



*Chris Cornell – vocals, guitarist
Kim Thayil – guitarist
Ben Shepherd – bass
Matt Cameron - drums*

SOUNDGARDEN

Soundgarden, the Seattle-based band that changed the landscape of rock music from their formation in 1984 to their breakup in 1997, are the recipients of the full-on “greatest hits” treatment with the release of **A-SIDES**, a comprehensive collection of singles from the quartet’s earliest releases all the way through to last year’s **DOWN ON THE UPSIDE**.

During their twelve-plus years of existence, Soundgarden made a career of defying expectations and turning conventions inside out. Moving to Seattle from Chicago, lead guitarist Kim Thayil formed the band in 1984 with another Windy City transplant, bassist Hiro Yamamoto, and singer/drummer Chris Cornell. The vocalist soon relinquished the kit first to Scott Sundquist, and then to Matt Cameron shortly thereafter. The lineup changed again when Yamamoto departed from the band in 1990 to pursue academic studies. Jason Everman stepped in for a six month touring stint but Ben Shepherd became the permanent bassist later that year and remained in the band through its duration. Making their first appearance on the legendary Deep Six compilation in 1986, Soundgarden followed that a year later with the Sub Pop release **SCREAMING LIFE**, an EP that soon became a classic of the post-punk-and-metal era.

Sure enough, Soundgarden’s powerful blend of punk, new wave, and heavy rock influence attracted fans, media and record labels alike to the band and the Seattle music scene in which they thrived. After two more independent releases (**FOPP**, an EP on Sub Pop and the LP **ULTRAMEGA OK** on SST), Soundgarden made their A&M debut in 1989 with **LOUDER THAN LOVE**, the first of a wave of albums that would alter the scope and style of rock music for the next seven years.

It may be ironic that a band who never compromised their music for the sake of commercial consideration would end up compiling a lengthy list of singles, along with a number of bona fide radio and MTV hits. “There is a bit of irony over that, because we certainly weren’t a Top Forty band,” says unofficial band historian Thayil. “But it’s good to compile all these singles together because there are fans who are into that, and in a way, it offers some closure for the fans, in regard to the band’s splitting and everything.”

A-SIDES begins with “*Nothing to Say*,” the first single from **SCREAMING LIFE**, and ends with “*Bleed Together*,” a song from **DOWN ON THE UPSIDE** sessions that has never been commercially available in the U.S. before. In between, the listener will find fifteen tracks that chart Soundgarden’s progression as musicians, songwriters, and recording craftsmen. “*Hands All Over*” (from **LOUDER THAN LOVE**) and “*Jesus Christ Pose*” (from **BADMOTORFINGER**) established the band’s bludgeoning assault for a whole new audience of rock and alternative fans. Later tracks like “*Black Hole Sun*” (from the multi platinum commercial breakthrough, **SUPERUNKNOWN**) and “*Blow Up The Outside World*” (off **DOWN ON THE UPSIDE**) reached a wider following than ever before, revealing a more poetic, melodic side to the

band without sacrificing their uniquely individualistic approach to rock.

"The advantage of a compilation like this is that someone can be driving in their car and can hear the most popular songs in sequence, without having to rummage through a half-dozen CDs," says Thayil. "It's a good, quick reference for the fans who want to have these songs all in one place."

As one might expect, compiling the songs for **A-SIDES** was a little like taking the proverbial trip down memory lane for Thayil. "Certainly, I remember '*Nothing To Say*,' which was the very first Soundgarden record for Sub Pop. That was a big deal, when that came out, to see our songs on blue vinyl. It was originally released on blue vinyl, the '*Hunted Down*'/'*Nothing To Say*' single. And then, of course, '*Flower*' was our first voyage into video-dom. There are definitely milestones in there. And the stuff from **LOUDER THAN LOVE** there's material here from three successive records on Sub Pop, SST, and A&M, and they're each a rite of passage in their own way."

"Specifically, I remember playing those songs live quite a bit, and I remember the experiences of making videos for most of the songs," continues Thayil. "We weren't a band that was the most comfortable with making videos, being that we considered ourselves songwriters and musicians before we considered ourselves actors or entertainers. But I guess this represents our voyage into the world of entertainment, so they're certainly memorable in that regard."

Thayil also admits to the difficulties of compiling an album such as **A-Sides** for a band with such a long and rich catalog. "Unfortunately, we had to leave a few songs off in order to include singles from our independent days on Sub Pop and SST," he says. "So by including those, we had to skip a few later songs like '*My Wave*' and '*Superunknown*.' Basically, I love all the albums individually, and all of them have songs that are great and perhaps closer to my heart individually, and to the other members of the band, than these singles. But these songs were often the ones we thought were good representational vehicles for the albums, and the record company often concurred. They weren't always the songs we listened to the most, or the songs we enjoyed playing the most, but they were certainly songs that we did enjoy and that our fans especially enjoyed."

Thayil would like to see a video collection emerge at some point as well, featuring all the band's clips from "*Flower*" to "*Blow Up The Outside World*," and he is also keen on compiling, for future release, every B-side, live recording, alternate or demo mix, and non-album track (original and covers) that Soundgarden ever recorded. For the hardcore fan, **A-SIDES** provides a taste of what may come in "*Bleed Together*," which has only previously appeared as the European B-side to "*Burden In My Hand*." "*Bleed Together*," was a song we recorded for the **DOWN ON THE UPSIDE** sessions, which didn't make it to the album because of time considerations. So we decided we would save it for the future as a single or a B-side," says Kim, adding in his deadpan style, "And it's a hard-driving punk rock song with a hooky vocal melody!"

Just as they did everything in their career, Soundgarden disbanded in an unconventional fashion, electing to go out at the peak of their creative and commercial success. For Kim Thayil, the band's breakup last April is still something that's too fresh for him to garner a sense of the band's place in rock history. "It probably needs a little more time. I understand it in terms of numbers and chart positions, sales, record reviews, influencing other bands, I can understand it in those terms, but I think time will put it in a better perspective as well."

In these days of one-hit wonders and disposable music, it's virtually a given that Soundgarden's repertoire will stand the test of time. For now, **A-SIDES** is not just a chronology of Soundgarden's best-known and best-loved songs, but a reminder and testament of a potent rock and roll legacy.

- November 1997

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