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MUSIC: FEATURE

Poison the Well



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Screaming forward

By [Omar Perez](#)

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Despite the band's growing success within the hardcore and screamo circles, and despite earning overwhelming fan support both in the States and Europe, there was a time when Miami's Poison the Well wasn't appreciated back home.

"Everyone hated us in Miami way back in the beginning," says guitarist Ryan Primack. But the local disdain wasn't due to their growing pains as musicians, but rather from the band's knack of sprinkling melodic elements into its brutal blend of hardcore -- something that didn't sit well with fickle fans who didn't want their hard stuff watered down with anything too elaborate or colorful. "When we started the band we were set on the idea of having both," says Primack. "When you create heavy music with dynamics, everything gets heavier."

Five years later, Poison the Well (Primack, vocalist Jeff Moreira, guitarist Derek Miller, bassist Geoff Bergman and drummer Chris Hornbrook) has stuck to the formula. On its recent "You Come Before You," the band injects equal parts of vivid sing-alongs and vocal rage into a wall of guitar ferocity. "Meeting Again for the First Time" alternates between airy nuance and full-on thrash blasts, while "Ghostchant" will force the Weezer geeks into the mosh pit. Toe-tapping hooks and toe-curling screams complement the angst-simmered testosterone that fuels the entire album.

Formed during high school by Primack and original vocalist Aryeh Lehrer, the band kept its sights relatively low, playing as a way to relieve pent-up aggression, musical and otherwise. "It was never meant to be taken that seriously, but it ended up being something that we wanted to do," Primack remembers. "I was going to school for music and I was like, 'Urgh, I don't want to go on tour.' We went on tour a couple times and I was like, 'Fuck college, let's go on tour.'"

From their first tour across the East Coast, the band gradually expanded its performance boundaries. Moreira joined the band as frontman when Lehrer left to attend college and his previous local hardcore act Defy called it quits. Besides two vocalists, the band also went through several roster changes on drums, guitars and bass. The revolving cast wasn't so much a hindrance for the band as it was a way to keep it on its toes. "It just made you want to do everything quickly," Primack says. "We tried to be fast about everything because if anything happened we would have had something to fix it."

The band released a split 12-inch along with Promise No Tomorrow through Ohev Records. Four of the songs would re-appear on the band's 1998 EP on the Belgian Goodlife Recordings label, "Distance Only Makes the Heart Grow Fonder" (reissued domestically with live tracks in 2002). The band followed up with 2000's "The Opposite of December" and last year's "Tear From the Red," which sold more than 60,000 copies despite limited distribution on the Trustkill label.

While hardcore's DIY ethos typically frowns upon acts such as PTW signing to a major label, the band jumped at the chance to sign with Atlantic subsidiary Velvet Hammer, which released their latest effort. "There was hesitation at first, but you're just as much at risk with a *smaller* label as you are with a major label," Primack says. "But now our record is cheaper than it was before, and it's easier to get. You don't have to find a crazy record store to find it. And we had the money

to make an album sound the way we wanted it to." Ironically, the band has pointed out in the past that it was the smaller label that gave them less musical freedom, and was pushing them to commercial sellout status.

Despite Poison the Well's bad start in the Banana Republic, Primack doesn't hold a grudge against Miami. "I still love it here. I love the traffic É It's like, what would home be like without traffic?"