



WHEN THE MUSIC TAKES YOU

What do artists go through when they create, and does the process change them? *New Scientist* magazine asked leading songwriters Alex Kapranos of Franz Ferdinand and David Gray what inspiration feels like.

NS Can you describe the process you go through when you write songs?

Alex There are two very different stages. There is an initial creative stage where it all comes out. It feels a bit like the first time you ride a bicycle or drive a car.

1 You end up with this big sprawling mess of an idea. And then you have that other process which is a lot more controlled, where you get rid of all the parts that are irrelevant. During the first process you're not really considering what you're doing, you're just doing it. The actual writing of a song is fairly easy. But the second process is very ruthless and quite cold because you have to cut away things that you're attached to.

NS Do you write better in certain environments?

Alex I tend to write in all sorts of places. For our new record I've written songs in hotel rooms, on the back of tour buses, in corridors, wherever I've had an opportunity to sit down and pick up a guitar. **2** I usually just feel like doing it, and do it. It's usually either when you feel there's no pressure to be doing other things, or when you feel almost selfishly unaware of other things.

NS Are you a different person when you're writing?

Alex I find myself being rude to people when I'm trying to get past the distractions. I used to have big arguments with my mother. It's funny because I'm generally not rude at all, I'm generally very polite, probably too polite.

NS What does it feel like when you're writing?

Alex If it's good, it feels really exciting. It's like listening to a story you've never heard before. **3** All the everyday stuff – conversation, where you left your keys – it all seems to belong to a different brain, almost like a brain in somebody else's head. That's why the distractions are so infuriating, because it's like being reminded that this other brain exists.

Reading

Part 2 Gapped text

- Look at the photos and answer these questions.
 - Can you name the people shown?
 - Do you know the name of any of their songs or albums?
- Quickly read the first paragraph of the text opposite to check your answer to 1a.
- Read the whole text carefully, then match sentences A–H with gaps 1–7. There is one extra sentence.

- A As you follow it, you lose your sense of where you are.

B I'm not a particularly easy person to live with during these times.

C You're trying to control something but you're not quite sure which direction it's going.

D I never write songs when I'm in a bad mood.

E But sometimes you can tell, because all your emotions are stirred.

F Environment isn't particularly important.

G But occasionally a song just seems to come out of nowhere.

H At the same time, you open a door in your brain that is normally closed.



NS How do you write your songs?

David I begin with little ideas that aren't fully formed and I have to either excavate further or enlarge a small idea and turn it into a song – perhaps join it to some other ideas that I have hanging around. So a lot of the time it's more like being a mechanic. **4** I pick up my guitar and within half an hour I've written one. It's an instinctive process, you shut down conscious thought. **5** It's about dredging up things that surprise you: images that you had stored and didn't know you had remembered. One image will unlock a chain of images, and that becomes a song.

NS How do you know if a song is any good?

David You shouldn't always trust inspiration. Just because it came out of thin air doesn't mean it's any good. **6** The whole feeling, the purity of the germ of the song – it's all so vivid and wondrous. It feels so shockingly fresh. But a song that comes from nowhere is usually much better than anything you consciously think up.

NS What's your state of mind when you're writing?

David It's an extremely intense period. I find myself storming around the room, biting my nails, scratching my head to the point that it bleeds. It's like having an itch you can't scratch until the process is completed. It takes hold of you. That's how you make records. You start off by tinkering around, making a few sounds and having a really good time, but when you get deeper into it and your demands get greater and more ambitious, something rears its ugly head. You become possessed. **7** I find it really hard to get back into normal life.

4 Find phrasal verbs a–g in the text and match them with meanings 1–7.

- a end up (l. 11)
- b turn into (l. 45)
- c hang around (l. 46)
- d pick up (l. 47)
- e shut down (l. 49)
- f think up (l. 61)
- g start off (l. 68)

- 1 wait, not doing very much
- 2 begin
- 3 find yourself in an unexpected place or situation
- 4 stop something working
- 5 invent or create in your mind
- 6 take hold of
- 7 make something become something else

5 Read the dictionary entry for *think up*. How does the entry indicate that it is a separable phrasal verb?

think sth-^sup (informal) to create sth in your mind
SYN DEVISE, INVENT: *Can't you think up a better excuse than that?*

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th edition

6 Decide which other verbs in 4 take an object, then check in your dictionary to see if they are separable or not.

Listening

Part 1 Multiple choice

how to do it

Read the question and options carefully as you hear them. Decide what kind of information you are listening for.

In the exam the seven situations are unconnected, so mark your answer after the first listening then concentrate on the next question.

Check your answer during the second listening. If you aren't sure, make a guess.

- 1  Read the **how to do it** box and the example question below, including the three options. Then listen and mark your answer. Say which words helped you decide.

Example You hear two people discussing ideas for a party.

Where are they?

- A in a café
- B at work
- C at home

- 2  Listen to people talking in seven different situations and choose the best answers.

- 1 You hear an actor and a director rehearsing a Shakespeare play.

What problem did the actor have?

- A He wasn't speaking loudly enough.
- B He wasn't putting enough emotion into the lines.
- C He was standing in the wrong place.

- 2 You hear a book review on the radio.

Why doesn't the presenter like the ending of the book?

- A It's unrealistic.
- B It's boring.
- C It's too depressing.

- 3 You overhear a conversation between a daughter and a parent.

What agreement do they come to?

- A She can stay out late if she does her homework now.
- B If she comes home early, she can finish her homework tomorrow.
- C If she stays out late, she must finish her homework in the morning.

- 4 You hear someone talking about their favourite holiday destination.

What do they like most about it?

- A the peace and quiet
- B the friendliness of the people
- C the scenery

- 5 You hear a musician talking about songwriting. What is she doing?

- A describing how she writes songs
- B offering advice on how to write songs
- C saying why she writes songs about other people

- 6 You hear an art critic talking on the radio about a painting.

Why are most people so interested in it?

- A It's really beautiful.
- B It was mentioned in a book.
- C It's been restored.

- 7 You overhear a conversation in which people are talking about things they'd like to invent.

Which invention does everybody agree on?

- A a self-loading dishwasher
- B a car that parks itself
- C something that can take the dog for a walk

