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From the Front Row : Sugar Ray Granulates Fort Lauderdale

Posted by Matt Simpson - WNEW Staff on August 31, 2009

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Words and Photos by Marc Birnbach

The Culture Room is one of those clubs that you just happen upon when looking for an open deli at ten o'clock at night. With the exception of an airy courtyard, the club is a venue for the up close and very personal. The room was tightly-packed, leaving me to fight for space towards the front. After a few pushes and even fewer apologies or thanks I found an amazing

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spirit named Bianca defending her two square foot area with all of her might. This full-figured beauty reminded me of the days long gone. The days when fans would go just about anywhere and at anytime to buy a ticket to see their favorite band.

Bianca was fused to her sister and their cousin at the hip and the cost to squeeze yourself in set the ladies back a whopping seventy-five dollars and that was before the beers that Bianca shared with my camera bag and Custo Barcelona shirt. I learned for an additional fifteen dollars you can meet the band after the show without any opportunity to snag a photo. Ok, don't get me wrong. The twenty-five dollars to see **Sugar Ray** with **Fastball** opening as the support is not bad. Tack on another ten dollars for parking and fifteen for the magical pink sticker bracelet and you were fifty dollars in the hole of this overly-cramped evening with 350 of your newest friends. By the looks of the fans that fifty dollars is a full day's pay. Sugar Ray's popularity peaked in the latter half of the 1990's, but seriously?. In a time when music is being mishandled by the labels and intervened by the government this is hardly the time to milk your fans for the extra buck.



With that said I will add that as disinclined as I was to dip into my pocket for the bracelet Sugar Ray did knock out the audience with hard-rocking hits one after the other. **Mark McGrath** is one frontman who is absolutely 41 going on 28. His delivery and stage presence was fluid, jarring, and colorfully vibrant with excitement. While most men in their forties have lost their hair, gained their "Daddy/Beer Guzzling" 50 lbs, Mark has

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preserved himself as a truly fit man who will steal your daughters away with his alluring glances, his pulchritudinous smile, and admirable ability to connect deeply to his fans while on stage. I was expecting to see a show that would be downscaled and delivered by an ego driven front man, but Mark McGrath is the real deal and lead Sugar Ray with such forcefulness and intensity that the potency of his leadership and his spirit left me with a get-up-and-go drive. His devotion for his craft is visually stimulating to watch. Constantly unfixed on stage and pumping the crowd up into a conniption of devoted zealots, McGrath is committed to Sugar Ray and loyal to the music first. He may have gone Co-Host Extra crazy in Hollywood, but he's still pure Sugar Ray at heart.



Sugar is now touring in support of their latest release titled *Music for Cougars* which I am assuming is a title referencing the young ladies who once attended the shows over the years or more likely dedicated to the mothers who picked their intoxicated daughters off the floors after a solid Sugar Ray performance. Whatever the meaning behind the album's sultry title, tracks like *She's Got The (Woo-Hoo)*, *Love Is the Answer*, and *Morning Sun* are substantial evidence that being contracted to a major label or not you have to believe in yourself and the songs you create or your window of opportunity will shut you down. Sugar Ray isn't done by a long shot and their tour bus window is wide open. The tour continues West with stops in Tennessee, Texas, Washington and California but I think we will see them again real soon. Keep this in mind. If you have to wake up early *Every Morning* for work to *Answer the Phone*, *When It's Over* Sugar Ray will continue to sweeten our most bitter day. *Someday* you will understand what I am talking about.



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