If you pierce the skin and pull back the layers, you inch closer to your essence. Norma Jean invite this level of intimately incisive immersion. An avalanche of jagged sonic hues, off-kilter samples, grunge-drenched guitars, noise rock exorcisms, hardcore screams, and slashed-throat poetry encode the essence of the Georgia band on their ninth full-length offering, *Deathrattle Sing For Me* [Solid State].

The group—Cory Brandan [vocals], Grayson Stewart [lead guitar], Clay Crenshaw [guitar], Matt Marquez [drums], Michael Palmquist [bass], and Matthew Putman [drums, percussion, songwriting]—plunge into unparalleled emotional depths, as if their very existence depended upon the catharsis these 13 tracks promised…

“This record was really about banding together,” observes Cory. “It embodies the camaraderie of our brotherhood in Norma Jean. At the time, we needed something to do, and we wrote these songs for our own souls. The record was necessary to keep me alive in a very literal sense. It’s a deeper place.”

Norma Jean have always inhabited such intense cavities of emotion. The band unearthed a searing signature style on *O’ God, the Aftermath* in 2005. They struck up a creative partnership with iconic producer Ross Robinson on the seminal *Redeemer* [2007] and *The Anti Mother* [2008]. The latter notably boasted appearances by Chino Moreno of Deftones and Page Hamilton of Helmet. Following the acclaimed *Meridional* [2010], *Wrongdoers* [2013] represented a critical high watermark with a *9-out-of-10* score from *Rock Sound* and a *9-out-of-10* score from *Outburn*. On the heels of *Polar Similar* [2016], they reached another level on *All Hail* [2019]. In a perfect *5-star* review, *New Noise Magazine* raved, *“All Hail* *is yet another momentous accomplishment on their part*,*”* and *Kerrang!* attested, *“All Hail’s ambition and execution is worthy of worship*.*”* Along the way, they toured with everyone from Rob Zombie and Korn to Mastodon and Lamb of God, to name a few.

During 2021, they recorded what would become *Deathrattle Sing For Me* with longtime collaborator Jeremy SH Griffith in Tampa and Fort Walton Beach, FL in addition to sessions helmed by Matthew in Fort Smith, AR. They nodded to inspirations as diverse as Alice In Chains’ *Dirt*, The Smashing Pumpkins’ *Siamese Dream*, and the sample-and-riff onslaught of White Zombie’s *La Sexorcisto: Devil Music Volume 1*.

This time around, they also expanded the sound like never before, integrating over 200 tracks with vocals, guitars, strings, and samples on select cuts.

“It’s extremely dense,” Cory goes on. “I don’t know if we’ll ever do this to the same extent, but we really wanted to provide the experience of lying on the floor with headphones and absorbing those layers. You can listen to it with fresh ears and hopefully find something new each time.”

Fittingly, they introduce the record with the single “Call For The Blood.” Right out of the gate, feedback buzzes, and glitchy samples warble. Meanwhile, Cory’s exhaustedly manic delivery of the line *“Ones and zeroes incoming”* proves corrosive over verses submerged in guitar. It snaps into a jarringly catchy refrain.

“It’s one of the more strange songs we’ve ever written, and we liked the idea of everyone hearing *‘Call For The Blood’* first,” he notes. “This isn’t what you’d normally expect from us. Matthew named the song, and my brother and I knew what he was talking about. We’re brothers. We’re blood. When things go down, your friends or brothers come to the rescue and pull you out of the bloody wreck.”

Then, there’s “Spearmint Revolt.” Originally conceived by Grayson, it hinges on a thick beat and seesawing groove as Cory pleads, *“Deathrattle, sing for me!”* (the line inspired the title) The intensity gives way to a hauntingly gorgeous bridge.

“I see it as acceptance,” the frontman muses. “The title may sound like something horrible, but it has a beautiful tone. You get to the level of grief where you just accept everything as it is and let go. Grayson wrote the lyric, and I thought it was great.”

The gnashing opener “1994” set the pace for the project with one unsettling and undeniable final proclamation, *“I think I’m witnessing the end of the world, and I like it!”*

“It’s an image of the scene we grew up in,” he notes. “We performed at these tiny venues during the early-to-mid nineties. These were abandoned houses where the power was still on, so we’d jump in and play. It’s an old school throwback remembrance.”

Elsewhere, “Sleep Explosion” tempers a pummeling breakdown with a psychedelically dark melody. “On the last tour we did, Grayson showed me the demo,” he recalls. “I was so excited that I opted to sleep in the van, listen to it over and over again, and write the vocals. It’s a special one.”

Everything culminates on the eight-minute epic “Heartache.” With its clean guitar, sinewy bassline, and dreamy echoes, it offers a final exhale steeped in raw truth.

“It has one of my favorite lines, *‘This world was never meant for me or I was never meant for it’*,” reveals Cory. “We thought Heartache sounded like it would be a great conclusion for the record very early in the writing process. But by the time we got to tracking, we tracked another song to come after it in an effort to avoid it as a closer, as it seemed too obvious to us by then. But, in a way, we felt like Heartache fought all of us to conclude the album, won, and the new song was ultimately B-sided.”

In the end, Norma Jean welcome you into a suffocatingly beautiful embrace that never relents on *Deathrattle Sing For Me*.

“When you listen to this, I hope you let it simmer,” he leaves off. “There’s a nineties vibe when you look at the artwork, read the lyrics, and listen to it. Spend some time with it and maybe you’ll find something. Do whatever you want with it. I hope you escape with it—then let us know what you think in a year.”