

More Than You Ever Wanted or Needed to Know About Oasis CD Mastering

It's no secret that Oasis CDs sound like garbage. While not the first CDs to use compression to achieve louder volume levels, they were among the first – and certainly the most popular – pop/rock CDs to push that level of compression to new heights, and in doing so, they kicked the loudness war into high gear. Those albums were ubiquitous, and engineers everywhere started to mimic the absurdly in-your-face production, constantly trying to one-up each other, and now, nearly thirty years later, here we are.

The early Oasis CDs have an interesting history, though. Owen Morris wasn't the only engineer using compression in mastering, but at that time, there was a generally accepted standard for compression, and it was far below what he was doing. A handful of songs, primarily released on singles, were mastered by other engineers, and had more dynamic range than we're used to.

There was also a bit of a discrepancy in the releases between various territories. They were signed to Creation in the UK and distributed by Helter Skelter in Europe, Sony in Japan, and Epic in the US. And, of course, the music has been reissued a few times with new mastering. So with this, I want to detail each release and describe the differences and the similarities between them.

***Definitely Maybe* – Background, Album, and Singles**

Definitely Maybe had a troubled background. The first recording sessions with Dave Batchelor yielded unsatisfactory results, and the second set with Mark Coyle only proved fruitful for “Supersonic” and “Married With Children”. Anyone who's heard the “safety masters” of *Definitely Maybe* knows how different the recordings and early mixes sound compared to the finished product. Owen Morris was called in at the last minute to try to get something meaty out of these incredibly polite recordings; the rest is history.

Owen Morris mastered *Definitely Maybe* after all of the mixes were finalized. By using the “soft limit” feature on an Apogee AD-500 A/D converter, he was able to bring up the volume on the album tremendously – at the expense of dynamic range. However, “Supersonic” – which had been mixed by Mark Coyle before Owen's involvement – was released as a single three and a half months before the album. The single was mastered at Abbey Road, possibly by Chris Blair (although no engineer is credited). The Abbey Road-mastered “Supersonic”, although still mildly compressed, has about 5 dB more dynamic range than the *Definitely Maybe* album master.

“Supersonic” had been mastered separately because the mix was already available before it was time to release as a single. But since Owen had mixed much of the album, he was the one to provide the tracks being released as singles. And so, two months later, when it came time to release the “Shakermaker” single, Owen provided his mastered version of the A-side. It's not bit-for-bit identical to the album mastering – the speed is slightly off and the EQ is marginally different – but they sound very, very similar. The same happened for the “Live Forever” single, released just weeks before the album itself, and “Cigarettes And Alcohol”, released two months after that.

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“Cigarettes And Alcohol” was the first single to have B-sides produced and mixed by Owen Morris. The previous B-sides had all been recorded and mixed before his involvement, and as such, they were provided to other mastering engineers for the singles. The “Supersonic” B-sides are more dynamic than the A-side, although there is still some light compression. The B-sides of “Shakermaker”, in spite of that track’s loudness, are perhaps the most dynamic masters ever officially released by the band! A Japanese EP called “Supersonic” combined the A-sides from both that and “Shakermaker” with two B-sides from each single (omitting “Take Me Away” and the live recording of “Bring It On Down”). The masters of the Japanese CD tracks are identical to those on the Creation singles.

By the time of “Live Forever”, though, the anonymous engineer in charge of mastering evidently didn’t want the shift in volume between the A-side and B-sides to be so jarring. They’re about 3 dB louder than the previous set of B-sides, although “Live Forever” still remains louder and more compressed than those. With the B-sides to “Cigarettes And Alcohol”, Owen Morris is not only the mix engineer, but also the producer and recording engineer, and they suffer the same mastering fate as the album. (It’s unknown if Owen mastered the single himself, but it seems likely.)

Differences in Masters of the Album

Definitely Maybe was released on Creation Records in the UK, Epic Records in the US and Canada, Helter Skelter in Europe, and Sony Music in Japan. The Japanese CD has two bonus tracks, “Cloudburst” and “Sad Song”. The mastering of the eleven album tracks are identical to the Creation CD, and the mastering of “Cloudburst” is identical to the version on the “Live Forever” single, quieter and more dynamic than the remainder of the album. “Sad Song”, which was included as a bonus track on the Creation double-LP vinyl edition, is present here with minimal compression, making it noticeably quieter than everything else (including “Cloudburst”).

Although it was based on Owen’s mastering, the North American Epic CD is a bit different from the Creation CD. They don’t play at the same speed, suggesting that perhaps an analog dub was made of whatever digital mastering Epic received. The EQ is virtually identical for the bass frequencies, but there is a reduction of 1-2 dB for the midrange and treble frequencies, beginning at around 1.5 kHz. The masters are very similar otherwise, except that “Slide Away” is reduced in level by 1 dB, and “Live Forever” – strangely – is actually *more* compressed; about half a dB has been shaved off. Perhaps the engineer who made these changes to the Epic disc was curious how the disc’s loudness was achieved and did a little experiment of their own!

The infamous “safety masters” – a set of four CD-Rs containing backups of many mix variants of *Definitely Maybe*-era songs – has a handful of final mixes without the mastering compression that was present on the album and most singles. However, it mostly comprises mixes not done by Owen Morris, so more than anything, it serves to highlight the impact he brought with his mixing. Unfortunately, the owner of these discs only ever distributed the files in low-quality MP3 format, and it would appear that the discs are not in very good shape, because there are some skips and glitches on various tracks.

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“Whatever”

The runaway success of *Definitely Maybe* and the “Cigarettes And Alcohol” single prompted Oasis to release “Whatever”, a non-album single which, confusingly, contains the *Definitely Maybe* album version of “Slide Away” as a B-side. The mastering of the track is basically the same as *Definitely Maybe*, but with the bass frequencies (150 Hz and below) rolled off. The waveform looks markedly different and it runs slightly slower, but it’s virtually identical otherwise.

The A-side is the most compressed track of all their releases up to this point. There is noticeable distortion on the kick drum throughout, and a very heavy-handed high-frequency EQ boost renders the song rather shrill as well. However, “Half The World Away” is relatively dynamic by Oasis’s standards, and sounds quite nice sandwiched between the crushed masters of “(It’s Good) To Be Free” and “Slide Away”.

In Japan, an EP called “Whatever” was released which combined the three new tracks from “Whatever” with the B-sides from “Cigarettes And Alcohol”, which had not been released in Japan. The mastering is nothing more than slightly tweaked versions of the Creation CDs. “Half The World Away” is digitally identical, apart from the studio chatter at the beginning, which is bafflingly placed before “Fade Away” instead. “Whatever” and “(It’s Good) To Be Free” use the same mastering as the Creation CD, but lowered in level by 2 dB. The three “Cigarettes And Alcohol” B-sides are lowered by 0.2 dB and also, like “Slide Away” on the Creation single, have a roll-off in the low bass frequencies.

“Some Might Say”

This is where things get interesting for audiophiles. Exactly how this came to be remains a mystery, but the “Some Might Say” single and its B-sides were sent to another engineer at Abbey Road to be mastered, despite being recorded, produced, and mixed by Owen as usual. The result is the most dynamic mastering of an Oasis album track to date, and even *more* dynamic mastering than that on three of their most beloved B-sides.

“Some Might Say” itself is a very flawed recording. Excessive mixing, in an attempt to mask a tempo change in the first chorus, renders the song a sonic mess. More troubling, however, is an ugly “pop” noise on the snare drum, which is the result of the drum microphones being out of phase with one another; by folding the song to mono, the popping sound disappears, but the snare drum becomes very quiet (and the kick drum becomes very loud). Although that particular flaw could have been fixed by removing one of the out-of-phase tracks from the mix, the flaw is inherent in the recording itself. Another flaw that affects all versions of the song is a hollow 600 Hz tone that swallows a lot of the music after the final chorus, during the “you know what some might say” outro. The EQ of the track on the single is not the best, either; it’s quite bright and lacking in low midrange.

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The B-sides, in addition to being better-recorded, have a little bit more dynamic range than “Some Might Say”, and much better EQ. “Acquiesce”, in particular, is a shining example of how good the music of Oasis *could* sound if it were mastered without compression. All three B-sides later turned up on *The Masterplan*, albeit with significantly reduced dynamic range. This was the first Oasis single to reach #1 on the UK charts, and copies of the single are cheap and plentiful.

The single was also issued in Japan with two bonus tracks – a by-the-book cover of “You’ve Got To Hide Your Love Away” and the original Noel-sung demo of “Some Might Say”, recorded during the “Whatever” sessions. The four tracks from the Creation single are present here, with identical mastering, although they’re dropped in level by about 1.4 dB. The two extra tracks also have astonishing dynamics for an official Oasis release. (The Beatles cover was reissued on the deluxe edition of the album in 2014, with about 5 dB compressed out of it, but this CD remains the only place to get the original “Some Might Say” demo.)

“Roll With It”

The next single to be released in advance of *Morning Glory* was “Roll With It”. This single is similar to “Live Forever” in that the B-sides aren’t fully dynamic, but they aren’t *as* compressed as the A-side. Strangely, “Roll With It” doesn’t have the same mastering that would appear on *Morning Glory*; there’s about 1.5 dB more dynamic range here (as opposed to roughly 7.5 dB more range on “Some Might Say”). Also, for some reason, the stereo channels are swapped on all tracks (compared to *Morning Glory*, *The Masterplan*, and the 2014 deluxe edition).

Owen has stated that the distinctive sound of *Morning Glory* is the result of a Neve 1081 EQ unit, which allowed him to add even more volume in mastering. However, to my ears, the version of “Roll With It” on the single sounds closer to that of *Definitely Maybe*, suggesting that it was indeed mastered by Owen Morris, but not using the same gear as he would for the album. The B-sides are still moderately compressed, but not to the same extent as the “Cigarettes And Alcohol” or “Whatever” B-sides. This leads me to believe that Owen Morris provided the mastered A-side, but another engineer (who was more wary of abusing the compressor) mastered the three B-sides.

The same mastering was reduced in volume by 0.5 dB when it was released in Japan. There are no bonus tracks on that single; it’s essentially identical to the Creation CD.

(What’s The Story) Morning Glory?

Many people point to this album as “ground zero” for the loudness war. It certainly wasn’t the first – nor was *Definitely Maybe*, for that matter – but it was so massively successful (and so *loud*) that it’s hard to ignore as a turning point. This was certainly the moment when the loudness war kicked into high gear.

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As mentioned, Owen credits the sound of the album to a Neve 1081 EQ, which he states helped him get even more gain out of the mixes before distortion... not that he stopped before that point! What's more puzzling is the EQ: it's much more dull and muddy than *Definitely Maybe*, but more to the point, half of the album's songs have different EQ in each channel. It's reminiscent of the '60s "fake stereo" processing, where mono mixes would be copied into two channels with bass added to one and treble added to the other... except, here, the mixes are actually stereo!

The songs affected by this phenomenon are "Roll With It", "Hey Now!", the first "Swamp Song" excerpt, "Some Might Say", "Cast No Shadow", and "Morning Glory". It's worth noting that the (more dynamic) single masters for "Some Might Say" and "Roll With It" do not have this improperly balanced EQ, and nor does the remaster done by Ian Cooper in 2014. The best-of *Stop The Clocks* is also free from this issue, suggesting it was a deliberate choice in the mastering of the album. If Owen has ever commented on why this was done, I'm not aware of it.

It's worth mentioning that there is a point of contention regarding who mastered the album. There's a famous interview with Barry Grint where he states that Owen Morris instructed him on how to master the album by showing him the three volume indicator LEDs on a DAT player. He said that, by the time the album was mastered, he wanted all three LEDs to be lit up constantly. Grint states that the masters were rejected by Epic when they were sent to America, as the label believed there was an error in mastering. However, Owen Morris claims that neither he nor the band's management ever met Grint, let alone worked with him, and that he – Owen – mastered *Morning Glory* himself.

Whatever the case, the heavily compressed digital mastering was done in the UK and was released on Creation Records. The same mastering was sent to North America, and, like *Definitely Maybe* before it, Epic Records did some additional processing on it. This time, they reduced the entire album in level by about 3.5 dB and performed a high-frequency roll-off. This time, the EQ reduction started higher than *Definitely Maybe* – at about 8 kHz – but it was much more aggressive, scooping out up to 6 dB when it reached the 18 kHz range. There was barely any treble on the Creation CD to begin with, so the rationale behind this decision confounds me. You wouldn't think *Morning Glory* could sound any worse, but Epic found a way!

"Wonderwall" and "Don't Look Back In Anger"

The final two singles released from *Morning Glory* both use different mastering from the album version, but the differences are not major; the mastering is still heavily compressed. "Wonderwall" and its B-sides appear to have been mastered by somebody else, or using different gear; the sound of the compressor is noticeably different. "Don't Look Back In Anger", on the other hand, was mastered by the same engineer who did "Cigarettes And Alcohol" and "Whatever" – probably Owen Morris himself.

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Like “Roll With It”, these two singles were also released in Japan with no differences in track listing. This time, the mastering is identical, with no level shifts. If you have the Creation CD, the only thing you’re missing is the obi card that wraps around the spine of the Japanese CD case.

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The American “Wonderwall” Single

CD singles were very popular in the UK, but they never caught on to the same extent in North America. Nevertheless, “Wonderwall” was such a success that Epic Records put together a five-track single for the US market. In addition to the title track, it includes “Round Are Way”, “Talk Tonight”, “Rockin’ Chair”, and the live recording of “I Am The Walrus”.

What makes this disc unique is the fact that three of its five tracks are different to the British releases. “Wonderwall” is a different mix, with quieter lead vocals that have more reverb. “Talk Tonight” omits the studio chatter at the beginning, but features the original ending of the song, with Noel asking “You got any batteries?” in a silly voice. “Rockin’ Chair” starts at full blast instead of fading in, resulting in the song being a little bit longer. Also, while likely a mistake, “I Am The Walrus” has swapped stereo channels; only “Round Are Way” is the same as the British release, musically speaking.

This CD is especially of interest to audiophiles because the mastering is very different from the British releases, with more dynamic range. It’s still quite compressed, and the EQ is less preferable due to yet another roll-off of high frequencies, but there is an improvement in dynamic range across all the tracks. Although “Rockin’ Chair” and “Talk Tonight” had fairly good dynamics on their original singles, and thus don’t sound too different, the three remaining tracks are a significant improvement, with “I Am The Walrus” gaining 2 dB of dynamic range and “Round Are Way” gaining 3 over their Creation counterparts. That may not be a lot in the grand scheme of things, considering this single probably still has around 3-5 dB of compression on it, depending on the song, but 3-5 dB of dynamics lost is better than 7-8!

***Be Here Now* – Album and Singles**

Be Here Now is the first Oasis release to properly credit a mastering engineer – Mike Marsh at the Exchange. He mastered the album as well as the four singles that were released (one of them exclusive to Japan). A lot changed with regards to mastering between 1995 and 1997. The unstoppable success of *Morning Glory* led to many engineers copying the ultra-compressed sound for their masters, and lots of artists wanted their music to be as loud as Oasis so it would jump out of the speakers when played in jukeboxes or on the increasingly popular multi-disc CD players. Compressors were tweaked to get more gain with less distortion. The loudness war was now in full effect.

Consequently, *Be Here Now* and its singles surpassed “Whatever” in the race to become the loudest Oasis release to date. Also, since Mike Marsh mastered the album as well as the singles, they are digitally identical and cancel out perfectly in a null test. Well, for the most part, anyway: the intro of “D’You Know What I Mean?” is edited somewhat, making the song about 20 seconds shorter. “All Around The World” is actually *longer* on the single, with its fade-out uninterrupted by “It’s Gettin’ Better (Man!!)”; it goes on for about 20 seconds more. “Stand By Me” has its ending cross-faded with “(I Got) The Fever” rather than “I Hope, I Think, I Know”. But, for the bulk of the songs, the mastering is completely identical.

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In Japan, a fourth single was released, for “Don’t Go Away”. Again, the mastering is identical to the album version, except that the four drum stick clicks that begin the track are omitted. It’s also cross-faded into the next track, a live recording of “Cigarettes And Alcohol” that is not available on any other release. “Sad Song” is the same recording from the Japanese *Definitely Maybe* CD, but about 4 dB louder. “Fade Away” is a different version of the song with Noel singing lead and Liam singing backup, featuring Johnny Depp on guitar and Kate Moss on backing vocals. It previously appeared, with about 4 dB more dynamic range (but significantly duller EQ), on a Warchild-sponsored tribute compilation called *Help*, released on the Go! Discs label.

Like the *Be Here Now* album itself, many of the B-sides on these singles are cross-faded into one another. In fact, the only songs across all four singles that don’t cross-fade at all are “D’You Know What I Mean?” and “Stay Young”. “Going Nowhere” might also count; by the time it starts, the previous song’s fade-out is so quiet that you’d need to turn the volume up significantly to hear it (and, considering how loud the single is mastered, you might damage your equipment and your ears by doing that).

By inverting the polarity between the album and single masters of “Don’t Go Away” and “All Around The World”, you can isolate the beginning of “It’s Gettin’ Better (Man!!)” and the live recording of “Cigarettes And Alcohol”, and the entirety of “Be Here Now”. “Sad Song” uses a unique transfer compared to the Japanese *Definitely Maybe* CD, so even if you can match the EQ, you can’t isolate the ending of “Cigarettes And Alcohol”.

The Masterplan

This “best of the B-sides” compilation was intended for the US market. American fans were importing the Creation singles, which proved their loyalty but was also rather costly, and at that point the only B-sides that had been released in the country were found on the “Wonderwall” single. That, obviously, wasn’t all the best tracks... nor was it loud enough. So, in 1998, *The Masterplan* was put together... and, despite being intended for the American market, the album was most successful in the UK, where the singles were readily available. Go figure.

The Masterplan was mastered by Mike Marsh, the same engineer who mastered *Be Here Now*. While the album is as loud and compressed as you’d expect, what makes this release interesting is the fact that a lot of the early B-sides had more dynamic range than the albums at the time. Unfortunately, of the twenty or so B-sides with dynamic mastering, only five of them appear on this compilation: “Rockin’ Chair” from the “Roll With It” single, “I Am The Walrus” from the American “Wonderwall” EP, and all three B-sides from “Some Might Say”.

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For the most part, the tracks here match the versions found on the Creation singles. “Rockin’ Chair” fades in from silence, “Talk Tonight” has the thumping noise at the end, “Half The World Away” has the studio chatter at the beginning instead of it being placed in front of “Fade Away”. However, two songs are edited, and coincidentally both are from the “Cigarettes And Alcohol” single. The guitar solo of “Listen Up” is shortened, removing about 20 seconds from the song, and “I Am The Walrus” begins to fade out after about six minutes, instead of playing for its full eight-minute duration. It’s also worth noting that the fade-in of “Rockin’ Chair” and the fade-out of “I Am The Walrus” are compressed, meaning that the full-length tracks were mastered before the fades were applied.

Well, we know that there’s five tracks on this album that have better dynamic range elsewhere. But what about the others? Well, even though they were mastered by the same engineer, the two *Be Here Now* B-sides are actually a *little* bit quieter (and thus a *little* bit more dynamic) than the versions that appeared on the singles. Also, despite two of them being edited, the “Cigarettes And Alcohol” B-sides are a bit less shrill than they were on the single (although the “Wonderwall” version of “I Am The Walrus” is much more dull than this CD). Beyond that, differences are so small that it’s really just a matter of EQ preference; the singles are generally brighter, the album has more warmth in the bass. But they all still sound like Oasis.

Stop The Clocks

The next major release of the Creation-era material was the 2006 best-of compilation *Stop The Clocks*. Of the album’s 18 tracks, six came from *Definitely Maybe* (one of them a B-side), and eight came from *Morning Glory* (including three B-sides). Not a single *Be Here Now*-era track made the list, and only four songs from their three later albums made the cut. If you want to know why I’m not expanding this guide beyond the Creation-era material, look no further than the official “Best of Oasis”, 80% of which was first released during the same two-year window. And it was selected by Noel Gallagher. (That’s not to speak ill of the later material, much of which is great – but the few mastering variations that exist are extremely minor, and it all sounds like crap!)

All of these tracks were newly remastered by Ian Cooper, and supervised by Noel. As you would expect, they’re louder than ever before. There’s a lot more focus on the upper midrange in the EQ than previous releases. Also, the set is designed to flow as an album, so there is some editing to the tracks. For instance, “Morning Glory” is cross-faded directly into “Champagne Supernova”, skipping the “Swamp Song” excerpt. More puzzling, however, is the decision to fade “Supersonic” ten seconds early, or worse, the removal of about eight measures near the end of “Some Might Say”. “Slide Away” is also a slightly different mix, sounding very close to the album version but lacking Noel’s high harmony vocals on the pre-chorus.

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The biggest difference between this set and previous releases is that “Wonderwall” is not the same mix as the album version. It’s the alternate mix that was first released on the American “Wonderwall” single, although the channels are in the opposite orientation between the two. I don’t know which is correct; this CD has the acoustic guitar in the intro panned to the left, like it is on the album mix, but the American single has the arpeggiated guitar in the pre-chorus panned to the right, again like the album mix. Considering no other songs have swapped channels on this disc, but “I Am The Walrus” does on the single, I’m inclined to believe this is the correct one.

I’ll comment briefly on the later-era tracks: “Go Let It Out” is significantly louder than *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants*, and the EQ is similar; “Songbird” is only a little bit more compressed, but the EQ may be preferable due to it taming some of the high-end distortion on the vocals; both *Don’t Believe The Truth* tracks are about 1 dB louder but almost identical EQ-wise.

Stop The Clocks EP and Instrumentals CD

A four-song EP was released in conjunction with *Stop The Clocks*, imaginatively titled *Stop The Clocks EP*. It contains “Acquiesce” and “The Masterplan”, with identical mastering to the compilation they’re based on, and two extra songs: a “demo” of “Cigarettes And Alcohol” (which is actually a live radio broadcast, from the same BBC session as “I Will Believe” and “Bring It On Down” from the first two CD singles, recorded on 11 August 1993), and a live recording of “Some Might Say” from 1995. The latter was never reissued.

There also exists an extremely rare promotional CD containing instrumental mixes of eleven songs from the album. Surprisingly, there’s significantly greater dynamic range than not only the mastered *Stop The Clocks* CD, but also any previous CD releases. Due to its extreme rarity, I’m not entirely sure if this was a legitimate promotional release, or a bootleg disguised as one. I only have MP3 files of this, but those files contain several skips (indicating a damaged CD) and long periods of silence following the end of most songs; this last point suggests to me that it was not put together by an actual engineer, but just by somebody who had access to the files.

The versions of “Rock ‘N’ Roll Star”, “Cigarettes And Alcohol”, and “Slide Away” are not the finished album mixes, but the same early mixes that can be found on the *Definitely Maybe* “safety masters” CD-Rs. On the plus side, “Supersonic” and “Live Forever” are instrumental versions of the album mixes; unfortunately, “Live Forever” is fairly compressed, and we already have “Supersonic” with dynamic range, so the *Definitely Maybe* tracks are a bit underwhelming. “Some Might Say” is based on a different mix of the same take (most notably, the popping noise on the snare is gone; it seems that one of the two out-of-phase mics has been muted on this mix). “The Masterplan” has about 7.5 dB more dynamic range than the “Wonderwall” single, but surprisingly, it doesn’t sound too different; it’s improved, certainly, but the drums are still dull and buried in the mix, and there’s still no impact when the first chorus kicks in.

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For the four post-Creation songs, it's obvious that there is a lot more compression in the actual recording and mixing itself. The two *Don't Believe The Truth* tracks, in particular, are only marginally more dynamic than the album mastering. Whenever these instrumental mixes were made, it seems they were also mastered at the same time. "Songbird" sounds quite nice, but it's a quiet song to begin with, and compared to the instrumental, there's only about 2 or 3 dB of dynamic range compressed out of the album version anyway. The instrumental disc is a nice curiosity, but not essential; it would have been more interesting to have a song like "Champagne Supernova" or "Morning Glory" present with dynamic mastering to hear what it actually *could* sound like.

Time Flies... 1994-2009

Following the band's split in 2009, this compilation rounds up all 27 of their singles. The DVD is a must-own for Noel's deadpan *Mystery Science Theater 3000* commentary on all of the songs; the CD, on the other hand, is not as essential. While it does contain the rarity "Lord Don't Slow Me Down", every single song on this disc is simply a digital clone of another CD.

"Supersonic", "Shakermaker", and "Cigarettes And Alcohol" are digital clones of the *Definitely Maybe* Creation CD. "Whatever" is the same mastering as the single. "Some Might Say", "Roll With It", and "Don't Look Back In Anger" are identical to the Creation *Morning Glory* disc, right down to the wonky stereo EQ on the first two. "D'You Know What I Mean?" is identical to the *Be Here Now* album, and "All Around The World" is identical to the single (albeit with a digital fade-out at the very end). "Live Forever" and "Wonderwall" use the masters from *Stop The Clocks*, "Wonderwall" being the alternate mix. Only "Stand By Me" is at all unique – it has the same Mike Marsh mastering for the majority of the song, but it also has a full ending instead of crossfading with another track. It's not simply a fade-out, it's a true ending; however, that ending also doesn't cancel perfectly with either the album or the single master, either.

As for the other tracks, they're all digitally identical to their respective album and/or single masters, except "Lyla" and "The Importance Of Being Idle", which are identical to *Stop The Clocks*. Also, the North American edition omits "Sunday Morning Call" (a hidden track on every other CD) and includes "Champagne Supernova" due to the song's success in the States; this mastering is identical to the Creation *Morning Glory* CD.

Chasing the Sun: Remastered and Expanded Deluxe Editions

In 2014, deluxe editions of the first three albums were announced. Audiophiles started to get hopeful when an article published on Owen Morris's website stated that they would sound "pretty much exactly like" the original half-inch analog master tapes, not like the heavy-handed versions he mastered. The track lists were revealed: each would be three CDs, with the first disc being a remastered version of the album, the second consisting of B-sides and other previously released tracks, and the third being filled with unreleased demos, live recordings, and other things of that nature.

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Well, those who were hoping these releases would be a sonic improvement over the original CDs had their hopes dashed when the remasters turned out to be *even louder*. It seems that Mr. Morris's comment about sounding "pretty much exactly like" the un-mastered analogue tapes only referred to EQ, not compression. Listening to a song like "Champagne Supernova", the bass and high end are significantly reduced compared to the Creation CD mastering. It's quite possible this is what the original mix's EQ sounded like.

The wealth of bonus content these sets provide is incredible. "Bonehead's Bank Holiday", which was previously only available on the vinyl edition of (*What's The Story*) *Morning Glory?* makes its digital debut. Each set includes a full disc of previously unreleased material, and the legendary Mustique demos for *Be Here Now* were finally released – although due to litigation from ABKCO over an uncleared Rolling Stones sample, the demo of "Be Here Now" is replaced by an irrelevant (although gorgeous) instrumental.

It should be noted that the deluxe editions are not totally comprehensive. *Definitely Maybe* excludes the live take of "Bring It On Down" from the "Shakermaker" single, and while it includes most of the legendary "Union Jack Swirl" cassette, "Bring It On Down" is missing. (Compleatists will note that the "White Label Demo" of "Columbia" is a longer alternate mix of the same track on the tape – only the B-side version is present here.) *Morning Glory* omits "Live Forever" from Glastonbury '95 (from the "Roll With It" single) and the demo and live versions of "Some Might Say" (from the Japanese single and *Stop The Clocks EP* respectively). *Be Here Now* lacks "Heroes" and "Street Fighting Man" from the singles for "D'You Know What I Mean?" and "All Around The World"; it's also missing the live take on "Cigarettes & Alcohol" and the acoustic "Fade Away", both from the Japanese *Don't Go Away* single (although the latter belongs with *Morning Glory*, chronologically speaking).

What about the sound quality? I've already mentioned that they're all louder than the previous releases, but are they better EQ-wise? Well, the stereo channels of *Morning Glory* are properly balanced for the first time... but that's about it as far as positives go from an audiophile perspective. *Definitely Maybe* is the best of the three, but still inferior; the bass is improved, but the snare drum sinks back considerably, and the vocals just sound unnatural. *Morning Glory*, already a muddy mess of an album, has *less* treble than the original CD – *except* on "Wonderwall" and "Don't Look Back In Anger", which are louder than the rest of the disc. And if you thought *Be Here Now* wasn't loud enough, the bass was just too damn high in the mix, and the instruments just had *too much* clarity and separation, then this nasally, midrange-centric sonic atom bomb has you covered.

While writing this, I came across an interview with Owen Morris, where he stated that "Shakermaker" was fully recorded, mixed, *and* mastered with the original "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" lyric, and that the "Mister Sifter sold me songs" lyric was recorded after the fact in order to avoid a lawsuit. The final mixes were printed to both half-inch analogue tape, as well as DAT – the latter of which was used for the original CD mastering. If those lyrics were recorded after the song was mastered, does that mean they *aren't* on the analogue tape?

More Than You Ever Wanted or Needed to Know About Oasis CD Mastering

I checked the spectrogram of the remastered “Shakermaker”, and sure enough, for that verse, there is an obvious change in the source; instead of the frequency information reaching all the way to 22 kHz as it does for much of the song, there is a roll-off starting at about 21.5 kHz for that specific section. This suggests that the analogue master tape actually contains the “Coke” lyric instead of “Mister Sifter”, and that the correct lyric was “flown in” from the DAT when the album was remastered. (Credit must be given to Ian Cooper for matching the EQ perfectly for a seamless transition!)

This also made me wonder about “Slide Away”, because the version included as part of the remastered album is the same mix as *Stop The Clocks*, lacking Noel’s high harmony vocals in the pre-chorus (“Slide in, baby, together we’ll fly”). It’s worth noting that this same mix also appears on the *Definitely Maybe* “safety masters”. There’s no obvious way to tell, as there was with “Shakermaker”, but I suspect those backing vocals may have also been recorded after the “final” mixes, and thus only exist on the DAT master.

So, are the deluxe editions worth buying? It depends on how much you love Oasis, and how much you’re bothered by loud mastering. If you aren’t interested in the unreleased bonus content and you just want the original albums and singles in the best quality possible (which, admittedly, is not great), then you’ll want to skip these and just track down the original pressings. But, if you’re a fan and you can tolerate the extreme mastering, these are wonderful and can be had quite cheaply. The Mustique demos for *Be Here Now*, in particular, are essential – and, interestingly enough, have much better dynamic range than the rest of the discs.

In terms of improvement in sound quality over previous releases, these expanded reissues score a big fat F. But it’s not like the originals scored an A to begin with. And, really, when you can get three hours’ worth of Oasis for twenty bucks (or less!), there’s really no reason to complain. We may want our music dynamic and tastefully EQ’d – and certainly, it does sound better that way – but, at the end of the day, it’s just rock ’n’ roll... d’you know what I mean?