



Warp Records Limited
PO Box 25378
London NW51GL
Warp.net

WARP347

HUDSON MOHAWKE: CRY SUGAR

Text: Nick James Scavo

In 2022, Hudson Mohawke cries sugar. Stifled by the traditional chin-stroking, po-faced genre studies of UK club culture, the producer has fully embraced the deranged technicolor of American decadence—the high jolt of a drive thru Sprite, the asphalt-and-trash highway smell, the low-brow graffiti sold at auction, the ecstatic, dark hedonism that relishes in the sweetness of shed tears. Now gilded by the East LA sun, the producer wields shimmering soul samples and rococo-baroque strings alongside his firebrand brass and crystalline drop architectures. His new productions are just as comfortable premiering in the ooblong rafters of LA’s famed Walt Disney Concert Hall than in the shadows of London’s Ormside.

Recently, a day in the life of Hudson Mohawke often involves a 7am grill out session in an abandoned lot across the street from the club—coals blazing as the skeletal sound of cavernous bass echoes out from empty warehouses in morning twilight. These early dawn cookouts have become crucial post-rave rituals for Mohawke to stave off exhaustion and ennui after years spent hustling as a cartage driver for a little known Bounce House installation company. After countless hours traversing LA, inflating twisted clown structures, and engaging in back-breaking set up for birthday parties and quinceaneras—Mohawke has been “focusing on his health,” taking cues from his new home in LA by trying out juice cleanses, meditation sessions, and stationary bike exercises. While smoke rises from the western Californian horizon, Mohawke flips grillables and offers sustenance to the last early morning ravers and revelers—a way to prioritize health and “give back” to the bleary-eyed sloshed club goers who made it far enough to see the morning light. It’s this spirit that imbues tracks like “Is it Supposed” or “Dance Forever” with the unfettered optimism of a club lifer, a producer who can withstand the empyrean pressure of exhaustion only to keep going into oblivion. Amidst the sound of MRI machines and contorted celebratory howls, Mohawke hints at an athletic ability to rage well into the next decade.

Cry Sugar is Hudson Mohawke’s third album and deepens his practice of producing motivational music for club goers—uplifting the debauchery and inspiring many through his own brand of anthemic maximalism. Trading in his lineage in dark UK back-alleys filled with Glaswegian antipathy for studio sessions with blazed Pavarotti-inspired tenors and drunk string quartets, Mohawke has dialed in an ongoing fascination with melding high and low



Warp Records Limited
PO Box 25378
London NW51GL
Warp.net

WARP347

culture. After all, he is indeed the architect for the high peaks of high-definition trap production that became embellished in the 2010s—a style that has been appropriated in everything from beer can littered college parties to Arbys commercials. Instead of sneering at the “red solo cup” nihilism of his legacy, Mohawke seems to relish in the uncanny freedom such depravity affords—still leaning into his legendary drop construction on tracks like “Bow” and “3 Sheets To The Wind.” American decadence, then, becomes a stage for his music to thrive—where the DJ booth becomes a composer’s podium for him to conduct the tense drama between debauchery and apocalypse, the “mise-en-scene” of club culture in 2022.

After all, hasn’t club culture in 2022 proven that we will constantly mine all that’s left in the shadows—only to expose the underground to the gleaming glitter of our decadence? As a club-maestro sensitive to this precise tension between the accessible and hidden, Mohawke embraces our rabid obsession with exposure alongside crate-digging genre infatuation. His omnivorous musical perspective comes from his almost painterly composition approach—using genres as colors and textures on his tracks. Recently, he has also been participating in a series of Bob Ross-style still life and landscape painting classes for producers—where club producers and DJs meet up, paint together, and use the medium as a way of informing their own musical approach. Together electronic music enthusiasts paint everything from the busted Teslas parked outside the studio to trash heaps, scenes of the LA Observatory on fire, or the Santa Monica Pier sinking into the surf. Finding solace in such hobbyist activities—like Arnold Schoenberg or Igor Stravinsky’s late LA life spent watering gardens or dabbling in chess—again imbues his recent work with a kind of optimism. Therein lies the possibility that we can continue finding meaning in our daily lives despite the multiple crises that 2022 leaves in its wake. This approach can be heard in tracks like “Bicstan,” which dabs elements of Roland TB-303 flecked acid and driving gabber alongside floating, effervescent vocals and Kerri Chandler-esque house chords.

In this jack-of-all-trades spirit, Mohawke has also been conducting his own “anti-irony” clinics since before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, pioneering a motivational 12-step program that attempts audit how culture juxtaposes traditionally highbrow or “serious” styles of music with uncool or overtly commercial tropes. His masterclasses (Big Booty Hiking Exhibition, Poom Gems, Airborne Lard) assert that this binary is a trap and



Warp Records Limited
PO Box 25378
London NW51GL
Warp.net

WARP347

demonstrate how to interact with culture free from the “sincerity vs. irony” prison. The result has been a production style able to integrate elements of jazz fusion, prog rock, happy hardcore, chiptune, and more with formal educations in rave, hip-hop, soul, IDM, and glitch. The broad and complex nuance of all these genres and more has become the palette of the Hudson Mohawke sound—from the heart-on-its-sleeve epic balladry of “Lonely Days” to the disturbingly abstract and AI-tinged wizardry of “KPIPE.”

In addition to his masterclass work, *Cry Sugar*, serves as Hudson Mohawke’s first work deeply informed by apocalyptic film scores and soundtracks by everyone from the late Vangelis to the goofy major-chord pomp of 90s John Williams. Especially on tracks like “Stump,” “Expo,” and “Some Buzz,” gut-wrenching scenes emerge as party-goers return home post-club amidst rising sea-levels, bomb cyclones, and flickering wildfires. *Cry Sugar* serves as Mohawke’s own demented OST to score the twilight of our cultural meltdown. As the album’s artwork (by Wayne horse Willehad Eilers) depicts—we are arm-in-arm with the Ghostbusters marshmallow man, returning home while swinging a bottle of Jack only to gaze out at the gray tempest of a coming catastrophe.

Despite the apocalyptic undercurrent, Mohawke foregrounds the iridescent vibrattos of gospel choirs, soul samples, and scat-sampling throughout *Cry Sugar*—scaling our bright human drama in the tumult. Known for his deft uses of fragmentation and deconstruction, Mohawke presents our fraught cultural moment as set against the quintessential backdrop of late capitalism—a tightrope walking between chaos and the unashamedly euphoric, between the erratic and the bold, the noisy and anthemic, the saccharine with the devastating.

Cry Sugar becomes a testament of its namesake. In our most intimate, melancholic moments, something sweet and twisted emerges. A wry smile beneath the malice. In 2022, we cry sugar.