**Sunflower Bean, *Mortal Primetime***

Time marches relentlessly on, but it can pass unnoticed unless you find a way to capture it. For the entirety of their remarkable career, Sunflower Bean has made monuments of fleeting moments, by turning them into art, bottling them as song. They broke onto the scene as teens wise beyond their years with *Human Ceremony*, captured the melancholia of nascent adulthood on *Twentytwo in Blue*, and confronted the alienation of life under late capitalism on *Headful of Sugar*. Now in their Saturn Return, the band is back with the most hard-fought and vulnerable album of their career: *Mortal Primetime*. “You get to decide what your prime is, and you fight for it,” Cumming says. “This is ours, and that can’t be taken away by circumstance. We can’t take it away from each other. This moment, where we are now, is what we’ve always fought for.”

That confidence is earned, because *Mortal Primetime* almost didn’t happen. In the years since *Headful of Sugar*, the members of Sunflower Bean drifted from one another as they pursued new projects and confronted personal challenges, tragedies and transformations. Synonymous with New York, the band lost guitarist/vocalist Nick Kivlen to California, leaving vocalist/bassist Cumming to write songs alone for the first time in the band’s history. Soon after, she separated from her long-time partner, informing much of her songwriting. Additionally, drummer Olive Faber birthed a new project, Stars Revenge, after coming out as transgender around the last album cycle. Despite the wealth of success they’d experienced together as a band – from the stages of Glastonbury and Lollapalooza, to touring with Beck, Interpol, and The Pixies – Sunflower Bean struggled to tend to their collective fire and tensions rose. The three friends grew up together and spent their twenties in the spotlight, but away from it, they struggled to make sense of who they were outside of Sunflower Bean. The future seemed finite – it felt like time was up.

“Coming close to losing something you fought for, for over a decade, is a really good way to get close to your heart as an artist,” Cumming says. “Every long-term relationship, experiences challenges – you either stop or you go deeper. What is a band but a relationship with a body of work?”

Reinvigorated, Sunflower Bean chose to keep the faith and go deeper. “Faith is just another word for a healthy dose of delusion,” Faber says. “We make good music together – how could we walk away from that?” All three original band members convened in Los Angeles, encouraged by the team that’s uplifted them from the very beginning. They doubled down by choosing to self-produce the album, tracking it live to ensure that the immediacy of the performances so essential to Sunflower Bean’s mystique shined through. “It’s such a rare and special thing for a band to have played together this long, so we wanted to lean into the skills we’ve built and take an old-school approach to the recording—which is maybe the most subversive thing we could do at a time when it’s so easy to copy and paste,” says Kivlen. With mixing by Caesar Edmunds (The Killers, Wet Leg) and engineering by Sarah Tudzin (Illuminati Hotties, Boygenius), Sunflower Bean were inspired by alternative rock, dreamy psychedelia, and arena-sized ambition to create a sound that’s undeniably theirs on *Mortal Primetime*; a record that celebrates their history while hurtling toward the future.

Kivlen says these songs are about “friendship, perseverance, revenge, and rebirth.” They are the most honest of Sunflower Bean’s career – unvarnished, exposed. Kivlen wrote the tender sixties-inspired “Waiting for the Rain” in a fit of nostalgia, as the new Los Angeles transplant yearned for the simplicity of childhood and friendship. “As kids, life felt easy, but in adulthood everyone is on a different path. As much as I miss those days, I also know that getting older is a privilege, and it’s healthy to embrace the changes of life and responsibility.” Featuring a mellotron from Roger Joseph Manning Jr. (co-founder of legendary power-pop band Jellyfish), the poignant song feels timeless and reflective of the album’s message of perseverance. To hear the band play it together speaks to the endurance of their bond – life is no longer easy, and their career is now stretched across both decades and coasts, but love keeps them tethered.

Sunflower Bean has never fit neatly into a scene, and *Mortal Primetime* will remind listeners why. They draw from a wide swath of influences most bands wouldn’t dare namecheck together in a sentence, and that daringness has made them undefinable. “Sometimes I think of this record as Belle and Sebastian meets Alice in Chains,” Cumming says. “In the past, we’ve been told to tone down who we are, and this album is our refusal to be anything but ourselves,” Faber says. “It’s the purest expression of who we are.” Recording vocals for the album’s power-pop opener and lead single “Champagne Taste,” Cumming channeled Iggy Pop circa *The Idiot*, purring the album’s namesake over wolfish riffs. “Hey babe let’s go out tonight/ I want to spend ten thousand large/ It’s mortal primetime.” Later, on “Look What You’ve Done to Me,” her staggering range conjures the unsettling madness and whimsy of Kate Bush’s “Babooshka.”

Tapping into their respective senses of faith and spirituality, the members of Sunflower Bean make reference to religious imagery throughout. “Nothing Romantic,” which searches for salvation under desperate circumstances. “Sitting at the bar drinking alone/ Waiting for God to take me home/ When the Devil said heaven is closed,” Cumming sings, as soaring power cords harken back to arena-ready hits of the ‘70s and ‘80s by Heart, Pat Benatar, or Joan Jett. “For years, I sabotaged my own happiness—and hurt the people I loved—because I believed suffering was essential to creativity,” Kivlen says. “The truth is, I create my best work when I’m happy, not broken. This song is a raw confession and a declaration that there’s nothing beautiful about self-destruction.”

Though she’s written about being groomed in the past, on the searing “There’s a Part I Can’t Get Back,” Cumming wanted every lyric to be “as intentional and direct as possible.” On the chorus, she recites a childhood bedtime prayer over a baroque arrangement that contrasts painful revelations. Later, on the disarmingly beautiful “Shooting Star,” Cumming questions how worthy she is of being loved. “It’s about asking someone if they want to be a part of your journey given your baggage and personal history,” says Cumming. “I think many of us wish we could change who we are—and yet we wake up the same, and the only answer is to try to learn to accept yourself.” “So many things have happened/ That I can barely start to explain,” she sings. “Do you really want a piece of all this pain? Do you really want a piece of all this pain?”

On *Mortal Primetime*, the members of Sunflower Bean carry each other’s pain in all of its complexity, even when the band itself is the source. By embracing discordance and uncertainty, they created the bravest album of an already storied career. When Sunflower Bean set out to make music together as kids, they knew they wanted to go the distance, to create something that could stand up to the unforgiving passage of time. “The further you move through life, the more you realize how precious every moment is,” says Cumming. “This album is about choosing the present as our prime, but also being in touch with the transient and fleeting nature of this existence.” However fleeting this existence is, with *Mortal Primetime* Sunflower Bean offers up another monument that will withstand the weathering of time.