it lost to Radiohead 's OK Computer . In 2013 , NME ranked it at number 137 in its list of 500 Greatest Albums of All Time . The album was also included in the book 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die .

Unlike some of Blur 's previous albums , praise from the band members has remained . " I 'm really fond of that record , " Coxon said in 2009 . " I think it 's one of our best . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Damon Albarn , Graham Coxon , Alex James and Dave Rowntree , except where noted .

Notes

The length of track 14 on the American version of the album is 11 : 24 , with " Dancehall " as a hidden track in between " Essex Dogs " and " Interlude " .

The European version came with a live CD recorded in The Netherlands (also with selected B @-@ sides from the " Blur " singles) that was also released separately in The Netherlands as simply " Blur Live E.P. " .

The Australian version came with a second CD featuring the complete Peel Acres sessions (as released in the UK on the " On Your Own " singles)

The Japanese version of the album has " Dancehall " as a separate , listed track (15) , which includes " Interlude . "

" Death of a Party " was demoed in 1992 . That recording was released to the fan club prior to the version which appears on the album . The 7 " remix version appears on Midlife : A Beginner 's Guide to Blur .

= = Personnel = =

Damon Albarn ? lead vocals , piano , keyboards , Hammond organ , acoustic guitar

Graham Coxon ? electric and acoustic guitars , backing vocals , vocals on " You 're So Great " , theremin , additional drums on " Song 2 " .

Alex James ? bass guitar , lead and rhythm basses on " Song 2 " .

Dave Rowntree ? drums , percussion

Produced by Stephen Street , except for " I 'm Just a Killer for Your Love " produced by Blur

John Smith ? engineer (all tracks except for " I 'm Just a Killer for Your Love ")

Jason Cox ? engineer (" I 'm Just a Killer for Your Love ")

Arnpór " Addi 800 " Örlygsson ? additional engineering

= = Charts = =

= = Certifications = =

