

SPOTLIGHT



Scarlett Page

JAMES BLUNT

A mega-selling artist recaptures his past to move forward

"WHAT I'M ABOUT IS NOT TRYING to write songs that get played on the radio or become hit singles," says James Blunt, "because that would be a hollow inspiration for making music. A desperately hollow inspiration." To most who know his music or his name, Blunt is the pop star who sold around 20 million records over the past decade, powered by the megahit "You're Beautiful."

More hit singles followed that song, including the recent effervescent Ryan Tedder co-write "Bonfire Heart," the lead single from his new album *Moon Landing*. However, as Blunt sees it, his work isn't chart-topping pop, but deeper, soul-bearing music. "Over the past few years I've had experiences that are good and some really bad, and I wanted to capture them for this record," he explains.

"When I write songs, it's without *you* in mind—that's why it's so naked and raw and personal to me. It's someone exposing their vulnerability in a world where people are posturing and posing, talking about what's cool or what car they drive. This isn't an album to keep up my image or a front. It shows weaknesses and fallibility. That's what I think is more important than pretending to be something I'm not."

At the start of his career in 2004—fresh out of the British army, where he held the rank of captain—Blunt's debut, *Back to Bedlam*, was released on indie label Custard Records. Atlantic snapped him up, and by 2005 he was a household name with the year's biggest album (current worldwide sales for the record top 11 million). For *Moon Landing*, Blunt decided to return to his roots.

"I went back to Tom Rothrock, who recorded my first album," says Blunt, 39. "I wanted to capture it like we did before there was an audience, before there was an expectation of an audience. So we recorded it in that indie way, like we recorded *Back to Bedlam*."

As he speaks, a car whizzes the singer around L.A. to tape a performance on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. Blunt has a large audience and is still signed to a major label. For many artists in his position, it's important to maintain relevance not only to his audience, but also in the current music market climate. But Blunt doesn't seem concerned about popularity.

"To stay relevant to what?" Blunt asks, somewhat aghast. "As a musician, for me, I'm writing about personal experiences. I'm not writing words that you need to hear, I'm writing words that I need to say."

—Linda Laban

