



BIZ TALK with Cyrus Rhodes

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CD REVIEW: A.S. - Exile

By [Cyrus Rhodes](#) - 03/06/2013 - 10:46 PM EST



Artist: A.S.
Album: Exile
Label: Independent Artist
Website: <http://www.astheband.com/presskit/full.html>
Genre: Ambient, Experimental, Ethno-Ambient, Electro
Sounds Like: Depeche Mode, Erasure, Nitzer Ebb, Berlin, Camouflage
Technical Grade: 8/10
Production/Musicianship Grade: 8/10
Commercial Value: 7/10
Overall Talent Level: 8/10
Songwriting Skills: 8/10
Performance Skill: 7/10
Best Songs: Time, Exile, Reasonable Doubts


Weakness: Winded Songs, Short Sided Catalogue

CD Review: Eclectic Paris based Pop/Rock duo A.S blends acoustic intimacy with sweeping soundscapes on their second full length album Exile, recorded in France and mixed in LA by Grammy Winner Darrell Thorp. Fully embodying the title concept of Exile, the highly anticipated second full length recording from A.S.—Nick McRoberts' eclectic pop/rock duo with Algerian born guitarist Idriss Halfaoui—the classically trained pianist and singer/songwriter moved to Paris from his native Australia over ten years ago to study conducting. While working as a conductor of orchestras, operas and ballets, his classical cohorts tried to convince him that mere pop songwriting was beneath him. But as his career grew to include film and documentary scoring, pop's pull on him kept growing and he wanted to challenge himself. "Not only is it fun and hard," McRoberts says, "but I realized that if I write pop and perform it live, people will be voting with their feet!" Along with his deep training as a composer and arranger, he brings a wealth of ambition and sonic imagination to the expansive sound of A.S., which is influenced by classical music, film music and rock.

The CD kicks things off with "Do What You Want" a slow moving acoustical ballad that serves up a peaceful yet methodical melody by McRoberts accompanied by inviting fretwork, piano, dynamic rhythm and impressive harmonies. Track 2 "Exile" shifts gears a bit with its methodical intro dishing out melancholy guitar ambience, driving rhythms against impressive duet harmonies and a grand slam chorus. Track 3 "Time" offers up soothing melody against heartfelt vocals from McRoberts with well-placed Piano, in the pocket drum accents that flows and ebbs its way through to emotional fruition. The CD makes a great first impression, providing 3 solid musical experiences in a row. As the CD slowly unfolds you will notice most of the songs are very conservative in nature, with lush layers of musical instrumentation layered everywhere. I would classify this music as Alternative Rock

Pop with Ambient and Chill elements that go down smooth and fills the sonic space with what I would describe as peaceful tranquility. The musicianship provides a lot of musical variety behind McRoberts. Besides the 4 piece standard you will also notice brief splashes of Ambient touches, Impressive guitar, piano vocal Harmonies and thick as a brick rhythm section - Halfaoui should get credit for some of this. All in all the CD has some truly impressive moments, showcasing impressive lyrical content, soothing vocal melodies all built upon a unique signature sound. Now turning our attention over to McRoberts as for his vocal abilities it works extremely well across the board as he crosses many musical boundaries effectively and successfully. This is not easy to do. Whether it's Ambient, Pop, Rock, Chill McRoberts seems comfortable within each one. His vocal style reminds me a lot of (David Gahan) Depeche Mode. The songwriting offers a brilliant perspective and the lyrical content is very thought provoking and very compelling. From hypnotic "Fast" to striking "Probable Cause" to mesmerizing "Invisible Kiss" to heartfelt "Pleasure and Pain" to melodic "Fallin" this CD has something for just about everyone. The CD ends with Track 10 "Reasonable Doubts" the perfect finale statement for a CD of this caliber.

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perfect more statement for a CD of this caliber.

CD is a bit short at 10 songs. All songs over 3.5 minutes tend to drag you to the finish line. Finally I wish McRoberts would spike the punch a bit more with his overall vocal emotions, delivery and even be a bit more aggressive vocally on some of the songs. There's a time and place for a widely spaced vibrato as well. More solo segments please.

After spending some quality time with A.S. it's hard to find any real weaknesses. Instead as the CD progressed I became more and more impressed with it. The musicianship is first rate, the songs are short and sweet musical experiences. Each one possessing a unique personality, flair, and signature groove. What I like most about A.S. besides the unique signature sound is there is no attempt to sugar coat the truth anywhere on the CD. I really admire artists out there who are themselves and just let the chips fall where they may. Praise goes out to artists that can show us something genuine beneath their veil of vanity – A.S. is one of those artists.

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For a short bio, along with an intro to the columnist section, see here :

<http://www.musesmuse.com/mrev-cyrus.html>. If you would like to ask **Cyrus Rhodes** a question, you can write to cyrus@musesmuse.com . Please indicate the column you're inquiring about in the subject matter of your e-mail.

If you have a suggestion for a column or would like to be considered as a columnist yourself, feel free to write to me at jodi@musesmuse.com .

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