

SHORT VERSION:

Since forming in 2012, FREE THROW's story has been simple: keep going. New records, longer tours, bigger rooms – it's always been another step upward for the Nashville-based quintet, whose 2014 debut, *Those Days Are Gone*, has become an era-defining classic in the emo-punk genre, launching them onto global tours with Hot Mulligan and New Found Glory and slots at Slam Dunk, Riot Fest, and The Fest. Every milestone has pushed them ahead, but on their sixth LP, *Moments Before The Wind* (Wax Bodega), that constant charge gradually slows, suspended mid-step, mid-thought, mid-life.

Recorded with longtime producer Brett Romnes on either end of the sold-out *Those Days Are Gone* 10-year tour, the follow-up to 2023's *Lessons That We Swear To Keep* chronicles a surrealist descent into liminality: a period of intense personal upheaval colored by loss, renewal, reflection, and, ultimately, life-altering joy through the impending birth of a child. The 11-song set is disarmingly real, colored by sonic spontaneity – a swirl of Midwest emo, sweat-soaked punk fervor, and crashing alternative rock – but also the sort of achingly vulnerable lyricism fans and critics have come to expect from the band. Through it all, *Moments* finds Free Throw still moving, still growing, but now, perhaps more than ever, acutely aware that the path ahead is neither straight nor obvious. There's a quiet confidence guiding them there into a brand-new era, ready for whatever the wind blows their way.

LONG VERSION

Since forming in 2012, **FREE THROW's** story has been simple: keep going. New records, longer tours, bigger rooms – it's always been another step upward for the Nashville-based quintet, whose 2014 debut, *Those Days Are Gone*, has become an era-defining classic in the emo-punk genre, launching them onto global tours with the likes of Hot Mulligan and New Found Glory and slots at Slam Dunk, Riot Fest, and The Fest. Every milestone has pushed them ahead, but on their sixth LP, *Moments Before The Wind* (Wax Bodega), that constant charge gradually slows, suspended mid-step, mid-thought, mid-life.

"The record has this theme of liminality – not just as a place, but in your mind," vocalist/guitarist Cory Castro explains. "It's like being stuck in a doorway or a long hallway that never ends."

The band – Castro, Larry Warner (guitar), Jake Hughes (guitar/vocals), Justin Castro (bass) and Zach Hall (drums/vocals) – once again returned to longtime producer Brett Romnes (Hot Mulligan, The Movieline) for LP6. Together, they wrote and recorded the album's 11 tracks in two sessions on either side of the band's sold-out North American tour for the 10-year anniversary of *Those Days Are Gone*. Stepping away between sessions gave them perspective; when they returned to the studio, they heard everything with fresh ears. At the same time, Romnes challenged them to trust their instincts, resulting in spontaneous sonic breakthroughs: "The Need for a Post-Credits Scene" arrived almost fully formed, its lyrics spilling out quickly, while first single "A Hero's Grave," juxtaposes a serpentine guitar line and buoyant '90s groove against Castro's gruff vocals, helped along by the first-blush energy of writing on the spot.

"We wrote it in like 15 minutes," Warner says of "A Hero's Grave." "I was tracking guitars for a different song while Brett stepped out to take a call and ended up coming up with the riff. Zach came in and started working through drum ideas, and we had the whole thing done pretty quickly. If songs come together like that, it's a pretty good sign for us."

In all, *Moments*, the follow-up to 2023's *Lessons That We Swear To Keep*, chronicles a period of intense personal upheaval in Castro's life: the dissolution of a long-term relationship and attempts to move on, the slow realization that what he'd lost was actually what he truly wanted and, ultimately, the life-altering moment of finding out midway through recording that he was going to be a father. The closing track, "The Waters Of Life," written in the afterglow of that news, becomes the push that finally shoves him through the doorway into something new.

"There was a lot to write about this time around, but getting over that threshold definitely took some time," Castro says. "We tend to write albums that have a conceptual arc to them, but you just sort of have to let the songs reveal themselves and figure out what that actually is. When I got the call that I was going to be a dad, I immediately knew what song I was going to write. It just felt right."

Pulled from Mark Z. Danielewski's cult novel *House of Leaves*, *Moments Before The Wind* references a passage that compares life to fragile structures on the verge of being blown apart and rearranged into something unrecognizable. Its artwork mirrors that feeling: a massive crystal head cracked open, its interior filled with surreal, Dalí-esque rooms and corridors that echo the "backrooms" of the mind Castro kept returning to while writing lyrics.

The emotional architecture of the album might be abstract, but the stories at its center – the heart of Free Throw's music for more than a decade – are disarmingly real, exemplified on songs like "The Outlaw Star," inspired by the anime of the same name and stuffed with dextrous Midwest emo guitar and rough-hewn punk tempos, the album-opening "MissingNo." and aching, atmospheric "This Dollar General Ain't Gonna Rob Itself."

Ultimately, *Moments Before the Wind* finds Free Throw still moving, still growing, but now, perhaps more than ever, acutely aware that the path ahead is neither straight nor obvious. There's a quiet confidence guiding them there into a brand-new era – both personally and professionally – ready for whatever the wind blows their way.