**Courtney & Nirvana: Smells Like a Sellout**

By Gina Serpe

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Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit"--coming soon to a soap ad near you?

So far Courtney Love ... is ruling that out, but chances are we'll be hearing more of the seminal grunge band's music in unexpected places now that Kurt Cobain's cash-strapped widow has agreed to sell off a 25 percent stake in the Nirvana song catalog in a deal valued at $50 million, per *Rolling Stone*.

On the other end of the deal is Larry Mestel, the former COO of Virgin Records and current head of Primary Wave Music Publishing.

To preemptively squelch backlash from fans worried about the over-commercialization of a decidedly anticorporate band, Love sought to assure the Nirvana faithful that the music won't simply be licensed to the highest bidder.

"We're going to remain very tasteful, and we're going to [retain] the spirit of Nirvana and take Nirvana places it's never been before," Love told the magazine.

"I took on a strategic partner, Larry Mestel, to help me comanage the estate because it was overwhelming," Love said. "The affairs of Nirvana are so massive and so huge, and they've all fallen on my lap.

"I own almost all of [the publishing]...and it proved to be too much for me. I needed a partner to take Kurt Cobain's songs and bring them into the future and into the next generation. And this guy's the guy to do it," she said.

Following her husband's 1994 suicide, Love became the primary benefactor of Cobain's estate, which included ownership rights of more than 98 percent of Nirvana's song catalog. The other two former members, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic, own the remainder--slightly less than 2 percent split between them. The new deal does not affect their portion.
Mestel, too, is quick to quell rumors that he's just another suit out to profit on Cobain's legacy.

"My goal is to keep the music very true to who the songwriter was and what his passions and tastes would be and to work through Courtney to figure out exactly the best way to go about exposing his music to a new youth culture to a new generation," Mestel said.

He also told Rolling Stone that he was thrilled to have been able to buy into the Nirvana catalog and become, with his three-year-old company, a part of music history.

"The appeal to me is that [Cobain was] one of the most important songwriters of his time," Mestel said. "Kurt was an incredible songwriter, and Courtney is an exceptionally talented person herself. So I felt the combination of Courtney's creativity and the things I can add can really help in creating more value for these copyrights."

Novoselic and Grohl, long-time adversaries of Love, have yet to comment on the new deal. But we're guessing they're none too pleased.

When rumors first swirled that Love was looking to unload a stake in the lucrative catalog, it was expected that the duo may have first dibs, but, based on their troubled history with Love, it's doubtful they were ever offered the chance.

In 2001, Love filed suit against Grohl and Novoselic in an attempt to gain sole custody of the Nirvana songbook, calling the duo merely "sidemen" in the band, which she equated as a one-man show--the man of course being her late husband. The same year, Grohl and Novoselic struck back, filing their own suit alleging Love was using Cobain's music to "further her own career goals," calling her a "greedy prima donna" with a "waning recording and acting career."

Love also filed suit against Grohl and Novoselic and Nirvana's label, Universal Music Group, to block the release of a Nirvana box set, The Heart-Shaped Box. The suit was eventually settled and the album released.

In an interview with Blender magazine last year, Love claimed that "$40 million has been stolen from me and Frances by a fiduciary institution." In July, she blamed former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl for her financial woes, telling Spin magazine that Grohl had been "taking money from my child for years."

Aside from the wrangling over Nirvana, Love's once considerable fortune has been sapped by lawsuits, liens and numerous drug-related charges. In January, a mortgage company took possession of a Seattle-area house owned by Love (and the former residence of Cobain's sister), after the singer-actress failed to make payments. Last August, a Manhattan financial firm moved to foreclose on her pricey New York condo, claiming she had not made a mortgage payment in months.

But things are looking up. Aside from the Mestel deal, Love was given a good report card in February by a Los Angeles judge in her last remaining drug case. For her part, Love told the judge she had put her "very gnarly drug problem" behind her.

She's also resuming her own music career. Love is in the studio recording a follow-up to her 2004 solo album, America's Sweetheart. Linda Perry, Moby and Billy Corgan are pitching in, with the latter joining Love for a track called, aptly enough, "How Dirty Girls Get Clean."