

Released on the heels of her critically acclaimed 2018 album, *With the Sun*, Sunny War's new album finds her a little bit older, a little bit more mature, but looking back on the rocky roads of her past with a surprising amount of nostalgia. *Shell of a Girl*, released June 14, 2019 on Hen House Studios with vinyl released by Org Music, was written in a burst of creativity in Los Angeles, and marks a new transition period, with Sunny moving from the Venice Beach boardwalk, where she first made her name, to the streets of downtown Los Angeles. Holed up in a studio apartment in an old halfway house that's rumored to be haunted, Sunny muses "I think I've heard ghosts, but I've always heard ghosts everywhere." These ghosts are reflected in the songs on the new album, either through the ghosts of friends who've passed away, from overdose or accident, or in the ghosts of who she used to be. "I feel like I've tricked myself into trying to be a part of the system that I swore I'd never participate in," she says. "Now I'm worried about moving from a studio to a one-bedroom. It bums me out when the thing I'm happy about is paying the light bill. I'm never happy about something that's real anymore."

Growing up in Los Angeles' punk scene, Sunny was hopping trains from a tender age, riding free on the rails and living homeless on the streets. Her music has always been raw, and she refuses to shy away from a brutally open honesty about the rougher parts of her life, but now that she's gotten a modicum of comfort and routine, she finds herself looking back to what she remembers as the happiest time in her life. Far from her early days playing house shows with members of FIDLAR, and racing through punk sets with her band Anus Kings, Sunny insists she's never lost touch with her punk roots, in fact she feels more punk than ever; "I've graduated to just hating everybody," she says with a laugh.

Sunny War jokes that the songs on *Shell of a Girl* come from her attempts to write a radio-friendly single, inspired by wildly varied influences like commercial jingles that fascinated her as a kid, the cross rhythms of bossa nova guitar, even a peculiarly twisted version of circus classic "March of the Gladiators." Recording again at Hen House Studios on Venice Beach with producer Harlan Steinberger and her musical collaborators Micah Nelson (Particle Kid) Aroyn Davis, Milo Gonzalez, Tato Melgar, Lesterfari Simbarashe, and Edith Crash rounding out the cast, Sunny moves freely between musical genres, anchored by her virtuosic, self-taught fingerstyle guitar work. Playing on a temperamental Guild acoustic guitar, that she's named Big Baby for its tendency to squall and feedback, Sunny's guitar work is as dazzling as ever, notes cascading out of the guitar in Art Tatum-ish flourishes.

Her songs cut deeply too, confessional at times, wounded at other times, and fiercely proud throughout. As Sunny explains the title song, "Shell," "in relationships, people just treat somebody like shit. Then that person changes and they don't recognize them anymore. If you keep attacking me, I'm going to morph into somebody who's more defensive and more aggressive, so why are you surprised?" "Drugs Are Bad" attempts to reconcile Sunny's own medicated childhood and our culture of medicating children with self-righteous parents who think that the only drug addicts are those that use street drugs. "Soul Tramp" speaks to the hobo's urge to keep moving, to avoid routine, to keep from ever being bored. "A 'soul tramp' is somebody who constantly feels like they need to go somewhere all the time," she explains. "You're just fighting that feeling. The lyrics are inspired by train hopping. When I hopped trains, I was living off of food stamps and just drinking Night Train. Looking back now, I think that those were the happiest times of my life. Everything was so random. Something new was happening every day, it was always interesting."

Moving further into adulthood, Sunny War feels herself pulled back to the wild days of her youth, to the adventure and freedom we all remember, though rarely with the intensity that she lived it. But that freedom came with a price. "Most of my travelling friends died from ODing or liver failure," she admits. "The drinking was a really big part of it, but also heroin. Almost everybody I know is dead. Then I think, why did I gravitate towards these kinds of people and then I think, was I supposed to be

dead?" It's a question she asks explicitly on "Rock n Roll Heaven", reflecting that "I wasn't really planning to live past 27, so now I'm like, OK what happens? I feel like that old gag where two kids are standing on each other's shoulders with a trench coat on, pretending to be an adult. I kept wondering if I'm the only one pretending or..." Of course, she's not the only one pretending, but few other artists ask such honest questions with such an earnest curiosity.