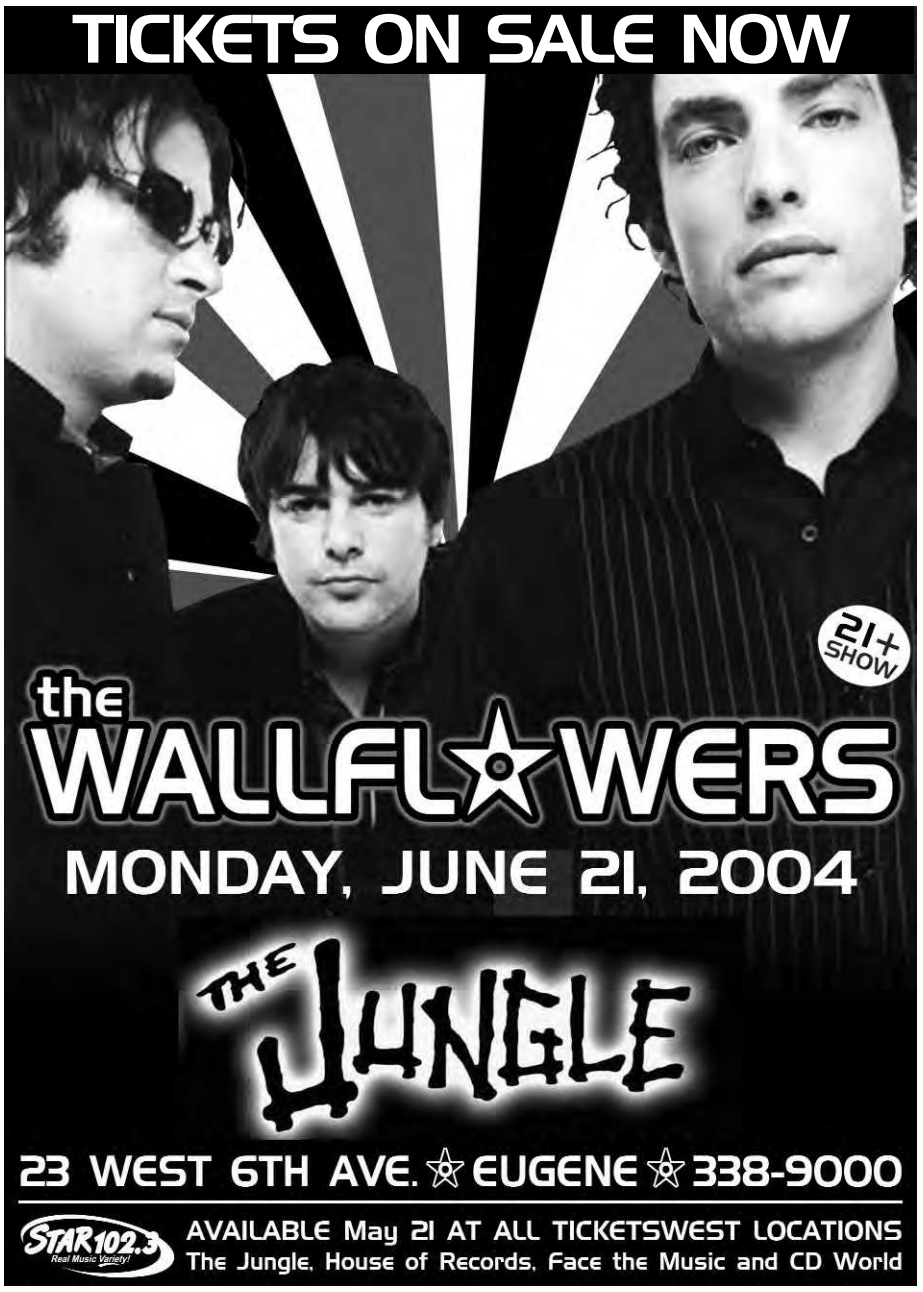

pLUGGED iN CD REVIEWS BY LOCAL WRITERS

Mudhoney, *SuperFuzz Bigmuff/Early Singles,* 1989 SUB POP RECORDS. By Tony Dawson

Mudhoney frontman Mark Arm is widely quoted as describing the sound of his own band as "Pure grunge, pure shit."

Grunge, a dirty word, a labeling tool fabricated by the corporate rock media, which destroyed pure rock 'n' roll long ago by their minimizing of individual creativity.

Well this is not a grunge album, it's simply pure rock 'n' roll. Owing much to the swagger, sex, and stomp of the early Stones and the greats of garage (Sonics, Wailers), Mudhoney haphazardly dives into art-school, bohemian noise with their covers of Sonic Youth's "Halloween," and "Hate the Police." They also cover legendary Texas punks the Dicks. Mudhoney refuses to be labeled as grunge.

What is grunge anyway? The bassist of the most famous grunge band once described it as what grows on a shower curtain. Listen to "Touch Me I'm sick" (loud), and feel Steve Turner's chord snarl and Mark Arm's desperate rasp. This is music made for music's sake. If you're not convinced, take a gander at "If I Think" and notice the human connection. It makes you feel something that every other human can feel.

Mudhoney was in an era when rock was pure, full of long, sweaty hair, beer, and good tunes, yet they are omnipresent, forever rocking.

Laura Kemp, *May,* 2004 RAIN WATER RECORDS. By Chris Roth

Local folksinger-songwriter-guitarist Laura Kemp has won Best Female Musician honors repeatedly in *EW*'s readers' poll, and her eagerly anticipated new CD, *May*, reflects many of the reasons why. A skillfully assembled song cycle, it surpasses even Kemp's fine previous recordings in the quality of the performances, the beauty and power of the music, the depth and range of emotion and experience conveyed.

Nearly all of the songs have something to do with land and the seasons, as well as with such themes as love, gardening, relationship, and life choices. Some tracks, like "Sword Ferns and Salmonberries," are beautiful in the simplicity of the arrangement (just voice and banjo); others, like "Snow Returns," are intoxicating in the rich tapestry of sounds they weave from multiple instruments.

More highlights include the wistful, haunting "Hannah Branch;" "Rootless Way," which contemplates the roads that take friends and family away from one another; the upbeat "Love and Soil;" the funky, humorous, and touching "TV Song," which should convince anyone to at least consider what home could be like without a TV set; the title track; "In Time," "Cold Comfort;" and a cover of Kate Wolf's "The Lilac and the Apple."

Also listen for a sly reference to Jimi Hendrix and a feline commentary on the proceedings from Laura's cat Chumley.

Guest musicians include Sally VanMeter (dobro), Steve Smith (mandolin), and many others; Tony Kaltenberg co-produced. A splendid time is guaranteed for all.

The Sawyer Family, *The Sawyer Family Album,* 2003 SELF-RELEASED. By Robert Jacobs

This is one solid rock 'n' roll album with strong doses of rockabilly. The "Link Wray" sound hits you deep down. There are traces of Zeppelin, George Thorogood, punk, and the Ventures throughout 13 tracks.

Strengths include the pacing of the songs, which meander from hard rocking numbers, to mid-tempo croons to inspired instrumentals. This diversity shows the breadth of the bands talent. There's a wicked sense of humor throughout. Solid rhythm section and good guitar work with tastefully applied swaths of reverb. In general, though, the guitars are untreated by superfluous effects.

Drawbacks are the lack of subtlety in the lyrics. This isn't subtle music, however, but the bluntness and somewhat unnecessary use of profanity sometimes detracts from the meanings of the songs. Furthermore, there's not much new ground being broken here. It's a tough road to travel, one that's been tread by literally thousands of bands before.

Fans of The Reverend Horton Heat, The Cramps and Link Wray will love this record. Standout tracks are "My Collection" and "Shotglass."

As homage to Link Wray and other bands from the birth era of rock 'n' roll, *The Sawyer Family Album* stands up admirably as the Sawyers' first full-length CD.

Sarah McLachlan, *Afterglow,* 2003 ARISTA RECORDS. By Jon Young

There are not many sounds as sad and hopeless as a grown man attempting to hit the notes and plateaus reached by Sarah McLachlan. I yearn to share my own past relationship pain through song. Unfortunately, I can only emit screams and whines that sound as if I am shrilly calling for help, wounded and in pain.

Afterglow was written years ago while McLachlan was is the throes of a tumultuous relationship, and we are blessed with the opportunity to vicariously revisit her pain and emotion.

McLachlan's newest release is an aural fireplace, burning with her voice and equally charged guitar work. Like many of her past CDs, *Afterglow* features dimmed instrumentals, allowing the voice of the "Lilith Fair" creator to shine with vivid brightness.

McLachlan's ethereal voice soars and dives effortlessly in this CD. *Afterglow* evokes painful memories of lost love yet radiates a warm sense of comfort, insinuating that bad times always burn out and lead to good. Lamenting songs, such as "Fallen" and "Stupid," capture remorse and the desperate, vain attempts to keep a long-doomed partnership alive. "Perfect Girl," with its fiery angst and burning accusations, sets things straight with McLachlan's finger-pointing, brand-hot blame.

Long overdue, *Afterglow* emits more of the smooth, yet complicated vocal beauty that Sarah McLachlan is loved for. *Afterglow* provides fuel for many hours of melancholy listening, and offers the listener the chance to fan the fire, which may still be smoldering in their heart, memory and soul.