

THE EXACT OPPOSITE



Band chemistry is a strange, undefinable, intangible thing, but when it's there, it's undeniable. And it's undeniable that new duo **The Exact Opposite** have it in spades. That much is clear from the first listen of their debut album, **Skill Issue**. From the moment it kicks off with '*Look At Him Go!*' – which opens the record in a flurry of angular, crunching riffs and a very real and raw sense of urgency – all the way through to final track '*Why Are You Back Again?*', it's a record that fizzes and fizzles with a very tangible chemistry. It's one that bonds these songs together to create a real album, one that should and needs to be listened to from beginning to end, the way it always used to be done, and which sounds like a band at the absolute peak of their powers. That it's just singer/guitarist Jamie Stuart and drummer/multi-instrumentalist Nigel Powell makes the depth, richness and full-bodied texture of these songs all the more impressive.

First things first, though. This record is a truly vital collection of songs that brims and overflows with the innate chemistry between them while also offering an insightful, impassioned and emotional reflection of the world today and their lives (and, by extension, the listener's) within it. But it also serves as a testament to the importance of creativity, addressing the reasons and purpose for the pair making music together while simultaneously confronting their hesitations about doing so, along with the ineluctable existential dread of mortality. While those are all recurring themes throughout the album, they're perhaps most pointed on the afore-mentioned '*Look At Him Go!*'

"When we finished that song we both just looked at each other and said 'Fucking hell, this is great!', says Powell. "There's just something about it – it's very hooky, it's got a great story, I love the lyrics and it just crackles with excitement and energy."

"I remember," says Stuart, "that there was a slight false start when I was writing the lyrics to '*Look At Him Go!*'. It was about something different, but then I decided what I wanted it to be about and I've never had such a stream of lyrics. I'd never put that many different words into a song before. And I know songs about aging superheroes – which is really about the death of the hero

inside you – have been done by other bands, but it was really fun. And if there is an underlying theme to the record, it is aging and wondering if it's time to call it. But it's clearly not!"

That defiance and determination manifests in every song on this album. Recorded in Johnny Greenwood from Radiohead's home studio in Oxford over the course of a month, **Skill Issue** was produced, engineered and mixed entirely by Powell ("Jamie brings the Burt Bacharach," he quips, "I bring the Trevor Horn.") and both recalls and builds on the pair's impressive musical heritage, while forging boldly forward into new territory, both lyrically and musically. That **The Exact Opposite** have made such a stirring, youthful record is proof not just that they could and can still do this despite their fears of growing older, but also that they absolutely should.

Stuart and Nigel Powell already knew they had chemistry from their time together in Oxford's Dive Dive, which they'd formed in 2001 after their other bands – Unbelievable Truth and Dustball, respectively – broke up. That said, like all of us, they're different people 20-plus years later. Not only that, but Powell and the other two members of Dive Dive have been pretty much been playing full-time as Frank Turner's backing band, The Sleeping Souls, since 2007, so that chemistry continuing into the pair's new outfit, **The Exact Opposite** wasn't necessarily guaranteed. That said, neither were particularly surprised to find it was still there in full force when they started making this record.

"From my point of view, it was instant," adds Powell. "Jamie's one of those guys that I just have chemistry with, so it was very natural. It's much more interesting being in a band with somebody who is conflicted about the idea of being in a band than being in a band with somebody who wants to be, because they end up saying more interesting things. And we've got an album that's proof of that."



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