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Sugar Ray returns to what fans know best

by Christina Fuoco-Karasinski | Contributing Writer
Thursday July 23, 2009, 8:17 PM



AP Photo

'I know people aren't really on the edge of their seats waiting for a Sugar Ray record but for the people who want to hear it -- let's make a Sugar Ray record for them,' says Sugar Ray singer Mark McGrath.

In the past, Sugar Ray singer Mark McGrath recognized how fortunate he is to be a full-time musician. But after being gone from the band for four years due to his stint on television's "Extra," he's enjoying every step of his musical career.

"I'm so happy," McGrath said during an interview with The Flint Journal. "We kind of got away from the band being a full-time focus for awhile. I went and did 'Extra' for about four years. It's so nice to be in the cycle of recording a record, waking up a band member, talking to you on the phone, going over artwork, looking at radio ads, seeing your release date, putting a tour together. It's really a gas."

That excitement is captured in the 21-year-old band's album "Music for Cougars."

"We built into our work ethic to have fun," McGrath said. "I love bands like the Nirvanas of the world or Rage Against the Machines, who do that angst sociopolitical thing so well. We're living on the beach in Newport Beach, Calif. We're very fortunate. We don't hate everybody and it comes through in the music. That fun embodiment has always been an integral part of the band and a real contributor to the fact that we've been around for so long."

McGrath said the journey for the band -- which also includes Craig "DJ Homicide" Bullock, drummer Stan Frazier, bassist Murphy Karges and guitarist Rodney Sheppard -- has been fun yet heartbreaking.

"There's this surge of career when we've been up, we've been No. 1 on the charts and then we haven't even been able to get a single on the radio," McGrath said. "All these things you have to take into consideration you have to process them all. You have to laugh at them and have fun. Being able to laugh in the face of adversity is very important in rock 'n' roll otherwise your band's not going to succeed.

"It's all relative to your problems in life. If you watch 'Spinal Tap' and you

PREVIEW

What: Sugar Ray concert with special guest Fastball

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday, July 28

Where: Emerald Theatre, 31 N. Walnut St., Mount Clemens

Cost: All ages welcome. \$20 in advance and \$25 day of show.

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see backstage they're complaining about the rider, it's like pathetic and laughable. It's all relative. That's what their world is. We've been on that end of the spectrum. Now we're here hustling again and starting phase two of Sugar Ray and hoping anybody even cares. But it's fun. It's great and we're lucky to even be able to do it."

Phase two includes the release of "Music for Cougars," its first album for Pulse/Universal/Fontana, but its sixth overall. The first half of Sugar Ray's career featured the sales of more than 12 million CDs and a string of hits including "Fly," "Every Morning" and "When It's Over." "Music for Cougars" captures the Sugar Ray's summery, upbeat sounds on tracks like the first single "Boardwalk."

"With the songs, we were like, 'Let's get back to the Sugar Ray sound.' The last record we released of original material in 2003, 'In Pursuit of Leisure,' we were trying to get out of our lane a little bit, trying to add new sounds, new style and kind of evolve a little bit because the landscape of music was changing. The bands of our fraternity -- the Smash Mouths, the Everclears, the Third Eye Blinds -- were falling out of favor with radio. Lil Jons and Ushers and R&B influence was coming into music.

"We reached out to the Neptunes to try and get a new style, a new sound. It didn't really work for us. We ended up releasing a single that wasn't really right down the middle for a Sugar Ray-sounding song, which is good, which is what we tried to do at the time. But it didn't work with our audience."

This time around, with "Music for Cougars," Sugar Ray decided to make a record for its fans. Produced by Josh Abraham and Luke Walker, "Music for Cougars" features special guests Rivers Cuomo of Weezer, Donovan Frankenreiter, Josh Freese, Dean Butterworth, Wayne Jobson and Tim Pagnotta, in addition to Collie Buddz.

"I know people aren't really on the edge of their seats waiting for a Sugar Ray record but for the people who want to hear it -- let's make a Sugar Ray record for them," McGrath said. "That's what we did. The first single, 'Boardwalk,' certainly embodies and typifies the Sugar Ray sound. First it's called 'Boardwalk,' so you're at the beach already. And it's got the harmonies, the acoustic guitars and the fun lyrics that I think typifies a Sugar Ray song."

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