

# BASKING IN THE Afterglow

Sarah McLachlan enjoys the fruits of the post-Lilith Fair world.

BY TODD R. BROWN

Sarah McLachlan has been taking it easy. While most artists would play live, virtually nonstop, to promote a new album, McLachlan released her "Afterglow" CD in 2003 and didn't hit the road until July, for the first time since performing in 1999 at Lilith Fair concerts. Then she took a break in September. This April, McLachlan kicks off the second leg of her tour, on the heels of this winter's "Afterglow Live" CD and DVD set. At 7:30 p.m. May 8, she visits the Office Depot Center in Sunrise.

Not that the singer and songwriter hasn't been busy otherwise; she just has her priorities in order. After Lilith wrapped up in 1999, the 37-year-old Canadian native focused on raising her infant daughter, India, with her husband and drummer, Ashwin Sood. India came into the world just five months after McLachlan lost her mother to cancer.

"To me, 'Afterglow' is a perfect metaphor for that reason," McLachlan said on her Web site. "Such a huge transition...first, losing my mother, then five months later giving birth to India. It's still all a blur to me—it has less to do with the album tracks and more to do with my recent state of mind. I'm sure in five or six years, there's going to be a record about all of this, but it's too close right now."

While professional commitments have taken a backseat to family matters in McLachlan's recent life, she hasn't shied away from the stage for the sake of charity. In January she joined Avril Lavigne, Sum 41 and Barenaked Ladies for a sold-out benefit concert in Vancouver, Canada, that raised \$3 million for victims of the tsunami in South Asia and inspired a second show in Calgary.

McLachlan has been involved with fund raising for years. According to the All Music Guide reference Web site, in 1992 she traveled to Cambodia and Thailand to work on a documentary about poverty and

child prostitution. Her latest video, for the single "World on Fire," compares the cost of its production to paying for food and social services for Third World children. McLachlan also funds the Sarah McLachlan Music Outreach program through her charitable foundation. The program provides free, after-school instruction in guitar, piano, "world beat" percussion and choir to inner city students whose music classes have been affected by budget cuts.

"As a kid," McLachlan said on her site, "music saved my life; having that one thing that I knew I was good at made all the difference. A lot of these kids might have that, but there's no outlet. It feels so good to be able to see their lives impacted, and I'm the first one at the recitals giving them a standing ovation. There's hardly any job comparable."

McLachlan studied classical guitar and piano as a child and joined a rock band as a skateboarding teenager in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She became an underground fan-favorite with the release of her debut album, "Touch," on Vancouver's Nettwerk Records in 1988. Her 1993 album, "Fumbling Toward Ecstasy," sold slowly but went platinum in just more than a year thanks to its heavily played single, "Possession." To date McLachlan has sold 22 million albums and won three Grammys; her latest nomination, for female pop-vocal performance on her 2004 single "Fallen," she lost to Norah Jones.

From 1997 to 1999, McLachlan organized the Lilith Fair package tours, which proved that "women's music" could not only compete with but outsell Lollapalooza, OzzFest and other all-day, macho, rock-metal-rap concerts. The three Lilith tours—named for Adam's first wife, who was created from the earth as an equal partner and who refused to "lie beneath" him like Eve (which probably is why Lilith didn't make

it from the Hebrew bible into the latest edition)—attracted two million fans and raised \$7 million for charities for women.

Even more important, Lilith gave female music-lovers a sense of community and confidence. In the '90s such artists as Sheryl Crow, fellow Canuck Alanis Morissette and No Doubt's Gwen Stefani enjoyed blockbuster, breakthrough success. But despite the burgeoning market, McLachlan said she still found resistance among concert bookers to pool feminine-minded, alternative rock performers for a group tour.

So McLachlan took that idea herself and developed it to include consciousness-raising, activist groups such as the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) and Amnesty International. She also provided secondary stages that gave lesser stars, including alt-rocker Juliana Hatfield and country singer-songwriter Kelly Willis, a chance to build up their audiences.

As a fringe benefit, McLachlan became a huge star. A 15-year-old fan at a 1999 Lilith concert e-mailed the festival's Web site to say: "I could not help myself from smiling the whole evening; I had such a great time. It was very moving to see, and be surrounded by, so much greatness, yet not feel threatened or little, but to rather feel as if I were a part of the concert, and to feel even more whole as a person, for just having been there."

You can't buy that kind of appreciation, but you can bank on it. McLachlan now enjoys the luxury of calling her own shots, in her life as well as her career. As she sings on "Perfect Girl," from "Afterglow": "I own my insecurities, I try to own my destiny/That I can make or break it if I choose."

Afterglow? Not quite: Sara McLachlan is still red-hot among her fans, and their radiant love is pretty hard not to bask in. **CS**