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hat's Sugar Ray bassist Murphy Karges, talking from a motel room in Denver about the song any casual observer of the band who brought us 'Mean Machine' may have deemed a serious, but inescapably pleasing, diversion from their previous game plan.

"But a lot of people went, 'That's the best I've ever heard.' I guess that's the way that goes, and you just can't worry about it at the end of the day. You just have to go, 'You know what? It's a good song. I think people will dig this for summer, so let's just do it.' So, we did it, and it worked out in the advantage for us."

The song so good it gets two chances on Sugar Ray's follow-up to *Lemonade And Brownies*, *Floored*, sticks out like a licked thumb from the songs that surround it — the dope edge to a largely amphetamine ride — but listening to Murphy wax fan-struck on his influences, it's easy to see he for one isn't interested in pledging allegiance to any one style of music. And although it was singer Mark McGrath who originally suggested the included cover of Adam and the Ants' 'Stand and Deliver' on *Floored*, Murphy's quick to kick a whole family of skeletons out of his closet when we get to talking about this song.

"It's almost like the heavy metal/glamour period of the 80s you could *maybe* say that people look at 'em like that. But I think it's baloney, because I think there were *incredible* songs being written in the 80s for new wave stuff — like, Duran Duran, Haircut 100, XTC, Adam and the Ants — they were doing some groundbreaking stuff. So, I don't think you can compare it to the glauouresque rock period that happened just after that. ['Stand and Deliver']'s kind of a tribute to the fact we think there was a ton of great music being written."

Credibly so, it was the discovery of the Sex Pistols that most prominently inspired Murphy and co. to pursue a common dream Mark McGrath has summed up as an urge to "drink, scream and fuck", more commonly categorised as 'musician' on one's passport. Murphy proudly announces that he and Mark were the only two Sugar Rays to have their passes signed by every mobile member of the Sex Pistols when the former got to play with the latter on their *Filthy Lucre* reunion tour.

"It was really fun. We had all grown up listening to them, that was like our education to the world, and to punk rock and music and stuff... at least mine and Mark's — I know everyone else listened to 'em, but I was *really* into 'em and so was Mark. You're still a fan

"I ALMOST WANT TO CALL IT EITHER STUPID ENOUGH OR GUTSY ENOUGH TO RELEASE A SONG CALLED 'FLY'. I BET IF I COULD'VE PLAYED IT TO A BUNCH OF MY FRIENDS THEY MIGHT'VE THOUGHT, 'AW, DUDE, THAT SONG IS TERRIBLE, LIKE, IT'S REALLY LAME AND POPPY OR SOMETHING.'"

when you're playing shows like that, there's no element of, like, 'Yeah, we're veterans...' You're still excited to see... I mean, you're *overwhelmed*, you're not just excited. We're excited to play with bands that we're playing with — we're excited to play with Smashmouth now, we're on tour with them, and then on the *Warped Tour* with bands like Social Distortion, the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, and stuff like that, we were excited to play with them — but to play with the Pistols, I mean, if you can say it, it was kind of almost an honour, it really was, 'cause however they were, good or bad, they have their place in the history of music."

As humble as all that gushing may sound, there's no mistaking the inherent (but obviously tongue-in-cheek) pomposity instilled in the cover design of *Floored*. Although not a real Sugar Ray pinball machine, it looks good enough to fool ya, and there's no mistaking the implied meaning of a gesture such as that the mechanical rendering of a band's status as world champions.

"Exactly, that's why we wanted to do it," says Murphy. "It was kind of a spoof on that, and we would already have our pinball machine made for us. Only so many bands have pinball machines made after them."

On further examination of the *Floored* cover art, it's heartening to see Sugar Ray haven't ditched an old pal you should remember first spotting in the 'Mean Machine' video, even though his musical input into the band could be judged right down there with Sid Vicious' to the Sex Pistols. He's an English bulldog called Austin, and Murphy thinks it's fair to call him the band mascot.

"That's [guitarist] Rodney [Sheppard]'s girlfriend's dog. He's come to a lotta videos. Sometimes he comes to shows and he hangs out, covers his ears — 'Woof! Woof!' — he's a friendly dog."

And it has to be a genuinely friendly band member who'll do a dog impersonation you're not tempted to punch him in the face for. To prove it further, Murphy tells me he's working on the new Sugar Ray Website which was just getting going the day we talked.

"What I'm most interested in is talking to our fans on our Web page. We're gonna be able to post a letter and people will be able to write in and answer it, and post their letter to. It's really cool, we are communicating with the fans all over the world."

It seems the fans couldn't pick a nicer bass player to communicate with.

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