

= Axe to Fall =

Axe to Fall is the seventh studio album released by American metalcore band Converge . It was released on October 20 , 2009 , through Epitaph Records and was released later on in the year through Deathwish Inc. as a vinyl record . It is their second most commercially successful to date , peaking at number 74 in the Billboard 200 . The album was produced by guitarist Kurt Ballou , who previously produced Converge 's Jane Doe ( 2001 ) , You Fail Me ( 2004 ) and No Heroes ( 2006 ) , and features artwork created by lead singer Jacob Bannon . Axe to Fall is a collaborative album , which features a large number of guest musicians , including members from Cave In , Neurosis and The Red Chord among others .

Axe to Fall was met with widespread critical acclaim . It has been referred to as the band 's most accessible album to date , and was compared with Converge 's widely lauded Jane Doe .

= = Writing and recording = =

Converge began writing Axe to Fall in November 2008 . With Jacob Bannon , Kurt Ballou and Nate Newton all living within a half a mile of each other in Boston , and Ben Koller living a couple hours away in Brooklyn , Converge could easily practice for weeks at a time . Though most songs originated from a guitar or bass riff from Ballou or Newton , all members had equal input on the writing process , with each member proposing different songs . Vocalist Bannon wrote a few songs for Axe to Fall , but were scrapped because they were slower than the rest of the songs , and did not fit the energy of the album .

Following a short tour in March 2009 with Ceremony , Coliseum , Pulling Teeth , Rise and Fall , Converge entered the studio to begin recording in May 2009 . During this short tour , the band debuted a few new songs live , and footage could be seen online . The album was self @-@ produced by Converge 's guitar player , Kurt Ballou , in his own GodCity Studios located in Massachusetts . Ballou has produced and co @-@ produced several Converge albums , including 2001 's Jane Doe , 2004 's You Fail Me and 2006 's No Heroes . He has also produced a number of independent metal and hardcore bands , including Genghis Tron 's Board Up the House , Torche 's Meanderthal and Disfear 's Live the Storm . Ballou has a degree in aerospace engineering , and prior to devoting his time and effort with Converge , he worked at a biomedical firm for six years . The money he received from his severance package was used to fund and create his home studio . His experiences and knowledge in engineering carry over to his recording work . In regards to Ballou 's technical precision as a producer Bannon has stated , " nothing gets by him ? it is inspiring to watch him work . " Throughout the recording process , the band updated their fans via Twitter of their progress in the studio .

= = = Guest collaboration = = =

While creating Axe to Fall , Converge tried to challenge themselves creatively as artists . Ballou stated that with each new Converge album , he " always [ wants ] to create a new listening experience " and continued with the concept of " pushing [ themselves ] forward and not repeating [ themselves ] . " Lead singer Jacob Bannon stated , " We appreciate our past albums , but we 're very much about forward movement and challenging ourselves musically and expressing ourselves emotionally . " Bannon has stated that he felt that the main artistic difference between Axe to Fall and previous albums was the large number of guest musicians included on the record . Axe to Fall features various members from Cave In , Neurosis , and Genghis Tron among others . Most of the guest musicians already had an existing relationship with one or more band members of Converge prior to recording , or the band had " admired in some way . " Converge had previously thought of the idea of creating a collaborative album with many guest artists for a number of years , but the band felt that the " time to execute it [ had ] never been there . " Bannon has stated that working with a number of different artists was difficult and something the band was not used to , however the finished product was " an extremely focused album . "

Though writing did not officially begin until November 2008 , work on some songs from Axe to Fall began four to five years earlier . In 2004 , Converge collaborated with Cave In and recorded some songs together . The material from these recording sessions , dubbed the " Verge In " sessions , was never released and the project later dissolved . The instrumental parts that Cave In contributed to " Effigy " were from the original recordings in 2004 . Converge took the parts they contributed to the project to create the foundation for what would become " Cruel Bloom " and " Wretched World . " While producing Board Up the House , Ballou gave Genghis Tron a rough mix of " Wretched World " to contribute their talents . According to Ballou , Genghis Tron " embellished it and created a whole new melodic structure on top of the song that we would 've never come up with . " Brad Fickeisen from The Red Chord also later added his own drum track to " Wretched World " . Much of the song " Plagues " from No Heroes also originated from the Verge In sessions . With the release of Axe to Fall , everything Converge contributed to the sessions has been released in some form .

= = Release and promotion = =

In August 2009 , two months prior to the release of Axe to Fall , Converge made the opening track " Dark Horse " available for streaming and as a free download . It can also be found on the soundtrack for the horror movie Saw VI . The song was noted for being one of the few tracks lacking guest musicians , and was also met with a very positive reaction from reviewers . The title track , " Axe to Fall , " was also made available for free download in September 2009 . The entire album was available for streaming one week before the official release date on Converge 's MySpace page . Axe to Fall was released in the US through Epitaph Records on October 20 , 2009 , in digital and CD formats . The vinyl edition of the album was released through Jacob Bannon 's own independent record label , Deathwish Inc . , shortly after the release of the CD version .

= = Internet leak = =

On October 4 , 2009 , a digitally watermarked advance copy of Axe to Fall had leaked onto the internet . The watermark was linked to the advance copy given to Shaun Hand , a staff member of the music news and reviews website MetalSucks.net. Converge posted a number of Twitter messages regarding the leak , one of which read , " Special thanks to Shaun Hand at Metal Sucks for leaking our album , " and another one was posted shortly thereafter directed at MetalSucks ' Twitter account stating , " have fun with that . " The source of an album leak is rarely discovered or publicly announced . Converge 's method of dealing with their album leaking , referred to as " street justice " by Every Time I Die and Jamey Jasta , avoided a costly lawsuit yet still inflicted damages upon MetalSucks by means of viral negative publicity . The staff at MetalSucks issued a formal apology , stating that the leak was completely unintentional and the first incident since the website 's inception . They went on to say :

= = Artwork = =

The artwork for the cover and liner note booklet of Axe to Fall was designed and created by Jacob Bannon ( who graduated from The Art Institute of Boston ) . The booklet features a different piece of artwork for each song on the album . Bannon tried to create images that " encapsulated some of the emotion of each song " in contrast to more literal imagery , such as avoiding an axe literally falling for the song " Axe to Fall . " He also experimented with a technique where a single image would be repeated within a frame , but the copies would be distressed or slightly different . This could be seen in the cover art where a single image of a woman 's profile was broken down within the repetition , and some of the copies showed the woman 's teeth through her cheek . Bannon stated that for the cover art , he " just wanted to have something that felt timeless and sort of embodied the whole emotional gamut of the record , something that was explosive and powerful but also something that felt poetic and soft at the same time . It could look violent and beautiful at the same time . "

== " Axe to Fall " music video ==

A music video was directed by Craig Murray for the album's title track and was released in October 2009 . The short video ( 1 : 40 in duration ) shows a man and a woman strapped to a machine , a television that gives birth to a bio @-@ mechanical creature and several disturbing clips in between . The video features stop motion animation influenced by horror films and has been referred to as " terrifying , " " seizure @-@ inducing , " " nightmarish , " " excruciating " and " gross " by various sources . It was filmed in Ronda , Spain with the intent of making " a film in which we see a cycle . This cycle will study an idea of new creation without pleasure and the art of numbing for progression . " Murray was inspired and influenced by artists Chris Cunningham , Gaspar Noé , Nine Inch Nails and the films Ringu , A Clockwork Orange and Hardware while making the music video . On November 7 , the " Axe to Fall " video debuted on MTV2 's heavy metal music program , *Headbangers Ball* .

== Touring ==

Converge 's first tour in support of *Axe to Fall* was the *Metalocalypse* tour in late 2009 sponsored by Cartoon Network 's *Adult Swim* . Alongside *High on Fire* , Converge held an opening slot for co @-@ headliners *Mastodon* and *Dethklok* . *Axe to Fall* was released mid @-@ way through the tour . Converge 's first headlining tour in support of the album took place starting in April 2010 , with *Coalesce* , *Harvey Milk* , *Gaza* , *Lewd Acts* and *Black Breath* . The first week of the tour also featured *Thursday* and *Touche Amore* . Converge began the European leg of their world tour in July 2010 with *Kylesa* , *Gaza* and *Kvelertak* . For this tour , the band released a limited @-@ edition 7 @-@ inch vinyl single called " *On My Shield* " which was recorded between the US and European legs .

== Musical style and theme ==

Converge took their music in a more progressive direction with *Axe to Fall* . Ballou noted that drummer Ben Koller had been listening to more progressive rock over the last few years , and that he tried to complement this sound on the guitar . He went on to say that he was getting the " more straightforward , raw punk aggression out in a yet @-@ to be named hardcore side project that I started . So that leaves me free to get weird and progressive with Converge . " Ballou considers the band 's previous three albums ( *Jane Doe* , *You Fail Me* and *No Heroes* ) to be a trilogy in regards to their sound , and hoped to push their musical boundaries on *Axe to Fall* . The tracks on the album have been noted to range from " drone @-@ and @-@ pummel " to atmospheric . Bannon believes this album is " not about being as loud and vicious as possible . " Feeling that 40 ? 50 minutes of metallic hardcore can be difficult to listen to for some , Converge used softer tracks , or " slow jams , " such as " *Damages* " and " *Wretched World* " to take the listener " to some other places . "

Unlike previous Converge releases , the songs on *Axe to Fall* do not have a central and consistent lyrical theme throughout the record . Each song was meant to be a " standalone song " about Bannon 's life between this album and *No Heroes* . Bannon has said that he uses his lyrics and Converge to " vent about things in a healthy way so I 'm not a person that walks around with a lot of negative energy . " The opening track , " *Dark Horse* , " was written about the passing of a close friend of Jacob Bannon , and how he died while trying to succeed as the " underdog " .

== Reception ==

== Critical reception ==

*Axe to Fall* was met with widespread critical acclaim . *Metacritic* , an aggregate review website , scored the album with 77 out of 100 or " generally favorable " based on ten reviews . Citing a wider

range of music styles on *Axe to Fall*, many reviewers found the album to be Converge's most accessible album to date. The album features songs like the "doomy [and] noisy" track "Worms Will Feed / Rats Will Feast", the "synth @-@ drenched shoegazing" track "Wretched World" and "Kerry King @-@ admiring solos" on "Reap What You Sow" in addition to hardcore tracks like "Effigy" and "Cutter". Andrew Parks of Decibel commented on the album's wide range of sounds, stating "it strikes the perfect balance between dry @-@ heaved hardcore ? blunt trauma tracks that bleed into one another and hover around the 1 : 40 mark ? and post @-@ metal opuses that embrace Converge's experimental impulses." Juan Diniz of Mammoth Press noted that the album flowed really well, stating that "every track compliments and balances out the one prior and after. To skip tracks would be foolish as it's a compendium of aggression, frustration, beauty, and brutality," and that the album "demands to be taken in as a whole." Cosmo Lee of Pitchfork Media referred to Converge as "this generation's Black Flag", and compared *Axe to Fall* to Black Flag's 1984 second studio album *My War*. Lee noted that Converge combined abrasiveness with "slower, abstract sludge", much like how Black Flag mixed "equal parts lightning and Black Sabbath" on *My War*. Several reviewers compared the *Axe to Fall* to Converge's highly praised 2001 album, *Jane Doe*.

*Axe to Fall* received little negative criticism. Jared W. Dillon of Sputnikmusic (who had previously given *No Heroes* a 4 @.@ 5 out of 5) gave the album a score of 2 @.@ 5 out of 5, citing his distaste for the large number of guest musicians. Dillon stated that Converge "seems out of ideas as they enlisted a group of musicians associated with the band to fill in at various points of the record" and rhetorically asked, "why replace the band on a decent portion of their new record with far less talented, less interesting musicians?" He also criticized the album's longer and slower track, "Wretched World". When compared to Converge's similar previously released @-@ tracks, (*No Heroes*'s "Grim Heart / Black Rose" and *Jane Doe*'s "Jane Doe") Dillon claimed that the song "never builds to anything" and "cuts off seemingly just as it should've started." Noel Gardner of *Drowned in Sound* also found *Axe to Fall*'s two closing tracks underwhelming and felt that it "would have been a better album for finishing at track 11." Jason Pettigrew of *Alternative Press* criticized both the lyrics and overall sound of *Axe to Fall* as sounding too familiar, "when it could've been more alien" and that "in many aspects, Converge took the road most traveled for the majority of *Axe to Fall*."

== Charts and sales ==

*Axe to Fall* debuted at number 74 on the *Billboard* 200 with 7 @,@ 400 copies sold, becoming Converge's highest charting album in the US at that time. That chart high was surpassed by 2012's *All We Love We Leave Behind*. It also became the first Converge album to not appear on the *Billboard* Top Heatseekers albums, which ranks the top 50 albums released by bands that have never charted higher than 100 on the *Billboard* 200. By November 4, 2009, the album had sold 10 @,@ 487 units. *Axe to Fall* also appeared in Canada's *Chart Magazine*, a weekly chart that compiles airplay data from various Canadian campus radio stations, and peaked at number 42 on their "Top 50" album chart and number 1 on their "Metal / Punk" chart.

== Accolades ==

*Axe to Fall*'s critical acclaim has led the album to be listed on several critic's "Best of 2009" lists, both in the US and internationally. A "?" denotes the publication's list is in no particular order, and *Axe to Fall* did not rank numerically.

== Track listing ==

All lyrics written by Jacob Bannon, all music composed by Converge, except where noted.

== Personnel ==

Axe to Fall personnel as listed in CD liner notes .

= = Chart performance = =