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A.S., Exile

February 20, 2013

By [Skope](#)



When Pop Rock duo, A.S. penned the tracks on their debut EP, they seemingly stumbled onto a songwriting formula that combines the demure approachability of Keane; the textural multilayered ethos of Radiohead's The Bends and the emotive, yet ethereal matter of Coldplay. That formula is again the foundation for their new full-length, Exile. The 10-tracks contain the same emotion-evoking lyrical matter; myriad soundscape interplay and the musicality and composition abilities of Pianist/Composer Nick McRoberts.

"Do What You Want" opens to piano and vocal tandem before Idriss Halfaoui lends acoustic strums over slight backing percussion. What stands out immediately is the track composition—layers of sound laid neatly over one another blending to a sum of the parts sound. Vocally, McRoberts channels Thom Yorke's upper octave range and eerie delivery while programming lends strange intermittent fills. Title track "Exile" (final [track on the](#) EP; more on that later) features an atmospheric sound building intro before guitar chord progression lends the foundation. [The emotion](#) comes through in the lyrical matter about self-doubt in otherwise talented artists who abandon their calling. This one plays out as if Morrissey sang lead over a vintage Ocean Blue track—beautiful, powerful and provoking. Strange electronic clicks and clanks open the slightly dark "Fast" before giving way to dour note work across the instrumentation. The track plays out with urgency from the acoustic strums and backing percussion and offers a peak at what Joy Division may have sounded like were they 20 years younger. More demure piano ushers in "Pleasure And Pain." Backing guitar fills what is in essence a "piano and vocal track." The appearance of backing strings, occasional electric strums and acoustic picking rest one layer under the constant of the ivories and the soaring vocal delivery. "Probable Cause" opens dark and shadowy before McRoberts again channels Ian Curtis on the vocal delivery of what plays out like a dark Pop track injected with a "spy movie score." The dark ethos of this one remains through more soaring vocal delivery and the musicality ever building. Finally, "Reasonable Doubts" rounds out the album (and as was done with "Exile" will be a track on the next album). Single acoustic guitar guides this one from the

intro with McRoberts' vocal delivery at the foreground. Weepy strings make occasional appearances at the chorus, but this one is rather stripped down aside from Halfaoui's intricate finger work on the acoustic.

This album reminds me of so much, it's hard to [nail](#) down where to begin. The ability at Halfaoui and McRoberts' disposal is overwhelmingly vast. The musicality can be slight and the track works well; it can be vast and multilayered and the track works well. It is daunting to think the sound they could achieve were they a four-piece. The arrangement of the songs gives the album the proper peaks and valleys and allows the listener a full range of feelings and emotions. Superbly played, excellently produced... I can't muster a negative on this one. Perhaps two more tracks. And if that is the worst I have to say about it; well, you do the math.

by Christopher West – cwestlaz@gmail.com

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