

TEN ESSENTIAL

SCREENING Ask that guy



From The Editor's Floor: Chris Carrabba of Dashboard Confessional

Posted by Scott Heisel on 21-Dec-07 @ 05:52 PM

We here at AP love to talk. So much so, that when we do interviews with the rich and famous (or the on tour and barely scraping by and eating Taco Bell), we end up with an excess of Q&As that can't be wedged into the magazine, no matter which way we turn it. This is why we have From The Editor's Floor. This week, enjoy managing editor Leslie Simon's full, unedited interview with Dashboard Confessional frontman Chris Carrabba. -AP

LESLIE SIMON: What inspired you to return to your acoustic roots and go solo for your fall tour?

CHRIS CARRABBA: I've never really stopped doing shows [acoustic]. I do them every now and again. It's not like it

stopped being fun or anything, I've just done a *lot* of them--like, *a lot*. Like, *thousands*. I think I had tired of them a little bit. I had done so many shows, I think I burned out on them a little. Anyways, I felt fresh and I thought it'd be fun to do a whole tour like that.

Are there any songs you won't play live anymore because they're too personal? Or are there any songs that you're dusting off for the tour? There's songs that I wouldn't play for a while because of whatever reason, but there are no songs that'd I've said, "I'll never play again." I just put some songs in the vault for a while. I'm trying to pull out everything for this tour. I did a song called "Living In Your Letters" for the first time since we taped *MTV Unplugged*. Then there are songs like "Bitter Pill," which I had locked away a long time ago. It had become a song that had hung really heavy on me for some reason.

Is it possible to be immune to the feelings you once felt when you originally wrote these songs?

I [feel them every single night] because I'm not a very good actor. For whatever reason, they always take me back into that place. I did have a funny moment with ["Bitter Pill," specifically] the other day when it just struck me, for the first time, that it's a *really* mean song. There's a line in the song that says, "This medicine is just what you deserve," and then the crowd said, "Swallow, choke and die," which is the next lyric. They said it with fervor and it stopped me in my tracks. I stopped playing. The crowd looked at me and I looked and them, and I said, "That was *angry*."

When you initially wrote songs like that, which were seemingly so venomous towards whatever girl who had done you wrong, did you mean for them to be acts of revenge?

[*Laughs*.] No because--especially *those* songs in *those* days--you never think that anyone's going to hear them at all, and certainly *not* the person you wrote about. It's just cathartic.

The songs that are angry or unhappy or whatever, they were genuinely born out of those feelings. Somehow, you can tell in those moments where the audience is singing them that they're pouring themselves into that moment as well. It's brought them happiness--and it's brought me happiness.

Have you ever heard a response from any of your exes who may've been the subject for some not-so-nice lyrics?

I've actually seen them [at shows] and I've caught their expressions. You can see it cutting them a little bit and I can't help but feel bad.





RECENT ITEMS

News:

Rise Records add In:Aviate to... Solid State sign Sever Your Ties Fall Out Boy to reschedule...

Features: Web Exclusive: Manchester...







Really?

Well, whatever we'd gone through, we've gone through it. At this point, I'm not in the business of punishing anybody. But, that being said... [*Pauses*.] Earlier, in the past, I might have enjoyed that a little bit more. [*Laughs*.] It's one of better revenges. I try to dress the subject matter up a little more now, so whoever the subject is doesn't know [if it's them or not], which is almost worse. Now they wonder. Every time they wonder.

So many of the bands now are fighting to be in the spotlight. Nothing's off limits. How did you manage to keep your private life private--and actually have fans respect that?

You know, it never occurred to me that anyone from our scene would ever do what they do now--ever. So it was never a question. Number one, it's not part of my personality, which maybe you wouldn't expect if you only listen to my music. Once they get to know me, a lot of people are surprised that I'm a different kind of person in my life than I am in my songs. That's because that's where I get out my bullshit. I have no desire at all to live that out publicly. I knew that it could be advantageous to my career, but it would kill my creativity. I also think your fanbase also takes a very temporary ownership of you when you live that loudly and that publicly. How can they ever relate to what they *imagine* the song is about? If they know a song is about Hilary Duff, then they know the song's not about them or anyone like them. It's about HD.

Our scene was built on accessibility, though. Have bands today gone too far?

Let's use that band in a bubble thing. I have only heard good things about that band but the only exposure I ever had to them was that [show.] It's not about being accessible; it's about "Hey, look at *me*. Listen to *me*. Check *me* out." It's become about grandstanding--and grandstanding and accessibility are two different things.

There's always the worry that if you're not the center of attention, then fans will forget about you.

Now you get into that thing where [people can say], "Easy for you to say, Chris." Maybe I got my footing before things got harder, or before the shelf life got shorter. Now it's the toughest thing. I don't know why it is that I'm allowed things that other bands aren't--like longevity, so far, and the ability to change and do the things I want to do to drive my career. It's a lot harder now. It's more difficult for some [band] coming in now. Of course, it was it was harder than ever when I came in. There's always going to be a different challenge but I'm interested in the mystery of it. Who are the kids people are going to listen to forever? I don't know, but I have a hunch it's bands like Manchester Orchestra, who people are discovering on their own and sharing with each other. They're doing it for what seems to be a genuine reason. Sure, they out there when an opportunity arises, but they're not insisting on opportunities for opportunities sake, which is something I've never done and I can't stand.

It'll be interesting to see what's next...

When something's new and fresh, it seems exciting. When something's repeated a million times, it starts to seem stale. [Bands should] create something new from a new palate. I did. I wanted to step away from that thing before it became redundant.

You said yourself that you're allowed certain concessions that other bands aren't. Is there a moment before you put out a new album where you worry that the fans won't like the direction you're taking?

Yeah, I wonder. I wonder every time. I wonder. But that's not the same as fearing they're not going to. I'm always wondering what's the [album] they're gonna... Look at Neil Young. His audience outright turned on him several times for the risks he took. But they always knew he'd go back. They'd say, "This album was for him, I guess." That's what you seem to say as a Neil Young fan. If you don't like the album he's just made, then that one's for him and you hope the next one is for you. I think that when my records are done or right when they come out. "Is this the one that was for me?"

Are there albums in your career that you feel closer to than others?

Not when I'm making them, no. It comes in these weird tides. Suddenly I'll have a strange relationship with certain songs and I won't understand how I can't relate to them and then the whole record [they come from] makes me think, "Was that ever me? Was I ever that guy?" Then before you know it, the song steps in and doesn't sound so... You know, so many songs I've written when I was 17, 18 years old. I'm 32 [now] and you start saying to yourself, "What part of that guy is still with me?" You can be embarrassed by poetry that's unsophisticated or trying to be too sophisticated, or song structures you wouldn't do now, or whatever... Then all of a sudden, one night you play it and it's this refreshing thing--and you're proud of it.

Adversely, my newest record is one that I'm more proud of than any I've ever made. A lot of it is the methodology of which I made the record and the attitude I walked in with and still have about it. I certainly didn't have that [attitude] on *Dusk And Summer* or *A Mark, A Mission, A Brand, A Scar.* There were instances with Dusk And Summer where the process was a taxing thing. It was taxing because of the length and time it took, the process with which it was attended to, and how

many people had opinions, which with one glaring exception have never listened. I've never put my songs or records to committee ever. There were decisions I made on that record, mostly which songs to select for the album, that I kind of rearet.

It's not something I can't come around to, as I have with songs I've written at 17. But the record you just made always makes more sense to you than the one before it, which makes the least sense. The ones before that you've come to grips with, you've come to terms with, and you're happy with them on almost every level.

The Shade Of Poison Trees sounds very much like the yin to Dusk And Summer's yang, going from something so over-the-top and highly anticipated to something to unexpected.

I didn't want to make them wait. I didn't want [my fans] to get to the point where they should start waiting. I wanted to beat that wonderment.

The new album is really a return to the era of The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most in that it's primarily acoustic and overtly lovelorn, yet you seem pretty content with life. How do you write sad songs without being sad?

I mainly only write songs about my Italian sports cars breaking down because it's hard to get parts here [in Florida]. That makes me sad. That breaks my heart. [Laughs.]

But, seriously...

I don't know what I'm writing about. I don't know what the songs are taken to be. Sometimes they are about heartbreak still because you can't be in love without having your heart broken. You can't as a 17-year-old, and you can't as a 27-yearold. This process is a wild ride. Also, yeah, my life is cushier in some fashion than it ever was but it's a lot rockier in some places than it ever was. I've got a lot to draw on. I haven't had the easiest life and, one day, when nobody cares anymore, I'll tell you about it. I'm not a silver-spoon rich kid who grew up with no problems or hardships. There are plenty of things that have gone on in my life that I will always be able to draw on--and I have on this record. I've drawn on things from my present and I've drawn on a couple experiences from my past that I never let myself think about and I'm still angry about them and I carry that around.

On the new album there are ever-present themes of falsity and superficiality. Take, for example, "Where There's Gold" and "Matters Of Blood And Connections," which seem to be counterparts to each other.

First of all, I don't know whether to be impressed by you or admit that I need to hone my skills a little better in hiding the relationships between songs. For every song I write, there's always a cousin or two, actually. There are probably another two songs on this record that more deeply explain the relationship from one song to the other.

Yes, one's female based ["Where There's Gold"] and one's male based ["Matters Of Blood And Connections"]. On ["Matters Of Blood And Connections"], I'm just disgusted with the posturing and arrogance of this spoiled brat. There's no shortage of arrogant, spoiled brats in this business, and it really surprises me. It's like, "Dude, you win. You got your dream. This is what you hoped to do. Where do you get off?" There's somebody I know who passes themselves off very loudly as something that he really isn't. It's like, how dumb does he think we are?

Will this douchebag ever figure out this song is about them?

No. I'm sure a lot of people I know will wonder for a second if I might be talking about them as they read this, but as for listening to the song? Never.

What about the female counterpart in "Where There's Gold?" She gets off the hook because I find more sympathy in that. I guess that's the duality in me. I want to forgive a girl and I want to stay pissed at an asshole. [Laughs.] I've just come to forgive her because she's doing the best she can... We should talk again in six months because I still haven't processed these songs.

That's probably because you wrote them yesterday.

[Laughs.] I just wrote them but it takes me years to figure out what I was really getting at. I'm closer to knowing what "Matters Of Blood And Connections" is about than "Where There's Gold," and that's just because I was so pissed then when I wrote it and there's no question in my mind. When I wrote "Where There's Gold," as I was singing it, I kept thinking, "Who is this? Or is this so many people?"

Tell it to me straight: Is "Matters Of Blood And Connections" about Brody Jenner? Who?

That dude from The Hills? Oh, I don't watch The Hills.

Damn, that joke would've been way funnier if you knew who he was. Um, how about Brandon Davis, the greasy oil heir who dated Mischa Barton. [Laughs.] Yes, it's about him. [Laughs.]

As if you're not already busy enough hanging out with Brandon Davis,

you're already in the studio recording another record. What gives? Making *The Shade Of Poison Trees* was a way back in. I don't know how to explain it other than that. I was feeling a little disgusted with the music scene and I was feeling a little curious about my own place and my own part in it. I wasn't sure how I felt about the process of making records. Coming out of [the recording of] *The Shade Of Poison Trees*, I really knew what it *should* be again, and I made it that way. Leaving there, it felt pretty great. I felt like the world was still worth exploring as a songwriting, so I just started writing songs that are more personal to me. I thought that I had got pretty close to my unabashedness with my earlier work, but something about *Shade* just reinvigorated me and remolded me. I've written 18 songs and I've demoed them pretty sophisticatedly.

I was home [in Florida] for basically six weeks and recorded *The Wire Tapes*, which is a covers record, and 18 new songs. That's a tremendous amount of work, and that's how I used to do it. I was in three bands at once and you don't even have any time to think about if the one you finished just a second ago was any good before you're writing the next one. I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel here. I'm not trying to pull the same move I did on *Shade*, where I'm saying, "Oh, well, the new album will be out *this* Thursday." [*Laughs*.] I don't want to build anybody's expectations; I'm tired of expectations. But the fact remains if these songs get on a record or not, it's so great to sit down and write them without thinking a second about how, when, where or why. To those answers, I have no idea.

But you tend to say every single album is your "most personal album." How can that be?

Well... [Pauses.] That's because you have different reasons for saying that every time. My first records [*The Swiss Army Romance* and *The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most*], which I often speak of as one, were personal because it's self-evident. *A Mark, A Mission* was personal to me because I was fighting for something, but I wasn't sure what. *Dusk And Summer* was personal because I had to win it back. I don't even know what that means, but I know I did. In order for me to get a hold of that thing, I had to invest my whole heart into the process. For a while, it seemed like it was everybody else's: It was the listener waiting for [the album]; it was the kid who liked "Vindicated" who demanded I had more songs like that to listen to; it was the kid who liked *Places* who was waiting, hoping like hell that I'd never write another song like "Vindicated;" it was the people at the distributor who needed it by the fourth quarter, who didn't get it and didn't get it the next year or the next year. Just getting *Dusk And Summer* released was a big personal moment for me. But *The Shade Of Poison Trees* was me reestablishing who I am. I'm reminding myself and letting myself be that. With this album that I'm writing next, when I say it's the most personal to me, I've started with that

Who's the person that The Shade Of Poison Trees is reminding you that you are?

Fiercely independent and somebody who knows what they want to do, whether or not anybody's going to like him or that. I got fooled into caring a little bit about what people said just because there's such an abundance of opinions. The internet's such an amazing thing. It's a great tool, but it's also this amazingly foolish thing where people have no accountability whatsoever. Thusly, they say really bold things in a very pussified way, anonymously. It's not that I can't take an insult. I'm Italian. [*Laughs*.] It's just that that shit doesn't exist when you're just a kid in a room with a guitar. It doesn't occur to you, and it shouldn't occur to you. **alt**

.....

Portions of this interview originally appeared in AP 233.

Also in this issue:

- + Web Exclusive: Manchester Orchestra tour diary (part one)
- + Web Exclusive: Meg & Dia Tour Diary (part six)
- + Web Exclusive: Meg & Dia Tour Diary (part five)
- + Web Exclusive: Meg & Dia Tour Diary (part four)
- + Front Row Center: The Loved Ones/The Gaslight Anthem
- + Web Exclusive: Sherwood Tour Diary (part four)
- + Web Exclusive: Meg & Dia Tour Diary (part three)
- + Front Row Center: Paul Baribeau/Eric Ayotte/Super Bobby
- + Web Exclusive: Sherwood Tour Diary (part three)
- + Web Exclusive: Sherwood Tour Diary (parts one and two)
- + Web Exclusive: Meg & Dia Tour Diary (part two)
- + Front Row Center: Hot Water Music/Lucero/Able Baker Fox
- + Web Exclusive: Meg & Dia Tour Diary (part one)
- + Front Row Center: Chuck Ragan/Ben Nichols
- + Front Row Center: The Swellers/Fireworks
- + Front Row Center: Yellowcard in Kuwait
- + From The Editor's Floor: Jack's Mannequin
- + Web Exclusive: Enter Shikari Tour Diary (Part 1)
- + From The Editor's Floor: Jarrod Gorbel of the Honorary Title
- + Front Row Center: Spitalfield

- + From The Editor's Floor: Chris Conley of Saves The Day
- + From The Editor's Floor: Trevor Reilly of A Wilhelm Scream
- + Web Exclusive: Annuals/Manchester Orchestra Tour Diary (part two)
- + From The Editor's Floor: Josh Homme of Queens Of The Stone Age
- + Web Exclusive: A conversation with Rivers Cuomo
- + Front Row Center: The Fest 6 (days one, two and three)
- + Web Exclusive: Blessthefall Tour Diary (part five)
- + Front Row Center: A Wilhelm Scream/Only Crime
- + Web Exclusive: Blessthefall Tour Diary (part four)
- + Front Row Center: Bomb The Music Industry!
- + Web Exclusive: Blessthefall Tour Diary (part three)
- + Web Exclusive: Set Your Goals' Halloween Adventure
- + Front Row Center: The Draft/Dead To Me/The Gaslight Anthem
- + Web Exclusive: Scary Kids Scaring Kids making the video
- + Web Exclusive: Blessthefall Tour Diary (part two)
- + Front Row Center: Minus The Bear
- + Web Exclusive: Blessthefall Tour Diary (part one)
- + Web Exclusive Interview: Evergreen Terrace
- + Web Exclusive Interview: Three
- + AP web exclusive: More most anticipated albums of 2007
- + Other sections...

Home | News | Mosh Pit | Bands | Features | Contests | AP Mag | Downloads | Media | Subscribe | Shop | Advertise | Jobs | Contact Copyright © 2005 Alternative Press Magazine, Inc. 1305 West 80th Street • Ste 2F • Cleveland, OH 44102

Created and Powered by mission Media