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Episode #124

Oasis vs. Blur

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Alastair Budge: [00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:13] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:23] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about the battle of Blur vs. Oasis, the battle of Britpop.

[00:00:33] We haven't really had that many music-themed episodes yet, so I'm really excited to share this one with you today.

[00:00:41] It's not just about music though.

[00:00:44] Through this story you'll learn about British culture, regional rivalries, and the UK in the 90s, so I hope you'll enjoy it.

[00:00:53] Before we get right into that though, let me quickly remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus the subtitles, that transcript and the key vocabulary



Oasis vs. Blur

for this episode and all of our other ones over on the website, which is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:10] This is also where you can check out becoming a member of Leonardo English and join a community of curious minds from all over the world, doing meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally improving their English in a more interesting way.

[00:01:24] So if that is of interest, and I can't see a reason why it wouldn't be, then the place to go to is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com) .

[00:01:34] OK, then, Blur vs. Oasis.

[00:01:37] I imagine you will have heard of Oasis, and you may well have heard of Blur too.

[00:01:44] As a reminder, here's Oasis:

[00:01:50] And here's Blur:

[00:02:15] Oasis are far better known internationally now, as the band stayed together for a lot longer, but back in the mid 1990s they were both incredibly popular in the UK.

[00:02:52] These two bands were at the [forefront](#)¹ of a movement called Britpop, British pop music, which was a musical and cultural movement that [emerged](#)² in the 1990s.

¹ the most important position

² came out



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:03:04] Britpop was a celebration of all things British, it was a reaction to the dark, [grunge](#)³ type rock music that was coming out of the US, stuff like Nirvana and Pearl Jam.

[00:03:18] It [emerged](#) as a reaction to this [fixation](#)⁴ with American, dark music, instead Britpop was [optimistic](#)⁵ and celebratory.

[00:03:29] Britpop celebrated the very fact that it was British.

[00:03:33] Bands at this time would [pose](#)⁶ in front of the Union Jack, the British flag, and they would sing about very British things.

[00:03:42] And, unlike in the era of Spotify and streaming, actually selling music was big business in the 1990s.

[00:03:51] How this would work is that a band would make an album, but one or more singles, the single songs, would be released before the album, and then also after the album was released.

³ a type of rock music popular in the early 1990s

⁴ unable to stop thinking or talking about something

⁵ the quality of being full of hope

⁶ to stand (in front of something)



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:04:03] The singles served the purpose of being an advert for the future album, and also being a nice way for [record labels](#)⁷ to sell songs twice - once as a single, and again as part of the album.

[00:04:18] The charts, the position in the [rankings](#)⁸ of what song was the most popular that week, what song was 'number one', was decided by how many copies of a song was sold each week.

[00:04:30] The song that sold the most copies of its single got to number one, simple.

[00:04:36] As Britpop became more and more popular, the media [latched onto](#)⁹ this cultural phenomenon to try to drive more and more interest in it - the popularity of Britpop, at least from a cultural interest point of view, was powered by a huge amount of interest from the media.

[00:04:56] And Oasis and Blur were the kings of Britpop.

[00:05:00] There were other bands, such as Suede and Pulp, but they weren't really in the same category, at least of popularity.

[00:05:09] Although Oasis and Blur were both Britpop, they were very different.

[00:05:15] Oasis were from the north of the country, they were from Manchester.

⁷ companies that produce and market music for bands

⁸ the lists of the most popular songs

⁹ to follow something closely and be very interested in it



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:05:19] Blur were from London.

[00:05:21] Oasis were [ostensibly¹⁰](#) working class, with two brothers as [frontmen¹¹](#), Liam and Noel Gallagher, who had been playing music together since they were kids.

[00:05:32] Blur had met at art school, and were [labelled¹²](#) by the media as middle class, soft, southerners.

[00:05:40] Liam and Noel Gallagher were loud and [confrontational¹³](#).

[00:05:44] Blur, in general, were more [reserved¹⁴](#).

[00:05:47] The [lead guitarist¹⁵](#), a guy called Graham Coxon, seemed to hate interviews, and they didn't seem so interested in [insulting¹⁶](#) other Britpop bands or fighting journalists.

¹⁰ claiming to be

¹¹ the most important people in a musical group (usually the singer and/or guitarist)

¹² described (as)

¹³ behaving in an angry and unfriendly way, looking to cause an argument

¹⁴ being shy and not talking about feelings or emotions

¹⁵ the most important guitarist in a band

¹⁶ being rude to someone



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:06:00] But the differences were there, and the media started to create this huge [circus¹⁷](#) based on the idea that Blur and Oasis hated each other, and the fact that music fans needed to choose between them.

[00:06:15] You were either Blur, or you were Oasis.

[00:06:19] And your choice of group reflected on you as a person.

[00:06:24] If you were from Manchester, you better not be a Blur fan.

[00:06:28] And if you thought of yourself as more of an [artsy¹⁸](#) type of person, well you probably weren't going to be an Oasis fan.

[00:06:36] In one British [tabloid¹⁹](#), The Sun, there was a story about a married couple.

[00:06:55] The husband was Blur, and the wife was Oasis. They couldn't get over their musical disagreements, and she ended up [smashing up²⁰](#) all of his Blur [records²¹](#).

¹⁷ a situation where there is too much excitement and noise

¹⁸ someone who knows a lot about art, film, and music

¹⁹ a popular newspaper with small pages, mainly dealing with non-serious stories

²⁰ breaking

²¹ a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:07:08] There were the [inevitable](#)²² comparisons to tThe Beatles and The Rolling Stones, with Oasis being The Beatles and Blur being The Rolling Stones, and the newspapers were full of these kinds of stories.

[00:07:08] Even though it might have been [hyped up](#)²³, it might have been [exaggerated](#)²⁴, the bands knew that it helped sell their [records](#), sell their music, so they kept it up.

[00:07:19] There were stories about the [frontmen](#) insulting each other at parties, and talking each other down to the press, saying bad things about each other to the newspapers.

[00:07:30] Oasis were the more aggressive of the two, and what might have started out as a bit of fun turned into a serious rivalry.

[00:07:39] All this [came to a head](#)²⁵ in August 1995, it [culminated](#)²⁶ in the summer of 1995.

[00:07:47] Blur had scheduled to release their lead single, the first single of the band's fourth album.

²² certain to happen

²³ made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is

²⁴ made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is

²⁵ if something comes to a head, it comes to a climax

²⁶ ends with



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:07:54] It was called Country House, and the album was called The Great Escape.

[00:07:59] Rival bands would not normally release their songs too close together, because doing so would **harm**²⁷ their chances of selling as much as possible.

[00:08:10] Instead, the **record labels** would carefully **coordinate**²⁸ the release dates so that there was enough time between them to **maximise**²⁹ sales.

[00:08:20] But Oasis had a different idea.

[00:08:23] They knew the date that Blur's lead single was to be released, and they decided to release a single from their upcoming album, one week before Blur's one.

[00:08:34] The single Oasis chose was called Roll With It, from the album What's The Story Morning Glory?

[00:08:42] Releasing it a week before Blur's would really hurt Blur's chances of getting to number one, and give an opportunity for Oasis to get **one up on**³⁰ Blur.

²⁷ damage, hurt

²⁸ to work together to make things happen at an agreed time

²⁹ make the most amount of something

³⁰ if you get 'one up on' someone, you get an advantage over them



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:08:54] So, Blur had to do something. They had to move the release date of their song otherwise it would be [crowded out](#)³¹ by Oasis's Roll With It, which would have had a week's time on the [airwaves](#)³².

[00:09:08] A week after Oasis was just not going to work, but instead of pushing it back a few weeks or forward a few weeks, Blur decided to release Country House on exactly the same day as Roll With It.

[00:09:23] This was something that just wasn't done in the music industry, as it would hurt both song's chances, and both groups would end up selling fewer [records](#) than they would if there wasn't this [clash](#)³³.

[00:09:36] Nevertheless, the date was set, August 14th 1995.

[00:09:43] Now, just in case you hadn't heard these [tracks](#)³⁴ before, these songs before, or you need a quick reminder, here is Blur's Country House.

[00:09:53] And here's Roll with It from Oasis.

[00:10:24] The funny thing is that neither of these songs were the bands' best songs, and they both knew it at the time.

³¹ if something is crowded out, there isn't enough space for it

³² the news channels (radio, TV)

³³ a fight

³⁴ songs



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:11:15] Country House is a relatively [straightforward](#)³⁵, it's an uncomplicated song, and no serious Oasis fan would rate Roll With It in their top 5.

[00:11:27] Nevertheless, these two [tracks](#) were chosen, and they were set to be released on exactly the same day.

[00:11:34] This was something that just wasn't done, and the media went mad reporting on it.

[00:11:40] The month of August in the UK is nicknamed 'silly season' because there isn't a huge amount that happens in the news, and the newspapers and news shows end up reporting on a load of stories that really wouldn't make the [headlines](#)³⁶ in a normal news period.

[00:11:59] This battle of Blur vs. Oasis, the battle to see who would be number one that week, was [dubbed](#)³⁷ by the media as 'The Battle Of Britpop', and with not a huge amount of other, more important news to be reporting on, it was all over the front pages and TV news.

[00:12:18] **Newsreader:** [00:13:00] Two of Britain's most popular pop groups have begun the biggest chart war in 30 years. The Manchester band Oasis and their [arch](#)

³⁵ easy and simple

³⁶ the main stories in a newspaper

³⁷ given the name of



Oasis vs. Blur

[rivals](#)³⁸ Blur released new singles today, each hoping to reach the number one spot next week.

[00:12:32] **Alastair Budge:** [00:13:14] The fight was on, the two giants of Britpop were releasing songs on exactly the same day, and it was to be a battle for number one.

[00:12:43] The media did everything they could to remind everyone about the differences between the bands, and that your choice of what single to buy wasn't just about which one you wanted to listen to, it was also about what sort of person you were.

[00:13:00] Were you Blur, or were you Oasis?

[00:13:03] It was almost like a general election, but instead of going to the [polling booth](#)³⁹, to the [polling station](#)⁴⁰, you went to the local [record](#)⁴¹ store and made your choice.

[00:13:14] And much like politicians do in the [run up](#)⁴² to an election, the bands did everything they could to make sure their single was as attractive as possible.

³⁸ very serious rivals

³⁹ a small enclosed place in a polling station (the place where people vote)

⁴⁰ the place where people vote

⁴¹ a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music

⁴² the period before something



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:13:26] With Blur, you actually got an extra CD with your purchase of Country House, so you got two CDs for 99p, which was the price of the single.

[00:13:37] Oasis tried to do a similar thing, but they were a little too late and couldn't actually give an extra CD away with the single, so they put [barcodes](#)⁴³ inside the single which gave you the right to get another CD.

[00:13:52] But of course that wasn't nearly as [enticing](#)⁴⁴ as getting two CDs immediately.

[00:13:58] So, who ended up winning the battle of Britpop, who ended up with the number one single?

[00:14:04] It was a [tense](#)⁴⁵ week, as music fans made the [pilgrimage](#)⁴⁶ to the [record](#) store and [cast](#)⁴⁷ their votes.

[00:14:12] It ended up being the best week in a decade for single sales, but Blur beat Oasis, selling 274,000 [records](#) to Oasis's 216,000.

⁴³ small rectangular patterns of black lines printed onto a product, which can be read by a computer

⁴⁴ attractive

⁴⁵ a tense situation is one where you feel worried because of what will happen

⁴⁶ a special journey, often made for religious reasons

⁴⁷ vote (in an election)



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:14:26] Blur's [record label](#)⁴⁸ threw a huge party, a big celebration, but the victory didn't really mean very much.

[00:14:34] In the interviews years afterwards most of Blur and Oasis admitted that the entire 'battle' was created by the [record labels](#) and the media, and that Oasis [added fuel to the fire](#)⁴⁹.

[00:14:49] And if Blur won the battle, there are few that would [contest](#)⁵⁰ the fact that Oasis won the war, at least from a popularity point of view, from a sales point of view.

[00:15:01] While Blur grew apart and the [lead guitarist](#) left in 2001, Oasis's popularity grew and grew, despite the rivalries of the Gallagher brothers.

[00:15:13] And although both bands have [devoted](#)⁵¹ followings outside the UK, Oasis's worldwide popularity far [outstrips](#)⁵² Blur's.

[00:15:24] In what goes for 'popularity' nowadays, Blur has around 6 million monthly listeners on Spotify while Oasis has 14 million.

[00:15:32] And as for Britpop, it survived for a few more years after the Battle of Britpop.

⁴⁸ a company that produces and markets music for bands

⁴⁹ to make a difficult situation even more difficult

⁵⁰ debate, disagree with

⁵¹ extremely loyal and loving

⁵² to be more important



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:15:41] Noel Gallagher, the guitarist from Oasis was invited to 10 Downing Street, the home of the Prime Minister, for a party when Tony Blair won the election of 1997, and both Oasis and Blur continued to release [critically⁵³](#) [acclaimed⁵⁴](#) albums.

[00:16:00] But August 1995, and this battle, was its height, and Britpop [mania⁵⁵](#) never reached the same levels again.

[00:16:09] Within a few years [manufactured⁵⁶](#) pop was back, with [acts⁵⁷](#) like the Spice Girls [dominating⁵⁸](#) the top of the charts for years.

[00:16:19] But this battle of Britpop went down in history as one of the great chart rivalries, and was the high point of one of the [defining⁵⁹](#) moments in British music.

[00:16:31] Neither song may have been particularly great, and it might have all been [hyped up](#) just a little bit, [manufactured](#) so that people were even more interested in it, but it certainly was a lot of fun, and sold a lot of [records](#).

⁵³ according to critics, people who give professional judgments about music, films etc.

⁵⁴ praised, said to be very good

⁵⁵ a strong interest in something, especially one that affects a lot of people at the same time

⁵⁶ produced in an industrial way

⁵⁷ musical groups

⁵⁸ being the largest

⁵⁹ being important and influential



Oasis vs. Blur

[00:16:47] And if you want a good way to start off a long conversation with a Brit, you can always ask them who's better, Blur, or Oasis.

[00:16:56] At least now you'll know a little bit more about what their response will reveal.

[00:17:03] Ok then, that is it for the story of Blur vs. Oasis, and the battle of Britpop.

[00:17:10] It is a fun story, and one that not that many people outside the UK know. So I hope you enjoyed it.

[00:17:17] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, to unlock the transcripts, the subtitles and key vocabulary, then the place to go to is Leonardoenglish.com.

[00:17:36] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:17:41] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Teamed up	join together to work (on something)
Assess	judge or decide
Forefront	the most important position
Emerged	came out
Grunge	a type of rock music popular in the early 1990s
Fixation	unable to stop thinking or talking about something
Optimistic	the quality of being full of hope
Pose	to stand (in front of something)
Record labels	companies that produce and market music for bands
Rankings	the lists of the most popular songs
Latched onto	to follow something closely and be very interested in it
Ostensibly	claiming to be
Frontmen	the most important people in a musical group (usually the singer and/or guitarist)



Oasis vs. Blur

Labelled	described (as)
Confrontational	behaving in an angry and unfriendly way, looking to cause an argument
Reserved	being shy and not talking about feelings or emotions
Lead guitarist	the most important guitarist in a band
Insulting	being rude to someone
Circus	a situation where there is too much excitement and noise
Artsy	someone who knows a lot about art, film, and music
Tabloid	a popular newspaper with small pages, mainly dealing with non-serious stories
Smashing up	breaking
Records	a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music
Inevitable	certain to happen
Hyped up	made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is
Exaggerated	made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is
Came to a head	if something comes to a head, it comes to a climax
Culminated	ends with



Oasis vs. Blur

Harm	damage, hurt
Coordinate	to work together to make things happen at an agreed time
Maximise	make the most amount of something
One up on	if you get 'one up on' someone, you get an advantage over them
Crowded out	if something is crowded out, there isn't enough space for it
Airwaves	the news channels (radio, TV)
Clash	a fight
Tracks	songs
Straightforward	easy and simple
Headlines	the main stories in a newspaper
Dubbed	given the name of
Arch rivals	very serious rivals
Polling booth	a small enclosed place in a polling station (the place where people vote)
Polling station	the place where people vote
Record	a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music



Oasis vs. Blur

Run up	the period before something
Barcodes	small rectangular patterns of black lines printed onto a product, which can be read by a computer
Enticing	attractive
Tense	a tense situation is one where you feel worried because of what will happen
Pilgrimage	a special journey, often made for religious reasons
Cast	vote (in an election)
Record label	a company that produces and markets music for bands
Added fuel to the fire	to make a difficult situation even more difficult
Contest	debate, disagree with
Devoted	extremely loyal and loving
Outstrips	to be more important
Critically	according to critics, people who give professional judgments about music, films etc.
Acclaimed	praised, said to be very good



Oasis vs. Blur

Mania a strong interest in something, especially one that affects a lot of people at the same time

Manufactured produced in an industrial way

Acts musical groups

Dominating being the largest

Defining being important and influential

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