

A room full of music and people isn't so strange. The trick is filling the spaces in between. When truth finds a melody, strangers disappear, and suddenly everyone belongs. And Chris Carrabba knows how to fill a room better than anyone.

"There's this magical thing when you find that people are connected through your songs," he says. "It's a stroke of luck, really. And I feel lucky that it happens with our music."

He can call it luck, but for close to a decade now, Dashboard Confessional has cultivated the kind of connection with fans that most songwriters spend a lifetime pursuing. Since the release of *Swiss Army Romance* in 2000, Carrabba's fearless honesty has inspired fierce loyalty from anyone seeking truth in music. You cannot fake the truth. You can't even hide from it. So the best songwriters dive deeply into it, coming out the other side armed with sing-a-long anthems.

"Music is all things to me," Carrabba says. "It's a respite from real life, but it's also a place to contemplate and begin to understand what you're going through. Music can clarify how things are affecting you."

Carrabba's sixth full-length album as the mind behind Dashboard Confessional, *Alter the Ending* is a collection of songs that speak to the desire in all of us to bend the shape of our lives, to twist fate, to change the end before we arrive at it. For Carrabba, this new album is the hard-won remedy for the rough spells that can plague any life, his being no exception.

"In the course of making this record, things kind of fell apart," he says. "My sister was in a terrible accident and was in a coma, one of my relatives had a heart attack, and another was in sudden need of a liver transplant. I spent quite a number of hours away from the studio at various hospitals. There was a lot of disarray going on. My whole life was on fire as I made this record. Life felt like it was burning through me."

From the first notes of album opener "Get Me Right," Carrabba sings of a struggle to get home, through a dense forest, to a rundown, broken old place. As the music moves from its first sparse, cautious notes, the song grows taller and larger and until it finally sounds like the very salvation its narrator is seeking. On the first single, "Belle of the Boulevard," Carrabba sings, "Down in a local bar/Out on the Boulevard/The sound of an old guitar/Is saving you from sinking..." To be saved by music is not a fairy tale. For Carrabba, it's a very real aspiration, maybe even a work ethic.

"I've always looked at music as a way to feel better. I've written some sad songs and some happy ones too," he says. "But the goal has been the same every time: to feel good. To pick up a guitar, to enjoy holding it in my hands, to tell a story, and to feel better after having told it."

In fact, *Alter the Ending* might be the most confident, optimistic music in Dashboard Confessional's entire storied career up to now. It's the sound of Chris Carrabba finally finding in his own music what everyone else heard from the very beginning, turning this "little side-project" into a decade-long triumph of empathy and truth. But where can you go after you've made an entire album about endings?

"I feel like this is the beginning of something new. It's a really good feeling. And I haven't felt like this since *Swiss Army Romance*. I have no idea what will be next, but this feels like a new start."