

King Midas Sound: Solitude

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Daniel Bromfield

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The two members of King Midas Sound, poet Roger Robinson and producer Kevin Martin, are happily married men. It's hard not to see their second album together as anything but a subversive genre piece. *Solitude* exposes the breakup album as the one-sided, self-obsessed, petty, and manipulative genre it is. Whether that's their intention is up in the air.

In a *Wired* interview, Robinson expressed disbelief anyone would interpret the album's content as creepy—despite an entire song, “Who,” about the art of stalking. Perhaps embarrassed by his partner, Martin argued that the characters on the album aren't “particularly nice people” and maybe were left for a good reason.

That seems clear upon a first listen. Robinson's voice is perpetually perched on the edge of violence. He gives no details about the breakup and shows us only the before and after. A woman's perspective is conspicuously missing—literally, as second vocalist Kiki Hitomi does not appear on this record. A female voice might have served better to make the band's point than the feedback loop of male ego we find here.

It's not a stretch to imagine someone sharing the Robinson character's feeling of alienation and seeing him as a hero rather than a reprobate, the way so many college dorm-room posters continue to miss the point of Travis Bickle. But what's clear is Robinson does not demand sympathy. We don't feel for these characters so much as fear for them, or simply fear them.

Robinson is well-respected in his own right in Britain as a poet, and his words make delicious use of space. On "You Disappear," he and his lover "*float through different parts of the house like a chess game,*" and on "Zeros" they separate "*only to go to the toilet.*" Sensory details abound: the look of a lover's body, the feeling of a wet tongue on skin, the food she'd order, the food he eats now.

Martin eliminates the reggae aspect from the duo's previous collaborations and thrives in cold, celestial sound. These are beatless things that suggest the interior spaces of the psyche into which the wounded retreat to burble in their misery.

He does astonishing things with his partner's voice. On "Her Body" Martin lets the word "gone" loop until the word loses its meaning. On several songs, snatches of dialogue are lifted wholesale and run through a gauntlet of dub effects that makes it sound like Robinson's voice is falling apart. "You disappeared," goes the record's opening line. But it's Robinson who seems to be fading fast.

This is the moment in the movie where the protagonist covers his face with his hands and sees things in the mirror and we feel a point of no return has been crossed. And like so much psychological horror, the record ends on a deceptively happy note. On "X," he imagines himself dining with his lover's other exes, united by their situation, sharing stories about the way they've been scorned and mistreated. But it's in his head. Robinson is alone, and he's disappearing.



<https://youtu.be/HI8XhwncEW4>