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# A.P.

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## lennon

Lennon Murphy knows how most music buyers think, and she's pretty disgusted. "There are two types of people who listen to music," she opines. "There are people who love music, and they listen to it because they truly enjoy it and they can relate to lyrics and melodies. Then there are people who watch *TRL* and buy nothing but Limp Bizkit, Korn, Backstreet Boys, Kid Rock, 'N Sync and Britney. I know people like that, and they have all those records on their shelf right next to each other." So how is this one-woman wrecking crew going to smash down the music business? "I'm one *person*," she corrects. "I'm not so into the fact that I'm a woman. So what? I have personal experiences that I can share and people can relate to." On her Arista debut, *5:30 Saturday Morning* (out Sept. 11), Lennon wants to set the emotional bar a few notches higher than Alanis Morissette has, and she's ready to take the jump. "I want longevity," she stresses, "and one way to achieve that is to not direct [my work] exclusively towards youth: Your parents could buy my record, but the first song on the album is called 'Property Of Goatfucker.'" —Jason Pettigrew

A tattered ticket stub from a great concert. An old photo of family and friends. We've all got mementos in our wallets, and 19-year-old singer-songwriter Lennon is no exception. She carries the original lyric sheet to "5:30 *Saturday Morning*," the title track of her debut album, wherever she goes. Resolutely holding on to her own words, written in her own hand, may seem sentimental, self-nurturing, even sweet. And the song itself is a rich piano ballad redolent with pre-dawn, love-drunk emotion. But form a snap impression of the artist based on the tune — and the tender act of preserving it on paper as a kind of talisman — and you'll soon be sweeping up the shards.

# LENNON

## 5:30 *Saturday Morning*

"I've played punk and hardcore clubs, and I've played the most distinguished blues and jazz clubs. I've played with 30 different bands," Lennon recites, her matter-of-fact tone belying her youth. But while her experience can perhaps be justified — Lennon grew up just outside of Nashville, a.k.a. *Music City*, and has been writing songs since she was seven — her sound is an absolute head-spinner. Assaultive. Intense.

From individuality anthems like "*Morning*," with its relentlessly ominous rhythm and guitars, and the cranked-up, pissed-off "*Property of Goatfucker*," to such love-is-hell pieces as bleak and treacherous first single "*Brake Of Your Car*" and "*These Days*," a storm of menacing guitars, sinister keyboards and monstrous background growls, it is obvious this girl is high on the hard stuff. Yet Lennon also uncannily merges the heavy with the heavenly on "*Couldn't Breathe*" and wields whisper on the hammering "*Trying To Make Me*." And yes, she's the same artist who aches on the delicate "*Asking You*" and the aforementioned title track.

Lennon's songwriting dexterity and flat-out gorgeous voice — vigorous, passionate, defiant and feral but never strident or shrieky — attracted attention immediately.

"My first real show was in this small bar — me on keyboards, with a backup singer and a guitarist," she recalls. "It was a four-hour show, all original stuff. I was 15. Right after that, everyone started coming around. I've been dealing with labels for years."

Before that, Lennon's primary audience — not to mention mentor, collaborator and inspiration — was her mother, Kathleen Murphy, an aspiring songwriter. "I always just wanted to be like my mom," Lennon says. "She played piano a little bit, so I started taking lessons at age four. She wrote country stuff, and to spend time with her, I would fix it — the music or the lyrics. I started doing stuff by myself shortly after that — just being bored and screwing around on the piano." Floored by her daughter's talent, Kathleen assumed a management role, culling players from the Nashville scene, booking gigs and negotiating with the various record companies vying for the young artist. Meanwhile, Lennon's life was, "School —

basically all honors classes — and between homework and tests I wrote songs and did shows."

A few days passed her 18th birthday — just as Lennon was about to graduate from high school and sign her record deal — tragedy struck. She arrived

home from school to find her mother dead of an apparent allergic reaction. But Lennon herself couldn't fall apart; she became solely responsible for her eight-year-old sister, Mariella, whom she and her mom had been raising since the child was an infant. "I had to take care of her," Lennon says, explaining that an aunt suddenly decided that she wanted Mariella, and a fierce custody battle ensued. "I couldn't rest, I went right back to school because if I broke down — if it looked like I wasn't going on — Mary would be taken away from me," says Lennon, who has formally filed for adoption and hopes to see the situation soon resolved. Suddenly finding herself without a mother — and becoming a mother herself — reinforced, rather than deterred, Lennon's musical goals. She needed her deal to support Mariella, and her own mom, of course, would have wanted Lennon to make her album. "My one stipulation was that we'd do the record here in Nashville, so when Mary got home from school my roommate could bring her to the studio," she says. In-between "household stuff — cooking, cleaning and running around to soccer games," Lennon threw herself into the recording process. "We went in, worked our asses off and had it done in a month."

As to her music's genesis Lennon simply says: "Inspiration? Fuck ... *life*." The power struggles on *5:30 Saturday Morning* reflect professional hurdles jumped: "In the music business, basically everybody wants you to be what they want," she explains, noting author Ayn Rand as a big influence "in terms of sticking to what you want to do."

But Lennon isn't especially concerned about whether people understand exactly where she's coming from. "If they get it, they get it" she says. "What I really want is for people to relate to my music — to put their lives into my songs." It may not be a safe place, inside Lennon's songs, but anyone who's ever known pain, or passion, or power, will be drawn to *5:30 Saturday Morning*. Any time of day. Any day of the week.

# Billboard

SEPTEMBER 15, 2001

## REVIEWS & PREVIEWS

★ LENNON

5:30 Saturday Morning

PRODUCERS: Jeffrey Pringle, Scotty Smith,  
Marcus (DJ) Siskind, and Spider

Arista 4669

Anyone who thinks that all female teenagers entering the music business are of the same cookie-cutter pedigree (a blond fashion plate who sings strictly made-for-radio fare) will be jolted from their jaded complacency upon hearing singer/songwriter Lennon's Arista debut, *5:30 Saturday Morning*. At 19, the Tennessee native has taken more musical chances on her debut than some seasoned artists have in their entire careers. She opens the set with the Rob Zombie-styled "Property of Goatfucker" and drops in some sinister organs and trippy voice-overs on first single "Brake of Your Car." Her two torch songs ("Asking You" and the title cut) will surely convert the most die-hard teen-queen fans, thanks to the artist's passionate piano playing and a lyrical honesty that's almost too authentic. For immediate gratification, go directly to "My Beautiful." Let it serve as your introduction to a solo artist who's poised for the top.—CLT



# Rolling Stone



## LENNON

### HOT METAL CHICK

Lennon Murphy is every hard-rock-loving dude's wet dream: a voluptuous teenage vixen with a penchant for bawdy lyrics and dark metal riffs. And, though she cops to a serious crush on Brendan Fraser, she's currently sans boyfriend.

Her debut album, *5:30 Saturday Morning*, catalogs "fucked-up relationships, getting screwed over or pissed off at someone" via headbangers that recall both Korn's gloomy aggression and Fiona Apple's arty dysfunction. "I'm on my knees finding you/Bring myself just low enough/To do what you want me to do," she sings in "Property of Goatfucker."

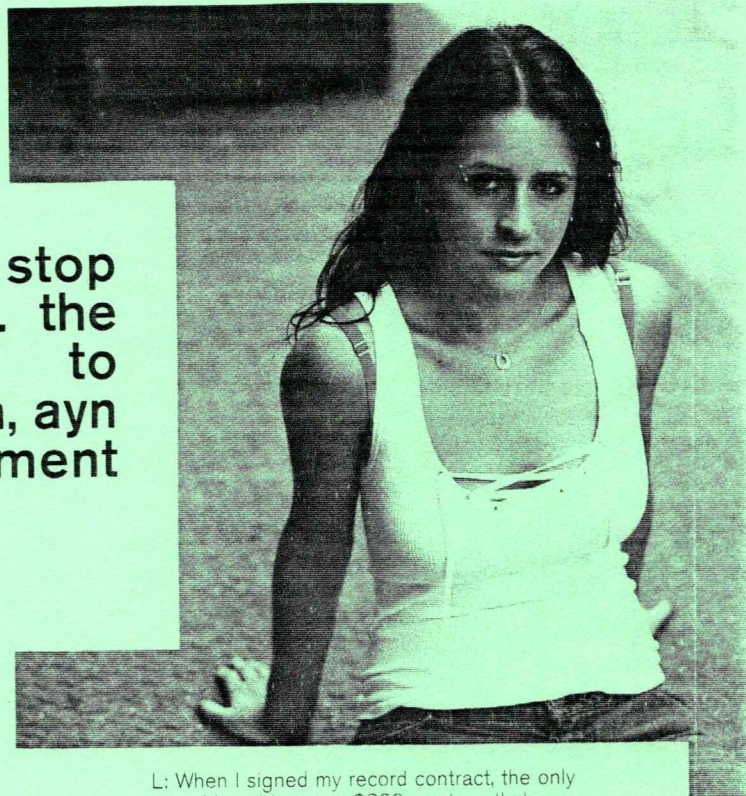
Ever since the nineteen-year-old played her first gig — a three-hour show at a dingy club in Hendersonville, Ten-

nessee, when she was only fifteen — she's understood how to raise eyebrows. "I like to say very sexual things just for shock value," she explains. "When I was younger, it was fun to hear whispers around the room, like, 'She's fifteen!'"

If you want to think all this brazen sexuality is a subversive feminist gesture, you're spending more energy worrying about the politics of gender than Lennon does. Except for Ani DiFranco, she's "not a big fan of" other women's music. Her tastes run more to Korn and Marilyn Manson. "I don't like the stigma of being a female artist," she says. "The only difference between me and everybody else is I don't have a dick. And sometimes I've got more balls than half the guys I perform with."

—JENNY ELISCU

**lennon hasn't let tragedy stop her from pursuing her dreams. the 18-year-old singer talks to tamara ikenberg about alienation, ayn rand, and a fierce commitment to making meaningful music. photographed by andrew levine**



**NYLON:** You've endured some serious family trauma. You found your mother dead from a fatal allergic reaction just as you were committing to a major record label deal, and now you're fighting for custody of your adopted sister, Mariella. Much has been made of your compelling story. Is it getting annoying?

**LENNON:** I think it's over-dramatized. I'm doing the best I can and I don't want to be reminded of it every single day. I started trying not to bring it up as much as possible.

**N:** Your debut album, *5:30, Sunday Morning*, blends raw, sometimes raunchy rock anthems, mournful ballads, and some truly uplifting tunes. You're bound to be compared to Alanis Morissette. What did you think of her sudden spiritual transformation after venturing to India?

**L:** I respected her more before she went. I didn't like her second album. I wanted something I could relate to. I like to have a connection with the lyrics. Her first album, I could definitely relate to lyrically. Hey, I've been fucked over, too.

**N:** OK. Go ahead and bash Britney and company.  
**L:** I'm not a big fan of the pop thing. I prefer for people to write their own stuff. If they put on a good show, instead of calling them artists, call them performers. A strip club puts on a good show, too.

**N:** Did you hear that A.J. from the Backstreet Boys is depressed and in treatment? What's up with that?

**L:** Maybe it's for press, maybe he's really depressed. But I can't really see why he's depressed. He's making a shitload of money. Come live my life for a day.

**N:** What drew you to making your own music?  
**L:** I had no friends; I was miserable and looking for something in my life. I never wanted to be on stage. And I always wanted to write: music, stories, poetry.

**N:** Poetry? Like Jewel?

**L:** No. Not like Jewel. I write prose pieces

sometimes. They don't rhyme.

**N:** The first song on your album is called "Property of Goatfucker." What's the story?

**L:** It's an inside joke between me and my roommate. She has a tattoo on her lower back, and people would ask what it meant. It got to the point where we got so sick of people asking, we would say it meant "property of goatfucker." I hate naming songs.

**N:** Do you think it'll be your first hit?

**L:** I think if it ever went to radio it would be over-popularized. It's more like a show thing. People know it.

**N:** Your mom, Kathleen, was an aspiring musician, and your biggest fan and supporter. How did she influence you while you were growing up?

**L:** She played Frank Sinatra, Harry Chapin, Jim Croce—singers who told stories. I studied piano since I was 4, and my mom taught me to sing. That's why I can't breathe right on stage. I like my voice because it's not trained. It doesn't sound like anyone else. It sounds better on stage than in the studio. My mom pushed me on stage at 15, for a three-hour set. I loved it.

**N:** You're a fierce performer. There's moaning, pounding, and grinding, and you alternate between sweet smiles and scowls. How would you describe your style?

**L:** Very animated. I play guitar, I play piano. I play around with the lyrics.

**N:** I've noticed you're a multi-tasker. Smoking, answering questions, emailing from your Palm Pilot, entertaining your sister... How is Mariella dealing with the rock 'n' roll lifestyle?

**L:** She's fine. I've taken her to every concert.

**N:** Do you indulge in said rock 'n' roll lifestyle?

**L:** When I play a show, that's my fun. I don't like going out. To me, fun is staying at home and watching a movie.

**N:** When the big bucks start rolling in, how are you gonna spend them?

**L:** When I signed my record contract, the only thing I bought was an \$800 used car that caught on fire three months ago. I hate spending money on myself. It's like, I could get this, or I could buy a week's worth of groceries for me and my sister. Um, I'll go with the groceries.

**N:** Did you have any ambitions besides becoming a musician?

**L:** My goal was, that if something didn't happen by the end of high school, I would go to college and do fashion design, because I make clothes, or be an English literature professor, which is my real passion.

**N:** What book are you most passionate about?

**L:** I got *The Fountainhead* for my 16th birthday. A friend gave me that and *East of Eden*. I rarely read books twice. I read *Fountainhead* twice. I've read every single one of Ayn Rand's books.

**N:** What ideals do you and Ms. Rand have in common?

**L:** Individualism against collectivism; standing on your own, no matter if you suck, no matter if you're weird.

**N:** What do you want from your career?

**L:** Credibility and longevity. I want to be doing this ten years from now. It would be dangerous to make me a role model. I fuck up too much.

# P W I S S E D

TOWER RECORDS' MUSIC MONTHLY



## Lennon

BY ANYONE'S account, the past 12 months have not gone well for Lennon. After the unexpected death of her mother late last year, the 19-year-old singer/songwriter, with a dirty, razor-sharp vernacular, threw herself into recording her debut album amid a painful battle with her estranged father for custody of her younger sister. If her personal tragedies weren't enough, her album *5:30 Saturday Morning* (Arista) endured a convoluted journey to completion. An A-list producer was appointed to helm Lennon's grinding, hard-edge sound, but was let go after he "screwed it up." After an attempt to salvage the album in a Colorado studio, the project was scrapped and Lennon was pissed. "We went back for a month and recut the whole album." Despite finding great personal freedom per-



KEN SCHLES

forming the songs live, as she recently did as opening act for the Cult, she admits not having

listened to the finished product. "I've wasted too much of my life recording this album. I never want to hear it again."

If Lennon won't sing her own praises, or even listen to her album, she already has a multitude of publications hailing her as the Next Big Thing. With her first single "Brake of Your Car," she proves a

stark contrast to the glossy singers of her age group. But it's another song, the piercing

"Property of Goatfucker," that's turning heads. "I knew it would cause all sorts of problems," says the singer who willingly admits her joy for shock. Those scared off by her bluntness might be surprised to learn that she's been writing songs since the age of 7, and wrote most of *5:30 Saturday Morning* alone on a piano. "I never wanted to be a singer; I always wanted to be a writer." Over the years, she's gained a love for performing. "It's the only time I feel alive," she says. However, it's onstage where she repeatedly endures drunken requests from the crowd to expose more than her cryptic songs. Her response to them: "Usually I tell them to go fuck themselves. They didn't pay enough at the door to get in for me to take my shirt off. That usually keeps them quiet. I mean, once people get past my tits, they can get to the music."

—CHRIS CHANDAR

## Lennon

5:30 Saturday Morning  
(Arista), September 11

**Her sound** Rock-metal meets Fiona Apple-ish lyrical exorcism (first track on the CD: "Property of Goatfucker").

**Her beginnings** "I was a child model in New York. I did Amway and *McCall's*. I was almost the OshKosh B'Gosh kid, but I started walking and I refused to crawl."

**Her pain** Lennon's mother died suddenly of an allergic reaction last year, a week before Arista offered Lennon a record contract. Lennon's now raising her sister, 8-year-old Mariella. "My main thing is, she always taught me to get on with my life and not hold back. She's with me every night, I love her to death. But I gotta support a kid now, so. . . ."

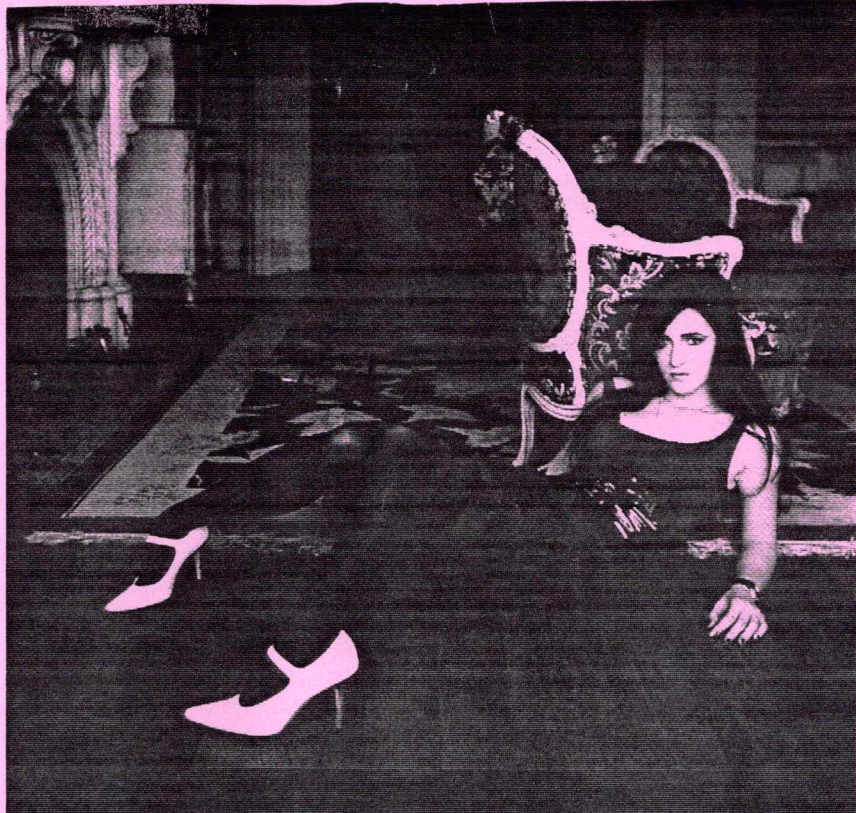
**On her pigeonhole** "I get labeled with the stupid, angry, grrrr-rock thing. A lot of my songs are about relationships—a lot of them are about this *one* relationship. But I'm not angry. You know, he *did* fuck me over—oh, he fucked me over good." She laughs. "The guy the songs are written about is my best friend now. It's almost a joke between us. He's like, 'See, you need to thank me for screwing you over.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I got a career out of it.'"

PHOTOGRAPHED BY FRANK W. OCKENFELS 3

FALL PREVIEW SPECIAL

# REQUEST

September / October 2001



▶ scouting report

## Lennon

**Who:** Raised in a small town outside Nashville, Tennessee, 19-year-old Lennon started reworking her mother's country songs and writing her own music when she was only 7. Impressed by her daughter's developing talents, her mother insisted that she perform her original tunes in public at age 15. "I fell in love with playing live," says Lennon, an initially reluctant singer-keyboardist who was eventually seduced by "the chance to be oneself" onstage.

**Sounds like:** After the heavily sugar-coated kiddie-pop overdose of the late '90s, this brash singer-songwriter shows us what it feels like to finally be all grown up. Lennon's biting, confessional lyrics, edgy atmospheres, and bombastic guitars sting like the advent of adulthood on her rawking full-length debut, *5:30 Saturday Morning*. "I have always found something very beautiful in hard music," she says.

**Light and shadow:** "I'm extremely shy. I don't like to go out at all." Onstage, however, Lennon unleashes a ferociously animated persona. "I get into the songs, and I just pretend there's no one around."

**Behind the music:** Following the recent death of her mother from an allergic reaction, Lennon began taking care of her 8-year-old adopted sister, Mariella, who travels on tour with her. Despite being embroiled in a custody battle with her aunt over Mariella, facing the prospects of life on the road as a single guardian, and teetering at the brink of stardom, Lennon takes things in stride. "I'm just trying to live life and that's it"

—Bryan Reesman + photograph by Ken Schick

gear

property of no one, thank you very much

# meet lennon murphy

**The question is in the air. Lennon Murphy can feel it. She's** heard it 50 times in the past three months. It's why she feels she hasn't given her best interview yet. Why, at 19, not having even released her first album yet, she already hates the press and the media game she must play.

The question always spoils it. Ask her about her cleavage ("size 34D and proud"), her obsession with Jerry Orbach, or if she was named after John (yes, she was), and she has no problem.

It's late July and Lennon's driving a 65-foot tour bus. She's got her nine-year-old adopted sister Mary and a mutt named Izzy by her side, en route to L.A. to shoot her first music video. Life is so good. Just don't ask...

"Yeah, my mom dropped dead last year, you fucker. Yeah, I found her dead. Yeah, I think about her every day. It's always the first question. No, 'hi' or any pleasantries. It's right into that and it's just so fuckin' rude."

**The Lennon Murphy PR bombardment is about to begin. Arista** — a company better known for Whitney Houston and Lite-FM tunes than pure-bred rock — is putting the full force of its machine into a guitar-wielding, piano-playing unknown from Dixieland who they believe could single-handedly revive the public's faith in rock. So the questions are coming full force.

"Fuck, that's a lot to be responsible for," Lennon says sarcastically. "I can't even keep my clothes clean and now I'm a savior? Please. Rock never died. Dormant, maybe. I think live music is dying and I'm definitely here to turn up the volume."

Lennon seems impossibly muted at our first meeting,

Article **Tim Wood**  
Photography **Randy Harris**



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"I'm lying on a bed, ass up, completely nude. No make-up, just natural sexy. What do you think?"

utterly at odds with the rock chick persona. How could this girl with zero energy possibly be the next, a better, Alanis?

Now, two minutes into our latest talk as she heads west, a different Murphy emerges. F-bombs are dropped at a frequency to rival vintage Eddie Murphy's *Raw*. Smiles, sexy laughs, lively talk. At ease in ratty jeans and a four-year-old cut-off that shows off her ample bosom — just the way she likes it.

Lennon is aware of everything — she doesn't need handlers or stylists or a phalanx of admirers. Her look is real, her attitude so refreshingly removed from Britney and the rest of the pre-fab teen idols. There are no parents, no older siblings. Just Lennon, her belief in her

rising stardom and her steadfast edict that no record label or magazine writer is going to control her fate.

She's proud behind the wheel of the tour bus, driving for 200 miles on the deserted highways outside of Dallas, over the Arizona line. She keeps repeating, "I drive the bus," as if she's begging me to use the cheesy metaphor. She's proud to be in control of details like her album cover photo.

"It's all my idea — it's like you're watching me through a video camera. I'm lying on a bed, ass up, completely nude. No makeup, no hair person, just natural, sexy. What do you think?"

There's a mania to her, a frantic quality that belies her cool, sexy image. "I don't sleep. I don't need it and I'm not going to end up on a shrink's couch. I'm in control. All the labels knew it. Arista knew exactly what they were getting. I'm not hiding anything. I just want to say, 'Fuck you' if you think you can package me the way you see fit. I'm packaging me. Nobody else."

**There's no better entrée in to Lennon's world than** track one of her Arista debut, *5:30 Saturday Morning*. "Property of Goatfucker" is a hard-rocking anthem of Nine Inch Nails-esque angst.

"We're in the secluded studio in Colorado, trying to fix the album that the first producer fucked up, and the song just came to me," she says. "I was dealing with a lot of shit and wasn't that easy to be around. I was feeling totally like everyone's puppet and I needed to get that out. All the execs were like, 'Goatfucker?'" But then [producer and Arista chairman] L.A. Reid heard it and loved it and suddenly, I've got it as cut No. 1 and all the execs are using 'Goatfucker' as a catch phrase."

That's just the beginning to an album that's pleasingly schizophrenic.

"It's hard, it's ballady. It's very introspective, because I'm trying to find myself and get on with life," she says of her work. "Tori Amos, Alanis, Black Sabbath, Lita Ford. Whatever you need to label me, go ahead. As long as you're listening to it."

People have been listening for years in her hometown of Hendersonville, Tennessee. She started playing shows at age 15, thanks to the pushing and shoving of her songwriting mom.

"I was so afraid, but my mom, she heard me and got this local bar — The Low Places Café — to give me a shot," she says of her first performance.

Lennon had always been counterculture in Hendersonville, a bible-thumping conservative town of 40,000, twenty miles north of Nashville. She dressed different, had few friends. While oth-





ers talked of last night's *Friends*, she was going gaga for Jerry Orbach on *Law and Order*. Performing gave her freedom from "the shitty politics of teenage high-school life."

Her dad had left the family many years ago. So traveling from gig to gig was just an extension of a tight-knit relationship with her mom. All the while, her instrumentals and lyrics — more *Silent All These Years* at that point — were getting her plenty of attention around Nashville. She played the Ryman Auditorium at 16.

**And then it happened. April 4, 2000. Kathleen Murphy had spent the past few weeks repainting the apartment in honor of visits from Arista executives. A record deal was pending. Kathleen, a songwriter with a taste for Sinatra and Manilow, left New York when Lennon was four to pursue a songwriting career that never took off.**

Lennon was two weeks away from graduating high school with a 4.0 GPA and a "Most Talented Female" yearbook title. She came home around lunchtime, thought her mom was out. So she practiced her music and took a nap. Hours later, with Mary due home from elementary school, Lennon realized something was wrong. That's when she found her mother's body in the closet of her upstairs bedroom. She was dead, of natural causes, at 49.

"The town rallied around us financially, kept Mary and I afloat for a few months," she says. "My mom was my *everything*." Months later, Mary's real father showed up wanting custody. Lennon's fighting it in court, keeping Mary on the road with her for now.

"It's an education for both," she says.

Lennon has spent the past year on the road, her first-ever expo-

sure outside of the Nashville area. She's played intimate dates and stadium shows with the Cult and Monster Magnet.

She says she's dealt with her mother's death, that her music speaks for the healing. A harder edge, a loud-pounding sound is in the mix now as Lennon has evolved into a one-woman music-making and marketing machine.

"I am myself on the stage. It's the only place I feel comfortable, like I can truly be in my skin," she says. "It's where I reveal what you see. The albums, the press, it's all a necessary evil to keep me on stage."

To keep on that stage, she'll do whatever it takes to get the audience to hear her.

"You know, guys could care less that I love sewing and Ayn Rand and Bill Murray. I've got boobs, I don't think I'm a bombshell, but fuck yeah, I'm going to use whatever I got to pull you in," she says. "My mom always told me, 'You'll keep 'em as soon as you hook them.'"

In fact, she's mastered the sell when it comes to men.

"It's a strip tease. I'm selling a package. I love making that eye contact with the one guy, making him feel like I'm singing to him only and moving on to the next pair of eyes. One guy at a time."

She has no clue where this current circus of promotion will end up, but she knows what she doesn't want.

"Listen, Morrisette's first album was genius and then the follow-up sounded like a total cop-out piece of shit. You could hear it; it sounded like the label bought her soul. I'll fade into oblivion before that's going to happen to me." □

# SPIN

October 2001

**LENNON** *5:30 Saturday Morning*  
(Arista) Looking for an antidote to Britney? Behold Lennon Murphy. The tough 19-year-old has her battle scars: The day before a big label meeting, she came home to her mother's dead body. Rather than sulk, Lennon, whose scorching riffs and tormented lyrics are more Black Sabbath than Alanis, channels her anger with enough sinew to take down the Rock. Never underestimate a scrappy teen who's hooked on the hard stuff and pissed as hell.

**HEIDI SHERMAN**

