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A Line in the Sand Album Review

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This article was written as part of the curriculum for the Bachelor of Music in Music Management and the Bachelor of Science in Music Industry Studies at University of the Pacific. Each student conducted research based on his or her own areas of interest and study.

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***A Line in the Sand* Album Review**

By Robby Moore

The Basics

On July 3rd, American Arson released their first full-length album titled *A Line In The Sand*. The Detroit based punk/rock group teamed up with Facedown Records to create a polished and professional-sounding release. Facedown Records is known for their work with metal acts such as For Today, Sleeping Giant, and War of Ages (the latter of which is a personal favorite of mine). *A Line In The Sand* has a tight and powerful sound while still feeling raw and untamed, thanks to the help of high production standards. The lyrics somehow find a balance between bold, catchy, and beautiful. Their message mainly revolves around the current American socio-political sphere, challenging their listeners to seek compassion and unity instead of giving into apathy and ignorance. With frontman Evan Baker leading the way on vocals and guitar and Jesse Gentry thundering on the drums, *A Line In The Sand* takes its place right where heavy music should be: loud, fierce, and brazenly honest.

The Sound

American Arson's music lands somewhere in between punk and hard rock with some hardcore influences peppered throughout. Most of their songs follow a quick tempo with consistent snare hits that keep the energy pulsing. Detuned guitars maintain the modern hard rock standard but with a slightly warmer and fuzzier sound than the bright crunch that most

contemporary hard rock and metal bands use today. Their hardcore elements present themselves most often in the song's bridges, such as in "Let Conviction Grow" and "Huddled Masses," where the breakdowns hit like a hammer. Their single, "Unbreakable," is a great example of the combination of all three elements. The jumpy first verse leads into a catchy chorus, enhancing the punk vibes; the second verse slows into a heavier groove, more applicable for head-banging, and then the bridge opens up, shoving kick blasts down your ear canals, accentuating their hardcore influences.

The album rarely lets up in its intensity, making the quiet moments even more impactful. The synths in songs like "The End" and "The Water Will Rise" add a much needed dynamic space to the constant force of distorted guitar chords. The ending track "The King Is Alive," trades their normal aggressive nature for a chorus of strings, flutes, and a piano, creating a hopeful ballad that contrasts the dark and ominous beginning of the opening track.

Even though American Arson is just a two man group, their sonic imprint gives the impression that they should have at least four members. Gentry's drums sound huge. He makes every hit count and accentuates the perfect moments. Every part fits perfectly in the mix. Baker's vocals land somewhere between singing and shouting. His voice shines the most in tracks like "Unbreakable," "Stay True," and "Wolf Pack." I was even surprised to find some spoken word on the tracks "Let Conviction Grow" and "The King Is Alive," which was a welcome breath of fresh air in this often stale musical environment.

What also makes American Arson stand out is the amount of guitar trickery that Baker

utilizes. Through an elaborate system of pedals, amps, and live-loops he plays all the parts himself: rhythm guitar, lead guitar, and even bass. If you're a gearhead like me, see the link below to find out how he creates such diverse and dynamic layers.

The Writing

American Arson's songs are beautifully poetic while remaining simple enough to understand. Their point is never lost in flowery language and yet never becomes too dumbed down to become boring. *A Line In The Sand* typically follows the modern pop song structure of verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus. In this sense they never stray too far from the norm, but this is merely a vessel for their colorful lyrics. They particularly excel in creating interesting imagery and metaphors. Some of my favorite lines include "Memories, painted in Great Lakes blue; We are the wolf pack following after you," in the track "Wolf Pack," and "So smash me like waves on the seawall and let me reform; Make me the voice in the quiet cathedral, a gathering storm," in "Stay True." Other songs like "The Water Will Rise" and "The King is Alive" stand out due to their creative use of symbolism and visual language which result in compelling stories.

On top of its wonderfully vivid imagery, *A Line In The Sand* somehow manages to be catchy. Often catchy songs can be too repetitive, boring, and lacking in substance, but American Arson have found a great balance in their songwriting. Their lyrics remain stuck in your head for days, yet are so well-crafted that you'll want to come back and explore every word.

As elegant and catchy as their writing can be, some of their lyrics carry a strong shock value that might be surprising to some listeners. In moments like this, their language becomes

fierce and unyielding as upsetting scenarios play out. However, they never stoop to a level of crudeness or vulgarity. “Let Conviction Grow” is probably the most harsh with its opening verse stating, “a young girl tugging at the threads of my conscience; tomorrow she'll be killed in a drone strike paid for by my tax dollars, or added to the menu at a seedy motel frequented by American businessmen to be used and discarded.” The shock-value of such an intense image adds to the fervency of their music, lacking the beauty of some of their other songs, but driving home the primary political message of their music.

The Message

From the onset it's clear that American Arson is a band with a mission. Their words challenge our dark socio-political sphere and call on humanity to unite outside of our political and cultural beliefs. Their opening statement in the first track titled “The End” sums up their outcry perfectly: “if every poor man is a burden and every foreigner the enemy, if love is only for the ones who share my skin, I swear that this could be the end.” At other points they lay into America's fractured bi-partisan political system arguing, “politicians polarize; we disagree so we demonize, and we abandon any talk of compromise.” Then they urge humanity to seek compassion and unity, “Brother, sister: let's unite! Drop your daggers, leave the fight! Our real enemy is neither left or right” in the song “Drop Your Daggers.” “Let Conviction Grow” hits with a gut-punch, revealing the ignorance and apathy that wealth and comfort create, before calling on a higher power for mercy for our lack of compassion.

From beginning to end, American Arson isn't afraid to be brutally honest and upfront

in their lyrics. Though they sometimes depict the horrors of the world and the lack of sympathy humanity can show, they never do so without hope. A constant theme of unity and compassion run through their lyrics, ultimately culminating in the concluding track “The King is Alive.” The last song tells a story from a first-person point of view where the narrator searches for a hope outside of himself. Eventually his search for faith leads him to an encounter with goodness, and his heart becomes even more “anchored in hope.”

My Thoughts

A Line In The Sand really surprised me. The thoughtful yet brutal lyrics, the carefully constructed songs, and their energetic performances made me an instant fan. They have a great sound and I believe that their message couldn't be more timely. My favorite tracks are “Stay True,” “The Water Will Rise,” and “Let Conviction Grow.”

What sets American Arson apart musically is that they're just a two-man group yet they have a massive sound. The amount of guitar trickery that Baker utilizes is innovative and intelligent. However, what really made me fall in love with American Arson was their message. I adore how upfront and aggressive they are. They're not afraid to look at our political atmosphere and call it what it is. At the same time they're not rude or hopeless. They see the messed up world we live in and believe it can be changed for the better. I greatly admire and respect these guys for what they believe in and I hope that their message finds its way to many more people. This is a band I can stand behind.

Links

Listen to *A Line In The Sand* here on Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/album/6fQ3ippD8seKblhYglrkHe?si=Rh44p3jPTsC8J8oDYkW4Lg>

Make sure to check out some of their older work as well. They have some stellar EPs. For their entire catalogue on Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/7c19j0U54gBxbcGO7zXXs2?si=M8hpsmSCSKOg9JA2My9u3>

[A](#)

Their YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/americanarson>

Music Video: <https://youtu.be/ByePMSOjNjQ>

Their Website: <https://www.americanarson.com/>

Merch: <https://facedown.merchnow.com/catalogs/American-Arson>

For those music gear geeks like myself, here's a link to his guitar pedal setup:

<https://youtu.be/IpR6nAvjqXA>