

## Yellowcard *Lift a Sail* bio

For their seventh studio album, *Lift a Sail*, Yellowcard had a simple but ambitious goal: to outdo everything they'd ever done before. The guitars and drums had to hit harder; the songwriting had to cut deeper; the choruses had to reach heights only hinted at on their previous outings. Frontman Ryan Key believes he and his bandmates—guitarist Ryan Mendez, violinist Sean Mackin, bassist Josh Portman and guest drummer Nate Young (Anberlin)—succeeded on all those fronts. “We really feel like we got where we wanted to be, and made a proper rock ‘n’ roll record,” Key says proudly.

Recorded with longtime producer Neal Avron at The Casita, his studio in Los Angeles, *Lift a Sail* is Yellowcard's first album for Razor & Tie and by far their most dynamic, full of massive rock anthems and haunting ballads shot through with Mackin's evocative violin and string arrangements. Young, who recorded his drum tracks at East West Studios, gives songs like “Transmission Home” an extra hard rock kick, over which Ryan Mendez' guitars have never churned with more intensity.

After two of the most eventful years of his life, it's the kind of emotionally cathartic record Key needed his band to make. In 2012, while on tour in Europe, Key met the woman who would become his wife, Alyona Alekhina, a professional snowboarder from Russia. By the end of the year they were engaged—but just a few months later, while training in California, Alekhina suffered a spinal cord injury, causing paralysis below the waist.

In the end, the tragic turn of events brought Key and Alekhina even closer together. Key was at her side for months in intensive care and through the beginnings of physical therapy. They were married in the ICU. “It's been an unimaginable challenge for us both,” Key admits, but his wife's will and determination through it all has been an inspiration. “She's incredible. She is by far the strongest human being I've ever known, and I know she will walk again.”

Key's whirlwind journey with Alekhina inevitably influenced the lyrics on *Lift a Sail*, as on the ballad “Madrid,” named after the city in which they met, and album standout “One Bedroom,” which Key wrote about the apartment the couple shared in Denver during the first part of her rehabilitation. Over acoustic guitars that gradually give way to an anthemic power ballad, Key sings, “You're the one for the rest of time.”

“It was just the two of us most of the time and that apartment seemed to be the only safe place on Earth for us both,” Key remembers. “We went through so much, we shared so much there. So the song is sort of a love letter...letting her know what she means to me.”

“Obviously that was a massive life event,” he adds, “and as a songwriter, it's hard not to put that down on paper. A lot of the record is about she and I and what we've been through.”

Another of Key's favorite songs on the record, “My Mountain,” is about another important person in his life: his grandfather, a poet who passed away earlier this year and who Yellowcard fans will know as the voice on “Dear Bobbie” from 2007's *Paper Walls*. His dying wish was to have his ashes scattered on a family property in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, next to one of his daughters, Key's aunt, who passed away two years earlier. “As my grandfather was passing, in hospice, he kept asking my mom if he was on the mountain yet. And my mom kept saying, ‘You'll be there soon.’” Key's lyrics to “My Mountain” imagine his grandfather looking out from his final resting place: “I have found my mountain/I can be with her/When I finally came across/I recovered all I lost.”

To match the most profound lyrics of Key's career, Yellowcard had to step up with some of their most risk-taking music. "MSK," in particular, stands out with a sparse arrangement that sets Key's emotive vocals against a backdrop of Mackin's swirling violin and atmospheric keys and electronics, the latter programmed by Nate Young. It's one of the few Yellowcard tracks ever to feature no guitars or drums at all. "It's a bold leap for us," Key declares.

Elsewhere on *Lift a Sail*, Yellowcard returned their early '90s alt-rock roots, finding inspiration in the dense guitars of bands they grew up listening to like Nirvana, Filter, Foo Fighters, and Smashing Pumpkins. Ryan Mendez' raging guitar parts on hard-charging anthems like "Crash the Gates" and "Illuminate" channel those '90s influences into songs that push Yellowcard's sound well beyond their pop-punk origins—especially when Sean Mackin's increasingly sophisticated strings come swooping in to take the songs to another level.

"We really changed lanes, I think," Key explains. "It's still a massive rock record, but there were a lot of choices made while we were writing the songs that were new for us. We continued to challenge ourselves throughout the writing and recording process."

The song that perhaps best sums up that attitude is the anthemic title track, whose resilient lyrics ("If a storm blows in on me/I am ready now") reflect both the inspiring determination of Key's wife and Yellowcard's increasingly fearless approach to making music. "It's the one song that really encompasses this whole experience," Key declares, looking back on everything he, his family and his bandmates have been through over the past year. "It's saying, we're ready for anything now."