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LINER NOTES

Liner Notes: Grant Hart, 'Hot Wax'

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DESPITE THE HORDES of fans who would be thrilled if he did, [Grant Hart](#) does not suffer from reunionitis. The former drummer of hardcore-turned-fuzzy-alt-rock group [Husker Du](#) simply doesn't see the point.

"[Husker Du](#) never took a cue from the [Pixies](#) and I don't know why people expect us to look to them now," Hart said. "Because people thought that reunion was unlikely, it just is an example of how different Husker Du is from the public perception of Husker Du."

And while [Hart](#) and guitarist [Bob Mould](#), with whom he shared singing and songwriting duties, did reunite for a brief, surprise performance at a benefit in 2004, don't expect to see the Minnesota band touring the country and playing a classic album — or touring at all, ever.

"Not at all interested," he said. "There's no reason to now. I'm in contact with the other two fellows, and there's no need to do it. It would be the most ridiculous thing in the world. It's the biggest jump backward to placate a bunch of mid-life crises."

Unlike [Mould](#), who has stayed audible through [Sugar](#) and under his own name, Hart has spent his years since the band's breakup doing whatever he wants — which hasn't always meant making music.

"I'm doing a lot of visual arts, a lot of things that aren't meant for public consumption," Hart said. "I have a tendency that every hobby that I've ever had, within a short period of time, gets co-opted into the business of being a musician and I've tried to resist that the last 10 years."

Hence why it's taken a decade for Hart to release his third solo album, "[Hot Wax](#)" ([Con D'or](#)), which comes 10 years after "[Good News for Modern Man](#)," released — you guessed it — a decade after his solo debut, "[Intolerance](#)."

"Hot Wax" is the result of recording sessions in both Montreal and Minneapolis, near Hart's home. He worked with members of [Godspeed You! Black Emperor](#) and [Thee Silver Mt.Zion](#) on the album, which screams British Invasion from the very first notes.

Hart recently began a solo tour to support the album, where he'll play his solo work — and maybe even some Husker Du tunes — through his **Gibson** ES-125 T semi-hollow body electric guitar.

"Anything I wrote is fair game for concerts," he said. "I'm not oblivious of the value of those songs, but I think it's like taking the stones from your grandmother's wedding ring and remounting them — you've got to be very careful."

In advance of his show at the [Velvet Lounge](#) on Dec. 21, Express asked the 48-year-old to guide us through his long-anticipated return to recording.

"You're the Reflection of the Moon on the Water"

It's referred to as a '60s punk thing — but you add a keyboard to something and people say, "'60s." There's a book called "[The Search for the Panchen Lama](#)" [by [Isabel Hilton](#)]. I picked it up because I was curious if she was related to [James Hilton](#), who wrote "[Lost](#)

[Horizon](#)," a tale of the Himalayas. The Chinese candidate for the Panchen Lama was [once] referred to as "he is the reflection of the moon on the water, but he is not the moon," which is a very pretty way of saying close but no cigar.

"Barbara"

You put a bunch a bunch of Italian strings on it and it becomes British. I think you have the trumpet part, which people identify as, "Oh, '[Penny Lane](#).'" It's somewhat of a — it spells it right out but there's still quite a bit of mystery to the song. ... [Esopus magazine](#) still includes a CD with every issue. For issue No. 2 they asked me to be involved, and the project for that one was they were going to solicit from readers stories of their imaginary childhood friend and a number of these stories were packaged up and sent to different songwriters. I chose the one about the imaginary childhood friend known as Barbara, this one middle-aged woman.

And when I recorded the version for the CD, I did a very primitive version, knowing that a bunch of the other artists were going to do it on their computer, or do it in a home studio and take it to the extreme that those things lend themselves too. ... It sounds like the special education band from elementary school where you have the kids hitting woodblocks, and there's a really bad out of tune recorder — but lo-tech all the way, and it ended up getting exactly the attention that I planned for. It stood out, but it stood out well. ... You see, I don't like doing demos because it's like when I'm involved in that it makes me want to carry it further and want to do it for real — and since I almost did an un-demo of it, there was no satisfaction with the recording of it. I sat aside with the result, but it didn't extinguish the passion to re-record the song.

"Charles Hollis Jones"

[Charles Hollis Jones](#) is a designer in Lucite and Plexiglas, and he pretty much introduced that material into the home world and he's a friend of a good friend of mine, who actually passed away — Charles didn't pass away, but our mutual friend passed away. I had a lot of song ideas inspired by my friend Steve, but it all kind of fit in with this "Charles Hollis Jones" song. Interesting person, interesting life and a beautiful sounding name lends itself to putting it to music. Good rhythm to the name.

"Schoolbuses Are for Children"

I wanted that one out by the time of the [2008] election. It's kind of a reflection on [former Minnesota] [Sen. Paul Wellstone](#) and his life and his death. There was a radio commentator of the conservative ilk that was criticizing his campaign a couple of days before [Wellstone's] airplane crashed. Wellstone would always campaign from the same school bus that he first started his political campaign with, and this fellow was criticizing him and he said, "School buses are childish, school busses are for children." And the absurdity of that line — it's exactly who school busses are for — inspired me to throw it back at them.

[Former Minnesota Sen.] [Norm Coleman](#) switched from being a democrat right up a couple of years before this election, and the tragedy took place and he wasn't looked upon very kindly in this state by more progressive people and he made a total ass of himself

suings [Al Franken](#). It's like, come on, be a gracious loser. I've done some work for Franken and especially in my neighborhood where they're not Eastern intelligentsia democrats — they're labor-affiliated people — and the reason it wasn't a landslide was because of that Easterner aspect. They successfully — though not 100-percent successfully — painted [Franken] as a showbiz — all the implications that go with that, and Franken was able to say, "I've been to Iraq six times doing [USO](#) shows — tell me how unpatriotic I am." He's a great man, and he was certainly inspired by Paul Wellstone as well.

"Narcissus Narcissus"

I really would have to say that the ratio of words written and words that made it to the final version was probably at least five to one. I filled an entire notebook with things that some of it will only occupy that notebook, but being able to select from 50 different verses for something when I was placing together the song, I was glad I hung onto it so long.

And that fits into the time factor, too, and I'll explain why: Every so often I have to go back to [Husker Du albums] like "[Metal Circus](#)" and "[Zen Arcade](#)" and become aware of the frailties of those albums, the faults of those records, and the imperfections because after having spent three-fifths of my life with the critical baggage of Husker Du, even I get the impression that sometimes that stuff is unapproachably good. It makes me work on the new stuff even harder to surpass it in quality. Now there's not the other conditions that prevailed back then. We worked hard and we toured non-stop and we were part of an American phenomenon.

The songs get jealous over the other songs. ... It's gratifying to have a balance between overappreciated and underappreciated. It's like from all the B.S. that has been said about that band — deservedly or not — you're expected to recite a new lyric and have it etch itself on the plaster of the walls, and it doesn't always happen that way.

"California Zephyr"

I was in **San Francisco** after [South by Southwest](#) last year and ... I was traveling by [Amtrak](#) and the song — it's an amalgam of older, [in his 70s] friend that's in San Francisco that pretty much lived the life of the lyric, except that he was stationary in the city once he got there. And I noticed in the motel that I was staying at that a lot of guys showed up in one garb and became Mr. Leather by the time they went out at night, so I combined those two realities: the gay guy who goes back and forth between his old, old home and his new, new home. And the harmony, it just lent itself to this, dare I say, **ABBA** kind of treatment. It's a travel song and you've got a nice wide-open chorus like that.

"Sailor Jack"

That's a friend of mine from the East. That kind of started out as a joke. [Sailor Jack is] one of the fellow's nicknames. Not to many instances before this record of me writing so many biographies on one album, but it's a group that I guess play well together.

"I Knew All About You Since Then"

I had always loved the song "[Smoke Gets In Your Eyes](#)" [from the operetta "[Roberta](#)," made famous by **The Platters**] and especially the way the lyric turns around at the very end where "These aren't tears when a flame dies / smoke gets in your eyes." I like how I could do the same kind of turn around with the lyrics of this song and it's a good standard-y kind of thing. Very paranoid as I was recording that — "God, are you sure this isn't something that's already been done by somebody?" There's a lot of things it could sound like, a lot of things it does sound like.

There's always this quest for originality because you always want to be honest about your work and make sure you didn't pick up something from somewhere. Because the difference is all promotion and it's all luck. Somebody could have worked on something 90 percent the same song and for some reason or another not have done well with it. You're either hearing your stuff in other people's work, which makes you throw away your work, or you catch it the other way around.

"My Regrets"

I record before I edit, but it became pretty obvious that it was tough to beat as a closer, and there's nothing wrong with following the obvious at times. It makes it that much more meaningful when you go against it.

» [Velvet Lounge](#), 915 U St. NW; with [Ambition Burning](#) and [Thee Ultimate Vag](#), Mon., Dec. 21, 9 p.m., \$8; 202-462-3213. (U St.-Cardozo)

Photo courtesy Debbie Donovan

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