The Rough Justice of The Warlocks' *The Chain*

The longtime L.A. psych-rockers' tenth studio album is released on April 3, 2020

"Creamy, dreamy, glass breaking-style storytelling" is how Bobby Hecksher describes the psychedelic-rock sound of The Warlocks' tenth full-length studio album, *The Chain*, which is to be released April 3, 2020, on Cleopatra Records.

"We're telling a story this time," Hecksher says about the album's ripped-from-the-headlines concept, which he says had been percolating for a few years before it suddenly came to him with the delirious intensity of a fever-soaked dream, like that "out-of-body experience you get at a show when you're drenched in sweat and suddenly feel so alive."

That concept, Hecksher says, is based around "a Bonnie & Clyde-ish twenty-something couple who rob a bank but get caught and then are cast down the bottomless pit of our justice system. The main characters, Rocky and Diamond, come from different means and thus have very different outcomes. It's a loose collection of 'you got fucked and swept under the rug'-type feelings revealed amid happy songs about their relationship, provided as a kind of relief."

"I've been reading lots of articles about our justice system" Hecksher says. "I've also been watching a lot of real-life/fictionalized prison TV series. All these young adults are caught committing very low-level crimes, but they end up getting these huge bits of their lives taken away from them. The ones who have money usually fair better."

*The Chain* was recorded by The Warlocks — Hecksher (vocals, guitar, keyboards, bass), John Christian Rees (guitar, feedback), Earl V. Miller (guitar, drone machine), Christopher DiPino (bass), Cesar A. Reyes (keyboards), and Jason "Plucky" Anchondo (drums) -- over the course of a few weeks and co-produced by Hecksher and Rob Campanella at Rob's Figment Studios in Lake Hollywood, CA.

After Hecksher explained *The Chain's*back story to Cleopatra, they greenlit the shooting of a short film (comprised of two four-minute mini-movies) based around two new songs -- "Dear Son" and "I'm Not Good Enough/Party Like We Used To" -- which tell the story of the ill-fated tragic couple. These are accompanied by several other tracks from the album: "The Robbery," Mr. Boogeyman," "Double Life," "You Stooge You," "Consequences," and "You Hurt Me."

"I read a bunch of screenplay books," Hecksher says, "and then tossed a script together, punk-rock style." Bobby and his band mates and friends then filmed their mini-movies for *The Chain* over the course of two days this past February near Hecksher's home in Eagle Rock.

In June, The Warlocks — who are joined by Bob Mustachio on a second set of drums -- will launch a full-scale four-week tour of the U.S., hitting all the major markets ("we're looking forward to the East Coast shows," Hecksher says, "I think it's been about ten years since we've played there"), followed by European dates in the fall. "We've been focusing on Europe for the last five-to-seven years, and have hit all the major festivals over there many times over."

Bobby Heckser actually grew up near the beach on Florida's west coast before his family moved to an avocado farm near Ft. Myers. His first real exposure to music came from listening to records being played on the air at his grandfather's progressive/AOR rock radio stations, WMYR-AM/WHEW-FM, where his mom worked as a secretary.

"I spent a lot of time at the radio station," Hecksher says, and gravitated towards listening to bands like "Sonic Youth, the Butthole Surfers, Neu! and Hawkwind," a few of his biggest musical influences, but he says he didn't get into what he calls the "originators" -– legacy rock acts like the Stones and Bob Dylan — until much later, a decade or more after he and his family had moved to Los Angeles in the late '80s, when he was sixteen years old.

By the mid-'90s, a couple of Hecksher's first L.A. bands, Charles Brown Superstar and Magic Pacer, had both released two full-length albums each before splitting. He then found himself playing bass in the Brian Jonestown Massacre, led by kindred spirit Anton Newcombe, who ended up living at Hecksher's house after his post-*Dig!* meltdown (once upon a time, Bobby was also housemates with Beck, playing bass on his 1994 album *Stereopathetic Soulmanure*).

After Newcombe heard Hecksher playing some of his new dark magick-inspired songs through the bedroom wall they shared, he encouraged Bobby to form a new band. Hecksher says he had no idea that that NYC's the Velvet Underground (clearly an early influence), and San Francisco's the Grateful Dead had both used the moniker the Warlocks in early incarnations, he just though it was a cool-sounding name. Hecksher's L.A.-based Warlocks would play their first gig — as an eight-piece double-drummer ensemble -- on July 4, 1998.

After signing a record contract (in Bobby's own blood!) with Greg Shaw's Burbank-based Bomp! Records, the Warlocks released their debut album, *Rise and Fall*, in the fall of 2001, which was subsequently followed by full-length albums and EPs on larger and smaller labels, including *Phoenix* (Birdman, 2002), *Baby Blue* (Mute, 2002), the Tom Rothrock-produced *Surgery* (Mute, 2005), *Heavy Deavy Skull Lover* (Tee Pee, 2007), *The Mirror Explodes* (Tee Pee, 2009), and *Skull Worship* (released on Hecksher's Zap Banana imprint in 2013).

In 2016, Hecksher's Warlocks signed a new contract (this time in ink) with L.A.-based indie Cleopatra Records, who so far have released two studio albums -- *Songs From the Pale Eclipse* (2016) and *Mean Machine Music* (2019) -- and the band's first live album, *Vevey* (2017), a career-spanning selection of some of their best songs, which was recorded in Switzerland.

"It's weird to think I've been signed on one label or another since I was eighteen years old," Hecksher says, but he's particularly proud to be associated with Cleopatra, who have, in his words, "always managed to always do what they say and be very supportive. They are absolutely wonderful to work with."

Now 45 years old, Bobby Hecksher is enjoying the path his life has taken over the past twenty-plus years, recently marrying his longtime girlfriend, Marianne (who he affectionately calls his "Frenchy"), who he first met about ten years ago. Together, they are expecting their first child in August, after which he expects he will take some time off to focus on family before returning to making more music and touring again sometime further down the road.  
  
By Bryan Thomas