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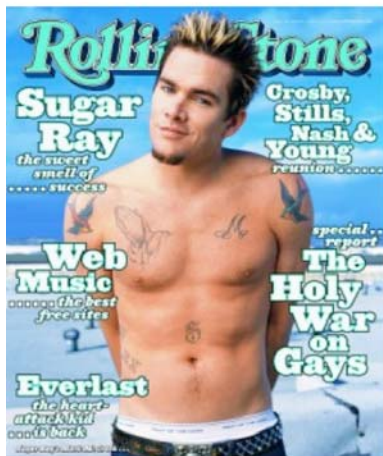
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Interview with former Extra host and Sugar Ray lead Mark McGrath for August 12 Variety Playhouse concert

8:49 am August 9, 2009, by Rodney Ho



During the peak of Sugar Ray

Sugar Ray, along the lines of **Smash Mouth** and **Third Eye Blind**, is a clear reference to the more halcyon late 1990s. At that time, the band generated plenty of sunny hits such as "Fly," "Every Morning" and "Someday."

But alas, their day in the spotlight soon set. Amiable lead man **Mark McGrath** in 2004 landed a gig to host "Extra," where he would troll red carpets and gab about **Paris Hilton** and **Lindsay Lohan**.

Now he's back on tour with the band's first album in six years the group dubbed "Music for Cougars."

"It's tongue in cheek," he said in a phone interview last week in preparation for Wednesday's Variety Playhouse appearance. "I'm 41 years old. Cougars aren't digging me anymore!"

Sugar Ray

- Good to have you back, fellas!
- Best kept in the '90s vault.

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Did he date a few back in the day? "I didn't date," he said. "I might have had relations with a couple. I was moving and grooving!"

McGrath is nothing but a realist. He knows top 40 radio is not going to be exactly falling over itself for a new Sugar Ray record.

"There is no money in this now," he said. "It's not the point. We were fortunate to be able to sell millions of records. But we're not **No Doubt** or **Blink 182**. We have a passion for playing music. We've had the same dudes in the band. We're lucky enough to have a vehicle for that. It's all of us in one bus. It's not the most comfortable set up. But once we're on stage for those 90 minutes, it's the best job in the world."

McGrath said the most common misconception was that the band “had broken up. We were still doing 30-40 shows a year.” The band did a lot of one-off corporate gigs and casinos but not a tour like they’re doing now.

“I made more money doing ‘Extra’ than music,” he said. “I got lucky. It’s been nice being overpaid to do two jobs I can’t do very well.”

He said he lives modestly in the same home he’s had for 10 years. “I like my tiny mortgage,” he said.

“Extra,” he said, was fun. But he didn’t have the passion for pop culture the way **Billy Bush** or **Ryan Seacrest** do.

“I fell into the job backwards,” he said. “I had to learn on the job.” He was reluctant to do live shots at night and work the Rolodex 24/7 the way the others do. But he managed to stay on the gig for four years until “Extra” replaced him with **Mario Lopez**.

He liked the job because for the first time, he had to show up to the same place every day. “It kept me grounded,” he said. “It gave me structure I needed at that point in my life. And it was a challenge for me to do something I wasn’t comfortable with.”

McGrath got a kick meeting some A listers who actually knew who he was, such as **Dame Judi Dench** and **Al Pacino**. “That was always a trip,” he said.

What he disliked the most was confronting celebrities such as **Angelina Jolie** and asking them about things unrelated to their lives such as what **Britney Spears** is doing. And while “Extra” played nice with celebrities, the TMZ’s of the world are making it tougher for everybody. “It’s now the salacious, lowest common denominator,” he said. “They like it nasty and dirty.”

He does like Dunwoody High School grad Seacrest. “One of the nicest guys I’ve ever met in entertainment,” he said. “I met him in 1998 at Star in L.A. We’d come by and do lounges. He’s super cool, super smart, really professional. He makes hosting ‘Idol’ look easy, like anybody could do it.”

Sugar Ray’s return coincides with the 10th year anniversary of another 1999 time capsule: “Who Wants To Be a Millionaire.”

McGrath recalls being on the show as a celebrity and going for \$250,000 for charity. He blew it. It was a question about where the movie “A Room With a View” was set. He picked Paris, not the correct answer, Milan. “I thought Duran Duran and ‘A View to a Kill,’” he said.

IN CONCERT

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