

# P.O.D.

Paul Sonny Sandoval – throat  
Marcos Curiel – guitar, background vocals, synth, glockenspiel  
Mark Traa Daniels – bass, background vocals  
Noah Wuv Bernardo – drums

It's the rare band who, more than 20 years into a storied career, creates their magnum opus with a tenth album. But P.O.D. is that band, and *The Awakening* is that record. The quartet's creativity and passion is revealed in the multiple layers of lyrics, music, artwork and spoken interludes of their T-Boy Records/UMe release *The Awakening*. Produced by longtime collaborator Howard Benson (Kelly Clarkson, My Chemical Romance, Daughtry), and featuring special guests Maria Brink from In This Moment on "Criminal Conversations" Lou Koller from Sick of it All on "Revolución," *The Awakening*, says bassist Mark Traa Daniels, is "definitely an evolution from where we've come from; it's this amazing piece of art that we've been able to put together as four guys who are like brothers; this is really special." Drummer Noah Wuv Bernardo concurs: "I feel this is like a pivotal moment for P.O.D. It's more than just 'Man, we just went in the studio and did a record; the urgency of our band as far as how serious we are putting this kind of material in there, and the way that we did it blows my mind. I am proud of these guys, of us."

A lyrical through-line suffuses *The Awakening*, and it reveals a full-circle storyline, but each song is an aural and lyrical vignette that also stands alone. "We are a band of faith; and once I started running with the lyrics a storyline came about," explains singer/lyricist Paul Sonny Sandoval. However, the lyrics aren't necessarily literal, and every song, like the first single, "This Goes Out to You," "ultimately explores a character dealing with life, making mistakes, fighting, trying," says Sonny. A look at the titles illuminates the struggle: From the album kickoff, "Am I Awake" ("Am I awake? I'm wasting away. Don't want to break. I just can't take the pain") to "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me" ("Every time I think I'm hearing voices / I ask God please make it go away / See I've tried to find out who's behind the wheel? / So is this real or am I just paranoid?) to the redemptive closing title track, "The Awakening" ("I can feel the changes. It's how I want to be. And now I gotta keep it moving if I really want to be free (I want to be free)," it's a record that delivers on multiple levels. Like Pink Floyd's *The Wall* or Queensryche's *Operation: Mindcrime*, *The Awakening's* timeless topics and musicality invites exploration and introspection from the ground up. Sonny adds, "*The Awakening* is meant to be listened to in its entirety, but we live in an iTunes, singles-type world, and it works on that level too."

P.O.D. (Payable on Death) formed in 1992 in San Diego, CA, and over the last two decades, they've sold over 10 million albums (including 2001's triple platinum record *Satellite*), garnered four No. 1 music videos, three Grammy nominations and over a dozen rock radio hits, including "Southtown," "Alive," "Youth of the Nation" and "Goodbye For Now." On *The Awakening*, P.O.D. follow their tradition of bringing on simpatico musical collaborators. *Murdered Love*'s (2013) ultra-heavy "Eyez" has a cameo by Hatebreed's Jamey Jasta, while "West Coast Rock Steady" features Sen Dog of Cypress Hill. On *The Awakening*, Brink and Koller—a fan/friend and an influence, respectively, contribute key parts. "Lou told us he'd be 'honored,'" says Sonny, still seeming shocked. "We were like, this is SO cool, brother!"

A video for "This Goes Out To You," furthers the cinematic approach of the record and the world it creates and inhabits. P.O.D. debuted many of the new songs on tour before *The Awakening* came out, and the band members have different favorites, including the punky, agro and aptly titled "Revolucion"; while Marcos cites the "rollercoaster of hard rock to beautiful clean pieces of music" in "Am I Awake" as a favorite, while the uplifting title track captivated of the band's friends and fans who heard it early on. Sonically, each song benefitted from the band's years of studio and stage experience. "I used to want to put as many tracks of guitar on the record as I could, because I thought that's what you did, but as I've gotten older I've realized that more space you're letting in with all the instruments, everything breathes and has an energy and a vibe," observes Marcos.

Kudos are due to Grammy-nominated producer Benson, who's been with P.O.D. for three of the group's biggest successes to-date, including their Platinum-selling 1999 breakthrough, *The Fundamental Elements of Southtown*, was crucial for P.O.D. Sonny explains: "Howard said 'Let's do it for the fans that have been there for 23 years, that are growing with you and love your band and get you and your bigger-picture ideas, but also make it accessible for other listeners and fans.'" The band lived at Benson's Woodland Hills, California home studio while recording, and as guitarist Marcos Curiel notes, "back with *Murdered Love*, Howard played a major role in making us excited to be a band again. We are doing our thing a little more out of the box than what people would expect from an ordinary P.O.D album." Furthers Wuv: "We've heard the hype, we've had the pats on the backs and all those things in our career. This time around it's just pure band excitement. It's natural and it's where we're at."

Ultimately, the care put into the new album is reflective of the band member's own musical obsessions: "It is kind of like an art piece--putting together all the elements; the layout, the album cover, the artwork, the pictures, everyone who gets thanked on the record," Sonny says. "We used to study albums when we were young-- we cared what guitars were used, who else is credited, so it's all that. Hopefully," he says, "If people do get the whole picture, it becomes even more special to them, like it is for us."

As Wuv concludes: "We had to ask ourselves 'do we want to do a record this ambitious, and do we think we can?' Yes we do, yes we can, and we aren't looking back."