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STING

Of **MERCURY FALLING**, his new musical adventure, Sting says, "The title is a good indication of its intent. It's a mercurial record; you can't pin down." Laughing he says, "Mercury was the god of theft - and here I've stolen from every genre. That's become an identifiable signature - I like to make music that runs seamlessly, one style to the next. I see all music, after all, as a single language."

It's a language he commands. Again with his ace collaborators - guitarist Dominic Miller, keyboardist Kenny Kirkland, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta - Sting has delivered melodies and lyrics as varied as his own aesthetic journey. His sixth solo disc of all new material, **MERCURY FALLING** ranges from gallic bossa nova "*La Belle Dame Sans Regret*" to the latin-Celtic grace of "*Valparaiso*," from country music in avant-garde 9/8 "*I Hung My Head*" to the gorgeous, gospel-derived "*Let Your Soul Be Your Pilot*." Add jazz heat and classic R&B swagger, and a triumph emerges that reflects the unstilled zeal of its creator. "I like to put myself in all kinds of situations. I'm never afraid to be a beginner."

A Newcastle milkman's son now the father of six, the scion of shipyards and smokestacks now a global traveller (and pathfinder in the realms of soul), Sting composed **MERCURY FALLING** in his 16th century Wiltshire home - its setting one that "Wordsworth," he says, "would've found inspiring." In the boat-house there, windows on all sides and a river running past, he crafted the new tunes, most of them products of solitary treks ("I find that the rhythm of going on long walks will suggest melodies"). Taking a break sometimes to practice the Bach lute suites (a favorite pastime this year), he labored at the answers to three questions he poses before starting any project: "Have I learned anything? Have I anything to say? Will anyone find what I have to say remotely useful or interesting?"

Since starting out as chief of The Police with their **OUTLANDOS D'AMOUR** debut in 1978, Sting has answered his own rigorous questions in ways that have riveted listeners worldwide. The Police catalogue - **REGGATTA DE BLANC**, **ZENYATTA MONDATTA**, **GHOST IN THE MACHINE**, **SYNCHRONICITY**, **EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE-THE SINGLES**, **MESSAGE IN A BOX: THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS**, and **THE POLICE LIVE!** remains a benchmark of innovation. His solo work - **THE DREAM OF THE BLUE TURTLES**, **BRING ON THE NIGHT**, **...NOTHING LIKE THE SUN**, **THE SOUL CAGES** and **TEN SUMMONER'S TALES** - took the trailblazer even deeper into music that satisfies both heart and head. "I like to write music as puzzles," he says, "I like to enfold as many levels as possible into a song."

Filming the English black comedy, "The Grotesque," last year, Sting has acted in more than a dozen movies, from "Quadrophenia" to "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen," (note, too, his groundbreaking new CD-ROM, Sting: All This Time). He's hit Broadway with Brecht/Weils "Three Penny Opera," and forayed into classical music (duets with Pavarotti; Stravinsky's The Soldier's Tale). His social conscience in league with his creative consciousness, he's crusaded for the Brazilian rainforest, starred at Live Aid, and championed Amnesty International. One driving force, however, remains consistent. "Music," he says, "music is my passion."

That passion pervades **MERCURY FALLING**. The first song he penned for the album. "Hounds Of Winter," leads into a general theme of acceptance. "A lot of these songs," he comments, "feature protagonists in situations that can't be helped. They have to summon the courage it takes to face that. In my younger days I tended to fight against everything. Now I understand better the cycles of life." Capturing those cycles in "All Four Seasons," a fond tribute to his daughter Coco, he moves, too, from bitterness to epiphany on "I'm So Happy I Can't Stop Crying" and toward hard-won hope on "Lithium Sunset" (the latter, inspired by a visit with a Brazilian shaman, springs from the astounding fact the sunset light, containing the chemical lithium, assuages depression.)

Notable guests - the legendary Memphis Horns, saxophone titan Branford Marsalis, pedal steel wizard B.J. Cole, Kathryn Tickell on Northumbrian pipes, as well as The East London Gospel choir - make for song arrangements that are rich and satisfying. Playing with musicians of this caliber - a Sting trademark - keeps the singer/bassist on his toes, striving for the kind of sweep and ambition he has found in such good friends and "father figures" as jazz orchestrator Gil Evans, bossa nova maestro Antonio Carlos Jobim, and the ferociously inventive Miles Davis. "I'm still a student," Sting insists, "I haven't carved myself a niche; I'm not smugly sitting. I'm constantly looking for other areas to try to excel in."

Throughout **MERCURY FALLING** - indeed throughout the singer's entire career - runs a generous, empathetic range of vision. The source of that vision? "Music. It's healed my life in so many ways. Truly, I've been healed, in a sort of religious way, by the spirit of music."

-March 1996