

# '80s band Blondie makes lukewarm attempt at comeback

'NO EXIT' TRIES TOO HARD TO GET WITH THE '90S AND OFFERS TOO LITTLE OF BLONDIE'S BEST SOUND

By Nicole Garton  
Oregon Daily Emerald

When embarking upon an attempt at a major comeback, a formerly successful band has two options.

It can try to recapture its former magic by reviving the old hits that made it big in the first place, or it can hope to slip into the present by riding the latest music trend.

With "No Exit," Blondie's first release after 16 years of nonexistence, the late-'70s new-age punk band takes a crack at both — and does a pretty decent job.

Blondie never was a band to work within the narrow confines of one music genre. In their five years of fame, they produced everything from disco dance tunes, sexy ballads and reggae to early rap songs, psychedelic romps and the driving, punchy rock anthems they are best known

for. And they did it all well.

With "No Exit," the members of Blondie continue their all-over-the-map approach to music as though they had never stopped.

The album's first single, "Maria," is a catchy anthem reminiscent of Blondie classics such as "X Offender" (1976) and "Dreaming" (1979). Lively guitar and energetic drums punctuate Deborah Harry's rich vocals to create an aesthetically pleasing foot-tapper — just the kind of song radio stations love to over-play. "Maria" even borrows a line from the song "Walk Like Me" (1980): "She's like a millionaire, walking on imported air."

To further recreate the Blondie sound that fans fell in love with two decades ago, the CD includes a funky-up remake of the 1975 tune "Out in the Streets," which was first released on "The Platinum Collection" in 1994.

From there, however, "No Exit" departs from the "typical" Blondie sound in a big way.

The title track begins with a gothic organ intro and launches

into a laid-back rap song that Harry performs along with rapper Coolio. This track is Blondie's most obvious attempt at endearing the band to current music audiences, and while the band's right to rap is indisputable — Blondie created what is arguably the first rap song in 1980 with "Rapture" — the genre is definitely not the band's strong point.

Harry has no problem singing tough even at age 53, and drummer Clem Burke sets a driving beat, but "No Exit" lacks the energy and flare of the band's best music. And Coolio's performance on the album diminishes rather than enhances the band's sound.

Like "No Exit," the opening track is also tinged with a sort of monster-mash gothic flavor. Blondie dabbles in ska a bit with "Screaming Skin," whose lyrics deal with Harry's experience nursing her one-time partner and Blondie guitarist Chris Stein through a rare and often fatal genetic disease.

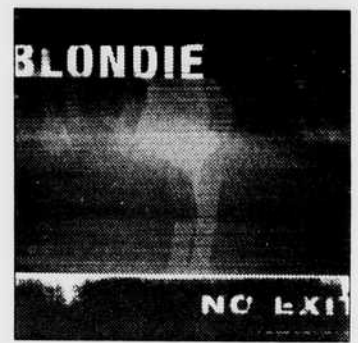
As though defiant toward the disease that contributed to the band's demise, Stein approaches

"Screaming Skin" with a vengeance, while Harry attacks the playful lyrics with equally playful vocals, and oddly, the song ends up sounding not unlike many of the band's less popular older tunes.

The rest of the CD continues to offer a platter of musical genres and sounds. "Boom Boom in the Zoom Zoom Room" is a jazzy lounge air that hearkens to Harry's recent years fronting the band Jazz Passengers, while "Forgive and Forget" combines an electronic jungle beat with eerie, hypnotic vocals.

Overall, "No Exit" is much like many of Blondie's older albums. It covers a range of styles, it stretches the versatility of the band, and although the songs aren't necessarily spectacular at first listen, they tend to grow on you. Perhaps that is the primary quality that has helped the band maintain a strong fan base for the nearly two decades between releases.

Although "No Exit" is a little rusty as the band searches for footing in the ever-evolving music industry, it is still worth buying — at least for nostalgia's sake.



No Exit

Artist: Blondie  
Genre: Alternative  
Released: February 1999  
Score: ★★★★★

## Blondie

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their second album, "Parallel Lines."

From there, the band enjoyed a three-year wave of success with three more albums, two of which went platinum, and two more number-one singles, including "Call Me" from the film "American Gigolo." But in 1982, the group fizzled, torn apart by disension and the rare genetic disease contracted by Stein.

Although Blondie hung around for only half a decade, the band left a lasting mark on the music industry. Blondie transcended genres and pioneered new ones, making history as one of the inventors of punk music and the first band to combine rock with reggae and disco.

As a band, Blondie did anything and everything, including topping the charts with a disco song at the height of anti-disco sentiment. And as a lead singer, Harry took the same approach.

With her bleached mop, her former-playboy-bunny-bad-girl attitude and her outrageous wardrobe, Harry paved the way for the naughty blonde vocalists who have spread themselves over the pop charts during the past decade-and-a-half.

"I think she was a ground-

breaker — there's no doubt that she was," Walker said. "[Harry] was going off in a different direction. They had a different style, a different look and a different sound than what was happening at that time."

Nearly two decades after their breakup, Blondie returns to the music scene not as a pioneer, but as a band out to prove it still has the stuff. Although "No Exit" features a few tunes sporting the classic Blondie sound, it makes an effort to dip into the latest music trends, including the ska romp "Screaming Skin" and the title track Harry performs with rapper Coolio.

"They're doing a good job of staying on top of the times. They've got their finger on what's hip now," said Krista Meyer, a Eugene resident and a fan of '80s music. "They're not doing the techno thing; they're sticking to pop, which is what they do best."

However, Meyer added that the band is trying a little too hard.

"Coolio just doesn't work, and that ska-thing they do on the first song ['Screaming Skin'] is too all over the place," she said. "But people really seem to like it ... Debbie Harry still looks awesome."

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