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Friday Oct 12



Photo courtesy of Granary Music

Indie rock pioneer Bob Mould performs Tuesday at San Francisco's Herbst Theatre and chats with Rolling Stone contributor Michael Azerrad as part of the City Arts & Lectures Series.

The records Mould has made have included landmark albums with the bands Husker Du and Sugar, as well as superlative solo work. His new DVD, "Circle of Friends," encompasses material from all stages of his career.

Mould's first official live concert release, "Friends" was filmed in Washington, D.C., where he currently resides. His powerhouse band features Brendan Canty (Fugazi), Richard Morel and Jason Narducy (Rockets Over Sweden).

"The Husker Du stuff and the Sugar stuff, I had never carried those songs forward in other band settings before," Mould said, of playing his old tunes with the current lineup. "I don't think we were trying to sound like those (old) versions. We were just trying to sound like the four of us playing together.

"Any band is really unique, in the sense that the people all bring something stylistically that is unique."

Mould fans - whom he's taken to many different musical places over the years, from hard core to pop-rock to electronica - welcome new interpretations. He has even performed his material on acoustic tours.

"When you strip away the bombast of a band, and you're just left with the words, a solitary instrument and a voice, you can see through the song a little bit better. When I'm performing solo, I'm sharing the song as I conceived it in my head."

Those attending Mould's appearance in San Francisco at the Herbst Theatre on Oct. 16 (which happens to be his 47th birthday) will hear more of his musical insights. In addition to an acoustic solo performance and screened excerpts from the DVD, the evening will feature an interview with Mould, conducted by Rolling Stone magazine contributor Michael Azerrad, author of "Our Band Could Be Your Life," a highly regarded look at the '80s independent music scene.

Though critically acclaimed and revered by peers, Mould has never been rewarded with mega-commercial success. Yet his music continues to earn a faithful following.

"I guess it's just sheer willpower," he laughed. "Every time the music business tries to stick a nail in it, it doesn't work. I love what I do."

And judging by the feedback and fan mail he receives, Mould's material continues to resonate with people on many levels.

"For some people, it's all about the rock. It's about that guitar sound, all that shrapnel flying off that thing," he said. "For other people, it's about the sentiment of words and how it speaks to a condition that they can empathize or sympathize with."

Mould's music, insights to be shared live

By Paul Freeman / Entertainment Writer

Bob Mould, one of indie rock's most influential figures, has always carved out his own paths. "When I sit down every day to write music, I don't know what I'm going to do. I have no plan. ... I have an idea of who might listen to it - and that might inform some decisions. But ultimately, I've got to make the records I want to make."

The records Mould has made have included landmark albums with the bands Husker Du and Sugar, as well as superlative solo work. His new DVD, "Circle of Friends," encompasses material from all stages of his career.

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Though he's openly gay and vocal on gay rights issues, Mould prefers to keep his songs more personal than political. "There's other people who are more qualified and more eloquent to speak," he said. "The community at large is very educated these days, very aware of what the issues are. So I'm reluctant to make broad statements."

When his sexual orientation became public, it affected his career trajectory a bit. In 1994, when Sugar released its "File Under: Easy Listening" record, "There were some Southern radio stations that wouldn't play the record, because I was gay," Mould said. "That's a business decision. They were probably afraid of losing advertisers. I understand that. They don't have to play it."

As a music fan, Mould responds to different artists in different ways. "A lot of times for me, it's music that takes me out of my life, takes me someplace else, whether it's back where I've been or forward to a dream. Music can be very hypnotizing.

"Sometimes, it's the way somebody turns a phrase that catches me, or the quality of their voice, or the layers of sound that are coming at me. It can be so many different things. I know it when I hear it, though."

Mould believes there is still worthwhile indie rock happening. "The scene is flourishing," he said. "Social networking (Web) sites offer a lot more opportunity for new bands. I don't know if those sites can make a band as popular as the music industry can, at least not yet."

In 1981, Mould was going town to town in a van, selling singles for a buck. "I'd have to try to find where the punk rockers hung out in Tucson. It's a lot easier now. That's like three seconds on Google. For me, I had to drive like 3,300 miles and starve," he chuckled.

"You were living it and breathing it."

Mould releases a new album in February, his first since 2005's "Body of Song." Music remains his driving force, though he stepped away from it for a while in '99 to indulge another passion - pro wrestling. He worked with TBS' "World Championship Wrestling" as a scriptwriter, and came to find it more demanding than a rocker's life.

"It was like helping to write and run a different Broadway show twice a week. Insane!" he said. "The travel was crazy. The hours were crazy. It was so exhausting. It was a great experience, another dream come true. But I was very grateful to return to the music."

Mould says he envisions less travel in his future. "I'm in pretty great shape, but as I get older, the touring gets harder - hard on my voice, hard on my hands. My tolerance for interrupting my life is less. When I go away for months, it's hard reconnecting with friends and routines. It's true, as people get older, they get set in their ways," he chuckled.

Mould says he thinks about doing other things, such as scoring, commercial work, production work and writing for other musicians. "From time to time, opportunities come up where I test the waters," he said.

But will he find anything that can equal the exhilaration of the performing itself?
 "I don't know. It's tough to get that out of your blood."

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