Artist

**OF MICE & MEN**

Label

**SharpTone Records**

Year

**2020**

By Ryan J. Downey

**LONGFORM BIO**

“When you’re going through hell, keep going.” Those famous words from Winston Churchill easily double as a declaration of intent for the essential metal, hard rock, and hardcore bands. At its best, the genre produces songs of escape, exorcism, and catharsis. And few bands demonstrate this ethos as powerfully as OF MICE & MEN, the multifaceted metalcore machine whose mission is to make the soundtrack for every heartbreak, melancholic rumination, and moment of triumph.

The band’s renowned spirit of determination, aggression, and musical excellence has never been more evident than on *TIMELESS*, the first of three EPs set for release in 2021, a sort of trilogy culminating in OF MICE & MEN’s seventh full-length album before the year’s end. Conceived in collaboration over platforms like Twitch and Zoom, in the midst of the pandemic, the California quartet’s new music is their most impressive and expansive, without sacrificing any heaviness. “Obsolete,” “Timeless,” and “Anchor” take a special place in the ever-evolving OM&M song canon.

Frontman Aaron Pauley is at his most dynamic: from the invigorating command of his recognizable choruses to the nuanced placement of distant falsettos blended seamlessly with a colorful flourish. Guitarists Phil Manansala and Alan Ashby alternate between stomping riffs to rival Meshuggah and shades of post-hardcore melody verging on classic alternative rock, all underpinned by Pauley’s bass and the crushing, inventive, yet always tasteful drumming of Valentino Arteaga.

“We started to create music because that’s all we had,” Pauley says. “It’s grabbing the plank out in the middle of the ocean. We’ll make music because what else are we going to do right now?”

It’s a potent and perfect storm of elements. A bombastic and uplifting roar familiar to fans of Linkin Park; a layered crunch akin to the Deftones; thrashing old school riffage a la Slayer and Exodus; the sensual atmosphere of Sade or Radiohead; swirled into a singular sound uniquely OM&M.

Which isn’t to say the band will abandon the all-out heaviness of 2019’s *Earthandsky*. “Of Mice & Men fans are really appreciative of the high-energy up-tempo metal, and the songwriting is similar to the last record,” explains Ashby, noting that some of the songs began on the keyboard as opposed to the guitar. “We’ve taken some new twists and turns. There is an ebb and flow.”

Arteaga concurs. “We had a mission plan with *Earthandsky*, which was to make the most badass, kickass, quintessential Of Mice & Men record. It’s built for the stage, for circle pits, and engaging a live audience because we love to do that, and Aaron’s lyrics just accentuate that. The heaviness is 150% there with the new EPs, but we’re diving deeper into our sonic landscapes to create an experience in headphones for people. We want the songs to transport the listener somewhere.”

“We’ve always had a more melodic vibe because we have such a great singer,” notes Manansala. “So, as much as we’ve always had the riffs, we have the parts that can just take you away.”

OF MICE & MEN first emerged as part of a vanguard of subculture alongside their contemporaries and tour mates in Bring Me The Horizon, A Day To Remember, Pierce The Veil, Asking Alexandria, and Dance Gavin Dance; and as a staple of the Vans Warped Tour and international rock festivals. They took home the Best International Newcomer price at the 2013 Kerrang! Awards and were twice nominated as Artist Of The Year at the APMAs, where Manansala took home Best Guitarist.

Across a half dozen studio albums, including career redefining fan-favorite masterpiece *Earthandsky* and the No. 1 Billboard Independent Album *Restoring Force*, the group’s combination of crowd-moving breakdowns, staccato rhythms, and soaring melodic vocals bridged the gap from the underground to the world at large. Songs like “Would You Still be There” and “Unbreakable” catapulted OF MICE & MEN onto massive tours with Linkin Park and Rise Against (2015); Slipknot and Marilyn Manson (2016); and Five Finger Death Punch and In Flames (2017).

“I grew up going to Warped Tour, and then Warped Tour happened for us. Then we got to tour with Linkin Park, in arenas,” Manansala marvels. “If you would have told me in my garage when I was 14 playing ‘One Step Closer,’ that one day I’d be on tour with them? It blows my mind.”

At every turn, no matter what obstacles presented themselves, the four men at the OF MICE & MEN core since 2016 never lost sight of the strength of their connection to the audience or each other. They refocused and persevered at every turn, delivering massive anthems that work in the most intimate of punk clubs, the biggest of European festivals, and American rock radio formats alike. So, when the 2020 pandemic ground the touring business to a halt, Pauley, Manansala, Ashby, and Arteaga turned inward and resolved to take advantage of the year to create. They expanded their home-studio setups, wrote together online, and self-produced their new music. Pauley, already an experienced producer, handled all of the mixing and mastering duties himself.

“Aaron is a guru in every sense. He’s a mastermind musician *and* wordsmith. It’s insane,” explains Valentino, who notes the band hasn’t seen each other in person since they gathered for his birthday in February 2020. “We are able to play to everybody’s individual strengths right now.”

Pauley credits his experience of making records with A-list Grammy Award-winning and nominated producers Josh Wilbur (Lamb Of God, Korn, Trivium), Howard Benson (My Chemical Romance, Skillet, Halestorm), and David Bendeth (Bring Me The Horizon, Breaking Benjamin, A Day To Remember) with the skillset he now brings to the table. He credits Bendeth with tips on songwriting, Benson with vocal production, and Wilbur with perfecting an aggressive mix.

Of course, it’s about the songs themselves and what they mean to people at the end of the day. “It’s about creating moments for people,” Pauley says. “Music is the soundtrack to people's lives. Songs are not fireworks to me. They're not something you look at and go, ‘Oh, cool.’ People will listen to this as they are living through something else. These songs are the soundtrack to *our* lives, in that we get to write something personal for ourselves, and they become that for someone else.”

**MEDIUM LENGTH**

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Of course, it’s about the songs themselves and what they mean to people at the end of the day. The music of OF MICE & MEN begins as something deeply personal shared among the quartet. Once they’re turned loose, they take on new meaning, adding to the soundtrack of people’s lives.

**SHORT FORM**

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**Line-Up**

Aaron Pauley – Vocals, Bass

Phil Manansala – Guitar, Backing Vocals

Alan Ashby – Guitar, Backing Vocals

Valentino Arteaga – Drums, Percussion

**Select Discography**

* *Timeless* EP (2021)
* *Earthandsky* (2019)
* *Defy* (2018)
* *Cold World* (2016)
* *Restoring Force* (2014)
* *The Flood* (2011)
* *Of Mice & Men* (2010)