

RADIOHEAD

THE BEST OF



CD 1

**JUST
PARANOID ANDROID
KARMA POLICE
CREEP
NO SURPRISES
HIGH AND DRY
MY IRON LUNG
THERE THERE
LUCKY
OPTIMISTIC
FAKE PLASTIC TREES
IDIOTEQUE
2+2=5
THE BENDS
PYRAMID SONG
STREET SPIRIT (FADE OUT)
EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE**

CD 2

**AIRBAG
I MIGHT BE WRONG
GO TO SLEEP
LET DOWN
PLANET TELEX
EXIT MUSIC (FOR A FILM)
THE NATIONAL ANTHEM
KNIVES OUT
TALK SHOW HOST
YOU
ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR
HOW TO DISAPPEAR COMPLETELY
TRUE LOVE WAITS**





It's hard to imagine now, but there was a time when Radiohead didn't seem in the least bit destined for greatness. When it would have seemed laughable that, some day, people would argue and agonize over which tracks could be squeezed onto their first career retrospective. In fact, a time when the suggestion that the band might become the most ground-breaking, influential and downright brilliant act of their generation may well have elicited a puzzled look and the response, "sorry, Radio who?"

And that's not because these five school friends from Oxford didn't hit the ground running with their recording career. The band's first proper single was Creep. We might know it now as one of the great slacker anthems, a gut-wrenching expression of Thom Yorke's self-loathing draped around Jonny Greenwood's thrilling stabs of guitar. But when the track was released in September 1992, the response was one of deafening indifference. Radio One deemed it "too depressing" to playlist and the single limped into the charts at number 78.

That was particularly concerning given that Creep was the best track from Radiohead's forthcoming debut album, Pablo Honey, a record of angst-ridden grunge-pop which sounded promising, rather than fully-formed. When the NME greeted the album's February 1993 release by describing Radiohead as a "lily-livered excuse for a rock band", they were in danger of stalling before they'd even begun.

But you couldn't hold down a song as good as Creep. First, it became a hit in Israel. Then, an Israeli import of the track found its way to a San Francisco radio station. The station played it, the listener response was overwhelming and before very long, Radiohead found themselves with a bona fide US chart smash too. After that, Creep became a worldwide hit; including back home in the UK.

Even then, though, most saw Radiohead as Nirvana-influenced one hit wonders who were unlikely to strike it lucky again. Not that Radiohead necessarily wanted to. After a gruelling year trawling the globe to promote Creep, Yorke felt like a human jukebox, sapped of inspiration and motivation. Moreover, the band now actively disliked the one song that had helped their debut album sell millions. When Radiohead finally returned to Oxford, the mood wasn't so much one of triumph, as exhaustion and disillusionment.

As it turned out, it was Yorke's ability to channel those dark sentiments into the band's second album that propelled Radiohead to a whole new level. Recording it, though, was torturous. The band spent much of 1994 in studios with producer John Leckie, arguing with each other and hating themselves. Their sole release that year was the My Iron Lung EP, whose title track was a metaphor for the success of Creep. If the song's intense layers of sound hinted at a sizeable musical progression, its lyrics spoke of discord and uncertainty; "This is our new song / Just like the last one / A total waste of time / My iron lung".

It took a huge band fall-out on a Mexican tour at the end of that year for Radiohead's members to confront and resolve their growing differences. Returning to London with a new collective zeal, the band completed the album in a few, intense weeks. Tellingly, they named it *The Bends*, after the medical condition which affects divers when they rise to the top too quickly.

The Bends wasn't greeted with any enormous fanfare on its March 1995 release, but those who bought the album soon realised what a massive leap in quality it represented. Whereas Pablo Honey had featured one magnificent track and several good ones, this second album boasted an almost indecent number of powerfully moving and memorable songs. In the desperate yearning of *High And Dry*, the melancholy sigh of *Fake Plastic Trees* and the biting snarl of *Just*, the band had proved *Creep* wasn't their only future classic.

Propelled by word-of-mouth, some striking videos and Radiohead's increasingly amazing live shows, *The Bends* seemed to grow in stature throughout 1995. R.E.M. invited the band on tour, the album appeared in most publications' end of year lists and, by the time the breathtakingly bleak *Street Spirit (Fade Out)* was released in February 1996, Radiohead were receiving the critical and commercial recognition their music clearly deserved. Despite being the album's fifth single, *Street Spirit (Fade Out)* became the band's biggest UK hit yet.

The excitement around Radiohead was now palpable. And the band proved they were a match for it, going back into the studio to make a record that was arguably even better than *The Bends*.

OK Computer was recorded with producer Nigel Godrich, in the contrasting confines of the band's own simple studio/rehearsal space (no toilet) and actress Jayne Seymour's plush country mansion (six toilets). The success of *The Bends* had afforded Radiohead the opportunity to be as ambitious, adventurous and uncompromising as they liked. Rather than the Pixies, R.E.M. or Magazine, the band were now taking their sonic inspiration from Miles Davis, Ennio Morricone and DJ Shadow.

When Radiohead delivered the album, they were told it was commercial suicide. The band showed how much that concerned them by selecting *Paranoid Android* as the first song people would hear from it (not counting the lilting *Lucky* which had first appeared on a 1995 War Child charity album). At over six minutes long, with its skewed time signatures and full-tilt rock meltdown, this vicious critique of coked-up scenesters was hardly a conventional choice for an album's first single. But, when it was released in May 1997, the track gave Radiohead their first UK Top 3 single. A few weeks later, buoyed by critical acclaim for its invention, musicianship and wired, claustrophobic lyrics, *OK Computer* became the band's first Number One album. Their storming Glastonbury headline set at the end of June 1997 confirmed that no band on the planet currently mattered more.





The menacing Karma Police and the sorrowful No Surprises soon followed Paranoid Android into the upper reaches of the world's hit parades, proving Radiohead still had the melodies to match their musical ambition. The band were now bigger than ever, headlining arenas wherever they toured and finding themselves up for Mercury and Grammy awards (in February 1998 they won Best Alternative Album at the latter). But, just as Creep had almost torn the band apart, so the new heights of success and lengthy touring brought about by OK Computer left the band, particularly Yorke, drained, confused and depressed.

Yorke was tired of being the focus, tired of baring his soul, tired of singles, tired, even, of rock music. So he led his bandmates in the complete sonic reinvention that resulted in Radiohead's amazing fourth album, Kid A. The plan was to make electronic music, inspired by Krautrock, jazz, Brian Eno and leftfield electro artists like Autechre and Aphex Twin. First, though, the band had to learn *how* to make it. Much of the arduous 15 month recording session was spent reading instruction manuals for the necessary synthesisers and samplers. Throw in some major inter-band rows and several truckfuls of self doubt and it's a wonder Radiohead even finished an album, let alone one as good as Kid A.

Built around twitchy electronica, industrial beats, parping brass and distorted vocal mantras, Kid A was a genuinely brave, ground-breaking and impressive record. But it was more than just an album to stroke your chin to. This was bewitching and beautiful music, in turn childlike and unsettling, moving and mesmeric, brutal and gentle. What it lacked in karaoke choruses it made up for in depth, scope and class. And the world hadn't stopped listening; after its October 2000 release, Kid A enjoyed global acclaim and chart success, becoming Radiohead's first US Number One album and winning numerous awards, including two Grammys.

In June 2001, barely ten months after Kid A, Radiohead returned with their fifth album, Amnesiac. With 11 tracks mostly the product of the same marathon sessions as Kid A, it offered more of the same twisted electronic creativity, except different. Once more, the critics were wowed and the award nominations flooded in. Meanwhile, the chart success of the dreamy, Smiths-influenced Knives Out and the wistful, piano-driven Pyramid Song made a nonsense of the notion that Radiohead didn't make songs any more.

Two years on, they returned with Hail to the Thief. Subtitled 'The Gloaming', Radiohead's sixth album may not have re-written the rule book in quite the way Kid A/Amnesiac had, but it was a striking new chapter. The band recorded it in two weeks in LA, fusing their trusty old instruments with their newfound electro gadgets in an atmosphere free of the usual friction and doubt. It was as if the struggles to make their previous two albums (and the acclaim which then greeted them) had cleansed the band's system. Finally, they seemed happy to be in Radiohead.

Which, of course, isn't to say that Hail to the Thief was a markedly cheery affair. This was still Radiohead and doomy, apocalyptic themes abounded. But the record had a driving, positive energy to it too. It was there in the rollicking rock wig-out of 2+2=5 and the reassuring lullaby of There There. And it was there in the awesome live shows they played to ecstatic crowds across the world that year, including a triumphant return to Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage for the first time since their seismic OK Computer appearance.

According to legend, Radiohead hadn't enjoyed that 1997 performance in the way everyone else had; a mixture of paranoia and bad monitors spoiling their night. This time, there was no hiding their joy as 80,000 people greeted Kid A tracks like the pounding Idioteque and the hypnotic Everything In Its Right Place with the same giddy roar as they reserved for old classics like Street Spirit (Fade Out) and its gorgeous B-side Talk Show Host. Once again, it felt like no band on the planet mattered more.

As the tour continued around the world, Radiohead even began to throw their one albatross, Creep, back into their setlist. Eleven years into their recording career, the band seemed to be hitting full speed; enjoying their present, excited about their future (rightly so, as it turned out) and at one with the gloriously creative past which, we hope, this collection serves to celebrate.

CHRIS SALMON, MARCH 2008



Pablo Honey
077778140955
Released in 1993



The Bends
724382962656
Released in 1995



OK Computer
724385522956
Released in 1997



Kid A
0724352968459
Released in 2000



Amnesiac
724353276454
Released in 2001



I Might Be Wrong:
Live Recordings
0724353661656
Released in 2001



Hail to the Thief
724358454352
Released in 2003

RADIOHEAD ARE THOM YORKE, JONNY GREENWOOD, COLIN GREENWOOD, ED O'BRIEN, PHIL SELWAY.

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