

LOS LOBOS: NORTH OF THE BOREDOM

# MUSICIAN

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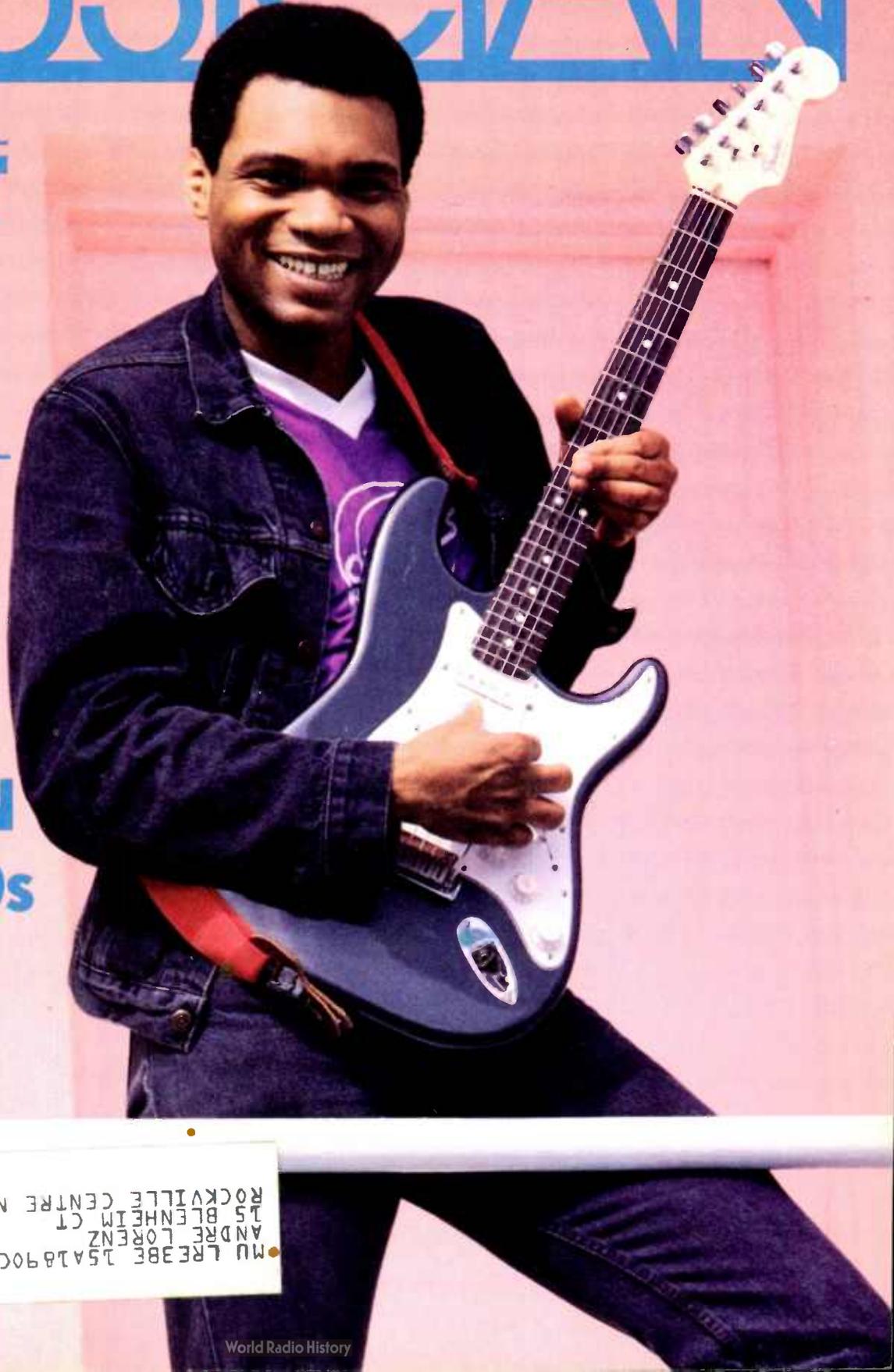
**ROBERT  
CRAY**

GUESS HE  
SHOWED  
THEM

**SIMPLY  
RED**

CAN'T BE  
SATISFIED

**VAN  
MORRISON  
STONES CDs**



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*Steve Winwood  
Multi-Instrumentalist, Vocalist, Composer*

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STEP																
TRACK	MEASURE		PATTERN		MODE											
6	106		A		15 TRACK PLAY											

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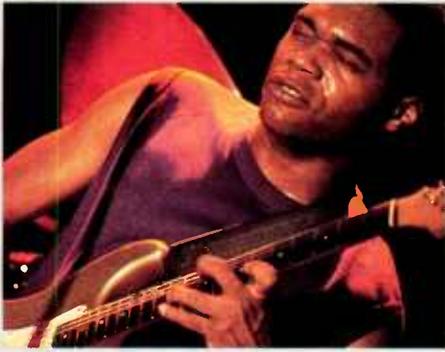
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GARY GERSHOFF/RETNA



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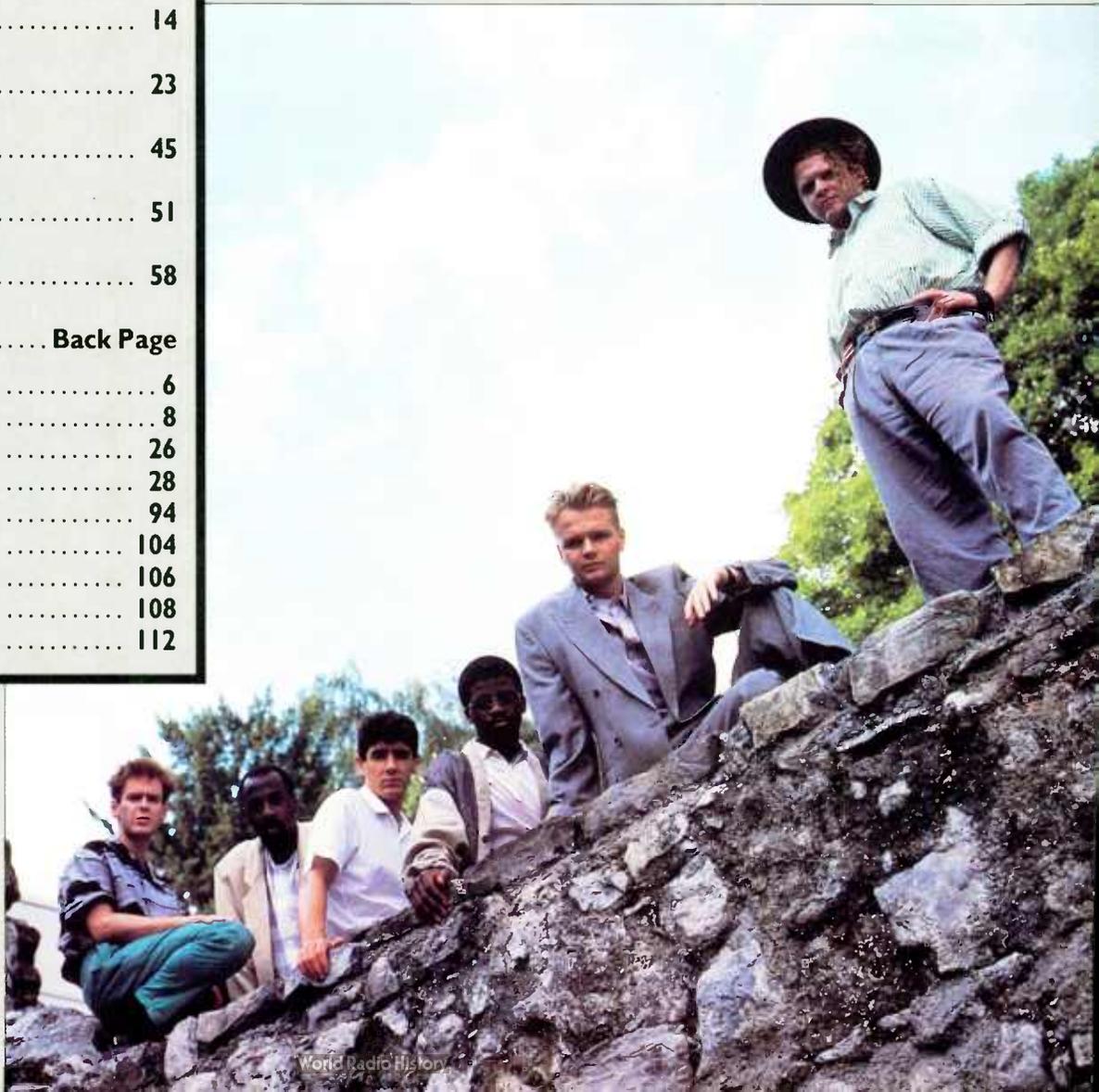


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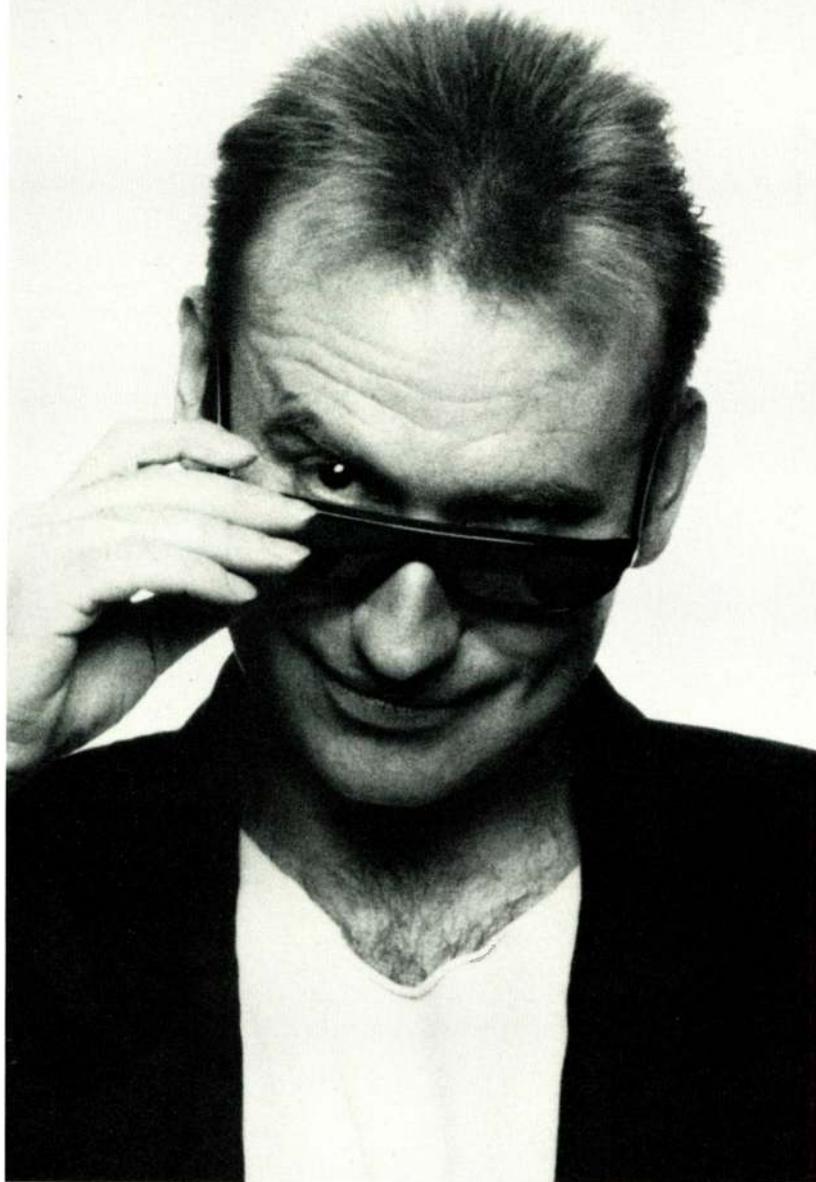
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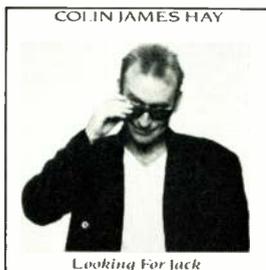
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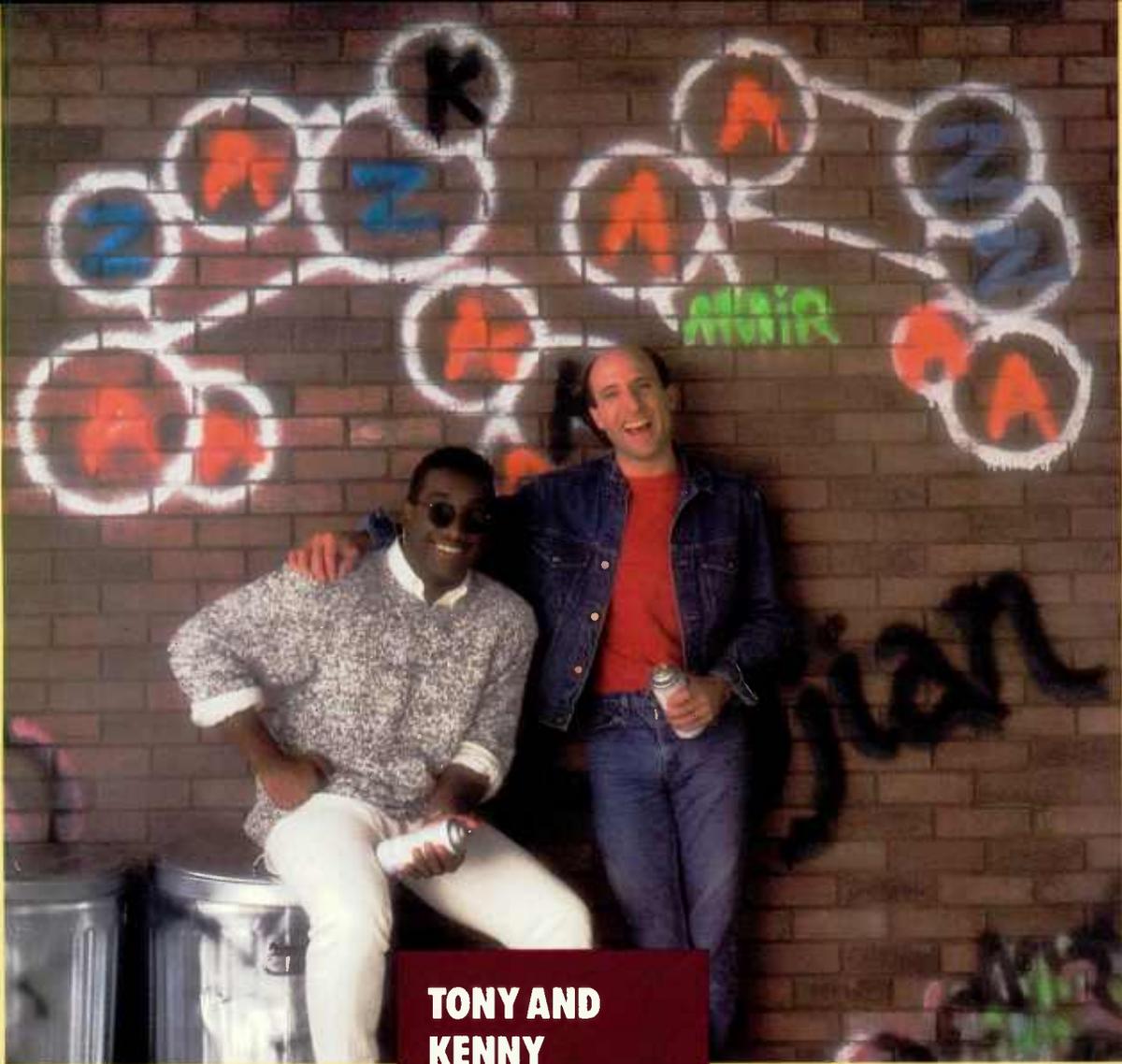
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Two of rock's most celebrated power players, Kenny Aronoff of John Cougar Mellencamp and Tony Thompson of Power Station fame, have discovered the answer.

"The only rule is that there are no rules," says Aronoff. "You have to experiment. Once I started using the new Z Power Crashes on stage I found I needed a louder and more powerful sound from my Chinas. So I went from 18" and 20" A China Boys to two 22's. Kaboom! These babies explode."

Thompson takes a similar approach, "I switch around a lot. I've been using a 22" A Ping or a 22" Z Light Power Ride on current studio projects and with my new band, The Distance. And I match them with A Quick Beat Hi Hats—the ones with the flat bottom and holes. I might use K crashes in the studio, but on tour I'll go with A's and Z's. I love the way the Z's cut through on stage. I hit hard and want my cymbals to be heard."

"Music is a series of frequency ranges. I look for the one that isn't being saturated, so my cymbals stick out. For example, recently I was in the studio and tried an A Ping Ride, then a K. But for the music I was playing, the Amir Ride really cut it. It was incredible!" says Aronoff.

"With the A's, K's, Z's, and Amirs, Zildjian's got every sound covered," adds Thompson. "And they're always creating new ones. Zildjian's been around forever, but they move with the music of the times."

"Zildjian gives me all the letters of the alphabet. I can pick and choose the ones I want to create the words, the sentences, the paragraphs, the story. The way you put your cymbals together is what makes you sound unique," concludes Aronoff.

"Zildjians are the only cymbals for any drummer that's got a really good ear. I know, I've tried them all. But Zildjian's definitely happening," says Thompson.

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World Radio History

## Soda Popped

In Charles M. Young's recent "Soda Pop" essay he wrote that 1986 was "a watershed year...a year in jingles...

[whereas before] no corporation interested in respectability was willing to associate with rock stars." Nice try. As a fan of pop music and a member of the Long Ryders I would like to point out I have audio or print advertisements of musicians endorsing non-musical items beginning with a late-50s tape of Little Richard for Royal Crown Hairdressing. Other memorable jingles from rock's pre-1986 Dark Ages include Otis Redding, Ray Charles, Jan & Dean, the Bee-Gees, the Easybeats and the Who for

family men now. We never said we were perfect. We said we were hungry.

*Sid Griffin  
Louisville, KY*

**Primitive? Contemptible? Puds?** Mr. Young has certainly worked up a bellyfull of bile over a seemingly inconsequential band. After panning his sights across such fearsome big game as Glenn Frey, Phil Collins and Lou Reed he locks aim on (pause)...the Long Ryders? The same Long Ryders who sold 60,000 copies of their latest LP while grinding their way through 400- and 500-seat clubs across the country? Not much of a trophy to hang in the study, Charles.

us all these years?

*Karen Gunderson  
Seattle, WA*

In a time when we are faced with a seemingly unending stream of hype and bullshit every day from the media and even our own government, it's nice to see that there's at least one rock critic that's not afraid to speak his mind.

*Russell Cole  
Arcata, CA*

*Charles M. Young replies:* According to *Before I Get Old: The Story of the Who* by Dave Marsh, Pete Townshend is now "mortified" by his Air Force ad. The undeniable point of the Miller commercial was to equate beer with "in-

As for Tom's "uniqueness," it is only fair to state that he is one of a very few people in music today that is playing, writing and recording *and* having the knowledge of what is happening with the signal all the way through the recording chain!

*Bill Montella, Jr.  
Warwick, RI*

Lest anyone think that the ex-members of Boston have exaggerated any negative aspects of their former working conditions, I would like to confirm the accuracy of everything that was said; in fact, they were being too nice! I am the drummer who played the Epic showcase with Boston mentioned on page 29.

Tom Scholz is a very intelligent person, but I felt extremely stifled in the band, as did the other members. Immediately following the Epic showcase, Tom told everyone how badly they played, and how we had hurt the band's chances of being signed. If anything, Tom was the least experienced at playing live, and it showed. I quit as a direct result of that meeting, only to find that Epic had decided to sign them anyway. I have not been sorry.

*Dave Currier  
Woburn, MA*

## On Bill & Boss

Please tell Bill Flanagan that I live a happy life without a single Springsteen album. — *Rob Johnson, Athens, GA*. When Bruce looks at his hometown, I see my hometown. — *Demeter Christakes, Sudbury, ONT*. Springsteen is not asking his audience to avoid the draft, but is balancing our information so we can make knowledgeable decisions. If Mr. Flanagan missed this obvious point, it makes me wonder how much else he's missed in thirteen years as a fan. — *Jim Kiernan, Milwaukee, WI*. What? "I hoped for more"? More than the greatest triumph since the invention of the wheel? — *Dave Edelman, Villa Park, CA*.

# LETTERS

Coca-Cola. Harmless? Mr. Young informs us cola is "brown carbonated sugar-water with flavoring." Oh. Peter Townshend, whose conscience is at least as developed as Charles Young's, did a recruiting spot for the United States Air Force in 1968, during the height of the Vietnam War, while Keith Moon was recording a spot for the U.S. Navy. The Who also sang for Great Shakes Milkshakes. The Yardbirds appeared in a print ad for Yardley Black Label fragrances.

It is worth noting both our Miller ad and Lou Reed's Honda commercial are as much commercials for the artists as they are for any product. This was an important factor to us and I know for Lou Reed as well. It was very valuable exposure.

Finally, close examination of our spot reveals no moment or point where a Long Ryder says "this product is good" and at no point is an identifiable song of ours used on the advert's soundtrack, basic tenets of Young's three relationships an artist can have with an advertiser.

Half the Long Ryders are

The Long Ryders had the chance to sign two contracts with Miller Beer. They took the first, a one-shot commercial for \$30,000. That doesn't sound like "great piles of money" to me. They did not sign the second contract, a



lucrative long-term sponsorship and endorsement deal.

The Long Ryders have yet to reach a large following but they have survived a decade on their own terms. I am certain Mr. Young can find bigger and better targets for his pointed vehemence.

*Bill Caulfield, Road Manager, The Long Ryders*

The appeal of rock music has always been rooted in a healthy suspicion of the status quo. What are we to think when our "heroes" play both sides of the fence? Multinationals and artistic integrity don't mix, Lou. Isn't that what you've been telling

tegrity," to use the Long Ryders' own word. They sang, "What you do is what you say—Miller's made the American way." Now Griffin claims what they did is not what they said, and Caulfield makes the astonishing assertion that it is more ethical to sell out for less money. This is compounding a mistake with hypocrisy and bad business sense. I invite the Long Ryders to admit they goofed, as Townshend has, and get on with their career.

## Battle for Boston

Jock Baird finally writes the Boston story that I've scoured magazine racks for and hadn't found. Let's face it, though—record companies are in the business to make money, and I can appreciate Yetnikoff's position. If I read it correctly, he did wait three years since the release of the second LP before he started to flex his corporate muscle.

It was a great story. To Tom Scholz: Thanks for the *Third Stage* and next time, get it in writing.

*Dave Hines  
Lowell, MA*

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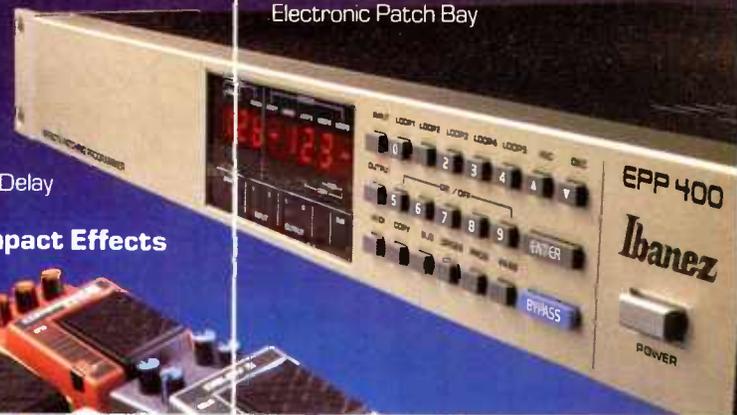
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# VAN MORRISON

BY CHRIS SALEWICZ

## QUOTATIONS FROM CHAIRMAN VAN

**I**t's always a pleasure to run into Van Morrison, that musical legend and legendarily reluctant interview subject. Finding Van in London recently, Musician decided to let his thoughts stand free of our own. To know him is to love him, but he's a hard cat to get to know.

### On His Early Career

All I wanted to do was start playing. It was all very ear-oriented stuff, it wasn't oriented along the lines of "I'm a personality, and I'm going to put myself across and wear these clothes."

When I started playing, I went down to the union and said, "I'm a professional musician, give me a card." So they gave me a card, and I began to play in various bands and get work. And that was it. But it was for the music itself, never the show, although that did enter into it. And that's really what my entrance point was, and that hasn't changed. But I think it's difficult to find a way of doing music that doesn't have all these peripheral attachments to it.

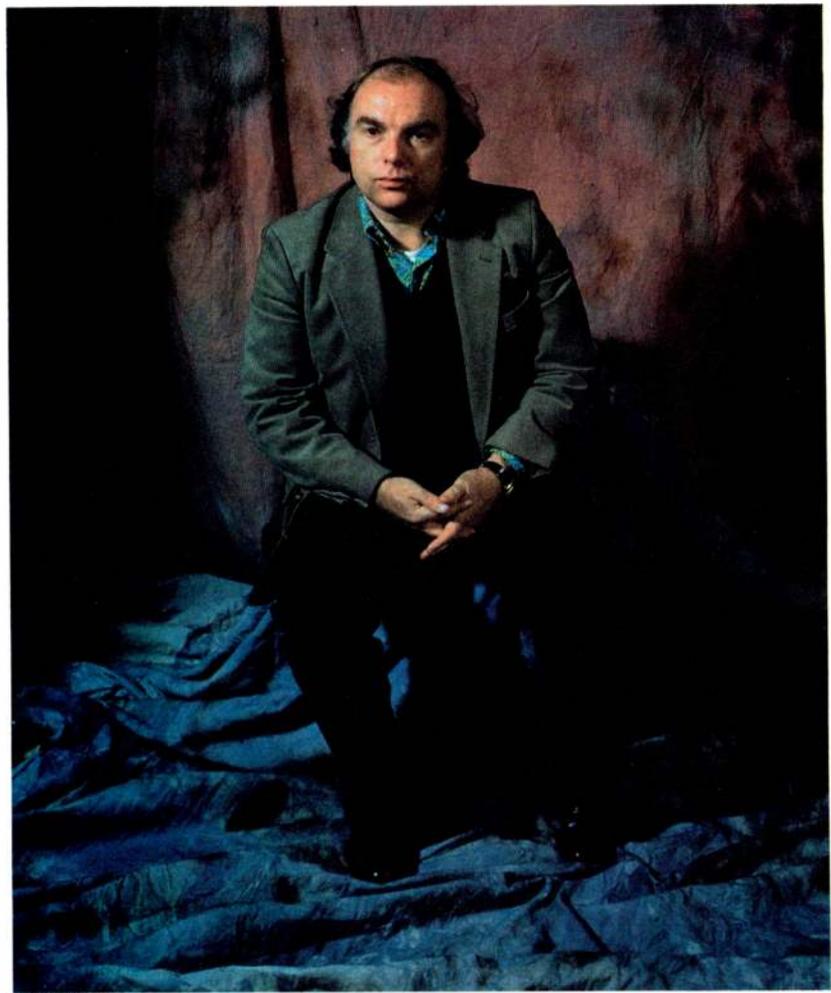
### On Moving From Them to *Astral Weeks*

Everybody around me was saying I shouldn't try to actually sing. They'd be telling me that I should be getting into feedback guitar—that's what was going on. But at that point, I wanted to do songs, I wanted to sing. And the group was into some other thing—I don't even know what it was.

So somewhere in there with Them I started to develop myself. And when it ended, it all came out. Because there was nobody to lean on, I just started working with my guitar and voice. Also, there was no one around to squash things.

### On Moving to America

I was twenty-one years old and I didn't have an idea what I was doing. I was of-



### Playing a few songs is not what it's about.

fered a contract with Phillips here (in the U.K.), but the deal was dragging on, and while I was waiting for it to be sorted out, I got an offer from this American company run by Bert Berns. So basically I didn't have a job, and I paid for myself to go over to New York. All the books say that Bert Berns paid for me to go over, but Bert Berns never paid for anything—ever.

That's basically it. It was a job, and I needed the work and the money, and so I went to New York. And one thing led to another, and I just kept working for years, and one day I suddenly realized I was living there.

### On Giving Concerts

I've always found it extremely difficult to go out and play concerts. I perform all these songs just to get to one part that might be in one or two songs. And if there's any message, it's in those mo-

ments—if there's anything that this has all been about since I recorded *Astral Weeks*. And if people are clear about what it is I'm doing, then maybe I'll just be able to get on with it.

It's a lot more difficult than you might think, to keep that concentration and focus. People wander—it's like if you're trying to meditate and clear your head, you really have to concentrate on focusing. It's the same in music: you have to concentrate very, very hard to get to that place. And when you're playing different songs and arrangements, and traveling from place to place, sometimes you're so aggravated just by the touring process that you forget what you're doing, and why you're there. If it's just about playing a few songs, then I might as well go home. Because that's not what it's about for me. Playing live is not touring. Touring is carrying a lot of bags around and taking a lot of flights, and

waiting in airports. That's what touring is, it's nothing to do with playing. I can play anywhere.

**On Jung's Theory that Artistic Growth Is Always at the Expense of Another Area of Development Within the Individual**

Where I feel this has cost me is in the personality situation, where you're expected to be a personality. You not only have to write and record, but you have to go out and sell it. Well, I'm not a salesman, and I'm very bad at selling things. If I had to do that for a living, I'd probably be completely broke. I can't sell myself. And I don't even want to. That's some-

thing that's not going to change.

**On Religion and Philosophy**

Like anybody else, I'm interested in loads of things. You name it, I'm interested in it. It doesn't mean that I say that everybody should do this. Why shouldn't I have the freedom to look into whatever I want, without people trying to block or limit me, or put out false images. My stance is clear. I'm not in any organization. I'm just me, a singer and a songwriter, and that's it. For me, the spiritual thing in a nutshell is simply being yourself. That is spirituality. It's very difficult to be yourself for most people. But in my case I have people assuming that I

have this identity that is not even me.

People keep superimposing the profession I'm in on top of me. So I have to deal with that layer constantly. And just keeping that layer off me is a tremendous load of work. Fame is not very conducive to this sort of thing, you know.

Psychologists will tell you that artists have to be in a state of despair before they can produce great work. But I don't think that: It just feels better, because you think that although you're depressed, you're going to come out of it with something.

But in my case I know it doesn't produce better work. I produce better work if I'm content. I can't create that feeling if I'm in a state of conflict.

**On Meditation**

I was doing Transcendental Meditation all my life. And I didn't know. The people who were telling me to go and do it didn't even know about meditation. I went over to the TM place, and went through the process, and said, "Is this what you're talking about? I've been doing this for years." And the reason the people were raving about it was because they'd never meditated before—they'd never stopped the mind. But I've been doing that all my life.

A lot of creative artists have to exist in that meditative state in order to pick up information. People who don't write or paint or whatever also get in that state: They get on the bus, look out the window, and they're away. You don't need a mantra to meditate.

**Favorite Author**

Brian Moore. He's originally from Belfast.

**Music That Inspires**

Mozart, Beethoven, and particularly Debussy.

**Most Stirring Poet**

Blake is the one I connect with the most. I'll be reading something of his, and I just feel some kind of affinity, that feeling of "Yeah, that's what I remember it to be like." I don't know if that comes from reincarnation, or what. And besides, I don't remember what it is that I remember. But I just know that feeling.

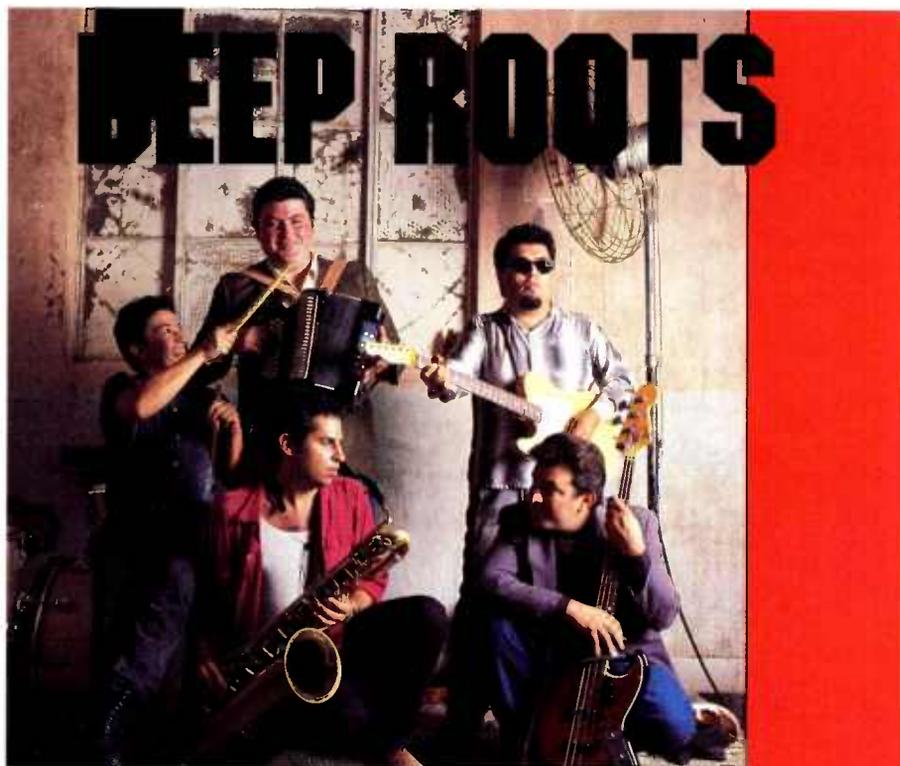
**Van Morrison Songs**

**That Achieve**

**His Spiritual Intent**

"Summertime In England," "Into The Mystic," "Listen To The Lion," "In The Garden."

*continued on page 20*



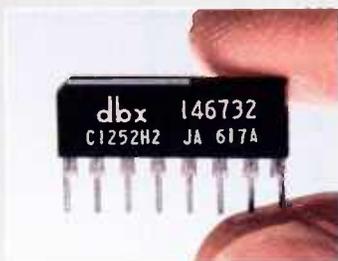
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# DON DIXON

BY LOU PAPINEAU

PRODUCER/PLAYER  
TURNS  
PLAYER/PRODUCER

I'm trying to figure out ways to be unpopular so people don't ask me to produce their records," Don Dixon smiles. Every producer should have such problems? Well, not every producer is also an accomplished songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and recording artist. The time Dixon spends working on other people's projects is time he

*Baby For A Nickel*. And his first "real" record, *Romeo At Juilliard*, is due out immediately. The thirty-five-year-old from Chatham County, North Carolina is getting used to alternating his different roles.

"You have to be real sensitive," Dixon says of producing, "particularly when you write and play and sing—to not take your ideas and *jam* them down people's throats, but to let them bounce things off you and help them figure out why they're having a problem, give them some options and let them decide which direction it's gonna be. If they've been signed in the first place based on something they already have, you don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater—which a lot of people do. I've seen bands that I *love* make completely generic records that are lost in the shuffle with all this other generic crap, with producers and engineers that are just *scratching* at the blackboard trying to make their mark instead of worrying about the music.

"It's all tied up with being happy and

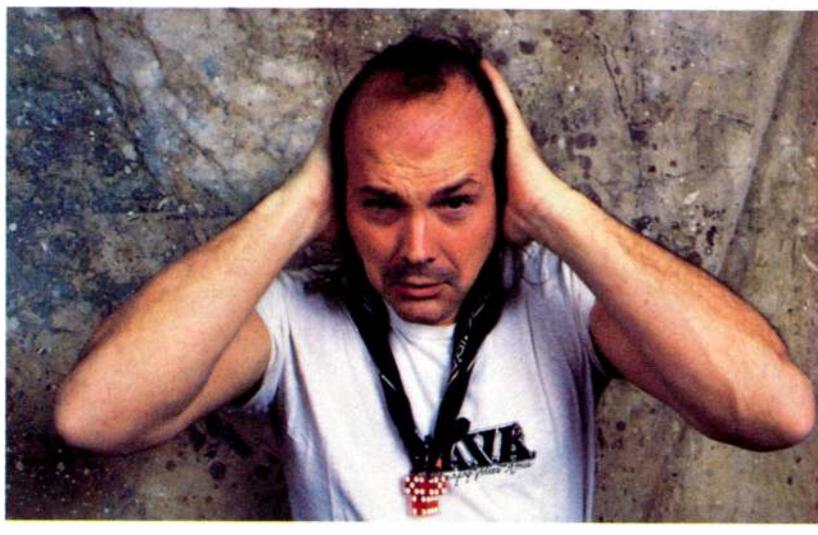
sibility. Of course, he was a musician long before he ever sat at a console. "Essentially I consider myself a bass player," Dixon says with a slight drawl. "I never had guitar aspirations much as a kid. I played guitar, but there's a certain control to the bass that appealed to my compositional sense. There were two records that I liked and learned to play bass with—*Meet The Beatles* and the first Kingsmen record that had 'Louie Louie' on it." He played bass and trombone in jazz and rock bands throughout high school and fell under the influence of Jimi Hendrix in '69. "By then I had electric guitars and fuzzboxes, so I put together your classic four-piece group, wrote songs and did Hendrix covers. Then I went to college; Arrogance got together later in '69, when I was a freshman."

The band called Arrogance—formed at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill—was Dixon's "primary means of income" for nearly fourteen years. They released a Dixon-produced and self-distributed single entitled "Black Death" in '69. Albums followed in '72 and '73—a bold move in those pre-DIY days. "There was no network like you have for independent stuff now," Dixon recalls. "It was horrible. We had to educate the clubowners to the fact that they could get human beings to come in and hear original songs."

Now it can be told: while rocking with Arrogance Dixon led a secret life. "The band played a lot but I had to make ends meet. I did as much session work as I could; I sang and played and wrote jingles, mostly local stuff, just \$100-a-pop kind of singing. We were trying to keep it as quiet as possible, 'cause we were Kansas City stars, so we didn't want to sully our image as rockers with the fact that we sang on these jingles."

Arrogance toured extensively in the East and Midwest. Through the years the band's aggressive edge yielded to "what you would refer to as folk-rock, though we were more like *Rubber Soul* than the Byrds." They signed with Vanguard and released *Rumors* in '76 (a year before the Fleetwood Mac album of the same name).

The album swiftly disappeared. The quintet got a second chance with *Suddenly*, issued by Curb/Warner Bros. in 1980. It was another frustrating experience. "The guy who produced the record (Phil Gernhard) pushed the band in the coliseum rock vein and took away some of the pop materials, the things that would've been hipper in the long



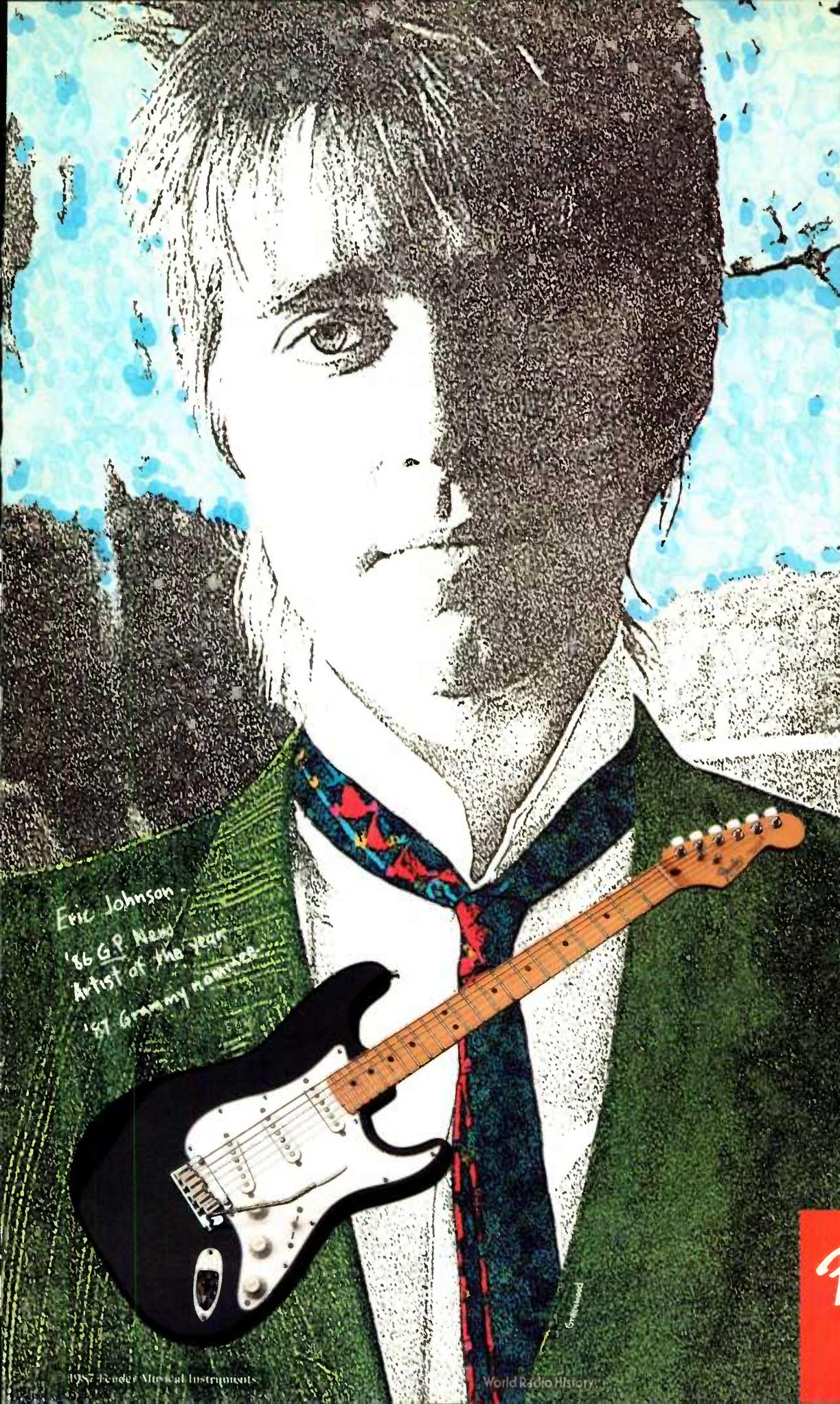
Don Dixon hears no evil.

can't spend on his own. Right now Artist Don and Producer Don are trying to balance their schedules.

*Most Of The Girls Like To Dance But Only Some Of The Boys Like To*, a collection of demos which showcase Dixon's soulful voice and offbeat, catchy songs, was released by Enigma last August. The playful, funky single "Praying Mantis" garnered AOR airplay and medium rotation on MTV. Dixon contributed a strong vocal and guitar work to "Faithless Heart," a track on the Golden Palominos' *Blast Of Silence*. *Axed My*

doing a good job and being creative and maintaining that creative energy. A lot of producers come in with a sledgehammer and think that they've been hired to be construction consultants. They go in with this idea of breaking everything apart and building it back together and I think that's absurd. The job of producing is to bring out the good elements and lay them on the table, not just take those elements and smash them into people's faces."

The bands Dixon produces are grateful to find a producer with a player's sen-



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run. 'Cause we weren't really Toto or one of those kind of bands." After touring with Triumph, Jefferson Starship and the Cars, mismanagement and the rigors of the road led to Arrogance's demise in 1983.

Temporarily burned out on performing, Dixon gave more attention to songwriting and producing. By the time Arrogance folded he had spent a lot of time in studios, picking up recording tips by observation and osmosis: "I learned by using those highly tuned instruments, the ears."

The fledgling producer got his training at "an early version of Reflection," the facility in Charlotte, North Carolina

which Dixon treats like a home away from home. "The first record I'm credited with producing—it was actually a co-production—was a 45 by a guy named Toby King. It was called 'Operator,' a top twenty soul hit in '72." But it wasn't until the release of R.E.M.'s *Murmur*, after eleven years of yeoman service on both sides of the glass, that Dixon became a *name* producer.

How did Dixon and Mitch Easter capture R.E.M.'s unorthodox sound? "We didn't mess with their arrangements a lot for a couple of reasons. One of the reasons was they were real good. There was a real organic sort of thing going on with R.E.M., the melting pot aspect of

the different guys.

"So we tried to help them highlight things with different sounds, make sure we had great performances, settle the grooves out and make it interesting. 'Cause obviously if it was just the stuff they'd been playing onstage, you'd get tired of that pretty quick in terms of a real record. You've got to supplement the fact that you're not there. That's what records are all about. You don't *have* to settle for anything. You can create the kind of aural space and environment that you want to create."

The cooperative approach Dixon utilizes enables the immediacy and spirit of a band's music to come charging through. "I've always tried to not really have a sound, to help the band find the sound *they* like and go with it. A lot of records are made so quick and cheap that all you can do is have a meeting ahead of time and do a song and say, 'Okay, how does *this* sound?' And they say, 'Yeah, it's okay.' 'Well, everything's gonna sound like *this*,' and then you blow it on.

"I have a 'going to battle' attitude about recording," Dixon explains. "I think you're better off if you take yourself out of a comfortable environment. And by that I don't mean that you sleep on concrete. You need to maintain an edge and to create a working atmosphere that's got energy that doesn't get dissipated with a nine-to-five schedule."

Since R.E.M.'s *Murmur* and *Reckoning*, Dixon has worked with many of the South's finest new bands: Let's Active, Guadalcanal Diary and Fetchin' Bones among them. Last year Dixon produced the Smithereens' breakthrough LP *Especially For You*; Marti Jones' *Match Game*, the follow-up to 1985's acclaimed *Unsophisticated Time* on which Dixon played nearly all the instruments and contributed four songs; Dumptruck's *Positively Dumptruck*; and Wednesday Week's debut. His most recent production work was on Marshall Crenshaw's fourth album.

How does Dixon draw the best out of musicians in the studio? "I try not to be like a photographer and give pep talks, 'cause I think that's real demeaning. I just kinda hang out. It'll depend. If a vocal is not really happening, I'll just say, 'Forget it. We'll do it later.' And it'll happen. Why sing it for five hours when you can sing it for fifteen minutes and it's gonna be as good as it's gonna be in five hours? Nobody I've ever seen gets better after five hours of singing."

Dixon has developed some simple standards to determine which bands to work with. "My big criteria is whether I

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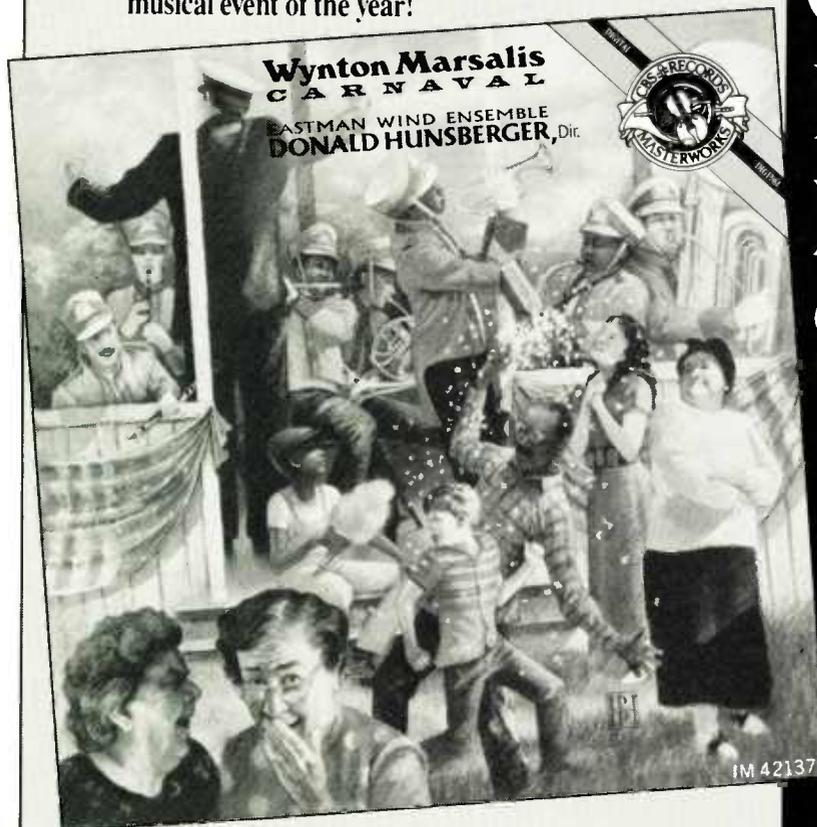
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can help, whether they're so different from the way I view music that it'd be ridiculous to work on 'em. And the other thing is how much I like it—if I really like the way the guy sings and if I really like the songs. Because to be as blunt about it as I could be, if you've got two guitars, bass and drums onstage and somebody wailing, in the big picture they're all kind of the same. So the songs have to be good and the singer's obviously real important. My idea of who's a good singer and who isn't varies; I try not to let that be as important as the songs."

Now that Dixon is finally reaping attention for his own music, he is "trying to cut back to fewer projects so I can really concentrate on those projects and still have time to be a human being. My jones for getting to perform has somewhat abated by doing the tour (a short trek in late '86) and by getting to work on the new album. So I got my looking in the mirror out of the way." He can be more selective about his production work these days, "but picking and choosing is the most difficult thing as far as I'm concerned—I hate saying no, and there are

*continued on next page*

## DIXON'S FIXIN'S

Dixon uses three basses: "A Fender Jazz, a Hofner Beatle-type and occasionally one of the old Danelectric Silvertones." His favorite electric guitar is a Framus Nashville (made in Germany). "Acoustic guitars vary. I use one of those little skinny Ibanezes, the AC-410, or an old Gibson J-45 with the G-string tuned up an octave." He favors Vox AC-30 amps.

Dixon usually works at Reflection Studios in Charlotte, North Carolina and Mitch Easter's Drive-In Studio in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. "Reflection has things the Drive-In doesn't that makes it better for some things. It's real high-tech, with two 24-track studios in one building. They're in better shape than a lot of studios in L.A. or New York 'cause the guy that owns it also has a business that sells studio equipment, so he turns the stuff over a lot more than normal studios can afford to."

But Dixon has been branching out lately: Crenshaw's LP was done at Bearsville and mixed at Reflection; Jones' *Match Game* was recorded at R.P.M. in New York and the Smithereens' *Especially For You* emerged from NYC's Record Plant. At home, Dixon captures rough ideas with a Teac 3340 four-track and a Drumulator.

In the trivia department, Dixon "sang several of the vocals (on *Most Of The Girls...*) into the very same Neumann U-47 tube mike that James Brown used on 'Cold Sweat.'"



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World Radio History

an awful lot of things that I get offered that I would like to do. There just isn't time to do all of it.

"But I'm certainly not going to give up the playing and writing side just to keep sitting in a studio *all* the time. The physically limiting aspects of being in a studio are really awful. You have to maintain perspective somehow. I don't want it to be a chore; I want it to be fun."

Working on Marshall Crenshaw's latest album was a certifiable good time. "It's a real departure; there's lots of guitar playing," Dixon enthuses. "I think Marshall's destined to be a new guitar hero. I hope this record's gonna open Marshall up to a whole bunch of people that think he's a wimp—'cause he's not a wimp at all."

Dixon wrapped up *Romeo At Juilliard* earlier this year. "Again, it's me playing a lot of stuff," he says. "There's not incredible numbers of famous people on there. Mitch plays on it; Anton Fier came down and played drums on a couple of songs; the band that toured with Marti Jones played on a song; Marti sings on a couple songs and plays guitar and stuff. It's real eclectic. I don't think it's gonna surprise anybody much, but who cares?"

Whatever the project, Dixon's hall-

mark is his direct, down-to-earth attitude—his human touch. "I see a lot of people using technology as the star and that's incredibly stupid. Despite the success of that kind of stuff, the people on the street still respond to the way somebody sounds when they sing. These impersonal, generic things don't have any appeal to me at all and there are a lot of people like me that are turned off by the kind of stuff they're being offered. A lot of them would maintain more of an interest if there were better stuff. But there's some hope."

And some perspective as well: "Not so much that the music you're making is that important, because it's still pop music—it's not art for art's sake. That's not what we're dealing with here; we're dealing with art with a silent 'F.'" ❧

## VAN from page 12

### On Interviews

For a long time—for years—this didn't click. I didn't realize how important it is to actually explain what you're doing, so that it will be approached in the right way. I didn't really know what to talk about. I'd go into an interview, and I didn't really know what it was I wanted

to get across; I didn't know what they wanted. So I'd just be playing this game with interviewers where I'd be trying to give them something I thought they wanted, and it wasn't really me.

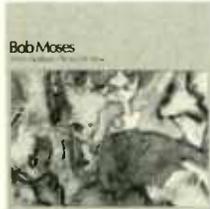
I'll tell you what's difficult is paying lip-service to... I don't take any of this seriously, right? I don't think that what I'm doing is important. There's nothing that I want to put out and say, "Look, this is where I'm at and that's me."

It's a job. I started doing this because I thought it was a job. I had a choice. I was an apprentice engineer. And I thought, "I don't want to be an apprentice engineer; I'd rather be a musician." How do you become a musician? You learn music and you study, and you work hard, and you become a musician. And the bottom line is that this is a job.

I'm not doing this because I want to be on Top of the Pops. Or because I want to do a big American tour. I've done those things.

I don't have the fodder to feed the masses. You know why? Because I'm simply not interested. To be a star... I don't even know what that is. I call it ego-oriented. You have to want to put your ego up there. I don't need to do that. I think that explains my whole thing. ❧

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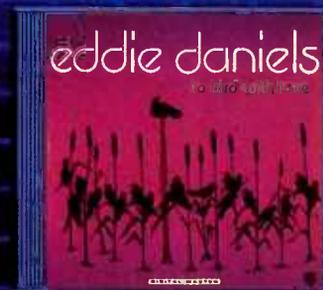
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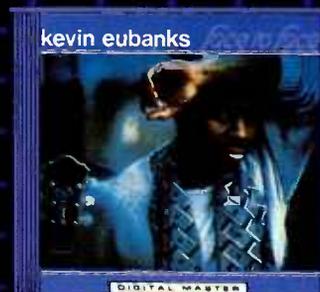
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World Radio History

# FRANK MORGAN

BY PETER WATROUS

## CONFESSIONS OF A LEGEND: SAX AND DRUGS AND PAROLE

I'm walking down the beach in Venice, California late one night. On my right, the sands fade into darkness; on the left, shacks, an occasional palm tree, a walkway. From the distance, a saxophone shreds the still evening, snaking into the night on the rhythms of Charlie Parker. From the tone, pearly and cryingly sensual, I know I've found Frank Morgan, legendary dope fiend, jailbird and alto saxophonist.

Morgan's playing a joint called the Sidewalk Cafe. He's momentarily out of jail, where he's spent most of the last thirty years. The club is virtually empty, with more hangers-on than audience. It's a living scene from a documentary never made about 50s southern California jazz, an informal jam session where the true flame of bebop is carried to an audience of hustlers and junkies in a dark beachside club. A singer appears, stretching "Lover Man" to its breaking point, as Morgan sighs obbligatos in the background. He whips into a quick blues, the set's over, and I head back home.

Nearly ten years have passed since that night, and Frank Morgan has been in and out of jail many times since. But I've never forgotten the hardened brilliance of his playing, that mixture of intensity and yearning. Nor have others: Since his most recent parole in 1985, Morgan's made two extremely well-received records. On the West Coast, jazz critic Leonard Feather anointed him the greatest living alto saxophonist, a comment so laden with responsibility that it almost sent Morgan back to using heroin, while the *New York Times'* Robert Palmer raved only slightly less ecstatically. So now Frank Morgan has come to New York for the first time, playing a week at the Village Vanguard for a live record due out in April (*Bebop Lives, Fantasy*). He's also been collaborating on an album with McCoy Tyner, recorded a set of duets with pianist George



**"One becomes addicted to prison life; you don't have to do anything."**

Cables, worked with singer Mark Murphy on an album of Ivan Lins tunes, been invited to Europe to make festival dates, been sprung from parole, fallen in love. As we're riding down the East River Drive in a call car to pick up his methadone, Morgan looks at the Brooklyn skyline and asks, "Where's the prisons around here? Where's Rikers Island?" He pauses, then says, "Hey man, forget it. I don't need to know. Every con checks these things out, you know, but fuck that, I don't need it anymore."

Morgan is a paradigm for an entire generation of musicians coming up in the early 50s, but with a set of personal wrinkles. His father Stanley, who leads one version of the Ink Spots, was a guitarist on the flourishing California scene of the 40s and early 50s. By age twelve, Frank had memorized slews of Parker solos, and was regularly taken around to jam sessions by his father. Southern Califor-

nia in the 40s was a riotous place; labor shortages had forced wartime industries to open their doors to the area's burgeoning black population; clubs sprang up everywhere; within two blocks, the Turban Lounge, Club Alabam, Lovejoy's, Down Beat, Memo and the Last Word all served up jazz to audiences comprising Hollywood's elite along with soldiers, welders and minority members of an emerging middle class. Charlie Parker played his first engagement in Los Angeles in 1945, and his effect on local players, personally and musically, was immense. By the time Morgan graduated high school, he and nearly every other major bop figure then living on the West Coast had become heroin addicts.

His first record date, from 1953 (available on *Wardell Gray Memorial Volume 1, Fantasy*), under the leadership of vibist Teddy Charles and featuring Wardell Gray and Morgan's roommate, pianist

Sonny Clark, helps explain why Morgan would still be remembered today. His playing flickers through the hip rhythms and lyricism copped from Latin gigs and the movie soundtrack music favored by West Coast players, while adding a rich, compassionate tone. A year later Morgan recorded with Kenny Clarke and Milt Jackson (*Black California Vol. 2, Savoy*), then cut his first album as a leader in 1955, using the great pianist Carl Perkins, Wardell Gray and others. He didn't record again for thirty years.

In between, Frank Morgan lived the life of a drug addict. As California suf-

fered no shortage of peckerwood cops or prosecutorial attitudes towards black junkies, the existence could become uncomfortable. An extremely intelligent, well-spoken and well-read man, Morgan learned how to con and steal. "He was a creeper," recalls one musician, a user friend, "he knew how to be slick, to dress up enough to walk into a place, talk well, case it out, and come back that night and rip off all the typewriters." He racked up a \$1000-a-day drug habit, landed in the pen, then became addicted to jail life, its securities, codes and morals. Back on the street, life would break

down. "I had intentions to play," says Morgan, "but first what I really had in mind to do when I got out was to fix. I was using in jail. Given freedom and some money, you just use more."

During the 50s and 60s, California's prison system allowed jazz musicians unusual leeway, while inmates afforded respect and supplies. "The pressures are monstrous to go back in; life's a little different when you have to get up and get your own breakfast," Morgan says with a laugh. "One becomes addicted to prison and prison life because you don't have to do anything. You can go back anytime you want and be a big shit. I was a superstar. I got the best dope free, I was much more important in than out. I did more playing in prison than I did on the streets.

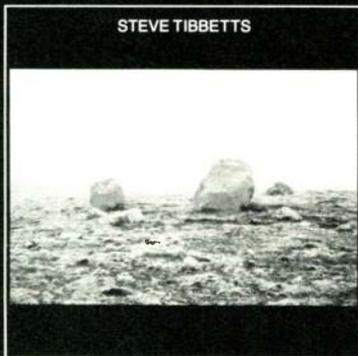
"Within that subculture," Morgan continues, "there were people who really appreciated music, and they would do what they could to show it. We would go out on the yard at 8:00 in the morning and stay until 4:00 in the afternoon, playing out in the sun and never leaving that spot. There were massive crowds, and people constantly walking up and saying, 'Here's a little....' Guys would go to the canteen and come by, bringing you back a carton of cigarettes and some ice cream, another guy might walk up, pass you a joint or give you something."

Morgan co-led the warden's band with Art Pepper; the group included trumpeter Dupree Bolton, pianist Jimmy Bunn (who had recorded with Charlie Parker) and drummer Frank Butler. On Saturday nights, a tour of the prison regularly drew 1500 to 2000 people coming to hear the band as much as inspect the premises. "I got into the honor block because I led the warden's band," Morgan notes. "I moved there the day after I got to San Quentin. Art and Dupree lived there too. We used to take mace and nutmeg. We could get in and out of our cells and do pretty much whatever we wanted."

At one point during his stay in San Quentin, Morgan got deep into drug debt. His dealer sold the debt to another convict, meaning that Morgan could now be charged triple the amount owed. The debt came due: Morgan would either pay up or be killed. George Jackson, Black Panther and perhaps the most feared convict in San Quentin, heard about Morgan's problems and let it be known that he very much appreciated all that Frank did for the prison, and that he loved his music. The debt was dropped.

Both junkies and cons learn how to scam to make the best of their time. Morgan hasn't lost that trait—he's eager

## Guitar Music and Beyond



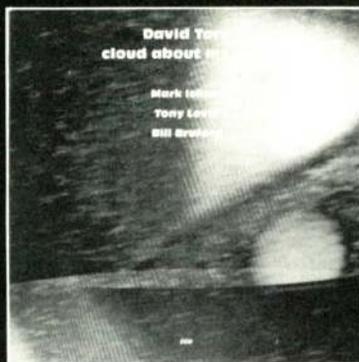
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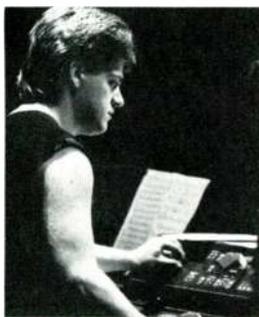
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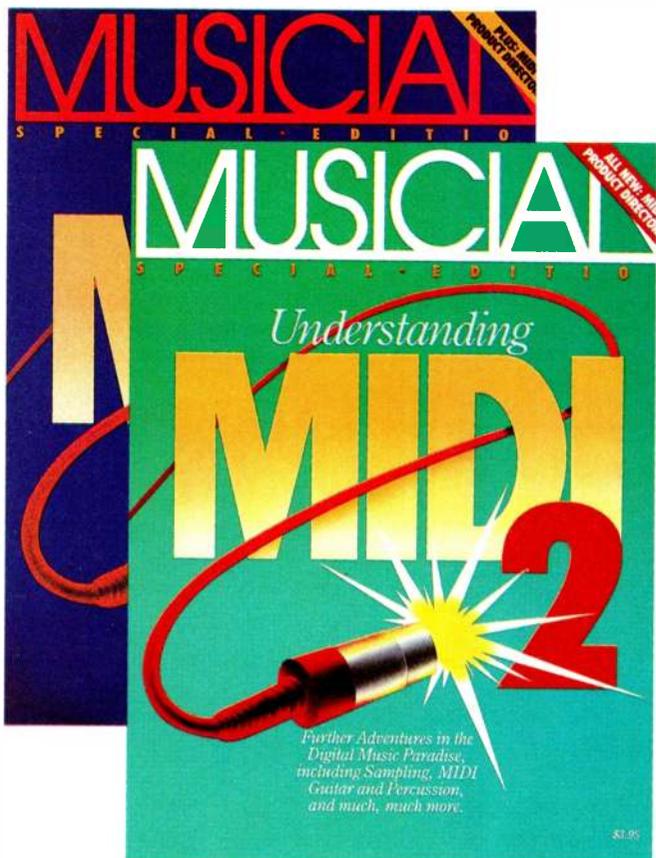
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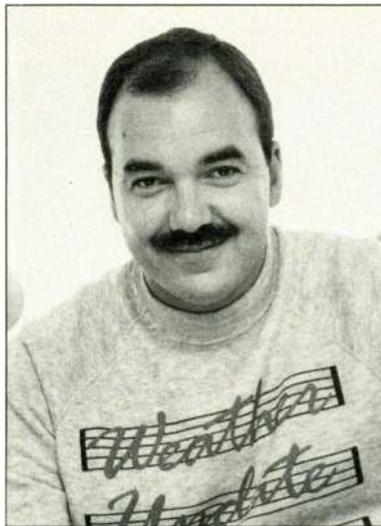
to please, subtly probing to find what a person wants to hear. His diction slides from street talk to middle-class conversation. It's obvious he's still trying to reconcile his experiences as a junkie and a prisoner with success in the outside world. But he's also self-aware. "Prison rubs off," he admits. "You can't rid yourself of prison attitudes unless you really make a conscious effort. There's a whole mess of things that become warped. But prison makes you get rid of a whole lot of bullshit too. I can stop somebody right in mid-sentence and say, 'Hey, have you ever read my shit? I've spent so many years in San Quentin, I've listened to all the lies in the world; and I've told them. You got a new one, good, but if it's the same old shit, don't waste our time. Go find a vic'—that's short for victim. I'm not one of them. I'm a robber."

Morgan looks like a college professor, well-dressed and in good condition, belying the harshness of his experiences. He seems happy, which makes sense: He has records due out, plays regularly, and is conquering the desires which have kept him in jail, including the desire to head back to jail. Part of this is due to prison life 1987, which doesn't boast the same privileges accorded jazz musicians in the 50s and 60s, partly it's due to his relationship with Rösälinda Kolb, an artist with whom he's fallen in love, and who has helped Morgan not only believe in a future, but plan one. "It's fair to say that this time it's different because Rosalinda met me at the gate, and she had my horn, and I had a record out. So I had an alternative plan. The thing of fixing was still there the first day, you dig. Left to my own devices, I could say, 'Nobody cares enough to come and pick me up and see that I'm all right so I'll go and finish myself off, fuck them,' and I would. But for once, I wanted to play it out.

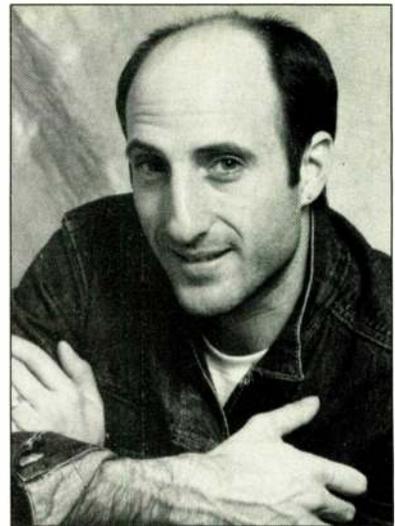
"You see, I don't have as big a fear of failure anymore, because I've become an expert on failure. Now I'd like to become very successful at being successful. I want to turn all the way around. I'm out now, I'm in New York, I really love it. I've done this before from my cell at San Quentin—riding down an expressway looking at the skyline of New York—and it's not the same as the real thing."

One of the main threads of a conversation with Morgan is regret: He retains a profound respect for the jazz tradition, and an understanding that many among his generation betrayed the promise of bebop, one of the most important flowerings of American and black culture. Perhaps as a result, he's recently latched

*continued on page 110*



Peter Erskine



Kenny Aronoff

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## Democracy Doesn't Live Here Anymore

*The Rock Rag* may not be an outstanding example of rock music journalism, but publisher/editor Marianne Hatfield shouldn't have to fear for her life. Yet she's disconnected her phone to stop the threats in the middle of the night—and is on



the verge of moving out of Goshen, Indiana to avoid further harassment.

Goshen is an unlikely place to base a rock magazine, and that's Hatfield's problem. "It's a little town all to itself," she says. As the biblical name implies, Goshen is a center of religious fundamentalism. The town hosts a Mennonite college, and is located amid a large Amish population—not exactly the place to take kindly to a publication boosting groups with names like Salem's Wych.

Hatfield, thirty-five, started *The Rock Rag* late last year after her teenaged son was unable to find out about a W.A.S.P. concert in the area. *The Rock Rag* runs short items on (mostly heavy-metal) bands and prints area concert listings. Last fall Hatfield started receiving anonymous phone calls attacking the bands in her publication and Hatfield herself—"for promoting satanism, for promoting homosexuality," she says. While shopping, she was stopped and harangued by a man who "said he had quit his

job and would follow me." Hatfield called the Goshen police about the incident. Later she saw the same man spying on her at her trailer home. "I called the police back, and they didn't have anything on record that I'd called the first time."

She also mentioned her problems to Elkhart County Sheriff's Department detective Bud Miller. "He said, 'It's your own fault for starting something like that around here,' and told me to move." Miller, who retired January 1, remembers the exchange differently. "I advised her that since she lived in the city of Goshen, she should contact the Goshen Police Department," he says. He admits that "they do strange things around here," but "I don't care if she wants to publish [the magazine]. If she can sell it, more power to her."

Hatfield suspects Rev. Paul McGechie, pastor of Goshen's Mennonite First Assembly of God congregation, is behind the harassment. According to Hatfield, McGechie believes "rock has to be stopped because it's devil music." McGechie could not be reached for comment. He was quoted condemning rock ("many worship Satan that way") in a five-part series on devil worship that ran in *The Goshen News* in January.

With the help of the Vinnie Vincent Invasion, Hatfield met with Goshen mayor Max Chidister on January 29. The result was a promised investigation and weekly police reports. "I don't know if I really feel reassured," Hatfield says; her printer forbids her to mention his name for fear of reprisal. "Right now I'm just looked upon as the epitome of evil... I really am afraid."

## CAMPER VAN BEETHOVEN

### Turning a Deaf Ear to Typecasting

Calling Camper Van Beethoven "eclectic" is like suggesting Oliver North has something to hide. Over the course of three albums (and an import EP), the Santa Cruz band's often-bent material has embraced country, ska, punk, Celtic, psychedelia, quasi-Middle Eastern, pop, bluegrass...you get the idea.

Variety is clearly a touchstone of *this* Beethoven's approach, and one that initially extended to personnel as well. Singer/guitarist/chief songwriter **David Lowery** estimates that since the band was formed in 1983, "fifteen or sixteen" members have passed through the ranks, though "in the last year we've gotten a pretty consistent five- or six-person line-up."

The other touchstone of the group's music is humor, whether it be subtle or out-and-out ham on wry. This was telegraphed on the first LP with "Take The Skinheads Bowling," a droll gem that quickly became a college radio hit. Unfortunately, songs like "Skinheads" also caused many to peg CVB as a novelty band, forcing Lowery to contemplate the pros and cons of writing funny songs.

"I can't make up my mind whether we should be more cautious about that or not," he confides. "It seems like

you're not allowed to be serious—and then *not* serious.

"The other problem is sometimes when you're serious, people think you're joking. People thought a lot of the stuff on the first record was parodies of other styles of music. Well, they weren't.

"Basically, we're into this idea of approximation, where you just kind of take an idea but don't really learn it. You just fake it and you get a third thing that's unrelated to what you normally play and what you're trying to approximate. It's a way of hearing—and finding—new sounds."

These "new sounds" have earned the band a growing number of fans, including R.E.M. (who had the group open several dates of its 1986 tour) and Eugene Chadbourne (who contributed some bizarre guitar parts to the new *Camper Van Beethoven* LP).

Already a college radio favorite, the group is even starting to receive commer-



cial airplay with "Good Guys & Bad Guys," an ironic song open to interpretation—which ties right back into Lowery's humor-in-rock musings:

"I just don't want to give in to some notion that a band has to either be serious or a joke." And well he shouldn't. — *Duncan Strauss*

# GREGORY ABBOTT

## Gourmet Taste in Roots

I always liked Earth, Wind & Fire, the Bee Gees, Marvin Gaye, early Motown stuff, the Spinners, Patti Labelle. Those are some of my heroes."

Ask singer Gregory Abbott to name his major musical influences and you start hearing names that, with one or two noteworthy exceptions, no one has invoked for years. The Spinners, the Bee Gees, even Patti Labelle... they're all artists with roots and styles that go back a decade or two. And Abbott's got no apologies.

"I have found that if you go way back, you find some delightful, very raw productions that can be remade and they stand the test of time. Sam Cooke's stuff, Otis Redding, early Smokey Robinson, Mary Wells...."

There he goes again. But who can blame him? With apologies to Garrett Morris, that old-style stuff "been



beddy beddy good" to Gregory Abbott. After all, "Shake You Down," the title track single from his first album, climbed to the top of the charts. Deeper into that album, Abbott demonstrates further the lessons he has learned from his predecessors, showing off a tenor whose warmth and clarity evoke a young Eddie Kendricks. And, if Abbott's lower range won't cost Lou Rawls any sleep, it's still a powerful instrument.

Abbott, who composes and produces his own material, admits his debt to his vocal

forefathers, a debt he says shows up not only in his singing, but in his producing—his preference for smooth chordal progressions, for instance. But he adds that he also picks up the occasional stray idea from more adventurous souls, like George Clinton's old Parliament/Funkadelic group. "I've studied Bootsy

Collins and how he lays a bassline, and certain elements of that can be incorporated and can funk up an otherwise conservative song.

"I guess I'm really curious musically. I enjoy music and I love to wallow in it. Whenever there's music, I study what makes it it."

— Leonard Pitts, Jr.

## WILD SEEDS

### A Rock Critic Who Could

Rock 'n' roll is the greatest thing, because it eats up the whole culture," says Michael Hall, the boyish twenty-nine-year-old vocalist, songwriter and leader of Austin's Wild Seeds. "Me, I'll eat up everything."

Hall, a former rock critic, is certainly a musical glutton with a highly catholic diet, judging from the Wild Seeds' repertoire. Their records—a 1984 EP and last year's *Brave Clean + Reverent* album—sparkle with references to bouncing Texas border music,

want to sound like.' That would be cheating."

Hall is amused by writers' attempts to bag his rigorously unclassifiable music. In particular, he finds the "new sincerity" label applied to the Austin music scene (which includes such diverse aggregations as the True Believers, Zeitgeist, Glass Eye and Doctor's Mob) to be of dubious worth.

"The whole label came about as a joke," he says. "I think it was just a backlash against synthesizer music. It was a rejection of the stupid nihilism that comes with industrial music. But it started being applied to any band that had guitars in it."

He prefers that the Wild Seeds be considered a pop band, influenced by what he calls "the heyday of cool

## Dangerous Reading

Not all rock books are awe-struck biographies. Robert Pattison's *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (Oxford University Press) takes a provocative look at the myth of rock's creation and the attitudes that perpetuate the myth. If this revisionism drifts toward the academic, at least Pattison knows his music.

Anyone who collects or just listens to records should be interested in Evan Eisenberg's *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography* (McGraw-Hill), a pioneering treatise on how recorded music differs from the real thing. Eisenberg juxtaposes

portraits of various obsessives—hi-fi bugs, record accumulators—with wide-ranging dissertations on the history and practices of the record business. Pretty fascinating stuff.

In 1981 *The Literature of Rock* indexed twenty-five years of books, magazine articles, etc. in 350 pages. Now *The Literature of Rock II* (Scarecrow Press) requires two volumes and over 1,100 pages to survey the years 1979-1983, and supplement the coverage in the earlier work. Although a "selective" bibliography, the scope is broad. Frank Hoffmann and B. Lee Cooper further provide helpful annotation.



pulsing late-60s soul, the churning bayou rhythms of Creedence Clearwater, and even a hint of psychedelia.

"It comes from not having one major influence in music," says Hall, an admitted aficionado of such diverse musical sources as Otis Redding, John Fogerty, the Beatles, Lou Reed and Neil Young. "There's not one thing I went to and said, 'That's what I

radio" of the mid- and late-60s. Betraying his rockcrit orientation, he speaks respectfully of pop craft, which is frequently on display on *Brave Clean + Reverent*.

"Craftsmanship is the best thing about pop music, from Cole Porter to John Lennon," Hall concludes. "I'd much rather be called a pop musician than a roots musician."

— Chris Morris



## THE THE

### Dancing at the Usual Apocalypse

**M**att Johnson loves pulling the rug out from under people. A hyper-developed gadfly who can rap, croon or sound like an electronic Phil Ochs, Johnson is the voice of dark alleys: slightly slinky, slightly subversive and slightly psychotic. He adores afflicting people with the pricklies, and his yarns of obsession and global depression might cut off your circulation—if his music didn't get your adrenalin flowing.

"I think it's important to juxtapose conflicting elements," notes the twenty-seven-year-old singer, songwriter and central force behind the The. "Placing musical ideas out of their

usual context sets up new kinds of moods. I create an atmosphere to shatter it."

What's odd is that this man also admits to being a bit of an escapist. He collects old films and pulp comics, a pastime which hardly squares with his songwriting style. "In a way, I suppose I've created this little shell," Johnson explains, "keeping a bit of the child in me intact. A lot of people have that part of them destroyed, and they're susceptible to the influence of others—governments and things—'cause their resistance is broken down."

Johnson, on the other hand, seems like a one-man Resistance Front, with his latest LP, *Infected*, as his credo. Though it's full of archetypal symbols which paint a world going down in flames, "there's nothing in there you haven't seen on TV," he says. "I've just condensed the images to shock people, to remind them of the world they're living in."

— Robin J. Schwartz

## COCTEAU TWINNS/ HAROLD BUDD

### Music That Falls Like Butter

**I**t's down to adjectives. In the red corner, you've got the dreamy pre-Raphaelite baroque Anglo/Scot nuevo-psychedelia of the Cocteau Twins. In the blue, there's the cosmically avant-garde, ambiently trance-like keyboard minimalism of Los Angeles' own Harold Budd. They're together at last on a collaborative LP, *The Moon And The Melodies*.

The Cocteau Twins' 1984 single, "Pearly Dewdrops' Drop," moved 100,000 copies for the British indie label 4AD. We're talking cult-verging-on-religion. One journalist, moved by Elizabeth Fraser's haunting

for his ambient (he loathes the term) albums with Brian Eno, is the kind of guy who'll steam into Tower Records and cosmically (if politely) bust open a few skulls, "just to get my albums shifted out of that ghetto called the 'New Age section' and into rock."

Creative prodding from Ivo, 4AD's founder, brought Budd and the Cocteau Twins together. The four recorded in London with no master plan—"but if you admire someone's history, you go in as an act of faith," Budd says. "The music fell off our brains like butter. The minute something rings your bell, you get a funny rush feeling." He laughs. "Of course, even among us heavyweight spiritual artists there's a run of practical thinking: This works for the album, this won't, here's a good single...."

Neither Budd nor the Cocteau Twins are instant radio fodder. As Fraser says, "We don't get played because they can't pronounce the bloody titles, like 'Aikea-Guinea,' or can't understand the words."

Guthrie agrees. "And now here's the Cocktail Twins



Cocteau  
Twins

vocals and obscure/mystical lyrics, and the guitar/bass/synth percussion wash provided by Robin Guthrie and Simon Raymonde, dubbed them the veritable Voice of God. "People write to tell us that they were going to kill themselves, but then heard our music," Guthrie says. "Naturally, that's balanced out by the twelve-year-old girls who want to know if we think they should run away from home...."

Harold Budd, best known

with...uh....' The Japanese transcribed some lyrics. Are you ready for 'my baby is a mud dancer'? Or that old Cocteau catch-phrase, 'hit me with your aeroplane'?"

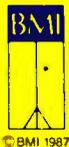
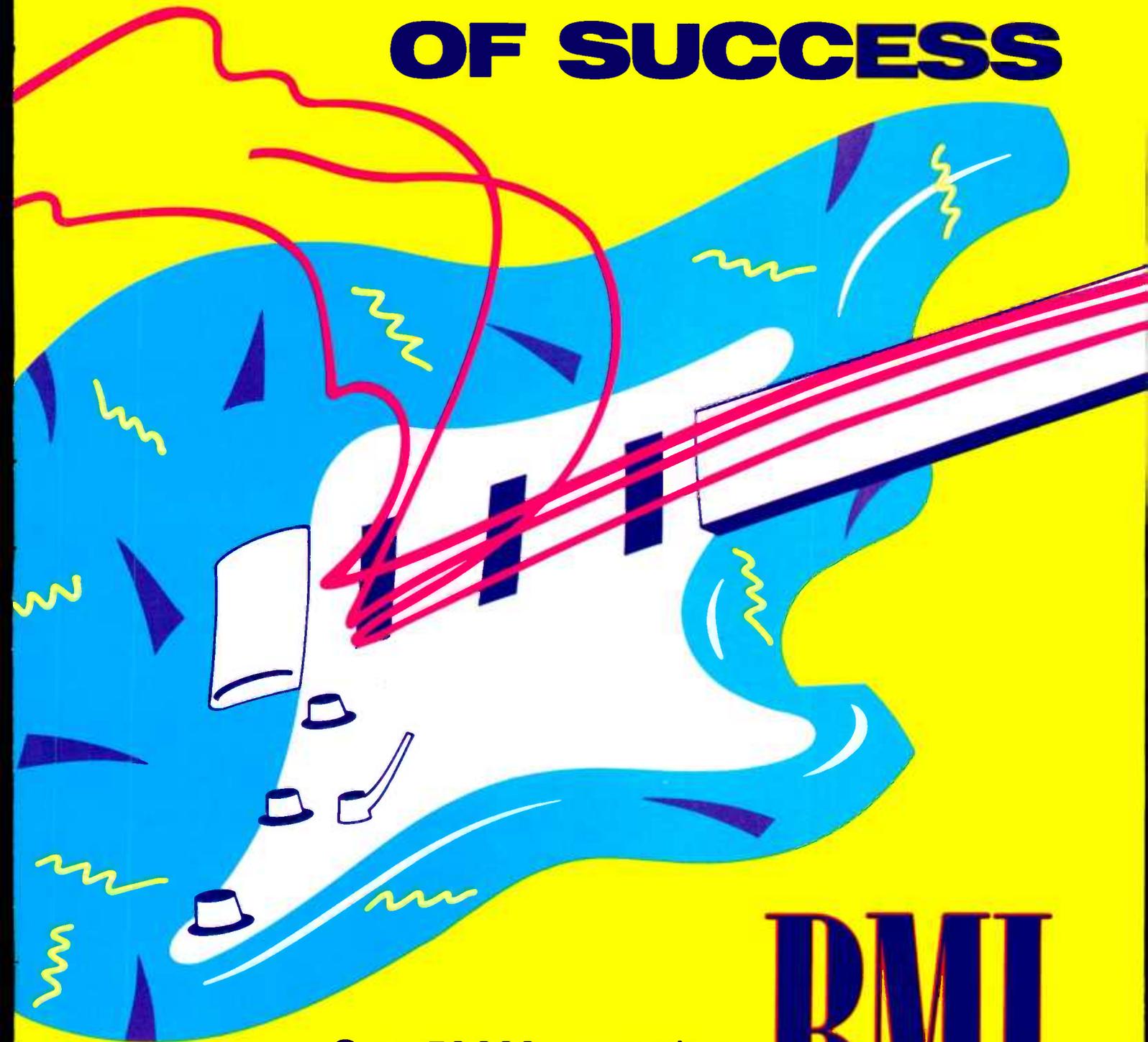
Fraser shrugs. "I suppose I'm just singing about the same things everyone else does."

The Meaning of Existence? The Secrets of the Universe?

"Everything and nothing. And people do sing along."

— Dan Hedges

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# Simply Ready

Mick Hucknall Knows What He Wants  
and **Simply Red**'s Going to Get It.

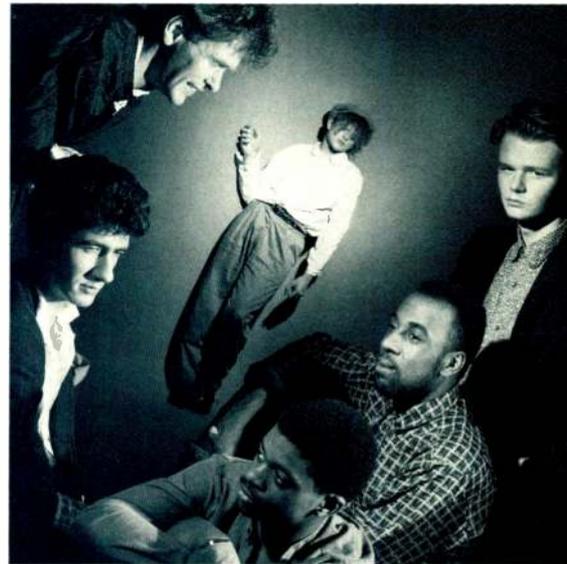
By Fred Schruers

On a morning flight from Liverpool to Amsterdam, Mick Hucknall is murmuring something to the KLM flight attendant, who happens to be straight out of Central Casting—knockout stewardess type—with a fresh tan from a vacation in Togo and a taunting smile. As she heads down the aisle he leans out for a look at the calves most of our six-across group can't see, then smiles: "Looks like thumbs-up all the way across the board." Hucknall has a richly mutable personality; he can go from the charming scamp next door to something approximating Louis XIV, the Sun King, and he can do it on a sixpence.

It's entirely in character for Hucknall to be celebrating the attractiveness of this KLM queen. As acknowledged auteur of an abruptly successful band, he named their new LP *Men And Women*, and occasionally serious though its themes may be, it's partly a paean to the joy he personally takes in being free, "Red," and twenty-six.

He's even removed the earphones that otherwise seem permanently stationed somewhere in the waterfall tangle of ginger hair that gave him his nickname, and he grins again as she comes back with the fruit of their conversation—six splits of fine young champagne, the breakfast of champions for a band with a number one under their belt ("Holding Back The Years") and another one ("The Right Thing," released that day in England and Europe) very possibly on the way. With him today are the rest of what band management calls the promotional "A-team"—young trumpeter and synth man Tim Kellest, plus the seasoned rhythm section of drummer Chris Joyce and bassist Tony Bowers. Missing are guitarist Sylvan Richardson (the baby of the group at twenty, and relatively shy) and keyboardist Fritz McIntyre (loquacious, even eloquent in patches, but tends to dazzle interviewers and often his bandmates with philosophical profundities that may not be appropriate for selling a pop record). They'll come later, while this lot break the first wave of Dutch journalists. "Holding Back The Years" stayed at number one in Holland for thirteen weeks last year, boosting sales of the *Picture Book* LP to some 200,000 there. The band's label wants those buttons pushed again.

*Picture Book*, recorded in just three weeks in the Amsterdam suburbs our plane is now putting its shadow across, was a remarkable debut. "Holding Back The Years" was its proper introduction, with Hucknall's high, sometimes girlish tenor moving over hill and dale of a convincing emotional landscape. To know that they were from grimy, wet, recession-beat Manchester added to the poignancy. But the three elementary piano chords of that track belied the strengths of the band behind Hucknall, a band that was busy defining itself even as producer Stewart Levine put them through their paces on that debut. "Money's Too Tight (To Mention)," a cover of a 1982 single by America's Valentine Brothers, showed more—notably the vanilla-funk bottom Joyce and Bowers were capable of. Levine had just the sort of credentials the fledgling band



Photographs by (l to r) Davies & Starr and Simon Fowler/L.F.I.

was interested in—he had produced Womack & Womack's *Love Wars* in 1983, played sax on Little Eva's "Loco-motion," and, as Quincy Jones' son-in-law, had generally been thick with the American soul-sound elite about whom just about every good English boy can quote you chapter and verse.

Members of Simply Red are quite capable of rhapsodizing about the high points of, say, the Graham Central Station oeuvre, but their talk and their record collections are so all-embracing that it's reassuring when the same names show up more than a few times—mainly Howlin' Wolf, James Brown, King Tubby, and Sly & the Family Stone. Just when you think you've got Hucknall pegged, though, he'll hit you with a solemn pronouncement on one of his enthusiasms. "I'm a Gene Vincent *nut*," he says, the last word rhyming with that thing at the far end of your leg, "adore Gene Vincent."

We deplane into a sunny if chill Amsterdam morning and climb into a Mercedes limo. Mick removes a tape from his personal machine and stretches across the front seat to jack it into the car's system. There's a moment of richly amplified hiss as the tape rolls to the next track, and then the sound fills the sun-light-suffused car—Ella Fitzgerald singing "Anything Goes." It's such a pleasurable, transporting, unhurried rendition that nobody speaks for a while. The thought they seem to share at this moment goes unspoken, but it's clear enough—that the trade of musician, as they are determined to live it, is invested with as much grace and significance as any work there is.

"Mick always had a great deal of self-belief," says Elliot Rashman, the alert thirty-four-year-old Manchester native who's guided the band's career from the start. "He just knew there was a place for his kind of music, and he went for the substance, to write songs in the classic mold. I love the fact that he's fearless. If something's bearing down on him, he'll stand up and get run over, but *believing*. It's very easy in this business to sidestep out of the way. Sometimes it's better to stand up, get run over, and then decide to make yourself stronger."

**M**ick Hucknall was born on June 8, 1960, into Manchester's working class. His father was a barber. He would never really know his mother, who left the household when Mick was two. "She called me last year—first time in twenty-three years. I—ummm—really had nothing to say. I just said, 'I'm not angry with you or anything, I just don't know who you are, and to be honest, I don't particularly want to know.' I thought more of hurtin' my father than anything else. He was the one who brought me up, and to immediately start associatin' with my mother who was never there...it's like a real affront to him, I would think."

The Hucknall residence was without hot water—"I think that's why I'm still averse to shavin'. I mean we only used to have hot water when you put the kettle on the coal fire every Sunday or somethin'. It was like livin' in the Wild West."

While his father worked, Mick was looked after by a succession of relatives—his Aunt Nellie and her four daughters. "When I was about five, I think Nellie'd had enough—she'd already brought her four daughters up and this little ginger-headed brat was...enough, so I got passed on to the eldest daughter, who was about twenty-three and had just gotten married. She looked after me for a year, then the one below had gotten married—I got passed down by the four daughters till I was about eleven and then I could go home from school and cook my own tea." It sounds like a scenario from which a mournful ballad like "Holding Back The Years" could readily be constructed, but Hucknall finishes off with a characteristic, level gaze. "They're really loving people. I had a wonderful childhood."

The musical obsession came early and deeply. "I didn't have a record player till I was about eleven but Sheila [one of the daughters he stayed with] used to, and I was a Beatles fanatic. When I was about six she took me to see *A Hard Day's Night* and—I only found this out this past Christmas—I used to be able to find the tracks that I liked in an album by the size of the grooves. I couldn't read, but she says when I was about four, I used to find the songs and sing to them. When I was eight I used to buy little magazines that had the words to the songs, and sing them."

With the acquisition of his own turntable, Hucknall began his wide-ranging record collection. For him to cleave to the likes of Robert Johnson and Howlin' Wolf held a curious logic. Manchester was a textile town, and a ship channel had been cut from Liverpool in 1894 partly so boats bearing American cotton could sail—and later steam—up to supply the mills. (When the Civil War interrupted the flow, Manchester suffered disastrously in what was known as the Lancashire cotton famine.) It seems the bluesmen who had inherited the down side of the slaveholder's cotton economy were nowhere so well appreciated as by the English lads who inherited the bad times on the manufacturing side.

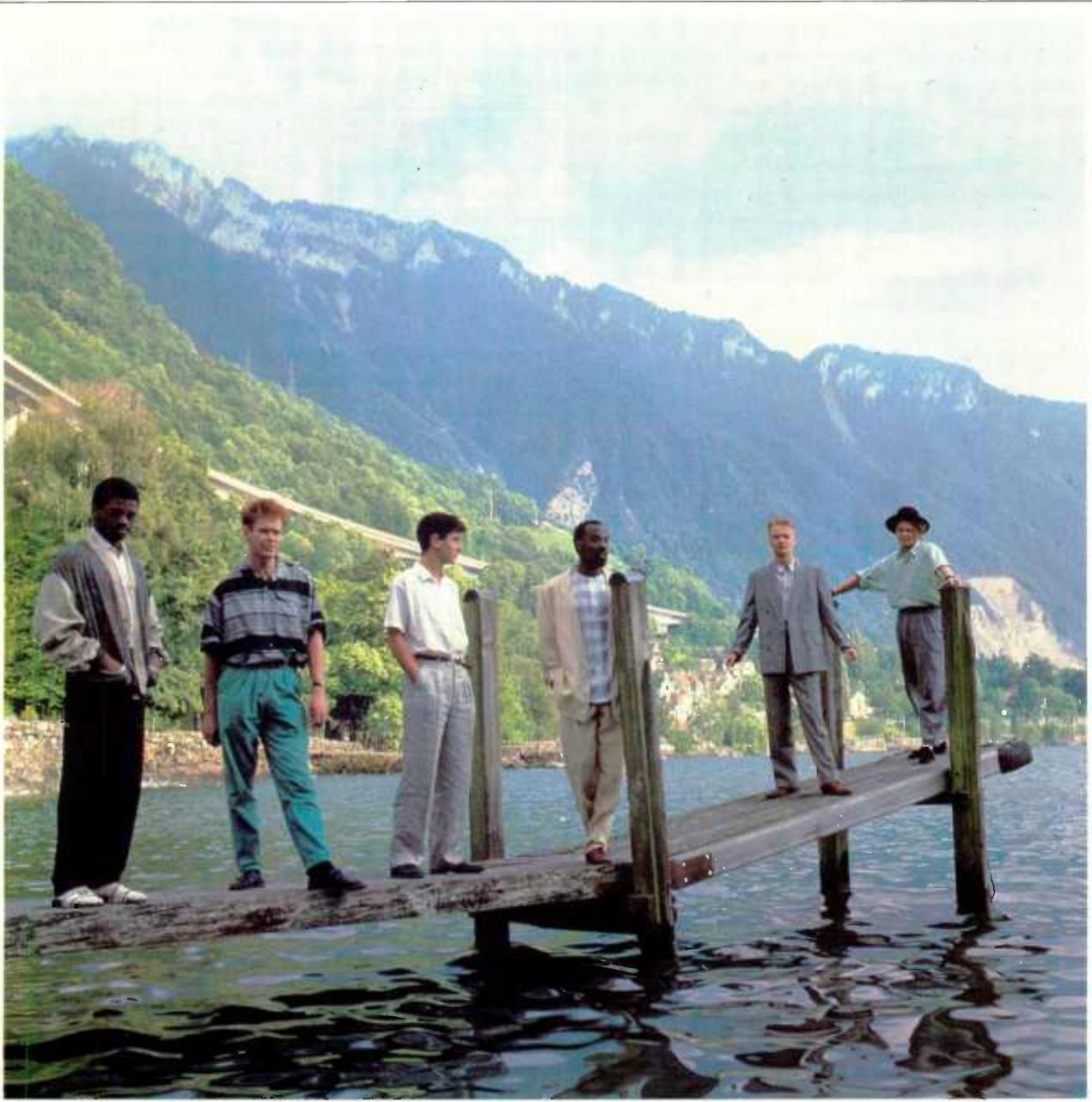
Somewhere along the way Hucknall showed considerable aptitude in art, and like so many musicians of the past three decades, ended up at art school—ticked off that his teachers, products of the pop art 60s, couldn't or wouldn't teach him the fundamentals of draftsmanship and painting. A great admirer of Picasso and Matisse, he became quite competent anyway. But punk had turned up on the English music scene, and it offered a precipitate entry into a music scene that in the early 70s had been ruled by the great British dinosaurs. Hucknall became the front man in a band called the Frantic Elevators.

The Elevators were a riotous, punk-style ensemble who wrote songs aping the greats. They'd have a tune in the manner of Howlin' Wolf, which might have confused the audiences in places like the Liverpool punk bar Eric's, had the titles not been so of the moment. One of Mick's personal favorites, he recalls, was "You Turn Me On, Turn The Fookin' Telly On." (That one, Elliot says, was "Er, 'You Turn Me On, Turn On The TV.'")

With Neil Moss, co-writer of "Holding Back The Years" (and like the rest of the Elevators a school chum of Mick's), the red-haired vocalist wrote a dozen songs a week. By now Mick had a mentor in the form of Liverpool/Manchester legend Roger Eagle, an outsize, harumphing, warmhearted music freak who managed Eric's and had the largest collection of black music anybody in the north of England had ever seen. Rashman was booking gigs for Manchester Polytechnic when Eagle told him to check out the Elevators as a possible support group. "He said, 'Put them on, they're very funny,' so I did."

Rashman turned up at the hall the night of the gig to hear the band he'd booked. "I heard this voice, and I was like a drowning man, in reverse—I saw not my past, but my future flash in front of me. I thought, 'This is an incredible voice, a voice that has everything but has yet to be formed.'" When Eagle headed south to try his fortune, the nurturing of Hucknall fell to Rashman.

Meanwhile, a pair of the manager-to-be's acquaintances were making a bit of a name for themselves. Chris Joyce was the son of parents "from the Bog" of Ireland, and, after haunting the local youth clubs with their R&B playlists, he talked his welder dad into buying him a drum kit when he was fifteen. He began gigging with local cover bands, and in 1977 enlisted in punk with a band called Fast Breeder. They opened for the likes of Generation X, but never cut a record "because we



DAVIES & STARR

“There’s unlimited possibilities for this band. We all have a knowledge of different musical forms...I might be fresh to the business, but not to writing. Ever since I was a child, it’s been music.”— Mick Hucknall

year—he'll be based amidst his synths near center stage, with the option to wander out blowing his trumpet rigged with a radio mike.

The band found Alex Sadkin a congenial enough producer for *Men And Women* (just as they've remained friends with Stewart Levine). Sadkin's work on Bob Marley albums (and engineer Barry Mraz's acuity with horn sounds from working on Ohio Players LPs) help make their cover of Bunny Wailer's "Love Fire" a standout. Still, as regards producers, the band wants to keep their options open, as they rummage through influences. Hucknall's high regard for Sly Stone is evident in the vocal mimicry of his Sly cover, but a more subtle inheritance is the touch that he brings to two cuts he co-wrote with Lamont Dozier, of Holland-Dozier-Holland. "Suffer" is a stately dirge, with Hucknall trading off vocals against Fritz's bassy voice. Much more arresting is "Infidelity," which reinforces the LP's romantic, not to say libidinous, theme: "I've been out loving all night long/ I can't help it, that love makes me strong."

"We wrote those songs the afternoon after Lamont saw our concert in Los Angeles," recalls Hucknall. "He wasn't gonna work with me [this despite Stewart Levine's introduction], then he saw the show and said maybe we should do some work. I said, 'I'll come out tomorrow!'" The song's arrangement, he says, "Largely comes out of Lamont's piano playing, virtually the rhythm of my tape recorder banging as he played the piano. I'd put the tape machine on top of it, so all you hear is this *clump, clump, boom* of him hitting the piano, interspersed with the melody he's singing and this occasional 'heh, heh, heh.'"

Hucknall's talking in a wide-windowed Indian restaurant in Amsterdam. Suddenly he cuts himself off to gape out the win-

dow. "What's she doing..." he says, and pops up and out into the street. Seems a Dutch girl he often dates in England was walking by. Soon she's across the table from him, grinning with the rest as he gets naughty by comparing Simple Minds' sound to North American Indian chants. This in rebuttal, he admits, to Minds' frontman Jim Kerr's contention that Simply Red are boring in concert.

In fact the band's capable of considerable excitement live, as Hucknall does his upbeat soft-shoe, sometimes in tandem with the statuesque backup singer Janette Sewell. Bowers and Kelllett provide foils on his flanks, promenading forward at appropriate moments. But the organizing element is Hucknall's keening, often impassioned vocal style. If there's a song on the new LP that approaches the vocal ferocity of "The Right Thing" ("Sexily right, I'm gonna do the right thing"), it's Hucknall's diatribe against the middle class (Americans read: upper middle class), "I Won't Feel Bad." "I'm frequently appalled," he hollers, "by them pretending to be poor men."

When the Indian meal is slow in coming, Hucknall checks his watch, aware that the afternoon's round of interviews is looming. "We've got fifteen minutes," he says, "we're due back at half past one." The phrase "Let's get on with it" is heard from him with a frequency most bandleaders reserve for "Where's the party?" Says Rashman: "He sets standards of hard work amid perfectionism for the band, and says, 'I'm prepared to work fourteen hours today—you meet it.'"

Hucknall's duties as frontman include braving a slagging in the British press. "The critics have been nagging them," said the *Record Mirror*, "saying they're too mellow, too mannered, to influenced, and too, er, white." The cuts began almost precisely on the day when Simply Red hit it big with "Money's Too

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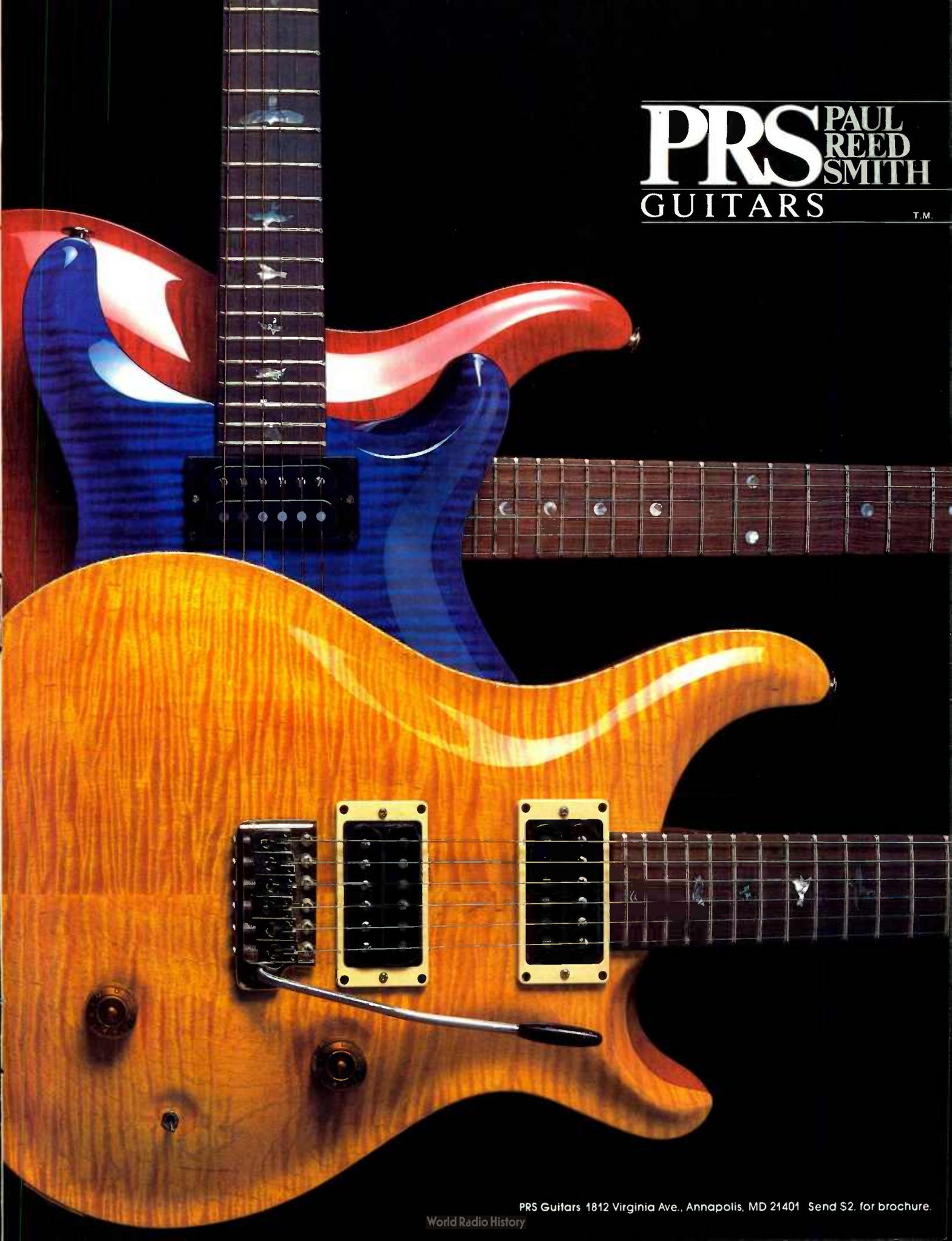
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Tight (To Mention).” As an album track, it seemed a proper tribute to what had already been a clubland hit in Great Britain; as a single, it exposed them to charges of ripping off their soul betters. “Where [Hucknall’s voice] falls is in its tone,” scolded the *New Musical Express*. “God devised him as an 80s Gene Pitney, not a Junior Valentine.” “Hucknall is now that most difficult of propositions,” said the *Face* sympathetically, “a pop star without honor in his own land who has found profit abroad and feels thoroughly vindicated.” And Hucknall fences back; “People don’t realize it here,” he told one British interviewer, “but we’re enormous in Europe.” And to the *Record Mirror* last spring: “Basically, to stop pissing about, we’re fucking huge in America.”

When his food comes, the singer is still mad with the middle class: “The middle-class people who pretend to be streetwise and poor but always go back to their bank account,” Hucknall says, “are the people who now slag us off for having money. It’s not the working-class people, ’cause they say, ‘I’m glad you got out, good luck to ya.’” In fact, says Rashman, Hucknall is unheeding of the bags of money that have begun to come his way. “He was totally poverty-stricken when he was writing; he’s a star now and all he owns is records. He’s just bought like a \$50,000 house, which is his idea of a mansion. He has no interests that way except buying records, probably 3,000 of them in the last two years. He’s obsessive about music, and when he’s not listening, he’s singing somebody else’s songs, or talking about it. And that’s genuine.”

“There’s unlimited possibilities for this band,” says Hucknall. “We all have a knowledge of different musical forms, different periods of R&B, jazz, reggae...it’s as important to me to keep doing other people’s songs as to do my own. I didn’t

know what I was gonna turn out when I first started writing—didn’t even know if I could write. Now I might be fresh to the business, but I’m not fresh to writing. It’s a mystery to me where the hell it came from. All I know is ever since I was a child, it’s been music.”

It’s time for Hucknall to report upstairs to a photo session with his bandmates, which he does with his usual promptness. “The best way of being,” he says, “is almost businesslike; it gives you artistic freedom to find your own space. You say, ‘Look, I want some control as well,’ and fight for it. And you get it.”

The rest of the group, used to being tyrannized by his punctuality, are already arrayed. Hucknall parks himself by them and peers out at the inevitable couple of female lookers who seem to turn up for any rock—er, musical—event. He’s humming something, maybe looking to cast some sort of “men and women” spell, and on the way out, one wonders what the tune will be. As it rises in volume, the choice—at least in the Hucknallian world—is no surprise. “I’ve got you,” he purrs, “under my skin, I’ve got you/ Deep in the heart of me....” ▮

## M.I. TOO TIGHT TO MENTION

**D**rummer **Chris Joyce** uses a Yamaha Series 9000RA kit with Ludwig snares and Paiste 2002 cymbals. Bassist **Tony Bowers**, though he’s learning to play sax, still confines himself to his Steinberger XL2 bass. Keyboardist **Fritz McIntyre** plays a Yamaha KX-88 electric piano. Guitarist **Sylvan Richardson** plays a Gibson ES-335 and a Sadowsky. Singer **Mick Hucknall** uses a Shure SM-58 mike with a Nady wireless mount. Trumpeter **Tim Kellett** shares a rack of eight Yamaha DX7s with McIntyre. Fritz controls six, Tim two.

# THE GEORGIA SATELLITES

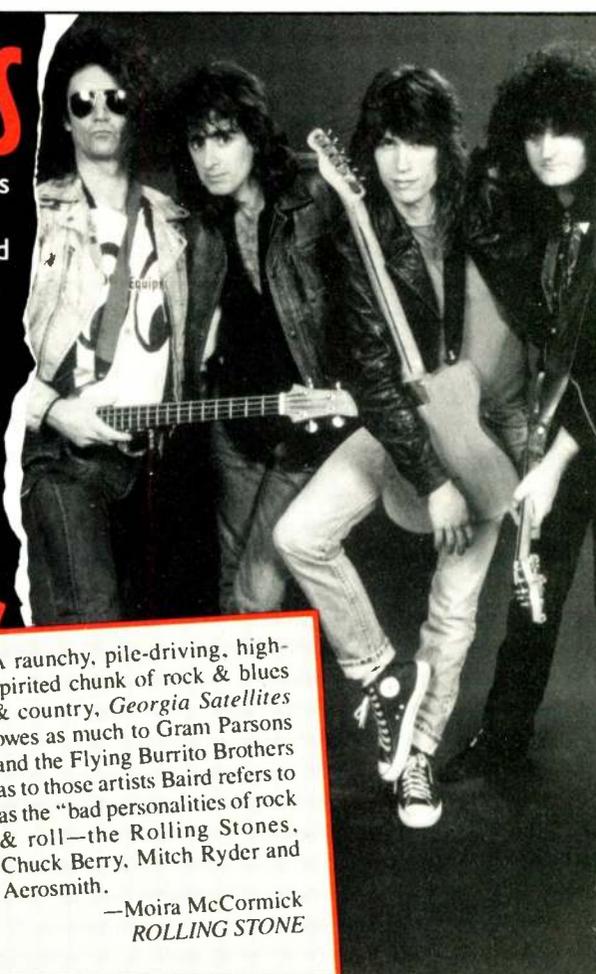
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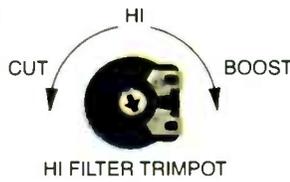
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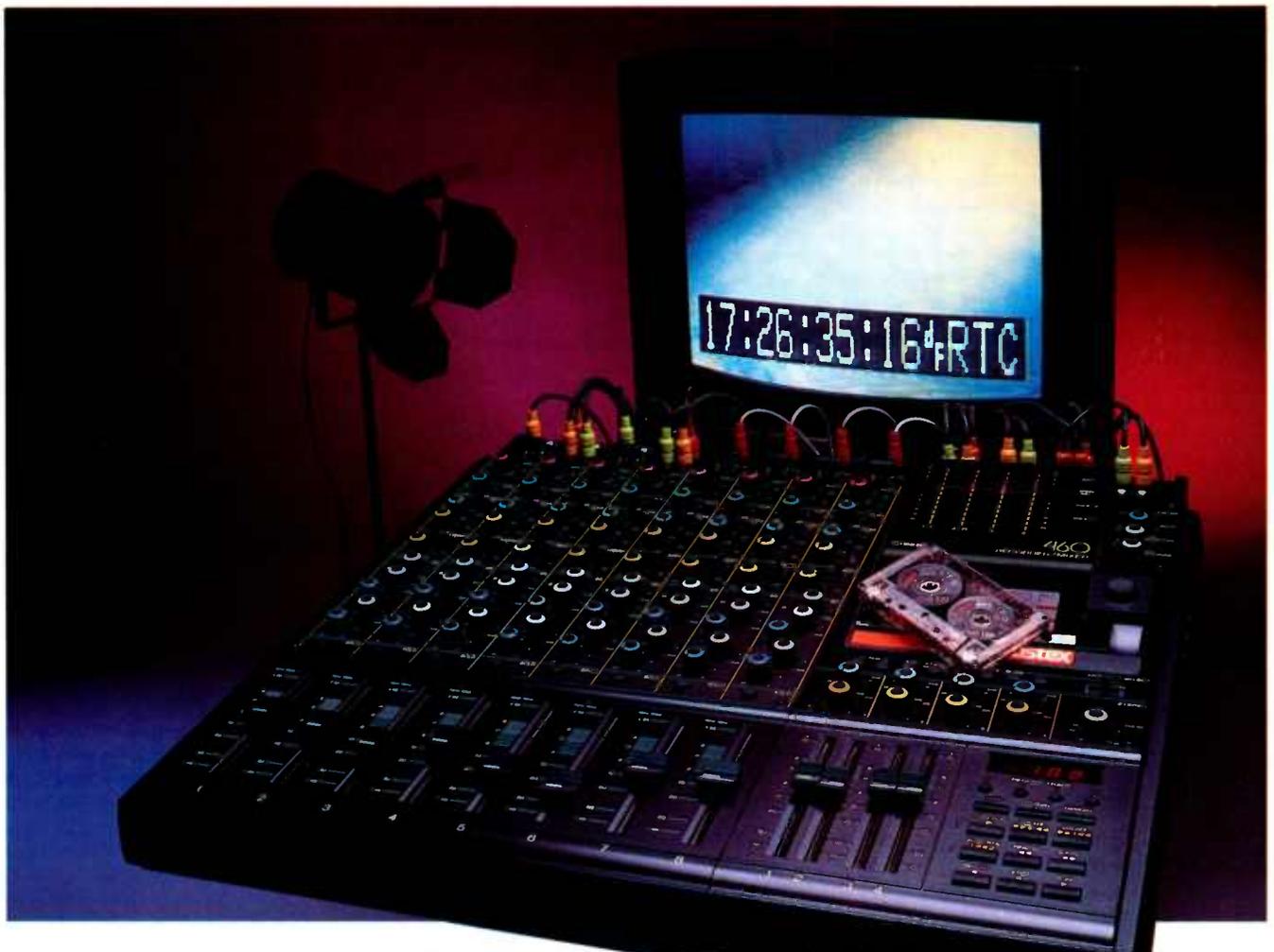
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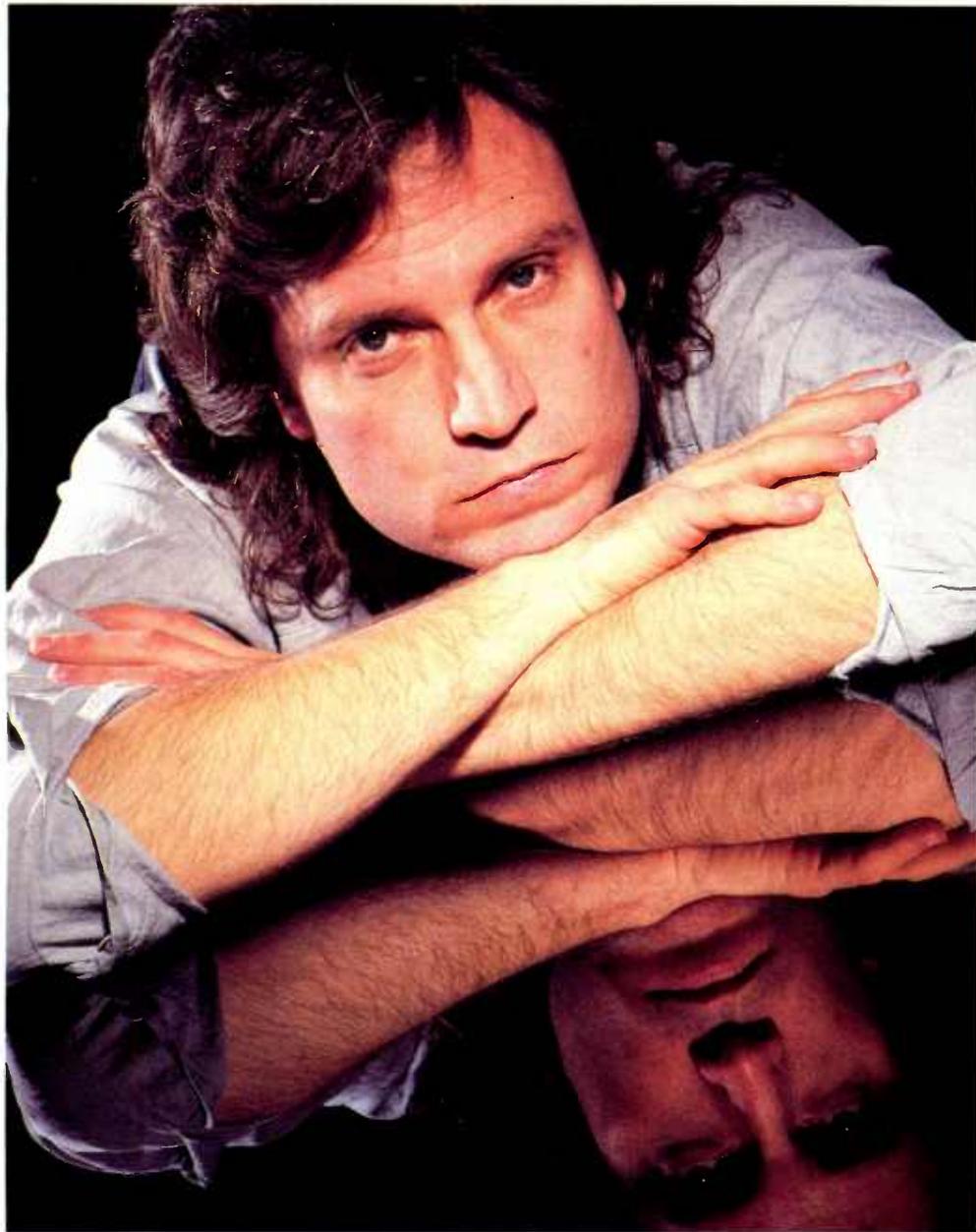
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**F**rom Bob Marley to Simply Red, from Duran Duran to Talking Heads, a producer for all seasons and all reasons.

## Alex Sadkin—Send In the Fire Extinguishers

By Richard Buskin

"EVEN THOUGH HE'S DEAD, BOB Marley is still probably my only musical idol...the things he gave me, the inspiration, are still there. I've never met a musician that powerful, who had that much control and really got what he wanted. He taught me a lot about how to build tracks and make a rhythm work, and just how musicians can come together and put together a unique hit rec-

ord. He really helped to get me started."

For a kid from New Jersey who grew up in south Florida, and started his professional life carrying out research into the hormone growth of giant sea turtles on Grand Cayman Island near Jamaica, Alex Sadkin has done pretty well for himself in the world of music. A track record that includes producing or engineering for the likes of Marley, Duran Duran, Ar-

cadia, Talking Heads, Grace Jones, Foreigner, Robert Palmer, the Thompson Twins, Joe Cocker, Third World, Robbie Nevil and, most recently, Simply Red, is fair testimony of this, and the varied output of the aforementioned provides proof positive of both his adaptability and ingenuity.

During his youth Sadkin cut his musical teeth listening to jazz and training to

play saxophone, and thereafter he learned to play bass when he joined a soul band with Jaco Pastorius—"probably one of the best bass players that ever lived"—while still at college. A geology degree led to the scientific research work on Grand Cayman, but the greater satisfaction that he attained from playing bass in a local reggae band on weekends hastened his return to Florida, where he joined another band.

In 1973 the breakthrough into studio work arrived courtesy of his father's business connections with Criteria Studios in Miami, where Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Wilson Pickett and Crosby, Stills & Nash had recorded.

"MCI Recording actually started in my garage in Fort Lauderdale! My father was friendly with "Jeep" [Harned], who was then head of MCI, and the equipment was developed and built at my home."

Shortly after joining Criteria, Sadkin started disc-cutting on records by the Eagles, Elvin Bishop and Crosby, Stills & Nash, but he made his first positive step towards engineering when he managed to get involved in the Bob Marley *Rastaman Vibration* sessions booked at the studio, "which was easy, as none of the other engineers knew what reggae was!" This would eventually lead to work on subsequent albums by Marley & the Wailers, including the production of *Survival*.

"That guy just had so much talent. Imagine working in Jamaica and getting to organize a hit record on the worldwide scale that he did. Every record, no problem. He just had it, and he did it in lots of funky little studios. Bob moved to Miami, so I used to go over to his house and he would play the acoustic guitar and sing stuff to me, and he knew that I was really dedicated to reggae."

After three and a half years at Criteria Studios, Sadkin accepted an offer from Chris Blackwell to work with him at Island Records in London and Nassau. It was also an offer to produce, which he readily took up with the likes of Third World and Hi-Tension, having previously only produced T-Connection's *Magic* album which included the smash-hit disco single "Do What You Want To Do." Alongside Marley, Blackwell has been the other major influence on Sadkin's career.

"When I started at Island I had a lot of help from Chris. Y'know, ideas on sound...the first thing that I noticed about working with him was that they always had the high-hat really bright and loud on British records, whereas it wasn't like that on American recordings;

the high-hats would just be sort of in there, quite subdued. So I started hearing a whole different kind of sound-picture. I'd heard a lot of Island records, but it wasn't until I was in the studio hearing the tapes and doing the mixes and editing that I realized I was listening to a very different sound from what I was used to.

"I co-produced quite a lot of records with Chris, and in a very low-key way he



**"The English groups are more open to trying things. In the States you'll get an actual rebellion against an idea!"**

came out with incredible ideas. He's not a pushy man, he's a real tasteful, thoughtful person, and just by being next to him hearing him yea or nay something or make some little comments, I was taking in some valuable information.

"Working with Island and Chris and Bob, I did reggae and then I did Robert Palmer, which in turn led to Talking Heads who were working at the same studio (Compass Point). I did the Jags, I did rock things, I did Japanese things—very international—French punk music, all sorts of things, and it just completely opened me up. So when I went to the States I had a completely different view of things. When I worked with Foreigner my ideas were completely un-American, and a lot of the ideas I came up with were thought of as quite bizarre by some of the established groups I ended up working with. They wanted me because I'd come up with fresh sounds, but when we'd get in the studio and I'd suggest something they'd say, "What?" I had just learned a

different way of doing things.

"I find that for the most part American recording techniques are very samey, very traditional. Whereas over here in Britain there are these great sound people who do something very individualistic, very unique. There's a handful of engineers in London who are real artists, doing sounds that have never been heard before! I don't find so much of that going on in the States. The best engineer in America, I think, is Bob Clearmountain, and his sound—which I love—is fantastic but very traditional. In Britain, on the other hand, you'll find sounds that to me are just as dynamic but more unusual, breaking new boundaries. I sort of like more angular, gated sounds, more roomy. Things that can sound a bit odd, and there are a lot of guys in Britain who are quite at home with that type of thing.

"A thing that happens in England is that the tape-ops learn to run a tape machine and edit, and they do everything right away. In America the engineers do all of that themselves, so the assistants aren't really doing that much. So they're usually not as good as some of the guys in England who are incredible. The day they step on the board they can edit, they can punch in, they can maneuver the tape and handle it in all ways; whereas most guys over in the States wait until the time they get on the desk to start learning all about these things. So overall I find that if you go to a studio in England the staff's better.

"The rooms in British studios are also liver and this is following on later in the States. Places like the Power Station are live, but some studios in New York are like little closets; ceilings are low, they're dead, they still haven't changed. The West Coast I'm not so familiar with, I never find that much reason to go there. I love the liver, more ambient, drastic European sound. Not as luxurious and smooth as the West Coast sound.

"There are also, of course, many specifically American ways of working that are ingrained in me, but the English groups are more open to trying things anyway. Whereas in the States you'll often get actual rebellion against an idea! I've worked with American engineers and wanted to try a certain sound, plugging up certain gear that I like, and then half an hour later I've realized that they've taken that piece of gear off the sound, because they don't know how to work it and don't like the sound that it makes. They'll slowly remove those effects and replace them with the sound that they like, whereas if an English en-

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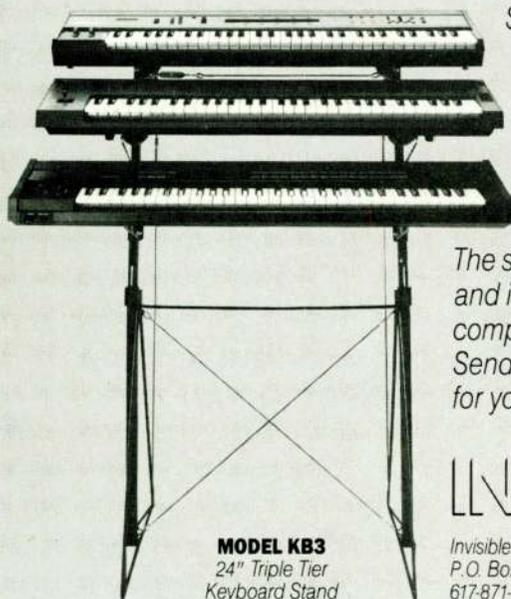


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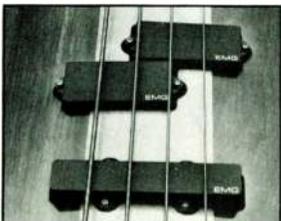
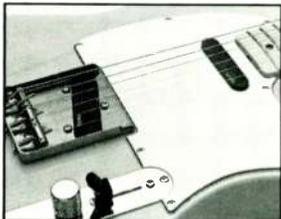
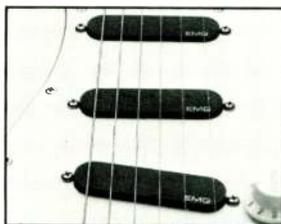
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gineer can't hear the benefits straight away he'll usually keep working on it until it makes a good sound."

Alex Sadkin's "anything goes" approach to his work, and the ensuing success that it has brought about, is a major factor on which he has built his reputation. Clear sonic evidence of this lies in the tracks of his collaborations with the likes of Grace Jones—*Warm Leatherette*, *Night Clubbing* and *Living My Life*—Duran Duran—*Seven And The Ragged Tiger*—and the Thompson Twins—*Quick Step And Side Kick* and *Into The Gap*. Noises that jar with convention appear out of the woodwork, and sporadically toy with the sensibilities of the listener. "Spot the device" is a popular pastime, but the finished sound is always a carefully laid mosaic in which no stone lays loose (even though some may appear to have been somewhat squeezed into place).

"With the Thompson Twins and Duran Duran you could suggest to pull the ceiling down and record it and they'll go for it! Especially Duran—Nick loves to destroy a room for the sake of sound! We've hit every conceivable thing and sampled it to try to make a new sound. We've taken a classical harp player, had him play a sort of angelic sound and then treated this so that it sounded really hard and metallic, like nothing you've ever heard before. It had been played with the technique of a harp player, and it ended up sounding like a piece of steel being struck across some heavy cables, but in tune. All done with a lot of compression, a lot of eq and a lot of flanging. That was done for one of the tracks on the *Arcadia* album. We've also melted plastic bags, which make a really strange sound, and recorded that. There's a percussionist named David Van Tieghem who I've worked with on several things, and he takes his instruments and puts them in water and hits them, so they'll make strange sounds and vibrate like a gong and sound like a wolfman or something!

"With the Thompson Twins you can sample anything that sounds like it would add to the mood of the song, whether it's a fire extinguisher, a lawn mower, cattle.... There was one B-side where we took the sounds of sheep and lots of animals and fed those into the mix at times. It just seemed to work. A lot of the time those things become hits, just because they sound different. So if you just realize what you enjoy and start trying it, a lot of times it works. If you hate it, then probably everyone else will hate it too!"

Apart from his ingenuity another of Sadkin's strengths is his adaptability,

which is a principle requirement considering the wide variety of artists, material and environment he is faced with. Grace Jones and her band are recorded mainly live in one large room, with some nifty use of vocoder, flanging and ambience providing the robotic effect on Grace's vocals when required. For Simply Red's new album, *Men And Women*, Alex abandoned his usual penchant for effects as the band wished to attain a more traditionally live sound on vinyl. Each song was recorded live in one or two takes, and then the album as a whole was enhanced in layers; all of the keyboard parts that needed recording or re-recording would be taken care of with regard to every song, followed by all of the guitar parts, all of the percussion and so forth. No track was dealt with individually from beginning to end, and in this way the album took a total of ten weeks to record and mix.

Roughly the same time was required for each of the Thompson Twins' albums, although the recording techniques were vastly different, the material being constructed mainly piecemeal with heavy emphasis on the use of machinery. Either way, Alex prefers quick, efficient recording sessions.

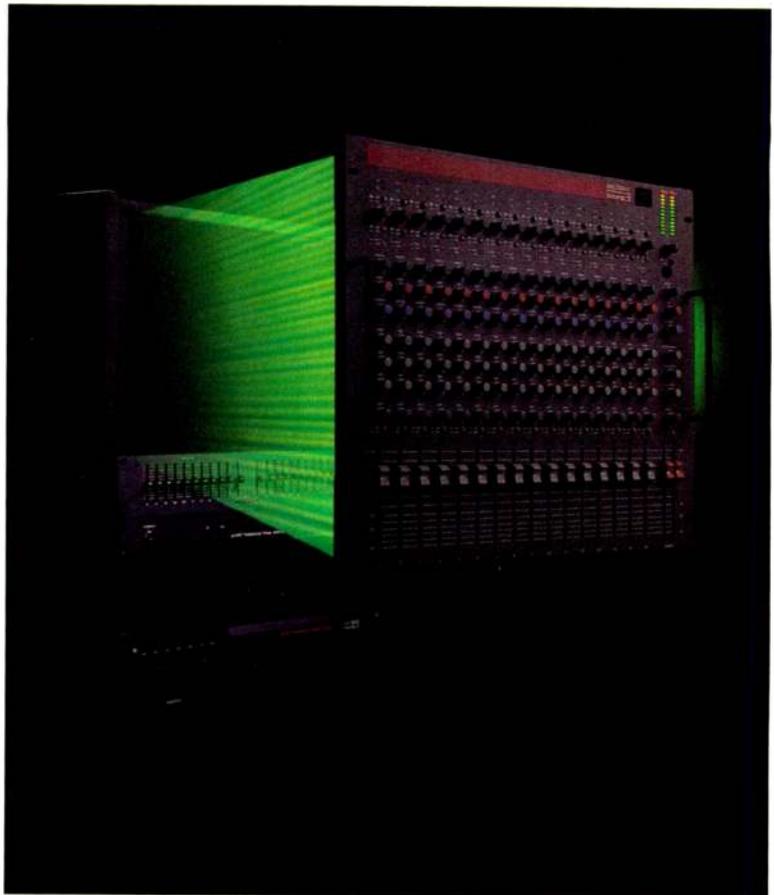
"I went through a period of doing some really long records: Duran Duran—*Arcadia*—were great fun to work with—Nick [Rhodes] thinks a lot like me, being very open-minded and

*continued on page 110*

## SADKIN'S SANDBOX

**S**o long as the material is good, I don't care if I'm working with a Studer or Otari tape machine, an SSL or a Neve desk, or whatever. It's all down to what you do with it. Listen to some of the material of Lee Perry, the master of reggae and dub; much of it sounds unbelievable and was 4-track!" Still, when coaxed, Sadkin will admit to a few favorites. He loves API boards ("fatter, warmer sound—the eq is nicer than SSL's), Lexicon 224X digital reverbs (for that "big, hall-like ethereal effect"), AMS digital delays and reverbs, Lexicon PCM-70 and 480L digital effects and EMT 160 plate reverbs ("they'll work on anything,").

Sadkin likes to hear his mix on big speakers, particularly Tannoy Gold monitors in lockwood cabinets. His small monitors are Yamaha NS10s. Fave outboard gear includes Drawmer noise gates ("very controllable"), and Urei 1176, Scamp and dbx 165 compressor/limiters. Sadkin also uses Fairchild ("nice on the voice, warms it up") and Roland Dimension D ("for anything with a lot of top end") compressor/limiters.



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# Rolling Stones on CD: You Can Get What You Need.

By Scott Isler

THEY MADE THEIR NAME BY PLAYING (and looking) raunchy, dirty and a few galaxies down the block from gentility. The Rolling Stones' idea of revolution verged closer to anarchy than thoughtful improvement. So ironists must be having a field day now that virtually all the Stones' recorded output has been sonically cleaned and combed and issued on compact disc, the Little Lord Fauntleroy of sound reproduction.

What's so funny? Well, nothing, really.

The still-costly compact disc has to appeal beyond classical-music audiophiles to establish itself as the dominant recording format (as the industry would like). The Stones, like their friendly rivals the Beatles, make an ideal choice to spread the digital gospel. They're massively popular, with a special pull—okay, call it nostalgia—on the hearts and wallets of aging baby-boomers with enough discretionary income to buy CD players and pay twice the price for albums they

already have.

No surprise, then, that last summer ABKCO Records and Columbia Records—the two companies that handle the band's repertoire in the U.S.—simultaneously started preparing Stones recordings for domestic digital release. In November ABKCO's batch of fifteen albums—from the Stones' first through *Let It Bleed*, the live *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!* and the *Hot Rocks 1964-1971* compilation, all originally released on London

DAVID REDFERN/RETNA

Records—hit record stores in CD form. Fast as you can say “stocking stuffer,” Columbia, the current distributor of the Stones’ own label, retaliated with CDs of the band’s following fourteen releases, from *Sticky Fingers* through *Undercover* and *Rewind*. (*Dirty Work*, the most recent Stones album, debuted on CD upon its release last spring.)

Preparing a digital master tape from an analog (i.e. “conventional”) source is as much art as science. Digital purists consider their CD players wasted unless they’re listening to digital recordings—which is fine as long as your taste in music begins in 1972. But digital encoding can deliver even pre-digital performances as you’ve never heard them before: with uncompressed dynamic and frequency range, and permanently free from wear. (Try finding an unworn Stones record in anyone’s collection!)

ABKCO and Columbia both took pains to insure that the Stones CDs wouldn’t be aural disappointments. Andrew Loog Oldham, the Rolling Stones’ flamboyant ex-manager and producer of their first nine albums, supervised the digital remastering of the ABKCO material. “This cleans it all up,” Oldham says of the sonic overhaul. “If it’s old to people it becomes new to them. It’s wonderful.”

Oldham, who was there when it happened, ought to know about the limitations of Rolling Stones recordings. “It was hit-and-run then,” he reminisces. “Your quality control were your ears. I would very often bring things back from California to New York when I knew that I would have to do twenty percent of the mixing before I got on the next plane to go home.”

Oldham had no production experience, but such insouciance was what the Rolling Stones were all about. He refused to record the group at Decca, the Stones’ British label, preferring to book odd hours in looser (if less equipped) studios. He doesn’t regret the policy, “just from remembering what the Decca studio looked like. The control rooms in those places let you know who was in charge: A guy’s gotta come *down the steps* to tell you how it is. I really don’t think that’s conducive to the change that was going on.

“Technique had nothing to do with it. Whether I wanted to be a producer or not doesn’t even come into it. You’ve definitely got to follow your instinct and say, ‘If they’re in *this* place, with this guy with his pipe and his tie and his white shirt-sleeves rolled up, we’re not even gonna get horny!’ I’d rather go for where the feeling got through.”

The feeling got through, and Oldham even learned a little about recording along the way. He certainly started at square one. At the recording session for the Stones’ first single, “Come On,” the fledgling—and clock-watching—producer was ready to leave when his two hours (and £40) were up. “We’d done the two things, it was five to six, I said, ‘Right, let’s go.’ The engineer turned



around to me and said, ‘Well, what about mixing it?’ I didn’t know what he was talking about. I said, ‘What’s that?’ He explained it to me. I figured, if I’m not there I won’t have to pay for it; ‘I’ll pick it up in the morning.’ After that we went to a mono studio because I knew we could only deal on the level of ‘what you hear is what you get.’ That’s how the first album and ‘Not Fade Away’ were done. Then we got up to three tracks at Chess [Studios in Chicago], and four tracks when we went to Los Angeles.”

The learn-as-you-earn attitude obviously didn’t faze Oldham. “What’s the three things that make up a hit record?” he asks rhetorically. “A great song, a great song and a great song... It doesn’t matter: scratch, hiss, pop—if you’re gonna convert the world.”

Still, the digital remastering required for CD gave Oldham a second chance to go over his work. PolyGram, ABKCO’s distributor, offered production facilities at its huge CD pressing plant in Hanover,

West Germany. Oldham went over the master tapes with a German engineer who “was fortunately the right age. He knew the records,” Oldham says. The two developed a sign language to overcome verbal barriers. Oldham would move his palms toward each other—like squeezing an invisible accordion—to signify a narrowing of the stereo soundstage. Another gesture involved moving his hand from the base of his neck over the top of his head; this meant bringing up the vocal.

Sometimes solving one problem created others. With “Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown,” for example, Oldham was “totally happy with where the vocal was on the single. But when you put that up with all the clarity that you’ve got now, you can put the balls back into the tape. Then, for some weird reason, where you put the voice doesn’t sound right! It doesn’t sound like the right amount of voice; it sounds like not enough. You’ve got the ball of the track sounding like the other records, and for some reason it’s affected the vocal. The requirement is: Lift it up!”

Integration of the sometimes extreme stereo separation was number one on Oldham’s list of priorities. He cites the previous stereo mix of “Mother’s Little Helper” as a “nightmare.” “The guitar sounded like Herman’s Hermits. Awful.

“You’d be a fool to think you could correct a lame song, a lame vocal or a track that doesn’t move,” Oldham says of his remixing philosophy. “But I was able to remember little things like, ‘Yeah, that tambourine really bothers me now’; in Hanover we had a little gizmo where we could tuck it under. It’s not so much a technical point. I was saying, ‘Look, Keith’s guitar comes in there. I can’t have this.’ I knew on things like *Flowers* or *Between The Buttons* I was in shock when I heard the tambourine hanging out of the bottom left-hand corner. It was like—no respect. It was aggravating.”

Other surprises were easier to take. Oldham heard bass parts he’d never heard before. On “Ruby Tuesday” he discovered someone counting off at the chorus/verse turnaround. (The conscientious timekeeper—possibly the cellist?—whispers twice, at 1:50 and 3:04 into the song.)

Generally, Oldham viewed his mission as “mastering the mystery back in.” That mystery lies deep in the primary source—the magnetic particles arranged on the master tape—rather than any mere studio hocus-pocus. “People say to me years later,” Oldham says, “I hear that you got the drum sound on ‘All

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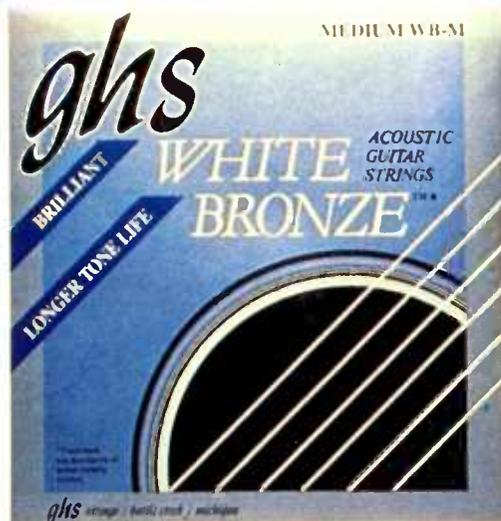
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"Andrew's idea," ABKCO president Allen Klein says of the CD project, "was, 'We've got to give people what they heard!' We didn't try to remake a record. Since everyone's concern at the time was what the single sounded like, we used that as a reference." Or at least a starting point: "We always mastered the singles bright," Oldham says, and with a lot of compression for radio.

ABKCO announced its Stones CD series (records and cassettes were overhauled too) in grand style. "THROW AWAY ALL YOUR ROLLING STONES ALBUMS. NOW" trumpeted the headline to a lavish eighteen-page trade magazine insert published last fall. But Stones fans with CD players might already have seen compact discs by their heroes well over a year before. Atlantic Records, the former distributor of Rolling Stones Records, issued CDs of the *Rewind* compilation and *Still Life*, the 1982 live album. More intriguingly, compact discs of the Stones' 60s albums had been dribbling into the U.S. as European imports. Klein was not happy.

"Those albums are not as good as ours," Klein says of the import Stones CDs, released by the British Decca Record Company with an ABKCO trademark. "We're both starting from the same two-track masters. They're missing an in-between step"—that of equalizing the master tape to yield a powerful sound equivalent to the vinyl counterpart. Master tapes *are* original source material, but not necessarily the final word (or sound). Engineers commonly fiddle with multi-track masters in preparing the two-track tape that will be used as the source for LPs and cassettes—to compensate for sonic shortcomings in those media and/or to correct problems at the recording session.

The British CDs have their origins in a lavish boxed set of ABKCO Stones LPs distributed by the audiophile-oriented Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab in 1984. MFSL, Inc. president Herb Belkin says his company produced a set of digital masters, at ABKCO's request, while MFSL was in possession of the stereo master tapes. The digital masters went to Decca Records in England for a series of LPs and CDs; MFSL itself didn't have CD rights.

Belkin claims that Decca ran Mobile Fidelity's digital tapes through the Decca Digital System, "which changed the

sound." He was so chagrined by the result that he asked Decca to remove the credit line—"Analogue to Digital mastering by Mobile Fidelity Sound"—from the CD packaging. Tony Hawkins, manager of the transcription department at Decca Recording Services in London, remembers receiving the digital tapes from MFSL. He says, though, that the tapes went straight through to Hanover for CD mastering. (PolyGram manufactured the British as well as the U.S. CDs.) Hawkins acknowledges that Decca Digital is an "in-house" system not compatible with the more standard Sony technology used by MFSL. However, "we couldn't even play [the Mobile Fidelity tapes] at that time 'cause we didn't have Sony equipment."

There are differences between the British and U.S. Stones CDs, largely attributable to Oldham's supervision of the domestic product. The awkward stereo separation that always marked *Aftermath* and *Between The Buttons*—and is even more obvious on the British CD than on LP—has been integrated into a more cohesive, forceful sound. "Let's Spend The Night Together" sports a brighter, louder vocal. On the other hand, some instrumental parts are buried, e.g. the piano on "Amanda Jones" and the acoustic guitar on "Complicated." The two electric-guitar parts on "Goin' Home" are melded into one.

The British *Hot Rocks I* (sold, unlike the U.S. version, as two separate CDs) has stereo mixes of "Time Is On My Side," "Get Off My Cloud," "Play With Fire" and "Satisfaction"; we get mono. The U.S. *Their Satanic Majesties Request*—one of the best recorded of all the early Stones albums, despite its chaotic creation—lops off the opening two notes of "Sing This All Together (See What Happens)," and programs that cut's "We Wish You A Merry Christmas" finale as the beginning of "She's A Rainbow." In its defense, the CD's insert sheet includes all the cover art of the original gatefold album; the British CD prints only the front cover on a chintzy slip of paper. (Ditto for the British *Let It Bleed*, lacking personnel credits.)

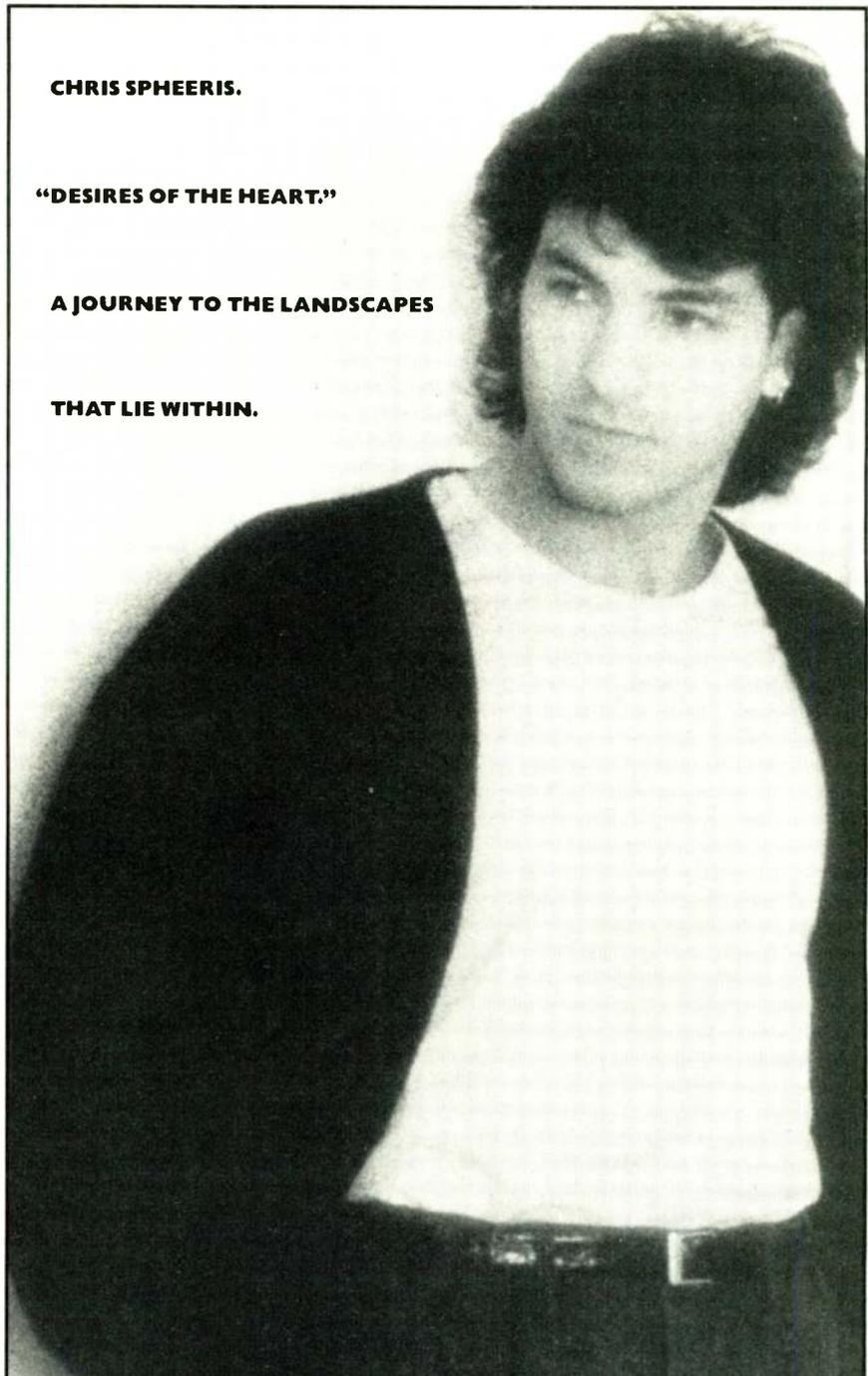
Well, trivial pursuit is a fascinating game, and doubtless there are other examples. A more substantial difference concerns the *Aftermath* album: The British CD reproduces the cover art and track line-up of the fourteen-song British LP; the U.S. version retains the state-side order of eleven songs, and is ten minutes shorter. The other British CDs, unlike their vinyl cousins, conform to the U.S. albums in song selection.

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**ON COLUMBIA RECORDS, CASSETTES AND COMPACT DISCS.**



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"It has nothing to do with trying to cheat anyone," Klein says. "We sat down and figured out what's the best album. Now *Out Of Our Heads* with 'Satisfaction' on it has to be better than [the British] *Out Of Our Heads* without 'Satisfaction.'" Klein adds that *Aftermath* is the only Stones album with more songs on the British than U.S. release. "We did not change *Aftermath* in the U.K. because that was a studio album."

Oldham goes along with this philosophy. "In England you never put your hit in albums, and here you had to." U.S. record companies viewed singles as promotional teasers for album sales. Oldham is vaguely aware of other dis-

crepancies between U.S. and U.K. Stones recordings. "People would point out to me years later, 'Did you know that 'Tell Me' is longer on the fade on the English version?' Quite honestly, no! 'Cause I was too busy. By the time I wasn't too busy, I really didn't care!"

The track-switching disappeared as the Stones took over control of their career. Since starting their own record company, Stones albums have been uniform here and abroad. Other traits were slower to change.

"When you consider the type of people the Stones were in those days, you can imagine the approach they took in the studio." Greg Calbi, mastering en-

gineer at Sterling Sound Studios in New York, speaks from experience: He digitally remastered *Sticky Fingers*, *Exile On Main Street*, *Some Girls* and *Emotional Rescue* for Columbia Records. "I don't think they really had the patience," Calbi continues. "Because it's the Rolling Stones and it's your favorite record, a lot of times you think a record's gonna be a lot better sounding than it really is. These records were never really recording gems but they were rock classics. That's their big conflict with digital."

Calbi's job—along with Vladimir Meller, the CBS Studios mastering engineer who handled Columbia's other Stones CDs—was to resolve that conflict. Their modus operandi was identical to Klein and Oldham's with the earlier Stones albums. "We bought each of the albums in a store," Calbi says, "and listened to what people had available to buy right now. Then I would go back and listen to the master tape. In some cases they were better, in some cases the record sounded better: Mastering, eq-ing doesn't go onto the master tape; that's done through the recording console. The main thing was to have plenty of time to compare all this stuff and see what was on the market and try to improve on it."

Calbi praises Don DeVito, Columbia's coordinator and supervisor for the Stones CD project. "He was very open to any suggestion. A lot of A&R people might just get the most convenient tape and say, 'Here, make a record out of it.' A few years ago I think they were just interested in getting a CD out. Now the competition is pretty serious. I think they know that if they get bad reviews in any of the magazines, that's just going to hurt the whole catalog."

Calbi and Meller were flooded with tapes: original masters, equalized masters, safety copies of original masters—several different versions for each album. "That gave me a tremendous advantage right off the bat," Calbi says. "In mastering, every stage is so important as far as differences in sound."

Nothing brought that home to Calbi like working on *Exile*, his self-described "favorite record" when it originally came out. "*Exile On Main Street* was probably the most perplexing one of all" the Columbia Stones CDs, he says. "The master tape sounded so drastically different from the record that was out on the market. I wouldn't want to insult anybody, but the master tape I had was dreadful. It was very muddy and there was very little separation between everything. It was obvious that whoever mastered the

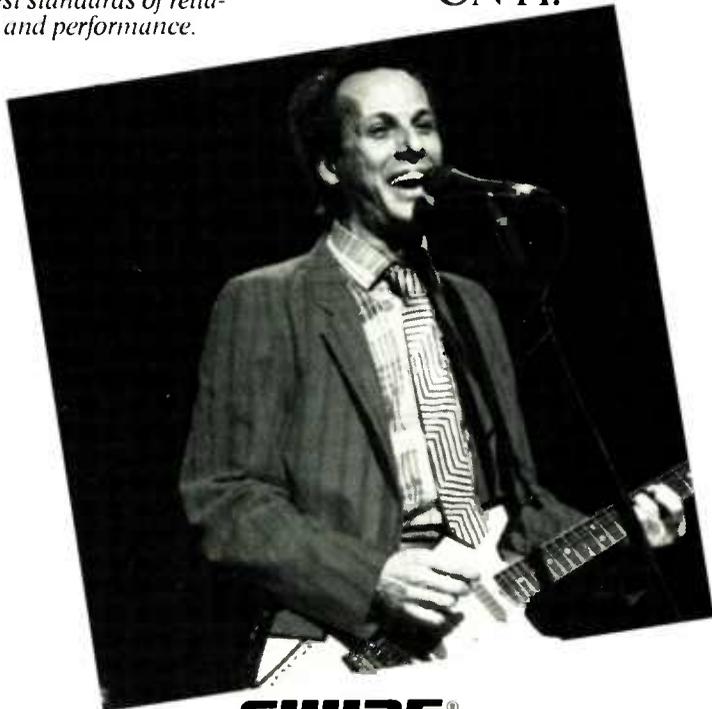
*continued on page 113*

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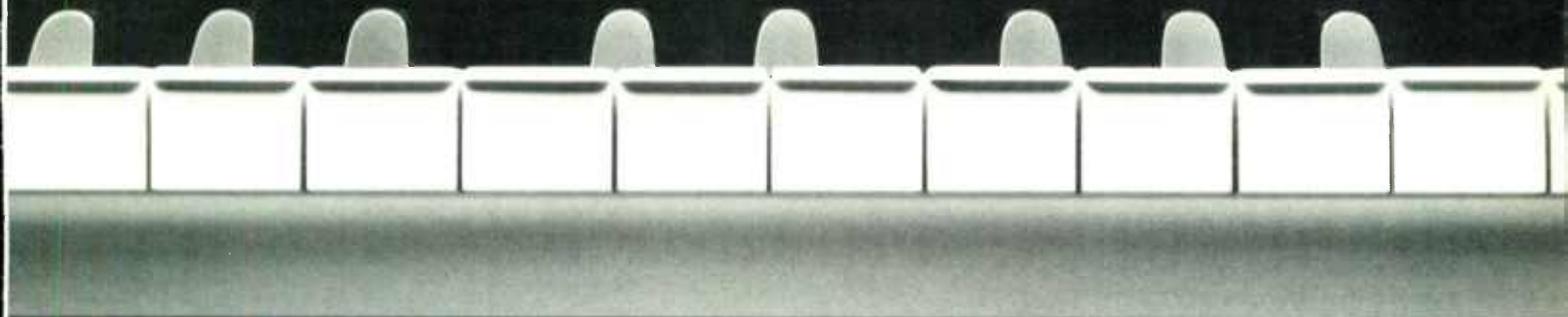


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## **YOUNG CHANG**

# YANKS TAKE NAMM

From the Instrument Industry's Latest Love Feast Comes Good News for Long Buffeted American Manufacturers.

By Jock Baird

**O**h those winter NAMM shows. Whenever a good setting for the musical instrument industry to celebrate was needed, Anaheim, California had always willingly volunteered. Near the perfect universe of Walt Disney, with music stars from Bon Jovi to Chick Corea to Joe Pass doing walk-ons, how could you *not* send back reports of rampant industry health? But this year, there were more quantifiable and concrete symptoms of improved fortunes among a specific group of manufacturers: the Americans. More than a coincidental number of once-buffed U.S. firms are having a noticeable upturn. Upturn, hell—some of these guys are back with a vengeance.

What's currently fueling this engine of recovery is the very non-musical area of international finance, specifically the decline of the dollar against the Japanese

yen. Eighteen months ago, a dollar could fetch 263 yen; now it's between 150 and 160, and will probably go lower. This means that Japanese instruments cost more in the U.S. How much more? Right now, around ten to fifteen percent on the average—although the exchange rate has changed a lot more than that, Japanese firms have bit the bullet to keep prices competitive. This yen-dollar boogaloo isn't enough of a handicap to give *all* American manufacturers a free ride; mostly the ones who already were moving. And what got them moving, among other things, were high-tech infusions, more rigorous quality control and major management changes.

Before we pop the champagne and launch into the theme from *Rocky IV*, though, here's a few sobering qualifiers. The strange laws of international finance suggest that all this is really a bet against the U.S.—the dollar was high because confidence in the American economy was high. It's now declining because our trade deficit is so bad. A low dollar may help turn that around a bit, but it's like a referee spotting you an extra touch-down—what does that say about your team? And in the past, a low dollar has been followed by higher inflation, killing that competitive margin. Will the spenders come out in '87? And how about those new laws that will tax U.S. corporations more? Now you can see why economists always get the last word, and it's usually "maybe."

If those are all very theoretical negatives, here's something more down to earth. For the Japanese, 1986 was a horror show. (Like a natural disaster or the oil price explosion of the 70s, the soaring yen even has a name, *endaka*.) Overall profits were down fifteen percent, unemployment was at its highest ever, and the land of the seventy-two-hour work week experienced new kinds of stress. Yet Japanese manufacturers seem to be responding to adversity quicker than their American counterparts did—belt tightening and a new upping of technological ante are expected to put Japanese industry back in the black in '87. That's why not all NAMM overachievers were domestic, and why you shouldn't count the Japanese out for long.

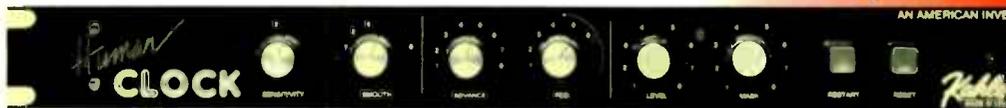
Okay, enough pop economics. Here are some of those rugged American musical entrepreneurs who stole the limelight at Anaheim this January. Cue the fireworks, Ray Charles and the Chevy commercial—we're going to hit the NAMM show floor.

**M**ichael Stewart's main profession is not inventor, but producer—he did *Piano Man* for Billy Joel before Joel moved back East. Though convinced of the worth of MIDI sequencers and digital drummers, he felt their lock-step tempos too rigid for the rough and tumble world of stage and studio. Rather than make his drummer play to the click or die, Stewart invented a box that would take the tempo from a live drummer and send it out as a MIDI sync pulse, thereby making the sequencer follow—gasp—the drummer. It was an idea as revolutionary as it was simple, because it throws off the mechanical monkey that's always been on MIDI's back. Of course, it wasn't completely new—Dan Garfield's boxes use what he calls Click to manually send tempo, but the drummer has to play only naked tempo—anything more would confuse it. The innovative thing about Stewart's invention is that once it's going, a drummer can play all kinds of things on the sending pad and the machine won't be misled. And at the NAMM demo, Stewart had his drummer do some confoundingly confusing kick solos and the thing never blinked.

Michael Stewart decided to let Gary Kahler manufacture and sell his invention. This is no coincidence to the theme of this story, for Kahler's American Precision Metal Works has long been the nation's most militantly patriotic MI manufacturer. It began when Kahler invented and sold one of the best whammy bars in the world and watched in amazement as thousands of Japanese copies suddenly flooded the market. Ned Steinberger gradually converted his imitators into licensors, but Kahler fought—and took no prisoners. It was expensive and absorbed Kahler's natural combative energies for years, but unlike many American inventors, he has harvested

most of the fruits of his own invention. Kahler underscored this last point by naming Stewart's wonder box "the Human Clock, an American Invention."

The Clock is designed primarily for drummers, but has what's called a Sustain mode that will work with other instruments if the player gives it a moment of silence before each *one*. To set a tempo you hit on the first beat of two bars and the Human Clock'll send a MIDI start command on bar three. From that point on, it'll use what Kahler calls Real Time Prediction to calculate live tempo. You can set its sensitivity to rhythm changes, so it will either stick to your change like glue or figure maybe you were a little off and adjust more slowly—sort of like an extremely friendly click track. It also has feel and advancement controls to move the sequencer ahead or behind the beat, excellent for squeezing out any MIDI lags. Stewart put the Human Clock through an obstacle course of tempo changes and it followed each one. It's not hard to see big implications:



the mass humanization of MIDI'd music, an increase in the dignity of the drummer and new possibilities for using sequencers in live performance. Beyond that, it could become a more reliable sync-to-tape method than tones like FSK, which tend to disappear when the tape degrades. You could even add MIDI sequencers to existing tapes. For \$600, that's a lot of implications.

Of course, when it comes to comebacks, no one's been down as long as the classic American guitar companies, and Gibson has probably come back the farthest. It was sad for many of us sentimental Gibson owners to see the company lie fallow in recent years as a corporate stepchild of Norlin, and sadder still to play their new guitars and feel something lacking. But Gibson's woes caught the attention of three young Harvard Business School roommates, Henry Juszkiewicz, Dave Berryman and Ben Rhodes, who had upon graduation

#### Drummer-to-MIDI: the Human Clock

bought a high-tech Oklahoma City company called Phi Technologies and turned it into a winner—among its products were tape recorders for defense use. The three then looked about for an undervalued company with untapped name recognition, and jumped at Gibson, no doubt spurred on by the blues-playing habits of Juszkiewicz. The sale went down last summer, and after six months of new management, Gibson has gotten a good shot of Phi Tech high-tech.

The first Phi Tech music product is a trigger-to-MIDI drum interface called the Translator 2. It's fairly straightforward but does quite a bit, and at \$250 is going to put a lot of hitherto reluctant drummers into the MIDI universe. The Translator 2 will either MIDify any existing non-MIDI electronic drum kit, or can be matched with a new solid metal drum mike/trigger system that will enable a drummer to MIDify an acoustic kit for under \$500. There's actually a lot in the box: It'll take six inputs as well as MIDI in, it'll control pad sensitivity and change the channel assignment, and it even has a panic (all MIDI notes off) button. The Translator 2 can also rearrange MIDI note assignments, but you're limited to a choice of eight pre-programmed sets. This is a textbook example of finding a viable niche in the marketplace and coming up with exactly the right product.

The new Gibson management team also entered into a new joint venture with K-Muse to manufacture and distribute the Photon MIDI guitar converter (another American invention by Maryland's Bing McCoy). The Photon has emerged as perhaps the best of the under-\$2000 add-on systems, but has had trouble meeting demand and shaking the K-Who? factor. The new venture is called K-Phi USA (rah rah!) and seems like a deal that will significantly improve the fortunes of both parties. But maybe most important to Gibson's new fortunes, whatever was lacking in those recent-year guitars is back—they really do feel and play more like the old ones.

Guild is another one of those seminal U.S. guitar firms that has seen better days. Although there had been no quality drop in their mostly acoustic line of guitars, there was a curious lethargy in distribution and marketing. A year or so

ago, a turnaround was begun, and an impressive new line of electrics was launched, but some of the old habits remained. Then in 1986, Guild was purchased by a Chattanooga guitar-picking investment banker named Jerre Haskew, who saw in Guild almost exactly what the Phi Tech trio saw in Gibson: a great resource with high brand loyalty not being used to its full potential. Haskew immediately hired legendary Nashville luthier George Gruhn and tightened up his company from shop to reps. Haskew feels Guild guitars are the only guitars in the U.S. now being made by union labor (a claim we were unable to verify), and notes that a certain New Jerseyite who was also born in the U.S.A. was impressed both by that fact and by the guitars Haskew sent him.

The cream of the line has been its acoustic guitars, and Guild plans to get them into more stores. But the big push will be in electric guitars (without, however, the Brian May model—so it goes). Any company joining such a well-hoed field in 1987 will be asked what noteworthy new approaches they offer, and Haskew came equipped with a damn good answer, the Ashbory bass. Because it's a miniature fretless bass that uses rubber-like strings (one was called them "Gummi Bear strings"), it's tempting to call the Ashbory a gimmick or practice bass. It's not, and not just because no one would pay \$500 for a gimmick. It plays wonderfully, has all the speed and grab you could want and is also perfect for guitarists who can't adjust to the long bass scale. And the active-electronics-boostered sound is really unusual. I repeat, this is not a toy, a gimmick, or Son of Gitter. All I can say is you gotta play it!

The most-cited example of MI corporate neglect has always been Fender under CBS, and it's been several years now since Bill Schultz and his merry band have been shining the firm up. What's most interesting about Fender's fortunes this January is a shift away from the cheapo Japanese-made Squier series and a new thrust into the so-called mid-line (\$700) range. Fender has opened a new plant in Oregon and is there assembling two new lines of Strats called the American Standard and the Strat Plus. Oh sure, you may say, a Strat is a



Phi Tech's Translator 2 MIDI interface



**Guild's rubber-stringed Ashbory bass**

Strat is a Strat—how different can it be? Pretty different, actually. The new guitars use a slightly less curved neck (9½-inch radius vs. the classic Fender 7½-inch), a new whammy bar with more range, all-new pickups that have less magnetic damping effect on the string, and a tone control that can literally take itself out of the signal path and give you nothing but the naked pickup without ripping it out à la Van Halen. The Strat Plus has all this and adds a new two-pin roller nut and locking tuning machines that obviate the need for a locking nut. Individually these improvements may not seem earth-shaking, but they add up to one giant leap of a Strat.

Fender is also deep into its Signature series, guitars made exactly for all-star artists. Most significant of these is a Yngwie Malmsteen model that may be the first commercially available guitar with a scalloped-out fretboard. Fender also brought out a new high-quality bass speaker system called the B.X.R., brought in a new line of so-called "Special Products" that includes some nice headphones and mixing boards, and added full MIDI implementation to one of its Sunn programmable lighting controllers, the PLC 816.

Not all of the guitar news was domestic: Yamaha, flush from last summer's reorganization into new product divisions, launched an ambitious new line of Gibson-scale solid-bodies, the RGX "power guitar" series, and refined its Strat-like SE series. This gives Yamaha a guitar at every price point from \$200 to

\$1000, all with whammy bars. The styling on the RGX series is swell—I especially like the "Access Angle" neck-body joint and the cutaway phone jack—and even the cheaper models have a smooth feel. There's also an RBX bass line, similar in many ways to the classic BB series, and a new short-scale Motion bass that's already won over Duran's John Taylor and Mister's Richard Page. And Yamaha is even intruding on the sacred soil of the Gibson L5, offering a superb version at considerably less than collector prices.

Okay, okay, I hear the mutterings. What's with all these old-line guitar companies hogging the stage? What about the MIDI guitar explosion you got so worked up about last summer? Perhaps the biggest surprise at NAMM was the degree to which MIDI guitar was a non-issue. The only major innovation was the Stepp DG1, which really was impressive. Although the strings setup is not orthodox, it was no problem at all making a transition. There may be some question about whether the digital synth section is hefty enough—some time developing new patches may resolve that—but on playability the Stepp gets an A. Other than that and the Photon, things were muted. Ibanez decidedly played down its controller, concentrating instead on some new electrics and a whole new line of Tama drums. Voyetra reportedly decided not to produce its impressive prototype—for now. Charvel, as well as fellow IMC brand Akai, did not even come to NAMM, deciding one show a year was enough.

That left Kaman (Ovation/Takamine) carrying the flag at Anaheim, with Roland quietly showing the GM70 converter it debuted in Chicago, and DOD taking over the IVL system from Kramer. The only other MIDI guitar action worthy of note was a new \$700 add-on system from Beetle, who also makes the PR-7 DX hardware programmer. Called the Vortex, the Beetle system does not read pitch at all but uses a "radar scanning detector" to locate the position of your fingers (the literature claims it to be a thousand times faster than the competition with no glitches—hmmm). Unfortunately, what they showed was so preliminary, a real evaluation must wait. Does all this mean I'll have to calm down



**Yamaha's sharp-cutaway RGX axe**

and face the fact that America may not be ready for MIDI guitar? Could be, but don't count on it.

The other big high-tech glamour issue of 1986 was sampling, and no such rollback was evident. The only totally new entry was the Casio FZ1, a \$2200 16-bit sampling keyboard that adds a number of impressive new wrinkles to the familiar sampling repertoire. First and foremost is its display, which is actually a small 64x96-dot video screen which graphically displays the waveform—it scrolls back and forth and can zoom in for close-ups. Other killer FZ-1 extras include the ability to set eight loop points, crossfade, reverse, fade or mute on a velocity cross-point, do waveform or additive synthesis, cut samples into cyclical waveforms, hand draw them, and put up to 64 sounds on a keyboard. It's even got a high-speed data interface to dump sam-

ples, and a \$400 expansion board that takes the onboard memory to three megabytes. Even more provocative, it has changeable software, so optional programs could temporarily turn the FZ-1 into a sequencer or phase distortion synth—yes, this'll be open to third parties. Casio really did their homework on this one, folks.

Shrewd readers will note I slipped in another Japanese company, but there was still plenty of American sampling action. Ensoniq, still sitting on the most affordable sampler, the Mirage DKS, chose to make the point more emphatically by dropping the price to \$1300—\$1100 for a rack-mount. By now, many techno-handicappers are asking if in this brave new world of 12- and 16-bit samplers, the good old 8-bit Mirage has what it takes, but the answer to that may be in the incredible number of new com-

puter visual editing programs for the Mirage that were on the show floor. The *vox populi* seems to be saying we'll find ways around the limitations to get the price break. And the ESQ-1 is also starting to get its share of editor/librarian programs. Other Ensoniq action saw the release of rack mount versions of both the ESQ-1 (\$1000) and the SPM-1 sampled piano (\$900).

At the other end of the dollar spectrum, Kurzweil did a little price cutting of their own, bringing the price of their flagship 250 under ten grand—this includes the sound modeling program for user sampling that used to be optional, and a new high-speed data interface known as the QLS. Kurzweil also brought out a new \$8500 rack-mount expander version, the 250 RMX. Both include a new software operating system and a 12-track, 12,000-note sequencer. But even

## UNIVERSAL FM & OTHER GOOD NEWS

**S**ome synthesis technologies come and go before anyone's had a chance to finish reading the manuals, but it doesn't look like that's going to happen with FM digital. In fact, the Winter '87 NAMM show could have been aptly subtitled: "FM: The Saga Continues." Part of the story, of course, was Yamaha's introduction of their new DX7s (the DX7 IID and IIFD) and the TX81Z tone rack. And to answer everyone's number one question, yes, all your existing DX sounds will work on the new machines. All it takes is a very simple, and presumably inexpensive, adaptor called the ADP1 for your old DX7 RAM cartridges. (And no, the rumors are false! The model letters have *nothing* to do with the initials of everybody's favorite techno writer).

Also false, obviously, were the vile canards floating around NAMM to the effect that Yamaha introduced the new DXs to cut third-party developers of DX voicing programs out of the picture. How could that be the case when the old and new units are fully compatible? And if Yamaha were hostile to third-party developers, how come the Bäckhus Systems IBM-PC editing program for the TX81Z made its debut simultaneously with the 81Z itself? Incidentally, if you're curious about what *you* can do with those seven new waveforms in the 81Z, the Bäckhus program seems a good place to start.

But Yamaha is now only part of the FM saga. Korg also introduced an FM machine of their own: the DS-8. Nippon Gakki, Yamaha's parent company, now has an interest in Korg's Japanese parent company, and has licensed one of their 4-

operator FM systems (with 2 algorithms) to Korg for use in the DS-8. It's an 8-voice, multimbral machine which is easier for some to program than the DX7 because it translates the language of algorithms and operators into conventional analog-related parameters and controls. The 40-character display doesn't hurt either. From what I could tell in a crowded, noisy NAMM display room, the DS-8 also has the articulate clarity of FM without sounding like a DX ripoff.

Even seasoned DX owners have at times felt the need for some hardware programming aids, and a new box from Symphony doubles as a user-friendly editor panel and a 512-voice memory expander. How friendly? It has an "FM EQ" feature that'll turn requests like "make this brighter, will ya?" into the necessary parameter changes. It also has all kinds of global editing, MIDI signal clean-up and software update capabilities. The voice storage section has very hip data base software, which can sort voices alphabetically, by parameter, by synth or other esoteric criteria. It has a high-speed RS232 interface to work with computers, does printouts and works for everything from an exalted TX816 rack to a lowly FB-01. The Symphony VX7 sells in the high seven-hundreds. The Salt Lake City operation also has a new 16x16 MIDI processor. The equivalent of four MEP4s, the Concert Series will map, merge, process and do laundry, and four can be chained together to be 64x64.

Of course, there's more to keyboard life than FM. Roland debuted their D-50 digital synthesizer at NAMM. It boasts their latest sound-generating scheme: Linear Arithmetic (LA) Synthesis. Essentially, partial timbres drawn from digitally synthesized waveforms are combined with partials derived from PCM

samples to produce the D-50's sound. Partials from these two sources can be blended via a joy stick. As on-site demonstrations made clear, this dynamic relationship among partials can produce much more dramatic results than simply stacking samples and digital synth sounds via MIDI. And the D-50's voice architecture even includes onboard digital parametric eq, chorus and reverb.

Playback-only sample devices also made a strong showing at NAMM. Of course the concept is as old as the digital drum machine itself. And one of the pioneers in playback-only sample technology, 360 Systems, unveiled two new products. One is the Professional MIDI Bass, a rack-mount version of 360's classic MIDI Bass with more onboard sounds, and a Modify section for customizing samples. The company also debuted the new 360 Voice Module, a rack-mount unit which can hold 128 lead and percussion samples, thanks to 360's Silicon Audio™ LSI chips.

Elsewhere, Oberheim unveiled their DPX-1, which can play back library discs for the EII, Prophet 2000/2002 and Ensoniq Mirage. Generic playback devices like this could very well become the biggest thing since sliced waveforms. Hybrid Arts' ADAP digital recording/sampling system for the Atari 1040 ST, for example, can play back and edit discs for the Ensoniq Mirage, Prophet 2000/2002, Roland S-10/S-50, E-max, Korg DSS-1, and the Akai S900.

The new developments in FM and sample technology at NAMM bring up one important point. As technologies become more universal—i. e., not the sole domain of one manufacturer—they become more immune to obsolescence. And that's good news for both musicians and manufacturers. — Alan di Perna

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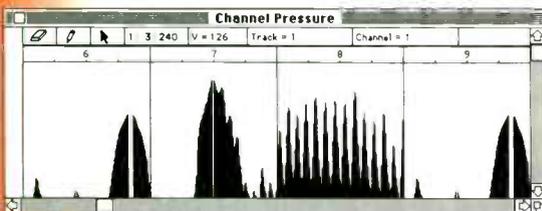
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more activity surrounds their under-\$3000 150 Fourier Synthesizer, which is based on harmonic frequencies rather than waveforms. Where once it only took ROM sound blocks, now a new Apple software program called the 150 Sound Lab enables users to design and store their own patches. And there's also a Mark II version of their fancy home keyboard, the Ensemble Grand. It's been a tough last few years for the company, but internal restructuring, including a public stock offering, have made 1987 look considerably brighter.

One way U.S. firms are getting a leg up is to join forces in new product ventures. Witness Zildjian's new ZMC-1 cymbal miking system, developed in conjunction with Barcus Berry. The system uses up to six box-like condenser/electret mikes that go under the cymbals, thereby minimizing leakage. The six cymbals are then fed into a basic stereo mixer, which also has eq and effects loops. Six mikes and the mixer go for a grand. Considering how long cym-



**Passport Master Tracks Pro window displays complex MIDI controller data.**

bals have been immune from the drive to electrify, this seems overdue.

Another link-up of great Americans involves the latest version of Samson's stage wireless system. Feeling that the last frontier of wireless was noise, Samson put a dbx noise reduction system in their Concert TD series, which runs from \$800 to \$1200 in price (TD stands for True Diversity, natch). It banishes breathing and pumping symptoms as well as transmission noise, but still packs a 115 dB dynamic range. The Samson unit is also the only wireless setup in which you can get the Electro-Voice N/D 757 mike element. And Samson took over the distribution of the aluminum Hartke speaker system.

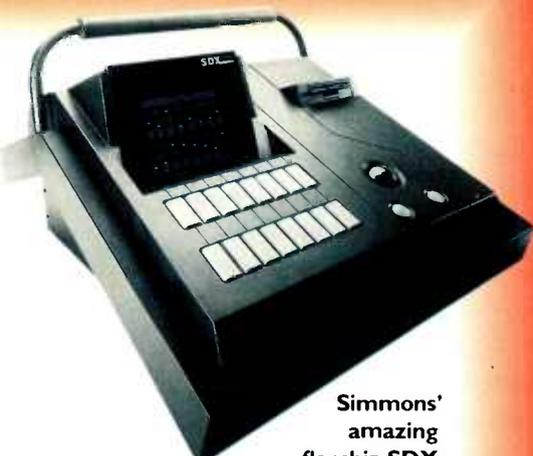
Not all our fellow countrymen are into cooperation, though. Alesis and ART seem to be having their own private pre-set reverb war. Digital reverbs and effects with no user-programmable patches can cost a lot less and still sound excellent, as Alesis demonstrated with its MIDIVerb and MIDIFex units. This show, MIDIVerb died and went to MIDI heaven, replaced by the \$400 MIDIVerb

II, a 16-bit rack-mount unit that has all manner of reverbs (including gated), delays, chorusing and flanging among its 99 programs. Bandwidth is 15kHz, a notable improvement on MIDIVerb. And Alesis got much of the same processing system into their \$250, 16-preset MicroVerb, which packs three to a rack but has a big, big sound. Alesis also showed a cute hand-calculator-size MIDI patch transmitter, the \$99 MPX.

ART, meanwhile, was running straight at Alesis in ads for its new \$400 ProVerb, a rack-mount 99-preset MIDI-accessible digital reverb unit. Should we set MIDIVerb II and ProVerb up across from each other and just let them flange it out? ART's other big NAMM release was more unique: a MIDI eq system that completely rethinks equalizers as we know them. How? A slider on your typical eq does not work in isolation—a "skirt" effect tends to drag its adjacent bands along, giving you more a rounded hill, let's say, than a spiky peak. What ART did was figure out a way to adjust the adjacent bands to compensate for band interaction, so that what you set is what you get. They call this Smartcurve and put in it a professional  $\frac{2}{3}$ -octave eq system with 120 patch locations, then added a composite video output to graphically display the frequency curve, slider positions and MIDI info on any TV. The IEQ, or Intelligent Equalizer, is available in a \$600 master rack-mount unit, with controls on the front panel, and a \$350 satellite box, up to fifteen of which can be slaved to one master.

Other good Americans who were feeling no pain included Sequential Circuits, true to their word in having their vaunted Model 440 sequencer/sampler/synco-box/digital drummer up and pumping. Tom Scholz's SR&D showed a prototype of a new modular amplifier that works in a system along with the RockModules. (Scholz is also sitting on the most advanced effects amp-switching pedal design around.) And Whirlwind caused quite a stir when it was learned the cable/hardware firm had been importing European product—until it turned out to be two Porsche 944s for their dealer/customer Leader cord sweepstakes, won by some very happy guys from Schenectady, New York's Drome Sound.

Actually, the biggest single American winner at winter NAMM was probably not a music manufacturer at all, but a computer maker: Jack Tramiel, the Holocaust survivor who turned Atari around. Tramiel's baby is the incredibly affordable Atari ST, which is so close to the Macintosh in operation it's known as

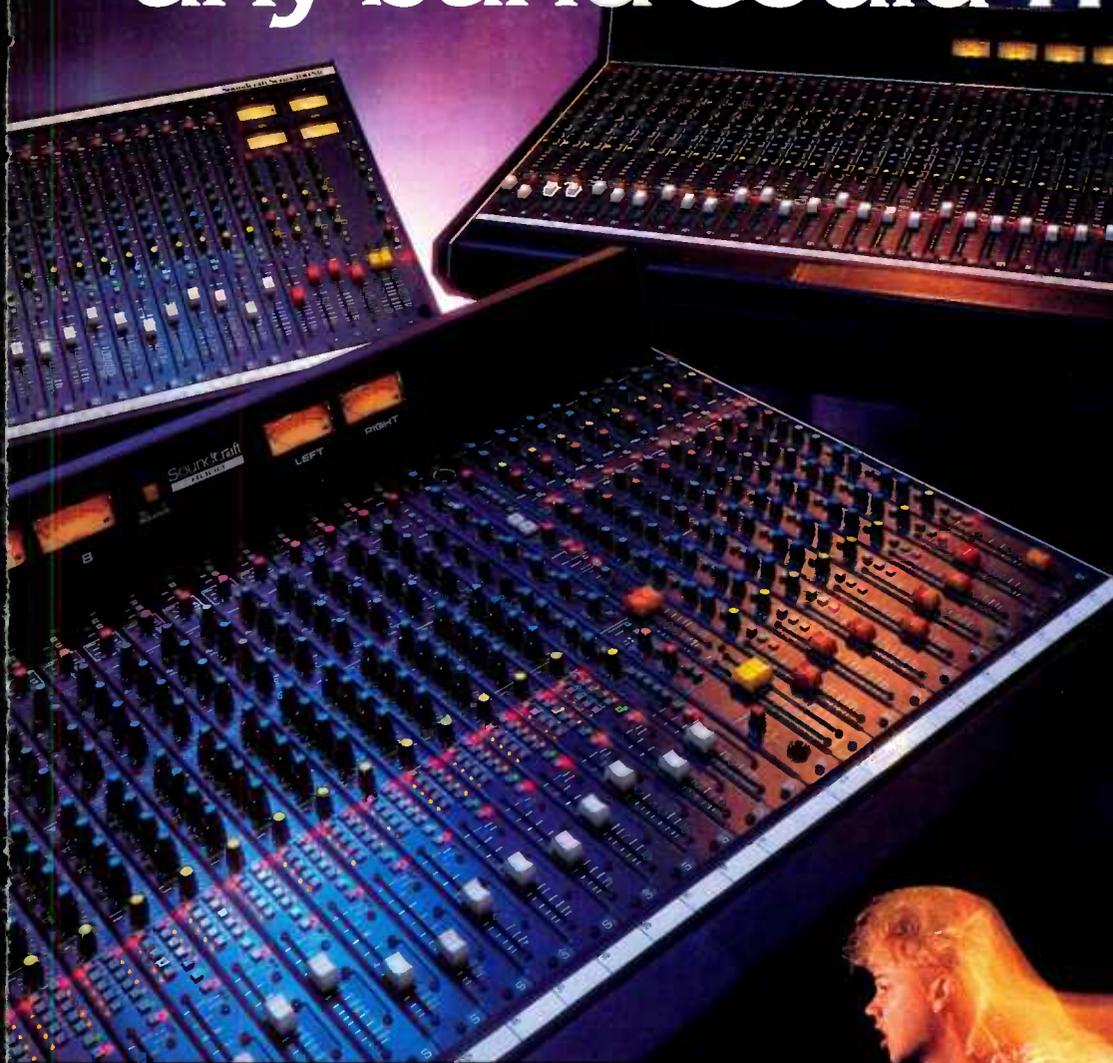


**Simmons' amazing flagship SDX**

the "Jackintosh." Word was out that several established software houses were adapting their programs to the ST, but this didn't prepare us for the astonishing number of available music programs. For instance, there were five very impressive pro-level sequencers (Hybrid, Dr. T, Sonus, Beam Team and Steinberg), a couple of fine starter sequencers, editor/librarians for not only the familiar DX/CZ/Mirage clique, but even new machines like the Akai S900 sampler and Kawai's R-1000 drum box. We're also seeing some new approaches: Beam Team's Xsyn, for instance, is actually a five-part integrated editor/librarian that includes a bare-bones sequencer, full service editing (including performance functions on the DX7) and even a program that lets the computer generate sounds for you, all for \$99. And as long as we're talking ST, Hybrid Arts' sensational ADAP sampling system is finally coming out. If 1986 was dubbed "the year of sampling," my call is for '87 to be "the year of Atari." Nice job, Jack.

Another U.S. computer company, Apple, has had some recent problems but is now feeling its oats. When Steven Jobs left to build the ultimate educational computer (the Next), many wondered whether Apple chief John Scully could keep the Macintosh competitive. Scully was able to make strong inroads on IBM's lock on the business market and as a result, there are more Macs than ever out there. And more Mac music programs than ever. Witness Passport's new Master Tracks Pro, written by Don Williams, who did the non-MIDI Music Shop for Broderbund. This has some terrific features, including graphic plots of aftertouch, key pressure, modulations and whatnot, a sysex librarian, 64 tracks, a fine bar-graph edit window, a keyboard mapper that allows you to control the sequencer from a piano keyboard, and one of the most flexible song/chain editors going. Passport also has the first se-

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quencer adapted for the new Apple II<sub>os</sub>; no, you can't use the new Ensoniq Q-chip synth voices interactively with the sequencer yet, but give them time.

Apple's good health bodes well for Opcode, which specializes in Mac software. Opcode brought out what may become the standard Mac interface, the Studio Plus. It merges two MIDI Ins, sends six MIDI Outs, and syncs to your heart's content. A new version coming soon will allow you to keep your modem and printer hooked in to your system. Opcode also has a superb new FB-01 editor/librarian which has the ability to translate your fave DX7 patches into FB-01 patches, as well as new editors for Oberheim Matrix-6, Kawai K-3 and even the Akai MPX820 MIDI programmable mixer. And how about their new line of dedicated librarians that have random patch generation. Opcode furthermore took over the distribution of Laurie Spiegel's Music Mouse composition program, as well as a hot new Film Music System called Score! that automates all manner of synchronizing functions. Now that's upward mobility.

A lot of Mac enthusiasm was further generated by Intelligent Music's Jam

Factory, which like its name suggests, takes musical phrases or chords and uses artificial intelligence to generate "improvised" music. A crowded demo made it hard to tell exactly what was programmed and what was jammed, but this'll be worth a closer look. Another Mac champ, Digidesign, just added Sound Designer for the Korg DSS-1 and is ready with their long-awaited SMPTE/MIDI Q-Sheet, an ultra-pro sync package that creates and manages a cue list of edit "decisions."

The software market is now dividing into computer-specialists like the above and the "we-do-it-all" houses. Witness Dr. T, who not only became the east coast distributor for Roger Powell's Texture for IBM and Amiga, but debuted Views, a sequencer/editor for Macintosh that's compatible with all Mac sequencers. As we've noted, the Doctor is also heavily into Atari ST. A new Renaissance-computer software firm from West Germany, Steinberg, unleashed a major product offensive, so far centered on C-64 and Atari ST, with sequencers, scorers and DX, CZ, DW8000 and Akai sampler editors. I was particularly knocked out by their Card-32 for C-64.

Instead of using up memory for the sequencer program, the Card 32 combines the interface with a hardware cartridge program which loads instantly and gives you 10,000 notes instead of the usual 3,000. This program has a superior graphic drum pattern editor and keyboard editor, plus a scorewriter section, drum and tape sync, and 1x3 thru box. For \$400? Damn. If the other Steinberg stuff is as good as this, look out!

This is one more exception that proves the rule: sure an import product can do just fine in the U.S. market in 1987—if it's great. Which is the perfect context to mention the SDX from Simmons. This is a new state-of-the-art 16-channel computer drum kit that incorporates sampling, performance setup, sequencing and pattern editing. The "zone intelligent" pads are divided into sixteen areas and interpret velocity and location to generate sample cross-fades. Thus, hitting closer to the rim will change the sound, either to a real rim sample, or a completely different one. The SDX's biggest draw is its sensitivity to drumming technique, and its \$7000 price tag is altogether reasonable for the

*continued on page 103*

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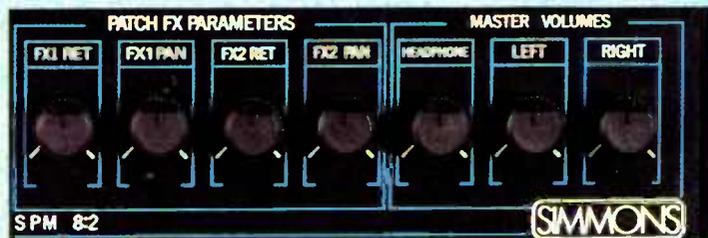
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## SPM 8:2

*A Conventional Mixer?*

The SPM 8:2 from Simmons is anything but a conventional audio mixer. There are, however, some similarities: Eight channels, each with bass, treble and parametric mid-range equalization, two effects sends, pan and level controls. Two effects returns. A headphone/monitor output and left and right master outputs.

Here the similarities end because SPM 8:2 is a computer controlled device making duplication of channel controls unnecessary.

64 different mixes of eight channels, each comprising level, pan, eq and effects data can be stored in SPM 8:2s memory and individual mixes selected at will via MIDI, footswitch or the front panel. Cross-fade times between mixes are programmable for individual channels allowing fade outs and ins of different instruments simultaneously. Each channel also has a four function effects bank offering such features as variable rate auto-pan and phasing.

With a specification and price tag the envy of most "mixing desk" manufacturers SPM 8:2 has only one disadvantage... How do you fill a page with its picture?

**SIMMONS**

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# How the ESQ-1 can split, sequence, display and control better than any other synth in its class...

**L**et's start with sound. After all, sound is your first criteria for any musical instrument.

In his review of the ESQ-1, Peter Mengaziol of GUITAR WORLD wrote, "The ESQ-1's sound combines the flexibility and analog warmth of the Oberheim Matrix-6, the crisp ringing tones of a DX-7, the realism of a sampler, the lushness of a Korg DW-8000 and polytimbral capacity of the Casio CZ-1".

The ESQ-1 has 32 different waveforms — from analog and FM-type to multi-sampled and additive synthesis waves. And each of the ESQ-1's 8 voices is a wall of sound that's 3 oscillators thick.

### Displays of intelligence

Next, there's simplicity. Synthesizer complexity has gotten out of hand recently. In fact, just try saying "linear arithmetic algorithmic operators" 3 times.

The ESQ-1 is a breeze to program. All the information you need is spelled out on the 80-character lighted display. And the clearly-written manual makes it easy to pick up the details.



Paul Wiffen of MUSIC TECHNOLOGY was pleasantly surprised with the ESQ-1's simplicity. "Unlike so many modern synths, the new Ensoniq has a programming layout that's so easy to get to grips with, it almost *invites* you to delve deeper."

### Split ends

A split keyboard is a great performance feature. The ESQ-1 lets you split the keyboard anywhere you want and save the sounds and split point as one program.



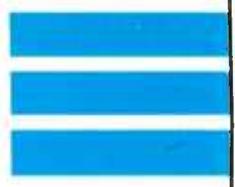
Page by page the 80-character ESQ-1 display makes programming and sequencing a breeze.

You can also layer sounds across the entire keyboard or on either or both sides of a keyboard split with the Split/Layer function. Because the ESQ-1 has dynamic voice assignment, all 8 voices are available wherever and whenever you need them.

### The multi-track, multi-timbral, multi-mode marvel

It's not easy to find a multi-track sequencer that's both powerful and easy-to-use. Seek no more. The ESQ-1 sequencer is loaded with features: 8 polyphonic tracks, multi-timbral, punch-in/punch-out, quantization, step-editing, auto-locate, mixdown levels — to mention just a few.

In summing up the sequencer, Peter Mengaziol suggests, "The sequencer alone compares favorably with stand-alone units that cost as much as, if not more than, the



*"At \$1395, it would be a bargain just for the sounds it makes, but when you consider the sequencer as well, this thing is a steal!"— Jim Johnson—KEYBOARDS, COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE Oct. '86*

ESQ-1 itself. Go to the store and ask to hear the DEMO 1, 2 and 3 songs to appreciate what the sequencer section can do using the internal voices alone... it's scary." And if you're really brave, you can connect as many as 8 MIDI units to the ESQ sequencer and control them all independently.

**With your ESQ, everything's under control**  
If you need a MIDI master keyboard, you'll be pleased to find how easily an ESQ-1 can get your entire MIDI setup under control.

For instance, you can send MIDI channel and patch changes to 8 different MIDI units one at a time or simultaneously at the push of one button.

The unique MIDI Overflow Mode gives your ESQ room to grow. Just add the new ESQ-M synthesizer module (\$995 US) and you've got a powerful 16-voice synth. While you're thinking of expansion, there's the Mirage Multi-Sampler which can add hundreds of sampled sounds to your setup or the new Ensoniq Sampled Piano Module (\$895 US) with instant access to 12 sampled keyboard and bass sounds.



MIDI Modules for your growing ESQ-1 studio. The ESQ-M Digital Wave Synthesizer Module, the Mirage Digital Multi-Sampler, the Ensoniq Sampled Piano Module.

**Unanimous decision**  
England's most respected music paper, MELODY MAKER, named the ESQ-1 as "Synth of the Year". In fact, all the major international music magazines who've reviewed the ESQ-1 have come to much the same conclusion, so let's give them the last word.

*"Every once in a while, a product comes along that begs to be raved about. Ensoniq's ESQ-1 synth is just such a case"—Benjamin Russell—CANADIAN MUSICALIAN Feb. '87*

*"Its voice has the kind of sonic potential that today's musicians demand, its 80-character display gives you plenty of information to help in programming, its keyboard splitting and layering are superior and the on-board sequencer is a killer... you simply can't afford not to check out the ESQ-1."—Jim Aikin, KEYBOARD Sept. '86*

*"I often suggest the ESQ-1 to those looking for a cost-effective mini MIDI studio."—Craig Anderton—Editor, ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN*

For more information write: Department M.  
ENSONIQ Corp. 155 Great Valley Parkway, Malvern, PA 19355 □ Canada: 6969 Trans Canada Hwy., Suite 123, St. Laurent, Que. H4T 1V8 □ ENSONIQ Europe BV, Dommelplein 1 3512 JC Utrecht, Holland □ Australia: Electric Factory, 188 Plenty Rd., Preston, Vic. 3072 □ Japan: Hammond Suzuki, Ltd., 1135 Koike-Cho, Hamamatsu



# SITTING PRETTY

WILL  
SUCCESS  
SPOIL  
ROBERT  
CRAY?  
DON'T  
BET  
ON IT.

"A lot of people are out there playing music to be looked at," Robert Cray says, "to be anything they want to be in the business. But to be *understood*—that's the most important thing. That's why I started playing this music."

All of a sudden a lot of people seem to be understanding. After a dozen years of playing and dues-paying, the Robert Cray Band—arguably the best blues band in America today—found itself on the verge of big-time success. And then suddenly the rules changed.

Richard Cousins, Cray Band bassist, is sitting in a hotel room in Orlando, Florida, where Cray is in the first of six weeks opening for Huey Lewis & the News. Having played with Cray since the two were high-schoolers, Cousins has seen every phase the band has gone through, has suffered through every bad night and exulted in every success. From working tiny Northwest bars behind Albert Collins to playing enormous European festival dates with Eric Clapton last summer, anything the Cray Band has seen, Cousins has seen.

And none of it prepared him for the sound of 14,000 teenagers screaming their guts out, all at once.

"Man, that's *loud*," he says, his face a picture of incredulity. "I don't know how these guys can stand it. The other night, when we went out there, the *stage* was shaking!"

But that, at least, Cousins figures he can get used to. What really throws him is the shift in aesthetics.

"It's weird," he says, leaning forward as if to share a secret. "We've been getting a better response with each show, and I don't know if I should say this, but it's not so much what you play in a show like that, it's how much movement you make."

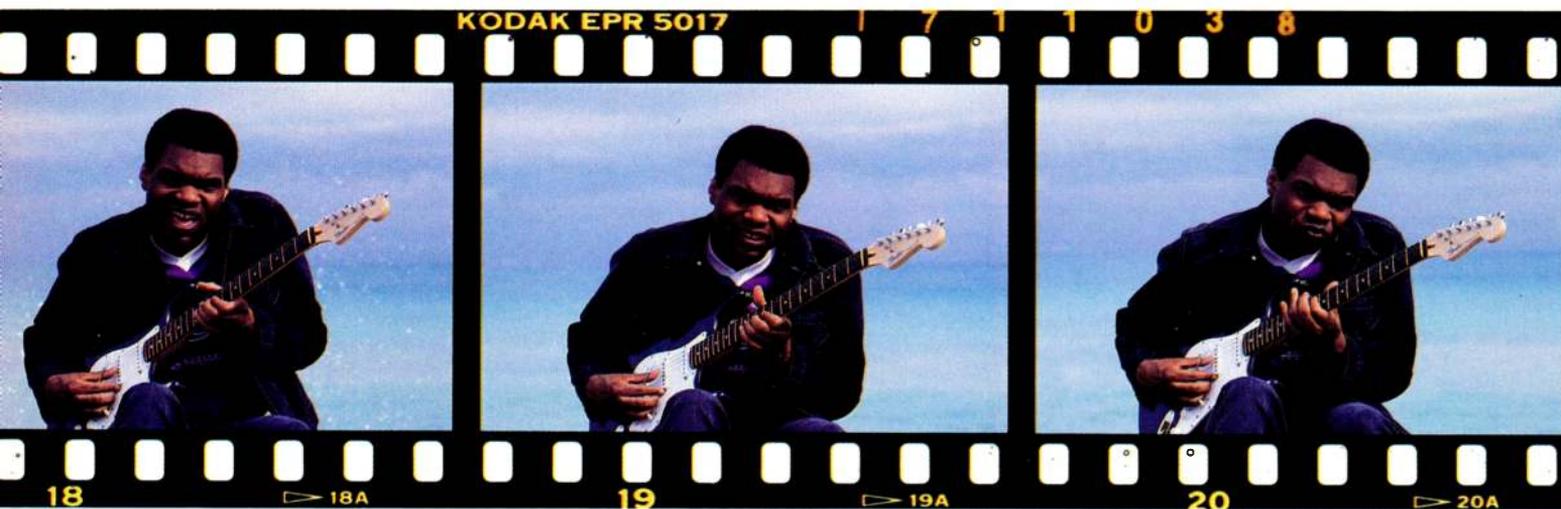
He laughs, as if he barely believes it himself. "It's true! The shows we've done where we headlined, if one of the soloists played something particularly good, they got howls from the audience for that. But now, you don't get howls for what you play—you get howls if you go from point A to point B rapidly, and play it over there. That's what gets them going. Between A and B, you don't have to play shit. You can play in the wrong key!"

"Did I tell you about the conversation I had with Huey last night?" asks guitarist Tim Kaihatsu, a long-time friend of the band who has been added to its line-up for these coliseum dates. "It was the perfect cynical comment on what we're doing right now. He said, 'You know, when you're playing in front of this many people, it don't mean shit how well you play.' We're not talking musicality. We're talking about Who Has Got The Most Hits. It's like a *People* magazine popularity contest: Whoever has



BY J.D. CONSIDINE  
PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE MARSEL





the most hits, wins.”

Kaihatsu’s crack gets a big laugh, but nobody in the band buys into such cynicism. Despite the youngsters’ apparent fervor for form over substance, the Cray Band is intent on making fans the old-fashioned way: They want to *earn* that applause. Cray continuously tinkers with his song list in hopes of lending optimum impact to his band’s forty-one minutes onstage.

The funny thing is, it’s working. Riding across Florida on the band bus Cray jokes about how superficial the audience enthusiasm seems. “Last night, about a half hour before we went on, people were having a *good* time,” he says. “They were throwing frisbees and getting excited about it. With that kind of thing going on there was no way we could miss.”

But there’s more to it than that. “With the stuff we’re doing now, if you’re reaching twenty percent of the audience, you’re really reaching them,” argues Kaihatsu. “And I think we are.”

Nor does it hurt that the single, “Smoking Gun,” had been in heavy rotation on MTV for over a month, while *Strong Persuader*, Cray’s major-label debut, had climbed to number twenty-nine by the time the band hit Orlando.

Still, Cray can’t help but wonder what it is these kids are getting from his music. “Smoking Gun” contains some fairly adult subject matter. Its chorus is built around a powerful metaphor for the anger and fear a man feels when contemplating the possibility that his woman is screwing somebody else: “I put two and one together,” he sings accusingly, “and we know that’s not an even sum....”

In short, it’s a far cry from what usually sets fifteen-year-old girls screaming, and Cray is left baffled by the response. “There’s no way in the world that kids understand what [the song] is talking about,” he laughs. “No way in the world.

“But I think there’s no way in the world they’re understanding what all Huey’s talking about, either. Six- and seven-year-old kids don’t understand ‘Power Of Love’ and things like that.

“We talk about this among ourselves,” he adds, more quietly, “because we can’t understand it. I mean, it’s a big age group that comes out to see Huey’s show, and I know when I was younger, I didn’t understand what all I’m singing about now, but I guess I paid attention to it. It always confuses me that music can do that.”

In a way, it’s like a line in the Howlin’ Wolf song, “Backdoor Man”: “The men don’t know/ But the little girls understand.” When yet another night’s swell of applause greets the Cray Band as they jog onto the stage, what the little girls understand seems very frightening, indeed.

**S**creaming girls were part of the reason Robert Cray took up guitar in the first place. The year was 1964, and the girls were in New York, but to be perfectly honest, young Robert didn’t pay much attention to them—he was far more interested in the four guys they were screaming at.

“I got a guitar because the Beatles were out,” he recalls. “Everybody in the neighborhood got guitars, so that’s when I started playing.” The son of a career soldier, Cray was living in Ft. Louis, Washington, at the time, after having bounced between Columbus, Georgia (where he was born), California, Alabama, Germany and Virginia. “It was a lot of fun, moving around as a kid,” he says, although he recalls being none too happy when, at fifteen, the family was about to make its final move, from Norfolk, Virginia to Tacoma, Washington. “I was in my first band, I did not want to move,” insists Cray. “I wanted him to retire then and there, in that spot.”

It’s just as well he didn’t, though, for it was in Tacoma that the young guitarist discovered the blues. Perhaps “rediscovered” is a more accurate term. “When we lived in Germany, we listened to a lot of records,” he says. “My father bought a lot of records, and so did my mother. They had B. B. King and Freddie King, Miles Davis, Bobby Bland, Sam Cooke, records like that. Some gospel stuff. Plus the current pop things, you know, like Ernie K-Doe, and all that stuff.”

When he turned twelve, Cray, like most adolescents, “didn’t want to listen to my parents’ music anymore,” focusing instead on British Invasion rock and other teen tunes of the time. But once he got to Tacoma, he fell in with a crowd of nascent Bluesniks: “They were listening to Magic Sam and Buddy Guy and B. B. King. We’d all get together, sit around and listen and steal licks. Then and there is when I became a fanatic. Nobody could tell me that anything was better than blues.”

Meanwhile, just across town, young bass player Richard Cousins was going through a similar process of discovery. Cousins’ parents, too, had played a lot of blues and jazz records when he was a tyke, but like Cray, it wasn’t until the Beatles that he got the itch to play. “I was always interested in music,” he says, “and I wanted to play trumpet first. Then I saw that Ed Sullivan thing, and said, ‘No, mom—get me one of *these!*’”

While Cray started off on guitar with lessons and Mel Bay books, Cousins says his bass playing put him straight into bands. “Immediately. I was in bands way too soon,” he laughs. “I started playing when I was twelve, and by the time I was thirteen, I’m sure I was in bands: Teen dances, uniform steps.”

KODAK EPR 5017

KODAK EPR 5017



As it turned out, Cousins didn't play many Beatles tunes when he was young, "probably because they were too hard." Instead, he played in cover bands, heavily influenced by the Northwest rock sound. "Perhaps it wasn't such a big deal nationally, but Don & the Goodtimes and Merilee & the Turnabouts were a big deal to us," he says. "Not to mention the Wailers, and Sonics, and Paul Revere & the Raiders, stuff like that."

Eventually, Cousins worked his way through psychedelia, acid rock, Hendrix, Cream and other late-60s faves before finally ending up with, as he puts it, "what my mom listened to."

Cousins recalls running into Cray "in a park, when we were about sixteen years old. We knew each other for a couple of

West Coast, and we'd come and watch his shows. So in our little basement bands, we'd model ourselves after him. The band would come out and play 'Hip Hug Her' by Booker T. & the MG's, and, like Albert, I'd have my guitar slung over the front of my amplifier. And when it came around to the chorus I'd come out, and it's my turn."

It was a cool concept, but, says Cray, "There was no work. You had to be playing top forty, pretty much, to live in Tacoma at that time. So Richard and I decided to split."

"We had a friend who was living down in Eugene, Oregon, so the two of us went down there. A drummer friend of ours was living in Salem, and there's about seventy miles between the two cities, so we'd work our way up to Salem, hitchhiking and stuff, and just go have rehearsals. We did that for about six months, and we started our band."

This was 1974, and the Robert Cray band was considerably different from its current incarnation. For one thing, Cray was sharing vocals with Curtis Salgado, who left for Roomful of Blues. "Curtis was the lead singer in a band in Eugene," Cray says. "I would sing a couple, and Curtis would do some, and we'd sing maybe a couple of Sam & Dave songs together, do harmonies. So we were a one-two punch."

By '76, the Cray Band was backing its old idol, Albert Collins, up and down the West Coast, supporting him at the 1977 San Francisco Blues Festival, and earning a solid reputation in the process. Collins, says Cray, "showed us the ropes—how to collect the money, and how to deal with bar owners. He's like our father."

Prompted by the San Francisco Blues Festival, Cray and company became involved in a similar venture in Eugene, which brought in such Bay Area luminaries as J.J. Malone, Sonny Rhodes and Charlie Musselwhite, as well as the likes of Sunnyland Slim and Howlin' Wolf guitarist Hubert Sumlin. Add in an extensive touring schedule up and down the West Coast, and the Robert Cray Band was well on the way to making a name for itself.

But it wasn't until the band met Bruce Bromberg at the San Francisco Blues Festival in 1978 that national exposure seemed possible. "Bruce was working as some kind of promotion man for Tomato Records," Cray recalls. Bromberg had his own little label and bankrolled studio time for Cray with that in mind. But he finally ran out of money and was forced to cut a deal with Tomato for the release of *Who's Been Talkin'*, Cray's first album. The whole thing turned into a mess. "The record was done in '78," says Cray, "but it wasn't released until '80."

**"I used to be a blues purist, but then I realized, *I'm a musician*, it's dumb to knock other kinds of music. The best thing for me to do is to go song by song."**

years after that. Then we started a band that was short-lived and ill-fated, thank goodness. It wasn't very good. I remember, during a gig in Billingham, we did 'Mona,' and I think we actually ran people out of a full bar." He chuckles, describing the band's sound as "a cross between the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver and some other screwed-up mess. We were about seventeen, eighteen years old, so that's a minor excuse. I was a kid, so I played like a kid."

Cray, too, had his problems. There was his vocal confidence—or, rather, his lack of any. "When I started off singing in the band," he says, "man, I was scared to death. I couldn't even announce the songs. Richard would do all the announcing, and I'd just sing. Nervously."

Still, the real stumbling block was that Tacoma-area groups leaned heavily on the FM-rock staples of the day, which was a far cry from what Cray and Cousins were into. "We tried to model ourselves after Albert Collins," explains Cray, "because we'd seen Albert play quite a bit. He was hanging out on the

Six months later, the label was gone.”

It was a tough experience. “When the record came out, Richard and I sat there and looked at it, just looked at it for a half hour,” Cray recalls. “And then it was gone.

“We weren’t seeing anything from it, anyway. Couldn’t see any response, couldn’t find it in the stores. It was shipped as a cut-out, basically.”

Listening to the album now—it’s been re-issued by Atlantic—it’s clear that little was lost when the album sank out of sight. Not that *Who’s Been Talkin’* is in any way a bad record, just that it’s altogether too pat and predictable to be of much interest to any but Cray completists. There are only four originals, one of them a collaboration with Bromberg under his *nom des bleus* D. Amy, and the overall sound is typical of revivalist bands of the time, like the Nighthawks, early Fabulous Thunderbirds or the Powder Blues Band. Still, even at that stage, there was something special about Cray’s sound. You can hear bits of it in his guitar playing, especially when he pares down his solos to a few stinging notes. You can hear more of it in the soulful phrasing of his vocals. Cray may have still had some distance to go, but it was obvious he was on his way.



**The Cray Band: bassist Richard Cousins, drummer David Olson, the boss and keyboardist Peter Boe**

## Cray-Fishin': What Robert's Success Means to the Record Business

If you find the commercial success of Robert Cray a surprise, you're not alone: When PolyGram Records signed the bluesman last year, it was almost purely a public relations move and not because they saw Cray as a viable commercial artist. Although the company is presently riding high on the charts with mega-seller Bon Jovi and quasi-metal newcomer Cinderella, PolyGram hasn't enjoyed more than a few random hits through the early 80s. After the collapse of a proposed merger with Warner Bros. Records in '85, a banner headline in *Billboard* declared the company's future "cloudy," and PolyGram's inability to score hits on a regular basis became the brunt of industry jokes. (Q: How do you keep an elephant cold? A: Put it between two PolyGram records. Q: What's the difference between the Titanic and PolyGram? A: The Titanic had a good band when it went down.)

While Bon Jovi and Cinderella were being signed by A&R man Derek Shulman, Peter Lubin was bringing in Cray for a completely different reason. Dick Wingate, PolyGram's senior vice president of A&R, said at the time that he hoped Cray would bring PolyGram instant credibility. The goal was not to sell Robert Cray records, but to attract other, more commercially viable artists to the label by demonstrating that PolyGram was serious enough to sign a musician's musician—even though that artist was perceived as having commercial limitations.

Today Wingate declares that goal accomplished, although the label has yet to announce any signings of established acts. "It did help establish our credibility," he says. "And we are getting a lot of artists interested in PolyGram because of Robert."

Of course, if PolyGram never signs anyone because they're his label, Cray has already paid off: initially projected to sell 150,000 copies, *Strong Persuader* had passed

the 330,000 mark at press time, and was still building.

In a business where signing clones of the latest rage is an art, this success suggests we may see other labels embark on Cray-fishing expeditions. The A&R men we spoke with are convinced that Cray is a singular artist. As Wingate puts it: "Sure, there'll be attempts to duplicate his success, but I don't think it'll be like it was with the Knack where everyone tried to sign an artist who sounded like them."

Well, that's reassuring. But if you don't think you'll see any fallout from Cray's success, try this on for size: a favorable review in *Billboard* of a new album by relatively unknown blues guitarist David Dees on the tiny Edge label produced several calls from major labels and *Cosmopolitan* magazine (*Cosmopolitan* magazine?), according to label owner Al Bell.

In Chicago, where Alligator Records has been one of the true torchbearers for the blues, label president Bruce Iglauer says he feels "great" about Cray's comparatively massive showing for PolyGram. "The response to Robert's album means that if blues albums are promoted as energetically as other popular music is, they can sell just as well," he says.

Alligator itself is benefiting from Cray's success. The label released *Showdown*, featuring Cray, Johnny Copeland and Albert Collins in a cutting contest. The record, which received a Grammy nomination and won the W.C. Handy Award for contemporary blues album of the year, is almost guaranteed to be Alligator's biggest seller ever.

Iglauer, who says he's shipping twice as many copies of new Alligator releases as he did a year ago, draws a parallel between what Cray is doing for the blues and what Sam Cooke did for soul. "Robert brings a melody to the music that many didn't know was there," he says. "He's somewhere between B.B. King and Sam Cooke, and he's very much like Cooke in that he's bringing a type of black music to a white audience." Iglauer says he "wouldn't be surprised at all" to see major labels embark on a blues signing spree, but he quickly adds that he doubts the majors will ever sign anyone over fifty years old (which leaves out a lot of Alligator's roster) and that "no one's called to buy Albert Collins' contract...yet." — Fred Goodman



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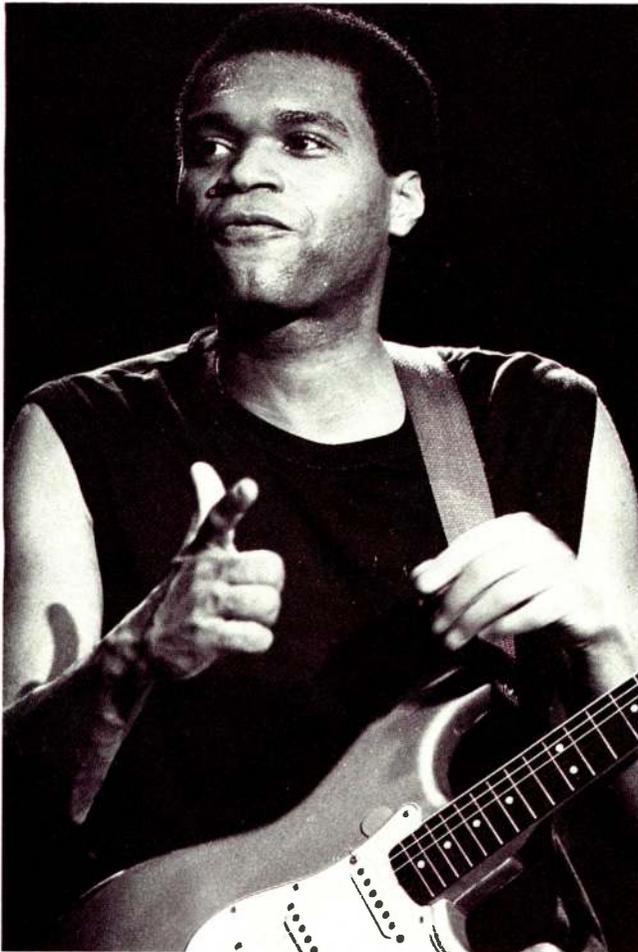
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**W**e used to do a song," says Cray, "we used to do B.B. King's 'I Don't Want You Cutting Off Your Hair,' and there's this one line that goes: 'There's something about your girlfriends, baby, that I don't understand/ She got her hair cut off the other day, and now she looks just like a man.' We did that at a gig we played in San Francisco, at a community center one time, and half the women left."

As he tells the story, Cray smiles slightly, seeming almost



## CRAY PLAYS

**R**obert Cray has four Fender Stratocaster guitars: two '64s, a '58, and a Fender American Standard model soon out on the market. He plays D'Addario strings in his own gauges—.011, .013, .018, .028, .036, .046—and runs his guitars straight into a Fender Super Reverb. "I run it about halfway up: all full treble, full middle range and half bass. A pinch of reverb. And I have five-position switches on most of my Strats, so I play in the second and fourth positions most of the time." **Richard Cousins** is also a Fender man, playing an '85 Jazz Bass Special and a new Precision, as well as an old '63 J-bass and a '64 P-bass. All are strung with Rotosound roundwounds. His amp is an Ampeg SVT head, driving two Hartke 4x10 cabinets, with no effects. **Peter Boe** carries a Roland RD-1000 digital piano and a Yamaha DX7. These go through a Peavey 7-channel mixer to a Yamaha 2200 power amp, which drives an Electro-Voice cabinet largely full of JBLs. **David Olson** plays a Pearl kit, with all toms double-headed with Remo pinstripes. His snare is a 6½-inch Troyan he bought in Montreux, and his cymbals are all Zildjian.

amazed at his own naiveté. To him, the serious blues student, those words were just another part of B.B. King's world, the verbal equivalents of a few bent notes. It wasn't until he and his bandmates began noticing how those words went over in the real world that he began to re-think what he was singing.

"We knew about it," he admits. "We always had an inkling about things like that, back in the late 70s, and we made a conscious effort to change the lyric every once in a while. Especially songs about the woman getting up in the morning, like Elmore James: 'She used to cook my breakfast and bring it to my bed/ She used to wash my face and even comb my hair,' things like that. We'd always try to avoid that.

"We were living in a college town—Eugene, Oregon—and that had a lot to do with it," he adds. "Changed our music around for us."

Indeed it did, for Cray's sound was becoming less like his models, and more like him. Or as Peter Boe, the Cray Band's keyboardist, explains, "Robert comes from blues music very strongly, but he comes from a lot of other things as well. As do we all. When people say 'blues band,' that's a pigeonhole. We're more than that. But where do you draw the line between blues and R&B and soul?"

In fact, being called a "blues band" can be something of a liability for anyone who would dare to extend the tradition beyond the parameters of the Chicago style of the late 50s. Says Boe, "The blues purists—*blunatics* is what Robert calls them—have an idea of what they consider blues to be, and that's what they want it to be. If you play anything else for them, it's thumbs down."

Cray understands, though. "I was [like that] at one point," he admits. "But I realized, *I'm a musician*, and for myself, I said, 'Man, it's really dumb to knock other kinds of music when there's good music all around you. The best thing for me to do is go song by song.'"

Which is why Cray will talk as passionately about something by Brook Benton, Otis Redding or the Swan Silvertones' Claude Jeter as he will about a Lightning Hopkins track. And as far as his definition of the blues goes, it has less to do with musical form than with the lyrics.

"That's the most important part," he insists. "When I think back to people like Howlin' Wolf, or Elmore James, or Muddy Waters, all three of those guys played blues songs. Not every song was a blues song *per se*, because they were also singing happy songs about how cool their woman was.

"Now, a lot of people think that blues music is the music that's in that particular form, with three chords and that certain structure. But each of those guys had his own, new kind of style. When you listen to Howlin' Wolf, pretty much every song he does has a different kind of rhythm, taken from the country; go to John Lee Hooker, and he'll sing maybe thirteen- or fourteen-bar verses, just as long as he gets the story across. So who's to say what's traditional, what's pure blues?"

"But the lyric remains the same—talking about real-life situations, and I think that's the most important thing."

Mind you, "real life" isn't the same thing as "autobiographical." Or, as Cray hastens to point out, "Right now, my life isn't what it seems to be on the record. 'Cause right now, I've got a girlfriend, and I'm very happy, I'm having a good time. She was out here on the road with me for a while. I haven't had any real rough times for a while.

"A lot of it, songs like 'I Wonder' and 'More Than I Can Stand,' are things that happened to me in the past. A lot of the cheating and sneaking around songs are Dennis Walker's ideas. I mean, I could see myself in some of those situations, but they're not all true."

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Dennis Walker, an L.A.-based songwriter, co-produced Cray's last three albums and came up with many of the lyrics. "Robert and I have worked so long together," Walker says, "when I sit down to write something I kind of have him in mind. We've been friends for ten years or so. Robert basically decided that there were just certain things he could feel comfortable doing. So when we begin to get material together for Robert, I sit down with those things in mind."

Walker has written or co-written some of the most emotionally charged numbers in the Cray repertoire. Some of the power of "I Guess I Showed Her" or "I Guess I've Slipped Her Mind" stems from the confidence of his characterizations, the way the lyric conveys several sides of a situation through the narrator's point of view. But Walker's most memorable songs—"Porch Light," "Sonny," "Right Next Door (Because Of Me)"—hit home because they push the basic material of blues songs into a sort of moral minefield. "Sonny," for instance, isn't simply about fooling around with your best friend's wife while he's away; it ups the ante considerably by sending that best friend to Viet Nam, doubling the guilt.

"What I really try to do is write situations," Walker explains. "'Porch Light,' basically, is a moral question. It's about a guy who absolutely cannot quit going to see this woman. I think everybody, if they haven't indulged in that, has at least had something they couldn't give up, no matter how many times they told themselves it was wrong or a bad thing."

That ability to connect with the underlying emotion may be the heart of how the Walker/Cray relationship works, but details help, too. "You really have to know everything, especially the smaller things, of how the man's personality is so that he can get the songs across in some kind of honest way. For every tune you hear that I've written for Robert, I've probably given

him two others that he rejected. He wouldn't sing a tune one time because it had 'chablis' in it."

Still, Cray feels that he's "changed quite a bit. I used to have a lot of problems. Used to have a lot of fun, a lot of women back in those days. I guess you might say I've cooled out quite a bit. I just...." He laughs to himself, then says, "I don't want to go through hard times anymore.

"Nobody does," he adds, "but it's always going to happen. It's the curse of mankind."

**A**fter *Who's Been Talkin'* sank from sight, the Cray Band continued on as before, slowly working its way around the club circuit. Thoughts of recording were put aside, and didn't crop up again until 1982, when the band again ran into Bruce Bromberg. Bromberg, Cray says, "was surprised that we hadn't gotten another record deal. So he said, 'I'll record you guys, and then I'll try to find somebody to shop the record.'" Instead, they found Larry Sloven, a friend of Bromberg's who felt the band would be better off on its own. "That was the beginning of Hightone Records," says Cray. "That was us."

The album was called *Bad Influence*, and it was a major turning point for Cray. For one thing, the line-up had solidified in '79 with the addition of drummer David Olson. But to Cray, the most important thing was that, with an album behind them, "we were able to get off the West Coast, get more work, and start going across the country. And that's what we wanted. We'd been on the West Coast since '74, and here it was '83. We needed to get out."

As it turned out, the Cray Band was more than ready. *Bad Influence* didn't simply introduce the band to an audience of willing converts, it presented the blues world with its first new

## BOSS SPECIAL SET-UPS/2



hero in over a decade. Albert King covered "Phone Booth," the album opener, while Cray himself walked off with his first W.C. Handy award, the blues equivalent of the Oscars. In all, it wasn't a bad first impression.

Its successor, *False Accusations*, did even better, attracting an impressive amount of positive press, and earning Cray another couple of Handy awards. Best of all, it led to a licensing deal with Elvis Costello's Demon Records, which, after both *Bad Influence* and *False Accusations* topped the British indie charts, led to Cray's current major label deal.

Nor were those the only changes taking place. By late '84, the last link in the current line-up fell into place, as Peter Boe replaced keyboardist Mike Vannice. Like Olson, Boe had grown up in Oregon, and like Cousins and Cray, his earliest desire to play music was kindled by the Beatles. But Boe, who'd spent eight months with the Cray band in '79, was a dedicated bebopper. He put in several years in a jazz trio before returning to Cray. Boe's jazz background is a clue to how the pieces of this band fit together. "Robert would have been a great jazz player, had he decided to go in that direction," offers Boe. "He's got ears for miles, and he brings that sort of looseness to the way he plays, a sort of improvisational thing and the ability to respond like *that* to a given circumstance. That's the key to the interplay between Robert and myself. We're both tuned to the same sorts of things, and respond to them in similar ways."

"There's a common language to this music," offers Cousins, but he warns that it takes more than simply knowing the dialect to make a band work. "To do it like us, you have to know each other very well." He smirks, then explains, "People in the Cray band never get rehearsal."

"Yeah, that's been a real problem in the past," admits Boe. "We've been doing it backward in terms of recording. We've

gone into the studio and learned the tunes, recorded them, and then gone out and started to play them live.

"Well, naturally, as a result of playing a tune night after night, it's going to evolve into something better. But we've already recorded it. That's a real problem."

Though Cousins insists that "*Bad Influence* is one of my favorite records, because it's got good songs on it," he's equally quick to complain that "basically, it's played for shit. The band doesn't know what it's doing, and it doesn't play very well. I'd like to cut it again, knowing what we know now."

Cray doesn't go that far, but he does allow that Eric Clapton's version of the title tune from *Bad Influence* solved a few problems for him. "Somebody told me a long time ago that I should have put an intro on the song," he explains. "And when I heard [Clapton's version], there was an intro. Plus he put a guitar solo at the end, which was another thing my friend told me a long time ago. So I was real happy to see it done that way."

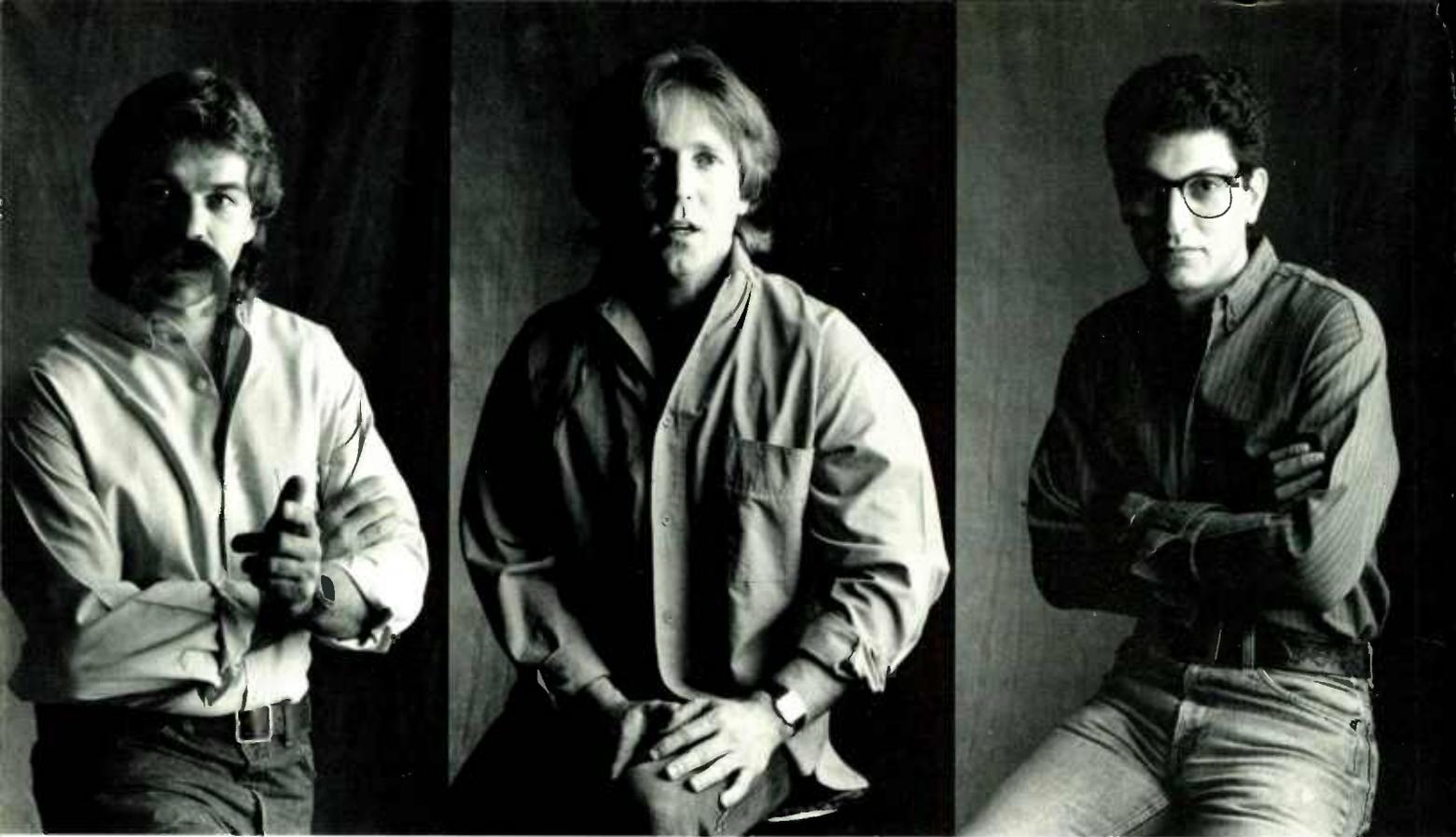
Nonetheless, there's one thing Cray loves about the way his band plays: the level of communication between players.

"We can sit backstage, be tired and everything, and then get on the stage and have so much fun," he says. "It's like if we don't see each other all day, when we get on the bandstand, that's when we start talking."

Cray is easily the most private member of the band, friendly but never entirely forthcoming. During a day off in Orlando, the rest of the band wanders around the hotel. Boe searches for a new pair of Converse, and Cousins follows his girlfriend from souvenir stand to souvenir stand. But Cray appears only when there is work to be done, like a poolside interview with a reporter from *People*. Though he is loose, personable and open enough, there is something about his recitation of the band's



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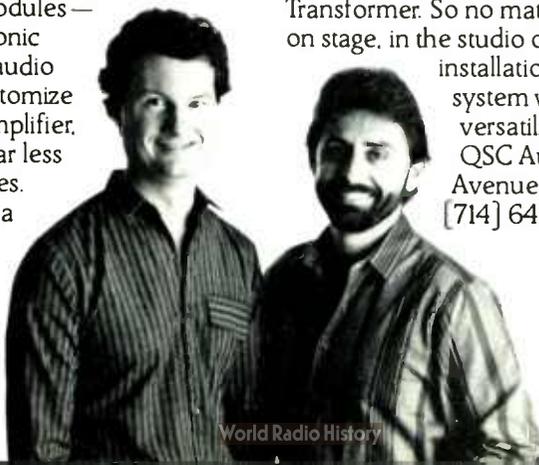
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history that seems completely contrary to the shy reserve he shows when the reporter's not around. It's almost as if Robert Cray, Professional Musician, takes over when the reporter's tape starts rolling, while the Robert Cray who worries about getting his heart "busted up" waits inside until the work is over, or the music's about to begin.

Robert Cray may look like a friendly, easygoing guy, but don't let that fool you. Deep down, he's even nicer than he looks.

"Robert is a very shy guy, and he's a man of few words," Boe assesses. "I like that about him. He's not the kind of guy who will say something before he has something to say."

"Robert is a genuine guy," says Olson. "I've spent a major part of my adulthood, growing as a musician, with this band. I can come to these guys and talk to them about problems, personal and musical. It's a nice feeling, to have people in your corner."

"Even in the songs where Robert's cheating," says Cousins, "you feel bad for him, too."

Add in the fact that the Cray Band is, in Boe's phrase, "a checkerboard band—black, white, black, white," and you're left with a very hopeful image for the future of American music. Ironically, Kaihatsu—the fifth player added for the arena shows—preserves the racial balance by virtue of his being Oriental. Unfortunately, reality has a nasty habit of intruding upon even the cheeriest circumstances.

Back on the bus, Kaihatsu is explaining how he wound up on crutches for the tour. In Atlanta, Kaihatsu wanted a beer after his first night on the road with the band, and the only place still serving was a topless joint across from the hotel.

"It was amazing," he says. "It was an all-night titty bar. The

idea was to get a round of beers. But gee, there was an astoundingly beautiful girl on the runway. So I figured, 'I'm sitting back; I'm gonna dig this.'"

Kaihatsu enjoyed it even more when, with no prompting on his part, the dancer sat down next to him and began to chat. Things were definitely looking up, until Kaihatsu felt a hand on his shoulder. "Next thing I know," he says, "a couple of good ol' boys, one on either side, escort me out of there, telling me how I should not touch any white women in this area. So I figure, okay, they got my ass out of the club—all of a sudden, boom! I get one in the kidney, boom! I get one in the back of the neck, and I'm sprawling out on the parking lot. And I tore up my knee. Welcome to the Deep South...."

Cray, listening in silence, shakes his head in disgust.

"I don't think guys like me much think about it anymore," concludes Kaihatsu. "And to have it come up on me like that is weird, real weird."

Which may be why Cray so cherishes the down-to-earth aspect of the tour. Like this story: "This morning, man, I saw this lady walking. She's got to be in her mid-forties, wearing a nice red windbreaker, and she's going back and forth outside my room, all morning.

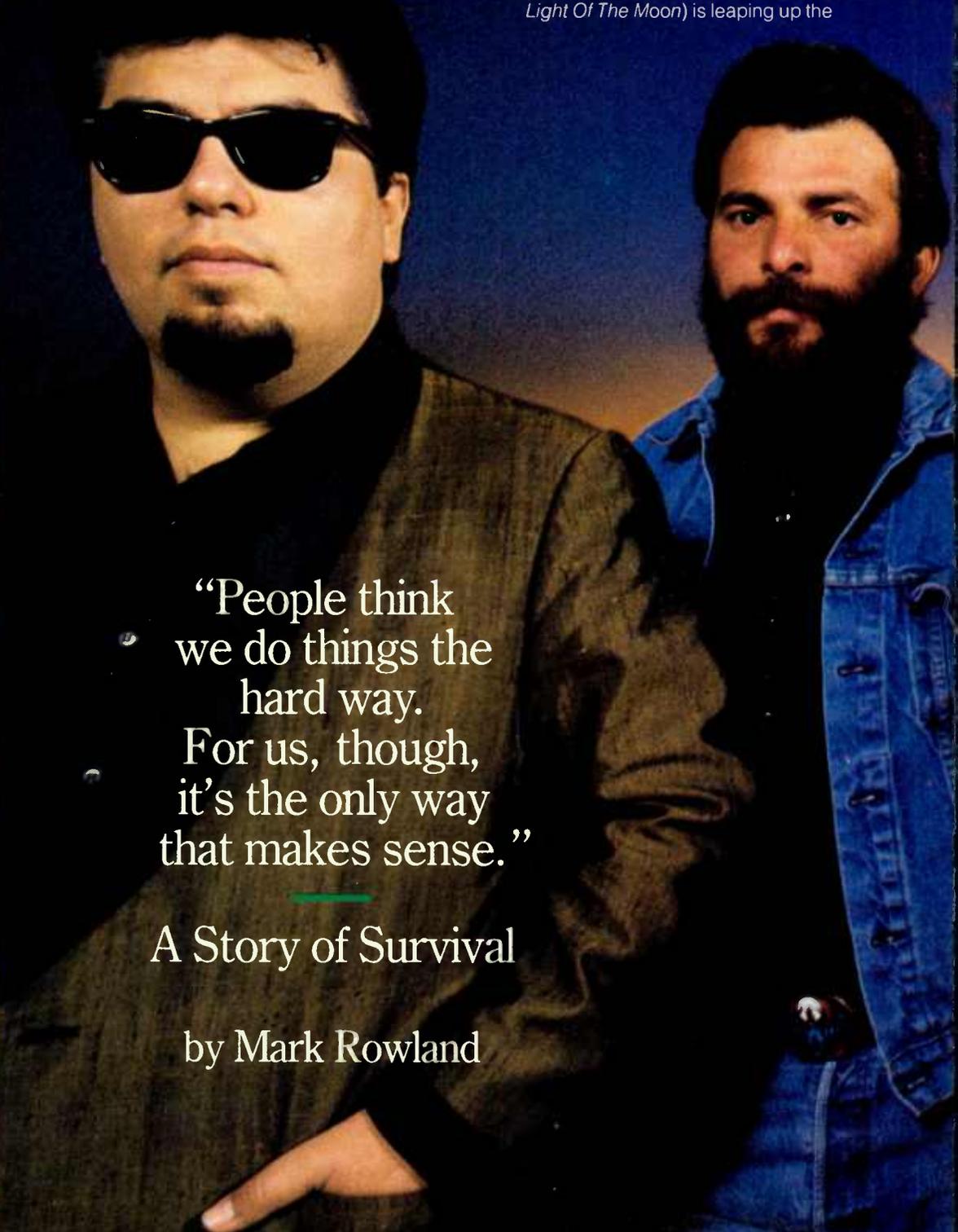
"Finally, my breakfast came, and I was yelling out the door to my girlfriend, Patsy, and this lady goes, 'Mr. Cray, can I have your autograph?'"

"I felt really cool. We sign a lot of autographs, but when somebody older comes up and asks, that makes me feel good. Because they may not be the ones out there screaming, but I know they're paying a lot of attention to the lyrics. And that's nice." Cray pauses a second, collecting his thoughts, and adds, "It's nice to be understood." ■

# S O B O S T S O

You can't say Los Lobos is special just because they've been together thirteen years, or because most of the band has known one another since junior high. You can't call them principled simply because they got together to play Mexican folk music, spent years learning how to play specialized instruments and obscure *norteña* tunes, then gave it up because they felt their niche was becoming too commercial.

You can't say they're musically gifted just because some members have recorded with Bob Dylan and Elvis Costello while collectively scoring the soundtrack to an upcoming film about the life of Ritchie Valens. You can't assume they're regular guys just because they're all married and have kids, and wear pretty much the same clothes onstage as they do in the backyard. Maybe it's a little early to call them stars—just because a song from their first EP won a Grammy, their next record went gold, and their latest effort (*By The Light Of The Moon*) is leaping up the



“People think we do things the hard way. For us, though, it’s the only way that makes sense.”

A Story of Survival

by Mark Rowland

charts while garnering critical kudos as the first great pop album of 1987.

And maybe it's a little early to start calling Reagan senile, too. So let's just say the evidence is mounting.

The five members of Los Lobos—drummer, guitarist and songwriter Louie Perez; bassist and guitarrónist Conrad Lozano; saxophonist Steve Berlin; guitarist, songwriter and bajo sextoist Cesar Rosas; and singer and songwriter David Hidalgo, who plays too many instruments to list—are gathered one evening in their manager's living room. The menu features

pizza and beer. With a new record just hitting the street and a European tour looming within days, you'd think this group would be a little excited. At first, though, the overall mood is relaxed, even sleepy. Everyone is cordial, responding to questions about the tour and their new record politely but without much apparent enthusiasm. Attempts to draw out more detailed responses seem to hit a wall.

Finally Cesar Rosas breaks the un-

easy silence: "Say, are you the guy from *Musician* magazine?" When I say sure, the room erupts in laughter. "We couldn't understand why you kept asking us all these questions," Rosas explains. "We thought you were one of the neighbors coming over for a pizza."





**"We're not rock dudes": Conrad Lozano, Louie Perez, Cesar Rosas, David Hidalgo and Steve Berlin**

**ROSAS:** For a while we still had other bands. I'd play weekend nights at the clubs and then play with Los Lobos on Sunday afternoons. About two years later Frank quit the band. It was hard because he'd been the nucleus in a way. We'd had a couple of different bass players that didn't work out before Conrad came over from Tierra. He was amazed, I think. 'Cause we were not playing any typical stuff—no "Cucaracha" or anything. By this time, we were on a mission.

**CONRAD LOZANO:** I'd started out playing guitar but switched to bass almost right away. One time in junior high school a bunch of guys jumped me and kicked my face in 'cause I wouldn't pick up a pencil or something. The next week they came back and said, "Hey, I hear you play bass." That was my first band.

Musically, the 70s were a horrible scene—just ugly. I did have my first success with Tierra [an East Los Angeles band who scored a national chart hit with "Together"], but we were always bickering. For a while I played with both bands, and then the guys in Tierra said I had to choose between them and Los Lobos. They'd made the decision for me.

'Cause what we were doing in the backyard was so much more challenging. At the same time, there was a good feeling about learning this stuff I'd never even thought about getting into. It's funny; I always hated that kind of folk music. When the guys in Tierra wanted to play a *corrida* I would just refuse. But when Louie introduced me to some South American groups like Los Incas I just fell in love with it. I took up the guitarrón and it took me a year just to get the strength to play it. I loved the sound, and the challenge, I guess. We made a lot of instruments, too. The reward was that older people would appreciate what we were doing, and then younger fans would start to get into it.

**HIDALGO:** That's how it got to be Los Lobos: learning styles of music, trying to learn. Whenever we'd see an instrument one of us would pick it up. We were just crazy about it, together. It worked because of the combination of people in the group, and what we came upon.

**PEREZ:** It was important that we were friends before we played together, so we could relate to each other that way. We didn't even have to say "I'm tired of playing top forty," we felt it. It was like osmosis. But a lot of other people couldn't under-

stand why we were playing records we used to be embarrassed to hear our parents play. Now we were running home and trying to find those records.

**ROSAS:** We didn't start off playing Tex-Mex and all that "button stuff," you understand. That came years later. It was all acoustic. We became musicologists in a way. One of the things we were known for was having a harp in the band—not a blues harp, I mean a big harp. That was part of the music that had developed in Velázquez, Mexico.

And then, around 1978, we decided to give up rock music completely. For two or three years I didn't touch an electric guitar, and for almost five years we never bought a rock 'n' roll record. Just folk music—Mexican, African, Chinese, South American....

**HIDALGO:** We'd try to find different instruments of the region, and if we couldn't find it we'd substitute a mandolin or something else. At that time, though, you could find instruments for thirty dollars, so we picked up a lot of them.

**LOZANO:** We never thought that we might get gigs out of this, we just enjoyed what we were doing. But then we started getting TV coverage, and Chicano awareness began happening, and suddenly it turned out we had a lot of input, a lot of influence over people because of this music.

**ROSAS:** We were really just out for the music, but people did try to put politics into it. When that happened, we'd try to laugh it off. I think it made us go out and learn another song that nobody ever heard about.

We've always been caught in the middle. Like we'd get ostracized by guys who thought we weren't political enough. Then we'd go to social functions and other people would ask us, "Where's your suits?"—meaning the damn mariachi suits. We'd say, "We're not that kind of band." "Oh," they'd go, "you mean you're political?" I guess we've offended people sometimes by being that way.

**PEREZ:** Yeah, like when people would say, "When I close my eyes you guys sound so good."

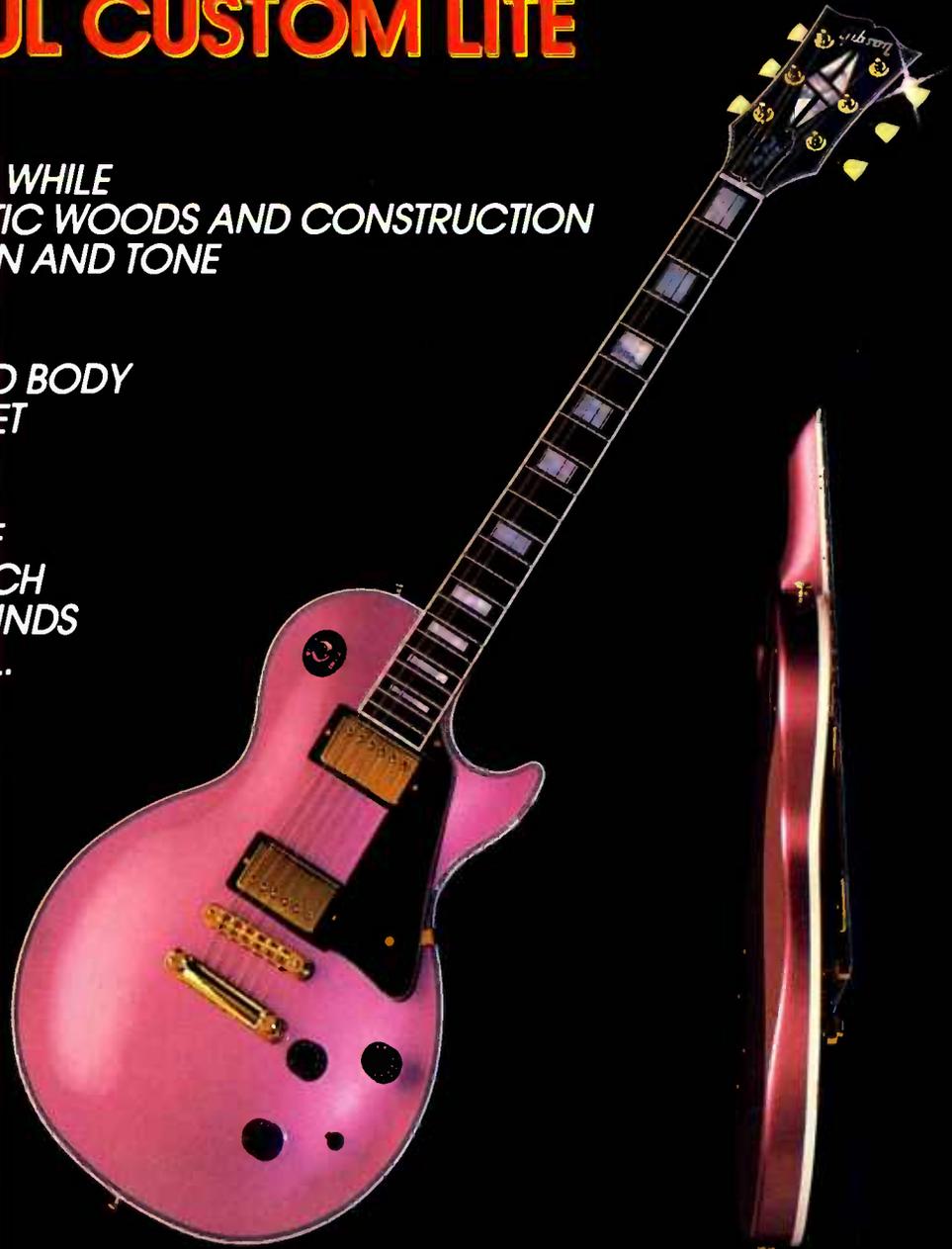
After a while it was like we were back at the beginning. Where before we didn't want to play the same top forty in a bar, now the Mexican restaurants where we'd get hired would demand the most typical songs. We began to get bored of our situation, but were locked in out of necessity. Life had gotten

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“At first, a lot of the songs we wrote for the new album just didn’t work. Actually, they stank. But a good thing about taking so much time to make a record is that we had the freedom to make mistakes and not have to live with them.”

more complicated over the past several years. When we formed the band, everyone was living at home, and any money we made was great. Then you start having children, wives, and your financial picture gets more complicated.

**ROSAS:** So we started changing again musically, getting out the guitars and dusting the amplifiers—playing rock ‘n’ roll again.

**T**hus commenced the saga of Los-Lobos-as-we-know-them. “That was a really rough period,” Perez says. “We’d gotten kind of comfortable playing the weddings, and it was tough to play a little club in Hollywood for thirty dollars on a Saturday night when we were used to getting hundreds. That transition was very rough on our families—hardly any money at all. It was like starting over. But we knew what we had to do.”

The transition was particularly challenging to Perez. While his mates were simply plugging their old electric guitars and basses into their dusted-off amplifiers, Perez had put down his guitar to become the band’s designated drummer. “The reason we learned to play so many different instruments is that we stayed so close-knit, like a family,” he explains. “David had turned us on to the accordion, and Cesar found his bajo sexto in a Mexican market, Conrad had the guitarrón for a bass thing. So when we went electric, it was like, ‘Well, Louie, what are you gonna do?’

“When I was in other bands I was always the guy who fooled around on the drums when everyone else took a break and went to the store. So I started on a snare drum and cymbal and just grew from that. I’m still probably a better guitar player than a drummer,” Perez says, “and I’d love to be great at it, but I also think my limitations can sometimes help the band. I’m not like a hotshot who’s all over the place.”

Los Lobos had a Hollywood debut opening for the Blasters at the Whiskey. They were quickly welcomed into a club scene that included “revivalist” bands like X, the Blasters and the Plugz. They needed that welcome; when the East L.A. clubs found out Los Lobos had gone Hollywood, “they wouldn’t even call us anymore,” Perez says.

Not even a record deal with Slash was altogether encouraging, Perez says. “For us it was, ‘Let’s just give ‘em an EP and \$6,000 to record it.’” “We were worried,” Rosas adds. “We wondered who’s going to buy this, are we gonna be accepted? And [Slash is] thinking, ‘What the hell do we do with these guys, how do we promote them?’”

A Grammy award for “Anselma,” from the EP, provided some measure of vindication. So did reviews for their consistently stirring live shows, and the range and artistic maturity evidenced by their first full album, particularly the near-title song, “Will The Wolf Survive.” “Still, no one [at Slash or distributor Warner Bros.] expected it to sell,” Perez says. “They thought it would sell seventy, eighty thousand at most. Part of the reason that single didn’t do so well is that no one was

geared up for it. Our success was totally unexpected.”

“We owe it all to our experiments,” Rosas cracks. “The acid, mostly.”

By this time saxophonist Steve Berlin, who co-produced both records, had left the Blasters to become a full-fledged Lobo. “Before, we would never have hired a new member to play an instrument,” Perez admits. “We would have learned how to do it ourselves. That’s how I became a drummer. We didn’t *want* anyone else. But Steve was kind of in the same situation we’d been in: frustrated, not able to stretch himself or do what he wanted. And we felt we could provide that.”

“I enjoyed the Blasters a lot,” Berlin says. “But with all the geniuses—excuse me, all the various viewpoints that were being disseminated, there wasn’t much room there. And I just love playing with these guys—to combine tradition with different idioms. It all seemed to fit.

“The only adjustment I had to make was learning not to scream. I mean, the Blasters are great fellows, but they’ll fight about the weather. And these guys *never* argue about anything. It took about six months for my adrenalin level to go down.”

Other musicians noticed Los Lobos as well. Elvis Costello invited Hidalgo to play on his *King Of America* album, and added Los Lobos songs to his endless repertoire. Rosas played on sessions (as yet unreleased) with Bob Dylan. The band was contracted to score a film biography of Ritchie Valens—they’d recorded Valens’ “Come On, Let’s Go” on their EP—with

## SIEMPRE LISTO

**U**ntil recently, the band has been getting bigger, louder and more powerful,” says Los Lobos stage manager “Mouse” de La Luz. “Now there’s an effort to tone down a little bit. We’ve realized in certain rooms they play that guitars and amps will bleed into some of the mikes. We want to get a cleaner sound.”

**Cesar Rosas**, who never met a guitar he didn’t like, usually depends on either a Fender Strat or Telecaster, with a Les Paul special and L series Gibson as a backup. Recently he’s been trying out a Zolla (“made by a guy in San Diego”) with a tremolo bar. For amplification he’s considering switching from a 100-watt Marshall to stereo Fender Super Reverbs and an old Fender Tremolux. He also employs a Yamaha SPX 90 for occasional effects.

**Conrad Lozano** has been playing through an Ampeg SVT for seventeen years. His cabinet includes an Electro-Voice Force 10 speaker (“twice the capacity of a standard stock speaker”). And, oh yes, the bass: Fender Jazz and Precisions, mostly.

**David Hidalgo** depends on Fender Strats and Teles through a Marshall or Hi-Watt head to standard four ten-inch speaker cabinets, and a Fender Concert amp with a Celestion speaker in conjunction with an old Fender reverb unit. His only effect is a tube driver (made by Butner Electronics in San Francisco) to boost wattage during solos.

**Steve Berlin** plays a Buescher baritone saxophone, and a Selmer Mark 7 tenor. **Louie Perez** plays Ludwig drums (late-60s model) and Paiste cymbals. Microphones include Sennheiser 407s for vocals and Hidalgo’s accordion.



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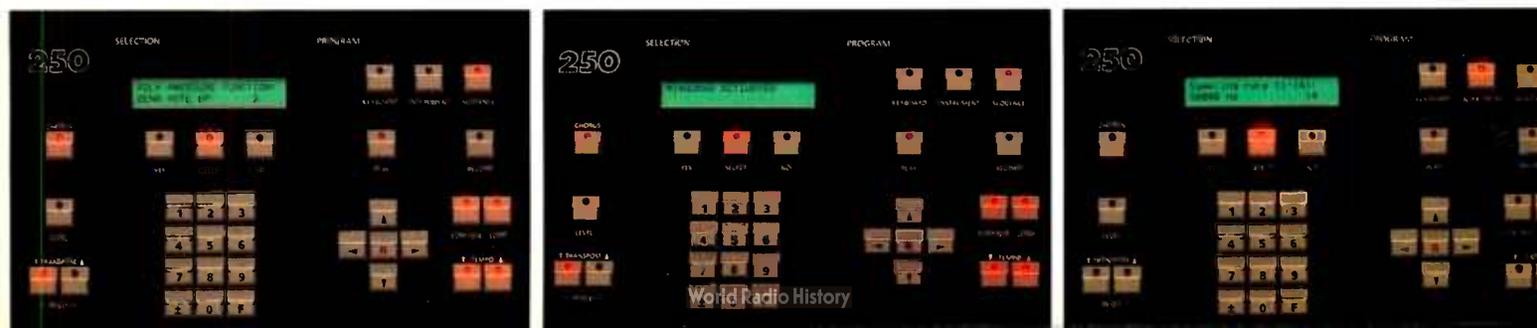
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Hidalgo having the honor of singing Valens' parts.

Then there was the Paul Simon experience.

Back in Los Lobos' folk days, Rosas had become a fan of the South American group Los Incas, whose "El Condor Pasa" became famous through Simon's rendition on the *Bridge Over Troubled Water* LP. One decade later, Simon invited Los Lobos to play on his new record, *Graceland*.

"He said he'd been a fan for a while and would we be interested in getting together," Rosas says. "We said sure; we thought he'd have a couple of songs or something. So we got into the studio, but there were no songs. After a while we started feeling like idiots; 'when is he going to show us the song?' By the last day there was this weird tension in the air. He asked us if there was anything wrong, and we said no, that's what *we* want to know."

It turned out that Simon wanted Los Lobos to "create" some music, perhaps in the manner of the African bands he'd contracted to play extended jams on old folk songs. "He thought we were this caged jungle beast," Perez says, "that we just do what we do." Rosas and Hidalgo decided to put a tune together from parts they'd written earlier. The band recorded it, Simon took it home, wrote lyrics, and stuck the now-completed track on his album—with no songwriting credits for Los Lobos. *Graceland* has now sold over a million copies.

And so, back in the studio to make a new album for which they had written zero songs, the members of Los Lobos found themselves in a familiar position: up against the wall. Rumors of a sophomore (or perhaps a sophomore-and-two-semesters) slump swirled about the corporate corridors. Even Burnett expressed concern.

"At that point, what I thought they ought to do was write

songs and go to a club up in Santa Rosa to play them for about three weeks. That was my big idea," he draws. Instead Los Lobos dug in, eventually grinding out some of the best music of their lives.

It wasn't easy. "At first, a lot of songs we wrote just didn't work," Rosas says. "Actually, they stank. T-Bone was having a tough time. David and Louie had their idea about the way their songs should be, and then T-Bone had his idea... we'd record and then have to do it all over again."

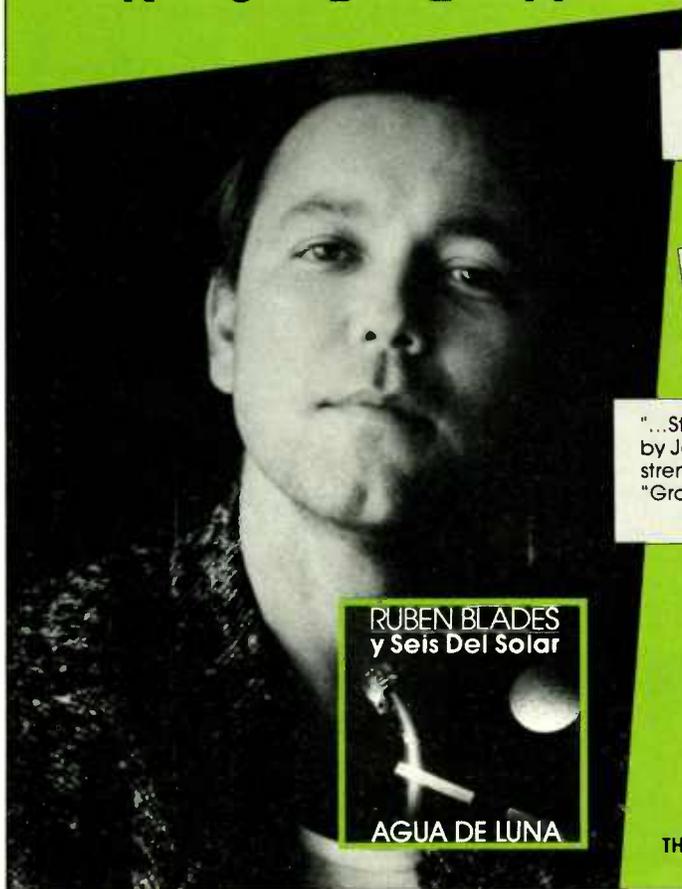
"But there are certain advantages to working this way," Burnett points out. "A lot of songs sound great onstage but are horrible in the studio. You have to completely disassemble the pieces and try to put it back together. That's no fun either. And I'm not the producer who goes in and says, 'Your bass drum sounds like this,' and tells the singer what licks to sing. That's not being a record producer, that's just being a meddler. My primary role was one of support and encouragement."

"I fought for their purity as a band. But sometimes, that would mean fighting against them."

One particularly sensitive decision was to bring in several drummers (including Anton Fier) to augment Perez. "That was the most painful part of the record," according to Burnett, who declined further comment. Perez claims he wasn't upset, however, noting that Hidalgo played drums occasionally on their previous records. "And I think it's kind of neat that we've gotten to a place as a band where we can ask other musicians who we really respect."

Such unerring instincts for the silver lining underscore Los Lobos' resilient spirit. "One of the best things about taking so much time to make a record," Hidalgo contends at another point, "is that we had the time to live with it for a while, even

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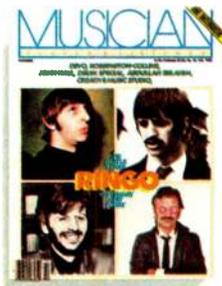
"Claro Oscuro (Twilight),"  
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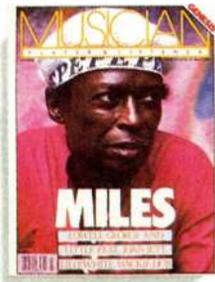
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**Ringo Starr**

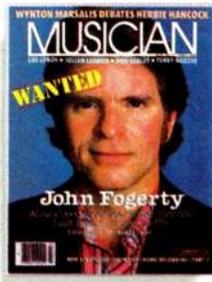
Drummers, Devo, Rossington-Collins



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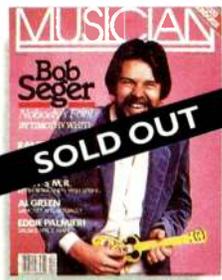
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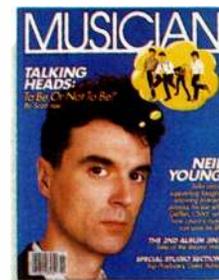
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get sick of it, and really know if it was what we wanted. We had the freedom to make mistakes and not have to live with them.

"'River Of Fools,' for instance, was recorded with a full band, and it was okay. But right after that we had a break from the record, and when we came back we knew it wasn't right. The emotion of the song was held back by the arrangement. So we sat down on guitar and started from scratch again, with all acoustic instruments. And the spirit was much closer."

That "less is more" strategy works only when the songs are strong enough to support it. Rosas, who specializes in blues-inflected jump tunes, came up with "Shakin' Shakin' Shakes," a biting R&B guitar figure married to a taut tale of passion crafted by Burnett ("one of my best lyrics," he modestly suggests). Balancing the scales were the more melodic pop songs of Hidalgo—whose prodigious musicianship and plaintive vocals make him the focal point of the band—and Perez, whose lyrics Burnett likens to O. Henry in narrative style.

"I've always liked writers who could put across their feelings in a story," Perez explains. "But I can't explain why we write this way. 'Wolf' seemed like the beginning of a new phase of songwriting for me, and a period of personal growth. East L.A. is a pretty insular community: church, family and friends. Shit, I didn't even see Disneyland until I was eighteen. Then traveling and seeing the world...coming back from that experience and thinking, 'Who am I?' I think after a while those experiences set in.

"But there's no answers in the stuff I write. I question things like anybody else. The most I can do as a 'rock guy' is maybe let people know that we feel the same things they do."

"Maybe some of that came from traveling, seeing the world we'd never seen before," Hidalgo says. "But we pick up ideas

from what's around us, even the news. A song like 'One Time One Night,' and the verse about the missing child—just go to the market and buy some milk, as Louie was saying, and there it is on the carton. Those situations are everywhere."

"Though you have to understand," Lozano says, "the band does work and evolve around David. His playing is so strong; his talent is still being tapped. What's really good about working together as a unit is that he's the kind of person whose talents and abilities will probably never go to his head."

"I've been lucky enough to sit around with some of the best singers in...the world, I guess," Burnett says. "And with these singers, you close your eyes and it's like you're out in the desert; it could be fifty thousand years ago. They have ancient spirits. Dylan can do that, or Bono. And I would say there is some of that in this group. You can hear it in David's voice. There's that kind of depth.

"This was a painful record to make, I'm not trying to paint any rose-colored picture. But it was also very rewarding. And anything worth doing has a lot of that element, especially when the people involved are really stretching themselves. But is it more important that a band gets on KLOS, or that a band stays true to its heart? In twenty years it won't matter much if it got on the top forty. But if the songs are done clearly and done passionately, that will mean something.

"And I think if you really put a good song across passionately and generously, it will do all the things you want it to do. That's what I believe," he grins sheepishly. "I'm a sucker."

"Our lives don't change," Rosas shrugs. "We haven't had a lot of money, but I'm not sure that would change us either. We've managed to reach the success we have now, and that's pretty good. You know," he cackles, "we're just *cabrones*." ❏

# ALBERT COLLINS

## MASTER OF THE TELECASTER

### Robert Cray Says:

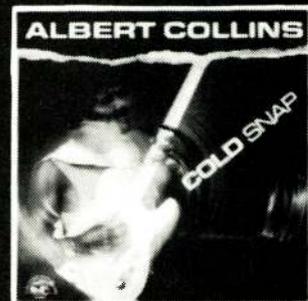
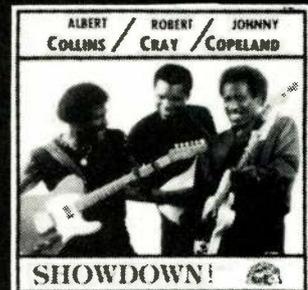
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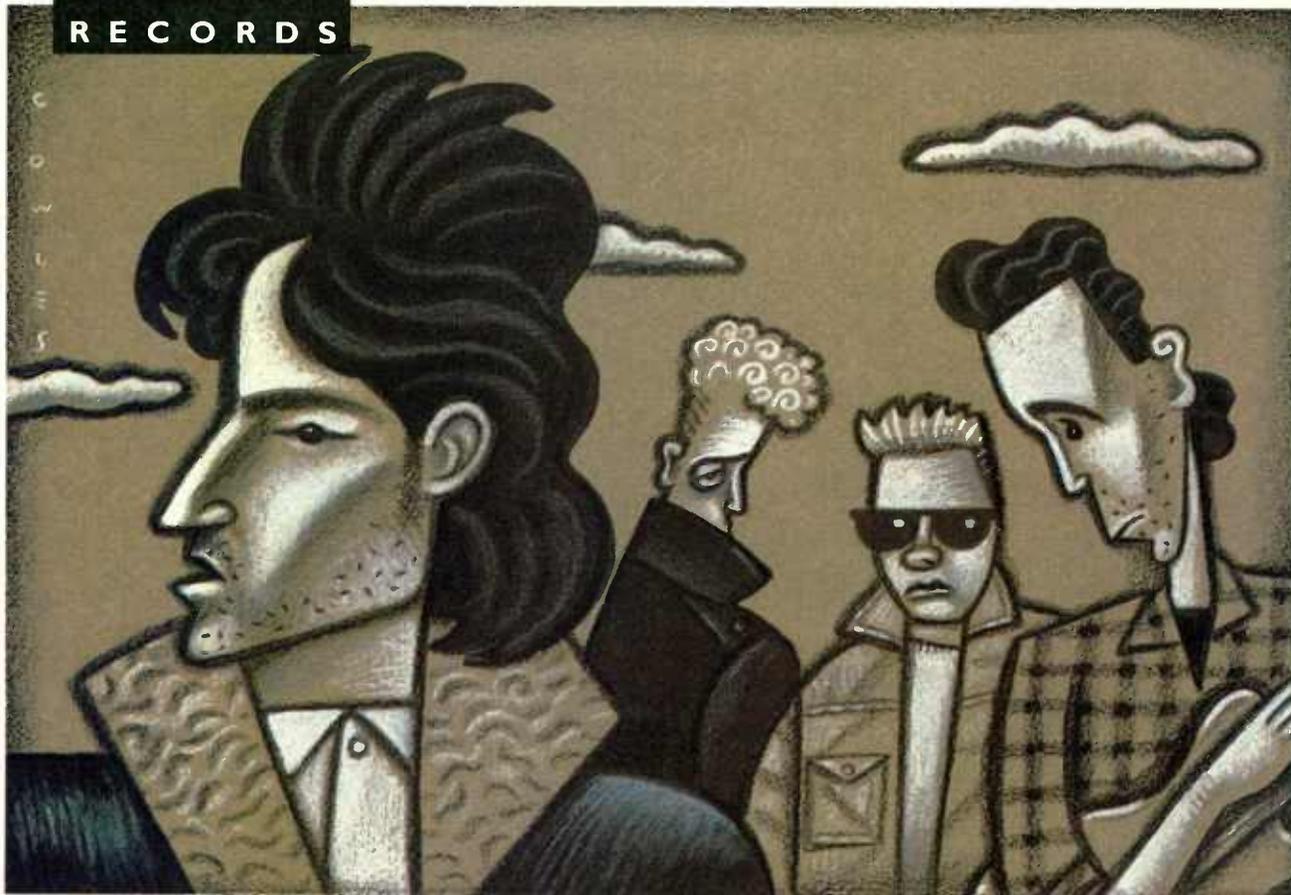


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U2

*The Joshua Tree*  
(Island)

**B**ono is the best folksinger going right now; *The Joshua Tree* proves it. In 1987 the local folk music is rock 'n' roll, so rather than simply play an acoustic guitar, Bono is accompanied by bass, drums and electric guitar. Rock 'n' roll bands have usually found their fire in tension and competition: instruments daring each other to *top this*, individuals matching talent

and egos, yet how remarkable to find a great rock 'n' roll band born of musical cooperation and unselfishness.

Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen and the Edge play like one person—the web of sound on *The Joshua Tree* gives equal weight to rhythm, melody and harmony, to top, middle and bottom. Just like an acoustic guitar. Much of the time the three players hold down a steady throb, and let Bono's voice add the tension and dynamics. It's less minimalism than subtlety—if Bono goes from a whisper to a wail, there's no need to start pounding and cascading behind him. And when the whole band does cut loose—as they do on "Exit"—it hits twice as hard.

This is the group's second collaboration with Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno, and their sound is very much a continuation of 1984's *The Unforgettable Fire*; the same misty moodiness, the pings and pangs of Edge's guitar over sheets of drone chords. The prototypical U2 song may turn out to be 1984's "Bad," which contained—as many of these songs do—both passion and gentleness, and was constructed as these are over (what sound like) triggered drums and a blanket of ringing eighth-notes. In the two and a half years since *Unforgettable Fire*

so many groups have copied U2 that a stylistic departure seemed likely this time, yet *Joshua Tree* is more a refinement. Like Dylan and the Stones, U2 has found a musical base that can contain all sorts of songs; rather than abandon it, they are moving further inside the sound, examining its possibilities.

U2 has always proposed a world vision, and their experiences working for Amnesty International have only expanded their ability to connect the dots between different cultures, to find common ground. A lot of songs on *The Joshua Tree* could be loosely called "political" or "religious" but that would miss the point, just as reading U2's lyrics can distract one from the points made by Bono's voice. What is important is the sense of dignity and potency—that the world is a beautiful place, and the greatest injustice is not to cause another pain, but to deprive another of that beauty.

There's a wonderful moment here, on a song called "Trip Through Your Wires," when Bono takes a raggedy harmonica solo. As a mouth organist this guy is never going to threaten Lee Oskar or Toots Thielemans, yet he blows his harp with such joy and abandon that it's hard not to be caught up in his en-

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thusiasm. Then Edge comes in to take a guitar break. Almost any other guitarist would respond to the messy harmonica with something melodic and restrained—for the good purpose of returning the song to musical order and for the nasty purpose of showing up the sloppy harp player. But Edge follows Bono's solo with a thrashing, primitive bent-string frenzy. It's got nothing to do with good musicianship, and everything to do with love and friendship. It's a moment when real happiness jumps out of the grooves and into the room. And while it contains no evidence of planning or conscious decision, those back-to-back solos are a small example of U2's "You, too" philosophy: One guy jumping around by himself is a clown—two guys jumping around together is a movement.

Sure they get too ambitious, and sometimes that looks a little silly. But U2 offers two choices—stand on the side and snicker, or climb down and join in the game. How much invitation do you need? — **Bill Flanagan**



**MINUTEMEN**  
*Ballot Result*  
(SST)

**FIREHOSE**  
*Ragin' Full On*  
(SST)

**T**he Minutemen were a hell of a band, and *Ballot Result* is one hell of a parting shot from this remarkable southern California trio, which became history when leader D. Boon died in a highway mishap in late '85. A robust 32-track hodge-podge of live takes, rehearsal tapes and previously-released cuts, these two discs offer an arresting summation, capturing the band's range, intelligence and, above all, their uncommon humanity.

"Punk rock changed our lives," observes Boon in "History Lesson—Part Two." Unlike by-the-numbers hardcore cousins, however, the Minutemen saw

punk as an openness to all possibilities, not an invitation to champion new clichés. While the dudes could turn out blurred noise with the best of 'em, from "Little Man With A Gun In His Hand" to "If Reagan Played Disco," their rough 'n' ready thrash could also accommodate funk ("No One"), jazzy jams ("Hell"), folkie philippics ("No! No! No! To Draft And War"), and even traditional dumb-stud rock (Steppenwolf's "Hey Lawdy Mama"). Boon's burly vocals and slashing guitar seemed infinitely adaptable.

At their most brutal, the Minutemen transcended random violence, keeping the first commandment of punk—"Thou shalt question everything"—after others forgot. They constantly challenged the militaristic mindset of the Reagan era, decrying the devastation of Central America in "King Of The Hill" and issuing a call to "stand up and start saying things" during the intro to the brawling "Courage." Thoughts of Vietnam and El Salvador hang over *Ballot Result* like a dark cloud, especially on the gorgeous "The Price Of Paradise," Boon's heart-breaking ode to war veterans.

The Minutemen once mocked their lack of mass appeal by releasing a supposedly saleable EP called *Project: Mersh* (i.e., commercial). In fact, the failing was the mainstream's, not the band's. Shunning show-business bullshit like the plague, D. Boon, bassist Mike Watt and drummer George Hurley remained honorable cats to the very end. Even latecomers to the Minutemen will likely feel a deep sense of loss after spending time with *Ballot Result*.

Comparisons to the 'men are unfair but inevitable for Firehose, Watt and Hurley's current band with singer/guitarist Ed from Ohio (a.k.a. Ed Crawford). To his credit, the new kid doesn't attempt to fill Boon's heroic shoes, pursuing his own identity instead. Though Ed's got some of the same axe habits, he's a tidier player, a prettier singer, and considerably less outgoing. "The Candle And The Flame" and "Choose Any Memory" have the melodic elegance of R.E.M., while "Chemical Wire" and "Another Theory Shot To Shit" create a more familiar racket. When Ed sounds too introverted, there's always the crackling rhythm work; when he hits the mark, as on the jumpy "Brave Captain," it's obvious Watt and Hurley made a good choice. Consistently interesting, if occasionally tentative, *Ragin' Full-On* should lead to some formidable sequels.

— **Jon Young**



**DOLLY PARTON,  
LINDA RONSTADT,  
EMMYLOU HARRIS**

*Trio*  
(Warner Bros.)

**I**t requires one listening of "The Pain Of Loving You" and "Making Plans," the first two tracks on *Trio*, to realize that the big news of this project is not that three vocal superstars could contort their schedules, their managements' arms, or their record company contracts to permit it. What matters is the humility of its musical agenda: To restore the tensile strength of simplicity.

Emmylou's reedy sob meshes with Dolly's plucky lilt and Linda's dark, brassy bottom, and the distractions of personalities vanish. The eloquence of these songs' careworn messages is so fragile, so elemental, that the sacrifice of a second's intimacy might mean ruination. I'm not talking about mood, I mean the legitimate emotional integrity of making acoustic music.

The only enjoyment greater than hearing these fine voices joined—often to where it's tricky discerning individual parts—is the natural brightness of the instrumentation. The fiddle alone on "Making Plans," its bowing on the bridge virtually defining the exhaustion of anxious longing, is worth the price of submission.

*Trio's* material ranges from the unhurried tread of the Teddy Bears' 1958 classic, "To Know Him Is To Love Him," to the deft entwining of trilled voices and stringed coloration of Jean Ritchie's "Dear Companion," yet there's nary a trace of overreach. Indeed, producer/engineer George Massenburg and musical director John Starling may be *Trio's* true standouts, so on "Wildflowers," for instance, they remind the ears how exquisite an autoharp can sound when plied against the resonances of an apt singer.

You get virtually no drums on *Trio*,

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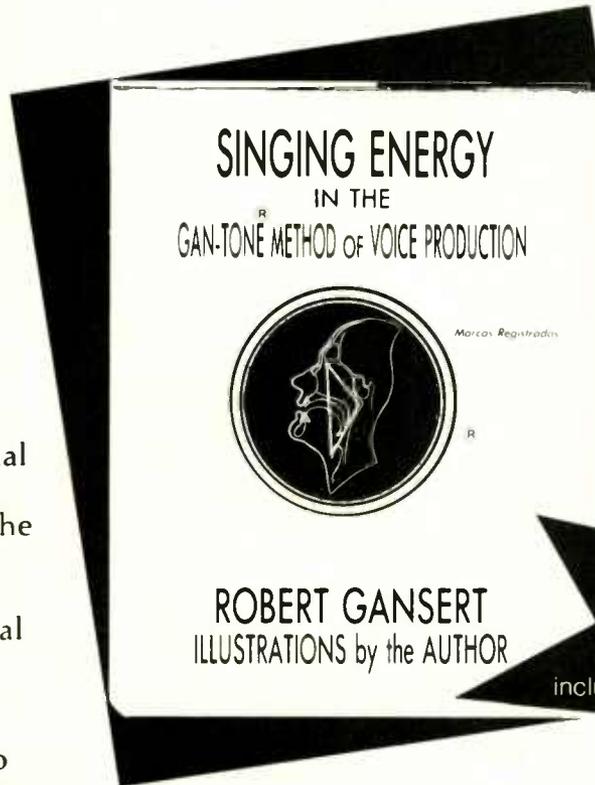
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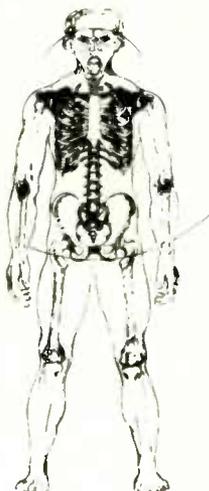
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Robert Gansert has been a performing vocalist for over twenty years, and has been featured in numerous concerts and recordings. His work has been internationally acclaimed. He is currently a noted instructor at the Carnegie Hall studios.

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beyond a tad of rimshot or a supple skip of the brushes; no artful atmospheric buildups or calibrated crescendos. There's just the accurate ring of mandolin, guitar, piano, dulcimer and dobro, and the sonorities that wonderfully absorbed singing can surround them with. Each member of the trio sings better than they have in years, particularly Ronstadt, who's forgotten herself in the subtle demands of this record's eleven miniatures. Only on the rueful "I've Had Enough" could Linda's devoutly gracile phrasing be accused of sounding precious, were it not for the track's overall clarity of intent.

When this summit conference was first attempted circa 1977, these three women joined forces to cut "Light Of The Stable," a Christmas song that eventually turned up as the title track to a 1980 Emmylou Harris record. Other collaborative tracks ("Evangeline," "Mr. Sandman," "My Blue Tears"), surfacing on subsequent albums by the singers, turned out to be lush, ultra-pretty fare.

Trio's allure is less tidy—there are even a few tentative notes left in—but it transcends the "old-timey" primitivism that's country music's latest trend. On its own gently circumscribed terms, *Trio* actually makes one occasionally forget who's in it. In that sense, everything old really is new again. — **Timothy White**



**RUBÉN BLADES  
Y LOS SEIS DEL SOLAR**

*Agua De Luna*  
(Elektra)

Rubén Blades has earned the right to take his art down surprising, even disturbing paths. But the kind of surprises supplied by *Agua De Luna* (*Moon Water*), an album based on short stories by the Colombian Nobel-laureate Gabriel García Márquez, may force even some of Blades' most passionate admirers to reconsider their ardor.

The first surprise here is that, despite pushing his music further away from *salsa* (a misnomer headed for obsolescence as much as the rhythm itself) and toward more universally accepted techno-pop, *Agua De Luna* is the most danceable album of Blades' solo career. A second, less pleasant, surprise is that his use of synthesizers, an act of emancipation over clavé slavery prominently displayed in previous solo efforts *Looking For America* and *Escenas*, now clutters his harmonies instead of enhancing them.

The worst surprise is the complete absence of Blades' typically fluid lyricism, the result perhaps of trying to cram *El Gabo's* expansive style into songs. Instead of simply transposing Márquez's universal themes of social justice, ghetto deprivation and pimps/whores into everyday language, Blades opts for a kind of rhyming, philosophical balderdash, incomprehensible to anyone who hasn't had the good fortune of reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Chronicles Of A Death Foretold* or other Márquez masterpieces.

Foolish? Hardly. Statistics indicate that the vast majority of Blades' record buyers are South American university students who see in his music an outlet for political and social oppression. Due to academic requirements, or geographical proximity, many are also avid García Márquez readers—unlike their U.S. brothers from El Barrio, El Segundo or Calle Ocho.

Considering that Blades has made his mark among U.S. Hispanics while obviously aware of the prestige such success enjoys among Latin Americans, *Moon Water* is as far removed from this audience as Unión de Reyes is from Timbuktu; even further when one surmises those U.S. Spanish stations that have refused in the past to program Blades' music because of his perceived leftist inclinations will probably have a field day with García Márquez—a friend of Fidel Castro.

None of which should bother Rubén; controversy is his intellectual fertilizer. But it does underscore his avowed, increasingly tenuous position as a Latino-americano, a man with a hemispheric perspective rather than simply a Hispanic who lives in the U.S.; the same hombre who aspires to the presidency of his native Panama yet marries an Anglo-Saxon, acts in English-speaking films and lives in California. Well, if it worked for Ronald Reagan, maybe he figures it can work for him, too. — **Tony Sabournin**



## WAYNE SHORTER

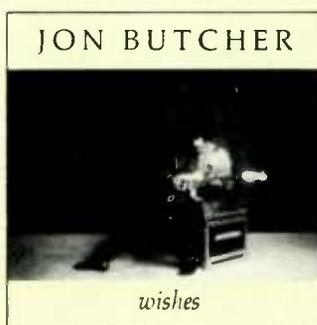
*Phantom Navigator*  
(Columbia)

Artists, like politicians, have a hard time shaking their pasts. To purists, Wayne Shorter earned his saxophone stripes as a Jazz Messenger and with mid-60s Miles, only to drift into electric tapioca after 1970. Having ended his fifteen-year tenure in Weather Report last year, many old fans figured his solo career would pick up where their 60s Blue Note albums left off. But last year's *Atlantis*—Shorter's first solo effort since 1974's *Native Dancer*—didn't grant the Shorter-hungry world its real wish: Man that tenor and blow hard. Instead the record showcased Wayne's more ornate proclivities as a composer, exerting a formalist fascination and a quixotic melodicism at the expense of gut-level get-down.

If compositional plotting and an almost chamber-music-like chiaroscuro were the hallmarks of *Atlantis*, the new album is an argument for letting MIDI-gizmos do the walking. Though Shorter has always been simpatico with drummers, only the bustling "Condition Red" sports a real kit (that of double-timing Tom Brechtlein); elsewhere, it's drummer-in-a-box. The album's synth timbres—especially the twisted celebratory yowl of "Yamanja" and the float 'n' flail approach of "Remote Control"—suggest Joe Zawinul's sonic palette, but the keyboardists here lack his rustic instincts.

Synth Think dominates the album despite hints Shorter is struggling for a philosophical balance. In the midst of the electronic-heavy "Condition Red," for instance, stacked saxes—Shorter's quadruplicate—overtake the sonic spectrum; real, blessed reeds come to the aural rescue, stating a bridge more worthy of Ellington. Lovers of Shorter, the soloist beware, however; virtually no tenor sax improvisation appears on

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the album. A few soprano sax flights tease us on coda fades; strain an ear and you'll catch an inspired flight on the tail end of "Flagships."

Still, this initially amorphous fest of elliptical fusion gradually becomes infatuating, if only because Wayne Shorter commands one of the most striking and identifiably personal languages of the post-bop era. His clip-noted, staircase arpeggios, economy of phrasing and life-affirming musical voice make for a reassuring mystique. Even on this transitional record, Shorter lives up to his rep as one of jazz history's most elegant figures. — **Josef Woodard**



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

*God's Favorite Dog*  
 (Touch & Go)

### FRIGHTWIG

*Faster, Frightwig, Kill! Kill!*  
 (Caroline Records)

### THE MEATMEN

*Rock & Roll Juggernaut*  
 (Caroline Records)

### EVAN JOHNS & THE H-BOMBS

*Rollin' Through The Night*  
 (Alternative Tentacles)

### FALSE PROPHETS

*False Prophets*  
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*Polkacide*  
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optimum balance between intelligence and brain damage. Killdozer's howling, out-of-tune cover of "Sweet Home Alabama" is one of the funniest things I ever heard on a record. And the Buttholes are my favorite band in the universe, which I shall elaborate on at a later date. I'll be very surprised if this isn't the best anthology of the year.

*Faster, Frightwig, Kill! Kill!* shows great improvements over Frightwig's previous *Cat Farm Faboo*. They've always been funny and honest, but have here climbed out of a pure primal scream and kindergarten rhythm band to occupy a slot halfway between Scratch Acid and the Runaways, and uniquely their own. Only band of females I know of who have achieved the above-mentioned optimum balance of brain damage and intelligence.

*Rock 'n' Roll Juggernaut* is slightly less gross than the class *We're The Meatmen And You Suck!*, but only slightly. The Meatmen would never release flaccid product, and it is heartening to hear them so uncompromised in these repressive times. Singer Tesco Vee writes lyrics like S. Clay Wilson draws: If it's taboo, he'll rub your nose in it. Led by guitarist Lyle Pressler, the rest of the Men have evolved into a serious metal/punk outfit that doesn't skimp on production value. Particularly recommended for those into sodomy jokes.

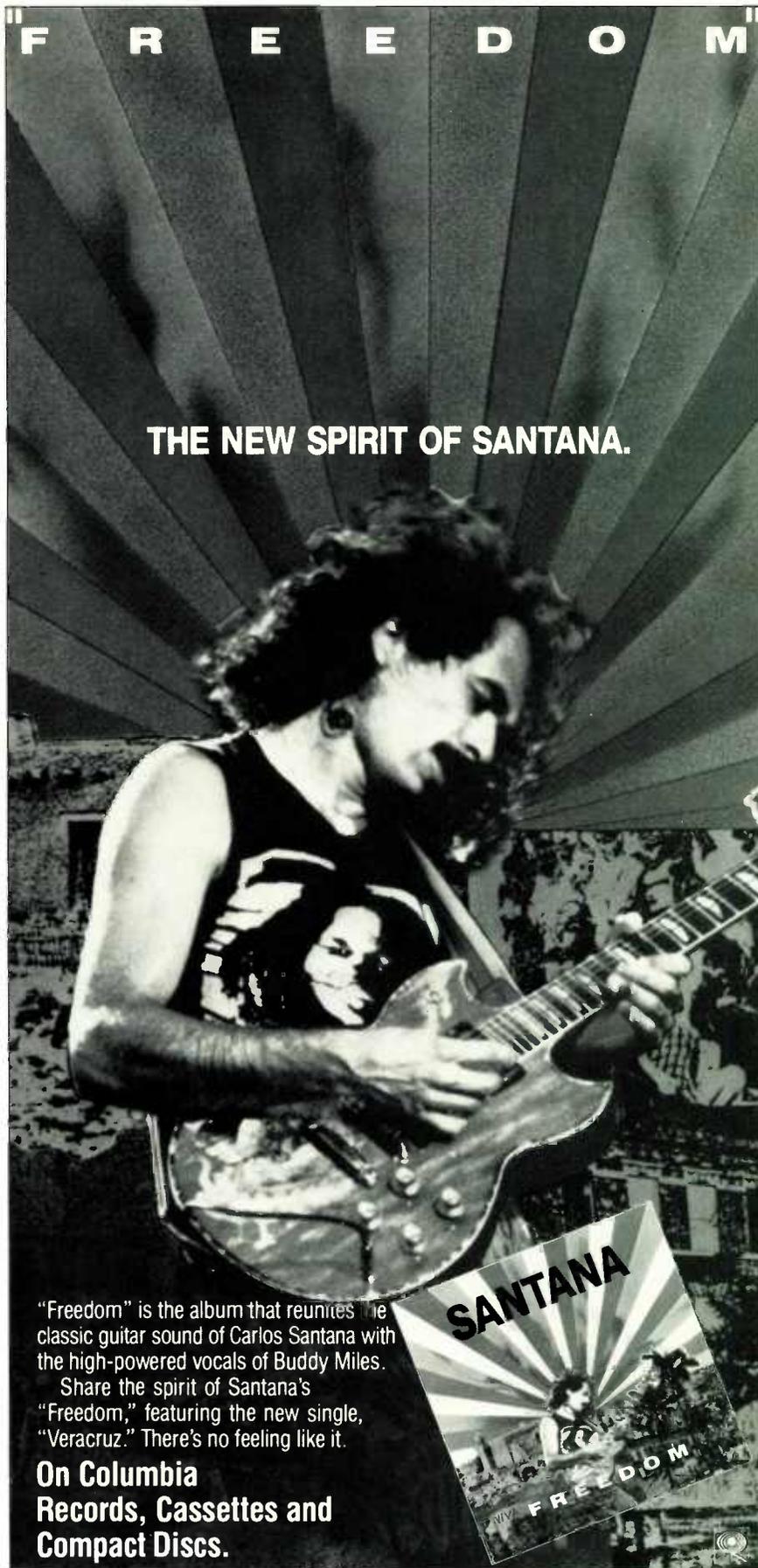
*Rollin' Through The Night* is ace rockabilly, updated Duane Eddy with plenty of snarl and crunch. Unusual for Alternative Tentacles because Evan Johns ain't political or gross. Nonetheless, it's been my favorite thing to slap on the turntable when I need adrenalin in the past couple of months. Title song is perfect.

Hailing from the anarchist end of punk, the False Prophets are distinguished by Stephen Ielpi's quite listenable voice, and arrangements that show more imagination than do most other bands equally interested in denouncing established evil. Cover of "Marat/Sade" should be a big hit with those unenamored of the ruling class, and I like Ielpi's rhymes: "When does the sexual become the frictional / The satisfactional become the fictional?"

Polkacide consists of guys with names like Dudzo Wartniak and Bruno De Smartass who wear crotchless lederhosen, stick tacks in their heads and—astoundingly—play straight polka music. Since polka sorta evolved as an Eastern European antidote to existential despair, it sorta works. I give them the Elvis Kierkegaard Bronze Bible for the deep musico-theological insight of "In Heaven

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There Is No Beer" ("...That's why we drink it here / And when we're gone from here / All our friends will be drinking all our beer").

Finally, we got a Band of Susans, who I like because they play guitar just like I do. First song of this EP is 4:49 of an E-chord. I say if you find a good note, stay with it. Nice feedback, nice drone, nice adrenalin with your trance, and they shift to 3:45 of A-chord on side two. Wish my name was Susan, but my editor says I have to stick with... - Charles M. Young



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8  
(WB/Paisley Park)

This was to be Prince's fusion album, the record he'd wanted to make for years. His chance to stretch out in a form more sophisticated and challenging than funk. In other words, big trouble. Fusion label aside, 8 has a cool, lackadaisical ambience reminiscent of a lounge band deep into its cups. How bad is it? Well, two cuts use Prince's trademark "found sound" of women moaning in the throes of orgasm, and that's about as fresh as it gets. "6" sounds like a sluggish retreat of "Girls & Boys"; "8" features a passable melody that's marred by a bizarre synthesized voice figure.

Cheesy to say the least, but Prince gave fair warning: 8 simply extends the more ponderous excesses of *Around The World In A Day* and *Parade*. Trouble is, there's no "Kiss" to redeem this record, and no funk experimentalism—however arty or overblown—to keep the faithful at least marginally interested.

But 8's combination of avant-garde pretensions and tired genre pieces does effectively dramatize Prince's artistic confusion. On the one hand, he fancies himself a musical revolutionary; on the other, he wants to please everybody. The grotesque *Under The Cherry Moon* was sincere in one respect: Prince, like

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the character Christopher Tracy, believes in social climbing, and hungers for respect and attention from "higher" cultural stations than his own. While Christopher tried to bag an heiress, Prince tries to bag the respect of a more middle-brow audience. Now he's bidding with jazz credentials. And of course, he means to do it without losing his old fans.

No pop star since Elvis has wanted so desperately to have it both ways. And while there's no comparing the two artistically, Prince's career path is looking more and more like Elvis', from the wildly uneven records and failed films to the starkly isolated personal lives; each man reached a point where he no longer saw what he did best, who he was doing it for, or just how brilliantly he had done it. Still, faith dies hard, so excuse me if I hold the obit until arch-rival Michael Jackson makes his presence felt again. After all, The Kid's always loved a cutting contest. — **Steve Perry**



**THE JUDDS**

*Heart Land*  
(RCA)

**W**yonna Judd, the younger half of the mother-daughter duet team the Judds, is the most striking country-and-western singer today. Whether lending her insouciant voice to a massaging ballad or a raucous uptempo foray, her verve and smarts can turn a slight, likable song—like the Judds' first hit, the bewildered "Mama, He's Crazy"—into a classic, and the most banal tune into a delight. And on *Heart Land*, the Judds' third album, there are enough banalities to keep that voice busy.

Still, a middling Judds album is one long rung above most of the pop pap that masquerades as country nowadays. Wyonna, mother/harmony singer supreme Naomi, and guitarist/bandleader Don Potter escort a tight big band (much instrumentation but razor-thin arrange-

ments) through a varied mix of spare country weepers and honky tonk-influenced stompers that make the other country-politan tracks tolerable (if not acceptable). Dumbest is "Cow Cow Boogie," an evocation of the Andrews Sisters that was probably fun to play with in the studio, but simply sounds pointless. Much better is "Old Pictures": The straightforward reworking of a standard country conceit (and a strain of nostalgia also mined on last year's hit "Grandpa [Tell Me 'Bout The Good Old Days]") works best as a showcase for Wyonna's nuanced, tightly-reined vocals. On "I Know Where I'm Going" and "Turn It Loose," Wyonna cuts those reins, lets her voice get rough, and cruises.

With that context, it doesn't much matter that the closer, "The Sweetest Gift," is as hokey as you'd expect of a song about an angelic mother whose son has gone bad. What matters is how the Judds, with a vocal assist from Emmylou Harris, pour themselves into the number and soak it with their supple, aching voices. The Judds' singing gets stronger every record—why can't the same thing happen to their songs?

— **Jimmy Guterman**

**NAMM** from page 66

unbelievable number of things it does. Don't run right out and look for one, though—the first thirty were instantly snapped up. Simmons is also opening a warehouse/service operation in the New York area to help east-coast owners.

There were plenty more Great American Inventions at NAMM, like Barcus Berry Electronics' BBE process, which fixes up problems in the amp-to-speaker chain, more and better boxes from DOD/Digitech, a software update for the Lexicon PCM-70, the Dornes Performance Bar which brings keyboards out of the one-handed mod wheel era, and the Artisyn MIDI controller for sax players. And plenty of interesting imports, including a new pro SMPTE synchronizer from Tascam, more MIDI-controlled effects from Korg and Roland, a cool MIDI bass pedal called the MIDI-Step and, incredibly, even more MIDI gear from Yamaha. But we've got to save something for next month, so for now, let's go out humming John Philip Sousa's "Stars And Stripes Forever" and keep those international exchange rates next to your MIDI implementation charts. **M**

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# ROCK TAKES

## **Bobby Womack**

*Womagic* (MCA)

Had the Rolling Stones managed a fraction of the soulful anguish Womack packs into the gritty, guitar-driven "(I Wanna) Make Love To You," it'd be heralded as their best in a decade. Here, though, it's just one of several equally impassioned tracks, which ought to provide some sense of the album's magnitude. Womack's singing is awe-inspiring as always, from the naked emotion of "Outside Myself" to the energetic abandon of "It Ain't Me," but the album's real power lies in the way Womack's songs plug into a palpable reality, so that even the surface hedonism of "When The Weekend Comes" is undercut by the sobering reality of 9-to-5 responsibilities. A masterpiece.

## **Gregory Abbott**

*Shake You Down* (Columbia)

In terms of sheer vocal ability, Gregory Abbott is appallingly capable, the sort of R&B crooner who tosses off chorus after chorus of breath-taking obbligati as if it were nothing. Trouble is, Abbott's soulful asides are often far more substantial than the songs they embellish, which is fine on the out-chorus but a bit boring through the build-up. Unless, of course, you happen to love Abbott's voice as much as he does.

## **Dreams So Real**

*Father's House* (Coyote)

Despite the Peter Buck production credit, this is no R.E.M. clone. There's an entirely individual sensibility bubbling beneath the muscular, melodic guitar lines and light, clean vocal harmonies. Perhaps it's the band's peerless sense of dynamics that makes the difference, or maybe just the strength of the songs, but whatever the case, this is as promising a debut as you're likely to hear. (Twin/Tone, 2541 Nicollet Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55404)

## **Lou Gramm**

*Ready Or Not* (Atlantic)

The cool thing about Lou Gramm is that he can cut loose with the same sort of

high-register histrionics as every other hard rock heldentenor, and somehow make it seem fresh, even soulful. Too bad he doesn't do it often enough; *Ready Or Not* offers just three examples, "She's Got To Know," "Midnight Blue" and the title tune. The rest is enough to make you miss Mick Jones.

## **Mantronix**

*Music Madness* (Sleeping Bag)

Like a lot of hip-hop's one-man-bands, Mantronix is interesting mainly for its quirks. For instance, the second-line snare from "Big Band B-Boy" or the eerie, dub-style harmonica in "Listen To The Bass." Worth rummaging through. (1974 Broadway, New York, NY 10019)

## **Concrete Blonde**

*Concrete Blonde* (IRS)

Self-consciously rough-edged, industriously ironic and calculatingly melodic, Concrete Blonde seem to want to become the garage band Missing Persons. Why this should seem worth doing is anybody's guess.

## **The Woodentops**

*Well Well Well... The Woodentops* (Upside CD)

Having short-changed the initial mini-LP, this CD, compiling all the band's pre-*Giant* singles, offers an excellent chance to make amends. Not only have the hooks held up, the Woodentops' depth and innovation becomes clearer with each play. Note how handily "Have You Seen The Light" pushes past its Velvet Underground overtones to stand strong, striking and surprisingly catchy. (225 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012)

## **The Mission**

*God's Own Medicine* (Mercury)

Sure, they're self-impressed, sophomore and stagey, but they're also pretty catchy, which mitigates at least some of the pomp. With a guitar sound halfway between the Bunnymen's dry wit and Big Country's swirling glory, the Mission manages to deliver the same punch the Cult promised, but without the semi-metal overkill. Meanwhile, the vocals

manage to sound fashionably anxious while somehow staying on pitch, a major achievement in Britain these days.

## **Various Artists**

*Father And Sons* (Spirit Feel)

It would be hard to imagine a better explanation of how gospel gave birth to soul than these sixteen selections, lovingly collected by gospel scholar Anthony Heilbut. The singers Heilbut focuses on—R.H. Harris, Archie Brownlee and Julius Cheeks—are obvious choices, but the examples are wonderfully well chosen, and amazingly informative. Find it, buy it, and *listen*. (Dalebrook Pk., Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423)

## **Camper Van Beethoven**

*Camper Van Beethoven* (Pitch A Tent Rough Trade)

Here's where the weirdos turn pro. Having already made stabs at C&W, psychedelia and Syd Barrett-style weirdness, the Campers finally pull everything together. And convincingly, too, whether through the oblique wit of "The History Of Utah" or the extended parody "Hoe Yourself Down." But when the backwards-tape stuff begins to make sense, the band gets downright scary. (326 Sixth St., San Francisco, CA 94103)

## **Colin James Hay**

*Looking For Jack* (Columbia)

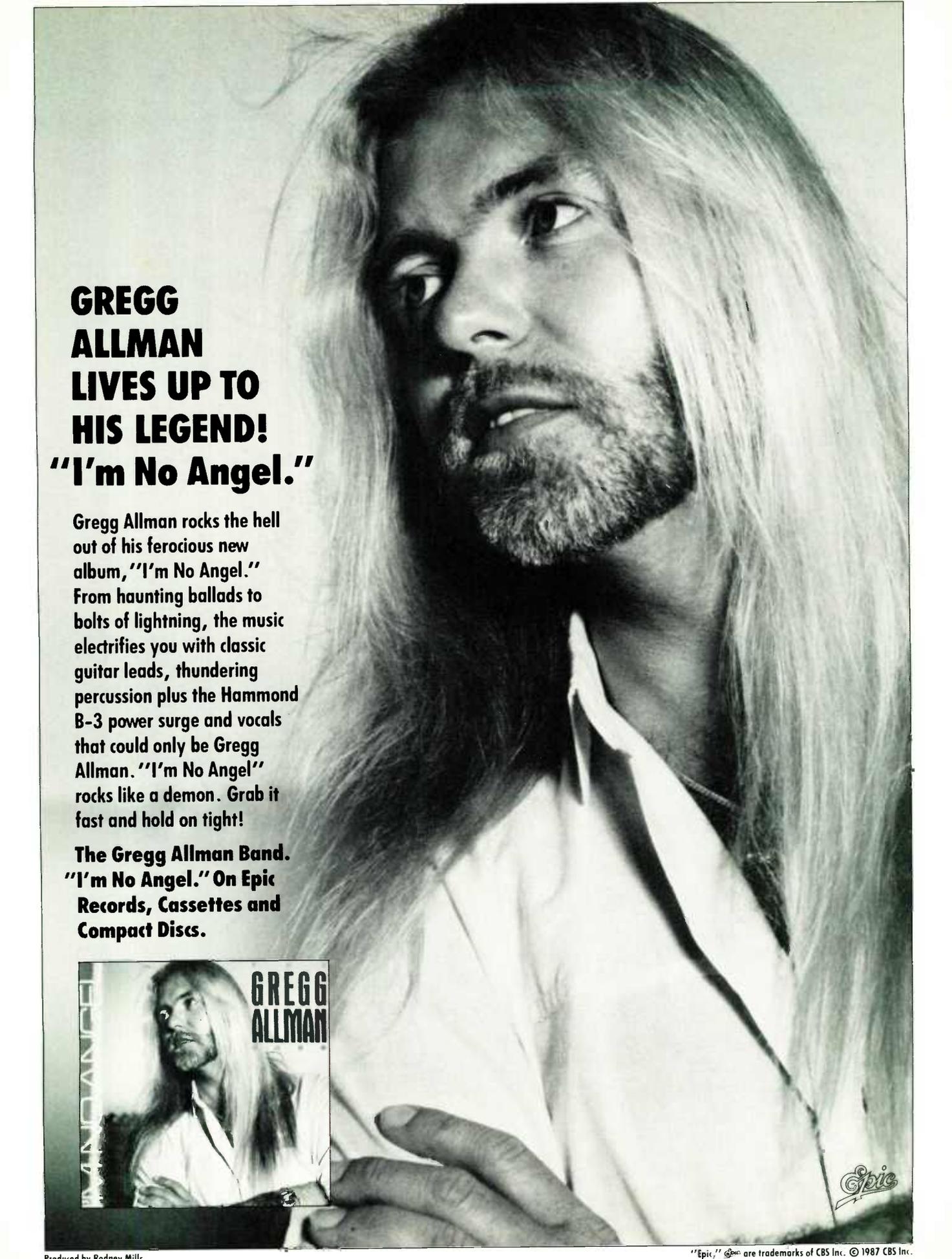
As slang, the title means "looking for money," which may be this album's most sincere sentiment. Musically, things are about what you'd expect from Men At Work's foreman—slick, tuneful and slightly melancholy pop, with predictable reggae overtones and even a bit of *mbaqanga* (Paul Simon's as good a source as Sting, eh?). But Hay still fancies himself a story-teller, despite the evidence his woolly-headed, melodramatic lyrics provide to the contrary.

## **Deep Purple**

*The House Of Blue Lights* (Mercury)

Can't these guys take a hint?

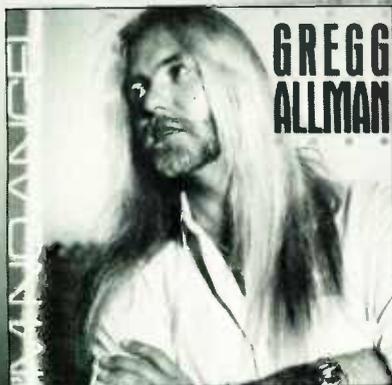
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**Miles Davis & Sonny Stitt**

*Miles Davis & Sonny Stitt Live  
In Stockholm 1960* (Dragon/Tower)

Like its predecessor, *Miles Davis & John Coltrane Live In Stockholm* (Dragon), this album is important not just for personnel, but performances. Stitt was with Davis for only six months but fit in perfectly, underscoring the conservatism of the group, and avoiding the garrulity that can sometimes mar his performances. And Miles, ah, Miles. These are classic performances, real heartbreakers made that much more interesting by Stitt's contrasting voice. Like Miles/Coltrane, an invaluable find. (800-648-4844)

**Mark Helias**

*Split Image* (Enja)

Bassist Helias has brought together a bunch of cronies—Tim Berne, Herb Robertson, Dewey Redman—to play his Ornette-ish tunes. They've made one of the best records of 1986, mixing pungent playing with unpredictable but relaxed writing, pushy experimentalism with straight swing. An accurate document of the hard-driving, texturally conscious music now being made in New York.

**James Blood Ulmer/George Adams**

*Phalanx* (Moers/Tower)  
*Live At The Caravan Of Dreams*  
(N.M.D.S.)

*America: Do You Remember The Love*  
(Blue Note)

Naw, Ulmer wasn't a character out of a weird dream. He wasn't a fake either. And he won't go away. He just keeps putting out thumpadelic records, and lots of them, too. *Phalanx* is biting, clean guitar skronk with an aggressively funky rhythm section as George Adams shares the front line. *Live* is hardcoré messy jams, with lots of guitar. *America* is an attempt to put Ulmer in different grooves—Ronald Shannon Jackson does the shoving around—to kind of calm him down. Take your pick: He's an American original, an eccentric, and each of the records is idiosyncratic enough to guarantee his place in history.

(N.M.D.S., 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012)

**Various Artists: Chess Reissues**

*Crescent City Roll 1957*  
*Soul Twist With King Curtis*  
*Bayou Drive*

Following a series of legal wranglings, Japanese R&B imports are finding their way back to these shores. Most are from the Chess catalog, all of it is good and some is close enough to incredible to imagine that God was behind Chess, not two white guys from Poland. Check these new titles: *Bayou Drive* (Chess/Tower), mostly early (1956) hard-driving Clifton Chenier with jump-styled horn section riffing; *Crescent City Roll 1957* (Chess), the best New Orleans compilation I've ever run across, featuring the "other" New Orleans R&B dynasty, the Paul Gayton Orchestra, a much tighter, cigar-chewing and more guitar-oriented band than Dave Bartholomew's, stomping behind a bunch of guys who seem dragged off the street to sing; *Soul Twist With King Curtis* (Enja), from the early 60s, which rocks harder than Mt. Rushmore—pure saxophone and clanging guitar boogie that will drive your feet into a frenzy.

**John Coltrane**

*The Coltrane Legacy/Trumpet Kings*  
(Video Artists International, Inc.)

The Coltrane video starts with his famous short solo with Miles Davis' big band on "So What," moves through a '61 session with Eric Dolphy, McCoy Tyner, Reggie Workman and Elvin Jones, and ends with a session from '64, featuring the classic quartet. The video's an essay in the uses of serenity and explosion, with Coltrane's symmetrical lines concrete cool one minute, anguished and hot the next. *Trumpet*, also essential, has a bit of the schoolteacher approach, with a slightly officious Wynton doing the narration. Duck and cover for the clips, though—Louis Armstrong from 1933, a to-the-bone cutting contest between Charlie Shavers and Buck Clayton, a

masterpiece from Rex Stewart, ditto from Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie (we get to see his '47 big band doing "Things To Come"), and Miles, finishing up "So What" (which starts the Coltrane video).

**Lee Konitz**

*Ideal Scene* (Soul Note)

**Oliver Lake**

*Gallery* (Gramavision)

The guy who once epitomized chilly detachment has owned up to a warm lyricism in his old age. He's also signed on a killer rhythm section—Harold Danko, Rufus Reid, Al Harewood—that pushes him into a state of near-flappability. His playing is about control, and it's brilliant, as is Oliver Lake's, whose playing on *Gallery* is also about control. Like Konitz, Lake's become a lyricist with a hard-ass band, including young upstart pianist Geri Allen, drummer Pheeroan ak Laff, and the great bassist Fred Hopkins to support his fiery, streamlined improvisations.

**Art Pepper**

*The Art Of Pepper, Vol. 1*  
*The Art Of Pepper, Vol. 2*  
(V.S.O.P.)

My favorite Pepper: Prodded by Carl Perkins' brittle piano playing, he alternates between silvery, convoluted runs and wistful lyricism. Pepper squeezes the tunes—"Fascinatin' Rhythm," "Long Ago And Far Away," "Without A Song"—for all they're worth, as his blowing, insecure side and sensitive, restrained side meet head to head. (Box 50082, Washington, DC 20004)

**Air**

*Air Show #1* (Black Saint)

Here's the news: Air isn't a trio anymore. No problem; *Show's* another great Air record. Henry Threadgill catalogs different grooves—a shuffle here, a march there—and blows hard enough to remind everyone exactly how good a saxophonist he is, leaving lots of space for new member Cassandra Wilson's moody singing.

BY PETER WATROUS



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# Indie

## Joseph Spence

*Happy All The Time* (Carthage)

You've heard about New Age music; Joseph Spence plays Old Age music. He fingerpicks his battered acoustic guitar so savagely you'd swear he was using tongs. His singing consists of fragmented words wheezed out between coughs, gasps and spitting up (or its aural equivalent). And with a powerful foot keeping time, he stomps like hell. The Bahamian Spence was fifty-four when he recorded this album for Elektra in 1964, and he never sounded better. Long a cult favorite, *Happy All The Time* is back in print after some fifteen years in deletion wilderness. Don't let it get away from you this time. — *Scott Isler*

## Cowboy Junkies

*Whites Off Earth Now!*  
(Latent/N.M.D.S.)

The cool names of group and album don't approach the cool of the group's sound. Part slowed down Lightnin' Hopkins, part San Francisco circa 1968, part 80s fascination with the 60s, they've taken one languid, Aquarian mood and turned it into a reason for existing (or at least an album). By that I mean long, sensuous, lightly-detailed cuts of drifting drug experience, completely incompatible with the prevailing hyper-chopchop of most art today and therefore more than just okay: necessary. — *Peter Watrous*

## Ella Fitzgerald

*Forever Young (Vol 1 and 2)* (Swingtime)

More archival treasures from the great Swingtime series. Vol. 1 chronicles Ella's rise to fame with Chick Webb's orchestra, whose leader, one of the swing era's tremendous drummers, helps develop Ella's felicitous phrasing and cheerful excitability with an impressive array of bomb-droppings. Vol. 2 takes up the tale following Webb's death in 1939 with Ella's only slightly less wonderful orchestra, and includes a radio broadcast of her "A Tisket A Tasket" theme direct from Roseland Ballroom. Finally, you didn't have to be there. (Street Level Trading Co., 5298/1 Valley Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90032) — *Mark Rowland*

## Elliot Carter

*Piano Concerto/Variations For Orchestra: Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; Michael Gielen, Conductor; Ursula Oppens, Piano*  
(New World Records)

Elliot Carter plays *Finnegans Wake* to Charles Ives' *Ulysses* in this kaleidoscopic panoply of orchestral colors, the effect of which is akin to the mitosis of a single cell of sound, particularly on the *Variations*. In her intuitive decoding of the *Piano Concerto's* fragmented, twisting turns of phrase and opaque voicings, Ursula Oppens evinces a power, grace and sensitivity that mark her as one of the greatest pianists of this or any other generation. (701 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10036) — *Chip Stern*

## Birdsongs of the Mesozoic

*Beat Of The Mesozoic* (Ace of Hearts)

If the Lounge Lizards make "fake jazz," do *Birdsongs of the Mesozoic* play "fake rock"? The quartet's obviously influenced by Philip Glass (ostinato keyboard arpeggios) and Steve Reich (*Four Organs*), adding a backbeat and careening fuzz-guitar. They also read music, but let's not hold that against them. The five cuts on this twenty-two-minute EP are textural exercises with a rock-bred flair for noise. At least the title track has harmonic changes and a Latin-flavored percussion break; it's promisingly titled "Part 1." — *Scott Isler*

## The Nashville Bluegrass Band

*Idle Time* (Rounder)

Bluegrass is as much about limitations as it is precision; change it too much and it's gone. So sure, the NBB are guilty of pandering to the past—but they refuse to kiss the music's ass. From the crystalline octave pluck that opens the title cut, to the prideful harmonies that honor "The Train That Carried Jimmie Rodgers Home," *Idle Time* makes a strong case for being a music of today. The quintet's a cappella renditions are sweet and clear, their instrumental rambles unified and curt. This is a one-foot-in, one-foot-out success. (1 Camp St., Cambridge, MA 02140) — *Jim Macnie*

## Earl King & Roomful of Blues

*Glazed* (Black Top/Rounder)

Everything about this collaboration snaps, crackles and pops. Earl King, one of New Orleans' most enduring icons, meets Roomful of Blues, those hardy hipsters from Providence. The result is pure retro-bution. Are the songs new or retreads? Hard to tell: King covers his ballad, "Those Lonely Lonely Nights" (1955), and is credited on all the tracks. He also sings with grace and grit, and burns with a vengeance on his old blue guitar. Roomful just keeps swinging till the vinyl stops. (1 Camp St., Cambridge, MA 02140) — *Steve Bloom*

## Curlew

*North America* (Moers Music)

Pastiche music from the lower east side. Fresh, raw production values make the anti-technique funk/free/rock/cello boogie all the more visceral. Composer, leader and saxophonist George Cartwright has a nose for melodies, and the damn things just keep popping out of the low-tech background. Like the Ordinaires, who Curlew kinda sound like, the music just out-and-out feels good. One of the better albums of the year. (PO Box 24854, Oakland, CA 94623) — *Peter Watrous*

## Various Artists

*Heartbeat Reggae* (Rykodisc)

With its unimpeded low-frequency range, the compact disc is a natural ally of reggae's throbbing bass pulse. It's an economic fact of life, however, that Rastafarians comprise an extremely small segment of the digital-audio marketplace—which means that this compilation is virtually it for reggae on CD. What *Heartbeat Reggae* lacks in classic cuts it makes up for in variety: fifteen selections (over an hour's playing time) by thirteen artists. The cast includes Black Uhuru, Big Youth, Gregory Isaacs, Burning Spear, Lee Perry and Mutabaruka. The analog recordings mostly sound good, with variable amounts of tape hiss. Reggae novitiates won't appreciate the leaflet that only repeats the back-cover track list. For what CDs cost, consumers deserve information too. — *Scott Isler*

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## HEARING from back page

quency drivers are above ear level. This way you are able to hear those frequencies while you are feeling the less-dangerous lower ones."

Dave Wakeling, guitarist for General Public, believes that there "isn't too much that can be done about loud onstage volume: Everybody starts out quietly, but ends up turning up." On tour Wakeling will sometimes experience earaches and sinus problems, but he believes this occurs "less from playing than all the flying. The loss is generally between 15-20k, and I make a special effort to monitor it, sometimes having a doctor take a look. For the most part, it comes back, or at least doesn't bother me."

Situations that cause trouble for one set of ears don't necessarily bother another the same way. Wakeling's General Public partner vocalist Ranking Rodger, for example, says he's never had hearing problems or found it necessary to consult a specialist. (He does, however, recognize that the situation can be troublesome for others and cites the old joke: "What do you call a deaf guy that hangs around with musicians? A drummer.") As a precaution, though, in the studio the band plays very quietly. "If we didn't we'd be deaf by now."

In addition to physical damage, excessive studio volumes can create fatigue problems, Harte believes. But Mary Lou Arnold, who works for Todd Rundgren at Bearsville Studios, says he almost always works at "painfully loud volumes."

"I don't look at it as a problem," says Hüsker Dü's Giordano. "I just look at it as a hazard...just like electricity. What you are working with is dangerous and you have to take precautions." ❧

## SADKIN from page 49

conjuring up the same images in his head as I do from certain sounds—but everything was always drawn out. There are always lots of people around in their sessions with loads of different ideas, and they're all really intense. Another thing is that they have these incredible schedules for promotion, videos and whatever, right from the start of a project, and so you can never predict what will happen from day to day. I'll be waiting around for five hours for them to turn up. Then, when they do come in straight from doing something else, their thoughts may be too distracted to really get down to the music. It's not really their fault; the next day their heads will be clear and they'll turn out the music.

"The Foreigner project a couple of years back, on the other hand, just seemed to go on and on. Everyone, including the band, got really pissed off with it. They're used to it, though, and I wasn't, so it just threw me. I couldn't believe what was going on! There was a problem with people not coming in; Mick, who is the leader, not showing up for hours and hours, and so that obviously would really slow it down. Then the songs wouldn't be really ready. While the album was being mixed the lyrics were still being written! Things were being changed right up to the last minute, and that is what took a long time. That is why I don't want to go into the studio when somebody wants to write the stuff there; it just takes too long and it isn't worth it, it doesn't come out right. You can't write properly in the studio because you're under pressure. How can you really be creative when you're watching the clock going round burning up the money?"

"Working with Robert Palmer on his album *Looking For Clues* was really great. It was done in just a few weeks, really spontaneous. Robert had everything prepared—he makes his demos at home, where he has lots of equipment—and so we just went in and did it. Talking Heads I also enjoyed: We did some of their *Speaking In Tongues* album at Compass Point Studios and some at Sigma Sound in New York, and we'd go in at 7 [p.m.] and be out by around midnight or one in the morning. It was just quick and spontaneous, and David would just go in there and sing everything straight off...great!"

Until now Sadkin has been dividing his time mostly between the U.K. and the U.S., but in the future he wishes to base himself in England, where he hopes to set up a company in conjunction with Chrysalis Records and producer/studio owner Micky Most. This will comprise a ring of producers and engineers with an accordant approach to music, all working on several projects at any one time, each complementing one another's ideas. With a future as bright as this, does Sadkin have *any* problems?

"One problem that I have is that if something sounds similar to something that I have already done, then I tend to shy away from it, even if it's something that I really love. Like the fire extinguishers; a lot of times I know they will be right for the mood, but I don't want to do them again. They are on an album that was done three years ago, and I don't want to be closeted with that."

But for all his reluctance, Sadkin can

still find it difficult to resist borrowing from *some* of his favorites, with slight variations. On Robbie Nevil's latest album, for instance, one may recognize one of the background effects to be the trusty sample of a blast from a fire extinguisher...backwards. ❧

## MORGAN from page 27

on to Wynton Marsalis as a symbol of the dignity possible for a jazz musician. "Wynton's my new hero," Morgan says, part serious, part with a tone that lets you know he still values his own experiences. "He's the other end of the spectrum, and it's good for me to have that kind of a role model, completely opposite Bird in his offstage behavior. His success represents the intelligent look at life and music that I *didn't* take when I was his age. He represents what I always really wanted to do."

Frank Morgan stays up all night doing interviews at radio stations, hanging out with friends, eating breakfast, then setting appointments for more interviews. "I really like people, so all this publicity isn't bad. Who the hell with any sense," he laughs, "would get off work after rehearsing and recording and then go do a radio interview and end up staying up until five in the morning and then go out to breakfast? But it feels good, you dig, because I've gone two or three days without sleep in pursuit of the wrong shit. There seems to be a lot of energy available for doing things that are right."

"And I like doing the right thing for once," Morgan continues. "I love seeing Rosalinda smile. It feels good to know that if I can do well enough to support us both, she can work full-time as an artist. Projects like this help you when you get in a vulnerable state. Every day I feel, 'Wow, here's four or five more people that will be disappointed if I fuck up.' Because in the course of a day I meet a series of people who are reaching out to help me, all kinds of people, sometimes it damn near makes me cry, some of the beautiful things that people do. You walk by a table, and a man reaches out and squeezes your hand and without saying anything, lets you know he's with you."

"See, I no longer associate with people who are using. If I run into a situation where somebody comes up to me and says, 'Hey Frank, I got some dope,' somebody's right there to support me. I know how to ease off if things get sticky—I've played all those games. I'm going to stay out. If I go back, you'll know I've been framed. I have everything to live for." ❧

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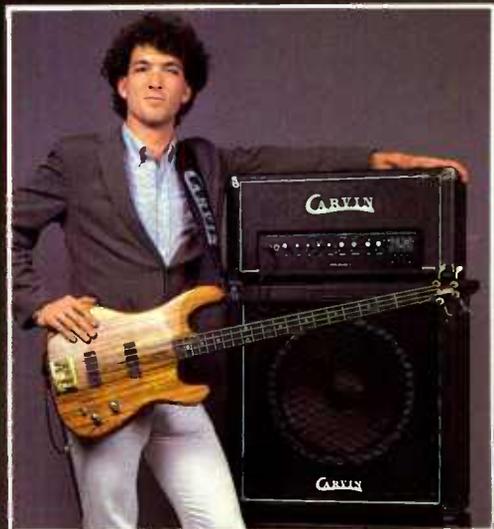
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## STONES CDs

from page 56

album did something magical to it, something which I couldn't figure out. I worked two or three days on it, and I just gave up. I thought maybe over the years the tape had lost some quality. I couldn't get it to jump out. I did the best I could.

"Three days after I sent out the final product, they found another tape. It was an equalized tape done when they cut the record. I put it on, and it's phenomenal. With the help of some people at Columbia, we stopped production on what we

had, and went back and actually used the equalized master that was done for [vinyl] disc. It just sounds fantastic.

"On the other hand, something like *Sticky Fingers* was fairly easy to improve upon. The bass response particularly was very lightweight and flimsy on disc. The bottom was so much fuller and richer when I got the master tape and played it on my Neve console."

"If you hear bass on an eq master that came out on disc," Meller says, "it's not enough for CD. You can put much more highs on CD. When someone buys a CD, the first thing they expect is more dynamic range than on disc, so why transfer the same sound to CD?"

Calbi cites a "transitory midrange" endemic to early-70s recordings. "The harshness is a hard thing to get rid of. But when I mastered *Sticky Fingers* I just went for the excitement, for the guitar growl. I figured the people who are going to buy those records want 'em to kick."

By the time of *Some Girls* (1978), the engineers' job was much easier. "I had all the cutting information at my fingertips," Calbi says. "I had the master tape. I opened up the bass a bit. I reduced the amount of compression considerably. The drums are clearer and louder now."

The Stones' journey to the digital domain is nearly complete. In March ABKCO released *Got Live If You Want It!* and *More Hot Rocks* on compact disc. That leaves only *Metamorphosis* without a CD counterpart. Even Klein seems to prefer it that way: "I don't think it really represents a part of history that this London [Records] era is." (Klein released *Metamorphosis*, an audio dustbin of 60s demos and out-takes, in 1975.)

And even Calbi is curious about the ABKCO CDs: "A lot of interesting albums are on there. Columbia got the second batch, which has a couple of good records, but has a couple of turkeys too."

Oldham has his own view of things. "I just get hit by the wall of it. We were listening back to stuff, running through in sequence. We'd reached *Satanic Majesties*, and at one point somebody snores. The engineer said, 'Who's that?' I said, 'Hm! Could be Brian.' He said, 'Oh.' Then I thought, that's interesting: 'We've been through eight albums and this is the first time you've asked me what anybody did!' He said, 'Well, this is when I started listening to them.' Well, each to their own. They'll be able to take those albums as personally as I can take the others."

But don't ask Oldham which is his favorite Stones album. He doesn't have one. "I just have a favorite group." ❧

# Turn It Down!!!

By Greg Reibman

## HEARING LOSS: ROCK'S UGLY LITTLE SECRET

**T**hey are the most essential—and the most abused—of all audio components. Without them decades of technological advances, the finest of sound systems and state-of-the-art recording studios become obsolete. And unlike other audio hardware, these components—human ears—are not sold in stores or by mail order. If damaged, for the most part they cannot be rebuilt or replaced.

Damage to the ear is a common twentieth-century problem and one that particularly plagues folks working in the music business. But surprisingly, in researching this article, many professionals who depend on their ears both to make their living and to enjoy their craft, either said they had no opinion about their ears or were reluctant to speak. One established record producer, who spoke only on the condition that he not be quoted directly, offered this explanation: "It's a very sensitive question. After going to shows for more than twenty years and having spent half my life in the studio I'm sure I've experienced some hearing loss. But I wouldn't ever want to admit it, because if the word got out that I was hard of hearing nobody would ever want to hire me to produce their records."

According to Dr. Wayne Kirkham, an ear, nose and throat specialist based in Dallas, many of his patients—who over the years have included Mick Jagger, Prince, Joni Mitchell, Patti LaBelle, Joe Cocker and Dan Fogelberg, as well as producers, engineers, d.j.s and, yes, rock critics—typically come to him with throat or sinus troubles. But it often "turns out that what they really have is hearing trouble. That's because one of the causes of voice problems is an inability to hear oneself properly. You then push your voice inappropriately to try to make up for the hearing loss."

Typically hearing problems begin with, and are most commonly affected by, high frequencies starting at around four thousand Hertz. Sometimes the ear will feel full—as if it has fluid or wax in it. But other frightening side effects—such



as an inability to understand speech—are possible too. Just as disturbing is a condition known as tinnitus, a nagging ringing or whistling in either or both ears. In certain situations (such as a loud concert) the problem can be temporary. But damage from continued exposure is almost always permanent.

"The ringing can have varying degrees of severity—it might be worse when you have a cold, for instance—but it is always going to be there," Kirkham says, dismissing the myth that ears heal with time. "We can make new ear drums and new ear bones but ringing in the ears, or even that full waxy feeling, is caused by nerve damage. And once the nerve is damaged it will never fully heal."

The nerves (actually tiny hairs) interpret tones. Under normal circumstances, when a sound comes in the hairs are gently pushed over, sending the brain an impulse. But damaged nerve hairs are permanently knocked over, sending abnormal messages that are interpreted as ringing.

Kirkham's never gone so far as to recommend that a patient forsake a career, but he has been the bearer of bad news. "I once worked with one of Journey's soundmen whose hearing trouble was affecting the way he mixed the sound, and in turn, affecting Steve Perry's singing." And three years ago, Roger Miller, a thirty-four-year-old Boston-based performer, had to make the tough decision to quit his band Mission of Burma because of excruciating tinnitus.

Kirkham says all he can do for tinnitus sufferers is recommend ways to minimize further damage. This includes being particularly careful about how p.a.'s are

set up, and sometimes wearing ear-plugs. In quiet situations, Kirkham suggests keeping a radio or fan on in the background to alleviate some problems. There are also hearing aid-like devices which create a different, less annoying sound to cover up the ringing.

Robert Medley, a former soundman who now works for Stone City Promotions, a San Antonio-based concert promotion company that produces many large concerts in the Southwest, agrees that much of the hearing damage he's known among musicians and crews occurs in one's early years. "Almost ninety percent of all indoor arena shows now hang speakers, keeping the most dangerous high ends out of earshot. And the monitors don't have to be blasting."

On the other hand, Rick Harte, a producer and owner of Ace of Hearts Records in Boston, says he has worked with many artists on the club circuit (including Miller and Mission of Burma) who have aural problems. "I think that many people who are onstage every night have definite problems," he says. "I can tell when somebody has hearing trouble by the way they boost their eq's on their home stereo."

Insisting that loud volume is aesthetically essential—but a hazard—Lou Giordano, the live sound engineer for Minneapolis' power trio Hüsker Dü, says he takes special precautions to minimize detrimental decibels. "I want Hüsker Dü to be loud," he says, noting that he has metered them as high as 118 dB. "But I don't want them to be deadly. We insist in our technical rider that the p.a. is set up so that the mid-range and high fre-

*continued on page 110*

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