



The Bad Ends
The Power and The Glory

Athens, GA occupies a curious corner of American history. Living up to the nickname of “The Classic City,” it harbors all kinds of heritage, dating back to 1801 (with enough of its own Southern Gothic flavor to fill a William Faulkner novel). At the same time, it remains a breeding ground for all things alternative, serving as home to the B-52’s, Widespread Panic, Neutral Milk Hotel, and R.E.M., to name a few. In this respect, the genesis of The Bad Ends may have been predestined all along. The lineup— Mike Mantione [Vocals, Guitar], Bill Berry [Drums, Guitar, Electric Sitar], Dave Domizi [Bass, Vocals], Geoff Melkonian [Keyboards, Piano, Guitars, Vocals], and Christian Lopez [Guitars, Mandolin, Banjo]—owes as much to the local scene as it does to the everyday community, forming through musical encounters as well as simple run-ins on the streets.

As if by fate, they collided personally and musically at the crossroads of their 2022 full-length debut album, *The Power and The Glory* [New West Records].

Mike initially attracted a cult fan base as the frontman of Athens favorites Five Eight. After they forged a friendship in 1991, Dave contributed upright bass to Five Eight’s *Hurt You*. Meanwhile, Geoff produced *The Black Album* for Five Eight. The bond between Christian, Dave, and Mike cemented as their kids attended the same elementary school and countless family gatherings and pool parties followed.

Mike also wrote music on his own, working up the courage to share some of his own demos with the group. He pondered the idea of a “solo record with Geoff producing and other favorite folks in Athens helping.”

For as idyllic as this season may have been, Mike dug deep lyrically on these nascent compositions.

“It was one of the happiest times, but I found myself tuning into the suffering around me and wanting to help family through their hardest times,” he reveals. “One afternoon, a close friend committed suicide. He left two sons fatherless. He was there for me years before, and he’d helped so many other people who wondered what happened. I doubled down on getting my life together and started writing and making music with a vengeance.”

However, a chance encounter catalyzed The Bad Ends...

By chance, Mike ran into R.E.M. co-founder, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame® Inductee, and legendary drummer Bill Berry. Now, Bill hadn’t played drums in a band full-time since leaving R.E.M. in 1997. Save for the rare special reunion or one-off, Bill was “retired,” as he puts it.

Nevertheless, Mike sent him a video, and Bill wound up in the jam room, practicing with the guys. After one particularly fruitful session, Bill simply proclaimed, “I’m in a band again.”

The brotherhood between the musicians crystallized with this declaration.

“This band means friendship, therapy, and a chance to pour what I’ve learned over a few decades playing music into something new to put into the world,” Dave reflects. “Emotionally, being in this band felt like a fresh start in music. It made me feel like a kid again, which is a precious thing as you get older.”

“To me, it felt like we were in our twenties, young, and hungry—like the old days of being in bands,” Geoff adds. “It was a very cool feeling, and it continues to be that way today amongst the five of us.”

Meanwhile, the journey enriched everyone.

“For me, it was a journey in and of itself to get to a nine-song record,” Mike goes on. “This is geared like many of my favorite old albums. It’s to the point.”

The Bad Ends quietly recorded, produced, and mastered what would become *The Power and The Glory* at Mike Albanese’s Espresso Machine Studio in Athens (where else?). Fun abounded in the studio, especially thanks to Albanese’s pup.

“Gladys was a ubiquitous visitor especially when we would all be there to listen to a new mix crowded around the control panel,” smiles Mike.

Born during a family camping trip to witness the eclipse, the opener “Mile Marker 29” rides a wave of distortion towards a hypnotic, albeit haunting refrain, “But you could not come around. You could not begin again.”

“It’s about trying to connect with a friend who is so depressed that he leaves you,” Mike says. “You want to show your friend how great life can be, but he feels like he can’t fix how bad he messed everything up.”

Lead single “All Your Friends Are Dying” seesaws between a sinewy melodic riff and melancholic hook topped off by a shout, which the frontman likens to “dancing at the foot of a grave.”

“You get hit with panic when close friends are dying,” he observes. “When my dad passed away, I was like, ‘Wow, this shit’s real. I’m not going to be here forever’. It feels like the rug is pulled out from under you. I’m trying to get to the hair-raising chills of the truth of the human condition on the song.”

John Neff of The Drive-By Truckers lends his pedal steel to “Little Black Cloud” and “Ode to José.” Bill lays down a simmering beat on “Thanksgiving 1915” as Mike recounts a harrowing and eye-opening tale.

“It’s the story of promises that are made to the family after a suicide attempt,” Mike elaborates. “Somebody gets stopped, and there’s a sense this particular person is trying to make atonement for this inconceivable mess. It’s frustrating, and you can see it as sort of pre-Alcoholics Anonymous, if you will. There is a sense that we need gratitude for the life we share and the beauty and sublime joy of living.”

A dusty story with divine implications unfolds on “The Ballad of Satan’s Bride.” Painting a vivid picture, he elaborates, “It’s about a guy who dies in a car accident with his new bride holding him in her arms—and she’s so consumed with grief she goes on a drunken tear and gets seduced by none other than Satan himself.”

The album concludes with “New York Murder-Suicide.” The vocals echo over naked guitar and production, emanating pain through lyrical catharsis.

“It sums up the record for me,” he reveals. “In my mind, it’s about my uncle who married my father’s sister. I had to move them out of their apartment, because she’s got dementia and he’s too weak to get up the stairs. I thought about what it must’ve been like for him to look at these boxes of old photos when they were young, in love, and traveling the world. I think he can’t bear to see her die this way, so I imagine he kills her and himself as an act of love and mercy. Thankfully, that doesn’t really happen! In my mind, it’s merged with an old tale from my wife’s family. This couple was crazy in love. When one of them got terminal cancer, they both got into bed, took plastic bags, and put them over their heads to suffocate themselves.”

For as intense as some of the subject matter may be, the experience itself remained nothing short of invigorating for the musicians. They bonded as players, friends, and now brothers.

“I was so grateful to be able to record the album with my friends,” Mike smiles. “I’m a bit of a fan boy and pretty much so is everyone else in the band. One of the crazy things is to be in a room with Bill, watch him work, and hear stories about the albums that defined everything I know and love about music. I will never forget how excited I was on the first day of recording.”

Ultimately, The Bad Ends tell timeless stories of their own.

“Mike touches on really heavy subjects in some of the songs, and I’d hope people who are struggling through tough times get something from his words,” Geoff says. “And that they keep fighting the good fight.”

“I especially hope that listeners find a bit of joy, and also the connection of knowing that they’re not alone in the hard times that life dishes out,” Dave leaves off. “Reach out if you need help surviving and navigating. It can take help to get back through to the good times.”