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A.S. - EXILE

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A.S. comprises Australian pianist/ lead singer Nick McRoberts, and Algerian lead guitarist Idriss Halfaoui, and *Exile* is the follow-up to their 2010 debut album *Intimate Circles*. The album features drums performed by *Mass Hysteria*'s Raphaël Mercier and also additional vocals from Juwenn of the group *Relay*.



Everything you need know about this record is laid bare in the opening track *Do What You Want* which, like the wounded lead singer who evocatively sings of love ventured and love lost, wears its cracked and fractured heart on its piano-driven sleeve. The track opens to McRoberts' simple twinkling keys before he adds in his unblemished plaintive vocal. As the song progresses, Halfaoui weaves in his subtle acoustic style guitar-work to the mix which, coupled with some minor orchestral flourishes, combines to produce a rather understated but rich soundscape.

Over the course of the ten songs it's McRoberts' piano and vocals, which gravitate from baritone to falsetto, that take centre-stage. His lyrics are simple and unpretentious, and occasionally beautifully poignant (title track *Exile*'s "It was just a temporary affair- but what affair is made to last?" being a notable example). The direct lyrics and melancholic nature of the music make

the album's themes easier to pinpoint: despair, doubt, and loneliness induced from hopelessness. McRoberts' haunting and bittersweet vocals breathe life into lyrics that are etched with self-doubt and uncertainty, nowhere more-so than on the wonderful *Pleasure and Pain*: "Waiting as the rain runs down the glass, it's such a small world don't you know! Watching as the drunk man makes a pass, there's such a long way left to go..."

Exile is an album characterised chiefly by absence and displacement- of being someplace far from where you want to be. In McRoberts' case this seems to be exile from the woman he loves, one whose memory haunts him like a ghost on *Invisible Kiss* ("some days I'd prefer you'd not been there at all! Memories of you here I'd rather not recall..."). The album's only truly upbeat moments are on penultimate track *Why The Hell Not?*, on which he decides he's going to try to talk to his lost love after all because... why the hell not?

On this album A.S. often meld malaise and detachment into something darkly wonderful, channeling early *Radiohead* and sounding at times like a less synth-fuelled *Keane*. For all the album's oppressiveness, *Probable Cause* is the only really overblown moment, but it's still an absorbing piece of melodramatic music.

Ultimately *Exile* is not easy listening but, given this is a record about a heart fracturing and being pieced back together, why the hell should it be?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Benji Taylor :: Benji spends his time flying between Amsterdam and London. As a master of words and magic, he provides RenownedForSound.com with amazing reviews of the latest UK album releases and revealing interviews.

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