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MUSIC: FEATURE

Trivium



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(photo: Brook Pifer)

COLLAPSING THE MASSES

By [Omar Perez](#)

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At first glimpse, Trivium seems to be a band of contradictions. Its members are in their late teens/early 20s, yet embrace the style and musicianship of a metal band from 15 years ago. They tinker with a European sound, yet hail from Altamonte Springs. They initially signed with a German metal label, yet are one of the genre's up-and-coming hopefuls in the United States.

During the past several months, Trivium (singer/guitarist Matt Heafy, guitarist Corey Beaulieu, bassist Paolo Gregoletto and drummer Travis Smith) have been touring with some of metal's more established acts (God Forbid, Iced Earth) and are currently undertaking a national tour with the brutal and

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popular Chimaira and the semilegendary Machine Head. "I remember being like 12 or 13 [and] going to Machine Head concerts dreaming of playing with them," says Heafy, 18, who just graduated from high school this year. "Now we're going on tour with them. It's amazing."

Formed four years ago while most members were still in high school, Trivium signed to the German Lifeforce label in May 2003 and, at the time, found more success abroad than in the States. "Those kids are dedicated to the music they like," says Smith of their European fans, with whom they briefly interacted while playing a string of shows in Germany and the Netherlands. "In the mosh pits they pretty much break each other's faces and literally knock the shit out of each other."

One listen to their music, and such antics are not without reason. Exploding with power-metal complexity and riled up by death-metal testosterone, Trivium thrives on its ode to late-'80s/early-'90s thrash. (With song titles like "Pillars of Serpents" and "A View of Burning Empires," there's no mistaking Trivium's influences.) Somewhere between Europe's darker metal corridors and the valleys of the New Wave of American Metal, the quartet also delves into its melodic side. In between guitar solos (remember those?) and Smith's double-bass assault, Heafy's vocals shift between throaty growls and clean singalongs.

AIR GUITAR NO MORE

A military brat born in Japan, Heafy moved regularly, spending time everywhere from California to Illinois to South Florida before settling in Central Florida when he was in fifth grade. Heafy's father Brian, who played guitar in various rock bands as a hobby, was among the his son's first inspirations. Today, the elder Heafy is the band's manager, and has funded the band's ongoing pursuit for metal greatness. "We're where we're at because of him," says Matt.

In 2000, Smith, looking to put together a band to compete in his high school's battle of the bands, formed the first Trivium incarnation with Heafy, then 13, on guitar and two other aspiring musicians. The band's first song: Metallica's "For Whom the Bell Tolls." ("We've always been into the old-school stuff," Heafy says. "We should have been from the new school 'cause we're all young.") When their singer left a few party gigs later due to the oft-cited "musical differences," Heafy took over on vocal duties, although he never aspired to be a frontman.

"Travis wailed at me and said, 'You're the singer now.' And I was like, 'I can't sing.' I didn't want to do it, but I essentially worked my way up. In my opinion, I didn't really learn to sing up until two years ago," he said. "I was always hacking it." Brent Young, an old bandmate of Smith's, stepped in as rhythm guitarist, and later transitioned to bass when the band fired its bassist and couldn't find a suitable full-time replacement. (Earlier this year, Young left the band due to what Heafy assumes were the demands of touring. In his place stepped in Gregoletto from South Florida act Metal Militia.)

As many bands do, Trivium started out playing "shitty covers," as Heafy recalls – Korn, Marilyn Manson – but eventually tired of playing other people's music and started writing their own. With originals in tow, the band played its first nonschool gig, at D.I.Y. Records in Orlando. In time, the band started playing parties, and then bars and nightclubs, calling managers and owners

requesting gigs. Although some were concerned with the legalities of allowing a young band to play at their booze-serving establishments, others gave the blossoming band a chance. (The venues they played include the Lost and Found and the Fairbanks Inn.)

"[The scene] started out as really supportive, but then it became really competitive between bands," Heafy says. "Recently we've done some local shows and everyone was really cool, but it was getting quite competitive before we left."

Still, Trivium found a place among area metal fans; first the band won their high school battle of the bands, and then Heafy won the best metal guitarist category at 2002's Orlando Metal Awards. Riding the wave of local recognition, the band recorded a three-song demo, then early the next year, recorded a seven-song, higher-quality demo. Somewhere between the demos, the band began injecting more melody into its songs.

"I don't know where that came from. It could be from listening to bands like Fuel and Virgos Merlot when I first got into music," Heafy says. "That could be where I got the melody from."

GO EAST, YOUNG MEN

With demos in hand, the band shopped for a label. Through their Sweden-based Web designer, whose works include sites for In Flames and Hammerfall, they found a willing party in German metal label Lifeforce, which released the full-length *Ember to Inferno* later that year. (The LP was rereleased in the States earlier this year.)

Given they were signed to a German label, it was no surprise Trivium was asked to play Europe for a week's worth of shows. Never mind the fact that Trivium had never set foot out of Florida.

All the while, Heafy balanced academics with amplifiers. "I was doing really really good in school, and Trivium was just a side thing," said Heafy, who, like Smith, graduated from Lake Brantley High School. "But once Trivium got serious, all my time went to Trivium. My grades started to go a bit, but I still stuck them up pretty high. School's always been kind of easy for me." He took some business courses for a semester, but dropped out to tour.

Smith, meanwhile, was just getting by working odd jobs, including carpentry and landscaping.

Around the same time, the trio got even better news when Roadrunner Records, one of America's heavyweight metal labels and home to acts including Type O Negative and Sepultura, contacted the band and offered to put out their upcoming release. Some six months later, the two signed a deal. At the time, Trivium was not obligated to release additional albums under the German label, according to Smith.

"At first we couldn't believe it," he said. "It took about a week to finally settle in. If you could have seen the expression on our faces when we found out the news. It was like that kind of Christmas when you're 5 years old and you get that big huge toy that you want."

The band's second outing was with God Forbid for a month's worth of shows – about 16 dates. Then one month later, they teamed with Iced Earth for about the same number of gigs, taking a 50-hour, nonstop drive to Las Vegas for the first show. For its current outing with Chimaira and Machine Head, Trivium is part of the Roadrunner-sponsored Road Rage Tour.

While the band is gearing up to release their upcoming album sometime late this/early next year, Heafy is already anticipating what kind of album it will be. Meanwhile he's limiting himself to music that is the opposite of Trivium – Radiohead, Muse – so as not to taint the angry well from which their sound spawns.

"This next album is a dark and angry and oppressed CD. It's the coming-to-terms-with-myself album, lyrically," he says. "Everything is an advanced version of [the previous album.] It's faster, angrier, more violent – it's a lot more fun."