

# 'The Night' brings a new dawn for Morphine

By Sean McCarthy  
Staff Writer

Mark Sandman knew how to open a concert. For most shows, as the lights dimmed, he uttered one phrase that could electrify the crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are Morphine, at your service."

And, as for their brand of "low rock," there wasn't anyone who could do it better.

"Low rock" is a term defining Morphine's sound, but it hardly does the band justice. Defining "low rock" is about as easy as defining "alternative." It was just a term that stuck with the band.

Last summer, lead singer Mark Sandman died after he suffered a heart attack onstage in Italy. It was a terrible loss for an industry sorely lacking in mainstream originality.

Morphine had a truly original sound. A novice listener could listen to one or two tracks off of any of the group's albums and not mistake Morphine for another artist or band. The group could sing about reveling



in a barfly-type of existence one minute and sing about paying for the consequences of such a life in the next song.

Though the band only had three members, the rhythm section was so tight, no other members were needed. Saxophonist Dana Colley and drummer Billy Conway perfectly complimented Sandman's unique, two-string bass guitar. And "The Night," Morphine's last studio release, shows how far the band was willing to take its sound to another level.

Lyrical, Morphine was able to

burn images into listeners unlike many of its peers. "Automatic taxi stops," "a head with wings" and "french fries with pepper," were random phrases that could loom in your head long after the song ended.

"The Night" has many such memorable moments. On "So Many Ways," Sandman's delivery of the line, "Is this what you had in mind/ When you called above to the angels/ For the six hundred and sixty-sixth time," manages to be both playful and menacing.

Morphine's lack of instrument variety was criticized. True, a band consisting of solely a two-string slide bass guitar, a baritone sax and drums may be a tad restrictive. However, each of its albums had a very distinct sound that varied from previous efforts.

"The Night" is Morphine's most varied yet. A viola, tri-tar, organ and female backup singers are some of the additional instruments adding an extra degree of fullness to Morphine's patented sound.

The new additions also make

"The Night" Morphine's most challenging listen yet. "Cure for Pain" and "Yes" could hook you in one listen because the band's lethal rhythm arrangement lured you to nod your head just like a Parliament-Funkadelic jam.

But many of the rhythms are hidden in "The Night." Colley's typically dominant sax skills show far more restraint on this effort than any other Morphine album.

Sandman wanted to stretch Morphine's sound as far as it could go. And tragically, "The Night" was the beginning of a new sound for the band. This was supposed to be Morphine's "Achtung Baby," a definitive division between the old-school Morphine sound and the new-school sound.

"The Night" is an excellent coda to a stellar career. The remaining members have arranged to tour for this album, using all the musicians' sitting in on "The Night" and using

## "The Night"

ARTIST: Morphine  
LABEL: Dreamworks Records  
GRADE: A -  
FIVE WORDS: Fitting tribute to Sandman's legacy.

different vocalists for Sandman.

Though the tour could never compare to seeing Morphine with Sandman, it keeps his memory alive. "The Night" is another great reminder of Sandman's desire to never be complacent, even if you had a damn-near perfect sound to be complacent with.

## Stolen Picasso works worth \$40 million found

ZURICH, Switzerland (AP) — Seven paintings by Pablo Picasso have been recovered more than five years after they were stolen, Swiss authorities said Tuesday.

The paintings were stolen by thieves who burrowed into the basement of a Zurich art gallery in October 1994.

Gallery owner Max K. Bollag then

estimated the loss at \$44 million. Two of the paintings accounted for \$40 million.

Other experts disputed the figure.

Police and prosecutors said the Picasso paintings had been recovered with the help of an unnamed intermediary, who was rewarded by being allowed to keep two of the paintings. The police did not elaborate.

A Swiss man and two Italians were jailed in 1996 for the theft, but the paintings were not recovered at the time.

The stolen paintings included Picasso's "Seated Woman," a gouache on canvas painted in 1903, and "Christ of Montmartre," a watercolor painted shortly afterward. The two pictures had been stolen from the gallery once before, in 1991.

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