

Karnivool

The Hard Way to Perfection

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Karnivool press photograph via Rolling Stone Australia.

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CHAPTER

1

Before the Shape Had a Name



Karnivool, 2019.

Perth is one of those places that can become an explanation too quickly. Say that a band came from there and a whole chain of meanings arrives preassembled: isolation, stubbornness, self-reliance, long distances, fewer gatekeepers, less fashionable pressure, more room to become strange. Some of that is true. Some of it is lazy. But with Karnivool, distance really does matter — not because Perth automatically made them profound, but because the band that would later sound so intricate and self-possessed began far away from its own finished form.

Before there was a discography that listeners could treat like a map of transformation, before there was *Themata*, before there was *Sound Awake*, before there was the long silence that would one day become part of the legend, there was simply a late-1990s school-band situation in Perth. The earliest version of Karnivool grew out of a high-school band in 1997. It was not yet the fully realized entity that later audiences would project backward into every story. It still carried the familiar loose edges of young heavy bands everywhere: enthusiasm outrunning definition, borrowed influence standing in for voice, a set list that included covers by Nirvana and Carcass alongside original material that had not yet become a worldview.

That matters because Karnivool's story can look, in retrospect, almost too coherent. Once a band has made records as architecturally deliberate as *Sound Awake* or as nervy and fractured as *Asymmetry*, people tend to imagine that the blueprint must have been there from the beginning. Usually it wasn't. In Karnivool's case, what seems to have existed early was not a fixed plan but a refusal — a sense that the ordinary versions of band life were not going to be enough for very long.

The first crucial move in the story belongs to Ian Kenny. In the broad historical outline preserved across later summaries and retrospectives, Kenny is the figure who pulled the group away from the cover-band template and toward a fully original identity. By 1998, he had shifted the set toward original songs and the project took on the name Karnivool. Later archived interviews flesh that outline out in small but useful ways: Drew Goddard remembered joining the band on bass in 1998 before later returning to guitar, while other retrospective accounts still remembered the group as a young act balancing originals with Nirvana and Carcass covers. That transition is easy to describe in a sentence. It is harder to appreciate as a formative act. Plenty of bands write originals; that alone proves nothing. But in this case the shift feels like the first real declaration that imitation was not going to satisfy the ambition building inside the group.

Even the name hints at a certain early volatility. One account ties it to a local description of the members as a “bunch of clowns,” which is exactly the sort of half-throwaway origin detail that survives because it sounds too unserious for the seriousness that comes later. That contrast suits Karnivool. The later band would become known for music that seemed to combine precision with unease, structure with instability, weight with philosophical ambiguity. But the beginning was messier, more human, and almost certainly more accidental than the legend likes to admit.

From 1998 through the early 2000s, the group did not move in a straight line. The lineup changed. The identity thickened slowly. The local profile grew. The stable five-piece now treated as the canonical Karnivool lineup — Ian Kenny, Drew Goddard, Jon Stockman, Mark Hosking, and Steve Judd — was not fully in place until 2004. That means the Karnivool

most listeners think of as inevitable actually took years to assemble. The band had to become itself member by member, choice by choice, attrition by attrition. That long assembly period matters even more because the early interview trail does not describe a group gliding naturally toward greatness. It describes a young band still testing what kind of unit it even was.

That prolonged forming period is important because it helps explain something deeper than chronology. Karnivoool did not arrive as a scene product with a ready-made formula. They emerged through correction. Through subtraction. Through the uncomfortable process of discovering which version of the band could hold the ambition that was accumulating around it. In another group, lineup instability might read as prehistory — the boring part before the real work starts. Here it feels more foundational. The instability was the work. It was the process through which the band learned what kind of pressure it wanted to contain.

If later Karnivoool would become associated with complexity, it is worth noticing that the earliest complexity may have been social and existential before it was musical. Who belongs in the band? What counts as enough? What do you do when the thing you want to become is larger than the songs you can currently write? These are not glamorous questions, but they are the questions that form serious bands long before critics begin describing their time signatures.

By the time Karnivoool moved toward the material that would become *Themata*, the project had already crossed a threshold. The songs were no longer just a local proving ground. They were becoming a vessel for identity. Ian Kenny would later describe the making of that debut not as a casual first album but as the point where the band finally felt it

had something “good enough and right enough” to deserve being the first Karnivoool record. He also recalled that it took about three years of writing to get there. That duration matters. It suggests that the debut was not a burst, but a slow compression.

What is even more revealing is the way Kenny talks about who they were while making it. Looking back from the tenth-anniversary period of *Themata*, he described the young band in language that is almost excessive in its totality: they were enthralled by what the band could be; they loved what they were trying to achieve; it consumed every hour of every day; it was part of their identity; it was everything. That is more than fond retrospective rhetoric. It tells us that Karnivoool’s beginning was not merely a matter of forming a band and writing a few songs. It was a period in which the future possibility of the band became a life-organizing principle.

That obsessive charge helps explain why the early story matters. Karnivoool did not become interesting only once the records got more sophisticated. They were already interesting when they were still trying to discover a form equal to their own ambition. The Perth years are not important because they give the band a romantic geography. They are important because they show how a group can spend years circling the thing it needs to become before it can fully inhabit it.

Perth probably did help, at least indirectly. A band working far from the most hyperactive cultural centers can sometimes survive its own awkwardness for longer. It can fail in relative privacy. It can get better before too many people are watching. That seems relevant here. Karnivoool were able to move from cover-band residue to a more singular original identity without immediately being frozen into some marketable version of themselves. They had room to be green. Room to overreach.

Room to bulldoze, as Kenny later put it, and somehow make that lack of polish work in their favor.

The geography also mattered in a much less romantic way: as logistics. Drew Goddard later recalled that in the early years it was expensive just to get out of Perth at all. One of his clearest stories from that period involved traveling by bus for roughly sixty hours each way to play a short show in Kununurra in far north Western Australia. That anecdote is useful not because hardship automatically makes better art, but because it restores physical scale to the story. Karnivool's early growth happened in a country where distance itself could act like resistance. The band were not only trying to become themselves creatively; they were learning how to keep becoming while hauling that unfinished identity across immense spaces.

The phrase is revealing: they were green and bulldozed their way through. It is not how people usually describe bands whose later work gets treated as refined or cerebral. But refinement is often born from people who begin with force before they learn shape. There is something very Karnivool about that combination — brute insistence searching for a form complex enough to justify it.

So Chapter One of Karnivool's story is not a tale of instant distinction. It is a tale of appetite gathering inside an unfinished band. A Perth school-band becomes an original act. An unstable lineup slowly finds its right weight. A cluster of influences begins to give way to a more singular hunger. The future is still unclear, but the band is already behaving as if ordinary growth will not be enough.

What came next would give that appetite a body. *Themata* would later be heard as breakthrough, rupture, totem, blueprint. But before it was any of those things, it was something more pressurized: the first serious answer to a question

the band had been living inside for years. If this was going to be Karnivool, what would the music have to become strong enough to hold?

CHAPTER

2

Themata and the First Architecture



Themata album art.

Chapter One ended with *Themata* as the first serious answer to what Karnivool's music would need to become strong enough to hold. Chapter Two begins inside that answer. Every important first album contains two bands at once. There is the band it visibly is, and the band it is already trying to become before it fully knows how. On *Themata*, Karnivool are still legible as a heavy Australian band of the mid-2000s: dropped tunings, jagged riffs, alt-metal force, traces of the post-nu-metal climate still clinging to the surface. But the reason the album lasts is that it is never only that. All through the record, another appetite is pressing from inside. The songs

want more room, more tension, more structure, more ambiguity, more scale than the debut format can easily hold.

That is why *Themata* matters. Not because it arrives fully formed, and not because it escapes its era altogether, but because it gives Karnivool their first durable design. It is the record where the band's instincts become clear enough to name: self-scrutiny, instability, awakening, rupture, and the sense that a song can be a container for change rather than just an object of impact.

Ian Kenny would later describe the period behind the album in almost totalizing language. The band, he said, were enthralled by what Karnivool could be. They loved what they were trying to achieve. It consumed every hour of every day. That kind of recollection matters because it tells us what *Themata* actually is. It is not just a first record assembled after some local momentum. It is the sound of obsession becoming form. Kenny also said the album emerged from about three years of writing, which makes the debut feel less like an eruption than a compression chamber. Time, hunger, lineup changes, and self-belief all got squeezed into one release.

The resulting album was released in February 2005, produced by Forrester Savell and Karnivool, with the recording spread across Perth and Melbourne. In purely technical terms, that is straightforward enough. In creative terms, it captures a band still consolidating itself. The available evidence suggests *Themata* was more writer-centered than the records that followed, with Drew Goddard functioning as the main compositional engine and even handling most of the drums on the album. That detail is revealing. Before Karnivool became the more collaborative machine heard on *Sound Awake*, they first had to survive the phase where one member's sense of shape could pull a still-forming band into coherence.

This is part of why *Themata* sounds so forceful. It does not have the later records' confidence in drift, patience, or communal sprawl. It hits harder, narrows faster, declares itself more aggressively. Yet the same record is already restless inside its own attack. "Roquefort" carries funk traces that push against genre orthodoxy. The arrangements already flirt with string textures and spoken-word color. The title track opens not onto blunt certainty but onto a world of unstable perception, where the real and the false keep contaminating each other. Even where the direct evidence on individual song meaning is partial, the larger pattern is clear: Karnivool were already writing heavy music that distrusted simple answers.

That distrust is one of the album's most important inheritances. *Themata* still draws energy from the heavy music climate around it, but it does not behave like a record content to remain in one emotional register. Its best moments suggest that the band were less interested in domination than in tension: between illusion and awakening, self-knowledge and self-deception, structure and overwhelm. The heaviness is real, but it is not the whole argument. It is the pressure system through which the deeper argument becomes audible.

The production details make this even clearer. One of the most telling facts from the sessions is that "Roquefort" was imagined with horns, an idea the band did not have time to finish for the album version. That anecdote may sound minor, but it says a great deal. Karnivool were already imagining a palette larger than the one they could comfortably execute. The same pattern appears in the history of "Change." Drew Goddard later explained that the piece existed originally as one much larger composition. At the time of *Themata*, it was only about sixty percent complete, so the band split it at the climax, with the second part reserved for the next record because it

would not have found its place on the debut. In one sense this is just a practical recording story. In another, it is almost the whole chapter in miniature. The band's ambition had already exceeded the container they were working in.

That matters because *Themata* is often easiest to remember as a breakthrough, and it was one. In retrospective accounts, Kenny makes clear that the album reacted with people in a way the band could not have fully engineered, helping it become one of those records that later listeners treat as formative. But to say that *Themata* broke through is not enough. The more interesting truth is that the breakthrough was internally unstable. The album gave Karnivool a public identity, but it also exposed the fact that this identity could not remain fixed.

You can hear that instability in the contrast between the album's compression and its horizon. Much of *Themata* still moves like a debut proving it can hit. But the record's most revealing moments are the ones that seem to lean past their own immediate success. They suggest a band already dissatisfied with merely being effective. Even the roughness becomes part of the meaning. Kenny later said the band were very green and bulldozed their way through, but that it somehow worked for them. That sentence is almost a definition of *Themata*. The album works because it does not yet know how to hide the violence of its own becoming.

This also helps explain why the record could not remain a permanent blueprint, even while it established so much. Mark Hosking would later say that Karnivool prides itself on never making the same album twice, and on returning from each cycle with different instincts. That ethos was not necessarily formalized in 2005, but *Themata* already contains the problem that would make such an ethos inevitable. Once a band has discovered itself through pressure, why would it trust mere

repetition? Once a song like “Change” has opened a door beyond the debut’s architecture, why would the band willingly close it again?

So *Themata* should be understood as a first design, not a finished house. It is the debut that taught Karnivool what their own music could hold, and also showed them where it was still too small. The record gave them their first stable vocabulary: philosophical unease, rhythmic intent, emotional tension, and a refusal to flatten meaning into one obvious message. But its deepest gift may have been more uncomfortable than that. It showed them that the real Karnivool project would require outgrowing every version of itself, including the first one that finally worked.

By the time the album closes on “Change (Part 1),” that future is already audible. The song is not simply an ending. It is the point where the debut stops sounding self-contained and starts sounding provisional. *Themata* has done its job: it has made the band visible. But now another question arrives, larger than the first one. What happens when the song that best completes the debut is also the one already pushing beyond it?

CHAPTER

3

The Song Called Change



Karnivool — Change.

Chapter Two ended with a question: what happens when the song that best completes a debut is also the one already pushing beyond it? Chapter Three lives inside that problem. Most bands reveal themselves in the songs they finish. Karnivool may have revealed themselves just as clearly in the song they couldn't. "Change" matters not simply because it is beloved, or because it became one of the band's most mythic long-form pieces, but because its very brokenness turned out to be diagnostic. Here was a song too large to fit neatly inside the debut that produced it, and instead of forcing it shut, Karnivool let the crack remain visible. In retrospect, that crack looks like prophecy.

On paper, the story is practical. During the *Themata* period, "Change" existed as one larger composition. Drew Goddard later explained that the band only had about sixty percent of it complete by the time the debut needed to be finished. So they split it at the climax. Part 1 would close *Themata*. Part 2 would wait for the next album. There is nothing mystical about that in itself. Songs miss deadlines. Albums are full of compromise. But what makes this case different is that Goddard did not describe the split merely as a concession to time. He also said the second movement "wouldn't have found its place on *Themata*." And in another preserved remark, he said the title "Change" felt fitting because it almost signaled what they thought could be a change of direction on the next album.

That is the key. "Change" is not important only because it was unfinished. It is important because the unfinished part already belonged to a different future.

This makes the song one of the best documents in Karnivool's catalogue for understanding how artistic evolution actually happens. It rarely arrives as a clean decision. Bands

do not usually wake up and announce, in fully coherent language, that they are about to become more expansive, more metaphysical, more structurally adventurous. More often, the future appears first as a pressure problem. A track no longer behaves like the record surrounding it. A song pulls against the vocabulary that gave birth to it. Something that should have been an ending starts acting like a doorway.

That is what “Change” does on *Themata*. The album around it is still compressed, forceful, often jagged, and deeply invested in proving what Karnivool can do inside the heavy architecture of its moment. Then the closer arrives and the emotional weather shifts. Even without overclaiming exact lyrical meaning, the song feels larger than the rest of the room. It does not simply conclude the album’s tension; it dilates it. It leaves the impression not of finality but of emergence, as though the record has reached the edge of its own language and is now staring past it.

This is why the song’s fan afterlife, for all its interpretive looseness, still tells us something useful. Listeners consistently hear “Change” in terms of rupture, awakening, release, burden, cosmology, escape from rigid systems, or some combination of all of them. Those readings should not be mistaken for hard authorial fact. Karnivool have long protected ambiguity, and “Change” remains open enough to sustain multiple incompatible meanings at once. But the pattern matters. People do not hear the song as a tidy message. They hear it as a threshold experience. That is exactly what its history suggests it is.

There is also something revealing in where the song sits within the band’s broader development. Chapter Two showed that *Themata* gave Karnivool their first real architecture: a durable grammar of force, self-scrutiny, unstable perception, and rhythmic intent. But every architecture contains stress

points. “Change” is the point where the debut stops looking merely complete and starts looking insufficient. The song exposes the limits of the album that houses it. It says: this vocabulary works, but it will not be enough forever.

In that sense, “Change” belongs to two albums at once. “Change (Part 1)” is not just the closing threshold track on *Themata*; it is the first audible leak from *Sound Awake*. And when the second part eventually arrives there, the effect is not that of a sequel dutifully resolving old business. It feels more like the completion of a thought that had to survive an era change in order to become fully itself. The song’s arc therefore makes a stronger claim than a simple recurring motif ever could. It tells us that Karnivool’s records are not sealed containers. They are connected by unfinished ideas, by tensions that refuse to die when an album ends.

That is unusually important for a band so often defined by non-repetition. Mark Hosking would later describe Karnivool as a group that prides itself on never making the same album twice, on deliberately leaving, living, discovering, and returning with different instincts. “Change” is where that ethic becomes audible before it is fully formalized. The band may not yet have had a manifesto about artistic mutation, but they already had a song that forced the issue. Once a piece of music has shown you that your next self is waiting on the other side of your current record, repetition starts to look less like stability than like betrayal.

It also matters that the song’s transformation is tied to incompleteness rather than mastery. There is a temptation in music writing to celebrate evolution only at the point of polish, to notice the breakthrough when the new style arrives in perfect form. But Karnivool’s story is more interesting than that. Here, the breakthrough first appears as something unresolved.

A composition is too big, too early, too unplaced. The band do not conquer that problem immediately. They live with it. They cut the song in half. They carry the remainder forward. What might have been a limitation becomes a structure of meaning.

This is one reason “Change” stands at the center of any serious account of Karnivool. Not because it is the band’s only important song, and not because its lyrics can be pinned down into a single thesis, but because it stages the very thing the band would spend the rest of its career enacting: transformation as unfinished pressure, as a refusal to let one successful form become a cage. The song is about transition in more ways than one. It may gesture toward awakening, mortality, collapse, or freedom. But beneath all of that, it also documents a band in the act of discovering that its real subject might be transformation itself.

So when *Themata* closes on “Change (Part 1),” it does not behave like a victory lap. It behaves like a fault line. The first Karnivool architecture has done enough to hold. But inside it, something larger has already begun to move. The band is still standing in the debut era, still carrying its force, its density, its urgency. And yet the future has already entered the room.

That is why “Change” deserves its own chapter. It is not just a song split across two records. It is the moment Karnivool’s history stops being a chronology and starts becoming a method. The unfinished thing is not a flaw to hide. It is proof of what was already happening. It is how we know the band had already started leaving one form behind before it had fully finished it — and why the next album would need to become not merely bigger, but differently alive.

CHAPTER

4

Sound Awake and the Breakthrough



Sound Awake album art.

Chapter Three ended with “Change” as a fault line: the moment the debut stopped sounding fully self-contained and began leaking toward a larger future. *Sound Awake* is where that future becomes livable. If *Themata* was the first architecture, *Sound Awake* was the first time Karnivoool learned how to live inside a larger building without collapsing it. That is the simplest way to describe the leap. The second album is not merely heavier in a smarter way, or more progressive in the loose critical sense of longer songs and stranger structures.

It feels different because the band itself had changed how its music came into being. The breakthrough is not just audible in tone. It is audible in relationship.

The most important available evidence comes from Jon Stockman, who drew the contrast plainly. Much of *Themata*, he said, had been written by Drew Goddard and arranged by a smaller cluster within the band. *Sound Awake*, by contrast, was written and arranged much more collaboratively, and much of it emerged in a jam-room environment before recording. Ian Kenny's 2009-era reflections add another crucial layer: after the debut, the band deliberately set the bar very high, wrote enough material for what he later described as two or three records, and then culled ruthlessly. That difference sounds procedural. It is actually philosophical. Once songs are built through a more social and spatial process, they stop moving like commands issued from a central engine and start moving like environments. The songs breathe differently, hold tension longer, and allow one instrument to answer another rather than merely reinforce it. They become less about execution and more about coexistence.

That is exactly what *Sound Awake* sounds like. Where *Themata* often compressed its force into jagged, declarative forms, the second album seems willing to wait. The songs are longer, more progressive in contour, and less interested in proving themselves through constant impact. The dynamics open up. Atmosphere is no longer a byproduct of heaviness but part of the composition itself. Space becomes functional. Silence stops being absence and starts becoming architecture. Karnivoool had always possessed ambition, but here the ambition is no longer outrunning the available form. The studio craft has finally caught up.

This does not mean the record abandons intensity. It means intensity is redistributed. On the debut, force often arrived as impact. On *Sound Awake*, it more often arrives as contour: slow accumulation, suspension, refusal to resolve too early, the feeling that the band can afford to let a section live before deciding what it has to become. That patience is one of the clearest signs of confidence. Only a band that trusts its own collective instincts can resist the urge to prove itself every minute.

The production details support this reading. The album, produced by Forrester Savell, was recorded in Perth, mixed in Melbourne, and mastered in New York, which on one level simply marks a widening professional scope. More important is what the record actually does with its resources. Additional percussion expands the physical language of pieces like “Simple Boy” and “Change.” Viola darkens the interior world of “Umbra.” Didgeridoo appears inside “Change” not as gimmick but as part of the album’s ritual scale. Extra voices thicken “Goliath” into something more collective and almost choral in its force. Kenny’s own description of the album as heavily layered is useful here, as is his admission that some of the words only made full sense to him after the record had been mixed and finalized. None of this reads like a band decorating itself to look sophisticated. It reads like a group finally capable of executing the kind of widened palette it had been reaching toward years earlier.

That distinction matters. *Sound Awake* is not the album where Karnivoool suddenly become ambitious. It is the album where ambition becomes organized. The debut had already hinted at strings, odd meters, incomplete epics, and ideas too large for their first container. But here the largeness no longer feels like strain against the walls. It feels like the room itself.

This is one reason the album has such a strong claim to being the place where modern Karnivoool truly arrives. Plenty of bands make a respected debut and then refine it. *Sound Awake* does something more substantial. It changes the logic of the band. The collaboration is not a footnote; it is the engine. The record's expansiveness is not just a stylistic preference; it is the natural outcome of musicians learning to write as a system rather than as orbiting executors around a dominant center. In that sense, the album is less a sequel to *Themata* than a reconstitution of the band that made *Themata*.

Even the record's internal tensions strengthen that claim. A breakthrough album can sometimes be remembered too smoothly, as though success arrived only by perfecting cohesion. But *Sound Awake* remains compelling partly because it preserves contrast. "Set Fire to the Hive" is the best example. Drew Goddard reportedly described it as coming from a weird place shaped by frustration, and it has been remembered as something of a black sheep within the album. That is revealing. A band less sure of itself might have sanded such a track into better behavioral alignment with the broader mood. Karnivoool did not. They left the fracture visible. More than that, they used it as the lead single. The public introduction to *Sound Awake* was not the album's softest proof of maturity but one of its most abrasive reminders that growth had not made the band obedient. The song acts like a pressure-release valve, a more direct and externally charged piece inside a record otherwise often drawn toward inward scale and suspended transformation.

That willingness to preserve dissonant energy is a form of maturity too. It suggests that the band's new collaborative confidence did not depend on making everything behave. *Sound Awake* does not break through by becoming uniform.

It breaks through by making room for more kinds of intensity without losing the sense of a coherent world.

The end of the album makes that world-building explicit. Chapter Three argued that “Change” was the place where Karnivool first made evolution audible, the moment when the future began leaking into the debut before the band could fully inhabit it. On *Sound Awake*, that leak becomes structure. The hidden reappearance of “Change (Part 1)” inside “Deadman” before the album resolves into “Change (Part 2)” turns the ending into more than a finale. It becomes a completion ritual. A memory returns. An unfinished threshold from the first album is folded back into the second and then carried through to its far edge. Karnivool are not simply writing longer songs now. They are writing across records, across years, across earlier selves.

This matters because it clarifies what the breakthrough actually consists of. *Sound Awake* is not just a better album than *Themata*, though for many listeners it is. It is a stronger argument about what a Karnivool album can be. The debut proved the band had a distinctive pressure inside it. The second record proved that pressure could become an inhabitable world. It could hold atmosphere, ritual, grief, violence, release, and return without sounding like disconnected experiments in sophistication.

The broader reception supports this view, even in the limited evidence currently gathered. The album’s nomination for Australian Album of the Year at the J Awards in 2009 suggests that its impact was not merely internal to a scene niche or a fan cult. *Sound Awake* landed as a major statement. But the deeper truth is not that it received recognition. It is that the record sounds like a band finally hearing, in collective form, what it had been trying to become.

There is also something quietly radical in the album's patience. Heavy bands are often rewarded for decisiveness, immediacy, and domination. *Sound Awake* can certainly dominate when it wants to, but its more lasting achievement lies elsewhere. It trusts atmosphere. It trusts duration. It trusts ambiguity. It lets songs gather shape rather than assault the listener into submission. That is not softness. It is a harder kind of confidence, because it requires belief that complexity can remain emotionally gripping without constant brute-force proof.

So the breakthrough of *Sound Awake* is not just that Karnivool got bigger. It is that they got truer to the full size of their own imagination. The collaborative shift gave them a new social structure; the production gave them a broadened sonic language; the sequencing gave them a way to treat albums as living wholes rather than track lists. By the time the record ends, the question is no longer whether Karnivool are an unusual heavy band from Perth with serious potential. That question has been answered and left behind.

What remains is something more durable: a band now fully in possession of a method, a scale, and a collective identity powerful enough to remake the meaning of everything that came before. *Sound Awake* is called a breakthrough because it breaks the surface. But what it really reveals is depth — the point at which Karnivool's music stops hinting at a larger world and finally becomes one. The next question is how that world distributes its pressure internally: which songs erupt, which ones open, which ones collapse, and which ones complete what the debut could only begin.

Songs That Open the Hive



Karnivoor live.

Chapter Four argued that *Sound Awake* became Karnivoool's breakthrough not just by getting larger, but by becoming a more inhabitable world. This chapter asks how that world actually works at song level. There are albums that explain themselves through one definitive statement, one central song that seems to carry the whole burden of the record in miniature. *Sound Awake* is not built that way. Its power lies less in one thesis track than in the way several songs perform different emotional tasks inside one larger system. That is one reason the album feels so alive. It does not flatten its meanings into a single declarative shape. It distributes them. One song vents. One reaches. One breaks open. One completes what another record could only begin.

This is why the chapter should resist the temptation to turn *Sound Awake* into a full track-by-track tour. Not every song needs to bear the same interpretive weight. What matters more is choosing the pieces that let the album explain its own logic. The clearest current anchors are "Set Fire to the Hive," "New Day," "Deadman," and "Change (Part 2)," with "All I Know" useful as a smaller supporting case. Together they show how Karnivoool had learned, by this stage, to make an album feel like an emotional architecture rather than a stack of individually impressive songs.

The easiest place to begin is with rupture. "Set Fire to the Hive" matters because it stops anyone from telling the wrong story about *Sound Awake*. This is not an album that becomes mature by becoming smooth. It does not achieve scale by draining away aggression. Drew Goddard reportedly described the song as coming from a weird, frustrated place, and it has been remembered as something of a black sheep within the album. That combination is revealing. The song is not simply heavy in the old sense. It feels like pressure venting

outward, more direct and more externally charged than much of the record's inward, spiraling gravity. A less confident band might have treated such a track as a misfit or sanded it into better behavior. Karnivoool leave it where it is, visible and necessary. The album needs a jolt, one song that sounds like the structure might erupt from the inside.

That matters because *Sound Awake's* emotional sophistication is often misunderstood as gentleness. It is not gentle. It is controlled. "Set Fire to the Hive" proves that the control does not mean emotional uniformity. The song occupies its black-sheep role not as decoration, but as a visible part of how the structure holds. Frustration is not something the album transcends and leaves behind. It is one of the forces the album learns how to place.

If that track gives us outward pressure, "New Day" offers something harder to write about and probably more central to the album's long afterlife: emergence that does not sound naive. The current evidence here is thinner and more reception-driven, so care matters. Even so, a pattern is visible in how listeners describe the song. Reception repeatedly treats it as emblematic of the album's hope-through-crisis thread, not because it resolves suffering cheaply, but because it makes movement feel difficult and necessary at the same time. This distinction is crucial. Karnivoool rarely sound interested in optimism as a slogan. What they do seem able to reach, at their strongest, is a form of earned opening — the sense that change may be possible, but only after pressure has done its work.

That is what "New Day" seems to carry inside *Sound Awake*. It is not a break from the album's darker weather. It is one of the places where the darker weather becomes bearable without being denied. If "Set Fire to the Hive" is force looking for release, "New Day" is the moment where forward motion

begins to feel imaginable again. It does not erase the album's uncertainty. It gives the uncertainty somewhere to move.

This helps explain why *Sound Awake* feels so much larger than a set of mood pieces. The songs are not merely different in atmosphere. They are different in function. One speaks the language of rupture. Another speaks the language of emergence. The deeper achievement is that both belong to the same world.

That world reaches its most intense form in "Deadman." Here the evidence becomes even more delicate, because the strongest current support comes not from direct band exegesis but from reception. Still, the consistency of that reception matters. Listener readings repeatedly place "Deadman" at a culmination point — a place where pain, collapse, self-definition, and transition gather enough force to become something like a threshold. One visible reading treats it as the death of an older self before movement into renewal. Others hear grief, psychic breakdown, metamorphosis, or apocalyptic inner crisis. None of these can be treated as final authorial truth. But together they show something important about how the song behaves in the listening experience. It does not register as just another late-album heavy piece. It registers as a breaking point.

The album's sequencing makes that reading even harder to ignore. "Deadman" houses the hidden return of "Change (Part 1)" before yielding to "Change (Part 2)." That means the song is not only climactic in itself. It is structurally charged by memory. An earlier threshold comes back inside it. The debut's unfinished future re-enters the second album at its emotional low point, just before the larger release. This is one of the most elegant pieces of architecture in Karnivoool's catalogue. The band do not merely write a sequel song. They

stage recurrence. They let the past arrive as pressure inside the present.

So “Deadman” becomes the place where collapse and continuity meet. If the reception layer is directionally right in sensing death-of-the-past imagery here, then the song’s power lies not in destruction alone, but in destruction becoming the necessary precondition for transformation. Even if one avoids overclaiming the exact lyric meaning, the function is clear enough: the album needs a chamber where all the unresolved weight can gather before the final release is credible.

And that final release is “Change (Part 2).” By now the song’s transitional importance is one of the strongest-supported insights in the whole research set. What matters here is not simply that Part 2 exists, but what its existence does to *Sound Awake* as a whole. It confirms that the album is not just a new phase after *Themata*. It is a completion event. The larger arc that could not fit inside the debut finds its final architecture here. That gives the ending of *Sound Awake* unusual force. It is not only emotionally expansive. It is historically expansive. The band are closing a door they have been carrying open across albums.

This is why “Change (Part 2)” feels larger than a standard finale. It completes a previously broken form, but it also demonstrates something about Karnivoool’s deeper method. These records are not sealed boxes. Ideas leak, survive, recur, and find fuller expression later. What sounds on the surface like grand progressive continuity is actually something more human and more revealing: unfinished thought searching for the right structure. By the time *Sound Awake* reaches its end, the listener is hearing not just the completion of a song but the completion of a transition that began inside the debut before the band could yet fully live inside it.

That leaves “All I Know” in a smaller but still useful role. The evidence around it is thin and somewhat shaky, particularly the changing-title history. But even as a minor supporting detail, that history fits something broader and believable about Karnivoool. Songs in this band do not always arrive with stable identities. They can change shape, rename themselves, resist easy framing, and only later settle into the form by which they are known. In a chapter about emotional architecture, that matters because it shows that the record’s openness is not only thematic. It is embedded in process.

Taken together, these songs reveal the real sophistication of *Sound Awake*. The album’s greatness does not rest on one monolithic statement about pain, awakening, or change. It rests on the way the songs divide that work among themselves. “Set Fire to the Hive” carries frustration. “New Day” carries emergence. “Deadman” carries collapse and threshold. “Change (Part 2)” carries completion and release. “All I Know,” in the margins, hints at the instability of naming and form that underlies the process.

This is what it means to say that *Sound Awake* opens its hive. The album does not simply contain strong songs. It organizes pressures. It allows different tracks to perform different emotional labors while still belonging to one coherent world. That is a more difficult achievement than writing one obvious masterpiece. It requires trust that meaning can be distributed across sequence, mood, recurrence, and contrast.

And that trust may be the real difference between a very good second record and a lasting one. *Sound Awake* does not tell the listener what to feel in one voice. It builds a world in which multiple emotional truths can coexist: rage without chaos, hope without innocence, collapse without final defeat, transformation without false clarity. By the end, the album

has not simplified itself into one answer. It has done something better. It has shown how a band can make complexity feel not scattered, but alive.

That achievement matters even more because the next record will refuse to let this newly coherent world become a comfort. *Asymmetry* begins where *Sound Awake*'s distributed balance stops feeling like an answer to preserve and starts looking like a stability Karnivoool would need to break.

CHAPTER

6

Asymmetry and the Beauty of Fracture



Asymmetry album art.

Chapter Five showed that *Sound Awake* worked because Karnivool could distribute different emotional labors across one coherent world. *Asymmetry* begins when the band refuses to let that achievement calcify into repeatable comfort. If *Sound Awake* was the record where Karnivool learned how to build a larger world, *Asymmetry* was the record where they refused to let that world harden into habit. This is the danger point in many band histories: the moment after the breakthrough, when success begins to imply obligation, when the thing that finally worked starts quietly demanding repetition. Karnivool's answer was not subtle. They made

a record whose very title rejects smooth continuation. They followed their most widely consolidated statement with an album built around fracture, contrast, imperfection, and the refusal of false balance.

That matters because *Asymmetry* is too easy to misdescribe. People often talk about difficult third albums as though their difficulty must be excused — as though the proper job of criticism is to explain why a beloved band suddenly became less immediate, less harmonious, less obviously generous. But in this case the difficulty is not incidental. It is one of the album's governing truths. *Asymmetry* does not stumble away from the graceful architecture of *Sound Awake*. It turns away from it on purpose.

The clearest current evidence comes from Mark Hosking, whose 2013 reflections remain central to understanding the record. He describes Karnivoool as a band committed to not making the same album twice, and he frames *Asymmetry* as a deliberate branching in multiple directions at once: heavier, darker, simpler, harder, and conceptually aligned with asymmetry underneath everything. That combination is revealing because it refuses the lazy idea that artistic progress always means increasing smoothness or integration. For Karnivoool, progress can also mean resisting the seduction of refinement when refinement starts to look like self-imitation.

That anti-repetition ethic is not just a slogan in the abstract. It is embedded in the album's process. By this stage, Karnivoool were already a band whose writing method kept songs alive deep into recording. Hosking says they often enter the studio with only fifty to sixty-five percent of an album complete, continuing to alter structure, lyrics, and sonic identity under pressure. More than that, the songs were still changing materially while the record was being made: not just tones or

finishing touches, but structure, lyrics, sounds, and even internal placement. That is an extraordinary admission. Most bands try to reduce uncertainty before expensive studio time. Karnivool, by contrast, seem to use the studio as one of the places uncertainty reveals what it actually is. The result can sound precise because the band are exacting, but it also sounds unstable because the exactness has been earned through exposure rather than security.

This is one reason the producer shift matters so much. After the long and successful Forrester Savell relationship that shaped both *Themata* and *Sound Awake*, Karnivool chose to work with Nick DiDia. On paper that could look like a normal attempt to avoid stagnation by changing outside ears. In practice it seems to have changed the internal pressure of the whole album. DiDia came from a different expectation of preparedness and studio discipline. Karnivool, by their own description, were still arriving with unresolved questions and a process that Hosking openly calls “really weird” and almost self-destructive. The friction between those two conditions is one of the key creative facts of *Asymmetry*.

It is important not to reduce that friction to drama for its own sake. The evidence does not support a melodramatic producer-conflict story. What it supports is something more interesting: productive mismatch. DiDia’s presence appears to have created a harder frame around a band that was still discovering the work while making it. That tension helps explain why *Asymmetry* feels both tightly worked and fundamentally unsettled. The songs do not drift. But neither do they settle into the kind of flowing emotional inevitability that made *Sound Awake* so immediately enveloping. Instead they hold more edge, more resistance, more exposed polarity.

Drew Goddard's explanation of the title makes the philosophy explicit. *Asymmetry*, he says, is about beauty in imperfection, two sides of the coin, and seeing beyond duality. This is not just a lyrical gloss. It is a compositional principle. Once the album is understood this way, many of its most divisive qualities become legible rather than merely forgivable. The roughness is not evidence that the band could not produce another *Sound Awake*. The roughness is part of what they were trying to mean.

That is why the chapter should treat the record's darkness and imbalance not as mood alone, but as method made audible. The songs feel more contrast-driven, more abrasive in places, less interested in providing seamless continuity. They do not always invite the listener in with the same social intelligence as the previous record. Sometimes they confront. Sometimes they destabilize. Sometimes they seem to hold two incompatible impulses at once rather than resolving them into one superior synthesis. That is exactly what an album committed to asymmetry ought to do.

The best song anchors reinforce this reading. "We Are" remains the strongest current case of direct thematic support. Hosking links it to waking up, opening your eyes, and seeing social structures as prison-like, while still resisting the trap of locking the song into one final interpretation. That combination matters. The song points toward awakening, but it does so without pretending awakening is clean. It is not a triumphant anthem of settled clarity. It is a confrontation with the systems and habits that make clarity difficult in the first place.

"Aeons" provides a different kind of evidence. Hosking singled it out as especially moody, moving, and emotional, which gives the chapter an important counterweight. *Asymmetry* is not difficult only because it is harsher. It is difficult because

it asks atmosphere and feeling to carry just as much structural force as riff architecture. If “We Are” is the record’s most clearly articulated social or philosophical confrontation, “Aeons” is closer to its emotional center of gravity: the place where the record proves that darkness and depth are not the same thing, but can meaningfully overlap.

Then there is “Aum,” along with its paired relation to “Om,” both of which appear to have found their place more fully during recording and carry links to Jon Stockman-originated ideas. Even without exhaustive song-by-song commentary, that is useful. It suggests that *Asymmetry* begins not with certainty but with invocation, threshold, a kind of opening ritual discovered inside the making process rather than fixed before it. The title track “Asymmetry” itself then gives the philosophical hinge in miniature. Between them, the record announces that its world will be structured less by stable balance than by unstable relation.

This is why it is too simple to say that *Asymmetry* is the record where Karnivoool became stranger. They had always contained strangeness. The difference is that earlier records often embedded it inside stronger containers of breakthrough narrative or collaborative expansion. Here the container itself becomes strange. The band are no longer merely writing songs about awakening, fracture, or divided perception. They are allowing the album’s form to behave according to those pressures.

That choice inevitably changes the listening experience. *Sound Awake* often felt like a world you could enter and wander through. *Asymmetry* more often feels like a world that keeps changing angle while you are inside it. Some listeners understandably experience that as loss. But the better reading is that the record risks alienation in order to remain honest to

its governing idea. Karnivool did not want to give the listener the comfort of symmetrical return. They wanted to make a work whose very resistance might become part of its meaning.

This is where the producer story, the anti-repetition ethic, and the title concept all converge. Karnivool choose not to repeat themselves. They continue writing in a method that preserves uncertainty far too long for normal efficiency. They place that method under a more pressurized studio relationship. And they name the resulting record after imperfection and duality. None of this feels accidental. It feels like a band deciding that if change is truly part of its identity, then even success cannot be allowed to stabilize the work into something too neat.

So *Asymmetry* matters not because it is the hard album fans have to learn to defend. It matters because it demonstrates one of the deepest commitments in Karnivool's art: the refusal to let previous adequacy become future confinement. The album is not a failed attempt at grace. It is a deliberate exploration of what grace cannot hold.

By the end, what remains is not smooth resolution but a more difficult kind of coherence. Across the songs, the process, the producer tension, and the title philosophy, the same truth keeps surfacing: beauty may require imbalance, meaning may require fracture, and a band serious about transformation cannot always sound reassuring while it transforms. *Asymmetry* is the record where Karnivool make that truth impossible to ignore. It is not the polished center of their story. It is the point where their method turns openly self-revealing — where instability stops being a hidden cost of the work and becomes one of the ways the work tells the truth.

The next question is what happens when that truth no longer feels artistically productive, when the same openness

and pressure that once generated difficult form stop converting difficulty into forward motion at all.

The Long Gap



Karnivoool — the long gap years.

Chapter Six argued that *Asymmetry* was not a compromised sequel but a deliberate embrace of fracture, pressure, and imperfection. The next question is what happens when a band built that way can no longer convert difficulty into forward motion. The easiest way to tell this part of Karnivoool's story is also the least truthful. You say the band disappeared for thirteen years while making an impossibly difficult fourth album. You let the silence glow and imply discipline, mystery, and hidden labor. You turn absence into mythology. It is a neat story, and by the available evidence, it is the wrong one.

What actually happened in the long gap is harder, more human, and more revealing. Karnivoool did not spend thirteen uninterrupted years patiently refining one finished idea toward perfection. They spent years failing to find the right frame for the record, drifting through false starts and demo limbo, carrying real mental-health strain inside the band, and at times wondering whether album four was achievable at all. If the eventual existence of *In Verses* means anything, it means something precisely because non-existence was genuinely on the table.

That correction matters because the gap exposes the cost of Karnivoool's method. Much of this book has argued that the band became distinct by refusing repetition, preserving openness, and letting songs remain alive until the right form revealed itself. Those traits helped produce the leap from *Thematata* to *Sound Awake*, and they shaped the difficult integrity of *Asymmetry*. But virtues become liabilities when the process cannot find a stable frame. The long gap is where that ethic stops looking romantic and starts looking dangerous.

Ian Kenny's 2026 reflections are the strongest currently accessible anchor. Again and again, he returns to the same core admission: the band simply could not find the right way to

frame the record. That language matters. It suggests the problem was not only lack of songs, lack of effort, or lack of care. The deeper issue was that the material would not yet cohere into a convincing identity. Karnivoool were not merely delayed on the road to a known destination. They were repeatedly unsure what the destination even was.

This is the first myth the chapter has to break. The silence was not empty, but neither was it secretly complete. Material existed. Attempts were made. Momentum came and went. Yet having fragments is not the same as having a record, and Karnivoool seem to have spent years trapped in the painful difference between those two states. Kenny's description of being lost in demo-land — of it feeling like purgatory — is probably the most honest available phrase for the middle of this period. Purgatory is exactly the right word because it implies duration without progress, work without arrival, continuation without release.

That alone would have been enough to slow almost any band. But the gap was not only creative. Kenny is unusually direct that, from roughly 2016 to 2019, mental-health strain among some members reached a point where it had to take priority over the album. That statement should prevent anyone from narrating this period as merely a dramatic artistic delay. There were human limits inside the story. The band were not just struggling with ideas. They were struggling with conditions under which any sustained creative work could remain possible.

This is one place where a more sentimental band narrative would do real damage. To romanticize the delay is to flatten the cost. The better reading is not that pain made the art deeper in some noble automatic way. The better reading is that pain interrupted the machinery of becoming and forced the band to confront the reality that no album, however de-

sired, could take precedence over survival. That does not make the silence empty. It makes it legible. The newer long-form interview material adds one more useful word here: patience. In Kenny and Goddard's telling, life inside "the Karnivool world" requires learning a new level of patience. That line matters because it rescues patience from cliché. This was not serene waiting. It was the uneasy patience of a band that could not yet make the thing move.

The metaphors Kenny and Drew Goddard use later are valuable because they communicate awkwardness rather than grandeur. Kenny describes restarting Karnivool like riding a bike whose tires had changed, while Goddard darkens the joke by suggesting the bike had effectively stopped being functional for years. These are not heroic metaphors. They are clumsy ones. They describe a band trying to remember how to move inside a machine that no longer fit the way it once had. That is exactly the tone this chapter needs. The problem was not that the band had gone into sacred seclusion. The problem was that their old means of motion no longer worked cleanly, and for a long time they did not know how to make them workable again.

Kenny's line that the creative process was "pushing back even harder" makes the second major correction. Force did not solve the problem. Trying harder, willing the record into existence, or treating sheer persistence as the answer seems only to have deepened the friction. This is an important insight for the whole Karnivool story. A band that built its identity on openness and anti-repetition could not simply bully itself into a convincing fourth album once the process had become misaligned. The more they pushed in the wrong frame, the more the work resisted them.

That resistance created genuine doubt. Kenny says there were times when every member of the band felt they might have reached the point where the album was not achievable. That is a devastating admission, and it should sit near the center of the chapter. Too many reunion-or-return narratives pretend the ending was always implicit in the middle. Here it was not. *In Verses* does not emerge from a suspense story whose outcome was secretly guaranteed. It emerges from a period when failure was credible.

Once that is acknowledged, the eventual chronology becomes much more meaningful. The turn does not look like a single flash of inspiration after years of darkness. It looks incremental and bounded. Even the 2021 single “All It Takes” now reads less like triumphant reactivation than like a document of the messy middle: Kenny described the song as something the band had already been sitting on for roughly a year and a half, a snapshot of where they were creatively while still trying to find their way through their own processes. Progress improves in 2023. Touring and renewed momentum seem to help the songs start cohering more effectively. By late 2024, the demos are in a much better state and the band can finally sense a finishable version of the record. Then, from January to May 2025, there is a concentrated completion push with Forrester Savell and Owen Thomas at Foxhole Studios. Kenny’s summary is almost perversely simple: they waited about twelve and a half years, and it took five months to put it together.

That line is funny, but it also clarifies everything. The point is not that the album was easy once they finally tried properly. The point is that most of the preceding years were not years of clean assembly. They were years spent failing to reach the condition under which clean assembly could even happen. Once

the frame existed, completion became possible at a speed that makes the earlier wandering look even starker.

This is why the eventual arrival of *In Verses* should be narrated less as comeback and more as recovery. Comeback language usually implies a continuous self waiting to be reactivated. Recovery implies damage, interruption, and the slow rebuilding of viability. Karnivool did not simply return to where they had been. Too much had happened for that. The better achievement is that they reached a point where movement became possible again. The next chapter can then ask what it meant to turn that regained momentum into an actual album.

It also means the long gap should not be treated as a blank between the real events. The gap is itself an event. It reveals what Karnivool's method costs when it loses traction. Openness becomes drift. Anti-repetition becomes difficulty framing new work. Patience becomes paralysis. Devotion to the right form becomes years of not knowing whether the form exists. None of this invalidates the band's artistic ethic. But it does make that ethic harder, riskier, and more expensive than a simple story of visionary perfectionism would allow.

By the time *In Verses* appears, the listener is not hearing the triumphant unveiling of a hidden masterpiece that was always forming out of sight. They are hearing the record that survived. That difference matters. It gives the album a different moral weight. It is not valuable because it took a long time. It is valuable because it was made despite the very real possibility that it would never become real at all.

So the long gap belongs in Karnivool's history not as sacred silence, but as exposed process: years of false starts, emotional strain, bad fits, stubborn hope, and eventual reassembly. If the earlier chapters showed a band learning how to change,

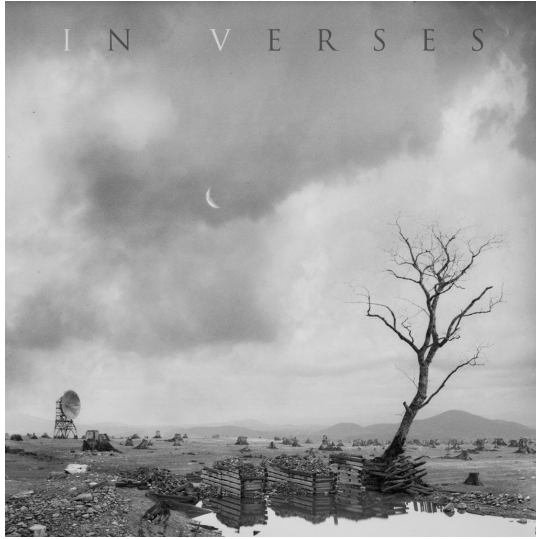
this chapter shows what happens when change ceases to feel liberating and starts to feel unmanageable. That is the darker side of the Karnivool method. It is also what makes the eventual recovery meaningful. The future did not arrive because the band kept a myth alive. It arrived because, after a long period of instability, they finally found a way to live with the work again.

That distinction is the real handoff into *In Verses*. The next album does not matter because the waiting itself became holy. It matters because the band recovered just enough viability to make survival cohere into form.

CHAPTER

8

In Verses and the Recovery of Possibility



In Verses album art.

There is an easy version of album four's meaning, and it is too small for what actually happened. You can say Karnivoool finally came back, that the long wait is over, that the band returned with a new record and proved they still had it. None of those statements are false, exactly. They are simply not deep enough. *In Verses* matters because it is not just a return to activity. It is the moment where the band turns a newly survivable process into an actual record.

The previous chapter handled the years of drift, misframing, strain, and doubt that made album four feel unfinishable for so long. This chapter begins after that historical clearing

work. Its real subject is not the gap itself, but the change in state that followed: how Karnivool moved from prolonged non-arrival into a form of making that could finally carry an album across the line.

Ian Kenny's language is the clearest available guide here. He does not describe the album as a linear triumph of perseverance. He describes a band that could not find the right frame for the work, a band that did not even always believe the record was achievable. That history remains the emotional floor on which *In Verses* stands. But the album's eventual existence matters because, after years of drift and resistance, the band finally found conditions under which the work could live.

This is why *In Verses* should be written less as a comeback chapter than as a completion chapter shaped by recovery. Comeback stories usually assume continuity: the self goes away for a while, then reappears. What matters here is narrower and more concrete. Something had broken down in the band's ability to finish. The real achievement was not spectacle but renewed operability. By the evidence currently available, Karnivool did not simply resume being Karnivool. They rediscovered how to become finish-capable.

That rediscovery seems to have depended on two related changes: better framing and safer momentum. The best interviews do not suggest a sudden burst of certainty. If anything, Kenny is careful to say the band never fully knew they were ready. What changed was more practical and more profound. By late 2024 there was finally enough real material, enough coherence in the demos, enough usable shape for true pre-production to happen. Then, from January to May 2025, the band entered a concentrated completion push with Forrester Savell and Owen Thomas at Foxhole Studios. Kenny's later description of that period is half joke, half stress report:

Savell ended up in hospital twice, Owen once, because everybody was “cooking it all for the greater good” while the details kept demanding attention. Uncertainty did not vanish. It simply stopped making the work impossible.

Forrester Savell’s role matters enormously in that shift. It would be too sentimental to cast his return as a nostalgic reunion with the producer from the classic years. The stronger reading is infrastructural. Kenny describes Savell as a trusted, safe space — someone who gets the band, who can accommodate their scale, volatility, and openness without either collapsing into chaos or forcing premature closure. Goddard’s offhand line that Savell became a kind of “bike mechanic” may be the most revealing shorthand of all, especially when set against the band’s admission that making another Karnivool album did not feel like riding a bike so much as discovering there had been no seat on it for years. After so many years of misalignment, that kind of working environment becomes more than a production detail. It becomes part of why the album could exist at all.

This is one of the clearest ways *In Verses* reframes the earlier records. The old Karnivool method was often described as open-ended, instinctive, anti-repetitive, and willing to keep songs alive until the right form emerged. Earlier chapters showed how powerful that could be. But *In Verses* reveals that openness needs containment if it is going to survive long enough to become form. Savell matters because he seems to provide exactly that: not control in the authoritarian sense, but the kind of trust that allows the band to keep being themselves without getting lost in themselves again.

The songs reinforce this story because so many of them carry both age and arrival. “Ghost,” for example, is especially important because Drew Goddard describes it as the first song

they really started working on, and because it apparently still carries a throwback-to-*Themata* feeling. That makes it more than just a strong track. It becomes evidence that *In Verses* is not made only of fresh late-period inspiration. It contains older seeds, older reflexes, older identities that survived the lost years and were eventually recontextualized inside a different record.

“Aozora” deepens that point. Goddard traces some of its material back to 2014 or 2015, and the newer YouTube interview trail suggests the song was already being road-tested live in older form years before the record’s completion. That means the album quite literally contains long-buried fragments from the early aftermath of *Asymmetry*. This matters because it complicates any clean before-and-after narrative. *In Verses* is not the sound of the band simply restarting from zero once the darkness lifted. It is the sound of stranded matter finally finding a survivable shape. Old pieces persist. Old textures return. Earlier alarms are not erased; they are metabolized.

“Opal” offers a subtler version of the same truth. Kenny’s insistence on preserving the line “I’d be so still and quiet like death was around” suggests that certain fragments endured because they kept generating feeling even when the larger frame failed. That image is important. In long creative droughts, whole structures may collapse while single phrases remain electrically alive. A record like *In Verses* can therefore feel both newly assembled and haunted by the residues of earlier unfinished selves. That is part of its emotional texture.

Then there is “Drone,” whose function in the album’s release story is unusually clarifying. Kenny says it felt like the obvious first single because it immediately spoke big volumes. In a project so defined by uncertainty, that kind of instant potency matters. “Drone” suggests a moment when the band could

once again recognize force when they heard it. Not certainty about the whole album, necessarily, but confidence that one piece of it could step forward and declare that the band was still capable of compelling motion.

“Reanimation” sharpens the emotional weather further. Goddard’s image of each stranger on a train carrying a different story gives the song a human scale that fits the chapter’s larger reading. *In Verses* is not only about restored band function. It is also about the ability to feel the density of other lives again — to perceive burden, anonymity, and shared solitude without collapsing under them. If the album often moves between hope and hopelessness, as Kenny says, then a song like “Reanimation” helps explain how that duality works. The record does not earn catharsis by denying loneliness. It earns it by moving through a world where loneliness is still palpable.

That phrase from Kenny — that the album dances between hope and hopelessness — may be the best single emotional key to the whole chapter. It keeps the writing from making *In Verses* sound either too triumphant or too damaged. The album is neither simple victory nor static wound. It is oscillation. It carries scar tissue and lift at the same time. Jaimunji’s shorter 2026 interview adds a useful after-the-fact shade to that reading: Kenny says the finished album still felt marked by disbelief and still felt new to the band. That is why the chapter should resist the language of pure renewal. Renewal implies cleanliness. *In Verses* sounds more like regained motion while the bruises are still visible.

Even the completion story supports that view. Goddard says the band only knew they were done when they realized they could not actually touch the thing anymore. That is a wonderfully Karnivool way to reach an ending. Not by achiev-

ing total certainty, not by arriving at some radiant moment of final clarity, but by reaching the point where further intervention would no longer deepen the work. Completion here looks less like conquest than recognition. The record becomes finishable not when all doubt disappears, but when the band can finally stop trying to solve what has already become itself.

His other comment — that finishing album four was a real win and a weight off his shoulders — should be kept close to the end of the chapter, because it gives the emotional reality without falseness. Relief is not a glamorous feeling, but it is often the truest one after prolonged strain. A band that had spent years wondering whether the album could exist at all would not necessarily greet completion with grand mythic language. They might greet it with exhausted gratitude: thank fuck, it is done.

This is also why *In Verses* subtly reorders the meaning of the earlier catalogue. *Themata* can now be heard as the first architecture, *Sound Awake* as the collaborative expansion, *Asymmetry* as the embrace of productive fracture, and *In Verses* as the proof that even after misalignment and near-collapse, Karnivoool can still convert uncertainty into form — but only after learning that force is not enough. The fourth album does not erase the cost of the long gap. It reveals what had to change for the band to survive it.

The production details help underscore that this is not a re-treating or miniaturized record. Guthrie Govan on “Reanimation,” strings and harp on “Opal,” bagpipes on “Salva,” Savell overseeing production, mixing, and mastering — all of this suggests scale, color, and confidence of execution. Yet none of it feels like decorative overcompensation. The widened palette matters because it shows a band that has not solved uncer-

tainty by shrinking its ambitions. Instead it has found a way to carry ambition again without being destroyed by it.

So *In Verses* should finally be understood as the recovery of possibility. Not the return of innocence, not the restoration of some earlier golden state, not the neat ending to a suspensefully delayed release cycle. Possibility is a smaller and harder word than triumph, but it fits better. It means the future is open again, that form can happen again, that the band can move without pretending the years of doubt were unreal.

By the end of the album, catharsis matters precisely because it is not clean. The record reaches release without denying burden, reaches motion without forgetting paralysis, reaches completion without pretending completion was ever guaranteed. That is what gives *In Verses* its weight. It is not simply the album that finally arrived. It is the album that proved the band could still arrive at all.

The next question is how a band makes that kind of arrival at all: what method produces music that sounds this controlled while carrying so much uncertainty inside it.

How Karnivool Actually Works



Karnivool, 2005.

Chapter Eight argued that *In Verses* matters because Karnivool recovered just enough finish-capability to make survival cohere into form. Chapter Nine asks the process question underneath that recovery. One of the easiest mistakes to make about Karnivool is to assume that a band this controlled must also be a band with a clean, repeatable method. The records sound deliberate, the arrangements feel exact, and the emotional arcs often seem too well-shaped to have emerged from anything messier than disciplined intention. But the available evidence points in almost the opposite direction. Karnivool do not work by fixing the shape early and executing it well. They work by keeping the shape open until stress, conflict, time, and repetition finally reveal what it can bear.

That is why the band's music so often feels both architecturally precise and faintly unstable. The instability is not a flaw left over after the real work is done. It is one of the conditions through which the real work gets done at all.

The clearest governing principle is anti-repetition. Mark Hosking says it plainly: Karnivool pride themselves on not making the same album twice. More than that, he describes a conscious habit of going away between cycles, finding something new, and bringing that altered experience back into the writing. This matters because it turns change from a passive result into an active value. Karnivool do not merely evolve because time passes. They make decisions that prevent comfort from becoming method.

Once that ethic is taken seriously, much else about the band becomes easier to understand. A group committed to not repeating itself cannot rely too heavily on inherited solutions. Each cycle has to create its own working logic. That is one reason the process looks different from album to album while still feeling recognizably Karnivool. *Themata* leans more heavily on

a Drew-centered writing gravity. *Sound Awake* becomes more collaborative and jam-room built. *Asymmetry* turns the process more pressurized and openly unstable. *In Verses* survives through long-fragment accumulation, attrition, and trusted facilitation. Different methods, same deeper refusal: no formula can be allowed to become home.

But anti-repetition alone does not explain why the work takes the form it does. The second major truth is that Karnivool seem willing to proceed for long periods without fully understanding the material themselves. Ian Kenny's 2022 description of the band as a "twisted, unpredictable beast" is among the most useful lines in the whole source set because it destroys any fantasy that the complexity is merely imposed from outside by critics or fans. Even the singer sometimes meets the music as a problem before he meets it as a song. His blunt question — what the fuck am I supposed to sing to that? — is not just a funny aside. It is a process statement. The band create conditions where meaning is not immediately available, even to the people making it.

This is where the band's difficulty becomes structural rather than mystical. Karnivool are not hard because they are trying to be enigmatic geniuses. They are hard because they keep themselves inside unfinished material long enough for confusion to do real work. Kenny is equally direct that the band hits walls, falls into doubt, and sometimes has to "pull the fuckin' band apart" to get through those moments. His 2026 reflections on lyric writing sharpen that further: he describes trying to reach a kind of pure flow state in which subconscious material surfaces before he fully knows what it means. That line matters because it replaces the romantic image of smooth perfectionism with something riskier and more physical. Karnivool do not just refine. They dismantle and rebuild.

That dismantling continues inside recording itself. Hosking's NZRock comments are probably the single best procedural evidence in the entire research set: the band may enter the studio with only fifty to sixty-five percent of an album complete. That should be startling. For many groups, recording comes after the composition is essentially finished. For Karnivool, recording is still part of discovery. Structures, lyrics, and sonic identities can remain fluid deep into the studio phase. Kenny's *Sound Awake* comments reinforce the same principle from another angle: the band generated enough material for multiple albums, culled it hard, layered it heavily, and still found that some lyrical meaning only became legible after the record was mixed and finalized. This explains a great deal about why the records feel so exact and so exposed at the same time. Precision is being demanded from material that has not yet fully agreed on what it is.

Seen this way, the studio is not just a place where Karnivool capture finished songs. It is one of the places where songs become finishable. That is a subtle but crucial difference. It means pressure is not external to the art. Pressure is part of the compositional environment.

This also helps explain why producer choice matters so much for this band. A producer in Karnivool's world is not merely a tone shaper or project manager. A producer becomes part of the psychological and structural architecture of how unfinished work survives being made. The difference between Forrester Savell and Nick DiDia, for example, is significant not only because they sound different, but because they change the kind of pressure under which the band discovers itself.

Savell repeatedly emerges in the evidence as a trusted facilitator — someone Kenny describes as safe, understanding, and capable of working with the band's complexity without flatten-

ing it. Goddard's joking description of him as a kind of bike mechanic says something similar in looser language. Savell helps keep the machine rideable. That role becomes especially visible around *In Verses*, where trusted infrastructure seems inseparable from the album's eventual completion.

DiDia, by contrast, matters because he appears to bring a different frame of expectation to *Asymmetry*: more conventional preparedness, a different pressure profile, less native embeddedness in the band's unstable habits. That mismatch did not simply produce conflict for gossip-value. It helped create an album where fracture and difficulty became audible parts of the outcome. In both cases the lesson is the same: producer choice in Karnivool is never only sonic. It is about what kind of unfinishedness the band can survive.

The long-gestation song examples strengthen this picture. "Ghost" was among the first serious album-four pieces they began working on and still carried older reflexes in its DNA. "Aozora" preserves material reaching back to 2014 or 2015. "Opal" keeps alive a lyric line Kenny refused to abandon because it continued to spark something. These are not just nice trivia points about development. They show that Karnivool's songs may exist for years in partial, fragmented, or dormant forms before a final structure gathers around them. The band do not always write by moving cleanly from blank page to finished object. They write by allowing durable fragments to outlast failed frames.

That helps explain why completion in Karnivool's world rarely sounds like certainty. Kenny says there was never a clean moment of knowing they were ready. Goddard says they realized they were done only when they could not actually touch the thing anymore. This is one of the most revealing process statements in the whole project. Completion is defined nega-

tively rather than positively. The record is not done because it has achieved theoretical perfection. It is done because further intervention would begin to damage rather than deepen it.

There is something almost ecological about that standard. The band do not impose finality by force. They observe when the work has reached its own limit of useful disturbance. That is a very different idea from deadline craftsmanship, and it fits almost everything else the source set suggests: anti-repetition, instability, fragment survival, studio entanglement, psychological dependence on the right collaborators, and long periods of not yet knowing.

So how does Karnivool actually work? By refusing premature certainty. By changing the terms between cycles. By allowing songs to remain alive long enough to become difficult. By treating breakdown, doubt, and reassembly as ordinary phases rather than embarrassing interruptions. By using the studio as part of composition instead of a final capture stage. By relying on producers not just for sound, but for survivable forms of pressure and trust. And by stopping only when the work can no longer be touched without being diminished.

This is why the records feel the way they do. They are controlled because the band is exacting, precarious because the method is genuinely risky, spacious because collaboration expanded the architecture, and difficult because difficulty has been built into the path by which they become themselves. Karnivool's process is neither mystical inspiration nor tidy craftsmanship. It is disciplined instability. Nothing about the finished albums feels casual or accidental, yet the path to them remains full of confusion, mutation, delay, tension, and lived uncertainty. Put those together and the mystery becomes less mysterious. Karnivool sound controlled and precarious at the

same time because control and precariousness are not opposites in their art. They are collaborators.

CHAPTER

10

Legacy, Audience, and the Unfinished Future



Karnivool press photograph via Rolling Stone Australia.

The previous chapter argued that Karnivool's music reaches finishability not by escaping instability, but by working through it. This final chapter asks what that method leaves behind once it enters public life. What kind of legacy does a band build when it refuses repetition, preserves ambiguity, and trains its audience to expect transformation rather than maintenance?

The wrong way to answer that question is to begin by asking how large Karnivool became. Size is not irrelevant, but it does not explain the particular kind of mark this band left. Karnivool's importance does not rest chiefly on omnipresence, chart domination, or the sort of mainstream saturation that makes cultural memory easy to quantify. Their legacy is stranger and, in some ways, more durable than that. It lives in depth of attachment, in the kind of listener relationship their records taught people to have, in the sense that this band's work is not merely admired, but inhabited.

That distinction begins early. By the time Ian Kenny looked back on *Themata* a decade later, his most revealing phrase was not one of triumphal self-congratulation. He said the record "reacted with people." That is a beautiful and oddly precise way to describe the album's afterlife. A record can be successful without reacting with people; it can sell, circulate, and impress while remaining essentially external. To say *Themata* reacted with people is to say it entered them more deeply than that. It met listeners in a way that changed something — not necessarily everyone, and not necessarily at mass scale, but with enough intensity to become formative.

That is the first key to Karnivool's legacy. They became, for many listeners, not just a good band but a formative one:

one of the groups through which a certain relationship to ambitious heavy music became possible. *Themata* hardens over time into something like a totemic Australian record not because it solved every problem perfectly, but because it carried an unusual pressure of becoming. Kenny's retrospective suggestion that the young band were consumed by what Karnivool might become helps explain the unusual charge of the early work. The record does not sound like a finished institution. It sounds like a band straining toward a form it can only partially contain. That incompleteness is part of why listeners stayed inside it.

The newer profile material helps keep that claim from floating away into pure mood. One long-form feature notes that *Themata* sold strongly as an independent Australian release, while *Sound Awake* later reached number two at home and moved into genuinely large worldwide sales for a band this idiosyncratic. More revealing than the numbers, though, are the stories attached to them. Drew Goddard describes audiences as unusually passionate and unusually thoughtful; Ian Kenny, in a separate interview, says the band has loyal fans far beyond Australia, including in Europe, America, and unexpectedly India. The most vivid example remains the 2011 Mumbai show where the band found thousands of people singing the songs back at them. The newer UK festival reporting sharpens the picture further. Kerrang's ArcTanGent coverage offers perhaps the cleanest outside formulation of Karnivool's position: a band worshipped by a loyal fanbase without ever quite becoming casual-fan ubiquity. That is not mainstream omnipresence. It is a different kind of proof: the evidence of a band that traveled by depth before it traveled by scale.

If the debut created attachment, the later catalogue taught audiences how to remain attached without demanding same-

ness. This is where Mark Hosking's anti-repetition language becomes central to the legacy question. He says clearly that Karnivool pride themselves on never making the same album twice, and that between cycles they deliberately go away, discover something new, and bring that altered experience back into the writing. This matters not only as process. It matters as an audience contract. Karnivool effectively trained their listeners to value transformation over maintenance.

That is rare. Many bands build loyalty by reassuring people that the next record will preserve the identity they already love. Karnivool built a different kind of loyalty. Their audience learned that each return would change the frame. That means attachment to the band could not just be attachment to one sound. It had to become attachment to a method, a standard of seriousness, an evolving argument about what the music needed to become next. In that sense, the band's legacy is as philosophical as it is sonic. The ArcTanGent 2025 booking helps make that philosophy materially visible: after the long gap, Karnivool could still be positioned as an exclusive Friday-night UK headliner. Prestige, in other words, outlasted frequency.

This also helps explain why ambiguity matters so much in the Karnivool story. Some of the current evidence here comes from fan and reception layers that need careful framing, but even handled carefully, a pattern is obvious. Listeners do not tend to treat Karnivool songs as fixed messages. They inhabit them as interpretive spaces. In reception, "Deadman" becomes a site of collapse, grief, psychic transition, or metamorphosis. "Change" becomes threshold, liberation, awakening, release from inherited forms. "Themata" becomes destabilized perception, the beginning of seeing differently. These are not final authorial truths. They are evidence of participation.

That participation is part of the band's legacy because Karnivool repeatedly preserve room for it. They do not explain everything into closure. They leave songs open enough that listeners keep working inside them. This does not mean vagueness is the same as depth. It means the band understand something crucial about endurance: art survives partly by leaving space for other minds to continue it.

Seen this way, Karnivool's audience has not merely consumed the catalogue. It has helped keep the catalogue alive. Listeners return not just to remember how the songs go, but to test their own readings against them again. What did this mean then? What does it mean now? How does *Sound Awake* alter *Themata*? How does *Asymmetry* roughen the meaning of grace? How does *In Verses* change the emotional weather of everything that came before? This is a richer kind of loyalty than fandom as repetition. It is fandom as ongoing interpretation.

That ongoing interpretation becomes even more significant once the silences arrive. The long gaps in Karnivool's history could easily have become merely frustrating footnotes or evidence of dysfunction. In one sense, they were painful and costly. But over time they also became part of what the audience was learning how to hold. Absence changed the shape of attachment. Because the band refused easy repetition and because each record had genuinely altered the terms of the project, silence did not function only as delay. It intensified expectation in a specific way. It taught listeners that the next arrival would matter only if it justified itself.

This is an important distinction. The gaps are not meaningful because absence is mystical. Silence, by itself, proves nothing. The gaps matter because Karnivool's earlier records had already established that each return redefined the whole.

Once that expectation exists, waiting becomes a different kind of experience. Fans are not simply hungry for more content. They are waiting for the next transformation, the next argument, the next reordering of what the catalogue means.

That is one reason the band's legacy feels unresolved in a productive rather than deficient way. Karnivoool has never behaved like a closed canon. Even when the catalogue was small, it kept changing the meaning of its own parts. *Themata* introduced the pressure. *Sound Awake* completed and widened the architecture. *Asymmetry* turned fracture into principle. *In Verses* recovered motion after years when motion itself had become doubtful. Each record did more than add songs. It altered how the earlier songs could be heard.

This is why the strongest available long-form synthesis is so useful: Karnivoool's deepest continuity is not stylistic, but methodological and philosophical. The sound shifts. The scale widens. The emotional weather turns. What persists is a commitment to change, fracture, ambiguity, and the refusal of too-easy adequacy. Once that is understood, openness stops looking like lack of definition and starts looking like one of the band's most durable traits.

That is also why the road ahead still feels charged. Fans are not waiting simply because they want another release from a beloved band. They are waiting because Karnivoool have built a history in which every release changes the stakes of the whole story. The future remains open not because the band failed to finish itself, but because finishing itself has never been the project.

This is a delicate point to end on, because it would be easy to drift into empty mythmaking here — to turn Karnivoool into some sacred unfinished object whose uncertainty automatically guarantees profundity. That would be the wrong note. The un-

certainty matters only because the band has repeatedly made something real out of it. They have earned the right to remain open by converting openness into form again and again.

So Karnivool's legacy is not best described as a monument. It is better understood as an unfinished conversation that listeners trust. That trust comes from depth of attachment, from records that reacted with people, from a catalogue that invites co-interpretation, from an anti-repetition ethic that made change part of the bond rather than a threat to it, and from long silences that reshaped expectation without emptying it. The audience does not remain because the band offers permanence. It remains because the band made transformation feel worth waiting for.

That may be the final truth of Karnivool's place in heavy music. They did not simply build a body of work. They built a way of listening: patient, interpretive, demanding, and open to alteration. If this book has argued anything, it is that Karnivool matters not because they resolved the tensions inside their art, but because they kept finding forms strong enough to carry them. That is what their listeners learned to hear, and what their legacy now consists of.