



Interview by Elizabeth Rhodes  
photographer Saryn Christina

# Blitz Vega

Andy Rourke (The Smiths) and Kav Sandhu (formerly Happy Mondays) decided on a unique way to start their next project. Instead of the standard strategy of releasing studio material first, Rourke and KAV pulled together Blitz Vega with Thomas Arizmendi (guitar/backing vocals), Asa Brown (keyboards/backing vocals), Greg Gent (guitar/backing vocals), and Craig Eriksson (drums) and took up shop at the legendary Abbey Road Studios. There they recorded a number of tracks live in-studio to be released as a live EP and docu-film (release date TBD), capturing the energy of the live and the historic surroundings. Auxiliary discussed with them the single "Lost and Found", the birth of this new project, and the benefits of leaving one's ego at the door in a collaborative musical environment.

## How did this project get started?

**Kav Sandhu :** We've crossed paths back in the UK quite a few times and became friends. Andy moved to New York and I was coming to the USA to play Coachella festival with the [Happy] Mondays. So we were backstage and Andy was DJing at that festival as well and we just talked about the possibility that we might make music one day. Forward a few years, I was running some club nights including in downtown LA called Downtown Panic, and Andy came over to DJ, and that was it really. We spoke again about getting into the studio together and then about six months later we actually did and just really enjoyed working together. We didn't even have a name or have any plans to go out on tour or do anything. We were just making music and enjoying it. Suddenly, it became something pretty serious and we were like, "Okay, cool, let's start a new band," and that was it.  
**Andy Rourke:** We just connected and we realized that we wanted to make music together. And that's what we've been doing.

## Kav, you have noted the name Blitz Vega is symbolic of the music you and Andy create. How did you two come to settle on this band name?

**KS :** We didn't have a name when we started recording so it wasn't something that we'd actually thought about yet. I started suggesting different names to Andy. The weird thing is I was looking at different languages, like the connections between Sanskrit and Latin and "vega" pops up on both. It kept on popping up again and again and again, and it was just there all the time. There are so many different meanings to the word "vega" and anyway that's how Vega came about. And "blitz" again was a similar sort of thing, the music was just "bang bang", it was like a blitz, and I think I was describing the music to somebody and I said, "Oh it's just like an explosion, it's like a blitz, it's like bang." I suggested Blitz Vega to Andy and that's how it came about. It kind of described the music and it just fit the sound of the band.

**AR :** Immediately, it fit. It just resonated and it was the perfect name, I think, for what we're doing.

**KS :** Yeah, it just felt right and then the music kinda began to also fit the name in a weird way, the other way around. That gave us an idea of where we were going. Both the music and the name just go hand in hand. It wasn't really something that was over-thought apart from the fact that I was deep in crazy research one night online.

## So what is the definition of the word "vega"?

**KS :** Well, in Sanskrit I found a character that was a description for a soldier, gods, certain philosophies and a connection to a lot of positive energy. That connects with stars and the solar system, energies and stuff like that. I guess what I'm describing sounds a lot deeper than it was, but really that was it. Everything that I kept coming across with "vega" was positive and it was used in a way that I connected with it immediately.

## Both of you have extensive previous experience playing music in bands. How is this experience unique?

**AR :** I would say it's unique in that me and Kav aren't controlling people and we communicate. There's no competitions and there's no hierarchy or anything like that. That's probably the first time that I worked in a band that has that philosophy.  
**KS :** It's just a really enjoyable process. Andy really helps me express myself and as a musician I feel really comfortable working with him. The band we have with us, they're all great guys [Thomas Arizmendi (guitar/backing vocals), Asa Brown (keyboards/backing vocals), Greg Gent (guitar/backing vocals) and Craig Eriksson (drums)]. It just feels right and we haven't had any crazy arguments or anything. We're just in there doing what we do making music and we enjoy it more than anything in the world, that's the most important thing to it. From a musical point of view, the energy of the band and everything we saw come out with this, it's not over-planned, it's natural. As a writer and musician, especially these days, you can get caught up with the science of songwriting, whether something works or has to sound a certain way when it comes to music production and everything. Because we're in a world where certain stuff is only played on radio or makes it on

to playlists on streaming channels and stuff like that, people tend to follow certain formulas and so musicians think about those things a lot, which is fair enough. The first song we released, we actually just plugged in both of us and pressed record and we did it in one or two takes. That was it. We didn't sit there and write our individual parts, we just did what we did and it just worked. And I think for me that's the most important thing. I just want it to be natural, I want it to be spontaneous and I want to feel it and enjoy it. I feel like Andy is the easiest person in the world to work with when it comes to just following that philosophy.

**AR :** Well, it's definitely spontaneity because we never over thought things, we just got in there and did it. And I think you can hear that in the results.

## Are you familiar with the concept of flow state? It means being 'in the zone' and fully immersed, engaged and focused without much conscious thought.

**KS :** That's absolutely spot-on. It's that creative sort of expression. It's as if you've got all these ideas floating around and you just connect with it. Again, you just don't overthink it. We just want to express ourselves and that's it. We kept those mistakes in there. It's often a vocal take or a guitar line where I've made a mistake: when you perfect it on the next take, then something happens. It seems to lose the energy.  
**AR :** You lose something.

**KS :** Yeah, you lose something that you can't explain. It's taken me a while to come around to this way of thinking, to go back to what it was like when you first picked up a guitar or you first picked up whatever instrument or whatever you do, and you just basically go with it. Sometimes in life you get to a point where you analyze everything, you try to think, "Okay, well if I do it this way, this is how it's supposed to be done," or this works or that doesn't work. I think this is capturing that moment, the songs just kind of 'fall out of the sky' if you know what I mean.  
**AR :** What we did with Abbey Road Studios, there weren't any rules, just doing live takes or overdubs, anything that was a 'flying by the seat of your pants' moment. I don't know, people don't do that anymore.

**KS :** When we went into Abbey Road, you can feel the history when you walk in. The energy's there, you're just sizing up the place anyway, and it was the first time we were performing live but the idea was to perform completely live. We're recording a live mini-album or an EP or whatever you want to call it, but with a film crew who are making a documentary on the band. So the idea was: let's just play live, record it and that's our EP. Whatever mistakes are in there, whatever we capture we capture, we just go with it because that's what it was meant to be. We were really happy with it because we'd already set out and said we're not going back, we're not doing any overdubs, you're not getting a chance to sing your vocals again, you can't redo your basslines. That's it. Somehow that captured that energy and it just feels great, that vibe. I guess we wanted to go back to the way bands did back in the 60s and 70s. There's a reason why people always go back to those old bands because they can really feel that special connection between the musicians. You can take four musicians, put them in a room together and play the exact same three chords as another four musicians. For some reason, one set of musicians it just works, it sounds amazing, those three chords sound incredible because of the connection between those four people. It's really special. Whereas the other four people, they're just musicians, it sounds awful, it sounds rubbish. They're all great players, they're all great musicians, but for some reason it just doesn't connect.

## What do you attribute that to?

**KS :** I definitely think there's a connection between people. It's like with anything in life, you have a natural connection with some people and you're on the same wavelength.  
**AR :** Yeah, I think there has to be passion, everyone in the same room is feeling that passion to make something beautiful. If everybody's focused in that same moment, some magic happens.  
**KS :** It's like when you're around people and somebody could be really negative or they're just going through something in their life and they're expressing themselves in a certain way, that obviously affects you because you absorb that and it's the same thing with playing music together. So, you can have a negative



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person in the band who's just not enjoying the music or isn't there with you and then everybody feels it and it sounds awful. I guess it's just one of those things that you can try to explain, but there's something just unexplainable about it. It definitely works and we all feel it. We have this drummer who's got a really great vibe about him. He just exudes this vibe, you kind of absorb it, the whole band feels good because of it.

AR : Certainly all about positivity and if you don't have it in the studio then you shouldn't even be in there. We were so lucky to work with so many great musicians making the record.

KS : All of those guys, they're all those kinds of people and it really worked for us. We've been really happy and lucky I guess.

AR : We actually all get along, you know. No ego, no arguments.

KS : You have to leave your ego outside the door. Everybody's got an ego I guess but you just leave it outside.

AR : And doing the thing that we love most which is just playing music. We're lucky that's what we can do on a day to day basis.

### What bands, visual artists, etc do you feel inspired by?

AR : I suppose one of my first inspirations was Neil Young. I so love what he does. Also beat poets and stuff like that.

KS : Andy's really inspired by life as well. Everything that affects him on a day to day basis which is similar to me as a songwriter. It could be anything. I could be sitting having a beer somewhere and it just hits me. I could be running or something when lyrics flash into my head so I stop and put lyrics into my phone or whatever. You know, from a musical point of view, I suppose you can name people like Neil Young as a kid, the [Rolling] Stones or The Beatles. I come from the era of Nirvana at school so they were a huge influence to me, Kurt Cobain completely changed my life. I guess if it's a day to day thing it's a life thing, you know, you just connect with it.

I sort of fell out of love with music at one point and I thought I'd had enough of being creative. I drove to a beach in Malibu, it was a stormy day in 2016. I'd had enough, I'm not going to be in a band anymore, I'm just fed up with the way music's going and everything that goes with the industry and stuff. So I pulled up on the beach and this car pulled up behind me, and it was Neil Young. It was basically just me, my girlfriend and Neil Young with his partner at the time, on the beach. I think at first I kind of froze because it's Neil Young. I thought, "Shit, it's Neil Young, he's like John Lennon to me and people like that." So he drove off but I knew there was a dead end on the road ahead and now my girlfriend was like, "Kav, you need to go and speak to him, otherwise you'll always regret it." So I pulled up next to him, said, "Hey Neil," in my Leicester accent. He started laughing and he was like, "Hey," and leaned into the car and just started chatting. We had this conversation about music, the weather, the environment, everything. It was weird. It changed my life and gave me the love of music again. It was a big inspirational moment.

### What a coincidence that you've both talked about Neil Young. In a way, we have Neil Young to thank for you being here right now, right?

AR : We really do.

KS : Yeah, we do. And everything he stands for is so relevant still to this day. He's still out there doing what he's doing. Oh, and the crazy thing about it: as we were driving to the beach in Malibu, we were listening to Neil Young.

AR : Hopefully, Kav, you weren't listening to *Crazy Horse*, that would be even more crazy.

KS : I always talk this one up, this is the first time I've actually told it in an interview but I'm always on about it. "Oh, this is the time I met Neil Young, and guess what?" You know, all that. Anyway, yeah, we have got a lot to thank Neil Young for.

### How would you describe the experience of your live performances? You've already spoken about the other members of the band and how they've con-

tributed, but what if somebody has not seen you perform as Blitz Vega, what would they be in for?

KS : A really energetic performance. It's pretty intense. We're up-tempo for at least the first half of the set, so I hope people can feel the energy.

AR : Yeah, we're working pretty hard. It is intense, in a good way.

KS : It's got that rock and roll kind of vibe to it, not really just in sound because we combine a lot of different styles and I suppose meshing different genres slightly. It's pretty up-tempo but then we sort of calm down to the last part of the set. That said, we really put everything into our performances but it's something we don't really think about, it just happens.

### Working in the music industry, how is it different now than when you started playing music?

KS : I mean me personally, I think it's a challenge for musicians being ripped off and not getting paid for the music that they've made.

AR : That's an ongoing challenge for me.

KS : I guess musicians being able to make money to survive. The value of music. You put so much into making a song, everything you have to invest into doing it. You get a lot back from some of the people reacting to it and enjoying it and that's fantastic, but you have to really hit a lot of numbers for that to actually come back and pay for your groceries.

AR : I think we would probably have to change how musicians get paid. I just think it's so unfair and corrupt and you know, where's all this money going? Spotify and all these companies, it's just crazy. We're not getting revenue back from that. They're taking all the revenue. It's ridiculous.

KS : We've been going through a bit of transition in the music industry and it has been a little bit like the Wild West. There's a lot of opportunities for people who are able to get in there and somehow exploit the industry. I know that's been going on for years but that's made it pretty difficult now for musicians to get paid. For example, some artists definitely have been surviving on getting in commercials, TV shows and movies and that's been great, then the rise of things like Netflix and stuff like that. That's been really positive. Once that was paying a certain amount but because everybody's now doing that as well, it's brought the fees down again and you're never guaranteed to get something. So it's one of those things that you have to navigate and adapt. For a band, the main thing for us is playing live and going out on tour because at least people are out there to want experiences. You can't fake the band playing live, that's one thing live bands have got. No matter what, people will go out to see a show because they want to experience that. Kids love that as well. They may not spend their money on buying records or merch or whatever, but they'll go to a show and they'll experience a band and they'll pay whatever for a ticket so that's kind of where you have to get to. The record and the streaming side of things I guess is there to elevate your ticket sales, so the industry's just changed in a way. We're adapting. But it's hard for musicians, they have to get to a really high level to be able to get something back from it.

### Given you both have extensive experience performing and as DJs, what do you see trending currently as far as genres and culture overall?

KS : From a music point of view I've seen recently a lot of local bands which is great. Back in London, I spent a bit of time there in the early part of [2019] and I could see that there's a lot of new bands coming through. Young bands that don't have deals and stuff like that, which is great. Here in LA I guess it's just where I spend most of my time and the music scene is great. There seems to be a lot of bands coming through, a lot of nights out there, people going out to watch new artists. You could say rock and roll or you could say 90s revival or whatever, but seeing more of that is really refreshing. I know electronic music's been really big in clubs and I love it when you combine both and bring in a live rock and roll band and merge that all together. So it's nice to see artists doing that and that's what I've been seeing from a music point of view.

AR : I'm terrible when it comes to going to concerts and gigs. I suffer from anxiety and claustrophobia, something like that. I'm just not very good with being in



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public and crowds. I would like to go see more music concerts, but it just gives me anxiety.

KS : Andy's kind of place is on stage. The audience is over there and he's on stage doing his thing, playing with the band.

**Andy, would it be fair to say that you are the type of person who wants to take in your music by coming home with the record, putting it on your turntable and just having a listen, on your own, in your own home?**

AR : Yeah, how did you know? [laughs] I've become a collector of vinyl. I had a big collection in England but I just left it there so it's all in storage. It's only recently that I've started buying again.

**What are your favorite record shops?**

KS : Back in the UK, same as Andy, I have a huge vinyl collection. Growing up there used to be a lot of record shops in my hometown of Leicester and you used to be able to buy a 7 inch for 99p or 50p so I would just go in with my pocket money and then spend it on records.

AR : Yeah, back in my day, the cap was the Piccadilly Records in Manchester.

KS : I like going into Amoeba [Music]. It's a cliché for LA but I like really going in and getting lost in there. It's definitely a lovely place to spend an afternoon, because you've got so much space, it's great. I really miss that you used to have Tower Records in London on Piccadilly and that was somewhere worth going to. There was a great record shop back in England called Rockaboom where I spent a lot of my teenage years going and picking records. There used to be one I liked on Hillhurst Avenue as well, in LA. It closed maybe about two or three years ago, so sad that they closed. I think it's a café now or something like that. I would go in and pick up old 60s and 70s records, some old school R&B, Otis Redding, Pink Floyd. You can't beat vinyl, really. It's capturing something about that sound and it's just a whole different kind of vibe. We'll tape stuff from the digital recording and put it back into a computer, but we've managed to capture that kind of warmth from somewhere again, so it just works. It's the same thing with vinyl.

**I definitely agree there's something about vinyl that's so different than any digital device that you can play music on. There's warmth and more intimacy**

**when you're putting a record on and you can adjust the levels, if you've got that kind of setup. You can really participate in the music in a different way than if you're just on your laptop listening.**

AR : Yeah, there's definitely a warmth that comes through with vinyl. The digital, it compresses everything and makes it just sound strange. So, yeah, I love vinyl. I continue to buy vinyl.

**Where should fans go to follow you online?**

KS : Everybody can find us on Instagram @BlitzVega and on Facebook at BlitzVegaMusic, on Twitter it's @BlitzVegaMusic, and individually...

AR : The individual for my own is @AndyRockMusic on Instagram.

KS : Same thing on Facebook you're Andy Rock Music as well. I'm just Kav Blaggerz, which is @KavBlaggerz.

**What's next for each of you and Blitz Vega?**

KS : We'll release another single and follow up with an EP, then the album and the live Abbey Road session as well, so that's the plan but our single "Lost and Found" is out [as of] September 20, 2019. That was mixed by a great producer and mixer who has worked with bands we're both big fans of like Primal Scream, Kasabian, and Massive Attack. We're going to be touring mainly [in 2020] and just sort of trying to cover as many countries as possible and play as many festivals as we can. That's kind of the plan for the band.

**Does the documentary film recorded during the Abbey Road Studios sessions have a release date coming up or is that still to be determined?**

KS : Yeah that's definitely still to be worked out. We're still filming so we've been filming stuff like the LA show we played at the House of Machines and filming in the studio, and then they'll come on the road with us. I suppose the earliest it would actually come out would be after we've released the album, but I think we'll be releasing the actual live show from Abbey Road and hopefully a vinyl release before we release the movie.

You can check out their new single "Hey Christo" on the official **Blitz Vega YouTube** account.

