Spend time talking to Mark Morton about his creative process and two themes emerge. One, he loves to write. The Lamb of God guitarist says, “I’m a musician, I'm a songwriter, I'm a guitar player, and I'm a lyricist.” Two, Morton is inspired by a wide swath of musical genres.

For his new project Anesthetic, Morton didn’t sit down this year and say *I want to write a solo album.* Instead, he’s actually been writing some of this debut for years. “This album wasn’t a concerted effort to start something outside Lamb of God,” he explains. “Music is always in my head, and until I write and record it, it’s stuck there. But once I record it, it’s out. It’s a catharsis, more for my own sanity.”

Morton is always creating: even when he isn’t writing lyrics, he’s thinking about writing lyrics. He writes on tour and he writes at home. Whenever something hits him, he jots it down: the notes section on his phone is jammed with song ideas and lyrics. Every time he hears or reads a turn of phrase, he takes out his phone. And it would be a mistake to pigeonhole Morton’s music taste as strictly metal. He’s always been inspired by all kinds of music, but his biggest inspiration comes from music “with a groove and undeniable head bounce that elevates your heart rate and gets you excited.” That’s why Morton cites not just Slayer and Metallica but Biggie Smalls and Public Enemy as influences.

One of the biggest influences for this latest project, though, was longtime Lamb of God producer Josh Wilbur. He’s worked with the band since 2003, but since then he’s worked with everyone from Steve Earle to LCD Soundsystem. After Morton played Wilbur some of his demos, Wilbur encouraged him to record it for release.

When it was time to assemble musicians forAnesthetic, Morton had a choice: he could ask friends to play on it—people who knew his style and work ethic—or he could assemble a dream team, many of whom didn’t know Morton and some of whom had never even heard of Lamb of God. Morton did both. He cites two albums as reference points: Slash’s first solo album and Dave Grohl’s side project Probot, in which both men used artists they admired to play on their tracks. Morton’s project, too, is a collaboration of highly respected musicians.

The recording process for Anesthetic was all over the place. Literally. They recorded everywhere from the Los Angeles area to Baltimore to the Grand Cayman Islands. Some tracks were recorded in studio, others were recorded thousands of miles apart. In some cases, Morton wrote music and lyrics; in others, Morton wrote the music and the vocalist wrote the lyrics. He cast a wide net for all-star collaborators. And almost everyone said yes: Mark Lanegan (Screaming Trees), Josh Todd (Buckcherry), Steve Gorman and Marc Ford (Black Crowes), Mike Inez (Alice in Chains), Ray Luzier (Korn), Roy Mayorga (Stone Sour), Dave Ellefson (Megadeth), Chuck Billy (Testament), Myles Kennedy (Alter Bridge), Alissa White-Gluz (Arch Enemy), Jacoby Shaddix (Papa Roach), Jean-Paul Gaster (Clutch), Jake Oni (ONI). Randy Blythe makes an appearance, and Morton even takes over vocal duties on one track.

Anesthetic is a diverse body of work under the rock umbrella. There’s alternative, metal, and thrash. Morton wrote most of the music, but all of the songs feature co-writes. The Josh Todd song **“**Back from the Dead” is a good example of how that process worked. With those songs, Morton says, “I wrote the music first knowing that I'm leaving space for the vocals. Once the song established itself, Josh (Wilbur) and I talked about what kind of song it was and who would sound good on it. What kind of voice is this song asking for?” Morton knew that Todd was the perfect match for this song. “It’s a high energy song, kind of cocky,” he explained. Morton sent Todd the music. Ten minutes later, Todd responded via text: I’m in.

The musicians on the album will all tell you how easy Morton was to work with. Much of this has to do with Morton’s creative philosophy in the studio: he wanted each song to play to the artists’ strengths. He never asked the artists to do anything too different from what they were familiar with. (That meant no double kick drum pedal for the Black Crowes’ Steve Gorman.)

As one of Morton’s “favorite living drummers,” Gorman was at the top of Morton’s list. He sent Gorman the demos, and Gorman loved them. Admittedly, he had never heard of the band, and his first response was, “Are you sure I'm the guy you’re thinking of? But then I realized that if this guy is in a metal band, he must be doing something different.” Gorman says that working with Morton “couldn’t have been easier.” Morton made it clear that “we were there to do what we normally do, and to just do our thing. It really removed the pressure.” As for the sound? “The fact that I'm involved should dispel any possible sense that this sounds like what he normally does,” Gorman points out.

Josh Todd was impressed with Morton’s songwriting ability, in particular how Morton writes songs for a vocalist. “Mark knows how to write a great song with a structure that sets a singer up. He made it easy for me to write lyrics and melodies. In other cases, I've gotten songs that are in such disarray that I have to sift through it to get a structure in my head.” Morton’s, he said, were already well thought out. The lyrics, Todd said, practically wrote themselves.

Longtime friend Mike Inez needed no prodding when Morton reached out. “Mark called me when I was in the car in LA with my wife. He didn’t have to ask twice.” Morton originally asked him to play on one track, but Inez insisted on more, so you can hear him on half the album. Like Gorman, Inez appreciate the space that Morton gave his players. “This isn’t really Lamb of God stuff at all. Mark stretched out. It was a smart move to just tell us to be ourselves, rather than calling us in and telling us what to play.”

Looking back, though, perhaps Morton’s fondest memory of Anesthetic is the song “Cross Off,” his collaboration with the late Linkin Park vocalist Chester Bennington. The song features Bennington on vocals, Morton on guitar, Paulo Gregoletto on bass, and Alex Bent on drums (Gregoletto and Bent are the rhythm section of Trivium). “Chester was one of the world’s most amazing vocalists and an incredibly creative force. I just hope that ‘Cross Off’ celebrates that fact,” says Morton.

“Cross Off” was the first time Morton and Bennington had worked together. It was also the first time they had ever met, but you’d never know it from the immediate bond between the two. “We spent the first two hours in the studio talking about things not even related to the project, things like our kids, family, stuff like that. Making music is very personal, so there must be a degree of trust between the artists,” says Morton. The time the two spent together before recording “Cross Off” cemented that trust and made the process almost effortless. Honest feedback was easy—and surprisingly easy, stresses Morton, considering they had just met. They spent the studio time testing out new ideas on each other. “It was an open creative process. There were no bad ideas. That’s what I hold on to. There was no ego to Chester. And I know for a fact that he loved this song,” Morton remembers.

Morton is excited to see this project come to fruition. He says that even if this project never saw the light of day, it would’ve been worth it. But make no mistake, Lamb of God fans, because that band is still Morton’s first love. Says Morton, “I’m behind Lamb of God 100%, of course. That’s my job, and that’s my priority. But I had the opportunity to write and record with some of my friends and idols and to build new relationships with people like Josh and Myles. What musician wouldn’t want to do that?”