

Q&A



Kim Thayil, Matt Cameron, Chris Cornell, Ben Shepherd

SOUNDGARDEN

Eclectic tracks from the past find new life on the band's box set

KIM THAYIL ISN'T BIG ON LOOSE ends. For years, the Soundgarden guitarist had thought about rounding up all of his band's B-sides, covers, live tracks, soundtrack cuts and other stray recordings, and now it's done. The Seattle grunge pioneers released *Echo of Miles: Scattered Tracks Across the Path*, a triple-disc box set that delivers precisely what the title promises: a vast hodgepodge of tunes spanning the late 1980s through 2014.

The Grammy-winning, multiplatinum-selling band never intended to cultivate such a diffuse discography. If Thayil, singer Chris Cornell, drummer Matt Cameron and bassist Ben Shepherd took the time to learn and record a song, they figured it was good

enough for a proper album. But record labels often wanted product for foreign markets and side releases, and in some cases—like the previously unreleased 1996 outtake "Kristi"—the band abandoned songs before they were finished. Then there were tunes like "Storm," an early live favorite that the group had never properly recorded.

Echo of Miles is a fascinating look at one of the alt-rock era's most complex bands. Broken up into "Originals," "Covers" and "Oddities," these 50 tracks comprise everything from a remake of Cheech and Chong's "Earache My Eye" to the Beatles' "Come Together" to "Night Surf," a trippy instrumental sharing little in common with the group's usual dark and stormy psych-metal

sound. If nothing else, the set will tide fans over until the next new Soundgarden album, which Thayil hopes to begin next year.

How'd you end up with all the material?

In the early days, we would orient our albums toward vinyl. You're limited to two sides, about 45 minutes. With four guys writing songs, we had plenty of material that wouldn't make the record. We'd set them aside. Maybe there'd be a movie soundtrack or some compilation. We started getting a backlog. It's helpful for trying to find material for B-sides and international releases. But these always seemed like little loose ends. We went to the trouble of learning them and recording them, but they were left on the side of the road.

Were any better than you recalled?

All of them are as good as we thought they were, because most of them were intended for albums. Many were left off of albums because of space limits. That's a difficult decision to make. You have all these songs. You like them all. Which ones do you like less? We didn't really like one less. We'd say, "Let's put our best foot forward. We really enjoy playing these live. Let's get them on the record."

Is that what happened with "Kristi"?

We really loved the song, but it wasn't completed for one reason or another. I wasn't happy with some of my guitar performances at the time, and Chris wasn't happy with some of his vocals. But Matt and our producer Adam [Kasper] liked them. Over the years, Matt and Adam would remind us about the track and say, "This is a real gem. You guys ought to consider having us mix it." When Adam played it for me, it was like, "Oh, my God, that was amazing. What were we thinking then?"

And "Storm" was an old song producer Jack Endino found on a demo tape?

We were very aware of that song. We used to play it a lot in the mid-'80s. When Matt joined the band, we started writing a lot of new material, and "Storm" kind of took a backseat. But it was a fan and a band favorite, and it was one of two songs that Matt always wanted to try to record. I don't think we had any recordings of Matt playing "Storm." So I brought it up to the band and said we could try to record it and get Jack to do it. We did it in May when we had a bit of downtime. It turned out great.

Do you have a favorite cover song from disc two?

Gosh, when I listened to the disc, there were some songs I hadn't heard in years. My memory was perhaps that the performances weren't satisfactory. Once again, this is just self-conscious, artistic-temperament sort of crap. But when I listened to it again, when we were working on this, I thought it was amazing. A lot of it has to do with the mix and the mastering, and getting over oneself and what you might have thought 20 years ago and saying, "That was really pretty good. It has its charm." If I had to pick one, I'd have a hard time, but "Into the Void," the Black Sabbath cover, stands out for a couple of reasons.

Like what?

One is that Ben had presented Chris with some lyrics from an apocryphal speech

attributed to Chief Sealth, who was a Native American chief. It was a speech he did not write, but it's a criticism on environmental exploitation. Chris took the speech—it has a meter similar to the lyrics on Sabbath's "Into the Void"—and he substituted the lyrics. It was an amazing idea, and fun to do. We took this song we love by Sabbath and made it very Seattle. You can't get more Seattle than taking this speech attributed to this chief from the area. And the other thing—and I forgot to put this in the liner notes—is that it was nominated for a Grammy for Best Metal Performance in 1993.

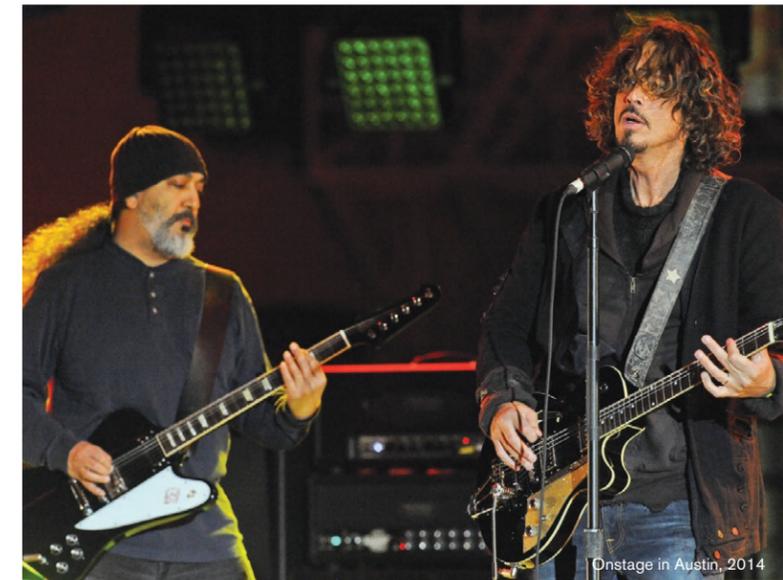
The covers disc shows off the band's different facets.

Many of these songs are homages to things that influenced us. But a lot of it was parody. For instance, if we're doing Spinal Tap and

Sly and the Family Stone song ["Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)"]. Or "Fopp," an Ohio Players track. These were heavy riffs, funk, R&B—and we took them and said, "Let's emphasize the main riff." We jokingly refer to it as Sly and the Family Sabbath. I'm not playing the guitar parts from the song, I'm taking the bass riff and making that a heavy riff. Same with "Fopp." We cranked up the guitar riff. There are some really cool brass runs on the original Ohio Players version. I figured it out on guitar, and Steve Fisk, our producer, doubled the riff on keyboard.

Eager to start the next new album?

It's no fun unless we're writing songs. *King Animal* was just two years ago, and Matt's been touring with Pearl Jam for much of the past year. And Chris was writing and doing some solo things. But we did tour, and we



Onstage in Austin, 2014

'You have all these songs. You like them all. Which ones do you like less?'

Cheech and Chong songs, it's because we loved them when we were younger. I had the single of "Earache My Eye" and "Basketball Jones." Sometimes, our interpretation of things is a bit wacky. But it shows our sense of humor, and our regard and respect for certain bands and the material.

These are bands you all like?

Everyone in the band loves Devo. Everyone loves the Ramones. We all love Fear, Sabbath, Hendrix and the Beatles. These were important enough to us that we thought we could do our take on them. Especially the

put out the *Superunknown* 20th anniversary edition, and finally after 20 years, we put out *Echo*. That was a lot of work for me, tending to the catalog and making sure the packaging and artwork were all coordinated. In February we're headed to Australia, and sometime after that, we'll find time to start working on new material.

—Kenneth Partridge



'With four guys writing songs, we had plenty of material that wouldn't make the record.'