

# DASHBOARD CONFESSIONAL

## CROOKED SHADOWS

Chris Carrabba had written over a dozen new songs when he uncovered “We Fight,” the opening track on *Crooked Shadows*, Dashboard Confessional’s seventh album. The song became the launching point for each note that followed, the bar under which each track was measured. It contains a dynamic force, a surging energy, that resonates throughout the album, and reflects back on everything Dashboard Confessional has achieved in the past two decades.

At first “We Fight” was simple in its intent, written about the Florida music scene where Chris grew up. It was a place where everyone was accepted and no one was judged, a island of inclusivity worth defending. Chris and his compatriots fought for the scene and fostered it, encouraging individualism and non-judgment. But as Chris was writing it, the song transformed into something bigger. “The election happened and suddenly the song felt relevant because of this climate of intolerance and aggression and hate,” Chris says. “We regressed as a nation to this place where people embrace backwards thinking. So the fight that started in our scene still felt relevant. It seems like it’s going to last longer than we’d like, but we have to stay here to fight.”

The eight songs that follow on *Crooked Shadows*, Dashboard Confessional’s first release since 2009’s *Alter The Ending*, are connected, threaded together by the idea that it’s essential to balance hope with anger. That we can reject the place where society has recently fallen and find ways to lift ourselves back up. The album, recorded in Chris’s basement over the past two years and produced by Chris and Jonathan Clark and co-produced by Colin Brittain, feels intimate and emotionally wrought. The musicians weren’t looking for perfection during the recording process. Instead, they focused on sincere snapshots of the songs, many of which, like “Heartbeat Here,” were laid down only moments after being written. The idea was to get as close as possible to the feeling Chris had while writing the song when recording it.

“It reminds me of my first record,” Chris says. “I think there’s something people connected to with that hand-crafted nature, possibly more than the later records. This was a chance to combine the two schools of thought. It can be well done and homespun at the same time.”

The title from the album comes from “Crooked Shadows,” an intimate track Chris wrote with Dashboard Confessional’s guitarist Armon Jay Cheek and Jonathan Howard. The inspiration came to Chris during a walk around town with his wife. They weren’t getting along, possibly

because Chris had been away too long on tour, and there was an unspoken feeling of upset. Suddenly the storm clouds broke and the sun filtered behind them, casting a shadow of two people holding hands on a nearby staircase.

“It was really beautiful,” Chris says. “I thought to myself, ‘Look how beautiful that is in its imperfections.’ I realized that’s why our relationships works – because it’s imperfect but beautiful and important enough that there we were holding hands anyway. It was a moment where it wasn’t easy, but where we were still together not getting along. Those crooked shadows were together in spite of it all.”

The closing track, “Just What To Say,” is the most personally revealing song Chris has ever written – which, he knows, is a bold statement. The acoustic number is quiet and reflective, looking inward in a way that feels deeply relatable. It’s about admitting and accepting flaws, but it’s also about embracing the better aspects of your own humanity. “It’s my honest assessment of who I am at my best and who I am not at my best,” the singer says. “It starts with me not at my best, but I think I explain myself well enough that by the end you get a better opinion of me.”

*Crooked Shadows* feels like the opening of a new chapter in Dashboard Confessional’s career, but it also revisits their past. For Chris, there were several roads the band could have walked down after the success of their first few albums. They picked one – and he’s grateful for that – but he’s always wondered what was down the other roads. *Crooked Shadows* is one possible answer to that question. It’s also a reminder of the band’s skill when it comes to penning deeply and unabashedly emotional songs, an aesthetic that influenced countless younger artists. Over the years, Dashboard Confessional has made it enviable to bare your soul in a song and to be unashamed of any feelings that may arrive. Chris and his fellow musicians have found a new perspective on the world in these songs, one that only comes with more life experience, but those exposed emotions remain.

“I’m searching for answers to questions I haven’t even thought of,” Chris says. “A lot of writers are trying to discover who they are and what their place is in the world – that’s part of the inquisitive nature of people who gravitate to artists expression. It’s exhilarating because not having the answers is the impetus to writing songs. When I sit down to write I’m in that place where I can attempt to describe the search for the answers – or the answers themselves. It’s hard to pinpoint which one you get in a song, even when you’ve written that song, but it’s the reason I do this.”

