

Emerson once wrote, "When it is darkest, men see the stars" and he might as well have been penning a poem for Rogue Wave. Last year was a rollercoaster ride for the foursome – drummer Pat Spurgeon had a kidney transplant, keyboardist Gram LeBron lost his father, singer Zach Rogue had a daughter and the band recruited a new bass player (Patrick Abernathy, formerly of Beulah). But instead of falling apart, they converted all their heartbreak, love, hurt, pain, elation and insight into a most affecting and beguiling record, ASLEEP AT HEAVEN'S GATE.

Rogue Wave's Brushfire Records debut, ASLEEP AT HEAVEN'S GATE, is a proudly defiant album shot through with heartfelt self-examination and a wider commentary on the flawed world around us. "The entire record is about the internal joy that we've been feeling at being able to overcome so much in the last year and then looking around at the country we love, which is disintegrating before our eyes," declares Zach Rogue. "I heard this guy on NPR talking about duality in relation to being with his mother when she died. Most people describe death as the most awful thing they could ever experience. But as he was watching the life leave her body, that instant was both the most horrifying moment in his life and the most beautiful spiritual and enlightening moment he ever had. Life is all about those dualities; we just wanted to capture them on tape."

"There's an intensity and a fury to ASLEEP AT HEAVEN'S GATE," he continues. "There is a sense of darkness, urgency and tension that we haven't had on our records before. It's new territory and it feels like a new band in a lot of ways."

Rogue Wave came into existence in 2002, when Zack Rogue decided to put down on tape some of the songs that had been kicking around in his head for years. After initially self-recording and self-releasing the resulting album, OUT OF THE SHADOW, Rogue Wave became a full band and found a home on Sub Pop Records, who reissued the album to widespread acclaim. DESCENDED FROM VULTURES followed in 2005, earning the band more rave reviews and landing their music on "Weeds," "Heroes" and "Friday Night Lights."

After touring non-stop for over a year in support of their second album DESCENDED FROM VULTURES they took a much-deserved break (though they did come out of hiding to contribute "Sightlines" to the hit SPIDERMAN 3 soundtrack). "When we recorded DESCENDED FROM VULTURES, we had been on the road for months and we had only a few days off before we went into the studio," Rogue confides. "We were exhausted and burnt out. This time, we had a few months off to relax and reflect – and it shows."

Produced by Roger Moutenot (Yo La Tengo, Sleater Kinney, Elvis Costello) with Zach Rogue and recorded in Forestville, California, ASLEEP AT HEAVEN'S GATE was derailed two weeks into the sessions after technical problems mis-pitched a majority of the early tracks. Refusing to be defeated, the foursome decamped to their studio in Oakland, CA where they spent days salvaging what they could, rerecorded some tunes and laid down overdubs. The results are worth it, because ASLEEP AT HEAVEN'S GATE finds the band at their most accomplished.

“Christians In Black,” which was inspired by a suicide, is a gentle ballad that gently combines Nick Drake and Neil Young, while “Chicago x 12” is a dulcet slice of melancholia that deftly manages to make self-doubt sound uplifting. The shimmering and glimmering mini-anthem “Lake Michigan” is a highlight, full of Seventies pop sensibilities and uplifting melodies, though in part it tackles “environmental destruction and the greed that perpetuates our inability to make any kind of progress,” according to Rogue.

Part of the richness of ASLEEP AT HEAVEN’S GATE is due to the band’s newfound sense of experimentalism. “We were listening to a lot of Wendy Carlos, who scored TRON, A CLOCKWORK ORANGE and THE SHINING,” Rogue says by way of explanation. “She is responsible for a lot the ambient noise and the interesting sounds you hear. It’s that noise versus melody abstract sound debate. It’s the idea that banging on a wall or hitting a door with your hand can be a musical instrument.”

ASLEEP AT HEAVEN’S GATE is not just the work of its four members strumming chords and hitting doors though, guest appearances and collaborations abound. Matthew Caws from Nada Surf sings on a couple of songs, indie innovator John Vanderslice contributes, Snowblink’s Daniela Gesundheit sings on a number of tracks, Dominic East of Our Lady of the Highway lends vocals and Bill Cameron of the Winechuggers plays keyboards on “Ghost.” For the sun-kissed epic “Own Your Own Home,” the band invited thirty friends into the studio with acoustic instruments of every ilk. In fact, Rogue estimates that they ended up using about 150 different instruments during the various recording sessions.

ASLEEP AT HEAVEN’S GATE is an album about hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies, sadness and joy. Filled with darkness and light swirled together, ASLEEP AT HEAVEN’S GATE is a stirring sonic reminder of the dualities that make life such an unforgettable and incomparable ride.

Rogue Wave is:

Zach Rogue
Pat Spurgeon
Gram LeBron
Patrick Abernathy