

# Q&A: JT WOODRUFF OF HAWTHORNE HEIGHTS

*"So cut my wrists and black my eyes," sings lead vocalist JT Woodruff on "Ohio Is for Lovers," a song that has been described as "The Emo Anthem." Hawthorne Heights was made famous by its screamed vocals and catchy, intense rock 'n' roll.*

*The band took a new direction after the accidental death of guitarist Casey Calvert, and this week, Woodruff talked with Diversions Assistant Editor Joseph Chapman about the band's upcoming acoustic tour.*

**Diversions:** So how did you land on the album name *Skeletons*?

**JT Woodruff:** I guess this is kind of a darker record for us. We're going through a lot of brutal life issues and I guess it just kind of fit to strip everything back to its beginning. You have to start with a skeleton no matter what kind of idea you're thinking about and you start piling stuff on top of that. We wanted the album to be basic and just write about where we're coming from.

**Dive:** Looking at just the visual aesthetic of the album, it looks like you guys are paying homage to the art surrounding the Day of the Dead, a Mexican festival that is more of a celebration of the dead than a mourning. Did you guys have this in mind when you put together the album?

**JW:** No, it's kind of a coincidence. We chose our album name when we were writing and everything and then our drummer Eron (Bucciarelli) was really into this artist from Pittsburgh named Mike Egan and that's exactly what he draws and everything. So he painted our cover and it was just kind of a happy accident I guess.

As it turns out, that's kind of what the album is about: it is about thinking back on good terms in a good way and having good memories of the dead.

**Dive:** Do you feel that Hawthorne Heights has been pigeonholed as a screamo band?

**JW:** I guess people could say that. I don't really read too much into that stuff. I'm not a big fan of like ten different subgenres of rock and roll. If it's loud, if it has distortion – it's rock and roll. I don't think anybody needs to come up with some sort of fancy name for it because then you start listening to stuff just because it has that tag on it or you don't listen to stuff because it has that tag on it.

I think you just listen to stuff because it's good and you like the way it sounds. Whether it's opera or our band or whoever – I think if you like it, it doesn't really need a name.

**Dive:** The acoustic tour comes as a surprise. What led you guys to strip down the instrumentation?

**JW:** I think that it just kind of came about. We've been a band for a while, we've got four records out, we've been touring for a couple of years now and we've never done anything like this.

We wanted to do something we've never done, we wanted to challenge ourselves and also challenge the listener. If someone is really into our band, we wanted to invite them to this show and say, "Here, listen to this music in a different way." Maybe they'll hear something totally different from the same exact songs. If you're not challenging yourself, you better give up I guess.

**Dive:** How does it change your sound live?

**JW:** Well, for about the past month, we've been sitting in our rehearsal studio just rehearsing these songs, just rehearsing these different versions and reworking and rearranging these things.

And I tell you, it's been a really cool experience because it makes you fall in love with the songs again. If you play a song over and over live, it tends to lose its luster to you, the songwriter, and then the performer. You're just playing it.

So we've been having fun just digging in and playing these songs in a different way, it's been really cool. You know, different live – we're going to be sitting up there with acoustic guitars as opposed

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**Time:** Sunday, 7 p.m.  
**Location:** Local 506,  
506 W. Franklin St.  
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to standing with our electrics and the drums are kind of scaled back. We've got a lot of percussion-type instruments and Matt (Ridenour) is playing piano as well as bass. It's going to definitely be a different vibe.

**Dive:** Where do you see your band going in the next few years?

**JW:** I don't know man, it's real tough. The music industry is crazy. These people have no idea what's happening tomorrow. I can't concentrate on what's happening a year later or five years later because I have no idea if music is going to be around in five years.

I don't know if it's going to be a subscription service on your TV or just ringtones, so I think that we'll continue making music as long as we're totally happy doing it and as long as it can be under our terms.

We'll continue to write together because we do get along together and we do have a good time. I hope they figure out something, because I think a lot of bands are not going to get to be heard. We're fortunate – we got in before everything got really crazy, we're just trying to stick around. Are we going to get to



COURTESY OF PAMELA LITTKY

Hawthorne Heights will play its reworked acoustic set Sunday night at the Local 506. Attalus, Harbor the Grudge and Hey Euphony will open.

hear the next Nirvana? Is anybody going to listen?

**Dive:** Is it piracy? Do you think it's killing the industry?

**JW:** Yeah, I really do. I really think that it is. I think it's really tough. Back in the day, if you didn't have money to buy something, you either waited until it came on the radio, came on MTV – you didn't own it.

Now, there's such a sense of entitlement. Somebody thinks that just because they want to hear it, they

have to be able to hear it. I'm in a tough spot as a musician: I'd love for everybody to hear everything that I've ever written, but I don't make those decisions at all.

I do this for a living. So imagine if somebody's parents had to do what they do for a living for totally free – they couldn't support their kids. I don't know what everybody is supposed to do, but not everybody is an 18-year-old kid with no responsibilities. Writing a song, you used to be rewarded, but now it's almost frowned upon.

## MOVIESHORTS

### THE WAY BACK



In an early scene of the World War II film "The Way Back," a prison guard warns the prisoners of a Russian labor camp that

Siberia is their true prison – not the guards.

And like the guard warns, the characters in this war film are faced with the most formidable weapons at nature's disposal – far more villainous than any baby-eating Nazi

or kamikaze pilot.

The movie follows the escape of a ragtag group of multinational prisoners from a Russian Gulag camp as they trek through the wilderness of Russia and southern Asia.

While none of the performances stand out and main character Janusz's (Jim Sturgess) Polish accent sometimes falters, the actors work well together as a unit to bring to life a collective sense of desperation.

When the escapees come across a well in the heart of a Mongolian desert, the actors' groveling towards the water is like a litter of puppies suckling for milk.

But it is the grandeur of nature itself that steals the film (it was produced by National Geographic Films).

Through wide landscape shots and stunning effects, the Russian winter looks like a Narnia apocalypse and a climactic sandstorm feels like it could rip through the screen.

Despite the cast's chemistry and impressive effects, some of the movie's plots are left undeveloped. Colin Farrell's character Valka, a wild-eyed Russian thug who is heavily focused on in the beginning of the movie, fades out before the group crosses into Mongolia and is not addressed again.

Even with no stunning perfor-

mances and occasionally weak plot points, the movie takes a unique look at a region of the world that's often neglected in World War II films.

-Lyle Kendrick

### THE MECHANIC



There's no denying that Jason Statham and Ben Foster have all the skills and machismo to play a pair of hyper-skilled, cool-headed assassins.

Unfortunately, even with their considerable talents, "The

Mechanic" is just another entry in the massive action film subgenre of "violent badassery."

Arthur Bishop (Statham) is a "mechanic," a contract killer who takes the jobs no one else can do. He also loves to work on his classic car, making the title the deepest and most layered element in the movie.

After Bishop is coerced into offing his friend and mentor, he takes on Steve (Foster), the dead man's son, as his apprentice in order to ease his conscience.

Eventually Bishop discovers that he may have unjustly killed Steve's father, forcing the duo to wage war on the shadowy company for which they work.

This is a film all about action, and in that respect it delivers. There are plenty of explosions, unnecessarily complicated and inventive assassinations and more headshots than you can shake a Glock at.

Not wanting to leave any base uncovered, there's also the obligatory sex scene to fulfill the movie's random T&A quota.

Statham and Foster are always a joy to watch in action films, but "The Mechanic" misuses them. As singular characters they're the epitome of cool, but when their inevitable battle comes, they're so poorly characterized that it's hard to pick one to root for.

Without this element, the show-down has plenty of visual pizzazz, but nothing to keep the viewer invested in the outcome.

"The Mechanic" has two great actors but a standard premise implemented in a by-the-numbers way.

Without any sort of emotional core or anything new to add to the genre, it's never anything more than mechanical in its execution.

-Mark Niegelsky

### THE RITE



"Based on a True Story:" five words that a horror flick inserts at the beginning to set the audience sinking further into their seats

before anything happens.

At least, that's what film intended the audience to do with the opening lines – but "The Rite" loses us soon after.

Michael Kovak (Colin O'Donoghue) heads to Italy for a convention on exorcisms at the insistence of a priest at his seminary school.

The skeptic in him can't help but balk at how preposterous it all sounds – holy water, demons possessing people and medicine that does nothing to help the afflicted.

The doubter is put to the test and so is the audience as we encounter Father Lucas Trevant (Anthony Hopkins), an exorcism specialist.

Things start getting unstable when Trevant works on the exorcism of a young girl pregnant by her father.

After a series of interactions with her and a few revelations about Kovak's past (i.e. daddy issues and going into the family mortuary business), Trevant's soul can't take anymore. Now he is the one who needs the exorcism. Can Kovak overcome his doubt to fight off the evil spirits plaguing the priest?

Other than strange body contortions and some great makeup for Hopkins, it's not Friedkin's "The Exorcist." Even Trevant notes, "What did you expect? Twisting heads and pea soup?"

He even answers his cell phone in the middle of an exorcism on the young girl. It's clear the Devil can wait and exorcism is much more subdued than audiences were led to believe almost 37 years ago.

Did director Mikael Hafstrom forget "The Exorcist" exists? To try to update the classic, Hafstrom recognized that music, makeup and a demonic voice wasn't enough, so he thought the Satanic mule would be the next best option. The red eyes are just the finishing touch to this ridiculous demon whose hoof prints are found on the body of a young boy visited by the image in his dreams.

Talk about an amateur hour. Not one person in the audience screamed.

-Rachel Arnett

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