

Hollis Brown Comes to The Goodland

New York Rockers Keep It Real

By **Eugene Cheng**

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With pop culture focused on hip-hop and electronica, Hollis Brown lead singer and guitarist Mike Montali (pictured center) and his bandmates make it their mission to prove rock and roll's relevance. Courtesy Photo

For how ubiquitous rock and roll seems to be in the history of Western music, it sure has been a while since pop culture gave a proper rock band the same level of attention awarded to hip-hop and electronic acts. One could entertain the possibility that rock music has proved incompatible with the particular yearnings of millennials, who have found solace down different streets. Maybe it's time for rock and roll to throw in the towel and accept that its claim to mainstream relevance is discontinued.

Don't tell that to Mike Montali, lead singer and guitarist of American rock outfit Hollis Brown, because he'll make it his mission to prove you wrong—with both his words and his band's relentless pursuit of

rock-and-roll relevance. In his view, rock music's influence has been cyclical since the 1960s. "I feel like everyone counts out rock music," he said, "and then two years later, there's a band that breaks out, and then it goes away again."

By Montali's reckoning, we are due for a changing of the guard. "I think it's time for it to happen again," he said, "to keep people honest, keep it real, and not let music that doesn't really matter dominate things." This is not to say that there are no bands whose creative output exemplifies the spirit of rock and roll, or that the state of pop music is in artistic shambles — Montali mentioned his affinity for Adele and Leon Bridges. Rather, the mainstream has trudged through an extended period of time without anyone carrying the banner for rock and roll. Who better to fill this vacuum than an upstart, Queens-based rock band founded by second-generation immigrants and named after a Bob Dylan song? Montali summarizes the rock-and-roll spirit as "that attitude of doing everything you can to be authentic and real."

Critics have already raved about how Montali and company pay their dues while simultaneously incorporating their own brand of modern rock—the results feel nostalgic, fresh, and timeless all at the same time. And although Montali falls just short of making a prediction, the Hollis Brown frontman recognizes the path he and his bandmates are on. "I don't know if there're many bands out there doing what we're doing," he said. "I think a lot of [popular] rock music out there kind of sucks."

Honesty, authenticity, and emotional connection form the cornerstones of Hollis Brown's rock-and-roll spirit. Some of Montali's opinions concerning his rock-and-roll counterparts may pierce their pride, but take some time with Hollis Brown's music, and you'll find that the oft-mentioned rock-and-roll spirit can be heard through every vocal phrase and bass groove. There's a sense that the frontman's treatment of rock and roll does not lead to self-satisfaction but rather serves a greater, more idealistic purpose. From his garage in Queens to playing onstage at Firefly Music Festival, Montali has always been on the side of the music.

"We want to contribute a live experience," he said, "that when you come by, you're moved by it in different ways — whether you're moved by the lyrics, or you're moved by the beat, or you're moved by the energy, or you're moved by the look. We also want a collection of songs that, recorded wise, are

contributing to how people live their life and the soundtrack to what they do, day in and day out. I think that's what everybody's trying to achieve."

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Catch Hollis Brown on Wednesday, July 26, at 7 p.m. at The Goodland (5650 Calle Real, Goleta). There is no charge for the all-ages show, but register online before the event at

[*tinyurl.com/GoodlandHollisBrown*](https://tinyurl.com/GoodlandHollisBrown).