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## MUSIC: FEATURE

### Chimaira



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Silent but deadly: Chimaira is a six-headed monster that sounds meaner than it looks

### Dead inside

By [Omar Perez](#)

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Whether it's the incident when their tour bus slammed into a concrete barricade or the time their video shoot caught fire, Chimaira's luck on the road hasn't been the best. But it appears as if things are getting better. Or at least not as bad.

"This tour is the first one we went through where nothing went drastically wrong," says Chimaira vocalist/growler Mark Hunter, calling from Tacoma, Wash., on a cell phone that, despite a bad connection, doesn't hide the fact that Hunter is short on words on this day. "Maybe our luck is changing."

While Hunter is not particularly expressive over the phone, he releases earfuls of aggravation and angst on Chimaira's latest "The Impossibility of Reason." While most metal has some sort of prefix attached, "TIOR" lacks one. Rather, Chimaira makes it evident that the word "metal" is implicit by its very definition, offering blasts of crunch guitars, jackhammer beats and more than enough backbone for critics to hail the band as among the New Wave of American Heavy Metal. Which should not be confused with the nü-metal mediocrity that attempts (often successfully, unfortunately) to convince listeners that one catchy guitar riff warrants a whole song around it. Instead, Chimaira (named after a Greek mythological monster) bestows complex time changes on tracks such as the lengthy "Implements of Destruction" and the hardcore-spirited thrash on "Pure Hatred." Hunter's growls accompany a double-bass pummeling throughout most of the tracks and recall the years when mullets were acceptable and '86 Camaros ruled the streets.

Since their previous album, "Pass Out on Existence" (2001), the band has seemingly abandoned much of the electro-tinged, Fear Factory formula that permeated that effort. "The way the music was written this time, the element called for something more atmospheric and punishing," Hunter says. "We wanted some stuff that you're hearing -- either sonically or sub-sonically -- to be there, regardless of whether you hear it or not."

Founded in Cleveland by former guitarist Jason Hager and Hunter, Chimaira (Hunter, drummer Andols Herrick, keyboardist Chris Spicuzza, bassist Jim LaMarca, and guitarists Rob Arnold and Matt DeVries) didn't take long to take their live shows to other areas in the East. "We just tried our hardest to play out of the state. We just started to do everything we could to play away from Cleveland so we wouldn't just be called a local band. Like any other touring band we only played there once or twice a year."

After getting their feet wet on the live circuit, Chimaira dove into the studio and released 1999's "This Present Darkness" EP on the East Coast Empire boutique label. The album would sell some 10,000 copies -- a surprising number for a band of working stiffs sneaking out on weekends to play shows.

While Roadrunner Records had its eyes on them, a performance on the nationally televised "Farmclub" show convinced the label to sign Chimaira, releasing its "Pass Out on Existence" full-length debut, which the band started writing two weeks after releasing "Darkness." However, just before it hit store shelves, guitarist Hager left to spend time with his expecting wife. "Basically, his heart wasn't into the road anymore," Hunter remembers. (DeVries later assumed six-string duties.)

Besides being part of this year's Ozzfest bill, the sextet has toured with acts including Machine Head, Danzig, Fear Factory and Slayer -- whose opening slots have become notorious for being difficult for fans who just want to hear Slayer and no one else. "Maybe a couple of those shows were rough, but we don't talk about those," Hunter says.

Of course not.

The label and the press have made it a habit to accent the idea that the label didn't go cuckoo over the first batch of songs Chimaira turned in, making the band return to the studio. The effort resulted in stronger tracks, but Hunter downplays that scenario, insisting that the band did nothing different in each instance.

"It was like an Alfred Hitchcock syndrome on "Psycho," when everyone wanted him to make all these cuts to be acceptable to play in theaters and then he didn't change it," Hunter analogizes. He adds that the song that the label's A&R rep liked the most, ironically, didn't land a spot on the album. "We never changed anything; we did everything on our own accord," he says. "Everything on that record is 100 percent us."