

EXIT

A hand swayed feverishly across a page in a Durham classroom in the summer of 1994, transfusing notebook lines with mercurial thoughts, darkening memories, and unnerving visions of the future. While enshrining escapist fantasies, 17-year-old Ben Londa struggled to compile his final project for a Duke writing program. But in attempting to write away old demons, he managed to conjure new ones. And in that grueling process, there arose the voice of Exit—a disquieting melding of faltering heart and persisting mind. In part inspired by the existential literature of Jean-Paul Sartre, Exit was more than a mere alias. It was a coping mechanism, another world imagined, and a necessary cathartic vehicle; it was an artistic alter ego for an individual whose thoughts would often spill way past tolerable limits. With this new emergence, Londa could essentially seclude from a caving-in world, while Exit would interact with it.

But where words are finite, sounds bleed without measure. Having fulfilled his assignment, Londa returned home to Houston, Texas, where he happily succumbed to the empyrean ambient washings of his newfound musical interests, Brian Eno and Harold Budd. Ensnared until then in more guitar-focused bands, Londa was eager to experiment in a new musical realm. Autumn fell away, and in the cool, luminous wake of Christmas lay his parents' gift of ready possibilities, a tempting four-track, illuminating a path for Exit's nascent recordings.

While those first Exit writings dwelt in the insular, the signature Exit sound creates its own grandiose universe—and has done so from the very beginning. Translating the internal meanderings of bedroom reverie into pensive, external provocations, Londa labored ferociously in an upstairs spare-bedroom-turned-studio, swirling out foreign, chaotic sounds that even confounded their creator. Exit's first album in 1995 was an innocuously packaged self-released cassette that betrayed no secrets of the rich world that thrived inside. In fact, Londa did exceedingly little to promote Exit's debut. And as album after album quietly shuttled their way to only the palms of his close friends, it became clear that Londa's passion was one borne out of necessity rather than any hope of notoriety.

Due to Londa's uninspired promotional efforts, Exit's releases—from *Exit I* through *Abrupt*—made nary a dent to the music world at large, but Londa's arts-embracing university in Georgetown, Texas, began to take notice. Quickly, Londa became an integral part of the local scene, garnering acclaim from the school's paper as well as reaping requests for encore performances. The escalating attention and growing fan base were stifled, however, when Londa graduated from college and moved to Austin, where he returned to his familiar pattern of releasing music in self-prescribed obscurity.

With the dawning of the millennium and a number of changes in Londa's artistic outlook, he embarked on an ambitious new album. Still characterized by a numinous atmosphere, *Love Letters*—a sighing consummation of relived missives and momentous admissions—marked a drift from earlier releases, revealing a subtle shift in perception and a more drastic change in aesthetic. Londa's vocals were more confident; his songs were more structured. But having endeavored in vain to capture the soundscape divined in his head, Londa grew progressively discontent. After two enormously frustrating years of recording, rerecording, and intermittently restarting, regressing, and returning, Londa tore the entire idea asunder and shelved the would-be album forever.

With years of dissatisfaction behind him and an aborted album being his only sonic glimmer in some four years, the demise of Exit seemed imminent. But miraculously, the veil lifted, and fueled by a disconcerting series of personal events, the necessity that once drove Exit was rekindled ten-fold and Londa fervently went to work on *The Way Out Is Through*. Though the months of making the album were harrowing, Londa, for once, emerged feeling vaguely satisfied. Having expended every ounce of remaining energy, he really felt this was it—a culmination of all he could give. And since years had transpired since his first foray into music, Londa had the experience to finally rectify many of the misgivings he had about his past vocals, song structures, and artistic merit. Surrendering to the past and endangering himself to the future, Londa released *The Way Out Is Through* in June 2005—a strangled acceptance of self-knowing, a dissolution of what was, and a ghostly, yet gripping fear of staying true to who he will always be.

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