

Q&A



EVANESCENCE

Amy Lee wanted to go it alone—but needed her band to bring the pain

AFTER FORMING IN ARKANSAS IN THE mid-1990s, the members of Evanescence watched in amazement as their 2003 debut full-length album, *Fallen*, sold 17 million copies worldwide on the strength of hits like "Bring Me to Life" and "My Immortal." Three years later the follow-up, *The Open Door*, racked up another 5 million. After such a whirlwind ride, bandleader Amy Lee needed a moment to take stock. "I wanted to do my own thing for a while," says Lee. "I wanted to break away from Evanescence and find myself as an adult. I had been consumed by being 'the girl from Evanescence' for a long time."

Eventually she resumed writing songs and went into the studio, but soon realized

that something was missing: the rest of Evanescence. "At first it was very much me and a lot of stuff I'd been working on alone," Lee says. "But I got to a point where I felt that this needed to be a band effort, that we needed to hammer this out together." Lee gathered guitarists Terry Balsamo and Troy McLawhorn, bass player Tim McCord and drummer Will Hunt, and together the quintet did something Evanescence had never done before: They wrote together as a group. It was potentially intimidating for a songwriter who was used to working on her own, but the collaboration went smoothly—one big reason the resulting album is dubbed simply *Evanescence*. "That was the final reason," she says. "It was about my love for it, what

it means to me and the struggle that it is sometimes. I can't escape it."

Why did the band take a break?

In 2007 I got married and went straight back on tour for *The Open Door*. When we finished the tour, I wanted to try something new. I definitely needed a break. I was living in New York and started playing the harp, cooking for friends, making friends who weren't involved in my work—it kept me sane and grounded. But writing music is a real part of who I am, and I started again, although not necessarily for Evanescence. Slowly it became this record, which is Evanescence completely. Having a chance to step away for a minute let me

explore some new directions and bring that into our new sound.

How did it sound without the band?

It just wasn't right. I was about halfway through figuring out what I wanted the record to be, and I had a bunch of songs and was really excited. It was more ethereal, more programming-based, more synthetic and cool—a lot of the elements that are still a big part of this record. But it fell apart. Things weren't sounding right, I didn't know why and it was really hard for me. Now that I'm over a year away from it, I can look back and say, "I'm so glad that happened." We kept working and I got some clarity on what I wanted to do next, which was to get the band involved. I felt pretty lost for a while, but I knew that we were doing the right thing, because it kept getting better.

What had been lacking?

The music was missing the pain. Going back and working more was difficult. There wasn't a giant struggle up to that point, so finally there was something for me to lament. These songs on the record are searching and soulful, deeper and harder. That was a big part of what filled out the record and made it so great and meaningful to all of us now. It felt like we had to go through something, to overcome something.

Is pain necessary to the process?

I want to say no. I want to believe I can make music my whole life and be happy and not need bad experiences to write great songs. I think you can write songs without being upset. But at the same time, on every Evanescence record that I've made there had to be something hard going on for those deepest tracks to happen. I don't want that to be true, but there it is.

How was writing with the band?

Better than I ever hoped. The way I normally write is very intimate. I do a lot of it alone, or it's me and one other person creating in a really intimate way. To have everybody at their instruments, it's like, "OK, go!" There's a lot more pressure. It's scarier, because everybody gets to hear you suck. But you get past it quickly. It's a cool feeling when everybody starts playing together and working on something and it begins to grow. It works so well because the musicians in this group are really talented. It's harder when there's somebody who can't keep up or doesn't get the music that we're trying to make, but we all had a similar vision for the idea of what we want Evanescence to be.

And that is?

It's always been passionate, of course, and on the dark side much of the time. But now that we have a history, you can hear how the band has grown. Even between *Fallen* and *The Open Door* there were different influences, different things about the band and me that came through over the years. Now it's about not being afraid of doing what I want to do, even if it's a guilty pleasure.

For instance?

[Lead single] "What You Want" is a good example. The vocal style on the verse is just fun. Years ago I never would have been confident enough to do that. I would have thought, "That's stupid." It's heavier than a lot of our music, but the vocals are fun

of that on the record, but the best of what Evanescence is to me is the passion, the depth, the meaning. What we're adding now is creative and musical maturity.

What accounts for that maturity?

I'm older now. We all are. I remember being young and writing *Fallen*, and during that time I was still figuring out who I was and what our sound was. I'm almost 30 now. We were writing songs like "Bring Me to Life" and "My Immortal" when I was 15 through 18. I've been playing music ever since, and I've only gotten more confident and hopefully better. I used to put all kinds of restrictions on myself: I didn't sing with very much vibrato because I thought that wasn't cool. I was afraid to sing off-key, and everything



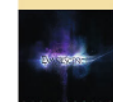
Troy McLawhorn, Terry Balsamo, Amy Lee, Tim McCord, Will Hunt

'To me the best of Evanescence is the passion, the depth, the meaning.'

and snappy and it gives it this cool dynamic. So part of the new direction is trusting myself and not being afraid to have fun with things like that on a musical level. The depth of our music is a huge part of what Evanescence is, but now there are moments of clarity and light. It's not all dark in a sad way. I think "What You Want" sounds badass, but I don't ever hear it and feel those emotions in "Bring Me to Life," for example, where I'm dying inside. There's definitely plenty

had to be hard all the time. Now there's a lot more looseness and fun going on. I'm not so afraid.

—Eric R. Danton



'I don't want to believe I need bad experiences to write great songs, but there it is.'