



# Life, Love & Dessert

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## MUSIC: FEATURE

### Mastodon



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Tar pit blues: Mastodon (Brann Dailor, right)

### None more heavy

By [Omar Perez](#)

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While mainstream alt-rock has striven to reinvent itself by visiting the garage in recent years, metal, in its pure form, has appeared to be nothing more than a rusted tool in yesteryear's musical shed. However, Atlanta band Mastodon has refused to accept the notion that metal is extinct.

"I think the classic metal sound has been missing from our scene for so long that, since we kind of have it in our music, a lot of people are taken by surprise," says Mastodon drummer Brann Dailor. "I think our influences are plain to see. When you listen to Mastodon, you totally see where we're coming from."

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While the name implies a band sludging its way through tar pits or impermeable stoner-rock clouds, Mastodon (Dailor, guitarist Bill Kelliher, vocalist/bassist Troy Sanders and guitarist Brent Hinds) opts for tech stylings with frenzied time changes, bestial beats and guitars that grind and crunch one minute and harmonize the next. On last year's "Remission," the band lunges into equal doses of death metal, prog instrumentation and Kelliher's blues-hued lead-guitar work, wrapped in a mammoth (ahem) package that's somewhere between hell and the Ice Age.

While Atlanta is the spawning ground of this beast, Massachusetts is where Dailor and Kelliher cut their teeth as members of heavy prog act Today Is the Day. Dailor and Kelliher, who at the time played bass, wanted to leave the frozen New England tundra and head to the greener (although not necessarily more fertile) pastures of Atlanta, while the rest of Today Is the Day was content staying put. Two weeks after moving, the two met Sanders and Hinds at a High on Fire concert, where Hinds' Iron Maiden jacket helped spark discussions about The Melvins and Neurosis, as well as the formation of a band. Several days later Mastodon held its first rehearsal and, within two weeks, had booked several shows.

After recording their first demo in June 2000, the band played throughout the East Coast, its live shows catching the attention of grindcore label Relapse, which ultimately inked a deal with the hopeful act. While later shows included opening slots for established acts including Queens of the Stone Age and Morbid Angel, earlier performances that year weren't quite as well attended.

"We played to nobody. We played for the door guy once and we played for four chicken sandwiches, and nobody showed up," Dailor remembers. "We lost our ass for a year and a half. It's not like we make any money now but at least we can go out on tour *and* still have a place to live."

In mid-2001, the band released their "Lifesblood" debut EP and, toward year's end, returned to the studio to record "Remission." Although the album took 10 days to record, the process wasn't as simple as the timeframe might indicate. Broken or outdated equipment, changing studios and laying down the entire album's drum tracks in five hours amounted to a frenzied recording process. "That album was so fucking stressful," Dailor remembers. "I can't believe it came out the way it did. I was nervous, and that added to it. There was a lot riding on the album."

Ultimately, Dailor's fears were quelled when critics and fans praised the album, placing it in the next wave of American heavy metal.

"I didn't think it was going to be that well received," he said. "It's a vulnerable place to be -- making music and putting it out there for people to criticize."

While Dailor and Kelliher's departure from Today Is the Day resulted in some friction between the exiled members and the band at one point, the two parties have since smoothed things out. After a recent joint appearance by Mastodon and Today Is the Day at the New Jersey Metal and Hardcore Fest, Dailor and Today Is the Day frontman Steve Austin drank some whiskey together and buried the hatchet -- and not in each other's skulls.

"I said, 'Let's not talk about bands, let's not talk about the past, let's not talk about music. How's your mom? Your family? What's up with you?'" Dailor says of the meeting. "There's no reason why stupid band stuff can get in the way of

being friends."

While 2003 saw the band's "March of the Fire Ants" video premiere on MTV2 and they landed a spot on "Tony Hawk's Underground" video game with "Crusher Destroyer," Dailor hopes their sophomore offering, "Leviathan" (expected out this summer) and even more regular outings will make 2004 the year of the Mastodon.

"I hope it continues for a while and that I'll be able to live off my music," he says. "It's the most fun thing for me to do: play drums and make music with my friends."