POLARIS

*The Death Of Me*

When it came time to make their new album, *The Death Of Me*, Sydney metalcore outfit Polaris knew they had a tall order on their hands. Its predecessor, 2017 debut *The Mortal Coil*, was an ARIA-nominated, Top 10 hit in Australia, introducing the group to legions of fans around the country and, thanks to an extensive international touring schedule, the world.

“We wanted to walk a line between maintaining what’s defined our band and brought people to our music in the first place, while trying to write for ourselves and keep ourselves interested,” begins drummer Daniel Furnari, one of the main songwriters in the unit. “Being our second full-length, we knew it was important for us to surprise the listener as well - nobody wants to hear the same record twice. We wanted to give them things they wouldn’t expect, take them to new places, but also for it to be definitively a Polaris record, building on what we’ve been working towards.”

The tone was set early in the writing process when the first two songs the five-piece penned – the melodically charged “Masochist” and the feral, two-minute-40-second aural headbutt that is “Hypermania” – stretched the boundaries of their sound further than ever before. They set the course for an album that features some of the most bruising material Polaris have recorded – witness the churning, high intensity “Landmine” – and in the ’80s rock-infused “Martyr (Waves)”, some of their most melodic.

Attuned listeners may also hear a palpable undercurrent of anxiety and paranoia in songs such as “Hypermania”. It stems not only from the pressure of following *The Mortal Coil*, but from the fact that while writing *The Death Of Me* each member was coming to terms with their world being turned upside down by the success of their debut. After all, when Furnari co-founded Polaris in Southern Sydney in 2012 with vocalist Jamie Hails, guitarist Rick Schneider and bassist/vocalist Jake Steinhauser – lead guitarist Ryan Siew joined in 2013 – they spent the next five years as a strictly local, underground concern. Now they’d been thrust into a life of international touring, complete with the euphoric highs of sold out shows and the crushing lows that happen in the silence that follows.

Indeed in the two years since *The Mortal Coil*, Polaris embarked on three sold-out headlining tours of Australia, as well as supporting Architects and Parkway Drive around the country; five runs throughout Europe (including a series of arena shows supporting Architects and a slew of high-profile summer festival spots); three separate US tours; not to mention performing at the Download Festival and Unify Gathering in Australia. Somewhere in there, the quintet found time to write *The Death Of Me*.

“We’d been cramming writing sessions in between tours since the middle of 2018,” advises Furnari, who even recalls writing riffs on his computer during one flight from Sydney to Amsterdam. The band tried a few new approaches to songwriting, with tracks such as the anthemic “Masochist” starting life as a vocal melody, around which the riffs were built, as opposed to the other way around. Elsewhere, influences outside the metalcore realm such as Southern Hardcore-riffing (“Hypermania”), 90s’ alt-rock (the phenomenally catchy “Vagabond”) and even melancholic pop (“Martyr (Waves)”) made their way into the music.

When it came time to record, Polaris returned to the rental house in the small South Coast town of Mollymook where they made *The Mortal Coil*, converting it into a temporary studio. The familiar surrounds acted as something of a refuge after the high-pressure claustrophobia of touring.

“The house is right on the edge of this huge cliff, and you just see endless ocean to the horizon when you wake up in the morning,” says Furnari.

Accompanying the band was their Front Of House sound engineer, Lance Prenc, and longtime friend Scott Simpson (of Melbourne band Alpha Wolf), both of whom co-produced the album with the band.

“Working with our live engineer and with a friend and being in a studio environment we chose and set up ourselves, there was a sense of freedom,” says Furnari. “We could take more time with the vocals to really get the best takes we could. I think people are going to hear the most powerful and unique vocal performances Jake and Jamie have ever captured on record.”

Having scheduled six weeks for the recording, come the end of that period the band realised the songs needed further finessing.

“We started to get honest with ourselves and realise there was so much more to be done,” says Furnari. “We were going to walk out of there with an album that wasn’t up to the standard we wanted it to be.”

In between more shows throughout Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the band spent two stints in Melbourne tracking drums at Range Master Studios, and additional vocals and guitars at their engineers’ respective home studios.

“It was very intense, back-and-forthing between tours and the studio over those couple of months, but it was also really exciting because we knew we were giving ourselves the time and opportunity to make something we would be really proud of,” says Furnari.

As the main lyric writer in Polaris, Furnari warns that *The Death Of Me* contains some of the bleakest material he’s ever penned, with recurring lyrical motifs and ideas floating throughout.

“There is a kind of arc to the lyrics that takes you across the record,” he starts, while stressing that *The Death Of Me* isn’t a concept album. “It’s really a record about losing faith in yourself and the world, and finding it again temporarily before losing it once more. It’s this cycle of ups and downs and highs and lows and victory and defeat again and again, struggling to find balance in our lives and within ourselves.”

Amongst the LP’s various topics – opener “Pray For Rain” posits the idea that we’re born with a finite amount of positive energy that diminishes the more we’re exposed to the world; “Above My Head” and “Vagabond” tackle from different angles the pressures and instability of touring; “Landmine” faces that mid-20s realisation that the universe doesn’t owe you anything and you’re going to have to fend for yourself – perhaps the clearest lyrical link can be found in “Masochist” and “Hypermania”, whose key lyrical hooks ask and state, respectively: ‘Am I addicted to the misery/Is this how I’ll always be?’, and ‘I’ve been up, I’ve been down every day / Something tells me I was always gonna be this way’.

“We’re so lucky to be out here doing what we’re doing, but the baggage that comes with that can be pretty heavy at times, and it’s definitely brought to the surface and exacerbated certain aspects of our mental health,” admits Furnari. “Learning to deal with that has been a big part of the journey. In a lot of ways, the album is a chronicle of what we’ve been through. There’s been a lot of good times too, but it’s not a happy record by any stretch - writing from a place of pain and struggle is a part of who we are as band. And in contrast to our earlier stuff, I no longer feel pressured to provide some kind of solution. I’ve just learned to be okay with saying, ‘This is how I felt at that time.’”

Such lyrical layers complement the expansive nature of the music, resulting in an album that adheres to the band’s initial vision: it’s distinctly the work of Polaris, but reflects the experiences and growth of the past two years.

“We’ve experienced more of the world and gone out of our comfort zone, and I think that’s audible in the music,” says Furnari. “I think a lot of things people enjoyed about *The Mortal Coil* we’ve managed to retain, but we’ve stretched the envelope further in every direction of what we consider to be our sound. I just don’t think we could have thought of most of this stuff two years ago.”

ENDS