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MUSICIAN

JANUARY 1991

ROBERT JOHNSON: THE FATHER OF ROCK & ROLL



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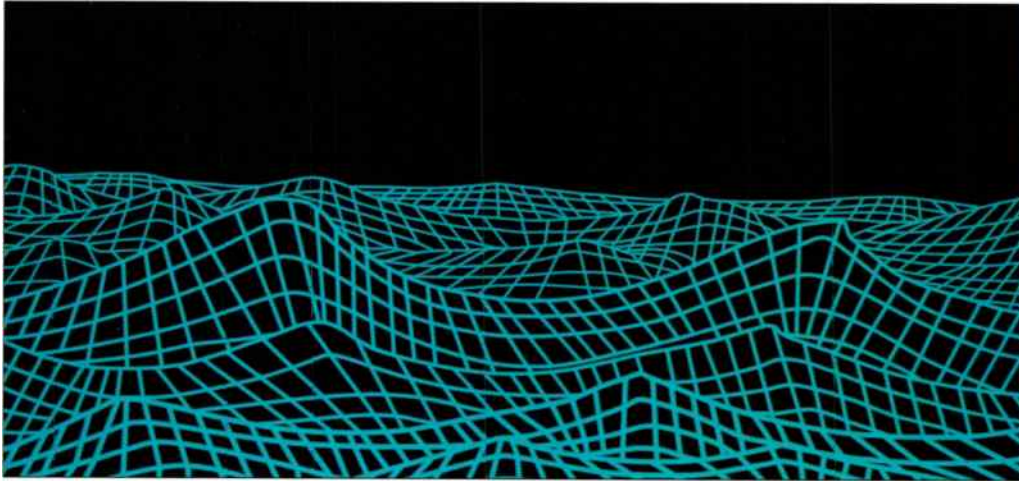
ISSUE No 104



"What struck me immediately is that the sounds have an 'inner life,'" *Electronic Musician*, 11/90, reviewer Gary Hall.

"We predict that wavesequencing will become as much a part of our musical vernacular as analog synthesis, FM, and sampling have." *Keyboard Magazine*, 9/90, Michael Marans

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—ROLLING STONE



"FEAR, SEPARATION, TRANSCENDENCE, CHANGE—THIS WOMAN HAS

THOUGHT ABOUT THE TOUGH STUFF....A"

—ROBERT CHRISTGAU, *THE VILLAGE VOICE*

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 **BOSS**

WORKING MUSICIAN

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BRUCE HORNSBY'S SIMPLE VALUES

The quiet piano player worked steadily, without attention or a record deal, into his 30s. Then he found himself with a pop hit and suddenly was recording with Dylan, writing with Don Henley, and asked to join the Grateful Dead. How does Hornsby stay normal?

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It's been more than 50 years since the king of the Delta blues singers was murdered. Yet his influence is greater now than it has ever been. Musician recruited some of Johnson's most illustrious students to untangle the music, the man and the mystery.

BY TONY SCHERMAN & ANDREW FRANKLIN

CHRIS THOMAS

On why Robert Johnson's music matters in 1990.

ERIC CLAPTON

Tapping into Johnson's pain and fear:
"The ones who become great artists take the spark to its final conclusion as quickly as possible."

ROBBIE ROBERTSON

Orselling your soul and other potent myths.

KEITH RICHARDS

Love of the blues united the teenage Rolling Stones.

JIM DICKINSON

A Southern record producer talks about Johnson's black humor and surrealism.

RY COODER

On how Robert Johnson tuned and played his guitar.

ROBERT PLANT

Driving through the Delta, searching for the King.

ROBERT CRAY

Johnson was an old soul in a young body.

JOHN HAMMOND, JR.

What it means to live as a bluesman.

VERNON REID

Johnson's dread and foreboding was social as well as existential.

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On the emotion of a man who never held back.

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VANILLA ICE

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COVER: Watercolor painting by Adam Allen.
This page: (left) © Stephen C. Lee; (right) Tom Witzel.



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Vanilla Ice

Your first album and single have both gone straight to Number One. Did you expect "Ice Ice Baby" to top the pop charts?

No. I knew it was a hit—I didn't know it was a pop hit. I didn't think any pop stations would ever be playing this. When we finished it, I thought it might do okay in the hip-hop community.

You are the first rap artist ever to have a Number One pop hit. What's so special about Vanilla Ice?

It's the terminology I use. I'm not like some suburban kid trying to rap. When you listen to Vanilla Ice, you get me. If you listen to New Kids on the Block, you get Maurice Starr. I produced it. I wrote it, you get what was in my head at the moment. I've been rapping since the seventh grade. My audience can tell I'm from the streets.

Who is your audience?

People who are into positive raps, raps that tell a story. You could make a movie off of every one of my raps.

Do you think the fact that you're white made it easier for you to cross over?

It's music. It doesn't have to do with color. You could be white. Puerto Rican, Jewish, whatever. You have to have some kind of positive thing to contribute. Rap is definitely a black music form, and you have to understand that. I grew up a block from the projects, went to the same school with mostly black kids from the neighborhood, got into the same trouble they did. Listened to the same music they did.

You've been called a colorizer. You've been called the rap Elvis.

I'm not Elvis, I'm Vanilla Ice. I'm not a colorizer, either. There are only three white acts that ever made it—the Beastie Boys, 3rd Bass and Vanilla Ice. The reason you don't see as many white people in it is because rap comes from the streets. White people can't dance. They got no rhythm, no connection to the streets. I know when I'm

onstage I feel the same way as black people feel. I can tell by the way they're moving. I look at white people in the audience and want to tell them to look around, and I keep thinking, "It's so easy! Why can't you get it?"

Did you pattern your style after any particular rapper? You grew up in Miami; did the Bass sound have an effect?

No, it's my own style. You have to gain your respect, and I think I have. My lyrics



aren't soft, not smooth at all. Why that is, I'm a battle-ax. I love to battle anybody. I'd battle L.L. Cool J, anybody. It would be two totally different styles, and let the crowd decide. A lot of rappers have a problem now where the music sounds good, but it sounds too much like something that's already out there. My stuff is on the storytelling line. You can understand it. It's real clear: I don't sound like Run-DMC or M.C. Hammer. I sound like Vanilla Ice. I came out with something original that worked.

Do you feel the responsibility of being a role model now?

Yeah. It's already happening. Kids are buying my stuff. I've pretty much already

decided that I'm going to be positive, because that relates to my own life. I used to be in some messed-up gang stuff. I got stabbed five times. The last time, they got a main artery. I woke up in the hospital and felt like my life had changed. I got a second chance. I realized that the street stuff was not the cool thing to do. It was ignorant.

You are currently on the M.C. Hammer tour. Did things change when "Ice Ice Baby" broke?

About the last seven weeks, they've been going nuts. Now I can barely hear my music when I get onstage. People know the songs. Last week I went to a mall in Minneapolis. Thought it was no big deal. We had 400 people following us around. Finally we had to hire the mall security, and they had to close down the stores I wanted to shop in to the public. It was wild.

Why is your real identity such a closely guarded secret?

I feel like I need to give my family and my loved ones some protection. Plus the stuff with the gangs. It's mainly for protection. It wouldn't be that hard to look me up.

Have you ever been arrested?

Yeah, I have been arrested, I have a record. No warrants outstanding right now, though. I just don't want anybody looking me up.

What is the future of rap?

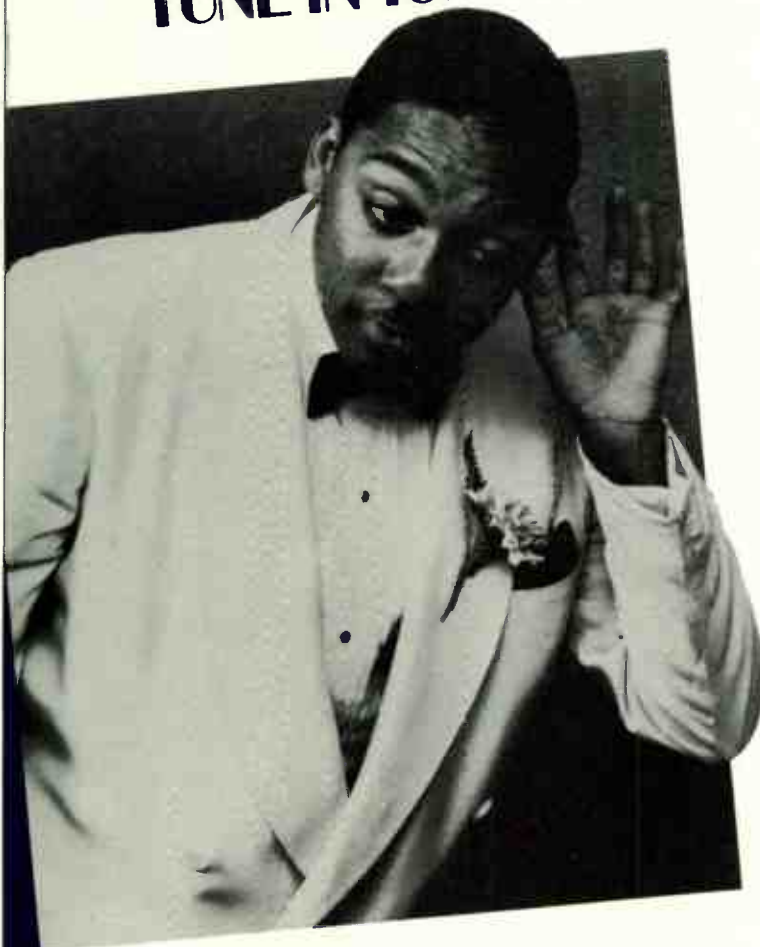
Rap is gonna change, no matter what. It's a new era, new style. There's a lot of choreography now. It's definitely here to stay, and it's not primitive, either. It's not a couple of guys with a drum machine and some rhymes. You'll see live drums, six-string bass, electric guitar. I start a headlining tour on the eighteenth of December. I'm going to bring a live drummer and a live bassist.

It's gonna be a killer show. We're using the high-quality lasers—the kind you need a permit for—and the stage has a huge ice cube that comes out of the sky. It's filled with smoke, and when it lands it cracks and the smoke goes everywhere. You can't even see me until the smoke clears. —Tom Moon

"WHITE PEOPLE CAN'T DANCE. I KNOW WHEN I'M ONSTAGE I FEEL THE SAME WAY AS BLACK PEOPLE FEEL."

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LETTERS



INXSEX

THANKS SO MUCH for the great article on INXS (Oct. '90). It's about time the boys from Down Under were recognized for what they are—the band of the '80s and '90s (and beyond)! Just the right mix of rock, rhythm and intelligence—and you can dance to it. Now that's my kind of band.

Oh, and as for Charles Young getting thigh-to-thigh with Andrew Farriss—I knew there was a reason I always wanted to get into rock music journalism. I'd be in heaven if I ever got that privilege. But (for now) I guess I'll just have to settle for watching Andrew play keyboards and guitar when the band tours again.

Ficky Hendley
Alexandria, VA

AS A LONG-TIME INXS fan, I was really gratified to see your excellent cover story. However, I'd like to take exception to just one thing Mr. Young said, the fact that Michael needs six inches more hair in order to smolder again. Mr. Hutchence would smolder regardless of how much (or how little) hair he has. If Charles Young needs any proof, all he has to do is look at the photos that accompanied his own story. Those dark eyes of Michael's will smolder into the next ice age.

Adrienne McCawn
Naperville, IL

I WANTED TO THANK YOU for your coverage of INXS because I have always thoroughly enjoyed their work but as I listen to *X* I can't help but notice a seemingly deliberate lack of structure that melds together not only verse, chorus and bridge but also each song in such a manner as to make me wonder if Michael Hutchence might have been listening to the Smiths before he dreamed up the vocals for this album which after having listened to a few tracks begins to sound like a 41-minute 33-second run-on sentence which I must admit I enjoyed anyway.

Ken Ullery
Chamblee, GA

Heavy Reading

ANY MUSICIAN who could read past the first couple of inches of Lou Reed's conversation with Vaclav Havel (Oct. '90) without looking at the words through tears of joy and rage has no soul...tears of joy at the triumph of spirit of the Czech artists/musicians/poets/writers and their people...tears of rage at the apathy and ignorance of far too many here in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." Thank you, Lou, for sharing something so inescapably personal, yet fundamentally universal. Everybody *should* be willing to die for the music!

J.C. Ronder
Austin, TX

LOU REED'S article on Vaclav Havel was beautiful.

John Densmore
Santa Monica, CA

YOUR VACLAV HAVEL interview by Lou Reed was excellent. It is exciting to hear how music has affected Havel's life. On February 21, Seven Simons was showcasing at CBGB's. A line of limos pulled up before our set. After the show, a group of about 30 men in dark suits squeezed their

way downstairs into the restroom. It seemed funny that all these guys had to go at once. The next day our agent told us that we had played for Milos Forman and Vaclav Havel.

David W. Prasse, Manager
Seven Simons
Athens, GA

Nice Goin', Bub

IT'S NOT OFTEN I write to anyone—let alone a mag. If you play—you don't want to do anything else. But hey!!!! I've been catching up on my reading ('cause girls usually distract you from that) so I'm a few months behind—and thanks for the B.U.B. contest! We music types in the Northwest don't have much of a chance to shop our music, and when the blues set in you guys show up and help in the inspiration department. Compliments to everyone. Hey—now I'm being distracted so gotta go.

Colly-Michael Howlett
Portland, OR

Neville Satisfied

OCTOBER'S NEVILLE Brothers piece left a lot to be desired. Only one paragraph about brother Aaron, with no quotes? Then, *wham*, the article ends after not quite three full pages of copy without really going anywhere. What happened? Tight for space that month? Or did a copy editor get carried away with his scissors?

Eric Berg
Santa Cruz, CA

Reviewed

IN HER REVIEW of George Michael's latest (Oct. '90), Kristine McKenna has taken a cheap shot at Patti LaBelle by saying that George is "big on the kind of vocal grandstanding that makes Patti LaBelle such a tedious performer." Of the hundreds of adjectives that spring to mind con-

cerning her vocal and performance prowess, tedious is nowhere to be found. Words like breathtaking, electrifying and awesome are more accurate. Then again, where does a review that begins with a discussion of the hairiness of Barry Gibb and the "butt-wagging" of George Michael expect to gain credibility? A perfect description of Ms. McKenna's critical abilities would be a paraphrase of her closing remarks in the George Michael review—though music criticism may be in her blood, there doesn't seem to be a lot going on in her head.

Alan Dorfman
Delray Beach, FL

IN DAVE DIMARTINO'S review of Neil Young and Crazy Horse (Oct. '90), he concludes an otherwise positive review with an unnecessary negative jab at former unnamed bandmates "who put hot dogs on their album covers instead of their hefty selves" and sing about wooden ships (who could this be?). This isn't Neil Young who is stooping low, it's critics like Dave DiMartino who create imaginary relationships and interpret lyrics to their own ends to spit venom at whoever they feel like. Maybe they're frustrated or jealous of these musicians, but Neil Young and Crazy Horse are outstanding regardless of who Dave DiMartino thinks should be put down in order to make them look good.

Steve O'Shea
San Francisco, CA

Congraze

CHETT RUBENSTEIN from Chicago sent in the neediest entry to the Musician/Takamine erumiist guitar contest. Chett can be seen burning down the house on his new Takamine NP18C.



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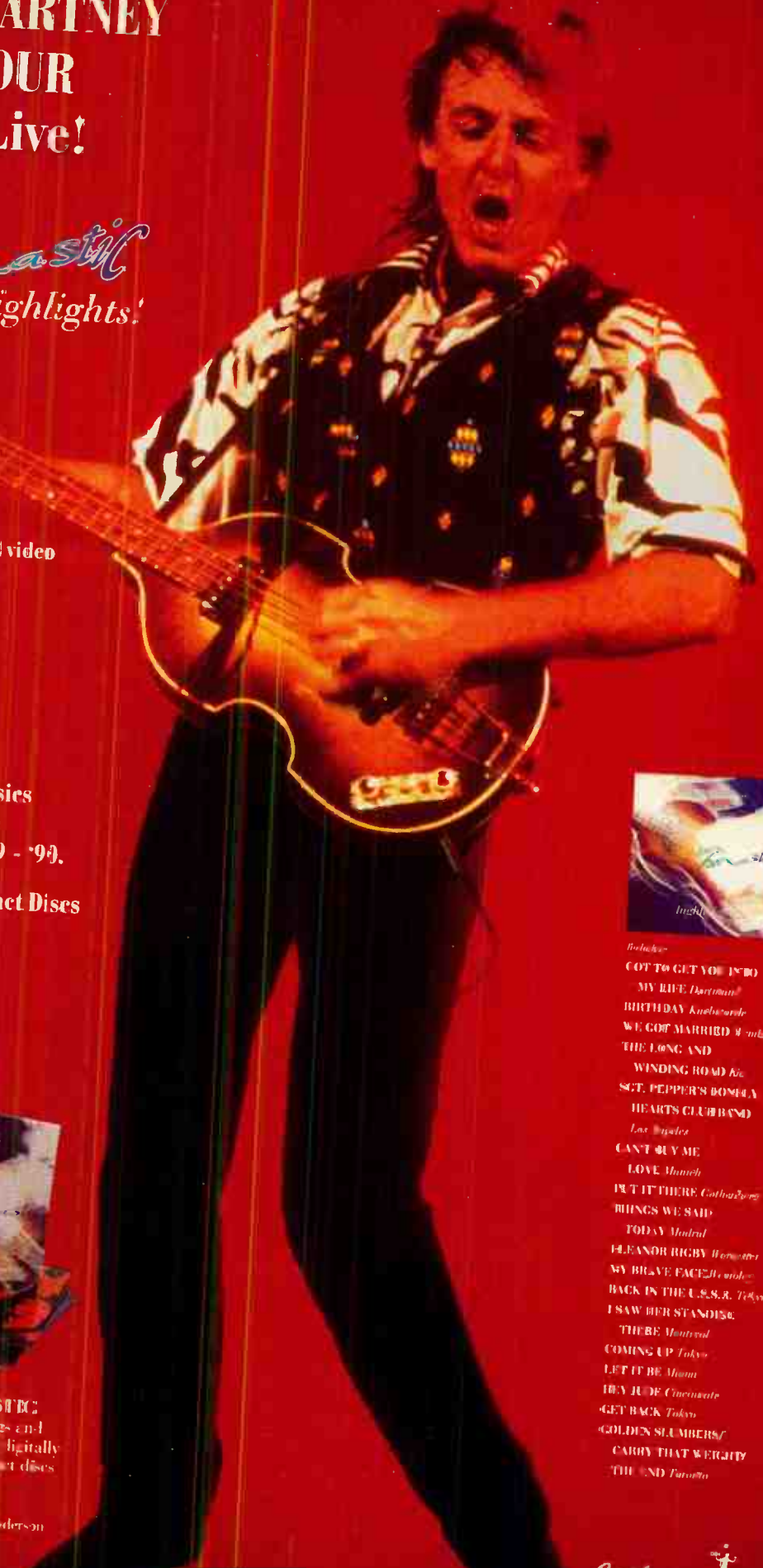
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 - HEY JUDE *Cincinnati*
 - GET BACK *Tokyo*
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 - CARRY THAT WEIGHT *NY*
 - THE END *Turcotte*



Mike Justin, Eclipse Concert Systems, St. Paul, MN.

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FACES



EXENE CERVENKA

EX-X'ER FINDS ECSTASY IN EXURBS

Two years ago Exene Cervenka and her husband, actor Viggo Mortensen, left the City of Angels for the Great Unknown. "When we told all our people that we were packing up our three-month-old kid and getting out of L.A. and we had no idea where we were going, they said, 'You guys are nuts, you're going to be back here in six months,'" Cervenka recalls. The emigrants ended up in Idaho. "It's two years later and I think we've done okay. It was really hard. People are always limiting themselves as to what they think they can do. I'd like to be an example in any small way I can that there's no limitations."

Running Sacred (Rhino), her second solo album since X went on hiatus, is Exene's testament to that effect. That's *sacred*, not a typo: In the woods and open country of

Idaho, Cervenka, the ex-Catholic punk/poet/priestess, found God. Actually, Goddess: "I base a lot of my beliefs on a great spirit, goddess, earth-based, mother-based situation, rather than a father, outside-of-the-earth-based belief."

Cervenka denies being a New Ager. Her spirituality is one of poetic observation rather than meditative tuning out. Proof: Turn to "Red Dirt," her rolling folk sob about "going out to the desert and crying," or her timely cover of Hazel Dickens' "Will Jesus Wash the Bloodstains from Your Hands." Cervenka is still vitally connected to the here and now; she's just changed her tone. "There's a little tiny step between running scared and then suddenly running sacred. That's what this record is about: taking chances."

—EVELYN McDONNELL

The Cavedogs UP FROM UNDERGROUND

What's all the fuss about this earthily titled rock 'n' roll band from Boston? The three Cavedogs, just back from their first national tour, are the proud parents of *Joy Rides for Shut-Ins*, a debut album on Enigma produced by Ed Stasium. Stasium, who's worked with Living Colour, the Ramones and Soul Asylum, has been in the business long enough to pick 'em, and he's been looking at the Cavedogs since 1986. After a deal with Relativity Records soured, the band went through two years of frustrating New York showcases. "We gigged relentlessly!" says goateed guitarist Todd Spahr. "Whenever somebody even got a whim, we would truck up to CBGB's on a Tuesday night and play in front of nobody to showcase for them. We got better, though." Apparently: Enigma Records signed them in 1989.

The group, also including bassist Brian Stevens and drummer Mark Rivers, honed its skills through four steady years in Boston-area clubs. Despite their grassroots rise, the Cavedogs made it through with a pure pop sense intact, à la the Kinks or the Smithereens. "That's where we're coming from, swear to God," says Stevens. Even if the band members haven't been able to quit their day jobs yet, morale is certainly high, and Stevens says the band is looking ahead. "That's what we're excited about. The next record we'll be able to make in one sitting—it's gonna be lots of fun!"

—CARTER ALAN





Mary Morello

MOMS 'N' DADS FOR ROCK 'N' ROLL

"Isn't it ironic that the Soviet Union freed its newspapers to print whatever they want on the same day the 2 Live Crew were arrested in Florida? So who's becoming repressive and who's becoming free?"

Frank Zappa, right? Luther Campbell? Try Mary Morello, a 66-year-old Midwestern mom. Morello—whose son Tom is the guitarist for Geffen recording artists Lock Up—got involved in the censorship fracas in 1987, when she delivered a passionate defense of a video screened by Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Center at a PTA meeting in Morello's ironically named hometown of Libertyville, Illinois.

Last spring, Morello took \$200 of her own money and a \$100 contribution from Lee Ballinger of *Rock and Roll Confidential* and formed Parents for Rock and Rap, a grassroots organization that vows "to monitor legislation and work to expose and combat all forms of music censorship."

Today, PFRR's 250-plus members in 45 states are busy contacting politicians to ascertain where they stand on freedom of expression, and lobbying store owners to keep controversial records like 2 Live Crew's *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* on the shelves.

Morello herself continues to besiege senators, congressmen, newspapers and radio and TV talk

shows to proselytize for artistic freedom.

In the planning stages is an even more ambitious strategy that will borrow from the conservative/fundamentalist arsenal: a nationwide boycott of major corporations deemed either soft on first-amendment rights or openly sympathetic to the PMRC's restrictive policies. And the activists aren't all youthful. "You'd be amazed at the number of grandmothers and grandfathers who are members," boasts Morello.

—JOHN D'AGOSTINO

INQUIRIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS CAN BE SENT TO MORELLO, A RETIRED SCHOOLTEACHER, AT PARENTS FOR ROCK AND RAP, P.O. BOX 53, LIBERTYVILLE, IL 60048. (BE SURE TO DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR SPELLING, PUNCTUATION AND PENMANSHIP)

Florida's Criminal Justice

AS NASTY AS THEY WANNA BE



The Florida obscenity trial of 2 Live Crew ended in a quick acquittal for the rappers. The Broward County jury proved to be a lot more open-minded than the prosecution expected. The jurors tried composing their own raps during breaks in

the case, and they giggled at the prosecution's fumbling attempts to play for the court bootleg tapes of a 2 Live Crew concert. One juror—76-year-old Helena Bailie—said that during deliberations she was moved by the arguments of juror Beverly Resnick, 65, who said, "You take away one freedom and pretty soon they're all gone." One of the prosecutors, assistant state attorney Pedro Dijols, told the *New York Times* that he regretted that Mrs. Bailie, a 1936 Harvard graduate, was on the jury because "she was a sociologist, and I don't like sociologists. They try to reason things out too much."

The 2 Live Crew victory was not without bitter ironies. Another Florida jury had already convicted record store owner Charles Freeman of obscenity for the crime of selling 2 Live Crew's album. Also, the rock group Too Much Joy was awaiting trial because they performed some 2 Live Crew songs at a recent Florida concert.

THE WHISPERS

WHAT BECOMES A NON-LEGEND MOST?

Call the Whispers doo-wop veterans. Call 'em Old Kids on the Block. But whatever you do don't call 'em legends. That word makes the hair on singer Walter Scott's neck stand on end.

"We see that all the hype from younger acts," he says. "They very hurriedly want to make you a legend. That's a nice way of saying, 'Get out of the way so we can come.' It's really a backhanded compliment."

In a way, the Whispers are too new to the business to be thought of as legends anyway. That might seem a strange thing to say about a 25-year-old stand-up vocal group. But the fact is, though they got together in L.A. in the '60s, the Whispers didn't hit their commercial stride until 1980 with their smash dance single, "And the Beat Goes On."

In the decade since then, this group of doo-wop purists has managed a quiet consistency on the black



music charts, culling hits from albums evenly balanced between frothy dance numbers they do for radio and sophisticated ballads they do for themselves. Their other hits include 1987's hyp-

notic "Rock Steady" and the more recent "Innocent."

Scott says the group's success is a tribute to their ability to work out a compromise between conscience and commerciality. "We came along in an era where it was about vocal gymnastics," he says. "Now you've got to sing to an instrument and let it damn near be featured. It used to bother us a great deal. In fact, it bothered us with 'And the Beat Goes On.' We had sung ballads for years and then we tried this new technique and got a near-double-platinum. After that," he concedes with a laugh, "we had no problems letting the instrument be featured."

—LEONARD PITT, JR.



The Soup Dragons HOT 'N SPICY

soup from a soup dragon. It was so surreal, you could imagine Salvador Dali making it."

In that spirit, the Glasgow quartet "tries to appeal to the subconscious" on its second LP, a collection of rockin' pop tunes layered with dense production touches. While he says *Lovegod* reflects the inspiration of everyone from T. Rex to George Clinton to Jimi Hendrix, Dickson firmly rejects comparisons to Robyn Hitchcock, despite a similar wry edge in his vocals.

Why *Lovegod*? "A lovegod is an icon, a sexual fantasy," he observes, "but to love god is to love something pure, which is the exact opposite. I feel sex and religion are very closely related." Dickson mocks mainstream propriety throughout the album, belittling big-time

evangelism in "Crotch Deep Trash" and mixing passion and brutality in "Kiss the Gun."

Their anything-goes cover of the Stones oldie "I'm Free" epitomizes the Dragons' artful irreverence. Featuring a reggae toast by Black Uhuru's Junior Reid and support from the International Gospel Choir, this rousing update bears only a passing resemblance to the original, though there's no mistaking the subversive attitude. "It would have been easy to include a song where every other word was 'fuck' and get banned," Dickson grins, "but I see that as just sensationalism. Singing 'I'm free to do what I want, any old time' is the same as saying 'Fuck the world,' only in a classier way."

—JON YOUNG

The name Soup Dragons comes from the early '70s, when it seemed like a lot of the kids' TV shows in the U.K. were made by former '60s acid heads," explains Sean Dickson, wrapping each word in a thick Scottish burr. "I used to watch a cartoon called 'Clangers,' about quiet little green creatures who lived on the moon, grew musical trees and got

HAL WILLNER RECORDS WILLIAM BURROUGHS

William Burroughs, the wizened storyteller whose patrician drawl and dry, creaky voice chronicled the decay and puritanism of post-atom bomb America, earned his rep for being acid-tongued, not cooperative. Producer Hal Willner claims, "I think this is the first time that anyone has gone to his house with a tape recorder and spent that much time. We had a visit with William and that's what the record is." The record? Willner and Nelson Lyon's reproduction of *Dead City Radio*, featuring Burroughs' dry, solomonic prose.

Willner spent 12 hours to come up with one hour of tape which he set to the stock music of the NBC Orchestra,

along with snippets of John Cale, Sonic Youth, Donald Fagen, Lenny Pickett and Cheryl Hardwick. *Musician* faxed four questions to Burroughs in Lawrence, Kansas. He faxed back four answers.

Does music add more resonance, rhythm or meaning to your work?

"Yes."

Does it force you to adjust your phrasing or delivery?

"No. The vocal tapes were made before the music was chosen by Hal Willner, as the liner notes make clear."

You've had work banned in the past. Do you have any comments on how the labeling of records affects the cultural landscape?

"No specific comment, but

I've always been opposed to censorship in any form, publicly and explicitly."

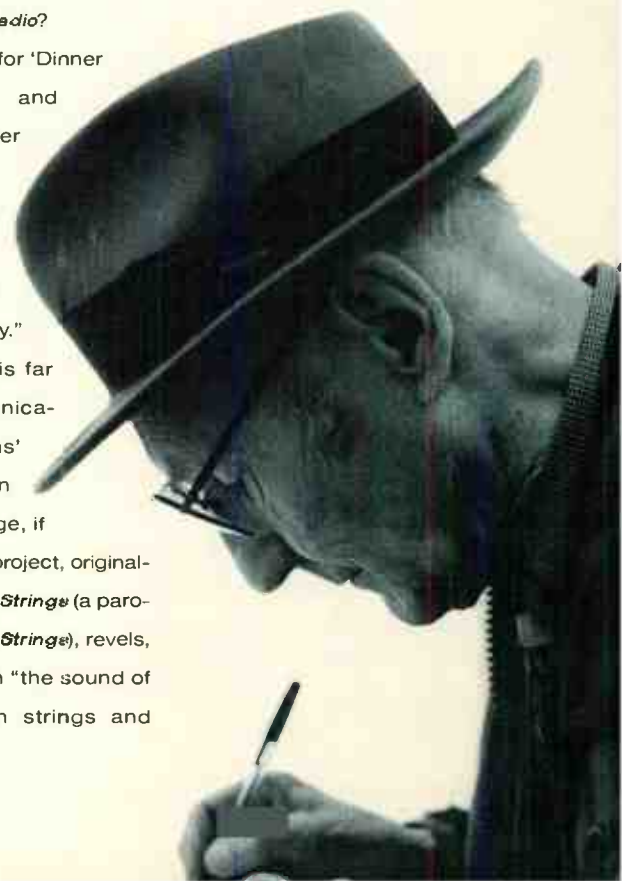
Did you write the new work for *Dead City Radio*?

"No, except for 'Dinner Conversation' and 'After Dinner Conversation,' which are obviously candid tapes as their titles say."

The record is far more communicative; Burroughs' images can make you cringe, if not recoil. The project, originally titled *Bill with Strings* (a parody on *Bird with Strings*), reveals, says Willner, in "the sound of his voice with strings and

Aaron Copland arrangements. The contrast is beautiful."

—DON PALMER



Top 100 Albums

The first number indicates the position of the album this month, the second its position last month.

1 • 1	M.C. Hammer <i>Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em</i> Capitol
2 • —	AC/DC <i>The Razors Edge</i> /Atco
3 • 97	Vanilla Ice <i>To the Extreme</i> /SBK
4 • 4	Mariah Carey <i>Mariah Carey</i> /Columbia
5 • 44	George Michael <i>Listen without Prejudice Vol. 1</i> Columbia
6 • 2	Wilson Phillips <i>Wilson Phillips</i> /SBK
7 • —	INXS <i>X</i> /Atlantic
8 • —	Vaughan Brothers <i>Family Style</i> /Associated
9 • 5	Bell Biv Devoe <i>Poison</i> /MCA
10 • 53	Warrant <i>Cherry Pie</i> /Columbia
11 • 28	Queensryche <i>Empire</i> /EMI
12 • 6	Poison <i>Flesh and Blood</i> /Enigma
13 • 16	Soundtrack <i>Ghost/Varese Sarabanie</i>
14 • 3	Jon Bon Jovi <i>Blaze of Glory/Young Guns II</i> Mercury
15 • 48	Garth Brooks <i>No Fences</i> /Capitol
16 • —	L.L. Cool J <i>Mama Said Knock You Out</i> /Def Jam
17 • 13	Faith No More <i>The Real Thing</i> /Slash
18 • 9	Michael Bolton <i>Soul Provider</i> /Columbia
19 • 19	Slaughter <i>Stick It in Ya</i> /Chrysalis
20 • 76	Too Short <i>Short Dog's in the House</i> /Jive
21 • 14	Phil Collins <i>...But Seriously</i> /Atlantic
22 • —	Iron Maiden <i>No Prayer for the Dying</i> /Epic
23 • 18	Nelson <i>After the Rain</i> /JVC
24 • 87	Soundtrack <i>Twin Peaks</i> /Warner Bros.
25 • 8	Anita Baker <i>Compositions</i> /Elektra
26 • 12	Depeche Mode <i>Violator</i> /Sire
27 • —	Judas Priest <i>Painkiller</i> /Columbia
28 • 10	Keith Sweat <i>I'll Give All My Love to You</i> Vintertainment
29 • —	Bette Midler <i>Some People's Lives</i> /Atlantic
30 • 15	Soundtrack <i>Pretty Woman</i> /FEM
31 • —	Megadeth <i>Rust in Peace</i> /Capitol
32 • 40	The Righteous Brothers <i>The Righteous Brothers Greatest Hits</i> /Verve
33 • —	Randy Travis <i>Heroes & Friends</i> /Warner Bros.
34 • 22	Living Colour <i>Time's Up</i> /Epic
35 • 11	New Kids on the Block <i>Step by Step</i> /Columbia
36 • 7	Prince <i>Graffiti Bridge</i> /Paisley Park
37 • 21	Winger <i>In the Heart of the Young</i> /Atlantic
38 • 17	Johnny Gill <i>Johnny Gill</i> /Motown
39 • 24	Janel Jackson <i>Janel Jackson's Rhythm Nation</i> /A&M
40 • —	Deee-Lite <i>World Clique</i> /Elektra
41 • —	Pebbles <i>Always</i> /MCA
42 • 27	N.W.A. <i>100 Miles and Runnin'</i> /Ruthless
43 • 20	Jane's Addiction <i>Ritual de lo Habitual</i> Warner Bros.
44 • —	Indigo Girls <i>Nomads/Indians/Saints</i> /Epic
45 • 81	Neil Young & Crazy Horse <i>Ragged Glory</i> /Reprise
46 • 25	Anthrax <i>Persistence of Time</i> /Megaforce
47 • 61	Maxi Priest <i>Bonafide</i> /Charisma
48 • 60	The Black Crowes <i>Shake Your Money Maker</i> Def American

Top Concert Grosses

1	ZZ Top, Steve Miller Band, Santana, Colin James <i>Cotton Bowl, Dallas, TX/October 20</i>	\$1,715,688
2	Oingo Boingo <i>Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre, Laguna Hills, CA/October 26-28</i>	\$774,796
3	Anita Baker, Perri <i>Fox Theatre, Detroit, MI/October 17-18 & 20-21</i>	\$556,660
4	Julio Iglesias, Ray Fell <i>Westbury Music Fair, Westbury, NY/October 5-8</i>	\$449,111
5	Bridge School Benefit: Neil Young & Crazy Horse, Elvis Costello, Steve Miller Band, more <i>Shoreline Amphitheatre, Mountain View, CA/October 26</i>	\$429,457
6	Bob Dylan, Lenny Kravitz <i>Beacon Theatre, New York, NY/October 15-19</i>	\$399,240
7	M.C. Hammer, Vanilla Ice, En Vogue <i>Palace of Auburn Hills, Auburn Hills, MI/October 21</i>	\$392,881
8	James Taylor <i>Shoreline Amphitheatre, Mountain View, CA/October 20</i>	\$339,372
9	Maze Featuring Frankie Beverly, Howard Hewett <i>Constitution Hall, Washington, DC/October 12-13</i>	\$334,525
10	Billy Idol, Faith No More <i>Cow Palace, San Francisco, CA/October 20</i>	\$327,798

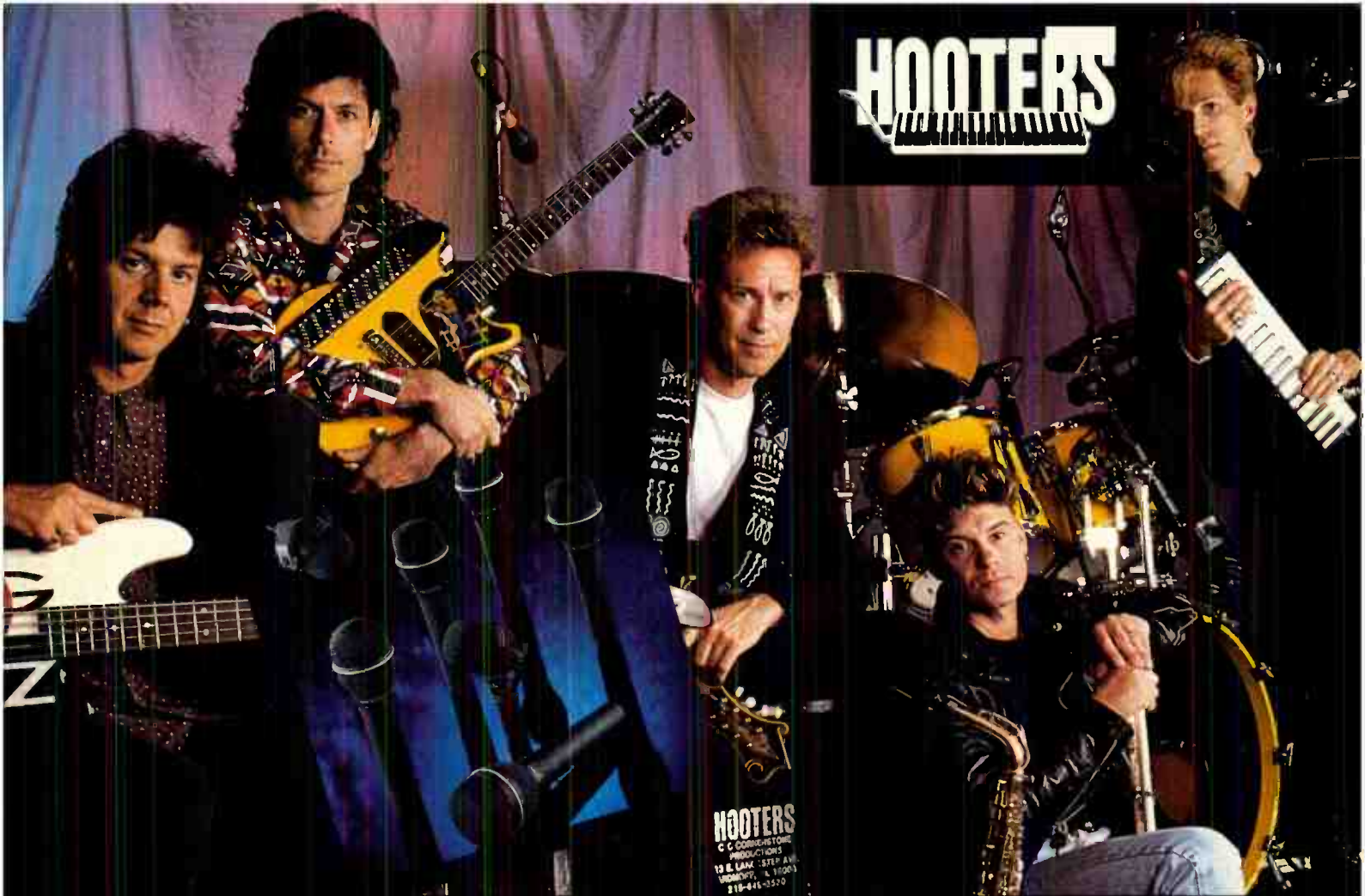
49 • 34	Snap <i>World Power</i> /Arista
50 • —	The Robert Cray Band <i>Featuring the Memphis Horns</i> Midnight Strail/Mercury
51 • 23	Ratt <i>Detonator</i> /Atlantic
52 • 50	Garth Brooks <i>Garth Brooks</i> /Capitol
53 • —	ZZ Top <i>Recycler</i> /Warner Bros.
54 • —	Grateful Dead <i>Without a Net</i> /Arista
55 • —	Paul Simon <i>Rhythm of the Saints</i> Warner Bros.
56 • 33	Mötley Crüe <i>Dr. Feelgood</i> /Elektra
57 • 79	Reba McEntire <i>Rumor Has It</i> /MCA
58 • 66	Black Box <i>Dreamland</i> /RCA
59 • 36	Heart <i>Brigade</i> /Capitol
60 • —	Slayer <i>Seasons in the Abyss</i> Def American
61 • 52	Concrete Blonde <i>Bloodletting</i> /A.R.S.
62 • 30	Sinéad O'Connor <i>I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got</i> /Ensign
63 • 70	Damn Yankees <i>Damn Yankees</i> /Warner Bros.
64 • 26	Aerosmith <i>Pump</i> /Geffen
65 • —	Carly Simon <i>Have You Seen Me Lately?</i> Arista
66 • 32	Luke Featuring the 2 Live Crew <i>Banned in the U.S.A.</i> /A&M
67 • 31	Billy Idol <i>Charmed Life</i> /Chrysalis
68 • 67	Clint Black <i>Killin' Time</i> /RCA
69 • 89	The Kentucky Headhunters <i>Pickin' on Nashville</i> /Mercury
70 • 64	Tony! Toni! Tone! <i>The Revival</i> /Wing
71 • —	A1B: Sure! <i>Private Times...And the Whole 9!</i> Warner Bros.
72 • 39	Harry Connick, Jr. <i>We Are in Love</i> /Columbia
73 • —	Take 6 <i>So Much 2 Say</i> /Reprise
74 • 72	Keith Whitley <i>Greatest Hits</i> /RCA
75 • 35	En Vogue <i>Born to Sing</i> /Atlantic
76 • 88	Bob Dylan <i>Under the Red Sky</i> /Columbia
77 • 46	Lisa Stansfield <i>Affection</i> /Arista
78 • 80	Rush <i>Chronicles</i> /Mercury
79 • —	Vince Gill <i>When I Call Your Name</i> /MCA
80 • —	The Replacements <i>All Shook Down</i> /Sire
81 • 54	After 7 <i>After 7</i> /Virgin
82 • 42	Don Henley <i>The End of the Innocence</i> /Geffen
83 • 57	Soundtrack <i>Pump Up the Volume</i> /MCA
84 • 57	Boogie Down Productions <i>Eddatainment</i> /Jive
85 • —	Carreras-Domingo-Pavarotti <i>Carreras-Domingo-Pavarotti in Concert</i> /London
86 • —	UB40 <i>Labour of Love II</i> /Virgin
87 • —	Kathy Mattea <i>A Collection of Hits</i> /Mercury
88 • —	Slyx <i>Edge of the Century</i> /A&M
89 • 29	Madonna <i>I'm Breathless</i> /Sire
90 • 49	Taylor Dayne <i>Can't Fight Fate</i> /Arista
91 • 100	Dino <i>Swingin' Island</i>
92 • —	Souls Black <i>Testament</i> /Megaforce
93 • —	Daryl Hall John Oates <i>Change of Season</i> /Arista
94 • 55	Van Morrison <i>The Best of Van Morrison</i> Mercury
95 • 47	Jeff Healey Band <i>Hell to Pay</i> /Arista
96 • —	Alan Jackson <i>Here in the Real World</i> /Arista
97 • 71	Don Dokken <i>Up from the Ashes</i> /Geffen
98 • 77	Roger Waters <i>The Wall—Live in Berlin</i> /Mercury
99 • 51	Bad Company <i>Holy Water</i> /Atco
100 • 45	Paula Abdul <i>Shut Up and Dance</i> /Virgin

The Musician album chart is produced by the Billboard chart department for Musician, and reflects the combined points for all album reports gathered by the Billboard computers in the month of October. The record company chart is based on the top 200 albums. The concert chart is based on Amusement Business Box Score reports for October 1990. All charts are copyright 1991 by BPI Incorporated.

Top Labels

1	Columbia
2	Capitol
3	Atlantic
4	Warner Bros.
5	MCA
6	Epic
7	Mercury
8	Arista
9	SBK
10	Elektra
11	EMI
12	Atco
13	A&M
14	RCA
15	Chrysalis
16	Sire
17	Enigma
18	Jive
19	Associated
20	Slash

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SOUL ASYLUM RETURNS THE FAVOR

BACK IN THE DAYS WHEN THEY WERE LOUD Fast Rules, Soul Asylum got their first big break opening a Hüsker Dü show at Minneapolis' garage-band mecca, the 7th Street Entry. At the time they were all 16 or 17, enduring high school and hacking their way through Ramones tunes in their spare time; an opening gig at the Entry was the grail. Nine years, four albums and countless tours later, Dave Pirner still talks about the romance of forming a rock band as though he's just joined up. "It was kinda like pitting your friends against the world," he says. "Taking what you got, which is basically four guys who are not incredibly virtuosic, and developing a work ethic. Trying to win. People were always telling us we could never get away with it, and that was the thrill of it—knowing the only way we could do it was as a collective personality, going out there and putting the shit on the line."

"And it was fun."

That hasn't changed. Soul Asylum is one of the best bands around, playing funky, ragged-at-the-edges rock 'n' roll that's short on posing and long on the kind of rapport that can only arise from hard work, shared history and mutual respect. Frontman/

songwriter Pirner tosses himself around the stage with a loose-limbed intensity, oscillating between little-boy vulnerability and smirky insolence; sometimes when he and guitarist Danny Murphy converge on the mike to sing harmonies, they look like best friends caught up in a moment they never expected to share, and still can't quite believe. Bassist Karl Mueller and drummer Grant Young are bedrock solid. They embody the Soul Asylum ethic: Do your job, and don't take anything for granted.

"Being from Minneapolis has a lot to do with it," says Murphy. "Minneapolis bands get to start out with no one watching, to figure out who you are and what kind of music you can play. In cities like New York it's a much more high-pressure thing. The first time you open at CBGB's, you know there will be record goons there to check you out. By the time we played there we were able to tell ourselves that wasn't important."

For their second A&M/TwinTone release, *And the Horse They Rode In On*, the band was paired with producer/session drummer

Steve Jordan. "He's a studio musician who's always wanted to be in a band. He's trying to put one together as we speak," explains Pirner. "So he was into us being a band."

"There's a chemistry thing about four people together in a room," says Murphy. "Steve was into that. He was cracking up. 'Oh, man,' he'd say, 'no one would do that shit on that part.' We'd say, 'Yeah...guess that's nerdy.' And he'd say, 'No, leave it.'"

Jordan is part of the reason this record contains Soul Asylum's best synthesis of songcraft and studiocraft to date. He helped the players feel confident about their contributions, and that helped the band settle into a collective voice. Longevity had a lot to do with it, too. Over time, "You sift through the shit and learn not to play so much," says Young. "You figure out when to lay back: I could put a fill in here, but why?"

"To me," adds Murphy, "that's the difference between a young band and—I hate to use the word—a mature band. You learn that you don't have to get all your licks in every song."

You and
them against
the world

By Steve Perry



Soul Asylum (l to r): Grant Young, Karl Mueller, Dave Pirner and Daniel Murphy.

"And once you accept that," says Pirner, "you can just forget it and say, 'What does this song need in order to communicate?'"

Pirner is always talking about communication, whether it's a matter of trading licks with Murphy or giving something extra to a kid standing by himself at the back of the bar. Pirner's songs are personal in tone, but many grapple with the same Big Problem: keeping your soul intact in an age when broken promises are the rule and "everything you wanted/Just leaves you wanting more" ("Brand New Shine"). The only respite in

sight is the possibility of connection, of honest moments shared here and there.


"Communicating has always been a big issue to me," he says later, after the rest of the band has split. "I think there's a great tendency for people to get harder as they get older. I guess I'm trying to combat that in myself. I don't want to become this cold, shrewd asshole who goes out and gets his and goes home.

"There's a certain type of feeling I want to get at: speaking to someone who's alienated and telling them that what polarizes them

from the rest of the world doesn't have to smother them. What makes you different can be liberating.

"A lot of it for me is just trying to return the favor, trying to give some kid what the music I listened to growing up gave me. It was one of the most important parts of my education. In those days I couldn't get what I wanted out of my parents, out of school, out of my friends. So I retreated to my record collection. Once I got out of my puberty/heavy metal stage, I just started going backward—the Rolling Stones, the Velvet Underground, Woody Guthrie, Robert Johnson. And the more I heard, the more it exposed me to different attitudes about a lot of things. About how to live. Music can expose you to a whole different way of thinking." Pirner laughs. "It makes the cost of a record seem pretty cheap, even now."

It's no secret that Soul Asylum needs *And the Horse They Rode In On* to garner respectable sales for the band to stay in A&M's good graces, but Pirner seems to have another mission in mind when he says he hopes the record will overcome the band's tag as an alternative rock outfit. "We're a working band from the Midwest," he says. "What does 'alternative' even mean by now? It's whoever doesn't have an independent promoter to ply some deejay with coke, right?"

"This sounds corny, but I've been feeling a responsibility to get our music out there. I think young kids shouldn't have to hear Heart all the time anymore. It's like, I wish I could have gone and seen Patti Smith when I was at the Bob Seger concert. I should have been able to." 

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SARA HICKMAN ♦ SHORTSTOP



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"[With] down-to-earth individuality and intelligence...Hickman sings in a fine, clear voice, matching the album's stylistic variety with impressive emotional range."—Entertainment Weekly

Produced by David Kershenbaum Management: Kevin Wommack/Loophole Management

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LOONY BIN

DAVE PIRNER plays Teles through Marshalls and DAN MURPHY plays Les Pauls through Ampegs; both use Marshall bottoms. KARL MUELLER and GRANT YOUNG are the gearheads in the band, so let them tell it. Mueller: "I play a '72 Fender Tele bass, and I just got a Peavey Megabass. I play through a Peavey 210 Power Cabinet for the highs, with a Cerwin-Vega 18x12 underneath. I use GHS Basic strings, 'cause they're cheap and I can afford to change 'em every night." Young: "I got a four-piece yellow Tura Turbo set. I use all Pearl hardware, and an old Caroline Aspen kick-drum pedal. My hi-hats are two 16" Zildjian crashes; my ride cymbal would be a 22" Paiste 2002 Power ride."

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FATHER OF THE BOXED SET

UNTIL RECENTLY, ROCK ANTHOLOGIES WERE “greatest hits” or “best of” collections, designed by marketing departments to repackage hit singles. Most were hastily assembled, slipshod affairs that offered little in the way of artistic insights or historical perspective.

Biograph helped change all that. Columbia’s thoughtfully arranged five-LP boxed-set retrospective of Bob Dylan’s music, with previously unissued tracks, superb liner notes and annotations by Dylan himself, set new standards for the form. By this fall, however, what was once a trickle of boxed-set tributes has turned into a cascade, with retrospectives on Led Zeppelin, Elton John, Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, the Byrds, Roy Orbison and John Lennon (see reviews) simultaneously appearing on a variety of labels—and all conveniently released within a month or two of Christmas.

No record company executive is more in the thick of this trend than PolyGram’s director of catalog development, Bill Levenson. The architect of 1988’s surprisingly successful Eric Clapton tribute, *Crossroads* (three-quarters of a million copies sold worldwide) and 1989’s sprawling Allman Brothers retrospective *Dreams*, Levenson has recently produced or executive produced sets featuring the Bee Gees, Derek and the Dominos, Hank Williams Sr. and James Brown. The two Clapton sets have drawn praise for bestowing the kind of largesse on rock’s icons that was previously the exclusive domain of classical composers or jazz pioneers.

The funny thing is that *Crossroads* is actually the pared-down version of a far grander scheme. “The original idea,” Levenson

admits, “was to do a 12-record set that had more sessions and third-party licenses [tracks leased by one record company to another]. But the company backed out of that, so I had to rethink the concept.”

So far, boxed-set retrospectives have inspired an unusual degree of respect and cooperation among otherwise competitive labels. “One of the best results is that labels are finally

talking to each other about patching different periods of an artist’s career into a cohesive whole.” Third-party license negotiations are often harmonious as well—no doubt because, as Levenson notes drily, “what goes around comes around.”

But what about the musicians? In addition to packaging the music in a way that suggests an homage, Levenson says that artists usually get paid “an equitable rate better than an average of all the individual tracks.” Contracts are frequently renegotiated, giving the artist a higher percentage of the profits than when the track was a hit. “In the ’60s most artists got between two and four points per song,” he observes. “In the ’80s and ’90s it’s not unusual to get 20 per-

cent.” When all the elements are in place, from track acquisition and re-mastering to cover art, commissioned liner notes and

marketing, the cost of producing a boxed set can run anywhere from fifty to one hundred

Producer Bill Levenson spearheads the anthology revolution

By Kevin Phinney



Photograph: Jeffrey Krantz

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*In case you were reading to fast, we wanted to remind you that this ad is about UHF, not VHF wireless. †As long as you are reading our ad this closely, we thought we'd tell you who they are: Yukinaga Koike, Doug Bryant, Takao Horiuchi, Susumu Tamura. †dbx is a registered trademark of Carillon Industries.

thousand dollars.

Levenson intends his sets to be in-depth documentaries tracking the musical evolution of an artist or group. "At least that's what we tried to do with the Clapton and Allman sets," he says. "But *The Layla Sessions* is more of a six-week retrospective. The album originally emerged as a series of jams where the musicians would just improvise until they felt they had something interesting, then add lyrics and turn them into actual songs."

The new three-CD set includes a com-

pletely remastered version of the original *Layla* LP, plus outtakes and 77 minutes of jams featuring Clapton, Duane Allman and, for the first time, other members of the Allman Brothers Band. "Most of it is pretty free-form," the producer says, "but you'll hear bits that became signatures of different songs: a little snippet of 'Killing Floor,' things like that."

In remastering *Layla*, Levenson says the "blueprint of the original was used. We started to go analog [the way the album was recorded], but I didn't like what was hap-

pening. The mixes were a little heavy in the top end, and the bottom end was getting too boomy, so we tried to go digital and that gave us just what we wanted.

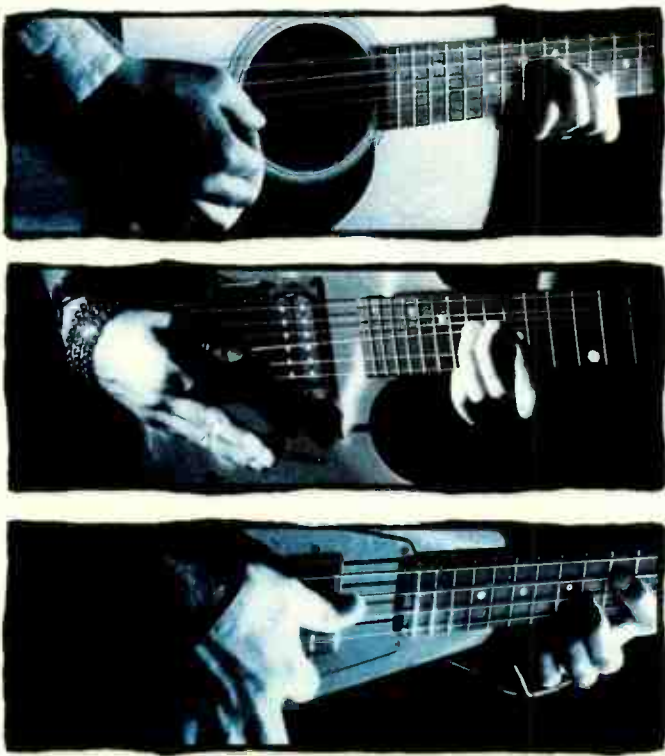
"When I first heard *Layla* as a teenager, I didn't know what to make of it. Now, in this age of sophisticated processed records, it's nice to hear something that still has the human element: bum notes, broken toms and all. But the passion and the playing still come through. And little things can knock you out—like you have this vision of them playing through mountains of Marshall amps and then you find out Eric was playing through this little Pignose most of the time."

In October, Levenson's four-CD Bee Gees boxed set hit the shelves. Ten years after the demise of disco, both band and producer have pulled out all the stops in an effort to win the group some measure of critical respect. Levenson, who worked directly with the brothers Gibb to assemble the package, believes their music may convince skeptics better than any amount of rhetoric.

"Listen to this set," Levenson says, "and very quickly you'll find yourself saying, 'Oh, I forgot this.' There are close to 80 songs—all of them written by the brothers. We used four CDs and we still couldn't fit everything. We didn't even go into their Australian career, because that's another three albums and 40 songs. And this is not a band where you're stunned by the musicianship; these guys were masterful songwriters. So we open with 'New York Mining Disaster 1941,' and the set unifies the folksy era they went through with their country phase along with the dance tracks from the '70s and stuff from the '80s."

A Hank Williams set, to be released for the holidays, includes an unreleased 1942 rarity, "I'm Not Coming Home Anymore," and the original version of "There's a Tear in My Beer." Meanwhile, Levenson is sorting demos and hits for next year's eagerly awaited four-CD James Brown anthology. The original seven-minute version of "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" has already been discovered. Reportedly, Brown has also been participating, by phone, in rounding up material.

"Since I began doing these packages, no one has accused me of doing something contrary to the artists' work or intentions," Levenson says. "And if I was the artist, I probably wouldn't want someone messing with it, either. But if you don't hear any complaints, you've got to figure you're being true enough to the work to make people happy." ❧



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MACEO PARKER'S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG

THE COMMAND USUALLY CAME WHEN JAMES Brown reached the end of a grueling love sermon. "Maceo, come blow your horn," he would urge, in a voice that walked the line between genuine need and campy theater. And for years Maceo Parker, the low-key bandleader and alto saxophonist, would step up and hit the emotional target. Parker was Brown's perfect foil—a player with blues in his blood, plus enough musical authority to take the spotlight without letting the intensity dip.

"There's something magic about James Brown saying, 'Maceo, blow your horn,'" Parker admits. "You always felt something real behind it—never was it just going through the motions. In a way, it made me play."

Brown's release from a Georgia halfway house program—the final step to freedom after more than two years of incarceration for drug possession and weapons violations—remains Topic A with most of his band. But in the interim, others have been asking Maceo to blow his horn, and he's been more than willing to comply. His bulbous tone invigorates Living Colour's "Elvis Is Dead" and adds much-needed spice to Deee-Lite's hit "Grooving in the Heart." Parker's hip-hop 12-inch "Let Him Out," dedicated to you-know-who and released in the U.S. as *Maceo: For All the King's Men*, is a hit in Germany, where he says interest in Brown verges on mania. Rappers are calling Parker to sample his sax. And, along with Brown trombonist Fred Wesley, Parker is working again with Bootsy Collins—on the Maceo 12-inch, and in performances that blend the simmer of the JB's with P-Funk chants to create a pan-generational soul stew.

Finally, there's his own record, *Roots Revisited*, which is turning Maceo into something of a celebrity. He seems to relish that too—particularly as the attention is prompted by such an unlikely record. A return to the loose, organ-propelled blowing sessions of the late '50s, *Roots Revisited*

finds Parker moving into the shimmering swing of Earl Bostic, David "Fathead" Newman, Hank Crawford. Though it covers roots ideas—there are hints of Ray Charles in the horn charts, as well as treatments of Brother Ray's "Them That Got," Mingus' "Better Git It in Yo' Soul" and the Kansas City shuffle "Jumpin' the Blues"—there's nothing scholarly about it. Nor does Maceo abandon the funk: Sly Stone's "In Time" and a rewrite of Brown's blistering ballad "It's a Man's World" display Parker's knack for understated percolation.

"I knew that sooner or later a situation would appear for me to do a record like this," says

Parker, who has recorded only sporadically under his own name since beginning his on-again-off-again gig with Brown in 1964.

Saxman wails while the boss is in jail

By Tom Moon

"I've always been able to get my ideas across without moving away from my sound. My music doesn't have deep changes, or different things going on during every beat. But in a setting like this, it's all me. Maceo, 100 proof.

"People want to hear something that's real, that's all. The critics will say, 'Okay, fine, what are you doing that's new?' And I'll say there's really nothing new. But once you get beyond that, you hear something that'll make you feel good. People relate to that."

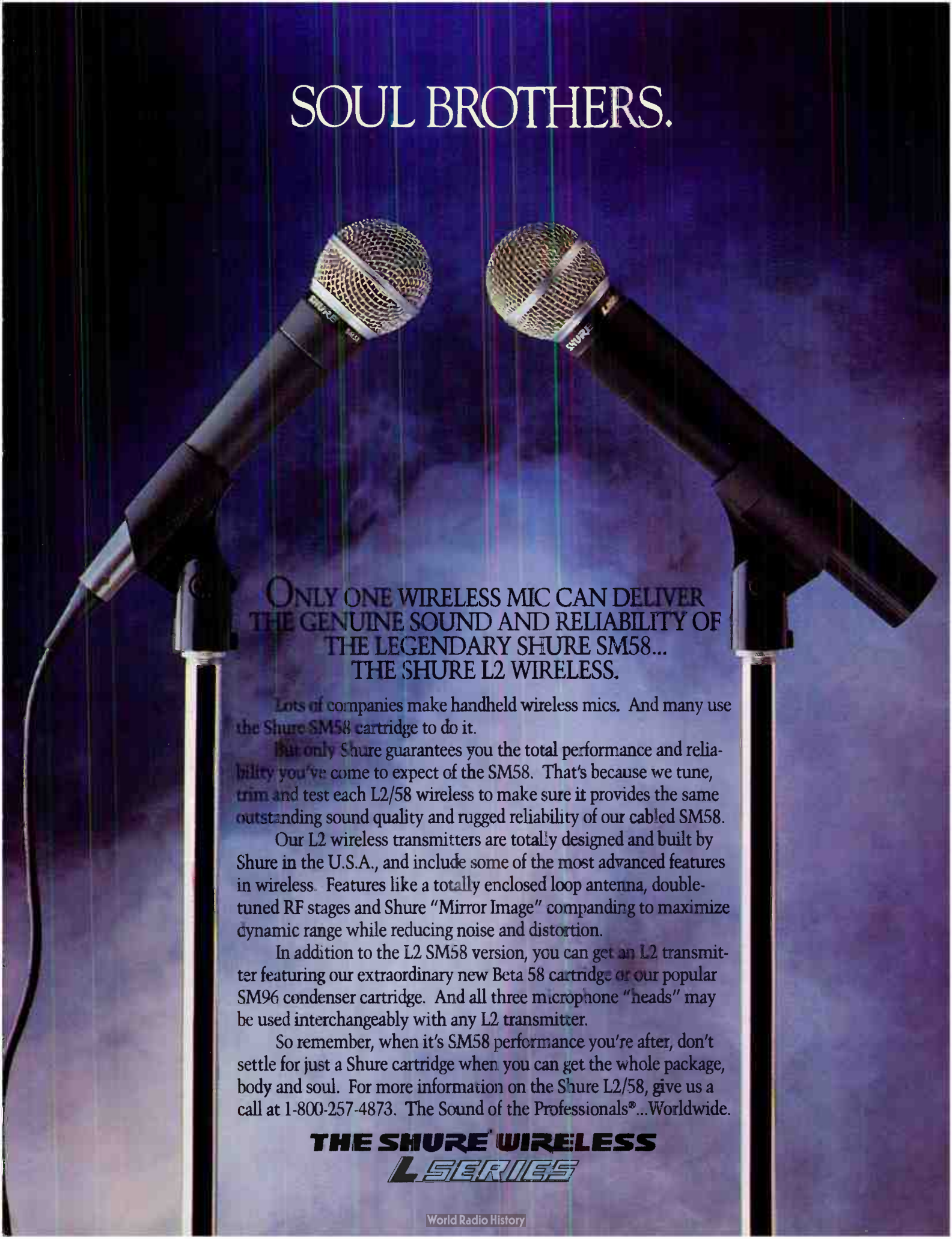
Parker's acute awareness of the public is a function of more than 20 years spent watching one of popular music's most incendiary figures—on top, at the bottom, blowing obvious big hits, scoring flukes, pulling out great shows under adverse conditions. Through this, Parker says, he's learned to give the public what it wants.

"James thinks in terms of feeling more



Photograph: Steve Winter

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than specific songs. So when I write, I try to find something that hints at my mood. That ballad thing James does really started out with 'Summertime,' and when he wrote it, it was 'Man's World,' and later 'The Soul of a Black Man.' And this album has 'Children's World,' which is basically the same thing. It's not like we're ripping ourselves off—people love that feeling."

Parker credits Don Pullen with helping to create the right vibe in the studio. The idea to record with Pullen had been in Parker's mind since the mid-'70s, when they first met at a jazz festival in Oslo. "He and Dannie Richmond were doing the Mingus thing, and I walked into the hotel and heard these guys playing in a lounge. There were musicians all over the place, and it was hot. I didn't know whether to run and get my saxophone or a tape recorder. I ended up jumping in on a real uptempo blues. It was like three-on-three street basketball, where everybody makes the good passes. All we could say when it was over was 'Yeah.'"

Though he's left the Brown band a few times over the years to record with Brown's musicians as Maceo and All the King's Men, and work with George Clinton and Bootsy Collins, Parker says Brown's prison term forced him to take control of his career in ways he hadn't before. "I realized I had to knock on a few doors," he says. "I've stopped three or four times now, and every time I get a little stronger. This time it forced me to really charge things up, and I can stand taller for it."

Brown supports his band's solo endeavors. "He's encouraging me to go ahead," Parker says. "He's making plans too—it looks like the work-release thing could end in January, so he's working on a documentary, and thinking about playing again. It's weird: Now he says, 'I hope you guys can come help me when the time comes.' I certainly feel like I've got to be close by. I want some more of that feeling when he gets out. I don't think we're through yet." 

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MACEO plays a Selmer Mark VI alto sax—he rarely plays baritone anymore, and though many of his early solos with Brown were on tenor, he's only recently considered picking up that horn again. He likes the Selmer and says his mouthpiece, a Brillhart Ebolin that came with it, works fine. He uses Rico 3½ reeds.



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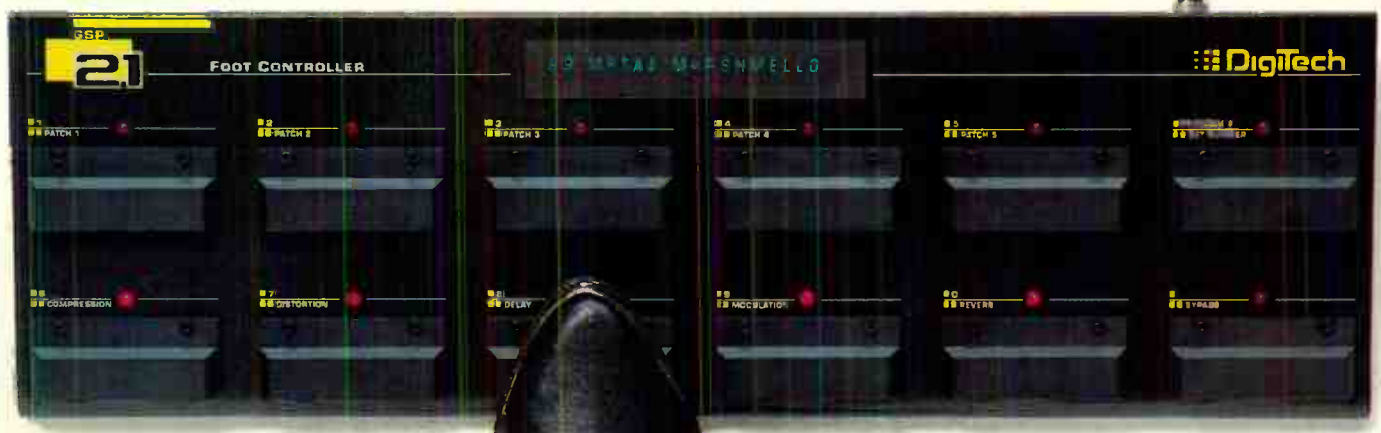
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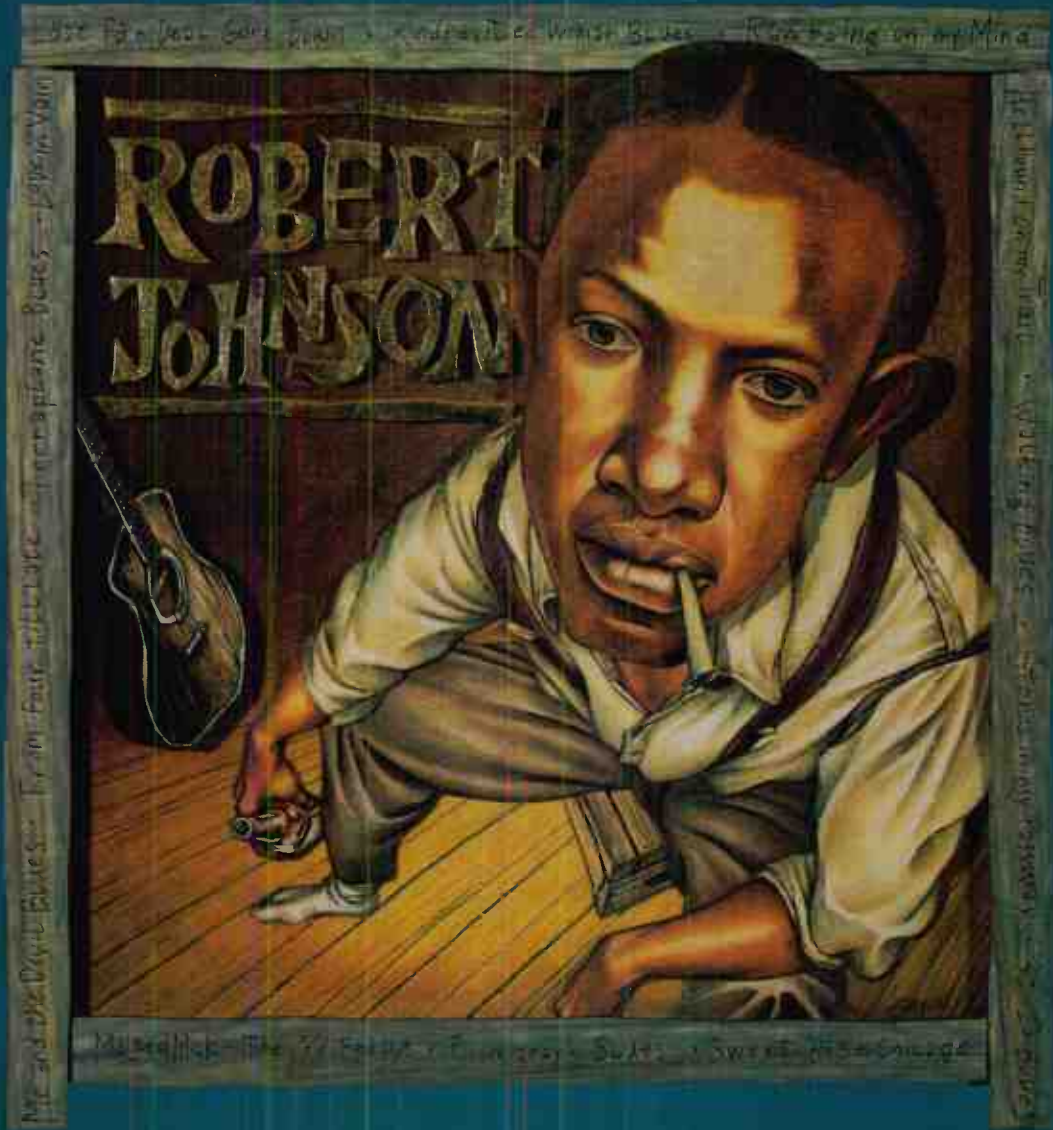
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The Hellhound's Trail

FOLLOWING ROBERT JOHNSON



He was rock's most brilliant, mysterious precursor. In an unprecedented set of reflections, 11 great musicians explain why Robert Johnson's grip on them will not loosen.

BY TONY SCHERMAN

• ILLUSTRATION BY TIM GAER •



I WAS 14 WHEN I BOUGHT AN ALBUM CALLED *KING OF THE Delta Blues Singers*. If something can overwhelm and insinuate at the same time, that was this music's effect on me. It got to me, hit me as hard as "Like A Rolling Stone" or "Hey Joe," except this was far more troubling, suggestive, exotic. Robert Johnson came to me out of a distant time and place; he came unadorned by facts or known photographs. Just a voice—vulnerable, high, liquid, swooping down to gruff barks; a guitar, with its shuffle-boogie bass and knife-like upper-register runs; and a scary intensity that leapt off the scratchy masters and fried my impressionable young brain.

This story is not about Johnson's life; it's about his afterlife. He was 25 when he first recorded in 1936. Eight months later he recorded again. In August, 1938 he was murdered. Twenty-three years later, on the cusp of the '60s blues revival, *King of the Delta Blues Singers* was released: Columbia Records' first rural blues LP ever.

It didn't take long for a cult to form on two continents. "Who the hell—where'd you get this?" said 18-year-old blues scholar and no-account Keith Richards when Brian Jones played him the album. In Los Angeles,

14-year-old Ry Cooder sat down with bottleneck and guitar to try and make sense of this goddamned crazy stuff; on the East Coast, John Hammond, Jr., son of the great talent scout, got his hands on a nine-song tape before the album was even released; with Jorma Kaukonen and his other blues-and-ragtime picking buddies at Antioch College, Hammond spent 1960 wearing the tape out. John Hammond's lead guitarist on the 1964 album *So Many Roads* was a precocious 20-year-old Canadian named Jaime Robbie Robertson; in '61 or '62, Robbie had walked into a Memphis record store, bought *King of the Delta Blues Singers* and seen right away, "This is it, the real item." Robert Johnson had commenced his amazing subterranean march into rock 'n' roll.

In its 30-year life, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, Volumes I and II (a second volume came out in 1970) has kept up a smallish but healthy sales flow, quietly becoming a talisman, a sacred text, among rock musicians. "There has not been a better album in the history of the recording industry," wrote critic Greil Marcus in 1975. The Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton have cut many a Robert Johnson song: "Love in Vain," "Stop Breaking Down," "Ramblin' on My Mind," "Four Until Late," "Crossroads" (Clapton's virtual theme

song); other artists—Bonnie Raitt, Steve Winwood, Cooder, Taj Mahal, even the Kronos Quartet—have recorded more. But you can't measure Johnson's impact in cover versions; his influence lies much deeper. For rock 'n' rollers today, Johnson is a mirror and a touchstone, perhaps the first of their breed. Clapton and Richards, probing their roots in middle age, acknowledge Robert Johnson as their master; to Robbie Robertson, Johnson is "the original print on things." Nor is Johnson's spell restricted to rock 'n' roll dinosaurs: 25-year-old Chris Thomas idolizes him, Tracy Chapman broods obliquely over the Johnson myth in her own "Crossroads," the Cowboy Junkies recorded Johnson's "Me and the Devil Blues" for a recent movie soundtrack, and Prince's film company is developing a screenplay based on the bluesman's life (the '80s already brought



Standing outside Morgan City, Mississippi, this is reputed to be the juke joint where Robert Johnson gave his last performance on August 13, 1938. Murdered with a dose of poisoned whiskey, he died nearby three days later.

us Hollywood's silly *Crossroads*, "inspired" by Robert Johnson's legend). And with the release this past September of a project begun 15 years ago—*Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings*, all 29 songs and 12 outtakes—you're seeing a whole lot of very excited rock stars. Ask them about themselves and they're testy, glib or unreachable; ask them about Robert Johnson and you've

got an interview.

Why is Johnson's grip so strong? Well, there's the alluring mystery that still shrouds his short life, despite massive research. Second, there's the legend of his pact with the Devil. You can take it as Mississippi folklore about bluesmen—Peetie Wheatstraw, after all, was "the Devil's right-hand man"—or you can take it as latter-day Faustian myth (Robbie Robertson's approach). Take it, if you're into spooking yourself, literally; or you can take Johnson's lyrics about walking with the Devil as metaphors for his own darker side. No matter how the legend grabs you, it's pretty potent stuff. Blues scholars who insist that Johnson was just one of many fine Delta bluesmen are honorable but small-minded: To miss the mythic in Johnson is to miss it in Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Hank Williams.

But above all, there's Johnson's music: carnal and funky, technically amazing, lyrically rich. A reference point for a lifetime. Genius pops up in all sorts of places, and in the mid-1930s a genius worked the juke joints of northwest Mississippi and east Arkansas. But don't take my word for it; listen to what Clapton and Robertson and Billy Gibbons and Robert Plant and Ry Cooder and all the others

Clapton: "The only parallel in modern times is Jimi Hendrix."

When did you first love Robert Johnson's music?

When I was between 13 and 16 years old, I had already heard a lot of other blues artists, but more contemporary. It was really down to what was available record-wise in England. I found an album, a double album that was a compilation of rural blues, it was called *The Rural Blues*, in fact. And it had very short cuts and lots of different artists. And at no time, luckily enough, was Robert Johnson mentioned during the course of any of this kind of mild research that I was doing for myself. I never came across his name as an influence on anyone else or in connection with anyone else.

But finally they put a Robert Johnson album out (*King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*). Now, this was a very rare thing, to find a complete album by any one of the old, old players. I bought it—and I actually couldn't take it. It was too strong. He was just too hard on his—too gutsy to listen to. And then maybe about six months later, I started listening. He got me like a bug. I got really bigoted and fanatical about the guy.

When I first got that Robert Johnson album, it had maybe 15 tracks on it, every one of them being completely dissimilar. That's probably why I couldn't take it all in, in a way—it was too much to cope with. When I did his songs, I would simplify huge chord shapes that he would play with his fingers into one line and make it easier. And when I did try to assimilate a style it came out of the more recent Chicago soloists, like Freddie King—well no, he was from Texas—but like B.B. King, you know, Eddy Guy. That was more accessible to me than anything I heard by Johnson. It was almost like Robert Johnson was too strong to mix with other people.

When you say too strong, what are you getting at?

Too intense, I suppose I mean. Far too intense to be—to hang out, you know. He was like a rebel in a way. I had all kinds of fantasies about him, but that's what I pictured him as—as being a real lone wolf, who was just too good for anyone to hang out with.

When he recorded, Delta blues had already overtaken it for some time. And yet he seemed to bring it to another level.

Yeah, I think he actually created a lot of the forms that became acceptable and became adaptable into rock 'n' roll or simpler blues, more so than anyone else. For instance, Blind Lemon Jefferson—I never took to Blind Lemon Jefferson, because it never seemed that he would settle down. He was playing so many figures around his singing all the time, it was very difficult to relax or to get a feel for his music. It was very—lots of filigree. And Robert Johnson could accompany himself—simply that it was— it was evasive. If you tried to pick it up, then you realized it wasn't simple. But it just seemed—in a groove. And that would lay the pattern for generations to come.

I want to get into that whole notion, because after all, today's audiences know little about Johnson. Why should people today care about him?

Well, because the artists they listen to and like would tell them to, I guess. I think it's important for people to question music, to ask where it came from. And what's amazing to me is that 50 years later, generations of young musicians are still playing what he laid down without even knowing it, because they're getting it from my generation. And they think that I invented it, or that I got it from Jimmy Reed or B.B. King or Howlin' Wolf, when in actual fact there's one guy in the back of it all really, in my way of thinking, it all started with the 10 different styles of playing the blues—which are

repeated, you know, rehashed over and over again today in very much the same way as he did it—completely on his own.

His background certainly was very different from yours, and yet you felt a connection with him almost immediately. What do you think the nature of that connection was?

I have no idea. My background was a fairly disturbed childhood, because of an unusual family situation where I was raised by my grandparents under the illusion that they were my parents. And, so it was a kind of screwy set-up, which sort of itself out as I got older. But through out my early teens, I was very confused, angry and lonely.

And that's what I got from listening to his music, much more than what I originally got from, say, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, who had the instrumentation and the sounds of the blues, but were on the surface—well, when you get deeper into

it—were actually more of an entertainment or an act. And most of the blues artists by the time I got to them were acts, you know. They were—not to put them down—slightly contrived. And were, a lot of them, playing to white audiences.

But Robert Johnson and that original record that I had—it ranks among all kinds of music. It's one of the strongest there is. And I wanted to be—I wanted to play like that, but it turns out that this life wasn't going to be that way for me.

But you learned how to play a pretty good guitar...

Yeah, but I became a rock star. Even though it was against my will to begin with, that's the way it turned out. I enjoy it. Now, I mean I love the music, but it still sometimes annoys me that I didn't kind of... Well, what could I have done? Even if I assimilated Robert's playing, I'd still just be copying it.

There are those who say that had Johnson lived, he might have gone on to pug in an electric guitar himself.

It may have been that he'd have given up playing, too. You know, with the amount that he put down in such a short time it could have been he might have moved on to something else. A lot of people do that. And the only kind of parallel I can think of in modern times is Jimi Hendrix. And I can't—people like to think, well, what would he play like now? And I can't picture it, you know. I just picture Jimi the way he was and the way he... [cont'd on page 50]





have to say. And then take a word from the wise—from auld Keith, that is: “If I could put it into words I gladly would, but then you wouldn’t need to listen to Robert Johnson. If you like great music, then that’s the man.”

• • •

CHRISS THOMAS— Actually, I got a big picture of him on my wall. It was just in the video of the song “Wanna Die With a Smile on My Face.” Robert Johnson meets MTV, you know? It’s overdue. I got introduced to Johnson in school, at Southern University; it must’ve been ’83, ’84. And I don’t know if it was because he was younger than those other guys when he recorded or what, but he didn’t have the same big powerful raspy voice that Son House, Charley Patton, Howlin’ Wolf had. Robert was different. He was a young fellow, almost a little boy. Maybe that’s one reason I was able to relate to him. Not that I can play his style, I’ve never even tried—

it’s difficult!—but I could relate. And I could relate to what he was singing about—I grew up in that same surrounding.

Robert knew—maybe not many other people did, but he did—that what he was creating was really special. For him to find his way into, here it is, 1990 and we’re talkin’ about his music—I don’t think it would surprise him.

His song “Hot Tamales and They’re Red Hot” shows his versatility: Now we’re hitting home with my whole theory about blues. People say blues is a certain chord change, but if you hear Robert Johnson singing “Hot Tamales,” he still brings to it the same thing he brought to “Crossroads” or “Ramblin’ on My Mind” or “Come On in My Kitchen.” It doesn’t matter what song, he’d still bring that same eeriness. When they took him to San Antonio they said “Okay, play the blues,” so that’s what he gave them. But I’m sure Robert Johnson could have played, and probably did play, anything he wanted. If

they’d said, “Come on in here and make some jazz for us,” we’d be hearing a whole different Robert Johnson. If you gave Robert Johnson five bucks and said, “Make me a blues record,” he’d do it, and that’s what happened. Then people zoom in and say this is what he is.

A lot of places he spent time in, I spent time in those exact places. I know how they smelled, I know the kind of people he played in front of. A lot has changed but a lot haven’t changed. I’ve been roaming around, going through a lot of the same things ’n’ stuff that Robert experienced. I’ve been back up there in the Delta.

You almost playing for your life in places like that. One time I was out there, I was playing, I don’t know, Rick James, and they was gettin’ mad. There was one guy dancin’ but I later found out he was deaf! That was the kinda place Robert was killed in. A lot of guys was killed; Robert was just the one people knew about. You might be Robert Johnson, people might like your music, but you’re not a star, you’re just one of them. They’ll dance to your music, but after the gig they’ll cut your throat.

Some of the old blues guys around Baton Rouge, I’d ask them did they know about Johnson. [Thomas’ father, Louisiana bluesman Tabby Thomas, runs the Baton Rouge club Tabby’s Blues Box.] They said no, but then I was playing one of his records, could’ve been “Terraplane Blues,” and this one guy knew him. Not by name but by sound. It was either Silas Hogan or Guitar Kelly, and they said they knew that song. They remembered hearing it on the jukebox, back when they was learning. The real blues guys, usually you can’t ask them about someone because they all feel they was just as good as anyone you could name!

People listen to Robert Johnson now and they say, “Oh yeah, that’s traditional, that’s dated.” But hey, in Robert Johnson’s prime, man, he was blowin’ minds, he freaked people out so much they figured he was Lucifer himself, like he’s working black magic or something. Robert Johnson was probably much better live than in that recording studio. Probably in a joint he was so good they just figured he had to be some kind of demon...just scared everybody.

He is the original rock ’n’ roll guy. Because rock ’n’ roll means somebody that’s on the outside, that’s lonely, the guy that don’t fit in. Not that he don’t wanna fit in, but they won’t let him, he can’t, he’s



Chris Thomas

“Robert Johnson was the original rock ’n’ roll guy. If a motorcycle had been around, he’d have looked real comfortable on that.”

Travel On, Poor Bob, Just Can’t Turn You ‘Round

Autumn 1990 saw the making of an unlikely new pop star. There he was: Robert Johnson with a bullet, as *The Complete Recordings* jumped onto *Billboard*’s Top 200, leapfrogged past Madonna and 2 Live Crew, kept its bullet and went steaming towards 150,000 copies. During one giddy October week, Johnson outsold New Kids on the Block and Warrant, trailing only George Michael and Mariah Carey on CBS’ roster. A CBS promotion exec got an excited, entirely serious call from a member of his Midwestern staff: “Listen, can the New York office get Robert to do some phone interviews with radio stations here?” The reasons are hard to pinpoint—the so-called blues explosion of 1990, a 20-year buildup of curiosity about Johnson with no new product to slake it—but an album of 50-year-old Mississippi folk music has, no matter how improbably, invaded the realm of rap and technopop.

Yet the evil imps that dogged Johnson in life have worked some subtle havoc on his recorded legacy. At some point after the mid-1970s, all the remaining metal parts—the source from which records are pressed—for Johnson’s songs vanished from CBS’ possession (the rest were long gone, probably scrapped during World War II). The source material for *The Complete Recordings* is a 1974 tape made from the metal parts and from test pressings; the new album’s quality is lower than if the engineers had been able to master straight from the metal parts—though to these ears it’s a real improvement over *King of the Delta Blues Singers*. But what happened to the parts? Were they stolen? Inadvertently thrown out? Are they some collector’s secret spoil? A half-dozen stories circulate, none of them conclusive—just like the tales surrounding Robert Johnson’s murder.

—T.S.

an outlaw. Robert Johnson was an outlaw, he didn't fit in, he didn't have no ties, he didn't have much of a family. Just moving through the Delta with a guitar. If a motorcycle had been around he would have looked real comfortable on that. Robert Johnson with his leather jacket and motorcycle. And groups like Black Sabbath, Alice Cooper, who have this Devil imagery, I mean that's like silly nonsense—Robert Johnson and the Devil, man, they was walking side by side!

It wasn't just Robert Johnson; all bluesmen was playing the Devil's music. The Devil myth, Robert didn't dream that up, that was just the way it was: Either you sung in church or you sung blues, and if you sung the blues you were singing the Devil's music. Like Slim Harpo said—"C'mon baby, scratch my back, we ain't goin' to heaven anyhow." The guy who was the blues singer, those guys were looking for salvation too, but they were more honest about their shortcoming. If they wanted a woman or was gonna drink some whiskey, they weren't going to hide it in the choir stands.

Robert Johnson, I have to hold him up. He gave me a vision that I could be a young guy and do this. He is what inspired me to get my first record out there, to not waste any time, 'cause I realized, as far as rock 'n' roll goes, and youth, that there is something really dangerous and magical about that combination.

Having him on my wall and putting him in my first video, that pretty much sums it up. There's a million people could be in those two places, but he's the one.

ROBBIE ROBERTSON— When I first started playing professionally, on the road, I was 16 years old. And I was kind of obsessed. I had to be to get the job I wanted, with Ronnie Hawkins, this rockabilly guy. I was so obsessed that when we went from Canada down south, I was just stealing everything in sight. I came a long way in a short time, and people used to kid me, they'd say, "What is it with this guy, what'd he do, sell his soul to the Devil?"

I didn't understand what this meant, but then I heard people in Arkansas referring to Robert Johnson in this connection. Just in a kind of folklore sense. And I didn't want to let on that I didn't know about him. Down there, one thing that was really very surprising to me was that the milkman knew as much about blues as the most profound follower. Everybody knew this stuff, and I thought I had reached the fountainhead!

I went to a record store in Memphis called Home of the Blues and spent my first week's paycheck on records by Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, Muddy, Sonny Boy Williamson. I became very influenced by Hubert Sumlin, by a lot of these different people. Then I got *King of the Delta Blues Singers*. I was always very curious about sources, about where things came from, and when I heard Robert Johnson I said, "Oh, / see. People just copied him and then they took it two steps further like it always happens." I listened to him and I thought "This is it, the real item." When you put on this

record you could just feel it, it was so rich and so true.

Years later, I wrote this song called "Daniel and the Sacred Harp," and it was based on this whole mythology, it's a disguised version of the Robert Johnson story of selling your soul to the Devil to be able to play amazingly. I mean, there was times when I was struggling and my fingers were bleeding and I'd say, "Jesus, doesn't anybody know—my soul is for sale! Come and get it! Help me over this bridge, let me play the way I want to play!"

When I'd first met Roy Buchanan in 1960, he was kind of a mysterious character, maybe three or four years older than I was, but he'd been around quite a bit too for his young age. Roy told quite a lot of stories, I mean, *crazy* stories, that he was half wolf and half man. When he'd talk about how he got to play like he did, saying "I practiced" is a boring story, so he'd make things up. And they weren't tremendously unlike this Robert Johnson story. Now, we know that these are just silly stories, but it's kind of really fascinating American mythology. We'd be sitting in a room playing together and I'd ask Buchanan, "Where, *how*, did you ever figure that out? Who did you ever see?" And he'd say, "Well, I can't really tell you," very mysteriously and clearly implying that he'd made some pact. And then years later it became obvious to me that he had heard these Robert Johnson stories and was playing a game with me. He'd say, "When you do what I've done—which I can't talk about—it means that you're probably gonna die a violent death, and way before your time, and that's the price you have to pay." So I'm only 16 years old and I'm listening to this guy with my mouth wide open and my eyes like banjos, 'cause I didn't really know

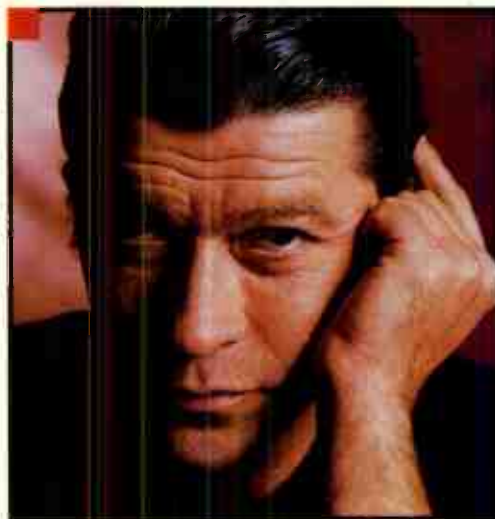
enough to just disbelieve him, and I'm thinking, "Himm, well, usually about 50 percent of what someone says is true, so..."

But look at Buchanan—a violent and mysterious death at 49! Let's hope you make it past 50!

[laughs]...The point is, Robert Johnson's influence on me is more *in story* than a matter of stealing his licks and using them later on a record. I didn't do that. For me, the music just made the story more true.

His playing, everything he did, the creative person that he was... For me, I'd put

people in categories, and the main category was "Originators. The Real Item." And this guy was an *inventor*. Whoever he stole from we don't know about, so this makes him kind of the original print



Robbie Robertson

"Selling your soul to become so much better than everyone—for a 16-year-old guitarist this was an appealing idea!"



on things. Now, I appreciated that tremendously, but whereas maybe somebody else, maybe Eric, would take licks and use them, I didn't do that. Not because I was being righteous or anything; I just wasn't a guitar player who sat down and learned solos off other people's records. I didn't do it because I didn't have *time*. I had to get to the point of invention immediately. Something pushed a button in me when I was very young, saying "You must make it up yourself."

And he's one of the people who said, "What you do is you become yourself as quick as you can." The old story about, "Well, you've gotta copy to become original," well, I went through that phase in about six seconds. Evidently, so did Johnson, because there he was at 21 or 22, totally himself.

The story stung me at a very young age. It's probably a real old story and it comes from God knows where, but I was always kind of a fool for this stuff.

Besides, the whole idea of someone selling his soul and becoming so much better than anyone else—for a 16-year-old guitarist, this was an appealing idea! Because I was on a mission. And my idea was, "I'll get there, and like Robert Johnson, I don't care what I have to do to get there!" This is kind of half-believing the stuff, but at the same time being very affected by it, and having it never, ever go away. It's not like I forgot about it and then someone reminded me and I said, "Oh dear!" No, it never left.

And that whole weird world down there, the deep South and its music and its voodoo, is with me always. Yesterday was my son's sixteenth birthday. When he woke up, I had this song ready to play for him. In the song it went, "I'm gonna bring back the second cousin of Little John the Conqueror." And my son said to me, "I don't know what that is, but I love it!"

JIM DICKINSON— When it's dark on the Delta, man, Robert is still there. In the Delta, as you drive south, things slow down, get hotter, wetter, maybe a little more serious, too. The feeling of the area is unchanged since 1938; the black people of the area haven't changed very much, and it just wasn't that long ago. Where I used to live was right off Mississippi 304, and at the crossroads of 304 and Highway 61 there's a restaurant that was a plantation commissary 50 years ago. It hasn't been redecorated much, and you can't help but think that he sat right there on the porch and played his guitar. 'Cause he



Jim Dickinson

"I defy you to walk down Highway 61 at night and not get spooked."

just *did*.

Highway 61 has its own kind of power. I defy you to walk down Highway 61 at night and not get spooked. I've been raised in a Southern religious tradition and there's some things I don't believe in anymore, some I do, but I'll tell you this: I wouldn't go down to a crossroads on Highway 61 at night—and I don't think you'd stay there very long either!

If you count Robert's music in twos instead of fours, it makes more sense. He's counting it like an African, in duple rhythm, without a backbeat—which makes his music a lot less accessible to contemporary players. If you try to count Robert in fours, there's 11/4-bar, 13-bar, 12 1/2-bar choruses, which drive a modern player nuts.

But where Johnson stands out the most is as a lyricist. There were bluesmen going for irony, but not really *satire*. He really did add—I don't want to be trite about it and call it poetry—he added a poet's touch. Here's a better word: Johnson's more literary, in a weird kind of semiliterate way. Listen to "Dead Shrimp Blues"—"I woke up this mornin' and all my shrimps was dead and gone"—who had said *that*? That's Johnson talking about being impotent. Blues guys had made sexual allusions, or pitied the human condition, but they'd never taken it over to a kind of black humor and surrealism.

In "Hot Tamales" you can hear two distinct voices, like a multiple personality: a high voice and a low voice. In other songs, there's a third voice, almost a Howlin' Wolf voice. You can either think he was doing it theatrically, like a vaudeville routine, or that the guy was nuts. I think Johnson was nuts. I feel sure he was clinical. I don't think the lyrics are nuts, but the multiple voices—I think it's obvious; if I was a clinical psychologist, I could go in there and find references. There are certain patterns that neurotic people express lyrically and I think Robert Johnson's full of 'em. I mean, what the hell is the end of "Love in Vain"? What is he *saying*? He says "Oh weedy-woe." What the hell is "weedy-woe"? He isn't saying words; I think he's trying to say something that isn't quite coming out. I've recorded [the Replacements'] Paul Westerberg and Danny Stuart [of Green on Red] and other contemporary people; you turn the music off and they're not sayin' words. And it isn't just the crazy people I've recorded—I've heard Mick Jagger say shit that wasn't words.

But Mick Jagger's not crazy.

Weeelll, he just might be considered weird in some circles...

RY COODER— I knew his tuning was G, I could tell that. Open G. I'd already figured out G tuning through a long, tortuous, accidental process. It just makes a G chord, it's all thirds, a diatonic thing. And Johnson's bottleneck pieces—not all of them, but primarily—seemed to be in G tuning. He probably had a capo on the guitar somewhere. The mystery is...see, most of the Mississippi players played in D, an entirely different tuning. So the mystery is...[long pause]...You know, we don't know *anything*. It's so stupid to sit and talk about these things, white people don't know a fucking thing. The key to all this is what's in the *mind* of the guy. Not what I think, but what *he* thinks. And how can I know what Robert [cont'd on page 40]

Keith: "I can figure out almost anyone's licks — but not his."

What was the connection for white English teenagers like you in the early '60s to the American blues artists that you were hearing?

For myself and for everybody else I knew just about, at least in my generation, it started basically with rock 'n' roll. There was obviously a lot of tradition behind that music. So it was a matter of retracing the music to find out where the base was. There used to be little clubs and cliques and societies in London and all over England. Every town, sometimes just four or five guys—the blues freaks! And it was the guys that wanted to play that really started to research it.

Mick was the most enterprising guy I knew in that respect, in that he actually wrote to Chess Records in Chicago for a catalog. And it would come like, six months later—they weren't that quick! He had the best blues collection at the time. I was about 15, 16, something like that. Mick and I got together and started to play a little bit and I guess *The Best of Muddy Waters* was the criteria album at the time for us. And then we found out about Jimmy Reed. And then you realize that there's a whole load of them! Once you're a musician, if you dig the blues it's like a magnet; you can't ever let it go, and it's something that's constant through your life. If you don't know what to do, then put on some Blind Blake or something. Then you've got something to do!

It still has that draw for you.

It's timeless. Blues strikes a chord in everybody. I'd have the balls to say that it's probably the original music. It doesn't take a lot; all you need is a couple of hand claps and a stick and something to twang, and a few voices. I can see those cats in the caves—all our forebears and ancestors—I bet you they were singing the blues.

When did you become aware of Robert Johnson?

It was Brian Jones who first played me the record, and I said, "Who the hell—where'd you get this? This is superior!" Because that must have been just about the peak, at least of '50s blues, just a blues singer with a guitar. I think that work he did is head and shoulders above anybody else, and that's saying a lot, because there's a lot of good other guys around. Maybe the guy that did him in was another guitar player! "I'm gonna get rid of this sonofabitch, because he's too good!" Nobody can play like Johnson, but everybody tries. I know a few of his licks; they're the most amazing pieces of music, just to play as a guitar player. It's almost classical, even though it's just a straightforward blues sequence.

And I've always been intrigued about these stories that he was just a kid hanging around Son House, who'd let him do a couple of numbers and say, "Go away, sonny." And then he disappeared, and it's like 40 days out in the wilderness. And came back with this incredible bunch of songs and this incredible technique and you say, "What did you do out there?"

The story is he sold his soul to the Devil. But we all do that! [laughs] It's a good one, and when you listen to "Hellhound on My Trail," "Crossroads"... [whistles] Maybe. Maybe he actually met the cat!

Those were the stories that were told at the time, his own contemporaries were blown away by him.

Well, whatever he did, maybe that was their best explanation: "You know what he had to do to play like that!" In a way, Eric Clapton was very much like that. When we first started playing, Eric would be at the front watching us play. He couldn't play at the time. Six months later he came back and he blew everybody out.

I really got the sense in talking to Clapton that—especially when he was younger—he really identified with Johnson, was really wired into him.

Yeah. Except Eric managed to get older!

He even voiced some regret that instead of getting deeper into the blues he became a rock 'n' roll star.

Yeah, I can understand that. In a way all of us feel a bit like that. But I don't think he tossed anything away. You can hear Robert Johnson every time he plays, and hopefully now and again when I play too. If you're a player, everything that goes in your ears eventually comes out. So if you listen to a lot of Robert Johnson, well, in one form or another he's in you. That's what makes the guy immortal. The guy was just amazing, you know. I mean, he's English! This guy could barely write his name, and he's coming up with some incredible rhymes, incredible ideas, incredible words. He had quite a vocabulary. So I wonder what the hell he did, you know? He must have been hanging with somebody.

Apparently he had a natural gift.

Natural gifts, I would say, in abundance. As a player, singer, writer; to be able to put all those three things together in such a short life. I mean, that guy sounds like he's 40, 50 years old, like he's lived...

Many lifetimes.

Yeah, [looking at the photograph of Johnson which Richards keeps on his mantel] And if you look at those fingers, then you start to understand. Look at the length between those joints. Amazing hands. With fingers that skinny and long, it means you can hop around that board without all the fingers tripping over each other and getting in the way, you know. I mean, there's a lot of big guys—Freddie King, Albert King—and they could doze around too, but for the style that Robert was playing, there's a lot of finger-picking and it's very delicate stuff. Amazing enough just to play like that, but to be able to sing at the same time!

Aside from his technique, what is it that sets him apart, makes him special?

First and foremost, the songs, the actual songs. They are very untraditional in a way, and you really come back to that word "compelling," or "driven." There is some extra intelligence at work in the lyrics and subject matter; I mean, "Come On in My Kitchen," or "32-20"—all the doctors in Hot Springs sure can't help you now." There's a master of English there.

Johnson's work is never a rehash of anything. I don't think anybody before or since quite put all of those talents together in one person, and that's why we're talking about him, because he's unique. It's like listening to Mozart, if you really





want to get into music, because I like all kinds of music. It has a whole range of things. It doesn't just excite one little part of you, it's all of it, you know.

Muddy Waters was totally immersed in Johnson's stuff. His first records prove it. And he was the next one—after the second World War, when they started recording again—that started to approach Johnson's level of intensity. Muddy carried it on; via Muddy, it went to Chuck Berry, to Little Richard and to the white guys; to Elvis Presley, to Buddy Holly. They all listened to Muddy. And so without knowing it, they were listening to Johnson as well, because Muddy came from the same area. I spoke to Muddy about it. As far as I can recollect, he couldn't say whether he'd actually heard Johnson in person or knew him or not, but he knew *about* him, and was picking up his records at the time that they came out.

It's as I say about all musicians: The only thing you can put on their tombstone is "He Passed It On." So, whether anybody knows it or not, Johnson's influence via Muddy and then via Chuck Berry and then by ourselves and the Beatles—it's all-pervasive, isn't it? Because without knowing it, we soaked him up before we even knew who he was. I started trying to play like Chuck Berry, and then I heard Muddy Waters and played like that. And then I got back to Johnson, and the intriguing thing to me still is, where the hell did *he* get it from? There were people around, influences. It probably should remain a mystery, because there's a mysterious aspect to Johnson. That's the other thing; he's got this incredible *image*, too.

Clapton compares him to Jimi Hendrix, who also died at 27.

There's a correlation there. That's a pretty good connection, Eric! Yeah, yeah, that's a very good one. It never occurred to me—not that he died at the same age, but in that incandescent sort of explosion, almost as if, "I've done what I've got to do; bye-bye."

And that's all we get. I've got a photograph of Johnson I want to show you that I bet you've never seen before.

Great suit! [looking at the "pinstripe suit" photograph] Man, see what I mean? This cat is a really sharp motherfucker! [studies photograph] Same fingers too, yeah. I didn't know there was another picture of him. That's amazing, that's great. Charlie Watts is going to go *berserk* when he sees this suit and these shoes! This guy—that's what I mean about the image. Forget it, this guy had an all-around thing. Amazing hat, man, look at that. This cat was obviously no country bum anymore, by the time he got to this. Was he a big guy?

Wink Clark, who grew up with him, told me he was a small guy.

Yeah? Because I'm looking at the guitar, and I'm wondering if it's a small guitar. It's very interesting. What hands! [whistles] I can do that! Amazing. Wait until I show the guys!

You keep Johnson's picture over your mantel, you've recorded his songs, you feel so highly about him. Do you feel you're carrying on his tradition?

Well, you'd like to think so. In a way, yeah. I think in the same way that Robert Johnson carried it on. Because, as I say, it's the passing it on that's the real fruit of playing music. If you can turn a few people on to something, a little bit of you survives in what they do. And to me, Johnson's influence on people is way and above—we're not sitting here talking about him for nothing, you know. He condensed it all, just like that. Everyone else has hit it here and there, certain aspects of it. But everything you want to know about the blues is in those 29 tracks.

There's like a delayed fuse on Robert Johnson. When he was alive and when he made those records, he was probably just selling a few records. Not a sensation. He never got to a wide enough audience, he didn't live long enough to do that. Because he may have—if he'd kept going, like Leadbelly or Big Bill Broonzy, he may have been playing Europe in the '50s, stunning people. But the fact is, he's almost hidden away there with those 29 tracks. And the fact that they still force their way through, the fact that we're here talking about them now...I mean, I just finished rehearsing a whole Rolling Stones show, but I'm happy to sit here and talk about Robert Johnson. Like all great music, it's indefinable. If I could put it into words I gladly would, but then you wouldn't need to listen to Robert Johnson. If you haven't heard about him, if

you haven't heard what he's done, then do yourself a favor and give him a listen. To me, he's head and shoulders above anybody else. I mean, I can figure out everybody else's licks, just about. But not this one. It's just fun trying.

What are your impressions of Johnson and his life from the things he sang about?

I wonder if as a person he was anything like the persona that comes across on the records. I'm not saying it was an act by any means, but it's like great comedians—most of them are not funny when they're not working; they're very depressed, you can't get them to smile. And I wonder if he just sort of found this supernatural fascination. And found that's the way he could write, and that's what would come out when he was writing that almost free-form sort of stuff. Because I look at the cat's photograph and I don't see a troubled guy, really.

And he's a craftsman. Those songs are well-honed, they're not just some madman running around. It's not eerie in that sense; there's a lot of work that's gone into those songs. I think he just found that subject fascinating, and found that he could express himself. Or express that part of everybody, really. Because what he did is bring out the sort of superstitions and fears that everybody has. And he managed to put that into words and into music. So he's really exposing this hidden side that everybody has inside. Maybe he had nightmares, I don't know. Maybe he was an insomniac!

But I don't think he was obsessed. I see it that he just found that part of himself and recognized it in other people and managed to put that thing into words. It's a very difficult thing to do; most songs are, "I love you, June and moon." I just think that side of people and that side of himself fascinated him, and that's where he found that he could really express himself the best. And of course, dying that young, it can lend to this whole mystique. You can dream up this thing where he sold his soul to the Devil and the Devil gave him all these lyrics—no copyright, you know!

What does Robert Johnson have to do with rock 'n' roll?

Just about everything. You've only got to listen to a couple of those rhythm licks; it's there. All you'd have to do is add a backbeat. And if you gave him an electric guitar and a backbeat, that stuff's rockin', man. I mean, it's all the way. That's a straight connection. I think most of his songs are head and shoulders above most rock 'n' roll songs, you know. Although we're still working on it!

By all accounts, Johnson was a notorious ladies' man—

Sounds like it.

—and the feelings apparently were mutual; women liked his sharp looks, liked his music. According to accounts, he drank whiskey like iced tea—

I know a few.

He used his musical ability to escape having to work for the Man—

I know a few. [laughs]

By the standards of his day, he was footloose, he was no account—

Well, if you write that description down, I'd say it pretty much fits a few rock 'n' roll people, probably including myself! What he's got to do with rock 'n' roll is basically through the guys that listened to him and brought it over through the '50s and into our present era. Anybody that decides to be a musician, especially if they're going to perform and do their own stuff—there's a difference in joining an orchestra and sitting in the pit and doing as you're told; you're still working for the Man there. But taking it out on your own—which I know a bit about, because that's what we have to do—is something else.

And if that description of him is true—and I have no doubt it is; from all I've heard, he was certainly a randy old bastard—well, for a musician, it's a great life. In your early 20s, you know, you're moving around, you don't have to get into any recommitments—you're gone already. It's the old troubadour thing, which is part of any musician's life.

It certainly seems to have been part of his. From the time he was old enough to be able to make a little money with his music, he was gone. He was out of there.

Robert [laughing, to photo of Johnson]—join the club!



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was doing “Traveling Riverside Blues”—you know, “you can squeeze my lemon.” Just last night at the Meadowlands the stage was full of lemons. And I was thinking, “If only Robert knew...”

When I got to Boston with Zeppelin in '69 and we played the Tea Party, I met Don Law the promoter, who it turned out was the son of the man who'd recorded Robert Johnson. Don talked about his dad being down there in San Antonio; he told me the stories about Johnson calling up Don Law Sr. from the hotel, saying “There's a woman here wants 50 cents and I lacks a nickel.” I might call my next album that, *I Lack A Nickel*, I love it, the idea of just not having

that last nickel. And Don told me about the lost 13. I got goosebumps, everything, you can't believe how I felt. All we had at the time was the original album, though I'd heard that Eric Clapton had a tape of the lost 13. At the Tea Party, a kid came up to me out of the crowd and pushed into my hand a little reel-to-reel and sure enough, there it was. I have no idea who he was, real nice guy with spectacles, never seen him since. That was the first time I heard “Little Queen of Spades,” “Love in Vain” and “From Four Until Late.” [The material was collected the following year as *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. II.*]

So Johnson has followed me everywhere. He's with me right now on tour, next to Jimmy Giuffre and the Musicians of the Nile and quite happily stuck between Dexter Gordon and Soundgarden.

Then I decided to follow him. On my last tour in '88, I got a day off and flew from Atlanta to Memphis. I took a rental car, went down Route 61 with my Rand-McNally atlas, got to Robinsonville, and took a right to Commerce. With my Samuel B. Charters book, *Robert Johnson*, under my arm, I asked around if anybody knew some old singers. There were some guys driving huge mechanized cotton pickers; they swung down off these ladders and came down. I'm in the car with my woman beside me, thinking, “This is a long way from anywhere.” I told them I was looking for someone who was related to a singer who used to live around there, who died 50 years ago.

They said, “The only guy around here that long ago was Son House.” These guys were younger than me, so it was quite surprising that Son House would be remembered by 50-year-old guys. Anyway, I said “No, no—Johnson.” They said, “Hmm, no,” but they pointed me back up the road from Commerce towards Robinsonville. I knocked on the door they told me to, white house on the left, and saw this huge figure looming forward. I put on my best

English accent, thinking it might get me through. The man came out and started talking: “Yeah, we played together as kids, and then he went away. He was mysterious, but he wasn't mean. Sonny Boy Williamson, he was mean. He came from Helena and stole my girlfriend.” He said, “Robert lived over the road there, but the house blew away.”

So I hung around, just standing there like some kind of fool. I headed for Friar's Point, and crawled in there with my car. Being a blues freak, I knew Robert would just get off the riverboat and play a gig, maybe get a little wild. He lived very close to the edge, according to that guy. The hypnotism was there. There was just an incredible smell of woodsmoke and seduction and timelessness. It reminded me of parts of Africa. Morocco...I was so out of step with it, really, all I could do was feel.

Reading about it, and poking around, I find the whole thing now opening up for me. I see that the guy, though he was very shy and polite, was also a great professional and very, very ambitious. And all of a sudden we find he has a sister in Baltimore, and traveled to New York. The whole mystery unravels a little bit. And as I get older, the romance—it doesn't fade away, but it gets moved over, and I've got to...hone it.

The anguish, the desolation in Johnson, it's beautiful. It's the most remarkable and beautiful currency for an entertainer, to really feel and sing like that. I try. *Sometimes* I get within 10 miles of it. There are some vocal performances throughout time, such as Nina Simone's “I Put a Spell on You,” where you get a ridiculous empathy between instrument and voice. Occasionally, on certain songs throughout my career, I've almost got there. There's a song called “Anniversary” on my current record, where I really sing, *sing*, I'm right on the edge of being there alongside the whole Johnson approach. On that one, I made it.

He is a huge musical force in my life; he's been a touchstone, really. Even though Kokomo Arnold was a great player, and Skip James, Son House—the people who Johnson was affected by—were all great, Johnson takes all those different things and creates something of his own. Muddy Waters was great, but I think he was quite calculating. Whereas to me, on “Preaching Blues” and “Crossroads” and “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day,” Johnson really creates something of singular magnificence; he goes beyond all other singers of that era. And perhaps since.

If I were to turn somebody on to Johnson I'd say, “I'd like your attention for one hour, and don't expect to be doing anything for another couple of hours after that.” I'd play “Judgment Day” and “Stones in My Passway” three times each, and then pull the phone out of the wall and lock the door, and leave the person with it. It would be a great gift, really, for anyone to be exposed to this. I don't know if outtakes are going to make any difference—the whole phenomenon of listening to Presley doing a song ten times, it's a matter of taste. But the very fact is that when I was a kid, I was just hit for six by Robert. Somebody, someday, is going to get my record collection, whether it's my daughter or my son or both—and they better know what they've got. 'Cause Johnson is part of why their dad is what he is.



Robert Cray

“When I first heard Johnson,
I thought he was from outer space.”



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Oh, I'm going back down to Mississippi, yes. I just want to be intoxicated. I'm going down there because of what Robert did to me when I was a kid. Because of Willie Brown and Son House and the whole Delta phenomenon. And if I get to the crossroads, I wonder if Mark Knopfler will be there.

ROBERT CRAY— I was always mystified by the fact that he was so young when he did those recordings. In the photos, he looks quite a bit older. That cigarette hanging out of his mouth. It really shocked me to see what he actually looked like—it's an old man in a young man's body. And all those songs that he's written, they're a lot older than what someone that age should've been singing. I guess people grew up much faster on the Mississippi Delta in the '30s, that's fact.

When I was first listening to him in '71, we would think he was from outer space. To be so young but know so much about life, and play it so well, and sing it so well, with such emotion—I mean, that's out of this world! But I don't think the depth of his music, the frightening element, affected me till I was lots older. I hear it now. It still befuddles me how he got to be that way, how he understood those things—what I call the curse of mankind, not knowing why you're here on earth. But what really gets to me is how in the hell, in that short life, did he become so proficient on guitar and vocally? I tried to figure out "Crossroads" and "Kind Hearted Woman." I got a little bit of it. Nobody can really get it. You can play it, but you don't *get* it. You can study this stuff till Hell freezes over, but there's no way you can sing and play with that kind of emotion.

For me, Johnson is the greatest rural bluesman. Someone like Tampa Red plays a really smooth slide guitar, but Johnson's my favorite. When someone's that good I hate them, actually. But you just have to live with it.

JOHN HAMMOND, JR.— Johnson was my inspiration to actually want to play. I first heard him in 1958, on Sam Charters' anthology *The Country Blues*. It was a great record. Then in 1960, Frank Driggs, the guy who compiled *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, gave me tapes of about nine cuts. Although I've since been gotten to by others, Robert got to me like no one else, and if I had to think of one rural bluesman who's still essential to me—there you go, it's Robert Johnson.

I'd been playing the guitar zero when I started playing his stuff; it was the first music I wanted to learn. I just wanted to do those songs. They rang true to me, very profoundly. When I finally got a guitar in 1960, it was within a year-and-a-half that I was playing professionally. [laughs] Right—"He sold his soul to the Devil!" You don't have to sell your soul to the Devil; if you're really inspired, really motivated, you learn fast. When I cut my first album in '62, I'd been playing professionally for about nine months.

In '64 came your electric blues album So Many Roads. With Levon and the Hawks...

That's right. Let me tell you something about Robbie Robertson, man: Robbie Robertson was once a great blues guitar player. I mean, the best that I ever heard. And when he got with Dylan it all changed. He bought the Albert Grossman line of, you know, "You're the greatest. In order to make the real dough you gotta write tunes, you gotta do this and that, and be holier than thou." He didn't see that what he was doing already *was* his own, the real thing. When I used to go see Robbie play I was thrilled, man. This guy was so strong and so hot; I don't care if you compare him to Buddy Guy or Otis Rush or whoever, that's irrelevant. I just felt so sad when that voice was stilled.

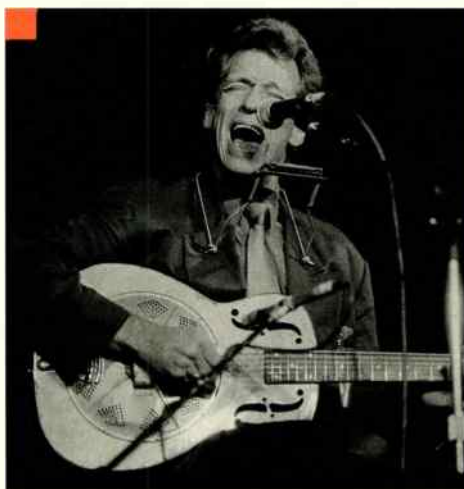
You still hear it on some of the Band cuts.

Nahh. It's not the same thing. I mean, he was a great guitar player, period—but when he played blues, he was really special. But to get back to Johnson: I'm sure he was influenced by Lonnie Johnson, by Leroy Carr, by Willie Newbern and all of these guys. I hear Scrapper Blackwell in him, and Kokomo Arnold and Skip James. But his stuff is the synthesis of that whole era, the most intense. Listen to the complexities of his rhythms, his uncanny ability to make the words jump at you because of little nuances he does on the guitar. Or the stops where a slide note bangs right out at you—"Who's been drivin' my Terraplane for"—and then that incredible slide note—"years since I've been gone." In "Traveling

Riverside Blues," the guitar is as much a voice as his voice is. His bass line in "Sweet Home Chicago" totally influenced the whole Chicago electric blues scene. I mean, the guy was brilliant, way ahead of his time, sophisticated in chord structure and rhythm. He was a real winner.

His guitar technique is phenomenal, I mean, he played the *shit* out of the guitar. It's just a phenomenal technique the guy worked out. A bass line and a treble line that are at times simultaneous. He was a musician on the incomparable level. Lonnie Johnson was real sophisticated, a great accompanist, great technical guitarist. He'll stand the hair on your head. But Lonnie never made a "Terraplane Blues," no "Preaching Blues," no "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day." I'm not just talking about intensity, I'm talking about technique—I mean, Robert Johnson was phenomenal! He was hitting stuff in rhythm and off rhythm and playing with it and hitting bass things and treble things at the same time...I don't know, I just don't think there's ever been a guy that good.

I haven't recorded all of his songs, but I know all of them. On any



John Hammond, Jr.

"I don't buy this whole 'sell your soul to the Devil' routine. I think that's all crazy."



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given evening, I could play any of his tunes. The tunings were hard at first. I figured out finally he had an open tuning for lots of the tunes. A lot of the slide was in an open G or open A. When I figured that out, everything made a lot more sense; I just knew it was right as soon as I got it. You can go to open G and capo it up; what I do is play an open A, sometimes an open E. Using the slide was the hardest thing to master, but with experimentation I developed my own way of being able to hit the notes. It's frustrating that I never got to see the guy play, and that there was never a film made of him. But life goes on, and you carry on a tradition the best way you can. You live it, you be it.

Many times I've thought about Johnson as a person. I've got my own feelings about where he was at. All I can go on is my own life on the road for all these years, but it's enabled me to form opinions that I think are fairly right on. And I don't see this *darkness* everybody talks about. Robert Johnson was a living human being, he wasn't a ghost off in a cave somewhere. The guy *lived*, he traveled. He went to New York, he went to

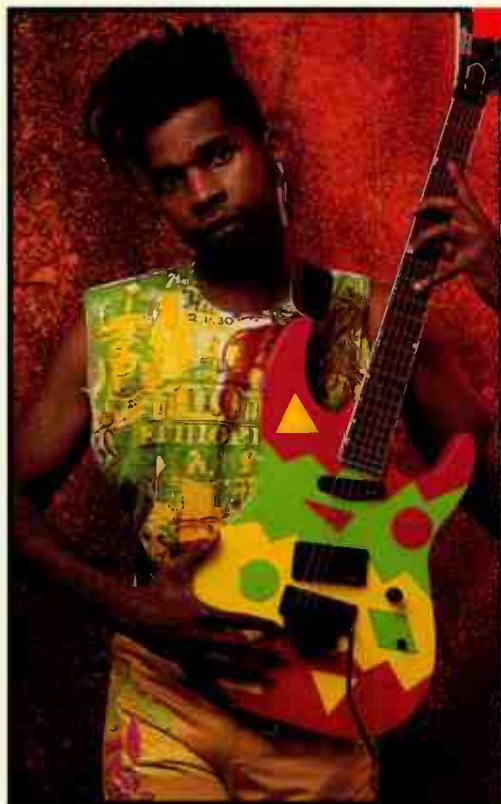
Canada, he'd been in California and the Midwest. Especially for a young guy, he saw a lot of the U.S. And he had success, too—you didn't make all those records unless you're popular.

If you're all on your own and you don't have somebody taking care of you, you can't be messed up. And to be able to play the gigs and maintain, night after night, you've got to have your shit together. I believe he really did. And the way he died: He didn't *want* to die, somebody killed him. He was a young guy who was just getting his career off the ground. He had made all these records. He was somebody on the scene. The people I've talked to whom he worked with—Robert Junior Lockwood and Johnny Shines and Honeyboy Edwards—they all refer to him as a very up guy. And he was a great source of inspiration to them, until he got real drunk.

I don't buy this whole "sell your soul to the Devil" routine. I think that's all crap. "Me and the Devil," that's *humorous*, for Christ's sake: "You may bury my body by the highway side, so my old evil spirit can catch a Greyhound bus and ride." "Hellhound on My Trail" has a

somber kind of feeling but there's an upness to it, too—"If today was Christmas Eve, then wouldn't we have a time, baby!"

I don't know how to put into words those magic coincidences, the right time at the right place, that make a person do what they do. But I'd say he was one of the greatest musicians I ever heard, and that his power, his persona, translated to some chord inside me that just sort of sprung me free to go out and play. I wouldn't say it's because of him that I became a musician, but for sure his stuff got me so acutely interested in the music I already loved that it drove me to actually get an instrument and learn to play it, and want to do it for my life.



Vernon Reid

"*Hellhound on My Trail*" is just brutal. When that song ends, you know there's no escape for Johnson."

VERNON REID— There's this real dark sense of foreboding. "Hellhound on my Trail." It's difficult to even imagine what it was like before World War II, in the deep South, out in the country, where to cross the path of a white man, for your eyes to meet the eyes of a white woman, to give an imaginary slight, could literally mean death. Lynching was almost an accepted form of behavior. People talk about the dread in Robert Johnson as existential, but you've got to look at it in social terms too. Imagine the mood in the black part of town when, say, a young boy who's real popular, all the girls like him, he's intelligent, and he goes out on a Saturday night and doesn't come back home. Imagine the dread, the darkness, the shadow of evil. The hellishness of that.

For me, the idea of the blues is the catharsis of dealing with your blues, and your situation, and coming out the other end. A lot of blues is humorous: "It's a lowdown dirty world where a man has to pawn his shoes" or "Caldonia, what makes your big head so hard?" But there's something really heroic about

Robert Johnson. Robert Johnson just goes headlong *into it*, you get the sense he's grappling single-handed with things that other artists turn away from, or try to come out the other side of. "Hellhound on My Trail," it's just brutal. When that song is over, you know that for this person, this character, for Robert Johnson, there's no real escape, no way out.

You wonder what kind of figure he must have cut when he walked into a room...

BILLY GIBBONS— It was on the Columbia LP reissue, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, that I first heard Johnson. There were three of us who'd started listening to this kind of music, and I was in my early teens. Great age to be bowled over by this stuff. I wish I could be somehow different from the other kids that were discovering this stuff around then, but it was actually through the English guys. There was just a brief interview in some teen magazine with Cream, and it was an Eric Clapton comment that kind of opened the doorway.

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We thought it was dark and smoky; you really were drawn into the meaningfulness of the Delta. The landscape, even though it has changed and the forms of commerce are different, you can still see the blues wigglin' right out of the ground.

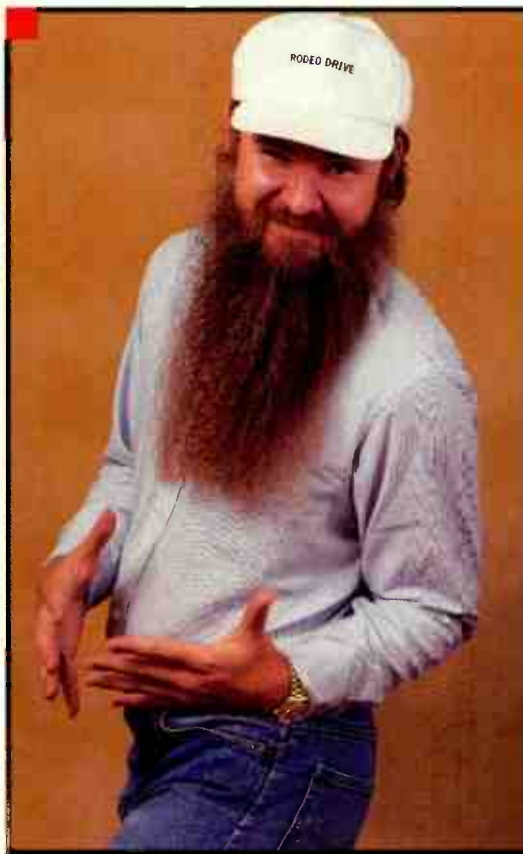
One point I want to make is about the aspect of mystery that's always included in a Robert Johnson discussion. Over time, we've had the benefit of a lot of comment by the so-called blues experts, and now there's even the famous two views of Johnson in photographs. And yet the mystery remains. But to listen to the music with your eyes closed, the mystery becomes less ominous and more inviting. What I mean is, by unraveling the former question marks surrounding his life, we know a little bit about him, but to me it becomes less and less important to have some measure of finality over his birthplace, or exactly who it was that may have done him in, because the music is so enticing and it stands alone. All in all, that's the bottom line: We're interested in the sounds this guy created.

His stuff was so *finished*. I can't remember who it was that remarked that Robert Johnson's work is really a kind of turning point from the so-called floating blues, but he created *songs*, he created content that thematically was with you from the opening line to the closing. "Little Queen of Spades," "Hot Tamales They're Red Hot"—we were just listening to that—and "Love In Vain"...God, add my name to the list! Of the rural bluesmen, he's the most listenable, the most fun to listen to, the most propelling. All we've really got to go on are surviving recordings from the same period, and I don't think it's a matter of the equipment he was recorded on being better. Let's just say this: He must have taken it pretty seriously when he decided to disappear and learn how to do it right.

I was always amused by that story—that he was kind of chided by his musician buddies for not being so good and then he did this disappearing act and came back and smoked 'em. It certainly shows up on record, 'cause his execution and delivery are just smoking. There's a guitar figure he added at the closing phrase of a lot of his material; it's the basic descending blues coda, but he made it his own with a few little twists. And it's always there, man, that haunting closing figure, though he always plays it a little bit different. I can't quite put it in words, but to me it says blues. All I know is, it was powerful enough for us to use in "La Grange."

I wrote a poem with a friend of mine not too long ago. It's about Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson coming back to see

what they started. They have a laugh at the end to see how this innocent thing they did lasted so long. There's a reference to "Who's that man standin' over there?" I'm not so sure that a deal didn't go down at the crossroads. But I care to leave it just like that. If it did, it did. I'm not gonna ask too many questions about it, but here's a funny little offside:



Billy Gibbons

"Look at his hands—they're a thing of beauty.


They're spiderlike."

We've been recording here in Memphis, where there's still a tremendous amount of *presence*, if you will. There's a young lady that's a receptionist at the studio, she lives outside Memphis, just across the Mississippi line. She gave me a small vial of dirt that was taken from the crossroads of Highways 49 and 61; that's Clarksdale. She said, "I'm honored to be able to give it to you, I know you have an interest in all of this." I said, "Well thank you very much. I certainly don't want to take this if it's your cherished treasure." "Oh no, we had a handful of it," she says. "But, uh, let me give you a little advice—*don't keep it in your house.*" So there may be more there than I care to deal with, at this point!

The first time I saw the picture of Johnson, it was a relief. I've joined the many that are fascinated by his hands. They're *spiderlike*. Trying to perform Robert Johnson compositions is a difficult task and I'm not convinced that anyone has successfully done so. But finally to look at the physical evidence of his hands is kind of reassuring to those of us who are just totally mystified by this guy. Look at his hands—they're a

thing of beauty. I think they go with what you hear.

To identify why the Mississippi Delta blues—the work of just a few people, who were black, illiterate, who were from a whole other world than urban people in the '90s—can still affect us so deeply, to identify that puts us closer to something that a lot of people seem to try to ignore, and that's feelings and emotion. There was no reason, ethnically or politically or spiritually, for these guys to hold back. To listen to the blues today is to welcome the recognition of one's own feelings and emotion. It's a curious notion that this music, this art form, is not only still present in modern forms of music, but that people are driven to continue to interpret it. There's definitely some kind of power in it. It's a soulful emotion.

Damn. You got me so fired up, I'm filled with the spirit. I think we'll go play some blues this afternoon. 



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CLAPTON

[cont'd from page 33] lived and died. It just seemed to be—very sad to say, right, you know? It burned and it extinguished.

Frozen in time. We've talked about the photos of Johnson. Here's one you haven't seen.

Huh! [looking at photograph: the portrait of Johnson in a pinstripe suit]...Wow. He's a pretty fancy dude, isn't he? Look at the suit and the hat and everything! Amazing hands too. Has anyone identified the guitar?

Not that I'm aware of, no. Do you recognize it?

Well, the body shape looks like it could be a Gibson. It looks like a Gibson to me, but it's hard to say. [It is probably a Gibson Kalamazoo, a pre-war budget model.] It's the same guy, isn't it, as in the other picture? [compares photographs] Yeah, that's the one. Yeah, it's the same guy. Wow. It's astonishing!

He looks more worldly than I thought he would be, you know. In this picture, he looks far more sophisticated than—you kind of got the impression that he never ever would have worn a suit somehow, or a hat like that. It's great.

It also turns out that he traveled much more widely than we had thought. He apparently even got up to New York, Chicago, Canada...

You're kidding. And yet he doesn't seem to have left a trace, you know, unless you dig deep and do some research. But you would think that he would be on other records with other people. Maybe he was. Maybe he was. [looking at photo again] You know, the other thing is he looks like Jimi in this too. It's freaky, that very strong similarity.

Do you identify with him? Do you feel you're carrying on his tradition?

I think—in terms of playing, yeah. I sometimes feel that spirit inside me when I play guitar or when I—even sometimes when I sing too. I don't know what it is. It's just—it's an embodiment of something that isn't necessarily an identity that he had, but just something that he expressed, which I never heard anyone else do as well. And when I try to reach for that, whatever it is, it seems to come from the same place.

"Crossroads" is a Johnson song you've become identified with. How did you come to choose it?

I do identify with him and I keep seeing myself at a crossroads. Always going through that same sort of shift, where you come up to a situation and don't know which way to go. I'm never, ever in a permanent situation. I'm never really satisfied with my lot, I'm always looking for something more. I'm never really sure where I'm going. I'm directionless, you know.

It's a funny dilemma, but it echoes and it seems to have started out around the same time as I heard this man. I'm not blaming him, you know! [laughs]

You've done other songs of his too ["Ramblin' On My Mind," "Four Until Late," "Steady Rollin' Man"]. Are there more you'd like to do?

I've always wanted to do "Kind Hearted Woman" and also "Come On in My Kitchen." But you have to do all of this stuff with the greatest of care. "Hellhound on My Trail"—forget it. That one's impossible. It would take a year's work to get it done right, by a great composer or a great arranger.

How does it make you feel to have brought his music to a whole new audience?

Very proud. I'm very proud that you've come to talk to me, because it gives me—it makes me feel like I've achieved something on his behalf. Because I'm sure, as you said before the interview, that if the Stones and I and whoever else was championing his cause hadn't done anything, he would just have disappeared.

It's funny. Very few of the bluesmen would acknowledge this guy, you know. Muddy was very keen to talk about him, but Muddy was a very open-hearted man. But then again, he probably was never asked, you know. It was only because we were close that he talked about Robert Johnson to me—because I would ask him. But in interviews I don't think I ever saw Muddy talk about him, you know. So Johnson must have been like a closed book, like a kind of black sheep in the family, or he was too good—there was a lot of jealousy, I think. Quite a lot of envy there.

To talk to a living bluesman about someone who's dead—you don't. It's a slight on their ego. It's not really a very smart thing to do. It wasn't smart for me to talk to Muddy about this guy, except that I knew Muddy well enough to be able to twist the conversation. But to have gone up to him the first time and said, "Hi, Muddy, nice to meet you, did you ever meet Robert Johnson," is like saying, you know, I'm not interested in you, but I want to know what you know.

Or like Johnny Shines, who traveled with Johnson.

He's been bugged all his life about this. And it wouldn't surprise me at all to find out that he was a little bit resentful about it. I mean, I would be too. Because after all, he's been working all these years since Robert died. And Robert achieved so much in such a little amount of time.

Johnson sang about walking side-by-side with the devil. What do you imagine Johnson's relationship with the devil was?

Well, according to my knowledge of these sorts of things, I would put it down to a story, you know, a way of simplifying, rationalizing the whole thing, even though it's not to his credit. For me, he has not sold his soul to the devil. That's too easy, you know. It's just too easy. It's a great myth, but I think it's an outsider's—or an envious way of summing up the situation. And my beliefs won't allow that; they won't allow for someone who sang so sweetly and so beautifully to have consigned himself to a life with evil. It couldn't work that way for me, because the music he made is so beautiful. It couldn't have come from an evil alliance.

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elves: the devil as a symbol, something he was struggling with in his life and in his music.

There's a fear there that I recognize from my own life. I can identify with it on a level of fear. But I think the only way I can picture it for him was that, possibly, he made some pretty big mistakes in his youth, which would lead him to be keen to be on the move. This may be kind of a petty rationalization of what we've got as evidence, but it's possible to see that he might have gotten into trouble with women, that he might have felt hunted, felt trapped. That comes across to me in his music very powerfully, that he didn't understand half the stuff that was going on around him and he felt the victim of it. Although he may have precipitated a lot of it by his own actions.

And that I can identify with, because that has been true in my life. You know, a lot of things have just got—snowballed to the point where I'm just—I have been in the past—absolutely bogged down and terrified by the consequences of my own actions. Now, he in his music is just that, but intensified to a point of unbearable proportions. He would use the name of the Devil, or Satan, or whatever—it just meant to me that he was incredibly scared of what was going to come upon him. But who knows what that may have been in realistic terms. I mean, his symbols may actually have

been actually a lot larger than life itself.

I'd go so far as to say that he spoke with an eloquence which didn't seem to belong to the situation he came from. That's another thing that freaked me out. When I used to listen to the lyrics in his songs, I was amazed by the eloquence that guy had, and his poetry far outshone anything his competitors or his peers had to say. Obviously, it would be nice to know where he got that from—whether he could read, or whether he was raised around people that—he just didn't come out of the air. Surely not in that part of the world. He spoke like a kind of—sometimes like an old English poet.


Peter Guralnick has written that even as more facts are learned about Johnson's life, the source of his art remains a mystery. What do you suppose that source might have been?

I think we can either see that it came out of the air, that he was phenomenally gifted, as happens, with for instance, Jimi, who is I think the closest parallel we have. Or that there was another great player that he met or that had influence on him that we'll never hear of, that was like one of his neighbors, someone that he picked it up from. But then that goes against the story that Son House tells about him being one year very ungifted and then the next year being phenomenally gifted. I think we have to assume he suddenly

found in himself a true calling; he suddenly, overnight, started to take it seriously. He grew up, quickly, on his music, within a year. He suddenly decided that he wanted to do it properly. And when he decided to do that, he did it better than anyone else. He found a gift and he tapped it. I think the spark could be there in a lot of people, but the ones that become great artists are the ones that kind of mature it quickly, or find a way of dealing with it quickly and get a joy from it and decide to take it to its final conclusion as quickly as possible. And I think that's what I would like to believe happened to him.

What would you want to tell today's audiences about Johnson's music?

Well, I think even if they bought his record and didn't like it, they'd realize that they had to tip their hat to the guy, because he is the one that laid it down for us all to pick up. In all the forms of blues, and a lot of rock 'n' roll, even to the edge of country music and into the verges of jazz, too. There's something there which is clearer than any other artist. It's clearer to see, which is probably why I found it so painful to listen to at first, because there was no bullshit.

He started it all, really. And his music is absolutely fantastically enjoyable once you've acquired the taste—and it's not that hard to acquire. 

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THE VIRGINIAN

JUST A COUPLE OF BLOCKS AWAY FROM THE SURREAL, WALT Disney-meets-David Lynch Colonial Williamsburg section of the otherwise appealing Williamsburg, Virginia, the reporter, musing mawkishly about the pull that small towns have always had for him, decides to order an archetypal American meal—cheeseburger, fries, Coke and apple pie—as a salute to the fact that both he and the artist he’s waiting to meet were rurally born, reared and marked. It is not an empty gesture. A foolish one maybe, but these places get to you. Judging by his music, Bruce Hornsby would understand both the sentiment and the cynicism.

Set smack in the heart of the Tidewater/Southside region, Williamsburg—minus the silver dagger of the almighty dollar that its aberrant colonial area holds at every tourist’s throat—seems as fine and resonant as a sleepy summer day. Stately and reasonably sanitary rivers flow through abundant woodlands into nearby Chesapeake Bay, which watermen have worked for centuries. If Frank Capra had directed “Twin Peaks” in the 1940s or ’50s, I wonder, would he have let Laura Palmer die?

When the six-foot-four, 35-year-old Hornsby—wearing jeans and a T-shirt and looking not much different from the sports-crazed high school basketballer that he was—bounds into the restaurant and interrupts this maudlin movie reverie, two not-altogether disparate

images jump into my head: Warren Zevon’s “excitable boy” zinging through the Southland and (this is the one that really sticks) Jimmy Stewart’s likability, prankishness and quiet but untrimmed intensity as George Bailey in Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life*, a movie about a man’s love-hate feelings toward Bedford Falls, a small town that, no matter how desperately he tries, he never manages to leave.

Hornsby’s story has similarities. Although he attended colleges in Boston and Miami and lived for most of the 1980s in Los Angeles, he recently moved back to Williamsburg because he found that it really is home for him—proving, I suppose, that the pull of rurality (or at least the dream of rurality) runs deep.

We break what little conversation ice there is by talking about sports and Bob Dylan and our towns, both of us finding it surprisingly unsurprising that there were far more similarities than differences in our respective growings up in Minnesota and Virginia. Paradoxically, regionalism seems to be universal. For every belt, there’s a Bible.

Hornsby offers the lightbulb joke for Virginians. “How many Virginians,” he asks, “does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Three. One to screw it in, and two to talk about how great the old one was.” He laughs and shakes his head. “I’m afraid it’s very much a place that looks back a lot.

Bruce Hornsby Finds His Way Home ♦ By Paul Nelson

P H O T O G R A P H B Y T O M W O L F F

"These people are just doing what they were taught. We beat up these guys because our fathers beat up these guys."

"There's a song on our second album, *Scenes from the Southside*, called 'The Valley Road' that's sort of an inside joke with my own little twist on the lightbulb joke and the living in the past that Virginians do. The real Valley Road is this fabled old road in the Shenandoah Valley that had great significance in Civil War times. I decided to make my Valley Road a place where people go parking to make out. It's a little stab at this reverence for the past."

Quite a number of your songs seem to be about violence, I say. Physical, psychological, political and racial violence. It's as if you look out your window in Williamsburg, but what you see can be pretty far-reaching. The title track on your last record, *A Night on the Town*, is just one example. Drinking and bragging around "a green table," blood in "a green forest" and then "an old man bailing out a son." So goes the world.

"That's right. Exactly. 'A Night on the Town' is based on something that happened about a year-and-a-half ago. But it's a very standard old tale. It's just a song saying that these people are just doing what they were always told to do and what they were taught. It follows up a tradition—we beat up these guys because our fathers beat up these guys.

"I rarely do this, but in that song, I actually named the place—the Midway Diner about 15 miles from here—and, of course, the guys at the Midway got a big charge out of that."

You use the word "secret" a lot in your lyrics.

"There's always an undercurrent. I tend to write about the underside of things around here."

We seem to be looking at an absolutely obvious blend of tradition, undercurrent and facade right now, I suggest, waving a hand at Colonial Williamsburg.

"Sure. CW is a powerful economic force in the town. John D. Rockefeller started the place sometime in the '30s. Williamsburg was just a sleepy Southern town before that. It was so sleepy that they didn't even have elections one year because they just forgot about it."

We both laugh.

"Funny thing is," Hornsby says, "CW wasn't big at all in my consciousness when I was a kid. It really meant very little to me. It was just a place to ride your bicycle where cars weren't allowed. When we began high school—or junior high school probably—it was just a place to pull some pranks with the guys.

"I think of Williamsburg as a small Southern college town, with an emphasis on the college, which is William and Mary—a state school, not private. Because of the college, there were a lot more

things to do than in most small towns. There were always football games and cultural events and plays and orchestras and rock concerts. Peter, Paul and Mary—that was the first concert I ever went to, when I was about eight years old. Trini Lopez, Wilson Pickett, Spider Turner and the Byrds all played here for school dances. Sam the Sham! To me, the college was much more influential on my youth than the CW thing."

What ties you to this area? What brought you back?

"I think that family is very strong with me and my wife. Kathy's parents and both sets of grandparents are here. I have a large extended family, so much so that when they have the Hornsby Christmas party every year, you have to wear name tags because there are so many people."

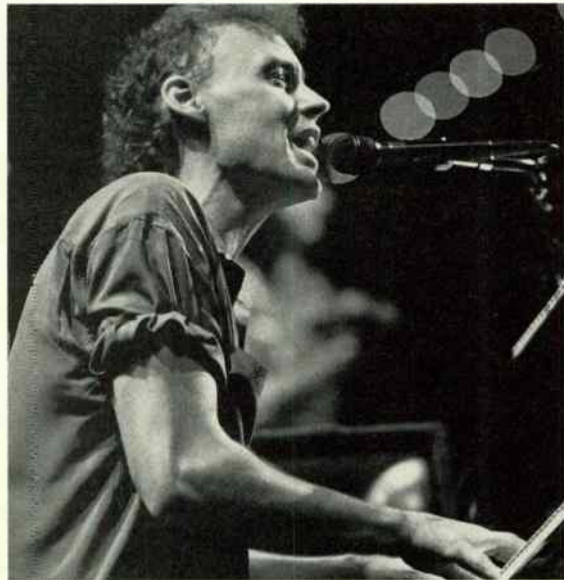
Hornsby pauses to think, then smiles.

"When I was growing up, my parents [Robert and Lois] were great about buying my brothers [Robert and John] and I the latest records, and they never naysayed rock 'n' roll. My parents have a tape of me at three singing 'Hound Dog' and 'Bebop Baby.' My mother's father, Pierre Saunier, made a living as a professional musician, and my mother was always playing the piano. My dad played sax in a local dance band called Sherwood Hornsby and the Rhythm Boys. They used to jam sometimes in our living room. Real Glenn Miller stuff.

"All of us kids took guitar lessons—Vox guitars, because the Beatles played Vox—when we were about seven, but the lessons were taught in a funeral parlor. After about a year, we bailed out. From the sixth grade on, I was in loads of bands. Bobby, my older brother, had one called Bobby High Test and the Octane Kids. He was always dragging me to Grateful Dead and Allman Brothers shows—he loved jam-oriented bands that could play one song for an hour—while John, my younger brother, turned me on to bluegrass. Later, I remember that Bobby sent

me a live bootleg tape of Joe Cocker playing at the Capitol Theater in Port Chester, New York. It had Leon Russell on it. I'd never heard him before. Basically, it was hearing Leon and Elton John that got me into playing the piano, along with the fact that my parents had a really nice grand piano in the house.

"My mother comes from New England stock. From her, my family got some forward thinking that was different from the general mindset around here, which was very conservative. I guess everybody remembers where they were when President Kennedy was shot. Well, I was in third grade. We were all waiting for the school bus when they announced that Kennedy had been killed. Almost all



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"I've painted myself into the mural that I was looking at when I was a kid."

the kids clapped and yelled, 'Hooray! Now Nixon can take over.' That fazed me. Because that wasn't the mindset of my family. But if you were a young kid growing up here and didn't have something else to counteract reactions like that, those reactions would be ingrained in you. So my mother's ideas and her cultural upbringing were a great influence on me.

"My father was not a liberal at all, but neither was he an unswerving conservative. Just a guy with a good heart and soul—a great guy. I've got great parents. I'm not one of those guys who got into music because they rebelled against a bad situation. That's a romantic notion and it makes a great story, but it's not my story."

Yet there's certainly some rebelliousness and ambiguity in, say, "Across the River."

"That song is really about me. I just made it about the girl so it wouldn't be an 'I' song. It's about someone who has ambitions to do something out of the ordinary—something that doesn't fit the norm of this very conservative area. And there's a certain way of thinking that really naysays that around here. If you pictured me at the Hornsby Christmas party in the early '80s when I'd been batting my head against the music-business wall for a few years, you'd have heard one old uncle ask, 'Well, what's young Brucie doing?' and

another old uncle answer, 'Oh, he's still fooling around with that music, but he'll grow out of it soon.'

"My favorite song on the new record and the one that means the most to me, 'Lost Soul,' is a tribute to one of my cousins [Eddie Hornsby]. I don't talk much about that one, though. Usually, I tend to be very open about my songs and they're very personal, but that one's a little too personal and hard-hitting to my family. It really is about a specific situation, but I've had Vietnam veterans come up to me and say that they really relate to it because they've felt 'between two worlds,' too."

It's a very tender song. Hornsby and Shawn Colvin really sing it well. I like it a lot. Especially the last verse and that lovely line with the "oh" in the middle that reminds me of "Barbara Allen."

"That's the way the song was written." Hornsby sings "There was one day oh I can remember" to the tune of "Barbara Allen." He smiles. "Exactly. It's very folk-oriented."

"One great thing about growing up in this area is its rich mixture of black and white folk music. My high school was about 50-50 black and white, so if you're interested in the black cultural influence, it's there and it's great. I try to juxtapose a lot of disparate elements from the kinds of music I love. For instance, country music and jazz. The

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A lot of these people I'm working with now are people I've loved for years."

Road Not Taken' is a very folksy song, then we get into a very jazzy chordal section and, at the end, it's got a groove to it.

"To me, 'Fire on the Cross' works with its subject matter because you've got Béla Fleck's banjo giving you this rural vibe—I think of the Ku Klux Klan as a very rural phenomenon, at least in its origin—and Wayne Shorter's saxophone representing the angry cry against Klan violence. I wanted to get the feeling of that mid-'60s, real modal, *A Love Supreme*, John Coltrane vibe into the song, and the way I'm playing piano is definitely from the McCoy Tyner school of comping behind a soloist.

"Charlie Haden is on 'Stander on the Mountain,' which has a bass melody. I love Charlie. There's kind of a bluesy groove thing in the middle and at the end, and it's very much like the kind of Keith Jarrett-type groove that Charlie used to play when he was with Keith. It was always one of my fantasies to play that groove with Charlie on a record and have that very distinctive acoustic-bass style of his playing behind the piano.

"When I was a senior in high school, I can remember reading a rave review of two Keith Jarrett albums, *Facing You* and *Expectations*. I couldn't find them in Virginia, but when I went to Boston to check out colleges, I found *Facing You*. It changed my whole musi-

cal life, and I went wholeheartedly down the path of jazz and made an intense study of it for the next several years."

"Stander on the Mountain" looks back on high school basketball, doesn't it? "When you filled it on up" is basketball slang.

"Sure is. It's a song about an old athlete who's still thinking about the old games at a reunion. I know a lot of guys like that. I'm sure I could have easily been that guy." Hornsby laughs. "My sophomore year, I was the only white player on the team. Whites and blacks who were watching the game definitely did not sit together. I had a decent game one night, and when I came out for a while, the white people in the stands gave me a standing ovation. But when the star of the game came out, they didn't give him a standing ovation. To me, that just sucked. I felt awful about it. Because the black guys on the team were the guys I hung around with mostly. They were my friends."

How did you meet Kathy?

"When I was 20, I took a semester off from school and lived out in a farmhouse with a friend and practiced music all day and played this piano-bar gig at night. My dad had sold a house and lot to a professor at William and Mary, and this man called him up and asked, 'Hey, is that your son playing up at the Hilton?' My dad said it was.

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I've always written melody, chords & words in the traditional Paul Simon's Graceland, Robbie Robertson's or Peter Gabriel's last

'Well, listen,' the professor said, 'my daughter plays the piano. Do you think Bruce would mind if she came in and played some songs during his breaks?' My dad asked me, and I said fine.

"So this particular Friday night, I'm sitting there playing for about four people. It's a bleak, bleak scene. All of a sudden, about 20 people come roaring into the bar. They're all this professor's family and friends. And trailing behind is this meek 17-year-old girl all made up to look a little older—she's done up to the max. So we said hello, she played some songs, and that's how I met the girl who later became my wife.

"This was 1974, and I didn't really see her again until a few years later when she came to one of our gigs. But I'd become good friends with her dad, who played jazz piano. Kathy and I started going out in 1979, she moved to L.A. with me in 1980, we lived together for a couple of years out there, broke up for about a year, and then got back together and got married on New Year's Eve, 1983—an easy anniversary to remember. In 1989, we moved back here, and now we're building a house and trying to start a family.

"I've always loved this area and I've always written about it, so it

often struck me that if I came back here, maybe I'd be more prolific and get more ideas. And that's what happened. I've never written more than 10 songs in a year before this last year, and I came back here and worked up in my attic and wrote about 14 songs in four months, basically because I was getting a lot of input. I'd ride around here with friends of mine, and they'd tell me some gossipy story, and I'd throw a few things in and come up with a song."

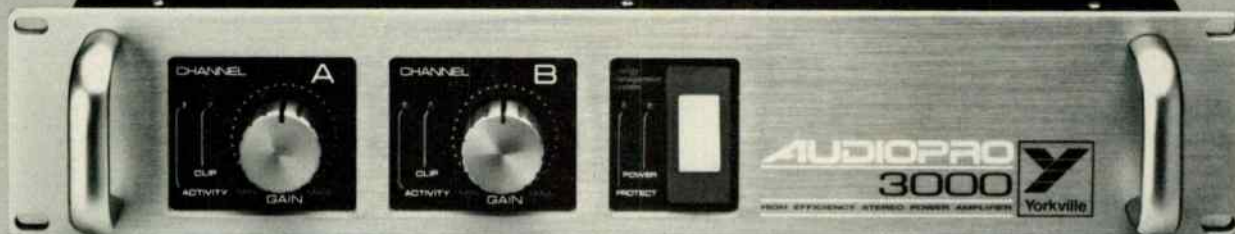
So most of the people and places on your album are actual.

"Oh, yeah. The 'roadside shack' in 'Down the Road Tonight' isn't very far from where we're sitting. There's definitely a segment of the population around here that goes out and finds themselves on the records. Or people they know."

Another song, "The Wild Frontier," from that same album, *The Way It Is*, is apparently your only L.A. song. And it seems to locate the wild frontier in, of all places, Williamsburg.

"I know," Hornsby says, laughing. "Thinking about it that way, it seems strange. The West was always the wild frontier, but L.A. certainly is not that now. It's such a city and so urbanized that I guess

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fashion, but I like records that weren't written that way: albums. They write sounds & tracks. They really write records."

we looked back at the relatively underdeveloped nature of the area that we came from and thought, That's the wild frontier for us. We'd moved to L.A. and started writing about our home and we figured when we came back here, we'd start to write about L.A., but it hasn't happened yet. We're still affecting our own version of *Our Town*."

WE DO THE REST OF THE INTERVIEWING IN HORNSBY'S EXTREMELY modest temporary home, a nice little house that he immediately offers to sell me cheap. Half of the living room is taken up by a huge Baldwin grand piano, and when Hornsby bangs out a tune on it, the piano's natural sound in the small room is impressively deafening. While he heads for the refrigerator, I wander over to a row of bookshelves. They're mostly filled with Southern fact and fiction. Lee Smith's *Oral History*, the book that sparked "The Road Not Taken," is there. William Hoffman's *Stander on the Mountain* stands next to a book on Babe Ruth. I have to smile when I see two books about Celtics basketball star Larry Bird and one book about Senator Harry Byrd, an ultraconservative Virginia politician. "The refrigerator is

filled with nothing but beer," Hornsby shouts in dismay. "And I don't even like beer. I think my wife is trying to drive me to drink."

This leads into a slapstick discussion on the demerits of rock video, one of the century's most dismal inventions. "Videos?" Hornsby says, looking down his nose at the word even as he's pronouncing it. "Our videos have tended to be an excuse for getting our friends on TV."

That's as good an excuse for a video as I can think of, I say, breaking up.

"Exactly. Well, why not? Our record company has always been pretty much not into our frivolous approach to videos, but I have a hard time taking videos seriously. On the 'Valley Road' video, we just had my dad playing clarinet—even though there's no clarinet on the song, and he doesn't play clarinet—while my pals walked around.

"We're not that good at videos, frankly. And I'm not a big fan of the form. For me, music's not about getting your name in the papers or getting on TV. It's about playing with the great artists and the great players, and I've been lucky enough to get some great calls in the past few years to do just that. We may be a bit of an anachronism right

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Photo: Sandra Eisner

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now—a band that is really just about the music.”

The list of musicians with whom Hornsby has played and/or recorded is impressive. Many of these artists are also his friends: Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen (who critiqued *A Night on the Town* and reached the same conclusion Hornsby had—that it needed another song with a little more piano—so “Carry the Water” was added), Bob Seger, Don Henley, Sting, Paul Simon, Robbie Robertson, Elton John, Leon Russell, Herbie Hancock, Charlie Haden, Branford Marsalis, Wayne Shorter, the Neville Brothers,

Huey Lewis, the Grateful Dead, Cowboy Junkies, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Cheap Trick, Kim Carnes, Marti Jones and other notables. Obviously, these people like and respect him.

“My brother John said it best,” Hornsby says. “He said that I’ve painted myself into the mural that I was looking at when I was a kid, because a lot of these people I’m working with now are people I’ve loved for years. They’re people I got a lot from. It’s very special.

“John and I write a lot of the lyrics together. Our process for writing the words is not easy for us. We painstakingly do these things. One

reason that I write with my brother is that we’re able to be critical of each other and still remain friends. Bob Dylan and Robbie Robertson influenced John and I the most. And Levon Helm influenced my singing.

“I guess the regionalism thing has been mostly my thrust rather than John’s. I tend to be more the idea guy, and he’s very good at filling in the blanks when I get stuck. Although, of course, some of the best words are his. My brother wrote all the words for ‘Defenders of the Flag,’ one of my favorites. Same with ‘Stranded on Easy Street.’ He wrote that based on personal experience, I think,” Hornsby says with a grin.

“To me, the most difficult thing is to write music that has some depth and passion but also reaches people. It seems to me that it would be a lot easier to write some real formulaic, let’s-chase-the-radio-pap or to get far out and bang on the sidewalk with a shovel and call the noise *musique concrète* than it is to walk that middle ground. The people that I most admire have always done that. Whether we get there or not is for someone else to say, but I think our aim is true.

“I’m going to have my own little studio in the new house—not a commercial studio or anything—and I hope to make my records there. Then I’ll be able to sort of write

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THE WAY IT IS

BRUCE HORNSBY summons Keith Jarrett on a Baldwin DD-10 or a Korg SG-10 Sampling Grand piano, but reaches for his Juno 106 and Korg M1 synths for tech-ier textures. He's keen on Cordovox and Pollino squeezeboxes. Range bassist JOE PUERTA chooses between Warwick Streamer and Kubicki Factor basses, and occasionally dips deeper with a Tobias five-string; a dbx compressor limits his signal, and a Nady wireless throws it to Trace Elliot amps and cabs. GEORGE MARINELLI, JR. uses Fender Strats and Teles through Laney amps. He provides that Range twang with the aid of Gibson and Suzuki mandolins. JOHN MOLO mixes things up: He's pounding brass and copper Pearl and chrome Ludwig snares, assorted Pearl toms and electronic bass drum pedals, Roland Octapads and a battery of percussion instruments. Mo plugs into a Rane headphone mixer and an Akai S10000 onstage, and uses a Furman power conditioner for his plug-in gear, which includes a Yamaha SPX9011.

records as opposed to writing songs. It's a different thing. I've always just been a guy who sat down and wrote melody, chords and words in the traditional fashion, but I like a lot of records today that I don't think were necessarily written that way. Paul Simon's *Graceland*, for instance. Or Robbie Robertson's or Peter Gabriel's last albums. They write sounds and they write tracks. They really write records."

A Night on the Town is a major departure from Hornsby's first two albums. It rocks hard. John Molo's drums are mixed way up from the start, George Marinelli's guitar sounds great, Joe Puerto's bass playing is rock solid and, although there's less piano, what's there is choice.

"My working with other people on their records has been a great thing because it's taken me out of my own little cloistered-artist world and provided new input and influence for my music. The Don Henley record 'The End of the Innocence' [an unused track of Hornsby's to which Henley added his own lyrics and singing] influenced me one way. I was proud of the song—still am proud of the song—but felt that it was time to move on, show some different sides of what I was doing, switch the focus and make a band record, not another solo record. When I did 'The Valley Road' with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band last year on their *Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Volume Two* album, I was influenced another way. It was the most enjoyable record I'd done up to that time—it was all done live. There was a certain spark there that our band had never captured on a record. So I figured we should try to do *A Night on the Town* that way because, at the very least, it's fun.

"The first two albums were really not Bruce Hornsby and the Range, they were more just Bruce Hornsby. It all stemmed from the way I got my record deal. It was a solo tape I gave to Windham Hill—they were starting a vocal label—that got me signed. I thought no major label would be interested in it. Shows how little I know. Windham Hill offered a deal, and that spurred interest from other companies. After seven or eight years of making demos, I finally got signed on the strength of a tape I thought nobody would like."

The band must have felt left out on *The Way It Is* and *Tales from the Southside*.

"Yes, especially the second album. Two things sort of kept the band out. The producer, Neil Dorfsman, wasn't their biggest

fan. And, on top of that, there was my feeling of, 'Well, this is a situation that really works when I do the solo thing, because those are the songs that people seem to respond to the most.' And I got my record deal by going solo. So I was confused about what to do."

A Night on the Town certainly sounds like a live band record.

"It was cut in a manner that's definitely not in vogue. This album was done really live with minimal overdubs and really minimal care. I'll give you a good example. 'Another Day' shows for real that this record was cut live. What's on the album is the first

take, and we were still figuring out the arrangement. Since not everyone was sure of it, I was yelling instructions to the band as we played the song. You'll hear me go, 'Let it ring, George,' which means that he's supposed to solo. Then you'll hear me say, 'Here we go, Joe,' and that means we're supposed to play a chord walk-up. Then I go, 'Now go ahead, Mo,' and that means he's supposed to kick in with his drumbeat. And we just left all that on there. I put 'Let it ring, George' on the lyric sheet just because I thought it looked funny. A lot of people think it's a reference to George Bush.

feel

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"My choice for producer of *A Night on the Town*, Don Gehman, worked out great. We actually had fun making a record, which had never happened before."

You once said that the high point of your career was simply getting signed. Is that still true?

"Yes, but only because it was so difficult and that someone gave me a chance. But my story is hardly unique. I must be a slow learner because it took me a while to find myself and arrive at a style that, like it or not, was at least mine. Lately, though, I've got to say that working with all of these

artists that I've always admired certainly rivals getting signed.

"I guess I was always more popular with musicians than I was with record companies. The corporate guys never thought I was commercial enough. That we didn't have the right look, the right sound.

"It's so funny to run into these people now and see them flogging themselves for not signing me. I have no bad feelings toward them. I don't know if I would have signed me either."

You're going to *defend* them? You're a generous man, Bruce.

"I've got to say that, about me, they were always right. When they passed on me, I don't think they were wrong. I hadn't really found anything yet that set me apart."

There are still rumors that you're going to join the Grateful Dead and be in two bands at once.

"We're just going to try it out and see what happens. I'll play what gigs I can with them here and in Europe, but scheduling is a problem because I'm on tour, too, and I'm also producing a Leon Russell album. All I know is that I really like playing with them. There are times when I'm onstage with the Dead when the hair stands up on my arms and legs and I get goosebumps from certain things that happen. And that's what it's all about. You're always in pursuit of those chills. So joining the Dead is alluring to me, and I have not ruled it out at all, although it may just not be possible."


Did you ever think about a jazz career?

"I thought about it. I really did. I played in several bebop bands down in the Miami area. When I got out of college, it was either go to New York and try to be a jazz piano player or form a rock band and write songs. I guess I liked the last choice more. But many times in the late '70s, both John Molo and I would get frustrated playing cover versions in Top 40 bands and almost bolt to New York to crack the jazz world. But that's a hard thing to crack, that jazz world."

Do you think you would have had a shot? Were you good enough?

"Who can say? There are a lot of great players. I could play. I was absolutely a better piano player in '78 or '79 than I am now because that's what I did and what I really worked on. Since then, I've gotten more into songwriting, and my piano playing is just—well, my chops are okay, and I sort of keep up now, but that's just because I play a lot. I still play Bud Powell solos because they're real finger benders. I transcribed a bunch of them from his records, and they'll really bollix your fingers up."

Hornsby laughs and holds up his hands, displaying three or four massively crooked fingers. "That's from an odd combination of basketball and piano playing," he says.

There's a pause. "Yeah, I definitely thought about a jazz career. But in the end, I don't think I would have had anything unique to offer. I'd probably have been just another guy playing in the tradition. I think what I'm doing right now is exactly what I'd like to do. I'll just keep trying to do it better." 


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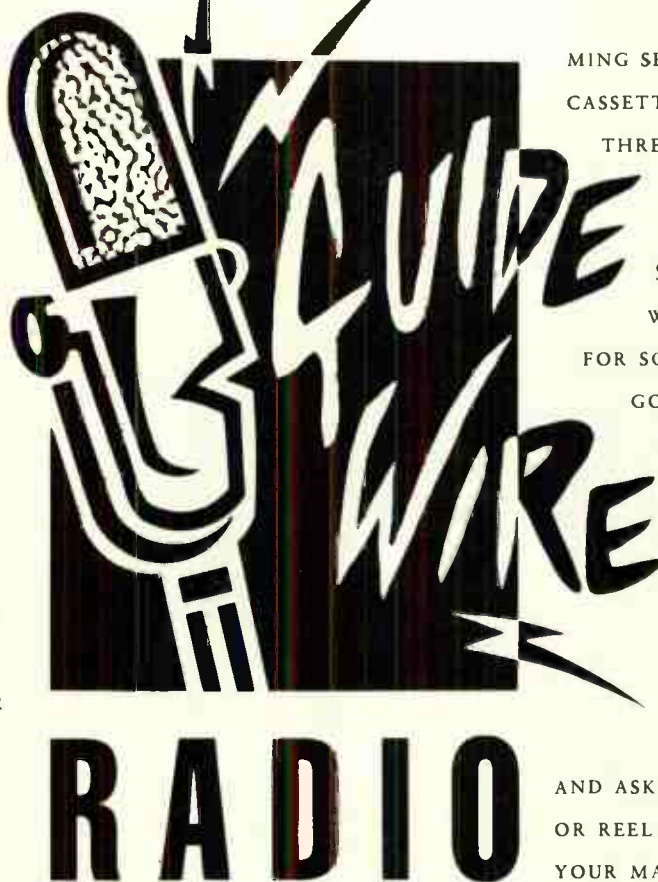
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DANNY GOTTLIEB: MAHAVISHNU TO MOTOWN

Jazz drummer learns
R&B tricks

By Rick Mattingly

WAS AS SURPRISED AS ANYONE WHEN I got the call," Danny Gottlieb says of his invitation to tour with the Blues Brothers. "This was basically the same band that John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd put together. When Belushi died, everyone assumed the band was finished. But they reunited a couple of years ago to play a party for Aykroyd, and they sounded so great that Dan suggested they go on the road."

The singers in the new version of the band were Larry Thurston, from Matt "Guitar" Murphy's band, and Eddie Floyd, who had the hit "Knock on Wood" in the '60s.

Besides Murphy, other original members of the group were Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn on guitar and bass, and the horn section of Lou Marini, Alan Rubin and Tom Malone. Leon Pendarvis was recruited to play keyboards and Gottlieb was invited to fill in for Steve Jordan behind the drums. Gottlieb admits that there was some initial skepticism about whether a guy known for playing jazz with Pat Metheny and John McLaughlin was the right guy for an R&B gig.

"As soon as I got the call," Gottlieb says, "I started shedding. The first thing was my sound. I realized that for R&B, bass drum,

snare drum and hi-hat are the priorities. I was used to approaching the kit from the top down; I always played a lot of cymbals. So I started at the bottom and worked my way back up. With the jazz gigs I was used to, the bass drum could be strong on one beat and kind of light on the next, with a lot of nuances. But for this music, it had to be strong, solid and precise all the time.

"With the snare drum," he continues, "I've always used traditional grip, and with the Joe Morello technique I use, that means finding a balance point almost midway on the stick so that you can accept the rebound. But R&B calls for a lot of rimshots, and I couldn't get consistent rimshots with that grip. Rather than hold the stick towards the back, as a lot of drummers do, I changed to matched grip and used the butt end of the stick."

Once he started playing with the Blues Brothers, Gottlieb had a revelation about the hi-hat. "With jazz," he explains, "I would articulate the hi-hat by putting accents on downbeats, like 'DAT-dit-dit-dit-DAT-dit-dit-dit.' But then I discovered that if I made the hi-hat really loud in relation to the drums, and played even, so it was like 'DAT-DAT-DAT-DAT,' the whole band really responded. So that became my anchor."

Danny also changed his approach to toms and fills. "With this music," he says, "you have to keep fills really simple, because the groove is the main thing. I kept the toms open, in the style of the R&B drummers of the '60s, with no padding whatsoever. That way they were a distinct contrast to the tight sound of the snare and bass drum."

The other thing Gottlieb had to deal with was the feel. "Being a jazz drummer from New York," Danny explains, "I tend to play way on top of the beat and push. I knew that would not be acceptable, so I got a drum machine and programmed all of the beats I would have to play, and then worked on playing precisely with the machine. At first, I rushed my brains out," he laughs, "and sounded like a jazz drummer playing bad R&B. I had to work on laying back."

People think of R&B drummers as generally playing behind the beat; Gottlieb found that this was not always the case. "I watched a video of Otis Redding live at Monterey," Danny says, "and listened to live James Brown and Sam Cooke albums. There was a definite energy that was not as behind-the-beat as the studio recordings. The Blues Brothers became more of a kick-out-the-jams R&B revue, so with that band I went



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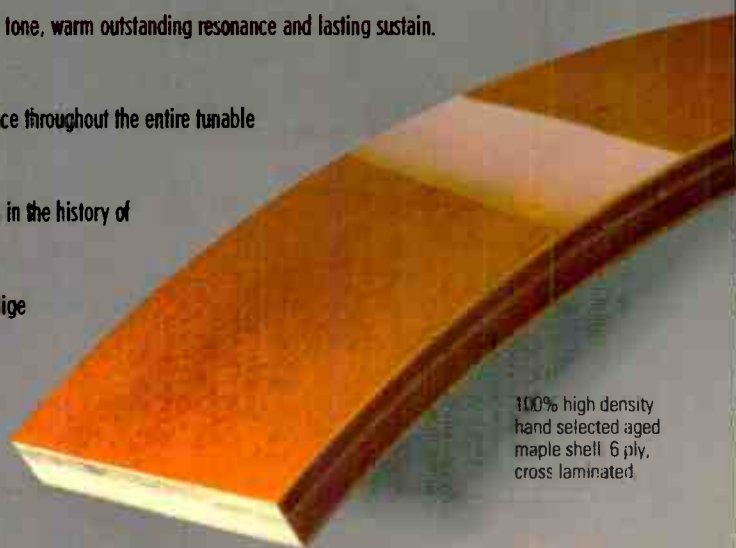
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World Radio History

more for the energy." But after three European tours with Cropper and Dunn in the Blues Brothers, Danny was called to do some U.S. dates with Booker T & the M.G.'s. "That band is more subtle," Gottlieb says, "so I used a little bit tighter approach."

Working with Dunn and Cropper gave Danny a lot of insights into the playing of legendary Stax drummer Al Jackson. "Duck told me that Jackson used to play a cha-cha rhythm on the bass drum: 'boom, boom, ba-ba, boom' [quarter, quarter, eighth-eighth, quarter]," Gottlieb says, "with snare drum backbeats. On the records, you didn't notice the bass drum doubling the two and four, because the drums weren't recorded that well. Whenever I did it, Duck would turn around and smile."

Cropper also gave Gottlieb an interesting tip. On records, it often seems that Jackson was simply playing a steady groove through the entire tune, rather than marking phrases with fills or cymbal crashes. "Cropper told me that Jackson would mark eight-bar phrases by accenting the second beat of the first bar," Danny says. "It was a subtle thing, but the whole band would lay for it, and it really helped lock in the groove."

His experiences as a Blues Brother/M.G. have had a noticeable effect on Gottlieb's own music, and it is especially evident on the recent *Spirit River* album by Elements—the group Danny co-leads with bassist Mark Egan. "That record has a Brazilian/ethnic flavor," Danny says, "so there was no room for a lot of fancy licks. I had to play a lot of groove parts. A song called 'Streets of Rio' is an R&B backbeat kind of tune, and it just came easier than ever. We got a good feel from the minute we started playing it." 🎸

R&BEAT

WHEN PLAYING R&B, Danny Gottlieb trims his kit down to the basics. He uses a five-piece Ludwig set with a 22" bass drum, 12" and 13" rack toms and a 16" floor tom. His snare is either a 5x14 Ludwig Black Beauty or a 5½x14 Eames. Drums are fitted with Ludwig Silver Dot heads on top and clear Rockers on the bottom. He uses Paiste Signatures consisting of a 21" Dry-Heavy ride, an 18" Fast crash, an 18" Power crash and 14" Heavy hi-hats. Gottlieb strikes everything with Hot Sticks 2Bs. When playing with the Blues Brothers, Danny wears Vuarnet sunglasses.



DAVID GRISSOM: BENDS OF STEEL

An Austin guitar firebrand sinks his hooks into Joe Ely

By Peter Cronin

JOE ELY AND BAND ARE ONSTAGE AT New Haven's Palace Theatre, shakin' the rafters with their Texas-hybrid rock 'n' roll. Unfortunately, half the audience is across the street in the parking garage getting primed for Little Feat's headlining set. Such is the fate of the opening act. "Give me a smoky club any day," says David Grissom a few minutes later. Over his past six years as Ely's full-time guitar slinger, Grissom has perfected a chunky rhythm and hands-on-fire lead style that, like Ely's best songs, takes chances and

knocks down boundaries.

"The stuff that excites me is not premeditated and it's not safe," says Grissom, 30. "That doesn't mean it has to be sloppy, but I'm always looking for the stuff that comes out of nowhere." By staying relaxed and keeping his playing out on the edge, Grissom often covers more stylistic territory in one solo than most guitarists do in an entire night. On his solo on "For Your Love," from Ely's 1989 LP *Dig All Night*, Grissom extracted every possible harmonic out of one sustained note before falling into some fast and furious flatpicking, somehow eas-





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ing into a drawling pedal-steel-ish ending. "I just hold the pick normally," he says, "and use my middle and ring fingers to pick at the same time." Grissom grabs one of his Paul Reed Smith guitars, and using this pick-and-fingers method (the same technique favored by such quick pickers as Danny Gatton and Richard Thompson), executes a flawless series of bends that almost perfectly duplicates the sound of a pedal-steel. Holding the root note with his middle finger, Grissom uses his index finger for whole-step downward pulls that

look *very* painful. "It takes a while to get used to that one," he laughs. "A lot of players only bend *up*, I guess, but I learned a lot of that stuff from this Albert Lee solo on Dave Edmunds' 'Sweet Little Lisa.' I spent a year figuring out everything he played, not knowing he was using a Parsons/White B-String Bender."

Grissom overcame that physical obstacle with the same stubborn determination that marks his never-ending quest for the perfect sound. "I can be real ornery about tone," he admits, "but I think the idea of

having a huge effects rack for the most part is bullshit because it doesn't allow any personal touch to come through. It just squashes your signal." Instead, Grissom has been gradually whittling his sound down to the basics: his guitar and his trusty *old* Marshall amp. "I throw out one more little effects pedal each year," he says, "and I don't want to romanticize it too much, but there *is* a very organic, warm sound in those older amps that allows a much larger dynamic range than any of the new ones. I like an amp that breaks up when you play it hard and sounds clean when you turn your guitar down—just tubes doin' their thing."

In addition to showering his guitar all over Ely's last two records, Grissom was given the nebulous title of Assistant Producer. "That whole thing is more from an arrangement standpoint," he says. "Joe generally brings in the songs on guitar, and I influence the direction." Grissom demonstrates, strumming the folkie version of "Everybody Got Hammered" that Ely first brought to the band. "These songs didn't have any kind of guitar hook," he adds, breaking into the sliding, dominant-seventh lick that instantly transforms the song into the pounding rocker that wound up on Ely's *Lord of the Highway* LP.

As the only soloist in Ely's three-piece band, Grissom has to dig deep to keep things interesting night after night. Luckily, he's drawing from a deep well. Aside from the normal American teenage diet of "Beatles, Stones and Hendrix," Grissom listened

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GRISSOM HAS three Paul Reed Smith guitars: his gold maple-top, an all-mahogany model and his new favorite for studio work, which has a maple neck with an alder body. "They're incredible. Right off the rack they feel like guitars that were made 20 or 30 years ago." He also dearly loves his two '50s Telecasters and strings 'em with D'Addarios. Most of his stomp boxes are long gone, but Grissom still uses his t.c. electronics booster when he needs a little push. The one effect he has no intention of throwing away is, of course, old. "It's a Fender spring reverb unit. When you run it into a Marshall it sounds fantastic." In addition to his '70s-vintage 50- and 100-watt Marshalls, Grissom likes to record with old open-back Fenders.

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to his share of jazz while growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, and traces his love for improvisation to those early influences. "One of the benefits of listening to Wes Montgomery, Miles Davis and people like that is the whole sense of developing a solo," he says. "Wes Montgomery would play the most melodic solos that would build so wonderfully and keep your interest the whole time."

Ely says Grissom's fatback rhythm style

got him the gig, but it was the guitarist's headlong approach to lead playing that has turned Ely's band into one of the hottest live tickets around. And like the character in Ely's "Me and Billy the Kid," Grissom sometimes goes for his gun and misses. "Yeah, I fuck up a little more than I'd like, but it's an ongoing process," he says. "There's an incredible art to improvising a solo that stands on its own and has a life, that's structured even if it's not premeditated." **M**



BASS MANIPULATIONS

Mark Dresser, all-star on the upright, enlarges the strike tone

By Gene Santoro

THIRTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MARK DRESSER traces his search for ways to expand his bass' tonal colors to two influences—one of them little-known, the second almost universal for his generation. "In 1970," Dresser says, "I heard Bert Taretaki for the first time; he's had more contemporary music written for the contrabass than any person alive. He's *the* avant-gardist of the bass in America. Anyway, I heard him do what was, in effect, a double glissando." Dresser's crablike hands scamper up and down the fingerboard, both of them picking in a skittering Van Halen fashion. "That sound implied two different registers for the bass. I loved it. I'd already been messing around with extended techniques and free-improvising for a couple of years, so when I got home I started working on left-hand hammers and doing the bitones [a fundamental tone plus a harmonic]."

Straightfaced, he launches into the opening of "Foxy Lady," plucking one open string à la Jimi—his second great influence; he then manipulates his hammer-on of a single note to conjure Hendrix's follow-up sharp-ninth chord from a halo of overtones. "I was a Hendrix freak," he grins from behind his axe. "I'm really a sound guy; that's what turns me on. Hendrix took a single note and fed it back until the harmonic came out. That, to me, was so expressive.

Even at 17 I knew that the bass had that kind of potential. Those were the mistakes your teachers were always trying to get you out of. But that was the area that was rich."

It was also an area that demanded some

thought—and work. "Once I got committed to this," he recalls, "I started charting bitones above and below the fretting point. I charted how they related to what I would be doing if I was playing in well-tempered tuning: What kind of bitones could I get that I could use in a harmonic way? Then I realized I could also use them in a microtonal way, as a noise component. So I use them both ways. And I did the same kind of charting to find out what harmonics were under each well-tempered semitone. That gave me another focusing point, another way to understand geographically what was under any note. You have a pitch, a bitone, a harmonic and a subharmonic—which hasn't really found its voice yet in my playing. Then with the bow you have combinations; you can create harmonics with the bow too, for instance. So I worked on isolating them. Naturally, the combinations began multiplying. It almost seemed like at a given time you could pull anything out of anywhere; suddenly the bass became a polyphonic instrument, because one note isn't just one note."

Dresser's inventory of innovative techniques is staggering. His two-handed hammer-ons—just a bit more difficult on the contrabass, with its thick strings and high action, than on an electric guitar—flurry polyphoni-

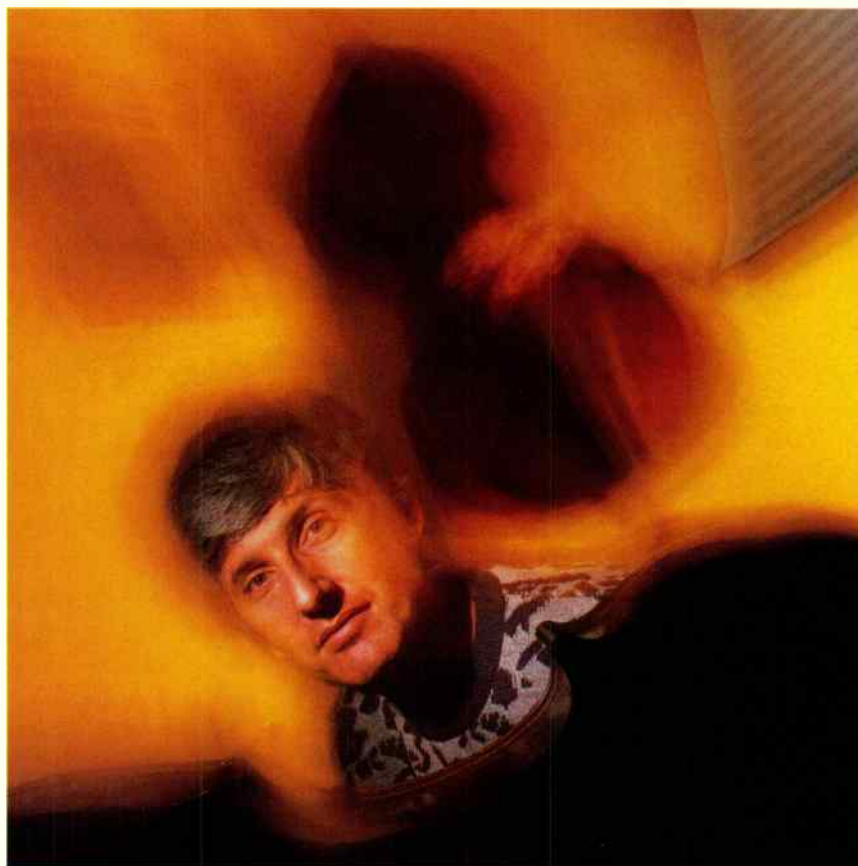
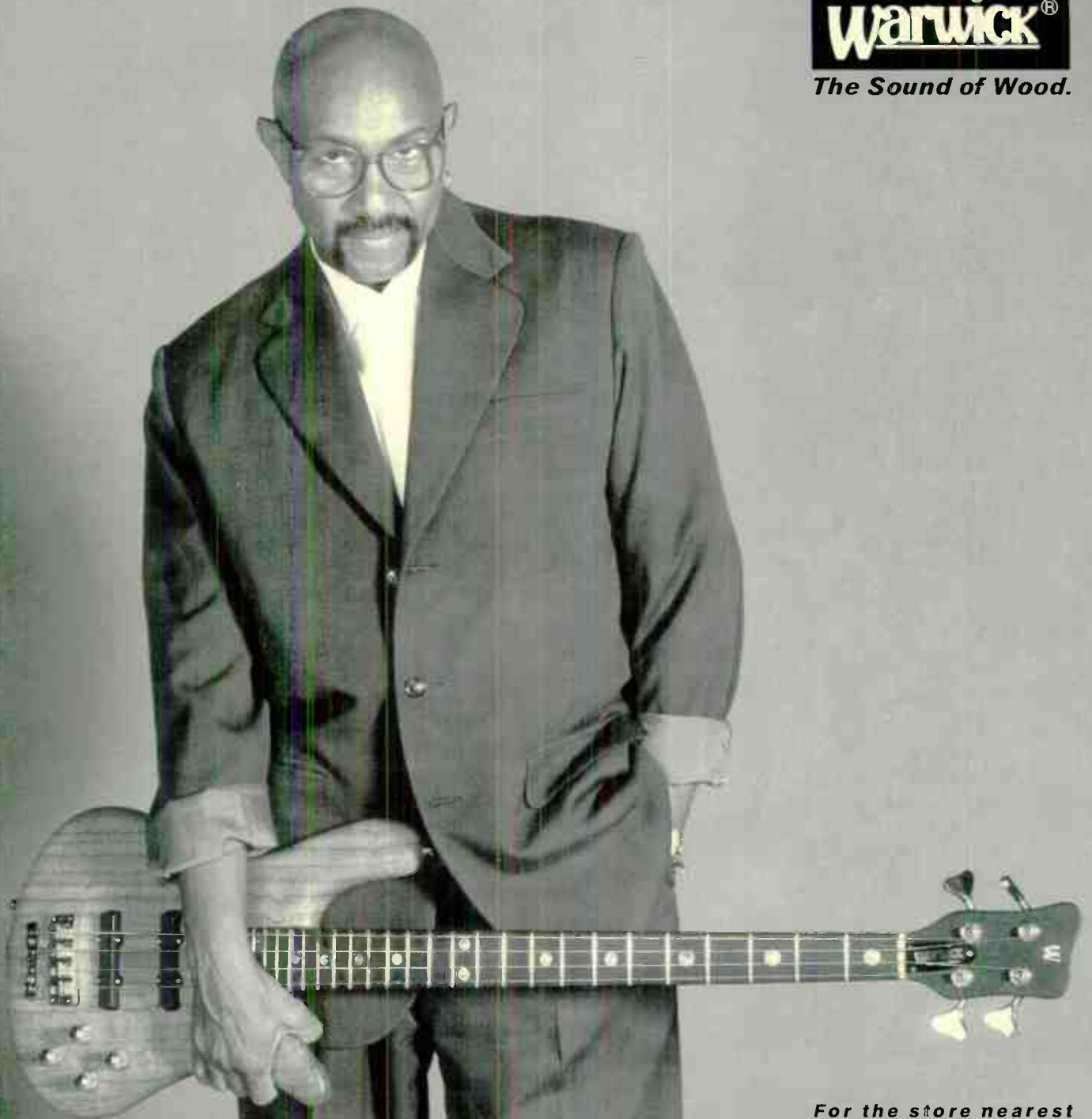


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cally, the bitones vibrating into a chordal aura. But for Dresser this is only a beginning. "If I put my right hand, which is normally the pizzicato hand, above the left, which is my fretting hand, and use it for picking *and* stopping, I can get a kind of contrary motion," he says, and then escalates his hammer-on flurry into a blizzard swirling in opposite directions across the bass' fingerboard.

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but in music as often as not accidents lead to breakthroughs. "The double glissando came from a mistake," says Dresser, skidding both hands up the fingerboard in a kind of round, and producing something like the sped-up cries of a pair of whales. "I was going for some two-handed shit and missed. Then I realized that this projects much stronger than two-handed picking. So it fits a world where you, as a bass player, want more dynamic range.

"I play arco [with the bow] a lot," he continues, "because it's such an expressive addition. Reading an orchestral or solo work, you'll see *sul ponticello* [over the bridge], which means not getting the fundamental. Well, it became clear that I could isolate different overtones by placing the bow in different places. Then there's *flautando*, which means flute-like, not a lot of fundamental. But it's not really clear what *that* means, so I started working on it. Technically, I put the bow on the harmonic note: If I stop an A on the D string, I put the bow two octaves above that A. If I bow it real fast and lightly, the second harmonic is blocked but the first harmonic sounds. That way, I can get two fifths and three octaves. The higher the harmonics are, the closer together they are and the harder it is to isolate them." But Dresser's bowing with left-handed picking, and you've got a bassist who's a virtual one-man band.

But even such an extended vocabulary needs to be integrated musically. According to Dresser, "More and more, I'm aware of not just the raw sound value but the musical value: How does this work intervallically? How can I use this to create a pedal? Usually, bass playing is such a conservative role: Keep that time, give me those roots and get me low, fat, juicy, pumping notes. Now, I love doing that, but I also want to be able to do more. That's where the integration comes in. How can I use this stuff harmonically, melodically, rhythmically? It's like integrating two different worlds. Of course, you never *arrive* at something finished; it just keeps develop-

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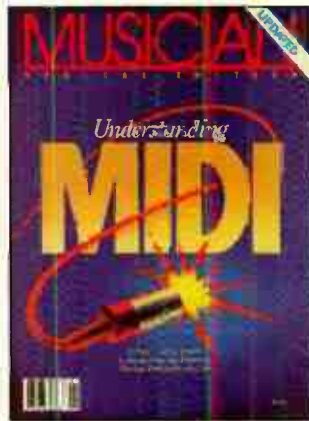
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ing. So to all of a sudden be able to throw in elements that are unstable, go like this, is great"—and he thrums a series of bitones for as fat and greasy a bottom as any bandleader could want, but with theremin-like sounds quaking above them. "It's what you heard from Hendrix: The power of that instability that implied so much."

Electronics have made Dresser's sonic palette viable onstage, since the usual live dynamics of any working group prohibit such nuances on an acoustic setup. With help from guitarist Tom North, sculptor Don Jacobson and the Bartolini pickup people, Dresser developed the Giffus, a pickup suspended from the bass' head via a metal mini-sculpture. "The first one is like a Giacometti," deadpans Dresser. "The second is simpler, more like a Henry Moore." The rest of his signal chain: Giffus into a Boss volume pedal (so he can shut it down as needed, since it picks up open strings too), then a D1D preamp. That and his Shirlter bridge pickup are sent through a Walter Woods amp. The rig has served him well during stints with Anthony Braxton, Tim Berne, Ray Anderson and Arcado, Dresser's own string trio with cellist Hank Roberts and violinist Mark Feldman.

"Amplification changed everything. I used to be in the old school, having my strings a mile off the fingerboard. So the way my instrument was set up wasn't conducive to a lot of the two-handed stuff. It became clear that this sound I'd been working on for many, many years was not projecting, that I'd better get smart with electronics. So I started investigating pickups and amplifiers, and I finally have a setup I really like. It takes a lot of time to refine all these electronics so you get something like what you want—at one point in the early '80s, I'd even had a pickup built onto my bow to amplify strike tones."

Dresser still has some mixed feelings about his rig. "When you amplify a bass, its dynamic range really gets reduced. It's the nature of the speaker; it tends to make things flat. The acoustic bass has a big range dynamically, although pizzicato it's a little less. It's more than most people realize, although in terms of projecting through a band it's actually very small. You often get locked into what will actually cut—that becomes the bottom dynamic line, which shrinks the range. So I can sit here and practice nuances for hours, but in the heat of the battle it's all out the window." 

THE "KING OF BACKGROUND MUSIC" STEPS OUT

Major moves from new age keyboardist David Lanz

By Alan di Perna

ACTING COMPLETELY OUT OF character, new age pianist David Lanz seats himself at the battered upright in his publicist's apartment and starts hammering out some clattering, flashy stride piano. "This is what I used to do when I sat down to play," he calls over his shoulder. "A lot of chords that had raised fifths, flat nines and things like that. But then I started to feel like I wanted to get away from the dissonance. All of a sudden, I started writing these songs using just major and minor chords. It was almost

embarrassing at first—the songs were so simple. But the reaction was overwhelming. I figured I'd better pay attention to that reaction. There's a need for this kind of music."

Quite a substantial need, apparently. *Cristofori's Dream*, Lanz's last album, was *Billboard's* #1 new age album of 1989. Equally great things are expected of *Skyline Fire-dance*, an ambitious work that contains a full CD's worth of solo piano pieces and a second disc with orchestral versions of the same compositions.

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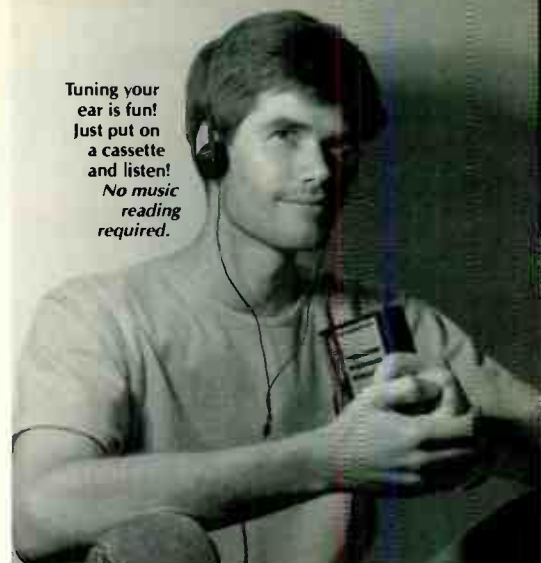
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Like many a baby-boom keyboard man, he started playing rock during the '60s and moved on to jazz during the '70s. A number of Lanz's trademarks stem from these roots. "From playing rock, stride and boogie-woogie, I really came to rely on my left hand to keep up a steady rhythm. I found that anything which creates a trance-like repetitive pattern is desirable to meditate to. But since I'm a pop musician, all this came together with my love for three-chord progressions. My idea was to come up with something I like to call pop-trance music."

Can he define it? One of pop-trance's main features is an avoidance of thirds, the telltale interval that makes a chord either major or minor. "A lot of that comes out of arranging for synthesizers with [producer] Paul Speer," Lanz explains. "It always seemed to sound better. So rather than voicing a chord with a major third, we'd use the root, two and five. Or root, five, dominant seventh. It implies both major and minor, which is nice. Kind of a Zen thing."

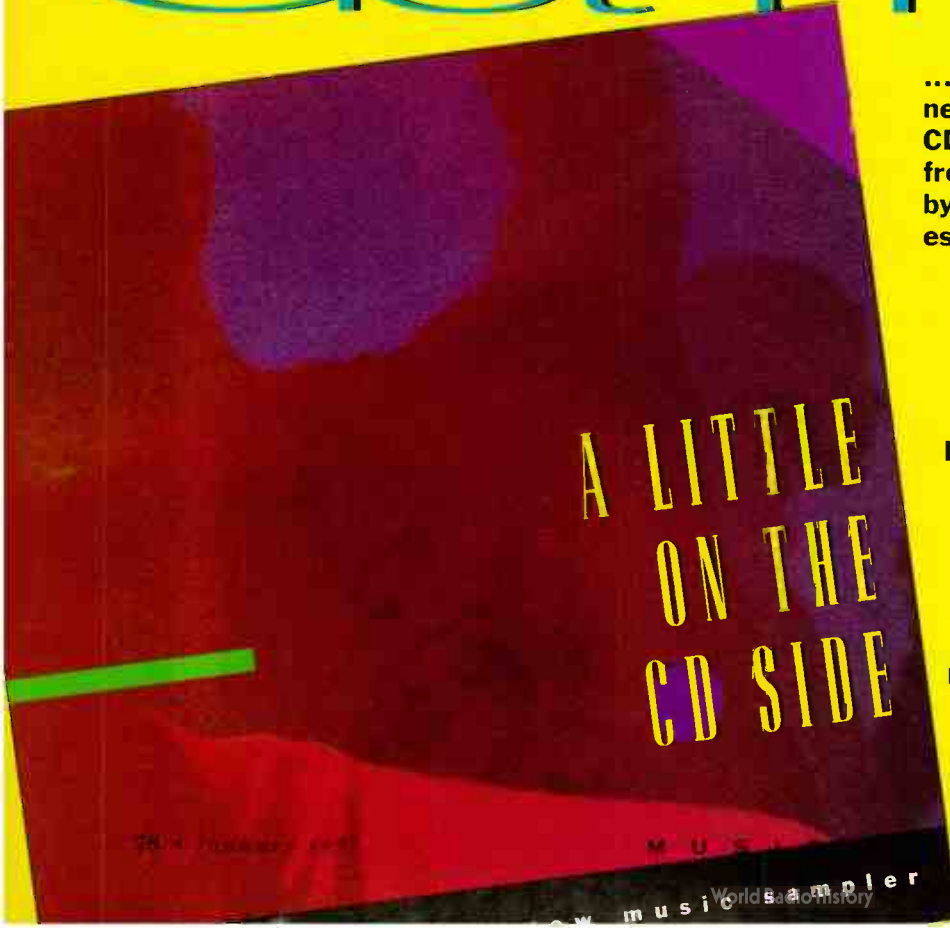
In simplifying his harmonic approach, Lanz began to focus more on touch and tonality. A composition like "The Crane," commissioned for the 1990 Goodwill

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Games, uses the natural acoustics of the piano's wooden sound chamber to good effect, evoking koto-like timbres.

"I always found other piano players' recordings to be too harsh," Lanz says. "And I think I overreacted to that. When I was recording, I was playing so lightly it was really hard to get a good piano sound; it sounded very good in the room, but it was hard to get the piano to record bright enough. Even today, I rely on finger dynamics more than anything. I don't like the sound of pedals going on and off. Although sometimes I'll try to create a motif"—Lanz plays a sonorous wash of arpeggios—"where I can leave the sustain pedal down the whole time."

Lanz's pop sensibilities also show up in his choice of cover material. His piano renditions of Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale" and the Moody Blues' "Nights in White Satin" are both big favorites at his concerts. "I learned a lot from 'Whiter Shade of Pale.' It was one of the first rock songs with a Bach kind of approach to the bass. The second chord is E minor, but you're playing a B in the bass. It's one of the songs that taught everyone that the bass doesn't *always* have to follow the root. I've got a nice left-hand stretch, so when I play the piece now I work bass and chording into a left-hand accompaniment part."

He plays the part, which calls for him to orchestrate each note of the song's descending C major bass line with two other intervals. On the first chord, for example, he uses his pinky to play the C bass note, his index finger to play a G (the fifth) and his thumb to reach the E (the tenth) in the next octave. "So I'm playing a lot of tenths," he sums up. "Oscar Peterson does that." Lanz breaks into another stride passage. "I just keep the tenths going instead of playing full chords. Again, it's a nice open sound, which I like better than tight clusters."

These days, Lanz finds some of his old love for harmonic complexity creeping back into his music. "I guess it's my ego, but as a composer, I'm tired of being the King of Background Music. I'm working on a concerto that's designed to be a little more foreground. It has a lot of Beethovenesque segments—A minor to E flat, D, G minor, C sharp to C—with lots of thirds and fifths in the bass. So I guess even though I'm going for something different, I still have a fascination with voicing simple major and minor chords in a way that has a feeling of expansion." M

Photograph: Rex Miller

PERFORMANCE

JOHN LEE HOOKER'S BIG-TIME BLUES

By Tony Scherman

WHEN JOHN LEE HOOKER FIRST CAME ONSTAGE, TO CRISSCROSSING FLOODlights and the smel of hot dogs, he was met by six rhythm guitarists, three harp players, two key-boardists and Mick Fleetwood on drums. By Hooker's fourth brief appearance three hours later, the all-star guitar army had swollen to nine, all strumming away like one of avant-gardist Glenn Branca's declaiming guitar choirs. In between came celebrities guitar, situated on and off in a triumph of award-show logistics: Guyton Allman, Joe Cocker, last-minute addition Bonnie Raitt, Ry Cooder... Huey Lewis' Poor 75-year-old Hooker, with his horn-made blues, seemed almost beside the point. Hey, is that Bill Payne on keyboards? No need for binoculars; you could just consult the two huge video screens (couldn't ignore them, with their iridescent freeze frames and strobe effects, designed to turn reality into a video).

This was the blues writ large—in bright, cartoon-style lettering. Instead of honoring Hooker, the show was almost insulting, in a rhetorically impersonal sort of way—as if sponsor Benson & Hedges, wracking its corporate brain for a way to fill the Garden during its 10-day blues festival, had grabbed at the notion of an all-star tribute ("Hram, which one of those funny old bluesmen is still alive?"). With its scurrying publicists and glittery cast (only one or two of whom saw fit to perform any of Hooker's material), the show had all the soul of a cigarette commercial.

Not that Benson & Hedges really intended a meaningful tribute to John Lee; would they have chosen a hokey arena, Hooker's haunting, very personal music—to the extent he got to play it—was badly out of place, his brooding vocals and scuffling guitar lines lost somewhere over center ice. And the best sounds of the night—Ry Cooder's band, with the magnificent Bobby King, Terry Evans and Willie Greene, Jr. soaring on vocals—were simply in the wrong room. On J.B. Lenoir's "Down in Mississippi" and a medley of the Falcons' "I Found a Love" and Sam Cooke's "That's Where It's At," Cooder and the singers swooped and plunged; but instead of silence filling the generous spaces between the notes, what you got was a sea of shuffling feet, random shouts, low-grade listening. Bonnie Raitt might disagree—"We play the same whether it's five people or 500,000," she said backstage. "how it sounds just depends on whether the PA guy knows how to put it across"—but the blues isn't made for arenas; its slurs and shadings are either inaudible or flattened out by arena-strength PAs.

So did anyone kill Yea, some of the louder acts, a tarred-and-feathered James Cotton, or Bo Diddley, wobbling and backing, flinging his round self about the stage. But on the whole, anyone in danger of working up a head of steam was whisked off for the next attraction.

Hooker himself seemed touched and delighted. "That was the biggest thrill of my life," he said two days later. "I just can't forget it, and all the lovely people who loves me, and I loves them. If I be with me until the day I'm gone." There's no reason to think he was just being polite—who wouldn't be tickled to have a dozen superstars tell you they love you, a cornucopia of TV newsmen desperately plying for your attention for the first time in your long and deserving life? John Lee Hooker got his tribute while he lived. It's just that it could've been so much more... of an embrace. M





LYRICS-LIABILITY SUITS: ARTISTS UNDER ATTACK

Will musicians have to worry about how their songs sound backwards, too?

By Stan Soocher

THIS PAST YEAR LIKELY WILL BE remembered by musicians and songwriters as the one in which the government took its biggest bite yet out of the creative process. From the threat of lyrics-labeling legislation to the civil and criminal rulings that found the music of the rap group 2 Live Crew obscene, song lyrics have been blamed as never before for the problems plaguing modern society.

But perhaps most frightening of all have been the issues raised by the suit in Nevada that blamed the lyrics of the heavy

metal group Judas Priest for the suicide shootings of two teenagers. Washoe County Judge Jerry Whitehead ruled in August—in the first such lyric liability case to proceed to trial—that the group wasn't liable for any impact from the *unintentionally* backward-recorded subliminal message “do it” in the song “Better by You, Better Than Me,” from the *Stained Class* album. (The judge concluded the words had been created by exhalations of lead singer Rob Halford, combined with electric guitar sounds.) But in an ominous additional pair of rulings, the trial judge said

that subliminal lyrics have no First Amendment protection and that technological improvements could make it possible to show that even unintentional messages can cause suicide. This raises the frightening possibility that artists could be held legally responsible for such messages.

Though it has no legally binding effect outside Nevada, the latter part of Judge Whitehead's ruling has touched off a flurry of activity among proponents of the “devil-made-me-do-it” school of music criticism. This includes the heating up of two suicide suits filed against Ozzy Osbourne in Georgia federal courts over forward subliminal messages allegedly contained in the song “Suicide Solution.”

Reno attorney Kenneth McKenna, a plaintiff's counsel in the Judas Priest suit, says that within days of the Nevada judge's ruling, he was contacted by at least three more families who claimed their children's suicides were prompted by Judas Priest lyrics. McKenna adds that during the two years he estimates it would take for his next case to get to trial, he plans to organize extensive research that would definitively prove a direct, causal connection between subliminal messages and suicides. (Of course, lyrics-liability suits have been filed, too, over clearly audible words in songs such as “My Fist, Your Face” by Aerosmith.)

All this has left many songwriters seriously considering or already engaging in lyric self-censorship. Musicians, too, are fearful that an unintentionally misplaced note could make them responsible for millions of dollars in damages. And record companies, which are often named as co-defendants in lyrics-liability suits, are bringing pressure to bear on artists to tone down recordings.

Just how well-placed is this fear? The U.S. Supreme Court has held that speech is protected under the First Amendment short of a direct incitement to immediate lawless conduct.

In addition, a California appeals court that dismissed a “Suicide Solution” suit against Ozzy Osbourne in 1988 said, “Merely because art may evoke a mood of depression as it figuratively depicts the darker side of human nature does not mean that it constitutes a direct incitement to imminent violence.”

New York lawyer Elliot Hoffman, general counsel to Judas Priest, simply insists it's



impossible to record subliminal audio messages. "You can see a subliminal message in a film by stopping the movie at a frame that says, for instance, 'Buy popcorn.' But there is no way to slow down or filter out other audio sounds to bring up something that is otherwise inaudible."

Adds rock satirist Mojo Nixon. "It's the idiot-monkey-at-the-typewriter theory. You could isolate a drum hi-hat and it'd sound like it was saying, 'Ssssaatan, Ssssaatan.'"

The complaint against Judas Priest and CBS Records was based on negligence and strict liability (i.e., that the group's music was inherently dangerous). But courts have generally treated suicide as an independent intervening act that can't reasonably be foreseen.

At trial, the defendants argued the human brain is incapable of deciphering messages recorded backwards. Rob Halford acknowledged he had recorded lyrics backward on only one of Judas Priest's 14 albums, *Defenders of the Faith*. But he claimed the result—the words "in the dead of night, love bites," recorded backwards—was a garbled mess. Much of the testimony focused on the behavioral patterns of the two teenagers, who the defendants sought to prove had been violent and suicidal before the shooting incident occurred.

The plaintiffs' attorneys played a video of recording engineers demonstrating how backward-masking may be done. Alleged examples of such uses included music by Led Zeppelin, ELO and Queen (the latter spouting backwards, the attorneys claimed, "Decide to smoke marijuana").

The plaintiffs also presented several witnesses who discussed the power of subliminal messages. But one, a computer science professor, admitted speeches played backwards can take on new meanings. For instance, she said that "testing, one" played backwards sounds like "no music."

The plaintiffs then asked for \$6.2 million in damages for pain, suffering and medical costs. Plaintiffs' counsel Vivian Lynch of Reno suggested in closing that the defense had withheld incriminating evidence.

Defense trial counsel Suellen Fulstone snapped back that the accusation was "insulting" and "degrading." But Judge Whitehead fined CBS Records \$40,000 for failing to bring forth some of the master tapes from the *Stained Class* album. And the plaintiffs are appealing the portion of the judge's ruling in favor of the band.

Attorney McKenna is also helping prepare legal arguments in the two handgun-suicide suits pending against Ozzy Osbourne in Georgia. Plaintiffs' counsel in those cases, Ben Mills of Fitzgerald, Georgia, claims the two teenage suicides were inspired by the forward subliminal lyrics "why try, why try, why try. Get the gun and try it. Shoot, shoot, shoot."

No trial dates have been set. Osbourne has filed a motion claiming the plaintiffs do not have enough evidence to proceed on the subliminal issue. The judge is expected to rule soon on the motion. Osbourne has always claimed "Suicide Solution" is about the alcohol-related death of his friend Bon Scott, AC/DC's original lead singer. He also denies the song contains any subliminal messages.

Aerosmith lead singer Steven Tyler has maintained his group's tune "My Fist, Your Face" is about Tyler's drug detoxification experience. But that didn't stop a concert-goer at a 1986 Aerosmith performance at Madison Square Garden from filing a \$5.5 million lyrics-liability complaint after she was punched by another fan and her nose broken.

The complaint charged that "[t]his song is only one example of the message generally communicated to the public by Aerosmith encouraging violence and other unlawful and outrageous conduct... Aerosmith deliberately created this image in order to attract attention to themselves... and sought to and did attract people (hereinafter referred to as 'crazies')... inclined to engage in such conduct."


Also named initially as defendants were Madison Square Garden, promoter Ron Delsener, the ticketing agent and Warner Bros. Records.

Plaintiff's counsel Judson A. Parsons of Morristown, New Jersey argued it was essentially a question of crowd control. New York attorney Marvin Wexler, counsel to Warner Bros., said, "If Aerosmith had gotten up onstage and shouted 'Fire!' that wouldn't have been protected expression. But everyone understood the song they were singing was not directed at anyone in particular in the audience."

To support its case that Aerosmith's lyrics were protected by the First Amendment, Warner Bros. prepared a legal brief that quoted Bob Dylan's "Masters of War," which calls for the death of arms manufacturers, James Taylor's "Steamroller Blues"

("I'm a steamroller baby/I'm going to roll all over you") and the Beatles' "Maxwell's Silver Hammer."

The record company and ticketing agent were soon dropped from the Aerosmith case. The claims against the remaining defendants were settled out of court in early 1990. But the suit demonstrated the willingness of courts to hear lyrics-liability cases. That's because the federal judge refused to grant the defendants' motion for sanctions against Parsons for filing a frivolous action.

But to artists like Mojo Nixon, who's authored such controversial songs as "Don Henley Must Die" and "Destroy All Lawyers," the lyrics-liability debate ultimately boils down to a question of literary license. "These types of lyrics are just hyperbole and overstatement. Politicians and professional wrestlers use those devices all the time." 



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BETTER BY DESIGN: NEW IDEAS IN SYNTHS

Vectors, effectors and other fun stuff make up the keyboard's latest renaissance

By Alan di Perna

DESIGNED IN AMERICA; BUILT IN Japan. That's shaping up as the '90s success formula for musical instruments. The Korg Wavestation synth is a recent product of Amerasian cooperation. It was conceived by the Japanese company's new U.S. think tank, which includes the designers of the Sequential Prophet VS: the machine that introduced Vector Synthesis to the world back in the mid-'80s. So when Korg sent a Wavestation over for inspection, I started salivating on cue, expecting a synthesizer with all the

instant appeal of California roll at a sushi bar, or at least a nice juicy teriyaki burger.

Instant appeal? Well, the Wavestation is a dream for people who like to program. But keyboardists who rely on factory patches may find the out-of-the-box sounds lacking in basic staples—like an acoustic piano, for instance. A lot of the other patches are the kind where you press a key and hear a whole factory-programmed funk jam play itself out. None of which is terribly useful for the musician who wants to create his *own* music.

Once you get under the Wavestation's hood, though, you discover it can generate a

much broader range of sounds than the factory patches would indicate. Dive down seven or eight pages into the operating system and you've got good old oscillators. They're digital, of course, and they produce quite a selection of basic PCM waveforms, some great samples of classic analog synths, plenty of FM-ish "reso" waves (pass the Neo-Synepherine), real instrument samples and all that modern, breathy chuff stuff.

But now we come to one of the unit's unique features: wavesequencing. Rather than having an oscillator produce a single PCM waveform when you press a key, it can play a whole series of different waves, one after the other. You can string up to 255 waves(!) together, program crossfades between them and even have any of several modulation sources vary the precise wave at which the sequence starts to play. Up to 32 wavesequences can be stored in memory, but if each wavesequence has a lot of crossfading and steps, you may run out of memory before you reach that 32. Wavesequencing is great for building patches that unfold over time, or that are full of abrupt sonic surprises. But the best part is that wavesequences can be synchronized to MIDI clocks, so all that unfolding and all those surprises can happen right on the beat.

The oscillators—whether they're playing wavesequences or conventional waveforms—can be processed through the usual gaggle of filters, envelopes and LFOs, and up to four oscillators can be combined to form what's called a Patch. Now we come to another great strength of the Wavestation: vectoring. On most synths, you set a balance among your oscillators and that's it for that patch—the oscillators stay at the same levels. But with vectoring, you build a four-stage mix envelope that changes the relative levels of the four oscillators over time. With the ability to build wavesequences and then vector them around, you can create some wickedly complex sounds.

But on to the next plane of electronic decadence. Up to eight Patches can be combined in what's called a Performance. Here's

where you build layers, keyboard splits and multitimbral layouts. The Performance level is also where the Wavestation's onboard effects get applied. The facilities here are quite

Synthesis' New Wave: Korg's ultra-programmable Wavestation (foreground), with two separate effects processors. The Ensoniq EP 16 Plus (rear) comes with sampling, 16-track sequencing and a ton of hot sounds.





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Ronald Shannon Jackson



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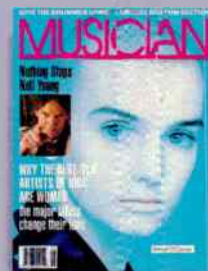
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five-star: two separate processors, both of which have many dual-effect algorithms like delay + chorus or reverb + EQ. The two effects processors can be connected in series or parallel. Routing into the effects processors and out to to the Wavestation's four outputs is extremely flexible. Chalk up another one for the U.S./Nippon connection.

Vector synthesis is pretty hot right now. A lot of the same ex-Sequential people in Korg's think tank used to be part of a similar brain trust set up by Yamaha. And Yamaha, of course, introduced their own vector synths—the SY77 and SY22—last year. The latest in the series has just come out: an affordable vector tone module called the TG33. Like the SY machines, it lets you do vector synthesis using sampled and FM-generated wave components. The 50-stage vector control is quite slick. Real-time vector moves can be stored in memory and



Yamaha's affordable TG33 (left), lets you do vector synthesis with sampled and FM-generated wave components. The 30-voice Studio M by Roland features 13 on-board effects.



then edited in minute detail. You get a built-in effects processor too. Not bad for \$595.

It looks like onboard effects will soon be a standard feature on samplers as well as synthesizers. A strong argument in favor of this development arrived the other day, in the

form of Ensoniq's new EPS 16 Plus Workstation. Remember the glut of workstations a few years back? Ensoniq's original EPS was nearly the only one that actually had all the features a workstation is supposed to have: sampling, synthesis and 16-track sequencing. The new version of the EPS improves on that by adding digital effects processing. And the sample resolution is up to a full 16 bits. The sequencer's been goosed up to 96 ppm resolution and has grown a few new editing features. Soundfiles from the original EPS will play perfectly on 16 Plus and benefit from the machine's improved D-to-A playback resolution. The 16 Plus is shipped with a ton of new sounds that take full advantage of the new effect facilities, including a fairly plausible screaming lead guitar and a Bösendorfer grand that's sheer murder.

Like most modern synths, the 16 Plus has a hierarchical setup. Your sampled sounds are the basic building blocks. You loop them, truncate them, filter, modulate and envelope 'em; then you spread them out over the keyboard. When you've done all this, you've got what's [cont'd on page 97]

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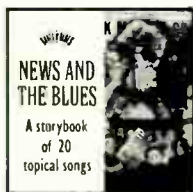
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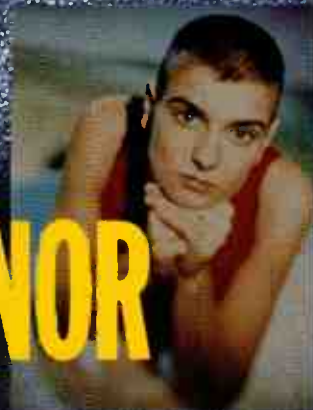
SINGING

"YOU DO SOMETHING TO ME"

NENEH CHERRY

SINGING

"I'VE GOT YOU UNDER MY SKIN"



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- SINEAD O'CONNOR
- NENEH CHERRY
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- K.D. LANG
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(Columbia)

THIS IS THE '90S, WE NEED TO remind ourselves from time to time, for the deification and recycling of modern pop's so-called "golden era" refuses to abate. The latest example is the mini-explosion of four-CD boxed-set retrospectives, usually accompanied by smart liner notes and some "previously unissued tracks" to snare the curious—along with more hits, near-misses and never-weres than a pair of ears is likely to bear with-



himself as an artist, lending his genius to help the careers of lesser figures. Although *Debut* didn't provide financial security for Mingus—how could it have?—the venture was a success because it allowed the composer to discover his talents. *The Complete Debut Recordings* is an important document in jazz history, and a joy to explore.

—Michael Ullman



BO DIDDLEY

The Chess Box
(Chess/MCA)

A NAME. A SONG TITLE. A RHYTHM. AN advertising tag line. Like his former labelmate Chuck Berry, Ellas McDaniel—that is, Bo Diddley—has achieved artistic immortality based on the slenderest public grasp of his talent. Whether or not Diddley actually invented that beat (usually simplified in print as “shave-and-a-haircut, two bits”), it sure is the knee-jerk association most people make with his name. For too many people it's the only association.

Ideally, *The Chess Box* will correct the impression that Diddley's a one-trick pony. As Robert Palmer makes clear in his accompanying essay, even *that* rhythm is subject to permutations of tempo and metrical emphasis. And anyone who doubts there's more to Bo Diddley than...you know... should check out the flamenco-like instrumental “Aztec”; or the unconventionally structured doo-wop ballad “I'm Sorry”; or the expressive vocal on “You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover” (a rare exception to this almost all-Diddley-composed collection); or the calypsoid “Pills”; or virtually any of the 45 selections here displaying the man's multifaceted gifts (not the least being his still-hilarious verbal cutting contest with maracas player Jerome Green). Bo, like God, is in the details.

Diddley didn't create his musical ingredients, but their fusion was unique. The macho surrealism of “Who Do You Love”

(with its inspired guitar exclamations following the title phrase) and the steamily erotic “Mona (I Need You Baby)” remain stunning soundscapes able to withstand hordes of imitators. In their early years the Rolling Stones performed and recorded about equal numbers of Berry and Diddley songs but released only one of the latter. They might have feared comparison.

As an anthology, *The Chess Box* holds few surprises beyond its skimpiness. Diddley recorded steadily well into the '60s, and sporadically thereafter. Over three-fourths of the *Box*, however, consists of pre-1961 recordings. Compact discs reveal the master tapes to be no audiophile's dream, with habitual distortion and occasional drop-outs. But getting hung up on the sound quality of Diddley's recordings makes as much sense as analyzing his lyrics apart from the music. Bo Diddley is an American original—as a self-made persona, and certainly as a musician.

—Scott Isler



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Rubaiyat
(Elektra)

RUBAIYAT IS ELEKTRA'S WAY OF CELEBRATING its fortieth anniversary, a 39-track compilation of artists from their current roster covering songs by artists from their catalog. As expected, you get a wide variety of results. Some of the renditions are appropriate homages: Phoebe Snow wailing on Delaney and Bonnie's “Get Ourselves Together”; the Georgia Satellites retro-rockin' a John Fogerty double-bill from '75, “Almost Saturday Night/Rockin' All Over the World”; 10,000 Maniacs (i.e. Natalie Merchant) sensitively treating Jackson Browne's sensitive “These Days.” These, and about a half-dozen other tracks, fall into the just-okay category.

Of the remaining 30 tracks, surprisingly, only three are indisputably dreadful: Jevetta

Steele's gospely version of the New Seekers' “I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing”—heavy soul-muscle like this only serves to emphasize the song's basic dumbness; Michael Feinstein's truly vomituous cooing of “Both Sides Now” (Joni Mitchell via Judy Collins) over offensively pointless strings; and Linda Ronstadt's hollow warbling of Kathy & Carol's (surely you remember) “The Blacksmith.”

A few cuts fall under the heading of Not As Bad As You'd Think, including Tracy Chapman's “House of the Rising Sun,” a studio-hop accompaniment (Waddy Wachtel) toning down the melodrama; and Ernie Isley doing the Cars' “Let's Go,” with the techno-pop updated to include Urban Battlefield textures—sirens, machine-gunning drum machine. Then you've got your Curios, like the Gipsy Kings' ethnic blowout of the Eagles' “Hotel California,” starting out well enough in Spanish but segueing into English like a man slipping on a banana peel (“Way-come to ze Hotel California!”). The Kronos Quartet help us to recall Television's “Marquee Moon,” but why? Why? And Bill Frisell and Wayne Horvitz join Robin Holcomb for an oil-and-water mix of ambitious fusion and modest folk on Dylan's “Going Going Gone.”

Finally, there's a handful of cuts that seem like fairly unmitigated Good Ideas. The Pixies take the Paul Butterfield Blues Band's “Born in Chicago” from its original boastful doomed macho stance into the more mod arena of panic and psychosis, while the Ambitious Lovers give us an up-to-the-minute bulletin on how styles in romantic alienation change, their version of Fred Neil's “A Little Bit of Rain” being more playful than the original, acknowledging the current need to get sentimental in a roundabout way. And the Sugar Cubes, sounding like refugees from the set of “Sprockets,” mix playful *and* psychotic with a terribly funny ravaging of that '72 AOR staple, Sailcat's “Motorcycle Mama.”

A bag as mixed as this one—covering “One Meat Ball” and “Kick Out the Jams,” Queen, Tom Paxton, the Doors and the Incredible String Band (Jackson Browne doing credit to Robin Williamson without sounding elfin)...well, you wonder who it's aimed at. But apparently somebody at Elektra thought it'd be a fun concept. It pretty much is, and, as with all celebratory artifacts, it's the thought that counts.

—Richard C. Walls

MUSICIANS AGAINST CENSORSHIP

SOUND OFF!

I believe an appropriate synonym for the word censorship is "prohibition." Prohibition is the act of prohibiting, or hindering accomplishment, and censorship, in its basic form, is legislation assembled to obstruct creation, expression, et cetera.

Americans are not the only ones who dream, but America has always had the reputation, as a country, where dreams seemed especially likely to come true. Because of this fact, the current anti-freedom of speech atmosphere in America has not only been harmful to the arts, but it also threatens mankind. The American Dream affects many inhabitants of the world, and gives most of them the opportunity to stand, steadfast, against opposition; hence, their ability to persevere. Freedom of creativity and choice gives the American Dream its hypnotic control, its ability to capture, and initiating a program within America to censor, in any form, in any meadow, will dilute this popular American concept. Furthermore, the repercussions for rescinding these virtues may not only be irreversible, but may include the cessation of man's ability to cultivate, to improve.

The fear of censorship is alive in America as a result of fanatical social and political advocates who believe curbing artistic expression will preserve current virtues of today's world for the future, and in many circumstances that's a shallow prospect. Amongst other articles, these individuals also lack hindsight, for they need to recall that all prior generations survived imperfect social climates; climates which did possess peculiar rituals and beliefs. And rather than creating an extensive debate over freedom of expression to map out our future, proponents of censorship should heed the vision of America's founding fathers; then, they too may see man's potential for phenomenal growth is still in its infancy.

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The current problems of today's society reflect the diffusion of leadership and education within our world. The problems do not derive out of the extensive growth which the arts have experienced. Additionally, the shaping of tomorrow's world today, should not be left to a few extremists whose vehemency may prohibit creation through legislation. Human existence is a collective effort, and each individual is needed to further the principles of humanity, however ambiguous, all are necessary. The arts possess many principles which further mankind; moreover, its contribution is paramount above all other contributing categories in the modern world; as a result, each category within the arts must be granted immunity because of its rich portrayal of, and endowment to human life.

Let all of us, in each nation, realize that domestic affairs need much of our attention. A better system of education should be our obligation to our youth, and improved guidelines for parental guidance need to be fostered and instilled. A dysfunctional domestic environment, and the lack of leadership and education are the foremost reasons for poor performance and lack of interest in our youth, not artistic inspiration or expression. Music, as one example, provides our youth with the challenge to dream and the challenge to pursue chances of opportunity. The current drudgery which non-caring parents, governments, and social programs propose to our youth is repugnant, and the American Dream is being steered toward extinction through continued exposure toward a proposed menial future.

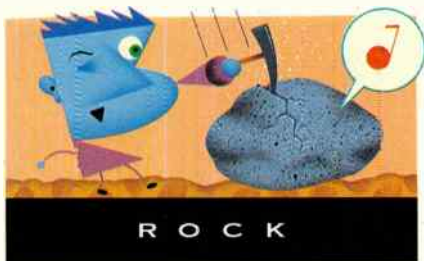
Robert Halford
Judas Priest

MUSICIAN

Where the Players Do the Talking

SHORT TAKES

SO MUCH MUSIC. SO LITTLE TIME



PET SHOP BOYS

Behavior [EMI]

Depeche Mode treats ennui as a fashion accessory, but the Pet Shop Boys take a positive approach—they joke about “Being Boring,” snipe at pretentious rock stars (“How Can You Expect to Be Taken Seriously?”) and fret over romantic fidelity (“So Hard”), all the while polishing their devilish wit and angelic arrangements. In other words, they understand that life isn’t about wrestling with the zeitgeist, but managing a laugh or two as you muddle through. And that’s the real difference between teen fare and grown-up pop.

HINDU LOVE GODS

Hindu Love Gods [Giant]

Though none of the Love Gods—Warren Zevon, Bill Berry, Peter Buck and Mike Mills—are exactly famous for their command of the blues, their versions of “Wang Dang Doodle,” “Junko Partner” and “Traveling Riverside Blues” are as charming as they are fierce, while their “Raspberry Beret” is simply smashing. Further proof that what makes a garage band great isn’t chops, but heart.

PAUL MCCARTNEY

Tripping the Live Fantastic [Capitol]

Half the thrill of catching McCartney on tour was watching his boyish charm slip back into context as he mugged his way through “Can’t Buy Me Love” or “Hey Jude.” Though that had to be seen to be appreciated, most of the rest, from the funk-lite of “Coming Up” to the full-tilt bop of “Twenty Flight Rock” to the dueling guitars of “Sgt. Pepper,” holds up even without the visuals.

INFORMATION SOCIETY

Hack [Tommy Boy]

Clever as the computer stuff is (and it takes a fair amount of wit to merge James Brown and Kraftwerk into

a single, seamless groove), where these guys really get brainy is in the songwriting. It’s smart to add a Thompson Twins gloss to “How Long” or a Latin hip-hop throb to “Think,” but finding hooks in electronic abstractions like “R.I.P.” or “CP Drill KKL” is pure genius.

VANILLA ICE

To the Extreme [SBK]

Bum rap.

ZZ TOP

Recycler [Warner Bros.]

Less a return to form than a return to formula, this album finds the Texas trio putting its electronics on the back burner (or further back in the mix), and turning up the heat on its basic blues ’n’ boogie. And though there’s little here as classic as “Pearl Necklace” or “Cheap Sunglasses,” songs like “Penthouse Eyes” or “My Head’s in Mississippi” are durable enough.

MEGADETH

Rust in Peace [Capitol]

Don’t mistake Megadeth’s apocalyptic imagery for doomsday overkill; not only do songs like “Holy War” capture the desperation of the dispossessed with chilling accuracy, but even a sword-and-sorcery number like “Five Magics” carries the tang of realism. But even without the lyrics, this band’s instrumental attack is so ferocious these songs would sound like the end of the world anyway.

SARA HICKMAN

Shortstop [Elektra]

Like any good singer/songwriter, Hickman understands the value of both a strong story (“Aurora”) and a funny lyric (“Too Fast”). What raises her above the merely good is that she remembers it’s the music that makes a songwriter, which comes across as clearly in the airy delicacy of “Salvador” as in the brash charm of “Short Stop.”

MAGGIE’S DREAM

Maggie’s Dream [Capitol]

Not just another acid-rock flashback, Maggie’s Dream plays off psychedelic nostalgia without falling victim to the usual hippier-than-thou clichés. Funkier than Lenny Kravitz, rootsier than the Stone Roses, the band not only understands how to live in the here-and-now, but clearly appreciates that history is what you make it.

BETTY BOO

Boomania [Rhythm King/Sire]

A classic Brit pop act, Boo is 40 percent concept, 30 percent production, 20 percent hooks and 10 percent talent. Which is not to say that “Doin’ the Do” and its ilk won’t leave you humming; they will. But so will TV jingles.

ANDY M. STEWART/MANUS LUNNY

At It Again [Green Linnet]

Despite such obviously Celtic touches as Uilleann pipes and pennywhistle, what Stewart and Lunny create here isn’t folk music so much as a sort of traditionalist pop. Meaning that it’s just as comfortable with singer/songwriter introspection as it is with Highland balladry, and always makes the most of Stewart’s heartbreaking tenor. (43 Beaver Brook Rd., Danbury, CT 06810)

TERRANCE SIMIEN AND THE MALLET PLAYBOYS

Zydeco on the Bayou [Restless]

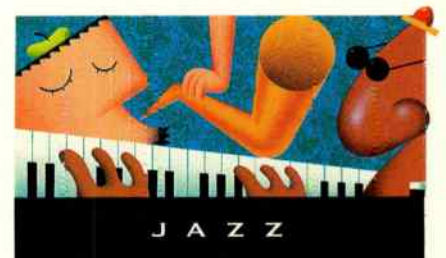
Though Simien can sound as sweet as any Neville when he wants to, what makes this such fun is that his band plays zydeco with all the breathless passion of a punk band (but twice the precision).

WHITNEY HOUSTON

I’m Your Baby Tonight [Arista]

A tourist in the realm of R&B (strange, considering how soulful her debut was), Houston shows that even if she can’t sing the stuff, at least she knows the right producers.

—J.D. Considine



WYNTON MARSALIS

The Resolution of Romance [Columbia]

The Resolution of Romance represents Wynton’s graduation present to his father. Ellis Marsalis’ sumptuous harmonies

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MUSICIAN
WHERE THE PLAYERS DO THE TALKING.

bathe Wynton's lyrical detachment in a light New Orleans bounce and leave him plenty of space to breathe. Wynton, above all, cherishes the elegance of melody and the nuance of phrasing, and *The Resolution of Romance* plays like a definitive statement of his musical principles, rather than a reboiling of old bones. So when's Wynton going to get all hot and bothered like Lee Morgan or John Coltrane? Understand that what you hear is likely what you're going to get: a classical trumpet master who is intent on mastering the jazz idiom from the ground floor up, and has the potential to be one of the greatest to ever pick up the horn. Those sitting on the fence wondering what all the fuss is about are hereby remanded to a compulsory sounding of "The Seductress," a commanding ballad refrain full of plunged Ellingtonian splendor and spectacular timbral control from top to bottom. The fruit didn't fall too far from the tree—this is the trumpeter's finest hour.

CECIL TAYLOR/TONY OXLEY
Leaf Palm Island [Free Music Production]

You don't always have the time to get into that Cecil Taylor frame of mind. But sometimes you crave the catharsis. If Wynton's is the resolution of romance, then Cecil's last rites are like shamanistic ritual invocations of magic—pure motion of the dance and drum. In Tony Oxley, Taylor has a multi-percussionist who is so blithely telepathic about Cecil's rhythmic forms that he never takes the bait and overblows to match the pianist's fire. He's transcended the martial cadences of the snare drum with his eccentric little hybrid kit, and shades Taylor's every nuance in skin and metal—Robbie the Robot meets the Master Musicians of Joujouka.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
Keep It to Ourselves [Alligator]
LITTLE WALTER
Hate to See You Go [MCA/Chess]

Rice Miller wrote the book on blues harp, and the rediscovery of this 1963 Danish date is cause for celebration. Sonny Boy's autumnal reflections are as intimate as a back porch chat, which is why the one-man-band mojo of "Don't Let Your Right Hand Know" and the barroom boogie of "Movin' Out" are so suffused with remembrances of the deep South. The spry acoustic guitar of Matt Murphy and the rolling cool of pianist Memphis Slim flesh out the music, but the focus throughout is on Sonny Boy's rap and roll—surely among our greatest storytellers.

Shure mike in hand, Little Walter's amplified stylings gave chromatic harmonica an eerie vocal power akin to the banshee shout of a saxophone or the growling distortion of a Hammond organ. He extended on the work of acoustic harp players like Sonny Boy, recasting electric blues harp in his own howling image. With his long fluid electric lines, Little Walter's brand of Chicago blues always inclined a little towards jazz (listen to the way he surfs over the deep grooves of Willie Dixon and Fred Below), and, by marrying his own vocal sound to the raw electric currents of Chicago modernists like Muddy Waters, helped define modern blues and rock 'n' roll.

STEVE COLEMAN & FIVE ELEMENTS
Rhythm People (The Resurrection of Creative Black Civilization) [BMG/Novus]

If you want a reference point for the kind of fusion I like,

listen to *Rhythm People*, one of the most streetwise, original jazz recordings of the 1990s. It's animated by both hard funk and rap, but instead of leveling the music in favor of some kind of vague dance sensibility, Coleman has expanded his music to nurture the all-encompassing sensibility of a modern jazz improviser. Yes, the music is bumptious, but the band is blowing ferociously from start to finish, harmonies that circle in and out of each other in a maddening swelter of polyrhythmic detail. The work of drummer Smitty Smith and bassist Dave Holland is particularly noteworthy.

SONNY ROLLINS
Sonny Rollins Quartet, Live in Paris 1963
[Magnetic Records]

Attention, Sonny Rollins! Please contact your lawyers: There's fresh royalties abrewing. Helpless as we are when it comes to new discoveries of classic Sonny Rollins, the moment any questionable "historical" release hits the browsers, we buy on instinct. So buyers beware: The *Sonny Rollins Quartet in Europe 1963, Vol. 1 & 2* on Jazzup has Cro-Magnon-quality bootleg sound, and is for fanatics only. But the *Sonny Rollins Quartet Live in Paris 1963* on Magnetic Records seems to be a keeper. A good live sound complements the superb, free-wheeling performances from Sonny's most adventurous ensemble (Don Cherry, Henry Grimes and Billy Higgins), back during that brief interlude when Newk was under the spell of Ornette Coleman. The highlights include Sonny's splendid ballad interpolations on "Everything Happens to Me," and the hard-driving ensemble blues interplay on "Sonnymoon for Two."

DON GROLNICK
Weaver of Dreams [Blue Note]

A visceral, no-compromise session, full of gutsy swing, tart harmonies and free-blowing polyphony that walks the stylistic chasm between hard bop and funk without condescension or glitz. Peter Erskine, Dave Holland (very much in his Paul Chambers mode) and the Breckers go for broke.

CHICO HAMILTON
Gongs East! [Discovery]

They got the liner notes and song sequences all balled up, but no matter. Long out of print, this session documents the cream of West Coast jazz experimentation back in the late '50s, with a cello-guitar-bass-reeds-drums combo that is probing, elegant and swinging. Noteworthy for the work of California native Eric Dolphy in the days before he completed post-grad work in caterwauling at the University of Mingus. His sound is lush and refined in the best tradition of Benny Carter and Bird.

SAM PRICE
Rib Joint [Savoy]

Here's a joyous compilation from the '50s that stakes out the ground where jazz and blues met to form the very foundation of rock 'n' roll. Pianist Price has been active since the 1920s, and his playing is an encyclopedia of rollicking barrelhouse and boogie-woogie grooves. And when the legendary tenorist King Curtis and unhinged electric guitarist Mickey Baker (remember "Love Is Strange?") cut loose over Price's big beat, *Rib Joint* will fire up any party.

MILT HINTON
Back to Basics [Progressive]

Sublime little duets with pianist Jane Jarvis, some fine grooving with Louis Bellson and a venerable encyclopedia of swing bass motifs on this solid traditional date. Hinton's bass is right up in your face on this intimate little recording, but where's the amp? Who needs one when your name is Milt Hinton and you've been minding the bottom since the '30s with Cab Calloway, making rock records for Atlantic in the '50s and modern jazz with Branford in the '90s? This man should be up there on Mount Rushmore. (1206 Decatur St., New Orleans, LA 70016)

PAUL BLEY
The Floater Syndrome [Savoy]

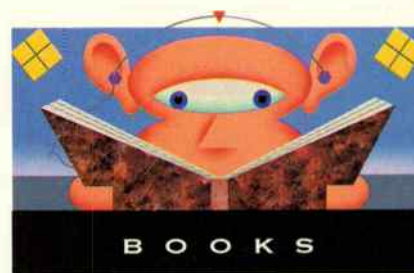
The sound changes appreciably cut by cut, session by session, as if the producer wasn't quite sure what he had or how to present it in the trio of Paul Bley, Steve Swallow and Pete LaRoca. But taken as a whole, this remarkable trio was on the verge of a stylistic breakthrough. Swallow's bearish attack and woolly acoustic bass tone complement rhythm mate LaRoca's dancing mixture of Baby Dodds and post-modern melodic fury; pianist Bley interpolates the work of Ornette Coleman and Charles Mingus on piano, anticipating the later freedom of the Hancock/Carter/Williams and Jarrett/Haden/Motian rhythm teams. And do you think Pat Metheny might've copped something from Paul's reading of Carla Bley's "Syndrome"?

BENNY GOODMAN TRIO AND QUARTET

Avalon—The Small Bands, Vol. 2 [Bluebird/BMG]

From Kenny G to Benny G. My, what a difference five decades make. Clarinetist Goodman found his greatest popular success as a big-band leader in the swing era, when jazz was popular music—was dance music. But he probably found his greatest expression as a jazz artist in these propulsive trios and quartets with pianist Teddy Wilson, drummer Gene Krupa and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton. These fine digital remasterings highlight the warmth and clarity of the original recordings, and the absence of a bassist focuses each instrument rhythmically, for breathtaking interplay and witty, high-wire improvisations of the highest order.

—Chip Stern



RIDERS ON THE STORM
John Densmore
[Delacorte Press]

Alas, poor Densmore: While everyone else was grooving in the sunshine during the '60s of Love, he was trapped (by lack of options) playing drums in that dank spiritual basement known as the Doors. That's one theme that

runs through these shards of recollections; another is his difficulty getting laid. Despite its jumpy narrative, *Riders on the Storm* is invaluable first-person testimony, and not just about the Doors. After all, to his bandmates Jim Morrison was an excruciating nutcase.—*Scott Slater*

AFRICAN ROCK

Chris Stapleton and Chris May
[Dutton Obelisk]

Many African societies view musicians as derelicts, degenerates and drunkards, while U.S. music fans often refer to something as amorphous as "African music." This detailed, highly readable work dispels the latter myth and celebrates the sober as well as the sodden. Describing hundreds of the musical styles and personalities that have popped out of the Mother Continent since World War II (and especially since the '60s), the authors underscore the sheer diversity of sound, from the more famous (*juju, soukous*) to the lesser known (*agbadza, ziglibithy*). Anecdotes and sagacious quotes abound. Despite such weaknesses as no coverage of the musics of the Horn of Africa or the incredibly weak chapter on African music in America tacked on for the U.S. edition (they don't even mention African music pioneer Babatunde Olatunji), this is easily the best reference yet on African pop.—*Tom Cheyney*



DEL MCCORY

Don't Stop the Music [Rounder]

Initially it's the sweetness of the twin fiddles, a slight variation on the Texas style, that makes you turn your head toward this feisty family affair. But it's McCory's vocals, with more twang than his banjo player, that keep you listening hard. Living legend Bill Monroe was a one-time McCory boss, so even though you might not have heard of this bluegrass bandleader, you know he's paid his circuit dues. At 50 he's learned a lot, and it's the little things—whispered passages, bluesy phrasing, loping rhythms—that show how genuine his old-timey stance is. There's a lot of worry lines on his brow, and McCory's candid enough to tell where he picked them up. (1 Camp St., Cambridge, MA 02140)—*Jim Macnie*

THE TRI-SAX-UAL SOUL CHAMPS

Go Girl [Black Top/Rounder]

The Soul Champs—Austin's Mark Kazanoff, plus Atlanta's Grady Jackson and Sil Austin—play sax, as in smokin' R&B. Here they've joined distinctive guitarists like Snooks Eaglin and Clarence Hollimon for a party record that never loses its place between fun and consequence. It tucks some no-sweat Ellingtonia (Kazanoff's "Blue Di") and Middle Eastern ("Misirlou") between sax battles like the title tune and songs such as "I Can't Keep Up with You," where guest singer Carol Fran lays down the law while guessing she's just in over her head.

Lucidly recorded, with a dependable rhythm section of bassist Rhandy Simmons and Wes Starr, the Soul Champs sound free and targeted, subtle and frank, and although they never bland out, they don't wallow in yesterday's grease, either.—*James Hunter*

THE GUO BROTHERS

& SHUNG TIAN
Yuan [Realworld/Virgin]

Playing their native flutes and *shens* (a hand-held mouth-blown organ), Yi and Yue Guo mostly tone up Chinese traditional songs, rendered in Guo arrangements. They're more atmospheric and cinematic than authentic folk. Although Shung Tian, a quintet based in England since 1989 in which sister Liang sings fetchingly, and former Clannad member Pol Brennan are also on hand, nobody clutters the Guos' confidently articulated melodies and cannily chosen textures. (Poise alone accounts for the Chinese-Irish connection, it turns out.) As fine as the Guos' nouveau Asian folk is—"The Dream of the Red Mansion," theme music from a Chinese TV drama, seems particularly cool—*Yuan*, especially Yue's rich and probing "My Second Life," leaves you hoping that next time these composer/musicians will write more of an album themselves. They've got dynamite instincts for rooted instrumental music, a little flash and lots of verve.—*James Hunter*

MICKEY HART

At the Edge [Rykodisc]

Hart calls these pieces "dreamsongs," as they literally came to him in his sleep, if the liner notes are to be believed. Their effect is less sleep-inducing than trance-like. Obscure instruments, many dating back to prehistoric times, are blended with nature's sound effects to create serene, contemplative atmospheres, making the occasional bursts of melody from (yes) Jerry Garcia's guitar or Airto Moreira's voice all the more surprising. Not many other albums can boast Zakir Hussain and Babatunde Olatunji on the same track, and the result is way better than anything Hart's regular band has managed in the last decade.—*Muc Randall*

THE BLUE AEROPLANES

World View Blue [Ensign/Chrysalis]

Striking an impeccable balance between artiness and candor, pop and rock, the Blue Aeroplanes glide smoothly through this mini-album made up of new material, covers and blasts from the 'Planes' past. The eight tracks (comprising *World View Blue* include three rediscoveries from the 'Planes' elusive back catalog and "You Are Loved," a new number that pairs Gerard Langley's warm and fuzzy vocals with a droning guitar pop backdrop reminiscent of the Smiths. But the real gems here are three covers through which the band pays tribute to their musical mentors. Richard Thompson's "You're Gonna Need Somebody" skips sprightly along over a lush ground of guitar textures, a live version of Bob Dylan's "I Wanna Be Your Lover" is an unremitting rave-up embellished with intriguing, psychedelia-inflected country-western guitar work, and a jubilant rendition of "Sweet Jane" tackles the strolling narrative of the Velvet Underground original with the exuberance of Bruce Springsteen's "Rosalia." —*Sandy Masuo*



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Giants of Danceband Highlife [Original Music]

This is African big-band swing music, courtesy of Ghana, and sounds every bit as strange and delightful as that hybrid should imply. This collection presents three bands from three decades, including the Caribbean-flavored E.T. Mensah and the Tempos, a preeminent ensemble during the '50s, and the 15-piece Hamblers International Dance Band. But it's Professional Uhuru that really steals the show, its creamy horn section and driving Cubop percussive rhythms transforming traditional African melodies into beautifully exotic dance music. Highlife was one of the first African pop idioms to sustain interest on these shores, no doubt because it was "society" music that did indeed draw some inspiration from '50s and '40s big-band swing. But like the best Latin mambo bands of the '50s—a sound Professional Uhuru calls to mind more than occasionally—it's at once disarmingly happy and sophisticated music, and with a dance quotient that's very much up to date. (R.D. 1, Box 190, Lasher Rd., Tivoli, NY 12583)—*Mark Rowland*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Sound of Kinshasa [Original Music]

Subtitled "Guitar Classics from Zaire," this collection deftly charts the progress of what has become Africa's most influential pop music. What's wild is how much the original form borrowed from early Cuban folk and salsa, itself the dominant strain of dance music throughout the Caribbean. The mix here of wafting horn lines, swaying percussive patterns and, of course, those amazing, reverb-laden Zairean guitar lines on tracks by the likes of Roehereau and Dr. Nico is about as dreamy as life can be. A personal note: I latched onto this album several years ago when it came out on LP, and it's been on my top 10 playlist ever since. The CD's sound quality is about the same, which is to say serviceable, but I guarantee that if you have any feel for this stuff, *The Sound of Kinshasa* is one disc that will stand the test of time. (R.D. 1, Box 190, Lasher Rd., Tivoli, NY 12583)—*Mark Rowland*

MIKE MCGEAR

McGear [Rykodisc]

This 16-year-old artifact represents the only collaboration between comic/musician Mike McGear and his big brother Paul McCartney. Fortunately, this is Paul circa "Jet" and "Junior's Farm," so the album—all of which he wrote or co-wrote save for one cover—fairly rocks. Denny Laine and Jimmy McCullough's guitars throw sparks throughout, and McGear's odd humor lends its distinctive touch to "Norton" and "The Man Who Found God on the Moon" (which Robyn Hitchcock must've heard at an impressionable age). Plus that great cover of Roxy Music's "Sea Breezes" with the pun no one got the first time around: "It's a shame to think about yesterday, it's a shame." Whatta guy.—*Thomas Anderson*

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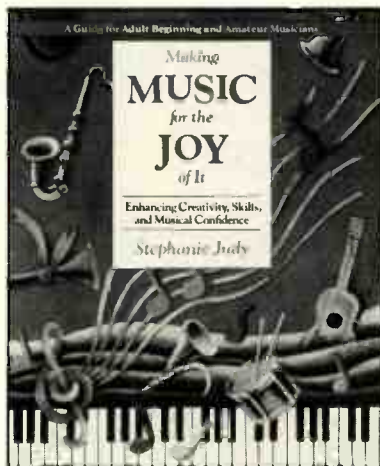
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DEVELOPMENTS

[cont'd from page 84] called an Instrument. Eight Instruments can be summoned up at once to create what's known as a Bank. These Instruments also form the first eight tracks of the sequencer.

Because of this hierarchical structure, adding effects to sounds can be a little bit tricky. There's just one effects processor which can be applied at the individual Instrument level or globally at the Bank level. Global effects can be loaded from disk or drawn from a pool of 15 onboard ROM effects.

The effects processor itself is a little 24-bit powerhouse. It has some premium audiophile reverb algorithms and lots of useful chorus + reverb + delay-style multieffects. The Leslie cabinet simulation is the best around. The effects give you all the standard adult programming parameters, many of which can be modulated by any number of MIDI controllers. Voices can be routed to the effects processor via three separate busses, which makes it possible to apply only reverb to one Instrument, while another gets reverb, chorus and delay and a third goes dry. All these new effects facilities, plus the machine's other features, bring the EPS well into the '90s.

In the coming months, we'll be seeing more experiments with the way different synth-related functions get combined in a single piece of gear. The tone module was an interesting packaging idea; the workstation was another. And now Roland has taken a brand-new design direction with their Studio M, a tone module with built-in effects plus a sequencer with tape sync and mix automation combo. Whoa, let's break that down. The sequencer is a 16-track, 50,000-step job. Eight sequencer tracks are dedicated to the Studio M's onboard voices and the other eight are for driving external MIDI instruments. The internal sounds are of the Roland RS-PCM variety. There are 30 voices that can be spread over eight multi-timbral parts and processed through any of 13 onboard effects. The sequencer reads and writes Roland's Tape Sync II synchronization code. Among its other tricks, it'll let you automate effects settings plus panning and levels for all 16 sequencer tracks. Whew. In short, if you've got a MIDI keyboard, the Studio M gives you everything you need to go with it in one tidy little box. Splendid idea, what?

EDDIE G'S Christmas

PARTY E JOKE S



Each year at this time the music biz buzzes with everybody's favorite Christmas package—the annual cassette of weird holiday novelty songs from TV comedy writer Eddie Gurodetsky. This year you can get in on the fun, too. CBS is releasing *Christmas Party with Eddie G*, the ultimate collection of gonzo seasonal selections, forgotten aberrations and Christmas radio filler. To celebrate, we offered Eddie a page of *MUSICIAN* to entertain our readers with some of his favorite musician jokes. So roll up the carpet and spike that eggnog—we're ready for Eddie!

When Duke Ellington died, Saint Peter was waiting for him at the Pearly Gates.

"Duke," Saint Peter said, "It's so good to have you here. The boss wants you to lead heaven's all-star band.

You can choose whoever you want. You want saxophones, you got 'em. Ben Webster, Lester Young. John Coltrane. Drummers? Chick Webb, Buddy Rich. Guitars? How about Charlie Christian, Wes Montgomery or even Jimi Hendrix?"

Duke listens carefully. Saint Peter leans in close and speaks in a more confidential manner, "Listen. One thing. When you're thinking about a singer—God has this girl..."



This frog is driving in a car. Coming the other way in another car is a trombone player. What's the difference between the two? The frog might be on his way to a gig.

This guy goes to Africa. He gets off the plane and the first thing he hears is the drums—the throbbing tribal beat of the drums. He turns to a native in the airport and asks, "What's the deal with the drums?" The native replies, "Very bad if drums stop." He gets to his hotel and the drums are still beating out their rhythmic pulse. He asks the bell-hop, "What's the deal with the drums?" The bell-hop replies, "Very bad if drums stop." Later, he's walking in the town square and all he can hear are the drums. He's about to ask someone on the street when, suddenly, the drums stop. He turns to the man closest to him and asks,

"Now what happens?" The guy says to him, "Very bad. Now come bass solo."

Q. How many members of U2 does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A. One. Bono just holds the light bulb and the world revolves around him.

Q. How many drummers does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A. They have machines that do that now.

This new nightclub opens. It has lots of little rooms and above the door of each room is a number. The number represents the average IQ of the people in the room so you can find people at your own level. So this guy walks in the room marked 180 and listens to the conversation—"I think Proust is one good example." It's a little too much for him so he goes into the room marked 130—

"Truffaut's early films are reminiscent of..." Still too heavy, so he tries the room marked 90—"Actually, as far as sequels go, *Die Harder* wasn't that bad." He checks out the room marked 70—"You know, that 'Roseanne' is a pretty funny show." Finally, he gets to the room marked 40. He opens the door and two guys are sitting there. One says to the other, "So, what size sticks do you use?"

Q. How do you make a rock guitarist turn down?

A. Put a chart in front of him.

A hunter is on safari in Africa. All he can hear is the furious beat of the drums echoing through the jungle. He says to his guide, "I don't like the sound of those drums." They go a little further into the jungle. The beat is even more furious. "I don't like the sound of those drums." They hike a little further. The sound is overwhelming. He shouts to his guide, "I really don't like the sound of those drums!" Suddenly, a head pops out from the underbrush and yells at him, "Hey, give us a break. He's not our regular drummer."

Q. What's the difference between the Lawrence Welk band and a moose?

A. On a moose, the horns are in front and the asshole is in the back.

A very intense, self-absorbed saxophone player is

sitting at the bar after playing all night. A beautiful woman shyly approaches him and says, "Excuse me, I hate to intrude, but I just have to tell you that I saw you play tonight. I have never been so deeply affected by music before. It's like it woke up my mind and my heart. It also woke me up as a woman. Your music touched me so deeply that I just want to take you home with me and make mad passionate love to you all night long."

The saxophone player stares at her for a moment and asks, "Did you see the first set or the second set?"



Q. What did it say on the blues singer's gravestone?

A. "I didn't wake up this morning."

This musician gets off the road. He wakes up on his first day back and calls up Buddy Rich's house. Buddy's wife answers. "May I speak to Buddy?" the musician asks. "Buddy's dead," replies Mrs. Rich. They hang up. The next day, he calls again. "May I speak to Buddy?" he asks. "Buddy's dead," she replies. They hang up. The next morning, he calls again. "May I speak with Buddy?" he asks. "Look," says Mrs. Rich, "you've been calling here every day. I told you—Buddy is dead." "I know," says the musician, "I just love hearing it."

Tom Fogerty dies. He opens his eyes and he's sitting in a giant rehearsal hall. Every type of instrument imaginable is there. He can't figure out what's going on. Suddenly, the door swings open and Jimi Hendrix walks in, picks up a guitar and sits down next to him. Right behind him are John Lennon, Buddy Holly, King Curtis and Brian Jones. All the instruments are taken except the drums. Tom is excited. He's figured out where he is. He turns to Jimi and says, "This is great. There really is a rock 'n' roll heaven and I'm in the band. I can't wait till we start jammin'."

Jimi says, "Heaven? Did you say heaven?" Just then the door swings open. Karen Carpenter strides in, sits down at the drums and says, "Okay, everybody, 'Close to You.' One, two, three..."



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Photo by Robin Visotsky

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