

# Bad Moon Rising Turned 30 and No One Cares But Me

written by Nicholas Rys | October 7, 2015



Bad Moon Rising, Sonic Youth's second LP, turned 30 this year to little fanfare. There were no reissues, no Pitchfork articles, no one there to discuss this bizarre anomaly of a record, even by Sonic Youth standards. I guess it should come as no surprise. It's confusing and heady, atonal and inaccessible; a weird and transgressive noise tapestry of American psychodrama. It's also a tweener album; falling squarely between the complete noise/no wave worship of Confusion is Sex and the more melodic song structure of EVOL. It's a transitional album that hasn't made up its mind as to what kind of record it really wants to be, drenched with textured guitar squall disguised as songs that all flow together in either a horrible confusing and convoluted manner or well-executed album; depending on your point of view.

This is where I say I kinda love tweener records, if that wasn't obvious yet. Sung Tongs by Animal Collective, which represents a great jumping off point from the lo-fi mask wearing cult-ness of Campfire Songs and Here Comes the Indian, but still isn't as pop oriented or refined as Strawberry Jam; or Cryptograms by Deerhunter, which represents the linchpin from debut LP, Turn it Up Faggot's abrasive punk rage to Microcastle's soft and lush, pop production (come back Friday for my article on Cryptograms and Dennis Cooper). Bad Moon Rising is that record for Sonic Youth. I think I love these records because they represent a dichotomy or contradiction I find to be very warm and reassuring, many of these records holding onto more of the bands experimental or innocently undeveloped roots before lunging off into more accessible territory. Frankly, Strawberry Jam, Microcastle and EVOL or Sister are all great albums that I love and are arguably better or stronger recordings, but I guess I like the messy, aural assault of their forebears.

Sonic Youth have always written songs in strange, alternatunings (a phrase a just made up for alternative guitar tunings) in their ongoing effort to destroy rock music, or what have you. However, live, this deconstructionist tendency proved difficult, and in many early gigs resulted in extended periods of awkward tuning between songs. As a means to combat this, the band would play pre-recorded noise collages between songs, sometimes with vaguely familiar songs buried beneath them by Iggy Pop or Madonna. This ended up creating a sense of jarring cohesion in their lives sets, which then could feel more like one extended noise jam or composition instead of a set of Rock Songs. The band decided to take this approach to recording Bad Moon Rising.

The songs on Bad Moon form a delicately woven, lucid and satanic noise tapestry that sounds like it was coughed up by Charles Manson and Timothy Leary backstage during some perverse, occult ritual at Altamont. And I mean that in the best way possible. Bob Bert's primitive and caveman-like drumming combined with Kim G's hypnotic basslines create the perfect sonic base for all of Thurston and Lee's wildest guitar fantasies to take hold, allowing

them to hurl into the stratosphere or burrow underground and many times, both in the same song. Lyrically, the content represents the detached and disillusioned orphan children of Reagan that are too helpless to address what the fuck was going on in the present and forced to dig back into the dark, and pervasive underbelly of American Hypocrisy; topics like the genocide of the American Indian and Manson's death ride bookend side B.

In fact, titling the album *Bad Moon Rising* itself carted confusion from the start. There were band members espousing a fondness for CCR, but the contents of the album resembled nothing of the ham-fisted roots rock of the 60s stalwarts. At first, this can make the title sound snarky or tongue and cheek, which I'm sure in some ways it is. But upon further reflection, we can see the title as more of a histrionic groan from the American Underground; a wakeup call to those still sleeping in America, a gasp for breath from the midpoint of a deeply confused decade.

If I can look past the almost comical pumpkin headed scarecrow aflame on the cover and look a bit more closely I can see a thin, black cloud hanging over the city like ominous smog. I can see the otherworldly blue and purple and yellow sky that gives way to the almost castle-like silhouettes of Manhattan's buildings, and I can even make out the building's haunting reflection in the river water below, slightly distorting their view. And it's there, in the building's reflections, that I can hear the wailing siren moan of the song *Ghost Bitch*. It's in the surreal colors of the sky that I hear the elliptical culling of *Intro*; it's in the thinning black cloud that I hear the persistent guitar drone of *Society is a Hole*, and it's there, in the buildings that stand like castles, stark in the backdrop that I hear Thurston deadpan ranting in *I'm Insane*. This is what still draws me to *Bad Moon* after being a fan of *Sonic Youth* since I was fifteen; you have to work a little harder, look a little deeper to see it, but it's still there. I'm up for it, what about you?