

# SEATTLE GRUNGE SCENE ALIVE AND WELL

By Tom Harrison  
PROVINCE MUSIC CRITIC

Profiled in Rolling Stone, championed by underground press and college radio, and characterized as grunge, the Seattle Sound has reached that juncture where being a grungy Seattle Sound band is a mixed blessing.

"Before, everyone wanted to do a story on the Seattle Sound," says Layne Staley, singer for Seattle's Alice in Chains. "Radio, TV, press. Now people say, 'Oh yeah, you're just another of those Seattle bands. You must sound like Sound Garden or Mudhoney ...' before they've even heard what you do sound like."

Staley has no regrets, however. The hype and the subsequent pigeonholing berisited Alice in Chains who got scooped up by CBS (now Sony) Records in the record company dragnet that saw major label reps swoop down upon the city last year.

Tonight, Alice in Chains and Seattle-mates, Mother Love Bone (signed to Polydor during the same feeding frenzy), are at the Town Pump.

"The good thing about the bands from this area is that they all have their own niche, which sets them apart from one another," says Staley, who also believes that despite the international attention suddenly focused upon the city's new metal/thrash scene it has remained cooperative rather than turned competitive.

The focal point of the "sound" is the Sub Pop label, an independent which championed big, loud and aggressive rock by such groups as Sound Garden and Tad as well as presenting other area bands on various releases. Concurrent with the activities of the lighter PopLama label and The Rocket magazine, Sub Pop's impact was to create the impression of a unified rock and roll community.

Alice in Chains fits the scheme in that Staley essentially fronts a power trio assau of drums, bass and guitar that spells sweat.

However, thanks to the engineering of producer Dave Jerden, the group's album, Facelift, succeeds in showing off the talented, expressive Staley's vocals against a tight rhythm section with a heavy funk quotient and guitarist Jerry Cantrell's occasional departures into the blues.

"The album didn't turn out quite the way I thought it would," confesses Staley, a proponent of grunge to the end. "I expected it to be heavier and noisier, so when I heard it I thought, 'Hmmm ...' But I played it for friends who liked the sound so ..."

## ROCK 'N' ROLL

Both Alice in Chains and Mother Love Bone have performed in Vancouver in the past, the former twice at Club Soda's Metal Mondays. By their assertiveness and disdain for the glam of L.A.'s pop-metal, they relate closely to the punk ethos, but by virtue of Seattle's blue collar industrialism (a culture that has assured heavy metal's supremacy in the suburbs) they have roots that discernably reach to the '80s and the Pacific Northwest Sound that spawned the original gurus of grunge, The Sonics.

For Staley, who doesn't think in the history-conscious terms of a rock critic, his inspiration is more immediate and fundamental.

"It's always been metal. When I was a kid I went to metal shows; that's my main influence. When I started getting pissed off with things and didn't have any way to vent my frustration, I started writing. I'm no poet by any means; the lyrics are kind of a diary."

Or?

"Self-awareness. Mine. I started reading Jim Morrison's poetry and that became a major influence, though, as I said, I'm no poet. But I shy away from songs about chicks and fighting ... They're too easy."



Layne Staley (seated, right) of Alice in Chains: at Town Pump tonight.