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New album shows how the stricken stay afloat

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Gentle Sinners and the 'This Action Cannot Be Undone' album.

BY SIMON COATES



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IT all started early last year when James Graham (The Twilight Sad) mentioned to Aidan Moffat (Arab Strap) that he was looking for a new project, something that he could use to

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time off from Arab Strap vocal duties. He suggested they work together, and James agreed immediately. Even in dark times, occasionally, things are just that simple. Their new project's name is taken from a line in Romeo and Juliet, their first track as Gentle Sinners, "Killing This

Time", came out late last year, and their debut album, This Action Cannot Be Undone, is released later this spring.

I mention to Aidan that the title reminds me of some kind of worrying software update message, a kind of digital crisis. "That's exactly it, aye," he says.

"It comes from the warning a computer gives you before you delete something forever – this action cannot be undone. I've always liked the ominous, existential sound of it, and I thought it suited the album's themes of dread and social withdrawal."

Followers of either protagonists' bands will know that both men are not afraid of confronting life's realities head-on. Arab Strap are compelled by unflinching honesty, with Moffat as a late-night bard. The Twilight Sad embrace brutal truths, portraying vulnerability with delicacy and volume. Both men have spoken openly about their mental health issues, and the This Action Cannot Be Undone album continues the crusade. "I certainly do think it reflects the world we live in today", James says. "We've all lived through – and are still living through – some of the worst times I've known since I've been on this Earth.



"The lack of humanity and love for our fellow human beings, elected and unelected power-hungry leaders of the world lying to us on a daily basis, a pandemic, the loss of life we've all endured, feeling helpless, war crimes, racism, global warming. Art imitates life and this is what we've all been living through, and my feelings and fears have come out in the lyrics within this record."

Working apart, Moffat sent his ideas over to Graham, who then added lyrics and vocals. "Aidan would send me these fully realised instrumentals and I'd just listen to them and enjoy them," James explains. "I had so much to write about as, like a lot of people over the past two years, I was struggling with anxiety and my mental health. I was always so excited to hear what Aidan would send me next."

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about the Billie Eilish album."

These Actions Cannot Be Undone is a set that paces the room. There's mordant wit and veins of deep frustration on show, as well as Baudelairean weariness and acceptance. Clattering drums

and a twisting, feedbacking guitar urge on Let Them Rot as Graham wonders “why don’t you run to me?” in a way that might make you want to run in the opposite direction, while The Cries is a groove woven around sinewy basslines and splashing cymbals. The arpeggiated Face To Face references avant-garde composer Michael Nyman (“I’ve loved Michael Nyman since I was a teenager,” says Aidan. “And the middle of Face To Fire was put together as a tribute”) and Shores of Anhedonia sounds very much like an Arab Strap track, simply because it’s built around Aidan incanting a spoken word piece.

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“You know what it’s like when you start to ask the big questions,” he notes. “Just write me out of the new season.”

Anhedonia means an inability to feel pleasure during ordinarily pleasurable times.

For all this, These Actions Cannot Be Undone is by no means a doomy album. James mentions that Moffat is a perfectionist, and it shows.

Production here is detailed and precise, as Moffat bombards the set with sounds both angry and tender. James is the alt.rock bluesman in Moffat’s noise-folk landscape, crooning, cajoling and consoling. Telling us it’s okay not to be okay. How even the deepest well contains sustenance, and how the stricken stay afloat.

“It was a really satisfying and fulfilling writing process, I learnt a lot about myself as a songwriter throughout it all,” says James. “Aidan’s given me a confidence I never had before”. And what’s next for the pair? “Maybe meet up in person as we haven’t seen each other in a year,” James continues. “Give each other a hug and have a drink together to celebrate the album. Make another record maybe...”

In the meantime, who is this Gentle Sinners album for? It’s for us. It’s for all of us.

These Actions Cannot Be Undone by Gentle Sinners’ is released digitally and on CD on May 13 on the Rock Action label, with a vinyl version to follow in September



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