

## SPOTLIGHT



Patrick Krief, Jeff Luciani, Murray Lightburn, Roberto Arquilla, Natalia Yanchak, Robert Benvie

## THE DEARS

**Welcoming new voices and familiar spirits into a house built on constant change**

OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS, no fewer than 15 people have had the privilege of calling themselves Dears. Of the four musicians who joined founding frontman Murray Lightburn and longtime keyboardist Natalia Yanchak in recording the band's fifth album, *Degeneration Street*, three are on their third stints as Dears. For their loyal service, they earned a privilege none of Lightburn's numerous previous sidemen have enjoyed: a chance to share in the songwriting. "The people who are in the band right now are the people I trust the most," Lightburn says. "Creatively, there were no rules. We had moments where an email would come in to me and be like, 'I bashed out this demo—check it out! The next thing you know it turns into a back-and-forth and a song is born.'"

After playing with the Dears at various points in the early '00s, bassist Roberto Arquilla and guitarists Patrick Krief and Rob Benvie returned during the making of 2008's *Missiles*, replacing three of the five members who quit before the album was completed. The threesome opted out of the seven-member lineup that toured behind *Missiles*, but when it came time to record the follow-up, all three reenlisted.

Once drummer Jeff Luciani came onboard, the musicians began swapping ideas for new songs. "We have a system in place for every song," Lightburn says. "There's a captain, and maybe a co-captain, and then there are the contributors."

That process led the Dears to *Degeneration Street*, which occupies a diverse stretch of sonic real estate. Alongside jangling chords and glossy arena riffs, the album's orchestral flourishes—piano, strings and harpsichord—carry the tracks down dark alleys and into unexpected places. Lightburn's vocal delivery reveals an intense personal connection with the lyrics—even on "Easy Suffering," a song whose words were largely written by Krief, he finds his own emotional footing. "I have no idea what his intention was," Lightburn admits, "but when I sing it, I'm thinking about something in particular that breaks me up every time."

Lightburn insists *Degeneration Street* maintains the distinctive voice of past Dears releases. "It sounds really pretentious and kind of lame, but I believe there's a spirit that inhabits the house of the Dears," he says. "When you walk in, you're willingly letting that spirit—whatever it is—inhabit you."

—Kenneth Partridge

JAN/FEB 2011  
**MUSIC & MUSICIANS**  
 MAGAZINE

IRON AND WINE | ADELE | DURAN DURAN | ERIC JOHNSON

**M**  
 MUSIC & MUSICIANS

GREGG ALLMAN  
 Blues power

DECEMBERISTS  
 Barn burners

BRIGHT EYES  
 Keyed up

**STING**  
 Exploring his history,  
 with strings attached

ZEP'S MASTERPIECE  
 IN THE STUDIO  
 PEDAL PUSH

DECEMBER 2010  
 ZEPHRAH BURNETT  
 PHOTONIC BY MATT D. STEIN