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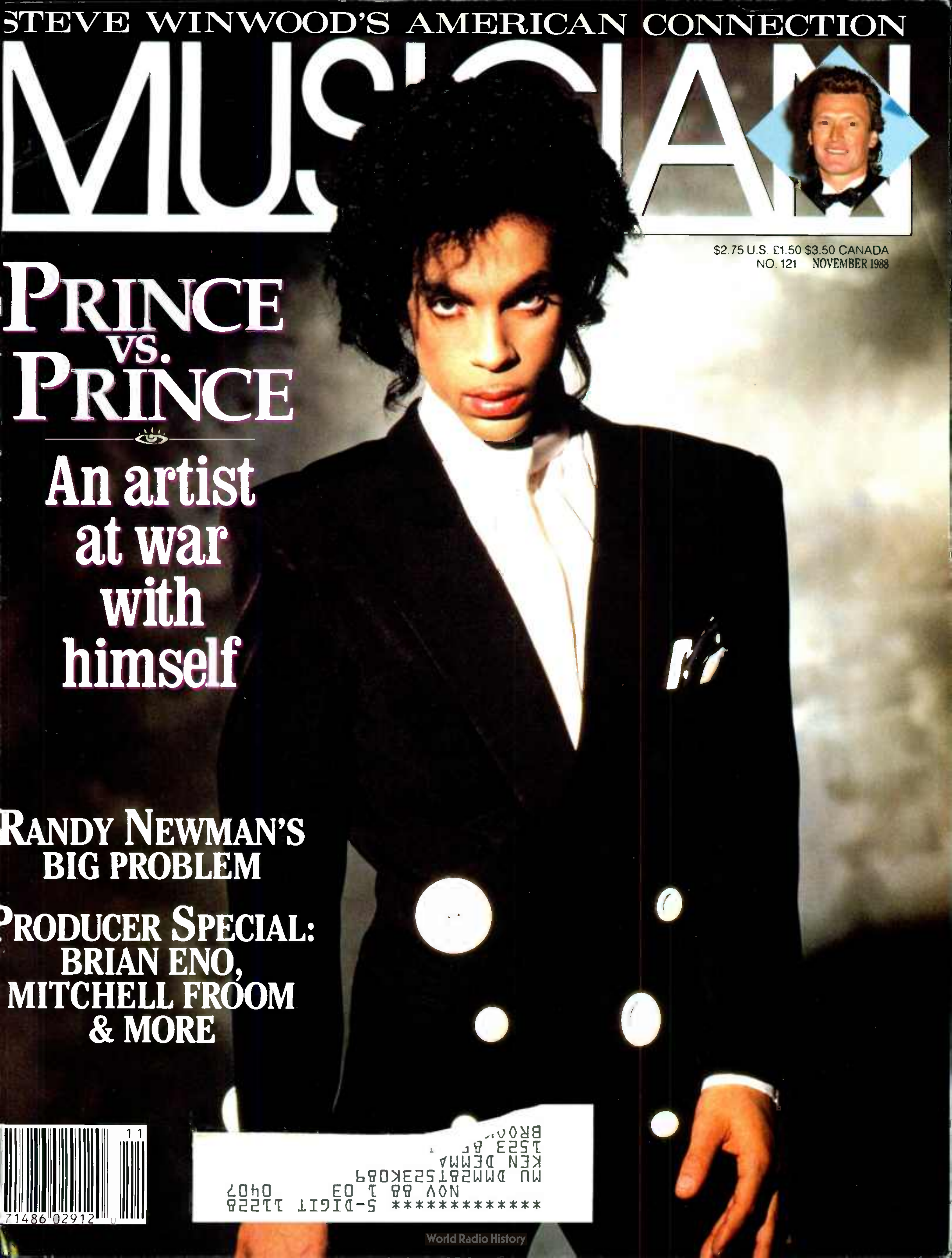

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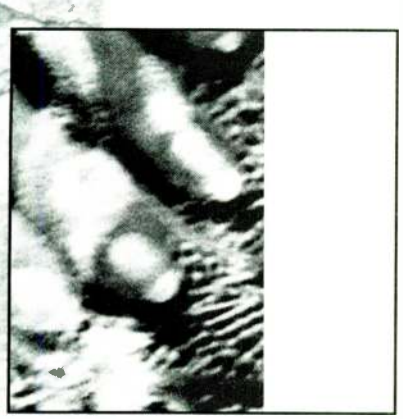

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Produced by Cocteau Twins

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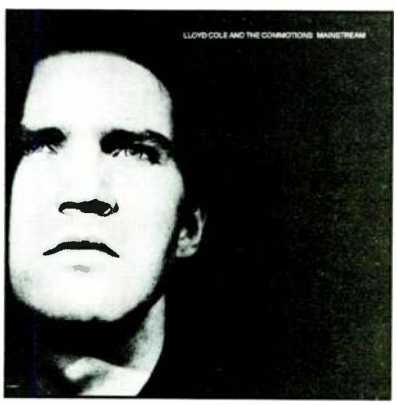

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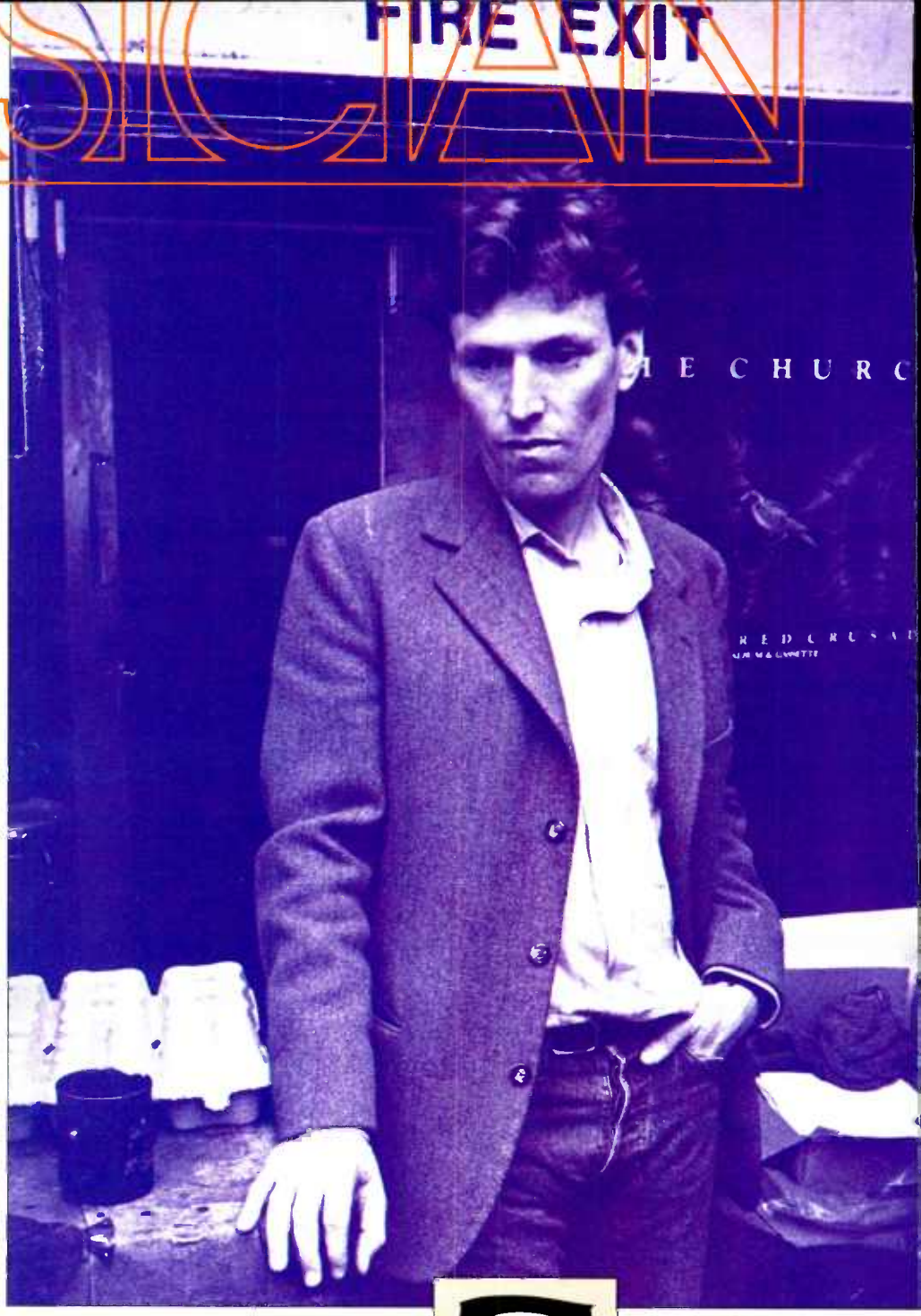

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LETTERS

FLOYD: STILL WATERS

I JUST FINISHED READING YOUR article on Pink Floyd (Aug. '88). I am sure that any real Pink Floyd fan would agree that when Roger Waters left the band, Pink Floyd should have ended as a group.

Chris Saikevicz
Upland, CA

ONE NEED ONLY COMPARE THE latest "Pink Floyd" album to *The Wall* to see that the real genius behind the post-Barrett Pink Floyd was truly Roger Waters. Gilmour and the others may complain that Waters dominated the project, but it is quite clear in comparison who the better songwriter is.

Joseph D'Alessandris
Mars, PA

THE FLOYDIAN TRIUMVIRATE has convinced me that Roger "Big Pink" Waters is a self-inflated swine himself with no appreciable ethical superiority to the barbarians he railed against in *The Wall*. But even so, it's time to bury the hatchet, Eugene, since it's obvious that Pink Floyd Mark III needs Waters' songwriting ability as much as Waters needs Floyd's musicianship.

Justin Reed
Phoenix, AZ

NEW ORDER'S NEW VALUES

UNLIKE THE ESSENTIALLY INsipid and ignorant article written about New Order in the September '85 issue of *Musician* by Scott Isler, which was at best condescending in its reference to Joy Division, the article by Robert Palmer in your August edition was a genuine surprise. Hats off to Palmer for dealing with the effectively laden, brilliant vision of Ian Curtis, and the equally original music created by Dicken, Hook and Morris in such a sensitive and personal way.

Shane Edwards
Chicago, Il

ALTHOUGH I WASN'T THERE when it all happened, I feel a sense of communion with Joy Division. For New Order's Peter Hook to say, "The things we're doing now I'm pretty sure that's what Joy Division would've ended up being," is not only sad, it's blasphemous.

Not to say New Order isn't good; rather, they've got the ability but have lost the feeling and the spirit. It was obviously still there on *Movement* but it's since died. It seems as if New Order has lost a direction they had as Joy Division.

Marcelino Sepulveda
El Centro, CA

SPILLED MILKMEN

CONTRARY TO GINA ARNOLD'S "First Flight," the Dead Milkmen are not incorporated. There is no tax advantage for this band to be incorporated—in fact there is a tax disadvantage for most bands to be incorporated. Until such time as the band members' personal income (their share of the group's profit plus any miscellaneous income they receive outside the band) is taxed at a percentage greater than the minimum service corporation tax rate of 34 percent, the band is better off as a partnership.

There are more errors:

- The Dead Milkmen were advanced $800 by Fever to extend a self-produced EP they finished before signing with Fever (making that a 14,000 percent return—give or take a thousand).
- Both Dean Clean and Dave Blood booked the first tour; I went along as a roadie/soundman. I did not take over as manager until we returned home. I've been on three tours as manager/booking agent/soundman/roadie, one as tour manager.
- The Tower Theater is in Philadelphia, not New Orleans.

David Reckner
Philadelphia, PA

DAG NABBED IT

I WAS BOTH SURPRISED AND pleased to see the article on Dag Nasty ("First Flight," Aug. '88). Unfortunately, one discrepancy in the translation of our interview from tape to paper needs to be ironed out.

In part of the interview I refer to the 10 guitars I had to choose from during our last studio session. The actual owner of seven of the instruments was paraphrased out of the text. So I'd like to publicly thank John Stevens-Lloyd of Culver City for his generosity.

Can I borrow them back now, John?

Brian Baker
Hermosa Beach, CA

R.E.M. M.A.D.

WE READ YOUR ARTICLE ON Camper Van Beethoven's finances ("First Flight," Aug. '88) and were amazed to learn that, according to their manager, (1) they "got" on our tour due to certain business connections, and (2) we somehow stole some of their support act fees. "Preposterous" is not a strong enough word to express the inaccuracy of these assertions.

First, we ask bands to open our tours because we like the bands. It's that simple, and those decisions certainly aren't based on music business connections. Second, we do not steal from people, and that includes the bands we invite to support our tours. To state that we do is slanderous, and it's a good thing we have a sense of humor about all this. Finally, letters like this one are generally a counterproductive endeavor—calling attention to the original piece, honoring the insult and all that. But in this case we felt compelled to write so as to be clear and on the record about the way we conduct our affairs.

Bill Berry
Peter Buck
Mike Mills
Michael Stipe
Athens, GA

J.D., LOOK OUT!

WHERE THE HELL DID J.D. CONsidine get the talent or nerve to question whether David Coverdale, Michael Jackson or George Michael believe in their music?

As someone who works with Aerosmith and other artists mentioned in Considine's "Sons of Aerosmith" article (Aug. '88), I take great offense at his unjustified and idiotic remark. Having not worked on the music with any of the people in his article, Considine just places himself in the long *Rolling Stone* magazine list of people who just write crap, instead of create.

John David Kalodner
Geffen Records
Los Angeles, CA

Do only musicians have a right to express opinions about music? Not critics? Not fans? Not record executives? –Ed.

I REALLY ENJOYED "THE SONS Aerosmith." However, on page 37 you pictured Brent Muscat (not Greg Steele) and Taime Downe of Faster Pussycat. Just wanted to let you know!

Karen Rawls
Greenville, NC

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Hunters & Collecters

Late Starters Take on Yuppies

Hunters and Collectors' singer and songwriter Mark Seymour, thirty-something, describes himself as "obviously ambitious" and cites his life goal as "international success." But although he admits he's wary of the term "yuppie"—"because I could so easily be accused of being one myself"—he and his Melbourne, Australia-based band have just released an album that's scathingly observant of that social phenomenon. *Fate*, Hunters and Collectors' sixth LP, deals with the increasing materialism Seymour says he sees in people his own age. Songs such as "You Can Have It All," with its sneering "have my cake and eat it too" verse, and "Back on the Breadline," with its stark observations about poverty in America, are, he says, "about how money affects one's lifestyle, and the difference between mere survival and creativity."

That's a big change in subject matter from 1986's acclaimed Hunters LP *Human Frailty*, which, Seymour says, "was more of a soap-opera, 'Days of Our Lives'-type thing that people found very appealing. I think love songs are the best kind of songs you can write, but you don't want to be constantly scratching at the wound."

Seymour grew up in a series of small towns in the Australian state of Victoria, where his father was a schoolteacher in constant

JOHN SOARES

Patti Austin

Music for Adults, About Adults

Patti Austin's last album produced a dance hit called "The Heat of Heat." Which probably made Austin miserable. Does she disavow the song? "I disavowed 'The Heat of Heat' when I *made* it," she says.

Patti Austin's new album, *The Real Me*, is a collection of pop/jazz/R&B standards from as far back as 1930, and is unlikely to produce any kind of hit. Which suits Austin just fine. "I don't care about the top 10. I'm tired of mediocrity and I can no longer live under the realm of mediocrity."

She's not as intense as she sounds. Actually, she's a funny, brassy lady—great person to talk with. It's just that she's decided that, hey, she's not exactly strapped for cash (she's made a fortune singing advertising jingles), so if she's going to be a recording artist, why not record music that pleases *her*?

"I'm newly 40," she explains. "I feel ridiculous getting rid of my last name and singing songs that say, 'Oooh baby, baby' for the 20-millionth time. It's time for me to make music for adults, about adults."

That music is the music of Sinatra and Ellington, among others. Patti's updates are reverential, the music mix eclectic, and the final results uneven, thanks to a smothering preponderance of slow ballads. While some of these songs are good exercises in bluesy sentiment, they often lapse into limpid, cloying sentimentality. However, one cut, "I Can Cook, Too," is a rocking scat number that alone is worth the price of admission.

Patti says she loves all these songs for their lyrical and melodic richness—things she says are absent from modern music. No one writes *songs* anymore, she grouses.

"They write records. Great records. Great productions. But they're not very substantive other than that. They've gotta have the synthesizer and they've gotta have the drums and they've gotta have the sound on the voice and they've gotta have 20 thousand elements to make them work. But a great song doesn't need any of that. You can just stand flat-footed and sing the darn thing with nothing behind you and it will work, *if* it's a great song."

—Leonard Pitts, Jr.

MARK RABOY

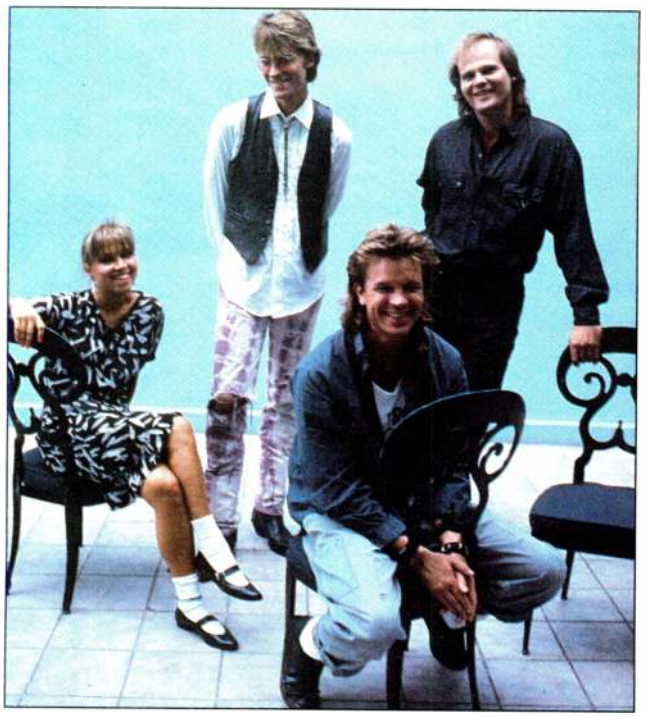
search of promotion. "My adolescence was very disciplined and I had a very religious and conservative home life," Seymour says. "It was only at university that I started having fun—discovered booze and girls and drugs, and seeing bands. I used to hover around the edge of the stage thinking, 'I can do that!'

"I'd always been very straight, but that's why I had so much desperation to play in a band—more so than many other people in bands around Melbourne in the early '80s. That's what everyone in Hunters has in common: We're all late starters, and we've developed this fierce sense of purpose because of it."

—Gina Arnold

Velvet Elvis

They Aim at the Stars



Let's examine our prejudices. Yes, Velvet Elvis is a southern folk-pop quartet with a little Velvet Underground angst and a lot of bright harmony singing and ringing guitars. And yes, their Enigma album is produced by Mitch Easter. And okay, their drummer is a woman. But if you think all that means they are one more Byrdsy post-R.E.M. college radio band who can hardly play, well take a hike, Ike—we don't need narrow minds around here! See, Velvet Elvis' problem is that at first listen (or glance) it's easy to lump them in with all the 12-string American roots-diggers. But give their music half a chance and it will bust your preconceptions as fast as you recognize the British in their Beatles melodies, their easy-going Lovin' Spoonful romance and the Police in the surprisingly tough and confident way they play.

In 1983 the punk movement finally hit Lexington, Kentucky, and stunned cover-band guitarist Dan Trisko with the notion that he could write his own songs. He began forming Velvet Elvis, whose personnel stabilized two years later. Trisko writes most of his band's material, and though he says he was a reluctant lyricist, he avoids the usual pop pitfalls of excessive rhyming and obsessive detail. "I never want to spell it out so that it's painfully obvious and boring. We're always trying to write a hooky song that has some heartfelt integrity to it, but is not smarmy. When I get stuck writing a song I say, 'Gee, what would Bob Dylan or John Lennon do here?' As a result, I end up with songs that, to me, fall short of the mark—but I figure it's a healthy attitude."

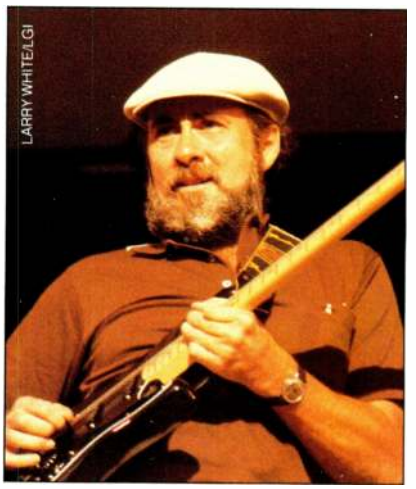
Falling short of Dylan and Lennon still lands you ahead of almost everyone else. "Yeah," Trisko says, "I aim impossibly high."

– Bill Flanagan

Roy Buchanan

1939-88

Roy Buchanan knew he had problems. "Don't do the drug things or alcohol," the master guitarist advised followers in at least one in-



terview, and he spoke from experience. But it was advice he was sadly unable to follow himself.

On the night of August 14, police were called to Buchanan's Reston, Virginia, home as a result of a family disturbance. He wasn't there, but an officer later found him and arrested Buchanan for public drunkenness. While in a receiving cell, Buchanan took off his shirt, ran a sleeve around the window grate, knotted it around his neck and sat down, crushing his larynx. In 1980 he had attempted suicide in a neighboring jail. This time he succeeded.

Buchanan was 48 years old. Besides his wife, seven children and five grandchildren, he left thousands of admirers and imitators. Famous or unknowns, these are Roy's children too.

– Scott Isler

Adele Bertei

A Punk Moves to Tin Pan Alley

She looks part waif, part slut, but really she's neither. A veteran of New York's '70s "no wave" scene, Adele Bertei got that streetwise smile acting opposite John Lurie, assisting Brian Eno, reading poetry with William S. Burroughs and playing keyboards for punk/jazz avatars the Contortions.

Now a mellowed hellion, Bertei spent her childhood in reform school, where she landed after running away from too many "Cinderella situations" in foster homes. There she learned about anger, throwing punches and the power of music. "That kind of experience can either make you very bitter or it can leave you with a real hard core," she notes, "like a seed of hope that you're gonna make it through all this disharmony around you. Music was that seed for me."

Her early musical career was full of thrash and ire. ("I think I was more of an angry little boy then than a woman.") These days, she works with a gentler touch; having tamed her demons, she now channels them into long-loved melodic forms. Where the childhood Bertei once planned to do her dissections as a pathologist, the adult now delves into the human spirit. "I like themes that aren't cotton-candied over," she explains, "that aren't what Hollywood wants people to think they should see. I'm interested not specifically in the darker things in life, but in situations that exist that people would rather not deal with."

So Bertei has become a raconteuse, peppering her stories with literary references and metaphysical undertones. Her music, too, has become more sophisticated. The "naked truth" songs of *Little Lives* owe as much to Rickie Lee Jones as they do to Laura Nyro, dance and world music. "You can't be an anarchistic punk for 10 years without your attitudes being synthesized and transformed somewhat," Bertei says. "Anarchists turn into yuppies. Or," she says slyly, "into songwriters who are a little bit Tin Pan Alley."

—Robin J. Schwartz

Corky Siegel

Even Cellists Get the Blues

To hear Corky (*nee* Mark) Siegel tell it, the concept behind "Chamber Blues" couldn't have been more logical. "Basically, the idea has to do with blues being an extremely influential and emotional form of music, and baroque being extremely uplifting and *also* one of the most influential forms of music," Seigel explains from his longtime Chicago home. "I felt it was time for the two to meet."

The two not only meet but coexist peacefully in Siegel's two-hour work, which premiered in Denver in August. Chicago's Consortium String Quartet, his collaborators on the project, play blues licks with baroque patterns and rhythms, abetted by Siegel's jaunty piano, harmonica and vocals. "The most challenging aspect was simply finding ways of blending the two idioms," Siegel says with a chuckle. "When you write a blues lick for a classical instrument, it doesn't always sound right."

Stretching blues in every which way has been the hallmark of Siegel's career, starting with the psychedelic folk-blues of the Siegel-Schwall Band, which he and guitarist Jim Schwall led from 1966 to '74. Still, neither Siegel-Schwall's 1968 collaboration with conductor Seiji Ozawa and composer William Russo ("Three Pieces for Blues Band and Symphony Orchestra") nor Siegel's subsequent work with local orchestras fully prepared him for "Chamber Blues," which took two years and numerous eight-hour days to compose.

"I had never written anything in my life other than songs with Siegel-Schwall, which we never wrote on paper," Siegel recalls, his voice still registering shock. "We just sort of sat around and did it. But I had never *composed* anything before."

Although the resulting work has garnered good response from the classical establishment, Siegel, 44, still plans to divide his time between solo concerts and the occasional gig with the reunited Siegel-Schwall Band. And while Siegel knows "Chamber Blues" will irk purists, he says he's not worried. "I never really agreed with the concept that blues was a sad music," he states. "It may have grown out of sad times, but it is a very uplifting form of music."

—David Browne

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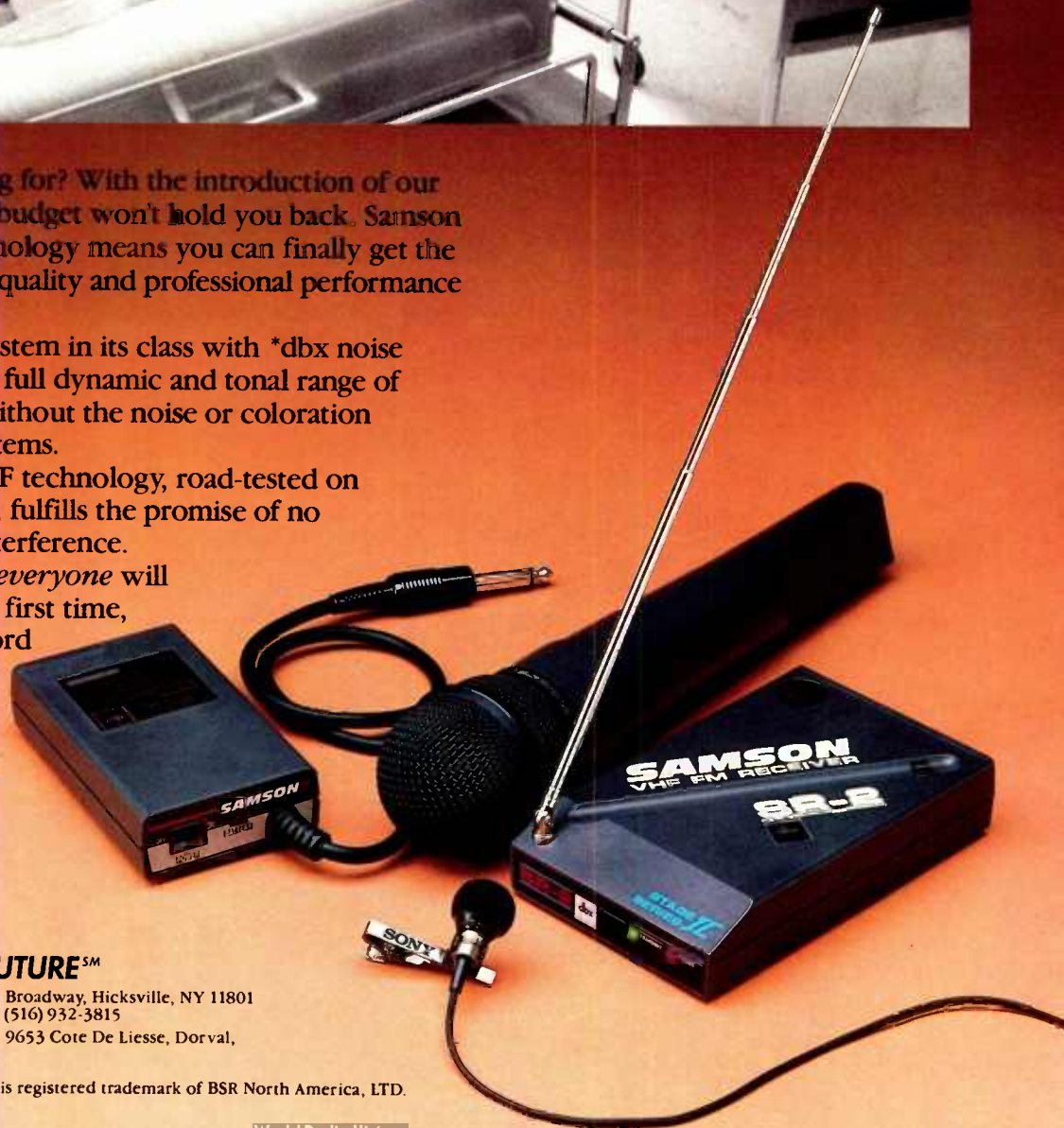

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SAM PHILLIPS

by j. d. considine

The Heretic Finds Some Happiness

MELANIE NISSEN

Sam Phillips is sitting in a New York office, looking remarkably unwilted in the sultry August heat and listening to me complain about having been beaten to the best description of her sound. According to a note her record company had sent, the music on her new album had been called "acid pop," which perfectly captured the blend of unfettered melody and semi-psychedelic instrumental flourishes that make up *The Indescribable Wow*.

"That was a friend of mine," she says.

Actually, I respond, I was told that it was an internationally renowned rock star who came up with the phrase, and name the rock star in question.

Phillips looks flustered. Didn't he say that? I ask. "Oh no, he did," she answers. "But I don't . . . that's not something I want to . . . It's off the record," she finally decides. "I just don't like that kind of stuff."

"When you have deep faith, there's always going to be a struggle."

Surprised, I point out that most young singers in the business would kill for such a kudo, to which she responds, "I guess I just haven't been in this business very long." She laughs, and adds, "I just really care about those guys, and want it off the record. There are enough people who do that. My record's good enough; I don't have to talk about [the internationally renowned rock star] and all these people I know. That's sleazy."

Sam Phillips is decidedly not sleazy. At first glance in fact, it may seem that she's principled to a fault to pass up such an obvious publicity angle. But there's more to her decision than not wanting to exploit her friendships; there's also an intense belief in the quality of her work, and an honest innocence that keeps commercial calculation at bay.

Musically, Phillips' songs seem special because they manage to hook the listener while avoiding the conventions of commercial pop. Part of that can be traced to her background; although she grew up to the same Beatles/Beach Boys soundtrack most California kids of the '60s heard, she was never much of a rock fan, tending more to the songs of Irving Berlin and Rodgers & Hart. "To me," she says, "the pinnacles of show business are Fred Astaire and the Beatles."

And while that has left her seeming a bit naive at times—when Phillips decided to use her nickname, Sam, for *The Indescribable Wow*, it had to be explained to her that there was also a Sam Phillips in Memphis, who had discovered Elvis Presley—it also lends a freshness and vitality to her songs that comes from discovering new sounds, not just repeating old ones. For instance, when it's mentioned that *The Indescribable Wow* recalls the Left Banke at its best, Phillips brightens and says she loves the Left Banke. Was the group an influence? Well, no, she says; she bought her first Left Banke album after finishing *The Indescribable Wow*.

Phillips' work is also marked by its spirituality. To a certain extent, that shouldn't be surprising, since she recorded three abums for Word, the Texas-based gospel label, under her given name, Leslie.

Phillips' adventures in the land of contemporary Christian music were anything but uplifting, however. For one thing, she's quite embarrassed by what she wound up recording there; when I mention that I'd listened to her first two albums, she actually cringes. "Ooooh," she says, "that's unfortunate. Those are really bad records."

Still, her eventual departure from the nouveau gospel circuit was sparked by more than mere musical differences. "I think I'm in good company with people who have spiritual beliefs," she says. "I'm not comparing myself to the legends, but people like Sam Cooke and Bob Marley had that set of beliefs.

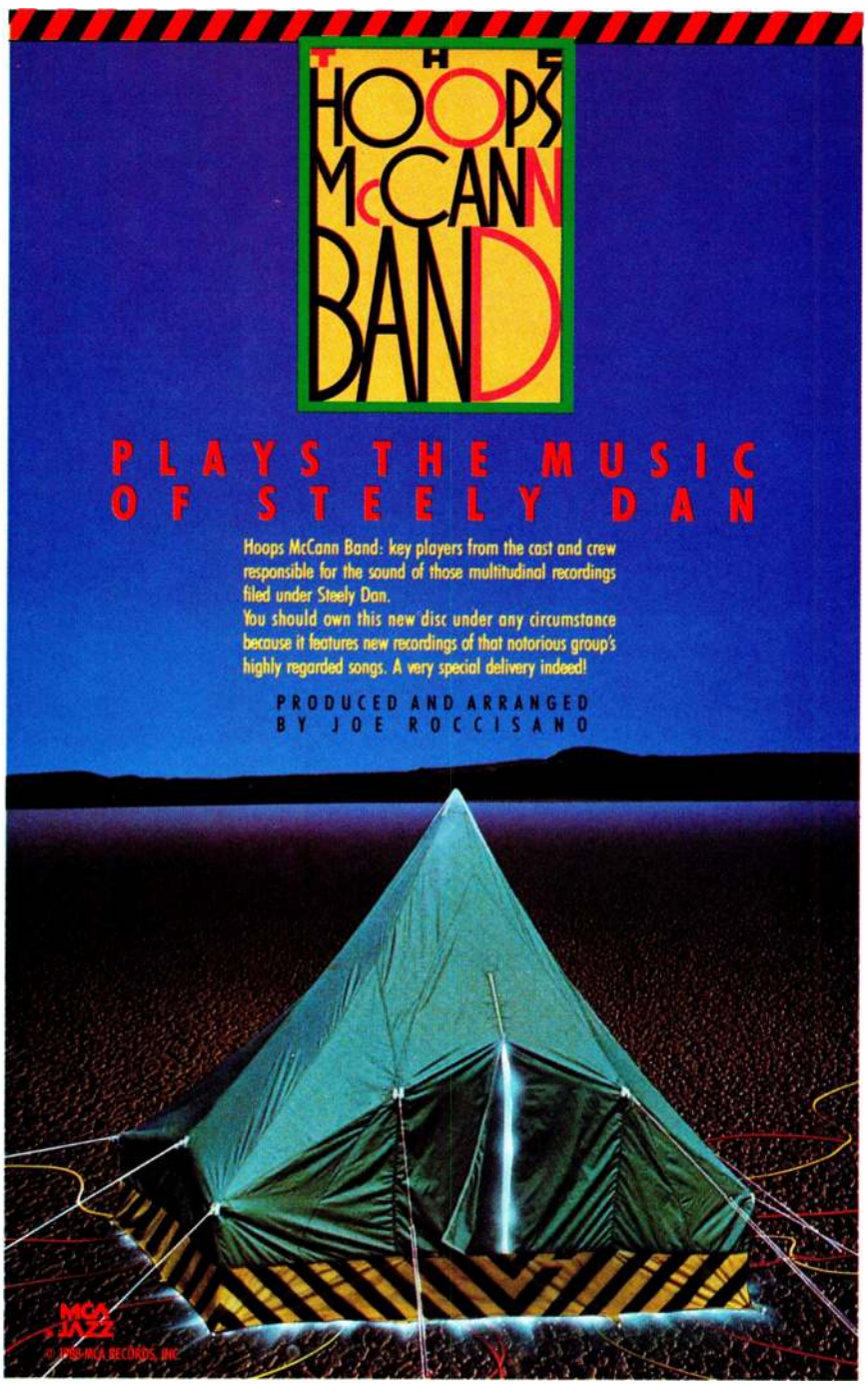
"But I'm not interested in becoming

part of the machinery that markets those beliefs, and shoves them down people's throats. I had trouble being one of those, which is why I'm no longer doing that." How did she wind up in the Christian music business in the first place?

"I started writing songs when I was 14, and I thought the best place to sing them, perform them, would be in the church. I thought, 'Well, here I'll have some freedom to sing some songs about spiritual things if I want, or about anything, basically.'"

That may seem a bit hard to swallow for those brought up with strictly sectarian churches, but, says Phillips, "that's not how it was with me, at least, not in California. California's a little more—*can* be a little more open-minded. As I went along, and as I made these gospel records, I found it to be quite the opposite. I really couldn't do what I wanted. I had to sound a certain way. It all had to have that religious content. Everything had to be about God.

"And God doesn't go around signing trees and flowers 'Made By God; Worship Me Or Else.' You know? I really don't feel that I have to put God in every song. I figured, basically, the whole thing has about as much to do with real Christianity as a bad Xerox of a 100th generation reproduction of the Mona Lisa has to do with the real thing. Christianity requires a lot more than hypocrisy, and narrow-mindedness, and fear. I think it requires love. That's the tough one."



Phillips worked to resolve the difference between her creative impulses and her stand as a "Christian recording artist" in her third album, *The Turning*. "That's who I am," she says, "I'm a writer, a songwriter. That's the talent I have, and why shouldn't I do that? Why should I limit myself?"

Fortunately, Phillips found a sympathetic soul in T-Bone Burnett, who she met through a mutual friend.* "That was a really happy thing for me," she says. "We have some common ground musically, but also, I think, spiritually. We saw eye-to-eye. He wanted to make the kind of record I wanted to make, which was *The Turning*."

After that album, though, Phillips wasn't sure what to do next. "I had written some songs for *The Indescribable Wow* and didn't know what to do with them. Because I had said, after *The Turning*, 'This is it, forget it, Word, goodbye.' And they called me a heretic and a hundred other things.

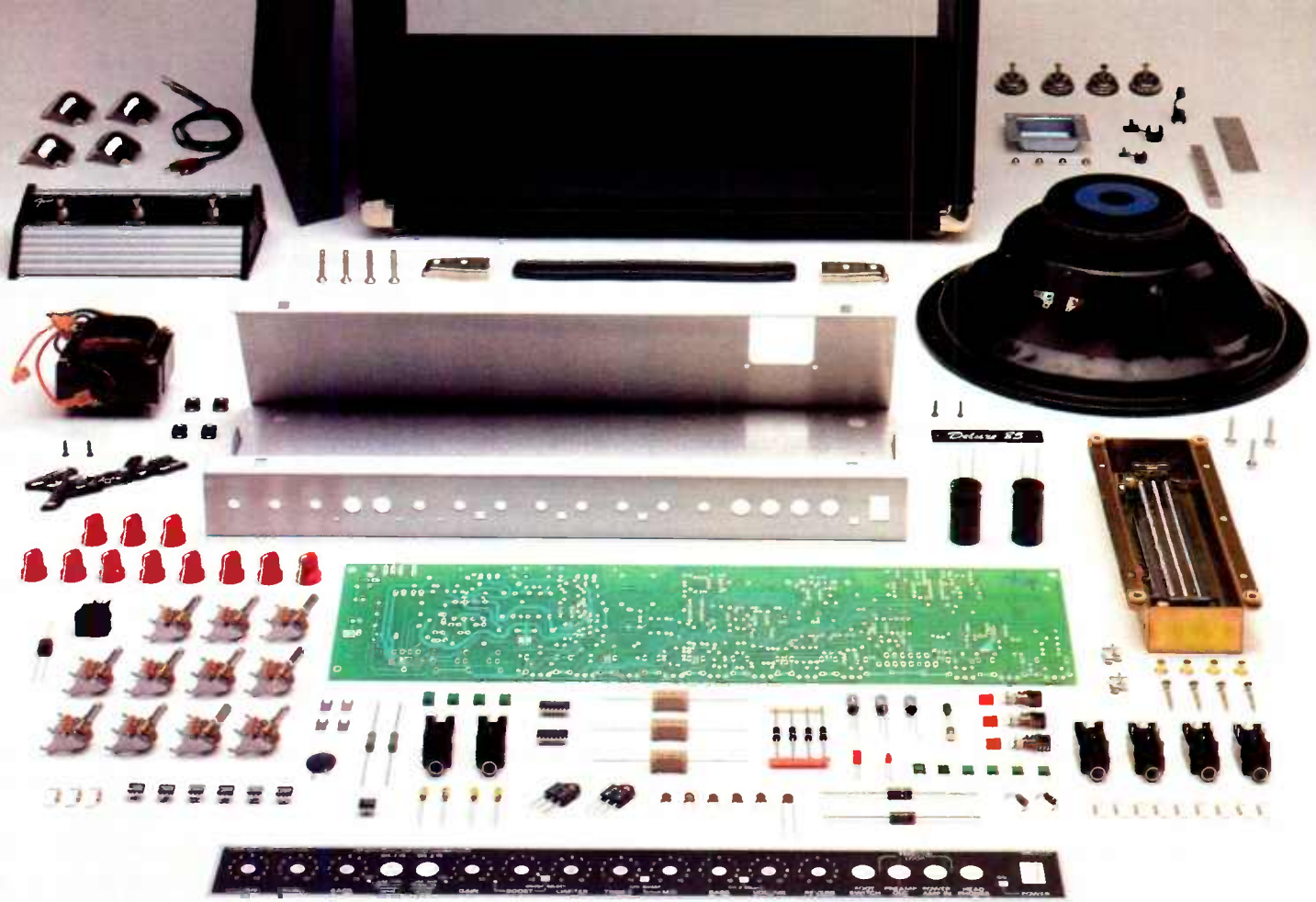
"But then T-Bone said, 'Well, I've got these friends who are starting a record company at Virgin, Jeff [Ayeroff] and Jordan [Harris], so why don't we go see them?' So I thought, 'Okay.'

"The morning we went to see them, T-Bone had the worst hangover he'd ever had in his life. We went down to the conference room and he was just laying on the leather couch, flat on his back, eyes closed, and hardly said anything the whole time. It was like, 'Here she is. This is Sam; this is Jeff and Jordan.'"

Not only had Phillips found a home, but she'd also found a record company that was interested in letting her take her own course, and that more than anything seems to be what Phillips was longing for. "I think it's really important to ask the questions," she says. "There are a lot of things you really can't answer—you're contradicting yourself—and when you do have some conclusions, or some deep kind of faith, there's always going to be a struggle.

"I suppose I should be more disciplined, and write about different subjects, but I always end up writing exactly what's going on in my life," she adds. "I think that's what's missing in a lot of music today—some vulnerability. I tried to do that, and. . .I still am trying to figure out the contradictions in myself." M

* Ha—thought you could get through an issue of *Musician* without T-Bone, didn't you?



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RECKLESS SLEEPERS

by jon young

Jules Shear Seeks a Collective Unconscious

Brian Stanley, Steve Holley, Jules Shear and Jimmy Vivino put loyalties above royalties.

Do you believe it's possible to think too much about what you're doing as an artist?" Perched on a stool in a small recording studio at his manager's midtown Manhattan office, Evian bottle in hand, Jules Shear pauses, then answers himself, "I do. I worry about it and try to draw the line."

This from a man who's obviously devoted a lot of time and thought to the creation of catchy pop songs. Both Cyndi Lauper ("All Through the Night") and the Bangles ("If She Knew What She Wants") have turned Shear material into hits, while artists as diverse as Mickey Gilley, Olivia Newton-John and Ian Matthews, who recently released a whole LP of the guy's stuff, have also drawn on the catalogue.

Songwriting royalties are nice, of course, but Jules Shear hasn't enjoyed success as a performer. From his early days with the Funky Kings, through a late-'70s stint as leader of Jules & the Polar Bears, through a solo career of light-selling albums, he's never made a record that attracted the kind of attention he receives for tunesmithing.

To remedy the situation, and to counteract what Shear calls a tendency "to become really isolated," he's formed Reckless Sleepers, which finds the singer sharing composing duties with bandmates Jimmy Vivino (guitar, keyboards), Steve Holley (drums) and Brian Stanley (bass). An unusual move for someone who's operated pretty much on his own for years, you'd think, but Shear says, "Oh yeah, I'm giving up control—that's what it's all about for me," as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Not that he'd ever, ever admit a desire to make a mark as a recording artist. Typically casual, Shear shrugs off the suggestion with sleepy-eyed ease. "Something to prove? No, it's simply a matter of coming up with good songs, trying to make good performances of them, and then getting them out to as many people as possible." Uh-huh.

According to Shear, Reckless Sleepers originated on an equally unassuming basis. Back in '86, Jules was concentrating on songwriting after two dud solo LPs (*Watch Dog* and *The Eternal Return*) for EMI America when he got a call from Elliot Easton, with whom he'd collaborated on Easton's *Change No Change*. Recalls Shear, "He said, 'You and me are buddies and we both live in New York City. Wouldn't it be fun to go out and play clubs?' He was still in the Cars, so I wasn't sure how serious he was, but I said, 'Fine. What kind of music do we play?'"

Recruiting Holley (an alumnus of Wings) and Stanley (whose credits included Bryan Adams), both veterans of Shear demo sessions, the foursome began churning out music he calls "a cross between Cheap Trick and Led Zeppelin, which is perfectly cool, I think. I liked the music—I just didn't like singing it."

Shear told Easton he'd lost interest and intended to unplug the group then and there, he says, "but that's when I heard Brian and Steve goofing around playing reggae. I told them I'd like to get into that and write some reggae songs with them."

In effect, bouncing Easton from the band he'd launched? Shear laughs, "I was afraid it might appear that way, but the point of my getting together with Brian and Steve was not to have a band, it was to write. Then, after we'd written five songs, I said to them, 'It seems like

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we're developing a thing here. Maybe we need someone else to take it further.'

"We made demos of Steve playing drums, Brian playing bass and me singing, with no chordal instrument, and gave them to people we thought were candidates for fourth member of the group. We didn't tell anyone what to play because the basis for the band was everybody creating his own thing. I remember being really surprised and disappointed at the number of musicians who came in intending to make up something on the spot. I guess there's a lotta lazy musicians out there."

Jimmy Vivino arrived prepared and walked away with the job. With a list of credits that included live shows for Dion and James Brown (not to mention co-production on the upcoming Laura Nyro LP), Vivino roused the others out of the reggae groove and back into a pop bag. Thus were born (awakened?) Reckless Sleepers, with group songwriting beginning in earnest last year.

Shear was no stranger to working with others (including Lauper, Easton, Natalie Merchant and Matthew Sweet). "I'm not really a very sociable person," he explains, "which is why I started co-writing with people—to get me out of my daily 'get-out-the-acoustic-and-write-a-song' routine. But I didn't like whoring around with other writers. I don't think it's an enlightening experience. I have a lot more fun writing by myself, except I don't think it's healthy."

Collaborating with the other Reckless Sleepers was different, explains Shear. While he still writes all the words, the four of 'em concoct the music together. "The concept was to have a collective consciousness from which a song will rise up. I can get musical fulfillment at home writing by myself, but something bigger happens when it's a sharing experience. I know I can bring things out of them that they can't bring out of themselves, 'cause they don't ordinarily write songs, but I also want them to bring things out of me, point me in a direction, which they've done."

Hence the name Reckless Sleepers. "I was in London visiting the Tate Gallery after we decided to be a band, and there was a painting by Magritte called 'The Reckless Sleeper.' I thought it was great because what I was trying to achieve was freeing the collective unconscious, to the point where we were able to create one thing out of the four of us."

That sounds a bit like therapy. "Oh yeah, it definitely is," he agrees quickly. "And just like therapy, you have to be ready for it. I was never ready to be in a room creating with other people when I was younger, because I thought great statements had to come from one mind.

SOUND SLEEPERS

Jules Shear did his vocals for *Big Boss Sounds* with Neumann U87 and U67 mikes, the U67s being the tube mike predecessors to the U87. Otherwise producer Scott Litt just added a bit of Pultec tube EQ and a Urei LA 2A tube limiter through some Focus-Rite preamp/EQ modules.

Drummer **Steve Holley** sounded his wake-up calls on a custom Gretsch kit, including "a lovely piccolo snare," and a selection of Zildjian and Sabian cymbals. Sticks? Promark 747s.

Bassist **Brian Stanley** took chances on his pet 1963 Fender Jazz bass, "with the original electronics still in it." **Jimmy Vivino** played a "Fender Telecaster with a Danelectro pickup in the front rhythm position that I just shoved in there with Krazy Glue. It works great! I used an old Fender Twin amp, an old Deluxe Reverb, a '63 Vox AC with a separate head and 2x12" cabinet, and a Marshall 50-watt." As for keyboards, try two different MIDI studio setups, basically a Kurzweil 1000, DX7s like crazy, a Hammond B-3—the real thing!—and an Akai sampler.

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I was a lot more dogmatic then."

Anyway, the four Sleepers began playing their crisp pop tunes around Manhattan and ended up signing with IRS, because, notes Shear, "A lot of record companies came to our shows but they were the only ones that said, 'Let's do it.' There's a contingent over at IRS that thought Jules & the Polar Bears should have been an IRS band, that we got lost at Columbia.

"The Polar Bears' albums [all two of 'em; a third never came out] always seemed to coincide with a Toto record," he laughs. "We'd listen to Toto's records and think, 'There's no way Columbia is gonna promote us. They're going to promote these guys, 'cause they're going straight on the radio!'"

Big Boss Sounds shouldn't get overlooked, in any case. Produced by Shear and Scott Litt, who was simultaneously involved in the Patti Smith LP, it's a bright, insistent disc that reflects the involvement of the whole band. Eight of the 10 tracks are composed by the Sleepers, and most rock out real good. "I Wake Up Loving You" will satisfy fans of Shear's wistful romanticism, while friskier cuts like "Tried to Please Her," "It Came Quick" and the title track suggest Squeeze with muscles. The tunes on *Big Boss Sounds* may not inspire as many covers as previous Jules efforts, being less purely musical, but they make for a more exciting record.

Shear reports that everything's ducky in the early stages of the marriage with Miles Copeland's IRS. "We've only had one big showdown meeting, when the record was finished, and he was pretty cool. There were a couple of things he wanted done and I told him that if he wanted to pay for 'em, I'd be willing to give it a shot. And they turned out to be good ones. He wanted background vocals on the chorus of 'If We Never Meet Again,' which made the song a little sparklier, and a new guitar part on 'This Heart.' I've been on three other labels and there's usually an A&R guy going [*whine*], 'I just don't like it. I don't really know why.' Miles had specific ideas and they worked. I'm not used to that."

Of course, for all the care that went into it, *Big Boss Sounds* could still go the way of previous Shear efforts, commercially speaking. Would he mind continuing to be known primarily as a composer?

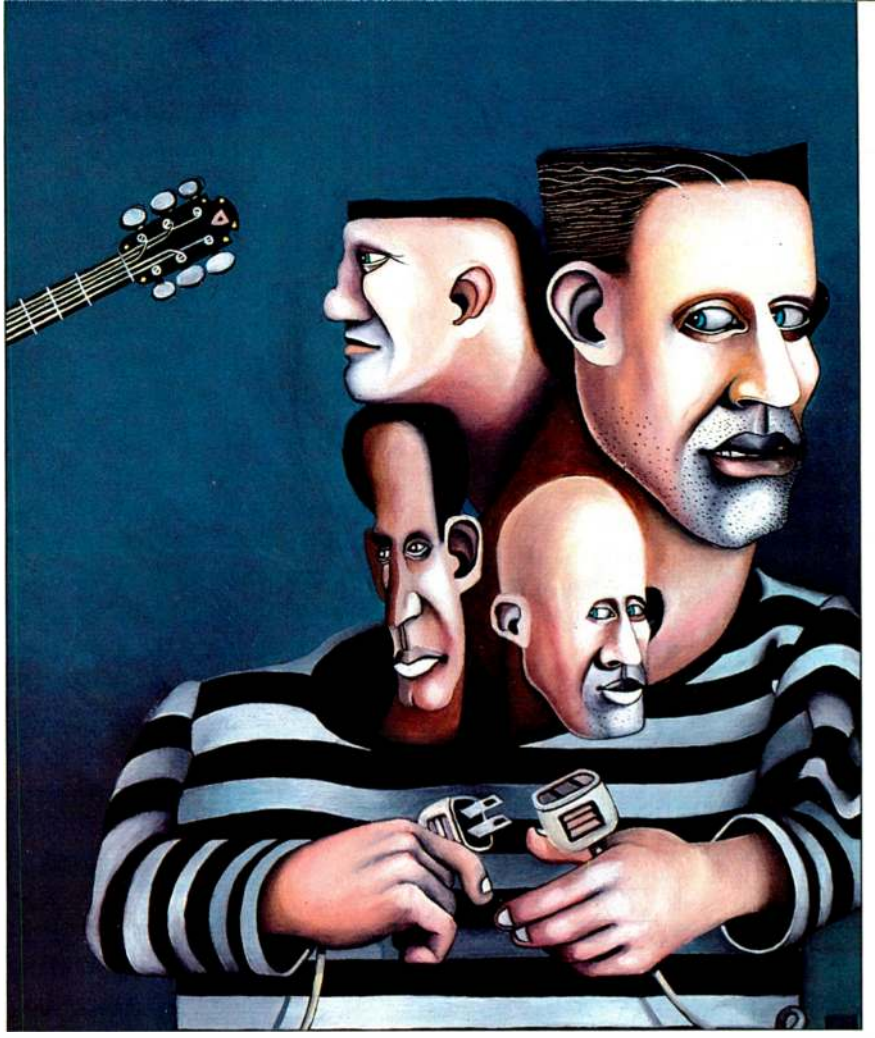
A slow smile spreads over his face at the inevitable question. "If worse came to worse, if I wrote as many hit songs as Jimmy Webb, I wouldn't mind, 'cause making up songs is the ultimate thing, the greatest thing, for me."

continued on page 30

PRISON FOR ROADIES

by mark rowland

The Oregon State Pen Gets "Schooled" in the Blues



No cigarettes allowed unless the pack is unopened. A metal detector so fine it picks up the pin in a reset bone. Enter in groups of 10 or less. We've all seen tight security at shows before, but geez, this is heavy. "You can't make anything too predictable around here, or they'll figure out a way to get by it," cautions Bud Chappelle, a recreation therapist, with wan admiration. "We've got a lot of smart guys in here."

Welcome to the first annual Bluebird Blues Fest, a 1987 Labor Day weekend extravaganza featuring 13 blues acts from California and the Pacific Northwest, fun in the sun and a literally captive audience. Welcome, in other words, to the Oregon State Penitentiary.

The fortress, a few miles down the road from the capitol building in Salem, is the state's maximum-security prison. Built to accommodate 1100 convicts, it currently houses close to 1850. The place looks clean, its tan facade freshly painted, but the architecture still clearly favors function over form—concrete walls, barbed-wire fences, guards in turrets surveying a yard full of young men wearing T-shirts and denim.

"There's predators here. I look at people's eyes as I walk down the line."

A familiar sight to anyone who's watched enough B-movies, or robbed enough convenience stores. Except that, on this occasion, several of these guys are running soundchecks, putting together equipment and staging. Concerts in prison aren't new, but it's a good bet the Bluebird fest is the first to be organized, promoted, engineered and paid for by the prisoners themselves. And for three days, man. Three days...

"Blues is one music that can touch everybody in here," explains inmate Robert Murphy, 12-year resident and the event's chief organizer. "Look at the history of the blues, in the fields and work camps...plus a lot of blues musicians have done time, so they can relate to this. So coming in to perform for us is a real positive thing. And personally," he laughs, "I really like the blues."

Murphy is "entertainment co-ordinator" of the State Street Jaycees, a prison club affiliated with the national Jaycees organization. The idea, Murphy explains, "is to train people for jobs on the street while serving our own community." The Jaycees' most popular program is their "Roadie School," which is just what it sounds like: Prisoners learn the skills necessary to put together a band's equipment, tune instruments, run a soundboard and troubleshoot the inevitable glitches that occur when bands hit the road. The would-be roadies have had their share of hands-on experience—the Jaycees have sponsored three concerts inside the prison in the previous month alone. A three-day festival is obviously a bigger challenge. "But I thought, 'Let's put together something that will be remembered by everyone,'" Murphy says, "'and that will be a real first.'"

With a combination of street smarts and infectious zeal, Murphy is a natural promoter; in the past year he's helped bring several "name" acts into the Big House, from Gatemouth Brown to Savoy Brown. The first Bluebird fest is designed to showcase the burgeoning blues scene of the Pacific Northwest, which has recently seen one of its own, Robert Cray, rise to prominence.

"But the bands aren't looking for publicity or money," Murphy points out. "We really can't afford to pay much more than some transportation and hotel expenses. It's from their hearts. Gatemouth Brown told me he hadn't done a prison gig since Folsom in '53. Now he wants to do as many concerts for closed-in people as he can, whether that's prisons or rest homes or hospitals. Because the reception was so strong."

Randy Geer, a recreation therapist at the prison for five years, offers a slightly different perspective. "The entertainment gives people here a chance to relate to the outside world. The other aspects are the same that anyone derives from music. On a show day here, people are happy, excited, even the ones that are shy. Today you can have 1200 men together on the yard without a problem. I can't remember any incident of violence during a show, not one. They treat it with genuine respect. They can

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be quite critical too, you know," Geer laughs. "If the music isn't good, they won't clap. But if it is good, they are very, very warm."

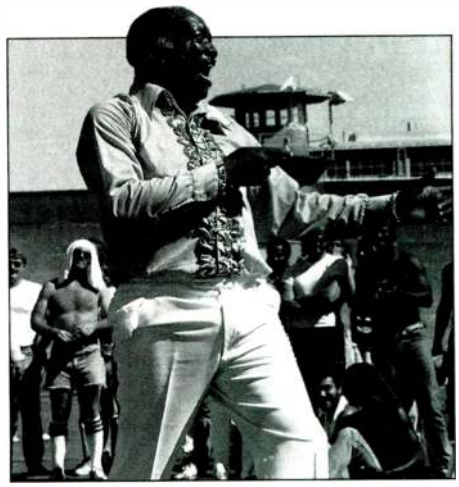
It's hot in the yard, maybe 90 in the shade, and there isn't much of that as the first band, Stevie & the Blue Flames, take the stage. A few hundred prisoners lounge on the grass in a loose crescent in front of the stage, curious if not exactly tingling with excitement. As the Flames run through a set of electric blues standards and originals with authority and precision, the audience begins to respond. The hour-long set ultimately draws an appreciative if less-than-thunderous ovation. Musically, it's a fairly sophisticated crowd.

Many of the prisoners are in bands themselves, ranging from native American music to heavy metal. "It takes a lot off your mind, even if you're not professionals," explains Dave Maimon, a gregarious inmate currently serving a lengthy sentence for drug-dealing. "Instead of getting pissed off and slugging somebody 50 times, you can pick up a guitar and play heavy metal. Look at Art Pepper or Merle Haggard—there's lots of musicians who've spent time in prison and gotten together mentally, or socially. And when they got out they could do something as artists instead of being a derelict or whatever.

"I like rock 'n' roll and jazz," Maimon goes on. "Still, there's something about the blues. I'll give you an example: There's a guy in our band who plays guitar, and he likes heavy metal. But he's a guy who's also looking at the death penalty right now, he's lost all his appeals. We all feel bad for him. And I mean, when he plays the blues, you get a feeling like you could never get off any album. He's been playing all his life, and maybe playing gets his mind off that lethal injection.

"A lot of us—somebody who robbed or killed or sold drugs—are going to be in here for a long time, maybe most of our lives. It intensifies your desire to play music—and sometimes it intensifies your desire *not* to play. You feel like a loser and life's over, and 'now I'm gonna spend the rest of my life looking at walls.' So music is a chance to have something for ourselves, something to get us through the hard times."

His sentiments are underlined a few minutes later as Warren Milton, a.k.a. Dr. Feelgood, commands the stage. The president of the Central California Blues Society, Milton and his wife have driven



Dr. Feelgood on the fly.

600 miles from Fresno, for no money, simply because they'd been asked. A blues singer and performer for three decades, he picked up the name "Dr. Feelgood" from "a packed house in a nightclub at three o'clock in the morning." At high noon in a prison yard, outlandishly attired in a white tuxedo, he proceeds to show why. An entertainer from the old school, he sings his heart out, sweats up a storm, jumps off the stage and demonstrates his "famous" mule kick, engages his audience in gentle but funny repartee. He gets a prolonged

ROBERT HAYES

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standing ovation. It's the day's highlight.

"This is the first time I've played in a prison," Dr. Feelgood admits. "I'd gotten the impression it was a very cold situation. But the response here makes me feel better than I can explain. The only way I can is to come back and perform again."

Following Dr. Feelgood's performance, visitors are escorted out of the prison for the afternoon "head count." Nobody's escaped, so the show recommences a few hours later with a fine set by the Blues Sisters, an all-women quartet from Portland. The band's bassist fails to show up, but no problem; convict Miguel Roberts, whose history includes gigs with Millie Jackson, Donnie Hathaway and a few more serious charges, fills in admirably.

The evidence that music has turned a maximum-security prison into Woodstock can be deceptive. Some prisoners mention that the administration consigned many "hard-core" inmates to their cells or "the hole" before the festival to help ward off trouble. "There's predators here," says Mike McConnell, who plays guitar in several prison bands. "I look at people's eyes sometimes in the lunch room as I walk down the line. They're all either victims or predators, and there's a lot more victims. It seems like hardly anyone is in between."

For this weekend at least, administrators and prisoners speak of each other with respect, if not affection. "When a program works here it's because of cooperation between staff and inmates," notes Randy Geer. "Respect is a word you hear in a penitentiary a lot. In fact, one of the rules infractions is 'disrespect' for one another."

"I don't think any other penal institution in the country would allow this to happen," Robert Murphy declares. "Any time we've given the administration a proposal for a show they've given us the green light. Philosophically, they are not my best of friends," Murphy emphasizes. "They are my keepers. But beyond that line, they're very cooperative, and it's a great opportunity to be able to do this for our own."

The shows on Sunday continue to reveal the diversity and talent of blues artists in the festival, notably the Chris Cain band, whose climactic evening set brings hundreds of fans to their feet cheering and offering clenched-fist salutes. Equally impressive, the sets are going off without a technical hitch, and for most of the weekend the sound is mixed as well or better than at your favorite club—a clear sign that the Jaycees' "roadie school" has its act together.

Carl Smith, the club president, has been in the Jaycees "nine, 10 years, pretty much since it meant anything." Smith has hippie-length hair, an arm missing and a droll, easy-going manner. ("I got in for 'arm' robbery.") He and a former inmate named Jimmy Bernhardt first got the idea for raising money for concerts by running a canteen in the prison yard, selling sandwiches and soda. The prison provided a bread truck, Smith recalls, and before long the Jaycees were turning a profit, which went toward the purchase of musical equipment.

"Then one day Skinny Jimmy said, 'What do you think about starting our own roadie school?' The thing was, we were paying $350 every time we did a concert just to pay for the sound; why not learn to do it ourselves? So we invited the Portland Music Association down here for a softball game. 'Course we let 'em win," Smith grins, "and we told a couple of their soundmen about our idea. They said pay our gas money from Portland and we'll teach you. Now we've got four good sound men and 10 others in training."

Two members of the Cascade Blues Association, Madeleine Pellum and Ed Johnson, are also at the festival, record-

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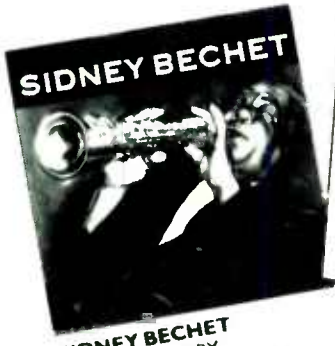

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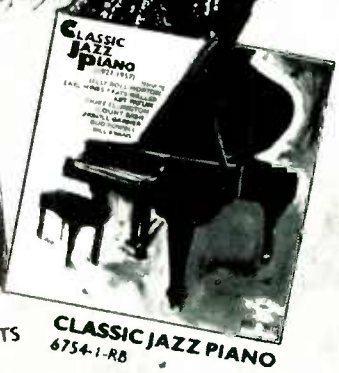

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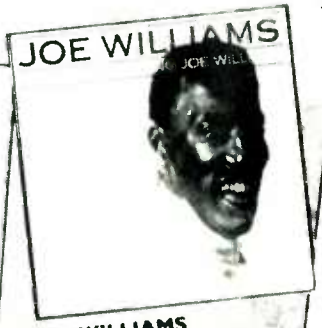

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ing the event for the Jaycees' music archives. Explains Pellum, "We saw Gatemouth Brown here and were impressed by their efforts. The reaction of the blues community? It's been mixed. Some people will flat-out say, 'You shouldn't be helping them, they're criminals.' The other end of the pendulum is 'that's great.' A lot of people in the first group have been the victim of a crime or known someone who was. I'm well aware of inmates who were released and returned to prison, but I also know people who have stayed straight for 10 years. It goes both ways. I think humans are generally warm-hearted and want to see people do better for themselves, and this is a good way for the community to do it."

After two days of serious summer, Monday morning dawns cool and cloudy, a depressing atmosphere for the last day of a festival. The prisoners seem nonplussed. "Don't worry," one says reassuringly, "once the music starts the sun'll come out. Happens every time here."

Terry Robb, something of a Portland guitar legend, starts things off with a casually masterful set of country blues. Aficionados laze out on the now-matted grass and voice approval for such staples of the genre as "Miss Brown" and "Little Red Rooster." About halfway through Robb's set, the sun breaks through.

"We'd have a riot by now for sure if there wasn't no soda truck or no music," Carl Smith contends. "It's really overcrowded here, you know—they're putting people in the hole, in the nuthouse, wherever there's a bed. When it's hot and there ain't no pot..." Smith sighs. "They say music soothes the savage beast," he laughs. "Nobody wants to admit it but there's a lot of truth in that."

The first Bluebird Blues Fest concludes triumphantly that evening with performances by the headlining artists, Lloyd Jones and the Tom McPharland Blues Band. For his work putting together the festival and his devotion to the music, Robert Murphy is nominated for a W.C. Handy award by the Blues Foundation in Memphis, Tennessee.

Murphy has been offered several music-related jobs upon his parole, which he hopes will occur before his scheduled release date: October 1993. After a dozen years of incarceration, "I think I've gotten my act together," he says.

"We all make mistakes, and I made a drastic one—I beat somebody up over a drug deal, and they died of a brain hemorrhage. I felt I was guilty of murder, and I've had to deal with that. The only thing I could do, if I really wanted to go somewhere in life and to live with myself, was to take all the opportunities that exist within this system and utilize them to make myself a better person.

"It's sad to say, but prison changed my life. I've met a lot of helpful people in the process, and I'd like to continue in the music business when I get back on the street. But I'll tell you this: As long as I'm entertainment coordinator in this prison, there'll be good music here." Ⓜ

SLEEPERS from page 22

More than performing? "Yeah, because performing isn't even like work. You already did the hard stuff; singing the songs should be more like a celebration. So I do derive more pleasure making 'em up than I do from singing 'em."

However proud of Reckless Sleepers, he doesn't tout it as some sort of personal peak. Asked if he's carving out a distinct career path, Shear answers, "No, I think you just do things as they come up and then look back and say, 'Hey, I had a career!' People ask me what my goal is and I feel stupid, because all I want to do is find out how much I can dig at this musical thing that's in my head. Wherever that takes me, I guess that's what kind of a career I have." Ⓜ

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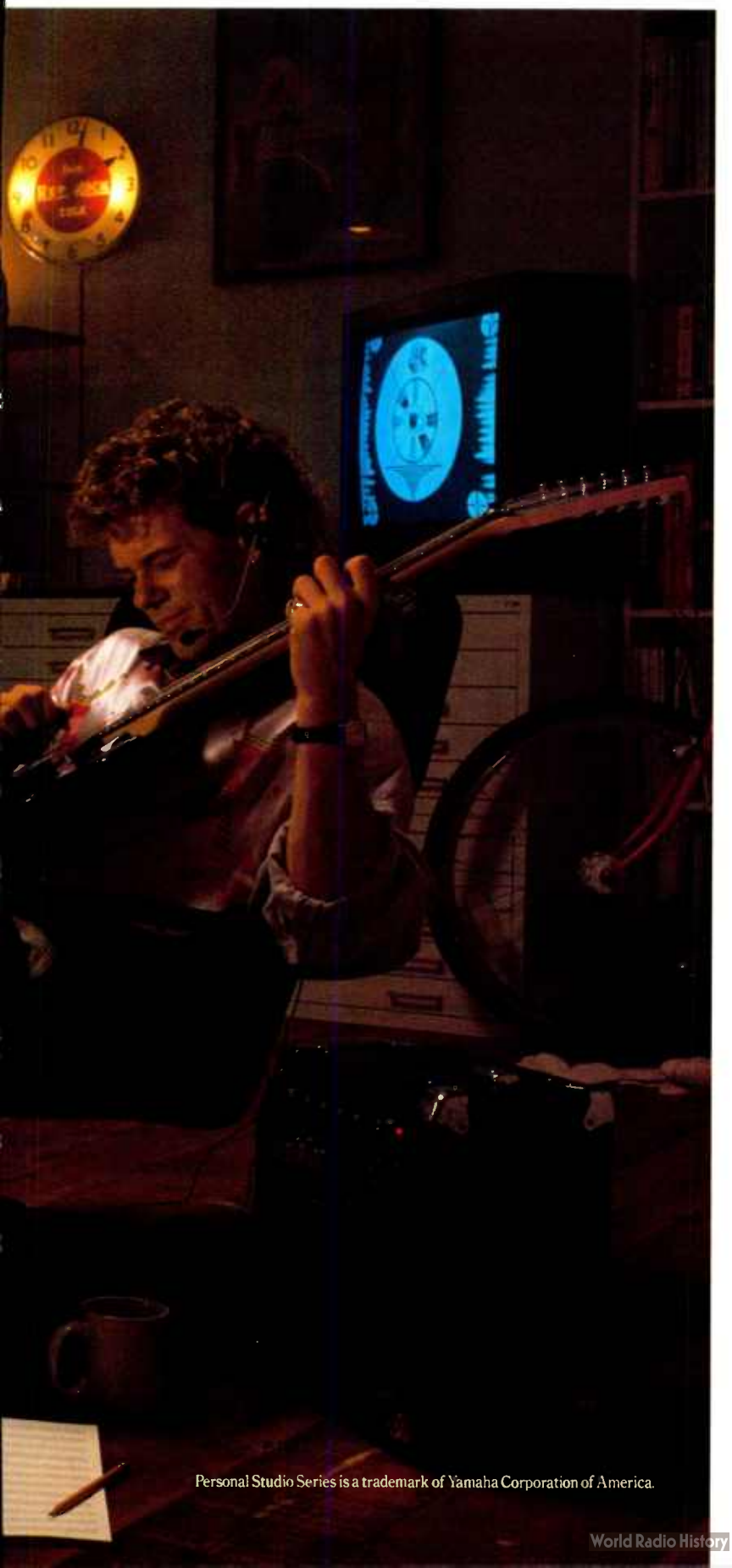

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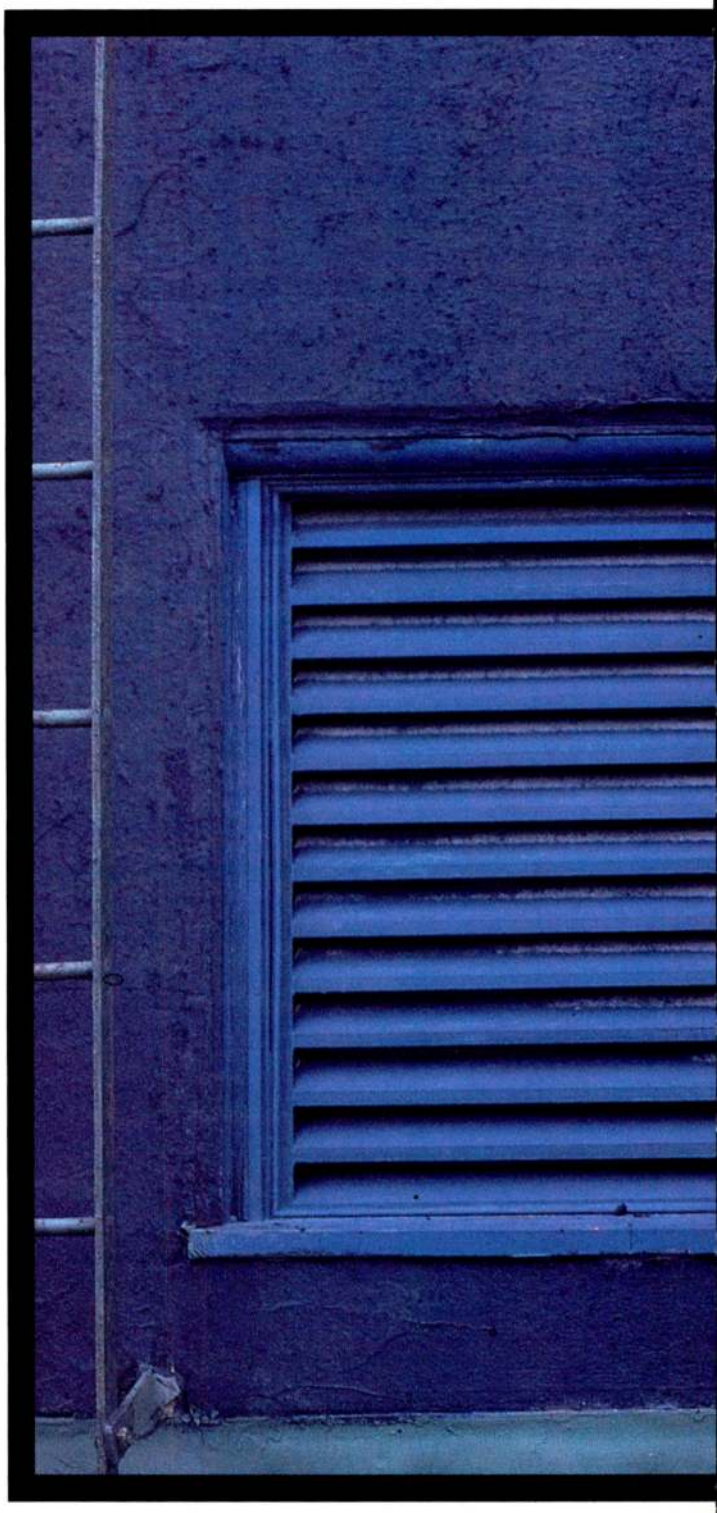
Brian Eno's Luminous Fringe

By John Diliberto



It was odd watching Brian Eno ascend the Grammy Awards stage last winter along with U2 for the album *The Joshua Tree*. It's just not the place you'd expect him to be, an artist who has always been on the edge. For Eno, the center is something to be unbalanced, not embraced.

"I've never made any really successful records of my own," says the self-effacing Eno. Sitting in a Warner Bros. office in Burbank, California, he distractedly surveys the cluttered room, passing over posters of a-ha without recognition. "I don't feel particularly on the inside. I sit in here and I look around at all these things and I don't know who any of them are, even. I don't! I know less about this than the world of contemporary painting or contemporary architecture or contemporary thinking about evolution theory. Any of those I could tell you a lot more about than the Hot 100."

Eno has always been drawn towards the outlands of sound, the quirky world of experiments and accident, theories and chance, mixing conceptualism with populism. In the '60s he played and recorded with the late avant-garde composer Cornelius Cardew while ingesting the minimalism of Steve Reich and LaMonte Young. His early '70s techno-glam group, Roxy Music, traded in androgyny and science fiction, playing dance music for the post-apocalypse. The mid-70s saw him manipulating sound through avant-garde techniques to mutate rock music, culminating in *Another Green World*, one of the most influential albums of the last 15 years.

He was already experimenting with music-generating systems like tape loops on his duets with guitarist Robert Fripp and his own record, *Discreet*

EBET ROBERTS

Music. These evolved into his Ambient Music series, subsequently co-opted as a New Age soporific. Eno became a new music promoter of sorts. He started Obscure Records, producing the vinyl debuts of avant-garde composers John Adams, Gavin Bryars and Michael Nyman, all established figures now. Then he turned his ears to the new wave, producing the debuts of Devo and Ultravox, and the *No New York* compilation. David Bowie enlisted him for the subterranean textures of *Low, Heroes* and *Lodger*. And then there were the techno-tribal Talking Heads and David Byrne projects.

Eno's own recorded output became sporadic. He involved Canadian producer Daniel Lanois in his first Ambient Music albums, and as they continued their relationship Lanois took on more co-producing and co-composing responsibilities. Together they redefined the sound of U2 on *The Unforgettable Fire* and locked it down with the mega-hit *The Joshua Tree*.

But Eno doesn't care much about music anymore, preferring to concentrate on his art exhibits. This places him in a bit of a quandary because he's in Los Angeles for the launching of Opal Records, a sort of Eno signature label distributed by Warner Bros. and featuring artists signed to Eno's Opal Management. The initial release includes Budd's *The White Arcades*, an album of salon music from Eno's brother Roger, *Drum* by the art-rock group Hugo Largo and *Music for Films, Volume III*. The latter serves as an Opal sampler, with work by Laraaji, ex-Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones, Leon Theremin's granddaughter Lydia, Roger Eno, Budd, and five tracks by Eno alone or co-written with Daniel Lanois.

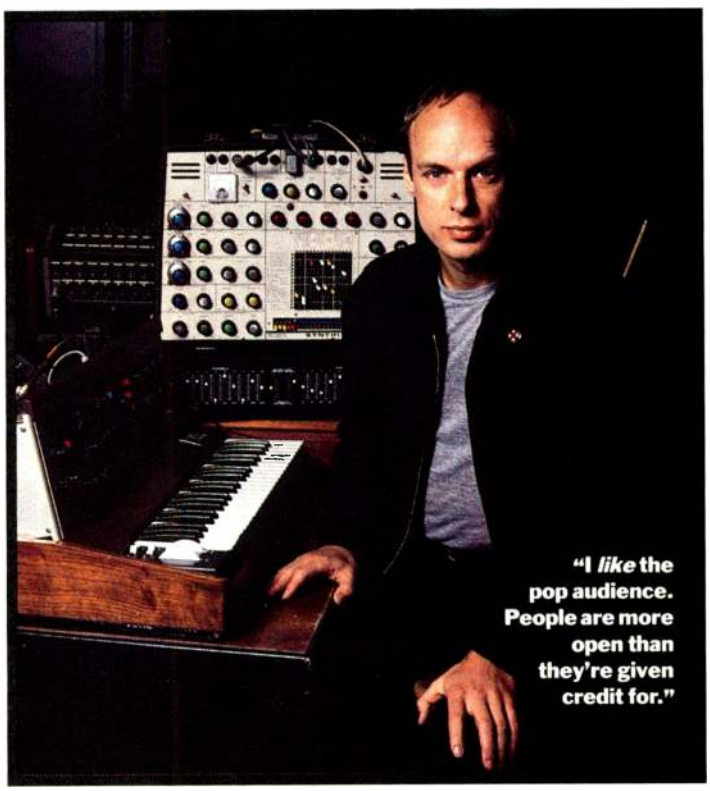
In fact, Eno doesn't seem to have much to do with Opal. According to Warners, there's no commitment from him to produce Opal artists or make his own record, although the hope is that he will do both. Still, Eno hasn't made a new album since 1985 and that was the soundtrack to his video *Thursday Afternoon*. His main concern in Los Angeles is actually the mounting of his exhibition of "light and sound structures" called *Latest Flames*.

Eno's visual art exhibits the same subtlety and grace as his music. Shown in a completely darkened space, it seems to hover in the air like diaphanous holograms. Some are like Bauhaus skyscrapers, bathed in overlapping light patterns from concealed video monitors on which they sit. Others are like suspended frames, also backed by video monitors, with color fields projected through cardboard shapes. Pre-recorded tapes randomly play on four auto-reverse cassette machines simultaneously, subliminally wafting at the borders of melody.

Like Eno's *Music for Airports* and *On Land*, the edges are soft, the depth relationships ambiguous, the movements tidal and their effect seductive. And like his brightest recordings, no matter how much Eno explains them—the foam core construction, the video color fields, the draftsman's paper on the surface of the boxes—they retain a mysterious allure.

MUSICIAN: *What do established artists want when they come to you; U2 for instance, who were already successful?*
ENO: They're looking for a way to unlock something that they suspect is in their music, but they can't quite get out. Sometimes your own past stands in the way of what you could do now. It's like a monolith that's been built up and everybody praises it: how wonderful it is and when are you going to do your next one and blah-blah-fucking-blah like they always do. And this thing grows and grows in everyone's perception until finally it's this huge monument to culture [*laughs ruefully*], and it's only a few ideas that you had. And then you have a little idea inside you that's saying, "my turn, I want to get out." You look at this feeble clumsy voice and look at the monolith and think, "Oh, God, I can't release that. It's too pathetic." And most artists don't. Most successful artists have one good idea and never have another one. That's the formula for success, if your readers want to know. One good idea, no others.

And I suppose sometimes what you want is someone who will come along and look at that little pathetic embryo of an idea and say, "Hey, that's a really interesting thing. You could do this with it." So that thing starts to get bigger and gets some strength and life and suddenly the monolith doesn't look so unbreakable anymore and, in fact, it starts to look a bit old-fashioned. You think, that was fine then, but now look at this new one. It's pulsing with life. It's young and can accommodate all sorts of things that I can do. So I suppose that what I want to do is to try to water those little seeds, you know, put them in fertile soil.


"I *like* the pop audience. People are more open than they're given credit for."

MUSICIAN: *What are some of the seeds that U2 had?*
ENO: They wanted a greater emotional perspective in their music. And this meant letting go of something, to an extent, for which they had become very famous, which was the big sound rock 'n' roll band. They still are a big sound rock 'n' roll band, but now there's another dimension to them, I think. But that was quite a hard move for them because there was a very salient possibility that a lot of their fans would say, "Christ, they've gone soft. They've finally got old," or something like that. And people do say that. They always say it about me, whatever I do. I've done the wrong thing [*laughs sardonically*] for about four years and then suddenly it was the right thing and what I'm doing now is the wrong thing, you know.
MUSICIAN: *Is one of your criteria for taking on a production that you have to have a very serious involvement in it, in terms of input into the music?*
ENO: That's pretty much true. Yes. If my name is going to appear on something, I feel I shall be judged by it, I suppose. So I want it to come to a certain standard. So I can't really just come in on something and sort of clean up the sound, or something like that. It's not interesting, anyway, for me to do that. I like really being in, sort of getting my hands dirty.
MUSICIAN: *I think a lot of the musicians you've worked with,*

EBET ROBERTS

Hassell, Budd, etc. have felt at times not that you artistically overpowered their records, but that the Eno reputation overpowered the perception of their records.

ENO: Well, that's not my problem. That's mainly to do with writers, I think, who of course will always write about people they know about. It's something that I'm aware of and I try my hardest not to encourage, you know? To sort of stay back and say, no, these are collaborations. But it doesn't help.

MUSICIAN: *On Talking Heads'* Remain in Light, *you're credited with co-writing the whole album. On your own records, Daniel Lanois has several co-writing credits. At what point do treatments turn into a co-writing credit?*

ENO: It depends, really, how radical they are and how much they change the conceptual nature of the music. For example, in some cases there might be a tape laying around that has been used for something else and I might decide to start working on it one morning. Then you might slow it down to two-thirds original speed, take out most of the instruments, make a totally different sound with the one or two that are left, and you're really making something new. So that's often the case for a rewrite. But with the Talking Heads thing, that's slightly different. I was really involved in writing that material as well. From the very beginning, those things were written as a group of which I was a member at that point. But it's different with different people.

MUSICIAN: *When we talked last September, you mentioned that there was an album of film music "threatening to come out." But* Music for Films, Volume III *isn't it, is it?*

ENO: No, it isn't the same thing, in fact. That's turned into something else. Probably not film music. Earlier this year, I had already done several pieces on the synthesizer and with the various instruments I use, and they started to take an interesting orchestral texture. Not like an ordinary sort of strings and horns type orchestra, but they had the sound of a big ensemble. So I went to a friend of mine who's a composer and said, "Suppose you had just been to a new planet, a newly discovered planet, and you heard this music as I've played it on these tapes to you. But you had no means of recording it. Say you were a sort of musicologist and you wanted to reconstruct it when you came back to earth. And you had to do it using this orchestra because at this time we didn't have any synthesizers or anything like that. How would you do it?" And that's sort of what we're working on at the moment. It's a very interesting compositional problem because a lot of the sounds are not at all like acoustic sounds, so to achieve them you have to make combinations of instruments. It hasn't gotten very far yet. And of course, what's interesting is the way in which it fails, not the way in which it succeeds.

MUSICIAN: *You've said that you have never put much import in lyrics, that you didn't consider that the meaning of a piece of music is invested in the lyrics necessarily, and that you have never regarded lyrics as the center of your music. Given that, how do you deal with someone like Bono, whose lyrics are central to a lot of what U2 is about?*

ENO: You might think that. I don't think they are. I've seen him writing songs, you know. Sometimes they write a lot of songs through improvisations, including Bono improvising singing. If you do that, you just suddenly come out with lines that are good. You don't know what they mean, but they sound good. In fact, most often the lines that just sort of popped complete and fresh out of your head are the ones that remain in the song, even though you don't know exactly what they're trying to say. They become the real center of the song.

This is kind of a running discussion that Bono and I have, where he says he wants the lyrics to say something, and I say, 'they do say something. Whatever you make them do, they already say something. Don't worry so much about that type of meaning, because it's not important.' Then he says, 'Yes it is.' [laughs] But he's Irish, you see.

MUSICIAN: *I think most of his listeners would say there's a lot of intended meaning in his lyrics.*

ENO: Well, a lot of people would say there's a lot in mine, too.

MUSICIAN: *I would say that as well.*

"U2 wanted a greater emotional perspective in their music. And this meant letting go of the big rock 'n' roll sound."

ENO: Well, it's almost by default, you know. This notion of meaning is for me a very overused one. Nobody ever says, what's the meaning of that piano part, what's the meaning of that guitar part? Those things have meaning, too. And for me, I'm trying to put lyrics on the same level of meaning as those. They have to make musical and rhythmic sense first for me, and if they have the other sense, if they have semantic sense also, that's another story.

What I don't like is lyrics that have stupid semantic sense. That sort of scrape through the semantic test by saying stupid things like, 'Girl, I want to feel your body,' which I seem to hear in every other song. My main interest was to avoid banal meanings. What that meant was always creating as much branching of ambiguities as I could, hinting at possible types of meaning that the words could have. That's always been my interest when working with Bono, if I've been advising him on lyrics. I've always tried to move him away from the specific towards the general.

There are lots of reasons for doing this. One of them is that then the song doesn't come out with a date stamp on it. Lyrics can date the song much quicker than music does. Certain issues are so characteristic of the week they were written or the month they were written. And I suppose it's an alibi to say, "Well, the lyrics don't have any meaning." What I mean when I say that is, I'm not going to tell you what it is.

MUSICIAN: *In an interview/lecture you did in L.A., you were talking about how you like listening to gospel music. And that you like singing it. And I was trying to imagine Brian Eno singing gospel and it didn't quite come together, because it seems like that music has a lot of elements that you don't project into your own music. That it's more overtly emotional.*

ENO: Well, yeah, that's why I like it. If I sing at all now, I sing much more emotional than I used to on my records. But it's interesting: One of the things about gospel music is that it's emotional without being personal. It's as though the emotion is tapping a common pool of emotions. It's not your feelings about your relationship or wanting to feel your girl's body. It's a much more impersonal, deep-rooted, feeling. The reason I never got emotional in my singing before is because I never wanted to write relationship-type songs, I never want to be the sort of center of the song. But somehow you never are with gospel records. So it's not at all difficult for me to join in with that music. That's what I should be doing this morning, actually. I want to go to church, to a gospel church here.

MUSICIAN: *Are you attracted to the spirituality of gospel?*

ENO: Yes, very much. Not necessarily to the specific values of it, let's say. But I'm very attracted to that kind of spirituality. The notion of being spiritual as part of your ordinary life. I've been to a lot of gospel churches and one of the things that's

very interesting is that they really function as centers of the community. They're centers of exchange of information, like church used to be, I think, in the white community. You go to one of those services, they're six hours long. They have playgrounds for the kids downstairs. The pastor will interrupt the service in the middle to ask someone to move their car and all this sort of thing. In a way it's very un-religious, but very spiritual. It doesn't feel that it has to have all those trappings of, 'Oh, aren't we being sacred, aren't we being reverent.' And I like the effect it has on people.

MUSICIAN: *Is there a sense of community there you feel you're lacking in your own life?*

ENO: Well, I think we all lack it in our own lives. I don't think only me is lacking it. I suppose what I value about it is that the individual becomes less important as the community becomes more important. Our social systems have placed so much strength on 'me,' you know, on oneself. It's very interesting to be somewhere where that self allows itself to be submerged, to surrender to a larger organism. It's a talent that we don't ever really use unless there's a disaster or earthquake or war.

MUSICIAN: *What about rock concerts?*

ENO: Well, actually, it's rather the same thing. I went to see U2 in Rome and it was like a huge gospel show. There were 60,000 people there and it was a fantastic feeling, just the feeling of that many people who obviously were as excited by the fact of being all together and being one of such a huge number as by the music. And they just sang along with songs. Quite often Bono wasn't singing. He'd stop and the whole 60,000 people would sing the song. It was very, very emotional and fantastic.

MUSICIAN: *You quoted Steve Reich saying that tape delay is a drug, and you partially agreed with him. I was wondering if digital reverb hasn't become a kind of drug as well.*

ENO: Well, he said that, not me. I only quoted him. I didn't actually agree with him, in the sense that I wouldn't pick on tape delay. All sorts of systems are drugs. He and all of the other systems composers, me included, have fallen victim to drug systems at various times. System drugs, I should say. Once you use systems, you tend to forget that systems are there to serve results, not the other way around. And as soon as you do that, it's becoming a drug for you.

Dan [Lanois] and I have been using less and less digital reverb, I suppose. We don't use the digital reverb as a pretense of being real reverb. We've started to use live recording more and to use room ambience. And then if we're using digital reverb, it's as an effect in the same way you'd use flanging or chorus or any of the other things. As an effect, not as a substitute.

MUSICIAN: *You said new music comes from new technology, because new technology presents new possibilities. But in your case, a lot of the music that you've done has suggested new technology. For instance, the tape-loop system that you used generated this whole raft of digital delays that we have now.*

ENO: Yes, that's possible, actually. But what normally happens is, a technology sits around for a while, and then someone thinks of a new way to use it. Something for which it wasn't designed. And then someone else thinks, well, I'll design something to just do that. Let's get rid of the other functions this machine was carrying on. And what you just suggested is a good example of that, where I was using two Revox tape recorders. It's an expensive way of doing it. So, other people built machines that do the repeating.

Mind you, I don't think they're as good. I think tape is interesting, because it's mechanical. I always try to bring things into the mechanical universe if I can, because there are so many more atoms in the mechanical world and, therefore, so much less predictability. Electronics always have the problem of dealing with the lives of too few atoms. That's why synthesizers are essentially boring.

MUSICIAN: *You've said that many times, yet still use them.*

ENO: Yeah, but I feed them into all sorts of junk. I don't know if when I last saw you I'd designed and built my Colouring Box. It's a loudspeaker with nine little speakers of the same size. I feed my synthesizer into that box and it stands on its back so the speakers face up. And I can put a plastic plumbing tube on each speaker so that I can make formants, you know, resonances at various frequencies. And then I can switch each speaker on, off or out of phase, so that I can either make a peak or a valley at that formant. It's like having a body for the instrument. But if you put this in, you must say it's patented. It isn't, but I know some bastard's going to copy it and make a lot of money from it. So any inquiries about this project should be directed to me. I have the patent rights. I know all the pitfalls.

MUSICIAN: *In the mid-70s you seemed to be a champion of new music. You produced Devo's first record, the first Ultravox record, the* No New York *collection. Since that time, you haven't really produced any new artists.*

ENO: Well, I'm just about to do something in Russia, with a Russian band who you won't have heard before. But there's two reasons for that. One is that I'm just not as interested in making records as I used to be. Now I have another career, which is as a visual artist. It takes up a great deal of time that used to be available for doing things like that. And secondly, I don't think music is where it's happening at the moment. I think it's in the visual arts. What's happened with recording, unfortunately, is that every consideration has been slanted towards what can be recorded, what can be made to work on a record. Well, records are quite a small part of musical experience. The next phase I'm waiting for is unrecordable music. That will be the interesting thing. Of course, musical live performance has some flexibility, but even that has been impacted upon by the considerations of recording. So that live performances have been kind of slanted towards the expectations of a record-educated public.

I even notice it with jazz now. Jazz has become sort of zippy and rather concisely cut. Better rehearsed, if you like. More like a recording.

MUSICIAN: *Well, it's interesting you would say that about unreproduceable art, because I always thought you were*

continued on page 114

TOOLS OF AMBIENCE

Eno outfitted his own 24-track studio about two years ago, and it's there that he does most of his work. A longtime disdainer of synthesizers, Eno only owns a few—a Prophet VS and a Yamaha DX7. He also has a DX7II,"but I never use it," he claims. "I like the original one. I hate changing instruments, quite honestly. If I find an instrument that I enjoy, I can't be bothered to accommodate another one. I've only owned three synthesizers." Even as a self-styled non-musician, he's been known to swing an axe or two, among them a Fernandes guitar and a 1964 Ampeg fretless bass.

Eno's much more interested in processing sounds, be they synthesized or natural. He uses an AMS harmonizer, Roland R-2000 reverb, two Rebus Gates, a Court Acoustics graphic equalizer, two Yamaha SPX-90s and an old Roland Tape Delay. He also uses a series of anonymous fuzz boxes, chorus pedals, flangers and phase shifters. "I fit those up to the mixing console's sends as you would send something out to an echo," he explains. "I'll do anything to make synthesizers a bit more dirty than they are." That console is a Harrison Mark III and he monitors on a variety of "homemade and peculiarly designed loudspeakers." And, finally, there's the Colouring Box.

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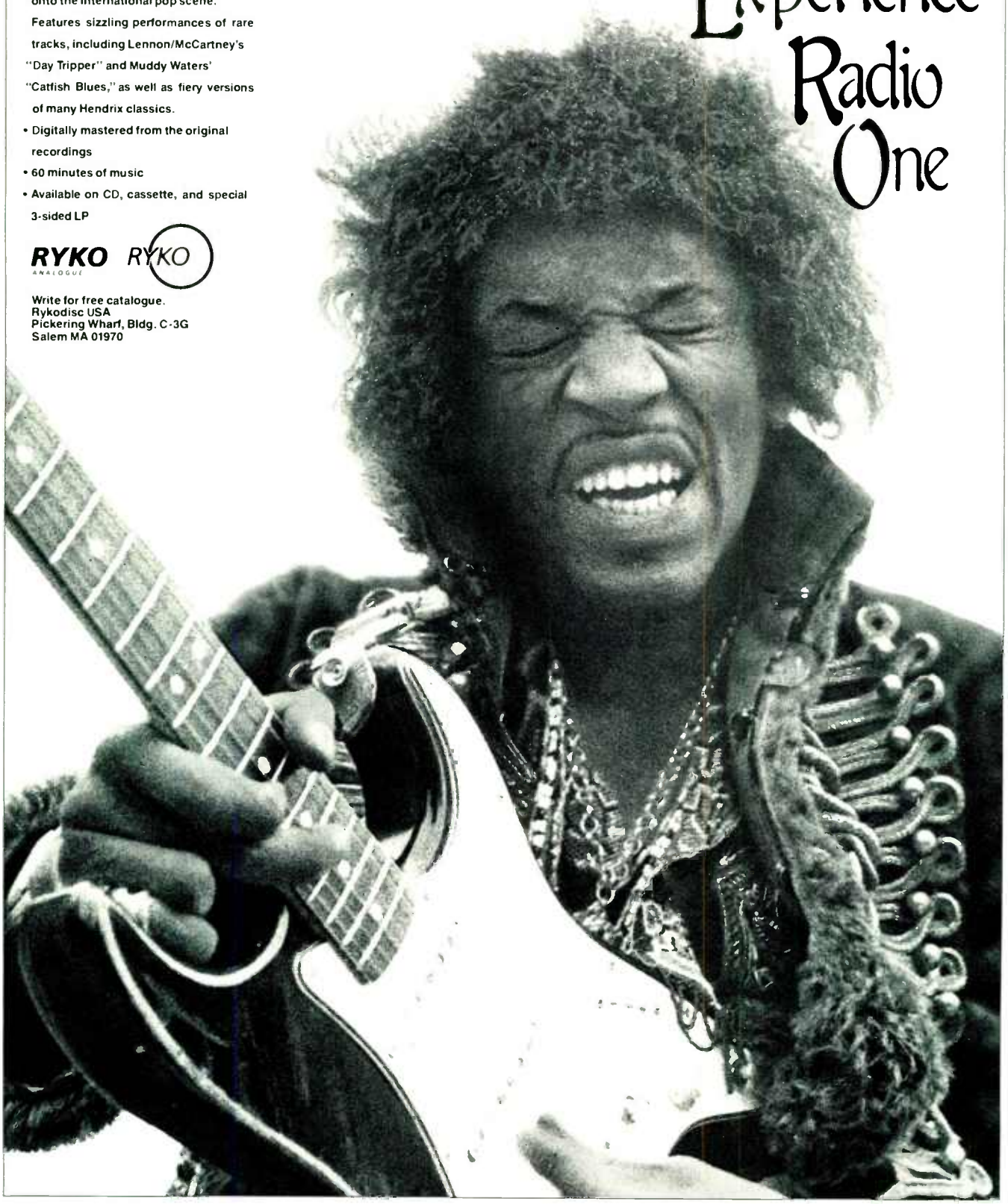

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MEET MR. HIP, **MITCHELL FROOM**, THE MAN OF A THOUSAND MIXES

by Alan di Perna

With albums, you can't just play it straight on every track. If a song wants to be a hit, if it seems like—done in its best possible way—it *could* be a hit, that's great. You can play it straight. But if a song wants to step out and be a bit risky or different, what's the point of trying to make it something it's not?"

The sentiments belong to Mitchell Froom. Sitting in the hospitable, fern-shaded backyard of his new home near the heart of Hollywood, Froom is explaining the producing philosophy behind the thinking person's pop records he makes: "I've always been a keen student of pop song structure. And of making a song into what it wants to be structurally. Most of the time, that turns out to be a bit of an unconventional form. Which I really find interesting, coming from the blues school of writing, where a guy would play two extra beats before a chorus just because he wanted to take a breath and wasn't necessarily thinking about staying in 4/4 time. You'll hear that in the work I've done—the way things lead into and out of the chorus. It's not something I think people are aware of. But it's that notion of someone singing a song and ignoring what would be expected of him. Just singing it in the most natural way. *That's* what you follow."

It's a fairly selfless outlook for a record producer, this concern with what the *song* "wants to do." Maybe it's a reflection of Froom's personality: low-key, but quietly insistent. Or maybe it goes back to Froom's origins as a keyboardist. He kicked off his pro career by playing and doing assistant production on two albums for David LaFlamme, one-time violinist for It's a Beautiful Day. In retrospect, Froom finds the records pretty embarrassing, but they were his entrée into the world of L.A. sessions. Between keyboard dates for high-rollers like Rick Springfield, Froom began to step out as an instrumental artist in his own right. In the early 80s he put together a series of two-man live shows with guitarist Ronnie Montrose. And in 1983 he released his solo debut album, a collection of electronically rendered beat-jazz instrumentals called *The Key of Cool*. The disc came out on Slash, and when the label discovered Froom had done it for just $2,000 they offered him a chance to produce the Del Fuegos.

Since then, Froom has concentrated fairly exclusively on production—these days, his session playing is restricted to special projects with old friends—like T-Bone Burnett and Elvis Costello. And together with T-Bone, Froom produced Peter Case's self-titled 1986 debut LP. Early on, Froom's production work with artists like the Fuegos, BoDeans and country-rocker Tim Scott earned him a reputation as just an "American roots rock" producer. He deftly cleared himself of *that* charge with his production of Australia's Crowded House—"the second group I'd ever produced," Froom says with a smile. The left-field success of their self-titled debut transposed Froom from cult/critical-fave producer to bona-fide hit maker. Which raised the stakes considerably when the time came to cut Crowded House's second album, *Temple of Low Men*.

"The pressure was there," he admits. "And we acknowledged it. But the great thing is that the record company (Capitol) really left us alone. I think you feel the pressure most when the label chooses to be there all the time and to try to influence what you're doing. But when that doesn't happen, you just go in every day and work on it. You don't worry about what other people think. You just please yourself."

If anything, he adds, *Temple of Low Men*

was an easier record to make than *Crowded House*. "On the first record we were really searching and didn't know what we wanted all the way down the line. When Neil and I discussed our plans for *Temple of Low Men*, we wanted to make the record a bit more colorful in general. We weren't afraid to be as wild as we would choose to be and to take some risks wherever they were applicable to the music."

The album was mixed in New York and overdubbed in Hollywood at the Sunset Sound Factory (Froom's usual hangout). But pre-production and basic tracks went down in Australia. Froom generally approaches these early stages of a project by becoming, in essence, the group's keyboardist, developing material as a de facto band member. "Even if I'm working with a solo artist. Most of the people I work with play guitar. So we get a drum machine, I sit at a keyboard and we get a little combo feel going. I record it into a blaster box. Working this way makes a big difference. You get ideas right off the bat, and you make music right off the bat. If you play it very simply, you get a real good notion of whether a song means anything or not."

One artist Froom generally does not take through extensive pre-production is Richard Thompson. Froom has produced two albums for the eclectic, idiosyncratic guitarist/songwriter/vocalist: 1986's *Daring Adventures* and the recently-released *Amnesia*. In both cases, says Froom, Thompson's songs were full grown and virtually perfect in their original forms—like Athena sprung from Zeus' brow.

"With a group like Crowded House, the harmonic structures of the songs are very crucial and can go in unexpected ways. It's something we spend a long time on. With Richard, if you tried to do that it would sound imposed. So really it's just a question of listening to the songs and deciding which ones to do."

In Thompson's case, then, "making the song what it wants to be" is largely a matter of keeping out of its way. "Richard was extremely aggressive in his guitar playing on this record," observes Froom, "so even the musicians laid back more than they did on the last record. People played it simpler around him in a lot of ways. He was just full of fire, maybe because he was more comfortable this time around."

There's no denying that *Amnesia* comes on a lot stronger than *Daring Adventures*. Many of the songs carry an intensely angry tone. "And there were some pretty devastating songs that we left off the album," Froom adds. The tracks rock hard, too. "Jerusalem on the Jukebox," Thompson's sendup of TV evangelists, could have been a mid-period Who song—complete with Keith

FROOM'S BROOMS

I've been really investing in *older* equipment," notes Froom. "Recently, I bought a great Indian harmonium. I've got a thing called a portative organ, which is based on a medieval design. And I've an old Baldwin electric harpsichord that I think is the one the Beatles used." And of course, Froom has his beloved Chamberlain, with its rickety, wobbly tape loops. He enhances all these offbeat instruments with a pile of old and new synths that includes a Roland Jupiter 8 and Vocoder Plus, Yamaha DX7 and TX816 tone rack, Oberheim Xpander and an Emulator II.

Other curios include a pre-Akai Steiner electronic valve instrument and a 1950s Wurlitzer Model B electric piano specially souped up by Dyna-My-Piano. Surprisingly, the man who brought the Hammond B-3 back into popularity doesn't have one, but rather uses the one at the studio he's working, usually the Sunset Sound Factory. He does own a CLS 222 electronic Leslie, which he uses for anything and everything.

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Moon drums.

"That's [session vet] Jim Keltner playing like he's 16. At the end, he completely goes off into outer space for a while. When we heard the playback—it was the second take or something—we just said, 'Thank God we got it on this take, because we're too old to keep at it all day!' That's a song that really has to be 'of the moment.' You couldn't do 30 takes of that song and get that fire."

Other tracks—like the stately, melancholic "Pharaoh"—give eloquent proof that Thompson hasn't been abandoned by his subtler, folkier muse. "I think that was a large reason why that song's on the record," Froom concurs. "It's definitely a song that was written in a folk way—verse after verse after verse. Actually, Richard played that song for me before the previous record we did; and it had about 12 verses. Even in its present, shorter form, we had a hard time keeping the song interesting. So we pared it down, worked on it and actually got it pretty good, I think."

When a song does call for the producer to do more than lay back, Froom rarely seems at a loss for ideas. "We used Northumbrian pipes on 'Pharoah.' They were tuned like they've have never been tuned before. There are three-part recorders on there and an instrument called a regal, which is a double-reed keyboard. It's a completely obnoxious-sounding instrument. Real edgy."

Along with the Crowded House and Thompson's records, Froom spent 1988 producing albums for two artists he hadn't worked with before: Pat McLaughlin and Tim Finn. "Four records in one year! That's something I'll never do again. But with artists like that, how can you possibly complain? I was really excited about the prospect of working with these people. And Capitol supportively stayed completely out of my way, which made it possible for me to work that hard."

Pat McLaughlin's rootsy, self-titled debut album was, in Froom's words, "not a very easy record to make. Pat is in his 30s and this is his first record. There was such a huge expectation behind it. And on first records you're always trying to decide what you're going to be. So we actually cut quite a few songs and had big discussions about the way songs could go. The problem, for me, was finding the ultimate type of backing for the way Pat sings and plays guitar. That's what he's really about—that rhythmic interplay between guitar and vocals."

In the end, Froom opted for a very spare, small-ensemble backing. "For some reason, records that you look back on and really like tend to be small ensemble records. Besides, I think it would have been ridiculous to go for a bigger production with Pat. He's the kind of vocalist where it's a bit of a seduction when he sings. And you don't seduce somebody over the *1812 Overture*."

The ensemble the producer built around McLaughlin included bassist Jerry Scheff, percussionist Alex Acuna and drummers Mickey Curry, Jerry Marotta and Jim Keltner. They all belong to a coterie of players who appear regularly on Froom's records.

As for Froom's production of Neil Finn's elder brother and one-time Split Enz cohort Tim Finn, oddly enough, it wasn't Crowded House that brought them together. "I had done a soundtrack for a film called *Slamdance*, mostly percussion and synthesizer bass, with South American and African influences in the music. I gave a tape of that to Neil, who gave it to his brother. And that's what Tim responded to. At that moment, he wasn't on a label, but he called me and said he would like some of his music to be along the lines of what I was doing on *Slamdance*. He *didn't* want to sound like Crowded House. That would have been pretty disastrous. And I

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wouldn't have been interested."

The record they made is due in January. According to Froom, it breaks down into two groups of songs. "One group I'd describe as highly percussive. And the other is more of a band type of sound. Maybe I'm naive about it, but I absolutely hate records that sound the same all the way through—the same drum sound from beginning to end, the same basic approach and a bunch of songs that sound like they were all written the same day. I like every track to be fairly radically different. I guess that's coming more from a '60s place or something like that."

Another Froom theory applies to the area of sonic experimentation. He attributes much of this to the working relationship he has cemented with engineer Tchad Blake. Froom and Blake have carefully explored the use of mechanical filters—i.e., miking drums, guitars, etc. through large tubes and other funnels, conduits and resonators. "You get all sorts of resonances that you couldn't get otherwise," Froom explains. "It sounds corny but the tube that we used recording Crowded House in Australia was a *dijeridu* [a large, wooden, tube-shaped native wind instrument]. We bought one and hooked it up; and that's the tube we ended up using for 'Kill Eye' and quite a bit of the snare from 'When You Come.' It has a real strong resonance."

Other evocative sounds were coaxed from Froom's exotic collection of keyboards. Among these is a Chamberlain, a pre-Mellotron instrument which uses tape loops as a source of string, wind, organ and other sounds. "If you ever want a section of a song to just explode," Froom advises, "or get abstract, or become disorienting for a second, you can mess around with the Chamberlain and usually come up with something."

Froom better come up with something for his next project, singer Maria McKee of Lone Justice fame. The record, he says, is likely to include some songs that McKee co-wrote with Robbie Robertson and, possibly, a Tim Finn composition. As always, Froom is searching for ways to pull what's unique out of the material and the artist.

"In a lot of ways, she sings *too* well, so it's easy to take her in an obvious way. But I think she has a lot in her voice that hasn't really been shown on record before. I think the album will be very different from her previous work. It'll be more out of the coliseum, more intimate and have more real singing. It's not going to be an easy record, but it could be a great record." Ⓜ

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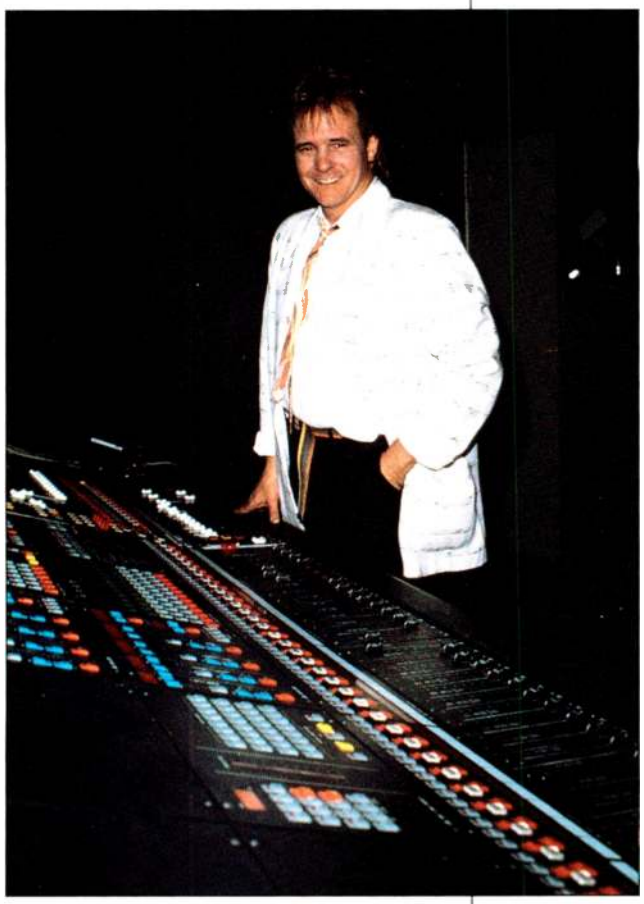
DOES KEITH OLSEN REALLY BELIEVE IN THIS STUFF, OR WHAT?



by Alan di Perna

It's easy to sneer at the increasingly predictable formulas that sell records in the millions these days. What's hard is to actually *believe* in the stuff. Just think about the Kierkegaardian leap of faith that must be involved in taking some- thing like the "power ballad" seriously.

To all appearances, Keith Olsen believes. Maybe it's all a highly polished con, but here's a grown man who can look you in the eye and tell you that Whitesnake's David Coverdale is "the master of the clever rock song." Or that the "chicks"—not the "dudes," mind you, but the "chicks"—all really identified with Foreigner's all-time randy bozo anthem, "Hot Blooded."

Olsen's faith has paid off in spades. He's netted prodigious hits with Fleetwood Mac, Foreigner, Pat Benatar, Rick Springfield, Sammy Hagar, and Whitesnake; and done respectably-selling discs with Santana, Heart, Joe Walsh, 38 Special, Saga and the Starship. In short, the guy is *Mister* AOR.

Mr. AO...er...Olsen greets me at the front office of his studio, Goodnight L.A. He's attended by a secretary who wouldn't look out of place cavorting in garters in an MTV video. About 5'5", dressed in a crisp, striped blazer, Olsen presses my hand warmly and leads me to the studio's spacious control room. The tanned skin around his eyes crinkles when he smiles. He looks tired. He's simultaneously finishing up records for Ozzy Osbourne, Night Ranger, pop singer Fiona and a few tracks for REO Speedwagon. At the same time, he's completed the first release for his new Atlantic-distributed label, Kore Records—a Swedish act called Time Gallery. He's hoping to get this all finished in time to go into the studio with Latin artist Emmanuel.

"I've definitely never done something like this before," he says of the latter project. "But that's how I like things to be. I've always worked very hard to make sure the sound I give one band is nothing like what I do with another band. 'Cause otherwise, radio will burn out on you.

"Like if Prince puts out three albums a year, you're gonna get real burned out on Prince. As it is, he's putting out one-and-a-half albums a year now and radio's close to burning out on him. He should definitely go away for about a year and not put out another album. But see...he writes 10 songs, he records 10 songs, he releases 10 songs. There's no one to tell him, 'Well, look, two of these songs are good and the others are basically crap.' That's a producer's job. And it's a hard job."

It's a job for which Olsen has all the right qualifications: A few years of Music Ed. training at the University of Minnesota; early '60s road dues as a bassist for country acts like Jimmy Rodgers and Gail Garnett; membership in one of the mid- 60s' archetypal garage bands, the Music Machine ("Talk Talk"). When the Music Machine broke up—"basically because of foul play," as Olsen puts it—he was ready for a change. "I'd been on the road for six years and I was tired of it. I'd been in a couple of plane wrecks and that was enough. I decided I wanted to stay in music and see if I could work on this side of the glass. I ran into Curt Boettcher, who was an old friend of mine from school. He was producing the Association and Tommy Roe, so I got to slip into the studio with him.

"We worked in Gary Paxton's garage, behind an electronics store in Hollywood. [Then the Association's arranger, Paxton had produced a number of early- 60s novelty hits like "Alley Oop" and "The Monster Mash."] He had his control room in a bus, with a bunch of wires going to

RON WOLFSON

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the garage. We cut a whole bunch of records, none of which were giant successes; but I learned a lot from them."

But it wasn't, Olsen says, "until I got past the technical side of things that the records started selling—once I was going for performance and songs, more than the clinical expertise of the recorded medium. And this was during the early-to-mid 70s, when a record had to have every piece of grease known to man on it or it wasn't considered any good."

The first Olsen production that "started selling" in phenomenal numbers was Fleetwood Mac's 1975 *Fleetwood Mac* LP. Olsen fortuitously teamed a veteran British rhythm section with a young Southern California couple (Buckingham & Nicks) that he'd been trying to get signed. The combination proved the catalyst that crystalized American FM radio's metamorphosis from "progressive to "AOR." Suddenly, Keith Olsen was a hot property—a transition, he says, which took its toll on his sanity.

"I could have killed myself at certain times. I really went nuts, to the point where, if a record didn't sell five million units, I would just be totally down on myself. I could not stand the rejection if the record didn't happen."

When Olsen entered the studio with Foreigner in 1978 to cut their *Double Vision* LP, there were added pressures: "Everybody was saying that Foreigner sounded just like Boston. And everybody was worried that Boston's [*Don't Look Back*] would be released and wipe out Foreigner. So when we did the *Double Vision* album, I made sure we were going right back to the roots of rock 'n' roll. Let Boston do the eight million guitar overdubs and note-for-note, harmonized solos. Let's get down to some rock and roll. Our album came out. Their album came out. Theirs sold 500,000 and started slowing down. Ours sold seven or eight million. Gee. We had a lot of really good songs on ours. They had one good song on theirs."

Probably every record producer ever interviewed has said "the song is king;" but Olsen has been consistent in his attempt to subordinate technological flash to songwriting and performance in his productions. That's one reason why, while he likes to keep his output diverse, there are some genres he won't work in.

"I don't know if you can say there's *too* much emphasis on technical polish in CHR [Contemporary Hit Radio] these days. Let's just say there's *so* much emphasis on that lately. When you can have just a sound sell a record—screw the performance, screw the song—that's pretty weird. A lot of dance records are like that. So I've stayed away from making those records. People have made money with them, but I prefer to do records with the kinds of songs and groups that make people want to go out and buy an album, not just a 12" single."

If Olsen keeps techno overkill at bay, it's probably because he understands recording technology well enough to do so. In 1979—tired of working at commercial facilities—he designed and built his own studio, Goodnight L.A. A Texas branch, Goodnight Dallas, followed later. Always a state-of-the-art showplace, Goodnight L.A. is currently equipped with Trident's new analog-digital Di-An console (one of the three currently installed anywhere) and two Sony 3324 digital 24-tracks. Given the fairly high percentage of hard rock that Olsen cuts, I express surprise at the ascendancy of digital machines at Goodnight L.A.

"You mean you can't cut rock 'n' roll on digital? That adage? To a certain extent, I go along with that. But it depends on what you're going after. If you're going after the tiered drum sound—where there's tiers and tiers of overheads for near ambience and far ambience—if you're going for that drum

continued on page 62

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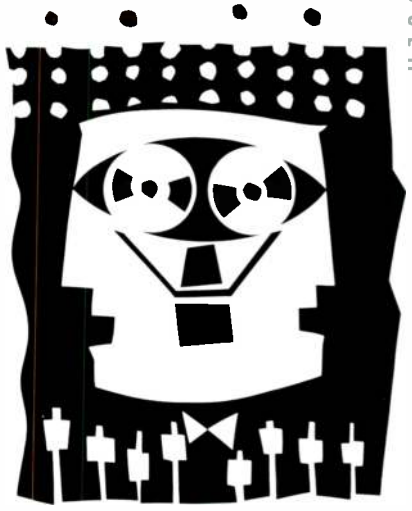

by Dan Forte

Headphones in place, the Robert Cray Band is poised in the studio, listening to the opening chords of a new demo by songwriter/co-producer Dennis Walker. Drummer David Olson immediately replaces the mechanized drum-machine backbeat, while keyboardist Peter Boe plays fills over the alternating minor-chord riff. Before the vocal enters, Richard Cousins has already beefed up the bassline to suit his own style. Cray sings a bit tentatively as he reads the lyric sheet and listens to Walker's vocal in the cans. He leans into the next line with more conviction, his booming gospel shout contrasting sharply with Walker's shaky whisper. Before getting to the verse's punch line, Cray motions the control room to remove Walker's scratch vocal from his headset, and his voice soars confidently.

"He did the same thing with 'Smoking Gun,'" says the other half of Cray's producing/songwriting team, Bruce Bromberg. "He listened to one verse and said, 'Okay.'"

After his two High-Tone albums topped Britain's indy charts in '83 and '85, Cray and High-Tone stepped into the big leagues with *Strong Persuader* (on Poly-Gram's Mercury/High-Tone hybrid), and Robert Cray became arguably the most commercially successful blues singer of all time. Those three albums (as well as Cray's 1980 debut on the now defunct Tomato label and his new *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*) were all the product of his eight-year association with HighTone's Bruce Bromberg and Dennis Walker, who co-produced all five and wrote many of his most recognizable tunes. Considering the history of most R&B labels, notably Atlantic Records and their success with artists such as Aretha Franklin and Ray Charles, it should come as no surprise to find that the behind-the-scenes choreographers of Cray's climb to the top are a couple of white guys in their mid-40s. But it's still a bit disconcerting to hear their original demos of tunes like "Right Next Door" and "Foul Play" and discover that both have roots, first of all, in country music.

"You'd be amazed by the way things sound when they present them to us and how they change," says Cray. "We pretty much go off on our own. In the case of Dennis, he usually comes in with chord charts, so if we make any changes at all it'll be very minor. Bruce will have his stuff on tape, and then we'll completely change it around."

"In my case," allows Bromberg, "the demos might sound more country than Dennis'. My songs are generally simpler than his. And I don't put in the seventh chords and stuff he puts in."

"The big difference," Walker points out, "is in the vocals, believe me. If you listen closely to our demos, with us singing, they're gonna sound country no matter what we try to do. It's kind of hard to explain, but when Bob gets hold of it, it's the same, but it really isn't."

Walker and Bromberg's association with Cray began around 1978, but their relationship with each other goes back some 13 years prior to that. Dennis Walker grew up in Grant's Pass, a small town in Oregon. "I came to Los Angeles in '65, and the very first guy I met when I moved to here was Bruce. My uncle had finagled me a job in the warehouse at Dot Records, and—"

"—that was the first job I got when I got out of the Army," says Bromberg, finishing Walker's sentence.

"When we started working at Dot," Dennis continues, "one day we saw that Long Gone Miles needed a guitar player. So Bruce was a semi-mediocre guitar player, and he said let's go. Turned out

Long Gone needed a whole band, so for some reason we figured I could play bass. Bruce traded in one of his old beat-up electric guitars, and we got a St. George bass. We put a band together and about a month later went in and cut our first sides. And boy, was it awful."

"But very funky," Bromberg adds with pride.

Walker studied trumpet in college, idolizing Conrad Gozzo, who, according to Dennis, "was absolutely the best swing trumpet player of his day. I had heard a lot of really good big-band-type blues, and then when I came to L.A. Bruce was deep into it. He took me to his place the first night and played 'Going Down Slow' by Howlin' Wolf and 'Brown-skin Woman' about eight times. In Oregon it was hard to find that stuff."

"He knew about Ray Charles and that stuff," Bromberg elaborates. "See, I was born in Chicago, and grew up in a small town called Park Forest. And I was a country music fan as a kid—still am. Hank Williams, Carl Smith, Webb Pierce—that was my stuff. I wanted to be Hank Williams. Then, of course, 1954 and '55 came along, and one day you turn on the radio, and something comes on—you don't know what it is. And there was Elvis. You've got to remember, in the context of those days, Elvis and Johnny Cash were electrifying records; they were so different from everything else."

By the late '70s, they had begun producing blues artists such as guitarist Phillip Walker for their Joliet label and writing original material. "I think the reason we started writing songs for blues guys," states Bromberg, "was that they hardly ever wrote many songs. So you're faced with doing 'Sweet Home Chicago' again, or trying to come up with something new. That was our concept—that you're not going to go anywhere doing what was done great already. As far as bringing the blues to the '80s, I don't know. I think that's great—it's a nice thing for people to say—but if you look at most of those songs, they're basically about relationships. I don't know that that's an '80s subject. I don't think either one of us has any concept of trying to make a guy like Robert Cray sing about big-legged women and pickin' cotton; that's not his orientation."

The minute they first saw Cray in '78, the pair knew they were on to something. "I had heard of Robert," Bromberg recalls, "from some people who told me he was like Magic Sam—who's a guy we both would have liked to have worked with. You've got to remember, in those days we just had this little label that had no money, and I was already working for Tomato. I went to this club in San Francisco to see the Cray Band, but at that time, basically, it was the Curtis Salgado show," he says, referring to the band's former singer/harp player. "He was more of the frontman. But I remember Bob sang a song with a lot of changes called 'Where Does a Man Go from Here'—an old Johnny Taylor song. He was so smooth. I said, 'Here's the guy.'

"To me, what I saw in Robert was a guy who could not only be a great blues artist, but also part of that Stax soul thing. But if you notice on a lot of those Southern soul records, guitar was not really a featured instrument—there was a lick here, a lick there—and Steve Cropper's stuff, as great as it was, was always rhythm. I figured with Robert, here's a guy who could do blues, he could do soul, and he could play the guitar. Plus he had a beautiful voice, and he was young. I got a lot of heat from various people because of the minimum amount of Curtis on the Tomato album, *Who's Been Talkin'*. And he's a talented guy.

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But that was a conscious decision on my part. Robert was what I wanted."

At this stage do the two producers divide their roles in the studio? "I don't know what we do, particularly," says Bromberg. "As it's evolved, on Dennis' tunes maybe he takes a little more of a hand, and on my tunes maybe I take a little more of a hand. But we both are involved in everything."

While Walker writes most of his tunes alone, Bromberg's are often collaborations with Cray or other band members. In fact Walker and Bromberg have only one co-write in the Cray stockpile. "The collaborations generally take place in the studio," Bruce details, "in the sense that for years Robert and I haven't sat down and tried to write a song together. I'll have the words, at least the rhythm that I want, and the basic melody, and then Robert will Robert-ize it. I don't write basslines and things. My orientation is basically so country, I feel I should give them as much room as I can to do what they will. On 'Smoking Gun,' Richard added the bassline, which is a very integral part of that song, and Robert came up with that lick. What I had was just a straight I-IV-V minor blues. Robert took the V chord and made it a IV chord—so where you would have a B7 chord, if you were in E, he made it another Am chord."

Walker says he prefers minor keys "for the mood of it, and, besides, you can shift the chords around so much easier. And Bob is a smouldering type of guy. You don't get the real major types of things, or the real obviously minor types of things. They're kind of thoughtful. In fact, if you read most of those songs, the outcomes are almost always kind of vague. So that's the mood you're after."

As for directing Cray in the studio, Bromberg states, "As great as Robert is, he'll always take direction. He won't even say, 'Why didn't you like that?' He'll play a solo 21 times if you tell him to."

Does the pair coach him in any way vocally? "I used to try," laughs Bromberg, "but it's silly."

"With Cray, he knows when it's good or not. And believe me, he'll hear it way before you will. And he would never let any bullshit go," says Walker. "The first time I heard the way Robert sang 'Right Next Door,' the way he built it up, I thought, 'Bob, I really thought you could give me more energy in that.' But you listen to that, and the guy has an incredible knack for slowly building it up; you're all the time simmering. And to try to direct him from that is lunacy."

continued on page 113

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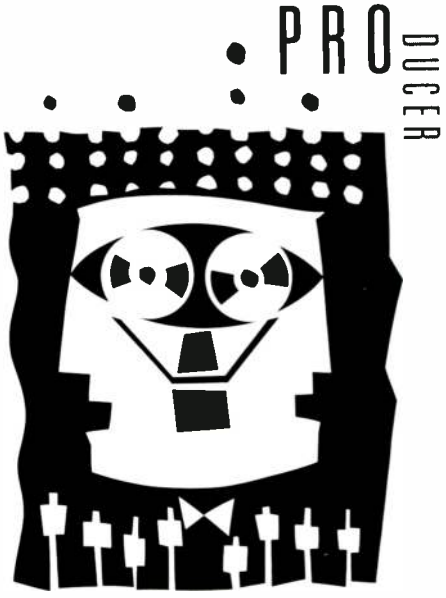
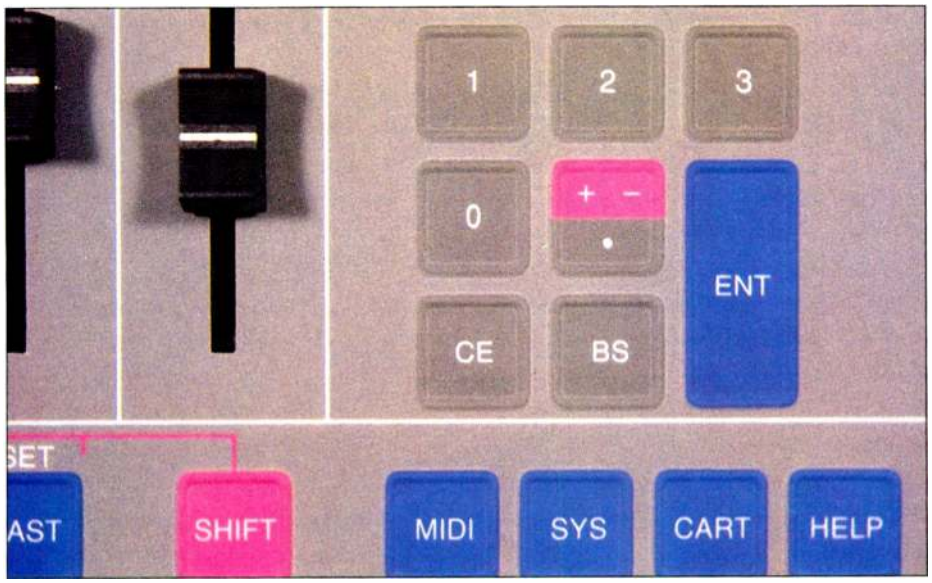
ARE YOU READY FOR THE WELL-TEMPERED **MIDI REVERB**? A LOOK AT AKG'S ADR 68K



by Jock Baird

It's true—the other half lives differently than we do. They cut their asparagus tips shorter, they don't pump their own gas and they use different reverbs. The truly wealthy don't have the same little black rack boxes you or I have in our homes—be they of the $200 variety or the $2000. No, they wouldn't be caught dead using anything that costs less than 10 Gs. And for good reason: "pro" reverbs simply sound better and do more than "semi-pro" ones, sad as that is to report. How would a schlep like me know? Ah, step over here and take a look at this AKG ADR 68K. This little gray and pink panel of sliders, buttons and liquid crystal is a veritable paradigm of what today's signal processing can do when you get it locked under MIDI control. In fact, the well-tempered MIDI reverb is far closer to being a musical instrument than its processing forebears ever imagined.



A good digital reverb, as you undoubtedly know, is a sampling synthesizer (you *don't* know? Go find Alan di Perna's horrifying introduction to reverb in *Musician's Players' Guide to Home Recording*). It samples whatever you give it and uses those recordings to synthesize a series of stereo aftershocks that mimmick the way sound decays inside a space. This could be anything from evenly spaced "echoes" (which are really delays) to bizarre, oblique parking garages. Certain setups of the synthesis system lend themselves to certain spaces, and digital reverbs are organized into what are called *algorithms*—preshaped for doing halls, rooms, classic old plate reverbs or DDL-type stuff. Within each algorithm, you get a set of individual parameters to tweak. The better the reverb, the more of these you can fool with. Our reverbs have four or five; this ADR 68K has four or five *pages* of parameters, six to a page. And any one of them can be controlled externally via MIDI.

The most basic parameter is hang time, known in the trade as *RT60* (or the time it takes the reverb level to drop 60 decibels). MIDI control means you can map RT60 to . . . gosh, anything. Here's an easy one: have the sustain pedal from your MIDI keyboard set the RT60 to infinite. Then when you step on the pedal, the reverb just hangs there like a big sonic chandelier. Or you could make RT60 vary with a CV foot pedal (similar to a volume pedal). Or maybe if you wanted to enhance a keyboard part, you could make the RT60 value inversely dependent on velocity, so that light parts hang for as much as 45 seconds while sharp, percussive attacks ring off immediately. And, of course, that would be over a full range of MIDI velocity, not just either/or. When changing a parameter over MIDI, it's especially fun to watch the display on the ADR spin to the correct value, then careen off again at the heels of your next command.

The next aspect of reverb you want to control is the musical *frequency* of the reflections—will they be bassy, honky, or whatever? The ADR is typical in that it has separate decay parameters for both high and low frequencies, and allows you to choose a crossover point. What is not typical is its ability to map all three interactively to MIDI, say using MIDI note numbers to give a bright, sizzling color to the reverb on higher notes and darken up lower ones. Or map frequency to MIDI velocity, putting attacks right in your face.

Before a reverberation really unfolds, two essential elements occur. The first is *pre-delay*, which is the time before the reverb actually kicks in. Mapping this to a mod wheel, for example, is a terrific way to fine tune a vocal's intelligibility. Then there are *early reflections*, an important aspect of what space we're being tricked into thinking we're in. Low-rent recordists like us don't get to fool much with ER's, but

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look what the ADR can do. It takes its two stereo inputs, and splits each into three early reflection taps; then it promptly crossfades one from each side to the other. Naturally, each of the six taps has its own delay and level control (hey, this is the big time), so you can fine tune every individual ER. Then there are master controls for the overall level of the ERs—one fabulous MIDI map I tried used the CV foot pedal to crossfade levels between the ERs and the RT60. Another did the same thing on the pitch wheel, nice because it has a center detent position it automatically returns to. You can learn a lot about reverb by isolating these two elements.

One crucial aspect of reverb is its *definition*. Since the sound is made up of irregularly repeating echoes, the actual number of those echoes has a big effect on whether the sound is smeared or clear. The number of echoes at the beginning of the reverb is called *diffusion*, while the number at the end (or "tail") is called *density*. High diffusion lends itself to a swooshing, white-noise effect, while high density makes things unintelligible. Of course too little density can make a reverberation "lumpy." The ADR has the usual controls to fine tune definition, but also has a randomizing effect to vary the tail so it doesn't get too mechanically repetitious. I did try mapping some definition parameters to MIDI but the effect was subtle at best.

There are two more parameters that are far less subtle, *size* and *depth*. These are interpretive in that they simultaneously affect several of the other parameters we've discussed, and as such are well worth slaving to MIDI. Size controls the apparent size of the room, expressed as a percentage of the algorithm's potential (after a certain point, a big chamber can't just turn into a hall; a new algorithm must be used). The bigger the room, the longer the RT60 and the lower the density, and vice versa, just as it does in real life. Depth controls the listener's apparent distance from the source—at a high value, you're in the back of the hall, at a low one you're in the front row. Depth is a complex function of wet and dry mix and changes in how we hear early reflections, and is especially useful in putting a solo instrument or vocal part forward on a verse and back on a chorus.

Okay all you Phil Collins fans, here's where we talk about *gated reverb*. That's of course where the sound squelches out a few milliseconds after the sound level goes below a certain threshold. Almost all new digital units have gated programs now, but not that much control. How much is enough? Try this. First, let's not merely have the reverb on or off, but rather have two separate control pages for what's called *running* and *stopped* situations. You might want the gated sound to have a little sense of space, or you might even want it to have a *longer* hang time. You might want to kill all the high frequencies on the running reverb and then push them up on the stopped portion, so that the sound whooshes a bit as the gate kicks in (careful, though; this is getting to be a flavor-of-the-month drum sound). And the ADR also gives you a *stop delay* time control to set precisely how long you want the running reverb to wait before the stopped one kicks in.

One of the coolest things you can do on the ADR is to put the gate under MIDI control. One setup has the key-on control the gate, so that as soon as you lift up your finger, the gate kicks in. This is about as organic as gating gets. Another way the ADR can gate is to set the RT60 level to correspond to the signal level at the input. As the signal level falls, the RT60 drops with it, following it more closely than a simple on/off gate can.

The delay/effects section of the ADR is pretty close to how us poor folks do chorusing, flanging and whatnot, with controls for *delay*, *gain* (a.k.a. *feedback*), *depth* (of any pitch change) and the oscillation *rate* of that change. Of course, the ever-fancy ADR also controls the specific number of delays (as many as 12) and the amount of high-end roll-off; one algorithm can run two independent delay setups. It also has an impressive stereo simulator. And one big multi-effect algorithm combines all of the above, including reverb. Speaking of combinations, the ADR will also simultaneously run two different reverbs or effects algorithms, routing them in several different configurations to either or both pairs of stereo audio outputs. One of the most fun MIDI effects maps in the ADR has the echoes bouncing around the stereo field, with the mod wheel controlling the perceived size of the loop and the CV pedal controlling the RT60. And who wouldn't enjoy having a flange program in which the mod wheel controls the frequency of the effect and the CV pedal the rate? Or another variation in which the mod wheel controls the delay time, the foot pedal controls the pitch change and the sustain pedal kicks the feedback up to 100 percent. Or maybe you'd like the portamento pedal to "freeze" the incoming signal in a looping delay. The ADR can do it all.

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nant frequency drops way down and that low end is way out there."

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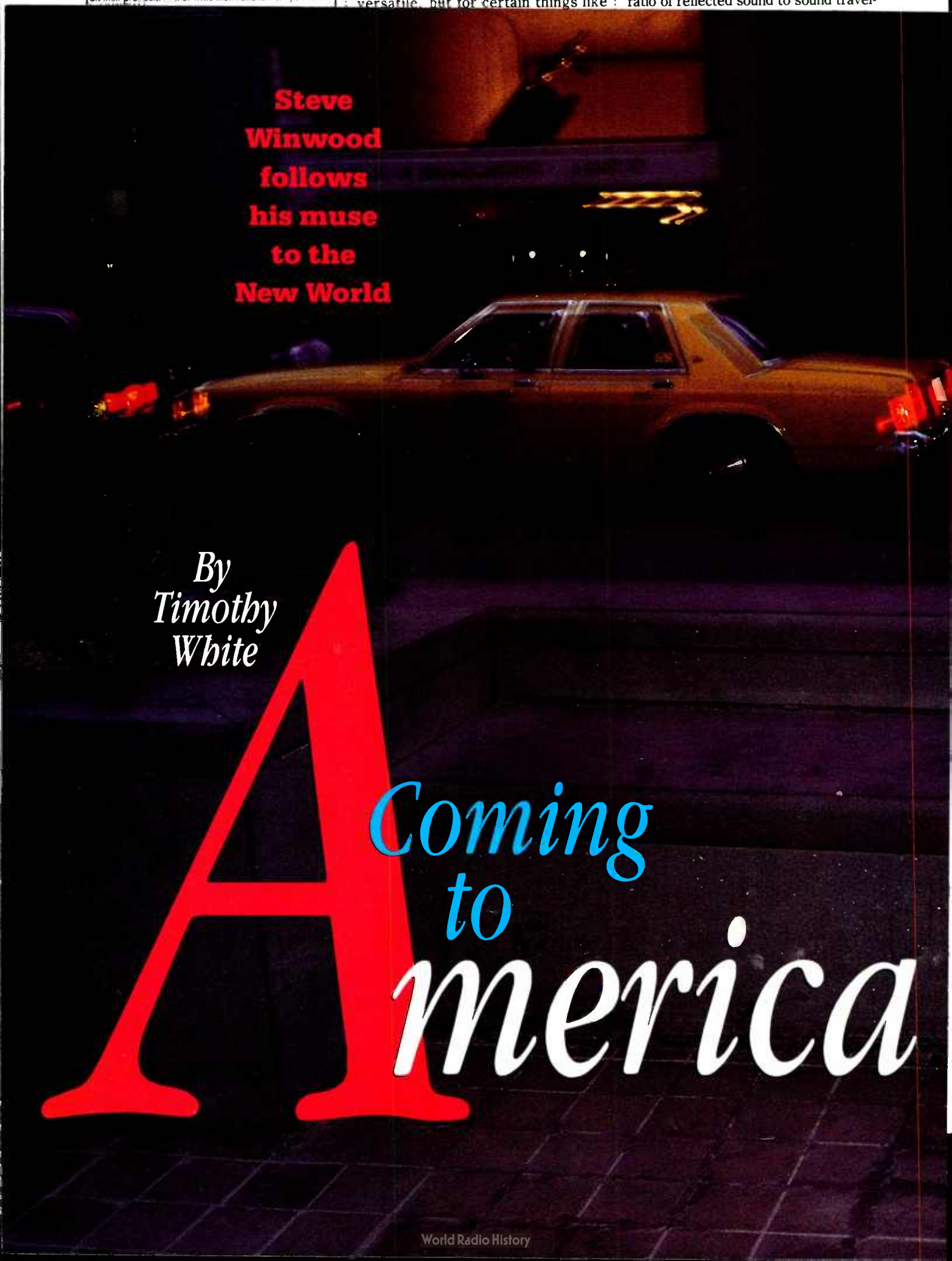

Steve Winwood follows his muse to the New World

By Timothy White

Coming to America

"I really love Americans and American musical roots," Steve Winwood offers. "It could be my British need for discipline that makes me admire the American appetite for freedom and passion. I've always been fascinated with the possibilities of drawing all these Southern, Detroit, Caribbean and African grooves together, along with what some people hear as a 'Church of England' thing in my keyboards. I don't argue that it isn't

LYNN GOLDSMITH LGI

spiritual-sounding. I'm a former choirboy, after all, and I've played Sunday organ at this church in Gloucestershire until last June, when I returned from touring to find that the vicar had died. I think my music remains more individual than my influences, but I have to confess"—he pauses for a swallow of sandwich—"that, in fact, I based the original Traffic on Jr. Walker's All-Stars!"

In light of the homage Winwood pays Walker on the title track of *Roll with It*, his latest LP, the admission surely seems apt, but perhaps a tad exaggerated?

"No! No! Think about it: The original lineup of the All-Stars was sax, organ, guitar and drums, with no bass—and that was the Traffic concept, although it did get modified over time. Vocally, I've definitely been influenced by the great saxophonists, and Jr. Walker is certainly one of those. I'm a huge fan and I'll go anywhere to catch a performance. I'll never forget the last time I saw him at the Lone Star Cafe in New York City."

He was ripping it up, eh?

"Jr.? Of course—but so was I. This was the night I met my wife Jeannie! She was there with some friends, and me with mine, and I started chatting with her at a table! Yes, it's a wonderful little bar, and Junior serenaded us!"

Although he's dining in London's tony Belgravia section this afternoon, his marriage to Tennessee-bred Eugenia Crafton has clearly furthered Winwood's Americanization. These days Steve and Jeannie divide their time between a farm south of Nashville and a manor house in Gloucestershire, England. *Back in the High Life* (1986), the greatest hits album *Chronicles* (1987) and the new *Roll With It* all reflect the growing contentment of Steve Winwood. Coming to America seems to have been a wise move. "Oh, absolutely," he says. "Though I'll always keep our house in England. But there's something about the mix of everything in the States that really grabs me. And, of course, Jeannie grabbed me, too."

So Jr. Walker practically introduced him to his wife. Who introduced Jr. Walker to Winwood?

"The first person who ever played me any Jr. Walker was Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones. When the Spencer Davis Group toured with the Stones in the beginning, I stayed 'round Brian's place in London and we got on great, playing records and talking music for hours. We'd also listen to Otis Redding, the Mar-Keys, all that great Memphis Stax-Volt stuff."

"A gleam in his eye": Winwood leading a Santa Monica Traffic jam, circa 1971.

Did he consider settling in Memphis rather than the Nashville area? "Good question. My wife's family is from around Nashville, so that seemed most natural, but I wouldn't have minded being in Memphis at all. They're all just a stone's throw from each other, anyhow. Nashville sounds like light-years away from Muscle Shoals, but it's just a hundred miles down the road. And of course all the people from Muscle Shoals are still in and out of Nashville constantly, while a lot of the Memphis musicians are likewise regulars in Nashville.

"Sessions are the nicest way to make friends among Nashville musicians. I did one with Mike Lawler, a keyboard and synthesizer whiz who's worked with James Brown and the Allman Brothers, and another with Jo-El Sonnier, the great Cajun zydeco accordionist. I just loved how sociable these people are in the control room."

Has he ever considered hanging out a shingle in Music City, U.S.A.? "Oh, I have already! I rent a little office right on Music Row in Nashville, and I go in there with some keyboards, a drum machine and a little four-track cassette recorder. I got quite a few ideas for the new album down there. The new album seems a definite continuation of the band sound of *Back in the High Life*, and it's also got that cross of Motown and Stax qualities, but I would argue that this combination, merged with my own Irish, Scottish and Anglican church borrowings, dates well back to Traffic. Remember that on the 1973 *Shoot Out at the Fantasy Factory* album we had Roger Hawkins and David Hood in the band, and they're Southern fellows who are associated more with Muscle Shoals and the Memphis sound than anything else.

"But every time I say things about Southern music, people recoil and say, 'He's not gonna make Steve Winwood country and western albums!'" He shrugs his rail shoulders. "Fact is, wherever I do an album, it ends up sounding for better or worse like me, whether it's in Gloucestershire, New York, Jamaica or—maybe someday—Nashville."

To spend five minutes with today's Steve Winwood is to see precisely where the boyish glee of vintage rock stardom has been preserved. He was born on May 12, 1948 in the sooty industrial sprawl of Birmingham, England, and grew up in the suburb of Great Barr. While his father toiled at Hall's Iron Foundry, young Stevie studied Elgar and Vaughan Williams in music classes at Great Barr Comprehensive School. During summers he hiked and camped in Cornwall and Devon with the 236th Perry Barr Boy Scout Troop and then performed with combos he and older brother Mervyn "Muff" Winwood organized in town. Victimized for his forbidden musical leanings, the classically-trained Steve was first expelled from Great Barr Comprehensive (before a schoolwide assembly chaired by headmaster Oswald Beynon), and then from the Birmingham and Midland Institute, for the sin of playing rock 'n' roll.

Not only did his sax-playing father not punish him for these failings, but Mr. Winwood imparted a few worldly tips from his own experience as a moonlighting bandleader, telling his boy how he advertised his own combo as if it was two different outfits, one very expensive and snobbish, the other working-class and cheap. "One way or another," his son says, "they always got work. Pretty shrewd, I thought." Soon Stevie was off gigging in Midlands cabarets from Birmingham to Manchester, keen to absorb the entire musical gamut, from Garnet Mimms and the Enchanters to the fugues of modern German composer Paul Hindemith.

At 40, Winwood retains the same humility, zestfulness and convoluted conversational zeal that charmed bandleader/Birmingham University instructor Spencer Davis back in 1963. Davis first spied the 14-year-old Ray Charles soundalike during an evening gig of the Muff Woody Jazz Band (headed by Steve's bassist brother) at Birmingham's Digbeth Civic Hall.

"He was playing piano, an Oscar Peterson-type thing," says Davis. "Then Steve got hold of a melodica like Ray Charles used to play and did a version of 'One Mint Julep.' You know when you hear something that gets down to the bottom of your spine, and you realize you're in the presence of something different? And I didn't hear him sing—he was just playing."

Steve and Muff promptly signed on with the Spencer Davis Rhythm and Blues Quartet, Steve at first restricting himself to guitar. It was an impromptu acquaintance with the house-

JOEL AXELRA/RETNA

owned Hammond B-3 at a Stoke-on-Trent club called the Place that moved Winwood to merge his clarion vocals with the rich attack of electronic keyboards. By 1964 the (newly abbreviated) Spencer Davis Group and its soul-belting teenage keyboardist had a No. 1 hit in the U.K. with Jamaican reggae songwriter Jackie Edwards' "Keep on Running," while the next two years saw the release of a pair of global top 10 smashes, "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "I'm a Man."

"Lyrically, 'I'm a Man' was the brainchild of New York producer Jimmy Miller, who had a feeling for the American market," says Spencer Davis, "and Jimi Hendrix showed me the E-7th guitar chord on the track. Steve provided the rest of the American R&B edge with his marvelous vocals and keyboards, and it's funny, because the song had originally been intended for a 'Swinging London' film.

"'Gimme Some Lovin" was also written with an American perspective. We used to rehearse at the Marquee Club in London, and Muff had a bass riff from an old record by Homer Banks [the prolific Stax songwriter] called 'Whole Lotta Lovin.' I hadn't heard that song, but I thought the riff Muff was playing was fantastic. I added a G, A and a C Minor to it, Steve played a Ravel's 'Bolero' kind of thing, and Steve said to me, 'Don't play major, play minors.'

"The English version was a stark, haunting thing, but the American version, which everybody knows best, had backing vocals. It was number two in England and the only thing that kept it from number one was 'Good Vibrations' by the Beach Boys. Steve and us had just the sound America craved! Pity the Spencer Davis Group never toured the States."

Steve Winwood was not yet 18 when the Spencer Davis Group disbanded—a result of Steve's musical restlessness—and it would be another decade of splashy ensemble work with the Powerhouse, Traffic, Blind Faith, Ginger Baker's Airforce and Go before Winwood got around to distinguishing himself on his own. Clues to Steve's current stateside allure as a solo performer seem woven into his band-to-band search for a cohesive career identity.

Winwood earned the accolade of "a mate's mate" from friends like Jim Capaldi, who admired his personal loyalty. Capaldi and Winwood's co-authorship of "Hearts on Fire" on *Roll with It* marks 22 unbroken years of fraternity since the day they converged while buying black American R&B records in Birmingham's Diskery record shop.

"The new album has that cross of Motown and Stax qualities, but I would argue that those— merged with my own Irish, Scottish and Anglican church borrowings—date well back to Traffic".

NADIRA HUSAIN/RETNA

Watching Capaldi and Winwood interact one Gloucestershire morning in 1982 while on a break from co-producing Jim's *Fierce Heart* LP, Steve reveled in his chum's lavishly deprecating Traffic anecdotes. Most centered on the group's pot-stoked folk-rock flights, with "the band recording hundreds of tapes outdoors, many of them filled with tweeting wildly in the backgound so you could scarcely hear what the devil we'd been aiming for!"

For all the good humor, however, Winwood firmly maintains that Traffic's bucolic merger of English folk idioms and American blues-rock was "a very conscious thing; we had a ball as people, but musically we were *not* merely mucking about."

"I always need the spark and inspiration of another person or two to urge me on."

"Steve has a gleam in his eye for anything he decides to participate in," says producer Russ Titelman, who shared a Record of the Year Grammy for *High Life*'s "Higher Love," "and he can communicate strength even when he's fearful, because he doesn't indulge his weak side."

If there is one qualm observers have with the New Steve Winwood, it's his controversial decision to license certain songs to sell Michelob beer. Winwood's outlook, akin to his "kill only what you'll consume" philosophy as a devotee of game sports: "I'm not offended by people endorsing a product they actually use in their daily lives." While many take issue with this dangerously simplistic perspective, crass commercialism being at least one American influence all compromised rockers will likely regret, Winwood has indeed been a regular imbiber of the suds he helps hawk. Excuse him or don't but there is nothing half-baked about Steve Winwood, whose acute curiosity for life is leavened with a collegial composure worthy of Mr. Chips. "I'm a believer in natural law, in the sense of any strong religious outlook," he says, referring to the theory that ethical precepts are fundamental to human nature and discoverable by simple reason. "I was brought up with the belief that you take nothing for granted, that all good fortune is a gift. Sounds austere, eh? And perhaps it is a bit, but I respected my father for his will to balance the hard times with the happy ones. When things go badly, I try to bear up and go on, but it does affect me greatly. And I guess it shows up most in my music. In recent years I've written a lot of songs about death and loss."

Asked about treasured songs of his solo era, those that spark inner satisfaction as well as reflectiveness, he sits back, absently tracing his lined brow with his fingertip. "Well," he sighs, "let's take a track like 'Vacant Chair,'" a ghostly ballad from 1977's *Steve Winwood*. "That song always needed explaining. It's a song about death, and I wrote it with Viv Stanshall [of the Bonzo Dog Band], and it was a reaction to a wave of deaths of great British and West Indian jazz musicians that had gone on, like Graham Bond and Harold McNair. Graham had drug problems and his body was found under a train. I was very affected by these deaths and this was a way of coping with them. The African lyric in the chorus is a Yoruban chant which means, 'Only the dead weep for the dead.'"

At the time Winwood cut the song, many in the press had pegged him as another imminent music-biz casualty, never guessing that the gaunt, withdrawn pop star had actually been a long-suffering victim of peritonitis, an acute inflammation of the tissue covering the abdominal cavity. "It was a by-product of acute appendicitis from the early 1970s, which itself was no picnic, and I spent absolute *years* recovering, during which touring and the like were unthinkable."

Accustomed to spending considerable time on his own, Winwood installed a sophisticated home studio in the Gloucestershire house he shared with his first wife, Nicole (they were divorced in 1986). His deft solitary composing resulted in both *Arc of a Diver* (1979) and *Talking Back to the Night* (1982), which contained a good deal of intensely reflective material.

"'While You See a Chance' was the first song I wrote with Will Jennings, who's since been my chief lyricist. I met him through my publisher at the time, Island Music. I'd said I desperately wanted somebody to write songs with, and they said, 'Oh, there's this bloke. . . .'" Jennings, a former English professor from East Texas, who's also penned sizable hits for Randy Crawford and the Crusaders ("Street Life") and Whitney Houston ("Didn't We Almost Have It All"), recalls that "when Steve played me the music that became the song 'While You See a Chance,' it was like looking right into his soul."

It was a soul so scarred by infirmity, career disappointments and financial woes that he was seriously contemplating quitting rock 'n' roll. "I thought, 'I'm just going to make a record and then I shall settle up financially, and move, if necessary, to a small flat or join a gypsy caravan. I figured I'd continue doing some things that I like doing and enjoy life as best I could in diminished circumstances."

That dire reckoning never arrived, however. Soon after the finished tape for "While You See a Chance" was delivered to his record company (complete with an ethereal organ intro that was the consequence of the other instruments being "inadvertently" erased), the single shot into the top 10 worldwide and transformed *Arc of a Diver* into a stunning fiscal windfall.

While freed from any further threats to his bank account, Winwood was still not immune to assaults on his spirit. Sick at heart as former Traffic mates Chris Wood and Reebop Kwaku Baah descended into narcotics-related demises, Steve retreated again to his home studio with a mind to create an entire album decrying the rock-and-drugs symbiosis.

"*Talking Back to the Night* was really an anti-drug album, the whole thing, but not in a very obvious way," he now explains. "The title track started with a poem Will Jennings wrote on the subject, and it spread from there. 'Valerie,' for instance, isn't a song remembering this girl I was madly in love with. It's not that at all. It's a plea to a certain girl singer—someone I don't know personally but who Will Jennings had drawn my attention to—not to destroy herself with drugs. The narrator in the song is saying, 'I'm back, and I'm the same person I used to be—so why isn't she?'"

The irony of *Talking Back to the Night* was that fans felt that Winwood was indeed the same man he'd been on *Diver*, and they found his home-made sound distinctly stagnant.

"I'm sure you're right," Winwood concedes, sipping the last of an Anglo lager. "I believe there was a production failing on the record; it was *under*-produced. But I was lucky enough to go back and remix certain of those tracks with Tom Lord Alge for *Chronicles*. We put certain tweaks of production on 'Valerie' so it'd sound better on the radio."

As we finish lunch, Winwood spells out the obvious, cyclical challenge that was *Roll with It*: to craft a follow-up record consistent with his last high point. To this end, Will Jennings and Steve spent weeks in September '87 sightseeing, pub-hopping and brainstorming over Steve's latest crop of Gloucestershire demo tapes. The album was recorded at McClear Place Studios in Toronto and U2's Windmill Lane in Dublin. Veteran Titelman was replaced for reasons of strategic revitalization with talented upstart Tom Lord Alge, the

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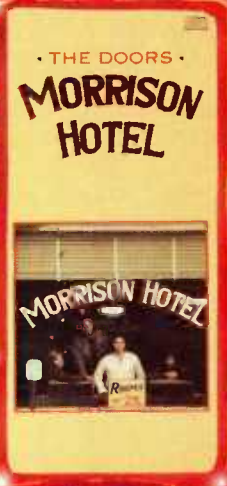
THE DOORS



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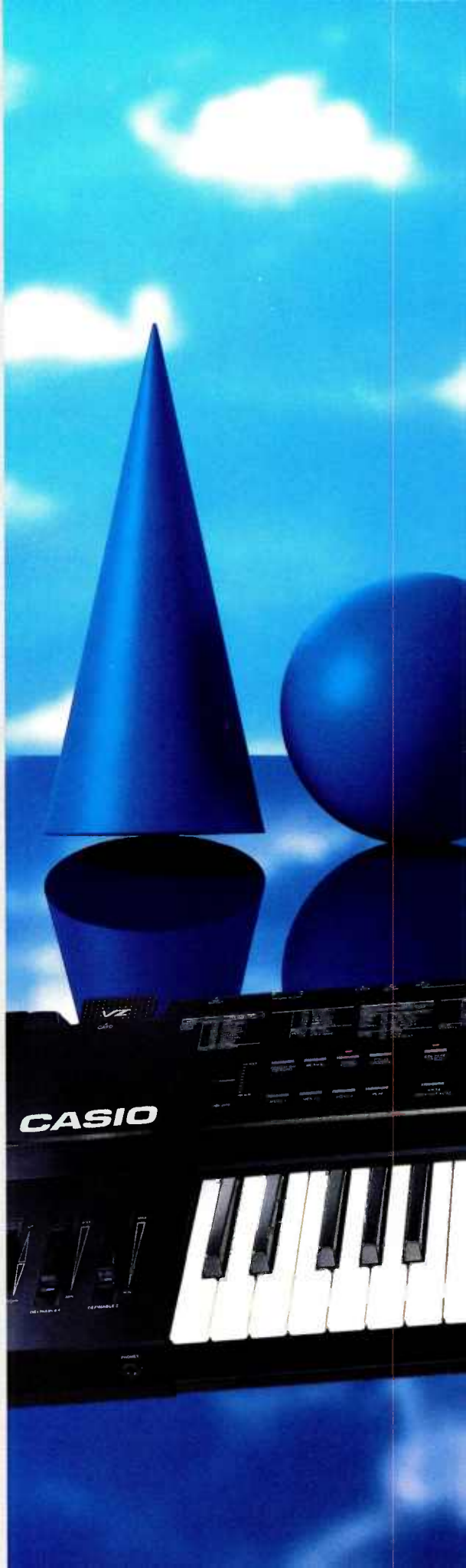

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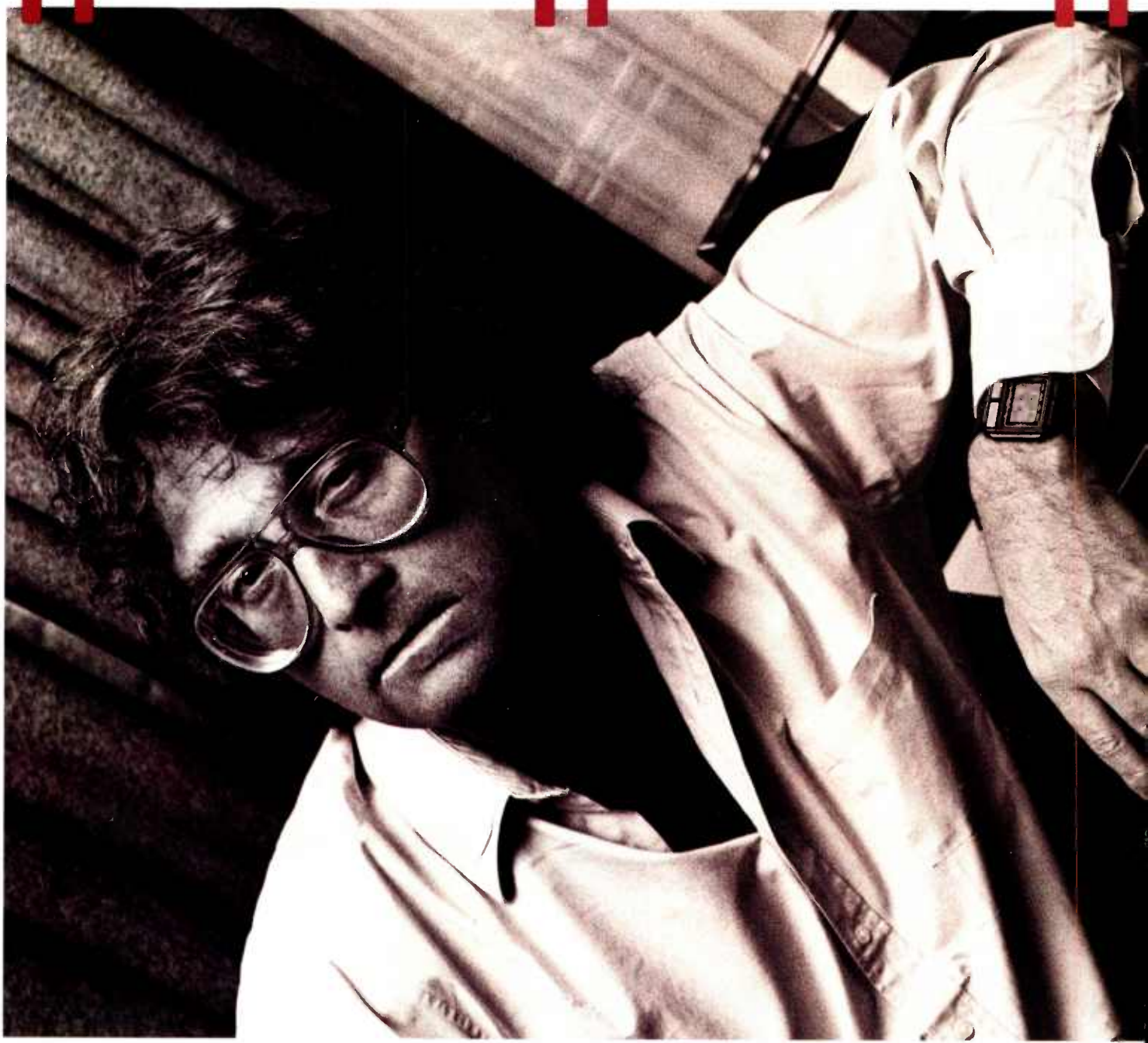
Every five years or so, Randy Newman gets a little famous. Back in 1972, he recorded "Sail Away," a song that grew so much in vogue among the tuxedoed crooner set that it became virtually synonymous with "America the Beautiful." Only one problem: The song is a satiric ode to African slave traders.

About five years later, Newman sang "Short People" which became the biggest hit—the only hit—of his career. The tag line "short people got no reason to live" properly enraged all decent folks who believed short people really did have reason to live and that Newman, who is not short, was a mean person. Just one problem: "Short People" was also a satire, on prejudice.

Another five years down the line, Randy released "I Love L.A.," a jaunty ride through his hometown with a big nasty redhead by his side. And this time, finally, everyone got the joke. After all, how could anyone of Newman's taste and sophistication possibly love Los Angeles? Just one problem: He does. For



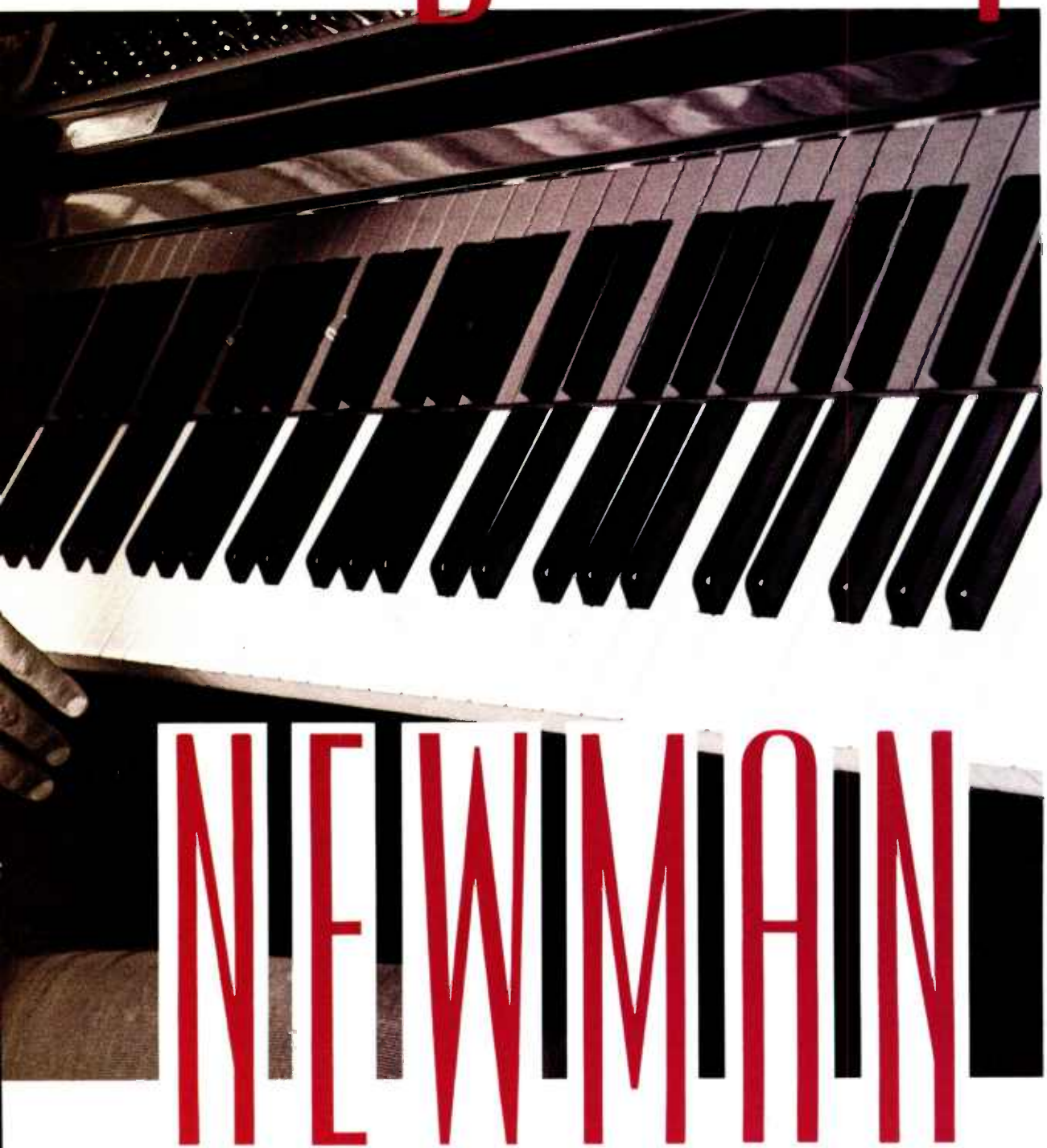
Pop's Mark Twain Continues to Mix the Oil With the Vinegar.

BY MARK ROWLAND

RANDY NEWMAN

once Newman was on the square.

Well, five more years have passed. Randy Newman is back with a new album, *Land of Dreams*, and it remains to be seen which of his latest vignettes will be most widely misinterpreted. There's plenty of contenders: a bluesy softshoe in which Newman counsels an impoverished ghetto child to "Roll with the Punches," an upbeat pop anthem titled "It's Money that Matters"; a "tribute" to rap music in which Newman's protagonists do little more than brag about how great they



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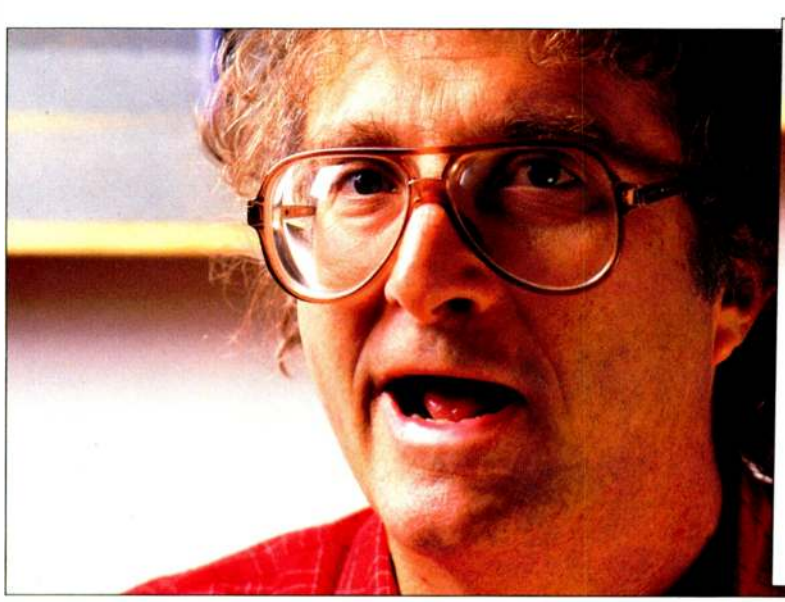
are; a patriotic hymn so solemn even Newman isn't sure what it signifies; or perhaps that touching moment when a father explains to his child why he's abandoning him: "I just want you to hurt like I do."

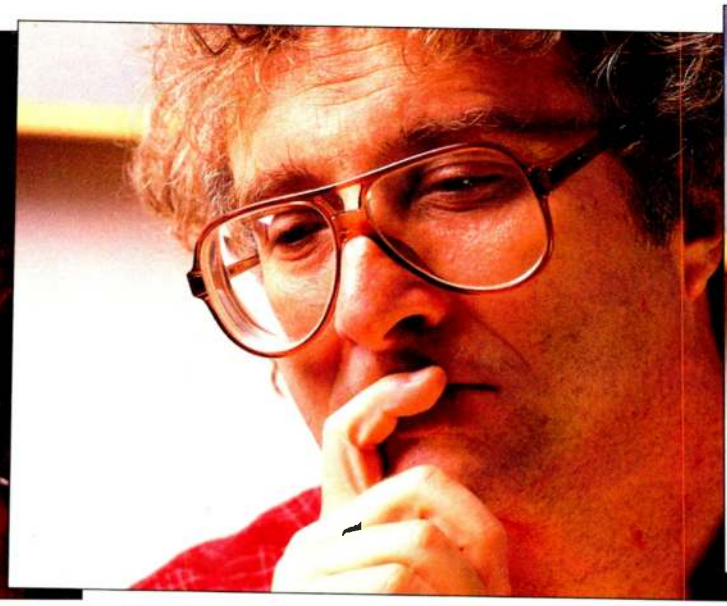
But seriously folks. "A joke is an epitaph on an emotion," to quote Friedrich Nietzsche, and what sustains Randy Newman's reputation as a major pop writer is not so much his music's humor but its bite. Neither his owlish stage presence nor his performing style, in which Newman, behind a piano, drawls out lyrics in sleepy southern cadences, suggests a likely rock 'n' roll subversive. But Newman knows how to mix oil with vinegar. By giving voice to the imaginary but instantly believable protagonists of, say, "God's Song" or "Rednecks," Newman gets to the heart of emotional matters without resorting to confessional songwriting and/or sentimentality. And while he tends to sketch portraits of guys a little crueler than the average Joe, his best characters ("Marie," "Old Man," "Christmas in Capetown," etc.) are subtle enough to earn sympathy for the honesty with which they express their feelings—even as those same feelings fill us with alarm.

Newman's musical approach is also deceptively folksy. His singing may sound laconic, his playing about as flashy as the guy in your local saloon, but both are hitched to sophisticated melodic compositions more typical of Harry Warren or Rodgers and Hart. His lineage is Hollywood heavyweight; the long friendship with Warner Bros. president Lenny Waronker (who is also Newman's usual producer) must also be considered an effective means of flotation.

All of this, combined with Newman's relatively stable domestic life—he's been married for 20 years and has three children—suggests an aristocratic pop figure, part of the music but not of the murk. Though he's often been lumped within the confessional songwriter genre that includes his friends Jackson Browne, James Taylor and Don Henley, Newman's music has never been overtly about himself—until now. The biggest surprise about *Land of Dreams* is that Randy kicks off the record with three songs—"Dixie Flyer," "New Orleans Wins the War," and "Four Eyes"—that together comprise a fairly straightforward narrative of a child's growing-up years, based not a little on Newman's life. A set of miniatures, they lack the ambition and range of Newman's 1974 masterpiece *Good Old Boys*, but the songs are as evocative of the South, and as concerned with Newman's attempt to resolve his web of attachments to the place.

That's what we started talking about, anyway, one sunny L.A. afternoon in the pleasantly appointed offices of his manager, Peter Asher. Attired in gray trousers and a dress shirt, Newman has a way of looking rumpled even when there isn't a crease in sight. He speaks quickly, as if trying to catch up with his thoughts. Discussing his own work, he displays a





"I'll do anything in a song. I would dig up my mother and

family tree includes studio executives, film music conductors and arrangers. One uncle, Alfred Newman, won nine Academy Awards for his film scores. He was an influence on Randy, whose own film credits include *The Natural* and the Oscar-nominated *Ragtime*. Newman's career began in the Tin Pan Alley tradition, writing tunes for the likes of Gene Pitney and Dusty Springfield (two for the semi-classic *Dusty in Memphis* LP). His songs have been covered by such disparate talents as Etta James and Three Dog Night; Harry Nilsson once recorded an entire album of Newman songs. Of his eight albums, however, only *Little Criminals*, which features the nefarious "Short People," can be considered a commercial success. He survives as a "prestige" artist, although, in the choppy seas of pop music marketing and bottom-line management, Newman's rather startling lack of confidence, mixing expressions of self-doubt with defensive remarks that one suspects are addressed to his own psyche. Discussing anything else, he displays a more familiar outspokenness and acerbic wit, but with traces of apology, like he really wishes he could be more tactful but just can't seem to get the hang of it. This manner makes him seem distant but likeable—rock's version of The Nutty Professor.

During his latest five-year hiatus, Newman wrestled with Epstein-Barr Syndrome, which laid him low but now seems to be in retreat. When Waronker was unable to commit to the new album's production, Newman recruited Mark Knopfler (who produced seven tracks), James Newton Howland and Tom Lipuma (four songs), as well as Jeff Lynne (one).

We had gotten around to discussing Randy's odd valentine

JAMES CASSIMUS

"I Love L.A.," which has recently taken on a life of its own. Nowhere is this more evident than at Los Angeles Lakers games, whose followers, of course, include a fat slab of music and movie biz royalty. This past spring, as the Lakers drove toward yet another NBA championship, the song became an exalted part of a fourth quarter ritual: The Lakers would be salting away another win, someone would call time-out, and "I Love L.A." would erupt across the Forum public address system. Then the place would really go wild, the Hollywood faithful swaying in ecstacy, singing along with Randy Newman's song. You'd think he would get a kick out of that.

"Yeah, I went to a game," Newman confesses. "It was like going to the Roman Colosseum. Black guys running up and down the floor putting a ball in a hoop, and rich white people watching, with their chains and the dancing girls. The 24-second clock is ticking. And I'm thinking, 'you know, there's something wrong with this.' I'm finding it pretty tough to be a Lakers fan."

Newman grins. "I started rooting against my own song."

MUSICIAN: *It's been five years since your last album. What takes you so long?*

NEWMAN: Bad work habits, I guess. I have no excuse. I promise it won't happen again. [*laughter*] Really, it's been one of my great derelictions that I haven't produced more work. I admire people like Elton John and others who've done more. It's not that I'm squirreling it away and waiting and waiting—well, maybe to some degree it is. I don't beat myself up as badly as I used to over it, but there should be more. I'd like to make an album a year for the next three. See if I do.

MUSICIAN: *For the first time in your career, you've written songs that are at least loosely autobiographical. Why?*

NEWMAN: I've always loved untrustworthy narrators. And I'm very conscious of my trait to deny that anything was about myself—I do that more than just about any writer you can think of. So I wanted to try this as sort of an exercise. Also, I love things like Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* or *Ragtime* or even *Roger Rabbit*, where you take real characters and kind of jerk them around.

I thought about doing a biography all the way on this album—a mock autobiography, but straight. In these songs I do whatever the hell I want with my father and mother—it's quite a luxury, you know—but there's more truth in there than I knew when I wrote it. We did go to New Orleans when I was six or seven days old, though the train wasn't called the "Dixie Flyer." Walking with my mother and the ice cream truck, with "white" on one side [of the truck] and "colored" on the other, drinking fountains, too. I remember that.

MUSICIAN: *You've dealt with racial and social prejudice in your songs throughout your career.*

NEWMAN: I had written about it enough in my opinion, but I always think I have something new to say: "Rednecks," "Sail Away," "Christmas in Capetown" and now "Roll with the Punches." They're all justifiable. I would hope I'd be done. But it's always been a big thing to me somehow. I don't notice it, it just comes out. Like on "Dixie Flyer" there's all that stuff about the Jews and the gentiles. That's never been done. There have been thousands of Jewish songwriters and they've never done it.

To be Jewish in America is different. No one wants to be an American more than a Jew. Irving Berlin was more American than John Wayne. But there's a lack of comfort here for Jews, somehow. Is this really our country? And I think sometimes, maybe not. I don't know how comfortable Jews in Clarksdale, Mississippi, would be. I liked making that joke about the Jews drinking—trying to be like the gentiles by getting drunk! [*laughs*] Even if it pisses people off.

bury her. Well, almost. I would hurt people's feelings."

But in terms of people, Southerners are just the best I've ever seen anywhere. "Rednecks" is a kind of pro-Southern song, in a sense. This attempt to homogenize everything and call the South "the New South" like it's not the South anymore—bullshit! It's still the South. Go down there. Their voices, thank God, are different. Except for TV: I saw a TV guy from Jackson, Mississippi, who could have been from anywhere, from Mars. No accent, no nothing. I didn't like it.

It's a great subject, the South, that I've written about even when I didn't think I had anything more to say. But at a certain point a writer crystallizes, and these become the subjects

you're gonna write about throughout your life. I'm not sure I'd be comfortable there, though, except in New Orleans. And I guess I'm worried that New Orleans will think I'm making fun of them, though I would never. I love that city. I like that joke, [in "New Orleans Wins the War"] that they didn't know the war was over. I just love stories about their inefficiency. Like when they had the World's Fair down there. Boy, that was so great! When I heard about that I said, "Hey, this is like throwing money down a sewer. If you could only go short on this venture." I could live there and be happy.

MUSICIAN: *I like listening to the radio there, and only hearing New Orleans songs.*

NEWMAN: It was always the stuff I loved the best by far. I loved Frogman Henry. I bought four singles in my life. One was the Beatles' "From Me to You" and the other three were from New Orleans. I didn't even know it at the time. One was called "Rockin' Charlie." I loved Fats Domino. My favorite artist. When I met him I went "Whoa!" I felt the same way when I saw Mickey Mantle in an elevator. Maybe because he was a childhood hero, which makes you think Freud was right. Presidents and Barbra Streisand, it's just not the same.

MUSICIAN: *You had classical music training. Did you try to work players like Fats Domino into your piano style?*

NEWMAN: Never consciously. So many people I've talked to, like Mark Knopfler or Jeff Lynne, would learn every note of a solo 'cause they liked them so much. I never did that; I just listened to it like other kids did. Ray Charles I loved. I bought his albums, his was the first stuff I had, at least extensively. A few years ago I heard Neil Young and got all his stuff, 'cause it was real good and I'd missed it.

MUSICIAN: *Most white songwriters these days combine a black rhythmic consciousness with their suburban sensibilities. It seems like yours is nearly the opposite—a kind of black consciousness hitched to a white rhythm.*

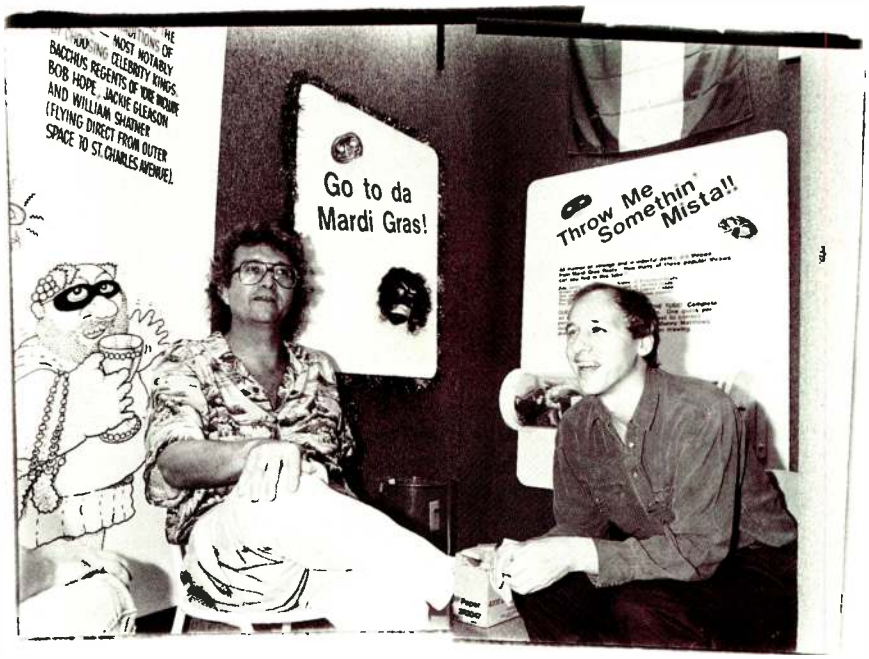
NEWMAN: Thanks a lot! [*laughter*] I know what you mean—it's the cerebral nature of Frogman Henry and the rhythm of Barry Manilow. I love an orchestra. I don't think I'd want to score a movie with a synth. The movies I've accepted out of all the ones I've been offered were big old-fashioned pictures. Things you just can't do in pop, or I can't anyway. I've been offered better pictures but the music didn't matter as much. I'd have done *Out of Africa* if I'd been offered, a nice big travelogue with Meryl Streep—what more could you want? It's a tricky job. Some guys have an instinct for it. Danny Elfman has a good dramatic flair. It's Nino Rota's, but. . . .

That work is good for you. It's odd to have a boss, and that maybe you're 17th in importance. A guy belching could be more important—the sound guy will fight for that. It's chastening to have to subdue your ego to help the picture.

I just saw *The Natural* the other night, for the first time since I did it, and it had some good music in it. Tune after tune, I was really surprised. After you do it you worry, "There's too much cymbal here," or "The strings are too florid." Like with this record now—I'll be able to listen to it in five years and see what it is.

MUSICIAN: *Songs like "Dixie Flyer" seem a way for you to reconcile your musical roots.*

NEWMAN: I think New Orleans gave me an excuse for writing and singing the way I do. I mean, hopefully John Fogerty was born on the bayou. It doesn't matter really. But I really like the idea of having done an autobiography. I had those three songs solid, sort of a trilogy about growing up. It actually follows someone to five years old. And then it goes away, which you would never do in a book. Maybe it's not alright on an album, either. It worries me a little bit, like I'll get criticized for stopping after three songs. They'll expect more from me than from the entire history of rock 'n' roll. [*laughs*] I mean, fuckin' *Tommy*, who would know what that was about if people didn't write about it?



Newman with Mark Knopfler in New Orleans

MUSICIAN: *What surprises me is that you followed those songs with the kind of straight love songs you usually do your best to avoid: "Looks Like You're Falling In Love" and "Something Special." Though "Bad News from Home" has a dark twist.*

NEWMAN: "Bad News" is sort of solid, though it doesn't have anything to do with me. I do come out strongly against women for the first time—like Elvis Costello. It's like a TV movie, and that almost bothers me. The other songs are very straightforward love songs, which I did just to see if I could do it. 'Cause I'm so averse to doing that. I'm not tremendously interested in the lyrics to "Something Special." Maybe I shouldn't say this, but I prefer "Roll With the Punches," where I can see the characters. Or "Red Bandana"; that's no better song, but I can see the guy, you know, sort of a dumb guy lost in Buffalo, in a short sleeve shirt. I can't see the faces of the people in "Something Special."

"Falling In Love" everyone seems to love, and it does sound great. In general people will like those two songs better than the others, but I sort of have to make myself do them.

MUSICIAN: *Are there aspects of yourself you don't want to reveal in a song?*

NEWMAN: No, no. I think I say more than anyone and would admit to more. Who's more out there? Lou Reed maybe. Dylan used to be out there. (James) Taylor will do it. Morrissey, those are interesting lyrics. Mostly though, it's all hero stuff, which I can't stand.

Springsteen'll do it a little bit, he's willing to make himself look bad. That Janis Ian song, "Seventeen"—so rare, so rare! It's the biggest problem teenagers have. People say they're worried about kids listening to lyrics. I mean are you kidding,

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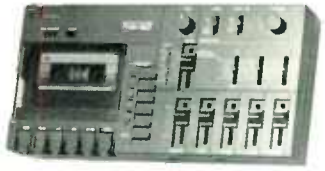

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there aren't any! No relevance to anyone. That was a helluva song, "Seventeen."

MUSICIAN: *How about changing a song because it's too controversial or over the top? The guy in "Rednecks" who says "we're keepin' the niggers down"—that's an incendiary line.*

NEWMAN: It's so ugly! I never say that word. But I needed it in there—what the hell was the guy gonna say? I don't like it. I try other stuff, but if it's the way people talk or I think I have to do it, I will. You try to get rid of them if you can. In "Master Man" I had "fucking street" and Knopfler suggested I change it to "stinking street." And I did. My vocabulary didn't go that far. [*smiles*] But the kid was almost as likely to say "stinking," so why not?

MUSICIAN: *You have a pretty strong track record of people misinterpreting your songs, most notably "Sail Away."*

NEWMAN: That's true. I heard Linda (Ronstadt) do it, sort of a happy version, though she knew what it was about. Bobby Darin sang, "little *one*, sail away with me." It made me think that maybe I've written things like that because of the nature of my voice. I can't get away with "pretty" with this voice. Though I have tried with a song like "Marie"—it's pretty but in a slightly corruptive way, like the guy was drunk or something. But it's hard for Linda to throw away stuff, 'cause her voice is right there. Which is beneficial in some ways, but harder in others. If I had sounded like Elton John, even, I might have done more straight love songs. I grew up thinking, "That's not the voice for me," though I'm actually more confident in my singing than in some other aspects of what I do.

MUSICIAN: *More confident than what? Your piano playing?*

NEWMAN: For example. [*laughs*] Even in rock 'n' roll you see guys like Elton or Jimmy Page, who can play anything.

MUSICIAN: *Yet this record seems to signify a move back to straightforward piano and voice arrangements.*

NEWMAN: Really? [*pause*] I'm trying to think what's on this record. There were those two songs up front, "Falling in Love" has a mandolin, next one is piano/bass, so is the next . . . yeah, you're right. I did try and get away from piano before that. Maybe Bruce Hornsby has made piano alright in some people's minds. "Take Me Back" on the last record would have fit well on this one, before "I Want You to Hurt."

"It's the cerebral nature of Frogman Henry and the rhythm of Barry Manilow."

MUSICIAN: *"I Want You to Hurt" seems like the overall theme of the record, and what makes it so powerful is that it can touch on. . . .*

NEWMAN: The world philosophy, that's what it can touch on! A bad one, and a really valid one. I don't think it's universally true, but it's true to a large extent. I do it—I don't want anyone doing well in this county but me. I wanted to do the song with a big chorus, but it came off a little stiff. Maybe I should have had everyone holding hands, like in "We Are the World."

MUSICIAN: *Do you think songs with strong political implications are inherently less accessible?*

NEWMAN: The content can hurt the accessibility of a song, though in some cases it helps: A song like "Luka" is all content, but was palatable musically. People hear what they want to hear politically. They heard stuff in "Born in the U.S.A." that wasn't even there! Any kind of wave-making invariably hurts, commercially. But you can think of lots of examples of things that are hits because of their lyrics, like rap stuff.

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of rap, what was the idea behind "Master-man and Baby J"?*

NEWMAN: I'm interested in words, and the best words are in that music. They say more, though it's a little like playing tennis without a net. It's easier to say "I walk down the street on my own two feet and I bop down the corner in the car" than it is to put it to music. There's a lot of really good stuff in there: Salt 'n' Pepa has a smart album, one of the best I've heard, Boogie Down Productions, Public Enemy. . . but where the song came from is, so much of that music is about bragging. Run-DMC's follow-up is about Run-DMC. Song one is, "We're DMC, we're the best disc jockey, we're the best rapper." Then the next one: "Hey, we're Run-DMC, we're great, we're just the greatest." That interested me. It's sad, all that kind of bragging, putting names on walls and things like that.

MUSICIAN: *So many of your characters are so self-absorbed they can't see the world around them. Do you think that your vision problems growing up* [Newman is quite nearsighted] *might have given you particular insight into that kind of character?*

NEWMAN: Maybe. I had vision problems to the extent that it was hard for me to look people in the eye. I was worried they thought I was sneaky. It probably had an effect in that I saw myself as an underdog. I don't have any teams that I root for, but I'll root for the team that's behind, just to make it close. If I ever get successful, I'll start rooting against myself. Maybe.

MUSICIAN: *Which of your songs hold up the best to you?*

NEWMAN: For me? Different reasons, some I just like the feel of musically. Some older ones like "God's Song" or "Davy the Fat Boy" I admire because the guys talk like they should talk and I'm gratified. That they don't make mistakes, particularly. There are songs like "Suzanne" that are good a lot of the way, but have something wrong with them—so I don't like them as much. There are songs I do 'cause people are crazy about them, like "Baltimore," that I was never crazy about.

MUSICIAN: *S.J. Perelman once said he thought the best jokes are the ones nobody gets. Do you agree?*

NEWMAN: You can go too far. I wrote three like that and did two, "William Brown" and "Follow the Flag." Now to tell you the truth, I don't think I believe one word of "Follow the Flag." But there's no hint the guy has anything wrong with him. "Maybe you can stand alone or with somebody else or stand all of us together"—I just don't believe in that. "If you can believe in something bigger than yourself"—it's impossible out here, what's bigger than Hollywood? [*laughter*] But I don't know what to make of it, or what people will make of it. There's no indication, that this is a bad guy or he's not.

MUSICIAN: *I think that's what makes the song so powerful.*

NEWMAN: Really? What did you make of it?

MUSICIAN: *Well, to me it was like the story of Oliver North. But the song is naturally loaded with emotion because of what you're singing about. It could also be an Irving Berlin song. The morality behind the belief is pretty much up for grabs.*

NEWMAN: Yeah, I don't begrudge anyone that solace or belief. Whatever flag it's supposed to be. I know what I believe, but you could believe just the reverse and be a fine person. I love the country. I love it, I write about it—in fact, I probably love it more than any other country. Hmmm, maybe I meant it. [*laughs*] I always thought it was a little odd though...

MUSICIAN: *It's like when you see a group of people; you can't feel connected to them, but you envy their sense of community. . . .*

NEWMAN: I've felt that all my life. I'd wish I believed in God or high school or my parents. It would be so comforting. I once knew a girl who said, "You don't believe in God, do you?" I said, "No." And she said, "Well, how can everything be so perfect?" I didn't say anything.

MUSICIAN: *I feel the same way about Bruce Springsteen. I wish I could buy into the religion, but I can't.*

NEWMAN: Presley too! He's so big! And he's dead! I mean, it's

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not as if he were Prince, a serious artist. He was a fat druggie in a white suit at a certain point. Maybe I've just got a writer bias. Maybe I'm always looking to be one of these debunking historians. I mean, Springsteen probably is better than I thought he was for a while. Sure he is. I don't want to talk about this anymore because I said once that I thought he had an inflated reputation. I've always said exactly what I feel, but I didn't like knocking the guy, it's not my function to do it. If it were, it would be a pleasure. [*smiles*] But I didn't even do it that hard, I hardly said anything. I just said, he's not as good as Prince. He probably thinks so himself. He's not Simon. He's not Chrissie Hynde. She's a very good writer. Top 10 in the world, certainly. He's not James Taylor. . . .

MUSICIAN: *You've only recorded two songs by other writers in your career, and one was by Huey Long. Do you consider covering other songwriters more often?*

NEWMAN: I've thought of doing Fats Domino songs. Each time I record I think, "This time I'll do 'Blue Monday'!" Or else "The Needle and the Damage Done." Or "TB Sheets," a song I've always loved, though I don't think you could do it. It's such an acting job. Someday. I don't think I'd be making records if I weren't writing, but I sort of like the way I sing and I can do those well.

MUSICIAN: *You're often described as a "satirist."*

NEWMAN: I'd have to look up the definition. The first thing that comes to mind is Allan Sherman. Maybe it's justified, but it seems a little narrow. I sometimes think it's creative writing. It's fiction.

MUSICIAN: *Do you think your kind of writing requires a certain level of courage?*

NEWMAN: Not when I'm doing it. It's not like going on a big roller coaster or something that scares me. I'll do anything in a song. That's what's important to me. Everyone says, "After my family, after the crippled squirrels." Hey, I would dig up my mother and bury her. Well, almost. But I would hurt people's feelings, and my own. As long as I were part of it.

My kid was in a punk band when he was 13, and they had a song about Ted Knight, 'cause he was living near us; he's gone now. And it was like, "Hey, you old has-been, hey, you old rat, get out of here you old actor," and plunk a plunk a plunk. I said, "What the hell kind of a protest song is that? That's what you're mad at, Ted Knight? I mean, let it go." So, I wouldn't do that. Of course, I did write that ELO thing ["The Story of a Rock 'n' Roll Band"].

MUSICIAN: *And on this album you worked with ELO leader Jeff Lynne. Was that a problem for either of you?*

NEWMAN: He knew the song. He liked it. A very good sense of humor. It may have bothered him at the time, but he didn't really say. He was very good, a very musical fellow. It was a different style of record making. There's a kind of bravery that lets you get in there and try to write hooks and make hits better than anyone else. I don't have that to live up to. Also, people don't notice. I've written things like "Half a Man," "Rednecks," and thought, "Oh, this is trouble." But there's such apathy if you don't sell millions of records, and I never will, that you don't get noticed.

MUSICIAN: *Does that frustrate you?*

NEWMAN: It would be harder to do what I do if I set out to write an attractive vocal melody. I don't think I could have that conversational, narrative style if I were writing like whoever writes beautiful tunes. Maybe that's why I love stuff like Abba. And it doesn't even follow that if I did it better more people would get it. They don't necessarily like to notice stuff in their music. The beat is a real powerful, brainless thing. And when

you're driving in your car, you just want to beat away.

I used to think, geez, a lot of people could like this, what's so odd about it? I don't so much anymore. I always wondered why a song like "Miami" didn't get noticed more. And then later I'll figure out, well, there is something the matter with it. It's not a lack of intelligence on people's parts. It just gets in the way. You can't give 'em too much of a message.

MUSICIAN: *Which explains "Short People"'s success.*

NEWMAN: And that was close. But it was also clear. Short people, there they are. Joke, joke, joke, joke, joke. It was like having a hit with "Purple People Eater." And there was so much smoke and it was a drag. I'd turn on the TV, watching the ballgame, and they'd be making jokes about it. It'd be on the news. It was too much fad for a writer like me, the worst thing I could have had a hit with. I was grateful for it, but I couldn't enjoy it. I should have enjoyed it more, 'cause they're rare. But it was too much press and stupidity and angry people.

MUSICIAN: *Are you more or less pessimistic these days?*

NEWMAN: More pessimistic. I was always optimistic in times when people were saying things were terrible, like Vietnam. The times that chilled me a little bit was when money was tight—the gas wars, things like that. When that happens, people start getting a little mean spirited out there. I think this debt might be real. It's real money. That's bad. Japan is real, and they're not like us, so it's a little disquieting; they are not going to run the world for our benefit. That's what I wanted "Follow the Flag" to be about. I wanted to fly a Japanese flag by it or something. I might have meant that song in some ways, now that I think about it.

I might be getting older, but the drug thing seems insidious. It's in society in little ways. People who smoke pot for 20 years, maybe it's nothing, maybe it's not nothing. It's just the idea of it being here. Why do people need it so much, in this society? I know from my experience, you take sleeping pills for a while, or codeine, which I always loved, pain pills and stuff like that, and it's tough to quit, tough, afterwards your legs are jumping around, and Jesus, I wasn't even doing that much. Then you tend to sharpen up, you find the words a little better. But some of the words have been killed. I often wonder how much the music is geared to a pothead.

MUSICIAN: *Like heavy metal was for ludeheads.*

NEWMAN: Now it's turned around: Heavy metal makes interesting sounds. They're all tenors though, I don't understand that. It's always a high-voiced guy, from what I've seen. Still, I like music to be a big deal like that. I think a lot of these heavy metal things are gonna look fairly good; sort of compact, well-made sounds if you divorce it from the ridiculous blondness and the gyrations.

MUSICIAN: *You once said that when you started, your ambition was to be respected. Now you are. Are you satisfied?*

NEWMAN: Maybe I was afraid to have the ambition of being rich and famous. But I did get the respect. Amazing how often you get the things you want! And I'm not just talking about me. People ask, "What's your dream?" and if it isn't hitting the lottery, you often get it. But most often it's like the fairy story with the three wishes. Or that song: "I got what I wanted and I lost everything I had."

MUSICIAN: *What's your dream now?*

NEWMAN: I want to do more work and like it better. You can't always love your work, but I'd like to look forward to getting up in the morning to what I was going to do, not be so afraid of it. A little more optimism, a little more belief that I have some worth.

Now I'm likely to get this. And something else will fail. M

PRINCE: the PURPLE DECADE

Bob Merlis is fretting. A VP in charge of publicity at Warner Bros., he's here *in Paris for the opening of the Prince* tour, barely a month after his department inherited the responsibilities of Prince's *deposed publicist, and already there are problems.*

Yesterday, just as a press entourage was about to leave for Europe, he received word that Prince had decided not to let the *music video channels, MTV and BET, film a segment of his show after* all; rumor had it Prince was upset over an unflattering picture of him that ran beside a more attractive photo of Michael Jackson in the French press, and he was cutting *off all photo and video access. That decision was reversed by the time we* arrived in Paris—perhaps because MTV's Kurt Loder threatened to fill his airtime by interviewing other disgruntled journalists—but the grief didn't end there. Tonight *at the concert the BET video crew was left standing in the rain for two hours* waiting for someone to let them into the arena. And now, at the opening night post-concert party, Merlis is explaining that *Musician*'s promised interviews with band *members have been nixed by Prince and his manager, Steve Fargnoli. Merlis* doesn't know why, so I approach Fargnoli to ask him. "Oh, yeah," he says. "Well, there's a fairly simple answer to that, really. . ." and he holds up one finger as *if to say, wait just a minute. "I'll be right back," he says. He never comes back.*

Prince is probably the most important rock musician of the '80s—but if you wait for him to explain himself, you'll never get any answers.

By Steve Perry

We will repeat this charade the next night, and again the night after that, and each time Fargnoli walks off quickly and distractedly, like a man who's just remembered he has to go to the bathroom, and pretty badly at that. (Finally, on the third night, he comes up with an answer: "Hey, we never promised those interviews." Oh.) Fargnoli is fortyish, stout and very L.A.-hip. Besides his Italian loafers, white T-shirt and tailored sportcoat, he wears that blend of arrogance, bluster and perpetual anxiety that's common to the upper-level servants of very powerful, very willful people. Though he's only one-third of the management team of Cavallo, Ruffalo and Fargnoli, he's the perimeter defense as far as contact with The Kid is concerned; it's practically impossible to get to Prince in any official capacity without going through him.

Later on Merlis stops by my table. "Are you getting everything you need?" he asks cheerily. I just stare at him.

Prince kicking off his current tour in Paris: "This is not music, this is a trip."

Throughout the evening he and Liz Rosenberg, the other Warner's publicist, do their best to placate us by other means. "Why don't you ask Sheila to dance?" Rosenberg urges me after Prince and the band arrive at the party. "She *always* says yes."

By this time no one believes Rosenberg's pledge that each of us will meet Prince briefly, but we do. Midway through the party she starts escorting writers—two at a time and no crowding, thank you—over to a spot near one of the buffet tables, where Prince is standing at the head of a makeshift receiving line and looking altogether ill-at-ease as he greets well-wishers. Journalists are at the rear of the pack, and he stiffens perceptibly when Rosenberg brings us over.

In his 1985 *Rolling Stone* interview, Neal Karlen asked Prince if he thought rock critics were afraid of him. "Hey, I'm afraid of *them*!" was his response, and it's easy to believe it. Once you've actually met Prince, it becomes a little harder to be angry at his standoffishness toward the press. In the company of any stranger, especially a writer, he seems painfully uncomfortable, and he dons a defensive smile that gives nothing away: part beatific and serene, part fuck-you smug. But tonight he's really trying to be cordial. I'm the last writer he meets, and I linger a minute talking about his latest album, *Lovesexy*. Everybody's misunderstood the cover, I say. "Yeah," he says. It's not a sexual image, I say, it's a rebirth image. Right? "Yeah," he says, and his smile loosens just a little. But within seconds his eyes start to wander around the room. He's looking for *somebody* to get him out of here.

A while later I stop at Boni Boyer's table. One of the last additions to Prince's new band, she is also one of its most distinctive features. Besides a repertoire of fat 'n' tasty Hammond organ lines, she's contributed a throaty gospel voice that's at once a complement and a counterpoint to Prince's ethereal falsetto.

I introduce myself, tell her how much she's added to the band, and we start to talk. For a few minutes she tells funny, charming stories about being girlhood buddies with Sheila E. in the San Francisco Bay area, but then her face clouds and her tone grows more wary. Maybe someone caught her eye, maybe she just remembered she was talking to the press. Apropos of nothing, she starts to say things like: "I'm just really grateful to Prince. I owe so much to him. He's been so good to me, he really has."

JUST TRY to get close to the Prince camp and this is what you find on all fronts. Out of 20 or so present and former associates contacted for this story, most refused to talk on the record. Revolution bassist Brownmark (Mark Brown) is one who would. "That's pretty typical," he says when he hears the Boni Boyer story. "The guy doesn't want anybody to know about him." Brownmark signed an agreement that stipulated he wouldn't talk to the press about his boss as long as he still worked for him; it's standard operating procedure for Prince employees. But that doesn't explain why so many of his *ex*-associates decline to talk about him, too.

"I don't know why," says Jimmy Jam, who's built quite a career of his own in the five years since Prince fired him and partner Terry Lewis from the Time for devoting too much time to outside record production. "I think a lot of it is probably just respect. Don't kiss and tell. And I think a lot of people probably have some sort of fear, if they're pursuing a career, that he can ruin it if they say the wrong thing."

Maybe so, but no one has claimed that Prince ever tried to sabotage his or her career for that reason. More likely it's deference to his wishes that motivates the silence. Although his demanding, high-control style has alienated a lot of people, Prince still represents something unique on the Minneapolis scene, and to the players who came up there. Jam, who first met Prince when they were a year apart at Bryant Junior High and sharing a music class, recalls standing in line years later to buy the first Prince album when it came out: "It was a real breakthrough. It was an inspiration. Because at the time, I was struggling in a local band, as were Terry and a lot of other people around here.

"Prince was the one who lit a fuse under everybody. He proved that yeah, you can get a deal and go out and do something with it. I remember telling my mom, Prince this and Prince that. She always thought I was crazy. But up until then, you always had a lot of people telling you, aw, you can't make it. My dad was basically a failed musician who never made it. So there was a lot of negativity around. Prince was the sun bursting through those clouds."

Alan Leeds, who runs Prince's Minneapolis-based production company, PRN, explains the cult of secrecy regarding Prince's business and personal affairs this way: "You have to understand that I'm not speaking for Prince"—a statement that prefaces almost every on-the-record comment from his staff—"but I think it's simply that he wants to be judged on the basis of his music, and not on the basis of which parties he attended or who he took to the Grammies. And he doesn't want anyone else speaking for him."

The bottom line in almost all Princely projects is control—over the look, the sound, the image, the whole package. And he doesn't have much patience with imperfection. "I've seen him have trouble with a lot of people," says producer/engineer David (Z.) Rivkin, who's worked with him off and on since

GRIFFIN

PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE JOEL BERNSTEIN

engineering the demo that got Prince his record deal. "He's not real communicative with everybody. He somehow just expects things to be perfect, and when they're not he can get mad."

Brownmark says Prince was always communicative with the Revolution, but he concurs with Rivkin about the high expectations. After joining Prince in 1981, barely a year out of high school, his first impression of his new boss "was how serious he was about his music. If anybody wanted to play around, they could go someplace else, because he didn't have time for anyone who wasn't professional. And he didn't have time to teach people. He'll give you a couple of weeks, and if you're not on his level, he'll get rid of you just that quick." That may be why Prince finally disbanded the Revolution, firing Wendy Melvoin, Lisa Coleman and Bobby Z in late '86 (Brownmark says he was invited to stay, but chose to launch a solo career); though they were his friends, they couldn't keep up with him musically.

"I never wanted to be a solo act," said Andre Cymone years after he left Prince's band. "But I enjoy playing in a happy environment with musicians who enjoy playing with each other. And that wasn't the case in Prince's band."

Like Cymone, almost everyone who's played with Prince for any length of time has expressed deep ambivalence about it at some point, either publicly or privately. It's practically inevitable, since working for him requires an uncommon amount of talent and ambition on one hand, and an uncommon amount of self-denial in the service of Prince's own ambitions on the other. He's capable of playing some power games, too. Jam and Lewis' "firing" from the Time, they later learned, was a calculated ploy to scare them out of freelance production work and back into the fold full-time; Prince hadn't even told his business office to cut off their paychecks, which kept arriving. But it all backfired when the SOS Band project they were working on at the time turned into a major hit.

Likewise, Time guitarist Jesse Johnson angrily observed years later that "his real knack is trying to discourage people, and keep them from being confident. He used to tell us that people wouldn't know us if we walked down the street. We'd laugh at that, because we couldn't even go shopping without getting mobbed. He likes to tell you stuff like that, because of course if you got people believing that, they're always gonna be there, accepting that small paycheck and feeling happy."

Still, the aura of secrecy that's grown up over the years has probably overblown Prince's reputation for caprice and tyranny. "A lot of people get the wrong impression of him, like he's this evil guy," says Brownmark. "He's not at all. He's got his ups and downs like anybody else. But I worked with the guy, I was friends with him, I go over to his house to this day. And I know that he doesn't control you for no reason, just to have power. People misunderstand that."

"Prince's thinking is just on a different level than most people's," says Jimmy Jam. "And people who expect a lot of themselves expect a lot of others. When you think a lot of yourself, you start to believe other people should be thinking of themselves along the same lines. And when they're not, you might say, hey, stupid, why aren't you doing anything? You end up alienating them."

The feeling you get talking to people like Jam and Brownmark about Prince isn't unlike what you might feel in talking to career Marine Corps men. They've been through it all, climbed the highest mountains, and pushed themselves past what they thought to be their breaking points.

"I remember when we were rehearsing for the second Time tour," says Jam. "We were having trouble with this song, '777-9311,' and we finally got it down to where we could play it good live. Then Prince came in one rehearsal, looked at me playing keyboards, and said, 'Jimmy, you're just doing the bass with your left hand. You're not using your right hand.' And I said, there's not a part there. And he said, 'Well, you *make* a part there! You add something. You got to make it better than the record. No hands can be lazy. You got to play!'

"I'm not a punk, but I'm not R&B either. I'm a middle-class kid from Minnesota, which is very much white America."

"So I started using my right hand. Then a couple of rehearsals later he came in and we said, 'Yeah, Prince, check this out! We're jammin'!' And Prince said, 'Okay, who's not singing? Everybody's gotta sing a harmony part.' Somebody said, but there's not that many harmony parts in the song, Prince. 'Doesn't matter. Gonna be better now than it is on the record.'

"Okay, so now we're singing. We got our parts down. He came back three rehearsals later and said, 'Okay, where's the choreography? You guys got to be steppin'!' Terry and Morris and Jesse are out there steppin', having a great time. Prince says, 'Jimmy Jam—what about you?' I said, 'What about me? I'm the keyboard player.' 'No, you got to step with them, too.'

"I said, 'What?! I gotta play with both hands, sing a note, and be steppin' at the same time? Forget it. I can't do that shit.'

"Couple of *hard* rehearsals later—I'm talking about four

ILLUSTRATION: JIM WARREN

"In some ways, *Purple Rain* scared me. It was too successful, and no matter what I do I'll never top it": *Under the Cherry Moon* premieres in. . .Sheridan, Wyoming?

solid hours of playing at each one—I could do the shit in my sleep. I could play my keyboard part, take out a handkerchief and wipe my face and put it back, play the part, and do the step." Jam tells the story with a smile, but he took the lesson to heart: "That's what Prince did, time and again. He taught us we could do things we'd never believed we could."

DESPITE THE PRESS relations blowout on opening night, the show Prince unveiled in Paris that weekend was enough to make anyone forget such mundane matters. It's hard to describe what I saw over the course of three nights at the Palais Omnisport/Bercy; this show really is amazing, without precedent, one of a kind. No one has ever conceived an arena rock show with this much audacious theatricality (lighting designer Roy Bennett is a behind-the-scenes MVP), this kind of explosive kinetic energy, or this musical dynamism. For the first time, Prince's live show measures up to the standards set by his best records.

That he's supported by what happens to be the best band in the world right now doesn't hurt matters, and the in-the-round staging maximizes democracy of access for the audience, which paradoxically heightens both the intimacy and the quality of spectacle. Prince and the whole band dance and run and cavort around the stage amid a welter of lights and smoke, across a multi-level terrain of diaphanous curtains and impressionistic props that include a swing set, a miniature basketball court where they actually shoot hoops when the fancy strikes (dancer Cat Glover has it all over Prince for shooting percentage, but hell, she takes easier shots), and a 1970-or-so T-Bird just like the one Prince used to drive around Minneapolis. It's as frivolous as it sounds, but deceptively so, because underneath the Sly-style party ambience there's a musical discipline worthy of the best James Brown ensembles. And Prince combines these critical influences into a musical and visual statement that's uniquely his own—the Exploding Purple Inevitable.

The first set is a conceptually ambitious summation of Prince's 10-year career. "This is not music, this is a trip," he chants on some nights, and that it is. Just as surely as the staging explodes traditional ideas about what a rock 'n' roll band looks like, the structure of the set does away with the *song* as dominant musical unit. It's all one long, highly charged medley, an 80-minute nonstop memory play in which Prince roars through 18 songs, some whole and some in brief fragments, with only a couple of pauses in between. There's a little of everything here, from "I Wanna Be Your Lover" to "Housequake," and even a couple of selections from the notorious unreleased *Black Album*. "Erotic City," a *Purple Rain*-era B-side, opens the show, and for over an hour the audience gets the Prince it knows best (though better rendered than ever before): bumps and grinds, come-hither looks and lots of sex.

It's all material from the past until the set closes with "Anna Stesia," the emotional center of *Lovesexy*. After that the whole tenor of the show changes. The second set is dominated by the more spiritual/philosophical *Lovesexy* material, along with the major *Purple Rain* hits and an apocalyptic reading of "1999." "Listen," Prince tells the French crowd one night, "I don't know how many of you can understand me, but I want to say that the first set I did because I thought you expected it of me. The second set I do because...this is where it's *at*." And then he launches into a long, bluesy jam called "God Is Alive," which is so ebullient and musically bracing that even the audience members who don't care for proselytizing can get into it. *Lovesexy* may represent a major turning point for Prince; it certainly does in his own mind. Sex is still an important part of the equation, but Prince takes pains, both on *Lovesexy* and in concert, to back away from the anarchic sexual libertinism of days gone by.

The Paris concerts are doubly gratifying in light of Prince's track record playing arenas. In the U.S., he's done only two extensive tours in big halls. The *1999* tour was the first to hit large venues, and was pretty well-received. But the Time, playing in the opening slot, routinely outshone Prince's own band, until finally the discrepancy became so pronounced that Prince took them off the bill and reduced them to offstage accompanists for their replacements, Vanity 6. Two years

EBET ROBERTS

later, in the autumn of 1984, the *Purple Rain* tour was launched against a backdrop of ferociously high expectations, generated by the summer's hottest movie and biggest album.

By most standards the tour was a success—it took in 62 cities and almost two million people in five months, drew good reviews, and grossed over $30 million—but it never really coalesced musically, and it never generated the excitement that the musical sequences in the movie promised. The composition of the crowds probably had something to do with it; Prince had always been a cult artist with a diverse but dedicated audience, and it must have been enormously disconcerting to him to look out upon the sea of clean-cut young professionals and suburban families with tots in tow, who collectively looked more like a *Star Wars* matinee crowd than a rock 'n' roll audience. Another part of the problem was onstage. Aside from keyboardist Matt Fink and bassist Brownmark, most of the players in the Revolution simply couldn't keep up with Prince. So the arrangements were kept pretty safe for the most part; when the band did try to stretch out and jam, as during the nightly encore of "Baby I'm a Star," the quality of their execution hardly ever measured up. If the new band's surehandedness allows Prince to explore new worlds, the Revolution tended to hold him in one place, shouldering more than his share of the musical load.

But beneath all this lay an even bigger problem: the ambience of the *Puuple Rain* show made it clear that the party happening onstage was a private one. The audience's presence hardly mattered at all.

Whether this insularity represented a circle-the-wagon response to the sudden intensity of Prince's success or a newfound delusion of artistic omnipotence is hard to say; it depends whether you saw arrogance or fear when you looked in his eyes. Either way, one hallmark of the *Purple Rain* tour was Prince's distinct lack of emotional generosity toward the audience. Any pop star can develop these psychic calluses, this sense of disconnectedness, over time if he or she isn't careful, and most never recover. One of the joys of the *Lovesexy* tour is that Prince seems to care very genuinely about the audience's welfare. He wants them to have as much fun as he's having.

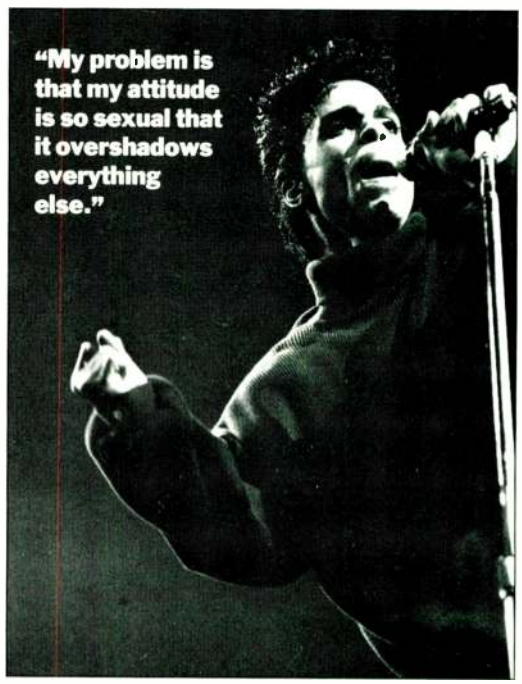
IT WASN'T ALWAYS this way. "In some ways *Purple Rain* scared me," Prince confessed a couple of years after the fact in an impromptu on-the-air interview with Detroit DJ The Electrifying Mojo. "It was too successful, and no matter what I do I'll never top it. It's my albatross and it'll be hanging around my neck as long as I'm making music." Part of Prince's fear must have stemmed from an intuitive understanding that the multi-media *Purple Rain* blitz, which constituted many people's first exposure to him, would forever harden public expectations about his music.

Prince's music wasn't the only indication of an extreme reaction to the *Purple Rain* juggernaut. Self-creation had always been a prominent theme in his records and his public persona—there was the new wave, rude-boy satyr who seemed to spring full-grown on *Dirty Mind* after two albums' worth of fairly conventional black pop, and the early interviews in which he freely mixed fact and fiction in fashioning a past for himself—but there had usually been an air of self-conscious playfulness about these machinations, or at least an implicit sense of limits. Now he started acting out a more arch version of his own creation myth, and the excesses that followed account for a lot of his problems in '85-'86.

The USA for Africa fiasco was the most publicized incident. The nominal reason he failed to make the all-star charity recording session was that he had to go bail out some bodyguards who'd been arrested for punching a *paparazzo* who tried to take his picture, but Prince inadvertently offered a more revealing account of his absence in a 1985 MTV "interview" (which was in fact a carefully staged PR event in which Prince controlled the taping and was fed selective questions by Steve Fargnoli): "I talked to the people who were doing USA for Africa, and they said it was cool that I gave up a song for the album, which was the best thing for both of us, I think. I'm strongest in a situation where I'm surrounded by people I know. It's better that I did it that way, the music, than going down and participating there. I probably just would have clammed up with so many great people in the room. I'm an admirer of all the people who participated in that particular outing. I don't want there to be any hard feelings."

Strip away all the modesty and contrition, and what Prince implies is, "I just couldn't conceive of entering a room where *I* wouldn't be in control of what happened." This is more than a matter of simple egotism. During that period Prince seemed compulsively determined to move around in a small, self-contained universe. Besides USA for Africa, the other issue that dogged him at the time was his penchant for taking bodyguards everywhere he went. Fear for his own safety in the aftermath of *Purple Rain* was undoubtedly part of the reason; this was a man who had always lived in relative anonymity and cherished his mobility, and you need only watch *Purple Rain* to see that Prince gets off on promoting himself as an object of desire, and then withholding himself. But physical safety isn't why his bodyguards were instructed to tell Night Ranger, who sat behind Prince at the 1985 American Music Awards, not to speak to him or in any way acknowledge his presence. Nor is it why those bodyguards accompanied him to the dais to accept his awards that night. They were there to keep the outside world from interfering with the boundaries of Prince's increasingly private inner world.

While Prince has never been the most public of artists, his next two albums reflected that growing fixation with privacy. To say that *Around the World in a Day* (1985) and *Parade* (1986) violated expectations is a drastic understatement; about the only categorical statement they afford is that they're neither as bad as mainstream *Purple Rain* fans thought nor as good as dedicated Prince culties maintained. Prince was right when he said on the MTV self-interview, "*Around the World in a Day* is a funky album." Under the whimsical, quasi-psychedelic veneer, several of its tracks have a hard, funky bottom, but it hardly represents the sort of vision and ambition that *Purple Rain* had led everyone to expect. A number of its tracks, as Jimmy Jam once pointed out, are musical re-treads—"The Ladder" of "Purple Rain"; "America" of the "Baby I'm a Star"



ANDREA LAUBACH/RETNA

groove; "Paisley Park" of the slow version of the Beatles' "Revolution." "I had a sort of FU attitude making it," Prince later admitted in his Electrifying Mojo interview.

Parade was even less distinguished. As on *Around the World* the best tracks on both records (in this case, "Kiss," "Anotherloverholenyohead," "New Position," and "Girls & Boys") were attempts to define a new brand of art-funk in alternately baroque and minimalist terms. But that was only one-third of the record, and the rest followed a more insidious muse. In songs like "Do I Lie," "Under the Cherry Moon," and "I Wonder U," Prince seemed to be trying to create *Art*, in the most turgid middlebrow sense. The spoken French parts and continental-sounding string arrangements scattered through the record were complete non-sequiturs, but Prince sported them like badges of legitimacy. The maddening thing about these second-rate MOR workouts was that Prince appeared ready to sell out the best of himself in pursuit of a standard he'd already surpassed. (Prince, meet Elvis Presley.)

In retrospect, even Prince didn't think much of the album. He's quoted in British writer Barney Hoskyns' bio, *Prince: Imp of the Perverse*, as telling a British TV interviewer, "*Parade* was a disaster. Apart from 'Kiss,' there's nothing on it I'm particularly proud of. The temptation is to go right back into the studio and make a killer album, but I think half the problem with *Parade* was that I recorded it too soon after *Around the World in a Day* and I just didn't have enough good material ready. I'm not gonna make that mistake again."

On another level these records—call them his middle period—had a problem that superseded their strictly musical merits. They sounded claustrophobic, self-obsessed, sometimes downright creepy. The overwrought, psychodramatic dialogue between Prince and God at the end of *World*'s "Temptation" was genuinely frightening, as was the romance with death in *Parade*'s "Under the Cherry Moon" and "Sometimes It Snows in April." Prince's artistic vision had always been quirky and private, and—most pronouncedly since *Dirty Mind*—it had always been tied up with self-mythology as well as music. But now he seemed wholly disconnected from the world at large, without a sense of his audience or of artistic purpose: For the first time, he appeared *more* interested in the mythology than the music. It was as if the success of *Purple Rain* had convinced him that the persona he'd created, and not his music, was what captivated people, and, therefore, he should focus most of his energy on elaborating the persona. Whatever he was trying to do, he clearly wasn't doing it halfway. The irony in this ever-more hermetic scenario was that the film *Purple Rain*'s dramatic resolution had hinged on The Kid's rejection of hermitage in favor of communicating with the broadest possible audience; it wasn't playing that way in real life.

And then came the deluge. In his second dramatic movie, *Under the Cherry Moon*, Prince played a piano bar gigolo named Christopher Tracy who falls in love with the daughter of a shipping magnate. The father, whose character is written like a cross between Darth Vader and Colonel Klink has Christopher killed in the end, but not before Prince can utter one of the great death speeches in cinema. "Hey," he smiles to his lover, a bullet in his back and the blood already congealing on his lip, "we had some fun, didn't we?" The whole movie was like that. Funny when it was supposed to be tragic, just plain strange when it was supposed to be funny. Most onlookers had been expecting the worst ever since early in the filming, when Prince started firing people off the set (including director Mary Lambert and co-star Terence Stamp) and installed himself as director. The result bore out their worst fears. It was a little like a Godzilla movie, only with Prince's ego as the 300-foot beast they couldn't subdue.

As busts go, it was no grander a flop than Madonna's *Shanghai Surprise*, which came out around the same time. (Together they were enough to doom the rock film mini-renaissance that *Purple Rain* had spawned.) But *Cherry Moon* was far the more embarrassing of the two, because Prince had clearly poured his whole heart and soul into this bizarre, almost impenetrable little movie. It was easy to see what made *Cherry Moon* so bad (hamhanded technical values—for one thing, it was reportedly shot in color and printed in grainy black and white—dumb script, atrocious acting), but it was harder to see what made it so *weird*. There was the gratuitous and narcissistic mugging for the camera, which far exceeded anything in *Purple Rain*; there was the grotesquely skewed sense of Cote D'Azur elegance; but most discomfiting of all, there was the sense that Prince had painted himself into a very tight corner—that the identity he'd forged was too pretentious, too constrictive, too inaccessible and unappealing to too many people.

Jimmy Jam was no longer in touch with Prince by this time, but he thought he could recognize what was happening. "When you're real successful and you start falling off the pedestal, you get real paranoid. Not only do the people around you begin to doubt you, you also begin to doubt yourself. You think, damn, am I really what I think I am? That kind of thing.

"I don't know what freaked him out, but he went through quite a few changes around that time from what I heard. He did a complete about-face around *Cherry Moon* time. He did a couple of interviews, he did that MTV thing when the movie came out. To me, that was beneath him. Here he was sitting

EMPEROR'S NEW CLONES

Onstage with his current courtesans **Prince** plays guitars made by Knut Koupee of Minneapolis and a Tele-style limited edition Hohner through a Nady 700 wireless. He uses a Mesa/Boogie Series 300 preamp and a Carver power amp into JBL speakers, with Boss pedal effects and JBL 547 graphic EQs. He also pounds a Yamaha KX88 keyboard controller MIDI'd to a Roland MKS-20 piano module.

Sheila E pounds a Yamaha Recording Series acoustic kit. For electronic assault she wields a Dynacord ADD-ONE kit, Roland Octapads and PM-16 interface, and an Emu E-Max sampler. She also uses Paiste cymbals, various Latin Percussion gizmos and Vic Firth sticks.

Boni Boyer plays a Hammond B-3 with Leslie 122 cabinet, an E-Max sampler, a Roland MKS-20 and D-50, a Yamaha DX7 and an Ensoniq ESQ-1. The ever-reliable **Dr. Fink** fingers two Yamaha MIDI keyboard controllers and an Ensoniq SQ-80, plus a Roland MKS-20, two Roland D-550 modules, a Yamaha TX816 MIDI rack, a Prophet VS, a Yamaha DX7 and a Fairlight CMI IIX, all run through a Soundcraft 200B mixer.

As for the horns, **Eric Leeds** blows Conn 10M tenor and Selmer Mark VI bari saxes through a Nady 701 system; **Atlanta Bliss** wails a B-flat trumpet via a Roland CT-8 trumpet effects processor. Microphones are Sennheiser EM-2003s and MKE 40s.

Guitarist **Miko Weaver** has a Charvel/Jackson, custom axes by Pete's Guitars, GHS Boomer strings, a Nady 1200 wireless, and pedals by Roland, Mesa Boogie, Boss (Chorus and Octave) and Dunlop (WahWah). He's backed by a Roland GP-8, Yamaha SPX-90, Rocktron Hush IICX, and a Mesa Boogie Quad pre-amp and power amp. **Levi Seager, Jr.** gets his Guild Pilot bass in yer face with GHS M-5000 strings, a Nady 1200 wireless, an ADA DDL, a Rocktron Hush IIC, a Mesa Boogie power amp and Boss Heavy Metal pedals.

The show's wireless hand-held mikes are by Sennheiser, headsets by Samson and Countryman.

with this chick reporter, I can't even remember her name..."

Martha Quinn.

"God. She made me sick. Here he's gone from not talking to *Rolling Stone*, not talking to the L.A. *Times*, not talking to anybody. And now he's talking to Martha Quinn?! Gimme a break. I thought that was one of the low points in an illustrious career. Of course, he's since landed on his feet, like I figured he would."

NOT EVERYONE SHARED Jimmy Jam's optimism. Through the years, more than a few great rock 'n' rollers have lost touch with what they do best, owing to drugs or ennui or isolation or a deluded sense of what distinguished them in the first place. Once gone, they almost never find their way back; Prince did, however, and he did it in spectacular fashion. *Sign o' the Times* (1987) was fun and free and unselfconscious in a way that none of his records had ever been. It was a grab-bag of new material, demos and long-stored vault items ("I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man" had been laying around since the *Dirty Mind* days; all Prince did was to add a live drum sound and a new vocal track). The whole of disc two was a masterpiece. Disc one had some fat, but that was necessary: The real point of *Sign o' the Times* was to allow Prince to slip out of his straitjacket, have some fun and try a few new things. (He had originally intended to deliver it as a *three*-record set, titled *The Crystal Ball.*)

But if *Sign o' the Times* and *Lovesexy* (and the unreleased but much-bootlegged *Black Album*) prove he's recovered artistically from his 1986 crash-and-burn, he's still having trouble moving records. It may be true that new Prince albums generate more excitement and speculation than almost anything else in rock 'n' roll, but it's also true that fewer and fewer people are buying them. Blacks are probably the most diminished segment of his audience; the perceived racism of *Cherry Moon* hurt immensely in that regard, and his neo-psychedelic funk records didn't help either. Billy Woodruff, an associate producer at BET, shrugs and says, "I really love Prince, but there's not a sense of excitement about him on the street anymore. Now, I know Prince doesn't like to be compared to Michael Jackson, but they *are* the two biggest black stars out there. And for all his image problems, Michael still gets the B-boys excited. Prince doesn't."

Sign o' the Times sold decently for a double album, but not all that well for a mega-star album. *Lovesexy* faded after less than three months on the charts, and his American concerts have not been instant sell-outs. Warners can't be happy, but Prince may not be too upset. After *Purple Rain*, which did so much to harden public expectations about what he should sound like, it could be that he wants his records to have an impact, but doesn't want them to be *too* successful. "Record sales and things like that don't really matter," Prince said post-*Purple Rain*. "It keeps the roof over your head and it keeps money in all these folks' pockets I have hanging around. But it basically stems from the music, and I hope people understand that. I wouldn't mind if I just went broke as long as I can play this type of thing."

Present and former Prince associates all maintain that he cares not a bit how many records he sells. But there's no denying he cares about his artistic hegemony in '80s rock. As he put it in the acceptance note Sheila E. read at his induction into the Minnesota Black Music Hall of Fame last year, "I consider this award a license to make the rules, and to break them." Prince has always wanted to be the bohemian *artiste*, standing outside and leading the pack, but he's always craved confirmation of his legitimacy, too; in a nutshell that's what *Under the Cherry Moon* is really about. So on some level he has to care how many records he sells, for the simple reason that he can't cease to be popular and still remain as important a force in pop music as he wants to be.

It's a bind, but exploiting the dynamic tension between art and commerce is one of Prince's specialties. No pop star has ever possessed quite his facility for wedding a passionate artistic vision to a canny sense of how to use that vision to sell himself. The nude shot on the cover of *Lovesexy* is a good example. Though the picture is integrally related to the emotional/spiritual rebirth motif of the album, it's also a way to generate some controversy. Prince's tactics don't always serve the bottom line—after the initial wave of publicity, the cover probably hurt *Lovesexy*'s sales more than helped—but they usually keep him in high profile. And when he's erred, it's usually been by pushing a successful ploy too far: *Controversy* failed precisely to the extent that parts of it carried the outrageous rude-boy stance of *Dirty Mind* over the line into ponderousness and pomposity, and his 1985-86 output did much the same thing with the temperamental boy genius of *Purple Rain*.

Prince's attention to his public mythology dates to the very beginning of his career. After all, he first conceived that career in the company of two Minneapolis ad men, Chris Moon and Owen Husney. It was Husney, his first manager, who counseled Prince to drop his last name, to shave a couple of years off his age to appear even more a prodigy, and to obscure the question of who he was and where he was from. And before that it was Moon, a recording-studio operator who pulled Prince out of a teenage band called Champagne and started collaborating with him on a set of demos, who suggested that sex—"naughty implied sexuality" was how he put it—was the marketing theme that might set Prince apart from the crowd. He wrote the lyrics for "Soft & Wet," which eventually became Prince's first single.

Sex was exactly the right hook; four or five years later, after

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Paisley Park Studios, located in the near-rural Minneapolis suburb of Chanhassen (pop. 6,359), is a dream-facility that's both Prince's own playground and a premium commercial studio. Under its roof are the PRN Productions offices, three separate studios that range from state-of-the-art to demo quality, and a 120'x105'x45' production soundstage, where the *Lovesexy* tour was conceived (and about 80% of the *Sign o' the Times* film was reshot).

Studio A features a large main room, a stone room with six tons of Italian marble on the wall, a cherrywood room for getting unusual percussion sounds and a vocal booth. In the control room, there's an SSL 64-channel 6000E-64 total recall automated console; Studer A800 Mark III 24-track and A820 2-track recording machines with the center stripe time code feature; 48 mono and eight stereo input modules; an SSL event controller and programmable equalizer; Sony BVU8000 and XBR monitor 3/4" video decks with lock-up; Westlake 5-way SM-1 studio monitors powered by Crown amplifiers; and a whole raft of special effects signal processing gear, including boxes made by Focus-Rite, Publison, AMS, Eventide and GML. (The video gear gives the room complete film scoring capabilities.)

Fully-digital Studio A is where Prince usually does his mixes; most of the tracking, however, is done in the smaller and homier Studio B, which contains the DiMedio custom recording console that used to be in Prince's home studio. Studio C, which adjoins a large rehearsal space, is "designed to function for master quality tracking, live rehearsal or demo recordings," according to the Paisley Park brochure. The board is a Soundcraft TS 24.

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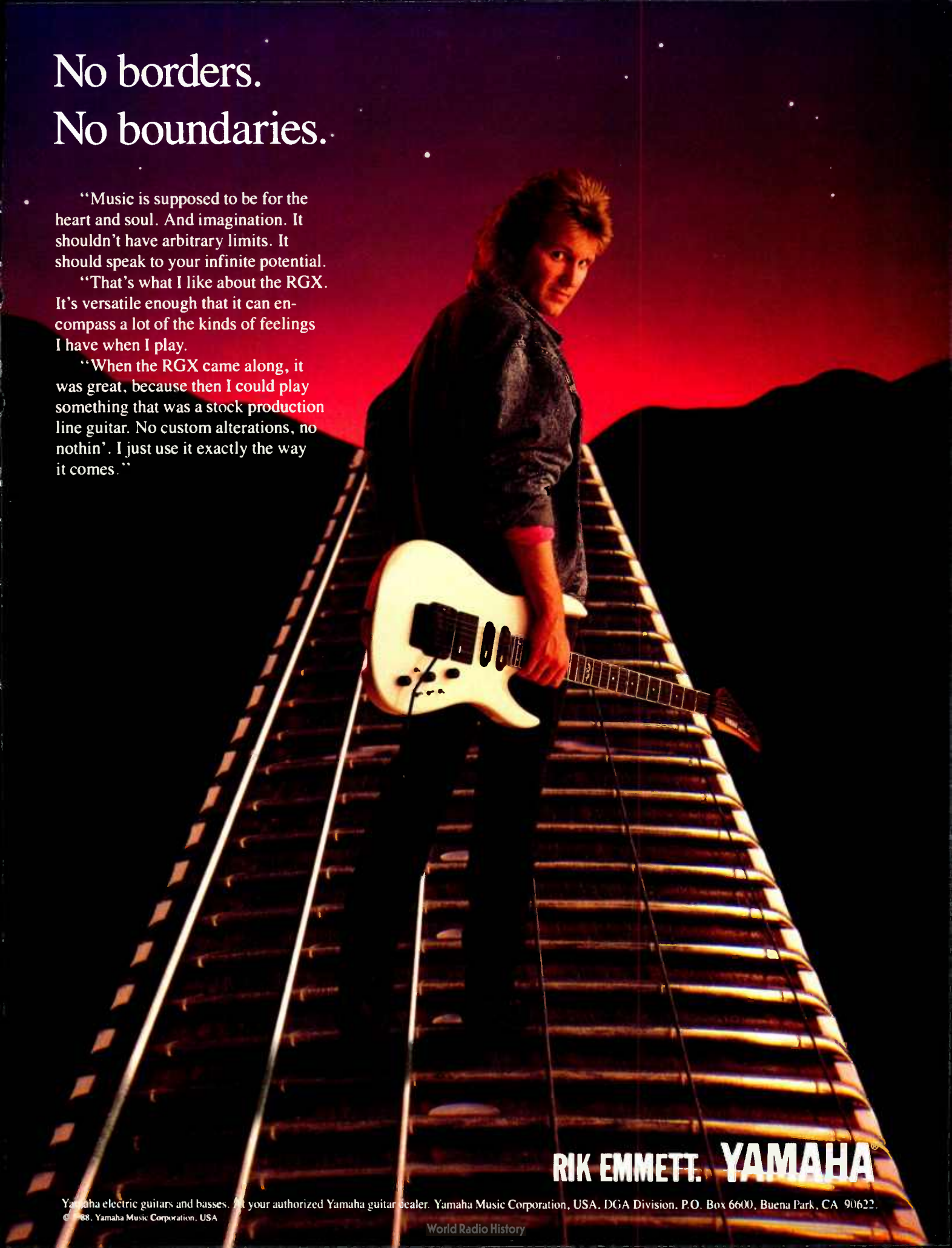

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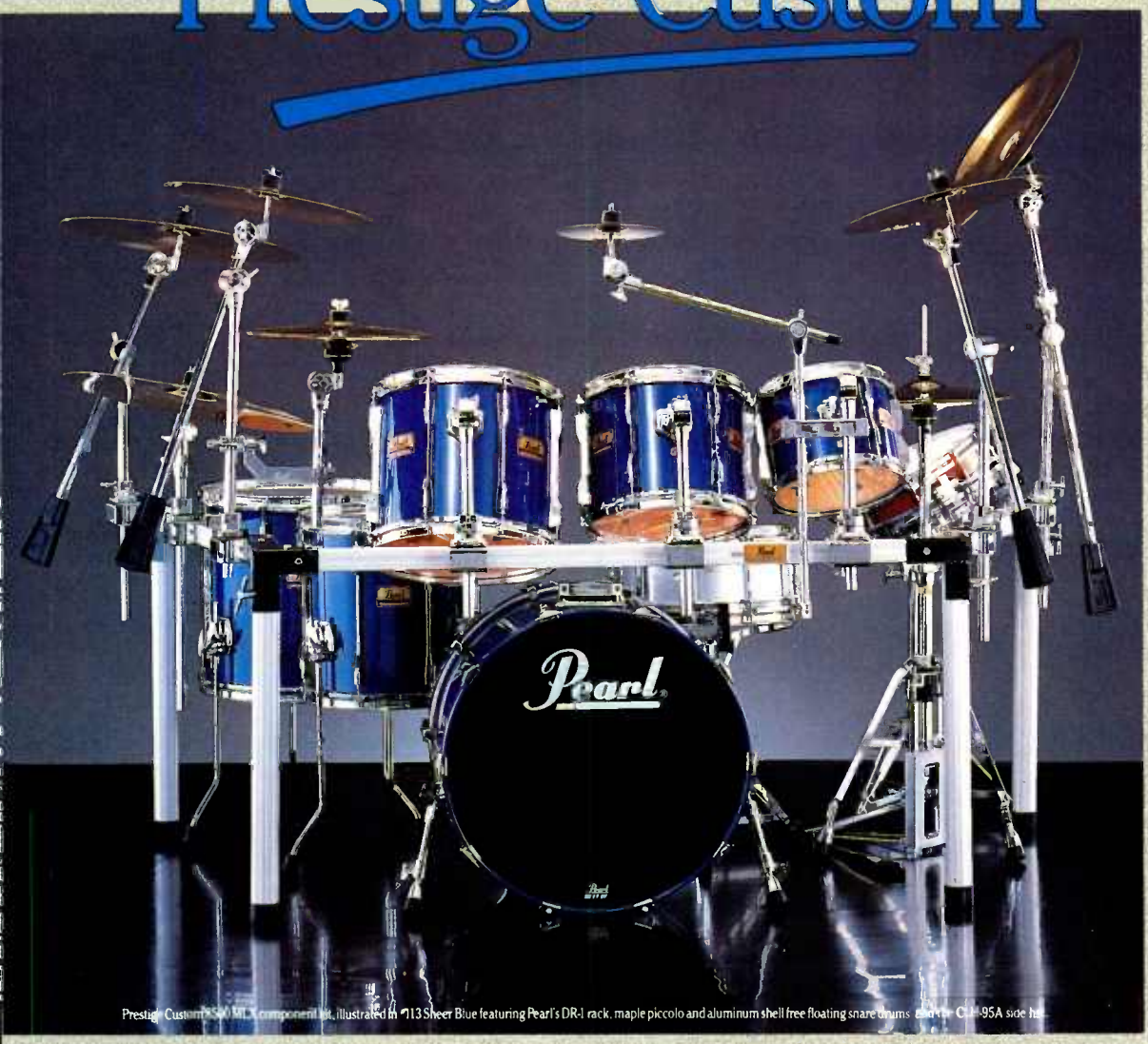

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Dirty Mind hit, Moon talked to Prince on the phone and asked him if songs like "Head" took the "sex angle" too far. "It's working," Prince reportedly answered. "Why change it?" But even in the beginning, it was obvious that Moon and Prince had hit on something more than a good gimmick. "It was amazing to see," Moon recalled years later. "Here was this very quiet kid, but once he'd discovered the notion of sex as a vehicle for his writing, it was as if a door had been unlocked for him."

Prince first tried his hand at lyrics in Moon's company, too. Moon still has the handwritten original of one of Prince's songs, written at 17, just before he went to New York to shop a demo. Titled "Leaving New York," it's something of a milestone for being the first known Prince song to contain a very familiar image: It begins, "Sitting here on the purple lawn."

WHEN PRINCE SHOUTS "Hello, Uptown!" at the beginning of the *Sign o' the Times* concert film, it's more than an allusion to the song from *Dirty Mind*. For Prince, Uptown is a whole cosmos unto itself. It's a place where people of all colors and ages and outlooks can hang together, where the "victims of society and all its games" that Prince sings about can get unbent by breaking oppressive rules. There's a great photo of him in concert around 1980 that captures this spirit. He's wearing one black boot and one white boot, an open trench coat and bikini underwear. He looks freaky and urgent—a little dangerous, yet completely inviting. Behind him is a band that mixes up black and white, male and female, and every conceivable style of dress. And his audiences around this time were even more diverse. He quickly became *the* cult artist of the early '80s; Uptown struck so deep a chord it must have shocked even Prince.

Because he really wasn't out to rock the world at that point—not yet, not consciously. In one sense, Uptown was just the dream an enormously talented black kid from North Minneapolis would need in order to survive and to keep believing that one day he'd prevail. It's important to remember that less than one percent of the Twin Cities metro area population is black. "I grew up on the borderline," Prince said. "I never grew up in one particular culture. I'm not a punk, but I'm not an R&B artist either—because I'm a middle-class kid from Minnesota, which is very much white America."

A lot of white musicians earned a decent living in Minneapolis just by gigging in bars, but breaking out of that scene as a black artist meant getting over with as many different kinds of people as possible from day one. That was the practical side; emotionally, being a black person from Minneapolis also meant you were pretty much a nonentity in your own hometown. And being a terribly gifted nonentity with a lot to say meant you were a freak. So Prince made it all a part of Uptown—the pragmatic determination to get across, to avoid being a "black" artist with its implicit limitations, the celebration of freakiness.

Characteristically, Prince also understood that Uptown was a good marketing move. "Radio was dead," Prince told Mojo. "The discos were dead and the ladies were kind of dead. So I felt like if we wanted to make some noise and I wanted to turn anything out, I was going to have to get something together. That consisted of a lot of bike-riding nude, but it worked."

"Prince really taught me what this business is about," says Brownmark. "Money and power. It's sad. I mean, I know how these bar bands think, because I used to be in a bar band: 'This is a good song, man! It could cross over! It could be on pop

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radio.' Well, it ain't gonna be nothing. You ain't gonna get a deal; you ain't even gonna get in the front door of the record company past the guard gate. That's how tight the business is.

"Prince helped me see that. He taught me how lame the industry is. It's the most prejudiced and worst business I've seen in my life. And so you learn to work around it. It's like...picking a lock. And if you don't know that, you'll be in that line with all the other [black musicians] trying to get through the front gate, when I'm slipping through the side door. I don't wait in line."

AND OF COURSE, sex is awfully important to Uptown. But what critics of Prince's lasciviousness have usually misunderstood (or feared) is that it's about more than getting your rocks off. Sex in Prince's early music is tied up with both pleasure and anarchic rebellion against the maddening limits of normality as he had known it. In the best moments, it's a way of looking to belong to a community. In the most disturbing moments, sex—and God—are just power media to Prince, ways to express domination over someone else ("Lady Cab Driver") or to paint himself as messiah ("I Would Die 4 U").

Horniness, anger, isolation: These are emotional states Prince has usually evoked most convincingly in singing about sex and romance. One thing Prince rarely expressed in his music, until recently, was intimacy.

If sex often equalled power for Prince, the prospect of intimacy seemed to equal a kind of impotence. Consider his circuitous remark about friendship in the 1985 *Rolling Stone* interview: "I'm kind of afraid [to ask friends to come by the house]. That's because sometimes everybody in the band comes over, and we have very long talks. They're very few and far between, and I do most of the talking. Whenever we're done, one of them will come up to me and say, 'Take care of yourself. You know I really love you.' I think they love me so much, and I love them so much, that if they came over all the time I wouldn't be able to be to them what I am, and they wouldn't be able to do for me what they do." Just so close, in other words, and no closer—which is a sensible enough attitude for a boss to take toward his employees. But Prince has also said that the people in the Revolution were his closest friends in the world.

Sign o' the Times was a kind of turning point. "If I Was Your Girlfriend" is the first Prince song to grapple with the sense of distance and inadequacy that runs under the sexual braggadocio in many of his songs. The song's profound loneliness is couched in envy: "If I was your girlfriend/Would you remember to tell me all the things you forgot when I was your man/If I was your best friend/Would you let me take care of you?/And do all the things that only a best friend can?" The tone is coy, but there's desperation beneath it. Try as he might, Prince can't bridge the gap with wordplay or cocksmanship, and he knows it.

As for the rest of *Times*, "Forever in My Life" and "Adore" were the most ingenuous love songs Prince had written up to that point, conveying a warmth that's partly a matter of more mature lyricism ("Until the end of time I'll be there for you" is a line he might have choked on in the past), but mostly tied up with Prince's forthright expression; his heart is right there in the song. Along the same lines, one of the finest moments of his career comes in the *Sign o' the Times* concert film, when he performs a medley of "Forever," a love ballad, and "It," a paean to getting laid. Prince and the band dress up both songs with fervent gospel flourishes, and manage to turn the whole

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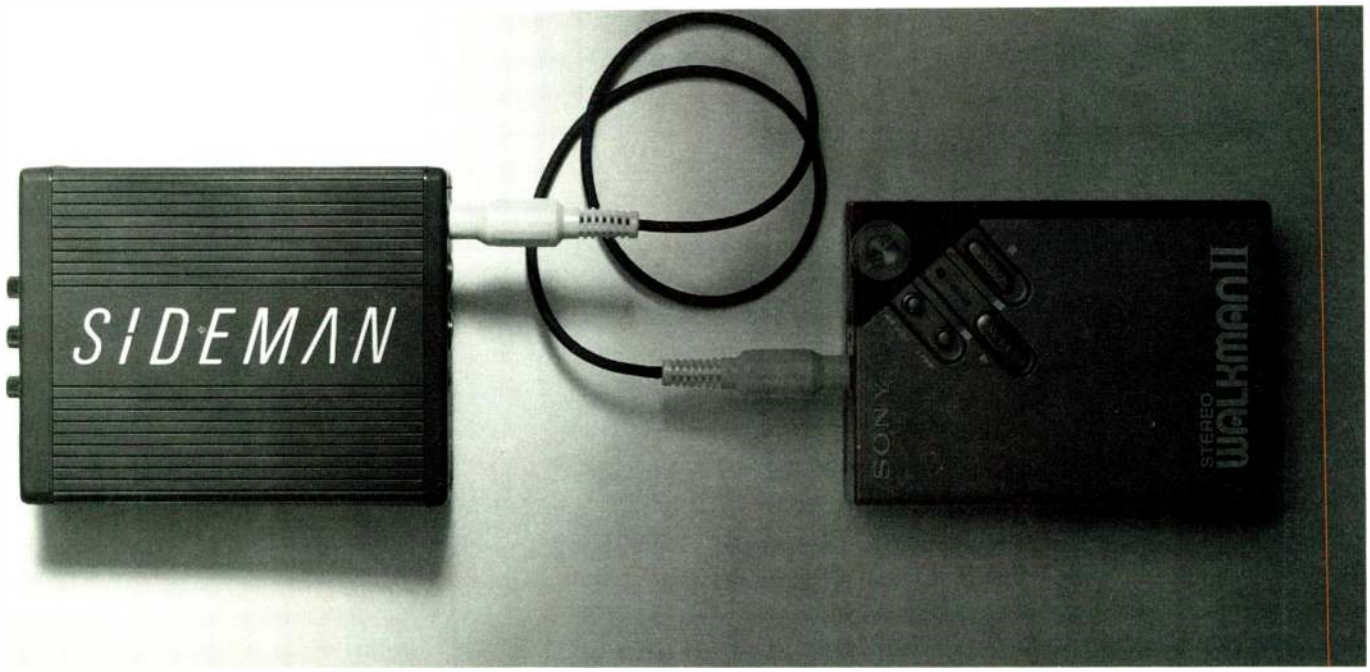

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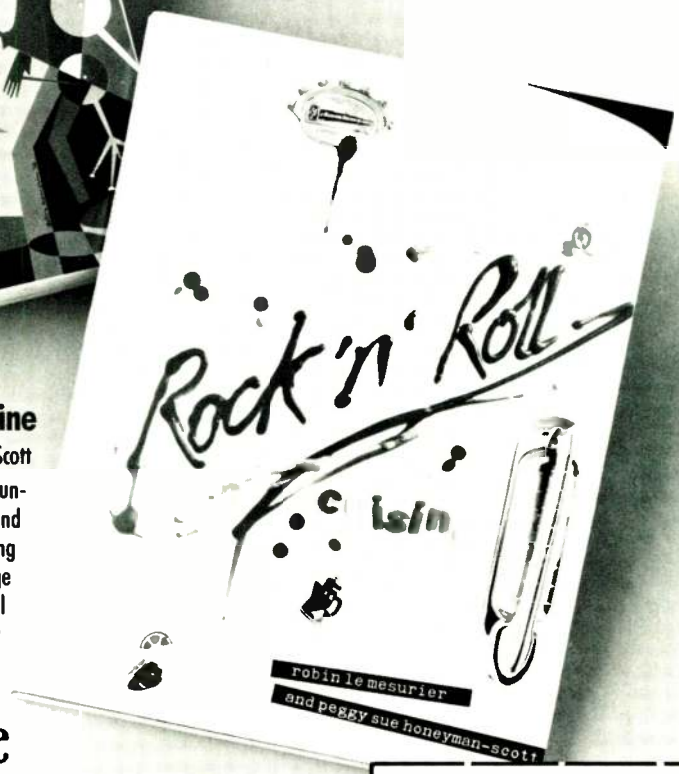

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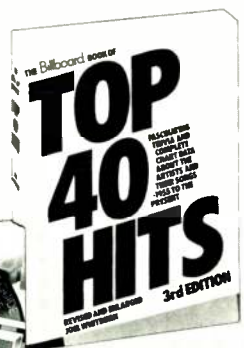

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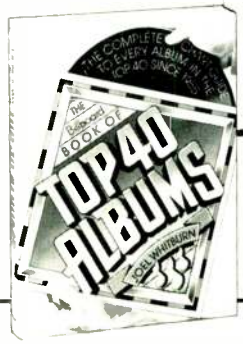

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thing into a sanctified ode to being in love *and* getting laid.

Which may get at the real reason he chose not to release the *Black Album*, which is nothing if not angry and horny in the manner of early Prince records (with the exception of "When 2 R in Love," significantly the only *Black Album* track to make *Lovesexy*). Originally scheduled for early '88 release and then abruptly cancelled, the *Black Album* is in-your-face funk with a hint of fusion. (And if you think the title is a shade immodest, you should know that the original working title was *Funk Bible*.) Musically it's very raunchy and very good, even if some of the lavish notices in the rock press smack of the romantic conviction that an artist's unreleased work must therefore be his best work, a thinking disorder sometimes known as Brian Wilson Disease.

But emotionally, releasing the *Black Album* would have represented a kind of regression into "Lady Cab Driver" and "Let's Pretend We're Married" screw-your-aggression-away territory. Prince's notes for the *Lovesexy* tour program suggest he thought so, too. Written in parables so opaque that they recall Dylan's old self-penned liner notes, the text implies that Camille (the latest in a long line of Princely alter egos) conceived the *Black Album* as a spiteful rejoinder to critics who claimed he'd lost his funky edge. But he realized its essential hatefulness just in time, and pulled it back. The tour notes cast it as a battle between Prince's good and evil sides (Camille and Spooky Electric, respectively): "Camille mustered all the hate he was able. Hate 4 the ones who ever doubted his game. Hate 4 the ones who ever doubted his name. 'Tis nobody funkier—let the *Black Album* fly.' Spookie Electric was talking, Camille started to cry. Tricked. A fool he had been. In the lowest utmostest. He had allowed the dark side of him 2 create something evil."

There's some disagreement about what really happened to the *Black Album*, even among people who ought to know. Some say Prince wanted very badly to release the record. His Paisley Park deal gives him the right to put out whatever he wants, but according to this version of the story he and his managers blinked when Warners—possibly foreseeing the charge of the PMRC light brigade—swore they wouldn't promote the record at all. Others maintain that Prince decided for personal reasons to withdraw it at the last minute, even though a lot of LPs had already been pressed up (no CDs, though, contrary to persistent rumor). Both stories could be true, for that matter. In any case, *Lovesexy* is a better record, and one that's far more consonant with the best impulses of *Sign o' the Times*. When Michael Jackson played Minneapolis a week before *Lovesexy*'s release, Prince reportedly told him he was changing his image, going off in a new direction. The album is certainly that, but so far not too many people have noticed. Reviewers have more often than not likened it to the most sexually flagrant of Prince's past material. And so while Alan Leeds (Prince's tour manager and the day-to-day handler of his affairs in Minneapolis) takes pains to point out that he's only speaking for himself when he says through clenched teeth that "*This-is-not-a-record-about-fucking*," don't you believe it; he's expressing Prince's sentiments, too.

Lovesexy mingles sex-and-God imagery as freely as any Prince record, but toward new ends. Gone is the overbearing self-referentiality of *Around the World* and *Parade*, and in its place is a sense of humor, hope and buoyancy that make *Lovesexy* far more accessible than anything he's done since *Purple Rain*, even if its musical textures and melodic structures are staggeringly intricate. It's impossible, for example, to imagine any previous Prince album containing "Alphabet St.," which is one part spiritual hectoring and two parts funny, knowing self-deprecation. Every Prince fan knows how to fill out this line when he pauses at the end: "I'm gonna put her in the backseat and drive her..." To ecstacy, right? No, to Tennessee. Besides making gentle fun of Prince's obsession with lust-for-lust's sake, the song later lifts a note for note snippet from "We Are the World" ("...and make a better day") and drops it into a lull in the music, where it plays like a joke on his own public image during that time. It also helps to heal some ugly memories.

"Lovesexy" itself (the concept, not the song) seems to represent an ideal spiritual state—sorta like Uptown, except that this utopia is an interior place. But you don't have to be looking for God to find what's best about *Lovesexy*. What really sets it apart is its musical ebullience, emotional breadth and generosity of spirit. The feeling of community Prince has always sung about (and, at his best, embodied) is right there in the grooves, in the joyful interplay between Prince and the band, and in the way the album beckons the listener inside. Prince's records are always parties in a certain sense, but not since *Purple Rain* has one been this open to the public.

While generations of rock, R&B and country musicians have strained to find metaphors for sex, Prince very unabashedly uses sex as a metaphor for more ineffable kinds of attachment. "More than my songs have to do with sex," he said in 1981, "they have to do with one human's love for another . . . the need for love, the need for sexuality, basic freedom, equality. I'm afraid these things don't necessarily come out. I think my problem is that my attitude is so sexual that it overshadows anything else. I might not be mature enough as a writer to bring it all out yet."

Of course, if Prince's music *rejects* the flesh for the spirit, he's got a whole new set of problems. Parts of the record seem to equate carnality with evil. But for now he's making music as scintillating as any he's ever made—chart action or no—and if he can continue to navigate this new course between the Scylla and Charybdis of fucking and fundamentalism, there may come a day when *Lovesexy* is looked back on as the most important turning point in Prince's art since *Dirty Mind*.

"NO ONE REALLY knows Prince," says his friend and protégée Jill Jones. "People think they do, but none of us does." But maybe she got it subtly wrong. You don't have to spend much time around the Prince camp to realize that any search for the "real" Prince (whatever that means) is in vain. Like all truly obsessive artists, this is a man who pours his whole emotional life into his work. (And most of his time, too: Besides the 10 albums he's released in 10 years time, he has hundreds of unreleased tracks in a private vault.) So in a very real sense, what you see is what you get; Prince *is* his work. "Whenever I meet someone and they find out I work for Prince," says Minneapolis aide-de-camp Karen Krattinger, "they always want to know what he does to have a good time. Well, he works. That's just the way it is."

And that's the way he wants it. On June 7th of this year, Prince turned 30. Sometimes in the past he's played a semi-private gig at First Avenue on his birthday, but this year's party was a more low-key affair, held in a ballroom of the downtown Horst Institute. The crowd consisted of two or three hundred family, friends, local music industry types and Paisley Park employees; most were given Prince masks at the door. Food and drink were plentiful, a local gospel/R&B ensemble performed live and a DJ kept the dance floor shaking. When Prince arrived, bodyguards at his side, he greeted family and friends, danced, even mingled a little. Then he disappeared. While the party went on, the guest of honor stood alone on a balcony above the ballroom, looking down on all the people in their Prince masks, dancing beneath him. M

A LONE ARCHITECT WHO FELL THROUGH THE CRACKS OF TIME

HERBIE NICHOLS

The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Herbie Nichols
(Mosaic)

Herbie Nichols was one of the singular pianists in the history of jazz. As an improviser he straddled its historical milestones without being defined by them. As a composer—the progenitor of a self-contained universe—he's the equal of Monk, in my heart, anyway. Chances are excellent you've never heard of him.

Now Thelonious paid some hard dues, but at least his music was accorded a place of honor in his lifetime. Herbie Nichols rarely got to perform his music, even while passing on his knowledge to aspirants like trombonist Roswell Rudd, saxophonist Archie Shepp and bassist Steve Swallow. And in spite of being championed in his lifetime by people like Mary Lou Williams, Billie Holiday and Charles Mingus, Nichols' recording career begins with some 78s for the Hi-Lo label in March 1952 (available again as *Thelonious Monk and Herbie Nichols* on Savoy) and concludes with *Love, Gloom, Cash, Love* for Bethlehem in November 1957. He died in 1962.

Thankfully, there were also five sessions for Alfred Lion's Blue Note label in 1955-1956 that together comprise this magnificent five-record boxed set from Mosaic. Combining the original releases with tantalizing alternate takes and eight never-before-heard compositions, *The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Herbie Nichols* is one of the most vital musical documents of the past 40 years—possibly the most perfect trio music in the history of jazz.

Because these are *real* trios, not a star turn with rhythm accompaniment. Nichols orchestrated the rhythm so his drummers (Art Blakey or Max Roach) could achieve a dancing, concerto-like effect—parts, not breaks—and the rhythm figures which invigorate his bold, oblique melodies inform the thematic development of the group's improvisations as well. Bassist Al McKibbon (sometimes Teddy Kotick) contributes a translucent harmonic sensibility and fervent locomotion, while Nichols italicizes the *tonal* aspect of rhythm, blurring traditional distinctions and obliterating clichés. Blakey's approach is at once primal and ghostly—most telling on the Latin-tinged "Brass Rings," and upbeat swing like "Crisp Day," "Step Tempest," "Dance Line" and the gripping alternate take of "It Didn't Happen"—but Roach's rigorous orchestral sensibility, dynamic clarity and long, loping gait—dig Max's teasing rhythmic motifs on "Terpsichore"—better define Nichols' architecture.

Nichols' own sound suggests an Olympian concord of Jelly Roll Morton, Teddy Wilson, Béla Bartók and Thelonious Monk. Like Monk, his tempos are enough to fix an image in the listener's inner ear. On one hand, there's the ruminative blueness of medium strolls like his "hit" "Lady Sings the Blues," "House Party Starting," "Spinning Song," "117th Street" and the haunting "Sunday Stroll" (the latter shifting between major and minor moods to such effect that when he hits the firm resolution of the bridge you want to shout amen). On the other are sprightly gallops like "The Gig," "Chit-Chatting," "Riff Primitiff," "Nick at T's" and "Furthermore," where Nichols uncoils long, fractured arabesques of melody, off-

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handedly punctuating these lines with quirky, amoebic syncopations that fall in between the cracks of time so unconsciously, he sounds like two pianists.

Herbie Nichols' music is avant-garde yet traditional, brooding yet quixotic; his contrapuntal piano playing—brimming with percussive verve—is rendered in a crystalline melodious manner. And always there is that blues quality—a sigh intoned as prayer, protest, resignation and affirmation (what annotator Roswell Rudd remembers as "The Sound"). Herbie Nichols was a renaissance man whose innovations anticipated the post-bop era. While his living crucifixion remains an American tragedy, the resurrection signified by this Mosaic collection guarantees that, once again, Herbie Nichols *lives!* (Mosaic, 197 Strawberry Hill Ave., Stamford, CT 06902-2510)

– **Chip Stern**

METALLICA

. . .And Justice For All
(Elektra/Asylum)

Contemporary metal is distinguished by its minor-key riffs and the relentless sense that you are manly to be doomed and doomed to be manly. Though a few bands do appear to think highly of the devil, reports of Satan worship are grossly exaggerated and usually founded on hysterical misinterpretations of lyrics that plainly assert that we are living in hell, not that we are necessarily going to hell, or that hell is fun. Or if they *do* think that hell ain't no bad place to be, it is only in comparison to a heaven that would include Jerry Falwell. Such insight is especially threatening to politicians and large corporations who want the Average Joe to think the ecocatastrophe that is now descending worldwide is simply bad luck or the fault of all of us and thus the responsibility of no one.

"When a man lies he murders some part of the world/These are the pale deaths which men miscall their lives/All this I cannot bear witness any longer/Cannot the kingdom of salvation take me home," Metallica says in "To Live is to Die." This is the statement of someone who is struggling to see the world accurately, despairs at what he sees, and cannot even bear the hope that anyone else will see it either. "The sickness unto death" Sorën Kierkegaard would call it; "touting teen suicide," the PMRC would call it.

Like the PMRC and PTA and brainwash organizations like Tough Love, Metallica traces the problem to child rearing practices, but with an opposite conclusion. In "Dyers Eve" they curse their parents for suffocating them in guarding them from real life. The brainwash didn't quite take, so they are stuck in this absurd, insulated middle-class world where you have to rip holes in your own flesh to feel anything at all. Without specifically mentioning it, they've explained headbanging. Though it is easy to ridicule or scold teenagers for the garish excesses they must undergo to break out of this world, there is no humor, no reconciliation, no condescension anywhere on this record to let anyone off the hook.

My one quibble with Metallica is that like so many of their peers, they emphasize adrenalin over groove. I have nothing against adrenalin, but the only way to listen to these guys is to bang your head and thrash around your apartment, or they just sound irritating. Theoretically speaking, I think it's possible to shout the truth with less emphasis on flailing and more emphasis on being in the pocket. Then again, maybe not.

– **Charles M. Young**

DWIGHT YOAKAM

Buenas Noches From a Lonely Room
(Reprise)

STEVE EARLE

Copperhead Road
(Uni)

The thing that bothers me about Dwight Yoakam is the hat. After nine years of public life, Yoakam's never been spotted without the damn thing. What's going on under there anyhow? Does he keep his wallet and car keys there or what? The reason the unmovable hat warrants mentioning is because it's indicative of the central failing in Yoakam's music, which is a bit too careful, controlled and picture perfect. He's got the thoroughbred country schtick down pat, but there's something bloodless and mannered in his delivery.

Yoakam's intentions are, of course, above reproach. A hillbilly purist out to wipe the cheap makeup off the face of country music, this former Kentucky poor boy is a staunch traditionalist who takes pride that his music is free of such Nash-trash as sappy string arrangements and drum machines. Exploring the stories and dreams of the working class, Yoakam's pedigreed mountain

music conforms to the canon of the style right down to the weeping fiddle and Saturday dance-hall accordion.

This, Yoakam's third LP, sticks with the formula that served him well on the preceeding two, and like those albums, *Buenas Noches* will no doubt sell well. Side one, structured as a song cycle chronicling the disintegration of a relationship, concludes with the title track, which is in the "Hey, Joe" tradition of songs about guys shooting their baby down. Yoakam's considerable talent as a tunesmith shines on this song, with a simple, graceful melody that's a real heartbreaker. Side two is a grab bag that includes three excellent cover tunes, the best of which, Homer Joy's "Streets of Bakersfield," features a duet with Yoakam and one of his heros, Buck Owens. Yoakam's other heros are readily apparent in his ultra-smooth vocal style, which owes a considerable debt to Lefty Frizzell and Merle Haggard. A nasal singer who punctuates his phrasing with a yodeling break evocative of a braying mule, Yoakam has a high, lonesome country voice built for keening harmonies and songs by the Louvin Brothers. His voice is flat out gorgeous, and four of the tunes here stand as solid proof of his writing talents. If only he'd relax and let down his hat a bit...

Though Yoakam is often lumped with Steve Earle under the "New Traditionalists" banner, they actually have little in common. Whereas Yoakam would get a day job before he'd soil his music with a synthesizer, Earle describes his sound

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–Brian Eno

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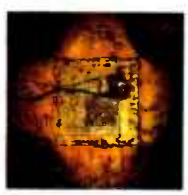

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as "heavy metal bluegrass" and irreverently declares that he hasn't a purist bone in his body.

An exponent of the John Petty "The Boss" Mellencamp school, Earle makes fields of waving grain music that rocks like a mother. The raunchy, country crunch of *Copperhead Road* is, in fact, evocative of nothing so much as the Stones, circa *Let It Bleed*. This big, angry guitar music is the ideal vehicle for expressing small-town frustrations about to explode, and the bulk of the songs here are tales of well-meaning young men who wind up on the wrong side of the law. The best of that batch, "The Devil's Right Hand," was recorded by Waylon Jennings two years ago, is featured in the current film *Betrayed*, and is shaping up to be a classic of its kind. Earle does a great version of it, too.

An unrepentant bad boy with a string of bad marriages under his belt, Earle isn't all bluster and bravado. A penny-whistling ditty titled "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" moves with a jaunty lilt worthy of the Pogues, while "Nothing but a Child" is a teary-eyed lullabye. However, even in these gentle moments, Earle's music is informed with a weathered, worldly grittiness that's pointedly lacking in Yoakam's. One can't help but respect the historical accuracy of Yoakam's music, but it's easier to warm up to Earle's raggedy rave-ups.

– **Kristine McKenna**

WAS (NOT WAS)

What Up, Dog?
(Chrysalis)

During the early '80s, Detroit-based songwriters and producers Don Ferguson and David Weiss competed with New York City art-funksters under the name Was (Not Was). Employing unlikely casts of support musicians ranging from guitarist Wayne Kramer to singer Mel Tormé, they made two albums, *Was (Not Was)* and *Born to Laugh at Tornadoes*, as well as *Don't Walk Away*, a more dance-geared R&B shot billed to their steady vocal collaborator Sweetpea Atkinson The Wases are fans and smugglers—fans of saloon pop and avant-jazz and Detroit's rock-soul heritage, and smugglers of satire and put-ons and yuks. In their previous work, their compulsion for the latter occasionally got the better of them, but their songwriting and production smarts were real. And they could cook.

On *What Up, Dog?*, their first album in five years, Was (Not Was) unclutter and consolidate their music; as they update, they also compartmentalize. The off-center arrangements and attacks that the Wases once built into their longer jams are now jokes with their own titles. As such, they interrupt the flow of the over-long 16-song CD and cassette versions (the album loses three tracks, including "Wedding Vows in Vegas" sung by Frank Sinatra, Jr., but only one joke). On the plus side, by giving standup humor like "Earth to Doris" or the pit bull terrier gag of the title tune their own dubious performing space, the Wases clear the musical runway enough for their more conventional pop/funk numbers to really take off.

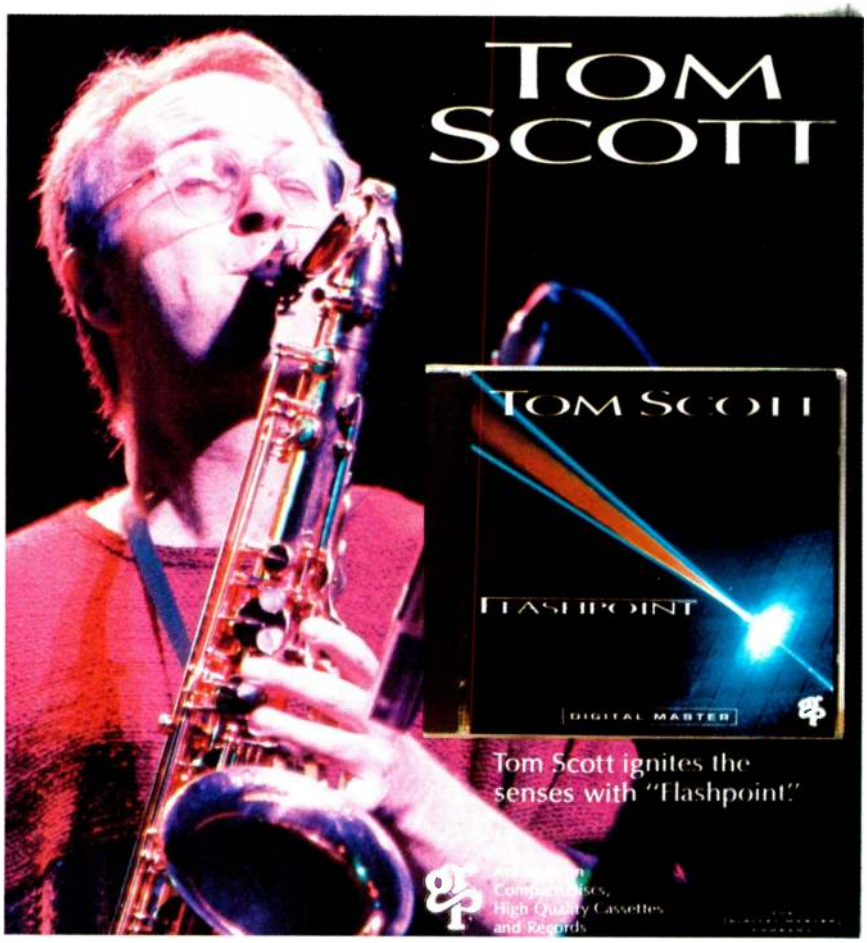
With Atkinson and Sir Harry Bowens singing like the Detroit soul men they are, songwriting collaborations with Marshall Crenshaw (the terrific "Love Can Be Bad Luck") and Elvis Costello ("Shadow and Jimmy") sound one way and think another. The Wases turn sardonic poignancy into atmospheric ballads, and they rev up nicely on up-tempo songs like "Boy's Gone Crazy" and "Walk the Dinosaur," which was a U.K. hit. The result is Was (Not Was)'s most accessible and best album. For all their outré touches, though, it works best when they play it close to the vest.

– **James Hunter**

JOE HENDERSON

An Evening with Joe Henderson, Charlie Haden and Al Foster
(Red/PSI)

I think this might be even better than Henderson's two Blue Note albums cut at the Village Vanguard, and it's less the difference in bassists—Ron Carter in the Blue trunks and Haden here in the Red—than



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the change of venue. For all the Vanguard's fabled history, playing in a narrow wedge of mid-November Manhattan basement for an album someone else is planning to entitle *The State of the Tenor, Volumes One & Two*, sounds like a lot less fun than breathing the open air of an

Italian July, and it shows: the Blue Notes are the weightier albums made by the better-rehearsed band, but Henderson sounds like he's enjoying himself a lot more on Italian Red. Which may be a quibble. In general he is, these days, playing about as much tenor saxophone as it is legally possible to play. It's just that here he sounds more humorous, garrulous, open-heart-and-throated, euphonious, uproarious, euphoric. Ecco, Italy is more fun than New York City, but then so is a poke in the eye. Between music and history-in-the-making, I'll choose music every time.

The difference in bassists is hardly incidental. I have no interest in promoting a bake-off of the modern bass, but on the Vanguard sides Carter set out largely to redefine the role of the bass in a horn trio—double, triple and other stops, sudden starts, repeated emphasis of compositional structure and thematic thrust—and he largely succeeded. Impressive and not a little saturnine, his playing, aided by an inexplicably muffled recorded sound, nearly dominates the music. Now, Charlie Haden is at least as capable of asserting his identity within a small band, probing the music until it either atomizes or elevates, but on this *Evening* he's at his most modest, offering Henderson loving, non-territorial support, and this adds admirably to the album's relaxed and festive air. In this he is enormously aided by hilarious Al Foster, who interrupts his own silken time with a host of bashometrics, rhythmocomedy and big nuance. Between gravity and levity, I choose levity tonight.

But Henderson is the main event on all these sides, and you'll just have to hear him to believe him, soaring and kicking his way through the music as if the whole range of the instrument and its history were his for the taking, and maybe they are: the selfsame song that the proud heart of Hawkins found a path to amid more alien corn then I care to shake a stick at. We're fast becoming the most stupefied nation on earth but it's a great period for tenor saxophonists. Sonny Rollins holds most of the property rights to the Colosseum, but when his monumental scale wearies you amid its gigantic exhilarations, Joe Henderson supplies sublime contrast—the angels play Bach on state occasions but listen to Mozart *en famille*—and I'd walk a mile in squeaky shoes to hear him play "Invitation."

– Rafi Zabor

JANE'S ADDICTION

Nothing's Shocking
(Warner Bros.)

Nothing's Shocking is intent on working more than a few expressive wrinkles into well-traveled hard rock terrain. The basic sound of Jane's Addiction will be familiar to most—the lunging live-wire fretwork, the subdued acousticisms and the straining wails of lead singer Perry Farrell all take their main inspiration from the first four volumes of the Led Zeppelin canon. But Farrell and his three bandmates (in league with Dave Jerden, who co-produced the album with Farrell)

aren't content to merely ape the old moves; they imbue the music with a primitive vigor and an acute lyrical sensibility that is truly subversive.

You won't find any standard cock-rock posturings in the band's music; Farrell's psychodramatic writing style runs closer to the scary introspections of Lou Reed than to the feeble bad-boy-on-the-prowl

continued on page 113

ROCK SHORT TAKES

LET'S ACTIVE
Every Dog Has His Day (IRS)

HOW DO I LOVE THIS ALBUM? LET ME count the ways. For starters, the writing is rock solid, matching gorgeously melancholy tunes like "Horizon" and "Mr. Fool" with such aggressively upbeat numbers as "Too Bad" and the title tune. Then there's the sound of the album, which is big, bold and bursting with detail, delivering the most muscular Let's Active groove ever. And finally, there's the sense that Let's Active is a real band again, and not just Mitch Easter, Inc.; special thanks for Angie Carlson, whose voice is to Easter's what gin is to tonic.

EDIE BRICKELL & THE NEW BOHEMIANS
Shooting Rubberbands at the Stars (Geffen)

VOCALLY, EDIE BRICKELL SOUNDS A lot like Rickie Lee Jones, minus the whiskey and cigarettes and with an irrepressible whimsy in place of Jones' boorish beatnik cool. Compositionally, well...comparisons are almost pointless. Her delivery, for all its girlish, sing-song surface, is uncannily tuneful (and unexpectedly bluesy), while her wry, word-clever lyrics ultimately prove wiser than her seemingly playful approach would suggest. But Brickell is full of surprises, not the least of which is this album's resilient charm.

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

HOTHOUSE FLOWERS
People (London)

IF OBTUSE NARRATIVES, VERBOSE LYRics and a vague sense of melody can make someone the next Van Morrison, then Liam O'Maonlai has it made. From the way the songs play words against melody, O'Maonlai clearly thinks himself as much poet as singer; too bad his lyrics are so leaden and his tunes so slight. Even so, he's more bearable than Kevin Rowland, his band's better-focused than the Boomtown Rats, and when they tumble across the likes of "Don't Go," they sound like winners in their own right.

DAVID LINDLEY & EL RAYO-X
Very Greasy (Elektra)

THERE'S NOTHING SO FRUSTRATING as hearing a great band saddled with weak material, which is why Lindley's previous solo albums never quite delivered what they promised. *Very Greasy* doesn't completely cure that problem, but it comes close, thanks to solid playing and some inspired cover versions. The tropic novelties become a bit much ("Tiki Torches at Twilight"?), but the Mexicali funk of "Papa Was a Rolling Stone," souped-up ska behind "Werewolves of London" and surf-guitar break in "Do Ya Wanna Dance?" more than compensate.

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA
The Rough Dancer and the Cyclical Night (American Clavé)

INSTEAD OF THE FIERCE ROMANTIcism of *Tango: Zero Hour* or the virtuosic flourishes of *Live*, what *The Rough Dancer* offers is sex, pure and dangerous. Though the writing is every bit as rigorous and evocative as a Stravinsky chamber suite, the playing is loose and salacious, making this Piazzolla's most vivid American album yet.

MICHELLE SHOCKED
Short Sharp Shocked (Mercury)

SHOWY, SHALLOW, SHRILL.

BUCKWHEAT ZYDECO
Taking It Home (Island)

AS WITH *ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS*, THE KICK comes from the way Buckwheat and his Ils Sont Partis Band add a zydeco twist to a familiar rock tune, in this case, a version of "Why Does Love Have to Be So Sad," with Eric Clapton on hand for added authenticity. But the album's real strength lies with the way the band sneaks an R&B snap into its rollicking two-steps and lazy rockers; accordion to the contrary, it's the rhythm section that makes Buckwheat seem like a true zydeco king.

KING SUNNY ADE AND HIS AFRICAN BEATS
Live Live JuJu (Rykodisc)

IN THEORY, THIS OUGHT TO BE THE BEST way to hear Sunny Ade—recorded live without edits, in straight two-track digital. So why is this 58-minute disc such a disappointment? Ironically, it's the recording itself, which not only relies too much on the house P.A. (thereby limiting the drums' tonal range) but also provides a mix that makes more sense for headphones than stereo speakers. Caveat emptor.

HUNTERS AND COLLECTORS
Fate (IRS)

ROUGH-HEWN AND RAW-EDGED, THERE'S nothing slick or commercially accommodating about Hunters & Collectors. Yet, beneath the band's brassy bluster there's a disarming, almost endearing sentimentality. It isn't just Mark Seymour's lyrics, either, though the words to "Back on the Breadline," "Something to Believe In" and the CD/cassette bonus track "What's a Few Men?" are affecting enough. No, the real power lies in the way these mournful, loping melodies play off H&C's brash, insistent sound, until the album sounds like a hit in spite of itself.

LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO
Journey of Dreams (Warner Bros.)

BY NOW, LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO seems less a politically-correct exoticism than a genuine (if still somewhat exotic) pop phenomenon. Even given the seeming impenetrability of their Zulu lyrics, there's something invitingly familiar about the group's delightfully diffuse melodies and warm, rain-like harmonies. Special credit for including a lyrics sheet that explains what the songs mean, and how they work.

VELVET ELVIS
Velvet Elvis (Enigma)

AS EXPECTED WITH AMER-INDIE GUITAR pop, there's no hot dogging here: The playing is functional and efficient, the production clean and uncluttered. But the writing is worth a thousand virtuoso solos. Effortlessly melodic and emotionally resonant, these are the kind of songs they don't much write anymore, but damned well should.

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JAZZ SHORT TAKES

CASSANDRA WILSON
Blue Skies (Candid)

WILSON'S BEEN ONE OF BROOKLYN JAZZ'S hidden heavyweights: masquerading as a singer, she's been leading one of the best groups out there, arranging and writing all the material. Her tunes mix meters, and they intimate various genres while she sings like an angel over their constructions. *Blue Skies*, however, is different from her more experimental work. It's all standards, all acoustic, and unlike her previous records—which haven't ever caught the maturity of her live performances—it feels totally assured, as if she'd already absorbed the potential of the style and was taking one last nostalgic dip back into it. Backed by Mulgrew Miller, Lonnie Plexico and Terri Lyne Carrington, she stretches out over tunes like "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and "Gee Baby Ain't I Good to You." She'll strangle a word to give it emotional resonance and leave the melody in the dust when she needs to. An astounding record.

HOP WILSON
Hop Wilson and His Buddies, Steel Guitar Flash (Ace)

IT GROANS. IT MOANS. IT'S WAY OUT OF tune. Don't expect something slick/country from Wilson's steel: It grinds out rubble-making blues guitar lines, but transferred to the oiliest instrument America (Hawaii?) ever produced. Wilson, a bluesman from around Houston, sings with a good voice—these pieces were recorded in the late '50s and early '60s—and everything he plays is loaded with gloom. Even the instrumental numbers, where the audience is supposed to tap those feet, then get up to dance, suggest the sound of somebody with terminal toothache. Yet, they rock. (From Roundup, Box 54, North Cambridge, MA 02140)

JACK DEJOHNETTE
Audio Visualscapes (Impulse/MCA)

THERE ISN'T A CLEAR, CLEAN MOMENT here. Lines are all jumbled together. Mick Goodrick's guitar muddles up the potential clear space, and two of the best young saxophonists, Greg Osby and Gary Thomas, start and stop solos at will, moving from riffs to solos to riffs. My guess is that this will be an important record. The saxophonists bring genuinely new ideas about phrasing to the mix along with jazz-in-the-space-age electronics. Anybody doubting that something new was going on in jazz has only to check this out. It takes some work to get what's going on, though; musical ideas drift in and out, while ideas about music do the same thing. It's the way jazz records used to be, like a news program telling you what's going on.

MAXWELL DAVIS
Maxwell Davis Father of West Coast R&B (Ace)

MORE EVIDENCE OF A BIG BAND CONNECtion to rock 'n' roll. Davis, a fine tenor saxophonist who toured with Jazz at the Philharmonic, was post-war Los Angeles' most important arranger and producer, leading the big riffing band that backed Etta James, B.B. King, Percy Mayfield, Gene Phillips, Amos Milburn and lots more. It's that sound of L.A. R&B: tight, glossy horns over deep blues piano. Unafraid to use jungle sounds, the horn section growls and shouts. But it's the saxophone section that attracted Davis, and these 14 great tracks are loaded with sensuous, Saturday night horn lines. Like jump bands, his orchestra owed more than its share to Count Basie, but it's also rock 'n' roll: It all depends on whose ears you use.

BOBBY HUTCHERSON
Cruisin' the Bird (Landmark)

SOMETIMES SESSIONS JUST SOUND GOOD. The recording quality matches the effortlessness of the playing, the material's good, and the musicians know where 'one' is. *Cruisin'* has that feel to it, where every note is a joy, everyone plays well, and everything, in a large sense, seems to fit. Partially, this is due to the group. Buddy Montgomery, Wes' brother and a good vibraphonist, plays piano: he can comp and swing, and he never gets tangled up with Victor Lewis' accurate drumming. Then there's Ralph Moore, who, through his ubiquitousness, is turning into the Hank Mobley of his generation. He's also metamorphosing into a profound player. Calmly emotional, he winds through Hutcherson's arrangements, which are marked off rhythmically with the geometrical accuracy of a chess board.

FRANK MORGAN
Yardbird Suite (Landmark)

ANYBODY WHO'S SEEN MORGAN PLAY REGularly knows that he's one of the most passionate musicians performing today. Maybe spending so much time up the river and not having to make a living from his art has kept him fresh, but when he plays you can't help being reminded that music can be a profound means of self-expression, not simply a craft. There's nothing special about *Yardbird Suite* formally; it's a head-solo-head routine, featuring either Bird tunes, or tunes Bird liked to play. But Morgan, who knows Parker's vocabulary as well as anyone, makes it special with his improvising. "Skylark" shows him as one of the best ballad players alive; his exchanges with Mulgrew Miller on "Scrapple from the Apple" show how wild his soloing can get—and how far away he gets from Parker's language.

IKE QUEBEC
Blue and Sentimental (Blue Note CD)

TENOR SAXIST QUEBEC WAS A SPECIAL guy. An A&R man for Blue Note, he brought Monk to the label. If that wasn't enough, he also recorded a masterpiece, this record, and on it you can hear why, among some people, he's got a great reputation. With a huge house of a sound, deep passion, and a tone that lands somewhere between Lester Young and Hawkins, he lets his motive mind loose. The CD includes two tunes not on the record; it also includes some of the best work of guitarist Grant Green, another obscure figure.

BY PETER WATROUS

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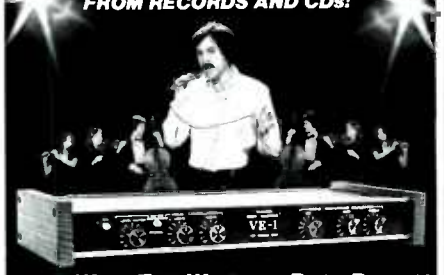

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BROMBERG/WALKER from page 56

The newest Cray album doesn't signal any major shifts in direction. "Why would we want to do that?" Walker says pragmatically. "The only changes we'll make are the ones Bob demands. The only difference was that we used Sunset Sound this time to do our tracking, and there's no question that that made a big difference in the sound, especially in the bottom end."

Having signed Joe Ely, Bakersfield country singer Bobby Durham and Texas honky-tonker Jimmie Dale Gilmore to HighTone, Walker and Bromberg are also excited to be getting back to their roots. "Country music is our thing," nods Bromberg. "We would *love* to be into country music major, but we're not known for that. So we're trying to ease into it. Not to say we're going to get rid of blues."

Of course, since the success of Robert Cray, production offers have been coming in from major labels. Are there any established stars the pair would like to work with? "It would depend," says Walker. "I would love to work with Billy Idol," he says, motioning to an Idol poster on the wall. "I love Billy Idol—everything he's done practically."

Bromberg shakes his head. "You can do that one solo." M

RECORDS from page 107

routines of lesser rock brethren. Two of the album's best tracks are particularly Reed-like: "Ted, Just Admit It. . . ," a menacing number linking media overkill to sexual violence (the titular "Ted" is mass murderer Ted Bundy, who appears in a sound bite); and "Jane Says," the band's signature song, a piece of junkie portraiture as precise, subdued and unsettling as any of Reed's similarly styled material on the third Velvet Underground album.

On other tracks—"Ocean Size," "Had a Dad," "Standing in the Shower. . .Thinking," "Idiots Rule"—the writing is by turns crude, naive, wide-eyed. It fuses with the pinpoint playing of guitarist David Navarro, bassist Eric A. and drummer Stephen Perkins to create a style that mashes punk angst and alienation against pure metal crunge. In the end, Jane's Addiction is a band as bewilderingly unclassifiable as it is electrifying. A single spin will clue you in: *Nothing's Shocking* is something new under the hard-rocking sun.

– Chris Morris

MIDI REVERB from page 62

have to do any new setups to use them. When using portable samples, the sampling algorithm works like a pallette—you can leave it and return to it to resample or do basic editing chores like slicing and enveloping (no loops, though). One hip editing feature is its ability to take one continuous 33.5-second sample and divide it up after the fact into twelve individual ones.

It goes without saying that all these external MIDI control commands can be permanently recorded through a MIDI sequencer on the way in, which in a tape-MIDI sync-up gives you automated effects control. But the ADR can also serve as its own MIDI controller, not a bad idea given its six sliders and vast array of "soft" buttons and function keys. Used this way, in "auto-MIDI" mode, the ADR also remembers page changes, so if you begin recording, adjust a parameter, then go to the next page of the menu and change another parameter, the page change will also be recorded. Nice touch. Overall, the ADR's brain/interface panel is quite a bit larger and gives you far more information and control capability than a Larc remote for a Lexicon 480L (the ADR's main competition), but that also means you can't just leave it around on the console. And if you're pricing a 480L, you might be pleasantly surprised to discover the ADR, at $7000, is $3500 less (I guess even rich people can use a price break once in a while).

But forget all these amazing features for a second. In the end, it comes down to how it sounds. To say the ADR sounds smoother than a $500 reverb is like saying a bottle of 1935 Vouvray tastes smoother than '87 Gallo. The gulf is so vast, words fail. For maximum effect, get your ears on one and listen, even if you eat a lot more chicken than caviar. In fact, considering how important a good reverb is to what your recordings eventually sound like, after a while an AKG ADR 68K may not seem like a luxury at all. M

WINWOOD from page 68

engineer on *High Life*. "He's a superb engineer," says Steve of Lord Alge, "not a slide-rule man, and he has a straightforward New Jersey attitude that kicks me in the pants."

Billy Joel, one of Winwood's best American buddies, has a funny story about the kick *he* got meeting Steve. Not in 1985, when Winwood played on Joel's *The Bridge*, not in '83, when he visited sessions for *An Innocent Man*—but way back in 1967—when a very nervous Joel knocked on the door of Traffic's New York hotel room. Young Billy was anxiously combing his frizzled hair when Winwood opened the door. "Well, hello then!" said Winwood throwing the door wide, disclosing the presence within of Traffic's Jim Capaldi and Chris Wood. "It is *Billy*, isn't it? So now, what would you like to interview us about?" "Oh no!" Joel corrected, "I'm not a journalist! I'm a keyboard player in a band, the Hassles. Here in America, we're on the United Artists label, same as you guys!"

"Steve remained the perfect gentleman, hardly concerned either way," says Joel with an affectionate grin, "and he was just content to talk music. He was amazed that the Hassles played 'Mr. Fantasy' in concert, and that we had also recorded 'Colored Rain.'"

"He just sat there, looking sorta thrilled and sorta shocked. 'STEVE, MAN,' I said, 'we love you over here. Honest! You just gotta spend more time in the U.S.A.!'"

Billy Joel wonders to this day if Winwood noticed how nervous he was at their initial meeting. "Actually," Winwood confesses sheepishly, "there is one small thing that comes back to me from that hotel get-together. Billy didn't expect me to answer the door, and Billy was combing his hair when I suddenly appeared. It startled him, and he left the comb in his hair for the whole time he was in our room talking! I didn't have the heart to divulge this."

"Since he's one of my role models, it's been a thrill to see how much he's grown," says Joel. "I guess you might say Steve has returned and is having a larger effect than ever, but for me he was never gone. Like Keith Emerson with the Nice and Felix Cavaliere with the Rascals, Steve's style has been an immense influence on any kid who ever sat down at a keyboard. But especially Steve—who was as good at piano as he was at organ, and always featured both instruments on record. For my generation, it was considered sorta wimpy to have taken keyboard lessons until the Spencer Davis Group caught fire, and Traffic just confirmed the idea of the guy at the keys being a leader.

"After 25 years as a professional," Joel concludes, "any compliment floors Steve, any trace of recognition surprises him, and any little thing he can learn or discover is a source of delight. From him, you get a man's wisdom as well as a boy's love of fun."

Joel's words of affection and praise are conveyed to

Winwood just before we adjourn our meal for a stroll, and Steve turns a deep crimson, literally hiding behind his lapel.

"Stop!" he pleads, "You're embarassing me! Billy was even kind enough to invite me to go to Russia with him on his special trip, which I would have loved, but with my marriage and the new album and setting up home here and in the States, we've been tied up for quite a bit." Hesitant pause. "I've also managed a few non-musical accomplishments, you know."

Such as?

"Well, please don't make too much of this, but I've recently learned to swim while in America. I was born in Birmingham, in the core of the Midlands, which are totally landlocked, but that's no excuse, because Britain *is* an island. As a kid, my dad had wanted me to follow him into the foundry, and you don't get 'round to too many water sports in those places. But anyhow, I got some breast-stroke and side-stroke lessons while I was in New York last, from this fellow who once swam for the British Honduras Olympic team.

"I know—you'd think somebody who did a record called *Arc of a Diver* could swim, but I was scared *stiff*. Those who learn all this as a child can never understand the *fear* that you face as an adult, but I conquered it, and I consider it one of my proudest recent accomplishments. I suppose I always need the spark and inspiration of another person or two to urge me on."

So what's next for rock's country gentleman?

"Next? You mean I have to do *more*?" He exuberantly stretches his slim frame. "*Weeeelll*, after the tour for the new album, I'm going to settle in with my new family, and maybe even pay a long-due visit to my relatives back in Birmingham. Then at some point I'll write songs for yet another album."

Is there material left over from all his 1980s studio activity?

"I've got a few unused things in the can, but I don't have a whole store of them like some people. One song I wrote with Viv Stanshall for *High Life* is titled 'If That Gun's for Real.' It's very funny, a real Percy Sledge-flavored track that you wouldn't believe! I suppose it describes my relationship to a lot of things: how I can be taken completely off-guard by good luck, and how I often reveal myself at odd and—even for me—very unexpected little moments. It's marvelous and confounding, this life," he chuckles, "but I'm learning to adapt." M

ENO from page 38

interested in democratic access of the popular mediums.

ENO: Yes, well, I absolutely am. And this is a real paradox. It's hard to resolve. But I have one answer to this. One new possibility, which I hope I'm trying to do myself, which is, why not try to make music that is installation, so that instead of going to a concert or buying a record, you go to a place that is a piece of music. It continues making this sound all the time. It's like a continuous performance. You might call it a sound sculpture or something like that. Just like when you go to a gallery and you see a work by Nino Palladino or something, he doesn't have to be there all the time making it. It is there, it belongs to that place. So I'm starting to think of music now in terms of being a place where things happen.

MUSICIAN: *Do you feel technologically bound in your music? Or the music that you work on with other people?*

ENO: Well, just this thing about records that I'm becoming more aware of. There was a time when records themselves were intrinsically exciting to everyone, I think. And they're just not anymore. There are too many of them. There's too much music. When I was in Germany, I'd flip through the wavebands and there'd be like forty or fifty stations all playing the same kind of recorded music with the same kind of technical values. The things that excite me in terms of recording now are things that really break the rules in a big way. Like sometimes I get demo tapes from people. The music is totally uninteresting but the recordings are so bad that they absolutely engage my attention. I think it's incredible how limited recording has been in its choice of possible colors. You know, things can be covered with hiss, they can distort, they can have rough as well as smooth surfaces.

But the whole aspiration of recording is so much like Hollywood. Everything's got to be perfectly lit, nicely balanced, nice color range, full spectrum—all this sort of stupid assumption that recording has something to do with reality. You know, some of these demo tapes I've received are recorded on terrible little machines with very active limiters so the whole thing is squashed flat. It's really fantastic; it's like music that's been under a steamroller. And yeah, I find these kind of bizarre technical things interesting.

MUSICIAN: *That's heresy in the age of CD, isn't it?*

ENO: Yeah, well, fucking CDs have really pissed me off for that reason. They've made everyone spend all their time polishing.

MUSICIAN: *You've actually echoed the tape hiss on some of your records, haven't you?*

ENO: Yes, I've actually used tape hiss, added it in.

MUSICIAN: *Do you see any irony in a "fringe" artist like yourself producing perhaps the biggest pop act in the world?*

ENO: I *like* the pop audience. I mean, I like ordinary people in a certain way. There's something so straightforward and honest about their reactions to things, compared to the art world. People are much more open than they're given credit for. Radio programmers might not be. Music journalists might not be. Record companies might not be. But people are very far advanced in their tastes. They're nearly always ahead of all the professionals. That's one of the interesting things about popular arts: It's usually a question of the professionals trying to keep up with the public, not lead them, as is thought to be the case. This is particularly true in England. Punk didn't start from a few clever designers or manipulators of the popular market. It took about a year for the professionals to even grasp what was going on at all, and of course then they co-opted *that.* [*laughs*] But it really was a street movement and the ideas came from ordinary people, not gifted professionals. When that happens it's always a tremendous threat to the people who are called gifted professionals because it makes them less special, apparently. So the only way of dealing with that is by buying up the competition. You buy the talent and say, yeah, these ones are really gifted and they're on our side.

An analogous situation from the art world would be graffiti art. For a little while, it posed an interesting threat, but the professionals contained that.

MUSICIAN: *By putting it in galleries?*

ENO: Yeah, and by deciding that only three or four of those people were really possessed of greatness. The others were not so good. They could've said graffiti art is a popular form—a lot of people can do it and it's interesting, just like pop music. But instead, what they said was there are some geniuses and the rest are not interesting. Don't bother with them. And those geniuses rightly belong to the fine arts camp. And now we've claimed them so forget about the rest of graffiti art. It's a very interesting process that they had to go through to defend their high prices again.

MUSICIAN: *Isn't that true of most arts scenes in general?*

ENO: In fine arts, yes, but not in popular arts. If you move between things you really start to value certain characteristics of them. I'm not a great protagonist of the pop world. I don't think it's particularly wonderful, but it does have certain things going for it. One of them is its lack of snobbery about what it's doing. Its sense of "Hey, we'll do *anything* if it sounds good." M

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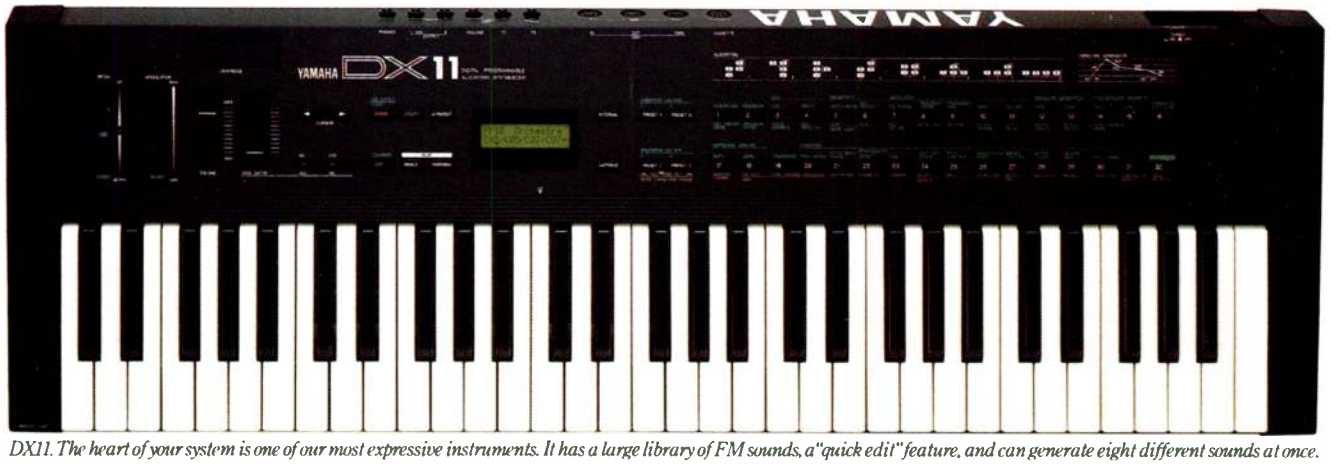

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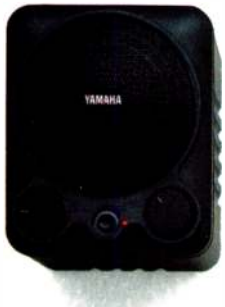

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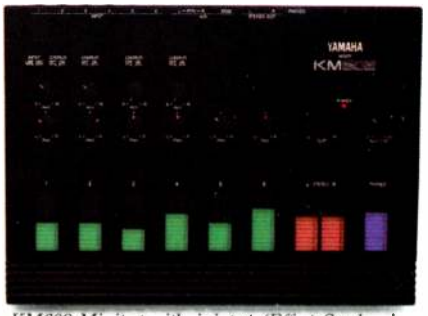

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