

Abandon Kansas

HOPECORE.com

An Interview w/ Jeremy Spring

Though they spent several years as an unsigned band you would think by the sound of this record that Abandon Kansas just stepped off of a tour bus with the biggest management in the game. However, if you get a chance to speak with one of the members of AK you will realize they are not much different than you and I. They struggle with the same challenges and issues that we all do. And what I love about their new full-length Gotee (Relient K, House Of Heroes) album, *Ad Astra Per Aspera*, is that those struggles are as evident as ever. These dudes are real and they aren't afraid to wear it on their sleeves. Frontman Jeremy Spring talks more about that and this record in the interview below.

The first thing I noticed when I listened to this album was the production. It is even bigger than, and contains more additional instrumentation and vocals than, your latest EP or prior full-length. How do you feel about your first signed full-length release *Ad Astra Per Aspera*?

Jeremy Spring: I am really proud of the way this record turned out. The biggest difference in this project vs the last one was time. We had three weeks in June and another three weeks in August to pull everything together. We did the last EP in 12 days just a few weeks after we signed. This project is on the same page musically from beginning to end because we approached the song writing intentionally around the concept. It was very much a pedal record. At one point we had four or five full pedal boards chained together creating all sorts of sound effects. At the end of a song called *Take My Lead* there are horns, extra drums, and even a trashcan on the track. Aside from a lap steel part on one song that Mark Townsend played, we played everything on this record and that feels good to say. You can hear our influences on this record. Bands like The Killers, Kings of Leon, Mew, and Phoenix. Mark and JR McNeely did a fantastic job producing and mixing this record; I am really impressed with the sonics of the final product. Much of the lyrical content is a dialogue with the sky, we needed it to feel big and ethereal and it does!

I don't know Spanish, so I'm not sure what your album title means *Ad Astra Per Aspera*... (Only joking, I know it's not Spanish.) Can you fill us in on the meaning of it and why you decided to go with such a tongue twister?

JS: *Ad Astra Per Aspera* is Latin for "to the stars through difficulty" and is the Kansas state motto. When I was writing the songs for this record we had not picked a concept yet, and about halfway through, the concept found us. We have this old Kansas flag as a tablecloth on our merch table and the motto is inscribed around the state seal. Brad busted out this incredibly vivid painting with a borderline psychedelic interpretation of the Kansas state seal. The lyrics have this ongoing dialogue with the sky and almost every song has some mention of the stars, heaven, or the sky. Whatever it is that you are shooting for, you have to go through some serious storms to get there. In a broad sense, *Ad Astra Per Aspera* is presenting life as a storm and heaven as the stars on the other side of it. It's a story about where we are headed without forgetting where we came from. Our label, Gotee Records, has been so incredibly open to our creative ideas with songs and artwork and concepts. It took some convincing to have such a foreign album title but it means a lot to us, and it makes for a good story every time someone asks.

What has the reaction been to the new tunes from live audiences thus far? And you guys have always been the kind of band to keep your head down and do your own thing, but what are the critics saying and how have you felt about the critics?

JS: We played *The Golden State* and *Heaven Come My Way* live on the last tour in 2010 and the reactions were strong from the audience. The music and lyrical content is more metaphorical and a tad more serious than *We're All Going Somewhere*, but our fan base has embraced it so far. You're right about us keeping our head down and doing our own



thing no matter what though, because critics are always there. It's hard for me to take a Christian cd reviewer seriously when his favorite band is Skillet because he has no idea where we are coming from creatively. On the other hand, we are open about our belief in Christ and a lot of mainstream critics won't give us the time of day because of that. I'll never apologize for being associated with Christ, but it makes our job difficult when we are associated with some extreme branches of Christianity. All of the press for *Ad Astra Per Aspera* so far has been overwhelmingly positive, but again, we have never been a band to take cues from someone else. We didn't wait for the industries permission to get out there, we just did it, and that's what we'll keep doing. We are answering our call and we believe in this record and we are going to play a million shows in support of it like we do every year.

In "A Conversation With The Sky" you state "Change with the times and you'll get left behind." I love that! And this song seems to be one of your more cryptic tracks, so can you tell us more about your lyrical direction on this one?

JS: I believe that if you set out to make flavor of the week art or live a life that is guided by the most current trends then eventually you'll get left behind because it's impossible to keep up for long. I feel like a lot of people my age give their bodies, their values, and their dreams away in exchange for a few months of public validation. If you sell your soul to 2011 then you are going to feel pretty useless in 2012. What's sad; we give those things away to people who could care less about us as a creation of God. This track was inspired by a long drive home watching the sunset over the flint hills in Kansas. God has never really spoken to me through his creation, or maybe He has and I just totally missed it. Lately though, I have been going on long walks, just listening and being open to what God has to teach me. The sky didn't open up and I didn't hear any audible voices, but if I did, I think this song is what it would have felt like. We tried to make the voice of the "sky" otherworldly in the track and let the dynamic build in the same way revelation strikes your heart. This is my favorite song on the project just because it's such a journey and it was the most challenging to sing and play in the studio.