

# BOYS BY GIRLS

BLOSSOMS  
BOOBOO STEWART  
BRADLEY SIMPSON

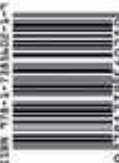
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I talk to Tom Ogden, lead singer of Blossoms, right before soundcheck. I am struck immediately by his resolute sense of self. It's one that you hear intertwined in Blossoms' music and is a quality that allows them to be silly, creative, and colour outside the lines. Tom, Joe, Josh, Charlie, and Myles are a gang of friends who happen to have a band.

Born in Stockport near Manchester, they formed Blossoms in 2013 and have since embraced a style reminiscent of the location's musical heritage. When it comes to inspiration, they find it everywhere: in love, friendship, life itself...and a giant fibreglass gorilla. *Gary*, the name of their fifth album and its opening track, tells the story of an eight-foot statue that was stolen. "You don't get much more random than that," says Tom. But randomness often stems from a deep sense of comfort and trust which has solidified them together since the very first blossoming bud they felt playing as a group.

Rock music tied with British identity and its rebellious youth during the Swinging Sixties. Rock bands' cultural influence in societal norms, fashion, music, and art was driven by a search for authenticity and personal freedom, as well as a validation of countercultural movements and a break from conservative values. Blossoms emerge as the contemporary grand heirs of the rock swing. Their sharp and clever lyrics testify to a complex approach to songwriting but a humorous outlook on life. Tom tells me, "We've never really been in scenarios where we were told what to do, and we're quite firm in that." Their style and personal freedom seem to have just seeped in from the city's air around them, and it certainly won't dissipate.

# BLOSSOMS











LEFT TO RIGHT:  
TOM WEARS:  
FULL LOOK  
VALENTINO  
ACCESSORIES  
VALENTINO GARAVANI  
CHARLIE WEARS:  
SUIT  
K&L  
ROLL NECK  
MARGARET HOWELL  
CHARLIE WEARS:  
ROLL NECK  
DENZIL PATRICK  
JOSH WEARS:  
SHIRT & JACKET  
HERMES  
JOE WEARS:  
JACKET  
TOM FORD  
TROUSERS  
MARGARET HOWELL

**What was the moment when you discovered music not just as a hobby, but as a potential career?**

I think it was when we started the band because we'd been in different bands when we were younger and we used to play in pubs in Stockport, so it never really felt serious. But when we got in a band together, hearing my songs played by this group of people felt completely different from anything I'd done before.

Once we got together and played in a room, we felt that this was different and that we could do something with it. You never truly know, but that was the moment we felt something in the air.

**The UK has birthed some of the most iconic music bands in history, spanning all genres and styles. How was it growing up with so many musical influences so close to you?**

I feel very lucky to be from Stockport near Manchester because, as you said, we were influenced by all those artists and acts who came before us - Oasis, The Stone Roses, The Courteeners, The Smiths, right back to The Hollies, Happy Mondays...the list goes on. We're lucky we're from that area because I think the city took us in as one of their own. A lot of people come out to watch us when we play in Manchester.

My parents grew up listening to those artists, so it was always ingrained in us. I feel very lucky because who knows what would have happened if we weren't from there, you know what I mean?

**Of course. So, since creating your first album more than ten years ago, you have changed a lot, the world around us has changed significantly, the music industry has evolved, and your fans have transformed. How differently do you think you approached your first album compared to your most recent one, Gary?**

I think the actual songwriting process is not too dissimilar; it always starts with the songs, and then you can build your campaign and all the other stuff. So, when you boil it down, the actual songwriting process is quite similar. For this album, we collaborated more than we ever have, so that was different, but I don't think that was necessarily reflective of the way the music industry is now.

There is more focus on online content now, and your content has to be good to set yourself apart. Weirdly, we've always been quite interested in that and never shied away from it, so it doesn't feel too overwhelming for us.

**How do you integrate social media into your process of creating music and songwriting?**

I don't really integrate it into the process of songwriting. I look for inspiration online and things like that, but not really on social media. I might look at blogs for certain songs, but songwriting is its own thing, I suppose. But once you've got the album and need to promote it, social media comes into play.

**Something I really admire about Blossoms is that**

**over the years, you have stayed true to your style, while many artists create music based on trends and algorithms for social media. How have you managed to stay true to your style?**

I think we've always had a good sense of self-belief. We've never really been in scenarios where we were told what to do, and we're quite firm in that. I believe the creative side has to come from you, so if there's ever been a moment when we feel someone's tried to pull us in a different direction, we know when it doesn't feel right.

You've just got to trust yourself. Being true to yourself is the most important thing in songwriting, so I don't think we'll ever lose that. We've always had a strong passion for maintaining that. We've never wanted to be something we're not.

**Your style - in music, looks, and music videos - is reminiscent of the sixties, seventies, and eighties bands but still feels very modern. What kind of followers do you connect with? How would you describe your community?**

We've got a really wide variety of fans, especially with this album. There are a lot of young kids coming to the shows - I'm talking six, seven, eight, nine, and ten-year-olds - whose parents are bringing them along because they love Gary. And then, it still connects with middle-aged people and even older people, so we do have a wide variety of fans. We've also noticed that as we express ourselves more through outfits, we see our fans start to emulate that.

That becomes part of [the community] too. I think people appreciate that we're actually friends. You can sometimes tell when you see other bands and think they might not be friends, whereas we're like a proper gang of friends.

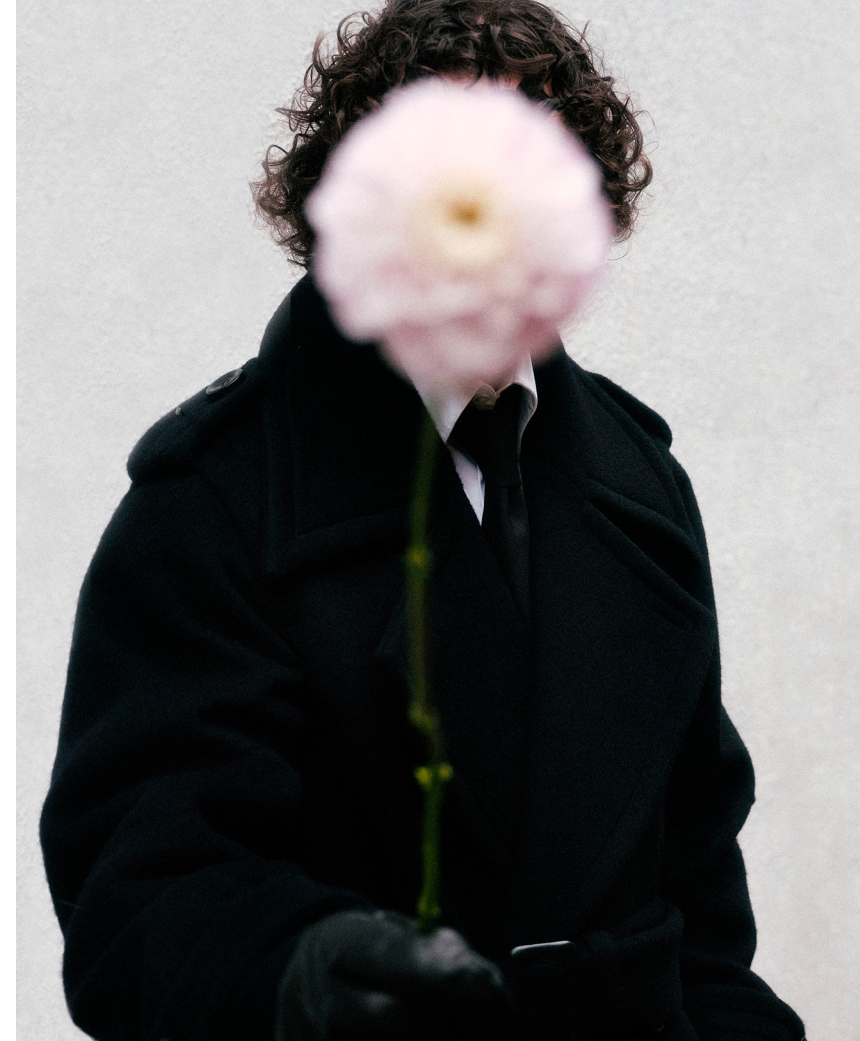
**Some of your lyrics are very introspective, but the melodies feel very lively. What kind of connection with your fans do you seek through your music?**

It's hard because you write the songs ultimately for yourself at the start. You don't write them for anybody else. Once you put them out there and people connect with them, they do so on many different levels. It might have helped someone through a hard time, or they might just like the song and want to come see it live. Everyone takes something different from music - that's the beauty of it. But when you're making it, you're not thinking about that. You just focus on whether you like it in that moment, or if it excites you.

That's the only thing you can go by. If you start making decisions based on other people, you might not make the best creative choices. I think people enjoy coming to watch us live and singing along with their friends - that's a big part of our shows.

**Yes, I agree with you. I think writing music is something very personal and music can awaken many emotions and feelings in us. When listening to the right song, you can discover deep emotions that may be hard to express without music.**





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It’s strange. You just  
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**How has your self-discovery journey been through music?**

It’s still ongoing, really. I find it easier to put things into a song than to say them to somebody. Maybe that just says more about me, but that’s what I’ve ended up doing as a songwriter. You do learn a lot about yourself when you look back at the lyrics.

**Has this happened to you, for example, when you listen to a song you wrote a while ago and remember the state of mind or things you were going through at that time?**

Yeah, sometimes. And sometimes it happens when you’re singing the song live. You’re performing it and suddenly you’re transported back to how you felt or even the smell of that time. It’s strange. You just think about what music can do to you - it can literally transport you. It just becomes its own thing live.

**I think when you’re the fan or the listener, it happens often. When I listen to music I used to listen to as a teenager, it transports me back to my teenage bedroom. I remember the friends I had and what I was doing at the time.**

Yeah, I have that with other people’s music. I think with certain songs of ours, I do feel that way, especially with the early music. Maybe because we don’t play it as much, when we do play it, I can remember where we were at the time. The songs we play every night on tour just become this different thing. You know what I mean? You kind of become desensitised to them.

**I think one of the biggest strengths of the group is the lyrics; each song tells a story or conveys a message. I believe that expressing yourself through music is a result of knowing yourself deeply and understanding your emotions and fears. Each song you write can give you the ability to discover yourself in the process. How do you approach the practice of writing?**

I think you’ve always got to be thinking about [writing], or at least keep one eye on it. You never really want to stop. I always look for different ways to be inspired. Often, I’ll start with song titles, collecting them along with lyric ideas, so that when I sit down to write, I have something to jump from. Sometimes, you might be feeling a certain way, and the song just falls out immediately. There are no set rules to it, but I do believe in showing up and treating it like a vocation.

The more you do it, the better you get at it. So, you don’t really want to stop for a long period. It’s good to have time away sometimes, but I do think you’ve got to keep chipping away, stay inspired, soak up information, meet new people, and do new things.

**The song “Gary” as well as the name of the album, was inspired by an eight-foot gorilla statue stolen from a Scottish garden centre. What about this story inspired you to create a song about it?**

I think it was the name. I heard the story on the radio in my car and thought, *Why are they talking about this*

*on the radio?* They were saying the hunt was on for this fibreglass gorilla statue that had been stolen, and it had a name - Gary. I think that was it. Because they gave it a name, maybe as a songwriter, I thought, *Okay, they’ve given this thing personality.* Do you know what I mean? And I also thought it was funny. So, I went home and read more about it.

They were talking about it like it was this serious thing, but obviously, it was a gorilla statue - it’s quite silly. I think it was the juxtaposition of trying to write a heartfelt story song about something that silly. Even as an exercise, I thought, *Okay, I’m going to try and write a song about this.* It might have been a rubbish song that I never would have shown anybody, but the song that day came out well.

**Is this the most random inspiration you’ve had for a song, or is there another one that you’d say is just as weird?**

No, that one’s definitely the most random. You don’t get much more random than that. I’ve been inspired by other things in the past that weren’t about myself. For the song “Your Girlfriend” I was reading blogs where people were writing about being in love with their friend’s girlfriend. I thought, *Oh, this is quite interesting*, so I took bits from the blog and turned it into a song. But yeah, “Gary” is definitely the strangest.

**I really like this song, and I really like the video as well. Your videos in general are really funny, energetic, and dynamic. Can you take me through the process of conceptualising and creating your videos?**

A lot of the time, we make the videos ourselves. For the “Gary” video, we made that ourselves because we have a real passion and interest in filmmaking. We used to make videos back in the day, and I’d edit them together, so that’s what we did with “Gary.” For that one, we just acted out the story of what actually happened. We also got Rick Astley, a friend of ours, in the video.

Sometimes, we work with a director called James Slater, who’s really great. I’ll send him the song, and he’ll come up with the video. He did that for “Perfect Me” and “I Like Your Look.” So, it’s just about working with people you trust, who get the vibe and the sense of humour.

**How fun was it for you to record this new album? Was it different from the others that you have already done?**

We collaborated more on this record than we have in the past. We worked with Jungle on a couple of songs, which was great fun. We’re massive fans of that band, so they worked on “What Can I Say After I’m Sorry” and “Nightclub.” That was just great because we’ve never worked with anybody else before. We also worked with CMAT; we wrote a bit with her and rented an Airbnb in Wales, locked ourselves away, and came up with a few songs.

We worked with our regular collaborator, James Skelly from The Coral. So, those three collaborators kind of made the record. It was totally different from how we’ve normally done it, and I think the album really benefited from that.



“I find it easier to put things into a song than to say them to somebody.”





LOOKS AS BEFORE

SUNGLASSES  
SAINT LAURENT BY  
ANTHONY VACCARELLO

**Working as a band of five must not be easy. Everyone has different things to say, and different ways to do things. Why do you think your synergies work well together?**

I just think from the start, we've always communicated really well. There's also a lot of respect for each other, so I think those two things are why we can work through a lot of things without falling out. When we do pull in the same direction, we all want the same things for the band. I've always written the songs and driven things forward, so there's a mutual respect for that as well. Everyone pulls together and wants what's best for the band.

**How do you ensure that each of you is satisfied with the outcome and that everyone's individual style is represented in an album, song, or tour?**

We split everything equally. Everything's divided fairly, so no one's going, "What about this or that thing I did?" It's very much equal. Every decision is made with the best interest of the band in mind and has nothing to do with money or anything like that. Honestly, that's the main reason. Sometimes you've got to understand what's best for the band, not just what you want. You've got to be able to let go of your ego sometimes, and I think we're pretty good at that.

**Can you share a moment in your career when you felt a significant shift in your identity as an artist? What did that moment teach you about yourself?**

I think making "Your Girlfriend" felt like that. It was on the third album, and we didn't know what we were going to do. We kind of found the sound on our own and trusted it, and it paid off because everyone really liked it. So, that was a big moment. Also, Gary really resonated with fans. As an artist, you can't ask for more than that. Those are probably the two big moments as a band.

**Do you listen to music that's completely different from the style you play?**

Yeah, totally. Inspiration can come from anything, you know? I listen to a lot of different genres of music. I'm not just strict on one specific genre, like my own. I don't find that's the way I work.

**What are your plans for the band in the future?**

Right now, we're on tour, and we've got about two weeks left - maybe ten shows. That's the immediate focus. Then, we'll have Christmas off and some more shows next year. The new album's only been out for about a month, so we're not really thinking about the next record just yet. We're just enjoying touring this one and playing live. That's the main focus - getting better [at performing] live.

**How is the tour going?**

Great! I think it's the best we've done. We've really stepped up the live show, and we're having a lot of fun with it. We've looked at every little fine detail and tried to make it more theatrical. We want people to come away thinking, *That was such a great show.*

**How does it feel to hear other people singing your songs?**

That's the best. You get different rewards. I love making records, but being on tour is a completely different thing. Seeing the fans react to the songs is a great feeling.





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LOOKS AS BEFORE