

“Straight up, no one is having more fun than me when we’re up there!” beams DRAIN frontman Sammy Ciaramitaro, whose face is perpetually glued in a grin. For anyone that’s seen the Santa Cruz hardcore firebrands live, there’s no mistaking that fact. Drain isn’t just a good time as Sammy presides over the chaos of stagediving bodies and mic-grabbing frontline; it’s a party—and everyone is invited. (Dolphin shorts and boogie boards are optional but encouraged.) “The vibe of it is, enthusiastic, hectic,” says the vocalist. “Five people deep singing and stagediving, then kids going berserk behind that. It’s a great vibe and I think people pick up on that.”

That, in a nutshell is DRAIN. The quartet inject a serious dose of relatability—not to mention catchiness—into hardcore’s penchant for toughness and brutality on their Epitaph debut *Living Proof*. Ciaramitaro’s desperate, snotty howl rides roughshod over thrash-leaning riffage as rhythms bounce in a big way. If you’re picturing the Pacific Ocean waves that rise and fall along the coastal town, occasionally violently so, you’re not far off.

Produced by longtime friend and multi-instrumentalist Taylor Young (God’s Hate, Suicide Silence), then mixed by John Markson (Drug Church, Koyo), this is hardcore for everybody. “As the band gets bigger, I try and keep that feeling alive,” says the smiling singer. “Every night I set up the merch and run it until it’s time to play. I want to be the guy that everyone says hello to. I want to thank every single kid that comes out for being there.”

From opener “Run Your Luck” to the closing title track, between surefire pit-pleaser “Imposter” to solo-charged anthem “Weight of the World,” *Living Proof* is a surefire spark-to-flame for a band that can’t help but be anything but themselves. “It’s very authentic, which is why kids can relate,” says Ciaramitaro. “I’m not a super deep, poetic lyricist. I want to feel like I’m having a conversation, very down to earth. I’m not going to front, I grew up middle-class; I grew up in a house, a suburban home. I’m not from the streets and I’m not going to front like I am. Lyrically, the things I write about are things I can personally attest to.”

DRAIN came together in the sleepy, oceanside NorCal climes of Santa Cruz in 2014 when Ciaramitaro met up with guitarist Cody Chavez and drummer Tim Flegal while attending college. “We had no idea or gameplan of what we were trying to do,” says Sammy. “It was more like, ‘Hey, you have a metal band T-shirt, and I got a Downpresser shirt on, and someone likes Municipal Waste. We should all play together.’” While nearby scenes like San Jose and Oakland (known for the legendary Gilman Street venue) had local heat, Drain had to pull up their bootstraps to ignite their own. “We made our own scene in Santa Cruz,” reveals the DIY vocalist proudly; he began booking shows at Café Pergolesi, a local coffee shop that became the town’s hardcore hub.

“When people come to Santa Cruz, they’re like, ‘Oh, I get it, DRAIN looks like what this town looks like. We also sound like what you expect Santa Cruz to sound like,” says the frontman, touching on their home’s penchant for surfing and skating. The quartet all

grew up in California and proudly embrace its hardcore history. Ciaramitaro hails from the South Bay's San Pedro, which birthed Black Flag and The Minutemen, a far cry from DRAIN's sound but with an intensity and honesty they undeniably channel.

It's the same kind of spirit that allowed them to build a Santa Cruz homebase and the same kind of spirit that would allow them to wave its flag across the nation on the back of two EPs: *Over Thinking* (2016) and *Time Enough at Last* (2017). It earned them pockets of fans across the United States, but it was with 2018's promo single that DRAIN's California cool started boiling over. The two songs ("Army of One" and "California Cursed") were, simply put, AWESOME and these Beach Sharks shredded a blistering set at 2019's Los Angeles' Sound and Fury fest and rode the wave straight to a deal with Revelation Records.

Their debut for the label took its name, *California Cursed*, a little too literally when it launched at the dawn of Covid-19 and the resultant worldwide lockdown. Well, sort of—the smiley singer even found a blessing in that curse.

"Kids fell in love with music but didn't have the chance for two years to see it live," states Sammy. "Now that it's come back, the feeling is, 'I want to see it live. I want to go to every show. I want to experience it.'" DRAIN didn't merely jump back onto stages across North America, they exploded onto them. The brunt of that force was felt at San Jose's REAL BAY SHIT! show, a guerilla-styled seven-band assault at an industrial park on the outskirts of the town that had rapidly risen to become the epicenter of hardcore. DRAIN played direct support to Gulch, the metallic group in which Ciaramitaro also played drums before their refreshingly planned demise. Other sets came courtesy of Sunami, Xibalba, Scowl and more, resulting in the June 19, 2021 date going down in history for the over 2,000 show-starved attendees—nay, hardcore at large.

Despite its large turnout, the landmark show's origins were much more modest. "It doesn't get more DIY than that, just a handful of us," beams Sammy, who was one of the day's organizers. "We built the stage ourselves. No promoters or big business. Just us on our social media sharing a flyer – it was a turning point for us."

Around the corner was a litany of good things for DRAIN, including the announcement of their signing with Epitaph Records. The process had begun much earlier, however, with the SoCal label getting in touch with the NorCal band a mere five days after *California Cursed* dropped. They inked a deal with the understanding that the signees would tour their recent release before even thinking about a follow-up album. And tour they would, hopping on the road for headline and one supporting Terror, as fans of the surging hardcore scene clamored for the Santa Cruz quartet's brand of good, friendly violent fun.

After hitting the studio to record *Living Proof* and then, making their live European debut, DRAIN headlined the first night of 2022's landmark Sound and Fury festival playing to 6,000 kids keyed up to welcome the next generation of hardcore royalty.

“We didn’t know we were headlining,” laughs Ciaramitaro, who also played the second night for Gulch’s fiery final show. “It was wild, totally surreal. It felt not real. We’ve kind of been the underdogs from day one: overlooked, too goofy, whatever. Flash forward six years, hey we’re headlining Sound and Fury. We really did this our own way which is crazy.”

*Living Proof* is just that. It’s a testament to the hard work and heartfelt ethos that’s at the center of DRAIN’s good-time psyche. There are a couple surprises on the album. Rapper Shakewell appears on the track, “Intermission”. “He’s a hardcore dude. He used to play in that band Betrayal,” reveals Ciaramitaro. There’s also a cover of “Good, Good Things,” a nearly four-decade old melodic punk carol by the Descendents: slam-pit forebearers to DRAIN if there ever were any. “It’s crazy because the song’s been out like forty years, but lyrically it’s a DRAIN song!” exclaims Sam. “It just hits on everything that I love, that I’m about.”

What Sammy’s about is plenty wholesome. “I hope with this record that when someone hears it it gives them hope,” Ciaramitaro beams. “If we were able to get through the tough times, anyone can. I can’t wait to play these songs and hear a room full of people singing back to us. We’re what the title says, the *Living Proof*.”