

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

Disarm The Descent

Jesse Leach – Vocals
Adam Dutkiewicz - Guitars
Joel Stroetzel - Guitars
Mike D'Antonio - Bass
Justin Foley - Drums

Within every musical movement of any importance, there are those few whose monikers are synonymous with specific strains of artistic achievement. It is from the creative leadership of these trailblazers that dozens of descendents have undeniably drawn inspiration. To mention one of these bands in conversation is to mentally conjure a musical identity, a fellowship of fans and of multiple inspired acts.

Killswitch Engage has become one such entity. Built organically from the most potent components of melodic, heavy and catchy-as-hell European death metal and the almost spiritual essence of the most grimy, urgent and forever yearning American hardcore, the brilliantly individual and self-described “Massholes” in Killswitch (as fans often abbreviate it) have come to define a generational shift equal parts inevitable and by design, as cultural earthquakes and uprisings often are.

The arrival of their self-titled debut and their Roadrunner-released follow-up, the *Decibel Magazine* “Hall of Fame” classic *Alive or Just Breathing*, heralded the dawn of the New Wave of American Heavy Metal and introduced the world to the soulful declarations-against-the-darkness of pensive, uplifting singer Jesse Leach. The singer's thoughtful lyrics were paired with the dynamic, fluid and unstoppable riffing of drummer-turned-guitarist/producer and on-stage madman Adam Dutkiewicz. Joel Stroetzel's guitar sound, tone and technique remain driving, persistent and immediate, laying the foundation for the band's dueling guitar style. Co-founding member and illustrative architect Mike D'Antonio has long served as an anchor personally, professionally and rhythmically and has designed the band's cover and album art from the beginning. He has been backed, for most of the band's career, by drummer Justin Foley, whose polyrhythms drove *Blood Has Been Shed* for years and whose command behind the kit in Killswitch is undeniable.

The decade that followed after *Kerrang!* promised that Killswitch's fresh reinvigoration of the genre would “kill nu-metal dead” saw the band sell millions across the globe, including two certified gold albums in the U.S.: *The End of Heartache* (the first following Leach's departure) and *As Daylight Dies*. From Ozzfest to Warped Tour to Rockstar Energy Drink Mayhem Festival, from the cover of *Revolver* to their first Grammy nomination, to headlining slots at major international festivals and beyond, Killswitch Engage have

maintained a high-minded artistic standard of achievement even as their stage show has offered enthusiastic positivity alongside the histrionics.

“My Last Serenade,” “Fixation on the Darkness,” “The End of Heartache,” “My Curse,” “Rose of Sharyn” and “When Darkness Falls” are just the beginning of a mammoth list of anthems imprinted upon the collective psyche of an underground generation. They’re embedded through participatory singing at festivals, theatre performances and solitary drives to work, school and to visit long distance loved ones fueled by the crackle of Killswitch on Rock Radio, specialty stations and all over SiriusXM.

When Killswitch Engage found themselves singer-less for a second time in 2012, Leach was gunning to reclaim his old spot. His passion was renewed for the songs he wrote with the band and he connected with the stuff that had come after as he explored it. “That was the big thing for me. Could I handle [the later stuff]? Could I live in the music?” he recalls. “I’m not the type of singer to just go up there and run through the motions. So when I started to fall in love with those songs, it all became really clear.”

Learning to enjoy the road again while supporting the album he and Adam had made as members of Times of Grace helped, as well. The remaining Killswitch members saw the fire and passion Leach brought to his auditions, making the decision to invite him back a no-brainer. “Jesse had come in with so much passion and fire, he said, ‘I’m ready, man I’m ready to do this. Hire me!’” Adam D. recalls. “He had an advantage, of course, with his own songs. And he did the newer songs justice, which was very important. So even after trying a couple people out, the choice was obvious to us.”

Leach’s homecoming with Killswitch Engage has coincided with the band’s definitive work. Killswitch’s sixth studio album is their first with Leach behind the mic in over 10 years. *Disarm The Descent* is their most accomplished, versatile and electric contribution to an already historic discography that will remain forever etched in the annals of heavy metal.

As Metallica once took a hold of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal and punk to create thrash, Killswitch Engage have reclaimed the combustible fire of that explosively experimental moment when they first combined the seemingly disparate energy of At The Gates and Carcass with the art-noise of Bloodlet and Deadguy. The middle ground where irresistible force meets immovable object has always been the name of the KsE game. They’ve once again harnessed the past for a momentous future, making the best of the rest their own with unrivaled catchiness and songcraft.

Each songwriter has brought riffs that are as alive and inspired as the brightest moments of not only the band’s past, but the genre’s overall. Clearly, Killswitch Engage reconvened for album six with something to prove. And prove it, they have.

The deepest recesses of *Disarm The Descent* reflect the years of experience as a top-tier, genre-defining act who’ve travelled the world while stoking the embers of the initial flames that drew members of Massachusetts scene veterans Overcast and Aftershock together in the first place back in 1999. They don’t have to pack it into a van anymore, but they’re driven by the same will to create, succeed and survive.

The undeniable vibe summoned by Leach’s shaman-like approach infuses the band’s unmistakable, trademark, signature sound with the spirit of punk heroes who raged

outward and reached inward inside dingy venues without a care for commercialism. That energy is tempered by the experience Killswitch's past and present frontman garnered singing bluesy hard rock in other projects during his time away. There is a persistently broadminded appeal inherent in the group's knack for writing sing-along inducing anthems built as much for stadiums as for high school parking lots.

Most of the songs clock in at 3:30 or less and all of them contain either a ferocious blast beat, a ripping guitar solo or both. It is Killswitch Engage at their leanest and meanest, defiantly shaking off any sense of doldrums or malaise that dare threaten to creep into the catalog. Killswitch sound hungry, agitated and yes, "engaged."

"We were always talking about getting even more aggressive," explains Adam D. "After the last album, we all started writing music with more teeth to it."

As has become their custom, the guys wrote as individuals before presenting their songs to the collective to be refined and tweaked accordingly. The best of the best would then make its way to Leach for lyrical and melodic treatment. Drums were recorded at Zing Studios, with the remainder of the work handled at Adam D's home studio. Adam has been behind the board for landmark albums from Underoath, As I Lay Dying and All That Remains, among others, in addition to his own band. His meticulous approach and specific idea of what he wants to has never faltered.

"You can't slack on this stuff. As a producer, you almost have to be able to picture the finished product in your head before you're even tracking basics," he says. "You have something in your head, an expectation you need to live up to. Of course, I know what to expect out of everyone in this band pretty damn well because I've been hanging out with them for so many freaking years. So, in that regard, it was easy, knowing exactly what we needed to do and how we needed to do it."

Of course it wasn't all hard work and perfectionist methodology in the studio. Adam and Joel in particular love to create absurd musical snippets that will likely never see the light of day. "It's just something for our own comic relief," Adam says. "After a song is done we'll create a new song at the end of it, a little snippet of a fun jam. We'll usually just take a motif from the song and build it into something else really stupid, and I'll add sound effects: animal noises explosions, gongs..."

Jesse tracked vocals for two songs before embarking on a summer tour with Five Finger Death Punch. The roadwork resulted in even bigger performances in the vocal booth, as the singer worked from his always-evolving notebook of ideas. Leach has long looked up to the passion, faith and conviction of vocalists like John Joseph (Cro-Mags), HR (bad brains) and Zack de la Rocha (Inside Out, Rage Against the Machine). "The singers that would bear their soul in their lyrics and really, really show it on stage," he says. "Those are my roots, what I'm cut from. I've tried to carry it over into what I've done."

Part of honoring that tradition lies in the content. "The core of the lyrics is embedded in the positive mental attitude of those bands, striving to pay respect by continuing that legacy," Leach says. "That stuff changed my life, saved me from depression and helped raise me, really. I feel it in my heart and I'm also paying tribute. I think 'Metalcore' as a genre has been leaving out the 'core.' That's why I like to wear the old band shirts on stage. I want to bring the 'core' back to metal."

The personal uncertainty and upheaval that caused Leach to bail on the band on the eve of their first big MTV News story and worldwide acclaim is entirely absent from the well-rounded, seasoned and incredibly connective man now fronting Killswitch. And for their part, the other members have matured into effective communicators.

“It's extremely different. We're talking a decade of growth, a decade of change and a decade of ups and downs,” says the singer. “My confidence is intact; I know what to do with my instrument. I feel a lot more comfortable on stage; it just seems like a natural fit now. 10 years ago, I was a very different person. We've all been through enough life to know how to communicate better. That really helps with the vibe and overall scenery of the band. Coming back has been extremely easy. Communication is at an all time high right now and I think that's a great way to start; starting fresh.”

That feeling of renewal is all over the album. It's in the biggest riffs, the most blinding blastbeats and the most reflective moments of contemplation alike. “When you listen, you'll hear the Killswitch you know and love, a sprinkling of hardcore, the spirit from *Alive or Just Breathing* and a whole new thing going on,” Leach promises.

From the lyrics, to the tones, to the overall passion and commitment behind the Killswitch sound and vision, this is a band whose legacy is assured. Across six albums, a DVD, countless tours and whatever the future holds, Killswitch Engage will remain one of those names that immediately conjures a specific sound, a particular community of fans and a well-balanced ethos of seriousness and levity.

Adam D. boils down the Killswitch mission thusly:

“I want people to go to the shows and have a great time. Party, feel the music, also maybe have a chuckle. It's the entertainment business, man. We're supposed to *feel* something. We're supposed to enjoy it. That's all there is to it, I think. If we can do that and make people enjoy what we're doing, that's all I ever wanted to do.”