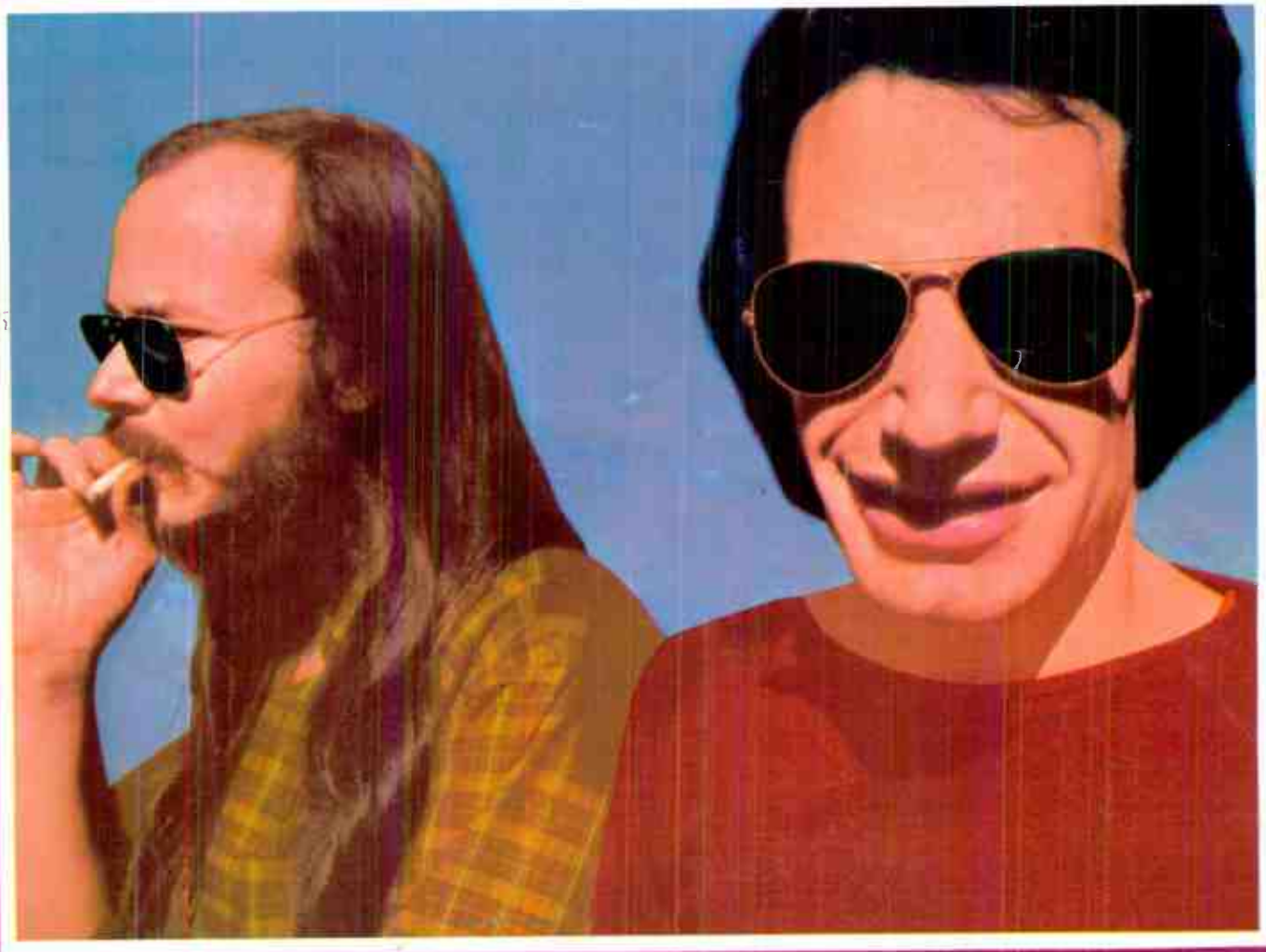
MUSICIAN

PLAYER & LISTENER

No. 20 Sept.-Oct. 1979 $1.25

Winning that Record Contract
Sales Slumps, Tuners, Reggae, Ulmer, Vocalists
Living in the Studio

STEELY DAN



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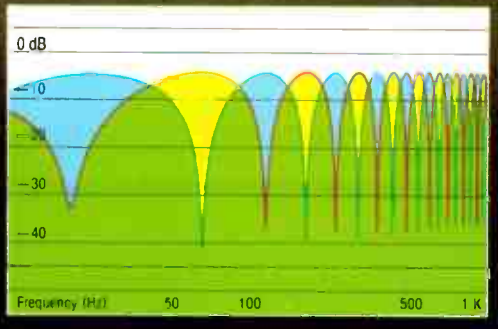
More than a chorus.



The new MXR Stereo Chorus stands alone among conventional chorus devices. Its unique design and sound almost defy description.

The Stereo Chorus utilizes advanced time delay circuitry providing a doubling effect for voices and instruments; one voice will sound like two singing in unison, two like four. As in nature, the voices can vary subtly in pitch. What you get is a natural choral effect. It can be used to thicken the sound, so that six-string guitars sound like twelve-strings. Through the introduction of extreme pitch bending, the Stereo Chorus will produce an intense vibrato, normally unattainable.

Not only is the Stereo Chorus musical and versatile, it also provides a means of achieving realistic stereo enhancement. We've included two outputs with complimentary notches and peaks in the frequency spectrum. The exact frequencies which are notched in one channel are boosted in the other. The graph shown is an actual response plot of the two outputs, which illustrates this concept. The Stereo Chorus transforms tones, harmonics and sounds into a lush and shimmering musical environment which surrounds the listener. This differs from similar devices which have one processed output, and one dry output. The Stereo Chorus provides a true stereo image which sounds more vibrant and alive than conventional chorus effects.

The manual control varies the delay time; a width control determines the amount of sweep; and a speed control adjusts the rate at which the delay is swept. A bypass switch provides noiseless accessibility to the dry signal in both outputs.

The MXR Stereo Chorus is equally geared for the studio or the road. We've included an internal switch which allows the selection of instrument or line level at both the input and output. Its high input impedance reduces the effects of loading when using long lines or other effects devices. Its low output impedance allows you to drive long lines and any other equipment. Superior circuit design has enabled us to maintain a wide bandwidth and dynamic range, ensuring signal fidelity.

The MXR Stereo Chorus is AC powered, ruggedly constructed to withstand the rigors of professional use, and is backed by MXR's reputation and commitment to the music industry. But reading about a product that has no equal is not enough. To appreciate what your music has been missing, see your MXR dealer.

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A symphony orchestra is a pretty complex affair. For a keyboard instrument to approximate the range of a symphony it has to be a lot more than just strings. The Roland RS-505 provides the ability to truly orchestrate music through the layering of many symphonic elements. Woodwinds, Horns, Strings and Bass voicings come to life with incredible richness and brilliance.

But orchestration is really just the beginning, as the RS-505's three unique tone-generating sections can be used any number of ways, for any number of effects—as a bass synthesizer, a lead instrument, or as a full range keyboard like a piano or harpsichord. The three sections can be played singly or together, and can independently be assigned to either half of the keyboard.

The key to the RS-505's flexibility lies within its polyphonic Synthesizer section. When contoured by the wide-range VCF, the Synth section produces full-bodied brass and woodwinds. The addition of the unique pitch-shift feature gives horns an added dimension of reality. The String and Bass sections produce voices that are warm, natural, and controllable.

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In fact, the only thing that's more amazing than its performance is its price—just $1695.00. The Rcland RS-505. It can start a lot of things for you. RolandCorp U.S.A., 2401 Saybrook Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90040 (213) 685-5141

Roland
We Design the Future

MUSICIAN
PLAYER & LISTENER

NO. 20, SEPT.-OCT. 1979

Steely Dan is the most advanced and creative rock band of the seventies. In a rare interview, Jon Pareles asks Becker and Fagen about their songwriting, recording methods, jazz influences, early history and more. Producer Gary Katz sits in.

Living in the Studio isn't easy. You've got to be on-time, in-time, at the right time all the time. Session guitarist David Spinozza and pianist Clifford Carter talk about what it takes to get in and stay in.

Making It is never easy, but there's a lot of very simple things you should know about the record business and how it works to make it easier. Miles Lourie and Karin Berg interviewed John Leopard reports.

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Cover Photo By Deborah Feingold

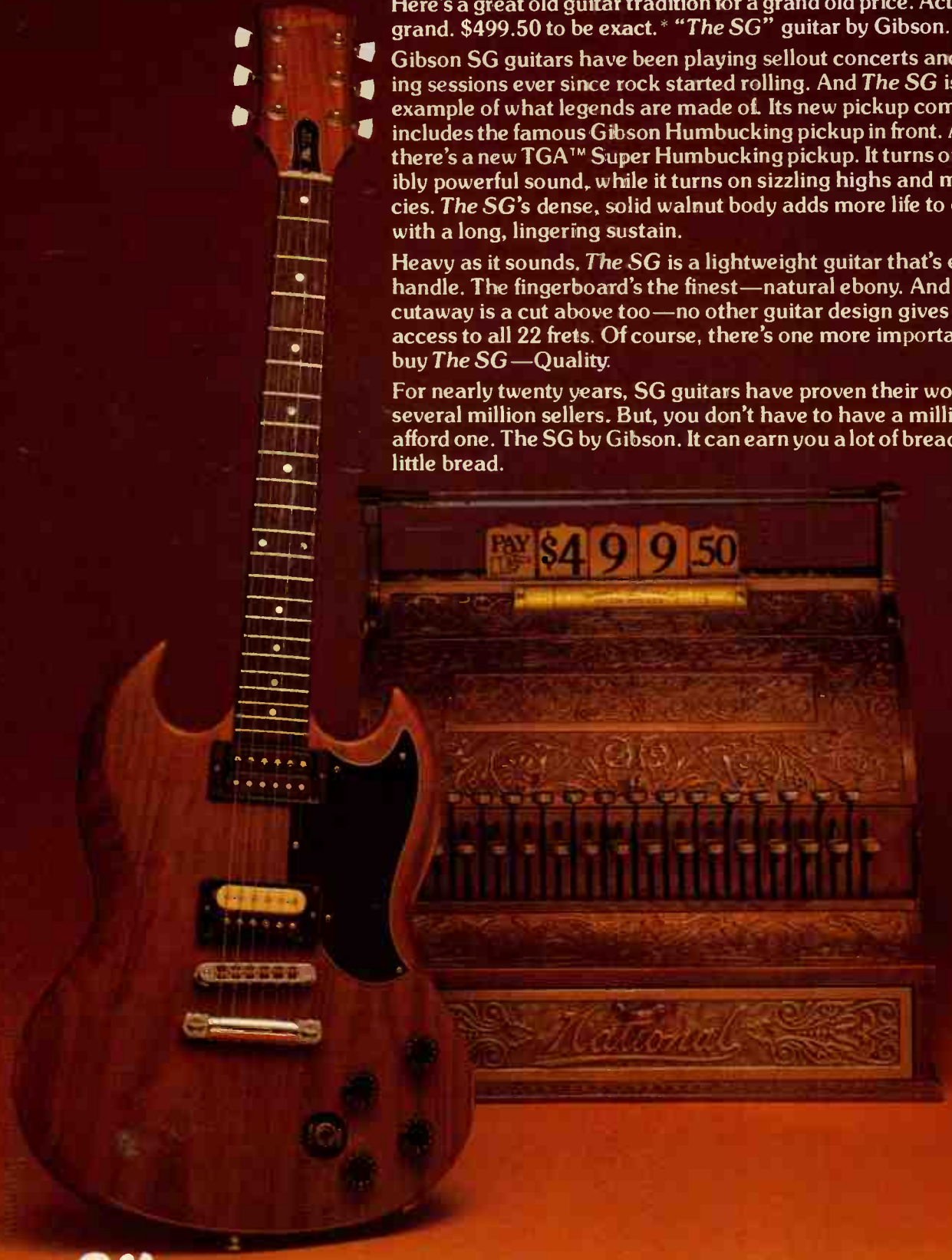
An SG. For half a G.

Here's a great old guitar tradition for a grand old price. Actually, half a grand. $499.50 to be exact.* *"The SG"* guitar by Gibson.

Gibson SG guitars have been playing sellout concerts and hit recording sessions ever since rock started rolling. And *The SG* is another example of what legends are made of. Its new pickup combination includes the famous Gibson Humbucking pickup in front. And in back, there's a new TGA™ Super Humbucking pickup. It turns out an incredibly powerful sound, while it turns on sizzling highs and midfrequencies. *The SG*'s dense, solid walnut body adds more life to each note, with a long, lingering sustain.

Heavy as it sounds, *The SG* is a lightweight guitar that's easy to handle. The fingerboard's the finest—natural ebony. And the double cutaway is a cut above too—no other guitar design gives you easier access to all 22 frets. Of course, there's one more important reason to buy *The SG*—Quality.

For nearly twenty years, SG guitars have proven their worth with several million sellers. But, you don't have to have a million seller to afford one. The SG by Gibson. It can earn you a lot of bread. For just a little bread.



Gibson

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Few professional keyboards stack up to the ARP Omni-2.

There are scores of keyboards available to the professional musician. But only a handful have earned a reputation for great sound, ease of play, and reliable performance. The ARP Omni-2 is one of these classic musical instruments.

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It's human engineering.

Playing the Omni-2 is as gratifying as hearing the Omni-2. All functions are located in logical order, with electronically activated viola, violin, cello and bass voices on the right side, variable synthesizer controls on the left side, and volume and mix controls conveniently located in the middle. LED status indicators let you know which functions are in use, even on a darkened stage. Optional foot pedals and switches control filtering, volume, and sustain. And stereo outputs provide discrete separation, allowing you to produce strings on one side, piano on the other, and bass in the middle.

It's proven reliability.

Over the past four years, literally thousands of professional musicians have been playing the ARP Omni-2, night after night, session after session. Because in addition to great sound and clean design, the Omni-2 is built to take the abuse of frequent travel. Electronically-tested circuit boards, computer-grade connector cables, and industrial-rated components keep the Omni-2 running at maximum performance. A rugged steel frame protects the Omni from accidental drops and rough handling, and the added weight keeps the keyboard steady and playable when stacked with other instruments.

It's time for you to play an Omni-2.

See, play and listen to an ARP Omni-2 at your nearest certified ARP Dealer. Find out for yourself why the ARP Omni-2 is worth the difference.

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ARP

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Publishers Letter

The word around the record industry these days is recession. Heads are rolling among the record companies' over-staffed lower echelons; middle-management and biggies are all looking over their shoulders fearfully, secretly wondering that worst of all possible thoughts, what if our cultural love-affair with music is finally over and they'll have to go back to selling insurance or some such other nightmare.

But what is really going on? Are people really no longer buying records, are the big companies going into debt, fighting for their lives in the face of overwhelming consumer adversity, as all the noise would have you believe? Not quite. The real story is that *profits* are down. Nobody's losing money, it's just that they're not pocketing quite as much excess cash as last year, which was universally acknowledged as a freak year anyway. This year album prices have risen another dollar (something record execs seem to have forgotten to take into account as sales dip) and the monster sellers just haven't happened to put out records this year. There's been no *Saturday Night Fever* (that sold 27 *million* copies, which is like having 27 different platinum artists, none of whom run up the bill at the recording studio or smash furniture on tour). No *Grease*, no Fleetwood Mac, Linda Ronstadt, Eagles; none of the biggies who sell the bulk of all records, so, of course, sales are down. When Volkswagen runs out of Rabbits, their sales are bound to go down, too. Now, if all these mega-sellers put out records next year (they've *got* to, the rock-star lifestyle doesn't come cheap these days), sales will boom, profits will go through the roof and record execs will go around patting each other on the back, reminiscing about the nightmare of '79, when profits were down and times were tough. So look again, things may not always be what they seem.

Letters

MAJOR VS. MINOR

Finally someone who can write acknowledges that rock can be as cerebral as jazz. I'll pit my stack of works by Steely Dan, King Crimson, Phil Manzanera, Eno, Bowie, XTC, Tubes and The Who against anyone's Tom Scott, Gato Barbieri and Chuck Mangione in a battle of compositional interest any day of the week. Long live major chords!
Jeff Eason
Triplett, N.C.

CERTAINLY NOT

I sincerely hope that you don't become wrapped up in only musicians who sell, thinking that the market for music is the market for magazines. Your format is taking a pretty strong swing, to where I'm not sure is as far-out. Are you somehow leaving the jazz spirit drifting, as the recording companies do? I hope not. I'm just getting involved. I think that your writers are excellent, by the way.
Denny Nolan
Tampa, Fla.

CLASH AND DIRE STRAITS

The comparison of Dire Straits ('deceptively virtuous' was the perfect description) and the Clash was one I felt a long time coming from critics and writers, even though their styles obviously differ considerably. Calling Dire Straits a New Wave act opened my ears tremendously. *Musician* is definitely on top of the music scene when you can include pieces on punk and rock bands and keep it intelligent and worthwhile.
Roger King
Wadsworth, Ohio

FIRST TIME EVER

The #18 issue of *Musicians* is the first issue I've read, and this is the first fan letter I've ever written to a magazine. Amazing. Your coverage of a wide variety of music is extremely thoughtful and caring and makes me want to listen to musicians and music I've never even heard of. It's an exploratory and positive tone that is very refreshing these days. I'm looking forward to the next.
George Neidorf
Venice, California

ENIGMATIC MR. FRIPP

It's comforting to know that the enigmatic Robert Fripp has charted an onslaught onto the 1980's music scene with the kind of fervor and implosive impact befitting the curator of progressive British rock music. *Exposure* seems to achieve the same inventive and thematic qualities as did the *Court of the Crimson King* a decade ago. Fripp has a rather uncanny ability to read the pulse of the times, musically expressing and juxtaposing a variety of emotions, ideas, and moods. And to think two more Fripp releases are slated for coming months. Even though I'm the proud owner of a 'Disco Sucks' t-shirt, it seems a tribute to Fripp's musical genius that I somehow find his dabblings into disco-tronics (?) palatable. Perhaps the release of *Fripp Live At The Studio 54* would be the drawing line, though
Robert Cervero
Santa Monica, California

JAZZ ORGAN

Michael Rozek's piece on the demise of jazz organ (#18) really struck a tender chord in me. I've been a full-time nightclub musician since the early 70's playing my Hammond B-3 in the Cleveland area, and used to catch every organ heavy that came through on my nights off. Truly the cookinest types of jazz ever. Sign me up as one of those who will wait patiently for the organ renaissance.
Bill Kazen
Euclid, Ohio

STILL MISSED

Mr. Rozek misses it and so do I. This music is immediate, soulful and very powerful. It is also missing an audience, at least up in this neck of the woods. This reality disappoints me to no end. My God! The Big-Money Boys haven't even attempted to bastardize the beautiful instrument in any major way! If that isn't a sign of its plight, I don't know what is! It's even missing in rock bands these days. This player and listener wants Mr. Smith, Mr. Davis, Mr. McDuff, Mr. Holmes, et al to know that this record buyer will continue to buy their products as long as they continue to be true to themselves and their art. I've been Oklahoma-funkasized by Jimmy Smith since I discovered him at seventeen years of age.
Bill Rowat
Ottawa, Canada

DON'T TELL HIM

Just loved your article/interview with Frank Zappa. It's good to know he's just a red-blooded American boy after all.
Sara Lee Hinnant
Apalachin, N.Y.

THE FINEST FORM OF FLATTERY

A letter from an impartial observer who reads a lot of music magazines. You've been around for two years, *downbeat* for 45. Yet I notice that lately, *downbeat* has begun changing their articles to make the lay-outs look like yours, and they've switched to a border cover with their Joni Mitchell issue. Also, Chuck Suber said in his last issue "first chorus" column that *db* would be adding instrumental clinics of brass, guitar, drums, harmony, and music business articles, etc. Who's chasing who?
James Monroe
Richfield, Virginia

By Robert Ford

As the first sales slump in the history of the record business grinds on, two major labels now have new owners and almost everybody else is cutting back and laying off. **Arista Records**, the largest independently distributed label, has been sold by **Columbia Pictures** to the German record conglomerate **Ariola Eurodisc**. The selling price is reported to be $50 million but much of that cash will go towards paying Arista's substantial debt to its former parent company. The final after-tax profit to Columbia Pictures is expected to be only $7 million. Arista's flamboyant boss, Clive Davis, has shelled out big bucks over the last five years to buy talent and promote and develop acts but the only consistent platinum-level record seller that the label has developed is Barry Manilow, who was there when Davis took over the struggling Bell Records operation. It is hoped this move will not signal the end of Arista's jazz operations such as Novus and Savoy, but when the new owners take a look at the cost vs. profits of the jazz products, Steve Backer's worthy efforts could hang in the balance. This will be a great tragedy but the laws of the corporate jungle always prevail. This move could also signal the end to Arista's independent distribution status as there is some speculation that the purchase is an effort by Ariola, a giant in Europe, to compete with the big six record distribution monsters (CBS, EMI, RCA, WEA, MCA, and Polygram) worldwide. Ariola has an American distributed operation, Ariola America, which is distributed by EMI. But this operation has not been particularly successful with the label only selling records in the moderate profit field of disco. Look for the Arista and Ariola America operations to be linked as soon as Ariola can get out of its ties with EMI. And speaking of EMI . . .

The worst sales period in the history of the record business continues as labels make moves to lessen the effect of the crunch. Latest to move is British based electronic and entertainment conglomerate **EMI** which has sold half of its world wide music operation to **Paramount Pictures** for an estimated $154 million. EMI main record company, **Capitol**, has been doing quite badly in recent months as the musical tastes of the world have passed them by. Capitol was formed before the war by, among others, songwriter Johnnie Mercer, to be a mainstream pop label. Historically Capitol, the first major label to be based in LA, has kept up with the world with artists like Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, The Beatles, Grand Funk Railroad and Helen Reddy. But while the rest of the record business was becoming increasingly album oriented, Capitol was laden with performers who basically sold singles. The recent swing towards disco has also caught the label off guard and the expensive aquisition of the **United Artists** Records operation has not yet panned out. Sources inside the industry say Paramount will play a senior management role which probably means the movie folks will be calling the shots from here on. Paramount is a division of Gulf & Western and this is not the first time the folks at G&W have dabbled in music. G&W owned the **Famous** music operation in the early seventies and they poured a whole lot of money into some of the worst acts ever put on record. The label was a great disaster and the remnants of it were sold to ABC Records in 1974. Hopefully Gulf & Western will have better luck this time around.

The **Recording Industry Association of America** has announced that it will now require a four month waiting period before it will certify an album gold or platinum. This will put an end to the expensive and downright stupid practice of shipping 500,000 units of an album just to get instant gold certification. Labels poured gobs of money into this absurd practice only to get the bulk of the records back as returns 60 days later. It was this kind of childish ego-tripping that currently has **Casablanca Records** in trouble with massive returns on the four solo albums from the members of Kiss.

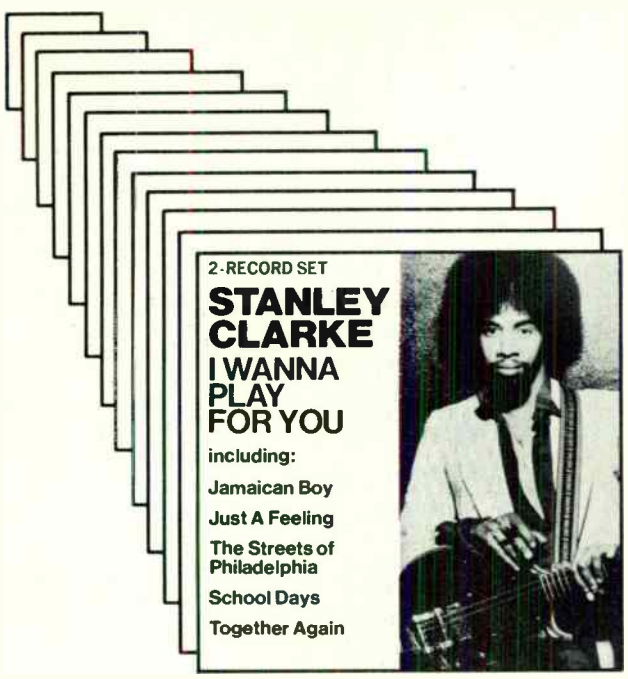
Elsewhere the hard times have meant layoffs as almost every major is trimming excess fat off its payroll. **CBS** has in effect folded its west coast-based **Portrait Records** operation, as it consolidated the Portrait staff that wasn't fired with the already existing Epic staff. Portrait will live in name only but it may be just a matter of time before the label, which signed such currently hot chart properties as Joan Baez and Ringo Starr, slowly fades into the western sun that spawned it. **Atlantic** has made a similar move with its r&b based **Cotillion** label. Atlantic has merged the remaining Cotillion staff with the Atlantic special markets (a.k.a. black music) staff under the leadership of Atlantic veteran Henry Allen, who had been prexy of Cotillion since its revival a few years ago.

Black concert promoters around the country are getting together to deal with major black acts who refuse to work for black promoters. Promoters complain that acts like Teddy Pendergrass, the Jacksons and Parliment-Funkadelic were supported by black promoters when they were just starting out and now that they are stars they give all their concert business to white promoters. Look for picketing and boycotts to come out of this rapidly expanding issue.

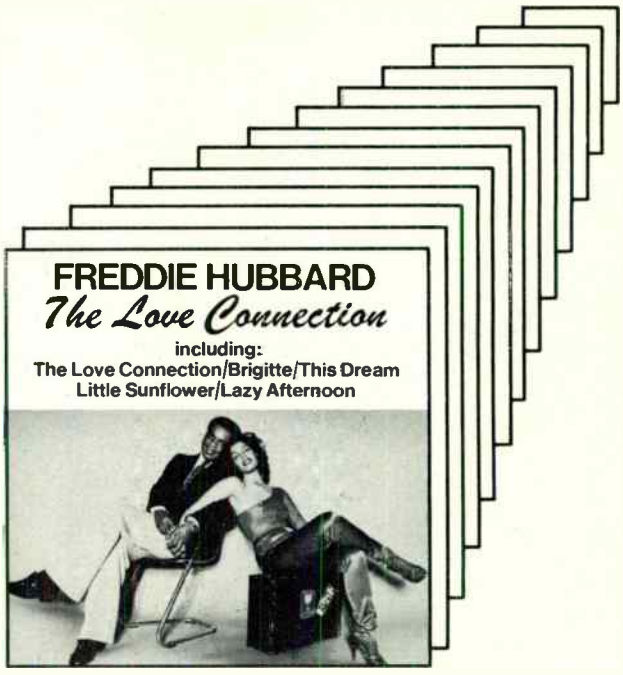
In spite of the slump, **MCA** records continues in its moves to become a fully competitive industry giant by forming three new labels, Backstreet Records, a wholly owned pop label; Songbird, a wholly owned gospel label; and LAX, a jazz and r&b label headed by Far Out Productions head Steve Gold.

Ayatollah Khomeini, the 79-year-old revolutionary leader of Iran, has banned *all* music from Iranian radio and television saying it is "no different from opium and stupifies persons listening to it and makes their brain inactive and frivolous." Music has always occupied a somewhat ambiguous position in Islamic culture and is generally approved for only such innocent occasions as "marriages, wars and national songs." Forbidden is music that might "excite youth or be conducive to something which is not proper between the sexes, like inciting people to dance or creating some kind of feeling". If you're a musician about to take on a Muslim moniker, you might think twice about its origins.

Contrary to our "Record News" of June, 1979, **CTI** has not been distributed by Motown since June, 1978. CTI is now using the independent distribution network in the United States and overseas.



Stanley Clarke is the most critically acclaimed bassist of our time. This extraordinary live/studio two-record set shows why. "I Wanna Play for You" is an offer you can't refuse.
Produced by Stanley Clarke.

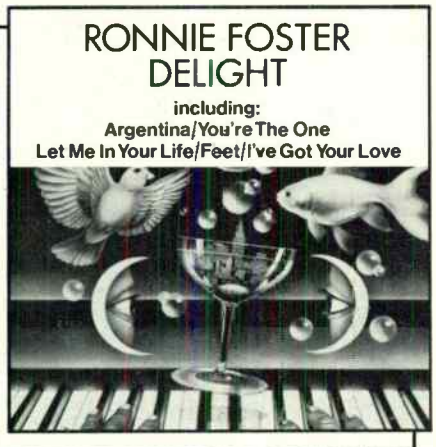


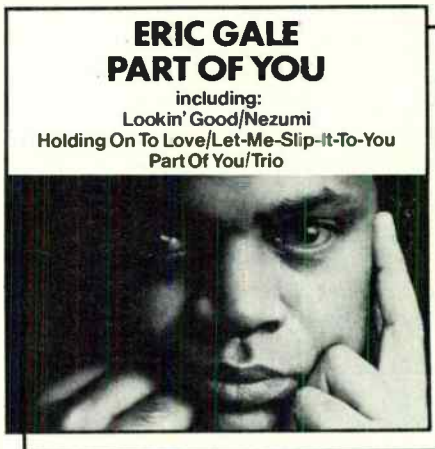
When Freddie Hubbard puts a trumpet to his lips, love notes spring forth. Gather them up on his latest album "The Love Connection." It's the real thing.
Produced by Claus Ogerman and Freddie Hubbard. Executive Producer: George Butler.

FOUR INDIVIDUALS THAT LEAD THE WAY.

Former George Benson keyboardist Ronnie Foster had such fun making his new album he decided to call it "Delight." You'll experience the same joy listening.
Produced by Jerry Peters for Music Mecca West Productions, Inc. Executive Producer: George Butler.

The distinctive guitar work of Eric Gale comes through loud and clear on his latest album "Part of You." Eric also plays most of the bass lines, with special friends taking care of the rest.
Produced by Ralph MacDonald for Antisia Productions.





Stanley Clarke.
Freddie Hubbard.
Ronnie Foster. Eric Gale.

Their music is by and for individuals.

On Columbia and Nemperor Records and Tapes.

TERRY ALLEN

Dire Straits, Nick Lowe, The Cars and DEVO have simultaneously produced follow-ups to much-acclaimed debuts.

"Something's flattening my Cola
Something's wrong with my brew
Something's rotten in Idaho
And I don't know what to do

Going, going, gone
On the Red Eye Express

Only go around once
Gotta quench that thirst
Gotta grab that gusto
Gotta get there first"

DEVO, "Red Eye"

The popular music industry is based on a steady flow of product. A group records an album, the package comes out, gets played on the radio, promoted, and people respond by purchasing said record. Critics methodically review only the most recent work, judging it against a band's previous cumulative output. In light of this system, a rock 'n' roll group's second LP takes on an added significance, especially if its first album has been at all successful and has served to raise the public's expectations. In rock 'n' roll's early days, when each release was not accompanied with the hype and hoopla common in the current market, artists would put out a string of albums as fast as they could record them. In such a way, individuals like Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly and groups like the Beatles, Kinks and Rolling Stones would have three or four albums out before their total effect would dawn on the record-buying populace. On the other hand, bands like the Who, Led Zeppelin and Bruce Springsteen have played a very profitable game of releasing relatively few albums, so that each record is greeted with the sort of reception accorded a long-awaited, would-be *chef d'oeuvre* like Copolla's *Apocalypse Now* has in the movie world. As the critics sharpen their fangs. . .

The difficulty with judging second albums by promising bands can usually be summed up in a rather simple dictum: A group of musicians have a lifetime to come up with its initial effort, and a mere six months to produce a follow-up. As a result, we have a slew of young, new wave rockers with impressive first efforts and disappointing sequels. Patti Smith's *Radio Ethiopia*, for instance, was a chaotic, mean-spirited augury of things to come, a self-parodic and bitterly self-lacerating second album compared to the gem that was *Horses*. Similarly with Television's *Adventure*, an acidic voyage into Tom Verlaine's increasingly insular psyche, foreshadowing the eventual break-up of this sterling guitar-dueling outfit, so reminiscent of the classic psychedelic sixties bands on its ultra-satisfying debut, *Marquee Moon*. Another group who managed to fulfill its vast potential only on a third album is Blondie, whose second LP, *Plastic Letters*, seemed thin, strained and way too coldly calculated compared to *Blondie*, the charmingly innocent debut. Except for Talking Heads' *More Songs About Buildings and Food*, the *Ramones Leave Home*, and Elvis Costello's *This Year's Model*, the Front Line of the New Wave has not produced a fully realized second album to compete with the likes of Cream's *Disraeli Gears*, *The Band*, the Allman Brothers' *Idlewild South*, the Grateful Dead's *Anthem of the Sun*, Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow*, the Stooges' *Fun House*, let alone *Beatles Second Album* or the Rolling Stone's *12 X 5*. Each of these albums so expanded their groups' original concept as to render the initial efforts mere sketches compared to their second output, a true and remarkable progression.

Which brings me to the latest crop of new releases on my turntable for discernment at the moment, four albums by four relatively new bands who achieved varying degrees of commercial and artistic success with their debuts. English pure popster/ace producer Nick Lowe and those idiot-savants from Akron, Ohio, DEVO, received critical kudos for their first LP's but scanty sales, while London-based urban cowboys Dire Straits and Boston pop-rock specialists the Cars each garnered platinum in their initial forays in the marketplace. Not surprisingly, this pattern appears to be holding through these bands' second releases — Nick Lowe's *Labour of Lust* and DEVO's *Duty Now For The Future* are languishing in the bottom reaches of the Hot 100 while the Cars' *Candy-O* and Dire Straits' *Communique* nestle in the Top 10. Sophomore jinx? As far as Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler and the Cars' Ric Ocasek are concerned, there is no such thing.

Ironically enough, the only one of these four new albums I believe is an improvement over its predecessor is DEVO's *Duty Now For The Future*, and I fear I'm distinctly in the minority with that opinion. DEVO's attitude in putting out new product actually lampoons the public's industry-instilled desire/need to have New Product. One would think that DEVO's little joke wouldn't last past one album, but it has. The theme of *Duty Now For The Future*, underneath all that mid-western adolescent sophomore humor, is the absolute necessity of work, the natural desire to create new objects out of old materials, the need to move in a forward direction, even if it takes us back to the start again, even if the work itself cannot yet be understood, or has no discernible meaning. *Duty Now For The Future*, like any successful second LP should, deepens the groups' philosophy. If DEVO's first album introduced us to DEVO metaphysics, *Duty Now For The Future* shows us its everyday applications. DEVO reduces the world to a series of physical movements and its music reflects this concern with how things work, why things move, and, concurrently, why things fail, how they fall apart. *Duty Now For The Future* is a flowering of the DEVO ideal, a record which takes absurd, yet simple risks and often falls on its face, but never ceases to be cogent and funny, with a thoroughly consistent point of view.

"Repetition is a form of change," once stated Brian Eno. On *Duty Now For The*

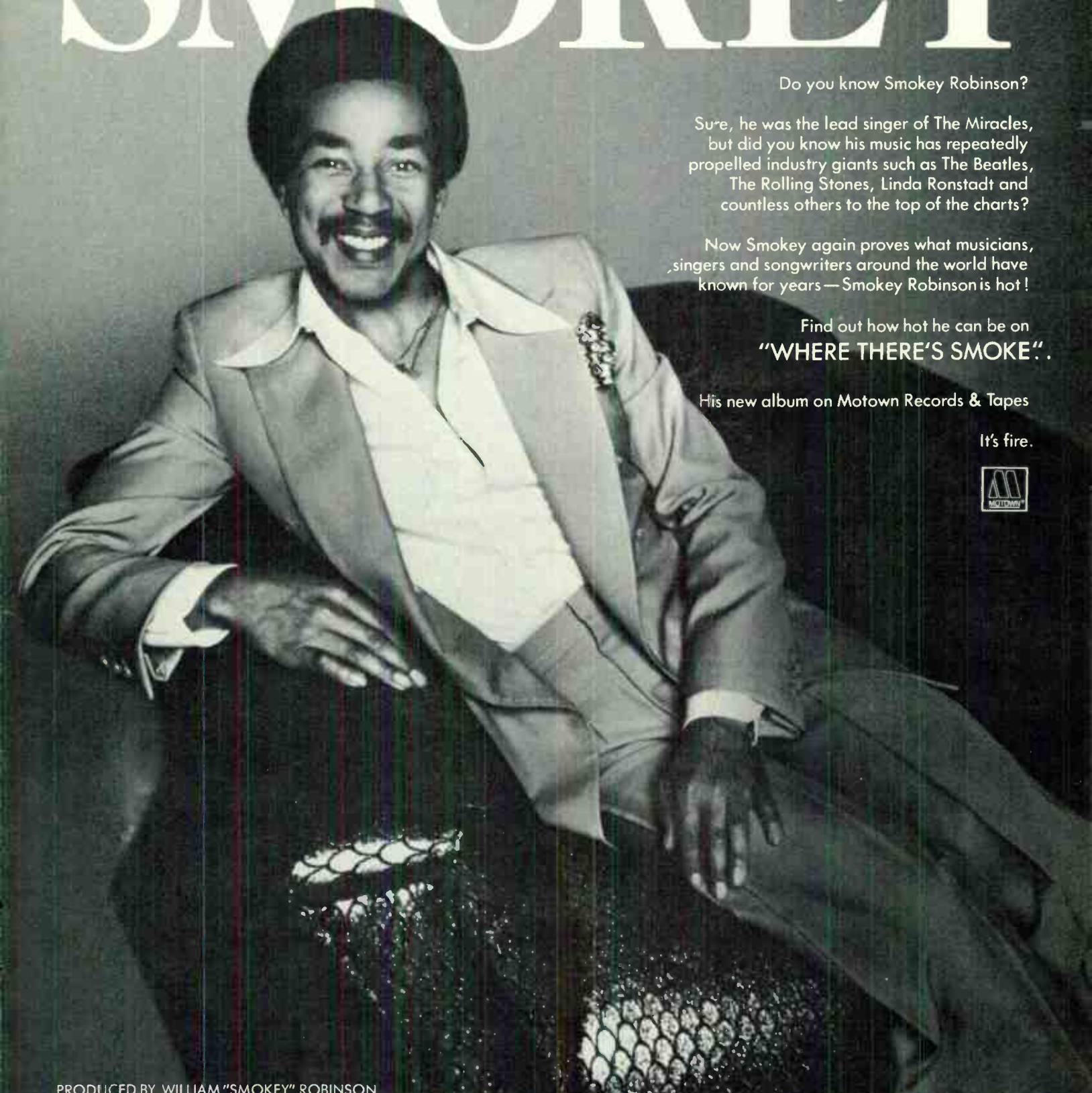
continued on next page

Sophomore Jinx:
You spend your whole life on the first album, and get only six months for the second.

By Roy Trakin

Rock

SMOKEY



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ROBINSON

Future, DEVO's terrifying normality, its absolute banality, its celebration of the mundane, is what comes across, and this fits in perfectly with the group's notion of exaggerating the everyday until it becomes surreal. No matter how cynical, nihilistic, gimmicky, and pretentious you think the DEVO boys are, one can't argue with their middle-class work ethic. DEVO is a record-making, image-producing machine that puts out bitingly satirical works, the humor of which barely disguises a black vision of an Inferno without Divine Order, except the rhythm we individually impose, the private languages we create to communicate. What most people tend to overlook in criticizing DEVO is the frighteningly absolute sincerity of the guys. They mean what they say!

Like DEVO, Nick Lowe's throw-away humor is parasitic on pop culture — his copped riffs and cross-referenced lyrics shroud a basically cynical view of mankind. While DEVO incorporates its brand of modern pop 'n' roll into a stoned system of philosophy, veteran Nick Lowe subscribes to a brand of self-effacement that downplays the mystique behind his creative amalgams of pop styles — no mystery to what I do, folks, I steal what the traffic will bear. In his first album as a solo performer, *Pure Pop For Now People*, Lowe, who was a founding member of the early seventies country-rock outfit Brinsley Schwarz, effectivly and sincerely parodied numerous styles of pop music, until his own persona became a transparent vessel for the pure joy to be experienced in the mechanics of the pop hook. Lowe's loving construction of these hooks allowed the listener to hear how they worked — his method was as transparent as his "real self."

On *Labour of Lust*, Lowe is once more poking fun at various styles of pop music and production, playfully copping riffs here and there though the sentiments expressed reveal a confused, bitter and angry, albeit clever, songwriter and arranger. "Cruel To Be Kind" is McCartney by way of the Beach Boys by way of Buddy Holly, and its punch-line would be hilarious is it weren't so achingly true (no pun intended). "Cracking up" is a marvelously reggaeized piece of fluff about a guy having a nervous breakdown. "Skin Deep" is a not-too-carefully-concealed lament about the impossibilities of true love and/or communication between the sexes.

For all of Nick Lowe's ostensibly flippant, non-pretentious approach to making rock music, there is an undeniably dark strain to his work, a kind of bitterness that there are, ultimately, no original riffs left to play that haven't already been played. Worse, I think, than DEVO's notion of the inevitability of progress and its eventual return to neo-primitivism is Nick Lowe's notion that all progress is impossible. In Lowe's pop-vision of the music world, there are no new licks, no possibilities of improving on what has come before. Although this may be an entirely healthy attitude to have in making pop music, Lowe is left lamenting for an idealized Rock 'n' Roll fountainhead or Source, which certainly never existed except in the minds of rock purists/jingoists, who I patently distrust anyway.

Talking about musical assembly lines leads into the Cars, whose phenomenal commercial success cannot be taken too lightly. Ric Ocasek and Company have obviously come up with a viable formula of rhythmic, chunky pop-rock with enough tantalizing hooks to make it sound great coming out of your car radio. The first album, spurred by the success of its single "Just What I Needed," was a remarkable seller and *Candy-O*, the follow-up, with its original Vargas sketch on an untitled cover, is proving to be a similar smash in the marketplace. Produced by Roy Thomas Baker, as was the first, *Candy-O* is the state of the art as far as FM-radio airplay goes. The surfaces are dazzling, while the accentuated spaces between the notes are drawn out until the melodic hook is delivered like the crack of a whip. The words are elliptical, free-associative, describing moment-to-moment existence with montage-like discontinuity. "Let's Go," the single, starts off like a carbon copy of "Just What I Needed." and contains the irresistible chorus, "I like the nightlife, baby." *Candy-O* is merely the most current, fastest, flashiest model off the racks, making the original seem almost obsolete.

Pop music is about the latest in fashion, the newest fad, the novel . . . hooks eventually outlive their usefulness, grow stale and new ones must replace them. If General Motors puts out new models every year, why shouldn't rock groups? Indeed, with *Candy-O*, the Cars' cool construction methods suddenly become very obvious, the formula a little too apparent. Like DEVO and Nick Lowe, the Cars are a combination of musical influences from everywhere which combine to create a sound that seems new, yet familiar, as if the very notes you hear come from some other time, another place. Music like that of the Cars evokes remembrances, spurs associations and, ultimately, leaves you with a taste in your mouth which is no taste at all, as Bowie sang in "Queen Bitch." Ocasek's calculations become even more upfront on *Candy-O*. Even though the avant-grade has had its effect on the Cars (witness Suicide's "Ghost Rider" riff on "Shoo-Be-Doo" *and* DEVO's "Red Eye"!!) their own thrust remains decidedly cotton candy-o. Step on it, and you're left with pure sugar. Shimmering artifices that are just that and no more. The Cars' success has lead to *Candy-O* being greeted with a sense of real anticipation it never quite fulfills. *Candy-O*, like its namesake, satisfies the instant need for gratification, and then dissolves like a mirage of an oasis in the desert. The Cars may have revealed themselves as calculating technicians on *Candy-O*, but the incredible sales that album has rung up certainly prove the band has created a demand only it can satisfy.

The final album to be discussed, Dire Straits' *Communique*, seems a terminally laid-back disaster, enlivened only by guitarist/leader Mark Knopfler's biting runs and razor-sharp leads. Like the Cars' album, which can't boast of a single tune with the impact of "Just What I Needed," *Communique* suffers from the lack of a blockbuster like "Sultans of Swing." While Dire Straits' debut was filled with the wonderment of a band popping out of nowhere to out-Dylan Dylan's vocals and out-Clapton Clapton's guitar-work, *Communique* seems a plodding follow-up, cursed by the lethargy of its Bahamas-based recording session with producer Jerry Wexler.

Communique is probably not so much an example of the sophomore jinx, but a group trying to duplicate its initial success with material that sounds suspiciously like outtakes from those first sessions. The sophomore jinx was originally a term used for baseball players who followed first-season rookie success with a disappointing second season. The Sophomore Slump, so-called, is usually the result of a player being a flash-in-the-pan, with the veterans catching on to him — it could be overconfidence or resting on one's laurels that brings about the jinx. In Dire Straits' case, it is none of these things, for Mark Knopfler is a certain candidate for rock superstar. *Communique* simply doesn't have enough drive, enough energy or enough humor to rescue it from banality. Certain hooks insinuate themselves, but the energy is almost immediately dissipated. Dire Straits' first album mixed beauty with terror — *Communique*, unfortunately, combines boredom with turdigity.

While the capitalist system demands new, newer, newest, the process of creating art continues at its own pace, with artists eventually accumulating a career's worth of achievement that can then be judged for posterity. Of the four albums I have talked about, I believe DEVO's *Duty Now For The Future* deals most successfully with the problem of popular music's inherent obsolescence by turning this weakness into a celebration, a never-ending dance of death, an unremittingly intellectual rejection of intellectuality. Both Nick Lowe and the

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Perhaps the first specification you'll encounter is usable sensitivity, or IHF usable sensitivity. Ignore it. It is the number of microvolts, or power expressed in dBf, needed to produce a signal at the output of the tuner which contains no more than three per cent noise and/or distortion. Right there is the reason for dismissing this figure. None of us wants to listen to music containing three per cent distortion, so there is little reason for caring what this figure is.

A much better way to evaluate a tuner's performance is to note the figure for 50 dB quieting sensitivity. Expressed in microvolts, or dBf, it tells the signal strength required for the background noise to be 50 dB lower than the loudest passages of music. Tuners will have two figures for this item, one for mono and another for stereo. The mono figure will look better than the stereo figure. The lower the number (less signal requirement), the better. Some of the best tuners will show a 50 dB quieting sensitivity of 2.5 microvolts (13.2 dBf) in mono, while in stereo it may take as much as 35 microvolts (36.1 dBf) to reach the same level of quieting.

Signal-to-noise is also an important figure for judging a tuner's performance, just as it is in judging a preamplifier. As explained when discussing preamps, the S/N ratio describes the difference between the lowest level of background noise and the signal's highest strength. Manufacturers are required to give an S/N ratio for both mono and stereo. A figure of 70 dB in mono is a good figure, and some tuners even attain that performance in stereo.

Total harmonic distortion, naturally, enters when reproducing the FM signal. It's much the same as with amplifiers, however, it's important to remember that no matter how fantastically low your tuner claims to keep THD, it won't do the job unless it's perfectly tuned. Slightly off, and distortion rapidly rises.

THD for tuners should be specified at three frequencies — 100Hz, 1000Hz, and 6000Hz, for mono and stereo. This is because distortion is always higher at frequency extremes than at mid frequency. Look at the figure for 6000Hz as the best indication of the distortion you can expect. At 6000Hz a good tuner should show a THD figure of less than 0.5% in mono and stereo.

Interference from other stations is very irritating when trying to enjoy FM and it's something that shouldn't be tolerated in a good tuner. Alternate channel selectivity tells us just how good the tuner is at zeroing-in on the desired station without interference from adjacent stations. Selectivity measures a tuner's ability to reject frequencies that are 400kHz (two channels) above or below the desired frequency. It's given in decibels (dB) and while it is generally assumed the higher the number the better, it doesn't always work that way. There is a trade-off to be made between selectivity and distortion.

Increased selectivity usually means a narrowing of the bandwidth of the tuner. Sacrificing bandwidth for selectivity usually results in distortion. If you've seen tuners on the market that offer selectable bandwidth (actually selectable selectivity) it is to allow the user to chose this tradeoff rather than be limited by the manufacturer's decision. Listeners in rural areas which receive only a few FM signals widely spaced can use the "wide" setting, giving low selectivity and lower distortion. Listeners in metropolitan areas where stations are closely spaced can use the high selectivity, or "narrow", setting, minimizing interference, but at the cost of higher distortion.

Related to selectivity is capture ratio, specified in dB. This describes the tuner's ability to reach out and grab the stronger of two signals broadcast on the same frequency. The lower the figure, the better. You may ask how you can receive two signals on the same frequency. There are two ways. You may be located between two major cities, which, for example, are 200 miles apart. But each is only 100 miles from you. It is possible that stations in each city have been assigned the same frequency, and that your tuner will receive both. A good antenna pointed toward the desired station will help your tuner receive a stronger signal from that station, but the weaker signal will still find its way in. A good capture ratio will help the tuner reject this weaker signal.

The other problem is with multipath reflections, a particular problem in metropolitan areas. Radio signals can be reflected off many objects, such as buildings. A directly received signal and its slightly delayed reflection are for all purposes just like two signals received at the same point on the dial. A low capture ratio means the tuner will grab the stronger (direct) signal and reject the weaker, reflected one. The better tuners on the market claim a capture ratio of 1 dB or even lower.

Other related rejection specifications to note are image, I-F, and spurious response rejection. Each describes a tuner's ability to reject a variety of unwanted signals, such as from airport towers, tv sets and citizen s band radios. In all cases, the higher the number, the better. High quality tuners will have figures above 70 dB. Most top units will be well above this.

Good stereo separation is important to enjoying a component system. In FM, however, once the separation figure exceeds 30 dB, there is no audible improvement. Few people know this.

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FM Tuners:
More ammunition to answer that fast-talking salesman; the specs to look for and what they mean.

By Terry Shea

Hi-Fi

Reggae: Edges

A hypnotic beat and more feeling than disco ever dreamed of, but it's still overlooked in the U.S.

By Craig Okino

Still very stoned, hypnotic and angry, reggae continues spreading the rasta vibration.

Ten years ago, while you were sprawled on the floor of the Fillmore West between sets, waiting for that hit of window pane to grab hold, if the space cadet with the dilated pupils sitting next to you had happened to comment (after passing you a joint of dubious origin) that he envisioned one of the major musical forces of the seventies to be religious ghetto music from Jamaica, you probably would have sent him to the overdose clinic for a stomach pump.

Today the seventies are all but over, reggae *has* made it "all ovah de whorl," and its lilting melodies, righteous Rasta lyrics, and complex loping cross-rhythms make new converts daily. However, in America, even though earlier this year there were an unprecedented *three* reggae albums on *Billboard*'s Top 100 — Bob Marley's *Babylon by Bus*, Peter Tosh's *Bush Doctor*, and Third World's *Journey to Addis* — reggae remains a largely underground cult phenomenon, and has been ever since it was introduced to these shores. Which is probably just as well. That way, without having to cater to narrow American tastes, the music can retain the fascinating cultural integrity and raw energy that made it vital in the first place.

It's a shame, though, that one hears reggae on the radio about as often as George Carlin's "Seven Words," or that you have to practically skin-search the salespeople to find any reggae in a record store; and for that we have to thank the Babylon record companies and radio stations, and their total misunderstanding of their own products.

But admittedly, despite the universal appeal of the infectious, herky-jerky beat and the soothing vocal harmonies, the lyrics (what you can understand of them through the thick Jamaican accent) are not exactly what you would call, ah, *accessible:*

"What a liv and bumbah year, when de two sevens clash . . ." — Culture

Most reggae musicians are deeply religious Rastafarians, the back-to-Africa faith founded by Marcus Garvey that has swept Jamaica in the last fifteen years. So to the already murky slang of the Jamaican dialect, the Rastamen have added a dictionary's worth of dreader-than-dread terms: *Babylon*, the wicked system that has them in captivity, *Jah*, their god (in the person of Haile Selassie, former king of Ethiopia, who died a few years ago — but, as people like Marley and Burning Spear insist, "Jah Live"), the substituting of *I and I* for the first person pronouns, and so on, ad infinitum.

Many of the terms are Bibilcal, since the Rastas follow the Old Testament, in their own fractured way. The Rastafarians are pacifists, preaching peace and love, avoiding meat and processed food, growing their hair in Medusa-like "dreadlocks" by not cutting or combing it, and smoking a ridiculous amount of dope — all in the name of Jah. Caribbean hippies, with a twist. They also preach a "back to Africa exodus, a return to their original homeland, Ethiopa, from which they were taken 400 years ago.

Sound a bit far-out? Well, you would be, too, if you chain-smoked joints the size of corncobs all day. But considering that these people suffer from some of the world's worst poverty, in a twenty-year-old nation still recovering from the effects of centuries of colonialism, then a glimmer of hope, no matter *how* thin — a return to Africa, even though in reality it'd be worse than where they are now — is still better than nothing at all.

It is no small irony that in America, most of the rabid reggae faithful are middle class whites; American blacks never took to reggae in any meaningful way. Too close to home, perhaps. Maybe the African visions and references to slavery — *Roots* not withstanding — were topics the American black of the seventies would rather not be reminded of. But that's another story.

Most everyone's introduction to reggae (disregarding isolated AM hits like Desmond Dekker's "Israelites" or Marley's "Stir It Up" by Johnny Nash) came in 1973 when the cinema classic, *The Harder They Come*, captured the imagination of moviegoers with its raw depictions of Jamaican ghetto life, the ganja trade, the sing-song street language, and above all, the energizing and uplifting music that rose from these conditions. Jimmy Cliff and Toots & the Maytals, two veteran Jamaican acts who were in the film, achieved deserved notoriety overnight; but the brightest star in the reggae heavens was someone who wasn't even in the movie: Bob Marley, the head Rastaman himself. With his apocalyptic lyrics, charismatic stage presence, dusky, powerful music, and the righteous Rasta stance, Marley has been spreading Jah words internationally as reggae's premier spokesman.

But most American fans of the music, save for the hard-core devotees, would be hard-pressed to name other reggae artists besides Marley, Toots, Cliff, and Peter Tosh, simply because the many excellent American releases of roots reggae in the mid-seventies (*Marcus Garvey* by Burning Spear and *Right Time* by the Mighty Diamonds among them) were never pushed by the record companies, and even the biggies seldom got airplay. You can't like music if you don't hear it.

There are countless vibrant reggae acts which have never seen the American light of day, and are available only as imports — either from Jamaica or Britain, where reggae is so popular it has separate record charts — groups like Yabby You & the Prophets, Culture, Ras Michael & the Sons of Negus, and Israel Vibration, not to mention the various stylistic offshoots of reggae: the earlier forms of the sixties, *ska* and *rock-steady; dub,* a non-vocal reggae sprinkled with blobs of reverb, as instruments drop in and out of the mix; and the bizarre *skank* or *toasting*, where a

continued on page 68

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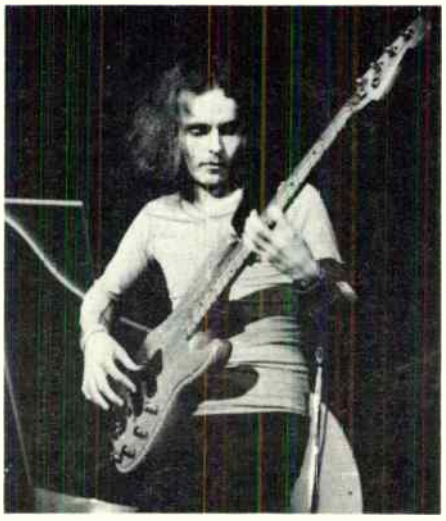

Mark Egan

Mark Egan plays bass in the exciting Pat Metheny Group and has recorded with Steve Grossman, Eumir Deodato, David Sanborn and Sonny Fortune among others. Mark recently wrote telling us how much he enjoyed his D'Addario XL Round Wound Strings. *"I've been using D'Addario XL soft gauge, long scale strings and have enjoyed their 'centeredness' and great feel, particularly on my fretless Fender Jazz Bass."* You can catch Mark Egan on "The Pat Metheny Group" album on ECM/Warner Records.

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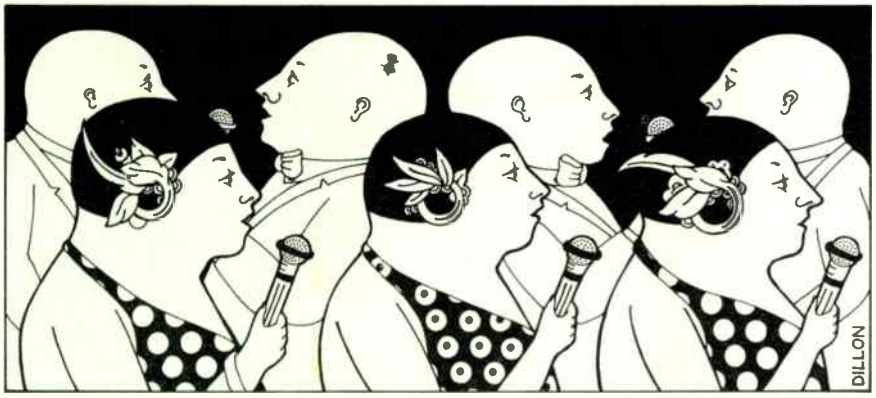

LUCY DILLON

Pop vocal groups are what started it all for most of us back then, and the tradition continues strong.

The other day I was waiting to catch an uptown subway in Manhattan. No one else was on the platform, but across the tracks on the downtown side, five men stood under an archway and started to sing "My Girl," the Smokey Robinson-penned Temptations chestnut from the 60s. Their four-part harmony plus lead vocal sounded resplendent, and because the men stood in the subway cavern, they got an incredible resonance and natural reverb effect. I missed my train that day, and for the next 15 minutes heard bang-up versions of old songs such as Bill Withers' "Lean On Me" and the Drifters' "Money Honey." I even sang along on the Four Tops great "Reach Out," from across the tracks (50¢ is still 50¢, even in New York).

But as we all know, the heyday of vocal groups — late 40s into the 60s — is long gone. Harmonizing today, especially in the pop mainstream, usually takes a back seat to increasingly overblown instrumental tapestries. In the rhythm and blues field, long-time champs like the Spinners, and the Dramatics still make the charts, but usually within a disco framework, which tends to level all vocals into catch-phrases or chants. Few r&b vocal groups have been able to survive doing ballads or non-disco funk (one notable exception being the wonderful Manhattans).

Several self-contained rock groups — ones that sing and play — have developed their vocals considerably over the last few years: obviously Earth, Wind and Fire and the Doobie Brothers can sing their collective asses off. And yet, in the area of purely pop vocal groups — i.e., those that aim their music at the broad demographics of the top-40 radio audience — the pickins' get a little slim. Sure, the Bee Gees can sing high and on pitch, and Maurice Gibb's writing has been exceptionally tuned to the tempo of the times lately. But there's a limit to their falsettos' appeal, which after awhile merge into one castrati-like wall of soprano. Down an octave in the mellow, soft rock mainstream, groups like Abba and the Starland Vocal Band (of "Afternoon Delight" fame) hold sway. But what can you say about a style that has its roots in the Swingle Singers? However, lest readers think that I prefer the halcyon days of doo-wop to anything currently on the airwaves, let me assure them that I've found several exciting items on the pop vocal front lately. Not surprisingly, these groups all have direct ties to a rhythm and blues heritage, and one even got its start on Brooklyn street corners.

Desmond Child and Rouge is a New York City-based vocal quartet that openly flaunts its urban roots. "Westside Pow Wow," the first song on the group's debut album, begins with the line: "Put the Spinners greatest hits on the eight track/Gonna bring the children out/Speakers on the window sill/Takin' time being look-out." Child is the group's songwriter and occasional lead singer; Rouge is three women — Myriam Valle, Maria Vidal, and Diana Grasselli — who recall much that was good about New York female vocal groups in the past. Echoes of Patti Labelle and the Blue Belles reverberate through Rouge's harmonies, but there's also something quite unique in their style. Churning big city life is the major theme in Child's writing, while the women, singing way up high, literally vibrate in an ethereal, transcendent wash of harmony. Half the songs on the album are tough talk and street action, framed by Rouge's near-angelic choir effect. The other tunes are ballads, also done with an urban twist. On "Lazy Love," Maria sings creamily that "it's high noon, but for us it's dawn/'Cause we've been lovin' all night long." Another slower song, "Otti," tells of a nineteen year old boy who is "the skateboard king... He don't got women on his mind, just a little board on wheels so he can fly." Ultimately what gives these tunes their punch and depth is the group's vocal harmonies and performance. Desmond Child and Rouge knocked around the New York club circuit for years, polishing and honing their singing down to an ultra-fine edge to match the bite of these songs' lyrics. Now it shows.

Everybody remembers the Jacksons, formerly the Jackson 5, the brothers from Indiana discovered by Diana Ross at a local talent show and who then went on to become Motown's biggest-selling group. A couple of years ago the Jacksons left Motown, and now it's clear why: they wanted to write and produce for themselves. Happily, the latest album, *Destiny*, is not only their best ever, but it's yielded the finest dance tune yet this year, "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)". This is the first song in a long while to make it as a disco hit using a syncopated drum part, rather than the usual military four-on-the-floor beat that's been fouling the airwaves far too long. Interestingly, *Destiny* is also something of a modern vocal tribute to the Jacksons' earlier counterparts, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. For me, a native Detroiter, the 60s were first and foremost Smokey's decade, a time when this genius' voice, his songs, and even his production techniques, really laid down the grooves for all others to follow. (The Beatles not only covered his songs, like "You Really Got a Hold On Me," but borrowed heavily from Robinson's production ideas on albums like *Revolver*.)

The Jacksons pitch their four-part harmonies high, as the Miracles did, and Michael Jackson is today's only legitimate contender for the ultra-smooth soprano lead-voice style that Smokey

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Purely Song:
The Jacksons, Desmond Child and Rouge, Sister Sledge and the unstoppable Persuasions keep singings ultimate expression alive.

By Chris Cioe

Pop

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FACES

Urbaniak and Dudziak

Right now, the greatest fusion band in the world is the Michael Urbaniak/Urzsula Dudziak unit. Before you start writing in, that's given one, specific sense of fusion: a genre best based on conservative, obvious structural twists — time-stops, coyly repeated riffs, abrupt changes in melody and rhythm — that showcase and heighten potentially intense solo energy. For years, Urbaniak's conceived his art accordingly: still, jazz-rock audiences seem to prefer their tension without much release (e.g. disco, and its influence on current, vamp-dominant fusion). Or, with less overt structure (ranging from one freer-form extreme — Weather Report — to the melodious gloss of recent Chick Corea). Perhaps that's why the violinist and his wife-vocalist Urzsula Dudziak keep label-hopping. And why most of the Bottom Line crowd at their mid-June two-nighter was kinda subdued. Not me, though.

See, to play those aforementioned structural twists, the Urbaniaks hired a razor-sharp, funk-filled quartet: coming stars Marcus Miller (bass) and Ira "Buddy" Williams (drums), newcomer (at 19) "Doc" Powell (guitar), and group veteran Kenny Kirkland (keyboards). And in the solo energy department, Urbaniak took richly felt, yet compact violin and lyricon rides; Dudziak's unique experimentation with rhythmic, guttural wordless vocals, based on her extended range, was precise and powerful, especially when fed through tape loops and synthesizers. The band even took advantage of its own push: Kirkland ran off three keyboard-sweeping, note-bending, pitch-screaming moog solos; Powell offered a small but hot rhythm guitar lick that all but turned the club out, and Miller's phased-bass anchoring was gritty 'n' greasy on a couple of solo runs. All told, the six totally exploited the changes in Urbaniak's deeply lyrical melodies — and the stop-on-a-dime breaks, bass lines and sharp corners in his charts. In fact, only when Urbaniak or Dudziak took a capella detours of virtuosity did other issues arise: like, will Dudziak ever take her genius further, vis. the early "Newborn Light" LP, and become a vocal classicist? She has the chops and mind — she just needs the setting, something seemingly more somber. And, more simply: lives there a more soulful jazz-rock violinist than Urbaniak, especially when playing a long-drawn, gypsy-wail run? Still, the evening was really about team play, and how it ups a collective ante; point is, Michael and Urzsula understand and love real fusion. Soon, maybe fusion's real fans will return the compliment. — M. Rozek

FEINGOLD

Joan Armatrading

With the exception of Joni Mitchell, no female singer-songwriter-guitarist of the past decade has produced a body of music or a narrative style as varied, personal and compelling as Joan Armatrading. Born in the West Indies in December of 1950, Armatrading came to England in 1958. She manages to straddle both cultures with a music that is at once elegant and elemental, touching so many stylistic bases (delta blues, jazz, rock, art songs, ragas, calypso, funk, reggae), often within the space of a single song, that categorization becomes meaningless.

At the heart of Armatrading's music is her extraordinary acoustic guitar work, intimate and transparent one moment, agitated and sinewy the next. As she showed in recent concert appearances, Armatrading is also capable of solo guitar pyrotechnics as well as propulsive rhythmic support. There is an understated urgency to her voice, as if she were trying to keep a nuclear reactor from melting down all at once. Sometimes her voice will waft through the octaves with effortless sensuality, other times she purges herself with a scabrous howl that suggests Janis Joplin — but less vulnerable, more self-assured. The songs themselves are completely without affectation and are naturalistic in design, displaying an emotional directness very rare in pop music ("Don't stand in my way/Let me pass...Don't embarrass me baby/Don't show me your body/Your body don't make it"). They are real songs about real people and real situations.

HARVEY WANG

"The songs are seldom about myself," she told writer Alan Platt in the Soho Weekly News. "Nobody believes that, but it's true. I borrow situations, I don't invent them. They're things I've seen. I don't make them up. I don't think of a situation as a good subject. I do try and become the situation I'm writing about, so in a way they end up being me, but they are not about me. "Barefoot And Pregnant", for instance, came out of a conversation I had about women who are trapped by their husbands giving them everything but their freedom. The song is about women who have had enough of that. But I don't write for women only. Men know what I'm talking about."

Considering the fact that Joan Armatrading's last five albums for A&M have been marked by a continuous refinement and improvement, and that her touring band is a powerful, eclectic unit, she should be attracting a lot more men and women soon. — C. Stern

Robben Ford

Being a Robben Ford fanatic can be a frustrating pastime. Just when you've finally saved up enough money to buy that Gibson Super 400 and have learned one of his blinding blues licks at maybe half speed, Robben switches guitars in mid-stream and shows up playing jazz-rock on an ES-335 through a volume pedal. In the ten years since he left high school in Ukiah, California, the 28-year-old Ford has gone through more stylistic changes than most musicians go through in an entire career. But to the dismay of his fans, many of the stops along the way were too brief to be documented accurately.

The Charles Ford Band, which he formed with brothers Pat (drums) and Mark (harp), recorded one album for the Arhoolie label that failed to capture the group's unbridled live energy and completely overlooked the bands progressive jazz side. Rob's two-and-a-half-year tenure with blues singer Jimmy Witherspoon (which began after Robben sat in with Spoon and was hired on the spot) left behind one highly commercial L.A. studio attempt not at all representative of one of the most dynamic blues couplings in recent years.

Ford came to the attention of the general public during his stint with the L.A. Express, which included the "Miles of Aisles" tour with Joni Mitchell and George Harrison's "Dark Horse" tour with Ravi Shankar and others. Robben admits that he'd never heard of Tom Scott when the saxophonist called him out of the blue with the job proposition. When Ford finally auditioned with the Express he had "a real aversion" to their music, and throughout most of his stay with the group the blues guitarist says he felt like "a fish out of water."

After leaving the Express, Robben spent a year in Colorado, working on his original compositions while sitting out a five-year contract with Far Out Productions that he'd signed during the Witherspoon days. When it became apparent that Ford had no plans of recording until he could find a better deal for himself, an album of inferior tapes recorded years earlier as a low-budget movie soundtrack was released. Rob can no doubt sympathize with George Thorogood's current plight with MCA.

As soon as he was freed from his contractual obligations, Ford signed with Elektra/Asylum in a deal that calls for seven albums over the next five years. "The Inside Story," Robben's first true solo effort, was released earlier this year, so Ford fans finally have something to put on their turntables and something to look forward to in the future.

Although only one cut on the LP is in the 12-bar blues mode, Robbens still describes himself as a blues guitarist. After playing in blues bands for so long, though, Ford is more interested in composing and playing melodically. As for sheer chops, he says, "That's not something I really want to do."

Since the release of the album early this year, Robben has been honing his road band with pianist Russell Feranti, the only keeper from the LP. At this year's Berkeley Jazz Festival things finally seemed to be jelling. Robben paced his afternoon set perfectly, playing most of the tunes from "The Inside Story," as well as David Nichtern's "It's Hard to Keep A Family Together Anymore."

Closing with a slow blues of all things, Charles Brown's "Driftin' and Driftin' " Ford built his guitar solo using both subtlety and intensity, and had the sell-out crowd at the Greek Theatre on their feet before hitting the final chord. The Ford band returned for "Tee Time for Eric," Robben's ode to Richard Tee and Eric Gale. Watch for him, he's an underrated guitarist who is still not well represented on record — Dan Forte

Fred Frith

Whither guitar sonics? Fred Frith had many scatty and provocative answers in his one-man show at the Modern Theater in Boston in July. Frith — a brusque Yorkshireman whose guitars have moled earthworks for British underground bands, notably the sacred Henry Cow — is now experimenting with strange and illicit uses for their battered, battlescarred bodies. Guitars, that is. Frith lays them out on a long, black table and performs all manner of musical surgery upon them: plucking with tweezers, sawing with a fiddle bow, rasping with crystals, thwacking with colored rags, salting with beadlets, pummeling with rubber balls, rolling with copper tubing, damping with faint stays, beating with mallets, even submitting the sorry Stratocasters to bondage with string, swatting across the insteps with rods, and his unusual assortment of inspired tweaks, pinches and twangs. Frith went about it all with none of a surgeon's meticulous restraint, but rather with the unstudied, shrugging abandon of a bloke milking cows. The gibbeted Gibsons, alternately tittilated and outraged, responded accordingly with susurrant murmurs, banshee wails, dumpster clunks, Mahlerian tremolo swoons and 'con sordine' Ligeti chatterings for full string orchestra.

Frith makes effective theater, playing for surprise and laughs. None of the house, nearly full of guitarists and fans, seemed moved to sympathy for the feckless Fenders; all were transfixed and giddy with the plethora of sounds and images. Besides, Frith's techniques also included preening and pampering: his wetted digits and playful yanks of the joystick produced OM-inous Pastorian glisses; opposite sides of a hairbrush, applied with elbow grease, produced slithery tinkles and abrupt bangs. Toothbrushing elicited purrs. He says he likes to use "found" objects people leave on the stage for him. Sound system crapouts work into his act: Frith's is not just work in progress but work in process. This live show was a rarity since Frith rarely strays from England, but you can hear him in more ordered and subdued chamber settings with the Art Bears on Random Radar Records, P.O. Box 6007, Silver Springs, MD 20906. — F. Bouchard

TOM COPI

FELIPPE ORREGA

HARVEY WANG

MAKING IT

A GUIDE TO GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR AT THE RECORD COMPANIES

HOW TO REACH THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE SIGNING DECISIONS; THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES THEY FEEL ARE NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS, THE KINDS OF ACTS THEY'RE LOOKING FOR AND THE KIND OF MUSIC THAT REALLY MAKES THEM STOP AND TAKE NOTICE.

BY JOHN LEOPARD

There comes a point in any serious artist or musician's career when he begins to ask himself why he is not making records, getting songs published, or generally being subsidized or even noticed by the music industry. Of course, there are some artists (and they can be extremely talented) whose work is so inaccessible that it will never be viewed as commercial or marketable, but we won't concern ourselves with them right now. Our concern is with the exceptionally talented and original individual who has worked like a maniac on developing a sound or style that is marketable. It shouldn't be hard for that person to make it, but for a variety of reasons it very often is. Luck, personal tastes, the state of the economy, timing, and common business sense all play major roles. It often becomes a matter of sheer persistance in deliberately decreasing the overwhelming odds against you.

The determined individual, however, can find ways to speed the process up. One way is to learn as much as possible about the industry from as many different (and hopefully reliable) sources as possible. Another way is by getting contacts and establishing relationships with people who know the business.

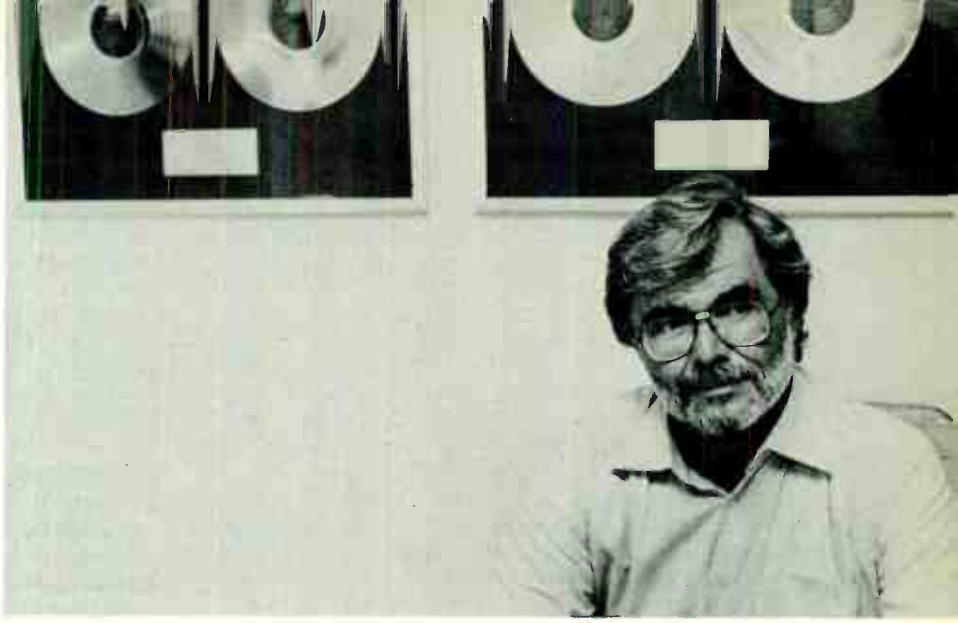
Read the trade magazines (see glossary), join various organizations, hang around at the local club, get into conversations with your peers, and generally compare notes. One of the nicest things about the music business is that there is a sense of community about it. Try to be a model citizen by being informed and active.

Although the product you are trying to market is the main thing, it is very often the relationships that you develop with other human beings that are the deciding factor. Therefore, when you decide that you are really ready to get management, make records, tour, etc., think in terms of contacting individual people, not international corporations.

In a business that is based on the exploitation of creative artists there is really no set method or formula that can guarantee success. Ideally, every artist should be handled differently, according to the special needs his particular product indicates. It is the artist's responsibility to seek out the type of business people that will understand what it is he is trying to do and help get it across effectively. Likewise every manager, A&R person, music publisher, and booking agent has his own approach towards the exploitation of talent, and is better suited to handling one type of product over another. Once you have figured out what type of person you are trying to reach, it becomes a simple matter of investigative research to come up with names of individuals and where they can be contacted. You must determine, through good citizenship and by reading the trades, which business people would be most receptive to your particular sound and style.

How you go about contacting these people will depend entirely on each individual case. If the person you want to reach is VP at a large record company, it will most likely take some aggressive action, and maybe some clever plotting. If

MILES LOURIE IS A PROFESSIONAL MANAGER, HAVING MANAGED RAY CHARLES, SIMON & GARFUNKEL AND CURRENTLY, BARRY MANILOW. HE IS THE ORCHESTRATOR OF AN ARTIST'S CAREER, COORDINATING THE NUMEROUS BUSINESS SERVICES EVERY MODERN MUSICIAN NEEDS TO BE SUCCESSFUL THESE DAYS.



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

the person in question is a club owner at a place you'd like to play, it may be somewhat less challenging.

In the more difficult cases, try writing an intelligent, succinct, and endearing letter of introduction. Allow time for delivery, then just when you think your letter is being read, call up on the telephone. Try to stimulate some interest. Without wasting anyone's time or being an utter pest, you must make your voice heard. You've got to convince whoever it is you are contacting that your product may very well be something that they would not want to miss out on. If you are persistent and maybe somewhat lucky you will be asked to back up your claims with a demo or a live performance. Very well then . . .

A record contract is not made overnight, and it is quite rare for somebody to be knocked out by your music on the first listen. A deal is usually the result of a tremendous amount of musical, spiritual, and business preparation. Hopefully you will persist in seeking out the right people despite back-to-the-drawingboard frustration. There are many creative and energetic people out there waiting for you to contact them, but don't be *too* eager to sign any contract that is put in front of you, because there are also a number of shysters. It can't hurt you to meet as many people as you can, but it is your responsibility to keep track of what is going on around you: it's *your* life. Use common sense when considering offers by taking any possible contracts to a lawyer you trust completely. By signing foolishly, you could be canceling many future options.

Essentially then, it all comes down to being informed and seeking out business people who understand what you are doing. Careers don't just happen by themselves, it's up to you to make your own career happen.

The following two interviews are designed to give you a better insight as to what the people who actually make signing decisions are looking for: how to reach them, what kind of acts they're looking for, the personal and professional qualities they feel are necessary for success, how they function within the industry and the kind of music that really makes them stop and take notice (you might be surprised by this).

Upon entering Miles Lourie's swank office in a black brownstone on the west side of Manhattan I was greeted by a receptionist in a flurry of activity who informed me that Miles was out to lunch, and offered me a choice of wine or Perrier. I opted for the Perrier, and received in addition subtle warnings about the dangers of journalists not being prepared. One false move, and the wrath of Miles Lourie would be upon me! I lit a cigarette, even though I didn't smoke . . . .

Shortly thereafter Miles returned, looking very much the friendly bear. Miles has been in the music business for a long time, and can certainly be referred to as a "heavy". He has managed the likes of Simon & Garfunkel and Ray Charles, among others, and is currently managing Barry Manilow.

MUSICIAN: How does one go about managing an artist?

MILES LOURIE: Well, it's like asking a performer how he goes about deciding how he's going to perform a song. It's probably the most artistic (with a small 'a') business you can get into. It's creative in a sense that there are no absolutes. To me, the word 'art' means it's instinctual: there's an art to mathematics, but mathematics is basically a science; it's more absolute and finite. There are rules to being an illustrator, but that's more artistic because it is a question of communicating. In that sense, management is a very artistic form of business. That's what makes it so crazy.

MUSICIAN: Would you say that there are rules for managing an artist?

LOURIE: There are rules, but basically the rules are very general. Some of them are that you never put yourself in a position of conflict so you never publish an act you manage, you never produce an act you manage, you never act as a lawyer for an act you manage — you do management, period. A manager orchestrates the acquisition of these other talents for his client. He doesn't publicize, he's not a publicist: he hires a publicist so that he keeps himself clean of conflict.

MUSICIAN: So you're actually sort of a liaison between the artist and the various services he needs in order to make his product as strong as possible.

LOURIE: I'm the orchestrator of the career. A successful music act in this day and age is a multi-million dollar business, and that business needs an organizer: that's the business of management. Part of management is also keeping the art and the business in sync.

MUSICIAN: Maintaining a balance?

LOURIE: Coordinating each other, so that they compliment each other; the business makes the art better and the art makes the business better. Better in the sense that the more commercially successful the art is, it is communicated more widely, and it is properly paid for. You realize that a rock and roll singer makes ten times what a heart surgeon makes (it's obscene at best), but since that's the way society is set up, it's more willing to pay for rock and roll singers than for heart surgeons. As a manager it is your job to make sure the rock and roll singer you manage is properly paid.

MUSICIAN: Of course, not all rock and roll singers are making ten times as much . . .

LOURIE: I said successful rock and roll singers.

MUSICIAN: What should an artist look for in a manager?

LOURIE: What should a man look for in a woman? What should a woman look for in a man? It's about that hard a question. Compatibility. Communication. Consistency of objectives and overviews and most importantly for me the ability to fight with the person you're going to work with.

MUSICIAN: (Gasp . . .) The ability to . . . ?

LOURIE: Fight with the person you're working with and yet continue the relationship.

MUSICIAN: A devil's advocate-type relationship?
LOURIE: No, it's not a game: I mean really scream, yell, fight, and jump up and down but keep working for the same objectives. The ability to disagree and work out disagreements is important to any human relationship and that's essential to the artist-manager relationship. It's like when I asked about the man-woman thing, what I was really saying was that every relationship has its own characteristics. Some men want different things from a woman. Some may want a hausfrau, some men want a career woman, just as an example. Similarly, some acts need a psychiatrist for a manager. Some acts need a "leave me alone and you take care of all the business, I just want to sing my songs, man" kind of manager. I'm not that kind of manager. It depends on what each party needs.
MUSICIAN: What do you look for in an artist?
LOURIE: I most want to know whether I can work with them. Even more important than the art. The primary thing is the humanity of the person. I really mean that. Somebody who can't play and sing, they can be very human and I wouldn't want to manage them, obviously, but my primary concern is still the human being. And I'll tell you why. To me, and I say this to artists, a career is like an arch. The talent is the keystone. You can have a very large keystone with nothing around it, and it can sit on the ground and do nothing. You can have a very small keystone and it can make a very big arch with the right bricks around it. So to me the keystone of a career is the talent, and marketing it properly, supporting it properly, getting it out there properly, it's like creating an arch. There are some incredible no-talents who've made enormous careers because they've been wise choosers of advisors.
MUSICIAN: At what point in an artist's career should he pursue management?
LOURIE: As a manager I have to deal with a constellation of things that an act has to be able to do, not all of which the act will do equally well at a time when he's looking for management, such as perform in person, make records, do interviews, write songs, and a dozen or so other things — arrows that an artist has to have in his quiver. So obviously an artist who is a superb songwriter and a modestly good singer might be attractive to me as a client. A person who is an incredibly good performer and writes fairly good songs might be attractive: it's a balance of all those things, and the best way to show that to a manager from an artist's point of view is by way of a tape and a live performance. I believe that initially and inherently the artist owes himself the obligation of getting his act together to a point when the business people, the manager, the record companies, the publishers — will hear the ringing of cash registers. A record company will make a deal when they hear an artist in the form of a cash register ringing. That's what it's about. That's the truth of it and that's the right of it too. So it's an artist's obligation to get his art, his product, together to the point of it sounding like cash registers to the rest of the world.
MUSICIAN: So you want to hear something that sounds like a cash register?
LOURIE: The manager tends to be the first one to have a vision of cash registers so the manager gets involved before the record company, before the publisher, before the agents, before anyone else. At this point the cash registers are further down the road: that's what makes management more creative.
MUSICIAN: The faint ringing of cash registers . . .
LOURIE: Yes. It doesn't have to be screaming out at you. It could be, I'd love it, but it doesn't have to be. Until an act is ready for a record deal, though, I don't want to manage it. And I think that's the artist's obligation to get himself ready for a record deal, and then to get management.
MUSICIAN: What does it take to be ready for a record deal?
LOURIE: It's a question of quality. The stronger an artist is when he approaches a manager, the better the deal he's going to make. The product has to be formed and ready (not necessarily finished and fully developed, however) enough so that it sounds like cash registers to the world. The more of that the artist does himself, the better. If a manager hears an act and says that with two years of hard work this act will become ready for a record deal, it's quite clear that the manager will have a greater degree of power over the act at that moment. From an artist's point of view, the more he does for himself, the more ready he makes himself without having to first go to a manager, the better deal he's going to make with that manager in terms of percentages. It's a negotiation world. And that's how it should be. I'm a firm believer that many artists find management too early, make record deals too soon, and the sad part is that there's no area, no fertile place for an artist to grow and develop. That's a very agonizing time in an artist's life and career, it's what separates the men from the boys and it's what makes it such a crap shoot in our business.
MUSICIAN: What are the main factors, musically speaking, that make you decide to sign an act or pass on it?
LOURIE: It's virtually impossible to spell out except to say, for example, that I would not manage most disco acts.
MUSICIAN: Why?
LOURIE: Disco is a musical form that is primarily created by producers, not by performers. It has tended to destroy a lot of acts who have chosen disco because you can make a quick impact. Basically, it is not a manager's music. That's a generalization, I'm not saying it absolutely, but I would tend not to want to manage a disco act. I would tend not to want to manage a country act because I don't know that market; it's a distinct sub-specialty of the music business, a distinct set of radio-stations. I think I would be reluctant to manage an R&B act for that same reason: it's a different market. That pretty well leaves me with Pop and rock and roll. Within the context of pop and rock and roll I would deal with the question of longevity. It's a balance in a new act between a degree of uniqueness and a degree of sameness. You can't have a totally unique act, because people won't buy it. They're not used to it. People have to have something to relate to.
MUSICIAN: What about the Beatles? Do you think they were a totally new act when they came out?
LOURIE: Of course not. They became more unique with Sgt. Pepper, but before that — I mean "I Wanna Hold Your Hand"? It was good, but not unique. That's one of the hallmarks of success. That's why I respect a person like Bowie. Bowie has been very creative in seeking new things to say. One of the problems about becoming successful in this business is that the artist tends to keep repeating and as soon as the audience catches on to the formula, you're dead. You've got to stay with it.
MUSICIAN: A couple of steps ahead?
LOURIE: Well, not totally ahead. The audience has to be comfortable with what you're doing, identify with it, recognize it, and yet you've got to keep them guessing a little bit too — so it's degree.
MUSICIAN: So is this 'keeping them guessing' calculated, or is it just something that occurs naturally as an extension of the artist?
LOURIE: We are in a popular art form, we're not in a fine art form. In a popular art form, it's similar to creating a package for a new toothpaste. Basically, you're dealing with a market. The artists from the sixties used to play with their backs to the audience, the Woodstock mentality; it worked then, but now the music has grown up. It's back to being more of an entertainment form now. We no longer kid ourselves that it's a fine art; it's not, it is a popular art. It can be made very valid, however: the Beatles almost transcended to a fine art.
MUSICIAN: Almost?
LOURIE: I say almost, yes. Talk to me in a hundred years and I'll tell you if they did or not.
MUSICIAN: Do you see any new directions developing in the music business?
LOURIE: Yes. The business is becoming more and more mature. It's still very immature but when I got into it fifteen years ago it was incredibly immature. I mean, for example, I came into it as an attorney and one of the biggest problems we

had was when writer/performers would come to us for advice, saying 'Listen, such-and-such record company offered me a deal and gave me this contract, but they told me that if I went to a lawyer to talk about it they would not sign with me.' That's how paternalistic and unsophisticated the business was in those days: the client would say 'Just tell me what I'm getting into, but don't call the record company!', with great fear. Also, the average age of successful performers today — I'm guessing, but my experience is that it is between 28 and 32 at this point. When I was just starting out in the business, it was between 17 and 20, and those kids were raped — and they were setting themselves up for rape. Artists today have lawyers, accountants, and business managers and the business is more business-like. Today there is a much more healthy sophistication.

MUSICIAN: Well, I guess that may be due at least in part to mass communication in general, you know, the world is getting smaller and people are more aware of what is going on . . .

LOURIE: I think the world is getting better too. There's less talk about the generation gap, less alienation. It may come back; ebbs and flows you know, but at this point it's a healthier world than it was in the fifties.

MUSICIAN: How does somebody get into your office? Could you tell me something about the way artists are 'screened' for management?

LOURIE: With a tape.

MUSICIAN: You hear the tape before . . . ?

LOURIE: Absolutely. I listen to every tape that comes across my desk. Sometimes it takes three or four weeks to get through them all, they pile up. I just went through some, as a matter of fact.

MUSICIAN: Was there anything that interested you in the pile?

LOURIE: No. Very rare. Most of the tapes were embarrasingly bad.

MUSICIAN: What's the problem with them, usually?

LOURIE: Bad singing, bad music. I look for quality. This doesn't really answer the question, it's hard. It's got to be good material. Material's really important. I think I can hear a potentially good artist from a bad tape. It doesn't have to be a studio tape. It can be a home tape recording with a microphone sitting in front of a guitar.

MUSICIAN: Can it be one microphone for a whole band? A real blurred sound?

LOURIE: Yes. Well, eventually it can get so blurred you can't hear the music. No. Not real blurred. I have tapes of live performances made in clubs, cassette machines plugged into PA systems that sound perfectly good enough on an acoustic level to show what the act is. Any good manager can hear a demo even if the balance is wrong: if you hear good material and you hear excitement, a presence, these are all indication.

MUSICIAN: It seems to me that one thing everyone seems to be looking for in an artist is a quality, a kind of radiation of something that goes beyond mere music, that is quite hard to define. Would you care to comment on that?

LOURIE: Sure. I think that's what I meant by presence. That's the word I would use. Some performers have presence, conviction. A performer is a persuader, he's a communicator: as a communicator and persuader he has to find the ways that are true to himself in order to convince the people who are listening. Records are very difficult because there is no visual contact. Records are an incredibly difficult medium in which to create that presence, that conviction. It's purely aural. The eyes are looking around at the walls and the pictures, that sort of thing. My mythological test for a hit record would take place in a bar: if there are a bunch of rednecks sitting around talking and drinking and something comes on the radio, and all of a sudden they stop and listen, then you're talking to them. I listen to demos while I'm doing other things, purposely. I heard one tape, years ago, while I was walking up a ladder: I *stopped* in mid-air.

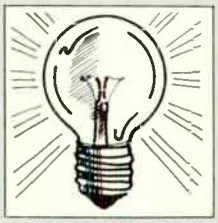
GLOSSARY

tools 'n' terms

PRODUCT

A & R
Artist and Repertoire. The A&R department of a record company (or management firm) is responsible for talent acquisition, and continues to act as a liason between the artist and the company, even after the initial signing. These are the people you have to sell yourself to first.

Attache Case
When you go to appointments you have made, carry your demo, press kit, and other paraphernalia in a professional-looking attache case. This will cause you to appear organized and efficient.


IMAGINATION

Commercial
That which sells. Not necessarily a dirty word; if your music is not going to sell, why try to get a record contract at all?

Cool Shoes
A pair of cool shoes will improve your chances for success immeasurably.

Demo
Come on now.

Imagination
The most essential tool in the business. Without one of these you will need pure dumb luck in order to infiltrate the ranks of the music business. If you don't have one, get one. It helps you get places others never even dream of going.


CONTACTS

Market
Your market consists, quite simply, of people who will buy your music. Try and figure out who they really are and where they hang out and what it is about you they like.

Press Kit
A collection of reviews, photographs, and other printed material describing your product. The cleaner and more professional looking the better.


THE DEAL

Product
The whole of your creative work: music, lyrics, presence, image, and any other aspect of what you intend to offer to the public at large. You don't make records anymore, you make product.

Telephone
Everybody knows about this wonderful invention. It saves tremendous amounts of time and energy, and can be used to extract vital information from unsuspecting lower echelon types as well as for setting up appointments and meetings.

AND BINGO!

Trade Magazines
Record World, *Billboard*, and *Cashbox*. Read them to find out who's looking for what. Glean.

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

KARIN BERG

KARIN BERG IS THE DIRECTOR OF EAST COAST A&R FOR WARNER BROTHERS RECORDS AND IS DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR FINDING, SIFTING THROUGH, EVALUATING AND SIGNING NEW TALENT. SHE'S LISTENED TO MORE TAPES THAN YOU'VE EVER DREAMED OF AND CAN'T BE FOOLED BY SLICK PRODUCTION.

Karin Berg is a soft spoken woman who is currently the director of East Coast A&R at Warner Brothers Records in New York. She spends most of her time listening to demos in her office, but was kind enough to take time out for the following chat.

MUSICIAN: How do you define the term 'commercial'?
KARIN BERG: It's interesting. A lot of people use the term to describe something that they look for: I think you can get into a trap by looking for what is called commercial. I define commercial as that which sells records, or those records that sell. I think there are many records that sell very well that are not "Commercial", however. You can be very good and very original and still sell records. For instance, The Roches. When I brought the Roches to the label, everybody else who saw them said that they weren't commercial. Maybe they aren't, but they're selling a lot of records . . . .
MUSICIAN: And they seem to have the potential to sell a lot more records.
BERG: Yes. I really do believe that. Perhaps I'm too much of an idealist, but I don't think I am because I think I've been proven right. Those acts who are original and quality can also be commercial, in the sense that they can sell. I wouldn't ever go after an act that I didn't think could sell records. Even if they appeal to me a great deal I wouldn't because there would be no reason for them to make records.
MUSICIAN: To what degree should an artist consciously try to make his material sound commercial?
BERG: Not to any degree. Rather than try to make your material sound commercial, you should try to *communicate* your material and in that way you can become commercial. I find that artists who come in the place and say they've got a really good commercial sound tend to identify 'commercial' with what sounds like stuff that's already out there. The problem with that is that record companies aren't too much looking for stuff that is like the other stuff out there. That is the only thing about their music that is commercial: it sounds like the other stuff, but nothing is going on — the lyrics are bad, the melody is bad, the singing is bad, there are no ideas, no passion, and no commitment to what they're doing. Many times they seem to be committed only to some fantasy they have of being a recording artist and selling a lot of records. You have to give them back the tape and say "I know to you it sounds commercial, and it's even likeable, but we can't record it". If an artist concentrates on getting his or her material good, on communicating the material (and this is whether the artist is into pop, jazz, or classical music), there is a better chance. One of the challenges of a record company is finding an audience for the artist.
MUSICIAN: Does the industry cater to the artist or does the artist have to cater to the industry?
BERG: It's hard to say. That should be a very easy answer but it's difficult. It should be an obvious answer but it's not because of the power of the industry. The industry should cater to the artist, but that's just not so. Because of this problem, the artist ends up trying to sound like other people. Then you get this thing that we call 'rock and roll yard by yard': one tape sounds like the next. In that sense the artists are catering to the industry. In another sense, the music business has become dominated by the record industry, ironically enough, much against the will of the record companies. The record company's involvement no longer ends with the making of the record. The record companies are involved in artist development, in advertising the record, sometimes in advertising for live appearances. You get clubs that won't book an artist unless the record company advertises, or booking agents that won't book tours unless the record company guarantees support, the theory being that support in all of these areas will guarantee the sale of the album. There's no other reason for the record companies to be involved. That investment cost has become so high it's gotten a little bit out of hand: the record company bankrolls everything. It buys the artist's equipment, it puts them on tour, makes sure they get some food if the record isn't selling, and it's getting a little crazy. The record companies would really like to back off, and I don't think there's a company in the industry that wouldn't like to say 'we really can't do that anymore . . . ' But if we do that, are we penalizing the artist? Will the rest of the industry say that that record company doesn't support its act?
MUSICIAN: It's interesting, the way the record companies have sort of become the banks in the general economic system of the music industry. Are the record companies becoming more and more uncomfortable?
BERG: Oh, I think so, it's just becoming prohibitively expensive to sign someone. You don't just talk about what it's going to cost them to make a record, you have to think about everything else. Ultimately, I think it's the artists who are suffering, although they may put themselves in that situation.
MUSICIAN: Ah, this leads us directly to another question. To what degree should an artist also be a business person?
BERG: To a large degree. I don't think they should do all of their own business because that can be a detriment to their work, and a detriment to what they really should be involved in. It can get into sticky situations at times. It can get to a point where an artist with a little bit of knowledge can do more harm than an artist with none, because they will assume that certain things are out of whack when they're really not. I do think, though, that artists should have a knowledge of the business. Then they can hire the proper people to represent them. What do you look for in a manager? What do you look for in a booking agent? What do you look for in a record company? That manager is going to be the person that the record company is going to be dealing with; more than they're going to be dealing with you. That manager is being paid to make decisions for you. The manager is supposed to know the artist well enough, creatively, so that when the record company

asks questions, the manager is ready with the proper answer. If you have a business knowledge, then you generally know what to look for in a manager and a booking agent (if you are getting a booking agent). These people, if they're good, earn their money. They really do. They're worth it.

MUSICIAN: What should an artist look for in a manager, booking agent, or record company?

BERG: It would depend very much on the individual artist. I think the first thing is to make clear an understanding that that manager is going to be able to represent you well, that that manager is honest and has a good reputation for being ethical. It's like choosing doctors: if you get enough good recommendations, you know the person is good.

MUSICIAN: And I guess your life, as an artist, depends on it. What about the artist who hasn't found management, but feels ready to make a record deal?

BERG: Well, you can get your foot in the door without a manager. And all record companies will listen to your tapes without management, without anything of that kind. I personally like acts who perform publicly, who are willing to play live, who have been tried a little bit in terms of public performance. And if we do indicate interest in signing an act that doesn't have management, it would be best to have someone waiting in the wings to step in as manager. It's very difficult to sign an act, get the manager, get the lawyer, get the booking agent: it places a tremendous burden on the record company. Of course record companies will assist in that . . .

MUSICIAN: So a record company is not always that anxious to get involved with an artist, no matter how good they are, if they haven't already thought about bookings, management, and certain other factors?

BERG: Right. I don't think that anyone would actually be passed on solely for those reasons, but you certainly have to take a very deep look, because it's a lot of work. A lot of artists expect the record company to do it all. The artist should have some determination of his or her own career. That's what I mean when I say that a lot of this has been surrendered to record companies; the artists themselves have been responsible for it because they've surrendered control of their careers, of their musical futures. It would be wise for artists to spend some time thinking about that.

MUSICIAN: What type of presentation impresses you most? When somebody brings in a demo, should they wear a funny hat and dance all around?

BERG: First of all, I make very few personal appointments to listen to tapes. There's just too many tapes and too little time, so I ask artists to drop their demos off. I get tapes back very soon because of this procedure: by not making appointments, I can listen to more.

MUSICIAN: So people don't generally get through the door?

BERG: Generally, but they should never, ever take that as an affront. I do that so that I can give more attention rather than less. I listen to everything. If a tape comes to my attention, I listen to it.

MUSICIAN: Do you listen to the whole tape?

BERG: If it's good. Otherwise, I spot check.

MUSICIAN: Does the quality of the recording have much to do with your decision?

BERG: No.

MUSICIAN: Have you ever signed an act that has maybe just recorded a song on a cheap cassette player but somehow managed to radiate a certain quality . . . ?

BERG: I haven't, but Warners has. And I would. The other thing to keep in mind is that A&R people do not have to listen to finished tapes. People go out and spend a tremendous amount of money to buy studio time at the Record Plant and turn in this great sounding tape, when it wasn't necessary. Good A&R people can figure out the difference. They know when somebody isn't coming in with a great engineer and producer. You can hear the material and in general, the feeling of what the musicians are playing. You can get an idea if it's something you want to pursue, and that's all a demo is. When I was at Elektra, the demo tape on the Cars was done live in a studio, in a real cheap studio and they came alive right away, one-two-three. They hardly spent any money on it and it was a great demo because the songs were very good and the musicians were good.

MUSICIAN: How many songs should be the limit on a demo?

BERG: The limit should be five.

MUSICIAN: How many would you recommend?

BERG: Three.

MUSICIAN: Not less than that?

BERG: You could do less, but if you have three perhaps you can get an idea of whether they work well up-tempo or slow-tempo. It gives you a good representation. You don't need any more. If you're good, the company will call you and say you've got a good tape. On the other hand, if you've got a tape with eight songs on it, that's a lot of time to ask somebody for to listen to your tape. There's no reason to put down eight songs.

MUSICIAN: You could put down the other five on the second tape.

BERG: Exactly. Put down your best three on the first demo.

MUSICIAN: What main factors make you decide whether to sign an act or pass on it?

BERG: This is when it gets down to finer points. This is after the initial seeding out?

MUSICIAN: Well, let's assume that you've heard a demo and are somewhat interested, and want to hear more. What happens?

BERG: After the initial demo tape, I want to see a live performance. Sometimes I don't even like the tape very much and I would still want to see a live performance.

MUSICIAN: Could it be in a rehearsal hall, or does it have to be in a club in front of an audience?

BERG: I've gone to private auditions. They're never, never as good as a live performance. People sometimes say 'I can't get a club date.' Just about anybody can get a club date in New York City. You can get a club date somewhere. If you can't get a club date, then you're not good enough to make a good demo either.

MUSICIAN: Someone who is unable to get booked probably doesn't have the necessary overview.

BERG: Right. To build a career. So I go see the act. What I look for is a commitment to what they're doing, which means a lot. Again, I can't stress originality enough. I'm not saying at the risk of being flakey, but doing what you're doing well. A certain amount of seriousness about what you're doing. Even if you're having fun.

MUSICIAN: Serious fun. (I noticed a photo of the band Television hanging on the wall.) Did you have a lot to do with signing Television to Elektra?

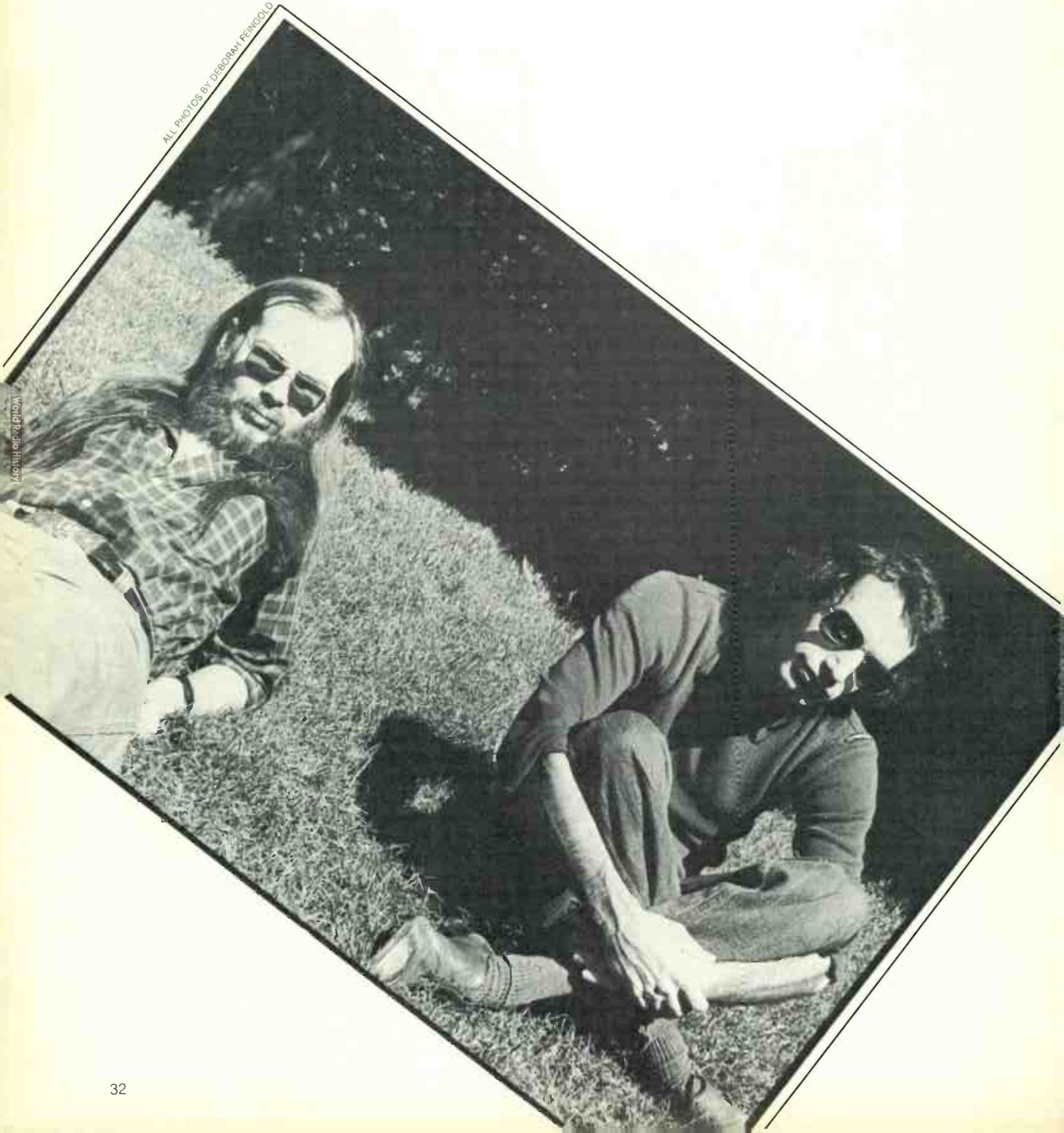
BERG: Yes. That's still in many ways the most exciting act that I have been personally involved with. Something like that comes along very rarely. I'd seen Television years ago when they first started out and I was working for Elektra. I remember I just couldn't believe it. I was dumbfounded, shaken . . . I just thought that they were tremendous and I still feel that way about them. They were so ahead of their time, they were penalized for it. (Note: Television had since disbanded, although Tom Verlaine's solo album is due out soon.)

MUSICIAN: They, I think, were a classic example of what many people would say is not 'commercial'. You look for something that different?

BERG: Yes. I think the great acts started out like that. I don't mean the good acts, I mean the great ones. I mean the Beatles, the Rolling Stones.

MUSICIAN: How do you mean? They start out like how?

BERG: Disturbing . . . You know you're not going to find mass acceptance immediately. Very few of the great acts started out with mass acceptance. I'm talking about the acts that changed the course of the record industry, acts who are very instrumental in changing the way musicians feel about themselves and about what they're doing. It's sometimes very dangerous to start looking for a commercial product with those acts. They'll define "commercial" for you.



ALL PHOTOS BY DEBORAH FEINGOLD

A SUMMER'S SUNDAY PICNIC WITH STEELY DAN

THE ELUSIVE DUO RECENTLY SURFACED IN CENTRAL PARK ALONG WITH PRODUCER GARY KATZ FOR A RARE INTERVIEW ABOUT THEIR MUSICAL INFLUENCES, HOW THEY WRITE TUNES, THEIR METHODS IN THE STUDIO, DRAWING SPONTANEITY FROM SESSION PLAYERS AND THE REAL MEANING OF THEIR LYRICS . . . WELL, ALMOST.

BY JON PARELES

Seven years along, it still makes no sense. If someone had suggested in 1972, when Steely Dan's debut album appeared, that a smartass band devoted to chromatic/modal harmonies; light, jazzy rhythms, and cynically oblique lyrics would make its way to the top of the pops, any rational observer would have scoffed. Pop success, the truism goes, depends on making a simple, usually optimistic point using elementary means. Late in 1972, however, a catchy little ditty about doomed romance, compulsive gambling and murder called "Do It Again" insinuated its way onto AM radio, soon to be followed by a failure-to-communicate shuffle called "Reelin' in the Years." Steely Dan had finessed themselves an audience.

They were smooth. Donald Fagen (vocals and keyboards) and Walter Becker (bass and guitar), the band's songwriting team, could make even the most perverse harmonic or lyrical twists seem natural, and they managed to warp every style from reggae to C&W to fit their own specifications. They were also low-profile professionals who quietly avoided media personality-mongering. It seemed that all they wanted to do was record perfect songs that were odd enough to interest them, but not so strange that the public would start to wonder what was going on. Even today there are people who think of Steely Dan as one more laid-back pop band. Becker and Fagen manage to simultaneously disdain and capitalize on pop's simple, universal appeal; as they wrote in "Doctor Wu," "All night long/We would sing that stupid song/And every word we sang/I knew was true." Deftly balancing ambivalences, Steely Dan set an appropriately suave, cynical tone for the 70s.

The music demands that you listen between the lines. Their lyrics never completely spell anything out, although some can be deciphered with a little effort. "My Old School," on *Countdown to Ecstasy*, is a jaundiced memoir of Becker and Fagen's undergraduate years at artsy Bard College in Anandale, N.Y. (where the pair played in a band that included Chevy Chase on drums). "Parker's Band" (from *Pretzel Logic*), is a you-were-there tribute to Bird and the birth of bebop; the title cut of *The Royal Scam* is a parable about Puerto Rican immigration.

On the other hand, some songs are determinedly elusive. I'm still trying to figure out both "Your Gold Teeth" and "Your Gold Teeth II," particularly the line "There ain't nothing in

Chicago for a monkey woman to do" — which, like the best Dan lyrics, rolls off the tongue, summons up strange images, and defies literal interpretation. From the beginning, Becker and Fagen have insisted on wringing double and triple meanings from seemingly innocent verbiage. They've also increasingly pared down the number of words per song. In "Green Earrings" (from *The Royal Scam*) and *Aja*'s "I Got the News," the listener ends up filling in almost the whole storyline; the lyrics seem to be excerpts from a more elaborate tale.

Yet there has been a perceptible shift in Steely Dan's outlook. On their first three albums, the narrative voice is generally detached, merciless, but with *The Royal Scam* and *Aja*, Becker and Fagen begin to allow us some sympathy toward the songs' characters (who are placed in typically desperate situations). "Deacon Blues," *Aja*'s evocation of the jazz life, even verges on sentimentality — the last thing anyone could have expected from this band.

As their lyrics have become both more open and more economical, Becker and Fagen's tunes grow relentlessly more sophisticated. Steely Dan travels down convoluted harmonic byways that most rockers (Paul Simon excepted) never dream of: impressionistic five-or six-note chords, polytonal superimposed triads. By now Becker and Fagen maneuver through the tonal system as gracefully as the jazzmen they admire like Duke Ellington and Bill Evans; no chord progression is too abstruse for them to try (listen to the chorus of "Peg," on *Aja*). Yet, like Ellington, they keep the blues as a touchstone; every Steely Dan album except *The Royal Scam* features at least one blues-based song. Usually, however, the blues borrowings are more figurative than literal. *Katy Lied*'s "Chain Lightning," for instance, starts both its verses and its solo in the second bar of the progression.

Aja signalled a new phase of experimentation: toying with song form itself. When the band had played long tracks before, on *Countdown to Ecstasy*, they were jamming on the songs' pre-established changes. But in "Aja," (the title cut), instrumental episodes introduce new material, equal in structural importance to the verses and choruses. Becker and Fagen also toy with bridges in "I Got the News," sprinkling bits and pieces of two different bridges through the song, then assembling them near the end.

Can't Buy a Thrill, Steely Dan's debut, is their only derivative-sounding album, because it uses stock arranging ideas like the Crosby Stills & Nash-flavored high harmonies on "Reelin' in the Years." From *Countdown to Ecstasy* onward, Becker and Fagen, with producer Gary Katz, have evolved a cooler, more seductive, more individual sound with each album. Detractors call Steely Dan an MOR outfit, but they're wrong; Becker and Fagen just happen to favor subtle detailing over raucousness or flash (while their slick veneer lets them slide into popular consciousness with greater ease). Their shadings of guitar tone, for instance, orchestrate their albums with astounding variety, from the snickering trills of "Daddy Don't Live in That New York City No More" (on *Katy Lied*) to the paranoiac fuzztone of "Don't Take Me Alive" (*The Royal Scam*) to the incandescent open fifths that open "Josie" (*Aja*). True to their jazz leanings, Becker and Fagen use horns far more often than strings to augment the band, but they rarely lose the audio image of a small combo.

Becker and Fagen gravitated toward the studio, not the road, and the band slowly dissolved. Guitarist Jeff Baxter and vocalist/keyboardist Mike McDonald left to revitalize the Doobie Brothers, while drummer Jim Hodder and guitarist Denny Dias dropped from sight. By the time *Katy Lied*, their fourth album, came out, Steely Dan was for all practical purposes Becker and Fagen plus session players, an arrangement that has continued to the present. Yet Steely Dan albums rigorously avoid the lazy, cliched session-sound ambiance. Becker, Fagen and producer Gary Katz will do endless retakes to get a spontaneous sound. And it seems that the peculiar demands of Steely Dan songs force creativity out of even the most jaded session veterans.

Steely Dan's procedure is straightforward. When a song is ready, Becker and Fagen will record a piano-and-voice demo and have lead sheets made up. They then assemble a studio rhythm section — drums, bass, keyboards, guitars — rehearse until the musicians play the song to their satisfaction, and roll the tapes. Later solos, vocals and sundries will be overdubbed on the live rhythm track.

But it's not as simple as it sounds. "The songs are all really hard to play well," Gary Katz explains. "There are a lot of changes, and we demand maybe more than some people do in the final product. Session musicians come from fourteen jingle dates, or whatever, and they sit down and see those changes, and they have to, like, sit for a while and play. Negotiating all the chord changes, rhythmically correct, and as a unit — it's time-consuming. Most of these guys are used to going in, seeing a track, and ripping it off in two or three hours. That never happens. The only tune that ever happened with was "Aja"; Steve Gadd ripped that off, solos and all. That tune was done in an hour and a half, the only tune that has happened with in all the years. It freaked us out."

BECKER AND FAGEN JUST HAPPEN TO FAVOR SUBTLE DETAILING OVER RAUCOUSNESS OR FLASH, WHILE THEIR SLICK VENEER LETS THEM SLIDE INTO THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

The second stage — solos and overdubs — is even more grueling. "Either it's great till the minute it's done," Katz says, "or it's as worthless as having never been done. Right now, I'm throwing away two tracks for this album that are sixty percent complete. . . . We punch in everything, anything, anywhere."

Occasionally, however, a soloist susses out a song immediately. Phil Woods, whose alto solo on "Doctor Wu" is still Katz's favorite, looked at the chart and played it in one

take. "It took about seven, eight minutes," Katz recalls. "It was so good that Donald said, 'You're the finest thing I've heard. Would you just play it a couple more times so I could hear it?'"

At the other extreme, Wayne Shorter wasn't satisfied with his 64-bar tenor sax solo in "Aja," according to Katz, until he took a break and wrote out sketches of the parts he wanted to play. And Mark Knopfler of Dire Straits, who plays on the upcoming Steely Dan LP, asked for a tape of the track before coming into the studio so he could work on it privately.

Apparently Becker and Fagen aren't particularly interested in studio (or tape) technology. Although they once used an eight-bar tape loop for the rhythm track of "Show Biz Kids" (on *Countdown to Ecstasy*), they haven't used that technique again, and Katz says they rarely build a song layer by layer from a click track ("FM," from the movie, is an exception to that rule). All Steely Dan demand is enough tracks to record on, enough flexibility to clean up anything even vaguely out of kilter, and enough time to agonize over every note.

"We try to run Steely Dan sessions like jingle dates," Katz continues. "Everyone loves jingle dates. They go so quickly, they sound so great — everything is laid out clearly. They don't go quite so quickly for us, but that's what we try for. With Donald and Walter, right from the first it was serious business. At the beginning, they knew exactly what they wanted in their music, but they had to learn the technique of making it work. It took work in the studio to bounce it back, to refine it."

Strangely enough, Katz insists that Steely Dan's overall sound is not premeditated. "After the basic rhythm track is done," he says, "the rest is trial and error, apart from a little bit of an idea. We try everything that we think might work, and reject them if we don't like it later." Mixdown is a three-man operation, replete with conflicting opinions and second guesses. "We play back through anything we can get our hands on," Katz says, "from a real expensive system to a cheap twenty-two-dollar stereo." Wherever it comes from, the sound Steely Dan gets is, by now, probably the most imitated style in pop music, particularly in Los Angeles. Now that Steely Dan is headquartered in New York, Katz doesn't expect them to sound radically different: "We fly so many people in," he says, "that it doesn't matter where we record."

Initially, Becker and Fagen intended to be staff songwriters, not performers. "They'd been trying to sell those songs for a long time," Katz recalls. "Nobody liked them. You have to understand — they'd sit down and sing these weird songs. It wasn't like Leon Russell, who can sit down at a piano and sing his brains out. The songs were real long, the structure was odd, and there were no football chords for people to sing to."

THEY ARE UNDOUBTEDLY SMOOTH AND HAVE MANAGED TO WARP EVERY STYLE FROM REGGAE TO C&W TO THEIR NEEDS, MAKING THE MOST PERVERSE HARMONIC TWIST SEEM NATURAL.

Kenny Vance, a veteran New York producer, snagged a soundtrack assignment for Becker and Fagen on the low-budget movie *You Got to Walk It Like You Talk It*, and for a short time the duo worked as sidemen for Jay and the Americans; they also contributed two songs to a Katz-produced album by Thomas Jefferson Kay. But it was only through Katz's intense lobbying efforts that Steely Dan finally got signed to ABC, at what were, it has been said, low royalty rates that have since been adjusted upwards. Once their ABC contract runs out, Steely Dan will be recording for Warner Brothers.

Lately, Steely Dan have been experimenting with song structures again, yet *Aja* — which uses extended structures — has been their best-selling album to date. Katz was reluctant to speak about the band's upcoming album, but apparently it, too, will feature long tracks.

"Before we even went near the studio," Katz admits, "and before most of the tunes were written, one night we said, 'Listen — this album we're gonna make short pop songs, we'll put ten songs on the album. But the tunes wound up being longer than that. To this day I couldn't tell you what happened. Donald said, 'Look, all right, I mean it's a verse, a chorus, a verse, a chorus, an instrumental, a chorus, and out — I mean, what's so big?' And it comes out to be five-and-a-half, six minutes. It's not, like, excess, it just works out that way. There isn't a lot of dead space in their songs now; everything that we use from bar to bar has a good reason for being there. They're much tighter songs now, even though they run six minutes.

"Their roots aren't pop songs," Katz insists. "They don't feel there are boundaries they have to work within."

Interviewing Becker and Fagen turned out to have its own unusual structure. Katz informed me that the band would meet us on the northeast corner of 72nd Street and Central Park West, and we'd talk in the park. Shortly after the appointed hour, the pale, surprisingly slight, sunglassed pair arrived;

Becker was clad in a plaid shirt, jeans and rose-colored glasses, Fagen in a Pierre Cardin T-shirt, jeans and incredibly scuffed, pointy-toed, gray-green Verdi footgear. They looked as if they hadn't seen daylight in a decade. As we wandered toward a suitably bucolic interview spot, it was all I could do to resist asking Fagen the question: "Where *did* you get those shoes?"

MUSICIAN: Gary (Katz) says you walk into the studio . . .

DONALD FAGEN: Sometimes we run in, but usually we walk in; it depends how fast we want to get there . . . .

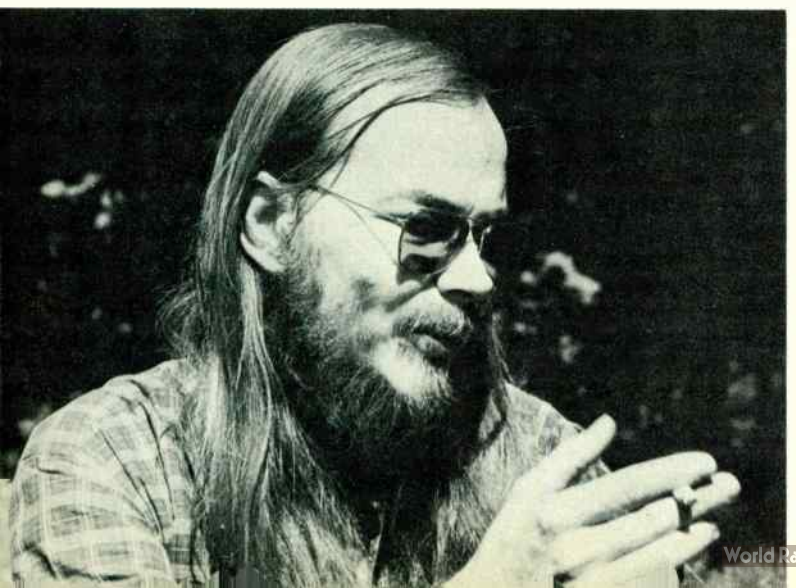
MUSICIAN: . . . with demos that are basically the complete song.

FAGEN: Usually we have a layout, a chart musicians usually play off.

WALTER BECKER: There have been occasions where we have been known to go in with an incomplete lyric, but that really doesn't amount to much. I know there are people who go in with the very thinnest, barest bones of a composition, and

hope that at some later date, after recording the track, that they'll be able to turn this into a song. I wouldn't feel very good about doing that. (*to Fagen*) Would you?
FAGEN: That would be a heavy risk — and probably a waste of money, unless you've got the knack for that sort of thing.
MUSICIAN: And the musicians come in cold, having not seen the charts before?
BECKER: With the exception of one or two of the players, who already have either prepared the charts or played the tune on a previous occasion, with another band, they come in without knowing the tunes. I wouldn't say they come in cold; in fact, they come in piping hot if anything's going to get done that day.
MUSICIAN: What song has gone through the most re-recordings?
BECKER: "Your Gold Teeth" did get recorded twice (on *Countdown to Ecstasy* and *Katy Lied*). I'd say that's some sort of landmark.
FAGEN: You mean how many times did we cut it before we used it?
BECKER: Or how many times did we change it and rewrite it before we cut it?
MUSICIAN: How many times did you cut it before using it.
BECKER: I think we're about to surpass ourselves in that regard. But I could tell you that many musicians have played on "Peg" (from *Aja*). Many, many musicians. Many guitar players have played the guitar solo on "Peg."
MUSICIAN: But it's just a simple "pantonal 13-bar blues."
BECKER: We explained that to them, but did they listen? No.
FAGEN: Rotten kids . . .
MUSICIAN: Have there been occasions when studio musicians got in the way of a song?
FAGEN: We just ask them to step aside . . .
BECKER: Unless it's someone very tall . . .
FAGEN: And then we tell Gary to ask him to step aside, and then walk past him.
MUSICIAN: How does your songwriting collaboration work?
FAGEN: I usually come up with a basic idea or format for a song, and Walter comes downstairs and we finish it up.
BECKER: Slowly.
FAGEN: It's gotten very slow. It's a slow decade.
BECKER: We've written our hundred-and-one most obvious lyrics already, I think, and now sometimes we have to try and come up with a new approach. Like a very radical approach to a subject, odd kinds of narrative form and stuff. Anything, so long as it's funny in the end.
MUSICIAN: Some songs seem to come directly out of a rhythmic groove, like "I Got the News" on *Aja*. How was that put together?

"WE'VE WRITTEN OUR HUNDRED-AND-ONE MOST OBVIOUS LYRICS ALREADY AND NOW WE SOMETIMES HAVE TO COME UP WITH A NEW APPROACH. ANYTHING . . . SO LONG AS IT'S FUNNY.



BECKER: Actually, it was put together partially from pieces of pre-existing songs called "I Got the News."
FAGEN: We'd had that song in a former incarnation; we actually wrote it with Victor Feldman in mind for the piano part he was playing. We let him play rather freely on the date.
BECKER: Of course, we did take the basic riff into consideration; we were writing lyrics over the riff. Always, when we're writing lyrics, we take into consideration how easy they are to sing and to pronounce, and how well they flow, and so on.
MUSICIAN: Do you usually write tunes first?
FAGEN: We usually write chord structures first.
BECKER: And song form — we lay out a song form.
FAGEN: And the melody and the lyrics are usually done together.
MUSICIAN: You use a lot of weird intervals. Are those generated by the chords?
BECKER: In part, yes, and in part because it makes for interesting melodies.
FAGEN: And we do it by ear, too — it sounds good.
MUSICIAN: Do you worry about what you can sing?
BECKER: I'd say it's come up once or twice.
FAGEN: I don't have a large range, so it has to be within a certain interval.
BECKER: You don't have that limited a range — it's not a Lou Reed monotone.
FAGEN: I can't go three octaves or anything like that. Actually, I have four very fine notes, in the middle of the keyboard there above middle C.
BECKER: And then it kind of tapers off.
MUSICIAN: Donald, you seem to sing one syllable per note almost exclusively, hardly using any melisma at all.
FAGEN: No, I don't really possess that technique.
BECKER: I think if more of our songs were in Latin, there'd be a greater tendency toward melisma. Or a Romance language, any Romance language.
MUSICIAN: The blues are melismatic, too.
BECKER: Well, most of those songs are in Latin, aren't they?
FAGEN: I know my limitations. I'm not a Van Morrison or a Ray Charles or anything.
BECKER: Donald is lacking the sharply defined pentatonic notches that are an absolute must for the crisp performance of a melisma.
MUSICIAN: In the first edition of the songbook for your first four albums, there's an introduction that says that the "Mu major chord" — a major chord with an added ninth — was the key to the Steely Dan sound? Is that still true?
FAGEN: That introduction was probably obsolete when we wrote it. It was kind of a gag anyway. We used to use it . . . .
BECKER: There was more than a grain of truth to what we were saying . . . .
FAGEN: But it's hardly original with us.
BECKER: Claiming that we invented it and named it was probably a little extravagant. We did name it, but it's probably appeared in the literature before.
MUSICIAN: So that's *not* the key to the Steely Dan sound?
BECKER: There may be a little more to it than that.
FAGEN: It's a device — one of many devices.
BECKER: We were, uh, limited by space.
MUSICIAN: One of those other devices is harmony built on superimposed triads. On *Katy Lied,* "Throw Back the Little Ones" ends with two major chords . . . .
BECKER: Michael Omartian just did that as a flourish, but various aberrations of that give you different sounds . . . .
FAGEN: . . . polytonal effects . . .
BECKER: In other cases it's structurally more important, superimpositions of triads over bass notes that are not the root of the triad. Without it, there wouldn't be any Bee Gees today. The Bee Gees would be impossible if they ever had to sing a real dominant seventh chord — forget it.
FAGEN: It's a common device. Where'd it start? Probably Stravinsky, Debussy, or Charles Ives.
MUSICIAN: Do you ever set yourself songwriting exercises?

Something like what Paul Simon did with songs on *Still Crazy After All These Years,* deliberately writing songs that used all the chromatic tones in their melodies.

BECKER: We once wrote a brief flurry that included all twelve tones. "Your Gold Teeth" came out of that.

FAGEN: We use intervallic inversion occasionally in melodies.

MUSICIAN: Is that a deliberate effort to be different, to break out of normal paths?

FAGEN: It's just a way of structuring a melody to make sense. There is a certain mathematical logic.

BECKER: And sometimes it is a certain problem-solving, a way of getting from point A to point B. I mean, if you need an idea to go on to suggest another.

MUSICIAN: Do you often work that way?

BECKER: Normally, melodies are pretty much . . .

FAGEN: . . . freely discovered . . .

BECKER: Rather than invented because of a formula, or modified according to a formula.

MUSICIAN: So how would the average *Musician* reader go about writing a Steely Dan song?

FAGEN: First of all, he'd have to get himself a partner.

BECKER: A friend.

FAGEN: And he'd have to somehow remove himself back into the '60s and grow up during that tumultuous era.

BECKER: To some extent at least. He wouldn't have to grow all the way up. And that should do it. I'm surprised that more people aren't writing those songs and sending them in. After all, we've solicited material from all sorts of people . . . .

MUSICIAN: Do you actually get songs in the mail?

BECKER: No — poison pen letters.

MUSICIAN: The typical rap on Steely Dan is that you put jazz changes into pop songs and write hooks.

BECKER: I think we used to tell people something that ended up coming out like that. I think we were just trying to suggest on a much smaller scale that we occasionally would use a slightly different way of getting from key to key, and slightly different chord qualities than were heard in ninety percent of the music on rock & roll radio stations. But that's changed a little bit. In disco music, the characteristic, prevalent harmonic color is a little bit different than it was in rock & roll by and large before disco.

MUSICIAN: It's more modal.

FAGEN: Yeah, but it's become much more sophisticated harmonically.

BECKER: There will usually be a passage that contains some cocktail-ish sort of harmony . . .

FAGEN: . . . the basic four-part jazz chords, five-part jazz chords . . .

BECKER: . . . for a brief moment, and then they return to the basic vamp. Back to the groove.

FAGEN: The kind of harmony we use is based substantially on jazz harmony, which is also the basis of any kind of big-band arrangement or string arranging for popular music, which is what they use in disco music as a matter of course. I don't think we stand out harmonically as much as we used to in the rock & roll field.

MUSICIAN: Is that a challenge?

FAGEN: Well, we just have to write better songs.

MUSICIAN: Did you set out at the beginning to write hits?

BECKER: Well, no. But we were not entirely unaware of the fact that structurally our songs were suitable for, uh, framing. We were given many reasons to believe that our music would be vastly unpopular by people we approached over the years.

FAGEN: It was mainly the lyrical content that put people off, and possibly at the time the kind of harmony. What we ended up doing was writing the kind of lyric we like superimposed over a traditional song structure, which made sense to people. Which made sense to me. Traditional song structure is extremely serviceable.

BECKER: It was what we believed in. Listening to jazz, you get on intimate terms with how songs work. That's probably one reason why we wrote a lot of bridges in our songs.

PRODUCER GARY KATZ GOT THEM THEIR FIRST CONTRACT WITH ABC RECORDS. "THEY'D BEEN TRYING TO SELL THESE SONGS FOR A LONG TIME —WEIRD SONGS; PEOPLE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND."

FAGEN: Jazz used popular standards as its grist, or did up until the '60s . . .

BECKER: And the advent of religious saxophoning

FAGEN: Political and religious saxophoning, of course, killed that.

MUSICIAN: You're still jazz listeners.

FAGEN: We listen to about everything. We listen to old records.

BECKER: We listen to jazz to the extent that it exists. I mean, to the extent that jazz with some harmonic structure is what we're primarily interested in.

MUSICIAN: Do you plan to do any other covers, like "East St. Louis Toodle-oo" (the Ellington tune on *Pretzel Logic*)?

BECKER: Not until we can find something else that everyone likes as much.

MUSICIAN: When I listened to the original, I was surprised at how well the pedal steel mimics the trombone's phrasing.

BECKER: If you listen again, you'll notice that the piano solo is a composite of four bad clarinet solos, with notes changed only where absolutely necessary. Duke didn't have a good clarinet player in that period; a few years later, he hired Barney Bigard.

MUSICIAN: Does the rigid structure of your pop songs get in the way of putting jazz ideas into them?

BECKER: Not really. When a soloist with a trio or quartet performs a pop tune, the liberties that can be taken with the structure are not that great. Essentially it's how many choruses is he gonna play, the sequence of solos, and those are very predictable things. He's not suddenly going to play another song. Although I have seen people do that, to the dismay of their friends in the band. Their former friends, I should say.

MUSICIAN: But your songs are structured tighter than that.

BECKER: We know how many choruses we're going to take.

FAGEN: They don't necessarily have a jazz feeling, either. What we try to do is encourage the musicians to play in a spirited fashion, with feeling, and not mechanically. I think this has a lot to do with any swing you may perceive.

MUSICIAN: Is one of you more perfectionistic in the studio than the other? Who rejects songs when?

BECKER: Donald rejects songs constantly. I reject songs sporadically.

MUSICIAN: For what reasons?

FAGEN: Whatever's wrong with it, we find it and kill it.

BECKER: Whatever flaw may be hiding in a composition or performance, we ferret it out and damn it to hell.

FAGEN: Belt it out of the park, so to speak.

BECKER: Or consign it to a fate worse than death: limbo.

MUSICIAN: Or overdubbing?
BECKER: We don't overdub on anything that's not first-rate.
FAGEN: Well, we do occasionally. And *then* we throw it out later, after spending several hundred thousand dollars. But usually a clinker gets through somehow anyway.
BECKER: Well, they can't all be as fine fine superfine as the other. Actually, we've reduced the number of clinkers on the last couple of albums.
MUSICIAN: You haven't played concerts since the *Pretzel Logic* tour, but at one point there was supposedly an *Aja* band in the works. What happened?
BECKER: There was a sliding pay scale with that band, based on the amount of money to be lost by various musicians leaving town. When this became evident to some of the members who had, uh, slid considerably from the top of the pay scale, they had things to say like, 'How come him . . . ? And me . . . ?' And we said, 'Oh shit,' we felt like capitalists exploiting and repressing these musicians, so we cancelled the band after the first rehearsal.
FAGEN: We've never had employees before. The original band was a six-way split, or a five-way split, or whatever. It was partners involved in a musical enterprise, although we directed the music.
BECKER: Suddenly we felt like shopowners or something.
FAGEN: I didn't like the whole atmosphere of it.
BECKER: And yet, the only reason we had to do *that* was that even with that arrangement we were going to lose money at every concert, on every deal.
MUSICIAN: How about using less established musicians?
FAGEN: We've looked for some young players, and we haven't really found that many outside the studio clique.
BECKER: Which is not to say we work with a bunch of old people. But you mean undiscovered people — the last person that worked with us that would really fit the circumscription was Mike McDonald. He was the only McDonald we had, and we lost that one.
MUSICIAN: When you listen to records or live bands, are you always saying to yourselves, 'We could use this guy'?
BECKER: Sure. We came upon most of the musicians we're working with today by hearing them perform on records, or hearing about them from somebody and then going out and buying a record.
FAGEN: Or seeing them live.
BECKER: You know, people will say that so-and-so is a great player, but usually they're not descriptive enough about what it is he does, not enough to give us an idea of what's appropriate or how to use him.
FAGEN: There's plenty of great musicians in town, but not that many are right for what we do.
MUSICIAN: What you need are players who can run any set of changes. How about someone like Pat Metheny? Could he fit into a Steely Dan song?
FAGEN: He's a good guitar player. He sure could.
BECKER: In fact, we've thought about that.
MUSICIAN: Could you see yourselves doing a quick, one-take, ECM-type album?
FAGEN: Well, we did produce a jazz record (for Pete Christlieb and Warne Marsh) that was basically a one-shot type of thing.
MUSICIAN: Have you written any other tunes without lyrics since then?
BECKER: Only in conjunction with extended song forms. Back when we had our touring band (around 1974) we would write little interludes that would give Donald a break from singing and provide some kind of counterpoint to a guy singing all the time. It was vastly unpopular with audiences.
FAGEN: At one point our show was almost a constant, uh, din from beginning to end. We had bridges between every song.
BECKER: Once we started, we just wanted to get up there and play nonstop.
FAGEN: I was so fearful of speaking to the crowd . . .
MUSICIAN: When I saw you perform in Waterbury, though, you were a real motor-mouth.
BECKER: Was that when he was saying things like 'Yours truly, Mary Tyler Moore?'
FAGEN: That came late in a tour. Who knows what I may have said? I had to steel myself with intoxicants.
BECKER: That was our best band, as far as live performance. But we were not impressed with the degree of civilization in Waterbury.
MUSICIAN: Do you miss the concert stage?
BECKER: No, there are concert stages all over this town. Any day or night you want, you can go and look at them.
FAGEN: I do miss playing. Not singing.
MUSICIAN: It looks like our time is running out. While we have a minute, could you explain the lyrics?
BECKER: Well, it all actually boils down to a single sentence.
MUSICIAN: Really? What is it?
BECKER: I can't tell you *that*. If I do . . . well, there goes the house in the country.

Blood Ulmer *cont. from page 46*
Kenton to Beefheart's Duke Ellington.

For me punk jazz began in 1967 with the death of John Coltrane. I always felt that some of his spirit was transfigured into the sky church music of Jimi Hendrix. There is an urgent cry of love in the work of both men. Though Hendrix never had a chance to conquer his instrument and develop a band like Coltrane did, he was a brilliant improviser and poet; an instinctive avant gardist who achieved a whitehot, yet tender, blend of voice, chordal accompaniment and simultaneous commentary that was imbued with the timeless poignancy of the blues. What his music *suggested* was more important than what he played.

Hendrix, the Who, Cream, John Coltrane and Miles Davis were the big influences on the Tony Williams Lifetime (with Larry Young on organ, John McLaughlin on guitar and Jack Bruce on bass), part of the second wave of punk jazz. Most of the subsequent explorations of punk jazz used James Brown's antiphonal funk as the rhythmic launching pad. In the case of Miles Davis (and Funkadelic), the music had a Hendrix/Sly Stone top and a James Brown bottom. My friend Tom Ray once noted that "Miles, in his heart of hearts, got Michael Henderson so he could have a bass player to play James Brown's "Sex Machine" vamp like Bootsy Collins (listen to the ostinato figure on "Spanish Key" from *Bitches Brew*)."

I wish I had more space to analyze the development of punk jazz, but let me say that I see these trends continuing to this day — in varying degrees — in a loosely allied group of jazzmen and avant garde art rockers. Besides the people I've already discussed, there is Robert Fripp, David Bowie, Brian Eno, Lou Reed, Talking Heads, Tom Verlaine, Bob Quine, Pete Cosey, Walter Stedding, Bill Bruford, Annette Peacock, Chris Spedding, Suicide, Jack DeJohnette's Directions, Carla Bley and Michael Mantler.

What does it all mean? Robert Fripp has said that 'disco is a democracy where people vote with their feet." I think punk jazz has the potential to open up the discos to those disenfranchised dancers who want a body music with something extra. So long as you feed their ass, the minds will follow damn near anywhere you want to take them. And disco has nowhere for the mind to go. I think the 1980s could see jazz returning to the dance floor as it hasn't since the Great Depression of the 1930s. "That's all jazz really needs is a little funk in it," Ulmer reflected. "Cats shouldn't have to deny that part of the music — they are not escaping anything. Because I feel if they don't put somethin' in it, it's going to wind up being classical. Guys want to play whole gigs with flute, oboe and cello, and they be calling it jazz — but it feels like classical music. Which is cool. *But it's time to put the starch back into the shirt.* After 'Trane and them left, people forgot the ingredient that caused all that. You've got to put the funk back in to get that connection with the people. When they used to play jazz people actually felt the music, because they could tap their feet and dance to that shit. That's what they want in that new wave rock music, too — they want that connection. *Four on the floor is a hookup!*"

ROSS VALORY

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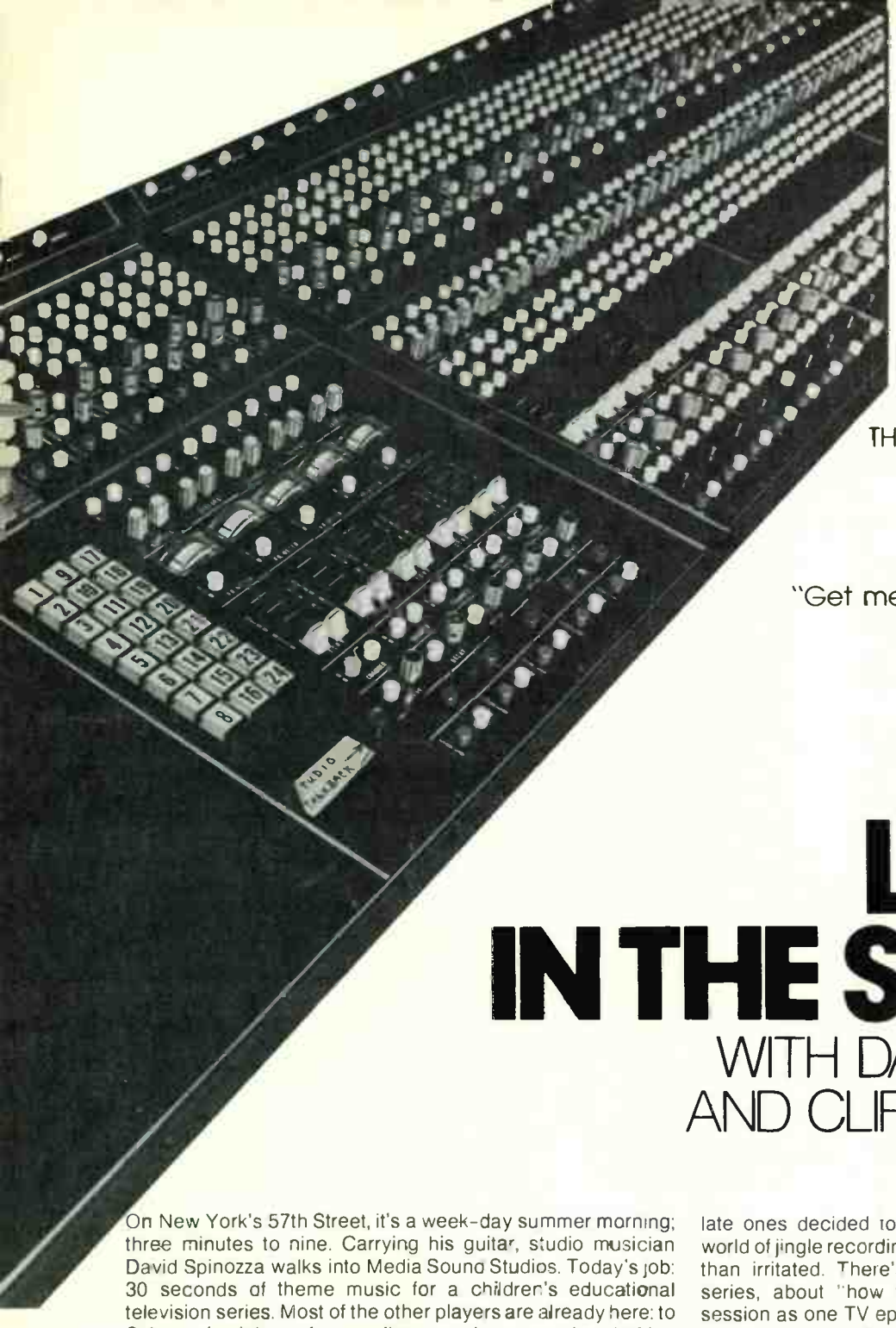

THE FOUR STAGES IN THE LIFE OF A STUDIO MUSICIAN:

"Who's David Spinozza?"
"Get me David Spinozza."
"Get me a young David Spinozza."
"Who's David Spinozza?"

— David Spinozza

LIVING IN THE STUDIO

WITH DAVID SPINOZZA AND CLIFFORD CARTER

BY MICHAEL ROZEK

On New York's 57th Street, it's a week-day summer morning; three minutes to nine. Carrying his guitar, studio musician David Spinozza walks into Media Sound Studios. Today's job: 30 seconds of theme music for a children's educational television series. Most of the other players are already here: to Spinozza's right, a four or five-man brass section; behind them, set in their own booth, a symphony-schooled, six-man string section. Spinozza and the rest of the rhythm players sit in a corner: there's drummer Chris Parker, an original member of Paul Butterfield's Better Days, The Brecker Brothers Band and Stuff; pianist Steve Robbins, a young veteran on the scene; newcomers Brian Allsop (bass) and Andy Schwartz (guitar); and Wyatt Day (acoustic guitar). While the violinists, mostly men in their fifties, discuss inflation and the Middle East, the younger rhythm section trades Mahavishnu licks, battles in blue and bebop jams, and bat punchlines around. ("A lot of string players are named Max," Spinozza will joke later, "but the rhythm section usually looks like the Muppets.")

Meantime, in the control room, writer-arranger Tom Anthony is tense. Hired by the series to create the music and run the session, he's handpicked the musicians — and a couple are late. Making a quick phone call, he learns the two late ones decided to send substitutes. In the by-the-clock world of jingle recording, this is still a *faux pas*; Anthony is more than irritated. There's already a big logistical wrinkle; the series, about "how things are made", is videotaping the session as one TV episode, and wires, crews, and producers are everywhere. There are even more musicians than usual, to show in one blow what's usually spread over three or four consecutive overdubbing sessions. Still, a bit past 9:30, things are set. Anthony walks into the studio, steps up to the podium, and begins guiding the players through the sheet music.

Immediately there are adjustments to make. One of the brass players has a long part without a rest. Figuring the piece will flow better if he pauses, he asks Anthony. They compromise. The string leader comes out of his booth to ask a question; the answer is an extra part for his section, to be overdubbed later. Meantime, Schwartz and Spinozza compare chord voicings. "*This* one," says Schwartz, "saves me from a lot of fuckups." "*This* is the one," attempts Spinozza, "I can never find . . . only maniacs can play it." Suddenly, Anthony calls out for attention, and the run-throughs begin.

By 10:30, there's a workable take on tape. But (as in almost all commercial or jingle work), it must be synced to a video or

audio track. Inside the booth, Anthony listens to a playback over a videotape of the show's opening. "I need it a little longer," says Danny Epstein, the music supervisor from the series. "We need a button to go to black." "I can make it anything you want," says Anthony. Back outside with the players, he adds notation ("There will now be a bar 14A . . . Chris, would you play a little more involved opening this time?"). Spinozza is given special instructions on his part, a rhythm lick throughout that's especially difficult. "I'm *scared*," he mock-whines. "Bite the bullet," says Schwartz.

By 11:00, there's a timed final take: by noon, the entire job is finished.

"The thing that keeps us all working?" David Spinozza poses, rhetorically. "For the 150 or so who do dates regularly, it isn't that we can all read or play at a certain level. Those are almost givens. It's that no matter what written notes we're asked to play, we can always make them come out music."

"No," laughs Spinozza, later that week, "I wasn't *really* scared. That date was a mountain I could climb. I just played the same thing over and over . . . Tom wrote a lot of it out, almost 100% of it." Normally, a rhythm player's job is the least pre-programmed in the studio. Most writers prefer to let them make up a basic "feel" on the spot. In this case, explained Tom Anthony, he'd been asked by the TV series to write something "very specific," hence the unusual degree of notation. Still, he specifically requested his office to call Spinozza for the job. "I knew David could handle the part," he told me, "but also make it interesting, just in the *way* he did it.")

David Spinozza has been a regular in New York since age 19; he entered the scene at 17, and has seen the genre of "studio musicians" grow from unknown quantities to household words. "The scene's definitely changed over the years," he reflects. "When I broke in, the guys who were doing the bulk of the work were jazzers. Now, there are more guys with rock roots, and the average age of the player is younger. Also, a lot of the record dates have shifted to California . . . but the commercial work here keeps getting bigger and bigger. And, the rise of multitracking has opened up the studios to more specialists . . . more good people on each instrument. If you can splinter tracks, you can splinter work . . . so that also means more contractors. There used to be just a few who assigned all the work." And, at 26, there isn't much work Spinozza hasn't done; in addition to the everyday, he's played on scores of hit albums, including sessions with three Beatles; produced (James Taylor's *Walking Man* LP); and released one LP of his own (*Spinozza*, A&M). The obvious question: aren't most dates a little . . . *easy* by now? "Yes," he admits. "It really started wearing thin about three years ago. So, I started taking less dates. Now, I get maybe fifteen calls a week. This week I took eight, and it was a pretty hectic five days. I really prefer to take five or so — one per weekday." But has taking less calls helped? "Not as much as I thought . . . I have to admit I'd like to see a day where I'm not a studio player any more. I'm out of my deal with A&M now (his finished second album was never released) . . . and what I'd eventually like to do is put together a band of non-studio players, so we can tour, establish something cohesive, and give a record company some basis for interest. But I'm not pushing for any big changes . . . I do what I do, and what I do now is play in the studios."

Of course, Spinozza acknowledges part of the reason he can be so sanguine about his future: his financial position, like that of most studio players, is *very* good. Start with the basic session fee ($127.05 for three hours' work, during which no more than fifteen minutes of music can be completed). Add extra moneys for overtime, doubling on another instrument, and leading or contracting a group of musicians. Add double scale for Sunday work. Add the fact that most top players routinely command double scale (a very few even work for their own, higher set fees). Add a yearly bonus check, paid by a trade association of clients and based on number of sessions played. And, add the *biggest* money of residuals for commercials (plus, for some name sidemen, a new phenomenon—percentage of record sales.) The sum is, uh, tidy.

On the other hand, riches rarely come cheap. Jingle work may start as early as seven in the morning, when most band musicians are asleep; record dates often go well past midnight. And no matter how long or short, every working day is frought with some amount of razor-sharp professional pressure — so mental and physical fatigue is a constant factor. Drugs, a ready conduit for big money, are some players' respite; others, like Spinozza, get into philosophical disciplines designed to keep one "in the moment." "You have to walk into a session," he says, "accepting the possibility that it may not go smoothly, because almost every variable you're dealing with has to do with people — with communication. So you can't come in with a lot of hostility, or shyness, or whatever negatives you might carry around. You have to be really focused on a peak sensitivity to the situation; on when to play . . . when to listen . . . when to take direction literally and when to go your own way . . . when to not even play anything. That's why even though the scene depends on players creating on the spot, the worst sessions are ones with no *overall* direction. It almost always leads to frustration, because there's no mutual communication about the goal of the session."

"In fact," says Spinozza, "there's a thousand guys who play better than me . . . playing's really about 30% of it. If I have

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DAVID SPINOZZA

CLIFFORD CARTER

something to contribute as a player, it's that I can psyche out what a guy wants, whether he's specific or not — and give it to him almost every time."

In the June *Musician*, Pat Metheny talked about his old University of Miami classmate Clifford Carter: "He's maybe the number two or three call pianist for studio stuff in New York now." This night, Carter's at RCA Studios as part of a top rhythm section (Miami classmate Hiram Bullock on guitar, Maynard Ferguson vet Gordon Johnson on bass, and rock super-sessioneer Andy Newmark on drums). Under writer-arrangeer-contractor Mitch Farber, it's basic tracks for,... er... a *disco* version of the theme from "Sweeney Todd", Stephen Sondheim's near-atonal Broadway score. The idea, explains Tom Shepherd, RCA's VP of A&R, Classical Division, "was mine... I asked our pop a&r people who could do a great disco arrangement, and they recommended Mitch. See, we've had some sales success with the *Todd* original cast album, on RCA Red Seal. So, I thought it might be fun to put this out... on Red *Seals* Records. We're even going to have a new logo — a seal bouncing balls on his nose." And, noted Farber, some interesting touches on the tune's bridge: "We'd like to simulate throats being cut — I guess you can do that by slicing watermelons (note: in the musical, Todd is known as "the demon barber killer")." So much for taste, we're talking money here.

Scheduled to start at nine and booked till midnight, with a possible extra hour, the session doesn't hit till ten; one player, coming from another date, is late. (In this respect, record dates are much looser than jingles; the rules are more the musicians' style than the client's.) Meantime, Cliff Carter explains why he's here: "Mitch and I go way back... he's been real influential in my career. He recommended I go to Miami, when I was studying piano with him in high school. When I started in town, he got me some of my first important gigs... some Dave Matthews records on CTI, primarily. Now, I do a lot of his projects." But unlike Spinozza, who concedes that his start in town a decade ago was relatively painless and accidental, the 26-year-old Carter, originally from New York's suburbs, had to return, starting from scratch, to make it. "Miami," he says, "was helpful. Jerry Coker gave a course in reading chord symbols quickly, where you had to comp correctly in front of a room full of people. *That* made your fingers catch up with your head real fast... But mostly I did a lot of playing in and out of Miami that prepared me. In 1974, I left school to go on tour with The Four Tops for a year, which was my first big professional learning experience. Especially the first night I joined them on the road... we did a record in L.A., and suddenly, there I was in a room with Wilton Felder. Ben Benay, all the heavy west coast cats.... Finally, though, I knew it was time to hit New York. I came up with Phyllis Hyman's group, the PH Factor. We'd worked a lot in Miami; there was me, Mark Egan (now the bassist with Metheny), Hiram Bullock, and a drummer named Billy Bowker. We used to play Mikell's and Rust Brown's uptown a lot — the scene where Stuff got started. We were doing a really unusual blend of all kinds of music... so a lot of different musicians come to hear us... everybody from George Harrison to Stevie Wonder to Roberta Flack. But then Hiram quit to go with Dave Sanborn, and then Mark and I left, and that's when I really tackled New York.

"I had some money saved, but the way I got started was working every gig I could, not in any pre-planned way, but just to get out there. Like free showcases... $20 gigs in Brooklyn... gigs where nobody really know how to play and I wound up never getting paid... I even went back with the Tops for a while. Finally, (drummer) Steve Jordan, who I'd met up at Mikell's, got in touch with me; he was working with Herbie Mann, and when Herbie needed a keyboard player, I joined the band. That led to some records, and people started to know my name, and pretty soon I was at least getting calls.

"The point is, the scene is so tight, you just have to keep hanging on... you can't give up. A classic example is the rise of (bassist) Neil Jason. A few years ago he was playing in basements.

At 9:45, the late musician arrives. Before going in to orient the players, Farber explains: "Once they get the bass line, they get the feel, and then they'll play more than I can ever write... they all read great, but here it's a matter of *hearing* what they see." The usual changes in notation follow: "That quarter note is just the rest for the bass; everyone else plays through it... there's no E-flat in the F-minor chord." Carter asks, "Is there any part that's more open... soloish?" Bullock says, "I like bar 52 where I add the second guitar. Maybe I can do it like McLaughlin, with two necks." On one track, a metronome keeps audible time, a standard aid when cutting disco tracks. Newmark suddenly realizes, "My barbershop in *London* is called Sweeney Todd." Some takes follow. "I played one wrong thing," offer Carter and Bullock. By eleven, the "Todd" theme, an "A" side of a single, is finished; work on the "B" side begins almost immediately. Now, the run-throughs go faster — but the rut of rote always begins to hang heavy. "I can't *believe* how long I've been in the studio today," says one player. "What if I had *jingles* in the morning?"

"Jingles happen too fast to be comfortable," says another. "If I'm playing somebody else's music, I like to get to know the players I'm playing it with."

"Sometimes, it's easier to stay up all night than to get up for a nine o'clock jingle," says the first. "But then, it's kinda nice... you make all your money in the morning, and you're asleep by noon."

The session ends around one. Around the corner, in an all-night Japanese restaurant popular with musicians, Carter unwinds. "I wasn't too focused tonight," he confides. "Everybody seemed pretty tired. I think that brought our individual energies down.

"You know, whenever I run into one of these really long days, I think of what two guys in Toto (the new, platinum-debuting L.A. band, comprised of long-time session stars) told us when they came to Miami. They said that when you're successful in the studios, there's a sense in which you're working your way to the bottom. Because by making all your personal goals, by applying all your artistry — you simply refine playing into a business proposition. And that's a big part of the mental fatigue you can feel. When you're in this very cut-and-dried, play-for-pay space, with this big, beneficial system taking care of you... the money keeps coming in, and the next day you'll do more work, and on and on and on... It's really kind of an unreal world at times."

Later, the talk shifts to more tangible occupational hazards. "Your headphones," offers Carter. "They not only have to fit right — that's why a few people even bring their own — but they also have to accurately reflect the music around you, what you're playing in relation, and the difference between what you're hearing live and what it'll sound like on tape. If the situation allows, it's even worth delaying the session for an adjustment... that's why some engineers put on phones, too. The problem is, people's hearing is such a big variable... and especially with the trend toward delays and phrasers, part of a player's responsibility on a date is to make sure he always sounds the way he's supposed to." (Later in the week, a laughing David Spinozza will concur enthusiastically: "Be sure you say that almost *no* engineers get the headphone mix right. I tell them, 'The mix is off.' They say, 'We can't adjust it until you play.' *I* say, '*I* can't play until I can *hear*!' ")

How about special problems a keyboardist might face? "I think reading's probably the hardest on piano," admits Carter, "because of the two clefs... so sometimes, before everything starts, I'll turn my Rhodes off and play my part silently thirty times, just to be ready... Also, though I certainly wouldn't classify this as a problem, I always keep up with new equipment... if I'm lucky enough to have one unique identity in the studios, it's that I can give people a certain sound on synthesizer... so I have models customized to my specifications, and I'm always looking to expand what I can do."

But, like Spinozza's, Carter's most fervent commentary concerns people, and how they make the scene work. "The studios," he laughs, "are a subset of life . . . write that down . . . In life, sooner or later you find out no one really knows *anything*; the trick is to make everybody, including yourself, feel *comfortable* about this. So, at some dates, maybe the music's not really so good, and yet the arranger doesn't know how to push the players enough to save it . . . or maybe the arranger's picked the wrong kind of players, or just been unable to get his first choice . . . or maybe one player on the date starts copping an attitude. So what you do is play your best . . . trying to give the music an identity whether or not anyone in charge has provided the atmosphere for one.

"On the other hand, the peaks come when there's an air of mutual respect and excitement in the room. On rhythm dates, I find this happens a lot when the arranger's also a top player . . . because if you play well for him, you're looking good in front of a peer, and that's the highest compliment. Or, maybe you wind up doing a date for a musician you've admired for a long time . . . like this week, a lot of the guys in town did Felix Cavillere's album. I only sat in on one tune very briefly, but I heard later that Eddie Brigati came in, and some of the players convinced him and Felix to do "People Everywhere Just Gotta Be Free" — and working together, the result was a really sensational track.

"Or, like the dates I'm doing now for The Village People. You know these are important sessions —people all over the world will be listening to this music. And there's enormous pressure on the producer —we're talking about *megabucks* here. And yet, he's given the players the responsibility for making it happen: what's written out is just a road map of chord symbols. In fact, at these sessions, (producer) Jacques Morali's been giving us just the barest feel: he dances a little; he puts on a record and says, '*That's* what I want;' 'he'll stop a take, and say 'More *dancing* . . . not dancing enough.' But the sessions have gone extremely well, 'cause we've keyed into his energy, given him what he's been looking for, and done it with time to spare.' "

At yet *another* dimly lit studio in the RCA complex, it's Friday night, late: a record date, and a long week's end for David Spinozza. All day he's done jingles such as thirty seconds of loping, glossy background for a car commercial, with bassist Anthony Jackson, pianist Warren Bernhardt, and other ace readers: the same thirty seconds, ten or more times, by-the-clock in a cramped studio . . . and perfect within minutes. ("David," said the composer-conductor, "I need a *fat* guitar sound . . . beautiful, lush, sustaining . . . no bending or sliding . . . just a *long* quality, to go along with the violins.") This job involves actress Diane Keaton. She's cutting her first album, for executive producer Richard Perry's Planet label. Producer Kenny Vance and keyboardist-arranger Kenny Ascher (a studio star on both coasts, and a frequent writing partner with Paul Williams) have assembled her small, responsive backup unit: Spinozza, acoustic guitarist Sal DeTroia, bassist Neil Jason, and drummer Alan Schwartzberg (who did some work on the Village People dates earlier that day). While Keaton sings, shy and charming, isolated in her own kiosk, they accompany in calm, semi-disco: the tunes are covers of hits by Al green, Neil Young, and Todd Rundgren. From seven till past midnight, there are seven or so takes of each; Vance wants to capture a broad spectrum of interpretations, to have maximum choice in later editing. Curiously, only the simpler arrangements withstand repeated retakes, gaining new and newer life; the complicated ones just seem to lock, and stale. Throughout, Spinozza only plays a variety of rhythm parts: all constant, all circumscribed. Once, engineer Joe Ferla is moved to say, "listen to what David's *doing* out there . . . he's *really* picking up the track." Near the end, though, nobody picks up anything: fatigue pulls the collective feel askew, and the date ends on a producer's sigh.

After, Spinozza's asked the recurringly obvious question: do *all* of his dates consist of playing the same thing over and over again? "I guess you could say that," he says. "But it's more *what* you're playing that makes the difference. Like, you missed the best session I did this week: a track on a David Sanborn album. I still didn't do any soloing, but the groove was *incredible* . . . great to play. The problem most of the time, though, is that once somebody has a big hit record, everybody plays *that* groove for the next year; a lot of producers are scared to do something new.

"But," he says, "I think it would be much worse if I had made it so young in a band . . . it would have been a total free float. One thing about the studios . . . they're comfortable." This said, Spinozza heads for another not-so-comfortable weekend of his favorite non-musical passion: racing motorcycles.

Meantime, Clifford Carter will be at a Village club, making music. But for a change, it'll be *his*: "I'm part of a group called the 24th Street Band, with Hiram Bullock, bassist Will Lee, and drummer Steve Jordan. And it's really the most special musical experience I've ever had.

"See, the four of us have been through a lot together. Hiram, Will and I all went to Miami. I played with Steve when we were both with Herbie Mann. We've all achieved a certain communality by working together in the studios, and by dealing with New York as a lifestyle. And that's what makes us special: we don't sound like four studio players, we sound like a *band*.

"This September, we're going to Japan for two weeks . . . we already did a digital record which just came out there, and the people are already buying tickets, writing stories about us. Our concept is basically progressive rock . . . we want to play for as many people as possible . . . be a band that gets over, and really make the band our lifestyle . . ."

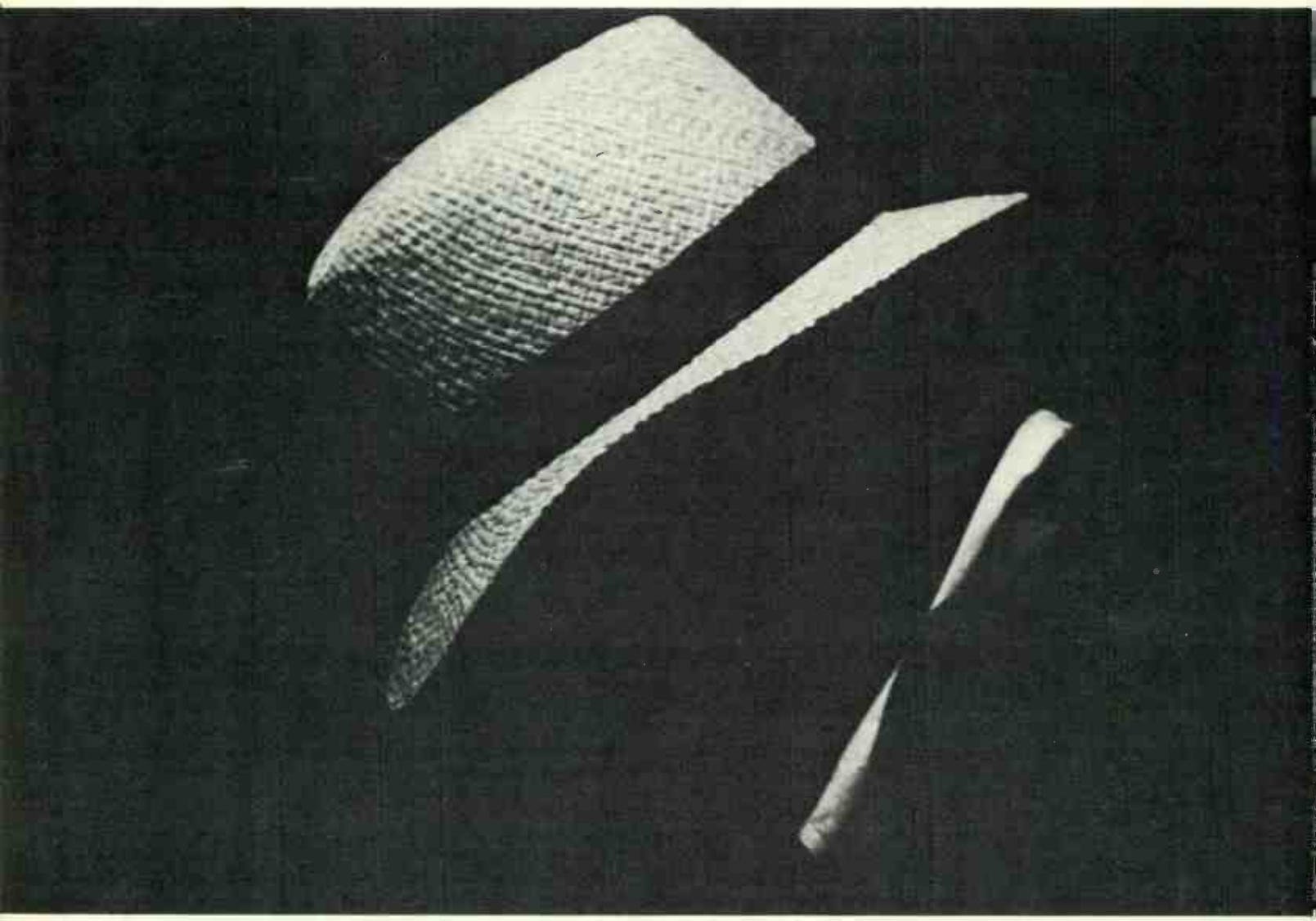
For a moment, Carter pauses: "Right now, I'm working pretty consistently in the studios. I've got the Village People dates for almost a month solid . . . two synthesizer programming jobs for some Japanese records . . . and I also get a lot of extra calls in the summer, when some of the older, more established players are out of town. But . . . in the studios, I almost never feel like I did when I was eight, and I played with my first band . . . just *happy*, you know? And with *this* band, every time we play . . . that's *exactly* the way I feel."

WHAT I CONTRIBUTE AS A PLAYER IS THAT I CAN PSYCHE OUT WHAT A GUY WANTS, WHETHER HE'S SPECIFIC OR NOT, AND GIVE IT TO HIM ALMOST EVERY TIME."

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

BLOOD ULMER AND PUNK JAZZ

BLOOD ULMER PLAYS HARMOLODIC GUITAR, RESOLVING OPPOSITES BY HAVING THEM COLLIDE HEAD-ON, CONJURING BEAUTY FROM A SUNBURST OF DISSONANCE AND CHAOS.



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

BY CHIP STERN

With the British invasion of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the early 1960's, the guitar became the dominant instrument in popular music. But among all those people out there playing guitar, is anybody doing anything different? Though it's an easy instrument to become acquainted with, the guitar's melodic and orchestral possibilities are difficult to truly master. The instrument tends to dictate repetitive scale patterns and chord voicings; technique often supercedes personal expression and experimental inquiry, becoming an end in itself.

Over the past 10 or 15 years a number of renegade musicians have brought the guitar into the avant garde, people like Sonny Greenwich, Sonny Sharrock, Derek Bailey, Fred Frith, Hans Reichel and Eugene Chadbourne. The Canadian Greenwich labored in obscurity for years while developing new chord voicings and a picking attack that liberated him

from rhythmic cliches. This allowed Greenwich to approximate the vocal phrasing of horn players like Sonny Rollins and Miles Davis. Sonny Sharrock employed slide, feedback, spastic rhythms, tremolo bar, and violent tonal clusters with Pharoh Sanders and Herbie Mann, and is considered among the first free jazz guitarists. Sharrock's album *Black Woman* (with wife Linda on voice and Milford Graves on drums) is an apocalyptic firestorm, but in recent years he's diddled indifferently with commercial forms and doesn't seem to practice much. Britisher Derek Bailey pre-dates Sharrock in avant garde circles. He developed a totally free style that employs a lot of space, scraped strings, clusters, banging sounds, artificial and natural harmonics, feedback and a volume pedal (to remove the transient attack from his notes). Frith and Reichel have developed radical uses for electronics (such as affixing a pickup to the first fret of the neck), and along with Chadbourne have experimented with various ways to *prepare* the guitar, such as affixing alligator clips, rubber bands and balloons to the strings. Chadbourne is in tune with the finger-picking inventions of a Lightnin' Hopkins, as well as elements of rock and jazz; but in his work with reedman John Zorn (to give one example), his preeminent concern is with the development of amoebic tonal variations — it doesn't swing, it oozes. More conventional players like John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell, John Abercrombie, Mick Goodrick, Pat Metheny and Michael Gregory Jackson have also taken steps along more traditional lines to extend the vocabulary of the guitar.

Which brings us to James "Blood" Ulmer. Ulmer has developed perhaps the most profound approach to electric guitar in modern music, with an ear for composition to match. His improvising concept can be likened to Thelonious Monk's; virtuostic gamesmanship is eschewed in favor of frugal, vinegary articulations. Like Monk, Ulmer has an extraordinary ear for pitch and zigzagging vocal phrases. Plucking a single note with his thumb while simultaneously hammering several notes with his chording hand, Ulmer knocks the strings out of tempered pitch, giving each note a microtonal slur and shake—like a sitar. Ulmer plugs his Gibson Byrdland into a Fender Twin Reverb and uses natural distortion, volume and a drum-like thumb attack to elicit writhing screams, throttled moans and blipping interval leaps; singing bell tones that reverberate like steel drums; garlands of stuttering triplets and choppy melodies, as jagged as a rusty razor blade; and nebulous, gong-like chords that swell outwards in concentric circles. Sometimes Ulmer will tune the entire guitar to a unison A or a unison E, which gives the bass notes a deep, swampy color; on his galloping hoe-down composition, "Woman Coming," Ulmer's tuning makes for a sound about halfway between a delta blues and North African oud music.

Part of what makes Ulmer's music so unique is his thorough grounding in Ornette Coleman's theoretical system, *harmolodics*. Harmolodics is as much a philosophy of life as a way to organize sounds and rhythms; it happens to coincide neatly with my own musical/historical/spiritual Weltansicht, which is *syncretism*: the reconciliation or union of conflicting forms and beliefs—delineating connections between seeming antinomy.

Which is just what harmolodics does. Harmolodics resolves opposites by having them collide head on, conjuring beauty from a starburst of dissonance and chaos. Harmolodics starts by presuming all notes to be equal, which in a sense doesn't allow for 'wrong notes' or 'mistakes' because everyone is compensating for one another. This might be taken to mean that *anybody* could get up and play along—which is precisely Ornette's intention—but this shouldn't suggest that you could play *anything* you want. In harmolodics your freedom carries a responsibility; you have to keep harmony and melody in constant motion, and balance what everyone else is doing. This leads to what Ornette calls "multiple unisions," in which everyone is simultaneously climaxing.

"When you modulate harmolodically," Ulmer explained, "you only use chords which are in tonic voicing. For instance, you have a tonic voicing of a C Major triad (C-E-G), then you have inversions (E-G-C, G-C-E). In harmolodic music you're not modulating through a scale, you're modulating through twelve equal tonics. So everywhere you move there is a tonic basic place—nothing can take you out. When you use chord inversions you can't do that everytime you move a chord, because inversions have a tendency to keep you in the same place you left with a note or two in a different position. For me the harmolodic approach to guitar is the most natural way of achieving the type of motion that piano players get. The idea of playing chord modulation is not like playing a sequence in a song. It's not like the way some cats start out playing "I'll Remember April" then never go back to back to the changes no more; just letting it happen, however they want to come. Harmolodic music is more organized. You have to instantly orchestrate the sounds someone is improvising, and it forces you to play melody at all times—it's a big job."

Ulmer's been developing this concept since he came to New York from Detroit in 1971. After playing Minton's Playhouse in Harlem for nine straight months ("six nights a week"), Ulmer worked with Art Blakey, Joe Henderson and Paul Bley, then joined up with the multi-directional drummer Rashid Ali. "Ali and I had a concept for guitar, drums and horns that was just too freaky a sound back then. The songs I played with Ali fit the way he plays, because he plays everything all the time." In 1973 Ulmer met Ornette Coleman, a musical relationship that endures to this day. This leads people to assume that "Blood" is an *out* guitarist, period. But Ulmer—who was born in St. Matthews, South Carolina, on February 2, 1942—has deep roots in Gospel, doo-wop, blues and funk. "When I was 9 or 10 I was in this little vocal group, the Southern Sons. You've heard them old groups the Dixie Hummingbirds and the Five Blind Boys? They used to have us on their program because we were some little kids who could really harmonize. I remember I stopped playing guitar at 13 and then started back up at 19. I used to think with music that when you became big enough you wouldn't have to do it no more

"ALL JAZZ NEEDS IS A LITTLE FUNK IN IT; IT'S TIME TO PUT THE STARCH BACK IN THE SHIRT

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

THE HENDRIX PORTFOLIO BY NONA HATAY

ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF JIMI HENDRIX'S DEATH, HE STILL STANDS ALONE AS HAVING TAKEN THE GUITAR TO A NEW THRESHOLD OF EXPRESSION.

(laughter). But I always liked the lifestyle, and eventually it became a choice of that lifestyle or get a job (laughter)."

So Ulmer headed to Pittsburgh, where a doo-wop group bought him his first electric guitar and amp. Ulmer played in several doo-wop groups, as did Jimi Hendrix and George Benson, who were also in Pittsburgh at that time. When Ulmer left Pittsburgh, he went on the road for nine solid years, getting a solid grounding in organ trios and funk bands. Eventually he settled in Detroit where he studied for four years and conducted clinics for jazz and acid rock guitarists.

In nearly 20 years of active playing Ulmer has not made a single record, and on his few as a sideman the producers either a) told him to play like Wes Montgomery, b) mixed him way down; c) edited him out completely. But Ulmer has been compiling music for all this time, and now he's organized a working quartet to play it. Tenorist David Murray, electric bassist Amin Ali, and drummer Ron Shannon Jackson allow Ulmer to develop his own brand of funk, as well as the free form inflections of his work with Rashid Ali, Ornette Coleman and Arthur Blythe (dig Ulmer's solo on "Odessa" from Blythe's *Lenox Avenue Breakdown*). Ulmer's also recorded an amazing album with Coleman on alto, the miraculous Jamaladeen Tacuma on Rickenbacker bass guitar and Denardo Coleman on drums. It's entitled *Tales of Captain Black*, and is tentatively slated for an August release on Artists House Records.

Ulmer calls his thing "harmolodic funk." By inference it reflects people like John Lee Hooker, James Brown, Captain Beefheart, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp and Jimi Hendrix. Each song begins with a definite beat, then peels off into something akin to an American Indian ceremony, a South Indian raga or African pop music. Sometimes rhythms of two and three collide at rapid speed; other times bassist Ali and drummer Jackson state the beat in a steady rolling fashion while Ulmer and Murray create bumblebee polyphony. the James "Blood" Ulmer Quartet is probably the most exciting improvising ensemble in New York, and Ulmer may be the first real post-Hendrixian guitarist, with two advantages Jimi didn't have. Though Hendrix had Mitch Mitchell, he never had a rhythm section equal to his vision, and he certainly didn't have an instrumental foil the likes of David Murray. Jackson is one of the great improvising drummers, with a unique approach to rock and funk syncopations. His high-stepping style is somewhere in between the Joujouka drummers of North Africa and the Grambling marching band. Jackson's drumming is all tension and no release; he avoids putting a period on the sentence with excessive cymbal crashes, allowing Ulmer and Murray to build their stories. Amin Ali plays like a futuristic Larry Graham, modulating whangy chromatic figures up and down the neck, while keying his bounces and dribbles to Jackson's pressing bass drum. David Murray alternates between honker and shouter and all the way outer. Convoluted, billowing trails of melody cut through swaths of percussive textures. Whether his mood is romantic or irascible, Murray's improvisations are animated and visual. And do they groove—a deep feeling for rock and funk is always apparent.

"There should be another name for what they call funk music," Ulmer suggested, "because what they call funk is so important. It seems like they call it funk so they can leave it out—it need to be in. It's as if they gave it a word so that a cat would say 'I don't want to mess with none of that,' but it be some good shit. A lot of jazz musicians are afraid to try and put that feeling in there. The difference between Ali and Jackson is between the cymbal and the drum concept. That's what I like about funk: there's a pulsation happening that you can feel all the time which makes it sound like we're in tune harmonically, but because of the way everyone plays their parts it gives the feeling of being free."

Harmolodic funk sounds inside out. The tension occurs when all of a sudden there's a unison, when just in passing the four musicians hit on a certain consonance. This can be part of a compositional plan or it can occur spontaneously. This may sound terribly radical, but it's not really new. I see it as part of a much larger historical movement, which I call *punk jazz*.

Punk jazz is a very particular interface of rock, jazz and funk... punk jazz is an attitude as well as a texture . . . .

The attitude is egalitarian, striving for an organic dialog even when there's a featured soloist; the individual isn't obsolete, but the collective sound is the main focus — a tribal axis in which there are no accompanists and everyone has a role to play.

The attitude is to sound spontaneous, even when you're not improvising. It's cool to be iconoclastic and experimental — to use all resources at hand: electronics, poetry, theatre, dance, multi-media, technology and magic (like Sun Ra). You're free to draw from any culture you wish or to create your own . . . .

The texture is physically immediate, bordering on assault — like taking both barrels of a shotgun to the face. The intricate words and music are full of irony and dissonance. It's music to mess with your mind, but it doesn't ignore the body. It doesn't matter whether you dance in your head or on your feet — the rhythms will make you move . . . .

After the original Mahavishnu Orchestra, with few exceptions, so-called fusion music became a perversion of punk jazz's spirit. Fusion became a high-overhead, lean-return formula swill that record companies have been trying to turn a buck on for quite a few years now. A form of bread and circuses.

Captain Beefheart (a.k.a. Don Van Vliet), Jimi Hendrix and James Brown are the antecedents of punk jazz. Only within the past few years have people started to hear what Beefheart was doing in the late 60s. It's a very idiosyncratic, futuristic blues music. Consciously or unconsciously you can detect his influence in the music of James White and the Black (a.k.a. James Chance and the Contortions), Pere Ubu, Ulmer and Coleman. I think Coleman and Beefheart have had a reciprocal influence on each other. Both are interested in odd tunings and harmonies; multiple tempos and polyrhythms; polyphony and dissonance; and the connections between blues musics and ethnic musics from thoughout the world. "Beefheart's thing is very good," Ornette once remarked to me admiringly. "He's very underrated." Even though Beefheart is a visionary poet, composer and arranger, Frank Zappa (a fallen punk jazzer) seems to get more recognition playing Stan

continued on page 38

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JEFF LORBER

HIS SECOND ALBUM ON INNER CITY RECORDS FEATURED SOME VERY HOT ORIGINAL FUSION JAZZ, AND SPENT A SURPRISING SIX MONTHS ON BILLBOARD'S JAZZ CHARTS. HIS NEXT WILL BE FOR ARISTA AND WILL FEATURE JOE FARRELL AND FREDDIE HUBBARD IN ADDITION TO HIS REGULAR BAND.

BY DOUGLAS CLARK

BRIAN DAVIS

Who is this kid named Jeff Lorber? Says he's a jazz musician. But he hasn't been a sideman for anyone; he hasn't spent much time on the road or in the studio; he hasn't even scuffled in New York or L.A. Who's he trying to kid?

Jeff Lorber isn't kidding at all. Through a combination of luck, determination and talent, the 27-year old composer and keyboardist is now poised on the edge of what promises to be a very bright career.

In the late '60s, in high school near Philadelphia, Jeff played in a number of average white bands. Acid rock and Motown ruled the airwaves; Jeff learned songs like "Foxy Lady" and "Ain't Too Proud To Beg" on his Farfisa. Jazz was a foreign country to him until Miles Davis provided a passport called *Bitches Brew*. Today, 10 years later, Jeff Lorber travels freely in that jazz, or fusion world that Miles opened up with that album.

Jeff's first few years in jazz country were also his first years on his own. He spent the early '70s in Boston, a restless time for him when he attended Berklee and BU, toured with a rock band, checked into macrobiotics, took piano lessons, and in general tested out the waters of his life. In 1973, still searching and unsettled, Jeff and his wife Syd left Boston for the West Coast.

They followed a passage to the Northwest, taking root in Portland, Oregon. By 1976 Jeff had formed his own band, the Jeff Lorber Fusion, a name which leaves no doubt whose band it is or what kind of music it plays. In 1977 Jeff sent a demo to Inner City Records, Irv Kratka's voracious company which was on the prowl for talented territorial bands. Kratka found the demo tasty and agreed to issue Lorber's first album, *The Jeff Lorber Fusion* (IC 1026), which met with mild regional success.

Jeff also sent a copy of the demo to Chick Corea. He loved it. The Corea connection clicked a few months later when Chick agreed to perform on Jeff's second album. Chick and his friend Joe Farrell overdubbed solos on four cuts. Inner City featured their names prominently on the cover of the album, entitled *Soft Space* (IC 1056).

Soft Space broke into the national market last year and spent six months on Billboard's jazz charts. Its unexpected success provided a springboard for Lorber, allowing him to negotiate a handsome contract with Arista Records. His first Arista release, *Watersign*, is due out this summer. It features Freddie Hubbard and Joe Farrell in addition to the band itself: saxophonist Dennis Springer, bassist Danny Wilson and drummer Dennis Bradford.

MUSICIAN: Were you surprised by the success of *Soft Space*?

LORBER: I felt good about the record from the time we finished recording it, but I didn't really expect it to take off the way it did.

Q: The fact that the names of Chick Corea and Joe Farrell were prominently displayed on the cover — how much do you think that helped the album?

A: I think those names lent the album some credibility and attracted people's attention enough to listen to it. But then after they listened to it, I think they liked it for its own sake.

Q: Would you call your music commercial jazz?

A: To me, the word "commercial" — all that means is whether or not something is going to sell. If Keith Jarrett can sell 100,000 copies of a three-record set of solo meanderings, then it's commercial.

Q: Has your music changed much since you put your band together three years ago?

A: Well, several different musicians have come through the band, and each person has left a mark. Everybody who has played with us has contributed something to our sound. But overall I think the orientation has been very consistent.

Q: So you haven't had to change your style to attract an audience?

A: No, not at all. When we started out, we were playing nights for $5 apiece at the Silver Moon in downtown Portland, but even then I felt good about the music. I had a lot of faith in it, and I stuck through those really lean times. I felt it was just a matter of time until people started picking up on it.

Q: Is there anything significantly different about the music on your new album, *Watersign*?

A: One thing is that the music really had a chance to develop over a fairly long period of time on the road. And most of the solos were done live in the studio with the band.

Q: Why did you do that?

A: It's difficult to play along with a tape and recreate the intensity of a live performance. It's somewhat schizophrenic, like a music-minus-one record.

Q: Do you prefer performing live to recording?

A: I think they both have their importance. When you record an album, there's a certain kind of condensation and concentration of a musical statement that has to occur. When you play live you want to get more energy across. You try to achieve the same kind of energy on your records that you get live, and you try to get the same kind of

precision live that you get on your records.

Q: You call your band the Jeff Lorber Fusion. What does "fusion" mean to you?

A: In general it means combining different musical styles. More specifically, I think there's a school of musicians who have really synthesized a lot of the influences that have been happening in jazz for the last 10 years. The elements are more thoroughly integrated now. Groups like my group, Pat Metheny's and Spyro Gyro have achieved a more complete fusion than some of the earlier fusion bands.

Q: What are the common elements in the second generation fusion bands you just mentioned.

A: I'm more struck by their diversity, which I find very exciting.

Q: What elements are fused together in your band?

A: There's a very strong, funky, r&b kind of rhythmic concept. And the melodic ideas are lyrical, almost pop.

Q: What about bebop?

A: Yeah, there's a lot of bebop vocabulary in what we're doing. There are a lot of changes and a lot of II-V progressions. The actual melody lines are somewhat simplified, but when it comes time for a solo, there's a strong bebop orientation. Rhythmically, though, our orientation is very funky. We do a few tunes that have a swing feeling to them, but most of our music is based on sixteenth note rhythms. It's pretty sophisticated because the accents are very intricate. I pay a lot of attention to the rhythm in terms of establishing some solid grooves. (We agreed that "groove" refers to two or more interlocking ostinato patterns that provide a rhythmic and harmonic base for the music.)

Q: How do you go about establishing a groove?

A: It happens when we sit down together and start playing a new tune. Dennis (the drummer) may experiment with some very syncopated accents, and so we have to work that out so that it fits smoothly.

Q: So the actual working out of a groove is more of a group effort?

A: Yeah, I'd say so. I come up with a melody and chords and usually some idea of a bass line. Most of the time the bass player will use my bass line as a kind of jumping off point for his own ideas. It just evolves.

Q: Sounds like a very natural process.

A: It is. Everybody in the band is coming from the same place musically. Everyone has a natural feel for what's in the pocket, so to speak.

Q: How much of an influence has rock had on your music?

A: I've played in a number of rock and soul bands that have helped mold my musical sensibility into what it is, but I don't consider that as major an influence as jazz.

Q: What do you listen to?

A: I listen to everything. My mind's open. I listen to a lot of jazz, but I try to keep my ears open to other things. I dig Little Feat, Tower of Power, bands like that.

Q: Who are your heroes in jazz?

A: That's a list that could go on for days. The cats that I've probably been the most influenced by are Red Garland, Wynton Kelly, McCoy, Herbie, Chick, Joe Zawinul . . .

Q: Jazz musicians, including those you just mentioned, have traditionally come up through established bands before going out on their own. Do you feel like you missed something by skipping that step?

A: It's easy to say that I could have learned a lot by doing this or that, but I really don't feel like I've missed that much. I've been working hard to develop my abilities as a musician over a number of years. Maybe that growth could have been catalyzed by playing with a jazz giant or whatever, but I'm pleased with where I'm at, and I expect to continue to develop as time goes on.

Q: Which would you say is your stronger point: writing or playing?

A: Writing. There are a lot of good players around, but good writers are not that common.

Q: How do you go about composing a tune?

A: There are three different ways that I write. One way is just to sit down and start messing around and usually I'll come up with some kind of groove: a chord progression with some kind of rhythmic concept behind it. And then I'll write a melody on top of that. Another way I write is when I'm not at the piano at all, and I'm just thinking about it. I come up with totally different kinds of things. Usually when I do that, the melody comes first. The third way is when I try to capture a particular feeling in a song. Sometimes I'll get an inspiration from someone else's music or from a particular place, like the state of New Mexico, for instance.

Q: What would you say are the characteristics of your writing style?

A: I have a tendency to use certain chord progressions. I like to shift key centers. Especially when you go to the bridge, you can really add some color by modulating. And I think people like to hear that.

Q: What about melodic characteristics?

A: I like to use bluesy melodies with a lot of grace notes and inflections. But I don't really think about all these things when I'm writing a tune.

Q: Now that you're under contract to a large label, do you foresee any drastic changes in your music?

A: No, I doubt it. Arista heard *Soft Space* and they liked it. That's what they bought, that kind of music. They're being very supportive and encouraging us to continue in a direction that we've already established.

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RECORDS

Robert Fripp — *Exposure*, Polydor PD-1-6201

Fripp, like Eno, is committed to new music using an electronic medium, but their approach is an intuitive triumph of humanism over technology.

Exposure is an idiosyncratic rock masterpiece, an aural collage and musical puzzle pockmarked with black holes of pain and mystery than can engulf interpretation. Yet *Exposure* is amply endowed with the vestments of mass appeal as Fripp balances his incurably arty tendencies with personal transfigurations of rock music. Fripp is trying to define a new genre: informed by the new wave's elliptical irony and primitive emotional directness; conversant in the various streams of contemporary experimental music; reconciling the formal aspirations of art rock with the chain-saw textures of heavy metal. Fripp's heavy metal dances are more in the spirit of Jimi Hendrix, Cream and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra than that of Ted Nugent and Van Halen, but his music indulges in neither bloated virtuosity nor loutish, jism-headed sexism. Fripp eschews the role of soloist as individuality gives way to a group concept; Fripp orchestrates and channels the talents of his collaborators, unearthing heretofore unknown veins of gold in drummer Michael Walden and vocalist Daryl Hall, and providing suitable settings for singers Peter Hammill and Terre Roche; Fripp's guitar is employed as conceptual glue in the tightly composed songs, and his textural flourishes (like the skysaw guitar on "Chicago" and the oceanic Frippertronics motifs that occur throughout the album) can be likened to Les Paul's earlier developments in electronics. The lyrics of Fripp and poetess-therapist Joanna Walton portray people in a state of extremis and entropy — there is an overwhelming sense of mass psychosis. Odd-metered power chord excursions represent the manic constraints of society, while bittersweet ballads release tension and illustrate the transience of relationships. Fripp's aural cut-up techniques might put-off listeners, but there are enough musical peaks (like Terre Roche's tsamuri feminist war whoops on the disco-mysterioso title tune, and the sheer terror of "NY3") on *Exposure* to offer hope for alternative directions in rock. —*Chip Stern*

Philip Glass — *Einstein on the Beach*, Tomato 101.

The more I listen to this music the more I begin to enjoy it and the less important my reservations become — and I have a bundle of them. Repetition-music seems drastically impoverished compared to its roots in Bali *mantra* and *dhikr*, as if the thinking mind alone were trying to do the work of mind, heart, body, blood, spirit, soul and flesh, a foolish reduction of vitality to a principle, of a forest to a jail. It also seems silly for a creative musician to spend more than a year of his creative life composing it. John Cage had the right idea when he started it going in the forties and then forgot about it, Stockhausen was smart to have no more than chance meetings with it, jazz was too thoroughly alive to have any need of it — so what if classical music doesn't know what to do after Webern — and no one ever paid any attention to Lamonte Young, who did the most to establish it as an ongoing style.

And yet, and yet, here it is again. Ten years after the civilized world discovered and then abandoned Terry Riley, here it is again, first Steve Reich's dessicated *Music for 18 Musicians* on ECM and now two releases from Tomato, the four record complete set of the full *Einstein* score and the one record sample reviewed here. I can recommend the sampler more or less without reservation. It's full of vitality and major triads, has as much sheer velocity as anything on record and there are enough echoes of Bach and other polyphonists to keep the body warm (heavily systematized music always works best when its emotional roots are sunk in the sacred memory of another idiom). The electronic keyboards are loud, onrushing and fundamental; the reed textures are intriguingly varied within the restrictive structure of the cycles; and the vocalists, narrators excepted, sing numbers or the syllables of *solfeggio*. I'm interested by this music, and I stay interested even though I'm only partially satisfied by it. I'm sorry I missed *Einstein's* stage production, a four hour extravaganza that toured Europe extensively, but only played for two nights in America. No doubt plans for a revival are afoot now that the music has been released and is in vogue. I'll catch it if I can.

As for some of the more pretentious claims made for this music, that it induces trance for instance, or imprints its patterns on the neurons of the brain and stimulates unsuspected centers of pleasure, Glass himself has best answered them by pointing out that Western music has usually been based upon the creation and satisfaction of expectation and desire. Once that mechanism is dispensed with, the listener is eased out into unfamiliar terrain. Occasionally something new will happen to him there. To call it trance is to say that one has to take refuge from the unexpected in the exotic. One does not. — *Rafi Zabor*

Woody Shaw — *Woody III*, Columbia JC 35977.

Woody Shaw, cornet, flugelhorn; Carter Jefferson, Rene McLean, James Spaulding, reeds; Steve Turre, Curtis Fuller, trombones; Onaje Allen Gumbs, George Cables, piano; Clint Houston, Buster Williams, bass; Victor Lewis, drums; and others.

Once again Woody Shaw, the stellar, young brass artist, takes his stand, and delivers a superlative modern jazz recording. In spirit, synthesis and execution, *Woody III* is undeniably first class. The tunes are inviting and sparkling and the blowing is of the highest order, as one would expect with giants like Shaw, Fuller, Gumbs, Cables and Jefferson participating. Overall, a very well balanced program that reveals clearly the state of the art in today's music.

A three-part suite, "Woody I, II, and

III," is side one. Using a larger 11-piece band, Shaw's writing is direct yet intricate and he employs the outside instruments, the flutes and bass trombone, to advantage. "Woody I" has a chant-like melody that rests on a two-part foundation: a swing section and a freer, suspended portion. Shaw's cornet unleashes a zesty, ringing sound with notes that sail through the air like small golden disks. In a double-time passage, his outpouring resembles a flurry of bubbles, bouncing off each other but always rising. Carter Jefferson's solo shows him to be a more authoritative and eloquent spokesman on each new outing. "Woody II" has a tense theme, like rush-hour traffic that resolves into Williams's sinewy bass solo, with its jabbing, punchy phrases. Woody reveals his continued affection for Coltrane and we welcome the biting sound of Spaulding in some fleet moments. Turre is facile and strongly on the beat. "Woody III" is a ballad, with a pastoral opening of flugelhorn, piano and bass, then additions of bass trombone and flutes lending a delightful openness. Shaw's sound here is cozy and full.

The other side has a soaring blues that singles out, really doubles out, altoists McLean and Spaulding; a beautiful quartet work, "Organ Grinder," with George Cables, that you'll want to play again and again; and a live rendition of the 32 bar, two-chord opus based on "So What." Jefferson and Shaw simply on fire this time. What a band!

The liner notes are by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and they're as together as this date. Check it out. — *z.s.*

Joni Mitchell *Mingus,* Asylum 5E-505
Joni Mitchell, guitar & vocals; Jaco Pastorius, bass guitar; Wayne Shorter, soprano sax; Herbie Hancock, electric piano; Peter Erskine, drums; Don Alias, congas; Emil Richards, percussion; Wolves, background vocals.

The qualities we would associate with Charles Mingus and Joni Mitchell are present only by inference on *Mingus.* Mingus was thinking more like a collaborator than a leader. Mitchell also had never taken a collaborator before, and she was obviously honored and humbled to work with the legendary bassist-composer. This degree of respect and homage is evident throughout *Mingus.* Her paintings point to a master-apprentice, father-daughter relationship; she depicts Mingus as a Zeus-like figure glaring down from the clouds and as a warm, cuddly, teddy-bear (which is slightly misleading — Mingus was a grizzly bear not averse to expressions of rage and violence). But there is a sense of pain and striving to *Mingus* as if Mitchell knew that she wasn't quite able to realize the grand expectations of their project.

On the musical level, Joni Mitchell presented Mingus with a conceptual challenge. Her music had orignally been built on a pedal-point — those droning, raga-ish guitar chords — over which she'd modulate in a conversational vibrato. Since *Court and Spark* Mitchell has pursued a jazz direction, her vibrato becoming less pronounced. The spacious melodies that Mingus wrote for Mitchell challenge her to modulate in a more scalar, linear manner, to make greater use of dynamics, and to evolve a floating, more spontaneous style of phrasing. Mitchell, for her part, was concerned with finding a comfortable vehicle for their collaborations ("*My* version of jazz" as she put it in *Rolling Stone*), and she disposed of earlier sessions before finally teaming up with Herbie Hancock, Jaco Pastorius, Wayne Shorter and Peter Erskine.

As a result, the music doesn't work as a Mingus album or a Mitchell album, but sounds more like Weather Report with a vocalist. Like those of early Weather Report ("Waterfall" and "Tears"), the harmonies and melodies are interchangeable; washes of electric piano, globular soprano saxophone obligatos, conversational electric bass, and a rotating percussive backbeat alternate as the main focus or combine into one elongated group melody. Mitchell's rhythm section is cannily protective and understated on the atmospheric ballads ("A Chair in the Sky," "Sweet Sucker Dance," and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"),

particularly bassist Pastorius who provides a constant stream of counterpoint (sometimes suggesting a funkified version of Mingus's characteristic rhythms of six against four), and covers up for Mitchell's lapses of time and pitch. Mitchell sings with a mentholated lyricism, strolling way behind the beat, then swelling and purring in a manner that indicates close scrutiny of Miles Davis (like the long cry that precedes the final chorus in "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"); and though she can't touch their vocal virtuosity, at several moments she suggests the slurring quality of Betty Carter and the octave dips of Sarah Vaughn. Mitchell seems most comfortable on "The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines," a punchy, brass-inflected chart; Mingus's blues melodies elicit bold elliptical leaps from her voice and force her to dig in hard rhythmically.

"Maybe I've never really loved/I guess that is the truth/I've spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes/And looking down on everything," Mitchell once sang. Moving from seduction to seduction, relationship to relationship, Mitchell would detail her own experiences and impressions, keeping her freedom to act as an observer. Thrust from first person narratives to third person panegyrics, and compelled to follow the contours of Mingus's melodies and rhythms, Mitchell's lyrics are far from profound. "Sweet Sucker Dance" reveals something of the tension Mitchell felt in working with Mingus; "A Chair in the Sky" is an empathetic portrait of Mingus's final days; and their brief vocal duet on "I's a 'Muggin" is a snippet of what might have been. But she tends to idealize Mingus, who was a compulsive, explosive personality — anyone who had followed Mingus over a long period of time would've witnessed incidents on the bandstand that preclude romanticizing him. Mingus was a giant, warts and all. He never did anything halfway — if he made a fool of himself, he made a damned fool of himself. In other words, Mitchell doesn't deal with the dark side of Mingus's nature, and her perceptions of him (and jazz) on "God Must Be a Boogie Man" and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" are epitomized by her affected pronunciation of 'music maaan' on the later (shades of 'jewellllls' on "For Free"). The tolling chorus of wolves on Mitchell's dirge "The Wolf That Lives In Lindsey," with its imagery of life as a storm without moral judgments and justice, comes closest to evoking a real sense of loss, more so than the intrusive tape excerpts of Mingus's voice.

How well Mitchell's over sentimentalized but sincere efforts will appeal to her audience, or Mingus's, I can't guess, and I'm not placing any bets on how well, if at all, she'll be able to carry it off in concert. Yet the fact that *Mingus* is closer to Weather Report than to Mitchell or Mingus, and that some of it is a failure doesn't really matter. What's important here is that Mitchell has put her reputation on the line to bring a sense of Mingus to a larger audience, and has disregarded safe formulas in favor of artistic growth. I suspect that Mingus must be pleased by the nerve that Joni Mitchell has shown in swimming the currents of his thought before she could even tread water. — *Chip Stern*

Barry Altschul — *Another Time/Another Place*, Muse MR 5176. *Barry Altschul, drums; Arthur Blythe, alto sax; Ray Anderson, trombone; Anthony Davis, piano; Brian Smith, Dave Holland, bass; Abdul Wadud, Peter Warren, cello; Bill DeArango, guitar.*

This very intelligently organized album has kept me listening to it for the last couple of months. It features four dissimilar pieces for four different ensembles and one brief drum feature for Altschul. The most completely realized piece on the date, and the one to which I listen most frequently, is Anthony Davis' "Crepescule: Suite for Monk," which makes fresh use of a number of Monk tunes and to my mind is more successful than anything on Heiner Stadtler's more ambitious but also more academic *Tribute to Monk and Bird* of last year. "Crepescule's" most impressive moment comes with the use of "Epistrophy" as an attenuated background figure behind fast rhythms — it sounds gigantic, saurian, fundamental — and there is also some excellent alto work from Blythe, who appears only on this cut, and a brilliant solo from Davis, who continues to evolve into one of the giants of the coming decade. The second piece on the album is Davis' ethereal "Chael," a trio for Davis, Altschul and Wadud. It seems to break down about two thirds of the way through after a reprise of the main theme, but since it seems to improve with each hearing and to grow more articulate, more poised, more concise, I'm willing to give it another few months before I make up my mind for sure.

Holland has contributed the long "Pentacle" for two celli, two basses and percussion. The percussion seems inessential and the piece only comes clear about halfway through, when it forsakes dissonance for modality and Holland comes forward for a solo, but once again it's a piece I keep coming back to, because it's so ambitious and accomplished. It's also something I'd like a chance to hear live. The album concludes with a cut featuring the allegedly "working" quartet of Altschul, Smith, Anderson and Davis: good con-

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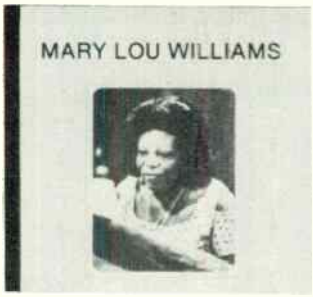

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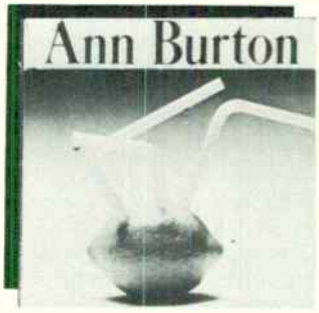

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temporary music-making and a strong debut for Anderson, a trombonist from whom we can all expect to hear a great deal in the immediate future. — *Rafi Zabor*

Dire Straits — *Communique*, Warner Bros. HS 3330.

Mark Knopfler — vocals, lead and rhythm guitars; John Illsley — bass and vocals; David Knopfler — rhythm guitar and vocals; Pick Withers — drums.

The phenomenal success of the Dylanesque "Sultans of Swing" catapulted Mark Knopfler into the front ranks of rock's pantheon of guitar heros virtually overnight, thereby confounding both cynical rock critics and music business moguls who had heretofore believed that tasteful, intelligent rock and roll could never find its way into the heart of the average American record buyer. Which just goes to show that being wrong can sometimes be a refreshing and rewarding experience. Knopfler eschews the usual plethora of electronic aids that cosmeticize so much rock in favor of a much more potent set of secret weapons. He calls them *fingers*, and he utilizes them to extract dazzling star clusters of notes from his trusty Fender, — terse stattaco bursts that effortlessly resolve into flowing, tumbling phrases. Occasionally he pauses to bend and stretch a single note like a piece of taffy till it finally resembles the kind of sound one might expect from Salvador Dali's doorbell. Unfortunately, with the exception of "SOS," there was little material on the debut album which showcased his extraordinary technique. *Communique* offers us more generous helpings of Knopfler's exquisite guitar playing, and as far as I'm concerned that fact alone is enough to qualify the album as a success. Happily, *Communique* is a firm step forward on a number of other fronts too. Jerry Wexler's deft production effects a shift in both mood and tone, with the grainy black and white documentary atmosphere of *Dire Straits* yielding to a richer, lusher, almost technicolor feel that gives further depth and resonance to the rhythm section without dulling the biting edge of Knopfler's instrumental attack. The songs themselves are far sturdier launching pads for Knopfler's sinuous excursions than the material on last year's model. Even the down-tempo numbers hold your attention, owing to Knopfler's aptitude for tossing off exquisitely crafted crystalline riffs and phrases, like the mesmerizing figure that floats through *Where Do You Think You're Going?* like a shimmering aural mirage. There's also a refreshing sense of play, fullness, and humor exhibited here that was somewhat lacking in the first album's somber perspective. Knopfler may not fit the Hendrix-Townsend-Clapton guitar hero image either tempermentally or stylistically, but he may well be on his way towards becoming the Django Reinhardt of this generation. I only hope that his record company, fans, and the critical establishment give him the space to experiment and grow. — *Vic Garbarini*

Keith Jarrett — *Eyes of the Heart*, ECM-T-1150.

Keith Jarrett, piano, soprano saxophone, percussion; Dewey Redman, tenor saxophone, percussion; Charlie Haden, bass; Paul Motian, drums, percussion.

Keith Jarrett's formidable, but now disbanded quartet with Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, and Paul Motian had the enviable ability of reaching a large audience without compromising its artistry. The group's most recent recording presents further documentation of its considerable communicative and musical powers. Leisurely exploring one long composition and a three-part encore, the ensemble creates a compelling and frequently mesmerizing music.

Eyes of the Heart successfully captures the four musicians' strong empathy for one another's musical contributions. Haden and Motian, for example, form a potent rhythm section. They provide Jarrett and Redman with firm, sympathetic support, that stimulates them to greater levels of creativity.

Redman also makes several effective musical statements, although his appearances are limited in length and in number. He makes up for his relative lack of solo space, however, with some highly spirited work. In his first solo, he plays with considerable passion while still retaining his customary lyricism.

Despite his colleagues' noteworthy contributions, Jarrett is the primary focus of attention, both in actual playing time and in influencing the music's overall shape and flow. His saxophone work has vastly matured, becoming more assured and fluid. At one point, he creates an effective incantation-type solo over the rhythm section's compelling beat.

Yet, the piano still remains Jarrett's primary means of musical expression. Surprisingly, he is usually more effective in an ensemble situation than in a solo context, despite his many superior performances in the latter medium. When playing with other musicians, the pianist edits his work more effectively, tending less to fall back on familiar patterns. Jarrett's gripping solo on side one is a superior example of his considerable talent. He produces an extremely passionate, romantically-conceived statement that ranks among his best work. — *Clifford Jay Safane*

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JAZZ BRIEFS

Charles Mingus — *Passions of a Man, An Anthology of His Atlantic Recordings,* Atlantic SD 3-600. This compilation presents various Mingus compositions and performances culled from several previously released albums. The bassist's brilliantly colored, intense music is marvelously complemented by his and a host of other musicians' instrumental abilities. On "Haitian Fight Song," for example, Jimmy Knepper's powerful trombone work is featured in a stirring performance. As with any anthology, there are bound to be disagreements about what material is included as well as omitted. Still, the album is recommended to those who want a varied sample of Mingus' impassioned music. — *c.j.s*

Marshall Royal — *First Chair,* Concord Jazz CJ-88. This is a charming, low-key album of standards and blues by altoist Royal, who for twenty years provided elegant soloing in the Count Basie band — in a sense he was Basie's Johnny Hodges. This is alto saxophone in the classic mold of Royal's 1930s contemporaries Hodges and Benny Carter. Royal's tone is tender and syrupy, full of curvacious inflections and swelling sentimentality. The tempos here are uniformly slow and swinging, the moods smokey and serene; the rhythm section is solid and unobtrusive (particularly the fine drummer Jake Hanna), and Cal Collins' guitar is a fine instrumental foil. The high points are the blues "Jump," the contrapuntal reading of Fats Waller's "Jitterbug Waltz," and the swaggering way Royal ends his solos on "Who Can I Turn To" and "My Ideal." — *c.s.*

Oliver Lake — *Shine,* Arista Novus AN 3010. Lake is one of the most gifted multi-instrumentalists and composers in contemporary jazz. It took my ears a long time to adjust to the intervallic and textural extremes in his music; the preference for cyclical improvising structures over thematic development; and the blurring of distinctions between foreground and background, soloist and accompanist. Oliver Lake is making a group music in which his alternatingly convoluted and sublime saxophone acts more as a traffic cop than central focus. The melodic pulse is free to shift back and forth, and silence is employed in the way some groups use a bass. On side two Lake, guitarist Michael Gregory Jackson, and drummer Pheeroan ak Laff create an impressionistic, tangential sort of swing with lots of room for textural details and vocalized melody. Side one is given over to Lake's modern chamber conceptions, a very pliant fusion of strings, drums, horns and piano. "Kuon Gunjo" is a conveyor belt of motion, but I keep returning to the atmospheric call and response of "Reference," which contains some simply gorgeous blues and ethnic melodies — all very stately and peaceful. — *c.s.*

Hamiet Bluiett — *S.O.S.*, India Navigation IN 1039. In this invigorating performance, Bluiett employs an astonishing number of sounds. His horn is often voice-like in character, with upper register cries and low, resonant growls answered by more traditional melodic patterns. Don Pullen is stimulating, both as an accompanyist and soloist. Weaving a collage of sound that incorporates various traditional jazz styles as well as more exploratory areas of expressions, he provides an effective foil for Bluiett. The two musicians are sensitively complemented by the superb rhythm team of bassist Fred Hopkins and drummer Don Moye. — *c.j.s.*

Earth Wind & Fire — *I Am,* Columbia FC 35730. Considering the level of this group's past work, *I Am* is a surprisingly tepid record. They seem primarily concerned with solidifying recent commercial inroads, and as a result much of this album sounds watered down and uncommitted. There are some good dance tunes — like "Rock That," "Star," and "Boogie Wonderland" — but the group sounds like a third hand imitation of Earth Wind & Fire. Everything is slinky clean and antiseptic, the arrangements are monolithic, and the lyrics are glibly mystical. I find it goes in one ear and out the other, but lovers of glossy funk and fusion might be more favorably inclined.—*c.s.*

Curtis Fuller — *Fire And Filigree,* Bee Hive BH 7007. It's about time that one of jazz's premiere trombone artists, Curtis Fuller, is back on record as a leader. After a long stint with Basie and a record or two as a sideman, Curtis has returned with his fat tone fatter and sultrier and his technical expertise still impeccable. He's got enough power to stop that proverbial Mack truck. And friends on hand? You bet, in the names of Sal Nistico, whose tenor work on Monk's "Blue Monk" is pushy but also laidback; Walter Bishop, Jr., the piano great; Sam Jones; and Freddie Waits. Other tunes include Fuller's "Egyptian Two," a rousing vamp number, and an extended reading of "Yesterdays." Trombonists are more in the limelight these days and it's my kind of news that a little of that fanfare should go to Curtis Fuller. He's been waiting. — *z.s.*

Michel Colombier, Chrysalis CHR 1212. The personnel reads like a who's who of fusion, musicians with names like Pastorius, Hancock and Gadd, to name a few. Of course, names don't necessarily make the music work, but in this case the players deliver. Colombier deserves most of the credit for this not only because he composed and arranged the material, but because the arrangements seem to be written for the particular players he's chosen. Even the weakest compositions succeed for this reason. It's interesting to note that none of these musicians perform at their peak on this session, but it's the sum of the parts. — *p.g.*

Urban Ensemble — *The Music of Roland Vasquez,* Arista/6RP 5002. To achieve a recording contract, the band's leader, composer and drummer Roland Vasquez sent approximately forty compositions to producers Dave Grusin and Larry Rosen. That much initiative should pay off if one has the goods, and the Urban Ensemble does. The musicianship is top notch and the recording is precise and clear, but it is the arrangements that make this record soar. The eerie voicings of the horns on "The Visitor" and the cookin' funk of "Music For a Flowered Pig" are but two of the excellent selections on this, the group's debut release. — *p.g.*

Lee Ritenour — *Feel The Night,* Electra 6E-192. I'm usually wary of overworked session musicians releasing their own albums, but Ritenour is an exception. Sure the production is a bit much, but in the end, it serves its purpose to highlight Ritenour's flashy but tasteful performance. With Steve

Gadd, Abe Laboriel and Alex Acuna cookin' in the rhythm section the rest of the unit serves up a fusion storm. Of course, nothing can save Ritenour's plastic rendition of "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing," but other than that, I especially enjoyed Ritenour's guitar harmonies and melodic lines on "Market Place" and the stop time solos by Gadd, Ritenour and Laboriel on "French Roast." Sources have informed me that Ritenour and his band, "Friendship" is knockin' em dead in concert. If this LP is a fair indication of their live performances I wouldn't be a bit surprised. — *p.g.*

John Coltrane — *The Paris Concert*, Pablo Live 2308 217. This recording documents a Paris concert from either 1961 or 1962 by the John Coltrane Quartet. While the broadcast sound is poor and sometimes hinders the performance's impact, the album still merits serious attention for several reasons. First, the recurrence of these three selections on other recordings provides an illuminating look at the saxophonist's development as a soloist as well as a group leader. Second, a rare Elvin Jones solo is offered on "Mr. P.C." Although the drummer's work is surprisingly traditional compared with the innovations he has initiated, his efforts still display some of the awesome power that he is noted for. — *c.j.s.*

Roscoe Mitchell — *Roscoe Mitchell*, Nessa n 14/15. Roscoe Mitchell has displayed a keen, probing musical personality with the Art Ensemble of Chicago and in his own individual efforts. The music on the saxophonist/composer's most recent album is some of his strongest work to date. He unceasingly explores the similarities and differences between sounds as they interact with one another. The relationships between the various timbres on "L-R-G", the enormous variety of instrumental colors on "Maze," and the pureness of the individual tones on "S II Examples" are a few reasons why this album makes for rewarding listening. — *c.j.s.*

Sam Most with Joe Farrell — *Flute Talk*, Xanadu 3001. Sam Most is one of the original jazz flautists, before Yusef Lateef started humming, before Herbie Mann (the two did a two-flute disc in 1955), and despite his early prowess, he has received little notoriety in the jazz press. He merits better: he has a very melodic approach and plays with a firm, centered tone. His cohort Farrell also excels, and while his sound is slightly airy and thin, he more than makes up for that with bold, adventuresome phrases. The most likeable tunes on 'Talk' are the easy, quiet pieces with unison lead lines, such as "Something Sweet And Tender," and Parker's "Kim," a rhythm-changes opus taken at a break-neck tempo, is delightful as well. The rhythm section of Mike Wofford, piano, Bob Magnusson, bass, Roy McCurdy, drums, and Jerry Steinholz, percussion, deserve kudos for their superior support of the leaders. 'Talk' as reviewed is direct-to-disc and the recorded sound is excellent. It is also available in regular stereo. — *z.s.*

AIRTO — *Touching You - Touching Me*, WB BSK 3279. Airto's records have always left me somewhat confused and disappointed. This LP is no exception. It is unfortunate because at times he demonstrates a unique and delicate sense of timbre and spacing. This especially occurs during his tradeoffs with the ensemble on "Toque de Cuica" and his solo performance entitled "Introduction to the End". It is during the ensemble sections that Airto gets lost in the mix and loses his aggressive approach. The material does not lend itself to Airto's strengths, opting instead for commercial appeal. — *p.g.*

John Clark — *Song of Light*, Hidden Meaning 001 (available through New Music Distribution, 500 Broadway, N.Y.C., N.Y.) The technical challenges of the french horn have prevented it from moving into the consciousness of jazz improvisers, with the late Julius Watkins a notable exception. John Clark is probably the finest practitioner of french horn in jazz or classical music today. His tone ranges from deep, buttery purrs to multiphonic cries that seem to imply chords. Clark's technical command reminds me of Freddie Hubbard on trumpet; patchwork quilts of fast runs,

bouncing triplets, and long tones are stitched into a deeply flowing lyricism. On *Song of Light* Clark is less outwardly daring than in his work with people like Carla Bley, Leroy Jenkins and Sam Rivers, choosing instead to fashion an appealing blend of latin, jazz-rock and electronic grooves, firmly anchored by the fine rhythm section of Michael Cochrane, Ron McClure and Victor Lewis. Clark's use of various pedals and attachments to alter the sound of french horn is tasteful, and his overdubs on "The Answer/Island Flower" create an extraordinary orchestral texture. — *c.s.*

John Serry — *Exhibition,* Chrysaus CHR 1230. Technical in its approach, Serry's debut album occasionally finds itself lost in its own clutter. Upon first listening, the music strikes one as breathtaking, but takes on a strangling effect after repeated doses. The compositions are most successful when edited, such as on the playful "Acting Up" and the delicate "Nicole." On the latter he demonstrates a classically schooled proficiency during a piano solo section which is quite effective. Serry also writes some intriguing melodies and works his various keyboards with ease. His arranging capabilities and understanding of textures are apparent, but are victims of overkill. Though there are problems with this record, John Serry's talents should overcome these obstacles in time. — *p.g.*

Evelyn "Champagne" King — *Music Box,* RCA AFL1-3033. When King tries to get into the slick, upwardly mobile Philly funk sound (which, fortunately, isn't too often) this albums falls on its face. She's not a convincing ballad singer. But the majority of *Music Box* is given over to hustling, syncopated arrangements that have more to do with the Memphis-Stax tradition than disco. This is a very appealing album of dance music, and King's gutsy, sultry vocals slither and shout through brass-inflected arrangements. — *c.s.*

Phillip Wilson — *Esoteric,* Hat Hut Q. Phillip Wilson is a marvelously inventive drummer who can say more with a well-placed brush stroke than many percussionists can deliver in an extended passage. Both he and fellow collaborator, trumpeter Olu Dara, explore a fascinating array of textures in their imaginative solos and duets. Wilson is especially provocative, creating many intricate rhythms that often exhibit an appealing delicacy. Exuding a flowing, natural feel, his work communicates a myriad of feelings. (Available through New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012.) — *c.j.s.*

Tin Huey — *Contents Dislodged During Shipment,* Warner Brothers BSK 3297. This is an offbeat rock album full of herky-jerky rhythm changes, rampant power chords, circus-inspired keyboard harmonies and fine honking saxophone work. The outer textures of Tin Huey would tend to align them with new wave rock, but this is basically a very progressive r & b band that owes something to the early work of Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention. The band's arch sense of humor is omnipresent and overbearing, but it's very effective on the blue-collar nightmare "Hump Day." Solos are spare and self-effacing; the group sound hard-edged and buoyant; the songs short and direct, with enough hooks and vamps for three rock bands. — *c.s.*

Bob Dylan — *Bob Dylan at Budokan,* Columbia 36067. On *Hard Rain,* his last live venture, Dylan sounded off balance and schizzy, like he had somehow gotten stuck two feet outside of himself and was scrambling to get back in. *Before the Flood* was no gem either, as I remember, but on his third try Dylan has finally come across with the live album that we'd all begun to doubt he still had in him. Dylan sounds more relaxed, centered and secure here than ever before. All his old standards are spiritually revivified by the creative reworkings effected by what may be the best band Dylan's ever toured with. (Yes, including The Band.) Steve Douglas' earthy, vibrant sax work deserves special mention. Naturally the new versions don't supersede the originals, just update them. For those who still find that hard to accept, a special consolation prize is in order: two bronzed ticket stubs to the '66 Newport Folk Festival. — *v.g.*

Lew Tabackin — *Rites of Pan,* Inner City 6052. *'Pan'* was first issued in Japan, and thanks to Inner City's leasing of many fine foreign releases, it is available on our shores. Basically a quartet date with Tabackin's multi-talented wife Toshiko Akiyoshi highlighted both as composer and pianist, *'Pan'* is a stunning demonstration of flute artistry. Tabackin's sound here is as voluminous and fresh as his tenor work, and is as instantly recognizable. The material runs from Akiyoshi's "Elusive Dream," a poignant and delicate ballad and the composer's first recorded effort on electric piano, to heated handlings of Gillespie's "Be Bop," a duet with bassist John Heard; and Weill's 'Speak Low,' the latter on alto flute. This superb album proves that Tabackin's musical conception is as diverse and assured as his technical foundation and repeated listenings show him to be easily one of the five finest flautists in music, whatever category. — *z.s.*

Slide Hampton — *World of Trombones,* West 54 WLW 8001. A brass fancier's delight. Hampton has fashioned the unlikely and potentially cumbersome ensemble of nine trombones plus rhythm section into a vitalizing sound. The leader exhibits a sensitive ear for color, employing harmonic voicings of varying dissonance to avoid textural monotony. In addition, Curtis Fuller, Steve Turre, and the rest of the trombonists produce fine solos that further contribute to the session's success. — *c.j.s.*

David Bowie — *Lodger,* RCA AQL1-3254. Many of the prototypical procedures of the 70s art work, heavy metal, glitter rock, new wave and disco were midwifed or forseen by David Bowie. *Lodger* is the third and most pop oriented of his collaborations with Brian Eno, the Merlin of modern rock. Every song is marked by a refined kind of aural distortion as electronic textures phase in and out of focus, vying for center stage with Bowie's multi-directional vocalizing (everything from plush theatrical crooning to screeching histrionics). *Lodger* is one of the most brilliant albums of the year, a vision of rock in the not-too-distant-future. "It's time we should be going," Bowie sings, and changing personnas as often as some people change clothing, the chameleon prince looks down on a world of dislocation and inertia from his Lear Jet in the clouds ("But any sudden movement and I've got to write it down"); and a voyage to the hinterland (as "life stands still and stares"), while side two's situations are stripped of fantasy; everyone feels trapped by relationships (the hauntingly poetic "Repetition"), self-delusion ("Boys Keep Swinging") and their own role games ("D. J."). Bowie hears the old structures falling and beckons us to shoulder our responsibility to create new values. All of which reads much heavier than it sounds, and although "D. J." might be the only song to really hit on the radio in 1979, the eclectic *Lodger* will loom larger and larger as we head into the 80s. — *c.s.*

The Tom Robinson Band — *TRB Two,* Harvest ST-11930. Tom Robinson plays high octane New Wave rock and roll propelled along by Danny Kustow's Texas chain saw guitar and Ian Parker's incandescent organ fills. His lyrics center on pro gay-leftist-radical themes, which some people claim get in the way of their enjoyment of the music. These folks would be well advised to shift their focus to what's behind said lyrics, namely the extraordinary quality of energy that surges through this record from start to finish. The words may seem like rhetoric, but the music communicates affirmation, joy, and hope. The musical medium, to paraphrase McLuhan, is a real part of the message. Like Galahad, Robinson has the strength of ten because his heart is pure. Did the fact that some Rastafarians believe that Haille Selassie was God make it impossible to listen to reggae? — *v.g.*

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ROCKETTES

By Vic Garbarini

MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS

Nick Lowe — *Labour of Lust* (Columbia).
Bram Tchaikovsky — *Strange Man, Changed Man* (Polydor)
Flash and the Pan — (Epic)
The B-52s — (Warners)
Supertramp — *Breakfast in America* (A&M)
Neil Young — *Rust Never Sleeps* (Warners/Reprise)

Due to the prodigious outpouring of what record companies like to call "product", — and the limited space available for long reviews and briefs, we at *Musician* felt the need to find a means of extending our coverage of contemporary rock. The result is Rockettes, a column of mini-reviews covering the 30-odd most significant rock releases of the past couple of months. Obviously it's not possible to provide in-depth analysis in the two or three sentences allotted reach record, but we will at least attempt to indicate centers of gravity and point out features of interest. We'll try to be fair and objective, but naturally such relevant factors as lunch and the fact that the reviewer's girl friend hasn't called from L.A. in over a week must be taken into consideration. We're not too keen on rating systems so instead, half a dozen releases will be chosen each month as Most Valuable Players. The criterion for choosing MVP's is fairly straightforward, — these are the albums that are *most recommended for purchase*. Most of us are on a limited budget, and when push comes to shove a 3/4 successful effort by David Bowie might well be a more disirable buy than some engaging bit of partially realized esoterica from this weeks critics' darlings.

Nick Lowe — *Labour of Lust* (Columbia). Pure distilled essence of Hollies-Searchers-early Beatles filtered through New Wave sensibilities equals clever, sparkling pop of the first magnitude. Like his first album, a minor masterpiece. **Bram Tchaikovsky** — *Strange Man, Changed Man,* (Polydor). I've been waiting fifteen years for someone to write a song like "Girl of My Dreams," with its neo-Byrdsian guitars and modal folk harmonies. Surprisingly, the rest of the album rocks a lot harder, but only their punkoid remake of the Monkees "I'm a Believer" calls you back for more. **The Knack** — *Get the Knack*, (Capitol). "My Sharona" turns the old "Gimme Some Lovin' " riff into a pounding libidinal teen anthem. Shiny supercharged power pop with a mid-Beatles feel. Impressive. **Flash and the Pan** (Epic). Surf music for androids. Keyboard/synthesizer dominated technicolor future pop with a cinematic feel and more hooks than the entire Russian fishing fleet. Surprisingly warm and engaging. The zombie vocals phoned in from Melbourne are a nice touch. Highly recommended. **The Records**, (Virgin). Innovative mating of tight pop vocals with razor edged guitar attack is promising, but they could use more up-front vocal presence. How come their searing cover of Tim Moore's "Rock and Roll Love Letter" isn't included on the American release? "Starry Eyes" is a step in the right direction, even if it is a watered-down remake of Eddie and the Hot Rods magnificent "Do Anything You Want To Do". **Squeeze** — *Cool for Cats*, (A&M). New Wave Vaudeville. Clever but undistinguished music hall rock replete with authentic (I presume) Cockney vocals. Stronger tunes needed here, though "Goodbye Girl" is absolutely gorgeous. **Abba** — *Voulex Vous*, (Atlantic). More superbly crafted Euro-pop confections from Sweden's answer to the Mama's and the Papa's. Don't worry, it's really O.K. to let yourself enjoy this stuff, I tried to resist but it was hopeless. Must be those mesmerizing hooks and that gleaming Phil Spectorish production. Novices are also advised to check out their Greatest Hits compilation and last year's *Abba —the Album*. **The Flamin' Groovies** —*Jumpin' in the Night*, (Sire). The Groovies take Bram Tchaikovsky one step further and actually *become* the Byrds, circa. 1966. Side 2 could easily pass for out-takes from either "Turn, Turn, Turn" or "5D," with near perfect (in both spirit and execution) covers of "It Won't Be Wrong" and "5D". Also included: "Ladyfriend", an obscure David Crosby gem, and "Absolutely Sweet Marie" — the obligatory Dylan. The ten originals maintain the Byrdsian persona while moving towards a more R&B-ish early Stones-Beatles feel. **Supertramp** — *Breakfast in America*, (A&M). Ten flawless middle-weight pop-art rockers with thoughtful lyrics and irresistible melodies, fleshed out by Dave Hodgson's vibrant electric piano and John Helliwell's scorching sax. Certainly not the most adventurous album of the year, but easily one of the most listenable. Ignore the little voice that keeps saying you're not supposed to enjoy this kind of thing. Man does not live by The Clash alone. **The Cars** —*Candy-O*, (Elektra). Sure, they still have the moves, but where's the adrenal wallop that made their debut a 70's classic? Cars without energy become pedestrian.

So much for the newcomers and weirdos, let's move along to the Wonderful World of Aging Superstars: **Wings** — *Back to the Egg*, (Columbia). McCartney swears off saccharin and rediscovers rock and roll. Hook-laden guitar-heavy pop-rockers with Paul really leaning into the vocals. His best post-Beatle effort, with "Winter Rose" checking in as his finest melody *ever*. **Neil Young** — *Rust Never Sleeps*, (Warners/Reprise). Young appears to be one of the few musicians of his generation to fully understand and appreciate the New Wave scene, the others being Pete Townsend and Robert Fripp. On "Hey, Hey, Hey, Into the Black" (A.K.A. "The Ballad of Johnny Rotten") he manages to sum up the entire Punk gestalt with one shattering chord. Amazing. No Rust on Neil. Surprising. **Ron Wood** —*Gimme Some Neck*, (Columbia). Ron is that likable little Keith Richards clone who plays scruffy but funky guitar with the Stones. Here he plays scruffy but not-so-funky guitar without the Stones.

Moving on to slightly more bizarre pastures: **The B-52s**, (Warners). The Ventures live from the Twilight Zone. Schizo Telstar guitar power-chording behind bleeping Farfissa organ riffs held down by a solid beat. Wild, whacky, and you can dance to it, especially "52 Girls" and the neo-psychedelic "Rock Lobster." Not bland. **Tim Curry** — *Fearless*, (A&M). Ex-Rocky Horror Show cult figure Curry comes across like a cross between Boris Karloff and Tom Jones. "I Do The Rock" works as a novelty rocker with its artsy references and infectious hook, but T.C.'s crypto-Shakespearean vocals make the rest of this stuff unlistenable. Fearful. **The Tubes** —*Remote Control*, (A&M). Controlled and remote. The tubes unwisely decide to nudge their way into the rock mainstream, abandoning in the process the engaging craziness of their heavy metal-Bonzo Dog Band days. Now they sound like all the other slick assholes on the block. Can this be the same band that wrote "White Punks On Dope"? **The Reds**, (A&M). White Dopes on Punk? Relentless New Wave angst rock with the tonal density of your average neutron star. Guitars that sound like metal filings in heat recorded at Three Mile Island during a melt-down.

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James Taylor — *Flag,* (Columbia). Valium Rock for the Martha's Vineyard set. Taylor croons about going "Up On The Roof" but winds up napping on the fire escape. **Moon Martin** — *Escape from Domination,* (Capitol). Valium rock for the Malibu Beach set. Martin sounds like a semi-sedated Art Garfunkel with a head cold as he moons his way through his repertoire of laid back El Lay country rockers. I gotta' admit though, he can sure knock out some purdy toons, — "Dreamer" could be a first-string Everly Bros. ballad, and when I cranked "No Chance" up to 45 rpms it sounded exactly like a Buddy Holly song at normal speed. **Robert Palmer** — *Secrets,* (Island). Palmer's cover of Toots and the Maytals "Pressure Drop" a few albums back showed him to be an inspired interpreter of other people's songs, but a dearth of outstanding material and a tendency to play it safe prevents *Secrets* from ever revealing anything worthwhile. **Peter Tosh** — *Mystic Man,* (Rolling Stones). Ex-Wailer Tosh percolates along in a relaxed but steady groove, spinning his tales of Apocalypse and Salvation with the calm authority and earnest conviction of a latter-day Isaiah. Melodic, graceful, and dignified.

Renaissance — *Azure D'Or,* (Sire). Annie Halsam sounds best when she has a nice, plump, ersatz-classical melody to wrap her tenor around. (Freudian enough for you?). Only "Winter Tree" and "Jekyll and Hyde" come close to qualifying here, and neither of them can stand up to earlier works like "Ocean Gypsy" or "Ashes Are Burning". I'd recommend their excellent live album instead, — where the production is less busy but there's more being said. **Phillip D'Arrow,** (Polydor). Traces of Warren Zevon, Elton John, and Springsteen surface here, though D'Arrow and his excellent band (especially Brian Stanley on bass) are well on their way to evolving their own style. If he can find a producer capable of capturing his dynamic live act on vinyl he may soon be livening up both the AM and FM airwaves. Meanwhile *Phillip D'Arrow* suffers from a production style that is at once both too glossy in some places and too flat in others. Still, it grows on you. A flawed but promising debut. **Donna Summer** — *Bad Girls,* (Casablanca). I was hoping that "Hot Stuff" was a sign that Donna had finally eschewed the Vegas Cabaret schlock of her live album in favor of some white-hot rock and roll. And while there are some O.K. rockers here, nothing really matches the burning urgency of "Hot Stuff". Side 3 features some surprisingly effective ballads, on Side 4 we return to the Planet of the Arps where once again Summer struggles to breathe some warmth into Moroders ultra-cool computer disco. (John Travolta meets Eno?) Not a bad album by any means, but a disappointment nonetheless. Free Donna Summer.

And now for a few quick impressions from our Send-in-the-Clones Dept. **Iron City Houserockers** — *Loves So Tough,* (MCA). These guys desperately want to be for Pittsburgh what Bruce Springsteen is for New York. And they are to Springsteen what Pittsburgh is to New York. **Jean-Michael Jarre** — *Equinox,* (Polydor). More Steve Reich. **David Kubinec** — *Some Things Never Change,* (A&M). Strained Bowie vocals meet half-baked tunes. Not a winning combination. **Frankie Miller** — *A Perfect Fit,* (Chrysalis). Bloozy blend of Rod Stewart and Joe Cocker, somebody write this boy some decent material and who knows what might happen.

Finally, let me say that I've always enjoyed **Rick Wakeman's** playing with Yes, and even found real merit in his pop extravaganzas like *Six Wives* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth.* And I certainly would hope he has lots of fine music still in him. But some of this stuff on his new album *Rhapsodies,* (A&M), is just too much. The original tunes are merely silly — the Star Wars bar-band on nitrous oxide playing disco-funk on the Coney Island calliope. But his merry-go-round renditions of "Rhapsodies in Blue," "Summertime" and "Swan Lake" go beyond merely lightweight, they are positively *anti-gravity.* Let me explain. First time I played "Swan Laeger" a gaping black hole appeared over my turntable. Before I had managed to hit the reject button it had sucked in my cat, an old lacrosse stick, this month's *Penthouse,* and my personally autographed copy of *The Ethel Merman Disco Party.* Roll over George Gershwin, and tell Tchaikovsky the news.

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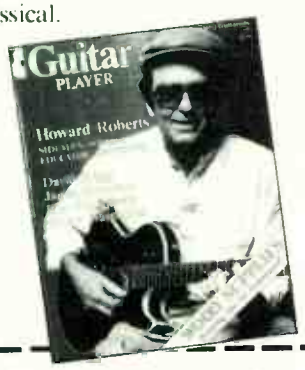

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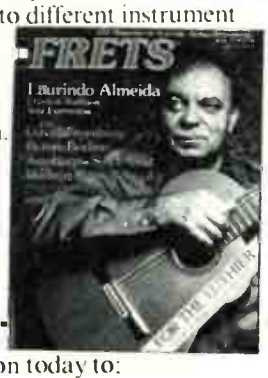

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Pop *cont. from page 22*
pioneered. When Michael slides up an octave to hit the last syllable of the word "destiny" on the album's title track, while his brothers chime in with a perfect echo, you have to conclude that this group's going to be around a long time. Lyrically the Jacksons' songs often deal with being used. On "Bless His Soul," they conclude that "you just can't please the world and yourself / You gotta start doing what's right for you," and it's clear that this album in particular is their bid for recognition and independence within the record business.

Sister Sledge is a 4-sister group that's also been around while. Now in their 20s and originally from Philadelphia, they never quite got off the ground under the aegis of Gamble-Huff's Philadelphia International label. Earlier this year, Sister Sledge teamed with producers Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers, who are also the force behind the self-contained disco group Chic. In real life, Nile is a classically-trained guitarist who has played jazz for a living and worked in the pit band at the Apollo Theater in the early 70s. Right now, he's also the best chicken-scratchin' ninth-chord rhythm guitarist on wax (check his work on "Le Freak"), while his bassist and partner Bernard gives quarter notes some of the only real swing heard on disco records today.

As producers, they switched Sister Sledge away from big-band Philly-soul arrangements over to a kind of funky, loose-limbed disco format that puts these ladies' voices up front in the mix. To continue my mid-60s—late 70s analogy, Sister Sledge update a pop tradition that Diana Ross and the Supremes started. Trading breathy lead vocals, the group creates a believable lustiness without getting too cutesy. Too deepen this quality, Edwards and Rodgers have brought out the gospel roots of the four Sledge sisters.

One recent pop album, though, stands apart, in terms of sheer, unfettered vocal prowess. *Comin' At Ya*, the Persuasions new LP on Flying Fish Records, is *a cappella* start to finish, as usual for them. This group now embodies such a wide range of pop music and history that they are like a precious natural resource, preserving and expanding our understanding of the human voice in American popular music. The Persuasions formed 15 years ago in Brooklyn, and have been touring and making records since 1970. On this album, the 5-man group has consciously mixed song styles and eras while still retaining their links with the earliest sounds in pop group vocals that had a gospel foundation.

I must also mention that the Persuasions live are incomparable, and will be opening for Joni Mitchell on her entire tour this fall. This album was cut live in the studio last spring, with absolutely no edits or overdubs, which means their natural blend and electricity is intact on *Comin' At Ya*. It's a blend I'll never forget. Last year I was playing in a band that opened to the Persuasions at the Other End in New York City, only a couple of weeks after that subway incident I mentioned. They closed their first set with Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready," and left the stage singing, in a line. They circled the room, still singing, and walked into the dressing room, while the crowd was on its feet, screaming for more. Then the Persuasions, who still hadn't stopped singing, sang two verses of that song for me and a friend, who had been sitting alone in the dressing room. Without missing a beat or word, they turned around and strutted back on-stage, singing "get on board, get on board," to complete their encore. It was one of those moments when nothing in the world ever sounded so good as the glory of the human voices in song. I just hope those moments never stop.

Rock cont. from pg. 14
Cars are slightly less successful because of their overly self-conscious attitudes towards pop music's disposability — even though they acknowledge this fact, they are never-the-less content to merely manipulate surfaces and produce more product. We never get below these surfaces to apprehend a life-style like we do with DEVO.

Don't misunderstand me, though . . . DEVO, Nick Lowe, the Cars and even Dire Straits are all excellent examples of the New Pop, with, in each case, a darkly brooding sensibility at work belying the essential lightness of their individual enterprises. Where DEVO succeeds is in its modern attitude, its attempts at creating a private tongue, and its inadvertent seriousness hidden beneath all the college humor.

Reggae *cont. from pg. 20*
stoned-out DJ speed-raps Rasta jive over an already existing rhythm track (and don't ask where the royalties go). U Roy pioneered skank, Big Youth refined it, and today a whole new generation of toasters like Dillinger, Dr. Alimantado, and Trinity have made it the most popular music in Jamaica.

So as the eighties rapidly approach, reggae has gone back underground. Since the major American outlet, Island Records, has drastically cut back on their catalogue, the only way for the reggae junkie to score is through the growing network of small mail-order specialty houses. Two of the most reliable are Chin-Randy's, 1342 St. John's Place, Brooklyn, NY 11213; and Strictly Reggae Music, 743 E Street, San Diego, CA 92101. Both have extensive lists of their stock, which come in handy, since there is an incredible output of recorded music from that small rock in the Caribbean

So, dear reader, if you decide to join Jah faithful and mail-order it, follow these simple instructions upon receipt of your records for maximum enjoyment: get yourself ripped to the tits on the best herb you can find, put a classic roots single on the turntable (like "Babylon Queendom" by Peter Tosh, "Run Come Rally" by the Prophets, "Work On Natty" by Culture, or "Best Dressed Chicken in Town" by Dr. Alimantado), crank the volume up until you can *feel* the bass in your chest cavity, and lock into de rhythm, mon. Listen to the staccato keyboard and scratching guitar, playing on the upbeat, the ominous bass booming out absurd convoluted patterns, while the drummer throws in accents and rim shots everywhere but on the beat, somehow keeping everything together, as the sweet three-part vocals enter the fray, chanting barely intelligible words.

It's music that goes in every direction at once, threatening to pull itself apart, then snapping back again. Tension-release, tension-release. Caribbean trance music. And after the record's over, do you find yourself rolling another number, shouting "Jah Rastafar-i", and spinning more reggae?

You're hooked.

"It is easier for camel to pass through needle's eye, than for reggae to die . . ."
— I Roy.

Hi-Fi *cont. from pg. 19*
You see. FM stations are only required by the FCC to maintain 30 dB of separation at all audio frequencies. There are stations that do better, but generally, if tuned to a station meeting the minimum, a tuner with higher separation capability will do no good. As with THD, it is much easier to attain 30 dB or more for the midranges than at the frequency extremes. Separation should be given at three frequencies — 100Hz, 1000Hz and 10,000Hz. Look for the unit that can attain 30 dB of separation at the higher frequencies.

Having waded through this guide to basic specifications for preamps, power amplifiers and tuners, you now at least have an idea of what manufacturers are trying to tell you in their advertisements and product literature. But don't let all this information suck you into believing in the infallability of specs. The point is, very few of the branded hi fi components now on the market are junk. You must decide what areas are most important, how much power you need, what sort of music you listen to and, most important, how much money you want to spend. Just as you may want to invest more toward FM performance, others might be more interested in a good preamp section to boost record reproduction.

Phono cartridges, turntables and, perhaps the most subjective component of all, loudspeakers, will be covered in the next column. Then we'll move on to using all this information to put together a system to meet your needs and budget.

Resynate your guitar Resynate your sax Resynate your Rhodes Resynate your flute Resynate your synthesizer Resynate your trumpet Resynate your violin Resynate your voice Resynate your drums

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TOOLS OF THE TRADE BY CHUCK HUGHES

NEW FROM NAMM

Our Man-in-the-Music store, searching always for that perfect sound wave, this month discusses some fascinating new developments in synthesis.

The Touch

The Eastern NAMM exposition has become the yearly showcase for the introduction of new musical instrument products. This year's show was held in Atlanta, Ga., in early June. The diversity of products shown was greater than ever, so I've chosen a few of the most innovative and a few of the most practical to discuss this month.

"The Touch" from Oncor Sound, Inc., is available as a guitar or bass style synthesizer. Totally self-contained, "The Touch" has no strings but contacts on the fretboard where strings would normally lie. A player must select a fret space with the left hand while moving one of the "strings" with his or her right hand. The "strings" are actually long springs which close an electrical contact when they are moved to the side slightly. This digitally-based synthesizer has one oscillator, six separate frequency adjustments for detuning, a six octave range, and a pressure sensitive button to control pitch bending. "The Touch" needs no pitch-to-voltage controller, which has been the primary problem with many guitar synthesizers. I found it fairly easy to play after a few minutes. A guitarist or bassist interested in a lead-voice synthesizer would do well to check this out. The suggested price for the guitar model is $1695; the bass, $1495. "The Touch" is available from Oncor Sound, Inc., 471 W. Fifth Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84101.

The Resynator is a brand new product designed to be used with any musical instrument. Basically a synthesizer, the Resynator uses micro-computers to analyze what note is being played and how it is being played. The basic sound is selected by using the Resynator's VCO, CFO, and FXO (effects oscillator). The FXO can be programmed to any interval by playing a note on your instrument while touching a pressure-sensitive pad with your foot. Another feature of the FXO is that it can be used to set up different sounds by playing specific notes. Thus, the player uses musical notes to describe the sound quality desired from the Resynator. One of the most revolutionary aspects of the Resynator is the eight preset wave shapes available. Conventional synthesizers give at best a rough approximation of the wave shapes of other instruments. The Resynator has changing, irregular shapes available, which is really what other instruments emit. The changing wave shape is heard as the flutter in a flute or the "wow" in a trumpet. This provides for an amazing degree of realism in synthesis. The Resynator's cover houses a bank of eight pressure activated switches to control sub-octave, FXO tune, sustain, bypass, UCF peak, pitch bending, and wah. This invention is in a class by itself now, and retails at $2995. This is double what the average guitar or lead voice synthesizer sells for, but there is really no comparison in capability or technology. For more information, contact Musico, 1225 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, Ind. 46204.

The Resynator

Oberheim's OB-X

The Dr. Beat

Roland's Jupiter-4

In the keyboard world, programmable polyphonic synthesizers are capturing the most interest. The OB-X is Oberheim's answer to Sequential Circuit's Prophet. All functions on the OB-X are programmable, and any program may be edited during live performance. Up to eight simultaneous notes (four on the four voice model) can be played with one key, by first simply playing the chord desired, and then pressing a button. Now whenever one key is pressed, the entire programmed chord is played. Tuning has been simplified with auto-tune. a feature that tunes all eight oscillators in a quarter of a second. The OB-X will store 32 programs internally, and has a cassette interface so that all 32 programs may be stored on tape, and

then fed back into the synthesizer when necessary. In this manner, an unlimited number of programs can be stored. The OB-X four voice will retail at $4400, the eight voice at $5600. Manufactured by Oberheim Electronics, Inc., 1549 Ninth St., Santa Monica, Ca. 90401.

Roland's entry in polyphonic programmable synthesizers is their Jupiter-4. The Jupiter-4 has eight programmable sounds, and ten preset sounds. Along with the usual synthesizer controls are included a stereo output, and an automatic arpeggio control. While you can buy bigger synthesizers than the Jupiter-4, it would be difficult to find anything else as versatile for under $3000. The Jupiter-4 lists for $2895.

From Roland also comes a new product for anyone who needs to play in time. The Boss Dr. Beat is really a calibrated rhythm unit. It features a chime at the start of each group of beats, and the group is adjustable from two to six beats. Four basic rhythms are available, and may be combined in varying strengths. There is a dial to set precise tempo, and a visual L.E.D. to indicate tempo. A volume control and output jack make the Dr. Beat useful for private practice or for patching to an amplifier. To add to the versatility, the Dr. Beat runs on a nine volt battery or A.C. current. It's small size (6.6" x 3.5" x 1.5") makes it very portable. Overall, the Dr. Beat should prove to be an excellent learning tool.

The Boss NF-1 is a new noise gate with excellent design features. A noise gate is a device which sets a sound threshold below which no sound is emitted. A guitarist, for example, would set the threshold so that buzz from pickups would be too quiet to pass through the noise gate, while allowing louder sounds, in this case the string vibrations, to pass through. The problem with noise gates has been that once the instrument signal starts to fade, as in the natural decay of a guitar string, the sound grows softer and all of a sudden abruptly disappears. At this point the guitar has faded to the same volume as the noise, so both are silenced. Often a coughing or sputtering sound is heard as the instrument sound decays. To remedy this undesirable effect, the Boss NF-1 features a variable decay rate, so that the notes of the instrument can be set to decay at a more natural rate.

NF-1 is housed in a cast case with the entire top panel for a switch. The throw of the switch is small and the action smooth. Changing 9 volt batteries is accomplished by loosening only 1 screw. A light is provided for battery check and on/off indicator. If you've been unsatisfied with noise gates in the past, the NF-1 may change your outlook.

The Jupiter-4, DB-33 and NF-1 are all available from Roland Corp., U.S., 2401 Saybrook Ave., L.A., CA. 90040.

STUDIO

SAXOPHONE/DAVE LIEBMAN

CLOSE-OUT

This last article in this series on chromatic lines consists mostly of my own examples. The inherent logic is a result of the ways of conceiving these lines, already outlined in previous articles. They were all written from the horn, without any reference to key or mode.

My point in these articles has been to give the musician a starting place for hearing and conceiving of these types of lines. The simplest analogy is to recall when you first learned major scales and you had to think about the sequence, until it eventually became automatic. This is the general process for learning any new material. The essential combination is of intellect and intuition. With time, patience and *practice*, it will all happen.

Notes

—Accidentals are marked individually and last for the bar unless otherwise indicated.

—For most examples, there is a metronome mark which indicates at what tempo I originally heard the line. Obviously, sixteenths and eighths are interchangeable by doubling or halving the tempo.

—The terms "even" or "dotted" feel are important because both articulations affect the curve of the line and how they sound. Usually, 16ths are played more evenly than 8ths.

—When there is a ^ at the end of a line, it means the next phrase (your own) could be played at any time.

1 means accented and tiny space after

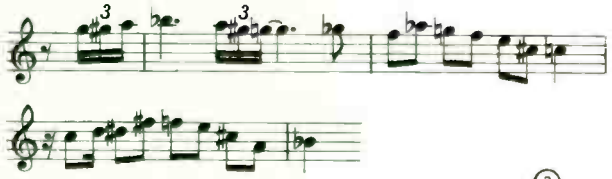
2 accented slightly

3 means quickly & slurred smooth

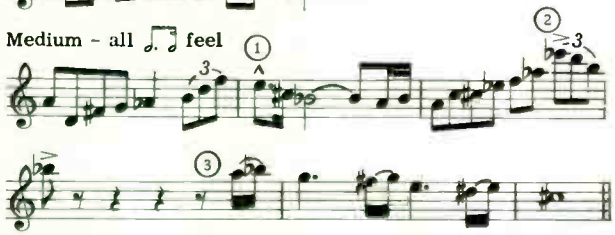
4 means long - short and cut-off

5 slight dip in pitch along with strong tonguing

C Flute Medium



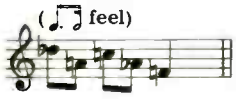
Medium - all ♩. ♪ feel



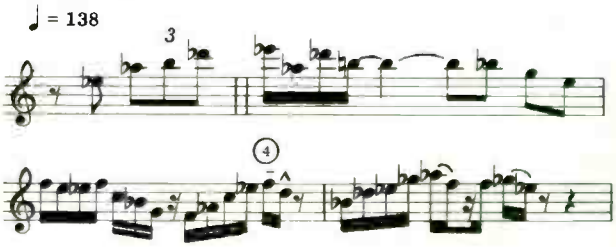
Soprano ♩ = 116, evenly

♩. = 200, evenly

(♩. ♪ feel)



♩ = 138



Medium fast (dotted feel)

Medium

Fast, evenly

Tenor ♩ = 96

♩ = 168 (even)

♩ = 144 (even)

Medium (♩. ♪ feel)

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YAMAHA

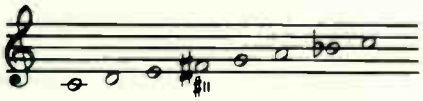
STUDIO

CONTEMPORARY HARMONY/RON DELP

11th CHORDS

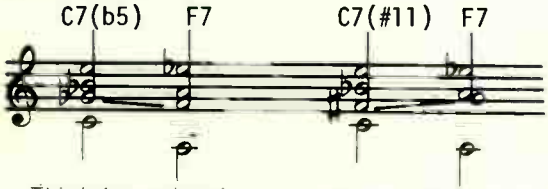
Both dominant 7th and major 7th chords can use the #11 tensions, both harmonically and melodically. In issue #13 I discussed the subV chord (dominant chord that resolves down by half-step rather than by P5th) which uses the *lydian (b7)* scale. The lydian (b7) scale is a mixolydian scale with a built-in #4th, which we call #11. For example, the scale built on C:

EXAMPLE #1



The lydian (b7) scale is primarily used with any dominant chord that has 1) #11 in the melody, or 2) #11 in the chord symbol. Obviously, the #11th is the same note as the b5th and the theoretical difference between the two is really unimportant. Basically, the note is b5 if it resolves down and #11 if it resolves upward:

EXAMPLE #2



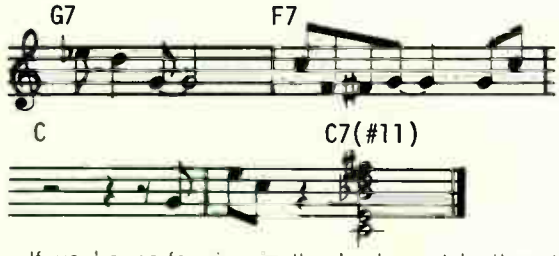
This is for analyzation purposes and really doesn't matter much in performance except that one spelling might be more convenient than the other (i.e.: Gb instead of F#). You will find the note/chord indicated as b5 in older music, as #11 in more contemporary tunes.

Actually, any dom7th chord that does not move down a P5th can use the lydian (b7) scale; hence, any such chord has #11 as an available tension. Normally, when #11 is used, the 9th of the chord is also used. The #11 became popular during the BeBop Era of jazz with two classic uses. The first is ending a melodic phrase on #11, implying dissonance and non-resolution:

EXAMPLE #3

The second is making the final chord of the tune dom7th with the added #11 (usually on blues tunes):

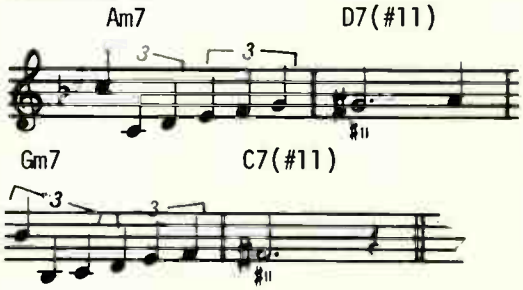
EXAMPLE #4



If you're performing the be-bop style then these devices should certainly become a part of your bag of licks and goodies.

In some cases you may want to add the #11th to a dom7 chord that IS functioning as V7 (moving down a P5th). If you hear it . . . play it. A song with an example is *Girl From Ipanema*, the last four bars of the bridge:

EXAMPLE #5



Another scale commonly used on dom7 (#11) chords is the *whole-tone scale*, which is a 7-note scale built in whole steps. For C7(#11) use the C whole-tone scale:

EXAMPLE #6

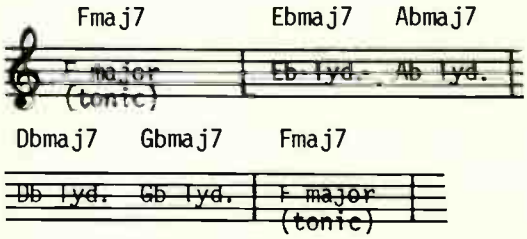
The whole-tone scale has a rather cliche sound and some players won't use it. It is a valid choice if used effectively (and not too often).

The maj7 type chord can also employ #11, both harmonically and melodically, and will use the *lydian* (no b7th) scale. Lydian is a major scale with a #4th (#11th). Here is C lydian:

EXAMPLE #7

The IVmaj7 chord automatically uses the lydian scale. For example, Cmaj7 is the IV chord in the key of G and will use the scale in the example above. But any non-diatonic maj7 chord also uses the lydian scale, so any maj7 chord that isn't functioning as a I (tonic) chord uses the lydian scale. Here's an example where the overall tonality is F major:

EXAMPLE #8



#11 chords — dominant and major — are very much a part of today's music and their use can greatly enhance your use of harmony. Figure out the #11th on every dominant and major7 chord and try working them into your own playing and writing.

JAZZ AIDS by Jamey Aebersold and Others

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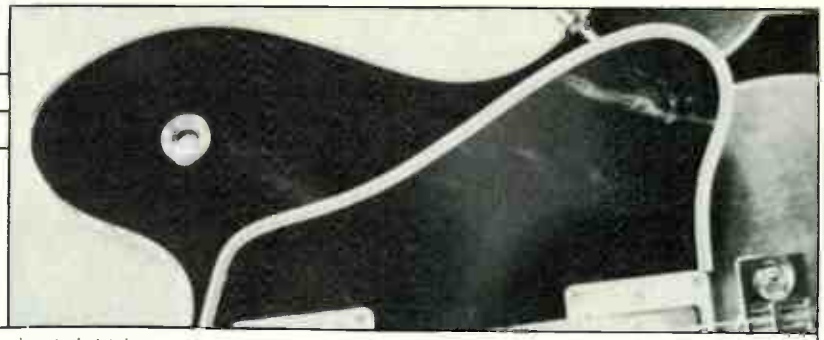
STUDIO

GUITAR/JOHN AMARAL

SIGHT READING



Sightreading, the ability to interpret new music at sight, is a stumbling block for many guitarists. Some of the reasons are: duplication of notes on the fingerboard, multiple fingering possibilities; lack of adequate study materials; and the traditional characterization that the guitar is not a 'serious' instrument, which excludes it from school music programs. Rather than focus on these negative aspects, let's learn to sightread.

The best incentive I know for becoming proficient at S.R. is the ability to track through any music to absorb the ideas of great musicians quickly, freeing up time to work on playing. You can learn tunes faster, develop your ear, analyze more music, and make more money as a sightreader. S.R. ability is a prerequisite for steady studio work.

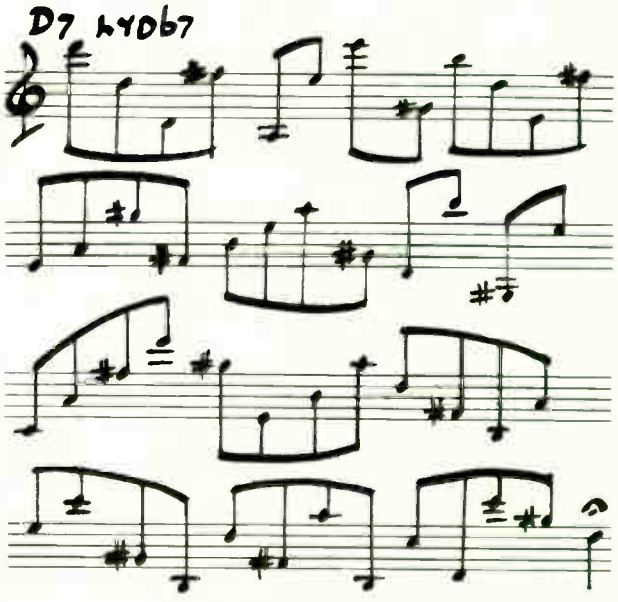
S.R. is a lot like reading words. If you put half the attention on learning S.R. that you once put on learning to read printed words, it will soon be a snap! The mind is a vast computer. If you realize that it is impossible to consciously control all the aspects of playing, you might as well give up, let your unconscious do all the work, make decisions, select fingerings, etc., leaving your conscious mind free to listen, transmit, and direct.

Helpful Exercises

1. Adopt an attitude of indifference to mistakes. The reason people make mistakes is that they're afraid to make mistakes. A very good way to get over this fear is to spend part of your practice periods intentionally making mistakes. That's right, you heard it here first!
2. Pay attention to speaking clearly in conversations and playing clearly on your instrument. Say only what you intend, and play only what you hear. Observe articulateness in speakers and players.
3. Read aloud from all kinds of books. Put out a lot of emotion and get a feel for the processes involved: vocabulary, diction, breathing, pitch, inflection, accents, etc. Try to see parallels between reading words and reading music.
4. Have the clear purpose in mind of playing music every time you play, whether you've sightreading, improvising, or playing from memory.
5. Eartraining, knowing what you're hearing and prehearing, what you're sightreading, is important. I'll devote a future column to this.
6. S.R. proficiency depends on quantity of experience more than quality. Any great sightreader will tell you that he's seen it all before. Here's a sure-fire approach to gaining a lot of S.R. experience while working on your time: Assemble a pile of S.R. material. Pick a metronome setting at random, and read a page of music. Don't stop to correct mistakes. Mistakes are good! If you don't make mistakes, you can't learn. At the end of one page, go immediately to another one, of entirely different material. Set a new tempo, at random, and go! Variety and avoidance of stopping will offset boredom and provide a challenge, ensuring maximum attention. Don't overdo it; about an hour at a time is enough.
7. Analyze lots of music, using a similar approach to #6. Move steadily and omit what you don't understand. Make a check mark and go back later to troublesome areas. The more you understand about music, the faster you will be able to read it.
8. Extensive observation indicates that prodigious technique is not necessary for good S.R., but a thorough familiarity with all note locations is. Playing on one string is a good technique for learning the notes. Each string can be thought of as a different instrument, with its own range and timbre. You can improvise this way, work on technique, and, yes, sightread. Try it.

These two concepts are very powerful for reducing mind fog from duplicity of notes and multiple fingering possibilities. Remember what a player Django was? And he basically used two fingers. He also played on one or two strings a lot. These concepts will help you develop a natural technique which is firmly rooted in your unconscious, where you want it to be. Some may raise the objection that it is difficult to sightread on one string. Consider this: many players are good at improvising on one or two strings (not only guitar, but balalaika, bousouki, etc.) A player who can do that *and* prehear written music, ought to be able to S.R. this way.

A very good exercise, which I got from Pat Metheny, is to prepare randomized chord scales like the example below. Application of the technique in #5 to these will increase your skills in many areas.



In his fine book on S.R., Howard Roberts discusses psychological aspects. I recommend it.

Finally, the way you play is an expression of what you're like as a person. Working on yourself is the quickest way I know to improve playing and S.R.

These columns will be capsule summaries of practical aspects of guitar playing, presenting essentials which will help you learn fast and save time. Next month: RECOMMENDED BOOKS.

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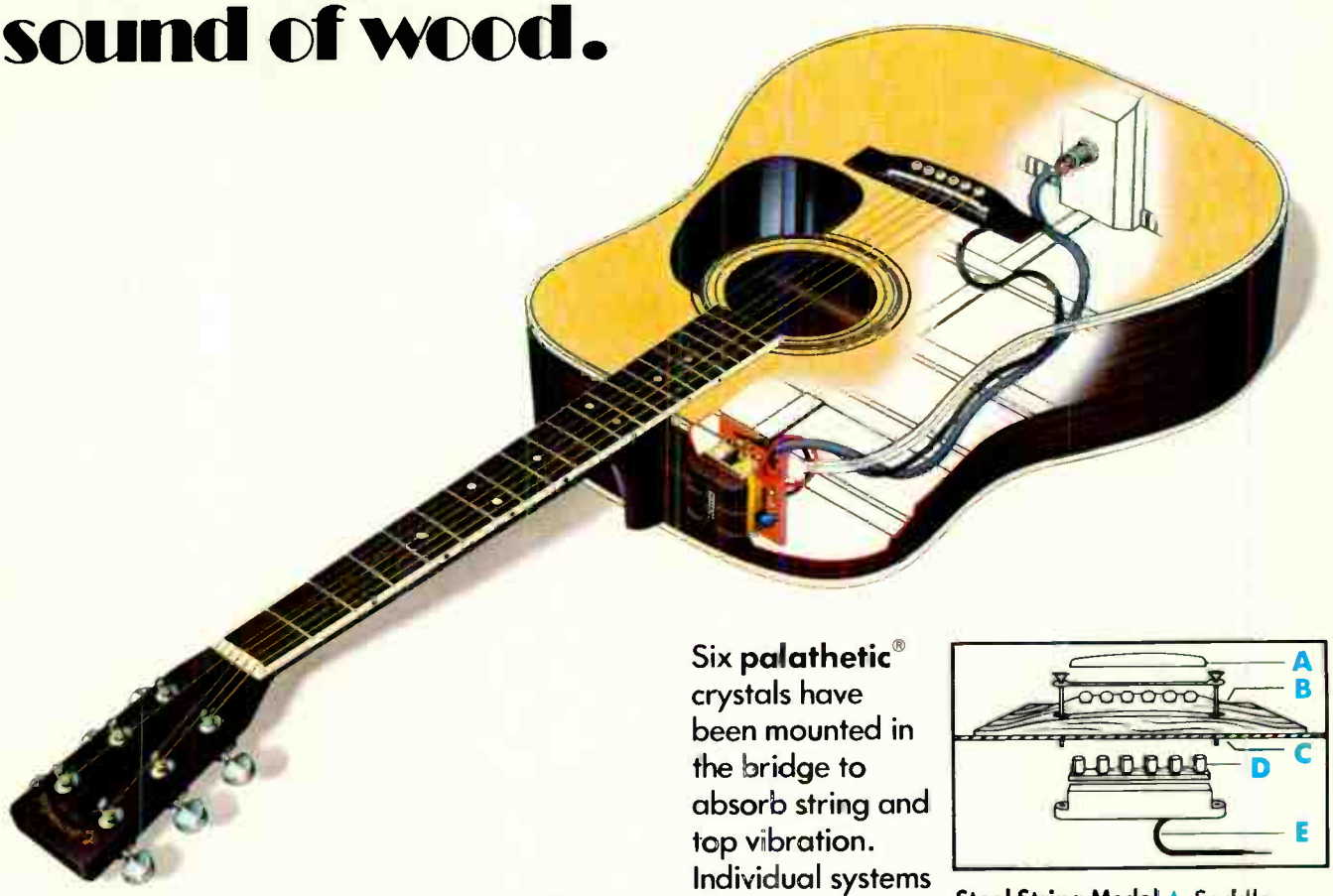

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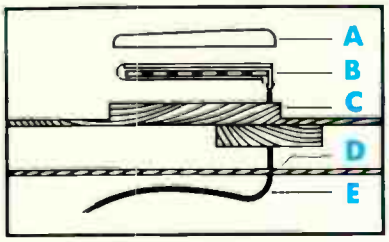

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STUDIO

DRUMS/RALPH HUMPHREY

DRUMMER AS MUSICIAN

Up to this time, the articles that have appeared in Musician Magazine have been geared primarily toward the more advanced player including those who play professionally. However, I would like to direct this article to those who have not either benefitted from years of experience, or had the opportunity of sound instruction. I'm talking about the beginner/intermediate who has visions of becoming a professional drummer, yet is somewhat in the dark about what *It* is all about.

When I say professional drummer, I really mean musician first, drummer second. Far too often, young drummers do not consider the music enough to really be a part of its making. Rather, they assume a role as "the drummer" and play their licks without giving much thought to the music. It is understandable that young players become hung up with images of the professional drummer, whether he be on stage or in the studio. But the young drummers' main concern should be the development of solid music habits.

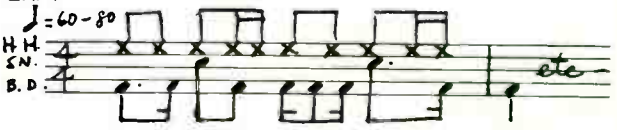
Your personal point of reference has to be one of openness and eagerness, to learn and discover the substance that makes up all different kinds of music. Become more acutely aware of subtle nuances of "feel" that differentiates one kind of music from another. Begin to acquaint yourself with various types of music, like jazz, blues. rock, rhythm and blues, funk disco, ballad-types, avant-garde, etc. Learn to know what is required of you to perform a certain piece of music a certain way. This takes into consideration various aspects of the music: its form or structure, its dynamic direction, its attitude (e.g. aggressive, hard, light, soft, melancholy, laid back, etc.). and its feel. By feel I mean the *pocket*. The pocket refers to the groove that the song has, which is, incidentally, more than just the tempo or pulse. It is the way in which the beat is expressed or stated and includes attack or touch, articulation, phrasing according to either metric accents (i.e. the natural accent scheme of a meter) or a preconceived accent pattern. These are the subtle nuances that cannot be ignored, simply because they are what makes the music come alive.

The best teacher is, of course, experience. And since young players have not lived long enough to experience many of the things the professional long has had under his belt, he must pursue alternate methods. Thanks to the record industry, T.V. and live concerts, the inexperienced player has many examples of fine music played by some of the finest musicians in the industry. Begin to become more aware of the things you like or don't like about a performance or a player. Through analysis of others, you can learn much about your own thoughts and feelings of the kind of musician and drummer that you would aspire to become.

When other musicians are not available to play with, use tapes and records and play along with the tracks. If you have them use headphones so that every instrument is clearly audible as you play. You might try hooking up a metronome to a headset and work on your time. Or better yet, try to acquire a tape of different samples and hold synthesizer patterns. If you have a friend or acquaintance who has a synthesizer, work with him to develop a tape of different patterns at various tempos. Also on the market are rhythm machines capable of reproducing drum sounds and patterns that you can manipulate to achieve a variety of rhythmic options. Remember, these aids were never intended to replace an actual music event, but they do provide a basic service to those who are getting it together.

To help you analyze what you hear when you listen to music, I offer the following suggestions: rhythmically speaking, try to determine what note value the groove or pocket is based on. Once this is established, then begin thinking in that note value. For example, the pattern below is basically a 16th-note groove, even though not all of the 16ths are indicated:

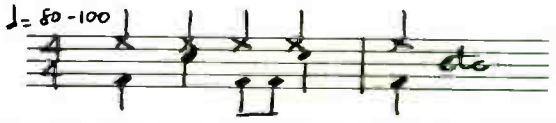
EX. 1



By thinking all the 16ths, you will be more likely to play the pattern more evenly and placing the notes more accurately.

A pattern like EX. 2, below, can be deceptively difficult if you misinterpret the space between the notes:

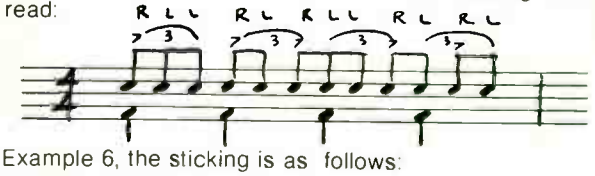
EX. 2



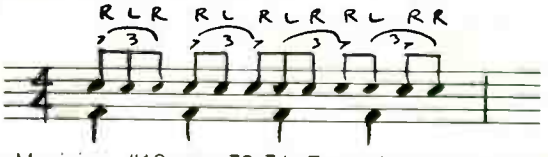
However, if you think of all the 8th-notes in the bar as you play, your chances of capturing the groove are greatly improved. You will discover that interpreting the space between the notes is as important as the notes themselves. There are times when a performance is so awe-inspiring that it becomes difficult and even unnecessary to determine exactly what the performer did that moved you so much. Examples like this provide strong evidence that, in the final analysis, it's the music that communicates and not the technique that was used to make it. This is truly your prime objective, to make music and have a good time doing it.

ERRATA

In Musician, #18, pg. 75, Example 5, the sticking should read:



Example 6, the sticking is as follows:



In Musician, #19, pg. 73-74, Example 1b should follow Example 1a immediately. Example 2a should appear where 1b is. The sentence than begins, "A second method....." refers to Example 2b. The sentence that begins, "For further practice....." refers to Examples 3-12.

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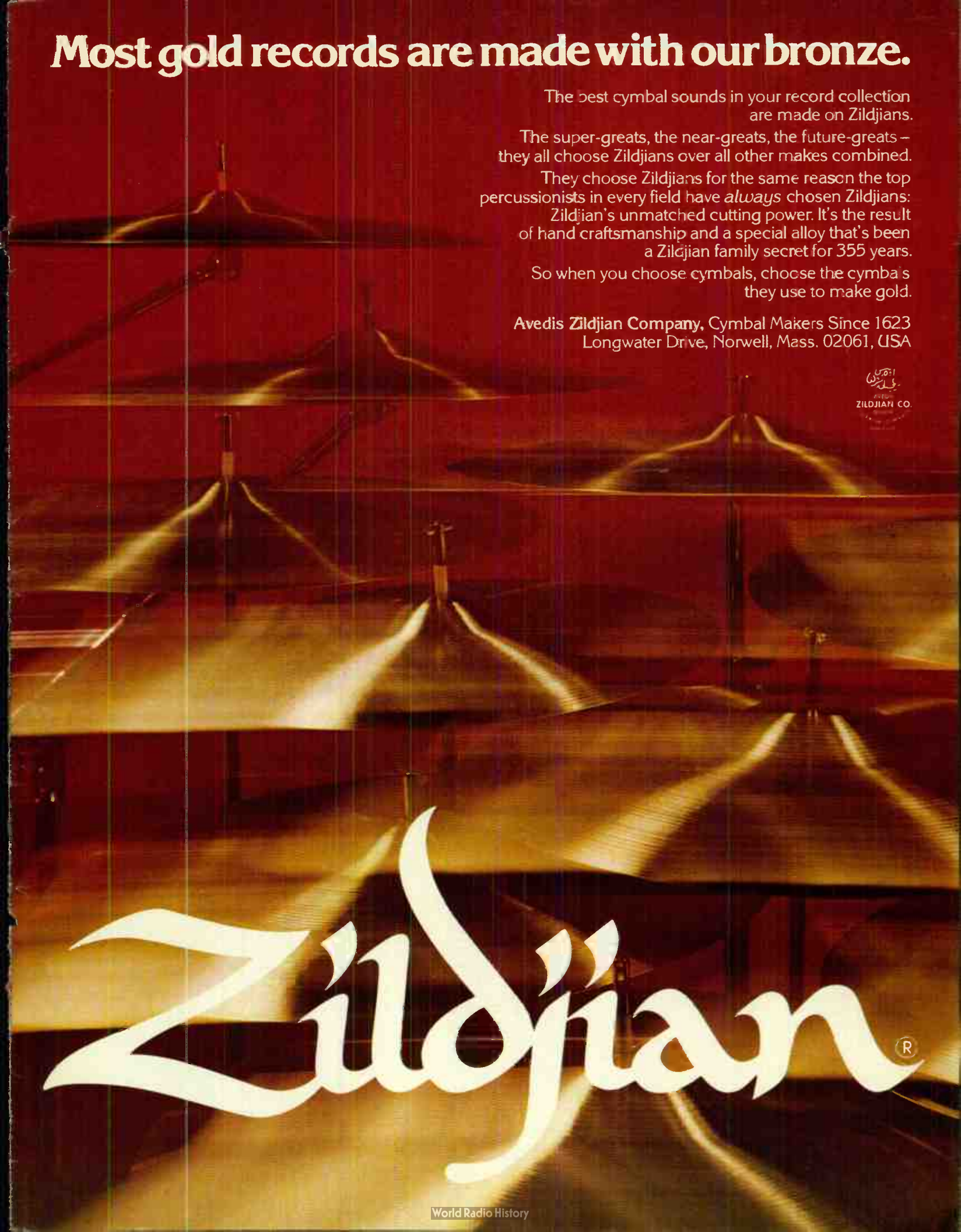

best buys

Ovation Instruments has just introduced the Electric Custom Legend 12-String featuring abalone pearl inlays and purfling, ivory bound ebony fingerboard, gold plated machine heads, a spruce top and walnut bridge. The pickup contains six piezoelectric crystals and runs to an FET preamplifier with volume and tone controls. The guitar has some nice design extras as the top has been tapered from .14" at the fingerboard to .10" at the lower bout. This makes it vibrate at a frequency complementary to the body's. Also, running the top brace with the grain has increased bass and mid-range response and the neck joins the body at he twelfth fret which makes far more comfortable playing. Ovation, Blue Hills Ave. Ext., Bloomfield, CT 06002.

Just available for shipping is the **TEAC** Model 5B mixing console, an eight-in, four-out unit with color-coded controls and new IC's with a slew rate four times faster than present IC's. The 5B is very expandable with the addition of the Tascam Model 1 mixer and can be easily brought up to a 20-in, four-out unit. The 5B provides 3 position attenuation, rotary trim from 0 to 20 db of continuously variable gain reduction for mic, tape or line, 3 position input selection, a fader cue, past-fader echo and built-in peak and dip equalization among other features. TEAC, 7733 Telegraph Rd., Montebello, Cal. 90640.

New from **Avedis Zildjian** this summer are their specially designed "Quick-Beat" Hi-Hats with four precision-drilled ½" holes in a flat bottomed cymbal. The top cymbal is a traditionally shaped medium heavy-weight cymbal with standard cup. The effect is a tight, compact sound for tight, compact drummers. A Zildjian, Box 98, Accord, MA 02018.

Fender Instruments has commemorated the 25th birthday of their Stratocaster with a special issue 25th Anniversary Strat, all serially numbered on specially finished and stamped neck plates, complete with a correspondingly serialized certificate of authenticity and a molded case.

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Ibanez announces their new Roadster series this summer. Shown here is the Roadster Bass, part of a line which includes two sixes and two basses, all four of which feature the Ibanez Quadra-Lock 4-Bolt neck mounting system to make the neck-body joint one of the strongest in the industry. Also, they feature the TR Tuned Response necks whereby each neck is individually tuned to eliminate dead notes and frequency response is leveled by embedding tuned steel rods in the neck under the fingerboard. These are solid, road-tough instruments with low-noise design and no dead notes. Elger, Box 469, Cornwells Heights, Pa. 19020

Epiphone shows off their new Genesis series electric guitars, a line that stresses tradition. One piece mahogany neck and rosewood fingerboard, matched to a carved top mahogany body. Double cutaway design offers total access to all 22 frets. Two humbuckers, three position toggle switch and a "coil-tap" switch for both humbucking and non-humbucking tonalities. Norlin, 7373 N. Cicero Ave., Lincolnwood, Ill. 60646.

Korg announces their KP-30 "Sigma" Monophonic Synthesizer, a performance oriented keyboard featuring nineteen mixable voices which can be used separately or in stereophonic unison. The KP-30 utilizes two separately tunable VCO's, with six sub-octaves and a separately programmed synthesizer module for each voice. Other features include twin Joystock controllers, programmable touch sensitive keyboard, high pass and low pass VCF's, single/multiple triggering, sample and hold, ring modulation and full interface patching. Unicord, 89 Frost St., Westbury, NY 11590.

MCI has brought forth their Daion guitar line consisting of 22 instruments. 10 acoustic guitars with spruce or cedar tops, 4 electric — all solid bodies, 2 solid body basses and 6 classic guitars. Pictured is the Heritage model featuring solid cedar top, mahogany back and sides, brass nut and saddle. MCI, P.O. Box 8053, Waco, Texas 76710.

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THE McPEAKE FAMILY

By Brian Cullman

I know this much: if it's beauty I feel, then it must be under the surface, because beauty is always under the surface...true beauty has *terror* in it. You can drop a stone into Beethoven, and you will never hear it strike bottom. The eternities and the infinities are in it, and they strike at the soul, like death.

The water, the surf, the colors on the shore. You think they make up the beauty of the tropical sea? They do not. 'Tis the knowledge of what lurks below the surface of it, that awful-looking thing, as you call it, that carries death with every move that it makes. So it is, so it is with all beauty.

- James M. Cain

Nothing I know has more beauty and terror in it than traditional Irish music. Not what normally passes for Irish or Celtic music, but the real thing. With the exception of the Chieftains (God grant them all three lives), I'd rather fall down a flight of stairs than listen to most of what fills the "Irish" section of record stores: the endless Toms and Micks and Pats, all pictured in tweeds and turtlenecks, a pipe perhaps, a shamrock stuck discreetly behind an ear, a twinkle in their eyes, a rogueish-but-good-hearted smile on their lips, all set to launch into a version of "My Wild Irish Rose," "When Irish Eyes are Smiling," or some other flight of geographical senility. Just as you can't say Poland without some bozo chortling on about lightbulbs or bowling shirts, you can't mention Ireland without some drunk blubbering all over a piano, sogging up the keys. Never mind the fact that a good percentage of the Irish drink simply to forget the awful fact that they share the same birth-place as these Toms and Micks and Patty-boys, who, not having the brains to become bicycle or horse thieves, came to America and became entertainers.

But The McPeake Family. Ah, now that's a different story altogether!

Most Irish music (outside of jigs and reels) is known for its melancholy, its sadness (for which read wistfulness). But here there is strength in the sadness, the beauty and terror of someone who has looked right into the abyss and had the abyss stare straight back into their eyes...and who must carry on with their life, regardless. Music of a homelessness that a home can never change. The McPeake Family. The Band's *Music From Big Pink*, Nick Drake's records, Bartok's string quartets, Beethoven's 6th, John Fahey...records that keep my life company.

The music is devastatingly, achingly beautiful---and oddly familiar, mostly because of the breadth of their influence. It's from them that Van Morrison learned his modal timelessness, Robin Williamson (late of the Incredible String Band) his beautifully odd phrasing, from them that The Chieftains learned the roar behind the sigh, the blood at the back of the harp. For this is music of love and obligation and duty, fierce in its price and terrible in its regret. This is, after all, the music of a people who believed that faeries would melt on Judgement Day because their souls had no sadness in them.

There are six McPeakes: Francis, the patriarch, on iullean pipes (like bagpipes, but sweeter, less nasal, and pumped under the arm instead of blown), his sons Frank and James on pipes and harp, respectively, and Frank's two children and a nearby cousin on pipes and harp as well.

As a young man, near the turn of this century, Francis was a lone piper, playing the pipes and singing simultaneously, a difficult and unusual feat. Occasional work with a Welsh harper opened up new possibilities in his playing and made him want to work with harp constantly; the only problem was that good harpers had a reputation for being prima donnas and were unfomfortable accompanying anyone but themselves. And so, like Talking Heads' David Byrne who, more comfortable with artists than musicians, taught two art student friends of his to play bass and drums for his band, and like Ornette Coleman, who made his twelve year old son his drummer, Francis taught his children to play harp and pipes to his specifications. The singing they apparently never needed to be taught. How many sing on each song is nearly impossible to tell, the voices seem to breathe in and out of each other, resonating like the under and overtones of the same string. Sometimes the background voices linger slightly behind Francis's lead, especially on the saddest of the songs "Carraig Dun, the Verdant Braes of Skreen", as if, already knowing the scope of the sadness, they are hesitant to bring it to life once again by naming it. The effect is of a glorious weightlessness, of a man walking up a flight of stairs---the lead voice his left food, the backing voices his right foot, just behind.

And when Kathleen McPeake accompanies herself on harp and sings "Eileen Aroon" in Gaelic, it sounds like a holy cross between Sandy Denny and Om Khalsoum, the Gaelic taking on the softest, most bittersweet qualities of Arabic music. I have played this cut for people who love Fairport Convention, for people who love Billie Holiday, and for a bad-tempered friend who only listens to Albert Ayler and watched as, in each case, their hair stood on end. It is, quite simply, chilling; filled with the fear of God and the fear of something even less nameable and more beautiful. It is also, obviously, too haunting to write about with much real clarity.

One of his many biographers notes that W.B. Yeats once burst into a friend's house, his eyes all ablaze.

"I had the most beautiful dream of my life last night," he said, and then sat looking out of the window in silence.

"Well, what was it?" his friend finally asked.

"I don't know; I was too busy dreaming it."

At the moment there is only one McPeake Family album available in the U.S. It's on Topic records, has the austere title *Irish Traditional Folk Songs and Music* and is available through Rounder Distribution, 186 Willow Ave., Somerville, Mass. 02144, or through Shanachie Records, 1375 Crosby Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10461. The McPeake Family performed and recorded extensively in the 1950's and early 60's, and the revival of interest in Celtic musics, sparked by The Chieftains, Alan Stivell, The Boys of the Lough, and Planxty, will hopefully lead to the American release and distribution of more of their records. Until more are available, albums of similar interest include: *The Chieftains 5* (Island Records), *The Chieftains 8* (Columbia Records), *Alan Stivell — Renaissance of the Celtic Harp* (Polydor International) and *Finbar & Eddy Furey — Irish Pipe Music* (Nonesuch).

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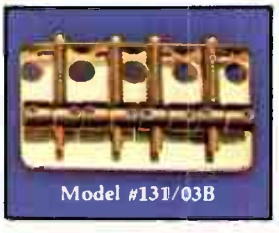
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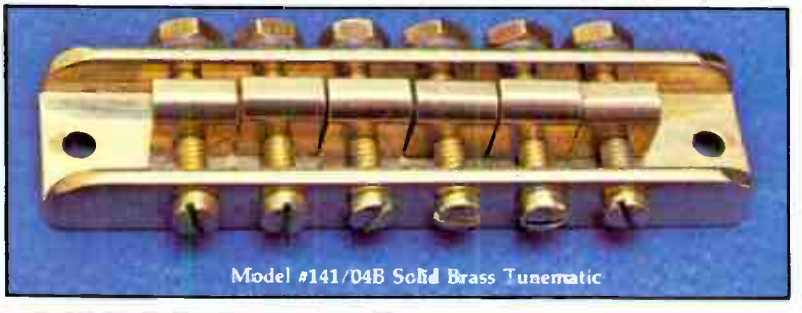
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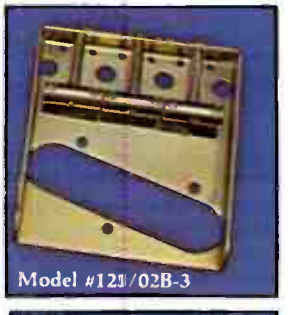
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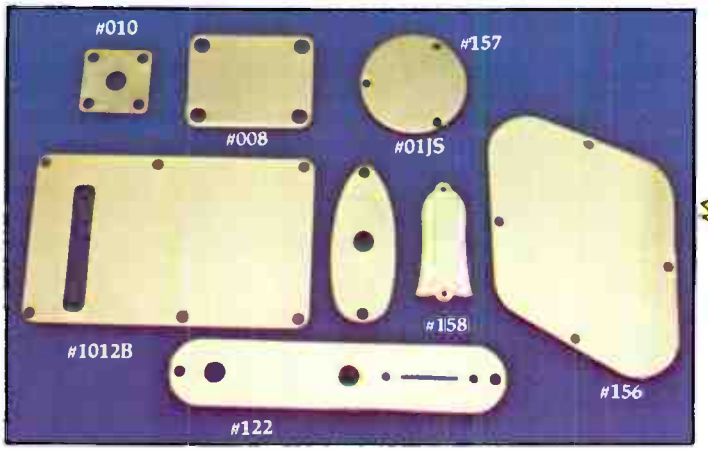

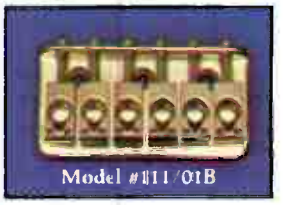
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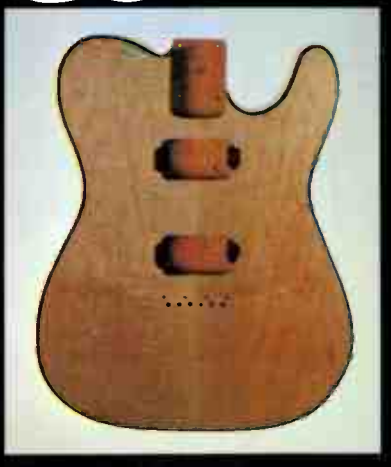

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