

OK Computer - Radiohead

Released May 1997

Formed in 1985 in Abingdon Oxfordshire, Radiohead is an Alternative rock band consisting of five members:

Thom Yorke - vocals, guitar, piano, keyboards

Johnny Greenwood - guitar, keyboards

Colin Greenwood - bass

Ed O'Brien - guitar, backing vocals

Philip Selway - drums

The name Radiohead was taken from the Talking Heads song "Radio Head" on their 1986 album "True Stories."

Their musical style, while very experimental, still retains elements of traditional rock and roll, Johnny Greenwood had said that Radiohead "strives to find a middle ground between their experimental influences and more standard rock music," the band was motivated by an urge to not be repetitive rather than any desire to be perceived as "experimental."

Their previous albums "Pablo Honey" (1993) and "The Bends" (1995) were both extremely successful, however "OK Computer" is the release that would become a massive turning point in the band's career, bringing them international fame and becoming a frequent contender for one of the best albums of all time.

OK Computer depicts a sort of dystopian world running rampant with consumerism, corruption, a strong sense of social alienation, and detachment in general.

The majority of the song's vocals were recorded in St Catherine's Court, a rural mansion in Bath, Somerset, England. Giving the album a unique feeling of isolation and loneliness, directly complimenting the subject matter of the tracks.

The album stands out against most dystopian media, as instead of depicting some apocalyptic hellscape hundreds of years away, it depicts the very near future, an extension of the present. A false sense of democracy and political corruption, very similar to the state of the world in the 21st century, leading to the common belief that the album had "predicted the future" in a way.



OK Computer consists of 12 tracks: *Airbag*, *Paranoid Android*, *Subterranean Homesick Alien*, *Exit Music (for a film)*, *Let Down*, *Karma Police*, *Fitter Happier*, *Electioneering*, *Climbing Up the Walls*, *Lucky*, and *The Tourist*.

I have chosen the five songs that I deem most influential, memorable, or that otherwise stood out below:

Airbag

The album's opening track, featuring choppy drumming and heavily distorted guitar, "Airbag" is one of several songs on the album that draws on the car accident Yorke was involved in a decade previous, leading to a strong distrust in cars. In a 1997 interview, Yorke said *"every age has its crazy idiosyncrasies, to me, for our era, its cars. I always get told off for being obsessed about it, but every time I get in my car I have to say to myself that I may never get out again."* Airbag attempts to portray the inherent danger of vehicles, and the looming threat of injury or death that comes with driving that seems to be wholly ignored by the public.

Paranoid Android

Generally considered to be the centerpiece of the album, "Paranoid Android" consists of several different pieces written by three members of the band mixed together, inspired by The Beatles Abbey Road album, Queens Bohemian Rhapsody, and several other musical inspirations. Despite being one of the less story driven songs on the album, Paranoid Android maintains the tense and haunting sound and the dystopian themes that are present throughout the rest of the album, at fits perfectly with the rest of the tracks

Exit Music (for a film)

Written for an upcoming *romeo and juliet* film by Baz Luhrmann, "Exit Music" features star-crossed lovers desperately attempting to flee their situation.

The song starts slow and sleepy, with the vocals recorded in a stone staircase at St. Catherine's Court giving the song a haunting and lonely feel, before building up to the gruesome climax featuring the deaths of the two protagonists.

The song structure mirrors the plot progression of Romeo and Juliet perfectly, but is also fantastic as its own song separate from the film, and is one of, if not my favorite song on the album.

No Surprises

The first song written for OK Computer, "No Surprises" sticks out amongst the rest of the album due to its calmer twinkling melody, although it maintains the same melancholy subject matter.

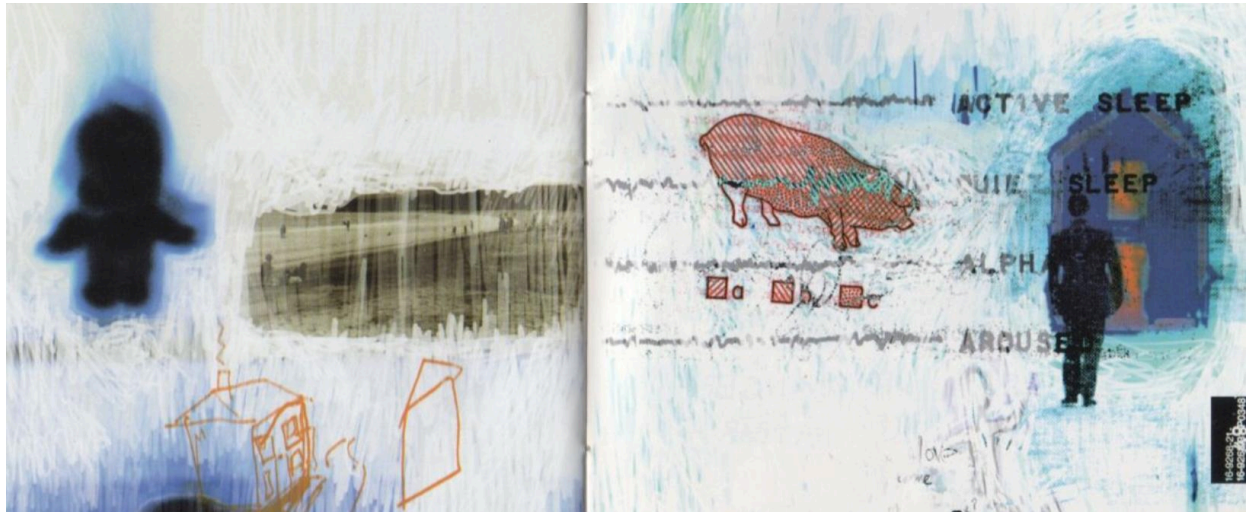
The protagonist of the song is portrayed as a victim of the system, stuck in a suburban situation and blaming the depressing circumstances of their life on the out-of-touch government.

Despite the song's lyrics, the sound of the song is much more conventionally pleasing to listen to. Referred to as a "stadium-friendly song" by the band's bassist, No Surprises Acts as a sort of respite from the harsh angry sounds of the previous tracks. It is among one of the band's most popular songs and one of my personal favorites.

The Tourist

The closing track for OK computer, "The Tourist" draws from an experience the band's guitarist, Johnny Greenwood, had with frantic American tourists on a vacation in France. The song's slow pace is intended as an opposition to the fast paced, rushed nature of tourism that Greenwood witnessed in France.

The songs dragging pace contrasts a lot of the tracks in the album, and works excellently as a finale for the album.



The album remains a unique and insightful listen well over a decade later. Despite Radiohead's unfortunate reputation, they write some phenomenal music, and this album is a must listen for anyone into alternative rock and roll.