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Out of respect for the purity of Eric Johnson's music, we won't tell you whose guitar synthesizer he's playing. But, if you happen to notice the logo down below, well, we can't do anything about that.

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34 BELLY MEETS THE BREEDERS

Or should we say, Throwing Muses meets the Pixies? Oh hell, let's call a spade a spade: Tanya Donnelly meets Kim Deal for a freewheeling discussion of fronting bands, playing backup, sexual politics in the rock world and the negatives of humping trees.

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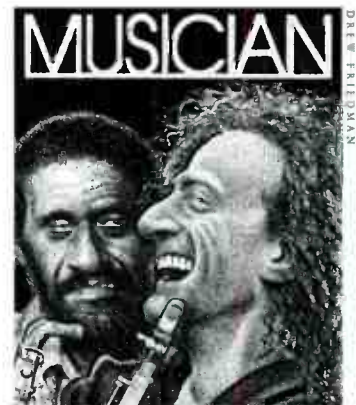
Go back, Jack—do it again. Nineteen years after the last Steely Dan tour, 13 years after their last album, Becker and Fagen fly back to New York to rehearse their band and explain to *Musician* why 1993 is the right time for a reunion of Doctor Wu, Charlie Freak and Kid Charlemagne. Is there gas in the car? BY TOM MOON

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We have no "Letters" page this month because the package containing all this issue's reader correspondence was (honest) lost in the mail.



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Photograph by James Hamilton (Steely Dan), Jill Greenberg (Deal/Donnelly)

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ROD STEWART

The energy level at your shows has been great lately.

Providing the voice is working. I have a lot of trouble with my voice. It's affected by weather conditions, air conditioning, pollen. I'll shake hands with someone who's got a cold and I'll catch a cold and it's fucked, you know? It's a very delicate instrument. Now, in the last five years I've found this piece of equipment where you have two earphones right inside next to your eardrums, as close as you can get. So you can hear everything—you can actually hear yourself breathing while you're singing. That's all you need. The trouble comes when you can't hear yourself. You push too much. Def Leppard were nearly going to cancel their tour. The singer was down to two concerts a week, three at the most. He is now singing five concerts a week. That's what a major breakthrough it is. I saw Phil Collins' earpiece when I was getting measured up for my one. [laughs] Phil's had voice problems.

But all that stuff in the world is not going to help you if you come down with the flu. You're a prisoner of your own voice when you're on tour. Two little muscles bang together in the bottom of your throat. Have you ever seen what it looks like? I've had to. They put a camera up your nose. It goes all the way back down. It really makes you gag. But to see your own throat, it looks just like a pussy. It's exactly the same, the same coloring and everything. A tremendous experience. I have it done every year.

You've stopped kicking soccer balls into your audience?

I keep getting sued. People come to the concert, and I'm sure they scratch their finger at home, and they make out they did it trying to collect the balls. I've got 12 suits pending already, so I've got to stop it. One guy sued me because he said when he reached for the ball, he got knocked down and broke his finger, and he's a writer and hasn't been able to work anymore. Ay-yi-yi. I used to enjoy that so much, too, kicking the balls out.

Did you listen to much folk music as a young man?

Yeah. Derroll Adams was my favorite. Banjo player, used to play with Ramblin' Jack Elliott. I used to love Ramblin' Jack.

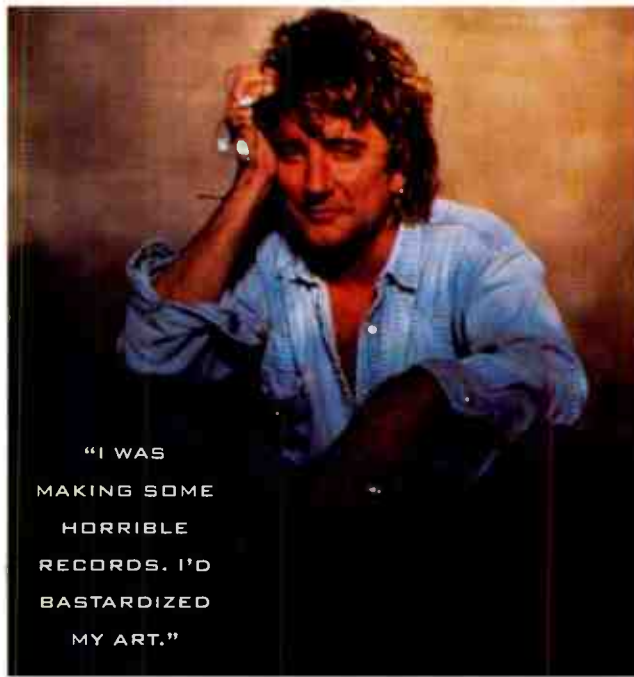
You can hear that a bit in your songs, like the way "Every Picture Tells a Story" rambles on.

Yes. It's the only song ever written where the chorus is right at the end. [laughs] The way we made albums then was so unbridled. Today they say, "Well, you've got two singles, and we'd like another one. Can you go back and record some more stuff?" It didn't used to be like that. You made a body of work, as an album, and it stood up. If there was a single on there, it was an accident. "Maggie May" was an accident. It wasn't meant to go on the album. A mate of mine who I thought had good ears said, "Well, I don't think it's got much of a melody, and it's a bit long, you know?" I said, "Well, I only recorded 10 tracks for this album. There's nothing left over, so it'll have to stay. I've run out of budget."

So I take it this friend is not your manager.

No, no. [laughs] You know what he was? He was a car salesman who wanted to be a rock manager. There's a lethal combination for you. He actually had a number one hit with a song called "In a Broken Dream" in England. That was a demo I did for him. He said, "Will you do this favor for me? Just sing on this tape, because I've got a new singer. I'll play him the tape and he can copy you." I said, "What do I get out of it?" He said, "I'll give you

FRONT MAN



"I WAS
MAKING SOME
HORRIBLE
RECORDS. I'D
BASTARDIZED
MY ART."

a new set of carpets for your sports car." So I did the tape, didn't hear anything of it until "Maggie May" is number one, the following year. They put this out, and it was number one as well. Bastard. Haven't seen him since.

Were you tempted to write anything new for your Unplugged album?

No. No, I didn't want to. I'm not a great lover of writing songs, really. It's a huge income for me. But still, it's hard work. I struggle over every fucking line like it's a jewel. I'm not really a natural writer. Dylan probably sits down and writes five songs a day. And Tom Waits and all those real songwriters. [laughs] I'm sure Shelley and Keats had the same problem, struggling over their art.

I haven't written anything for two years. I've been married two-and-a-half years. And a lot of things have changed. I don't think I'll be writing things like "Hot Legs" again, "Passion," or "Infatuation." I'll be interested to see what I come up with. "Pipe and Slipper Club Blues." [fruity voice] "Bring me my pipe and slippers, darling, will you?"

For all the Rod-bashing, it's not as if the critics didn't like you. What made them mad is you didn't stay as you were when they first liked you.

Well, they were right. Greil Marcus, I think it was, who said, "Biggest waste of one of the finest voices of the twentieth century..." or something like that. When I read that, I felt, "Geez, he's absolutely right." 'Cause I was making some horrible records. I'd bastardized my art. I'd made records like "Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?" and "Love Touch." Nothing more than just horrible pop songs. At least I realize I've made mistakes, and I've worked at making all that better now. I caused a lot of that Rod-bashing myself, because I totally believed I was God's gift to women. I was believing everything I read about myself in the papers. But, God. I was so lucky. I think I've come out of it fairly unscathed.

J.D. CONSIDINE

BE-BECK-A-LULA

"I started to play guitar after hearing Gene Vincent and The Blue Caps."

—Jeff Beck

And the rest is history.

Jeff Beck returns to his roots with "Crazy Legs," a salute to Gene Vincent and The Blue Caps and their legendary guitarist Cliff Gallup. Beck teams up with British swing/blues/country/rockers The Big Town Playboys for 18 amazingly authentic covers of hits and closet classics.

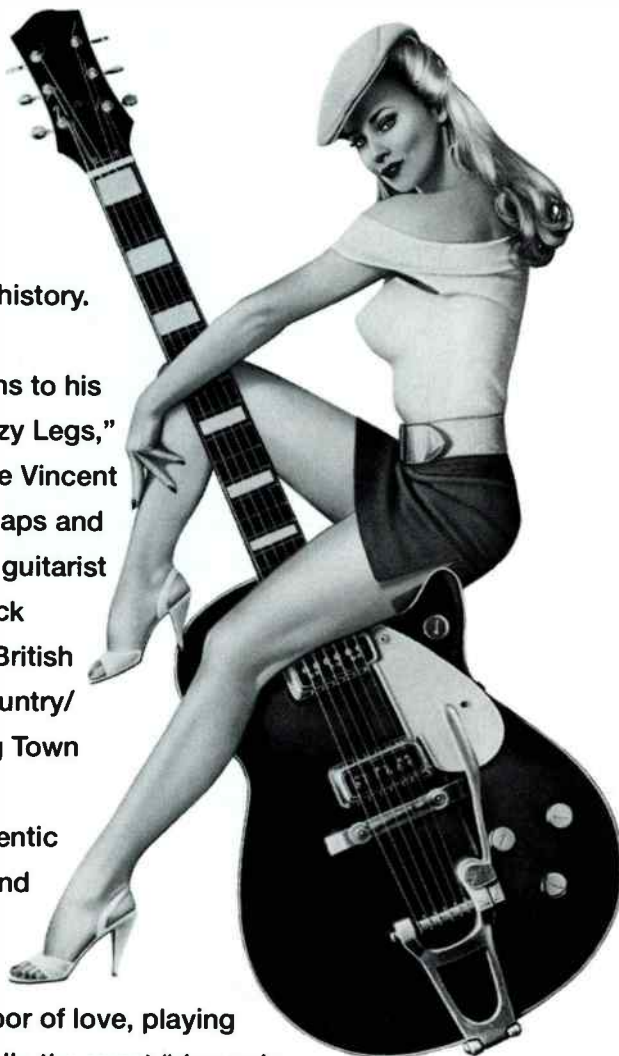
This is Jeff's labor of love, playing the music he calls the most "dynamic and wild rock and roll ever."

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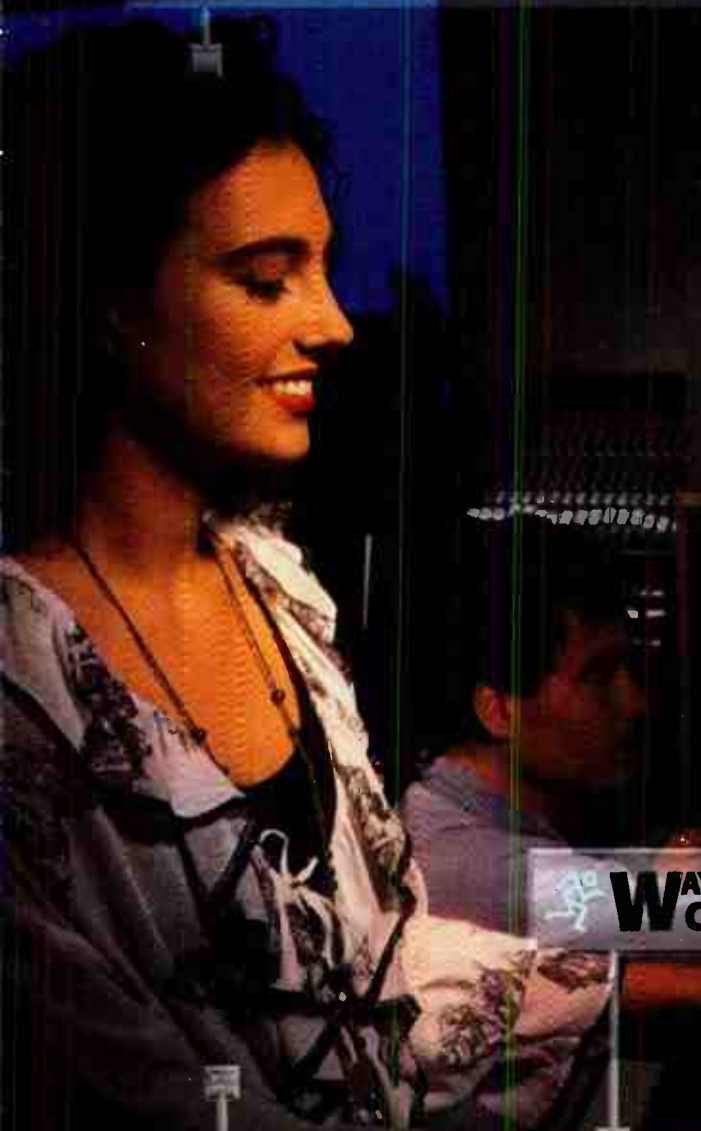
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STARR PARODI • COMPOSER, PRODUCER, ARSENIO HALL SHOW KEYBOARDIST



"On the Arsenio Hall Show, many groups want to reinforce live drums with sampled loops from master DAT or master CD. I like to

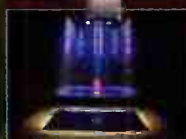
pump the volume of the samples high to get a big sound. When I do, the show's sound engineers come out of the booth and give me this 'you're doing it again' look...because the signal from the CR-1604 is so clean and hot that it regularly peaks their meters. Yet the 1604 never distorts. High headroom and dynamic range are why Jeff and I use Mackies in our commercial production studio and on the road...most other compact mixers in this price range artificially color the sound. Incidentally, not only does the Arsenio Hall Show use a total of four Mackies, but it's also the mixer I see most often in the racks of groups that we have on the show."

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Wayne Sharpe photo: Sheila Gracie
Starr Parodi photo: Peter Figen

Wayne Sharpe: Film music for 70mm "Welcome to the Max," "Atlantis," "Geresene Demonia," Commercial scores for Revlon, Drishti, Cover Girl, NEC, Red Lobster and Hawaiian Punch national TV spots; MIDI consultant/programmer for Beach Boys, Tommy Shaw (Styx & Damn Yankees), Rick James, and others.



View from 10,000 ft. above Manhattan as Mario falls to earth from outer space. From Liberty Science's signature film "Welcome to the Max." ©1993 Rosalini Film Productions, Inc.

"My soundtrack for 'Welcome to the Max' was mixed direct to six discrete digital channels at Toyland Studios through three Mackie CR-1604 16-ch.

mic/line mixers combined via a MixerMixer. The producers wanted the cleanest possible sound and needless to say, the CR-1604s delivered as usual. I've used Mackies to produce my recent television commercials and movie soundtracks, and continue to be amazed at the sound quality that comes from such affordable mixers. I've also recommended CR-1604s to a lot of other musicians. All I can say is, 'Accept no substitutes.'"

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Here Comes Sun-60

SUN-60'S brand of rock 'n' roll is a great deal like the architecture of its L.A. hometown, with classic and modern influences—the Beatles and X, Buffalo Springfield and the Jam, the Stones and Talking Heads—existing and clashing side by side. A collaboration between darkly earnest David Russo and willowy, intense Joan Jones (along with the muscular rhythm section of bass player Bret Jensen and drummer Greg Levitz), the group's second self-produced album, *Only*, explores the paradox of the City of Angels, where physical beauty and psychic dislocation are the yin and yang of the mindscape.

"People come here to let their dreams out," explains Jones over the din of a Los Feliz coffee shop. "This appears to be a place that's nurturing, but it turns out to be a desert. There's a harsh beauty that can suck everything out of you and, at the same time, create an environment in which you can grow."

After four years on the competitive local club circuit and non-stop touring with Material Issue, Style Council and Crowded House, the group has honed its live show to a jackhammer edge that belies the more dreamy side of such tracks as "Hold On," "All of the Joy" and "Pressure."

Playing in the Jabberjaw club on an otherwise deserted street in a seedy section of L.A., the group's sweaty single-mindedness and devoted following bring to mind the late-'70s CBGB's scene. But can today's new music regain the cultural impact enjoyed in the '60s and '70s?

"Music is universal and timeless," Russo insists. "It may not have the same role it did 30 years ago, but it still enriches lives. It's important to let rock 'n' roll die, so it can be reborn." **ROY TRAKIN**



MELISSA FERRICK

ONE DAY, Melissa Ferrick was playing for a couple of hundred people in a Boston club. The next, she got a call to open for Morrissey to front of 15,000. "I had no time to prepare or even get nervous," she recalls. "I had to just get in the car and go."

Soon after Ferrick was invited to complete the tour with Morrissey, record companies began paying attention as well. Performing solo with just an acoustic guitar, however, Ferrick was quickly tagged a folkie, a label she's been trying to shed ever since. Nonetheless, *Manote Blue*, her debut, marks the first time she played an electric guitar. "[Producer] Gavin MacKillop [Goo Goo Dolls, Toad the Wet Sprocket] put this Telecaster in my hands and said, 'Go ahead. I started playing and he said, 'You have to do lead lines on this record.' I had no idea what I was doing," Ferrick laughs. She did manage to lay down all the rhythm tracks and five of the leads. With her low, sometimes growly voice, comparisons will be made to Joan Armatrading and Tracy Chapman, but Ferrick is her own woman, as her energetic songs combine insightful tales of troubled relationships with loose, raucous, Neil Young-inspired electric guitar. There's not a folk song in sight.

CHRIS RUBIN

FACES

John Oswald

THERE'S SOMETHING excitingly different about John Oswald's fourth Plunderphonics release: It's for sale.

Canadian composer Oswald defines "plunderphone" as "a recognizable audio quote." In other words, what hip-hop artists do for a backing track, Oswald does for the main course. Heavily manipulating existing recordings—sometimes adding accompaniment, almost always shifting elements electronically—he creates a gloss on musical culture.

To get around the obvious legal difficulties posed by his source material, Oswald distributed his work free. Not even this was fail-safe. The Canadian Recording Industry Association destroyed his undistributed copies of a 1989 CD, charging copyright infringement against Michael Jackson, among others. A 1990 project for Elektra, using only



VID INCELEVICIS

that company's catalog, was aborted after some artists complained; it barely dribbled out to radio stations.

Now John Zorn's Avant label has taken the Plunderphonics challenge. Avant "quite impractically commissioned me to do a piece," Oswald says. "I tried to think of a practical Plunderphonics project." The result is *Plexure*, which embraces multitudes—"over 1000 sources from close to 1000 different artists."

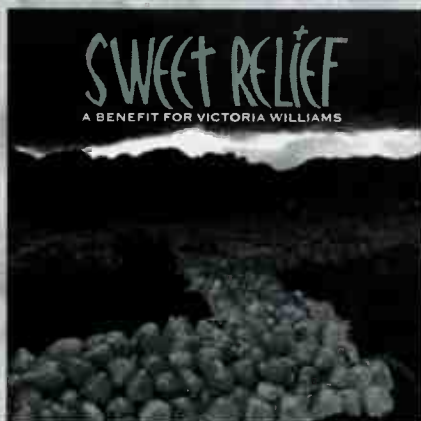
On paper it's a lawyer's nightmare. Oswald's strategy was to snip samples he calls "clones" as short as one-thirtieth of a second and mix dense sonic layers, "morphing" the artists. Oswald and assistant Phil Strong put in nine man-months assembling the 20-minute work. He considers himself one of the few musicians who've

earned the adjective "underground": "If Nirvana is alternative music and is at the top of the charts, then what is alternative music?"

There's more to Oswald than Plunderphonics; he's currently working on his fourth commission from the Kronos Quartet. Those pieces never seem to pique the legal establishment's interest. But there's still hope for Plunderphonics: He's also working on a Grateful Dead retrospective. We'll see what *their* sense of humor is like. **SCOTT ISLER**

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The Pharcyde

OUR GROUP'S IN-
fluence," the Pharc-
cyde's Romye "Boo-
ty Brown" Robinson says, "is mainly
Whitey's dancers." Whitey's danc-
ers???! As in Whitey's Savoy Lindy
Hoppers? The Harlem teenagers in the
'30s who tore up dancefloors and
Broadway and Hollywood stages with
their kinetic routines?

The answer is: yep. But Robinson's
citing is not just an unexpected
reply—considering the Pharcyde is a
very '90s hip-hop outfit—it's also an
honest one. The Pharcyde displays
the same acrobatic facility with words
as Herbert White's kids did with their
bodies. The L.A.-based quartet
evolved from a break-dancing group,
suggesting further parallels.

What immediately hits the listener
of *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*,
however, is the group's wiggy sense of humor. The debut album's
raps and skits float high above the mundane boasts and squalid sce-
narios of much of the competition. Whether or not they break new



Clockwise from bottom: Tre (Slim Kid), Romye
(Booty Brown), Derrick (Fat Lip), Imani (Darky Boy)

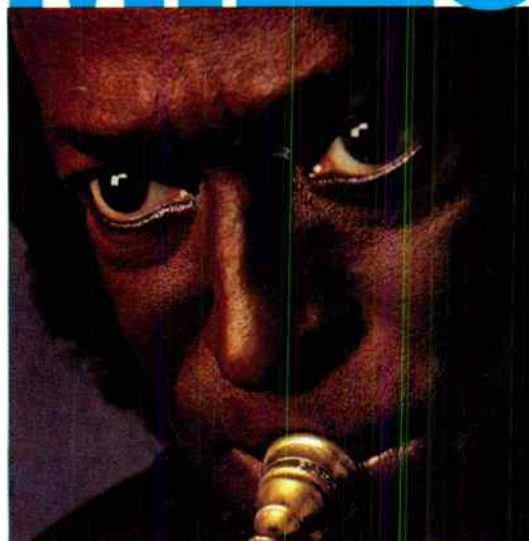
ground thematically, the Pharc-
cyde's jazz samples and sing-songy
vocals (shades of Jon Hendricks!)
underline an approach that lives up
to their name.

Released late last year, *Bizarre
Ride* at first seemed to be taking the
Pharcyde only to the darkcyde.
Robinson says he hates the album's
first single, the comic dis-fest "Ya
Mama": "If a comedian keeps say-
ing his jokes all the time, it's not
funny after a while." A second sin-
gle, "Passin' Me By," got them off
the ground; although a compara-
tively conventional romantic ballad,
the track does end with a belch.

The album's high-spirited cama-
raderie is less surprising in view of
the four Pharcycders' communal
living arrangement. If they can get
along with each other after such
prolonged exposure, it's no wonder
their PMA is infectious. Even
where *Bizarre Ride* isn't out-and-
out funny, its dazzling virtuosity is a joy to behold—like Whitey's
Lindy Hoppers. "That's how I want my music to be," Robinson
says: "the way they dance."

SCOTT ISLER

MILES & QUINCY



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LIVE AT MONTREUX

World Radio History

ON STAGE



LOS LOBOS AND FRIENDS

THERE WAS A GREAT OPENING band for Los Lobos at their twentieth anniversary celebration at the Greek—Los Lobos unplugged. Returning to a time when they played the musics of Mexico at weddings and coming-of-age parties, L.A.'s favorite *hijos* filled the soft twilight with 45 minutes of NAFTA-friendly *rancheras*, steamy Veracruz *sones jarochos* and a few originals. Cesar Rosas, who has kept the goatee-and-shades faith all these years, handled lead vocals for most of the early set, often saluting one of his neighborhood friends in the hometown crowd. Whether double-picking on the *reguinto* miniguitar, pumping fire on his button squeezebox or bowing his fiddle like a lost Cajun, David Hidalgo let it be known early on he had come to shred.

The "...and Friends" part of the show came during the 90-minute-plus main event. After a

spooky, three-quarter-speed "Don't Worry Baby," fellow roots revisionist Richard Thompson ambled on. The Wolves acted as his backing unit on a murderous version of "Shoot Out the Lights," replete with guitar turns featuring Rosas' roadhouse stomp, Hidalgo's earth-father blues and Thompson's Celtic modalities.

Two songs later, John Lee Hooker, in a copper-mocha suit and hat, sat in his center-stage chair as the band laid down a formidable choogle behind the blues legend's growls and moans on "It Serves Me Right (to Suffer)." The mojo came to a boil on "Think Twice Before You Go" and overflowed on an extended "Boogie Everywhere I Go," with Hooker stalking the stage like the king of the pride.

Though the appearances of Thompson, Hooker and later John Hiatt (who added vocals to "Will the Wolf Survive?" and "Down on the Riverbed") made for a memorable evening, the on-again, off-again format worked against the band sustaining any spiritual connection. But when Hidalgo strapped on his accordion for an uptempo border boogie—a tumblin' polkatharsis on "Ay Te Dejo

en San Antonio" and "Corrido #1"—even industry schmoozers were forced to shut up and give in to the oompahpah groove constructed by Conrad Lozano on bass, Louie Perez on drums and fellow Garfield High alum Victor Besette on percussion.

Before finishing off with "Georgia Slop," led by Steve Berlin's baritone sax, the band reeled off a frightening version of "Wicked Rain." As Hidalgo choked the upper frets of his doubleneck, Rosas spit out the kind of lyrics ("There's a storm off in the distance/And it looks like it's here to stay") that had made their *Kiko* album such an eerily prophetic soundtrack when Angelenos wept during the civil unrest of '92. Their choice to encore with Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" underscored Los Lobos' ability to communicate a populist critique of daily life without sloganeering. Hidalgo wrapped his tenor around the melody with clarity and passion in one of the night's most emotional performances. A fitting finale for a group that has gone from being another band from East L.A. to one of the most enduring ensembles in American music.

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BILLY JOEL VS. THE MUSIC BIZ

Elizabeth Joel. And third, he filed a \$90 million lawsuit against fired manager (and former brother-in-law) Frank Weber in 1989, claiming Weber stole millions and also lost millions more in risky investments such as horsebreeding. The suit is still pending.

"I completely trusted him," Joel says of Weber. "I made him the godfather of my child, and it gives me the shivers to think that if anything happened to me that I would have entrusted the future of my little girl to this man. I'm so naive. A lot of the story of what my new album is about is my own shattered faith and my ability to make judgments. If you can't believe in your own ability to discern and judge things, then what *do* you believe in?"

"I always was an anti-capitalist, and I got raped," Joel exclaims. "So unless you adopt somewhat of a capitalistic philosophy, you *will* get raped. That's the nature of the business. And no one is clean. I wrote a song about that, 'The Great Wall of China,' with the line, 'Nobody's perfect, nobody's clean.' I was always told about this and just went, 'Oh zippity-doo-

*An angry
artist becomes his
anger*

erful day'... I was
ow what? I'm not
nized."

and him to write the
reams album, which
"No Man's Land"
ous soul, blues-rock
epiphanies in its
believe.

hat you know and
e effectively," says
tour this fall. "I put
ause I couldn't write
very successful pop-
to Christie Brinkley,
daughter. Everything
y, right? Who the hell
I put it off, but I final-
feeling. This is what I
depressed. I am angry.
ng. I *do* have the blues."

Then it was easy for me to spin the songs off of that. Once I gave into that rage and anger and bitterness and grief, it was like therapy."

Now that he manages his own career, Joel will

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ing him to the point of writing his classic plaint of loneliness,
Second, he endured legal wrangling with his ex-wife and former manager,

BY STEVE MORSE



THE BOOK OF

"I'VE BEEN DOING THIS FOR 25 YEARS," SAYS DANIEL LANOIS, "and it's been sort of a long slow climb." Lanois grins wryly as he snaps two pool balls together where the period would arrive in his sentence. A musical nomad now looking back at 40, this sometime accompanist to a stripper named Delightful Delilah—she bathed onstage—knows the value of a rim shot.

His finances were making that same slow climb, he adds, when he migrated from Ontario to New Orleans in late 1988. "I used to have to go to the pay phone to make my phone calls. I was staying at a tiny little place on St. Ann near Rampart." Lanois casts a look over his shoulder. The streets he's talking about are just blocks away, but in an area where (despite its rich musical history) many locals don't venture on foot after dark.

Now Lanois perches on a sizable pool table in his gracefully aging dreadnought of a mansion on historic Esplanade Avenue. He has an indoor phone now. One suspects he could have had one then, thanks to his co-producing fees for U2's 1984 *The Unforgettable Fire* and Peter Gabriel's 1986 *So*. His going underground was more a creative strategy than a necessity. Lanois is one of those rare sorts who comfortably fits the billing of "Recording Artist," and the woodshedding he came to New Orleans for would produce his solo debut, 1989's *Acadie*. This spring he followed it with a second record made from his base here at

.....
Dan Lanois The
.....
Musician
.....
Eclipses Lanois
.....
The Producer
.....

BY FRED SCHRUERS



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT MAHURIN

World Radio History

Lanois settles his 12-string around his neck and discreetly peers at the numbered foot pedals before him. "This is the true story of a friend of mine who had a baby at 17," he says, "and gave it up for adoption..." Telling too much? he seems to ask himself. "...anyway, 30 years later, she met her son for the first time."

The rendition of "Unbreakable Chain" that follows shows how well Lanois can weave a musical spell, a performer preserving the song's essence even as the producer in him crowds more musicians onstage. The highlight of that afternoon's festival show had

been "Indian Red," with original co-composer Cyril Neville beating on a triangle and Blades relying on kick drum and tambourine combined. The sun-drenched crowd was happily shaking skulls and busts of Professor Longhair on long sticks, second-lining. Lanois had traded verses on "Everyday People" with Johnson, listed on the record as "Vocal Coach," attacking the Big Easy classic with verve. "The more you sing the better you get at it," says Lanois. "I can't claim to be one of the confident singers. If you had a voice like Stevie Wonder or Aaron Neville or

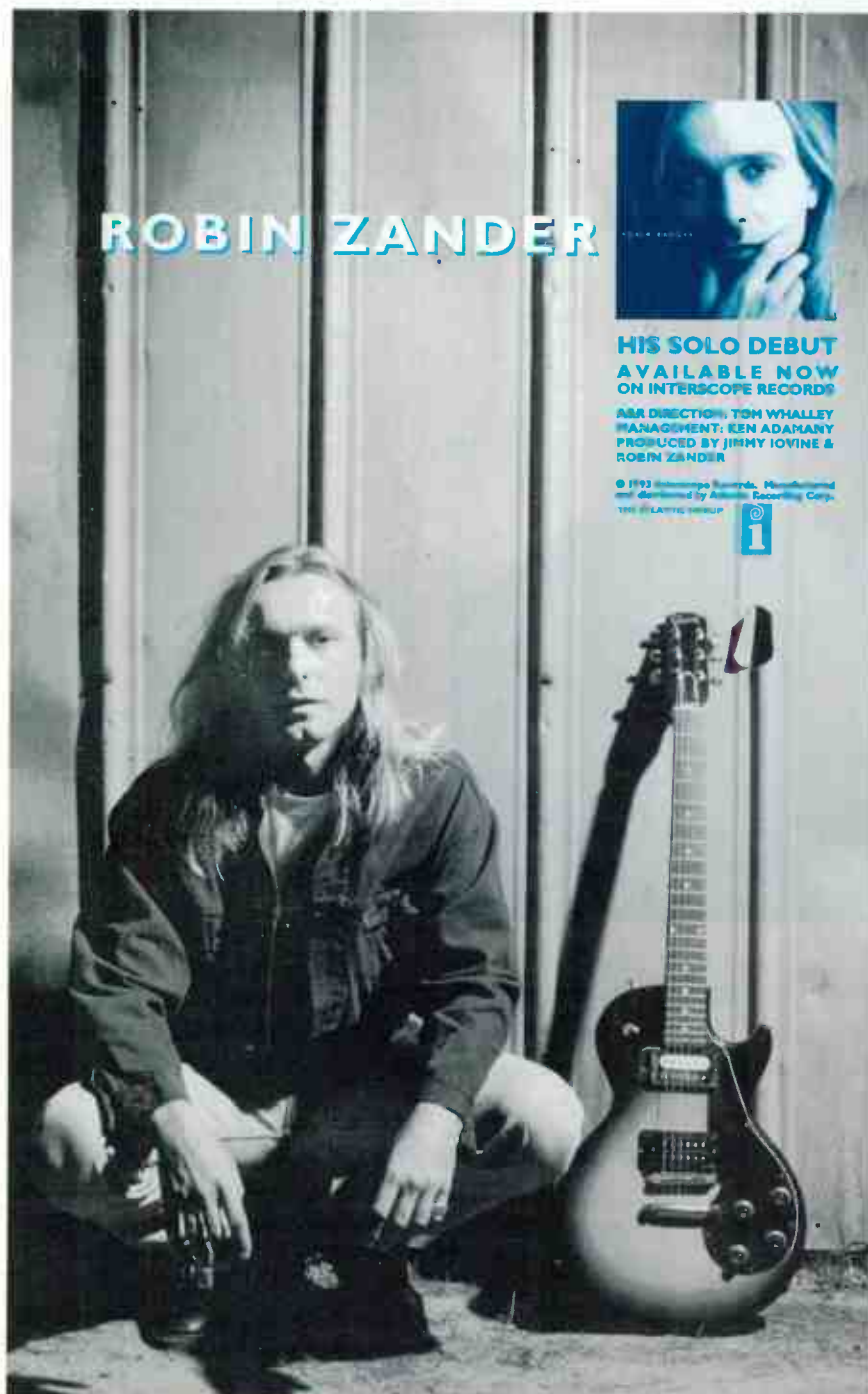
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, then your voice would be your life, you couldn't help but be confident with that kind of gift. Peter Gabriel's got this saying I like—'Don't play the game you can't win.' Another way of saying that is to show off your strengths." To record Robbie Robertson, Lanois set him front and center in the mix: "He's got what the voice-over guys call a real big *print*—you can't miss. So for lower-register deliveries like 'Somewhere Down the Crazy River' we just pushed to get that big intimate sound he has on tape. On the other end of the spectrum he has a nice falsetto. By maximizing what he's got, you build confidence. It's the same as a film director; if you have Jack Nicholson, you decide, 'Don't shoot him from across the room, let's close in on his mouth.'"

Lanois' fans and critics have remarked on his chameleon streak. Stack his records in with his clients and set the CD to random play, and both instruments and vocals commit musical miscegenation. The lifts are rarely actual (though some cricket noises Brian Eno put on tape years before ended up not only on Dylan's "Man in the Long Black Coat" but on a Lanois *Acadie* track) but the product of Lanois' canny ear and brain for what might be called organic sampling. A Bono visit to New Orleans, with the two colleagues jamming on melodies, resulted in the Bono-esque Lanois vocal on *Acadie*'s "Where the Hawkwind Kills."

Bono owed him. Adam Clayton recalls the final hours of recording *Unforgettable Fire*, when the record company was snarling for long-overdue product and Lanois was doing his last mixes. "We'd done that thing of working all through the night, we had the tapes ready at eight o'clock and they were all sequenced and ready to go off, and we were listening to it and Bono said, 'I'd love another crack at the vocals on "A Sort of Homecoming."'" Dan's taxi was waiting outside, he was waiting to get on the plane and deliver the tape to the mastering studio and everything, but he said, 'Yeah, do you mean that?' and Bono said, 'Well, if we had another few hours...' Dan just put the tapes back up, Bono sang it once, 'cause that was all the time we had. Dan said he'd mix it in London 'cause that was where he was going, grabbed the tape and ran out the door with it, and that was the last we saw of him for a couple years. But the track sounded great."

"I was literally going out the door," says Lanois, sighing, but with clear fondness. "I think he changed some lyrics too."

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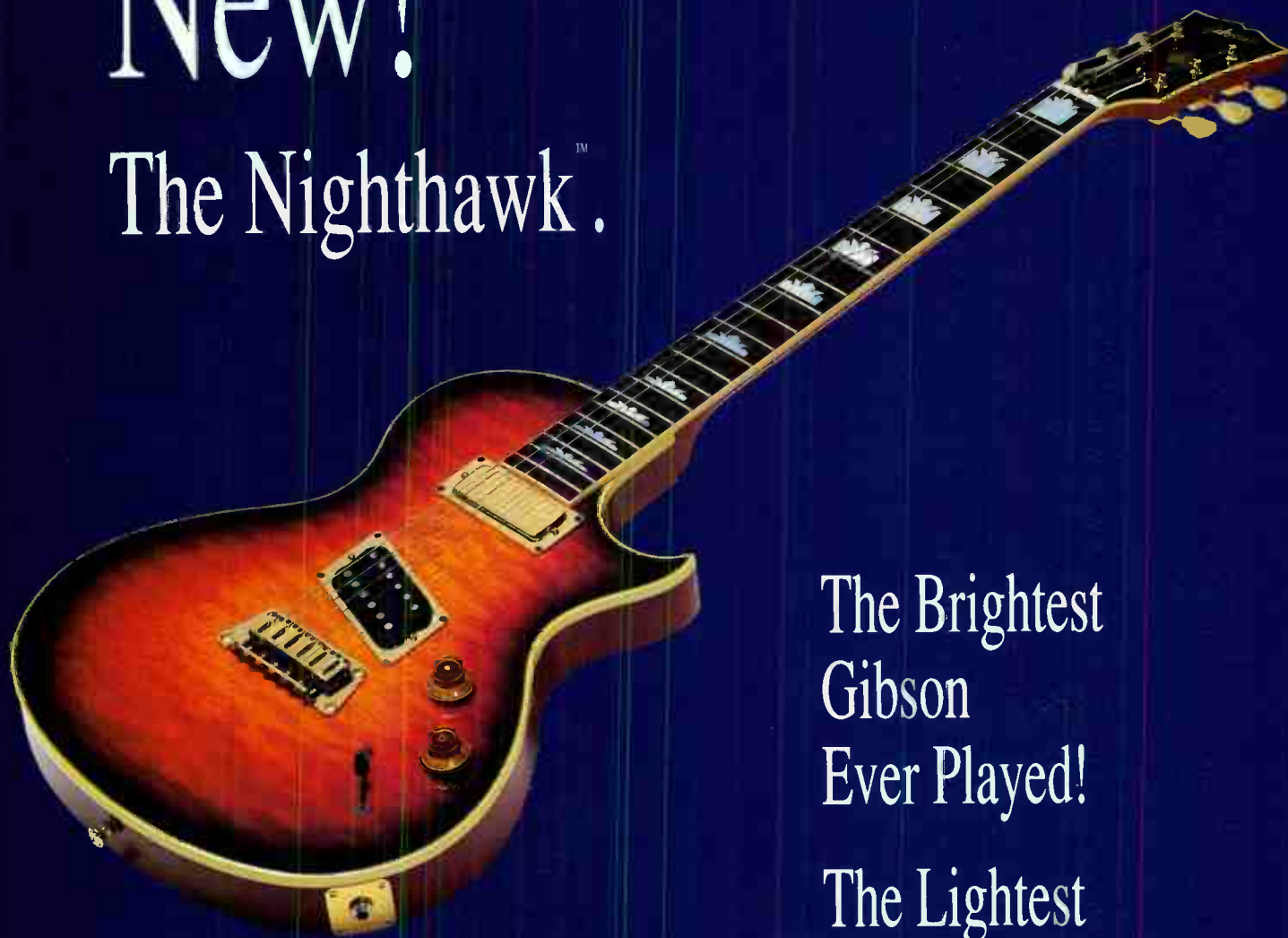
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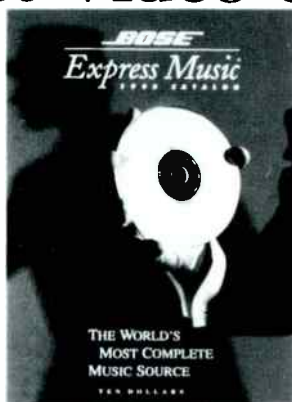
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all its clear strengths, is that it's clearly Lanois' own, right down to the title track's metaphors for artistry and its fine opening track, "The Messenger." The almost croaking vocal was the result of cutting it "with not a touch of reverb, at the end of a long workday, me pushing at the top of my range, Daryl singing in falsetto, both our voices blown out to this whiskey, tired sound, all defenses are down."

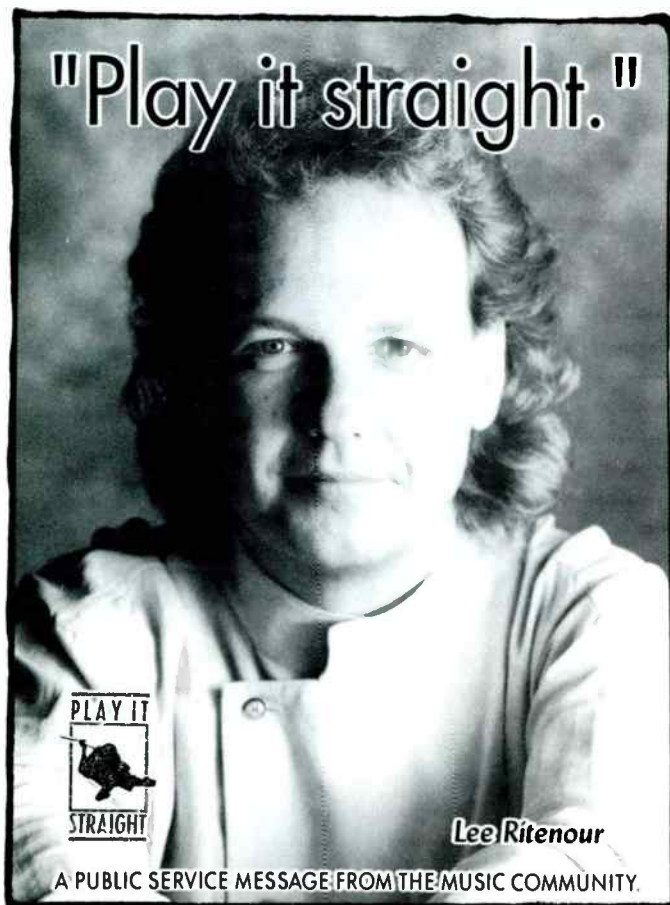
The song is "really a reminder that the things you're going after, searching for and imagining to exist in the future—some of those things already exist in your life, some of them are in the past, and maybe some of them are on the shelf, and they need to be pulled down from there."

As a practical matter, Lanois will be thinking this all through in his nomad mode—first on the road with *Wynonna*, then possibly at his apartment (not far from Eno's) in London. New Orleans may become not home, but a slot on his itinerary.

"I'm kinda ready to move on, to be honest. I've got friends and some musicians I enjoy working with here, and I feel like I've soaked in some good inspiration here—and also given some back."

This time, when he clacks the pool balls together, Lanois savors the sound for a second, and the youthful bones player and adult techno-wizard meet for a second in an artist's quietly beatified smile. 

"Play it straight."



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THE DEVIL'S BEDKNOBS

For guitar effects, LANOIS favors a Korg STD 300 ("Edge turned me on to this box a long time ago. I plug my guitar right into the front") with a variable output level: "I boost it up about 10 dB hotter—the amp is being driven a little harder." As an onstage backup he carries "a little Boss digital delay and this Mostortion—what a great name."

He uses either an old Fender Bassman tweed amp or a Vox AC30 ("a certain room will just like a certain amp") and is going on the road with his Fender Jazzmaster. After a long time playing a Telecaster, he switched to his rare '57 Strat for most of the solos on the *Wynonna* sessions, and will warily bring it on tour (bought for \$1500, it's now worth at least 10 times that). He also carries a beat-up old Martin 12-string, notable for its onboard amp and speaker: "I wanted to go into radio stations and have a little bit of an amplified sound without making too much of a fuss."

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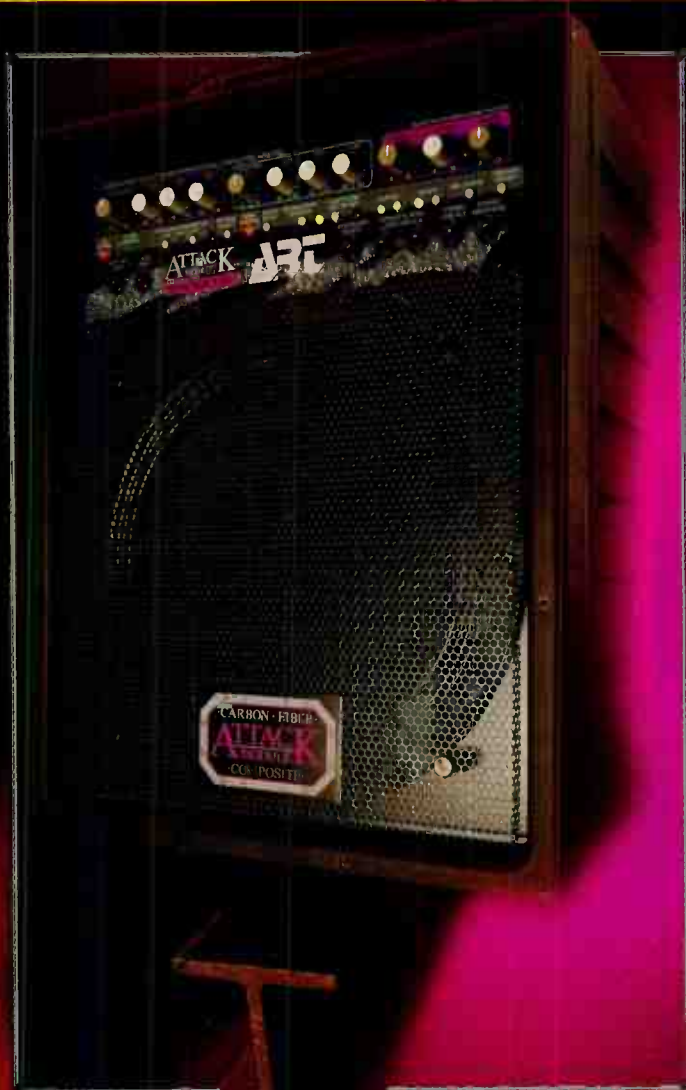
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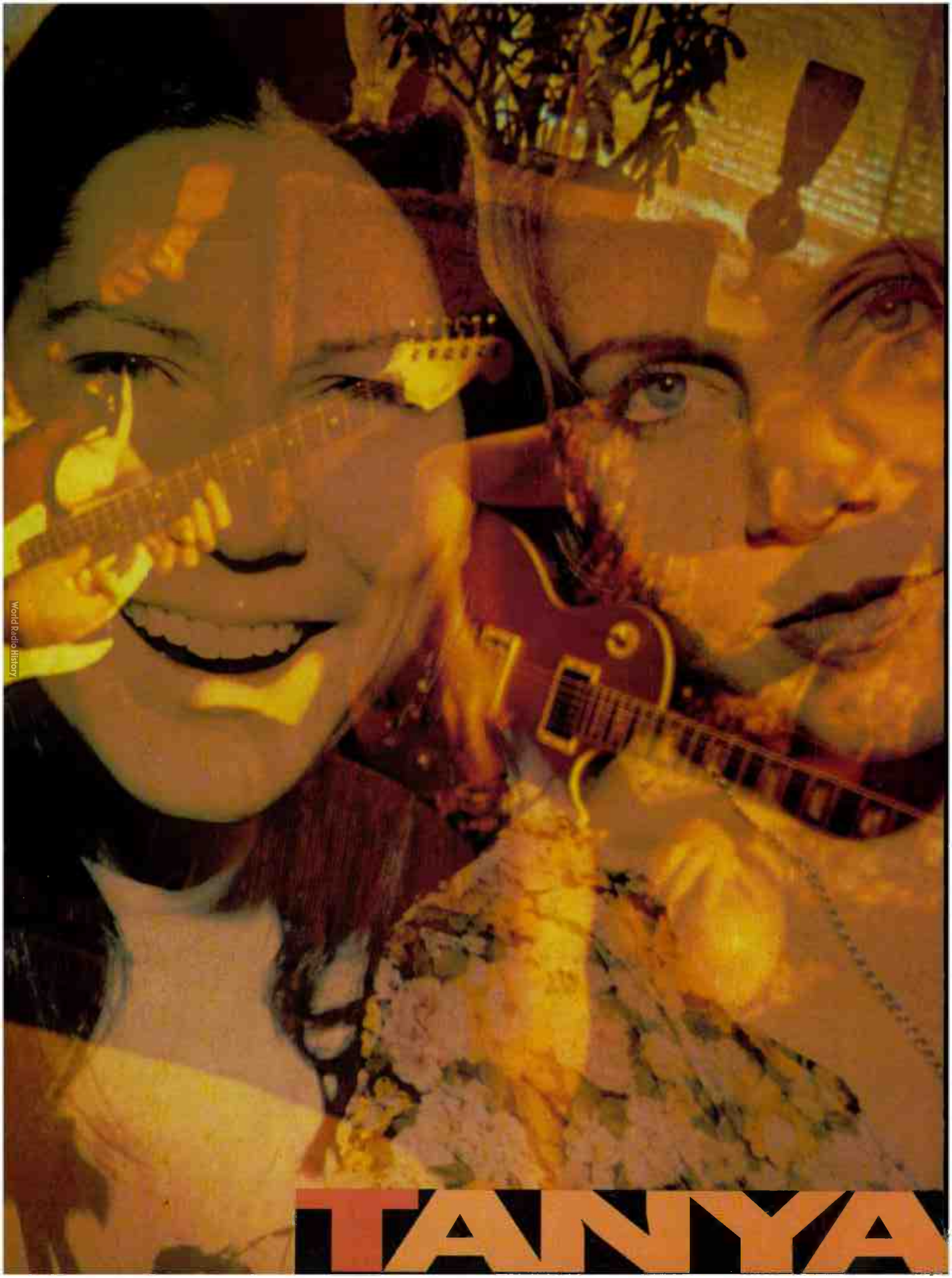


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TANYA

KIM DEAL



STROLL INTO the Dayton, Ohio, house shared by twins Kim and Kelley Deal on a muggy summer afternoon and step over a clutter of CDs, cracker boxes, papers, ashtrays and soda cans that warns you: These people party. It's 1:30, and you've woken the Deals up. Kim rolls a joint and pats black shoe polish over the gray in her hair. Kelley offers you a Mountain Dew from the two-door refrigerator in the eat-in kitchen with black and white floor tiles. The green lawn, the bathroom with pink and green ceramic, the wall-to-wall carpeting, the basement

where the band practices: The suburban America that punk once tried to tear apart has become the alternative nation's rec room.

The Deals grew up 20 minutes from here. And although Kim moved to Boston, became the bassist for the Pixies and toured the world, it's to here she's returned. And it's here, to a pizza parlor where dollar drafts drown hangovers, that she brings Tanya Donelly, current Belly leader and former Throwing Muses guitarist, for reminiscing, dissing and discussing.

Deal and Donelly have known each other ever since the Pixies and Muses used to share bills in Boston and Providence. A few years ago they started the Breeders, a then side-project that, since the breakup of the Pixies, has become Deal's main act. When Belly kept Donelly from making a similar commitment to the Breeders, Kim brought in Kelley—who'd never played guitar before—as a replacement. Earlier this year, Belly's *Star*, a collection of swirling fairy tales sung over guitar-laced pop, topped the alternative charts for longer than any record in history. The Breeders release their second album, the hook-driven *Last Splash*, on August 30.

Despite their shared past and easy slide into a goofy, gossipy groove, the Breeders' breeders couldn't be more different. In pink bloomers and a red ruffled tanktop, Donelly is unabashedly girlish, while Deal, fisherman's cap backwards on her head, Bud in one hand, cigarette dangling out of her mouth, plays the tomboy. Sitting on a wicker and a rocking chair in front of the Deals' house, they look like the perfect white-trash couple. But maybe Deal takes the caricature too far: Another joint later in the living room, she starts spewing nonsense. "Did you ever meet a black man who wasn't sexist?" she asks, to which Donelly and I reply a resounding yes. Time to leave those suburbs behind, Kim.



A CONVERSATION ABOUT BELLY, THE BREEDERS, THROWING MUSES, THE PIXIES, & ALTERNATIVES

BY EVELYN
MC DONNELL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JILL GREENBERG

DONELLY



ganda campaign and you need everybody involved to know, "Okay, this is my edgy album, I'm on the edge now, so everybody go for that." We just hand in another 10 songs and ask, "Do you like them?"

DONELLY: We went through a situation a while ago where people thought I should look more adult. Nobody ever said it, but it was like, "You look like a child in those pictures." They didn't even say that. They'd say, "We're going to redo the photo shoot because there's..."

DEAL: "...laws against that."

DONELLY: [laughs] They didn't want to attract the pedophile market.

DEAL: And did you redo the photos?

DONELLY: I did, actually. Because it was something that was discussed and I have the same problem with myself image-wise. I want to be an adult. I'm a 26-, going on 27-year-old woman, and I would like to be a grownup at this point in my life.

DEAL: No.

DONELLY: Yes, Kim.

DEAL: No. We had Elektra reject the "Safari" video.

DONELLY: Is that true? Why?

DEAL: 'Cause we weren't attractive. "Well," the director said—and he was probably right, they usually are—"people don't know what you look like. And this video, you could have done a really good one, but you did a really bad one. So let's just pretend it never happened." But we told him to go ahead and give it to them. And he did.

You have quite a story with your video. She did it in a redwood for-

est for "Feed the Tree." Were there nude people up in trees?

DONELLY: There were two naked people humping trees. A male and a female. It was people I never want to be in a room with again in my life. It was a 30-person crew; they called us the talent. We could have been a box of Cheerios for all they cared. First of all I said, "No models in this video." And they were, "No no no, these aren't typical models, they're exotic." What, they're black? And sure enough, they were dark-skinned and dark-haired. "We said no models! Let's just skip this whole day." We got talked into it, because they were going to "not look like models." The way it was described to us was they were going to lie on logs and the sunlight was going to go over parts of their body, but you couldn't really tell what was going on. It sounded pretty. But then we get the video and it's naked people holding trees. And then my face.

DEAL: So what did you say when you saw it?

DONELLY: We said, "Take it out."

MUSICIAN: Kim, you've said that you don't want to do a really expensive video and have to wear lipstick.

DEAL: It seems like the more money you spend on your album the more you have to pay back. If you spend a million dollars on your video, you'd better produce some sex in it somewhere. And there are certain triggers you can use sexually, men and women. A man can take off his shirt and show his tattoos, and grow his hair a little longer and look like a stud. That kind of thing sells way better. I like it better.

MUSICIAN: Then why don't you want to do it?

DEAL: Because it's stupid.

MUSICIAN: Tanya, your video was done expensively.

DONELLY: Yeah. It worked!

MUSICIAN: Do you feel like it was worth it?

DONELLY: Yeah, I do.

MUSICIAN: Because you decided to do some of the stuff Kim didn't.

DONELLY: It's not a matter of deciding.

DEAL: She does it anyway. She doesn't put lipstick on for a video.

DONELLY: I also don't put lipstick on for anybody. It's just something I've been doing since I was 15.

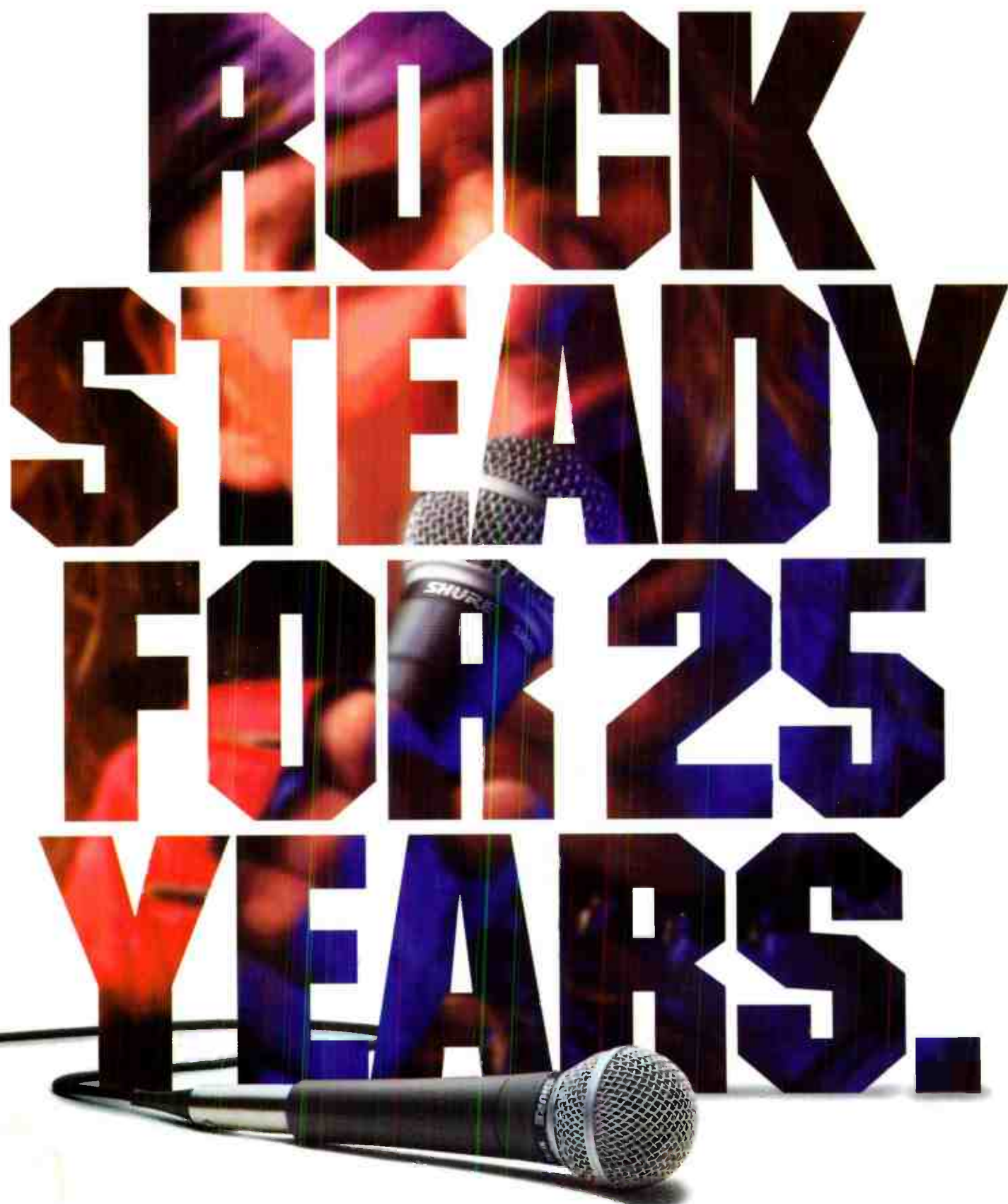
DEAL: And anybody can pick anything that they want. If they want to use certain triggers, they can. I just don't look good in lipstick.



MUSICIAN: Why did you call yourself "Mrs. John Murphy" on the first two Pixies records?

DEAL: That was just supposed to be funny. I was working in this doctor's office. On the East Coast, if you address some people by their first name, they'll say, "My name is not Ruth, it's Mrs. Herbert Steinsteen," or whatever. She'd use her husband's name for her identity. I just thought it was so cool. So I said, "Oh, I got married, I lost my

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identity, I'm Mrs. John Murphy now."

MUSICIAN: *Didn't you wear skirts?*

DEAL: I was a secretary. It was literally practical. I'd go from work to soundcheck. It really didn't matter. It's not like I needed to go home and get my spandex outfit.

DONELLY: Makeup is more deflection than attraction for me. I'm not going to deny that it comes from a mask impulse.

DEAL: Men's sexual tool isn't beauty, it's power and musculature.

DONELLY: I think physical standards hurt men and women. We have a lot of people in our

audience who are there because Gail [Greenwood] and I are...

MUSICIAN: *Blond women.*

DONELLY: Yes. Not the majority.

DEAL: So what do you do when you go to a Tom Jones concert? Why even apologize for it? There's a girl faction for Soul Asylum, Paul Westerberg.

DONELLY: You're right. In a way it's sad we can't enjoy the fact that we're getting attention paid to us because it's sexist. I'm a Riot Grrrl target right now because I wear makeup, because I smile. I'm really tired of justifying myself. First

of all, I've been doing this for 10 years, and fuck them on that level right away. And second of all, it is really unfair that it's been turned around to where there's a new set of rules. As opposed to having to do things that I'm not comfortable with, such as putting too much makeup on for pictures, now I have to do things I'm not comfortable with to please these other people.

DEAL: You should be able to do what you want to do.

DONELLY: And I always will.

DEAL: Your mom always tells you, "Be nice to guys, they're not too smart in social situations, help them out, don't make them feel embarrassed." So you do all this stuff to make them feel better. Now a new faction of people is saying, "We want you to do this to make *us* feel better." You might as well just be doing a pretty thing for boys. You're still changing your personality to fit somebody else's rules of social life. I need a list of the rules, I want them numbered, what I can and cannot wear, and what I can and cannot say.

DONELLY: I don't want to talk about them anymore. It always comes up and I always end up saying something I regret, out of insecurity and defensiveness. And it's always male journalists telling me, "The Riot Grrrls say this about you, what do you think?" So I don't even know if it's true they said it.

MUSICIAN: *And it's not as if the Riot Grrrls are a monolithic entity. I go to Riot Grrrl meetings. I went to one in New York after Belly played and this girl stood up and said how much she liked your show and how great you are.*

DEAL: People love talking about them, so they must have some good ideas.

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THE REEL DEAL

The Breeders practice in KIM DEAL's basement, where she conducts a tour of their equipment. "I usually go through the JCM 900, but Kelley bought a new Marshall cabinet, so now I let her use it and I use an old JCM head and cabinet. I also have a Peavey Classic 50. This is an old Sears Tremolo amp that we've pasted the word 'Marshall' on. Tanya used a Roland JC-120 on *Pod*. I mostly play a Seagull acoustic guitar that I distort through the amp. For electric, Kelley and I play a Les Paul and a Strat."

TANYA DONELLY: "I play a Les Paul and an SG, and a Takamine acoustic live. In the studio I play a lot of different things: I go through a Marshall JCM 800 head and cabinet. I use .011 D'Addario strings and a Boss chorus, overdrive and digital delay."

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DONELLY: They attack me personally. So I turn into a complete horror about the whole thing. It's really weak on my part.

DEAL: I thought they were supposed to show enlightenment, raise awareness. And sometimes it sounds more like they're making the choices for you.

DONELLY: But sometimes extreme situations are the only source of goodness. Their extremist view is a positive thing. I find it a weakness in my character that I'm so retaliatory.

MUSICIAN: *You did say you're not comfortable with your own image sometimes, and that you're not mature enough. And acting childish is a way men like women to act because it's nonthreatening.*

DONELLY: I don't act childish. If that's projected on me, that's not my fault. The main reason I have an image problem is that I'm imageless, so people can project whatever they want on me, which is too bad. Maybe I should be stronger about how I present myself. But the fact is, I don't think in terms of what the final result of a visual of me is going to be. It's not interesting to me.

DEAL: It's so true. You just see so many horrible images of yourself. We did two full days of press in New York, and we took picture after picture after picture. It got to the point where if they asked me to take off my clothes and run around the street I would, because I was completely immune. I would do anything, I had no backbone. You're right, the lack of thinking is the problem. It's your fault, really.

DONELLY: It is.

MUSICIAN: *Do you think about it, Kim?*

DEAL: About how bad I look in photos? Yeah. And how good I want to look, and what I'm going to do to help that next time? Yeah, probably. I've got my shoe polish on. Big artists have that all down. I saw the M.C. Hammer marketing program next to the Pixies' once. Ours was: We're going to do interviews for *Spin*, *Details*, *Alternative Press*. M.C. Hammer's: "The Pepsi commercial is debuting on the ninth, your cartoon is debuting on Saturday." Now that's a marketing plan!

MUSICIAN: *How would you two compare yourselves musically?*

DEAL: Here's a good story: [Breeders bassist] Josephine [Wiggs] was up visiting you guys while you were remixing a single, up in Liverpool. And she came in and said something like, "You can't hear the kick drum." And Tanya turned to her and said, "Josephine, there is no kick drum in pop music." It's so true too. In Metallica they have a lot of kick drum, and really bassy, low-end drums, to

make it more manly.

For "Saints," the kick drum's loud. But for "Divine Hammer," it's not. Usually in our songs we're bass/drums heavy. But that's good. Sometimes when you need to get it really loud, people just turn the guitars up, when really it's just the bass that needs to come up.

MUSICIAN: *Do you think you influenced each other as players?*

DEAL: When Tanya plays guitar, she'll say, "Okay, Kim, what do you think about this?" And she'll go *dah-dah-dah-wah-wah-boing-etc.* [mimics a wandering, wistful lead] I've never heard anything like it. Kelley had to learn some of your leads, and she was like, "What is she doing? What happened to dah-duh-dah?" It takes longer to understand where Tanya's going, but when you hear it, it's really good. She's got nonlinear playing. No one else plays like her. They couldn't try. They don't know what she's doing!

DONELLY: I learned a lot from you, especially structurally, as far as not being afraid of hooks. I used to avoid choruses.

DEAL: Tanya used to say, you can describe a Pixies or Breeders song like verse, chorus, verse, chorus, tag, verse, double chorus. That's basically any song, ever. And Tanya said, "Well, our music's kind of, intro, tag, break, break, tag, verse, tag, break, then intro again, break, verse..."

DONELLY: Outro. But then after the outro you come back to the...

DEAL: And it's true. I can't even learn a song like "Finished," because structurally it doesn't do anything I can understand.

MUSICIAN: *Where do you think you got this unique sense, Tanya?*

DONELLY: From not knowing how to play technically. Nobody taught me. And because I'm trying to be interesting to a certain extent, which sounds obnoxious. I learned how to play guitar in Throwing Muses with Kristin's songs, and Kristin's songs just kind of run their course.

DEAL: But there's no repeats.

DONELLY: And she's a very complicated guitar player. So playing in and out of her complications taught me how to play oddly.

MUSICIAN: *Do you find it hard playing with other bands?*

DONELLY: Yeah, in a way.

DEAL: That makes it good, though, and different.

DONELLY: I'm starting to get more of an appreciation for playing with people on a traditional level.

DEAL: "This is in A." "I don't care. You don't have to tell me what key it's in, it's not going to make any difference."

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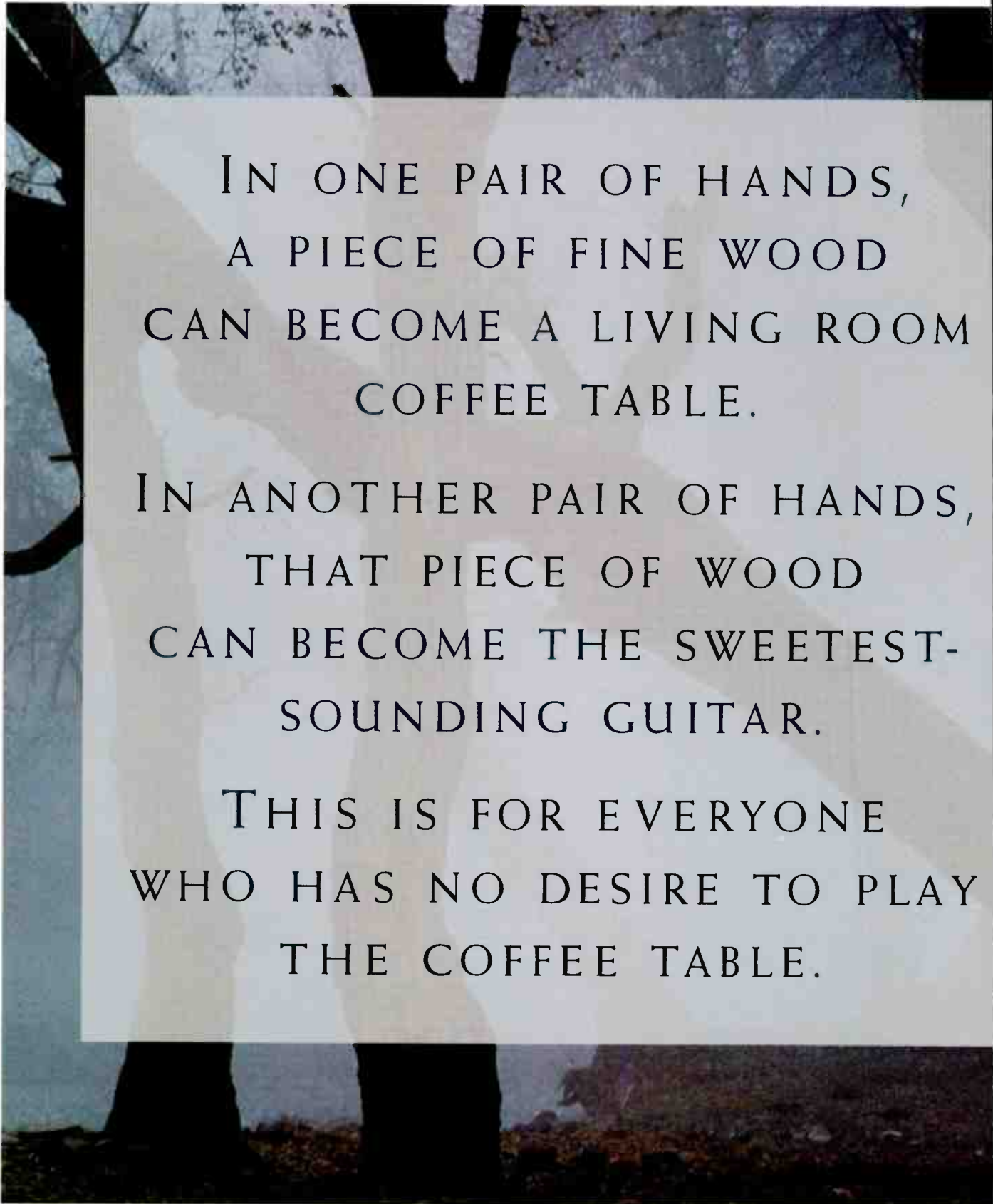


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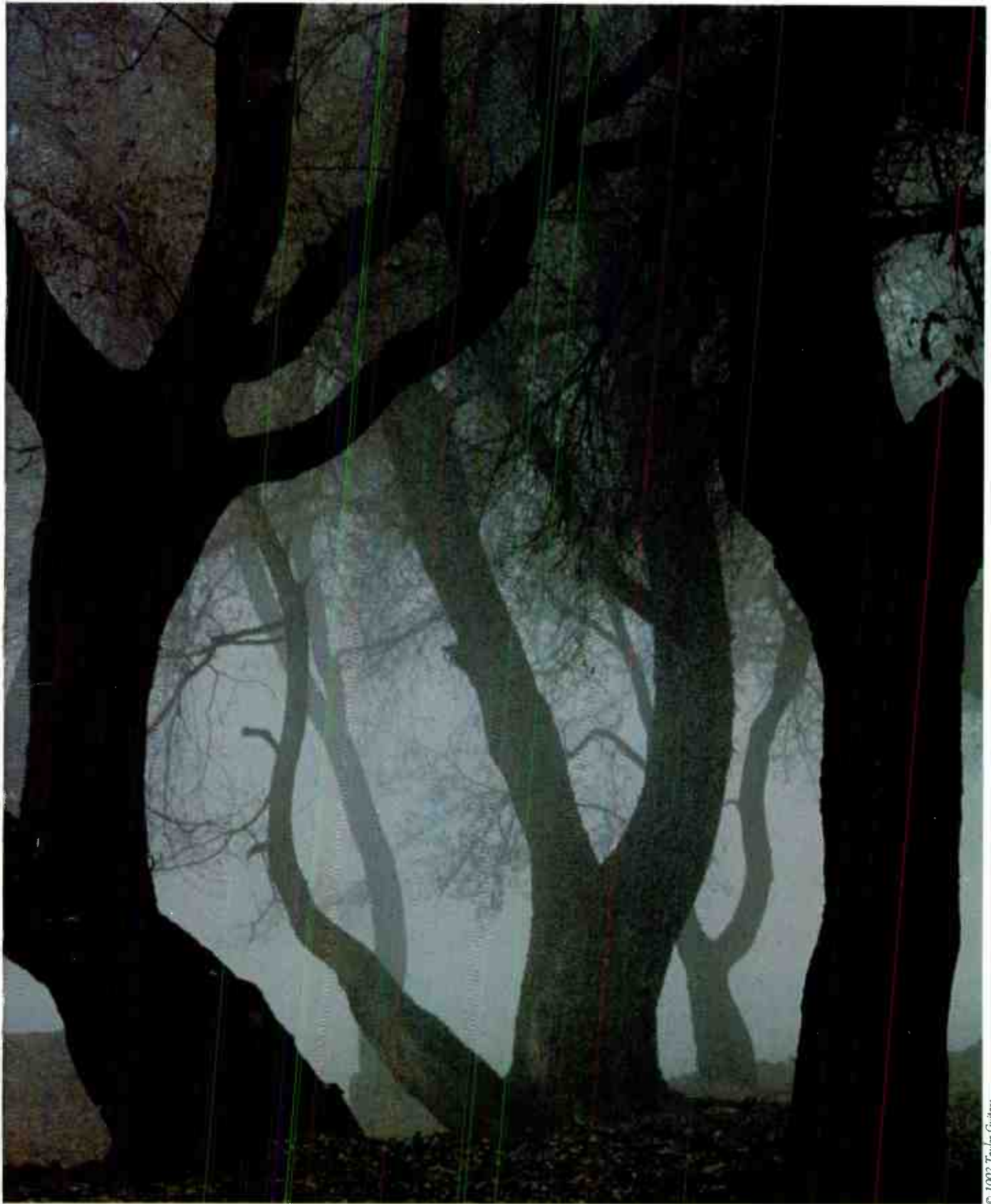


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THE RETURN OF steely dan

BY TOM MOON

THE NEW *Rolling Stone* arrives. Donald Fagen has heard that the review of his second solo album *Kamakiriad* is not totally favorable. He's just spent two hours with once and future cohort

Walter Becker deconstructing the myths that gather around Steely Dan like black clouds, so he's ready for a fight. He begins to read aloud.

"If the firmament of pop were a high school yearbook, Donald Fagen would qualify for either class beatnik or class nerd."

**Becker And
Fagen
Polish Up
Their Act**

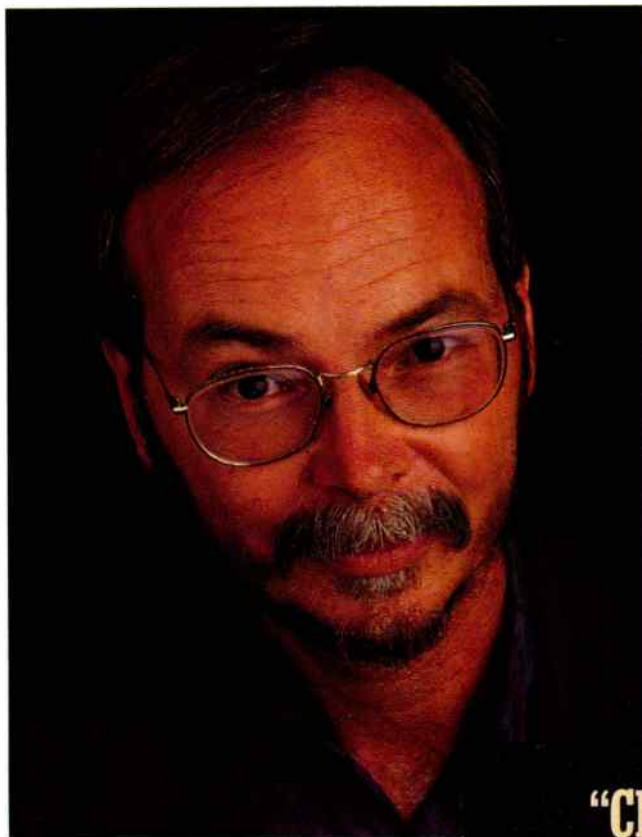
"Already a big mixed metaphor right there," he bristles. "Now am I up in the firmament or in the yearbook?"

He keeps reading. *"The futuristic song cycle suggests the fantasy of an overgrown kid who dreams of touring the galaxy in the coolest automobile ever built."* Did I ever go into space in the car? Do you remember that?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES HAMILTON



Becker looks on
as Fagen prepares to
be shot in his New
York apartment.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

"Charlie Parker? He played with us. He was just a sideman."

"The journey eventually takes him to the Florida Keys, where he fantasizes he's being murdered in 'On the Dunes.'" Now, how does he get from 'it was like a homicide' to being murdered?"

Ah, yes. It's been a while. Seems like decades since these acid-tongued bards of thinking-person's pop have had anything to gripe about. They're clearly aware of the adversarial volleys that are now part of the legend. And, after all, they're here to kick-start Steely Dan, to return one of the most bizarre success stories of the '70s to active status following a mysterious decade-plus absence.

Last summer, in one of rock's more curious turnabouts, the two artists who spent their stardom swearing they hated touring provided children of the '70s with something we were brought up knowing we'd never see: thousands of people on their feet, singing along with that resolution about never going back to "My Old School." Sure, it was part of the all-star New York Rock and Soul Revue, but so what? The band was roaring and the main men were serene, breathing fresh life into music they hadn't performed in nearly 20 years, if at all. And, wonder of wonders, they enjoyed it. Steely Dan stopped touring in 1974, victims of the bad-PA-opening-for-Slade grind. Evermore a studio band, they became known for wanting to control every guitar quip and cymbal crash. When keyboardist Fagen and guitarist/bassist Becker split after *Gaucho* in 1980, it was clear they'd worn the concept out.

Yet here they are. Back again, as Steely Dan. Fagen says he and Becker have talked about more collaboration, possibly a new Steely Dan studio album once Becker's solo debut gets finished. Drew Zingg, the guitarist and musical director for both the Rock and Soul

Revue and this summer's Steely Dan tour, says Fagen and Becker have had to come to grips with the lingering affection fans have for Steely Dan: "I don't think they quite understood the phenomenon, that people are fanatic about hearing this music," he said days after tickets for a Madison Square Garden show sold out in some 40 minutes. "He [Fagen] really took it cautiously, from the very first Rock and Soul gigs where he wouldn't sing at all. By the end of the tour last summer, I saw him really enjoying himself."

Zingg says the tour, which may be recorded for a live album, will be



CAN'T BUY A THRILL goes gold, 1973: Guitarists Jeff Baxter and Dennis Dias, drummer Jim Hodder, Becker and Fagen.

anything but nostalgic: "They want to open it up, have as much of an improvisational approach as possible. The band is geared toward that, and the only way these two will play some of the older things is to substantially rework them, rewrite the horn charts or something."

These days, rock artists enjoy an endless supply of second acts, and Unplugged comebacks. Even the least cynical in Steely Dan's audience must wonder about this: Not them,

too. Why, after all this time spent with a secure legacy, risk adding another verse? Why return now, at a time when the sons of the Dan (most recently Bruce Hornsby) find themselves hitless, when selections from *Kamakiriad* (it hurts to report) regularly turn up on jazz-lite radio, when intelligent pop is an oxymoron?

MUSICIAN: What made you do it?

FAGEN: Money. [laughing] Of course. I think my manager was trying to prove that this could be done in a way that wasn't too onerous. 'Cause all we had was memories of the early '70s, being for the most part an opening act, kind of rough road trips. I think one of the big things was that you could be comfortable enough so that you could actually play at night without having gone through this ballistically bruising traveling.

BECKER: What we did last summer made clear to us that this whole procedure of traveling around with rock 'n' roll bands and playing concerts for people has evolved considerably.

FAGEN: In a really scientific manner.

BECKER: And the other thing I saw, which I guess Donald had already experienced in his previous...

FAGEN: ...life...

BECKER: Live performances. What were you in your previous life?

FAGEN: Remember in the movie *The Egyptian*, the architect who built the pyramids?

BECKER: That was you?

FAGEN: Yes.

BECKER: What was I saying? At those shows I was reminded of the fact that there was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for hearing this music performed live. Throughout the Rock and Soul shows, practically everything that we did was really well-received, but there was a certain segment of the audience who were saving themselves for the Steely Dan songs. There was a real demand for it.

MUSICIAN: *Why now?*

FAGEN: A lot of it has to do with having some new material: the *Kamakiriad* record, the fact that Walter's got some new material of his own. If it was just us going out doing Steely Dan material, I'd have to think a lot harder about doing that. Even with rearranging them and so on, there's still the same element of nostalgia that I'm really not interested in.

MUSICIAN: *How do you feel about playing arenas?*

BECKER: We did at least one arena last year, the Spectrum in Philadelphia. While it was kind of weird-sounding onstage, it actually sounded good out in the hall.

FAGEN: We played at Madison Square Garden when we were with Jay and the Americans, on this big oldies show, and that wasn't bad.

BECKER: Hugo lost his tambourines and shakers, you remember that, it was a tragedy. We played there twice—once it was in the round—and that sounded pretty good. And those were pretty harmonically sophisticated, rhythmically precise arrangements we had with Jay and the Americans. "Our Day Will Come" sounded great.

Fagen and Becker as show-biz kids—"I'm the architect who built the pyramids."



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

MUSICIAN: *What's your recollection of the 1974 Steely Dan tour?*

BECKER: I don't think I was making any memory tracks by the end of that tour. Luckily there were a few recordings. The band was young, and there was a lot of medication of various types going on—as was generally found in the day. Of course, the audience was much more medicated than the band could ever afford to be. There were all sorts of interesting musical and personal clashes going on onstage. There was a core band there—five guys, right—that was about to disinte-

grate. It was loud, and guitar-heavy...

FAGEN: We were getting pretty good by the end of the run, when Mike McDonald joined the band, Jeff Porcaro—we had two drummers. It started to have a rich sound to it, in a way. And we had a lot of energy, so we'd play everything really fast.

BECKER: It was frightening up there on those stages.

FAGEN: We just wanted to get it over with.

BECKER: What we were lacking in precision we were hoping to make up in enthusiasm.

MUSICIAN: *What were the clashes?*

BECKER: The overall problem was Donald and I not wanting to tour in a bigger league at all. And the other guys in the band, particularly as they were being sort of phased out of the record-making, all they *wanted* to do was tour. It seemed to us like, "Why should we be doing this when it doesn't really help us make records? In fact, it seems to detract from it by using up a lot of time and energy." And it seemed to them like, "Here we are, we're finally in a position to do what we've always wanted to do, we can make some money, make some new friends in every town, and why aren't these guys letting us do it?" It was ultimately an irreconcilable difference.

FAGEN: Also the band was put together very quickly. It was while we were making the first album, we'd never played together before, and the record came out and we were expected to tour. So we went out. Also it was a matter of musical and personal style clashes. We had a pretty good idea of the sort of thing we wanted, and some of these guys, although they were good rock 'n' roll players, couldn't handle this different universe. It wasn't as if there was much of a power struggle—they liked all our tunes and they were willing to take direc-

"It's just like the old days—they think we invented jazz chords."



STONE PIANOS

FAGEN recorded *Kamakiriad* at River Sound, the studio he co-owns with Gary Katz in New York, and at WALTER BECKER's Hyperbolic Sound in Hawaii. The album was tracked on Sony 48-track digital machines; River Sound's board is an old Neve, Hyperbolic's a Soundcraft. A Neumann TLM-71 microphone was used for vocals. "I guess I made three trips to Hawaii," Fagen recalls. "We were doing vocals and technical stuff. At one point I did ship a Rhodes out there, but most of the keyboards were done in New York."

Fagen used a Yamaha six-foot acoustic piano and one of his stable of 76-key Rhodes electrics. He says he's still having trouble adjusting to "the digital aesthetic": "A record made with synthesizers sounds like your head is in some sort of clamping device. It's out of tune. A piano tuner 'stretches' the top and bottom of the piano to account for the fact that the extremes are going to be a little off. They're starting to put the stretch technology in synthesizers, but you still get weird-sounding harmonics. And as you overdub, there's an increasing tuning clash."

So Fagen avoided synthesizers except for the string parts on "On the Dunes," which came from "this funny Roland thing that looks like a refrigerator. It has two piano sounds and a string sound—I think it's designed for your living room."

For Becker, the 48-track storage meant that he and Fagen could maintain a creative flow for much longer than on previous projects: "With a 24-track machine, pretty soon you only have three or four tracks, then the performance is stopped and you've gotta start to edit. With 48, you don't sit there and judge everything. You keep going because there are any number of empty tracks."

Becker says the vocal tracks required an average amount of time. "They pretty much just came out. The playing room is in a separate building from the control room, so Donald was all by himself. He's very consistent from take to take. He has the vocal well-defined in his mind, so even after working on it for a while, his performances still had the character he wanted."

Becker's Strat-style guitar is a patchwork: body by John Carruthers, neck by Jim Tyler, a Floyd Rose vibrato, Seymour Duncan pickups. The instrument was recently tweaked by Roger Sadowsky. Strings? .010s, but he disavows all knowledge of brand: "I always try to weasel out of actually changing the strings." His bass is by Jim Crawford at Carruthers' shop.

On tour Fagen plans to play electric piano; Becker will play guitar. DREW ZINGG, the guitarist and musical director, plays a custom Pensa-Suhr, with neck specs from a Gibson 335. He uses D'Addario strings and a reconfigured Fender Princeton amp.

BOB SHEPPARD uses a Selmer Mark XI tenor sax with a Hollywood Dukoff mouthpiece, and a Yamaha YSS-62 soprano with a Francois Louis mouthpiece; he likes La Voz Medium reeds. Bob also uses a Yamaha bass clarinet and 881 flute, and a Gemeinhardt alto flute. CORNELIUS BUMPUS has a Selmer Super 80 tenor with an Otto Link hard rubber mouthpiece and La Voz medium reeds; his Selmer Super 80 soprano has a Selmer metal mouthpiece and Rico Royal #31/2 reeds. He also uses a Haynes flute. TOM BARNEY uses two basses from The Bass Shop—an ESP four-string and a Music Man Stingray five-. Strings? Dean Markley Magnums and Supers. PETER ERSKINE uses Yamaha Maple Custom Vintage drums—bass and five toms; he alternates between a S1/2x14 and a 4x12 snare. He uses Zildjian cymbals and Vic Firth sticks. WARREN BERNHARDT will use a Yamaha C7 on the road. Fagen will play a suitcase-model Rhodes.

MUSICIAN: *But are you happy with the records?*

BECKER: You mean without actually playing them? I manage to live with them as long as no one plays them. Through the years we were more and more able to accomplish what we were trying to do without sounding too amateurish. On the other hand, in isolated examples, some of the stuff on the early albums is just as good as the stuff on the later albums. On the early albums, the things that were more ambitious didn't come off as one might have hoped, and still sound that way. Although it's kind of charming that we were trying to do some of the things we were trying to do—you get points for that. To tell you the truth, some things from the first album that were successful were as good as anything else we did, and what they lacked in polish they made up for in other ways.

MUSICIAN: *Those obscure lyrics have become touchstones for people, in ways you could never have intended.*

BECKER: We were probably just taking the cheap way out with these evocative little names for places or people that we used.

FAGEN: Some of them were real people.

BECKER: It was subjective and stylized in a way that lends itself to the type of thing you're talking about, or to William Gibson naming bars in his books after Steely Dan songs. We were throwing out a lot of little names and places that made it possible to enter the songs. I think it's great up to and including Steely Dave's. It kind of adds to the myth.

MUSICIAN: *Steely Dave's?*

BECKER: One of Donald's uncles was going to open a bar.

FAGEN: Actually it was my Uncle Dave. He had this bar in Dayton. The bar was going belly-up, and he called me and asked if he could change the name to Steely D's. Dave, you're down there in Florida now—in the long run it was better you got out of the bar business. You even sold the beer and wine drive-through warehouse.

MUSICIAN: *"Hey Nineteen" is more prescient than it was when it came out. You guys are part of something that happened a generation back.*

FAGEN: The sequel's gonna be "Hey 34." It's just like the old days—they think we invented jazz chords.

BECKER: That of course adds a lot to the myth—those jazz chords. Remember that, upstairs at Minton's Playhouse?

FAGEN: Yeah, we were great.

BECKER: We'd come up there after our regular gig...

FAGEN: ...and explore some of the upper intervals of the chords.

BECKER: Charlie Parker, man? He played with us. He was just a side-man, brother.

MUSICIAN: *Walter, you're working on your first solo album. Donald has established a certain territory connected to but apart from Steely Dan, with his two solo projects. Do you have to avoid certain things?*

BECKER: I don't feel any compunction about that. But as a practical matter, because I was working alone and I don't have the harmonic ability, the compositional ability, and some of the other technical abilities Donald has, it's basically me and a sequencer for most of these songs. A couple of them are guitar-based, but most were written like that. I realized very early on that I should not necessarily try to maintain any particular high level of harmonic sophistication, because it's just not possible for me to do that without a lot of work. So I started writing things that were simpler and more accessible to me with the skills that I did acquire over the years, which are spotty. For all the years I was writing with Donald, I didn't have to worry about learning the chord voicings or anything, because Donald already knew all that. The things I have that may sound different or simpler harmonically than Steely Dan things are a product of the fact that it's just me writing. I didn't have Donald's ability in that area. But there are similarities—I



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David Lowery splits up his fab college/alternative band Camper Van Beethoven and tells the press he'd been "getting really tired of alternative music." Then—after listening to personal high school faves like the Stones, ZZ Top and Little Feat—he forms a new band called

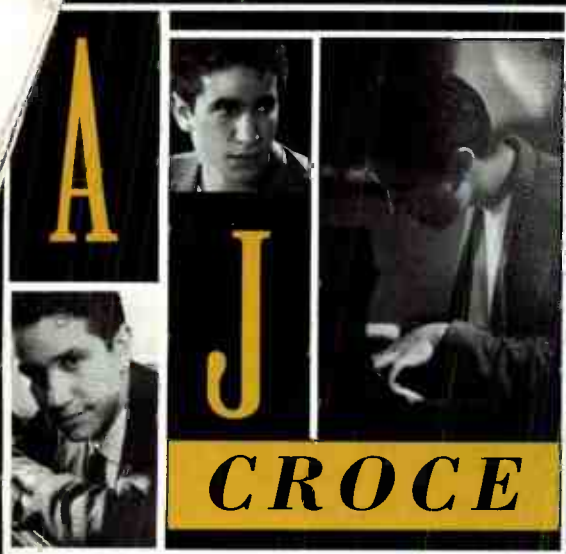
Cracker that plays, in his words, white-boy rock, soul, country and country blues. They make a record and it's...an alternative smash. The cutting edge: It's so darn sharp.

But to Lowery's credit, the last thing anyone's going to think upon hearing Cracker's simply terrific second album will be the words "career move." *Kerosene Hat* is well-produced, sure—but unlike so many other bands, the group's choice of producer (again they've

opted for Don Smith) almost doesn't even matter. In the same sense that no two early Little Feat songs sounded alike but you knew it was them, that *Sticky Fingers* and *Tres Hombres* were stylistic romps by utterly recognizable bands, Cracker has that indefinable spark that money, producers and limitless session players alone can never provide. These songs and this playing would exist regardless of who pressed what buttons.

Kerosene Hat may be the year's

most important rock 'n' roll album simply because it shows that the genre hasn't died of overuse—and, more importantly, that it doesn't deserve to. Respect, not ridicule, for the past shines through on every track, no matter how varied the source. And the sources do vary—from the expected Stones, Feat and ZZ to Captain Beefheart (title track lyrics: "Here comes old kerosene hat/With his earflaps waxed"), T. Rex ("Get Off This") and, hypothetically, Tom Petty



"Considering he's only 21, it's understandable that people are surprised to discover how gifted A.J. Croce is as a pianist, singer, songwriter and band-leader whose musical abilities belie his age."

--- George Varga, San Diego Union-Tribune

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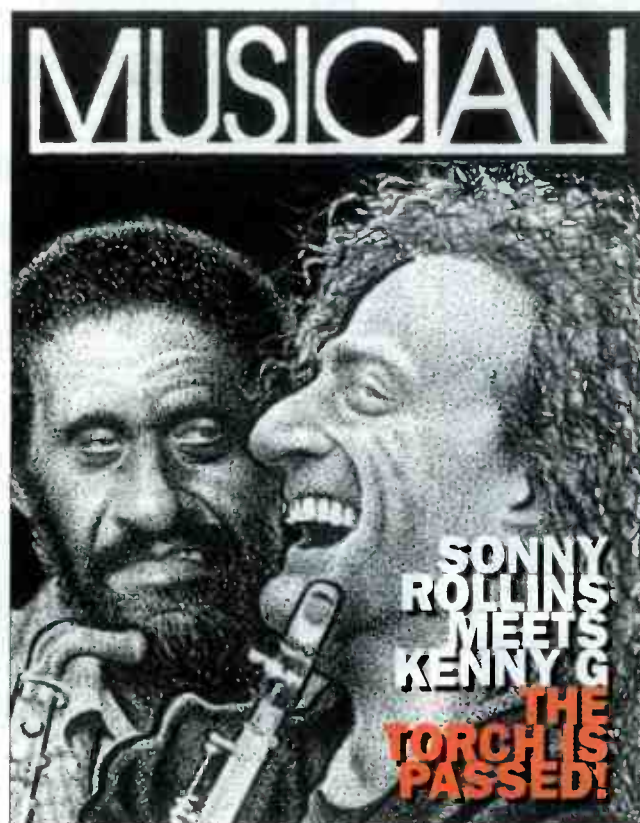
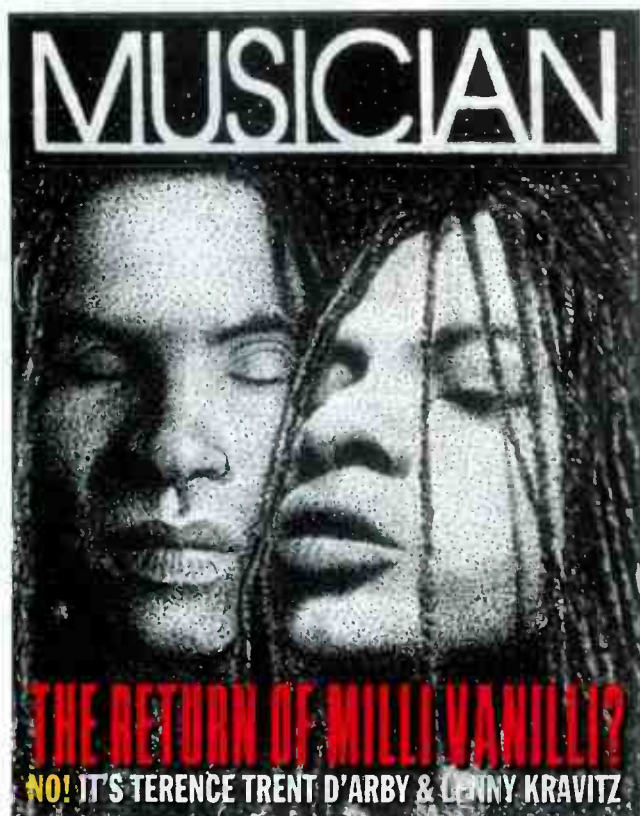
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Produced by Eliza Gilkyson & Tony Gilkyson

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