

# I Am Empire     *Anchors*

Austin Lyons - vocals  
Andrew Stanton - guitar  
Joshua Case - bass  
Eric Martin - drums

Since we last heard from alternative rockers I Am Empire with 2011's highly heralded Tooth & Nail debut *Kings*, the San Jose-based band logged endless miles of sweat equity on the road, supporting the likes of Emery, Brian "Head" Welch and Project 86, alongside its own headlining outing, plus a pair of performances at Germany's enormous Christmas Rock Night festival. The results have not only found the foursome cementing their already apparent chemistry to indestructible degrees, but has also renewed their zeal for constant creativity that manifested itself throughout its second long player *Anchors*.

"We're always writing, and even when *Kings* was just finished, we got right back to writing and continued throughout the next year-and-a-half," confirms front man Austin Lyons. "As we approached *Anchors*, we went into the studio with 30 songs and jammed our way through them all, but then recorded the best eight or nine and then finished up the rest in the studio."

Aside from the prolific players' initial instincts about what tracks to include, I Am Empire credits super producer Brian McTernan with helping shape their instantly noticeable evolution, increased artistry and intriguing experimentation on the whole. After all, he's not only the man who's sat behind the board for the likes of Thrice, Circa Survive, Senses Fail and Hot Water Music, but is also an accomplished artist in his own right as front man for now defunct hardcore groundbreakers Battery and guitarist for fellow hardcore/punk act Ashes.

"Brian brought a lot out of us, and when we were at the point of needing to write a few more songs, he simply said 'I'm gonna leave and let you get inspired. I want you guys to be who you are, and as long as you like it, then it's cool,'" explains Lyons of the unconventional but incredibly productive method. "He certainly led us and more than lived up to his role as producer, but he was very open and artsy. As a result, the new album is very raw. We're not against electronics, but we didn't use any samples or even any keyboards on the album, which gives it a raw and live sound that's dark and heavy, but also ambient at times."

As was the case on *Kings*, *Anchors* once again traces the deeply personal lyrics of the pensive but relatable Lyons, who faithful fans may recall came from a broken home. Though there's certainly been pain in the aftermath, along with the general trials and travails of a burgeoning band climbing the ladder, the current collection takes a remarkably hopeful turn, accented by newfound creative freedom.

“There are a couple of different themes throughout the record, starting with a lot of progression in my life and the idea of moving forward and rebuilding,” reveals Lyons, also asserting the band’s support of The Mentoring Project (which helps kids growing up without father figures). “*Kings* was my therapy from my upbringing, but things are getting better, which even plays out in why we named the album *Anchors*. It’s about throwing away and getting rid of the weight that holds you down, which is something we also experienced collectively as a band. We’ve gone through seasons of getting burnt out from the road, difficult times financially and just going through rough stuff behind the scenes, but we came out of all that wanting to make a record that’s 100% our art and not what anyone else wants us to be. Tooth & Nail said ‘you guys just do your thing’ and they’ve been completely supportive.”

Musically, the new material is sure to find the fellas ascending to the modern day alternative/indie rock ranks alongside influences like Thrice, Brand New and Circa Survive, though there’s also a grungy feel that echoes the classic shades of Smashing Pumpkins or Garbage. But when all the cards are laid out on the table, *Anchors* is still unquestionably an I Am Empire record, especially in light of the revealing lyrics, which are bound to connect on a myriad of levels.

Take for instance the lead off track “Gravity Bomb,” an aggression-fueled anthem Lyons aptly describes as “a song about tearing down walls and setting you free. When the world tells you to strive for a certain amount of money or to marry a certain type of person in order to be successful, it’s enough to drive you crazy and make you want to rebel. It’s a very emotional song, but also had a lot of inspiration behind it based on what we were going through.”

Other crests include “Remedy,” a raucous declaration to learn from previous mistakes and rebuild every single day rather than wallowing in past pain, plus the even more scalding “Labor,” about finding happiness through God rather than money. And then there’s the reflective “Sing,” which chronicles humanity’s continuous search for the peace we all long for, while sending a much needed reminder that there’s always at least a glimmer of hope amidst the most harrowing obstacles.

“If listeners can take away one thing from *Anchors*, it’s the idea of just throwing away all your worries and casting them aside so you can be free mentally and spiritually in your life,” sums up Lyons, who credits his high school sweetheart turned new bride in helping shift his perspective towards the positive. “You can’t progress if there’s a giant anchor tied to your ankle. You’ll be stuck in the same spot as long as you want it there. As far as my *Anchors* go, I’m done with them. Just move forward and progress.”

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