



Apple Music commentary for NOTES ON A CONDITIONAL FORM

You don't make a 22-track album without experiencing doubts—even when you're Britain's biggest band. "We kept laughing to ourselves," The 1975's Matty Healy tells Apple Music. "Can we really put out a record like this? Can we really be where we are?" The success of [2018 album *A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships*] didn't change us, but it certainly made us think, 'God, this is a lot of responsibility. To be compared to Radiohead. Fucking hell. What are we going to do?'"

The way they saw it, there were two options. The first was to play to expectation and try to become even bigger. The second—the path they chose—was to return to when they were smallest. "Go back to when we were wearing Spider-Man T-shirts," says Healy, "and the reason I wanted Ross [MacDonald] to play bass was not because we could eventually be in some culturally informative, cool thing but because that noise sounded cool with this noise." On an album that begins with an address by Greta Thunberg and winds down with a song written by Healy's dad, Tim, the noises that sound cool together include folk, UK garage, Max Martin-inspired pop, and hazy, discolored indie. Over that questing backdrop, Healy digs further into his inner self. "It has a lot of heart, this record," he says. "A lot of the ideas have evolved. There was stuff like [2015 single] 'Love Me,' earlier work, which was about ego; those ideas are still there, but it's not more about self-love in the truest sense—that people only change when it's too hard not to. You've got to look out for yourself, accept that you're not a Superman. There's a lot of self-reflection. It's the most me record. It's the truest." Here, he talks us through that truth track by track.

The 1975

"We were talking about how we were going to do *that* statement—the same statement that we always make musically—and we wanted it to be us at our most modern. That first track always has to be us checking in. That got us into the conversation of what is the most modern statement, or who has the most modern statement, and Greta was the decision. I think it sounds like how a lot of us feel. There's a lot of hope in it, but it's quite a somber piece of music. It's very 1975 in the way that it's quite beautiful superficially but also quite sad, quite pretty but also quite ominous. Greta has a lot of reach, but I really wanted to see her exist formally in pop culture, not just as an anecdote of somebody."

People

“This song is right back to where we came from—almost what we were like in our first incarnation of the band. Very inspired by bands like Refused and Converge and stuff like that. It was around the time of the Alabama abortion bill and we’d just played a show in Alabama. It was the feeling of oppressive, conservative religion. It happened up on the tour bus. It was kind of like our ‘Youth Against Fascism’—[UK journalist] Dorian Lynskey said that. I was definitely thinking about that Sonic Youth song. I think that it’s about fear and apathy and referencing how annoying responsibility can feel. I wanted there to be like a slapstick madness to its urgency.”

The End (Music for Cars)

“The actual reason that it’s called (‘Music for Cars’) is because... I wasn’t going to tell anybody, but there was a song called ‘Hnscc,’ which was an ambient piece of music about death, the death of one of my family members, that was on the [2013] EP *Music for Cars*. And ‘The End’ is a reinvention of that, basically an orchestral version. And yeah, ‘Music for Cars’ has kind of become the umbrella title for this whole era.”

Frail State of Mind

“[During our early teens], we were super into hardcore and making noise and, like most people in the UK, super into dance music. I think Burial is quite an obvious one that you can hear on this, and even people like MJ Cole. That darker side of garage is something that I’ve always really loved. It’s very dreamy and sounds like driving down the M25 at night with the passing of lights and the smoking of stuff. Mike Skinner spoke about how garage clubs and the actual garage scene was always a bit intimidating to him as a late teen, so he would experience these things at his mates’ houses or in cars with his mates smoking weed. That’s what my experience was—with so much time spent in my car listening to music and then going home and making music with George [Daniel, drummer and co-producer] and then going out in my car and listening to it for context. That was one of the happiest times of my life.”

Streaming

“Sonically, it’s a tribute to our formative years and what we were into—Cult of Luna and Godspeed [You! Black Emperor] and Sigur Rós, all of these big ambient artists. And UK garage music. This record is like a bit of that with a bit of Midwest emo thrown in. What we love in ambient music, we called it Pinocchio-ing: It’s stuff that’s trying to sound like a real boy. Sigur Rós sounds like it’s striving to sound like a river or a landscape. All of the kind of visuals that you get with that kind of music. It really takes you back to one’s relationship with nature and texture and temperature. To be honest with you, we took quite a lot of that off. A lot that made way for more actual songs.”

The Birthday Party

“It was the first thing that I wrote for this album that I knew was great. And it was the first thing that we got excited about. Inherently, excitement equals projection, [so it was originally going to be the first single]. And then we went off on tour and I wrote ‘People.’ And we were like, ‘Right, well. If we don’t start with this, where are we going to put it?’”

Yeah I Know

“I fucking love ‘Yeah I Know.’ I don’t know what it reminds me of. It’s kind of like Hyperdub. I remember super, super minimal ravehead music when I was growing up. It was just a synth and a drum kit. We’re also big Thom Yorke fans, outside of Radiohead, so I think there’s probably a bit of that.”

Then Because She Goes

“It doesn’t have a bridge or anything. It’s just this little moment. But this is how I feel about life. There’s so many fleeting moments of beauty on the record, which was really important because most of my favorite records always have them. Especially if we’re talking about shoegaze records. I think a lot of that comes from the slacker mid-’90s thing of Pavement or Liz Phair. There’s a lot of Life Without Buildings and stuff like that, especially in this song. And it’s like faded splendor, as I always call it. I love pop songs that sound like they’re drowning. Like My Bloody Valentine. Like a Polaroid that’s gasping for air. That really sunny but sun-flared feeling is quite across the record because—for the time and for the kind of person that I am, and my political views—it’s inherently quite a warm record.”

Jesus Christ 2005 God Bless America

“This song happened quite early in the record. It reminded me of America so much in its ambience. It even goes back to [*A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships*—I think I wrote it around that time. There’s quite a bit of folk music on the record. I’ve never really collaborated with anyone before, and it was so easy making music with [guest vocalist] Phoebe [Bridgers] that every time I had an idea or I wanted a slightly different texture to the vocals, I just got her to do it. Phoebe does all the backup vocals on ‘Roadkill’ and then ‘Playing on My Mind.’”

Roadkill

“‘Roadkill’ is about touring America, it’s about getting burnt out and searching for things. Anecdotal things that happen on the road—pissing myself on a Texan interaction, all those kind of things. I don’t know what it sounds like—maybe like Pinegrove, or there’s a band called Limbeck that I used to love.”

Me & You Together Song

“We’ve gone full circle—this album is very like the early EPs: dreamy, hazy, and quite broken and deconstructed. A lot of our hardcore fans emotionally relate to our EPs and we see them as our first albums, so it’s nice that we’ve ended up back there. Our favorite music is music that’s kind of inherently beautiful. It’s not pretty but kind of fractured or a bit jangly or overly distorted. I think the whole record is like that, and this is a stark example of that idea.”

I Think There’s Something You Should Know

“It’s explicitly about imposter syndrome, depression, that kind of a sense of isolation. I think there’s a lot of that in this record. I think it’s also about the lack of desire to communicate about those things as well—like, if I’m talking to someone close to me who’s not aware of what’s going on. And I think the reason for that is normally because it’s exhausting to take it out of your head and put it on the table.”

Nothing Revealed / Everything Denied

“It’s quite a lo-fi hip-hop track. It came from George jamming on the piano, and I was putting a really low-resolution breakbeat over the top of it. Stuff like that is really fun for us sometimes. If it’s really simple and you’ve got a loop to work with, you can kind of just go into producer mode. And—like any producer normally is—we’re huge J Dilla fans and all that kind of stuff. Lyrically, it’s just more self-reflection. I think it’s also about doing your bit as an artist—if you give people nothing to work with, if you say nothing, then you leave room for people to project anything. I find that a lot of people who are out there doing their thing musically, who aren’t challenging any ideas, are only made interesting through association or projection. I don’t feel like a lot of people stand by stuff.”

Tonight (I Wish I Was Your Boy)

“This is the anomaly on the record for me. I don’t know where it came from. That was me fucking around when the record was feeling really, really relaxed. It reminds me of all the kind of proper pop music that I grew up listening to, like Backstreet Boys. And it’s like an ode to early Max Martin, late-’90s pop. I don’t think we ever do anything retro. We never do anything pastiche-y. But there’s definitely a reflection on a certain time of our musical upbringing. And that was very much part of that. And it’s got a great Temptations sample at the beginning, and kind of reminds me of Kanye or something.”

Shiny Collarbone

“Cutty Ranks did all those vocals for us. It started out as a sample, but then we spoke to him to clear it and he was like, ‘Oh, I’ll just do it again.’ That’s Manchester, that tune, to me, man. That just sounds like going to town—that kind of dreamy, deep, dreamy, slow deep house music. Again, it’s like a fractured shard. There’s so many shards on this record. A lot of that is George. George always talks about how I’m quite expressive, how I have the ability, or even

the desire, to express myself outside of music. And that can be in lyrics or in conversation. Whereas, because he's not like that, he takes a really big responsibility on himself to express himself through sonics. That's a really good way of explaining why a lot of our records are almost OCD in their detail. It's because that's George's language."

If You're Too Shy (Let Me Know)

"If your vibe is instilled in people's brain from what your earlier work is like, then probably [it is the most 1975 song on the record]. When I hear bands that are sounding—or are trying to sound—like The 1975, it's normally *that* 1975 that they're trying to sound like—that reference to post-punk pop, '80s pop. And that does come out quite naturally in [the album] sometimes, because that's very much in our blood. This song is very on-the-nose for this album. But I like that, because it's another completely different tone to the album and it kind of comes out of nowhere."

Playing on My Mind

"This takes us back into that American, James Taylor-y, Jackson Browne-y kind of sound. Again, Phoebe is just great to have there. As soon as I write something, if I get her to put a harmony on it or to just do something over the top of it, it completely changes. And that was really easy and really natural. I think this is my funniest record; there's some lines in there that still make me smile when I listen to it. [With] 'Playing on My Mind,' there's one line I really like: 'I won't get clothes online 'cause I get worried about the fit/That rule don't apply concerning my relationships.' I thought that summed me up really, really well."

Having No Head

"This is George, man. All George. It's the only thing that George titled as well; he's very much into his Eastern philosophy. You can ask him what it's about. I don't fucking know. That's just George meditating. That's what that sounds like to me. That is how George gets it out, this big, sprawling ambience, his artwork, like tapestries."

What Should I Say

"Bane of my fucking life. Honestly, for two years. This was going to be on *A Brief Inquiry*. It was just this piece of house music that we never really quite got right. I think it's about social media. It was kind of like Manchester again; we always thought about New Order when we were making this, or some reason. I've seen New Order, I've been a couple of times during the making of this record. I mean, we even met Brian Eno recently. The reality that we get to fuck with these people now: Whether it gives you a confidence... it gives you a *something*."

Bagsy Not in Net

“We finished [the album] and after we’d done all of our deliberations, the record came down to 21 tracks. Now, we were looking at it and thinking, ‘But hold on: It was 22 tracks.’ It’s not that we didn’t want to lose the preorders, it’s just that it didn’t really make sense to me. But we weren’t just going to make up an interlude or something for the sake of it and put it on what we want to be our best album. We’d been with Mike Skinner recently, and I was talking to him about this tune, which is basically using that string sample. The conversation just turned to that, and then George started doing it, making the beat, and it was so fucking exciting. So we set the mic up and recorded the whole thing in, like, a day. It’s about wanting to die with your partner. Don’t want to lose someone that I love. If somebody wanted to know what the album sounded like in a clip, I would play them this. We knew exactly what [the album] was just at the very end, whereas during the creation of it, we just didn’t.”

Don’t Worry

“‘Don’t Worry’ is the first song that I ever heard, I think. In 1989, 1990, our dad was in a band, just a fuck-around band, and he had this song that he wrote for my mum about her postnatal depression. It’s a song that I remember because my dad would play it on the piano. Looking back, in the way that [this album] is about me and my family and my life, it just felt right [to do a version of the song]. It was written 30 years ago, and it’s me and my dad singing—that was just a really special moment. He’s a good songwriter, my dad. It’s a very 1975 interpretation of his work. And he loves that. He’s very, very proud to be on the record.”

Guys

“There’s not many love songs about some of the most beautiful, powerful relationships in your life. Especially straight guys or whatever in rock music, [they] tend not to write about how much they love their mates, or how this would be impossible and frivolous and completely pointless if we weren’t all doing it together. One of the things we say to each other all the time is ‘Imagine being a solo artist. Imagine being here, now, on your fourth day in Brisbane, waiting to go...’ It’s hard out here if you’re just constantly traveling. And we’ve been a band since we were 13, and they’re my best friends. And we’ve never fallen out. It’s a really true song. They’re the thing that gives me purpose.”