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"some music was meant to stay underground..."

Interview

STEMM's Joe Cafarella Talks "Crossroads," Scene Bands, And More

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UFC soundtrack band STEMM is set to drop a new groove metal album titled "Crossroads" ([reviewed here](#)) this coming September 13th, 2011. To let fans know what's in store on "Crossroads," vocalist/guitarist Joe Cafarella checked in with Metalunderground.com and dished on the album's writing process, what's going on with the lyrics this time around, and his thoughts on the different styles within metal.

Joe also went into detail about the recently released "Left Behind" video, which skewers the many trends in modern metal. He commented on the inspiration behind the clip, "We had the 'scene' fans pick on us, even labels and managers tell us what we needed to do. Even when we did try to make others happy, it wasn't good enough and we were still the 'outcast' band. 'A band without a core' to say... Looking back over the years, I'm happy to say that STEMM is still here, doing our own thing and evolving how we want to. STEMM is not some bi-product of a metal genre. We're a rock band." Check out the full interview transcription below.

xFiruath: When did you guys write the songs for "Crossroads" and how do you generally write songs?

Joe: The songs took shape within the past year or so. We don't write much when we're on the road. Parts get thrown around from time to time but we mainly focus putting the music together during rehearsal. I come up with a majority of the songs but the guys put their own flare to it once I present the idea to them.

xFiruath: What's different about "Crossroads" from the previous albums?

Joe: The writing process was different in general. We kept the musical ideas very loose until we began recording where in the past, the songs were generally finished. These new songs were a fun challenge for us because we focused more on writing a good song no matter what the outcome was instead of being in the mindset that we are a metal band and have to keep it heavy. Once we stopped thinking that way, the boundaries became endless for us.

xFiruath: Where did you record and how were the sessions? Did you have any particular challenges or have any interesting stories from the studio to share?

Joe: We recorded in Niagara Falls, NY with Mike Hatalak (guitarist from It Dies Today / Trustkill Records) who also produced our last 2 CD's "Songs for the Incurable Heart" and "Blood Scent." Mike is a great friend, respected musician, and we've known him for so long

he's not afraid to tell you when he doesn't like something and that it can be better. If you let him, he will push you until he gets your very best out of you. He also pushed himself to the brink of insanity! The sessions were great! At times a bit trying especially when you're fresh out of ideas and the ones you were using were not making the cut but we are all truly happy with the end result. I don't think anyone walked away saying "I wish we could've...."

During the "Blood Scent" sessions, I worked on vocal / melody / harmony ideas with Mike's partner and friend of the band, Judah Nero who really opened my eyes to different vocal approaches. I fought Judah the entire time during the "Blood Scent" sessions even though I loved his input. In the end, it made me a better vocalist and songwriter. During the "Crossroads" sessions, Judah worked with me again and I was much more open to his ideas. Some days, we would record for hours and get a ton of work done. Some days, we would stare at a blank sheet of paper for hours and then realize that we were drunk and didn't get one thing done... We learned something valuable this time around and that is "You can't rush creativity." Mike and Judah gave us the time we needed to work out what I feel is the best CD that STEMM has ever recorded.

xFiruath: The video you guys did for "Left Behind" was hilariously fantastic. Where did you shoot that and who did you work with?

Joe: The video was directed by Solomon Nero and it was shot in various locations in our hometown. It was the most fun we've ever had making a video!

xFiruath: Who came up with the concept for the video, and was it meant just to be poking fun or more of a serious statement about all the trends that pop in metal and rock these days?

Joe: I came up with the concept by accident actually and told my idea to Alex (STEMM guitarist) and Solomon who pretty much wrote out the treatment. The one thing I can say about the members of STEMM is, we listen to a lot of styles of music besides the metal genres. We openly mess with our fans because we mainly listen to country when we're on the road and we mainly listened to country while recording the new CD. It kept our minds off of what was going on in the metal world. Throughout the entire history of STEMM and the band's musical evolution, we were always told and had held against us what style of music we were not. Back when STEMM started, there was hardcore and there was death metal and grindcore and black metal and nu-metal. Over the years, all of these flavor of the week "core bands" would come out, be a big thing for a bit and go away on our scene and nationally. We had the "scene" fans pick on us, even labels and managers tell us what we needed to do. Even when we did try to make others happy, it wasn't good enough and we were still the "outcast" band. "A band without a core" to say...

Looking back over the years, I'm happy to say that STEMM is still here, doing our own thing and evolving how we want to. STEMM is not some bi-product of a metal genre. We're a rock band. That's where it all came from anyway.

The actual video concept does poke fun at the trendy bands out there, and yes, if you know us, we DO in fact hate most of your music and the way you look cause you look fucking ridiculous, but we were mainly poking fun on ourselves. We are huge Foo Fighters fans. During the time we were thinking of a concept for the video, we knew that we did not want a serious or dark theme typical metal video. Alex showed me the Foo Fighters video for "Walk" which had me riveted from the beginning since the movie "Falling Down" is one of my all time favorite movies.

After watching the video, it was as if a light bulb went off in our heads because if you know the Foo Fighters, just about all of their videos are hilarious and its mainly Dave Grohl picking on himself the hardest. So, we took a page from their book and the rest is history.

xFiruath: Lyrically it seems like STEMM goes more for real world issues and things that can be related to more easily. Where do you draw your lyrical inspiration from and what specific ideas are you trying to express on this album?

Joe: Music in general is my own personal therapy. It doesn't have to be my own music either to work out my issues. I never let the songs I write affect me so badly until I wrote the lyrics for the "Blood Scent" CD. I was in a bad place, had a lot to say and get it out. I also found that night after night, the songs were haunting me, affecting me and I hated that feeling. I hated being so angry. We toured in support of "Blood Scent" with over 200 dates. I did not want to write a new CD expressing how much I hate a whole bunch of new things that happened to me / us between CD's.

When we toured, we were privileged on our journeys to see some things and be in cities we could only dream about going. Hiking in The Badlands in South Dakota, hanging out in Nashville Tennessee and New Orleans, Louisiana are just a few things that we loved. We had a good time. We had a great experience. We learned a lot. We came out stronger as a band and most importantly, as people in general.

I wanted to write about that for the "Crossroads" CD. We knew we wanted to write a different CD from anything we had ever done before, I did not want the lyrics to have the typical angry approach to each song. Sure there are some pissed off songs on there. But there are also some songs about having a good time, you know, things that dare I say, Pantera wrote about? Drinking, touring, being a modern day cowboy coming through your town, tearing it up and gone the next day type of stuff. Metal isn't always about being miserable. I needed to convey that with "Crossroads."

xFiruath: Does the band have any upcoming festival appearances or tour dates in support of the new album?

Joe: We're going through a management change at this time, and we're picking up dates along the way.

xFiruath: STEMM has a very groove oriented sound, and I'm wondering how you personally feel about more extreme or abrasive metal styles such as death and black metal?

Joe: As I said before, we listen to all styles of music. I personally love Chimaira, White Chapel, Nile, etc. But when you have to explain to me the difference between death core and death metal over a drum beat or style of clothing, we usually start picking on you. It's all metal for Christ's sake, which was ripped off from the true death metal bands over 20 years ago. Regurgitated with eyeliner and skinny jeans. Chuck Schuldiner is rolling over in his fucking grave right now!

xFiruath: What albums are you listening to in your spare time and do you have a personal favorite release so far this year?

Joe: By far right now, Chimaira's "The Age of Hell" is amazing. Aside from that, I've been listening to Clutch's "From Biele Street to Oblivion," Zac Brown Band's "You get what you give" and as much Brad Paisley that I can fill my ears with.

xFiruath: Do you attend shows very often and have you seen any great/terrible concerts in recent memory?

Joe: I recently bought a house in the country which turns out could be of historic value due to the house dating further than the deed which began in 1836. My girlfriend and I have been restoring the house so, I haven't got out much this year for shows. But we did catch the Brad Paisley H2O2 tour this summer which was incredible. Brad Paisley is my favorite guitarist, by the way.

xFiruath: How is your local metal scene these days and do you play local shows often?

Joe: The scene is segregated as usual around here which is why it suffers so much. We've tried to help it but we decided to do what we do best: help ourselves and take care of our fans. No one gets hurt that way. We try to get around our home crowd every three months so they don't burn the city down.

xFiruath: Anything else you'd like to discuss that I didn't bring up or anything in particular you'd like to say to the fans or detractors?

Joe: We can't thank you enough for taking the time to do this interview for STEMM. Hopefully you have connected us to some new fans looking for a breath of fresh air in modern rock / metal! To our fans, you're the best, you know it, thank you for the support! Don't forget to buy your copy of "Crossroads" available Sept 13th. Check out our online store for pre-order packages at [this location](#) and say "hello" to us at [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

Ty Arthur is a freelance writer who writes for both entertainment and technical instruction sites. An avid fan of many different forms of metal, he has been involved in reviewing music for several years and is currently a contributing editor for Metalunderground.com

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