

“The world got shook”

So Algiers formed a crew. Holed up in their native Atlanta, the band—who have built one of the most exciting catalogs and cult followings of recent years—gathered a posse of like-minded artists to create their fourth album, *SHOOK*. Stacked with guests spanning icons through to future stars, with Algiers as a connecting bridge between worlds and sounds, *SHOOK* is a lightning rod for an elusive yet universal energy and feeling. A plurality of voices; a spiritual and geographical homecoming; a strategy of communion in a burning world; the story of an end of a relationship; an Atlanta front porch summer party. Ultimately, it's a 17-track set of the most mind-expanding and thrilling music that you are likely to hear anytime soon.

*SHOOK* was born amid a much-needed break from pressures creeping up from many sides. “We all got shook”, says multi-instrumentalist Ryan Mahan. It proved to be a perfect opportunity for recalibration, as they reconnected as friends and lost hours immersed in scores of episodes of *Rhythm Roulette* and *Against the Clock* and descending deep into alt-rap YouTube rabbit holes.

This triggered an intense process of beatmaking for vocalist Franklin James Fisher and Mahan. A revisit of DJ Grand Wizard Theodore’s 1970s punk-infused New York City rap masterpiece “Subway Theme” served as a spiritual moodboard for the cross-pollination of urban and counter-culture styles at the heart of Algiers’ approach. They honed their skills as producers while paying respect to a sprawling lineage of rap and punk iconoclasts from DJ Premier, DJ Screw and Dead Boys to Lukah, Griselda and Dïat. The band continued in the path set out by their own one-of-a-kind 2020 free jazz montage “Can the Subbass Speak?”, chopping and screwing beats on a dusty SP-404 and a Sequential Circuits Tempest, building imagined sample libraries from scratch, and feeding found sounds and live performance through a host of modular synthesizers and tape machines.

The assimilative, hands-on approach encouraged them to think of the songs not just as executive producers for the first time since their debut, but also as a conduit for a multiplicity of voices. While community and collaboration has always been integral to Algiers’ ethos, *SHOOK* brings this to its fullest manifestation. The liner notes read like a who’s who of ground-breaking and contemporary underground music, featuring Zack de la Rocha (Rage Against The Machine), Big Rube (The Dungeon Family), Billy Woods, Samuel T Herring (Future Islands), Jae Matthews (Boy Harsher), LaToya Kent (Mourning [A] BLKstar), Backwash, Nadah El Shazly, DeForrest Brown Jr (Speaker Music), Patrick Shiroishi, Lee Bains III and Mark Cisneros (The Make-Up, Kid Congo Powers). Their contributions throughout deftly reshape and recontextualize the notion of being Shook from a variety of perspectives, occupying shifting roles as oracles and narrators. “It very much deepens and broadens the world of Algiers”, says drummer Matt Tong.

*“This a relapse / what it be god / No rehab for my jihad / A rapture in a grief storm / Time on my neck an’ it be gone”* spits Zack De La Rocha on the breakneck ‘Irreversible Damage’ to a climax of clattering beats, snaking guitars and pulsing electronics. “The end of that song is the sound of joy,” says Fisher of the track’s livewire climax. “That’s what hope sounds like in

2022 when everything's falling apart." Backxwash, Fisher and Billy Woods trade verses on Black resistance, PsyOps and police oppression on the epic "Bite Back", with Backxwash particularly venomous with the stinging lines: "*These fascists don't mask their faces / They do just what they do / The news said I was looney / Till poof, happens to you*".

On "I Can't Stand It" Fisher's punchy vocals pair with crisp rattling clacks as Future Islands' Samuel T. Herring offers up a caramel-smooth hook, before Boy Harsher's Jae Matthews shifts the tone into darker terrain with a spoken monologue. Unbeknownst to Matthews, the song is about the dissolution of Fisher's long-term relationship, and when Fisher heard lines such as "*I just wish that we could figure out a way to see each other and not destroy one another completely in the process,*" the emotion Matthews intuitively tapped into brought him to tears.

On "Out of Style Tragedy"—which pays homage to Sun Ra—Fisher declares: "*listen for the sound*". "That's a literal statement," he says. "Listen to the music and then we'll have a conversation. I want to just have the freedom to discuss things as an artist in the way a white artist has the liberty to do. But being in a perceptively political band, and being the black singer as a frontman, it's almost as though I feel silenced. If I want to talk about anything that is not immediately recognizable and, serviceable, for people's personal political ideals". The sentiment is echoed in the lyrics of the aptly titled "Cleanse Your Guilt Here," which radiates the infectious psych-soul of Supreme Clientele-era RZA.

Atlanta, where the genesis of this record took place, is ultimately at its heart. It opens with a robotic train announcement from Hartsfield Airport—iconic to many Atlanta natives—that used to frighten Fisher when he was a child. Field recordings and original samples created by the band emphasize throughout a sense of place, collectivity, imagined community and home. Cicadas sing in unison deep in the woods; wind swirls through pine, oak and sweetgum trees; interstellar radio transmissions collide with surveilled phone conversations; all building a world that evokes the elusive sensory experience of growing up in the urban South. "Being in Atlanta in the summer is unique. It's super hot, humid and swampy, there's storms and kudzu", says Mahan. "It's how the urban and rural interact - capturing that sound and feel." "We were working in an environment that we were used to", adds guitarist Lee Tesche. "It feels like the most Algiers record that we've ever made."

The accomplishment of this record is made all the more impressive by the fact it was made by a band who were falling apart and on the verge of breaking up. But instead they have produced an extraordinary, transformative record born from a shared sense of place and experience. "I think this record is us finding home," says Mahan, with Fisher adding: "It was a whole new positive experience— having a renewed relationship with the city we're from and having a pride in that. I like the idea that this record has taken you on a voyage but it begins and ends in Atlanta."