

Jeff Rosenstock makes increasingly chaotic albums for an increasingly chaotic world. With each passing year, it feels like the temperature of the universe boils five degrees hotter, and with each new album, Rosenstock's music grows more unwieldy and lawless. Louder, faster, more feral. Which brings us to 2023—a planet on fire, a mere 90 seconds to midnight on the doomsday clock, and the release of Rosenstock's appropriately titled, anarchic record, *HELLMODE*.

“To me, the album feels like the chaos of being alive right now,” Rosenstock says of *HELLMODE*. “We’re experiencing all these things at the same time that trigger our senses, and emotions that make us feel terrible. We’re just feeling way too much all at once!” But for all its textured turmoil, there are also surprising glimpses of clarity and grace to be found in *HELLMODE*, when Rosenstock deliberately slows things down in places that are prettier and more delicate, rare moments of shelter in the storm. Which only makes it more rewarding when these moments unexpectedly unravel and spiral back into extreme, manic chaos, like abruptly being flung into a Nintendo game on level 99.

*HELLMODE* marks the fifth studio album the prolific Rosenstock has released in the last ten years under his own name, following the dissolution of his beloved cult projects Bomb the Music Industry! and The Arrogant Sons of Bitches. Also tucked into his rapidly expanding catalog is a live record, a ska reimagining of his 2020 album *NO DREAM*, and various dumps of stray songs and loose singles. And somewhere on the side, he has found time to score the Emmy-nominated animated series *Craig of the Creek*.

Rosenstock's rising profile and critical acclaim over the last decade have been something of an anomaly. He's a proud torchbearer of the punk sonics, aesthetics, and ethos of his youth, leaning into pop punk and ska sensibilities that were deemed Decidedly Uncool by the gatekeepers of the time. (On any given day at a big outdoor music festival, he is likely the only musician who will bust out a saxophone solo.) But when Rosenstock celebrates these styles, he somehow ends up getting praise from tastemakers and landing on prominent year-end lists. Maybe it's because his appreciation doesn't feel like cheap nostalgia or surface-level cosplay. Everything he does is just so damned sincere.

That success is something Rosenstock has been conflicted about, and fuels some of the anxiety that runs through *HELLMODE*. “It's weird feeling success at the worst possible time, while the world falls apart,” he says. “These things I've been unintentionally working towards for the last two decades have come to fruition now, when everything is on fire.”

To record *HELLMODE* in the summer of 2022, Rosenstock once again enlisted his longtime studio collaborator, Jack Shirley, the Grammy-nominated master of heaviness who has recorded all of Rosenstock's studio albums. But this time, they took a slightly more ambitious approach, booking time at the legendary EastWest Studios in Hollywood. They recorded to tape in Studio 2, the same hallowed ground where System of a Down recorded *Toxicity*, and where Whitney Houston laid down vocal tracks for *The Bodyguard* soundtrack. The newfound studio resources produced the biggest and most expansive Jeff Rosenstock record to date.

“I looked at it like: Well, we’re never gonna make a major label debut record. But I really like the sound of a lot of those records from the 90s—the Rob Cavallo stuff, the Jerry Finn stuff,” Rosenstock says. “So what would we do if we were in the studio trying to make that kind of record? It’s funny, I feel like in 2023, you can write an unabashedly poppy punk song and it’s probably not gonna be on the radio anyway, so it doesn’t feel like a sellout move. We felt free to make something that just kicks as much ass as possible.”