

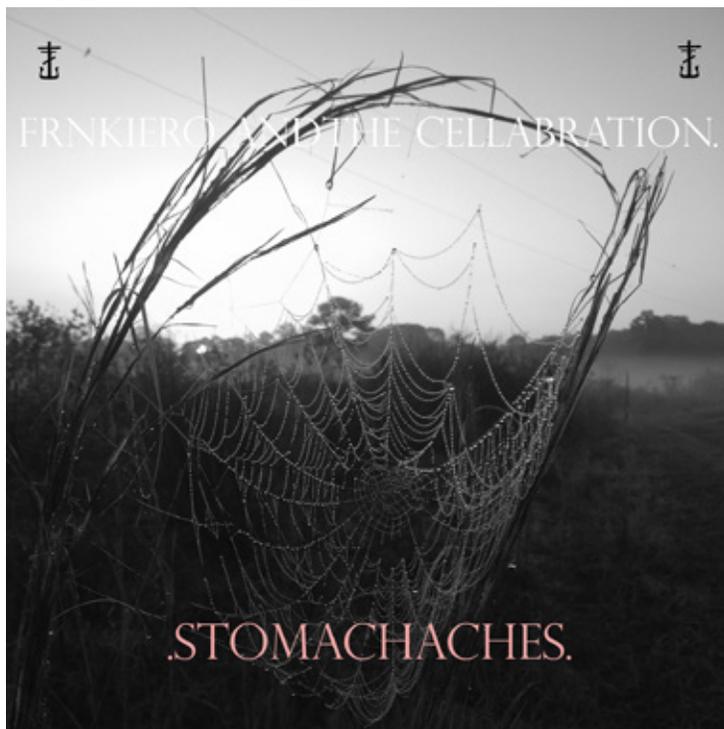
FRNKIERO AND THE CELLABRATION. STOMACHACHES.

“The funny thing about belonging to a scene,” begins singer/guitarist Frank Iero, “is that at a certain point, there becomes all these factions. Are you pop-punk? Are you emo? Are post-hardcore? Hardcore? Are you a fuckin’ hipster? In my last band, these factions were waiting to see, ‘What are these guys? They came from here, they’re not really this, we need to label them somehow.’ The reality was had we decided we were something, that scene wouldn’t have wanted us anyway. It wasn’t like getting picked for a kickball team in elementary school. It was like, ‘Well, you’ve got to go to a team, so you better decide soon. But none of us fuckin’ want you.’ So we decided to do our own thing.”

Doing your own thing is a *modus operandi* that’s worked well for Iero, the former guitarist in the groundbreaking outfit My Chemical Romance, who was responsible for bringing (and maintaining) an old-school punk energy to that band’s bigger-than-life-and-twice-as-heavy rock vision. After 10 years, four albums and rounds of incessant touring, MCR quietly adjourned in March of 2013. But the creatively restless guitarist has always held a hardcore work ethic, a mindset that helped propel *Stomachaches*, his proper debut full-length on Staple Records. Well, that and his rebellious lower intestines.

“I’m plagued with a bacterial overgrowth of the lower intestines,” he says. “When those levels get out of wack, I experience digestive problems and pain. My levels are naturally out of wack, so every few months, I take a bout of antibiotics that kill everything and then I start from scratch. When normal people are digesting food, they don’t notice it. When I’m digesting things, it causes me pain.” He begins to laugh. “It’s like saying, ‘Every time I breathe, it hurts.’ There’s not a day that goes by when I don’t feel nauseous: On my good days, I feel like a mess. I’m sure a lot of it is psychosomatic, because I’m such a nervous wreck, no matter what. For me, if I’m making something new, whether it’s a song or a poem or a short story or a painting, that’s what gets my mind off of how I feel. That’s the thought process behind the entire record.”

Iero’s insatiable need to create powered him significantly throughout his adult life. In 2009, he fronted the amplifier-burning, nihilist hardcore outfit Leathermouth, releasing an album, *XO*, on Epitaph. In 2012 Iero contributed a track to the soundtrack of director Tim Burton’s reboot of *Frankenweenie* (“This Song Is A Curse”),



seemingly referencing film composer Danny Elfman, Queen and Suicidal Tendencies in slightly more than 140 seconds. In 2013, he teamed up with auxiliary keyboardist James Dewees to create Death Spells, the morphing, bad-tripping, industrial noise-rock band. In a completely different direction, he recorded askew covers of songs by the Ronettes (“Be My Baby”) and Johnny Cash (“I Walk The Line”) and released them as *For Jamia*, a tribute 7-inch for his wife (released on his own B.calm imprint), as well as contributing to Fadeaway Records’ *Friends*, a benefit album for cancer research (“2.5mg Ain’t Enough For Me”) and British rock magazine’s *Kerrang*’s tribute to Green Day’s *American Idiot* (covering “Extraordinary Girl”). Iero even teamed up with his twin daughters for a song, dressing them up in ski masks like cuddly cat burglars in the video for “BFF” (available at frank-iero.com).

Which now brings us to *Stomachaches*, his solo debut on Staple Records, credited to frnkIero andthe cellabration (more on that rendering in a bit). Recorded in studios located in and out of his New Jersey home, the record finds Iero playing everything on the album save for drums, which were manned by former MCR touring drummer Jarrod Alexander. Produced by Iero and mixed by Ed Rose, the album is a rocket ride of styles, attitudes and emotions, at times conciliatory and resigned, contradictory and caustic. The sonic and emotional arcs the album’s 12 tracks cover create a curious lattice

of basement-show punk fury, frayed nerve endings and quiet singer-songwriter desperation. What's remarkable about *Stomachaches* is how compelling, complex and coarse Iero's creative vision can be. The songs are brash and confident, but deceptively fragile, like a vanquishing prizefighter hovering over his crumpled opponent but unaware he is actually two punches away from death. Or as curious as a contract killer crying in a ratty hotel room soon after completing his latest job. Iero's music can be slightly unhinged or ripped right off the frame entirely, a Venn Diagram where realms of decibels and extreme vulnerability share a commonality.

"Within the songwriting, I feel like it was a means to heal myself and to get whatever it was inside of me out," he says. "Doing it all myself with whatever equipment I had lying around, these limitations I like to use as tools. I promised myself that no matter what, [the record] was going to be pure. I wasn't gonna go in and overthink the original intent of things or fix things. I wanted moments in time, I wanted to include mistakes and build off of them, because I truly feel that what we are as individuals is an amalgamation of all our mistakes. It wasn't like, 'Well, in my last band, I couldn't do this, so now I'm going to.' That was never really my intention. This is the way I do things. I don't know why."

Iero assimilates the role of punk-rock Zen master in "All I Want Is Nothing," probably the best gift a scrappy radical *poonk* could give to a partner—barring make-up sex. "Tragician" is sung through the eyes of someone who has crashed, burned and simply "can't save themselves from themselves." Examine as much as you want, but the dialed-down Billy Bragg-ish respite of "Stage 4 Fear Of Trying" is *not* a manifestation of self-doubting impulses post-MCR. (It was actually inspired by a troupe of Columbian trapeze artists Iero saw and created a backstory of his own design about them.) His love paean to his wife, "She's The Prettiest Girl At The Party And She Can Prove it With A Solid Right Hook," is big-hearted emotion honeymooning with low-budget recording. ("One of my favorite things is listening to poorly recorded music and finding beautiful melodies in it. That speaks to me. When I was in bands starting out, I would love the hasty, shitty tape recordings of songs I would hear things in that maybe weren't there, but I'd hear them anyway—which is how I would write my parts.")

But the most particularly telling moment on *Stomachaches* that nicely sums up where Iero is as both artist and individual, is the thumping, uneasy "Stitches." He drawls, "I want what I want/I need what I need/I need what I want/I want what I need/I'm not what you wanted." In this case, the character in the song is talking to the listener, who might come to *Stomachaches* with a pre-conceived notion of how a Frank Iero record "should" sound. "It's a broad

spectrum," he reveals. "It's not necessarily a particular listener. It really signifies that this is for me and nothing to do with you. You can come along for the ride if you want, but I didn't do this for you. And if I'm not what you wanted, that's cool. Move along."

"My definition of a punk-rock mindset is that you do what you do because you *have* to do it," he continues. "Not because of who you are trying to please or what you're trying to make. These are things that need to be done for your sanity, for you to stay alive. I don't know if that's punk-rock or not. I'm a very sensitive person, and for me to say, 'I don't care about what you think,' well, that's not entirely true. Ultimately, it doesn't *change* what I want to do, but if you have something terrible to say to me, it's going to hurt because I'm a sensitive person. It's not going to affect the outcome." He begins to laugh. "It'll probably make me more self-loathing! I don't think it's punk rock; *that's* neuroses. If you have a patch for that, I'll take it and wear it on my jacket!"

Fans will be able to see what Iero's wearing on his sleeve when he hits the road with the Used and Taking Back Sunday in support of the release in September. Iero will be hitting the road with guitarist Evan Nestor, bassist Rob Hughes and drummer Matt Olsson, as well as a satchel full of stomach-management medication. Oh, and Iero's obsession with missing vowels, tedious punctuation and wanton disregard of spelling? Well, it turns out that despite all of his prowess as songwriter, player and performer, Iero is quite simply a lousy typist—and crazy as a fox. "Ever since I can remember, I've had a terrible way with spelling. My grammar is horrible; I'm just no good with it. So when I'm typing things out, things get fucked up. That's why all my emails end with 'xofrnk,' because for some reason I don't know why, the 'a' just never gets hit. It's a running joke with me now, but like the record, [the misspelling] is about having the mistakes be a part of you."

Frank Iero proves that not only can you have "punk" without "punctuation," you can find respite, safety and *celebration* in the most grueling and unlikely places. Even in the pit of your stomach.



<http://www.frank-iero.com>

<http://www.staplerecords.com>