



August 24, 2015

MUSIC

Disturbed has a grasp of the element of surprise

Heavy-metal band's return 'Immortalized' in secret

Brian Mansfield
@brian_mansfield
USA TODAY

Clearly, the members of Disturbed can keep a secret.



In June, when the heavy-metal group announced a new album and released its single *The Vengeful One*, few knew the group had been in the studio.

A five-year hiatus ended with the release Friday of the group's sixth studio album, *Immortalized*. To keep the recording sessions under wraps, the band recorded in Las Vegas with producer Kevin Churko, not even telling friends and most family members what they were doing. Singer David Draiman told people who saw him in Vegas either that he was there with his wife and son or that he was producing a new act. Guitarist Dan Donegan and drummer Mike Wengren made sure to post on their social media accounts only when they were home so nobody could deduce that the group's members were all in the same place at the same time.

"Surprise is a tremendous element in the battlefield out there," Draiman says. Also, staying out of the public eye relieved some of the pressure to produce new music quickly after an extended break. If word had leaked the band was in the studio, the logical follow-up question was "When's the album coming out?"

"We really didn't have an answer," Wengren says. "Rather than have to say that, we decided to keep it quiet. As things kept go-



TRAVIS SHINN

ing, we kept it a secret for so long, we just decided to keep rolling with it."

Immortalized has a good shot at landing on top of the *Billboard* album chart. Four of their albums have entered the chart at No. 1, and *The Vengeful One* already is No. 1 on USA TODAY's Active Rock airplay chart.

The Vengeful One has exactly the sort of heavy, aggressive sound fans have come to expect from the group, but that's not what they'll get from the rest of *Immortalized*, Draiman says. "It takes our music in many different directions, with many left turns that people are not expecting by any stretch of the imagination. Nothing was off-limits this time, nothing was taboo — not stylistically, not thematically."

One song, *The Light*, sounds like the kind of '80s rock song the

band often likes to cover. Another, *Fire It Up*, extols the inspirational powers of marijuana.

"I'm completely straight-edged on the road," Draiman says. "I don't touch anything. You're traveling. You're doing hour-and-a-half-long sets every night. It's hard on the body. The last thing you want to do is introduce another X factor."

But it's a different story when Draiman is in creative mode. Smoking marijuana is permitted. And that's just what Draiman had been doing when Churko approached him about cutting the vocal track for *Immortalized*'s cover song, a somber but lushly orchestrated version of Simon & Garfunkel's 1965 ballad *The Sound of Silence*.

"I thought I was done for the day, and he played me his arrangement," Draiman says.

"He said, 'Do you want to try singing?'"

Draiman was reluctant because he had been smoking. "I felt very vulnerable in doing so. Maybe that's part of what created the whole vibe. That vulnerability certainly ended up coming out in the track."

The one downside to recording in secret was Disturbed couldn't start scheduling a tour to support *Immortalized*. Approaching promoters and reserving dates at arenas would have been a sure way for word to leak that the group was back.

So the band won't mount a full-scale tour until early 2016. "All the major stuff is booked up for the year, and we don't want to just squeeze in," Wengren says. "We want to come back big and strong and blow everybody's faces off."

John Moyer, left, David Draiman, Mike Wengren and Dan Donegan are back after a five-year break.