MUSICIAN

ANATOMY OF A RECORD DEAL

$1.95
NO. 69, JULY, 1984

R.E.M.
Kudzu Power

CHARLIE WATTS
Interviewed by Max Weinberg

Michael Jackson's Perfect Universe

by Nelson George

The Music Behind The Mania

- QUINCY JONES
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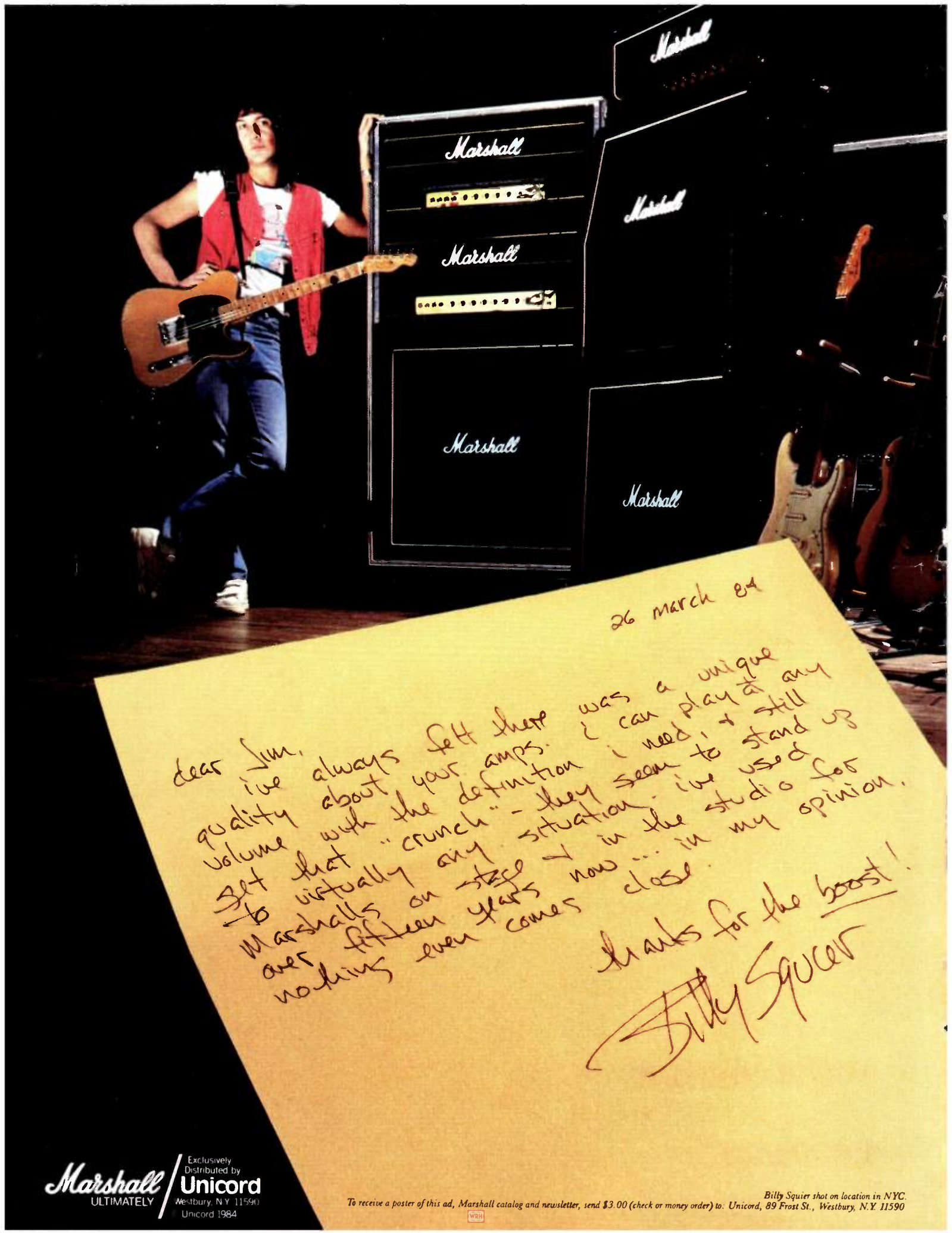

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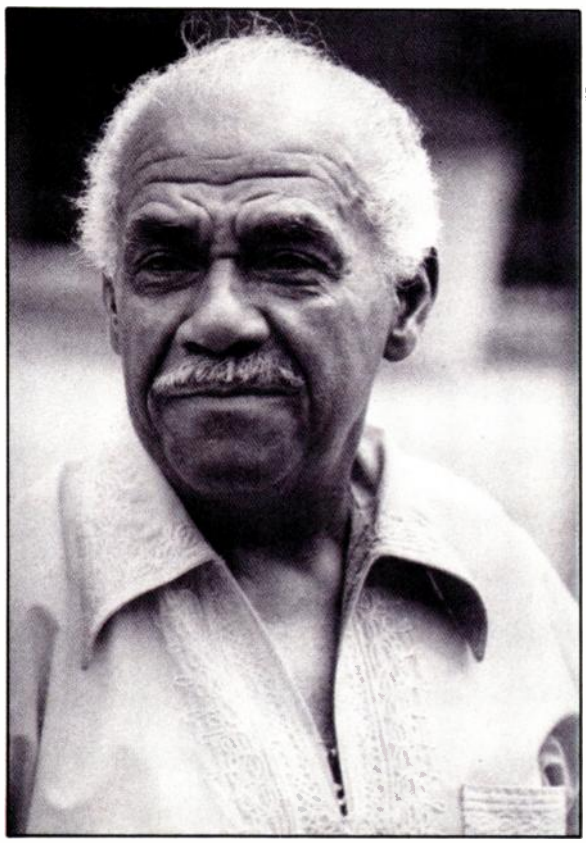

FRAN VOGEL

On April 15, 1984, the music world lost Francisco Raul Grillo, or as he was better known, Machito, a singer and bandleader of reknown who practiced his craft in New York and around the world for over fifty years. With brother-in-law Mario Bauza, he first formed his fabled Machito & his Afrocubans in 1941. Bauza's jazz credentials (musical director and trumpet player of the Noble Sissle, Cab Calloway and Chick Webb orchestras, discovering Ella Fitzgerald during his tenure in the latter's band) gave the Afrocubans instant credibility; but it was Machito's stage presence which made the band click in live performance. The two friends, who grew up in the same Pogolotti neighborhood in Havana, knew they had something special from their first rehearsal in a heatless tenement at 138th Street and Lenox. They also realized that the key to their success would rest in their ability to mix luscious big-band harmonies with intense Afro-Cuban percussive rhythms.

After conquering the sparse dance venues of Spanish Harlem, Machito & the Afrocubans debuted at La Conga, 46th Street and Broadway in 1943—the first black Latin musicians to work at a midtown club. Shortly thereafter, an agent hired by a dime-a-dance club at 53rd Street and Broadway engaged Machito to play American standards for the few customers who still dared venture into the place. Instead, Bauza convinced the agent to put on a Sunday afternoon Latin dance. The agent acquiesced. By the time the doors opened that eventful day, throngs of Latin dancers were waiting outside. Weeks later, when the dime-a-dance entity headed towards that Unhappy Grounds for Failed Nightclubs in the Sky, Machito moved over to the Palladium Ballroom, and history was made.

The Palladium became *the* place during the remainder of the 40s and 50s. Beautiful women, dashing men, WASPS, Jews, blacks, Middle-Easterners, Hispanics, all swayed and swiveled on the dancefloor, arms flailing and hips threatening to leave their sockets, propelled by the beat of the Afrocubans—the furious attack of bongo player Jose Mangual and pianist Rene Hernandez providing a dynamic cushion to the sometimes sweet, sometimes throbbing sax section, the basic framework for the powerful waves of trumpet riffs which invariably engendered pandemonium. Amidst it all, Machito's vocals—now joined by sister Graciela—served as a constant guide.

Songs like "Tanga" (the African word for marijuana), "Asia Minor" and "Llora Timbero" became anthems for the mixed Palladium crowd, which often included luminaries like Harry Belafonte and Marlon Brando, all moving in a style still known today as Palladium dancing. But sadly, the pendulum of popular fashion swung against Machito in the 60s and 70s. At a time when Americans were paying deserving—if long overdue—praise to jazz giants Armstrong and Ellington, the two creators of Latin jazz, Bauza and Machito, remained ignored, unappreciated, and even ridiculed, as a new breed of promoters, record executives and public termed their music "old fashioned." Machito remained stoic through it all, even when Bauza and sister Graciela left the band in 1975 after more than three decades. Years later he would say about those days, "God gave me more things than I deserve." On the rare occasions the orchestra played, Machito often had to dip into his own pocket to pay his musicians' salary.

Rather than retire, Machito applied his increasing free time to help others: counseling young would-be musicians, working with addicts at drug centers and assisting senior citizens. It wasn't until 1981 that his career took another upswing when Europe rediscovered him, and an initial ten-week tour was followed by another, and another. It was during one of those trips that he recorded *Machito And His Salsa Band 1982*, the LP which won him a Grammy for the first time in his long career.

"I called the album *Machito And His Salsa Band 1982* just to keep with the time, but I've been playing that music long before it was known as salsa," Machito pointed out. "As a matter of fact, the songs on the album were the same that I've been playing for the past thirty-eight years."

Few fans were aware of Machito's work with S.C.O.U.T., the senior citizens outreach program. It was a thing of beauty to watch Machito, his five-foot, four-inch frame erect, distinguishedly handsome with glistening olive skin, white hair and snowy moustache carefully manicured a tenth of an inch from his upper lip, lavishing attentions on the mostly female crowd with the same adroitness that he would a nightclub's.

I last saw him at the Village Gate on March 26, part of that club's Salsa Meets Jazz Monday series. Belying his many Aprils, Machito danced, sang, played maracas, and pattered to the crowd in both English and Spanish with customary verve, ever careful to avoid the spotlight during any of his band members' solos, for, as he used to say, "I'm nothing without them."

A stroke felled him in London on Wednesday, April 15, sending him into a coma which he never survived. His wake in New York extended for three days to accommodate the crowds. - **Tony Sabournin**

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torturing each other—Bob's song 'House Of Pain' really describes that well. But that family emptiness is a part of Bob's lyrics, part of that high 'n' lonesome sound, that lump-in-the-throat quality. It's why the mundane part of putting together a relationship has such a special meaning for him. It makes his songs real rather than art-school cleverness. There *is* humor and satire, but there's also real emotion, real sadness."

After four weeks at Bearsville, recording was running behind schedule. Hugh Jones worked even harder, his growing commitment to the record now manifested in his perfectionism (his fee would be the same no matter how long the project took). "Days and nights became the same thing—shot," remembers Gary Leib. "We'd just wake up and walk down there and at some point we'd all go, 'Okay, no more,' and then sleep for four hours." Jones' self-described specialty was vocals, and he was a man of his word. While some of the lead parts were done quickly, Hugh worked up contrapuntal background harmonies for several songs. The most ambitious vocal background transformed "Anywhere With You," as Trish and Bob were joined by Hugh and Will Garrett. The song became everyone's enthusiastic choice for the first single. By the end of the available time, though, not all the vocals had been done and instrumental problems remained. Jones returned to England and the masters lay dormant for over two months while the band tried to solve the serious problem of rebuilding their rhythm section for live performance.

This was not going well. First rehearsals revealed the depressing fact that Doug either hadn't been practicing enough or was too tied to his love of old blues and C&W to play the new material. Still, a showdown was postponed. "We did everything possible to make it work," sighs Bob. "We said, 'No, Doug is our friend. We gotta make it work.' And it wasn't working. The last two months it was, 'We'll do *anything* to make it work.'"

Doug's closest friend in the band, Gary Leib, was the most pulled apart by it all, but felt as vehemently as the others that Doug had not spent the recording period well: "We were so involved in making the album, it was easy to forget that at that time we were actually paying Doug a salary to be practicing, and he wasn't. He was there making us jolly, drawing idiots, being Mr. Yuks. It was great until you started practicing a new song and wanted to hear some bass, and suddenly it was, 'Oh brother, here we are again.' How many records could we make with John Doelp writing the bass parts and how much pressure did we want to be putting on Doug...."

Still, nothing was done before Bob, Trish and Don's trip to London for final vocals and mixing. "It was just like Bearsville," laughs Bob of their reunion with Hugh, "except instead of coffee and english muffins, it was coffee and McVitie's Digestive Biscuits. But it was really to our benefit to have waited." Indeed, the two months Hugh had put the LP out of his mind had greatly improved his perspective. He even dropped some of his ideas that were most suspect to Bob. The mixing ran over budget (how much is still unknown) but Bob insisted on rearranging the drum parts on two songs, a feat made possible by Hugh's recording of the LinnDrum's sync track at Bearsville. By the time the album, now dubbed *Scenic Views*, was finally finished, its inventive bridges and shifting textural detail were an important strength.

Don Rose used his time in London to build a separate relationship with PolyGram's British cousin, Phonogram, since a major strategy of Derek and Don's had been to sell the group to the British and to use the buzz and critical acceptability to break the States and Europe. Plans were made to release the first U.K. single a month before the U.S. version. Rose's wildest marketing ideas, considered too left-field in the United States, were well-received by Phonogram. Perhaps more importantly, the mixes were being well received by the rabidly anti-American British music press. Rose played five songs to editors at *NME, Melody Maker* and *Sounds*, and all did featurettes. "We didn't even have to do any explaining," Bob marvels. "They just immediately understood the music. We've never had that reaction."

Of the twelve songs originally planned for the LP, only nine went onto the album, with one used as a B-side for the single. The more everyone thought about it, the more the use of "Anywhere With You" as that first single seemed fraught with danger. "If you hit 'em first with a mainstream song, and they don't get it, then you're sunk. You've got all your eggs in one basket," Bob observes. "So they're hedging their bets and building a good AOR base before they try 'Anywhere.'" The first single became "The Hardest Thing," with the sure-kill hit held until after group identity was established.

But the hardest thing remained to be done. The band finally had to act to end the terrible limbo. Doug offered his resignation. Don then put a straightforward ad in the local papers: "Rubber Rodeo needs a bass player." Dozens of Boston's finest bassists auditioned. None of them seemed at all right for the band. Gary Leib shakes his head: "Every audition, we kept on looking at each other and going, 'What is going *on*?'" Holmes got "alarmingly good" at scoping resumes, but didn't even bother to run through it all with a relative nobody named Hal Cragin who had called Rose about twenty times for an audition. Hal fit perfectly. At the end of the process, he beat everyone hands down.

"When he came down to rehearsal, we were kidding him, 'I guess if you're the bass player, you're going to have to draw cartoons like Doug did,' and Hal said, 'I *draw* cartoons.' He had gone to art school and his main thing is drawing cartoons. We said, 'Oh. Of course.'"

The sense of relief brought more perspective on the way their rhythm section had been recorded. "The two issues of Doug and Barc were really the same issue," explains Mark Tomeo. Hugh Jones had used digital drums not because he didn't like Barc's playing, but because once John Doelp had become the album bassist, it was the only way the rhythm section could've been recorded. "A rhythm section is something that's not just between instruments," Bob notes. "It's between the psyches of each player."

Now in April, about to go to the California desert to shoot two rockvids which will join "How The West Was Won" on a long-form video single, and with tour preparations advancing, the band's mood is noticeably upbeat. "The best bass audition was the guy we didn't see," guffaws Mark Tomeo. "He was from the Billy Idol band, and wanted to know, 'Do I have to wear those funny outfits?'" The band collapses in collective mirth at the picture of someone clad in full Billy Idol regalia branding *their* stage garb "funny." The joke may ultimately still be on Rubber Rodeo, but so far they're taking it extremely well.

How the East Was Won

Mark Tomeo plays a Kline single-neck pedal steel and a Webb steel guitar amp. He also uses a Goodrich volume pedal, a Roland SDE-3000 digital delay, and a Scholz Rockman. **Gary Leib** plays a Roland Jupiter 6, Prophet 5 and Arp Odyssey through a Roland Space Echo, Yamaha power amp and Electro-Voice cabinets. His home recording unit consists of a Fostex 250 4-track cassette recorder, Oberheim Mini-sequencer, a Wurlitzer piano and Arp 2600 and 2620 keyboard. **Bob Holmes** swears by his semi-hollow Telecaster Deluxe with two humbuckers and uses a Fender Twin Reverb amp. **Hal Cragin** uses a Fender Jazz bass with EMG pickups, a Peavey power amp, Furman parametric equalizer and Electro-Voice cabinets. **Trish Milliken** pipes her Farfisa through a Roland Jazz Chorus 120 amp. **Barc Holmes** just got a set of Yamaha drums and uses Zildjian cymbals.

The studio at **Bearsville** uses a Neve 8058 console and a Studer A800 24-track recorder. Outboard gear includes an Eventide Harmonizer; a dbx 160 compressor, Klark Teknik, Pultek EQP-1A and Maxi-Q equalizers; a Kepex 2 noise gate; and a Gain Brain 2 level adjuster. For playback, a Perreau power amp and a Crown PSA-2 power a range of speakers, including Phase Linear 700Bs, Urei 813Bs JBL 2215s, Visonik David 9000s and Yamaha NS10. The wood, glass and steel main room is 65x35 by 45 feet high; the control room is an equally ample 22x18x12.

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thus giving a finished-mix momentum to the project. Derek Shulman has come up from Manhattan and couldn't be happier. The two Brits are giving a civics lesson in stiff-upper-lip: everything is "brill" and "smashing." The Yanks are equally thrilled. There's the heady scent of vindication in the air.

Derek is already thinking ahead to the next stages of promotion and marketing with his usual positivism: "I think it'll get on AOR radio. The key to any successful sale is crossing over to top forty. If it shows itself as a hit record, the numbers will be available for it in the company, believe me." But what if the support just isn't there? "I'll be in a group again if they do that to me," laughs the confident Shulman. He grows more pensive: "I've been reflecting in recent weeks how bizarre my situation really is. I'm still ultimately a musician, but here I am making key decisions, looking at computer printouts. It's like *The Twilight Zone*."

"He leads a double life. He really does," offers Don.

As Derek returns to the control room to say farewell, he can't resist a quick jibe: "So, good luck with your PolyGram *single*." "Oh no," moans Trish, "we're back on Eat." The band is hardly defenseless against this type of ribbing: they rave the new album will be a smash "because it's got the PolyGram Beat." Derek then professes great enthusiasm for the PolyGram Beat, breaking into a frenzied version of "Maniac" while furiously jogging, hands on thighs. The sight of Shulman's curls and beard madly bouncing amuses all. He departs for Manhattan and Rod Serling.

Hugh and Trish finish one song and plunge into the next, "Slow Me Down." This is one that's still up in the air, with Hugh's proposals under quiet scrutiny. He removes from the playback every instrument but the kick drum and patches it through a Lexicon Prime Time II. Through practiced trial and error, he finally gets the kick's quarter-note pulse to become sixteenth notes in the correct time. He then makes note of the digital readout, whips out a calculator and manipulates the figure. Punching in a new number on the Lexicon's display, Jones then turns up the other instruments on the rhythm track. The organ's delay is now in perfect time, so Trish can play a quick three-chord figure that will repeat for several bars, bouncing from the left channel to the right. This tantalizing detail will become the song's focus for a few moments before a bracing pedal steel intro.

"I'm not a believer in setting up a balance and letting it go," observes Jones, dubbed "His Hughness" by his lunatic fringe subjects. "I like things moving in and out a lot, so at certain points in a song, certain instruments dominate." Jones' activist philosophy applies particularly to drums: "It seems to be an English mentality, less traditional than the American two-and-four approach. For me it began by putting down a cheap drum box track and then adding really fragmented patterns and phrases, and then removing the box. The parts become more intricate, more interlocking. You have to get beyond the idea of a single person playing a drum kit."

(Cross-cultural footnote: One afternoon, the dB's, recording in the neighboring studio, listened to several Rodeoites explain Jones' theory of percussion. Responded one dB in his finest Carolina drawl, "Sounds to me like y'all been pretty well *brainwashed*.")

The organ overdubs are at last completed and Jones suggests a dinner break. The party of nine piles into the late-60s Checker Aerobus and heads down the hillside and through downtown Woodstick, boutique capital of the Northeast, to a local tavern. Rubber Rodeo is a rock 'n' roll anomaly, the type of partiers who drive club owners to drink: they'll all nurse a beer through two sets. Jones orders a hamburger. "Thank God, he's eating!" razzes someone. The group maintains an active if not manic merriment which readily pauses to accommodate Jones' reserved observations. At one point, someone asks him why he *does* work so incredibly hard. Jones thinks carefully, then offers, "I know this sounds really pompous, but I feel I'm in a privileged position and any slacking on my part would be a betrayal of that privilege." The table turns silent. "Write that down," nudges Gary.

The group returns to work, with Leib up next. The ubiquitous studio assistant Caryl helps him set up his Prophet 5, Jupiter 6 and Arp Odyssey synths, patching one through Gary's favored Electro-Crud box. (He emphatically prefers analog synths over digital: "They're more depressing.") Meanwhile, Hugh and Don are talking shop, and Hugh is displaying a marked mistrust of record labels: "They're only interested in fast turnover, like financial companies," Jones declares bleakly. "The singles thing is the most crucial element to the whole relationship. If you haven't got something they can easily market, then you're really in trouble. That seems to be the area where it can screw up really easily."

"I like to think that we *all* have to deal with the marketing side of it," says Don. "With different degrees, but you have to understand the enemy, you can't just say, 'I hate record companies.'"

"But it seems to have very little to do with what goes on here in the studio. It's more airplay and maneuvering...."

"I see what you're saying," says Rose, "but I'm just afraid of compartmentalizing, of having all the different people along the way saying, 'Well I do this and screw them, they won't understand.' There's got to be a way to establish some kind of links. Dealing with the corporate animal is a new thing for me, so I want to go into it thinking that there are no hard and fast rules, that there's an awful lot of frustrations, an awful lot of roadblocks, but they can be dealt with one by one through establishing some kind of communication, trying to understand what this animal needs."

"But don't you think that then you'll just be joining the whole crew of people who already understand what that animal needs and are already supplying it?" Jones is no slouch as a debater.

"Not necessarily to *give* it to him, but to understand what he's craving and maybe give him something else—like methadone. I think it's uncharted territory. Maybe I'm the Christopher Columbus of the record industry."

Gary Leib pipes up helpfully, "You'll be constantly going, 'Land? Land? Land?'"

"I just hope I can get through this and still be a music fan," Rose smiles.

The next morning, Bob is getting ready to do a phone interview with a *Musician* writer on—oh lord—country-punk. Given the prolonged misunderstanding the band has enjoyed under that umbrella, Bob is anxious to use the free press to put some distance between Rubber Rodeo and the cow-punks. He laughs ruefully at Derek ("enough with the Prairie Modern") Shulman's oft-repeated pledge to tear his hair out if the band is called country-punk: "I don't know why Derek is so literally scared of association with these kinds of bands. That's his biggest fear."

"Derek's recurring nightmare is to see the band appear in those Italian tablecloth suits," Don grins.

"I can't speak for Bob, but I know that for myself, when I even *start* to think about stuff like that, the fuck-'em-if-they-can't-take-a-joke factor immediately comes into play," Gary bristles. "You might as well not do *anything*." Rubber Rodeo's specific act of rebellion and identity-assertion will become their version of the Patsy Cline classic "Walkin' After Midnight," (the main vamp bassline of which was played by Doug). It remains the track they're collectively proudest of.

It was clear that corporate sponsorship *was* succeeding in toning down Rubber Rodeo's most subversive cow-punk tendencies, but Bob Holmes had anticipated this and had already put into his songs the thing he most admired in country music—its aching warmth. It was a basic need not only of Holmes' songs, but of his personality. Bassist-in-limbo Doug Allen offers, "Bob and Trish both come from these high-powered broken homes. Both have had problems feeling close to their parents. It's really an important part of their relationship, trying to put together a home with all those dogs and cats, trying to make a relationship together. They kind of enjoy

How changing your pickup will improve your guitar's sound.

There's a frustrating time in a guitar player's development when you have the fingering right, you're bending the strings at the right time, but you still don't sound the way the record does.

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I thought it might be an effects box, but no: you can juggle the signal with effects boxes, but you can't improve the original sound except with a pickup. His pickups had more windings and bigger magnets than my stock pickups, and were more sensitive and responsive to hard or soft picking.

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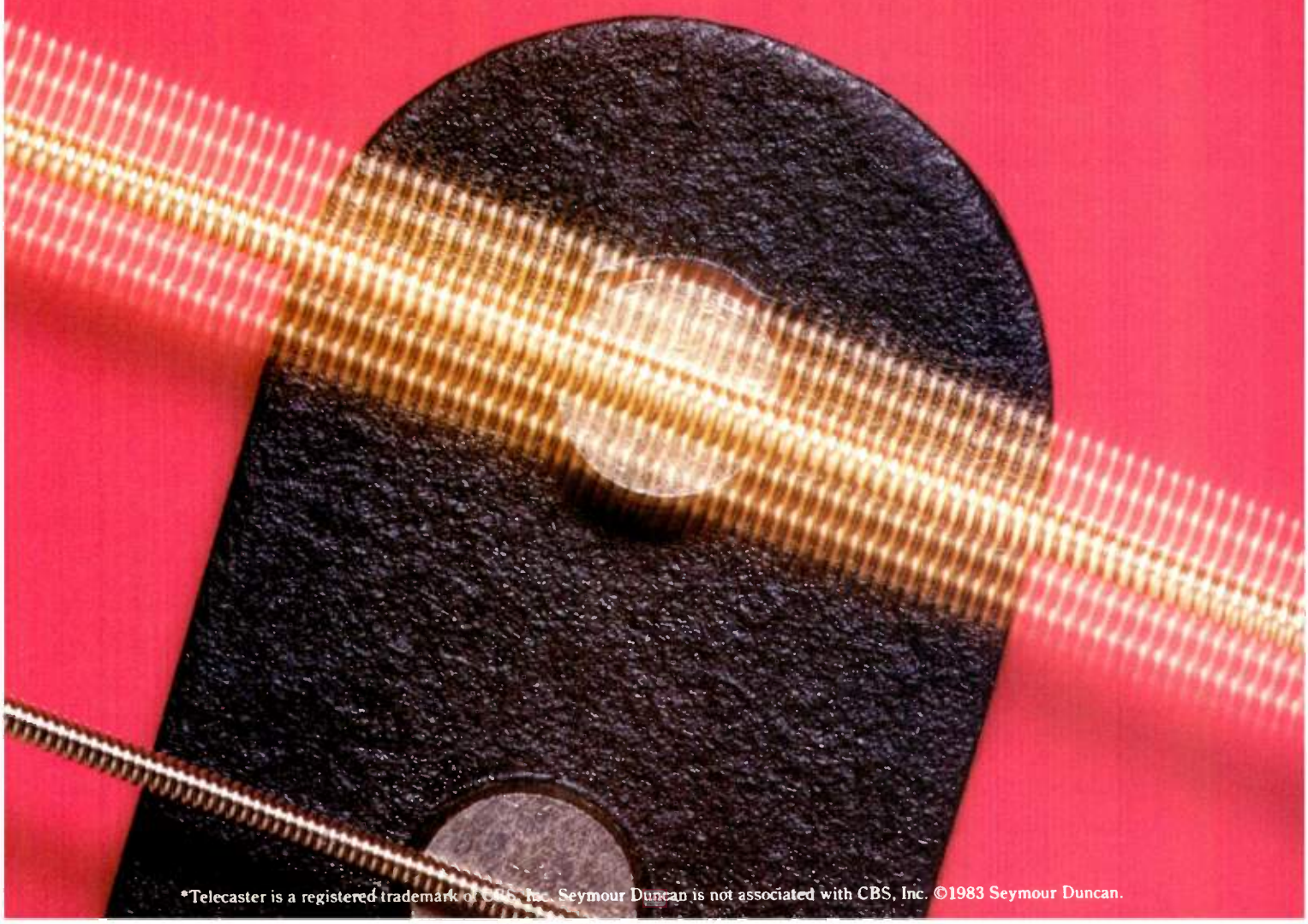

Rubber Rodeo from page 76

worst fears were totally confirmed. Most record company executives' egos were *far* bigger than any rock stars'. The politicking I've come to know about...seeing why things happen and don't happen. Now I *know* why Gentle Giant didn't have the success it should've had. You need someone inside, some key person who can push a button. I've learned a lot about that in the last few years. It's diplomacy and politics. *Especially* in the music business. And any band that reads the magazine should really understand: if they're serious about the business, then they've got to understand that it *is* a business."

The $110,000 advance did very little to change the band's hand-to-mouth financial shape. $80,000 of it was earmarked to produce the new album. Of the thirty grand that remained, about a third was spent salarying the band at a hundred dollars a head per week. This lasted four months, until the money ran out. Other funds were spent paying legal expenses for the negotiations, equipment repairs, pressing debts and practice room rental.

Both band and Shulman had wanted to use a major British producer and in June Derek "cleared the deck" and began gathering intelligence from his British connections. The managers of the top English guns were contacted, and proposals for flat-rate advance and royalty points—which had to be paid out of the *band's* twelve points—were exchanged: Mike Chapman turned them down; Martin Rushent liked the band but was doing the Go-Go's; Tony Visconti and Peter Mclan almost bit; Steve Lillywhite wanted too much money. Then Derek suggested Hugh Jones, reputed to be "next year's name producer." Jones' client list included Echo & the Bunnymen, Modern English, The Icicle Works, Teardrop Explodes, Bauhaus, and Clock DVA. Jones' manager asked for an advance of between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars and a sliding royalty rate of two to three points. Bob, Don and Derek flew over to Britain on People Express to meet Hugh.

Jones' previous clients—all British—had all been young, relatively inexperienced musicians, but Bob Holmes was not as pliant. Recalls Shulman, "It was interesting when they met. I saw the two getting down with each other, Bob testing him. Bob asked, 'Well, why *do* you want to do this record?' That's not something you usually ask a producer. I kind of got nervous there, but they enjoyed testing each other."

Holmes and Jones' reference points were noticeably out of phase. "Hugh's all-time hate is Gram Parsons," laughs Bob, "but his very favorite band, after the Beatles, is the Byrds. He hates black music but he loves Talking Heads. The man's a living contradiction." Fortunately, there was an especially fertile meeting ground: "Hugh really picked up on the psychedelic elements in the band—all of his projects are part of a psychedelic resurgence. He heard 'Jolene' and it made all the sense in the world to him. He saw lots of possibilities for what I call 'psychedelic breakdowns,' little sections of the songs where things stop, break down, go someplace special and then pick up again."

The band booked time at Bearsville Studios, favored by Jones because of its size and equipment. Thus ennervated, they began preproduction in September. It was then that they confronted a problem which all agree had been festering for some time, the more traditional, laid-back playing style of bassist Doug Allen. Says Don Rose, "Doug hadn't really grown musically with the rest of the group. He plays adequately, but the word 'adequate' began to get under our skin. The album couldn't be *adequate*, it had to be great."

After much heated discussion, the band decided to use their first producer and studio counsel John Doelp (a Berklee alumnus) as the album's bassist. Doug would be advised that he would be given first shot at winning his job back, but that he had to earn it through practice. For Allen, an original Foggy Vision Boy and *Boston Rock* cartoonist (*Steven*), "it was kind of a nerve-racking situation for everybody. It was strange the way it happened: they didn't even let me know there was a problem until they had made the decision to use John Doelp. Gary came over and told me one afternoon, and then later that evening Don called me up and explained it more fully. At first I was pretty insulted, but I had put a lot of time into the band and these were all my close friends. I *hadn't* really kept up my bass playing as I probably should've, so I began practicing every day. By the time Hugh heard me, he thought I was better than most of the bassists he's worked with." All agree with Allen on this last point.

With Doelp now leading preproduction, the songs were broken down and reassembled completely to reflect contemporary rhythm section requirements. This was only the beginning of a seemingly endless process: once Doelp's changes were made and Bob had finally understood them, "Hugh came in and tore 'em all apart again. Then I was *sure* we'd made a big mistake in trying to do a record. But it came together." Derek Shulman stayed in touch during preproduction, and communicated his enthusiasm for pop single candidates.

Hugh Jones flew over and joined the final week of preproduction in late September. It was then that Hugh dropped The Bomb: he intended to use only Barc's live drum sounds recorded onto ½-inch tape and sampled by an AMS digital delay and then triggered by a LinnDrum and/or Roland TR-808 drum computer. *Barc Holmes would not play drums on two thirds of the record.*

Cultural differences fueled several levels of potential disharmony: Jones wasn't interested in acquiring Bob's taste for Big Note guitar and simply didn't get the essential American kitsch joke, so long a part of Rubber Rodeo's identity. "He thought it was too cheesy, too pretentious, a cheap shot," shrugs Trish. Holmes rose to the challenge: "From the beginning, we had to set up this relationship where I was asking questions about his motives, which he was at first really taken aback by."

For Trish, "working with a real producer was the first time in three years that we've been under someone who wouldn't let us be self-indulgent if we wanted to be."

It is a clear, balmy November Wednesday in the steep hills of Woodstock, New York, but few people in the control room at Bearsville Studios are even sure what day it is. The entire band (minus Mark Tomeo) is hanging out on sofa and chairs watching Trish dub organ parts on a tough, guitar-dominated rhythm section. At the Neve board, Hugh Jones is his own engineer, a frail yet politely charismatic presence. Three packs of Marlboros stacked within reach, he has worked the wheezy whinny of Trish's fiery red Farfisa into a soft pastel wash. Milliken is wearing a knee brace on her still-crunched right leg and is doing punch-ins, not entirely sure when her simple chordal part is actually being recorded but dutifully following the track. She is not so much bored (though she's probably been playing the same song for well over an hour) as weary of standing. Bob Holmes tears out an ad from the new *Billboard* depicting a woman with gargantuan lips and her new single, "Playin' The Family Feud." He puts it on the organ's music holder and Trish smiles drily. Doug Allen and Gary Leib are taking turns adding to a sketch pad of R. Crumb-influenced drawings. Barc, who is easily the least talkative of the Rodeo, ghosts in and out of the main room repairing an old Gretsch wooden bass drum. Intrepid "bullshit detector" Will Garrett maintains a respectful but observant post near the board.

Jones' obsessive workaholic tendencies have created quite a stir in this normally laid-back community. He has gone from noon to long past midnight every day for three weeks, with no days off. He drinks so much coffee there is talk of putting an oil drum on rollers and attaching an intravenous tube. He is said to rarely eat. Hugh's basic tracks have also created a good deal of excitement. Some of this is attributable to Jones' habit of setting his final echo and eq sounds right on the original track, a holdover from his quick 'n' cheap years,

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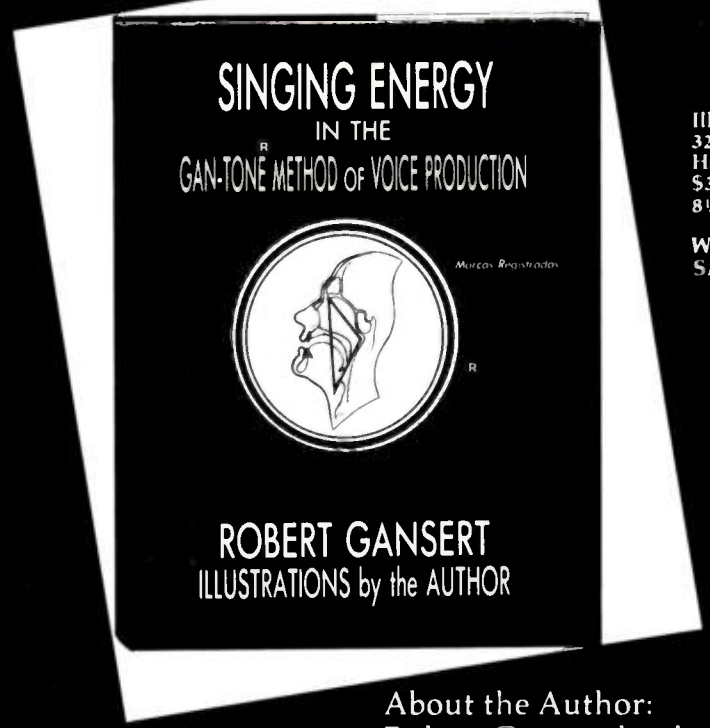

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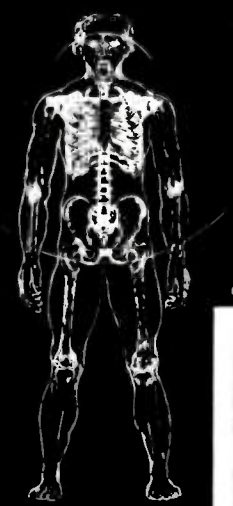

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The pessimists among you are by now undoubtedly wondering what the catch is: true enough, the Paul Reed Smith custom guitar goes for $1,400, higher with options. If you can hold out until fall, however, Smith will be bringing out a new line of guitars through Kramer. Not only will the price be more affordable, but Smith has even come up with a new body design. The impetus for this came from putting one of his tremolo systems on Adrian Belew's beloved Stratocaster. "The body design that I had been using I basically stole from the double-cutaway Les Paul, Jrs., the old ones. I wanted to have the Strat feel, because a Strat is *right* there when you play it, but I also wanted to keep the intimacy of my guitar, where it seems to wrap around you." Smith made a model of the Stratocaster shape, and one of his own guitars, and began to sketch variations, trying to hone in on the essential elements of each design.

Sure enough, that's what he got. Smith's guitar *is* comfortable, the sort of guitar you wear with the easy familiarity of an old shirt. The neck, when worn at mid-body, seems to spring from your gut. The balance is even and the guitar sits right whether played standing or sitting. "We've gone to a 25-inch scale, which is right in between a Fender and a Gibson," Smith says. They will all have Smith's pickups, his six-position tone control, and the "sweetener" circuit his custom guitars boast, as well as a few class touches like special half-moon inlaid dots on the fretboard, and special paint jobs.

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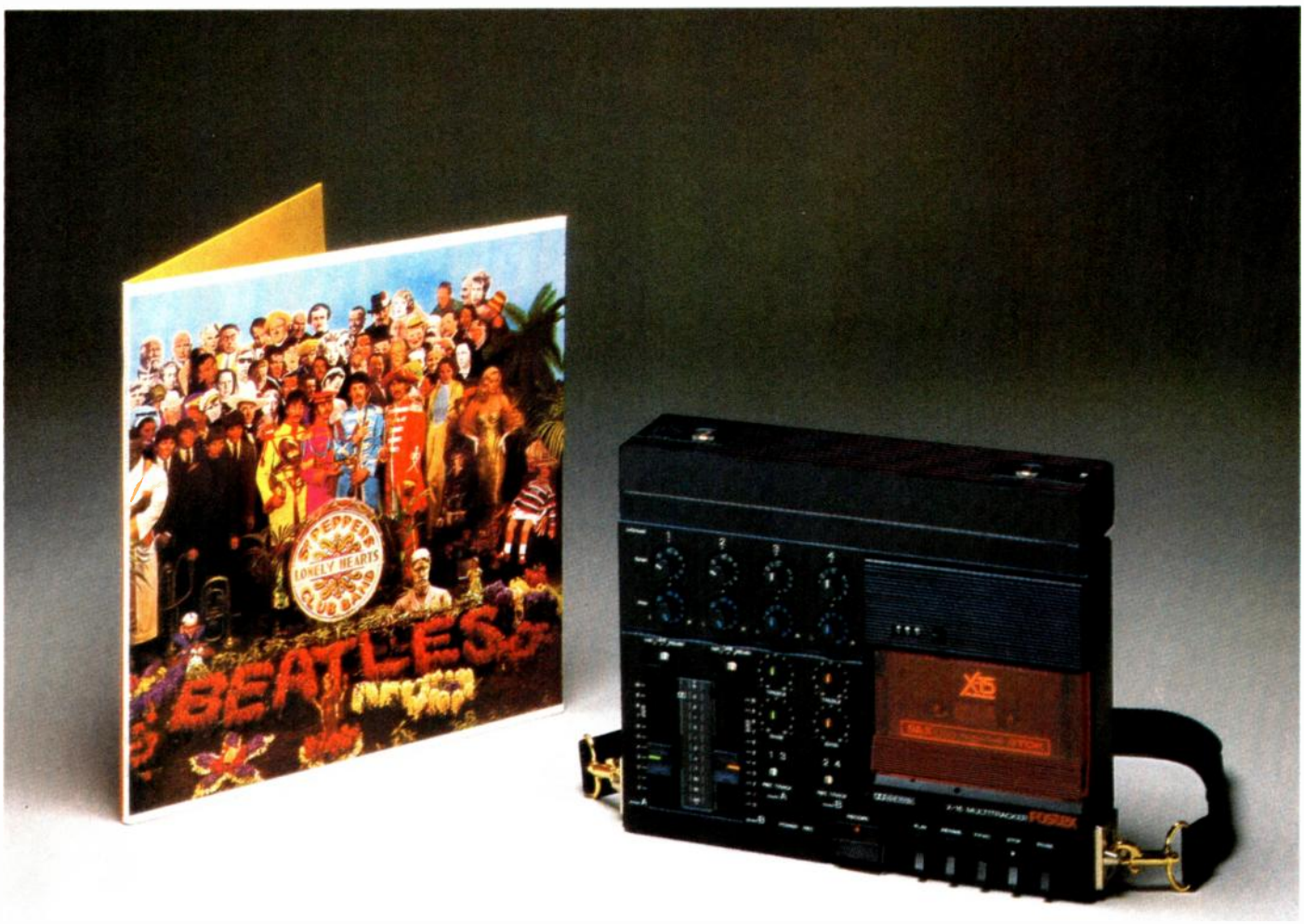

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there have been, and how welcome it is to hear one now.

David Friesen — *Amber Skies* (Palo Alto). *Schizophrenia* would've been an apter title. The bassist enlisted Chick Corea and Paul Motian to form a superb rhythm section, but it's still what's up front that counts, and there's a world of difference between the cuts with Joe Henderson's coiling tenor and those with Paul Horn's disingenuous nature-fetish flute.

Judy Carmichael — *Jazz Piano* (Progressive). In comparison to her models, this young pianist's approach to stride seems circumscribed by a peculiar strain of nostalgia only suffered by well-meaning archivists. Still, this is a charming recital, with at least one cut (a probing treatment of Ellington's "Black Beauty") that is considerably more than charming.

Panama Francis & the Savoy Sultans — *Everything Swings* (Stash). The shop-worn swing era favorites that have dominated this band's live book since its re-formation in the late 70s are beginning to dominate its records too, which is a pity, because few bands of any orientation swing as infectiously as this band does when it's inspired—and what band would be inspired by "In The Mood," et al, at this point. Music's for dancing, Panama, but records are for posterity.

Elvin Jones — *Brother John* (Palo Alto). The polymetric elixir Jones heats up with help from pianist Kenny Kirkland and bassist Reggie Workman has little noticeable effect on the lumbering Pat LaBarbara. Still, Jones is always worth hearing, and who knows? This could date as handsomely as his 70s Blue Notes, which didn't seem like anything special at the time either. Ⓜ

SMITH

from page 80

number of turns, everything."

One day, however, Smith and Ingram made a mistake while assembling a pickup, and when they tested it to see how much of a botch they had made, they were surprised to find that the pickup actually sounded *better*. "We broke the code," Smith enthuses. "We found out in mathematical terms what it is that gives a pickup character."

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Kent Jordan "No Question About It"

On his second album, "Orion," drummer Steve Smith and his band, Vital Information—whose collective credits include work with Al Di Meola, Jean-Luc Ponty and Billy Cobham—continue to meld jazz and rock in most creative ways. The music of "Orion" shows a new star is on the rise.

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JAZZ S·H·O·R·T T·A·K·E·S


DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Count Basie — *88 Basie Street* (Pablo). Like the last couple Basie Pablos, this new one combines the best of both worlds, celebrating the resurgence of the Basie Orchestra while also spotlighting Basie the sly pianist in an informal small group setting. An unbeatable combination, and to say there are no surprises here is hardly to say there are no revelations—this is Basie we're talking about. It's impossible to imagine what jazz would have been like without the innovations of the Basie Orchestra of the 30s, and it's impossible to imagine what jazz will be like now that Basie's gone. All that can be said with any certainty is that the music is infinitely richer for his contributions.

James Newton — *Luella* (Gramavision); **Dusan Bagdonovic** — *Early To Rise* (Palo Alto). The sharper, more asymmetrical edge of Newton's attack and the higher concentration of heat in his lyric ardors make *Luella* an even headier album than last year's finely textured *James Newton*. Though his writing overreaches in places (on the programmatic "Diamonds Are Not For Freedom" most notably), the flutist generally negotiates an equitable balance between composition and improvisation, engaging his sidemen to their fullest capacities by playing the flighty, scraping strings (Abdul Wadud's cello, Cecil McBee's bass, and John Blake's and Gayle Dixon's violins) off against the earthy, mantric percussion instruments (Jay Hoggard's vibes, Kenny Kirkland's piano, and Billy Hart's rupturing drums). Newton is also prominently featured on *Early To Rise*, the debut album from an acoustic guitarist whose mysterioso fretting strikes similarly questionable tendencies in Newton and bassist Charlie Haden.

Bob Moses — *Visit With The Great Spirit* (Gramavision). Slightly less revelatory than last year's *When Elephants Dream Of Music* if only because the vocal passages seem suspiciously new age-y, if only because Michael Gibbs' glossy orchestrations sometimes muffle the band's ferocious roar, if only because the large cast of characters contains fewer amiable eccentrics this time around (with the exception of John Scofield on "Carintio" and Steve Kuhn on "Monktonal" and "Deepest Blue"), if only because it no longer comes as revelation that someone is at last integrating third world rhythms, vocal colorism and electronics into the big band lexicon—the sort of thing Gil Evans might be doing, in fact, if only he could rouse himself to do it.

Ella Fitzgerald — *The Harold Arlen Songbook* (Verve/PolyGram); **Fitzgerald & Andre Previn** — *Nice Work If You Can Get It* (Pablo). The most mannerless of American popular singers was never lovelier than on her just-reissued 1960-61 double album tribute to the bluesiest and pepperiest of American melodists. Billy May's unobtrusive arrangements swing lightly, and Benny Carter has a few short-but-sweet solo breaks. Meanwhile, Fitzgerald's new collection of Gershwin, though offering charm in abundance, pales in light of her Verve *Gershwin Songbook* from the 50s. The problem isn't just that her voice ain't what it used to be—her fidelity to lyrics ain't either, and Previn's rococo piano accompaniment (reinforced by NHØP's bass on some cuts) hardly encourages her to toe the line.

Steve Lacy & Mal Waldron — *Herbe de l'Oubli* (hat MUSICS, from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York City, NY 10012). The best of the recent collaborations between these two odd ducks, which is to say the one that best reconciles their idiosyncracies. Far from boxing Lacy in, as usually happens when they play together, Waldron's ad infinitum comping paves the way for the sopranoist's quirky tonal transformations, resulting in duets which unfold with quiet, hypnotic intensity. Highly recommended.

Stan Getz & Chet Baker — *Line For Lyons* (Storyville). This has been roundly panned elsewhere, and I can't quite figure out why. The tenorist is in peak form, his rhythm section is fleet and on the money, and Baker's trumpet solos flex such lyrical muscle I'm willing to overlook the fact that his two vocals are flabby to say the least (even a devotee of his singing has got to concede that much).

Larry Coryell & Michal Urbaniak — *Facts Of Life* (Love, from S.W.S., 250 West 57th Street, New York City, NY 10019). The jury's still out on the rejuvenated Coryell, the talents of Kenny Kirkland and Urszula Dudziak are largely wasted, and the rhythm combination of Victor Bailey and Omar Hakim is no less turgid here than with the Joe Zawinul Quintet. So all that rescues this fusion all-star date from utter blandness is the dash and rip of Urbaniak's violin.

Rich Halley — *Multnomah Rhythms* (Avocet/N.M.D.S.). A sleeper from the Pacific Northwest—joyful noise from an energetic tenorist who takes his cues as a composer and bandleader from Coleman and Mingus. Notable for its good-natured volatility, the solos of trumpeter Richard Burdell, altoist Denny Goodhew and the leader, and the spring of the rhythm players, drummer William Thomas especially.

Bill Harris — *Memorial Album* (Xanadu). Hermanite Harris was the most influential modern jazz trombonist prior to the emergence of J.J. Johnson; today, a decade after his passing, he symbolizes the kind of brassy mischievousness each generation of trombonists has somehow eventually managed to discover on its own. This reissue of material from '57 by no means offers prime Harris, but it will have to do—it is the only record currently available under Harris' name, apart from a similarly spotty LP with Ben Webster on Fantasy.

Joe Morris — *Wraparound* (Riti/N.M.D.S.); **Rory Stuart** — *Nightwork* (Cadence Jazz, Redwood, NY 13679). Two guitarists who bear watching—Morris, who fronts a bass and drums trio and combines a percussive attack with a horn-sharp tremolo that evokes overtones of both Hendrix and post-Coltrane shriekers; and Stuart, who leads a quartet featuring the empathetic pianist Armen Donelian and navigates the rapid swells of the jazz mainstream with such conviction as to remind you how few genuinely idiomatic hard bop guitarists

continued on next page

Francis Davis

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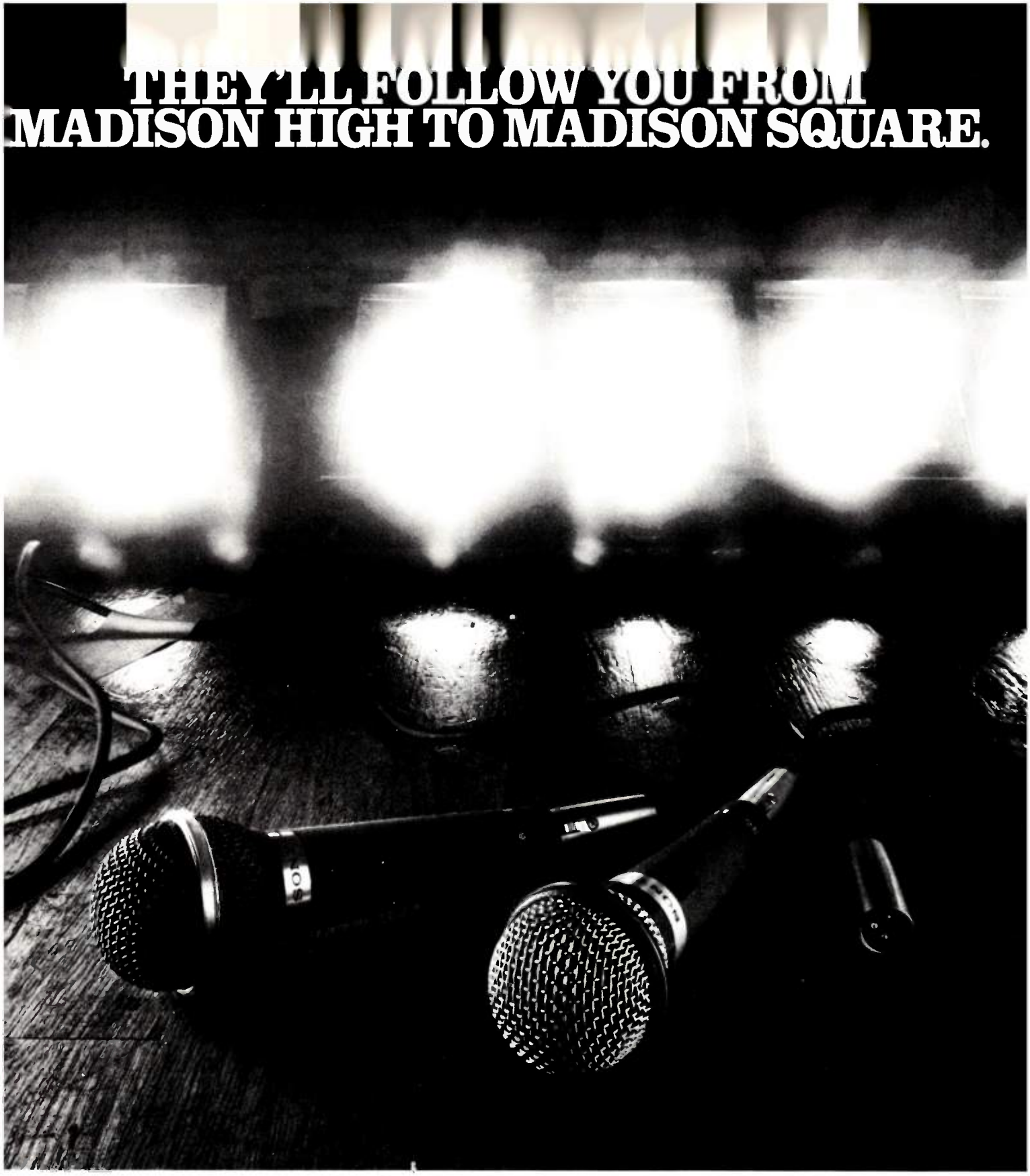

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ROCK S·H·O·R·T T·A·K·E·S


CAROLINE GREYSHOCK

Ruben Blades y Seis del Solar — *Buscando America* (Elektra). The title translates as *Searching For America*, but if all that does is put you in mind of the old Chevrolet ads, listen up. With its doo-wop introduction and softly percolating percussion, the America of "Decisiones" may seem to suggest the Bronx, but it could also pass for East L.A. or even Panama City. The America of "GBDB," with its stark *guanganco* pulse and breathlessly chanted narrative, may seem like Buenos Aires or San Salvador, but could as easily be Miami or Houston. The ambiguity is precisely Blades' point—America is no longer something belonging strictly to Latinos or Anglos. And the fact that his music, with its deftly articulated rhythms, carefully shaded dynamics and hauntingly expressive melodies, conveys that idea so eloquently merely underscores the validity and importance of this album.

Ray Charles — *Do I Ever Cross Your Mind* (Columbia). Ray Charles' pop instincts have lain dormant for so long that it's easy to forget just how potent they are. This, his latest country album, ought to remind you. Having cut down on the corn that blunted the appeal of *Wish You Were Here Tonight*, Charles sticks to material that works for him, not against him, and turns in state-of-the-art performances on everything from the bluesy "They Call It Love" to the blowsy "I Had It All."

Rush — *Grace Under Pressure* (Mercury). In a dozen albums, Rush has gone from mindlessly imitating Led Zeppelin to carefully copying the Police. That's progress for you.

Run-D.M.C. — *Run-D.M.C.* (Profile). Granted, there's a certain sameness to "Hard Times" and "It's Like That," but that's more a matter of thematic continuity than lack of imagination, especially given the amount of mileage Run-D.M.C. get out of the monolithic rhythms constructed for their raps by Orange Krush and Jam-Master Jay. This is, after all, not rap as word-gaming, but rap as the ultimate beat, and it's damned unlikely that you'll find grooves as massive as these anywhere else.

Steve Perry — *Street Talk* (Columbia). As annoying as Perry can be in front of Journey, on his own he's remarkably charming. Part of it is not having to oversell his vocal lines, nor does it hurt that the material is entirely sympathetic to Perry's vocal strengths (among them a delightfully muted feel for soul). But mostly, what makes this album work is that it doesn't box Perry in to a single, narrow musical perspective—a factor that ought to be a lesson to somebody.

Tommy Keene — *Places That Are Gone* (Dolphin). Like Marshall Crenshaw, Tommy Keene is a rocker with an irrepressible affinity for the jangly hooks and buoyant melodies of 60s pop. Unlike Crenshaw, though, Keene has the sort of ragged, catch-in-his-throat vocal style that adds an undercurrent of fatalism, not optimism, to his love songs. That, and Keene's seeming inability to write a riff that's less than hummable, makes the five originals on this EP resonate with the kind of real-life emotional power rarely found in any pop these days. (P.O. Box 8744, Durham, NC 27707)

Solomon Burke — *Soul Alive!* (Rounder). Although this double album, recorded live in D.C. last year, includes versions of such hits as "Everybody Needs Somebody To Love" and "Got To Get You Off My Mind," it isn't the material but the delivery that carries the day here. Burke's preaching vocals, a combination of soulful crooning and gospel interjections, illuminates each song with down-home wit and anecdotal authority, and the fact that this recording captures him in front of a great band and in total communion with the audience makes this an essential addition to any soul fan's collection. (P.O. Box 154, N. Cambridge, MA 02140)

Hanoi Rocks — *Back To Mystery City* (PVC). Who'd have thought that the ultimate inheritors of the New York Dolls' sound would be a bunch of aging high school punks from Finland, of all places? Even though their wit is given more to the broad sarcasm of "Strange Boys Play Weird Openings" than the stylistic send-ups of their precursors, their loose-limbed rave-ups and calculatedly careless guitar licks are close enough to the real thing to fool even older fans. But if this is Mystery City, where are the Mystery Girls?

Meat Puppets — *II* (SST). Given the twang and fancy pickin' Curt Kirkwood has lent the songs here, it's easy to call this country punk. But a closer look at the song forms, whether hardcore aggroblitzes like "Split Myself In Two" or such oddities as the Leo Kottke-on-Methedrine instrumental "I'm A Mindless Idiot," indicate an all-purpose fascination with folk music in its many guises. Even if it means talking blues at 150 mph. (P.O. Box 1, Lawndale, CA 90260)

The System — *X-Periment* (Mirage). If you're going to call Boy George a blue-eyed soul singer, you probably ought to dub Mic Murphy a brown-eyed pop-rocker, because what he's doing vocally is roughly the same. Except that where Culture Club has a weakness for bubblegum fantasy, the System holds onto a sense of gritty reality in its songs. But the best thing is, that doesn't make the System's new-age pop any less irresistible.

The Dice —*The Dice* (Mercury). Not since Aerosmith was in its prime has there been a band with as canny a blend of metal muscle and soulful swagger. But unlike those Bostonians, this Canadian trio never indulges in instrumental overkill, leaving the songs to throb of their own accord. And throb they do.

Oh-OK — *Furthermore What* (DB). "Guru" is a little close to the B-52's for any Athens, Georgia band to want to sit, while "Giddy Up," as its title suggests, more than flirts with preciousness. Still, Oh-OK doesn't let minor cavils like that get in the way, and as a result, this EP is never less than diverting, and occasionally even wonderful. (432 Moreland Ave., N.E., Atlanta, GA 30307)

The Persuasions — *No Frills* (Rounder). They "Still Ain't Got No Band," as one tune triumphantly puts it, but that doesn't keep them from gliding effortlessly between gospel, rock 'n' roll and pop with such authority that you wonder why people bother with instruments in the first place. Highlights include a warmly respectful medley of "Sand In My Shoes" and "Under The Boardwalk," as well as a wistfully evocative "Slip Sliding Away." (P.O. Box 154, N. Cambridge, MA 02140)

J. D. Considine

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the *Hitch Hiking* story, a nightmare tour of emotional crises and sexual upheavals. Musically, the opening scene "4:30 AM (Apparently They Were Travelling Abroad)" is a blueprint for the rest of the album. Introduced by a taste of sunrise Clapton guitar, Waters' bleak folkie theme sounds like a simple bedroom ditty suddenly swollen to fiendish proportions by bellicose fuzz guitars, air raid siren sax and Waters' own strident voice activated into a Nuremberg rant.

The stark contrast and rollercoaster switch between simmering introspective tension—Waters' lullabye whisper and sensitive picking in the two parts of "For The First Time Today"—and his sudden explosions of rage, intensifies *Hitch Hiking*'s lunatic impact. "I'd like to go on with this bit of a song/ Describing this schmuck," Waters screams of the man who stole his wife in "4:58 AM (Dunromin, Duncarin, Dunlivin)," "But I'm going to throw up!" Clapton's guitar often acts as a Greek chorus here, at once echoing Waters' emotional state and prefacing his violent mood changes with bittersweet country dobro and cutting solos—like the swashbuckling break over the title segment's haughty disco trot.

But if Waters' dramatic gestures are in full Technicolor, his heart still beats in severe black and white. He accuses his women of falling for cheap transient pleasures and mocks Yoko Ono's fidelity to John Lennon with unwarranted viciousness. At the same time, he illustrates his relationships with crude locker room imagery, transparent references to fishing rods and "the doggy in the window (the one with the waggly tail)." Like Lou Reed's classic *Berlin*, another discomfiting trip into the heart of darkness, *The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking* is not meant to be pretty. Indeed this bridge over troubled Waters is a fascinating trip, a miracle of black humor and monstrous construction. Still, that bit of true love added almost as an afterthought, "The Moment Of Clarity," makes you wonder where Roger Waters' dream really ends and the real life begins. - **David Fricke**

BANANARAMA

Bananarama
(London)

Nostalgia, as Simone Signoret noted, isn't what it used to be. In the slightly hysterical world of British pop, where nothing is as fresh as a just-exhumed style, Bananarama has carved a niche as a neo-"girl group": Sarah Dallin, Siobhan Fahey and Keren Woodward chirp against faceless backing tracks. Producers/arrangers Tony Swain and Steve Jolley know what to do with Bananarama's cheerful if thin blend: they compress the vocals to pack all the punch of a dog whistle. *Bananarama* is a more unified effort than the group's patchwork debut, *Deep Sea Skiving*, but lacks the preceding album's high points as well as inconsistencies.

What drags the songs down are the most rudimentary of verse/chorus structures and over-refined production. Swain and Jolley, who presumably provide the music, are sprightly without being vital on keyboards and rhythm guitar. And a flesh-and-blood drummer would certainly help.

There's little personality on display on *Bananarama* and more's the pity. Underneath all the multi-dubs, studio gimmickry and vocal tracks punched in and out, some soul is drowning in the lacquer. - **Scott Isler**

Two and a quarter minutes of music isn't worth the price of the record, but "The Calling" does validate every extravagant claim made on Charlie Haden's behalf by Rafi Zabor in a previous issue. Against a background of guitar synth and tape-altered percussion, Haden's bowed bass sings with reverence and audibly concentrated attention a song about the unity of all life, which misses perfection only by fading out at 2:16. I could have used a little more of this instead of side one's noodling.-**Chris Doering**

MISSING PERSONS

Rhyme And Reason
(Capitol)

BERLIN

Love Life
(Geffen)

It was easy to confuse Berlin and Missing Persons before Berlin's first LP, *Love Life*, and the latter's second, *Rhyme And Reason*. Both bands struggled for distinction in the L.A. new wave/synth-pop scene, each with a blonde bombshell archetype at their centers. Both bands also seemed unlikely candidates for lasting careers or musical respectability.

The quickest way to understand what's wrong with Berlin's *Love Life* is to imagine its Euro-disco hymns of psycho-sexual desperation being played by a standard guitar-based rock band. Until there are more and better touch-sensitive synthesizers, players in bands like Berlin will be unable to draw on the visceral language of a calloused fingertip hitting a steel string. That kind of power could have filled lots of empty spaces in *Love Life*'s songs, as it's done for iffy material throughout twenty-five years of rock 'n' roll.

Rhyme And Reason works within many of those constrictions, and with a sense of delight that acknowledges its possibilities. Their melodies may be too top forty at times ("Right Now") but the arrangements intrigue, particularly the hit single "Give," the anti-war "All Fall Down" and "Waiting For A Million Years," and "Now Is The Time (For Love)." Each instrument (or synthesized semblance thereof) is engaged in dialogue with the others, giving listeners a wide choice of focuses without missing the whole. Traces of ex-employers like Frank Zappa and George Duke lurk in the polyrhythms, metric switcheroos and funk underpinning—and in the suggestion that one can have chops and fun at the same time.

Blonde icon Dale Bozzio has come a long way—old gestures like her Lena Lovich hiccups are used sparingly here. She doesn't have the classically beautiful soprano of Berlin's Terri Nunn, but she uses what she's got as an effective narrative and percussive tool on the group's ingenuous, heartfelt lyrics. By refocusing their librettos on things like non-romantic love and collective hope, Missing Persons helps to humanize the possibilities of both pop culture blondes and pop synthesizer groups. For that alone, they have earned some respect. -**Laura Fissinger**

ROGER WATERS

The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking
(Columbia)

This album will not tell you much about Roger Waters that you don't know already. His women still grind him into the dirt. His world is overrun with people who are morally bankrupt or emotionally crippled or both. And his music—that familiar compound of awesome sky-scraping art-rock and dark acoustic musing that built *The Wall*—proves conclusively that in its twilight years Pink Floyd was little more than an inflated theatrical metaphor for Waters' own tortured ego. The substitution here of Eric Clapton's salty plucking for the long arching whine of David Gilmour's guitar gives parts of the record a leaner, more athletic feel. But the sense of Floydian *deja vu* on *The Pros And Cons Of Hitch Hiking*, Waters' first solo album, is so overwhelming it nearly obscures the soul he finally tried to bare at its end.

That his torment seems consequential affirms Waters' extraordinary talent for making self-absorption so engrossing. Strategic sound effects and peripheral dialogue wrapped in fat distant echo enhance the slow trance-like motion of

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Of The Rain" and "Saddest Girl In The World" point to a band up to this challenge. Rank & File are by no means long gone dead, but this time they're playing that way.-**Jimmy Guterman**

LITTLE STEVEN

Voice Of America
(EMI)

In a dramatic shift, Steve Van Zandt has followed up the punchy R&B chops of 1982's *Men Without Women* with *Voice Of America*—a cry from the heart of any everyday guy compelled by conscience and common sense into condemning his government's domestic and international violence.

A raging sense of betrayed belief suffuses this record, firing it with an emotional force a more analytical leftist critique couldn't muster. "Everything we stood for has been compromised," Van Zandt rails in the LP's guitar-rampaging title cut, indicting the criminal state of the union while lacerating himself for passively allowing conditions to degenerate: "I been quiet, too quiet."

In certain direct ways the proletarian politics of *Voice Of America* grow directly out of Van Zandt's previous work on his own and with Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band. Van Zandt's internationalist perspective—underscored by titles like "Los Desaparecidos," "Checkpoint Charlie" and a reggae work-out called "Solidarity," derives from his street-level view of the world as "the neighborhood" writ large. It's time for action when innocent people get pushed around, either by bullies on the block or in the hemisphere, where it's called imperialism.

Appropriate to his message, Van Zandt has deep-sixed the horn section that lent soul support to *Men Without Women*, streamlining the sound here to guitar, bass, drums and the occasional keyboard embellishment. Only "Solidarity" and "I Am A Patriot," the LP's other reggae groove, momentarily slow down the rock avalanche that comprises *Voice*'s other eight cuts.

"Why do we let it happen?" Van Zandt wonders in "Checkpoint Charlie." Such anguished questions about the persistence of recognized evil in the political realm haunts all of *Voice Of America*. Asking it represents the first step in the progress from anger to ideology. As we approach an election (and in 1984, at that), Van Zandt's is one voice of America that deserves to be heeded.-**Anthony DeCurtis**

PAT METHENY

Rejoicing
(ECM)

This trio session with Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins is two records in one. The first side finds Metheny abandoning most of his signature sound and stylistic devices on a straight ahead blowing session devoted mainly to slightly warped blues written by Ornette Coleman. Although Higgins and Haden have presumably played these tunes before, the trio spends most of its time searching for a way to play them together, finding it only on the closing restatements of the themes. The exceptions are the Horace Silver ballad "Lonely Woman," given a lovely chord melody treatment by Metheny's acoustic guitar, and the free-jazz hoedown of the title tune. The recording creates an unusual aural perspective that had me feeling like I was sitting inside Billy Higgins' swish cymbal half the time, which did nothing for my enjoyment of the music.

On the second side Pat cranks up his Roland guitar synthesizer on two of his own compositions and a duet with Haden. "Story From A Stranger" is a Spanish-flavored ballad that could have come straight from the Metheny Group songbook, with two acoustic guitars standing in for Lyle Mays' piano. "The Calling" contains, for me, both the high and low points of this record. In the free middle section of the piece Higgins and Haden really let loose and Metheny does some quite extraordinary things with the guitar synth and what sounds to me like a Strat with a wang bar, recalling both Sonny Sharrock's 60s explorations of noise guitar, and the classic freeblow cry of Trane and Pharaoh Sanders. Low points are the beginning and ending sections, where the guitar synth sounds like a cross between a novice bagpiper and an organ on the verge of throwing up.

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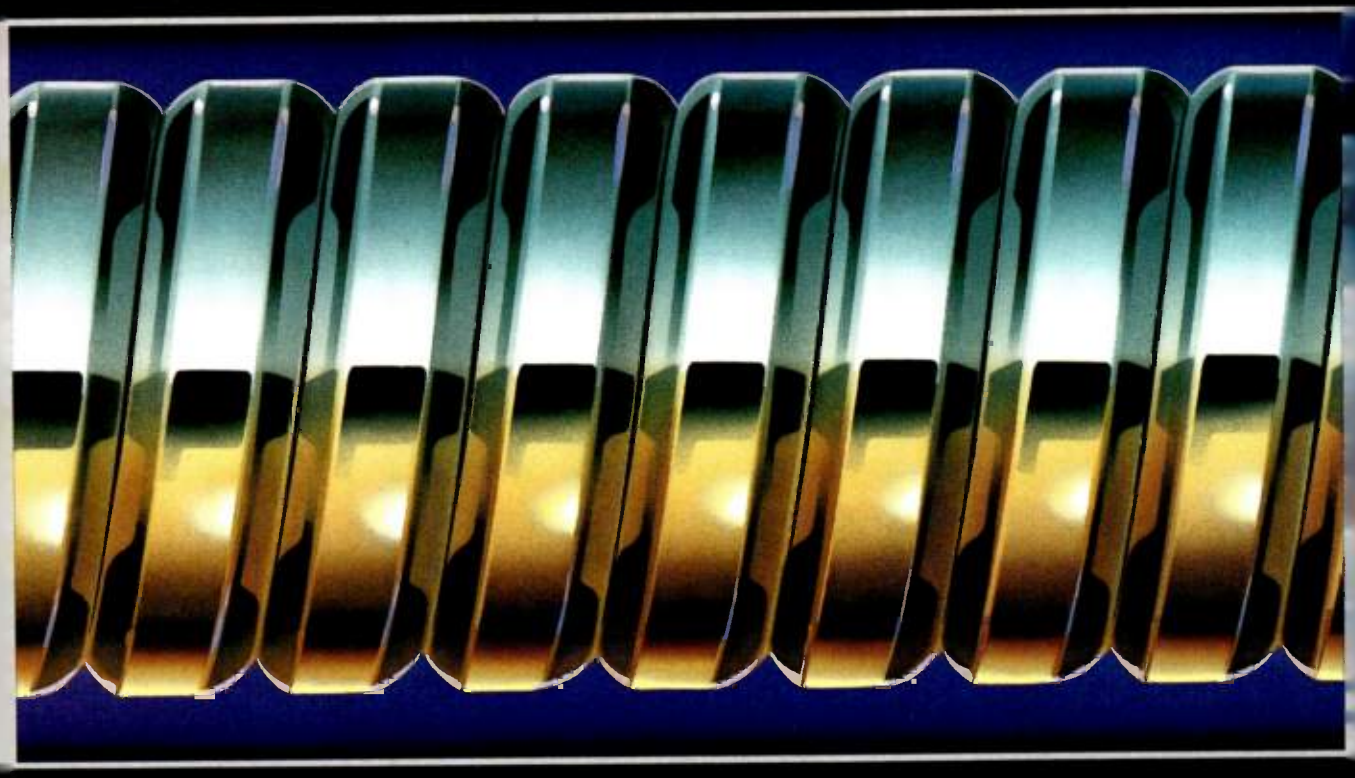

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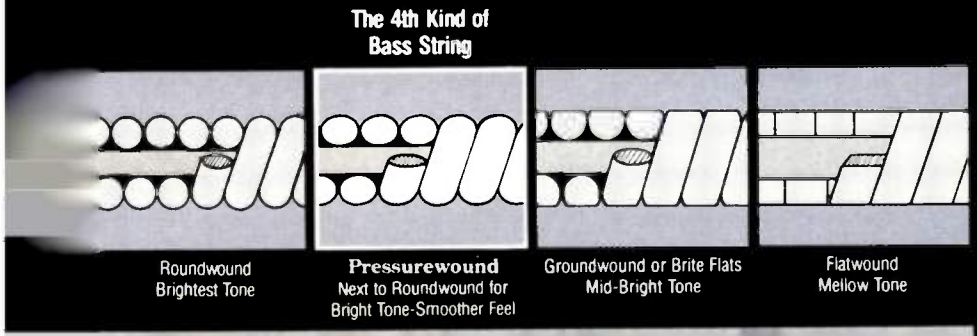

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memorable material here, which leaves Jermaine's vaporous tenor very little to cling to. "Some Things Are Private" is passable, provided you liked "Footloose" enough to want a song that sounds just like it, while "Sweetest Sweetest" suggests little more than Air Supply with a rhythm section. The duet with Michael, "Tell Me I'm Not Dreamin'," is burdened with a melody so contorted that even the ol' Thriller himself has trouble throwing off the usual heat. In fact, except for "Oh Mother," a pleasant tune with lyrics sappy enough to turn up in an AT&T long distance commercial, Jermaine seems barely present on his own album.

Still, I suppose it could have been worse—what if Don King produced the album, too?-**J.D. Considine**

RANK & FILE

Long Gone Dead
(Slash)

It's sophomore slump time, folks. Rank & File's debut, *Sundown*, was an ecstatic joy ride through the history of country music by a quartet of ex-punks, led by the dark, sarcastic visions of brothers Chip and Tony Kinman. And in live performance, pushed into fifth by Slim Evans' inspired drumming, the band moved from their own hardheaded originals to a faithful cover like George Jones' "White Lightning" without ever seeming forced. Only the Kinman brothers remain from the band on *Sundown*. *Long Gone Dead*, Rank & File's second album, isn't a *bad* record, but it does fail to deliver on the promise of the debut.

"Try to get up/ They'll only knock you down" is the first couplet of the album, a fitting keynote. From gloomy moniker on down, *Long Gone Dead* is the work of nihilists and, like all good nihilists, Rank & File lull the listener into a false sense of security before attacking. At first listen, "Sound Of The Rain," the album's best song, is pretty and evocative without being slick. But then the words come in. "I don't listen to the cops/ I wish they all were dead" jumps out like a mugger from a dark alley and forces the listener to pay attention. The Kinman brothers *mean it*.

Not that this record isn't any fun. "Old Old Man" is a hot, dirty Chuck Berry rave-up, and "Tell Her I Love Her" is a first-rate pop song. Rank & File are a country band, but they can also rock out with punky urgency. Their best songs combine the intensity of the early Clash with the rhythmic sense of Merle Haggard. The one song on *Long Gone Dead* that hints at this intuitive cross-pollination is "Saddest Girl In The World," in which the music transcends its depressing lyrics via an exhilarating cross-over from country-punk to country-funk. Set up barriers and they'll trash 'em.

But the problem on *Long Gone Dead* is basic—it's the songs. One could argue that the new band (Bobby Kahn on drums, Jeff Ross on guitar) isn't as well-suited to the material as the old band might have been, but that's because the new songs aren't as well-suited to the band as last time out. Even though the guitar break in "John Brown" would do Richard Thompson or Mark Knopfler proud, is there any need for an abolitionist song in 1984? "Timeless Love" is a dirge-like retread of the first album's "Lucky Day," obeying The Law of Diminishing Returns, and the album's closer, "It Don't Matter," is an unsuccessful attempt to sound like the Carter Family, the punks-gone-country concept for once sounding like a gimmick. Rank & File are not a novelty band; it's especially distressing to hear them sound like they're auditioning for *Hee-Haw*.

I have no doubt that this band is capable of redeeming itself live. Both "Sound

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Reed, taking basic human emotions that are at the heart of everything he's ever done, and translating them into familiar pop terms with stirring conviction. For someone who's seen it all and sung about most of it, Lou Reed still knows how to surprise.-**David Fricke**

DREAM SYNDICATE

Medicine Show
(A&M)

What's the best way to judge a band like the Dream Syndicate? On one hand, they're a lean, hard-charging attack force, with plenty of swell slashing guitars and imposing vocals. On the other, Steve Wynn and his subordinates haven't got an original lick to their names—not one worth boasting about, anyway.

I hate to knock these well-meaning souls too hard, 'cause they've got excellent taste in influences. On *Medicine Show*, you can find neat paraphrases from the Velvet Underground, Iggy Pop, Neil Young, Television, and even the godfather of cool-guy rock himself, Bob Dylan. Unfortunately, constantly playing "spot the source" quickly becomes tiring. No sooner does Wynn finish his fake Dylan monologue in "Armed With An Empty Gun," than he sneers "I couldn't hit it sideways," just like Lou Reed did in the Velvet's "Sister Ray." Heavy, Steve, but so what? Then, "Bullet With My Name On It" unleashes a swarm of ornery hired-killer guitars that's guaranteed to have you dusting off your trusty copy of "Down By The River" for one more nostalgic spin.

Not surprisingly, a band that lugs around all this baggage doesn't have the energy to go anywhere. The skittish two-guitar duel between Wynn and Karl Precoda in "John Coltrane Stereo Blues" could be Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd jousting, yet the competition generates no sparks. Wynn's uncanny Iggy inflections dominate "Daddy's Girl," but you'd be hard-pressed to find a less sleazy evocation of sexual obsession—he's too busy swaggering by the book to display any personality.

Wynn does have a way with words, though he usually fails to push his ideas to the limit. The moody "Medicine Show" begins with the tantalizing announcement, "I got a front page story buried in my yard" (then slides into monotony). And "Armed With An Empty Gun" is a great title, not to mention an incisive, if unintended, commentary on the band. Ironically, the sweetest tune on this LP ("Still Holding On To You") is also the most satisfying. Inside the terminally hip Dream Syndicate may be an old-fashioned pop group, struggling to get out.-**Jon Young**

JERMAINE JACKSON

Jermaine Jackson
(Arista)

If Michael Jackson's public persona makes him out as a bit of a dreamer, there's always enough fire in his work to add an edge to even his fluffiest efforts. Big brother Jermaine, by contrast, seems unable to separate the image he bore in the original Jackson 5—the wistful romantic—from his solo work, and as a result, those efforts have been sorely lacking in punch. Still, he has been making considerable progress in recent years, and his last album, *Let Me Tickle Your Fancy*, held sufficient promise to make the advent of a career away from the protection of Motown seem like the turning point for Jermaine.

Sure enough, *Jermaine Jackson* came out with all the trappings of a major event. Not only was there a duet with brother Michael, but there was another track featuring *all* the Jacksons—great marketing for a nation eagerly a waiting a summer tour. And, if that weren't enough, Jermaine recruited Michael Omartian as an auxiliary producer, and brought in a brace of studio heavies to give the album the proper degree of slickness. Product control was definitely going to be high on this project.

Problem is, all the polish was applied to the wrong items. The backing tracks are smoother than anything this side of Toto, and about as anonymous; the rhythm arrangements are canny and insistent, but barely compelling. Worst of all, there's almost nothing in the way of

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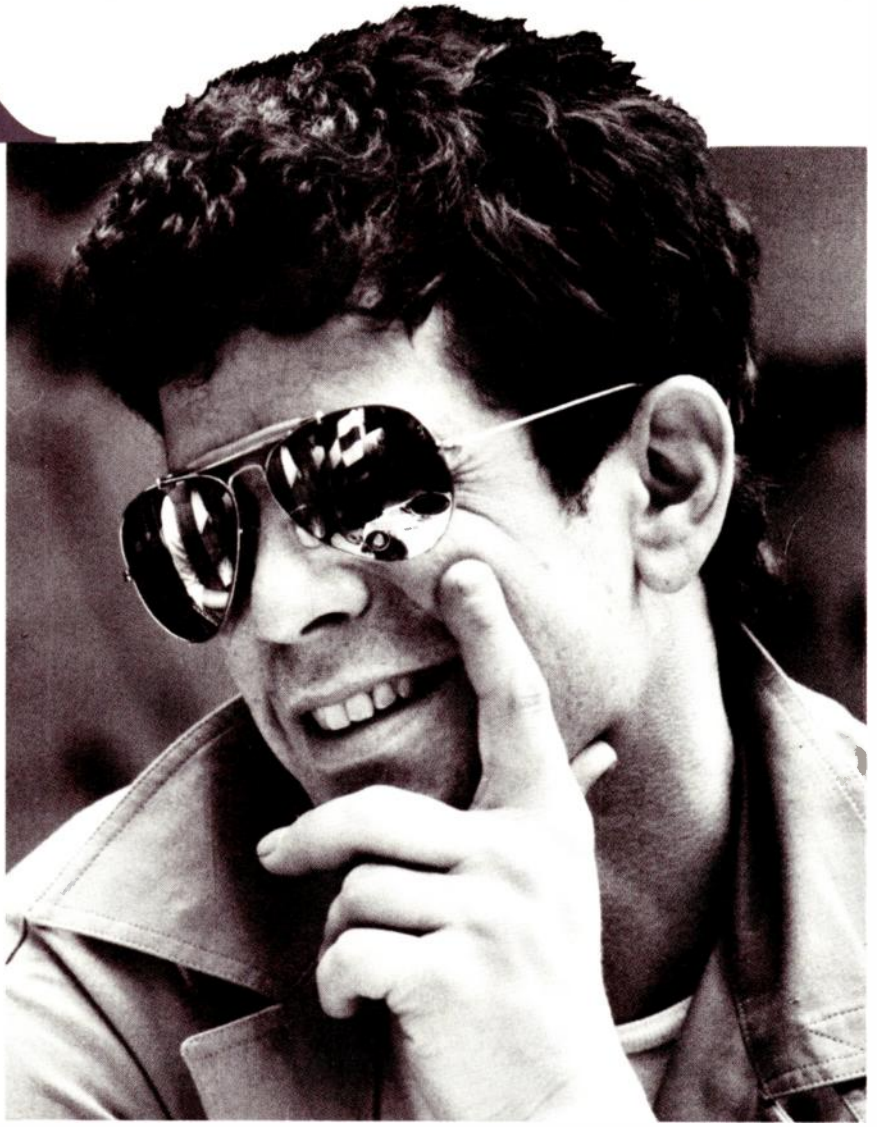

The Great Defender of the Velvet Legacy returns to aggressive, radiant pop.

LOU REED
New Sensations
(RCA)

For someone as over-reviewed, probed, grilled, psychoanalyzed and second-guessed as Lou Reed, calling his sixteenth solo album *New Sensations* takes a lot of nerve. What new thrills can be left for a man who has been to the depths of bohemian darkness, the heights of glam excess, who spent his last two studio albums peeling back the layers of love, hate and need in domestic relationships with a band that sounded like stark naked Velvets?

Yet here he is at the beginning of "I Love You, Suzanne" rapping tough like the guy in "Do You Love Me" by the Contours—"You broke my heart/ And you made me cry/ You said I couldn't dance/ And now I'm back/ To let you know/ I can really make romance." The band jumps into party gear, and suddenly Reed is about as close to aggressive radiant *pop* music as he's been since *Transformer* (and, dare we speak its name, *Loaded*). It's all in the little things: the sweet gospel echo of the background chirping in "Turn It Up," steel guitar chimes heightening the cheerful glow of the title track. In "The Great Defender," a cameo vision of video arcade cool and R&B vigor, Reed juxtaposes his ornery burping guitar break with a sentimental calliope-like keyboard in the fade.

On a purely visceral level, *New Sensations* may seem like two steps backward. Confrontational scraping and skeletal picking have departed with guitarist Robert Quine. (Seek out the recent *Live In Italy* import set to hear what the *Blue Mask* band could do to "Sister Ray.") But with fuller, more amiable arrangements and animated singing, this album begins to connect the adult Reed with an audience weaned solely on spiritual descendants and cheap pretenders. He equates his own art of desperate innocence and fearless experience with that of Sam Shepard and Martin Scorcese in "Doin' The Things That We Want To," underlining the parallel with a spunky neo-jig guitar figure and the combative thump of ex-Material drummer Fred Maher. And with "Fly Into The Sun," a haunting, even hymn-like variation on "Walk On The Wild Side," Reed announces once and for all that his fearlessness and its attendant excesses were the means to his revelations, not the end in themselves: "I'd shine by the light of the unknown moment/ To end this worldly pain."

One thing you can say about *New Sensations* is that, unlike a lot of his post-*Street Hassle* work, it *is* a really good time—randy rhythms and sly monotone vocals are perfect for the divorce court version of the Adam and Eve story in "Red Joystick." But it is also crucial

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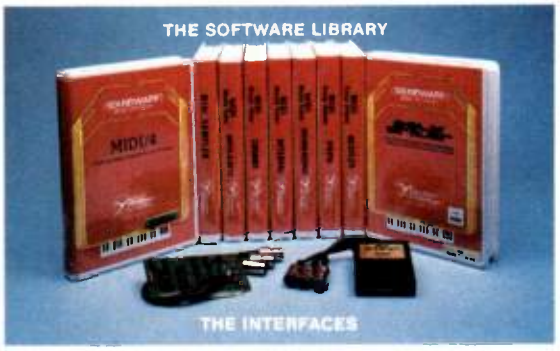

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XPANDER

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board than on the high octaves. Using the keyboard as an input to the tracking generator and the five track points, this becomes easy to arrange. There are three tracking generators per voice too, which enable you to place several different parameters under non-linear tracking control.

You'd think that with all of these programming options (and this account by no means covers everything) the Xpander would be a nightmare to program. Actually though, it's surprisingly easy to grasp the basics in a short amount of time. The heart of the programming system consists of two 40-character alphanumeric vacuum fluorescent displays, six 360-degree stepped encoder rotary pots and thirteen push-button selectors. Different sections of the synthesizer are called up on various software pages. Your guide to the pages is a highly readable block diagram showing the relationships between sections.

Say you call up VSO 1, page 1. The upper display will tell you the parameters you can control on that page—with the first page for VSO 1, for example, you get Frequency, Detune, Pulse Width and VCA Amplitude as your parameters. The lower display indicates the amount of each parameter. The rotary stepped encoders which adjust these amounts are located just beneath the displays, each in line with its assigned parameter readings.

This system offers a distinct advantage over synthesizers with single-knob parameter controllers. It places an entire section of the synthesizer in front of the programmer all at once. He can approach the section as a whole, rather than constantly shuttling between individual parameters.

The Xpander's patch memory section can store up to a hundred single patches plus a hundred of what Oberheim calls multi-patches. A multi-patch is a combination of six individual voice patches arranged in a configuration. Each voice of the multi-patch can be individually edited. Multi-patch parameters such as the relative volume of each voice and panning information (the Xpander has stereo and mono audio outputs, plus individual audio outputs for each voice) can also be programmed.

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level. I co-wrote eight of the eleven songs on the album. It is the best thing that has ever happened to me. Nothing but positive things have come out of it. And that is the hardest working man I have ever worked with—they say James Brown is the hardest working man in show business? Peter Wolf is the hardest working man I've ever seen in a studio. He don't let up, buddy."

Jonzun boisterously enumerates: "With Peter you'll eat good, sleep good, he pays good, and he always mentions me. What else could I ask for? He covers all the ground. Hopefully he and I will work together forever."

Before he's barely out of the studio with Wolf, Jonzun will be back at the House of Hits recording the next Jonzun Crew LP for Tommy Boy (whose president, Tom Silverman, he regards as "a pioneer of electronic music"). "A lot of artists complain about independent labels, but it all comes down to this; if I sell a million records for Tommy Boy, and they pay me for a million records, I'm satisfied. RCA and Tommy Boy are just names; the money is the same."

A dream of Jonzun's is to produce James Brown. "I think I could get a hit on him. James, people have forgotten him. But Sly Stone, Chuck Berry, Little Richard and James, that's where all the different styles arrive from. Those people—everybody else just grew out from there. James is not only the godfather of soul, but of R&B, punk, funk and rock."

Jonzun grabs his fuzzy white lamb's wool coat and he and Sonni get ready to leave by putting their hands out and giving the space shake: a funny little gesture that looks like a peace sign or the rabbit ears of the Playboy insignia. "Everyone is learnin' the space shake—Mick Jagger came by the studio to see Peter, to hang out, jam, and give us some inspiration, and I taught him the space shake. Peter Wolf, Ric Ocasek—I'm teachin' it wherever I go." With that, Jonzun winks wickedly, smiles slyly, and disappears. Ⓜ

A House Can Be A Home

Besides having an astonishing view of downtown Boston, the House of Hits setup includes a TEAC 80-8 8-track ½-inch tape recorder and a TEAC mixing console. Michael Jonzun uses an Otari MX50 2-track reel-to-reel recorder for mixing; but final mixes for the Jonzun Crew records are done at Unique Recording, because of Frank Heller, "the best electronic engineer."

House of Hits has an Ibanez Harmonizer, as well as Korg and MXR effects. The monitors are JBL 4315s, and the speakers are Auratones.

Jonzun relies on the shag carpeting that covers the entire studio to absorb the sound. "Electronic recording is done mostly by direct input. You don't use acoustics as much." Outer rooms with hardwood walls and flooring are employed for recording horns and vocals.

As for microphones, they have a variety of Sony and Sennheisers. A Neumann U-87 and a Beyer M-500 were utilized for New Edition. "The ribbon mike is more receptive to high frequencies—for instance, a woman's voice. That was the only mike that could bring out and make stronger Ralph's thin voice on 'Candy Girl.'" For his own voice Jonzun prefers an AKG 414—"It's bright, crispy. And I don't use a windscreen, I use pantyhose instead, stretched across a hanger in front of the mike."

The Oberheim DMX drum machine is favored over Linn's; however, he likes to use both on a song, on top of real drums. The inventory of keyboards includes Oberheim, Roland, a few digital synthesizers, an Emulator, an Arp Odyssey and a Yamaha DX7. Jonzun writes songs on a piano or an Ovation acoustic guitar that he got in a trade for a two-inch master tape.

The new studio, nicknamed House of Hits II, is designated to open in Cambridge, Massachusetts shortly. Some of the goodies purchased: a Sound Workshop Series 30 mixing console; an Otari 24-track recorder; Yamaha NS10 bookshelf speakers; Urei monitors, limiters and compressors; and a full video production facility.

Does Jonzun use anything unusual in his studio? "We compensate for what we don't have; we use our ears."

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his chewing gum. "To tell you the truth, that's what gave Peter Wolf the idea I knew what I was doing. He came over to the House of Hits and we worked hand-in-hand; he said, 'I've got an idea.' I said, 'I've got an idea,' and we started putting them together. We put them down and Peter said, 'Hey man, I think we've got a groove here.' That turned into working on the record.

"Peter is the easiest person I have ever produced. He already had a style developed, and all I had to do was expand on it—which is a challenge, but he knew what he wanted. My input was to pull it all together and enhance it. Now with the New Edition kids, Maurice, Sonni and I molded them; they were really poor and trying to do something positive—that's what I dug. But they couldn't sing, and I thought Maurice was really wasting his time. He worked on one song...."

"For a year," Sonni yells, from his comfy chair across the room. "It took Ralph all year to sing 'Candy Girl.'"

"Yeah," Jonzun agrees. "They had no style; we had to develop one. They are an imitation of Maurice and me—we would go in, sing the song, and they would mimic it—and any kid can mimic a record."

"Half the tunes," Sonni says, "on the New Edition album we did ten years ago."

"As kids," Jonzun cackles, "and even I thought it sounded too much like the Jackson 5. Berry Gordy must have had a lot of patience."

Jonzun moans that people have the wrong conception of what a record producer does: "It's not the movies, we don't put up the money. A producer is the artist's coach. He makes him feel comfortable, he gives him inspiration. He sits behind the mixing console and translates to the engineer the exact sound that he wants: trumpet, sax, keyboards, treble, whatever. Most of all he's the closest thing to the artist and has to translate to everybody around him to come together, make it a unified production, and make it dynamic." Jonzun's favorite producers: Nile Rodgers, "very energetic," and Prince, "very dramatic."

The first thing Jonzun does before he goes into the studio with someone—besides making sure they are nice and have a good attitude—is work out their musical arrangements. "We try to build it around the person, make the music hit from all angles. Then basically all the person has to do is put their voice on it. Or like instrumentalist Tom Browne, who put his trumpet on it—that was *Tom Browne's Rockin' Radio* on Arista, which I co-produced with Maurice. That was a big hit!

"Anyway," he carries on breezily, "with the rap groups we lay down the music track, then lay down a scat-track—a scat vocal—to give 'em an idea where the rap goes. Whew, Grandmaster Flash, those guys, they have a natural talent for rappin'—rapping was made for those guys; they come into a room and come up with rhymes and rhythms just like that, off the top of their heads," Jonzun snaps his fingers. "But in a lot of cases, they don't ever even see the music being put together. New Edition, they don't know who played on their album."

It's easy, Jonzun pips, to produce yourself: "The guys in the Jonzun Crew—Sonni, Stevo Thorpe and Gordo Worthy—feel I know what I'm doing, so till I mess up, they don't have any comments." Sonni giggles, and Jonzun continues, trying to muffle his own laughter: "I recorded 'Pack Jam'—not to take anything away from my group—when I was alone. I'd start the machine, run out, and start playing drums. If I made a mistake, I was playing with one hand, punching the machine with the other.

"You know, I had almost given up on performing. Electronic music was the last thing we chose to do. But look at Midnight Star: they completely copied the Jonzun Crew. Boy, boy, boy, they just imitate the space-funk. But it just lets me know how strong my ideas are, when I see other people using them."

About Peter Wolf, Jonzun will at first only remark—quietly—that "the thing about him is that he gave me the opportunity to express myself on another

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The Top's Off the Convertible
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Other unique features include a continuous 40:1 damping pot to tighten or loosen the amp's control over the speaker, a pentode/triode switch to change the power degrees of the modules and a dual power supply that uses low voltages for the preamp stages and high voltage for the power stages. The power stage has some other surprises that are commercial amplifier firsts. The speaker is a 12-inch Celestion G12K-85. For $1260, this is an amp that's worth taking a closer look at. (Seymour Duncan, 203 Chapala St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101)

Passport to Paradise
The Northern California music software firm that has been making a lot of MIDI waves lately offers several software packages for Apple II and Commodore computers. The MIDI/4 lets you interface four MIDI instruments and drum machines together for multi-track recording with unlimited overdubs, real-time editing, transposition, external sync and tempo control, all for $99. Their Polywriter music printing software translates musical performances into standard notation, printing out hard copy. Correct beaming, split stemming and ties are all handled automatically. For $299, a chart-writers wet dream.
Passport also makes an interface that Yamaha licensed for its DX synths ($195) and a software library for education, performance, recording and various genre programs, including the Beatles. Next month, we'll be telling you more about the plethora of MIDI programs that can scarily reproduce the sounds of classic artists and records. (Passport Designs, 625 Miramontes St., Suite 103, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019, 415-726-0280)

Lowrider
These 16-inch macho drivers from Altec Lansing are specifically designed to increase the kick of low frequency horn and vented horn enclosures. Known as the 515-G Series, the three speakers boast 132-ounce ferrite magnets, edgewound aluminum flatwire voice coils and low-distortion cloth suspensions. For maximum wattage the 515-8GP is recommended. (Altec Lansing, 1250 N. Red Gum St., P.O. Box 3113, Anaheim, CA 92803)

Give Me The Knight
A good condenser mike for $180? Yes, Virginia, from Electro-Voice. A cardioid condenser with proximity effect and without a presence peak, the "Black Knight" BK-1 uses an electret condenser to give smooth response and high sensitivity. On-board or phantom power, with on-off switch for battery conservation. (Electro-Voice, 600 Cecil St., Buchanan, MI 49107, 212-682-7600)

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Monitor Madness
You say you've got a particularly hard-to-please band to mix? You say they're always bugging you for individual custom-mixed monitor settings? Well, try the AHB SRM-186 mixer, designed for the grumpiest of groups. It'll give them six independent mixes and you so many easy-operating features, you'll throw away your Excedrin forever. The SRM-186 incorporates a passive mike splitter and external signal processing can be easily patched into any of the six output sections. The sound crew can monitor each mix through the PFL solo system, exactly as the musician hears it (the PFL also has its own LED meter, so the confusion of one meter doing several jobs is gone). The engineer can also effortlessly switch from speakers to phones without fiddling with the output levels. It even has an arm rest for Grateful Dead-length performances, and is designed for low light levels. Talk your band into buying one for $3,400, from Allen & Heath Brenell USA, Ltd., Five Connair Rd., Orange CT 06477.

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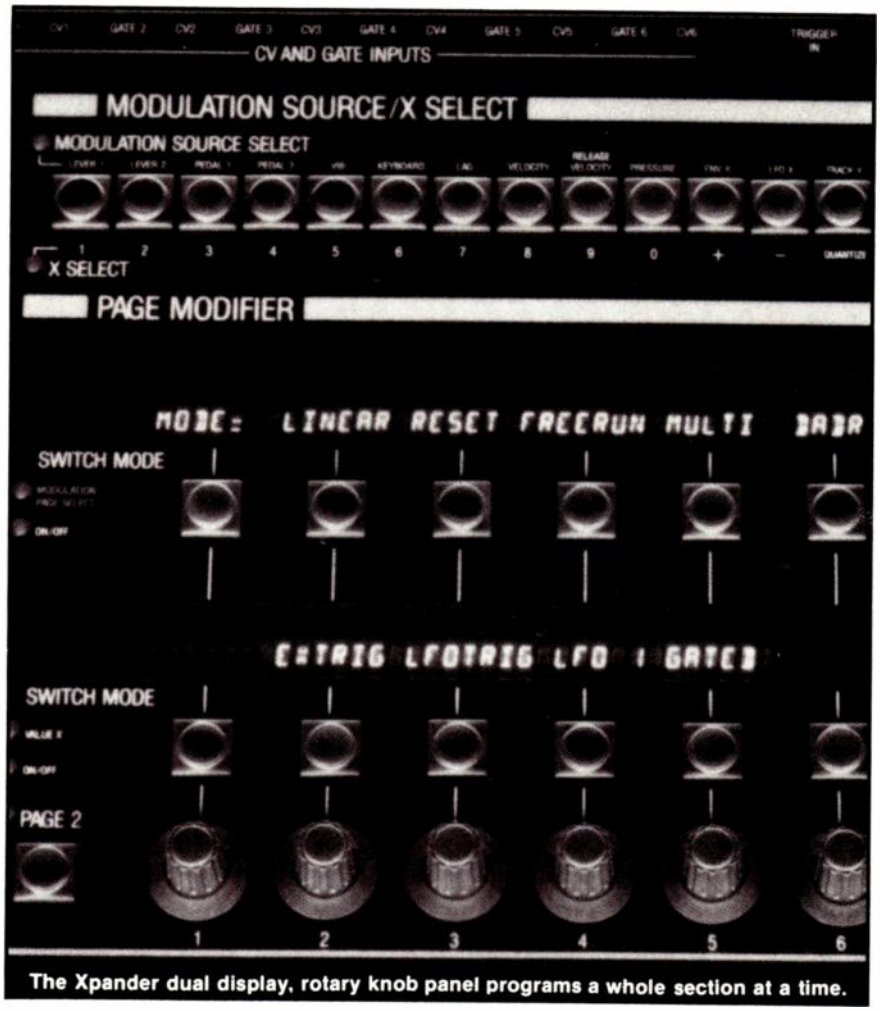

The Xpander dual display, rotary knob panel programs a whole section at a time.

ENDING THE WAR BETWEEN THE SYNTHS

The Xpander Reconciles Modular with Performance.

By Alan diPerna

There's always been something of a Mason-Dixon line in the evolution of synthesizers: the old modular system vs. hardwired performance synths issue. The performance-oriented gear won the lion's share of the market as synthesis made its way from arty campus "realizations" onto the Hot 100. But players never lost their hankering for the greater programming flexibility of modular equipment. The new Oberheim Xpander is an instrument that points to a rapprochement between the options of modular-style patching and the convenience of programmable presets.

To start with the basics, the Xpander is a 6-voice polyphonic synthesizer. The six voices are totally independent; each can have a completely different patch, and two or three voices can be "stacked." Each voice has two VCOs (each generating triangle, sawtooth and pulse waveforms, plus noise on the second VCO), fifteen VCAs, five LFOs, five Envelope Generators, three Tracking Generators, four Ramp Generators, a Lag Generator and a 15-mode Filter.

These elements can be combined in a great variety of ways. But before getting into some of the details, it should be mentioned that all of the basic sound-generating functions on the Xpander—the oscillators and filters—are analog. All of the control functions—modulation sources, envelope generators, etc.—are digital. One of the Xpander's on-board computers can also create digital-type FM synthesis sounds by applying the triangle waveform from one of the oscillators as a modulation source to the other oscillator.

It's called the Xpander because it can be controlled by—and expand the capabilities of—any synthesizer, sequencer or computer that is equipped with either MIDI or CV and Gate outputs. The Xpander's sound can be layered with that of other synthesizers via MIDI, but it is more than capable of standing on its own as a sound-generating device. Its design allows for the use of more than one controller, in any combination of MIDI and CV/Gate formats. With six independent voices, it is ideal for interface with guitar synthesizers—one of several reasons why Oberheim decided to furnish it without its own keyboard.

The filter and modulation sections on the Xpander are perhaps the best indicators of just how flexible it is. The filter section contains no less than fifteen different modes. This includes the 2-pole and 4-pole low-pass filters offered by the Oberheim OB-8 and Roland Jupiter 8, plus a complete array of other high-pass, low-pass, band-pass, all-pass (phase shifter) and notch filters, all of which make it possible to imitate the filter characteristics of just about any conventional polyphonic synth.

The Xpander contains twenty-seven different modulation sources. Up to six of these can be used on any given voice. The modulation sources can be applied to any of forty-seven different destinations. This is where the Xpander really begins to resemble a modular system. Not only can modulation be assigned to fairly conventional destinations such as oscillator frequency or pulse width; it can also be applied to parameters that are not usually available for modulation, such as filter resonance. This matrixed system of modulation sources and inputs also makes it possible to construct some rather involved patches.

The Xpander's tracking generator is one of its more interesting and useful features. It will take any input and allow you to scale it—using five different track points—in such a manner that its output is a non-linear function of the input. Say, for example, you have an LFO vibrato that you only want to apply to the top octave of your keyboard. Or maybe you want your filter cutoff frequency to be a little more open in the middle of the key-

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Guitarmaker to the stars, Smith holds his new prototype with adjustable pickups.

PAUL REED SMITH'S HIGH-CLASS HYBRID

Bridging the Age-old Gap Between Strat and Paul

By J.D. Considine

Traditionally, one of the things that has made a guitar great has been the distinctiveness of its sound. Go through any music store, and you're likely to find guitars trusted for their twang, guitars beloved for their bite, guitars acquired for their crunch—in short, a whole world of instruments that do only one thing, but do it well. Paul Reed Smith wants to change all that.

Sitting in his guitar shop, a cluttered attic office less than a block from the Maryland Statehouse in Annapolis, Smith talks about how he wanted to broaden the sonic palette of his guitars. After all, most guitarists who need more than one sound end up buying more than one guitar. Wouldn't it be great, he wonders, if you could get "a variety of sounds you love from your guitar, instead of just one or two?"

Rather than answer, Smith plugs in one of his guitars and begins to play. He tosses off a raunchy blues figure, and what emerges from his amp is the lean, focused lead sound of a classic Strat in the treble setting. With a flick of a rotary switch, the sound mellows to the darker, slightly hollow sound of a Strat set between the treble and middle pickups. So far, nothing earth shattering.

Then the character of the guitar takes a 180-degree turn as Smith moves to his third setting, a stingingly powerful treble; you'd swear you were listening to '59 P.A.F.'s.

Smith's rotary switch also has a setting that delivers the sort of throaty bite you'd normally expect to get from a wah-wah pedal cocked slightly back, as well as a fat out-of-phase sound. And to top it all off, there's a tone-control circuit that can transform the angry aggression of his P.A.F. lead tone, virtually identical to Edward Van Halen's signature snarl, into the muted dignity and jazzy smokiness of a '59 Les Paul. All of this without active electronics, special effects, or anything more elaborate than his guitar and an old 20-watt Gibson amp.

So what's his secret? How'd he do it? And who is this guy, anyway?

Paul Reed Smith is a twenty-eight-year-old Marylander who has been building guitars in Annapolis for eight years now. In that time, he has developed a reputation for building guitars that were masterpieces of woodworking and design; even without amplification, they project clear, ringing tones. Smith's client list has grown to include Carlos Santana, Al DiMeola, Neal Schon, Howard Leese and Nancy Wilson. Says Santana: "He must have a Japanese soul to keep him going for quality."

The quest for quality has made him well-known as a luthier; it also has led Smith on a long search for the perfect pickup. His first major step came two years ago. "He loves the sound of old single-coil Gibson P-90s," says his assistant, Jon Ingram. "But they hum, they make incredible amounts of noise. Paul finally figured out a way to duplicate the sound of a P-90, without the hum."

It was a good start, but the perfectionist in Smith realized that there was more to it. One night, he went to see Carlos Santana play. "He plays one of our guitars with a Seymour Duncan custom, and a Duncan P.A.F.," Smith says. "But midway through the show, he pulled his old Yamaha out, which has an old Gibson P.A.F. in it. There isn't anything special about the acoustic sound of that guitar—I know, because I've played it—but the *electric* sound had such character that it was clear as a bell.The notes were right *there*, and when he held a note, the feedback was sweet as candy.

"We made a test guitar, and started comparing all the pickups you could buy to this old P.A.F. we bought, and the P.A.F. just kissed them all good-bye. And we didn't understand it, because the stuff you can buy and the P.A.F. are all made the same—same magnets, same

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MICHAEL JONZUN'S SPACE SHAKE

Hit Production from the Leaner Side of the Tracks

By Julie Panebianco

The House of Hits looks like a fire-trap: the first floor windows are boarded up or broken, and a shaky staircase with crooked wooden steps leads to a room filled with red velveteen furniture, too frayed and rickety to be considered antique. Torn copies of *Billboard* and a pencil sketch of James Brown are the only clues that the 8-track studio inside, lined with ragged orange shag carpeting, has been the unlikely birthplace of hit records by New Edition, the Jonzun Crew, Maurice Starr and Peter Wolf.

The proprietors of the funky place are Michael Jonzun and Maurice Starr. They are two of six musical Johnson Brothers, sons of Ray Johnson, a celebrated horn player: "Miles wasn't good enough to carry his case," goes the legend. They worked as a jazz band, a brass band, a rock band, and an R&B band: "We couldn't get ourselves arrested," Jonzun claims. After being kicked out of too many music bigwigs offices, Starr and Jonzun decided to go into producing; their D.I.Y. approach turned the House of Hits into a gold record factory.

The brothers earned the money for the studio when a tape wrapped in tissue, sent to Sylvia Robinson at the Sugarhill label, came to her attention by way of a sneeze. They subsequently produced their furious rap "Showdown" for Grandmaster Flash and the Sugarhill Gang. Then Starr cultivated a bunch of neighborhood kids in Boston called New Edition, convinced a dubious Jonzun to help, and they came up with "Candy Girl," a huge international hit. Starr signed as a solo act to Arista, and embroiled himself in a losing battle with the parents and the management of New Edition. (See p.10). Meanwhile Jonzun, obsessed with the weird sonic noises his cheap Sinatra organ made, began to dabble in electronic music. His Jonzun Crew combined an urban savvy with ambient synthesized rhythms. "Street-space-funk" debuted with "Pack Jam," a drowsy dance-trance on the Tommy-Boy label, which became one of the largest-selling indie singles ever. "Space Cowboy," an irresistible hip-hop set to a western shuffle, and their album *Lost In Space*, followed suit, topping club and R&B charts.

But now Jonzun is back behind the boards as the co-producer (and co-writer) of fellow Bostonian Peter Wolf's first solo LP, the basic tracks and pre-production for which were done at the House of Hits. On a break from final mixing at a New York studio, he's in a fine, ebullient mood, hilariously reminiscing with brother Sonni about the ridiculous exploits of an infamous club-circuit performer who billed himself as "James Brown, Jr." Most of their day has been spent planning a large, new 24-track facility, though the family has no intention of deserting the House of Hits.

"All our productions started there. Before we had an 8-track, we had a 4-track. We were always trying to save for a rainy day, and we were sure having some rainy days," Jonzun grins impishly, his saucy eyes flashing under the brim of a baseball cap. "Eight-track recording forces you to formulate your ideas sooner. And if you don't have a song on eight tracks—which are the basics: drums, bass, guitars—then you just don't have it, buddy. An orchestra can't make it sound much better.

"For any aspiring engineer or musician, 8-track is where to start—Prince would probably tell you the same thing. An 8-track will challenge you, because you have to go with one basic arrangement, and it's got to be a dominant idea." Magnifying his Massachusetts accent, Jonzun adds, "The advantage of twenty-four tracks is in the arrangements, because you can have three or four different arrangements going. Otherwise, it's just more people makin' more noise."

Jonzun takes a breath and chomps on

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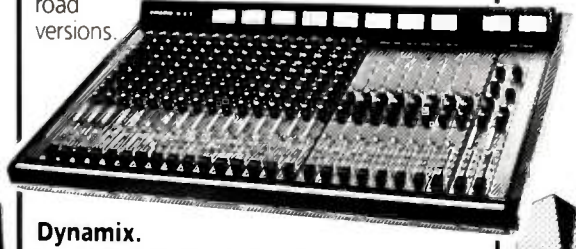

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again, remembering that in a year-old reorganization program the rock division had become autonomous and was now under the wing of a popular new vice-president, Jerry Jaffe. Jaffe was known to be an ardent pre-MTV supporter of new music and had brought in a new A&R staff which had already helped put the American label in the black for the first time. Most of these successes had been full-grown British talent like ABC, Dexy's, Big Country or Def Leppard; Jaffe intended to develop some home-grown talent, and put nearly a million into nurturing the Call. As one of his jean-regime A&R execs, Jaffe brought over from A&M the former lead singer of Gentle Giant, Derek Shulman, primarily as an AOR specialist. Englishman Shulman had yet to make a signing when he took Don Rose's call, though he was also developing a hard-rock band called Bon Jovi.

Six months later, Derek and Don are reminiscing about that First Contact. "Did I pick up the call?" asks Derek incredulously.

"I think I called for Jerry and it trickled down."

"That's a smart move, you see." nods Shulman. "'Jerry can't take this call: can you, Derek?' It's horrible, but most times you don't take the call—you listen to the music first."

"I was refusing to do that at that time," notes Don. "Someone would say, 'Well, drop off a tape,' and I wouldn't do it."

"He did it right. He hoodwinked me. It impressed me, the whole thing impressed me." Derek shakes his head. "This guy had it *down*. He had the right hook and the left hook and the straight left, three or four knockout punches."

"I'd been kicked out of there once before," Rose ruefully recalls. "I wasn't going to let it happen again."

What did Derek like about the band? "I viewed Rubber Rodeo as one of the most creative situations I've seen in America. They felt very English to me, with the satire, the wit, and the music, which is ultimately the key. It caught my imagination, I must admit. But what really did it was when Don played me the new demos—they were quite critical. It sounded like they'd taken the essence of American music and brought it into a totally new perspective, into *pop*. I told Don that, and he said 'That's exactly what I'd hoped you'd say.' He had other offers and I'm sure I'd have said 'Go with what you got' if he'd wanted to keep it kitschy like the B-52s. There was no way I could view it that way."

Don indeed had other offers. When Derek went down to the Lone Star to catch the showcase, he witnessed a living, breathing (and eating) testament to Rose's five-point program: Gotham's major label scouts were turned out in full: "There were A&R people tripping over each other," Don chuckles, savoring the memory. "Almost to the point of *embarrassment!* When the dust had cleared, I was left with three real offers."

MCA, Portrait (a CBS associated label) and PolyGram were the final contenders. The decisive factor for Rose was the label's *perception* of the band: "We had to have the assurance that we'd be taken seriously, because in the long run, we had to get the label to commit resources to the project. Derek was the first ranking A&R guy to perceive Rubber Rodeo not as a novelty, not as trendy new music, but as a commercial pop group. And Derek was very diligent: he followed up, returned my calls, checking in on a regular basis. His enthusiasm was very important to me."

Shulman's nervousness about the country-punk factor gave him second thoughts about the name, however, despite the fact it had initially intrigued him. One pre-signing meeting he presented his reservations: "I told Don, 'Maybe we should change the name if we're going for this pop line.' He stood his ground though...."

"I started zipping up my briefcase...," says Don.

The tactic worked. Shulman beat a retreat: "I quickly said, 'Okay, no. I didn't say that.'"

The night the decision to sign Rubber Rodeo would be made, Derek brought a friend from the rock division down to hear them. He was a big Rank & File fan and walked out after the third song. Derek considered that an auspicious omen and plunged ahead. Rubber Rodeo was now a PolyGram act.

Rose wisely turned the actual negotiation of the contract over to attorney Robert Somma, once managing editor of *Fusion*. Thus he and Derek were not directly involved (except for conferring at particularly sticky points) and their nascent friendship remained untainted. The negotiations lasted nearly three months in the late spring of '83. PolyGram bought the rights to eight albums—at the company's option. Per normal practice, they reserved the right to drop the band if any record stiffed. The parties quickly agreed on a $110,000 advance and a typical royalty structure (with a reduced royalty for overseas sales, even then thought to be an important factor). Rubber Rodeo would earn twelve percentage "points" out of the $8.98 list price, about $1.08 on each record sold. A mechanical royalty of 4¼ cents a song (as well as performance royalties if there were hits) would be paid to the owner of the publishing rights— the band is still shopping for a co-publisher.

The negotiations bogged down, however, as the band attempted to avoid other typical first-album clauses, especially recoupment of video costs from the band's royalties. Don took the unusual step of asking that certain amounts of dollars for promotion and tour support be written into the contract; the label refused, but assured the band that that much and more would be forthcoming when the time was right. The band wound up giving ground on lesser financial issues and taking it back on creative control. PolyGram gave Rubber Rodeo final rights of song selection, producer and studio (the label did get a right of approval), and the freedom to do their own album art. In the end, both sides felt they had gotten what they most wanted—*and* it was quietly understood that should the album be a big hit, "everything is negotiable." Derek Shulman, who had his first hit single at age seventeen (and who still makes brash pro-musician statements that are too potentially dangerous to his corporate future to be anything but sincere), did note, however, "There were areas where, if I'd been Don, I would have stood a little bit firmer."

Shulman's enthusiasm for the band was the essential but unwritten part of the deal: they personally trusted him. This was understandable, given Shulman's assessment of the record business: "When I first got into the record business, my

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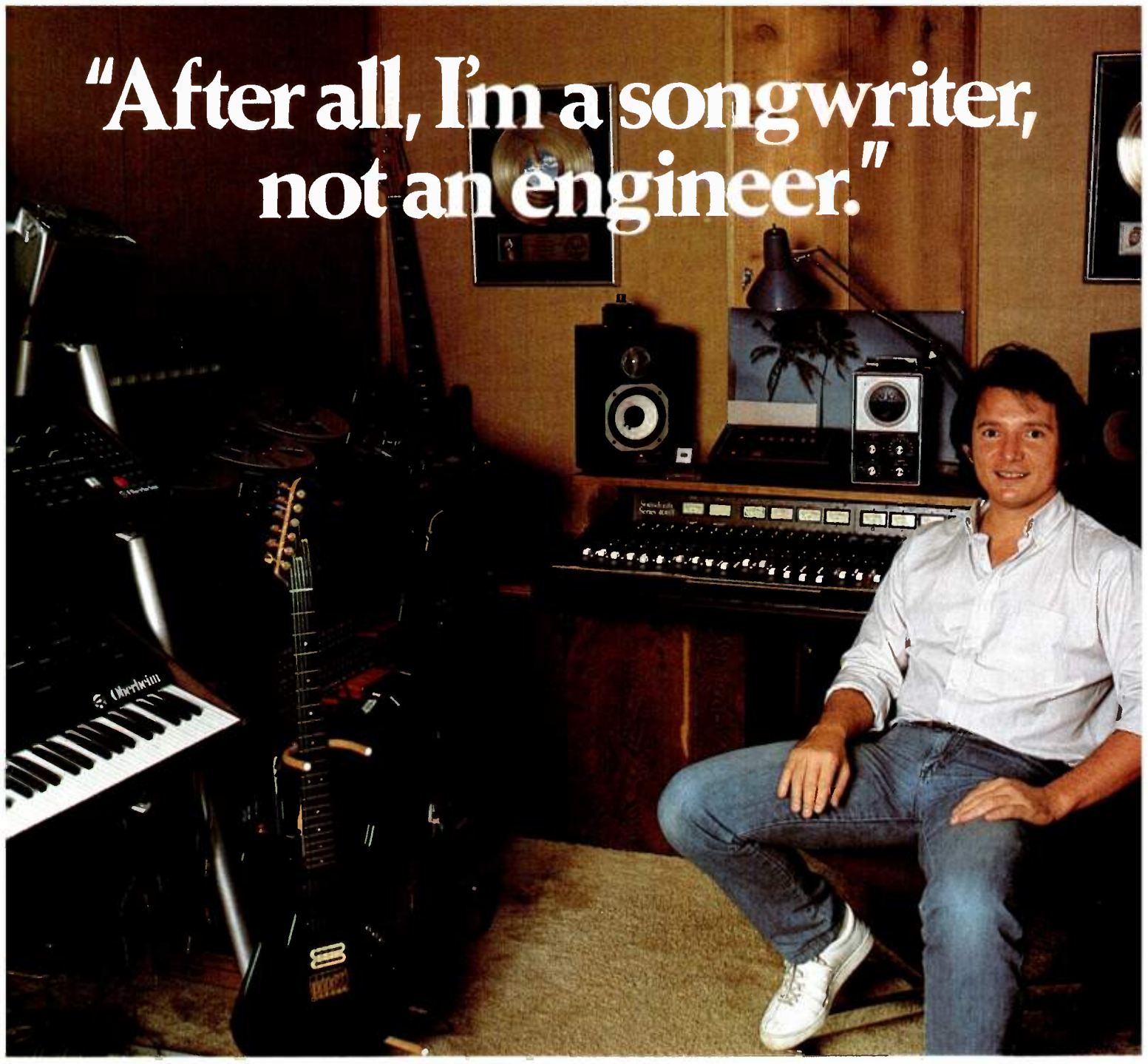

Songwriters and engineers are not only equipped with very different kinds of talent, they need different kinds of equipment to bring those talents out.

No one is more aware of this fact than Steve Kipner. He's one of the most successful songwriters in the country. You'll find his words and melodies behind many of the industry's top recording artists. Like Olivia Newton John's "Physical", "Heart Attack" and her newest hit "Twist of Fate." Other contributions include songs for Sheena Easton, Dolly Parton, America, and Laura Branigan.

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Steve chose the 400B for reasons that are as solid as gold. "I spend long hours in my home studio, and I never know when the creative spirit is going to strike, even at 3 AM. I spend time at this console laying down tracks, not patching and repatching, or fooling around with a lot of confusing controls. The Series 400B does what I want it to do and lets me do it easily. The quality of the sound is equal to expensive commercial studio sessions, plus I've got the comfort and control of my home environment. After all, I'm a songwriter not an engineer."

It's easy to see why Steve chose the 400B. But of course, at Soundcraft we do more than build the kind of consoles that bring out the best in recording artists and songwriters. We also provide a full line of quality mixers to bring out the artist in the engineer.

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throughout the fall of 1982.

During these early years, the band was being booked with all kinds of acts, playing in front of all kinds of people—"alcoholics, sleazebags and preppies"—and putting most of their gig income into a band fund (necessitating day jobs for all). They discovered the darker side of being a punk novelty act: "The worst gig was where we played with a band called the Sick Kids," muses Bob. "Wasn't that the Sic F★cks?" asks Mark. "They *were* sick f★cks," rejoins Bob. "It was really horrible. There was another gig where a guy farted into a microphone, and then you had to go up for the next set and sing into that same mike. [*This gives new importance to the use of windscreens. —Ed.*] Sometimes it was great, and sometimes it could really slap you in the face. Nothing was worse than going onstage and having people say, 'You're a *total idiot!*.' The problem with being so obvious was that the joke was getting old—and it wasn't *with* us, it was *on* us."

There was another, more serious problem brewing. Country-punk was growing as an idiom, and Rubber Rodeo was clearly not what it appeared to be. Writer Doug Simmons, feeling betrayed, savagely attacked the band in the *Boston Phoenix*. Bob saw that as an understandable development: "If you like that music, it's because it's getting back to, quote, what music's all about, whether it's nostalgia or revivalism. And people don't see that in our music because it's not there. Some people don't like to see a genre changed, let alone trashed." This factional infighting was brought home when the band played a club in Nashville and consented to be interviewed afterwards by Jason & the Scorchers: "Jason was really *irate*. He was asking why we were doing this weird, stupid thing, when what country music's all about is what Rank & File and the Scorchers were doing."

"'You're show stuff,' he told us," rejoins Trish. "'You're the Las Vegas of country music.' He had the gall to talk about what we wore onstage when he had on his fringe jacket and knee-high moccasins and his Rank & File hat. *That's* a costume! The only difference was that his wasn't lame' and ours was."

In the fall of 1982, an photo and article in *Us* interested a rising New York video production company, Second Story Television. Recognizing the band's latent videosyncrasies, director David Greenberg offerred to do a promo clip, absorbing the cost himself. Shooting began in November in Manhattan, but it ran overtime and another day was needed. While returning from that first shoot in the predawn, Bob and Trish's VW bus skidded off their exit ramp and hit the end of a guard rail: the rail literally split the cab in two and ripped the front off the bus. "We came so close to death it was just ridiculous," Bob shakes his head. "It was pure luck we ever got out." Holmes escaped harm but Milliken broke her nose and badly injured her knee and was taken to the hospital.

"That was the turning point, a really bad period," Bob says. "That's where the song "Slow Me Down" comes from. "It was mainly from there that we quit all our day jobs and jumped off the cliff. We decided to live on a pittance, and that's when I really started writing." Something else was clearly happening to post-accident Bob. A descendent of Oliver Wendell Holmes, his father still the Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, Holmes may have been visited by the genes of his achieving ancestors, or may just have been trying to finally silence them. He began to write the best songs he'd ever written, knocking chords and lines out on an old upright piano. Barc had bought a Fostex 8-track mixer and tape deck (the A-8), and helped Bob, joined by Gary Lieb's synths and a Roland TR-606 drum box, in recording rough sketches of the new songs after each whirlwind tour. By late spring, this process had yielded finished demos of some far more mature material. Bob had finally gotten his songwriting engine started;

FOR HUGH JONES, CREATIVE WORKAHOLIC, PRODUCING RUBBER RODEO BROUGHT PSYCHEDELIC OPPORTUNITIES AND A BRITISH-AMERICAN SHOWDOWN.

JOCK BAIRD

the center would now hold.

Rose was developing a new strategy and was determined to follow up the release of the first EP with press and radio, so despite Trish's pain-killer wooziness, he led a daring two-week raid on California. Bandmembers picked up their own then-cheap airfares, the band's better drivers trucked out the equipment, and the income from gigs paid expenses. In fourteen days, the road show did club gigs, college radio interviews, in-store autographing parties, and got mucho radio airplay and local press.

Things were beginning to accelerate. David Greenberg shot the second location for his "How The West Was Won" clip and finally assembled it. Everyone was knocked out. Greenberg had taken the postcards and snapshots and favorite movies the band had given him and mixed it into his own storyline. Sight gags like Trish (in her then-standard-issue Dolly Parton wig) stuffing cowboy boots into a Manhattan laundromat washer and Bob looking contemporarily inadequate next to old cowboy movie footage were made for rockvid. The video debuted for the press in March, 1983 at N.Y.C.'s Danceteria, with junk food buffet ("Always food," counsels Rose). Within weeks it went onto medium rotation on MTV. The Danceteria press party also announced the release of a new Eat EP. It used three more of the first 24-track "demos" done nearly two years before, but almost everyone assumed "She Had To Go" was a newer song—its synth sympathies and Bob's gutsy Bryan-Ferry-meets-Jerry-Garcia vocal were clearly new music fodder. The band fund bought an airport limousine-type Checker Aerobus and launched another club-press-airplay blitz in the Southeast and Midwest.

Don Rose now set in motion Plan B: "I finally had all five of the elements necessary for a good package. Number one, we had a track record on the first EP, with sales and radio successes and an inordinate amount of press for an indie. Number two, we had test pressings and covers for a new EP that was more contemporary and danceable. Number three was the video; it was well done and slick. Number four were the demos of Bob's new material. Our recorded material was getting dated so we had to show a label we were still growing. And number five was a local showcase: 'And now here they are in your backyard!' We booked gigs at the Lone Star and CBGB's. If you have these five things you won't be refused."

Don began visit Manhattan, "railroading" appointments and developing some healthy interest among the majors. On one of these trips, almost as an afterthought, he called PolyGram

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JOCK BAIRD

FOR BOB HOLMES, WHOSE EXPONENTIAL SONGWRITING GROWTH CLINCHED THE DEAL, SUCCESS BROUGHT HARD WORK AND HARD CHOICES.

Rubber Rodeo began as late 70s living room happenings at the Rhode Island School of Design, good friends "drinking a lot of beer and reaching a lot of people." Two participants were actually professionals—so to speak: guitarist/singer/songwriter Bob Holmes and bassist Doug Allen were both members of Blind Gary & the Foggy Vision Boys, a local bluegrass-cum-humor act (Blind Gary Bogus would be led onto the stage, despite his perfect sight). The living room jams, which fostered a romantic liaison between Holmes and singer/organist Trish Milliken, also coalesced into an electric C&W band called the Asphalt Cowboys. This included guitarist Jeff Dresher, who now heads N.Y.C.'s the Egyptians; Dresher's Middle Eastern and jazz influences and more sophisticated chordal sense set him and Bob on opposite courses and Dresher bowed out.

Thus emerged Rubber Rodeo in all its untethered glory, art students run amok at the Grand Ol' Opry. Holmes and his cohorts added their punk sympathies to the most improbable C&W material, and took it to the stage dressed in lurid lame' cowboy/cowgirl suits or gingham sportcoats ("They'd look like tablecloths in an Italian restaurant," laughs Don Rose). The basic concept was to use the spaghetti western humor of 60s cheap (Holmes loved muzak versions of "Wichita Lineman") and mix it with comic book kitsch. The interplay of Gary Leib's doomsday synthesizer humor with Eddie Stern's and later Mark Tomeo's authentic heart-melting pedal steel, spiced by Holmes' Big Note guitar, was the musical leading edge of a new genre, dubbed "prairie modern, " a.k.a. "home-on-the-radar-range." "Those are the two big textural instruments, " notes Holmes. "You can't tell the pedal steel apart from the synths—then they'll separate and you can tell—and then they come back together and you can't. That happened a lot on 'Jolene.'"

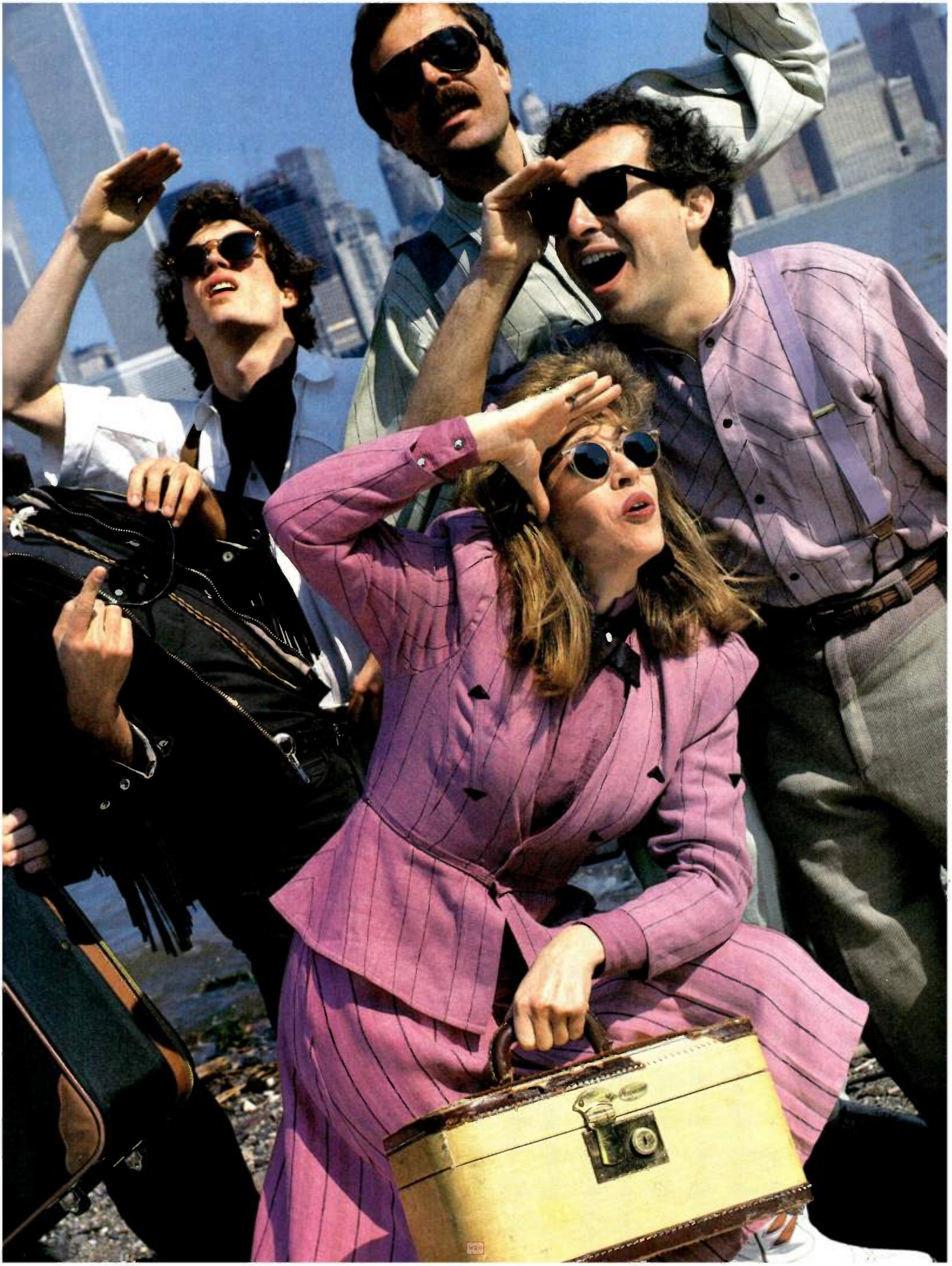
Rubber Rodeo's four-year-old version of that Dolly Parton classic still chills the spine today. A spacious, soaring pedal steel duels with taunting synths over nervous, jangly guitar and thundering drums. Milliken's blank-slate alto voice transforms the Parton vehicle into Everywoman's plea. New York synth-artist Richard Bone saw them perform the song at Max's Kansas City 1980 and produced it as a single on his own Rumble label. Boston critic Doug Simmons called it "the best regional single of the year." (Simmons is also generally credited with coining the term "country-punk" almost four years ago.) But even with an indie single and good press, things moved slowly. As the rhythm arrangements grew more sophisticated, Bob's brother Barclay came East from Ohio to replace the drum machine. By early 1981, they had succeeded in getting regular gigs and little else. It was then that they met Don Rose.

Rose had founded his own Eat Records in 1979 and ran the business out of his Salem, Massachusetts home. His biggest act had been Human Sexual Response, one of Boston's many failed great white hopes; Eat had also put out records by the Tweeds, the Commercials and the Original Artists and would later put the Incredible Casuals, Men & Volts and the Vinny Band on its menu. He had seen an article in *Boston Rock* about Rubber Rodeo and his childhood friend Rick Maxon had played banjo in the Foggy Vision Boys, so he went down to the Rat to catch the band. "I immediately clicked when I first heard them. They suited my personality—I saw something in what they did that *I'd* like to express. I'm very marketing oriented, and they also had a lot of marketing savvy, didn't just think of it as necessary evil. I saw we could *work* together." Bob and Trish drove up to Salem shortly thereafter, and a management deal was struck.

Rose personally financed an extended studio sojourn in August of 1981 to produce the demo that would become their first two EPs. Eddie Stern had just departed the band, but out of the blue, "Easy" Mark Tomeo answered an ad and his successful audition was recorded on the EP. Rose enlisted Human Sexual Response's producer John Doelp and they recorded eight songs at Rhode Island's 24-track Normandy Sound, mixing at the Cars' Syncro Sound. The engineer on the project, one Will Garrett, would become a close associate and volunteer soundman. These recordings not only showed the band's progress in building C&W spiced novelty vehicles, but revealed Bob Holmes' nascent new wave songwriting talents. "We had these two opposite ends going for us," elaborates Trish, "and we really had to pick out what we wanted."

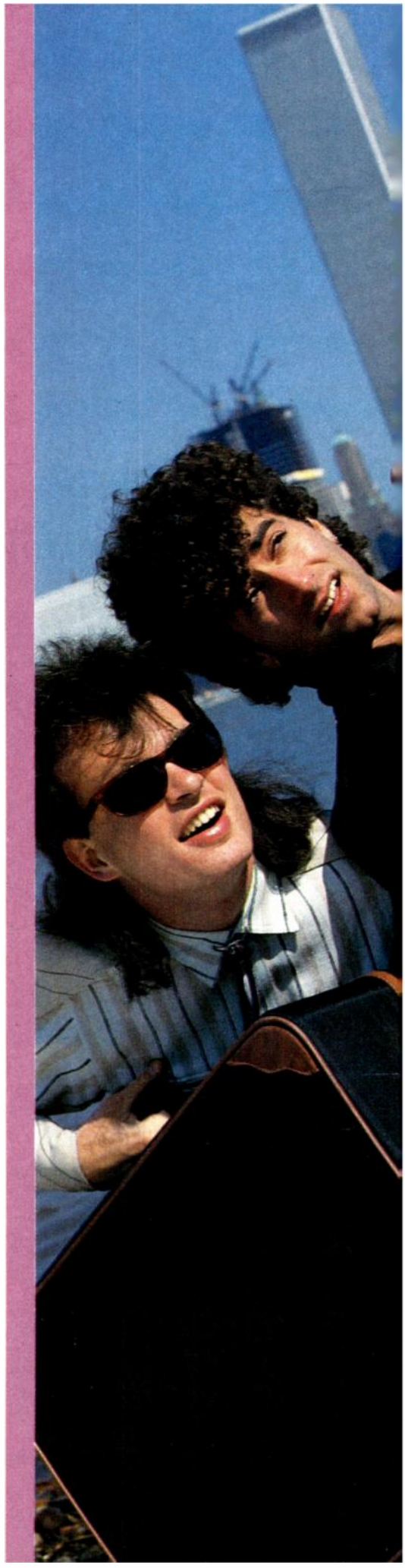
In the fall of 1981, Rose began his first assault on Manhattan record labels, shopping for either a licensing or distribution deal. He scheduled a showcase at the Sundown cafe and had Bob and Trish, dressed in full regalia, barnstorm the A&R departments. One label where the act didn't get over was PolyGram: the three intruders were unceremoniously tossed out of the office. The showcase that night went famously: Don brought in some spicy Texas chili and cartoony cardboard cacti decorated the stage. By a fluke, Andrea Lee, a friend of Rose's and a writer for the *New Yorker*, came by and "got caught up in the event." She later did a phone interview with Bob and her piece became the lead feature in "Talk of the Town." It was a publicity triumph—national press for a band with no record, and became the first of many such enthusiastic write-ups, as scribblers fell over each other to come up with new catch phrases to describe this new "country-punk."

But great press wasn't influencing the majors, and Rubber Rodeo decided to release their own eponymous EP on Eat. The first single almost became their campy remake of "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," but the band insisted on recording a pop-punky new tune of Bob's "How The West Was Won." Don was unable to put any more money into recording and remixing, so Gary, Bob and Trish put up about $4,000 between them to do it. (While recording at N.Y.C.'s Ranch, Mark Tomeo met the Gun Club who were recording *Miami* on another floor of the building and was asked to play on the album.) *Rubber Rodeo* was sent far and wide, with Don tirelessly servicing stations and press alike. The result was not only rave press clippings (collected in a fabulously effective comic book that included ads for X-Ray Specs and phony endorsements from the likes of Ricardo Montalban and Zsa Zsa Gabor), but surprising FM airplay. "How The West Was Won" made the *Progressive Media* top forty and a number of Top Adds charts



THE ANATOMY OF A SIGNING: RUBBER RODEO IN THE PROMISED LAND

Jock Baird



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Knowing full well how tough it is to place a feature on a relatively unknown band in a national publication, Rubber Rodeo's manager Don Rose came to us last year with a very unusual offer: he would reveal every detail—musical, personal and business—of the signing and production. We took as much advantage of the open window as we could: we saw the books, went to Bearsville to observe recording, ate Chinese food with the A&R man and chili with the band at their post-grad RISD hangout. In making their debut LP, *Scenic Views*, Rubber Rodeo was itself changed forever, often in painful, intimate ways. Nonetheless, the group resisted understandably strong temptations to keep certain details out of our purview, for which we are grateful.

The ending of this particular story is more intriguing than most, because it will be occurring as you read it. The single and album will hit the streets the same day this issue does, and the final chapter will be written on the *Billboard* airplay and album charts in the coming weeks.

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NATURAL SELECTION:
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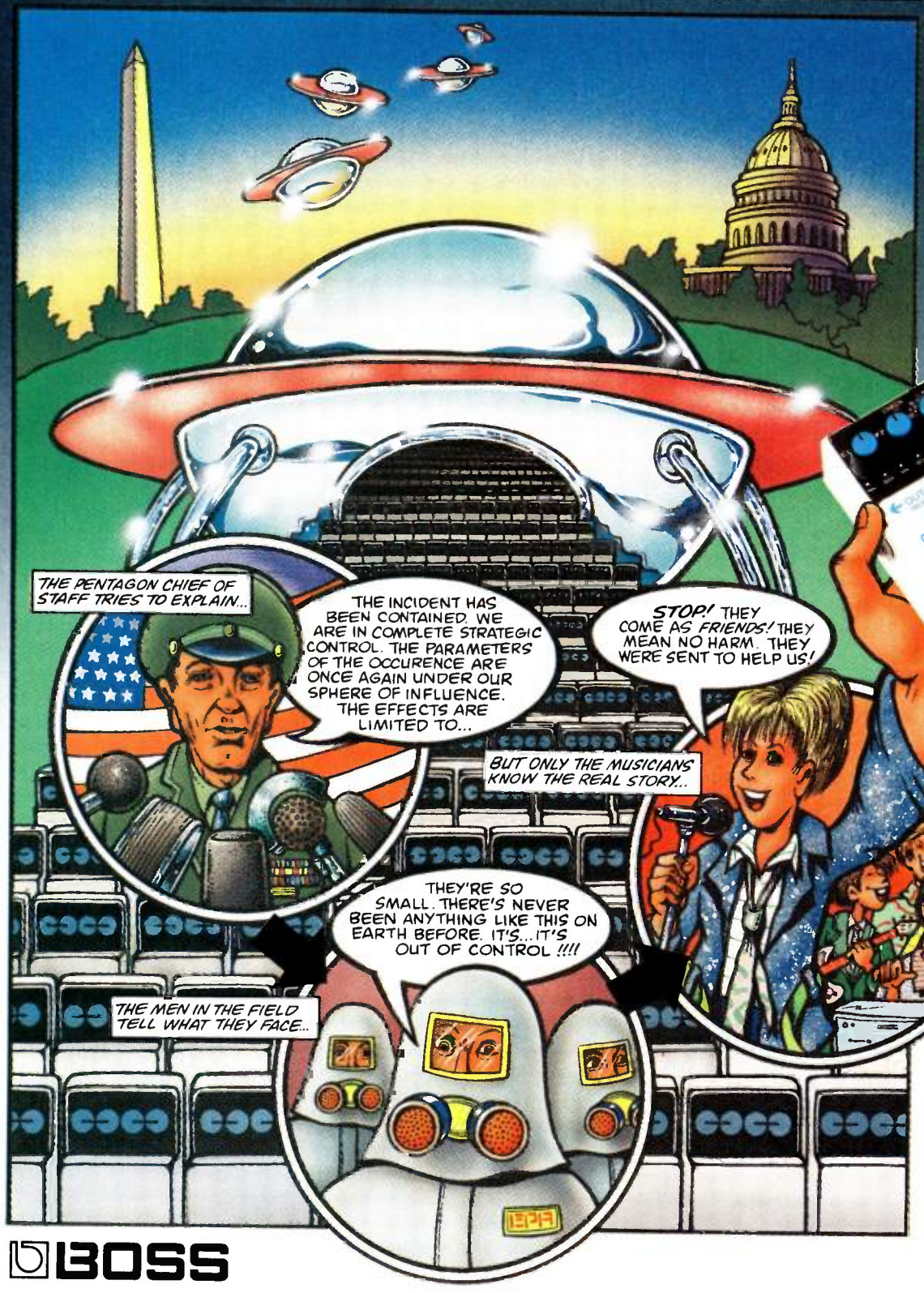

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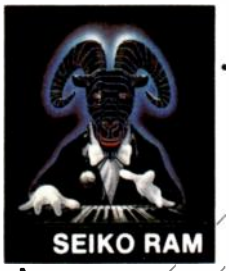

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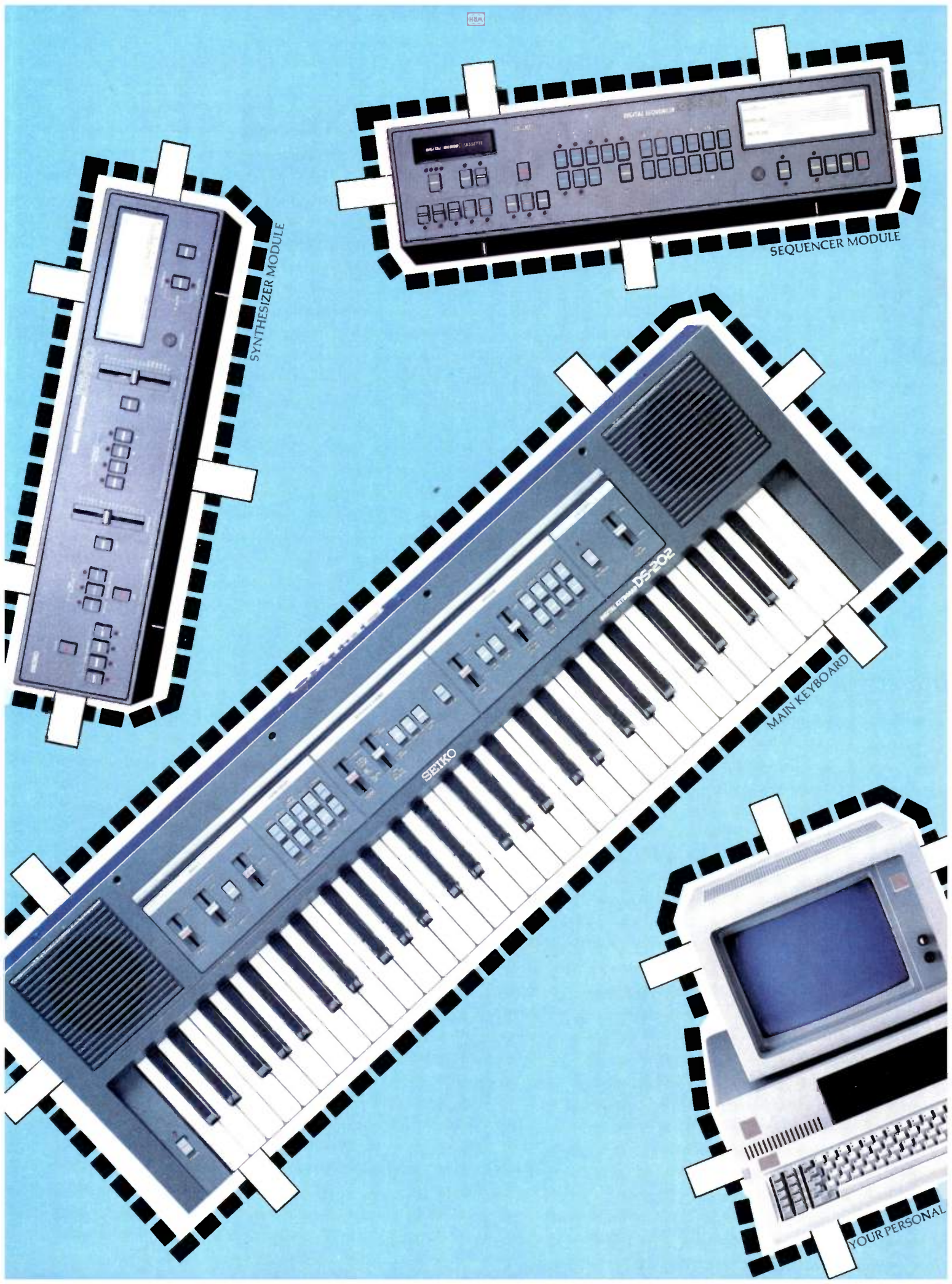
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WATTS: ...sing them (laughs).
WEINBERG: *Sure, if you like, but first tell me what comes to mind when I say "Satisfaction"?*
WATTS: Oh, blimey! Jack Nitzsche, I suppose. He was standing in the corner of RCA's studio in Hollywood playing the tambourine. Phil Spector was there as well.
WEINBERG: *"Street Fighting Man."*
WATTS: God, it's Mick and Keith, really, that one.
WEINBERG: *One of my favorite songs is "Rocks Off."*
WATTS: Keith—that's all Keith.
WEINBERG: *How about "Beast Of Burden"?*
WATTS: That's Keith too, really. That one came easy. It sounds odd but we just did it.
WEINBERG: *One or two takes?*
WATTS: Yes, it was as easy as that. It sounded so good; it's fun to play onstage. It's a lovely track.
WEINBERG: *"Paint It, Black."*
WATTS: That just fell, that tom-tom part. I mean that's a good example of what I mean when Keith plays a song—it was just the right thing to do. If I could have played a tabla, I might have put it on that track. Actually we ruined a marvelous pair of tablas trying to be Indians. You're not supposed to use sticks on them!
WEINBERG: *"Honky Tonk Women."*
WATTS: I can see Jimmy Miller, the producer, playing the cowbell. One take, I think it was.
WEINBERG: *"Tumbling Dice."*
WATTS: Me and Jimmy Miller played it. Jimmy played drums on "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Did you know that? Jimmy Miller was *the* person in the studio who helped me an awful lot; he showed me how to do it. By that I mean he didn't stand over me, but he showed me certain things that would work and things that wouldn't, like fills and things. He didn't actually sit down and show them to me, but he used to love playing drums, so he'd play. Sometimes I couldn't play what he wanted, so he'd do it.
WEINBERG: *How did he help you?*
WATTS: He could hear songs better than I could. There's a whole period where Jimmy helped me out a lot without saying or doing anything. The result was that I began to realize I should work harder on my drumming, so I started to practice. Not on the drums, mind you, I practiced on my legs to keep my chops together. I can't stand practicing on the drums.
WEINBERG: *Keith said that if he doesn't see you or play with you for six months, suddenly you come back five times better.*
WATTS: Dunno 'bout that.
WEINBERG: *He actually said that.*
WATTS: Did he really? He is an incredible guy. Marvelous.
WEINBERG: *Would you say all you guys are close?*
WATTS: Yeah, I think we are, but we never see one another. You know how it is. At times you see them every bloody day, and then, when you're doing nothing, you might never see or hear from 'em. I suppose I speak to Mick more than any of the others because we talk about album covers or cricket or things like that. But sometimes I don't see Mick for weeks. There's a reason for that. I'll tell you—our band never would have stayed together. The Beatles seemed to be together all the time. I wonder if that had a bit to do with their breaking up.
WEINBERG: *I've been very fortunate in being able to get together with so many of the drummers I admire, but of course there are going to be some missing chapters. You knew both Keith Moon and John Bonham. Could you talk about them?*
WATTS: I was talking to Kenney Jones and I asked him what it was like going on the road with the Who and taking over Keith's seat. Of all the drum chairs to assume, to me that certainly would have been one of the most difficult. Keith's style was *so* flamboyant, I could not have gotten into that for a start. When we were working on *Some Girls* in Paris, Keith came over. It was a hilarious three days. He played with me in the studio, sort of stood behind me with all his tom-toms. I'd hired a couple of drums to make like I knew what was going on—you know, make the kit bigger. I never used them. But there was Moonie, a maniac really, always very charming, yet completely mad. I went out with him one day—the whole day—and it was the most hilarious thing. I always thought there was a limit, but he'd go on and on. You know, when the champagne's finished, let's go on the brandy. There aren't many personalities around that were bigger than him. As far as his drumming, he was an innovator; he played with such style. He said Krupa was his big influence; well, you can see Krupa in him. It's a coincidence, really, that Keith and Ginger and myself are from the same area of Wembley. But I'll tell you what Keith Moon is—Keith Moon is what legends are made of.
WEINBERG: *Did you know John Bonham very well?*
WATTS: No, I met John a couple of times, that was all. He was an incredible player too, a wonderful player. His foot was the thing, for me, anyway. His foot was so strong. "Kashmir" and those lovely songs....I know Jimmy [Page] misses him. You could tell that even at the rehearsal yesterday. Me and Kenney—or, really, Ray Cooper and Kenney—were playing with him: we just knew that if Bonham had been there, he would have done what had to be done. You know, you need a drum about *that* big and be able to hit it *so* hard. Bonham—you won't get another one of him.
WEINBERG: *We've talked before about our mutual respect for Al Jackson. What would you say was his greatest talent?*
WATTS: Al Jackson was the best drummer of a slow tempo I've ever heard. It is very difficult to play that slowly. Also, I don't know anyone who could play as strongly as he did. I've see him play, and he could do everything.
WEINBERG: *The Stones' music goes on and on. As a band, you've faced many musical trends and created a large niche for yourselves in each. What do you think the Rolling Stones' greatest influence has been?*
WATTS: Well, I think what the band has done is helped put rhythm & blues in the place it should be.
WEINBERG: *Simple enough. Charlie, I have one more question; it's about something you mentioned before, that the art of a good drummer is the ability to play with anyone. But you also said that you don't think you are a good drummer. Why?*
WATTS: Well, I don't think what I do is particularly difficult. What is good, though, is that people look at me and say, "Well, I can do that." I like that. The drumming *I* do ain't hard, but drumming is hard when you take it a step beyond me, which is where you should be if you really want to be good. I ain't that good, and it's taken me twenty years—though I think the band I'm in is pretty sensational. ◻

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(laughs). John let them have "I Wanna Be Your Man." I think that was where the help came in. We used to see them about when they first moved to London. And we played with them at the Royal Albert Hall. That was the first time we played with them; the second time was at Wembley Stadium. It was incredible, man. Both times were for a *New Musical Express* poll. We went on first at Wembley because they had invented a "new" category called R&B for us, and the Beatles closed the show. We were so popular in London; we were like the "in" thing, really. We won the Wembley. I remember that you couldn't hear anything—it was just screaming girls. We went through that as well. I actually stood at the side and watched them. You couldn't really hear; the amps were so small and there were no mikes on Ringo's drums. Everyone was screaming.

WEINBERG: *Coming from a jazz purist background, how did you react to the audience screaming over your band?*

WATTS: I never understood it, actually, but I loved the adulation when we were onstage. After that I hated it. The days when you couldn't walk down the road without people running after you—literally. *That* was the most awful period of my life. I mean, it didn't happen to me that much, fortunately. I always kept away from that. I really couldn't stand it. It's quite incredible to go onstage and have that happen to you. Jellybeans getting thrown is really amazing. But that's part of youth.

WEINBERG: *Having spent half your life performing with the same band, can you point to any changes that have had a significant impact on the Stones?*

WATTS: I think one of the biggest changes this band has faced was in terms of performing. We did this one particular tour of America during the mid-60s. We returned three years later, and during those three years—because of groups like Led Zeppelin—everything changed. Suddenly it was that

EBET ROBERTS

Ron Wood demonstrates difficult drinking maneuver.

period where shows were incredibly long and there would be no audience reaction until after the number; then everyone went mad. It was really a concert. We'd always done shows for twenty minutes; now we had to play for two hours. We used to play a lot of times—when we were with other stars, if you like—on shows that were like revues. You only had twenty minutes because there were eight or nine other acts on the bill. Here we were coming from playing two to three hours nonstop in the clubs, to playing for twenty minutes a night. Then the kids would start shouting. We had a period where I never played more than ten minutes a night. It was every single night, but only for ten minutes—twenty minutes maximum. We never finished a show for about a year because someone would get hurt in the front row and we'd have to stop, or it would be chaos and people would run all over the stage. I can tell you—it didn't help my drumming much, but, you know, it was just part of being with the Rolling Stones.

WEINBERG: *Over the last twenty years, the Stones have recorded a vast amount of material. When you work that closely with people over such a long period of time, work patterns become quite established. When Mick or Keith present a song, how do you develop your ideas?*

WATTS: I try to help them get what they want. I mean, you do it a few times and you realize all your messing about ain't getting you nowhere, so you play it straight. Then, if they want something else, they'll tell you. It's very easy working with them.

WEINBERG: *Do you find yourself referring to other recordings you've made?*

WATTS: Oh yeah, sure. You try not to when you're playing, but there are things I do automatically that are just part of me. You know, maybe a certain fill or a high-hat thing. It all comes from playing with the same people, doesn't it?

WEINBERG: *I've always found it interesting to hear what fellow members of your band—or any band, for that matter—think about the role another member of the band plays. Keith, for example, always refers to your unique feel—that you are the heart of the Stones.*

WATTS: Lovely! I've heard him say that about the feel. But I get the feel off of him, really. You know, when we play in those ridiculous places—stadiums and that lot—all I really hear is him. When I talk to Kenney Jones, he tells me about the Who's amps. Now *that's* equipment. Kenney has a monitor bigger than he is for those gigs. I never worked like that. All I hear is Keith's amp, which is not that big. And I really listen to him all the time. If I weren't able to hear Keith, I would get completely lost. It all comes from him.

WEINBERG: *Your drum sound seems to stay remarkably consistent from track to track and album to album, particularly your snare. How do you achieve that tuning?*

WATTS: For me, it's really how it feels more than how it sounds, somehow. I play the military-style grip, and the hard thing about that, when you're playing rock 'n' roll, is to get the volume. The nicest sound is not to hit a rim shot like Krupa used to—you know, the high, ringy one that you hit with the narrow part of the stick—but to take the fat part of the stick and hit across the drum onto the rim. You'll get a thick sound, especially if the top head ain't too tight. Also, I don't play very loudly; the sound doesn't really come from the volume. It's getting the thing to hit right all the time. That's when I feel comfortable; when it's on and you don't even think about it.

WEINBERG: *One aspect of your playing and recording with the Stones was that you went from playing a boom-ba-boom bass drum pattern to a straight-four beat. Did you just fall into that or was it a conscious thing?*

WATTS: Yeah, that *was* conscious. I think the reason for that was, well, the old beat became unhip, didn't it? Unhip—I'm a bit too old for that. But the straight-four thing worked really well. It's funny you should mention that. I found playing that straight-four way very hard for me to do. I used to play the one and the three. To go straight through—I found that very hard to do. Keith and Mick would say, "Keep it going at the same volume," and you'd think, "Yeah, that's easy," and you'd start tapping your foot. But I found when I was going like that, the two and the four would be softer because of my left hand playing the backbeat.

WEINBERG: *It seemed Mick and Keith started writing songs that lent themselves to that feel, like "Miss You."*

WATTS: That was a very popular song, and it became sort of the "in" thing. I mean, there's a load of "Miss You"'s, aren't there?

WEINBERG: *I'd like to try something, which is for me to throw out some song titles and have you....*


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"I loved the adulation, but I never understood it."

don blues scene during the early 60s. Can you tell me about that?

WATTS: I used to play in a coffee bar two days a week, and it was there at the Marquee that I met Alexis Korner, who was really responsible for the start of R&B music in England. I remember I told him to turn his amp down! Ginger Baker used to sit in as well.

WEINBERG: *Ginger was such a powerful drummer with Cream. What did he sound like in the early days?*

WATTS: Ginger was an incredible jazz drummer; always in the best bands. He had a homemade kit; the first perspex [plastic] set I'd ever seen. This was in 1960. He'd put his own fittings on, which were probably Ajax. And he used to have calfskin heads. They felt a quarter of an inch thick. He also had this really big ride cymbal with lots of rivets that he kept tightly buttoned down; it would not move an inch. One night when he was playing with Graham Bond, the organ player, I borrowed his kit. Ginger had been playing with Alexis, but that band folded. Anyway, this one night the Stones split the bill with Graham's band at a church in Harrow, and Ginger loaned me his set. But I couldn't play it, nothing would happen. I broke three pairs of sticks in one set! He had them set up so the angle was all wrong for me. It was total work. But Ginger could play them because his chops were so great. His wrists were amazing, too.

WEINBERG: *How did you come to meet Mick and Keith in the first place?*

WATTS: Through Alexis, really. I'd been playing with Alexis before I met them. See, Alexis and Cyril Davies were the only ones really playing blues in London at that time. Cyril was a great harmonica player; he made a couple of very good records—"Country Line Special" was one. He and Alexis got together while Alexis was playing with Chris Barber, who had one of the biggest trad bands.

WEINBERG: *Can you define the term "trad"?*

WATTS: Trad is white revivalist traditional jazz. it was sort of like our Dixieland music. Very popular in the 50s. Anyway, Alexis would play the interval between sets and got the idea to form his own group. He teamed up with Squirrel, which was Cyril's nickname. Then Alexis asked me to join. I was away working in Denmark, but he waited for me to come back. After I'd joined up, we got the opportunity through Chris Barber, who owned the Marquee, to do the off-nights. This was the old Marquee on Oxford Street, not the one now on Wardour. We played there on Thursday nights. After two weeks, Alexis held the record for people in attendance. Lots of musicians who were interested in that sort of music used to come. You'd get people playing bottleneck guitar, but if it wasn't a saxophone, I wasn't interested.

To get back to your original question, one night Mick and Keith came to one of our sessions. Mick did a few gigs with the band. It was quite hard to get singers; actually, it still is. We did a few things without really knowing one another. Mick never really liked the music we were doing. So they decided to get a band together on their own—or it might have been before I met them. Mick was at school then; I'm not sure whether Keith was at school or college. He might have been just roaming around. Brian Jones I met through Alexis as well. Brian loved the blues; he loved Elmore James. That scene became the only chance you had to play that music. It was a chance to talk about those records. Alexis was very knowledgeable. A lot of guys who played the Marquee went away and made their own bands up. At least, the next time I saw them they had their own bands.

WEINBERG: *You mean Mick and Keith?*

WATTS: Yeah, them and Paul Jones, who was with Manfred Mann. I'd seen Manfred Mann in clubs, not as an R&B band, but as a jazz band. You know, I used to play with Alexis and didn't really know what to play. He taught me to listen to blues records.

WEINBERG: *Whose records did you listen to?*

WATTS: Well, Jimmy Reed for one. I think Earl Phillips, who used to play with Jimmy Reed, is a marvelous player. His drumming is the subtlest playing of that particular style. I mean, if you listen to Jimmy Reed, Phillips has everything, really. He has terrific dynamics and quite a bit of technique. Yet, he's not sitting there doing paradiddles all over the place. He does some marvelous triplet things. And his cymbal work is beautiful. Another guy was Francis Clay, who plays on *Muddy Waters—Live At Newport*. He is incredible. He plays Chicago style; the pickups are marvelous. He had this cymbal that curled up like a Texas hat. He played it around and around.

WEINBERG: *What you're doing looks like an old-fashioned dinner triangle—like "come and get it!"*

WATTS: It was a beautiful concept. Clay is a brilliant drummer. By anybody else, I suppose, it would be sloppy, but because it's him, it's right on. He's whacking all over the place—sort of mad playing. Oh, it's perfect, but I used to play more Muddy Waters than Jimmy Reed when I was with Alexis. In those days, Muddy Waters' tunes were like standards.

WEINBERG: *Did you leave Alexis at that point to join the Stones?*

WATTS: When I left Alexis, Ginger took over, and I went around with a few different bands. I was sort of between jobs, as they say. I used to play with three bands at once. You'd play with people you knew because they knew that you knew what song they were talking about. But Keith and Mick were looking for a drummer and asked me if I'd do it. So I said yeah. I had nothing better to do. Getting with them was just luck, really. I didn't expect it to go on; bands usually don't. So I kicked in with them. I was young, and you never see the end of the year, do you? I guess they became rather important, didn't they?

WEINBERG: *I've heard that the Beatles helped the Stones a bit in the beginning. Is that true?*

WATTS: I tell you what they *might* have done. I think John, because he knew Mick and Keith, or Mick and Keith knew him; I personally didn't know them that well. Obviously, Ringo I knew because drummers tend to gravitate toward each other

ing the Thames, Charlie served tea. As he had to be onstage three hours later, we had to be brief. With the television on in the background, Charlie leaned over to me and softly said, "I never do interviews. Can't stand them—bloody waste of time...."

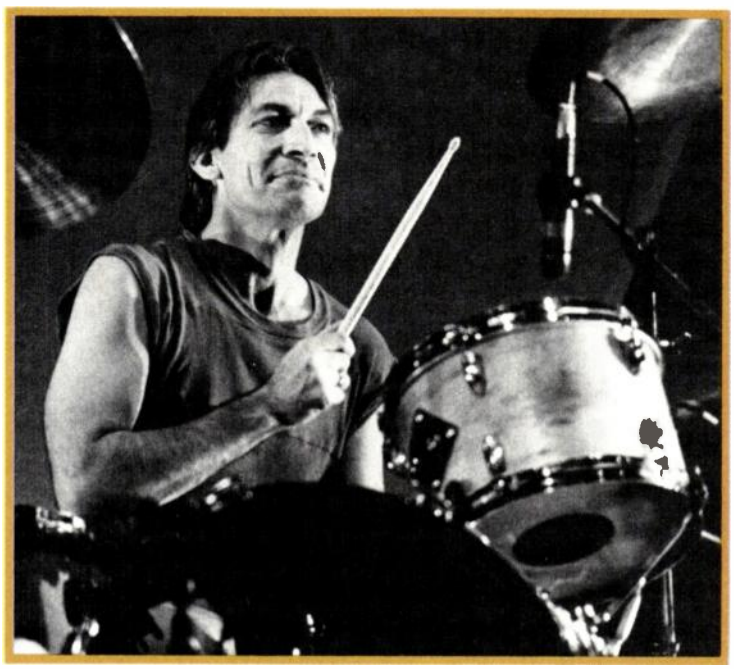
WEINBERG: *In that case, I'd like to jump right into this, Charlie, and ask you this. If there were any other time in history in which you could have lived and played your drums, when would that have been?*

WATTS: Well, when I think of it, I would love to have been born in an era when jazz was the thing. I wish I could have been around when it was a struggle to get in the door, when *jazz* musicians were the stars. It must have been incredible. Not like today, when they can hardly fill a club. I mean, I would love to have seen Gene Krupa in 1941 when he had "Let Me Off Uptown" with Roy Eldridge on trumpet. God, that must have been something else. For two years every song was great. Though it was probably no different than it is today, with what they call rock 'n' roll. You know, nowadays it's the singers and the guitar players. It must have been incredible to have had the trumpet player with the star.

WEINBERG: *With the Rocket '88 band, you had the experience of playing horns....*

WATTS: Well, there's one thing that happened the other day during the rehearsals for this benefit. I had a gig with [Stones aide and piano player] Ian Stewart's band. He has four horns and a guitar player. It's not like playing with the Stones, where you're following the guitar player and, obviously, the singer. Here you're following the horns, and when horn players play slow, they can play *so* slow—it's all air. Unlike the guitar. It's unbelievable, really.

GARY GESHOFF/RETNA



Watts' muscular authority belies his early love of traditional jazz.

WEINBERG: *Did you find yourself having to change your playing to fit a horn band?*

WATTS: Yeah, sort of. I try to play with them. That's the art of a good drummer. Not that *I'm* a good drummer. A *good* drummer can play with anyone.

WEINBERG: *One element that helps make a drummer good is an ability to play in a variety of styles. With the Stones, you've certainly had to adapt to many different feels and styles.*

WATTS: The Stones are a good band to play with if you like that sort of thing. I mean, one minute you're trying to be D.J. Fontana, then you're Earl Palmer.

WEINBERG: *What was it like when you first hit the States?*

WATTS: Well, when the Stones actually got to tour America, I got to go to New York, and that was *it*. I never really wanted any more. In those days, the only way to get to New York was in a band on a cruise ship. I was lucky to get there right before Birdland closed. We first went to New York in nineteen sixty-whatever it was, and I think it closed about two years later. I saw Charles Mingus there with a thirteen-piece band. I also saw a marvelous Sonny Rollins period, where the band would stop and Sonny would just go on for hours. *That* was America. After that, I met Hal Blaine, but that was a whole other scene. He was a lovely man. He had the first remote-controlled garage door opener I'd ever seen.

WEINBERG: *I remember reading in a fan magazine in 1965 where you said your goal was to look like a black American jazz drummer.*

WATTS: I always wanted to be a black New Yorker. You know, the sharpest one on the street.

WEINBERG: *Did you have any one particular drummer in mind for a model?*

WATTS: No. It must have been a mixture of everyone, really. I suppose Tony Williams would have been one. His action looks so good; whether the notes are better than anyone else's, I don't know. I did see Gene Krupa at the Metropole, however. I never really liked his style. Everything he did was exaggerated. His cymbal would be level with his arms and his head would be level with is cymbal. It was very funny, I mean, instead of just throwing it away, every move was a big deal. But he *was* one of the best. Actually, I'd prefer to look at Buddy Rich rather than Gene Krupa. Buddy looks like he's giving it all away. I mean, how does he do it? When they talk about God-given talents, well, there you are. For fifty years Buddy Rich has staggered the drum world. He's played with every great musician, from Ravi Shankar to Charlie Parker.

WEINBERG: *You mention Charlie Parker; I know he's one of your great inspirations. You wrote a book about him, right?*

WATTS: Yeah. It was the story of a little bird. It was a kid's book. I just strung all the pieces together—the dates and things like that. It was just a bird instead of Charlie Parker. I was about twenty when I did it. The guy who published it used to do magazines called *Beatles Monthly* and *Rolling Stones Monthly* and *Beat Monthly*. It was when John Lennon brought out his book, *In His Own Write*. Well, this chap saw my book and said, "Ah, there's a few bob in this!" But of course John Lennon had a far greater appeal than me and Charlie Parker.

WEINBERG: *What is it about Charlie Parker that appealed to you then?*

WATTS: He sort of epitomized an era of my life. If I could have played an instrument, that's what it would have been. Even now, although I may only play him once a month, maybe six times a month, or not once in six months, every time I get to a good record of his, I still get that good feeling. Parker was just unbelievable—and dead at thirty-five.

WEINBERG: *Charlie, how did you actually get started on drums?*

WATTS: Well, I had a banjo first. I tried to learn that, but I couldn't quite get the dots on the frets right. It drove me up a wall. So I took the thing apart. Luckily, it wasn't a really good banjo. I made a stand for it out of wood and played on the round skin part. It was like a drum, anyway. I played it with brushes. I got my first kit when I was about fourteen. Had a lot of fun with that. But I really taught myself by listening to other people and watching.

WEINBERG: *What were your early gigs like?*

WATTS: Well, I played jazz on weekends when I was working in the art studio. But I've done other things as well, you know, Jewish weddings, and that sort of thing. I never knew what the hell was going on. I'm not Jewish, you see. What you really need on those jobs is a good piano player. If the piano player's daft, you've got no chance. I don't care if you're Max Roach—you'll only last a half-hour.

WEINBERG: *You really got your start in the burgeoning Lon-*

by Max Weinberg

Watts

Clapton had organized this supersession. With Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, and sessionman Andy Fairweather-Low on guitars, Steve Winwood on vocals and keyboards, Bill Wyman on bass, and Charlie, Kenney Jones, and Ray Cooper on percussion, it promised to be an incredible show.

Charlie invited me to the rehearsal the day before the concert, and even *that* was a remarkable event. Out from under the pressure of center stage, each musician seemed to enjoy a relaxation that drew out some very special performances. Seeing Eric, Jimmy, and Jeff together, on the same stage during that first concert was especially thrilling. Each a former member of the legendary 60s group, the Yardbirds, their passionate, soaring version of Eric's "Layla" was more than an encore—it was history in the making.

The next day, as we sat in his sunny parlor overlook-

DAVID GAHR

THIS IS ONE OF A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS DONE BY E STREET BAND DRUMMER MAX WEINBERG FOR HIS BOOK, *THE BIG BEAT*, PUBLISHED THIS MONTH BY CONTEMPORARY BOOKS.

Through change and through storm, thank God for...

Charlie

In a world of many musical styles—in which the definition of rock is constantly changing—it is comforting to know that Charlie Watts lives and plays the drums.

Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones. The qualifier is really superfluous: Charlie's drumming is so important to the sound and feel of the Rolling Stones that it is impossible to think of one without the other. Since 1963, Charlie has played for a band that has personified the spirit of rock 'n' roll. As a member of the Stones, Charlie has participated in a musical institution that has not only exceeded his own expectations, but has created a unique and powerful legacy as well.

Charlie's drumming is admirably consistent, powerful and spontaneous. His style has become a genre in the field of rock 'n' roll. As Robyn Flans observed in *Modern Drummer* magazine: "Pick up a copy of the *Village Voice* and look in the back, where bands advertise for musicians. Invariably there will be a couple of ads that say something like: 'Charlie Watts-style drummer wanted for rock band.'"

Charlie is unique. His backbeat chops like an ax, yet he has a jazzman's sensibility. Charlie's drumming style is the result of several generations' influences combining an affection for pre-World War II jazz and postwar rhythm & blues with a dash of third world syncopations. Perhaps his musical orientation gave him a super-defined sense of playing on the edge. His style is amazing, for he can hold the beat tight yet at the same time appear on the verge of losing it. But—he stays with it.

As musicians and personalities, the Rolling Stones have always been entertaining. Still, nothing was ever more important than their music. The songs have survived the test of time, and Charlie's contributions stand as examples of solid, expressive drumming. Consider the barrelhouse funk of "Honky Tonk Women," the galloping tom-toms of "Paint It, Black," the classic drive of "Satisfaction," his New Orleans-style drumming in "Rocks Off," the toughness of "Street Fighting Man" and "Gimme Shelter," on up to the more contemporary "Miss You" and "Start Me Up." Lifted by Charlie's drumming, Keith Richards' guitar playing and Mick Jagger's vocals, the Rolling Stones have consistently shown an ability to rock *or* roll in a variety of styles and have it all wash as Stones music.

I first met Charlie during the Stones' 1981 American tour. We talked a while when he and the band were in New York City, and we made tentative plans to meet again.

On September 8, 1983, I received a phone call from Charlie's London office informing me that he would be in London from September fourteenth through the twenty-first. Would I be available to come to England then? What a question! I flew to England to talk with Charlie.

He was in London to perform in two concerts for the benefit of England's Action and Research into Multiple Sclerosis. At the suggestion of Ronnie Lane, the ex-Small Faces bassist stricken with this disease, Eric

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WRH

from saxophone charts to bass lines. An ardent admirer of Maurice White, he had begun to challenge White's position as black pop's most imitated auteur with his production of the Brothers Johnson. With a jazz background that emphasized texture, harmony and counterpoint, coupled with his growing fascination with rhythm (as he noted in *Musician*: "Before the electric bass and the electric guitar, the rhythm section was the support section...but when they were introduced, everything upstairs had to take a back seat."), Quincy Jones was the perfect man to guide Michael in his search for a musical identity. The technical accomplishments were impressive: the four kinetic percussion parts on "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough" are balanced as carefully as a score for French horns; Paul McCartney's "Girlfriend" is rendered with the same charm Jones once imbued Leslie Gore's "It's My Party"; and his use of synthesizers on the title track and "Rock With You" exerted influence on black pop through the early 1980s. Michael interpreted the songs of Stevie Wonder, Carole Bayer Sager, and McCartney with equal facility. *Off The Wall* sold some ten million copies, then a record for any black singer, showing that black pop eclectism could appeal to blacks *and* a larger white audience.

Only one thing was missing: Michael Jackson's mind. *Off The Wall* suggests little sensitivity or emotional depth. That came with *Triumph*, and the ambitious "Heartbreak Hotel." "I was trying to step into the future with that song," Michael told Deanne Collins. "[I was] trying something different; integrating drama and sound effects with music. And it worked." Here Michael took many of the tricks he learned from Quincy Jones and Bruce Swedien and placed them in service to images that still startle. Like its namesake, the "Heartbreak Hotel" Elvis made famous, this song is about an evil, treacherous way station where faces stare, tear, and glare at the innocent.

Heightening this sad tale's impact was Michael's (in association with Phillinganes) audacious production. A mournful string arrangement provides a prelude to a track that explodes into thundering Phil Spectorish drums and blaring horns, with sister LaToya Jackson's scream buried somewhere in the mix. Sound effects abound; drum beats sound like cannon fire, manically laughing voices, antic breathing from Michael. Four guitars combine to give the track a slinky, dense sound reminiscent of vintage Motown, while Phillinganes' sinister synthesizer lines and Marlon Jackson's staccato tympani dominate the foreground. "Heartbreak Hotel" ends reflectively with the opening strings reprised over a lightly tickled acoustic piano. This song's intensity, its musical ideas and emotion run skillfully amok, overshadowed everything else on *Triumph* and most of the pop, black and white, released in the same period. Just as *Off The Wall* upped the ante for Michael Jackson, Record Seller, "Heartbreak Hotel" set his music in a direction that transcended the secure, middle-class values black pop had come to represent. *Thriller* marked its full maturation. Ⓜ

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"We didn't even rehearse for *Motown 25*. We wanted it to be very free and spontaneous. It was like magic."

that sometimes makes the L.A. sound seem less a conduit than a Cuisinart, so be it. Nearly alone among his peers, Michael Jackson has managed to use that machinery to reach the heartland and still express a strong personal vision.

After leaving Motown for CBS/Epic in 1975, and slogging through two disappointing apprentice projects with producers Gamble and Huff, the Jacksons were finally granted creative autonomy, and began to compete directly with the same state-of-the-art sound that had proven so successful for Parker, White and Richie.

Keyboardist Greg Phillinganes, who in 1978 had helped turn the group's musical ideas for *Destiny* into recordable arrangements, recalled that he "was fairly surprised at how much music they had in them. They were really enthusiastic and excited because for the first time in their entire careers they controlled the music. All of them could write, but I thought Michael and Randy were probably the strongest." The two youngest Jackson sons proved Phillinganes right by composing the album's monster hit "Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground)," to which Phillinganes contributed a bootie-shaking synth-bass line. ("Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground)" is also significant because John Luongo's mix, heightening the drum and bass tracks, made it one of the first major label singles to profit from a DJ's remix.)

Those seeking the genesis of such soul-searching Michael Jackson songs as "Billie Jean" and "Heartbreak Hotel" should check out *Destiny*'s last song, "That's What You Get (For Being Polite)." It is the tale of a sensitive fellow named Jack who tries hard to be happy, but feels emotionally unfulfilled. He wants to burst out, to cut loose. Michael sings, "He wants to be so bad/ He cries about you, he cries about me/ Don't you know he's scared?" In retrospect, it's clear that the song's Jack is the Michael of real life; Michael's calm, polite exterior belies his inner turmoil. With "That's What You Get," Michael begins to examine his inner life through his art.

With *Destiny* still on the charts Michael began recording his first solo album in five years with Quincy Jones and engineer Bruce Swedien. Jones, ex-trumpeter and creative big band leader/arranger, had slowly been changing his 70s orientation

EDDIE VAN HALEN'S CROSSOVER CRAFT

It was Michael and Quincy's idea to ask Eddie Van Halen to play on "Beat It," though their initial overture, as Eddie told Charles Young, was less than auspicious. "The phone in my house wasn't working too well," he remembers. "I could tell the person at the other end of the line couldn't hear me. Quincy called and asked, 'Eddie?' I say, 'Who's this?' He didn't say anything 'cause he couldn't hear me. So I hung up. He called back. Same thing, he couldn't hear me. Third time he calls back, he goes, 'Eddie?' And I said, 'What the fuck you want, you asshole?' He says, 'This is Quincy. Quincy Jones.' 'Oh, my God. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I get so many crank calls that I didn't know.' He asked, 'You know, there's this song we'd like you to play on. Are you up for it?'"

Van Halen and his favorite engineer Donn Landee picked up a tape of "Beat It" and gave it a listen. They "asked for some changes. I didn't want to solo over the part they were asking me to solo over." Calling Quincy the next day he suggested editing out certain parts of the song and to solo where he preferred it, and the alterations were made. When Van Halen plugged his guitar into the Westlake studio's console Landee sat next to him, Quincy and Michael behind him. Two solos and it was done.

More amazing than Van Halen's solos was that he wasn't paid for it. "I didn't care," he says. "I did it as a favor. I didn't want nothing.... Maybe Michael will give me dance lessons someday.... I got two more friends now. People don't understand that. I was a complete fool, according to the rest of the band and our manager and everybody else." But he also points out, with justification, that Van Halen benefited from the Jackson connection as much as "Beat It" was aided by his solo. "Jump" made the black singles chart, with Van Halen reaching an entirely new audience because of Eddie's generosity and skill. "I'm obsessed with music and I get off on playing and I don't care how much money someone makes off it.... Put it this way: I was not used. I knew what I was doing. I don't do anything unless I want to do it."

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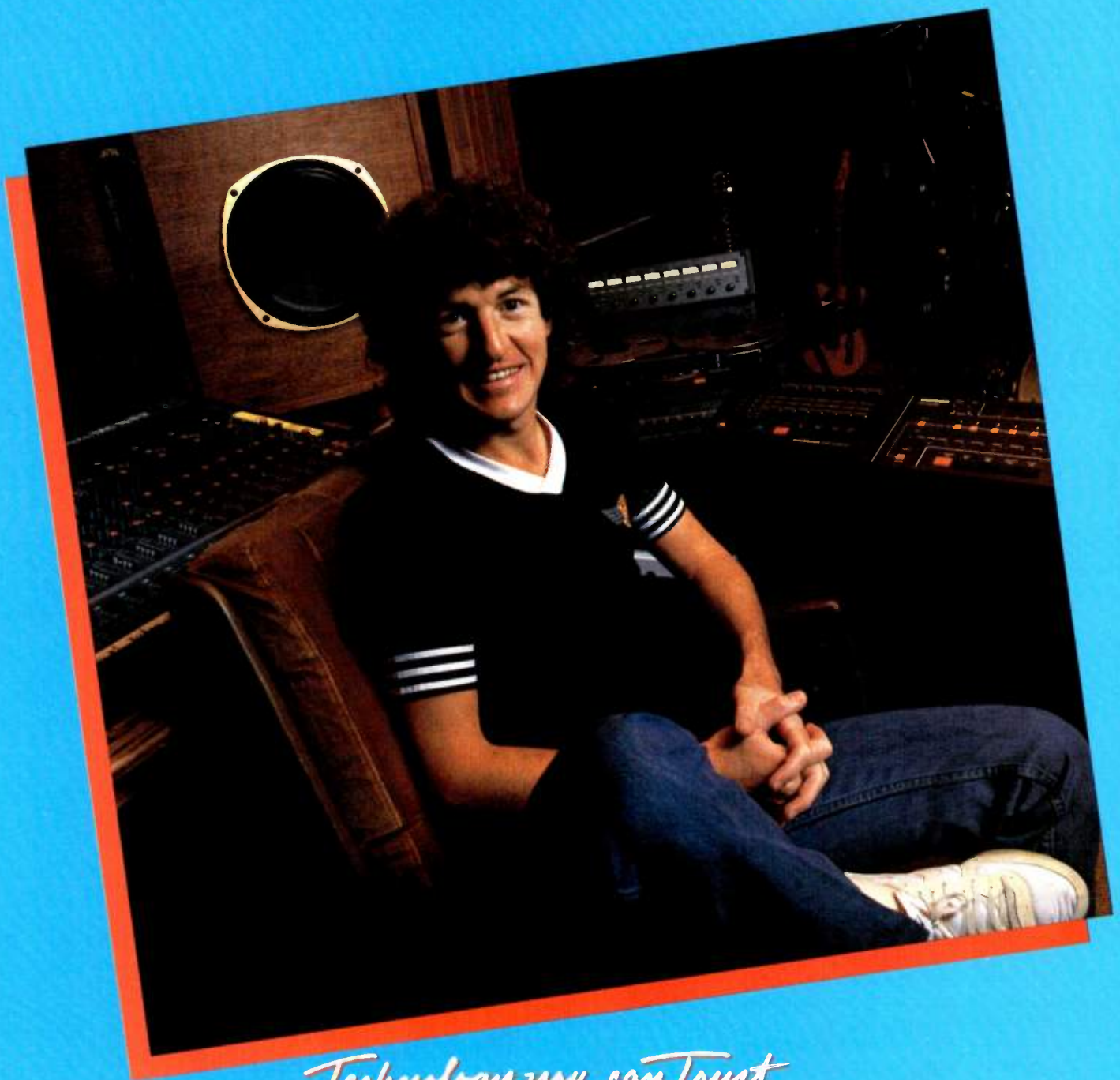

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level of success to rock videos miss the point. Michael has sold himself *via* video, as he has from his first appearance on *Ed Sullivan*, to the Motown 25th anniversary special, because, simply put, the guy can dance. He fascinates, seduces, inspires and yes, scares, injecting an electricity into the air, that, like watching Dr. J soar or Wayne Gretzky score, transcends its context.

The primary reason Elvis so shocked and thrilled America in his time was by his ability to move, to dance with the abandon associated then, as now, with blacks. Listening to Cark Perkins, for instance, I hear little difference between him and Elvis vocally. But Elvis moved. His twitching and itching certainly weren't lost on Mick Jagger, about the only other white rocker

NEAL PRESTON

Michael and Jermaine fuel the first wave of Jackson-mania.

who has since managed to tap into the power of dance with any real imagination or ingenuity. By adapting elements of Mick and Elvis, Jackie Wilson and James Brown, Michael has merged contemporary showbiz sensibility and L.A. market strategy with the traditional impulses that once fueled R&B—a music born in, and of, the inner city.

THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY

The branch of American popular music that grew out of the Afro-American experience was molded by economics, geography and racial circumstance. From the rich saucy creole culture of New Orleans came the rock 'n' roll of Little Richard, Allen Toussaint and Smiley Lewis, a rhythmic fire as hot as red beans and rice. The cool, controlled sound of Chicago soul epitomized by Curtis Mayfield's classic compositions for the Impressions, Major Lance and Jerry Butler rejected Chicago blues' more abrasive edge and pointed the way to an urban, Northern soul esthetic. In Memphis, Otis Redding, Sam & Dave and the Soul Children created a distinctive mix of blues grit and pickup truck country melancholy. Philadelphia turned the pop corn of *American Bandstand* and lively local dances ("Philly Dog," "Twist") into the sophisticated soul of Gamble & Huff. And in Detroit, a city of Southern immigrants searching for a better life on the factory line, earthy themes, laced with pop melodies, were laid over disciplined rhythms. All these local styles were spotted (or nurtured) by sharp, local entrepreneurs, packaged for mass consumption, and sent out to the heartland until, often kicking and screaming, they were absorbed by the pop mainstream.

But as Michael Jackson's history illustrates, those days are gone. Both geography (born and reared in Gary, Indiana) and contractual obligation (signing with Motown) should have made Michael an ardent student of "the Motown sound" and, like his earlier generational counterpart Stevie Wonder, grounded his music in the self-consciously crafted songwriting/arranging taught at the company's Hitsville studio. But when Motown began shifting its operations from Detroit to Los Angeles, effectively cutting its roots for opportunities in a town that celebrates rootlessness, the move sent a tremor through musicians' communities in Chicago, New York, New Orleans, Memphis and Philadelphia, and in many cases ultimately stripped away the top layer of black talent from these local scenes.

"YOU'RE COMPETING AGAINST YOUR PREVIOUS PRODUCT AND EVERYONE EXPECTS MORE."

So, even as Motown's Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder began flexing their creative muscles, the company's move west was creating a very different sort of impact. Ray Parker and Norman Whitfield from Detroit, Earth, Wind & Fire's Maurice White from Chicago, the Commodores' Lionel Richie from Tuskeegee, Alabama, and a slew of smaller stars and session players, hailed from places where musicians jammed and refined their ideas in clubs. But Los Angeles was a whole 'nother head. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported last year, "The local black club scene is a virtual wasteland for contemporary R&B artists." Instead a studio sound, emphasizing state-of-the-art technology, unrelenting slickness and a palpable insularity from street life became the standards of the emerging black pop consciousness.

By all standards a successful musician can live well in L.A.—swimming pools, great weather, a relaxed atmosphere—which unconsciously (and sometimes intentionally) changes the non-musical attitudes a player brings to the studio. 'Laid back,' for lack of a better term, defines the result. In black music it was the difference between Earth Wind & Fire's "Shining Star" in 1975 and "After The Love Is Gone" in 1979 or the Commodores' "Brick House" in 1977 and "Three Times A Lady" in 1978. Despite disco and P-Funk, it was the only black musical style that consistently dented white top forty radio from the mid-70s to the present. And as black L.A. music turned white, white L.A. music turned black; both the Doobie Brothers and the Eagles, who started as rockers and country rockers respectively, were recording in a "beige" style, similar to EW&F and the Commodores, before their demise. Even Toto, the quintessential L.A. studio group, appears regularly on sessions of top L.A.-based black pop stars—including, of course, Michael Jackson. None of which should surprise. L.A. is the official capital of the entertainment industry and its commercial standards must reflect that fact. Since provincialism and eccentricity simply won't sell in Middle America, edges must be rounded and homogenized, and if

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Jackson songs in which he links superb music with an intense vision few contemporaries, black or white, have ever matched. "Billie Jean," "Beat It," and "Wanna Be Startin' Something" constitute a trilogy of paranoia—and not only are the images personal, each has a clear thematic expression.

On "Billie Jean," the evil women of "Heartbreak Hotel" have returned in the form of one beautiful, treacherous gal named Billie Jean, who torments Michael, accusing him of fathering her son. In "Startin' Something" she spreads lies and uses her body as a weapon to upset Michael's "baby" and cause her pain. In both songs Michael sings with palpable paranoia of being observed, talked about, and desired. In "Billie Jean" he remembers his mother's advice to be careful who you love, because of the ease with which lies can be construed as truth. His fear of the outside world and its designs upon him have never been more evident than in "Startin' Something" where he compares himself to a buffet and a vegetable that "they" are eating. Reinforcing that feeling on "Beat It," he notes that, given a chance, "they'll" attack you, physically and mentally, and still justify their actions (a veiled reference to fans' tearing at his clothes or journalists snooping into his life?).

> "I WAS TRYING TO STEP INTO THE FUTURE, TRYING TO INTEGRATE DRAMA WITH MUSIC, AND IT WORKED."

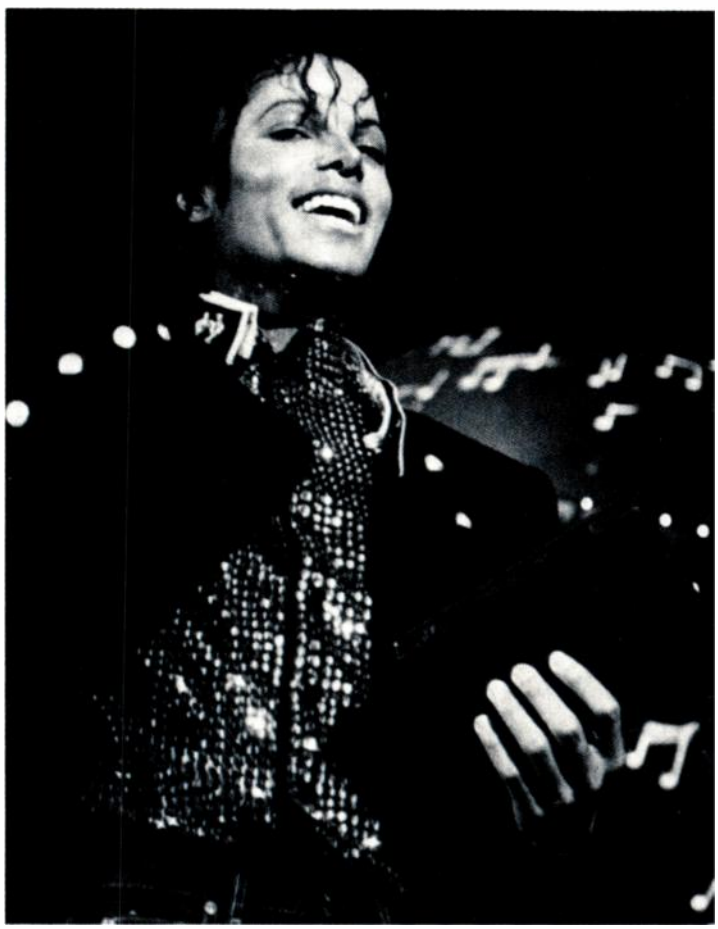
Children play a prominent role in "Startin' Something" and "Billie Jean," but not as the objects of joy Michael so often describes in interviews. The little boy in "Billie Jean" is the result of an affair Michael regrets. In "Startin' Something" he bluntly states one shouldn't have a baby if you can't feed it, a pragmatic and unromantic view of sex. Such comments can be traced to the Jehovah's Witnesses' stern admonishments against premarital sex. Media observers openly speculate about Michael's sexuality and wonder what impact his image has on young people; yet if anybody, particularly in the mass media, ever really *listened* to what the man was advocating, they'd see a basically conservative world view, one the moral majority might comfortably embrace. It is a fascinating contradiction: for all Michael's sex appeal and suggestion of outré sexuality, his lifestyle (no drugs, drinking or partying) remains above reproach. In that respect he defies common rock star clichés, a defiance that only sharpens his music's edge.

If "Billie Jean" is *Thriller*'s most stylish tune, "Beat It" is clearly its most influential, no doubt because it is also the most frankly rock-oriented. Not only was it the linchpin which linked black music to AOR radio, thanks in part [see sidebar] to the presence of white guitar god Eddie Van Halen, but it managed to straddle the racist barrier erected by MTV as well, opening the door to the medium with which Michael's charisma has since achieved its fullest expression; indeed, his sheer physical presence is so riveting it occasionally threatens to overwhelm everything in its path.

As a song, "Beat It" thrives on elements of tension and surprise. When I first heard the jarring Synclavier opening (by Tom "She's Out Of My Life" Bahler, of all people), I thought maybe Michael and Q were about to pick up on the electro-funk of, say, Afrika Bambaataa. But that intro is only a trap that draws one into the fire of David Williams' and yeah, Eddie Van Halen's guitars.

In appraising "Beat It" let's not overlook Michael's surprisingly hard-edged vocal, with its swoops, slides, grunts and pure rock energy. The key to the vocal, says Swedien, lies in the seriousness with which Michael takes his craft. "When we do vocals we usually start at noon," he says. "During that period, every day—I don't just mean one day a week or something—every day that Michael records vocals, he's at his vocal coach's place at 8:30 in the morning. So when he comes in, he's ready to go." It is not unusual for Michael to cut his lead vocal and backing parts in one day. His "Beat It" vocal is a testament to artistry and discipline.

But for all its musical drive, "Beat It" the song still pales before the "Beat It" video, certainly the most dramatic and possibly profound pop video ever made (for whatever that's worth). Like "Billie Jean" and "Thriller," the "Beat It" vid casts



Jackson's conquest rewrote the *Guiness Book of World Records*.

LAURIE PALADINO

Michael in the role of outsider, and, like those others, suggests that he is in possession of special powers which separate him from "other guys." But only in "Beat It" does he employ them as a unifying force, confronting the leaders of two street gangs locked in deadly combat, and redirecting their energies from violence into dance.

Well, sort of. What makes this conceit so fascinating is Michael's attitude; he can pull the gangs apart because his own dancing is even badder, reeking of even more anger and repressed sexual tension, than the other protagonists. At the beginning of the video Michael is lying on his bed in a classic wimp pose, bemoaning the situation unfolding on the street. But once he starts to dance, he's transformed into Superdervish. As in "Billie Jean," his movements evoke the paranoia and fear of loss that is at the heart of those two songs, and maybe in his own heart as well. His dancing even seems like a kind of violence. But because "Beat It" also offers dancing as a purgative, a way to expunge poisons that are beyond our choice or judgment, it is ultimately inspirational, and elevates Michael's special power into the realms of myth.

So those who simply attribute Michael Jackson's current

minute overdub thing. Quincy calls it 'ear candy.' You're not conscious of it. It's just a subliminal element that works well."

Another tactic employed by *Thriller*'s brain trust was for Michael to sing parts of the backing vocal through a mail tube. But on the lead vocal, though it's difficult to believe, Michael gave a letter-perfect reading the first time. Swedien says, "I don't think there's one punch on that lead vocal. I'm serious." This certainly refutes any suggestion that Michael Jackson superstar is simply a creation of Jones-Swedien alchemy.

What had made Michael and Quincy's first collaboration, *Off The Wall*, so effective was the manner in which it evoked the 70s L.A. "groove"—its rhythmic but well-rounded texture corresponding to the way cars in that city roll along the freeway, or skaters twirl along the palm-lined boardwalks on the beach. *Off The Wall*'s aura is sweet, sunny and bright—and, characteristic of so much MOR black 70s pop, offers philosophical bromides about rockin' the night away in place of any real personal vision. Nothing betrays the contrast between the Michael Jackson of *Off The Wall* and that of *Thriller* better than a random scan of videos culled from those two records. On "Rock With You" (for instance) Michael's dancing is graceful but also loose and mellow. There's no tension and little flash; he even laughs as he sings, and why not? There's no personal investment here. But on *Thriller*, previously unexplored polarities and conflicts are exposed and dealt with for the first time. It is the baring of these contradictions, its honesty, that braces *Thriller*'s dramatic tension.

For its time, of course, *Off The Wall* was a brilliant synthesis of contemporary black pop trends. But any claims for *Thriller*'s greatness begin (and probably end) with the three Michael

EBET ROBERTS

Michael experiencing the golden age of wireless.

years later we were a black act." But in the wake of Michael's *Off The Wall* and *Thriller*, the Jacksons "are a pop act again."

The Jacksons know that musical styles are universal, but record industry promotional campaigns and the attitudes of the general (i.e. white) audience are very color conscious. There is a window of acceptance, often brief, for black musicians in the pop market. If Lionel Richie hadn't left the Commodores when he did, a dropoff in the group's popularity might have plunged Richie back in a commercial ghetto.

Consolidating his brothers' position in the marketplace, attempting to help them overcome their current "second banana" status, is one major reason Michael agreed to a tour he doesn't need. Another may be the chance it provides for him to return to two areas where he's found security in the past—with his family and onstage. A Jacksons tour will give Michael all the freedom he wants to perform, and the chance to deflect the spotlight when he doesn't. And it may turn out to be the graceful coda Michael needs for what has already been a truly epic (no pun intended) saga.

Like the tour, the *Victory* album is also a showcase for Michael's siblings. Each Jackson (excepting Jermaine, who was completing his Arista solo album *The Three Sides Of Jermaine Jackson*) produced or wrote songs for inclusion on the record. The Jacksons' attitude toward the album is typified by guitarist Tito, generally the most low-key member of the family. "It is time for the individuals in the family to showcase other aspects of our talent," he contends.

For *Victory* Tito submitted two compositions: "Change The World," which he describes "as holding a looking glass up to society to get people to see things can be better" while recalling the music of the Jacksons' anthemic "Can You Feel It" and "Bad Company," "an uptempo song with a rock backbeat and a real fun song," punctuated by Tito's guitar solo. For the first time in his career Tito will be singing lead and, he asserts, "Even if my songs don't make the album, because there are other songs better or just that we have too much good material, I see myself recording an album alone, showing my vocal abilities." Tito's "coming out" also includes a song on an upcoming album by the veteran black vocal group the Dells, and two tunes on sister Maureen, a.k.a. Rebe's, Columbia debut (one of which, "Frustration," was written with Shalamar's Howard Hewett).

Tito's comments about *Victory* were echoed in interviews with Marlon and Randy, both of whom are submitting several songs (if there isn't enough room on the album, they'll end up on solo albums they contemplate releasing sometime in late 1984 or 1985). With the aid of synthesizer programmer John Barnes and guitarist David Williams, Marlon prepared "Where Do I Stand" ("a breakup song, a nice slow one, that I wrote the words to in one day" he says) and a song with the elemental title "Body" ("that has a lot of the feeling of 'Wanna Be Startin' Something'"). Though by his own admission Marlon just "plays well enough to make demos," he showed considerable promise as a producer/writer with Betty Wright's moody, 1983 reggae-flavored "She's Older Now." On sister Janet's second A&M album he has produced three tracks and Giorgio Moroder five, suggesting the regard A&M's A&R department has for his talent.

Randy, a self-taught multi-instrumentalist and converted Yamaha synthesizer fanatic, prepared one ballad and one boogie track, "One More Chance," playing all instruments and singing lead vocals on both. Randy is the youngest male Jackson and also, with the possible exception of Jermaine, the most gifted instrumentally. His youth, musical acumen, and desire for stardom tag him as the Jackson most likely to establish a substantial solo career in 1985.

What about Michael's contribution to *Victory*? Michael has cut at least five songs for *Victory*, though two have received the strongest word of mouth prior to release, "Buffalo Bill" and "State Of Shock." He hired Swedien to engineer his tracks, since past Jacksons albums have sounded thinly recorded.

According to David Williams, "'Buffalo Bill' is a different direction for Michael. It has a more vocal sound and features his brothers singing more than in the past." Swedien reports "a big symphonic opening and...a charming melody." "State Of Shock" has an ominous lyric along the lines of "Billie Jean" and a stomping drum beat not unlike "Beat It." One of them (surprise) is the probable first single, revealing, despite all disclaimers, who still ranks first in the Jackson family hierarchy.

Jones and Jackson were still calling players in for twenty-minute overdubs at triple scale.

In another instance of possibly mistaken musicianship, drummer Ndugu Chancler claims it is he and not Jeff Porcaro playing on "Human Nature." Despite what the credits say, Chancler asserts, "I know my sound and that's me."

This credit confusion is partially due to how Swedien engineers Jones' projects. He uses two 24-track tape machines to record and often four to five reels of tape per song. This can, and often does, translate into a hundred tracks per song; a dream for a record producer and a headache for someone tabulating musicians' credits. Swedien, a hands-on studio craftsman (he says, "Q is non-mechanical, non-electronic. The greatest thing for him was cassettes because he only had to put one thing in the machine"), applied two other favored studio tricks to *Thriller* as well. Once the rhythm tracks were recorded he ran off a work tape with a cue mix on it and then put the master tape away until the final mix, eliminating sonic wear and tear of overdubbing. When mixing, Swedien employed three 24-track machines. Time consuming? No question. But it's a key step in providing the quality of sound which he and Jones—and Michael Jackson—crave.

"Billie Jean" is one of those rare pop records, whose greatness is apparent the first time you hear it, and it all starts with the rhythm. "Part of the rhythm was recorded on 16-tracks," says Swedien. "That way I don't use any noise reduction equipment and the quality is fabulous. It gives it more punch. You can hear it in the drum sound."

The song's rock solid, yet sweetly shuffling beat, is the consummation of marrying technology to a studio-skilled drummer. The basic rhythm was recorded by Michael on a drum machine, but late in the recording process Jackson and Jones decided to add a human touch. "Michael always knew how he wanted the song to sound," remembers Chancler. "I was placed in a room by myself, so there was no leakage. Both Michael and Quincy came in to suggest things for the two or three hours it took to cut the track. I played through it about eight to ten times." Chancler credits Swedien for creating the balance between his nine-piece jacaranda wood drum set and the drum machine that is the foundation of "Billie Jean."

The other dominant rhythmic element was the bassline, the conception of which was solely Michael Jackson's. "Michael was very specific about how he wanted the bass line to go," says Louis Johnson, member of the Brothers Johnson. "He had me bring all my guitars to see how they sounded playing the part. I tried three or four basses before we settled on the Yamaha. It's really live, with a lot of power and guts. If you'd have heard me on a different bass on 'Billie Jean' you'd have said, 'Use the Yamaha.' On the basic riff I overdubbed three parts to strengthen its power." Phillinganes later doubled the bass line on "Billie Jean" (and on most of *Thriller*'s other tracks) with a synthesizer bass.

Jerry Hey arranged the strings that heightened the tension on "Billie Jean." "If you listen to the strings only, you'll swear you're in Carnegie Hall," claims Swedien. "It has a very natural stereo spread. The recording of it is as legitimate and straightforward as a classical recording."

Way in the back of the "Billie Jean" mix is Tom Scott playing an (uncredited) Lyricon solo. "It was Quincy's idea to weave this little thread into the thing," says Swedien. "It was a last

JAMES COLBURN

JACKSONS

This summer, Michael and his brothers (including Jermaine) embark on the most anticipated U.S. tour since the Who's farewell. If you're one of those lucky enough to beat the odds, obtain tickets, brave intense security (metal detectors? frisking? strip searches?) and actually hear the music above the loudest screams this side of Duran Duran, you'll be witness to a fascinating family project.

The "Victory" tour and its namesake LP are intended, in the words of Randy, to "show the world how much talent there is in our family." For Jackie, Tito, Randy, Marlon and Jermaine this tour is an opportunity to reclaim a piece of a spotlight they once shared with Michael. Motown originally marketed the Jackson 5 as a unit, and while Michael has always enjoyed a higher profile than his other brothers, the effects of that initial publicity blitz have never completely waned either.

Jermaine was "the cute one," an adolescent sex symbol often photographed by Motown with only a bass and bare chest. He laughs about it now, but has found "that now that I'm older I still have the same fans who grew up with me." In fact Jermaine feels that Jackson 5 residue is partially why "with the right material" the Jacksons are still significant record sellers a decade after debuting with four straight number one singles. Tito notes wryly, "When we first came out we were a pop act," then the Jackson 5 cooled, the family moved to Epic, and "five

BILL NATION/SYGMA

Michael and Quincy Jones share the spotlight as the *Thriller* juggernaut sweeps yet another awards show.

comfortable in daily life but petrified in front of a crowd; Michael's mode is its reverse. From his youth he's succeeded as an entertainer by surrendering to his instincts, and received adulation in return. Now he professes to be so comfortable onstage he could fall asleep there. Offstage, he's more like one of his prized mannequins—a blank.

That's not to say Michael lacks intelligence or sensitivity—far from it. But he's been so consistently isolated from reality inside his celebrity bubble that he may lack many of the ordinary defenses and immunities we develop to get through our lives. Perhaps such defenses would block the emotional channels through which he funnels his art. But it's not surprising that his offstage company is usually comprised of fellow exotics, be they pets, children, former child stars, or a collection of showbiz friends that sound like they were put together by a stylist. The one clear thread which unifies Michael's public and private personality is a desire for purity, for perfection. And after twenty years' practice and discipline, he's achieved extraordinary insights into the manner of attaining it.

THE MAKING OF *THRILLER*

"No matter what you do you are competing against your previous product and everybody expects more," said Michael Jackson last summer. "Just like motion pictures: *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Star Wars*, *Jedi*. You really try to top yourself all the time, and it's hard—like the Bee Gees with *Saturday Night Fever*. But I believe in doing better work. Just like the old saying, 'You don't get older you get better.'"

The belief that *Thriller* had to be bigger and better than *Off The Wall* permeated its recording sessions. "It was everybody's goal to sell ten million records again," recalls drummer Leon Ndugu Chancler. "Everybody came in ready to give it up." Quincy Jones certainly was. Following the success of *Off The Wall* and his own multi-Grammy award-winning *The Dude*, Jones had firmly established himself as *the* pop producer. But being number one is a tenuous position; after the lackluster *Donna Summer* album, Jones' big budget, "wide screen" production style had become vulnerable to criticism.

So for over two years prior to cutting *Thriller*, Jones screened material. Bruce Swedien, Jones' engineer of twenty-eight years (and a Grammy award winner for his work on *Thriller*) claims Quincy "listened to a thousand songs or some astronomical number to get the nine songs that eventually were on the album.... I've never seen Quincy so into anything. Ever. In all our years we've worked together."

Ironically, *Thriller*'s key songs weren't that hard to find, since they were written by Jackson himself. Michael is an instinctive songwriter, who builds his songs up from the rhythm. In their early stages, for example, "Billie Jean," "Beat It" and "Wanna Be Startin' Something" were basically rhythms on drum machines and synthesizer bass, over which Michael hummed melodic ideas. As the song selection process progressed, Jackson and Jones made what Quincy calls "Polaroids" of the songs. "In other words, it's a small mock-up of what the songs will appear like," says Swedien. "At that stage they try different counter melodies and different vocal registers and make it work for Michael. Quincy does this on everything."

While working with Jones on these "Polaroids" and sometimes afterwards, Jackson enlisted the help of keyboardists Greg Phillinganes and Bill Wolfer, bassist Louis Johnson, and guitarist David Williams, among others, to flesh out 16-track demos. Rod Temperton, who provided *Thriller* with "Baby, Be Mine," "Lady In My Life" and the title cut, brought in detailed demos of his own songs. The musicians who played on these original demo versions would often be called down to Beverly Hills' Westlake Audio (Jones' favorite studio), because of their familiarity with the material.

But that was no guarantee any musician would end up on the final cut. Jones believes in the cast of thousands version of producing. Just as he uses different versions of a song to test tempo or key, session musicians are used to cut alternative versions of each song. For example, the original credits on *Thriller* erroneously listed Dean Parks as the guitarist on "Billie Jean," a song noted for its surging rhythm guitar figure, instead of David Williams. Williams (who played on the demo) was called in after the credits had already been sent to Epic Records. At the point most records are considered finished,

musical, stemming from the shift of black musicians from their heartland roots to LaLa land. Finally, it is the odyssey of a child star to a sophisticated musician and consummate entertainer, a star whose presence is at once thoroughly ingenuous and the essence of slick style.

THE UNIVERSAL SOLVENT

Every generation creates its heroes, and their characteristics usually reveal as much about the culture which exalts them as of the heroes themselves. In retrospect it's easy to play coffeetable shrink and surmise that Elvis agitated the libido throbbing just beneath 50s repression, or that the Beatles were no less an advertisement for the New Frontier than they were for new music. Michael Jackson is no different; indeed, he's the perfect polarity therapist for a schizoid age. In Michael all ends meet—black/white, male/female, exotic/wholesome, adult/child, entertainer/recluse, sex/Jehovah's Witness, even Katharine Hepburn/Brooke Shields. He's like the universal solvent—one size fits all. Yet at the same time he exudes sincerity. David Bowie was an icon for the 70s because he so effectively mirrored the celebration of surface which defined that decade. Michael is an icon today for its opposite: expressing raw emotions through music and dance. When he performs his feelings are so painfully exposed, he might as well be stripping off his skin.

What's strange about all this is that, unlike Elvis or the Beatles, we probably thought we knew Michael Jackson. He may only be twenty-five, but hey, he's been in view for almost two decades. We're used to having our pop messiahs sort of appear out of a desert of cultural stasis, not subtly evolve into the role before our eyes. Five years ago, or even two, no one would have dared predict that anyone, let alone Michael, would generate a Beatles-sized mania. And yet, like a good detective mystery, it's possible to spot some of the signposts once the deed is done.

IN MICHAEL, ALL ENDS MEET: BLACK/WHITE, MALE/FEMALE, ADULT/CHILD. ONE SIZE FITS ALL.

For one thing, Michael has not spent the greater part of his life fronting some middling family choir. Before *Thriller* was ever released, the Jacksons were the second biggest-selling group in pop history while Jacksonmania has been swelling, in variously undulating currents, for the greater portion of their existence. But for the most part, their impact was ignored.

It's easy to see why the Jacksons never gained due respect from the establishment media—they were black. The opaqueness of otherwise astute music observers may be more subtle. The Beatles had ultimately left their marks as songwriters, composers, and that legacy became the standard by which to judge heirs apparent; that is why critics have always drooled over the genius of Stevie Wonder (albeit with good reason). But Michael hails from a different tradition, that of the popular *entertainer*. Performance has always been his natural milieu—until recently, his only one. After all, when the Jackson 5 were traveling around in the family bus winning amateur and talent night competitions from Phoenix to the Apollo, their ace was an incredibly charismatic five-year-old. (It certainly wasn't their hit songs; nobody at Motown had yet written them.) Those were the days when startled competitors would complain that Michael was a thirty-year-old midget, while, for his part, Michael boned up on the stage moves of early inspirations James Brown and Jackie Wilson. During the 50s, Elvis Presley had exemplified the power of that approach to a white audience as well. Like Michael, Elvis was first a singer and dancer and one whose place in pop culture was ultimately elevated from mere stardom to myth via video (in the Pelvis' case, his appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*). Through the 60s and 70s that kind of emotional abandon was lost in an era of cool pop, as if it were an anachronism, like vaudeville. Michael Jackson has brought back the power of that form with a vengeance.

He's honed it in part by being in the right place at the right time. The Jackson 5 arrived at Motown in 1968, a propitious moment for the company, black music in general, and thus the Jacksons themselves. Motown was black music's flagship; through the 60s it had become a paradigm of meticulous, tightly controlled studio craft. But Berry Gordy, Jr. had bigger dreams. He wanted to take Motown beyond deejayland into the real mainstream of American entertainment—TV, movies, Vegas. Among other things that meant moving to L.A., and since Motown was Motown, that in itself generated profound changes in the development of black pop through the 70s, as we shall see. But Gordy also fancied himself a Svengali. Diana Ross was his prize project, and from the moment he spied the Jacksons he set them along a similar course. He couldn't have ordered more promising raw material—a handsome, wholesome family of apparently unlimited talent and ambition. So Gordy flew them to L.A., installed half the family in his home and the rest (including Michael) with Diana. Michael and Diana each have since characterized their relationship as extremely close, akin to mother-son. Ross is the only Motown artist who successfully connected to a white mainstream audience beyond radio, establishing herself as a star on stage and television and even in film. So in a sense, Michael has taken the legacy of his "mother" one step further. He's become *the* star.

Gordy trained the Jacksons for a year in the finer points of stage presence before ever releasing them on the public. Unlike Stevie Wonder, who spent hours in Motown's cramped basement studio with bassist James Jamerson, drummer Benny Benjamin and the label's other studio cats learning music, Michael was tutored in media manipulation (and he's always been a quick study—his mother recalls Michael expertly mimicking Jermaine at the age of two). Sure, the Jacksons had their own rehearsal room, but mostly they were rehearsing to be stars. The family's three technically proficient instrumentalists—Jermaine, Randy and Tito—are all self-taught. For years Motown resisted attempts by the Jacksons to assert themselves more musically, a pattern which eventually led to their departure from the company.

Freddie Perren, a member of the corporation team that created hits like "I Want You Back" and "ABC" recalls that "I never saw any songs he [Michael] wrote, but I always knew he could. There was an instrumental hit out, "Love Is Blue." He came in one day and asked me about this section of the song he found interesting. I showed it to him on the piano. He couldn't play but he was able to learn his part and would sit there picking it out. There is a certain talent that goes with songwriting and I could see he had it. Motown just didn't encourage it in performers. At Motown the producer was king."

Walter Scharf, the Oscar-winning film composer who wrote the music for Michael's hit "Ben," recalls the thirteen-year-old as "meticulous about everything, almost to a fault. Very disciplined. I think it's marvelous to be like that at that age—to have that kind of knowledge and feeling toward your work."

Marvelous yes, from an adult's viewpoint. As an artist Michael Jackson has long evinced a maturity and dedication suggestive of one much older. But that also suggests the dichotomy between Michael's public and private persona (where he seems much younger than his years), a schism which has only deepened with time. Most of us are relatively

MATTHEW ROLSTON

Michael Jackson's Perfect Universe

The Education and Execution of Total Victory

November, 1983, Landover, Maryland

Surrounded by politicians, civil rights activists and secret service men, Jesse Jackson announces his candidacy for the Presidency of the United States. He attempts to spearhead a "rainbow coalition" that will unite whites and blacks, Latins and Indians, the whole miscegenated crazy quilt that makes up the "real" American heartland. He will try, perhaps futilely, to reverse prevailing reactionary social currents powered by big money and a national nostalgia for a white bread past. Yet how can a black man unite an America that denies its own mulatto personality?

It may be impossible, racism and tradition withstanding, for a black man to become President. So what do we make of Michael Jackson? He has sold more copies of *Thriller* than the populations of several third world countries. He has become a mass culture figure of such celebrity that by wearing one glittering glove he's revolutionized that industry (we won't even discuss what he's done for white socks and loafers). He is not Elvis. He is not—quite—the Beatles. Nonetheless, Michael Jackson's stardom has reached truly mythic proportions, along with his sales figures. And just one more thing. He is black.

Reverend Jackson's quest may seem quixotic. Then again, if you'd asked me before *Thriller* whether Michael Jackson or any black musician would have penetrated our national consciousness to the point of generating fodder for *Rolling Stone* muckraking and *National Enquirer* headlines, along with the usual *Jet* and *Ebony* star worship, I'd have simply said, "No way." For that *Thriller* would have to have been even better than *Off The Wall* (it was and wasn't) and all of Jackson's inspirations, predictable and eccentric, would have to have been expertly mined. And here we are, bemused smiles on our kissers, savoring a triumph that has to give the most cynical black American (me), much less a professional dreamer like Jesse Jackson, hope that the impossible dream is about more than jousting windmills.

For Michael Jackson's triumph is no accident. It is the culmination of several trends that have long been developing in black popular music. It is the story of the process of setting out to create a blockbuster album, and then doing it; of selling a black artist in the video age; and of the implications, cultural and

By Nelson George and Mark Rowland
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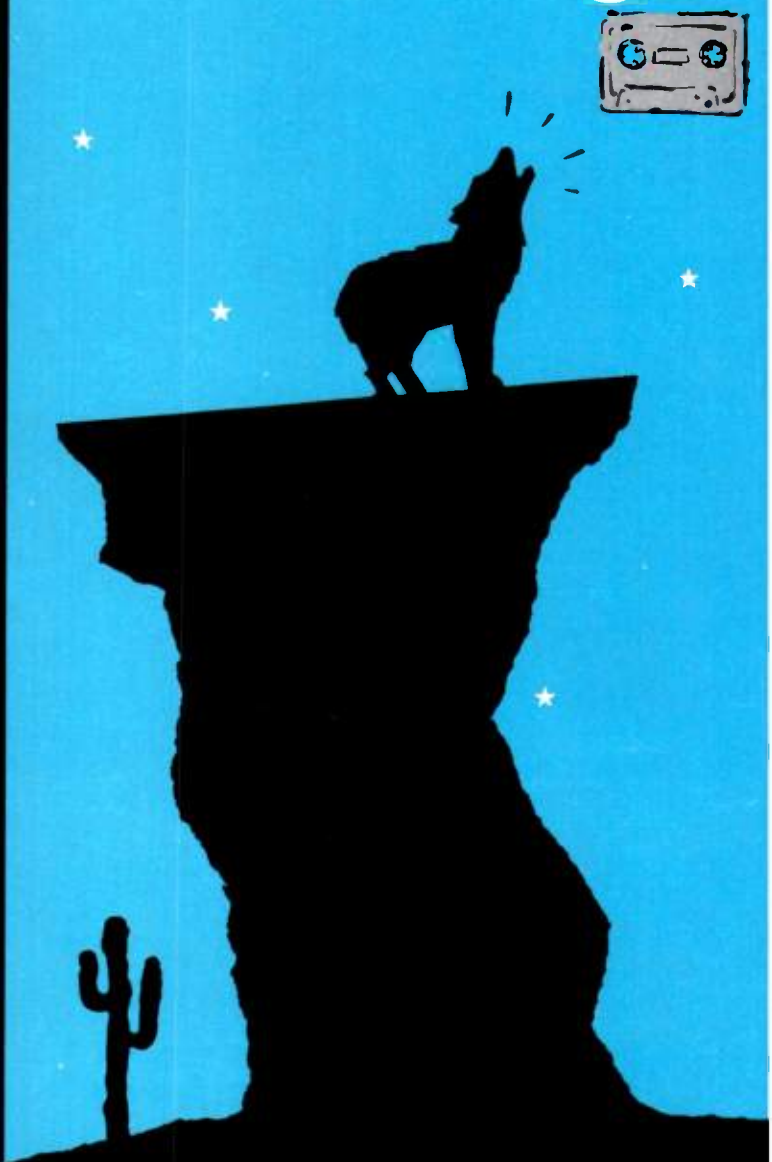

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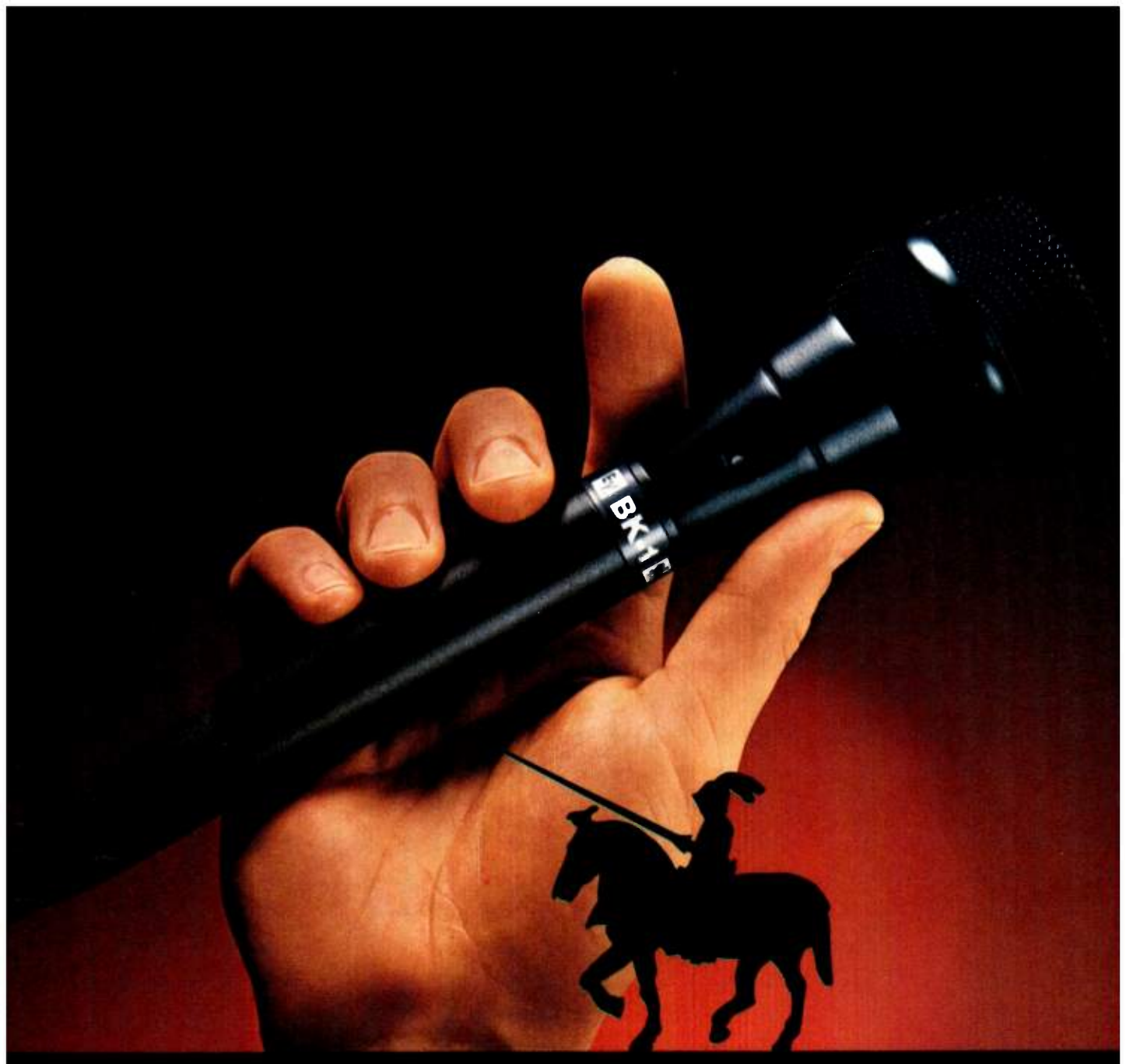

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"We knew it was easy to be local heroes and we didn't want to be like that. We wanted to make it all over or not at all."

"We barraged New York with tapes," Buck says. Then we purposely made it as hard as possible for them to understand it." They edited the tape so that "Sitting Still" was prefaced by a thirty-second polka version; there was no return address on the tape; Stipe made Xerox baseball cards with the band members' faces on them; and when they wrapped it all up, they wrote in big Magic Marker letters, "Careful, Do Not Open." "There was a certain sense of humor about it," Buck admits with gross understatement.

Then the impossible happened. The new wave bloodhounds at the old *New York Rocker* got interested and Gary Sperrazza gave the tape a rave review in his "Crib Death" demo tape column. That review inspired four record companies to send letters to the band asking for tapes.

"I remember we were sitting in the van unloading for a gig we were playing in town," Buck explains. "We opened these letters that said, 'Please send a tape,' and we went, 'Oh, yeah, right,' tore them up and threw 'em out the window. We figured, 'What the hell, who's gonna sign us?'"

If R.E.M. was so convinced of its mediocrity and unsaleability, though, they wouldn't tour eight months out of every year. They would use those twenty-four-karat rock critic quotes as a crutch, plastering them all over record company ads instead of insisting on the simple copy line, "There's a *Murmur* in the air. Out April 15." They have turned down high-profile opening act slots on U2 and B-52's tours to stay close to their audience in some pretty questionable venues—like the Drumstick in Lincoln, Nebraska which, much to the band's chagrin, was actually a fried-chicken restaurant. In the interests of other new American music, R.E.M. also has a standing policy of putting top local underground bands on their club bills, some of which, like Jason & the Scorchers and Minnesota's Replacements, have given them a damn good run for their money.

Mike Mills describes R.E.M.'s work ethic as "not so much what we want to do as what we know we don't want to do." It's worked too, this kamikaze game plan of theirs, because it is based not on executive decisions and Madison Avenue math, but on their own infectious vigor and the belief they have in the capacity for loyalty in a single fan, something they are not afraid to earn. That kind of vigor and independent nerve would be applauded in any music, any time. But instead of languishing in hip Athens obscurity, R.E.M. has capitalized on the emancipating influence of punk and served as a timely reminder that the real business of making music is still a matter of attitude. It makes you wonder, however, if R.E.M. would have ever stood a chance of crossing the Georgia state line, in say, 1972.

"I'd like to think so," says Michael Stipe, smarting a little from the implication otherwise. "I wouldn't want to think we couldn't have done it in 1972," backpedals Mike Mills, "although....

"Sure," he then retorts, "I got back into music because of the Damned and the Pistols. But if I'd heard Big Star in 1972 or '74, I would have felt the same way. They were a tremendous band that had a lot in common with us.

"You talk about Alex Chilton and Big Star. Alex Chilton didn't tour. He didn't do interviews. He put these records out and then waited for the storm to rise. If we hadn't gone out and toured and done interviews, nobody would have bought the records. They would have gone to the critics for free and been bought by the maybe ten thousand people we know."

Yet like Big Star, R.E.M. runs a great risk of being mythologized out of all proportion—not by high-brainfat rock videos or, in the case of Big Star, self-destructive tendencies, but by overzealous rock critics who sometimes sound like they're beating a pulpit instead of a typewriter in those *Murmur* and *Reckoning* reviews. For Buck, the best way to fight that is to ignore it.

"If there is anything good about us, it's that we don't feel any need to mythologize ourselves. I'm not going to talk to every single person who bought our albums just to show them I'm a normal guy. But you do try to live your life, to have the business conducted so you're not creating an image for yourself other than what you are.

"We've proved that you don't have to be interesting to be an okay rock band," suggests Stipe. Of course, given the present competition, R.E.M. is, at the very least, interesting. What Stipe probably means is that they have proved you don't have to be larger than life to inspire an epic reaction in your audience, from a chorus of press hosannas to fruit and vegetable missiles launched by irate Air Force pilots. R.E.M. knows the media love affair has to end sometime, that the almost religious testifying of true fans on their behalf means that they will be playing for new audiences this year armed with impossible expectations. But if those crowds are going to hate them, Stipe for one wants them to hate him as hard as they can, to return his energy in kind.

"Think how exciting it will be two months from now when we're playing Cow's Ass, Illinois and some kid's gonna come to see us expecting some really great band. And he's going to *hate* us, think we're the worst crap ever. And that's going to incense him so much that he's going to run home and put his own band together. And it will be incredible, the new Velvet Underground or something. That's exciting."

It has to be. That kid's got a tough act to follow. ■

Rapid Ear Movement

R.E.M. is so blasé about the tools of their trade that they almost make you embarrassed to ask for details. Peter Buck has only two main guitars, a Rickenbacker 330 and 301 both dated 1981, that he puts through a Fender Twin Reverb amplifier with two JBL speakers. He also uses a 12-string '81 Rickenbacker in the studio and has a 1981 Gretsch Chet Atkins Tennessean at his disposal. Besides the Twin Reverb, Buck has a Marshall amp that he sometimes borrows from his producer Mitch Easter to make a more heavy metal racket. As for effects, he has only one—an Ibanez VE400 pedal that he uses live though he isn't too sure what it actually does.

Mike Mills' bass setup is no World's Fair exhibit either—a Fender Dual Showman amp with two EV 154 bass cabinets. He alternates between two black Rickenbacker 4001 basses of undetermined vintage. Bill Berry's current live drum kit is a standard Rogers arrangement with Zildjian cymbals, although he used a Sonor kit in the studio for *Reckoning* basically because it just happened to be there. And we can assume that singer Michael Stipe uses a Shure SM10A microphone because it is the only mike listed on the band's insurance inventory.

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Unlikely stadium-idol Stipe scans Shea Stadium crowd for a hot dog vendor.

tears." Buck also finds it strange that critics and fans are so fixated on Stipe's lyrics, although he understands it is probably because they can't understand half of them.

"People don't have to know the story or the genesis of the song to get what it means to us. For example, the most moving moment I've had in the last couple of years was at the end of one of our tours. I hadn't slept in days, I was tired as I could possibly be and we were doing a concert that night for a live radio show. And I was standing in the City Gardens in Trenton, New Jersey at the back door and it was just getting dark. These kids were playing touch football, the last game before dark came, and for some reason I was so moved I cried for twenty minutes.

"It sounds so trivial. But that's more or less what 'Perfect Circle' on *Murmur* is about. I told Michael to try and capture that feeling. There's no football in there, no kids, no twilight. But it's all there."

The problem Stipe originally had with singing his third-person narratives was that the band started out playing everything, as he puts it, "at Circle Jerks speed. In the first year we were together, they played everything that fast. And for various reasons, I like slow songs. So in order to slow down the songs, I sang in a slower fashion on the really fast songs. Most of the earlier songs, to sing them with the beat would have been near-impossible. 'Gardening At Night' was one of the first songs where that worked."

Another one of Stipe's favorite tricks is to write the exact opposite of what the band might be playing. Stipe usually meets the rest of the band in Mike Mills' bedroom where they hammer out songs together. "And if I've had a great day and they're playing a real slow dirge-y song, I'll change it around a little and put some really nice words to it."

Buck's guitar work also has a few strange twists. What might sound at first like modal banging is really just variations on the usual C-F-G chord progression. But he favors homemade tunings like the mutant raga-bluegrass sound he gets on the short improvised fragment at the end of *Reckoning*—D-A-F#-D-G-D in descending order—"just something," he says, "that I made up.

"But part of the thing about liking us is that we're not a really obvious band in a lot of ways," he insists. "You have to think a bit, to throw away your preconceptions about what rock 'n' roll can be. Like we often play a lot of new material when we do a show. We played in Athens a couple of days ago and I figured we played six songs from *Murmur*, three from the EP and the other seventeen were new songs, covers or unreleased stuff. I like the fact that we can get away with that."

The one thing Buck can't understand is how some people came to the conclusion that R.E.M. is a band of born-again Christians. "We get that a lot. I guess it's something where anybody who dares to be positive is either a Christian or on drugs.

"But there aren't that many misconceptions about us basically because there are no conceptions. Just confusion."

The R.E.M. story officially begins in April, 1980. Athens already had its own 40 Watt Club, so named because it had ony one light bulb, and a growing list of bands formed in the wake of the B-52's' success. It was there that Peter Buck, juggling a day job managing a used record store and night classes at the University of Georgia, and fellow undergrad Michael Stipe ran into Mike Mills and Bill Berry. Over a few beers, they decided to try playing together and made a date to meet back at the old dilapidated Episcopal church where Buck and Stipe had set up housekeeping.

As Buck explains, "We all got together, had a few more beers, played five songs and thought, yeah, this is okay. We rehearsed a bit and a few weeks later we were out playing."

But for Buck, the *urge* to form a band like R.E.M., to play music instead of just records, dates back a few years to San Luis Obispo, California where Buck was washing dishes in a restaurant and sharing a house with four old hippies whose idea of a good time was "listening to 133 different versions of the Grateful Dead doing 'Turn On Your Lovelight.'" It was almost out of perversity that when he heard about the Sex Pistols, he ordered a copy of "Anarchy In The U.K." from a local record store.

"And talk about reactionary old hippies! I put the Sex Pistols on the stereo at home and everybody came down and just went, 'Aaarrgh!' These guys thought Kiss was punk rock. I used to play that record all the time just to offend them.

"When I first heard the Velvets, my fantasy was, 'Oh, boy, I'd like to do that.' But I acknowledged it was a fantasy. It didn't seem like something you could really do. The Sex Pistols and the punk thing changed that."

Punk had the same critical effect on Mike Mills. Born in California, the son of a Georgia military career man, he had a year of piano and marching band experience on tuba and sousaphone before doing the rock combo rounds in Macon with Bill Berry. The enormous shadow cast by the local Capricorn Records operation and its Dixie boogie talent roster meant that Mills could only play top 40 covers or boozy R&B party numbers to survive. After a few years of toeing the Allman Skynyrd party line, he and Berry just packed it in, selling off their equipment.

Mills was out of music entirely for two years until he met Ian Copeland, currently head of Frontier Booking International but then a newly hired talent agent at the local Paragon Agency. "Bill and I got to be friends with him," Mills explains. "We'd go over to his house and he'd start playing us the Damned, Chelsea, the Ramones, the Dead Boys, the Sex Pistols and I would put on the headphones and play his bass along with the records, going, 'Wow, this is fun.' That got me interested again. So I bought all my gear back."

Mills repurchased it from... Ian Copeland, who had bought it in the first place. ("I bought it back for less than I sold it," he laughs.)

But in what sense is R.E.M. punk? Their dress is best described as thrift-store weird; Buck claims he never saw a leather jacket in Athens until a few months ago. The band looks like college students gone to seed, hobo's Sunday best. Musically, R.E.M. soars where most buzzsaw bands just growl and kick up dirt. Yet the way R.E.M. has conducted its business since day one is D.I.Y. in the extreme. You might also describe it as dangerously casual. The first time they played up north they didn't even bother to go as far as New York City.

When they did finally bother to go to New York, they prepped the press and club owners there with demo tapes—sort of.

Buck admits with a laugh that R.E.M.'s sense of fun and adventure—falling down onstage, colliding into each other like a demolition derby, fearlessly taking requests—made them a pet joke among Athens musicians in the early days. "But we never actually tightened up. We just learned how to play with one another, to complement each other. All the things you're not supposed to do—speed up tempos, slow down—we do together intuitively. We can improvise intuitively and make it sound like a song."

Which is remarkable when you consider that Buck, for example, did not seriously pick up the guitar until just before R.E.M. was formed in the spring of 1980. His style—a haphazard cocktail of Pete Townshend thwack, arpeggiated bluegrass picking and neo-raga droning—is actually a response to Stipe's ethereal bleating and the aggressive talking bass of Mills. Add to that the telepathic rhythm lock of Mills and drummer Bill Berry, a partnership that dates back to high school dance bands in Macon, Georgia.

"If we're playing a song," Mills says, "I can tell when Bill's going to end it or change it. If there is the rare mistake he or I will make—well, maybe not that rare—I can feel when, say, he's going to end the song one measure too soon."

The result, in terms of pure sound, is like several musical conversations going on at once, an otherworldly hubbub in which Stipe and Mills will sing different halves of a lyric in a dizzying overlap that sounds like a transatlantic phone echo ("Harborcoat" on *Reckoning*) or Stipe tugs at Buck's reckless guitar surge by intoning his prayerlike vocal as if in a sleepwalk trance ("Stumble" from *Chronic Town*). It is a rich, full sound, sucker bait for anyone who loved the acid-folk jangle of the *5D* Byrds or the aggressive clatter of the later Velvet Underground, but not without its problems. Mike Mills says the group's co-producer Mitch Easter originally had a lot of trouble figuring out how to get that sound on tape without hamstringing their rebel streak.

"The thing he found frustrating," he says with an impish grin, "was that there's not a lot of songs we have when everybody isn't playing at the same time. We're usually all going at the same time and no one ever stops for very long."

It is for exactly that reason most critics only talk about R.E.M. in terms of pure sound. A calmly inscrutable album that still defies easy armchair analysis, *Murmur* dared you in a gentle, almost sexual way to penetrate the limpid swirl of its lyric mystery, epitomized by the melted quality of Stipe's vocals and Buck's silky curtains of layered electric and acoustic guitars. Buck admits it was designed to "short-circuit everything that is accepted as rock 'n' roll but that was so strong emotionally that it *was* real rock 'n' roll." The album's draping gossamer texture and liquid segues—the spooky urgent kick of "Radio Free Europe" into "Pilgrimage" with its calmer trot and churchy echo, the easy-going hee-haw intimacy of "We Walk" suddenly breaking into the record's last desperate gallop, "West Of The Fields"—meant you couldn't yank it apart and rationalize its exotic appeal.

Reckoning, cut in almost half the time (eleven days compared to *Murmur*'s sixteen), is a friendlier, more inviting record that bares R.E.M.'s uncommon *soul*. In "Harborcoat," Buck's guitar resonates with a bright pop flush while Stipe's and Mills' overlapping vocals spread out with the guitar in a welcoming arc. The poignant lift of the "I'm Sorry" chorus in the gorgeous "So. Central Rain" actually heightens the song's gray melancholy. In fact, a better album title might have been *Beckoning* because the simpler, more open production is a clarification not only of R.E.M.'s deceptively rich sound but also of their purpose.

For the self-effacing tone of R.E.M. music—that what you hear is what you get, not some holographic image of Peter Buck as guitar hero or Michael Stipe as the tortured Southern poet—has in one sense blunted the group's thrust. Because of the nasal mantra sound of Stipe's voice, the very personal, narrative structure of his lyrics are often mistaken for hippie dreamspeak.

"But I approach my lyrics from the third person instead of the first person, which gives it a slight detachment. It's kind of a protection—I would no more care to cut my gut open and display it to the 200,000 people who are going to buy the record. The songs are personal—'Camera,' 'Letter Never Sent' from the new album—but it's just easier to write from that perspective, to see A, B or C on that page instead of 'you' or 'you and I.' Plus I was reading this book the other day from 1938 called *Fashion Is Spinach*. I went down a page in the middle of a chapter and underlined every 'I' and 'me' on the page. There were fifty-five of them. It just seemed too much, too open."

For Buck, writing songs isn't the catharsis but the playing of them is. He recalls the first time the band played "So. Central Rain" with Michael singing—"We didn't have a P.A. and Michael was just singing to himself. I was almost moved to

LAURA LEVINE

Stipe, no tortured Southern poet, savors the taste of pop stardom.

"We're not a really obvious band. You have to think a bit, to throw away your preconceptions about rock 'n' roll."

LAURA LEVINE

Peter Buck, Michael Stipe and Mike Mills very live at Boston's Rat.

> **"We never actually tightened up. We just learned how to play all the things you're not supposed to do together intuitively."**

and mock threatening and that was more frustrating to me than just having them come up and smash our heads in. That's what drove Peter and I to kiss and rub butts together in the middle of 'Radio Free Europe.'"

Huh?

"Yeah," laughs Buck, "Michael and I were rolling around on the floor, doing the bump onstage, kissing one another. It was like throwing meat to the lions. Finally Bill (Berry, the drummer) threw his sticks into the crowd and walked out. I got Sara from Let's Active who was with us to play drums and finish the set. And at the end, they booed so loud we came back and did an encore."

There are, according to Buck, two morals to this story. One is that "when I'm fifty years old, these will be interesting experiences to tell my grandchildren." The other is that for all the greatness thrust on them by panting critics and hometown hipsters, R.E.M. always suspected that being Athens, Georgia's Great White Hope would never be enough. Any blood, sweat and tears spilled in New Mexico bars or on Texas military bases was really an investment in the future.

"We knew it was easy to be local heroes," Buck admits. "It's easy for your hometown to think you're the greatest thing in the world. And we didn't want to be like that. We wanted to make it all over or not at all."

Whether R.E.M. has actually "made it" depends on who you ask. A recent review of the band's current *Reckoning* album in Britain's usually acidic *New Musical Express* is typical of the love letters fattening up R.E.M.'s press file back at I.R.S. Records—"One of the most beautifully exciting groups on the planet"; "When I get to heaven, the angels will be playing not harps but Rickenbackers. And they will be playing songs by R.E.M."

Most critics have already found that heaven on earth. In the 1981 *Village Voice* Pazz and Jop writers poll, R.E.M.'s humble indie debut "Radio Free Europe"/"Sitting Still" was voted single of the year. The following year, their I.R.S. launch *Chronic Town* copped the top EP spot. And in the 1983 voting, the *Murmur* album came dramatically close to unseating Michael Jackson's *Thriller* as album of the year, probably the most competition he's had all year. Record sales—nearly 44,000 for *Chronic Town* and a very encouraging 170,000 for *Murmur*—have gradually borne out the typing pool's faith in the band, bolstered as well by blanket airplay on college radio and an exhausting tour schedule.

Those numbers don't impress Peter Buck much. Shrugging his shoulders in mild disgust, he claims record sales are "completely extraneous" to any measure of R.E.M.'s greatness. And he doesn't think the band is that great anyway. Like, compared to *what*?

"Oh," he muses for a second, fidgeting in his chair in the interview chamber of his label's high-rise headquarters, "compared to bands that I really love like the Replacements and Husker Du, the great albums like *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Astral Weeks*.

"That's the greatness we aspire to. To be the best songwriters alive at the time we're going, to be a tremendous live band where people go to see them and everybody walks out with their chins hanging down on their chests. To be a band that makes tremendous records that change from album to album, that presents new facets of themselves without losing touch with what originally motivated them. That's greatness."

They're already good for one out of three. As a live band, R.E.M. is currently one of American rock's best nights out, a crucial antidote to the disco stupor of identikit white funk imports and the condescending separatism of post-punk intellectuals. The magic is in their contagious abandon, a liberating ya-hoo glow radiating from Michael Stipe's dervish twirls at the mike—dirty-blond curls bouncing around his crown like frenzied atoms—and the maniac Who-ish ballet of Buck and elfin bassist Mike Mills. It is also evident in their daredevil choice of covers, which over the years have included Jonathan Richman's "Roadrunner," a Gang of Four jam-up of Funkadelic's "One Nation Under A Groove" and even Bloodrock's gruesome 70s classic "D.O.A."

That magic would be nothing without the motion. People don't walk out of R.E.M. shows talking about how *tight* they were. But like a rubber band stretched to its dangerous limits, R.E.M. moves with a vigorous elastic tension that can suddenly go from the casual bounce of *Murmur*'s "Catapult" to the locomotive lunge of "Carnival Of Sorts (Box Cars)" from *Chronic Town*. In one song, "Wolves, Lower," there is an improvised midsection in which everybody plays the first thing that pops into their heads for sixteen beats. And no matter how atonal Buck's guitar gets or how randomly Mills cuts up the bass pulse, every night the band swings back onto beat seventeen with smug precision, as if it were the most likely thing in the world.

LAURA LEVINE

You wouldn't know it from all the year-end critics' polls or the way reviewers trip over all their glowing superlatives and twenty-dollar metaphors. But there are still quite a few people who don't like R.E.M. Like the audience in Fullerton, California that sat on its hands for entire set and then ganged up on guitarist Peter Buck after the show and asked, "What do you think you're doing? What is this shit?" Or the angry mob of macho drunks at a bar in Albuquerque, New Mexico that got so hot and bothered about the evening's main event, a women's hot legs contest, that R.E.M.—the opening act—was paid five hundred dollars *not* to play.

But those are bedtime stories compared to the epic battle R.E.M. fought against an entire squadron of terminally pickled enlisted men one night at an Air Force base in Wichita Falls, Texas.

"It was the first time they'd ever had a band that either didn't play all covers or wasn't superfamous," Buck recalls. "And they pelted us onstage. There were oranges flying out of the audience, death threats, notes that came up onstage saying 'Faggot, you die, we're gonna get you backstage.'

"But the military police there wouldn't let them physically assault us. There were maybe three or four guys who liked the band. But everybody else hated us so much they started beating up the guys who were enjoying it. They kept on yelling, 'Rock 'n' roll, rock 'n' roll!' So we started playing all covers—'I'm Not Your Steppin' Stone,' 'Secret Agent Man,' 'Route 66,' 'Pills' by the New York Dolls. Finally I grabbed some guy up front and said,'What the fuck do you mean by rock 'n' roll?' And he says, 'Def Leppard.'"

"The thing about that show," complains singer Michael Stipe, "is that these guys would not get really violent, because they'd be arrested by the MPs. But they had this mock violence

Not everybody adores these guitar rebels from Athens, Georgia yet, but in their own left-handed way, R.E.M. is working on it.

R.E.M.

By David Fricke

al Orchestra

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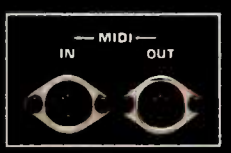

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Echo from previous page

bing groove of powerhouse locomotion, anchoring McCulloch's clenched rhythms. Will Sergeant's Telecaster betrays an obvious Tom Verlaine influence, shifting from spacious, ringing leads on "A Promise" and "Going Up" to shuddering wads of white noise flooding "The Cutter" and "Back Of Love." The set is both frantic *and* precise.

The band concludes with the typically oblique "Crocodiles." The guitar torrent calms briefly and McCulloch inserts a verse of "Light My Fire."

"When *Crocodiles* came out, everybody said it was like the Doors," he explains afterward. "I said, 'What do they know? We're nothing like the Doors.' And then I got to like them, so I put 'Light My Fire' in as soon as we *stopped* getting compared to them."

He smiles slightly. "It's serious, but it's also very tongue-in-cheek."- **Rob Tannenbaum**

Marsalis from page 18

identity? "I've always wanted to be the consummate sideman. I want to be the guy who, when somebody needs a saxophone player, they'll say, 'Let's call Branford, because we know he can do whatever we want him to do.' If they want to call me to play behind Phyllis Hyman, I can do a saxophone solo that is acceptable to her and appropriate to that idiom. If Billy Eckstine called me, I could do a saxophone solo that's acceptable to him.

"After a while I'll have my own identity, because as time goes by you establish your personality. But I know a lot of people who have their own identities in their own bands but who, if somebody else called to ask them to play, it'd be hopeless, 'cause they can't play anything but what they play. That's definitely not gonna happen to me."

Meanwhile, Marsalis warns listeners that if they think they know what to expect on his next few albums, they may be surprised. He talks about recording with vocalists and even—brace yourselves, purists—about the creative use of electronic instruments "for certain purposes." But, although he professes admiration for anyone who can apply artistry to the making of commercial music—he singles out Prince as "a visionary musician, the seminal figure in pop music right now"—he's a jazz traditionalist through and through when it comes to the commercialism (or lack thereof) of his own work.

"Beethoven wasn't thinking about what the people thought when he wrote. I'm not thinking about what the people think when I do my albums.

"I just think about playing music that I like, and I hope the people like it. If they don't, they can go buy Grover Washington records." M

MI News from page 10

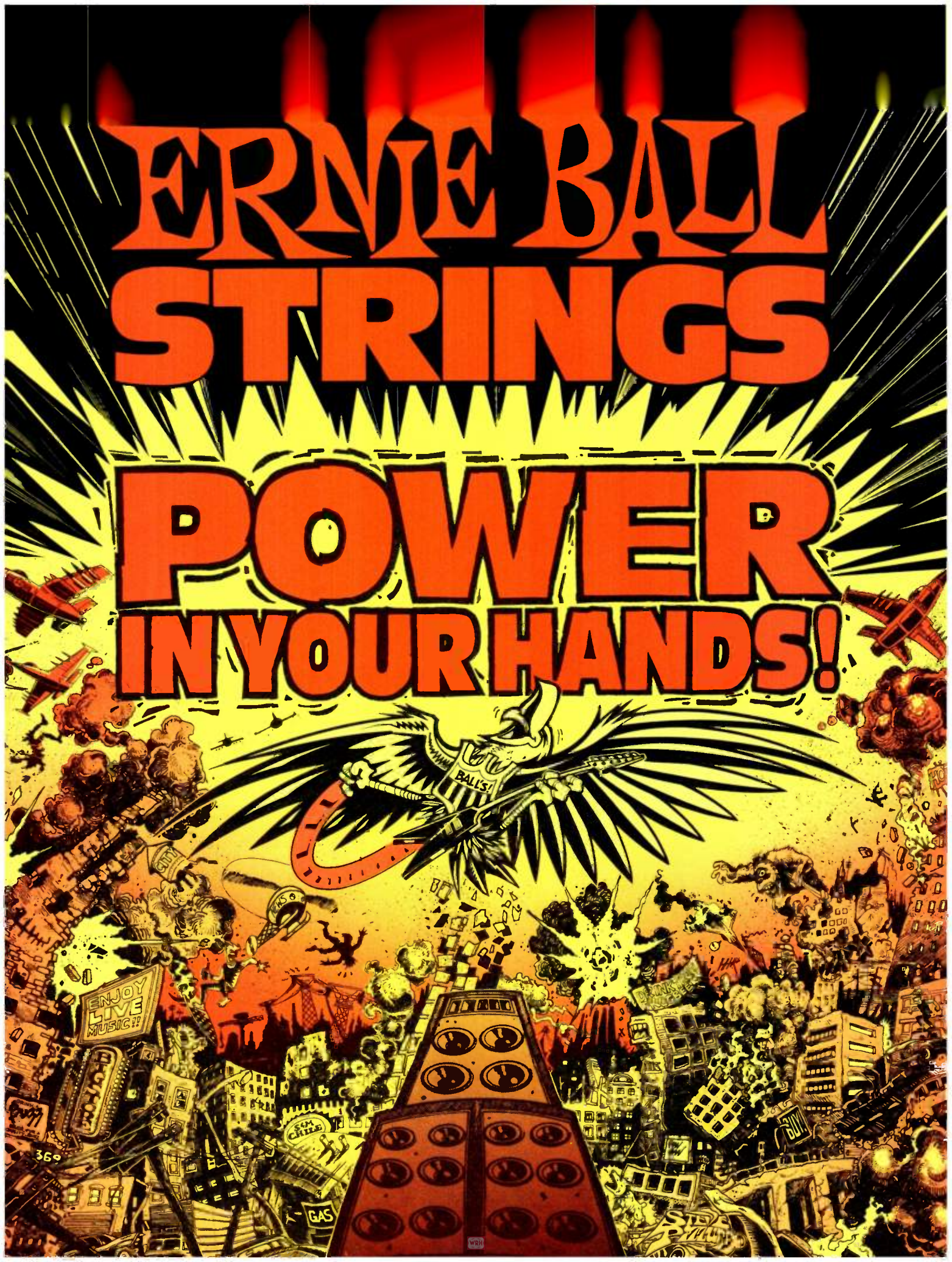
De-Pressing

We're all one big happy family in the music magazine publishing world, so it's with a heavy heart that we announce the demise of *Trouser Press*. For ten years *TP* kept its intensely hip readership informed about tomorrow's superstars—and tomorrow's hypes and one-hit wonders—today.

"We started as a labor of love," commented publisher **Ira Robbins**, "and when it stopped being love it just became a labor. We figured out how to sell out and decided not to do so." The magazine's finances were always shaky; Robbins claims "it was the long-term frustration of being so close to the edge that wore me down." Editor Scott Isler could not be reached for comment.

Originally a street-level fanzine, *Trouser Press* was right on top of the mid-70s British new wave that ran into the broader, calmer waters of "new music." Now that there's increasing press coverage of acts no one but *Trouser Press* used to touch, Robbins feels the magazine was due for a natural death. Rock In Peace.

We are happy to reveal that Scott Isler has ended his short-lived status as editor emeritus to join the Musician *staff.*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MARCIA BALL

Blue Texas Soul

PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

Ball's new Rounder LP preserves her feisty barroom intensity.

Live and learn. In 1978 Marcia Ball—a fixture of the Austin, Texas music scene for over a decade—had a shot at the big time with *Circuit Queen*, an album for Capitol Records. But the then honky-tonking vocalist was buried by David Briggs' excessive country-pop production. Six years later she has a new record, *Soulful Dress*, on the smaller Rounder label, and seems much happier.

Sparked by her sensuous singing and rollicking piano playing, punchy horn arrangements and a guest appearance by guitar wiz Stevie Ray Vaughan, *Soulful Dress* is a four-year culmination of Ball's changeover from one roots style to another. Following the late-70s demise of progressive country, Ball says she "ended up playing cowboy bars" as a human jukebox. In 1980, after a performing hiatus, she decided to concentrate "on the music I grew up with: the Gulf Coast blues and R&B." She organized the blues-based Marcia Ball Band and began plying the "Crawfish Circuit" stretching across Texas and through her native Louisiana. She gradually worked up to urban centers—Memphis, Chicago, New Orleans and Houston—and a Rounder contract. This time, her artistic freedom was assured: she credits producer Denny Bruce (her first choice) for capturing her and her band's barroom intensity.

Soulful Dress has garnered rave reviews, but Ball is ambivalent about her music's chances of commercial success. "I think there's a large audience for what I'm doing, but there's no telling what'll catch the public's fancy. It's like that line in a Larry McMurtry book about a woman's love being like the dew: it's just as likely to settle on a horse turd as on a rose."

For the singer whose career has known similar extremes, the most important thing is "that we're a tight band playing interesting, exciting music."-**Frank Joseph**

ELVIS COSTELLO

Up Close & Personal

I'm going to do something you've never seen me do before," Elvis Costello told the audience at Washington, D.C.'s Constitution Hall as he unstrapped his trusty Telecaster. "It's not a strip-tease, either," he added, and walked over to a concert grand. Some of the crowd chuckled at the strip-tease remark, but nobody laughed when he sat down at the piano; the version of "Shot With His Own Gun" which followed was received with rapt enthusiasm.

Costello was doing a lot of things he hadn't done before, the most obvious being his tour as a solo act. (A full-scale tour with the Attractions is scheduled for the summer.) He's flirted with unaccompanied performance in the past, but this show was heavily geared toward novelty. Among other things, Costello premiered a half-dozen new numbers, offered a strikingly uncluttered reading of Bob Dylan's "I Threw It All Away," and demonstrated the similarity between his own "Just A Memory" and Bacharach & David's "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head."

Entertainment value aside, the one-man show provided a few clues to Costello's creative process. His deft Debussian accompaniment on "Shot With His Own Gun" and colorfully concise Rhodes piano part for "Motel Matches" argued strongly that piano, not guitar, is Costello's main instrument. His vocal phrasing on "Kid About It" and "Shipbuilding"—between jazzy inflection and stolid country crooning—was far preferable to last tour's Sinatra impression. Costello remains an artist whose chief interest is musical growth, not necessarily commercial success.-**J.D. Considine**

CHRIS GABRIN/RETNA

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

Psychedelic Ferocity

RETNA/LTD

Echo & the Bunnymen: tough rap, live throb.

"All you need to be successful these days is a Gibson Les Paul and a Marshall amp, with some bloke wailing away about '*in excelsis Deo*,'" Ian McCulloch sniffs in a Liverpudlian drawl. "Anyone can write an anthem like U2. We don't need to condescend and wave flags around. Our music isn't meant .to save anyone's soul; it's more meant to make their ears bleed."

Echo & the Bunnymen's singer/guitarist is trying to endear himself to the press between shows at the Channel in Boston. Over the course of an hour-long conversation he insults everyone from T.S. Eliot (pretentious) to Dudley Moore (inferior sex symbol) to Paul Weller (insignificant creep) and Big Country (pig shit). He professes appreciation only for "Jacques Brel, the Velvets and a bit of Bowie."

With a rap like that, you better deliver the goods. And at the Channel, Echo & the Bunnymen indeed confirm their reputation as ferocious live performers. Bassist Les Pattinson and drummer Pete de Freitas lock into a throb-

continued on next page

McFerrin was born and raised in Los Angeles. His mother took him to an Episcopal church where he was "very moved by the quietude, the ceremony, the music." His father, a former baritone in New York's Metropolitan Opera, gave him classical vocal training. He toured nationally with top forty bands in his twenties, settling down in San Francisco with his wife Debbie in 1979. He subsequently assembled a band and became the darling of the Bay Area jazz-pop scene. Then came the album and the inevitable comparisons to Al Jarreau.

"From what I understand," McFerrin says, "Elektra has envisioned me following in his footsteps. It does have its lure. I could pay off my bills, get out of debt, buy a house, get a new car."

But McFerrin would rather attain success on his own terms. He's so confident that he recently declined an offer from John McLaughlin to tour with his group. "It came down to a choice between working with him or doing my solo thing." For a determined Bobby McFerrin, it was no contest.-**Steve Bloom**

ICEHOUSE

No False Impressions

RETNA/LTD

From group to solo back to group, Iva Davies fronts Icehouse.

That voice! The clipped cockneyesque diction, the cigarette-constricted larynx, the familiar yelp—who else could it be but David Bowie?

No. The lugubrious croon, the melismatic bleat, the underwater smile—of course! It's Bryan Ferry!

Wrong again. Icehouse's Iva Davies has taken a lot of stick for his sometimes startling vocal resemblance to the above singers. The twenty-eight-year-old Australian, however, claims to be insensitive to the charge of impersonation, even keeping a list of artists to whom he's been compared, just for his own amusement.

Diversity is nothing new for the singer/songwriter/guitarist, who began his musical career as a conservatory-trained oboist. "I've never been a real fan of classical music," Davies now says. "I don't find it interesting at all."

What he did find interesting was "this horribly out-of-tune stuff" that appealed to his Sydney friends. After receiving an electric guitar as a birthday present, Davies cofounded Flowers, a group who gained local fame by playing lots of T. Rex songs. That infatuation is well hidden on Flowers' 1981 debut album, with its cool keyboards/guitar arrangements and existential lyrics. Since the name "Flowers" was taken outside Australia, the band renamed themselves Icehouse (the LP title) when Chrysalis picked them up for international release.

Lack of new material and heavy touring at home and abroad led to Icehouse's breakup by mutual agreement in 1982. Davies set to work recording song demos with the aid of synthesizers and a LinnDrum computer. The resulting *Primitive Man* LP, while credited to Icehouse, is actually all Davies. The record included Davies' biggest brush with chart success yet in the catchy "Hey Little Girl," written and recorded in four hours.

The new *Sidewalk* album confirms his impulsive approach to songwriting. Davies booked studio time before he'd written anything. All the material was created in the studio.

On *Sidewalk*, Icehouse is a multi-headed band again with largely new personnel. This group dates from last year, when "Hey Little Girl" demanded a flesh-and-blood outfit to take it on the road. The king of David Bowie impersonators, Bowie himself, liked Icehouse enough to have them open six of his European shows. Bowie also offered them a spot on his 1983 North American tour. Then Peter Gabriel asked if Icehouse could play on *his* U.S. tour, concurrent with Bowie's. But Davies was already taken: he spent his summer scoring *Razorback* for director Russell Mulcahy.

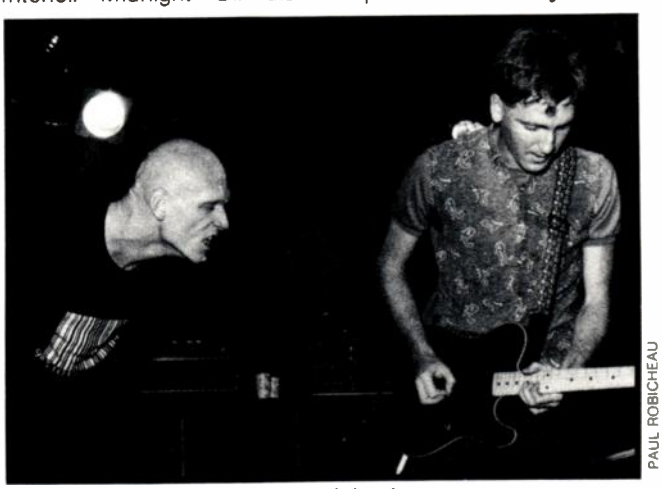
"I get bored with any one thing really quickly," Davies says. "It's necessary for me to keep changing styles areas all the time, because that's the way I listen to music."-**Scott Isler**

MIDNIGHT OIL

That Burning Sensation

Is Midnight Oil the long-lost "thinking person's rock band"? The group justified its Australian rep as a superb live act at Boston's Channel and the crowd agreed. Tall, bald frontman Peter Garrett is no run-of-the-MTV non-star; the riveting performer sings up a storm with conviction (and some pretty snappy harmonies by his bandmates) while rampaging around the stage like a combination of Lurch and the Cramps' Lux Interior. Midnight Oil displayed power, grit, finesse—and, not least, sincerity.

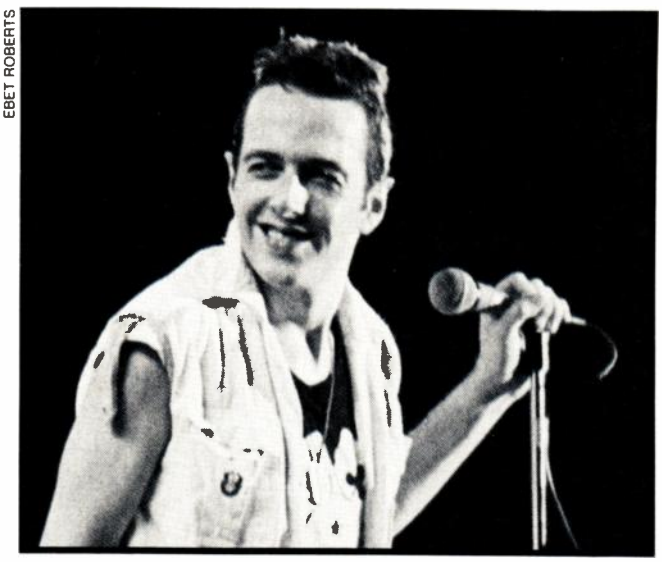
Like the digeridoo—a colossal aborigine kazoo brought onstage at one point—Midnight Oil is primal yet sophisticated. Live, the band's often subtle material from *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1* was no less incandescent than stunning renditions of previous, simpler, rockier output. If Midnight Oil is an acquired taste, a live dose just might help the U.S. acquire it.-**Marc Mayco**



PAUL ROBICHEAU

Peter Garrett Lurches, Jim Moginie glows.

FACES



EBET ROBERTS

THE CLASH

Post Purge Punk

Kosmo Vinyl's voice rips over the phone like sandpaper. "So, you wannen innerview for *Mewzishin* magazine, eh?" the Clash road manager and all-purpose Visigoth queries rhetorically. "Well, there are no mewzishins in the ban'—implyin' nothin' derogatory abou' the ban', mine you. If yore lookin' for en innerview for *Mewzishin*, Oi'd sugges' per'aps you should ge' in touch with... B.B. King!"

Momentarily dumbfounded by this flash of mother-country wit, I remind the twerp this magazine was formerly called *Musician, Player & Listener*. "Lissener?!?" bellows the champion of human rights. " Lisseners!?! We don' 'ave '*lisseners*.'" He oozes out the word in hip condescension. "The fuckin' London Symphony Orchestra 'as lisseners! And Oi don' 'ave to continue this debate wi' you, know wharrimean?"

So forgive me if I wasn't exactly pumped when I sauntered down to the Fox Theatre in Atlanta that evening to catch Joe Strummer's purified Clash. With guitarist Mick Jones purged for unhealthy pop star aspirations and political bad faith, my hopes were smaller than a tick on a flea, as we say in Georgia.

But if the playing's the proof, the Clash are back with a ruthless vengeance. Their nearly two-hour, twenty-four-song onslaught made for an urgent, intense performance. Throughout the show, the varying two- and three-guitar lineups (Strummer aiding new recruits Vince White and Nick Sheppard) generated texture as well as muscle. Bassist Paul Simonon hit sturdy and hard; most impressive of all, new drummer Pete Howard skillfully slammed or swung as the moment demanded. This band was taut and hot.

Now the Clash's unchallenged front man, Strummer is a harrowing presence indeed, mohawked to the max and duded up in a white double-breasted suit over a sleeveless black shirt. For extended periods he sang with his head angled to the right and the three middle fingers of his right hand stretched along his scalp. With his four mates arrayed in spiked hairdos, denim, leather, studs and military kit, the Clash resembles a guerrilla hardcore band hammering behind Travis Bickle.

Yet, for all its iron will and new songs—including the anti-nuke "Are You Ready For War?" and anti-porn "Sex Mad War"—this Clash does miss Jones' pop chops, his warmth and glamor. They're less funky, and their reggae jam-downs ("Armagideon Time" and "Police And Thieves") have lost ease, sinuousness and atmosphere—although they've gained in kick. The band seems less an inspired collective than an ideological gang following a possessed, tormented, brilliant leader.

Heading into the wings after a thunderous "Garageland," Strummer muttered to the audience, "Keep your chin up. Believe in the future." But we need more than what this Clash is giving us for a reason to believe. Politics is not solely "right ideas," and "right ideas" don't justify self-righteousness. The people are not an abstraction, know wharrimean, Kosmo? Joe?-**Anthony DeCurtis**

BOBBY McFERRIN

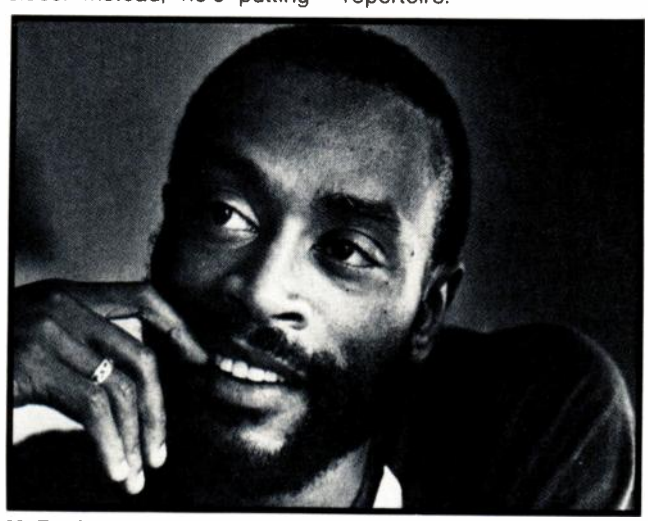
The Ultimate Solo

Two years ago, Bobby McFerrin—San Francisco's answer to Al Jarreau—made his recording debut with a self-titled album on Elektra/Musician. Buoyed by a top forty duet of "You've Really Got A Hold On Me" with Phoebe Snow, *Bobby McFerrin* sold over 50,000 copies. Dollar signs lit up in the eyes of Elektra executives as they awaited McFerrin's second effort. They're still waiting.

"The studio holds no fascination for me," the thirty-four-year-old singer says after a remarkable ninety-minute solo performance at the Noe Valley ministry in San Francisco. Instead, he's putting final touches on a live solo album recorded in Germany this February.

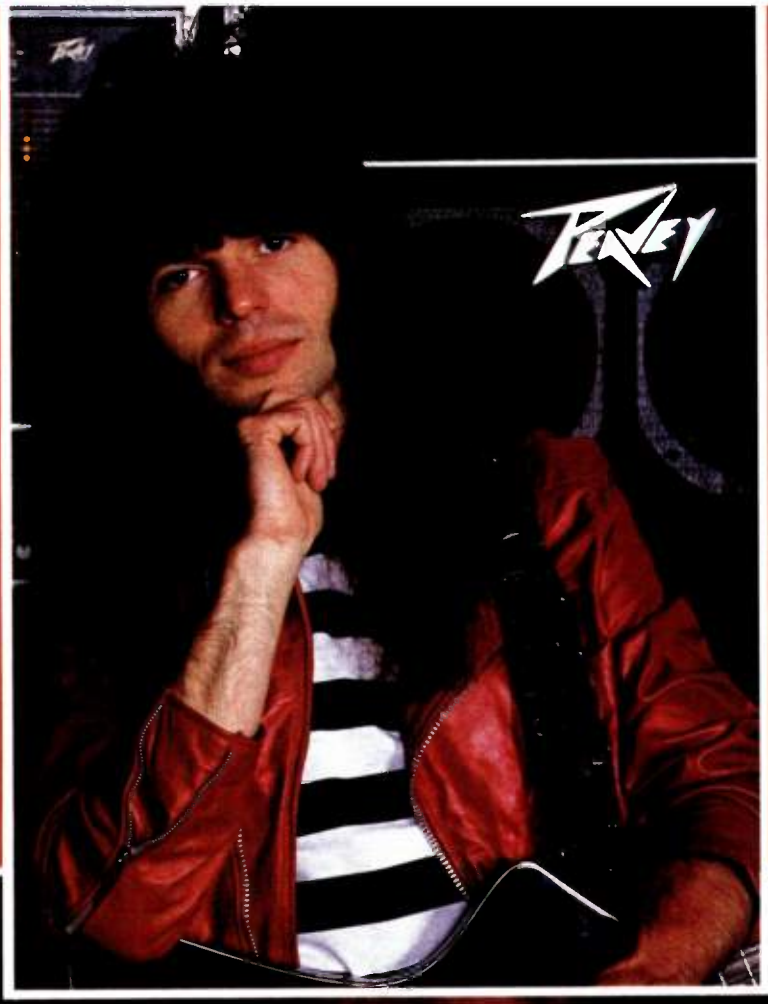
"The seed was planted in my heart and mind six years ago: solo voice," McFerrin explains. "At the time I didn't know what it meant to walk onstage alone and sing."

What it means now is that McFerrin plays the parts of three musicians, patting out a beat on his chest or a chair while singing melody and bass lines simultaneously. Besides being an extraordinary improviser, he has eclectic taste: Chick Corea's "Spain," the *Beverly Hillbillies* theme and some Bach pieces are in McFerrin's repertoire.



McFerrin continues to give Al Jarreau comparisons the slip.

QUIET RIOT



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singing in different ways to show that I'm a versatile singer. And I think that in that respect it certainly succeeds; at times it's like two different people singing."

Daltrey's references to the possibilities the Who possessed as a vehicle for non-musical work relate to a specific regret: the band will not produce a movie he wants to direct later this year about the Kray twins, English gangsters who controlled much of British crime during the first half of the 1960s. Daltrey insists that he was the band member responsible for the Who's inroads into film production: the auto-documentary *The Kids Are Alright* and mod fiction *Quadrophenia*. With Pete Townshend's efforts in book publishing, it appeared the Who would mature into multi-media moguls.

Daltrey, though, remains undaunted in his efforts to make the movie about the Krays. No doubt he's fired by his recent acting successes in British TV productions of *The Beggar's Opera* and Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. Could Daltrey have envisioned playing such parts ten years ago?

"Nine *months* ago I wouldn't have expected to be in *The Beggar's Opera* or *The Comedy of Errors*! But I loved it; it was *fabulous*!" he enthuses.

For all his own extra-curricular activity, Daltrey regrets Townshend's absence from music; the guitarist currently is editing for British publishing house Faber & Faber. "What he's *really* good at is writing music. He's a fabulous musician. And not just a *rock* musician; he's a musician, full stop.

"He thinks too much about it," is Daltrey's only comment on Townshend's anxieties over being a middle-aged rock 'n' roller.

"It doesn't worry me at all. But then I don't think my album *is* a rock album.

"Rock 'n' roll is best for adolescents, because it needs that whole thing of being able to make a huge fool of yourself. Which is not so easy to do when you're middle-aged."

Does that explain why the last Who records were so bad?

"It got more and more difficult as we got weaker and weaker producers. A group like the Who needs a producer who's also a musician, and not only a musician of similar ability, but who's actually better.

"Pete blames himself for the last album, because he thought the songs weren't up to it. But I thought the *performances* weren't up to it. If we'd have gone into the studio as four individuals, we'd have come up with something.

"But Pete is The Seeker; he's searching all the time. You can't knock it, really; he's come up with at least two works of genius, *Tommy* and *Who's Next*.

"You know, I have a funny feeling we might still get back together at some stage. Who knows? Only time will tell."

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touched up for promotional appearances in support of his album, a record that glows with a vitality almost entirely absent from the last Who records.

Very much a man of mainstream influences—his principal musical input these days comes from British radio, and his favorite recent acts are Big Country and the Alarm—Daltrey wanted to make an album of direct pop songs, with synthesizers and guitars equally dominant, and rhythm supplied by a drum machine. When this project failed to get off the ground, Daltrey hooked up with Soft Cell producer Mike Thorne, who convinced him to scrap the drum machines and synthesizer emphasis. Instead, Thorne enlisted impeccable guitarist Chris Spedding and New York session drummer Alan Schwartzberg; Daltrey himself came up with bassist Norman Watt-Roy and keyboards player Mickey Gallagher, both alumni of Ian Dury's Blockheads. These were augmented by a number of horn and string players, and Daltrey himself on harmonica—a clue to the record's bluesy feel. With Spedding and Schwartzberg replaced by Johnny Turnbull (another ex-Blockhead) and Charley Morgan respectively, plus saxophonist Gary Barnacle, Daltrey swears he'll be on the road a year from now.

His own function, Daltrey has decided, is to be an interpreter of music. One of the reasons, he believes, for the present decline in musical standards—for which he throws much blame on the racing tastes of the British music press—is down to the insistence of new acts on writing all their own material.

"That's why I think it's great that someone like Paul Young has come up," comments Daltrey. "I hope on his second album he doesn't fall into the trap of thinking he has to write all his own stuff."

Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart's "Somebody Told Me" and Bryan Ferry's "Going Strong" are among the songs covered on Daltrey's album. In fact it was on the Ferry song that the singer felt he most perfectly achieved a sound he was seeking: "I wanted to try and get a kind of 40s feel, with saxes and clarinets like Glenn Miller had. But I wanted to mix it with a modern sound. That's the kind of area I'm going to be working in on my next album. I really felt that kind of mood suits me."

Parting Should Be Painless was completed last September. Daltrey claims, however, that his British record company was in no hurry to release the record. "They were better in America, but in England it was hopeless; they didn't even want to know that I'd done an album, just because I'm not Flavor Of The Month.

"But *I'm* proud of this LP. I've tried to do things I've never done before, like

ROGER DALTREY

WHO'S LEFT: LIGHT AND LIFE AFTER A NOT-SO-PAINLESS PARTING

CHRIS SALEWICZ

EBET ROBERTS

Multi-media wiz Daltrey's new LP reveals unsuspected vocal versatility.

"Of course the title of my new album refers to the Who split," Roger Daltrey briskly explains, clear eyes gleaming cheerily, about *Parting Should Be Painless*, his first LP in seven years.

"And *yes*, parting *should* be painless—but we all know it never is. In fact," he considers, "the last five years of the Who were pretty painful and miserable for me. The song 'Parting Should Be Painless' definitely refers to my relationship with Pete Townshend. The other songs on the album represent feelings I've had over the last five years, the kind of feelings you might have if you're stuck away in a hotel room somewhere in the middle of America. I know people always find it hard to believe, but just because you're the biggest box-office draw in America doesn't mean you don't sometimes feel incredibly lonely and introverted."

Why does the album feel so positive and warm?

"It's the warmth of me. I've always had this dual character: I can be really warm towards someone one minute, and ice-cold the next. But I know that warmth isn't there on the last Who records—I felt really frustrated making them.

"But I'm sorry that the Who is finished, because as far as I was concerned, it wasn't just a rock group; it was a vehicle for presenting all sorts of work to the public. I tried to push it into films and various other areas. And from that point of view it's a pity it's over; it offers such fabulous opportunities." Daltrey still speaks of the group in the present tense, like someone not yet accustomed to a recent death. Indeed, Pete Townshend's firm disassociation from the Who last December came only ten days after Daltrey had announced the band was alive, appearances to the contrary.

"It was Pete who announced he didn't want to be part of the Who anymore," the singer says. "He said he couldn't write songs for the group any longer. But I think Pete is very confused. It's quite understandable that he might feel down about the group after a nine-week tour of America, but he should have given it more time. It seems to me that when you're trying to swing through the trees, it's not a good idea to cut your arms off.

"I don't want to be bitchy. Of course I want Pete to be happy, but the fact that he felt he couldn't write songs for the next Who LP shouldn't mean that we have to split up. The Who is a *group*; together we could have come up with the songs, even if it was only down to recording a set of rock 'n' roll classics (which was discussed at one point). In fact, maybe we *needed* to do an album *without* his songs.

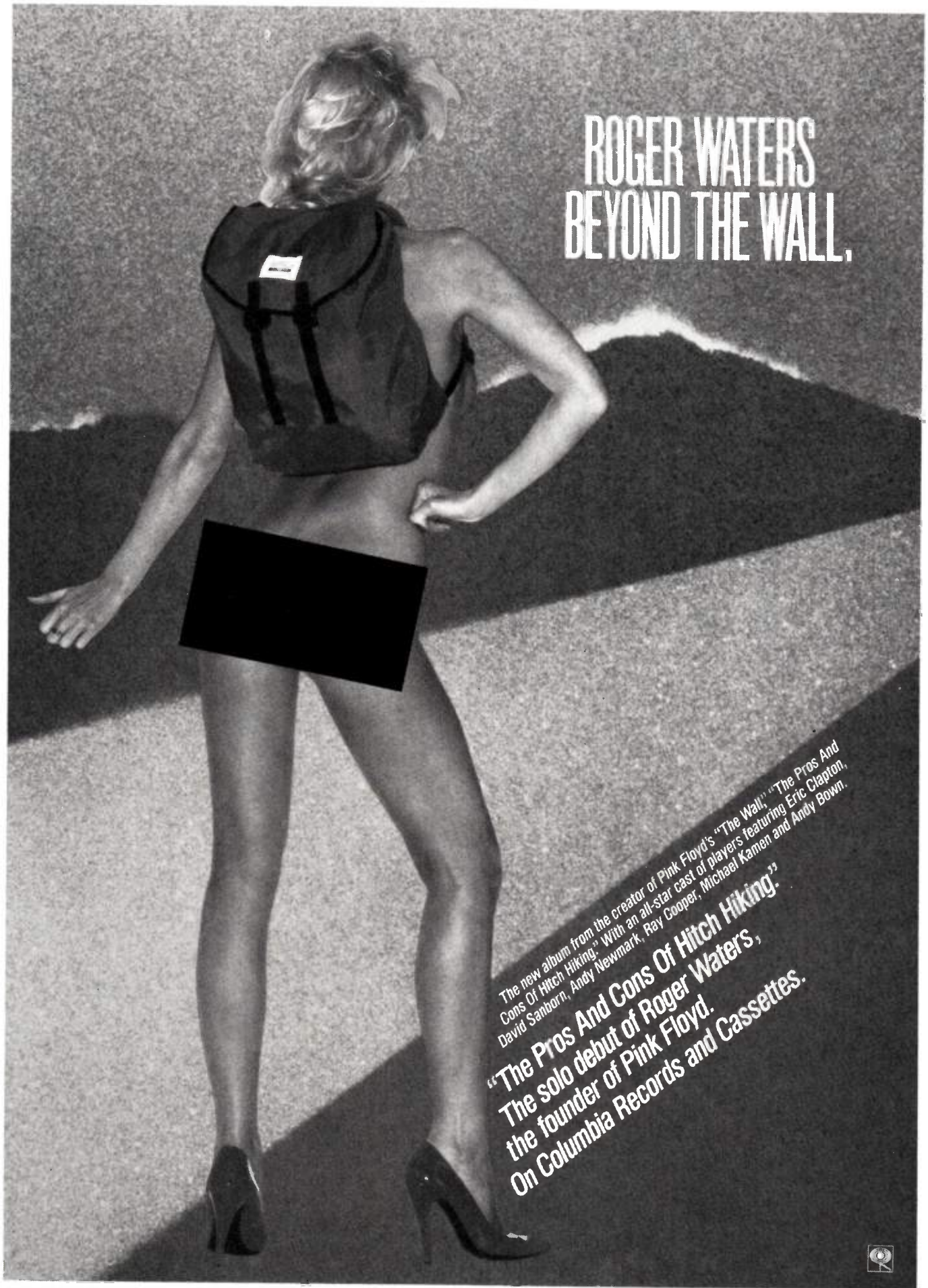
"I feel his reasons for leaving the Who don't really hold water. The real reason, I think, was not that he couldn't come up with the songs but that he just didn't want to play with us any longer. He was bored.

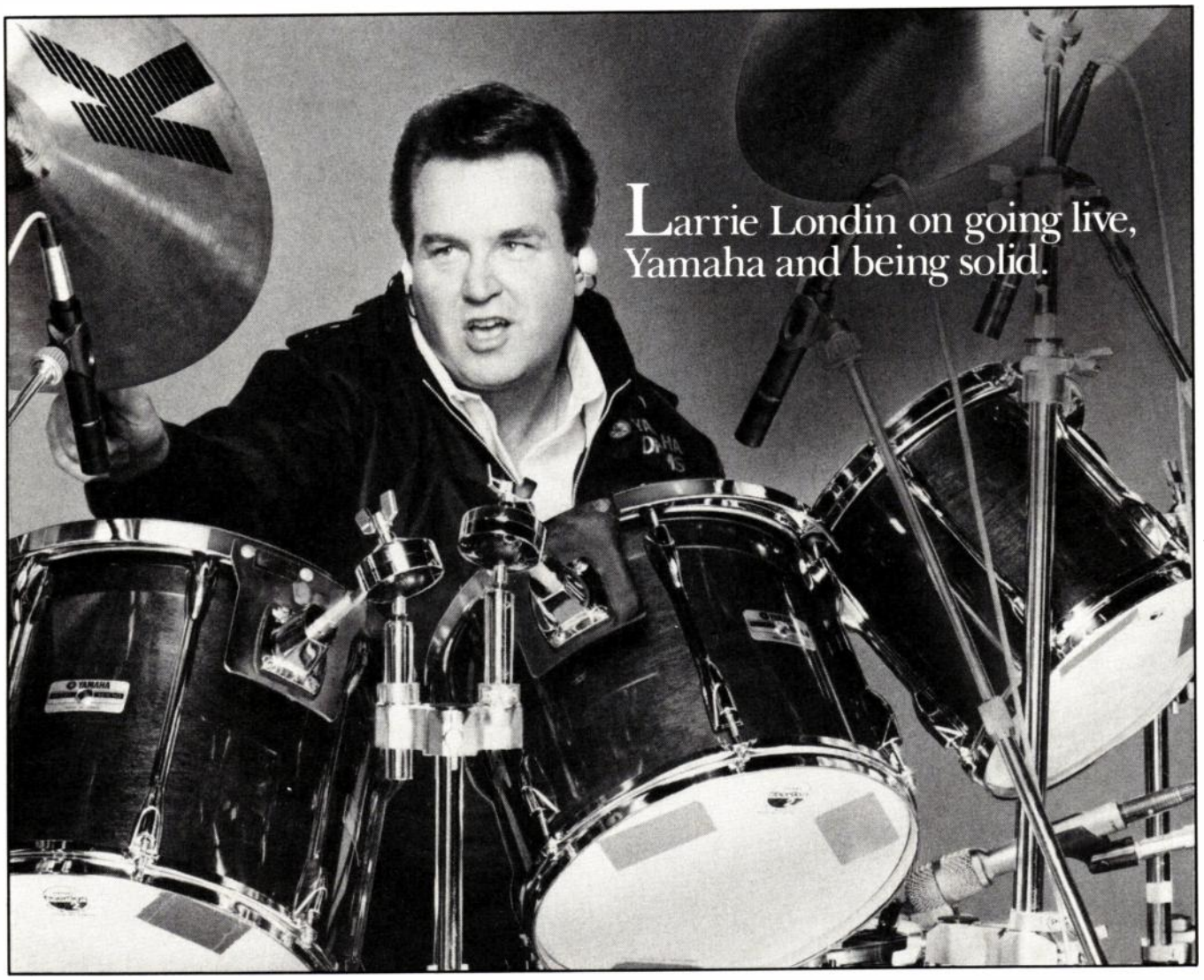
"Mind you, after seeing him when he was going through his drug phase a couple of years ago, he looks incredible now. So just saving his life might be a good enough reason for ending the Who."

For Daltrey, the Who made their one fatal error when they replaced Keith Moon with Kenney Jones: "As far as being the group that played 'My Generation' and 'Won't Get Fooled Again,' it was a big mistake not to have ended that when Keith died. But instead we tried to remain the same kind of band that we'd been.

"At that point we should have started throwing various ideas at the wall, and come up with something new and different. Everything was open to us in the way of experimentation, but instead we closed all the doors by getting in a replacement drummer."

Notwithstanding Daltrey's mourning the end of the Who, he seems fresh and expansive, sitting, four days after his thirty-ninth birthday, in his management's office in Soho, London. Light-colored garb emphasizes his tanned, fit appearance. The swept back, brightly blond hair has been trimmed and





"When I go live, I use a larger set-up with double bass drums. It's more demanding than playing in a studio because I have to play harder. I make more demands from the drums volume-wise. When I'm looking for drums to play onstage, I'm looking for volume and tone. You have to do a lot of preparation when you play live because it's much *heavier* playing, depending on the artist."

"When it comes to sound, I'm a real low end freak. I tune the bottom head down, and when you do that live, you usually lose the clarity. Yamahas sound different, you can get a lower sound — even with a tighter tension. If you play with a lighter touch, you can still get that low end; it just seems to be built into the drum. I don't know if it's the wood they pick, or the way they bead the top of the drum where the head sits, but there's a warmth you don't get anywhere else. It's kinda like my wife, Yamahas look great, they feel great and they get better with age."

"The hardware holds up unbelievably well too. When you're out on the road for weeks, you usually have a lot of things getting stripped because a bunch of guys are tightening them down. But I haven't had any problems."

"When I'm trying to get a nice solid backbeat on the snare drum, I hit the rim and the center of the drum at the same time. That way, I'm getting a nice full sound and power behind the impact. It takes the same kind of finesse and control to hit a hard stroke as it does for a soft stroke. And if you have both of those, you know exactly what you want to get out of that drum. And a drum can only give you so much volume — after that, you're only wasting energy.

"A lot of times, people think power means bashing on the drums. I think of my power as trying to be *solid*. Trying to be definite about what I'm playing. If I'm sure about what I'm playing — even if it's a mistake — the band is gonna be going with *me*."

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brothers is, as some have suggested, a reaction against fusion and he answers, "We grew up playing fusion. We're not playing this music because we're reacting against fusion. We're playing this music because it's harder to play than fusion. The way my mind works, I'm gonna play whatever is the most difficult music to play, intellectually and physically."

So did Branford then head off to Berklee with the aim of becoming a guardian of the tradition? Not quite. "I went there to be an arranger and composer; I was trying to be the next Quincy Jones. I wanted to go to L.A., get into the pop world and all that stuff."

The first Quincy Jones, as you may know, started as a jazz musician and spent several years paying dues before crossing over. Branford Marsalis was looking for a faster route to the big time, but he got sidetracked and ended up paying dues and not crossing over. Jazz history works in mysterious ways.

It was brother Wynton, who had landed a job in the celebrated training academy known as Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, who was the catalyst. "I had never heard Art Blakey," Branford recalls. "My father has all these records, but Wynton and I just used to pick out the Art Blakey albums and laugh at the cover of *Moanin*—'Ha, ha, look at him, he ain't got no hair on his head.'

"When Wynton called up to tell me he was working with Art Blakey, I said, 'Who?' He said, 'Remember that guy whose album cover we used to pick up all the time and laugh at?' I went to see Wynton play with Blakey when they came to Boston and I just went, *'Wow!'*

"That's when I decided I wanted to play jazz. As soon as I told my father I was thinking about playing, he sent me a pile of tapes, and I started doing my homework."

Branford, whose main instrument at the time was alto, was a quick study. Within two years of his Blakey epiphany he was playing alongside his brother in the Jazz Messengers. Prior to that he had a four-month stint with Clark Terry's band (which he prepared for by learning Johnny Hodges' solos off a Duke Ellington album) and a few days with Lionel Hampton, his first gig on tenor.

After working together for a few months with Blakey, the Marsalis brothers, with Branford now concentrating on tenor and soprano, left together in 1982 to form a quintet. Actually, of course, it's Wynton's quintet, but Branford maintains that playing second banana to his younger brother is in no way frustrating. What is frustrating to him, he says, is the lack of recognition given to the other two charter members of the group, Kenny Kirkland ("His harmonic conception is unparalleled; he's one of the most powerful pianists I've ever played with") and Jeff Watts ("One of the few drummers I know who thinks in a band context rather than just in drum context; there are a lot of good drummers, but they're not Jeff Watts").

The Wynton Marsalis Quintet, seemingly everybody's favorite new/old breed ensemble, clearly derives most of its inspiration from Miles Davis' classic mid-60s quintet, and Branford readily acknowledges Wayne Shorter, the saxophonist in that group, as a primary role model. So it was appropriate that when Herbie Hancock last year organized a new edition of VSOP, which is essentially a re-creation of that memorable band, he recruited both brothers. And, although Miles' music sounds very different now than it did in the mid-60s, it is somehow not surprising that he in turn recruited Branford to play on his new album. Jazz history works in mysterious but strangely logical ways.

"It was an honor to be playing with Miles," Branford says of the session. Yes, but what was the music like? "It was pretty much the stuff I used to play in high school. It was, you know, vamp music. But it was good. I definitely had fun."

Branford Marsalis is, obviously, an extremely *adaptable* musician. Is this any way to develop a distinctive musical

continued on page 30

BRANFORD MARSALIS

FAMILY FORTUNE: THE MYSTERIOUS MAKING OF A NEW JAZZ TRADITIONALIST

PETER KEEPNEWS

The last few years have seen the emergence of a new/old breed of jazz musician. If the typical young jazzman of the 60s was intent on smashing icons and pursuing freedom at all costs, and his counterpart in the 70s was mostly interested in plugging in and fusing genres, young players today are more likely to be into studying, respecting and preserving the jazz tradition—if not necessarily all the way back to Louis Armstrong, certainly a lot farther back than this morning. It's no longer as important to play something that's never been played before as it is to build something on the foundation that's already there.

The latest member of the new/old breed to light a fire in the hearts of jazz purists is twenty-three-year-old tenor and soprano saxophonist Branford Marsalis, whose debut album, *Scenes In The City*, has garnered near-unanimous huzzahs (one reviewer expressed a mild reservation or two, but then again he didn't even know that "No Backstage Pass" was a blues). Branford's credentials are, of course, solid: he is the son of the respected New Orleans pianist Ellis Marsalis and the older brother of that trumpet player who won those Grammys.

Ask him what it was like growing up in a jazz family in New Orleans, steeped in jazz sounds and jazz lore, and he answers, "Some people have the idea that me and Wynton listened to jazz all the time when we were growing up. But we were watching *The Flintstones* like everybody else, playing football and basketball and getting into fights. We listened to some jazz and played tunes with our father once a month or something, but our parents never forced it on us. I never liked jazz until I was nineteen."

What?

"I ought to clarify that," he smiles. "I wasn't interested in *playing jazz for a living* until I was nineteen. I liked jazz, but I didn't like it enough to want to play it."

Ask him if the music of the Marsalis

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Branford's adaptable tenor helps fuel the Wynton Marsalis Quintet.

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Ranking Roger, the other Beatnik turned General Public. "But I think with us and the Beat it was because half of the band wanted to work, and the other half of the band didn't. Half of the band wanted to tour and the other half just wanted to stay home. In a way it was good when we split, because it was just when the apple was starting to turn bad."

A non-stop U.S. touring schedule helped push the Beat over the edge. "After a while, I just started to get numb," Roger says. "I knew every stage move and it became half-hearted."

Roger and Wakeling lost no time after the Beat split in forming a new band. They recruited bassist Horace Panter, better known as Sir Horace Gentleman of the Specials; and two Dexy's Midnight Runners vets, keyboard player Micky Billingham and drummer Stoker (Andy Growcott). Former Clash guitarist Mick Jones helps out on the band's debut album, and may tour with General Public, but he is *not*, contrary to rumor, a full-fledged member. "He refused to dye his hair blond as Wakeling requested," the band's tongue-in-cheek bio explains.

Personnel aside, General Public seems to be carrying on where the Beat left off. The new band's first, self-titled single has the social awareness and recognizable amalgam of rock, reggae, and pop-flavored arrangements that characterized the Beat, but with a harder edge that both Wakeling and Roger feel the Beat had lost by the last LP.

Part of that harder edge is reflected in General Public's look: the band has, for now, adopted fairly paramilitary jumpsuits to present a unified visual front.

"The effect really was more for our own benefit than the audience's," Wakeling says. "It's almost like a ceremony, I suppose, and it makes you think in unison, which is probably just as important. You tend to start doing things for the common good without having to be reminded."

Musically, General Public is "getting closer to what we want to say," Wakeling notes, "but what we're wanting to say is starting to get a bit more complicated. On the early Beat records it's dead easy to tell what's a love song and what's a political tirade. It's not as easy to tell now, which I prefer."

Wakeling and Roger are both passionately involved in socio-political issues. The Beat, and now General Public, have done benefit concerts and albums for such causes as CND, unemployment and racial unity. The articulate Wakeling is not just a sunny blond exterior.

"I care more now because, let's face it, I'm even more pessimistic. God knows I didn't have much hope a few years ago." He laughs. "I have even less hope now! I don't know...it still looks so nice in the mornings, you know, the sun and the trees and stuff. Then you go downstairs, have breakfast and read the newspaper and you want to cry or go and hide in bed again." He laughs again—always a cheery laugh.

"I think mine and Roger's lives have been wonderful the last three or four years. That 's why I always hate it when I see pop groups misbehaving. I think they're already lucky, there's no need to show off about it. You see them throwing drinks about in hotels and stuff. I hate it."

Wakeling is justifiably proud of his past. The English Beat emerged in late 1979 as part of the 2-Tone scene—a clutch of British bands preaching cultural blend, and not just of music.

Wakeling feels 2-Tone was one of the few instances of pop music spreading past the confines of radios and jukeboxes. "All of a sudden something fairly important, at least in England at that time, was being said socially about how black and white people should be able to find it dead easy to live with one another. There was such a big upswing of Nazi and right-wing movements, things like the National Front, that 2-Tone ended up being the opposition—and it won! That was the proudest moment, the fact that being in the Beat had an effect outside of music as well."

No, Wakeling doesn't plan to run for office; "even the most ardent Socialist, if he gets a load of power, is going to start thinking a lot of himself." Then again, he doesn't need to—not as long as he already has a forum. John Doe, meet General Public. M

GENERAL PUBLIC

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Ranking Roger and Dave Wakeling, champions of the public's right to hear.

TWO 2-TONERS DECIDE TO BEAT IT AND SHARPEN A HARDER EDGE

KAREN SCHLOSBERG

"No entry to the general public," blare the signs posted on gates outside London's Houses of Parliament. Dave Wakeling had never noticed them until he marched past as part of a CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) demonstration protesting the arrival of U.S. cruise missiles in Britain.

"I was in this very sour political mood," he laughs, "and I thought, 'Yes, that just about sums it up! We're not allowed in the forecourts and we're not allowed any say in what happens in this country, either.'"

The phrase "general public" stuck in Wakeling's mind, especially as the former singer/songwriter/guitarist of the (English) Beat was shopping for a name for his new band.

"I kept hearing it on the news, the different ways it gets used. Most often it's by politicians making excuses. They blame the general public, kind of like in Gil Scott-Heron's 'Mandate My Ass.' As soon as they're asked three tricky questions and they haven't got an answer, they start blubbering stuff about it's what the general public wants.

"Then there started to be loads and loads of stuff about Orwell, it being 1984, and I thought there was another subtle twist to it: you could look at General Public as being one person, as being the dictator. He could be Big Brother."

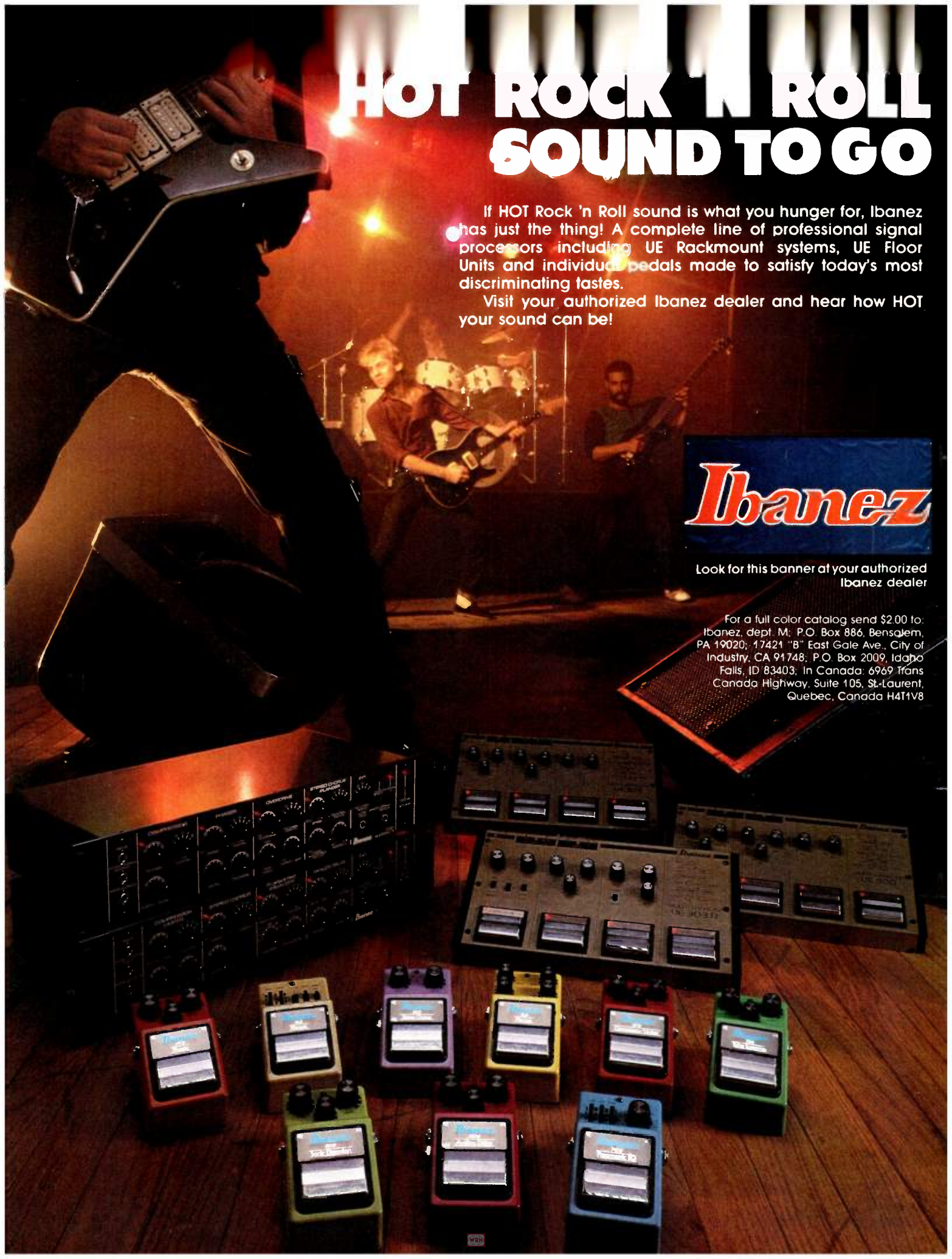
What finally convinced Wakeling to christen his group General Public was the term's ubiquity. "People kept saying, 'I wonder why no one else has called themselves that?' You know you've got a good name when people say that to you. They did that to us with the Beat as well." He pauses, then laughs. "Little did we know somebody in Los Angeles did!"

Now, of course, the Los Angeles Beat has the field to itself. The English Beat split up last July, after four years and three albums established them as one of the most politically conscious and solidly musical of recent British bands.

"It wasn't very dramatic," Wakeling sighs, recalling the Beat's caesura. "It wasn't like there was a huge argument. It started to get dull and everybody noticed it. All the way through the career it seemed like it was an accident—an accident that used to go right all the time. When it became enormous hard work just to get the simplest of things done it was obvious that we'd worn our particular bit of magic out.

"I think something of the charm of the Beat was that we weren't meant to be a peer group. We were all different personalities. I think when we started we all knew there would be a limited amount of time an experiment like that could last."

"People always say 'musical differences' when they split up," adds toaster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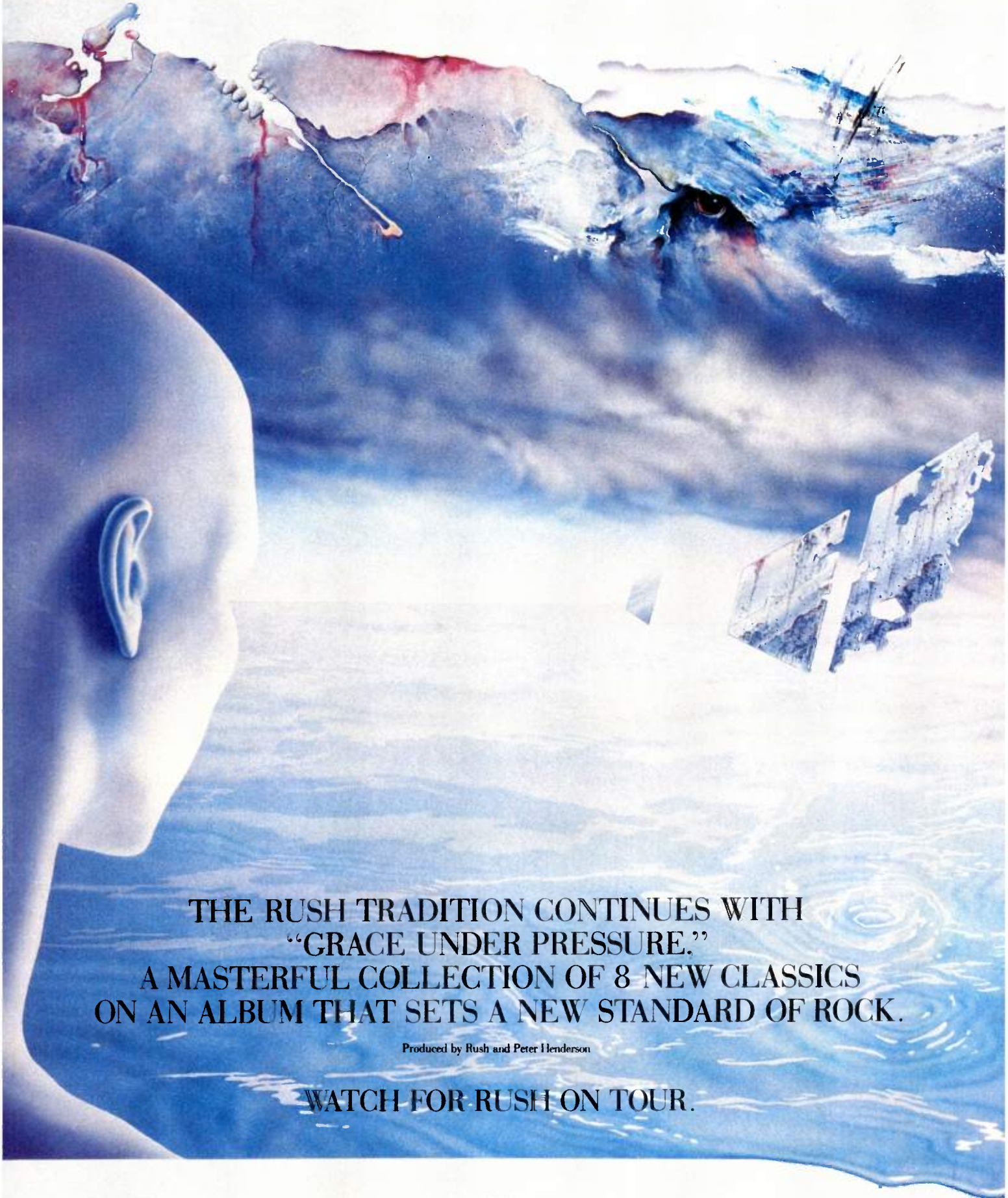
RUSH GRACE UNDER PRESSURE



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MUSIC INDUSTRY NEWS

by Scott Isler

Eine Kleine Rockmusik

When the **Rolling Stones** recorded "Let It Bleed" back in 1969, they could have had then-manager **Allen Klein** in mind. In the late 60s the controversial Klein handled affairs for both the Beatles and the Stones, and has been in and out of lawsuits ever since.

The Stones terminated their relationship with Klein in 1970. A mere fourteen years and several agreements later, the group is still doing legal battle with him. In April Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts went to court against Klein's ABKCO music publishing and record companies to obtain a "commercial divorce." They settled for, if not divorce, at least more systematic alimony payments.

The payments are royalties on early Stones recordings which Klein—to the band's chagrin—still owns. Songwriters Jagger and Richards also won the right to use their ABKCO-owned material in filmed and videotaped performances made since parting ways with the manager.

The most intriguing detail of the agreement for Stones fans concerns the maddeningly legendary "Rock and Roll Circus," a filmed 1968 bash also featuring the Who, John Lennon and Eric Clapton, among others. ABKCO has the right to issue a soundtrack album of the event—except the Stones claim they can't locate any of the tapes.

To be continued?

Foster and Louder

What do **John Cale**, the **Raybeats**, **Big Joe Turner** and **Tom Waits** have in common? No, seriously: all will hit the **Stephen Foster** songbook on an upcoming album tribute to the nineteenth-century composer, whom nobody ever claimed was the grand-daddy or even step-forefather of blues, rock 'n' roll or break dancing.

The record is the brainchild of co-producer (and *Musician* contributing editor) Brian Cullman, who found previous Foster albums "pretty monotonous in their semi-classical approach." Cullman and co-producer Margot Core certainly can't be accused of that; besides the above artists, they also have **Dr. John**, **T-Bone Burnett** and **Johnny Copeland** lined up, and are trying to get **Randy Newman**, **William S. Burroughs** (croaking "Massa's In De Cold, Cold Ground" accompanied by the Raybeats), and **Lester Bowie**. Seriously.

The record will be out on Ze/Island by Christmas.

Hobbies of the Stars

Edison Lighthouse members David Tewes and Brian Huggins have been accused in London of running a lucrative sideline: cassette counterfeiting. The British Phonographic Industry uncovered the setup in March while executing search-and-seize orders as part of its anti-piracy campaign. The BPI also fingered a third partner, Colin Perry, in the Kent county operation, charged with manufacturing over half a million illegal tapes since January, 1983.

Although the band still exists, Edison Lighthouse—essentially a studio outfit—peaked with its debut 45, the million-selling "Love Grows (Where My Rosemary Goes)," in 1970. Neither Tewes nor Huggins are original members. Seized counterfeit tapes included recordings by Culture Club, Eurythmics and Thompson Twins, suggesting that Tewes and Huggins may also be guilty of sour grapes, or maybe just have a wild sense of humor.

Trouble Inna Hollywood Babylon

It's tough being rich, as **Mick Fleetwood** can tell you. The drummer and manager of Fleetwood Mac filed for bankruptcy in Los Angeles in April. He claimed personal property worth $2.4 million against debts of almost $3.7 million. A good chunk of the latter is a nearly $1.5 million bank loan, plus $525,000 owed Warner Communications Inc. Fleetwood also owes Christine McVie $50,000, ex-wife Jenny Fleetwood $25,000 for child support, and Dave Mason $387.

It's tough being **Neil Young**, as Geffen Records can tell you. Young's label is suing him for a cool three million dollars in damages. Geffen charges it tried to negotiate a contract with the idiosyncratic singer/songwriter from early 1982 until November 1983, when Young announced he was through with the company. Geffen describes Young's two albums for the label, *Trans* and *Everybody's Rockin'*, as "not 'commercial' in nature and musically uncharacteristic of Young's previous records." Were they thinking of *Harvest* or *Tonight's The Night*?

Back on the East Coast, **Yoko Ono** lost a three-year-old breach of contract lawsuit brought by **Jack Douglas**, co-producer of John Lennon and Ono's *Double Fantasy* album. A jury ruled that Douglas was entitled to the royalty rate on a contract that Ono (in a separate countersuit) claimed he fraudulently switched on her. Pending a possible appeal, Douglas is now over three million dollars richer.

PHIL MARINO

A new postage stamp, to be issued by Bahrain, honors producer Chris Butler (center) for putting up with dB's Gene Holder, Peter Holsapple and Will Rigby.

Name-Calling

A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but a Boston judge has decided the name **New Edition** belongs to that band's members and not producer Maurice Starr. The group had switched from Streetwise to MCA Records only to find that—according to Starr and Streetwise—"'New Edition" is not a group but a concept ("'80's black bubblegum") practiceable by any bunch of black teenaged males."

Judge Robert Collins' March 23 decision found that "the primary significance of the mark 'New Edition' is not the music but the group." In other words, Menudo they ain't.

Another war of names is raging between **Grandmaster Flash** and Sugarhill Records. Flash and fellow Furious Fivers **Raheim** and **Kid Creole**, all of whom left the group last fall, had sued Sugarhill for five million dollars and the right to the Furious Five name. A New York judge threw out the damages claims and awarded the seceding members the rights only to the term "Grandmaster Flash." The remaining group was allowed to continue as "Grandmaster **Melle Mel** and the Furious Five." Sugarhill stated the only Furious Five record Flash ever wrote or appeared on was "Wheels Of Steel," and that Melle Mel had written, sung and rapped most of the group's hits.

continued on page 30

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THE SOUND THAT CREATES LEGENDS

Letters

HADEN'S VALUES

To elaborate more on Rafi Zabor's question (April '84), "Do left-wing revolutions work out all that well?" The United States government does not want left wing revolutionary governments to succeed and uses all its economic and military power to prevent their success. Embargoes (Cuba), CIA sabotage (Chile and Nicaragua), and support of right-wing racist and military governments like South Africa, the Philippines and El Salvador are other ways of preventing left-wing revolutions from succeeding. Nevertheless, some left-wing revolutions, like China and Cuba, have withstood U.S. government opposition.

Our discussion about the rock and pop world was omitted due to space limitations. It's important to me that the people who read *Musician* know of my ongoing anger about the values of opulence and extravagance that superstars teach by example to young people. The recent videos which depict violence and degrade women particularly offend me. It's very sad that these shallow values are the best this country's popular artists have to offer.

I want to thank Rafi Zabor. We need more people like him in this world.
Charlie Haden
Pacific Palisades, CA

When I read your article on Charlie Haden I became re-committed. This proves that real people with real talent can make it and be heard. Thank you Charlie for hangin' in.
Bruce Bouck

The divine spark in Charlie Haden which enables him to bring out the best in fellow musicians has also brought out the best in Rafi Zabor. Zabor's interview with Haden is nonpareil and can move one to think, to reconsider, to listen again and even to tears. It is like looking into a kaleidoscope and seeing *all* the colors.
Kris Larson
E. Machias, ME

Unfortunately, I read the latest issue right after dinner. Rafi Zabor's endless, incomprehensible verbiage clogging up his interview with Charlie Haden was bad enough. But referring to Herbie Hancock as an "appliance" turned my stomach, and revealed Zabor as the *real* trendoid, his heart closed off as bad as Reagan's. People all over the third world love and *dance* to Herbie, having the fun Charlie was describing. You'd rather worship the past.
Chris Kathman
Los Angeles, CA

GOING IN STYLE

I would like to applaud Vic Garbarini and *Musician* for the Paul Weller interview. Vic is the first interviewer to ask Weller intelligent and in-depth questions about his beliefs, the past with the Jam, and the future with Style Council. Many of us related to Weller's youth, exuberance, passion and songwriting with the legendary Jam, even if we were on these shores. With Style Council, Weller keeps us believing in the music while he expands into new areas. Maybe now America will wake up and discover one of the most important gifts to music we've ever had.
Richard Farquhar
Westport, CT

LAURIE'S DAY

Thanks so much for the insightful cover story on Laurie Anderson (April 1984); it's great to see her getting the attention and respect she deserves. I love the attention you devote to lesser-known, more innovative artists, introducing them to us in an informative manner without making them look like gods or kooks. Keep up the great work!
Scott A. Ronan
Columbus, OH

PULL THE PLUG ON AC/DC

I love heavy metal and wish you'd print more. I didn't even read half the AC/DC article because the writer [Charles M. Young] poked fun at God. He would feel like a fool if he found out God loves HM. He belittled His intelligence (God has more sense than to want Ronald Reagan in a band). He would want to die if God had long golden hair and knew more about rock 'n' roll than he did. God knows and created everything...including rock 'n' roll. Rock on!
Tink Cooper
Murfreesboro, TN

AC/DC has to be kidding. Here they are setting themselves up as *the* rock 'n' roll band; truth is that Angus and Malcolm Young were still peeing in their knickers and choking down mummy's mush when the real champions of this art form (i.e. Berry, Haley, Holly, Little Richard) had already changed the course of musical history. These clowns have been cranking out the same drivel for eight years, and in another eight years it'll be so much recycled vinyl and cardboard. And the world will be so much the better.
James F. McIntire
Boring, OR

Thank you for another fine issue (April '84). The interview with Laurie Anderson was exceptional. However, the article on Angus Young was profoundly irritating. His stylistic narrowmindedness has nothing to do with rock 'n' roll—and very little to do with *Musician* either.
Cathy Carfagno
East Aurora, NY

POP'S QUIZ

"Pop" quiz, pardon the pun, for Jock Baird. Not to worry, though, this one's open book. Use the latest edition of *Musician*:

1. Roger Nichols also works with...
   a) Root Boy Slim & the Sex Change Band
   b) Rude Boy Slam & the Sex Change Band
   c) Root Boy Slim & the Name Change Band.

Mark Zampino
Marlborough, CT

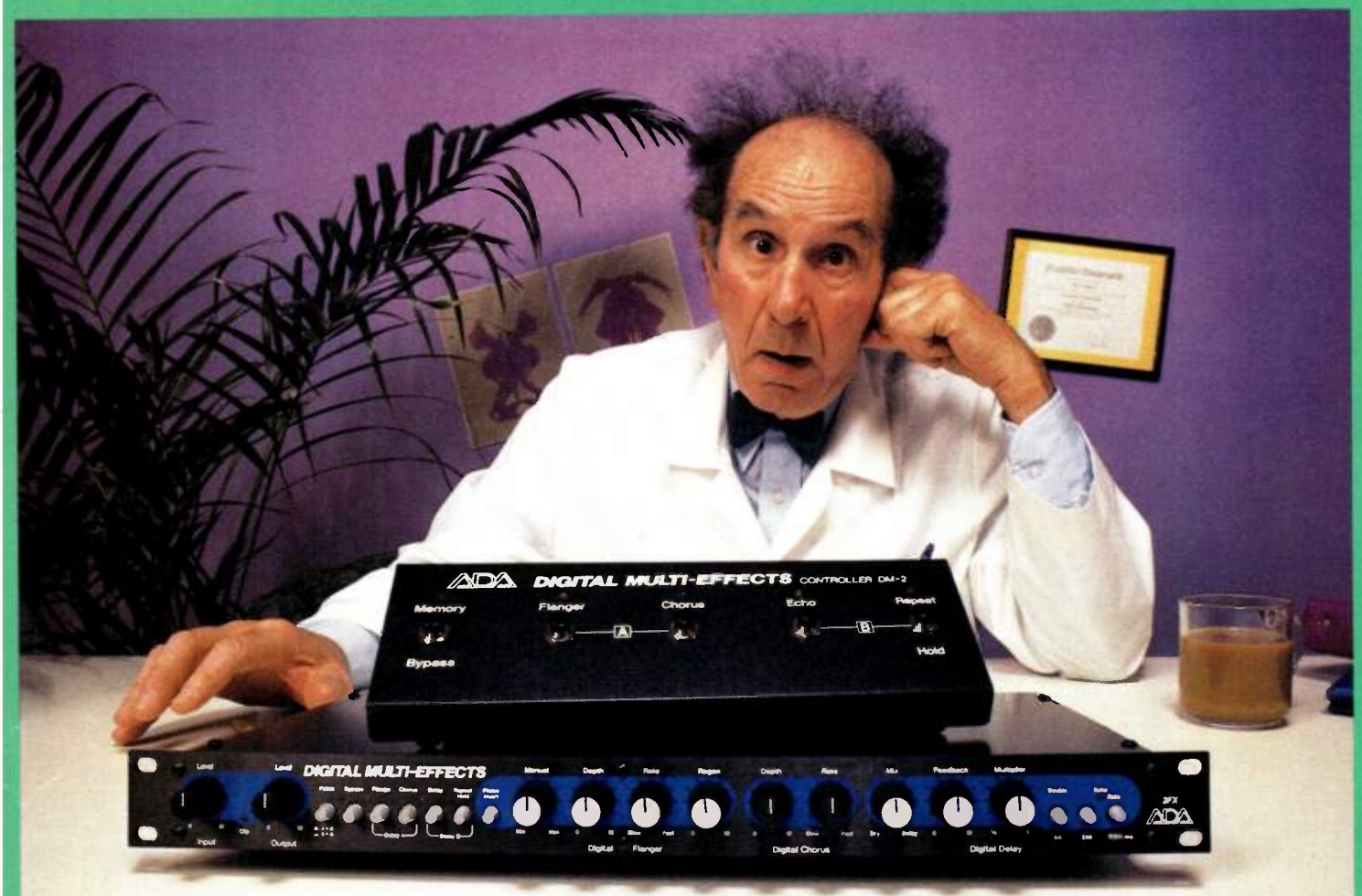
STERN REPLY

Regarding Chip Stern's reaction to David Breskin's article on Stevie Wonder (April '84): I was surprised by the letter because I enjoyed Breskin's interview and do not remember it being derogatory in any way. Mr. Breskin had to explain why the interview was shorter than most *Musician* stories; he did so in an honest way, and showed Stevie to be human like the rest of us. I didn't sense any disrespect.
Dwight Anglehart
Vancouver, BC

WHO IS GORDON BAIRD?

Look, a joke is a joke. Like April Fool's, right? At least we knew *all the employees (and owners) would yuk it up when Baird stole their jobs (and assets) in the April masthead. But the readers? Who would've thought they'd deluge us with mail about it? Some of the best:* Cut the Gordon Baird shit, okay?" — *Kevin Dammen, Fargo, ND;* "Boy am I tired." — *Gordon Baird, Los Angeles, CA;* "If you need a new job, come down to our bakery. You can stick your head in the dough and make monster cookies." — *J.W. McCullough, Dneverneverland, CO;* "Boy, I'd like to see Jann Wenner top that one." — *C. Low;* "Maybe the staff took off for Bermuda?" — *Amy Bellezza, Bronxville, NY.*

SPLIT PERSONALITY



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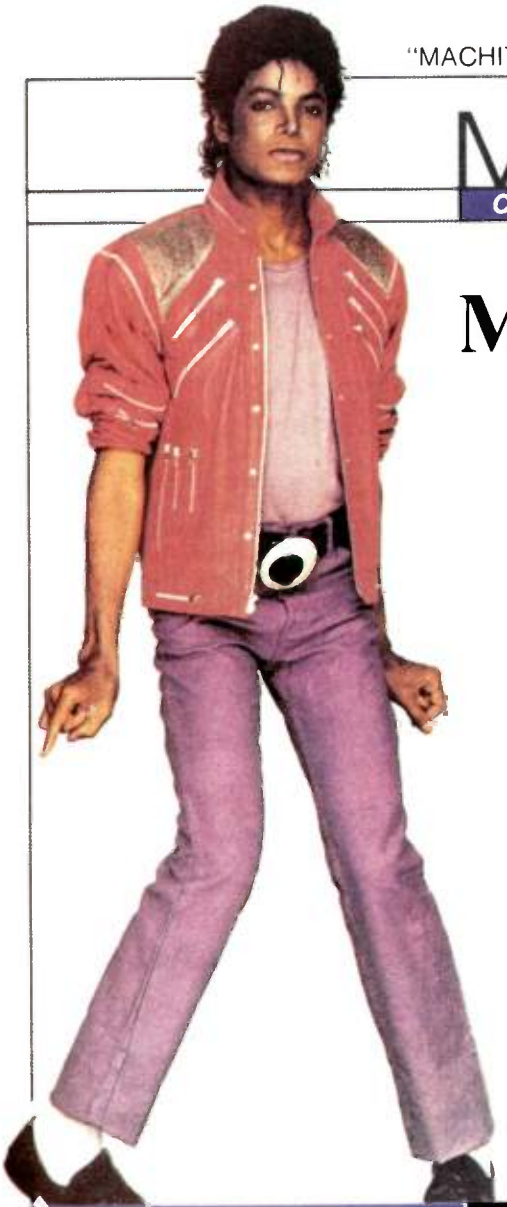

MICHAEL JACKSON

Total Victory and world domination by one of pop music's unlikeliest candidates, a young, seasoned black entertainer who broke through the gloss of Hollywood modern to echo a new generation's anxiety and angst. A behind-the-scenes look at the making of Thriller, *a pre-tour visit with the Jacksons and a look at their new LP,* Victory, *and an inquiry into the forces that shaped Michael.*

LAURA LEVINE

MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA

WORKING MUSICIAN

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