

SUPERCHUNK I HATE MUSIC

OVERFLOWS
ME & YOU & JACKIE MITTOO
VOID
STAYING HOME
LOW F
TREES OF BARCELONA
BREAKING DOWN
OUT OF THE SUN
YOUR THEME
FOH
WHAT CAN WE DO

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If punk taught us anything—and it might have been just this one thing—it’s that loud, aggressive music can provide the sweetest release. Shouting out can clear your psyche of problems ranging from a copy-shop co-worker who won’t do his part to the realization that you, along with all your friends and loved ones, are hopelessly impermanent. It’s a fantastic tonic for a wide spectrum of ailments, like aspirin. Where do you hurt? Sing this—you’ll feel better.

Superchunk has offered up that sonic salve off and on for two decades, at various volumes. Like most great bands that started loud, they also explored the quiet, beginning the 1990s with a self-titled debut (which housed “Slack Motherfucker”) and ending them with *Come Pick Me Up*, a stately set that incorporated strings and horns. 2001 saw the even gentler *Here’s to Shutting Up*, but the rest of the aughts saw so little activity that the end seemed nigh.

And then Mac, Laura, Jon, and Jim decided to shout it out again: 2010’s *Majesty Shredding* is perfectly described by its own title—it’s a celebratory set of whoa-whoa-whoas from a group so thrilled by making music together again that they can’t contain themselves. It’s unsubtle in the best possible ways.

I Hate Music, which you’re hopefully listening to right this minute because you couldn’t wait to put it on, is *Majesty*’s dark twin. It’s similarly aggressive—often moreso—and every bit as energetic. It reflects the joys of a life spent immersed in music (“Me & You & Jackie Mittoo,” “Your Theme”), but there’s a dark undercurrent as well. That title isn’t tongue-in-cheek, but it’s really more a question than a statement: When you’re 20, lazy co-workers and romantic missteps number among your biggest worries; two decades later, life’s bigger questions knock louder and louder, demanding answers.

“Low F” finds Superchunk in classic mode—both classic Superchunk and a dash of classic rock: The rhythm section drops out for big choruses, and a guitar solo



brings pure sunshine. “Trees of Barcelona” is similarly joyous; it’s “so happy, so happy to go with that flow.”

To borrow a phrase, *I Hate Music* rages against the dying of the light, and refuses to go gentle into that good night. The people and times that he’s missing haunt Mac’s lyrics this time out in ways both gorgeously sentimental (“You’re not around / but you are still the window we are looking out”) and angrily cathartic (“All I see is a void”). “Your Theme” longs for someone and somewhere that he will never know again. (The original definition of “nostalgia,” as you may know, was “severe homesickness,” and it was treated like a disease. It applies here.)

But in the end, *I Hate Music* sounds to me like an album about love more than anything else: love of life, love of living, love of people, and yeah, love of music. It defies its own title so completely and diligently that it never even seems like a fair fight: There’s no pain this deep or yearning this severe without the type of love earned over a lifetime. “I hate music – what is it worth? / Can’t bring anyone back to this earth” goes the first line in “Me & You & Jackie Mittoo.” That song and its ten companions can’t relive the past or resurrect those lost, but they can keep them close enough to see and hear and celebrate. It’s dark in here, but if we conjure the right words and sounds, we’ll find our way out.

—Josh Modell

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