



“It’s changed my whole world,” says singer-songwriter-producer Bleu. “I have a completely new outlook on my career and my life. It sounds dramatic, but it’s really true.”

The gifted pop-rocker’s effusive words don’t refer to the creation of his dynamic, highly personal new album, *Four*. Nor do they reflect his work as co-writer with chart-topping acts like the Jonas Brothers and Selena Gomez. Rather, they convey his response to the astonishing generosity of his fans, who helped him raise some \$27,000 in a single week following the launch of his campaign on DIY fundraising site [Kickstarter](#).

As a result of fans’ contributions, he’s been able to launch his own record label and put *Four* out himself in North America (U.K. indie Lojinx acquired the rights to release the record across the pond).

The financial offerings were accompanied by fervent good wishes. “I only wish I could afford to pledge more,” goes a typical comment. “I want to help because you are giving me so much with your music,” reads another, while still another admirer writes, “Loved your music for years—so glad to help in any way and be a small part of your work!”

Bleu was stunned by the enthusiasm of his loyal fan base, “I was playing a show a couple of weeks ago and told everybody about the whole thing,” he recalls. “I started crying onstage.”

The release follows on the heels of 2009’s critically admired *A Watched Pot* (which suffered, promotionally, from big-label implosions far out of his control), and comes amid a flurry of co-writing and production projects. “I really enjoy working with other artists part of the time and then creating my own material,” he says. “It keeps things nicely balanced.”

What’s more, *Four* demonstrates Bleu’s decision to forego what he calls the “brass ring” of the pop mainstream in favor of pleasing those dedicated fans. “I made this record just for me and them,” he says. “I just want to take more chances and make them – and me – happy.”

Not that he’s neglected his preternatural skill at crafting gigantic hooks. *Four* is packed with pop pleasures, such as the rollicking opener “Singin’ in Tongues”; the stirring hometown anthem “B.O.S.T.O.N.”; the ecstatic “Dead in the Mornin’”; the propulsive, questing “Know It”; the menacing rocker “Evil Twin”; the sprawling, melodic suite “Ya Catch More Flies With Honey Than Vinegar”; and more besides. But the lyrics of these effortlessly catchy tunes often find him venturing into more spiritual, and sometimes much darker, territory than ever before.

Bleu recalls that the title for “Dead in the Mornin’” preceded the actual song by a fairly long stretch. “I was thinking about my mortality when I came up with the title, but I didn’t want to write this melancholy dirge,” he points out. “Then I thought, ‘What if it’s a big gospel rave-up?’ When I think about my death, my funeral – which we all do – my great desire is that it’ll be a celebration, a party. Everybody wants that New Orleans-style funeral. It IS the best way to send somebody off. It’s personal, but tongue-in-cheek.” The story-song “Singin’ in Tongues” also contains what Bleu admits is a religious subtext: “It’s not really about me,” he relates, “but it does address the way music has saved me from total destruction. There’s a lot of God in it.”

He acknowledges putting what he calls “a lot of weirdly morbid, upbeat stuff” on *Four*, noting various references to death (albeit mostly in high-energy rock settings) throughout. “Needless to say,” he adds, “my mom’s not too happy about it.”

“Like everyone else, I’m always grappling with these issues of death, God, the afterlife, my legacy – all the real things,” Bleu adds of the album’s themes. “That’s reflected on this record; it’s not just a bunch of love songs.” Of course, the love songs it *does* include are choice, notably the exquisitely tender “In Love With My Lover” and the Lennon-esque, orchestral torch number “How Blue.” As always, he insists, “I’m trying to find new angles on classic subjects.”

But he’s clearly delighted not to concern himself with the market-driven, committee-based processes of the record biz, which have dogged him since his stunning, ambitious debut, *Redhead*, appeared on Columbia/Aware Records in 2003, earning a spot on NPR’s Top Ten Records of the Year and landing one of its songs on the *Spiderman* soundtrack – but falling victim to the obscure predations of label politics. “*Four* is the adult version of *Redhead*, in a way,” he relates. “It’s me as a mature songwriter, loosened up and trying to move toward bigger, more personal themes. I’m done writing big pop songs that are supposed to appeal to everybody. I don’t have to.”

Part of the reason he doesn’t have to: the songs he’s penned with and for the Jonas Brothers, Selena Gomez, Hanson, Jon McLaughlin, Kate Voegele and other pop-radio mainstays whose gold and platinum successes allow Bleu to forget the aforementioned “brass ring” in his solo material and focus on following his muse.

“People ask me all the time, ‘Don’t you feel like having cuts with these mass-appeal artists might make people take you less seriously?’ That’s never been a concern of mine, and frankly, I don’t even understand the question – I really enjoy mass-appeal pop. But in any case, being able to do that allows me to do my own stuff my own way.” What’s more, he places bubblegum icon Britney Spears at the top of the list of artists he’d like to work with. “I just love her, especially her last few records,” he says. “Not that I wouldn’t be thrilled to work with bands like The Arcade Fire and My Morning Jacket, if the opportunity came along. But writing for Britney would be fantastic.”

In addition to his solo work, production projects (Drake Bell, TV/TV, Air Traffic Controller, Chris Mann) and commercial tunesmithery, Bleu has organized and/or lent his voice and playing to inventive side projects like the rock band The Major Labels (with his pals and fellow pop geeks Mike Viola and Ducky Carlisle); the one-off ELO tribute L.E.O. (featuring Andy Sturmer of power-pop legends Jellyfish, Hanson, Matt Mahaffey of Self, and countless other aficionados of Jeff Lynne’s musical confections); LoudLion (with Taylor Locke of Rooney); and numerous others.

He’s also toured widely, sharing stages of late with Rooney, The Posies, Katie Herzig, Graham Colton, Creed Bratton of The Office, John Doe, Mike Viola, Derek Webb and Drake Bell, joining Tracy Bonham for a string of dates in 2010, and performing intimate shows on his own – usually with just his acoustic guitar and an impressively large-sounding collection of loops and effects, but also sometimes as a duo with drummer Joe Seiders.

Such appearances are a chance for Bleu not only to display his uncanny way with a melody but also to express his gratitude to the fans who’ve made this new phase of his career possible.



Bleu “*Four*”

10/25/10 - UK - Lojinx (UK digital available on 11/29/10)

11/02/10 - US - The Major Label via Redeye Distribution

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