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Nirvana song is 'Right' for radio

By Joan Anderman, Globe Staff, 10/4/2002

For a long time it seemed like it would never happen. But after a protracted legal battle, the last known song recorded by the seminal alternative rock band Nirvana - laid to tape in January 1994, less than three months before Kurt Cobain committed suicide - is suddenly all over the radio. A Nirvana career retrospective, which includes the track, is due in stores Nov. 12.

"A breath of fresh air" is how WBCN music director Steven Strick describes "You Know You're Right." "It's just a tremendous song," he says.

"This is the top phone request, far and above everything else," says Kevin Mays, music director at the 'FNX Radio Network, the first station to play "You Know You're Right" in New England. 'FNX began playing an MP3 file lifted off Nirvanaclub

.com last Wednesday before receiving a cease-and-desist order from Universal Music's legal department. A label-sanctioned CD single was released on Monday. "Nobody can believe how good it is. I was thinking it was probably a throwaway, something they stuck away because it wasn't so great. But this song could have been on any of their albums."

The track is unmistakably Nirvana: a grinding rush of indie rock shot through with melody and shattering guitars. But if Nirvana had lived on, the song would have been seen as a transition, says Mark Kates, founder of Boston's Fenway Recordings, who at the time was Nirvana's A&R representative at Geffen Records. Kates heard a cassette tape of "You Know You're Right" shortly before Cobain's death.

"I'd had a conversation with him about the next record and what he wanted to do," says Kates. "Kurt wanted to be something besides a loud rock band with a songwriting style that was so identifiable. He thought they had become a little predictable. Coming off of [1993's] "In Utero," hearing this song where he was so vocally dominant was exciting. Of course we'll never know what the next direction would have sounded like."

Courtney Love, widow of Kurt Cobain, and the surviving members of Nirvana had been locked in a long legal battle over

Log on to ae.boston.com to hear an audio clip of Nirvana's "You Know You're Right."

the rights to the band's music. Concurrently, Love filed a lawsuit against Universal Music Group last year to terminate her band Hole's recording contract, charging the label with fraudulent business practices. Nirvana was signed to a Universal-owned label as well.

This week Love settled her lawsuit against Universal before the case went to court. As part of the

settlement, Universal freed Love from her record deal and gave her ownership of unreleased Hole music; in exchange, the label can sell a series of long-awaited Nirvana packages - which was given the go-ahead from Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic, the surviving members of Nirvana. Love, Grohl, and Novoselic announced the settlement of their dispute over the band's musical legacy on Monday.

"It involved lots and lots of money," Love told Howard Stern.

In addition to the retrospective due next month, a boxed set is scheduled for release in 2004 and a collection of rare and unreleased songs will also be released. Meanwhile, fans will have to make do with "You Know You're Right," which is being spun morning, noon, and night on rock radio.

"It was surreal saying 'this is new music from Nirvana,'" says 'FNX's Mays. "Who thought we would ever get to say that again?"

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