Mercury and BRIT nominated Kae Tempest’s fifth studio album wasn’t meant to be the record you’re listening to right now. Kae had originally written an entirely different project. But something about it didn’t align with the moment. The realisation came after Kae visited Fraser T Smith’s studio to overcome a creative block on a track. Smith, the Grammy-winning producer behind Adele, Stormzy, and Dave, became a friend of Kae’s during a podcast recording in 2020. Kae later featured on Fraser’s 2023 EP, We Were We Still Are. But rather than solving the initial problem, their meet-up drove the pair headfirst into a spontaneous string of sessions that took Kae’s practice in unexpected directions. A new album was being born.

Fraser encouraged Kae to write in the first person, “he said to me, *who else can tell the story that you can tell?”*The duo created three songs a day for a week before stepping back to survey their work. Slowly they filtered through their findings, “you’re only as good as the ones you leave off. We cut a lot because we wanted it to be concise, complete.” They kept going; towards what was working, leaving behind what wasn’t. The result is Self Titled.

At its core, Self Titled is a love letter to a younger self and a dialogue between Kae’s future, past, and present selves, interwoven with the people, places, and experiences that have shaped them. Themes of resistance, doubt, and hope are wrapped around reflections on our flaws, frustrations, accomplishments, and desires; the headiness of love,  and the liberation of acceptance. While it is deeply personal, it taps into the collective spirit often found in Kae’s work, “I hope that by digging into my truth, I can meet people in theirs. I hope people can find something of themselves reflected back at them.”

Self Titled opens with the powerful ‘I Stand On The Line’. As stirring as it is epic in scale,it recalls iconic James Bond themes of the past, the Verve at their height, and Stormzy in his more meditative moments. The rowdy ‘Statue In The Square’ follows; a galvanising piece that taps into Kae’s early days as an open mic MC. The double time flows nod to noughties Jungle raves, while the musical references reflect the hard-hitting syncopation of El-P and the audaciousness of Megan Thee Stallion. Kae describes it as “joyful. The whole point of it is that I’m having fun.” Traces of Massive Attack’s Mezzanine, Dr Dre’s 2001, or Arctic Monkeys’ AM can be detected in the mix, while you might feel the presence of Run The Jewels, or a hint of Late Registration-era Kanye West.

The album also extends to the wider world with its guests; all accomplished, some better known than others. The first take freestyle ‘Breathe’ was co-produced by Kae and the Mercury Prize-winning Scottish trio Young Fathers, while ‘Bless The Bold Future’ sees London-based alternative soul singer Tawiah make her mark. That’s without touching on the two surprise features from icon-status collaborators.

Delivering a punch as the album draws to a close, ‘Diagnoses’ is a dexterous exploration of neurodiversity, ‘me and you and our trauma flashbacks, relaxing at home with a Horlicks. Backpacks stuffed full of my dysphoria, your dyspraxia | off exploring | panic attacks to get the heart rate up.’ A sample from the godfather of modern psychology, Carl Jung, opens ‘Hyperdistillation’ – “it’s a reminder to look again,” explains Kae, “we are all more alive than we give each other credit for.”

A lifelong Londoner, Kae Tempest was born in 1985 and raised in Lewisham. They are a musician, lyricist, performer, poet, playwright, and author. Their career began as a 16-year-old MC busking at bus stops, open mic nights, battles, raves, squat parties, and scrappy festivals. After a stint in the band Sound of Rum, Kae self-published the poetry collection *Everything Speaks In Its Own Way*in 2012. That same year, their debut play *Wasted* opened in London and toured the UK. Meanwhile, their long poem *Brand New Ancients,*won the Ted Hughes prize and transferred to New York in 2013.

Their first solo recording, the Mercury-Prize-nominated Everybody Down, came in 2014 as well as the release of *Hold Your Own*, which named them a Next Generation Poet by the Poetry Book Society; a once in a decade accolade. They’ve since recorded four more albums: 2016’s Mercury & BRIT nominated, Let Them Eat Chaos, followed by The Book Of Traps and Lessons and The Line Is A Curve both of which were executive produced by Rick Rubin (Jay Z, Adele, Lana Del Ray, Johnny Cash). Kae’s debut novel, *The Bricks That Built The Houses* (2016) made the Sunday Times Bestseller list. Their first non-fiction book, On Connection, was released to critical acclaim in 2020. To date, they are the only artist who has opened a play at the National Theatre one summer and played Glastonbury festival the next.

Reflecting on their latest offering, a decade after their first album they explain, “This album has its own life force, it knows where it wants to go. I’ve just got to follow it for a bit and see what happens.”

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