

SONGS FOR THE DEE



DEFTONES HAVE LIVED THROUGH SOARING HIGHS AND DESPERATE LOWS IN THEIR THREE DECADES TOGETHER. NOW, AS THEY LOOK BACK ON THE PAST AND TO A BRIGHT FUTURE WITH STUNNING NEW ALBUM **GORE**, THEY TELL GEORGE GARNER WHY THIS FAMILY NEEDS EACH OTHER MORE THAN EVER...

PHOTOS: JABARI JACOBS (PORTRAITS), ANDREW STUART (LIVE)

It started on the sun-bleached streets of Sacramento, California. The year is 1988. A teen called Chino Moreno hooks up with Stephen 'Stef' Carpenter, who lives around the corner. Stef's a metal dude: long hair, typically seen playing guitar on his porch. Chino plays drums while Stef writes riffs and lyrics – that is, until he gets shifted to the microphone when they realise their friend, Abe Cunningham, is a much, much better drummer. Gradually, Chino adjusts to his new role, sometimes singing like Danzig, others Morrissey. They find a way to make it work. Their first demo: a release by the 'Def-Tones'. Their first gig: a friend's birthday party. Their dream: play the next town over. They get a bit further than that.

With the addition of Chi Cheng on bass and DJ Frank Delgado, and later Sergio Vega, Deftones actually change metal forever. Their first two albums, 1995's *Adrenaline* and 1997's *Around the Fur*, would – alongside Korn's self-titled debut – invent the blueprint that would become nu-metal. Their third album, 2000's *White Pony*,

would reinvent it so mesmerically that no-one could copy it. In truth, even from the start, the release of a new Deftones album has always been an event.

That's why Kerrang!'s travelled to Pollution Studios, located in an area of Los Angeles you'd expect to see on a show called, perhaps, *America's Most Murderiest Murders*. It's here that Deftones are recording the video for their highly-anticipated eighth album *Gore*'s superb lead single, *Prayers/Triangles*. Inside, a camera crew is trained on Chino as he performs like he's slowly vaporising into the dreamlike lyrics. Then, as the song fades out...

"ACTING, GARY!" Chino blurts out, quoting Team America. Everyone bursts out laughing.

Some people would be surprised to see Deftones joking right now. So far, *Gore*'s impending release has been overshadowed by an interview. Specifically, Stef telling *Ultimate-Guitar.com*, "I think my proudest thing about my guitar playing on this record is just playing on the record, because I didn't want to play on the record

The Deftones Family Portrait: (from left) Frank Delgado, Chino Moreno, Stef Carpenter, Sergio Vega and Abe Cunningham

Chi Cheng makes for the sofa as Chino and Stef play a Tony Hawk's game



Taking a breather during the White Pony years. No pony was harmed in the making of this lunch

THE ART OF DEFTONES

CHINO GIVES THE STORIES BEHIND THREE CLASSIC COVERS

ADRENALINE (1995)

"At the time, I was using that [baby aspirator] on a daily basis – I'd just had my son Christian – and I was like, 'I think our album cover should be this very medical, stark white thing.' I took a picture with my camera and said, 'I'd like you to use this [inhaler] boogie getter,' and they did it, but it started looking all sci-fi. So, I said, 'See this Polaroid, just use this!' That's a Polaroid picture of the thing! It's not what I wanted it to be, but I guess we got lucky and it became iconic."



AROUND THE FUR (1997)

"That cover is horrible. At the time, we all lived in an apartment complex and were partying every night. We were at the hot tub [one time] and this was just a random shot [that] somehow we picked as the cover. On the back cover, there's a picture of the girl from the waist down. In the original, Frank's in the hot tub next to her, so we Photoshopped him out of it. We were all married at the time, so how do we explain to our wives we're in a hot tub with these chicks?"



WHITE PONY (2000)

"This was the only record up to this point where the art came before the music. I didn't even have the actual pony itself, but I said I wanted to call this record White Pony. There's an old '80s song that has this line in it, 'If you want to ride, ride the white pony' [White Horse by Danish electro group Laid Back]. It's a total drug reference. I looked on Clip Art for an outline of a pony and said, 'I want this to be our thing.' That was the only time we ever did it, and it's crazy how iconic it is now."



to begin with," later adding, "I would never leave the band that I started, but the band started leaving me."

Ever since, people have been speculating: is there a civil war going on in Deftones?

If there's supposed to be an elephant in the room, it's forgotten to show at Pollution Studios.

Sergio Vega, for one, is smiling his arse off, walking around playing bass and mouthing along to Prayers/Triangles all day, even when he's not being filmed.

The next day, spirits seem even higher when Kerrang! rolls up to the backstage area of Musink Festival. Part tattoo convention, part gig, this is where Deftones will perform their first set of 2016. Backstage, alongside the sight of blink-182 drummer/Musink owner Travis Barker slinking around, Deftones are blasting Chaka Khan's hit song Ain't Nobody in their trailer. Abe is busting moves.

Deftones in crisis? Nothing could be further from the truth...

This is Gore rumour-control – time for the facts. Let's not waste time: there must have been some tough conversations after Stef said, "I didn't want to play on the record?"

"People are saying, 'Are you mad about what Stef said?'" smiles Chino, sipping an IPA in his trailer. "Fuck no! That's Stephen! He says that shit to me! I

understand when he says stuff like that, people are going to react in a certain way, but Stephen didn't say it to make people react – he was just being Stephen. That's how shit is."

There was no fight. In fact...

"Not a single email, text message, phone call," Stef replies, grinning. "You know what came out my end? Straight crickets. Like nothing happened."

Sat beside him, Frank Delgado – the man responsible for Gore's beautiful textures – nods. He still hasn't even troubled himself to read Stef's interview.

For 20 years and counting, Deftones have been deservedly praised as many things: 'Best Band', 'Best Live Band', 'Coolest Band' and all the etceteras. But Deftones also deserve another accolade: 'World's Most Honest Band'. Gore is the product of true friendship. Not the fairytale kind. The real kind that's navigated extravagant highs and tragic lows. The kind that, quite frankly, doesn't deal in the manicured truths the world often expects from bands promoting their new album.

"When I gave 'the interview', I was just saying that, in the beginning, I wasn't too inspired by what was going on. I didn't elaborate," Stef clarifies. "The emotions tied to that statement were really all around one song called Hearts/Wires. Once I got over my BS about it and dug into it, I found a place in it where I like it and have fun. It ended up one I liked

the most. It's so funny how things get spun out."

For the record, then, you're happy with Gore? "Oh yeah! I went eight records before I had any kind of issue," he smiles, "but I've already lived through two records in the past where somebody else didn't enjoy them at all. For me to finally hit a wall, I think I lasted pretty good, because I've seen other people already buckle."

So, can Deftones work with everyone feeling fulfilled?

"I think so," explains Chino. "In the end, we are all fulfilled. I think Stephen is fulfilled. I will speak for him: he fucking is! I see it in his face! We played the new songs a couple of days ago and I watched him light up with excitement the same way I was realising how dope some of this shit was. Straight up."

Gore is so dope, in fact, that Abe and Sergio are still talking about the great stuff that didn't make the cut. During its recording, they woke up early every morning to trawl through everything they'd recorded the previous day together over oatmeal and coffee. Sometimes tequila. They laugh recalling a percussion-only jam that got axed.

When it comes to the truth about Gore, however, Stef's zero-bullshit offers the best summary. Without ever once coming across like a jerk, he refuses to answer questions he thinks suck. He's disinterested in both praise and criticism – "They're both devastating to me as an individual" – and cautious of "energy vampires" ruining Deftones' vibe. He won't give a hard sell on Gore. He only cares what it means to them.

"I've said this now [on] every record and I'll say it

"THE MUSIC IS US CELEBRATING OUR TIME TOGETHER. IT'S THE PRODUCT OF OUR FRIENDSHIP"

STEF CARPENTER

[for] one more record 'cause maybe the last seven [times] everyone missed it," Stef says. "The music is simply us celebrating our time together. We're a group of friends. What you hear is the product of our friendship."

Specifically, Deftones' discography is the product of six friends. Tragically, one of them is no longer here. But, then again, as Gore testifies, maybe that's a matter of perspective.

A moment, frozen in time. Chi Cheng is flying through a room like Superman. He's completely horizontal, both arms stretched out in front, dreadlocks flailing behind. In front of him, Chino and Stef are playing PlayStation. Frank's beside them, eyes closed. Abe's there, too, reading a magazine. Chino loves this black-and-white photograph, taken in Chuck Berry's former home, where Deftones resided during the recording of White Pony. It's just one of dozens of shots he's scanning at Musink Festival, 20 years of his life spread out before him. "Fucking aye!" says the frontman, pointing at one photo. "Abe looks like a little kid, man!" Another, of Stef wearing a preposterous hat, draws a smile.

And, of course, there's Chi.

It's with great dignity that Deftones have spoken of their fallen bassist. First, as they waited, hoping and praying he would wake from his coma for four years and five months following his terrible car accident in 2008. Later, after April 13, 2013, when Chi's

OPENING THE ARCHIVES

ABE IS DEFTONES' RESIDENT COLLECTOR. HERE HE SHARES FIVE ITEMS FROM HIS PERSONAL ARCHIVE...

DEMO TAPE

"That is the demo for what would become Around The Fur! We were so proud of that tape because it sounded really, really good. The titles are funny! Crenshaw ended up on B-Sides & Rarities; MACKS became MX; but the best is Dreamboat – that became Be Quiet (And Drive). We have a long history of the most ridiculous working titles – some stick and some don't!"



FLYER & POSTER

"That's the first time we came over to the UK. It was Kerrang!-sponsored! The poster, that's our first full-on, proper UK tour and it had sold out next to all the dates! We were so wide-eyed at the time. The shot of us all [bottom right] is from the Astoria! If you look in the background there's an afterparty sign. It was absolutely wild in those days, everything was so new! I still get those feelings – you try and never lose sight of them."

DEFTONES BIKE

"That was early 2000s and we okayed this [and a fingerboard] because we like skateboards and BMXs! It was pretty damn cool 'cause we'd all grown up skateboarding and biking! How cool is that!? It was nothing more than that. A lot of that stuff can be junk, but it was really cool!"



TOUR LAMINATES

"I've been accused of being a borderline hoarder... That is just one little stash – I have four or five like this! There's easily a couple of hundred in this picture. I always collected them – even wristbands from festivals. It's pretty nerdy but, dare I say it, I have one from just about every show we've ever played with the exception of 50 or 60. One day I'll do something with them; it's a disgusting mess."

ABE & CHI PHOTO

"I don't even know what's happening in this photo, I found it digging out my old pictures! This is probably '97 or '98. We had so many good times together – many were the best times ever, exploring and travelling the country or the world together. I loved that dude more than life, and this picture just sums it up. We were just goofballs, man."

body finally lost its battle, they eulogised him with great eloquence, stressing how his spirit lives on. Gore is the first album they've made since he passed away.

So, what was that spirit to them, specifically?

"That's a very good question," says Chino. "What a lot of people don't know about Chi, that motherfucker was funny as fuck. The man was very smart and very funny. Straight up, man. Today I was thinking about this thing he used to say – this kung-fu movie part about 'The art of fighting without fighting'. I started thinking about that. There's so much shit I learned from Chi – stuff he talked about a long time ago that I'm barely catching onto now."

It's not always easy to put Chi's memory into words.

"That's a hard one unless you knew Chi," sighs Frank.

"He was a good guy, a crazy guy. He was one of us."

Stef?

"I live a life where the only thing that's different between then and now is that I just have a physical absence," he says. "I feel a physical loss, but I don't have a loss of him. He's always there when I need him. I'm not trying to be spiritual about it – I have the memories."

When Abe sees the flying Chi photograph, a visible warmth spreads across his face.

"I was an only child," he begins. "I never had a big brother. That dude was my big brother. We got along very well and we also had a spell we didn't talk to each other for almost a year during the self-titled time. It was the strangest thing; we were on tour every night around the world, I would see him all day long, but we wouldn't talk to each other for almost a year. It doesn't matter what it was about now; it's pretty silly. It was so tense and ridiculous – a year's a long time, you know? But he always had my back. He taught me a lot. He always stuck up for me. I called him the Man Mountain. His spirit, his presence, is very, very strong, man. That's our boy, you know? I miss his laugh. That motherfucker is funny as hell..."

There's a pause. Abe corrects himself.

"...was funny as hell. A fucking comedian. It resonates. It's a strong force. We celebrate it. We draw from it, too."

Gore is not just a product of friendship – it's a testament to a band who persevered. Frank explains how one of the key people who helped them do so appears on it, too. On the stunning track Phantom Bride, Alice In Chains' Jerry Cantrell – a man who knows what it means to lose a band member – contributes a haunting guitar solo. Jerry and the rest of AIC visited Deftones while they were recording 2010's Diamond Eyes, encouraging them to carry on. And it was on that triumphant comeback album Deftones welcomed a friend, too: Sergio Vega. He would offer them stability to make three incredible records back-to-back, and they offered him something just as valuable.

"Deftones made me understand the nature of friendships," Sergio says. "Coming from my personal experience of New York bands, we all dissolve really quickly – not even over anything major. The reverence everyone has for each other was the first thing I noticed. They're fused on a deeper level than I've ever experienced. They're not going to walk away, it's not going to happen. It's just not. They're true brothers."

Yet it's not just as brothers that Deftones have had to stay fused together. That battle's been fought individually, too.

Chino Moreno pursues two lives – one as the revered, unimpeachably cool frontman of Deftones, the other as a husband and father. When all his kids are finally through school, his dream is to build a cabin in the mountains and live there. For now, he makes do by roaming the surrounding acres behind his house in Oregon where he goes hiking, explores the snow shelters and builds fires.

My favourite deftones moment

CHINO MORENO

"Anniversary Of An Uninteresting Event [from 2003's self-titled album] is a song that was totally spontaneous in the studio and, honestly, that song might be my favourite Deftones song ever. I know it doesn't represent Deftones completely, because it was written with me and Stephen both playing instruments we don't play, [but] it's so beautiful and sad."

My favourite deftones moment

STEF CARPENTER

"I refuse to ever, ever again in my life answer what's my favourite, because it doesn't matter! It's going to be a new favourite next week 'cause I got so much fucking content coming my way! Let's take a break from faves already!"

deftones.

My favourite deftones moment

ABE CUNNINGHAM

"The first time we went to the UK. Poor Astoria [the London venue that was closed in 2009 and later demolished]! It's a parking lot now, or something [It'll soon be part of the Crossrail network – K! London Ed]. Just being able to leave Sacramento and go different places was one thing, but going across the sea! It's amazing when you think about it!"

My favourite deftones moment

FRANK DELGADO

"It would have to be going to places I never thought I would see in my lifetime. Honestly, for me, I never thought I'd be involved in something like this in my entire life. The way it happened for me is crazy. To be able to go to places like Japan, Russia, Africa – all these first experiences!"

My favourite deftones moment

SERGIO VEGA

"I look at our first meeting as really awesome. I first met them on the Warped Tour in 1995 when I was on tour with Quicksand. I went to their vehicle after and introduced myself with a box of cigars, a bag of weed and bottle of wine, I had long hair and a mouthful of gold and I was like, 'Yeeeeeah!' I always think about that."

Chino gives a fan directions from the mosh-pit to the toilet at Musink Festival

"I'VE NEVER ONCE FELT LIKE I'M NOT FULFILLED WITH DEFTONES, WHERE I NEED TO FIND IT SOMEWHERE ELSE"

CHINO MORENO

Both of these lives have been hard fought for. Case in point: the year 2000. Limp Bizkit and a host of other bands are selling multimillions with a blueprint Deftones (and Korn) created. It's in this climate that Deftones release *White Pony* – the absolute antithesis of the durr-brained nu-metal scene. And it was successful. In what remains a bizarre occurrence, in August, MTV's flagship show TRL even saw *Change* (In The House Of Flies) rubbing shoulders with *Lucky* by Britney Spears. But behind the scenes, self-destructive patterns of behaviour were slowly forming.

"White Pony, that's when drug-use really became a thing in our band," reveals Chino. "Before that, we didn't really do anything – I didn't even smoke weed. But we started using cocaine, we lived life like there was no tomorrow, we sold it to ourselves that that's what you do in a band. In retrospect, I'm not completely upset I did it – it kinda makes you who you are. But fuck, man, I had this false reality that I could do whatever I want. And we were successful from that record, so it was this falsehood, like, 'We can just get high and fucking make some shit and people are going to love it.' You get this false feeling that you can't fuck up."

Yet for all its success, Deftones had to suffer the indignity of making one of the best metal albums ever, only to see a band they'd influenced sell in one week what *White Pony* would in total. With an album that compared a sphincter to a chocolate starfish.

Thinking back, would you ever trade or do anything different to make yourself 'bigger'?

"Fuck no," answers the frontman. "Never. Yes we were successful and we were on TRL for one week, while these other groups – I'll still fucking say it – these cookie-cutter, candy version of what we had done magnified that shit intensely. We had to accept that. We had to swallow that a lot of times, too, and say it is

what it is and say our longevity is what's really going to matter one day."

Deftones won the battle – they've enjoyed sustained critical and commercial success far longer than any other band of their g-g-generation. But the path of integrity bred its own problems. The drugs stuck around. Deftones' 2003 self-titled album would see Chino go through a particularly bad time personally that reached its peak on 2006's *Saturday Night Wrist*. Chino listened to that album recently.

"It was fucking horrible," he admits. "To me it was horrible. You know why I don't like that record? I didn't believe in myself. I was put with three or four different writers – [the band's label and the management at that time] made me believe I couldn't write a song any more. [Yet] my real problem was I had a drug problem and I probably just needed help for that. But it got so much bigger, because instead of just getting over that, they made me believe I couldn't make music any more. And I believed that! That record is so unconfident, that's why I hate it. I don't feel like it's me – it's this unconfident version of myself that doesn't know what he's doing or even believe in himself. It was horrible. The worst time in my life."

Thankfully, things couldn't be more different in 2016.

"Listen, today I'm very, very pleased," explains Chino. "Any time you make a record where the more you hear it, the more you get into it, that's how I am with *Gore*. I can't dictate that's how everyone will be with it, but that's how I feel. I've never gotten

that when I keep listening to it and listening to it. Seriously."

Last year, Deftones celebrated their incendiary debut *Adrenaline*'s 20th anniversary. That's a lot of time in which those aforementioned school friends have had to change, but Deftones don't think they have. Stef is the only one who'll offer an example. "My hair is definitely going away," he smiles. Otherwise it's "nah" or "no" or "not a damn bit". Deftones have, however, grown. Indeed, when *Diamond Eyes* was released in 2010, they were vocal about how their friendships needed repairing following the strain of *Saturday Night Wrist*. But was that just 'repairing', or had they actually ever stopped being friends? There is a difference...

"It's a good point," says Chino. "At that time I didn't think any of the band were my enemies. You know what it really was? Something this simple: I didn't think they cared enough about the music, and they didn't think I really cared enough about it. Another thing I think is important

for people to know is that I have done a lot of side-projects, which is never more than just fun shit. I've never once felt like I'm not fulfilled creatively, artistically, with Deftones, where I need to find it somewhere else. It is so not that. I think maybe even the band thought that at some point; I know a lot of fans probably think that and it's definitely not true. I am so fulfilled in Deftones."

Well if you will use cheese wire instead of strings, Sergio...

That's the last time Stef ever towel-dries his hair



You might think Abe's drumming, but he's actually catching up on his Kindle reading



The trouble of trying to play guitar and sneeze at the same time...

Do the others feel they ever stopped being friends? "Nah," says Frank.

"We almost chucked Chino out the band on that record," points out Stef.

"But that didn't mean we weren't friends!" laughs Frank. "Seriously, in all honesty, it was less an unfriendly thing, just motherfuckers were in bad places. Drugs are a bad thing. They make you make bad decisions."

"Relationships don't get terminated," explains Stef. "You don't do that. But that record and self-titled, we refer to them as our 'dark days'. Lives were collapsing. Immaturity. Divorces. Drugs. Alcohol. All the clichéd bullshit."

You guys have encountered a lot of the big clichés in rock that destroys most bands... yet you never split up. Why?

"We've been doing this so long," explains Stef. "It's a place of comfort. You go back to what you rely on and have that great time. Even though we have problems, at least we've got this to escape to – from the very problem it is! It's both therapy and punishment."

"Deep down, it's something that's bigger than all of us individually," reveals Chino.

"If you ask me why we lasted, internally, I think it's because I fucking love these motherfuckers and playing music with them. Maybe people have supported us this long because they see there's something within us that can't be fucked with. There's a chemistry. Like, me and Stephen weren't supposed to be friends, you know what I'm saying? But, at the same time, maybe we were meant to be best friends. I think people see that when they fucking see us play. If we didn't want to be here, we would not fucking be here."

A member of Deftones' label gets inked at Musink



Head to **Kerrang.com** now for even more from Deftones



GORE IS OUT ON APRIL 8 VIA REPRISE. DEFTONES PLAY THE SSE ARENA, WEMBLEY AND DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL THIS JUNE – SEE THE GIG GUIDE FOR INFORMATION

deftones.

DEF JAMS

DEFTONES REAPPRAISE THEIR CAREER'S WORK, ALBUM BY ALBUM

ADRENALINE (1995)

STEF SAYS... "Its sound was based on a record I used to really love – and still do love to this day – the very first Metal Church record. It was one of those records that got better and better as you turned it up. *Adrenaline* doesn't have all the low-end in because it's meant to be turned up loud. If you crank that fucker up, it's going to sound great at high volumes."



AROUND THE FUR (1997)

CHINO SAYS... "It's still my favourite record. And I think it will always be. We wrote and recorded and mixed it in four months. The essence of Deftones was on fucking fire during that time. We were. My Own Summer? C'mon, dude. It was the easiest, simplest song; raw, dynamic but it was like a punch to the throat and a warm caress."



WHITE PONY (2000)

ABE SAYS... "It was an amazing time, a very crucial time for us. In the scheme of things at that time, all the stuff that was going on musically – [nu-metal] trends and what not – it was very important to us to go somewhere different. We took a hard left and went the other way and carved our own path. We branched out and that's probably why we're still around today."



DEFTONES (2003)

CHINO SAYS... "It's just dark. My life was kind of in shambles at that point. It got worse than that, but my personal life was in fucking shambles. I had money, it wasn't like I was down and out in that way. I was just down and out, but I still felt creative, so good things came out of it. I'm proud of it."



SATURDAY NIGHT WRIST (2006)

FRANK SAYS... "It was a crazy time – that record was done in so many different places throughout the country. We were so burned out after the self-titled record. It was a lot of work. We didn't do a damn thing. We had budget. We had Corrs dropping palettes off! We were riding high. Very high."



DIAMOND EYES (2010)

SERGIO SAYS... "The circumstances involved [with Chi] are really at the forefront when I think about it. I often think about the first time we jammed and came up with a couple of songs – Royal and what became Prince – and there was a synergy. I was used to things being really laboured in my other bands, but it was exciting and also they made me feel very comfortable. It came together fast."



KOI NO YOKAN (2012)

SERGIO SAYS... "Deftones songs are an expression of a time and place, and also a by-product of a friendship. For me, what *Koi No Yokan* felt like was that, whereas *Diamond Eyes* is compact, with short blistering songs – like a boxer coming up off the ropes – *Koi* is more expansive. It's what happens when you've got 'it' back and you're spreading your wings."

