



Bit of a Blur: The Autobiography

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For Alex James, music had always been a door to a more exciting life—a way to travel, meet new people, and, hopefully, pick up girls. But as bass player of Blur—one of the most successful British bands of all time—his journey was more exciting and extreme than he could ever have predicted. Success catapulted him from a slug-infested squat in Camberwell to a world of private jets and world-class restaurants. As "the second drunkest member of the world's drunkest band" Alex James's life was always chaotic, but he retained a boundless enthusiasm and curiosity at odds with his hedonistic lifestyle. From nights in the Groucho with Damien Hirst, to dancing to Sister Sledge with Björk, to being bitten on the nose by the lead singer of Iron Maiden, he offers a fascinating and hilarious insight into the world of celebrity. At its heart, however, this is the picaresque tale of one man's search to find meaning and happiness in an increasingly surreal world. Pleasingly unrepentant but nonetheless a reformed man, Alex James is the perfect chronicler of his generation—witty, frank and brimming with joie de vivre. *A Bit of a Blur* is as charming, funny, and deliciously disreputable as its author.

Bit of a Blur: The Autobiography Details

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From Reader Review Bit of a Blur: The Autobiography for online ebook

Magnus Larsson says

En väldigt välskriven, uppriktig och fascinerande berättelse om ett popband uppkomst och uppgång, och den galna karusell som följer med framgången. Alex James lyckas även ge en intressant bild av hur gruppdynamiken kan se ut i ett band, och vilka olika krafter som kan bidra till det kontrollerade kaos som det verkar vara.

Niklas Pivic says

So Graham and Damon and I met in the studio on the last day of the first term. Damon had the keys, as he was sort of an assistant there. There were a couple of things that Damon and Graham had been working on together that we bashed around for a while. I showed them some chords that I'd been strumming in my room. Graham started to play them on the guitar, there was a drum machine going boom whack and I started grooving along on the bass that was lying around. Damon started jumping up and down and saying, 'Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant! You're a natural!' He got his lyrics book out and started singing, 'She is so high, she is so high.' It all happened there and then. It was instantaneous, shockingly so. Graham wrote the lyrics for the verse, over the same chords, and sang a backing vocal on the choruses. I'd never been in a band with backing vocals. The two of them sang really well together, they'd been doing it for years. We made a tape and I went home for Christmas thinking, 'I'm in the best band in the world.'

Even if you don't fancy Blur or even if you've never heard them, this is a good memoir. Even though James may seem to have his head up his own arse at times because of his wealth and the sheer amount of silly things he's been up to because of it - whether it be purchasing an aeroplane or wasting thousands of pounds per night getting drunk with models - his style of writing drew me in.

Short sentences telling stuff like it was, according to no-one but himself.

James saw himself as a rock star, and as such, he wanted to live up to the myth, combining alcohol and bad behaviour all over the globe.

I was really drunk by that point and I went down to the bar to have a fight. Bruce Dickinson was at the bar. I hate Iron Maiden. They're devil-worshipping ponces. I said, 'The devil can suck my cock and you can kiss his arse, you fucking poodle.' He got me in a headlock and sucked the end of my nose really hard. I was laughing quite a lot, not really resisting. We left it at that.

Point to Dickinson, there.

I was still enjoying my lack of responsibilities. Being able to have whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, had made me grotesque and self-centred, but there was a huge upside to being cash rich and morally bankrupt.

From an art school background to riches as Blur recorded their first album with Stephen Street producing it, alcohol and deviant behaviour led James to be unfaithful to his then-girlfriend. A lot.

The first time I was unfaithful to Justine was about halfway through the first year at Goldsmiths. I was in London. She was in Bournemouth. I was drunk. It wasn't premeditated. It was a brief pornographic fantasy scenario with someone I'd never seen before, never saw again. I regretted it terribly and confessed. Justine was devastated, more hurt than angry. We both cried a lot and I knew I'd never do it again. Of course, there were pretty girls at college. I flirted with one or two of them, but I never had any intention of getting involved. I suppose, if I'm brutally honest, if I'd fallen in love with somebody else, I would have been a bit stupid to stay with Justine, but I didn't. I wanted to be with her. The second time was a real disgrace. I snogged Raych. She wasn't going out with Adam any more, but he still loved her, I think. He was long gone, but when I thought about it afterwards it seemed like a double whammy of treachery against him and against Justine. It was only a quick affectionate snog, but I definitely fancied Raych, which made it a worse crime. I didn't tell Jus about that. Andrea, the singer from the Darling Buds, was a pin-up platinum blonde and that was the third time. The world had started to open up to us and it appeared there was no town that didn't have beautiful women I could have married or interesting people I could have quite happily spent my life with.

...and:

Another one-night stand. It wasn't like I pursued these women. It was suddenly as simple as not resisting. Still, I was more than willing and it was the same act of betrayal. There were so many reasons to say yes and only one reason to say no, and she was an ocean away.

There are no swan songs re. the bad times, which is very refreshing:

The album had stopped selling and Woolworths returned quite a lot of copies. Then a really big bill came from the VAT man and we couldn't afford to pay it. It was serious. I had no idea what VAT was. I was good at playing the bass and showing off. That was my job. We trusted our manager to make sure that those kinds of unpleasantnesses were taken care of. It turned out that quite a lot of bills remained unpaid. We owed everybody money. We brought in new accountants, who told us we were staring bankruptcy in the face and facing prison if we

couldn't come up with the cash to pay the VAT. Whenever this happens it's time to start looking for a new manager.

And there's always a breath of fresh air when James writes about unusual stuff very up front, e.g.:

There was a bottle of Tabasco on the bar, for Bloody Marys. He said, 'Watch this!' and necked the whole thing. Temporarily, he went into convulsions and was sick. Then the hiccups started. They were the biggest hiccups I've ever seen. There was an element of sneeze in each hiccup, and each one possessed his entire body. It wasn't deadly serious, but we were supposed to be onstage in twenty minutes. We went on late. I smashed a guitar and a few drums. Having destroyed backstage, Damon tore into the front of house. Dave swan-dived into the crowd and was devoured, so I finished the drums off. We hadn't done that for a while. It is very satisfying to make a lot of noise and break stuff.

On fame:

I'd done a fair bit of hobnobbing with famous people by this time. They didn't seem to have anything in common, particularly. Famous people generally seemed like everybody else, only a bit more famous. Rich people aren't particularly different from anyone else either. They've just got more money. Fame is just another kind of money. It can do things that money can't, but it's just a currency. No one ever loved anyone because they were rich. No one ever really loved anyone because they were famous, but it's an attractive quality.

On what really matters in the end:

On Boxing Day I went back to London to get Tabitha and took her to a hotel where I'd always wanted to stay, in Corfe Castle in rural Dorset. Suddenly we were alone and it was very still and quiet. Immaculate. We walked to Kimmeridge, my favourite place, and I built a big bonfire. There's absolutely nothing to do there, just fossils and shells and rock pools. It's where you realise if you love someone or not. I felt a bit bored. It was surprising. She was possibly the most beautiful woman in the world. I thought success would be the answer to everything. I'd climbed a hill and seen a mountain in the distance. I climbed the mountain and I saw the moon. I somehow got to the moon and realised I'd left what I loved behind in another world. I missed Justine. I'd come all this way to realise I really was happiest with what I already had. It was a journey that had to be made. I wanted it all. I'd never felt I wanted to escape from Justine. I'd just lost her. I just wanted to sit and be quiet with her, listen to her thoughts and make her laugh.

There are some reminiscences on alcohol and adventures:

When I woke up I was in her bedroom. I was emptying my bladder all over her dressing table. People had told me about this kind of thing. It had never happened to me before, though. She woke up and asked what I was doing. I said it looked like I'd made a big mistake. We cleaned it up. We'd only known each other a couple of hours and I don't think anyone could have been any more drunk than I was. Usually being that drunk would make you unconscious, but with absinthe you go on expeditions. I did see her again. Some people you try and make a good impression on and nothing works, others you piss all over their make-up and they've decided they like you and it doesn't seem to matter. Anyway, that was the only time I ever went to Richmond.

On being a tourist:

We live in a climate of fear, but the world is a safe place as long as you know how to behave like everybody else does. If you stand around holding a map waving a video camera with your shirt tucked into your waist-high trousers, you're in trouble wherever you go. Millions of people live in Rio, after all, and they eat salad and have ice in their drinks and they don't get murdered very often.

Wealth and no morale:

I'd spent about a million pounds on champagne and cocaine. It sounds ridiculous but, looking back, I don't regret it. It was definitely the right thing to do. It was completely decadent, but I was a rock star, after all, a proper one, with a public duty to perform.

Claire was worried about me starting my new drinking campaign in January. She'd only known me sober. I assured her that I was very good at it. It was February and a nice man called Bill was saying, 'And tell me what you remember about the party.' 'Well, I remember swapping shirts with the principal dancer of the Royal Ballet Company.' 'OK. Good. What next?' 'I think I snogged the dog.' 'Right. OK. Then what happened?' 'Well, I had a row with Claire and went home. I locked her out, and when she was banging on the door, I pissed on her head from the fourth-storey window.' 'Why did you do that?' 'Well, that's what she wants to know.' 'Anything else happen?' 'No, not that night, anyway.' Bill was kind and he listened and he helped me and I stopped drinking altogether after that and tried yoga.

And somehow, the feel of the book is stashed in a single sentence:

I sometimes found it excruciatingly funny and begged them to stop, and sometimes I just begged them to stop.

All in all: a really interesting tale of the love for music, but mainly on friendship, the loss of ethics and love due to alcohol and drugs, and little thoughts on life and what matters and not.

Tfitoby says

Alex James reckons bass players in bands are cool, most of the bass players I've ever even noticed on stage have hidden behind everyone else. Although Alex James seemingly set out to be the coolest bass player rock & roll has ever known he goes on to prove with a brilliant anecdote about the bass player from Coldplay the competition hasn't been that strong.

From the opening lines I was impressed with his ability to write, weaving together a series of interesting and entertaining anecdotes with an infectious enthusiasm, granted if you can't have enthusiasm for your subject when you're writing about yourself you may as well give up writing altogether, but James is erudite and witty and incredibly frank about his occasionally abhorrent behaviour. I was enamoured from the start and James (and obviously a great editor) didn't let me down, becoming, by quite some margin, my favourite autobiography/biography that I've ever picked up.

Blur came to my attention at that most impressionable time in my life, I was eleven and my favourite family member, who I thought was infinitely cool, was talking about how amazing this band called Blur were and he played me one of their songs. As soon as I had saved up enough pocket money I went straight out and bought their album on cassette. Yeah it was that long ago, I hadn't even heard of CD. And for the next twenty years if anybody asked me to name my favourite bands Blur would be in there no matter how my tastes changed over time; Blur, Pulp, Britpop in general, they have a special place in my heart. So when I recently got back in to the band, revisiting my youth in some ways, this book was always going to get read; however it is not one of those biographies that only reward people already familiar with the subject, so rarely does it touch on the ins and outs of Blur as a band, instead focussing on the human experience of somebody catapulted from reading French at Goldsmith's to international superstardom via the artistic medium of music.

Alex James, whilst being a drunken rockstar celebrity was, and still is, in the shadow of his much more famous frontman and frontmen in general. Albarn, Cocker and The Gallagher's could never have written this book, they may well write fascinating autobiographies in time but Bit of a Blur is the work of somebody who was allowed to live in the shadow, even slightly, and it is far more interesting because of it. At no point are you left with the impression that the author is concerned about their "legacy," immortality, rectifying perceived sleights, politics, muckraking and scandal, it is simply the memories of how he became famous and how he reacted to his dreams coming true.

The infectious and casual nature of the prose leaves you feeling like you're tagging along on one of his many, many nights of debauchery with his famous and not so famous friends, to the point that you worry when you put the book down that you'll miss some crazy antic whilst you're away. Now THAT is impressive storytelling that 99% of fiction authors could do with learning. Whilst at the same time he skips ALL of the boring bits that bog down most biographies without getting caught in the trap of going in to explicit detail about EVERY LAST THING that ever happened to him, cramming pre-record deal Seymour in to two chapters (thankfully) and spending a mere 200+ pages on the following 20 years of his life. The title is apt and not just a clever play on the name of his most famous music project.

I recently saw the Blur documentary No Distance Left To Run and in it Graham Coxon credited this book as

being the major catalyst behind the band putting their differences behind them and getting back together. A reward much greater than being named "book of the year" by NME or being reprinted four times within a year of being published.

Ian Morphet says

A pretty amusing read. Exposes the fickleness of your average super model and the laziness of your average bass player. Gets a bit samish from half way through. Same message on alcohol abuse as Fat, Forty and Fired, like, don't drink, its bad for you.

Rosemary says

I adored this book, but then I am one of the biggest Blur fans to grace the planet. That aside this is a very good book. It's entertaining, action packed and witty. Yes it's fairly shallow, but it's a lot of fun. I Always enjoy hearing about that transition that all successful bands seem to make from living in grotty flats and drinking all the time to touring the world drinking all the time. For a musician Alex James is a great writer with a very clever turn of phrase.

Beth says

It takes a long time to say: I got famous, did a lot of drinking and coke and had sex with a lot of chicks, I learned to fly a plane and then I got married to a hot chick who had some kids. I would recommend reading this on a plane.

Julia says

I LOVE HIM. That's my review.

Karen says

Efternin drinkin: it does ye in but ye cannae fuckin beat it. -Francis Begbie in *Porno* by Irvine Welsh

Efternin drinkin, as it happens, is the reason I bought this book (see previous review). And the principal reason my memory of the first few chapters is a wee bit hazy. I have the feeling a young Alex James would have approved though.

I went to university with the express purpose of meeting a boy who looked like Alex James: floppy dark

fringe, cheekbones to slice cheese (ooh, James would probably approve of that metaphor too - obviously my 17-year-old crush is still alive and well...) and a big, cushiony pair of lips. I don't know where all the Alex James lookalikes were in 1994 (Glasgow, probably - the place I'd escaped from) but they certainly weren't in Aberdeen. Not even any Jonny Greenwoods - like a more serious and intense older brother of James. [Small aside: the rare pictures of Greenwood smiling, and James not, are far more attractive than their far more familiar brooding stare and imbecilic grin, respectively] The closest I met was James, one of the guys who lived in the university flat downstairs from us, who used to play the bassline from 'Girls & Boys' *ad infinitum*. Sadly, neither his looks nor his bass-playing skills came close to those of his famous namesake. I used to play the tape of *Parklife* louder just to drown him out.

This book zips along at an entertaining pace and, although blatantly self-centred, is refreshingly free of either the "I'm so not worthy" false modesty or whiny "my incredible talent is sooo overshadowed by my fame" extremes commonly found in autobiographies. He accepts things for what they are and does his best to wring every last piece of enjoyment out of them, just to soak it all up again. He does admit that other people suffered because of this attitude, but it doesn't seem to trouble his conscience *too* much. Which probably makes him a prize tosser. But does make for a fun read.

Kirsten says

Bit of a bore.

Alex tells us that he drank a lot, took drugs (although is of course too coy to mention them in any detail), and had lots of sex served up to him on a plate, with buttered soldiers. So far no surprises, and nothing particularly interesting or remarkable about this. However, end of story. Alex doesn't really think about his what happened, or analyse it, or make any of it at all interesting. Apart from the time when he drunkenly urinated on his girlfriend's head from a top-floor window. Admittedly Alex was always The Shallow One out of Blur, so with hindsight I shouldn't expect anything particularly insightful from his autobiography. He seems to think that his vintage champagne habit and that he now makes his own cheddar is fascinating enough in itself.

However what I object to most of all though is that, despite this, Alex - self-styled wit, flaneur, bon viveur and decadent etc. etc. - would clearly love to be viewed as some sort of modern-day Oscar Wilde. However, he lacks the crucial prerequisite for this, which is having wit. In fact I think Alex has done a pretty good job of making the story of an adult life with no doubt many varied experiences, emotions and even anecdotes fairly predicatable and unexciting. Which is quite an achievement really. Although Alex likes (us) to think he could have gone to Oxbridge, all of his supposedly wise and witty trusims "There are few sounds more objectionable than a young boy learning to play the fiddle" simply sound pretentious and flat.

Unfortunately in this instance I really did judge a book by its cover and the old adage is right: Julian Opie's portrait is the only interesting thing about this book. Boo to you Alex James.

Louise Smith says

Probably the best autobiography I've ever read. Bring a rock star sounds brilliant! Alex James has led the most bizarre life and done things I had no idea he was involved in, and it's absolutely fascinating hearing it from his perspective. He also has a wonderful way of storytelling. Highly recommended!

Natalia Pì says

This was actually a lot nicer than expected - mainly because I didn't know Alex James is such a good writer. I would give it 3 and a half stars if I could.

It's obviously recommended to those who like/liked Blur, but it's a nice book in its own right. It gives you insight on Britain in the 90s, and since I spent a lot of my 90s there it was clearly interesting for me. I have the impression I would have found Alex James a terribly annoying character if I met him a few years ago - his 2.0 version of himself as a... Cheesemaker and a dad seems a lot friendlier.

On the whole, it's a light, entertaining book that you will read in a few days. I also agree with some other readers here who write it's a book brimming with optimism, wonder for what the world can offer and gratitude and awareness of being a lucky person. I actually underlined lots of passages I agree with. I think I found these qualities most refreshing, especially at a time like now. Lovely read :) oh, and now even more than before - I need to go to a dune desert.

Sara Tilson says

enjoyable read

Vanyo666 says

...in which Alex James drinks, drinks, drinks, drinks some more and shags beautiful women non-stop, occasionally dropping a remark or two about his girlfriend back home and a couple of Blur songs and sessions, which are definitely a secondary interest, the primary being hedonistic exploitation of fame and celebrity.

The first part is told as it was lived: unaware, semi-conscious, and terribly vacuous. Blasé and unrepentant, he doesn't seem to suffer any negative consequences for his actions. One is left wondering if he's just that kind of guy who just floats above everything.

Finally at 82% he recognizes "I was a morally bankrupt, pissed fatso with a stupid grin and a girlfriend with a murdered heart". Phew. I was beginning to hate this guy with his Monaco and his private plane.

The second part is where our hero gets overweight, starts training without actually deciding to get fit, gets fit, quits drinking, finds he can say no to pretty girls winking, finds love, gets married and settles down in a very big house in the country.

Funny at moments, irritatingly reactionary at others, quite charmingly told, in all.

Clara says

Alex James really isn't a great writer. Nor is his story all that remarkable. That said, it was a fun, weird, timewarp read.

Leslie says

Amazing book. Alex James is a stunning, witty, essentially British writer, which for me was completely unexpected. I'd venture to say he's a better writer than bass player. (Though really, no, that's not true.)

What I love most, besides the quality of his prose, is his inherent optimism. It permeates the entire book, and keeps it from sounding dull, trite, mean or too self-serving. This is not a 'poor little rock star' story by any means. Alex owns all of the choices he has made in his life, and does not necessarily regret any of them. He simply finds that as he's grown older, he's grown more mature, as we all hope to do, and has made choices that are probably more healthy now that he is a bit wiser. But who can say they regret the adventure of the full rock star experience? It seems to me that if you have the chance to do it, you should do it while you can, then introduce quiet and calm later on in life, as Alex did. I'd venture to say he was probably wiser in retrospect than he thinks he was.

There is no doubt Alex has lived an uncharacteristically exciting life, and I for one am thrilled to have been privy to some of the events in it through reading this hilarious and heartfelt book.

[Another cool thing about the book is that it was finished and published before there was ever a chance that Blur might reunite. Now it's the perfect companion piece to that reunion. :)]

Antonomasia says

So.Much.Fun.

I can't remember when a book last left me with such a sense of undiluted joy. Alex James is clearly one of those people who is extroverted, optimistic, spontaneous and naturally lucky, and the tone of the book is infectious. He has enthusiasm and curiosity about pretty much everywhere he goes and everything he does, whilst seeing his 1990s excesses through older, wiser eyes - it's lovely to find such positivity combined with self-awareness and intelligence. It seems that he rarely did stuff or hung out with people because it was supposed to be cool: he unwittingly stumbled across them and genuinely really liked them. This is friendly, funny and often aphoristic writing and it's really nice to see someone uncynically making the most of life, whether it's debauchery or geeking out over science. Heck, I probably don't know enough optimists!

I will definitely be looking out for his newspaper and magazine columns in future and I'll bet this isn't the last time I'll read Bit of a Blur. As one of the cover quotes says, this book is excellent company.

It can make you feel inspired to go to somewhere new, or finally throw yourself into some unusual interest you've pondered. But the slightly dazed simplicity of expression and tangential wit - probably the effects of

years of booze and drugs - and the sense of looking back on a younger, wilder past, meant that the book also felt like it was on the right wavelength when I read the first few chapters earlier this year when quite ill, dizzy and without the energy for any projects.

Of course, one of the other reasons the book seems quite so magical is that Blur were *the* band of my teens. This is life on the other side of the stories in NME and Melody Maker, inside the London Britpop scene where we dreamed of hanging out - and the middle chapters are chock full with references that sent a shiver down my spine.

Peter O'Connor says

The fact is, I liked Blur a lot more before I read this book. The problem isn't so much that it is badly written (it's not) - it is more about how it made me feel as a reader. We usually read these type of books to gain an insight into the artist - not to have our faces rubbed in their wealth. Alex James chooses to largely gloss over the Blur stuff (I've often suspected the band was more driven by the Albarn and Coxon anyway) and instead continually boasts about the life of luxury that he has led. Popular musicians can also become very wealthy, I get that, and I love a rock and roll excess story as much as the next guy but in this case, it is page after page of namedropping of famous friends, exclusive clubs for the wealthy, luxury hotels, even a toe curling section on his love and knowledge of vintage champagne (spoiler alert: most people reading this book could never afford it), the buying of aeroplanes and so on and so on. It can become irksome and, worse still for the reader - boring. My hope now is that as my memory of the book fades, my love of Blur will gradually return as I put my faith in the other three who haven't written books yet.

Michael says

One of my favorite characters from one of my favorite bands, but this was just not good. Spends the whole book talking about his mega-rich lifestyle and doesn't seem to learn a single lesson along the way. I get that it's his autobiography, but I got the vibe that Blur was an afterthought, just something happening in the background of his life.

He also has this really annoying writing tic where every event, no matter how significant or minute, gets exactly one sentence. "We went out for lunch. Damon went home and wrote 'For Tomorrow.' I ended up snogging a supermodel. When I woke up the next day, I still had my clothes on." (Not an actual passage, but you get the idea).

Two stars because, at points, he is very funny

Tosh says

How many bass playing figures who can write a good memoir as well. Ok, there is Charles Mingus, but there is also Blur's Alex James. Well first of all he's charming. He loves cheeses (really into the cheese thing), drinking (lot of drinking and quality drinking but still a drunk), into sex (can't say no), and yet, he's intelligent, well-read, and has a deep interest in science. He is also a very good travel guide type of writer for the world.

And Alex James is also handsome. So one has to think 'what is wrong with this guy?' Well, basically nothing. He's funny on top of it. Do you like Blur? No? It doesn't matter because you are not going to like this book due to his music. He makes sharp observations about the world around him, and he basically a very grounded fellow. Reading this you get a slice of group life, the groupie situation (which for him is super good), and various cocktails in very nice bars. In fact he has the knack to write in almost fetish terms the art of drinking.

Alex James is a good guy. He wrote a very good book. One would wish that there were more guys like Alex James out in the world.

Aydin Turgay says

EXCELLENT rock bio.

Alex's writing style reminds me of Anthony Bourdain. He's a great storyteller and you can hear his voice while reading his words.

I really enjoyed how the stories were very short - it felt like having a long conversation with a friend about many things, rather than a stuffy, overly researched history of events.

The stories about Blur's first North American tour, about Alex's love life and about meeting other celebrities like Damian Hurst were especially entertaining.

I would recommend this whether you're a fan of Blur or not, as it doesn't go too deep into the music. The stories are just so well written that I could not imagine anyone not enjoying this!
