**BOB MOULD**

*SUNSHINE ROCK*

BIO

The cliché that circulated after the 2016 election foretold a new artistic golden age: Artists would transform their anger and anxiety into era-defining works of dissent in the face of authoritarianism.

Yet Bob Mould calls his new album *Sunshine Rock*.

It’s not because Mould—whose face belongs on the Mount Rushmore of alternative music—likes the current administration. His decision to “write to the sunshine,” as he describes it, comes from a more personal place – a place found in Berlin, Germany, where he’s spent the majority of the last three years. Here Mould would draw inspiration from the new environments.

“Almost four years ago, I made plans for an extended break,” Mould explains. “I started spending time in Berlin in 2015, found an apartment in 2016, and became a resident in 2017. My time in Berlin has been a life changing experience. The winter days are long and dark, but when the sun comes back, all spirits lift.”

These three years in Berlin would quite literally shed new light on Mould’s everyday mindset.

“To go from [2011 autobiography] *See a Little Light* to the last three albums, two of which were informed by loss of each parent, respectively, at some point I had to put a Post-It note on my work station and say, ‘Try to think about good things.’ Otherwise I could really go down a long, dark hole,” he says. “I’m trying to keep things brighter these days as a way to stay alive.”

That makes *Sunshine Rock* as logical a product of the current climate as any rage-fueled agit-rock. Variations on the word “sun” appear 27 times in five different songs over the course of the album’s 37 minutes. To hear Mould tell it, the theme developed early.

“‘Sunshine Rock’ was such a bright, optimistic song, and once that came together, I knew that would be the title track, and that really set the tone for the direction of the album,” Mould says. “It was funny, because writing with that as the opener in mind, it was like, ‘This is not *Black Sheets of Rain*.’”

Mould’s famously dour 1990 solo album still serves as a point of reference: a title track that sets the tone for the album, though on *Sunshine Rock*, it’s the opposite of *Rain*.

This being Bob Mould, *Sunshine Rock* still has darker moments. “Lost Faith,” for example, has him quietly lamenting, “I’ve lost faith in everything / Everything, everything.” The Mould of 1990 may have wallowed in the feeling, but the Mould of 2018 jumps into a hooky, bombastic chorus where he sings, “Really gotta stop this now, this is your / Last chance to turn around, I know we / All lose faith from time to time, you / Better find your way back home.”

Those cathartic moments in “Lost Faith” foreground a surprising element of *Sunshine Rock*: Mould’s rawest vocals since his throat-shredding days in Hüsker Dü. It started when Mould and the band—drummer Jon Wurster and bassist Jason Narducy—had extra time in the studio with Mould’s longtime engineer, Beau Sorenson. They settled on a cover of Shocking Blue’s “Send Me a Postcard,” and Mould decided to lay down vocals right there.

“This was the first real vocal take during the session. I walked to the mic, not knowing how I would sing these words. Three minutes later, I went back into the control room and everyone was like, ’What *the fuck*, that was wild!’ I was like, ‘Yeah, it’s pretty good!’ That was the only take, and that’s what you hear on the album.”

“After that moment, I learned to let go and be more spontaneous with my vocals. Because of that, there’s way more emotion on this album. Perhaps I was ironing some of that out in the past by double- and triple-tracking vocals, hoping for some perfect pop result.”

The rawness of the vocals counterbalances the strings that appear on five songs. Although Mould has experimented with small-scale string accompaniment on previous albums, *Sunshine Rock* ambitiously incorporates an 18-piece orchestra.

“I had this idea as we were right up on recording, ‘Why not take some of these extra melodies that I’ve got kicking around and build them all into string arrangements?’” Mould says. “I like really big, dense chordal structures and rhythm guitars, those layers that come at you. This time, I was just trying to be mindful of adding more melody.”

Mould wrote the string parts, which collaborator Alison Chesley transcribed for the various instruments with some input from consultant Paul Martens. The Prague TV Orchestra spent a day recording the parts while he listened remotely from his home studio in San Francisco. The process came together so easily, Mould laughs, “It’s going to be tough *not* to use them now.”

It all amounts to Mould’s catchiest, grabbiest album since *Copper Blue*, the acclaimed 1992 debut of his trio Sugar. Back then, Mould’s work in Hüsker Dü, as a solo artist, and in Sugar helped define the sound of guitar rock in the alternative age. *Sunshine Rock* finds him doing it again for an era that has ostensibly eschewed rock.

“I’ve heard this thing about ‘guitars are dead’ at least five times, and they always seem to come back,” he says. “For better or worse, this is what I do. I think there’s a lot of people trying to aspire to make great albums. That’s really what this is about: trying to make great rock albums for people because there’s not that many anymore.”

Maybe that cliché about great art coming from strife could be true—but who would’ve guessed it’d be called *Sunshine Rock*?

“*Sunshine Rock* is one helluva way to wrap up the busiest decade of my career,” he shares. “The autobiography, the Disney Hall tribute show, reissues of several albums from my catalog, three current rock band albums, several world tours, and now this new album — I’m humbled and grateful to still be making new music while celebrating my lifetime songbook.”

*Merge Records will release Sunshine Rock on February 8, 2019.*