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Asylum Street Spankers
play Sam Bond's
on Thursday, Feb. 5.

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Acoustic & Reggae Roots

ASS, Midnite offer faithful recordings.

It was early August the last time the **Asylum Street Spankers** toasted Eugene. Now, six months and two ice storms later, ASS is back to acoustically rock your world with the brand new CD, *Mercurial*. By brand new I mean shit-hot, as of just this week, and it's full of musical gems from (as usual) more genres than you can poke in the eye with a 10-branched stick.

Mercurial, the band's sixth release, dredges up covers the likes of which you'd never have thunk — Black Flag's "TV Party," Beastie Boys' "Paul Revere," Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" — and maybe a couple you would have imagined, like the traditional tune "Tight Like That" and soul sister Nina Simone's sexy "Sugar In My Bowl."

Austin's A.S.S. is proudly nearing its 10th anniversary, and to mark that milestone, there's not only no career "retrospective" best of album (that would be sooo Hollywood and sooo not ASS-like), but the new CD consists of none of ASS's own songs, hence the smorgasbord of *Mercurial*'s covers.

In addition, the band has a forthcoming documentary DVD entitled *Sideshow Fez*, which was recorded at a sold-out show in Portland's Fez Ballroom on Aug. 15, 2003.

The idea for *Mercurial* actually began several years ago, as bandleaders Christina Marrs and Wammo realized they played a few cover tunes that were audience favorites but never fit in with any album. Over the years, that grab bag of tunes grew. The band decided to compile those orphan songs into a single "party album," recorded in Austin's Mercury Hall, a restored wooden church in the town's south side. Optimal acoustics in the old church and a vintage tape machine led to an album that does justice to a live Spankers show.

Named after a famous street in Austin that once featured a mental hospital, ASS has polished its ultra-tight acoustic playing to perfection. Onstage, band members play wildly with no amplification, and hold nothing sacred in the realms of sex, pop culture or legal and illegal substances. They also never limit themselves to playing songs only from certain eras or styles. That means the band has 200 years of American songcraft in its repertoire, and something new to offer each and every time, while remaining predictable in the best of ways. The Spankers perform Feb. 5 at Sam Bond's.

St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands band **Midnite** will perform its old-school roots reggae music at WOW Hall on Feb. 6. On the reggae scene since brothers Vaughn (vocals, songwriter) and Ron Benjamin (keyboards, musical director) founded the band in 1989, Midnite has made a splash with uncompromising teachings from the Rastafarian tradition and long hard looks at oppressive culture.

ASS

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Midnite debuted in 1997 with *Unpolished*, followed up in 1999 by *Ras Mek Peace*. The third album, *Jubilees of Zion*, garnered the band even more acclaim for its stripped down, honest approach to classic reggae and Rasta interpretations of the modern day black experience. Though originally from Antigua, the band relocated to the U.S. in 1994 and has spent considerable time in Washington, D.C.

The Midnite musicians return frequently to the island of St. Croix and its dedicated Rastafarian community for spiritual sustenance and sound refinement. Friday's WOW Hall show marks the second Eugene appearance for Midnite (rounded out by drummer Dion Hopkins and bassist Philip Merchant) following a sold out show at John Henry's in September. Friday's show also holds special significance, as it falls on the birthday of reggae legend Bob Marley.

Critics have hailed Midnite as "poetic and profound" and "the rootsiest band since the Wailers." Opening the show will be **DJ Swami I** of Santa Cruz's Green-Up Sound System, who will get the vibe going by spinning reggae classics as doors open. **EW**

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