Artist

**WE CAME AS ROMANS**

Label

**SHARPTONE**

Date

**2021**

By Ryan J. Downey

**BIO**

“A new age is here. We Came As Romans are *back*.” – *Rock Sound*

It was early 2021. We Came As Romans fans hungered for news about the band’s next album, the first material since 2019’s pair of well-received singles, “From the First Note” and “Carry the Weight,” and the eclectic Michigan metalcore group’s first full-length since the 2018 death of Kyle Pavone.

“I cried today while tracking a song. If that gives you any insight as to how emotional this is for us,” lead guitarist and primary songwriter Joshua Moore wrote in a Tweet. He added: “No shame.”

No shame, indeed. Since the release of the milestone debut album, 2009’s *To Plant a Seed*, diehard fans depend on We Came As Romans to deliver intimate, confessional, and autobiographical anthems, each one challenging, triumphant, and passionate. Roughly a month after Moore’s missive and subsequent Tweets, bassist Andy Glass posted a lengthy and heartfelt update on Instagram.

“We came together and put every ounce of energy into making something truly beautiful for Kyle,” he wrote. He talked plainly about grief, the new album’s role in healing, and the importance for anyone in similar situations to take care of themselves, too. “Be kind and gentle to yourself.”

*Darkbloom* is a bright light in the darkness that honors their brother's legacy and harnesses the strength of every WCAR album before it, ushering in an ambitious, courageous new era.

We Came As Romans’ ascent was quick and assured, catapulting the band (who met as teens) into the hearts of diehard fans immersed in the metalcore, post-hardcore, and Warped Tour subculture. Their hook-filled heavy music carried an uplifting message and connects with even greater urgency live. The increasingly diverse catalog of metallic might, melodic strength, and electronic atmosphere soars in clubs, theaters, and fests. They’ve supported tastemaker acts like Bring Me The Horizon, I Prevail, A Day To Remember, Falling In Reverse, Bullet For My Valentine, and The Used.

Moore and vocalist David Stephens proved a formidable writing team. Crowds connected with the songs on *To Plant a Seed* and its follow-up, 2011’s *Understanding What We’ve Grown to Be*. Moore, Stephens, Glass, guitarist Lou Cotton, and Pavone (who shared lead vocal duties) entered Billboard’s Independent Albums chart at No. 1 with 2013’s *Tracing Back Roots*. The record boasts enduring fan-favorite tracks, like “Hope,” a song streamed more than 22 million times on Spotify.

*Metal Hammer* described the band’s 2015 self-titled fourth album as “a massive departure from their comfort zone. Where once there was positivity, patience, and platitudes, there is now pain.” The menacing record confronted the darker aspects of relationships and life. Like its predecessor, *We Came As Romans* sold well over 20,000 copies during its first week in the US alone.

*Alternative Press* declared 2017’s *Cold Like War* a “milestone for WCAR,” noting the band “expanded their range of sounds, emotions, and songwriting capabilities without compromising their sincerity.” Songs like “Learning to Survive,” “Wasted Age,” and the title track are among their most streamed. *Cold Like War* was the first album with SharpTone and first to feature David Puckett, who replaced longtime drummer Eric Choi. Tragically, it proved to be their last with singer Kyle Pavone.

Roughly a year after *Cold Like War*’s release, an accidental overdose took Pavone’s life. As *Kerrang!* reported, “the world of metal and hardcore lost a talented singer before his time.” A devastated WCAR vowed to continue, in his memory, for each other, and for their fans. The Kyle Pavone Foundation arose to help musicians and fans struggling with addiction and mental health.

After the 2020 pandemic postponed plans for a *To Plant a Seed* anniversary tour, Moore wrote roughly 35 songs, together with longtime friend and producer/engineer Nick Sampson (Miss May I, Fit For A King, Polyphia). “Nick was the engineer for Joey Sturgis on our first two records, so we’ve known him since I was 18 years old. I’m 31 now,” Moore explains. “On *Cold Like War*, we started writing songs with Nick at home, then took those to producer Drew Fulk to make the album.”

The presence of Fulk (Bad Wolves, Lil Peep, Ice Nine Kills) was essential, as he was not only close with the band but deeply understood the electronic flourishes Pavone perfected on *Cold Like War*. “The keyboards on the first album sound a little bit dated. On other albums, I went for all organic sounds, with strings and piano,” says Moore. “Kyle nailed it on *Cold Like War*. We gave him free rein over everything that didn’t come from a guitar or bass. It was important to preserve that element as we entered this new era. We can’t have Kyle physically with us, but his essence remains in our music.”

Before they flew to California to record with Fulk, Moore whittled the initial batch of 35 songs down to the best 20. Those became less than ten, with additional tracks written in the studio which made the cut. “Drew didn’t tell me what they thought of each song. He made sure I formed my own opinion,” Stephens notes. “We all had differing opinions on every song. One song, in particular, I fought for, and it made the album. It was a cool process to go through all of the material like that.”

The band’s collective loss plays a significant role throughout the lyrics. Still, they were careful to choose songs that address different emotional needs and reflect varied aspects of the grieving process. Equally essential to the record are the leaps and bounds of growth in Stephens’ vocals. “Before, I was strictly screaming; always aggressive. I was never the guy singing the soft, emotional parts that express sadness in a song. I was always doing the high energy, angry parts,” he points out.

Experimentation, vocal lessons, and soul-searching resulted in a new “persona” for the singer. “My voice is so much different than Kyle’s voice, so it was important to find my style,” he adds. “Normally, we only have a few months to make a record. But we were able to spend so much time on *Darkbloom*. I was able to develop who I want to be as a singer, to carry on for both Kyle and me.”

Moore explains. “We sat down as a band and said, ‘Whether you like it or not, you’re our voice. You represent us. It’s on you to step up, or we’re not a band.’ And he *really* stepped up. He just crushed it. Dave, Andy, and I are all doing vocals live and, in the studio, Dave steered the ship with our little parts in the background. It was an emotional, feel-good moment for us. As a trio of vocalists now, it’s very cool that we evolved in that way. This wasn’t a conversation we had between the first and second record. ‘How did you guys evolve? Oh, we made the breakdowns heavier.’ Dave started this band and brought me into it when I was 15 years old. It was cool to have a natural evolution. We aren’t kids looking to rage and party all the time. We’re at a place to appreciate the progression.”

In an enthusiastic review, *Rock Sound* described the album’s title track, “Darkbloom,” as “a pitch-black piece of decadent and delirious post-hardcore that feels like wave after wave of hitting you square in the face. Ferociously dense synths clash violently with gloriously symphonic riffs and howled harmonious vocals that equate to a wall of glorious sound, expelling unbridled emotion and pushing the band into new and unchartered waters.”

“One More Day,” one of Stephens’ favorite vocal performances on the record, is plaintive, melancholic, and beautiful. As the title suggests, it’s about the wish for a little more time with Kyle.

“The Anchor” nearly didn’t make the album, but it turned out to be one of Stephens’ favorites. “I loved Josh’s lyrics, about grief pulling you down like an anchor. There’s something visually attractive to me about the lyrics – boats, the ocean – and obviously, the emotions behind it,” Stephens says. “It hit home for me. And vocally, I vibed with the song. I just love singing it.”

“Promise You” is a sequel to the *Cold Like War* song “Promise Me,” Pavone’s electronic-heavy, heartfelt anthem of self-acceptance. “Promise You,” with Moore singing lead, emphasizes WCAR’s commitment to his memory. “It’s the most emotional song I’ve ever written,” Moore says. “It meant so much to me that the boys were cool with that and encouraged it. I hope that every one of our fans can listen to it, and they can make a promise too, to always remember Kyle.”

Fulk suggested moving the crushing breakdown in “Daggers” to the chorus and the song just exploded from there. “I’m much more of a live guy than a studio person, and when I heard that song, I could immediately picture people screaming it back at us at our shows,” Stephens explains. “It will be a crowd mover, for sure.” The high-energy beatdown track features aggro cult rapper Zero 9:36.

The album title, a creative and expanded variation on the themes found throughout their catalog, represents the ability of love, and hope, to persevere even in the direst of circumstances. It’s an idea reminiscent of the 1921 Sterling Trio recording, “I Found a Rose in the Devil’s Garden.”

Each record marks a moment in time, a stage in the process of continuing evolution, none more so than *Darkbloom*. The band’s first album as five-piece balances the robust optimistic vitality of their earliest work with the stark realism of later records. It is an album, and a band, shaped by struggle, singing anthems of inspiration and survival. Like a flower fighting up through concrete, We Came As Romans continue to symbolize the transformative power of perseverance through struggle.

**SHORT BIO**

Since the release of the milestone debut album, 2009’s *To Plant a Seed*, diehard fans depend on We Came As Romans to deliver intimate, confessional, and autobiographical anthems, each one challenging, triumphant, and passionate. *Darkbloom* is a bright light in the darkness with the strength of every WCAR album before it. Singer David Stephens, guitarist Joshua Moore, bassist Andy Glass, guitarist Lou Cotton, and drummer David Puckett usher in an ambitious, courageous new era, while honoring the legacy and memory of their fallen bandmate, co-vocalist and keyboardist Kyle Pavone.

We Came As Romans’ initial ascent was quick and assured, catapulting the band (who met as teens) into the hearts of diehard fans immersed in the metalcore, post-hardcore, and Warped Tour subculture. Their hook-filled heavy music carried an uplifting message and connects with even greater urgency live. The increasingly diverse catalog of metallic might, melodic strength, and electronic atmosphere soars in clubs, theaters, and fests. They’ve supported tastemaker acts like Bring Me The Horizon, I Prevail, A Day To Remember, Falling In Reverse, Bullet For My Valentine, and The Used.

Moore and Stephens are a formidable writing team. Crowds connected with the songs on *To Plant a Seed* and its follow-up, 2011’s *Understanding What We’ve Grown to Be*. They entered Billboard’s Independent Albums chart at No. 1 with 2013’s *Tracing Back Roots*. *Metal Hammer* described 2015 self-titled fourth album as “a massive departure from their comfort zone. Where once there was positivity, patience, and platitudes, there is now pain.” *AltPress* declared 2017’s *Cold Like War* a “milestone,” noting the “expanded range of sounds, emotions, and songwriting capabilities.”

Roughly a year after *Cold Like War*’s release, an accidental overdose took Pavone’s life. A devastated WCAR vowed to continue, in his memory, for each other, and for their fans. Each record marks a moment in time, a stage in the process of continuing evolution, none more so than *Darkbloom*. Shaped by their collective loss and grief, the album balances the optimistic vitality of WCAR’s most beloved work with stark realism and emotion. Like a flower emerging through concrete, We Came As Romans symbolize the transformative power of perseverance.

**LINEUP**

* Dave Stephens – Vocals
* Joshua Moore – Guitar, Vocals
* Lou Cotton – Guitar
* Andy Glass – Bass, Vocals
* David Puckett – Drums

**SELECT DISCOGRAPHY**

* *Darkbloom* (2021)
* *Cold Like War* (2017)
* *We Came As Romans* (2015)
* *Tracing Back Roots* (2013)
* *Understanding What We’ve Grown to Be* (2011)
* *To Plant a Seed* (2009)

Demon Hunter · by Ryan J Downey · 2021 ryanjdowney.com · ryan@superherohq.co