

HITS



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WILDCARD

M. JORDAN PMP/RAL/IsI
BRYAN ADAMS A&M
BLUES TRAVELER A&M
DES'REE 550 Music

B. SPRINGSTEEN Col
TOM PETTY WB
LETTERS TO CLEO CD/Giant
R.E.M. WB

B. SPRINGSTEEN Col
R.E.M. WB
JAYHAWKS American
COLLECTIVE SOUL Atl/Atl G

DURAN DURAN Capitol
MONTELL JORDAN PMP/RAL/IsI
RADIOHEAD Capitol
MORPHINE Rykodisc

BOYZ II MEN Motown
See Page 14 For Details

HOT NEW RELEASES

JON B.
Someone To Love
Yab Yum/550 ESK 77895

BOYZ II MEN
Water Runs Dry
Motown 422860359-2

ELASTICA
Connection
DGC 19385

SOPHIE B. HAWKINS
As I Lay Me Down
Col CSK 77801

MARY KARLZEN
I'd Be Lying
Atl/Atl G N/A

MIKE + MECHANICS
Over My Shoulder
Atl/Atl G N/A

SPANISH FLY
Daddy's Home
Upstairs/WB 4-17876

TAG TEAM
Pig Power
Curb/Atl/Atl G N/A

VANESSA WILLIAMS
The Way That You Love
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Addicted to

Low-ROCK

"THE MUSIC LEAVES SOMETHING TO THE IMAGINATION SO PEOPLE HEAR IT IN DIFFERENT WAYS."

TIME TO CHASE THE DRAGON WITH MORPHINE'S MARK SANDMAN BY PAT KRAMER

Since the guitar-less power-trio Morphine formed five years ago, critics have been desperately trying to categorize them as alternative jazz, low-key grunge, rockabilly/swing or bluesy funk — none of which quite fit. The truth is, Morphine's bare-bones, lyrically sparse and intensely bottom-heavy sound encompasses a lot of elements — but mostly, it's just "low-rock."

Frontman Mark Sandman leads the band on bass and vocals with raspy lyrics that evoke images of Tom Waits living on the edge. With sax player Dana Colley laying down riveting horn riffs and Billy Conway's thundering drums, this Boston-based band is finding a market in a previously, unmarketable genre. Their first release, "Good" (Accurate-Distortion, then Rykodisc) was named Independent Album of the Year at the 1992 Boston Music Awards and got considerable college airplay. Following that, "Cure For Pain" (Rykodisc) was an instant success, with sales over 300,000. Their third Rykodisc release, "Yes," threatens to thrust them to even greater heights. Of course, it didn't hurt that four of their songs were chosen for the soundtrack of the critically acclaimed independent film, "Spanking The Monkey" or that Sandman's former band, Treat Her Right, warmed up for the Replacements and Bonnie Raitt on world tours. Morphine has out-distanced those claims and, as they ready for another exhilarating world tour, the band's Mark Sandman explains the low-rock phenomenon to HITS' own low-talent scribe Pat "Kramer Vs." Kramer.



How did you come up with the name Morphine?

Mark Sandman: We thought it was a good name for the band. It just came to us really fast. Dana [Colley] and I both liked it.

A name like Morphine gives you a lot to live up to. All we knew was we were going to play one time. When things started slowing down for Treat Her Right, we all started getting involved in different projects and Morphine was just one of the things I was trying out. We had no idea how people would respond. But they just accepted it, right from the start.

We played a lot around Boston, really low-key. Corner bars, after-hours parties, early on weekdays... we really took it slow and gave ourselves a chance to play where we could feel free to try out new songs.

Is "low-rock" a term you came up with?

People kept asking us what it was, so we told them it was "low-rock," as if anybody really knows what low-rock is. But it sounds like it should be something, so they accept it.

We do have an above-average emphasis on the low end, but it still feels like rock to us because it has that penetrating quality. Which was really our accidental discovery.

How do jazz fans respond to your music?

A lot of people, when they hear a saxophone, think "jazz." To me, the saxophone's the most rock instrument of all. And especially in the hands of Dana, who often plays it like a guitar. And that's why we don't have a guitar — there's no room.

I see elements of different musical influences in your music, from Frank Zappa to Peter Wolf and Tom Waits.

I just had a drink with Peter Wolf two nights ago. I really like Tom Waits, especially his last five or six albums. We have our own aesthetic, though. I don't know if we're trying to emulate any of them, but it's good company to be in.

What are your own personal musical tastes?

Music by people who have never seen the

inside of a music store, with no dream of American rock stardom. I've discovered this incredibly rich history of Egyptian music. There's so much amazing music available. Oum Kalthoum is pretty much acknowledged as the "Queen of Egyptian Soul Music."

Is that where the simplicity comes from in your music?

It's just a matter of taste. But there are some really simple recordings that move me a lot, like Muddy Water's first single, "Can't Be Satisfied." It's just him and a bass player and it rocks as hard as anything. There are hardly any chord changes... it's all dynamics. And you wonder, "How does a song like that rock almost 40 years later?" Or I think back to Prince when he started. He took out all the cymbals, something really simple like that. I try to get in touch with that type of simplicity. Reduce it down to its most savory sauce.

When Dana plays the tenor and baritone sax, simultaneously, the sounds he gets out of it are pretty amazing, particularly the bagpipe effect on "Radar."

Yeah, he's really getting good at it.

Where did he get the idea from?

Well, Rahsaan Roland Kirk was the acknowledged master of that and he actually played three of them. He was a black, blind jazz musician who recently died.

What are your goals at this point?

I would like to do some dance-floor recordings, extended length, and some collaborations.

With anyone in particular?

I'd like to work with Prince, Daniel Lanois and maybe Tricky, this English guy who's going to become popular over here.

Have you ever figured out what attracts such a wide audience to your music?

Well, I have a theory. The music leaves something to the imagination so people hear it in different ways.

You've come a long way.

All I can say is, it should be encouraging to any band to get the support that we've got when we're not necessarily, obviously marketable. To have people like Rolling Stone and MTV get behind us, to a certain extent, is real encouraging. ■