Trust is hard, but trusting yourself is harder. Are the decisions you make the right ones? Is it worth taking risks if there's no one around to talk you out of it? Is it brave to follow your arrow without knowing where that arrow will lead, or is it better to exercise caution?

L.A. punk shredder Charles Moothart wrestled with some of these quandaries while making his second solo album under the CFM moniker, *Dichotomy Desaturated*. "I love working with other people," he explains, "But there's always been that side of me where I've wondered, 'Can I do this without having someone tell me that it's acceptable or good?'" Suffice to say, he pulled it off, and with aplomb, too. *Dichotomy Desaturated* is a toothy, swirling collection of songs that captures a variety of sonic moods—raucous, pastoral, pensive—while retaining an indelible melodic punch.

The Laguna Beach-raised Moothart first picked up a guitar at 12 years old and got behind the drum kit for the Moonhearts at the age of 16 with fellow Cali six-string ripper Mikal Cronin. Since then, the 27-year-old journeyman has become a fixture in the West Coast community; he's logged oodles of studio and stage time with Cronin and Ty Segall—both on his solo albums and as part of the ultra-heavy supergroup Fuzz, the latter experience driving him to make music on his own.

"There was a song I brought to Fuzz where I said, 'I kind of want to sing this song.' Ty said, 'Oh dude, you gotta sing it,'" Moothart recalls. "That led to the moment where I thought, 'I have these songs. Can I write and record these myself and not give into self-doubt?'"

To find out, he struck out on his own with 2016's solo debut, *Still Life of Citrus and Slime*; a year later, he's back with *Dichotomy Desaturated*, which marks the first time Moothart's written songs for the specific purpose of compiling them onto an album. While writing and recording, he was careful not to fall into the trap of making music that, in his words, "Might as well just be a Fuzz song."

"There's a lot of stuff on this record that's extremely out of my comfort zone, but that's what I've come to enjoy in music," Moothart states, citing influences ranging from Black Sabbath, the Stooges' *Fun House*, the Grateful Dead, folk-rocker Fred Neil, and British proto-rockers the Groundhogs. "The whole record is a constant push and pull where I'm at with my life and with music—coming to terms with the fact that all I want to do is push myself, but it becomes scary."

That push and pull—which extends to changes in Moothart's personal life, including a move to Los Angeles—is reflected in the changing dynamics of *Dichotomy Desaturated*, which embraces relative quiet alongside hard-charging riffs and bursts of incendiary color. "Voyeurs" represents Moothart's boldest stylistic deviation yet, a jangly acoustic guitar cut with occasional drum fills and cymbal washes. If listeners have come to expect thick slabs of sound from Moothart, then the cool-handed spaciousness of "Voyeurs" is a thrilling new twist in his catalog.

"It has a different groove to it, which is something that I'm personally trying to find more comfort with—giving things more space and time," Moothart explains when talking about "Voyeurs"' sonic designs. "As a songwriter, I'm still getting comfortable with singing and trying to wrap my head around writing a vocal melody. My initial reaction to everything is, 'How do I make the music more exciting?' With this song, there's more of an effort to let a song have the space it's supposed to have and see how far that carries it. The riff sits in the pocket, instead of exploding out right into your face."

Fear not, though: there's plenty of face-exploding moments on *Dichotomy Desaturated* as well, a sense of mischief that is nonetheless serious as all hell. "I'm at a point where I don't really care to play any games," Moothart states with intent. "I want to be constantly pushing myself to do different things—to keep myself on edge and keep myself growing. I don't want to play into anything that might be considered popular. We're just a bunch of punks, and I'm trying to go back to the punk mentality of not giving a fuck and trying to do things my way. It's a 'take it or leave it' situation—and I hope people will take it." Just listen to the record—the choice is obvious.