

LAST

ORDER



MOTORCYCLES
VEMENT LIGHTS
IMITED

S It was the biggest party in British music since the '60s. Ten years on, as the hangover finally clears, MOJO talks to the winners, losers and casualties to uncover the real story of Britpop – an incendiary period of bad deals, blizzards of cocaine and corrosive rivalries. By Andrew Perry.

Big Pictures (4)

LONDON, IT SEEMED AT THE TIME, HADN'T been so good since it was swinging in the '60s or spitting in the '70s. There were sharply dressed young groups to see, scene-defining clubs to be seen at, and there were parties seven nights a week. In little more than two or three years it was all over and, until now, even the vaguest hindsight has seemed too harsh a spotlight for any possible re-inspection.

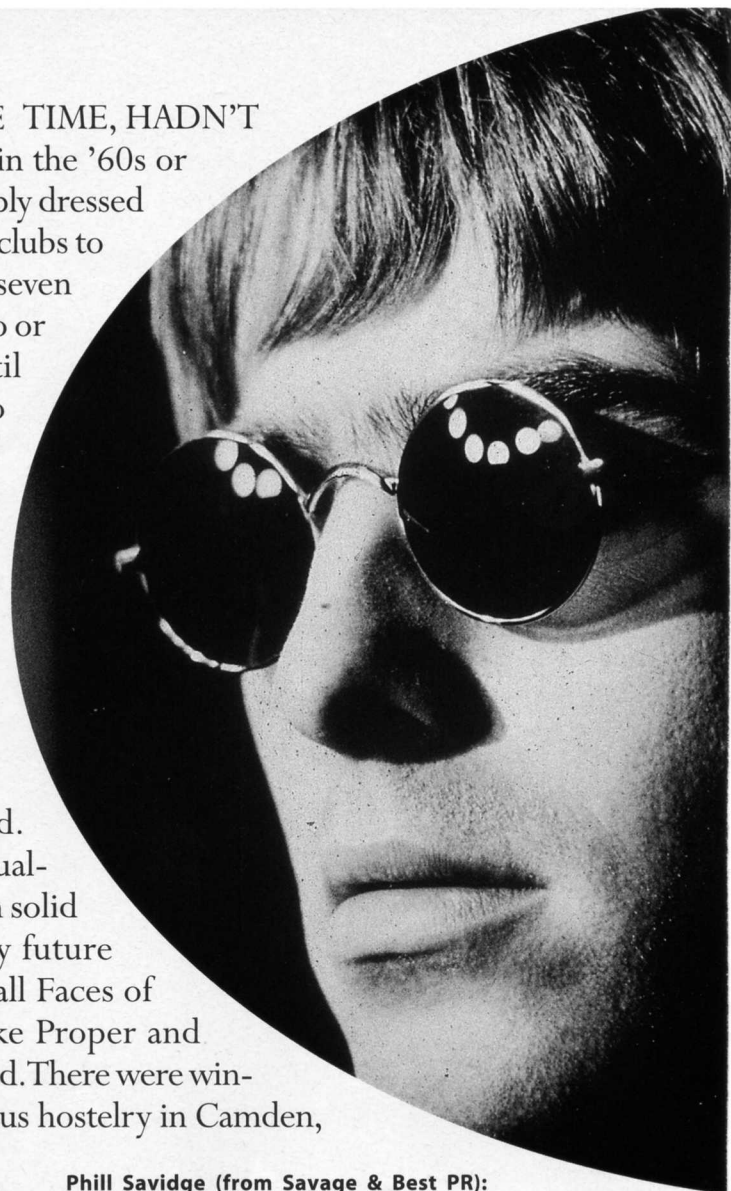
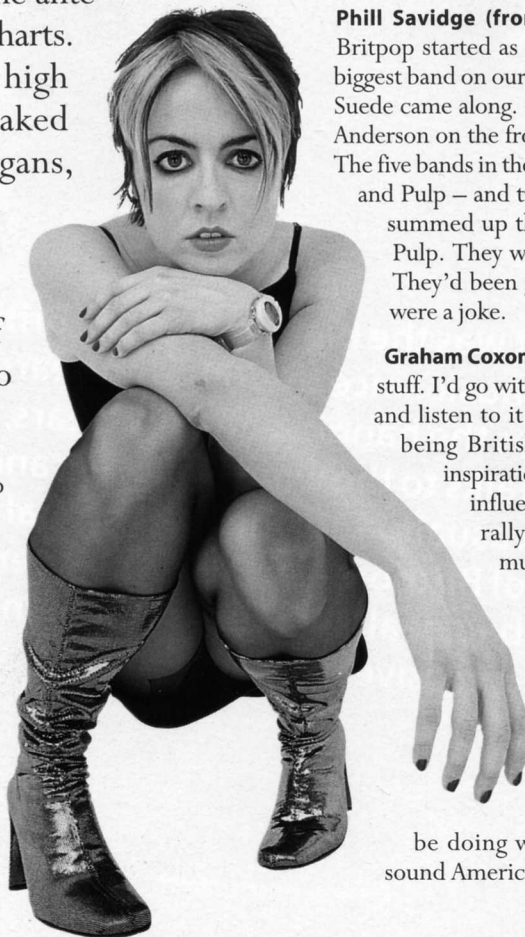
Now that there's a reasonable stretch of clear blue water between us and 'it', we can begin to get some perspective on a time when the British music industry, however fleetingly, was interested in homegrown music with guitars and, indeed, was sinking money into such a commodity faster than bands could form to create it. There's even a new film, *Live Forever*, celebrating the period.

It was a turbulent, cut-and-thrust period. Behind the obvious Blur/Oasis-Beatles/Stones duality, groups like Pulp and Supergrass emerged with solid careers, and may yet come to be discovered by future generations as The Walker Brothers or The Small Faces of their day. Others, unbelievably called things like Proper and Sussed, disappeared almost as soon as they arrived. There were winners and losers; there was Knebworth and a curious hostelry in Camden, The Good Mixer, serving as the ante-chamber to the national pop charts.

In the middle, there were high times, lively minds, naked ambitions, political shenanigans, pointless fisticuffs, financial disasters and some frightening, spiralling drug habits. This, then, is the *real* story of Britpop, as told by those who made it happen...

Graham Coxon (ex-guitarist, Blur): Britpop started with Popszene [Blur's fourth single], that record, which was me telling our drummer Dave to do the rhythm to Mother Sky by Can, and me using this flanger playing one note. That was '92, when we were trying to think about what to do with all this rock that was coming from the States.

Liam Gallagher (singer, Oasis): Grunge? People in shorts and socks and pumps with guitars with stickers on jumping up and down screaming. Not having it. Far too smelly for me.



Phill Savidge (from Savage & Best PR):

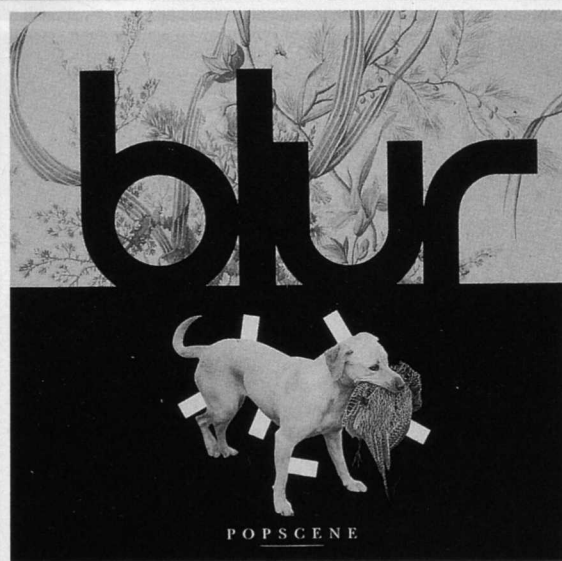
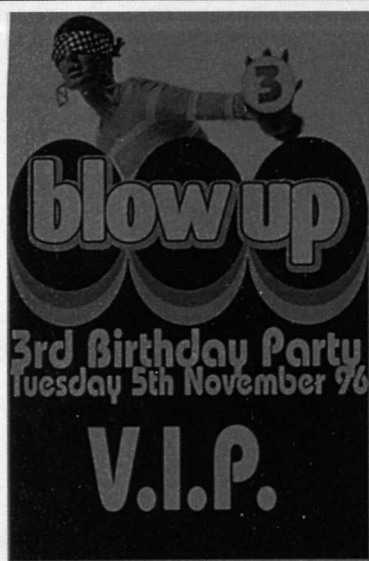
Britpop started as an anti-grunge movement. The biggest band on our roster was probably Curve, when suddenly Suede came along. In Summer '93, *Select* magazine had Brett Anderson on the front cover with the Union Jack behind him. The five bands in there were three of ours – Suede, The Auteurs and Pulp – and two others, Denim and Saint Etienne. That summed up the start of Britpop. Nobody would touch Pulp. They were just linked in to make it a movement. They'd been going for years and everyone thought they were a joke.

Graham Coxon: I was furtively admiring all that American stuff. I'd go with my Walkman to my bunk on the tour bus and listen to it in secret, because we had to be proud of being British at that point. Even then, none of my inspirations were British. I always thought Pulp were influenced by old French pop music. So yeah, the rallying behind the flag was built on sand, musically.

Alex James (bassist, Blur): We made a very deliberate attempt to embrace classic British songwriting values and imagery. The American record company didn't want to release *Modern Life Is Rubbish* – "Oh, you've got to go and re-record this with Butch Vig." Food Records came down and said we were absolutely mad to be doing what we were doing, and that we didn't sound American enough.



We have lift-off: (clockwise from top) Blur en route to the pivotal Popszene, 1992; a Blow Up club flyer; Suede pose for Britain; ice cool Liam. Opposite page, bottom, Sleeper's Louise Wener.



“WE’D BEEN REHEARSING IN SOME STINKING ROOM.

THEN WE HAD THE KEYS TO THE CITY, ANY CLUB, ANY PARTY.”

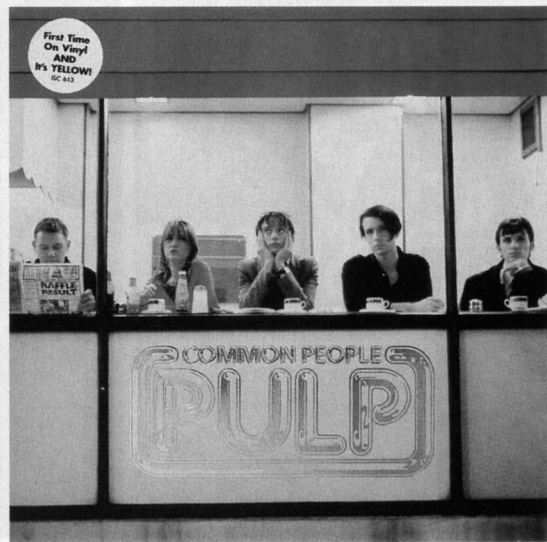
Noel Gallagher (guitarist/singer, Oasis): The grunge thing was all about eating your parents and all that shite. The bands like Suede and Blur were so far up their own arses about their place in the London rock scene. They were all too studied, them bands. We just came along and it was like, if fucking ‘cow’ rhymes with ‘now’, and it goes with a good tune... you know, who cares? ‘Lets have it’ was the main ethos, I think. Nobody was doing stuff like that. All the songs were about leaving Manchester and ending up in the sunshine somewhere, taking drugs and drinking for the rest of your life. Rock And Roll Star, Live Forever, Cigarettes And Alcohol. It’s all about escapism – a pint in one hand, your best mate in the other, whoever that may be, and just having a good time.

Rick Witter (singer, Shed Seven): We were looked upon in York in 1991 as being completely strange and out of sorts. So we were there thinking we were doing something really different and really new for the time. After the Manchester bit died off, it was all your aciiid and your shoegazing and all this business. We were thinking, Let’s make it good again, without realising that there was an Oasis in Manchester thinking the same, and Sleeper wherever they were thinking the same... All these bands were thinking the same.

Louise Wener (singer, Sleeper): We were one of the bands that sort of rode in on the coat tails of the big three – Blur, Oasis and Pulp. Underneath them there were these rungs of other bands that sort of filled in the gaps. It was like Bagpuss. The mice on the mouse organ – that was the rest of us.

Phill Savidge: Elastica actually formed in our office. Justine had been playing with Suede and she was in one day and said, “Ooh, I think I might form a band”, and we were like, “That’s not bad idea actually.” Donna and Justine were very talented, I thought. Not the most prolific of bands, obviously, and it was possibly Justine’s plaything to a certain extent. She didn’t have quite the hunger – she couldn’t have, could she? Donna might have done.

Justin Welch (drummer, Elastica): We rehearsed for six months, and it seemed like suddenly we’d be rehearsing in the same stinking little rehearsal room, and bottles of champagne would arrive, and gold discs – and not just from Britain. You had the keys to the city. You could go to any club, and any gig, any party. I lived with Steve Mackey from Pulp at the time, in this house in King’s Cross, which was madness. Sometimes I’d come downstairs and Jarvis would be asleep on the floor in our front room. He’d been kicked out of some- ➤



◀ where because he'd been out all night. Blur, Pulp and us were all good mates.

Phill Savidge: Anything me and John [Best, Savidge's business partner] did seemed to go ballistic. There were bands who got huge deals because of their association with us. It probably didn't help them in the long term, but it wasn't our fault. There's one band I can't name, who were signed because the A&R guy had his hand up at the wrong moment at the bidding war. It was "200... 250... 300... 325... 350... sold to that man there!" He went, "Argh!", and everyone laughed and left the room. They didn't really know what they were bidding for. I doubt that they'd even listened to the songs properly.

Pearl Lowe (singer, Powder): Everything seemed so easy. Getting record deals was so easy. We'd been playing gigs to no-one, then John Best saw us and that was it. He told everyone about us, and then, Whoom, everyone wanted to sign us. We did one show at the Monarch and every single label was there, every band was there and it was like, "Oh my God, we have all these offers from everyone."

Chris Gentry (guitarist, Menswear): In Summer '94, we used to go to [London club nights] Blow Up and Smashing. When you're 16, 17, you think, well, I could do a band, get a record deal and get on Top Of The Pops. We did our first gig on October 9, 1994, and it had to be a secret gig, because we didn't want any record companies coming down. We couldn't do a pub in north London or the West End, so we went for some old man's drinking hole in south London. Still, we were offered a deal before we'd even finished the last song. The second gig, about 50 A&R men came down. We got taken out

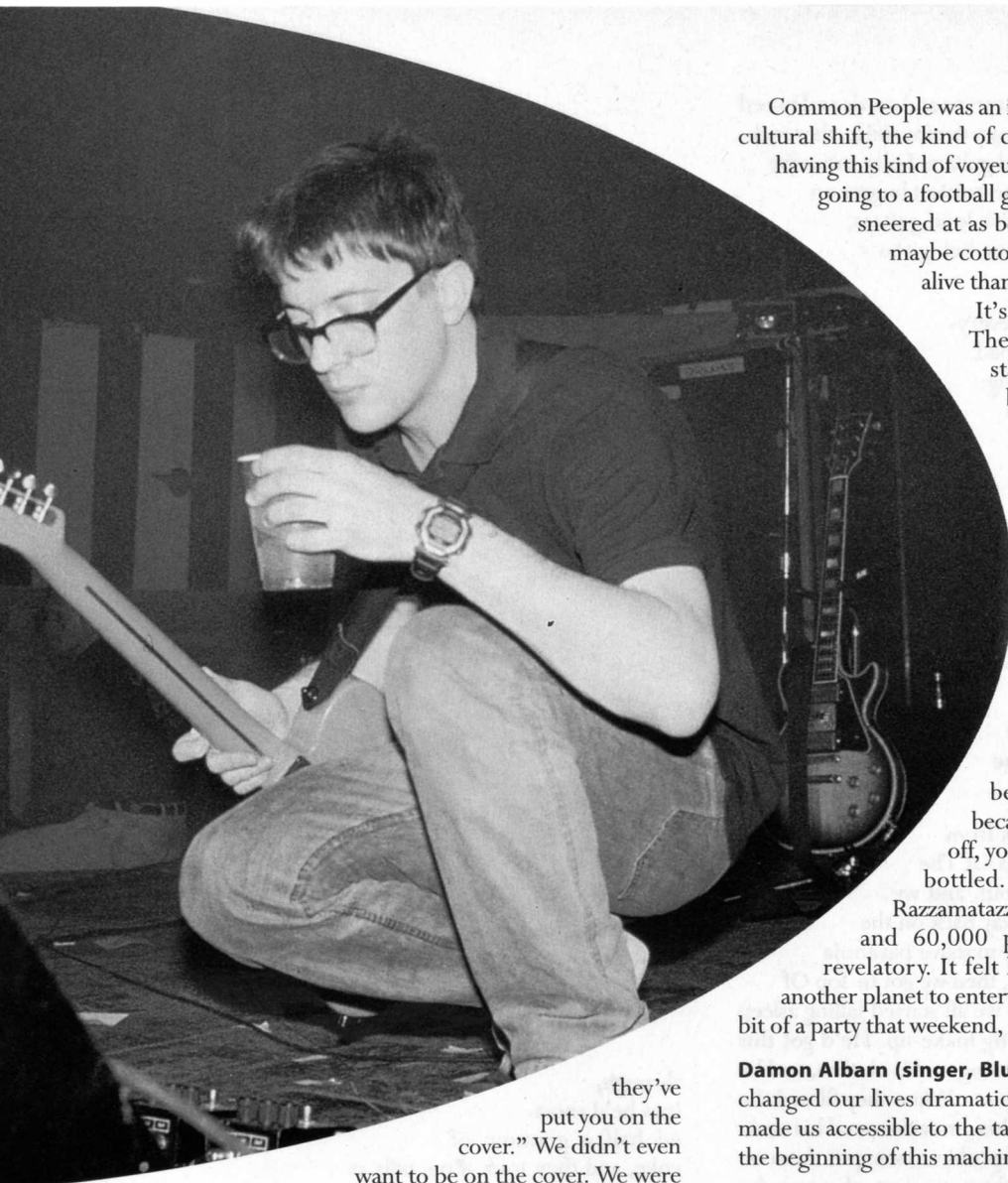
for dinner every night for two months, got flown out to New York, given as much champagne and coke as we could handle. The night before we actually signed our deal, we were at some party at [a certain major record company], and they were trying to get us to pull out of our deal. We said, "We really want to get some coke." They said, "Oh, we know where you can get some, but it's in Liverpool. If you get in this cab now, we'll drive you to Liverpool and give you cocaine" – just to get us out of London so we couldn't sign.

Richard Hawley (guitarist, Longpigs): Cocaine appeared out of nowhere. One day we were doing E's and speed for a laugh, or maybe a bit of acid if we had a day off. The next thing, we were up until six every morning doing charlie. The consumption was relentless. Whenever the four of us were together with time off, we'd be up for days. I'm surprised that no-one died, particularly the drummer Dee. I'm really surprised he's still alive.

Noel Gallagher: When you're on fucking coke, you would sit on the bog with Hitler, quite literally. "I like the 'tache," you know... You'd fucking go out to anybody's house, you'd probably end up in Number 10 Downing Street, ha ha. I loved all that in the beginning, meeting people you'd only seen on telly, and supermodels and actors. You know, I had posters of Paul Weller on my fucking wall and the next thing he's at my fucking house and I can't get him out at seven o'clock in the morning. Fantastic.

Chris Gentry: I was in the Good Mixer in '94, and this guy from the Melody Maker walked in and said, "Oh, you're on the cover of the Melody Maker this week." I said, "No, we're not." He went, "No,

PA Photos, SIN, All Action, LFI



they've put you on the cover." We didn't even want to be on the cover. We were

trying to get it stopped because we thought it

was too early. It was before we even had a single out. The press was being thrown at us, and the backlash was horrendous. We had a backlash when our first single came out.

Liam Gallagher: The thing about our band is that we didn't want to just be playing to 2,000 people. That was fine at the beginning, but we always wanted to be at the top. 'Cos a lot of bands these days shy away from being big, there's no point being in it if you're not going to check out what it's like. It was just Phil Collins and all these boring people and boring bands who were playing big gigs but it was like, "You've got nowt to say, you don't look like rock stars, you look like dicks in tights, like summat off a pantomime, and it's time for some real lads to get up there and take charge."

Jarvis Cocker (singer, Pulp): It was kind of a breath of fresh air when people were quite crude. I remember walking around town in Sheffield and there were always gangs of lads parading around going, "Do you want a sausage with them chips, love?" and stuff like that, and I thought it were quite funny. I do like crudity actually but it's when it's as a laugh that it's all right. If you actually believe that, it's pretty bad. It probably started off as a joke and then people kind of took it seriously.

Above, (clockwise from top left): Elastica in 1995 (Annie Holland, Justine Frischmann, Donna Matthews, Justin Welch); Graham Coxon sporting regulation pint and US indie chic; Common People sleeve; Noel chez Tony. Right, Pearl Lowe of Powder.

Common People was an important song because all of that was a cultural shift, the kind of cultural slumming-it mentality, people having this kind of voyeuristic attitude, like middle-class people going to a football games. Working-class culture was often sneered at as being crude, and then suddenly people maybe cottoned onto the fact that it was a bit more alive than the supposedly high-brow culture.

It's still there in fashion shoots and stuff. There's a glamour about trashy circumstances which I do find a bit worrying because it's like a kind of tourism – "Yeah, let's look at this shitty place and take some pictures of it and then fuck off and leave these people living in their own shit..."

Phill Savidge: Pulp were asked to stand in for The Stone Roses at Glastonbury '95, because the Roses had pulled out at the last minute, but we didn't think they could pull it off on the main stage – they were just a band that we were into in the office. We thought it was going to be a bunch of pissed-up Mancs booing because they weren't the Roses, going, "Get off, you poof!" I really thought they might get bottled. They came on and started with Razzamatazz – supposedly an obscure early single – and 60,000 people were singing along. It was revelatory. It felt like they'd been beamed down from another planet to entertain us, it was so other-worldly. It was a bit of a party that weekend, all weekend.

Damon Albarn (singer, Blur): We were given four Brits, which changed our lives dramatically, for ever and ever. It immediately made us accessible to the tabloids. OK, we embraced it, but it was the beginning of this machine.

Louise Wener: We toured with Blur on the Parklife tour. The kids in the audience were absolutely devotional. At one gig, we came off and went up into the balcony to watch it. Damon lost his shoes and he sort of spread his arms out wide, and the audience started chanting, "Jesus" at him. Christ knows how it felt for him.

Alex James: I adapted by getting very drunk and fucking everybody. Glory days! It was fun being a Britpop twat. We were just pissing around.

Graham Coxon: When what you're doing has got such a vast appeal, there's different understandings of what you're doing – too many. You can end up playing gigs to people you despise, and they're really into your music. I know it's really snobby of me, but I wasn't playing music for 12-year-old kids, or American football players, or English football players, or fucking Guardian readers. They're the worst of the lot. Then it was like: but who am I playing music to? By that stage it was very difficult to know. It was a spectacle. It wasn't a musical appreciation, it was a sensation – a smaller scale version of what The Beatles may have been thinking in '65 and '66.

But all this was just in the tiny crappy world of Britain. It didn't get anywhere abroad. It was shot to bits before it even left the trench, as regards France and America. ➤



◀ There we were in our little paisley scarves and cords and tweed jackets, and we were running at these greasy denim and leather rockers in the States, with these massive loud guitars. I play a massive loud guitar. I was trying so hard to be the noisiest bugger on the stage but when there's three massive loud guitars, you can't really beat them. And we were being too clever. Britpop was a bit too clever.

Rick Witter: We found ourselves going everywhere. It was always funny going abroad. We'd be doing E's and shit, and gooning from hotel balconies at all these foreign people, on their way to work first thing in the morning. It was always funny, because they don't get the humour. You'd find yourself in the back end of Holland, or getting barred from Oslo for smashing up the dressing room. We played in this club, the So What? Club. The name of the venue said it all – like, a 'Why on earth are you playing here?' sort of reaction. No respect, so we gave no respect back. The last thing we were told was, "Don't come back to Oslo."

Richard Hawley: One time we flew back from Germany on Dee's birthday to do Top Of The Pops. We'd just finished a German tour, and we were all so drunk, off us faces all the way back on the flight, and white-knuckling it. I got a massive paranoia comedown. We managed to stay awake, then we got to Top Of The Pops, but all the drugs ran out, so we all started falling asleep one by one. I just remember Dee doing make-up. He'd got this serviette on him to stop the powder getting on his clothes, and he was asleep, while they put the make-up on. When they filmed the rehearsals, he was asleep at his kit with this serviette round his neck.

Our management's answer to every problem was: put them on tour. We toured relentlessly. We thought it was just what you do. We'd bump into other bands and they'd go, "Fucking hell, are you still on tour?" We suddenly figured out we were on tour more than anyone else. I just kept asking myself, "Why? What are we trying to prove?" In the end I just didn't believe in it.

Justin Welch: We toured America five times in a year. The touring stopped when we finished the Big Day Out in Australia. I arrived home at five in the morning. It was snowing, and I'd still got my shorts on. Justine and Donna had decided to stay out there for another month. We'd had enough of seeing each other. We didn't see each other for another year.

Pearl Lowe: At the end of the day, your label just wants you to earn them loads of money, and they don't give a fuck how your health is, or how your emotional state is. I had a daughter as well, who I'd had when I was 18, and at that time was only three or four. I lived with my mum and she brought her up with me. I felt such terrible guilt leaving her all the time. I'd come back off tour and I'd be absolutely exhausted and I remember thinking, "Can I actually handle this?"

Chris Gentry: It was all excess, and it was encouraged by management and record companies. When we were making the Stardust video, they thought it would be a really great idea to get us off our heads, but they ended up having to call an ambulance for our guitarist halfway



Noel: "The drug habit kicked in. Big sunglasses and pretending to be Ziggy Stardust."

through, 'cos he'd snorted half a gramme of coke, and then took three pills at once. He ended up in mental hospital for two weeks. Nobody really looked after us, or our careers. It was basically, "Here's the money, off you go." Nobody ever said to us, "Look, what are you doing?"

Liam Gallagher: We were recording *Morning Glory* in about a week. Me and our kid had a bit of a scuffle, and I came out with a broken arm, broken leg and a shotgun on me shoulder, and me Mam goes, "What fucking kind of music are you making down there?" Then it was all out. I can't remember much of it. We were never here anyway, we were in fucking America when it was all going off for us. We were trying to turn on a load of fucking idiots in America.

Damon Albarn: *The Great Escape* was a hard time. Because the whole *Parklife* thing had gone wrong. I couldn't fucking walk down the street without someone shouting "Oasis". I couldn't go into a shop.

I used to walk down the street and, literally, people would open their windows and turn up Oasis. I'm not exaggerating. It was a nightmare, but it taught me a lot. It made me realise that, emotionally, I had a lot of catching up to do.

Noel Gallagher: We had no problem with Blur right up to the point that they started pissing about moving singles back and forward, and then they started booking gigs in the same towns as us when we went on tour, and they had this big stupid projection of Number 1, and they were going to project it onto our gig –

The gig fight

BLUR PLAY HERE **OASIS PLAY HERE**

Oasis and Blur play concerts 200yds apart on same night

BOURNE TROUBLE... where the rivals are playing on the same night in Bournemouth

BLUR and Oasis' rivalry has hit the road—with gigs just 200 yards apart on the same night.

Oasis are to play to 3,200 fans at Bourne-moath's International Centre—years from the 500-capacity Play Show Bar, where Blur are booked. They claim the clash is a coincidence, but an Oasis spokesman says: "We just a cheap trick to

steal our Spotlight. It won't be hard in the country."

Oasis' September 16 show, sold out in just 30 minutes, while tickets for Blur went within two hours.

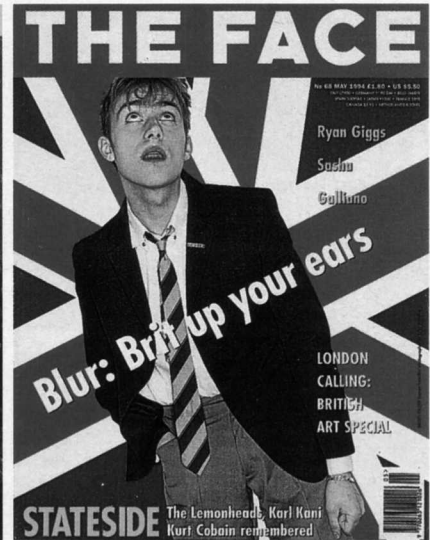
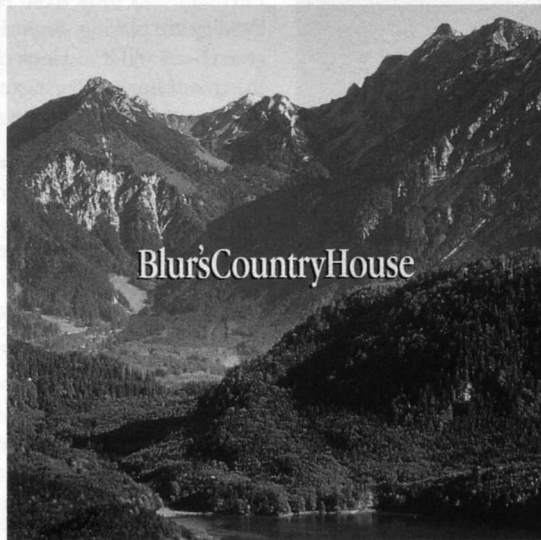
Their spokesman says:

"You want some?" Musical rivalries get out of hand, 1996.

Jill Furmanovsky/Oasis, SIN, Virmag Archive (2)



The high '90s: Menswear, with Chris Gentry, far left; the Union flag becomes a media tart; Blur's Oasis-trashing Country House.



"I AMUSED MYSELF. I THOUGHT KULA SHAKER

WERE SICK, BUT I WANTED TO SEE HOW FAR IT COULD GO."

they were playing in a pub across the road and we were playing in some fucking gym or summat. So we phoned their management and said, "Look, we're going to pull this gig because if one of your fans gets his head smashed in with a bottle by one of our fans, then, you know..." They'd started this ball rolling, so we pulled the gig and of course, they didn't pull their gig. They played that night and he was basically gloating at the fact.

Graham Coxon: Why was there was a showdown between Country House and Roll With It? I didn't even know why. I still only hear rumours. A lot of it was about these weird personal grudges between Damon and Noel. It wasn't just bloody music. It wasn't just bloody north and south. And it wasn't just ITN. If it was just that, then they were just insanely ambitious people. I'm sure there was personal stuff going on. Shagging each other's bird? I dunno. I suppose when two very proud blokes really hate each other, it's usually something to do with male pride, which maybe comes down to girls. I have heard rumours around that kind of thing, but nothing definite. They always treated me with respect, and were always nice. That confused me even more.

I guess I wanted us to win it, but I had no idea why. You did get imbued with the mindless ambitiousness that Damon had, but I

didn't know what it was proving, or where it was getting us. It wasn't like a victory at all. Not with that song. It started out as such a clever little tune and ended up as some pizzazzy, cabaret, fucking horrible monster. It was so hook-ridden, it made you shit yourself.

Phill Savidge: I started doing things just to amuse myself. You know, like Reggie Perrin's Grot shops, like, "Maybe I could actually have a bit of a laugh with this." I'll give you an example: I was never a fan of Kula Shaker. But I could see that a lot of journalists would be a fan of Kula Shaker, and I wanted to see how far I could run with it. I got their music and thought, "Well, I'm not personally gonna represent this because I think it's sick, but maybe the office can handle it, and maybe no-one will see through the mire." The only time I ever saw them live, I was 500 yards away at T In The Park, walking past with my hands over my ears, going, "I shall never see them."

Pearl Lowe: I broke up Powder because I was pregnant with Alfie, my son with Danny [Goffey, Supergrass drummer, her partner]. Danny and I still went to a lot of gigs. In the NME, they used to have a Pearl-and-Danny-watch in the gossips. I was "Pearl Spam, without the pram". They weren't too nice. They said I was going to have my baby in the toilets of the Dublin Castle, which I cried about. ➤

BRITPOP TOP 12

A dozen reasons why it was all worth it. By Ian Harrison.

DENIM

Back In Denim JBO, 1992



Few but the extraordinary Lawrence could follow one of indie's feyest-ever acts, Felt, with a big, bold glam album that made its own alternative reality out of songs about The Osmonds, vagrancy and despising the accepted rock canon. The first Britpop album? Likely.

OASIS

Definitely Maybe CREATION, 1994



Their parody-Manc arrogance was fun, but this album's personality and excitement could only have been generated by a band naïve enough to believe they really were the best band in the world. And copying this inspired really counts as originality.

ASH

1977 INFECTIOUS, 1995



This Ramones-like racket was recorded (aptly) when the group were doing their A-levels. Angel Interceptor (sublime love) and hidden track Sick Party (vomiting) sit at either end of its winningly innocent emotional spectrum.

BLUR

Modern Life Is Rubbish FOOD, 1993



Written on a lengthy tour of America, Blur's second album was full of sophisticated, stiff upper lip love and loathing for their homeland. Certainly less predictable, and potentially more enduring, than their current experimentalist act.

PULP

Different Class ISLAND, 1995



Wondrous vignettes of frustration, class anxiety, body fluids and man-made fibres, viewed through a surveillance camera and given a seedy pop sheen. Amusingly, Common People made Jarvis Cocker into a national emblem of triumphant outsiderdom.

RADIOHEAD

The Bends PARLOPHONE, 1995



OK Computer sold more, but Radiohead's mastery of music to move and to be felt – rather than intellectualised – reached its zenith with songs like *Street Spirit* and *High And Dry*.

60FT DOLLS

The Big Three INCIDENT, 1996



This album saw gleeful, life affirming punk rock ferocity crashing headlong into hungover, lachrymose delight. Its after-taste of thwarted potential, meanwhile, makes it a devilishly evocative document of the period.

SUEDE

Dog Man Star NUDE, 1994



A glam apocalypse for those who never got over Ziggy, here were heart-stopping songs darkness and drugged omnipotence. Brett Anderson's Performance fantasies were never so well realised again.

ELASTICA

Elastica DECEPTIVE, 1995



Like some superior, saucy female take on Wire, their back-to-basics art punk came in an irresistible pop package. They blew it spectacularly, of course, but their one good album remains one of superb, no-fat economy.

SUPERGRASS

I Should Coco PARLOPHONE, 1995



More exuberant juvenilia would be hard to find. Peer closer, though, and you can see how well Oxford's youngest sideburn devotees absorbed their pop history. Which was, extremely well.

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

Exit Planet Dust JBO, 1995



It wasn't all listening to The Small Faces. Here, two inspired, backed-up brains spewed forth "the beats of Marley Marl and the sonics of The JAMC." The results can still get the most grizzled casualty's serotonin receptors tingling.

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

Fuzzy Logic CREATION, 1996



They got better, but this erratic sequence of glammed up pop and acerbic eccentricity is an indispensable primer for their later majesty. Notable for being perhaps the sole occasion when namechecking Howard Marks has been hip.

very well at that time. They did a billboard of it as well and I remember thinking, "There's nothing going on behind the eyes." It's a kind of vacant, nobody-at-home kind of look basically. That was probably the point at which I realised I had to sort myself out.

Noel Gallagher: After *Morning Glory* came out and Wonderwall took off, it felt that everything was leading up to something that was going to define not only the size of the band but what British pop music was about at that time, so it all felt like it was leading to Knebworth.

Knebworth House is Batman's house in the Batman films. After the first gig, we stayed overnight in the caravans behind the stage, so you can imagine what time we all got to bed. I went up the next day for a bath. I was in one of the bathrooms upstairs, filled the bath up with water and got in. I was there with me soap and there was a knock on the door and in comes Bob, a proper fucking butler. He had a tray with a bottle of champagne and one glass. He put it down and he said, "Awfully sorry to disturb you, sir, but here's your champagne." I was like, fucking, "So this is how they live..."

I've got a picture which has got to be 10 foot wide of what Jill Furmanovsky took from the back of the stage, and it's while the Prodigy are playing. Right in the distance you can just see this little green head and if you look closely it's Keith who's gone right out into the crowd singing Firestarter or summat. I think the crowd started in one county and finished in another. It was frighteningly big.

Jarvis Cocker: I got the fear, because I got what I wanted, what I'd been after for the majority of my life, and then the actual reality of it was rubbish. It was awful, definitely the worst period of me life, without question. I was just a mess. Taking drugs didn't help. That never helps in a situation. You don't often hear people say, "Oh, since he's been taking them drugs, he's such a nice person! He's really come out of his shell, he's really nice, he's blossomed!"

Phill Savidge: Bands' friends change. There were certain people around Suede and Pulp and Elastica – those people got into different drugs. If those people are your friends, then you get into different drugs. Obviously, some people within the Britpop movement took heroin. I remember speaking to a certain person from a band, "Have you got any charlie?" And he said, "No. We have got something but you wouldn't be interested in it." That's the secrecy of heroin. Certain cliques formed, because heroin is one step further for a lot of people. So a clique came around heroin. A lot of people were smoking it, and still thought, "We're only smoking it, we don't really do heroin, do we?" Which isn't strictly true.

Justin Welch: Habit-forming? It did get messy, yes. In between records, there was nothing going on whatsoever. It can only happen when there's money there, if you know what I mean, and we all seemed to have a good wedge of it. You get lazy. The hunger goes. Donna was still in the band, and we spent a year trying to write the second album before we even went in the studio again. Then you'd go to the studio and no-one would turn up. One day Donna would come in with her songs, one day it'd be Justine with hers, some days neither of them, and nothing would ever get done.

Chris Gentry: Yeah, the stories about goings-on round at Donna's house. Group-sex heroin orgies? Hmmm, yeah, it was pretty mad. We had loads of money, and we were young. We had large bank accounts and nothing to do. Well, we had things to do, but not *real* things – just play guitar for 20 minutes and look pretty. I wrote a lot on the first album, and pretty much didn't write anything on the second album, just because I wasn't even picking up a guitar at that point. Other things seemed more important, like partying and hanging out, and having a laugh.

Jarvis Cocker: I decided that I was a brain-dead mess, so I went away to New York at the end of 1996. Which was a really sensible thing to do, you know, when you're really fucked up – go away on your own to a country where you don't really know anybody. I wasn't thinking

◀ **Phill Savidge:** The Michael Jackson incident at the Brits changed everything for Jarvis. That was his brush with big, proper, fame. After that, everyone just went, "That's that guy who put his arse in front of Michael Jackson", which must've been horrible for him. He'd been in the band for 15 years – "Is that what I'm going to be remembered for? I'm just cheapening myself." So he recoiled a bit, and went into this dark space. That's what *This Is Hardcore* came out of. Though they weren't anywhere near as famous as him, the rest of the band went to the dark space with him.

Jarvis Cocker: The cover of *GQ*? It was horrible, that. I really wasn't

straight so I ended up going off me head in this hotel room and all weird things kept happening. One thing was that suddenly I got a phone call. Nobody was supposed to know I was there and I got this phone call – “It’s Imogen from New Labour, can we count on your support?” I put the phone down on her, so I never got formally invited to Number 10.

Damon Albarn: At the time it just felt normal to be introduced to the leader of the Opposition. It shows you how fucked up it had become. They invited me around just before the election, appearing quite casual, but then saying, “If you’re as successful as you are now come the election, then we can do some business together.” I was really troubled after meeting him. *Parklife* was a really angry record. It was saying that this country has got some really shit things about it, and it turned into the launchpad for New Labour, New Everything.

Alex James: We’d gone from being a ‘you’ll get dropped, you’ve lost the plot’ notion to government-level mainstream. The government were hijacking classic British songwriting values and imagery and using it to get elected. We’d moved on by then, anyway. We were listening to the Pixies.

Noel Gallagher: The end of ’96, that’s when the money came in – like, the big fuck-off money. We took our foot off the gas a little bit but we only did what everyone else would’ve done in our position. We’d worked our bollocks off for five years. We’d basically been on the road or in the studio or been interviewed or photographed or analysed – and then all of a sudden you’ve got X millions in your bank account. I mean, I’m sorry, but fuck being in the band for a game of tennis, I’m fucking living, you know?

I went away and cobbled together an album in two weeks in Mustique – the rich people’s playground, apparently – and I spent the rest of the year fucking drinking and buying cars I can’t drive, buying houses I couldn’t live in, buying the most ridiculous clothes... That’s when the drug habit started kicking in, wearing big fucking huge sunglasses growing your hair long pretending you were fucking Ziggy Stardust.

So *Be Here Now* is the sound of a bunch of guys on coke in the studio not giving a fuck. There’s no bass to it at all. I don’t know what happened to that, it’s all *ccrrrrrrrrrr* and all the songs are really long and all the lyrics are shit, and for every millisecond Liam is not saying a word, there’s a fucking guitarist in there in a Wayne’s World stylee, you know, fucking going mental.

Pearl Lowe: They dropped the rest of my band, but I still had a deal with Universal, which was then Polygram. I tried to get



Jarvis Superstar: the worst period. "I became a mess. Taking drugs didn't help."

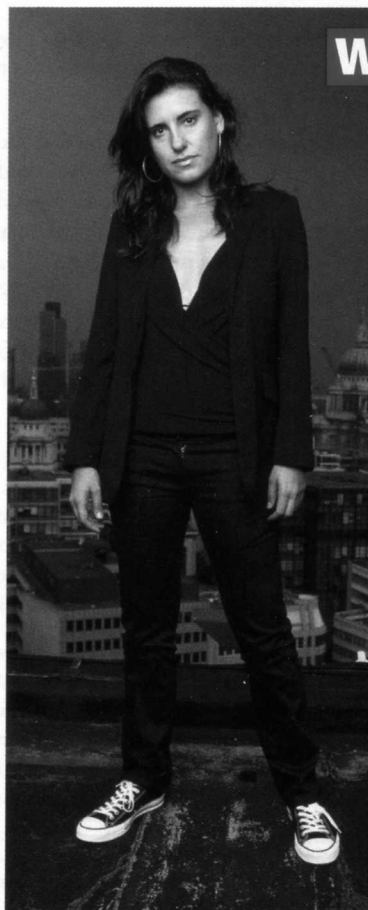
out, and they went, “No way, you owe us a hundred grand! And that’s you personally!” I used to ring up and go, (*wheeling Marilyn Monroe voice*) “Hell-o, it’s Pearl, I need some money please. I need to buy a mike”, and they’d go, “OK darling,” and they’d just send over cheques. It was absolutely mental. But then I was really stung because they were like, “Oi, you’re not fucking getting out of here that easily...”

Chris Gentry: After the first album, we said, “We want to have a writing time in a writing studio.” The record company paid for three months in this country residence, and we just sat there for three months taking coke. The only song we came up with was called Horses, which was about Kenny Jones’ horses – the

drummer out the The Who and The Small Faces’ polo horses. When our manager played it to the record company, it wasn’t the best meeting they’d ever had.

We were doing the second album for years, trying to make a country rock album in Wales, then we split up. We couldn’t stand being in a room anymore. Loads of my friends were fucked up. I had a friend die, a friend who had a bad car crash – all fucking not nice. It ended up being horrible.

Graham Coxon: Alex could always say things that were devastating. He would say his name was Alex Frombler, and that started to really depress me. Then another time we were going to go on-stage at the Budokan and he told me how much money we were going to be earning in the next two hours. Those things kind of ate away at me. Because if you know you’re going to earn a certain amount of money no matter what you do in the next two hours, you don’t have to try too hard. We always did, we always made sure we tried very ➤



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

JARVIS COCKER

Still sings with Pulp. Currently taking a sabbatical.

DAMON ALBARN

Helped form Gorillaz. Discovered world music. Still in Blur.

ALEX JAMES

Lives in Covent Garden. Plays bass for Blur.

GRAHAM COXON

Solo artist.

LIAM GALLAGHER

Sings with Oasis. Married to Nicole Appleton.

NOEL GALLAGHER

Sings and plays guitar for Oasis.

JUSTINE FRISCHMANN

(ELASTICA, LEFT) Presenter of Dreamspaces, an architecture/interior design programme on BBC3.

DONNA MATTHEWS

(ELASTICA) Has started a new group called Klang, who are described as “like Elastica, with a bit of Krautrock”. She is rumoured to have embraced Christianity with some fervour.

JUSTIN WELCH (ELASTICA)

Married Mew, the keyboardist from Elastica’s second line-up, last summer. They live together on a farm near Barnstaple

CHRIS GENTRY (MENSWEAR)

Still only 25, has been a session guitarist for the likes of Finley Quaye. Is currently in Kelly Osbourne’s studio band.

JOHNNY DEAN (MENSWEAR)

Working for a mobile phone company. Lives with Sheila Chipperfield, briefly from Elastica.

LOUISE WENER (SLEEPER)

Had her first novel, *Goodbye Steve McQueen*, published last year.

RICHARD HAWLEY (LONGPIGS)

After the Longpigs split, Hawley became second guitarist with his old mates from Sheffield, Pulp. He has also released three marvellous solo records on Setanta.

PEARL LOWE (POWDER)

After forming a short-lived studio band called Lodger, with her man Danny Goffey, she is currently writing again with, among others, former Suede keyboard player, Neil Codling.



Never again: friendly smiles and jolly japes at Live 105 Radio, 1994. Spot the fake smiles.

"THE POT OF GOLD AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW

WAS EMPTY. I HAD A GUN TO MY HEAD THE WHOLE TIME."

◀ hard, but there was a point at which I was becoming intolerable to the other group members, because touring was becoming intolerable to me. I was angry and disappointed. It was getting very near a point where the band was going to collapse.

We were good friends at the start, but for survival purposes, we had to become the limited company. We were partners instead. There was no time for friendship. Friendship needs a lot of space and time, and really you have to put that aside if you're in a situation like we were. We weren't communicating very well, so I wrote Damon a letter, saying, "This is all bloody horrible, I'm sick of these buggers at record companies, I'm sick of touring, I wanna make some music that will scare them." Then we went on to make *Blur* which I think is *Blur*'s best record.

Louise Wener: Once the bigger bands lurched into crisis, which they did, then all the smaller bands... You know, when Bagpuss goes to sleep, everyone else goes to sleep and that's when it finished for everybody that came in their wake. People talk about the '70s being the 'Me Generation'. Towards the end, that's what the '90s became as well. It celebrated itself, it loved itself too much. That's what cocaine does to you, it makes you believe that you're much more significant than you really are. That you're so important to the cultural genesis of a country.

Phill Savidge: I don't think drugs destroyed Britpop. It was just the public had had enough of it. It ended so abruptly, because in the market place, everyone realised at the same time, "Well, actually, all this new stuff is crap." The aftermath was that a lot of record companies who were really stupid ran over the cliff like a load of lemmings, saying, "Sign the next Britpop band", not noticing that the audience had moved on. I don't think they saw

beyond their noses, or front covers. The press were still all over it, but we knew that front covers don't necessarily sell records. Why didn't they?

Justin Welch: Because the first record was such a success, you tried to compete with it. We got into different recording techniques. In the end we went back to the old ways, and threw a load of stuff together, stripped it all down. I have CDs of another 20 or 25 tracks – and tons of mixes of them – which never saw the light of day. I'm not pointing the finger, but a lot of it could've been done a lot quicker, we could've put the record out, and we could've still been together today. I speak to all the other members except for Justine. I don't think she can be bothered with any of us.

Graham Coxon: The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow was empty. I felt like I had a bit of a gun to my head the whole time. Now I exist without the gun, it's a bit strange. I don't know what to do with my emancipation, except write insane, weird kinds of songs. But I'm very glad to be out. I think I like my life a lot better, because I know that I'm doing the right thing, and that every day I can pretty much stand by what I'm doing and not feel in any way ashamed of it.

Noel Gallagher: It was a really bad time for music, Menswear and Sleeper and 20 other bands that have long since gone... These things come along every time there's a few bands that are starting to make a name for themselves who wear vaguely similar clothes. It was vaguely guitar-based, and Brit pop became the soundbite. It was just one nifty sentence to sum up a lot of shit music, to be honest. **M**

Special thanks to Passion Pictures for additional interview material with Noel and Liam Gallagher, Jarvis Cocker and Louise Wener. Live Forever, a Passion Pictures film about Britpop, directed by John Dower, is released on March 21.