

# 188

magazine



b l u e



**THOSE WHO  
GREW UP WATCHING  
SATURDAY MORNING TELEVISION  
SHOWS SUCH AS SMTV AND CD:UK IN  
THE EARLY 2000S WILL VIVIDLY  
REMEMBER BLUE REGULARLY BEING  
ON THEIR SCREENS.**

PHOTOGRAPHER JACK ALEXANDER  
FASHION ELLIE WITT

# BLUE

GILL SANS BOLD TITLING—gives weight.

Debuting during an era where pop groups were flying out of our ears, Blue, made up of Antony Costa, Duncan James, Lee Ryan, and Simon Webbe, have been able to cement themselves as one of the UK's most prolific boy bands, boasting a career lasting over two decades.

With three No. 1 albums and singles, a total of 11 top 10 hits in the UK, two BRIT Awards, major collabs with Elton John and Stevie Wonder, an adoring fan base overseas, and over 15 million global sales, it seems Blue's reign isn't going to let up anytime soon. On October 28, they released their sixth studio album, *Heart & Soul*, which will be followed by a nationwide UK arena tour in December that will celebrate both their legacy and new material.

On the set of the photo shoot, 1883's Fabio Magnocavallo sat down with the four-piece to discuss their upcoming album, how the industry has changed over the past two decades, and what other groups they'd like to see reunite.



Lee - Suit Edward Sexton T-Shirt All Saints Shoes Russel & Bromley Jewellery His Own / Antony - Suit Han Kjobenhavn T-Shirt American Vintage Shoes Tod's  
Simon - Suit jacket Edward Sexton Trousers Mr P Roll neck Boss Necklace Serge D'nimes Trainers Tod's / Duncan - Suit Edward Sexton Shirt Boss



"Haven't Found You Yet" served as the lead single for your new album, *Heart and Soul*. How did that song come about and were you confident in choosing that one to be the first to be released?

*Antony:* Good question! I wrote that song in January 2020 before the pandemic, etc. We had a week off and Christmas had just been done and I thought, let's go over to Sweden to write a couple of tracks and see how it goes. Luckily, I ended up co-writing "Haven't Found You Yet." There was something about that song, I'm not gonna big myself up because I never do but there is something about that song that screams old Blue to me. I was very nervous about playing it to the boys because the song had been kept so close to me and I hoped the boys would like it.

I played the demo to Duncan and Lee but Simon still hadn't heard it. I got the boys to record on it and I said to Simon, look, what do you think? He texted me and asked when he could record his bits in the studio. It was lovely to hear that. We then played it to Hugh Goldsmith, who A&R'd this album and worked with us previously, and he loved the single. It went on from there and that's how the album came out really.

Suit Han Kjobenhavn  
T-Shirt American Vintage



You've chosen to cover 112's *Dance With Me* on this album too. What was the thought process behind that?

*Lee:* We wanted to do a throwback to that era.

*Duncan:* I guess it's a nod to "Too Close." We always used to sing it back in the day so it made sense for us.

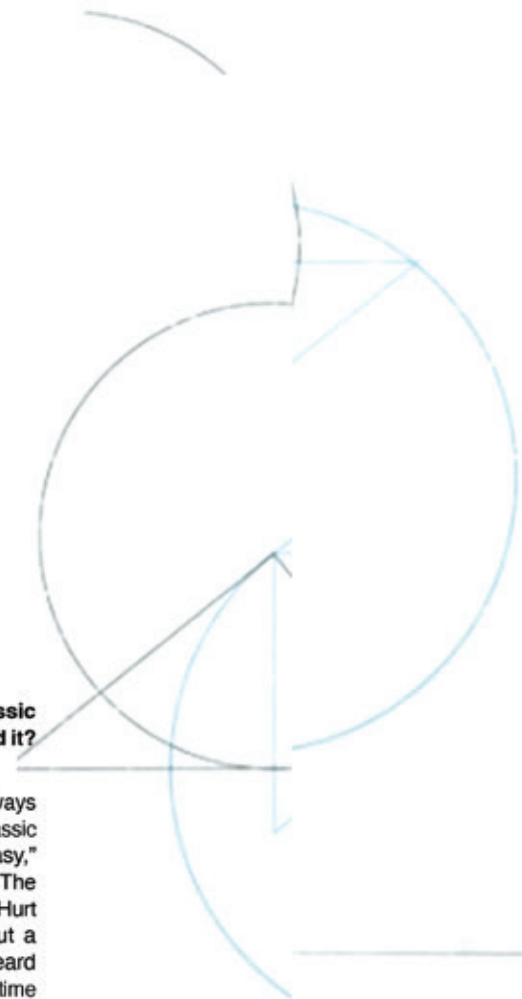
*Simon:* We wanted to emulate the first album. We did another track and it just didn't sound right. I had always wanted to cover a 112 song.

**Magnetic** is a classic ballad. What inspired it?

*Duncan:* We have always been known for our classic ballads, "Breathe Easy," "Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word," and "Hurt Lovers," to name but a few. When we heard "Magnetic" for the first time it was a no-brainer. We did some work on it in the studio and it very quickly had that Blue feel and sound to it. It's a great song with great harmonies.

Is there a different approach to writing a ballad compared to creating an up tempo track?

*Lee:* When it comes to a ballad, the lyrics are more emotionally driven and you get into that pocket where you start to draw on your past experiences in love and relationships and you take a journey almost back to that place as you are writing. It becomes very therapeutic almost but equally, it's exciting because it feels so real and reaches out and touches you almost with the words and music. It's beautiful.





Your latest single is the album title track. Tell me about this song.

*Duncan:* The fabulous MNEK wrote it. A weird story is, I was a huge fan of the Joel Corry track he did. I saw him on Drag Race and thought, this guy is fucking cool. I loved everything he kind of stood for as an openly Black gay man who was proud of his heritage, proud about his sexuality, and making incredible songs. I was just like, wow, I love him. So, I wrote to him on Instagram and I was like, I fucking love you, I think you're great. He ended up writing back and I told him that we had a new album coming. He was like, I fucking love Blue, and I was like, really?! He sent over some songs and I played *Heart & Soul*. And instantly, I knew it was the one and everybody loved it.

*Lee:* It was just instant. You get a few songs like that in your career. We write as a band and we've always been really proud of that. *All Rise*, *One Love*, a lot of the singles we're well known for, we wrote. However, we've always been open to taking songs from people as long as they're top class. Sometimes you just hear something that you think is amazing but there are other times when you are unsure. This one was a no-brainer. It's my wife's favourite song on the album.

*Duncan:* Shift K3Y produced it as well, he's really cool. The whole creative process was really nice because MNEK invited us into his house and we went into the studio to do some extra little bits.

*Lee:* I'd like to work with him again. I think he'd be dope for the next album. We took a long time to make this album, and for many different reasons. We were all going off and doing different things on our own. We finally come back together and finished it. We've got this album and we're currently promoting it but we're already thinking of what we're going to do next. We want to make another album because we just love making music, we love writing, and we love getting in the studio. Each album takes its own journey and that journey is also so interesting and the way the album always comes together. I'm sure the next album will have a totally different journey, especially because we made this in lockdown.

*Antony:* With the lockdown thing, it was hard with all the different tiers because there were times when only two of us could go into the studio after two others had left. Sometimes one of us would have to go in on our own, it was quite segregated. Despite that, it's a great Blue album and personally, I think it's the greatest body of work that we've done in a very long time. It just doesn't feel like something we made together.

*Lee:* I was recording at my place in Spain. I was recording my vocals and sending them back. For the first single, I did all the adlibs in my studio. It felt weird because I was sitting there on my own thinking, what should I do? Normally, we'd bounce off each other and work it out together, that's the beauty of creation. This one was quite isolated.

GILL SANS BOLD TITLING—gives weight.



Suit jacket  
Edward Sexton  
Roll neck  
Boss  
Necklace  
Serge D'nimes





Suit  
Edward  
Sexton  
Shirt  
Boss

If you had to each pick a favourite from the album, what would you choose and why?

Duncan: *This Could Be Love* stands as a favourite for us all. It has an energy for us that is exciting and we can't wait to perform it live. So, don't miss that one. Simon loves *Stop* which is so beautiful and we're all proud of *Haven't Found You Yet*. Antony did such a great job co-writing that one and setting the bar for how the rest of the album was going to be shaped.

How have you felt about the reception of the songs released so far?

Antony: It's been fantastic. The support from radio has been amazing and the fans love what they have heard so far. It has been a great ride and Hugh Goldsmith did a great job of A&R'ing us into the right place with this album. We have taken the overall feel back to the beginning and back to our early sounds but with a modern twist and it seems like there is a lot of love for those old Blue classics.

Having been in the music industry for over 20 years now, you're obviously aware of the many changes that have occurred over time. CD singles and albums were the main things when you came on to the scene, then it shifted to digital downloads. Now, it's all about streaming. Do you like the way music is consumed now?

Duncan: It's different, isn't it?

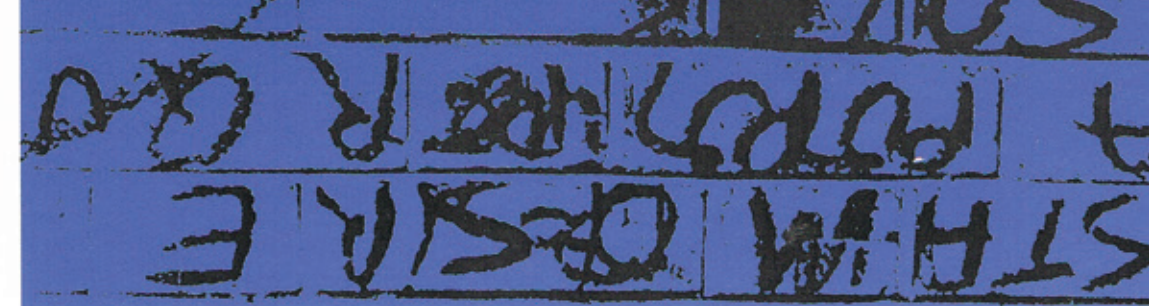
Simon: I don't think it's beneficial for the artist, but it's beneficial for the chief or the consumer. You've gotta do a lot more things online nowadays whereas before we had magazines and TV. In the same morning, you would do SMTV and then do CD:UK before hopping on a flight to Denmark and then doing the same thing again.

Would you rather the promotional aspect

be similar to the way it was 20 years ago?

Simon: I'd like it to go back to the old days, yeah. You got to mingle with a lot of other bands as well.

Lee: It's very segregated now. Everyone just sits in their own space. It represents the society we're in now. On social media, everyone's got their own page, and their own content. It's very isolated. It's a weird world that we're living in and I'm still very much getting used to it.



F  
M  
S  
K  
ANS BOLD

ANS BOLD CONDENSED

—leg trab  
A'm quired



Back to the new album, how would you say this one differs from your previous ones?

Lee: I don't think it's that different, actually [laughs].

Antony: It's not that different from *All Rise* and *One Love*, for me personally. The other albums, *Roulette* and *Colours*, were very different. *Colours* I don't remember, it was a weird process.

Lee: That album started with an idea that was then taken. We came up with an idea and then it kind of got mishmashed into something out of our control. We had an album to do an idea with classic songs and then it all got mixed into half covers and half originals. It turned into this hybrid album and we kind of looked at it and went, what the fuck is this?

Duncan: It was out of our hands at that point.

Lee: At that point, we kind of had enough of it. There were some people that liked the album but for us, as a band, we didn't. I'd say that *Heart and Soul* is our proper fifth album. I wouldn't say I won't count *Colours* as an album. It was almost like a weird karaoke album.

For those that have only heard the singles so far, would you say the album is a good indication of what the rest of the record is going to sound like?

Simon: I think there is something for everybody on this album. We're not a one-trick-pony band either. We're rock, pop, R&B, hip-hop, whatever you want it to be. I think we've put together a great body of work. People will see that the next single is totally different from the first.

How are you feeling about the upcoming arena tour?

Duncan: We're really excited actually. It's the first time we've done an arena tour in years on our own. The last time we were in arenas as a band was probably for The Big Reunion when we were part of a collective on it. But as a band on our own, it's been since 2004.

Antony: A lot has changed in that time. Now everyone has a camera phone, it's going to be weird performing to that. It wasn't like that back in the day.

24



54

GILT 2VW2 BOND LITTING—Gives weight.

Suit  
Edward  
Sexton  
T-Shirt  
All Saints  
Shoes  
Russel  
& Bromley  
Jewellery  
His Own



Lee  
Jacket  
Philipp Plien  
T-Shirt  
All Saints  
Jeans  
Levi's  
Trainers  
Grenson  
Antony  
Jacket and  
T-Shirt  
Philipp Plien  
Jeans  
Levi's  
Simon  
Jacket and  
T-Shirt  
Philipp Plien  
Trousers  
Mr P  
Trainers  
Tod's  
Duncan  
Jacket and  
T-Shirt  
Philipp Plien  
Trousers  
Mr P  
Trainers  
Tod's



Are there songs you feel like you have to perform that you're not into anymore?

Simon: I don't personally like *U Make Me Wanna* but it's a fan favourite.

Lee: I don't mind it.

Duncan: I'm a bit like that with *I Can*.

Have there been any songs you released that you initially weren't feeling?

Antony: *All Rise*. That's because it was a completely different track in the beginning.

Duncan: We were taking the piss when we were singing it because we were like there's no way this is going to be a song. It was almost very militant. The guy was from Norway and he was wanting us to sing it and I remember it being very military.

Simon: Because we recorded it to a harder track, they then softened it so that the vocals sort of spoke to you.

Duncan: I remember going into the record company and the label telling us that they had our first single. I thought they were gonna say *If You Come Back* or maybe *Fly By*. When they said *All Rise*, we all looked at each other and thought it was a joke as that was the one we took the piss out of. It started playing with this harmonica and we were like, that's not the same song!

Did you love the new version of the song once you heard it?

Duncan: Yeah, because it was so different.

Lee: The new version gave it soul. When we first came out, people thought we were American. We hadn't done any interviews so with radio, they must have kept it a secret about who we were, they were quite ambiguous about it. They thought we were the new Backstreet Boys or NSYNC. *Too Close* and *If You Come Back* was produced by Ray Ruffin so we had that very American sound because he kind of produced us in that way. It was interesting. Those were some good times.

You collaborated with Elton John on your second album. How was that experience? He's been described as a bit of a mentor for other artists.

Antony: He said to us that *All Rise* was his favourite album of 2001, hence why when we approached him, he jumped at the chance to collaborate. He told us to enjoy it and told us that we're good at what we do and long may it continue.

Lee: There was something online that said he told us to split up but that was a fallacy.

What other groups would you like to see reunite?

Antony: NSYNC.

Simon: Five but together as the original five. We see the boys out sometimes on the circuit and I just think it'd be amazing if they got back together.

Duncan: I'd like the Spice Girls to get back together with Victoria. There's a little rumour that they might be doing Glastonbury next year.

Lee: I'd love to see The Corrs back, I was listening to them the other day. Oasis too. They won't do it but I'd love to see them boys back on stage.

GILL SANS BOL TITLING—gives weight.

Fin

Fin

Fin

New album *Heart & Soul* is out 28th October

Interview **Fabio Magnocavallo**  
Photographer **Jack Alexander**  
Fashion **Ellie Witt**  
Grooming **Jon Chapman**  
at Carol Hayes Management using HGD Prohair and Fudge Hair  
Fashion Assistant **Holly Bartley**

Cover credits  
Lee - Jumper and trousers **Mr P Jacket Kingsman at Mr Porter Trainers Grenson**  
Antony - T-Shirt **American Vintage** Jeans **Levi's** Jacket and shoes **Tod's**  
Simon - T-Shirt **Philipp Plien** Trousers **Mr P Jacket Boss Trainers Tod's**  
Duncan - Coat **Berluti** Shirt **American Vintage**