

Rearviewmirror: Remembering the 90s – Stabbing Westward – Darkest Days

90's score: 8/10

2020 score: 9/10

I'm probably revealing more about my age than I'd like to, but in 1992, I was only six years old and too young to understand the magic that was brewing in a little basement in Illinois. Two young guys by the name of Christopher Hall and Walter Flakus, in a band called [Stabbing Westward](#), were releasing their first bit of music to the world – a small EP called [Iwo Jesus](#). By the time I became old enough to discover and appreciate the music, Stabbing Westward would grow to become a semi-big name in the Industrial rock/metal world. Never quite big enough to match the level of [Nine Inch Nails](#), but big enough to garner a rabid fan base and tours that included the likes of [Placebo](#) and [Depeche Mode](#). I could go on forever about their history, as I'm a bit of Stabbing Westward nerd. But I'm here to talk about one of their albums that came out at the later end of the 90's – *Darkest Days* – an album that, in my opinion, is a criminally underrated piece of experimental industrial rock, and another record I credit to opening up my mind to new sounds.

Stabbing Westward released *Darkest Days* in 1998, after re-locating to Los Angeles. They wrote it as a concept album – a four-act record detailing the different stages of a breakup – sabotage, lust, rock bottom, and recovery/self-respect. Unfortunately, the record label would not allow them to market it as such. This would be a recurring theme in Stabbing Westward's history; a reason which I believe stifled their growth and stopped them from becoming as big as they could have. But I digress. Let's get into the nitty-gritty of the record!

The record opens with the title track, "Darkest Days." The ominous, opening lyric of "There are times, when I'm just a shell, when I do not feel anything for anyone," sets the tone for not just this track, but the rest of the record. It's a somewhat slow song until it opens up in blistering rage as Christopher Hall shouts, "My rage, my pain, I hate my darkest days" at the top of his lungs. It immediately launches into the next track, "Everything I touch," which continues the theme of this record's first act of relationship sabotage. Next up is "How Can I Hold On," which has one of the catchiest guitar riffs I've ever heard and is tinged with experimental sounds and melodies.

This record also has a song called "Save Yourself," which some consider to be Stabbing Westward's one-hit-wonder. It contains an incredibly catchy, sing-along chorus where Christopher sings, "I cannot save you, I can't even save myself." It got plenty of air time on MTV, Much Music, and college radio stations around the United States and was responsible for putting Stabbing Westward on the map. They had some previous hits from an earlier record called *Wither, Blister, Burn + Peel*, but nothing that would reach the heights of this track.

But in my opinion, the record is packed with hit-worthy tracks beyond "Save Yourself." One of the heaviest tracks (in both subject matter and music) is "Sometimes It Hurts," in which Christopher tells the story of what seems to be a man, drunkenly waking up and looking at this life, hating himself for creating the situation he's in. But it's not all darkness and despair. The record ends with "Waking Up Beside You," a nearly seven-minute piece, with a guitar melody that truly levitates the song as Christopher sings about longing for that person he let go, but in a way that feels more like acceptance of the situation, rather than anything self-destructive.

In 2020, I can gladly say that Stabbing Westward has reunited. They recently released their first piece of new music in 20 years, a small EP titled [Dead & Gone](#). No longer the road-warriors they once were, nearly all the members of the band now have family and jobs to think of. So, the plan is to release new music a slower basis, with a series of small EPs and an eventual full album. As for touring, they will likely never do extensive stuff and only play a handful of shows when they're all available to do so, and that's just fine with me.

When I first discovered Stabbing Westward in my early teens, I was mind-blown. The first thought I had was "I'd love to see these guys live." A week later, they broke up due to in-band arguing and greedy asshole record executives. I was crushed and thought I would never get to see them live. Fast forward almost 15 years later, and my wife and I were on our honeymoon in California. And who happened to be playing a reunion show AND playing the *Darkest Days* album in full at the [Regent Theatre](#) in L.A!? Stabbing Westward. So, celebrating our new marriage, my wife and I chose to watch a band sing about heartbreak, alcohol & drug abuse and hitting rock bottom. Have you ever heard of anything more romantic than that?

Written by Dominic Abate