

LIFE IN A BLENDER

kicks sand in 2020's ugly face with a new album

SATSUMA

Satsuma is the 10th studio outing from New Yorkers Life In A Blender. Produced at guitarist Al Houghton's Dubway Studio in New York City, this six song EP is brimming with the band's singular, signature brand of punky, brainy indie pop. It's being released by Fang Records on November 20, 2020 as a deluxe CD package and digital download.

The physical edition of the album is a limited-edition book and CD, featuring original art and cocktail recipes from a variety of artists and mixologists, inspired by each song. "We wanted to give people an extra reason to spring for the physical package," says lead vocalist and co-founder Don Rauf, "and an extra reason to drink."

Another aspect of *Satsuma* that makes it different from the other titles in Life In A Blender's deep catalog is that most of its songs have their seeds in stories written by others. The majority of the tunes sprang from the Bushwick Book Club, a salon series Rauf participated in that sees songwriters composing and performing songs based on selected books. The results include the crunching, horn-laced "Vacancy for a Bluebird," inspired by Kurt Vonnegut's *A Man Without a Country*; "Party in the Drunken Forest," a harmonious thicket of sunshine pop rooted in Peter Wohlleben's *The Secret Life of Trees*; the spiky, spy guitar-laced "Freak of Nature With a Lonely Heart," ripped from the colorful pages of Dean Haspiel's *The Red Hook* comics, and the eerie, unsettling "The Ocean Is a Black and Rolling Tongue," based on Jonathan Ames's *You Were Never Really Here*.

"We definitely became more focused on the recording process because of the quarantine," muses Rauf. "There are some dark themes in the songs. But, overall, they're more high-energy. More up-beat."

Satsuma features the act's long-time lineup of Rauf, guitarist and cellist Dave Moody, Houghton, bassist Mark Lerner, drummer Ken Meyer, and violinist Rebecca Weiner Tompkins, augmented by guest horn players Jackie Coleman (trumpet), Drew Krasner (alto sax), and Kevin Moehring (trombone).

Poughkeepsie, that rundown, upstate blue-collar city has been the butt of jokes since the vaudeville era. It's probably not the first place many listeners would peg as the birthplace of a mercilessly literate, hilariously surreal, and artistically innovative band like Life In A Blender. But that's exactly where the group's story begins. Which is perfect, really. After all, Poughkeepsie's also been home to the likes of B-movie director Ed Wood, Velvet Underground guitarist Sterling Morrison, 19th-century humorist Josh Billings, and Andy Warhol collaborator Billy Name. Then there's Life In A Blender, which has hints of all of those preceding powerful and offbeat personalities. Their links to the "Queen City of the Hudson" go back to the initial, late-1970s local collaborative union of front man and songwriter Don Rauf and guitarist and cellist Dave Mood.

"As a kid, I was into non-mainstream songwriters who were storytellers—Tom Waits, Loudon Wainwright III, Randy Newman," recalls Rauf, who with Moody in 1979 formed the band Batteries Not Included to play a high school variety show. "Dave was little more ahead of the curve than I was then, and he got me into Elvis Costello and Joe Jackson."

After a few years apart for college, Rauf and Moody met up again in Jersey City, launching Life in a Blender before relocating to Brooklyn and becoming known for their group's oddly theatrical performances. Starting with their 1988 debut, *Welcome to the Jelly Days*, which was produced by Chris Butler (the Waitresses, Tin Huey), they began a run of 10 acclaimed albums and collaborations with fellow musically eccentric travelers like John Linnell (They Might Be Giants) and Ralph Carney (Tom Waits, Tin Huey).

"Blender is a group of really smart, creative people, and you hear that in their music," says Butler. "There's also this Dada surrealism that's a big part of their live shows."

In these sour times, one couldn't ask for a better blend than that. www.lifeinablender.net

"Life in a Blender is a long-running Brooklyn institution specializing in heartfelt pop that is both surreal and thought-provoking. Though rife with oddness, the band's work hides moments of poignancy and introspection amidst the laughs." —*The New Yorker*

"True to its name, Brooklyn's Life in a Blender funnels an impressively broad range of influences into its quirky rock, from Tom Waits to R.E.M." —*Time Out New York*

"Rauf has the quality of not being right on the note, but close enough, being in the ballpark musically to sell the song and be unique all at once, much like David Byrne and Isaac Brock." —D.W. Dunphy, *Popdose*

"Off-kilter pop nuggets with a dark streak reign supreme here." —Stephen Haag, *popmatters*

"Don Rauf is an illustrator who uses music in place of paint to reveal elusive nuances of thought, emotion and life... Pop underground music that is melodic, inventive and clever." Joe Ross, *Roots Music Report*

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