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MODEST MONSTER

Big Head Todd doesn't let it go to his head

Todd Park Mohr, bandleader with **Big Head Todd and The Monsters**, tells me there's one primary lyrical theme on his band's latest release: "The heart is always wrong." We're talking about *New World Arisin*, Big Head Todd's 12th studio album, out now on Big Records.

"I find conflict to be a rich subject matter," he explains, "trying to understand what all conflicts have in common. Relationships are conflict-driven. I think our emotions are part of that structure. Oftentimes they're misleading or wrong, and people are trapped in conflicts."

Big Head Todd and The Monsters, perhaps best known for 1993's platinum-selling *Sister Sweetly*, added a bluesy tone to '90s-era guitar rock and grunge music. They also made several appearances on the era's jam-band-centric Horde Tour, alongside acts like Blues Traveler.

"We didn't feel we were a jam band," Mohr says. "We looked at ourselves as a song-oriented rock band. We always felt misunderstood."

In his early days in music Mohr lacked assurance as a performer. "Initially I didn't have the confidence that would allow me to be comfortable on stage. Today, I'm very confident. I know I have something to offer. Our fans have been with us for many years. I can put that behind me, clear my hard drive and worry about the music."

Since the '90s, Big Head Todd has continued to tour and release new music, maintaining a sizable and loyal fan base. *New World Arisin* features the Tom Petty-esque "Damaged One," the Van Morrison-style "Wipeout Turn" and grungy wah-wah on "Long Coal Train." Mohr and his Monsters handle it all with the steady hand of an experienced road act.

Mohr says blues and other African-American musical styles also play a big part in Big Head Todd's sound. Early in their career, Big Head Todd worked with John Lee Hooker on "Boom Boom," and Mohr recalls Ray Charles' live album *The Genius of Ray Charles*, the first record he ever bought, opening his eyes to the music of the African-American experience.

"I liked the tones and the structures of black music," Mohr says. He also appreciates "the feeling of it, what it represents in the social context, the historical context, the human experience. All that comes through to me."

With the collapse of the CD market and the rise of internet streaming services like Spotify, Mohr calls the music business "upside-down" from how it was when his band started. Nevertheless, he remains hopeful.

"You can still be somebody's favorite band, and that's worth a lot," Mohr says. "I tell young groups to focus on songwriting. There's a lot of shredders and great musicians of every instrument. Songs are the things people remember, relate to and identify their lives with."

Big Head Todd and The Monsters play with Simo 8 pm Friday, Dec. 8, at Hi-Fi Music Hall; \$25 adv., \$30 door, 21-plus.

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