Foo Fighters: In Your Honor

"Mine is yours and yours is mine/There is no divide/In Your Honor I would die tonight"

Foo Fighters fifth and definitive album opens with a statement of purpose universal in its passion. Dave Grohl could be singing to his wife, bandmates Nate Mendel, Taylor Hawkins and Chris Shiflett, or to any and every fan listening to the song. In truth, the song and the double album -- one heavy as fuck, the other subtly laid back -- are dedicated to all of the above: the friends, family and fans that have made the decade-long Foo Fighters odyssey possible.

"We've been a band for 10 years now," says Grohl, channeling the band's quandary at the outset of the In Your Honor sessions. "So what do we do? Do we make another album? Rush into making another record? So I came up with this idea. I thought since I'd just been all around the world for a year and a half screaming my ass off, I'd make a solo acoustic record…but disguise it as movie score. We've always had acoustic songs. Most of our rock songs were written on acoustic guitar, songs like 'Times Like These,' 'Everlong'… I had this little studio up at my house and started recording all this music, some of it songs, some of it like a score, it was really beautiful, really coming out well then I listened to it and I was like 'Wait a second: It sounds like the Foo Fighters. It sounds like the *band.'*

"Everyone in the band has so much to offer," Grohl says. "But we'd sort of remained in this one 'thing' for so long that I felt it was time to break out, to branch out, that maybe we should make the acoustic record - but then I started thinking about how I didn't want to show up to the Reading Festival with a harpsichord, or whatever. This band just has to make some rock music…so I thought, OK, why don't we do this? Why don't we make a DOUBLE album?"

And so it was that the In Your Honor double disc opus was conceived. The band and producer Nick Raskulinecz would take the Foo Fighters' unique and precarious balance of balls-out aggression and lady-killing melodic tenderness and split the difference. The chemistry that had made it possible for "All My Life," "Everlong" and "Times Like These" to impact listeners equally in their acoustic and electric incarnations would be divided and pushed to separate extremes of hard and soft, distilled into their purest forms.

"By splitting the difference," Grohl continues, "You eliminate the middle ground. We can make the acoustic record far more delicate and beautiful and atmospheric than anything we've ever done…and we can make the rock record far more brutal and aggressive and powerful than anything from our past.' In order to make it work, I really thought "take out that middle ground, make these two records, put them together and you've accomplished something." I've always sort of believed we were capable of doing both – just not as well as this has turned out."

Indeed, Foo Fighters being at the peak of their creative powers 10 years in – let alone still together at all--often seemed a sketchy possibility. From a genesis in the form of a 1995 self-titled platinum debut originally recorded as a demo tape by Grohl (who played all instruments, save for a lone guitar track contributed by erstwhile Afghan Whig/Twilight Singer Greg Dulli), the Foo Fighters' career has been largely, as bassist Nate Mendel puts it, "accidental."

Accidental… or worse: The shattered relationships that inspired, permeated and continued through the recording of and touring behind 1997's The Colour and the Shape would surely have left a lesser band in tatters. Foo Fighters, however, persevered first through the mid-session departure of drummer William Goldsmith, who would be replaced by Taylor Hawkins months before Pat Smear would depart -- all of this as The Colour and the Shape yielded one FF classic after another: "Monkey Wrench," "Everlong," "My Hero," "Walking After You" -- and rocketed beyond the sales of Foo Fighters.

The resultant, strengthened Grohl/Mendel/Hawkins nucleus decamped to Grohl's now derelict home studio in Alexandria VA to create 1999's There Is Nothing Left To Lose. Heralded by the infectious "Learn To Fly," the album was in large part their answer record, especially in retrospect, to the testosterone-drenched rap-metal onslaught mounting in its year of release. Mellifluous down-tempo numbers rolled into one another ("Next Year," "Aurora") while the record's few raucous numbers ("Breakout," "Stacked Actors") would become live staples. The band enlisted guitarist Chris Shiflett and embarked on yet another global conquest in support of the album, concluding with two Grammy victories: Best Rock Album and Short Form Music Video ("Learn To Fly").

One By One followed in 2002…and a difficult birth it was. The result of two passes at recording, it once again tested the mettle of the band and its personal bonds -- resulting in Grohl's leave-of-absence to gain much needed perspective: recording and touring for a spell as drummer for Queens Of the Stone Age. Regrouping, regenerating and putting the record to bed, Foo Fighters released One By One to rave reviews and followed with the band's biggest world tour to date-including two sold out nights at London's Wembley Arena and a headlining stand at the Reading Festival. By 2004, One By One had become the fourth FF record to surpass the platinum mark, putting two more Grammies on the band's mantle: Best Hard Rock Performance for the "All My Life" single and a second consecutive Best Rock Album statuette, as the band wound down with a show-stopping Grammy performance of "Times Like These" augmented by legendary jazz pianist Chick Corea.

As a result of these cumulative experiences, not to mention down time spent with various side projects--Grohl's Probot, Mendel's Fire Theft, Hawkins' Coattail Riders

and Shiflett's Jackson United-the collective Foo Fighters would become more assured than ever that this was the final lineup of their band-for-life. In Your Honor would be their chance to commit that statement to music: The days of near-disintegration with every record had long since come to an end.

"Every album that we made, I'd always imagine it to be our last," Grohl recalls.

"I think we all felt that way," adds Hawkins.

Cue In Your Honor's first single, the magnificent and grandiose "Best of You," which packs a career's worth of passion, rage and melody into a breathtaking 4:16. No coincidence that a lyric repeats *"I swear I'll never give in/I refuse,"* elsewhere Grohl executing possibly the defining vocal of his career, rife with heartfelt sentiment on pertinent lines like *"I'm getting tired of starting again/Somewhere new."* Small wonder "Best Of You" is already tearing radio a new one and eliciting early press raves.

And so it goes over the course of In Your Honor's hard-as-nails first disc. Confessional screeds melding fury and melody with precarious balance and finesse on anthems "No Way Back," "DOA" and "The Last Song." With each successive track, it becomes more apparent why Hawkins calls disc 1 "the best rock record we've ever made," and Shiflett "can't wait" to leave the band's self-built 606 studio-cum-grownup-clubhouse to "get out and play these songs live." Deeper still into the first disc, "Resolve," "The Deepest Blues Are Black" and the closing "End Over End" find the band's formidable rock power channeled into more varying tempos and arrangements, more than making good on Hawkins' claim.

But as Hawkins is quick to clarify, In Your Honor's first and second discs "really are two different albums." As such, they were created in two distinct manners. Grohl recalls: "We'd been recording the rock record for nearly two months when I finally realized 'OK, we have to start on this acoustic stuff or else it's not going to happen.' So I sat everyone down at this meeting where I said 'here's the deal: No more fuckin' around. No more doing the drums, then you come in Wednesday and do the bass, then you come in Thursday and do the guitar.

"We just needed to have everybody here the whole time," says Hawkins.

"To do a song a day," adds Shiflett.

"And everybody was kinda' scared because we'd never done it that way before," Grohl says, though they quickly adapted, soon preferring the new pace, Shiflett referring to it as "a more natural process for creating music," while Mendel noted, "It's a lot more fun and there's a lot more spontaneity to it. Everyone's there and feeding off of one another."

The creation of the mellower half of In Your Honor turned surreal when the band's self described "insane wish list" of guest performers began materializing. Norah Jones lent vocals and piano to the sultry bossa nova of "Virginia Moon"-a performance Hawkins describes as "awesome; She is a *pro*." (FF guitar tech Joe Beebe, also guests on guitar on the same track) Elsewhere on the second disc, photographer

extraordinaire Danny Clinch, on hand to document the recording process, shows off his harmonica skills on "Another Round," producer Nick Raskulinecz sits in on double bass for "On The Mend," Petra Haden adds violin to "Miracle," Josh Homme of Queens Of The Stone Age plays dueling acoustic guitars with Grohl on the stunning closer "Razor," while "Cold Day In The Sun" showcases an alternate universe featuring Hawkins on vocals, Grohl on drums and Raskulinecz on bass.

But nothing could prepare the boys for the day their calls to John Paul Jones were actually returned: The legendary Led Zeppelin bassist was in town to pick up a Lifetime Achievement Grammy, and would end up contributing piano to "Miracle" and mandolin to "Another Round." His most significant contribution, however, would be ensuring that Grohl would die a happy man: "Honestly, that was probably the musical highlight of my life because I've been so obsessed with Zeppelin since I was a little kid--It's just like *give me a fuckin' break man, pinch me this is NOT happening!"*

Then, unexpectedly, as Shiflett recounts, "The energy of the acoustic record ultimately affected the rock record in an interesting way."

"Yeah we ended up re-thinking a lot of it," Hawkins agrees.

Or as Grohl adds less diplomatically, "There was no way we could let the acoustic stuff kick the rock stuff's ass. So we went back in on the rock stuff for about three weeks or something like that---from noon one day until 8 the next morning, making the rock record the most devastating thing we'd ever done." The resultant sprint to the finish line saw marathon sessions that had the band thanking their lucky stars for their decision to build 606, where they could write, rehearse, record and re-record to their heart's content, all completely off the clock. The end result? In Your Honor: the double record Grohl looks on proudly as his band's crowning achievement.

"In 20 years, when some kid asks his dad, 'You ever hear of Foo Fighters? Which record should I get?' They should say In Your Honor. Like if you wanna hear some Led Zeppelin? Get Physical Graffiti. That's exactly what I want to happen with this record. I want people to say 'Wow, that's the album they'll be remembered for.'"