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Marianas Trench Take You Through Their Haunted Opus With *Phantoms*

By M.J. Rawls [@viewtifulj21](#) · On June 28, 2019

When you listen to *Phantoms*, the fifth album from rock band, **Marianas Trench**, it feels like the makings of a haunted house film. Certain sounds that may spook you and entice you to explore deeper. All these layers that have you walk in with all the trepidation of a scare coming.

In one of their most ambitious projects yet, the band is able to portray a haunted place with more than meets the eye. With layers and a meaning of love and hope as well. We caught up with drummer/vocalist **Ian Casselman** to talk about *Phantoms*, the recording process, and how the band approached making something totally unique after time spent in New Orleans.

Astoria was patterned after 80's movies. *Phantoms* is more about ghosts of former lovers. I like how Mariana Trenches' albums are all thematic. It's good to see that bands still do that. In the beginning of writing this album, what drew you to this particular theme?

So, we knew we were going to find a theme going into it. We weren't sure what it was going to be. First of all, it was cool to have that kind of thing because it gives you a little bit of a vision of where to start creativity. When you have a vibe, a world, a realm, or a sound with a framework to begin with in. Its funny because it gives you rules and restrictions, but as you go, it actually also gives you different permissions you may not have had before.

Like in the songwriting. The sort of eerie stuff. We have a harpsichord starting one of the songs that have never would have worked on any other album. The ghostly "ooooo" that would have been super weird and out of place, but

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somehow on this album, it works. The concept itself, we were on tour in the states in the summer almost two years ago. We were playing in New Orleans and had a day off and was just walking around as you do. It's a cool town. Just looking around, it has a different culture and vibe than anywhere in the states. Maybe South Carolina has a bit of it, too. More of a voodoo culture going on.

The interesting about that is that it seems like a creepy thing at first, but it's more about a celebration of life and remembering loved ones positively. There are all those Day of The Dead type parades, but they are more in memory of and not necessarily haunting. It sort of inspired the whole world where it looks like an eerie, creepy type of story, but if you look deeper, there's a lot of love and hope in there.

That goes into my next question. You mentioned using a harpsichord and there are a lot of layers to peel back on this album from a musical standpoint. Every subsequent listen turns up something different. A lot of organic practically to Phantoms where fans may think it's electronic, but it's the band themselves. How was adding all these layers because the album makes you feel like you're in a haunted house?

I feel like "Echoes of You", "The Killing Kind", and the transition into the "The Killing Kind" from "The Death of Me" are the ones that set the tone and the setting for the listening experience. I love those songs in there. The transition into "The Killing Kind" is probably my favorite spot in the whole thing.

It was a year of work including mixing and mastering. The reason it's that long is because it's a really deliberate process. Every song. Every verse. All the sounds are picked out. If you listen to this album over and over, you'll probably notice new things going on in the background. Little subtle touches. I don't know if a lot of people are doing that right now. I feel like a lot of songs are getting simpler and simpler. There's nothing wrong with that. It's actually light to listen to. It's just not the way we do it.

Trying to keep it as organic as possible was the goal where even a lot of the interesting sounds like vocals are done just through effects pedals. This was other than using synthesizers or samples for everything. Sometimes you do that anyway, but if you come see us play, we're a band that plays instruments. So, we're going to record that way, too.

I appreciate the album and the band making the sounds more extensive. There are a lot of Edgar Allan Poe references throughout. Just from stories like "The Telltale Heart" or "The Raven." There are also a lot of IT references, too. With Edgar Allan Poe, there's a certain macabre romanticism with his work. What was the process like incorporating one of your favorite authors into this album?

I think it just helped set up the mindset of the story, if that makes sense. If you're journeying through this listen, rather than..you can just listen to the music or climb in on the journey with the music. The Poe stuff kinda does that in writing. It really goes inside the head.

The cool thing about Poe is there is a romantic side to him. A lot of it has a mature vibe to it. Not a gimmicky horror feel. Almost how you can haunt yourself. That madness. Your own brain can be your worst enemy and honestly, it can be in real life. What we do with our own thoughts has the biggest effect on our daily goals and feelings.

Going back into what you mentioned about New Orleans and the way we view death. Instead of it being thought of as overall sadness, it can also be more of a celebration of life. When I listen to Phantoms, it feels like the lyricism is geared a lot towards a remembrance.

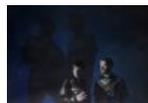
There was definitely an intention to give the album a flow. You don't want to have an album with eight ballads. It'd be a pretty painful listen after a few of them. So you want to have the rhythm of the listen actually have it's ups and downs. Sort of start small with the acapella. The songs are definitely sequenced

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in a particular order, so you get this really big climax at the end. Even within that last song, it starts small and gets really big again. A summary or a more succinct summary of the whole entire album.

I feel with a lot of the music, the melody sounds really upbeat. If you listen to the lyrics, sometimes there's something different going on. I don't feel like it's very inspiring to think about "hey man, we went for a really nice walk in the sun!" It's not stuff that really moves you to create, I find.

"Echoes of You" sounds like three different songs in one. You have the main part, the middle which have great harmonies, and then the end which has an acoustic vibe to it. Phantoms doesn't rest on its laurels and the band doesn't behold itself a particular song structure which is really unique.

The funny thing about **Josh [Ramsay]** when he records and he's creating these things is that he'll record and keep adding until he can't think of anything else that could make it better. Like "This might make it better. I'm going to try it." If it doesn't, ok, that didn't work. Usually you can bend the additions around until they do work in the right way.

Based on what we were doing in the past, there's a lot of songs that have similar ideas to that. These might even be more separated with actual sections. With "The Killing Kind" for example, it's supposed to have that effect where if you were at a musical, it reprises a lot of feature moments at a play. That's the job of that song. Convey the feelings of the overall album, but also call back to other feature spots. "Echoes of You" kind of does that without having any songs to call back to. It does it within itself. I love that. I love that it has the sections. It's one of my favorite ones to play live.

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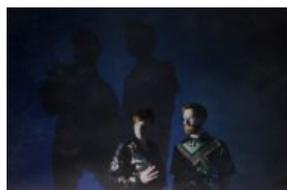
M.J. RAWLS

Journalist, Self-published author, and photographer since 2014, Murjani "MJ" Rawls is always looking to stretch his capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the

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