

INDESTRUCTIBLE

(SO FAR)



FOR THEIR SOPHOMORE ALBUM, THE MEN OF

WAGE WAR

FOUND THEMSELVES TRUDGING THROUGH
HARDSHIP TO FIND ACCEPTANCE.

STORY: TAYLOR MARKARIAN PHOTOS: MAYSA ASKAR

Difficult periods inevitably befall us all, with pain and hopefully wisdom in tow. This is a lesson the members of Wage War learned as they were writing their sophomore record, *Deadweight*. When the band—vocalist Briton Bond, guitarists Cody Quistad and Seth Blake, bassist Chris Gaylord and drummer Stephen Kluesener—transitioned from their teen years into adulthood, they were met with some cruel realities that ended up opening the door to a wider spectrum of sound and experience.

"The way that I view records is, I think they're yearbooks," Quistad says. "I describe what happened last year and how you felt about it." With our first record, *Blueprints*, a lot of

our songs were written five or six years ago. We were anywhere from 16 to 18, just kids. Not really much to write, not much had gone wrong. A lot of the album was produced

But by the time Wage War's debut *Blueprints* was released in 2015, the band had already started to go through some changes. Internal and external issues began to take their toll, and their tone would soon shift.

"It was a significantly darker time," Quistad says. "Just getting used to touring and the effects it has on you. Touring is a great thing, and we're so lucky and blessed to be able to do it, but it definitely comes with its share of challenges, whether through relationships and just feeling

really important to you—which is a big theme on the record—or just simply having the time to figure out who you are when you're on your own. From that standpoint, I think the second half of *Deadweight* is [about] inner struggle and looking at the parts of you that you either like or want to work on."

Wage War didn't just apply that perspective conceptually, but did it in terms of expanding their reach musically. They kept the parts that worked from their previous record and wove them in with a new incarnation of the band. *Deadweight* runs the gamut from nu metal ("Stitch") to metalcore ("Southbound") to melodic rock ("Gravity"). It became clear to them when they started writing the new record that when it came to song writing, it was time to venture further out into unknown territory.

"We took some chances for sure," the guitarist/vocalist admits. "We pull influence from pop, from country, from R&B, hip-hop—the influence is all over, whether it's directly heard or not. When we write when we're in the studio, it's never an

People are still finding out who we are as a band." The album also includes the band members themselves, who do their own parts alongside well-known producers Andrew Wade and A. J. McInerney. Remember the Jeremy McKinnon.

"Working with Andrew and Jeremy is awesome," Quistad says. "A lot of bands will have butting-head moments with producers who produce their album. It becomes a weird time for writing the songs that you wrote in your bedroom change something. [For this record], everyone just came in with this understanding that was just like, 'Let's make the best record we can.' So it was absolutely a positive effect and all the changes we did with them absolutely made the record a better record."

The relationship between producer and artist is certainly a defining one, and each producer enters the studio with their own approach. Some go in ready to dictate, while others try to create a kind of support system. Wade and McKinnon chose the

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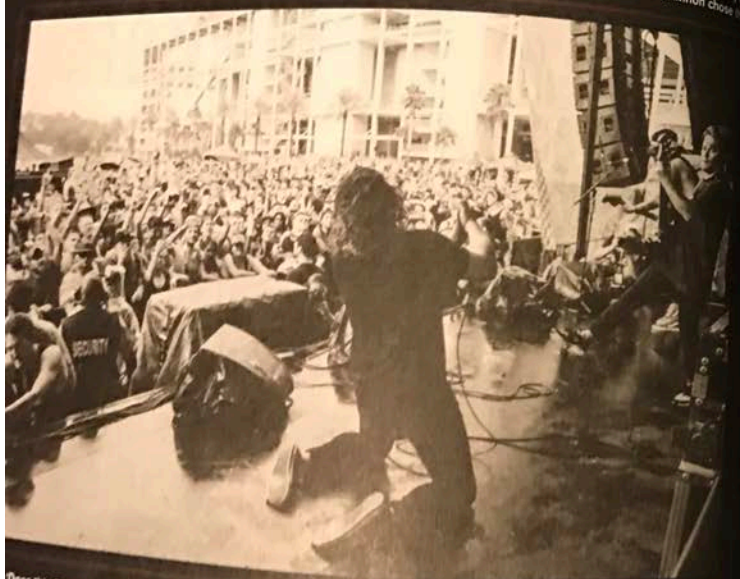
and I think there was kind of an exorcism, if you will, with the album. Just letting go of all the stuff that is in the record... I feel like it is a process. It's not just something that immediately happens. Some of this stuff, we're still going through it. It's more the mindset and learning to let go and just live where you're at and accept what happens. Having stuff like that out there that's so honest. It's like someone just opened up the diary from under your pillow. It's definitely freeing."

But Wage War aren't out of the woods yet. While writing and recording *Deadweight* was a sort of therapeutic exercise, their struggle does not end here. Many try their hardest to find closure or to riddle out a solution to all of their problems, but

the point Wage War bring home with their sophomore album is that that goal isn't one that is ever really reachable—or perhaps ever should be.

The most important thing is not to walk away hopeless, but to have the courage to improve and persist. "All right, I'm like you never reach the point where you're like, 'All right, I'm like you never reach the point where you're like, 'There's a line between who I wanna be,'" Quistad says. "There's a line between happy with yourself but still always being in progress. Some things just don't go away and you live side by side." ALT

WAGEWAR



Does this fit in the metalcore genre? It's whatever we want it to be. It's all over the place. That being said, it's no reason for anxiety to set in for those who love the sound of metalcore. *Deadweight* does not endeavor to put Wage War onto the same stage as Justin Bieber or Kanye West. It's more of a subtle influence, in both sound and message. The final track on the record is called "Johnny Cash," a nod to one of Quistad's all-time favorite artists. "Johnny Cash, whether it's his attitude or [being] a rebel, goes hand in hand with heavy music. It's not any bearing in our sound or anything, but it's that kind of kind of carried over from something that we've always had."

Quistad elaborates on the second record, we still have the time and the space to be creative before people start saying, 'It's over.'"

latter option, and it was crucial in crafting *Deadweight*. The guys in Wage War had the good fortune of being able to view their producers both as professionals and as friends. "I just love being around those guys," McKinnon responds in a separate interview. "They're young, they're exciting. I call Cody and Seth 'riff lords.' They're seriously incredible guitar players. Cody is a fucking wizard. I don't know what else to call him. There are a lot of good bands in heavy music, but those guys are fucking talented."

Still, having someone as established and enthusiastic as McKinnon by their side doesn't assuage every single shred of doubt. Whenever bands alter their sound even a little, there is always the chance of negative feedback. When an artist puts their heart in a song, it always leaves them exposed. "I'm always scared at what people are saying," McKinnon says. "I'm