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## CONCERT REPORTS

### Sugar Ray

#### Pozo Saloon

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After a five year hiatus, Sugar Ray is back and better than ever. The Southern California-based band makes its long awaited return with "MUSIC FOR COUGARS," an exuberant reiteration of the band's signature sound, with particular focus on songcraft and sonic invention. As ever, musical styles – from dancehall to disco, punk to pure pop – are mixed and matched, resulting in a celebratory, swaggering collection that is distinctively and delightfully Sugar Ray. Songs like the buoyant first single, "Boardwalk," or the Rivers Cuomo-penned "Love Is the Answer" are fit to burst with the wit and energy that once saw the band rule over the



Top 10. "MUSIC FOR

COUGARS" sees this band of brothers operating at the very peak of its powers, with the skills, strengths, and smarts that only two decades together can provide. "All the stars aligned and we were given a great opportunity from Pulse Recording to do a record", guitarist Rodney Sheppard told us. "As far as how the title came about, we were playing a show in a big outdoor mall in Hollywood, and the producer Josh (Abraham) turned to Mark (McGrath) and goes "Dude, look at your audience, its all Cougars", and it sort of was, it was a lot of Moms with their children. We thought that was a funny title and it just stuck over time"

### Interview with Sugar Ray guitarist Rodney Sheppard

**Central Coast Rocks:** You guys just completed the first leg of your tour for "Music For Cougars", how did it feel to be back on the road and how did the shows go?

**Rodney Sheppard:** Well it felt good. It felt a little strange at first, just being out of the loop for so long but we got right back into the groove of things. Really the most important thing in a tour is if all the personnel, the band, the crew and everything get along (Laughs) cause that's sort of the daily grind. It's all the in-between time that tends to be the challenge when you're touring, and on this tour I gotta say we all got along better than ever so that made things real good. And some of the shows in particular were awesome, we were blown away at the amount of young people that were turning up at the shows, that was a nice surprise for us.

**Central Coast Rocks:** "Music For Cougars" was released in July (21<sup>st</sup>). Tell us how the decision came about for the band to go in and record a new Sugar Ray CD, and how the title for the CD came about.

**Rodney Sheppard:** We had been sort of on a recording hiatus for five or six years. Throughout those years we kept playing at least one show a month just to stay a band and keep together and stuff. We just sort of reached a point. We had done it for 10 years full time and we reached a point where 3 out of 5 of us in the band started to have children so that and I think we had reached our peak creatively and we kinda hit a dead end so the writing was on the wall for us to step back for a while, let some years go by, do some living with our families. Get reacquainted with our families (Laughs) because we had been on the road for so long. That's what we did and after five years all the stars aligned and we were given a great opportunity from Pulse Recording to do a record. No strings attached, just go in and take our time and make the record that we want to make. As far as how the title came about, we were playing a show in a big outdoor mall in Hollywood, and the producer Josh (Abraham) turned to Mark (McGrath) and goes "Dude, look at your audience, its all Cougars", and it sort of was, it was a lot of Moms with their children. We thought that was a funny title and it just stuck over time.

**Central Coast Rocks:** Were the songs for this record written fairly recently or have some of the ideas been floating around from past records.

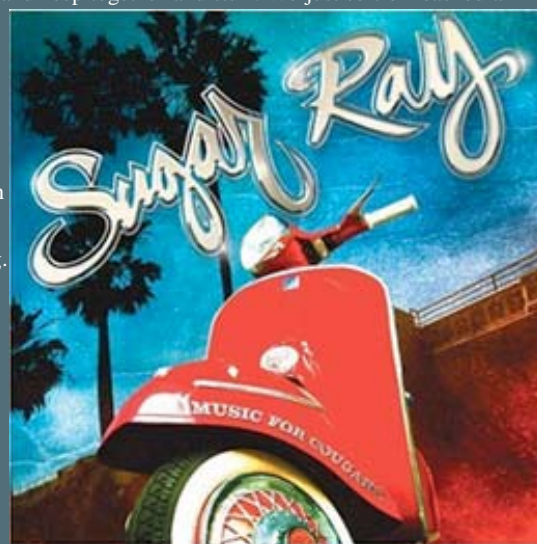
**Rodney Sheppard:** From the time that we decided we were going to do the record, we wrote and recorded as we went, so there were no old songs, they were all new and fresh for us. On our last release (2003's "In The Pursuit Of Leisure") we sort of got away from what people come to expect from Sugar Ray and we tried to get a little

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experimental and released a single called “Mr Bartender (It’s So Easy) that really didn’t connect with the fans, didn’t really connect with the band (Laughs) so we didn’t want to make that mistake again and thought let’s just do what we do best and not try to throw in any extra bells and whistles that weren’t needed. Let’s just give them nice melodic songs and that’s what we tried to do. To bring it along and make it sound good and modern we had some great engineers and (Producer) Josh Abraham really helped us with our tones and stuff and gave us a contemporary sound without sacrificing the Sugar Ray Sound.

**Central Coast Rocks:** Let’s get to your live show. People who come to see you in Pozo can expect a fun and energetic concert. What do you and the band make a point to convey to the audience when you perform?

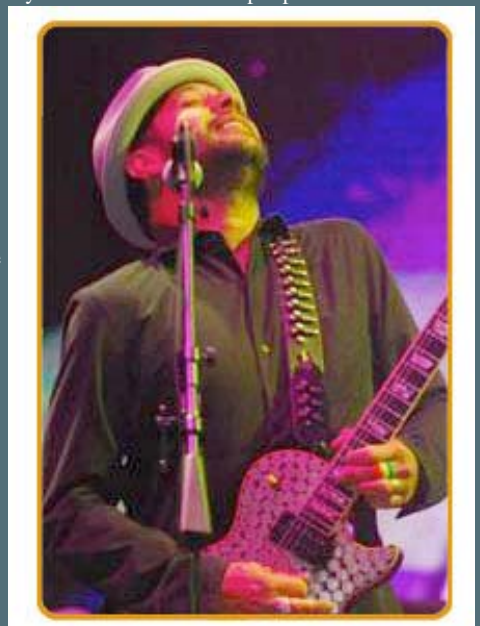
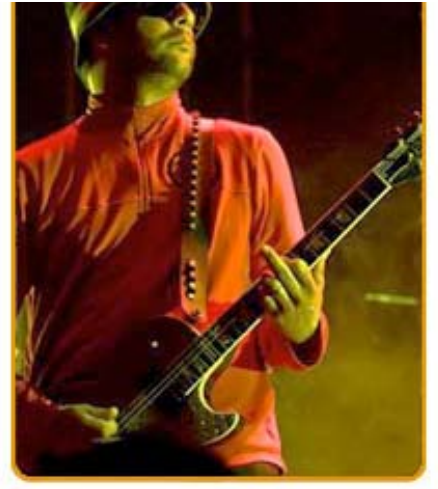
**Rodney Sheppard:** Forget your troubles and have fun with us for an hour or so. We do a few tracks from all six of our CD’s. We don’t shy away from our successful songs (Laughs), we definitely enjoy playing them. There’s a little bit of unpredictability to our shows. It kinda depends on what mood Mark’s in, but he does a lot of audience interaction. We actually have a time in the set where we bring up a couple people from the audience and let them kinda freestyle to something that our DJ will be playing or something. Its fun, it’s a little different than your typical rock band. We have a DJ in the band (DJ Homicide) so he brings his club mentality to the stage, so there’s really never a dull moment in the show (Laughs)

**Central Coast Rocks:** Of all the shows you have played, which one or two stand out for you personally?

**Rodney Sheppard:** Well, the band has been at it for almost 22 years now. I have a couple personal favorite shows that were little backyard parties back in Newport Beach that there were only maybe 50 people at. That would be kind of pointless to even talk about it because it was such a little, what seemed insignificant at the time but sometimes it’s certain little things that stick in your mind throughout your life. We’ve had some of our best shows in front of crowds of no more than 100 people or so. But recently since our success and stuff we’ve had some amazing shows. We’ve opened for The Rolling Stones, we opened for KISS when they first got back together with the make up. We opened for The Sex Pistols in Germany. We also had a great local show, we played between the piers. It was Newport Beach’s 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday, we played between the Newport and Balboa Pier right on the sand. There was about 10,000 people there, that was a special show that sticks out. There’s been far more great shows than bad shows.

**Central Coast Rocks:** Let’s get to Rodney Shepherd, was there a certain event or personality that inspired you to pursue music?

**Rodney Sheppard:** My main inspiration really probably comes indirectly from my Family. I’m the youngest of six kids, all my older brothers and sisters and my dad was really musical. My whole life was introducing me to great music and I have all the records, I have all the vinyl and stuff. My Family really loved The Beatles, therefore I’ve loved The Beatles my whole life and they were a huge influence and really a big influence on this band with harmonies and melodies and stuff like that. You might as well inspire from the best.





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**Central Coast Rocks:** How long have you been playing and what guitars do you prefer?

**Rodney Sheppard:** I started playing in Junior High, back in the days when they used to offer Guitar as an elective in School, wonderful times (Laughs). So I started playing in Junior High and I mostly play Gibson Les Pauls for electric and Martin Acoustic.

**Central Coast Rocks:** What is your process for writing a song, is it true the best ones are the most effortless to write?

**Rodney Sheppard:** Sometimes, but what is true is there is no rule or law when it comes to that. Great songs can come from all sorts of different circumstances. Sometimes you labor over them, sometimes they come super quick, literally in five minutes. For me, if I had to pinpoint a way that I write, I write to drum beats. If I don't have a drum beat in my recording stuff here, then our DJ Craig makes drum loops all the time. Almost every song you've heard of Sugar Ray on the radio started as a drum loop from our DJ, and then I will either add a Bass or a Guitar progression to the drum loop. So I sort of get inspired by a drum beat if you can believe that or not (Laughs), then I'll play the music for Mark or Stan (Frazier) our Drummer and they often think of all the singing parts. Or if it's a Rock Sugar Ray song then maybe that might come from Murphy (Karges) our Bass player because he also plays guitar. Really our songs come from all over the place, all five of us contribute to the songwriting which is why, if you listen to all of our CD's there's really sort of a mish mash of different styles on there.

**Central Coast Rocks:** A lot has changed in the Music Industry since you guys came on the scene, how would you do things today if you were starting out and what advice can you give young bands and musicians?

**Rodney Sheppard:** The only advice I could possibly give is if you really love it and it feels right inside then stay with it and don't let anybody discourage you. As far as the new model, the new way to do it, I'm 42 so I'm certainly not going to tell anyone that I know the new way. We're sort of struggling ourselves being a band that has come from the old school where the label sort of did everything for you. It's a new world now. One thing I can say is it's mostly about Internet, your internet presence will sell your music more than anything else. I'd say for a new band, make a cool video of yourself. Don't let anybody else tell you what you should do. That's what we did and we ended up getting a record deal from making a video, we didn't even have a demo. We got signed to Atlantic Records and we didn't have any originals, can you imagine? We had one original that we made a video for but that was it (Laughs). We literally got signed on just our potential, they had vision. That doesn't really happen anymore I don't think labels really take chances anymore. Of course you have to be good live, at the end of the day if you want people to come and see you, you have to be able to deliver the goods.

**Central Coast Rocks:** Back to the new CD, what songs are you performing from "Music For Cougars" on the tour?

**Rodney Sheppard:** We're doing a few. We're kinda changing it around we've done "Boardwalk", "Going Nowhere", "Girls Were Made To Love". We also do one that's not on the record but it's something that we're going to be releasing in about a week on I-



Tunes and there's a video for it on You Tube. It's a song called "Day And Night"

**Central Coast Rocks:** Final words for your fans?

**Rodney Sheppard:** Thank you for all the support throughout the years, hope you enjoy the new CD and please come out to the show and have a good time with us.



Please Visit: [www.SugarRay.com](http://www.SugarRay.com) [www.MySpace.com/SugarRay](http://www.MySpace.com/SugarRay)

A promotional banner for Sugar Ray's 'Music for Cougars' album. It features the band's name in a stylized font, a red motorcycle helmet, and the text 'FULL CD LISTENING PARTY AOL music'. A large button says 'CLICK HERE TO LISTEN TO MUSIC FOR COUGARS'.

Very Special Thanks: Amanda Charney

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A promotional banner for Sugar Ray's 'Music for Cougars' album. It features the band's name in a stylized font, a red motorcycle helmet, and the text 'MUSIC FOR COUGARS'. A button says 'DOWNLOAD THE NEW ALBUM NOW and get a song for FREE'.

A banner for TimeToTalk.org. It features the text 'TimeToTalk.org Talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol starts here.' and 'The Partnership for a Drug-Free America'. A button says 'Go'.

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