THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

# RADIOHEAD

DELUXE UPDATED EDITION



CLASSIC INTERVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS

THEIR 30 GREATEST SONGS

## HAIL TO THE CHIEFS

# RADIOHEAD

## THE FULL STORY

SOLO ALBUMS | RARITIES | INSIDE THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

# Welcome!

WRITING AS WE are in strange, and slightly frightening days, it seems appropriate to be presenting a publication about Radiohead – a band that's always evolving, the better to uncover and attempt to console human discomfort amid global chaos. Indeed amid the spring 2020 Coronavirus pandemic, on March 24, 2020, Radiohead's guitarist Ed O'Brien stated that he had been experiencing Coronavirus-like symptoms, but remained "in good spirits".

It's not only in our own world that a lot has changed. Since *Uncut* first published its *Ultimate Music Guide* to Radiohead in 2015, a lot has changed in Radiohead's world, too, and we're happy to be able to bring you this deluxe 148-page new edition of the magazine to cover it all. There's been yet more solo activity in the Radiohead diaspora. Thom Yorke has delivered two further albums, both which mark a growing affinity with film: *Suspiria* (an actual soundtrack) and *Anima* (accompanied by a Netflix event). Ed O' Brien has released his long-gestated project EOB, and Jonny Greenwood has started a record label.

Meanwhile back at the mothership, the band continue to make impressive and innovative leaps forward. Since we last convened, there's been a new album, *A Moon Shaped Pool*, to add to their canon of ecstatic and disconcerting work, and also – a customarily interesting way into their past – a couple of new archival releases. *OKNOTOK* revisits their classic *OK Computer* and reveals a trio of important unreleased tracks, and wraps it up, if not in a bow, then with a sliver of actual master tape. With its hand apparently forced by a theft, the band also released via Bandcamp *Minidiscs [Hacked]*, a 16-hour dumping of songs in development and live tracks.

"Major band relaunches website" wouldn't normally warrant a mention in an introduction like this. And yet, Radiohead's launch of their "Public Library" continues their meaningful interactions with their fans – turning a promo tool into an online archive, with webcasts, newsletters, T-shirts and its own library card. *Uncut*'s own Tom Pinnock compiles 20 choice points of interest for the cardholder to check out on page 144.

**RADIOHEAD CONTINUE TO MAKE IMPRESSIVE AND INNOVATIVE LEAPS FORWARD**

Whereas Radiohead's archive contains weird bears, webcasts and fan-shot films, ours contains the band's meetings with *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Uncut*. Never a band to trot out platitudes and move on to the next one, the relationship has been spiky at times (legend has it that after a 2001 interview, Thom Yorke stopped a car in LA to berate *Uncut*'s features editor about what had transpired, when he saw him walking down the street) but always thoughtful and enlightening.

Here you'll read extensive selections from that archive, and also in-depth reviews of every recording, as the band continue to chart their uniquely graceful path through modern music, and through ever-weirder and unprecedented times.



Keys to the city: Thom Yorke at the Austin City Limits Music Festival, Zilker Park, Texas, September 30, 2016

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

# Contents





**6 "We scream and yell and generally are... completely tragic!"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW We meet the wry young men already keen to avoid the clichés of rock'n'roll...

**10 PABLO HONEY**
ALBUM REVIEW Radiohead's uneven, but promising debut – propelled by the massive hit, "Creep"

**14 "Suddenly everyone's nice to you. And it's like, fuck you!"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW The loves, the vices, the Chomsky books... Radiohead-mania on the US East Coast!

**20 "I thought I'd turned into a monster"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW After nearly breaking up, Thom Yorke's gang return revitalised with "My Iron Lung"

**24 "There suddenly wasn't this need to cower in the corner any more..."**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW *The Bends* done, we find Yorke pondering his paranoias

**28 THE BENDS**
ALBUM REVIEW Radiohead do it their own way – and come up with their first rock landmark

**32 "We are fucking lucky!"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW On tour with the group in '95, talking stardom, REM and new songs

**38 OK COMPUTER**
ALBUM REVIEW Amid the lunacy of Cool Britannia, the band create a masterpiece of pre-millennial tension

**42 "We're still capable of producing enormous trauma for ourselves, unfortunately..."**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW From drunken Belfast award ceremonies to star-studded New York shows, we follow Radiohead as they embrace the madness of *OK Computer*

**52 "I was basically becoming unhinged... completely unhinged"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW The band shed light on their extremely painful reinvention

**56 KID A**
ALBUM REVIEW Born to anxious parents, a difficult new child...

**60 AMNESIAC**
ALBUM REVIEW A fiery and eccentric sequel to *Kid A*

**64 "Who the fuck wants to be a big band?"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW Even with their millennial makeover vindicated, Thom Yorke remains wary

**78 "We think this is a sparkly, shiny pop record. But people won't get it..."**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW We enter the Oxford gloaming to talk politics, pop and the band's "clear, pretty" new LP

**84 HAIL TO THE THIEF**
ALBUM REVIEW To Hollywood, and a radical new departure: an album recorded live, at speed

**88 THOM YORKE – THE ERASER**
ALBUM REVIEW Alone with a laptop and his "psychic garbage", the frontman branches out

**90 IN RAINBOWS**
ALBUM REVIEW A romantic masterpiece, with an equally pioneering release

**94 "The internet is not the fucking universe!"**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW With *In Rainbows* out, the band reveal its creation, from stately homes to rat poison...

**100 JONNY GREENWOOD – THE ALBUMS**
ALBUM REVIEW The extra-curricular adventures of an avant-classical maverick

**104 "What do I do? I just generally worry about things..."**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW Inside Jonny's studio lair, talking soundtracks, orchestras and Radiohead

**108 THE KING OF LIMBS**
ALBUM REVIEW The band reconvene, and skilfully weave together the organic and electronic

**112 PHILIP SELWAY – THE ALBUMS**
ALBUM REVIEW The master drummer's late-flowering solo career

**114 ATOMS FOR PEACE**
ALBUM REVIEW In which Thom Yorke jams with Flea and ends up with "some pretty cool shit"...

**116 THOM YORKE – TOMORROW'S MODERN BOXES**
ALBUM REVIEW More nightmares in the garden and revolutionary delivery mechanisms

**118 A MOON SHAPED POOL**
ALBUM REVIEW Radiohead's ninth: excavations from the past help the band confront the future

**122 THOM YORKE – SUSPIRIA**
ALBUM REVIEW Movie soundtrack debut heads in a creepy new direction

**124 THOM YORKE – ANIMA**
ALBUM REVIEW Channeling unease: a satisfying solo album from 2019

**126 COMPILATIONS**
ALBUM REVIEW EPs, live mini-albums and remixes

**128 TOP 30 SONGS**
CLASSIC INTERVIEW Our all-star panel of friends and fans select 30 game-changers from the catalogue

**138 EOB – EARTH**
ALBUM REVIEW Rural seclusion and global musings: Ed O'Brien's solo debut outing

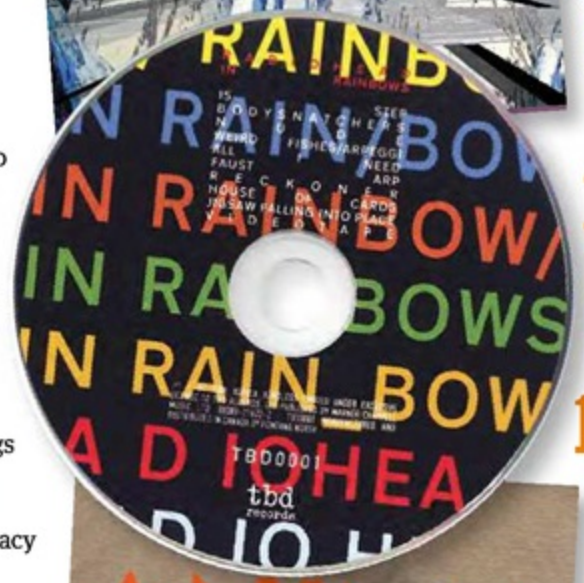
**140 MISCELLANY**
The singles discography, Radiohead on film, plus guest appearances and collectables...

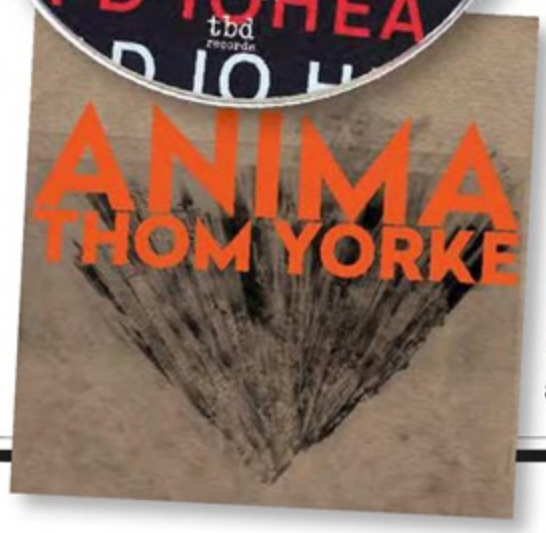
**144 PUBLIC LIBRARY**
Inside Radiohead's online archive

**146 STOP ME...** Champagne! Spike Milligan's Dalek! A night out in Paris with Thom Yorke












Live at Firenze Rocks Festival, Florence, Italy, June 14, 2017

**BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES**
**-2, 110 SOUTHWARK ST, LONDON SE1 0SU**

## EDITORIAL

**EDITOR** JOHN ROBINSON, WHOSE FAVOURITE WHO SONG IS: *KNIVES OUT*

**UNCUT EDITOR** MICHAEL BONNER *CODEX*

**ART EDITOR** MARC JONES *TALK SHOW HOST*

**SENIOR DESIGNER** MICHAEL CHAPMAN *EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE*

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT** MARK BEAUMONT *MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK*

**PRODUCTION EDITOR** MICK MEIKLEHAM *JUST*

**SENIOR SUB EDITOR** MIKE JOHNSON *LUCKY*

**PICTURE EDITOR** PHIL KING *CREEP*

**THANKS TO** LAUREN SHARP AND BEN ALLAN

**COVERS PRINTED BY** WILLIAM GIBBONS UK LTD

**TEXT PRINTED BY** WILLIAM GIBBONS UK LTD

**COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY** ALEX LAKE

## CONTRIBUTORS

TOM PINNOCK *AIRBAG*, PETER WATTS *EXIT MUSIC (FOR A FILM)*, ANDREW MUELLER *STREET SPIRIT*, LOUIS PATTISON *IDIOTEQUE*, GRAEME THOMSON *FAKE PLASTIC TREES*, SHARON O'CONNELL *THERE THERE*, ROB HUGHES *AIRBAG*, MARK BENTLEY *JIGSAW FALLING INTO PLACE*, JASON ANDERSON *RECKONER*, PIERS MARTIN *NO SURPRISES*, BUD SCOPPA *THERE THERE*. NICK HASTED *HIGH AND DRY*

## PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

**PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER** CRAIG BROADBRIDGE
**AD PRODUCTION** DAVID BARTON

**DISTRIBUTED BY** MARKETFORCE (UK) LTD, 5 CHURCHILL PLACE, CANARY WHARF, LONDON E14 5HU

## CLIENT SERVICES

**BRAND MANAGER, MUSIC** MATTHEW CHALKLEY 07966 159962

**COMMERCIAL EXECUTIVE, FILM & ENTERTAINMENT** GEMMA LUNDY 07711 957566

## BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER** MENG RU KUOK

**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER** IVAN CHEN

**AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES** LAURENT LE GRAVEREND

**AVP, COMMS & PARTNERSHIPS** LAUREN HENDRY PARSONS

**SNR MANAGER, BRAND & GROUP STRATEGY** KRYSTLE HALL

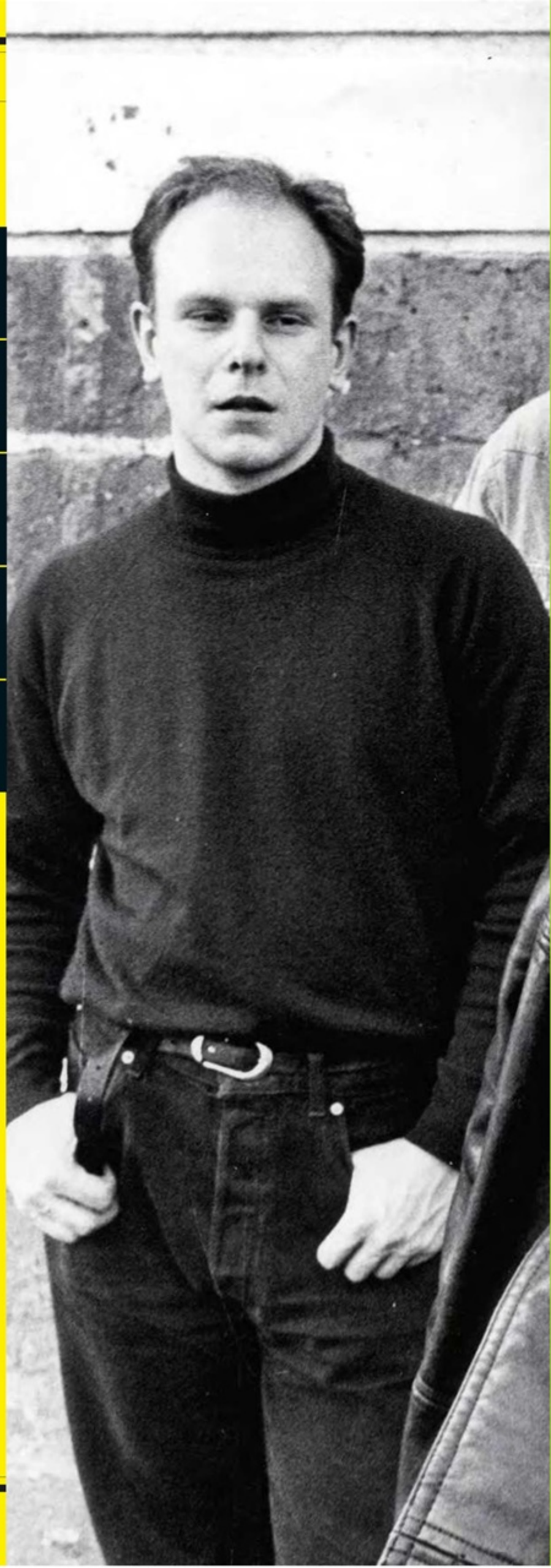
**MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY** ILIYAS ONG

**COUNTRY DIRECTOR (UK) AND HEAD OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS (EMEA)** HOLLY BISHOP

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

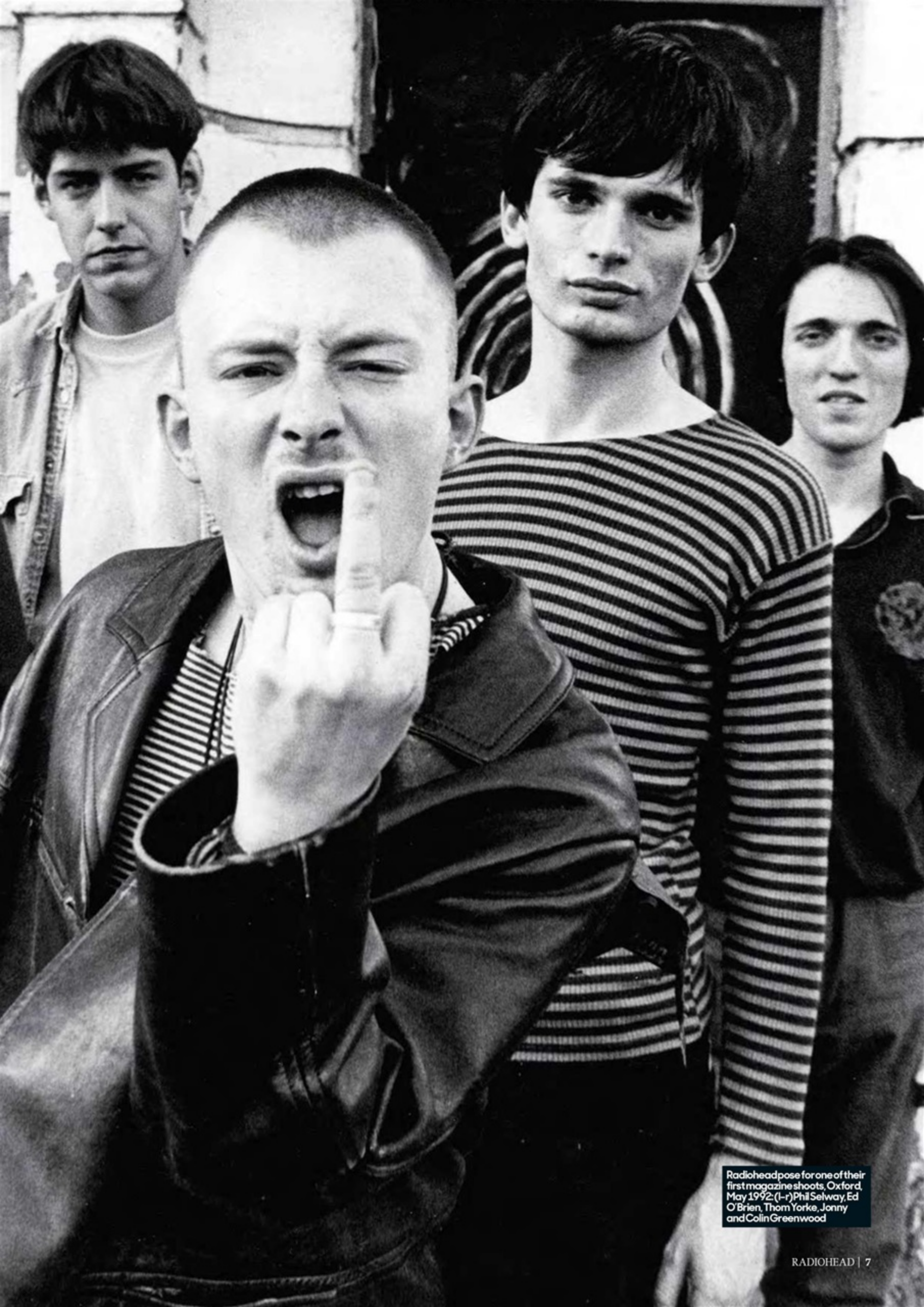
All content copyright BandLab UK Limited 2020, all rights reserved. While we make every effort to ensure that the factual content of UNCUT Magazine is correct, we cannot take any responsibility nor be held accountable for any factual errors printed. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or resold without the prior consent of BandLab UK Limited. UNCUT Magazine recognises all copyrights contained within this issue. Where possible, we acknowledge the copyright

# "We scream and yell and generally are... completely tragic!"



May 1992. *SIMON WILLIAMS* meets a bunch of wry young men with a slightly mystifying EMI contract, a debut EP, and a nagging suspicion that they've "completely missed the boat". A year later, though, *STUART BAILIE* celebrates a band who've become articulate standard-bearers for a constituency of neurotic outsiders, keen to avoid the clichéd trappings of rock'n'roll. "Being in a band is about not wanting to grow up," says Thom Yorke. "We're all little kids."

TIM PATON



Radiohead pose for one of their first magazine shoots, Oxford, May 1992: (l–r) Phil Selway, Ed O'Brien, Thom Yorke, Jonny and Colin Greenwood



Radiohead, 1993: tipped for the top by The Frank And Walters!




**"We play fuck-off songs!" Pardon?**
**"We play fuck-off songs! If you're not interested, fuck you!"**

RADIOHEAD, IT WOULD appear, are working up a head of steam about this, that and several others. As befits a band who play live like their, erm, lives depended on it.

"We're calm people normally, but onstage we get such a buzz," apologises singer Thom Yorke. "And response is really important – you can't go on in front of 50 people and do a Manic Street Preachers. You can't!"

"We supported Sultans Of Ping FC and the audience probably expected a joke band as support," continues Thom. "But we're not exactly a bundle of laughs: we scream and yell and generally are... completely tragic!"

Radiohead have been around for half a decade, content to amble along until last summer when they reconvened in Oxford around drummer Phil Selway, bassist Colin Greenwood and guitarists Ed O'Brien and Jonny Greenwood.

"When we were off at college, Ride started up and the whole Thames Valley thing happened," shrugs Thom. "By the time we got back it had all finished! That's called impeccable timing – we completely missed the boat."

Now Radiohead are content to sail their ship alone, propelled by the hyperdrive inherent in their debut "Drill" EP. The choicest cut is "Prove Yourself", the kind of sly meander which suddenly erupts in a torrent of temperamental guitars, with nary a warning about manning the barricades. Thom explains that "Prove Yourself" kicks against such basic downers as infringement of privacy, returning to the cheery theme of fuck-off tunes, but emphasises that positive sentiments lurk beneath the furious fur.

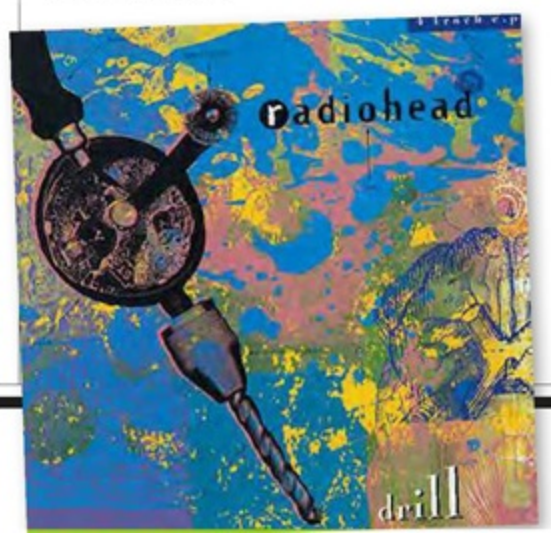
"One of the problems with punk was that the violence just intimidated people to the point where they were moved to fight back. The idea of just moshing around and hitting each other doesn't make any sense to me – it's bollocks. The aggression should be channelled into something rather than encouraging people to hit each other."

Fugazi's intelligent aggression gets the thumbs up, as does the DJ in Newcastle who has been playing "Prove Yourself" – with its key refrain of *"I'm better off dead"* – on hospital radio! Add this to Radiohead's strange position on the (gasp!) EMI roster and one could well be looking at subversive instincts gone wild.

"The day we signed to EMI, the label MD walked in," grins Colin. "He said, 'You'll never see me again until you sell 500,000 units and then we'll shake hands and take a photo. By the way, I really like that song "Phillipa Chicken", that's my favourite.' And I said, 'Oh, we've dropped that one from the set,' and there was just this silence as the pen wavered over the contract..."

Tune in to get turned on.

***SIMON WILLIAMS***




STEFAN DE BATSELIER




THEY'RE SO FREAKIN' special. Bernard from Suede rates 'em, Loz out of Kingmaker is a fan. The Frank And Walters say they're the Cork tips for '93. In plenty of significant places, folks agree that Radiohead are the ones who we need to help us whup up the current personality recession.

And so say you, the *NME* readers who saw them play one of their hundred gigs last year – voting them into our New Bands poll between Therapy? and Verve. So say the masses of studes who jammed out ULU a month ago, bleating along with obscure B-sides, blacking out the stage area, leaving just the top of Thom's spikey barnet on view. Only if you stretched your head enough could you see a spasm of disbelief on the singer's face that betrayed the unthinkable: are Radiohead utterly worth it?

Well, there's this vision – this beautiful rock'n'roll ritual that clinched it for me, proving how Radiohead will be a band that many of us will care deeply about this year. And it was in Chelmsford, of all places, in a pokey old YMCA hall, that we found our thrill.

Early in the show and you already guessed it was going to be the ultimate freak scene. Every reject from every cult was there: the fat rockabilly, the past-it glam boy, the clueless indie clones and gawky babes. And there was the blubbery kid who looked like a swine even by their standards, who'd taken to painting – with boy-neurotic brutality – an enormous 'CREEP' on the back of his saggy shirt, with an arrow pointing right at his head.

And he just stood by the front of the stage for the duration, the accusing arrow on his shirt

twitching like some kind of geek-detector as the owner jerked to the music he liked, or when he tried to maul the dumpy girl beside him. It was an excruciating carry-on, right up to the time when the band played their most famous song. His song.

And "Creep" was just the most perfect thing, with Radiohead confident enough now to stack up the drama; Thom submerging in his vat of loveless, hopeless pity and guitarist Jonny jack-knifing away, hacking out his frustration, clanging into the chorus and through to that excoriating loser litany...

*"I want a perfect body/I want a perfect soul..."*

By this time, Creep Boy was beautifully radiant; leaping high, singing his life, all his angst on the line, emancipated the way that the ugly-bugs used to get during a classic Smiths show. The ceremony had been rediscovered, relived, completed. At the moment, Radiohead were just the greatest.

THOM YORKE IS freaked because some kid has sneaked into the soundcheck and keeps bad-vibing him. People ask Thom what the boy said to him, but he answers that nothing was said. "He just kept staring at me," Thom mumbles.

He's not as freaked as he was last year, though, when touring got to him and he drank and smoked to excess and then shaved all his hair off. Or before then, when he worked in a menswear department and people used to laugh at his Oxfam suits, and then accused him of stealing clothes from the shop. Or that terrible time when the girl he was obsessed with blew him out and he had to write "Creep" to take some of that intensity overground. Say, Thom, did the girl ever get to hear "Creep" in the end?

"I got into a lot of trouble over that. I shouldn't have admitted to her being the real person."

So when you're on *This Is Your Life*, they can play the song and she'll come striding out to shake your hand, to remind you of the good old days...

"I'm sure she didn't give a shit, really. She never gave a shit. She wasn't even that nice, anyway..."

Radiohead used to be ugly, characterless, lacking in confidence, mooching about Oxford, never good or different enough to get the media interested. Before they signed, A&R men looked at them and saw nothing special. Then, through inspiration or fluke, they were swept away by the man who signed up The Sundays and, later, Luke Goss. They started to play lots and recorded songs with magical bits in them – records that will forever call fans back to the zip and anxiety of the early '90s. Consequently, the people who passed the baby Radiohead over aren't so dismissive now.

"People still call us ugly," Thom figures, "but there are bigger criticisms."

So what about the vulnerability, the self-hatred in the music? Does that just come splurging out naturally?

"For ages I didn't want to deal with that. Then I realised it was one of my strengths. And people called us ugly ducklings. So we came to a point where we had to turn it around and start using it, rather than trying to hide it."

Isn't there a danger, though, of Radiohead over-using that angle, and becoming the Woody Allens of rock – turning therapy sessions into art?

"I think I'd get bored far too easily. I hope we don't get to the point where people will think, 'Shut up and stop moaning.' Besides, we like to be angry too, and one of the new songs, 'Pop Is Dead', is really vitriolic."

Ah yes, "Pop Is Dead". The closing song in the Radiohead show, a wonderfully sustained farce in which the shagged-out corpse of popular music just isn't able to manage any more. It gets dragged out on its knees, and then keels over. It's had so many facelifts that its face pops open like an old onion. Rotten old pop. Thom likes to dedicate it to Freddie Mercury.

It's a theme that's reprised all the way through the Radiohead show, most notably on new single "Anyone Can Play Guitar", in which the author is unsure just what to make of rock'n'roll, whether it's a splendid, liberating art or just a forum for chancers, fixers, and rubbish talent. So, if it's as bad in the song as you say, Thom, why bother?

"The song is an attack on people who think that growing their hair long and wearing tight leather trousers constitutes being a rock star – and God, it doesn't. It's such an easy way to market yourself."

And what does it take, then?

**"PEOPLE CALLED US UGLY DUCKLINGS, SO WE HAD TO TURN THAT AROUND AND START USING IT"**

"Songs, ideas, thought... all the things that you're not expected to have. Also, connecting yourself with an audience is really important. Like, Bowie, he would stand there and strike all these poses. And everything would be really mannered and clever but... you knew he was just clever. When you become a caricature of yourself, it's time to give up."

Which is why Jim Morrison is given a tough time in the new single and video?

"Well, Jim Morrison was a bimbo. He was great looking and stuff and took loads of drugs and girls loved him, but his poetry just fucking sucked. The day they brought out a book of his poetry, it was all over. It's not art, it's pop music."

And pop is dead, right? So why bother if you don't like it, you contradictory, messed-up kid?

"Yeah, it's a good job. Like I say in the chorus of the song, I want to be in a band when I get to heaven. It's the best thing you can possibly do with your life.

"It's like when kids wanted to run off and join the circus to get away from the real world, and be glamorous and travel and have all these things. Being in a band is as much about that desperate attempt – that last fling before you finally give up and take a job. That last attempt to give up and grab life in a different way before you realise that you can't... Being in a band is about not wanting to grow up. We're all little kids. Julian Cope is just a mad little kid, isn't he?"

DON'T YOU JUST love the follies and delusions of rock'n'roll? And aren't you glad of the number of great songs that have sprung out of this romantic source? Like "Star", "Complete Control", "Long Live Rock", "All The Way From Memphis", "You Love Us", "So You Want To Be A Rock'n'Roll Star" – all of them infused with some cynicism, but still luxuriating in the panstick'n'vaudeville roots of the trade. Ultimately, the singers of those songs are in love with the job. And, of course, the great era for all that was the '70s, when being a star was such a desirable achievement. When you had to be a full-timer; royally weird, awe-inspiring, unfathomable, singing about starships and the girl you fancy next door.

Suede, of course, know this stuff. And it seems like Radiohead are feeling their way in that direction, too. You just have to glance at a year of press clippings to see how they've started to look less like village idiots and more like boy princes from Planet Pop, flaunting those unusual angles, cultivating the fragile personae, even mincing a little – though not so much as their mums might notice... Which brings me to my pet theory of the week: if Brett is rehearsing for this era's Bowie job, then it figures that Radiohead, with their shaggy, creepshow appeal and fascination for the image of rock'n'roll lore, are shaping into this generation's answer to – wait for it – Mott The Hoople. "Anyone Can Play Guitar" is Radiohead's "Honaloochie Boogie". And "Pop Is Dead" translates as "The Ballad of Mott The Hoople". ...Easy!

"Oh God, don't let us be Mott The Hoople!" says Thom, horrified. "We might as well do the Bowie cover now and have done with it!"

But aren't you infatuated with the myth and all its failings, the way Ian Hunter was?

"No, I'm not trying to define rock'n'roll. To me, rock'n'roll just reminds me of people with personal hygiene problems who still like getting blow-jobs off complete strangers. That's not what being in a band means to me. Lester Bangs would say it was 'The Party' – the party of life."

Well, at the very least, Radiohead ought to confess to putting some extra intrigue into rock'n'roll again. For finding poetry where last year's T-shirt bands were so depressingly prosaic. For electing to swoon and be mysterious when the rest of them just want to shout...

"I think being cryptic is great. Last year, everyone was being really obvious. What really bugged me was looking at the T-shirt charts, and it seemed like the only way to sell a T-shirt was to have 'Fuck Off!' in really long letters. It was so boring."

And there's masses of other things to explore, right? Like writing a damn song that can make you break down and cry. Like singing anthems for creeps and misfits. Like having a show that doesn't cater to arse-brain stage-divers. Stay special, you freakin' dudes. Carry the news...

***STUART BAILIE***

# PABLO HONEY

*"I wish I was special…"* On A Friday become Radiohead and, tentatively, prove themselves. | BY PETER WATTS

**RELEASED: 22 FEBRUARY 1993**

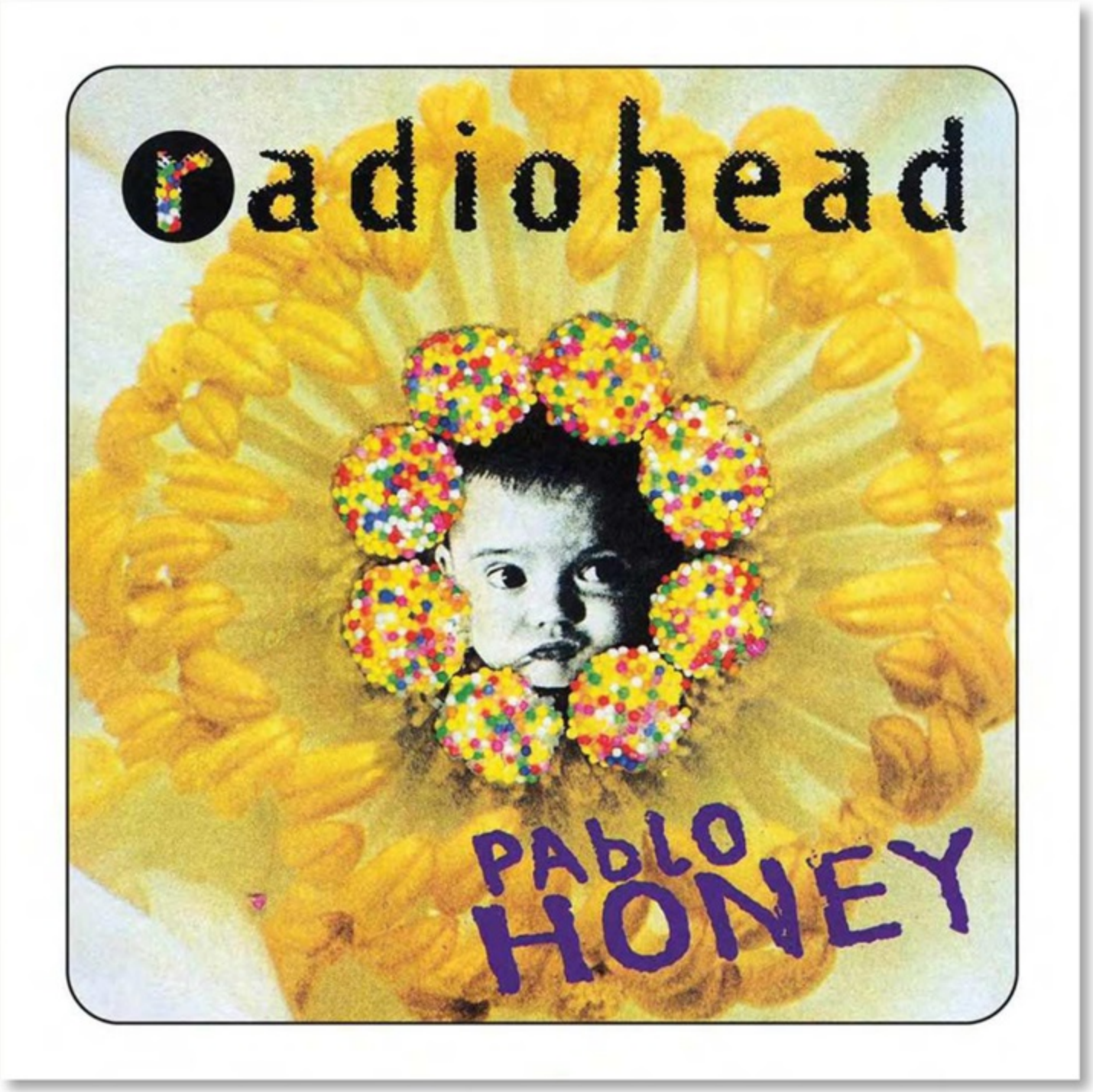
WHEN EMI'S NEW signings, On A Friday, were told they needed to change their name, the opportunity was a godsend. Thom Yorke, Phil Selway, Ed O'Brien and brothers Colin and Jonny Greenwood had picked the name shortly after forming at Abingdon School in 1985, a nod to the day their supportive music teacher, Terence Gilmore-James, let the five teenagers use the school music room for rehearsal.

Seven years later, and all five had left school, gone to university, left university, returned to Oxford to play the local pub scene and signed to Parlophone/EMI – and were still called On A Friday. So when a generally positive live review in *Melody Maker* noted their "terrible name", the moment was seized. Making what would be a rare concession to their label's wishes, the band rebranded. On A Friday became Radiohead, the name chosen, it seems on a whim, from "Radio Head", a lesser Talking Heads song, above suggestions like Jude, Music and Gravitate.

History proved it would be an appropriate one. *"Hey, radio head, the sound of a brand new world,"* jittered David Byrne on "Radio Head", and Radiohead would come to define pre-Millennial angst, a brand new world of incomplete connections and emotional dissonance, of alienation and isolation in the face of technological innovation, of the desperation and powerlessness of the individual in a world that no longer believed in society or in God or even in the reconciling power of rock'n'roll.

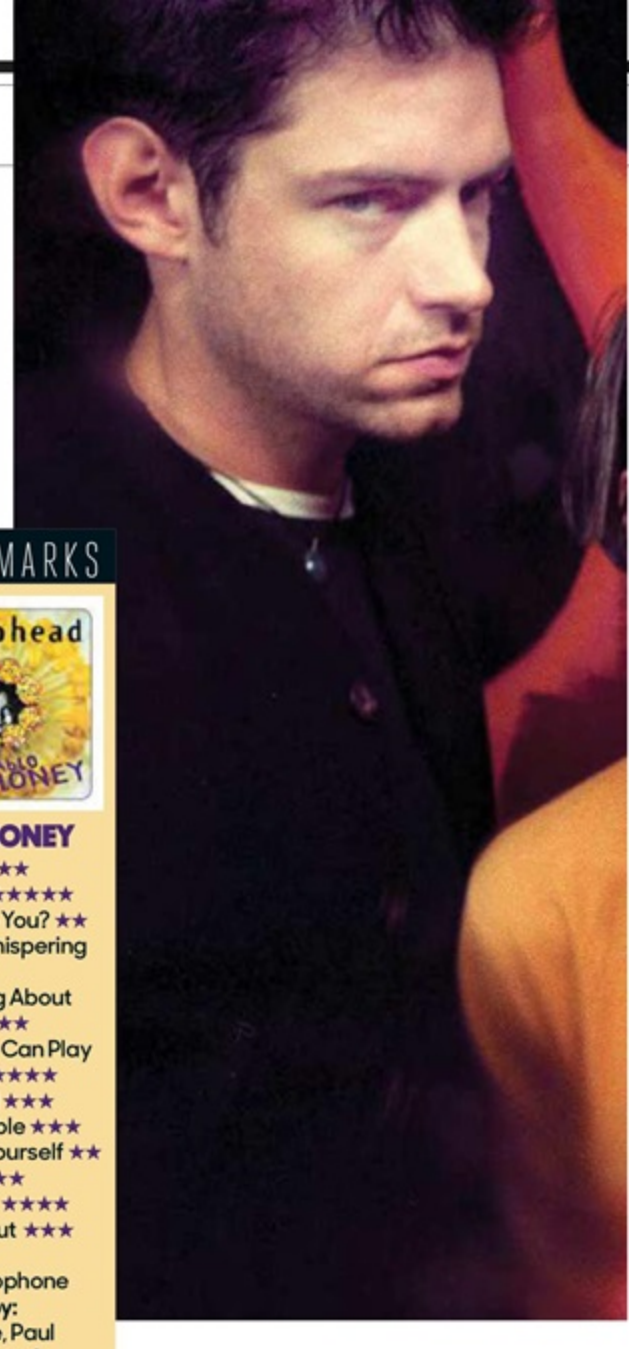
> "IT'S IMPORTANT THAT A DEBUT ALBUM SHOULD NOT HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS"

This was to come. When *Pablo Honey* was released in February 1993 it sounded, if anything, a little dated. From the opening churn of "You" and through tracks like "Ripcord" and "Lurgee", Radiohead channelled intense, introspective American bands like the Pixies and Fugazi. Radiohead were American-inspired: their name came from a quintessential New York band, and even the album title was filched from US culture, borrowed from a routine by comedy duo The Jerky Boys. American music wasn't unfashionable – Nirvana were, after all, the hottest band on the planet – but local tastes tended towards the dreamy psychedelia of Ride and Slowdive. Further afield, up-and-coming UK groups were in thrall to the sharp, studied ironies of art-school pop, writing self-celebratory songs about sex and class. Radiohead's interests were more internal. Throughout *Pablo Honey*, Thom Yorke agonised about personal failure; songs like "I Can't", "Prove Yourself" and "Creep" were wreathed in self-doubt that bordered on self-loathing. Radiohead were earnest, and earnest would rarely be cool. While this


radiohead
PABLO HONEY


1. YOU 2. CREEP 3. HOW DO YOU? 4. STOP WHISPERING 5. THINKING ABOUT YOU 6. ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR
7. RIPCORD 8. VEGETABLE 9. PROVE YOURSELF 10. I CAN'T 11. LURGEE 12. BLOW OUT


radiohead
PABLO HONEY



helped ensure their longevity, it also gave the band a grudge.

They looked different, too, foregoing the peacock eccentricities of Jarvis Cocker and Brett Anderson and dressing so dismally that EMI gave them £300 to spend on clothes. They were bolshy, blithely telling one suit from the label that they'd dropped his favourite song, "Phillipa Chicken", from their set, and scorning another who told them they needed to write a "manifesto". But *Pablo Honey* showed why EMI had given them a six-album deal. On "You", "Stop Whispering" and "Lurgee", there was an ambitious sense of dynamics and drama thanks to Yorke's vocals and the three-guitar attack that had O'Brien and Yorke on rhythm and Jonny Greenwood on lead. In the acoustic "Thinking About You", there was variety and great songwriting. And in "Creep" there was a song so strong it could stop a bus.

One of the first to spot the potential had been Chris Hufford, who ran an Oxford studio with Bryce Edge and heard an early demo. He was impressed by Yorke's "brilliant songs with the amazing power of the three guitars" and the pair agreed to manage the band. Also listening eagerly was Keith Wozencroft, a sales rep for EMI who was about to move into A&R. He was handed a tape by bassist Colin Greenwood while visiting the Oxford branch of Our Price, where Greenwood worked. Wozencroft put the band on EMI's radar, who signed them ahead of a dozen competitors.

> "RADIOHEAD ALREADY HAD SONGS BETTER THAN A LOT OF BANDS WILL EVER WRITE"

After a debut EP, "Drill", was released to nobody's interest, EMI decided to capitalise on Radiohead's American instincts. Paul Q Kolderie and Sean Slade ran Fort Apache studio in Boston, producing Buffalo Tom, Uncle Tupelo, Sebadoh and Dinosaur Jr. The pair were in London looking for work, having noticed their style went down well in the UK. EMI put them together with Radiohead, suggesting they record three songs – "In My Head", "Million Dollar Question" and "Lurgee" – for their next single. The sessions at a rehearsal space in a barn outside Oxford were going nowhere, so the band started messing about with an anguished singalong that Yorke called their "Scott Walker song". The producers liked it, but assumed it was a cover version of a Walker song they'd never heard before. It was only later, at the studio in Chipping Norton, that they suggested the misfiring band give it another go. When Radiohead finished their performance, the studio broke out into applause. Belatedly, they'd chanced upon a jewel. "Creep" was a slow-burner. Neither band nor label were sure about it, and when it was released as a single in September 1992, the public weren't that keen either. It sold 6,000 copies, soaring to No 78. *The Evening Standard* dismissed it as "a gloomy anthem of self-loathing", while Radio 1 played it three times before shelving it for being too depressing. However, the potential was clear. As "Creep" began to pick up radio play in Israel, then New Zealand, Spain and, unexpectedly, San Francisco, where it hadn't even been released, Slade and Kolderie were busy recording an album.

*Pablo Honey* came together in three weeks, recorded in a converted schoolhouse in Chipping Norton. Although the company was amiable – Slade recalls "watching *El Dorado*, staying up late, drinking warm ale" – the recording was tough, with the band wanting to use "all the ideas they'd ever come up with in 20 years of listening to records", as Kolderie saw it. Yorke in particular fussed over every detail, becoming "unbearable, according to my girlfriend". The producers discovered Yorke sang best when he couldn't hear himself, so made monitor mixes that blurred his voice. Other than that, they layered guitars and focused on getting the band "to mesh and gel and get into a groove," recalled Kolderie. "They already had songs – better than a lot of bands will ever write – and they already had Thom's voice. But they needed to get tight." What helped was the band's "unity", says Slade. Although Radiohead had formed at school, they had been in different years and had dispersed around the country to different universities; that they should still be together despite this was remarkable. Now, they all lived in the same semi in Oxford and, Slade said, "seemed like a band that was together for the right reasons; they were friends and they really loved each other and they loved making music together." This would stand them in good stead when fame came crashing down.

Kolderie and Slade intended to mix the tapes in London, but found the pressure from the band to be intolerable so ran off to Boston. As a result, the final mix was "pretty much rammed down the band's throats", as Kolderie admits, something that may account for the band's ambivalence towards their debut.

*Pablo Honey* wasn't groundbreaking, but it was no dud. The album oozed regal comfort, retaining a constant sense of its own importance despite flagellating lyrics. Nowhere was this more apparent than on "Creep", the album's second song. Adorned by Jonny Greenwood's characterful guitar crunches – the most precise explanation Greenwood gives is that when he first heard the song, "I didn't like it. It stayed quiet. So I hit the guitar hard – really hard" – "Creep" saw Yorke contemplate a woman, *"an angel"*, with a frightening mixture of desire and hate. *"I wish I was special, you're so fucking special,"* growls the self-confessed *"weirdo"*, like a high-school stalker, with Greenwood's guitar sounding like a shotgun ejecting shells. But while the lyrics ooze disgust, Yorke's voice is assured, steely, determined – he sounds like a man who knows what he wants and, worryingly, how to get it – and the tune surfs majestically, almost serenely, above the fray, aware of its explosive power.

The quiet-loud ethic is borrowed from Nirvana, but the lyrical approach is much more direct and the attitude unique. "Creep" spoke to people and, as it broke in America in 1993, transforming Radiohead into stars, the band would recoil against this, much as they did years later following *OK Computer*. "We spent a year being jukeboxes", complained Jonny

## TRACKMARKS




**PABLO HONEY**

1. You ★★★★
2. Creep ★★★★★
3. How Do You? ★★
4. Stop Whispering ★★★★
5. Thinking About You ★★★★
6. Anyone Can Play Guitar ★★★★
7. Ripcord ★★★
8. Vegetable ★★★
9. Prove Yourself ★★
10. I Can't ★★
11. Lurgee ★★★★
12. Blow Out ★★★

**Label:** Parlophone
**Produced by:** Sean Slade, Paul Q Kolderie and Chris Hufford
**Recorded at:** Chipping Norton Recording Studios and Courtyard Studio, Oxfordshire
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (vocals, guitar, tape loops), Jonny Greenwood (guitar, piano, organ), Ed O'Brien (guitar, backing vocals), Colin Greenwood (bass), Phil Selway (drums)
**Highest chart position:** UK 22, US 32



Radiohead in '93: enigmatic from the start...

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The thing that tips the balance in their favour is Greenwood's guitar. When he makes that grotesque crunching noise in 'Creep', just after the words '*so fucking special*', it sounds like the prison door being slammed and locked on a man's entire hopes and aspirations."
SIMON PRICE, MELODY MAKER, FEB 20, 1993

"Some make flawed-but-satisfying things that suggest their talents will really bloom later on. Such is *Pablo Honey*."
JOHN HARRIS, NME, FEB 20, 1993

Greenwood of the "Creep" effect. One reaction was that Yorke, who hated being identified with the song's narrator, embraced a more enigmatic approach to lyric-writing, rejecting the chance to milk the disgruntled teen market. "I think being cryptic is really great," he later said, a sentiment he rarely looked back from.

GIVEN YORKE'S LYRICAL prowess, the first lines on *Pablo Honey* are amusingly trite. "*You are the sun, the moon and stars,*" croons Yorke, while the guitars pummel underneath and the singer releases a heart-stopping yell; an early showcase of his vocal power. Another side of his singing comes on the punky, sneering "How Do You?", which follows "Creep" and could be the most unsophisticated song in the Radiohead canon. Thankfully, it's short and followed by three crackers. "Stop Whispering" is an earnest if ambiguous ode to self-empowerment, with a slinky, undulating groove and coruscating climax. It's followed by "Thinking About You", an acoustic variation on the unrequited-love theme of "Creep", musically pre-empting "Fake Plastic Trees" and "Exit Music (For A Film)". It sees Yorke address a pop star, perhaps his future self, warning, "*These people aren't your friends, they're paid to kiss your feet.*" Already, the singer is revealing his antipathy to celebrity, and that thread is picked up by "Anyone Can Play Guitar". When an EMI suit told Radiohead they needed a "manifesto" the band laughed, but "Anyone Can Play Guitar" is something like that. On the surface, Yorke celebrates the power of rock: "*If London burns I'll be standing on the beach with my guitar,*" he insists, while the band hammer away at grungy chords. But there's also self-knowledge, a caustic "*I wanna be wanna be wanna be... Jim Morrison*" that's a warning to anybody inclined to take themselves too seriously. Rock was important, but being a rock star? That was something else entirely. Radiohead – and Yorke especially – would spend a career trying to stay true to its sentiments. As a statement of ambition, it's the polar opposite of "Rock'n'Roll Star", Oasis's similarly pre-fame musing on the theme.

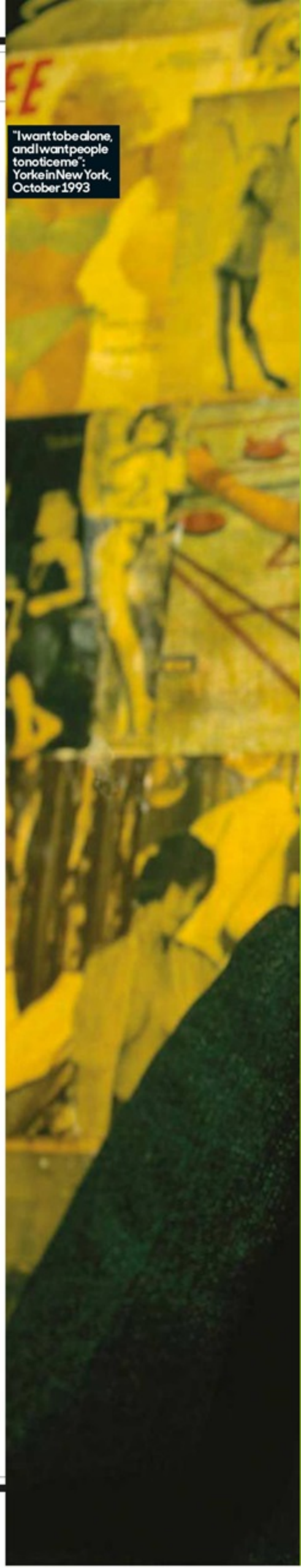
Invariably, this powerful first side, with four outstanding songs, sets up the second side for a fall, but while the remaining songs have less variety, lyrical dexterity and thematic complexity, they all have grace and power, collectively capturing an atmosphere that gives an indication of where Radiohead were heading. All contain something of note. On "Ripcord", it's the thundering, jagged, outro. On "Vegetable", it's the delicate switch of emphasis mid-song and Yorke's raging, Manics-style, chorus. Even "Prove Yourself" and the jangling "I Can't" have heft, particularly the former's bracing refrain, "*I'm better off dead.*" Here is ennui, Yorke's exhaustion at existing. Years later, when covering the same ground on "How To Disappear Completely", it would be through a veneer of inscrutability.

"I Can't" and its successor, "Lurgee", were both produced by Chris Hufford, and "Lurgee" certainly seems to have a singular feel about it. Evocative and unsparing, it locks into a mood of hypnotic melancholy, winding you in, in a way that recalls Pink Floyd or The Smiths on *Strangeways, Here We Come*. In a sense, so does the piano-led intro of "Blow Out", the big finale that ends with a spectacular flurry of guitar.

Yorke playfully insisted that *Pablo Honey* was "going to save pop music", and if the initial reception was supportive rather than enthusiastic, it did go gold on the back of the US success of "Creep", with the single reissued successfully in the UK. But in one sense, Radiohead would start as they meant to go on. "It's important that a debut album should not have all the answers," said Ed O'Brien in 1998. "It should just hint at things." Enigmatic from the start, Radiohead now had to square this with the barrage of attention that came with celebrity.

BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES

# "Suddenly everyone's nice to you. And it's like, fuck you!"



"I want to be alone, and I want people to notice me": Yorke in New York, October 1993

**"Creep" is a massive hit, *Pablo Honey* has sold half a million in the States, and Beavis is claiming they will be bigger than U2. *PAUL LESTER* witnesses Radioheadmania on the East Coast, and gets an unusually intimate glimpse of the five charming men at the eye of the hurricane… The loves! ("Have you ever seen *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*") The vices! ("We're a testosterone-free band…") The Noam Chomsky books!**




I'VE HEARD SCREAMING before, but nothing quite like that. At once exhilarated and anguished, it is the scream of a girl on the verge of a nervous breakdown. "I love you, Thom!" The scream is four syllables long, very sharp and extraordinarily loud, managing to pierce the commotion of the Providence, Rhode Island crowd and the noise blasting out of Radiohead's enormous PA.

"I love you Thom!"

There it goes again, sharper and louder now, a terrifying mixture of frightened child, ecstatic weenie and wailing banshee. Of course, I have no trouble hearing the screams: everyone in Club Lupo's – Jesus, everyone in Providence – can hear this yell-from-hell; it's just that I don't seem to be able to work out where the fuck it's coming from.

"I love you, Thom!"

That does it. I've got to find out who on earth is responsible for this orgiastic moan-cum-death rattle. So, as Radiohead build towards the climax of finale "Pop Is Dead", I wade into the fray, a claustrophobic crush of pretty preppies, frat-house freaks, cropped jocks, sweaty crowd-surfers and all-round American psychos.

And there she is, squashed between the "Beavis And Butt-Head"s, the tiny kid with the giant voice.

"Hey! Look at this!" the drenched (new) waif calls out, instantly recognising me from the hotel where Radiohead and the *Maker* have been staying and on whose doorstep she's been camping out over the last few days in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of her heroes.

The girl – Sharon Bouchard, 21, from Massachusetts – is shivering, not from cold but like she's just seen a ghost, or Christ, or the ghost of Christ. "Oh my God," she sighs, "that was the best thing I've ever seen. They are just awesome."

BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES


VENUS

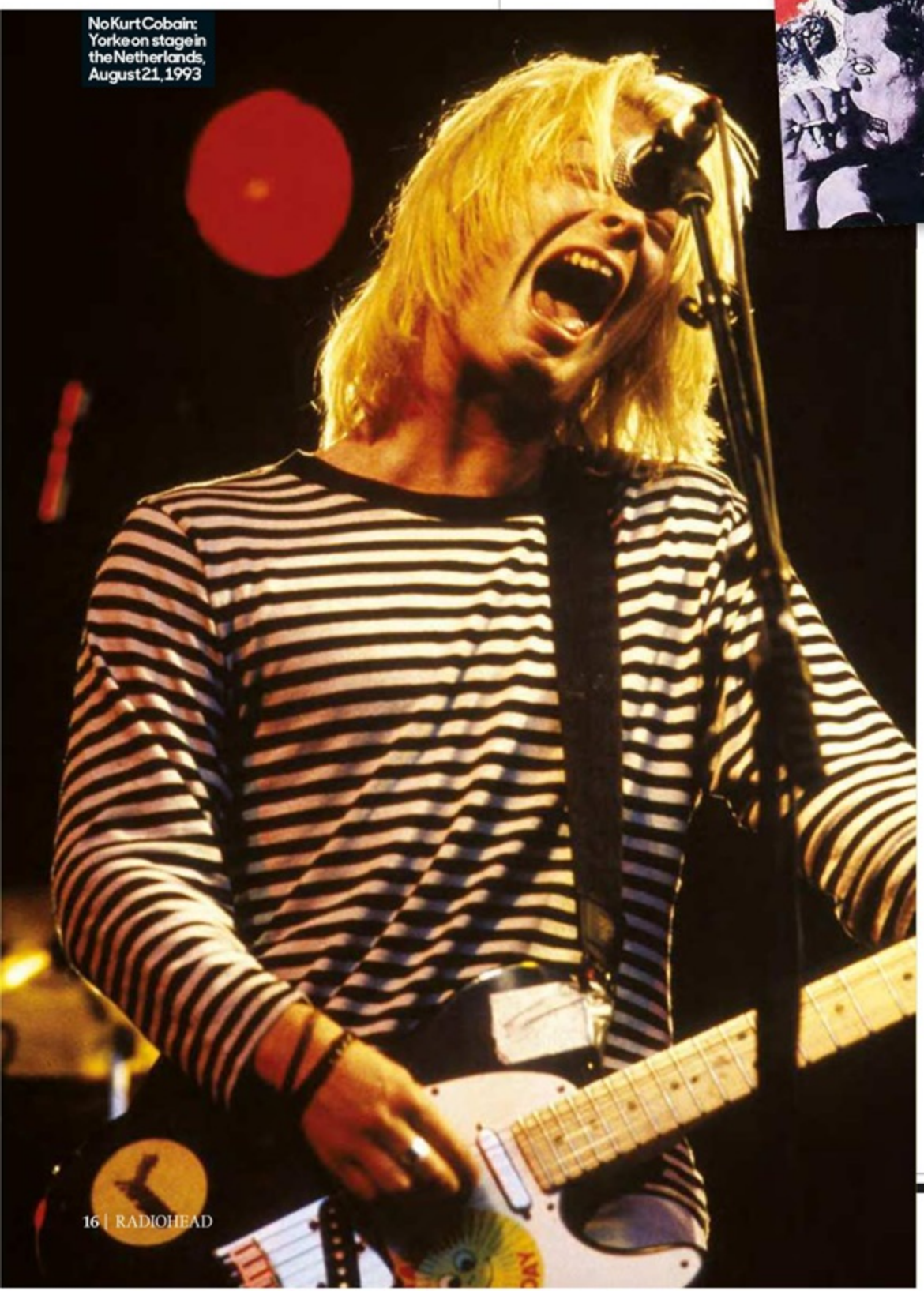
Suddenly, Sharon starts pulling up her sweatshirt to reveal her midriff. It is purple. So determined was she to get close to Thom E Yorke – Radiohead's singer, guitarist and reluctant messiah – that she braved the mêlée, risking, in the process, such irrelevancies as life and limb.I guess that's the kind of thing you do when you're in love. "He is *sooo* gorgeous," swoons Sharon, prodding at her equally bruised thighs and grinning, oblivious to the gawping hordes, oblivious to the pain. Clearly, she can't feel a thing. Obviously, she would do it all again.

"'Course I would!" she beams. "Anyway, it doesn't hurt a bit."

Brett who?

I'VE SEEN BIGGER bands. I've seen better bands. I've seen U2 in Germany, New Order at Reading, Public Enemy at Wembley and Barry White in Manchester, so no, you can't possibly blame me for assuming I'd seen everything. And I have, in a sense. But I've never seen five undernourished ex-college boys from the Home Counties inspire such reckless enthusiasm, such devotion, such love. I've never seen a fan letter for an "indie" band from a man on Death Row before. I've never seen a bunch tagged "ugly losers" by hacks in their home country make so many luscious teenies (male and female) on the other side of the Atlantic quiver and shake. I've never seen a group of hicks from the sticks make some poor bastard stuck in a wheelchair at the back of the concert hall smile so hard he could cry. I see all of this and more in America with Radiohead.

Yeah, that Radiohead. The Radiohead we all used to studiously ignore when they were called On A Friday. The Radiohead we sort of began to notice when their monument to misery, "Creep", crawled out of Parlophone last September. The Radiohead we begrudgingly gave press space to when their next slabs of caustic plastic, "Anyone Can Play Guitar" and "Pop Is Dead", scraped the charts (respectively, Nos 32 and 42) and debut album *Pablo Honey* reached the Top 30. The very same Radiohead we pushed aside in our rush to sanctify Suede and who we're now being forced to (re)assess in the light of the "Creep" reissue (No 7 with loads of bullets) and the band's impressive Stateside success – the LP has shifted upwards of half a million units, while estimates suggest it will have sold a cool million by the end of the year. Yes indeed. That Radiohead. Embarrassed? *Nous*?



No Kurt Cobain: Yorke on stage in the Netherlands, August 21, 1993

MICHEL LINSSEN/REDFERNS




NO. NOT US. Never. We know no shame and have even less pride. Besides, Radiohead, we now realise, are worth every cringeing second of the shameless volte-face it takes to be granted an audience with them.

Certainly, Thom E Yorke – a man who seems to have taken Elvis Costello's early "Revenge And Guilt" persona and multiplied it several fold – is becoming a fascinating figure at the centre of British pop. If the sensitivity, irritability, suspicion, rage and anxiety displayed in Yorke's words are anything to go by, he should be a chap with a chip the size of a small banana republic on his shoulder.

And if the savage riffing and thrillingly conventional ("Music For Lapsed Rock Fans" is how I describe Radiohead later, to the band's assent) attack of the players is any measure, then Jonny Greenwood (lead guitar), Ed O'Brien (rhythm guitar), Colin Greenwood (bass), and Phil Selway (drums) will be bullish and brash, defensive and aggressive, in the mould of the young Joe Strummer and Paul Weller.

Wrong! Radiohead are disarmingly charming, articulate on every subject from representative democracy to *fin de siècle* Muggletonian ascetism, erudite from morning 'til night and educated to the max. Their received pronunciation has more in common with royalty than rockers. And they could probably knock out the odd authoritative political column for *The Guardian* in their spare time.

I can't help wondering, as I watch them leave the Providence gig, head towards the tour bus and reduce a startled young female to a trembling wreck (Sharon Bouchard!), as the Greenwood brothers get swamped by autograph hunters, whether these strange (banal?) pop rituals are beneath them. And I can't help wondering just who are these pale young men whose songs and sounds, eyes and skin, are exciting thousands of music lovers thousands of miles from home.

"HE'S GREAT, BUT what is his problem?" asked Steve Mack of That Petrol Emotion when he first saw Thom E Yorke at a Radiohead gig last year.



Jonny Greenwood live at The Garage in north London, September 1993

The crusty kitten-hunk had a point. Yorke may well be as much of a gentleman as the others in the band, it's just that he's rather more prone to bouts of moodiness. And don't forget that the enigmatic singer is the man responsible for this little litany of lacerating and self-loathing *"I'm better off dead"* ("Prove Yourself"); *"Failed in life"* ("Stupid Car"); *"What do you care when the other men are far, far better?"* ("Thinking About You"); *"All my friends said bye-bye"* ("Faithless The Wonder Boy"); and of course *"I wish I was special"* ("Creep").

Back in the Providence hotel bar, and bearing in mind his reputation for sporadic fits of pique, even black periods of nihilistic despair, I approach Thom cautiously and repeat that Petrol enquiry; what is his problem? Nursing a bottle of Beck's in the corner, he reasons, "I'm a lot of different people when I write."

I hear you've been in a steady, happy relationship for three years. How come you sound so haunted and hurt, fierce and fucked off/up in your songs?

"You can feel those things in any relationship," he explains, eyeing me from beneath his Cobain-ish blond fringe, apparently unaware of the fact that Sharon Bouchard (again!) is spying on him, *à la Fatal Attraction*, from a nearby table.

"Am I 4 real?" he repeats. "Good question. I am sincere about what I do."

How about that line from "Faithless": *"I can't put the needle in"* – have you ever been tempted, in one of your more downer moments, to try hard drugs? Or were you just flirting with heroin imagery?

"I wouldn't be that pretentious to play the Kurt Cobain," he winces. "That phrase is more about trying to get back at people, get nasty."

Tonight, you introduced "Yes I Am" (the B-side of "Creep") by saying, "This is for all the people who shat on us." What made you say that?

"That was just... I wrote that song about the sensation of being the underdog for so long, and how suddenly everyone's nice to you. And it's like, fuck you," he snarls, offering a glimpse of the human being behind the hysteria.

More glimpses: Thom was born in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 25 years ago (it's his birthday on the day of this bar confessional. Ed and Colin present him with a book by leading dissident intellectual Noam Chomsky), moving to Oxford when he was seven. His childhood was all right, but he hated his public school ("It was purgatory," he says. "It nurtured all the worst aspects of the British middle class: snobbery, lack of tolerance and right-wing stupidity").

After a tortuous failed romance ("Have you ever seen *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?* It was like that for a year and a half, lots of fighting in public"), Thom went to Exeter University where he studied English and Fine Art, shaved his head, started DJing and discovered he had a dangerous taste for drink. ("I almost died from alcohol poisoning once," he shudders. "I lost it for a bit.")

Thom doesn't say whether or not things got so bad he thought about ending it all ("Might have done, might not have done," he half laughs), but he does agree with my theory that "Creep" is the exact inverse of The Stone Roses' "I Wanna Be Adored": the former is fuelled by self-pity, the latter by arrogance; both by egocentrism bordering on narcissism.

**"I JUST GO OFF ON ONE. FOR DAYS I'M UNBEARABLE, I CAN'T TALK TO PEOPLE... AND IT SHOCKS ME"**

"Creep" is saying "I Wanna Be Abhorred", isn't it? "Yeah, definitely," Thom is quick to agree but slow to disclose any more. "It's about [*pause*]... It's about sympathy [*longer pause*]. This is all very hard. If, erm... Yeah, I s'pose. Mmmm [*very long pause*]... As soon as I say this, everyone will take the piss. It's just, I think [*pause for several centuries*]... Part of me is always looking for someone to turn around, buy me a drink, give me a hug and say it's all right," he says at last, breaking the painful silence. "Because I just go off on one. For days I'm unbearable, I can't talk to people. And it shocks me because I'm still doing it. I want to be alone and I want people to notice me – both at the same time. I can't help it.

"There's this book, *The Famished Road*, where the main character has these forces following him around and pulling him about – I feel like that," Thom continues to bare his soul and disprove the idea that commercial reward + public acclaim = emotional stability. "It sounds really tossy, this. If I was a painter it would be like, 'Wow! That's wonderful!' But this is pop, and in pop you're not meant to say things like this."

You are if you're Radiohead. You are if you're Thom Yorke. And you are if you're one of the dandy Greenwood duo. Jonny is 21, Colin is 25. Their father died when they were young, leaving their mother to worry about her two wayward sons.

"She thought Jonny was being dragged away by the forces of evil," confides Colin the day after the Rhode Island gig, chain-smoking Camel cigarettes inside the tour bus now parked outside the Avalon – the venue for tonight's Boston show. "She got a bit better after she saw us on *Top Of The Pops*. Mind you, she thinks everyone on that programme is a drug-taking lunatic. Actually, she's not that happy unless she's worrying. Very Radiohead, that. We're all worriers, you know. Even when there's nothing to worry about."

Jonny, who left Oxford Poly after one term to concentrate on the band, is Radiohead's resident musical genius, the Bernard Butler to Thom's Brett Anderson. Something of a prodigy at school, he played viola for the Thames Valley Youth Orchestra, then started hanging around with Colin and co as soon as soon as the group started. Pretty soon, all five members were sharing a house in Oxford, just like The Monkees.

"No, Banana Splits," corrects Jonny, joining me in the scorching Indian summer heat on the pavement – sorry, sidewalk – outside the Avalon. "Which of us was the father figure? No patriarchs! We were all mothers."

I ask Jonny whether he thinks Radiohead have achieved success in the States rather quicker than Suede because the latter are more of a tease and Americans mistrust ambiguity of any kind.

"Are we more boyish? Ooh no," he grimaces, genuinely peeved at my proposal. Jonny later admits to being more than slightly repulsed by a nipple ring given to him by a female fan who appeared stark naked at his hotel door a few nights ago, and asks me, at the end of our chat, not to mention the gender of his partner back home.

Meanwhile, Jonny's staring at the sun, telling me this: "We get fans of both sexes. Groupies? That's a terrible word. How '70s. No, we don't get offers. We're not the Manic Street Preachers. We're a testosterone-free band. We didn't form this group to unleash our libidos on the general public."

Colin, who has a degree in English from Cambridge University, spent his formative years in the kitchen at parties with Thom, wearing black body stockings and garish mauve and green shirts and generally, as you do, trying to ➡

ANDY WILLSHER



The geeks shall inherit: Radiohead in New York City, October 1993

halt the hegemony of goth. Another of Colin's favourite pastimes was outraging the boys of school (Radiohead attended the same school, although, apart from Colin and Thom, they were all in different years) by getting off with their male friends. Then he went to college and really let his hair down.

"We all pretty much shot our load at college in terms of drinking and drugs," admits the most candid member of the band, squinting at the sun coming through the bus window and closing the blinds as scores of Radiohead's new American fans mill about on the street below, waiting for their bass-playing idol to emerge.

"It was nothing extreme," he adds, sounding for all the world like an Oxbridge don with an epicurean bent. "Nothing more than speed or dope. Smack? No! People can't afford that indulgence in terms of time and money these days.

"I remember at college," he goes on, furiously inhaling and exhaling, "there was this chemist on the corner – it was the local methadone dispensing clinic. I used to walk past and see all these junkies queuing up. Then I'd walk round the corner and they'd be shooting up, which wasn't very nice..."

Colin has already informed me that Brett Anderson's celebrated remark – "I'm a bisexual who's yet to have a homosexual experience" – was lifted from notorious slacker manual *Generation X*. What about those early gay encounters of yours, Colin?

"Yeah, well. Yeah, well. Yeah!" he laughs, momentarily embarrassed, before divulging: "Well, yeah, I had a couple of flings at college with some guys. But my girlfriend knows about them, so it's all right. She doesn't like me hanging out with her gay friends in London too much, just in case I get tempted! I'll show you a photo of her if you want. She's a biker. She's more rock'n'roll than me. She's biker woman. She got through three bikes on our holiday in Greece. Y'know, I was the only guy in Greece on the back of a bike with a woman on the front!" he chuckles, leaping up to dig a photo of Madeleine, his crazy biker chick girlfriend, out of his travel bag.

ED IS THE only member of Radiohead who doesn't have a partner back home. There are advantages to this. For one, he has more money than the others (a homesick, love-struck Colin has spent about £600 ringing Madeleine every night. Drummer Phil doesn't disclose a precise amount for his nocturnal calls to girlfriend Cait, but he does tell me he wishes he'd bought some shares in British Telecom). For another, he gets to flirt with women on the road.

Like Tanya Donelly of Belly, for example, who – take note, True Stories fans – has just broken off her engagement with her US rocker boyfriend. Even as we speak, Radiohead's playmate, Tanya, is jumping down the steps of Belly's astrodome of a tour bus and interrupting my chat with Ed as we sit in the shade outside the Avalon.

"Sorry!" Tanya squeals in my general direction after bounding towards Ed to plant a big kiss on his cheek, that legendary "shark with lipstick" smile forming on her face. "I thought you were just some college geek doing an interview." (Memo to 4AD: you can forget about any more Belly front covers.)

Ed's parents split up when he was 10, although he moved back in with his father in Oxford five years ago – he's 26 now, but his dad, a Happy Mondays fans, is pretty cool. After a regular adolescence ("I used to think girls hated me," he says. "I couldn't speak to girls 'til I was 17"), Ed went to Manchester University, then "did his Jack Kerouac bit", taking a Greyhound bus around America, exorcising most of his bacchanalian tendencies. "Someone held a party for us the other night, and none of us went," laughs the handsome, blue-eyed, 6ft 5in guitarist. "Drinking just depresses me nowadays. Until recently I was drinking very heavily and I loved it. But then it started to act as a depressant.

"I like to smoke dope a lot, but that's about it. Crack and coke? We've been offered it. I am intrigued, but... The same goes for girls – there's a hidden rule that no-one goes with groupies. I hate that side of things, it's so dirty and seedy. It might be all right in a Guns N' Roses video, but it's not for us. We're quite a normal band, you know."

**"AMERICANS LIKE OUR ENGLISHNESS – IT'S A FAR MORE ABRUPT KIND THAN SUEDE'S... MORE DIRECT"**

I DON'T SPEAK TO Phil Selway – who only last night was stopped outside the band's tour bus by a girl and asked whether he was "the roadie or just a hanger-on? Oh, and can you get me Thom's autograph?" – until after Radiohead's storming appearance in front of 3,000 devotees at New York's Roseland theatre. I know it was storming because Thom's skinny-rib black jumper is hanging over a heater pipe in the band's dressing-room after the gig and it is dripping with sweat. Really. Drip drip drip. I also know it was storming because all sorts of record company and MTV types are schmoozing and salivating and generally declaring Radiohead to be the best new band since whoever, the cure for all known diseases, etc etc.

You wouldn't know it was storming to look at Ed, who, after a puff or 27, of, well, puff, has got what he calls "the fear". And you definitely wouldn't know it was storming to look at Thom E Yorke. Evidently, schmoozing with record company and MTV types comes just below verruca removal on his list of likes. Fearing the onset of one of Thom's "moods", I drag Phil into the corridor and ask him why he thinks Radiohead have Made It Big in the USA, as opposed to, just to pick a name at random, Suede (interesting fact: Suede immediately faxed their congratulations on hearing that *Pablo Honey* had gone gold).

"Americans like our Englishness," says the drummer, Liverpool Poly graduate and former Nightline counsellor (true!), leaning against a drab, grey wall. "It's a far more abrupt kind of Englishness than Suede's, more energetic, more frenetic, and direct."

Just as Phil is getting into his stride, a rude American strides over to where we're standing and starts listening in on our conversation. Surreally enough, it turns out to be Michael O'Neill, production assistant on MTV, better known as the voice behind America's latest lobotomised cartoon cult, Beavis, of *Beavis And Butt-Head* infamy.

"Radiohead rock, man!" O'Neill/Beavis announces, unprompted, as Phil and I exchange looks of the "an Uzi, an Uzi, my kingdom for an Uzi" variety. "Are they gonna be big? Let's quote-unquote: 'Bigger than U2'! Definitely. They know how to write songs, they know how to sing and they know how to play. They're cred. They've got attitude. They're alternative crossover! They're like Jim Morrison-meets-Jimi Hendrix. MTV love them. They're rockin' the country!"

Huh-huh, huh-huh. Only this time, the joker's not joking. Radiohead's acid anthems and simply twisted pop is just what Europe, America, the world ordered. One million people can't be wrong.

Can they? ✊

BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES

FROM THE MAKERS OF UNCUT

THE ARCHIVE COLLECTION

# ULTIMATE RECORD COLLECTION

PART 1
1964
–76



THE MUSIC.
AS IT HAPPENED.
BY THE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT.

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

AVAILABLE TO BUY NOW AT UNCUT.CO.UK/STORE

PART 2 COMING APRIL!

# "I thought I'd turned into a monster."

**"It's not all chuckle-trousers stuff with us, you know; we've had our lows recently…" After a tempestuous period of coping with "Creep" and nearly breaking up, Radiohead are on the mend. Exhibit A: a new single, "My Iron Lung", that's "a full stop on everything that was turning us into something we didn't want to be. But at the same time," Thom Yorke tells *STUART BAILIE*, "it's our life-support system."**




**AMERICA, WINTER '93 — THE DESERT PRATS**

Thom Yorke looks out the window of the tour bus. A relentless vista of stupid, boring desert – it just empties your head after a while. All that's left are the murky, scary thoughts, the stuff that's prone to mess your brain up at the best of times. And now it's kicking in – bad. If he doesn't occupy himself soon, the singer realises, his mind will get completely mangled. So Thom thinks of five things he can do to pass some time. These are:

**1)** Watch *The Exorcist* on video. On your own. Again. Maybe not.

**2)** Get drunk. Done it already.

**3)** Read something. There's a whole stack of books that Tanya from Belly has brought over. Let's see. Jeanette Winterson and Joan Didion, and some heavy German poetry. There's a copy of *Faust*, of course, which is a half-ironic tour totem, or Bill Bryson for those more upbeat moments. You don't need any of this right now.

**4)** Sit at the back of the bus and mess around with the portable tape machine, and try and finish that song you wrote about the current Radiohead conundrum – your career kept alive by a song you despise, all the rotten duties that your job now involves. That's far too depressing to even contemplate.

**5)** Talk to the other band members. You'd rather die.

The voices in Thom's head tell him that he doesn't need to deal with the rest of Radiohead any more – that he's the kingpin, the poet, the most sensitive soul in the group. He's gonna leave them after this tour, deffo. He'll go back to Oxford and nurse his bruised, tortured spirit. Really indulge himself. Nobody's talking anyway – to see them, you wouldn't think that Radiohead had all grown up close to each other, gone to school together, consoled each other when they'd been given short shrift in Britain. Former mates who'd freaked and then rejoiced when their single went nuclear in America, and subsequently took off all over the world. That's probably when it started to go wrong, really. "Creep" was never meant to be the definitive Thom song, but the singer knows that everybody else thinks it is. So now you've got to face up to that one song every hour of the day, and there's nothing you can fucking do about it.

YOU FEEL THAT the song has become irrelevant and that you're being terrorised by it – pushed all over the place by a pop song. "Creep" has turned you into something you hardly recognise. So when it's finally reissued in the UK, you'll make sure you're on

PAT POPE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Haircut, sir?
Jonny and Thom,
September 1994

the other side of the Atlantic to avoid the silly scenes at home.

But as soon as you start your second American tour, you realise that it's no longer so groovy here, either. The hype and excitement over "Creep" has passed, and the other singles didn't sell so well, really. The band is playing terribly, not even trying to communicate, which sets everyone off drinking afterwards, and so the problems are accentuated. Colin is the most affable guy on the bus. As bass player, he says he's got the smallest ego, and therefore he relates to the road crew best. He's happy trying to get legless on weak American beer with the roadies, honing his dry humour, necking many bottles of 'fine wine', keeping clear of the worst of the band politics.

Drummer Phil, he's quiet enough – maybe he's preoccupied with his forthcoming marriage. Ed's all right, too; laughing when the occasional journalist asks him about his relationship with Tanya Donelly. He plays the gent effortlessly, and the Americans adore him for it, but you don't want to talk to him just now.

Jonny's dealing with the pressure in a strange way also. He's not unfriendly, but he's grown more introverted, lying on his bunk, listening to BBC talking books on his Walkman. His favourite is the Sherlock Holmes story about the Scarlet Claw – narrated by Jeremy Brett, who portrays the detective like the cocaine-snorting perv that he originally was. Jonny loves it, and riddles his conversation with Sherlock quotes, combined with ultra-dry steals from Stephen Fry and gibberish out of *Viz*. A few more months of this and he'll be royally mad.

Jonny probably adds most to the tour ambience, though. He's the one who turned Radiohead on to the mournful strains of Messiaen – music scored in a Silesian prison camp during the Second World War. Everybody loves the mix of cello and piano, the way the violin always seems to go to a sad, unexpected note. "Let those storm clouds gather," Radiohead say, as they cue the music up for the start of every gig now; relishing the gloom, not caring whether the audience likes it or not.

Jonny is one of the big Nick Drake fans on the bus, and Thom likes to hear those songs, too; they make such a contrast to the brash scenes outside in America. They've even written a song together, called "Lozenge Of Love", that's pure Drake, with Jonny strumming all these cool modal tunings, mainlining the melancholy until he finally gets cheesed off and starts slashing to the end in a riot of Sonic Youth hackery.

Jonny is also the closest Radiohead have to a flamboyant figure. Sometimes the rest of the band may look prosaic, but he livens up the scene by donning, say, a woman's lace bodysuit. The guitarist keeps the tone ambiguous also, by referring to his lover in Israel as "my partner" – never using the term boyfriend or girlfriend, letting those outside the band's inner circle wonder about the sexuality of this odd figure.

People call Jonny and Colin 'The Greenwood Sisters' because they're so lacking in macho qualities. Colin agrees that they're probably the antithesis of Liam and Noel Gallagher in that they're actually mates all of the time. He calls his brother Jonathan, not Jonny. "It's really nice to be with a member of your family in a small place and you get on really well," he says.

That's no comfort to Thom, however, as he eyeballs the scrub and sand outside the bus. He's thinking about the British bands they've toured with throughout '93 – PJ Harvey, Moonshake, Gallon Drunk – and how they've all fragmented in some way or other. Radiohead figured they were gifted – that they could conquer America while so many other Brits died in the act. Now the same merciless syndrome is taking Radiohead down as well, and Thom Yorke, soon-to-be solo artist, proper prima donna, feels glad about it.

**GLOUCESTER, AUGUST 1994 — THE GRAND OLD KOOK OF YORKE**

He didn't actually leave the band, you know... "I thought I could go it alone," says Thom. "I thought I didn't need anybody, but I fucking do. It's so easy to think like that. It's such an easy frame of mind to lock yourself into and never get out of. As soon as you get any degree of success, you disappear up your own arse and you lose it forever. That's probably number one in the 'thousand ways to lose it' list."

"When I got back to Oxford, I was unbearable. You start to believe you're this sensitive artist who has to be alone, and you have to become this tortured person in order to create wonderful music. The absolute opposite is true, I think now. All those things happen to you anyway; you don't have to sit there and make them happen. Otherwise you're not a human being."




**"AS SOON AS YOU GET ANY DEGREE OF SUCCESS, YOU DISAPPEAR UP YOUR OWN ARSE"**

Basically, just after the American tour, Radiohead were booked on to a European circuit with James. It was a horrible prospect, so when they arrived for the first show in Hamburg, the band tabled an emergency meeting, to work out whether they should bother at all.

It was the best thing they'd done all year. None of the arguments were deeply ingrained. Thom got to express all the things that were bothering him, and everybody else chipped in, until the only conclusion was that they were still friends and that Radiohead "should not be strangled at birth". The benefits were immediate. During that evening's soundcheck, they were joyfully blasting away again, and James' crew all stopped what they were doing to look up at them, gobsmacked. The shows that followed, G-Mex, all those places, they were the best they'd ever done.

FIVE THINGS YOU notice about Thom Yorke these days:

**1)** His hair's a lot shorter. When he picked up the *NME* that featured the Brat Awards winners last February, he gazed in horror at his barnet on the cover and decided that enough was enough. He looked like Rod fucking Stewart. At least he wasn't as bad as Brett Suede and Justine Elastica though, who looked like "a pair of Hitlers".

**2)** Thom's smiling, relaxed just now. This time last year, on the eve of blowing out the Reading festival, he was falling to bits. He went to a Harley Street specialist who felt his neck and said it was like concrete, he was so stressed. This year he'll be fine. However, a nervous member of The Mean Fiddler organisation has just faxed the manager saying please look after Thom and his voice.

**3)** He's not lugging his video camera around so often now. When he took it to the Brat Awards, Thom got so pissed that he allowed the camera to film bits of the carpet for ages. And there was also an excruciatingly long section of footage that featured a close-up of a woman's breasts. Thom insists that this was an accident; that she just happened to be standing next to a friend of the band. "A bit difficult to explain, that."

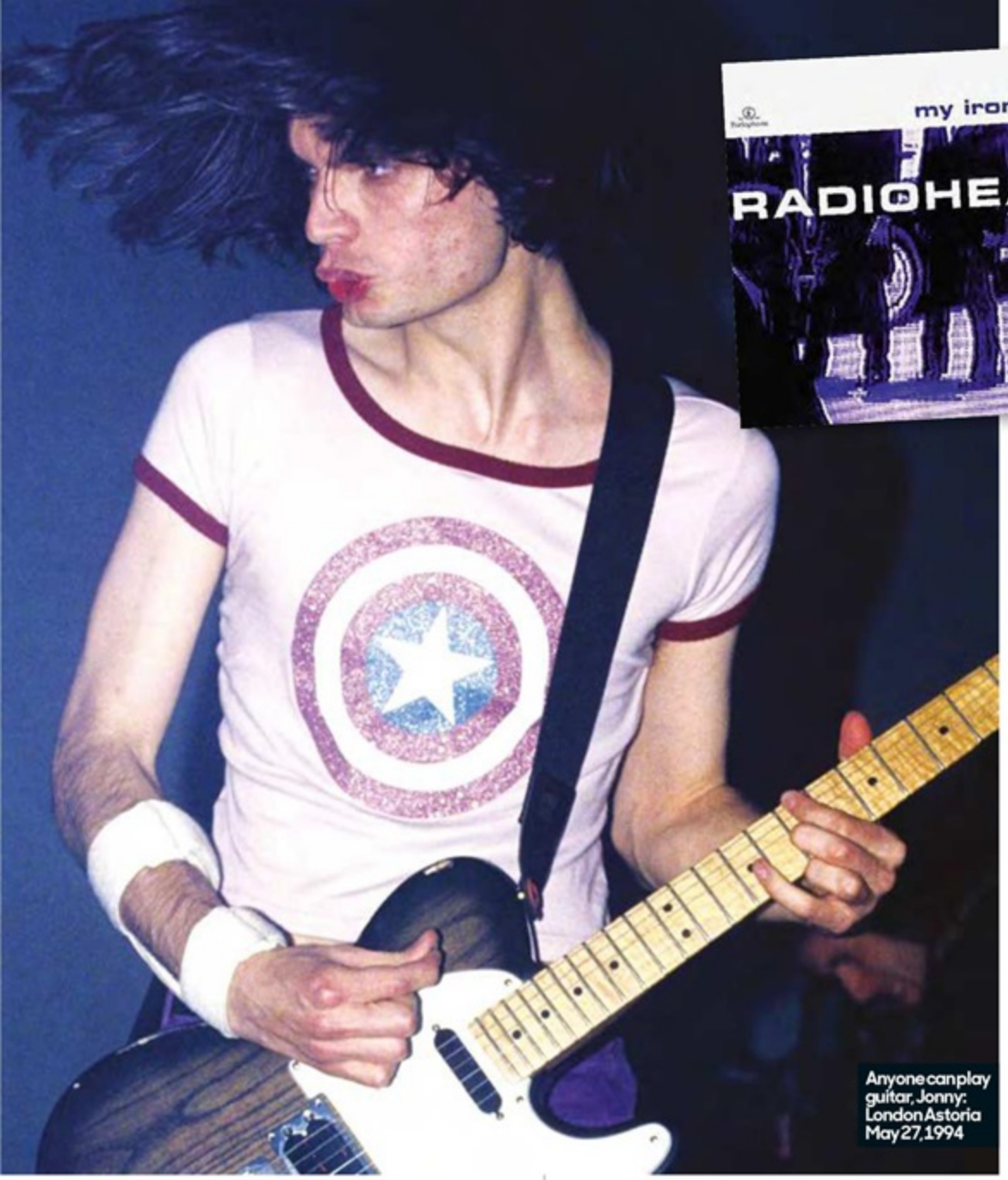
**4)** He's headed for a holiday in Ireland straight after Reading, so Thom's extra cheery.

**5)** Thom's got into books so intensely that he becomes completely wired by them. When Radiohead were mixing their new songs at Abbey Road recently, they were commuting a lot along London's Westway. Thom was reading JG Ballard's *Crash* – about the sexuality of cars mashing each other up, and "the million ways that a gear stick can damage a woman's womb". He was crapping himself. A few days ago, Thom was reading *The Tin Drum* when he was gigging in Sopot, near Gdansk, and he found out that parts of the book were apparently set in the hotel he was staying in, a converted asylum, with scarily thick doors on the rooms. Woo-hoo!

Thom's talking about Richey Manic, Sinéad, Kurt Cobain – souls who reside in the 'badly damaged' or 'destroyed' files this year. And he knows some people will try to put him in with them as well, that gestalt of breakdown, morbidity and despair, and the compulsion to write about such bleak stuff, worrying it like a dog with a bone. What troubles Thom most is the fact that even Kylie's doing "dark music" at the moment.

"I'm sure there is a zeitgeist, there must be. People just don't come up with the same thing. They just don't say, 'Well, this is our next angle.' You could see it happen with the Manics for a while. And I suppose for the past two years there was nothing else we could have written about either. You can't say, 'Hey guys, this is too much, let's tone it down a bit and write some bright,

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



Anyone can play guitar, Jonny: London Astoria May 27, 1994

happy songs', 'cos it wouldn't have worked. The stuff we've been going through is mind-altering. Emotionally. That sounds really overdramatic, like we're playing up to it, but we're not, really."

The new Radiohead single, "My Iron Lung", closes with the lines, *"This is our new song, just like the last one, a total waste of time."* The scabby guitar and hangdog vocals recall Nirvana's "Heart Shaped Box" – itself a corruption of "Smells Like Teen Spirit". It's got that kind of lineage. To quote Ed: "It's not all chuckle-trousers stuff with us, you know; we've had our lows recently."

Thom started to write it on the morning of the abortive Reading appearance in '93. His voice was completely totalled, so his friend Rachel had to ring up the management and tell them it was all off – a very messy time.

Thom suddenly remembered a tune he'd been carrying in his head, and he found words to fit – sentiments that ridiculed the band and the rock'n'roll ceremony they'd found themselves part of. At college, Thom had come across a picture of a sick kid inside one of the '50s iron lung machines – just his head poking out of this modern behemoth, little humanity remaining, nowhere left to go.

He used the picture relentlessly for six months, until he lost it. But the image fitted with the current band situation – dehumanised by the music biz, fortified by the now-hateful "Creep".

In short, "My Iron Lung" became the sound of ritual infanticide, with Radiohead trying to do away with their hit tune and all its baggage.

"That's true," says Thom. "It's me trying to kill the beast. I wrote the second half of the song in America – most of it in one day. It normally takes me ages. I wrote virtually half the album in the back of the bus, with my tape recorder and guitar.

"It was about me trying to get it out of my system once and for all... It's not just a full stop on 'Creep'; it's a full stop on everything that was turning us into something we didn't want to be. But at the same time, it's our life-support system. You have to play certain games, kiss certain arses, and shake hands with certain people you'd rather hit in the face. But everybody does that, it's part of being a human, and 'Iron Lung' is us trying to come to terms with it."

**MAY 27. LONDON ASTORIA — THE FURIOUS CREEP BROTHERS**

It's a blinding night. The audience sings along to every song, even the new ones, which is outrageous. Thom's forgotten about all his problems; a banjaxed leg, his fear of/contempt for the UK music press, the fact that recording sessions throughout the spring have been abysmal – utterly lacking in spirit.

But this is a wonderful show. The crowd carries all the tunes, and even "Creep" isn't such a chore. This is why you went on tour: to find inspiration again, to break away from the fruitless graft of the studio. Part of you wasn't sure just how popular Radiohead would be in London, but now you appreciate it's rocking more than ever.

"My Iron Lung" next. Jonny picks out the weird arpeggios for the intro, and you can feel it's going to sound ace. The meaning of the song's already manifest in this performance, too; it's only a total waste of time if you're kow-towing to the music industry, giving them what they want. The different melody lines collide and complement each other. Ed and Johnny are lunging and thrashing under the scorching white light.

After the show, producer John Leckie is beaming. They've all spent months trying to get the proper mood for the new record, and onstage tonight, it's just revealed itself. "My Iron Lung" sounded as good onstage tonight as it ever will – so just use the live tapes, keep it spontaneous, like you did with Jonny's impatient clanging on "Creep". You can even use the MTV tape of the Astoria gig as a video. It's just perfect.

FIVE RIDICULOUS FACTS about Radiohead:

**1)** Their Polish record company, Pometta, is the old Boy Scouts' label. "There's a conspiracy theory that the Boy Scouts rule the country," say Radiohead. They've sold 152 copies of *Pablo Honey* in Poland to date.

**2)** Every time American girls threw items of underwear onstage last year, Colin kept getting flashbacks to his college days at Cambridge and 'The Heater House Knicker Thief'. Someone kept stealing girls' smalls from the laundry until a hidden camera revealed it was the college Nazi – the same guy who bullied Colin when he worked in the library, saying he kept too many books with black people on the covers.

**3)** On the new track "You Never Wash Up After Yourself", you can hear Phil set down his drumsticks halfway through the song and walk out. He thought it was just a rehearsal.

**4)** The artwork on the "Iron Lung" sleeve is a fourth-generation video reworking of a TV image ("some legs and a limo"). Thom accepts that the visuals may be a little arcane. "People might just think it's blue and purple shapes."

**5)** The inspiration behind the album title 'Pablo Honey' can now be witnessed on *The Jerky Boys 2* record. It's a hoax phone call from someone masquerading as a fretful old Cuban biddy, calling a stranger who she pretends is her errant son. She begs him to come back to Florida, and enquires about his personal hygiene. "You washin' your ass?" she gibbers.

PARTING WORDS FROM Thom E Yorke: "When you're in isolation for so long, away from the place you came from, you feel like you've turned into someone everyone's gonna hate when you come back. It's like you've been adopted by someone else, and your parents aren't gonna recognise who you are when you get back. I thought I'd turned into a monster." Are you happy that you're not a monster? "Yes, thank you."

The patient's on the mend. He really, really is.

FRED DUVAL/FILMMAGIC

"There suddenly wasn't this need to cower in the corner any more..."



**_The Bends_ is complete, and a newly confident Radiohead have dispersed across the globe on promotional duties. In Stockholm, *SIMON WILLIAMS* finds Thom Yorke pondering his "fucking dull" paranoias, and the possibility that he could be "lying through my teeth" in his astonishing new songs. Also involved: Ed O'Brien, drink, and a significant revelation about mods…**




OK, SO IT'S harsh and cruel. It's like sniggering at some poor sod tripping over a loose paving stone. It's like guffawing at the haphazard passenger who drops their shopping on the bus, sending oranges rolling down the aisle. Intrinsically, it's the voyeur mocking the arse end of reality. Yup, it's a Scandinavian journalist in full interview mode and he's clutching a list of questions as long as the bar table, saying, "So, in a supermarket, where would I find Radiohead? Would I look in the coffee section? Or would I look in the canned food section?"

Guitarist Ed O'Brien radiates the haggard aura of a man who's answered this question a million times, not to mention drunk a thousand drinks. Singer Thom Yorke mutters quietly, and carefully lowers his head onto the table. Our friendly, nay irrepressible young hack nods knowingly at the stock band response ("Uh, next to the skimmed milk"), metaphorically rubs his hands in inquisitive glee and prepares to launch his next rapier-like thrust at the very heart and soul of Radiohead...

"So what would you say is the area that the band has grown in most over the years?"

Silence. Mild bewilderment. Weary expressions.

"Pubic hair."

Thanks, Thom.

**"WE'RE QUITE HAPPY STAYING INSIDE OUR BUBBLE, THANK YOU VERY MUCH"**

OH, THE JOYS of Continental travel. Really! Today is Monday, which must mean Stockholm, because Sunday was Amsterdam, Tuesday is Cologne and Wednesday could bloody well be Mars as far as Radiohead are concerned.

The whereabouts of the other three-fifths of the band are rather vague: Jonny and Colin Greenwood and drummer Phil 'Mad Dog' Selway have their own promotional duties to fulfil elsewhere in Europe, but as the itinerary seems to be changing every five minutes, it would be a Lottery-winning fool who'd put money on which country they're in.

Certainly it doesn't help a guitarist's sense of geographical balance when he stumbles into AN Other hotel at the end of AN Other long day and finds Shane MacGowan slumped over the bar. Especially when the barmaid is adamant that she's closing up in half an hour and the small part of your brain which is still functioning after spending a few hours too many in Dutch coffee shops insists on contemplating tomorrow's schedule of interview-acoustic-TV-session-interview-airport-flight to somewhere else for more of the same...

Like, SHUT UP!

At least there are a few clues: four quid for a packet of fags? And 25 of your finest English smackeroonies for a cosy round of beers? Why, this must be Sweden! So don't gripe – just gulp. Put the shutters back up that have protected you for so long from the cynics and the sneerers. Remember that your band thrives on existing outside of the allegedly fashionable run-of-the-mill. Tell yourself (again) that Radiohead's best attributes are friendship, the will to survive and your inherent weaknesses becoming strengths. And for Christ's sake, keep that pin away from your bubble...

"I think the bubble is totally necessary," says Thom Yorke, by way of explanation. "We've been living with this suspension of disbelief since we were 15 or 16, when we came up with the whole thing. It's a way of isolating yourself enough to actually believe that you're in this wonderful band and you're going to change the world and make everything all right.

"There were so many things to justify at one point that don't have to be justified now, because we're quite happy staying in our bubble, thank you very much. Back then, we thought that anything could burst it. And we thought that until we did something we were really proud of. Other than that, it was all about recording, going on tour and having a nice time."

Or a bad time.

"Or a bad time..."

The downside has been well documented, too. Last autumn, Thom was caught still battling

STEVE DOUBLE/CAMERAPRESS

with the demons unleashed by the success of "Creep", wincing at the memories of a US tour that should have capitalised on the "freak anthem" but turned into a dysfunctional nightmare.

Initial recording sessions for the follow-up to *Pablo Honey* had been equally catastrophic, with the band barely communicating and producer John Leckie – the man who finally abandoned The Stone Roses in the control room – adopting a hands-off approach that merely served to fuel Thom's 'fuck off' attitude.

It didn't help that the comeback single, "My Iron Lung", was deemed "too heavy" for daytime radio play. Move back two spaces. It helped even less that their American record company was having cold feet about a second Radiohead album and refused to commit themselves until they'd heard some of the new tracks.

Cue one freaked band manager, on one hand desperately pretending that the recording was going swimmingly, and on the other, watching his pissed-off charges bang their collective head against wall after wall. And slide back down the snake.

Little wonder, then, that Thom should sit on the floor of a cramped hotel room at midnight in Scandinavia and talk so earnestly about Radiohead's will to survive. Because with *The Bends* – only their second album in a bizarre 10-year career – Radiohead have taken all that self-torture, bitterness and anguish and turned it into the best rock album of the year so far.

So angst is an energy? Obviously, judging by the way in which *The Bends* takes the irascible spirit of *Pablo Honey*, smoothes out the awkward angles, sews up the patchier moments and surges with a self-belief that even Thom and Ed occasionally seem surprised to have discovered in themselves.

Most importantly, beneath the axe-wrenching bluster and sonic assaults, there lurks a none-too-subtle sense of fragility, a feeling of physical fatalism encapsulated in the likes of "Bones", "My Iron Lung" and the title track, and supported by Thom's frank admissions about the band's state of health. Even the alarmingly dapper Ed has apparently fallen victim, slipping a disc three years ago and, uh, developing a stoop by living in a cottage where the dimensions weren't exactly compatible with his lanky frame. Still, always look on the blighted side of life, right?

"We used to be completely vulnerable," shudders Thom, poncing another mouthful of beer. "We thought that everything we did was basically open to abuse and it was almost as if we were willing it to happen – we just expected it. But I think that changed last year. Now we kind of expect abuse, but once we started encountering other bands that actually quite liked what we did, and started coming to the close of making the album, there suddenly wasn't this need to, y'know, cower in the corner any more.

"Someone recently said that we'd come back with all this energy from nowhere. And it was simply because we finally had something on tape that justified our existence. It was like, 'Hmmm, cool. Right! Now we can start!'"

It's the small things that count in the long run. The tide started turning at last year's *NME* Brat Awards, when Radiohead were accosted by Donna and Annie from Elastica, who actually said they LIKED THE BAND! Good grief! Small potatoes in global terms, but not if you're Radiohead, a band who pathologically hated playing in London because they always expected everyone to hate them.

Now, after the praise and the fruitful recordings, Thom and Ed are full of symbolic wonderment, wistfully frothing about "clouds being lifted", "mountains being moved" and suchlike. Hell, if they could bottle the essence of their vitality, they could retire tomorrow.

"We never associated being in the studio with fun," says Ed. "Touring was fun, but recording was always supposed to be hard work. Or so we thought."

"The thing John Leckie used to say all the time was, 'Do what the fuck you like,'" nods Thom. "And nobody had ever said it before in that way. It was like being at art college: in the first year they said, 'You can do whatever you want.' So I spent a year wandering around saying, 'I don't want to do any of this, actually.' Then by the second year I'd got into computers. I just needed something to start me off, and I was all right after that because I'd found a medium in which to work – and it was the same with recording."

**"WE USED TO BE TOTALLY VULNERABLE... WE THOUGHT EVERYTHING WE DID WAS OPEN TO ABUSE"**

ODD BAND, RADIOHEAD. There's Thom, on tonight's performance a mind-boggling blend of cynicism, open-hearted charm and petulance: when the ever-efficient barmaid tells him to take his (shoeless) feet off a chair, the singer stares at her with a fierceness that would impress Paddington Bear.

And for five eminently sensible people – this is, after all, the band who postponed global domination to go to college – their mistrust of the media is irrational, if not bewilderingly naive. Even now, Thom and Ed scratch their scalps when informed that, well, no, *NME* doesn't actually hate Radiohead. Maybe this is what comes of a group whose debut single was called "Prove Yourself". So you think of the bubble and you wonder if Radiohead have always considered themselves outsiders. "Yeah, but I don't think it's something we go out looking for," frowns Thom. "It's not even something we deliberately set ourselves up to be. It just comes down to the five of us. We all seem to have come from really isolated backgrounds in a weird way.

"When I was at college, the only art I ever really loved was something with this dodgy broad term of Outsider Art, which was by completely untrained people who'd never been to art college or who were mentally unstable. One of my favourite artists was this, uh, paedophile bloke who did these scribbles which most people would say were like the doodles you do on the telephone.

"But there was something underneath it... and I'd much rather study stuff like that than all the endless fucking Saatchi art, y'know – here's the New Artist For The '90s and aren't they wonderful? I'd much rather go off and explore stuff that didn't come out of that context at all, because that context is self-referential and boring. The same is true of the music industry in a lot of ways.

"My main problem with the whole Outsider Art thing was that there was a really nasty element to it in the sense that it was a freak show; there were a lot of people who were murderers or emotionally unstable. It wasn't normal housewives – most of them were pretty fucked up one way or another. And so if you read articles, it would be about the personalities and not about the work.

"That's why I'm very reluctant to agree that we thrive on being outsiders. Because that smacks of being a freak show, which, um, I don't think we are. If I ran around saying, 'Oh, we're outsiders, we're tortured artists,' I'd be lying anyway. It's just that we don't have the self-referential context, we don't have the reference points that make it easy to write about us."

True enough. It is journalistic desperation that leads to screams of "The surrogate U2!!!" from Apple Macs across the land. It is journalistic slackness that causes experienced hacks to witter on about "Creep" being Radiohead's debut single (duh!). And the 'Head have proved themselves to be about as comfortable with cosy trends as Eric Cantona is with social graces. Tsk.

Look, Thom – you're British! You're in a band! You're in the charts! The words 'happy' and 'bunny' should spring not unreasonably to mind!

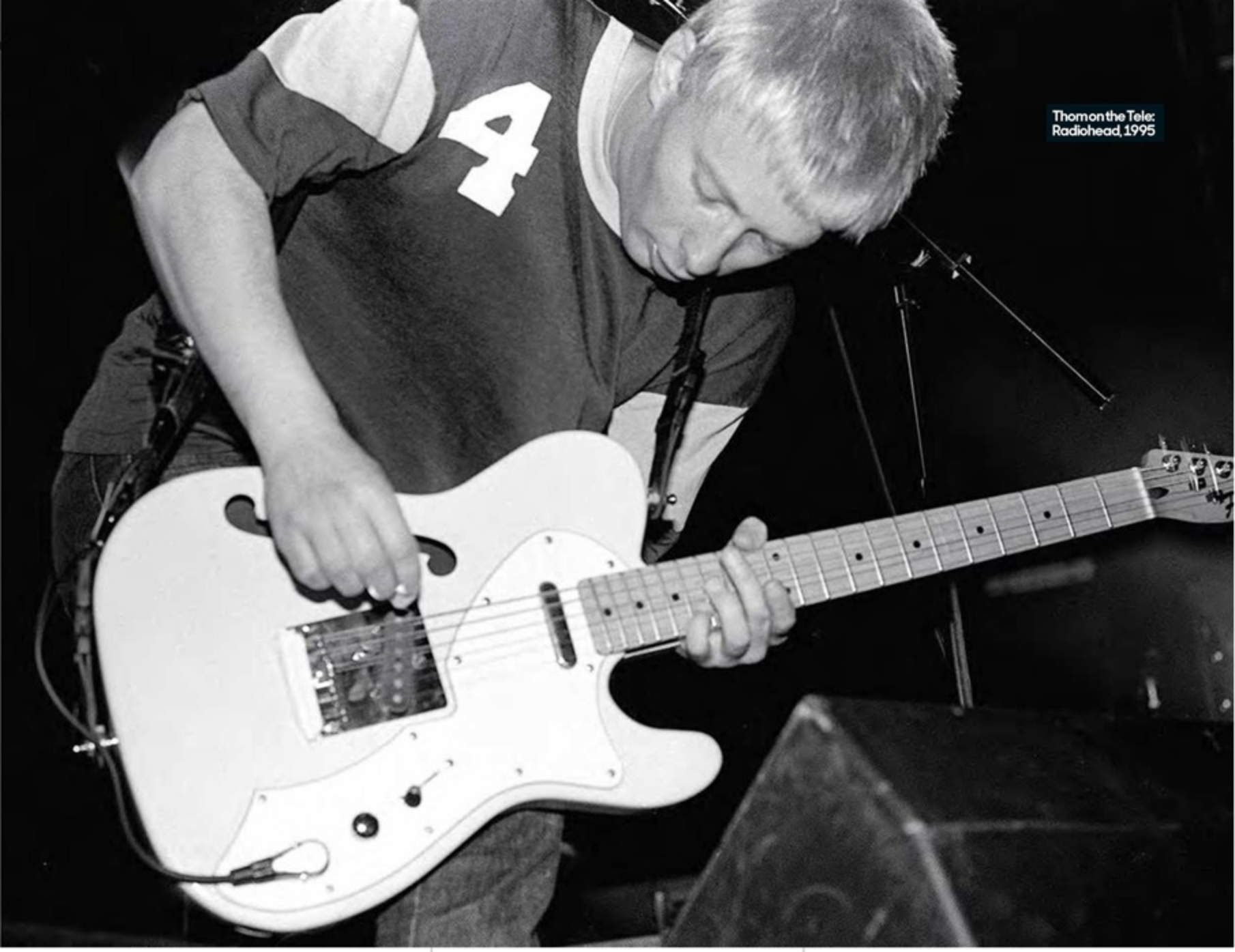
"That's beyond my terms. It just so happens that, yeah, lyrically I write from my personality, but it seemed appropriate on this album, and on *Pablo Honey* it's really extreme because I was deliberately projecting all these things personally onto me. It could be completely calculated, but it was just personal bits of me and I thought the best place to put it was in a song.

"And this album is a lot more circumspect. I'm not projecting quite so much onto me, because I was so sick of the reactions I was getting. It was becoming indulgent and boring. You can only do that now and again, and if the sum total of what we did was projecting my paranoias and fucking troubles onto the band, then it's fucking dull. And I think we're more than that."

So did you start to bore yourself, then?

"Yeah! Fucking totally! But then that's the exciting bit, as well, because people have decided what you're going to do for evermore and you can come out with the exact opposite. So I look at it in a really positive way, because it gives me licence to do what the fuck I want.

"Before we signed, the songs weren't so personal. I was writing stuff that was really daft, really simple, a bit like Talking Heads. And the lyrics were the same. That's why I was really happy with 'Planet Telex', because the lyrics



Thom on the Tele: Radiohead, 1995

are gibberish, complete gibberish."

Yet "Planet Telex" sounds so important: it's the first track on *The Bends*; it's passionate, so it must have some kind of, like, deep significance, right?

"Exactly! But why do the words have to have that deep significance?" argues Thom.

Because you set yourself up for analysis.

"Yeah, but I think that's quite cool in a way, because even though the words are gibberish, there are bits that I really like. It's almost as if I'm just joining the ranks of people listening, because I'm just letting it happen.

"I mean, it's no wonder that New Wave thing happened, because music was so fucking BORING! It became a joke before it had even finished happening, but at the same time *The Bends* is an album that came out of that in terms of the way we were thinking and what was going on in my head. A lot of these songs were written on the tour bus, trying to do something new and different.

"There's this really calculated element to what we do that isn't obvious, but it is to me. I could mean every word of it or I could mean none of it at all. Y'know, I could be lying through my teeth, but the music's still good, so what the fuck? In one of the first interviews I did for this album, I basically ended up saying, 'I didn't mean a fucking word of that. It was all lies, it's all bullshit just to make it seem much more important than it really is.' And it's a nice feeling, saying something like that. I don't see Eddie Vedder doing it."

FUNDAMENTALLY, THEN, RADIOHEAD are very, very happy. We find Thom and Ed wittering on about Scott Walker and Magazine, about Tricky, Massive Attack and PJ Harvey: the oddballs on the snooker table of pop and some of the few acts Radiohead feel to be worthy of their consideration. About how, fair enough, the success of "Creep" did send the band spinning off to gig madness in Mexico and Thailand, so it wasn't all bad. About the freedom they've now managed to give themselves for their third album ("We could do anything"). And, in Ed's case, about discovering "bitchin' rock'n'roll" in American strip joints.

But there is one crucial point when, around 2am, Thom Yorke has finished off everyone else's beer and is thoughtfully considering his status within the great rock pantheon. And he's thinking about the Vedders and the Corgans of the world, about how his band once seriously considered moving lock, stock and double-barrelled riffs up to London but, thankfully, changed their minds before the lure of the business became too great.

And the singer sits and frowns and he says, instinctively and spectacularly, "I'd much rather be a miserable git than a mod."

"The weird thing is, I remember being 17 or 18," he says later, "and I'd pick up this stuff about 'How To Sell Yourself'. And my teachers at school would always be like, 'You've got to sell yourself.' And then you find yourself walking into a radio station in America and basically selling yourself.

"We were on this fucking boat in America a week ago. It was John Wayne's boat, which the record company had hired and plonked us on with some people who run independent record shops, and me and Jonny had to play to them. Now, if that isn't selling yourself, then I don't know what the fuck is. So sometimes it's a battle. And sometimes you just give in. It's a bit crap, to be honest. Mind you, PJ Harvey had done it the day before, so if she was doing it, it can't be that bad. Or maybe she was even more pissed off than we were..."

It ends, as all the best things should do, by going full circle. Back in the bar, the local hack is persevering with a line of questioning involving cream buns, Northern Ireland and how Radiohead "never want to go through last year's shit again".

Another interview. Another one-line answer. Yet another question. Another pained, hungover pause.

"So tell me, how would you describe your climb to recognition?"

"Sheer bloody-mindedness," deadpans Thom.

Correct. Don't fear the "Creep"-er.

MARTYN GOODACRE/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

# THE BENDS

Our heroes escape the indignities of rock'n'roll fame — by becoming even more famous, on their own terms. A landmark reassessed. | BY ANDREW MUELLER

**RELEASED: 13 MARCH 1995**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN you get what you always wanted, then discover that you don't want it? "Creep" and *Pablo Honey* had done for Radiohead everything any rock group dreams that their debut single and first album might do for them. Radiohead were on television screens, on the front of magazines, on everybody's playlist. They were suddenly famous all over the world, hearing their words sung back to them every night in a bewildering array of accents as they toured, and toured, and toured. They were presumably – this was still the mid-'90s – making a few quid. And to judge by the eponymous track of their second album, they were hating more or less every second of the whole glorious joyride.

There was no mistaking the significance of that title. *The Bends* is nautical slang for decompression sickness, a condition brought on by ascending too quickly from the depths, symptoms of which include psychological disconnection and physical hallucination. Throughout the album of the same name, Radiohead appear to be describing similar afflictions brought on by their own vertiginous hurtle from minor cult following to incipient global rock stardom. "*Alone on an aeroplane,*" splutters Thom Yorke on the title track, over an appropriately claustrophobic backdrop,

> THIS IS A RECORD MADE BY FIVE YOUNG MEN YET TO LOSE INTEREST IN THE SOUND OF ROCK'N'ROLL

a seething squall of diseased riffs sounding like My Bloody Valentine trying to teach themselves Lynyrd Skynyrd. "*Falling asleep against the window pane/My blood will thicken.*"

A few months after the release of *The Bends*, this correspondent put that interpretation of the song in particular, and the album in general, to Thom Yorke in a Manhattan cafe. The previous night, Radiohead had completed their 18-date stint opening for REM on their Monster Tour, in the immense Meadows Amphitheatre in Hartford, Connecticut. They were now a few hours away from an unannounced show at New York's rather smaller Mercury Lounge – the sort of descent to reality liable to engender whatever the opposite of the bends might be. Yorke, as always, was reluctant to agree too readily with any hack's analysis of his lyrics.

"That song," he said, "was really just a collection of phrases going round in my head one day. The crazy thing about that song is that there was no calculation or thought involved – it was just whatever sounded good after the previous line. It was written way before we'd ever been to America, even, but yeah, it's always interpreted as this strong reaction against the place and everything that went with it for us."

This seemed even more telling: it turned out that the "The Bends" – the song – wasn't


RADIOHEAD
the bends


<01>planet telex
<02>the bends
<03>high and dry
<04>fake plastic trees
<05>bones
<06>(nice dream)
<01>just
<02>my iron lung
<03>bullet proof..i wish i was
<04>black star
<05>sulk
<06>street spirit (fade out)


7243 8 29626 2 5
Parlophone

Yorke describing the deracinated loneliness of fame, but bracing himself for it. Whether premeditated or not, *The Bends* – the album – gripped then, and grips now, as a compelling statement of righteous disgust, a coruscating howl of self-loathing vis-à-vis one's circumstances and one's inability to do anything to change them, and a thunderingly great rock'n'roll album. Musically and lyrically, it's almost possible to hear *The Bends* as some supercharged hybrid of Elvis Costello & The Attractions' *This Year's Model* and The Byrds' *Younger Than Yesterday*: the sound of fame being forced to choke on itself. Dedicated to the memory of another tireless exorciser of modern cultural chimerae – the late comedian Bill Hicks, who died in 1994, aged 32 – *The Bends* is as fine a record as the 1990s produced.

The tone is set by the bait-and-switch that opens the album. The first 38 seconds of "Planet Telex" give every indication of being a gentle fanfare, a slowly swelling riff borne by shuffling drums and a lolloping bass. This, you could be forgiven for thinking, is the decorous throat-clearing of a group confidently preparing for their serene ascent to the bigtime. Any such

**RADIOHEAD WERE WILLING TO FLIRT WITH MONSTROUS SUCCESS, IF NOT GO SO FAR AS TO EMBRACE IT**

ponderings are interrupted, like "Planet Telex" itself, by what seems, in the circumstances, a jarringly violent insertion of jagged electric guitar, and then there's Yorke, so high in the mix you can hear him gulping a first, desperate lungful of oxygen, before expectorating, "*You can force it but it will not come/You can taste it but it will not form/You can crush it but it's always here.*" Key lines as the melody finally erupts from beneath a dense arrangement of squabbling guitars and keyboards: "*Everything is broken/Everyone is broken.*"

Yorke would later sigh at *Melody Maker* to the effect that he "didn't make *The Bends* for people to slash their wrists to". He could also have pointed out that it's not like anyone could say they weren't warned. A few months before the release of *The Bends*, "My Iron Lung" had appeared as the lead track on a mini-album of the same name. It was as cheerless a report from the heights of notoriety as has ever been dispatched, borrowing heavily – especially in the demented breakdowns at the middle and end of the song – from "Heart-Shaped Box", and Nirvana's similarly inclined *In Utero* album of the previous year. The titular metaphor was not subtle – the iron lung, a contraption that permits its occupant to live, even as it confines them. Radiohead sounded like they were already beginning to feel like this about their own band: "*This is our new song/Just like the last one/A total waste of time/My iron lung.*" When one considers the unorthodox course Radiohead have largely charted since *The Bends*, "My Iron Lung" now reads akin to their declaration of independence.

At no stage, however, does *The Bends* become oppressively woebegone. While it does spend much of its running order describing a swift and bracing disillusionment with the reality of rock'n'roll, it's still a record made by five young men yet to lose interest in the sound of rock'n'roll – that was a process that, for Radiohead, would occur more gradually. While *The Bends* is arguably burdened by a surfeit of lyrical self-consciousness, there is none of that about the actual playing on the record, which is unreconstructed to a degree that, in other circumstances, could be almost be described as gleeful. "Just" is another track in heavy hock to Nirvana – it says much about Radiohead that while most of their contemporaries reacted to grunge by donning Union Jack-spangled bowler hats and doing the Lambeth Walk, Radiohead embraced aspects of it, thereby out-contrarying the contrary. "Black Star", which opens with a motif not light years from Boston's "More Than A Feeling", is a positively stately lighters-aloft rock ballad, the kind of thing which, at the time, prompted much speculation that Radiohead's rise to the rarefied orbit inhabited by U2 et al was theirs for the asking.

While it would turn out that this wasn't a prospect that much interested Radiohead, the thought had – at the very least – clearly occurred to them. If one is entirely uninterested in creating a rock album that will excite massive popular appeal, one doesn't enlist as producer John Leckie, whose previous credits, notwithstanding a certain quantity of apposite indie experimentation (The Fall, PiL), included Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* and The Stone Roses' *The Stone Roses*. It would transpire that a more significant arrival in the Radiohead camp for *The Bends* was one of Leckie's engineers – Nigel Godrich, producer of every subsequent Radiohead and Thom Yorke solo album – but despite their evidently mixed feelings, Radiohead at this point were still clearly willing to flirt with monstrous success, if not quite go so far as to fondly embrace it.

## TRACKMARKS




### THE BENDS

1. Planet Telex ★★★★★
2. The Bends ★★★★★
3. High And Dry ★★★★
4. Fake Plastic Trees ★★★★★
5. Bones ★★★
6. (Nice Dream) ★★★★
7. Just ★★★★
8. My Iron Lung ★★★★★
9. Bullet Proof... I Wish I Was ★★★
10. Black Star ★★★★
11. Sulk ★★★★
12. Street Spirit (Fade Out) ★★★★★

**Label:** Parlophone
**Producer:** John Leckie
**Recorded:** RAK and Abbey Road, London, The Manor, Oxfordshire
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (vocals, guitars, piano), Jonny Greenwood (guitars, keyboards, recorder), Ed O'Brien (guitars, bk vocals), Colin Greenwood (bass), Phil Selway (drums, perc), Caroline Lavelle (cello), John Matthias (violin, viola)
**Highest chart position:** UK 4, US 88

It's another (probably) unconcious echo of Nirvana discernible on *The Bends*. Kurt Cobain's sulky resentment of the jackpot hit by *Nevermind* was always rather undermined by the fact that he'd knowingly signed to a major label, then made a perfectly listenable album of some very pretty tunes. Radiohead were obviously (and quite astutely) afraid of the cretinising effects of success. But at no point do they go out of their way to avoid it. "High And Dry" is another pleading rejection of fame's face-eating mask: "*You'd kill yourself for recognition/Kill yourself to never ever stop/You broke another mirror/You're turning into something you are not.*" It's also a sweet, exquisitely plaintive ballad, and a reminder of the degree to which Yorke's brittle whimper of this period became the default for a subsequent generation of almost invariably inferior, very often incredibly annoying, male rock vocalists. Yorke's own subsequent assessments of what remains one of their most popular songs have run the gamut from "it's all right", to "it's not bad – it's very bad".

Similarly, "Fake Plastic Trees" is a seething, righteous jeremiad against myriad manifestations of inauthenticity, nonetheless expansive for its terseness ("*He used to do surgery/For girls in the '80s/But gravity always wins*," is one of Yorke's deftest character assassinations, up there with the subject/victim of "Karma Police".) And it's also an unapologetic, gradually building rafter-raiser, a post-punk "Stairway To Heaven" beginning with Yorke sighing over a gently strummed acoustic guitar, introducing strings, electric guitar, keyboards and drums verse by verse, before climaxing in a sumptuous tumult, and finally returning to Yorke, alone and lonely, pleading, "*If I could be who you wanted/All the time.*" "Fake Plastic Trees" may be the key track on *The Bends*, at once a throwback to the quiet-loud-quiet of "Creep", and the foundation stone for the unbound, multi-movement ambition of "Paranoid Android".

Even the less obvious and aggressive cuts sound so diseased and queasy that it can feel more like they're being contracted or ingested than listened to. "Bones" is another sketch of disconnect, the hypochondriac gibberings of someone who has been too far from home, for too long, ie a touring rock musician ("*Now I can't climb the stairs/Pieces missing everywhere/Prozac painkillers*"); its chorus sounds not so much sung as vomited. "Just" and "Sulk" both capture Radiohead perched assuredly



"Radiohead are in a really dangerous position at the moment...": Yorke in 1995

between their punkish roots and their stadium rock possibilities: the former sounds like Pixies playing U2, the latter more or less vice versa: "*Sometimes you sulk, sometimes you burn*," keens Yorke over another cacophonous symphony of guitars, a concise summary of Radiohead's emotional palette up to this point. "Bullet Proof... I Wish I Was" is a wistful plea for a thicker skin, while the gentle, inexplicably bracketed "(Nice Dream)" briefly seeks a retreat into some prelapsarian pastoral refuge ("*Gave me sunshine/Made me happy*"). In a debasement nonetheless crushing for its inevitability, this fantasy gets obliterated beneath an instrumental break that all but sounds like bulldozers demolishing this flourishing Eden.

A less confident – or less comprehensively disenchanted – group might have been tempted to supply a redemptive flicker of light at the end of this tunnel. Radiohead finish *The Bends* with what might be the bleakest song in their canon. "Street Spirit (Fade Out)" is as pretty and chilling as a blizzard, its guitar arpeggios drifting across a lyric that appears to describe a long stare into the darkness beneath the Reaper's cowl ("*Cracked eggs/Dead birds/Scream as they fight for life/I can feel death/Can see its beady eyes*"). So utterly cheerless is "Street Spirit" that even the ostensibly redemptive coda, imploring "*Immerse your soul in love*", sounds freighted with an unspoken coda to the effect of "For all the good it'll do you."

Back in that New York café in October 1995, Yorke was already thinking ahead, already unkeen on being cast, as some had gracelessly sought to do, as Kurt Cobain's successor as rock'n'roll's laureate of doom.

"I just think Radiohead are in a really dangerous position at the moment," he said, "where we could end up supplying that pathos and angst all the fucking time, and I think there's a bit more to it than that."

From that day to this, Radiohead have busied themselves showing just how much more – but *The Bends* endures not only as a great and powerful album on its own merits, but as a still-tantalising signpost down the more straightforwardly rock'n'roll road that Radiohead eventually elected not to take.

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Jonny Greenwood frequently turns the very concept of The Great Guitar Riff upside down and inside out. Thom Yorke's ghostly falsetto attains heights of emotion practically unheard of in this irony-infested age."
MARK SUTHERLAND, NME, MAR 18, 1995

"Melodic, yet almost unrecognisable as pop, and no relation to the sweeping certitudes of the U2 to which it will, erroneously, be compared. And almost unbearably, brilliantly, physically tortured by the facts of being human."
JENNIFER NINE, MM, MAR 11, 1995

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS



Radiohead at the Luna Theatre, Brussels, December 1995

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES



# "We are fucking lucky!"

At the end of a momentous year for Radiohead, *ANDY RICHARDSON* hooks up with the band on one more UK tour, and hears about how, with the help of their new friends REM, they have learned to deal with stardom in their own pragmatic way. There are, also, new songs in the works. "We could really fall back on just doing another moribund, miserable, morbid and negative record," explains Thom Yorke, "but I'm deliberately writing down all the positive things that I hear or see."




THOM YORKE STANDS alone backstage at Nottingham Rock City. He stares at the floor and sighs. When his press officer approaches, Yorke looks up, his face a picture of discontent, then measures up the person next to his press officer – a journalist. An invader.

The press officer asks how he is and he lies, "Fine," eyes wide, shoulders tight, hands hanging limp at his sides. For two minutes he tells her about his troubles, then wanders back to the dressing room and his girlfriend, still shuffling restlessly. A mass of contradictions, he wants to be here and he wants to be far away. He wants to be with his girlfriend and yet... he doesn't.

They talk for a few moments, then Yorke's girlfriend ambles off into the crowd. Yorke walks into catering, looks blankly at the food, then returns to his dressing room. He sits briefly, then drifts away yet again, unable to stay still for more than a minute...

Three hours later Yorke is again backstage, this time smiling. Nottingham enjoyed tonight's show. He talks to his girlfriend animatedly and even, for a fleeting moment, affectionately. Soon she leaves, and for a minute Yorke is sullen and mumbling miserably, before shrugging off the disappointment and talking to two female fans who have procured backstage passes. One is from Japan and urges him to drink more vodka, though Yorke declines. The other is coy and gives him an inflatable birthday cake for Jonny. "Where did you get this?" he asks incredulously. "Oh, I found it in my house," she bluffs. The singer smiles his gracious rock-star smile, places the cake on the floor and says he'll leave it outside Jonny's door.

Then he's off wandering again; amiable, chatting, snatching food where he can. All the while he's smiling, content that he performed well, pleased that tonight's gig was so good.

Clearly, this is not the Thom Yorke of old. The Yorke who was prone to panic attacks, spitting, swearing and desperately bleak moods. The people around him can't believe how comfortable and confident he is in this dressing-room full of people. He's changing, they reckon. And they're right. No longer crippled by an enormous, irrational fear of failure, there are times tonight when he positively revels in the acclaim and attention, when he enjoys being in Radiohead. When he feels momentarily satisfied. He can't quite believe how he got here, how easy it all now seems. Yep, Thom Yorke is lucky, and tonight he knows it. He really does.

THE MOST IMPORTANT British band of 1995? It could well be Radiohead. It is Radiohead, after all, who have defined fashion rather than followed it, who have kept a healthy distance from the hedonistic excesses of Britpop and refused to indulge in the cocaine binges, chic heroin habits and brash arrogance of their contemporaries.

Radiohead are an exception. In 1995, most bands sought solace in an unreal world, in a Prozac and intoxicant-addled world of rose-tinted Englishness. Lyrics were filled with fantastic falsehoods and few dared to mirror the ideas and failings of a disaffected generation... except Radiohead. And while Yorke talked at every turn about his inner turmoil, he was too smart, unlike Courtney Love, to use his pain as a bargaining chip. Rather, he described his feelings with honesty, eloquence and dignity. He found ways to enjoy his sometimes precarious lifestyle without becoming an idiot. And, like the rest of Radiohead, he made a friend of reality despite living in an unreal world.

So backstage at Nottingham Rock City is a typical scene. Guitarist Jonny Greenwood ignores a collection of presents and 24th-birthday cards and leaves for the sanctity of his modest hotel room. Drummer Phil Selway collects a small kit bag and heads home to his wife in Oxford: "I clock on and clock off," he says as he breezes past.

Guitarist Ed O'Brien leaves with his girlfriend, while Colin Greenwood sinks into a three-seater sofa with a large glass of Stolichnaya vodka and cranberry juice. By 1am he's the only one left, surrounded by a half-finished bottle of vodka and a row of paper cups soiled with fag butts.

Radiohead on tour is like a well-behaved public school trip. They are reliable and calm. They arrive on time and treat their crew and tour manager with respect. Their only excesses are a drop of vodka and the occasional late night.

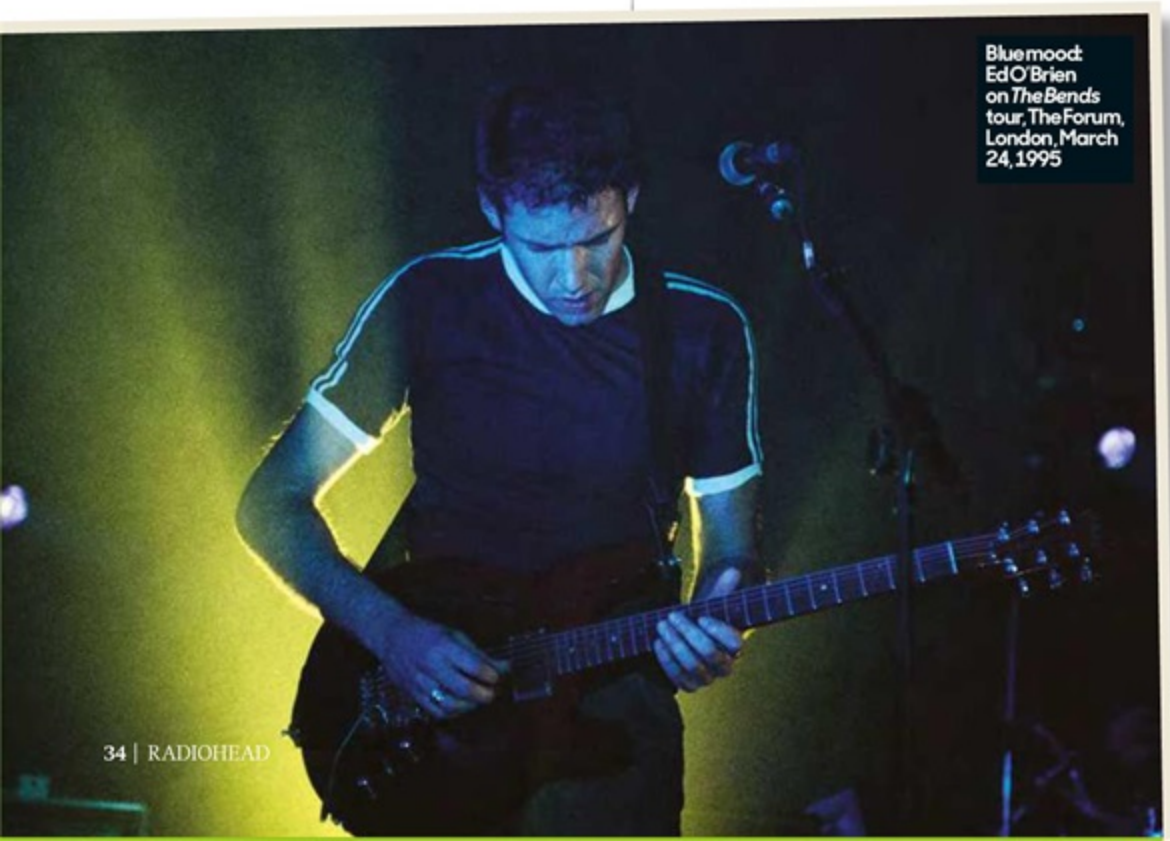
"I'm sure we'd probably all be much happier and better party monsters if we indulged in Class A drugs," Greenwood says later, wryly, "but we'd probably self-destruct six months down the line, which is what a lot of bands do. I'm not defending or condoning bands' use of drugs – it is a bizarre, precarious, insecure, paranoid, falsely comfortable, perspective-driven lifestyle.Personally, we've never been a band to focus any energies on groupies or drugs or anything like that. I mean, I don't know any bands that do, to be honest – maybe I don't see it. We're quite a solitary band, but everyone is so different; you talk to each member of the band and you get a different answer."

The turnaround for Radiohead happened because of *The Bends*. Twelve months ago, they were stuck at RAK studios, in Charlbert Street, North-West London, fuming with each other and causing endless tantrums and panic attacks. Both Greenwoods, O'Brien and Selway wanted a break. Yorke insisted they carry on. In November, the issue was resolved when the band went to play in Mexico.

"It all just came out," Thom Yorke remembers, "all the stuff that we'd always been fighting. And I think, when we started our little band, when we were kids at school, it was never really about being friends or anything. We were all playing our instruments in our bedrooms and wanted to play them with someone else, and it was just really symbiotic. We never really thought about it.

"Years and years of tension and not saying anything to each other, and basically all the things that had just built up since we'd met each other, all came out in one day. We were spitting and fighting and crying and saying all the things that you don't want to talk about and I think if we hadn't ever done that... I think that completely changed what we did and we all went back and did the album and it all made sense."





Blue mood: Ed O'Brien on *The Bends* tour, The Forum, London, March 24, 1995

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES



Radiohead live on *Later... With Jools Holland*, May 27, 1995

"It was like that typical Radiohead thing, things had been brewing," Ed continues. "We're not really confrontational with one another. Things had been brewing and they basically came to a head. We were all completely knackered on this Mexican tour bus, 12 of us, with six bunks and they were about 5ft 6in long, so you're getting no sleep. It was just ridiculous. It was something we'd been spending eight or nine years working towards and it was like, we'd never been totally honest with each other in terms of... We're not into bonding, we're friends and everything, but because of maybe our upbringing or the school that we went to, we don't tell each other our problems. We deal with them ourselves. It's the only way you can deal with them."

"It's really shit to talk about that in interviews," adds Yorke, "because for most bands, it seems, there is this sort of thing about it's all ready and presented and it's like, 'Here you go' and there's an angle and there's so on and so on, and it's wonderfully easy to write about... And here I am just talking about how in Mexico we all just started swearing and crying and throwing things around."

The fighting in Mexico was productive, though. Somehow, it gave Radiohead fresh resolve and, most importantly, Yorke's belief in the band grew: "It was coming out rather than not coming out, you know what I mean? I think that it's something you fall back on. I'm really into this theory now that anything that's worthwhile is really difficult and if it's becoming easy it's time to fuck it up."

THE ONLY THING Radiohead want to fuck up now are the preconceptions of the press and the public. Yorke is no longer the tortured, angst-ridden subject who prompted one newspaper to describe him as the rock star most likely to commit suicide. Sure, he can still be moody, surly, difficult and solitary, but at least he now manages to balance so many potentially destructive characteristics.

"I get people coming up on the street in Oxford," he says, "saying, 'Can I have your autograph?' Sometimes I'll say yes and sometimes I'll be really, really rude because they'll catch me when I'm not being Thom Yorke from Radiohead, like in a restaurant or something, and it'll be, 'No, piss off.' But then to have people come back and say, 'We heard you're a bit difficult, a bit weird, you're not very easy to talk to.' It's the circumstances that people are talking to you in, when people come up and they want a little bit of you, their two cents' worth.

**"THOM YORKE THE PERSONALITY... I DON'T WANT TO DIE HAVING JUST BEEN THAT"**

"And that, to be perfectly honest, is not why I got into this, and that's just me being honest. You feel like saying to them, 'Look, this is not why I got into this and I don't really give a flying fuck whether or not you have my autograph or not and I'd rather you didn't bother me because if I was anybody else in the street, you wouldn't.'"

Plainly, Yorke despises many aspects of fame, biting the hand that feeds him when it suits him. He pisses off business people to preserve his sanity and dismisses the press as self-serving and pointless because that protects him and his few close friends.

"I stopped reading the press when they printed I was going to top myself. And my girlfriend rings me up, really really upset, saying, 'What's all this, what have you been saying?' You know, that's when I stopped reading it. That was enough for me... But then I'm in this business, I choose to be in this business, but I also choose to be in this business on my terms, you know."

Undoubtedly, the death of Kurt Cobain – who took a not dissimilar stance – and the consequent demise of grunge has heightened Yorke's position. He is now one of the most successful of a dwindling breed of songwriters who deal only in reality. In fact, Richey Edwards was the only mainstream British lyricist in a similar position.

"That was all sort of happening as *The Bends* came out," says Yorke. "I had people warning me a few months before Richey disappeared, before he went away the first time, warning me he was in a bad way and he was..." his speech trails off.

Taking stock, he continues. "I thought that basically it was the British press that did it to

ANDRE CSILLAG/SHUTTERSTOCK

Richey. Full stop. Although I've got lots of friends who are journalists, the few who I think were basically responsible for him having a breakdown I will always hold responsible and I will always see what we do in that light."

He pauses again, leans forward, holds his hands in front of his chest and slowly, deliberately concludes: "And I think he is still alive."

Yorke is justly proud of *The Bends* in all its brave, mournful, agonisingly painful glory. While Oasis sang of champagne supernovas and Supergrass spoke of feelin' alright, *The Bends* described torturous isolation and despair. It was bleak and vulnerable. The cover featured a photograph taken in hospital and the inside sleeve included line drawings of ostriches with their heads buried in the sand. You didn't need to be a psychoanalyst to interpret the symbolism.

Now, though, Radiohead are emerging with uncharacteristic optimism. Yorke, inching towards acceptance of his rock-star status, seems eager to start recording again.

"I don't know how good the new songs are," he says, modestly. "The jury's out."

He and the rest of Radiohead have already decided, however, not to make another album like *The Bends*. They don't want to push themselves through so much torment again, and besides, they've reached a level where they don't have to. Instead, they will try to record at a more leisurely, relaxed pace: Yorke has told their label, Parlophone, that they want a year to make their next LP. Apparently, the paymasters have agreed.




"You know, the big thing for me is that we could really fall back on just doing another moribund, miserable, morbid and negative record, like lyrically," he explains, "but I really don't want to, at all. And I'm deliberately just writing down all the positive things that I hear or see. But I'm not able to put them into the music yet. I don't want to force it, because then all I'm doing is addressing all the issues where people are saying that we're mope rock. As far as I'm concerned, *The Bends* is like that because that was really, really where we were at when we did it. And you could say the same about REM's *Automatic For The People*. It's a really miserable record, you know."

Instead, Radiohead will record songs like "Lucky", the stand-out track on War Child's *Help* compilation. That was Jonny Greenwood's idea, to donate a song Radiohead were playing every night on tour and which the fans loved even though they did not know what it was. When Greenwood suggested it, however, Thom Yorke wasn't so sure.

"There wasn't that sense of screaming and fighting and being on the phone to people for ages and spitting and swearing any more. But that was never any help to anybody, I don't think. There was a sense of release to me, that was the thing, that was the thing I wanted. To me, 'Lucky' is sort of like that. 'Lucky' is a song of complete release. It just happened, writing and recording it; there was no time, no conscious effort."

Colin Greenwood adds: "I think we're learning not to think too much about stuff. Thought can be an inhibiting thing. I don't know if you've read Arthur Miller's autobiography *Timebends*, but analysis can be a crippling thing and self-consciousness can be a crippling thing, but it can also be a source of great creativity, and articulation of crises of thought can be a great thing in itself."

But Radiohead's change in attitude is not entirely down to the Mexican tête-à-tête. An equally important factor was their summer-long tour with REM. It acted as a stress-reliever, freeing Radiohead of the pressure of headlining each night. They went onstage, played for 30 minutes and actually – God forbid – enjoyed themselves.

The relationship between Radiohead and REM, too, was far more civilised than that between most headline/support bands – especially when the headliners just happen to be one of the biggest bands in the world. When Radiohead joined the tour, Michael Stipe took Yorke to one side and told him he was a fan. They socialised after gigs, talked about shared favourite songs – like REM's "Drive" or Radiohead's "High And Dry" – and Stipe explained how he became a phenomenon and managed to retain his integrity.

Yorke recalls: "Everything that we've come to expect was turned completely on its head, like the idea that you get to a certain level and you lose it and that's it – you're lost – and for everything to be amicable and there be no bitchiness or pettiness about it. Onstage, REM were playing with songs they've written, mucking around with the idea of being who they are and having no illusions about it – or seemingly so. And you

Man of mystery: Yorke at the Luna Theatre, Brussels, December 5, 1995

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES

compare that with a lot of what we feel when we are at home and it was just so different. It's just such a headfuck."

REM smashed Radiohead's preconceptions. They emerged strong and triumphant from the tour.

"A lot of it was like, yeah, we're the support band and you could go onstage and make a complete prick of yourself and the more the better, which I enjoyed doing for several months.

"It was a real full stop and it really opened things up. It took the pressure off and I could just observe, which really helped me. I got really, really drunk one night and was talking to REM about fame, and Michael Stipe was saying he went through exactly the same thing during the *Green* tour, when suddenly they went from being a band to being a phenomenon for the first time, and he was a 'phenomenon' or whatever. And I'm not really at that stage at all yet, we're not playing Wembley yet. But I suppose it's quite funny, that idea of everything that you do, 24 hours a day, that when you go and have breakfast or go out into the street, that every single minute of every single day you're conscious of the fact that people might be watching you is really, really unhealthy. The whole cult of personality surrounding bands is pointless. I think the '80s really bore that out.

"Obviously, people want to know about the people that make the music, but by the end of it, it was just becoming so pompous. Like with the whole U2 thing at the end of the '80s, and like Madonna and so on, it all became an extension of the whole Saatchi & Saatchi concept that you can sell anything to anybody if you put it across the right way."

So when people referred to you as "the new U2", did that description annoy you for those reasons?

"That whole idea of being Thom Yorke the personality... I don't want to die having just been just that. That whole thing that most pop stars are desperately trying to attain immortality through their cult of personality... this phenomenon, this Sunday review section, glossy front page... It's like 'NO!', actually. No, I don't want to be remembered for this; I want to be remembered for doing pieces of work that people liked, and other than that I don't want to know.' I'm not into this for immortality's sake. Sixty years from now, I'm going to be dead, and that will be that.

"I made the fatal error. You know I was saying I don't read any of the press? Well, I read this thing because it was in the dressing-room and it was saying something about "these people don't look like the sort of people who have looked death in the face and have walked away again", and I thought, 'Yeah, but I'm not here to prove how real I am.'"

RADIOHEAD STILL MANAGE to separate the personal and the professional, leading separate lives when the band is inactive, travelling separately to gigs during tours. Selway drives to and from his home in Oxford, the gregarious Colin travels with the crew on their tour bus and O'Brien, Yorke and Jonny drive with their tour manager in a hired Renault Espace. Soundchecks are chaotic affairs kept in sync by a tenacious sound engineer, while before and after shows, the five Radiohead members are rarely in the same place at the same time.

"I think the more that we are doing and the more successful we are being," says Colin Greenwood, "the harder it is to deal with on a personal level and to connect with personal wants and needs and personal life. You understand why people get caught up with quick fixes like drugs, because it is quite a numbing experience. I was thinking about Blind Melon with *No Rain* – they had already toured that

**"I'M SURE WE'D ALL BE MUCH HAPPIER IF WE INDULGED IN CLASS A DRUGS"**

album at least twice before it was a success and they had to tour it again. And you can go mad. It's bizarre – it's like being in a band is a privileged, rarefied existence and you should never get complacent about it, but at the same time there are pressures about it. It's interesting to be back here where I did my degree [*Cambridge*] and think about how far we've come and how far you can travel and how many places you can see, but you can still be unhappy about yourself as a person and the way you are, emotionally or intellectually."

Radiohead remain fiercely self-critical. Their level of self-analysis is acute, so that whenever anybody tries to write anything bad about them they've already thought it or said it. But then, they revel in the paradoxes and contradictions they create.

"My father asked the other day how it was going," confides O'Brien, "and I said, 'Oh, you know, it could be better from our point of view.' It's similar to when someone suffers from bulimia and looks in the mirror and thinks they're too fat when they're really thin. We're getting this amazing response from people and we're thinking this isn't good enough."

In January they will take a month off. Selway will spend time with his wife, Yorke will travel around Europe trying to avoid *The Bends*, O'Brien will go to India and Colin will move to London.

Yorke says: "The only other person I've ever talked to about this is Michael Stipe and he just said, 'It takes me six months to come down from a tour at least now, or more than that.' So I can understand it actually now. All the emotions and all the tensions and the freak-outs are all stocked up and they all come seeping out at the end, so you have to keep it together. It's the same with the live situation. Sometimes I think it's just amusing and it's just a joke and I just enjoy that rather than fighting it any longer."

THE NIGHT AFTER Nottingham Rock City, Radiohead play Cambridge Corn Exchange. It is another good concert. At 11.40pm, Yorke leaves his dressing-room and sits at the bottom of a stairwell.

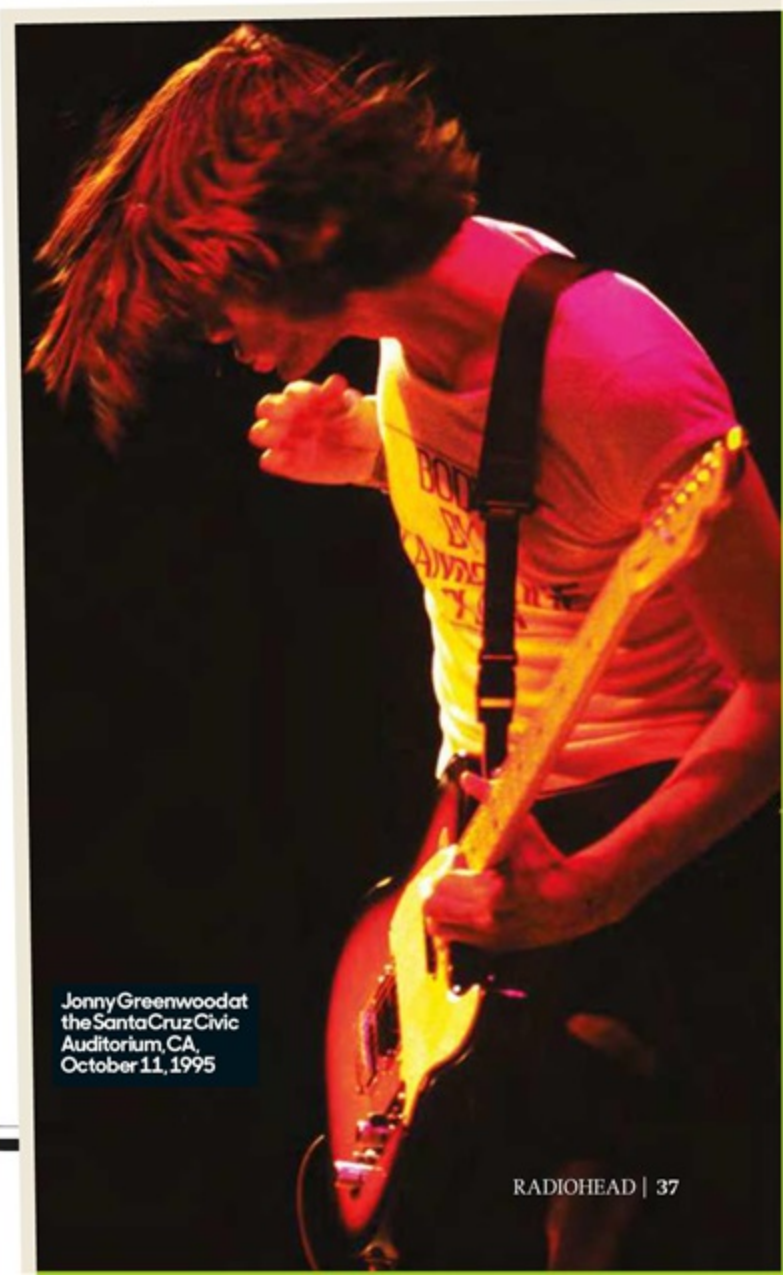
"The secret, I'm slowly discovering, is that if you don't feel anything inside for what you're doing it doesn't necessarily mean that it's not working. It just means that you can't possibly mean it all the time, and if you do you're a sad fuck."

Is there more self-confidence? Do you finally think, 'Yeah, we are good'?

"No, I hope not. But that's the same with anybody, really, or should be. If you wake up every morning thinking, 'Fuck me, I'm great', you're a boxer or something."

And are you learning, finally, to enjoy it?

"It barely pays the bills, really, but what's really scary is when you start hearing people saying things like, 'At least you don't have to work for a living,' and it's, 'Fuck, yeah.' You forget that... We are fucking lucky."



TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Jonny Greenwood at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, CA, October 11, 1995

# OK COMPUTER

Amid the lunacy of Cool Britannia, a masterpiece of pre-millennial tension. "*This is what you get when you mess with us!*" | BY JOHN ROBINSON

**RELEASED: 21 MAY 1997**

RADIOHEAD USED TO say that "Creep" was their "Scott Walker song". Perhaps it was this sideways acknowledgement of his genius that led the reclusive avant-pop star to book the band to headline a night at Meltdown, when he curated the London music festival in the summer of 2000. Who can say? But you can be damn sure he didn't book them to have them screw up "Paranoid Android".

That, though, is exactly what Radiohead, then playing their first show in the UK for 18 months, managed to do. Rather than smoothly ascending the mounting drama of the song's four-part structure, somewhere near cruising altitude, they hit unexpected turbulence.

This being a time when people watched gigs rather than filmed them on their phones, you won't find a record of it on YouTube, and to be honest it didn't look as if Radiohead quite believed what was happening either. As I recall, they stopped, then Thom Yorke shook his head a bit sorrowfully, and started singing the "*from a great height*" bit, guiding the band back down to a safe landing, as if talking in a novice pilot from the tower.

Was this perhaps a late appearance of the "millennium bug" that we'd been talking about six months previously? This, we all understood, was a fatal flaw in the modern world, which would wreak havoc when midnight rang in the 21st Century: setting off the fire alarms, bringing down aeroplanes, and breaking our tenuous dial-up connections. Revealing, in fact, our modern world to be less secure than we thought.

> IF RADIOHEAD HAVE NEVER DONE ANYTHING QUITE AS STRONG SINCE, THEN NEITHER HAS ANYONE ELSE

Or perhaps it was simply down to something we'd long found in our own lives, just not in Radiohead's – human frailty.

Yet here we all were, not so much watching Radiohead perform a song from *OK Computer* as participating in the album's dramatic proposition. On one level, calm. All passengers seated. Exits clearly illuminated. On another, vulnerable and oblivious. Happy with our entertainment, and to not have to think about anything apart from the images flashing in front of us. Were we so complacent as not to feel the thinness of the ice beneath our feet? How we were a hair's breadth from panic and collapse?

*OK Computer* arrived in the shops on May 21, 1997, three weeks after the landslide victory of Tony Blair's "New Labour" government. This was three months before a demented summer: *Be Here Now* and Princess Diana's death, London filled with people publicly drunk, often crying, feeling hysterical connections with people they'd never met. As such, *OK Computer* is technically an artefact of "Cool Britannia", something that it might have been fun to bring up with Thom Yorke at the time. Yorke,


OK COMPUTER
RADIOHEAD
Lost Child


RADIOHEAD : OK COMPUTER
AIRBAG
PARANOID ANDROID
SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK ALIEN
EXIT MUSIC (FOR A FILM)
LET DOWN
KARMA POLICE
ELECTIONEERING
CLIMBING UP THE WALLS
NO SURPRISES
LUCKY
THE TOURIST
18576397


Parlophone

though (as can be observed in Grant Gee's depressingly enjoyable documentary, *Meeting People Is Easy*, about the responsibilities of promoting this album), didn't really engage with fun back then.

That didn't mean he wasn't funny. Like Nick Cave and David Bowie, Thom Yorke is joking more often than you'd think. On *OK Computer*, he relishes the psychopathic disconnect at the heart of John Cleese/Graham Chapman Monty Python. He's big on inhuman behaviour: the unborn chicken voices of the slimy natural world, the inability to empathise ("*He talks in maths*"), and in conveying horrific news as a glib matter of fact. When he's abducted by aliens while out driving on track three ("Subterranean Homesick Alien"), he's worried he can't tell his friends because they'd think "*I'd finally lost it completely...*" On the lyric sheet, meanwhile, there are parenthetical remarks: "Sentimental drivel" (on "Let Down"). Alongside "Airbag" the words "completely terrified" are crossed out.

Two years previously, a song called "Talk Show Host" (the B-side to "Street Spirit (Fade Out)" found Yorke waiting patiently with "*a gun and a pack of sandwiches*" – an image so British,

*OK COMPUTER* MADE DARK INTIMATIONS ABOUT WORK, TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBAL VESTED INTEREST

sinister and amusing it may as well have originated in 1967's *Otley*, a Clement and La Frenais-scripted conspiracy thriller starring Tom Courtenay. "*You want me?*" Yorke taunted in the song, "*Fucking well come and find me...*"

It's a voice that carries through to *OK Computer*: intelligent, intransigent and quietly fuming. He could simply be some dangerous person of interest muttering to himself; equally, he might prove to belong to some vigilante hero. Modern life, he seems to be saying, will blur those boundaries for you. Heroism is a bit of a theme on *OK Computer* – superheroes are mentioned once by name on "Lucky" later in the album. On first track "Airbag", meanwhile, Yorke disappears into a phone box to emerge and announce "*in an interstellar burst/I am back to save the universe...*"

Outwardly unremarkable, but capable of great deeds. Unafraid of dangerous foes. It's not hard to see how Radiohead might have felt some kinship with a Clark Kent/caped crusader transformation in 1996. While Yorke's songs for *The Bends* had been written in the back of the band's tour bus, feeling "drunk and pretty upset", *OK Computer* was the product of a more fundamental retreat.

The band took three months to record, but spent the best part of a year "agonising", prior to that, rehearsing and rewriting their material. For a group caricatured as morose, the album came from a positive place. *The Bends* proved there was an audience interested in them. Further, they were reassured, having toured with REM, to discover it was possible to find ways of being a resourceful and principled group, while still being a commercially successful one.

Crucially, the band had met Nigel Godrich. Having worked with the band on "Talk Show Host" (a guitar blues, populated with eerie submerged noise and fierce processed drums), and "Lucky" (a jagged guitar face-off released as a benefit single for the War Child charity), the band felt they had met a producer of like mind. Radiohead then funded an audiophile supermarket sweep: instructing Godrich to select whatever he needed to equip a studio to record them wherever they chose.

They spent what Yorke described as "a ridiculous amount of money", but also took their first steps to redressing the master/servant relationship between band and label, and controlling the means of production – all while still inside a corporate behemoth like EMI. Radiohead immersed themselves in Miles Davis, Can and Penderecki. Godrich, meanwhile, found "Stop The Cavalry" singer Jona Lewie and bought a vintage plate reverb off him, its clanking analogue delay becoming a key sound of the album. To record, the band moved between the low-key Canned Applause in Oxfordshire, and St Catherine's Court, a mansion near Bath owned by the actress Jane Seymour. The music they recorded there pondered why other human beings did not enjoy the same freedom of movement as they.

Within the group, *OK Computer* began a re-evaluation process. The album is often described as paradoxical, in that it uses all the technological tricks in the book, with the aim of refuting the modern world. It's probably more accurate to say it's more about the actual process of engagement, and what that means for man and machine. Are they really at war? And if so, who will win?

Philip Selway is key to bringing the idea about musically: on "Airbag" his drums are sampled and cut up; on "Let Down", however, he's a swinging, warmly human player. Rather than using the Mellotron's customary string settings on "Exit Music (For A Film)", meanwhile, they dug out the '8 Voice Choir' tapes. Those may be playground noises being sucked down in an entropic, Gavin Bryars-style whooshing in the same song. Internally, as they moved beyond straight rock structures, the band asked its members to re-interview for their positions. Just because you were a guitar player didn't necessarily mean you would be playing guitar in the future – a human resources issue which would be key to the band's subsequent leaps forward.

Radiohead have plenty to say on this album about jobs, careers (the "*quiet life*" and "*a handshake*" as they put it on "No Surprises") and the somnambulant nature of the Western lifestyle bargain. But if *OK Computer* walked the same beat as Pink Floyd's *Animals*, it did so in an infinitely more compassionate and intelligent way. In Roger Waters' misanthropic view, corporate fatcat, religious observant, and company clerk were all as contemptible as each other. Radiohead worked more by suggestion, the power of nightmares. They made dark intimations about work, technology and global vested interest, and showed their effects on the man in the street.

Their engagements with the concept made it sound what it was: a serious, human and heroic

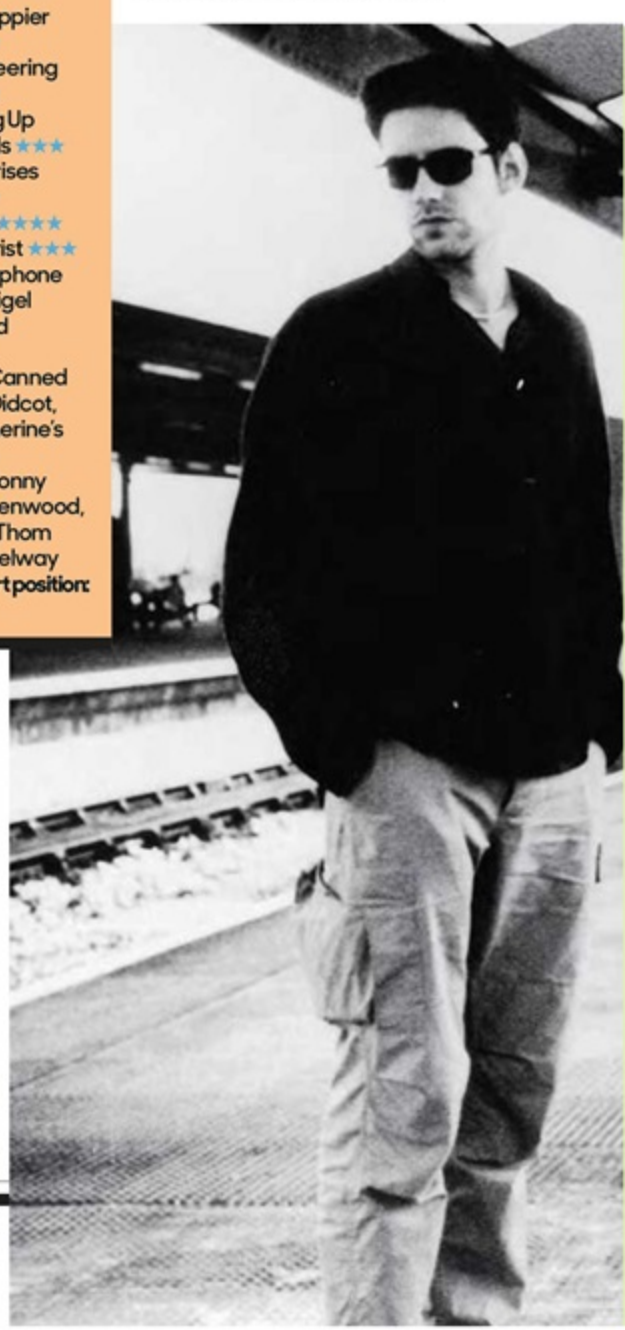
## TRACKMARKS



**OK COMPUTER**

1. Airbag ★★★
2. Paranoid Android ★★★★★
3. Subterranean Homesick Alien ★★★
4. Exit Music (For A Film) ★★★★★
5. Let Down ★★★★★
6. Karma Police ★★★★
7. Fitter Happier ★★★★★
8. Electioneering ★★★★★
9. Climbing Up The Walls ★★★
10. No Surprises ★★★★★
11. Lucky ★★★★★
12. The Tourist ★★★

**Label:** Parlophone
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich and Radiohead
**Recorded:** Canned Applause, Didcot, and St Catherine's Court, Bath
**Personnel:** Jonny & Colin Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Thom Yorke, Phil Selway
**Highest chart position:** UK 1, US 21



struggle. There's a case made for "Exit Music (For A Film)" (ghostly choir; buzzing mechanical bass) as a suicide song. The song is of course heard over the end credits of *William Shakespeare's Romeo And Juliet* by Baz Luhrmann (a creative patron), but as good A-level students like Radiohead would know, suicide wasn't the intended outcome of that story. Better to see it as a hopeful escape, with "*a song to keep us warm*" helping to keep your nerve against the odds.

"Let Down" takes the beautiful arpeggios of "Street Spirit (Fade Out)" and makes them celestial, proposing an escape that never comes, a modern and high-speed journey that arrives at no meaningful destination – in other hands possibly an "on tour malaise" song. This and "Karma Police" invent Coldplay only to instantly render them obsolete: certainly, this was mid-paced melodic rock with a piano, but one with a sense of purpose. You could say that Radiohead have never done anything quite as strong since as the sequence of songs that is "Exit Music"/"Let Down"/"Karma Police". But, as Joseph Heller said of *Catch-22*, neither has anyone else.

The most disturbing track on the album is "Fitter Happier", in which a neutral synthesised voice a bit like Dr Stephen Hawking's (actually a function on the Mac SimpleText program designed to assist the blind) implies that humanity has been completely overrun. Its illusions of freedom and wellbeing ("*exercise at the gym*", "*keep in touch with old friends*", "*enjoy a drink now and then*") are just a pitiful series of tropes. In fact, this fitter happier, calmer being is no better than "*a pig, in a cage, on antibiotics*". At about this time, an *NME* colleague sat next to Stephen Hawking at a university dinner, and he wasn't like that at all. He asked her who she liked better, Blur or Oasis.

"Fitter Happier" seems designed to be a line in the sand, a turning point in the battle, the moment when an album of troubling interior monologue becomes more of a call to arms. Such certainly is "Electioneering", a surging rock'n'roller, in which Yorke and Jonny Greenwood tear through savage riffing, the cathartic nature of the music perfectly meeting Yorke's outrage, in which he protests "*cattle prods and the IMF*". "Climbing Up The Walls", however, feels very much of the first half. Apparently inspired by Penderecki's *Threnody For The Victims Of Hiroshima*, its distorted breakbeats and lyrical paranoia sound more like a Tricky remix from 1995.

It wouldn't be right to say that the album's last three songs conspire to end it on a high, resolve its conflicts, or send the audience home happy. Still, whatever their content, "No Surprises" and "Lucky" both capture the sheer delight and spirit of musical creativity that overtook Radiohead in 1996. The latter was done in five hours. The former was the first thing the band recorded, the musicians, give or take, just plugging in, playing, and that being what we hear on the album. If there's a message to take from final song "The Tourist", then it's "*slow down, idiot*", which have since turned out to be more prophetic words than the writer probably intended.

In a way, that's what's recommended in "No Surprises", too. True enough, we should probably realise that there's more to life than going to work and having a pretty garden, but that's human beings all over. Frailty and imperfection is what makes us different from the machines. The thing that makes us flawed is ultimately what prevents us from becoming monsters.

PENNIE SMITH

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

**"When the vocals dissolve into a distant storm of rabid, distorted screams, it's not the snortings and foot-stampings of a petulant ingrate, rather a snippet of that same rage that drives us into lousy self-mollification or else off the hinge. A modern terror..."**
TAYLOR PARKES, MM, JUNE 14, 1997

**"Love, work, sleep, politics have all failed – all you can do is accept it. Such stoicism renders this a spectacular success: a true articulation of the anxiety of late-20th Century man, backed with music of extraordinary grace."**
JAMES OLDHAM, NME, JUNE 14, 1997



The 'Headin '97: reprogramming themselves


LG



Radiohead, New York, June 1997

# "We're still capable of producing enormous trauma for ourselves, unfortunately..."

"...But I suppose it's good," says Jonny Greenwood. "It's the opposite of getting fat and lazy and rich." From drunken Belfast awards ceremonies, through Oxford beer gardens, on to the superstar-packed backstage zone of a Tibetan Freedom Concert in New York, *STUART BAILIE* tracks Radiohead as they prepare for the release of *OK Computer*. PLUS! The band discuss the album, track by track: "We are the New Labour of Rock, after all."

MIKE DIVER




WHAAAH! SCREECH! YAKKA yakka! They're incoming from all sides. Fierce noises from the right, altercations from behind. Just now there's a stormy advance on the left – only seconds before it comes howling through. All Thom Yorke can do is hold tight, neck some more beer and hope that the mayhem will pass.

Ridiculously, this is friendly fire. Guys are moving in with their hands open in welcome, wanting to connect with the singer, to assure him that he's a great bloke and his music rocks like no other. Musicians are shouting about how *The Bends* has inspired them – completely rewriting the lexicon for guitar bands everywhere, a real milestone.

The bawling drunks before him have found the secrets of the universe, except they've forgotten how to get the words out. Girls are smiling, wanting to engage Thom in intelligent conversation. But that, sadly, may not be possible. An occasional tape recorder clicks on beneath his nose and the singer does his best, but he burbles gamely, his sentences spinning into each other, much of the sense gone.

He brightens for a bit when somebody mentions his American friends from the East Coast – Tanya Donelly and Kristin Hersh. His face is illuminated now, with a great childlike smile and he's raving about the latter's *Hips And Makers* record, how it touched him deeply – how the author of so many ace Throwing Muses records could manage such a formidably great solo record as well.

All this is happening at the Paradise Lost nightclub in the centre of Belfast, an annexe of the Europa Hotel. It's February 20, and the mix of Radiohead's new album has recently been finished. There's no turning back now – rather it's the perfect occasion to celebrate another job well done, to wet the newborn, still-sweaty head of *OK Computer*.

Earlier in the evening, there had been grand speeches and a prize to collect. *Hot Press* magazine, Ireland's equivalent of *NME*, had invited the band over to their annual awards. Radiohead were honoured as the Best International Live Act to play the island in '96. Many of the well-wishers were still raving about that show at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin, and when Thom picked up his trophy, he'd mentioned the energy the crowd gave the band that night. So everybody cheered him again and again.

The vibe around the Radiohead table was wide-eyed and euphoric, like the best school trip ever. Maybe they just hadn't been out much lately. Colin Greenwood was powering down the Heinekens, making friends. Larry Mullen from U2 was sitting to his left, and he started passing fresh beers over.

Larry was offering advice as well, remembering that when U2 had been making their first impact in America, Bruce Springsteen had come backstage to say hello. The New Jersey boy told the young Dubliners that they'd probably do great things in the music world, but that they should never, ever forget to have fun while it was going well. So here was Larry, passing on the word from one generation to another. Colin accepted this as a flattering and important ritual.

Tim from Ash, he came over at the end. He was looking at Thom, scary expression on his face. "Do you like rock'n'roll?" he bellowed. Thom was speechless.

Meanwhile, Colin was trying to explain how the new LP sounded to some old acquaintances. "If you thought there were no singles on *The Bends*, you should hear this one," he laughed.

"It's like a... stoned Radiohead."

All that was a couple of hours ago; now the after-show party is in session. All of Radiohead, bar the singer, have gone missing on manoeuvres. A few of them had gone searching for the missing


'Robin' (right) in the "Paranoid Android" video

"THE VIDEO HAS BEEN CENSORED BY MTV... THEY'VE TAKEN OUT ALL THE NIPPLES"

award, found it under a table, and then mislaid it again. So at this point Thom finds himself alone, battered by the well-wishers, rapidly losing it in the fracas.

Some musicians would love this much attention. Admiration from punters and players, from the media and the industry people alike. But Thom doesn't care for it. He has this thing about being liked purely because of his musical status; it's as if people are stripping him of his personality, pinning him up like a species, something fixed and recognisable.


Yorkepal Michael Stipe

One of the people who've helped him deal with this is Michael Stipe. They became good mates on the Monster Tour of '95, and the REM singer was able to impart some useful advice about the bum side of success and the danger of overexposure.

"He's a lovely bloke," Thom said earlier, "and he's coped with fame very well – which helps me, 'cos I find myself having to fight certain aspects of it at the moment. I don't like my old friends talking to me like I'm a pop star, 'cos it makes me feel like I'm becoming two-dimensional."

So, when he meets a journalist who'd interviewed Radiohead a few times before, he starts asking questions about the other guy's life – finding out about his family, his friends and aspirations. And then the singer locks his arm around the journo's elbow, maybe for some physical support, possibly also to indicate that the pair shouldn't be disturbed. It's a bizarre sight, like a pair of awkward newlyweds, a perfectly squiffy odd couple.

This works for a bit, but Thom still can't take the attention away from himself. His neck tightens, his shoulders hunch. He reaches for his hat – huge, navy and woolly – and he pulls it down over his forehead, obliterating his features.

Consciously or not, he looks like Robin, the cartoon slacker with the knitted hat, a creation of the Swedish animator Magnus Carlsson. Robin became a huge hit with Radiohead during the recording work for the album at Jane Seymour's mansion near Bath in '96. They'd taped lots of the Friday-night transmissions from Channel 4, and they'd laugh at the little guy's hard life, at his mixture of innocence, sadness and guile.

There was a fave episode in which Robin dreamt he was being pursued by a French mime artist who copied all of his moves and mannerisms. It was a terrifying concept, and there was only one way to resolve the situation. Robin got a gun and blew the guy's head off.

That's hardly Thom's style, though. But he's never going to be anonymous with his hat pulled down either. Everyone else is in their party clothes. He's wearing wrinkled cargo pants and a baby-blue shirt, the collar all stretched and twisted. He's unmissable, and the compliments are firing in once more.

Yakka yakka! Whaaah! He can't fit any more beer in. It's been time to quit for at least an hour – to retreat to his foxhole and let somebody else take the flak. Thom staggers to the elevator. He goes up to his hotel room and vomits everywhere.

ED'S DAD SOUNDS like a great bloke. He rates Primal Scream, reads the music press and rips the piss out of old Radiohead videos. He actually throws parties, bringing all of his mates around for a few beers, for some banter and the inevitable return of the "Pop Is Dead" promo. That's his favourite.

"What's going on there, then?" he'll ask his boy, jabbing at the remote control switch. "You call that a music video? So why is there a lizard in that scene? Explain it to me." He rewinds the tape just for the hell of it, thoroughly enjoying himself, as his guests chortle at the sheer pretentiousness of it all. "Look. A lizard. Call yourself an O'Brien? Do you, son?"

Ed's grandfather came over from Tipperary many years ago. The guitarist still goes out there on occasions, marvelling at the way his relations

THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES



Platform souls: Radiohead, 1997

can drink until two in the morning and then get up at five to milk the cows. Loads of them turn up whenever the band play in Ireland, and there's often a scary scene when a member of the O'Brien posse misbehaves, causing Ed to step over and play the peacemaker.

Meanwhile, Colin Greenwood is thinking about some of the other video crimes the band have committed. He can barely talk about the "Stop Whispering" effort, when they were persuaded by the American director to dress in linen and some kind of bizarre headgear, striking cute poses. Maybe the intention was to make them seem very English, or whatever, but they just came across as royal prannies.

Which is probably why the band are philosophical about their current success. After all, it's been an uneven history. They've had their early hit with the "Creep" single, sold masses of their *Pablo Honey* album in America, lost their momentum. When they put out *The Bends*, it didn't move in spectacular amounts until a few singles registered, when the ordinary fans spread their reputation and the end-of-year polls revealed it as a treasured LP.

So there's no danger of being overconfident, then?

Ed: "The thing is, when *The Bends* was released, we felt we were still fighting people's preconceptions. We thought it was great – we don't release a record unless we think it's really good. But we'd had no critical acclaim, which is fair enough, because we were an incredibly inconsistent band.

"It's not surprising people thought we were crap. And we'd released dodgy singles – 'Pop Is




Dead', I have to admit that was a rubbish record."

Colin: "As Keith Richards would say, it's the price of an education..."

It's margarita time in Oxford, May 29, as Ed, Colin and Phil warm their bones in a beer garden and the chaps – and how better to describe these three with their ever-pulsating brains, with their top humour and proper manners – have been checking the monthly music mags. It seems that everybody rates *OK Computer* as a mighty record. Old *NME* troopers like Nick Kent and Paul Morley have been commissioned to write critiques – the vibe being that here is a special occasion to celebrate. Even *Rolling Stone* magazine has marked it out for a lead review, complete with a suitably mad illustration.

You may be wondering how the band react to these fervent write-ups. Here's what they say: "God, you can see Thom's cold sore on that photo."

"That just makes me look fat."

"What the fuck's going on there? What do I look like?"

"Not a bad review, though."

So isn't it nice to read the reviews and the cover stories you always dreamt about?

Phil: "Yeah, but you dream about good pictures of yourselves, as well."

Colin: "The novelty of reading about yourself wears off after the first record or so. After a while you just get detached from it. Because obviously it's got nothing to do with you. You realise the important thing is that it should be entertaining and mildly informative and vaguely based in fact."

AS THE AFTERNOON wears on and the booze kicks in, Colin starts reminiscing about the band's days at school together, and somewhere down that path remembers that himself and Thom once took part in a school dramatisation of the TS Eliot poem *The Wasteland*, and that his mate was "really into all that". You find this interesting because the poem's punchline is "*the horror, the horror*". "Paranoid Android" tails off with "*the vomit... the vomit*".

Both pieces are stridently modern, like nothing that's been before, and are told via a series of fractured viewpoints, under great duress.

Both call out for God's burning rain to come down and wash away the anguish and suffering that's so visible all around. Both *The Wasteland* and "Paranoid Android" are the result of laborious editing; splicing together a series of very different sections.

But of course you might discard that idea and run with the line about the "*kicking, squealing, Gucci little piggy*" and the Tate murders,

PENNIE SMITH

"piggy" being one of the cult's buzz words. The line also recalls the ritualised schoolboy sacrifice in *Lord Of The Flies*.

Neither reading is particularly far-fetched when you listen to another new Radiohead song, "Climbing Up The Walls", in which a psychotic intruder aims "*15 blows*" to the back of his victim's head. Yum.

It's also worth noting that Thom was raving about JG Ballard's *Crash* at the time of "My Iron Lung", and that the first song on the new LP, "Airbag", features the line, "*In a jack-knifed juggernaut/I am born again.*" Basically, whatever the specific references, it's clear that these are stories and head-trips rather than confessions. The other Radiohead members approve.

Colin: "I think Thom's still trying out lots of different things. There's never been a set formula from the first record onwards. It's that boredom thing, too."

Ed: "Thom said about this album that of the 12 songs he wanted it to be sung with 12 different types of voice. I think Thom at times has had a hang-up about his voice. And the fucker can sing anything – he can reduce you to tears. That was one of the reasons why we did take a long time over the recording of the album. We had to get the vocals right, 'cos he didn't want to sing it entirely straight. That was one of the things about *The Bends*, where he did sing it entirely straight for what it was."

Phil: "Which was great for those songs, 'cos it made them more introspective. Anything else would have been this real smokescreen between you and the songs. But this new album comes from a lot of different angles."

Ed: "Thom's funny about vocals anyway. Vocals are the most important thing on any song – the music can be shite but redeemed by a great vocal take. But Thom doesn't see it like that. It's almost as if the music is more important and the vocals are an afterthought. But it's not like that."

Colin: "With 'Paranoid Android', what happened was that we recorded the first bit and we were really into it. Each of the other bits had to be as good as what had been before. It was like the record in miniature – really exciting, but it just raised the stakes each time and piled the pressure on."

Colin dates the start of the record back to the summer of '95 when they supported REM on tour. He recalls playing "Climbing Up The Walls" at a soundcheck at the Hersheypark Stadium. Peter Buck was checking their progress from the sound desk, and when they'd finished, he walked away, whistling the tune with his hands in his pockets. "No Surprises", "Let Down", and a different version of "Airbag" were coming together. The latter took its final shape after Phil, inspired by the Mo' Wax sound, carved up a recording of his own drumming, giving it that artificial, reconstituted feel. Meanwhile Alanis Morissette audiences were getting a 10-minute version of "Paranoid Android" during last summer's tour, as the band tested out a wiggy organ outro.

"Luckily, says Colin, "those fans were all in their teens, so with the trauma of adolescence and stuff, they'll forget about it. It was the Ronnie Corbett moment in the set. Time to go to the toilet."

Having recorded "Lucky" for the *Help* album in five hours, the band were hoping for a quick result for the album. Jane Seymour's ballroom sounded great for the band, while Phil set up his gear in the kids' room, sharing it with the cuddly toys. Colin used to joke that it looked like a cross between *Rockschool* and *Blue Peter*.

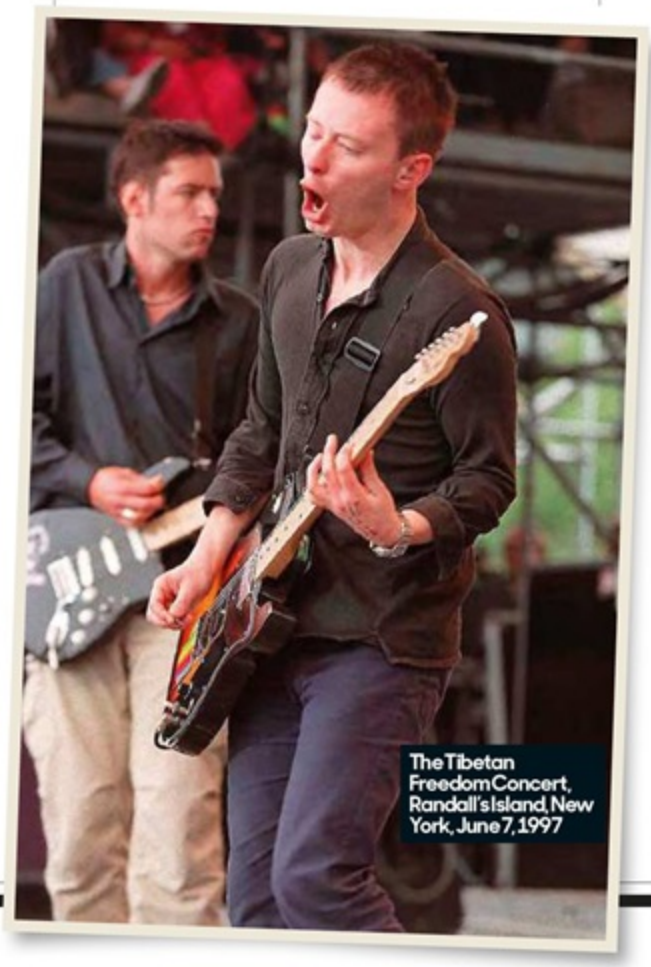
They recorded two songs on the first night. About a third of the album was sketched out in the third week. Of course it couldn't last. The

**"WE THOUGHT THAT THIS SELF-PRODUCING LARK WOULD BE A PIECE OF PISS"**

music became more complex, until they realised after a few difficult months that it would be better returning to the early versions, stripping the embellishments away.

Ed: "It's funny, I was going over some video footage that I'd done, and it ends on day three. Everyone's really happy. Colin's given up smoking, he's really happy about it. This is a great place, we're all saying. And it's funny how there's no recordings after day three."

Colin: "It's like that bit in *Apocalypse Now*, when Martin Sheen was going down the river and he's calm..."



The Tibetan Freedom Concert, Randall's Island, New York, June 7, 1997

SHUTTERSTOCK

Ed: "Then you get to the bridge and there's flares and rockets and trenches and it all goes wrong. We thought that this self-producing lark would be a piece of piss. When we've recorded an album before, the producer is there to pull you up and suggest when things go wrong. So we had to learn that, the non-musical side of it, and the discipline."

So Ed, what's your dad's critical opinion of the record?

"Well, he rang the other day. He said, 'I've listened to *OK Computer* five times now and I think it's majestic.'"

So might Radiohead develop a strut to go with their rising popularity?

Colin: "I think about this a lot, with Oasis and stuff, that confidence factor. But what would it be that would make one strut?"

A No 1 record in America?

"Yes, but I would like to think that we'd find a reason to be unhappy."

IT'S SATURDAY, JUNE 7, and Jonny Greenwood is breakfasting at the Westway Diner, on 9th Avenue, New York. He spoons down his muesli topped with banana and explains how he likes the ambience of this funky place, remembering that last time he was here it was full of overweight cops, spitting into their food.

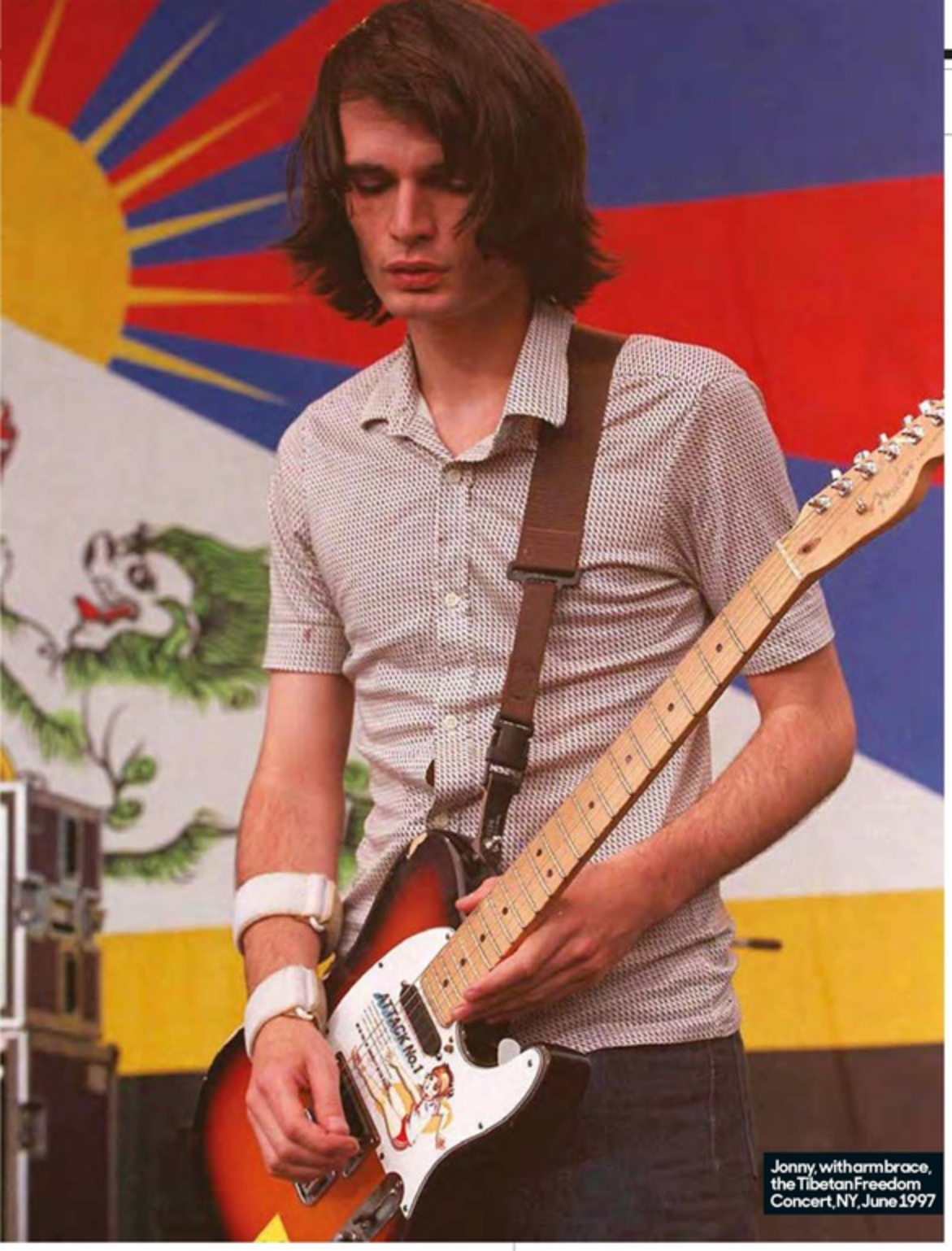
In four hours' time he'll be onstage before thousands of people at the Tibetan Freedom Concert, a bill that also features U2, Patti Smith, Noel Gallagher, Foo Fighters and Porno For Pyros. But he doesn't seem fussed. When you remind him that the recent Radiohead gig at Toronto sold out in 48 seconds, he dismisses the hype, pointing out that it was only a small gig – a mere 1,000-seater – and that the record company probably bought up loads of tickets beforehand.

Jonny has the ability to partition off aspects of his personality. There's no sign of the frenetic axe-monster who puts much of the danger and disarray into the band's sound – such a physical style that he routinely gouges his hand on the stings. Now he's also obliged to wear a metal arm brace when he plays, to redirect some of the stress.

This is the same guy who's now talking about the Kenneth Williams diaries and the wilfully strange life of playwright Joe Orton. You remind him that back in '93, he was killing time on tour buses by listening to cassette dramatisations of Sherlock Holmes stories. That's still a fun practice, he claims, only now he's got a spoken-word version of Samuel Pepys' chronicles, a lurid flashback to London life around the time of the Great Fire.

"They must have been great, bawdy times," he laughs. "Lots of wild sex being had with dirty old whores. It's a classic. A great way to relax when you're travelling in a foreign country."

After completing *OK Computer*, Jonny says he went on holiday with his wife to Italy, where he checked out the arena in Pompeii,



Jonny, with arm brace, the Tibetan Freedom Concert, NY, June 1997

scene of a famous Pink Floyd concert. News of this trip prompts us to ask him about his alleged prog-rock sympathies – how the young Greenwood brother might be taking Radiohead into more abstracted and 'difficult' areas.

He reckons this is half a joke, because there's only a couple of tunes by the Floyd that he cares for – the first and the last tracks on the *Meddle* album.

He loves the video for "Paranoid Android", using the animator Magnus Carlsson and the Robin character. Unfortunately, the TV stations aren't quite so accepting...

"It's been censored by MTV," he laughs. "They've taken out all the nipples. And yet they leave in the stuff where a man's sawing through his own limbs, which is peculiar. Whereas if we'd had a beachful of babes in bikinis, grinding away, that would have been fine."

Jonny has previously mentioned the difficult terrain of Mile Davis' 1970 jazz fusion double album *Bitches Brew* as a reference. He has badgered Thom about this music for years, and the singer has even suggested that this opus has made its mark on *OK Computer*. You tell the guitarist that you hear no similarities at all between the two records – not even of Jonny's dreamy sign-off tune "The Tourist", but he's happy to explain the connection.

"We were getting off on the fact that there were two electric pianos and a really trashy drum sound on *Bitches Brew*. But we're not going to become a jazz fusion band – luckily we don't have the confidence to go down that road..."

Jonny responds to compliments and funny stories by saying "bless", like a groovy young vicar. He thinks it's hilarious that Duncan, his tattooed guitar tech, has another job during the gigs now – bringing a little glockenspiel out for the "No Surprises" song, which embarrasses the old road dog. Such are the demands that come with a job on the all-action 'Head experience.

When you ask him to explain the method behind the band sound – how three guitarists and so many mad ideas are lashed into unusually great songs, he pulls his Jackie Onassis fringe behind his ear and smiles.

"The most exciting time for me is when we've got what we suspect to be an amazing song, but nobody knows what they're gonna play on it. And that's the best feeling. Because that's when something happens. You should watch us rehearse. Everyone just clusters around their own individual amp, working stuff out. All you can hear is drums and Thom's vocals. And after a week or a day – or an hour – people tentatively turn up and say, 'What do you think?' It's the best part of being in a band in a way. That and the gigs."

And how does the whole classical thing fit into this?

"Well, we stole a lot of Polish composer Penderecki's string ideas. Rock arrangements haven't changed much since the days of The Beatles and 'Eleanor Rigby'. And if bands do want to get weird things with strings, they just put them through effects.

"We've found all these composers that are still getting new sounds out of violins. On the last chord of our song 'Climbing Up The Walls', there's this block of white noise you can make when 16 violins are playing quarter tones apart from each other. It's the most frightening sound – like insects or something. But it's beautiful."

Radiohead used to play Messiaen over the PA system before a gig, didn't they?

"Everyone's leaping on Philip Glass and all these minimalist composers, but Messiaen and all this stuff from the '40s and '50s, it's so lyrical and beautiful, and not difficult to listen to at all. It's all been overlooked. At school, I remember being excited by a composer who was still alive at the time and still writing. It was a very musical school, but I was surrounded by all these kids who said, 'Yeah, we like rock music – The Beatles and Simon & Garfunkel', that kind of crap. Or even worse, they were into Mozart and Enya. You played them Joy Division and they'd say, 'Oh no, he's out of tune, isn't he?'"

Before you joined the band, you kept turning up with different instruments, desperate to join. Why were you so obsessed with the idea?

"I'd heard tapes of Thom's songs before I joined, and I couldn't get over the fact that if I played an Elvis Costello record and then his stuff, the songs were as good. And yet he was 16 and at my school. A handful of those songs would stand up today."

In the "Paranoid Android" video, the angel takes sad little Robin to heaven, where they get to watch a game of ping-pong. What's your vision of paradise?

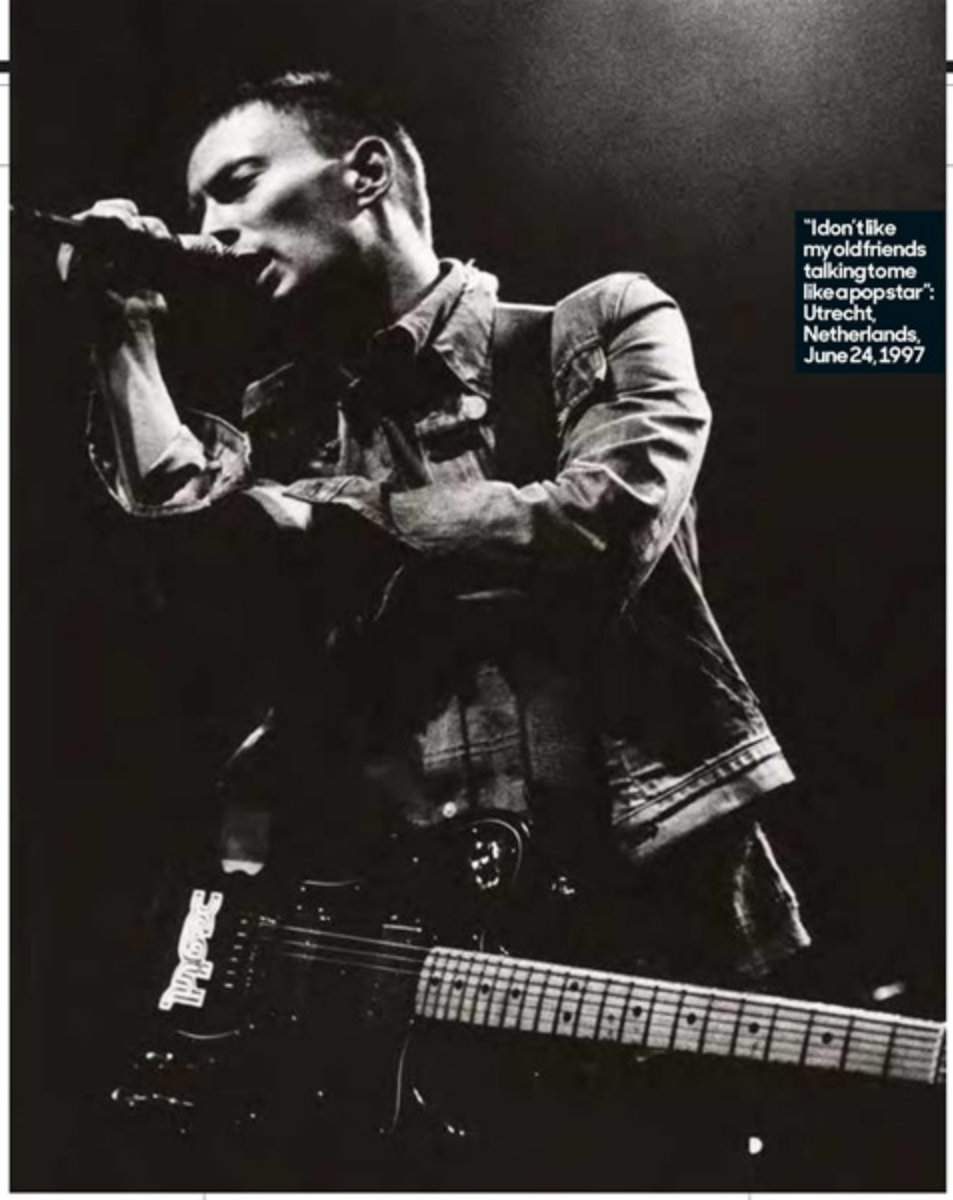
"A big empty room with the band and all these half-written songs. There are good songs coming up, and we're sticking them on the B-sides. We're lucky, 'cos we're still at the stage when I can pester Thom at all hours of the night and we'll go to the rehearsal room together and just play. It's the best thing to do."

So is there less trauma in the band these days?

"We're still capable of producing enormous trauma for ourselves, unfortunately. But I suppose it's good – it's the opposite of getting fat and lazy and rich.

"Still, it's so dangerous to rely on anything like that. It's like courting despair, because you think the songs will be better. You can't do it. Which is why *OK Computer* is such a break for us. It's so outward looking and descriptive. It's an exciting time. I feel like Thom's written about everything, which is breathtaking."

SHUTTERSTOCK



"I don't like my old friends talking to me like a popstar": Utrecht, Netherlands, June 24, 1997

THE ARTISTS' ENCLOSURE backstage at the Tibetan Freedom Concert on Randall's Island is like a rock'n'roll village in miniature. Radiohead's tent is to the left of Noel Gallagher's, with Dave Grohl on the right. U2 and Patti Smith are directly opposite.

As the day gets going, the various players will stroll into the central square and greet each other, forming little star clusters, comparing experiences and renewing friendships. Occasionally, a Buddhist monk, a supermodel, Chuck D or a Beastie Boy will stroll over and join the mêlée.

When there's a good band on, many of the artists will check it out from the side of the stage. Everyone's there for Patti, sharing the fun with their families, watching the fury of "Rock'n'Roll Nigger", still a fire starter after so many years. And there's another act that everyone's talking about. Radiohead's must-see value has never been higher within this community.

Watching so many famous names, you realise that most of them have developed this facility to help them deal with hustlers and incidental grief. It's not exactly the same as the thousand-yard stare that American GIs brought back with them from Vietnam. But there's something similar going on: a shut-off technique, a way of drawing inwards when the pressure gets too much.

You appreciate it when Patti Smith makes her way back to the enclosure, tunnelling her way through the crowds, talking to her kids like they're the only people around, blanking out the journalists and photographers who all want something off her. It's evident in the walk and the poise that says, don't even think about it.

And you feel for Noel Gallagher, newly married and who should, by rights, be having a nice honeymoon. But instead he has to keep moving – even when he's inside the enclosure, avoiding eye contact, his asshole detector perpetually wired up. Just a second's hesitation, a word with the wrong person, and the incoming fire will begin.

Thom Yorke is moving into that scene now. Everybody wants a photo, a TV interview, a favour for a friend. It's probably for the best that he's in the company of Michael Stipe much of the time, who's been introducing him to other artists, vibing him up, developing a friendship that began on the Monster Tour and blossomed in London during the sessions for the *Velvet Goldmine* soundtrack – when Michael, Thom, Jonny Greenwood and Bernard Butler were having a hilarious time in the studio, getting into the glam aesthetic, performing Roxy Music songs. You'd like to ask Thom about some of this stuff, but he's elected not to speak to the British press. Consequently, you feel like a voyeur, taking in the sights, but under a moral obligation not to get involved.

There's a particularly weird moment when Stipe puts his arm around Thom and starts hugging him, and the English boy realises he's being watched. He tenses up, and Michael lets him go again. Colin Greenwood is on the sidelines, taking one of the day's numerous reality checks. He's quietly worried that his sneakers may have been made in China, a sartorial mistake on a day that these Tibetan pressure groups are publicising the Western world's collaboration with the occupying force from Peking.

**"THE NOVELTY OF READING ABOUT YOURSELF WEARS OFF AFTER THE FIRST RECORD OR SO"**

Colin mentions, almost in passing, that he and Thom went out for dinner with Bono a few nights earlier. Yorke is passing as we speak, and the conversation changes again, as the frontman realises that a female Tibetan singer is on later, and Thom's got one of her records. And then he's remembering how a Buddhist monk once visited his school for a talk, and it was fascinating stuff, except the other boys were taking the piss out of him – unforgivable.

Earlier in the day, you'd travelled with the band through New York, over the river to the venue and they were sorting out a setlist for the gig en route. Half an hour on stage, and so many important songs. At one stage they realised that "Paranoid Android" and "Lucky" together would take up a huge percentage of the allotted time. That's all been beautifully resolved by 1.30 in the afternoon, when they open their show with "Fake Plastic Trees". Most acts today have opted for noise and adrenaline, a hit-and-run approach. Radiohead are playing it slow, allowing Thom's notes to hang there, pulling you into the feeling.

The music bounces off the back of the stadium and eases the crowd into a dreamlike state. "Talk Show Host" follows, a submarine, trip-hop song without the conceptualising and aren't-we-clever baggage other acts bring to such experiments. This sets the crowd up for "Paranoid Android", most of them hearing it for the first time, and they're astonished. Thom's black shirt accentuates his thin frame, but he's feeling empowered now. He introduces "The Bends" with a rant about the world. Today, that means the involvement of firms like McDonald's, Disney and Holiday Inn, who are plugging into the Chinese economy, despite its human rights record.

You remember that *OK Computer* was partly inspired by Will Hutton's *The State We're In*, a terrifying account of Britain under the (then still-ruling) Conservatives. The writer described how they deregulated the economy, brought market forces and unrestrained capitalism into the welfare sector, and crapped on manual workers and the disenfranchised from a great height.

There's a sense of that frustration in Thom's voice, in the tensions meshed into the song, in the dynamics of the extraordinary band. And while there's not much that a little singer and a few tunes can achieve against the towering cynicism of commerce, such a voice and this particular context, at least it amounts to something.

That's also the message you get from *OK Computer*. The world is savage, perverted, bone-crushingly callous, but Radiohead are still engaging their humanity in there, lifting a few souls in the process.

Maybe, as the year's greatest song allows us to hope, the nourishing rain may yet fall. God may even love his children, yeah.

*STUART BAILIE*

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS




# Radiohead on *OK Computer*

## Track-by-track from Thom, Colin, Jonny, Ed and Phil…




### "AIRBAG"

**Originally titled "Last Night An Airbag Saved My Life" in a typically tongue-in-cheek tribute to Indeep's 1983 disco hit "Last Night A DJ Saved My Life", this makes for a brooding, claustrophobic start to the album.**

**COLIN:** "We wanted it to be like 'Planet Telex' off *The Bends* – a start that's not like the rest of the album. It's quite dancey, 'cos Phil's been attending drum'n'bass nights."

**PHIL:** "I told you, I thought it was a line-dancing evening! It was actually DJ Shadow who inspired it – the way he cuts up beats is amazing. The end result doesn't really sound like what we were aiming for, but that's probably a good thing."

**ED:** "It's about the wonderful, positive emotion you feel when you've just failed to have an accident; when you just miss someone and realise how close it was, stop the car and just feel incredible elation. There's something so joyous about it; life suddenly seems more precious."

**Key lyric: *"In a jack-knifed juggernaut, I am born again…"***

**THOM:** "Airbags go off spontaneously, so researchers claim. I think that's a cool judgement. Driving along in your Mercedes."

**COLIN:** "They're actually quite dangerous things. They can kill."

**ED:** "What would you know about it? You can't even drive!"

### "PARANOID ANDROID"

**Hyper-complex, vaguely prog-rock multi-mood epic, ranging from acoustic angst to pure white noise, yet perversely chosen to be the first single from *OK Computer*. Perhaps because those clearly defined segments make it a "Bohemian Rhapsody" for the '90s. Allegedly.**


"New Radiohead, New Danger": at Capitol Records in LA, June 11, 1997

**ED:** "Well, when we wrote it, one of the references was 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. But the other was the Pixies."

**JONNY:** "It's not actually complex enough to be 'Bohemian Rhapsody' – there's only really two different bits there. Plus it's way too tense."

**ED:** "Its not a 'Bohemian Rhapsody' for the '90s – it's just a handy reference point. It's like 'Creep' was meant to sound like Scott Walker… it just didn't come out that way. But 'Paranoid Android' is the song we play to people when they want to know what the album's like, 'cos it should make them think, 'What the fuck is going to happen on the rest of the album?'"

**COLIN:** "Plus it's so long, we have time to make them a cup of coffee while they listen to it."

**Key lyric: *"When I am king you will be first against the wall/With your opinions which are of no consequence at all…"***

**ED:** "It's not about the press, if that's what you're thinking. Thom wouldn't be that specific."

**THOM:** "Everybody has an opinion. People make professions out of it. Most of it is white noise. It is not personal, OK? 'Opinions are like arseholes, everybody's got one.' What liberates 'Paranoid Android' is a sense of humour – Marvin the paranoid android. The bleakest things can be said with jokes – re, *The Fast Show*: it's funny."

### "SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK ALIEN"

**Sprawling, freeform, spooked-out-sounding tale of alien abduction. Title is a homage to Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues', apparently.**

**THOM:** "Yeah! Jonny's in the basement mixing up the medicine, I'm on the pavement thinking about the government…"

**COLIN:** "When we were doing *The Bends*, John Leckie told us about this hollow Earth theory that John Power of Cast has. Apparently, there's a sun revolving in the centre of the Earth and there are holes in the North and South Poles that aliens fly into. We, er, weren't completely sold on it to be honest, John."

**JONNY:** "Americans believe in alien abduction, but that's about it. I'm a fully paid-up subscriber to *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. If you go to a newsagent in America you'll find 30 mags about UFOs, aliens, the supernatural, etc and all these scientists providing logical explanations for everything. Thanks to *The X Files* and everything, it's become the lazy option to believe in all this stuff, but science fascinates me far more than aliens."

**COLIN:** "Yeah, apparently there is now neurological evidence to prove the existence of a human soul. They've had big meetings about it in the Vatican, because obviously the Roman Catholic Church are very keen to control it. Er, I sound like John Power now, don't I?"

**Key lyric: *"I'm just uptight…"***

**THOM:** "What do I think of *The X Files*? And which Spice Girl do I like?"

### "EXIT MUSIC (FOR A FILM)"

**Brooding ballad specially composed for the movie *Romeo & Juliet*, where it appears alongside another Radiohead song, "Talk Show Host". Significantly, Radiohead are first heard just as the characters are discussing Romeo's *"black portentous humour"*.**

**THOM:** "I like the film very much. It's just my sort of thing – not quite as many bodies as *Hamlet*."

**ED:** "It's the only song we've ever done on demand. We were on tour with Alanis Morissette last September when we got sent through the last half-hour of the film. It looked great, so we did this song straightaway."

**COLIN:** "Soundtracks are a bit naff nowadays: they just stick on some contemporary music. We wanted to be a bit more intelligent than that."

**ED:** "The only thing I don't like is 'Exit Music…' appears over the end credits, so it will just play to the sound of loads of chairs banging upright."

JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

**Key lyric: *"Pack and get dressed, before your father hears us/Before all hell breaks loose..."***

**ED:** "Thom looked at Shakespeare's original text and tried to incorporate lines from it into the song – but he gave up on that quickly. But I still think it fits with the film amazingly well, especially as the lyrics are quite personal."

## "LET DOWN"

**Old-school Radiohead song, with Thom crooning away in Bono-esque style. Despite the title, sounds resigned rather than angry.**

**JONNY:** "It's like when Andy Warhol said he enjoyed being bored. It's about that feeling that you get when you're in transit but you're not in control of it – you just go past thousands of places and thousands of people and you're completely removed from it."

**ED:** "Feeling let down is just down to your insecurities and paranoia most of the time, which is why the song sounds sad, not furious. It's about not being in control of a situation."

**THOM:** "I am fascinated by how insects are squashed, especially wasps – the cracking sound and the yellow gak, just like people."

**Key lyric: *"Crushed like a bug in the ground..."***

## "KARMA POLICE"

**Ignoring the appalling track record of the word 'karma' in pop music (Boy George, George Harrison, etc), Radiohead use it to project an Orwellian vision of the future and write a bonzer tune to boot.**

**JONNY:** "It was a band catchphrase for a while on tour – whenever someone was behaving in a particularly shitty way we'd say, 'The karma police will catch up with him sooner or later.' You have to rely on something like that, even though we're probably just kidding ourselves. But it's not a revenge thing, just about being happy with your own behaviour."

**Key lyric: *"This is what you get when you mess with us..."***

**THOM:** "Karma is an important idea. I like it. It makes me nicer to people. It fills me with joy. This song makes me laugh. It was Ed's idea."

## "FITTER HAPPIER"

**A computer speaks a random spiel of modern-living buzz phrases to a soundtrack of tinkling piano, screeching violin, and, er, that's it, actually. Weird.**

**COLIN:** "Thom doesn't want to have to say it, so we were messing around with a computer voice box. We really liked the way the emotion still comes across, so we kept it."

**THOM:** "The computer was the most emotional voice I had ever heard, at the time."

**COLIN:** It sounds like Stephen Hawking is guesting on the album. Maybe he should have been. I used to see him when I was at college, toddling around in his wheelchair."

**Key lyric: *"Concerned, but powerless..."***

**THOM:** "Are the lyrics a reflection of my own life? Yes."

**ED:** "It's about the lack of naturalness in modern life. I'd like to see the lyrics printed as a full-page ad in one of those dreadful men's magazines... 'cos some people might believe all that stuff."

**COLIN:** "It's an exercise in finding meaning in things that seem to be random and chaotic and out of your control. A bit like life, really."

## "ELECTIONEERING"

**Big, scary, searing rock track. Nothing to do with Tony Blair and his New Dawn for Britain, etc.**

**ED:** "Basically, it's about those times when you go out to a territory and have to sell yourselves and sell your record. You can meet some cool people, but if you're pissed off or tired, it feels like a huge propaganda machine and you feel like a politician, kissing babies, shaking hands."

**JONNY:** "We're not a political band, but we are political people. One of the first things I can remember is Thatcher coming to power, so just the fact that it's changed is revelation enough. We had a hell of a party that night."

**ED:** "It was weird all those people going down to Downing Street to mob Blair. He's definitely the first pop star PM."

**COLIN:** "The first New Grave PM, more like. He *is* the New Seriousness."




**PHIL:** "Where does that leave us, then? Perhaps we're the Labour Party of New Grave. New Radiohead, New Danger!"

**Key lyric: *"When I go forwards, you go backwards, and somewhere we will meet..."***

**THOM:** "This is about being liberated, this is about getting beyond the dirge; they are all bullshitting, but I'm already laughing. On the other side, I trust I can rely on your vote."

## "CLIMBING UP THE WALLS"

**Even bigger, even scarier rock track. Thom Yorke does his best to sound demented, but is out-done by the monumental chaos going on behind him.**

**COLIN:** "It's quite horrible, isn't it?"

**ED:** "We always knew that that song had an atmosphere and it was very easy to capture. The white noise is loads of violins."

**COLIN:** "We recorded it in the ballroom of this old stately home. Dare we say there was something gothic about the environment? It was certainly very New Grave Of New Grave."

**Key lyric: *"In the crack of your waning smile/15 blows to the skull..." [as on sleeve]***

**THOM:** "'Was it an accident that of the 10 largest mass-murderers in American history, eight have occurred since 1980, typically acts of middle-aged white men in their thirties and forties after a prolonged period of being lonely, frustrated and full of rage, and of 10 precipitated by a catastrophe in their lives such as losing their jobs or divorce?'"

*New York Times*, October 17, 1991 – quoted by Eric Hobsbawn in *The Age Of Extremes*.

## "NO SURPRISES"

**In contrast, the simplest, most stadium-friendly song on the album. Built around the chimes from a jewellery box. Lovely.**

**COLIN:** "Scare the daylights out of 'em, then soothe their brow: that's the Radiohead way."

**ED:** "It was meant to be like a nursery rhyme. Strangely, it was the very first song we did for the album. Didn't exactly set the tone, did it? If it had been the first single it wouldn't have been a very true representation of the album. It's a bit like Louis Armstrong's 'Wonderful World'."

**COLIN:** "We'd like it to be a single at some point but we're not making any promises. We are the New Labour of Rock, after all."

**Key lyric: *"A heart that's full up like a landfill."***

**THOM:** "What is fad today is rubbish tomorrow. I am an emotional dumping ground."

## "LUCKY"

**Highlight of the Bosnia-siding *Help* album, included here largely out of embarrassment at the way it fared when released as a single.**

**ED:** "Yeah, No 53 with a bullet or something. That was pretty bad considering it was for charity and it was the best song we'd ever done. It did seem to make a difference to how people perceived us, though – the broadsheets started to get interested in us and stuff. And it was a brilliant thing to be involved in. We're very proud of it, especially as we took the hard option and recorded a brand-new song. Although, admittedly, that's only because we're so bad at covers. Always have been – even when we were a school band we couldn't do them."

**Key lyric: *"I'm on a roll..."***

**THOM:** "It's our song, we want it on our album and it fits exactly where it is."

## "THE TOURIST"

**Written by Jonny, the calm after the storm. Features minimal vocals and maximum mellow Eric Clapton-esque guitar.**

**JONNY:** "I'm still amazed that everyone else in the band let it on the album. It was a bit of a late runner. We were packing up and leaving when we decided to do it."

**THOM:** "What do I think of Jonny's songwriting? Whenever I am tired, he is there and awake."

**Key lyric: *"Hey man slow down/Idiot slow down..."***

**JONNY:** "We just wanted a song where we weren't paranoid about making something happen every three seconds and where we could record it with space."

**COLIN:** "But not record it with Space. That would never have worked, frankly."

*MARK SUTHERLAND*

# SUBSCRIBE TO UNCUT TODAY AND GET UP TO 65% OFF!

## ENJOY ONE OF OUR BEST EVER SUBS OFFERS – AND GET UNCUT DELIVERED DIRECT TO YOUR DOOR!

EASTER OFFER!




## Subscribe online at magazines.bandlabtechnologies.com

## or call 01371 851882 and quote code UCPRES20

LINES ARE OPEN MONDAY - FRIDAY 9AM - 5.30PM

Direct Debit offer is available to UK subscribers only. £22.99 payable by six monthly Direct Debit. Offer ends April 13, 2020. This price is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue. The full subscription rate is for 12 months (12 issues) and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. For enquiries please call: 01371 851882 or e-mail: support@uncut.co.uk.

# "I was basically becoming unhinged... completely unhinged."

**After 10 years of "not being able to really connect with anything," Thom Yorke has guided his bandmates into radical new territory. As *Kid A* arrives, however, *JAMES OLDHAM* discovers how Radiohead's reinvention was critical to the band's survival. Are all the bandmembers delighted with the change of direction? "I don't really know anything about the Aphex Twin," claims Colin Greenwood...**




***"YOU HAVE NO-ONE to blame but yourselves and you know it."***
**Message on the sleeve of *Kid A***

HAVING ALREADY been uniformly heralded as the most important record of its generation, *OK Computer* was released on June 16, 1997. It took just six days for Thom Yorke to become disillusioned with it. On Saturday, June 21, Radiohead played their biggest gig to date in front of 40,000 people at the RDS in Dublin, and it sent Yorke tumbling into an abyss of loathing and self-doubt.

There's a song on the forthcoming Radiohead album called "How To Disappear Completely" that documents these emotions. Its key lines – *"I'm not here/This isn't happening"* – capture his mental state at that point, as well as offering a clue as to what happened as the rest of the promotional schedule unfolded. Yorke may claim now that all the plaudits didn't "mean a fucking thing", but clearly there was a price to pay.

"I had this thing for a while," he reveals, from the confines of a café on Oxford's Cowley Road, "where I was falling through trap doors all the time into oblivion – like acid flashbacks. I'd be talking to someone and then I'd be falling through the earth. It went on for months and months, and it was really weird. It was all happening towards the end of *OK Computer*... the end of the 'promotional period'."

Were you unhappy?

"That sounds like an MTV question," he laughs. "I was a complete fucking mess when *OK Computer* finished! I mean, really, really ill."

Do you know why?

"It was just going a certain way for a long, long, long time and not being able to stop or look back or consider where I was, at all. This was for, like, 10 years – not being able to really connect with anything. I was basically just becoming unhinged... completely unhinged."

By the end of 1998, Yorke was close to collapse. Suffering from writer's block, he got "the horrors" whenever he picked up a guitar. The band, aware that something had to change, decided that from then on, the way they wrote, recorded and promoted their music had to change. They had to start again from scratch.

Next week, you'll be able to hear for yourself what that entailed. Three years on from *OK Computer*, *Kid A* is the sound of a band struggling to surpass a record with a critical and cultural importance that is unmatched in recent memory. Recorded in four studios and three countries over a 12-month period rife with false starts and inter-band friction, the very least you can say about it is that it represents a complete and definite break from the past.

It trades the ambitious, heavily treated guitar sounds of its predecessor for a skeletal electronic framework of meandering ambient clouds and fractured, subsumed vocals. Supported by brittle drum patterns and keening static, the songs drift by with minimal human input, utterly at odds with their live counterparts. If *OK Computer* vividly articulated Yorke's anxieties, then *Kid A* shrouds them in sonic fluff. It's almost as if Yorke has chosen to erase himself from the group completely.

A few tracks stand out – and it's no surprise they're the ones that are more propulsive and conventional in tone. The fuzz-bass and free-jazz histrionics of "The National Anthem" recall the excesses of Primal Scream's *XTRMNTR*, while the warped acoustics of "Optimistic" push towards the sound of *Isn't Anything*-era My Bloody Valentine, but these are exceptions within the general electronic haze. It might be the record Radiohead had to make, but it won't necessarily be a record you'll want to listen to. Although the rest of the band dispute it, *Kid A* is very much the sound of Thom Yorke working through his own neuroses. For better or worse, it's his record.

BY THE TIME Radiohead entered the Guillaume Tell studio in Paris at the start of January 1999, Yorke had already begun to worry that *OK Computer* was not the radical new dawn critics had purported it to be. Worse, rehearsals for the new record were going terribly.

"After a while you just hear a sound," Yorke explains now. "And it doesn't matter what you do, you're not going to respond to it even though you think that's what you should be doing and it's what you've always done. When you get to that point, it feels like the ground is being pulled out from beneath you and you're just falling through space. It's a fucking nightmare."

A change of approach was vital, and it was Yorke – still crippled by the writer's block – who instigated it. Having begun to immerse himself in the avant-electronica of Warp artists such as Autechre and Aphex Twin, he began to bring in ➡

JASON EVANS





The UK comeback: Tredegar Park, Newport, Wales, September 4, 2000

HUW EVANS/SHUTTERSTOCK

demos that were little more than drum loops or found sounds, and the band would have to build something around them. He insists it wasn't just an arbitrary shift towards a more electronic sound. "I could so easily find myself beating myself up about having played guitar music," he sighs. "'Oh no, it's all completely fucking shit,' but ultimately people will think that within my neurosis about what we've done in the past I've gone off and said, 'We must be electronic,' but that wasn't the point in what I was doing. I'm sure certain people will see it like that..."

Certainly, the rest of the band were unsure about this new approach.

"When people say you're doing something radical in rock or dance music I'm not sure how special that is," confides guitarist Jonny Greenwood. "What we do is so old-fashioned. It's like trying to do something innovative in tap-dancing. As a motivation, it's irrelevant. We don't sit down and say 'Let's break barriers.' We just copy our favourite records."

Feed that into guitarist Ed O'Brien's comment that he just wanted to make an LP of three-minute guitar songs and bassist Colin Greenwood's confession that he doesn't really "know anything about the Aphex Twin", and you can see why there were tensions. But despite the fact that Yorke was obviously driving proceedings to a greater extent than ever before (even though he's always been sole songwriter), everyone is at great pains to stress that *Kid A* isn't just a glorified solo record. "It's a return to when we were at school," argues Colin. "And we couldn't play our instruments very well and we just picked up what we could. It's fine. Thom played some amazing bass on the record, everyone contributed and no-one took it easy, but there was a lot of pain in making it. Personally, I've come out of it feeling excited and grateful about the whole experience. The only reason you go through all this shit is because you're looking for new things to inspire you."

It's a sentiment that Jonny echoes.

"No, that's not true," he says of the 'Thom's solo album' accusation. "You can argue that for maybe one or two songs in the whole sessions and that's it."

Despite their protests to the contrary, there were problems. Paris was a wash-out, and in March 1999 they moved to Medley Studios in Copenhagen. There, they began work on fragments of songs – and while the other band members struggled with the new methodology (Thom claims the songs on the new record weren't written, they were 'edited'), long-standing producer Nigel Godrich aired his doubts.

"I think he thought I'd lost my marbles," states Yorke bluntly. "Because he didn't understand why, if we had such a strength in one thing, why the fuck we'd want to do something else."

What did you say to him?

"At the same time he trusted me to have an idea of what I wanted, even though he didn't understand at the time what the bloody hell it was. But basically (for me), all it was, was frustration, not getting off on anything that we'd normally do. So it wasn't like I was even trying to prove anything, it was just, 'Well this isn't fucking working for me. We have to do something else.'"

Little by little, the band settled back into their new working pattern. By April, though, they'd moved again, this time to Batsford Park in Gloucestershire – they had now accumulated upwards of 60 incomplete songs.

"The truth is," explains Jonny, "that it was a difficult process to get going, but once we were up and running, it started going too well, and we were recording good song after good song, and it became difficult to stop, which is partly why we've got so much material recorded, and partly why it's taken so long."

Parallel to the album's musical construction, Yorke also began to work on its lyrics. A dispatch on Radiohead's website claimed he had "had enough of dwelling in (his) existential – and now highly profitable – angst", the hint being that *Kid A* was to represent a more political direction. As it is, the lyrics – like the record as a whole – are tied in with the period in the immediate aftermath of *OK Computer* – and fear constitutes one of the main themes.

"It's fear of dying, actually," he smiles. "It's a 30 thing. Most men hit 30 and think, 'Oh my God, I'm not actually immortal.' There's definitely fear of dying on *Kid A*. I have this house down by the sea and the landscape around it is really harsh and I used to just go off for the whole day walking and just feel totally like nothing. It's just corny stuff, and when you sit down and talk about it, it all just sounds like complete bollocks."

So much for ditching the existential angst, then. Yorke might be an avid supporter of the Drop The Debt campaign, as well as Amnesty International and the Free Tibet movement, but it's something he's unable – or unwilling – to incorporate in his songs. By the time the band had finished *Kid A* in April 2000, the only political song he'd written for it ("You And Whose Army" – which the band performed at their Royal Festival Hall show in July) was destined not to feature – a move that only added to the insularity of the whole project.



That insularity was finally broken when Radiohead returned to the public domain in June this year with a series of gigs around the rim of the Mediterranean. Relaxed, and peppered with new material, these shows were positively received, and suggested that the band's re-entry into the real world wasn't destined to be too bumpy. The reviewers, your correspondent included, might have felt differently, however, if they'd realised how many of the songs unveiled (particularly, "Knives Out" and "Nothing To Fear") weren't actually going to make it onto the record.

THE NEXT TIME *NME* catches up with Radiohead, it's mid-August, and they've just played the first date of their British tour in Newport. The atmosphere onstage has changed markedly, with the chatty bonhomie of the summer having given way to something far nervier. The crowd too seem muted and confused by the new material. Meanwhile, in the press, stories have begun to circulate that *Kid A* was to be called 'ENC' (or 'Emperor's New Clothes'), but the label refused to allow it. The band, however, seem oblivious to the gathering storm clouds.

"You'd be apprehensive if you were playing in front of your home audience," insists Colin equably. "There were nine to ten thousand people there tonight... We can't just play in pretty places in the South Of France; that would be really crap. It was our first show, and we're trying to do everything differently with the sound and lights."

It hasn't made you apprehensive about the way *Kid A* is going to be received, then?

"Not really. We've lived with the music for about a year now and I still like it. If you're in a band and you become very professional and slick, I think you have to pull the rug out to survive. Thom was saying tonight when he came off that he really enjoyed it, because there were moments of chaos and frenzy and doubt and success and failure, all happening in an hour-and-a-half. We don't want boredom to set in."

**"MOST MEN AT 30 THINK, 'OH MY GOD, I'M NOT IMMORTAL.' THERE IS FEAR OF DYING ON *KID A*"**

Jonny, too, is optimistic: "My experience of the album from having given it to friends, is that after hearing it once, there's two songs that you really like, but the more you hear it, the other songs start to take over. Hopefully, your relationship with the album will change. Different songs will make sense after a period of time."

What about all the songs that didn't make it onto *Kid A*? You seem to have deliberately left off all the catchy ones.

Colin shifts in his seat. "When we did *OK Computer*," he sighs, "the first single we released was 'Paranoid Android', which was six-and-a-half minutes, and what I hope we've done with *Kid A* is what we did with 'Paranoid Android'. We've put a record out that's taking things a little bit further, and we hope people have the patience to deal with it, and then next year we'll put out more music that we've been playing live, and that people will be prepared for. If you want to hear songs like 'Knives Out', come and hear us play it and then we'll release it in March next year."

In light of the fact that people understand the difficulties surrounding the making of this record, and the fact that it represents a massive stylistic shift in your sound, don't you think you should have done more press explaining all this?

"Do you feel like you're being jilted or left at the altar?" laughs Colin. "There's no axe to grind. Isn't this better than sitting in a hotel in North London? [*We're currently sitting in a freezing kitchen in South Wales*] We're trying to be more open and less confrontational."

"I think we realised with *The Bends* and *OK Computer*," concludes drummer Phil Selway, as their tour manager beckons them away, "there was an awful lot of energy going into things like interviews, which was taking time away from the really important parts of being in a band, making music and the whole visual side of it. We're not putting two fingers up at anybody; we're just trying to find a balance at the moment, and we may well have not got it right yet."

The balance that Phil is talking about doesn't just extend to the press. The fact is that following *OK Computer* was always going to be a near impossible task, and Radiohead have opted for a route, which, first and foremost, ensures their survival. *Kid A* sounds like what it is: a record that's been slowly and painstakingly edited together. It's a brave, but flawed affair. It attempts to mimic the arrhythmic sounds of Autechre and Aphex Twin, but ends up mired in compromise.

Aphex Twin works outside the music industry, releasing records when and where he wants, under his name and others. If Radiohead had wanted to, they could have followed suit. As it is, they're still tied to the rock band aesthetic, determined to play gigs and trade on personalities. Under their current setup, all attempts at electronic radicalism come across as diluted and arbitrary. Worse, it's arguable that they've missed the point about what made them so special in the first place. *OK Computer* wasn't fantastic because it was radical sonically, but because the quality of songwriting was exceptional. *Kid A* sees them abdicating that responsibility, as if Thom was frightened he couldn't reach the same standard (hence the exclusion of all the actual 'songs').

Making experimental music is the easy way out. For Radiohead, and in particular Thom Yorke, it seems to have been the only way. Time will judge it. But right now, *Kid A* has the ring of a lengthy, over-analysed mistake.

## "I don't think Aphex would even listen to it"

### Warp Records co-founder Rob Mitchell has his say

**What do you think of *Kid A*?**

"The album's excellent. It doesn't sound gratuitously electronic to me, it sounds like they've properly immersed themselves in the music. It's an honest interpretation of those influences. Tracks like 'Idioteque' are fine examples of a great bond between a superb voice and a great electronic backing track.



Aphex Twin and Autechre



"It's very brave for a band like Radiohead to do something like this, as a lot of people are going to react badly to it, but maybe one day you might look at it the same way you look at (David Bowie's) "*Heroes*" or *Low*, because a lot of people didn't appreciate his change of direction when he made it, but now those records are probably regarded as his finest."

**Is it as radical as the records Warp release?**

"No, but Autechre and Aphex Twin are incredibly pure about what they do; they listen to virtually nothing but experimental music and because of that they're closer to the source. Having said that, what Radiohead have done is totally authentic. To me, it's more personal and immediate then *OK Computer*."

**What do you think Autechre and the Aphex Twin would make of it?**

"I don't think Aphex would even listen to it, to be honest. He doesn't really listen to anything that's got a rock edge to it. I wouldn't like to say whether Autechre would like it or not."

**Is it true they were asked to support Radiohead and refused?**

"Yes, that's true. I don't think it's because they didn't like Radiohead. I think it's because they didn't think it was the right thing to do."

**Is imitation the sincerest form of flattery?**

"All music has its roots somewhere. It's definitely more flattering coming from Radiohead than anyone else. We get lots of bands phoning up asking whether Autechre would fancy producing them, and obviously they wouldn't. Most of the bands they probably wouldn't even share a drink with, but Radiohead command much more respect."

PAUL HARNESS/REDFERNS, ANDY WILLSHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

# KID A

To anxious parents, a confounding and difficult new child: one to cherish, perhaps, over time... | BY JASON ANDERSON

**RELEASED: 2 OCTOBER 2000**

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, *Kid A* could've sounded a whole lot weirder. Given the traumatic effects of *OK Computer*'s success, the fraught circumstances of its follow-up's creation and Thom Yorke's urge to break through his writer's block by shredding the old formulae, it ought to be as formidably austere and clangorous as any of the Warp acts that the Radiohead singer cited as inspirations. These were certainly the expectations raised by the eerie fragments of music used for the "blipverts" that arrived in lieu of singles and videos for *Kid A*. Suffused with dread and despair, these 10-to-40-second-long animated vignettes presented forlorn stick figures and sharp-toothed creatures in desolate landscapes, like the jagged mountain scene in Stanley Donwood's cover design. If Samuel Beckett had packed in the writing thing to work in advertising, this would be his idea of a boffo marketing campaign.

So if the LP more closely resembled the knotty array of beats and squelches on Autechre's *LP5*, or the glitchy nightmare of the Aphex Twin's "Windowlicker" – two key Warp releases during *Kid A*'s time in embryo – it might have been less surprising than the truth. That is, Radiohead could still sound like Radiohead even with so many startling new stratagems in play.

It's easy to forget the anxieties that *Kid A* generated among band and fans alike, now that its reputation as a landmark albums is so well entrenched. (It topped best-of-the-noughties lists for *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone* and *The Times* and joined *In Rainbows* in *Uncut*'s Top 25 of the decade.) Yet the vibe in the Radiohead camp was hardly triumphant at the end of the '90s, and the band made few efforts to hide their discomfort with the trappings and travails of success. Released in late 1998, Grant Gee's doc *Meeting People Is Easy* provides frank views of life inside the bubble, both the metaphorical kind and the glass one that envelops Yorke's head during the torturous shoot for the "No Surprises" video.

> *KID A* WENT STRAIGHT TO NO 1 ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

The lesser-known B-sides that surfaced on the "Airbag/How Am I Driving?" EP in April 1998 suggested a growing eagerness to shed old skins. The strongest indication was the loping dub exotica of "Meeting In The Aisle", the first instrumental the band had ever released.

Exhausted from the *OK Computer* tour and suffering a loss of confidence, Yorke was hardly brimming with enthusiasm when the band convened in Paris to begin work on new music in January of 1999. Though Ed O'Brien was eager to make a return to first principles and crank out some pop songs, the singer campaigned for a more daring shift away from guitars, melodies and other things he believed were worn out


RADIOHEAD
KID A


EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE
KID A
THE NATIONAL ANTHEM
HOW TO DISAPPEAR COMPLETELY
TREEFINGERS
OPTIMISTIC
IN LIMBO
IDIOTEQUE
MORNING BELL
MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
7243 5 29590 2 0
7 24352 95902 0


KID A
RADIOHEAD



from overuse. Perhaps fired up by memories of his stint with indie-dance hopefuls Flicker Noise while at Exeter, he wanted music that chimed with Warp's lean and rigorous aesthetic. Another inspiration was the signature throb of Underworld, and their early-'90s decision to jettison their first incarnation as lumpy rockers and remake themselves for a new digital age. Not having released anything as embarrassing as *Underneath The Radar*, surely Radiohead could pull off an even greater feat of reinvention? Nevertheless, Radiohead's month in Paris yielded little of value. The same was true of a month in Copenhagen. Much of the difficulty stemmed from the struggle to develop a new process, the band having abandoned the method of beginning with Yorke's song ideas, then roughing them out in rehearsal and performance until they were ready for recording. Now, the members had to face the prospect of not even performing on every single track (Philip Selway would often be the odd one out).

Written between July 1999 and June 2000, O'Brien's online diary is a sometimes cryptic account of the fits, starts and frustrations that abounded as work continued in a stately home in Gloucestershire and then the band's new studio near Oxford. By August, he'd lament that "nothing substantial" had come of the work so far, "except maybe a few harsh lessons in how not to do things". "We're smashing our heads against the wall," reads an entry from October. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*'s David Fricke after the LP's release, Yorke countered the suggestion that problems resulted from his inability to provide a clear direction to his bandmates. "The mistake is to assume we had that level of a plot," he said. "We had no plot. We had 50 things on a blackboard, and we just kept throwing them out and adding more. We kept driving everybody crazy: 'Let's start this one today.' 'But we got these 50 other fucking things to work on.' It frees you up in a way. You don't know what's going to happen when you go into the studio every day."

All this trial and error must have sometimes felt like torture for a band that had already exhibited plenty of perfectionist tendencies on more straightforward recordings. But by the spring of 2000 they had completed almost 30 songs, a bounty that caused another set of headaches as they debated how to release them. What could have been a series of EPs or a double album would instead be two separate albums to be released eight months apart. The rows over tracklisting were fierce – O'Brien's description of the crucial final stage mentions "full-on fist fights" – and the release would be accompanied by such cock-ups as an internet leak and a recall of 150,000 faulty CDs by EMI in the UK. Still, *Kid A* went straight to No 1 on both sides of the Atlantic, becoming the first US chart-topper for a British act in three years.

However painful the whole ordeal had been, Yorke had definitely blasted through his block. The breakthrough came when he wrote the first incarnation of "Everything In Its Right Place" on a baby grand that he'd just bought for his home. Being a self-professed "shit piano player" was hardly a detriment in the topsy-turvy world of *Kid A*'s development. Taking inspiration from a favourite tactic of Tom Waits, Yorke believed that having "complete ignorance" of the instruments at hand could help a songwriter preserve a crucial sense of novelty. "That's one of the reasons I wanted to get into computers and synths," Yorke told *Rolling Stone*, "because I didn't understand how the fuck they worked."

"Everything In Its Right Place" would eventually assume its own rightful place as the opening track of *Kid A*, which was released in October 2000. Nothing about it could have reassured the listeners who'd been alarmed by rumours of a guitar-less Radiohead and unnerved by those blipverts. Dense, squelchy manipulations of Yorke's voice compete for dominance with long, reverberant keyboard parts, many of which were originally recorded by Yorke on electric piano and Greenwood on his Prophet-5 synth and ondes Martenot. The first words that emerge from the murk are the ones in the album's title. Other phrases, like "*Yesterday I woke up sucking a lemon*", are an accurate forewarning that Yorke's lyrics here would never yield their meanings easily. (An earlier omen came in the fall of 1999, when Tristan Tzara's instructions on how to make a Dadaist poem appeared on the band's website.)

Another manipulated voice effect adds a similarly disquieting air to "Kid A" itself, which may be more overtly rhythm-oriented than the preceding track but still conveys an impression of nervy stasis, all interwoven synth lines. With traces of the cyclical patterns of Jaki Liebezeit, the percussive underpinning of "Kid A" also

## TRACKMARKS




**KIDA**

1. Everything In Its Right Place ★★★★
2. Kid A ★★★
3. The National Anthem ★★★★★
4. How To Disappear Completely ★★★★★
5. Treefingers ★★★★
6. Optimistic ★★★★
7. In Limbo ★★★
8. Idioteque ★★★★★
9. Morning Bell ★★★★
10. Motion Picture Soundtrack ★★★★

**Label:** Parlophone, Capitol
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich and Radiohead
**Recorded:** Medley Studios, Copenhagen; Guillaume Tell Studios, Paris; Radiohead rehearsal studio, Oxford; Dorchester Abbey
**Personnel include:** Thom Yorke, Jonny Greenwood, Phil Selway, Ed O'Brien, Colin Greenway, Andy Bush (trumpet), Mark Lockheart (tenor sax)
**Highest chart position:** UK 1, US 1



signals the Krautrock-y predilections that surface more strongly in the most *Tago Mago*-worthy section of "The National Anthem" and Cluster-calibre cloud of sound in "Treefingers".

If *Kid A*'s dominant shade is one of grey through its first two songs, "The National Anthem" provides a wild burst of colour, especially once the groove – built around a riff that Yorke first devised at the age of 16 – is hijacked by a big brass-off between the guest horn players. Replacing the chill of the album's Autechre fetish, the touchstone here is Charles Mingus, and it's worth noting how much the influence of the jazz composer and player can also be felt in the most fervid passages of Talk Talk's *Laughing Stock*, one more key precedent for Radiohead's new adventures in hi-fi.

With "How To Disappear Completely" comes a potentially more reassuring bridge between old and new versions of the group, as well as a sign of Greenwood's avant-classical excursions to come. A harrowing expression of fame-induced despair – Yorke's refrain of *"I'm not here, this is not happening"* was inspired by Michael Stipe's advice on tuning out – it's also as affecting as the most delicately wrought moments of *OK Computer*. Besides being a perfect accompaniment to Yorke's most expressive vocal on the album, the sweeping glissandos and glacier-cool tone clusters in Greenwood's string arrangement demonstrate the sensibility that will emerge more strongly in his side career as composer of orchestral works and film scores. It would also be the first in a new pair of ballads – the other being *Amnesiac*'s "Pyramid Song" – that are as impeccably anguished as anything on *Scott 4*. Following the ambient repose of "Treefingers", "Optimistic" is a stark, angular rocker that strongly anticipates "I Might Be Wrong". Like its *Amnesiac* counterpart, "Optimistic" proves Radiohead's ability to integrate aspects of the old formula with newer variables, like the Liebezeit-like pulse of Selway's drums, the dissonant howls at the edges of the mix and the oddly funky dénouement that bleeds into "In Limbo". Well matched to lyrics like *"I'm lost at sea/Don't bother me"*, the latter song's flow provides another fleeting refuge amid *Kid A*'s angrier tempests, at least until Yorke's voice becomes an ugly, distorted smear.

Though *Kid A* never spawned an official single, "Idioteque" would become the song most readily associated with *Kid A*. Built out of a 40-second section of "absolute genius" that Yorke ferreted out of a 50-minute-long DAT of electronic abstractions by Greenwood, the track contains the only two credited samples on the LP, derived from a Columbia Records comp of a 1974 competition of electronic classical works. With its febrile beat, insistent melody and militantly spare aesthetic, "Idioteque" is the song that most deserves to sport Warp's logo, even if it also betrays *Kid A*'s sizable debt to "Djed", Tortoise's most dramatic demonstration of post-rock's possibilities.

Later synthesised with *Amnesiac*'s title track in a version that trades the original's uneasy tension for a more sumptuous treatment, "Morning Bell" still has the prettiest melody on either LP, one that not even Yorke's most opaque lyrics can mar. (Though he too expressed some alarm about the violence in the song, he'd later swear he didn't mean any harm when he sings of cutting kids in half.) Supposedly written in 1987 and nearly recorded for *The Bends*, "Motion Picture Soundtrack" closes *Kid A* with a graceful evocation of *"the next life"*, complete with heavenly harps and hints of a celestial choir. Though Yorke's opening reference to *"red wine and sleeping pills"* and later talk of limbless, helpless angels inevitably suggest a more sinister reading, the song still conveys a welcome sense of sweet relief from the anger and anguish that otherwise fill the album's many dark corners.

The band were certainly owed a few moments of relative serenity, having laboured so long and so hard on music that would rate as the bravest and most inventive of their career. In the process, they would disregard and overhaul rock conventions in a way that few major acts ever had and ever would again. In fact, for all the paths that *Kid A* blazes into terrain rarely explored by their peers – electronic music, free jazz, Krautrock kosmische, avant-garde classical – the album now seems less like a survey of possible futures than a heroic final stand for the notion that this spirit of artistic fearlessness could exist in music's mainstream. As the more unabashedly retrogressive likes of The Strokes and the White Stripes overtook the scene in the new century, anyone with such a forward-looking aesthetic would soon be marginalised, with gestures like Wilco's flirtations with noise on 2004's *A Ghost Is Born* being all too rare.

This collective failure of nerve seemed to affect Radiohead as well, with the overt experimental bent here being largely consigned to solo projects and Jonny Greenwood's scores from here on in. Even *Amnesiac* feels like something of a retreat, with its restored emphasis on guitars and relative abundance of opportunities for Selway and O'Brien to get themselves heard. But given the boldness and courage of *Kid A*, it's hardly the kind of achievement easily repeated.

JASON EVANS

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"This patently magnificent construct betrays a band playing one-handed just to prove they can, scared to commit itself emotionally. And isn't that what this is supposedly all about?"
JOHN ROBINSON, NME, SEPT 30, 2000

"The sound is astounding... warm, smudgy, the instruments seeming to bleed through and mingle with each other. Colin Greenwood's bass is a particularly powerful presence, often seeming to throb from inside your own body, hip-hop style."
SIMON REYNOLDS, UNCUT, NOV 2000

# AMNESIAC

Pharaonic dreams, 21st-century protest songs and Humphrey Lyttelton… A fiery, eccentric sequel to *Kid A*. | BY NICK HASTED

**RELEASED: 5 JUNE 2001**

THOM YORKE THOUGHT of *Amnesiac* as "our secret weapon", as Radiohead worked on its tapes during the brief and uncertainly received *Kid A* tour. Such a weapon was needed, Yorke believed, to combat "a lot of the weirdness that was going on". *Kid A* had been their first US No 1 and, as *Uncut*'s Stephen Dalton informed the surprised singer, highly praised even in the UK. But Yorke rightly detected a suspicion of its sound: initially strong sales fell away, millions short of its predecessor. The idea that *Kid A* was a wilfully obscure failure of nerve, which *Amnesiac* would correct, gained critical and popular traction in the eight-month wait for *Kid*'s sibling. It even had a germ of truth.

Yorke had explained the shaky confidence supporting Radiohead's ambition in 1995, when discussing the "bubble" they worked inside. "We've been living with this suspension of disbelief since we were 15 or 16, when we came up with the whole thing," he confessed to *NME*. "It's a way of isolating yourself to actually believe you're this wonderful band and you're going to change the world and make everything alright." *Kid A*'s fractured trance-states and numbly resigned tone were the sound of Yorke's artistic survival mechanism kicking in, when that fragile faith collapsed. Millions falling for Radiohead with *OK Computer* left him feeling more of a fraud, emotionally dissociated from his own music and wracked by a fear of his own death. *Kid A* kept its distance from feelings that were too raw for its singer to touch. Colin Greenwood found the lack of "emotional baggage" on Warp records repellently cold – but that, the bassist explained, was what Yorke wanted.

"MORNING BELL" SOUNDS LIKE A CHIME OF FREEDOM… THE "ICE AGE" *KID A* PREDICTED IS THAWING

*Amnesiac* was, of course, drawn from the same sessions. But while *Kid A* found beauty by rarely straying from Yorke's chilly condition, *Amnesiac* was significantly different. Little thought had been given to its content as *Kid A* was painstakingly assembled. But when Radiohead sifted through their remaining tapes, and listened to by-now road-tested songs such as "Knives Out", they found more confident, engaged music waiting for them. During the torturous sessions, a wish "to change the world and make everything alright" had been revived.

Yorke explained *Amnesiac*'s hotter, angrier emotions to Nick Kent by looking at its sleeve: "*Kid A* was kind of like an electric shock. *Amnesiac* is more about being in the woods. [*On Kid A's artwork*] the fires were all going on on the other side of the hill. With *Amnesiac*, you're actually in the forest while the fire's happening." A limited edition of the new album, designed to look like an arcane book left


RADIOHEAD
AMNESIAC


7243 5 32764 2 3
PACKT LIKE SARDINES IN A MORNING BELL/AMNESIAC
CRUSHD TIN BOX DOLLARS AND CENTS
PYRAMID SONG HUNTING BEARS
PULK/PULL REVOLVING DOORS LIKE SPINNING PLATES
YOU AND WHOSE ARMY? LIFE IN A GLASSHOUSE
I MIGHT BE WRONG
KNIVES OUT
7 24353 27642 3


AMNESIAC
RADIOHEAD

forgotten in an attic, added to the atmosphere of European fairytales and myth.

So does "Morning Bell/Amnesiac". This initially rejected version of the *Kid A* track has woodwind sounds which, alongside bell-chimes, form a comfortingly organic place of rest among *Amnesiac*'s darker thickets. There's something of "Strawberry Fields Forever"'s childhood psychedelia to it. Even Yorke's threat to "*cut the kids in half*" sounds less like an IMF diktat here, more Brothers Grimm gruesome. And when he pleads "*release me*" with beautiful purity, this "Morning Bell" sounds like a chime of freedom. The "*ice age*" *Kid A* predicted is thawing.

"Pyramid Song", which could stand proudly on any Radiohead album, was seized on with relief by *Kid A* refuseniks. It saw the return of *OK Computer*'s grand, melodic melancholy, played and sung with new restraint. It also confirmed *Amnesiac*'s interest in the archaic and mythic, and Yorke's search for apparently spiritual "release". Written the same week as *Kid A* highlight "Everything In Its Right Place", his enjoyment of a just-purchased piano inspired both. Charles Mingus' "Freedom" was also

**EASILY APPROACHABLE TUNES COME AS MORE FREQUENT RELIEF ON *AMNESIAC***

heavily influential, to the extent that Yorke and Jonny Greenwood had a go at its gospel-style handclaps, giving up when it made them feel even more like white Oxonians than usual.

A visit to an exhibition of Ancient Egyptian underworld art in Copenhagen during early album sessions, along with Yorke's reading of Gnostic texts, also led him into fresh territory. "Pyramid Song" is an epic vision of reincarnation, past lovers and future lives, "*black-eyed angels*" and "*astral cars*". "*I jumped in the river, what did I see?*" he asks, the native of a city where a stretch of the Thames is given the Egyptian name Isis. Beginning with Yorke's stately playing of the piano's "black notes", as he self-mockingly called them, his wordless voice soon merges with strings conducted by Jonny Greenwood at Dorchester Abbey. This imaginative immersing in a Pharaoh's afterlife is at once woozily dreamlike and controlled. "*There was nothing to fear and nothing to doubt,*" Yorke concludes, with the weariness of a modern man wracked by doubt.

"Pyramid Song" is bracketed by music that continues *Kid A*'s Warp-inspired experiments (almost as evident here as on the earlier album). "Packt Like Sardines In A Crushd Tin Box" begins *Amnesiac* with what sounds like wildly swung ship's bells (actually sampled pots and pans), which soon synchronise with gently skipping bass beats. Guitar feedback also stirs, deep in the mix. "*After years of waiting/Nothing came,*" Yorke starts, apparently still in the stasis of *Kid A*'s "In Limbo". But a fightback is coming. "*I'm a reasonable man, get off my case,*" he repeats with dangerous understatement, his voice floating off for a moment before returning. After "Pyramid Song"'s gorgeous interlude, "Pulk/Pull Revolving Doors"' hypnotic rumble and flutter then backs Yorke, digitally denatured by Auto-Tune, murmuring about "*big ships*" and something "*that you can't come back from*". Such tracks not only usefully shift *Amnesiac*'s mood, they seem to continue a journey that Yorke is in the midst of.

Easily approachable tunes come as more frequent relief on *Amnesiac*. Like "Pyramid Song", "You And Whose Army?" avoids the chopped, masked phrases Yorke used to shield himself on *Kid A*. Both songs offer some of his very best singing, far from the overwrought quaver that *OK Computer* copyists such as Fran Healy and Chris Martin had seized on so greedily. "You And Whose Army?", in particular , is a 21st-century protest song, and Yorke's most explicit stand on either of these albums for the values of Naomi Klein's *No Logo*. Yorke sings its first verse very nearly a cappella, shadowed for almost two minutes only by guitar and the supernal, voice-like Palm Speaker (another Martenot-invented antique instrument rediscovered by Jonny Greenwood). The singer croons with high, sheathed power, almost floating over the music; touched by regret, but spoiling for a fight. He was happy to explain to interviewers who he was battling, and why.

"*Come on, come on, you think you'll drive me crazy,*" is the opening line of what started as a reaction, Yorke explained, to "the voices in my head that were driving me round the bend". He found a more universal threat to focus on at the 1999 G8 summit in Cologne, where he watched police screen Tony Blair from the protesting voices of "Christian women in cardigans", as iniquitous economic policies were settled behind closed doors. "We're not a political band, but we are political people," Jonny Greenwood had considered in 1997, the year *OK Computer* was released and Blair was elected.

The band "had a hell of a party" to celebrate the end of Tory rule. But seeing the atmosphere and mechanics of the globalisation elite at close quarters fascinated and repulsed Yorke. "You And Whose Army?" calls them out, in an oblique but withering style his lyrical hero Elvis Costello would surely approve. "*You and whose army?*" he sneers. "*You and your cronies.*" He puts his faith, like hippy rockers before him, in the protesting mass: "*Come on, if you think you can take us on.*" Then the piano slams in a big, '70s-style rock chorus, complete with surging vocals. The song is an old-school rallying cry that ends with a sigh, job sharply done in three minutes.

Yorke's dad, Colin Greenwood revealed, taught him boxing, a pugnaciousness at odds with his image. "You And Whose Army?"'s lyrics, Greenwood told *Hot Press* with admiration, showed their writer's "combination of direct involvement and aggro and sublimation... taking it somewhere else at the end". As with "Pyramid Song"'s Gnostic detour, Yorke's stand as an anti-globalisation bruiser took him out of his self, permitting direct expression.

"I Might Be Wrong", like "You And Whose Army?", saw Yorke find a positive conclusion to a personal crisis. Looking back from the beach to his Dorset house, which he had just left empty one evening, he saw a figure still moving inside it. This doppelganger showed his dissociation was at an extreme point. Meanwhile, his partner Rachel had been pleading with him to take pride in his past achievements, and let them go. "I Might Be Wrong" was recorded when Yorke went back into his still haunted house from the beach. His demo was later finished with Jonny Greenwood's scratchy, Beck-like blues guitar and his brother's Chic-style bassline. "*Have yourself a good time, it's nothing at all,*" Yorke tries to convince himself.

"Knives Out", loathed by Yorke for most of its reputed 313 hours' recording, is about consumption and the personal odyssey that runs through the album ("*Look into my eyes/I'm not coming back*"), dominated by Jonny Greenwood's pastoral Johnny Marr homage. "Dollars And Cents" is an ambient shuffle slashed by Alice Coltrane-style strings and a chaotic Yorke outburst; "Like Spinning Plates"' electronic phase and flutter, like birds beating at a window, reverses tapes of "I Will" (soon to be on *Hail To The Thief*) to create another state of stasis and dread.

Then *Amnesiac* concludes with one more major song. "Life In A Glasshouse" expresses

## TRACKMARKS



1. Packt Like Sardines In A Crushd Tin Box ★★★★
2. Pyramid Song ★★★★★
3. Pulk/Pull Revolving Doors ★★★
4. You And Whose Army? ★★★★
5. I Might Be Wrong ★★★
6. Knives Out ★★★★
7. Morning Bell/ Amnesiac ★★★★
8. Dollars & Cents ★★★★
9. Hunting Bears ★★
10. Like Spinning Plates ★★★
11. Life In A Glass-house ★★★★

**Label:** Parlophone
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich/Radiohead
**Recorded:** Medley, Copenhagen; Guillaume Tell, Paris; Radiohead rehearsal studio; Dorchester Abbey
**Personnel include:** Thom Yorke (vocals, gtr, piano, synth), Jonny Greenwood (gtr, Ondes Martenot, Palme speaker), Colin Greenwood (bass, gtr), Ed O'Brien (gtr), Philip Selway (drums, prog), Orchestra Of St John (strings), Humphrey Lyttelton (trumpet)
**Highest chart position:** UK 1, US 2




Shears out... Yorke in 2001

Yorke's visceral loathing of paparazzi and celebrity culture. "*Of course I'd like to stay and chat,*" he sings to a member of the public foolish enough to accost him, voice dripping with disdain. "*But someone's listening in.*" These paranoid celebrity blues were the last recordings of the *Kid A*/*Amnesiac* sessions, and inspired their most unlikely turn. Wanting a jazz arrangement and realising "we can't play jazz", Jonny Greenwood turned to trad jazzer Humphrey Lyttelton, 80, for help. His chairmanship of Radio 4's *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue* appealed as much as his musicianship. Humph offered a knowing, New Orleans funeral-style arrangement. His trumpet and Yorke's voice meet across a half-century of English public school pop, in an eccentric, inclusive finale.

The difficult period since *OK Computer* reached a redemptive climax back home in South Park, Oxford, where Radiohead headlined a festival of friends including Lyttelton, Supergrass and Beck on July 7, 2001. Under black skies that eventually released a cleansing deluge, the thematic and musical coherence between new songs and old was revealed, and Radiohead at last relaxed. When the machinery required for the intended encore of *Kid A*'s "Motion Picture Soundtrack" crashed, Yorke bellowed "Bugger!", and played "Creep" instead. "One answers the questions that the other throws up," he finally reflected on *Amnesiac*'s relationship to *Kid A*. "I think it makes much more sense of *Kid A* in a cool kind of way. But it's nice to get it all finished and move on."

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

**"You can see the shared genes: the jazz spasms and electronic pulsings, the chill blood, and most of all the chronic hypersensitivity to the world outside."**
**VICTORIA SEGAL, NME, JUNE 2, 2001**

**"Radiohead's job is to express a condition, the present-day condition of disgust – near terminal, if *Amnesiac* is anything to go by."**
**DAVID STUBBS, UNCUT, JULY 2001**

On the road: Radiohead in 2001



DAN HOLDSWORTHY/RIK PINKCOMBE

# "Who the fuck wants to be a big band?"

*Amnesiac* sits at No 1, and Radiohead's millennial makeover seems vindicated. As the band gather to talk through the highs, lows and myriad complexities of their entire career, however, Thom Yorke remains wary. He wants the myth-making to stop, he tells *STEPHEN DALTON*, even as he inadvertently contributes to it… "I was terrible, awful. I created a climate of fear, the same way that Stalin did!"




THE TOWERING INFERNO is visible from miles away. Thom Yorke drives towards the horizon, the acrid stench of toxic smoke filling his car. He cranks up the air-conditioning to maximum, but still the rank odour is inescapable. A wave of choking nausea shudders through him.

The Radiohead singer is passing Arscott Farm in Devon, on his way back to Oxford from his country hideaway. Here a mountainous funeral pyre of 7,000 animals, slaughtered under foot-and-mouth regulations, will burn for a week. Maybe longer. By some sick twist of voodoo economics, this grotesque flesh bonfire will pump more potentially cancer-causing dioxins into the food chain than all of Britain's worst chemical plants. Death stalks the natural world, making it safe for capitalism.

Thousands of miles away, the masked foot soldiers of free trade are using riot shields, tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets to beat down 400 anti-globalisation protestors in Quebec City. Meanwhile, high above the Atlantic, REM guitarist Peter Buck is engaged in a drunken orgy of air rage that will see him charged with assault and threatening behaviour on landing. The bad karma police are out in force today.

All these disconnected but simultaneous events somehow link back to Thom Yorke, choking in his smoke-filled car, a tiny speck crawling across the Devon landscape. Rage, nausea, motion sickness, animal corpses in flaming heaps. The vomit, the vomit. And then Thom remembers – tomorrow he has a day of press interviews scheduled in London. Being the planet's most critically revered rock icon comes with a heavy price. His heart sinks. His lip trembles.

Why can't these buzzing bullshit media-noise insects leave Thom alone? Why must he be crushed once again between the giant wheels of multinational marketing? It's a major headfuck. It makes him very, very ill. The bile rises in his throat once more. He can't breathe. He starts to choke...

RADIOHEAD DON'T LOOK like rock stars. More like Edwardian grave-robbers, pre-Raphaelite laudanum addicts, Dickensian consumptives or World War I flying aces. Twitchy, well-spoken, deeply posh English eccentrics to a man. But like it or not, the secret history of British rock has been fought on the playing fields of Eton, Westminster, Abingdon and other venerable public schools. Most privately educated bands dumb down their accents and cover their tracks. But these Oxford oddballs do the exact opposite, almost to the point of Bertie Wooster caricature.

At a riverside London café in spring 2001, affable bass-playing Christopher Walken lookalike Colin Greenwood greets *Uncut* with sardonic quips about the Tory cabinet, GK Chesterton and "the officer's mess". His Jackie O-haired guitar-virtuoso younger brother Jonny likens Radiohead to "18th-Century rakes who live life in the country and go to London to gamble the night away". Somewhere in the studio complex behind us, guitarist Ed O'Brien, drummer Phil Selway and Thom Yorke are grudgingly selling their souls to *Uncut*'s photographer.

Although global in reputation, Radiohead are deeply, traumatically English in person. Middle England is their home, geographically and spiritually. Articulate, literate and soberly dressed in autumnal hues, they could pass for trendy vicars or junior theology professors. The Greenwood family tree is entangled with the army, the British Communist Party and the socially progressive Victorian liberals of the Fabian Society. Even Radiohead's political conscience reeks more of puritanical duty than punky passion. Church meetings and temperance halls, more Methodism than Marxism.

Radiohead do not inhabit the chippy, colloquial, know-your-place Britpop kingdom of Cocker or Weller. Theirs is not the mythic North of Lennon or Morrissey, nor the fabled London of Brett or Damon. All five belong to an oddly nostalgic Middle England of bracing walks and improving books, cold showers and warm beer, Oxbridge and Ambridge.

But close exposure to Radiohead throws up a distorting mirror against all this comfortingly bookish, tweedy Englishness. Simmering alienation, sexual nausea, middle-class guilt, bodily disgust, fear of women, volcanic self-loathing – all of these unsavoury themes, mere background radiation in Radiohead interviews, explode like volcanic pustules across Thom Yorke's bilious, cathartic lyrics. Middle England turned inside out, stripped of its outer skin, raw and visceral.

**"IT WAS WEIRD TO SPEND THAT LONG ON SOMETHING AND HAVE JOURNALISTS JUST PEE ALL OVER IT"**

Repressed passion and thwarted ambition are the lingering scars of the schoolyard rebel. The kind of upper-middle-class hothouse background that spawned Radiohead may turn out politicians, BBC governors and other Establishment pillars with mechanical ease, but it also throws up square-peg absurdists and prickly class traitors like George Orwell, Peter Cook, Joe Strummer, Stephen Fry and Mark Thomas.

And Thom Yorke. *Uncut* has been chatting happily with the rest of Radiohead for almost two hours when Yorke is ushered into the café by management minders. Necks noticeably stiffen. The temperature drops a degree or two. Listen carefully and you hear the singer's tightly wound internal motor whirring at full pitch, ready to snap.

Yorke is bearded and pale, his hair a concentration-camp crop. He wears a duffle coat and shoes seemingly made from Cornish pasties. This is the rumpled, hair-shirt chic which divides serious artists from mere pop stars. He slumps down, staring intensely at the table ahead of him. Once more into the fridge-buzzing media noise bullshit machine. A condemned man, facing the gallows. A caged animal, pumped full of antibiotics. A rabbit in the headlights.

So then – an easy, ice-braking theme to start. Yorke's new baby son, Noah. Cuddly, inoffensive, human interest stuff. The soft side of Mr Radiohead. How's fatherhood, old chap?

"Great. It's good."

Babies, eh? Ahhh! Was he planned? "No."

Is Thom doing his fair share, changing nappies and everything?

"Hmmff..."

Decorated the spare bedroom yet?

"Not really, no. Well yes, I guess, sort of. Anyway, personal – next."

Yorke throws his head back, a slow-motion spasm, his face contorted with disgust. "Also, asking me whether it was planned or not is about the most personal thing you could possibly ask," he snarls, "so maybe you want to retract that..."

This is not a contest, Thom. If something is too personal, just say pass. "Well, pass."

Nor is Yorke keen to talk about his longterm girlfriend and Noah's mother, Rachel. "Off limits, sorry." Has she inspired any Radiohead lyrics? "Whoah, man! Fucking hell! Next! Bloody hell! what do you think this is...?"

An interview, possibly? A harmless conversation? But as anyone who has met Radiohead knows, this is what you get when you mess with Yorke: acid sarcasm, tense silences, sullen grunts and Kevin The Teenager huffs. And, just occasionally, violent outbursts. Later, he will threaten to break the legs of *Uncut*'s music editor. And he will be deadly serious.

So should we talk about the weather? Or should we talk about the government? Either way, Yorke will probably take mortal offence. But surely the new Radiohead album is a suitably non-confrontational subject. Right? *Amnesiac* was recorded during the same sessions as last year's parameter-pushing *Kid A*, and appears to build a


Walking on eggshells with Thom Yorke in 2001

JASON EVANS



bridge between its sister album's avant-noise/post-rock soundscapes and more traditionally recognisable pop forms, from acoustic ballads to big band jazz. Its reception has been mostly positive, restoring Radiohead's high critical standing after the bafflement which greeted *Kid A*.

"As far as I was concerned, a lot of grubby hands were put over *Kid A*," insists Yorke, gnawing intently at his fingernails. "A weird reaction which people... it's entirely their own fucking problem, but it was a bit upsetting. The stuff about no-one getting to hear it, and all that over-protection of it. It meant there was a sort of weird smell that went with it and I think that was unfair. As far as I'm concerned, it was nothing to do with the music, and there was kind of no way to avoid it, but it didn't stop it being a pain in the arse."

The security and secrecy around *Kid A* meant that reviewers had very little time to live with it before making their assessment. "It was weird to spend that long on something and just have journalists unzip their trousers and pee all over it," Yorke sniffs, "and then walk away thinking how clever they were."

Right. Is that what happened? "I don't know. I didn't actually read much of it." This is said with a straight face. "I sort of read the aftermath, which was kind of worse."

Actually, *Kid A* was almost universally well-reviewed. "Really?" says Yorke, raising an eyebrow. "Well, there you go, you see – I'm totally confused. That's what comes of not... trying to avoid it but getting the second-hand stuff. It was totally confusing."

*Kid A* seemed to many like an attempt by Radiohead to short-circuit their own fame. While *Amnesiac* was trailed in press reports as a more commercial offering, it turned out to be almost as wilfully "difficult" as its predecessor. The slightly disingenuous party line within the band is that it is all "pop" – as Yorke told Radio 4's *Front Row* recently, "We don't make music to exclude people, or show how clever we are." No, but how about to sabotage expectations?

"But the way you're putting that across is in terms of: you've set something up with *OK Computer* and you copped out by not supplying the demand you've created," says Yorke through gritted teeth. "That's fucking sales pitch, that is... it's bullshit."

This is about fame, not commerce. Perhaps Radiohead just got sick of being a big band and fancied downsizing to cult size? "Well we certainly don't want to be a big band," spits Yorke. "Who the fuck wants to be a big band?"

It's not such a terrible ambition. You can be big and clever – The Beatles managed it, after all.

"OK, you can be big and clever," he sighs. "Two very operative words, yeah... bit of a non-argument."

Maybe, but a lot of big bands of the last decade seem to have taken a deliberate left turn after staring pop fame full in the face. Pulp and Blur, for example. "Can't think why," Yorke snaps back with paint-stripping sarcasm. "If we'd split up at the end of *OK Computer*, it would have all been nice and neat and tidy," he snarls. "Everybody would have been happy – they'd built us up, they got the record they wanted at the end of it, blah blah blah, and everybody could go on about it for the rest of their lives. The fact that we actually choose to carry on is wrong, that's not right, you know what I mean? We should have split up while the going was good. For everyone, in order to like... become a myth."

So did Radiohead consider splitting after *OK Computer*? Yorke pulls a toothache face, rolls his eyes skywards and groans. Pure Kevin The Teenager.

"Next...!"

JESUS. TALK ABOUT walking on eggshells. Of course, most great artists are self-serious, self-pitying and self-absorbed by nature. It goes with the territory. But for a fan of Radiohead's music, especially its apparent intelligence and sensitivity, Thom Yorke's petulance is disappointing. On record, an

achingly fragile choirboy. In person, Rik from *The Young Ones*.

He would hate the comparison, but Liam Gallagher springs to mind. Where Gallagher gets his way by being aggressive, Yorke is passive-aggressive: forever playing the wounded victim, too delicate for this cruel world. As a control mechanism, it is highly effective. In the support staff around Yorke, the minders and managers and fellow band members, there is an unquestioned acceptance of constant, low-level tension. People tiptoe around the singer like courtiers around a tyrant.

Yorke would call such observations "lame post-Freudian bullshit". But later in our interview, he will confess to creating a "climate of fear" in Radiohead, and becoming "this horrible ego that was out of control". Then he will compare himself to fun-loving mass murderer Stalin. However, before we can reach the singer's funny, self-deprecating side – and he does have one – we need to cut through years of ingrained disgust and distrust.

It should be explained here that Yorke has a serious aversion to journalists. Even though he gets almost wholly reverential press coverage, he views interviews like pulling teeth, and reporters as malicious irritants. He seems particularly wary today because *Uncut*'s music editor Paul Lester commissioned a *Melody Maker* feature six years ago which still incenses him to this day (see Thom Yorke Vs The Press sidebar). "Paul Lester's the cunt that stitched me up in the first place," he snaps.

But far more intriguing than media navel-gazing is what lies behind all this passive-aggressive paranoia. What makes Yorke's life such a trial that he suffers constant "headfucks" and "breakdowns"? Why is recording every Radiohead album a "fucking nightmare"? Why does even the highest critical acclaim leave him "completely unhinged"? What is wrong with Thom Yorke?

"You'd have to live with me for a while," Yorke shrugs. Can he describe the problem, at least? "I can't. What's the point?"

**"A LOT OF CREATIVE PEOPLE WANT TO JUMP OFF BRIDGES... SO FUCKING WHAT?"**

Right, let's put it bluntly, then. Does Thom suffer from depression?

"This is why I get defensive," Yorke says warily, sinking back into his chair. "People reflect this back onto the music we make, as well, and it makes me quite angry. Depression is a medical condition, and in this country especially it's very badly stigmatised and it damages the people who suffer from it. If you suffered from dyslexia, for a long time that was stigmatised. And now it's sort of encompassed and you can have treatment. If you suffer from depression, you are stigmatised. You're a freak, you can't get a job – things like that, if you're medically depressed."

Yorke lurches forward, boring a hole in the table with his gaze. "And therefore, for there to be a culture of antagonism towards music that involves depression or any form of self-expression where perhaps the artist suffers from depression, well you know, that artist is a freak and will get attacked for it. And it will reflect back in the music. And I think that absolutely fucking stinks."

There is hardly a culture of antagonism towards depressive music, more a climate of reverence. Look at the cult of Ian Curtis, Kurt or Richey.

"Yes," Yorke frowns, "but equally..."

People trivialise it? "Yes, and I have a problem with that. Because that shows utter irresponsibility and lack of respect for not just me but anybody who suffers at all from depression. It can be an illness – I'm not saying it's an illness for me because I've sort of dealt with it. But for a lot of people it really is an illness, and for the sake of them I think it's highly offensive."

How did Thom deal with his depression? "Not very well, as you can see."

But has he tried therapy? Or anti-depressants?

"No. I needed to stop what I was doing and answer questions about it and sort of just stand the right way up for a while."

Was there a single event or period which shaped his mental state? "Depression's not like that. When you say you suffer from depression it's a condition, it's something that's there, that's all. It's not particularly strong, it's not particularly

BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES



The band that plays together: Radiohead in NYC, October 1993

destructive, it's not particularly bad – I'm very lucky. Lots of people are much, much worse – lots of people can't leave the house. They've got no idea why, maybe they never will find out why. And all the drugs they get given don't work, or whatever, and all the therapy is completely pointless. That's kind of not the point."

Several Radiohead biographers claim that Yorke's childhood illnesses, including five operations on his lazy left eye, left him with a legacy of bitterness and anger. "The old Freudian legacy," he sneers. "Everything has to be traceable back to your youth. It's all bullshit."

So Thom doesn't believe there is any truth in this theory? "No, I don't," he scowls. This "post-Freudian" line of questioning is starting to needle Yorke, and he wants to shut it down.

"Why do you think we've just got all this pop shite around now?" he seethes. "Because people just got sick of all this in-depth character analysis, and it didn't mean anything. It was post-Freudian, lame, university psychology bullshit, basically. A lot of creative people hear voices, a lot of people have crazy thoughts, a lot of creative people want to jump off bridges. So fucking what?"

So what indeed. But the reason people sometimes take the piss out of depressed pop stars is because the subject has been trivialised by the rich and famous too. Fairly or unfairly, every Prozac-popping Priory case on their 19th nervous breakdown boosts the perception of mental illness as just another celebrity pose.

"I'm sure the aftermath of this interview will be exactly the same thing," Yorke shrugs wearily, then adds a warning to *Uncut*'s music editor. "I'm quite prepared to talk about this, but if Paul Lester chooses to spin it out and put it on the cover, I will come around and break his legs! Tell him that, because I will do it..."

THOM YORKE HAS spent 10 years living in a glass house, and at least five trying to remix himself out of Radiohead's emotional equation. But every step he takes away from the media microscope only seems to find him backing into the limelight.

It was 10 summers ago that pre-Radiohead hopefuls On A Friday reconvened in Oxford after returning from universities and colleges across Britain. The band moved into a shared semi in Ridgefield Road, turning it into a "fucking hole" of a makeshift rehearsal space. The house was haunted by its previous occupant, the sink stacked high with unwashed pots. It was *The Young Ones* scripted by Samuel Beckett.

Seasoned veterans of Oxford's live scene since their teens, On A Friday's first post-graduation show was at the Holly Bush pub on July 22, 1991. Less than three weeks later, after another gig at the Jericho Tavern, they had a management deal. Chris Hufford and Bryce Edge were two ex-New Romantics who ran the Courtyard studio complex in Sutton Courtenay, a sleepy Oxfordshire hamlet where George Orwell lies buried.

By November there was a five-track demo in circulation and a bidding war in progress. Jonny, the youngest and newest Radiohead recruit, ➡

## Knives Out: Thom Yorke Vs The Press



Yorke's advice on the press: "Do Not Swallow"

**THOM YORKE HAS always had a turbulent relationship with the press. As far back as 1993 he was threatening to boycott interviews with the music weeklies, a policy he carried out during much of the late '90s after taking offence at various Radiohead-related stories. But while a healthy antagonism towards the media is understandable, it is slightly baffling that Yorke feels so persecuted when Radiohead have been so critically revered for so long. Besides a few dismissive reviews in their early days, which all bands get, everything since *The Bends* has been hugely positive. So what's the problem?**




**Thom:** "But at the start, that's where it all hurts! Later on, you can just go, whatever. But once you've been fucked over that many times by – who's the guy who used to edit *NME*? Once that piece of shit has fucked your life around that often, you don't want to know. And there was that sort of thing going on at the beginning for us, which I couldn't get my head around."

**Was it something specific that *NME* wrote?**

**Thom:** "Not at all, it was just a general atmosphere. You got this feeling all the time, like, what exactly have I done here? Why are there personal attacks being made? It warps your perspective. Personally, I was into not doing interviews again for ages. And then I thought that's a bit arse about face, as well, because if you choose to stand in front of a microphone and blare your voice out and then refuse to go and explain, that's even worse. So in a way, it's kind of a nice way to explain what we're doing a little bit so people don't just get the perceived wisdom."

**You were also angered by that *Melody Maker* cover story in 1995 which labelled you a potential "rock martyr" in the mould of Richey and Kurt. Ghoulish, maybe, but the feature actually called you a survivor, not a suicide risk. Surely there is a positive side to being compared to two all-time rock icons like that?**

**Thom:** "I don't think anybody could possibly have read that piece as a positive thing! I cannot see how Paul Lester could have dared do that and think he could have got away with it! You have no idea how badly that affected all my friends and family, and how I had to spend years convincing my closest friends that it was not how they [*The Stud Brothers*] had written it. I'm still stigmatised now because of that article – the legacy went on for years. And that's why I'm still defensive, because I met Richey, and I didn't know Kurt, and Kurt as far as I'm concerned – it could have been any of the things, not necessarily depression. Who the fuck knows? And whose fucking right is it anyway? He was a musician, that's why people loved him."

**You stopped doing interviews almost entirely around *OK Computer*, probably the most acclaimed album of all time! How much more positive can press coverage get?**

**Thom:** "You just get bored. I can't see the point in answering pointless questions, that's all. For a while, after I stopped doing interviews for *OK Computer*, I had a constant fucking monologue going on, a constant interview dialogue – I was asking myself questions and answering them as I'd talked so much shit and had to answer all these questions on issues I wasn't in any way responsible for – just general media noise had started entering my head and it was there all the time. And so now I don't want to get pulled into it very often, it's just not interesting. There are a lot more interesting things to talk about."

**Maybe, but this looks less like press hostility than your persecution complex.**

**Thom:** "I'm sure it is. I think in a way it's a self-defence mechanism, completely. Attack first, before being attacked. Totally."

ANDY WILLSHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGE

abandoned his Psychology and Music course at Oxford Poly to join the band full-time. On December 22, the band signed an eight-album deal with EMI's Parlophone label.

Greenwood senior remembers the occasion gloomily. "We were in Leicester Square going, yeah, we've signed! Then driving back to Oxford in the pouring rain, the clouds were gathering, already starting to worry and panic, how are we going to do this?" The band members agreed to meet for a drink in Oxford, but instead got lost and soaked and missed each other. "It was a typical Radiohead day," sighs Greenwood.

Early in 1992, EMI took the band aside for a makeover conference. They were given a £300 clothes budget and told to sharpen up their act. "There was one A&R man in particular who gave us a lecture on how we could get our shit together," recalls Greenwood, "and he gave us people like Primal Scream as an example, you know, in terms of how they looked and they had a soapbox. He said we needed a manifesto."

Instead, they changed their name. Gravitate, Music and the Thomas Hardy-inspired Jude were all candidates. But Radiohead, taken from an old Talking Heads tune, won the day. "You receive and you consume," Yorke explained afterwards. "It's very much about the passive acceptance of your environment."

Despite their ingrained Englishness as people, Radiohead's music always seemed like a missile aimed squarely at America. Their rowdy, raw, guitar-heavy sound owed more to grunge and hardcore than the arse-end of Madchester or the birth pangs of Britpop. Yorke's octave-vaulting growls and universal lyrics were never hobbled by parochial irony or geographical bias. And their choice of Boston duo Sean Slade and Paul Kolderie to produce their debut album may have been a nod to their beloved Pixies – Kolderie had engineered *Come On Pilgrim* – but it also highlighted their transatlantic ambition.

Lukewarm, mildly positive reviews greeted the band's debut "Drill" EP in May 1992 and second release, "Creep", in September. This future anthem of seismic self-loathing stalled at 78 in the singles charts first time around after an impressive three plays on Radio 1. The song was dropped from the playlist for being too depressing. Of course, "Creep" would be Radiohead's making and breaking in the months to come. In March 1993 the single went ballistic in Israel, of all places, followed by a *Billboard* Top 40 placing in the US. That same month the band's debut album, *Pablo Honey*, made No 25 in the UK charts. Beyond stand-outs like "Creep" and "Stop Whispering", the record's dense and polished three-guitar racket offered few hints of the band's skyscraping potential.

Radiohead played their first American show in July and toured themselves sick. Yorke "hit the self-destruct button pretty quick" and began shaving off clumps of his hair. Then he got peroxide hair extensions and went slacker-metal. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jon Bon Jovi declared their love for "Creep". The band played it beside a swimming pool on MTV's *Beach Party*. "This was the early days for MTV," smiles Colin apologetically, "before they got their shit together."

With a huge hit on their hands, groupies swarmed to these new British invaders. But some perverse sense of decency, or perhaps a deeply English embarrassment about sex, prevented the band from taking advantage. In Dallas, O'Brien politely declined the offer of a cocaine-fuelled sex session. At the infamous Hyatt in LA, Jonny had a naked girl call at his hotel room. "Luckily, I was out," the junior Greenwood said later. "I've never taken advantage of the opportunity of one-night stands. It's like treating sex like sneezing. Sex is a fairly disgusting sort of tufted, smelly-area kind of activity which is too intimate to engage in with strangers."




*Pablo Honey* sold two million copies worldwide, but the pressure of following up "Creep" weighed heavily on Radiohead. The single became a Top 10 smash on its UK re-release, a global Generation X anthem to rival Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit". But neither "Anyone Can Play Guitar" nor "Pop Is Dead" made even a fraction of the impact.

Meanwhile, Yorke was growing to despise the song which had made him a poster boy for self-loathing, rechristening it "Crap". Even today, he rarely discusses or performs it.

"It was everything that went along with it rather than just the song," Jonny insists. "Thom just doesn't like playing it – it's his words, he can do what he wants with it. It's like, he's not in that emotional space anymore so doesn't like playing it. And one of the things that's so good about him is that he's a performer with emotional convictions."

Radiohead continued their relentless touring schedule as support act to Belly and PJ Harvey. But band relations became strained and shows were cancelled – including a high-profile Reading festival slot, scuppered by Yorke's throat problems. A December tour with James culminated in a fraught band summit in Hamburg. Then all five separated and scattered, back to Oxford.

In Yorke's words, Radiohead had "sucked Satan's cock" and paid a bitter price. "As soon as you get any success you disappear up your own arse and lose it forever," the singer admitted later. "When I got back to Oxford I was unbearable. You start to believe you're this sensitive artist who has to be alone – this melodramatic, tortured person, in order to create music. The absolute opposite is true."

Radiohead were starting to feel like one-hit wonders, a cash cow to be cynically milked dry by their short-term paymasters. To make matters worse, they were barely communicating. Their house of cards teetered on the verge of collapse.

IN EARLY 1994, Yorke and his girlfriend Rachel moved into a three-bedroom detached house in the Oxford suburb of Headington – just around the corner from the location of Radiohead's South Park mini-festival this month. The singer christened his new home "the house


*The Bends*, 1995

PAT POPE/SHUTTERSTOCK

that 'Creep' built", arguing that it may be his one financial reward from short-burn rock fame.

Typical Yorke paranoia, perhaps, but this time the singer's fears were not wholly self-created. Locked in creative stasis in their new rehearsal space, a converted apple shed jokingly christened Canned Applause, Radiohead's future looked highly doubtful. Their US record company Capitol were withholding their second-album option until they heard promising new material. According to some reports, their UK label also gave the band a six-month ultimatum.

Managers Edge and Hufford, by their own admission, were "shitting themselves". They began shopping around for new acts, and found one under their noses: Supergrass. Hufford would later recall this period as the bleak low-point of his relationship with Yorke.

Inter-band relations were also in tatters. "It was a very silent, cold thing," Jonny revealed later. "We thought we were trapped in one of those *Twilight Zone* slow time machines." O'Brien would later claim Radiohead had entered "this huge, energy-sucking black hole... It was horrible, at one stage everyone was trying to find their get-out clauses." Yorke called the sessions "the hardest thing I've ever, ever done... we had days of painful self-analysis, a total fucking meltdown for two fucking months."

Recording moved to RAK studios in London, with former Stone Roses/Fall producer John Leckie. Still the new material was painfully slow in conception. Before Radiohead played the London Astoria in May, Yorke told *NME*, "I'm fucking ill and physically I'm completely fucked and mentally I've had enough."

The summer saw Radiohead play both Glastonbury and Reading, after which Phil married his longterm girlfriend Cait and honeymooned in Lyme Regis. Album sessions then resumed at RAK and Abbey Road in London, and The Manor in Oxford. But the band hated many of their new songs: "High And Dry" was dismissed as a "Mull Of Kintyre" rip-off by Jonny and "fucking dreadful" by Yorke. "Planet Telex" was completed in the early hours, with Yorke drunk and bent double on the floor. And "Fake Plastic Trees" was going nowhere until producer John Leckie made a divine intervention.

"It was going really slowly," Colin Greenwood recalls, "so John Leckie said, 'Why don't we go out?' We went to see Jeff Buckley play at the Garage. He just had a Telecaster and a pint of Guinness. And it was just fucking amazing, really inspirational. Then we went back to the studio and tried an acoustic version of 'Fake Plastic Trees'. Thom sat down and played it in three takes, then just burst into tears afterwards.



During the recording of *OK Computer*, 1996

And that's what we used for the record."

An October mini-tour in Mexico brought all the pent-up bile of the past year into the open. "It was like a band imploding, when it needed to find its feet," says O'Brien. "Years of tension and not saying anything to each other, and basically all the things that had built up since we'd met each other, all came out in one day," Yorke admitted later. "We were spitting and fighting and crying and saying all the things that you don't want to

**"SEX IS A FAIRLY DISGUSTING SORT OF TUFTED, SMELLY-AREA KIND OF ACTIVITY..."**

talk about. It completely changed and we went back and did the album and it all made sense."

But Radiohead were not making much sense to their American label, who released new single "My Iron Lung" with minimal promotion in November. According to Capitol Marketing VP Clark Staub, "My suspicions was that there was no fanbase." As if to confirm this self-fulfilling prophecy, the single virtually disappeared overnight.

In Britain, "My Iron Lung" made No 24 despite no Radio 1 airplay. Britpop was hitting its cheery, inward-looking, Londoncentric peak and Radiohead's murky gravitas seemed once more out of step with the national mood.

Even so, Radiohead's next single "High And Dry" landed at No 17 in March 1995. Then their second LP, *The Bends*, entered the chart at No 6. This dark masterpiece was a massive leap forward from *Pablo Honey*. Beyond the typically fraught, lurching guitar anthems it boasted grace and grandeur, epic soundtracks and programmed rhythms. The title track was widely interpreted as an acerbic commentary on the disorienting effects of sudden fame. In fact, it had been written long before "Creep".

Yorke claimed his voice was now "just another instrument rather than me personally giving you everything in my soul. You do that once and you never ever want to do it again." Only later would he admit *The Bends* was "an incredibly personal album, which is why I spent most of my time denying that it was personal at all."

Lyrically, Jonny Greenwood claimed *The Bends* was about "illness and doctors... revulsion about our own bodies." The album's cover image, adapted by Yorke from hospital snapshots, seemed to reflect this theme. "I was a sickly child," he told reporters. "The content of my lyrics shows that I am almost obsessed with my health. If I get ill on tour, it really does something to me emotionally."

The album's air of sickness haunted Radiohead. After suffering sharp head pains, Jonny took to wearing protective headphones during concerts. This was on top of the splint he had taken to strapping on his right hand to counteract repetitive strain injury. Yorke was also obliged to plug his ears after they began filling with fluid due to the constant pressure changes of air travel.

*The Bends* barely dented the US charts despite a year of almost constant touring. Yorke's fragile state grew worse on the US tour, where Radiohead were "living through pure fucking hell" on three hours of sleep a night. Before a New York show in May, the singer suffered "a complete breakdown" and begged tour manager Tom Greaves to book him on the next flight home. He was talked into staying by his fellow band members, a testament to the brittle new mood of unity within Radiohead.

Radiohead's future direction was also beginning to take shape in Yorke's mind. "I get really envious when I hear good jungle or stuff on Warp or the Tricky album," the singer told *NME* in May. "I get this sense that they were

PAT POPE/SHUTTERSTOCK



Yorke with Brian Eno at The Brit Awards, Earl's Court, February 19, 1996

ALAN DAVIDSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

made in isolation and that there wasn't this need to be ina bollocks rock band." Prophetic words.

A prestigious summer tour supporting longtime idols REM showed Radiohead a more positive way to deal with fame. Meeting Stipe, Yorke says, taught him that "it is possible to do more than two albums, and to like the idea of sticking around. Learning to forget how you did something and not trying to compete with yourself. It's a cool thing, just learning to not have to fight and argue with yourself all the time."

But Radiohead's idyllic summer evaporated into frustration again as they toured *The Bends* to a largely indifferent America in late 1995. During an October jaunt with Soul Asylum, all the band's equipment was stolen in Denver. Later, in Vancouver, Yorke interrupted the show to silence a table of chattering industry types. "We've gone all around the world on this tour," he raged, "and you are the rudest fuckers we have ever met."

Radiohead's recurring ill health caught up with them again in Munich in late November. A sick Yorke tried to cancel a show, but the promoter called a doctor who pronounced the singer fit for action. Onstage, a clearly disturbed Yorke blew a fuse before blacking out and collapsing.

"I just got really fucking freaked out," he said later. "I got tunnel vision and I didn't know what happened. I threw stuff around and threw my amp around and drum kit and ended up with blood all over my face and things. I cried for about two hours afterwards."

This incident was labelled "Thommy's Temper Tantrum" by the *NME* in a short, innocuous news story. The singer claimed, "I'm sure the *NME* don't give a fuck, but what they wrote in that piece hurt me more than anything else anyone has ever written about me." He then froze the paper out of interviews for over five years. "Forgive and forget" is not Thom Yorke's motto.

"When things get personal," he says, "when you're a moving target, once you've had to deal with that, you find it very difficult to forgive and forget."

A SLEEPER HIT PROPELLED by positive word-of-mouth, *The Bends* would gradually notch up two million global sales and re-enter the *Billboard* Hot 100. It eventually went platinum in Britain and climbed to a late peak of No 4. But as 1996 dawned, Radiohead's second album seemed overlooked and underrated.

In February, Yorke and Brian Eno jointly collected the Freddie Mercury prize at the Brits for the War Child compilation, *Help*. But Radiohead were beaten in all their nominated categories by all-conquering new boys Oasis. The Gallaghers had become rock's news clown princes almost overnight, much to Yorke's disdain. He dismissed the Mancunian brothers as "a freak show" and "mentally ill".

**"WE WERE RIPPING OFF THE PIXIES WHEN WE STARTED, OR TRYING TO AND FAILING"**

In this charged atmosphere, work began on the next Radiohead album. Writing and recording self-produced material with an open-ended deadline was supposed to defuse tensions between the group. Instead it made them worse. But initial sessions at Canned Applause were marred by problems more fundamental than musical differences. According to Jonny, "there was nowhere to eat or defecate, which are two fairly basic human drives."

In August Radiohead played a short US tour supporting Alanis Morissette. The "silly money" they earned almost made up for Morissette's big-haired covers of "Creep" and "Fake Plastic Trees". Back in Britain, with £100,000 worth of newly purchased mobile studio equipment, Radiohead decamped with engineer Nigel Godrich for two months to St Catherine's Court, actress Jane Seymour's 15th-Century mansion near Bath.

The location was beautiful, spooky and silent. Inevitably, Yorke hated it. "It became a complete fever, like being ill all the time," he said afterwards. "It was fucking horrible, I could never sleep."

*OK Computer* was initially planned as an upbeat reaction to *The Bends* and defiant demolition of Radiohead's gloomy image. But as recording progressed, its trip-hop symphonies and sci-fi lullabies brimmed over with nausea, disgust and travel sickness: *"The crackle of pig skin, the yuppies networking/The vomit, the vomit."* Pigs, crashing vehicles and millennial despair became recurring motifs. "The album's more about speed and transport than the future and technology," says Jonny Greenwood. "The songs are very transparent, it's very clear what they're about."

Yorke tried to make his voice sound different on every track. "He was getting very sick of the fact that he could sing about garden furniture and it would still sound very passionate," says Greenwood. Dark references to *"cattle prods and the IMF"* also reflected the singer's growing interest in *"voodoo economics"* and digestion of political tracts like Will Hutton's *The State We're In* and Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age Of Extremes*.

The track "Fitter, Happier" was voiced by computer speech software and ended with the brutal comment on modern consumerism: *"a pig in a cage on antibiotics"* – a line adapted from Jonathan Coe's darkly comic novel about arms



Backstage at the Grammies, Staples Center, LA, February 21, 2001

dealing and the death of the welfare state, *What A Carve Up!*. This extraordinary slice of digital nihilism was even considered as the lead-off single for *OK Computer*.

Instead, the towering six-and-a-half minute epic "Paranoid Android" was chosen, with an animated video by Magnus Carlsson featuring murder, mutilation and topless mermaids. MTV censored the mermaids. Eleven minutes long in its original form, this neo-prog mammoth was hailed as a "Bohemian Rhapsody" for the '90s. Jonny began to despise it. "I just couldn't stand it after the second time," he recalls. "If I was working in a shop or a factory, I'd go out for a cigarette break."

Colin Greenwood says "the idea behind 'Paranoid Android' was trying to do a combination of DJ Shadow and The Beatles. We've always aimed ourselves at this trajectory towards other people's music that we've fallen in love with. It's like lover's flattery, we try to emulate these people and we always fall short. When we did 'Creep' we were heavily into Scott Walker. We aim for the stars, and we hit just north of Oxford, ha!"

Ominously, Radiohead's US record company Capitol heard *OK Computer* and immediately downgraded sales forecasts from two million to 500,000. And Radiohead themselves were hardly expecting to find themselves the most acclaimed band on earth in the summer of 1997.

Early signs had been mixed. On June 8, Radiohead played the Tibetan Freedom concert in New York followed by an Irving Plaza gig attended by REM, Madonna, U2, Blur, Courtney Love and Lenny Kravitz. O'Brien moved Madonna to make sure his mother had the best table in the house. But at their next show, previewing mostly new material at the KROQ "weenie roast" in LA, they were booed offstage. Yorke exploded at the crowd, branding them "fucking mindless".

Released on June 16 in Britain and July 1 in the US, the reviews for *OK Computer* were beyond hysterical: "The first album of the 21st Century... The world's most important, innovative band... The Beatles' true heirs... the first British band since The Smiths to move rock onwards and upward." At the Barcelona album launch, Jonny Greenwood glumly mused "journalists like it, which is always ominous." Yorke added, "Oh shit, now we're in trouble." Very Radiohead.

**"THOM JUST DOESN'T LIKE PLAYING 'CREEP' – IT'S HIS WORDS, HE CAN DO WHAT HE WANTS WITH IT"**

"We were so insecure," says O'Brien. "The only reaction we'd had at that stage apart from the UK was the Americans calling it commercial suicide. We needed those good reviews and record sales. We were nervy because we hadn't gone for the easy option, we hadn't gone for *The Bends Part 2*."

Glastonbury 1997 caught Radiohead in the teeth of both triumph and adversity. Yorke was blinded by stage lights, his monitors blown, buzzing and vibrating like a human lighting conductor. He "played six songs to a pitch-black wall of nothingness" and almost left the stage.

"The lights on the floor just burned Thom's eyes out so he couldn't see anyone or hear anything," Colin Greenwood recalls. "He started to make mistakes and miscues and nearly walked offstage, but Jonny and Ed basically talked him out of it. He didn't have any monitors for the encores, which is amazing. So we have very mixed feelings. But if we'd done that a year before, we would have definitely left the stage – and our career in ruins."

Headlining Glastonbury was one of the most powerful and certainly the most significant performances in Radiohead's career to date. It was also the point where everything started to go supernova – and off the rails. Following more monitor trouble at the Torhout festival in Belgium in July, Yorke lambasted the "special people" in the crowd and stormed offstage. He began freezing up when "Creep" was mentioned in interviews and refused requests to play it live. "Fuck off, we're tired of it," he bawled at a Montreal audience. Fans who demanded old favourites were dismissed as "anally retarded".

*OK Computer* matched critical acclaim with commercial clout, going gold in the US (500,000 sales) and platinum in the UK (also 500,000) before Christmas. It topped almost every end-of-year album poll on the planet and was even voted the best album in history by one rock monthly. But once again, a more conventional rock'n'roll success story – The Verve – beat Radiohead at the Brits in February 1998. As consolation, the Oxford misfits still picked up two Ivor Novello songwriting awards and a Grammy for Best Alternative Rock Performance.

Radiohead toured *OK Computer* around the world and into immortality. Along the way, Yorke guested on the UNKLE album *Psyence Friction* with DJ Shadow, while he and Jonny recorded three Roxy Music covers for the *Velvet Goldmine* soundtrack. Band tension was never far away, though Yorke claimed at the time "we're much better at shouting at each other now, which is good. There used to be a lot of serious infighting under the guise of reasonable discussion, and now it's lots of shouting and eventually we decide, so that's kind of cool. It's sort of like a marriage."

A marriage heading for divorce, judging by Grant Gee's Radiohead tour documentary, *Meeting People Is Easy*. Premiered in November 1998, this queasily beautiful tapestry of millennial unease was the *Koyaanisqatsi* of rockumentaries. Mimicking the shifting textures and gear-crunching tempo changes of *OK Computer*, Gee's film caught the mind-warping mundanity and motion sickness of life on the road with a homesick, paranoid, psychologically scrambled art-rock quintet.

"He did so many edits of it," Colin Greenwood recalls. "This hot summer in London, this tiny room, we saw hundreds of them. The poor man. We ended up with over eight hours of edited footage from 40-odd. It was a mammoth undertaking – the heartache! But for all that stuff that you saw, there was all this paddling about in the sea in New Zealand and going to barbecues and getting wasted and go karting – but no-one wants to see that. It confirmed what everybody likes about us anyway."

Despite the multiple re-cuts, Gee was given a mostly free hand by the band. "We saw it before editing, and bits and pieces that felt like too much were taken out," Yorke explains. "Equally we kept saying to him, 'Can we have some light bits?' He was going, 'No'. Hurg hurg!"

Indeed, the film somehow failed to capture

SCOTT GRIES/IMAGEDIRECT









Country life: *(clockwise from top left)* Jonny, Colin, Phil and Ed, taking time out from recording sessions for *Kid A*/*Amnesiac*

JASON EVANS

Radiohead's naturally sunny, bouncy, happy-go-lucky side. "The idea, really, was to sort of burn out that element of the myth, or the glamour bit," Yorke adds glumly. "The actual brutal reality when you turn your domestic digital camera on and film somebody backstage before a show is a bit like *Meeting People Is Easy*. It's kind of supposed to be a rough guide on reasons not to be in a band."

Featuring teasing snippets of future *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* tracks, the film also caught Britain's most neurotic band on the verge of a nervous breakdown. "It was Radiohead, wasn't it?" Colin smiles feebly. "Eddie Izzard would do a good pisstake."

One scene in *Meeting People Is Easy* finds Yorke berating his fellow band members about the "headfuck" brought on by *OK Computer*, dismissing the acclaim as "bollocks" and concluding "We should get out while the going is good."

With hindsight, was it really that stressful?

"It wasn't stress, it morphed into something far more interesting," grins Yorke, rocking gently in his seat. "I don't know what. Totally out of control, almost like hallucinating all the time. It was great."

After *OK Computer*, Radiohead were proclaimed the most important, influential and forward-looking band since The Beatles. Radiohead's third album was probably the most hysterically praised release in rock history, earning the band a global popularity rating somewhere between The Beatles and Jesus.

How did Yorke react? He suffered a "total headfuck". It was a "fucking nightmare". He became "totally unhinged". Again.

At the peak of their career, Radiohead were a quivering mess of sickness and insecurity. It was time to rethink the band – or get out of the game altogether.

THOM YORKE GAZES at the greasy grey river slipping by outside. The afternoon has darkened, but he is brightening slightly. After nearly an hour of tense tooth-pulling he seems to be relaxing, opening up. Sometimes even laughing. He talks about how the fall-out after *OK Computer* meant remaking the rules, rewiring Radiohead for a new millennium. But first, and perhaps more importantly, he had to learn to stop acting like a spoilt bastard.

By his own admission, Yorke had become an egomaniac dictator who ran Radiohead as his personal fiefdom. His power within the band was "absolutely unbalanced, and I chose to subvert everybody else's power at all costs. But it's not as bad as that anymore. It's actually a lot more healthy, democracy-wise, now than it used to be, partly because I was so paranoid and uptight about not getting my own way, and growing a beard and starting to bake your own bread and stuff has made me realise that maybe I'm not right all the time."

That must have come as a shock.

"It was a fucking nasty shock, man," Yorke nods with a guilty grin. "I was terrible, awful. I created a climate of fear, the same way that Stalin did. Hurg hurg! I was very paranoid that things would get taken away from me. It was to do with being under massive amounts of pressure, as much as anything. You cannot make mistakes, you don't have time, you have to get this right. And it takes its toll, so I had to sort of attack."

In 1996, Yorke admitted, "I'm always losing my temper, and it's very rarely justified." In 1997, he told me, "You have to oscillate wildly between screaming megalomania and neurosis." But the *OK Computer* period turned him into a raging tyrant. "We should have stopped earlier and we didn't," Yorke says, "and in order to cope with things, you build up all these fences, and there was part of me that was this horrible ego that was totally out of control. It was kind of just annoying, you know."

How bad did it get? Did Yorke ever try and sack anyone else in Radiohead?

"I don't think so, no. The others wouldn't let me do stupid things like that."

Does he treat Radiohead as his personal kingdom? "Not any more." And other people's creative ideas are given breathing space? "Yes, and it's more fun – it's pointless otherwise, completely pointless. It was never really like that, but I kind of started thinking it was... I started thinking that it was all my idea, and it wasn't, it had never been my idea, but I started kidding myself that it was. In retrospect, I'm quite amazed that I got that bad, but I did."

The last time we met, Yorke had just thrown a fit onstage and the rest of the band seemed to tiptoe around him carefully. "Yes, that's something I used to do a lot," he shrugs. "I try and stop doing that, really, because it's damaging and pointless."

Of course, rock'n'roll has always indulged the Charismatic Bastard. John Lennon became an immortal beacon of Punk Truth by sneering and bullying while cheery, level-headed, professional Paul McCartney went down in history as Mr Light Entertainment. Just compare the critical standing of Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Johnny Rotten, Mark E

Smith or Kurt Cobain to their more courteous and reasonable contemporaries. Thus Thom Yorke is an icon to tortured teens everywhere, Colin Greenwood is the bass player in Radiohead.

Does Greenwood ever take offence at Yorke's volatile outbursts? "Not really, because it won't be on a personal level, so you can't take it personally," he shrugs. "I think everyone is fairly tentative with everybody else anyway. But obviously Thom reacts very acutely and is very sensitive to his environment."

The loosening of Radiohead's power structure also freed up their creative agenda. "It was weird," Yorke insists, "it was like starting the band again, in some ways, because a lot of the time you would have something written and go in and just bash through it. But now ideas come from all over the place which is good, much better." Yorke remains on a higher royalty rate as the band's main songwriter, but argues, "It's not massive at all... it's pretty even, actually, because that's the only way it would work. Otherwise it all gets very peculiar."

With born-again fervour, all five band members immersed themselves in the growing underground subculture of electronica, and began to use computers as prime compositional tools. With another open deadline, the intent was to remake Radiohead for the 21st Century, blurring the old singer-plus-band boundaries, teasing out the ghosts which haunt the vast no man's land dividing rock from techno.

"There's this middle ground between the two," says Yorke. "It's the grid that depresses me, being locked in a grid all the time. That's the best way of putting it really – that we've been locked on a grid."

Part of Yorke's agenda was clearly to remix his personal emotions out of the spotlight, slurring several vocals into mere textures and tone poems. But buried voices, cryptic words, cancelled interviews – all simply add weight to the myth of Yorke as tortured soul. As David Stubbs wrote in *Uncut*'s review of *Amnesiac* last month, "there's more 'said' in Yorke's pained, implacable, soaring wail than in many of his lyrics." If he is trying to avoid marketing himself as a "personality", Yorke is failing gloriously. The less he tries to give away, the more it seems worth knowing.

Another spur behind the creative left turn of *Kid A* was doubtless the new crop of emotionally charged guitar bands cruising in Radiohead's wake, their corporate paymasters plainly hoping to bathe in reflected glory. Just as Travis, Muse, Coldplay and their peers seemed to consolidate this copycat A&R trend, the original Radiohead wisely set their controls for galaxies new.

"Everybody's got to start somewhere," shrugs Yorke diplomatically, but his tone is one of thinly veiled contempt. "Just like we were ripping off the Pixies when we started, or trying to and failing. But at the same time, the one thing that does my head in about it in this country is that Radio 1 will willingly play that lot and won't touch us with a bargepole – that sort of makes me spit blood. It's all about supply and demand and as, of course, we're not supplying that demand now then someone else ought to."

Radiohead stumbled through 1999 with recording sessions in Gloucestershire, Paris and Copenhagen, but progress was slow. "It's taken us seven years to get this sort of freedom," confessed O'Brien in his online diary at the band's website, www.radiohead.com. "It's what we always wanted, but it could be so easy to fuck it all up."

After *OK Computer*, Yorke bought a new house overlooking a remote Dorset beach, and blasted his overheated brain with fresh air. "I got back into drawing," says the man who left Exeter University with a 2:1 in English and Art. "Lots of drawing, and lots of walking. It was the best help I could get really, especially in extreme weather and strong winds and things like that. It kind of reflects what's going on inside."

A thoroughly English cure. Never mind the self-medicating slackers of the Prozac Nation, we do things rather differently over here. Fresh air and solitude. A brisk walk, an improving book. Very Radiohead.

**"IT'S DAWNED ON US THAT OUR PROBLEMS ARE UTTERLY, UTTERLY IRRELEVANT..."**

Yorke's windswept comedown sessions also helped alchemise personal angst into political anger. The undercurrent of social protest which haunted *OK Computer* finally crystallised into serious activism when Yorke joined Jubilee 2000's Drop The Debt campaign, finding a healthy outlet for his natural persecution mania in the growing anti-globalisation protest movement. If nothing else, he gained a sense of perspective.

"Radiohead very much came out of the culture of complaint," he announced in 1999. "We've grown up now and it's dawned on us that our problems are utterly, utterly irrelevant."

Yorke had been on protest demos as far back as the late '80s, but grew impatient with old political definitions. "I got involved with left-wing stuff when I was at university and it was just so boring, like comparing the size of your penis – how much redder am I than you? It's just really dull, really macho. A waste of space, really. This to me has nothing to do with the politics that are being discussed. This is to do with the operations of people like the IMF who are responsible for the deaths of millions of people every year around the globe, who we have put into power, we finance, and we don't know who they are, and they're not answerable to us in any way, and yet they decide everything. This is a humanitarian issue."

So it was a personal connection? "Yes, it was exactly that. I had to wait for it to become personal, which it did, really. And getting involved in things like Jubilee 2000 made it personal for me."

The Jubilee 2000 march at the 1999 G8 summit in Cologne showed Thom the power of political spin, with armed police keeping protestors at bay while Tony Blair claimed his own victory against Third World debt. "Complete bullshit," is his honest assessment of the event. "He hijacked it because he'd failed on all the other issues he was trying to deal with that weekend. When you're actually there and that shit's happening to you, you think: this is amazing, I'll never ever see this again, I'll never be this side of the fence. It was a completely peaceful protest and they were calling us trouble-makers. Jubilee 2000! It's a bunch of Christian women in cardigans!"

During the lengthy, sporadic sessions which eventually spawned *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*, Yorke digested Naomi Klein's seminal anti-globalisation tract *No Logo*. A ready-made manifesto for Radiohead?

"Not really, because all the songs were written," Yorke says. "You know, we'd read our Chomsky and our John Pilger. But she put connections together which I thought were good. And since then, as she says herself, she has a pretty face and she can sell the ideas to people and she gets asked onto chat shows and she knows exactly what she's doing. I think that's a cool attitude. She knows she's being used."

The Trojan Horse idea? Fighting the system from within? "Totally. But because of the nature of the protectionist media, people like her will be hung, drawn and quartered at some point, and patronised by a large section of mainstream political media. But she knows it's going to happen, and that's fine. At least the issues are getting into the mainstream, even though they're roundly dismissed by all those on the payroll."

But some would argue that both Klein and Radiohead are "on the payroll" as much as anyone. After all, both of these anti-globalisation figureheads are bankrolled by huge media conglomerates: Radiohead by EMI, Klein by Murdoch-owned HarperCollins. For all his anti-corporate rhetoric, Yorke's music is promoted and distributed by a vast global marketing machine. Can he live with this contradiction?

"Not really, I'm pretty touchy about it," he grumbles. "But if you want to actually have your record in a shop, then you've got no way




RICHARD HANSON

round it because you have to go through major distributors and they've all got deals and blah blah blah. There isn't a way around it. Personally one of the reasons that I wanted to be in a band was actually to be on the high street. I don't want to be in a cupboard. I write music to actually communicate things to people."

So you can't do anything without getting your hands dirty? "Well, you can, and I respect people who do because I think that's the correct thing to do. If you can do it, then you should. And if you can't, then you can't."

Naomi Klein and Radiohead have become friends, and namecheck each other in interviews. Two highly respected anti-brand brand leaders joined in cross-marketing synergy. An unavoidable consequence of being "products" in the marketplace, maybe, but the irony is amusing.

However, Klein tells *Uncut* that, "I really don't think it's accurate to give the impression that the band is offering some kind of celebrity endorsement for these ideas. Their political ideas clearly inform the way they interact with the world in a far more organic way than that."

Klein also claims "my personal influence on Radiohead has been greatly exaggerated. The band had these political ideas long before reading my book, but until a couple of years ago there was less going on politically to tap into. That's the way movements work – they are contagious. If some of the band members gave the impression that the book inspired them to get more actively involved in activism, I suspect they were referring less to *No Logo* than to being inspired by the movement itself, ie, Reclaim The Streets, Indymedia, Drop The Debt, the protests in Seattle – which, after all, is the subject of *No Logo*."

Even so, Klein's book was widely assumed to have influenced Radiohead's sponsorship-free big tent tour in summer 2000. "The only statement was having a good sound to people's ears," says Jonny Greenwood. "The lack of adverts was kind of a lucky by-product. It didn't save us any more money, or make us any more." Radiohead also played London's Meltdown festival at curator Scott Walker's personal invitation – a full circle of sorts, since "Creep" was their attempt to write a Walker song.

*KID A* FINALLY arrived in September 2000. An artfully sequenced collage of drones and tones, fissures and moans, Radiohead's audacious reinvention proved impenetrably self-indulgent to some, heroically avant-garde to others. The cultural significance of a huge global rock act releasing these fragmented, opaque, largely guitar-free moonscapes on a major label was almost palpable. This was head music for post-rave ears, the weightless abstraction of techno wedded to the weighty inner monologues of rock. Comparisons with late-'60s Beatles and early-'70s Pink Floyd proved irresistible. Miles Davis, PiL, Joy Division, My Bloody Valentine and Aphex Twin were added for good measure.

With no singles, no videos, minimal press and only a handful of hysterical (but useless) "i-blip" TV clips as promotion, *Kid A* carved its own rarefied media space. Perhaps because it was the first Radiohead record to abandon the visceral thrust of what Thom once called "all the ugly male sleazy semen-smelling rock bullshit", some called the record a failure of nerve. Were Radiohead raising the stakes or simply retreating to the experimental margins?

"The dangerous thing is that all this is presupposing we were somehow trying to be experimental," frowns Jonny, "which I'm not sure is true. To me, half of *Kid A* sounds like half of *OK Computer*. There was no line drawn underneath, we just carry on. I mean, for the market we've arguably been making wrong turns since *The Bends*, and that was so long ago. But it's not something we try and do or avoid, really. I think if we'd done three or four albums full of 'Creep's or something, and then done this, I could understand. But we're just drifting off and always have been."

An emphatic validation came when *Kid A* topped the album chart on both sides of the Atlantic. But even this achievement Colin Greenwood dismisses as a fluke. "It was like prize-giving day at the media," he grimaces.

**"IF YOU EXPLAIN YOURSELF THEN THINGS WILL BE ALL RIGHT: IGNORANCE IS THE REASON PEOPLE GET HURT"**

"They had the gold trophy that the headmaster was about to give to us because of previous form. Then they heard the record and it got put back in the glass cabinet for the next people. It was like we'd won before we'd actually done the race."

OVER THE PAST year, Radiohead have busied themselves with non-band projects and personal concerns. O'Brien joined an all-star supergroup with Johnny Marr, Tim Finn and Lisa Germano in New Zealand. Yorke sang a duet on PJ Harvey's LP. In February, he and Rachel gave birth to their first son, Noah.

Meanwhile, *Amnesiac* was released last month to very positive reviews, completing the cycle started by *Kid A*. "One kind of answers the questions the other one throws up, maybe that's the best way of saying how are they related," says Yorke. "I think it makes much more sense of *Kid A*. It explains *Kid A* in a cool kind of way. But it's nice to get it all finished and move on."

Contrary to advance press speculation, *Amnesiac* proved easily as experimental as its sister album, although some of its crackly textures sound more antique than futuristic. If *Kid A* resembled a sense-warping bulletin from the mid-21st Century, its sequel seems to excavate the lost musical civilisations of the mid-20th Century – especially the progressive jazz moodscapes of Miles Davis, Charles Mingus and Chet Baker. One track, the sublime "Life In A Glasshouse", even features 80-year old veteran jazz trumpeter Humphrey Lyttelton and his band. Having mapped the sci-fi fringes of rock on *OK Computer* and *Kid A*, Radiohead are now reinventing the pre-rock past.

*Amnesiac* arrived in the same week as Tony Blair's historic second election landslide. Pure coincidence, of course, but one track "You And Whose Army" has been widely seen as an attack on the Prime Minister. Yorke has lambasted Blair in the past, but plays down any personal animosity. "It's about anybody who is put into a position of power and is then surrounded by his cronies and goes off and does this thing and doesn't feel that he's answerable to anybody. Blair, Yorke argues, is merely a "point man" for the shadow forces of globalisation. "He's just a pawn, a cog in the wheels. But politicians are being incredibly naïve if they think people are going to sit down and let it happen. They won't, I don't think. They're not that fucking stupid."

By the end of our two-hour chat, Yorke has eased his foot off the paranoia pedal, laughed seven times, smiled five, and taken the piss out of himself twice. An improvement on our frosty start. Is the passive-aggressive pop pixie more at ease with himself these days?

"Oh yes, big-time," Yorke nods. "In a superficial, late-twenties kind of a way. Hitting 30, entering 32, about to probably visit 33. Mellowing out, beards, big cars, baking your own bread. Definitely. Just growing up, really. Growing up is something to be proud of. Unless you're The Rolling Stones, of course."

Radiohead are not The Rolling Stones. Even if they were that crassly populist, they could never hope to recreate that level of cultural impact. Simply leaving the same footprint on history as personal benchmarks like Joy Division or The Smiths might prove a tall order. Radiohead may outsell both these cult icons many times over, but the wheel has already been invented and The Bible written. Pop's cultural space is much more cluttered today, its consumers more sophisticated and cynical. Amid the distracting buzz of lifestyle pornography and what Thom Yorke calls "media noise bullshit", it is impossible to matter now in the way The Beatles or the Pistols mattered.

When Bowie made *Low* and *"Heroes"*, or Pink Floyd made *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, they were operating in a virtual vacuum of avant-garde ideas. But Radiohead share their era with Portishead, Primal Scream, Massive Attack, Mercury Rev – even U2 have flirted with deconstructed, post-rock textures. That's why Radiohead need to be big to matter. Do Squarepusher fill stadiums? Will Tortoise ever headline Glastonbury? Anyone can be a fringe cult, it's much harder to be left-field superstars, dragging a large chunk of pop culture behind you.

But history has not finished with Radiohead yet, and vice versa. The Oxford oddballs have undoubtedly moved rock forward, expanding the grammar of pop with *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*. Their importance in the coming decade depends on whether their vast global fanbase is prepared to follow them into uncharted waters, and whether



Killer cars: summer 2001 – promo shoot for *Amnesiac*

other mainstream rock acts will pick up the gauntlet they have thrown down. By no means a sure thing in either case – but a tidal wave of stadium esoterica would be something to behold. Come on, Coldplay! Jump to it, Travis!

ANOTHER TRANSATLANTIC CHART smash, *Amnesiac* is the first Radiohead album not to include lyrics. "I've changed my relationship with the words I sing on this one," Yorke whispers. "It's much less confessional. I've just fucking had enough of that."

Oh yeah? He said exactly the same thing last album. And the album before. "That's right, yes. Bugger! Shit! All right, it's less than it was – all right? Things like 'Pyramid Song' is hardly what you'd call confessional really... although it is."

Cryptic, evasive, paranoid. But Thom Yorke's decade-long mission to erase the personal, cathartic, raw-nerved element of his songwriting has been an abject and glorious failure. Thankfully so, because a fierce emotional charge is one of the key qualities that sets his band apart from the competent strummers behind them and obscure ambi-tech boffins ahead. Without Yorke's gaping wound of a voice, Radiohead really would be aloof gentleman rockers in the Pink Floyd tradition.

After 10 years of break-ups and breakdowns, Radiohead have settled into some kind of workable routine. They live apart from the media glare. They tour in short bursts, usually when they choose. They have their own studio, their own rhythm, and the commercial mandate to do what they please. They seem to be down to one serious band meltdown per album.

"It's been pretty stable, really," frowns long-suffering Colin, Radiohead's chief diplomat and peacemaker. "I used to think it's all going to end tomorrow, every day – but I don't think about that any more because it's really unhealthy. Am I ready for it to end? Probably not. You know people go to The Priory for rehab for drugs? I'd have to go to rehab for organising my life."

Does Greenwood need Radiohead more than Radiohead needs him? "Definitely. That's the one most emphatic, to all the questions in your interview, it's a big yes, underlined, italic, with a flashing red light behind it."

Right now there are half-finished tapes all over Radiohead's studio, but no future masterplan, no clear direction. "It's much more like, this is an ongoing, healthy, slightly less destructive, slightly more enjoyable thing that we decided to do," says Yorke, visibly brightening as his car ride back to Oxford looms.

But if an air of calm hangs over Radiohead today, history tells us that it won't last. Yorke will doubtless find the success of *Amnesiac* a "headfuck". There will almost certainly be tears and traumas ahead. The crucifixion of Thom Yorke dictates that genius equals pain.

"It's not genius," frowns O'Brien, breezily dashing off to a gathering of Victorian polar explorers. "It's just that if you want something good to come out of something, you have to put in a lot of effort and that involves a lot of hard work, and a lot of blood, sweat and tears sometimes. No different to anything, no different to what we all do."

The interview is over. Radiohead are moving onwards. Maybe we'll take the journey with them, or perhaps we will get off at the next stop. Thom Yorke might make the world a finer, fairer place. Or maybe he will end up choking on the festering contempt for his fellow man which seems to fuel his bilious, acerbic, lyrical worldview. "Really? Hmmm," Yorke ponders the accusation, calmly scanning his mental hard disk. "I don't think it's about people," he says cautiously. "A lot of it's about self-created demons. People build themselves their own mazes that they can't get out of... but no, I'm not negative. In fact, if I was negative about strangers in the street, then I think I'd go mad, definitely."

So Thom Yorke does have some faith in the human race?

"Yes," he says softly. "Given time and the correct amount of information. That's one of the things I really hang on to. If you explain yourself then things will be all right. Ignorance is the reason people get hurt."

Yorke's minders are hovering now, eager to wrap the golden child back up in cotton wool and whisk him away to safety. In fact, so keen is he to escape that he rises from the table and darts through the wrong exit, searching for a taxi that isn't there.

He returns sheepishly, a minute later, laughing quietly.

*Uncut* bids Yorke goodbye with an intended note of conciliation. You know what, Thom? You really should do more interviews.

"You know what...?" he snaps back, darting for the door. But he never finishes his sentence.

DAN HOLDSWORTH/RIK PENKCOMBE


"We think this is
a sparkly, shiny pop record.
But people won't get it..."

*Kid A* and *Amnesiac* were, says Thom Yorke, "us trawling around finding other things to do." *Hail To The Thief*, though, is a return of sorts to more accessible territory – a "clear and pretty", coherent pop album, they claim. In Radiohead's world, of course, nothing is ever quite so simple. *JOHN ROBINSON* enters the Oxford gloaming to talk politics, allusively, with the man who would be Prime Minister.




BACK THEN, THEY were hailed as the chiefs. Six years ago, Radiohead looked around them at the end of the 20th Century, and wrote *OK Computer*, an album that tried to record, if not make sense of, the mess that they found. It was about advertising, extreme politics, planes crashing, fear, brainwashing. About the world as we now know it, although it was mostly paranoia then.

Then they talked in depth about it all. And talked some more. And after a while they found it all became quite insane, and didn't talk to anyone at all. Even their albums became inscrutable to the point of secrecy. But after six years' radio silence Radiohead are back. They're talking about what they've been up to. Talking to *NME*, in fact, about what it all means.

This is what they're saying about their new album. Jonny Greenwood, Radiohead's guitarist, thinks it's all a fairy story – like turning up at a house made of sweets, only to find there's an old woman inside who's eating children. Thom Yorke, Radiohead's singer, nods in agreement and can see his point. But when he thinks about *Hail To The Thief*, he thinks about driving in his car, at dusk, down country lanes.

It was here, after all, that he first began to notice it. He doesn't want to sound like a lunatic or anything, but as he drove, as he would do most nights during Radiohead's last six-month break, he found he was entering a dream-like state. It quite tripped his head out, actually.

As he drove, he saw several things under the blue glare of his headlights. The animals running for cover. The strange quality of light at that time of day. But above all, he'd notice the shadows, and it was these particularly that set him thinking. They set him thinking about 'the gloaming'. Previously he knew this archaic word for 'twilight' as the sort of thing that turned up in sentimental ballads, and as such definitely a bit on the dodgy side – "Roaming In The Gloaming", all that. As he thought about it some more, though, he began to think it might be more appropriate than he first imagined. Already new songs, in various stages of completion, were beginning to circulate between band members. 'The gloaming', with its slightly gloomy suggestion of darkness and the end of the day, might fit in nicely with ideas about the world he was beginning to formulate.

Traditionally, musicians have used the countryside as a place to "get their heads together". A year later, with the new Radiohead album *Hail To The Thief* finished, subtitled, and quite often referred to by him as 'The Gloaming', Thom Yorke was beginning to wonder whether his experience had the opposite effect.

"I sound like a loony," he says, as he sips his coffee outside an Oxford hotel. "But there's an awful lot of shadows and malignant forces that are pulling strings at the moment. It's barely human, it's something that's coming from somewhere else, and that is impossible to control.

"Now, I don't know if you have this experience in your job," he continues, "but in my job you meet people who have ceased to be human. You know how in an office there's always one person who's like this ambitious arsehole who doesn't care who he treads on, they actually think they're doing the right thing? Or if you meet a powerful politician – it's like shaking hands with thin air. The tornado has nothing in the middle. The gloaming to me is exploring this unhealthy darkness, which it seems it's impossible to counteract."

**"THERE'S AN AWFUL LOT OF SHADOWS AND MALIGNANT FORCES THAT ARE PULLING STRINGS AT THE MOMENT"**

Thom leans back in his chair and grins.

"There you go," he says, with some finality. "Look me up!"

IT MIGHT BE a dark and shadowy place, but the subject of Radiohead's new album is approached on a beautiful day, in bright sunlight. What's more, it becomes obvious that a suitably summery mood envelops this particular portion of Radiohead. Thom Yorke (large sunglasses, greying beard, dressed in jeans and a bleached denim shirt, altogether looking a bit more like a painter than a rock star) and Jonny Greenwood (quiet, funny, super-articulate) are, after all, extremely satisfied with what they've just achieved. Happy that it's been completed quickly, in just seven weeks in the studio. Happy that it's vindicated a new working method, but most of all happy that *Hail To The Thief* is an album, that is, in Thom's two-word estimation of it: "Coherent. Pop."

This, *Hail To The Thief* undoubtedly is, but it's also plenty more besides. Already held up as both a protest album and an album that signals the band coming to their senses and triumphantly returning to their native land, Guitar Rock, it starts life as a record on which there has been intense speculation, a great deal of which will prove to have been misguided. It's been a highly anticipated album in other ways, too, rough versions of its songs having been leaked, three months in advance of its release, onto the internet.

Thom leans over to the 'Security Protected' CD of the album sat on the table before him, points to the ominous skull and crossbones logo and harrumphs loudly. "Not that bloody secure though, is it?"

Safe, secure... *Hail To The Thief*, in a more abstract sense, is certainly none of these. *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* were undoubtedly important albums, but this is something else altogether – bigger, at 56 minutes, better for having a wealth of styles that hang together brilliantly. Were statues and monuments and the kind of things they represent not so completely against the tone of this album, you could say it was "statuesque" or "monumental". As it is, it will probably have to suffice to say that it's the most satisfying and substantial Radiohead album since *OK Computer*.

And this, in a way, is what's most striking about meeting two of the people who helped to make it. So large is the shadow that Radiohead's music has cast over the last eight years, it's difficult to square their achievements with the people in front of you. Not rude. Not especially charismatic. Not blessed with the self-assurance of accomplished shakers and fakers, instead Radiohead appear to have remained much the same as they ever were. In fact, saving the occasional schoolmasterly, slightly condescending remark like, "What I think you're failing to understand here...", they're more than happy to tell you what they've been up to, and help demystify themselves a bit further. *Hail To The Thief*, they explain, was notable for its absence of dark arts.

"I think," says Thom, "we were feeling more



Thom Yorke, 2003: "If you try to write anything political, it's just... shite"

joyful and more positive about where we ended up being. On tour, the new songs seemed like – they seemed like songs where everyone knew what was going on much more. It was a much more positive experience, and to me the music sounds much more positive and alive.
I don't think it sounds more rock, I just think it sounds more alive.

"We decided we were going to not progress," he smiles. "We were going to take a step left, a step back, a step right a bit, and then forward, then go round in circles."

So it was a different approach to the last two?

"Then, it was more that there was lots of stuff we got into and wanted to try out," he says. "That was it, really. After *OK Computer*, it was a case of, 'Been there, done that, bored shitless of it – let's do something else.'

"When we went in the studio before, it was one of those classic scenarios that usually split bands up – where there's no preparation and no-one knows what's going on, and it just becomes about being in the studio."

Was it a battle of wills?

"It wasn't really a battle of wills," says Thom, "it was just that everyone thought I was crackers for a bit. Is that a battle of wills? With the last two, nobody even knew when the verse was going to break into the chorus. I was insisting on recording absolutely everything, so every act had this reaction and analysis... all this stuff that I should've got out of my system at art college, but I didn't. The whole Can tip – tape everywhere. So much tape. We're contemplating wiping it, because you can't get that type of tape anymore."

This time, things were different. Optimistically, or so they thought, the band set themselves a new timetable for their new album. After the last leg of their Amnesiac tour finished in Japan, they would take six months off to develop new ideas. They would then regroup for three months to work them through and rehearse them, and then go on a brief tour to decide how well the songs were shaping up. Only then would they go into the studio with Nigel Godrich and attempt to record what they'd done. This, to their surprise, was what they managed to do, and as a result, says Jonny, it's an album bearing the stamp of the circumstances that led to it being made.

"Everybody had an idea in their head of the songs as musical ideas, but also no idea of how they should be done," he says. "Phil [*Selway, drums*] suggesting that parts be cut out or repeated, or whatever... these are all part of the composing process for us. It's quite hard to explain.

"Us going and playing in a room, it's not something that we worship as being the only way, but it's a great skill that we realise that we have, and for some songs it's a great way to work. But for other songs it can sound flat and just not work, and no big deal."

"We had six months to deal with it all," says Thom. "*Kid A* and *Amnesiac* was us trawling around finding other things to do – but saying

**"AFTER *OK COMPUTER*, IT WAS A CASE OF, 'BEEN THERE, DONE THAT, BORED SHITLESS OF IT'"**

that, the end result is always us. We could trawl around for years, and still sound like us."

He pauses, and laughs.

"No matter how hard I try. Heheheheheh!"

THRILLING, FILLED WITH great rock music... *Hail To The Thief* undoubtedly sounds like Radiohead. However joyful to make, no matter how satisfying to listen to, though, this is undoubtedly an album with a considerable darkness at its heart.

Jonny listens to it and hears "confusion, avoiding things, looking after yourself and your family". It's a human struggle he's talking about, and it's one that *Hail To The Thief* records admirably. Always concerned with the fate of the individual in the modern world, over the past three years Radiohead have steadily been making rock music that's more and more about the survival of the fittest and that implicitly ponders the fate of those who get left behind. *Kid A*'s brutal riffing and disturbing ambience, *Amnesiac*'s drowned cats and tough hedges – there's violence everywhere in Radiohead's recent world, natural and man-made in equal measure.

Part of the reason that *Hail To The Thief* is like this, explains Thom, is because of the noise in his house. As the political events in the world following 9/11 unfolded, he listened to them on the radio, and wrote them down.

"I was listening to lots of Radio 4," he says. "*The Today Programme*, *PM* and *The World At One* every day, and whenever I heard words that rang bells in my head, I'd write them down, until I had this really long list, which is basically much of the artwork."

"Wax Eyes", "No Way Out", "Millbank", and of course, 'Gloaming'... the words on Thom's list that find their way onto *Hail To The Thief*'s artwork are set out like place names on a particularly sinister landscape. George Bush had a 'roadmap' on which he marked out his plans for the Middle East. Here, Radiohead have devised one, too.

"Except ours is better," chuckles Thom. "More coherent."

Alongside their roadmap, they have for the first time since *OK Computer* included the lyrics. After the release of that album, Thom found it had been analysed to such an extent it felt like other people had put so much of themselves into it, it no longer had anything to do with him. After two albums' silence in this respect, he now feels able to face down the interpretive army.

From the LP title (a reference to George Bush's election 'win'), to the dark mood in the songs, it's possible to get a first impression of *Hail To The Thief* as an overly political album. It is, says Thom, not quite as cut and dried as that. "The point, which you chaps have failed to grasp, perhaps understandably," he says "is that I was cutting these things out, and deliberately taking them out of context, so they're like wallpaper.

"Then when I needed words for the songs, I'd be taking them out of this wallpaper and they were out of any political context at all. That was sort of the point. The point was this very powerful language, but I didn't want to use it to say anything deliberate, as it just wouldn't work.

"If you try and write anything political," he continues, "it's just... shite. Unless you're The Clash, in which case you can get away with it. But we can't, and have no intention of doing."

You were using a cut-up technique instead?

"It wasn't heavily thought out," says Thom. "This was the noise going round my house, and so it was the noise that ended up in the songs. This was during the Afghan war and stuff, and lots of it felt wrong. Everything felt wrong. It was like overhearing other people's conversations and having them set something off in your head – I was deliberately trying to take any of the anger out of it."

"It was a shock to me, reading the whole piece through afterwards, that it's so angry – that wasn't really the intention, and I've not really been in that situation before with lyrics. The only reason they sound like they do is because they work with the music. So if the music's not all there to begin with, I'd never get away with it. On the page they read like bad poetry, because that's what they are, they're lyrics to a song, they're not poems. The music's the energy that puts it together.

"With most of the lyrics, like the ones on 'Go To Sleep', I was thinking, 'Well, this is obviously all nonsense. I'll have to rewrite it.' Then there we were in the day of recording in the studio and I hadn't rewritten it yet, so it was, 'Right, they'll have to be it.' And now I look at it, they're the lyrics I'm most proud of. They're involuntary, there was no mandate, no trying to make a statement, but obviously somewhere in the back of my head that was happening.

"I hadn't realised how angry it all was until afterwards," says Thom. "Jonny and I had a chat about it, and it was like, 'Fucking hell...' It wasn't intentional. The whole point was, having written all the songs and music, it wasn't until typing it up that you realise where it came from."

Do you feel a responsibility to be the band recording world events?

"No, absolutely bloody not," fumes Thom. "It's embarrassing, I was making a conscious effort not to do anything like that – but this stuff's in the air."

Jonny gently suggests that there was no 'manifesto' to *Hail To The Thief*.

Thom continues. "We could have done that," he says. "But that would have split up the band straight off, I can guarantee you...

"Like, 'OK chaps, we're in the cash! Ready? Go!'"

RADIOHEAD'S ROADMAP HAS led them instead down alternative, but no less revolutionary avenues. Featuring some of their most impressive rock music (from the album's opener "2+2=5", through to "Go To Sleep", and the epic, Bowie-esque single "There There"), the album has nonetheless proved a place for Jonny Greenwood to indulge, rather than his inner guitar hero, his inner teenage nerd. Instead of being disempowered by Radiohead's recent shift away from guitar music, Jonny's found it all quite liberating – instead of using other people's computer programmes to find new sounds, he began to write his own.

"My guitar is 11 years old, and my laptop is two years old, my piano is a hundred and something years old," he says. "There's no worship attached to any of them. There are people doing electronic music for whom the thought of recording acoustic sounds would make them run to the toilet with vomit leaking through their fingers, and some guitar bands probably feel the same. We can only use these things in one, fairly limited way. It's partly why we keep moving around and using these different things."

Did they miss rock music?

"The thing about the guitar," says Thom, "is that it has all this baggage attached to it. There's a lot of it about. So I find it difficult to get off on the guitar, and probably always will. But I'm having the same problems with the piano – I only know three tricks and I've used them all now. So now what?"

Jonny is not one to ever plead the superiority of rock.

"There's these shows on Radio 6," he says, "which seems to suggest that unless a song has a guitar intro, then that singer doesn't mean it somehow..."

Thom interrupts.

"I never mean it," he says triumphantly. "It's all for cash!"

**"I'D LIKE TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT, OR PRIME MINISTER – I THINK I COULD DO A BETTER JOB"**

Somewhere in among the guitars and computers, the darkness and the jokes, ("There are jokes," says Jonny) lies the key to *Hail To The Thief*'s considerable success. Exhilarating though it is, however, it's impossible to shake the shadows that the album brings in its wake. For every sweet tune, there's an idea that leaves a bad taste – the plight of the little man protecting his family, trying to prevent himself from being erased by forces beyond his control. It's this that makes Jonny think that the album's like a Grimm fairytale. It's this, too, that makes Thom a little worried about the album's fate.

"Here we go," he says. "I'm going to speak the truth. As far as we're concerned, we've made a record we think is very coherent – we think that this is a sparkly, shiny pop record. Clear and pretty. But I think people won't get it, that it won't come across to some people, which is hard to get your head around."

In what way?

"Because in it there's lots of looking to the future and seeing fuck all," he says, "and people don't want to hear it. I don't feel it anymore, because I've just finished an album that's about that. But that's probably a very good reason for people not to be interested in this record, if they don't want to hear that atmosphere. I think they should go and buy something else. There's a general sort of fear of the unknown, fear of the future, that it's being jeopardised, that it's extremely difficult to do very much about, because things have been set in motion which seem to be unstoppable. It's something that's there all the way through – in the artwork, there in everything."

But you do your bit, don't you?

[*With incredible scorn*] "No."

You don't think so? Making intelligent rock records that try to say something about it?

Thom mutters something inaudible.

Excuse me? "That no-one gives a fuck about."

You don't think anyone gives a fuck about them? "Not really," he says. "It's only rock music. You don't write anything thinking, 'This is an important statement', not if you want to carry on writing. You can't take responsibility for the impact or not it's going to have; if you do, you're fucked, you're so up your arse."

I understand that. But what would you prefer to be doing?

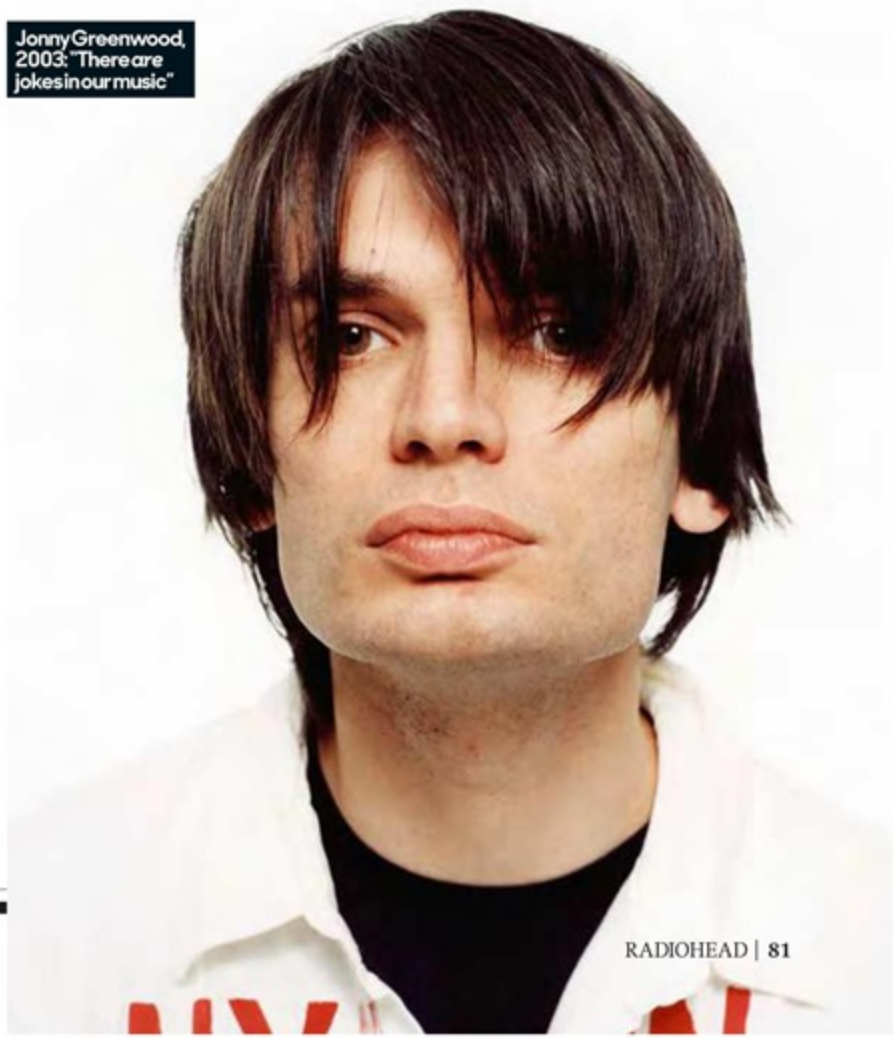
"Well," says Thom, brightening considerably, "I'd like to run for President. Or Prime Minister. I think I could do a better job. I think most people could. That would be my contribution. If anyone's willing to fund me, I'd be down with that."

Thom Yorke for PM?

His own question time drawing to a close, Thom leans back in his chair, momentarily satisfied with this concept, if with very little else.

"Yeah."

In the bright morning, the shadows have for the time being, been banished. Still, it's nice that Thom Yorke isn't locked up, or in government just yet. Far better instead that Radiohead be out there in the twilight with us. Roaming, as the old song had it, in the gloaming.



Jonny Greenwood, 2003: "There are jokes in our music"






# "Dodgy Kraftwerk exploration", "Freeform jazz nightmares" *Bagpuss* and "the angriest thing I've written..."

**Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood guide John Robinson along the roadmap of *Hail To The Thief*. "The whole thing ends with a bit of a shrug..."**




## 2+2=5 (THE LUKEWARM)

**A brutal rocker, reminiscent at times of Jeff Buckley's post-*Grace* material. A "can't you see what's happening in the world?" sort of song.**

**THOM YORKE:** "Sort of, but not entirely serious. That song's pretty throwaway, really. It's got guitars in it – we did it in a hurry, because it was a test. Nigel [*Godrich, producer*] wouldn't let us eat anything until we'd done it. It was four in the afternoon, and we were all starving. I didn't have any of the words, so I had to write them all down quickly."

**JONNY GREENWOOD:** "It was the first thing we recorded, on the first day."

**THOM:** "It was the most number of syllables I've tried to get into a line, ever: *'Swat 'em like flies but the buggers keep coming back'*."

**NME:** Tell us about these subtitles.

**THOM:** "I was having trouble with titles. *Hail To The Thief* was also called 'The Gloaming' and I wanted to subtitle that, so I decided to carry on. I have this big list that I carry around and they come from there. And from kids' programmes because I was watching a few of those. Mostly *Bagpuss*. I like *Bagpuss*."

## SIT DOWN. STAND UP. (SNAKES & LADDERS)

**A mixture of sleepy-sounding guitars with a hectic, techno conclusion; the essence of the *Hail To The Thief* practice. A key lyric is: *"We can wipe you out anytime"*.**

**THOM:** "That was written five years ago, in fact. Post *OK Computer*, around the delights of Rwanda, watching that on TV."

**JONNY:** "A lot of the lines and lyrics are older than people are assuming, I think. Like 'I Will' is from five years ago. In the lyrics I hear confusion and escape, like, 'I'm going to stay at home and look after the people I care about, buy a month's supply of food'."

**THOM:** [*Laughs*] "Spot the new father!"

Jonny: "So I think it's wrong to think there's a coherent thing running through the album. The whole thing ends, for me, with a bit of a shrug."

## SAIL TO THE MOON (BRUSH THE COBWEBS OUT OF THE SKY)

**A beautiful song which seems to be about a less than beautiful idea – the terrifying responsibilities that come with enormous power.**

**THOM:** "That was written in five minutes. That's a love song, I think it's a bit lovely. There's a lot of that – about responsibility. Lots of looking to the future and seeing fuck all. That's probably a very good reason for people not to be interested in this record. If they don't want to hear that atmosphere I think they should go and buy something else. A general fear of the future, that it's being jeopardised, that it's difficult to do very much about, because things have been set in motion which seem unstoppable."

## BACKDRIFTS (HONEYMOON IS OVER)

**A great melody with a sparse electronic accompaniment, as if a song from *The Bends* or *OK Computer* has been remixed by Autechre. Lyrics suggest it's about covering your tracks.**

**JONNY:** "That's pretty old. That was started, I guess, about three years ago. Then there was an acceleration in terms of writing and arranging, where it came together quite quickly from being a bit aimless to quite exciting."

**THOM:** "As to where the words go, that one is pretty difficult to explain. The original thing, which was unrecognisable, was written on one of those Q170 [*sequencer*] things, that you can program on. Björk uses them. We were stuck in a snowdrift in Japan. It was the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. The snow was piled high on the branches, and then a bullet train would go past, and the snow would drop off the branch. The whole world was utterly blanketed except for these straggly bits of black and white. And that's where it started. The words have always been based in that image."

## GO TO SLEEP (LITTLE MAN BEING ERASED)

**Based around an acoustic guitar riff, the song seems to juxtapose newspaper headlines ("Something big is gonna happen") with the replies of the man in the street ("Over my dead body"). Includes an image from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, of little people tying "the monster" down while he sleeps.**

**THOM:** "Yeah, the *Gulliver's Travels* thing. I really want the video to be something about that, somehow. Very difficult to take responsibility for the words, because I feel like I got beamed them from somewhere else. I don't feel like they're mine at all. It used to turn into this dodgy guitar thing at the end. [*To Jonny*] Not you, specifically. All of us."

**JONNY:** "The key was getting it right without it


Shepherds Bush Empire, London, May 24, 2003

sounding like a worthy rock thing. Basically, we've been playing live concerts for the last four years and been so relaxed. I think we're beginning to feel like that in the studio, and this is an example of that."

**THOM:** "I think we're loosening up. At last. Taken an Ex-Lax."

## WHERE I END AND YOU BEGIN (THE SKY IS FALLING IN)

**A beautiful and melancholic song. Seems to reference a monumental event, like that which wiped out the dinosaurs...**

**THOM:** "The wiping out of the dinosaurs? I must have been stuck for a line there... I've used that one before. That shows what sort of hurry we were in."

**JONNY:** "It's another love song, isn't it? You old soppy."

**THOM:** "Let me think about that for a moment. Yes, I guess so. With the last two records, I think you can tell that I had a problem with things being read a certain way, which was born out of the *OK Computer* experience – which was insane. I don't really have a problem with it now, which is why we chose to print the words on the record, because in a way I enjoy the fact that people all read things differently."

## WE SUCK YOUNG BLOOD (YOUR TIME IS UP)

**To begin with, reminiscent of an African-American worksong, interspersed with lethargic handclaps. Briefly goes into a psychedelic jazz freakout.**

**THOM:** "For me, that song is not to be taken seriously, but at the same time it was quite fun because somewhere in the lyrics it's pretty twisted. Then we break out into this freeform jazz nightmare. It's like 'Come on, lads!' Well, it makes me laugh..."

## THE GLOAMING (SOFTLY OPEN OUR MOUTHS IN THE COLD)

**The thematic heart of the record. At the end of the day, shadowy forces have been set in motion.**

**THOM:** "This doesn't make me laugh..."

**JONNY:** "It's kind of the centre of the record, I guess. At the last minute we thought that 'gloaming' was a bit of a poetic word in the wrong way."

**THOM:** "It's well dodgy. It's like a cliché, it's 100 years old, and it's in some dodgy folk songs. Which is us, I guess."

## THERE THERE (THE BONEY KING OF NOWHERE)

**The first single from *Hail To The Thief*, and one of the best Radiohead songs. In a world of uncertainty, this offers some reassurance.**

**JONNY:** "We did a bad version of it on a webcast once..."

**THOM:** "Oh yeah. It was all right, but... I guess the first half comes from around *Kid A* time. It made me cry when we finished it because I think it's the best thing we've ever done. That's just me."

**NME:** An unorthodox single, perhaps. Five minutes, no chorus...

**THOM:** "I know, a bummer that, because everything else on the album is pretty much three and a half minutes. Oh shit!"

**JONNY:** "It's got that Pixies thing that I love, which is a huge build-up of tension, and release. Which is really important in music – it's not thinking of things being good in an instant way, but good thinking in terms of five minutes."

> "'THERE THERE' MADE ME CRY WHEN WE FINISHED IT. I THINK IT'S THE BEST THING WE'VE EVER DONE"

**THOM:** "It's free range. It's supposed to be comforting: 'It's all right, you're just imagining it'."

## I WILL (NO MAN'S LAND)

**A brief mission statement outlining what an individual will do to protect his family.**

**JONNY:** "We started this during the *Kid A* sessions and it wasn't any good..."

**THOM:** "...during our dodgy Kraftwerk exploration, which luckily didn't last very long."

**JONNY:** "It was the recording that we played backwards and cut to pieces to make 'Like Spinning Plates', so it's a process that we were ploughing through. It's done right, and that's why it works."

**THOM:** "Bizarrely, it's like the angriest thing I've ever written, because it's written from the point of simple blind anger that makes nations go against nations. It's that thing of, 'Everything's fine until you come into my home and touch my children, and then I won't be responsible for my actions'. Like you flick a switch."

## A PUNCH-UP AT A WEDDING (NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO)

**A bit of a departure – 'Funky Radiohead'.**

**THOM:** "Yeah, that's kind of it. Bling-blong. It does its thing. It's got a loose funk at times..."

**JONNY:** "It comes from the fact that Thom is playing rhythm piano for the first time on one of our records. I hesitate to use the 'groove' word..."

**THOM:** "You definitely should, man. Although there's got to be a better one."

**JONNY:** "All right, it swings. It swings great."

**THOM:** "The words are very much a case of 'Shake a cup and let them come out'."

## MYXOMATOSIS (JUDGE, JURY & EXECUTIONER)

**A fearsome keyboard noise makes this sound like Add N To (X). Could be a song about people in public life, but whatever, has terrifying words...**

**THOM:** "Hoorah!"

**JONNY:** "I think it's exciting because right towards the end we realised that the rhythm might not be so important and, as we turned it down and turned up the keyboards..."

**THOM:** "The evil worm keyboard..."

**JONNY:** "...it became the right thing."

**THOM:** I was trying to cut it up and make it make sense, and driving myself around the fucking bend. It's about the whirlwind thing – you get to the centre and you realise there's nothing there. There's nobody home at all. That's been my experience."

## SCATTERBRAIN (AS DEAD AS LEAVES)

**About seeing old newspapers blowing on the wind.**

**THOM:** "One of my favourite things to do on *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* was to walk through empty landscapes. I became a rambler, and on this one I ended up walking through cities a lot. This song was born out of the fact that my favourite weather is windy weather, and that night there was a huge gale. I'd never seen anything like it. I could hear the roof of my house coming off, and had to get out. I'm getting my pastoral thing down. Like Wordsworth..."

## A WOLF AT THE DOOR (IT GIRL. RAG DOLL)

**A pretty song, with a sinister monologue over the top of it. *Hail To The Thief* concludes with this stream of aggrieved mutterings.**

**THOM:** "Well, that's me. The image seems violent, but the music is quite pretty. If you took it out of context it would sound like a children's toy but it made me want to do this rhythm thing in the words."

**JONNY:** "It reads like a Grimms' fairy tale..."

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

# HAIL TO THE THIEF

To Hollywood, and a radical new departure: an album recorded live, at speed. "It was," says Thom Yorke, "part of the experiment." | BY TOM PINNOCK

**RELEASED: 9 JUNE 2003**

IF RADIOHEAD ARE, as has been suggested, the modern-day Beatles, then *Hail To The Thief* must be their *Let It Be*; an attempt to get back to basics, a vérité look at the live band behind the studio mask, both deeply flawed and fascinating in equal measure.

From its very inception, it was clear that the band's sixth full-length would have to be a simpler, speedier affair – they were unlikely to have survived another bout of the tortuous studio work that had created *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*. Despite its step away from second guessing, though, *Hail To The Thief* is still the work of an experimental band, in process at least. For, abandoning the endless manipulation of laptops and samplers, the quintet attempted something new – namely, laying down tracks live in a studio in the very un-Radiohead locale of Hollywood.

While the recording of *Amnesiac*'s "Knives Out" spanned a ridiculous 373 days, the group cut a song a day during their two weeks at Los Angeles' Ocean Way studio, which longtime producer Nigel Godrich had recommended after his work there with Beck and Travis. For *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*, Yorke had brought scant, skeletal ideas to the studio, but for *Hail To The Thief*, O'Brien, Selway and the Greenwoods received, by courier, three CDs of well-developed demos from Yorke, titled 'The Gloaming', 'Hold Your Prize' and 'Episcoval', before all five whipped them into shape in rehearsals. Some of the songs had appeared tentatively during sessions for the previous albums, with "There There" premiered during a webcast performance in February 2000, and "I Will"'s original backing track reversed and turned into *Amnesiac*'s "Like Spinning Plates". Many were tried out live before being cut, such as "Sail To The Moon", first performed in Lisbon on July 22, 2002.

> AN ENERGETIC ALBUM, AND THE BAND'S MOST IMMEDIATE SINCE *THE BENDS*

After two weeks in LA in September 2002, Radiohead returned to Oxford to put finishing touches to some of the tracks at their own recording studio. Even so, the majority of the album was already completed – Godrich told *NME* in 2013 that around a third of the final released tracks were in fact rough mixes from Ocean Way.

It all sounds like a gloriously easy – even fun – process, with an air of spontaneity and excitement suffusing the usual tension that accompanied Radiohead in the studio. "Eighty per cent of this record was recorded in one take," Colin Greenwood told *Bang* magazine in 2003. "It could've been recorded in the 1950s. The idea was to capture these songs new as they were emerging... the goal was to preserve the energy."


FAVORITE
24HR
POOR
VIDEO
RETIREMENT
ANYTIME
GOD
COLOR
SOON
SALE
WILL
TOW
XING
BAIL
MANIA
GASOLINE
PERFECT
DANGER
YOURSELF
COPIES
TV
ARMED
COIN
BANGBANG
25¢
AID
LONG STAY
ULTRA
GIRLS
GRAND GUIGNOL
NO
END
TRUST
CALL
MEAT
AIDS
THEFT
ULTRA
ZONE
FINE
VACANT
HOME
TEST
SCREEN
AUTOS
NOTHING
DELICIOUS
OIL
POOL
AWAY
100%
EXIT
99¢
BE
BEEF
TURN
MAIL
FEAR
CENTER
CHECK
ENFORCED
COLLISION
BALLISTIC
PHOTO
PLAYERS
ENTER
HAIR
DRUGS
DEPOT
EXTRA
COIFFURE
LIQUOR
RECOVERY
TANNING
TROUBLE
ONLY
ANTI
POPCORN
MEDIA
SPIRITUAL
REMEMBERING
PROSECUTED
HAMBURGER
SECURITY
HAUNTED
BEEPERS
SUNSET
TEENS
SALE
ENFORCED
LUXURIES
KARAOKE
ADVISOR
BLOCK
RAPID
PATROL
LUBE
DONUT
VCR
LOSS
BACON
COCKTAILS
CLOSED
PRIVATE
INTERNET
USED


AT THE FIRST SIGN
OF PANIC COUNT TO 10
MONEY FOR THE GENERALS
HONEYMOON IS OVER
AFRAID OF TOMORROW
DIGGING TRENCHES
CHEERING + WAVING
HOLIER THAN THOU
WOLF
JUNTA
STRAFE
NO WAY OUT
COLD WIVES
POWERCUT
A LITTLE KNIVE
YOU HAVE NOT
RIDE
NOW
GO TO SLEEP
FALLING
FOR EVER
QUESTION
2+2=5
BEGGING FOR A BREAK
WAITING
OUT
DESIGN FAULT
BRIGHT CHEAP
WEIRD WEATHER
KINDERGARTEN
DOUBLESPEAK
CLEAN IT UP
TRESPASSING
GAGGING ORDER
PAYING ATTENTION
LIKE FLIES
TIME IS UP
BLIND
REVENGE
EDITED
CREEPING
ECONOMIC
CLAMPDOWN
PHONE
WAITING
SNOOK
STEAL
GEEKS
FELL
BUNKER
DISASTER
LONELY
SHADOWS
BACKDRIFTS
EAT
SAD
X RAY
ALARM BELLS
CREDIT CARDS
COP
STAND
SAD
THE HIGH ROAD


Radiohead. Hail to the Thief.

Certainly, *Hail To The Thief* is an energetic album, and the band's most immediate since *The Bends*. Two tracks are even a return to the kind of guitar-driven, melodic rock songs that their mainstream fans probably wished they'd returned to after *OK Computer*. Lead-off single "There There" was a stunning preview; Thom Yorke's keening vocal dueling with Jonny Greenwood's guitar, reminiscent of John McGeoch's finest moments, all underpinned by tribal percussion. The stomping rhythm was more spooky than glammy, though, exemplified by the opening line: *"In pitch dark/I go walking in your landscape..."* The arresting video saw Yorke lost in creepy woods, meeting all manner of forest creatures, before eventually turning into a tree himself. Very Grimm's.

"2+2=5", recorded on the very first day of the LA sessions, was a three-act epic squeezed into three minutes, a "Paranoid Android" in miniature, and no less anguished. *"There is no way out/You can scream and you can shout/It is too late now,"* sings Yorke over a spiralling riff, before the guitars burst into life for a frantic second half that recalls "My Iron Lung"'s noisy

**FROM THE TITLE DOWN, *HAIL TO THE THIEF* IS STEEPED IN ANGER TOWARDS THOSE IN POWER**

peak. The raw nature of the album's recording is demonstrated by "2+2=5"'s intro, 15 seconds of guitars being plugged in and pedals being tested over muffled studio chatter, the very first thing to be recorded in Hollywood. If *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* were like audio sculpture, this was, as the band admitted, more like staging a play, or creating a documentary.

Elsewhere, "Go To Sleep"'s syncopated funk-folk is closed by a pioneering solo, Jonny Greenwood feeding his Telecaster through his own Max/MSP program until it stutters like a dial-up modem. The nature of the swift recording meant Yorke was unable to refine his lyrics much before they were laid down, a situation he welcomed as it prevented overthinking. Other highlights include the motorik "Where I End And You Begin", and "Myxomatosis", a caustic mix of distorted synths that sound like guitars, flayed guitars that sound like synths, and crisp, clattering drums, with Yorke wailing about feeling *"skinned alive... strangled, beaten up..."*

There are quieter pearls, too: ghostly piano ballad "Sail To The Moon" features Yorke tenderly referencing his infant son Noah with the line *"And in the flood/you'll build an ark"*, while the disgruntled "A Wolf At The Door" sees Yorke rapping oblique doggerel over a sour, shuffling minor arpeggio. *"City boys in first class/Don't know we're born/Just know someone else is gonna come and clean it up/Born and raised for the job,"* spits Yorke gruffly.

Despite the quality of its best songs, though, *Hail To The Thief* feels curiously less than the sum of its parts. Betraying its spontaneous sessions, the production and arrangements throughout are strangely flat, with none of the subtle, shimmering reverbs and atmospheric textures that infuse much of their work. You can't exactly imagine *HTTT* being used as a sound reference, for example, in the way some engineers deploy *In Rainbows*.

"We tried to achieve that live sound on *Hail To The Thief*," Yorke told Nick Kent in *Mojo* in 2006, "but it ended up as a more 'default' reaction. Because we did it so quickly, it became difficult to see through all the ideas that we wanted to properly instigate. It wasn't as experimental as we expected."

Interestingly, the potential of some of the tracks was unlocked onstage after *HTTT*'s release – for example, hyperactive electronic track "The Gloaming", which on the album sounds like a slightly bloodless demo, was reanimated when Jonny began live-sampling the others' instruments during each performance. This Frankenstein's monster has been a staple of Radiohead's sets ever since, even when perennials like "Karma Police" fall by the wayside from time to time – it was played at every show bar three during their 2012 tour.

Another problem is the tracklisting and, indeed, sheer number of tracks here. At 56 minutes, Radiohead's longest album to date, it could do with a few trims. "We Suck Young Blood", a dirge that might have been written to prove their detractors right, the laboured, uncomfortable funk of "A Punch Up At A Wedding", and "Backdrifts", a pulsating electro track recorded back in Oxford that barely merits half of its six-minute length, should have been B-sides at best. Some other songs are a little unloveable, too, such as the pastoral "Scatterbrain", unmemorable save for its jarring vocal processing.

*Kid A* and, to a lesser extent, *Amnesiac*, felt like aural journeys, concept albums without the concepts, but *HTTT* is a disjointed trip, with a mood often briefly established then flattened by its polar opposite – see the hectic, electronic onslaughts of "Stand Up Sit Down" and "Backdrifts" separated by the sombre "Sail To The Moon", or the pounding intensity of "The Gloaming" and "There There" defused by the funereal "I Will". Compared to the rest of their later work, electronic elements are primitively incorporated, with the songs oscillating between three-guitar rockers and laptop constructions, the subtle shades between almost rubbed out.

Unsurprisingly when dealing with such disparate material, the band had trouble deciding on a final tracklisting, and all involved now agree that it could have been improved. "As a whole I think it's charming because of the lack of editing," Godrich told *NME* in 2013, before admitting it's his least favourite of the Radiohead albums he's worked on.

"Of all the records we did, I'd maybe change the playlist," Yorke told *Spin* back in 2006. "I think we had a meltdown when we put it together." The frontman even posted an alternate, rearranged order online two years later, which omitted "We Suck Young Blood", "A Punch Up At A Wedding", "Backdrifts" and "I Will", to create a punchier, more energetic 10-track album, kicking off with "There There". It's well worth a listen, highlighting the sense of fun captured during the fevered recording sessions in the dark heart of American glitz.

Expanding on "You And Whose Army"'s Blair-baiting, Yorke's lyrics were influenced by the events happening across the world at the time, especially in America, with George W Bush's controversial election, the attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the build-up to the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan influencing his bricolaged words. From the title down, *HTTT* is steeped in anger directed towards those in power, using Orwellian slogans such as *1984*'s "2+2=5" and imagery drawn from fairytales and children's stories – even *Chicken Licken* and *Bagpuss* – to outline Yorke's fear for the future. Another *"walk into the jaws of hell"*, as "Sit Down Stand Up" puts it. "It's about the feeling I had that we're entering an age of intolerance and fear," the singer told *Q*. "I was worrying about what was going to be there when I was gone and [*infant son*] Noah was left. Which is quite a normal thing for a father to think."

A seam of apocalyptic imagery runs throughout *Hail To The Thief*: references to *"murderers"*, babies killed in bunkers,

## TRACKMARKS



**HAIL TO THE THIEF**

1. 2+2=5 ★★★★
2. Sit Down Stand Up ★★★
3. Sail To The Moon ★★★★
4. Backdrifts ★★
5. Go To Sleep ★★★
6. Where I End And You Begin ★★★
7. We Suck Young Blood ★
8. The Gloaming ★★★
9. There There ★★★★★
10. I Will ★★★
11. A Punch Up At A Wedding ★★
12. Myxomatosis ★★★
13. Scatterbrain ★★★
14. A Wolf At The Door ★★★

**Label:** Parlophone
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich and Radiohead
**Recorded:** Ocean Way, LA; Canned Applause, Didcot
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (vocals, gtr, laptop, piano), Jonny Greenwood (gtr, analogue systems, Ondes Martenot, laptop, toy piano, glock), Ed O'Brien (gtr, effects, vocals), Colin Greenwood (bass, string synth, sampler), Phil Selway (drums, percussion)
**Highest chart position:** UK 1, US 3



Radiohead in 2003: fearing for the future

vampires, Force-10 gales, getting knifed in the neck and having your children kidnapped, all images dreamed up by Yorke on long walks or drives in the Oxfordshire countryside at dusk, after OD'ing on Radio 4's coverage of dark global events. The themes bind the album's disparate styles a little more coherently than they would otherwise seem, although these reactions to contemporary events do timestamp the album more than, say, *OK Computer*'s more abstract look at the troubling pace of modern life.

Ultimately, however, aside from highlights like the magisterial "There There", for the first time on a Radiohead album there are no surprises. Even *Amnesiac*, largely leftovers from the *Kid A* sessions, included the novel New Orleans jazz of "Life In A Glasshouse". Here, everything is much as a fan might expect.

"'There There' is amazing, and '2+2=5' is good," Yorke told *Spin*, "but as Nigel says, I wish I had another go at that [*album*]. We wanted to do things quickly, and I think the songs suffered. It was part of the experiment. Every record is part of the experiment."

In this case, the experiment seemed to lead to a dead end, and in 2004 the band, burnt out, contemplated splitting. But they rallied and, with some lessons about recording learned, returned – much like The Beatles with *Abbey Road* – to lush, new adventures in the studio. But, with their Parlophone contract completed, the band were now free to experiment with more than just their music...

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The best moments occur when Yorke opens up a more personal side to his songwriting, but *Hail To The Thief* is a good rather than great record, and Radiohead are still coming to terms with what to do after you've made an LP hailed as one of the greatest ever."
JAMES OLDHAM, NME, JUNE 7, 2003

"Emerging from years of processed vocal abstraction and fragmentary slogans, Yorke's personal demons loom very large here in a symphony of physic disgust and parental anxiety, nocturnal gloom and claws-out nature imagery. Couched in a ripe vocabulary of slavering wolves and child-eating vampires, the LP feels like a grandly gothic horror film set to music."
STEPHEN DALTON, UNCUT, JULY 2003

# THOM YORKE
# THE ERASER

"I don't wanna hear the word solo. Doesn't sound right." Alone with his laptop and his "psychic garbage", Thom Yorke branches out. | BY PIERS MARTIN

**RELEASED: 10 JULY 2006**

ALTHOUGH *THE ERASER* is very much a Thom Yorke record, its release marks the point where Radiohead, having fulfilled their obligations with EMI, cut loose from the anachronistic major-label machine and set out on the second phase of their illustrious career, with the world at their feet and no obvious direction in mind. In choosing to side with the independent XL Recordings and by announcing news of *The Eraser* in a typically self-deprecating post on the Radiohead blog Dead Air Space six weeks before its release ("I want no crap about me being a traitor or whatever splitting up..."), Yorke looked to be testing out a cavalier strategy that would lead to the revolutionary business model for the following year's *In Rainbows*.

What's more, though the band might not have realised at the time, *The Eraser* also acted as a kind of valve, relieving the pressure built up over the course of a colossal world tour for *Hail To The Thief* and the ensuing downtime. The band had written and recorded new material during this period but with no deadline, label or familiar structure in place, their rhythm was completely out of sync. "We lost all momentum and it's very, very difficult to get momentum back," Yorke told the *New York Times*. "When I say momentum, I don't just mean the physically working every day, I mean just hanging out and playing each other music and swapping ideas and stuff. It's something that you take for granted until it's gone. And then you're like: 'What's wrong? There's something wrong here.'"

Seldom a glass-half-full guy, Yorke internalised these feelings and over time weaved them into the nine songs that would form *The Eraser*, which became a poetic expression of self-doubt, and alienation. For the music, Yorke assembled the recordings that he'd made using a laptop over the past few years – odds and ends and ideas written on the road, in hotel rooms and studios, some from old Radiohead sessions – and ran these broadly electronic sketches by Nigel Godrich, who sifted through them and helped Yorke arrange the components into coherent pieces. This the pair did without drawing attention to themselves; it was not a secret project as such, but there was no need to involve the other band members. "This was all done with their blessing," Yorke wrote in his announcement. "And I don't wanna hear the word solo. Doesn't sound right." These tracks, too, were of a different, darker stripe to the material being concocted for *In Rainbows*. The track that sparked the record into being, "Black Swan", used in the Richard Linklater film *A Scanner Darkly*, has a chorus of "*And this is fucked up, fucked up*".

**IT ACTED AS A KIND OF VALVE, RELIEVING THE PRESSURE BUILT UP ON THE TOUR FOR *HAIL TO THE THIEF***

Indeed, while news of *The Eraser* raised eyebrows, its content did not. Anyone familiar with the electronic textures and skittering beats of *Kid A*, that other surprising release, knew that Yorke's fondness for Warp Records acts like Aphex Twin and Autechre had bled into Radiohead's sound. On Dead Air Space, Yorke's occasional home listening charts showed he was au fait with the trippier end of dubstep and techno; a subsequent set of remixes, *The Eraser*




## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Forget electronics, though: the first thing *The Eraser* reminds you of is just how remarkable, how utterly unique Thom's voice is. Freed from Radiohead's titanium heaviness, here it soars unimpeded."
LOUIS PATTISON, NME, 8 JULY, 2006

"Sonically it collides a certain style of post-psychedelic soft-rock with textures and rhythms drawn from across the span of '90s electronica."
SIMON REYNOLDS, UNCUT, AUGUST 2006

*Rmxs*, saw album tracks reworked by Burial and Four Tet, among others.

Now, as producer, he took these influences a step further, pairing the artificial – mechanical rhythms and curdled synths, digitally altered – with live elements such as churning bass and treated guitar, fashioning a mood of crepuscular melancholy that lingers across the entire record. "Being forced by Nigel to isolate the best bits made me realise these *were* the best bits," he told *Rolling Stone*'s David Fricke. "All I could see was how clever my programming was. Suddenly I was being forced to forget all that and be the singer again. And I wasn't thinking about Radiohead. I never thought, 'I should stop here. I should give this to the band.' Once I had made the decision to do this record, that's what I was writing for."

What strikes you about *The Eraser* is the unusual quality of Yorke's singing voice, which cuts through and soars above the murky minimalism of the music, and how his usually opaque lyrics seem to make more sense when tethered to his own compositions. He calls this stream of consciousness his "psychic garbage" and at times he appears to be conducting an internal monologue with himself, rather than projecting outwards as he would do with Radiohead. "*Please excuse me but I got to ask/Are you only being nice because you want something*," he asks in the opening title track. "*The more you try to erase me, the more I appear*".

Elsewhere, whether intentional or not, Yorke appears to raise environmental concerns and directs withering glares at those in power. At the time of *The Eraser*'s release, in summer 2006, Yorke was being courted by both Tony Blair and the then-leader of the opposition, David Cameron, who saw the eco-minded musician as a valuable asset to their campaigns, much to his dismay. On the dilapidated blues of "The Clock", Yorke imagines Mother Nature on her knees: "*It comes to you begging you to stop/Wake up/But you just move your hands upon the clock/Throw coins in the wishing well for us/You make believe that you are still in charge.*"

"Harrowdown Hill" is *The Eraser*'s watercooler moment, though, with Yorke explicitly (well, for him) addressing the circumstances surrounding the death of the weapons inspector Dr David Kelly, who took his own life on Harrowdown Hill near Oxford in 2003 after his name was revealed as a source when it was leaked to the press by Blair's head spin doctor Alastair Campbell.

"*You will be dispensed with when you've become inconvenient*," sings Yorke, animated. "*Did I fall or was I pushed?/And where's the blood?*" A leftover from the *Hail To The Thief* sessions rewired into a compelling funk cut, it is, Yorke admitted to *The Guardian*, "the most angry song I've ever written in my life".

## TRACKMARKS THE ERASER

1. The Eraser ★★★
2. Analyse ★★★
3. The Clock ★★★
4. Black Swan ★★★★
5. Skip Divided ★★★★
6. Atoms For Peace ★★★
7. And It Rained All Night ★★★★
8. Harrowdown Hill ★★★★★
9. Cymbal Rush ★★★

**Released:** July 10, 2006
**Label:** XL Recordings
**Producer:** Thom Yorke and Nigel Godrich
**Recorded:** Various locations; Radiohead's studio, Oxford; The Hospital, London
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (vocals, electronics, programming, guitar, bass, drums, piano), Jonny Greenwood (piano on "The Eraser"), Nigel Godrich (arrangement, electronics, programming)
**Highest chart position:** UK 3, US 5

# IN RAINBOWS

Where next? Out of a bootcamp for eggheads, a romantic masterpiece emerges and a cunning plan falls into place… Free love! | BY BUD SCOPPA

**RELEASED: 10 OCTOBER 2007**

*IN RAINBOWS* IS Radiohead's elegant, wholly unanticipated celebration of the pop-song form, the most accessible LP in the band's challenging discography, and the most beautiful. The LP goes down smoothly and satisfyingly like your favourite everyday wine – a first for this constitutionally contrary band. Having played with endless variations of a number of these songs, they settled on an approach that values clarity, immediacy and sheer punch, demonstrating that they can deftly pull off what rock'n'roll bands through the ages have been aiming for – values they'd often delighted in subverting. If they hadn't made this satisfying an album, Radiohead wouldn't have been able to pull off the gambit of the century, the brilliant-in-its-moment "pay what you want" grandstand play. It was so brilliant that it initially upstaged the work itself, an irony that paid off again when people actually got around to listening and discovered it was superb. That's the short-form version of the narrative...

Having fulfilled their obligation to Parlophone/EMI with *Hail To The Thief*, which also broke them out of the box, so to speak, as they shape-shifted from the electronic tinkerers of *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* into what more closely resembled a rock band once again, Radiohead were free at last. But what to do with this hard-earned freedom, now that they were in full control of their destiny for the first time since they'd signed that six-album deal as On A Friday in 1991?

**THROUGHOUT, THE DIRECTNESS OF YORKE'S LYRICS IS AS SURPRISING AS THE WARMTH OF THE SOUND**

As it turned out, the five band members and their inner circle – producer Nigel Godrich and the Courtyard Management team of Chris Hufford, Bryce Edge and Brian Message – were in no great hurry to make any crucial career decisions. For starters, they had no interest in signing with another major label, which would make little sense financially, considering that they'd derive all of the net revenue from future releases if they remained autonomous. At the time, successful bands were beginning to question the logic of giving up the lion's share of their income in return for the marketing clout of a corporate overlord, and Radiohead found themselves in the vanguard of this movement virtually by default. "I like the people at our record company," Thom Yorke said in 2005, "but the time is at hand when you have to ask why anyone needs one. And, yes, it probably would give us some perverse pleasure to say 'Fuck you' to this decaying business model." Blithely turning down several offers of multi-album deals and the multi-million-dollar advance attached to each album, Radiohead chose reinvention instead.

With that bit of business behind them, the bandmembers turned their attention to the


IN/ RAINBOW
IN RAIN/BOW
IN RAINBOWS
RADIOHEAD


RADIOHEAD
IN RAINBOWS
15 STEP
BODYSNATCHERS
NUDE
WEIRD FISHES/ARPEGGI
ALL
FAUST
RECKONER
HOUSE OF CARDS
JIGSAW FALLING INTO PLACE
VIDEOTAPE
TBD0001
tbd
records

familiar process of making new music. After a studio break that extended from the completion of *...Thief* in 2003 through the holidays of 2004 – they were now family men in their thirties, after all – Radiohead reassembled in February 2005, but the going was slow and marked by a lack of energy; this was the first time they'd started work without the motivational pressure of working toward a deadline. A verse in "Open Pick" (which would evolve into "Jigsaw Falling Into Place") seems to describe the ennui of this period: "*As the magic disappears/No longer wound up like a spring/Before you've had too much/Come back and focus again*". Concurrently, Yorke was making more progress on what would be his first solo album, 2006's *The Eraser*, working alone on his laptop.

Starting in August, the band tried to get some recording done on their own, having concluded that working with Godrich had become too comfortable and predictable. Several months of intermittent sessions yielded little of value beyond the halting development of the potentially useful song ideas they'd come up with during the initial stages of the project. It was then they realised another presence was needed in the studio, but Godrich was in the States working with Beck on what would be released as *Guero*. Instead, they recruited Mark "Spike" Stent, who'd produced commercially successful albums for mainstream acts from Madonna to the Spice Girls, as well as Björk, Massive Attack and end-of-the-line Oasis. In April 2006, after eight weeks of sessions, they pulled the plug on that questionable experiment.

A month later they were on the road for the first time in several years, in essence woodshedding the material. On average, their sets contained a half-dozen new songs, including "Arpeggi", "Bodysnatchers", "Open Pick", "15 Step" and "All I Need", as well as a couple of oldies in "Feeling Pulled Apart By Horses" (the forerunner of "Reckoner"), which had been introduced in concert in 2001, and "Nude", dating back to Godrich's very first session with the band in 1995. Invariably, cellphone recordings of the new pieces turned up on YouTube within hours of the performances, fans documenting the work in progress. When the band got back to Oxford, Godrich was summoned with the hope that the third time would turn out to be the charm in this drawn-out and frustrating recording process. "The material was great, and we knew it," Godrich later told *Rolling Stone*. "The difficulty was actually, physically doing it." They'd become paralysed by the very multiplicity of the ideas they'd accumulated, unable to decide among countless ways of approaching each song. In order to break through the impasse, the producer suggested that they go on what he posed as "an adventure".

**THIS ISN'T JUST RADIOHEAD'S MOST ROMANTIC ALBUM, IT'S ALSO THE SEXIEST**

It says volumes about the band's willingness to take direction from Godrich that they agreed to his slave-driving concept of working up the new and long-gestating material under conditions that could be described as Dickensian – within the crumbling ruins of Tottenham House in Savernake, Wiltshire. Boot camp for the eggheads, so to speak. It was an odd premise to begin with, and it was odder still that these theoretically pampered rock stars willingly submitted to it. Godrich, having considered the folly of the previous false starts in the studio compared to the visceral way they'd thrown themselves into invention-in-the-moment workups of these songs onstage, had apparently concluded that what they now required was a swift kick in the arse to shake off the remaining sediment.

That turned out to be a brilliant notion. During their three-week stay at the condemned country house, they nailed a pair of scintillating rockers in the scalding distort-o-rama "Bodysnatchers" and the sleek accelerator "Jigsaw Falling Into Place" – a great rock band firing on all cylinders. The opening riff of "Bodysnatchers" is the very quintessence of balls-out shredding, finding a sweet spot somewhere between "Sunshine Of Your Love" and "Big Eyed Beans From Venus". By the time they decamped from their three-week countryside caravan retreat, they must have concluded that the most surprising and gratifying move they could make, as they reintroduced themselves to their constituency, was to strip away the cerebral folderol and just rock. That they could do this, given "Paranoid Android" and "There There", was no surprise; that they chose to do it, and throw themselves headlong into it, became the key that would unlock *In Rainbows*.

From there, the jigsaw started falling into place, so to speak, as they went from one locale to the next – Halswell House in Taunton, Godrich's Hospital Studios in Covent Garden and their own facility in Oxfordshire, getting a keeper or two every step of the way. But that wouldn't be the end of the process, not by a long shot. "Bodysnatchers" would be the only instance during the sessions of purely capturing a performance; the rest of the album would be constructed out of the best bits from various takes – a traditional recording process known as comping that was taken to another level altogether during the *In Rainbows* sessions.

The songs were further refined by overdubbing. "Nude" went through numerous iterations before being locked as a bittersweet ballad with an R'n'B feel, thanks to the soulful bassline of Colin Greenwood, whose subtly inventive playing provides the album with its pulse. Strings arranged by Jonny Greenwood and performed by the Millennia Ensemble are used sparingly but crucially, bringing enveloping drama to the ballads and ramping up the eeriness of "All I Need", on which Jonny has them play every note of the scale, further intensifying the mood with his own violas doubling the effect. And because this is Radiohead, certain parts have been sonically distressed, like Phil Selway's glitchy drums on opener "15 Step", or the warped percussive pattern on the spare closer "Videotape", which would've worked nicely as a mechanical sound effect in the 2008 Disney/Pixar film *WALL-E* (indeed, that acronym's full meaning, "Waste Allocation Load Lifter – Earth-class", could've come straight out of Radiohead cosmology).



## TRACKMARKS




### INRAINBOWS

1. 15 Step ★★★★
2. Bodysnatchers ★★★★★
3. Nude ★★★★
4. Weird Fishes/ Arpeggi ★★★★
5. All I Need ★★★★
6. Faust Arp ★★★★
7. Reckoner ★★★★★
8. House Of Cards ★★★★★
9. Jigsaw Falling Into Place ★★★★★
10. Videotape ★★★★

**Label:** XL (UK), ATO (US)
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich
**Recorded:** Tottenham House, Wiltshire; Halswell House, Taunton, Somerset; Hospital Studios, Covent Garden; Radiohead Studio, Abingdon
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (vocals, guitar, etc), Jonny Greenwood (guitar, devices, violas on "All I Need"), Ed O'Brien (guitar), Colin Greenwood (bass), Phil Selway (drums), Millennia Ensemble, led by Everton Nelson, conducted by Sally Herbert (strings)
**Highest chart position:** UK 1, US 1



Free at last... Radiohead in 2007

Throughout the 10 songs, the directness of Yorke's lyrics is as surprising as the warmth of the sound. The album's most-oft-quoted line – "*I don't want to be your friend/I just want to be your lover*" – appears at the top of its most beautiful song, "House Of Cards". *In Rainbows* isn't just Radiohead's most romantic album, it's also the sexiest. And as demonstrated on their 2008 tour, this was dance music in precisely the way that transformative rock'n'roll has always caused bodies to move in response. It isn't just the songs that make the LP such an immersive experience, it's the seamless way it unfolds. "The songs can amplify each other if you put them in the right order," Yorke later explained.

The album was mastered in late September, and just days later a message appeared on the band's site, Dead Air Space. "Hello everyone," it began. "Well, the new album is finished, and it's coming out in 10 days; We've called it *In Rainbows*. Love from us all. Jonny 01 October." The album title in Greenwood's post was a link to inrainbows.com, where visitors were invited to download the album for any amount they wanted, starting at £0. Or, for the fixed price of £40, they could order a limited-edition "discbox" – a lavishly tricked-out, physical copy of the album on CD and vinyl that also contained eight additional tracks recorded during the sessions, packaged in a hardcover book. Yorke referred to the 10/10 event as "our leak date"; Hufford (who'd come up with the idea) called it "virtual busking". For those grateful fans on the receiving end, it was a rare, downright extraordinary communal experience, the closest thing as an indelible moment in time to the release day of *Rubber Soul* or *Revolver* four decades earlier. One observer described it, colourfully but accurately, as "the world's largest listening party".

On October 10, the release date for the "pay what you want" digital album, the amount of traffic – later estimated at 1.2 million – caused the site to crash. But eventually, everybody who wanted *In Rainbows* got a copy. The offer ended in December, and on New Year's Day the album became available as a standard CD via XL Recordings in the UK and ATO in the US, with a variety of distributors contracted in other territories around the world. "In terms of digital income," Yorke told David Byrne in a December 2007 interview for *Wired*, "we've made more money out of this record than out of all the other Radiohead albums put together, forever – in terms of anything on the net. And that's nuts."

By October 2008, according to Warner/Chappell, Radiohead's publisher, roughly three million people had bought *In Rainbows*, including 1.75 million CDs and 100,000 discboxes (that's £4 million right there). "People made their choice to actually pay money," a delighted Hufford noted in *The New York Times*. "If it's good enough, people will put a penny in the pot."

What makes this whole thing – from song to sound to delivery – hang together so magically is that it was executed with such transparency. In bold brushstrokes, the resulting canvas paints a vivid picture of uncommonly smart people making consistently interesting decisions every step of the process. *In Rainbows* stands as a sustained and emphatic act of pushing art into the moment, and trapping it in amber. The fact that the work itself is a raw/refined textural kaleidoscope that continuously reshapes itself into bold, beautiful patterns is the beating heart of the matter and the thrilling payoff. How does an artist follow such an unmitigated triumph? That's a very good question...

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"'I don't want to be your friend, I just want to be your lover,' sings Yorke, remarkably, reclaiming that sweet ache of a voice you thought he'd abandoned forever to Chris Martin and his legion of Radio 2 heads."
STEPHEN TROUSSÉ, UNCUT, DECEMBER 2007

"'Reckoner' has been resurrected for *In Rainbows*. When played live, it has been known to come close to heavy metal in places, structured around a monstrous guitar riff almost reminiscent of Led Zeppelin."
NME, OCT 18, 2007

CAMERAPRESS/ STEVE FORREST

Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood, November 2007



# "The internet is not the fucking universe!"

DEAN CHALKLEY/WWW.TIMEINCUKCONTENT.COM

December 2007. Two months after *In Rainbows* has magically appeared online, Radiohead give the first interview about their revolutionary move to JULIAN MARSHALL. There is talk, too, of how the remarkable album was made – in a disintegrating stately home, surrounded by broken glass and rat poison. "Just before I get really sick," reveals Thom Yorke, "I'll have this 12-hour hyperactive mania. I felt genuinely out of it when we did that."






ENDLESS YARDS OF dusty books line the walls, a roaring open fire warms each room and everywhere not-too-tasteful stuffed fish are pinned into glass cabinets. Rumour has it The Old Parsonage Hotel in Oxford is where Oscar Wilde used to stay when he was visiting the town. It's pretty easy to believe — the place is a shameless feast of antique chintz. So fervently traditional and backward-looking, it's perhaps an odd venue for the first interview Radiohead's Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood have given since October 10 of this year. That was the day they sent shockwaves through the music world by announcing that their seventh studio album, *In Rainbows*, was finished and would be available for fans to download in 10 days' time. Oh, and that each person could decide how much they wanted to pay for it.

Thom is the first to arrive, by foot. He orders a coffee and small talk immediately shifts to his record collection. He's excited about the new albums from !!!, Modeselektor and Robert Wyatt but, surprisingly, hasn't heard the new PJ Harvey record yet. He's just been listening to a bunch of remixes of tracks from his solo debut, *The Eraser*, that he hopes to put online before the end of the year. Greenwood arrives 20 minutes late, looking flustered. Compared to Thom he's shy, but get him on the right subject — the BBC archive, the lost genius of Clive James or computer programming — and he practically glows. Together, they are the heart and brains of a guitar band who, more than any other, has moved at the cutting edge of music in the last decade.

The duo are quick to reveal that the original idea to give *In Rainbows* away as a free download actually dates back to 2003 and *Hail To The Thief*. That album leaked online extremely early, as did Yorke's 2006 solo album. The embryonic plan this time was to have an official "leak" date so the group themselves could control how it was put on to the net. When *In Rainbows* was completed this summer, the band were without a record contract, their six album-deal with Parlophone having expired with *Hail To The Thief*. They knew it would take at least until the new year to negotiate a new deal and get the album released if they went down the traditional route. Egged on by their management, they decided to take complete control and release it themselves.

It was the best-kept secret of the year: *In Rainbows* would be available to download only a few weeks after it was finished. You could pay what you liked, and if you were dead set on having a version you could hold in your hands, there was a special collectors' edition discbox with eight extra tracks that, if you ordered it, will be dropping through your letterbox later this week. At first it sounded like bankruptcy-inducing madness, but on closer inspection it made sound financial sense. Under a normal record company deal, the band would make just over a pound per album sold, whereas with an honesty-box style approach to their music, the few people paying a tenner or more would balance out those downloading it for nothing. Radiohead's revolutionary step was widely regarded as an industry-shaking stroke of genius, remoulding the distribution of music as defiantly as they had reimagined music itself. Daring? Inventive? Revolutionary? From these modest maestros we expected no less. But did it feel as though they were messing with the music industry's DNA?

"We didn't really invite that many people into the circle of trust," says Jonny. "I bought *NME* and there was something on the cover about a new Oasis single out in a few weeks' time. I remember thinking, 'We've got a new album coming in 10 days and nobody knows!'

"I stayed up until midnight to announce it and just watched people on messageboards claiming that the website had been hacked. I think they thought it was a joke. That seemed to be the first reaction. It was going to be two weeks originally because we thought it might take two weeks for people to actually find out about it. Our manager had said, 'There's a chance that people are less interested than we're assuming.'"

Radiohead weren't done with the shock announcements. On October 31, just under three weeks after *In Rainbows* had been released digitally, the band declared they had signed a conventional deal with independent XL, and that a normal CD version of the album would be available in shops on December 31, 2007. It's time for *NME* to get to the bottom of this unconventional revolution...







Ed, Phil and Colin on stage, May 2006

**After the bold way *In Rainbows* came out, isn't putting out a normal CD a bit regressive?**
**Thom:** "I don't think people should assume that everyone is internet savvy. The internet is not the fucking universe. Lots of people seem to have a problem with the fact that we are putting out a real CD at all. That assumes that all we do is worry about the internet and we don't. I'm not into MySpace, it's not my thing. And Facebook... I don't know, it's just not my thing. I'm too old."

**Could you not have done the physical release yourselves? Why sign to XL?**
**Thom:** "It's not a record deal in the sense of a traditional record deal, that's very important – it's just the distribution. There's none of the normal dynamics of a record deal where they have artist development and that sort of thing. I had a good relationship with XL doing *The Eraser* and it felt like the right thing to do."

ANDY WILLSHER/ WWW.TIMEINCUKCONTENT.COM



A break from the recording of *In Rainbows*, October 2006

**Jonny:** "The alternative was to sign a five-album deal with Universal or Warner and do a traditional, '90s-style record deal. Having done what we did in October, it would have felt a bit weird."
**Thom:** "XL had actually called up our manager the week before the download happened and said, 'We've got this great idea. How about you just release it for free as a download?' [*Laughing*] We were like, 'That sounds like a good idea.'"

**What will you do if no-one buys the CD because they've already downloaded it for free?**
**Thom:** "I think we're doing all right already."

IF THE RELEASE of *In Rainbows* was a rushed affair, then the recording certainly wasn't; sessions first began in the autumn of 2005 with producer Mark 'Spike' Stent, but after a year in the studio, still feeling like nothing productive had come from them, Radiohead abandoned them to tour the UK and North America. It was on these tours that they were able to roadtest around 20 new songs, experimenting with their structure and sound in front of a real-life audience. Reinvigorated, the band called in long-term 'Head producer Nigel Godrich to Tottenham House in Wiltshire: a Grade-I-listed building that dates back to the 1720s, and, in that sense, is a similar environment to the country-house studios that some of their favourite moments from *OK Computer* and *Kid A* had been made in.

**Tottenham House sounds pretty swanky – was it a palace?**
**Jonny:** [*Laughing*] "They were waiting to go and demolish most of it. It was just a plumbing-free place full of buckets of rat poison. It was a bit grim."
**Thom:** "There wasn't even a functioning toilet. It was quite alarming – if the wind picked up you couldn't really stand beneath the windows because the top windows kept blowing out. They were all broken."

**"MY BEST VOCALS ARE ALWAYS THE ONES THAT HAPPEN THERE AND THEN"**

**Jonny:** "It had been a prep school up until the early '80s and then it was a rehab place for recovering heroin addicts. The bathrooms were designed for small boys."

**How did the surroundings affect the recording sessions?**
**Thom:** "Whenever you go somewhere, you observe whatever the atmosphere is. The reason we went there at all is because it had this bizarre round chamber [*a large space where the group could set up their equipment to get the best possible sound*]. We used it on everything. We were there for about three weeks and I got very sick. I couldn't swallow and it was all very horrible. I stayed in a caravan for two days thinking that I was going to get better and then it just got worse and worse and worse."
**Jonny:** "We were staying in caravans. I thought it would be quite glamorous, like winnebagos!"
**Thom:** "But it wasn't t like that, and the cold set in and it was damp. It was kind of the wrong time of year, It was October and the weather was kicking in."

**What was the mood like during the recording?**
**Thom:** "We could do what we wanted and it was great. You just get into this crazy headspace really fast. In a couple of days you lose track of time and where you are, as you're just in music 24 hours a day."
**Jonny:** "The house was so dilapidated. But we developed an idea about all the songs. There was a room with just a guitar and drumkit and amp. We were just playing bad blues rock at three in the morning for the sake of it."

**All this filth, rats and falling masonry might explain why "Bodysnatchers" is perhaps the most aggressive-sounding Radiohead track to date...**
**Thom:** "I have this thing – just before I get really sick I'll have this 12-hour hyperactive mania, and that song was recorded during one of those. I felt genuinely out of it when we did that. The vocal is one take and we didn't do anything to it afterwards. We tidied up my guitar because I was so out of it, my guitar-playing was rubbish. My best vocals are always the ones that happen there and then."



Indoorways: Thom and Jonny, November 2007

AFTER THREE WEEKS at Tottenham House, the band returned to Oxford, craving home comforts. Pretty much all of the songs on *In Rainbows* (both the download and discbox versions) had been worked on – though none actually finished, as the band were ironically hobbled by an overload of ideas: they could think of a million different ways to record each song, some of which had been in their live sets and in demo form, in different guises, for upwards of 10 years. String sections were experimented with, a choir of schoolchildren was recruited for "15 Step", and Jonny Greenwood would disappear for days at a time to write a computer program, which would finish up only making a couple of seconds of the record. The complexity of finishing these songs brought them dangerously close to an unproductive halt, as with *Kid A* years before.

**Thom:** "We deliberately did this thing to get a sense of disembodiment when we were assembling tracks. So the vocal may be from one version or the drums may be from another. If there was something that you were particularly fond of, you kept it from that take and forced it on to the other version. It was a really interesting experiment. For example, "All I Need" was the outcome of four different versions of it. It was all the best bits put together."

**Jonny:** "Thom will come and play a song like 'Nude' [*which was originally written by Yorke in the mid-'90s*] to you and obviously it's good. You want to record it. But it's been hanging around for 10 years and you find yourself thinking, 'Why haven't we recorded a good enough version of that song?' The relief now is that it's done and we didn't mess it up — it's worth it all."

**Thom:** "We would have these days where there were big breakthroughs and then suddenly... no. 'Videotape', to me, was a big breakthrough, we tried everything with it. One day I came in and decided it was going to be like a fast pulse – like a four-to-the-floor thing and everything was going to be built from that. We threw all this stuff at it. But then a couple of months later I went out and I came back and Jonny and Nigel Godrich had stripped it back. He had this bare-bones thing, which was amazing."

**After such a painstaking recording process, are you happy with the album now? Are you ever?**

**Thom:** "When it's finished I am, otherwise it doesn't get out. This one was hard because we had to jettison tunes that were as good as what's on there, but for some reason didn't bounce off the other tunes right. They were to the detriment of them. That was a real headfuck for me. 'Down Is The New Up', for example, is one of the things I am most proud of us ever doing. It's got the best drumming that Phil [*Selway*] has ever done on it. If you get it right, and we have done in the past, songs bounce off each other and they create something different."

THE CLOCK TICKING, Jonny Greenwood has made plans for a long weekend so makes his excuses and leaves. But Thom is in the mood to talk some more. Earlier, *NME* had pressed him on what some of the more obscure lyrics were about. He seemed evasive. Now, one on one and a glass of white wine later, he seems more willing to discuss them.

**With many of the lyrics on In Rainbows written in the first person, are we to take it this is a more personal record?**

**Thom:** "With *Hail To The Thief* I was using the language of the impersonal, but the fact I'm using a different language on this doesn't necessarily mean I am personally reflecting it on me."

**What about the night out that you described in "Jigsaw Falling Into Place"? Did you experience that first-hand?**

"I would never say it was personal, because it's always a set of observations. 'Jigsaw Falling Into Place' says much about the fact I used to live in the centre of Oxford and used to go out occasionally and witness the fucking chaos of a weekend around here. But it's also about a lot of different experiences. Personally, I was really surprised that it's going to be the single. The lyrics are quite caustic – the idea of '*before you're comatose*' or whatever, drinking yourself into oblivion and getting fucked up to forget. When you're part of a group of people who are all trying to forget en masse, it is partly this elation. But there's a much darker side."

**There's also a lyric in "Jigsaw..." about exchanging phone numbers, while "House Of Cards" has a line: "I don't want to be your friend, I just want to be your lover". Is this Radiohead's, um, sexy album?**

"Oh yeah, most songs on the record are seduction songs. My version of it anyway. I guess it's something that is not very often apparent, but it became apparent as time went on."

**Songs like "All I Need" are about obsession, aren't they?**

"That's why it's called *In Rainbows*: that obsession thing, thinking beyond where you are at the time. It's a phrase I had for a while, it kept coming up in my notebooks. And I don't know why, because it's kind of naff. But it seemed to work – it's one of those weird things. It stuck and I don't know why."

OUR DRINKS DRAINED, it's clear that the always self-conscious and reticent Thom feels he has talked enough about himself and his band for one day. But as he makes his

DEAN CHALKLEY/ WWW.TIMEINCUKCONTENT.COM

# Dr Tchock and his mysterious artwork




THE CREATOR OF Radiohead's startling, mysterious, downright odd artwork is the enigmatic Stanley Donwood. Not much is known of him; legend has it that Stanley Donwood isn't his real name, that he met Radiohead at university and has collaborated with Yorke – working under the name 'Tchocky' or 'Dr Tchock' – on all the artwork from *The Bends* onwards.

Donwood's stated in the past that the music and art have a "symbiotic" and "parasitic" relationship, but since his work complements their music so perfectly, you could easily see him as integral to Radiohead as a whole.

Granted a rare interview with Donwood, *NME* tried to find out more about his relationship with the band but, befitting the smoke and mirrors that surround him and his work, his answers came more in the form of cryptic clues. From here on in, make sure you leave a trail of crumbs behind you and always remember that "2+2=5".

**How did you first start working with Radiohead?**
I saw an advert in the window of a newsagents in Oxford; 'Wanted – artist for new band, own material, major label interest. Apply 01865 XXXXXXX.'

**The first thing you designed for the band was the cover for the "My Iron Lung" EP. How did that come about?**
Well, after phoning the number on the ad in the newsagents, I went round to this horrible squat the band had round the back of a cinema. A really tall bloke, Ed [*O'Brien, lead guitar*], I suppose, explained that they were in a spot of bother. They had a single out in a week – did I reckon I could sort them out? Of course I said that I could. No point telling them I'd failed my art course.

**What is your work inspired by?**
The usual things; rage, bewilderment, cynicism, boredom, paranoia, confusion, security guards, pylons, ring-roads, out-of-town supermarkets, petrol stations, fury, suburban lawns, pig farms, government installations, anger, decommissioned atomic sites, primetime TV advertising, volcanoes; you know.

**How closely do you work with the band when you're designing artwork?**
Typically, I camp in the nearest woodland and try to forget who I am. Occasionally I stumble through the muddy fields to whichever derelict mansion they're recording in and make a few sketches and notes. Sometimes Colin [*Greenwood, bass*] notices me, skulking in the rain, peering in through the broken windows, but mostly I wander like a ghost.

**Are you given a brief or can you do what you like?**
I don't know what a brief is, although I suspect I would start screaming if I ever got one.

**What's the Radiohead angry bear all about?**
It isn't angry; it's hungry. It's all the toys you used to play with when you were little. I first drew it for my daughter when she was about one. It was part of a story about how forgotten toys wake up in dusty boxes and go and eat the adults who abandoned them.

**What do you think of the way Radiohead decided to release *In Rainbows*?**
Everyone's got an opinion, hey? I reckon it was the only thing to do. What else? Major label? Free CD with the fucking *Daily* fucking *Mail*? Covermount on *Q*? Give me a break.

**Has the band ever said, "No, that's crap, can you do something else?"**
They did once, when I wanted to make giant topiary porn. Just as well, really. Though I don't think they said it was 'crap'. I would have remembered and held a grudge for decades.

**Are there overall themes to your work which perhaps dovetail with some of Radiohead's obsessions?**
It's not beyond the realms of possibility. Though I imagine those 'themes' and 'obsessions' are common to a fuck of a lot of people. But do you know what? *NME* exclusive: I'm even more of a miserable nihilist fucker than they are.

**What do you think is your own best piece of work and why?**
I don't know, but I got sent this quote this morning, which somehow seems quite apposite: "You do not have to believe in yourself or your work. It is not your business to determine how good it is, how valuable it is, nor how it compares with other expressions. But it is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly to the urges that motivate you" – Martha Graham [*US pioneer of modern dance*].

**How important do you think artwork is when it comes to forging the identity of a band?**
Well, if the band is no good, it doesn't matter how good the artwork is, but if the band is great then the artwork can be shit and no-one'll care. I'm quite repelled by the notions of marketing, brand identity and so on, but I grew up in the '80s so was continually exposed to the sort of corporate fuckwittery that gave us the insulting consumer-orientated client-state we inhabit today. This relatively sudden embrace of the power of 'graphic design' – formerly know as 'commercial art' – undoubtedly had an effect on the music 'industry', paradoxically allowing me to rant about consumerism on record sleeves. And in music magazines.

move to leave, there is still one question – the same question that precedes every new Radiohead release – left to ask. Like night follows day and headache follows Gallows gig, a Radiohead album always comes trailing internet chatter that it will be their last, and *In Rainbows* has been no exception.

**So, Thom, will there be another one?**
[*Long pause*] "Yeah, but I'm not sure we would go on tour beforehand and do all that bullshit. But we are actually really happy. I think with the download thing... somehow we've been released from things. Not just from EMI, but also creatively. The idea that you can just press 'return' and people can hear it. It's expanding everybody's minds. You can sort of see it happening. Colin [*Greenwood, bass*], for example, is really excited about all the possibilities. So I'm sure there will be, but it will be a manifestation of the freedom of things. There's no need to now answer to the old history of the band."

**Finally, what advice would you give to a "Creep"-era Thom Yorke?**
"Don't go on tour for quite as long as you did during the *OK Computer* period [*Thom famously suffered from depression during the tour, as seen on 1998's Meeting People Is Easy DVD*]. And don't assume that in any way this is yours. It's everybody's. Don't be so fucking selfish."

There he goes then, shuffling smartly out of the Old Parsonage's dusty history into whatever bright future he envisions for us all: rock's most downloadable Santa Claus and the least selfish man in showbusiness. Hail to the anti-thief.

# JONNY GREENWOOD
# SOLO ALBUMS

Exit music (for serious films). The extra-curricular adventures of Jonny Greenwood, avant-classical maverick. Now with added record label. | BY JASON ANDERSON

**RELEASED: 2003-2017**

AS IS THE case for so many precocious tykes who wind up devoting their lives to the passion, Jonny Greenwood's childhood was rich with music. What's more unusual – though perhaps unsurprising given the guitarist's pursuits both in and outside of Radiohead – is where he sometimes found it.

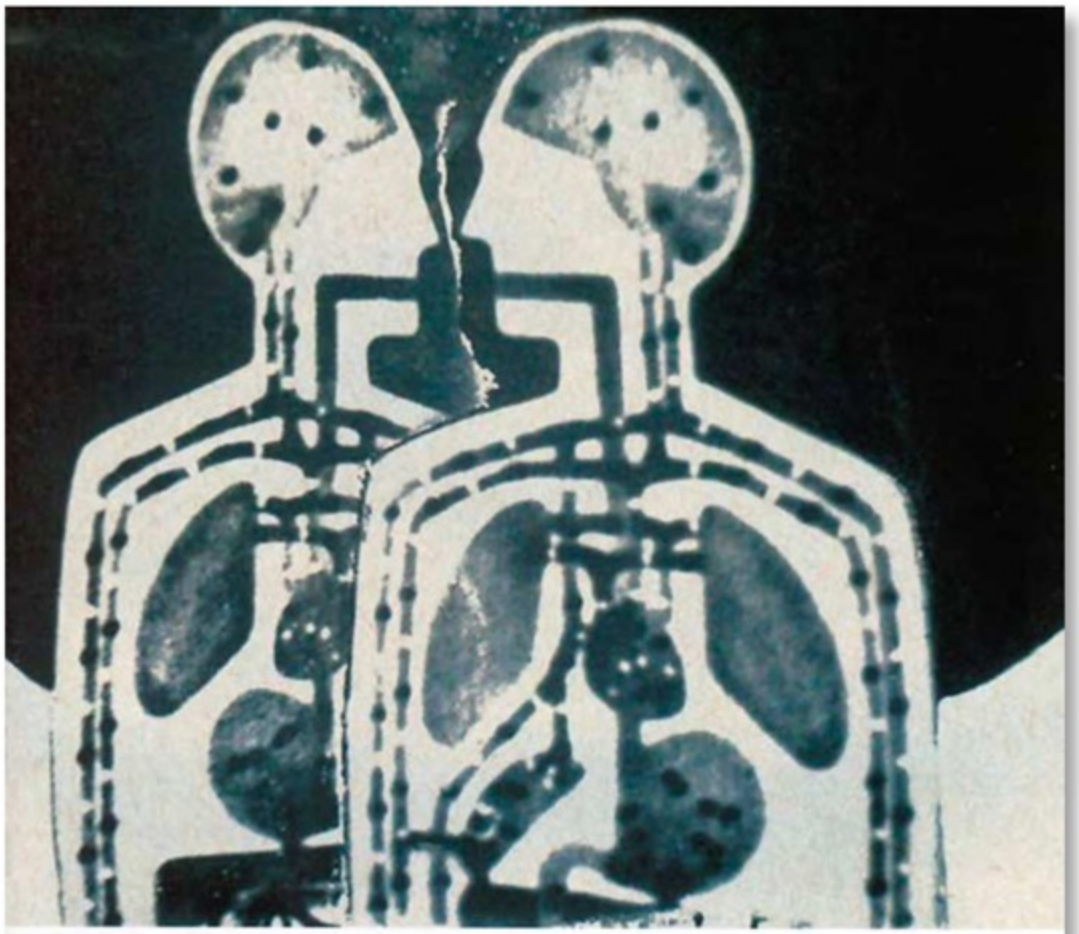
In his programme note for "Popcorn Superhet Receiver", an orchestral piece that emerged from the year he spent as the BBC's composer in residence in 2004, Greenwood located the roots of this dense, dramatic work in his peculiar listening habits during the family car trips with his older brother Colin.

According to the younger Greenwood, the car only ever had four cassettes in it. They were "the songs of Simon and Garfunkel (though bizarrely not sung by them); Mozart's horn concertos; and two musicals: *Flower Drum Song* and *My Fair Lady*." Inevitably, the Greenwoods would collectively tire of the options during the longer journeys and turn the stereo off. At that point, Jonny would listen just as avidly to the engine noise. He'd spend hours listening to the drone while imagining the music from the cassettes still playing in the background.

It was an early lesson in wresting musical forms out of dissonance and disorder. It also seems like an appropriate inception point for his continuing endeavours in the contemporary classical world and as a collaborator to directors such as Paul Thomas Anderson and Lynne Ramsay. Indeed, Greenwood has travelled far beyond the parameters of modern rock, pursuing a trajectory that was clear even before he made his first official solo endeavour in 2003 by scoring Simon Pummell's experimental documentary **BODYSONG**. The alternately jagged and spaced-out sounds he uses to frame *OK Computer*'s "Subterranean Homesick Alien" and the impact that his ondes Martenot had on the shape of *Kid A* were two of many indications from Radiohead's first decade that Jonny Greenwood was not content to be a garden-variety guitar hero.

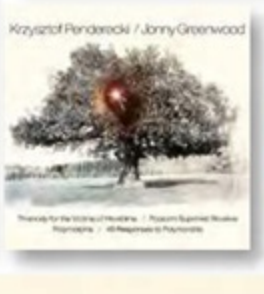
> IF STRIPPED OF STRINGS AND HORNS, *BODYSONG* MIGHT'VE BEEN PASSED OFF AS A DUB COUSIN TO *KID A*

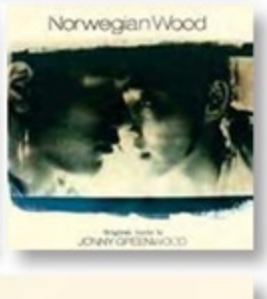
Just a few short years before the band took off, he was a teenager playing viola in the Thames Vale Youth Orchestra, one who was just as excited about the Pixies as he was about Olivier Messiaen. Greenwood has long cited the latter's *Turangalila Symphonie* – a dauntingly complex yet exhilarating 1948 work by the French composer – as his favourite piece of music ever. He was beginning his degree course in music and psychology at Oxford Brookes University when EMI signed Radiohead's predecessor band On a Friday in 1991. Had his studies not been interrupted, Greenwood would likely have stayed on a path toward classical-world

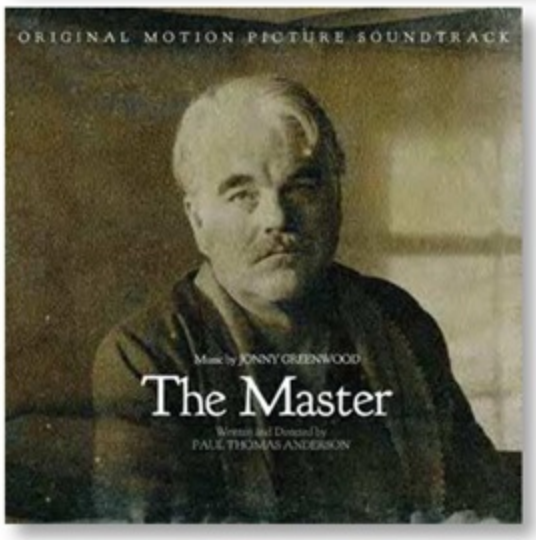


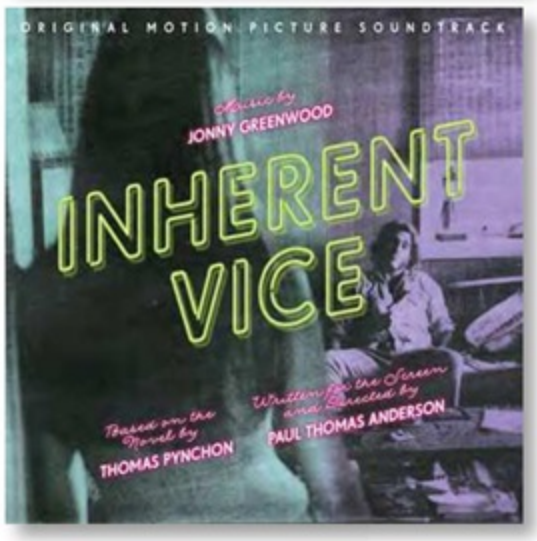
**Bodysong.** Jonny Greenwood.
Music from the film.

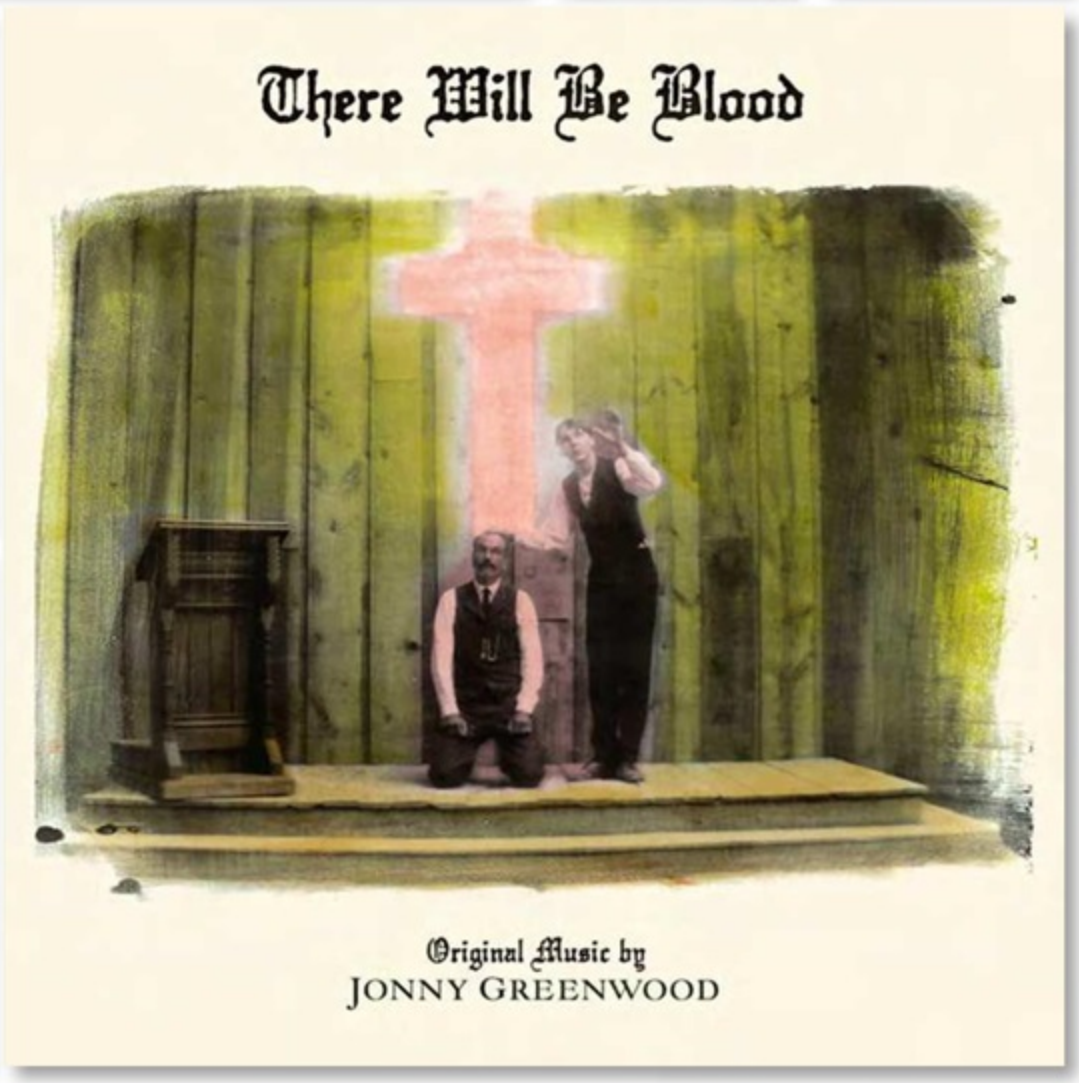




Jonny Greenwood and the LCO perform the score of *There Will Be Blood* at the Roundhouse, London, August 6, 2014

EDU HAWKINS/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES

respectability, though that destiny might've involved playing in an orchestra rather than composing. As he lamented to *Uncut*'s Michael Bonner in 2012, his lack of singing ability has sometimes impaired his confidence as a songwriter for the band: "Aside from a few guitar chord sequences, I can't really write songs." Mapping out sounds and textures digitally has been more his forte. His devotion to dub reggae – as evidenced by *Jonny Greenwood Is The Controller*, a 2007 dub collection he curated for the Trojan label – would also point to a predilection for knob-twiddling, timbre-tweaking and otherwise working over pieces of source material until they're unrecognisable.

His score for *Bodysong* is roughly split between sounds that have undergone this treatment and others that are more unvarnished. (The latter are provided by guests like the Emperor Quartet and a set of free jazzers.) Greenwood's intensely physical music feels deeply embedded in the body's own internal symphony of noises as depicted in Pummell's film – the rushing of blood, the humming of nervous systems, the cycles of breath. If stripped of strings and horns, much of *Bodysong* might have been passed off as a distorted dub cousin to *Kid A*.

The same could not be said of the three pieces that Greenwood composed after being hired as the BBC's composer in residence, all of which demonstrate the fast-growing sophistication of his work. Written for two ondes Martenot and nine players, "Smear" oscillates between qualities of winsomeness and dread – it might've had a place on the soundtrack for *The Shining* alongside the music of another of Greenwood's heroes, Krzysztof Penderecki. Cutesy and Cagean in equal measure, "Piano for Children" simulates the halting, messy style of a beginner player.

**HIS LATEST SCORE SUGGESTS GREENWOOD IS NOW MOVING PAST THE PENDERECKI WORSHIP**

"Popcorn Superhet Receiver" is a different and much more menacing beast, as Paul Thomas Anderson realised when he used a recording to score early versions of **THERE WILL BE BLOOD**. Inspired by Stanley Kubrick's use of music by Ligeti and Penderecki for *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Shining*, Anderson knew his saga of an early-20th-century oil baron's insatiable drive to dominate man and land alike required music with the same eerie grandeur and "Popcorn Superhet Receiver" fit the bill. What with Daniel Day-Lewis' loquacity in his Oscar-winning performance as Daniel Plainview, it's easy to forget that Anderson's movie is entirely wordless for the first 14 minutes. Instead, the spare soundscape consists of the thuds and scrapes as Plainview tears away at the barren Californian landscape, the occasional grunts and exhalations that accompany these exertions, passages of stillness and Greenwood's music. And what music it is. Unsettling and constantly startling, the Greenwood compositions heard throughout Anderson's film – much of it reworked from "Popcorn Superhet Receiver" and "Convergence" on *Bodysong* -- fully convey Plainview's destructive energy. This was orchestral music with uncommon mass and force, Greenwood's Penderecki-like emphasis on micro- or quarter-tone intervals resulting in a shifting, swirling cloud of noise.

Though *There Will Be Blood* was declared ineligible for an Academy Award due to its use of pre-existing music, it garnered Greenwood acclaim and recognition far beyond the confines of Radiohead's fanbase. A condensed version of the score later earned one of the most prestigious distinctions in the classical world when it was recorded for a release by Deutsche Grammophon in 2014. (It would be accompanied by several compositions by The National's Bryce Dessner, another modern rocker with a classical education.)

Greenwood's subsequent works for film demonstrate his eagerness to expand his compositional palette while remaining sensitive to his clients' needs. Released in 2010, **NORWEGIAN WOOD** is director Tran Anh Hung's adaptation of Haruki Murakami's novel about a fraught student love triangle. Despite the Fabs song in the title (a nod to the '60s setting) and the delicacy of his guitar instrumental "Toki No Senrei Wo Uketeinai Mono Wo Yomuna", the chief reference point for Greenwood's score is Toru Takemitsu. Firmly in

the mould of the Japanese modernist master's music for films by Hiroshi Teshigahara and Akira Kurosawa, Greenwood's elegiac music seeks to reconcile Western and Eastern traditions with electronic and experimental strains, all while maintaining a special reverence for silence. "Naoko Ga Shinda" provides the requisite burst of Penderecki-style hypertonality.

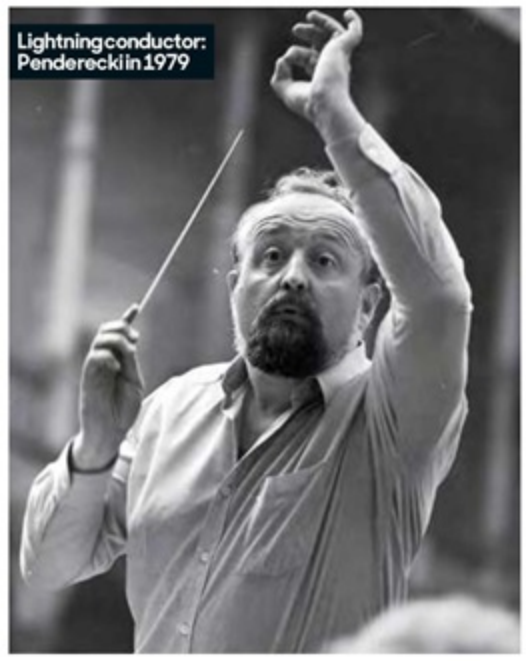
The Asian influence also surfaces in Greenwood's musical motif for Tilda Swinton's travel writer character in **WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN**, Lynne Ramsay's grim 2011 version of Lionel Shriver's bad-seed horror story about a mother struggling to understand how her son could perpetrate a Columbine-like massacre. Speaking to *Uncut* in 2012, he'd described his contributions to the soundtrack as "a few pretty steel-strung harp things" augmented with "laptop-generated stuff broadcast to and recorded from an old longwave radio." It adds another layer of dread to Ramsay's film but as Greenwood noted, it's "not exactly *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* on its own."

He teamed again with Ramsay for **YOU WERE NEVER REALLY HERE**, a grimly intense 2018 psychological thriller starring Joaquin Phoenix as a psychologically disturbed mercenary waging a one-man war against sex traffickers. Matching and often intensifying the film's abrupt shifts from scenes of eerie calm to episodes of brutal violence, Greenwood's score is a work of constant turbulence. More placid passages continually give way to sudden bursts of dissonance, noise and harsh electronics, much of it underpinned by percussion suggestive of the hammer blows Phoenix's character delivers to assorted bad men. It still wasn't *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* but it marked a further advance in complexity and boldness.

His next three collaborations with Anderson yielded much more music that stands apart from the images. Foregrounding woodwinds and harp, his music for **THE MASTER** – the director's 2012 drama about the fraught dynamic between an L Ron Hubbard-like guru and his unstable acolyte in post-WWII America – shifts between fleeting moments of serenity and angry fury. The Bartók-like squalling of "Baton Sparks" is especially nightmarish.

Also impressive is Greenwood's ability to maintain a sonic cohesion with the period jazz ballads that Anderson uses elsewhere in his film. But that must've seemed like child's play compared to the task of creating original music that could knit together the wild mixtape heard throughout **INHERENT VICE**, Anderson's screwy take on Thomas Pynchon's very-shaggy-dog mystery story set in 1970 Los Angeles with Phoenix this time as a dope-addled detective. Somehow Greenwood fashions a throughline between the free-ranging Krautrock of Can, Neil Young's sun-scorched Californian folk-rock, Les Baxter exotica and vintage R&B and doo-wop. He also found a place for "Spooks," a surfy Radiohead instrumental that had been kicking around since 2006 and is played here by former members of Supergrass.

Greenwood's score also nods to Herrmann's sickly sumptuous music for *Vertigo* and *Marnie*, Alfred Hitchcock's two most twisted stories of romantic obsession. Just as Anderson's anarchic movie ultimately finds a pivot point around the torch that Phoenix's detective carries for his


Lightning conductor: Penderecki in 1979

missing ex-lover, these swoony passages serve as the emotional centre for a soundtrack that could've easily been eclectic to a fault.

While that more voluptuous sensibility was one of many modes in *Inherent Vice*, it absolutely dominates Greenwood's music for **PHANTOM THREAD**, Anderson's elegant 2017 period piece with Daniel Day-Lewis as a couturier catering to the upper crust of 1950s London. Recorded with a 60-piece orchestra, the score couldn't be grander in scope, Greenwood successfully emulating the florid recordings of baroque composers popular in the movie's era. Another of the key reference points – Glenn Gould's revolutionary performances of Bach's piano pieces – is prevalent in the sparer sequences that add an undercurrent of icy tension to the prevailing romanticism. Greenwood's fourth score for Anderson became his first to be nominated for an Oscar.

As Greenwood continued his work with high-prestige auteurs, he also sought out collaborations with equally revered figures in the music world, including his hero Penderecki. In 2011, Greenwood made a pilgrimage to the Polish master's farm near Krakow to join him in overseeing the Aukso Orchestra's live performances and studio recordings of his 1960 landmark "Threnody For The Victims of Hiroshima" and 1961's "Polymorphia" and two Greenwood pieces they partially inspired: "Popcorn Superhet Receiver" and a new piece named '48 Responses To Polymorphia'. Released in 2012 by Nonesuch, the resulting album reveals the many connection points and subtler divergences between the two composers.

Greenwood changed tack completely for **JUNUN**, a cross-cultural collaboration documented in Anderson's 2015 film of the same name. This time the recording location was Rajasthan, India, where Greenwood and Israeli composer Shye Ben Tzur joined forces with players from the region – which they dubbed the Rajasthan Express – to create gloriously ecstatic music that combined elements of devotional Qawwali music, North Indian ragas, Sufi and Romani traditions, and much more. Whatever its constituent parts may be, the brass-heavy result boasts an earthy, even funky exuberance.

Back at home in the UK, Greenwood has continued to present and record more pieces that demonstrate his close ties to the contemporary classical world. In 2014, the evocatively titled "Fight With Cudgels" was one of five pieces he debuted in a concert with soloists from the London Contemporary Orchestra at the Wapping Hydraulic Power Station. Premiered at the BBC Proms in 2019, "Horror vacui" is an enthralling and mind-bending concert work in which the high keening sounds of a solo violinist are echoed, warped and distended by 68 other string players.

Last year also saw the launch of **OCTATONIC RECORDS**, a label founded by Greenwood to document the many classical musicians who've become his friends. The first volume featured his "Horror Vacui" soloist Daniel Pioro tackling Bach's Partita No 2 in D Minor; the second combines Greenwood's "Three Miniatures From Water" with "Industry" by Oliver Coates, cellist and regular collaborator with Mica Levi.

Greenwood's statement about his reasons for starting the label brim with his characteristic enthusiasm for non-rock musical realms. As he writes, "I stand in awe of classically trained UK musicians: a twentysomething carrying a cello case will always be more impressive than someone with a guitar. It's just harder to do. It takes more commitment and the sounds they make are so limitless – for all that, the instruments they play are 'traditional'."

He hopes Octatonic's releases (which include impeccably stylish vinyl editions) will encourage more people to see live classical music, too. And though Greenwood pledges to "work hard to produce recordings to encourage you to see this music as something vital and passionate," he ought not to be so tough on himself given how much he's done already to inspire Radiohead fans to explore a much wider planet of sound.

### THE CRITICS' VERDICT

**"A spacey set of instrumental ambience and interference... You probably need to watch the film in tandem. No-one will be humming this, but Radiohead fans will find Jesus in it."**
CHRIS ROBERTS ON *BODYSONG*, UNCUT, DEC 2003

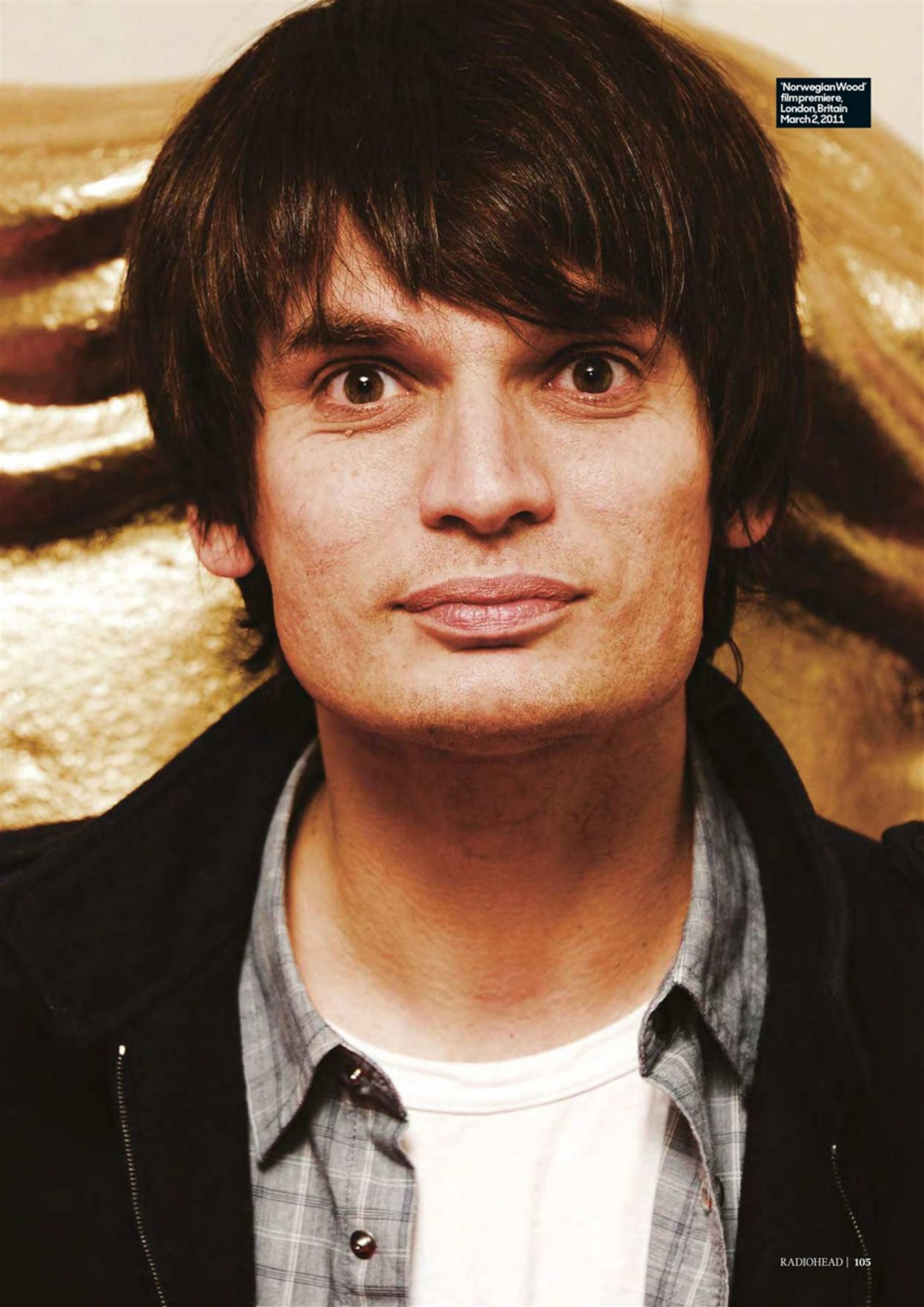
**"Jonny Greenwood's second collaboration with Paul Thomas Anderson is almost entirely orchestral, dominated by Debussy-esque romanticism with touches of Charles Ives-style dissonance..."**
JOHN LEWIS ON *THE MASTER* OST, UNCUT, DEC 2012

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

# “What do I do? I just generally worry about things...”

**How does the most innovative guitarist of his generation spend his spare time? By writing masterful film scores and trying to reinvent how music sounds, it seems. *ROB YOUNG* penetrates the studio lair of Jonny Greenwood and discovers, among other things, what Radiohead have been up to of late: “We’re quite incompetent, I think, and always have been.”**

DAVID FISHER/SHUTTERSTOCK.V



'Norwegian Wood' film premiere, London, Britain March 2, 2011



Purplehaze: Jonny Greenwoodonstage at the Roseland Ballroom, NYC, September 28, 2011

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE




THE CAR PULLS into the courtyard of a small complex of offices in the middle of a housing estate on the fringes of Didcot, an Oxfordshire railway town. There are two doors into this unit, and we take the right-hand one at first, which leads, like the proverbial rabbit hole, into a warren of cramped rooms. Here's a drum kit, now a stack of guitar amps, and finally, as the air becomes muggier, even slightly fetid, we reach the control room, a windowless space piled high with effects racks, keyboards, a crumpled black leather sofa and mixing desk.

This is where Jonny Greenwood has been lurking, putting the finishing touches this damp January morning to his soundtrack for Lynne Ramsay's adaptation of Lionel Shriver's *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, made for BBC Films and starring Tilda Swinton and John C Reilly. Despite being enthused by the outcome – mainly music played by Jean Kelly on a seven-string Irish harp – Greenwood seems eager to get out of this lightless place, and after manager Bryce Edge hands him a plastic bag of victuals from the local Waitrose, suggests we retire to the awards-lined lounge of his management's offices up the left-hand staircase. Looking at the shiny discs, trophies and statuettes Radiohead have picked up for *OK Computer*, *Kid A* and others over the years, one can't help but wonder how work is progressing on the follow-up to 2007's *In Rainbows*?

"It seems to be slow, but there's lots of work going on," Greenwood explains. "We've been with each other an awful lot. It's more about working out which is the right path to go down for each of the songs and ideas. I don't think people appreciate what a mess most bands' records are until they're finalised, the songs are in order and you've left the right ones off and put the right ones on, and suddenly it has something. We're quite incompetent, I think, and always have been."

RIGHT NOW, GREENWOOD is representing his parallel side, his composerly career which has run alongside (and fed into) Radiohead for several years. This month his music – introspective orchestral stuff – graces the soundtrack of Tran Anh Hung's *Norwegian Wood*, a stately, melancholy, period-detail-soaked adaptation of Haruki Murakami's coming-of-age novel. At just over two hours, the film's hazy, atmospheric evocation of late-'60s Tokyo is strangely static, and for much of the first hour the only music heard is a sprinkling of early Can tracks. "I told him about Can," claims Greenwood, "because originally he had lots of Doors, and I had the Oliver Stone heebie-jeebies about 'this is the '60s', Jimi Hendrix and so on. I thought, Can, they had a Japanese singer, it sort of fits..."

Greenwood's music for films began in 2003 with *Bodysong*, a wordless documentary about human motion and activity with antecedents in films like *Koyaanisqatsi*.

"Jonny always wanted to go against the grain, mess with expectations," recalls *Bodysong*'s director, Simon Pummell. "At one point he was looking into the possibilities of soundscapes of extinct languages. The way the percussion in the 'Violence' section slowly shifts into a more synchronised, obsessional beat – and moves from excitement to something oppressive, as the images escalate from brawling to genocidal brutality – is an example of the music really telling the story, together with the images."

He moved from art-house to mainstream theatres with Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* in 2007, with a harsh catgut accompaniment – "music about the characters and the landscape", he says – that scaled the movie's epic peaks and troughs with atonal introspection and wide-horizon scrape. Partly derived from a standalone commission he'd written for the BBC Concert Orchestra called "Popcorn Superhet Receiver", it was a musical language of understatement.

"It's recurring textures," explains Robert Ziegler, who conducted the orchestra on both soundtrack recordings. "Certain clusters that he used, especially in *There Will Be Blood*, just nailed the quality of the film. And some of the new music he wrote, propulsive, rhythmic things, worked out wonderfully. He got that menace; on one of the most brilliant cues, "Open Spaces", he played the Ondes Martenot [*an eerie-sounding early electronic instrument*], and the whole conception of it was perfect. Those huge Texas landscapes, and it was just this little cue, but it lifted the whole film."

I ask Greenwood whether he needs something visual as a starting point.

"Yeah, I enjoy having something to write the music for that's concrete but at the same time the luxury of it not being that concrete, more an excuse to write music. My most exciting days ever are the morning of recording a quartet or an orchestra or a harp player, and knowing they're coming, and setting up the stands and mics, and putting music out for them. And then after four hours it's all over and you've got something.

"I've had a real soft ride. Traditionally film composers are way below the make-up people in the pecking order. It's not seen as important, unless you find enthusiastic directors. And I've been lucky three times in a row."

Is that excitement greater than coming out on stage in front of thousands at a Radiohead gig?

"Yeah, I think it is," he says. "Because you've got weeks of preparation, and it's just on paper and wondering what is going to happen. These great musicians are coming in, and you can hand them something that's fairly lifeless and they can make it very musical. That's been a big discovery for me, you realise how much they put into it... they can make things sound musical even if it's just a C major chord. It can sound far more

exciting than you thought it was going to. It's a big secret, but you don't realise how much input comes from these people. 'I can do this four or five different ways – which way would you like it?' Or 'You can get this kind of effect from the strings', and so on."

Robert Ziegler is in no doubt of Greenwood's talents as a composer, citing Polish modernist Penderecki as an antecedent. "Obviously he's got the same attraction to masses of sound and big clusters of orchestral sound. As a film composer you have to be careful not to 'frighten the horses' and the producers..."

*There Will Be Blood* led directly to Greenwood's next commission, as Tran Anh Hung used some of it as guide music on early cuts of *Norwegian Wood*. "When I saw *There Will Be Blood*," says Hung, "I was completely seduced by Jonny's music. It was a 'new sound' with a profoundness that I have not heard elsewhere in films. The emotions coming from his music were so... right, so mysterious and yet so obvious. No doubt for me that Jonny's music would give a dark, deep beauty that *Norwegian Wood* needed."

Eventually Greenwood adapted another piece, "Doghouse", for the finished film. "Doghouse" is a triple concerto for violin, viola and cello, inspired by thoughts of Wally Stott's scores for Scott Walker songs like "It's Raining Today" and "Rosemary" languishing in the BBC library.

On a structural level, "as a toddler I was once shown that the note D on a piano is between the two black notes, and that's D because it is in a kennel, and that piece is written with this symmetrical pattern that started on that note," Greenwood explains.

The hands-on business of composing music might seem diametrically opposed to rock's spontaneity. But since 2000's *Kid A*, Radiohead have been moving away from the sound of five men in a room playing live, to a more laboriously constructed, digitally processed approach. The forces of group and orchestra were combined on the group's most recent offering, "Harry Patch (In Memory Of)", a tribute to the last surviving WWI veteran (who died in 2009, aged 111). How does Greenwood, who trained on the viola at school, see these two methods complementing each other? "There have always been bits of orchestration in Radiohead," he acknowledges. "It's always been good to have the knowledge of music theory and I've used it all the time. A big part of what we've always done is slightly scientifically tried to copy something which we can't. It's always been like that, whether it was bits of *OK Computer* that in our heads we wanted to be like *Bitches Brew*, and the fact that none of us could play the trumpet, or jazz, didn't bother us. Which sounds like arrogance, but it's more that you aim and miss, and don't let it bother you. And a lot of this film stuff is trying to do something I don't really know how to do, so I'm scrabbling around and getting a little lost and unsure, but it's been a nice way of working."

In person, Greenwood is reserved and modest. But all the same, he becomes enthusiastic when discussing the more exciting aspects of his job. Here is a man, it seems, who even uses his downtime constructively in the pursuit of making music. "Touring's been good for working on classical stuff," he explains. "I've had hours and hours in hotel rooms. The silence..." So is there such a thing as a typical day for him at present, and what does he do when he's not working?




"I play the piano a lot at the moment," he says after a pause. "I don't know, I'm a bit low on hobbies. I used to do lots of photography... I don't know. What do I do? What do you do? I just generally worry about things, I think? And daydream ideas for programming." That puts him back in his stride. "The programming is really fun at the moment, very satisfying. I spend half my time writing music software, computer-based sound generators for Radiohead. Trying to bypass other people's ideas of what music software should do and how it should sound, going back a step. It's like building wonky drum machines, not using presets, basically. It's like 'Mouse Trap', you construct things." Has he got a mathematical mind, then? "I like a lot of popular science writing – John Gribbin and stuff. Lots of nerdy science and linguistics books. Yeah, I'm a bit trainspottery, let's not deny it."

"FILM COMPOSERS ARE WAY BELOW THE MAKE-UP PEOPLE IN THE PECKING ORDER"

"As a guitar player he's extraordinary: a virtuoso, frenetic, and full of personality," testifies Bernard Butler, who views Greenwood as one of a quartet of players with distinctive styles who emerged at roughly the same moment, including himself, John Squire and Graham Coxon. "We're all very emotional and slightly deranged guitar players, and have an overwrought and melodic sensibility. I can't think of any guitar players with those qualities at the moment. It's a most un-Radiohead thing to do, but he probably did meet a devil at a crossroads somewhere, along the A1, probably."

How, I ask Greenwood, would he like to be remembered? As a composer or as a respected guitarist?

"God, not as a 'guitar stylist'!" he bursts out. "Helping to write some very good songs, playing on them and recording them with this amazing band is like nothing else. As to what people think years from now... You see our record winning top album of the last whatever years, but then you see shocking albums winning the same thing 20, 30 years ago and you think, it's nice but... All that really matters is what we do next."

Such a comment naturally leads to more gentle probing about forthcoming plans for the Radiohead crew. "We've been recording and working," he allows. "We're in the frame of mind of wanting to finish things and then decide what to do next. The old-fashioned way of thinking, when we had a record label, was, 'You need to book the tour today, even though you're only half way through the record.' And we can't do that anymore. We just want to finish something and be satisfied."

Leaving EMI to go it alone has meant, not surprisingly, "you lose the structure, but then you are a bit freer. None of us are very nostalgic for those days of waiting for somebody's approval of your recording. But I've always said at EMI we had a good relationship compared with some people."

But in the age of digital distribution, and the increasingly invisible presence of music on the high street, and given that *In Rainbows* was launched with its radical pay-what-you-like policy – plus an extraordinary free, televised late-night gig at East London's Rough Trade store – chances are, however the next record ends up, there'll be something of a fanfare.

"I don't like how music dribbles out," he announces as we wrap things up. "I like events, that's the only thing, really."






Soundtracked: Tilda Swinton in *We Need To Talk About Kevin*. Right: Daniel Day Lewis in *There Will Be Blood*

MOVIESTORE COLLECTION/SHUTTERSTOCK, PARAMOUNT/VANTAGE/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

# THE KING OF LIMBS

Into the wildwood! Radiohead reconvene, and cut themselves to pieces. An enigmatic last act (for now)... | BY LOUIS PATTISON

**RELEASED: 18 FEBRUARY 2011**

BEFORE IT BECAME an album – a good thousand years before, if you want to consider some sort of approximate timescale – 'The King Of Limbs' was a tree. A gigantic, twisted oak around 11 metres in girth, it is one of the oldest trees in Wiltshire's Savernake Forest, itself said to be one of the most ancient in all of Europe. This is a place of deep history. Standing on a Cretaceous chalk plateau, the 'Safernoc' woodland was first mentioned in AD 934 in the written records of the Saxon king Athelstan. In the 16th Century, Savernake was a favourite deer-hunting haunt of King Henry VIII. Back then it was owned by Sir John Seymour, and it was while England's impulsive monarch was staying at Seymour's Wolf Hall pile that he found himself captivated by his host's comely daughter Jane. Not so long after, King Henry's second queen, Anne Boleyn, found herself bound for the chopping block. 'The King Of Limbs' has outlived many.

Radiohead first came to Savernake in October 2006 while midway through the recording of *In Rainbows*, and holed up in Tottenham House, a crumbling country pile on the edge of the forest. This new location was designed to shake a period of writer's block, and it's easy to imagine the members of Radiohead breaking up frustrating recording sessions with misty morning walks through the bracken and brush – or some days, perhaps, delving deeper to see what ancient secrets might lie further in, beneath the thick and knotted canopies.

**WISPY AND ABSTRACTED, LIGHT ON GUITARS AND TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE**

Still, *The King Of Limbs* was not made here, or even nearby. In fact, it appears to have been recorded in three concentrated weeks of sessions with long-time producer Nigel Godrich at a house in Los Angeles – a house, if you believe the rumours, owned by the actress Drew Barrymore, who is singled out for profuse thanks in the liner notes. Reports that filtered back on the gossip grapevine suggest the recording of the album culminated with a star-studded wrap party in the Hollywood Hills attended by the likes of Danger Mouse, Beck and the actress Salma Hayek. The Radiohead of the 1998 rockumentary *Meeting People Is Easy* might have feigned catalepsy to escape this sort of backslappy social occasion, but it just goes to show how one can loosen up when doing things on one's own terms.

Like *In Rainbows*, *The King Of Limbs* was a surprise drop. Announced on Radiohead's website on February 14, 2011 and released as a download four days later, it sparked first a rush to judgement, then general confusion. Wispy and abstracted, light on guitars and traditional verse-chorus structure, and clocking in at a relatively light 38 minutes in length, its main


RADIOHEAD
THE KING OF LIMBS


BLOOM
MORNING MR MAGPIE
LITTLE BY LITTLE
FERAL
RADIOHEAD
LOTUS FLOWER
CODEX
GIVE UP THE GHOST
SEPARATOR
XL tbd Hostess
2011 TICKER TAPE LTD. PUBLISHED BY TICKER TAPE LTD.


GIVE UP THE GHOST
SEPARATOR
CODEX
LOTUS FLOWER
FERAL
LITTLE BY LITTLE
MORNING MR MAGPIE
BLOOM
THE KING OF LIMBS
RADIOHEAD
PUBLISHED BY TICKER TAPE LTD.
2011 TICKER TAPE LTD.

hallmark was its airless, repetitive rhythms, expertly played by drummer Philip Selway to sound as mechanistic and inhuman as possible (one man determined to prove that he *could* dance to it was Thom Yorke, who donned a white shirt and bowler hat and grooved, in a faintly Charlie Chaplinesque manner, throughout the video to teaser track "Lotus Flower"). The immediate response to *The King Of Limbs* was a sort of optimistic disappointment: perhaps this strange and muted album was a grower? Indisputably, its contents took a little while to settle, although approaching four years on, it's hopefully fair to say that Radiohead's eighth album still hasn't entirely given up its secrets.

It might have been born in LA, but ancient currents run through *The King Of Limbs*. When discussing the record, Yorke reached for words such as "wildness" and "mutation", and spoke of the influence of old European folk tales. Accordingly, a sense of nature at its most queer and peculiar permeates throughout. The skittering drums and free bass of "Bloom" gestures to astral jazz as practised by the likes of Alice Coltrane or Pharoah Sanders, but in Radiohead's hands it feels more oceanic, Yorke singing of floating jellyfish and *"a giant turtle's eyes"*. On the twitchy, pointillist funk of "Morning Mr Magpie" – a song debuted in 2002, finally completed to the band's satisfaction here – we find him engaged in diplomacy with a feathered foe he accuses of having stolen his memory. As "Codex" segues smoothly into "Give Up The Ghost", we hear the twitter of birdsong, sped-up slightly in a way that sends prickles up the back of the neck.

The album's fairytale tone is beautifully captured in artwork created by Radiohead's long-time artist-collaborator Stanley Donwood and Yorke (credited here as Zachariah Wildwood). The sleeve depicts colourful, phantasmagorical forests filled with mysterious flora and fauna, canopies and undergrowth dotted with eyes and strange beasts – faintly reminiscent of the Ents in Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings* – gazing quizzically out of the darkness. Speculating on these creatures and their motives, Donwood described them as "neither malevolent or benevolent... they're simply there, part of the living spirit of the forest." For a band that has often fretted over environmental concerns, here is a fantasy of a world untouched by human hand. And while it might not have been obvious from the outside, musically, too, *The King Of Limbs* found Radiohead stepping into uncharted territory. No-one in the band, says Jonny Greenwood, had any interesting in writing songs the conventional way – picking up guitars, strumming out chord sequences. But Radiohead being a compositional, collaborative beast, nor did they have a fully electronic album in them. Instead Greenwood, by now an experienced computer programmer, wrote a custom piece of sampling software, which the band would use to cut up and process passages of their own playing; an activity Yorke explained as being like "editing a film". So while it's a band you hear here, the process has as much to do with, say, DJ Shadow's *Entroducing* as any conventional rock template.

**IT WEAVES TOGETHER THE ORGANIC AND ELECTRONIC WITH A COMPLEXITY THAT'S HARD TO UNPICK**

The result is a record that weaves together the organic and electronic with a complexity it's often difficult to unpick. *"I would slip into the groove,"* sings Yorke in a high, clear falsetto on "Lotus Flower", a track that builds a pneumatic, rather sensual funk from punchy breaks and dolorous synthesiser sobs. "Little By Little" begins as a simple, brooding acoustic guitar piece, but a thumping backbeat slowly fans out into something detailed and syncopated, a poltergeist orchestra rattling away on pots and pans. "Feral", meanwhile, dispenses with all pretence to song form entirely, being a skittering electronica piece in the vein of Four Tet or Burial that takes a detailed Selway drum loop and tweaks and layers it with much gusto. Technically it's an instrumental, Yorke's voice reduced to mere texture, and hung about the place like drapes.

If the first side of *The King Of Limbs* appears to focus on dense rhythmic experiments, the second side feels softer, more formally structured, and, for the casual listener, perhaps more approachable. "Codex" is this record's "Pyramid Song", a softly resigned piano piece accompanied by distant swells of flugelhorn that finds Yorke invoking that common Radiohead trope of disappearing without trace: *"Sleight of hand/Jump off the end/Into a clear lake/No-one around"*. "Give Up The Ghost" makes a strong case that *The King Of Limbs* is in fact Radiohead's swing at making a futuristic psych-folk record, a sort of sparse and burnt-out Neil Young ballad with ghostly backing vocals and time kept by a hand tapping at the body of an acoustic guitar. The album finishes on the sweet "Separator", a mid-tempo shuffle of beats and modestly pretty melodies with a lyric that unfolds like a dream sequence. Yorke falls off the back of a gigantic bird, feels like a fish flipped out of water, finds himself on his back under a tea parlour, and jerks awake. *"Finally I'm free of all the weight I've been carrying,"* he sings. Finishing an album with a 'And it was all a dream...' moment might smack of cliché, but you barely even notice, blindsided as you are by the shock of Radiohead wishing all their troubles away, lost in zen-like contentment.

Having made a rather quixotic album, the band went about promoting it in a quixotic way. A month later, as physical copies of *The King Of Limbs* found their way to record shop shelves courtesy of XL Recordings, Yorke and Stanley Donwood arranged a very Radiohead marketing stunt: the pair dressed in warm coats and flat caps, stood outside Rough Trade East just off London's Brick Lane, handing out free copies of a newsprint publication titled *The Universal Sigh* (its name a reference to the opening couplet of "Bloom", *"Open your mouth wide/The universe will sigh"*). The interior featured writing and art by Yorke and Donwood, as well as original essays by Robert Macfarlane and Jay Griffiths, whose books *The Wild Places* and *Wild: An Elemental Journey* detailed the authors' explorations of deep, untouched wilderness. Typographically beautiful, Donwood says he sourced the fonts from old US newspapers published at the height of the Great Depression. Meanwhile, in lieu of singles from *The King Of Limbs*, in the coming months Radiohead would release seven limited 12-inches featuring remixes by the likes of Caribou, Jamie xx, SBTRKT and Modeselektor – a run of music later collected in full on the 2CD remix album *TKOL RMX 1234567*.

*The King Of Limbs* met with robust criticism from some quarters. "I heard that fucking Radiohead record and I just go, 'What?!'" said Liam Gallagher, then promoting *Different Gear, Still Speeding*, the debut album by his post-Oasis band Beady Eye. "I like to think that what we do, we do fucking well. Them writing a song about a fucking tree? Give me a fucking break! You'd have thought he'd have written a song about a modern tree or one that was planted last week. You know what I mean?"

Given that Beady Eye would limp to a not-so-impressive two albums before calling it a day, you might be tempted to hand this one to Yorke and co. Still, you can kind of see where Liam is coming from. In the years prior, Radiohead had made bold statements about the world as it is – songs about 21st-Century alienation, political

## TRACKMARKS




**THE KING OF LIMBS**

1. Bloom ★★★
2. Morning Mr Magpie ★★★
3. Little By Little ★★★
4. Feral ★★★
5. Lotus Flower ★★★★
6. Codex ★★★★
7. Give Up The Ghost ★★★
8. Separator ★★★

**Label:** XL/Ticker Tape
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich and Radiohead
**Recorded:** Home studio, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (lead vocals, guitar, piano), Jonny Greenwood (lead guitar, keyboards, software), Colin Greenwood (bass), Phil Selway (drums, percussion), Ed O'Brien (guitar, backing vocals), Yazz Ahmed (flugelhorn), Noel Langley (flugelhorn), The London Telefilmonic Orchestra (strings)
**Highest chart position:** UK 7, US 3



Radiohead; heading into the sonic undergrowth, 2011

malaise, environmental apocalypse, cattle prods and the IMF. On *The King Of Limbs*, we hear the occasional flare of conscience – see the *OK Computer*-ish middle eight of "Little By Little", on which Yorke breathes of "*Obligations/Complications/Routines and schedules/A job that's killing you*". By and large, though, they're away with the faeries. Before the close of 2011, Radiohead would digitally release a brand-new two-track single, "The Daily Mail"/"Staircase". It was packaged in *The King Of Limbs*-style artwork – a creepy monochrome stencil of a tree with eyeballs peering from its branches – but the title track was bracing in its forthrightness and engagement, a vengeful horn stomp spitting venom at tabloid populism and establishment corruption: "*You got away with it but we lie in wait,*" sneered Yorke. That it would have stood out like a sore thumb placed on *The King Of Limbs* itself you can, perhaps, read as criticism of sorts.

Still, as a creative exercise, a dot in a broad career arc, *The King Of Limbs* feels both validating and necessary. Stanley Donwood, close to the band, but at a slight remove, had the clearest view.

"*In Rainbows* was very much a definitive statement, and that isn't where the band are at the moment," he told an interviewer. "Where they are now is more transitory."

And this is perhaps a useful way of approaching this enigmatic, searching record. Radiohead had been a rock band, they had been a prog band, they had dabbled in jazz and electronica. They'd been the flavour of the month, and they'd been yesterday's men; reinvented music, travelled up their own arse and come out the other end. They'd released on cassette, CD and vinyl, then they'd challenged the music industry by giving an album away for free.

So where, what now? On *The King Of Limbs* we find Radiohead hunting for a new way of working; creeping around in the twilight, burrowing like a bug into the joist between the electronic and the organic, aiming for the liminal and in-between. It might be a way to the future, it might simply be an invigorating wander into the wilderness. But that is to come.

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"'Morning Mr Magpie' is the first sign of guitars, but they're noticeably clipped, leashed, weaving a taut mesh of Can-ned, neurotic funk. It's clearer than ever what a superb band Radiohead have become, one who have learned to graft the programmed precision of digital rhythms into the organic matter of their own drums and bass."
STEPHEN TROUSSÉ, UNCUT, MAY 2011

"*The King Of Limbs* has the same relation to *In Rainbows* as *Amnesiac* did to *Kid A*: ie, stylistically similar, but not as good. It is Radiohead's most ambient album to date, with thick layers of echo and reverb creating a watery, dreamlike feel that is further evoked by the various marine images."
LUKE LEWIS, NME, FEBRUARY 26, 2011

# PHILIP SELWAY
# THE SOLO ALBUMS

Another master songwriter is coaxed out from behind the drumkit for a late-flowering solo career. | BY GRAEME THOMSON

**RELEASED: 2010-2014**

THE WORDS 'DRUMMER' and 'solo album' are rarely welcome bedfellows, but the fact that Philip Selway's work outside Radiohead challenges such established misgivings shouldn't come as much of a surprise. Each constituent element of Radiohead is a distinctive talent in his own right. Put them together and you get a wonderful, fragile alchemy; break them apart and you end up not with a pale echo of the mother band, but some new shade of excellence. Always more than just The Drummer, Selway harboured parallel aspirations as a singer-songwriter during the early days of the group. Fate led to him discharging his creative energies from behind a drumkit, but the itch to create his own music remained.

Though it was the extended hiatus between *In Rainbows* and *The King Of Limbs* which offered Selway a window of opportunity to pursue a solo career, the idea had been percolating for some time. As far back as 2001, he and Ed O'Brien had been involved in **7 Worlds Collide**, an ad hoc musical gathering organised by Neil Finn which included among its ranks Johnny Marr, Eddie Vedder, Lisa Germano and former Soul Coughing bassist Sebastian Steinberg. On their first coming together, Selway's contribution was restricted to playing drums, but a 2008 revival of the project at Finn's Auckland studio (comprising most of the original participants, and also involving Wilco), saw him not only contributing two self-penned songs – "The Ties That Bind Us" and "The Witching Hour" – but singing lead vocals on both. The two tracks were included on 7WC's second album, 2009's *The Sun Came Out*, and they appeared again on Selway's own **Familial** (★★★★), released in 2010.

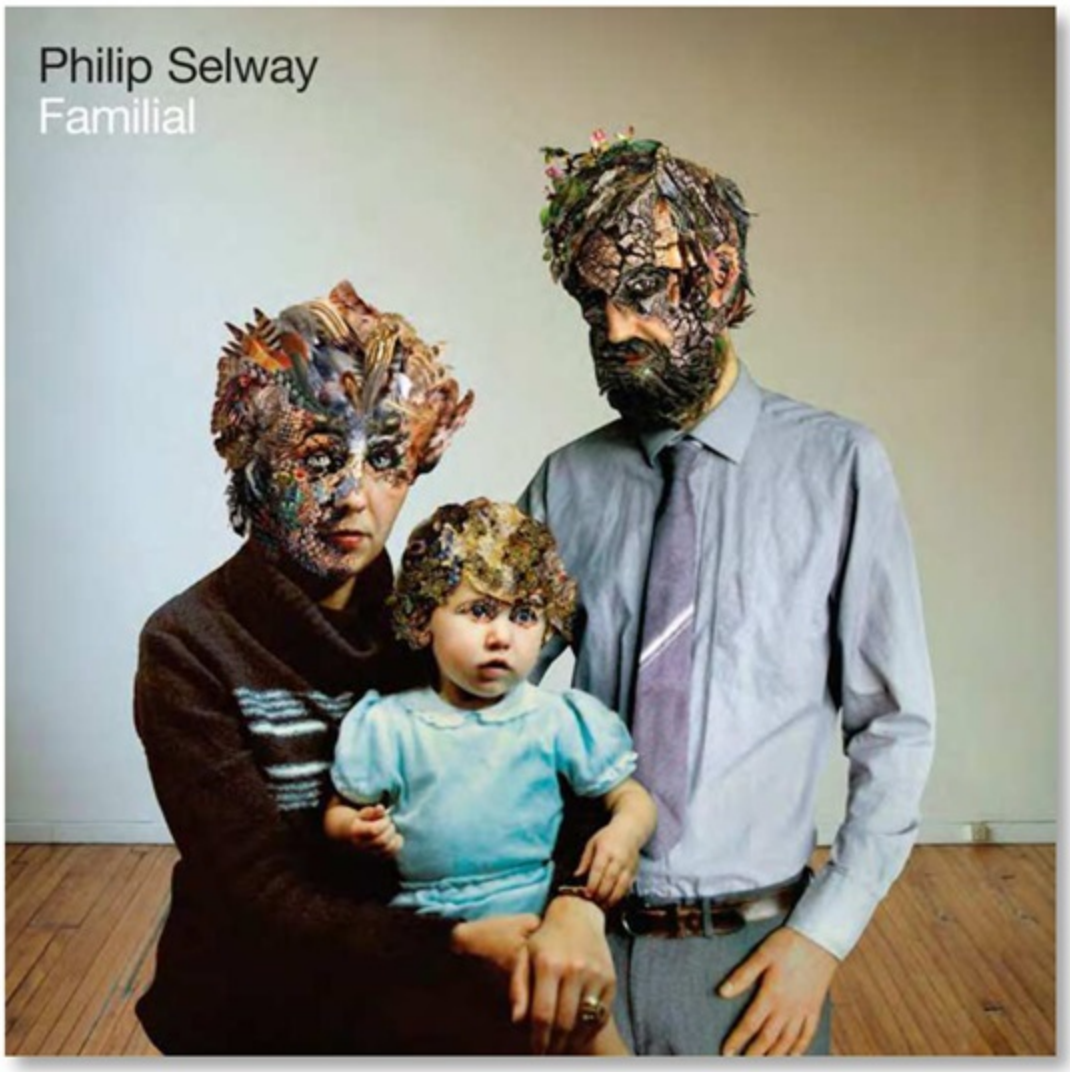
In several respects it was the 7WC project which provided the impetus for Selway to become a solo artist. Not only did it offer him a confidence-boosting context to step out from behind the drums, but he recruited many of the musicians – Germano, Steinberg, Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche and multi-instrumentalist Patrick Sansone – to play on *Familial*. Their presence throughout is restrained and respectful, placing *Familial* halfway between a genuine 'solo' enterprise and something more full-bodied. Clearly well-practised in the art of sidestepping expectations, Selway generally eschews anything much in the way of defined rhythm, favouring instead the odd smattering of percussive intrigue; any drums that do appear are delegated to Kotche.

Smudges of artful sonic dissonance aside, *Familial* is an old-fashioned singer-songwriter album. Barely half an hour long, it's quiet and often very beautiful, strong on mood and melody. Leaning towards bucolic English blues, Selway evokes Stephen Duffy on "A Simple Life", Ian Broudie on "Don't Look Down", and Nick Drake on "Falling" and the rolling, rumbling "The Ties That Bind Me". On "By Some Miracle", the minor-chord play is positively Beatles-esque. The ensemble offer nuanced, simpático support, weaving around the squeak of acoustic guitar strings and the crack in Selway's affectingly plain voice, which frequently slides into falsetto. Lyrically, the default is murmured angst. Brooding on his role as father, husband, son and friend, Selway seems to have trouble heaped on his shoulders. He

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

**"With further forays into experimental electronics than its understated predecessor, the expansive nature of Radiohead's influence grips harder."**
JAMIE FULLERTON ON *WEATHER HOUSE*, NME, OCTOBER 14, 2014

**"A smattering of artful dissonance aside, this is a singer-songwriter's album, filled with quiet, personal, often very beautiful music on which you can hear the squeak of guitar strings and the crack in Selway's wispy, melancholy voice."**
GRAEME THOMSON ON *FAMILIAL*, UNCUT, SEPTEMBER 2010










returns, none too happily, to *"the house where I was born"* on the heartrending "Broken Promises", while on "By Some Miracle" there's *"a black dog down in the basement/Barking at my name"*. In a recent interview with the *Independent*, Selway admitted, "You can read the lyrics and come away thinking I'm more troubled than I actually am." Here's hoping.

*Familial* is moving and accomplished, even if it seems reluctant to attract too much attention to itself. It was swiftly followed by **Running Blind** (★★★), a four-track EP featuring songsleft off the LP and re-recorded with Selway's live band. "What Goes Around" in particular marked a tentative move away from low-key acoustica, a transition completed more authoritatively on 2014's **Weatherhouse** (★★★★).

Selway's second solo record is a considerably more fully-formed affair than his debut, bigger and richer in ambition and texture. Recorded at Radiohead's Oxfordshire studio, it shrugs off the innate modesty of *Familial* and tries on boldness for size. Created in close collaboration with multi-instrumentalists Adem Ilhan (Fridge, Vashti Bunyan) and Quinta (Bat For Lashes, Patrick Wolf), both members of Selway's live band, rather than the sound of a musicians tip-toeing around a troubadour, *Weatherhouse* feels like the work of an integrated band. "From the outset we wanted the album to be the three of us, and we covered a lot of instruments between us," said Selway. "With a studio full of inspiring gear and a great-sounding desk, we felt like a band. Different musicians stretch you, and I felt stretched on *Weatherhouse*, but very enjoyably so." Selway even deigns to play drums, adding heft and rhythmic variety to the music.

The mood of downbeat anxiety remains, now daubed on a larger canvas. The twitchy "Miles Away" and spectral melancholy of "Ghosts" aren't a million miles away from the music Selway has made latterly with Radiohead, and neither suffer from the comparison. "Coming Up For Air", with its insistent electronic pulse, woozily distorted vocal and ringing chorus, falls somewhere between Massive Attack and U2.

Elsewhere, the English pastoral of *Familial* is given more room to breathe: "Around Again", with its taut double bass and sprinkling of vibes, has a spare, jazzy feel that suggests an affinity with John Martyn's *Solid Air* and Talk Talk's *Spirit Of Eden*. There is evidence of a nimble pop sensibility on "It Will End In Tears", a big, weepy '70s piano ballad with classic changes, epic Ringo drum fills and a singalong coda, while the chiming "Let It Go" finds Selway embracing his non-ironic stadium rock god after decades spent successfully dodging that particular bullet.

Two albums into a solo career that looks to have both promise and legs, Selway is carving out a rewarding niche, filtering the post-millennial jitters through a series of accessible, expressive and very human songs.

## TRACKMARKS FAMILIAL AND WEATHERHOUSE

**FAMILIAL**

1. By Some Miracle ★★★★
2. Beyond Reason ★★★
3. A Simple Life ★★★
4. All Eyes On You ★★★
5. The Ties That Bind Us ★★★★
6. Patron Saint ★★★
7. Falling ★★★★
8. Broken Promises ★★★★★
9. Don't Look Down ★★★
10. Witching Hour ★★★
11. Running Blind ★★

**Released:** August 30, 2010
**Label:** Bella Union
**Personnel:** Philip Selway, Lisa Germano, Sebastian Steinberg, Glenn Kotche, Pat Sansone

**WEATHERHOUSE**

1. Coming Up For Air ★★★
2. Around Again ★★★
3. Let It Go ★★
4. Miles Away ★★★★
5. Ghosts ★★★★
6. It Will End In Tears ★★★★
7. Don't Go Now ★★
8. Drawn To The Light ★★★
9. Waiting For A Sign ★★★
10. Turning It Inside Out ★★★

**Released:** Oct 6, 2014
**Label:** Bella Union
**Personnel include:** Phil Selway (vocals, guitar, drums, perc), Adem Ilhan (gtr, bass, marimba, programming, vocals), The Elysian Quartet

# ATOMS FOR PEACE

In which Thom Yorke gets wasted with Flea, listens to Fela Kuti, jams for days and ends up with "some pretty cool shit". Next: surfing! | BY SHARON O'CONNELL

**RELEASED: 25 FEBRUARY 2013**

THE IDEA OF Thom Yorke hanging out in LA with Flea – a man once described as "less modest than Dave Lee Roth" and a member of a funk-rock band who've frequently taken to the stage naked, save for strategically placed socks – would once have seemed absurd. But as a measure of how very different from Yorke's previous work *Amok* was in terms of genesis, approach and practice, it's a useful one: time spent at the home of the Red Hot Chili Peppers' bassist proved, it seems, pivotal.

Yorke has described his role in "supergroup" Atoms For Peace as that of conductor, with producer/programmer Nigel Godrich in a co-steering role. The project was born out of a three-day jam session at Electric Lady Studios in 2010, when the pair were joined by Flea, drummer Joey Waronker (a long-standing Beck collaborator) and percussionist Mauro Refosco, best known for his work with the Chili Peppers and David Byrne. They'd convened to work on live treatments of Yorke's solo songs prior to a short US tour promoting *The Eraser*, but out of those rehearsals came what Flea described as "some pretty cool shit", the result of shared musical interests and an immediately apparent chemistry. They were so galvanising, in fact, that Yorke organised three days of studio time in LA after the final date of the tour. Without any prepared material, they worked 10 hours each day, jamming along heavily rhythmic, Afrobeat-inspired lines and emerging with what Yorke gleefully described to *Rolling Stone* in November of 2012 as "a fucking mountain. We were playing all the time. It was bonkers. We'd stop to change beat; Joey and Mauro would scribe the beat out, using whatever weird notation they have, and then go off on it for another hour."

**DEEPLY RHYTHMIC AND LAYERED, AND AS BOUND TO PROCESS AS A POLLOCK PAINTING**

On paper, the eventual process sounds disjointed and messily protracted. Beats and grooves improvised live in the LA studio were sifted through and edited by Yorke and Godrich back in London over a two-year period. They were fused with Yorke's moody, glitch-hop soundscapes, with him composing characteristically keening melodies to match. Back in LA again, this time at Waronker's house, digital parts were refined, augmented or even mimicked instrumentally. Nothing describes this oddly backwards procedure so well as "Reverse Running", but the resulting nine tracks that constitute *Amok* sound remarkably free, and represent an intriguing mix of the live playing/digitised studio process and human/mechanical dynamic.

"This was around the same time I'd started DJing," Yorke explained of the marathon LA sessions to NPR in January of 2013, "and I discovered that I liked the ideas around the dubstep thing, but it was really annoying me that there was no human element to it at all. And it was also really obvious, the crossover between it and Afrobeat rhythms. So, it was all just sort of jamming in my head quite a lot. When we discovered that when we play together there's this crazy energy and how the one thing we all really identified with was




## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Nobody will be surprised that the album's fairly predictable premise is: 'Let's see what happens when you try to make electronic music sound organic'. It's a premise lesser musicians have often bored people with. Yet the chemistry between everyone on *Amok* means more often than not the record is beautiful."
**DAN MARTIN, NME, FEB 21, 2013**

"This seamless synthesis of sinew and silicon is crucial to the album's slippery feel; there's a pleasing fluidity and crooked funkiness to the arrangements that Yorke sometimes struggled to achieve on *The Eraser*."
**SAM RICHARDS, UNCUT, MARCH 2013**

Afrobeat, I thought, 'Whoa, we're really onto something.' When we first hung out, we were at Flea's house. We got wasted, played pool and listened to Fela Kuti all night. It was that idea of trancing out and it was like, 'This is good.' It was just really a good jumping-off point; it started off with a laptop album [*The Eraser*], all made in headphones – confined beats and confined structure – and then suddenly, it's become this other thing completely."

The heavily rhythmic nature of *Amok* is immediately striking; opening track "Before Your Very Eyes..." and "Stuck Together Pieces" are especially indebted to Fela Kuti's hypnotic, irresistibly undulating funk. But while the former cuts its buoyant, organic percolations with Yorke's digital skitter, the latter track is more obviously "humanised" – although betting on that would be rather reckless. As Yorke told *Rolling Stone*, "One of the things we were most excited about was ending up with a record where you weren't quite sure where the human starts and the machine ends." It's a confusion he and Radiohead had indulged with relish on *The King Of Limbs*, where drummer Philip Selway's task seemed to be to make his repetitive beats sound as mechanised as possible. Elsewhere, *Amok* builds up a clattering head of drum'n'bass steam from a mesh of cooing, multi-tracked vocals and stuttering synths ("Dropped"), echoes the ecclesiastical post-house of Tim Hecker ("Unless") and, with "Default", suggests a primitivist LCD Soundsystem, splicing Kraftwerk's "Pocket Calculator" with Ligeti's "Atmosphères", then adding assorted clicks and whirrings. The germ of that track, it seems, was a tone Yorke had produced by making a patching error on his sampler when he was working on *The Eraser*, and had never used.

At the time of its release, Yorke described *Amok* as "a sort of dance-music record", which begs the question as to exactly what sort it might be. But of course, even if Radiohead's steady advance from a rocky landscape to the plains of textured, digital abstraction had surely stopped confounding everyone by this point (*Kid A* was, after all, 13 years' old), *Amok* was different – deeply rhythmic and layered, with repetitive lyrics working more as incantatory time markers than confessional prose, and as bound to process as a Pollock painting. For many, it also represented a shocking new sharing of Yorke's hallowed aesthetic. The singer was predictably dismissive of this supposed outrage. "The whole 'supergroup' thing," he told NPR, "is just because there's me and there's Flea and there's blah, blah, blah. That was one of the weird things when we initially started out; loads of Chili Peppers fans were like 'No, he can't do this! No!' And I had the same things – like, 'How dare he!'" For those fans, the news that Thom Yorke had also been taking surfing lessons from his bass-playing new pal must have been a bombshell of some magnitude.

## TRACKMARKS AMOK

1. Before Your Very Eyes... ★★★★
2. Default ★★★★★
3. Ingenue ★★★
4. Dropped ★★★★
5. Unless ★★★★★
6. Stuck Together Pieces ★★★
7. Judge, Jury And Executioner ★★★
8. Reverse Running ★★★★
9. Amok ★★★★

**Label:** XL
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich
**Recorded at:** Various locations in Los Angeles and London
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (vocals, guitars, piano, keyboards, programming), Michael "Flea" Balzary (bass), Joey Waronker (drums, all except "Default"), Mauro Refosco (percussion, all except "Amok")
**Highest chart position:** UK 5, US 2

# THOM YORKE
# TOMORROW'S MODERN BOXES

Time, once again, for nightmares in the garden and revolutionary delivery mechanisms... Boxing clever, with Thom Yorke. | BY MICHAEL BONNER

**RELEASED: 26 SEPTEMBER 2014**

THOM YORKE EVIDENTLY hasn't lost his taste for surprises. Revellers enjoying an intimate after-party backstage at Cornwall's Leopallooza festival in August 2014, for instance, found themselves enjoying an unannounced late-night DJ set from Yorke. A few weeks later, Yorke played surprise sets in Los Angeles and Tokyo. At around the same time, Yorke and Nigel Godrich began tweeting cryptic images that further indicated something was afoot – photographs from Radiohead's newly updated PolyFauna App, a mysterious white vinyl record, snatches of old lyrics and notes revealing the tantalising news of overdubs in progress at Radiohead's studio. But what exactly were they up to? New Radiohead? New Atoms For Peace? Another side-project?

Given his history of mischievous digital benevolence, the eventual arrival of Yorke's *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* – unannounced, on September 26, 2014 – felt like part of an ongoing exploration of non-traditional launch mechanisms. Or, at the very least, it was possible to view it as a discreet counterpoint to U2's shenanigans two weeks earlier, where they spammed half-a-billion iTunes libraries with their *Songs Of Innocence* album. In this instance, Yorke deployed peer-to-peer file-sharing software BitTorrent as his distribution platform of choice. You could buy the album digitally for $6 – there were one million downloads in the album's first six days on sale – or for the more traditionally minded, £30 would buy you a 180g white vinyl pressing in a funky bag.

But, of course, there was more to Yorke's first solo album in eight years than simply natty delivery systems and enigmatic online teases. Built principally around crisp digital beats, oblique piano and synth sounds, *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* resembles an elegant pulling together of several threads from throughout Yorke's career. Its wintry electronic explorations feel of a part with *The Eraser*, while the subtle blurring between Yorke and his laptop recalls the fluid interlacing of instruments and electronics on *Amok*. But perhaps its closest antecedent is *The King Of Limbs*; another album that privileges dreamy, understated textures (and clocking in at 38 minutes, Yorke's second solo album is only one minute longer than *The King Of Limbs*). Critically, *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* represents Yorke's strongest application of electronics to date. His playlists on the Radiohead site feature contemporary touchstones like Caribou or Eomac, but other conspicuous influences here include the electronic nocturnes of Beaumont Hannant, Autechre and Richard James (ironically, *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* arrived one week after Aphex Twin's first album in 13 years, *Syro*).

**THE ALBUM ENDS WITH A MOMENT OF WARMTH IN AMID THE GLITCHSTEP, THUMPS AND BLEEPS**

"A Brain In A Bottle" opens with a soft electronic pulse that sounds like a vintage Dalek Control Room (check Volume 19 of your BBC Radiophonic Workshop albums, Whovians) before a slithery low-end bass and glitchy drum pattern pick up. Lyrically, Yorke describes conflict, perhaps with one of the imagined creatures of the subconscious who




## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Incrementally, Yorke's resilient gifts come into focus, as 'Interference' reveals one of those rapturous yearning melodies, articulated in minimal strokes, that he's been finessing since 'Pyramid Song'." JOHN MULVEY, UNCUT, DECEMBER 2014

"We all know what's in it, and no-one would argue that it isn't worth opening. But for the time being, he's quite happy thinking inside it." BARRY NICOLSON, NME, SEPTEMBER 27, 2014

prowl PolyFauna – "*The entity I wrestle to the ground/Looked in the eye, looked in the eye*" – before he concludes, "*Think I'm gonna go to pieces now*". The next three songs – "Guess Again!", "Interference" and the six-minute "The Mother Lode" – are highlights. "Guess Again!" wafts in on a subtly processed piano motif similar to "Pyramid Song" or, most explicitly, "Codex". This time, "*Wild dogs are howling/Behind the curtains... All of my nightmares are in the garden*", and then he describes another struggle against an eldritch opponent: "*I'm fighting in the darkness/The one who can't be killed*".

One of the many pleasures of *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* is the way fresh details emerge with repeated listening. "Interference", for instance, initially feels quite slight – a keyboard wash similar to Bowie's "Warszawa" over which Yorke sings about the transience of human interaction ("*In the future we will change our numbers/And lose contact*"). But, listen again, and you can hear gentle keyboard droplets in the background, beautiful harmonic lines rising and falling with the key refrain. You can find similar detail hidden behind the dubstep beats of "The Mother Lode": Floydian atmospherics, a supple electronic bass and soulful harmonising. Initially, "Truth Ray" similarly feels quite weightless, but Yorke layers warm reverb and bell tones beneath the song's vacillating synth lines. Its electronic wheezing and groaning sounds like Marvin The Paranoid Android with an infection of the upper respiratory tract. All this, incidentally, is appreciated more fully when listened to on headphones.

The final third ostensibly consists of instrumentals, allowing Yorke (and Godrich; who receives a "Produced and edited by" credit) the opportunity to indulge in longform sonic experiments. The seven-minute "There Is No Ice (For My Drink)" is a delightful gallimaufry of bass synth lines, treated vocal effects (similar to *Kid A*'s "Everything In Its Right Place") and techno beats before it quite literally melts into "Pink Section". Familiar from PolyFauna, "Pink Section" loops its way around a fractured piano refrain and watery synths which segue into "Nose Grows Some", bringing the album to its close with resolutely sharp focus. Against a backdrop of delicate but insistent beats, "Nose Grows Some" carries a beautiful vocal performance from Yorke, with his falsetto rising through the song's meandering tones. "*One day I'll grow up tall/I will be with you*," he sings. It's a reassuringly upbeat end to the album; a moment of human warmth, perhaps, in amid the glitchstep, thumps and bleeps.

While *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* might not offer any clues as to where Radiohead will go next, taken as a snapshot of Yorke's interests in 2014, however, it reveals plenty. Not simply in terms of Yorke's tastes in music – already documented on his online office charts – but in his staunch deployment of electronics. Not just in relation to music, but also in this album's explicit link to PolyFauna – and, enticingly, where these kind of multi-platform projects might develop in the future. Assuming, of course, that the nightmares in the garden don't get Yorke first.

## TRACKMARKS TOMORROW'S MODERN BOXES

1. A Brain In A Bottle ★★★
2. Guess Again! ★★★
3. Interference ★★★★
4. The Mother Lode ★★★★
5. Truth Ray ★★★
6. There Is No Ice (For My Drink) ★★★★
7. Pink Section ★★★
8. Nose Grows Some ★★★★★

**Label:** Self-released/ Landgrab
**Producer:** Nigel Godrich
**Recorded:** n/a
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (music and vocals), Colin Greenwood (beat programming on "Guess Again!")
**Highest chart position:** n/a

# A MOON SHAPED POOL

A confluence of the personal and the political. *Trumpton*, Jung and excavations of the past help Radiohead confront the future. | BY LOUIS PATTISON

**RELEASED: 8 MAY 2016**

IN THE YEARS since *OK Computer*, Radiohead's music has come to occupy a space laden with meaning but often vague on specifics. It gestures towards big contemporary themes – think the apocalyptic visions of "Idioteque", or *Hail To The Thief*'s allusions to George W Bush and the War On Terror – but generally it's a little too opaque to be considered anything as straightforward as protest music. On the whole, this approach has served them well. In concert with their constantly morphing, occasionally remote music, it has given Radiohead the sense of a wise and in some ways rather enigmatic entity; a band existing somewhere above the fray.

Events transpire, however, and it has become impossible to view *A Moon Shaped Pool* other than through the prism of the personal. It has been widely interpreted that Radiohead's ninth album deals at least in part with Thom Yorke's separation from his wife Rachel Owen, a printmaker and scholar of medieval Italian literature whom he met at university in Exeter over two decades previous. (It was later reported that Owen had died of cancer in 2016.)

Along the way, there had been other losses. Vic, the father of Radiohead's long-time producer Nigel Godrich, passed away midway through the sessions ("I literally left him on a fucking table in my house and went and recorded," he told *Rolling Stone*). Meanwhile, the band were collectively still raw from a stage collapse in Toronto in 2012 during *The King Of Limbs* tour that killed their 33-year-old drum technician Scott Johnson (at the time of writing, the court case rumbles on, and *A Moon Shaped Pool* is dedicated to his memory). Admittedly, Radiohead albums are seldom especially sunny of temperament. But as you work your way through the album's 11 songs – sequenced, curiously, in alphabetical order – you can feel this accumulation of loss. A universe away from the inchoate rage and self-pity of "Creep", *A Moon Shaped Pool* is rooted in a deeper, more subtle sadness, a gentle weighing of the past and a reckoning with the impermanence of life.

> THE ALBUM IS A GENTLE WEIGHING OF THE PAST AND A RECKONING WITH THE IMPERMANENCE OF LIFE

Rehearsals for the album began in mid-2014, although the bulk of recording took place in three focused weeks of activity in 2015 at La Fabrique studio, a former 19th Century mill near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in the south of France. *The King Of Limbs* had found Radiohead pursuing a modern, experimental recording method, instrumental parts sampled and chopped up in a collage style. But *A Moon Shaped Pool* was recorded in comparatively old-school fashion, the band returning to a familiar five-piece rock mode, with Godrich ➡


RADIOHEAD
A MOON SHAPED POOL


RADIOHEAD A MOON SHAPED POOL
Side A: Burn The Witch / Daydreaming
Side B: Decks Dark / Desert Island Disk / Ful Stop
Side C: Glass Eyes / Identikit / The Numbers
Side D: Present Tense / Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailor Rich Man Poor Man Beggar Man Thief / True Love Waits
In memory of Vic Godrich 1936-2015
XL


RADIOHEAD A MOON SHAPED POOL A
BURN THE WITCH / DAYDREAMING

capturing takes to an analogue eight-track tape machine. Don't expect to hear any outtakes from the *Moon Shaped Pool* sessions. If the band fluffed a take, Godrich would hit rewind, then record, and start again – a scorched earth policy that seems to have reaped positive results.

"When you don't have an undo button on a recording machine, then it adds this quite creative tension to what you're doing," Greenwood told NPR. "Whereas traditionally you'd use Pro-Tools, and there's layers and layers of things that you can go back to and revise and mend."

Compounding the sense this record was a sort of dredging of the memory banks, a number of the tracks here date back to earlier eras of the band. "Burn The Witch" could be traced to recording sessions for *Kid A*. "Ful Stop" and "Identikit" were debuted live in 2012, the latter even captured to tape at Jack White's Third Man Records in that year, but rejected as substandard; while Yorke had first performed "Present Tense" solo at Latitude Festival back in 2009. But oldest of all was the album's gorgeous closer "True Love Waits". The song had seen its first live outing way back in 1995, emerging in a number of forms over the course of two decades. A stripped-back, acoustic take of it appeared on 2001 live compilation *I Might Be Wrong*. But the version here feels like the definitive one, a curdled romantic entreaty that finds Yorke's bereft vocal – *"Just don't leave/ Don't leave"* he pleads – drifting like a cloud over looping pianos that slowly accrue like tangled moss. The effect is deeply beautiful but not a little eerie; the sound of a love song experiencing its own afterlife.

The presiding tone of *A Moon Shaped Pool* is ruminative and dreamy, foregrounding Jonny Greenwood's choral and string arrangements. The latter, performed by the London Contemporary Orchestra, are especially evident on "Burn The Witch", which was released as the album's first single in May 2016, backed on seven-inch single by the band's aborted Bond theme, "Spectre". There are percussive, pizzicato strings that swipe tetchily back and forth, deep currents of cello that recall The Beatles' "I Am The Walrus", and high squealing tones that show off the influence Greenwood has drawn from 20th Century composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki or Bernard Herrmann. But the end result is pretty conventional by Radiohead standards. And while Yorke's lyrics paint a paranoid picture (*"Stay in the shadows/Cheer at the gallows"*) it came with a video that played its themes of tabloid-stoked authoritarianism, groupthink and modern-day witch hunts for laughs. The murderous pagan rituals of folk horror touchstone *The Wicker Man* are re-enacted by figures animated in a stop-motion style clearly inspired by the 1960s children's TV show *Trumpton*. Characters bearing resemblance to the townsfolk of Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew, Cuthbert, Dibble and Grub capture a city interloper and burn him alive in rapturous anticipation of next year's harvest.

A second – and very different – calling card for the album came with "Daydreaming". A somnambulant waltz featuring circling piano, muted strings and a cryptic lyric from Yorke, the song feels almost inextricable from its accompanying video. Directed by the Hollywood auteur Paul Thomas Anderson – with whom Greenwood had struck up a fruitful creative alliance, scoring his films *Inherent Vice* and *There Will Be Blood* – it literally feels like a dream. A solo Yorke drifts through a number of doors and passageways, which join a series of apparently unconnected rooms and landscapes, as if looking for someone or something that remains tantalisingly just out of reach.

Later, on Yorke's 2019 solo album *ANIMA*, he would delve further into this dreamlike space, drawing on the ideas of Carl Jung. In search of answers here though, fans have speculated at length around "Daydreaming"'s buried meaning. One internet theory has it that the locations in the video allude to moments in Radiohead's past – the grocery store a reference to the video "Fake Plastic Trees", the snow-covered mountains a reference to the cover of *Kid A*, the final scene in which Yorke lies down in a cave an echo of the final scene of "Just".

Another theory had it that the 23 doors Yorke passes through in the video represents 23 years – the amount of years of Radiohead's existence, or the length in years of Yorke's marriage. Such theories may feel fanciful. But it's a fact that hidden messages are implanted into "Daydreaming". Take that curious sound at the six-minute mark, spin it backwards, pitch-shift it and it sounds like Yorke speaking words that sound like *"half of my life/half of my love..."*

But neither "Burn The Witch" nor "Daydreaming" really prepare you for *A Moon Shaped Pool*, a sumptuous record rooted in mid-tempos, generally accessible but seldom particularly anthemic, instead locking into long, rolling grooves that gesture out to the influence of jazz and folk. "Desert Island Disk" is a limber acoustic number in 7/4 time, its spry fingerpicking recalling Nick Drake a little, although Yorke's lyric is by his standards quite rosy: *"The wind rushing 'round my open heart/ An open ravine with my spirit light/Totally alive and my spirit light"*. Similarly lush is "The Numbers" (formerly known as "Silent Spring"), a gently simmering blues with occasional flourishes of twinkling keys, astral jazz chimes and a spectacular swell of strings that springs up from nowhere two-thirds of the way through. Its lyric seems to address climate change and man's place in nature – *"We are of the earth/To her we do return,"* sings Yorke – although this is a song that soothes rather than chides.

The tone can feel heavier when *A Moon*

## TRACKMARKS



**A MOON SHAPED POOL**

1. Burn The Witch ★★★★
2. Daydreaming ★★★★★
3. Decks Dark ★★★★★
4. Desert Island Disk ★★★★
5. Ful Stop ★★★★
6. Glass Eyes ★★★★
7. Identikit ★★★★
8. The Numbers ★★★★
9. Present Tense ★★★★
10. Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailor Rich Man Poor Man Beggar Man Thief ★★★★
11. True Love Waits ★★★★★

**Label:** XL
**Produced by:** Nigel Godrich
**Recorded at:** La Fabrique, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence; RAK, London
**Highest chart position:** UK 1; US 3



THE SORT OF RECORD RADIOHEAD FANS HAVE BEEN ASKING FOR THEIR WHOLE CAREER



Live at Madison Square Garden, NYC, July 26, 2016

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

*Shaped Pool* confronts the personal. *"You really messed up everything,"* seethes Yorke on "Ful Stop", a tight, claustrophobic krautrocker driven forth on taut, locked-down drums and brooding synths. "Glass Eyes", a wisp of violins and cello that charts a passage out of civilisation and into the wilderness, closes with the breathed words *"I feel this love to the core/I feel this love turn cold"*. Set to a skittery bossa nova rhythm, "Identikit" seems to address some sort of betrayal of trust: *"Now I see you messing me around/I don't want to know/I don't want to know,"* sings Yorke. An extended bridge offers one of the record's most profoundly communal moments. *"Broken hearts make it rain,"* chants Yorke, before his words are echoed back by a ghostly choir. And then – more crowd-pleasing! – Greenwood straps on his guitar and draws the song to a close with some deliciously barbed soloing.

Even when Radiohead bare their hearts, though, it is in their nature to keep a little something back. "Decks Dark" is a tale of extraterrestrial visitation that harks back to the theme of *OK Computer*'s "Subterranean Homesick Alien" some two decades before. In that song, the aliens that came down offered a sort of transcendent experience, a glimpse of *"the stars and the meaning of life"*. But there is no such revelation here. On the contrary, the spaceship that visits on "Decks Dark" is mysterious and unknowable, its appearance eliciting a sense of dread that is terrifying, even paralysing. Listen to Yorke sing all of *"all we trapped rag doll cloth people/We are helpless to resist"* and you're reminded of the cosmic horror of HP Lovecraft, or his modern-day disciple Thomas Ligotti, whose deeply pessimistic fiction paints a picture of an uncaring and unfathomable universe in which free will is but an illusion. Of course, it goes without saying that the song is gorgeous. Twinkling pianos and unearthly choirs bringing to mind distant constellations and vast expanses of sky, but everything feels close up and in perfect focus.

*A Moon Shaped Pool* is the sort of record that it seems like Radiohead fans have been asking for their whole career: an album of verses and choruses, melodies and hooks. Of course, after such a long and daring creative streak, it was regarded with disappointment in some quarters, dismissed as Radiohead losing their bite, going tame. True, it lacks the fire and angst of their earliest music, and the shock of the new that characterised much of their mid-period output.

But there is something honest in Radiohead's decision to yield. *A Moon Shaped Pool*'s cover was created by Stanley Donwood painting canvases and then leaving them outside for a season, exposed to the merciless Oxfordshire winter. It looks how the record feels: this is the work of a band weathered by the years, and honest about it. Once, Radiohead gazed forward in anticipation of dystopian futures. But here we find them turned back to face the past, older, still afraid, a little resigned and gradually learning how to process loss. Sometimes, *A Moon Shaped Pool* feels like a balm; other times, an exorcism. Other times still, a spell to hold the here and now at bay. As "The Present Tense" has it: *"This dance is like a weapon/Of self-defence/Against the present/Against the present tense"*.

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The fact that they've deigned to include the likes of 'True Love Waits', 'Identikit' and 'Present Tense' has got some fans wondering if this is going to be the band's last record. With the album being so geared towards their audience's favourites, they're seeing it as a sign that this could be the end. But with Radiohead, who knows?"
**RHIAN DALY, NME, MAY 8, 2016**

"There's a lighter, more hopeful bent to the musical settings, which perfectly balance the more dissonant leanings of *The King Of Limbs* with a sumptuousness and gentleness they've rarely sought since *OK Computer*. Just as impressive is the LP's coherence, despite the vintage material."
**JASON ANDERSON, UNCUT, JAN 2017**

# THOM YORKE
# SUSPIRIA
## [MUSIC FOR THE LUCA GUADAGNINO FILM]

Real horrorshow! Thom's movie soundtrack debut proves a creepy and minimal new direction. | BY MICHAEL BONNER

**RELEASED: 26 OCTOBER 2018**

THOM YORKE MIGHT have made his debut as a film composer a lot earlier than this, it seems. During the late '90s, shortly after Radiohead had completed *OK, Computer*, Yorke was approached by Edward Norton and Brad Pitt to score *Fight Club*. If ever there was a film that dovetailed perfectly with Radiohead's own take on atomisation, alienation and crises, this was it.

In the end, Yorke rejected Norton and Pitt's offer – and since then, of course, his bandmate Jonny Greenwood has gone on to become a highly successful soundtrack composer. Radiohead, too, have made their own foray into film music – their shelved Bond theme, "Spectre", is now a highlight of Yorke's live sets. Even Yorke's external projects like the PolyFauna app and his *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* LP have featured the kind of subtly involving music you might expect to hear in a movie.

So at last – a mere 20 years on from Norton and Pitt's offer – Yorke has finally got round to making his first film soundtrack. It's for *Suspiria* – Luca Guadagnino's remake of Dario Argento's horror classic about a coven of witches operating out of a ballet school. It is not, as you might imagine from PolyFauna or *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes*, slow-moving, electronic and ambient – as it transpires, *Suspiria* finds Yorke stepping in a new direction.

The setting for Guadagnino's film – Berlin, 1977, but not as Bowie would have recognised it – is evidently a critical factor in all this. Yorke has made an album that draws partly from the krautrock armoury – modular synths, repetition, pulseless drones. Among the acts most associated with that era, Can, Popol Vuh and Klaus Schulze all worked on film scores – while Argento's original *Suspiria* was soundtracked with swarthy, demonic intent by the Italian progressive rock band Goblin. All these elements, somehow, find their way into Thom Yorke's *Suspiria*.

The critical point is this, though: what exactly is *Suspiria*? Is it a solo album? Is it a film soundtrack? To an extent, the answer is a fudge: it's a bit of both. Pieces like "Suspirium", "Unmade", "Has Ended", "Open Again" or "Suspirium (Finale)" are evidently full-length songs. But of the album's 25 tracks, some of them – like the 44-second "A Soft Hand Across Your Face" or the 25-second "An Audition" – feel more like cues, designed to enhance the drama as it unfolds on screen. Even some of the longer pieces – "The Hooks", "Olga's Destruction", "The Conjuring Of Aneke" – are titled after specific narrative events in Guadagnino's film.

**WHAT IS *SUSPIRIA*? IS IT A SOLO ALBUM? IS IT A FILM SOUNDTRACK?**

Having said that, though, Yorke's aesthetic is sustained throughout; even the shorter pieces reflect something of their creator's intent. Clocking in at 59 seconds, "Synthesizer Speaks" might appear like a minor cue, for instance – but its weird, electronic shrieking feels part of a favoured Yorke obsession: technological fear and breakdown. There's a line in "The Axe" (ultimately on *Anima*), where Yorke sings, *"Goddam machinery, why won't it speak to me? One day I'm going to take an axe to it."* Not so much a paranoid android, perhaps, as a seriously spooked synth.

In one final revelation, Yorke is not working here with his usual collaborator, Nigel Godrich. Instead, *Suspiria* has been co-produced by Sam Petts-Davies, recording engineer on *A Moon Shaped Pool* and Jonny Greenwood's *Junun* project as well as the Godrich-produced Roger Waters album, Is *This The Life We Really Want?*.

One of the pieces that works best both on and off screen is "Volk". Named after a fictional avant-garde ballet that is performed in the film as part of a demonic incantation, its simple five-note refrain becomes the starting point for a prolonged and substantial sonic exploration. In its eldritch route through discomforting Moog lines and deviant effects, it displays the kind of wry contempt for conventional rock'n'roll that has informed almost every artistic move Yorke and his




## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"You sense the Radiohead singer has a point to prove with this, his first feature film soundtrack... there are some lovely moments here, such as 'Suspirium'. Just Yorke and a piano, his voice adrift and exploratory, it could have been a single plucked from the *OK Computer* era. It sounds not so much ghostly, but certainly spiritual."
JAMES McMAHON, NME, OCTOBER 24, 2018

band have made in the past 20-odd years. Similarly out there, "A Choir Of One" is a 14-minute drone where wordless vocal harmonies rise and fall across an icy electronic landscape.

The opportunity to do something entirely unconnected to songwriting in any form evidently appeals to Yorke – and for the most part, these experimental compositions for *Suspiria* work. But that's not to ignore the moments where Yorke does consent to contribute songs – and they're really very good. At first, "Suspirium" recalls "The Daily Mail" in its rawness and piano style. Then, as Pasha Mansurov's flute pirouettes through the song's second half, it is possible to detect the delicate orchestral filigree of *A Moon Shaped Pool*. These are made more explicit by a second, longer version, "Suspirium (Finale)", which brings a wide-angled, cinematic quality to the song. Incidentally, the strings on *Suspiria* are provided by the London Contemporary Orchestra, who delivered such strong work on *A Moon Shaped Pool*. "Has Ended" is unsettling kosmische, built around slow, clattering drums (apparently played by Yorke's son, Noah) and circular organ drones. At first, Yorke's lyrics appear to refer directly to the film. There is a city, returning soldiers – presumably partitioned Berlin – "*the witches were all singing*". Then, though, he makes an unexpected narrative leap. "*We won't make this mistake again,*" he sings, suggesting the fascists and "*their dancing puppet king*" are, once again, on the rise. "*We won't make this mistake again...*" he sings, somehow connecting a gruesome period horror to more genuinely disturbing contemporary events.

"Unmade" is one of those beautiful, melancholy piano ballads at which Yorke excels, the repetition in melody and chordal changes recalling Eric Satie. It offers respite from the heavy drones and sinister atmospheres generated elsewhere. Meanwhile, "Open Again" weaves, spell-like, around a cycling guitar motif – one of the few times a guitar appears on the soundtrack.

As a creative exercise, it feels useful for Yorke to have made this record. Another electronic solo album along the lines of *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes* would have felt like a step backwards. This project allows him to engage with the broader collaborative experience of filmmaking while also presenting a work that stands on its own terms.

With the benefit of hindsight, *Suspiria* now feels like an important bridging work to 2019's *Anima*. It occupies the uneasy space between ghoulish cinematic nightmare and the kind of 'real world' techno-dystopia Yorke has long explored solo and with Radiohead – and which he drills deeper into with *Anima*.

## TRACKMARKS SUSPIRIA

1. A Storm That Took Everything ★★★
2. The Hooks ★★★
3. Suspirium ★★★★
4. Belongings Thrown In A River ★★★
5. Has Ended ★★★★★
6. Klemperer Walks ★★★
7. Open Again ★★★★
8. Sabbath Incantation ★★★
9. The Inevitable Pull ★★★
10. Olga's Destruction (Volk Tape) ★★★
11. The Conjuring Of Anke ★★★
12. A Light Green ★★★
13. Unmade ★★★★★
14. The Jumps ★★
15. Volk ★★★★★
16. The Universe Is Indifferent ★★★
17. The Balance Of Things ★★★
18. A Soft Hand Across Your Face ★★
19. Suspirium Finale ★★★★
20. A Choir Of One ★★★★
21. Synthesiser Speaks ★★★
22. The Room Of Compartments ★★★
23. An Audition ★★
24. Voiceless Terror ★★★
25. The Epilogue ★★★

**Label:** XL
**Producer:** Thom Yorke, Sam Petts-Davies
**Recorded:** Memory Has No Holes; AIR Lyndhurst
**Personnel:** Thom Yorke (music), Hugh Brunt (orchestration, conducting), Noah Yorke (drums)
**Highest chart position:** UK 13, US 79

# THOM YORKE
# ANIMA

Channeling commuter unease, Thom Yorke and Nigel Godrich make their own remote working seem effortless. Catch the film, too. | BY PIERS MARTIN

**RELEASED: 27 JUNE 2019**

EIGHT MONTHS AFTER the release of *Anima* in the summer of 2019, it seems the world finally came round to Thom Yorke's way of thinking. As the coronavirus took over the planet, everyone felt more anxious, scared and confused, a dystopian scenario surely too far-fetched even for Yorke, the eternal pessimist. During that carefree summer, the Radiohead frontman began peddling his third solo album with a series of mysterious ads for a firm called Anima Technologies that asked, "Do you have trouble remembering your dreams?" and "Have you lost your dreams?" Ringing the helpline to enquire about the "dream camera" the company claimed to have developed left callers none the wiser, though they were treated to an extract of what turned out to be a new song, "Not The News".

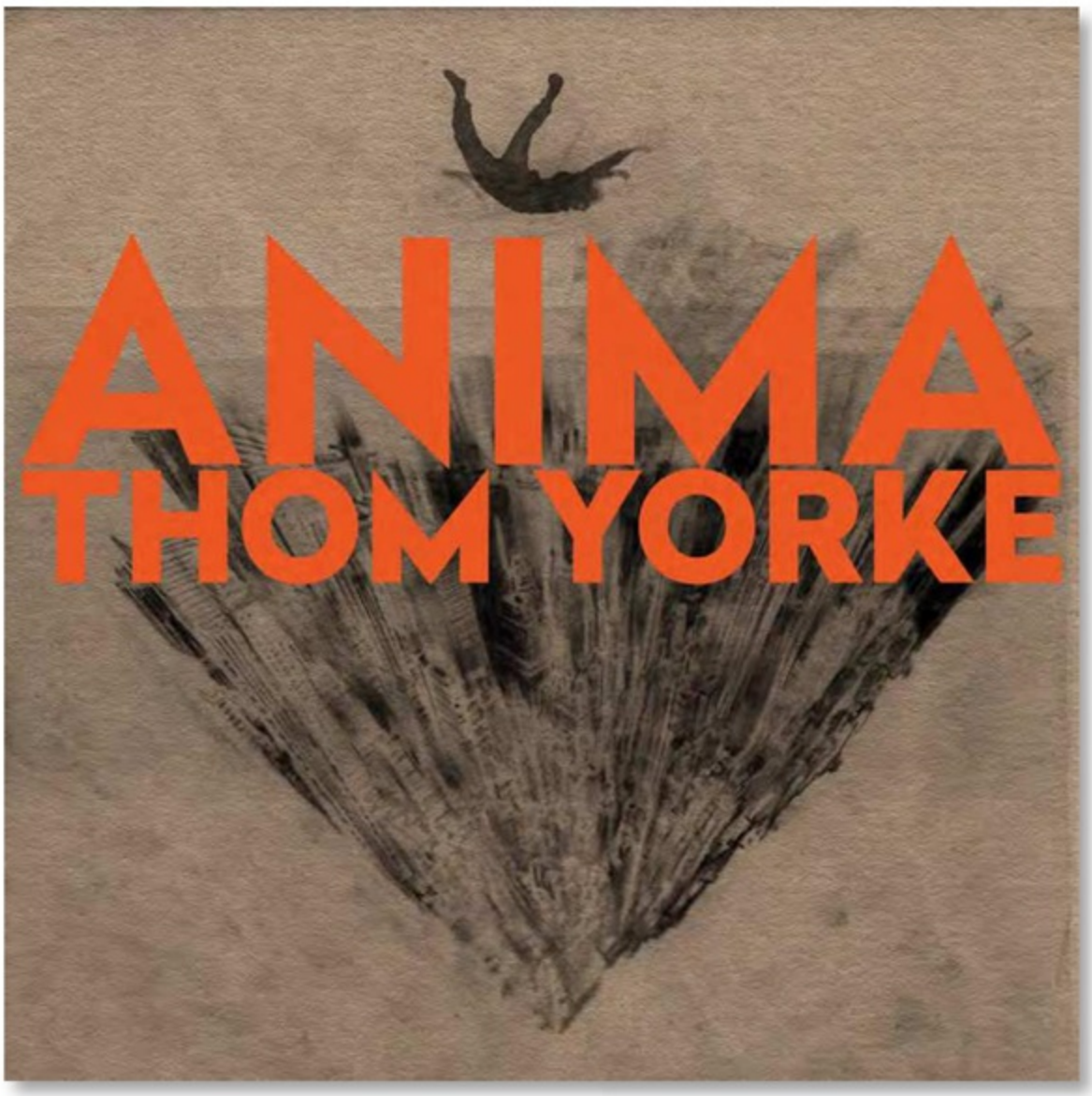
Vexed by existential issues raised by Brexit and the climate crisis, Yorke had plenty to fuel his anguish, to an almost bleakly comical degree, and unlike the roll-out for *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes*, which focused less on its work-in-progress electronica and more on the ways you could download the record from torrents for free, *Anima* was presented as a project of substance showing Yorke at the peak of his powers. It is, certainly, his most satisfying solo effort, a richly seductive swirl of beautiful moments that draw from the full spectrum of his activities – Radiohead's charisma, the funk of *Atoms For Peace*, the *Suspiria* soundtrack, his neo-classical dalliances – but which feels most comfortable lurking in the corner at the rave.

As he's become more proficient using synthesisers and programs in the time apart from Radiohead, so he's able to express himself more eloquently. The melodic doodles and vocal sketches he would send to his producer Nigel Godrich were better-realised than he'd perhaps assumed, while Godrich, so familiar with the way Yorke works and what he's trying to say, compiles the files and intuitively finishes Yorke's sentences for him. For all its uneasiness, its lingering sense of muffled panic, *Anima* is where the pair sound most fulfilled.

IT IS, CERTAINLY, HIS MOST SATISFYING SOLO EFFORT, A RICHLY SEDUCTIVE SWIRL OF BEAUTIFUL MOMENTS

"I would send [*Nigel Godrich*] completely unfinished, sprawling tracks and he would focus in on the bits and pieces that he thought would work, build them up into samples and loops, and then throw them back at me, where I would start writing vocals," Yorke told *Crack* magazine, later telling Apple Music: "It's not too dissimilar to what I've done with Radiohead: play a bunch of chords, mumble over the top, send it to the guys and they'd go, 'That's good, we'll work on that.' Then I have permission to work on it."

To visualise the looming intensity of *Anima*, Yorke teamed up with the US director Paul Thomas Anderson, who'd previously shot Radiohead's "Daydreaming" video, for a 15-minute "one-reeler" film for Netflix that attempts to articulate the futility of work in a nightmarish world of grey commuter misery and oppressed liberation. Choreographed by Damien Jalet, who worked on *Suspiria*, and starring Yorke's partner Dajana Roncione as the ensemble dancer he takes a shine to, it's an elegant, innovative piece, a grim ballet heightened by theatrical devices and special effects. In this Expressionist dystopia, Yorke stakes out the middle ground between Mr Sandman and Freddy




## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"There's little hope in *Anima*. Little in the way of joy. It sounds exactly like a record trying to say something about 2019 should sound. Often it approaches the realm of the atonal... It, at once, sounds completely resigned, absolutely world weary, while also unparalleled in its beauty. It evokes visions of flowers growing on a rubbish dump."
JAMES McMAHON, NME, JUNE 26, 2019

"*Anima* poses a strange paradox: intimate, homespun electronic music that, in a roundabout way, grapples with the biggest questions of the age. Still, in a roundabout way, doesn't that echo the absurdity of our present moment?"
LOUIS PATTISON, UNCUT, SEPTEMBER 2019

Krueger like a Margiela-wearing hobo, showing his impressive moves as he jerks and twitches to "Not The News", "Traffic" and "Dawn Chorus", still the king of limbs at 50 years old.

In keeping with the unsettled tone of *Anima*, Yorke used the film to convey his feelings of uncertainty, his distrust of authority. "One of the big, prevailing things was a sense of anxiety," he explained to *Crack*. "If you suffer from anxiety it manifests itself in unpredictable ways, some people have over-emotional reactions. For some reason I thought a really good way of expressing anxiety creatively was in a dystopian environment. I had so many visual things going on at this point. Another one was where everybody was travelling to work but their bodies were telling them that they wouldn't do it anymore. They were refusing to cooperate, so they were doing these involuntary movements."

Musically, Yorke is on familiar ground, moulding his arrangements in the style of trance producer James Holden's undulating groove – plaintive synthesiser lines decay and crumble on "Traffic" as itchy rhythms scamper below; the pulse surges forward yet Yorke often seems rooted to the spot by fear, the music eddying around him. The song "Dawn Chorus" finally makes an appearance after first surfacing during a Radiohead soundcheck in 2008 and quickly becoming a hot topic among 'head cognoscenti; the name was later used for the legal company that registered *A Moon Shaped Pool* in 2016. Over the smouldering embers of a curdled synthesiser, Yorke builds a beautiful mantra, softly singing: *"In the middle of the vortex, the wind picked up/ Shook up the soot from the chimney pot/Into spiral patterns of you, my love."* Yorke spent a long time trying to get this song in place. "I tried to find something as cold as possible to go with it," he told Apple Music. "I sing one note all the way through and the chords just go round and round. There's nothing happening other than the words. Sometimes I can sit down and the stream of consciousness tells me what I want to say before I've had time to say I want to say this."

There are moments of humour, too. On "I Am A Very Rude Person" he sends up his po-faced persona, singing, *"I have to be rude to your face/ I'm breaking up your turntables/ Now I'm gonna watch your party die,"* perhaps referring to his ill-fated Boiler Room DJ set when he seemed to happily alienate his audience. As a murky sound wash spills, he rails against technology, the means of production, on "The Axe", complaining: *"Goddamned machinery, why don't you speak to me?/One day I am gonna take an axe to you/You bastards speak to me/Have you no pity? Give me a goddamned good reason not to jack it all in."*

This, then, is the Yorke of 2019: he knows his actions have little effect but still he feels compelled to make them. "The difference between now and me being the barky annoying dog of *Eraser* and *Hail To The Thief* is there's no consequence now, it doesn't matter. It's just a volume of traffic, of noise," he told Apple Music. *Anima*, at least, is a glorious celebration of futile gestures.

## TRACKMARKS ANIMA

1 Traffic ★★★★
2 Last I Heard (...He Was Circling The Drain) ★★★
3 Twist ★★★★
4 Dawn Chorus ★★★★★
5 I Am A Very Rude Person ★★★★
6 Not The News ★★★★★
7 The Axe ★★★
8 Impossible Knots ★★★
9 Runwayaway ★★★★

**Label:** XL Recordings
**Produced by:** Nigel Godrich, Thom Yorke
**Recorded at:** AIR Studios, London, home studios
**Personnel includes:** Thom Yorke (vocals, various instruments, programming), Nigel Godrich (programming), Philip Selway (drums), Joey Waronker (drums), Hugh Brunt (conductor), London Contemporary Orchestra
**Highest chart position:** UK 5, US 59

# COMPILATIONS AND MORE

Many discs, hacked. Radiohead's comps: a place where revealing oddities, Bandcamp dumps and boxsets meet "Best Ofs" that maybe aren't. Which presents the truer picture of the band? | BY ROB HUGHES

**RELEASED:** 1998–2019

IN THE ABSENCE of a truly definitive comp, the closest we have is 2007's **Radiohead Box Set** (★★★★★), which collects the band's six albums for EMI alongside a 2001 EP, "I Might Be Wrong: Live Recordings". The 10-year journey from *Pablo Honey* to *Hail To The Thief* is chronologically assembled, as you might expect, which makes the live EP the main attraction for Radiohead diehards. The eight-track "I Might Be Wrong..." offers some intriguing digressions from *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*, recorded at venues in the UK, Europe and the States. "The National Anthem", for instance, forgoes the rasping horns of its studio counterpart for some deliciously huffy guitar from Thom Yorke. The title track is pretty urgent too, hurtling along at a far greater clip than its *Amnesiac* version. Perhaps most impressive is "Spinning Plates", in which they strip away the cryptic electronica and recast it as a superior piano ballad with a rolling bank of synthetic strings.

Radiohead's other significant round-up, 2008's **The Best Of** (★★★★), is about as imaginative as its title suggests. Again it's another EMI product, issued after the band had decided against renewing their contract, preferring instead to go it alone with *In Rainbows*. Given their long-held suspicion of the greatest-hits format, Radiohead were none too pleased with EMI, prompting Thom Yorke to call it "a wasted opportunity... If we'd been behind it, and we wanted to do it, then it might have been good."

Still, for the newcomer, *The Best Of* is a handy entry point. Everything's here that you might expect, from "Creep" to "Paranoid Android", "Karma Police" and "2+2=5". The two-disc edition does at least make some concession to ferreting out the less obvious stuff, namely "Street Spirit" B-side "Talk Show Host" and a live version of "True Love Waits".

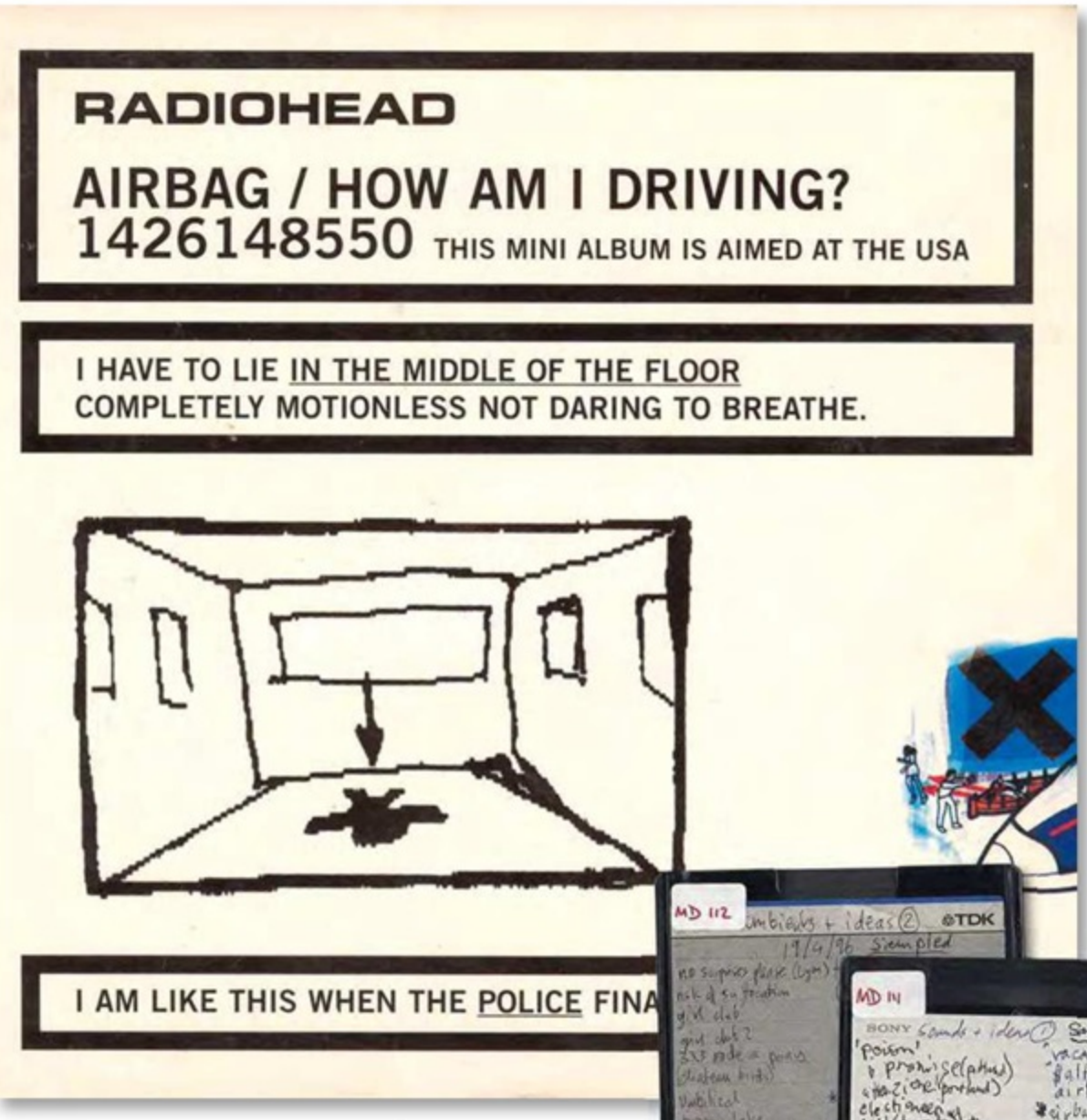
When it comes to EPs, perhaps the most persuasive offering is **"Airbag/How Am I Driving?"** (★★★★), released for the US market in the spring of 1998. The seven-track CD features various B-sides of UK singles from *OK Computer*, as well as the indomitable, LP-only "Airbag". Terse beats and lacy guitar figures bring a winsome quality to instrumental "Meeting In The Aisle", which remained something of a hidden treasure until Radiohead began playing it on the *King Of Limbs* tour. Standouts are "Palo Alto", jarred loose by a fat metal riff from Jonny Greenwood, and "Polyethylene (Parts 1 & 2)", which goes from gently-gently to stoner-heavy.

> RADIOHEAD TEND TO KEEP A FIRM HAND ON QUALITY CONTROL

As if to accentuate the more experimental nature of the contents, "Airbag/How Am I Driving?" came with a booklet featuring a Dadaist 'questionnaire' (random examples: "200 people faint. Hard to breathe" or "People are aware, but not that bothered") odd graph charts and quotes from Noam Chomsky. And if you dialled the number on the front, an automated Thom Yorke was on the line, asking "Hello?" The whole package served to foreshadow the more outré sensibility of *Kid A*.

2004's **"COMLAG (2plus2isfive)"** (★★★) was less cohesive, mopping up B-sides from *Hail To The Thief* and making room for a couple of remixes by Four Tet and Cristian Vogel. The keeper is a furiously intense "2+2=5", recorded live at London's Earls Court a year earlier. Aside from the very un-Radiohead sound of a bluesy harmonica on "I Am A Wicked Child", the other song worth piping about is an alternate take of "I Will (Los Angeles Version)". Here the whole band weigh in, as opposed to the Yorke-only original from *Hail To The Thief*. The result is still beguiling, everyone playing a little within themselves, imbuing things with a lovely, shaded grace.

If ever a Radiohead album invited the full remix treatment it was *The King Of Limbs*, its fleeting regard for conventional song structure finding a mode of expression in samples, cut-ups and metallic rhythms. 2011's **TKOLRMX 1234567** (★★★) gathered under one roof the seven 12-inch singles from its parent album, freshly mixed by an all-star gaggle of mutual admirers, plus a download-only effort from their own W.A.S.T.E. site. Granted, occasional thrills are to be had listening to the likes of Caribou, Nathan Fake, Four Tet and Jamie xx rewiring these densely meshed songs. But there's ultimately a certain coals-to-Newcastle feel to an LP that, in its original form, often sounded like the work of a band remixing themselves in the first place.













Fast forward six years and **OK Computer OKNOTOK 1997-2017** (★★★★), a 20th anniversary salute to *OK Computer*, features a remaster of the original album plus various B-sides. But the real draw is the addition of three previously unissued tunes. "Lift" was initially performed live on tour in 1996, but proved too elusive to nail down satisfactorily in the studio. Regarded at the time as a "bogshite B-side" by Ed O'Brien, it's armed with a keening melody, flag-waving chorus and an unusually self-referential lyric: "*We've been trying to reach you, Thom/ This is the place.*"

"Man Of War", aka "Big Boots", suffered a similar fate back in the day, the band wrestling with it to no avail in the *Meeting People Is Easy* doc. Here it's a finely-wrought ballad with strings, piano and Jonny Greenwood's formidable guitar screech. Meanwhile, acoustic guitar and Mellotron form the bedrock of the equally memorable "I Promise", over which Thom Yorke's falsetto grabs lungfuls of air.

The bumper edition of *OKNOTOK*... came with a bonus cassette of demos and experiments, among them a computer program accessed only through a ZX Spectrum.

Much of the same material landed, in less-calculated circumstances, on the mammoth **MiniDiscs [Hacked]** (★★★★). Dumped on Bandcamp in the summer of 2019, supposedly in response to an online hacker who'd leaked Thom Yorke's stolen MiniDiscs from the *OK Computer* sessions, the set consists of over 16 hours of demos, outtakes, rehearsals and live performances. A slog for even the most committed Radiohead fan, there are more than a few grandstanding moments. Superior versions of "Lift" – three of them, in fact – outrun its *OKNOTOK*... counterpart in terms of soaring intensity and sheer scale. "True Love Waits" had already appeared in minimal form on *I Might Be Wrong* and 2016's *A Moon Shaped Pool*, but the full-band rendition is something else – Radiohead in spectacular flight. Similarly, "Last Flowers" opens out to reveal a multitude of contours that its discreet *In Rainbows* version merely hints at.

Other essentials include a feverishly psychedelic "Paranoid Android" and a skeletal prototype of "Nude" that sounds like it might have been recorded in the empty taproom of a forgotten boozer. None of these songs were meant for public consumption, with Yorke dismissing them summarily as "not very interesting." Don't believe him.



## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

**THE BEST OF**
"Some discernment at least is shown in the tracklisting, relegating pompous early single 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' to the optional disc 2 and excising 'Pop Is Dead' and 'Stop Whispering'... Nothing, however, you shouldn't already own."
SAM RICHARDS, UNCUT, JULY 2008

**TKOL RMX 1234567**
"These 19 tracks feel designed to float in a space between clear genre boundaries, somewhere purposefully undefined..."
LOUIS PATTISON, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 2011



Radiohead in 1997



# The 30 greatest Radiohead songs

From "Creep" to "The Numbers", our all-star panel of friends and fans selected 30 game-changing moments from the Radiohead catalogue for Tom Pinnock

PAT POPE/SHUTTERSTOCK




IN 2017, RADIOHEAD delved back into their past. There was *OKNOTOK*, a deluxe reissue of the 20-year-old *OK Computer*. Then there was their third Glastonbury headline. What better time to pick Radiohead's 30 greatest songs – in chronological order – with help from the band's close collaborators, friends, famous fans, and even some of their biggest influences. You'll learn a lot: not least about their post-gig celebrations. "Gentlemen, some sake?"

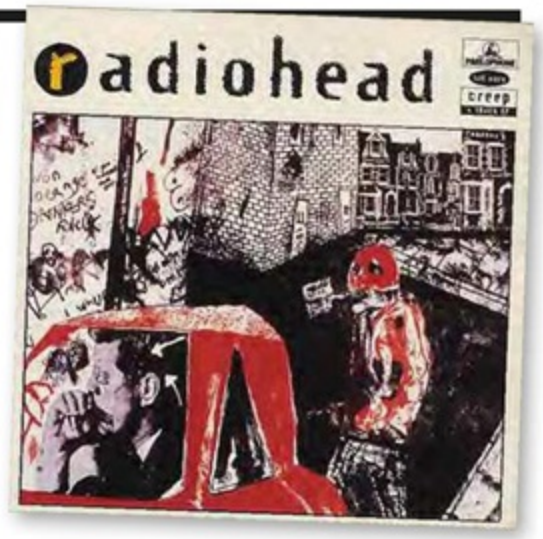


## 1 CREEP

SINGLE, 1992; PABLO HONEY, 1993



**MARK MULCAHY, MIRACLE LEGION:** I first heard "Creep" on the radio, and it somehow felt different to me. Thom's voice and that explosive guitar just really got me. So I went to track it down in this store in New Haven, bought a cassette of it and listened to it over and over. I looked at the credits and [*producer*] Paul Kolderie's name was there, so I called him up – I was a real fan-geek. Sometimes everything meets, the singer and the song and the guitars and the production and everything. I didn't suspect then that they were fans of my band, Miracle Legion. After becoming devoted to the song, I heard they were playing in New York at a theatre in Midtown. So I went to see them, and I was way into it. I went to the backstage door to try to meet them, instinctively, and [*security*] said, "No no, get outta here." But the ironic part of that story is that when I first did meet Thom, it was after a gig at Irving Plaza, New York – Thom came out and dedicated the encore to me, which was a pretty great surprise. Then I went backstage, and [*security*] were like, "Oh yeah, come in, come in..." The first time we met, Thom kept talking about how much he loved my song "All For The Best", so I wasn't surprised that he did such a great version of it [*on 2009 Mulcahy tribute album, Ciao My Shining Star*]. What I'd really love to do someday is to record something together with Thom – I know our voices have something similar about them.




"ON 'CREEP', THOM'S VOICE AND THAT EXPLOSIVE GUITAR REALLY GOT ME"

MARK MULCAHY

## 2 PLANET TELEX

THE BENDS, 1995

Radiohead have always had a knack for dramatic and powerful openers, and on *The Bends* they put their second album's most adventurous track first. While most of their recordings from this period were laid down live, the hallucinatory "Planet Telex" was created wholly in the studio. Beginning with what's rumoured to be a drum loop taken from the 'Mogadon Version' of B-side "Killer Cars", the band multi-tracked layers of tremoloed, distorted guitar, echoing piano and rumbling, syncopated bass. Topped off with an intro of echoing synthetic winds, the result is something like trip-hop covered by Can and produced by Kevin Shields. The title – originally "Planet Xerox", before they sensibly shied away from a potential lawsuit – isn't mentioned in Thom Yorke's lyrics, which instead warn of some nameless foreboding that's *"always near, chasing you home"*. Echoing Bob Dylan's *Oh Mercy* track, Yorke resigns himself to the thought that *"everything is broken/Everyone is broken"*, his twisted vocals recorded as he crouched drunk on the studio floor. In both its influences and its studio-based creation, "Planet Telex" would become a blueprint that has remained relevant all the way to last year's *A Moon Shaped Pool*.

## 3 THE BENDS

THE BENDS, 1995



**JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD, MANIC STREET PREACHERS:** *The Bends* is just a supreme rock album – Radiohead fans, even Radiohead, might take umbrage with that, but it's a testament to what you can do when you write the songs and don't think about it so much. It's visceral in parts, it's tender, it's got a brilliant post-indie rock'n'roll edge to it. It's big, but it's not pompous ever, which is a trick I find very hard to pull off [*laughs*]. I think they did their best work with John Leckie. We all know Nigel Godrich is a great producer and a sonic alchemist, but I think John Leckie did exactly what Radiohead needed – it was a great partnership. I can hear the interplay between Ed and Jonny, the rhythm section is beautifully understated and brutal at points, and Thom is just singing in such a powerful way. He's not trying to obscure his emotion at all, it's just there. If you can get a great title track, a song pivotal to the album, it's a rare trick, and for me "The Bends" does that. It's an anthem that doesn't want to be an anthem, but it just can't help being an anthem. It's not over-thought and it just shows what an instinctive, brilliant rock'n'roll band they were. Richey [*Edwards*] absolutely loved their stuff, and I was tempted to pick "Fake Plastic Trees" on his behalf, because he loved that lyric.

DAVE J HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES




June 1992: Radiohead in an Oxford field after the release of first single "Prove Yourself" and before the release of "Creep"

## 4 STREET SPIRIT (FADE OUT)

THE BENDS, 1995



**DJ SHADOW:** I first heard "Street Spirit" when I was at Metropolis Studios in London, working on UNKLE's *Psyence Fiction* album. James Lavelle, my partner in the project, popped into the break room and showed me Jonathan Glazer's video for the song, which was a masterpiece. Glazer later went on to direct the first single from our album, "Rabbit In Your Headlights", which featured Thom Yorke. Aside from it being a great closer, I had a particular experience with "Street Spirit" that cemented my relationship to it. I supported Radiohead on their tour of the UK for *OK Computer*, and after my sets I'd usually join friends in the audience to enjoy their show. In Manchester, Thom did something quite special. He read a letter he'd received from the mum of a person who'd died shortly after attending one of their shows. She mentioned how much the band had meant to her child – you could tell Thom was quite affected by it. He then dedicated the final song, "Street Spirit", to that person. The entire arena was mesmerised, and many were crying. It was a visceral experience, one I'll never forget. At that time in the mid-'90s, prior to Gorillaz, rock and hip-hop seemed very far apart, other than the odd novelty thing. Rock guys didn't own MPCs, and hip-hop guys didn't know how to mic a drum kit. Now, the intermingling is commonplace, but it's easy to forget it wasn't always so. [*But*] quality is quality, regardless of the genre. The best and purest art transcends cultural and ethnic barriers in ways we can't always predict.

JOHNNY GREIG / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

## 5 TALK SHOW HOST

"STREET SPIRIT" SINGLE, 1996; ROMEO + JULIET OST, 1996



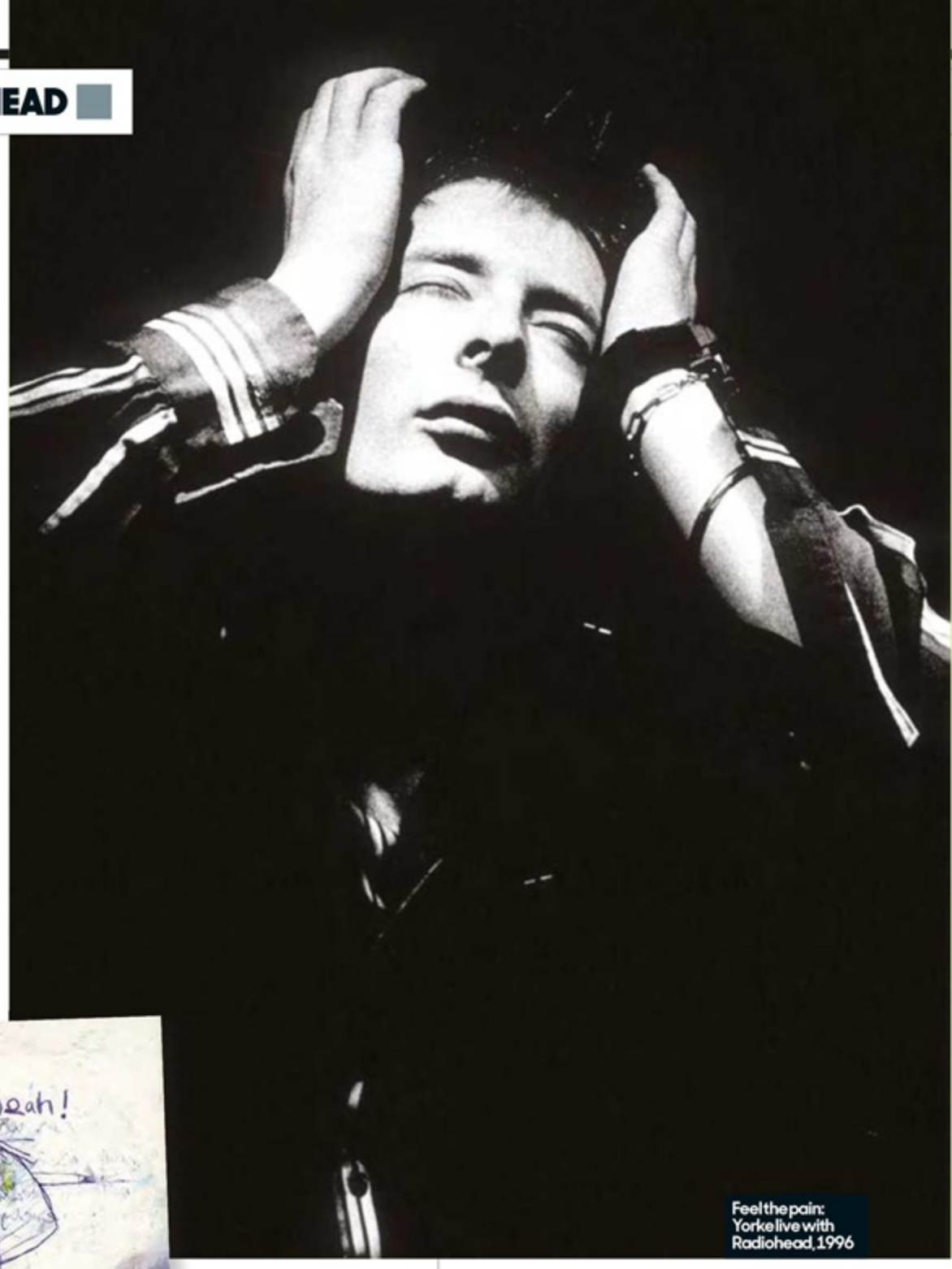
**EMILY KOKAL, WARPAINT:** I got the *Romeo + Juliet* soundtrack when I was in high school. When "Talk Show Host" came on, I think I discovered a new way of listening to music – that song was just a revelation for me. I felt like I had never really listened to a bassline in music before – I've always really loved how Colin plays, he knows how to use space as much as he knows how to use notes. I just sat there and played it so many times, listened to how everything was interacting. My whole musical palette changed, the way I wanted to make music, and the mood of it, especially, all down to trip-hop and Radiohead. I was captivated by the subtlety, allowing for the listener to come to you. If you truly tune into Radiohead, you realise they're an amazing, high-functioning organism. To hear them expand their soundscapes and move into even less of a rock band format and to keep exploring that, that made being in a band more interesting, hearing a group keep shedding their skin and seemingly do what interested them more than doing anything for the public. I don't think Warpaint would be the same kind of band if Radiohead didn't exist.

## 6 AIRBAG

OK COMPUTER, 1997




The opening track of the band's (second) magnum opus began life as slightly underwhelming, shuffling anthemic rock, a little like a *Pablo Honey* album track on the evidence of the bootleg recording from the Bataclan on May 26, 1996. The drums are uninspired, the guitars jangle and the bass is unremarkable. By the time it was released almost exactly a year later on *OK Computer*, however, it had been transformed into a dynamic, otherwordly piece. A dark, pummeling riff from Jonny Greenwood now introduced the song, backed by sawing Mellotron and distant sleigh bells, before processed drums, inspired by DJ Shadow and sampled and chopped up with an Akai sampler and a Mac, cut in. Twenty years on, "Airbag" still feels gloriously disconnected, its phasing, filtered percussion, eerie drones and stuttering guitars echoing Yorke's fever-dream proclamations of being *"born again/In a neon sign scrolling up and down"*. The secret behind "Airbag"'s barren beauty is Colin Greenwood's bass, however: it only appears after 32 seconds, and then merely plays fragmentary phrases. Only in the final 30 seconds does Greenwood play anything close to a normal bassline, which makes the coda, with its wordless vocals and high-pitched electronic squeaks, ecstatically strange.



Feel the pain: Yorke live with Radiohead, 1996

## 7 PARANOID ANDROID

OK COMPUTER, 1997



**ERIC PULIDO, MIDLAKE/BNQT:** For me, their early stuff probably got mashed up with a lot of other music at the time, but *The Bends* and *OK Computer* took things to a whole other level, and as a fan I fell deeper in love with them. I graduated high school at the time *OK Computer* came out, and I'm sure Radiohead's lyrical content, and the concept of *OK Computer*, was fitting for a transition like that – but probably also a bit daunting! "Paranoid Android" has stood the test of time for me in a lot of ways, especially from a musician's standpoint. Who would come out of the chute with their first single from an album, a six-and-half-minute song that has three or four different sections in it? It's a beautiful orchestration and story and arrangement. They took the listener to different places within one song, it's not just verse-chorus-verse. It takes some guts, and it just goes to show you just never know what people are going to embrace and fall in love with. They are the best. Between Midlake's first two albums, we got a showcase with Capitol Records. We got up there and played songs, and all the Capitol heads came in and sat down on these black couches and watched us play. As we drove back to Texas, we got a call from our manager: "Capitol said they already have one Radiohead, they don't need another..." We appreciated the reference at least!

## 8 EXIT MUSIC (FOR A FILM)

OK COMPUTER, 1997



**ALAN SPARHAWK, LOW:** There are so many things about this song that I think are really beautiful, but also visceral – there are some really genius things going on here. Writing songs is always kind of a trick – "OK, I've got this melody and these chords,

PAT POPE/SHUTTERSTOCK, DANNY CLINCH, ZORAN ORLIC, SHAWN BRACKBILL

and this leads into this thing here, how do I lay this out?" But here, it comes in and it's so intimate, so close. The chorus section is still quiet, and then you get to second verse and you can feel it coming. Then you get the second chorus and it feels like the peak, complete with Phil Collins "In The Air Tonight" drum fill – it's the ultimate trick! They come in and it's the whole band, with fuzz bass, and it's all the things that fit right in the wheelhouse for me. I think everybody hopes that they can straddle that chasm of band and electronic music in a graceful, interesting way. But there's very few that can do it. Maybe they inspired Low to change, a little bit. When we did [2007's] *Drums And Guns*, there were a few factors going in there: we had just done the dates with them, after *Hail To The Thief*, and in a vague way that was a bit of an inspiration – how does a band incorporate the front edge of technology and still remain a unit that flows? In various ways everybody's been trying to figure that out the past 15 years or so. Radiohead exude this pure love for making something new, that connects. Playing shows with them – seeing that they were still in the moment, trying to make something interesting and visceral and true – to me, that was like, "Oh, then I guess it's OK for me to do that too!"

## 9 LET DOWN
OK COMPUTER, 1997



**MARTIN COURTNEY, REAL ESTATE:** I listened to *OK Computer* again recently, and this song really stuck for me, for some reason. I always liked it, but [*laughs*] I like it more now! I like songs like that where you're not sure where the rhythm is – literally every time I listen to this I can never figure out when the drums are going to come in. The guitars are playing in some weird time signature that's disconnected from the rest of the band, which is kind of genius, because it's melodic but it's almost textural, like they took a loop of something and had it running in the background. There's a magic to it – in most bands, that line would be more straightforward, and it would still be a good song, but the way they did it there's something very special. It's almost like the lyrics are secondary to the actual feeling of the song – classic Radiohead with the extremely triumphant and beautiful music mixed with pretty dark, seemingly nihilistic lyrics. It's a pretty great combo. I became obsessed with *OK Computer* – they were a real gateway band for me, along with Beck, into the world of weirder music. It's music that rewards deeper listening. When Real Estate are gonna make a new record, I will go back to *OK Computer* to hear the production – because the texture is so rich, but it's still a guitar record, it's still rock-band arrangements with a lot of acoustic guitar. I think we took cues from "Let Down", with those textural, arpeggiated guitars.

## 10 KARMA POLICE
OK COMPUTER, 1997

On the face of it, the second single from *OK Computer* had the potential to become a straightforward post-grunge anthem along

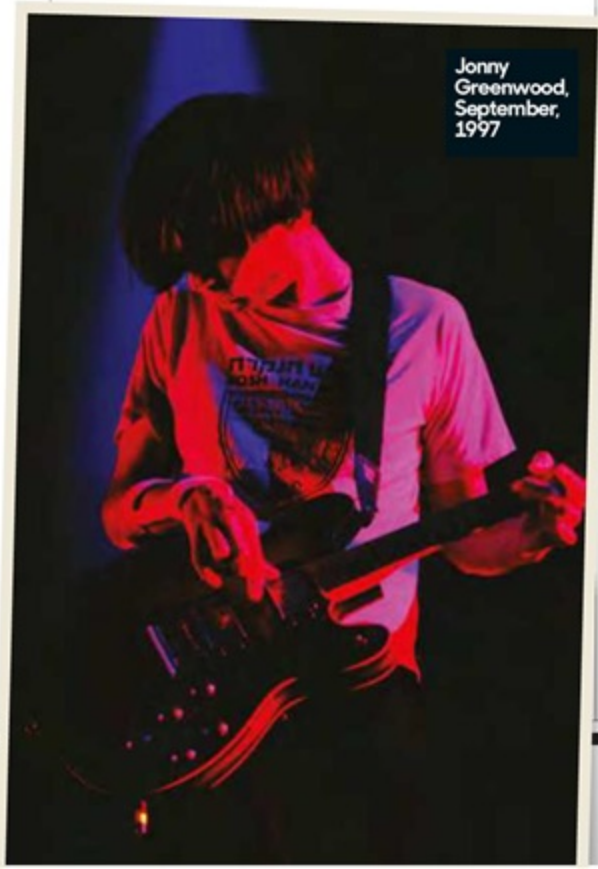



the lines of "High And Dry". With its references to karma, and its bed of piano, acoustic guitar and slapback-echoed drums, it also resembles early '70s Lennon, with the police in question being an in-joke dreamt up by the band on tour. Yorke's lyrical references are striking – the man who *"buzzes like a fridge"*, the girl with the *"Hitler hairdo"*, and the narrator himself who, despite everything, is *"still on the payroll"*. Its hushed, "Sexy Sadie"-like choruses, sprinkled with spidery piano arpeggios from Jonny Greenwood and a multi-tracked choir of voices, are ominously powerful – *"This is what you get when you mess with us,"* mutters Yorke through gritted teeth. What could have been a radio-friendly ballad, though, a future echo of Travis or early Coldplay, is turned on its head in the transcendent final two minutes. Yorke's call of *"for a minute there, I lost myself"* is simultaneously arch and moving, until the drums and vocals are gradually engulfed by feedbacking echoes, a mocking, pitch-shifted chorus and shattered electronic noise. A tour de force in the unexpectedly emotional.

## 11 CLIMBING UP THE WALLS
OK COMPUTER, 1997



**ISHMAEL BUTLER, SHABAZZ PALACES:** I hadn't heard any Radiohead until 1997. I hadn't even heard "Creep" – I wasn't really listening to rock music at all. I was in a car with these people working on a video project, and they were talking about this Radiohead group, really being effusive about it. So I went and got the tape, listened to the whole album top to bottom and I was just blown away. When "Climbing Up The Walls" came on, with the drum intro and that bass sound, it just sounded so murky and dark. It drew me in immediately. When the drums came in with that stuttering snare pattern, I was like, "Yeah, this is cool." It's definitely super groovin', man. Philip Selway's sense of rhythm and the way that he pounds just appeals to people who like hip-hop – it's so steady that you almost felt like you could flow over a lot of those beats. Also, Thom's cadences, his delivery, even the way he moves and dances, has got a lot of swag to it. It's groovy and they're a soulful group. It comes out in the rhythms, and I think that's why hip-hop people dig it so much. I like "Burn The Witch" too – that shit's nasty, man! We actually opened up for them on a couple of dates recently, and I got to see them four times in a row, and it was amazing – now they have two drummers playing in unison, the precision that those cats have is otherworldly. People say, "Ah, they're the best band in the world", and it's kind of true – the amount of time they've been together playing, and what magic they can create now through their instincts. They are one of the best bands of all time. On tour, we got the chance to hang out a bit. In Mexico City, Thom and Nigel were spinning records at this all-night party – they rented out this old church, and they were spinning some sick cuts and shit. It was cool to be in that world.


Jonny Greenwood, September, 1997

"THOM'S DELIVERY HAS GOT A LOT OF SWAG TO IT. IT'S GROOVY AND THEY'RE A SOULFUL GROUP"

ISHMAEL BUTLER

## 12 NO SURPRISES
OK COMPUTER, 1997



**NORMAN BLAKE, TEENAGE FANCLUB:** We toured with Radiohead on the *OK Computer* tour in the US. When I think of that tour, "No Surprises" is the first song that comes to mind. It's a beautiful melody, and it reminds me of the intro to "Sunday Morning" by The Velvet Underground. I suppose it's such a gentle melody, and quite a contrast to what Radiohead were generally playing on that tour, which was much louder and more aggressive, even though lyrically it's pretty dark, talking about bringing down the government or whatever. I think they could have played arenas on that tour, but they decided to play 3,000-capacity seaters, so it was great, very intimate. In terms of touring with a band, you never really know what you're gonna get, whether you're gonna have any kind of relationship with them while you're on tour – but we hung out with them quite a bit. They're lovely guys. They

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS), VICTORIA KOVIOS, SARAH MASON

always gave us the full PA, they looked after us really well. Every night after Radiohead had played, Colin would come in with a different bottle: like, "Gentlemen, some sake?", and we'd all have a little drink. I don't know if he was bored waiting to play, but Jonny became our lighting guy for that tour. I watched them every night, they just put on such a great performance. For a large part of the tour, Thom was battling some throat problems. So they'd soundcheck and you'd hear him rasping away, and then he'd be belting it out at the gig – he went through the pain, and I've got a great amount of respect for him for that.

## 13 THE TOURIST
OK COMPUTER, 1997



**ADRIAN McNALLY, THE UNTHANKS:** I think Radiohead could rightfully be described as the most important band of their generation, and maybe since. Radiohead are a band still centred on the rock vernacular, while at the same time still being completely musically progressive and taking everything that's gone before them musically into account. They constantly try and push things forward, they're the greatest progressive band, in the literal sense, of the past 30 years. If there is a direct musical influence on me, it's in the drumming. I think Phil Selway is extremely underrated – the function of rhythm in Radiohead is what protects them from being an overtly four-to-the-floor rock band, in that Phil's drumming has a sort of hypnotic discipline. He's not tempted into a flourish, and it gives the whole music a modesty that it might not otherwise have. He should be up there with the greatest drummers of all time. "The Tourist" took a good few listens before it didn't evoke tears, and occasionally it still does [*laughs*]. There's something really spiritual and soulful that's kind of indefinable. On an objective level, it captures the way that modern life is lived too fast, and it's wonderful for that reason, but on a musical level, to drum to a piece of music as slow as "The Tourist", and to give it rhythm and fluidity at that speed, is genius. I arrange for singers who like to do things slowly or in free time, so I'm frequently faced with the challenge of handling rhythm at a very slow pace, and "The Tourist" is something I go back to again and again. But I've never managed to replicate it, because it's too good, too singular.

## 14 FOLLOW ME AROUND
UNRELEASED, FEATURED IN MEETING PEOPLE IS EASY FILM, 1998



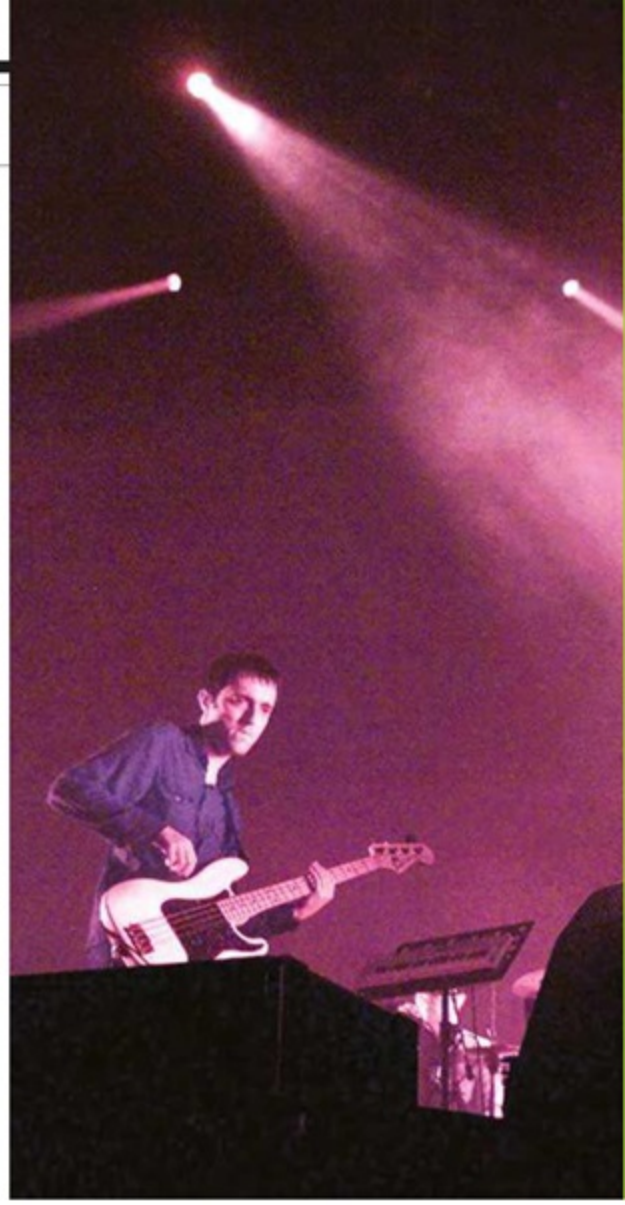
**GRANT GEE, *MEETING PEOPLE IS EASY* DIRECTOR:** There's footage of them playing this start to finish in *Meeting People Is Easy*, and whenever I've seen it I've just loved it. It makes me laugh, gives me shivers, a total delight. It was filmed at an afternoon soundcheck in Japan, towards the end of the *OK Computer* tour. By that point, they would use soundchecks to sketch out brand-new songs which, for me as a goofy fan, was thrilling. I remember Thom just starting to play some uncharacteristically bluesy thing I hadn't heard before, over and over on a fat, black acoustic guitar. So I turned the camera on, and after a bit, he starts to sing a song that sounds like some Buffalo Springfield tune. The rest of the band's onstage but they're not even looking at him, just doing their own thing, not playing. Jonny's sat on the floor doing a crossword or something. As I moved the camera across the stage, one by one the rest of the band started to ease into the track. They may have played the tune before, but right there and then, it felt like they were just finding their way in, making it up as they went along. And suddenly, they all locked in and the whole thing just throttled back and lifted off. Maybe it was just the simple, wonderful sense of them nonchalantly coming together – 1+1+1+1+1 – to make "Radiohead". And, as the track's flying along, Jonny finally unfolds himself, gunslingers his guitar and starts to dig and scratch and hack high up the neck, and now there's all this splintered free-jazz squealing attacking the groovy glide, which shifts it all to another place entirely... Then the whole thing just stops and Thom says "Right, lunch!" or some such.




## 15 EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE
KID A, 2000



**JAMES LAVELLE, UNKLE:** I remember hearing this on XFM at midnight before *Kid A* came out. I'd worked with Thom on [*UNKLE's 1998 album*] *Psyence Fiction* and toured with them after *OK Computer*, but hearing this I realised they'd reinvented the wheel, in many ways more for me than with *OK Computer*, because I came from electronic music. Occasionally you get records which transcend all musical categories, and "Everything In Its Right Place" was like that. Immediately, we went and remixed the record and played it out. There was a host of other bootleg remixes of it too, and that album is one that I reference a lot. Their use of the Kaoss pad and how they were messing with vocals and taking it into a different place, it was just one of those moments. I don't know what they were trying to do when they were making it, but it transcended all genres. And it also signified the start of a more understood relationship between electronic and populist music. It's happened many times before, whether it's Vangelis or Kraftwerk or Blondie, but at that time *NME* rock and electronic music were very separated. They were also one of the first bands of that generation to engage with remix culture. It's not just Thom, either: Jonny's always said great things about Mo'Wax, and one of their best tracks to me is "Meeting Down The Aisle", which Ed made, and that's like a Mo'Wax track.



## 16 THE NATIONAL ANTHEM
KID A, 2000

While latter-day Radiohead albums have often featured recordings of long-awaited songs – such as "Nude" on *In Rainbows*, or "True Love Waits" on *A Moon Shaped Pool* – recycling old ideas is something that the band have always done. The origins of the most propulsive song on *Kid A* stretch back to a riff Thom Yorke came up with as a teenager, which the group revisited during B-side sessions in 1997. The fuzz bass and Jaki Liebezeit-like drum groove were then looped, before the band – with Yorke unable or unwilling to write conventional songs for the follow-up to *OK Computer* – constructed a panoramic landscape of sound on top. Yorke's vocals are fed through a ring modulator, Jonny Greenwood contributes ghostly ondes martenot lines and manipulated orchestral samples, before a guttural eight-piece horn ensemble thrillingly rip apart the icy mood with free-jazz squawks indebted to Charles Mingus.

> "THEY COULD RIGHTFULLY BE DESCRIBED AS THE MOST IMPORTANT BAND OF THEIR GENERATION"
> ADRIAN McNALLY

TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, DANNY CLINCH, ZORAN ORLIC, SHAWN BRACKBILL



The *Kid A* tour, Victoria Park, Hackney, London, October 2, 2000

Live, sans horns and with a faster tempo, "The National Anthem" has been played at the majority of Radiohead shows since, with Jonny feeding a transistor radio through his effects board in a kind of local-radio lucky dip.

## 17 HOW TO DISAPPEAR COMPLETELY
KID A, 2000

Although Jonny Greenwood's second career as a prominent film composer was some years away, he had experimented with Penderecki-style arrangements on "Climbing Up The Walls", the song ending with 16 violins playing quarter-tones away from each other. On "How To Disappear Completely", influenced by a self-help mantra given to Yorke by Michael Stipe and a nightmarish dream involving Dublin's River Liffey filled with mud, Greenwood was given free rein to do whatever he wanted to Yorke's acoustic basic track. The acoustic guitar and drums are intentionally distant, and even Colin Greenwood's constantly moving bassline is subsumed beneath the layers of blissfully discordant strings and ondes martenot. Recorded on an Apple computer in three hours at Dorchester Abbey, those woozy strings, provided by The Orchestra Of St John's Smith Square, lift "How To Disappear Completely" from potentially maudlin and dour to utterly transcendent, especially when their nightmarish, rising swells threaten to completely destroy Yorke's voice as the end nears. The result was at one time the singer's favourite ever Radiohead song.

## 18 IDIOTEQUE
KID A, 2000



**ADE BLACKBURN, CLINIC:** We supported Radiohead in 2000 over a couple of stretches, some in Europe in the summer, then we played that Big Top tour in the autumn. "Idioteque" seemed to really mark a turning point for them. It was the song where I thought they'd got an ideal balance between melody and this new rhythmic direction they were going in. It really stuck in my head. It could easily have gone wrong – when you think of a lot of things from the past that have tried more of a rhythmical side, but have just been a mismatch with the melodies or the instrumentation – but they managed to do it in a really tasteful way. A lot of the songs they played then I didn't know; the setlist featured quite a lot of the new songs, but it was this one that was really quite immediate, but without resorting to an obvious structure. In leaving the guitars behind, they were really ahead of the curve, they did that before a lot of other people. I think Radiohead picked up on our use of the melodica and old keyboards, that's why they asked us to play. I remember them talking about how just a simple two- or three-note riff is enough if you're pushing yourself and using different instruments.







The impression I got from them is that nothing was off-limits, as far as experimenting with things. They seemed to have a really good approach.

## 19 PYRAMID SONG
AMNESIAC, 2001



**JOHN MATTHIAS, VIOLIN AND VIOLA ON *THE BENDS*:** I think this song defined a very big change in what they did. I was lucky enough to have heard some sessions when I visited their studio in Oxfordshire. This was before *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* came out. Colin was there with his double bass, this upright piano was wheeled out, it looked a bit second-hand; Thom went to the piano and this amazing song came out. It references Vaughan Williams for me; it sounds incredibly English but ethereal and magical all at the same time. I've never worked out what the time signature is – I could sit down and do it, but I've always preferred to just let the thing wash over me instead. It's just beautiful. It was called "Egyptian Song" when they were working on it, and my partner Jane thinks it's about the solar boat in Egypt [*a mythical craft of the sun gods*]. The words are fantastic – *"I jumped in a river, what did I see?"*, what a great first line! It's straight into the story, and you're completely immersed. Around that time their studio in Oxfordshire had a tape studio and a digital studio. They were one of the first to work in both spheres, which then was very unusual in 2000. I hear the orchestration as a bit like "Serenade To Music" by Vaughan Williams: those two tracks harmonically evoke a pastoral English landscape to me. When I played on "Fake Plastic Trees", me and the cello player, Caroline Lavelle, played along to just the voice, acoustic guitar and Jonny's guide organ track, which was replaced later on. That was quite unusual – that wasn't how rock music was made with other bands I'd played sessions on. So their processes even then were the right thing to do for the track as they felt at the time. Even back when I played with Thom in [*Exeter university band*] Headless Chickens, he was clearly an incredibly talented musician, without a doubt. He picks up an instrument and something special happens, it always has done.

## 20 YOU AND WHOSE ARMY?
AMNESIAC, 2001

Another song subjected to endless experimentation and rearrangements, the loamy "You And Whose Army?" was finally unveiled on *Amnesiac* as a stately ballad, otherwordly in its archaic feel. First, Yorke sings over mellow jazz chords and Colin Greenwood's double bass, his vocals fed through the ondes martenot's Palme diffuseur speaker. Meanwhile, lo-fi backing vocals attempt to channel the subterranean sound of '30s and '40s vocal group The Ink Spots with the help of an eggbox over the microphone. *"You and whose army?/You and* ➡

JON SUPER/REDFERNS



Video director Chris Hopewell with "Burn The Witch" props, April 2016

*your cronies,"* taunts Yorke, addressing the duplicity of Tony Blair's government. *"Come on if you think/ You can take us all on... Holy Roman Empire..."* The lyrics are threatening, but the mood is funereal, until Phil Selway's see-sawing, ride-heavy drums propel the song to a menacing climax, with Thom Yorke's wraith-like, distorted vocals calling on *"ghost horses"*. "You And Whose Army?" is a spooked slice of bitter catharsis, its off-kilter structure so successful that the band even ripped it off for "The Daily Mail" a decade later.

## 21 LIKE SPINNING PLATES
AMNESIAC, 2001



**ANGUS ANDREW, LIARS:** I've never spun a plate, but I'm aware of the concept. They're all on sticks and you've gotta keep them balanced and turning otherwise everything comes crashing down. It's anxiety illustrated. Even though I'd be hard-pressed to decipher what other lyrics are being sung in this song, that one idea, *"this just feels like spinning plates"*, is so potent that my anxiety shoots through the roof every time. I think it's a fantastic lyric. The delivery is unique too. Phonetic reversal. Very clever. It's supposed to be a song they later released called "I Will", backwards, but I've listened to that song and well... Whatever the case, it's a pretty brave move. Usually when you reverse something in the context of songwriting it gets old pretty quickly. But here, somehow, the music functions precisely in accordance with the anxiety of that titular lyric. The way it lifts through the chorus is really beautiful and essential. *Amnesiac* was released the same year as Liars' first album. That's pretty crazy to me. I remember listening to it on dubbed cassette in our burly old tourvan while we criss-crossed the USA. Pretty inspiring for us young 'uns to hear a mega-big band take such exciting creative leaps of faith. Much later we had the opportunity to do some touring with Radiohead. I'll never forget watching them perform "Like Spinning Plates" in stadiums and thinking, 'Damn.' Sure, it's not their big hit song, but in terms of an art form, for me it sits at the top of their catalogue.

## 22 THERE THERE
HAIL TO THE THIEF, 2003

**CHRIS HOPEWELL, "THERE THERE" VIDEO DIRECTOR:** My first impressions were that it was quite unlike anything I'd heard from the band before. The track is incredibly atmospheric, with a slow build that really draws you in, and this kind of thing is a real gift to a filmmaker. We talked about it having a strong folk tale/fairytale narrative, a cautionary tale with a twist at the end, and the track's structure was perfect for this. I believe they asked Oliver Postgate first, but he had retired by then, so it was quite an honour to step into his shoes, as he's my all-time favourite animator/ storyteller and a huge influence on my work to this day. His *Pogles' Wood* series had big effect on me as a child and was a big inspiration for the video. I had some long talks with Dilly Gent, their video commissioner, about Thom's ideas for the video and his love of Postgate's old-style stop-motion animation. The idea of the "dark folk tale" where the character played by Thom comes to a sticky end due to his avarice was distilled from these conversations. Most of it was shot in a studio in Bristol, but we did one day in a nearby woodland, which was great fun. Thom spent the day walking very slowly around the wood and we filmed him. He was marvellous to work with and took the whole process very seriously: the style of shooting we were doing was very slow and quite exhausting, as the subject has to move at one-third speed for long periods to get the look we wanted. He performed brilliantly with real patience and was a pleasure to direct. He would have made a damn fine actor in another life. "There There" is still my favourite track and the favourite video that I've made.




## 23 15 STEP
IN RAINBOWS, 2007



**ROBERT ZIEGLER, RADIOHEAD & JONNY GREENWOOD CONDUCTOR:** I first met Jonny in 2005 when I was conducting the BBC Concert Orchestra in London. He'd written a piece called "Popcorn Superhet Receiver" which we were rehearsing for broadcast on Radio 3. That was heard by the film director Paul Thomas Anderson, who asked if he could use it for his next film, *There Will Be Blood*. Jonny wrote more music for the film and developed some great new sounds for string orchestra, which we recorded at Abbey Road. Although the film and its score were a great success, we missed out on Oscar glory as any film that uses pre-existing music doesn't qualify in the original film score category. I knew some of Radiohead's earlier music and, after the sessions, listened to the latest release, *In Rainbows*. I was knocked out by the sound, by the fact they asked fans to pay what they wanted, and especially by the opening track, "15 Step" – it really rocked in 5/4 time. At the opening of the song it's hard to know what the beat is with just Thom and the drums playing the off-kilter rhythm. Then it becomes infectious and carries you away. Another song I love is "Harry Patch (In Memory Of)", a tribute to the 111-year old Harry, the last surviving World War I combat soldier, who died shortly after the song was recorded. Jonny wrote the music and Thom sang Harry's own words, which recalled his harrowing experience as a soldier. Thom recorded it live with me conducting a string orchestra in a small abbey in Oxfordshire. I still find it incredibly moving to listen to as a sad, elegiac reflection on war.

## 24 WEIRD FISHES/ ARPEGGI
IN RAINBOWS, 2007

A huge fan favourite, the sublime oceanic drift of this *In Rainbows* highlight pulls off the neat trick of being beautifully accessible despite its avant-garde adventurousness. As with "Let Down", the guitars are polyrhythmic, but on "Weird Fishes/Arpeggi" the textures suggest Terry Riley or Steve Reich, with Ed O'Brien, Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood all playing interlocking, overlapping arpeggios. Meanwhile, Colin Greenwood signifies the slow-moving chord changes over a Phil Selway beat that seems to combine drum'n'bass and motorik. *In Rainbows*' lusher textures were more immediate than much of the band's work, but Radiohead's seventh album also found the group moving further away from conventional structures; with no definable chorus or verse, "Weird Fishes/Arpeggi" merely dissolves, until Selway's beat and Ed O'Brien's shimmering drone take the song to a glorious coda. *"I get eaten by the worms/And weird*

TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, DANNY CLINCH, ZORAN ORLIC, SHAWN BRACKBILL

*fishes,"* murmers Yorke. *"I hit the bottom/Hit the bottom and escape."* Listening to the more ordinary stripped-down version performed by Yorke and Greenwood at a Friends Of The Earth benefit show at London's Koko a year before *In Rainbows*' release demonstrates how crucial the band's impeccable arrangements are to the power of their songs. With "Weird Fishes", Radiohead's painful studio process somehow conjured up perhaps their finest five minutes of all.

## 25 RECKONER
IN RAINBOWS, 2007

Like "Weird Fishes", "Reckoner" circles around a blissful, meditative groove, led by Thom Yorke on picked electric and the rest of the band on massed percussion. Originally expanded from just one part of another song, "Feeling Pulled Apart By Horses", "Reckoner" blossomed into one of the band's most hypnotic recordings. One of Yorke's finest vocal performances, his falsetto here is sensual and warm, and there's none of the lyrical nihilism of his earlier work; instead, he seems to croon sincerely as he dedicates the song to all of humanity. Greenwood's string arrangements halfway through are sweeping and sweetly melancholic too, with any Penderecki or Messiaen influences kept distinctly harmonious. *"Reckoner,"* keens Yorke as the song returns to its original feel, the beat and chords reminiscent of Sebastian Tellier's "La Ritournelle", *"Take me with you/Dedicated to all human beings..."* The song bows out on a strangely groovy note, perhaps pointing the way to their next move, *The King Of Limbs*.

## 26 VIDEOTAPE
IN RAINBOWS, 2007



**SEBASTIAN SZARY, MODESELEKTOR:** Compared to other bands, Radiohead have always been evolving and thinking outside the box. They let much more happen to their music than other bands would ever do. A good example are the remixes of *The King Of Limbs*, which reflect the various interests of the band. I think since *OK Computer*, it's been important to the band to break out of the conventional. "Videotape" is based on several piano chords and a series of drum patterns made with drums, drum machines and echo effects that are slowly building up. But they seem like they're not perfectly in time, which gives a certain irregularity to the beat. It sounds a lot like a timestamp of a moment that you want to backdate. To me, it's this aesthetic that makes "Videotape" perfect. I don't think Radiohead have been influential on us, but we've always had a pretty good exchange with them, especially Thom and Colin, about plenty of things: music, studio gear, food... pretty normal discussions, actually. Thom came to visit us back in the days in our pretty gross studio to record "Shipwreck" and "This" for [*2011 album*] *Monkeytown*. We gave a lot of thought to the recording situation... It ended up being pretty improvised, no headphones, the monitors to maximum volume and a very hard compression on his vocals. Took us three takes for each song. Afterwards we had pizza and beer.



## 27 BLOOM
THE KING OF LIMBS, 2011



**YAZZ AHMED, FLUGELHORN ON "BLOOM":** I like the track so much that I was inspired to write an arrangement for my band. What I really like is the complexity of the three interlocking drum parts, the electronic loops and the long melodies sweeping over the faster rhythms – it's hypnotic, very dreamy, you can get lost in it. Recording with Radiohead was top secret. We were asked to go to the studio, and we weren't allowed to mention this to anyone... where it was, when we recorded. We were greeted by Jonny, who's very shy and relaxed. He showed me and my partner some stuff – including some Alice Coltrane. I got to meet the rest of the band and everyone was really cool, and we just tried some things out. Then they took what they wanted and mixed it into their piece. We also played on "Codex". We were only in the studio for a couple of hours, it was loose, very relaxed. I think it was more of an experiment for them, to try out some flugelhorn lines, chopping them up and seeing what worked. On the *From The Basement* session it was quite different: as it was live we didn't have so much time, so they were very focused. After hearing us play the live version it made me imagine how it could sound with my band. I had to imagine how my musicians play, and I was writing for different instrumentation, bass clarinet, piano and vibraphone, instead of guitar. I can hear all these jazz influences. It's having that freedom that jazz allows you to have, with a bit of spontaneity.

> "RADIOHEAD HAVE ALWAYS BEEN EVOLVING AND THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX"
> SEBASTIAN SZARY

## 28 STAIRCASE
SINGLE, 2011

Beginning as a Thom Yorke solo piece picked on electric guitar, this choice offcut from *The King Of Limbs* was radically changed when it appeared as a download single paired with "The Daily Mail" in December 2011. Yorke was now playing a Moog Prophet, and Radiohead – with Portishead's Clive Deamer on additional drums – had rarely sounded funkier. With Selway, Deamer and Colin Greenwood playing frenetically, O'Brien and Yorke were free to summon up long, shifting glissando drones, while Jonny Greenwood fingerpicked gorgeous, mellow lead lines over the singer's disconcerting and unpredictable chords. The groove was new, but the mood – melancholically beautiful – was reassuringly familiar even to fans of *The Bends* or *OK Computer*. "The pot is full with secrets to be told," promised Yorke, mysteriously.

## 29 DECKS DARK
A MOON SHAPED POOL, 2016

The third track on the band's ninth LP seemed to nod back to "Subterranean Homesick Alien", the third track on *OK Computer*, in its nocturnal, psychedelic mood and extraterrestrial lyrical concerns. On "Subterranean...", Yorke wished for alien abduction, but on the sultry "Decks Dark" the image of a gargantuan spaceship, *"blocking out the sky"*, is a source for despair. *"There comes the darkness,"* broods Yorke, over sampled crystallised piano, and Jonny Greenwood's delicate arpeggios. The song features one of the band's most stunning transitions, when the impeccably recorded bass and drums come in after a minute and a half, joined by the spectral London Contemporary Choir. From these sticky beats – some of the darkest slow funk the band have ever laid down – "Decks Dark" spirals organically outwards, with Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien's guitars swamped in reverb and almost unbearably claustrophobic as the song drags to a close. With hindsight, the fact that *"into our darkest hour"* could be referring to Yorke's former partner Rachel Owen's terminal cancer diagnosis makes this *A Moon Shaped Pool* highlight even more deeply moving.

## 30 THE NUMBERS
A MOON SHAPED POOL, 2016

While *The King Of Limbs* foregrounded the group's interest in electronic music and Afrobeat, *A Moon Shaped Pool* highlighted their passions for jazz, piano and string arrangements. "The Numbers", originally titled "Silent Spring", is a perfect example, beginning with looped and multi-tracked piano clearly inspired by Alice Coltrane's *Journey In Satchidananda*, before a folky, bluesy acoustic guitar riff appears. The whole vibe is unhurried and hypnotic, but with strange touches – loops of laughter and conversation lurk in the background. The arrangement sums up the resourcefulness of modern-day Radiohead – the sounds are almost all acoustic, but the track is clearly constructed as artificially and cleverly as *The King Of Limbs*' most synth-heavy songs. The London Contemporary Choir turn up again to provide eerie drones, until "The Numbers" flowers into glorious Technicolor with the entry of Jonny Greenwood's strings, spread luxuriously across the frequencies paying homage to Jean-Claude Vannier's superb arrangements for Serge Gainsbourg's *Histoire De Melody Nelson*. *"You may pour us away like soup,"* sings Yorke, raging quietly against manipulating establishment figures. *"Take back what is ours/One day at a time..."* The track falls apart into abstract jazz piano and those disconcerting loops, a perfect palate-cleanser for whatever might come next.

VICTORIA KOVIOS, SARAH MASON

# EOB
# EARTH

The long-gestated debut of Ed from the 'head. Rural seclusion and global musings, here manifested in celebratory indie dance. | BY MARK BEAUMONT

**RELEASED: 17 APRIL 2020**

IT WAS VERY much a case of Earth calling Ed O'Brien. He, more than anyone, knew that no-one was waiting for his solo album. "Thom, Jonny and Phillip are making music," he said in his promotional material for that very record, "and I'm like, 'The last thing the world needs is a shit album by me.'" But as the teetotal, meditative philanthropist and nature lover roamed the globe in the wake of the *King Of Limbs* cycle, the planet made its feelings on the matter known. The sounds of the Brazilian countryside, the heady rhythms of Rio Carnival and Glastonbury's Shangri-La field, the majesty of the Cambrian mountains and the loneliness of the Pale Blue Dot all demanded he document them. What emerged, over eight years, was a love letter to two families; his own and his species'.

Late 2012. As he had pre-warned his bandmates back around *In Rainbows*, for a year O'Brien and his family moved to a forest farm near Ubatuba, midway between São Paulo and Rio De Janeiro, cutting themselves off from mobile phones and wi-fi to escape the techno-nag of modern life, help O'Brien work through issues with depression and make an electronic album on his laptop in the process. His usual listening pleasures – dubstep, Burial – weren't resonating with his new environs though; it was a spin of Primal Scream's *Screamadelica* – and specifically "Movin' On Up" – which provided what he'd call his "Eureka moment". The combined significance of the idea of "*getting out of the darkness*" via uplifting soul rhythms spoke to the light, warmth, colour and joy he hoped to draw from his own personal murk.

He felt the same sense of connection when visiting the "extraordinary explosion" of the Rio Carnival and, later still, while "hanging with the tribe" in Glastonbury's 'naughty corner' watching his friends dab MDMA at 4am. "I felt there was a thread right through *Screamadelica*, rave and carnival," he said and, relocating to a cottage in the shadow of the Cambrian mountains in Wales in 2013, set about plucking away at it.

**AT LEAST ONE CORNER OF THE RADIOHEAD UNIVERSE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT SOMETIMES THE SIMPLE CAN TRUMP THE COMPLEX**

Working on laptop and acoustic, and pleased enough with his vocals to ditch his plan to ask Yorke to sing, O'Brien strove for a universal profundity. His working title was "The Pale Blue Dot", inspired by Carl Sagan's call for global unity and understanding which accompanied the image of the earth taken by Voyager 1 in 1994, from 4 billion miles away – "a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark" – and his tone was guided by the songs of the body electric to be found in Walt Whitman's poetry collection *Leaves Of Grass*. "I wanted to talk about love, your family in the immediate and the wider sense, where we are on the planet, the bigger picture, life and death," he said. "Something hopeful and full of love."

"Santa Teresa", O'Brien's ambient 2019 debut release as EOB was named after Rio's bohemian quarter, and hinted at an engrossing tapestry of dark and light textures, but the finished record is rather too opaque to encompass his ambitious themes. Rooted in three weeks of live sessions in a Welsh mansion house in 2017 with his band – guitarist David Okumu and bassist Nathan East from The Invisible, plus Bowie alumnus Omar Hakim and Wilco's Glenn Kotche on drums – and Flood at the desk, then reworked over the following year in London, it's an album that revels in ambiguity, sketching wonderfully misty tableaus of family bliss but leaving effects and electronics to handle the more abstruse concepts.

Take opener "Shangri-La", written while still on a contact high from Glastonbury 2015 (O'Brien




## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"In all, it's hard to see *Earth* as anything but a triumph for O'Brien – important proof to himself, and others, that he has something significant to offer on his own. It also, perhaps, clarifies just what the guitarist contributes to Radiohead: namely, their bold and unashamedly anthemic elements, stemming from his love of combining collective euphoria in music and earnest folk storytelling."
GREG COCHRANE, UNCUT, MAY 2020

is a regular) and one of two tracks to feature Portishead guitarist Adrian Utley on morning mist duties. One of the album's rockier tracks – in an "Idioteque" sort of sense – it builds from looping robotic bleeps delivered at R2D2bpm and Ed's very Thom-like soul falsetto into a Primals funk maelstrom that attempts to emulate the heightened state communion of the Avalonian rave field by climaxing in a dizzying collage of manipulated sound, a very Radiohead sort of trick. The eight-minute "Olympik" has another stab, this time utilising distorted dub, sub-Saharan beats, acid rock guitars and funky drumming, O'Brien delivering such enlightenments as *"kaleidoscope starts to spin, shaking up all the mess we're in"*.

The gorgeous "Mass" – inspired by NASA's 3D IMAX film *Hubble* which took the viewer on a spacewalk above the earth and a CGI tour of the Orion Nebula, buffered by solar winds – does a better job of capturing a sense of shared human experience by setting us all within one frail planetary boat. Largely dispensing with woolly lyrical conceits, it expresses the elemental enormities of the cosmos, and the fragility of the earth, by means of "Space Oddity" acoustics, chorales of the spheres and bursts of tectonic guitar. Otherwise only "Banksters", with origins in O'Brien's anger at the villainous money men of 2008, addresses the global dilemma. *"Unwinding boom and bust, your Ponzi schemes and 'God we trust'..."* O'Brien croons over a glitchy folk blues full of Tom Waits' bayou heat, Latino shuffle and Southern strut, *"...where did all the money go?"* It ends with a shaft of fiscal positivity, twinkling synths surrounding O'Brien as he declares *"I'm breaking free"* as, arguably, only a member of a major international rock band with a following still willing to shell out on deluxe vinyl sets can.

It's best to consider these tracks as a panoramic frame for the more intimate, revealing moments which form *Earth*'s core. Before it expands into an ambient rave piece that sounds how you imagine ayahuasca feels, "Brasil" traces O'Brien's journey from desolation to redemption: *"This bad dream has got me... feeling like I'm on my knees,"* O'Brien sings over tender arpeggios, and *"there's no fear now... golden nights spent with you"* as the bass beat rises (courtesy of Colin Greenwood). "Deep Days" is pure soul devotion to his family, "Long Time Coming" a spectral portrait of urban loneliness, "Sail On" a delicate tribute to a cousin who died during the album's journey, musing mournfully over death's unfathomable waters: *"It's time to say goodbye to everything I know/Just one more voyage we all must undergo."*

The record ends with a "Mother Nature's Son"-like folk duet with Laura Marling called "Cloak Of The Night", the intimate coiled within the cosmic, a sign that at least one corner of the Radiohead universe acknowledges that the simple can sometimes trump the complex. O'Brien intends *Earth* as the start of a trilogy; if so, there's time to hone EOB's grand vision and focus, perhaps, on more such earthiness.

## TRACKMARKS — EARTH

1. Shangri-La ★★★★
2. Brasil ★★★★
3. Deep Days ★★★
4. Long Time Coming ★★★
5. Mass ★★★★
6. Banksters ★★★
7. Sail On ★★★★
8. Olympik ★★
9. Cloak Of The Night ★★★★

**Label:** Capitol Records
**Produced by:** Flood, Catherine Marks
Studios: remote location, Wales; Assault & Battery, London
**Recorded:** 2017–18
**Personnel:** Ed O'Brien (vocals, guitar, bass, programming, percussion, keyboards, David Okumu (guitar), Nathan East (bass), Omar Hakim (drums), Laura Marling (vocals), Colin Greenwood (bass), Adrian Utley (guitar), Glen Kotche (drums), Richie Kennedy (synthesiser, percussion, drums, programming)
**Highest chart position:** UK n/a; US n/a



Thom, Ed and Jonny recording *In Rainbows*

# THE RADIOHEAD MISCELLANY

Singles, films, collaborations, collectables… *"No alarms and no surprises?"* | By MARK BENTLEY

"WE HAVEN'T REALLY had any hits, so what's the purpose?" said Thom Yorke of EMI's career-spanning *Radiohead: The Best Of* in 2008. That's not entirely true, of course – although seven UK Top 10 hits and not one No 1 seems a slender return for a band of their stature. The interesting thing to note from Radiohead's single and EP releases is not the Beatle-baiting chart positions, but the sheer amount of additional material the band supplied as routine. Maximising the space afforded by that staple of the 1990s – the CD single – many Radiohead releases arrived in a number of editions, each with its own discrete audio enticements, not limited to 'radio edits' or remixes. The end result is that many Radiohead singles are more like EPs, and some EPs – "My Iron Lung", say – are more like albums...

## UK singles discography



### DRILL EP

PARLOPHONE, MAY 1992

*The debut commercial release, limited to just 3,000 copies, and recorded while the band were still technically known as On A Friday. Received its first airplay from an unlikely source, perhaps: Radio 1's Gary Davies, who played "Prove Yourself" on his afternoon show...*

**Tracklisting:** Prove Yourself/Stupid Car/You/Thinking About You



### CREEP

PARLOPHONE, SEPTEMBER 1992

UK CHART: 78 (1992)

**Additional CD single tracks:** Lurgee/Inside My Head/Million Dollar Question

### ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR

PARLOPHONE, FEB 1993, UK: 32

Additional CD tracks: Faithless The Wonder Boy/Coke Babies






### POP IS DEAD

PARLOPHONE, MAY 1993

UK: 42

**Additional CD tracks:** Banana Co (Acoustic)/Creep (live)/Ripcord (live)



### CREEP (REISSUE)

PARLOPHONE, SEPT 1993

UK: 7; US: 34

**CD single tracks:** Yes I Am/Blow Out (remix)/Inside My Head (Live At The Metro)

**12" 'US Live EP' tracks:** Creep (K-ROQ Acoustic Version)/You (live)/Vegetable (live)/Killer Cars (live)



### STOP WHISPERING

PARLOPHONE, OCTOBER 1993

US ONLY ISSUE, DNC

**Additional CD single tracks:** Creep (KROQ Acoustic Version)/Pop Is Dead/Inside My Head (Live At The Metro)

### MY IRON LUNG EP

PARLOPHONE, OCTOBER 1994, UK: 24

*Two singles or an EP? A key release in the transition between* Pablo Honey *and* The Bends, *this marked the band's first work with Nigel Godrich, and showcased some outtakes from sessions for The Bends.*




**CD 1 tracklisting:** My Iron Lung / The Trickster/Punchdrunk Lovesick Singalong/Lozenge Of Love

**CD2:** My Iron Lung/Lewis (Mistreated)/Permanent Daylight/You Never Wash Up After Yourself



### HIGH & DRY/PLANET TELEX

PARLOPHONE, FEBRUARY 1995

UK: 17; US: 78

*Not technically an EP, but a double-A-side single, released as two separate CDs. But who's counting?*

**High & Dry CD tracklisting:** High & Dry/Planet Telex/Maquiladora/Planet Telex (Hexicidecimal Mix)

**Planet Telex CD tracklisting:** Planet Telex/High & Dry/Killer Cars/Planet Telex (LFO JD Mix)



## FAKE PLASTIC TREES

PARLOPHONE, MAY 1995
UK:20; US:DNC

**CD1 additional tracks:** India Rubber/How Can You Be Sure?
**CD2 additional tracks:** Fake Plastic Trees (Acoustic Live In London)/Bullet Proof... I Wish I Was (Acoustic Live In London)/Street Spirit (Fade Out) (Acoustic Live In London)



## JUST

PARLOPHONE, AUGUST 1995, UK:19
**CD1/12" additional tracks:** Planet Telex (Karma Sunra Mix)/Killer Cars (Mogadon Version)
**CD2 additional tracks:** Bones (live)/Planet Telex (live)/Anyone Can Play Guitar (live)



## STREET SPIRIT (FADE OUT)

PARLOPHONE, JANUARY 1996, UK:5
**CD1 additional tracks:** Talk Show Host/Bishop's Robes
**CD2 additional tracks:** Banana Co/Molasses
*Note: this was the band's first 7" vinyl release, with "Bishop's Robes" as the sole B-side*



## PARANOID ANDROID

PARLOPHONE, MAY 1997, UK:3
**CD1 additional tracks:** Polyethylene (Parts 1&2)/Pearly
**CD2 additional tracks:** A Reminder/Melatonin



## KARMA POLICE

PARLOPHONE, AUGUST 1997, UK:8
**CD1 additional tracks:** Meeting In The Aisle/Lull
**CD2 additional tracks:** Climbing Up The Walls (Zero 7 Mix)/ Climbing Up The Walls (Fila Brazillia Mix)



## NO SURPRISES

PARLOPHONE, JAN 1998, UK:4
**CD1 additional tracks:** Palo Alto/How I Made My Millions
**CD2 additional tracks:** Airbag (live)/Lucky (live)
*Note: "Lucky" was released as a single solely in France; the import even charted at 51 in the UK*



## PYRAMID SONG

PARLOPHONE, MAY 2001, UK:5
**CD1 additional tracks:** The Amazing Sounds Of Orgy/Trans-Atlantic Drawl
**CD2 additional tracks:** Fast-Track/Kinetic



## KNIVES OUT

PARLOPHONE, AUGUST 2001, UK:13
**CD1 additional tracks:** Cuttooth/Life In A Glasshouse (full-length version)
**CD2 additional tracks:** Worrywort/Fog



## THERE THERE

PARLOPHONE, MAY 2003, UK:4
**CD/12" additional tracks:** Paperbag Writer/Where Bluebirds Fly



## GO TO SLEEP

PARLOPHONE, AUGUST 2003, UK:12
**CD1 additional tracks:** I Am Citizen Insane/Fog (Again) (live/acoustic)
**CD2 additional tracks:** Gagging Order/I Am A Wicked Child



## 2+2=5

PARLOPHONE, NOVEMBER 2003, UK:15
**CD1 additional tracks:** Myxomatosis (Christian Vogel Remix)/There There (Demo)
**CD2 additional tracks:** Scatterbrain (Four Tet Remix)/I Will (1st Mix At Ocean Way)



## COMLAG: 2+2=5 EP

PARLOPHONE, APRIL 2007 (JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA IN 2004)
*Belated UK release for this 10-track EP, originally issued in Japan and Australia in 2004. Notable for the alternate LA version of "I Will".*
**Tracklisting:** 2+2=5 (live at Earls Court, London, 26/11/03)/Remyxomatosis (Cristian Vogel RMX/I Will (LA version)/Paperbag Writer/I Am a Wicked Child/I Am Citizen Insane/Skttrbrain (Four Tet RMX)/Gagging Order/Fog (Again) (live)/Where Bluebirds Fly



## JIGSAW FALLING INTO PLACE

XL RECORDINGS, JAN 2008, UK:30
**CD additional tracks:** Down Is The New Up (Live)/Last Flowers (live)
**7" vinyl B-side:** Videotape (live)



## NUDE

XL, MARCH 2008
UK:21; US:35
**CD additional tracks:** Down Is The New Up/4 Minute Warning
**7" vinyl B-side:** 4 Minute Warning
Nude was also downloadable in the form of stems – mixed instrumental/vocal tracks – allowing fans to remix the song.



## RECKONER

XL, SEPTEMBER 2008
DOWNLOAD ONLY
UK:74
*As with "Nude", this was made available as stem tracks.*



## HARRY PATCH (IN MEMORY OF)

SELF-RELEASED
DOWNLOAD ONLY
*Dedicated to the last surviving British soldier from WWI, this sold on W.A.S.T.E. for £1, all proceeds to the Royal British Legion*



## THESE ARE MY TWISTED WORDS

FREE DOWNLOAD
AUGUST 2009, UK:DNC

## SUPERCOLLIDER/THE BUTCHER

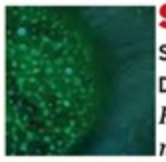
TICKER TAPE, APRIL 2011, UK:DNC
*12" vinyl-only for Record Store Day*






## THE DAILY MAIL/STAIRCASE

TICKER TAPE, DECEMBER, 2011, UK:71,
*Download only*



## SPECTRE

SELF-RELEASED/XL, DECEMBER 2015
*Rejected by the movie's bigwigs, Radiohead's keening Bond theme was instead given away on 25 December on SoundCloud.*

## BURN THE WITCH/SPECTRE

XL, MAY 2016, DOWNLOAD+VINYL, UK:64
*First issued as a download the week before A Moon Shaped Pool, this would go on – in physical form – to become the 27th best-selling vinyl single of 2016, no less. It's backed by "Spectre" – "something of our own we love very much".*






## DAYDREAMING

XL, MAY 2016, DOWNLOAD, UK:74
*Released just three days after "Witch", this is notable for the accompanying video, helmed by a workmate of Jonny's: vaunted Hollywood director Paul Thomas Anderson*




## I PROMISE

XL, JUNE 2017, DOWNLOAD
*A reject from the OK Computer sessions, reclaimed as a download, with music vid, for 2017 – the lead single from the OKNOTOK set*



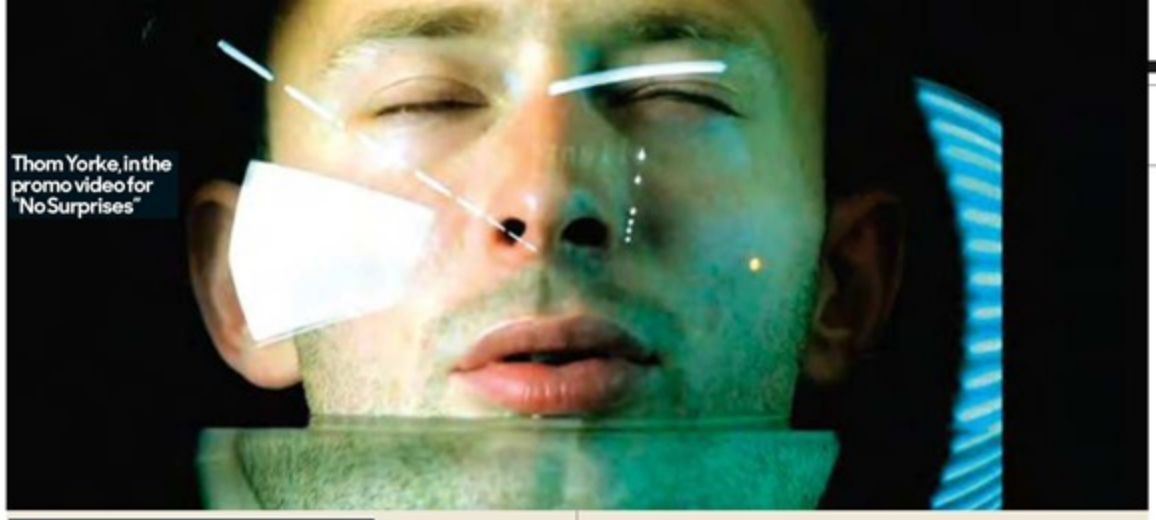
## MAN OF WAR

XL, JUNE 2017, DOWNLOAD
*The Bondishness is no mistake: Radiohead had originally suggested this OKNOTOK track as a potential for Spectre – rejected for not being a new composition*



## ILL WIND

XL, JANUARY 2019, DOWNLOAD
*From the lesser-spotted bonus disc of A Moon Shaped Pool, this was put out digitally for streaming services, with its own, on-brand artwork*


Thom Yorke, in the promo video for "No Surprises"

# Some films about Radiohead

**These days, Radiohead's official site – and YouTube – are your best bets for visual content, particularly the stunning promos of recent years. These are good too, though…**



### LIVE AT THE ASTORIA
**March 1995**

Were you there? Still the only full UK concert release, this May 1994 set from London's Astoria featured a number of songs from the forthcoming *The Bends*. Initially a VHS, it received the DVD treatment in 2005.



### 7 TELEVISION COMMERCIALS
**May 1998**

A video greatest hits, featuring seven key video promos from *The Bends* and *OK Computer*. This slimline set articulated the band's high-pomp period, with Jonathan Glazer's work for "Street Spirit (Fade Out)" and "Karma Police" particularly striking.



### MEETING PEOPLE IS EASY
**November 1998**

Enter Grant Gee, graduate of U2's Zoo TV tour and director of "No Surprises". This celebrated abstract 'videography' chronicles the 105-date OK Computer Tour via a raft of fridge-buzzing effects, including slo-mo, excerpts, time-lapse camera work and snatches of interviews, intercut with awesome live footage.



### THE MOST GIGANTIC LYING MOUTH OF ALL TIME
**December 2004**

Twenty-four conceptual films by fans and collaborators, and another essential visual document of the band, this DVD issue anthologises the four portmanteau 'episodes' from the short-lived Radiohead internet television channel. Look out for early demo footage, some deathlessly sarky mock interviews, and the bookending commentary from 'Chieftain Mews' – a composite digital avatar featuring Nigel Godrich's body and Stanley Donwood's voice.



### RADIOHEAD: THE BEST OF
**June 2008**

As utilitarian as the title suggests: 21 videos, chronologically spanning Radiohead's EMI years, starting with "Creep" and ending with a live performance of "2+2=5". As with the accompanying compilation album, the band had no creative input in its release – but the fact that seven videos here were issued on DVD for the first time makes it a must-have for the completist.



### IN RAINBOWS – FROM THE BASEMENT
**June 2008**

This live video album was filmed in a day at The Hospital Club in London's Covent Garden. Aired on VH1 in May 2008, it featured *In Rainbows* material plus recast versions of older tracks, including "Myxomatosis", "Optimistic" and "Where I End And You Begin". There was no physical issue: the 10 Discbox tracks were then made available as an iTunes-only issue.



### LIVE IN PRAHA
**August 2010**

An official bootleg, of sorts: this live set, the visual record of a gig at the Výstaviště Holešovice in Prague on August 23, 2009 was filmed and edited by the audience, with the band providing audio masters. The resulting 120-minute document – mixing *In Rainbows* material with older cuts – was offered as a free download.



### RADIOHEAD FOR HAITI
**December 2010**

To raise funds for victims of the Haiti earthquake, Radiohead played a 24-song impromptu benefit gig at the Henry Fonda Theatre in Hollywood in January 2010. Notable for its stripped-back arrangements and high-rolling audience (including Justin Timberlake!), the show was filmed by audience members, and issued under the 'honesty box' system on Christmas Eve 2010.



### THE KING OF LIMBS: LIVE FROM THE BASEMENT
**December 2011**

The DVD/Blu-ray release repeats the *In Rainbows* trick and then some – studio live performances of eight tracks from *The King Of Limbs*, plus "The Daily Mail" and "Staircase", alongside the Record Store Day performance of "Supercollider". Intense, immense and with enlightening between-song patter, it's a superb package. Many fans actually prefer the audio quality and more guitar-led arrangments to the album versions.

# Anyone can play… harmonica?

**Top 10 lesser spotted guest appearances and collaborations**

### THE WEIRD SISTERS 2005

The sorting hat says 'rock': the hairy wizard band from *Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire* comprises Phil Selway (as "Orsino Thruston") and, Jonny Greenwood (as "Kirley Duke") alongside Pulp's Jarvis Cocker and Steve Mackey, Jason Buckle (of All Seeing I) and Steven Claydon (of Add N To (X)). Catch Jarvis-penned tracks "Do The Hippogriff", "This Is The Night" and "Magic Works" on the DVD extras.

### SCOTT TENORMAN MUST DIE 2001

Cartoonified, the band play themselves in this infamous series five episode of *South Park*. After accepting an invite from Cartman to meet Scott, Radiohead manage to reduce him to "tears of unfathomable sadness…"

### THE VENUS IN FURS 1998

Glam-rock supergroup alert: Thom Yorke and Jonny join Suede man Bernard Butler and Roxy Music's Andy Mackay to cover "2HB", "Ladytron", "Bitter-Sweet" and "Baby's On Fire" for *Velvet Goldmine*.

### 7 WORLDS COLLIDE
**2001, 2009**

Alongside Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, Phil Selway and Ed Greenwood have twice featured in Neil Finn's charity supergroup. Catch them on the 2001 live album and its 2009 studio follow-up, *The Sun Came Out*, with Phil composing and singing "The Ties That Bind Us".

### WOODPECKER 2008

Colin's only recorded work outside the Radiohead diaspora, this soundtrack also features members of Clap Your Hands Say Yeah.





**PAVEMENT – TERROR TWILIGHT** 1999
Nigel Godrich produced it, Jonny plays harmonica on two tracks on Pavement's final LP: that's him on "Platform Blues" and "Billie".

**THOM/BJORK** 2000
Thom duets with Björk on this track on "I've Seen It All" from *Selmasongs*, the soundtrack to Lars Von Trier's *Dancer In The Dark*.

**COVERING MARK MULCAHY** 2009
Thom (and brother Andy) contribute "All For The Best" the opener of tribute comp *Ciao My Shining Star: The Songs Of Mark Mulcahy*. LP also features Michael Stipe, Dinosaur Jr and Frank Black.

**EUREKA STREET** 1999
Ed contributes to this lost BBC drama, based on Robert McLiam Wilson's hard-boiled Belfast novel. It's not on DVD, but there is an OST: our man co-wrote five of the 20 atmospheric pieces, on the BBC CD, contributing to four other cuts.

**THE COLBERT REPORT** 2011
Less a collaboration than a meeting of minds: look hard online to find the six-song live set from Stephen Colbert's Comedy Central show – plus interviews with Thom and Ed.

## Street Spirit

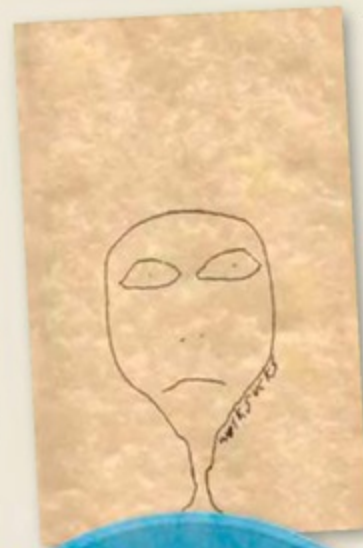
### Thom Yorke: selected collaborations



"Rabbit In The Headlights" – with UNKLE (*Psyence Fiction*, 1998)
"The White Flash" – with Modeselektor (*Happy Birthday!*, 2007)
"...And The World Laughs With You" – with Flying Lotus (*Cosmogramma*, 2010)
"Shipwreck" and "This" – with Modeselektor (*Monkeytown*, 2011)
"Electric Candyman" – with Flying Lotus (*Until The Quiet Comes*, 2012)

# So fucking special!

## A brief guide to Radiohead collectables…

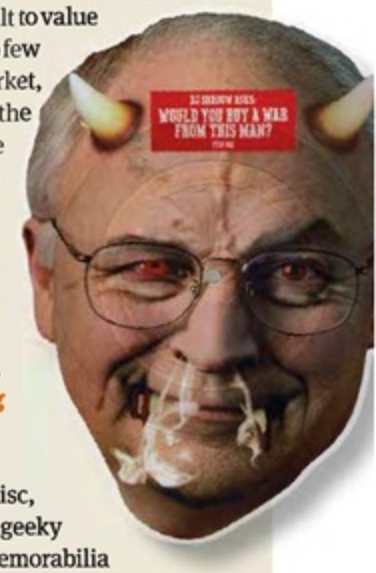


NINETIES VINYL IS definitely a thing. Scarcity drives value, and relatively few albums and singles were pressed on wax because – quite frankly – not many people were buying them. Prices are on the rise, but just how much they are rising may surprise you. Just five years back, you could pick up a decent original UK vinyl copy of **Pablo Honey** for £35. Today, you are looking at £80+. Likewise **The Bends**: a showroom-condition copy sold for £50 in autumn 2014. Now, we'd estimate £150 upwards; a 'mint' copy made £199 in December 2019. We can go on. A museum-quality shrink-wrapped first UK pressing of **OK Computer** sold for £202 in 2013. Today, that's the price of an opened, played version. It's all in the details. You're looking for the catalogue number NODATA02 and an EMI Records credit, which was removed on later versions. If you picked up a later vinyl version you're still doing well; the 1997 'reissue' is no bargain at £70. Limited to just 3,000 copies (with sticker!) the 1992 **"Drill EP"** is a long-time heavy collectable. We're calling it at £150+. Other 7" and 12" singles are less pricey, as you'll pay around £20 for a standard UK Radiohead 12" – get on them while you can. Rarer releases such as the blue 7" of **"Paranoid Android"** can make £40+. Meanwhile, your prized CD1 and CD2 versions of the classic singles are pretty meh, at a fiver or so.

Collectability doesn't end in the '90s. The original 10" vinyl issues of **Kid A** and **Amnesiac** are rising steadily: £120+ each, doubling the estimate from a few years back. The **In Rainbows Discbox**, of course, became an instant must-have. Available pre-order in 2008 for £40, prices have only gone one way. One unopened copy – still in the W.A.S.T.E.-stamped brown mailer – sold for £250 in 2018. Remember the newspaper-issue of **The King Of Limbs**? This checks in at £150 if it's still sealed, £60 if you (like me) played it like some kind of idiot. We've seen its sister release, the limited hardcover 7 x 12" boxset **TKOL RMX 1234567** go for an astonishing £500, too. With a nod to the collectomania of the fanbase, the band even issued **A Moon Shaped Pool** in a case-bound special edition in 2016, with a bonus strip of ORIGINAL MASTER TAPE! Shit! As the band said at the time: "Each loop contains about three-quarters of a second of audio – which could be from any era in the band's recording past going back to *Kid A*. You may have silence, you may have coloured leader tape, you may have a chorus... It's a crapshoot." We think £120 is a fair estimate now.

That said, the No 1 Radiohead collectable is probably the same as it's always been – the three-track **On A Friday/Manic Hedgehog** demo tape. That's difficult to value accurately as so few come on the market, but £500 seems the going rate. There are a litany of cheaper pulse-quickening promos out there – look for one-sided issues like **"Climbing Up The Walls"** (Zero 7 mix, £50), **"The Gloaming (DJ Shadow Remix)"** (Dick Cheney picture disc, £40) or geeky memorabilia like the promo jigsaw of **Hail To The Thief** (£100). It's all falling into place!

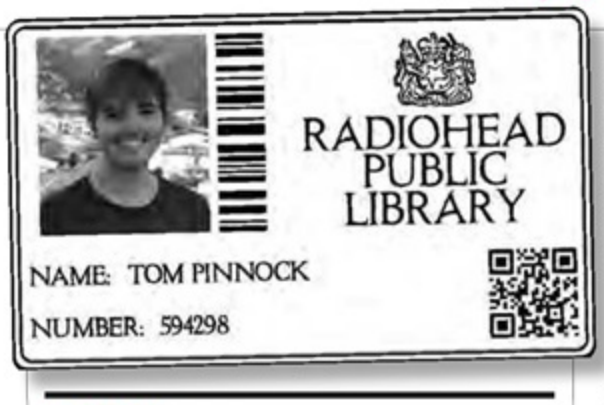
*MARK BENTLEY*



# LIBRARY: FINE!

Webcast finds. Rare tracks. Newsletters. Even T-shirts! We visit some of the dustiest corners of the Radiohead Public Library. | By TOM PINNOCK

IF RADIOHEAD HAD a spiritual building, it would most likely be a library. Labyrinthine, of course, stocked with plenty of Dante, Chomsky, Naomi Klein and Douglas Adams, it might also sport an airy music area packed with jazz, krautrock, electronic and classical LPs. One can even imagine the slightly ironic signs informing visitors how best to be fitter, happier and more productive while they visit. Until the band construct that monolith, we've got their Public Library, online at Radiohead.com. It's a stunning digital resource, collecting all their music, videos, webcasts, live films and more, much of it previously unavailable, in one place. For ease of navigation, here we've curated the 20 best things inside their digital vault – and best of all, no late fees!




## 1 LIBRARY CARD
### I REMEMBER HEARING THIS ON XFM AT MIDNIGHT

You can't be a member of a library without a good old-fashioned card to laminate, and so the band have kindly let their fans generate our own retro library cards, featuring a photo of your choice. Being kind fellows, Radiohead don't force us to replicate the style of the pictures on their own cards, from Thom's ghoulish visage to Colin's surprised, just-out-of-bed look.

## 2 THUMBS DOWN
### WEBCAST NOVEMBER 9, 2007

"Thom's in a fantastic mood this evening," says Adam Buxton, introducing this *In Rainbows* webcast motherlode, "because he knows there's all kinds of fun lined up tonight for all you folks who've joined us..." The gems across this two-and-a-half-hour marathon include raw, rocking versions of "Bodysnatchers", "Reckoner", New Order's "Ceremony" and more. There are DJ sets (Burial, Asian Dub Foundation and Jorge Ben feature heavily) from the whole gang, and a bunch of often hilarious curios including their homage to *Se7en*. Just what is in that box?

EDD WESTMACOTT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO




## 3 KID A BLIPS

A curio at the time, these micro video promos for the group's return in 2000 effectively invented the kind of short, ambiguous adverts we now see every day on social media. Set to clips of their 10 new songs, the visuals bring to life the imagery from the album artwork, from rural desolation to digital abstraction. There's even an animated version of Yorke, being buried in falling snow as blood drips out of his nose – you don't see that on many influencers' Instas. 20 years on, these 13 minutes feel gripping, artful and bracingly modern.

## 4 "VIDEOTAPE" BONNAROO
### JUNE 17, 2006

While the minimalist *In Rainbows* version has an eerie charm, this early live take is a holy grail for many fans. Available here in top quality for the first time, it's arguably a stronger take than in its studio incarnation: circular and hypnotic like many later 'head songs, it builds inexorably as the other members join in. At its peak, it's a snarling and angular beast, a sublime collision of Joy Division and Neu!. Plus this whole performance is probably Radiohead's longest ever set, reckons Ed O'Brien.

## 5 WASTE NEWSLETTERS

"Thank you very much for your interest in us," begins the band's first photocopied newsletter to fans; and it's certainly fascinating to chart their evolution in these early missives. The five well-bred lads start off excitable and eager, but by the time of their fourth WASTE newsletter they've assumed their now familiar air of gallows-humoured irony: "Urbane, witty, well-dressed and well-travelled? We weren't. That is, not until we kissed the ring and joined the world of corporate politics." By #8, they're obliviously announcing the arrival of their second album, *The Bends*, with a breezy "hope you like it!"

## 6 UNSEEN GLASTONBURY
### JUNE 28, 1997

Assaulted by technical problems, the band famously believed their first Pyramid Stage headline slot was a disaster: the crowd thought otherwise, though, and this comp of the three songs not transmitted by the BBC at the time only cements it as one of the band's finest. "Airbag" is ferocious, while "Planet Telex" matches My Bloody Valentine's *Loveless* for flickering, psych noise. Most legendary of all is Yorke's furious proclamation before a heavy "You": "These two lights, here and here, off, now! For the rest of the show. I couldn't see a single soul in the audience for the whole of that show, and I wanna see them. Can't see a fucking thing!"

## 7 OKNOTOK WHITE CASSETTE

Only previously available on cassette with the Special Edition of their 2017 *OK Computer* reissue, these doodles, demos and lost snippets from the sessions are now available for all. Some of it appeared on their hacked *MiniDiscs* last year, but it's still a delight: "Jonny's Radio From Climbing Up The Walls" is peak-geek and wonderful; Thom's four-track demo of "The National Anthem" is a little more baggy than its looped *Kid A* version; an organ-drenched full-band version of "Nude" is gorgeous; there's also a chance to hear Thom's hymn-like first try at "No Surprises", captured during soundcheck.

## 8 "DRILL" EP 1992

The debut Radiohead release on Parlophone, these four songs (three of which would appear on the following year's *Pablo Honey*) were recorded while the band were still named On A Friday. On one hand, it's fascinating to peer in at the band in a fairly embryonic state, sounding like slightly dreary indie also-rans on "Stupid Car"; on the other, it's delightful to hear just how Greenwood's rubbery, explosive guitar leads and Yorke's ascending vocals have remained a constant.


Glastonbury Festival. June 28, 1997

## 9 "I WANT NONE OF THIS"
### HELP!: A DAY IN THE LIFE 2005

Tucked away on 2005's charity album *Help!: A Day In The Life*, this gem featuring just multi-tracked Thom Yorkes and a piano is now available to stream everywhere – with its own new *In Rainbows*-esque cover art. The group might have been on the way to



Canal+/Nulle Part Ailleurs, Paris, September 18, 2000

that album when Yorke recorded this, but the song would have perfectly suited *Hail To The Thief*, its dour mood akin to "I Will", or even *Amnesiac*, its backing vocals a little like the Inkspots-inspired chorus on "You And Whose Army".

## 10 ENTANGLEMENT WEBCAST NOVEMBER 8, 2007

Thom Yorke shows off his unconventional scratching skills on this short 'testcast' a month after the surprise release of *In Rainbows*. After some eerie synth drones – an early audition for scoring *Suspiria*, perhaps – about three minutes in, Yorke drops an instrumental and extended version of his own "Harrowdown Hill", which had appeared on 2006's *The Eraser*. It's a great reworking, which cuts without warning to a beautiful cover of Björk's "Unravel".

## 11 "THE HEADMASTER RITUAL" THUMBS DOWN WEBCAST 2007

"This is about when we were younger," says Thom Yorke, "but we didn't write it." With that, they launch into a taut, quasi-motorik version of the opener to The Smiths' *Meat Is Murder* classic. With their triple-guitar lineup, Radiohead do a better job of recreating Johnny Marr's multi-tracked majesty live than The Smiths ever did, while Yorke pulls off a strong vocal performance, halfway between Morrissey and Vic Reeves' club singer.

## 12 JONNY & THOM IN 1994 & 1995...

The whole quintet are of course crucial to Radiohead (along with their sixth member Nigel Godrich), but Yorke and the younger Greenwood seem like the most simpático pairing, hence why they were often sent out to perform as a duo. In these early performances, they do "You" and "My Iron Lung" for MTV's *Most Wanted* in 1994, and play a 15-minute, fully acoustic set in Shinjuku's Liquid Room – "Street Spirit" opens, with Thom on 12-string!

## 13 ...AND AGAIN IN 2007, 2008 AND 2016

There's a lovely "Faust Arp" on a hill at sunset in *Thumbs Down* and a cover of Portishead's "The Rip" backstage at St Louis, but the finest performances from Radiohead's answer to Simon & Garfunkel probably came after *A Moon Shaped Pool*: here, Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood packed off to Paul Thomas Anderson's garden with their new mate, a vintage Roland CR-78 drum machine. Thom's vest aside, their versions of "The Numbers" and "Present Tense" are pretty much perfection.

## 14 PARK HAYARKON TEL AVIV JULY 19, 2017

Despite being a controversial location, this 130-minute set from the Moon Shaped Pool tour is as good as Radiohead get. It's an epic and wide-ranging set, from deeper cuts such as "Like Spinning Plates" and "Identikit", to arguably their biggest songs – "Paranoid Android", "Creep", "Karma Police", "The Bends" and "There There". This is a high-quality document of a band at peace with their whole catalogue, at the cross-section of rock and electronics, of beauty and weirdness, celebrating the healing power of music.

## 15 MEETING PEOPLE IS EASY 1998

Halfway between *Some Kind Of Monster* and ...*Spinal Tap*, Grant Gee's lo-fi document of the *OK Computer* tour is a sober, dark and slightly ridiculous watch. The grinding treadmill of life in a world-famous rock group is exhaustively (and exhaustingly) catalogued, from interviews to travel to recording radio idents; and star of the show is Thom Yorke, seemingly captured while experiencing a glacial meltdown. *Meeting...* is also packed with some crucial musical footage, from soundchecks of then-new songs such as "Follow Me Around" to a recording session of "Man Of War".

## 16 LIVE FROM A TENT IN DUBLIN OCTOBER 7, 2000

53 minutes from the band's legendary Big Top tour – the tent in question being free of sponsors in an anti-corporate move influenced by Naomi Klein's 1999 book *No Logo*. The video is grainy, but the sound is far better, and seeing the group rip through *Kid A* cuts such as "How To Disappear Completely" (inspired by a previous Yorke meltdown in Dublin, hence its River Liffey reference) and "In Limbo" – Ed on electric piano! – is thrilling. The opening version of "The National Anthem" is "pretty much definitive", according to Yorke.

**YORKE IS SEEMINGLY CAPTURED EXPERIENCING A GLACIAL MELTDOWN**

## 17 REVIVED BEAR/MINOTAUR T-SHIRTS

Around the *Kid A*/*Amnesiac* era, the group introduced two characters – the toothy, vicious-looking bear and a sad, tearful minotaur – that adorned T-shirts, artwork and various other merch. They might not rival Hello Kitty in the cuteness stakes, but they've become a crucial part of Radiohead's iconography, and the Public Library has made a host of these old T-shirt designs, many featuring the bear and minotaur, available to purchase again.




## 18 CANAL+/NULLE PART AILLEURS SEPTEMBER 18, 2000

Catastrophe! "Morning Bell" goes well, but "Idioteque" seems like a nightmare for the band: Jonny Greenwood's modular percussion generator is glitchy (even more than usual) and Thom Yorke breaks a tooth on the mic as he indulges in his customary Ian Curtis dancing at the song's climax. No wonder he hurls his piano stool in fury at the end. As with the '97 Glastonbury set, though, these obstacles only create a more passionate and violent performance for the rest of us to enjoy.

## 19 "NOBODY DOES IT BETTER" MTV'S MOST WANTED

AUGUST 18, 1995

Radiohead here reverently cover Carly Simon's title song from 1977's James Bond caper *The Spy Who Loved Me* for a TV session promoting *The Bends*. Unlike most Bond themes, it wasn't composed by John Barry, so it's a surprising choice for a group clearly fond of Barry's orchestrations: just check out the second half of 2016's "Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailor Rich Man Poor Man Beggar Man Thief" for evidence. In another world, these 007 fans would have nabbed their very own Bond theme with "Spectre".

## 20 NO "POP IS DEAD"?

Considering the Public Library's completist drive to archive all the band's work, one might imagine the collection should also include "Pop Is Dead", the band's third single, maligned by both creators and fans. Yet Radiohead, in their infinite wisdom, have decided that no-one needs to hear this awkward slice of pop-punk whimsy, or see its ridiculous video featuring a corpse-painted Yorke miming from a glass coffin. Before you call the librarian over to complain, however, don't worry: it's available to watch on Vimeo.



# STOP ME

## IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE

### CHAMPAGNE! WOMEN IN PECULIAR DRESSES! SPIKE MILLIGAN'S DALEK! ANDREW MUELLER HAS A DECADENT NIGHT IN PARIS WITH THOM YORKE

"WELCOME ABOARD," SAYS Thom Yorke. "Coffee? Instant OK? I think there's a cafetière somewhere, but I'm not sure where..."

Thom rummages in a drawer in the kitchen at the back of the bus. This midnight-black vehicle will be Radiohead's home for a couple of weeks of European festivals. Today, we're leaving London with a complement of Thom, Ed O'Brien, Nigel Godrich, a tour manager, one crew member, a driver, and myself. We're meeting the rest of Radiohead in Paris, at the Costes Hotel.

"Have you stayed there before?" asks Thom, as he continues his search.

I haven't. What's it like?

"Unbelievably expensive, full of the most awful wankers, and decorated like a brothel."

You've stayed there before, then?

"We always stay there. It's brilliant."

Radiohead are going to Paris to discharge promotional duties for *Hail To The Thief*. In the credits on the album's sleeve, I'd noticed, there was a nod to Spike Milligan, who'd died the previous year. Radiohead had previously dedicated *The Bends* to the memory of Bill Hicks, another outraged iconoclast. Hicks and Radiohead were a congruent fit – intelligent, informed, sensitive to hypocrisy. Milligan, whose best-known work was hyperactively absurd, seems a less obvious choice of hero.

> "SOME POOR FUCKER HAS TO DO IT, PUT THE JESTER'S HAT ON AND MAKE A TIT OF HIMSELF... IT MIGHT AS WELL BE ME"

"He did a TV series called *Q*," explains Thom, as we proceed towards Dover, "which someone bought for me at a car boot sale. There's this one about a Dalek coming home for tea..."

The Pakistani Dalek?

"Yeah. The Pakistani Dalek family. And every time I watched it, I thought, fucking hell, this is a person on the edge. He was so inconsistent, so incredibly spontaneous, and at the same time really fragile. There was also this book, *Depression & How To Survive It*, which he wrote with Anthony Clare. That had a really big effect on me."

In what way?

"There's one amazing bit where they're talking to people about whether there's a positive side to depression. These aren't people who are chronic, where it's really out of control, but a lot of them say yes, there are positive sides. You see things in a way that other people don't, and you feel things a lot harder than other people, and that's good, it's almost OK. It was good to hear people say it like that."

Has there been a particular period when it got really bad?

"On the *OK Computer* tour, we were in a situation where people were trying to persuade us to carry on touring for another six months, we should have said no, but we didn't, and I went bonkers."

When you say bonkers...

"Oh, bonkers. Not violent, but ... enormously, uncontrollably depressed, delusional. You know that film *Ghost*? Terrible film, but there's this bit where these shadows come down and take that kid away who gets hit by a car. That's what it was like. We lost contact with reality, and got to feel like everything that wasn't related to what we were doing was annoying or irrelevant. We'll never do that again."

The Costes is everything Thom promised. Those of us who came by bus park ourselves in the bar with a bottle of Champagne. A woman in a peculiar dress comes over to tell Thom how much she likes the new album; Thom accepts the compliment graciously, and tells her, correctly, that she looks like Alice In Wonderland. Neil Tennant drops briefly by the table, and when Colin Greenwood shows up, he's disappointed to learn that he missed Yves St Laurent. It's that kind of hotel.



Thom's one of the last to retire. He's an even better talker with a few glasses of fizz inside him, and he's very funny, his own failings the punchline to most of his anecdotes. Of Radiohead's legendary appearance at Glastonbury in 1997, he remembers, "That was a disaster. Everything that could have gone wrong did. I thundered offstage, really ready to kill, and my girlfriend grabbed me, made me stop, and said, 'Listen'. And the crowd were just going wild. It was amazing."

A few hours earlier on the bus, Thom and Ed had been composing setlists for their festival appearances. In between lobbying as forcefully as I dared on behalf of my favourites – I may have saved "Exit Music" for some lucky audiences – I'd asked Thom if his position made it difficult to articulate Radiohead's hymns to humanity's impotence. He's a millionaire rock star, after all, and gets to run his life on his own terms more than most of us.

"It's easier," he decides. "It's easier, because you have more time to think about these things, more time to listen to Radio 4 and worry. But it's sort of my job. Just like you've got your job, mine is to be the Ides Of March-type person, and some poor fucker has to do it. Somebody has to put the jester's hat on and make a tit of himself. 'We're all fucking doomed.' It might as well be me."

Andrew Mueller

ARNALDO MAGNANI/GETTY IMAGES

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

# RADIOHEAD

From "Creep" to *A Moon Shaped Pool*, solo projects, film soundtracks and beyond, via global acclaim and reinventing the record business, the full, updated story of rock's most adventurous band. "This is what you get when you mess with us…"



JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

*Including...*

## "SUDDENLY EVERYONE'S NICE TO YOU"

An MTV hit immediately raises band suspicions

## "WE'RE QUITE HAPPY INSIDE OUR BUBBLE, THANK YOU VERY MUCH..."

As *Bends*-mania mounts, the band self-isolate to stay sane

## "THE INTERNET IS NOT THE UNIVERSE"

Radiohead devise a new way forward

ARCHIVE INTERVIEWS AND IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF EVERY RADIOHEAD ALBUM FROM *PABLO HONEY* TO *A MOON SHAPED POOL*, AND SOLO WORK BY THOM, JONNY, PHIL AND ED

More from **UNCUT**...













