

## A Murder of Crow

Sheryl Crow is that rarest breed of odd and beautiful American artists – a recognizable face/name in the mainstream with several true blue hits and Grammys tucked under her belt, a folk/rock crooner whose music crosses generational boundaries to appeal to sis and mom and grandma, and yet, like, say, Tom Petty or Lucinda Williams, she also garners a kind of minor-key reverence and respect, because she's a musician's musician, the sort of popular artist capable of being both genuinely good-good and big time, and like Petty, sometimes we end up taking Crow for granted, because she is of such a consistent quality, always there, always strong, cranking out solid albums and solid airwave bangers like "All I Wanna Do" and "A Change Would Do You Good" and "If It Makes You Happy," and writing what is easily the most karaoked duet in the history of karaoke, "Picture" with Kid Rock, but then, just like Lucinda, she can sneak up and rip your heart out with a tune like "The First Cut is the Deepest" or "Leaving Las Vegas," as her songwriting has subtlety and depth crossed with a broad intuition for the killing hook, the catchy chorus, not to mention her ballsy great cover of "Sweet Child Of Mine," which Crow completely owns as her own without undermining the auto-nostalgia and edgy summer groove of the original, and you know, let's not forget that she started out as an elementary school music teacher before she became a backup singer for the late, great King of Pop, Michael Jackson, and that her debut album initially was rejected and scrapped, another embarrassing instance of sheer corporate idiocy, only to have her roar back and score award-winning albums one after the next, by now Crow's sold some 40 million albums globally, and finally, the woman is just plain kickass, a breast cancer survivor and a lefty activist in the mold of Michael Stipe, but she can still soak up the sun, play it light, sing for the day with that beautiful rapturous rapt-making voice of hers, like a beacon of glow, it just calls for a, you know: Hell, yeah. Viva la Crow. But, really, what's up with the cookbook? I mean, if it makes you money, I suppose.

Sheryl Crow plays 7 pm Friday, May 20, at Hult Center. – Rick Levin



## Ready or Not, Here She Comes

Whatchu know about **Lauryrn Hill**? Most likely a great deal of questionable hearsay alongside one simple and indisputable fact: She is a legend. The icon who fused hip hop, R&B and reggae has been the subject of controversy for years, ever since dropping out of public view and marrying Rohan Marley following the success of her debut album in 1998, *The Miseducation of Lauryrn Hill*. Before that, her membership with The Fugees was her claim to notoriety. Then, after a four-year hiatus, Hill returned to the music scene, releasing an *MTV Unplugged* live recording, only to fall off the map once more in protest of the music industry itself.

Many years and five children later, Hill may be the classic case of bright talent muddled and abused by the music industry that ate her up, or she may be, as some people would say – just crazy. The latter is disputed as a result of her controversial statements regarding the Catholic church, her self-imposed exile from music, her "spiritual advisor" Brother Anthony, nasty rumors about her dislike of white people spread by a Howard Stern radio show caller, showing up three hours late to her own sold-out concert, etc. But really, who cares? That label of crazy could be applied correctly or incorrectly to many a performer of Hill's stature (try arguing on behalf of Jimi Hendrix's sanity. Did you happen to care if Whitney Houston was all there in the mind, or did you just bump that "I Will Always Love You" cover song without question?).

The present for Hill seems to be a series of surprise performances that have been popping up. Stages in New Zealand, Australia, New York City and Santa Rosa have been graced with her presence. A late-night last-minute performance alongside Dave Chappelle was all the rage in Oakland earlier this May. Though she has hinted at another album in the works, live shows appear to be all we will see of the elusive and mysterious performer deemed by many to be the greatest female hip hop emcee of all time (see "Lost Ones," *Miseducation of Lauryrn Hill*).

Lauryrn Hill plays with revolutionary underground hip hop artists **Dead Prez** Friday, May 20, 7 pm at The Cuthbert Amphitheatre; \$55-\$35. – Dante Zuñiga-West



## Getting Down to the Roots

As with most things in life, balance is good. Eugene's own Paul Wright, frontman for the reggae-dance-rock band **Rootdown**, can attest to this, as can anyone who is even remotely familiar with their catalog. Over the course of several albums and EPs, Wright and his bandmates have written odes to lovers, flip flops, God and Burrito Boy. And on their latest release, *Tidal Wave*, they name drop Mr. T, Hanson, Napoleon Dynamite and former NBA star Karl Malone, to name a few. Wright and the band relish running the gamut between the silly and the sacred.

"The silly and the sacred... I've never heard that before," Wright exclaims with a laugh. "Our faith is our foundation and it really helps us to live life with

an optimistic view, but we're probably not going to go up to someone and bring up matters of faith unless someone else brings it up."

Many of the band's songs have an upbeat rhythm or message (often both), and their live shows are an explosion of unabashed joy. Between their bassist making random animal sounds throughout songs and having audience members participate in dance contests, the action never stops, especially on the track "Karl Malone in a Cowboy Hat."

"That song really feels like a Napoleon Dynamite song," Wright says, "where you can just geek out and people can be free from other peoples' perceptions. We usually end up on our backs clapping with our feet at

the bridge of that song. We're always trying to find the most entertaining and engaging way of playing these songs live, and sometimes that's on our backs!"

For this group of guys, it's not about just trying to be rock stars or being preachy with their faith; when it comes to their music, they just want to have a shared experience with the audience.

"I love writing. I love being creative," Wright says. "It's amazing when someone comes up after a show and says, 'Man, I've been living off of "Good Day" today. It's totally helped me out.' That's just awesome. That's where it's at."

Rootdown plays with Anna Gilbert and Hunter Gray Thursday, May 19, at WOW Hall; \$10 adv., \$12 door. – Brian Palmer