Culture



From left, Mark Hoppus, Travis Barker and Tom DeLonge of Blink-182 perform at the Coachella Music and Arts Festival at the Empire Polo Club April 24 in Indio, California. (AP/Invision/Amy Harris)



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"Toxic masculinity is toxic for everyone."

It's a refrain commonly heard in my house, and though the words don't appear verbatim in Blink-182's "One More Time ...", they are the heart and soul of the newly released album — a body of work that hinges on love and tenderness between men.

Mark Hoppus, the band's bassist, recently beat cancer and that trauma surfaces repeatedly throughout tracks like "You Don't Know What You've Got," "Anthem Part III" and "More than You Know." Tom Delonge, the band's guitarist, went through a contentious divorce, which shows up in "Bad News" and "Hurt." Travis Barker, the band's drummer, survived a plane crash, informing lyrics of the titular track, "One More Time."

Perhaps the deepest trauma expressed in the album, though, is the loneliness and regret felt by each during the band's two breakups in 2005 and 2015. Mark and Tom, best friends since long before their meteoric success with Blink-182, weren't even on speaking terms just two years ago.

Longtime Blink fans understand that the band's drama could sometimes rival a soap opera. Creative differences, personal insecurities, fatigue, and poor communication were common themes, even while they were publishing hits that became cultural phenomena like "All the Small Things" and "I Miss You." It's a miracle that all three of these men are here, let alone making music again.

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That fact is not lost on the band, and the album's themes of forgiveness, nostalgia, trauma and brotherhood come together beautifully in its unapologetic thesis: Tell your male friends, your brothers, that you love them. Male platonic love, forged in friendship amid suffering, is not just important, it's healing.

The album begins triumphantly with "Anthem Part 3," which serves as an announcement to fans, but also to each other: "This time, I won't be complacent."

The song, the third "anthem" they've published during their career, sets the tone for the album. Things are different this time. They're not just back, but they're in this

together, as brothers.

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That sentiment prevails as the album persists through catchy hits "Dance With Me," "Fell in Love" and "Edging" — all of which sound and feel like vintage Blink-182 with a sprinkle of the wisdom the three have amassed over the years.

"When We Were Young" is a nostalgic track, harkening back to simpler times when things were easier both in life and for the band. Many of the songs on the album have a double meaning — some are about love or romantic relationships, but can easily be applied to friendship, too.

"You Don't Know What You've Got" is specifically and acutely about Mark's cancer, as he sings verses about his diagnosis, chemo and the existential crisis of someone facing the possible end of his life.

Importantly, it is Tom who sings the chorus: "You don't know what you've got till it's almost gone." He has watched his friend suffer, wondering if the end had come.

In interviews around the album launch, we are told that Mark's illness was the catalyst for the band getting back together. The way both Mark and Tom tell it, after the diagnosis, nothing else mattered.

Tom served as Mark's cheerleader, calling him almost every day with promises of a future when they would be touring and making music together again. Mark let go of his resentment and allowed himself to feel worthy of that love. You can hear and see the emotions on their faces when they talk about it.

Not your typical "windows down, radio up" Blink-182 song, the album's title track, "One More Time," tells this story in simple but profound lyrics. Tom sings about how the band started as "strangers, from strangers into brothers, from brothers into strangers once again."

Mark sings back at him that it "shouldn't take a sickness/or airplanes falling out the sky" to bring them back together and reforge their friendship.

The song chronicles their hurt, sure. But it ends with them overcoming that hurt with the realization: "And I know that next time ain't always gonna happen/ I gotta say 'I love you' while we're here."

Punk rock is supposed to be rebellious, emotional and raw. What's more raw and, frankly, rebellious, than two grown men singing that they love each other? More importantly, why does this sentiment still seem so countercultural in today's world?

At the end of the day, "One More Time ...", both the album and the song, is a love story about three men, three best friends, who are proud to admit how important they are to one another.

The album concludes with "Childhood," which serves as a nostalgic homage to how simple and easy relationships are in youth. The song, perhaps the most dramatic departure from Blink's signature sound on the record, evokes core memories of playing with friends and bonding over the simplest, most enjoyable things. This song particularly moved me.

Listening to Blink-182 has always been a bonding experience for my male friends and me. I remember listening to some of their earliest albums in the basement of my Grandma's house at Cape Cod with my cousins Sean and Mikey; I remember introducing my little brother James to the band for the first time. I'll never forget jamming to "All the Small Things" at my wedding with my friends Jeff and Alex. Core memories, courtesy of Blink-182.

All of these friendships are responsible for who I am today.

Perhaps that's why I, and thousands of people on the internet hyping up this album, feel so seen by "One More Time ...". Healthy, abiding male friendship might not be such a rarity after all. Maybe it's time to stop taking it for granted, and to start saying, "I love you," while we're here.

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