

September 1991

SOUNDGARDEN

Simplify, simplify, simplify, Thoreau advised a hundred years ago from deep in the Massachusetts woods, but there is no simple way to explain this music not even when it slugs the stomach and feeds the head all at once. That's the dichotomy of **SOUNDGARDEN**, the first of many bands to emerge from the fertile Seattle scene. Soundgarden set the international fashion with long, unmoussed hair, loud, textural guitars, plaid shirts, and dry humor (it goes with the rain). And they cover Spinal Tap.

All of which is why it's been busy at the garden of sonic delights ever since the album **LOUDER THAN LOVE** erupted two years ago. There was a Grammy nomination. There were tours, ceaseless, far-flung excursions with, oh, say, Faith No More, Prong, Danzig. There was the death of long-time friend, singer Andrew Wood and, for singer Chris Cornell and drummer Matt Cameron, there was **TEMPLE OF THE DOG**, a brilliant hard rock tribute to Wood released last spring to critical raves. There was even a new bass player to break in.

And now, pausing briefly for fresh air, there is a new record, **BADMOTOREFINGER**, primarily recorded at rural Bear Creek Studios, north of Seattle, and again produced by Terry Date (Pantera, Mother Love Bone, Screaming Trees). "We wanted to loosen up a little more on this record," Chris says, "and it seemed like the best way to do that would be to use Terry because we're familiar with him and he's familiar with us. All that work had already been done and we could just get down to making the record we wanted to make."

BADMOTOREFINGER, the record Soundgarden wanted to make, is the work of a potent and remarkably versatile ensemble. Forget all the psychedelic-Zeppelin-grunge-punk-metal trash that's been written about this band; the only explanation for this music is the four strong and diverse voices who wrote it. Songwriting duties are spread with wonderful disorder throughout the ensemble (though Chris handles most of the lyrics—check out "Outshined"). "It's a really good situation," Matt says. "Everyone brings in ideas and completed songs. I guess it's somewhat unique when you consider a lot of bands these days are using one or two guys in the band to write."

The band's creative juices were flowing so furiously—both in practice and in the studio—that guitarist Kim Thayil put words to Matt Cameron's "Room A Thousand Years Wide" which marks his debut as a lyricist. "I'm into guitar riffs and grooves and ambiences," Thayil says, "not lyrics—until this song. I liked the song a lot and we always use that as a meter judging songs. Or a ruler. But the metric system isn't present here."

"Somewhere" announces the arrival of Hunter (he answers to Ben) Shepherd on bass. It's true, you've never heard of him, unless you caught Soundgarden's last tour. His only vaguely visible band was a short-lived Seattle hardcore outfit called March Of Crimes, in which he played guitar.

A long-time friend of the band, Ben originally auditioned two years ago. "I kinda feel like I'm a cheeser just jumping on a bandwagon," he says softly. "They're used to putting out records. For me the whole thing's one big hairy adventure."

You will hear Ben's impact on **BADMOTOREFINGER**. "Ben and Kim and I are pretty much

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improv-based players," Matt says, "so we definitely wanted a musician who could stretch like that. His songwriting skills are really good and he has really good instincts as a musician." "Have you heard '*Jesus Christ Pose*'?" Ben asks, returning the favor. "That was written around Matt's drumming."

But really, the whole disc was written around Soundgarden's combined strengths. And that makes **BADMOTOREFINGER** kinda like an eight cylinder classic screaming down the highway on a long clear night. Or a dark stormy night, oh, but no explanation is ever going to be simple enough for true art.

