

= Xx (album) =

xx is the debut album by English indie pop band the xx . After they signed a contract with XL Recordings , the band recorded the album from December 2008 to February 2009 at the record label 's in @-@ house studio in London . Audio engineer Rodaidh McDonald worked with the xx during the recording sessions and strived to reproduce the intimate , unembellished quality of their demos . The band 's Jamie Smith produced xx on his laptop and created electronic beats for the songs , which he then mixed in a detailed process with McDonald .

Although the xx had been strongly influenced by R & B acts , the album drew comparisons from critics to alternative rock , electronica , and post @-@ punk sounds . The melancholic songs on xx featured minimalist arrangements and were built around Smith 's beats , Oliver Sim 's basslines , and sparse guitar figures played by Baria Qureshi and Romy Madley Croft , who employed reverb in her lead guitar parts . Most of them were sung as low @-@ key duets by Croft and Sim , both of whom wrote emotional lyrics about love , intimacy , loss , and desire .

xx was released in August 2009 by Young Turks , an imprint of XL , and received widespread acclaim from critics , many of whom named it one of the year 's best records . It sold consistently over its first few years of release , becoming a sleeper hit in the United Kingdom and the United States . Although none of its singles became hits , xx benefited commercially from the licensing of its songs to television programs and the band 's Mercury Prize win in 2010 . When Qureshi was dismissed from the group shortly after the album 's release , they continued to play as a trio on a protracted concert tour that helped increase their fanbase , reputation in the press , and confidence as performers .

= = Background = =

While students at South London 's Elliott School in 2005 , childhood friends Romy Madley Croft and Oliver Sim formed the xx with Jamie Smith and Baria Qureshi . Croft and Sim played guitar and bass , respectively , and dueted as the band 's vocalists , while Smith programmed electronic beats for their songs and Qureshi doubled as a keyboardist and additional guitarist . During late nights , Croft and Sim either shared lyrics with each other through instant messaging or rehearsed quietly with Smith and Qureshi in their bedrooms so they would not disturb the rest of the household . The xx were greatly influenced by American R & B producers such as The Neptunes and Timbaland , whose minimalist productions incorporated vocal harmonies , handclaps , unconventional samples , and pronounced beats . The band covered Aaliyah 's " Hot Like Fire " (1997) , Womack & Womack 's " Teardrops " (1988) , and other past R & B hits when they performed live and recorded their demos .

After posting the demos on their Myspace page , the xx drew the interest of Young Turks , an imprint label of XL Recordings . They submitted the demos to XL 's head office at Ladbroke Grove and were subsequently signed to a recording contract . The group worked with producers such as Diplo and Kwes , to no success before they were introduced to audio engineer Rodaidh McDonald by the xx 's manager Caius Pawson , who gave him three CDs of demos titled " Early Demos " , " Recorded in Rehearsal Space " , and " What Producers Did Wrong " . McDonald was impressed by the intimate quality and use of silence on the demos , which both he and the band felt may have challenged other producers who wanted to incorporate their individual tastes : " They 'd worked with about four other producers before then that had ? and no discredit to them ? I guess they 'd seen a lot of space to add a kind of stamp on . There was a lot of empty space in the xx 's music , even then , in the ' Early Demos ' . But we just found that the best stuff was the most sparse . "

= = Recording and production = =

At the behest of XL owner Richard Russell , the xx recorded their debut album at the label 's small , in @-@ house recording studio , making them the first act to record there . It was once the head office building 's rear garage before Russell transformed it at the beginning of 2008 into a makeshift

writing , rehearsal , and demo space for XL 's artists . McDonald was assigned in September to manage and properly equip the room , which he liked because it was soundproof and " isolated from the rest of the office , so it wasn 't like you were working in the record company 's presence . " Croft , on the other hand , called it a " pretty confined space " the size of a bathroom . Over the next few months , McDonald and Pawson prepared a budget for the label to fund the studio 's preliminary setup , which would have recording equipment specifically suited for the xx , including a modestly sized soundboard ideal for recording a small group .

The xx started to record the album in December with McDonald , who engineered the sessions . They would usually record at night after XL 's staff had left , which Croft said made it feel " isolated and quite creepy " . To reproduce the sound he had heard on the band 's demos , McDonald had them write down their instruments ' settings and test different areas of the studio to determine where he should record each member . Sim , who played a Precision Bass manufactured in the 1970s , was often recorded in the hallway outside the studio with a Fender Bassman , one of several amplifiers McDonald experimented with for xx . Some of Qureshi and Croft 's guitars were also done in the hallway . Qureshi played a Gibson SG with a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe or Blues Deluxe amplifier , while Croft played an Epiphone Les Paul on most of the album and a Gibson ES @-@ 335 on a few songs . For her lead guitar parts , Croft used a delay pedal and a Roland Micro Cube amplifier with a reverb setting , which McDonald felt would best replicate her " icy " , echo @-@ filled sound on the demos .

After all the instrumental elements had been tracked , Croft and Sim recorded their vocals together , rarely singing backup to one another on any of the songs . McDonald believed it was important for the singers be " in sync " and share the same mental state or mood when performing full takes of songs , some of which he said benefited from when they were both " quite tired and emotional " . He had Croft and Sim sing into Neumann microphones on most of the songs in order to make their vocals sound as " intimate " and conversational as possible . The microphones were among the more expensive items he borrowed for the studio 's preliminary setup so XL would not be overwhelmed with a costly budget .

Despite McDonald 's close involvement , the xx had been encouraged to self @-@ produce their album by Russell ; he believed it would remain faithful to both the band 's distinctive live sound and the DIY ethic practiced at XL since its beginnings as a rave label . Smith was chosen by the rest of the group to produce xx . He used Logic 8 recording software on his Mac Pro and often worked late nights in a nearby conference room while they recorded in the studio with drafts of his beats . Smith produced rhythm tracks with an Akai MPC sampler , which he occasionally processed through a Roland RE @-@ 201 and other effects units . He also created click tracks for the rest of the band to keep timing when they recorded their individual parts . After those parts had been recorded , he refined and incorporated his beats into the songs for three to four weeks . Croft trusted that Smith , who did not want to conceal any imperfections by overproducing xx , would make it practical for them to perform live rather than layer the songs with several guitar or vocal elements .

Most of xx was recorded from late December to late January before McDonald and Smith began an exhaustive mixing process , which lasted two weeks . For each song , they mixed one or two tracks of each instrument and used Waves Audio components to equalize the recordings . Having enjoyed how the demos captured unintended background noises such as street sounds , McDonald deliberately left certain sounds that would have otherwise been unwanted in the final mix . " I wanted it to sound like people in a room , rather than this polished kind of perfect crystalline thing " , he explained . " It was all the small details that we really liked . " In February , the group wrote and recorded " Fantasy " , " Shelter " , and " Infinity " before finishing xx by month 's end . Sim sang his vocals for " Infinity " on the side of the studio opposite from Croft after his microphone had been unintentionally moved there , which resulted in a distant @-@ sounding vocal exchange on the song . While recording " Shelter " , a mechanical part from the guitar amplifier loosened and caused it to make a clattering sound , which McDonald and the xx chose to retain . " It was just like this missing piece of percussion that the track needed ! " , McDonald recalled .

= = Music and lyrics = =

The songs on xx were developed around a framework of basslines and beats , while incorporating simple guitar riffs for melody , rhythm , and texture ; their melodic notes were separated by rests . Croft said the band 's style of instrumentation had become defined by the limited equipment they originally used : " My guitar sound pretty much came from discovering there was reverb on my little practice amp and really loving the mood it created . " The loudest song , " Intro " , was a largely instrumental recording with double @-@ tracked beats , distorted keyboard , non @-@ lexical vocables , and a guitar riff . Songs such as " Crystalised " and " VCR " began with a melodic ostinato and some understated sounds , including a xylophone on the latter , before leading to quietly sung verses . Croft and Sim exchanged verses on " Crystalised " while backed by the sound of drum stick clicks and basslines before the beat was heard . On the austere arranged " Night Time " , Croft sang its first two minutes over only guitar and bass before its beat developed . " Fantasy " was highlighted by a shoegazing guitar sound .

While McDonald observed a predominant R & B element , Russell felt the xx 's music evoked the early hip hop records he listened to when he was young , as they were often limited to vocals , samples , and beats . Music journalists , however , inferred from xx that their influences were alternative rock acts such as Portishead , Young Marble Giants , and Cocteau Twins , the last of which Croft said she had never heard before the album was released . The Scotsman described xx as a minimalist , melancholic indie pop record that draws on elements from electronica and R & B , as well as The Cure and other alternative groups . According to Sarah Boden of The Observer , the album 's unadorned , dream pop love songs are reminiscent of Cocteau Twins and Mazzy Star , because they feature low tempos , moody melodies , and rhythms influenced by R & B and dubstep . Their arrangements have what Neil McCormick called " a very British , industrial aspect " , somewhat similar to the dub @-@ inflected post @-@ punk sound of English producer Martin Hannett and his work with the band Joy Division . Both Croft and Sim said their combination of seemingly disparate influences could have been attributed to the variety in each band member 's music collection .

On xx , Croft and Sim touched on themes of love , desire , and loss in their songwriting , which Croft said has " always been based around emotions , right from the start . My favourite songs are usually quite sad and I think heartbreak is something that so many people can connect with . " Like Croft , Sim said he wrote much of his lyrics at night when his emotions ran " a bit higher " . Because of their reserved personalities , Robert Christgau believed they relied on a low @-@ key , vulnerable style and " traded ideas about intimacy as contemporaries , comrades , prospects , lovers , ex @-@ lovers , and friends " . According to NME magazine 's Emily Mackay , all of the songs dealt with the consuming emotions associated with first love , including the tacit intimacy on " VCR " , the yearning expressed on " Heart Skipped a Beat " , and the premature affection warned of on " Crystalised " . Petra Davis from The Quietus argued that the thematic crux of xx was in the succession of songs from " Islands " to " Shelter " , each of which saw " a radical shift in perspective on a similar ? perhaps a single ? love story . "

The album 's Roman numeral title referred to each of the band members having turned 20 years old by the time xx was released . Because of their age , many critics interpreted the songs as nocturnal depictions of adolescent lust . Philip Sherburne wrote in Spin that xx brimmed with a " young lust " often found in rock music , and recordings such as " Fantasy " and " Shelter " expressed a jaded yearning , particularly in a lyric from the latter song : " Can I make it better with the lights turned on " . Croft vehemently denied this : " We were writing these songs when we were 17 . I can honestly say I 've never thought this is about my sex life . " Croft and Sim , who were both gay , did not intend for the songs to be heard as romantic duets ; she said they were singing " past each other " rather than each other . Having combined their individually written lyrics , they could not definitely explain what their songs were about , although Croft said Sim 's lyrics resonated with her nonetheless and enjoyed the personal interpretation it offered . " You can put them into your own life " , she explained , " like , ' Oh , this is my song . ' " The romantic situations Sim wrote of had been inspired by other people . " I hadn 't really had any relationships to be working off , but I had a huge interest in life , and looking at other people 's relationships around me " , he said .

= = Promotion = =

" Crystalised " was released as the xx 's debut single on 27 April 2009 and helped build interest among listeners and journalists . It was part of a series of singles from xx , which included " Basic Space " on 3 August , " Islands " on 26 October , and " VCR " on 25 January 2010 . They did not receive significant airplay on BBC Radio 1 in the United Kingdom , and other media outlets believed the xx did not warrant strong attention ; one editor from NME said at the time that the band was not ideal for their magazine 's front cover . In the United States , the xx benefited from the word @-@ of @-@ mouth marketing of blogs , beginning when they performed six consecutive sold @-@ out shows at New York City clubs such as Pianos and the Mercury Lounge months prior to the album 's release .

Several of the songs from xx were licensed by XL to television programs in the UK and North America . " Intro " became widely used as theme music in television , including sports highlights , episodes of series such as Law & Order and Cold Case , an advertisement for AT & T , and BBC 's coverage of the 2010 British general election . Along with their placement in television , songs from the record were used by North American chain stores such as Starbucks and Urban Outfitters as background music at their locations . According to McCormick , these marketing strategies helped the xx develop enough media presence to garner " over half a million sales around the world without ever having anything as vulgar as a hit " . Kris Chen , XL 's A & R senior vice president , believed the exposure was desired and necessary for promoting an album that was not " driven by pop radio " . Although the band realised their music had to be marketed somehow , Croft expressed reservations about " putting our music on everything , just to put it to anything just for the sake of money " .

= = Release and reception = =

xx was released by Young Turks in August 2009 to widespread critical acclaim . According to Alexis Petridis , it was the most acclaimed album of the year , and at Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , it received an average score of 87 , based on 25 reviews . Critics particularly praised the group 's sound on the album ; Simon Price wrote in The Independent that they were being universally lauded for their " atmospheric indie rock , and rightly so " . In a review for The New Yorker , Sasha Frere @-@ Jones remarked that xx rewarded repeated listens because of the band 's disciplined playing , while Mark Edwards of The Sunday Times said it succeeded with simple but " very near perfect " pop songs . AllMusic 's Heather Phares called the instrumentation impeccable and said she was impressed by how poised and refined such a young group sounded . Matthew Cole from Slant Magazine believed Croft and Sim 's rapport gave an emotional weight to the music , which he said sounded timeless and capable of appealing to both indie and popular tastes . Christgau , writing in MSN Music , was somewhat more impressed by the music than by the lyrics , although he said the underlying force behind Croft and Sim 's charmingly minimalist songs was a " spiritual dimension " offered by their ability to " shift roles without ever seeming hostile , cold or even unsupportive " . Daily Telegraph critic Jack Arnhold considered it " one of this year 's most beautiful and original debut albums " .

In a less enthusiastic review , Jon Caramanica of The New York Times felt the singers were too disengaged and reticent to reveal any genuine emotion . " Though they 're singing to each other , it rarely feels intimate " , he wrote , " more like two shy teenagers , eyes cast downward , awkwardly talking to the ground " . In the opinion of PopMatters critic Ben Schumer , the consistent structures and tempos of the songs made them sound somewhat monotonous on what was an otherwise affecting nocturnal mood piece . Conversely , Joshua Errett from Now found the music and singing mesmerizing but lamented the lyrics , which he deemed emotionally immature and " overwrought " .

By the end of 2009 , xx had appeared on several critics ' lists of the year 's best albums . It was ranked second by NME , sixth by Uncut , third by Pitchfork , ninth by Rolling Stone , and fourth by Chicago Tribune critic Greg Kot . The Guardian named it the year 's best record in their annual

critics poll and Tim Jonze , the newspaper 's editor , hailed it as not only " the sound of 2009 , [but also] a distinctive musical statement of the like we may never get to hear again " . It also finished seventh in The Village Voice 's Pazz & Jop poll of American critics and third in HMV 's Poll of Polls , an annual list compiled by British music retailer HMV and collated from best @-@ album nominations made by journalists in the English and Irish music press . In decade @-@ end lists of the greatest records from the 2000s , The Times and its sister paper The Sunday Times ranked xx thirtieth and seventy @-@ seventh , respectively . In September 2010 , it won the Mercury Prize , an annual award given to the best album from the UK and Ireland . Before the nominations shortlist had been announced , bookmakers and critics considered the xx as favorites and predicted they would win over the more high @-@ profile artists Corinne Bailey Rae , Paul Weller , and Dizzee Rascal . McCormick , one of the critics who predicted its victory , explained that it " seemed the record that most represented Britain " with its charmingly intimate style and unique take on modern pop tastes .

xx was not an immediate chart success , but eventually became a sleeper hit . It debuted at number 36 on the UK 's Official Albums Chart and sold 4 @,@ 180 copies in the first week after it was released , while in the United States it did not chart higher than number 92 on the Billboard 200 . The album sold steadily for the next 44 weeks until July 2010 , when its announcement as a Mercury Prize nominee led to a sharp increase in sales and a jump from number 44 to 16 on the British chart . By then , it had sold more than 150 @,@ 000 copies in the UK and 179 @,@ 000 copies in the United States. xx remained in the top 20 of the Official Albums Chart in the weeks leading up to the Mercury Prize ceremony . Immediately after its win that week , it climbed from number 16 to 3 on its highest weekly sales ? 28 @,@ 666 copies ? and reached a total of 212 @,@ 835 copies sold . According to McCormick , " its triumph is a rare example of the Mercury Prize doing music lovers a service . " In the US , the album reached sales of 350 @,@ 000 copies by June 2012 with consistent weekly sales during its first two years of release , which Time magazine 's Melissa Locker said was " quite a feat " in an era of music piracy , media streaming , and YouTube .

Although xx had been highly anticipated by XL , the album 's success exceeded expectations in the press . McDonald said their direction and sound would have been entirely different had expectations been higher . Croft was " baffled " by the acclaim given to what she viewed as an album they had made " for themselves " . Sim had mixed feelings about its success and believed it could affect his songwriting in the future : " This album was done with no expectations . No one knew who we were . When I was writing the songs , I didn 't think anyone other than Romy or James would ever actually hear them . Now I know so many people will . I might feel I have to be a bit more private . " At the Mercury Prize ceremony , he said the time since its release has " felt like a haze " , but that the event serves as " a moment of clarity " . In their acceptance speech , the band announced they would use the £ 20 @,@ 000 prize money to build their own studio , where they subsequently wrote and recorded their second album Coexist . When Coexist debuted in September 2012 , xx was still on the British chart at number 37 and had sold 446 @,@ 734 copies in the UK . The following year , it was ranked number 237 on NME 's list of the top 500 albums of all time and named the 74th greatest debut record by Rolling Stone , who found its music radical as " an exercise in restraint , in the artful use of space and silence " during popular music 's period of maximalism .

= = Touring = =

After xx was released , the xx toured Europe and North America through the end of 2009 . Their first show in August was at Hoxton Hall in London , which Sim recalled was attended by only 112 people . When Pitchfork 's positive review of the album elicited greater interest among American listeners , the xx were booked as the supporting act for the Friendly Fires 's tour of larger club venues in the US . The difficulties of touring early on exacerbated the growing tensions between the xx and Qureshi , which culminated in her dismissal after a difficult stay at an October music festival in New York . It was reported that she had become fatigued and left the group after they cancelled several concerts . Sim disputed those reports and said her departure had been the band 's decision : " We 've grown up to be very different people . It wasn 't working any more musically or as a friendship . " Croft told NME in November , " I guess ' personal differences ' would be the standard

way to say it . I guess it 's just the intensity of being on tour , things are so much heightened . "

Rather than find a replacement for Qureshi , the xx continued to tour as a smaller line @-@ up of guitar , bass , and percussion . They also reduced their already minimalist arrangements for songs in concert , although Sim jokingly said Smith " needs another few arms so he can work everything " after Qureshi 's departure . In their shows , Croft abandoned playing solos and chords in favor of less defined figures and motifs , while Smith performed beats and ambient sounds from his synth pad as an accompaniment to Croft and Sim 's playing . Because their style had been suited to the small venues they first played , the xx focused more on the production value of their concerts and performing for larger audiences while on tour . They dressed in dark clothing and illuminated the stage with light boxes displaying their x @-@ shaped , white @-@ on @-@ black logo .

With a growing fanbase , the xx made commitments to more concerts and extended their tour for the album . They intermittently toured for 18 months , including most of 2010 . That year , they embarked on their first US tour and played high @-@ profile festivals such as South by Southwest , Coachella , and Bonnaroo . Croft recalled their show at Coachella , where they performed for 30 @,@ 000 people : " That was the moment when I was , like , Oh , my God , I think people might be into this . " They were also a supporting act for fellow English group Florence and the Machine . By touring frequently , the xx broadened their reputation among listeners and the press . In March 2010 , they played two consecutive nights at the Shepherd 's Bush Empire in London to capacity crowds and appeared on the cover of NME , who proclaimed them " the most underrated band in Britain " . In April and May , they toured the southern US and Japan , which Croft said was most demanding part of the tour because " none of us had been away from home continuously for so long . " They were accompanied during this six @-@ week period by photographer Jamie @-@ James Medina , who later published his photos of the group in his book *The Tourist* (2010) .

While on tour , the xx acclimated themselves to the increased attention and became considerably more sociable and confident . As Sim recounted , " If you 'd have put me onstage at London 's Shepherd 's Bush Empire a few years ago , I 'd have run away . I couldn 't have done it . We used to be terrified . " In June , the band played the Glastonbury Festival in Somerset and , according to journalist Jude Rogers , displayed a newfound confidence through the rest of their summer and " post @-@ Mercury [Prize] autumn " concerts : " Croft would sing more boldly , Sim developed an onstage swagger and Smith began experimenting with different rhythms and textures . "

= = Track listing = =

All lyrics written by Romy Madley Croft and Oliver Sim , all music composed by Madley Croft , Sim , Jamie Smith , and Baria Qureshi , except where noted .

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = = The xx = = =

Romy Madley Croft ? guitar , vocals

Oliver Sim ? bass , vocals

Jamie Smith ? beats , mixing , MPC , production

Baria Qureshi ? guitar , keyboards

The xx ? design , photography

= = = Additional personnel = = =

Phil Lee ? art direction , design

Rodaidh McDonald ? engineering , mixing

Nilesh Patel ? mastering

= = Charts = =

= = Certifications = =

= = Release history = =