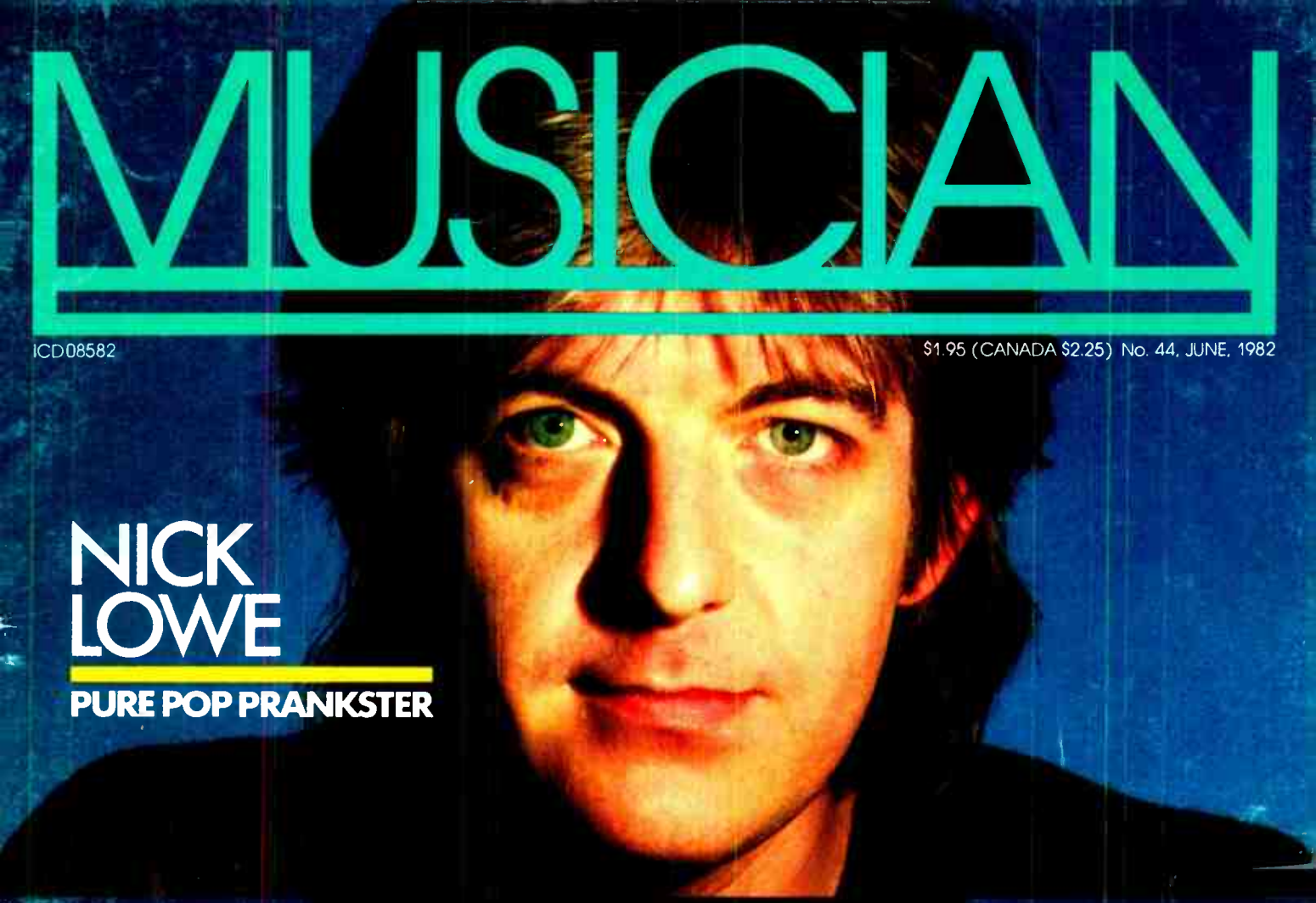
MUSICIAN

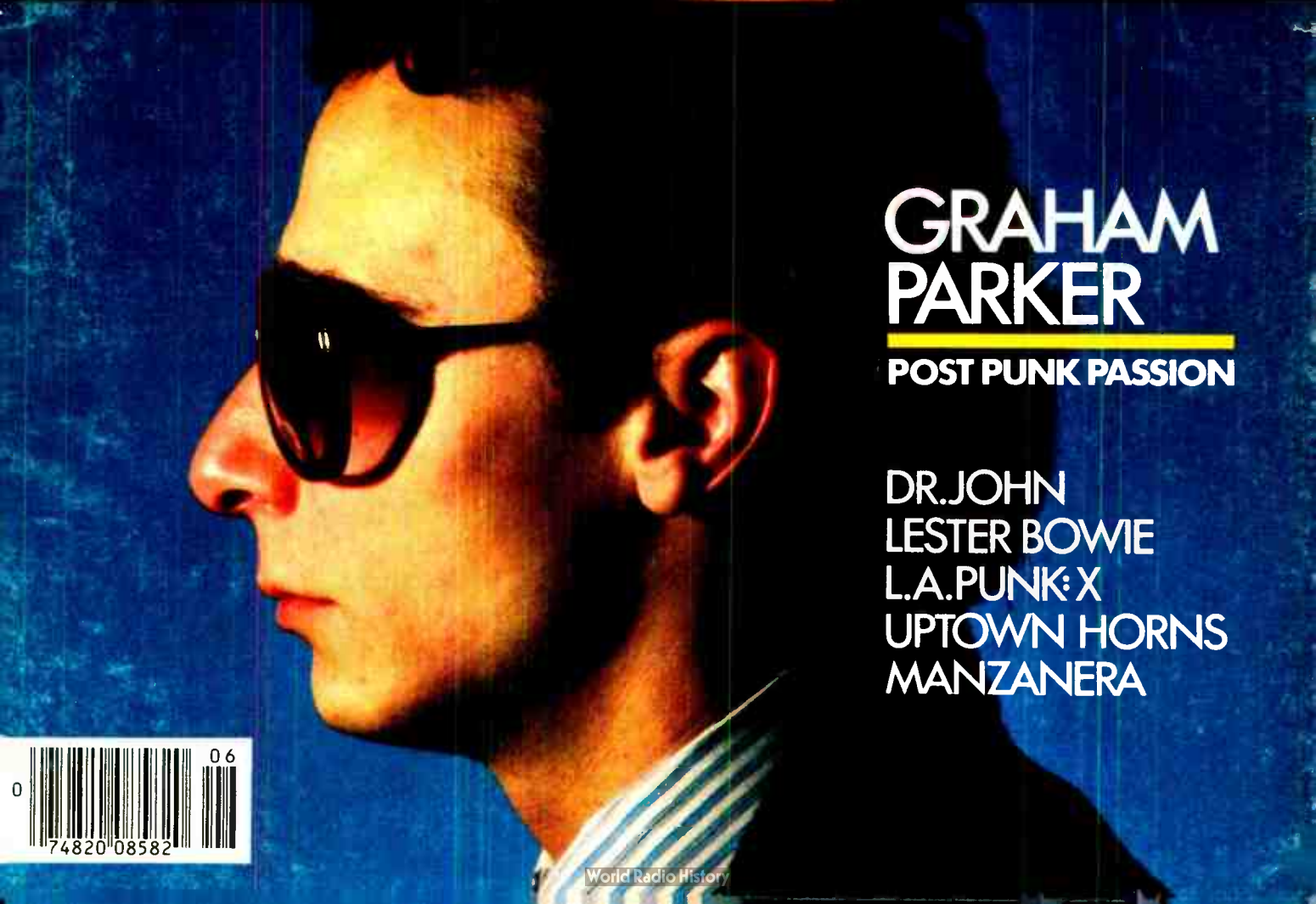
ICD08582

$1.95 (CANADA $2.25) No. 44, JUNE, 1982



NICK LOWE

PURE POP PRANKSTER



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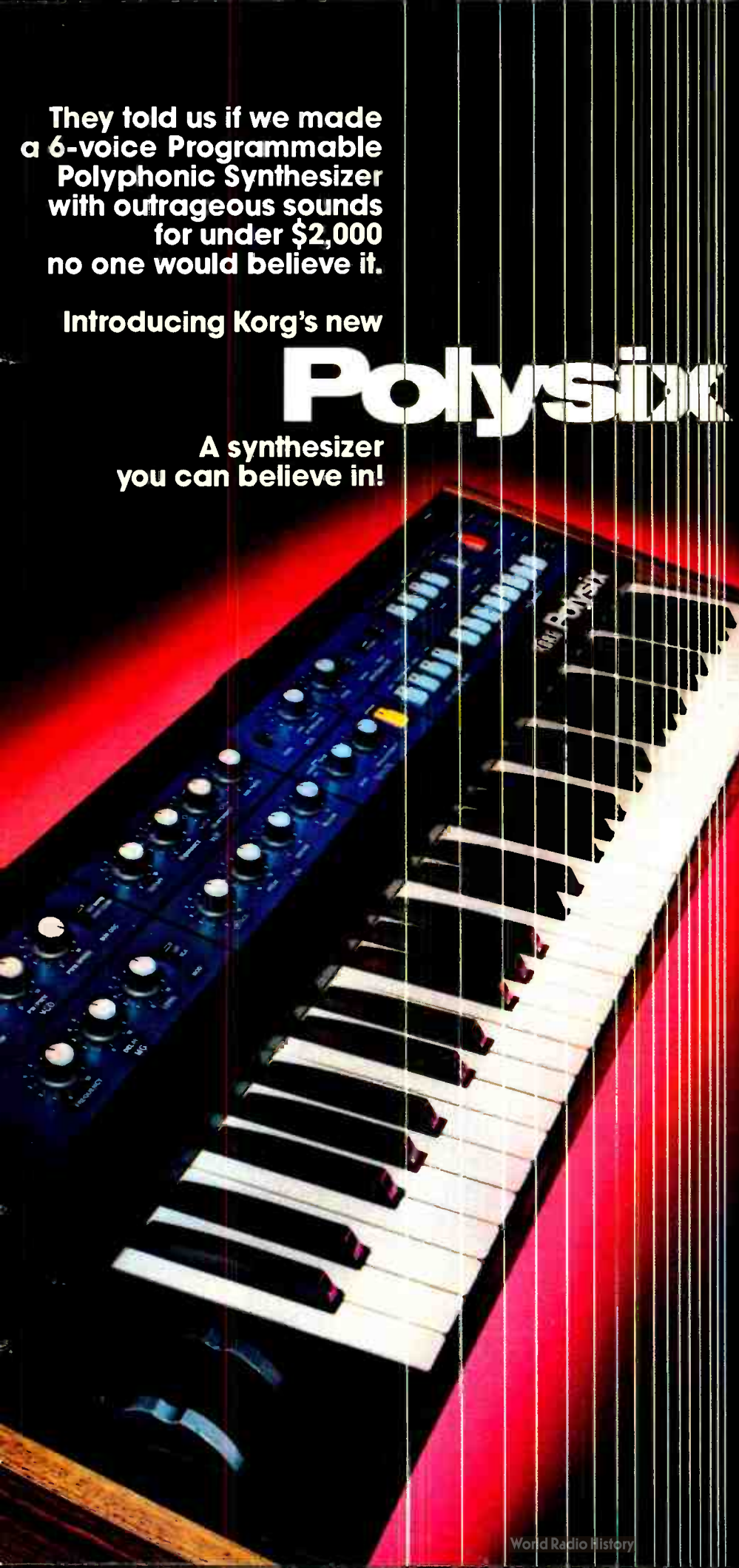

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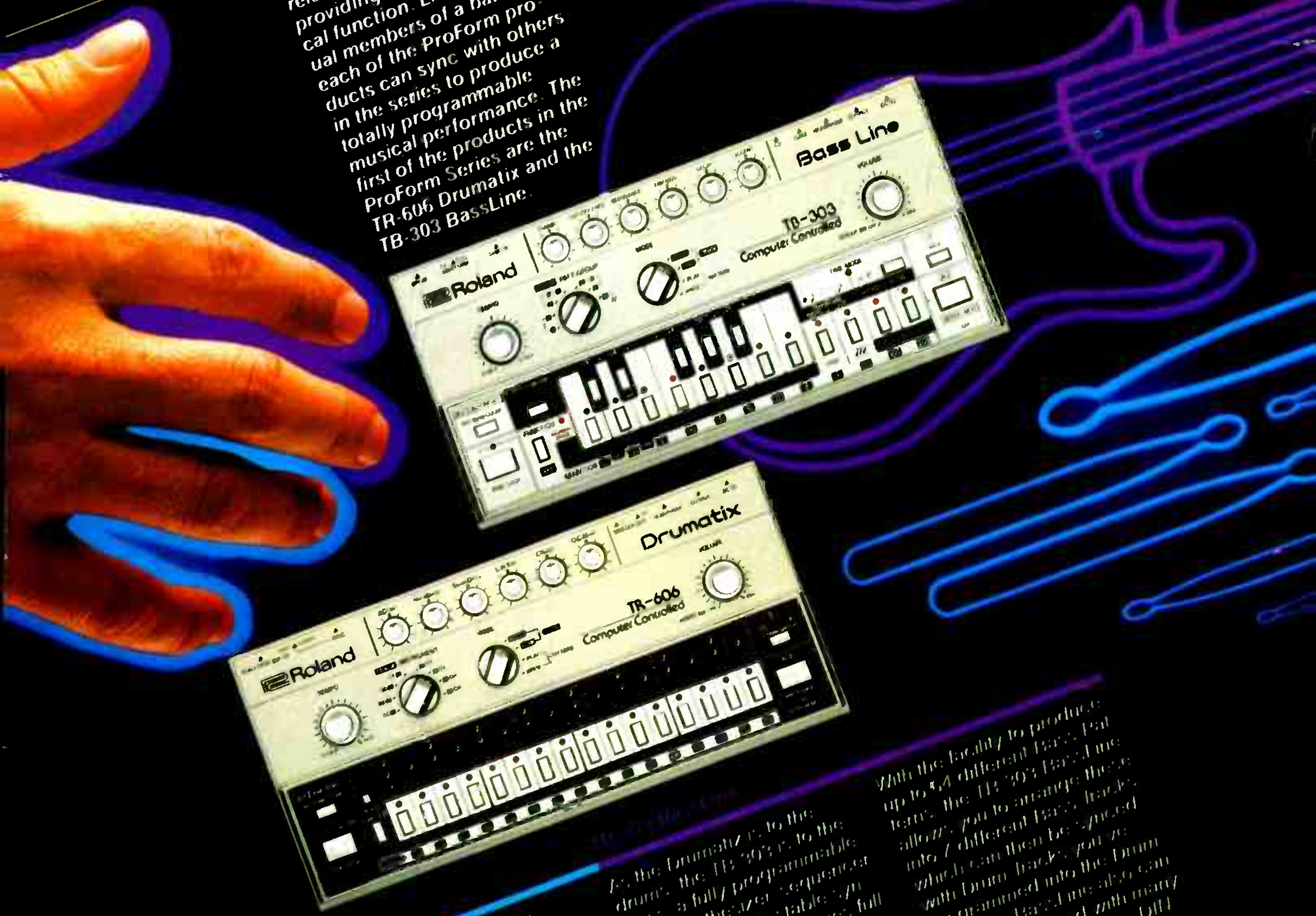
Roland

Understanding Technology Series

Subject: The Concept of Programmable Performance

ProForm Series

The new Roland ProForm Series is a group of interrelated products, each providing a specific musical function. Like individual members of a band, each of the ProForm products can sync with others in the series to produce a totally programmable musical performance. The first of the products in the ProForm Series are the TR-606 Drumatix and the TB-303 BassLine.



TR-606 Drumatix

The Drumatix is a totally programmable drum synthesizer sequencer. The drum sounds available on the TR-606 include: Bass Drum, Snare, Lo and Hi Toms, Cymbal, Open and Closed Hi Hat. Each sound has its own level control for total mix flexibility.

With the Drumatix, you can program 32 different Rhythm Patterns, which can be arranged to play up to 8 complete Rhythm Tracks (Songs). After the track has been programmed, the TR-606 can easily sync to other ProForm products, or many other products to play the complete drum track of the composition.

As the Drumatix is to the drums, the TB-303 is to the bass: a fully programmable bass synthesizer sequencer. The remarkable bass synthesizer section features full voice flexibility with dual waveforms and controls for Tuning, VCF Cutoff, Resonance, Envelope Modulation and Decay. The programmable Accent and Slide functions bring true bass technique capabilities to the TB-303.

With the facility to produce up to 64 different Bass Patterns, the TB-303 BassLine allows you to arrange these into 7 different Bass Tracks, which can then be synced with Drum Tracks you've programmed into the Drumatix. The BassLine also can be easily synced with many other products by the DIN sync jack or the CV and Gate outputs.

The ProForm Series is bound to appeal to any creative person for writing music, practicing, or simply communicating ideas to other musicians. Each of the products (and there are more to come), is battery operated with AC adapter capability, totally portable, furnished with a carrying case, and also contains a built-in headphone amplifier which lets you plug in a set of phones and write and practice music anywhere.

Roland

We Want You to Understand the Future

MUSICIAN

NO. 44, JUNE, 1982

Nick Lowe pub-rocker with Brinsley Schwartz, new wave producer for Elvis Costello and Graham Parker, and rockabilly roller in Rockpile, has always spiked his punch with traditional craftsmanship and cheerful intelligence Vic Garbarini visits the cool, eclectic, twisted, rock 'n' roll world of the Basher
Page 40

Graham Parker burst upon the bloated, indulgent 70s with a passionate urgency and an icy scorn spawning a whole new wave In the six years since he has shed some rough edges (and the Rumour) but kept his fiery lyricism Through Grey Areas of new bands and old anger Parker reflects in depth with Geoffrey Himes
Page 48

Lester Bowie, in any of his incarnations, Doctor Jazz, blues chef or carnival daredevil, is one of the most fully-realized and complete trumpet voices around. From the stockade to the tents to the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and on into his powerful new Root to the Source, Lester tells his own amazing story
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MUSICIAN

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31 Commercial St., P.O. Box 701
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Musician (USPS 431-910) is published monthly by Amordian Press, Inc., P.O. Box 701. 31 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 01930. (617) 281-3110. Amordian Press, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Billboard Publications, Inc., One Astor Place, 1515 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. Musician is a trademark of Amordian Press, Inc.

Second class postage paid at Gloucester, MA 01930 and at additional mailing offices. Subscriptions $18 per year, $34 for two years, $48 for three years. Canada and elsewhere, add $6 per year, U.S. funds only. Subscription address: Musician, Box 1923, Marion, OH 43305. Postmaster send form 3579 to above address.

Manuscripts and artwork are welcome, however, we assume no responsibility for their return, although all due care will be exercised. Current and back issues are available on microfilm from University Microfilms Intl., 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Savor the high.

Steve Gadd
Recording Artist

Enclosed in a booth you hear the tracks in your cans. The band's pulling in the right direction. So far you've been laying down the basic tracks, and now it's time for a little sweetening. You strengthen the groove and you bring in those quick chippy highs off your cymbals and start to savor the sound.

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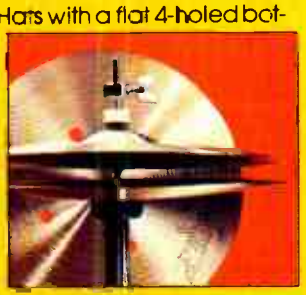

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LETTERS

THE NOSE KNOWS

After reading the interview with Frank Zappa, and listening to his music, I feel there is only one conclusion: his music stinks. It creeps out of the speakers and mercilessly grabs hold of your tepid little nose and puts it through a series of olfactory exercises that would decimate a bloodhound. Yes, Zappa's music is manure, *but what divine electricity manure expresses*! Especially when all the airwaves bathe us with sanitized mumdrum, a sailing pink flamingo, or the music of the sweaty, smarmy, frizzled hammer boys. What the record company execs need to do is abandon Brut and cocaine and stand knee-deep in some fresh, aromatic cow doo-doo. The sure sign of worthwhile music is the degree to which it corrupts and expands the sensitivity of the nose. I mean, look at Zappa's schnozz.
Mark Stuertz
Glenview, IL

RAP ON THE ZAP

Could it be that all of your writers are musicians too? It sure reads that way. Most "music" magazines are written by "audiophiles" with no feel for anything musical beyond what cartridge they put on their tone arms. Hooray for you guys!

As usual, Frank Zappa blew me away with his caustic wit and blatant, albeit sad, cynicism. I too have run the musical gamut from innocent inspiration to disgusted cynicism aimed at the omnipotent business of music. I now have settled somewhere in between, with music in my "back pocket" as it were. (Oh the fanciful babblings of a semi-retired weekend warrior.)

Please do continue to present the definitive magazine for and about musicians.
Dane Buxbaum
Miami Magazine, FL

BYARD ON CAMPUS

I was very impressed with your recent issue (April '82). The article on composer, pianist, philosopher Jaki Byard by Joseph Blum was just tremendous. It is about time that Mr. Byard is getting the recognition which he has so long deserved.

In the record reviews, however, there are two points concerning Mr. Byard which I would like to take issue with. First, the solo piano tune, called "A.T./F.W." (Art Tatum/Fats Waller) appears on *Mingus In Europe*, which Rafi Zabor called a "piece of the kind that has not been recorded before and badly needed to be," was, in fact, recorded previously (1964) on Mr. Byard's Prestige album *Out Front*, and was entitled "European Episode."

My second point concerns the *Amarcord Nino Rota* review in which Jaki Byard's exquisite interpretation of "Amarcord" is complimented in a rather backhanded way by the reviewer V. Gaits, who says, "Happily, he does not use the theme as a springboard for his usual routines." What, may I ask, are the "usual routines" of the composer-pianist with the broadest range and scope since Ferucio Busoni?
Bruce Wolosoff
Piano Faculty, Bard College
Annondale-On-Hudson, NY

THEFT IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

It would seem that home taping is being blamed for almost every ill of the record industry, but it's my theory that there isn't anywhere near enough of it. The reason the majors are putting out the same old Klean Kommercial Krap (KKK, right?) is because it makes money. Home taping is nothing more than a limiter of sales; the companies will be forced to seek out new acts, release better quality music and improve pressing quality.

A heavy promo man for Chrysalis told me he thought taping was theft. What does he call selling fifty cents worth of trash vinyl for $8.98? I had to return the Debbie Harry album four times to get a playable one...I was so pissed, I took it back, too (after taping it).

America, show us your decks!
Tapin' Tom Trash
Lenexa, KS

YOU CALL THAT NEWS?

I am writing in reference to your "Music Industry News" from the April issue. There was an unnecessary comment about "the world's greatest band," the Go-Go's: "the girls up close looked like they couldn't get dates at Hollywood High." If I'm not mistaken, you guys are being paid to report *music industry news*, just as your title states. This does not give you the right to conduct this type of criticism. What absolute nonsense! I would like my subscription canceled as soon as possible.
Cris Roule
Warren, OH
[*Don't be too hard on Roman Kozak. He also had a tough time getting dates in high school.*]

CONFESSIONS OF A POP JUNKIE

Just when I thought pop music was going to be all Alabama and Air Supply, along came Daryl Hall and John Oates. It's nice to know that two guys can suddenly fall into mega-platinum and still be so level-headed and stay on the right track, as so many musicians fail to do. Bill Flanagan's article/interview brought out the real musicians, not the private lives, not the brand of underwear they wear, just music.

One minor disagreement: Daryl wishes he could use a "raw" word now and then. I personally feel it would ruin the subjects they're presently dealing with. Their lyrics are so creative that raw language might ruin the impact. Let the listener use a little imagination! Thanks, Daryl and John, for giving the "pop music junkie" a long overdue fix.
David Grasty
Waukegan, IL

LETTER FROM LOWELL

Your Lowell George and Little Feat article was like receiving a letter from a long lost love; it was terrific! I thought everyone had forgotten about Lowell but you really proved me wrong. I only wish that he was around to appreciate it with us. Keep up the great writing.
Ross Shapiro
Yonkers, NY

MORE FRIPP, MORE FRIPP

I am writing in regard to the sudden disappearance of the diary of Robert Fripp. I am sure Mr. Fripp, being an extremely intelligent individual, has good reason for discontinuing the tales of his experiences with the band (and others). However, considering Crimson the premier rock band, I find the cessation of the series deeply disheartening. If at all possible, I should like to see the reinstatement of these articles, since, as it stands now, *Musician* is a sadly open-ended book.
Tadeo Martinez
Las Vegas, NV
[*Robert Fripp will return to these pages next month in an extended dialogue with guitarist John McLaughlin.*]

A TRULY BIG MAN

I knew there was something special about Clarence Clemons besides his imposing figure and the fact that he's a perfect complement to Bruce Springsteen's onstage performances. Clemons is a man of great insight and humanity. He hasn't forgotten his roots or become too egotistical to give others a starting chance in the business.

A man who gives so much of himself and asks for so little in return is a man who deserves admiration and respect.
Dominic Mancello
New York, NY

ECONOMY OF EXPRESSION

Thanks for the Richard Thompson article. Your readers deserve the enlightenment and Mr. Thompson certainly deserves the exposure.
John Kirby
Boone, NC

GRAPHICALLY GRATEFUL

Musician is the only magazine I read that doesn't force me to turn pages to focus my eyeballs. Thanks!
Lynda Elimon
Chicago, IL

Omni Magazine called this keyboard

"the Philharmonic of the future."

In its April 1982 issue, Omni Magazine wrote that Synergy is "a compact but powerful digital synthesizer, a computer controlled music maker of a thousand voices... capable of producing uncanny duplications of acoustical instruments, down to the scratch of a bow and the pluck of a string... lets a player modulate the volume of the music as a pianist does when he adds texture by either gently depressing or slamming down on the keyboard... play anywhere from 8 to 16 notes at the same time using four different voices... offers access to textures, timbres and colors that Beethoven couldn't even fantasize about".

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music industry news

By Jock Baird

Point Blank

Talk in the industry is of hard times, with the most serious debates centering on how bad the recession is and why the cassette home taping market should be allowed to get away with their continuing boom. There were no gold singles in February, and only three platinum albums, those of Loverboy, .38 Special and Quincy Jones, *all* of which had been around a whole year. RIAA figures on album shipments were down a numbing 11.5%. Suspicions of a big drop in the buying habits of blacks proved true.

Nonetheless, there were big leaps in prerecorded cassette sales and even bigger leaps in blank tape sales, and a movement to recover part of these spoils gathered momentum, from the record companies on down along the royalty, publishing and performance right chain. The Coalition to Save America's Music included *everyone*, from the musicians union's big March offensive in their *International Musician*, all the way to an expensive consumer survey commissioned by Warner Communications which used 52 pages and 25 tables to establish a case against home taping, and in the process, discovered several surprising facts.

The typical home taper was not a cheapskate high tech hoodlum, nor was he or she a dedicated audiophile demanding the cleanest sound possible. He turned out to be the backbone of the album-buying public; in fact, forty percent of his taping was of records he already bought! Moreover, he was knowledgeable about music, a kind of "opinion leader." The record industry suddenly realized they had to tread more lightly, but could not forego what they held to be losses of $2.85 *billion*. (Just for comparison, a rough estimate of the value of all prerecorded records and tapes sold in 1981 was $3.63 billion.)

The tide of righteous indignation has risen to the halls of Congress, where Sen. Charles Mathias (R-Md.) is sponsoring an amendment putting a five percent levy on all blank tapes *and* recording machine sales (amending Sen. DeConcini's bill legalizing home video-taping in the wake of the recent circuit court ban on it). A similar amendment in the House has been spearheaded by Rep. Don Edwards (R-Calif.). If both pass, about eighty million dollars in revenue will be given back to the recording industry, to be divided up by a Copyright Tribunal. Different interests in the industry, including different divisions of the same companies, are attempting to keep the coalition in agreement, especially while testifying up on the Hill, but there has been delicate negotiation behind the scenes since the beginning to avoid the kind of bitter public confrontations that have erupted in the past.

In the meantime, Maxell has taken the Warner survey's findings and turned it back on the industry, with a new ad showing a shelf so full of tapes *and* records that it is comically listing to port, flower pot in mid-fall. "People who buy Maxell tape buy twice as many records as people who don't," says the lead line, while the text below says, "so if you're wondering how you can boost record sales, stock up on...tape." While the recording industry does a slow burn in response, the laugh for Maxell and other blank tape makers may be short. Some action, however mild, will be taken, if only to give the industry a psychological boost to weather Reaganomics.

Blondie guitarist **Frank Infante** got the impression the group wanted to replace him: he wasn't invited to meetings, no one told him about future band activities or even rehearsals, and he even had to put his guitar parts on the new album alone after everyone else had done their tracks without him. A familiar story with a boffo ending. Infante filed suit in Federal court in New York and forced an out-of-court settlement, negotiating his way back into the group. If Pete Best had only known....

Signing **Marvin Gaye** was one of the most complex deals in modern music history, but CBS pulled it off. CBS had to talk to *three* sets of creditors, the IRS, Federal Bankruptcy Court and Gaye's ex-wife Anna Gordy (*Here, My Dear*), plus buy out Motown, who were owed a couple of Marvin LPs. Said CBS veep Larkin Arnold, "The only people who were sorry when these negotiations came to an end are at the phone company."

The second quarter of the record season is opening soon and a lot of heavy traffic will be flying out to impatient consumers. Among the highlights are albums by: Paul McCartney (look out), Queen, Fleetwood Mac, Stevie Wonder (mostly a greatest hits pack), Rick James, Van Halen, Supertramp, Elton John, Willie Nelson, Lionel Richie and Don Henley. After the first rush, look for new releases by Pat Metheny, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, Rosanne Cash, the Four Tops, X, George Clinton and the Alan Parsons Project. Biggest suspense item: will Joni Mitchell finish the last two songs of her new LP in time?

Chart Action

The Go-Go's have held the top spot for five weeks now on the album charts, while Joan Jett, J. Geils and the *Chariots Of Fire* soundtrack grapple furiously below. Loverboy, Simon & Garfunkel's Central Park extravaganza and a comedy disc by Bob & Doug McKenzie have been healthy contenders while alarming sprints by Rick Springfield's newest and Asia further humiliate winter-long chart squatters like Foreigner, the Police, Genesis, Stevie Nicks and Journey. But these oldsters hang tough on their way out, blocking the teens and twenties for up 'n' comers like Tom Tom Club (who've had big success on the soul charts), the Human League, the Scorpions and the Oak Ridge Boys. Chart shakeup is a-comin', though. *Reel Music*, the sixth Beatles repackage, a collection of tunes from the Fab Four's five films, broke in at #40, and Paulie's not far behind. After the new wave of spring releases, the top twenty won't be recognizable.

The singles charts had one of the clearest reflections of the album charts in recent memory, with all the top six albums represented in the top six singles. "Ebony & Ivory," Stevie and McCartney's collaboration, is actually more ivory than ebony, but broke in at #29, the highest of any single debut since John Lennon's "Imagine" in 1971.

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DR. JOHN: ON BECOMING MAC REBENNACK

The legend of Dr. John and his gumbo ragtime voodoo funk medicine, as told by the man who invented him, lived him and let him go, Mac Rebennack.

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Mac's virtuoso New Orleans piano style was his least known talent—until recently.

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

Wide-eyed hippies night-tripped up the bayou with him, oozing gumbo and voodoo and Creole jellyroll. Dancing slicksters got to the right place at the wrong time with him and the fabulously funky Meters. Famed and faceless session men cut up with him on innumerable commercial dates, always dazzled by his keyboard virtuosity. Lately, Mac Rebennack has ragtimed, barrelhoused, boogie-woogied and goodness-knows-what-elsed through a fine solo piano LP. For all of this—a career in the record business that began in the mid-50s—Mac Rebennack is virtually anonymous, bowing to the Jekyll/Hyde notoriety of Dr. John. If truth were to be told, Mr. Rebennack is not crazy about being known forever as the good Doctor.

"I had the concept of doing an album of Dr. John around 1964," Rebennack recalled. "Actually, at the time I wasn't thinking that I'd be the artist; I was just thinking of it as an album that I would produce for somebody. I was trying to get Ronnie Barron, who was then my organist, to be Dr. John. I wanted to produce, put the act together, go on the road and that thing."

Rebennack shrugs ever-so-slightly and adds, "His management thought that this was a bad career move for Ronnie, so he wound up not doing it, and I, not having anybody to do it, just did it myself."

It wasn't the first time Rebennack gave up his name for the sake of concept. In 1959, while still a teenager, he joined Frankie "Sea Cruise" Ford and Jerry Byrne to cut a single under the pseudonym Morgus & the Ghouls. That record was a local hit in New Orleans, but it's easy to see Barron's point, because Rebennack's "concept" has become so well known that his own name is all but unknown.

In a sense, Rebennack was simply keeping Dr. John in the family. "My great aunt Pauline was the mistress of a guy named Dr. John who lived in New Orleans in the 1800s," he recounted. "I found out that this guy was a real colorful character; like if Marie Levaux was Queen of the Voodoo, he was King of the Voodoo. I could see this as a nice concept for a record."

Maybe he could, but the rest of the industry, still trying to get used to long hair and remembering which one of them was George, didn't even want to *think* about 19th century New Orleans voodoo potentates as a means to sell records. Besides which, none of the features one would expect in a voodoo kingpin manifest themselves in Mac Rebennack. Instead of quick, snake-like eyes, Rebennack's are warm and sleepy; where you'd expect a dry, cutting voice you get an amiable, drawling grumble; and there's no hint of barely sheathed cunning or malevolence, just a spacey good humor. Only in full headdress and festooned with amulets did he begin to look the part.

Rebennack saw nothing unusual in the idea, though. "To me, Screaming Jay Hawkins was doing stuff like that," he said, referring to the up-from-the-casket delivery Hawkins employed for songs like "I Put A Spell On You." "There was a lot of stuff around New Orleans that was in that general area. A lot of people tell me that I may have got the idea from Prince Lala, who was a friend of mine. In the early 60s, we were on AFO Records together.

"But in reality, I was trying to utilize a lot of New Orleans and South Louisiana music that people weren't that familiar with. There's a lot of music of the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans and a lot of music of South Louisiana that was connected with the Cajun Creole culture, and with the Indian culture and also with the Voodoo culture. When you take the best musical elements of this, it really wasn't much that had been exposed to the world. And I knew it wasn't something that would survive on its own for very long, because television had moved in with a lot of things that were turning it into being like the rest of the country. In a way, it worked. Like with the Wild Tchoupatoulis and all, people got interested enough to record some of the tribes."

That Rebennack would want to preserve the musical culture of New Orleans should come as no surprise—that's what he cut his teeth on. He was a

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junior A&R man at Johnny Vincent's Ace Records at the tender age of fourteen, learning the trade from saxophonist Alvin "Red" Tyler. He got the job, he says, because "I had the only band in New Orleans that played rhythm and blues and could read. At the time, when we played big shows that were on tour and would come through New Orleans, we had to have so many pieces—maybe 17 or 24 pieces. If you didn't have that many pieces and couldn't cut the charts...."

Thanks to the variety of music that made its way through the city, New Orleans was a tremendous place to learn the craft of music-making. Jazz, blues, country, R&B and standard pop could all be heard there, as well as such local flavors as Cajun Creole music and voodoo chants, but what made for the most interesting sounds was when these diverse ingredients spilled over into one another. That was a particular strength when it came time to rock 'n' roll.

Yet, for all that, what attracted the most interest was the quality of the session players in New Orleans. Take tenor saxophonist Lee Allen, for example. "Lee Allen's saxophone solos were on so many records that were hits," Rebennack said, "and a lot of them were hits because of his solos. Companies would come into New Orleans to record, just to get this guy on a session. If they couldn't get him, they'd just go somewhere else to do the date. They'd go to New York to get King Curtis. There weren't too many guys whose solos would not only contribute to a record, but might help sell the record."

Another reason New Orleans was a popular location for recording was that the musicians there knew each other, and knew how to play cohesively and naturally. "These guys knew they could come to New Orleans without hiring an arranger," Rebennack said. "They saved money, and I'm sure that was a prime factor.

"But beyond this, they could come down there and they'd get a group of guys who would jell and always get a groove. We were all shocked when Earl Palmer went to California to work and said, 'Hey, man, they hired *two* drummers to do what I do. So I'm leaving New Orleans to go to California and clean up.' Which he did."

As did others. Despite the talent available in New Orleans, the big money was still in New York and Los Angeles, and so little by little the cream of the Crescent City's session men drifted away. For Rebennack, the most wrenching departure was when the rest of the AFO band went to Los Angeles to work with Sam Cooke in 1963, leaving him "stuck in a job in New Orleans I couldn't get out of.

"Soon as I got the chance I cut out," he said, "but it was two years after they all left. By the time I got out there, Sam Cooke was dead, and Harold Battiste, who was one of the heads of AFO Records, was working for Sonny & Cher and Phil Spector. The whole thing was in an uproar."

So he did session work, and joined his AFO buddies playing behind Sonny & Cher. Going out into the world in search of fame and fortune is one thing, but leaving home to play "I've Got You, Babe" wasn't quite what Rebennack had in mind. "We were used to this, though," he said. "In New Orleans, we had to do anything. We might do a gig and play a different style each tune, it wasn't unusual for us. But a lot of the style of recording in California was drastically different for us. Phil Spector and Sonny Bono, they were doing these wall-of-sound things with three or four pianos, eight or nine guitars, a huge amount of musicians.

"I didn't understand the necessity for it but I was checking it out because I figured these guys were successful, they must know something."

It was through Sonny & Cher, in fact, that Dr. John finally got recorded. "When I finally wound up doing this record, it was on Sonny & Cher's studio time—they were nice enough to let me sneak into the studio and do it. When we turned the record in, they made a deal and it wound up on Atlantic. It all worked out okay except that Atlantic was stuck with an album they had no idea what to do with."

No surprise there. *Gris Gris*, as the album was called, sounded like nothing else around. With the sidemen listed as Dr. Poo Pah Doo of destine tambourine, or Dr. Battiste of Scorpio of bass clef and the whole thing allegedly derived from "the eight visions of Professor Longhair," it was hard to tell whether to laugh or hang garlic in all the windows. The music, too, didn't go out of its way to explain itself. There was

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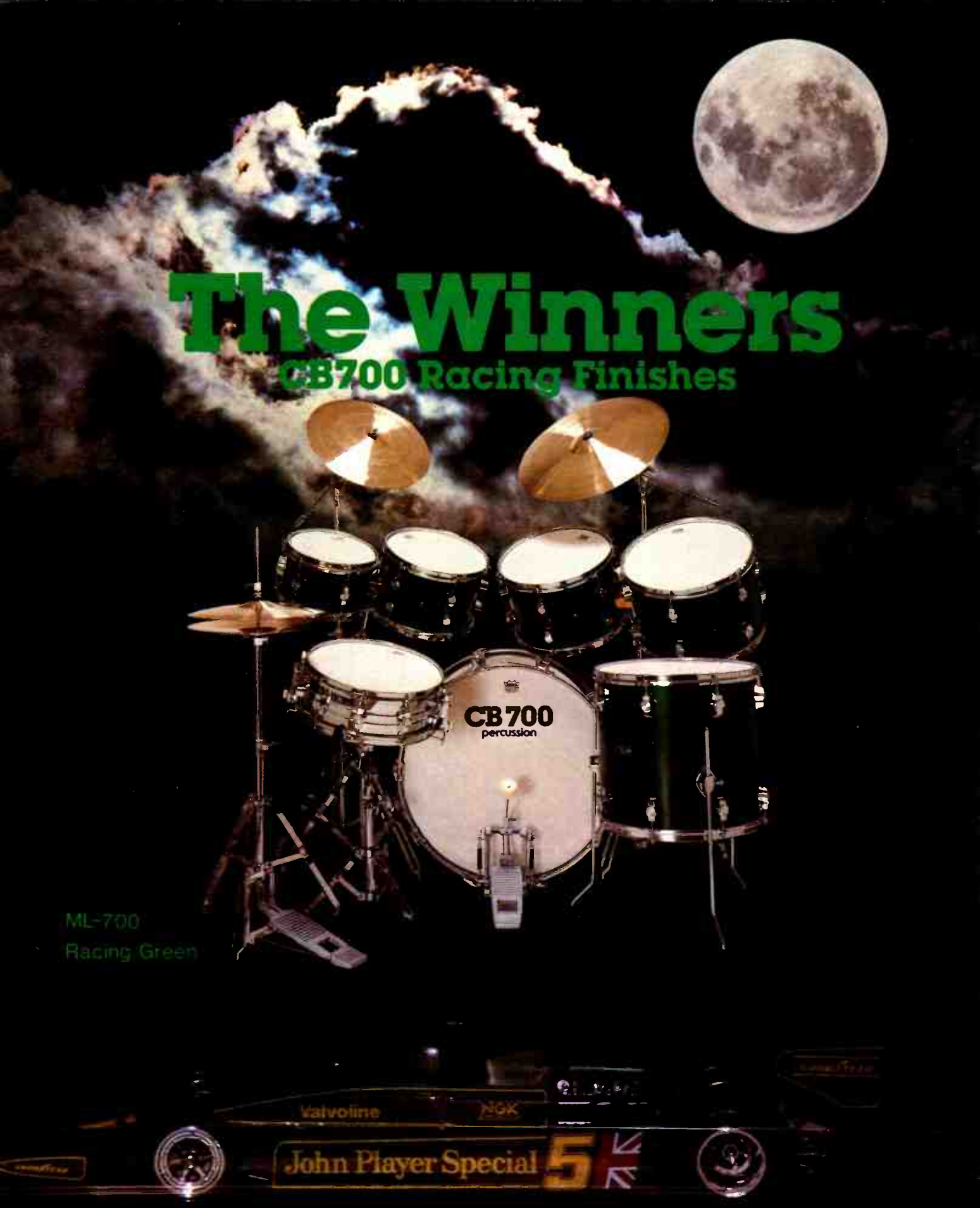

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that slinky New Orleans funk, only this time taken to the *nth* power, and songs that ranged from the distinctly spooky ("Walk On Gilded Splinters") to exuberantly otherworldly ("Gris Gris Gumbo Ya Ya"). As delivered by Rebennack, whose voice suggested all the gravel of Ray Charles distilled to a single bluesy rasp, it was not the sort of material that your average profit-minded record company would readily understand.

"I was doing a session for Bobby Darin, and Ahmet (Ertegun, president of Atlantic Records) came up and started asking me, 'What is this record you gave me? I don't know what to do with this record, my promotion people don't know what to do with it.... Why couldn't you give me a record that we could sell?'"

Actually, *Gris Gris*, also known as the "Night Tripper," did sell—in dribs and drabs. In 1967, when it came out, it was too far ahead of its time to capture much attention and sold chiefly to those fortunate enough to catch the band in concert. It did, however, establish Dr. John as a viable concept, and Rebennack & Co. went back into the studio for a second album. This time, Dr. John went into an even more esoteric version of New Orleans root music by constructing the album around odd-meter chants. "We were trying to get into something unlike Dave Brubeck, the things he did with *Time Out* and all," Rebennack explained. "If we did something in 5/4, we wanted it to be funky. Not that it was apparent that it was in that meter. Chants and things were in that meter because that's the way the lay of the thing was."

Wittily titled *Babylon*, it furthered the legend but didn't do much for sales. *Remedies*, which followed, greatly simplified the approach to a near-commercial level, but undercut that with a seventeen-minute rant called "Angola Anthem." Atlantic, hoping that a few big names would turn the trick, then sent the Doctor to England to cut the cluttered and confused *Sun, Moon And Herbs*.

Rebennack kept on, however. "I had a record deal under that name," he said philosophically, "and each time we did a record I thought that was going to be the end of it. And when they'd say, 'Hey, look, we're going to do another record,' I'd just do it. It's hard to explain. Success has nothing to do with it; it has to do with the gratification of seeing your music survive on some level. The only thing was, with managers and all kinds of outside influence after the first couple records, the records didn't even get completed in what I was trying to do. Like we did one record, and the managers took the tapes and ransomed them back to Atlantic. By the time the record came out, it was a much more cold, distant thing to me than what we started out doing."

Finally, in 1972, Dr. John clicked. Jerry

continued on page 90

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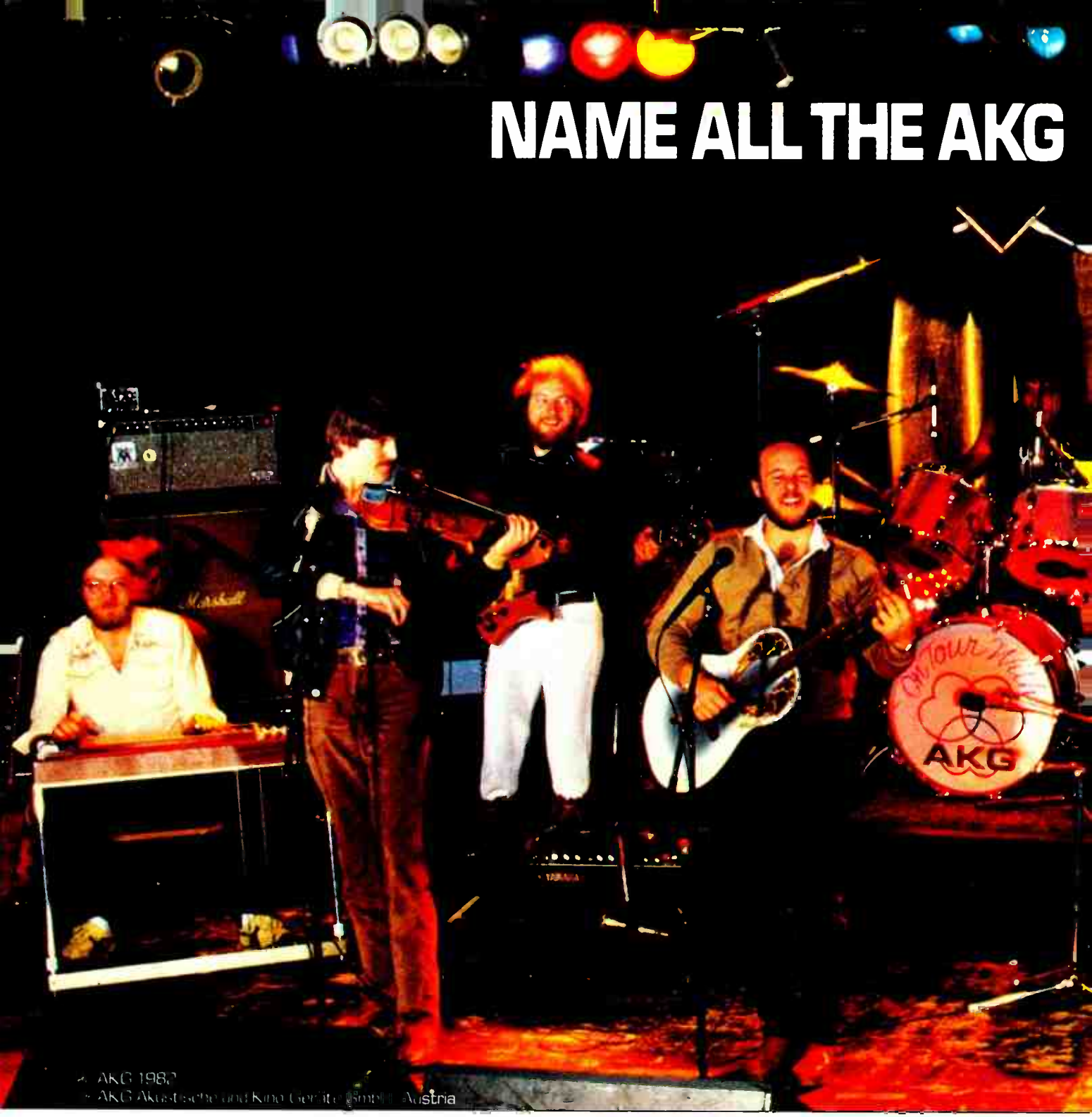

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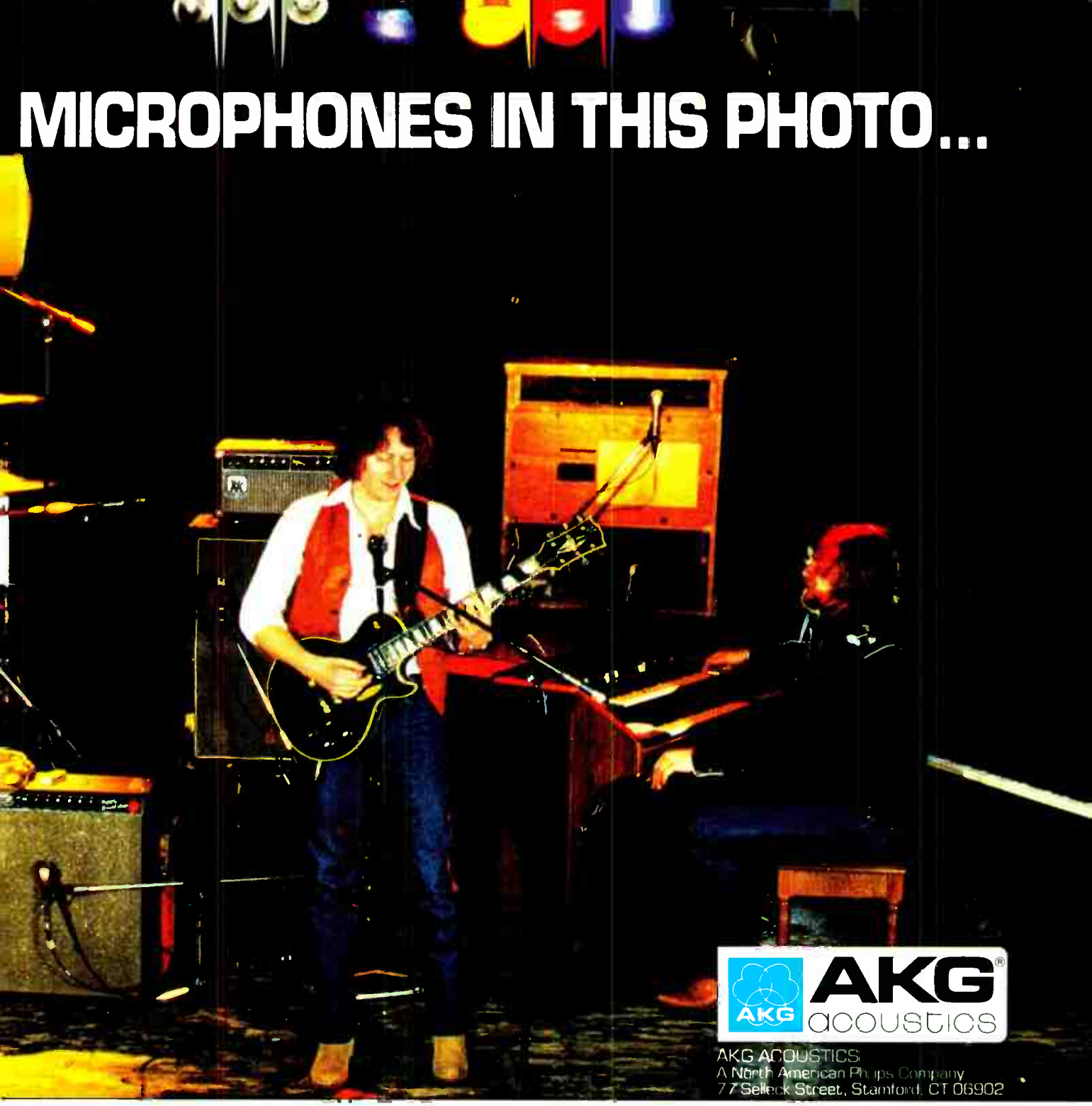

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PHIL MANZANERA: ROXY'S PRIMITIVE GUITAR

The man of a thousand textures and personalities reflects on his work with Roxy Music and his shimmering new solo LP.

RANDY MATUSOW

Manzanera places his highly personal melodic style in front of a sifting backdrop of atmospheric image.

BY J.C. COSTA

The temptation is to view Phil Manzanera, once and future guitarist for those seminally outré neon rockers, Roxy Music, as some kind of exotic cloaked in a thick aura of oblique mystique. After all, no one knew whether Manzanera, Bryan Ferry, Andy McKay, Brian Eno and their like were campy child molesters, saintly social reformers or sneering art deco degenerates. In person, however, Manzanera proves to be gentle and reflective, occasionally even bewildered and self-effacing. He is also, at the moment we meet, a man who is supposed to be helping Roxy Music mix down its latest album, a man worried that without his presence, the tracks he's put down won't find their way into the final mix: "I'm actually scheduled to be in the studio with Bryan and Andy right now, which means there probably won't be any guitar on the next Roxy Music album!"

Despite the dangerous ramifications of continuing our conversation, Manzanera nonetheless is eager to discuss his new solo album, *Primitive Guitars*, an album that merits conversation. Under the rarefied Editions EG label, an umbrella of "art for art's sake," Manzanera has made a powerfully personal and atmospheric record, a musical metaphor of his search for style. Few guitarists could have undertaken a purely instrumental album with no other players (save ex-Roxy bassist John Wetton on one track) and come up with such a fully-realized and eclectic conception, especially since so many of the tracks are derived from guitar lines improvised over drum machines. Manzanera holds the ground he is occupying with a confident and deeply coherent maturity, never letting go of strong, melodic foreground themes and an illustrator's sense of background and color. After nine albums with Roxy, several collaborations with Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry on solo projects like *Here Come The Warm Jets* and *Another Time, Another Place*, selected appearances with Nico and John Cale, two records with avant-fusion all-stars 801, and his own solo LP, *Diamond Head, Primitive Guitars*' subtlety and sophistication should surprise no one. In a compressed interview in his Manhattan hotel room, Manzanera talks about the simplicity of his conception for the album:

"I wanted to know, after ten years of being a professional musician, where I was at with my particular style. I had come to the conclusion sometime last year that the only way to describe my playing was 'primitive,' primitive in the sense of getting something emotional down on tape without having too much technique to block out the feeling element—especially in a studio situation where there are all of these invisible barriers to playing in a really relaxed way. Just the fact of you being in one room and the engineer being in *another* room with pieces of glass in between, and you're listening on small headphones and he's listening on big speakers, these things hinder the flow of your emotions through your playing onto the tape.

"I started doing this album at a period when I was very emotionally charged up because my wife was having her first child. I had this framework for an album and I just went in and *played*, with all of the emotion on tap and then, afterwards, just structured it all by using the desk and the faders with which I'd filled up the tracks, constructing the songs in the control room after I'd done the playing. They're really all improvised things that just happened on the spur of the moment. I'd go out and set up a rhythm with the Linn Drum—I also used the Roland 808 because the Linn only became available to hire in England about midway through last summer—and then I'd put down the first guitar track. The Linn was fantastic, but there were things you could do on the other rhythm box that, strangely enough, you couldn't do on the Linn. The way you have to program the Roland means that by making mistakes, you'd come up with rhythms that you would actually have had to think up first and program into the Linn yourself. Anyway, I did have a particular guitar that I started the track with and each guitar would make me play a different way.

"Also I had this geographical thing I

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wanted to inject into this album, just to make it more personal. Given that it was an instrumental album with no lyrics on it and I didn't want people to just think of it in terms of abstract pieces of music, I gave the tracks titles that were very obviously South American at the start and very European at the end. If it was at all possible that people could conjure up images while listening to the music, then that would be the desired effect."

The musical geography of the first side of *Primitive Guitars* travels up the South American continent, through "Caracas" and "Bogota" to Southern California; this parallels Manzanera's childhood in Cuba, Venezuela and Hawaii, a parallel made more personal by snippets of conversation and clowning between every cut on the LP (in one vignette, Brian Eno earnestly apologizes for a rough demo he's playing for Manzanera, repeating a timeless musician's ritual). From the rural airiness of the first track, the side grows in punch and technological excitement, including shifts to the Phrygian mode and other Coltranish eccentricities.

"I started off with the most 'ethnic' instrument that related to me, which was a tiple'. That's a Colombian instrument with four sets of three strings that's quite different from six sets of two that one normally associates with a twelve-string guitar. It's something I hadn't really used a lot on records and I hadn't heard it in this context before. Especially since I 'treated' it halfway through by putting echo on it. It has a very narrow fretboard and you play it a lot with your right hand using it as a percussive thing, and it's a very evocative kind of sound. I wanted to start this album very South American. I've always retained this vision of a scene that I'd remembered from when I lived there, which is three or four guys just standing around on a corner, tuning up, and gradually it slips into the rhythm of the thing. That's what happens on the first track, 'Criollo.'

"As the side progresses, there's more cohesion, more moving up in time; more like the West Coast with American types of things. I always liked the West Coast, and it's a straighter, more obvious kind of melody I managed to get in there, almost like a definite chorus kind of thing, but with my version of how it blended with American music. It's a phase I passed through in '69 when I got into Santana and that kind of music."

As the fusionoid liquid-laser melodies of "Ritmo De Los Angeles" echo away, Manzanera begins the "European" side with a meditative cathedralesque guitar synthesizer study. Immediately following are two Roxy-like flash-pop extravaganzas that may see airplay on discerning progressive rock stations. On "Impossible Guitar," Manzanera's guitar leaps right out of a burping sequencer texture and takes a barn-burner of a single-note rave-up solo that

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recalls his more conventional work with Bryan Ferry, while "Big Dome" sounds like Talking Heads' techno-tribal mood excursions—until a brace of stately, symmetrical synthesizer chords brings everything (everything but a snarling, angular guitar, that is) to heel. As the closer, "Europe 80-1" returns to the rhythmless syntho-montage that opens side two, the atmosphere is more fragmented, ambivalent and yet more intellectually curious, as Manzanera's guitar mutates into an abstract pointillist landscape, less and less recognizable as a guitar.

This is not surprising in light of the liner notes to *Primitive Guitars*, wherein Manzanera outlines his preferences for non-guitarists such as Bird, Mingus, Satie, Miles and organist Mike Ratledge (possible inspiration for both "Europe" cuts?). Manzanera has so little interest in classic guitar stylings that he confesses to an "abiding interest in the possibility of making the guitar sound as unlike a guitar as possible." Manzanera answered my question about the first appearance of this interest by taking me back to his early days with Roxy Music, when Brian Eno "treated" his guitar with wild sonic variations.

"Right from the beginning, when I first joined a rock group, which was Roxy basically, it was a group that dealt in different kinds of textures and backdrops to the music, trying to create a lot of atmosphere. Because there wasn't the technology available to do it like there is now—in ten years there's been an incredible amount of gadgets you can buy to do these things—I used to work with Eno a lot and we had a setup where we had two Revoxes (tape decks) onstage and he had the VCS3 Synthesizer, which was a really early synth model. It seems crazy now, but we were one of the first bands in England to use a synthesizer.

"So my guitar would get treated by Eno. Eventually, when he left the band, I developed this setup with Revoxes and modified DeArmond volume pedals. I could control the speed of the motor of the Revoxes, speed up or slow down the echoes, get ADT, and I had added all sorts of vari-pitch extras to the unit. I also had a guy named Jerry Rogers, who built the original VCS3, build me what was one of the earliest guitar synthesizers with four-function control pedals. I used it on a couple of the early Roxy Music albums.

"With the guitar itself, I've often been put in a position where people expected me to get all of these weird sounds and I wouldn't have any ancillary equipment with me, I'd be in a studio and they'd start the tape going, it would be closer and closer to where I was going to play and I'd just have a guitar like my red vintage Firebird with a tremolo arm. I'd be thinking, 'How am I going to get something different this time?' I distinctly remember one occasion on Nico's album where I detuned all of the strings on my guitar and played the thing from behind the bridge, just sort of plucked it. When you detune it, it goes weird anyway and using that with the tremolo I got the weirdest sounds coming out.

"I always used the bodies of the guitars a lot. I'd tap them with my ring and if there's echo in it, you get these dense sounds. I'd scrape the guitar all over the place and almost attack it physically as well. You can create lots of interesting sounds by simply striking the guitar with all of the strings muted. There are many interesting things you can do *without* using effects pedals."

"Interesting" is a good word to describe the Roxy sound, a shiny, almost bilious with scorn, mix of synthesizers, guitars and sax processed through an obsequious bureaucracy of echo delays, becoming probing mini-scenarios of the glam 'n' fizzle 70s. Lifting the veil on those semi-mythical days, Manzanera offers a nuts-and-bolts methodology behind a representative Roxy track, "Do The Strand."

"Let's see, I don't know if I can remember back that far. Bryan had a chord sequence, but no inkling as to what the song was going to be about. What we tended to do then was to take a chord sequence and jam on it for hours to see how it would develop before going into the studio. Then we'd go into the studio and put down the chord

continued on page 82

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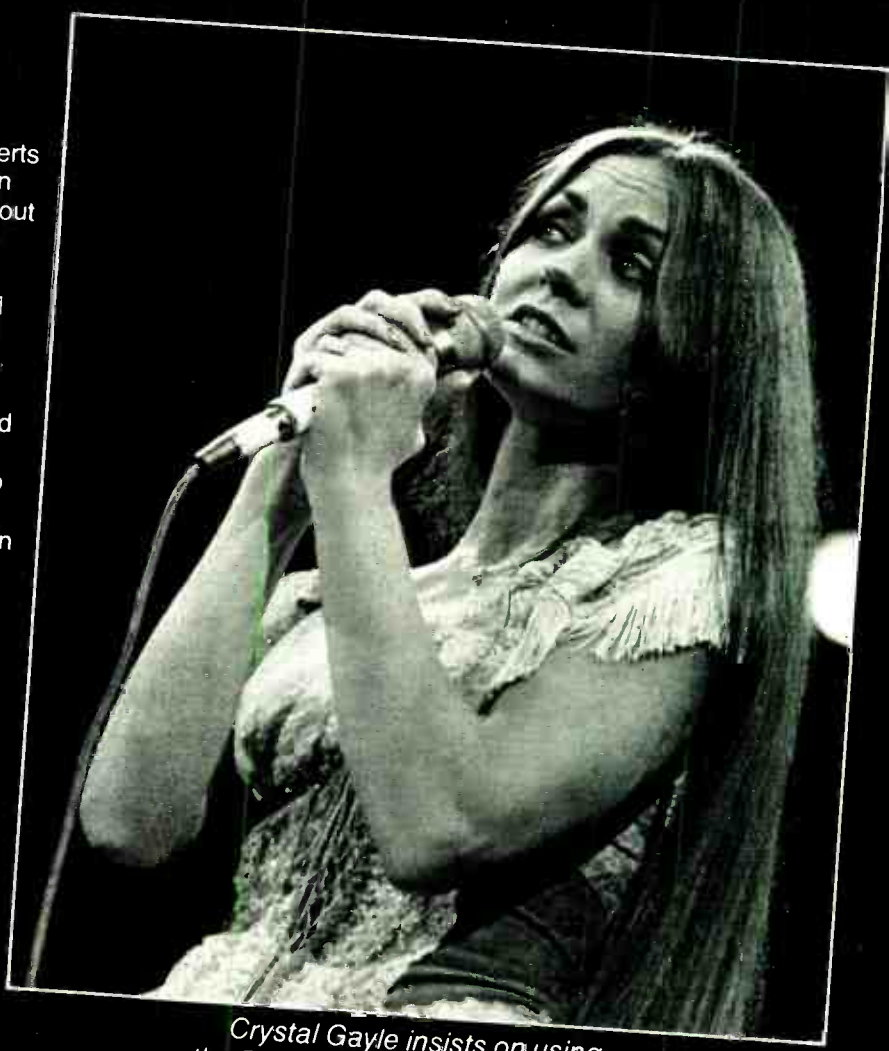
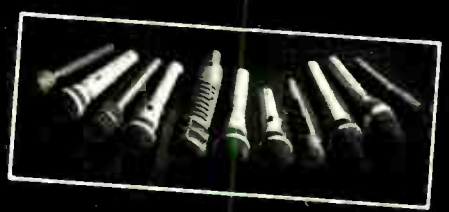


Crystal Gayle insists on using the Electro-Voice PL80 microphone.



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YAMAHA

FACES

Chic

JAMES BLOOD ULMER

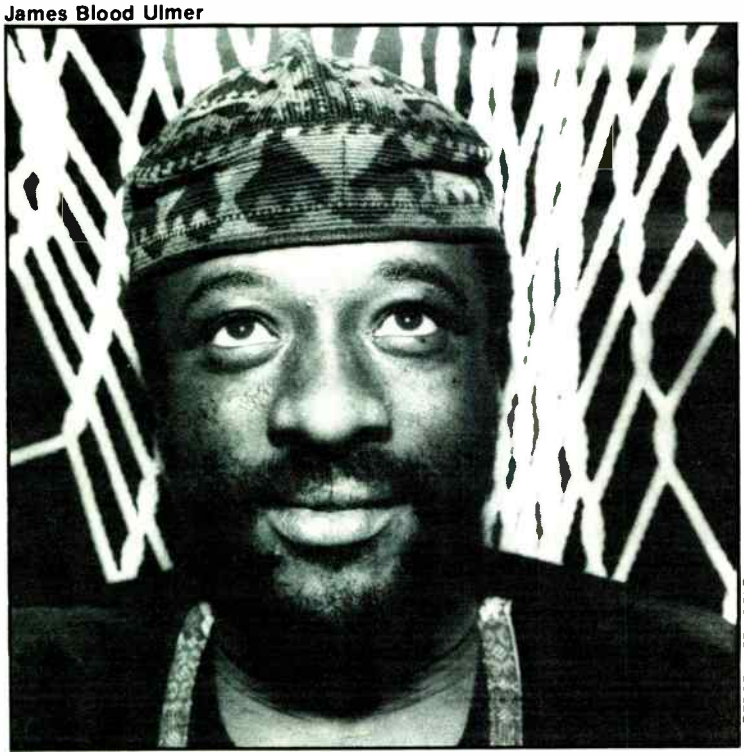
Dressed in a head rag and backed by an eight-piece orchestra, James Blood Ulmer sauntered onto the stage of New York's Savoy to lay down his modern day version of the head-rag hop. Much has been made of Blood's synthesis of rock and jazz and his use of harmolodics, and rightfully so, because harmony, call-and-response patterns, frenetic solos and disparate, yet somehow complementary, bits of melody are balanced over and against rhythms dominated by crackling cymbals, back-bending funk bass vamps and hellified drum rolls and marches. Blood unearths old musical artifacts, mud-encrusted or not, and presents them with a new commentary, a new identity, a new history—refurbished ritual. He takes the old bomp-de-bomp twelve-bar blues and its elegiac, exorcising qualities and transforms them into a nerve-wrenching drone.

Certainly the show was marked with allusions to Hendrix, especially Blood's vocals. But Blood's clipped, plucked guitar style runs counter to the crystalline sustain associated with the Voodoo Child; Blood's lines are an electrification of the jagged and raw styles that were common among the primitive blues guitarists. Although his playing is intensely rhythmic, it does not possess an easy-going swing because each note is suddenly torn from the guitar before being allowed to gently glide into the next. Blood's sound is metallic and grating, and although lacking the clarity of tone, it carries the emotional impact of a slide guitarist pumping his instrument through a battered amp. Vocally, Blood is more expression than style, but Blood's mumble adds one more instrument to the group. The result is music that is simultaneously anguished, joyous, searching, melodically catchy, disjointed, immanently funky and viciously rhythmic.

The sweetest moments at the Savoy came from the horns—Olu Dara, Julius Hemphill, David Murray—and cellist Abdul Wadud. The horns, especially Hemphill's expansive blues lines added some much needed dynamics to the music, creating a sense of space in the midst of density. Olu Dara's high-powered bugle-call-rag trumpet solos provided additional punctuation. Murray's tenor screamed and squeaked, turning the wildman R&B tenor style on its head and forcing Ulmer's chords to virtually yelp in self-defense. Wadud's pluckin'-'n'-grinnin' vamps skipped lightly over Amin Ali's snapping bass, the semi-chords of Ronnie Drayton and the pounding rhythms and machine-gun-like bursts of the two drummers, G. Calvin Weston and Cornell Rochester.

The show was unrelenting in its rhythmic tension. Blood offered a swaying soul ballad complete with the dot-dot-dot of a slow strum guitar, but the drums seemed to play even faster and harder and by mid-song the tempo had accelerated to the manic level once again. So much for gentility and sweetness. Otherwise, the best Blood offered for a break were loping grooves like "Are You Glad To Be In America?" and a few pauses between songs. This lack of contrast between songs, and sometimes within them as well, was the one burr left in Blood's music, but with all that sharp-edged twisted metal so magnificently brought to the stage, what's a burr or two? —*Don Palmer*

James Blood Ulmer



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

CHIC

Appearances can be deceiving. As the rest of Chic pumped out the urgent, staccato vamp to "Stage Fright," Nile Rodgers, Alfa Anderson, Luci Martin and Bernard Edwards strutted onstage dressed to the nines. Between Rodgers' white cowboy-cut jacket and fringed black leatner jeans, the exaggerated shoulders of the ladies' sophisticated retro look and Edwards' cream-colored, right-out-of-*Gentleman's Quarterly* suit, it was hard to miss what the Chic image was saying: this is high-fashion cool, the funk that never sweats.

But when they got down to it, the music said something else. Whether stomping through the bass-heavy "Burn Hard" or cutting loose with a frenzied "Le Freak," Chic made it clear that they were a *dance* band, and dance music is nothing if not physical. Forget the sartorial elegance of the front four; once the concert was underway, the outfit that said it all was drummer Tony Thompson's running togs.

Considering the band's history, this was no small breakthrough. Chic's music has always seemed too stylishly distanced to get down and dirty the way most funk does. It was terrifically danceable, sure, but always with an overriding elegance that put it above mere "party hearty" hysteria. Would the Commodores, for all their upwardly-mobile ambition, ever have thought up anything as wonderfully high-class camp as the "Yowsah, yowsah, yowsah" chorus to "Dance, Dance, Dance"? Could Funkadelic ever have put clams on the halfshell alongside roller skates the way Rodgers and Edwards did in "Good Times"?

Success has proven a cruel mistress, though, and each well-dressed hit seemed to move Chic one step closer to turning into a cartoon. That the band realizes this seems clear—Rodgers, Edwards and Thompson's work with Blondie's Debbie Harry was a strong indicator of their eagerness to break out of Chic's R&B straightjacket, and though the latest Chic album, *Take It Off*, seldom wanders from established grooves, it marks a shift to a gritty, stripped-down sound that suggests "Take It Off" is more a motto than a song title.

Chic carried through with that idea in concert, maintaining the music's inherent *savoir faire* but backing it with an almost streetwise intensity. Part of that may have been their eagerness to reestablish concert credibility—the band's Baltimore show was its second night out after an eighteen-month hiatus—but it can't be denied that Chic's get-tough policy brought out some of its best playing ever. Nile Rodgers' inspired lead work lifted "So Fine" above the sleek noodling of the album version to the level of a genuine guitar showpiece; Bernard Edwards' understated vocal and lean bass work built up so much tension during "Flashback" that the recriminating chorus cut unexpectedly deep; and Chic ended the too-brief set with a frenetic "Good Times," capped with a chant-along version of "Rapper's Delight" led by Rodgers.

As a band, Chic still has too much history to completely abandon the image that made it so successful, so for now the band contents itself with sly digs, like passing a tacky Diana Ross stole between Luci Martin and

Alfa Anderson during the "I'm Coming Out/Upside Down" segment of Chic's production medley. But the fact that they can laugh at the style they've sold means that they'll continue to work within it without letting it work them. Who could ask for a happier medium? — *J.D. Considine*

dB's

The conventional wisdom on these Carolina-bred, N.Y.-honed popsters says they're expert in the studio, puzzlingly erratic in concert. On two Albion import albums, *Stand For Decibels* and the recent *Repercussions*, the dB's concocted a series of synthetic symphonies that deftly paid homage to master craftsmen like Brian Wilson, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and Ray Davies. Trouble was, all too often the group took its live cue from the erratic nature of another mentor, Big Star/Box Top Alex Chilton, for whom co-leader Chris Stamey was once a braces-clad bassist.

This evening at the Ritz, though, these pop neo-classicists proved they could satisfy that old Saturday night urge as well as the cerebellum. A foolishly headbanded Peter Holsapple rips off ringing guitar runs as boyish Chris Stamey, wearing a very un-rock-star-like patterned pullover ski sweater, flashes a devilish grin and strums a raga riff. Staunch and dark bassist Gene Holder pins down the scattering rhythms, a near-impossible feat for this wildly careening outfit, while Will Rigby blows the band's intellectual cover by whacking his drum kit with little regard for anything except occasionally flipping a stick in the air and catching it—on the beat. A pair of saxophones and a trumpet amble on to assist at various intervals. No one at the Ritz seems to care that they're hearing some of the wackiest, most psychotically romantic pop this side of Squeeze, but at least they're not booing.

The tightly wound mainspring that makes the dB's tick comes from the tension generated by the restraint/catharsis fueling of their songs. Chief writers Holsapple and Stamey represent the dB's twin towers of suicidal passion and neurotic stasis, but they just as often switch roles, making their individual contributions blend together as one voice; like Lennon-McCartney, Holsapple and Stamey each write their own songs, rather than having one partner compose lyrics, the other, music.

Back onstage, the dB's bring in the trumpet player to bleat a mournful "In A Silent Way" solo during the break of an obscure B-side, "Soul Kiss," effectively echoing the avant-garde minimalism essayed by both Miles and the downtown SoHo no wavesters. Chris Stamey has long been an avid fan of this kind of music, even going so far as to remix the recently released *8-Eyed Spy* cassette. Along with the Cars and the Police, the dB's have been able to assimilate the weirdness associated with those bands into a seamless pop stew that doesn't hesitate to incorporate any and all musical idioms. For the encore, "Storm Warning," the entire horn section suddenly returns and bursts into a Latin rhumba that lacks only Carmen Miranda sporting a halo of bananas to complete the illusion.

LAURA LEVINE

dB's

The dB's tend to be critical darlings because they deliver the most morbid sentiments underneath the same sprightly, nasal, Anglo vocals that once yearned for the simple pleasure of holding your hand. Now Peter Holsapple matter-of-factly sings about killing himself for love and it is indistinguishable from Chris Stamey whining to his girlfriend to "run back to your mother" because "she always said you would." As Peter Holsapple points out in "Neverland," the Peter Pan-like promise of pop paradise has now become an impossible dream, especially when rock 'n' roll lovers don't will it to be true. — *Roy Trakin*

HUMAN SWITCHBOARD

With a whole February afternoon to spend at home, the mailman's latest batch of new wave releases went on the turntable. They told a distressing tale. New wave began as a worthy assault on pop myths about romance and success. Yet the frustration of attacking such sturdy myths has led most bands into either cynical detachment or resigned fatalism. Moreover, they all sound so much the same.

Then an album cut through the distractions of magazines and phone calls to demand attention. What came through first was a nagging, swirling Tex-punk Farfisa organ. Then came the pell-mell drumming that forced its way through any obstacles with cymbal accents or redoubled rolls. Then came the jagged guitar, which punctured the billowing organ chords with ice pick notes. Then I finally began to make out the vocals and lyrics. The familiar anger was there, but something else too: a stubborn refusal to retreat to a comfortable distance from the audience. The band was the Human Switchboard, a trio from Cleveland. They attacked public illusion ("In This Town" is about the current frostbelt depression) and private illusion ("No Heart" is about the current sexual depression), but they made common cause with the listener in resistance.

Rob Pfeifer, who wrote and sang most of the songs, sounded like Lou Reed at his chest, stubbornest best. Some singers (cf. David Bowie, Patti Smith, David Byrne, Ian McCulloch) futilely try all their careers to get that sound, and Pfeifer gets it on his first try. Pfeifer knows Reed's secret: the trick to effective confrontation is determined understatement, not blustering overstatement. But Pfeifer is just part of the Switchboard story. Ron Metz is an equally stubborn drummer with an unusual sense of swing for a punk band. Myrna Marcarian is the keyboardist and second singer. Her organ fleshes out Pfeifer's skeletal songs; her voice is gentler, more patient but even less budgeable than Pfeifer's. Her songwriting provides a crucial female perspective to the band's critique of romance.

In early March, I caught the band at Washington's 9:30 Club. They had expanded to a full-time quartet by adding bassist Steve Calabria (who played on three tracks on the album). Marcarian, in a simple black flower print dress, bobbed and weaved behind her organ. Pfeifer, in amber shades and a black jacket, stood ramrod straight and leaned at the microphone. The throbbing dance beat was more prominent than on the album, with Calabria's fretless bass and Metz' traps making the paradox of punk syncopation work. Pfeifer and Marcarian sang as many post-album new songs as album cuts. The intensity of Pfeifer's anger was unsettling, but it soon became clear that he wasn't aiming it at the audience. He was aiming it *for* the audience, and when he was joined by Marcarian's absorbing, sympathetic voice, it produced an exhilarating optimism. The one cover was Petula Clark's "Downtown," which was drenched in so much irony that when Marcarian sang, "Downtown, everything's waiting for you," it was as much a warning as an invitation.

In the cellar dressing room, I suggested that Northern Ohio must have a thriving club circuit to produce acts like the Human Switchboard, the Waitresses, Devo, Chrissie Hynde, Pere Ubu, Tin Huey, Rachel Sweet, etc. Pfeifer—engagingly open and friendly as he slumped on a couch—laughed. "No, it's pretty bad. If you're a musician out there, you either give up or fight. It's pretty sobering when we go back there. The fact that we sold out a Washington nightclub doesn't mean anything; nobody knows who we are and we still can't pay the rent. It's good in a way, because you avoid what I call Second Avenue stardom, where everyone you meet in several blocks on the Lower East Side tells you how great you are. It's hard to fool yourself in Cleveland."

Two weeks later I tracked down a copy of the Human Switchboard's live album at a Baltimore record convention. A printed slip inside read: "You're holding a copy of a very limited edition recording (1,000 units). The Human Switchboard has approved the limited release of this recording...taken from a May '80 Kent performance and an August '79 performance. The purpose of this release is to give Switchboard fans an album's worth of material to live on until some dumb record company figures out who the best white American rock band around today is.—Johnny Fan." Johnny is not as far off the mark as you might think. — *Geoffrey Himes*

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THE UPTOWN HORNS

An inside look at the birth of a New York horn section

BY CRISPIN CIOE

Backstage at the Ritz Ballroom, on a steamy Manhattan Saturday night last July, Chuck Berry wheeled on me and my tenor sax and snapped, "No horns!" then turned back to continue explaining his basic stage cues to the bass player and drummer ("....no fills on the drums, and when I stomp my foot like this, that means stop...."). Never mind that my three partners and I—Arno Hecht, Paul Litteral and Bob Funk, a.k.a. the Uptown Horns—had contracted the entire first-rate backup band that night, never mind that the Ritz was going to pay us whether we played or not, and never mind that we knew Chuck's amazing repertoire cold; his verdict of "No horns" had a terribly final ring to it. But we weren't going to take it lying down, even from the father of rock 'n' roll. In situations like this, attitude is everything, so I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Chuck, I think you're really gonna want us onstage with you." Something must have given him pause, since he hesitated a moment and said, "Do you guys know 'Honky Tonk'?" "Sure, it's in F," I flipped back. "So, we've got some real musicians here," he grinned, immediately motioning us all toward the stage entrance, "Okay then, let's rock!"

The three thousand-plus in the audience that night, which included such informed R&R ears as Keith Richards', accepted the totally unrehearsed band instantly (we *had* taken the time to learn chord changes and rhythm stops for all the songs in Chuck's basic repertoire), and about halfway through the set, the beaming Mr. Berry announced that "we in the band feel especially in tune, even though we've never played together before tonight, so from now on, we're going to play your requests." A little lady who was already halfway onstage screamed her request, and we jumped into "Little Queenie" right from the big guy's first snarling guitar chords. The set ended with a ferocious version of Bill Doggett's aforementioned "Honky Tonk," a perfect broiling roadhouse closeout, with saxes and guitar on our knees, trading riffs and honks.

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Clockwise from top: Funk, Cioe, Hecht and Litteral.

After the show we stopped by Chuck's dressing room to thank him for the good time. He still cuts quite a dashing figure, and we found a gaggle of girls itching to enter the dressing room too, although only a couple of beauties actually made it that far. Chuck shook hands with us—the guy's got sledgehammer-sized

mitts—and said drolly, "You fellas were cool." Just as we were leaving the room by its back door, we heard a big commotion and turned to see an interesting, if rather odd spectacle. Seems that Keith Richards suddenly entered through the front door and, no doubt to heighten the element of surprise, had embraced Chuck from behind and said, "Hi." Chuck, without hesitation and perhaps not even knowing who had him in a bear hug, spun around and delivered a supercharged haymaker to the other guitarist's face, whose aides and girlfriend then quickly escorted him back from whence he came. We sagely intuited that this was our cue to skidoo. For our part, the Uptown Horns had just crossed another bridge, and this one was longer than eight bars.

But let's face it, the past decade and a half haven't been easy on horn players who like to play rock, R&B and pop music in general. A couple of superb sections—like the Brecker Brothers, Seawind and Tower of Power—have broken new ground and challenged the guitar's hegemony, but by and large, guitar heroes still rule. So where does that leave us, the forgotten ones, who believe, say, that King Curtis was one of the greatest players who ever lived precisely because he could pack so much emotion and implied technical prowess in an eight-bar solo; or that Ray Charles' greatest horn section, the one that included David "Fathead" Newman, Hank Crawford and Marcus Belgrave, packed a soulful jazz-rock wallop that's still being felt today on records by everyone from the Clash to Genesis to Rickie Lee Jones; or that no synthesizer will *ever* come close to duplicating a good trombone vibrato.

The Uptown Horns first drifted together on random gigs and demo sessions, in true N.Y.C. fashion. Arno Hecht, who plays tenor sax like Hank Mobley meets Jr. Walker on American Bandstand in 1990, had led an earlier incarnation of the section four years ago which fell apart when two members decided they wanted to play strictly jazz. About two years ago he met Paul Litteral on a session and immediately recognized a superior lead trumpet player. Together Arno and Paul joined a hot local nouveau-soul band, Brenda & the Realtones, which occasionally backed up visiting R&B greats like Solomon Burke and Rufus Thomas. I met Arno and Paul in August, 1980 when the Realtones backed Rufus Thomas, the great elder statesman of Memphis soul, at Tramps and the Mudd Club. Rufus wanted three horns; I joined the section playing baritone and alto, Rufus did the funky chicken, and for us at least, history was made. At the Mudd, the infamous lower Manhattan modern music hangout, spike-haired punks and new romantics did the push and pull until sunup, and afterwards Rufus told us, "This audience might look funny, but they're the same as kids in the early 50s, when Elvis Presley used to come down and catch my act at clubs in Memphis: they all want to rockhouse all night long."

At about the same time, trombonist Bob Funk (yes, that's his real name) joined the section. Bob's excellent intonation, extensive classical chops and sure-footed swing sense gave the section just the right bottom line, and we immediately started working as much as possible. Individually our credits had included album sessions with Genya Ravan, Joan Armatrading, the Ritchie Family, Bo Diddley, Richie Havens, Willie Nile, Kid Creole and Steve Forbert. With the Realtones we backed up Carla Thomas, Syl Johnson, Little Anthony, the Shirelles, Leslie Gore, and began playing as a section with an exciting young rock-soul band called the Nitecaps.

Playing with the Nitecaps, in fact, led directly to our first album date as a section. Iggy Pop caught the band playing a hot set one night at Hurrah's, the former N.Y.C. rock-dance joint. After the show he and his bassist came back to the dressing room and informed us bluntly that "you guys are doing my next album." Flattered but somewhat skeptical, we forgot about the whole thing until two months later, when we got the call from Mr. Pop, as the *New York Times* sometimes refers to him. The session was to be the next night, when we had two sets to play with Solomon Burke at Tramps and a late show with the Nitecaps at CBGB's on the Bowery, before grabbing a Checker cab for the studio. When we arrived Iggy was in good humor, and quickly set the evening's mood, telling us "you guys are so ugly I'm gonna have to show you how to be beautiful." The rhythm tracks were already completed, and Iggy's technique of recording horns posed a special challenge to us.

As on many rock recording sessions, he wanted to use "head" arrangements, worked out and voiced on the spot without charts, for maximum spontaneity and live feel. As we'd listen to a song on the studio monitors, Iggy would sing us the part he had in mind. At the same time, he rightly believes that first takes are usually the freshest and the most exciting. Of course, this meant we had to quickly memorize and interpret a phrase on its first or second recording pass. Fortunately, Iggy supplied the kind of atmospheric direction that allowed us to zero right in on the emotional tone he wanted for a part. On one song, for instance, he asked Paul to "play like Doc Severinson, but more, shall we say, twisted...." Later, when Arno was about to play a sax solo, Iggy instructed him to "think of a bum down on the Bowery, you know, slouched on the ground in a heap under a lamp post...." Iggy got emotional sounds out of us we never knew

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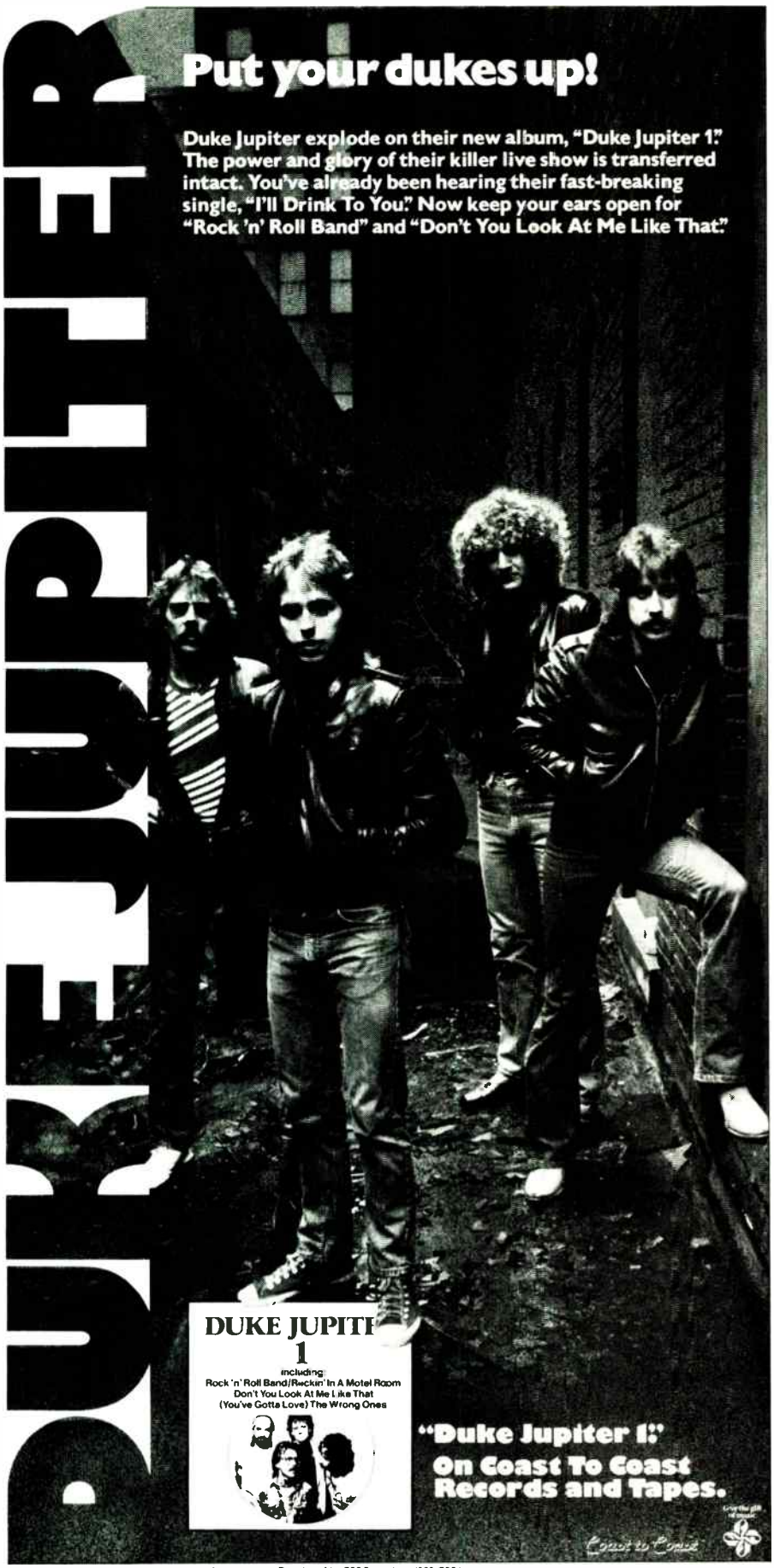

existed.

More album dates came in: we recorded with Holly & the Italians, Carolyne Mas, English rock-dance group the Quick, and played on several film soundtracks. The first was for director Arthur Penn's *Four Friends*. For this date, musical director Elizabeth Swados, who's had several celebrated plays and musicals staged in New York, hired the entire Uptown Horn Band and the session involved, once again, head charts, with Ms. Swados singing us the exact parts and voicings she wanted. A month later, we played on the entire soundtrack for another film, an L.A. cops vs. psychopath thriller called *Vice Squad*, set for early '82 release by Avco Embassy. This date involved completely scored musical themes, riffs and solos played over previously-recorded rhythm tracks. For example, we'd play a three-minute passage titled, say, "Ramrod Action" (the villain's name is Ramrod), and then watch the music being immediately synched up with the film on a video monitor in the studio control room. This way we could see and hear Paul's double-high G with a long trailing fall-off coincide with the bad guy smashing into a brick wall at 40 mph, which would of course give us inspiration for playing the next scene. The next day I was called back for alto sax solos. These were to be atmospheric, lonely-avenue-type themes, mostly scored out, that coincided with the heroine onscreen alone. Crushing slide guitar solos by Johnny Winter represented the villain, while Rick Derringer's brawny leads accompanied the hero as he tools down Wilshire Boulevard.

As much as we've enjoyed and sought recording as a horn section, though, the bulk of our experience and inspiration has been from playing live—at clubs, concerts, dances and lesser functions. We knew that the best way to really develop and expand as a horn section was to play with as many different musicians, singers and composer/arrangers as possible and, as often happens, we got our big chance by taking a chance. Last winter Terry Dunn, who owns Tramps, the premier blues and R&B club in New York, called and asked me to lead a jam session one night a week. Merely hosting an open-ended jam didn't interest us—other N.Y.C. clubs, like Kenny's Castaways, have been running successful jams for years. But we felt that with a slightly more organized format, headed up by the Uptown Horns and our own rhythm section, the event could succeed on a regular basis.

So the first thing we did was to form a complete band, drawing first on four Realtones: guitarist Marc Ribot, bassist David Conrad, Bobby Kent on drums and percussionist Linda Curtis. Charlie Giordano joined on keyboards, with funk-jazz guitarist David Acker an occa-

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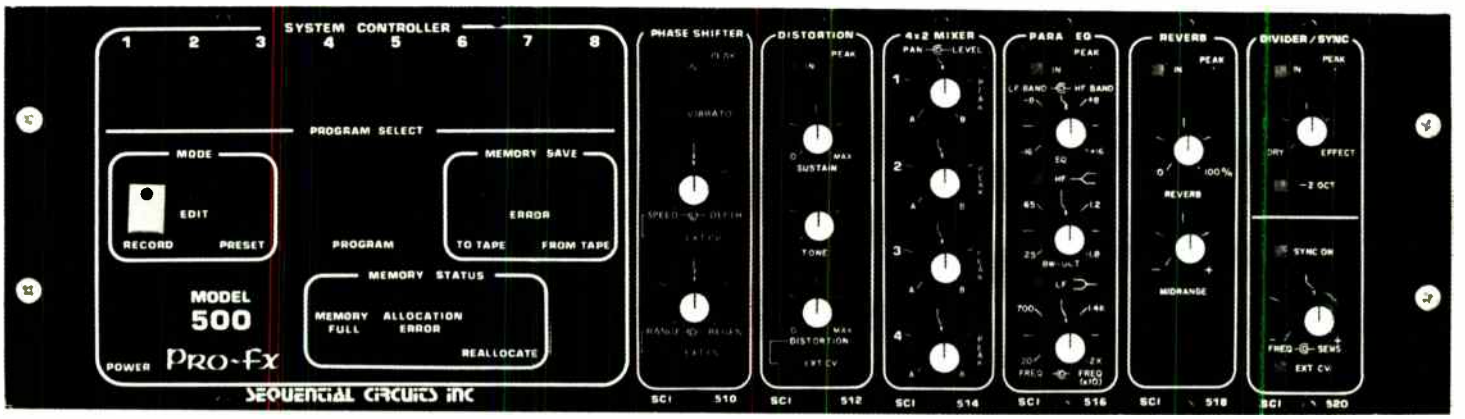

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Horns *from previous page*
sional replacement and utility infielder. Our format was simple: every Tuesday afternoon we met at the club with two or three singers or arrangers who were to be featured that evening. In short rehearsals, we'd run down chord charts, read through horn arrangements, or come up with basic lines of our own for the tunes. The other side of the coin would be instrumental jamming, and to accommodate players we'd invited or who just appeared with portfolios, we worked up a varied repertoire of charts and tunes to jam on (like Steely Dan's "Peg," James Brown's "The Chicken" or Horace Silver's "Sister Sadie").

The basic idea was to have a solid and flexible enough band onstage that could handle all kinds of singers and musicians, no matter who showed up. A typical night opens with the Uptown Horn Band doing a few of our own tunes—everybody in the group writes—and then alternating between singers and players until the wee hours; surprises quickly became commonplace. One night, for instance, I'd been alerted that the Neville Brothers from New Orleans who were in town recording their album *Fiyo On The Bayou*, might come down to Tramps. In the afternoon, we hashed out a tolerable version of Aaron Neville's classic, "Tell It Like It Is," complete with the original horn lines. When Aaron, Art and Cyril Neville did appear that night, we led off with the ballad. The brothers must have felt something click, because we then launched into a half-hour, non-stop jam, running through evergreens like "Iko Iko" and "Hey Pockyway," with Art on piano, Cyril on rolling congas, and the entire club in pandemonium.

Unplanned combinations have sometimes paid off in big ways. One night Southside Johnny Lyon showed up with his two backup singers, Lisa Lowell and Patty Scialfa, and they joined us onstage to belt out such standards as "In The Midnight Hour." While this was going on, Mitch Ryder walked into the club after playing a show at the Savoy, and we coerced him into a duet with Southside Johnny on "Good Golly Miss Molly/Jenny Takes A Ride." Steam was literally pouring off the stage when David Johansen jumped onstage and counted off a lurching version of Ray Charles' "Let's Go Get Stoned," with each singer taking a verse and the entire audience—bartenders, waitresses and a cop on the East 15th Street beat—joining in on the choruses.

Another time, Solomon Burke, the hulking bear of a preacher/soul singer was leading the band through his own "Everybody Needs Somebody To Love" when Don Covay—the guy who wrote such classics as "Have Mercy" (and whose vocal Mick Jagger borrowed extensively on the Stones' version)—jumped onstage with Dodie Dreyer of the Ritchie Family to engage in a vocal sparring match with Burke. This lasted twenty minutes on one vamp and ended with all the singers speaking in tongues, soul style. A few weeks later, Hamish Stuart and Steve Ferrone from the Average White Band got up to testify, but when we asked Hamish what he wanted to play, he just grinned and said he couldn't remember any lyrics just then, so go ahead and start any song. We decided to do "Knock On Wood," and Hamish proceeded to make up two perfectly stunning new verses to the Eddie Floyd tune before the originals flitted back into his memory bank.

On the jamming side, we've had our share of interesting combos grace the stage. Once Chris Spedding, the demonically-inspired British guitarist, who's played with virtually everyone from Robert Gordon to Elton John to the Stones, got up with Richie Morales of the Brecker Brothers Band on drums, Johnny Winter's excellent bassist Jon Paris, and Wayne Kramer—formerly of the MC-5 and now recording with Was (Not Was) and his own combo—singing "Tutti Frutti." Bassist Will Lee, Mac Rebennack/Dr. John, legendary R&B bassist Jerry Jemmott, guitar ace Arlen Roth, former Santana percussionist Mingo Lewis, a whole slew of great horn players from big bands passing through town, drummer Steve Holly from Wings, a great and totally obscure Texas blues guitarist named Texas Slim—these are but a few of the players who've stumbled onstage at Tramps 'round midnight to see what happens.

continued on page 88

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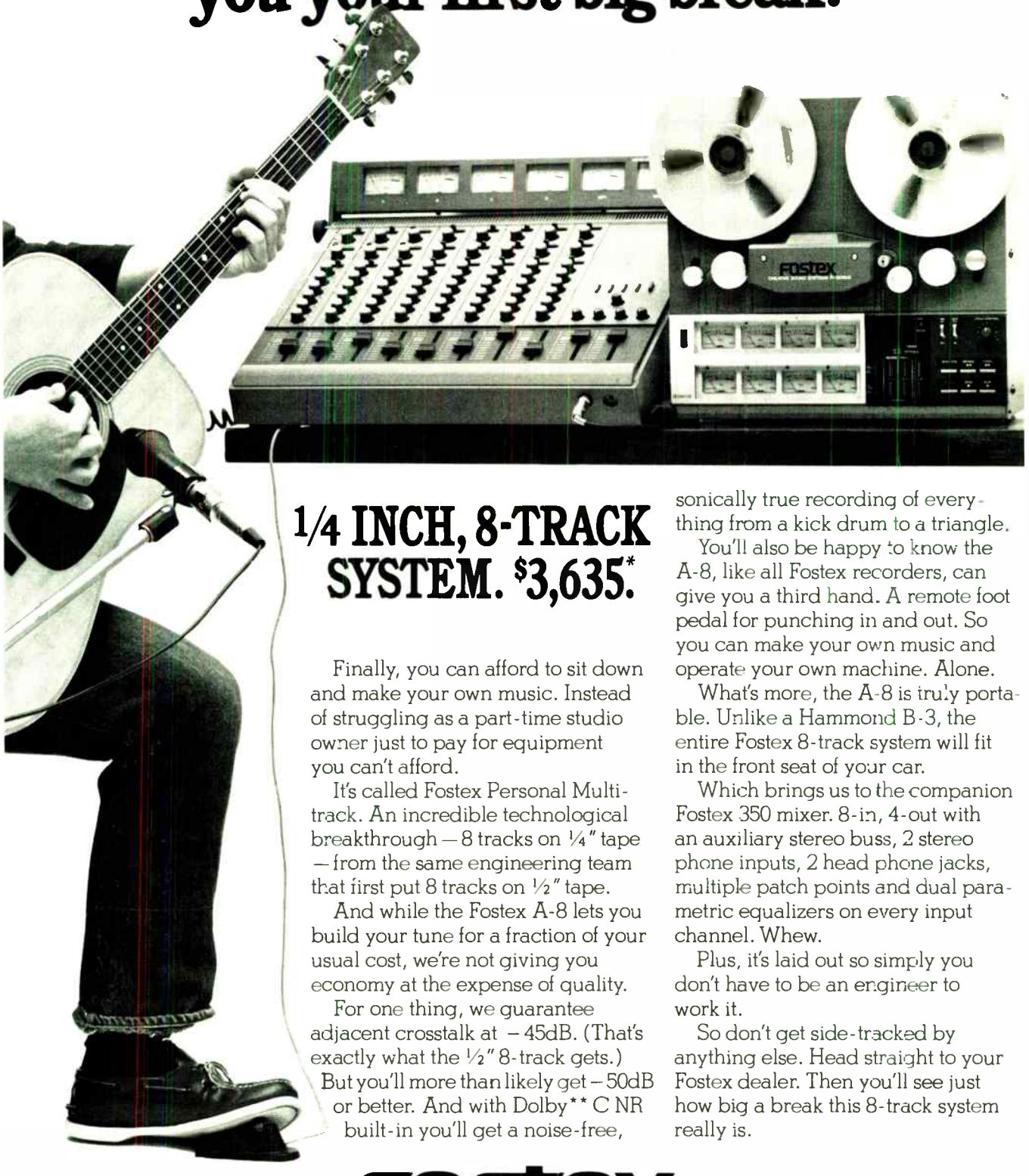

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BEYOND PUB-ROCK

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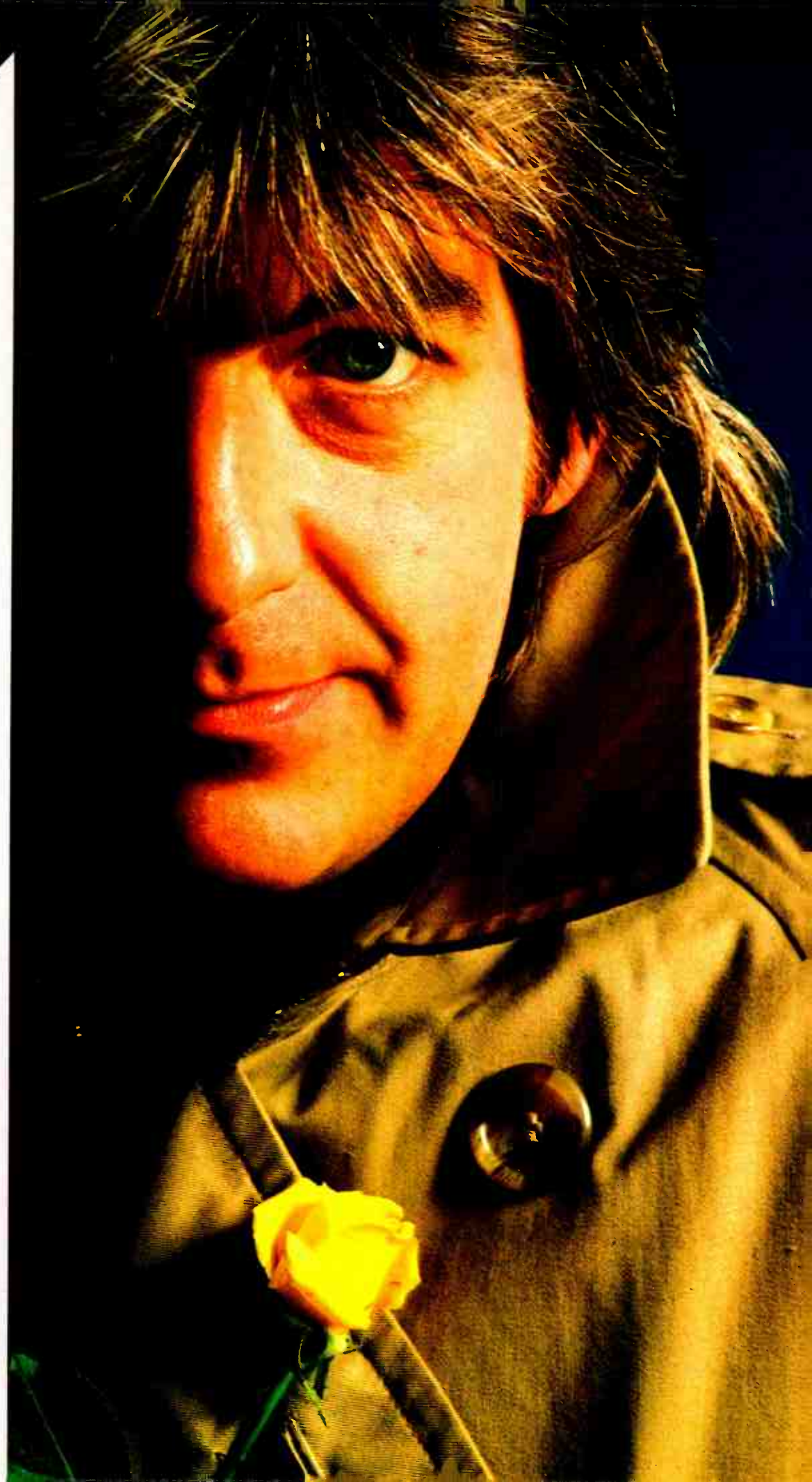


DEBORAH FEINGOLD

BY VIC GARBARINI

NICK LOWE

He is Nick Lowe, alias the Prince of Pop, a.k.a. the Titan of Trash and the Herald of Hip. Only this morning his dry wit, affable charm and eminently quotable *bon mots* had the college radio press eating out of the palm of his hand. But less than ten hours later, as the lanky bassist squints fixedly at the telegram tacked to the wall of his Boston Garden dressing room, a very

different side of Nick Lowe begins to emerge. Slowly it dawns on me that this feted paragon of *insouciance*, this self-styled Jesus of Cool, is—believe it or not—on the verge of tears. "I can't *believe* he did this," mutters Nick, his voice tinged with emotion. "Listen to this: 'Dear Nick, Sorry I can't be with you for this one. Know you'll knock 'em dead. Your buddy, Peter Wolf.' Aw, old Wolf didn't have to do that," continued Lowe, groping for another Heineken with one hand as he runs the other through his shaggy mane. "I mean, here's this guy I admire so damn much—he kept the old flag of R&B flying for all these years, and now they're bloody number one; haven't seen him in ages, and he takes the time out there on tour to send this. You shouldn't really play R&B like I do," he confesses to his beer. "Those guys are the real thing. And I was so damned pleased when their song went to number one, I bought every bastard in the bar a drink!"

Wait a minute. Is this genuinely warm, humble guy the same cool, cavalier popster that wowed the Adidas brigade at lunch?

You bet.

In fact, the real Nick Lowe is exactly that: a pleasantly paradoxical juxtaposition of passion and detachment. Unlike many of the post-punk English set who, in their rush to escape cliched forms and structures also reject the essential musical principles needed to create effective new rock vehicles, Lowe's unerring command of traditional rock dynamics, coupled with his detached objectivity (conceptual, not emotional) enables him to reshuffle these musical elements into novel configurations at will, creating in the process a unique hybrid of rock, pop, R&B, reggae and country. Clever as all this may sound, Lowe is acutely aware that it's his underlying passion for rock 'n' roll and his commitment to his craft that provide the depth and force that lend his efforts credibility.

Lowe developed his mastery of these diverse musical elements by way of a tough apprenticeship on the early 70s London pub circuit. As bass player and chief songwriter for country rockers Brinsley Schwartz, Lowe learned to switch genres effortlessly in order to satisfy the demands of the dance-hungry pubsters for everything from rockabilly to reggae. On any given night the band might open with the Band's "Chest Fever," then swing through a brace of Chuck Berry rockers and Beatle tunes before closing out with something by the Jackson Five. After a string of critically lauded but commercially disastrous albums of original material (disastrous in the U.S. way, anyway, where their entire catalog is out of print—you might scour the import bins for the excellent compilation *Fifteen Thoughts Of Brinsley Schwartz* [U.A. import], which contains the original version of their anthemic "What's So Funny About Peace Love And Understanding," later covered by Elvis Costello), the Brins decided to pack it in, at which point Brinsley Schwartz and Bob Andrews signed on with Graham Parker as members of his backup band, the Rumour. By now Nick had joined forces with guitarist/producer Dave Edmunds. Dave's hollow, glassine leads and raw, locomotive rhythms effected an organic synthesis of the rockabilly and R&B moves of his heroes—James Burton, Carl Perkins and Chuck Berry. Edmunds' earthy, straight-ahead playing soon helped to both ground and galvanize Nick's nascent post-Brinsley style. If Lowe was the brains of the operation, providing most of the ideas, humor and detachment, then Edmunds was both the spirit

and the brawn; his knotty fills and ringing leads supplied the heart and guts. Along with ex-Ruttles guitarist Billy Bremner and Welshman drummer Terry Williams they formed Rockpile, an informal aggregation that served as both a touring and recording vehicle for Dave and Nick's solo projects. "So It Goes," the latter's initial release on the newly formed Stiff label, is considered by most authorities (including *The Financial Times of London*, *Neve Zuricher Zeitung*, and the *Chronicles of Zone III*) to be the first new wave 45. In any case, there was certainly more overt passion, punch and sheer exuberance generated by the fat power chords of its majestic D-A-E chorus and descending chordal verse than anything the pubsters had been able to muster, and Nick's surrealistic tale of kids cutting off right arms and tired U.S. ambassadors on obscure missions set the tone for the twisted but topical tunes to come. Lowe's first album, *Pure Pop For Now People*, was a bizarre collage of sights, sounds and characters; actresses get eaten by their dogs, and the Bay City Rollers share the limelight with Messrs. Hitler and Castro. Musically, traces of cheerfully lifted Jackson Five riffs ("Nutted By Reality") rub shoulders with punkish two-chord wonders ("Heart Of The City") and Paul Simonized ballads (the intro to "Tonight"). His followup, *Labour Of Lust*, signaled a shift in texture and structure. Gone were the crystalline power chords and chunky rhythms. Instead, Edmunds' gnarled, linear leads snaked their way through a reverb-soaked matrix of chiming acoustics, fat bass lines and chattering drums. Finally, during the summer of '80, the team of Lowe, Bremner, Edmunds and Williams recorded their first and only record as a bona fide group. Muscular yet melodic, Rockpile's *Seconds Of Pleasure* was either greater or lesser than the sum of its parts, depending on your prejudices. It was basically a guitar-heavy collection of straight ahead 50s-ish rock 'n' roll, with Edmunds' meat-and-potatoes, rock-a-Berry stompers offset by Nick's Buddy Holly, Stax and Everly Bros. evocations. Sure it was a compromise, but it worked. And it might have taken off in some intriguing directions, had not personality and business disagreements between Edmunds and Lowe's controversial manager Jake Riviera come to a head, resulting in the band's breakup, and the dissolution of all personal and professional links between Lowe and Edmunds.

Elvis Costello is the Cole Porter of the 80s, and he's cool enough to keep changing his act all the time so it never becomes staid."

PHOTO BY LAURA LEVINE

Nick The Nife, Lowe's current effort (and his first since the Rockpile debacle), is a mixed bag at best. His compositional chops are still in excellent shape, as evidenced by the Temptations-style genre exercise, "Raining, Raining," the neo-Staxian "Too Many Teardrops" and the explosive "Zulu Kiss." The bad news is that with the exception of "Zulu Kiss," most of the tracks sound like rough demos, or interesting sketches that no one bothered to flesh out. *Nife* also continues Lowe's drift away from the use of electric guitars. As if in compensation, he pours on the reverb, mixes up the clattering drums even higher than usual, and relies, somewhat unrealistically, on acoustic guitars and Paul Carrack's keyboards to fill in for the missing metal. Onstage, Nick and his scruffy band of pub rock/new wave vets, Martin Belmont (ex-Rumour) on guitar, James Eller (Carlene Carter Band) on bass, Bobby Irwin (ex-Sinceros) on drums and Paul Carrack (ex-Ace and Squeeze) on keyboards, acquit themselves honorably. Carrack, in fact, almost steals the show with his smoldering, angel-in-heat rendering of "Tempted," his Squeeze-era gem. (Nick is currently producing Carrack's solo album.) The only beef I have with the stage show is the same one I have with the album: more guitars! Electric, please....

There exist two distinct schools of thought on interviewing the Basher. They are: (a) only when he's stone sober—never looped (the "Detached" school), and (b) only when he's well-oiled—never dry (the "Passionate" school). Fortunately, we were able to capture both conditions by first chatting with him in London over Perriers, and later concluding things in Boston over Heinekens. In both instances Mr. Lowe proved to be bright, witty, perceptive, outrageous, self-effacing, hilarious and occasionally quite moving, as he ranged over topics covering everything from the current state of American radio, Elvis Costello, Chrissie Hynde, bribing artists, producing crazed punks, the importance of grounding Marshall amplifers, and much much more. And no, we're not going to reveal which questions were asked at which session. That would be, uh, uncool....

MUSICIAN: *The average age for many rock musicians is around 23 or 24. You're playing music that in some cases is even older than that, you're over 33 yourself and yet you exhibit an incredible amount of vitality, more so than a lot of the kids. How do you maintain that energy level? What's the secret?*

LOWE: Well, I think it's by not playing too much, and not getting too involved in it. If you do that you can never get disappointed. It's sort of a coward's way out; if you don't throw everthing in you can always surprise yourself. I've got a lot of admiration for people who jump in with THIS IS GOING TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING, but they nearly always burn themselves out. So I think if we don't play together too much, and don't *have* to rush in and do another album immediately, we'll be able to sustain it, and people will be interested in what we come up with next, instead of, "Oh, 'ere it comes, it's the new Joe Jackson album! Whaddaya got fer us, Joe? Oh yeah ...more of that, is it? Oh, and a bit of that as well, eh?" Then, "Joe, it's album time again, whaddaya got?" I wouldn't like to be in that sort of position at all.

MUSICIAN: *Listening to you play tonight, I was reminded what a rare sense of rock 'n' roll dynamics you have. Your music manages to be melodic and exuberant on one hand, and yet risk-taking and intelligent on the other.*

LOWE: How flattering. Please, go on....

MUSICIAN: *No, I'm serious. That's a rare talent nowadays. I'm sure we can both remember when most rock 'n' roll combined all those elements. But now there's this artificial separation, with the radio dominated by shallow, superficially exciting music, while a lot of the so-called progressive/avant-garde stuff is emotionally and spiritually sterile...like all those synthesizer bands. So how did we get into this mess, and what can be done about it?*

LOWE: I have this little personal theory that occurred to me about three months ago. When people ask me about recording and making music, I always say the first rule is that there are no rules, and I wish more people would be aware of that. But if there *was* a rule, it would be this: *you can't shine shit.* Now, that used to mean that if the song and/or the performance wasn't any good, there's no point in trying anything; you won't be able to jimmy it up whatever you do. The problem is, with recording techniques being what they are nowadays, that rule's out the window. And it's the advances in technology over the last decade or so that did it. Because if you sang a couple of bum

notes there was a machine to get you out of trouble, which led to greater and greater excess; you could blur the edges if the backing vocals weren't quite in tune—you could stack on some more and mix it later. You didn't have to work so hard anymore. So the rule has changed: today you *can* make shit shine...*and shine like bloody chrome*, okay?

MUSICIAN: *You've just described American radio. Journey, Styx, Rush....*

LOWE: Frankly, all those groups sound exactly the same to me. They've all got great production and some demon songs as well, but it doesn't move me. It's like listening to Hawaiian music in elevators! Anson Williams is my favorite. Do you know him?

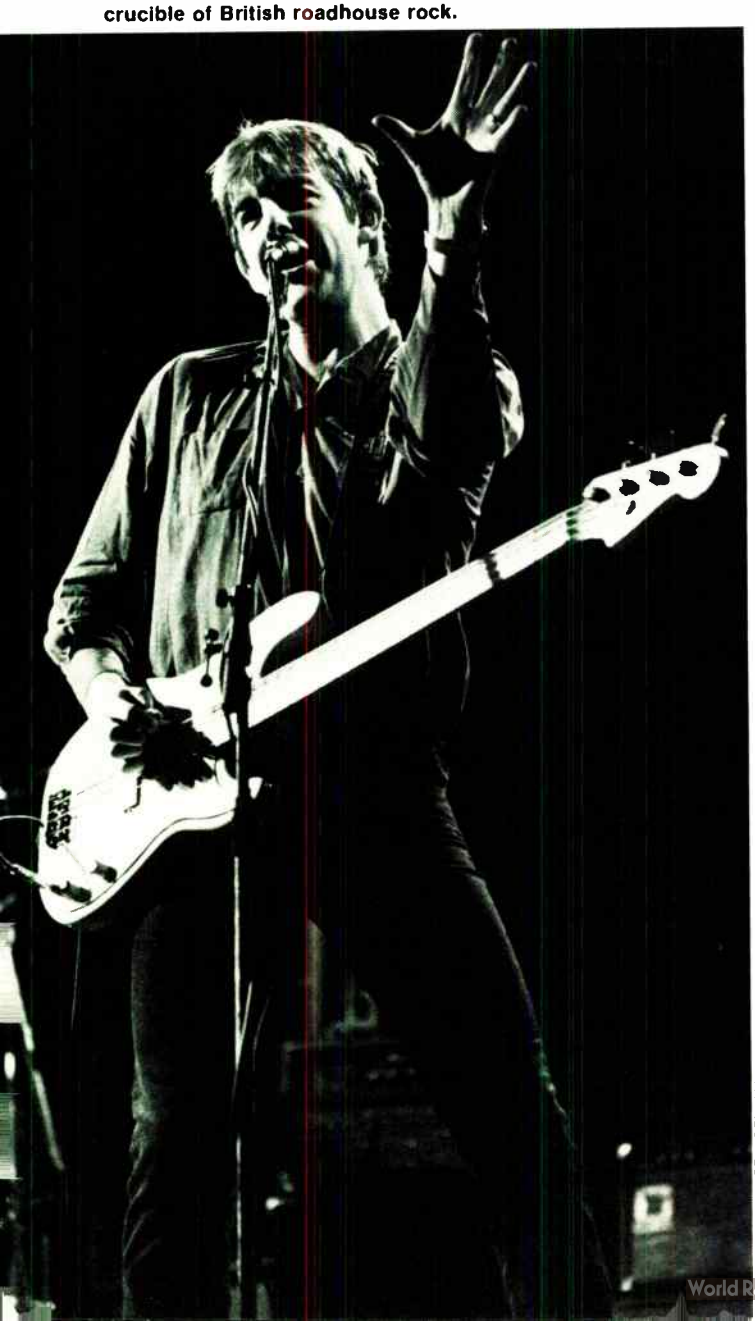
MUSICIAN: *The guy on "Happy Days"?*

LOWE: Yeah, the dark-haired guy who sings a lot. Now, I think that guy has the most *hideous* voice in the world (laughs). Every time he comes on I'm fascinated. It's absolutely *gripping* television, because I've never heard anyone with such a tuneless, VILE voice who's so convinced he's great. I mean, why would anyone want to display themselves to the American public with such a distinct lack of talent?

MUSICIAN: *But it's clear you're not against all pop.*

LOWE: No, I mean, I coined that expression "Pure Pop For Now People" five or six years ago, because the sort of music I do *is* pop; it's disposable trash. But then good entertainment doesn't always have to mean something. Take Barbra Streisand's "I Am A Woman In Love," which I think is a fantastic record. It's all there: she sings it beautifully—she's obviously so into it. It's a lovely song, and she interprets it gorgeously.

Lowe has never lost the feeling of the pubs, the sweaty, beery crucible of British roadhouse rock.



MARTIN BENJAMIN

MUSICIAN: *You seem to have this subversive approach to pop, at least on your solo albums—you're working inside the form yet doing something different with it, using it intelligently, but also willing to let yourself have a bit of fun.*

LOWE: Yeah, but even so I keep changing my mind about this, because over here they haven't got that understanding of the possibilities of pop. In fact, it's gone sickeningly the other way—it's got to be totally brainless. This "oh-let's-just-have-some-fun-happy-smiling-faces"—and all the rest of it is horribly smug. Whorish. If this keeps up I may be driven back to listening to the Grateful Dead in protest! I don't think you can sustain anything in the music business the way it is at the moment. You've got to keep changing your mind all the time to avoid getting trapped in some trend or fad.

MUSICIAN: *You deliver your pop with a bit of a twist to it, like in "Marie Provost". But I see your point about keeping it fresh: today's innovation often winds up as tomorrow's prison.*

LOWE: That happened with that song, actually. I wrote it about an actress who'd gotten eaten by a dog, and I used a really pretty melody and a lovely little chorus to set it up. I thought it would be great to have a pretty song about something really grisly. So on the next tour I had all these guys coming up to me with tapes saying, "Just listen to this, you're going to *love* it!" And they were all about little children getting eaten by trains and things like that, and I thought, "Oh dear, what's been spawned here?" So I thought, "Well, I'll get back to real songs and write something REALLY horrible," but I couldn't do it.

MUSICIAN: *How did you develop this sense of whimsy and detachment about your work? Did you start off like most people, earnestly hoping to become the next Van Morrison?*

LOWE: I started off wanting to learn to play "I Saw Her Standing There," and just kept going. But yeah, I used to get very keen and copy people like Van Morrison, just to learn what they were doing, really. Then one day you wake up and think, "Well, this is pointless; it's all been done. I can't sing like that, or write like that...but I do know how to do *this*." So I just kept an open ear, and tried to come up with something else.

MUSICIAN: *Your last two solo albums have shown a lot of country influences. Obviously, there's the connection with Carlene (Carter, his wife) and her family. But are you also finding something in country music that's lacking in today's rock 'n' roll?*

LOWE: Yeah, there's REAL EMOTION in country music! But I've always loved country, even before it got trendy to groove on it. I mean, the Beatles were a country group. Just listen to their first records. But people get this image of country music as being just this glitzy, over-the-top sort of show thing. It *is* very emotional stuff, and there's some really ghastly shlock that comes out, and I don't mean just the little-crippled-boys-and-the-truckers stuff, which I'm an absolute fool for. All the new country records nowadays sound like bloody "Tie A Yellow Ribbon," dreadful, cutesy-pie stuff. That's the sort of country I hate, whereas George Jones—who I'm crazy about—is a *soul* singer. Absolutely believable. That to me is soul music, whereas what passes for black soul today is just a joke.

MUSICIAN: *Can you think of any exceptions offhand?*

LOWE: Yeah, that guy in the Commodores is great. "Once, Twice, Three Times A Lady"—that guy was obviously INTO it. Like everybody, he had to put a pair of cans on in the studio and stand in front of a microphone and emote. And on that day he might have a headache, he might be in a horrible state, his missus might have left him, but on that one day *you've got to do it*. That's such a rare thing. And in country I hear more people that know how to do it than in any other genre. Real country is soul music to me. It can break my heart or make me feel bloody joyous. Country and western in England is far less separate from the mainstream of popular music. Over here, even soul music is woven into the charts, but country is something completely separate.

MUSICIAN: *But you've always been able to find everybody from George Jones to the Stones to Orchestral Manoeuvres on the English charts. Why are they more integrated and open over there?*

LOWE: I think it's because the people in charge of radio in England are far more into being known as "cool" than safe or rich. As it happens, they *do* generally become quite rich.

MUSICIAN: *Meanwhile over here radio is becoming even more restrictive and format-ized.*

LOWE: Things are getting tightened up, and frankly I welcome it. I think it'll help the music, because only the people who really care will still make records.

MUSICIAN: *How can you say that?! Have you looked at the charts recently? The people who are cleaning up under these conditions are the ones who strictly conform to the AOR format.*

LOWE: Yeah, but how long will that go on for? Let 'em all bloody do it for now. People will get damned sick of it soon enough. And in the meantime all these restrictions are gonna prune things down. The people who are really good aren't going to go away. I hear all these artsy groups bleating about how their last album didn't do anything because the record company didn't help. The real reason? 'Cause it was *crap*. Seriously, how many records come out that are undiscovered gems? There is NO WAY that Paul McCartney—whether he'd been in the Beatles or not—or Van Morrison or Ry Cooder would have remained undiscovered. They're too damn good!

It'll get harder—and I myself might have to suffer. I'm not exactly a household name, you know. And I'll care like mad, 'cause I can't bloody do anything else (laughs). Maybe it'll make me try harder. People aren't trying hard enough.

MUSICIAN: *You admit that you don't put enough work into your own albums?*

LOWE: Yeah, it's a real chore for me, because I'm basically lazy. One of the things I like about producing other people is that I can sort of live out my fantasies through them. I could actually have a few hits if I worked harder at my own stuff.

MUSICIAN: *Isn't that what you did with "Cruel To Be Kind"? You were doing it in its raw form with the Brinsleys, and then you decided to rearrange it and polish it up....*

LOWE: That idea was actually Greg Geller's, my A&R man at CBS. He'd heard the Brinsley demo, which kind of sounded like Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, and kept saying he thought it could be a hit. And besides, (laughs) he sounded like he was really putting the old foot down, so I was almost forced into recording it. It was almost too easy—like I was cheating or something. I can do that stuff in my sleep.

MUSICIAN: *You sound like you're almost ashamed of it.*

LOWE: No, I'm quite proud of how well it did. It's just that...I don't know...there's a few tracks on the new album that with a bit of work could be like that. But I've got this funny thing about being in the pop business. I feel like I'm really a plumber or postman and I have this hobby, which is the pop business, that I do in the evenings.

MUSICIAN: *I have to agree with you about the new album: the things like "Zulu Kiss," which you obviously put some work into, sound great. But most of the rest sound like demo tracks or interesting ideas that you didn't bother to flesh out.*

LOWE: Yes, well, that's why, to be frank, I agree with that review in your magazine (by J.C. Costa in issue #42), because really and truly, that's the way it was. I don't think that very many people really care about what I'm doing. I just get 'em out of the way. A lot of them are just demos and I switch on a bit of fancy echo here and there.

MUSICIAN: *I'm impressed with your modesty, but come on, people do care about your work. Don't sell yourself short.*

LOWE: I take myself seriously, but I'm still amazed at all the attention I get...though I *love* every bit of it. (sings to the tune of "Breaking Glass") "I love...the sound...of my own voice...."

MUSICIAN: *Okay, here's one to pontificate on. A lot of bands have trouble developing their musical and compositional chops without losing touch with that essence and spark that inspired them in the first place. How do you retain your vitality and refine your craft at the same time?*

LOWE: By not getting a bloody record contract!! They sign up every damn idiot who can string two chords together. The sooner they start telling these gits, "I'm sorry, but you're crap. Go back and learn how to play," the better things will get.

Things are getting tightened up in the business, and frankly, I welcome it. People who aren't really good are going to go away."

'Cause then the ones who aren't talented and serious will go, "Oh well, in that case I'll just bail out then." Suddenly, all that "Oh-the-kids-are-just-like-us-and-we're-playing-just-for-the-kids-so-screw-you" stuff is getting old. Suddenly they're going to America, getting to go on a bit of a tour, pulling a few nice girls, and then suddenly the old record starts slipping down the old charts and nobody particularly wants to know. Then it's "Dear, oh, dear, I said all that stuff about Anybody Could Do It, but I don't particularly want to go back to the car factory right now, so where's that Micky Baker guitar book?" They're a hypocritical bunch!

MUSICIAN: *Why didn't punk catch on here the way it did in the U.K.?*

LOWE: Because people in England go to gigs not so much to see a group, but to see their mates. They know if such-and-such a group is playing, they'll see their friends there and they'll be wearing the same clothes and sharing the same interests. Anyway, the groups that were heroes over here, like the Sex Pistols, were pretty ghastly...that's a bad example, really, because their records were rather good. Let's just say that a lot of them were terrible. Then the American kids heard about this terrific movement with all these fantastic groups and it was all so romantic. So when the first import records started to come in it was, "WOW, LET'S HEAR WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT! THIS IS GOING TO KNOCK MY HEAD OFF." Quick, onto the turntable. Click. Hsssssssssssssss. SPLANG-SPLANG-SPLANG-SPLANG WOOOOOOOOAAAAAAA-GGGGGGGHHHHHHHHH!!!!!! And they thought, "What the hell is *this*?"

MUSICIAN: *What about the political or social component over here?*

LOWE: Whenever they tried it in the States, like in L.A., it was an absolute joke. Because they all turn up in their silly hair styles and they're as nice as pie, really well-behaved. Then the group comes on and WAAAAAAAGGGGGGHHHHHH— spitting everywhere—and suddenly all these well-behaved kids are leaping up in the air and bashing into each other. And when it's all over they get in daddy's car and drive home to Malibu. It's absolutely ludicrous! At least in England the kids who are punks or skinheads or whatever are involved in a total lifestyle thing. They don't just play and then later wash the grease out of their hair like Sha-Na-Na.

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of imitations, do you ever worry that you might get sued for some of the riffs you steal. I'm kidding, really, but that lift from Creedence's "Green River" on "Stick It Where The Sun Don't Shine" was pretty blatant.*

LOWE: Nah, I don't worry; everybody steals. The difference with me is that I happily admit it. Besides, a lot of it's purely unconscious.

MUSICIAN: *I'd think that anyone who tries to suss out your production values by listening to the records you've produced for Elvis Costello would get totally confused, because they're all so different. How did that relationship develop and evolve?*

LOWE: At the time Stiff Records started in England, I was the only one who had anything to do with the studio before, so I automatically became the "house producer." Then there followed a period where I would get out of bed and go to this pokey little studio in London, and the door would open and in would come another crazy that Jake Riviera had sent down. And then it was, "Well, how does your song go, kid?" Another idiot jumping up and down howling. It was a good experience to try and get it into some arrangement. In fact, I quite enjoyed creating a presentable backing track to be loony over. Then Elvis came along, but I wasn't crazy about him at first. Jake was.

MUSICIAN: *What didn't you like about him?*

LOWE: Well, I thought it sounded a bit precious to me. Also, at that point I was very anti-English-people-singing-with-American-accents.

MUSICIAN: *What was it about him that finally turned you around?*

LOWE: His raw bloody talent! The man is the Cole Porter of the 80s, and he's cool enough to keep changing his act all the time, so it never becomes staid. For instance, that sound on *This Year's Model* was the raw sound of the group, and it was great. But if he'd made another two albums like that he'd be in the dumper now.

MUSICIAN: *Which session would you say came closest to capturing what you were aiming for with Elvis?*

LOWE: "Watching The Detectives." It may be the best thing I've ever been involved with; it was the last record I made with Elvis where I said exactly how it was going to be. After that Elvis learned more about the studio, and I had to adjust my techniques slightly to accommodate some of his ideas which I thought were wrong, but in retrospect were completely right. I'd bully him—still try to—and shout at him, and there was a period when he'd back off. But slowly I began to listen to his ideas and make them work.

MUSICIAN: *I've always felt "Pump It Up" was the most powerful thing either of you has put to vinyl....*

LOWE: That was a first take, and the problem was to try and get him *not* to do it again. He broke a string halfway through, and the guitar sounded absolutely...well, Elvis won't mind me saying this but his guitar playing is generally shocking. He's such a good musician, with so much actual feel. But his guitar playing? *Revolting!*

MUSICIAN: *What about that wedding cake of sound on* Armed Forces, *that layered effect? Didn't his approach conflict with your philosophy of keeping it fast and simple?*

LOWE: No, because we said, "Let's do something a bit classy here but still try to retain the spirit." So we banged it down in less than two weeks.

MUSICIAN: *What about* Get Happy? *How did you get that soulful early Stax sound?*

LOWE: We definitely did go for that. We wanted to get it really simple. That's one thing I really do like doing—getting quirky little drum beats and seeing if you can slot a bass part which is right, like a jigsaw puzzle, so that every bit is needed. Also I think you can get your records sounding louder the less you put on them. Producers say all the time, "Oh, it's Back To Mono." But will *they* do it? No one will do it. You still hear all these stacked harmonies. I listened to Bruce Springsteen's last album the other day, and that ain't a year's work in there. It just sounds like he thought, "Well, you've got to get spontaneous, so what we'll do is pitch the songs really high, and I'll bellow at the top of my voice about The Street and everything, and people will think I'm rock 'n' roll." Now don't get me wrong, I think that old Springsteen is really good. I think he's very clever, and I think he must be a very pressurized man as well; I have a pile of respect for him. But I think it's a shame when people miss the point of this spontaneity thing, and bang it down and tart it up. They think, "One mike on the drums, man! That's all you need!" And it comes out sounding awful—and that's why I was so disappointed with that Springsteen record; it sounds like, "*I can be—I promise you—I can be exciting! And here it comes.*" And then it sounds like it's recorded in a

BARRY SCHULTZ/RETNA LTD

wooden room. Sounds like it's recorded in the back of a barn or something. Sometimes you *have* to work at something, you know. There is that.

MUSICIAN: *How did you get involved with Chrissie Hynde and the Pretenders?*

LOWE: Well, Chrissie and I had a brief affair quite a long time ago. She was writing songs back in '75-'76 about heroin and stuff and I said, "Please, they're not going to be interested." But her other stuff was very soulful, so I kept encouraging her. One day she came over and played me the demo of the Pretenders doing "Stop Your Sobbing." It was quite a different arrangement, and I thought her voice was sensational.

MUSICIAN: *What appealed to you about it?*

LOWE: She sounded like she worked in Sears.

MUSICIAN: *Sears?*

LOWE: You know, the kind of girl who works in Sears or K-Mart instead of a Big-Blues-Mama-Janis-Joplin-Shrieker, or the Precious-Little-Gurly-Wurly-Heart type of thing. No interest in that at all. To me, the ultimate sort of sexy noise is the standard girl who works in a shop, and when I heard that demo I thought, "That's it...that's The Noise—she's sexy as hell and she's not insulting anybody's intelligence." So I said, "All right, let's get in there and DO it. You do that, you do this." Three hours. Zip. Done.

MUSICIAN: *Are there certain principles or constants that you carry into the studio regardless of who you're producing?*

LOWE: The most important thing is for me to actually *like* the person I'm producing. If I like the music, but not the person, I simply won't do it. Now, having said that, let me say that if it's a question of paying the bloody rent, all my highfalutin ideas and theories go right out the window. I can be an absolute prostitute if the rent's in question. "UH, RIGHT, *LOVED* THE SONG, GREAT BLOODY TUNE, JUST STAND OVER THERE BY THE MIKE...."

MUSICIAN: *What's your strategy once you get them into the studio?*

LOWE: What I have to do is suss out how to get the old performance out of 'em. Different chaps require different approaches. Some people like to get their egos stroked, to be told how wonderful they are. Some people like you to tell them exactly how to do it. And some people, believe it or not, like to be bullied; they like to be told what absolute *crap* they are all the time. Some people I've actually *paid* to get them to do something. "Look, there's ten quid in it for you if you hit that note." And they do it!

MUSICIAN: *What tack do you take with Elvis?*

LOWE: To make it even more confusing, some people like to have their egos stroked one day and be bullied the next. Elvis and I have got a very peculiar working relationship. He's not a very gregarious, outward-going person, and he can be quite difficult to get along with. But I'm probably one of his best friends because I understand and respect him; because he's totally committed to his music, which I, frankly, am not. I'm far more interested in him as a person and a friend than I am in his music. Because he intrigues me so much.

MUSICIAN: *You produced Graham Parker's first two albums and then said you'd bow out of the third, and yet you wound up producing* Stick To Me *after all. Why'd you change your mind?*

LOWE: I did the first albums because I'd worked with the people in his band back with the Brinsleys, and he figured I'd be a good catalyst to help bring it all together. I thought they should be on their own with *Stick To Me*, so they recorded it with a chap whose name escapes me now, and when they finished it and mixed it and took it out of the studio it sounded all muffled, like someone had thrown a wet blanket over it. I think the studio was what they call bass-light; you couldn't hear any bass, so obviously you had to crank on lots of equalization to make it sound like a bass or drum or whatever. They should have seen the old telltale signs: if you have to add on lots of treble or bass or anything, there's something off. So here they are with this mess, and only a week to redo it before their tour starts. Knowing that I was The Expert, they wheeled me in to do it.

MUSICIAN: *That must have been fun.*

LOWE: It wasn't as hard as all that. The poor devils had worked so hard at the arrangements that I didn't have to do much there. I changed a few things, but basically it was similar to the original—the only acetate of which, by the way, I managed to lose on the tube.

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of being on tour, is it different being on the road here than in England?*

LOWE: It's harder in England. First off, you can't get a drink after 11 p.m. unless you bully the night porter, and the TV goes off soon after that.

MUSICIAN: *Why didn't any of those pub rock bands ever make it? The Brinsleys, for example, were loved by the critics, their sound was fairly commercial, but they never went anywhere on the charts.*

LOWE: I think there were two main reasons it didn't work: (a) because our records were so bad, and (b) because our live show was so bad. Seriously though, none of those bands were really very good. We made an impact more because of the type of things we did, rather than how well we did them. We weren't all that great, but we were willing to have a go at a reggae or soul or country tune back then when all that stuff was totally out, so we were considered pretty daring. It was more of a live thing. The only pub band to actually break into the charts was Ace, with that song "How Long Has This Been Going On," which Paul Carrack wrote and sang. I remember all the other pub bands were so proud of them for that. Really.

MUSICIAN: *Was there a more real communication between audience and performer in those days?*

LOWE: We used to play the Marquee a lot in those days, and I remember we opened for Yes, who had just started and were fantastic, on the night after the Stones concert in Hyde Park when Brian Jones died (July, 1969). In those days everyone was using those big Marshall stacks, which looked fabulous ...this really has nothing to do with your question, by the way. It's just a funny story....

MUSICIAN: *Keep going. You're rolling.*

LOWE: Right, Anyway, the P.A. had been in the shop, and they'd somehow connected up the plugs the wrong way. We finished the first number, "Chest Fever," and the place went *wild*. I went up to the mike to say something, and I had one hand on the guitar and one on the mike, and I got this *violent* electric shock, but it was one of those where you can't let go! And I was literally flung about eight feet across the stage and went crashing into the back of those amps. I remember lying on the stage, unable to let go, shaking like a doll. It was like I was looking at everything through a glass of water, but my mind was very clear, and it was like this person was talking to me, saying, "God, you've got a nasty electric shock here, Basher"—and there was no panic, I was very calm—"I'm

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NICK KNACKS

LOWE: I generally use either a four-string Fender Precision Bass, or an eight-string that I got Hamer to make for me which has a fantastic sound. I trade off on the Hamer and Fender depending on the type of sound I need. As for amps, I prefer big, wooden ones.

PAUL CARRACK: I use a Yamaha electric piano and a Korg BX-3 organ. I like the Yamaha for its consistency. I feed the Korg through a 147 Leslie, and I just put the piano through the monitor system. I used a Prophet 5 with Squeeze, but in this group we don't go in for synthesizers.

MARTIN BELMONT: I'm a Fender man all the way—two '62 Strats. In the Rumour I used to use Gretch with real heavy strings for just playing rhythm, but now that I'm doing leads too, I'm back to Strats. I use Ernie Ball strings on both, and I toy with a Roland RE-501 Chorus Echo. I use single delay on solos, and repeat delay on one number.

BOBBY IRWIN: I use Sonar drums. Why? 'Cause they give 'em to me for nothing! Seriously, though, they're fabulous, absolutely solid, they never move an inch onstage.

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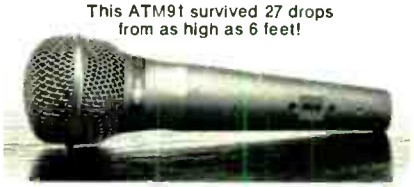

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BY GEOFFREY HIMES

n Graham Parker's last American tour, he and the Rumour visited Washington's Lisner Auditorium in 1979 with one of the greatest rock'n'roll shows this writer has ever witnessed. Wearing amber shades and a long, black, Merlinesque coat, Parker was a small, wiry man with a squirrel-like appearance. But as soon as drummer Stephen Goulding smacked his snare, Parker's whole frame tensed with urgency. He snarled and spat out the words with an anger almost inappropriate for a mere show. His claw-clutched hands scratched at the air as if trying to dig through the invisible barrier between himself and the audience.

The five members of the Rumour played with the same urgency. Brinsley Schwartz played slashing lead guitar against Martin Belmont's crunching rhythm chords; Parker followed their intro with a catchy soul melody. The band then shifted gears into hard-kicking rock 'n' roll, and Parker shifted away from wry sarcasm into this furious admonition: "Passion is no ordinary word—ain't manufactured nor just another sound that you hear at night."

"Passion Is No Ordinary Word" from *Squeezing Out Sparks* is the essence of Parker's whole career. With a barely contained rage, his lyrics have attacked the fake emotions that dominate so much of pop music, indeed so much of life in general. His vocals and music are offered as an antidote, as a dose of something authentic. This has made him a critical favorite since his debut album in 1976, but has made him very difficult for radio to digest.

Parker's music is a strange but seamless blend of the Rolling Stones' rhythm guitar hooks, Motown's bouncy melodies, Stax-Volt's dance beat, Bob Dylan's nasal, ironic vocals, Van Morrison's grainy howl, Willie Nelson's austerity and Bob Marley's throbbing rhythm accents. Yet Parker doesn't so much sound like anybody as he sounds like everybody. All his influences are subordinated to the emotional directness of his songs. Thus they sound totally original and quite new. For all his traditionalism, he is often considered the founding father of England's new wave.

In the early 70s, Britain's pop music was dominated by bloated art-rockers and innocuous pop stars. A handful of London bands were playing a simpler, subtler music, a British version of the American country-rock of the Band, Little Feat and the Byrds. This pub-rock movement, as it was dubbed, included bands like Brinsley Schwartz, Ducks Deluxe, Chilli Willi, the Sky-Rockets and Ace. These bands made some lovely records, but precious little money. By 1975, most of them had broken up.

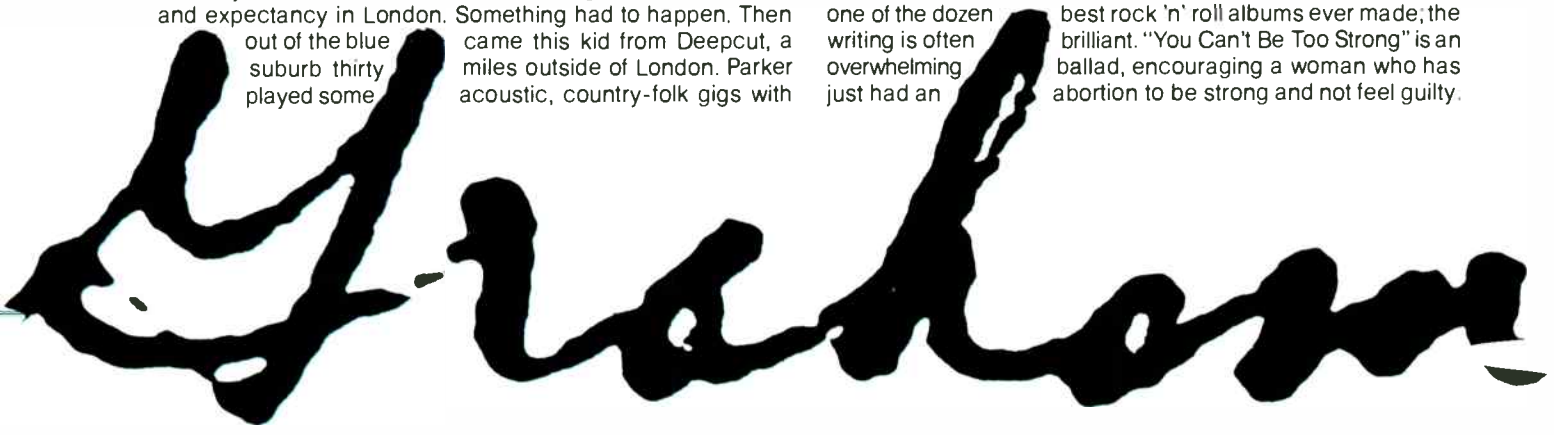
So by mid-decade, there was a feeling of both frustration and expectancy in London. Something had to happen. Then out of the blue came this kid from Deepcut, a suburb thirty miles outside of London. Parker played some acoustic, country-folk gigs with Noel Brown and Paul Riley. Then he sent a tape of his songs to Dave Robinson, the manager at the Hope & Anchor Pub. Robinson liked the songs and hooked up Parker with the newly formed Rumour (Brinsley Schwartz, Martin Belmont, Stephen Goulding, bassist Andrew Bodnar and keyboardist Bob Andrews. Disc jockey Charlie Gillett (author of the classic *The Sound Of The City*) played the tapes on the air, and Phonogram (Mercury in the U.S.) offered Parker and his crew a contract.

Nick Lowe produced the first album: *Howlin' Wind*. It landed like a bombshell. It contained twelve three-minute bundles of compressed dance beat, melodic hook and unmistakable honesty. Every cut reminded one of the hard-hitting beat and catchy melodies of the singles from Motown and the British invasion in the early 60s. Parker & the Rumour were joined by Dave Edmunds, Noel Brown and a five-man horn section. *Howlin' Wind* was followed with astonishing rapidity by *Heat Treatment*, produced by Robert John "Mutt" Lange. It too was filled with compelling, horn-powered R&B tunes transformed by Parker's angry attack on false promises. Mercury released a spectacular live album, *Live At Marble Arch*, to industry insiders only at the end of 1976. In early 1977, Parker released a four-song EP, *Pink Parker* (named after the color of the vinyl) with two R&B covers and two cuts from the live album.

In one scant year, Parker had released two albums, an official bootleg and an EP. It was a stunning outpouring, and it had its impact on other musicians. The results can be heard in Nick Lowe's production of Elvis Costello's first album, *My Aim Is True*. It can also be heard in the anger and direct attack of the punk bands that followed in 1977.

Despite critical ecstasy, the two albums only sold thirty and sixty thousand copies respectively. Parker shifted his approach and wrote longer, more complex songs for his third album. They were full of cinematic imagery, which reflected his visit to America. We'll never know how they might have sounded, because the album, *Stick To Me*, produced by Mutt Lange, had a serious defect in the original tapes and had to be completely scrapped. Instead, Parker & the Rumour canceled a European tour, went back to England and rerecorded the whole thing in two weeks with Nick Lowe producing. The record reflects the sloppy, rushed, frustrated job that resulted. They went right off on tour, and Mercury released a live album, *The Parkerilla*, with Lange as producer. Not only were the performances far short of peak nights on the tour, but the sound was muddy.

By this time Parker was in a rage at Mercury Records for what he felt were promotion failures and sound failures. He left the company with a legendary blast: a single called "Mercury Poisoning" with this scathing couplet: "I've got Mercury poisoning; I'm the best kept secret in the West!" He signed with Arista Records, which hired Jack Nitzsche as producer. Parker and Nitzsche huddled before the sessions to find a new direction for the singer. The result was the stripped-down, guitar-dominated rock 'n' roll sound of *Squeezing Out Sparks*. It is one of the dozen best rock 'n' roll albums ever made; the writing is often brilliant. "You Can't Be Too Strong" is an overwhelming ballad, encouraging a woman who has just had an abortion to be strong and not feel guilty.



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

ROCK'S LAST ANGRY MAN REFLECTS ON LIFE AFTER THE RUMOUR.

Parker

Jack Nitzsche said to me, "There's more ego in the Rumour than in any band I've ever seen. This band

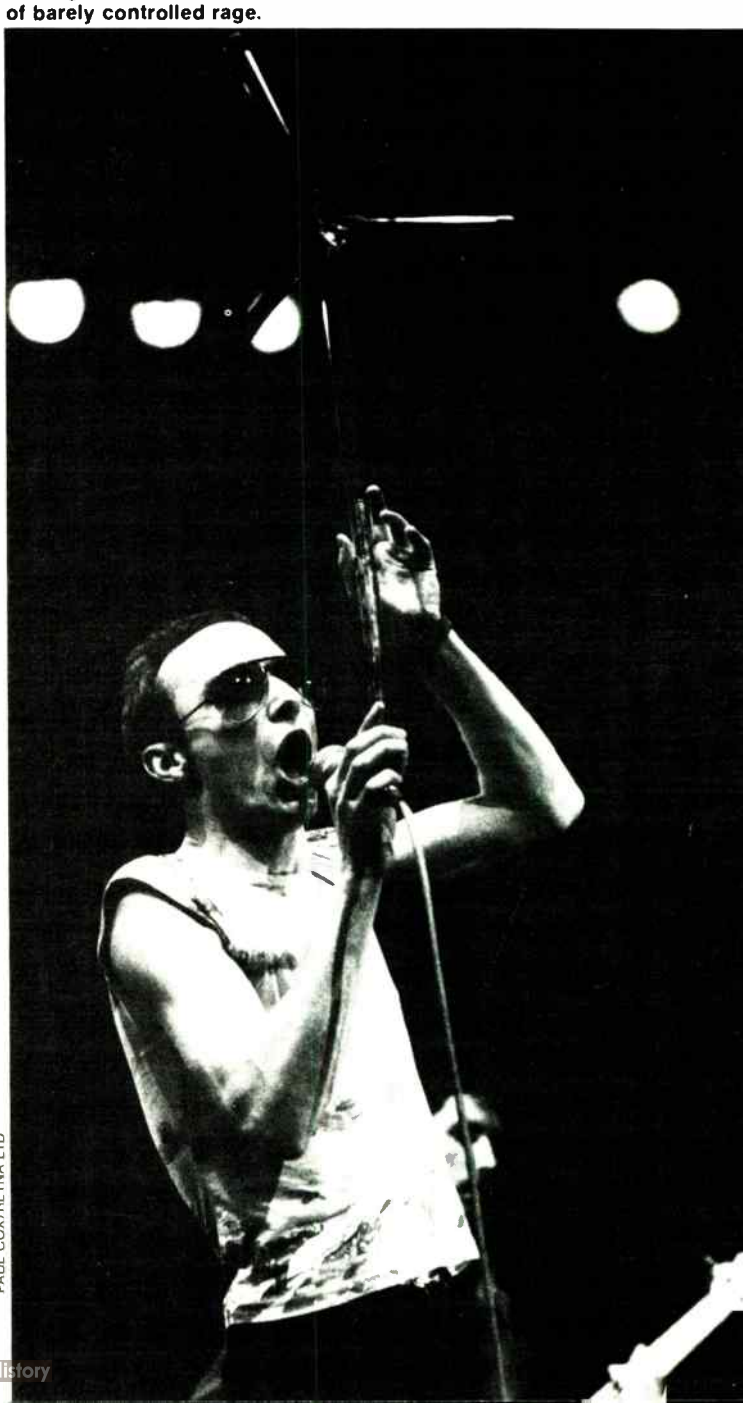
Squeezing Out Sparks was voted the best album of 1979 in the *Village Voice* poll.

About this time, Bruce Springsteen remarked that Graham Parker was the only singer he'd pay money to see. Springsteen went even further and made a rare cameo appearance as a backup singer on "Endless Night" from Parker's 1980 album, *The Up Escalator*, produced by Jimmy Iovine. Though it inevitably suffered by comparison with the once-in-a-lifetime *Squeezing Out Sparks*, *Escalator* extended the sound and themes of *Sparks*. Like Springsteen and Bob Seger, Parker was wrestling with the problem of how to preserve the passion of rock 'n' roll youth in the face of eroding age and corroding society. "I had the energy but outgrew it/ The identity but saw through it/ I had the walk but got trampled/ Had the taste; it was sampled/ If only I could find the switch/ That turns on the endless night."

Though his sales for the two Arista albums had improved to the quarter-million mark, Parker was still dissatisfied. He split with the Rumour after *The Up Escalator*, and holed up for a year. Last fall he came to New York to make *Another Grey Area* with producer Jack Douglas and Douglas' studio musicians. Gone is the blustery, all-out attack of the Rumour. In its place is a new clarity and subtlety that reveals a whole new dimension to Parker's music. The songs also reflect a subtler sense that his goals might always be elusive, and that temporary victories and the struggle itself must suffice in the absence of total victory. By the time this article appears, Parker should be touring America with a new band: guitarist Brinsley Schwartz, guitarist Carlos Alomar, drummer Michael Braun, keyboardist George Small and bassist Kevin Jenkins. The following interview took place over lunch in a midtown Manhattan restaurant just after *Another Grey Area* had been released.

MUSICIAN: *Do you still feel frustrated about not cracking the American top ten?*
PARKER: I'd feel that even if I were in the top ten. Nothing is good enough. Even if I were number one, it would be that I wasn't number one long enough. And so on. The reason I do it is for hit records. That's what it's all about.
MUSICIAN: *Why is that so important?*
PARKER: Because that's what it's always been about. Not that I write songs for that. I write songs because they give me a thrill; they communicate with other people, and that's satisfying. But still it makes you mad when you see some of the bands who are on the charts apart from the Police and a few others. You get these girl singers who sound like Robert Plant and make old-fashioned music and you see them selling a lot of records. But I've accepted the fact that the public wants that kind of stuff. They want averageness. That's it, so you just keep making records.
MUSICIAN: *No matter how much we may like Elvis Costello or Randy Newman today, pop music doesn't have the same universality, the same sense of community as it did with the Beatles and Stones.*
PARKER: Yeah, right. You want a large audience. What a great feeling to know *everybody's* getting off on your music. But that's probably another illusion, because half of them won't get off on it anyway. They're just buying it because they're supposed to. But you feel better if you sell more on the new one than on the last one. *The Up Escalator* was top ten in England, and that made me feel great. It wasn't great enough, but it sold better than the last record, and it wasn't even as good as the last record. Imagine making a record like *Squeezing Out Sparks*, which I think is pretty hot shit, and it sells less than *The Parkerilla*, which wasn't the best recorded live album. You feel the frustration, because you know what you went through to make it.
MUSICIAN: *You know how good it is.*
PARKER: You think it is anyway. You get letters from people who say, "It got me through the hardest time of my life." It really means something to people. But I accept the fact that I don't offer something easy. The way I sing is not really light. I don't pull the punches too often. If you hear me on the radio, I still stick out like a sore thumb.
MUSICIAN: *What concessions are you willing to make to get that audience?*
PARKER: None. I don't make any at all. I just write what I write. I can't preconceive it. I'm not interested. If the public doesn't want to buy it, they don't. It's fair enough. I go out on the road to promote the album, right, that's my job. But the songs come out as they are. I can't adapt them in any way. Or make them more accessible.
MUSICIAN: *Was the decision to work with a studio band and a producer like Jack Douglas an attempt to win a larger audience?*
PARKER: No, I didn't even know who the musicians would be.

Onstage, Parker is transformed into a snarling, spitting dynamo of barely controlled rage.



PAUL COX/RETNA LTD

I left it to Jack. The public doesn't care about production or a studio band or any of it. They just care about a hit song they can sing along to. If you listen to some of the records that are hits in England, the production or the playing is often pretty rough, but a lot of people still like it and buy it. I don't think it makes a shred of difference. When we made *The Up Escalator*, Jimmy Iovine said, "This is going to be a big record, top five." You can't say that; you can't predetermine it.

MUSICIAN: *Why did you split from the Rumour?*

PARKER: I should have quit years ago, really. It was just narrowness on my part. It was easy to have a solid band there. It was easy but it wasn't risky enough. A band can only play in one way. They can try and change, but you always know it's still the same band. About the time of *Squeezing Out Sparks*, I realized that I could have been making a good album with another band as well. I'm a solo artist, a lone wolf. It should just be me and I should collect people for each record. But I don't know any musicians, you see; I don't hang out with musicians. One of the reasons I picked Jack Douglas to produce the new album was he convinced me not to worry about musicians because he could get a good band. The only person I knew I wanted to use was Nicky Hopkins, who had played on *The Up Escalator*.

MUSICIAN: *There must be advantages and disadvantages to having the same band year after year. On the one hand, they understand you and you understand them, but on the other hand, you end up doing much the same thing again and again.*

PARKER: Yeah. Graham Parker & the Rumour got to a point that was incredible in one way. We did three shows after *The Up Escalator*: two at the Hammersmith Palais in London and the Rock Place Festival. It was the best gig I've ever done on TV. When you have a band like that, you get tighter and tighter, and it gets better and better as a live act. You can't reproduce that in a number of weeks or tours with a new band. You just can't. But with a new band you're taking risks; you're going to have more excitement, and you're not getting stale. You have to work harder. I can be as lazy as the next man.

MUSICIAN: *Did you find that the Rumour would take your song and make it sound like themselves?*

PARKER: That *always* happened. We were always friends, and when we started off, I was a total amateur and they had more experience. I didn't know how to arrange musicians. I didn't listen to drums. When someone said, "All the high-hats are there," I didn't know what a high-hat sounded like. All I ever heard was a song and if it gave me a thrill. Bob Andrews was a great help in the beginning. He could take a song and change it completely to make it work. I dug it; it was okay and it worked, but it was the Rumour playing Graham Parker.

MUSICIAN: *Then it became as much their song as yours?*

PARKER: That's right. It would become the band's arrangement. But over the years, by the time we got to *Squeezing Out Sparks*, I was totally controlling it.

MUSICIAN: *What had changed?*

PARKER: Just experience, that's all. I realized, wait a minute, sometimes I hear our records after they're made, and it sounds more like a lot of people fighting than a record being made. That's what it was like to me. If I listen to *Stick To Me*, it sounds like a pitched battle. Every hole in the record is filled with either a bass going boom-boom-boom, or a guitar that howls. It's all very frantic and frenetic. People loved it; that was Graham Parker & the Rumour. But it doesn't mean *that* is Graham Parker. That's just one aspect.

MUSICIAN: *How did things change when you and the Rumour did* Squeezing Out Sparks *with Jack Nitzsche producing?*

PARKER: I just realized that I wasn't satisfied with making the same record every time, where it fell into place, where I'd just sort of go along when somebody said, "Why don't we do a number this way or that?" I didn't want to do that. I had to have something different, because *The Parkerilla* was the culmination of Graham Parker & the Rumour live. After that I just had to have a different sound. A different outlook. So *Squeezing Out Sparks* was a logical step. It was stripped down to the bare, dry bones. This all came out in my discussions with Nitzsche before we recorded. I said to him, "I don't care whether it's like Phil Spector; I don't care what direction it takes, as long as it's different and more direct." It had to be more direct. I didn't want the drums to be all over. Stephen and the rest of the band had always been encouraged to play too much, because we always seemed to have producers who loved "Graham Parker & the Rumour." They loved the band. Jack Nitzsche didn't love the band. So that helped. He didn't even love me. He didn't know who I was. Until he heard the songs. He knew of me. "What's all this new wave stuff about," he said, "what's it mean?" When he got into the songs he really loved them. That's when he and I started to communicate and take hold of the whole thing. Jack said to me, "There's more ego in this band than in any band I've ever seen." And this is the Rumour. I said, "But you were with the Rolling Stones." And he said, "What are you talking about? There's no ego in the Rolling Stones. They play the song. This band doesn't play the damn song." So we had a bit of a crisis at the beginning of *Squeezing Out Sparks*. I said, "Look, you're the producer. I'm Graham Parker. You help me, and we'll tell them how to play. We'll make a different record from my last one." And from then on, that was it. His main focus was Stephen. He told me, "Stephen's playing all these cymbal splashes and it's falling all over itself. All that splashing is exciting live, but on record it's just a fizzy sound." I said, "I know, but I don't know how to change it. You're the producer." Now I could. I'd just tell the drummer, "Just hit the beats; just hold it there," and I'd tell the bass player, "Be the bass; don't be the lead; just be the lead when you need to be." But then I needed Nitzsche. So he told Stephen to get on the high-hat instead of the cymbals and everyone else to hold onto the basic chords and stop trying to be so clever.

MUSICIAN: *It was more a matter of telling them what not to play than what to play?*

PARKER: What not to play, right. Less is more. It's as simple as that. Then Nitzsche asked me, "Listen to your song. What do you want on it? Do you want dancing girls? Hand claps? I can put all that on it. I can put a million tambourines on it; I can add acoustic guitars. But what do you need? Listen to the words. Are you serious about these songs?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "So that's it. All you need are four or five instruments." There was very little overdubbing. We'd play live, get the basic thing, and go back and repair what was messed up. It was real easy once we found the direction.

MUSICIAN: *Even though you'd established some discipline on the* Sparks *album, you felt you needed a complete break?*

PARKER: Yeah, *The Up Escalator* was good. It was what I wanted. It was still in the right direction for me. It was still more direct, and I had as much say as I'd ever had, totally telling them to play this or play that. But I still needed to take a risk after being with the same people for five years. So just after we did that Rock Palace show in Germany, I said it's time to call it a day.

MUSICIAN: *Why is it hard to stay together?*

PARKER: Well, you just get up people's noses. And the Rumour are friends; we get along great compared to most bands, I'm sure. But that's all there is to it. We just get up each other's noses, and they can do other things. They're big boys.

MUSICIAN: *So the split was amicable.*

PARKER: Yeah, they knew it was probably about time.

MUSICIAN: *It seems that* Another Grey Area *extends the simplicity and clarity of* Squeezing Out Sparks *even further.*

PARKER: I'm singing better, that's all it is. I've always been striving to make a record that sounds beautiful. I think *Another Grey Area* sounds beautiful. The records I play at home are by

When you start off, you have nothing. The anger and aggression got us through, but after three years

Steely Dan and Paul Simon, and there's a Bobby Bland record I play called *Dreaming* with "Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City" on it. I play Lowell George's solo album, *Thanks, I'll Eat It Here*. Now that to me is a great-sounding record.

MUSICIAN: *What do you mean by beautiful?*

PARKER: I mean the perspective is just full. Everything is in the right place. It's not a question of sound. When I say sound, I mean putting instruments in the right perspectives, so you get a bass in the slot, so the whole thing holds together.

MUSICIAN: *There's a certain symmetry....*

PARKER: Yeah. Some of my records haven't had that. Everytime I make a record, about six months later it sounds terrible to me. When I hear *Squeezing Out Sparks*, all I hear is the bass drum. It's louder than the bass. I know that actually it's a good record, but I'm still not satisfied with it. But *Another Grey Area* still sounds like it has that symmetry. Everytime I hear it on the radio, it still sounds like a great-sounding record. Whereas, I hear "Fool's Gold" from *Heat Treatment*, and it doesn't sound like a great-sounding record. It sounds muffled.

MUSICIAN: *At the same time, the words you wrote for "Temporary Beauty" are no less angry and no less cutting than those you did with the Rumour.*

PARKER: Right, they're not, not at all. "Big Fat Zero," "Another Grey Area," they're all put-downs. Just the same as the other records have been. In England, the critics are panning it. They hate it. Because they're prejudiced. They've also missed the point of the lyrics. They think the songs are cop-outs, but they're not listening. They're listening to the fact that there isn't Graham Parker & the Rumour with the band being angry. You made the point exactly: the band was playing angrily as well and it wasn't necessary.

MUSICIAN: *I thought the Rumour were great, but this new approach reveals a whole different dimension.*

PARKER: Sure, it was great. I'm not putting it down now. I'm just trying to illustrate why you go from one thing to another. You O.D. on something and you go to somewhere else. I'm not a *static* artist. I'm not in a fixed position.

MUSICIAN: *You're listed as co-producer on the album. How much production did you do?*

PARKER: I just shouted a lot really. On my last two albums, I saw that production isn't just twiddling knobs. I don't know anything about control boards. But I have learned about perspective and the dynamics of sound, so I talked a lot. But the sound is Jack Douglas'. If you listen to *Double Fantasy* and *Another Grey Area*, you'll probably notice the similarity in sound. On the last few albums, I've been involved with some of the leading producers, so I figured that maybe I should be calling it co-production. After all, Nick Lowe, who taught me recording, is a producer. Most of the time, he just goes, "Yeah, louder! Great vocal! Yeah!" He's a primitive. That's where I learned it from: "It's missing the point.... Do it like this.... Give it a bit of this; change the rhythm; play it backwards; do something." He calls himself a producer, so why can't I?

MUSICIAN: *You said you feel you've become a more skillful singer on this album.*

PARKER: Well, I've improved my singing on every record, just by not being satisfied with my voice on any album I've made. I'm just hitting the notes right. Jack Douglas was great, because he didn't care about Graham Parker singing "Yah, yah, yah!" He didn't care. He just let me sing. "Temporary Beauty" is a live vocal, the whole thing. I just did three takes and the third one was the take. It's a technique of learning—not studying—to sing. You sing more and more, and instead of singing with your throat, you're singing with your chest.

MUSICIAN: *How much of it is premeditated? Do you know which lines to sing clearly and which to sing gravelly?*

PARKER: It just evolves as you sing the song. As you're rehearsing with the band, it gets locked into your head. I'm totally instinctive as a singer.

MUSICIAN: *It seems as if the non-shouting, non-gritty side of your voice has developed over the course of your career. It seems like you're doing a lot more of that now.*

PARKER: Yeah, because when I first started, the first thing you did as soon as you finished an album was go on the road. I'd lose my voice on the first gig. Shouting was a way of over-compensating for the fact it wasn't right. Everyone was saying how great it was, but it wasn't great. It was awful. After three years on the road, I got more professional, the Rumour got better, the sound balance improved and I could finally hear myself. We finally had enough money to afford good monitors. When you start off, you have nothing. You're just scraping through, and the anger and aggression got us through. And that was right for the time.

MUSICIAN: *Who were your models as singers?*

PARKER: Originally, it was people you obviously know, like Van Morrison, Mick Jagger and Bob Dylan. If you listen to *Howlin' Wind*, you can tell they were the main three sources. Now I'm not so impressed by those people. It's like a long time ago. I'm impressed by very few people.

MUSICIAN: *Anybody?*

PARKER: Smokey Robinson. I liked him years ago, but not much. I preferred the harder singers like Otis Redding. Now I think Smokey Robinson is the best singer on the planet. It's pretty weird, all the people who have been around since him, and I think he's the best singer. I don't think he makes the best LPs, but I get inspired by the occasional record, like "Being With You." I was inspired by that. That helped me sing this album in a way. I saw him in L.A. recently. It was just amazing; the guy sent shivers down my spine. He's a great artist. If you could hope for just one jot of what he's got, then you're hoping for something.

MUSICIAN: *Even though it comes across a bit differently in* Another Grey Area, *anger has always fueled your records. Where does all that anger come from?*

PARKER: I don't know anymore. That's why I don't like to explain my lyrics anymore. Just getting through the day is enough to make you want to write something angry. It just comes from everywhere. I just walk down the street and see the way people treat each other. Or in any kind of relationship. It's just one side of life. It's just that I can't sing about jolly things very easily. I can't write about them. Some people can. Like (sings) "Groovin'...on a Sunday afternoon." I wish I could write a song like that. That's fantastic. It walks the thin line between rubbish and great because of its subject. How can you write that? But they did, and it's great.

MUSICIAN: *On the new album, even though there's still a lot of frustration about not getting everything you want, there's also a more reflective sense that maybe no one gets everything they want. Sometimes you have to make do with "Temporary Beauty." Get it while you can. You can't always get what you want.*

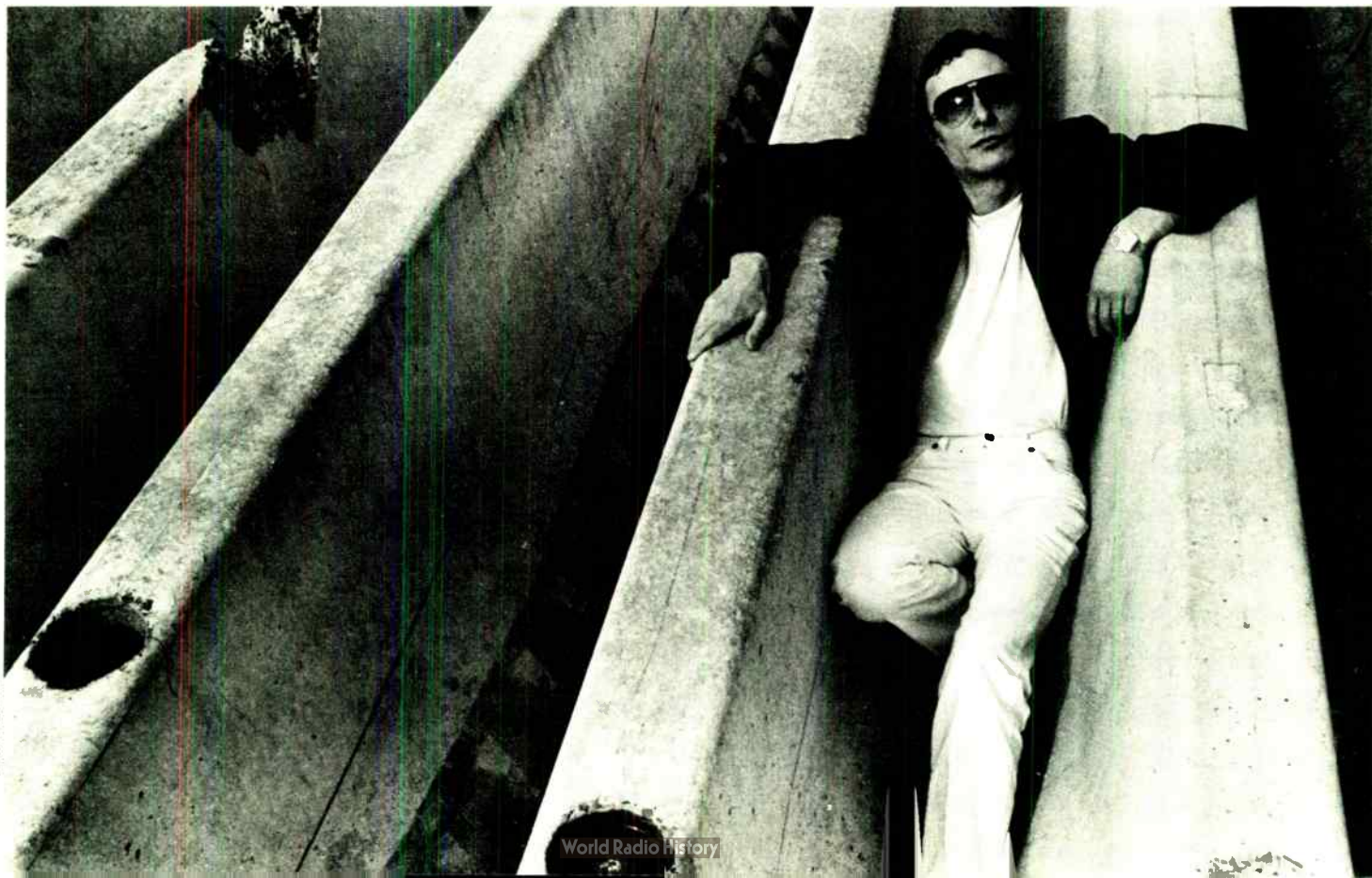
PARKER: Yeah, that makes sense. I'm a very happy person basically. Yeah, I have a pretty damn good time. People write about me: "This man is the most morose, miserable S.O.B. in the world," but I ain't. I just express that angry part that everyone else goes through but they can't put into words as well as I can. Everyone feels the same kind of things. I ain't different from anyone else.

MUSICIAN: *When you were growing up, what role did music play in your daily life?*

PARKER: Well, it was just more interesting than going to school. You realized you had to play the guitar and be like those people. Then when I was seventeen there was soul music and bluebeat and ska, though it was underground. It just struck a chord in me. It reminded me of what the Swinging Blue Jeans and the Beatles were doing when they started, when it was tough and raw. It was what counted. It was better than Cliff Richard, Lulu and those people.

MUSICIAN: *Did you feel part of a special group that knew the bands and the dances?*
PARKER: Yeah, when I was a mod, obviously. It was exclusive. Nobody else knew about Prince Buster & the All-Stars.
MUSICIAN: *Why was it important to know something no one else knew?*
PARKER: In England you have a youth culture. As far as I remember we always have. In America I don't see it as much. It was important to be different from adults and from people who didn't dress as good as you did.
MUSICIAN: *Why was it important? What were the alternatives?*
PARKER: The alternative was being a bozo. You were hip or you were a bozo. You felt good if you were in with the in-crowd. (sings) "I'm in with the in-crowd." We used to go hear that record and we knew what he meant, even though he was a black guy who didn't know anything about us or our dances. But it meant the same thing.
MUSICIAN: *Were you able to sustain that after you got out of school and had to take a day job?*
PARKER: No, when I went to work, I just forgot about music. I thought maybe it wasn't a serious thing. Then I gradually realized that work wasn't a serious thing, so I got back into music. Anytime I've forgotten about music for a bit, it's only been temporary. It's just a driving force.
MUSICIAN: *But obviously you were the exception. Most people abandon their passion for music as they get older and get jobs. Why don't they hold onto that passion?*
PARKER: No idea. They just lose it. My friends went through that. They stayed in their straight jobs and I didn't. They think it's more serious to get a job and get married. There's no alternative for them. How can they still be a part of it? It's very hard. You can't gain anything from it apart from fun. You can't get through life on fun; you have to earn a living.
MUSICIAN: *It seems a lot of your songs are about that, about keeping that spirit alive past that age barrier.*
PARKER: Yeah, you're right, they probably are. But they ain't going to listen to that—though it may change people's lives a bit. Fans have written me letters and said, "I heard your song and said, "Screw it, I'm giving up my job. That's it. You're right.'" So I've actually reached some people. It's unbelievable.
MUSICIAN: *Isn't that why it's important to have a large audience?*
PARKER: Sure, the more people you reach, the more who are going to say, "Yeah, screw it." There is an element of chaos in it. An element of internal revolution at least. But society won't allow it. The class system in England still has a total stranglehold. They'd like people who have a poor education to keep on having a poor education. They want them to fill the slots and do the dirty work. They don't want them to be inspired. They don't want them to make a living out of something creative or exciting. They want to crush them every step of the way.
MUSICIAN: *How did that affect you personally growing up?*
PARKER: That's probably why I wrote songs. I could see it happening all around me, and it wasn't going to happen to me. When I first got a job at seventeen, breeding animals in a research laboratory, that was going to be my career. I was interested in zoology and biology. But I soon realized that you had to have a pretty heavy education to do that. Being a working class person, there was no way I was going to get to do it. All I was going to do was look after these animals that were going to be killed and vivisected by someone else. So that's quite a mindblower when you realize that: they ain't gonna let you. The only way I could be educated was by going out into the world and finding out what made it tick and educating myself. So that's what I did.
MUSICIAN: *In America at least, your first album was lumped in with all the new wave stuff that followed, even though it preceded the punk explosion by a year. Was that appropriate?*
PARKER: Sure, it was appropriate, because they were saying this is the beginning of something new and so was I at the same time. I played for audiences who didn't know what I was

Despite being called the "godfather of punk," Parker never really caught on with the hard-core drone-clones.



LAURA LEVINE

doing. It was like I was from another planet.
MUSICIAN: *Do you feel you paved the way for new wave?*
PARKER: Definitely, there's no doubt about it.
MUSICIAN: *Do you see the influence of* Howlin' Wind *on Costello's* My Aim Is True*?*
PARKER: Yeah, to a point. But I think he was doing the same thing at the same time anyway. The fact is, there were a lot of people in London at the time who didn't believe they could become anything because of the way things were. Meanwhile I was out in Deepcut, thirty miles outside of London. I wasn't playing in the pubs and seeing how useless it was.
MUSICIAN: *You didn't know any better?*
PARKER: I didn't know anything. I came along and said, "I'm great. I'm going to be big. Listen to this." That took a lot for me to do, because I'm not that kind of person. I'm pretty humble about it. But I realized I was writing better songs than I heard on the radio, and I was going to other sources to get the songs: country, blues and reggae and bringing them together into modern music. I was the first one in that whole scene apart from Ace and Dr. Feelgood, who did a similar thing. Dr. Feelgood was the first new wave band.
MUSICIAN: *The punk stuff that followed your album was a lot different from your music. There was a similarity in the anger and the directness and the attack on melodrama. But yours was really rooted in tradition with lots of melody and swing, whereas the other stuff was very unrooted with almost no melody or swing. What did you think of the punk stuff?*
PARKER: I like the Sex Pistols a lot. It's hard not to; they made some amazing records. But most of it was crap, really and truly. Most of it was people cashing in, because here's the new thing. They may have liked it, but only a certain amount of people have the talent to do it like the Clash or the Pistols.
MUSICIAN: *Do you think there was that distinction between new wavers who had that pub-rock sound like you, Elvis, Nick, Joe Jackson and Squeeze, as opposed to hardcore punk bands like the Pistols, Clash and Jam?*
PARKER: Yeah, there was. There were people who hated me because they were so hardcore. The Sex Pistols and them had a definite style; it was drone music—loud and screaming all the way through. And there were people who didn't like that and liked me because they thought it was more serious or something. And there were people who didn't like any of it. I didn't mind being lumped in with the punks, because they took over England in a way. Being called the godfather of punk or stuff like that was not too offensive, because I'd rather be lumped in with the new fashion than the old-fashioned.

Dark Side of the Bright Lights

I never played lead guitar with the Rumour—only on "Mercury Poisoning" onstage. But on this new album, I played a lot. I did every guitar part on "Hit The Spot," which was a great thrill for me. I couldn't have done that with the Rumour. It would have caused problems. But my rhythm guitar is all over the new album. I have a Fender Telecaster that Nick Lowe sold to me a long time ago—a 1959 Telly, a real old, yellow-colored thing. I got my Gibson 303, which isn't bad for a guitar with a warped neck. I managed to use it on this album. We said "primitive," right? I've got two Ovations, one that I used on the album. I've also got a Martin acoustic and a Guild.

Brinsley Schwartz has a couple of Hamers that were made for him. He's got a black one, an orange one. He's got a little tuning device put in the black guitar so a light comes on when you hit a string and it's in tune. Otherwise he's using very simple gear: a Mesa Boogie amp with a couple of extension speakers. I'll just go with a Gibson Lab amp and a Music Man, and that should cover me.

MUSICIAN: *At the same time, you didn't go along with the punk movement; you kept your roots in reggae and Motown.*
PARKER: I knew there was no way music was going to be on just one dimension and stay there. Music will always be many different things.
MUSICIAN: *Why do you value those older traditions?*
PARKER: Because they're classic. They're modern, and they're old. They're timeless. While "Anarchy In the U.K." has its place in time. When I hear that, I think of a particular time.
MUSICIAN: *Are there any recent records that you like a lot?*
PARKER: I just heard that single, "Why Don't You Want Me" by the Human League. I just love that catchy chorus. I like hearing Nick Lowe's records. Squeeze. Elvis Costello. He's the greatest; he's really brilliant. I like the Clash's *Sandinista!* I didn't get the album, but I hear it on the radio and the tracks are great. They're really doing something different. You see, they didn't stick with what they were supposed to be either. *Sandinista!* got heavily slagged in England, but I think the public liked it because they were doing something different and going into more avenues of music. The Talking Heads' record, *Remain In Light*, that's sensational. I played that for a long time when it came out.
MUSICIAN: *On songs like "Passion Is No Ordinary Word," you imply that so much that passes for real emotion in people's lives isn't real emotion at all and that your music is striving for some authenticity. Why is that such an important issue to you?*
PARKER: People are dull, aren't they? People aren't living to their max, or to anywhere near it. They're just drones or clones. Especially in England—they're just walking zombies. They believe what the TV tells them. They're just put in a direction and led there.
MUSICIAN: *Do you think they're stupid or just manipulated?*
PARKER: No, I'm talking bullshit really. I think everybody has great potential to understand. I think probably they should all take LSD or something. I did it at one point. It helped a lot of people. People have more potential than they're given credit for. I found that the dullest people who are stuck in their job, who believe in TV, can be woken up. I mean, I've known people who believed that peanuts are made in a factory. I'm not kidding you; they didn't know they grew. But when you talk to those people, when they hear a song and listen to it, when they're introduced to new things, they have fun and start to work on different levels.
MUSICIAN: *In your lyrics, you attack both the people who are doing the oppressing and those who are letting them get away with it.*
PARKER: Yeah. Don't you get frustrated when you see all the money being spent on the military, and the public goes, "Ooooh, boy, yeah, sure." They know what's happening. They're powerless, but they're not. You feel there could be some chance of doing something about it. At the same time I hate organizations. I hate people who say, "We got to stop this nuclear stuff," dead serious. So really I don't think we'll get anywhere. If I got my way, no one would get anywhere. There'd just be chaos. But it would be fun, more exciting.
MUSICIAN: *So you don't think you'll ever write explicitly political songs?*
PARKER: No, I don't think so. It might be fun, though, maybe I would. If Dylan got into Jesus, anything's possible. After writing all that incredible music, he went into that direct preaching. Religion was always there in his songs, but for someone you think is the most far-out person in the world to say, "I'm a born-again Christian,"...I mean, if he can do that, anything's possible for me. I could be leading an anti-nuclear demonstration tomorrow. Or a pro-nuclear one. I'm full of contradictions. Whatever I say now, it's bullshit, because tomorrow I'll say something different. M

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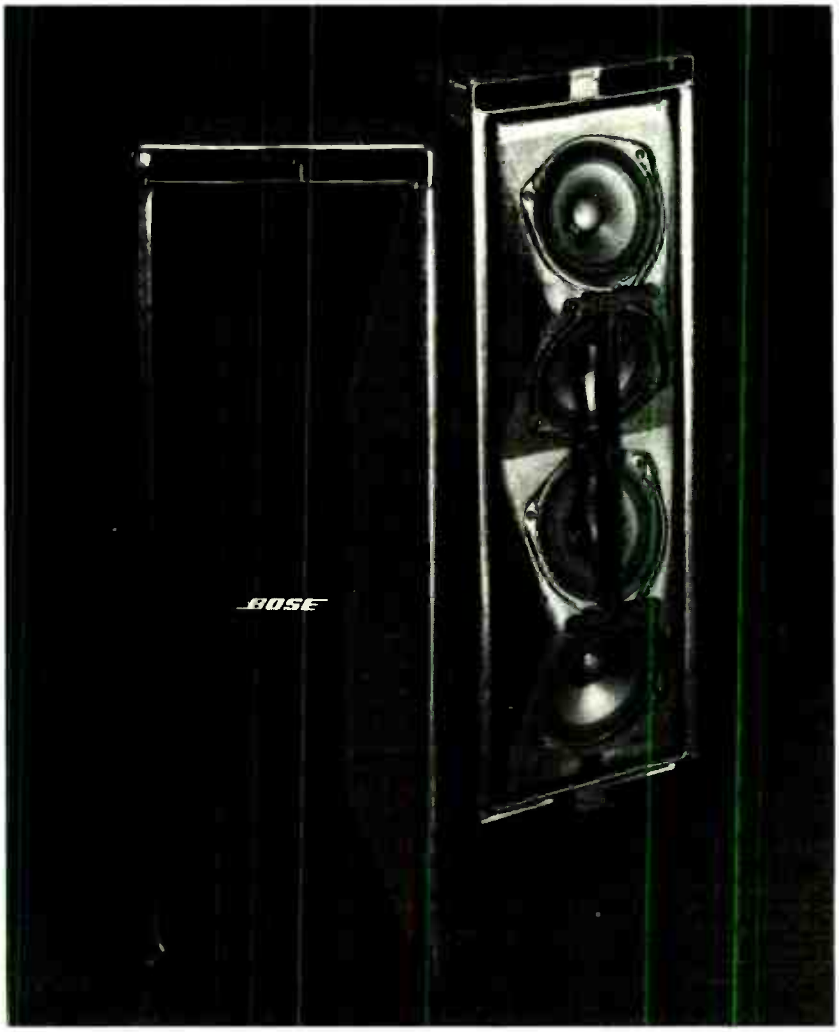

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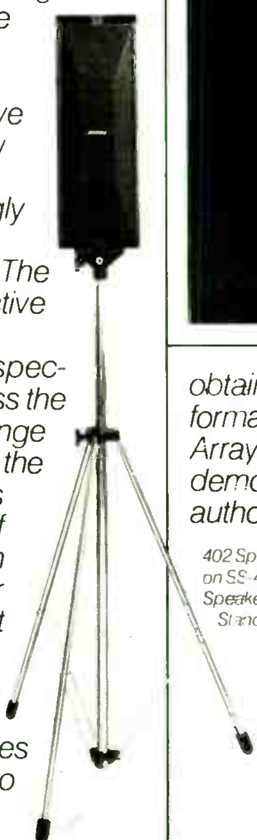

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L.A. NEW WAVE GROWS UP

BY KRISTINE McKENNA

The mid-70s Los Angeles music scene was a parched desert; nothing was happening there—or anywhere else for that matter. Then in 1977 the Sex Pistols sounded the battle cry, and amateur musicians all over the world heeded the call to arms. Dozens of bands sprang up in L.A. that year, most of them gathering at the Masque, a flea-bitten punk clubhouse located in a dank basement off Hollywood Boulevard. Then for an all too brief spell, the L.A. music scene was intensely creative and wild. Wild not because of slam dancing (hadn't been invented yet), but because it was still a jolt to see a room full of punked-up people. And in spite of all the "no future" sloganeering, the future was wide open for this music. At that spot in time, to be part of the West Coast's musical underground was akin to being in on an exciting secret.

It's 1982, and the deal's pretty much gone down on L.A.'s first punk wave. Of the many worthy bands born at the Masque, two, the Go-Go's and X, have ascended to national prominence.

X came to be thusly: in October of 1977 John Doe and Billy Zoom (their *noms de punque*) answered each other's ads in a Los Angeles paper and formed a band. Both were veterans of countless bar bands, so they started out playing old rock standards. One day Doe brought his girlfriend Exene, whom he'd met at a poetry workshop, to rehearsal. Exene converted one of her poems into a song called, "I'm Coming Over," learned how to sing it, and thus took root what would eventually blossom into X's style. The band solidified three months later when original drummer Mick Basher was replaced by Don Bonebrake.

X then proceeded to build a strong following on the L.A. punk scene by tirelessly slogging the local club circuit. They worked hard to make a

PHOTOS BY HOWARD ROSENBERG

name for themselves but the reason they rose to the top of the L.A. heap comes down to the fact that they were simply the best thing in town. They blazed with the energetic rage of punk, lighting up its dark nihilistic sky with the Gregorian acid harmonies of *Surrealistic Pillow* Jefferson Airplane and radiant pop-derived melodies stripped to stark, jarring essentials. Rockabilly space angel Billy Zoom traded in the usual jackhammer bar chords of the Gen X/Sham 69 mob for the more

Our music is basically details: an old church, a burned out hotel, an old, grizzled couple going into a liquor store, kids fighting on the sidewalk.

dramatic expression of Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" screech and inside-out Sun Session licks, often sounding like two guitarists at once. The juxtaposition of John and Exene's cutting, discordant harmonies (sung against the beat), Zoom's dexterous but aggressive riffing and the naked romanticism of their lyrics in songs like the ace 1980 single "White Girl" left the competition eating dust. And best of all, the beautiful Exene, who was so courageously genuine onstage she was an experience rather than a performer. The songs she and John sang were so personal and revealing you couldn't help but love them for trusting you with the most precious parts of their lives. Howling out songs of an angry/sorry sinner on a drunken, desperate hunt for some kind of glimpse of heaven, X was something to behold.

L.A. knew that X was great and couldn't understand it when the rest of the world failed to see it too. X was handed rejection for a long time. In November of 1978 they loaded up a car and drove to New York to introduce their music to the rest of the country. "We talked to Robert Christgau and he said we were boring, humorless and not worth looking at," Exene wrote in a letter. "New York is cold and snowing. Have not jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge. Write something positive about us, please, even though we are in hell."

Three and a half years down the road and the game has changed considerably for X. Ray Manzarek, keyboardist with the Doors, saw them, loved them, and signed on as their producer. Unable to land a deal with a major label, they signed with L.A. punk label Slash, and their debut LP, *Los Angeles*, a screaming saga of life among L.A.'s dispossessed, sold eighty thousand copies—an astonishing number for a record on a small independent label. Their second album, *Wild Gift*, which took a more melancholy look at the themes introduced on *Los Angeles*, garnered second place in the *Village Voice*'s 1981 Critics Poll. Critics raved over the album, and Elektra Records lured the group away from Slash and signed them to an eight-album deal. Their shows, anywhere in America, always sell out. Robert Christgau likes them now, too. Before the screams of cop-out start flying, it should be pointed out that X never presented themselves as a political band. They got that labeling because of when and how they came into being. Now that the dust of punk has settled and X's lineage has revealed itself more clearly, they've come to seem a child of Patsy Cline rather than of the Sex Pistols. "We're proud of being American, sounding American, and being influenced by American artists," says Exene, and their reverence for American roots music (soul, blues, country) shows. X salvages battered scraps of American culture and makes them shine again. Their songs, most of which are tethered to a narrative story line, are jagged pastiches incorporating cars, flat and empty expanses of land, country music and honky-tonks, sex, the Chicano culture of the Southwest, religious imagery, rock 'n' roll, cheap souvenirs—Americana deluxe.

In fact, their new album, *Under The Big Black Sun*, reminds me of no one so much as Merle Haggard. Focusing on the nomadic life of a touring band, *Black Sun*'s haunting aural snapshots of rambling around the U.S.A. make the musician's there-and-gone existence seem like the modern equivalent of riding the rails. The album also deals extensively with death, busted hearts and faith at the crossroads and is, in many ways, the bluest music they've made.

I saw X perform their new album to an adoring mob packing into Los Angeles' Roxy in February. They like to go public with new material prior to recording it because they feel the songs evolve naturally when performed before an audience. The band was obviously feeling good the night I saw them, relaxed and rightfully proud of their new tunes. Exene was in a particularly good mood—the girl has quite a droll sense of humor, and her asides that evening were hilarious. She's been taking voice lessons for the past year and a half and her vocals have taken on a new muscular strength without losing an ounce of subtle shading.

I talked with the band one evening at Billy Zoom's house in the heart of Hollywood, where he lives with Mrs. Zoom. Staunch traditionalists, X's personnel are all married (John and Exene to each other). The four distinct personalities that comprise X challenge and complement each other, and while they obviously respect one another, a lot of good-natured, intelligent arguing goes on when they get together. In the end, they're bound together by the fact that they're all fatalistic romantics who share a love of America's idealized past, and an edgy existential awareness of the present. And what of the future? X is still punk enough and smart enough to know that's just a trick of the mind.

MUSICIAN: *In one of X's earliest songs, "We're Desperate," you defined yourselves as social outcasts living in poverty and that's a theme that has run through all your music thus far. X has been fairly successful and I assume your lifestyle has changed. Does it concern you that a primary creative resource may have been erased?*

EXENE: A lot of people believe that hard times drive one to be creative, and it is true—but only to a point. I've had friends who were very creative and had a good attitude, looking forward to someday doing better things while they worked crummy jobs. But after a while they began to see themselves as just being kind of beaten down. If you struggle for too long it destroys your hope because anyone who is creative wants some recognition for what they do.

BONEBRAKE: At this point there's a lot of pressure for us to come up with hit stuff so that's almost as good as being poor. In fact it's better, 'cause you can eat every day and wake up and work on a project when you have energy instead of coming home from an awful job and trying to work up some inspiration.

EXENE: There's a replaceable set of inspirations. What good is it if you're always influenced by the same things?

MUSICIAN: *What's inspiring you these days?*

EXENE: Credibility and acceptance. It makes you want to work when people like your stuff and you feel that you're appreciated.

DOE: I think lyrics are more born out of hard times than music is—unless it's the blues. And singing comes from your personality. If you're the type of person who wants to sing pretty ballads then that's part of your character, it's not a result of your surroundings.

MUSICIAN: *How do you see your music evolving? How are the new songs different from the early ones?*

DOE: I think we understand more about making music. Listening to our early songs, some of them seem too short, like they weren't given time to develop. When the song finally "got there" there'd be maybe twenty seconds until the end of the song. With *Los Angeles* all we wanted to do was capture a live feel because we knew that we were a powerful live band and that was our strong point. *Wild Gift* was a little bit broader and this one expands even further using the influences we've accumulated.

EXENE: Yeah, we're finally going to be able to bring out Billy and Don's other talents. On the new record they add some parts on sax, clarinet, marimba and maybe vibes. The reason

they haven't done that previously is that the time and budgets we had didn't allow for that kind of experimentation.

MUSICIAN: *Was it difficult for you to write the third album?*

DOE: No, it was real easy. We came up with seven songs in two months so obviously we were wasting a lot of time in the past three years since it took so long to come up with those songs!

MUSICIAN: *How collaboratively are the songs worked up in rehearsal?*

DOE: The songs don't get changed so much as they bloom.

MUSICIAN: *How do Billy and Don work up their parts?*

BONEBRAKE: When John and Exene bring in a new song they usually have the chords, which Billy will occasionally elaborate on or change. But the words and the structure are there, although we'll sometimes restructure a song. It's pretty basic really. We play the song over and over and I just play along. Sometimes I'll get a specific idea I'll work from—on "We're Desperate," for instance, I wanted a rhythm that combined the Ramones and Captain Beefheart.

MUSICIAN: *Billy, you once told me that you never know the lyrics to X's songs, which infers that you don't work up guitar parts that consciously reflect what's being expressed in the lyric.*

ZOOM: True. Of course I learn some of the lyrics eventually but when we're working the parts up, I just go on the sound.

MUSICIAN: *What have been the pivotal episodes in your lives as artists?*

ZOOM: The training I got from my father when I was little (Zoom's father was a musician who played for a period with Django Reinhardt) and all the different music my mother played in the house I grew up in. I was exposed to a lot of different stuff.

DOE: I'd say meeting Exene, reading Edgar Allen Poe, listening to the radio and discovering the wonders of alcohol.

PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

"I can sing now"; Billy Zoom and Exene have learned to refine their music without losing its intensity.

BONEBRAKE: For me it was getting into the music I'm playing now. Beginning in 1974 I began gravitating towards simpler music. Prior to that I'd been playing in a lot of symphony orchestras and was considered a classical musician. I played timpani very well, and I played vibes but wasn't into the repertoire.

MUSICIAN: *Did you have to learn a whole new vocabulary to play simpler music?*

BONEBRAKE: I could apply most of what I knew but there were certain tricks—primarily learning to play less. But then, playing percussion in an orchestra you sort of do that too because basically you're just supporting a lot of the harmonies. Other important influences were the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, Joe Ramirez from the Eyes, and acid.

MUSICIAN: *In discussing writers you admire you usually mention Tennessee Williams, Flannery O'Connor and Nathanael West. What do you see as the common thread running through their work and why does it appeal to you?*

DOE: Two things you can't argue with are sweat and dirt, and those writers have a lot of sweat and dirt in their work. I think our music has those elements too.

MUSICIAN: *Can you still have those qualities if you're rich?*

DOE: Sure. A perfect example is the Doors. By the time they did their last two albums, *Morrison Hotel* and *L.A. Woman*, they'd reached a pinnacle of stardom but those two albums were probably the best street level records they made. The music is not tripping or dream-like, which are the qualities we expect in music made by people living in the removed world of the wealthy.

MUSICIAN: *X has a strong association with the Doors. Ray Manzarek is your producer, you've covered one of their songs. Do you think X has profited from the Doors revival?*

EXENE: I think X's emergence and the Doors revival were sort of a symbiotic thing.

MUSICIAN: *In talking about musicians who've influenced you, you mention a lot of blues artists. Is X more blues than a punk band?*

EXENE: We were once described as "country western like you've never heard it before" and I liked that.

DOE: James Brown recently said that new music had helped his career a lot because the people in new bands were more aware of the history of music than the bands of the 70s were. It's misleading to say we're a blues band but, yeah, I guess I do see us as being more closely aligned to blues. The stereotype of a punk band is a political English band, which we're not. On the other hand, there's also the aspect of punk that it allows for a very personal statement. So it's yes and no on the punk thing.

MUSICIAN: *How do you feel about Los Angeles' hard core punk scene?*

DOE: (laughing) Exene had this great idea that the Circle Jerks should do a version of "Let's Get Physical" with a sleeve photo of a bunch of slam dancers. Seriously though, this may be a gross generalization but it seems like there are fewer and fewer people who are willing to put up with the crap that comes with being a misfit. At least the hard-core audience is willing to be different and I respect them for that.

ZOOM: I don't like that scene because, for one thing, the music's bad.

EXENE: I think what's gonna happen is after all the clubs get shut down and things get like they were in '77, those kids will realize that the music scene wasn't always here and that X wasn't always at the top of some imaginary list. And that's already beginning to happen. In San Diego there are no punk bands playing and no one will go down there anymore. The Dead Kennedys won't even play there because they beat up Jello Biafra's girlfriend!

DOE: I'm glad we started when we did because it's much harder for a new band now. The hard-core bands have a much worse reputation than the Masque bands ever had—and they somewhat deserve it. (The Masque was L.A.'s seminal punk club.)

EXENE: The Masque was a bunch of misfits who got together because they all had artistic inclinations outside of what was acceptable. Even though a lot of us didn't have much in common, we were together because there was nowhere else for us to go. I understood the scene at the Masque real well, but I don't understand what's going on now.

MUSICIAN: *What's the difference between an artist and an entertainer?*

ZOOM: Artists don't play Las Vegas.

EXENE: I don't know if I agree with that. Sometimes when you're an artist and you're past your commercial peak, you're forced to do things you swore you'd never do. You remain an artist but you become real pathetic.

DOE: Entertainers are more preoccupied with surface than artists are, but a good artist has an element of entertainment. If they don't they rarely get over to many people. Everyone likes to be entertained—even artists.

MUSICIAN: *What would you like to change about your lives at this point?*
DOE: You make changes in your life when things are going badly. If you view it in relation to life and the world, things are going really well for us at this point.
EXENE: Sometimes when you're in, say, Milwaukee on tour it seems like it would be fun to rent a hotel room and spend a couple of weeks there.
MUSICIAN: *How has success changed your outlook on life, being able to do what you want?*
EXENE: I think it's an aberration for people to change when they get money. It reflects on what their basic character was—or wasn't—to begin with if they change when they achieve success.
DOE: Actually I think the higher you go on the ladder of success, the more you realize what's screwed up in the world because you're able to see more of the world. More doors are open to you.
MUSICIAN: *Bob Biggs, head of Slash Records (the independent label that originally signed X) has made a few comments to the press inferring that X in some ways betrayed Slash by signing with Elektra. How do you feel about that?*
EXENE: I've got three other friends that I didn't want to betray. Yes, we started out with Slash and we helped them and they helped us and it worked real good. But we really felt there was no further we could go with Slash. I hope Slash is real successful, but I didn't want to find myself in some hotel room fifteen years from now knowing that Bob Biggs was a millionaire and that I had sacrificed my career in the name of some kind of loyalty. We *were* very loyal to Slash while we were on the label, so that's not the point. We did everything we could. The goals Bob had in mind were goals we wanted to achieve with Slash, and it made us really sad when we finally realized it was impossible. But it just takes a lot more than an independent label is capable of to get people interested in a band like X. People can hear a Go-Go's song on the radio and go into a record store and there's the big display and they just pick up an album and buy it. With us it's not gonna be that easy because radio is really resisting playing our music. We needed someone to help make people aware that we exist.
MUSICIAN: *Having signed with a major label, you've entered a different realm of the marketplace. Have you been pressured to compromise yourselves or is that simply an untrue cliché?*
EXENE: It's not an untrue cliché. It's up to the individuals involved, and we assume a lot of responsibility. Sometimes I wish we could let somebody manage what we do and come up with ideas but unfortunately nobody seems to come up with any ideas except us. Our manager tries to weed things out for us but we still make the decisions.
MUSICIAN: *What of your work are you most proud of?*
EXENE: That's kind of a two-part question. An album or song, or a period that was particularly hard and we stuck together and kept working?
DOE: The most difficult periods we went through were right before signing with Slash and Elektra. At those points we felt we weren't reaching the audience we deserved. We were the quote "darlings" of the press and we were playing three-hundred-seat beer bars. We began to think, screw this, this is ridiculous. But we stuck it out. Then there are certain songs I'm particularly proud of—"Sugarlight" for instance, just because I like the way it sounds.

ZOOM: I think "Johnny Hit 'n' Run Pauline" is probably one of our best songs. We don't have many songs with actual guitar solos in them. That doesn't bother me—overplaying is the downfall of most guitarists and I have no problem restraining myself. But the songs that do have solos tend to be my favorites.
EXENE: I'm proud of the songs that have affected people the most, like "Los Angeles." That's one of our most popular songs in any city, which proves how important being specific in writing is. We didn't say, "I lived in a town and I had to leave." We were totally specific in telling who had to leave Los Angeles and why. So even though people hearing the song might have different problems or reasons for leaving a city, the song is doubly real to them because the details make it real. It sounds crazy and wrong but it's true that the bottom line in good writing is the more specific you are, the more general appeal it will have. I'm also real proud of "Some Other Time" because that song was a real breakthrough for me as far as singing.

MUSICIAN: *Do you really think your vocals have changed a lot from the early days?*
EXENE: Yeah, I can sing now. I mean, I've always liked the way I sing even though people tell me, "Oh, you sing really weird, your harmonies are flat and discordant." I still sing the same but I like the way I've been able to refine it. About singing, when most bands first start out they get drunk and scream and yell and run around. That's okay, but it's better to be in control of it and be able to sing while you're doing it.
DOE: You have to start with the screaming and running around, though.
MUSICIAN: *Do you think you sing better drunk?*
EXENE: Drinking is the same whether you're singing or talking to somebody in a bar. You sit there thinking this is the most wonderful person you've ever met, then the next time you see them you realize that they weren't great at all. And it's the same with singing. Sometimes it will result in an amazing performance but other times it just screws it up. You can't quite hit it so you get mad and when you're drunk and something goes wrong you tend to overreact. So you spend the rest of the night fuming onstage.

MUSICIAN: *Why do you think some people are driven to separate themselves from the masses and rebel?*
EXENE: Because they're smarter and they're exhibitionists. There are a lot of people who really despise and hate people who look unusual—maybe because they misunderstand the motives behind rebellious behavior. I wish I understood that kind of hatred better, because after ten years of being ridiculed and made fun of just about everywhere I go I still can't deal with it very well. It still makes me real uncomfortable when I walk down the street and people scream at me.
MUSICIAN: *That still happens? I would imagine that now you'd be recognized as a celebrity.*
EXENE: Occasionally, but people don't really make that connection. There could be someone standing in the checkout line looking at *Us* magazine and see X in there, then turn around and see me and say, "Jesus Christ, look at that girl's hair," making me real embarrassed.
MUSICIAN: *What do you see as the X image and how accurate is it?*
EXENE: That's such a weird thing to think about. I've always thought that our image, if we had one, was a lack of image. For instance, I've never seen myself as the focal point of the band simply because I'm a female vocalist. And we don't have a concept like Adam & the Ants or the B-52s. And I think the fact that we've avoided those types of things has hurt us from time to time. What's X? They're this band. What do they do? They play music. Oh.
DOE: Our music is basically driving down a highway and looking out the window and seeing an old church, a burned out hotel, an old grizzled couple going into a liquor store, a couple of kids play fighting on the sidewalk.

MUSICIAN: *Your music is very richly descriptive. Why do you think you have such a good eye for detail?*
EXENE: We've worked at it. Observation

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of detail is a real good talent for everyone to develop. It makes everything more interesting and for me, it's one of the little joys of life. Like you're on a bus and you'll see a thing happen that will only last two seconds. Then a passenger gets off and you leave that scene and look around and everyone's just sitting there. Nobody else saw it but you. It's almost like a three-dimensional thing you found, and you'll always have it.

MUSICIAN: *The lyrics on the new album seem even darker than those on the two preceding records. Why is that?*

EXENE: There are a few songs on the new album about my sister (Exene's sister, New York artist Muriel Cervenka, was killed in an automobile accident in 1980). And I guess that's the difference between an artist and an entertainer. If we were entertainers we'd keep our personal lives out of our professional career, but since we are artists, it's part of what we do. Everyone has experienced personal tragedy, and personally I find it really strange that that aspect of life is not a part of popular music.

Lowe, *from pg. 46*

afraid you're going to die any second now. Shame really...." I was going, "Yes, well, how long is this going to go on for?" And the voice said, "Oh, it's okay, in a minute your heart will give out and it'll be all over (laughs)...but while we're waiting, it's funny, isn't it? I really thought you'd do better than this, and your mom and dad really wanted you to...." "But," says I, "the Marquee isn't a bad way to go; at least I'm on the old planks." It was this *incredible*, calm conversation. Meanwhile, there were people screaming and fainting and leaping up and down. The thing is they couldn't turn the power off because those huge stacks of Marshalls were blocking the way to the power point. I was lying with the mike across my chest and the bass in my hand, jerking like a puppet, and no one would grab them or touch me because of the current. So Bob Andrews, who later played keyboards with Graham Parker, ran up and tried to kick the thing out of my hand, to break the circuit. But in so doing, he kicked me really hard in the ribs...*which the doctors later told me got my heart going again*! He broke the circuit, too, and I was lying there, having faced death, I must have looked dead, because Bob suddenly started crying and weeping and saying, "He's dead, oh God, he's dead! Somebody do something!" It must have been so dramatic for the punters in the audience. Then old Brins comes and leans over, saying, "Uh, you all right, Basher?" And I went, "Yeah, Brins, I think I'm here." So they carried me out in a stretcher and took me down the road to Middlesex Hospital. I had these evil burns on my hands, but I was so grooving on being alive that I refused a sedative. Instead I snuck out and walked back up to the Marquee, where Yes were going down real bad. My band was all over at the pub across the road, *hideously* drunk. I walked in and they freaked, 'cause they really thought I'd died. When they got over that, someone says, "Gee, do you reckon we could do the second set?" and I said, "Yeah, let's go!" So we did, and we went down an absolute storm, because it was like "HERE HE IS, BACK FROM THE DEAD, NICK LOWE!!" So at the end of the night the promoter comes in and says, "Right, here's your fee," and gives us nine and a half pounds, which was only half of what we were owed. He said that was all we'd get *because we'd only played one set* (laughs). There's a slight postscript to this story. Years later we played the Marquee again, and I ran into the guy who used to manage the club, an outrageous but charming queen called John, and told him the whole story just for laughs.

MUSICIAN: *What did he say?*

LOWE: Nothing. Couldn't believe it. Just turned pale as a ghost, reached into his pocket, and handed me another nine and a half quid. (laughs)...God, what a stultifyingly boring story. You're not going to print all that, are you?

MUSICIAN: *Oh, of course not. One last question: what do you want to be when you grow up?*

LOWE: I'd like to be a jet fighter pilot. Fly Phantoms real fast. Low level. You don't have to steer 'em, you know. They've got computers, so if you come to a hill it goes up just like that. Marvelous. You're just sitting there. That's what I'd like to do most of all. Fly. (sings) "I'll fly away ..."

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BY PHILIPPA RENDLE & RAFI ZABOR

ROOTS, RESEARCH, & THE CARNIVAL CHEF

LESTER BOWIE

The trumpet trapeze artist who works without a net, Ming-the-Merciless in a lab jacket, Lester Bowie tells the story of his lurid musical past, from carnival tents to the Art Ensemble of Chicago to his new Root to the Source.

I might go back to Jamaica in another three or four years. I went down there after I made this record *Fast Last* in '76 or '77. That's what I used to do, make a record and then finance an expedition to somewhere. When I got to Jamaica I had a new suit, clean trousers, I had the whole look and everything, a room at the Sheraton. I had just enough money to cover the airport and get a cab to the hotel. I got to my room and bought all the newspapers and laid them out to see what the scene was. People had given me a couple of phone numbers, but my assets were just five dollars after I'd paid for the room for a few days. I went downstairs and there was a reggae band playing in the bar. I asked if I could sit in. After about three notes this guy said, "Hey *brother*!" The next day I had a crib up in the hills, in the mountains, stayed there about a year after that. I had all the musicians bring me out some trumpets and I had a workshop with all the local kids in the hills, this real small community. And they took care of me. If my food was running low, they would see to that: their parents would send crates of mangoes and pies up to me. I had a house and no money, and I had these kids all the time. These cats were *bad*, chicks too. They would play some fantastic stuff and they would learn so *quick*. I was a music man, and I would always be playing. If I wasn't playing all the time people would say, "*Hey, I thought you played trumpet!*" I would get up in the morning about seven, go outside and practice, and people would come out of their houses all over the hills, big valleys, you know, just dotted all along with houses and these people would come out and listen. If they didn't hear me by noon, someone would come up and ask what had happened. The union made me an honorary member. I would come into town about once a week, get high and sit in on all the bands. The only real gig I did was my own TV show. I had a TV show, it was an hour show, an hour special, a Jamaica TV special. It was nice.

If you play music, and I play trumpet, you're gonna attract some attention. I never worry about it because I can always deal somehow. Either that or you just die. I almost thought I was finished in Nigeria though. Nigeria almost got to me! I always wanted to go to Africa, and I got tired of just talking about it. I'd just done a European tour and when we were finished I said, "Well, I'll see you all later." I had more money this time. I had $100 when I got there, then I had to spend $50 a night, $10 to eat. I didn't have enough money for the next night and I didn't know anybody in Nigeria. And Nigeria was really out. I thought, "This is it, man. You've done it! Finally you've bitten off more than you can chew! This is it!" It was rainy season, crazy mud, but I made it. When in doubt I just get my horn out, see,

and start hittin' it. I had a couple of phone numbers. And I ended up with Fela. I just got in a cab and said, "Take me to Fela's." Once Fela heard me, that was it, 'cause that's the one thing I've always done, is just play.

Necessary Interruption

Although maybe after that story he needs no introduction. Revolved in the mind, Lester Bowie has the satisfying roundness of a fully-realized fictional character hewing happily to his archetype, an actor who has found his human role and plays it to the hilt. Here is this guy in the doctor suit and Ming-the-Merciless two-pointed beard with this haunting tone, half-valve whinnies and apparently endless articulations of the spirit of the blues, a perfect self-invention whose proper life assembles itself around him in hills and valleys dotted with houses and music, crates of mangoes, trumpets, pies. Seems like a real happy fella.

Most of us know him best as the trumpeter in the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Turn on the projector, please. We see him onstage between Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman, lurching his way through a sudden sputtering funky interjection, swigging heavily from his bottle of Perrier, then swaying, head cocked back, to sounds unheard. He is the strongest melodist in the band, and of the three horns the only one who has gigged in every idiom American music has to offer. Good Lord, this band plays some weird stuff. Here's a second clip of him, this time he's wearing his immaculate, white, practically luminous chef's suit. Yes, he loves to crack the audience up. Look at the size of that hat. The soundtrack's bad, but you can hear him leading the band out of the gossamer and into the hot. Boy they're great. You can turn it off now.

Let's take his style seriously for a moment. It is, I'd say, the most original and fully realized approach to the trumpet anyone has come up with in twenty years, and it is there, surprisingly full-blown, on his earliest recordings (*Sound* and *Old Quartet*, '66 and '67 respectively, both released under Roscoe Mitchell's name), when he was still in his mid-twenties. You can anatomize it if you like—the straight playing from Clifford, Kenny and Miles; tonal effects an inspired leap from the premises of Bubber Miley, Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart and Lee Morgan—but that only covers some of the ground and misses at least two main points: that Bowie's is a total, seamless approach to the resources of the instrument, and that he has invented things none of his ancestors remotely imagined. His work is a living lexicon of everything black musicians have done to make the trumpet their own in America, all the proud and sardonic defections from tonal orthodoxy—school's out—and European dominance that represent a triumph history has tried to butcher in the flesh but has been unable to kill in the spirit. He employs all the resources of the exile—superior cunning, a better sense of humor—to steal the world back from its dull, stolid, putative owners and make his stand, a free man's song. Sideways like Miles he skips the direct line from Armstrong to link up, probably, with mad Buddy Bolden, parades certainly, and the church, the prison, the backporch and the angry oven heat of the fields, so that while he is an extravagantly comic artist, his music carries its full cargo of history and humanity, a reconciliation of private anarchy and collective order. If the bones of his style were there from its recorded beginnings, what has grown and deepened over the years is its body of implication and, as anyone who has listened to him closely these days can tell you, its beauty. Like Miles, he can go dowsing with one slender note and reliably find the heart.

I try to play everything I've heard or felt. I didn't spend all that time in the carnival or playing the blues to push it to one side and say, "okay, I'm avant-garde now."

With resources like these, naturally he works a lot. In addition to gigs with the Art Ensemble, which come a lot more frequently than they used to, he's led a fine series of quintets, worked with Jack DeJohnette in the New Directions band, organized the memorable Sho Nuff Orchestra (58 pieces strong), recorded with Fela Anikulapo Kuti in Africa, jammed with the Bear at the Tin Palace and Roy Eldridge at Jimmy Ryan's, made records for Muse, Horo, Black Saint and ECM, organized lately a superb band called From the Root to the Source and most recently an all-trumpet extravaganza called the New York Hot Trumpet Repertory Company...he keeps busy. The Repertory Company, at the moment six trumpets strong and including among others Olu Dara and the remarkable Wynton Marsalis, is sort of a brass counterpart of the World Saxophone Quartet ("Yeah, and we'll whup their asses, too," said Bowie when I suggested an encounter); Root to the Source is the incarnation of a more enduring dream: to put all Bowie's own music together in one band and send the wheel of it rolling through the world.

Bowie has a fierce and vociferous pride in his professionalism and the places it's taken him: the carnival tents, blues shacks, Jackie Wilson shows, weird Chicago stages—all the music on which he has never felt too pure to muddy his hands. He's managed to carry most of his experience into Root to the Source, and what is most important is that blues, gospel music and jazz are each presented with complete authenticity and commitment, not as superficial stylistic coups. Bowie's current quintet is augmented by the voices of Fontella and Martha Bass (his ex-wife and mother-in-law respectively) and the virtuoso David Peaston. Fontella Bass in particular, although nowadays she only sings in church outside of Root, has never sung better. Neither has Bowie sounded more free; he has assembled the spokes of his musical world around him and is audibly at home.

Here, anyway, is this interview. Perhaps you already know what a great talker Bowie is, and there's a few thousand words of that. He also, I think, emerges as an enormously encouraging figure—I'd use the word Inspiring, but it has inappropriately solemn connotations—for his totally positive attitude, his habit of working tricky heights without benefit of a net, and his outright refusal to take the world's ubiquitous No for an answer. Craziness helps too: here he comes out of the night on his Harley in a lab jacket and Darth Vader helmet—Zorro! If it's an act, it's a good one. It probably takes a lot of work to be Bowie—the last time I saw him he sat tired backstage between Art Ensemble sets at the Bottom Line: "Sometimes it's like diggin' ditches, you know?"—and it probably would be naive to imagine that he's sidestepped the daily drudgery of being human, but in the essentials he looks suspiciously like that rarity of rarities, a free man. If you were shopping around for a handy incarnation of the spirit of jazz these days, you could do a lot worse than Lester Bowie.

He's Coming Here from St. Louis

When I first started getting interviewed the guy asked me how long I'd been playing, and I had to think, I didn't really know. I had to go and ask my old man. He had been putting a mouthpiece or something in my face since I was about a baby. We decided that I really started when I was about five. I don't have any recollection of it, because I've just been playing all the time. My father, he had the uniform and the cap, did parades and stuff like that. Both of his brothers were musicians, his father was a musician, and that's going back a way to slavery, because my old man is 76. So it goes on back, I don't know exactly how far, a whole line of musicians. I've got a picture upstairs of the band my father was in before he was even big enough. The original Bartonville Coronet Band. I've got about three uncles in that.

My father taught in school, but I was so bad he didn't want

Lester's strong sense of melody and his comic warmth are an integral part of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. DAVID GAHR

me around. Not where he had to work. He didn't let me go to the same school! I mostly played trumpet and got into mischief. We used to do all kinds of things, start up bulldozers and drive them around. By the time I was fifteen I was in the musician's union. I'd worked clubs by then. I was always in two or three bands, all the school bands, the All-City Band, the All-City Orchestra, the All-City Swing Band, All-City Marching Band, and the—I would go and play with the old cats, the veterans bands. There were community centers that had bands and I did little church recitals too.

But when I got into high school I started hearing about Bird. John Hicks was there and Phillip Wilson and Oliver Lake. We had some really hip musicians. Hicks was cool even then, he had a hip little trio, he had a suit and tie, he had that *look*. Phillip was cool too. Phillip was like an organ trio-type dude. We had fun, but I didn't think it was the thing I was going to do for a living. I thought it would be crazy to try and attempt something like that. I didn't decide that I wanted to play trumpet until I was twenty or twenty-one. I looked up and I was twenty years old and never done nothing but play trumpet! I was in the service at the time. I had gone through a lot of experiences in the service. I was in the Strategic Air Command police, I was playing with the band, I was playing with a blues band every night in town as a civilian, I did a lot of shows and stuff on the base. Anyway, I ended up, I was in jail, in solitary confinement for something I had done, bein' high on duty or something, 'cause I went through *every* kind of part, from the police to prison. I had a ball in the service—I would recommend the service to any young man—but it ended up, "Now we're sitting in solitary." I had two weeks of it and I said, "This ain't it! Whatever I've been doing in the past, if it led to this, it's not happening!"

I'd been listening to Kenny Dorham. He sounded so hip that I said, "I would really like to be like Kenny Dorham, just a really hip trumpet player." Because he was really hip, not just a regular trumpet player but a hip trumpet player's trumpet player, and I thought I'd just as well do that as opposed to what I *was* doing, which had me sitting in solitary. I had been in every band they had since I was that big, but it never had been like, "Seriously, what are you going to do with yourself?" Now I was going to be a professional. And when I stepped through that door...I've been flying ever since! It's been unbelievable when I think on that time, it's been unbelievable! You know it beats working, beats the crap out of working!

Strong Bodies Twelve Ways

I knew I didn't play well enough to be a professional. I needed to have a couple of years of intensified practice, so I went to school and did nothing but practice twelve or fourteen hours a day, take pills and practice. I went to Lincoln University, a regular black college and then I went to North Texas State, a white college, the first school where you could get a degree in jazz, so I figured they were slick as scientists. I figured I'd see what they were talking about, and when I was down there I got to hang out and play in bands like James Clay, Fathead Newman, all the hip bands in Dallas.

We were talking about influences. The way I play trumpet has been influenced greatly by Art Tatum, the way he developed melody and played songs. Influenced a lot by Coltrane and Sonny Rollins, by a lot of people that don't play trumpet. Take the embouchure I use. It's flexible, whereas with standard trumpet playing you're supposed to get a set embouchure and stay with it throughout. Well, years ago, when I was going to school with Julius Hemphill, I noticed the flexibility of his embouchure—it almost looked like he was eating the saxophone mouthpiece sometimes, different things he would do to get different inflections. I started to adapt that to the trumpet, to put different emphasis on different parts of the horn, and this has been instrumental in the development of my style.

Just about everyone I've ever heard has influenced me. You have the trumpet players you were inspired by, that you read

about—Louis Armstrong and Miles and Diz obviously—but there's another whole set of trumpet players no one's ever heard of who helped me. I think everyone has these two categories of influence, but it's never mentioned.

There was a guy in St. Louis when I was about fifteen, his name was Bobby Danzie and he was like jazz, very cool. Came up with Miles, you know, played his ass off and kind of took me under his wing. And I didn't really know anything at all, just a little fifteen-year-old kid. I used to go over to his place and he'd show me how to play songs, and some of the things he told me stuck with me all the way. Like he told me, "Lester, whatever you end up doing, *whatever* kind of music you play, you've got to be soulful." And then he'd show me. He'd show me how to get that soulful sound with a little bit more air in it, just adds a kind of really hip soulful sound with a lot of air. Cats like Miles, Gene Ammons and people, the guys with big, soulful sounds and the way they phrase, using the tongue for attack, he got me together with that, even before I knew what it *meant*.

There were guys like Johnny Coles who helped me a lot when I was in those R&B bands. He would show me how to play my part, interpret it, how to phrase. Marcus Belgrave was another cat. Marcus was bad! He helped me a lot, still does, anytime I see him. Of course I've been influenced by Miles and all of that, but Miles didn't say how to roll your lip around a little bit or whatever. I just met Diz a couple of times. He still doesn't speak to me, just sneers when he sees me, you know. Freddie Hubbard, Kenny Dorham. Blue Mitchell was another cat.

I'll tell you something about Blue Mitchell. I was just starting off in the service and I said, "I'm not going to listen to *nobody*. I'm going to lock myself up here and practice and practice and I'm going to get me some new licks that ain't nobody playing. *Nobody*'s gonna influence me. I'm gonna develop my own thing!" I started playing. Then one of my buddies came and said, "Hey man, have you ever heard of this guy named Blue Mitchell? Well, listen to this!" On the record was everything I thought I had made up. I mean he had licks I couldn't believe, because I just knew I had made them up! And so then I learned that you can't close yourself off, and I've never been afraid to be influenced by someone. Some people are afraid to be, they think it will dominate their thing, but I think it's just the opposite.

Like Freddie Hubbard influenced me for awhile. I didn't know what I was going to play, because it seemed that Freddie was playing it all. I just took Freddie's solos and wrote 'em out in all the keys and I'd practice 'em for ten, twelve hours, to try to get some of the essence of what he does and then add it to myself. Freddie taught me how I'd have to be a good musician, and Miles taught me how original I'd have to be. I gained my manhood by checking out Miles. Because the way he plays, you'd almost have to be a trumpet player to know—most people, guys like Diz, play up and down, thirds, fifths, fourths—but Miles would be playing *sideways*. You can hear it, it's all kinds of sideways. That's why he's Miles, because he's got another thing.

Fats Navarro, Clifford Brown. I used to say that if Clifford Brown was still alive, I'd be working in the Post Office and Miles would be my supervisor!

The Circuit

East Montage: Let's see, when did I get that gig with Oliver Sain? Fontella and Oliver were part of Little Milton's band...I'd play with Albert King, a lot of touring with Little Milton, 25 one-nighters a month. Ike Turner was in town, producing records for Fonnie, then she hooked up with Chess. "Rescue Me" and it caught on from there. I was her musical director for the next few years, I was making plenty of bread. Jackie Wilson, the Apollo Theatre, that theater circuit, the Regal and the Apollo, the Royal in Baltimore, the Howard in D.C., the Uptown in Philly, I think the Riviera in Detroit. Different blues sessions. I'm on a lot of those old sessions they made at Chess, I was never listed. I had money and a big house, I was in Chicago quite a while before I ran into the A.A.C.M.

Weird Cats/Nice Guys

I always knew there was other stuff I wanted to do. When I was at the carnival, the cats thought I was crazy. I was like this young cat, up early in the morning and practicing. I worked for this carnival in a tent, and that was the hardest gig I ever had in my life, musically, physically, and I've had a lot of experience in tents. For awhile the Art Ensemble lived in tents. We got to where we could live damn near anywhere. Comfortably. That really helped the Art Ensemble, all of us were army veterans, knew how to fix our meals on the road.

Well, what happened is, when I got to Chicago I was doing all this different stuff, and I was always saying, "What else is happening?" 'Cause these guys were playing their parts and that was about it. I fit in, but it was kind of boring to fit in. A baritone player named Delbert Hill took me to a rehearsal of the Richard Abrams Experimental Band. It was shocking, because I hadn't seen that many weird cats in one room before. There were twenty cats, all the cats, Roscoe, Joseph, I met them all at the same time. I'd always run into some, there's always those isolated cats, three or four cats, but I'd never seen that many of them in the same place...and *playing*. You can go that much farther if you've got just a few people that are like-minded and go out and play. The collective is a more interesting way to live. Especially when times and conditions are adverse, you can manage to survive in a collective. Respect is a very important point in that context. You've definitely got to have respect for other people. If you've got that, you can actually do something. You look at the Art Ensemble—these guys play weird music. We've been together longer than damn near anybody in the business.

We took various trips before Europe, Europe didn't just come up out of the clear blue. We had traveled extensively in the States and Canada and parts of Mexico before '69. On our own, barnstorming, hitch-hiking, all over. I rode a bike, I rode from California to Chicago and back on that. Roscoe and Malachi followed me in the VW bus full of instruments behind this BSA. I used to really dig it when I had that. I could play, then speed off into the night. It was a nice fantasy, and I enjoy fantasy so...the shit's gonna be bad next time! I'm gonna get a bike with everything on it, everything, and I'm going to have all the latest in leather, and a helmet like Darth Vader. There's a helmet now just like Darth Vader. It's bad!

When I met the Art Ensemble, the only person besides myself whose income depended entirely upon music was Malachi, who worked the Holiday Inn. The rest of the cats, they played, worked in factories and had other jobs. I was playing for a living and immediately my whole objective was to be able to make the same kind of living off the kind of music we played with Roscoe. We had gotten as far as it was going to go in Chicago. We decided to go to Europe. I want to emphasize that any group can't just pack up and go to a foreign country and survive. For nearly four years before that we had been traveling, we had recorded, we had quite a bit of experience as a group before we went.

I had a Bentley and a house full of fabulous furniture and everything that went with that whole scene in the 60s. I figured if I sold all of that, I'd have enough to take the whole group to Europe, so we made a deal. The cats borrowed the money they needed and eventually they all paid it back. Roscoe was ready, he was tired of working. We had to talk Favors into it, he didn't want to go—but it takes all kinds of thoughts to make a well-rounded group. If no one's reluctant, if everyone's ready to go, maybe no one's thought it out thoroughly. Anyway I had some material things I could put my hands on to get money, and the only way we could do what we did was that we had bread. When we went to Paris, we had a country home surrounded by cherry trees and plums and grapes, and we had rehearsal space and rooms for all of us to live in. That was at St. Lue-la-Foret, our first house. We were expelled from France after our first year. We were asked to leave by the

police. Someone in Luxembourg was doing a radio show about us, not an interview *of* us, and it was like the Art Ensemble, the Black Revolution, the revolution and yes, by the way, they live in St. Lue-la-Foret. And one of the big cats, who was the big commissioner or the Duke that runs that section said, "What! Here? Get 'em out!" The next day the police, this Inspector Richard—trenchcoat, straight-ahead biz—went in and saw this cat in a uniform. It was weird, but it fit right in because we were leaving anyway.

We lived in a tent, but we lived hip. Hip sleeping bags, we had all the right stuff. We had a whole caravan of trucks, we had formations we got into with them. We were even *selling* trucks for awhile. We went all over Europe like that, from way down in the south of France up to Scandinavia. I don't want people to think we've ever lived bad. We carried our own environment, we were eating fried chicken and barbecue. People couldn't believe the food, they would come and eat with us and hang out. You may not have money all the time, but that doesn't always make, you know....

It was shocking because I had never seen that many weird cats in one room before... and *playing*. There were twenty cats, all the cats, Roscoe, Joseph, I met them all at the same time.

ROBERTO MASOTTI

New & Old Gospel

We don't feel that we have to limit our sources of reference. That's a drag. The things I do I feel naturally. I don't put a big thing on playing jazz, or playing blues, I just play music. I like it all. I feel free to refer to anything that runs through my mind, without all those preconceptions. I don't think I should be put in a role that I couldn't like gospel music. In this band I've got now, the Root to the Source, how do these gospel singers sound with Phillip Wilson on drums and all these different people? Well it's killing!

There's Donald Smith, Hamiet Bluiett, and Fred Williams, and the gospel singers, Martha and Fontella Bass and David Peaston. You think of Great Black Music as a tree, and you get all of these roots—gospel, blues, jazz, rock—and they all merge into this single trunk, and then its branches and flowers would be reaching to the source of what's happening. It's another form, another feeling, when you experience all these emotions in the space of an hour. It's devastating almost, it's unbelievable, when you think back on what you've felt. I mean I've seen some people completely wiped out, in tears, that couldn't even speak English, so I *know* it works. We've been to Australia and Europe. We had 4,000 people at our last concert in Sardinia, I mean 4,000 people going crazy! We're dealing with Great Black Music, and we have to recognize that, it benefits everyone. We have to get above isolating parts of it and saying, "Well this part of it's okay, but this part's not too cool." We're not that far away from the source. You have to realize it's taken several hundred years to get this far.

We realize we're dealing with visions, and we can deal with visions in sequence. You can structure the feelings, and it doesn't have to be a chronological thing. It doesn't have to be, "Here comes the blues and here comes the gospel." It can start with the avant-garde and end with the blues. I mean, I know the audience, they aren't dumb!

If you're going to play the blues, you've got to know about

playing the blues, you've got to have damn near lived that sort of thing. If you're gonna be in a bag, you've got to be *in* it. When I play, I try to play everything I've heard or felt. I didn't spend all that time in the carnival never to do that again, or all that time playing blues to push it to one side and say, okay, I'm avant-garde now. I didn't learn all these damn chords for nothing! I'm trying to tie it up into some sort of meaningful statement!

This is only the beginning. What we're doing won't be too visible for another five years, and then it will be ten years before people realize what's happening and another ten years for people to really get into it. I've got plenty of time. In a sense, Root to the Source gives me even more range than the Art Ensemble. In the Art Ensemble we had to do everything ourselves. Joseph would be the preacher.... What you'll see is Root to the Source in combination with the Art Ensemble soon, and then with the addition of a few more horns it'll turn into the Art Ensemble Orchestra with a choir. Soon all these groups are gonna merge on in and do some big things. Because that's our job as musicians, to spread it, we're not supposed to go over in a corner and keep it to ourselves. Take it to Broadway—Root to the Source would be like no other show, structured but different every night—Yankee Stadium. Yeah, that's the only way to do it. Just try to do something big. The way I look at it, most of the time you're broke anyway. No matter what you're doing, you're broke. So you must be doing some big stuff, be broke *for* something. At least you know you've tried. The energy kind of keeps up when you're trying to pull something like that off. At the same time you end up broke. But it's fun and you get things done. We want to have shows and successes, but the main thing we want to do is influence *people*. To make people enjoy life the way we do, and to see it that way, you know, and the beauty and what we can see, the vision that we have. And that's really the *main* purpose of it. I think that's beneficial. I think that's a nice way to spend your life. And if we can have some broiled shrimp on the way, it's cool!

Pretending

Actually I haven't really done shit. Personally, just speaking for myself, I haven't done shit playing no trumpet at all. I can, though, see it coming, like I say, in twenty more years. A little more polish in there. I should be able to play something, I hope, by then, but I've never been satisfied with anything I've done. Everything was done under such *duress*. Take the album *The Great Pretender* (ECM). I think it's going to be a great album, but we did it in two days. Two days and a mix on the third day. Now how can this album—in all kinds of strain! This is between flights, you dig? It isn't like I would get on the phone and say, "Okay, Donald, we're going to rehearse about a month, we're going to research and turn it inside out, then we're going to take another month and make us a really nice album." No, no, I don't get that privilege. It's always, "Okay, you got 24 hours." Here's an album that's going to be album-of-the-year, it's gonna win all kinds of awards, its sales are really gonna do something, and I know it ain't shit because it's only a part of what I'm capable of doing. I can only give so much in that situation. Otherwise, if you give too much of your talent, too quickly, you just burn yourself up, you go crazy. So in order to balance it I try to have patience, and meanwhile I just have to go hunting or something.... All my records. I've got to sit up here and hope on some stuff I had to rush together. I can't even count on my best work to get me through! That's like developing a whole reputation, and people say, "Lester Bowie, avant-garde trumpet." This is my *worst* work!

The Great Pretender is an inkling of what Root to the Source might be. It gives you a little idea of the *power* it can have. Root to the Source is an eight-piece band and *The Great Pretender* is mostly trumpet and rhythm section. One selection on it has got the singers of Root to the Source doing merely some background vocals. It's a little bitty pinch of what Root to the Source is, and it's probably going to be a smash!

How to Play and What to Wear

I feel that the sonoric possibilities of the trumpet have not been fully explored. I think it could be a lot more expressive than what we've been led to believe it can be. I think it's even more vocal than reed instruments. You can get into a baby crying, it's just unbelievable, and I've tried to extend the research in these areas. The trumpet has a certain sound when played so-called correctly, but I've used a lot of different techniques, and some of the sounds seem humorous, but it's not necessarily humor. People say, "It's an odd sound, so that must mean he has humor in his playing," when actually I'm just extending the sonoric range of the instrument.

In the Art Ensemble, we all are in costume, but Roscoe and I don't paint. Because I've always felt that music is like a ceremony, I've always wanted to do something special for that ceremony, even if it's just a hat or a tie, something other than what I would normally be in. Something to transcend the ordinary. Kind of gives you a special feeling. When I put on the white coat it puts me into another whole bag. It's like the African mask. Joseph has a good explanation: the mask serves to eliminate the individual and puts you into the art. That was the purpose of the mask, to take it away from your ordinary being.

I've had all kinds of clown suits, I used to have a whole janitor's outfit, housepainter's outfit when I was painting my house in St. Louis, paint all over it, but I came up on the doctor's thing because it means a couple of things I stand for. Research, for instance. It is a lab jacket, not necessarily a doctor's, that technicians in any field might wear, so it means research when you see it, and I mean research about me playing. I spend a lot of time researching. It's a very scientific approach, and people ask me how is it scientific.

Well, I actually shouldn't even be a trumpet player. I have had to use an enormous amount of science just to play the instrument, because I'm not a natural trumpet player. I don't have the tooth structure. I've got false teeth, I've got a whole bunch of things that are not natural attributes to playing trumpet. I've had to learn all kinds of tricks to produce what I do because the normal trumpet thing didn't work for me. Sometimes, when I make a move, it's the only way for me to hit the notes. I believe I'm a natural musician but not a natural trumpet player. Maybe I could have been a better saxophone player, a drummer or a bass. So that's why I settle on the lab jacket, and also the fact that it's very easy, something light I can carry around, just one little piece.

You just don't accidentally end up sounding original. You've got to be trying to do it. I found I had to concentrate on developing a specific sound. I'm not a great high-note man. I don't think my technique's going to develop that much more in the future. I may clean up certain things, but mostly I work on trying to be personal. Just, you know, make it sound like it's me playing. Because that's the key to the whole thing.

Kulchur

Like I say, you may find a little storefront museum somewhere in New Orleans or something, but you'll never see a Juilliard School of Music or Philharmonic Hall or anything like that. When you want to research classical music there are libraries you can go to, with volume upon volume, the whole life of Bach, what kind of underwear he wore, everything, all his original transcripts. But you can't go anywhere and see the Duke's stuff. Well, Duke's stuff may be in the Smithsonian now, but this music isn't—some people have chronicled it, but there are no institutions that really get into it. They just want to get out of it what they can, but they never want to put anything in. Which is the shortfall or the downcoming of this country. People are so busy being racist they can't even build a fuel-efficient car.

DAVID GAHR

When you live in a racist country it's weird. Like they'll be so busy being racist against me that I may have the idea that can save the world. Or let's say my child has the idea that can save the world, and that child is automatically stopped from getting into it. So you've got all these potential geniuses walking around. You've got musical geniuses in jazz. But these cats end up being winos, end up drinking themselves, out of frustration, to death. You've got to almost be superhuman. You've got to be Duke Ellington. Or Louis Armstrong. For every Duke Ellington there must've been another thousand cats who wrote well like that. Two or three of them survived, and maybe because their names were "Duke" and "Count." Royalty. That was instrumental. And how many bands were there back in those days? There were a lot.

But that's like part of slavery. You're taught to hate yourself, and after four hundred years it gets to be kind of ingrained. Even genetically. You get to where you feel bad about your color, the way you look. Your eyes or your lips are too big. Your music is not really happening, because first of all they named it "jazz," which means "shit." So you figure it ain't shit because at the time Negroes were property they hated jazz. When I went to Lincoln and you'd try to play some jazz in one of them practice rooms, they'd put you out of school for that. "You play classical!" You're taught to hate yourself.

It would really be something if we had the same budget as, say, the New York Philharmonic. But we can't wait till they decide. We just have to go ahead and get it together. That means getting famous and getting our own money. Shit! If I was a millionaire I would get me enough instruments. Matter of fact, when I go back to Jamaica, when I go back to move, I'm going with enough bread for a house and land, and have enough instruments for a hundred-piece orchestra. I'm going to train everyone in the area for one of the *baddest* bands in the world. The 58-piece band in New York was the prototype. I would like to have 800 just to see what it sounds like. That's what we're developing into once we get this camp going. With 5,800 you could start stations with different elements and you could have different parts synchronized to different notes.

I can organize things. People know it's going to be fun, because that's what usually happens. The Sho' Nuff Orchestra wasn't difficult, because most people *want* to do something. I could get on the phone and organize another one right now. I've had cats, Jackie McLean for instance, talking to me for the last two years about *volunteering*: "The next time you do anything, like let me know." People *want* to do things.

Maybe I'm crazy. I mean I don't believe this is real to tell you the truth. I can claim that I'm a heavy, heavy dreamer, but I know how to organize, to pull them off after I dream them up. I keep on dreaming them, and that always amazes me, so I'm usually pretty happy. I am just amazed that I made it this far, and when I look around I say, "*Damn!*" I didn't ever have a job. I've never been young and frustrated because I've always had my plans. I knew from the beginning that it would take a long time. I wanted to be the number one jazz trumpeter and I knew it would take twenty years. I know it's going to take another twenty years for what we're talking about now. I'll be sixty then, and then twenty years after that I'll be eighty, and then I'll, you know, white hair, grandchildren all around, but we'll have the camps, and then I'll be getting old, but the camps will be big institutions, temples and shit. I got it figured that I'm going to live until I'm 96, and by then this shit will be really big. And I'll have a big hip funeral. Big.

It will be world music by then.

We are talking about the Art Ensemble of Mexico. Ⓜ

Lester Bowie's Equipment

I've got a Benge trumpet. For the first time I've been given horns. The Benge company gave me this set of horns. I've always played a custom-made trumpet. This one's called a Claude Gordon model. I used to play a Shilke trumpet for eleven years. I still use a Shilke mouthpiece.

RECORD REVIEWS

Talking Heads
The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads (Sire)

Why is this art band different from all other art bands? Because they don't hide behind their considerable cool, that's why. Unlike many of their avant-garde contemporaries, the Talking Heads, with Brian Eno's help, confronted and transcended the fashionable dead-ends of cynical despair and rudderless musical eclecticism. Not content to rest on his conceptualist laurels, (and realizing something vital was missing from his charmingly eccentric brand of think-pop), head-Head David Byrne determined to find his merry band the one thing that any self-respecting head needs to fulfill its destiny and get its rocks off: a body. And not just any body would do. Hadda' have a natch'l sense a riddim. How 'bout Al Green? Yeah! Enter "Take Me To The River," a lurching hunk of gospel funk guaranteed to drop your center of gravity a good foot or two—and probably not coincidentally, their first top twenty single. Hey, maybe there *is* some secret principle hidden in this rock 'n' roll stuff? Wishing to pursue the funk even further, but not wanting to get caught up in the overworked cliches of blues and R&B, Byrne and Eno leapfrogged back to the Source: Africa. Byrne figured he could study, explore, and finally extract what he needed from the body of African music, and then move on. But traditional musics are not so easily tamed. Rather than manipulate, Byrne was manipulated, and on *Remain In Light*, both he and Talking Heads were, in a real sense, reborn. *The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads*, a two-record, live set, neatly documents this odyssey. The first record covers their new wave ingenue recordings as a quartet, from '77 through '79. Tunes like "New Feeling" and "Don't Worry About The Government" (recalling Arthur Lee and Love at their best) display the quirky rhythms, and oddly mellifluous chord sequences that became the band's trademarks. Byrne's yowls and yelps, and his parchingly dry-humored and arcane lyrics may have sounded like outtakes from a Broadway musical version of *Psycho* the first time around, but in reality they were semi-intentional exorcisms—part art and part innocence. In songs like "Psycho Killer," Byrne temporarily becomes what he mocks and/or fears by finding that place in himself (and in each of us) where the banality of evil (and the evil of banality) unconsciously lurks. Live, these tunes are relieved of any semblance of pretension. Vocally, Byrne is straining on his leash here, and he exhibits a raw urgency lacking in the tamer studio versions. Byrne and Jerry Harrison's scratchy guitars, Byrne's hiccupping vocals, Tina Weymouth's punctillious yet frisky art-school bass, and husband Chris Frantz's deep, rock-steady rhythms give up considerably more funk here than in the studio (if Bootsy is kiddie-funk, are these guys preppie-funk?), proving the band had an inherent, if mostly untapped, talent for funk 'n' polyrhythms long before *Remain In Light*, at least in concert.

But it's the material from *Fear Of Music* and, especially, *Remain In Light* on the second record that reveals the true extent of the Heads' inner and outer transformation. Again, there is a liberating sense of light, movement and release on numbers like "House In Motion" and "The Great Curve" that are absent on the studio takes. Byrne and Eno have always impressed me more as conceptualists than as producers—as purveyors of process rather than product. In the studio, their overly cerebral House-of-Usher productions sound thin, dark and muffled, more like Dorset on a rainy day than Dakar in its sunny splendor. Live, the music itself takes over. It begins to breathe and open itself on its own terms, as the expanded Heads lineup (ten points to anyone who remembers Tonto's Expanding Head Band) including Adrian Belew on guitar, Steve Scales on percussion, Busta Jones on bass, Bernie Worrell on clavinet, and Dolette McDonald and Nona Hendryx on backing vocals, form a seamless web, a percolating, ecstatic community of sound. Busta Jones' bullfrog bass burps up huge, globular bubbles that become the pivot for the churning, polyrhythmic dance of guitars, keyboards, voices and drums. Everybody leads, everybody follows, everybody keeps the beat, as their musical world/molecule/universe percolates on in funk-static harmony. Freed from the constraints of linear time, the one-chord vamps turn deeper into the circular time of Inside, the Mobius (drag) strip of Eternity. Occasionally Adrian Belew's Hendrixian laser becomes blissfully unhinged, oscillating through the dancers like a lone witch doctor of sound. Byrne's lyrics and vocals, released from the narcissistic wheel of personal neuroticisms, pass into the greater stream of living archetype: free, incantory, spontaneous—enabling him to wring every possible nuance of tone and feeling from the lyrics.

By learning to surrender to the music, by stepping inside and letting go, the Talking Heads have turned their band into a decentralized musical commune that creates a greater and more open musical matrix for music to enter and manifest through. By letting go, they've found something; going in circles, they've arrived at something real. "Turn myself around," sings David Byrne, "I'm walking backwards and forwards/I'm moving twice as much as I was before/I'll be down there in the center of the earth." Hey, wait for me. — *Vic Garbarini*

Dave Edmunds
D.E.7th (Columbia)

The chords in the title of *D.E.7th* are, of course, a conspicuous pun on the fact that this is Edmunds' seventh solo record. The question his avid cult has to have is: how has rock's greatest Welshman (John Cale fans, forgive me) remained so undercelebrated? Even with the considerable added cult clout of Nick Lowe, Rockpile failed to become the commercial vehicle these pub-rock veterans needed. They've doubtless sorted it out a

hundred times over a thousand beers, and still never figured out why America—their mutual musicological obsession and touchstone—hasn't made them rich and famous.

It may be that Americans demand more flash with their gut-rock. Dave and Nick are slightly embarrassed showmen, cute rather than sensual. With the breakup of their shared band, Rockpile, came estrangement; Nick's gone one way with feisty manager Jake Riviera, and Dave is now being guided by New Jersey concert promoter John Scher.

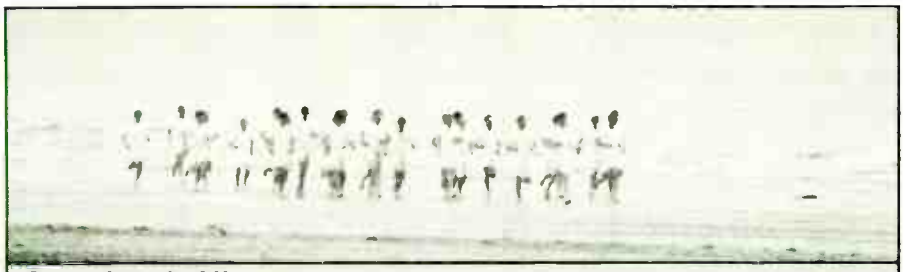
Here, in any event, is his seventh bid, and it has some wonderful moments. The terrain, again, is mostly white American roots music—or recreations of it. There's a version of Doug Kershaw's Cajun seesaw, "Louisiana Man," a droll rewrite (by his piano player, Geraint Watkins) of "Deep In The Heart Of Texas," and a version of NRBQ's paean to self-sufficiency, "Me And The Boys." This latter song exhibits Edmunds' studio wizardry. The bassy backing track sounds like a Phantom jet passing through Lincoln Tunnel at mach two, and the heavily phased vocals echo in circles. Edmunds' trademark skying guitar rides in and out of a mix so artfully dense it sounds natural.

As always, Edmunds shows he can switch from rockabilly hollering to what *Melody Maker* once called, with approval, "sleazy smoochiness." The weeper here is a piano tune in the George Jones manner, "One More Night." "You kissed me so chastely," sings Edmunds with a catch in his voice, "that I could have cried."

Throughout, this album's lyrics partake of an avuncular wisdom and nowhere more strikingly than on Bruce Springsteen's contribution, "From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come)." A pumping rocker that tips its hat to Chuck Berry and Eddie Cochran, with a story wheeling from the heartland to Tampa via two courtships and a killing, this is a horn-powered doozie with the stamp of a classic. Like Edmunds, who sings it with zeal, the song has sufficient vigor and craft to make chart position inconsequential. Edmunds may never be a tax exile. But he's got a good shot at becoming a legend. — *Fred Schruers*

Human League
Dare (A&M)
Japan
Japan (Virgin/Epic)

Contrary to popular belief, all synthesizer bands are not unlistenable. True, many do sound rather like the result of an infinite number of silicon chips in the hands of an infinite



Soundtrack Albums

By J.D. Considine

Nobody goes to the movies to listen to music; even with musicals and concert films, the emphasis is on the visual, not the aural. Consequently, soundtrack composers are seldom encouraged to go all out and hand in dozens of ear-catching melodies—the idea is to support what's happening on the screen, not draw the viewer's attention away from it. So, aside from the credits music, title song or love theme, most motion picture scores are about as exciting as a long vacation in Tulsa.

Soundtrack albums are something else again. Despite the movie company's insistence on discreet music (no, not Brian Eno; that's a different spelling) while the film's running, the sales records chalked up by such original soundtrack albums as *Saturday Night Fever, FM, Urban Cowboy I* and *II, Star Wars* and *Heavy Metal* have not gone unnoticed. More and more rock artists are being signed to do soundtracks in the hopes that chart success will prove a good tie-in to the movie.

But what about the Hollywood maxim, "The only good soundtrack is a boring soundtrack"? There are two ways of dealing with that. One is to write strong, exciting music for the album that is either watered down or edited to twenty-second snippets in the movie; the other is simply to write boring rock music.

Vangelis' *Chariots Of Fire* opts for the latter course. No surprise there, considering the movie's subject (running and morality) and it's a natural vehicle for the airy solemnity of Vangelis' keyboard style. But as adept as he is at evoking a sense of noble struggle and disciplined exertion, Vangelis really isn't very good at melody, and the most striking song by far is the stately Anglican hymn "Jerusalem," Charles Parry's setting of the Blake poem. Worse, Vangelis has the annoying habit of voicing the melody in elevator music piano octaves so that at any moment you expect to hear "Autumn Leaves" burst in.

There's no elevator music on **Jimmy Page**'s soundtrack to *Death Wish II*, but there isn't much in the way of Led Zeppelin-style rock, either. As long as Page is using Chris Farlowe as a vocalist instead of Robert Plant, that's fine with me—Farlowe sounds unfortunately like David Clayton Thomas imitating Jack Bruce, so the less sung the better. Instead, Page gets to show off his versatility as a composer, and the results are remarkably impressive. Page's small ensemble material is stunning proof that his strength as a guitarist is not technique but the sheer musicality of his playing, and whether crunching out the semi-metal of "Jam Sandwich" or layering the textures of "Shadow In The City," he's consistently in peak form.

Consistency is not the chief virtue of **Ry Cooder**'s soundtrack to *The Border*. Knee-jerk Mexicanisms are placed cheek-by-jowl with razor-sharp instrumentals; a mediocre singer like John Hiatt turns in a memorable vocal on "Skin Game," while Freddie Fender—who should know better—renders the title song so stiffly you'd think he'd been stuffed. Part of the problem seems to be that Cooder landed the soundtrack because he's supposed to know something about Tex-Mex, with the end result that the music is so earnestly authentic that's it's practically sterilized. When Cooder and the boys finally work themselves loose, things perk up, and "Highway 23" may well be the best thing Cooder has done in ten years.

Considering that his uncle was the noted film composer Alfred Newman, it's hardly surprising that **Randy Newman**'s *Ragtime* soundtrack is the most authoritative of the lot. Nor does it hurt that the film is set at the turn of the century, a period Newman has already worked into such songs as "Dayton, Ohio—1903" from *Sail Away*. Why, then, is *Ragtime* so resolutely bland? Largely because it benefits from Newman's craft, not his wit, and craft just isn't enough. Jennifer Warnes' touching rendition of "One More Hour" is nice, but the only truly memorable tune on the album is a period song called "I Could Love A Million Girls" that seems to have been dug up to add authenticity.

David Bowie's soundtrack to *Christiane F.*, on the other hand, isn't anything like real movie music. It's just nine songs from five of his last six albums (not counting *ChangesTwo*), with no new material whatsoever. Since one of the nine is the live version of "Station To Station" from *Stage*, and since the stills on the back of the jacket show Bowie onstage and with what I assume is Christiane F. herself, the tie-in here is that Bowie is actually in the movie. A cheap ploy, perhaps, but it's still the best way to get a truly listenable soundtrack album.

number of monkeys, but there are a few noteworthy exceptions. The Human League and Japan are two of these.

The Human League aren't likely to expand conception of what a synthesizer can do; their crisp, melodic lines and lean, functional rhythm arrangements could just as easily have been performed with conventional instrumentation. What conventional instrumentation couldn't do, however, is make the Human League's reliance on pop so subtly unsettling. Whether chanting, "Norman, Winston, Johnny, Joey, Dee Dee—Good times!" or insisting, "And you know I believe in love," there's a dour severity that seems to play pop for its own illusions. This doesn't always come off as planned—"I Am The Law" is as humorlessly didactic as a Calvinist sermon—but when it's on target, as on the U.K. hit, "Don't You Want Me," it hits home with a force most pop groups can't even approximate.

Japan, on the other hand, is no more conventionally pop than they are a synthesizer band. Instead of the cool, glassy textures and rigid rhythmic structure of most synth-rock, Japan has achieved a soft, almost organic sound reminiscent of Brian Eno's *Another Green World* or *Before And After Science*. At its worst, this is just high-tech atmosphere music with David Sylvain's dark, Brian Ferry-ish crooning adding just the right touch of melancholy. Mostly, though, Japan's deft mixture of synthetics, ethnic touches (like the African drums on "Talking Islands In Africa" or the *dida* on "Visions Of China") and unconventional dance rhythms makes for compelling listening. This is one band which bears watching. — *J.D. Considine.*

The Art Ensemble of Chicago
Urban Bushmen (ECM)

I suppose, the world being the cheesy and faithless place it's been for a while now, that the Art Ensemble had to put out a record of the first excellence to maintain their worldly rep, and, after the splendid one-two punch of Roscoe Mitchell's *Snurdy McGurdy* and Lester Bowie's *Great Pretender* and the footwork of Jarman and Moye's *Earth Passage/Density*, they have. Although they've made a number of great records in the past, the Art Crazies are primarily a performing band, and ECM was wise to give them a two-record amplitude and tape a concert. For the first time on the label, you can sit back and nod: "Yup, this is what they're like."

Urban Bushmen demonstrates, as clearly as any album they've made, what a five-brained band this is—no single musician dominates it or is left alone for long at the controls, but everyone gets to shine. The collectively improvised "Urban Magic" emerges out of the initial percussion pieces to essay a fast march, some magical, illogical exchanges (bassist Malachi Favors whispering into a bullhorn and Bowie answering, "Eh? Huh? Ah?") before opening out into a fast walk that begins to show off each of the band members at his best. The rhythm section is superb throughout the album, Moye supernaturally fleet behind soloists, furious and assured on his own outings, Favors sonorous and inspired: not for nothing do people leave concerts shaking their heads, muttering, "Malachi. Malachi!" Joseph Jarman takes a fast, fluent clarinet solo that shows how brilliantly he's been playing lately, Bowie announces that he's not telling the usual jokes tonight, and when the racing tempo stops there is some Mitchell alto, alternately wispy and hard as nails. The side ends out of tempo with gorgeous Bowie flugelhorn. Good evening. The band has introduced itself.

Side two opens with Jarman's fast march, "Theme For SCO," which lacks the visual element of Jarman's deranged enthusiasm with semaphores and confetti, but the racketous freeblow over a Moye onslaught increases the voltage from side one and shows how successfully the band has kept alive the free-jazz faith: Jarman takes a thrilling, Coltrane-ish solo on sopranino, Bowie has his way, Mitchell enters on soprano with systematic and impassioned trills—this is the real stuff! you're supposed to jump around your living room and break furniture!—before Bowie plays some Flamenco phrases and Favors elegantly leads the band into a slower Latin recovery. So far the band has been merely excellent, but the Art Ensemble doesn't hit its stride until it gets inexplicable. That's side three: after a short rendition of Bowie's lovely "New York Is Full Of Lonely People," the band holds one hushed note for seven minutes ("Ancestral Meditation" it's called). Lao-tse once complained that the five colors blind the eye, the six sounds dull the ear; the Art Ensemble proposes a purification. Because of what has gone before, you really *listen* to that note, and when the band comes out of it into Mitchell's terse "Uncle," you hear with new ears. This is quintessential AEC and for me the album's peak. My ears ache for mid-tempo blues but side four brings disjunct Jarman, and the album resolves on the very pretty "Peter And Judith," a percussion reprise and the out-anthem "Odwalla." Perfect? 'Course not. Best set they've ever played? No. But for real.
— *Ransom Stoddard*

George Duke
Dream On (Epic)

George Duke is a man with a problem that has turned the most creative minds to jello: what do you do when, after years of prolific and superb albums that reach a devoted few, you finally land a big record, a glossy shooting-fish-in-a-barrel ballad, "Sweet Baby"? Do you go to the well again, slowing your pace to make sure everyone keeps up, or do you plunge back into the forest of fusionoid funk? On his new album, *Dream On*, George Duke sets sail between the Scylla of sales and the Charybdis of change with dexterity, warmth and good humor and, for the most part, completes his voyage without embarrassment.

George has already undergone one barrage of sell-out accusations when he ceased making his virtuoso keyboard kosmology LPs for BASF (who?), including the extraordinary *Feel*, and in 1977 began a new P-Funk/George Clinton *persona* with Epic with his popular *Reach For It*. Duke earned the scorn of confirmed jazzers for his post-fusion/boffo-funk/pop vocal variety show, but don't listen to those Nervous Nellies; *Reach For It, Don't Let Go, Follow The Rainbow* and *Master Of The Game* are a terrific series of records, with plenty of great songs, great solos, great laughs.

Now, in the aftermath of the recent Duke-Stanley Clarke sales romp (of which the less said, the better), new rumbles of sell-out are afoot. Fans of these Dukey Stick classix and their often bizarre excursions will note with uneasiness that the first side of the new *Dream On* is all very "programmable" ("Shine On" is coming up da charts) and that side two replays two of Duke's greatest "hits," "Reach For It" and the breathtaking "Someday." This is clearly a record designed to introduce George Duke to a new audience: the most housebroken of the new and a taste of the old.

George handles all the dangers implicit in such a project by getting back old pal Leon "Ndugu" Chancler on drums and keeping the redoubtable Byron Miller on bass, and by molding the sound with a transparency that reveals the subtlety and inventiveness of all the rhythm section parts. More importantly, George has brought his full chordal vocabulary into pop songs such as "Ride On Love," "Framed" and the title cut, making them twist and reach around corners unexpectedly. If the skeptics remain unconvinced, Duke includes a couple of fine tunes in his more familiar mold, including the album's only instrumental, "Positive Energy," and two memorable studies of the heart, "You" and "I Will Always Be Your Friend," the latter of which will be *Dream On*'s "monster" hit.

For those uninitiated to George Duke, *Dream On* is, not accidently, a terrific place to begin. For those already taken to the bridge and dropped off—into some *funk*...it's not his best, but it'll do—for now. — *Jock Baird*

Cedar Walton
Piano Solos (Clean Cuts)
The Maestro (Muse)

Straight-ahead jazz pianists of the first excellence, like Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones, seldom claim the attentions of a large audience no matter how much fellow musicians and aficionados appreciate them, perhaps because this side of Tyner and Taylor modern jazz pianism lacks the element of heroism so crucial to mass appeal. Intelligence, continuous invention, emotional resonance, an artful and convincing registration of life and a fine touch have not always been enough.

Cedar Walton has written and played well for over twenty years, works here and there, makes good jazz records and even a few unusually well made commercial discs. *Piano Solos* might be some kind of a breakthrough for him, artistically if not commercially; abstract-

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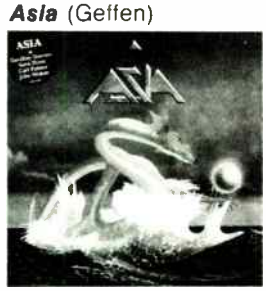
ing his customary style from its customary group formats has set its excellence in more acute relief and shown it off in clearer detail than I can remember any previous album having done. *Solos* has a certain spiritual kinship with the duets of Charlie Haden and Hampton Hawes: a similar lucidity and grace informs both albums and, like Hawes, Walton stands clear. He has an admirably well balanced approach to the solo instrument, a fine fluency of invention and a clear, strong tone that is unmistakably his own. The album is excellently recorded, the piano was a personal favorite, and the room not a studio but a friend's. This may account for the album's warmth and ease. Side one is better than side two and the jacket has wretched cover art but don't let that throw you.

The Maestro is a good album too, but more conventional. Walton and his working quartet of Bob Berg, David Williams and Billy Higgins sounds fine, and they're joined on four cuts by Abbey Lincoln, one of the handful of genuinely *modern* jazz singers, and she sings with her usual uncompromising strength. It's a fine album all right, but *Piano Solos* is something special, and it might help us remember how to hear. — *Rafi Zabor*

Asia

Asia (Geffen)



Hands down, Asia's debut album wins the "sidewalk sweetie" award for the most unalloyed prostitution of instrumental ability and musical technology committed to vinyl in recent memory. And as this carefully-plotted grid of AOR tendencies provokes the same twinge of revulsion in critics across the land, so does it instantaneously chart in the top thirty with a platinum bullet, guaranteeing king-sized revenues for members John Wetton, Steve Howe, Geoffrey Downes, Carl Palmer and their record label, Geffen.

But chart success and income-generating world tours are the bedrock point of this project. Asia is an AM band in art-rock drag and the shiny hooks coursing through over-produced pop extravaganzas like "Sole Survivor," "Heat Of The Moment" and "Here Comes The Feeling" provide the extra fuel-injection to lock this album into contemporary FM playlists for the next calendar year.

And what's not to like? Late of King Crimson, Roxy Music, Uriah Heep and U.K., singer/bassist/main tunesmith John Wetton brings to the proceedings his all-purpose sensitive crooning (which still bears an uncanny resemblance to Greg Lake's tremulous swoon) and an ear for the revivified sing-along chorus. Steve Howe, ex-Yes guitar hero, actually breaks through the glass bubble of Mike Stone's (Queen, Journey, Foreigner) production with his multi-textured if somewhat convoluted solos and fills. Geoff Downs, best known as one half of electro-popsters the Buggles, fills out whatever nooks and crannies are left with his facile manipulation of the Fairlight synthesizer, a digital keyboard instrument appropriately credited in the group bio as a "device capable of recreating virtually any conceivable sound." Carl Palmer (Atomic Rooster, ELP) buttresses this blur of shimmering tonalities with his characteristically martial drumming, not to mention an occasional bang-of-the-gong for hardcore Emerson, Lake Etcetera fans.

In fact, Asia is basically ELP plus guitarist, since Downes' use of the Fairlight is largely limited to an updated streamlining of territory plowed to death by Keith Emerson, Rick Wakeman and Patrick Moraz. The formula is readily apparent: tart up the standard pop song format by first adding a brassy, gratuitous intro (the more baroque, the better), then inserting superficially complex instrumental montages as a portentous announcement of the next "movement" (here comes the chorus), and finally bringing everything to a quasi-dynamic boil via Wetton's impassioned lyricism and a rinse-cycle wash of processed synthesizer textures.

Contrary to what you might believe, there is no joy in writing this kind of review. From a critical perspective, these four talented and (I hope) well-meaning musicians are pure cannon fodder. What takes all the fun out of it is that the Geffen crew are probably having a good laugh over this, laughing at this review because it will have no effect whatsoever on the album sales. — *J.C. Costa*

Sonny Rollins

No Problem (Milestone)

The Alternative Sonny Rollins (French RCA)

Maybe all it means is that, like most other Americans, I'm learning to live with lesser expectations, but I think the new Sonny Rollins LP (*No Problem*) is pretty good. The two best tracks are excellent by any standards, even Sonny's. "Here You Come Again," the jouncy Dolly Parton hit, might seem an unlikely vehicle for Sonny Rollins, but no more unlikely than "Wonderful, Wonderful" must have seemed in 1957, or "Isn't She Lovely" in 1977, or "Toot, Toot, Tootsie Goodbye" would have seemed in any year. Rollins plays "chicken" tenor here, pecking the song's gently rising

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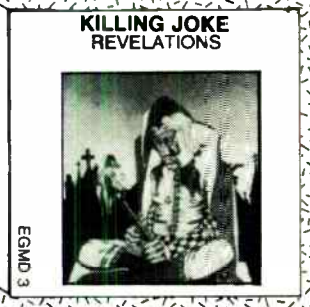

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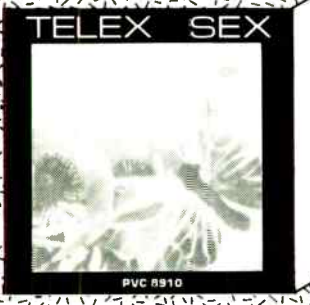
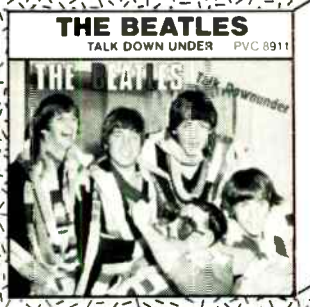
F **BONGOS**

Critically acclaimed nationwide, this is their first LP. The 15 tracks include "The Bulrushes", "Mambo Sun", "In The Congo", and "Zebra Club."



G **TELEX**

They scored with their version of "Rock Around The Clock". Now, with lyrics by Sparks Ron and Russell Mael, they return with great new songs and dance numbers.



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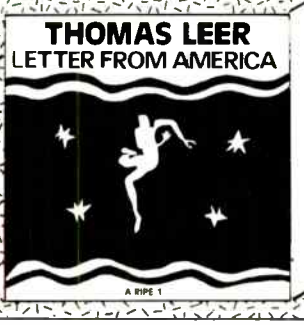

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line into snarls and sputters and topping off his solo with a pique of whistles from the sinus cavities of the tenor's upper register. He has almost as much fun on his own "Joyous Lake" scudding up and down its steep stoptimes with an infectious what-me-worry? nonchalance—seductive joyousness, as the *I Ching* might say.

The other material here (an obscure ballad, two more originals by Rollins, including the by-now obligatory calypso, and one each by vibist Bobby Hutcherson and guitarist Bobby Broom) strikes an honorable truce between the involuted meters of freebop and the dance rhythms of rock and funk. The rhythm section (which also includes drummer Tony Williams and electric bassist Bob Cranshaw) is limber, sensitive to Rollins' movements, even if it crowds him now and then. But, of course, this isn't the Sonny Rollins album we all dream of, our expectations of which must give Rollins nightmares. And its achievements seem minor measured against such Rollins paradigms as *Saxophone Colossus, Freedom Suite, Sonny Meets Hawk*, or even against *The Alternative Sonny Rollins*, a double album of outtakes from 1964, just released in France and distributed in the U.S. by Rounder. His tone was more toxic than it is now, his phrasing more belligerent, his shifts in thinking more lateral, more abrupt. There's a restless, unfinished quality to these performances, but they have a depth and reach of feeling his new music lacks. One reason, I think, is that, although Rollins is in some ways the most abstract thinker jazz has produced, he's best with a familiar melody, a catchy lick or the blues to bounce it off of, some solid shape for him and us to follow in the funhouse mirror of his solos. Standards provide him with that in a way Rollins' newer material, for the most part, does not.

But it's good to remember that some great Rollins sides weren't highly valued at the time and now are spoken of as classics. I suspect that the music Rollins is making in 1982 will likewise come into high focus as it enters history—and in the meantime, one would indeed have to be a sourpuss not to bask in its cheeky rose-red glow. — *Francis Davis*

Weather Report, *Weather Report* (Columbia) I think this might be the Weather Report album in which the world's best electric jazz band makes most of the right moves but it doesn't mean much somehow. There's a lot to be impressed by: the excellence of all the participants, the fact that the band's strategies are all home-made, the unique collective textural sense that can stud even rather bad pieces with telling and mysterious details, the telepathy, the class, the style. There has never been a band like them.

The album has a similar feel to *Night*

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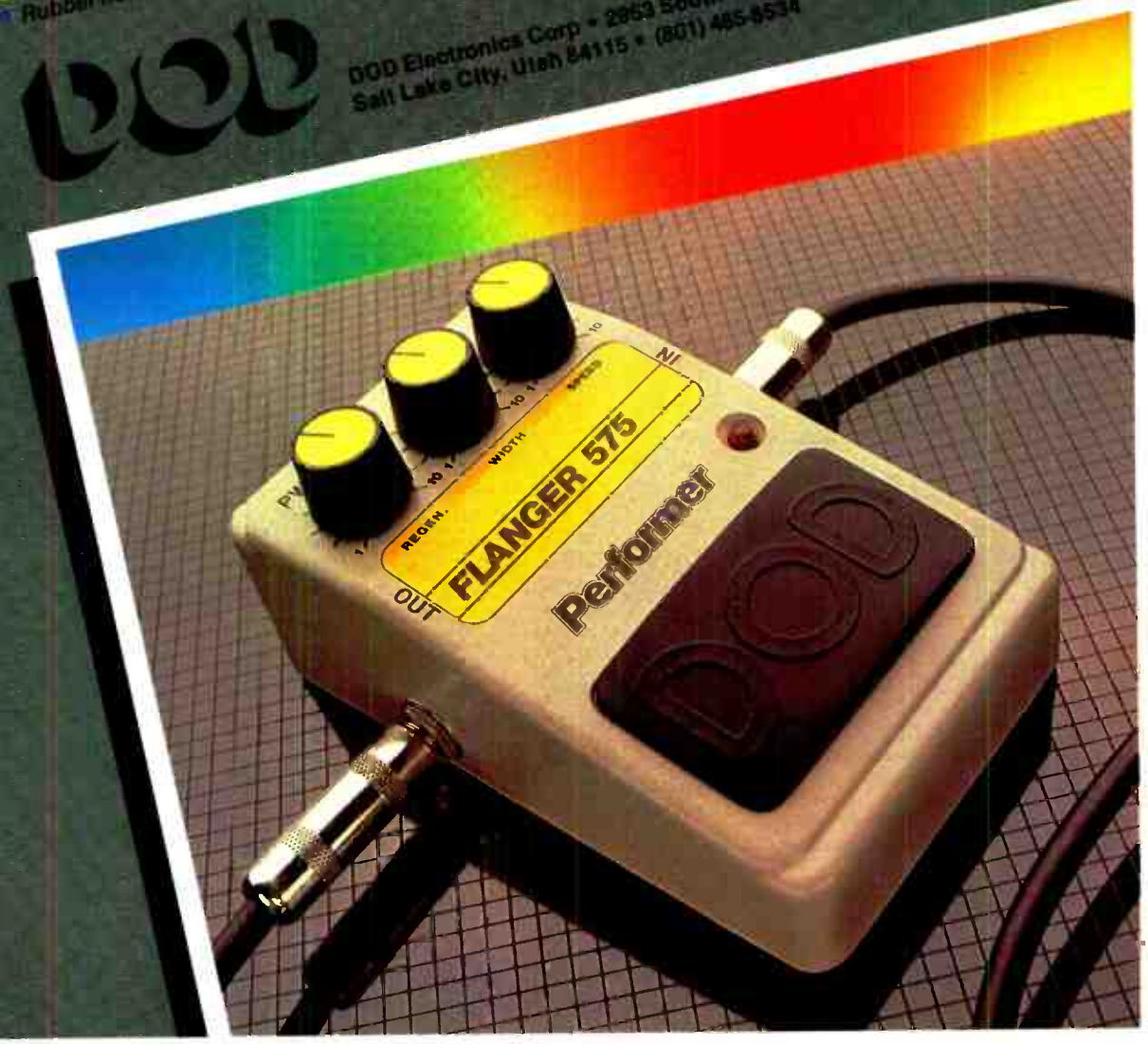

Passage but few of its surprises and little of its fire. Side one has most of the good music, all by Zawinul (formerly "Joe"): "Volcano For Hire" has some heat but doesn't really live up to its title; "Current Affairs" is a rote ballad with some soaring Shorter tenor near the end; "NYC" is a three-part suite that seems partly based on a germ of "I Got Rhythm" and it's, you know, jazzy. There's some good Shorter but it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that whatsit.

Side two? Jams that don't work, Shorter's tune a throwaway, a church-solemn dirge that has its moments, and the closer is another jam that doesn't work, with a vengeance. My guess is that the band knew it was doing well lately, had good material, set out to make a good album, figured they had the situation well in hand and didn't, perhaps because so self-assured. Everyone plays well—I've never heard Erskine better—but it draws no fire from heaven, and that's the whatsit which if you haven't got it a thing is not meant. If you get my drift. — *John Stook*

The Griffith Park Collection (Elektra Musician) Here we have the Return to Forever rhythm section, plus Joe Henderson and Freddie Hubbard, playing acoustically and on changes, and it works, which is no surprise. It brings to mind how different presentation used to be, not just chord structure. Musicians used to dress up, polish their appearance as well as their sound, and present tunes with clearly defined beginnings, middles, endings. Creativity had to be developed between the bar lines; risks had to do with fast thinking and technical fluency at high speeds. Past master of this type of spit and polish is certainly Freddie Hubbard, whose presence inspires an already together, solid group.

Large interval leaps, triple tonguing, and a wide range of tonal effects all show Hubbard's proficiency on his horn, but it's the use to which he puts these devices, the steady creative flow which puts him always one step ahead of the changes, always ready for the next flurry of thought. The transitions are smooth as silk, and whatever is not readily stated can be implied—as well as we may know them, harmonies are nonetheless mysterious, and players of this caliber have a way of being evocative rather than gratuitously flashy. I for one would like to see more of this, it's a framework where things can happen: Chick Corea's fast sense of harmonic movement, Stanley Clarke's almost forgotten skills as an acoustic bassist, Joe Henderson's versatility and Lenny White's song-writing talent (check out "Guernica"). There's certainly no reason why a return to an acoustic sound and a more mainstream framework should be seen as a step backward; it's the "main stream" which flows on and carries us forward. — *Joe Blum*

Manzanera, from pg. 26

sequence, get it in time...and we used to do lots of takes because we were so bad, and then piece them together for one good rhythm track. Then I would go home with the basic rhythm track and spend hours with my Revox trying to work out parts for it. I'd come back with four or five ideas and they'd say, 'That stinks,' and I'd pressure them and change things a bit. In the end, we'd come up with something, building it bit by bit until we were satisfied that it got the mood. *Then*, Bryan would take it home and write lyrics to it. We were always taking parts home to work on them, we were very keen in those days."

With all that dialectical disagreement going on, it hardly seems surprising that Roxy had its share of personnel changes, with frequent turnover of bassists and drummers, studio guitarists and the celebrated departure of Brian Eno from the group after its second LP. Were the conceptual differences too much?

"To start with, there weren't really conceptual differences, it was really down to theatrical jealousy. Roxy had made it very quickly in Europe, we were at the top of the charts, darlings of the press, a lot of exposure, and we were dressing up totally ridiculously and extravagantly. And Eno was looking weirder than Bryan, and Bryan wasn't getting the credit that was due him. The jealousy thing led to Eno's leaving. Looking back on it, there's no way for Eno to be in a group. What does Fripp call it...an independent mobile unit. He's more suited to individual collaborations. They both had different aspirations. Eno, when dealing with songs, was very self-conscious about his voice. Bryan would spend a lot more time writing lyrics.

"Eno was always pushing me further out. Bryan likes the weirdness but at times he gets frustrated that I don't play straighter. I've always found that when I did play more standard stuff on people's albums, they didn't want me to do it. But I've always been tempted.

"The thing you've got to remember about early Roxy was that we were basically inspired amateurs working from within our technical limitations. We've gotten better and calmer. Nowadays we work out the Roxy demos in my home studio with Rhett Davies (engineer and longtime Roxy collaborator) and then we comment on each stage mutually. We're all more *mature* now, but we still agree to disagree, as it were."

With that placid confidence, Manzanera looks at his watch and prepares to rush over to the studio where Ferry and McKay are happily evaporating his guitar from the next Roxy album. This inspired amateur of a "primitive" anti-guitarist will shortly be agreeably disagreeing with his Roxy cohorts, a burden he has happily assumed for quite some time now. M

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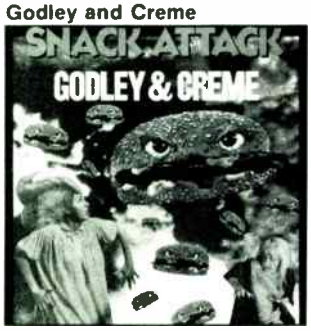
ROCK

By David Fricke

SHORT TAKES

Godley and Creme



Chas Jankel

Phil Manzanera

The Bongos

Godley and Creme — *Snack Attack* (Mirage) While the other half of the original 10cc seems to have disappeared into some sugar-pop void, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme—having faced the consequences of their 1977 lead balloon opera of the same name—work their busy art school wit into the context of more manageable tunes. Even at their talkiest (the Ken Nordine-meets Grandmaster Flash speedraps of "The Party" and the title track), they display an enviable gift for melodic cool and lyrical gab that hits full bloom on "Under Your Thumb" and "Wedding Bells," two choice chips off the old *Sheet Music*.

The Charlie Daniels Band — *Windows* (Epic) Country rock's great fatsby serves up the usual Allmans-cum-Nashville moonshine bop about hell-raisin' cowpunchers, purty Suthin' sexpots and ten-gallon hat Thoreaus. He also gets his second-hand two cents in about the Viet vet controversy by leading off with the angry protest anthem, "Still In Saigon," by New York rocker Dan Daley. Unfortunately, the Stones/Skynyrd thrash of Daley's original demo is reduced here to a polite, almost "Rhiannon"-like gait. Our boys deserved better.

J.J. Cale — *Grasshopper* (Mercury) The four cuts with the Area Code 615 session boys have a seductive pop grace that could lift Cale out of the cult leagues. The rest is typical smokey backporch blues, sort of Dire Straits in the buff. That's meant as a compliment, by the way.

Chas Jankel — *Questionnaire* (A&M) The chief Blockhead nearly beats boss Dury at his own game with these eight smart disco-funk reasons to be cheerful. "Glad To Know You," a slice of tarted-up vanilla boogie, is the big hit, but sample the sassy candlelight coo of "Boy," the Carib lilt of "Magic Of Music," and the title track's glib computer dating bit with salsa on top. Anybody who can't move to that needs a good whack with a rhythm stick.

Utopia — *Swing To The Right* (Bearsville) As Todd Rundgren's solo projects head for increasingly outer limits, Utopia has been making perfectly commercial modern rock that is nevertheless defiantly opinionated (the rightist scare of the title track and "Fahrenheit 451," the anti-war parable "Lysistrata") and refreshingly adventurous. "The truth ain't easy," Todd deadpans in "Shinola," "the easy part's shit." Swing with this or be swung.

David Thomas & the Pedestrians — *The Sound Of The Sand And Other Songs Of The Pedestrians* (Rough Trade) An exotic, exhilarating solo experience by the rotund singer with Cleveland post-punk radicals Pere Ubu. The bared emotional thrust behind odd ditties like "Yiki Tiki" and "Confuse Did" is colored in queerly by a remarkable assembly of players—folk guitarist Richard Thompson (reaching *out* there), bassist Philip Moxham (once of Young Marble Giants), a Boney M trumpeter, the odd Ubu and Henry Cow—and then heightened by David's child-man helium yodel. Thirty-seven minutes of avant-magic that plays at 45rpm.

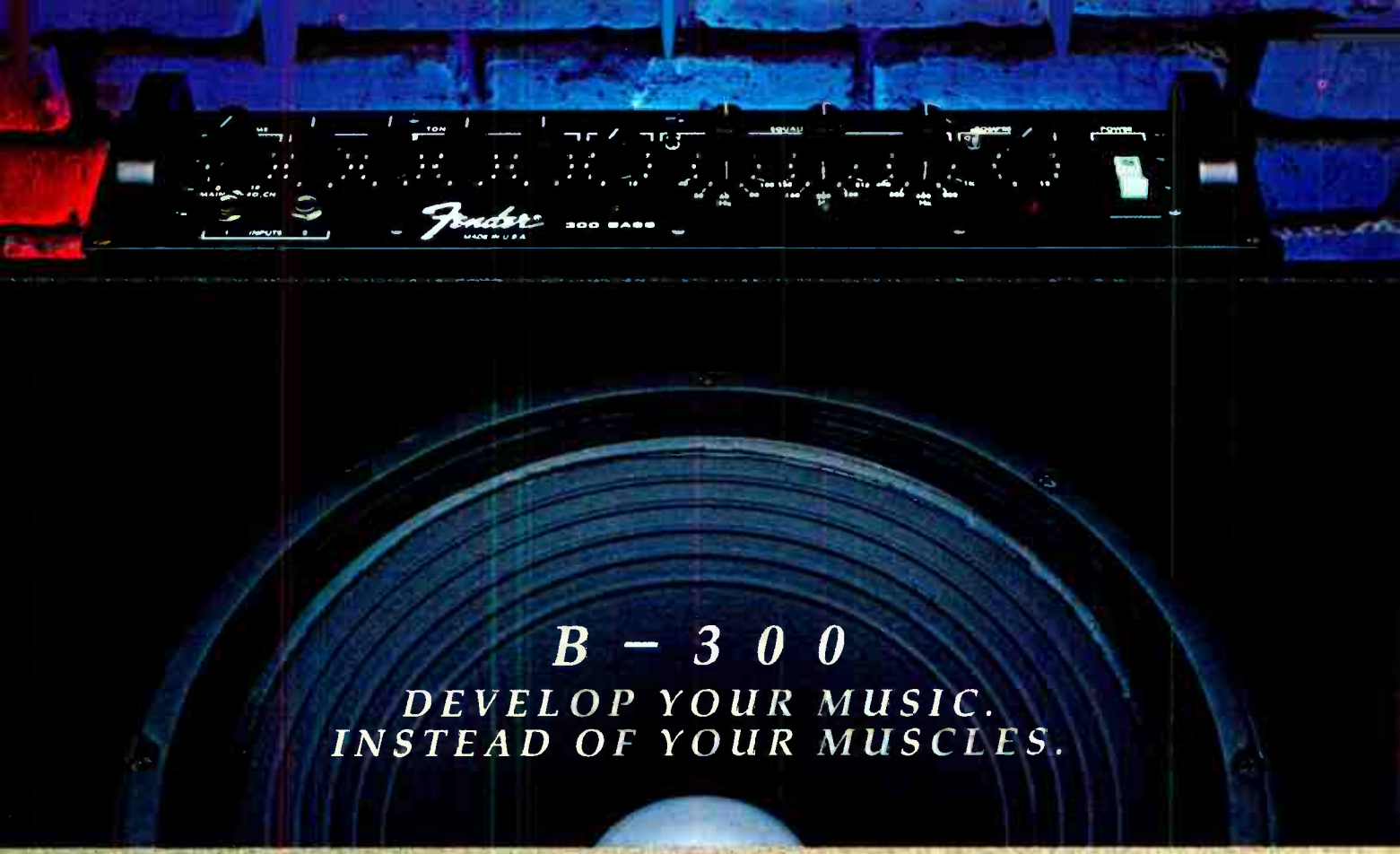
Phil Manzanera — *Primitive Guitars* (Editions EG) The Roxy Music guitarist's musical autobiography, at once a recap of his history, delineation of his influences and assimilation of same into a hopelessly indescribable style of playing. There are references, direct and otherwise, to his Latin ancestry, the avant-fusion work with Quiet Sun and 801, and his contributions to the Roxy canon, which alone stand as a model for modern guitar. As a bow to the roots, the title is quite appropriate. But to get a better idea of how it all sounds together, "Impossible Guitar" (from a track on side two) makes more sense.

Moon Martin — *Mystery Ticket* (Capitol) This album answers the question of what it will take to make rocker/tunesmith Martin a household name. For starters, a producer like Robert Palmer who customizes him in his own image with a fashionable electronic gloss that contrasts handsomely with the rakish buzz of the guitars and Martin's sunny Okie whine. Also ten more snappy tunes to turn the trick. This album also answers the question, "Whatever happened to King Crimson lyricist Pete Sinfield?" (He co-wrote "X-Ray Vision.")

The Bongos — *Drums Along The Hudson* (PVC) Stuff all the jokes about hailing from Hoboken. These fifteen tracks, including all three of their U.K. singles, are enough to embarrass any N.Y.C. or for that matter just *any* band treading similar post-punk pop turf. Elements of 60s U.S. garage rock, T. Heads-cum-XTC futurism and elfin T. Rex glam-bop (note the cover of "Mambo Sun") coalesce into a wonderfully spirited and original whole. Also nice to see the sitar (played by bassist Rob Norris on "Burning Bush") making a comeback.

The Waitresses — *Wasn't Tomorrow Wonderful?* (Ze/Polydor) Everyone rabbits on about how leader-songwriter Chris Butler waxes lyrical from a female point of view as though it took a man to give feminism its day in the rock 'n' roll sun. What they keep missing is that Butler as writer and Patty Donahue as vocalist play a kind of Everymanandwoman crawling through the wreckage

continued on page 88



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JAZZ

SHORT TAKES

By Rafi Zabor

Records to the left of me, records to the right of me. Into the valley of wax? The Elektra/Musicians have come in and I must say I'm impressed. When I first heard that Lundvall was putting out trudge by Eric Gale and Lee Ritenour I thought, here we go again, if jazz ain't dead yet its friends will kill it sure. In the event though, the label's balancing act seems a sensible if undramatic move. Which is to say that E/M looks like a real record company ready to do business, and if its poppish albums can support the real thing, then more power to 'em. **Gale** (*Blue Horizon*) and **Ritenour** (*Rio*) are fine guitarists to be sure, but I can't get myself interested in their albums. *Rio* in particular is a puzzle: you don't have to go to Brazil to record such sanitized and landless music. You could do it in a mall. **Freddie Hubbard**, maligned recently in this column as a shallow artist, continues his drive to put out more records in a six-month period than any human in history. Musician's *Ride Like The Wind* has the pop moves, a swollen ensemble of brass and/or strings, and a digital, supposedly audiophile recording job that imparts a clunky sound to the drums and often buries the flailing, straining leader in the competing brass. As in most of Hubbard's pop offerings, his best work is on the flugelhorn ballads. But Hubbard's best playing of the month, and possibly his best in nearly two decades, can be found on *The Griffith Park Collection* (Musician) and on the live *Keystone Bop* (Fantasy). *Griffith Park* is a damn near perfect record, but Hubbard takes greater risks on *Keystone*, and the album boasts some excellent Joe Henderson (better than on *Griffith Park*) and Bobby Hutcherson, and a superb "Body And Soul." Hubbard is a player of great if divided heart, and *not shallow*.

Elsewhere on Musician, the **Charlie Parker** record is terrific and unexpected and the **Red Rodney & Ira Sullivan** issue, *The Spirit Within*, a distinctly mixed bag. In Rodney we have one of the most exhilarating bebop trumpeters ever, and here he is almost exclusively on flugelhorn, with its limited capacity for high-note streaks, playing Sullivan's notion of more "contemporary" material. I'm not saying the duo should play bebop exclusively, but to ignore the idiom completely when the gloriously rejuvenated Rodney is in the band is plain crazy. Okay record though, and the band is good. **John McLaughlin**'s *My Goals Beyond* was always a good album; its guitar solos stand up as well as anything he's done, and the acoustic collectives "Peace One" and "Peace Two," which meld acoustic jazz and Indian music and highlight folks like Charlie Haden and Dave Liebman, are sweet reminders of a time when the birth of a new world seemed possible without labor pains, and remain luminous and impassioned performances. I've tried to get one of our rock boys to review **Material**'s *Memory Serves*, because that's where this balancing act between smart-rock and avant-jazz puts its feet. It's an impressive, brilliant and rather heartless album, a new-rock bottom (the Laswell-Maher-Beinhorn rhythm section is formidable) with new-jazz accoutrements supplied by Olu Dara, Henry Threadgill, George Lewis and Billy Bang. It's a helluva hip idea for a band and everyone plays well and the walls between forms are coming down all right, but the album's brutality makes me wonder if we'll end up with freedom or just a bigger prison.

Biggest surprise this month was *Aisha*, a big band date from **Saheb Sarbib** (Cadence Jazz *via* NMDS; 500 Broadway, NY 10012) packed with some of the agreeable looseness of the avant-garde. Soloists of all persuasions, many of them previously unrecorded, pop out of the interstices with invigorating things to say, and the record overall has the exuberance of all really good big band music. *Duo*, from violinist **Billy Bang** and bassist **John Lindberg** (Anima *via* NMDS) is as impressive a demonstration of the virtues of virtuosity as I've heard in awhile. For a violin and bass duo, they do some *hard* playing and generate a surprising amount of variety, but what cinches the album's success is that none of it—instrumental command, range of effects, demonstrations of power—seems gratuitous. **Alberta Hunter**, who just celebrated her 87th birthday, still seems capable of investing her songs with inordinate amounts of guts and conviction. *The Glory Of Alberta Hunter* (Columbia) is about as good as *Amtrak Blues*, which is saying a lot, and if life is what you like, it's here.

From Ulmer's *Are You Glad To Be In America*

Meanwhile, back in the meat-and-potatoes division, Muse Records goes on with the unglamorous business of putting out good jazz records. **Sonny Stitt**, *In Style*, finds the great reedman in reasonably fine fettle, maintaining as usual separate identities on tenor and alto, but if I were shopping for Stitt I'd go farther back in the Muse catalog for *Stitt's Back*, on which he plays at least as well and duels with Ricky Ford. *Jazz Caper* by **Bill Barron** is the tenorist's first date under his own name in a shocking twelve years. His brother Kenny takes, I think, the best solos, but Barron's severe, original voice is good to hear again, his seven originals have unusual structural integrity, and Jimmy Owens, Buster Williams and Ed Blackwell are all on hand and good. But the Muse with the best feeling to it comes from trumpeter **Bill Hardman**, I think, in *Politely*, a quintet far lighter in tone than Barron's, with Brownian wit from Hardman, and the welcome return after too long absence of Horace Silver's old tenorist, Junior Cook. Artists House is back in business with an extraordinary **Gil Evans** album which is perhaps his best, and an American issue and remix of **James Blood Ulmer**'s *Are You Glad To Be In America* which holds up nicely even after his Columbia disc. The sound is certainly superior to the Rough Trade import, and the cover art's as funny as the title tune's lyric. Available

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PolyGram, Inc., is inundating the world with Japanese Verves, among them lots of Oscar Petersons (*West Side Story* is back). I especially welcomed **Stan Getz**, *Focus*, with the original cover art (who cares?) and a better pressing (I care) than the reissue American Verve put out two years back. The mating of Getz at his best and Eddie Sauter's modern (as in Stravinsky, Prokofiev) string charts remains a classic. *Stay With Me* is one of **Billie Holiday**'s later recordings, voice torn and power intact, iconic. *Jam Session #3* is a fine example of pre-Pablovian jamaraderie piloted by the great sage **Count Basie** and featuring some of the best **Wardell Gray** on record, also excellent **Benny Carter**. *Goin' Out Of My Head* was the beginning of **Wes Montgomery**'s popification under Creed Taylor. It's warm, but go for the Prestige twofers first. **Peterson, Eldridge, Jo Jones** and **Stitt** *At Newport* is a superior example of JATP-style concertizing, but greater by far is *The Jazz Giants '56*, essentially a **Lester Young** album, Pres, like eyeless Gloucester, lending a terrible dignity to the date. He is great and heartbreaking on the ballads, and "Gigantic Blues" was always a standby in postwar Lestoriana. But that's not all, folks. PolyGram's Barry Feldman's been poking around in the Verve vaults and tells me he's found a Getz quartet date with Steve Kuhn and Steve Swallow, and, get this, *twelve hours of unissued Duke Ellington, ten boxes of unissued Count Basie*. Tells me he didn't have that much time to look around, there may be more. Will any of it come out? Will report in the future....

Rock Shorts, from pg. 84

of the Me Generation. And Butler gives his band of mostly Midwestern musos damn ingenious licks to play, as though he were rustling up some Tin Huey for the masses.

Thin Lizzy — *Renegade* (Warner Bros.) Lizzy's HM moxie and Phil Lynoff's black Celtic cool are undermined here by indifferent material and indecisive arrangements. Best moments: the ringing chorus of "Hollywood (Down On Your Luck)" and the streetwise poignancy of "It's Getting Dangerous." The epic grinder "Angel Of Death" would have made it except for the wimpy synths and the dopey Darth Vader rap.

Sheena Easton — *You Could Have Been With Me* (EMI America) Olivia may get physical, but this Scottish fox gets downright dirty. Although the songs and arrangements are run-of-the-mill adult contemporary, when she belts, swoons and heavy breathes her way through "I'm Not Worth The Hurt," you know different.

The Act — *Too Late At 20* (Hannibal) Competent, sometimes stirring, angry young pop in the Costello/Parker/Rumour mold. The most outstanding thing about them is that lead guitarist Mark Gilmour is Pink Floyd Dave's younger bro.

Slow Children (Ensign) At last, a serious American contender in the synth-pop sweepstakes (funny, though, how they're signed to an English label). No soft sell here, though. There are still plenty of rankled guitars and muscular drum-beating. Yet the brisk mathematical clip of this male-female duo's songs, their attractively clever lyrics and singer Pal Shazar's catty conversational tone will at the very least send you into XTC.

Uptown Horns, from pg. 38

For the Uptown Horns and our rhythm section, whom we now call Funkaderos, the whole Tramps experience has been an exhilarating challenge, and the hours we've spent working together have allowed us, literally, to become a band; we're going to start working around the city in early '82. But our ultimate dream was to have a horn section hold an audience's attention playing rock and R&B with a variety of artists and kinds of music in an evening's show, and so far that fantasy has been rolling along and developing quite nicely. Most Tuesday nights you can still find us down at the nightclub working peacefully towards the day when all horns and guitars can once again work together to ride the airwaves and fill the gin-mills with good old (or good new) rock 'n' roll. Ⓜ

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Rebennack, from pg. 18

Wexler was brought in to try to get Dr. John closer to his New Orleans roots, and came up with an album called *Gumbo*. The tunes were a mix of little-known rock 'n' roll gems from Rebennack's days with Ace and even more obscure local classics like "Iko Iko" (a hit single) and "Junko Partner." But *Gumbo* was hardly an exercise in nostalgia; its synthesis of twenty years of playing and three score more of history generated some of Dr. John's most outstanding music. Remarkably, it still sounds fresh ten years after the fact and continues to be a source of inspiration—compare *Gumbo*'s "Stack-A-Lee" to the version that prefaces the Clash's "Wrong 'Un Boyo," or the organ riff from "Big Chief" to Nick Lowe's "Zulu Kiss" and you'll see what I mean.

Then in '73, Rebennack turned to Allen Toussaint & the Meters for a record that combined the energy of *Gumbo* with the moody funk of *Gris Gris* (which by then had been reissued to cash in on Dr. John's new found success). The result was *Right Place, Wrong Time*, Dr. John's biggest hit ever. The title cut and the slyly lugubrious "Such A Night" made the top forty.

"It sold a lot," Rebennack admitted, "but I liked the album we did after that better, *Desitively Bonaroo*. Even though it never made a hit—one song on the album barely made the charts and we got dropped—that was the record I was happiest with at the time. The only thing I was disappointed with was that we didn't get all of the cuts on the record, and the record didn't really come out the way me and Toussaint had tried to put it together.

"At the time, Allen & the Meters were the first-string rhythm section in New Orleans, and it was closer to the way of doing records that I was raised into. Alvin 'Red' Tyler, the guy I learned to be an A&R man, producer, anything else from, was the same guy Toussaint had come up with. There was a way of doing records: you looked for simple, easy grooves and then you developed them from there. That concept of the New Orleans thing was ingrained in Allen and myself and a lot of guys. It's just a way we have of having a lot of fun making records that could communicate at the same time."

After he was dropped by Atlantic, Dr. John was signed to United Artists, but the album that followed was disappointing. *Hollywood Know Thy Name* featured one side of tepid studio material, and one side of the Rhythm and Blues Revue that had been worked into the Dr. John stage show. It was that second side that held Rebennack's interest, but unfortunately it didn't do the same for the fans. What they wanted was a taste of New Orleans voodoo, the Gris Gris show. And, as Rebennack put it, "It was stagnating always doing the same show.

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"I had lost the thrill for the Gris Gris show, and we weren't really doing it properly any longer. To me, that was a kind of spiritual show, and we were desecrating it or something.

"I cut out doing that show, and we got stuck doing the Mardi Gras show. It just became redundant. The people were digging it, but we were just stuck in this thing and it was exactly what we were always trying to avoid. The book was created so that the guys could play freely in it, and there was no question that anybody could get ho-hummed out with the gig behind the book. Then, without ever seeing that it could happen, the *show* became a trap."

Eventually, UA dropped Dr. John, and Rebennack decided to lay low for a while. "I started to just get the guys and go play a gig every now and then," he said. "No show." Because he was only interested in the music, not in getting caught in the trap that made Dr. John a drag, he didn't get involved in recording again until Tommy LiPuma took over Horizon Records. "My key interest in looking into that was that Tommy was starting a label with guys that were close to me, like Neil Larsen, Buzzy Feiten and a lot of guys who were good players from around here. I knew that if these guys were going there, this could be an interesting label."

Once again, things didn't quite pan out, but led Rebennack into some unexpected success. A version of Bobby Darin's "Splish Splash" that he recorded for the second volume of *In Harmony* became a chart single, and an album of piano solos for the Baltimore-based Clean Cuts label, *Dr. John Plays Mac Rebennack*, ranks with the best work of his career.

Where the great Dr. John albums served up Rebennack's roots in a tasty stew, his solo piano album offers a more detailed examination. "Dorothy," for example, stresses the ragtime elements in the New Orleans piano style, while "Delicado" closes in on the Latin tinge that has percolated piano bass lines since Jellyroll Morton discovered the tango. If you want funk, concentrate on the undercurrents in "Memories Of Professor Longhair," a classic example of the left hand not caring about the rhythms of the right; if you'd rather get the low-down on what New Orleans did to boogie-woogie, simply compare Rebennack's "Pinetop" to the original "Pinetop's Boogie." All told, this is an album that cannot be ignored by anyone with even a passing interest in New Orleans music, or for that matter, piano literature in general.

Rebennack doesn't think he's going to be stuck going back to "the old stuff." He feels that today's audiences are much more sophisticated. "The people who were teenagers when we first started," he said, "they're mature in their taste. They have matured to want to hear something with a little more meat to it. It's like, we musicians have a responsibility to try to turn people on to their spiritual awareness, not just to please their meat level. 'Cause it's easier to play funk rhythms and just attack the meat, where they're dancing. Hit that sex level.

"It's harder, though, to get to that level where it hits that spiritual thing, with their mind and their heart, and also turn the meat on. Then you've achieved something like what people study yoga for, or other philosophical, religious disciplines. Art can open people up quicker than drugs or philosophy, *if* people are receptive to it.

"And lots of people now are receptive to it. I find more and more that I'll play gigs, and people will come up to me afterwards and say, 'Hey, man, this really turned me around—what was that?' Somebody hears something in a song that has an impact on them that I, as a musician, may not consciously relate to because it comes from another level. But other people, according to how receptive they are, may glean something more important out of it.

"One of the key things I've been trying to work on with the band and all is in this area, and it's very hard finding the material to work with that we could use to have this overall reaction, where we're not just going out to do another gig. 'Cause the higher purpose is the only thing that inspires you to go on and maybe run the hundred yard dash at the new record, to get that extra effort." M

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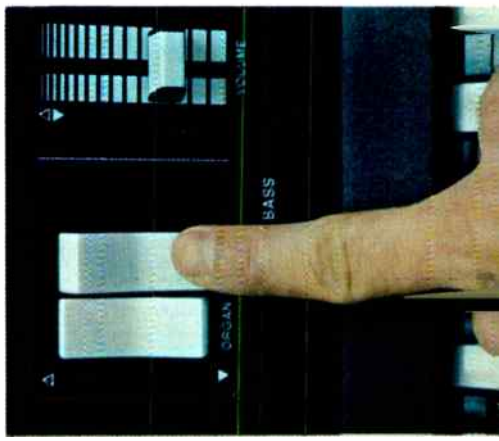
Says Joe Hedgecock, Gig Musician



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'DOC' POMUS, SONGWRITER SUPERHERO

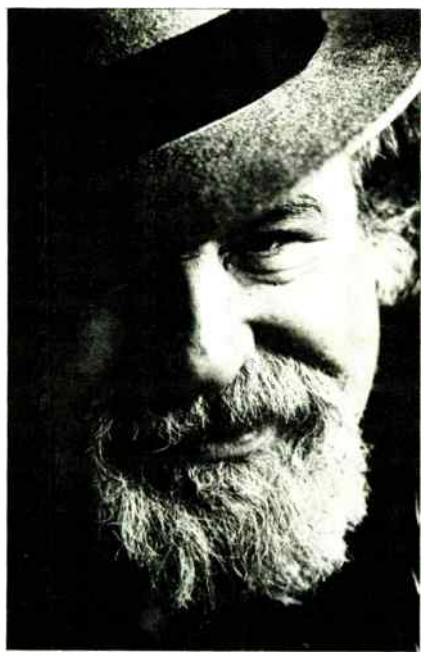
The writer of such greats as "Save The Last Dance For Me," "Teenager In Love," "Hushabye" and "Suspicion" talks about his life as a Brill Building legend.

By Gary Kenton

The name given to him when he was born on June 27, 1925 was Jerome Pomus, but everybody calls him Doc. It is one of those semi-legendary names familiar to music business *cognoscenti* but which escapes most casual fans. Yet, even the most impassive record buyers have glanced over his name hundreds of times in the songwriters' parentheses just below such all-time classics as "Save The Last Dance For Me," "This Magic Moment" and "Sweets For My Sweet" by the Drifters; "Little Sister," "His Latest Flame" and "Surrender" by Elvis Presley; "Teenager In Love" by Dion & the Belmonts; "Hushabye" by the Mystics; "Suspicion" by Terry Stafford; and "Seven Day Weekend" by Gary U.S. Bonds, as well as hits for Big Joe Turner, Jimmy Clanton, Ben E. King, Fabian, Andy Williams and others. But Pomus remains too active as a writer, producer and mentor to be related to antiquity. A song he wrote with Dr. John Rebennack for B.B. King, "There Must Be A Better World Someplace," recently won a Grammy Award, and *Le Chat Blue*, which he co-wrote and produced for Mink DeVille in 1980, is widely considered that artist's best recorded work.

Confined to a wheelchair for the last seventeen years, Doc Pomus reveals the ill-effects of a sedentary existence. When he wheels into a night club, though, as he does almost every night, there is hardly a musician, club owner, bartender or writer who doesn't greet him with unabashed affection. Spilling out of that wheelchair, along with his physical baggage, is an infectious good humor, a veteran's knowledge and a crusty, hipster's manner which fails to conceal a rare generosity of spirit. That spirit has been the same since he first sang professionally, at the age of six, at the Manhattan Beach band shell in Brooklyn. "Yeah," he says, "I'm still doing the same nonsense."

All the "nonsense" began in earnest for Doc Pomus when, as a teenager, he started singing blues in black clubs around the New York area, patterning himself after Joe Turner. (Several years later, he was to enjoy the rare privilege of not only meeting his idol, but writing some hit songs for him.) But Pomus' singing career didn't pan out, a fact for which singers should be eternally grateful. "I was about thirty years old and I thought I finally had a hit with a record



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Doc's lyrics deal with the joys and crises of teenage life in a non-condescending way.

called 'Heartlessly' on the Dawn label," Pomus recalls. "Alan Freed went on the record and he broke it in New York. I was hearing myself every day on the radio. Then, as was the custom in those days when there was a local hit, a major company, RCA Victor, picked it up. And then it died. To this day I don't know why. But that was the end of my singing career."

Pomus had already started writing songs for other artists and, now that he was devoting himself to it full-time, he needed a partner. There was a friend of the family, a young kid, who would trail Pomus to the clubs and hang around his hotel (the Jefferson, where, in addition to Pomus, Ahmet Ertegun lived and Atlantic Records would have its first offices). The kid, who Pomus started breaking in as a writer, was Mort Shuman. "I started giving him ten percent of every song he was around for," says Pomus. "This went on for a year or so until he was really contributing and I made him a full partner, fifty percent." It was with Shuman that Pomus would write most of his biggest hits throughout the 50s and 60s, Mort writing most of the music and Doc providing the lyrics.

The fledgling songwriting team got their first break from yet another Brooklynite, Otis Blackwell, who had already authored several hits including "All Shook Up," "Don't Be Cruel" and "Handy Man." He brought Pomus and Shuman to Paul Case, at Hill & Range song publishers, who liked their work and agreed to pay them the then-princely sum of $300-a-week, $100 of which went to bachelor Shuman and $200 to newlywed Pomus, whose wife was pregnant. "That was good money in those days," says Pomus, "and Paul Case was taking a chance because we hadn't had one significant record to that point."

Case's faith was rewarded almost immediately. Only a couple of months later, early in 1959, Pomus-Shuman had two songs in the top forty with Fabian's "I'm A Man" and Bobby Darin's "Plain Jane." Those songs hardly rank among Pomus' finest lyrical efforts, but were the first in a string of successes that would prove the Pomus-Shuman team to be one of the most versatile and durable in pop music history. Within the next two years, their songs reached the top ten a dozen times, during which streak Doc Pomus proved himself capable of squeezing as much emotion into the three-minute pop format as any lyricist since the heyday of Cole Porter and Lorenz Hart. In what was a burgeoning youth market called rock 'n' roll, he had the inestimable ability to speak directly to the young, possessing what Greg Shaw called a "genuine empathy with teenagers," while never condescending or losing his universality. "I never typecasted," Pomus says. "I always varied my songs so that someone else might record it in the future. Of course, I thought the 'future' was a year or two."

Pomus and Shuman were only two among a whole generation of songwriters who reached out to the new rock audience, and most of the hits seemed to pour out of one ornate building at Broadway and 49th Street in Manhattan. The cornerstone of what came to be known as the "Brill Building Sound" was the stable of writers at Aldon Music, run by Al Nevins and Don Kirshner, actually ensconced across the street at 1650 Broadway. Their roster included Gerry Goffin, Carole King, Neil Diamond, Howie Greenfield, Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil and Bobby Darin. And there was another mainstay who came to Aldon via Pomus and Shuman: Neil Sedaka.

"I met Kirshner originally because he was dating a cousin of mine," says Pomus, "and he was writing with Bobby Darin. But Donnie was a terrible writer.

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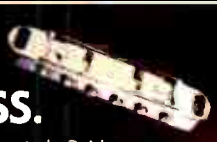

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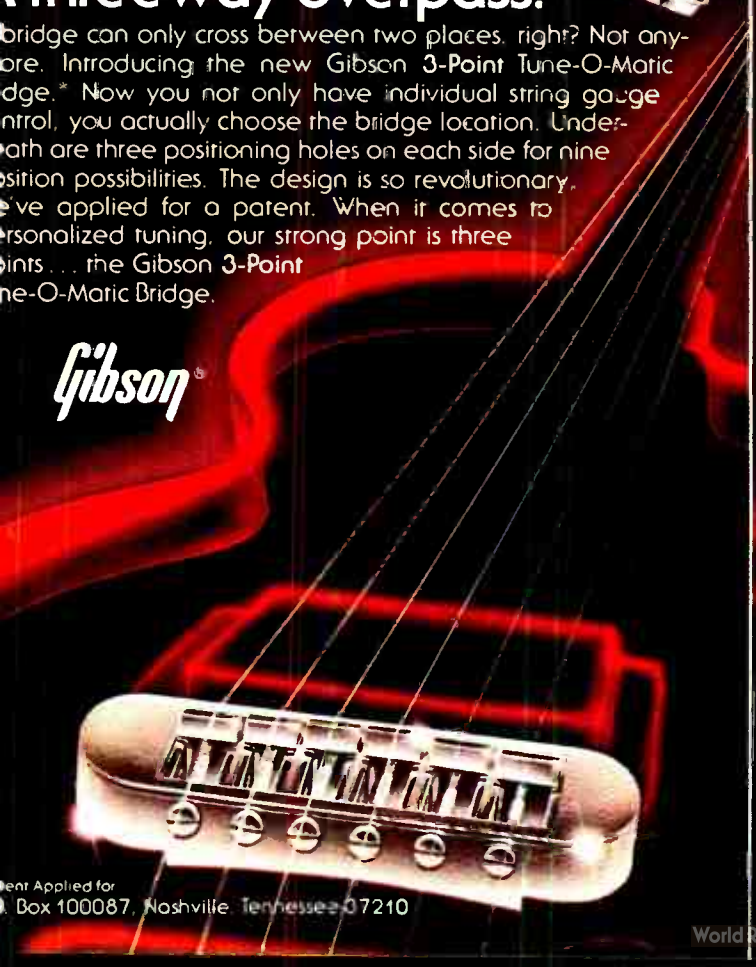

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One day he asked me if I thought he had a future as a songwriter, and I said absolutely not. He said, 'Well, publishers make more money than songwriters anyway.' Then later, just before Mort and I went with Hill & Range, Donnie came to us to write, but he didn't want to pay very much. We were struggling at that point, but we decided to hold out. There was a guy who lived in Mortie's building, though, who used to hang around our office all the time, so we sent him over to Kirshner. That was Neil Sedaka. Donnie often tells a different story about how he found Neil, but the truth is that Neil went to Aldon because he was willing to work for almost nothing."

Apart from Aldon, the "Brill Building Sound" encompassed such other New York-based writers as Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, Jerry Ragavoy, Bert Berns and Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller, the latter team already having had such rhythm and blues hits as "Hound Dog," "Smokey Joe's Cafe" and "Searchin'." "Everybody was borrowing from everybody," recalls Pomus with a grin, "but Leiber & Stoller were really the predecessors... they were the guys."

If there was a common thread uniting these writers, apart from their geographical proximity, it was their ability to describe the vagaries of young romance without trivializing. "I always thought there was a connection between the problems of young people and older people," says Pomus. "To be in love causes problems no matter what age you are. If a kid has a problem with a girl, I treated it as a real problem. One result of this, I guess, is that people can still relate to those songs today. I never anticipated that. To be honest, I never took any of it seriously until the past five or six years. It never entered my mind at the time that I might have been writing something profound, or anything like that. But I've discussed this with creative writers of all kinds and they've all said that they've been unable to put their work in perspective as they do it. I don't think that any creative person really *knows*, it just comes from inside."

Unfortunately, the string of hits ran out for Pomus in about 1965. After a triumphant trip to England, where he and Shuman were greeted as superstars (at one point, there were three *different* versions of "Teenager In Love" in the British top ten at the same time), Doc took a bad fall and was bed-ridden for several months. After moving around on crutches since he had been a victim of infantile paralysis at age five, Pomus was now confined to a wheelchair. While he was in the hospital, his two closest relationships broke down: both Mort Shuman, who moved to Europe, and his wife, who filed for divorce, left him. And Pomus figured that his time in the music business was up, too.

"It wasn't so traumatic for me to leave the music business with all this stuff coming down at once," he says with no apparent bitterness. "You've got to remember that we had no idea that this rock 'n' roll was going to last. In America, it was still backdoor stuff. There were no concert halls, no rock columns in newspapers... what we were doing was like some underground sleaze that we happened to make a living at. And there wasn't much money in it. A songwriter makes twenty times as much today as we did back then, when it was mostly singles. Today, if you've got a hit 45, you're probably selling some albums, with ten or twelve cuts on it. I've made more money in the last two years than in my five hottest years put together. Until I went with Hill & Range, I never made more than two grand a year. I swear it wasn't until I was 32 that I lived in a hotel where I had my own bathroom. And even in the 60s, the royalties weren't that great."

For the next decade, Pomus wrote sporadically, collaborating with Phil Spector and others on occasion, but he made most of his money gambling. "This was the era of acid rock and all that," Pomus sighs (he says the words "acid rock" as if he were talking about the plague). "I tell you, the worst thing that ever happened to songwriters was Bob Dylan. Because he was able to write a great philosophical type of song. But after him, you had thousands of assholes thinking they could write philoso-

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phical songs *and*, to make it worse, they didn't think they had to have good singing voices. That combination, along with drugs, ruined more promising songwriters."

So it was that, until the mid-70s, Doc Pomus, one of the great pop songsmiths, paid his rent mainly by playing cards. But he was still a fixture at the clubs—he continued to conduct much of his business from the back of niteries like Tramps or the Lone Star or Kenny's in Greenwich Village—and it took only a little prodding from Mac "Dr. John" Rebennack to get him back into music full-time. He worked with Dr. John on his *City Lights* and *Tango Palace* albums, with Willy DeVille on *Le Chat Blue* and with B.B. King. "With B.B.," says Pomus, "I proved to myself that I could write good stuff that was also commercial. *There Must Be A Better World Someplace* was his biggest album in ten years. I even got an award from the National Academy of the Blues (for Composer of the Year) for that song. I'm as proud of that as anything I've done in my career."

If he were to rest on his laurels, doing nothing but reminiscing and dispensing record biz wisdom, his place in the pop music pantheon would be secure. And, with a minor resurgence in the appreciation of the songwriting craft, Pomus' royalties are fairly steady again. But, surprisingly, in view of his track record and his recent renaissance, Pomus does not get many work offers. One thing that seems to work against him is his own legend; popular artists such as the Eagles, Ry Cooder and J.D. Souther are constantly singing his praises, but none approach him with jobs, which is frustrating to a man who is anxious to be off the legendary pedestal and writing. "When I get calls," he says, "it's usually people with problems."

But he'll keep at it. It may sound trite, but Pomus' entire life, aside from his dedication to his children (Geoff, 19, plays football and deejays at Dartmouth, while Sharon, 23, is an art therapist and photographer), revolves around his talent and his ability to nurture it in others. "If I can help a young artist who's out there scuffling," he says, "I enjoy it. As long as there's talent. I'm not trying to go to heaven or anything, it's just the most natural thing. Because I had it tough.... Leiber & Stoller and Otis Blackwell helped me. They were at the next step and they reached back and gave me a boost. If you're at the same level, people are too busy struggling, they won't help you. They're afraid you're going to make it at their expense. But, if you've reached a certain level, you can help out. And, hopefully, someone at the next plateau will do the same for you. My philosophy has always been, if you give more than you get, you don't get in serious trouble. And I try to teach my kids to live that way." Ⓜ

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builds and repairs instrumentsfor many New York studio pros, the *weight* of the body is also a crucial factor in relation to the volume at which the guitar will be played. A light guitar that "sings" at low to medium volumes will give out at very high levels and produce a thin sound. On the other hand, a heavy guitar that gives you the kind of grinding sustain a Marshall stack is made to produce, will sound dull and lifeless with a smaller amp. The weight, density and hardness of a guitar body are all closely connected, because the shape of the body is pretty well fixed by tradition or by design considerations such as the size of the average player and the physical properties of the wood. An all-mahogany Les Paul, for example, would be uncomfortably thick if it weighed as much as one with a maple top. Conversely, a rosewood or rock maple Strat body weighing the same as an alder body would be so thin that it would be in constant danger of warping.

Sadowsky is something of an expert on Fender guitars, and has recently been building Strat-style instruments out of *alder*, the wood used in the original vintage Fender instruments. Although alder is softer and lighter than mahogany, weighing in at only 28.8 pounds per cubic foot, it has small pores, like maple. The differences between Sadowsky's alder-bodied Strat and recent ash-body Fenders are obvious and instructive. The alder instrument is much lighter, with a sweeter tone and a more transparent high end than the dense, ash-bodied Strats of today. In fact, with vintage replica pickups and a lightweight bridge installed, Sadowsky's Strat could fool most 50s and 60s Strat *aficionados* in a blindfold test. Ken Tucker of Guitarman Instruments confirms Sadowsky's experiments, pointing out that the best vintage Strats he's played are the lightest, and that top-drawer Japanese copy builders like Fernandes and Tokai are using alder or a similar light wood in their vintage replica guitars.

Sadowsky took me into the back room of his shop in Manhattan and demonstrated how he selects bodies and necks for his guitars by using a tapping and listening process similar to that employed by master arch-top carvers like Jimmy D'Aquisto. The test is only approximate when applied to solid-body guitars, but Roger says he can tell an instrument will have that special sound if the body and neck produces a definite tone when held to the ear and tapped with the knuckles. Two bodies or necks may look exactly alike, but one will produce a definite note, the other only a dull thud. So it's not just the kind of wood, but the *individual piece* that makes a guitar sing. The exact differences between a resonant and non-resonant neck or body, however, remain a mystery.

Another point brought home by Sadowsky's tapping test is that guitar design and building is a matter of compromises and trade-offs, in this case between the ideals of perfect sustain and totally consistent tone and volume throughout the instrument's range, and the real-world nuances of tone and attack that give a guitar its individuality. *Resonant frequencies* in the body and neck will drain vibrational energy from the string much faster when the note is a *harmonic* of the body or neck resonance, resulting in "imperfections" of tone and sustain, "dead spots" on the neck, and other quirks that force a player to adapt his style and technique to the instrument. There are lots of ways, such as heavy brass hardware, of minimizing the interaction between the strings and the wood. But, as Jeff Hasselberger, who designed the Ibanez "Signature Series" guitars while working for the Elger Company, points out, the perfect guitar that sustains forever and is totally consistent all over the neck turns out to be a drag to play, because the instrument has no personality, there's nothing there to interact with the personality of the player to produce an individual sound. Hasselberger gave up searching for the perfect guitar that would be all things to all players some time ago (probably about the time Ibanez brought out its solid brass Artist guitar).

Perhaps it's magic, or perhaps it's just the fact that the sound of the electric guitar was defined so strongly by the genius of its early creators, but technological "improvements" invariably seem to improve everything *but* the sound. A case in point is the polyurethane and epoxy finishes on many new guitars. They're shiny, they're hard, they don't rub off or peel as easily as the lacquer still used by custom makers and a few companies like Gibson, but according to Phil Petillo, they do penetrate the wood much more deeply than lacquer finishes, and once they dry and harden, the wood is forever stiffened and the sound of the instrument is affected.

Another innovation losing favor with most of the luthiers I talked to is the use of decorative exotic hardwoods. Highly contrasting grain patterns and fancy swirls make great looking furniture, but guitar builders say that they're hard to work with, usually prone to checks and cracks as the weather changes, and they're generally too hard and dense to produce a good-sounding guitar.

Ultimately, of course, it's the player's choice, but thinking of the electric solid-body as an acoustic instrument should help you understand the good and bad points of different replacement parts, finishes and woods. It may even help you find a great axe the next time you go out looking for a guitar, provided you can find a quiet room where you can hear what an electric guitar *really* sounds like—acoustically. Ⓜ

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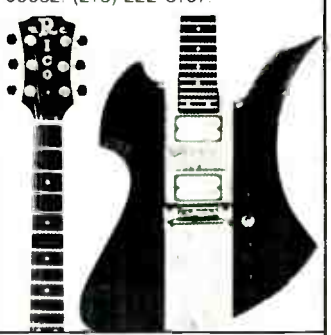

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The revolutionary **Gibson** Sonex 180 Deluxe, introduced in 1980, was designed to combine the Gibson "feel" and "sound" with a low price, and continues to satisfy these goals. The guitar is fitted with two high output humbucking pickups, individual tone and volume controls for each pickup, a rosewood fingerboard, chrome-plated hardware, and a maple centerblock running throughout the length of the sculptured Les Paul style body for added sustain and brilliance. The instrument is offered in a number of specialty finishes, complete with a high gloss finish treatment. The expensive hand buffing traditionally reserved for Gibson's top-of-the-line models is now available on the Sonex. Gibson, Box 100087, Nashville, TN 37210.

Bose Corp. has announced the introduction of the 402 Articulated Array loudspeaker system designed for high-quality reinforcement of voices and acoustic instruments. Bose research showed that most vocal and acoustic groups require accurate reinforcement of only a very specific range of frequencies. By optimizing the 402's performance in this frequency range, they were able to engineer a product that offers substantially greater clarity and projection than many full-range speakers in its price class. The TK-4 Transit Kit lets you clamp a pair of 402s, the equalizer and all accessories together into a one-piece System Set that weighs only 37 pounds. For the first time, performers can carry their entire P.A. speaker system in one hand. Bose, The Mountain, Framingham, MA 01701. (617) 879-7330.

The first user programmable audio processor with memory has been announced by **Lexicon**. Model 97 Super Prime Time allows the user to create, store in memory and recall the desired effects in any sequence at the push of a button. The eight built-in effects include: flanging, resonant flanging, doubling, tripling, chorusing, slap echo, short echo and long echo. Musicians can use the off-line tape storage to save and, if desired, keep confidential their repertoire of audio enhancements and effects. Programs can be re-loaded into any Super Prime Time from a standard audio cassette at the push of a button, so engineers and producers have the efficiency and convenience of working with their own library of effects at any studio or stage facility which has the unit. Lexicon, 60 Turner St., Waltham, MA 02154. (617) 891-6790.

The most musically usable and intense effects available today are housed in virtually indestructible Lexan® polycarbonate cases which are scratch-resistant, impervious to shock and will look new for years. The Commande Series' large and accessible footswitch lets you engage the effect smoothly and quietly while a high intensity LED, positioned for maximum visibility and protected by the shape of the case, tells you when you're In Commande. A new pop-open battery access cover with a living hinge design that will last indefinitely enables you to change the batteries in a matter of seconds without tools. Convenient end-located jacks for input, output and remote AC power simplify the hookup of single effects and multiple effects chains.

The Commande Series embodies the implicit corporate philosophy at MXR. From day one, we've understood our products to represent more than mere hardware in the music-making process. Our signal processing devices are intended as individual instruments for the musician to use much as an artist uses a palette and a paintbrush. Colorations to enhance the music and focus a musician's individual means of creative expression. Transcending the hard-line parameters of electronic technology where signal processing becomes an art form in itself.

Time Delay

Providing audio delay times of 30 to 300 milliseconds, the Time Delay also features a Regeneration control for repeating echoes and hard reverb. Internal noise reduction circuitry produces a dynamic range greater than 85 dB.

Phaser

The Phaser's Sweep Control provides a wide range of usable phasing effects and Regeneration can be added for extra color and depth. Innovative switching technology allows higher signal levels without distortion and produces one of the most consistent phasing effects ever created.

Overdrive

The Overdrive offers the full range of distortion effects from a heavy fuzz with prolonged sustain to a more subtle tube saturation effect. Two controls allow adjustment of distortion and output levels.

Sustain

The Sustain produces smooth, natural-sounding compression and the punch of a dynamic attack by making automatic adjustments to the attack and release times in response to the rate of change of the input signal. Provides unbelievably long sustain.

Preamp

An instrument and transducer preamplifier, the Preamp's unique equalization circuit provides variable one-knob control of bass and treble boost or cut. A variable gain control offers from 0 to 20 dB of gain.

The Commande Series.

Another Original.

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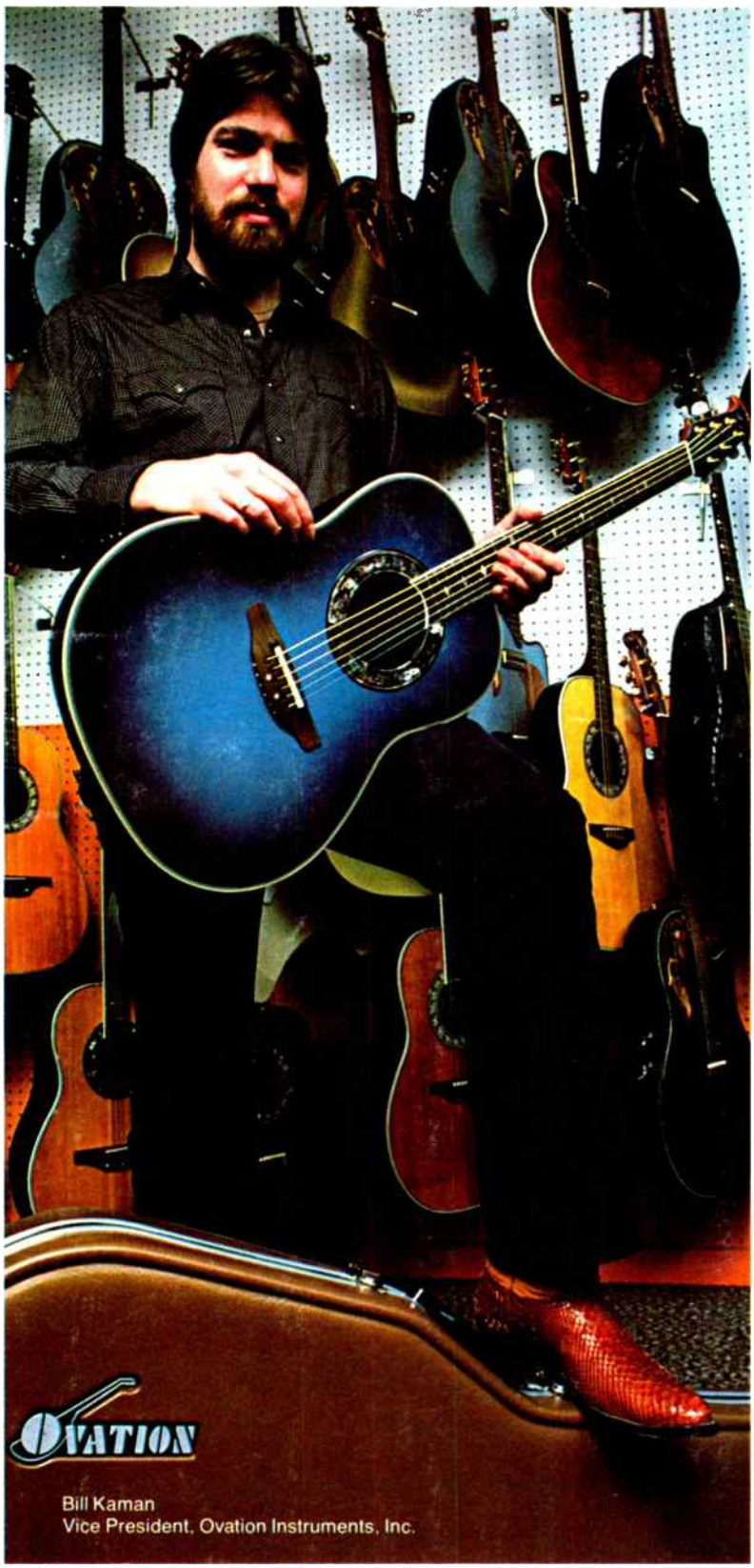

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