

ARTS

Sombre mix sounds right

by Mike Raycraft

Sting
Soul Cages
A&M Records

Since his first days as a pop pup, any new work from Gordon Sumner has been eagerly anticipated. Gordon Sumner? Sting. Just in case you've forgotten. Love him or hate him, Sting has always been one of rock's more intelligent artists. With or without The Police, his musical dabblings have produced some very memorable works over the past decade.

Soul Cages, his first studio effort in nearly four years, proves to be no exception.

Produced by Sting along with Hugh Padgam, of "Synchromicity" and Phil Collins fame, *Soul Cages* has "the sound." That crystal clear, impeccable sound which came across on 1987's "... Nothing Like The Sun."

Back as well are some of the extraordinary musicians Sting has added to his working repertoire since the demise of The Police: Manu Katche on drums, Kenny Kirkland on keyboards, and Branford Marsalis on saxophone.

Recorded mainly in Paris and Migharino, Italy, *Soul Cages* is not as loose or improvised as "Dream of the Blue Turtles", nor is it as smooth as "... Nothing Like The Sun." Rather, *Soul Cages* is an incredibly

sombre mix of songs that rekindles some of Sting's earliest memories as a young boy growing up in the shipping town of Newcastle, England. The album is abundant with such imagery. Ships, rivers, oceans and seas are at the heart of many a tune.

There are also many a reference to his late father, (*Soul Cages* is, in part, dedicated to his memory) his family and his Catholic up-bringing.

The haunting opening, "Island of Souls" encompasses most of this. It tells the tale of a son coping with his father's death, while desperately trying to avoid following in his footsteps; the grim life of laboring endlessly in the shipyards. "They launched the great ship out to sea. He felt he'd been left on a desolate shore. To a future he desperately wanted to flee. What else was there for a riveter's son. A new ship to be built, new work to be done."

"All This Time", the album's first single, tells a similar story, focusing on the river, as symbol of continuity, as it's central images.

Strong references to religion is brought out in "All This Time." While a light-hearted, up-beat piece, Sting asks some pragmatic questions about Catholicism. "Father, if Jesus exists, then how come he never lived here?"

Religious reflection is also plentiful elsewhere on *Soul Cages*. From the title of the instrumental "Saint Agnes and the Burning Train" to "When Angels Fall" to the tongue-

in-cheek nod regarding the Old Testament's prophet of doom, "Jeremiah Blues (Part I)."

"Jeremiah" is about as loosely worked as any song on *Soul Cages*, it may be in fact the only one that stirs up memories of the free-flowing "Dream of the Blue Turtles."

The title track, "The Soul Cages", further examines the torments of environmental trappings. A "boy-child" makes a wager with an elderly fisherman, who is the king of the sea. Though enjoyably hard-edged, it is a rather gloomy tale, similar to a deal made with the devil.

"Why Should I Cry For You", which closes out the side one, is perhaps the most poignant piece on the album. Carrying a slight Brazilian rhythm, Sting has embarked on a soul searching voyage via the high sea, once again pondering his love for his father. "And what am I to say, that I loved you in my fashion." In it's entirety, *Soul Cages* is a moving recorded work. Its long treks over oceans and seas takes us to the very roots of Sting's deepest and most private memories. Lyrics are gripping, melodies are intricate and musicianship is extraordinary.

Sting has apparently exorcised his past demons. With *Soul Cages*, he has assumingly come to terms with his past, presuming it is a past he has hated so. Bob Marley once said "... in this great future you can't forget you're past." *Soul Cages* is this realization.

At the I.D.A.



A. CLIVE COHEN

Fernando Baldassini's untitled collage (top) captures man's ascent. The untitled and unnamed painting (right) shows an abstract crucifixion, while Penney Zare Parsi's untitled impasto illustrates the inferno beyond the wall.



A. CLIVE COHEN



A. CLIVE COHEN

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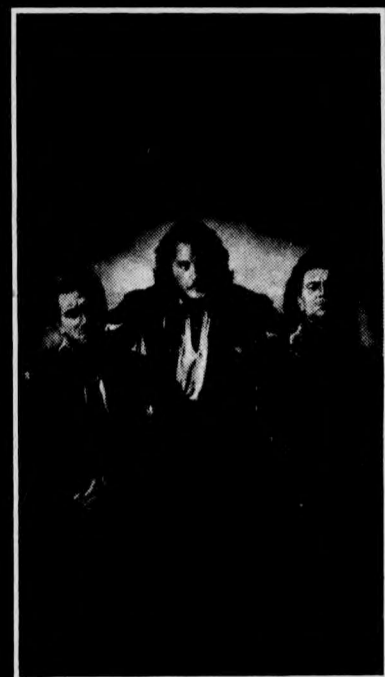
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