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BRITISH INVASION: LOOKING BACK ON BLACK MIDI

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Hello Huskies! Welcome back to the column that explores British music history: British Invasion. Today will be a different affair, instead of my usual deep dives into musical genres or Marxist romantics, I thought it would be nice to do a little retrospective on one of my favorite bands, black midi.

Black midi was created back in 2017, when the four members all attended school together. Vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Geordie Greep and guitarist Matt Kwasniewski-Kelvin first roped in fellow classmate Morgan Simpson to play drums with them before recruiting bassist Cameron Picton to complete the line-up.

The band played their first show at The Windmill in Brixton, London on June 12, 2017. Later, they got a residency at the venue and became one of the seminal bands in the Windmill scene, a group of like-minded experimental rock bands who frequented the venue, including such acts as Fontaines D.C., Squid and Black Country, New Road.

One key figure to this scene was Dan Carey, the London-based producer behind some of the first records by these Windmill bands. Carey would be the one behind the board for black midi's first album, "Schlagenheim," which released in 2019.

"Schlagenheim" was a wonderful entry into this band's unique sound. Every song is a romp and a whole different vibe. The first single, "bmbmbm," watches the band slog through chords while Greep repeats "she moves with a purpose."

The closing track "Ducter" details the fraught relationship between a conductor and a band. This noise-rock jam starts off with a foreboding guitar line, as the song's protagonist tells his story, before reaching a crescendo with Greep screaming the lines "He could never break me."

"Near DT, MI," is an anxiety-inducing listen, as a frantic tempo and shrieks of guitars complement Picton's foreboding narrative about the Flint, Mich. water crisis.

Black midi's first effort received universal acclaim from critics and rave reviews from

live audience members. A good performance of some "Schlagenheim" songs can be found in black midi's KEXP performance in 2019. The album would be nominated for the 2019 Mercury Prize, the premier award for the best album released by any British or Irish music act.

On Jan. 15, 2021, black midi announced Kwasniewski-Kelvin would take time off to deal with mental health issues and would not feature on the band's upcoming album, "Cavalcade," released in May 2021.

The opener "John L" is a standout piece from this album, and the one that made me discover this band. It's five minutes straight of pure, aggressive noise, with infectious melodies that will get stuck in your head for days. If those two don't work for you, the virtuosic playing will hook you in.

Meanwhile, "Slow," is the yin to the opener's yang, as the band uses a brass section and a saxophonist to create one of the creepiest tracks black midi put on "Cavalcade." The descending saxophone line, accentuated by drums, is a standout moment in this jazzy jam.

Black midi's sophomore ef-

fort was another home run, although some critics and fans expressed disappointment that they didn't hear enough of the black midi they came to love on "Schlagenheim."

Those criticisms would come to pass, as black midi would soon release – in my opinion – their best work to date with "Hellfire," in July 2022.

Working with the producer behind "John L," Marta Salogni, the band produces a raft of songs that they call "a tomb of stories about scumbags," and there are a number of scumbags to cover throughout these 10 tracks.

"Welcome to Hell" covers Private Tristan Bongo, a man at war who suffers with PTSD, and his abusive commanding officer, who tells Bongo he's "lucky I don't shoot you on the spot." "Eat Men Eat" tells the story of two gay miners forced to drink their own stomach acid. The closer, "27 Questions," is about a man so hated, he is blown up into a balloon for on-lookers to laugh at.

This album also returns to a sound more reminiscent of the noise-rock of "Schlagenheim," and everyone brings their A-game with these beautifully

written melodies and lyrics. Praise should also be given to Greep, who has started to come into his own as a singer and can wholly embody every character he plays on "Hellfire."

Looking at chart positions, "Hellfire," is certainly black midi's most successful to date, as it broke the top 40 in the UK. Fans couldn't wait for the band's follow-up. Unfortunately, Greep announced in 2024 that the band had gone on an indefinite hiatus, as the group wasn't on speaking terms by that point, and everyone soon started pursuing solo work.

Greep released his debut album "The New Sound" in 2024 to rave reviews, as people loved the black midi meets bossa nova sound. Simpson did some session work for Greep's new album, as well as Little Simz's 2025 album, "Lotus." Picton released two mixtapes of solo material to Bandcamp and formed a new band, My New Band Believe.

There was other news of note in 2025. But on Jan 12, 2026, the band's label announced that Kwasniewski-Kelvin passed away at the age of 26 after a long battle with his mental health. May he rest in peace.



British band "Black Midi" performs at the 2019 Festival Sideways in Helsinki. The band was created in 2017 when all members met while attending the same school. PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS