



UK BRITS AROUND THE WORLD

Brit Picks To Click

Billboard contributor David Sinclair picks the up-and-coming U.K. acts likely to make international waves in 1997. Sinclair's choices in previous years have included the Bluetones, Cast, Ash and Reef.

AUDIOWEB

With a handful of singles and an eponymously titled debut album on Mother Records all having grazed the lower reaches of the U.K. charts, Audioweb is hovering on the brink of that elusive breakthrough. Offering a welcome change from the retro sound of Britpop, the four-piece from Manchester has evolved a sensational combination of rock, roots, dance and reggae music that has won well-publicized support from U2 and the Stone Roses as well as fulsome praise from the less exalted tastemakers of the press. The band's latest single is a stunning version of the Clash's "Bank Robber," which showcases the key elements of Audioweb's sound: a rhythm section that operates on the cusp of rock and reggae, underpinning a cocktail of subtle dub effects and the extraordinary vocal talents of Martin Merchant, better known as Sugar. An imposing presence on stage, Sugar somehow manages to combine a high, silky singing tone with gruff, tongue-twisting rap interludes. Reaction to the band's recent tour of Europe with Fun Loving Criminals was overwhelmingly positive, and plans are in hand for a visit to America to coincide with the release of the album there, on Mother/Island, in the spring.



BETH ORTON

"I dreamed of you last night/You had a different face or maybe just a haircut/You were older and wiser, but more like a child..." The start of the video for Beth Orton's latest single, "Touch Me With Your Love" (Heavenly/Deconstruction), finds the 26-year-old, Norwich-born singer sitting in a dingy London cafe, talking wistfully to the camera while she bends down to change her shoes. The monochrome images are ordinary and everyday, and her speech quite normal and conversational. And yet there is a strangeness in all this hyper-reality, a gentle but persistent undertow that gradually draws you beneath the song's surface layer of innocence. Orton grew up in thrall to folk singers such as Tim Buckley, Nick Drake and John Martyn, then worked with dance acts—including William Orbit, Red Snapper and the Chemical Brothers—before releasing her debut solo album, "Trailer Park," in October. The result is a perfectly balanced combination of the conventional singer-songwriter's skill and the modern dance-producer's art, the sort of trick that Everything But The Girl recently pulled off with their jungle-tinged album, "Walking Wounded." Currently on her first headlining U.K. tour and booked to appear on the next Chemical Brothers album, Orton is a special talent that BMG (with its first option on releasing "Trailer Park" worldwide) would do well to nurture.



DAMAGE

The smoothly produced ballad "Forever" (Big Life)—a top 10 hit just before Christmas—seems on first hearing to be the work of yet another U.K. pop act with a classic "boy band"

sound. But check out the B-side, "They Don't Have To Know," and you hear the sweet soul sound of one of this country's brightest young R&B hopes. And if this talented five-piece can hold its own alongside Blackstreet, SWV and Snoop Doggy Dogg on the Super Jam 1 tour, which hit these shores in December, then it can surely do so anywhere. Damage has come up through the London R&B underground, winning a hardcore following by doing everything from PAs on pirate-FM club nights to touring with acts including Aaliyah, Hi-Five and Lo-Key. Now with three hits in its pocket, the group is working on a debut album for release later in the year. As lead vocalist Jade explained, referring to Damage's single "Anything," "It wasn't made for the American market or the English market. It was made for everyone."

MANSUN

"If I didn't think we could be bigger than R.E.M., I'd give up." That's Mansun's singer, guitarist and tortured-genius figure Paul Draper shooting off his mouth in typical Brit wannabe style. Talk is cheap, but there's no harm in dreaming, especially when you've been compared to everyone from Kurt Cobain to Marc Bolan and you are the 23-year-old leader of a band currently on a growth curve as steep as Mansun's. Convened in 1995 in Chester on the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, the four-piece band signed to Parlophone at the beginning of 1996 and has since enjoyed five hit singles in the U.K. Powered by noisy guitars and naggingly catchy choruses, Mansun's sound is a trans-Atlantic cross between glam-rock and grunge, with lyrics that range from the flagrantly provocative ("Stripper Vicar" about cross-dressing clergy) to the pointedly meaningless ("Wide Open Space"). In Japan, where the band has toured and released a Japan-only EP, confusingly titled "Special Mini Album," Mansun has already caused a



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Who's Selling Where

The fortunes of British pop in America are always of particular interest to those who follow the U.K. record business. But British labels nowadays are strongly focused on the success of their repertoire in markets around the world. To sample the global appeal of artists signed to British record companies, Billboard asked a selection of multinational labels in the U.K. to cite their international top-sellers of 1996 along with a year-end estimate of their sales and the markets in which those acts did best. Labels noted below are those that released the artists in the U.K. Included in the list are non-British artists (such as Peter Andre, Boyzone, Enya, Cher and Tina Turner) who are signed and marketed by U.K. labels.

PETER ANDRE, "NATURAL" (MUSHROOM)
Worldwide Sales: 600,000
Top Markets: U.K., Germany, Asia, Australia

ASH, "1977" (INFECTIOUS/MUSHROOM)
Worldwide Sales: 650,000
Top Markets: U.K., U.S., Japan, Ireland

BABYLON ZOO, "THE BOY WITH X-RAY EYES" (EMI)
Worldwide Sales: 750,000
Top Markets: Europe, Japan, Australia

BEATLES, "ANTHOLOGY 1, 2, 3" (APPLE)
Worldwide Sales: 15 million sales of three double CDs
Top Markets: U.S., Europe

BLUR, "THE GREAT ESCAPE" (FOOD/PARLOPHONE)
Worldwide Sales: 1.5 million
Top Markets: Japan, U.K., France, Italy

BOYZONE, "A DIFFERENT BEAT" (POLYDOR)
Worldwide Sales: 1.1 million
Top Markets: U.K., Japan, Germany, Thailand, France, Sweden

CHER, "IT'S A MAN'S WORLD" (WEA)
Worldwide Sales: 700,000
Top Markets: U.S., U.K., Germany, Italy, Sweden

JOE COCKER, "ORGANIC" (PARLOPHONE)
Worldwide Sales: 1 million
Top Markets: U.K., Germany, France, Holland, Spain

THE CURE, "WILD MOOD SWINGS" (POLYDOR)
Worldwide Sales: 900,000 in PolyGram territories, which excludes U.S. and Australia.
Top Markets: Italy, Spain and France

DEF LEPPARD, "VAULT" (MERCURY)
Worldwide Sales: 3.5 million
Top Markets: U.K., U.S., Canada, Japan

DEL AMITRI, "CHANGE EVERYTHING" (A&M)
Worldwide Sales: 500,000
Top Markets: U.K., U.S.

EAST 17, "AROUND THE WORLD—THE JOURNEY SO FAR" (LONDON)
Worldwide Sales: 1.2 million (excluding the U.S.)
Top Markets: U.K., Italy, Germany, France, Australia

ENYA, "THE MEMORY OF TREES" (WEA)
Worldwide Sales: 7 million
Top Markets: U.S., Japan, U.K., Germany, Australia

ETERNAL, "POWER OF A WOMAN" (1ST AVENUE/EMI)
Worldwide Sales: 2 million
Top Markets: U.K., Japan, Southeast Asia

EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL, "WALKING WOUNDED" (VIRGIN)
Worldwide Sales: 750,000
Top Markets: U.K., Australia, Ireland, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain

BRYAN FERRY, "MORE THAN THIS" (VIRGIN)
Worldwide Sales: 500,000
Top Markets: U.K., Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand

FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS, "THE FINEST" (FFRR/LONDON)
Worldwide Sales: 600,000 (excluding the U.S.)
Top Markets: U.K., Germany, France, Italy, Australia

GARBAGE, "GARBAGE" (INFECTIOUS/MUSHROOM)
Worldwide Sales: 2 million
Top Markets: U.S., U.K., France, Denmark, Ireland

IRON MAIDEN, "BEST OF THE BEAST" (EMI)
Worldwide Sales: 750,000 double CDs (excluding the U.S.)
Top Markets: Europe, Japan, Brazil, Southeast Asia

JAMIROQUAI, "TRAVELLING WITHOUT MOVING" (SONY S2)
Worldwide Sales: 2 million
Top Markets: Italy, France, Germany, Canada

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