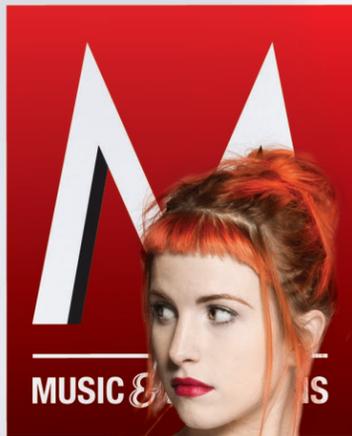


BOZ SCAGGS | TALIB KWELI | PATTY GRIFFIN | THE BAND PERRY



PARAMORE

Playing a new game



STEPHEN STILLS
Carrying on

BEATLES
In pictures

ALICE IN CHAINS
Rock ready

+

WIN \$25,000
RECORDING SESSION



CONTENTS

COVER STORY

38 PARAMORE
After losing two members, the pop-rockers move forward to explore new musical territory.

46 STEPHEN STILLS
With a career spanning a half-century, the classic rocker honors his past and embraces the future.

22 THE BAND PERRY
The chart-topping trio ups their game with some guidance from a noted production guru.

50 GREG KURSTIN
The hit-making producer shares insights from his studio time with chart-topping superstars.

24 ALICE IN CHAINS
The grunge rockers will work as long as it takes before they're ready to release new music.

62 BOZ SCAGGS
The veteran musician records vintage R&B in a studio with a history as storied as his own.



A GAME CHANGE

Now a trio, Paramore bounces back from

turmoil with a cathartic, creative new set

By Russell Hall

Sometimes it's true: What doesn't destroy you makes you stronger. Just ask Paramore. Two years ago, with mainstream success firmly in their grasp, two key members of the pop-rock group walked away. Remaining members—singer Hayley Williams, bassist Jeremy Davis and guitarist Taylor York—were roiled by the defection, unsure about their future.

"We felt all kinds of emotions," says Williams of losing guitarist Josh Farro and Farro's brother, drummer Zac. "We were angry, we were sad, we were hopeless—but at the same time we felt more determined than ever. There was a raging fire in all of us."

A lesser band might have succumbed, but passion has long been a part of Paramore's arsenal. A powerhouse vocalist by her early teens, Williams teamed with the band shortly after moving from Mississippi to Nashville a decade ago. Signed as a solo artist to Atlantic Records at 15 (she later landed at the more alt-leaning Warner Bros. subsidiary, Fueled By Ramen), Williams pushed to form her own rock group. Green-lighted, she reached out to her former bandmates—including the Farro brothers—and Paramore was born.

The group gained a substantial following with their full-length 2005 debut, but it was their second album, 2007's *Riot!*, that established Paramore as a heavyweight. Buoyed by the singles "Misery Business" and "Crushcrushcrush," the album sold 44,000 copies in its first week, eventually securing platinum status. The band scored a Grammy nod and snagged an even bigger boost when their new song, "Decode," became the lead single for the mega-selling *Twilight* film soundtrack.

The band's next album, *Brand New Eyes*, solidified their success—but beneath the exuberant exterior were rumblings of discontent. In December 2010, fans were stunned when news broke of the Farros' departure. Williams, 24, Davis, 28, and York, 23, were less surprised, noting in a collective statement that for the previous year the brothers showed signs of "not wanting to be around anymore."



Onstage in Singapore, 2011

'After everything we've been through, I'm extremely optimistic. It feels like the band has just started over.'

—Hayley Williams

"It was put to us pretty simply," Davis says. "They said they didn't want to tour, they wanted a home life and some privacy. We just wanted them to be happy. Then we thought, 'OK, what are we going to do? Will we enjoy this in the same way if we get other players?'" Ultimately, Paramore decided to carry on as a trio, heartened by a growing sense of unity. "The relationship between Hayley, Taylor and me kept getting stronger," Davis continues. "We hadn't realized how much deeper our friendship could grow."

The benefits of that bond are captured brilliantly on their latest, the self-titled *Paramore*. Having already poured their stormiest emotions into a handful of tunes released through a "Singles Club" project, the band was determined to make a vibrant, upbeat shift. "We had spent enough time wallowing in our troubles," Williams admits. "It was time to do something different, to look at things in a positive way."

To get it done, the band turned to Justin Meldal-Johnsen, known for his work with Beck, Nine Inch Nails and Tegan and Sara. Other producers were considered, but Meldal-Johnsen's enthusiasm for the project won them over. "He really wanted to get emotionally invested," Davis explains. "He likes to get down with the pedals—get dirty, do whatever it takes to find the right tone. He certainly added a new element to our songs."

Recorded over several months, *Paramore* unfurls with a diverse, ambitious sprawl reminiscent of classic double-albums from years long past. The band's punk-pop bluster remains, but nowhere does Paramore sound hemmed in by genre or stylistic preconceptions. String-laden ballads, slap-bass funk, and ukulele interludes are mixed among shards of guitar and soaring pop choruses. "We're prouder of this record than of anything else we've done," says Davis. "There's lots of diversity and a lot of influences we've never shown before. The songs just morphed in ways we love."

"If someone looks up Paramore in a dictionary in 30 years," says Williams, "I want this album next to the entry. In my heart and soul, I feel it's the record we were meant to make. It feels like a reintroduction not just to our fans, but to ourselves." Williams and Davis discussed the new album, facing down adversity, and why three voices are better than five.



Taylor York, Hayley Williams, Jeremy Davis

How did you approach the album?

WILLIAMS: We wanted to try new things, get outside our comfort zone. We felt if we didn't take that opportunity now it might not be there again. There was an excuse to change—with Josh and Zac leaving—and we wanted to take advantage of that. But it was scary at first—especially the first few songs. We were writing stuff that didn't exactly conform to what we thought Paramore sounded like. But by the end everything morphed into what it is now, which does sound like Paramore. There are new sounds, and we're playing around with different genres and bending things, but it still sounds like our band.

Did you feel you had something to prove?

WILLIAMS: We did, at first. It's hard to believe it's been more than two years now. That's where our "Singles Club" project came into play. We wrote four songs, put them on vinyl and sold them

directly to our fans. We didn't put them on iTunes. That turned out to be exactly what we needed to get through the valley we were in. Those songs didn't make it onto the new album because we weren't in that place anymore. Some of those feelings might have bled into the writing, but for the most part we had moved to a more positive place. By the time we were in the studio, we had *new* fires. We were fueled more by the pressure we put on ourselves to be a better band.

How did the change affect the songwriting?

DAVIS: The most important thing we had was time—time to write and record. We tried stepping into our old routines—trying to write songs that were like *old* Paramore songs, but it just wasn't working. We had to dig deeper into our influences and personalities. It was hard. It was hard to not have a drummer and yet still jam to see what we could come

All portraits by Pamela Lilly. Performance image by Timothy Simi/Routen/Landov.



THE RIGHT STUFF

Choosing Justin Meldal-Johnsen was more than a sound decision for Paramore

When Paramore had the rug pulled out after two members suddenly quit, the remaining three—Hayley Williams, Jeremy Davis and Taylor York—knew selecting the right producer for their next album couldn't be more important. Justin Meldal-Johnsen was that guy. "There was this great convergence of where they were musically and emotionally," Meldal-Johnsen says.

He had the right resume. The former musical director for Beck and Gnarlz Barkley, Meldal-Johnsen had amassed a host of accomplishments as an instrumentalist, songwriter and producer. He spent two years as a touring bassist with Nine Inch Nails and was a prominent contributor to albums by Garbage, Tori Amos, the Dixie Chicks and the Foo Fighters. And he'd achieved notable successes as a producer, including M83's *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming*, Tegan and Sara's *Hearthrob* and Neon Trees' *Picture Show*.

up with. We had to flip-flop things around, but in the end that proved to be an advantage. Three voices are a lot easier to manage than five. WILLIAMS: There was a period where we didn't write anything at all. We just talked about it. But once the first few songs came, we realized how liberating it felt. Like when you're a kid starting a band in your garage—sure there's pressure to be good, but there aren't preconceived notions about what things should be. You're just doing what you can with what you know. What we thought was a limitation turned out to be freeing and exciting and gave us a fresh sound.

You and Taylor wrote together as teens. Did that help?

WILLIAMS: True—but I can count on one hand the number of songs we had written together since. Taylor and I didn't have a lot of experience as a writing team. We were really nervous and uncertain about our abilities and what the end result would be. Taylor's like a mad scientist. You think he's got nothing going on, then you walk into his studio, he'll press the space bar on his computer and these crazy sounds come out. He locks himself away for long periods to work on stuff, and he hears things that Jeremy and I would never hear. That lays the groundwork for Jeremy and me to push ourselves and be inventive.

Which song surprised you most?

WILLIAMS: "Ain't It Fun." We'd just moved to L.A. for preproduction, and we'd been having writer's block. I just happened to hear this loop playing on his computer. I was like, "What is that?" It sounded like Siouxsie and the Banshees meets Paula Abdul, a weird riff sound. I said, "I want to write to this!" "But this isn't really for Paramore. I was just messing around." We spent 30 minutes hashing out little ideas I was hearing in my head. By the time we left I had the verse and pre-chorus written, and we were coming up with various sounds. Later Jeremy came in and wrote slap bass. The more input each of us gave, the more the song turned into something farfetched, something I never thought we would write. By the end we had a gospel choir. That was a really fun song to put together.

Did that song set the tone?

WILLIAMS: Actually "Grow Up" did that. That one happened by accident as well. Taylor and I were trying to write, and nothing was

Talent aside, Meldal-Johnsen's style and approach proved an especially good fit for Paramore. Instead of asserting his own ambitions, he acted as a confident echo of the band's collective voice. "I'm an experimenter, and I'm relatively fearless," says the Oregon native. "As a multi-instrumentalist, when we were introducing another musical element, it was a matter of playing it rather than discussing it. It lets me speak musically instead of having to explain with words."

Still, when recording sessions unearthed poignant memories, he provided the right words of support. "I'm not a minister or a therapist, but I wanted to give them the opportunity to feel it," he says. "Some producers think you can only make great art by having intense pressure in the studio, that it can only occur under duress and conflict. Any negative experiences they had, I wanted to act as a counterpoint. It's almost like catharsis, releasing the valve. Once they opened up the floodgates, it was a natural thing, them coming into their own."

As Paramore explored different musical territory, Meldal-Johnsen molded their vision into a cohesive unit. "The main thing for me is to create sonic drama," he says. "What I want is to put synthesizers with a live band so that it sounds more surreal. I'm all about blending the electric and the organic." —Blake Boldt

happening. He started running his hand along the guitar strings in frustration—and that turned into a riff. I suggested we put a beat to that, and that led to this early '90s idea of a Rick Rubin-like kick snare. It also sounded like nothing Paramore had ever done. Those two songs showed a new side for us. It also gave us confidence to do whatever we wanted. It just has to come from our hearts.

DAVIS: We wanted everything to be fresh, exciting and, most importantly, positive. We wanted to get past the drama. And all our previous records had been sort of negative. At first I don't think we knew how to change that style for the album. But once we got a few songs written, things started to fall into place. The next thing we knew we had 17 songs and couldn't decide which ones to kick off. We decided, "Let's just put them all on there."

Will you add a drummer?

WILLIAMS: We've come to love the idea of the band being just the three of us. It's not something we would have wished upon ourselves, but it seems to work. After two years with the three of us working on the album and doing what touring we've done, it just feels right. We also have a great touring family—the same crew since around the time we released *Riot!* six years ago. A lot of those guys are still with us. For this tour, we have Ilan Rubin on drums—he did the album with us as well. And we have Justin York, Taylor's brother, playing lots of lead and acoustic and backup guitars. We also have Jon Howard, who's toured with us, playing keyboard. There are six people onstage—but the band, it's just the three of us.

How do you keep your voice in shape?

WILLIAMS: I really stay on top of that. I'm hoarse today because I didn't warm down long enough last night after the show. I used to have really bad problems with my voice, but it's better now. If I don't warm up or warm down properly I might be hoarse for half the day. As long as I'm not eating junk, and not yelling or screaming onstage, I'm usually OK. It does take me about 30 minutes to warm



'We wanted everything to be fresh, exciting and positive. We wanted to get past the drama.'

—Jeremy Davis

up, though.

Is there a downside to being the band's focal point?

WILLIAMS: It bothered me a lot when I was younger. And there are still elements I'm not comfortable with. I don't think any human is made to get that much attention. On the other hand, it's cool that I have this vantage point to express my views. I try to sum

our perspective as a collective unit as well. And I try to write about things we all go through. As long as my focus is to stay true to myself, no matter what the attention tries to bring into my life, I'm OK.

Do you try to envision the band's future?

WILLIAMS: It's my nature to dream that way. I have to reel myself in and be a realist. After everything we've been through, I'm extremely optimistic. I feel like it's going to be a while before we slow down again. It feels like the band has just started over, and for the next few years we're going to be working really hard. Other than that, I have to take things day by day. We're fans of what we're doing now. That's important. **M**