



ATMOSPHERE

ALBUM:

When Life Gives You Lemons, You Paint That Shit Gold

RATING:



ROCKS LIKE:

Murs' *3.16: The 9th Edition*
Common's *Like Water For Chocolate*
Spearhead's *Home*

SLUG'S STORIES SQUEEZE GOLD FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S LEMONS—NOT JUST HIS OWN.



What has often gone unnoticed in Atmosphere's dozen-year-rise to the indie-rap pinnacle is that Slug is one of the few MCs in that scene with an interest in talking about more than himself. It's an easy mistake to make, given the vivid autobiographical

details he's supplied, but Atmosphere's fifth proper album finally shifts the focus to short-storylike vignettes about a hard-luck cast of single moms, struggling artists, on-the-edge warehouse workers and, in one remarkable song ("In Her Music Box"), the relationship between a father, his daughter and a car radio. When Slug does turn his own life into lyrics, it's with sharper results; "Yesterday" is a sweet, pitch-perfect farewell to his father. Fans of producer Ant's Golden Age boom-bap might be thrown at first listen to the full-band, synth-heavy backing, sometimes augmented with horns and extra vocals and sometimes (the infectious, discofied "You") incongruously bright, despite Slug's efforts to darken things. But the cumulative effect is a widescreen collection that seems destined to win a broader audience for the duo without sacrificing the intimate, I-feel-your-fucked-up-life atmosphere of their best work. And that's no gold-painted lemon. (RHYMESAYERS: rhymesayers.com) *Dan LeRoy*

IN-STORE SESSION WITH **SLUG** AND **ANT**

As someone with a fanbase that has a real connection to your autobiography, it must be a relief to make an album that announces right up front it's mostly fiction.

SLUG: I really love the fact that some of these kids take me so personal and so serious. At the same time, I've started to get concerned. When these 16-year-old fans come up and tell me how much they can relate to stuff like "Fuck You Lucy," I'm like, "Really?" When it just seems like we're breeding victims really early. There's still autobiographical stuff on this album, but I found myself just parking in front of the record store and watching cars go by. Because in each car, there's a story.

Would you say as your own personal life has stabilized that created the need to look elsewhere for material?

SLUG: That's probably true. I still think I'm an irresponsible dickhead. But, y'know, I used to be full of good intentions, and now I think I'm able to act on them, at least.

This record as a whole is really me and Ant trying to get progressive. After [2004's *Warped Tour*], I had to scare myself into doing something different. Because I'd drink 400 beers and just walk through a set.

I saw this bumper sticker I really liked: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting

different results." That was the philosophy of this record. If I wanna be the Tom Waits of rap in 10 years—fuck, if I still wanna be doing this in 10 years—I had to stop being so unprogressive. But the thing is, [the songs are] still pretty dark. I've been painting with dark colors for so long, ignoring the fact that it's the easiest fucking way to paint. I'm on some shit where I wanna paint with yellow and orange and... fucking baby blue!

How hard was it working all the live instrumentation into the songs?

ANT: The hardest thing was all the synth samples we used, trying to replace those and make them sound right. It was really painful about recapturing the mood of the demos.

SLUG: I think we were both going for '80s shit, but not in an obvious way. Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis were a huge influence on this record.

ANT: That's pretty much all I was listening to. But that's pretty much all I usually listen to anyway. [Laughs]

So you're including a children's book with the album packaging. Trying to break into a younger market?

SLUG: Yeah. [Laughs] I don't know if I'd really call it a kids' book—it's not really the kind of thing I'd give my kid to teach him how to read. But I guess for the hip, young scanner, it might be perfect. —*Dan LeRoy*