

When **Mike Kerr** and **Ben Thatcher** sat down to talk about making a new [**Royal Blood**](https://www.royalbloodband.com/) album, they knew what they wanted to achieve with it, and what they were determined to avoid. The former involved a conscious return to their musical roots, when, in their first band **Flavour Country**, they had made music that was deeply influenced by artists such as Daft Punk, Justice, and Philippe Zdar of Cassius. (It’s worth remembering that Kerr dabbled in the keytar in this period. Don’t @ him.) The latter was easy: they had to relocate the purity, innocence and joy of their early days as **Royal Blood**, to go back to the basics of chemistry, telepathy, hunger and drive that had made their 2014 self-titled debut album, with its brutal and utterly novel sound bed of bass played like a lead guitar and thunderous drums, so thrilling, visceral and original.

Kerr uses an arresting analogy to describe the experience of going stratospheric as a band, releasing one of the fastest selling British debut albums this century, topping the U.K. charts and being showered with indigenous awards and platinum discs - and then realizing you’re expected to repeat the magic formula. “It’s a bit like telling the same joke twice,” says Royal Blood’s frontman and bassist, “and trying to get the audience to laugh as hard the second time.” “He’s not wrong,” laughs drummer **Thatcher**. “It was like: ‘You’re the saviours of rock ’n’ roll, here are a ton of awards.’ And then suddenly: ‘Do it again. But better.’”

Two South Coast boys (specifically, Brighton and Hove, in the South East of England) with big dreams that came true pretty much overnight, they hardly had time to draw breath after the vast success of their debut album, and the globe-spanning tour and festival dates that followed. Reconvening to record their 2017 follow-up, ***How Did We Get So Dark***, felt like being inside a pressure cooker. “There’s so much riding on you, so much expectation and responsibility,” says Kerr. “That was handed to us incredibly quickly, and every day, it went up a notch. Every show was bigger. It felt like we were doing something for the first time, every time. You just have to hold on and not drown.” “It becomes strangely isolating,” says Thatcher. “Our world was getting smaller and smaller, while everything around us was growing. Look, our job is so much fun, we’ve been taken on an incredible ride, and we’ve loved pretty much every moment. But you can’t forget that you are allowed to have bad days.”

The first word I wrote down when I heard the band’s comeback single [**“Trouble’s Coming,”**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuYSarZXzrE) and three other new tracks featured on their new album ***Typhoons***, was “relief.” There are a ton of other things to say about “Trouble’s Coming,” but what the song communicates most powerfully and instantly is that, in the writing and recording of it, the two friends had found what they were looking for - a sort of “Yup, that’s it” moment of recognition. Musically taut, pop-bright and spare, with a riff the late, great Eddie Van Halen would have been proud of, “Trouble’s Coming” combines the ruthless sonic economy of the best dance music with lyrics that are unapologetically dark. *“These holes that I’m digging / Can’t stop my heart when it’s sinking,”* sings Mike, ratcheting up the ominous tension that courses through the song.

“It was the moment something started to click - where we started playing over those much more rigid dance beats,” says **Kerr**. “It kind of felt like disco. The breakthrough was realizing that there was real common ground between that and what we’d done before, the classic rock thing. It’s that AC/DC aspect: the straight beat, where the quality that makes the riffs seem so cutting is because of that beat. When we wrote the track, there was this immediate chemistry again. Even though on the surface we were stepping outside what we’d done before, it didn’t feel at all uncomfortable or unnatural; it actually felt like we were returning to the really groove-orientated music we’d loved from the very beginning.” “It’s important to remember with all of those bands,” adds **Thatcher**, “that the drums were there to serve the beat. When we first broke out, there were only two elements to the band. For me, I didn’t just have to carry the beat, I’d have to color in the changes, if you like. We were both bearing a lot of freight, sonically.”

“With those first two albums, I was carrying more. But this was a different challenge; less varied, maybe, but so satisfying as a drummer. Pure rhythm. He puts his whole personality on that concept,” **Kerr** continues. “There’s such a human touch there. It’s all about the beat - which fans of the two types of music insist have little in common, when they’re actually kissing cousins! They’re that close. It felt like familiar territory, but something we’d sort of censored in ourselves.”

“We sort of stumbled on this sound, and it was immediately fun to play. That’s what sparked the creativity on the new album, the chasing of that feeling. It’s weird, though - if you think back to [**'Figure it Out,'**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhgVu2lsi_k) it kind of contains the embryo of this album. We realized that we didn’t have to completely destroy what we’d created so far; we just had to shift it, change it. On paper, it’s a small reinvention. But when you hear it, it sounds so fresh.”

Lyrically, each of the new songs explores and addresses, sometimes directly, sometimes allusively, the flipside of success as experienced by both of them, but **Kerr** especially. As he sings at one point: *“Almost surprised I survived.”* It’s the sound of someone looking into their soul, and beginning to understand that you need to learn to recognize the warning signs: that success is much more complicated than it seems, that life on the road is a slog as much as it is a victory lap, that having the time to regain perspective is a precious commodity which becomes ever more elusive as the scaffolding of huge success assembles itself, stealthily and invisibly, around you, without your bidding.

Dawn finally broke while the duo was beginning to write new material for the new record, but they had endured a long, dark night to reach that point. “Coming off the road after the first album felt like crashing back down to earth,” admits **Kerr.** “I got a little bit lost. We’d shot to the top and when you get there you put yourself under this intense pressure to stay there; you can’t allow the quality to drop. I was scared shitless making that second record. You might still have the skill set to do the same thing again - but the context has changed. I love most of that record, but I didn’t enjoy making it. And looking back, it caused a lot of damaging behavior. I was really hammering it, I’d acclimatized to a lifestyle that was haywire, to be honest,” and trouble loves company.

“The tour around the second album, it was worse, if anything” **Kerr** adds. “There are shows I just don’t remember. I don’t remember playing Brixton Academy when Jimmy Page was there. And when that tour finished, I kept going.”

**Thatcher** was aware there were problems. “I knew it was making him unhappy. But it’s not for me to tell Mike what to do or what not to do; he had to find that out on his own. I’m quite a happy person in general, and quite stable. I knew that he had it in him because … well, because I know him, and I knew that I didn’t have to worry about that, even when it got pretty dark.”

“I had to really look inwards,” **Kerr** continues, visibly moved by his bandmate’s words. “You know: ‘I’m not doing a job I hate, I get to travel the world with my best mate. So why am I doing this?’ What it came down to was realizing that it was impossible to go on living like that and to make the record I really wanted to make; they couldn’t both occur. So it was one or the other. People call it a crossroads but it’s not, it’s a T-junction, and I was at it - I was like: ‘That’s got to go, I’ve got to sack it off.”

“We were writing in LA, and I went off to Vegas. I was just sat in the bar, I’d always thought I was going to be sober one day, but I was surprised it was this early. I had this dream of hitting 40, getting sober and just playing fucking golf and talking about the good old days. And here I am, 28, thinking, ‘Fucking hell, it’s now.’ It was like this voice in my head going, ‘If you want to carry on with this and not fuck it up, this has to happen.’ How surreal is that? Making that decision in a bar, in Las Vegas. And the guy was like: ‘Your espresso martini, sir.’ I downed it, put down the glass and went: ‘That’s it; that’s the last drink. I’m now going to put my happiness first.”

As ever, **Thatcher** was there for him. “I remember thinking: ‘He’s got this.’ So it was kind of a case of sitting back and letting him work it out for himself. And just be there for him.”

New challenges presented themselves, however. “All the fear comes in,” says **Kerr**. “Can I write a song sober, can I play a show sober? I felt like for the first time I could properly reflect on what we’d been through, like the lights were turning back on - like waking up every day and each day I was a bit more awake. I could finally appreciate what we’d done, and feel proud of it.”

They put together a short run of U.K. dates, to plug back into what bonded them in the first place. For **Kerr**, the tour was a revelation. “Playing those shows was bizarre, it was as if everything was in HD, as if I’d been woken from a coma and someone was going: ‘You’re in a band called Royal Blood, and it’s going great. You’re playing to 50,000 people on Reading Festival’s main stage tonight, these are the songs, we’ll see you tomorrow.’ My initial thought was, ‘Christ, these songs are loud.’ It was like all my senses were now heightened. How could I have not wanted to be present in that?”

“It reminded me of why we’d first started playing together,” says **Thatcher**. “And making these new songs has been the same, almost like a return journey. They feel ready now. *We* feel ready.”

The pandemic has delayed the release of the new album. No worries, they say: more time to refine, distil, perfect. “These new songs gave me this incredible freedom, vocally and instrumentally,” says **Kerr**. “I got to dance across the groove, if that makes sense - it was something to slice over, and that felt exhilarating. We realized that there was a genius in just deleting stuff, paring things back. You’d suddenly get hit with air, with space. We kept cutting parts and sounds. It was such a revealing and thrilling experience.” Less is more, then? “Less is definitely more,” says Kerr, as **Thatcher** laughs beside him. “Of everything.” Except? “Passion, purity, reality.” “And beats,” says **Thatcher**, a man of fewer words than his old friend but clearly determined to have the last one.

The reaction to the album’s first two singles has been phenomenal. Both “**Trouble’s Coming**” and **“Typhoons”** continue to earn Rock and Alternative radio support and media attention across the globe, the tracks whipped up a whirlwind of high impact playlist covers, including Rock This and *NME’s* *Best New Tracks* at Spotify, and *Rock Scene* at Amazon Music.

Now **Royal Blood** are shaping up to be bigger than ever before, which is no mean feat given their previous achievements. They’ve scored two UK #1 album placement, including their double-Platinum debut, in the process selling two million albums worldwide. Their acclaim has included the *BRIT Award* for *Best British Group* plus further accolades at the *NME* and *Kerrang! Awards* as well as a *Mercury Prize* nomination. What’s more, they’ve made a major international impact, hitting the Top 10 in a further seven territories and peaking at #2 on the US Alternative Album chart. Further US success has included three #1 hits at Rock Radio, plus four Top 20 records at Alternative Radio.

**Royal Blood** are back. And their future starts here.

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**Royal Blood:**

**Mike Kerr** (vocals, bass, keys, piano) and **Ben Thatcher** (drums)

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