

Abandon Kansas

AD ASTRA PER ASPERA

Through the fire of sleepless nights, uncertain futures, and countless miles on the road, Abandon Kansas emerges battle-hardened and tested with the highly celebrated *Ad Astra Per Aspera*. This, their first official retail release, is a right of passage for a band that has demonstrated over the past half-decade that they are more than prepared to lay claim to their own territory among the industry elites.

This—the consummation of their vision to be more than just a band, more than just empty words or singles—is the opus that most bands only fantasize about. This is their time, their most crucial hour, as frontman Jeremy Spring explains: “*Ad Astra Per Aspera* is Latin meaning ‘to the stars through difficulty.’ The title is the Kansas state motto, and the concept for our new record. Nearly all of the songs refer to heaven, the sky, flight, the stars, and the challenges along the journey. For every band there is that one record that outdoes all of the rest, and that record will always be your favorite. I have no idea what the future holds, but for me, this is going to be that record for us. Something has happened here, something bigger than four guys making noise with instruments and singing into microphones.”

This record is independent rock n’ roll that stirs the imagination and conjures deep optimism. The sound is ethereal, yet tangible. Spring’s voice harkens imagery of brisk fall evenings staring at distant stars, dreaming of hopeful futures, even amidst chaos. And the reverberation of Brad Foster’s echoing guitars will etch themselves into your memory as they gently carry you to the outer reaches of the atmosphere. Balanced by bassist Chet Keuffer and drummer Brian Scheideman the record paints in subtle strokes, communicating with deep feelings, rather than stringent riffs or unsettling beats. There is a unity to the instrumentation that can only come from a seasoned unit of men who understand that, in order to be great, the sum of the parts must equal a greater whole. Teaming up with producer Mark Lee Townsend to create a sound all their own, *Ad Astra Per Aspera* defies comparison, yet sounds all too familiar, as a memorable release should.

“This record is a story about where we are headed, without forgetting where we came from,” states Spring. “The stars aren’t fame and money. The stars represent heaven, or better yet, the presence of God. We are aiming for the stars, yet we seem to find ourselves in the middle of storm after storm. It is the story of how we have been able to maintain high spirits and use our valleys as fuel to create new music.”

Noteworthy tracks include the first single and album opener, “Heaven Come My Way,” the methodical, art-epic, “The Golden State,” and perhaps the catchiest tune in the band’s catalogue, “Like it Or Not.” But don’t make the mistake of thinking this is a record of a few radio tunes followed by filler, though. Rather than approach songwriting as most do, desperately attempting to manufacture hits, Abandon Kansas has delivered an entire, cohesive collection of songs with one measure of quality control. This is an album to be consumed in its entirety, absolutely. Lyrically, these songs are the templates for a culture that is battling through challenging circumstances. For example, on “Heaven Come My Way,” Spring’s vocals lay claim to bright futures when as he croons, *I’ve always aimed higher; don’t let me off the hook. We wrote a chapter, haven’t finished the book.* On “Where Else Can We Go?” he speaks into the problem of pain: *If pain produces harmony, we all have a note. If God conducts the*

symphony, no one sings alone. Steeped with the wisdom of a crafty veteran, the band's frontman has proven that eloquence is a given, as every single song contains nuggets of truth that will resonate, inspire, and even haunt the listener.

With such an extensive touring history (having shared the stage with the likes of House of Heroes, Run Kid Run, and The Classic Crime), Abandon Kansas has developed a special, cohesive show that is a must-see. Theirs is a tale of evolution, however, as Spring explains, "Every band grows between albums, but our band specifically grew a lot in how we present our music live. As our songwriting has matured, so has the way we present ourselves onstage. We have started adding television screens that run multimedia during our set. We're trying to offer more of a presentation, or 'show' rather than just get on stage and play loud songs for thirty minutes."

If the present is grey, and the future is uncertain, then only one thing remains: faith. And faith is the binding element, the constant for this band—a band fighting valiantly to emerge in the current musical and cultural context. Rather than rely on hype or politics or even the promise of a truly career-defining album such as *Ad Astra Per Aspera*, Abandon Kansas have placed their livelihoods in the hands of a creator who never fails, who never abandons us.

"At the end of the show we answer to our fans, at the end of the day we answer to our band-mates, at the end of the tour we answer to our label, and at the end of year we answer to our families and friends back home. But at the end of our lives we answer to God, and He expects us to follow through on what he has called us to do. God isn't a businessman, and I don't think He is interested in numbers. But I know he wants us to be good stewards of the talents he blessed us with and the time we spend on the road. I love the words from that old song "Be Thou My Vision" that say, *riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise.*"

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