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R.E.M.'s Stipe, Mills, Berry, Buck: It's the feeling, the mood, that counts.

R.E.M.: Shadows And Murmurs

By Jim Sullivan

BOSTON—Talk about rock 'n' roll bands—their public images and their music—and certain adjectives jump up and wave their hands in the air. Say the Clash and pretty quickly you get to “political.” Mention the Cramps and “voodoo rockabilly” comes tagging along.

Talk about R.E.M., yet another fine band from Athens, Georgia, and these sort of words sift to the forefront: Oblique. Hazy. Vague. Look at the cover of their debut LP, *Murmur*—a dark, murky, monochromatic shot of dried kudzu, a vine indigenous to the south. Listen to the music and think of what you remember from the songs—you come up with these gorgeous, hook-laden, minor-key melody lines sticking in your brain accompanied by lyrical snippets (and responses) like these—“Talk about the passion” (Which passion? Where?); “Box-cars, pulling out of town” (Why? Where are they going? Why is this important?); “Gardening at night” (a rock song about gardening?! at night?!); “House in order . . . wolves at the door” (Oh.) Fragments, shadows, murmurs.

This is confusing.

“Good,” says R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe, with a pleased, mission-accomplished tone.

We're sitting in a Boston apartment, Stipe, R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck and myself, following a gig the band has done with the English Beat. Buck and Stipe are comfortable as band spokesmen; bassist Mike Mills and drummer Bill Berry, at the moment out at a club, are quite content to let these guys do the hypothesizing. Buck shoots from the hip—“If you don't have a healthy contempt for most aspects

of the music business, you're a moron.” Stipe is generally more restrained, but both share an abhorrence for rock trends and critical categorization, and they bounce off each other as longtime friends and bandmates can do so well.

Buck: “I never say anything I don't mean and if it embarrasses me later on I don't care.”

Stipe: “Bullshit.”

Buck: “No, I get embarrassed all the time, but I would never retract anything I said.”

We've tackled the obligatory pop star stuff (Favorite dinosaurs? “Stegosaurus” for both. Former employment? “Toilet cleaner, dishwasher and record store clerk”—Buck; “I put lawn fertilizer on rich peoples' lawns”—Stipe). Now we're zeroing in on the Big R.E.M. Puzzle: what is this addictive, hypnotic, moody, uplifting—but damn it, lyrically abstruse—band all about? Or, put more specifically to frontman Stipe, what does he think an audience thinks about him—i.e., the singer and communicator of tangible ideas—on stage?

“What do they have to think about me?” he responds. “They come to a club, they like the way I move, they like the way I sing, they maybe get some feeling out of what we do. What more do they need?”

Let's pursue the feeling route.

“If it makes them sad, fine. If it makes them happy, fine. If it makes them elated, fine,” says Stipe.

Stipe's not trying to be evasive here. But what he's getting to is R.E.M.'s disavowal of, well, what really is a major part of pop mythology. To wit: When you get up on stage or make a record you're using your music as a vehicle for your heartfelt passions, political, person-

al, what have you. Rock 'n' roll is where the battles are fought and sometimes (in song anyway) resolved; where one person's solitary experience becomes an audience's.

“I'm not willing, and the whole band is not willing,” says Stipe, “to throw a diatribe at anybody. Nobody cares, or nobody would care, about where I stand politically or socially or what my love life is like.”

Why wouldn't they?

“Who wants to hear it from me? I'm not some great genius.”

“Without sounding too arty,” adds Buck, “we're making something that's very personal. It's got to be very personal. No matter how many times radio programmers or the record company says, ‘Gee, if you could understand the lyrics more or if they made more linear sense you'd sell more records,’ I just say screw it. We're just in it to do what, to us, comes naturally and this is natural.”

“I have no great story to tell,” Stipe picks up. “No great anecdotes. None of us do.”

Stipe catches himself. Actually, R.E.M. has a lot of anecdotes to tell—Buck stripping down to his undershorts and soaping himself up in the rain during R.E.M.'s first New York City visit in 1980; Mills nearly getting his eye cut out in a drunken fight; strip searches on the way into Canada; getting insulted by a drunken Lester Bangs at a party for Pylon.

But as for storylines, revelations and politics in songs and all that . . . “That's what coffeehouses are made for and that's what coffee-tables are made for,” says Stipe. “If you want to talk about politics or your love life or social problems or what it's like to live in 1983, then you should do it somewhere other

than on the stage.”

But (back to the aforementioned myth) isn't that what pop music is all about, to bring those personal things to the stage?

“Well, screw it then. I don't have a thing to do with it.”

No surliness intended. Because what R.E.M. does have a lot to do with is mood and texture, sounds that soothe and sting; Stipe thinks a lot of it would make good background music to films. When Buck is asked about pop's potential to provide some kind of emotional resonance and pull people through mundane life, he says, “If we could ever do that, that'd be great.”

All of R.E.M.'s recordings—the initial “Radio Free Europe” single, the *Chronic Town* EP, the *Murmur* album—have been cut with North Carolina producing ace Mitch Easter (Bongos, Beat Rodeo, dBs) who has helped shape their direct-but-murky sound. “Real cheap and in the next state,” chuckles Stipe, when asked about their decision to work with Easter. He quickly adds he loves Easter's approach, which on *Murmur* is slightly more straightforward. That is, the hazy description posed earlier might be amended to semi-hazy.

Their name, R.E.M., comes from the scientific term (rapid eye movement) for the deepest, most vivid stage of dreaming. The connection is not difficult to make—dreams wander and drift, they can be clear or disjointed, familiar or frightening. Or those qualities can become tangled. Stipe's fleeting thoughts flit in and out of Buck's swirling, textural passages and jangling leads, anchored by Mills and Berry.

“Emotion,” says Stipe, when he

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The New Spirit Of Oz Rock

By Christie Eliezer

SYDNEY, Australia—As the studio audience at the Sydney Capitol Theatre cheers and rises to its feet, the cameras zoom in tight on the face of the new Australian Prime Minister, Robert Hawke. Speaking via video relay from his official residence, The Lodge, Hawke announces Men at Work as winners in the Outstanding Achievement category of the 1983 Countdown awards, Australia's equivalent of America's Grammys.

Backstage a few minutes later, the Men's Greg Ham admires the trophy and chuckles. “It really is quite exciting, you know, because above all Men at Work are an Australian band and this is an Australian award. My parents will be pleased for me, because—”

He stops in mid-sentence, rolls his eyes and with perfect timing delivers the punch line: “No, wait a minute!”

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Rod Starts World Tour; No U.S. Dates Until 1984

OAKLAND, Ca.—Rod Stewart has embarked on a seven-month world tour in support of his new album, *Body Wishes*, but he won't be appearing anywhere in North America until some time in 1984.

The tour began May 26 in Luxembourg, winds through 12 European countries, Israel, South Africa, Australia, Southeast Asia, and Japan, and then ends with a three-day stand in Hawaii. Most of the venues are outdoor facilities with capacities in the 30-50,000 range; these concerts will be played before a 180-foot-long “painted lady,” a Vargas-style reclining female in a

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Rod Stewart

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On Stage

IN THE MIDST of his first tour in five years, Marvin Gaye's hitting some decidedly weird grooves. An Atlanta reporter finds him stopping the proceedings "to go to the bathroom," sending flashlight-toting security guards into the orchestra pit searching for a lost diamond and singing... great. Also reviewed: Roxy Music, and Martha and the Muffins. 30

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LETTERS

Journey

I AM, AS A RULE, NOT ONE to complain. But you broke my heart by printing Crispin Sartwell's review of the new Journey album (May RECORD). This is a tender subject with me, because I'm a proud, true fanatic Journey fan.

Tell me something: if Steve Perry sounds like amplified mosquito torture; if Neil Schon drives the melodies into the ground; and Jonathan Cain's keyboard solos are bloated, why is this album climbing to number one on the charts?

May I suggest you crawl back into your cereal box, where someone with a name like Crispin belongs, and listen to *Frontiers* for three more days and try to hear it as we hear it. Journey has put something into my life—they saved it!

LINDA HUMMEL
Sunbury, Pa.

Orff, Orff

I AM A MEMBER OF THE music composition faculty here at the Eastman School of Music; I also teach the school's rock history course and have been an interested reader of RECORD since its inception. In general I have much enjoyed the magazine (whether I agreed with its opinions or not), but Mark Mehler's recent article on Ray Manzarek's Orff project (May RECORD) is so full of errors, misstatements and inaccuracies that I feel I must object.

No doubt Mr. Mehler is highly knowledgeable on rock subjects, but I fear he typifies too many rock writers in being totally confused when faced with commenting upon classical music; never have I seen so many mistakes in such a short piece! First of all, Orff's *Carmina Burana* is most assuredly not a sym-

phony, as Mr. Mehler states not once but three times. Indeed, the work is about as far from a symphony as it possibly could be—Orff himself called it a set of "profane chants" for the stage, though I suppose the term "cantata" could be applied to it as well. But it most certainly has nothing to do with the symphonic genre! Secondly, Orff did not "fashion the symphony from the chants of 13th century renegade monks"; rather, he took the poetry of certain goliard poets (some of whom *may* have been monks) and composed his own music to them—whatever music the original poets may have composed to accompany these texts had no effect on Orff's own music. Next, Mr. Mehler quotes Manzarek as having replaced Orff's "implied pulse" with electric bass, drums and keyboards. Could this be a misquote? There is a constant and very strong *real* pulse in Orff's original, hardly an implied one. And how does the use of bass, drums and keyboards *establish* a pulse anyway? Pulse and instrumentation have no intrinsic relationship whatsoever. Mr. Mehler also says that Manzarek made a few chord changes but then goes on to say that Manzarek has remained faithful to Orff's "notes and time signatures." I cannot understand how one can change chords and yet remain faithful to notes, for what are chords but superimposed notes? You can't change harmonies and simultaneously be true to pitches. And as for being faithful to time signatures, time signatures are merely organizational timeposts for the performer, not audible phenomena. Manzarek could have changed Orff's time signatures without any audible difference in the musical presentation.

I am writing neither to express a *priori* criticism of Manzarek's proj-

ect nor to embarrass Mr. Mehler. Rather, I hope to bring to your attention the woeful ignorance of many rock writers when it comes to twentieth century "classical music." I hope to have alerted you to the fact that writers in any field should know what they're talking about before setting typescript to paper.

CHRISTOPHER ROUSE
Rochester, NY

Tape vs. Records

AFTER READING DAVID Gans' article on cassette tapes versus records (May RECORD), I decided to try a pre-recorded cassette. (I had not bought a pre-recorded cassette in many years.) I borrowed a friend's cassette of Men at Work's *Business As Usual* and compared it to the disc. I'm sorry, David, but there really was no comparison. Much of the high end is gone on the cassette, and the mid-range punch is very muted.

I agree with much of what you said in the article, but you were talking about the "possibility" of pre-recorded cassettes sounding better than records, not the reality of the product currently available. You glossed over the fact that pre-recorded cassettes are made via high-speed duplication. This is no small fact! Also, the type of tape used, the inferior packaging and the lack of liner notes are other problems endemic to the pre-recorded cassette.

The cassette I made for myself on my TEAC recorder is far superior to the pre-recorded cassette I gladly returned to my friend. David, please listen before you leap.

RICK PEARCE
Lafayette, N.J.

TOP 100 ALBUMS

- 1 DAVID BOWIE
Let's Dance (EMI)
- 2 PINK FLOYD
The Final Cut (Columbia)
- 3 MICHAEL JACKSON
Thriller (Epic)
- 4 MEN AT WORK
Cargo (Columbia)
- 5 U2
War (Island)
- 6 DURAN DURAN
Rio (Capitol)
- 7 DEF LEPPARD
Pyromania (Mercury)
- 8 MEN AT WORK
Business As Usual (Columbia)
- 9 JOURNEY
Frontiers (Columbia)
- 10 HALL AND OATES
H2O (RCA)
- 11 THOMAS DOLBY
The Golden Age of Wireless (Capitol)
- 12 PRINCE
1999 (Warner Bros.)
- 13 STYX
Kilroy Was Here (A&M)
- 14 CULTURE CLUB
Kissing To Be Clever (Virgin/Epic)
- 15 LIONEL RICHIE
Lionel Richie (Motown)
- 16 AL JARREAU
Jarreau (Warner Bros.)
- 17 TOTO
IV (Columbia)
- 18 BOB SEGER
The Distance (Capitol)
- 19 BRYAN ADAMS
Cuts Like A Knife (A&M)
- 20 FLASHDANCE
Soundtrack (Casablanca)
- 21 DEXYS
MIDNIGHT RUNNERS (Mercury)
- 22 ZZ TOP
Eliminator (Warner Bros.)
- 23 GREG KIHN
Kihnspracy (Beserkley)
- 24 JOAN ARMATRADE
The Key (A&M)
- 25 RICK SPRINGFIELD
Living In Oz (RCA)
- 26 BERLIN
Pleasure Victim (Geffen)
- 27 THE TUBES
Outside Inside (Capitol)
- 28 CARLOS SANTANA
Havana Moon (Columbia)
- 29 SCANDAL
Scandal (Columbia)
- 30 PETE TOWNSHEND
Scoop (Atco)
- 31 STRAY CATS
Built For Speed (EMI)
- 32 EARTH, WIND & FIRE
Powerlight (Columbia)
- 33 ERIC CLAPTON
Money And Cigarettes (Warner Bros.)
- 34 ENGLISH BEAT
Special Beat Service (IRS)
- 35 JOE JACKSON
Night And Day (A&M)
- 36 AFTER THE FIRE
ATF (Epic)
- 37 THOMAS DOLBY
Blinded By Science (Capitol)
- 38 ROXY MUSIC
The High Road (Warner Bros./E.G.)
- 39 ULTRAVOX
Quartet (Chrysalis)
- 40 DIRE STRAITS
Twisting By The Pool (Warner Bros.)
- 41 GOLDEN EARRING
Cut (Polygram)
- 42 MISSING PERSONS
Spring Session M (Capitol)
- 43 BANANARAMA
Deep Sea Skiving (Polygram)
- 44 MADNESS
Madness (Geffen)
- 45 TRIUMPH
Never Surrender (RCA)
- 46 PSYCHEDELIC FURS
Forever Now (Columbia)
- 47 THOMPSON TWINS
Side Kicks (Arista)
- 48 MODERN ENGLISH
After The Snow (Sire)
- 49 VAN MORRISON
The Inarticulate Speech Of The Heart (Warner Bros.)
- 50 SIMPLE MINDS
New Gold Dreams (A&M)
- 51 LOU REED
Legendary Love (RCA)
- 52 R.E.M.
Murmur (IRS)
- 53 ABC
Lexicon Of Love (Polygram)
- 54 ECHO AND THE BUNNYMEN
Porcupine (Sire)
- 55 TOM PETTY
Long After Dark (Backstreets/MCA)
- 56 CHRISTOPHER CROSS
Another Page (Warner Bros.)
- 57 PHIL COLLINS
Hello, I Must Be Going! (Atlantic)
- 58 HEAVEN 17
Heaven 17 (Arista)
- 59 THE RAMONES
Subterranean Jungle (Sire)
- 60 MUSICAL YOUTH
Youth Of Today (MCA)
- 61 RANDY NEWMAN
Trouble In Paradise (Warner Bros.)
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- 67 WALL OF VODOO
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- 68 NEIL YOUNG
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"...famous last words..." (A&M)
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A Flock Of Seagulls (Jive/Arista)
- 89 LUTHER VANDROSS
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- 90 GROVER WASHINGTON, JR.
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- 91 BILLY SQUIER
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- 92 PETER GABRIEL
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- 94 THE WHO
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- 95 CHAKA KHAN
Chaka Khan (Warner Bros.)
- 96 GRACE JONES
Living My Life (Island)
- 97 JUDAS PRIEST
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- 98 SPYRO GYRA
Incognito (MCA)
- 99 DEVO
Oh, No! It's Devo (Warner Bros.)
- 100 GARLAND JEFFREYS
Guts For Love (Epic)

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BY MILLER
HIGH LIFE
BEER



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American Grandstand

By Dave Marsh

1915-1983

Muddy Waters

Let's Say He Was A Gentleman

It is all but impossible to concisely summarize Muddy Waters' achievements, much less get a handle on mourning him. If Muddy were merely the first of the great Chicago bluesmen (which he was), he would be an important figure in American music. That he was also the last great Delta bluesman begins to give you a sense of dimensions. But he was so much more: a fine songwriter, magnificent singer, marvelous bottleneck guitarist, unparalleled bandleader, astute talent scout, generous and inspiring father figure. In short, he had such clarity of vision, sheer talent and unshakable self-possession that he galvanized everything around him. As an influential master musician in post-war America, he ranks with Hank Williams, Elvis Presley and Miles Davis.

It's a mammoth task just to list the greatest of Muddy's songs: "Louisiana Blues," "I'm Ready," "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man," "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "Standin' Around Crying," "Rollin' Stone," "Long Distance Call," "Rolling and Tumbling," "I Can't Be Satisfied," "Mannish Boy," "Got My Mojo Working," "Baby Please Don't Go," "I Feel Like Going Home," "She's All Right," "Sad Letter." Certainly, any list of classic post-war blues songs and performances would include more than a few of those.

The list of those musicians to whom Muddy gave a start is also voluminous, starting with Little Walter and Otis Spann, his two greatest disciples, and continuing with Jimmy Rogers, Big Walter Horton, Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, Fred Below, James Cotton, Francis Clay, Big Crawford, Elgar Edmonds, Pinetop Perkins, Sammy Lawhorn and continuing on almost endlessly. Muddy wasn't above cutting contests, but he was also the single most generous musician in memory, offering his sidemen encouragement in their solo ambitions and bringing unknowns more attention than anyone else's endorsement could have offered. Ask Otis Rush—or Chuck Berry, for that matter, who was brought to Chess Records by Muddy himself.

Discovering Berry was hardly the end of Muddy's impact on rock 'n' roll. The Rolling Stones took their name, and their early sound, from his music. Surely, Muddy was one of the things on Bob Dylan's mind when he made an album whose title alluded to Highway 61, the major thoroughfare of the Mississippi Delta where Chicago blues were born, and entitled its first and greatest track, "Like a Rolling Stone." The overpowering blues style that Eric Clapton developed, first with the Bluesbreakers, then with Cream, derived directly from the huge sound of Muddy's great Fifties band—and in that sense, all blues-rock and heavy-metal music is descended from Muddy's ideas. Johnny Winter paid Muddy the finest homage, by producing four solid albums with him in the last years of his life. The Band offered another kind of tribute in *The Last Waltz*, and typically, Muddy stole the show with his "Mannish Boy." Fleetwood Mac, the Paul Butter-



Muddy Waters: His mere presence lent events weight and meaning.

field Blues Band and Jimi Hendrix all owed something to Muddy's music—and to Muddy's music specifically, not just to the blues in general.

But none of these lists captures what the life and death of Muddy Waters really means. I'm not sure it can be defined, only described. Far more than most musicians, Muddy's mere presence lent events weight and meaning. You can hear this in even his most raucous blues—"I'm Ready," for instance—where instead of spewing out the notes, each phrase and syllable and inflection and beat and chord are considered and then placed precisely. The calculated effect does not eliminate excitement—instead, it creates it, by establishing a specific tension between the logic of the song and what Muddy might do with it.

Creating this music requires a kind of consciousness and control that is the definition of artistry. Uniquely among bluesmen, Muddy Waters was able to establish this tension to a greater and more complex degree with his band than without it. For most singers, the band has been a necessary obstacle to completely personal expression; but Muddy was able (from time to time but more frequently than the uninitiated will imagine) to create bands that furthered not only his personal sense of how the music ought to run, but also that of the other musicians. Little Walter's personality is as fully established as Muddy's in many of these records, and later on, so is Otis Spann's. An even better indication of Muddy's sensitivity to the requirements of other players is that he was the bandleader behind both Walter's masterpiece, "Juke," and Sonny Boy Williamson's "Don't Start Me to Talking."

The poles of Chicago blues were Muddy and Howlin' Wolf, the one a great and sympathetic collabora-

tor, the other one of the most outrageous individualists in cultural history. Their styles represented different responses to the brutally racist environment in which they were reared. Understanding that because he was black, he would never have the full respect that his talent and intelligence deserved, Howlin' Wolf, the persona Chester Burnett created, simply pissed on the very concepts of politeness and restraint. One never had the sense that there was anything Wolf wouldn't do—or, for that matter, that there was any way to get him to do anything except what he chose, however perverse his choices might be.

Muddy, on the other hand, took the cruel reality of being a black American and used it to create a personality defined by a sense of limits and boundaries. There was a point beyond which he could not be pushed; there were many things Muddy would not do, which is one reason his performances were always less flamboyant than Wolf's. Like his music, Waters' identity was founded upon his creation of a world in which he imposed order, a world which he structured around his own needs and perceptions.

All of this is summed up in what Waters told James Rooney, in the book, *Bossmen*. "You don't have to have a white face to be a gentleman and up to date with what you're doing," Muddy said. "You can be black, brown or any color, but you've got to carry yourself in a way that people know that you're it. They might say I can't play or can't sing but damn it, they'll say I was a gentleman."

His American ancestors were slaves, and after slavery, serfs—Mississippi sharecroppers, in the lush Delta flatlands where McKinley Morganfield was born to Bertha and Ollie Morganfield, sharecroppers, on April 4, 1915, in

Rolling Fork, Miss. Muddy, as he was dubbed very early, moved to Clarksdale in 1918, to live with his grandmother after his mother died. There, he grew up on Stovall's Plantation, drove a tractor, milked cows ("all that jive") and heard every blues performer who came to town. He particularly loved Son House, a farmer/performer from Robinsonville whom he saw often, and Robert Johnson, whom he knew only from records.

It is the hallmark of both Son House and Robert Johnson's styles that they are able to describe the most gruesome indignities ("Stones in My Passway," for instance) without flinching. There is an emotional center in their work which is undeniably the product of life in one of the most racist areas in the world. To survive—especially to survive as free-floating performers, rootless and with bad reputations—required an inner centeredness that Muddy must have picked up as his ticket out of misery.

None of which implies passivity. It was in fact arrogance—the refusal to know his place—which led Muddy to a confrontation with Mr. Fulton, the Stovall Overseer, in May, 1943. (He said he and Fulton had "a fight," though whether this was an argument or whether Muddy punched him is unclear.) Muddy said goodbye to his grandmother, grabbed his guitar, whatever little money he had and caught the train at Greenville. "The next morning, I was in Chicago," he once told me, still with a sense of relief.

In 1942, Muddy had made some recordings for the Library of Congress as a pure Delta bluesman. In Chicago, he kept on playing, mostly at rent parties and in bars, until 1948, when he made his first recording for Leonard Chess, "I Feel Like Going Home." It was an im-

mediate hit in Chicago and allowed Muddy to give up his day jobs and work as a local star. It wasn't until 1951 and "Rollin' Stone" that he managed to establish much reputation outside of Chicago, though. By that time, he was already working with Little Walter, Jimmy Rogers and electric guitars, and the shape of blues and R&B had been permanently altered by his band.

The rise of rock & roll nearly destroyed the popularity of the blues, at least outside of Chicago. It wasn't until musicians like Brian Jones and Keith Richards began pointing their white listeners toward Muddy and the other Chicago blues giants that Muddy again had much audience outside his homeground. Thereafter, he played most of his gigs at colleges and rock concerts. His very last appearance was at an Eric Clapton show last June, where he did "Blow Wind Blow."

Through it all, he didn't change much. His incredible array of vocal effects, his ability to mimic many of these on guitar, his wonderful sense of time remained at least partially intact throughout the Seventies and even into the Eighties. His last album, *King Bee*, contains a version of the Slim Harpo title track which sounds like he owns the tune.

Mike Rowe's book *Chicago Breakdown* contains photos of Muddy as a young man which suggest how extraordinarily fine looking he was: bronze-brown skin, high Indian cheekbones, almost Oriental eyes, a dapper dresser. In later years, he grew heavy, but he never lost his good looks. The last time I saw him perform, that massive head looked so elegant that it struck me he ought to be the fifth face on Mt. Rushmore. But the music he leaves behind him is a greater monument by far, and less subject to erosion as well. ○

PHOTO: PAUL NATAKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

London Calling

By Chris Welch

Who News? Who Knows

WHO'S IN THE studio? The Who, making an album for release later this year. Who nose Pete Townshend is keeping quiet about his solo plans, after the critical mauling of *Scoop*, his recent compilation of demos, but suspicions are that he may be working on a jazz album. Roger Daltrey is continuing his acting career by playing Mac Heath in *The Beggar's Opera*. This production will be screened here by BBC-TV in the autumn, and in America soon after (says a spokesman).

Get Back—Way Back

THE VENERABLE MARQUEE Club is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a host of special events designed to underscore the venue's reputation as a launching pad for some of the most highly-regarded names in blues and rock over the last two-and-a-half decades. Among those sitting in at a special gig organized by British blues pioneer Alexis Korner were Rolling Stones Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman. Said Watts: "We rehearsed for two days and the sound in the pub was perfect. But when we get on stage here it sounds terrible." Part of the problem was a loud, unstopable hum from the PA, but the band sounded fine, despite Charlie's fears. Mick Jagger was in town, leading to speculation that he might sit in with the jammers. Instead, he went for dinner with his parents. Meanwhile, the Stones are the subject of a massive set of albums released by Reader's Digest, containing some 62 Stones hits, dating from the early '60s to 1971.

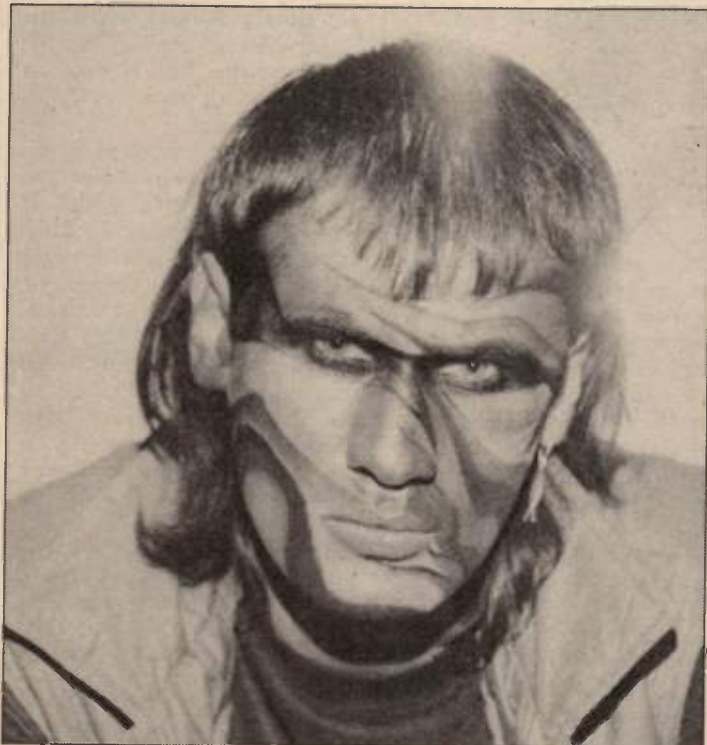
Manfred Mann had to cancel a Marquee reunion with his band's former lead singers, Paul Jones and Michael D'Abo, when his mother died. The gig will be rescheduled for later in the year. Another reunion scheduled to take place will team John Mayall with former Bluesbreakers guitarist Mick Taylor. Also, bets are being laid on who will be the singer with the Yardbirds for their get-togethers on June 22 and 23. Most expect Jeff Beck to be the guitarist, but hopes are high for appearances by Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page as well. Vocalist and harmonica player Keith Relf died in 1976, and one can only wonder if Robert Plant would take on the chore of replacing him. After all, he did sing "Dazed and Confused," a latter-day Yardbirds concoction.

Rod & Woody Go Public

NOW IT CAN be told. After 15 years work, Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood have finally finished their book of reminiscences. Titled *A Variety of Annoyances*, it's full of amusing tales of life on the road when the Faces were one of the bawdiest bands in rock. That was before Rod settled down to married bliss, you understand, and Ronnie joined the more sober Rolling Stones. The book also includes some of Rod's poetry, including a piece titled "Mr. Embarrassing Trousers." No doubt quite a few have been embarrassed by Rod's trousers over the years.

The Scene In General

LONDON'S PROGRESSIVE rock revival seems to be sustaining itself, as bands such as Twelfth Night continue to headline club tours and play before sellout audiences. With their current album, *Fact and Fiction*, selling well, a 1981 album, *Live at the Target*, is being reissued, always a sure



Marillion lead singer Fish, out of water.

sign of a new band making waves. Market leaders of the pro-rock cult, Marillion, who astounded onlookers by hitting the charts with their LP, *Script for a Jester's Tear*, are now set to play at the all-hippie CND Festival at Glastonbury. I tell you, it's 1967 all over again... meanwhile, punk rock hits back with the rise of Miles Copeland's latest proteges, Crown of Thorns. The North London band is rising up the independent charts with their "Kingdom Come" single and have been paired with the notorious Sex Gang Children on several gigs, including some at the Lyceum Ballroom, home of outrage. The band's now using a "revolutionary" three-dimensional light show to demonstrate that punks are not afraid of technology... so who are these new British groups who are going to revolutionize pop in the coming months? The Opposition, newly-signed to Charisma Records, may well be the band to cut it. Their album, *Intimacy*, is clean, clear and has some of the sophistication of the Police, but with a better lead singer. The trio's comprised of Marcus Bell on bass, Mark Long on vocals and guitar and Ralph Hall on drums. Spies tell me they're already huge in France, where rock fans like their singers to be unshaven gamins and their music full of Floydian echoes.

New Artist



The System's David Frank and Mic Murphy: "We always have to stay ahead."

The (Do-It-Yourself) System

By Derk Richardson

SAN FRANCISCO—If you don't like the system, go out and make one of your own. That's what Mic Murphy and David Frank did and you've probably heard the fruits of their labors, the harbingers of their success, jumping out at you from the speakers of your car or your favorite dance club. Together, and with little help from anyone else, Murphy and Frank are The System. Their first self-produced single, "It's Passion," earned them a record deal with Mirage/Atlantic and their second single, "You Are in My System," from their debut LP, *Sweat*, has made it onto both R & B and pop playlists and has already been covered by blue-eyed soulster Robert Palmer.

Crossovers in black and white dance music are less uncommon these days than a few years ago, especially with such white acts as ABC, Yaz, Culture Club and Hall and Oates funk up their sound with whacking backbeats, synthesized percussion and soulful arrangements. But The System is aiming higher than the pedestrian bridge that links black funk and white pop. "We want our music to be played in all the markets," says Mic (pronounced Mike) Murphy, "not just R & B and not just rock and roll. When you can write a song that reaches people of all ages and all colors, it crosses all boundaries and that's the ultimate of living. That's what music and art are all about to me," he said as he and Frank took a midnight break from mixing a new LP by Attitude.

Such aspirations seem less fantastic once you've digested The System's LP or caught the pair live. On the surface, Murphy and Frank appear to be a racial and musical odd couple, but unique twists in their individual backgrounds and compatible conceptions about their musical directions have led them to create a powerful, unified and original sound, crackling with high-tech precision and bursting with gritty emotion. Murphy, 25, was born in Raleigh, North Carolina but grew up mostly in New York City where he became part of what he calls "that black rock and roll clique" that favored Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone over mainstream Motown. As a child he was deeply influenced by

his family's favorite records—Brook Benton, Nat King Cole, Ray Charles, *The Sound of Music*, and, he adds with a laugh, *The Firestone Christmas Album*. But since his teens, he explains, "I've always liked a lot of rock 'n' roll music."

Born 29 years ago in Dayton, Ohio, David Frank lived in a Boston suburb from the age of eight. His classical piano training led him to the Berklee College of Music although he had already been working out on a Farfisa organ and immersing himself in the heavy rock of Iron Butterfly, Cream, Hendrix and Jeff Beck. As he began playing in bands, Frank was drawn to R & B dance music along the lines of Parliament-Funkadelic.

So the white funkateer moved to New York and was discovered by the black rock 'n' roller. Each had led his own bands—Frank's credits included a Boston band called Crescent and Murphy had been lead singer of New York's Sass—but when they met Frank was honing his considerable synthesizer chops in session work and Murphy had been exploring the technical end of the business. Their instant musical affinity, forged when Murphy heard Frank in a showcase backing band, outweighed their individual dispositions toward leadership. "Before I met Mic," says Frank, "I always had my own band. I was always the leader of the band. Having only one person to work with is a lot easier than working with a whole band."

"I always fronted bands," adds Murphy, "I've always been a good director. I've always been very aggressive about music and presenting it to an audience. 'Let's take it to the stage' is my motto." Hardly shy, retiring types, Murphy and Frank joined forces in May, 1982, and prepared to take the music industry by storm. They wrote and recorded their first tune, "It's a Passion," in just three days. On the third day they sold it to Mirage Records.

"I'd had unsuccessful bouts trying to get a record deal," Murphy explains, "so I decided to check out the business aspects of the music business, in terms of learning what it took to get a deal, why I wasn't getting a deal, who the men in power were. At the end of that search I met David." Their initial work was so

impressive that Mirage allowed them to produce their first album.

All of the sounds on *Sweat* are created by Murphy's guitar and voice and Frank's battery of Oberheim, Mini-Moog, Memory Moog and OBXa synthesizers. But The System is a far cry from the newest wave of technically dazzling synthopop bands. "The most important thing for me," says Frank, "is the actual song itself. The instruments that are used are just the ones that I'm familiar with and the ones that I want to use as a means for the song to get through. Synthesizers are, for me, a means to portray a song in the same way that a symphony orchestra was in the last century."

Given that Frank and Murphy have so harmoniously reconciled such ostensible opposites as black and white and man and machine, they find that "it's a little frustrating" when they run up against the lingering categories of pop, rock and R & B. "For example," Murphy says, "Robert Palmer did a cover version of our song and naturally that's gonna be automatically considered a pop record. Same writers, same concepts and lyrics but it's automatically considered pop." According to Murphy, MTV "was not particularly eager" to have a video of "You Are in My System," but "Palmer does have a video of it and they'll put that on."

Even though The System's glistering, punchy mix could appeal as easily to fans of Steely Dan and Soft Cell as to aficionados of George Clinton and Chic, it will have to overcome the color line that hovers between playlists. And Murphy and Frank have no doubt that their system will prevail as long as they don't become too self-conscious about it. "Because we both come from a lot of different circumstances and our lives have been involved in a lot of different things," Murphy explains, "we listen to a lot of different music and we want all our music to reach people without interference. We don't think about these things when we make our records. We're gonna get what we get when we're supposed to get it, but we always have to stay ahead; we don't want to fall into the groove that we've cut. The thing to do is to take a pole vault into the future."

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Lindsey Buckingham at Home Cutting Second Solo Album

OAKLAND, Ca.—Lindsey Buckingham is hard at work in his home studio, laying down tracks for his second solo album. Continuing a tradition he started with the solo portions of Fleetwood Mac's *Tusk* in 1979 and amplified on his first solo disc, *Law and Order*, Buckingham is working alone and experimenting with novel approaches to songwriting, musical instruments and recording technique.

Law and Order had one hit single ("Trouble"), and Buckingham con-

cedes that "it would have served my own purpose better to have at least one other song of that type that would have made the record more visible. The variety of the album was refreshing but as you went from one song to the next it didn't even sound like the same person." This time, he's "trying to begin with the most accessible arrangements, putting things together in a slightly less haphazard way."

Don't get the idea that Buckingham is planning to make a conven-

tional-sounding record, though. Much of the work to date has been done with the aid of a Fairlight digital synthesizer, which comes with a library of musical and non-musical sounds stored on computer disks. In addition to playing drums and bass on the Fairlight's keyboard, Buckingham says he's experimented with "all sorts of bizarre things in place of regular instruments—like a gong for a bass drum, maybe, or using birds to create a riff."

Buckingham warmed up for his current project by writing, performing and co-producing (with longtime friend and Fleetwood Mac co-producer Richard Dashut) "Holiday Road" and "Dancing Across the USA" for the new National Lampoon movie, *Vacation '83*, which stars Chevy Chase.

Asked whether he's concerned about the fact that Stevie Nicks' first album, *Bella Donna*, outsold *Law and Order* by a couple of million units, Buckingham insists that he's more concerned with creative satisfaction than platinum action—and he refuses to speculate as to the motives of bandmates Nicks, Mick Fleetwood and Christine McVie, all of whom have solo records in the works or in the stores this summer.

"I've been rereading the biography of Montgomery Clift," he explains. "At a very young age he was told by Alfred Lunt, 'Don't work for the money; work for being good at what you do—and know that if you are good you can always be better. That will ultimately make you happier than doing something because you want to keep your house.'"

It's easy to be brave when you're living in a spacious house in a nice part of Los Angeles, but Buckingham claims that "even if I never sell more than three or four hundred thousand albums, just as long as I can maintain a record contract—which I think I can do—I could be just as happy living in an apartment as I am here." —David Gans



Lindsey Buckingham: All the comforts of home.

Southside's Revamped Jukes Recording With Nile Rodgers

BOSTON—Though they've been counted down and out more often than a bad boxer, Southside Johnny Lyon and the Jukes have come out fighting again with a revamped lineup and a multi-album deal with Mirage Records. The Jukes are in the studio now recording a new LP that promises to take the band into previously-uncharted realms. For one, Lyon's enlisted fellow Mirage recording artist Nile Rodgers as producer. Rodgers, of Chic fame, is in the news these days primarily as a result of having produced David Bowie's *Let's Dance* LP. He's also released his own critically acclaimed solo album, *Adventures In The Land Of The Good Groove*.

Getting Rodgers to work with the Jukes is indicative of the changes

Lyon has in mind for the band. "The new stuff is going to be more dance-oriented," he explains. "We've done a lot of traditional things in the past, and that's all well and good, but right now we want to start doing newer styles." He adds that listening to performers like ABC and Joe Jackson made him realize "there's a lot of new stuff coming out that's dance-oriented, and I like that. What I started out doing and what I grew up listening to was music that was meant for a good time. That's exactly what we're going for now. This album is going to be very sleazy," he says with a laugh. "Sleaze, sex, and dance."

Most of the more than two dozen songs written for the album are by the Jukes' lead guitarist, Billy Rush.

In addition to Rush, the Jukes also include veteran members Kevin Kavanaugh on keyboards, Steve Becker on drums and Gene Boccia on bass. New recruits include former E Street Band member Ernie "Boom" Carter on percussion and rhythm guitar, Rusty Cloud on keyboards, and a new four-piece horn section that was formed seven months ago after Lyon's old unit defected to tour with Diana Ross and Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul.

After a seven-album career (one of those being a "greatest hits" package on Epic) that has yet to see a hit record, Lyon remains optimistic about the future. "You can say unequivocally that things look better now than they ever have as far as my musical career is concerned," he states. "Things have been terrific. The past few months have been a lot of fun, and I'm looking forward to the next 83,000 years."

—Dean Johnson



Southside Johnny Lyon: Looking forward to the next 83,000 years.

T-Bone Burnett Supported By All-Star Cast On New LP

LOS ANGELES—"It's a mystery album, that's what it is," says T-Bone Burnett of the as-yet untitled followup to his acclaimed 1982 EP, *Trap Door*. "All the songs are based on real characters and events, but I describe them without ever referring to them specifically. Every song is a bit of a riddle. I hope the album can just be listened to on a purely superficial level, but people can get deeper into the songs if they want to."

Burnett, who has been a performer in his own right for only a few years (he first set foot on stage as a member of Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue), is content to play and sing while Jeff Eyrich handles the board. The basic tracks and most of the lead vocals were recorded—fourteen songs in all—in the first week or two, with Burnett and David Mansfield on guitars, David Miner on bass and Jerry Marotta on drums. Mansfield has added steel guitar and violin overdubs and wrote some string and woodwind charts, and guitarists Richard Thompson, Ry Cooder and Mick Ronson have added parts here and there. "We'll probably finish it up in England," says Burnett. "Pete

Townshend's going to play some guitar and synthesizer, and maybe we'll do a track or two together."

After opening last year for the Who and the Clash, Burnett produced Leo Kottke's *Time Step* and then went to work on Lou Ann Barton's second album—only to have the plug pulled when Barton's label, Elektra, underwent upheavals in management and A&R. Burnett is uncertain as to the fate of the tracks they completed, but several labels have expressed interest in the project.

In between recording his own album and producing the others, Burnett has been doing some gigs on his own, accompanied only by his acoustic guitar. "Playing solo is something I never did before," he notes. "It's much more of a direct conversation with the audience." His legendary ability to pull off-the-wall classics out of thin air is "even easier" to exercise on his own, too, though he admits he might miss the thunder of the rock 'n' roll band, which last year included Ronson on guitar. "I'm real enamored of playing solo, though," says Burnett. "You lose one thing and you get something else." —David Gans



T-Bone Burnett: A "mystery" album.

Ellen Foley Tries To Right 'A Left-Hand Turn' on New LP

NEW YORK—"What you hear on this record," says Ellen Foley of her new album, *Another Breath*, "is the re-emergence of an American, a New Yorker, a person who goes out and does things her way. Somebody discovering her roots again."

Indeed, the currents of two decades of American pop do run through Foley's third LP, including the Brill Building spunk of two new Ellie Greenwich compositions, and pronounced vocal suggestions of Martha and the Vandellas, the Supremes and Barbra Streisand.

Foley says her new America First posture is a reaction to the results of her last album, 1981's *Spirit of St. Louis*, a collection of Continental cabaret tunes, art songs and other offbeat material. Produced by her former boyfriend, Mick Jones of the Clash, the album was a commercial flop.

"I trusted Mick's judgment," she explains. "He has a strong personality and I let him take me on a radical break. In the future I'll trust my own instincts more."

Following the release of *Spirit*, Foley took a few months to "re-group and rethink," then toured, appeared in the film *Tootsie* (in a small, but not throwaway, part), and began writing songs again.

While pondering her return to the studio, Foley was contacted by Vini Poncia, a veteran producer who wound up behind the board on *Another Breath*. "Vini knows how it goes in this business," says Foley. "He knows what happened to me is that I took a left-hand turn."

Her personal relationship with Jones, meanwhile, lasted until several months ago. "I held onto a belief



Ellen Foley: The belief wasn't enough.

in that relationship a long time," she says. "Until the belief wasn't enough." Foley blames the pressures of "living on two continents" for the breakup.

Foley's latest goal is to "work." She hopes to tour (if the album catches on), and has signed an agent to further her acting career. Currently she's struggling with life as a businesswoman.

"I'm trying to run things," Foley sighs. "In a month I went from Polyanna to Medea, from being in the studio and being up and creative, to watching it not happen and being at everybody's mercy when the record was out. But I know I'll always need activity—acting, music, something that's dramatic." —Mark Mehler

A 'Snakebit' Robert Palmer Reinvents Himself Once More

By Mark Mehler

NEW YORK—At a party some months back, Robert Palmer's song "Johnny & Mary" was on the turntable. "Wow," raved a dancing coed, "that's great stuff. But I haven't heard it on the radio."

"That's because it's three years old," her partner replied.

"You're kidding," she responded. "Whoever that guy is, he must be ahead of his time."

When this story is related to Robert Palmer, the artist takes it in stride: he stretches his legs across the coffee table and has a good laugh at his own expense. After nearly two decades as a professional musician, the 34-year-old singer-songwriter-producer seems to have learned how to live with the idea of never being a pop star. It is suggested that when it comes to timing, his career is "snakebit."

"Snakebit," Palmer muses, rolling the idea around in his head. "Now how did you know that's one of my favorite expressions? Actually, I'd have to agree. America has always been foreign territory for me. But you must be realistic: unless your music happens to tie into the current scheme of major radio and its advertisers, you aren't going to be successful. Yet it's nice to know that several years later people are still listening to me."

Here to promote his new, self-produced LP, *Pride*, recorded in England and at the Compass Point Studios in the Bahamas, Palmer says that despite the frustrations of awaiting a U.S. breakthrough, he's quite comfortable in his life and work. Six months a year he lives in the Bahamas, writing and recording at Compass Point. During the other six months, he's travelling and touring in Europe. "I'm balling my way across the continent," he points out, before quickly clarifying his statement: "That is, in the Little Richard sense of 'balling.'"

As a musician, producer and arranger, Palmer has evolved a working method that satisfies both his need to have it his way as well as his responsibility to get along with other musicians. He's come to view himself as something of a survivor in a business he continues to distrust.

"It's a circus out there," Palmer states in no uncertain terms. "For groups, I'm sure it hasn't improved since the '60s, when I was part of it all. (Palmer was a member of Vinegar Joe, among other bands). How bad does it get? How bad do you want it? I was in one band back then that had a press agent. After a concert, when you were so tired you couldn't see straight, she'd have you signing stacks of papers. Buried in there would be a management contract she was trying to slip by you. Unbelievable!"

Palmer also recalls a night at an upstate New York motel when the band he was with ran out of money. Someone wanted to roll a joint, but the only papers to be had were some green ones of indeterminate origin. But when you're desperate you'll try anything. Only problem was that when the band members looked in the mirror afterwards, they found that the papers had left a green film all over their faces. Which was fine, except that several nuns, attending a convention taking place in this very same motel, spotted the band and, horrified at the sight, beseeched the management to toss the rockers out of the place.

In retrospect, Palmer says he wouldn't have missed a minute of it. "During those 10 years, I found out something about myself—that I could take it, that I could be a singer. I got all the worst stuff out of the way in the beginning."

Palmer's nine-year career as a solo artist, beginning with the 1974 LP, *Sneakin' Sally Through The Alley* (on which he was backed by Lowell George, Bill Payne and the Meters) and maturing with 1979's *Secrets* (his first Bahamas record),

has been dedicated to "finding a vehicle that'll produce more than esoteric exercises to stick on the wallpaper. Something that's experimental and accessible, at the same time."

Something, say, on the order of *Pride*. Working in a digital electronic world has allowed Palmer to construct personal music, in the sense of capturing the intended sound: "Instead of demanding from a rhythm section, for example, that it play a certain thing and then being content with the energy level, what I do is record a whole album myself and bring in players to replace my parts. It's fun to create that way, and it comes out organically correct for me. It's no longer a matter of crossing your fingers and praying. When I started this, the guys in the band thought I was crazy. I don't think the drummer was used to coming in starting with a bass line and guide vocal, playing with 12 sequenced bass lines and going home content with that."

Nevertheless, Palmer says he's

worried that large sections of *Pride* may yet prove inaccessible, notably "The Silver Gun." "It's an (East) Indian song," he explains. "It may be a little too much. You know, on most rock, say you're singing 8ths on bass and pushing 4ths on guitar, hitting a tenor and whacking it out. On an Indian song, forget that, your eyes would roll up into your head. You learn to sing within yourself. I don't know how this one will fly, but I tried to make the song a little more mainstream by writing the lyrics in English."

At press time, Palmer was planning a three-week U.S. tour in June, after a few weeks in Europe. Here, too, he's concerned with finding the right commercial approach.

"Everything's so categorized in performance now. You're either theatrical, like Bowie, or a rock star like Pat Benatar, or a video star. People like me have to reinvent ourselves as we go along."

"But you know," he observes, "for somebody who's snakebit, I've been pretty lucky." ○



PHOTO: PAUL CANTY/RETNA LTD.

Robert Palmer: "People like me have to reinvent ourselves as we go along."

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Good, Sexy Songs From Five Souls Close To God's Heart

LOS ANGELES—Lesson number one in interviewing the DeBarge family: bring five microphones, blank tape and a mixing board. They all talk at once.

Bunny DeBarge clarifies a point brother Eldra is making about how growing up together, watching out for each other, they became inseparable. At the same time Mark explains, "We want to be an example, like Jesus was. He came down to earth and showed people, 'hey, you can make it.'" Randy and James lay down rhythm behind their brothers' and sister's comments.

"Chee... chee... chee," sputters 19-year-old James, the youngest. Even in conversation, they're jamming.

At 28, Bunny is the oldest in the family, presiding serenely over a DeBarge roundtable in one of the Motown offices with a backdrop of Hollywood Hills.

"We're best friends," she says of the siblings she helped raise. Her laugh rises above the din. "But there's times when they take me over."

It didn't take long for DeBarge to cross over to pop territory from their station on black music charts, where "I Like It," from their latest album, *All This Love*, once stood second only to Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." Each DeBarge wrote and sang at least one of the songs on the album, and 25 studio musicians supplied the glossy, jazzy instrumental backup.

DeBarge's vocals are perhaps best described as soul with cream. "There's a lot of white in us," explains Mark. Literally. They are from a family of ten French Creole children, full of musical spirit which they'll say was God's reason for making them. Some of their neighbors in the urban Midwest weren't comfortable with their mother being black and their father white.

"We were raised lonely," says Mark. "Our relief was through music."

Two other brothers, Tommy and Bobby, played in the Motown group

Switch and hustled their brothers and sisters out here from their Grand Rapids home to meet Switch manager Jermaine Jackson, and go through "about ten thousand auditions" before they were signed. When their first album, *The DeBarges*, came out in 1981, it didn't bust any charts. And there was a time when *All This Love* was languishing, too.

"I said, 'let's get together and pray,'" recalls Bunny. "The same God that opened these doors for us is the same God who can make our album go up. And if God puts us up there, nobody can bring us down." All of a sudden that album shot up,

and we couldn't give nobody else the glory but God."

So how do these five souls fluttering so close to God's heart turn out such good sexy songs?

"The part that God plays in our music really shouldn't differ from the part He plays in our life," says Eldra, who sings "Stop! Don't Tease Me" and other sultry tunes with bewitching cool. "Like the old saying, practice what you preach—what we sing should be an example of who we really are. We want to create not an illusion, but a reality image. It makes it easier to take God with us as we move up to always mention Him, to always make God a part of our life, because He is."

"But I'll confess one thing," Eldra adds with a confidential smile, "Stop! Don't Tease Me" has nothing to do with Him."

—Susanne Whatley



DeBarge (clockwise, bottom center): Randy, Bunny, James, Eldra, Mark

Fun and Games in the Studio: Up Close With Marty and Val

OAKLAND, Ca.—We're talking paradox here: although Marty Balin claims that producer Val Garay wouldn't let him record with his own band and characterized the material he submitted for his new album, *Lucky*, as "quote, 'dogshit,' unquote," the singer insists he'd work with Garay again.

Balin, an established performer since the mid-'60s, says he was "pressured" by EMI-America to "go with the best producer and the best musicians in Hollywood. I was told that I wouldn't get the chance to do a record if I didn't do it that way, so I agreed to be subservient to the captain of the ship."

"I accepted the fact that it was more or less a supersedence and I was just the singer, and I did the job with that attitude. Even though I disagreed at times, I was there to do the best job. I took it as a challenge."

Garay, most noted for his work on Kim Carnes' "Bette Davis Eyes," did allow Balin to choose a few songs for himself, including the current single, "Do It For Love" (written by Jesse Barish, who has penned several of Balin's most successful singles, including "Hearts," from his solo debut), "but they were done to Val's tempos, Val's arrangements." The producer wasn't totally inflexible, though: "sometimes if he was wrong he'd admit it," Balin concedes, "but mostly it was his lead, his direction."

What could induce Balin to subject himself to Garay's despotism again? "I wanted to work with the guy, because I knew what a great engineer he is," says Balin. "He taught me a lot about singing, and he got me to sing well even though the material wasn't my fave."

The critical factor where both Balin and Garay are concerned, it seems, is commercial success. "If I have a hit, I think Val might want to work with me again," says Balin.



Marty Balin: But is it commercial?

"You know how it is—if you don't have a hit with an artist, naturally you don't want to talk to the guy." Naturally.

"I'd work with Val again if we can sit down and discuss material," Balin concludes, before offering one good sound business reason why Garay might give him another tumble: "On the last day we worked together on the mixdown, I asked him if he'd do it again. He said, 'Do you think I took you this far just to turn you over to someone else?'"

—David Gans

Martin Briley Gets Hip To The Fine Art Of Simplicity

NEW YORK—Amid the quiet austerity of the MCA Corp. boardrooms, Martin Briley sits alone at the conference table thumbing through a 19th Century volume of great thoughts.

"I love this room" he says, directing attention to the hundreds of



Martin Briley: Purposely vague

dusty works lining the walls. "You can find so many fascinating things in here."

To an historian or anthropologist, such an acquisitive mind might be beneficial, but for an artist, particularly one working in a pop idiom, it has its drawbacks—as Briley was to discover in recording his second solo LP, *One Night With A Stranger*.

Fortunately, he notes, producer Peter Coleman (Pat Benatar, Blon-

die) straightened him out fast. "Peter would listen to one of my demos and the first thing he'd say is, 'Hear that guitar line? Well, you're never gonna hear it again, it's gone!' I thought all the thoughts I was cramming into the song were great, but Peter made me realize what really makes a pop song good is to develop maybe one or two ideas and pull the rest. Hell, once the thing's cranked out over the radio, the limiters are going to take most of it out, anyway."

Briley says he and Coleman spent four long months in the studio in California, mainly "because I don't tour, so I'm not used to singing loud. Most of the songs were done in my living room, very quietly. I had to learn to sing all over again, to expand my voice. That took three weeks."

Lyric-wise, Briley admits the new LP is "mildly autobiographical," as was his 1981 debut, *Fear Of The Unknown*.

"Both records were influenced by my second divorce," he says wryly. "But I purposely kept a lot of vagueness. I can't imagine anyone would want to know what anybody else has been doing every day for the past two years."

The former bassist for Ian Hunter and Ellen Foley has lately given more time over to writing, and has cover versions of his songs by Barry Manilow ("Getting Over Losing You") and Pat Benatar ("Take It Any Way You Want It") to show for it. Now Briley hopes his solo album will generate enough excitement to get him back on the road this summer, although he has yet to put a band together. "I always like to find different people," he says. "That way, if my career ends abruptly, I've spread myself as thin as possible." —Mark Mehler

The Microscopic Septet Gets Into The Swing Of Things

NEW YORK—Would you buy "Lawrence Welk on acid"? That's how Phillip Johnston describes the music of the Microscopic Sextet, whose appealing, idiosyncratic brand of original swing compositions hardly seem to jibe with the individual musicians' astonishing network of rock 'n' roll/new wave ties as either past or present members of such groups as the Waitresses, Raybeats,

Our Daughter's Wedding, Tin Huey, Mofungo, Swollen Monkeys and Public Servants.

"I'd hardly describe being sidemen in rock 'n' roll bands as the place we're coming from," Johnston says. "All of us have played in Dixieland, free jazz, avant-garde and funk bands as well as classical ensembles. The Micros' music contains the influence of all these things."



The Microscopic Septet: Uniting styles by experience.

Together for two-and-a-half years, the Septet—saxophonists Johnston (soprano), Don Davis (alto), John Hagen (tenor) and Dave Sewelson (baritone), plus co-founder Joel Forrester (piano), David Hofstra (upright bass) and Richard Dworkin (percussion)—are all aware they could be involved in more commercial and remunerative projects, but their commitment to an American musical form that pre-dates rock 'n' roll remains unswerving. "Nowadays jazz is much more cult music that people don't identify with," Johnston observes. "But when people come to see us they're able to forget they don't like jazz. That's the element of surprise—the personal style of the group cuts through preconceived notions. There may be boogaloo and funk sections, but the basic feel is swing in the most danceable sense, although we're not just imitating swing bands of the '30s and '40s."

Nostalgia prevails nonetheless, from the group's open reverence for Thelonious Monk to their irrepressible cover of Zequina Abrew's "Tico, Tico" to having recorded their first album, *Take The Z Train* (Press Records, 432 Moreland Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia, 30307) "direct to two-track—basically the way they did it in the '50s," according to Johnston. "There was no mixing, no overdubbing. We even used Seltzer Sound, where Eubie Blake used to record."

As far as the Micros know, they're the only predominately swing band that works the rock clubs. "There's not a readily available precedent for a band of this type," Johnston claims. "But our music is very formed. We're not just a bunch of eclectic styles 'tacked on' to one another. We unite them by our experience."

—Mary Anna Feczo

The Garage That Pop Built: Mitch Easter's Drive-In Studio

By Anthony DeCurtis

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.—Since rock's earliest days, the garage has been holy turf. It provides rehearsal space for kid bands muscling up for Saturday gigs and shelters the cars those bands celebrate. The garage means energy, fun, and freedom from the pressures of the commercial music world.

It's fitting, then, that 28-year-old whiz-adult Mitch Easter is triggering an American pop resurgence from a studio he's built in the garage of his parent's home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The cream of the eastern new wave crop—R.E.M., Pylon, the Individuals, and members of the dB's and Bongos—have all made first-rate records in the cramped, homey hook factory Mitch has dubbed the Drive-In Studio. Word has quickly spread that Mitch's place—complete with Mitch's good-sport mom, who serves coffee and chats with visiting combos—is the place to go for smart, cheap recording.

Easter's experience starting the Drive-In Studio highlights some reasons why vibrant regional scenes have burgeoned since the late '70s, even as the music industry has seen tough times. After graduating from the University of North Carolina in 1978, Easter bought equipment and headed for New York to set up a studio there. But his venture never got going. "I just really got cold feet when I got there," Easter explains, "because all the red tape involved in setting up a business in New York City is so much more than anywhere else. I just thought, if I do this I'll be in lawyers' offices for the next two years before I ever even open. So I chickened out . . . I finally got real itchy to start recording, so I moved back down here where I could start it up real easily."

Among Mitch's first customers after the Drive-In opened in 1980 were the dB's, who ran short of cash in New York mixing the tapes that eventually became *Stands for Decibels*, their debut LP. Chris Stamey and Peter Holsapple of the dB's had been in bands with Easter in North Carolina and New York and saw the Drive-In as a congenial place to get some work done fast and cheap. Says Easter: "They knew I didn't have whole lot of equipment at the time, but they thought it might be kinda neat to do it, and just sort of approach it in a real 1965 kind of way, back before they had a lot of equipment. All I had was the tape machines and a console and that was it."

Soon R.E.M. motored in from Athens, Georgia, to record the murk-rock anthems "Radio Free Europe" and "Sitting Still" that built their reputation, and returned in 1982 to do their I.R.S. EP, *Chronic Town*.

Along with these outings, three other records Easter's worked on have established the Drive-In as a kind of bopping think tank for the Theory and Practice of Pop Music. On Steve Almaas' *Beat Rodeo* (Coyote Records, P.O. Box 112, Uptown Hoboken, NJ 07030) and Bongos Richard Barone and James Mastropolo's solo album *Nuts and Bolts* (Passport Records, 3619 Kennedy Road, South Plainfield, NJ 07080), Mitch and the boys created layered, allusive three-minute pop theses that ransack the likes of Tommy Roe, the Monkees, the Beau Brummels, and the Turtles with the same energy a previous rock generation devoted to the blues masters. From another aesthetic direction, dB Chris Stamey unraveled pop song structure on his solo LP, *It's a Wonderful Life* (DB Recs, 432 Moreland Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30307), with a clinical fascination that recalls Brian Eno's disassembling of Pachelbel on *Discreet Music*.

The Drive-In is in a semirural area and its low-tech ambience provides a setting in which beginning bands are less likely to get the studio shakes. Easter describes the set-up:

"It was the kind of garage that had long ago been converted to little bedrooms. There was a little bitty room and then there was a big room where you could still park a car. So I used the big room for the studio and the little bedroom for the control room, and all I had to do was knock a hole in the wall for a window. And that's all I did!"

"I usually put the guitar amps in one room and the drums in the other room, and then everybody stands in the same room, but the guitar amps are separated so they don't get picked up on the drum microphone. And if we need more isolation for, say, a bass amp, I just put it out in the yard and mike it out there."

While Easter's phone is jangling off the wall with bands wanting to record at his studio, he's currently engaged in launching his own group, Let's Active, with the help of bassist Faye Hunter and drummer Sara Romweber. Let's Active made its vinyl debut earlier this year with the dreamy, obsessively catchy "Room with a View" on the North

Carolina compilation *Mondo Montage* (Dolphin Records, P.O. Box 8744, Durham, NC 27707). This tune bears all the marks of Easter's scrupulously detailed studio work: atmospheric vocal echos, electronic percussive effects, acoustic guitars, melodic keyboard embellishments, surging choruses, the creation of texture through overdubbing, and hooks to spare.

I.R.S., Arista and some independents have expressed interest in Let's Active, and the band is about to embark for dates in the Midwest, Texas, and California with R.E.M. But although Easter's own music is his top priority, he has not forgotten the ethic of garageland: "You know, a lot of people are in my situation, that we're just doing this and never would have the money to go record it anywhere else. So I thought there really was a need for one of these cheap kind of studios. I feel an obligation to these local bands, to be available to them. I really do feel good about it when they get something they like from here." ○

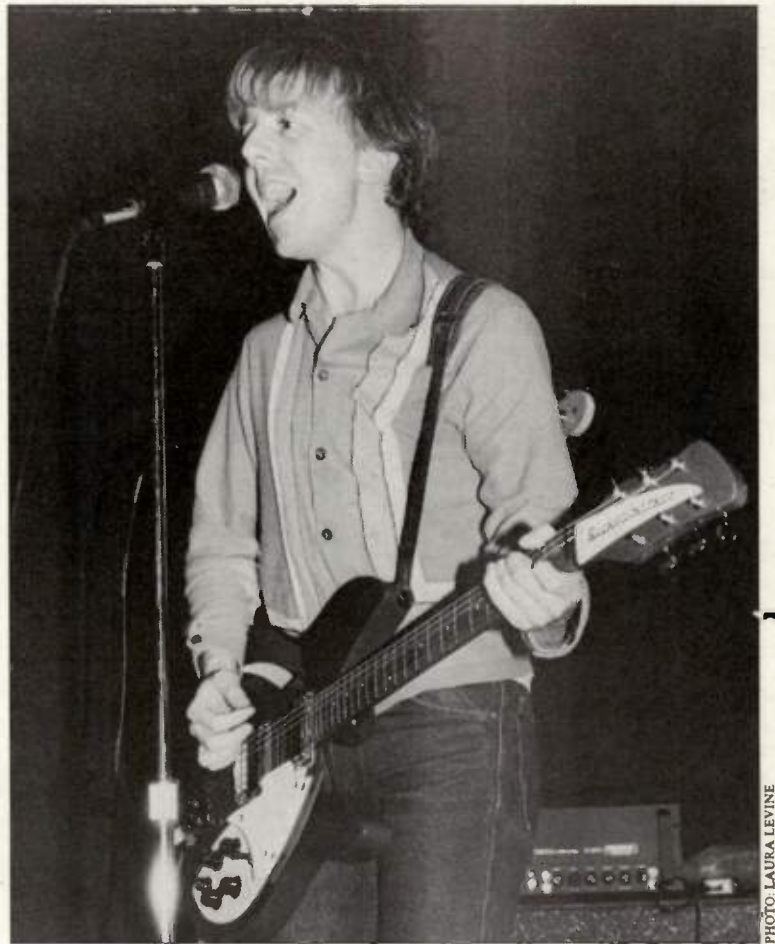
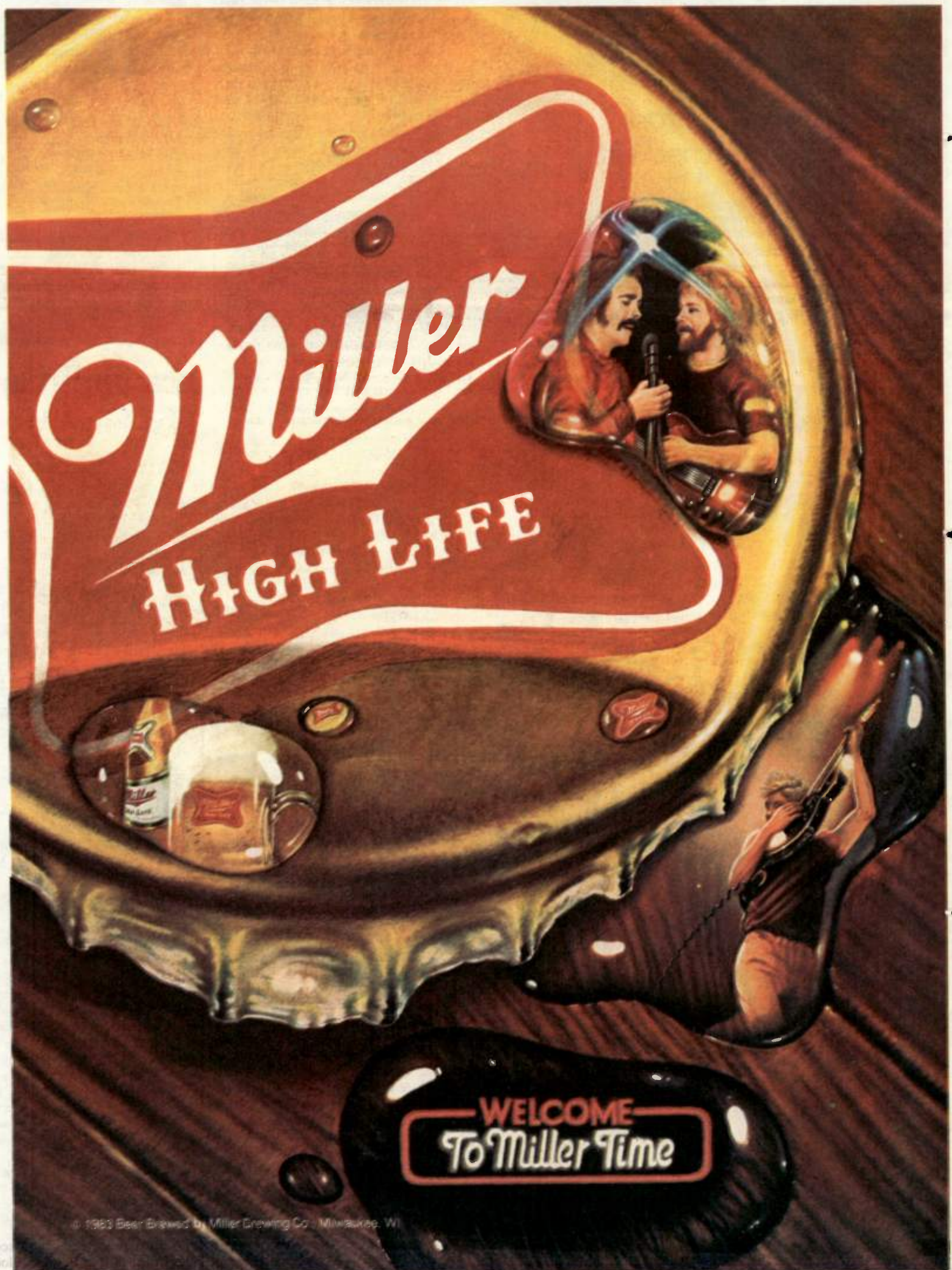


PHOTO: LAURA LEVINE

Mitch Easter: The garage as holy turf.



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Do you come from the land down under? A lot of rock bands do, and they're all flexing their muscles in the wake of Men at Work's American breakthrough. Herein a veteran Australian journalist examines the new spirit of Oz rock and checks in

with the Men's Greg Ham and John Rees on the eve of their world tour.

A
RUMBLE

DOWN

UNDER

Continued from page 1

My father's not going to be impressed at all! At the last elections he voted for the other side. Aaaagh!"

Doc Neeson and Rick Brewster of Angel City (who'd played at the Awards show) stop by to offer their congratulations, and afterwards Ham waxes philosophical again. "It's just as well Hawke got in, you know," he says in his frivolous tone. "I shot my big mouth off to the Sydney *Sun* some months ago and said that I'd leave the country if Malcolm Fraser (the former Prime Minister) got back in again. I mean, I didn't particularly want a letter coming from The Lodge saying, 'Well, I did get back in again, loud-mouth, now get out of my country,' that sort of thing."

If Greg Ham and his cohorts in Men at Work—Colin Hay, Ron Strykert, John Rees and Jerry Speiser—have to leave Australia, there's any number of other countries ready to welcome them with the proverbial open arms. America, for one, where the Men's debut album, *Business As Usual*, spent fifteen weeks at number one and remains, as of this writing, comfortably in the top 10, despite the release of a new LP, *Cargo*, and from it a Top Ten single, "Overkill."

Clearly these Men from Melbourne have come a long way since the time three years ago when a CBS-Australia salesman had to resort to all manner of practical jokes to get the label's top brass to even listen to the band (RECORD, December '82). Witness *Business As Usual*'s endurance in the rarefied air at the top of the LP charts. Behold the Men's Grand Slam—simultaneously topping the American and British charts (an achievement the Men share with only the Beatles, the Monkees, Simon and Garfunkel and Rod Stewart). Applaud worldwide LP sales totalling eight million (from which the Men have received royalties on Australian sales only—300,000—due to the peculiarities of international licensing agreements).

Simply put, if you're an Australian rock band you've got Men at Work to thank for all those American labels knocking on your door.

"We're lucky to have got to the States when people were searching for something new," says bassist John Rees on the eve of the Men's 1983 world tour. "I don't deny that we play well and have some good songs, but good timing had a lot to do with it. I don't know how long the Men will go on together, but our biggest contribution has been to open the door for those Australian bands which are far more original and musically better than we are. In the States the Men are considered new wave, but in Australia we're seen to be a very good mainstream pop band and nothing more."

THE FIRST great Australian band was the Easybeats (who, like the Bee Gees after them, were of British and European descent, rather than native Australians). In 1966 this quintet had an international hit with "Friday On My Mind" and might have ended up as prolific as the Who or the Kinks had not bum business deals and drug problems robbed them of their vitality. The band's principal songwriters, George Young and Harry Vanda, still pop up with monotonous regularity in national music polls in the songwriting and producing categories, and also boast something of a cult following in the United States and Europe.

The mid-'70s saw a number of Australian acts engaging in an undignified scramble to take a bite out of the lucrative American pie. AC/DC (fronted by George Young's little brother, Angus) disowned Australia and moved overseas; Olivia

Newton-John, Helen Reddy, Rick Springfield, Billy Thorpe, Peter Allen and Mark Holden migrated to Los Angeles and lost their accents.

Little River Band and Air Supply proved it was possible to make a dent in the American charts while still being based downunder; however, this success seemed hollow to Australian rock fans, because the bands' sounds and lyrical themes were as American as buffalo shit. Still, it seemed only a matter of time before Oz-rock would be accepted in its natural form: local tastes fall somewhere between English punk progressiveness and American melodic traditions, borrowing from the best of both worlds while discarding the excesses of the former and the sappiness of the latter. Much of Australia's live rock is heard in licensed beer joints ranging in capacity from 300 to 2000; the music has to be melodic, high energy, fashionable and immediate in order for a band to hold the crowd. In short, perfect AM fodder.

"What Men at Work have done is to draw together the various threads of interest that have existed overseas for two decades on different levels," explains journalist/historian/record label executive Glenn A. Baker, who is also *Billboard*'s Australian editor.

"Men at Work," he continues, "were a catalyst for this, giving the whole scene a focus and possibly giving it a rock respectability that appeals to both radio programmers and the public—something Air Supply, LRB and AC/DC do not have. The Men are perfect for American pop—they're melodic, contemporary and humorous, and they're effectively telling the world that there are more good things coming from downunder."

Prior to the Men's breakthrough, the local record industry felt Australian rock bands' inability to crack the U.S. market was due primarily to incompetence and/or apathy on the part of American labels; now, however, the fear is that the Men's mainstream pop will be considered "the sound of Australia." And one wonders: where does this leave the electro-synth cosmology of Icehouse and WHY? The hard blues-rock drive of Cold Chisel and Swanee? The unique eclecticism of Mental as Anything? The anarchic tantrums of Birthday Party and Sacred Cowboys? The high-octane delivery of Heaven, Rose Tattoo and Midnight Oil? From one end of the continent to the other, musicians express concern that Australian rock will be seen as some sort of movement (that is, transitory) or, worse still, a novelty.

Says Alex Smith of Moving Pictures, whose single, "What About Me," broke into the top 30 of the American charts earlier this year: "We don't want overseas fans to see us as being unique or special. All we ask is that we be treated equally, as British acts have been treated in the States for a long time."

INXS' lead singer Michael Hutchence also is wary of this communal association, inferring quite correctly that INXS might be made to pay for the sins of those Australian rockers who came before them.

Hutchence says "corporate backlash" is the major problem for Australian bands coming in behind the Men. "The radio people and the media people and the industry at large are saying, 'Okay, so we have Men at Work—they're boring live and the rest of the album wasn't very good. We had The Church over and Steve Kilbey put shit on everything he could find. We had Rose Tattoo over and Angry Anderson acted like a bigot. We keep on opening the door for these bands but they never wipe their feet on the way in.' I get upset when I hear things like that from people in America. We're all Australian bands, but every band is so different."

On the other hand, the Men's phenomenal success has had positive effects on the Australian music scene. For one, bands no longer see

themselves as working solely for an Australian market; from the outset they feel part of an international spectrum.

"It's been incredible how musicians have almost done an about-face," says Melbourne booking agent Lester John. "They realize they can't get anywhere by being self-indulgent or being there merely to please themselves."

"They're learning to be professional. They know that a lot of the Men's success was due to clever management, marketing and having an enthusiastic record company behind them. The new attitude is 'Things are getting hot for Australian music overseas; the doors are finally open. Let's get our asses in gear and get a slice of the action.' They're aware of marketing and promotion, of working closer with the local rock press, of the need for everyone to start working together for a common goal."

The Men's rags-to-riches story has overturned the notion that a band's lot here is to trudge up and down the country trying to establish an audience, to get noticed by record companies and the media, to score a few hits and to finally qualify for a crack at the U.S.—many times long after passing their artistic peak. Today, young musicians take heart from Melbourne's Dear Enemy and Sydney's Avion being signed directly to American companies, even though neither band is particularly well known in its native land. The world is shrinking.

BUT HOW has all this notoriety affected the Men? Very little, it seems, apart from having the wherewithal to purchase more expensive guitars and houses in better neighborhoods. They still hang out in the same clubs with the same friends they kicked around with before "Who Can It Be Now" made them something other than a pub band from Melbourne groping for recognition and regarded warily by the local press as harmless hippies playing overlong songs.

Judging by their attitude of late, Rees, Hay, Ham, Strykert and Speiser remain close, literally and figuratively, to the locals. When the Men played at the opening of a new club on Queensland's Gold Coast (fans found it hard to believe that for only seven dollars they could see a band then atop both the U.S. and British charts), Colin Hay cracked: "Hey, we really sucked in the Yanks, didn't we?" When *Business As Usual* went over the seven million mark in sales earlier this year, Hay and Ham appeared unannounced on the set of a late-night variety program, *The Daryl Somers Show*, and played "Down Under" as it was originally written—scored for guitar and flute only—before producer Peter McIan embellished it in the studio.

The worldwide launch for *Cargo* occurred in April, in a small club called Le Joke, years ago the band members' favorite watering hole. In addition to the usual media celebrities and the three record label executives who'd flown in from the U.S., Canada and New Zealand to present them with platinum LPs, the Men had invited numerous personal friends as well. When Ham made a thank you speech, he was careful to welcome "people from CBS, the media and our friends," deliberately marking a distinction.

Rees is suspicious—even contemptuous—of any efforts to make Men at Work something more than what it is: that is, a group of musicians playing music they enjoy. Fame and fortune are almost irrelevant in this universe. When they headlined January's open-air three-day Narara festival, there was talk in the crowd about how the Men

re there to show the other bands t who was boss down under. But was Angel City and Cold Chisel o checked in with blistering sets, ile the Men's performance was most embarrassing in its lumber- g-ordinariness.

"Every band has its ups and wns in their gigs," Rees says with hrug, "and that was one of ours. e went on after the Angels, at dnight, and that was probably too e. I think the Men were just tired m so much touring, our roadies ren't used to the equipment and e were probably too nervous." Nevertheless, he adds, "it doesn't ncern me. Music's too precious a ing to become merely a matter of mpetition. It's too spiritual. hen a musician is able to com- and his instrument . . . that's the n of success. As long as Men at ork keep trying to make better usic, then I can handle the occa- onal bad show."

GREG HAM could love to catch a few more ours sleep, but with the Men's de- arture from Melbourne only a day ay there's much to do. The driv- 's license and health benefits have e upgraded; equipment insur- ce has to be paid; and a payment is ue on the new house Ham has urchased.

"They send you all these remind- s, but of course you're away for onths and it piles up," Ham mut- ers, slamming the front door be- ind him and stalking off down the dewalk. "When I came back the st time there were three letters om Bankcard, each one progres- vely nastier. The final one was a ally terse letter from a lawyer say- g, 'pay up or else.'"

Ham is not one of those stars who an walk down the street without eing accosted. Carloads of fans whistle at him; giggling schoolgirls pproach him for autographs. Stop- ing in at a real estate agent's office o pay the rent, he is aware that sec- etaries are gawking at him as the anager comes out to pump his and, much to the saxman's obvious iscomfort. A few minutes later he's t a milkbar buying a meat pie and auce for lunch, and one of the cus- omers squeals, "Look! He's actual- y eating a meat pie!"

Too embarrassed to continue, Ham flees to a newsstand to pick up a handful of rock magazines, some with his own picture adorning the front cover.

"So you're doing alright then?" grunts the old man behind the ounter. "When youse come back from Hollywood?"

"I live here," Ham replies, sharp- ly and defensively.

"Awww, don't you guys all end up there sooner or later?" the gent queries.

"What for?" Ham retorts. "Breathing the Hollywood air is akin to putting an exhaust pipe into your nose.

"I get that all the time," Ham re- marks later. "I went to the Ware- house Club to see my girlfriend's band play and there were these kids . . . I mean, there were no has- les or anything, but they were just so surprised that I didn't drive up in a Rolls Royce and walk in with six bodyguards, you know?"

"I suppose the people in this country are so used to people like Helen Reddy and Rick Springfield moving from here to make it in the States that they can't accept that Little River Band and Air Supply and Men At Work have proven you can be based here and have world- wide success."

Ham's demeanor brightens con- siderably when he talks of Australia, particularly Melbourne, a city he claims he'll never leave: "I love the place too much. I love the architec-



PHOTO: DAVID HOGAN / LCI

The Men at ease: (from left) Colin Hay, Greg Ham, John Rees, Jerry Speiser, Ron Strykert.

ture, the Edwardian, the Victorian, the modern Bad Taste. And my friends are here. When we were Stateside, Brezhnev died and I remember constantly looking up into the sky wondering if some demented Russkies were gonna drop the big one or not! I could never live with that kind of fear.

"We're proud to be Australian, and we keep pushing that angle. I mean, even if we suddenly decided to become Americanized, I don't think we could get away with it: the American press will make quite sure we remain something exotic, and the Australian press generally tends to savage any Australian that starts to lose their identity."

Though Ham jokes about Men At Work's status in the world music spectrum, his perceptions about the band are quite sharp, and like Rees, he agrees with much of the press' assessment of the Men's weaknesses and strengths. Mention the English rock press, though, and he works up a full head of steam. Claiming the English papers have a long-standing bias against anything Australian—"they dismiss us as just a bunch of convicts" (Port Jackson, Australia—now Sydney—was once a British penal colony, and the continent long remained a dumping ground for undesirables from the British Isles)—Ham vows to "have a ball with them when we get over there.

"They could never accept that bands like AC/DC and Rose Tattoo could have anything going for them, or that Australia could give English kids anything of value. Now, despite their jeers, Men at Work and Ice-house have shot into the charts, and the writers are insecure about their positions.

"I welcome the fact that people see us in different lights," he continues, "from punks to pop to whatever. Some have even called us corny. In a way it's healthy because it shows the honesty of spontaneous reaction. But one English review actually called us 'incredibly loathe- some; a horrid, turgid little band not even worth seeing for free.' All you can do is highlight what a piece of garbage writing that was. And then there was a report in another maga- zine called *Time Out* which really symbolized how people get jealous when others become successful too

quickly—they basically said that Men at Work would have had no chance if the Police had been releas- ing records over the last 18 months. Such an absurd statement."

But there's a plan, see. "When we get back there," Ham says conspira- torially, "we'll take out full page ads in the rock press saying 'Come and see the Police being ripped off mer- cilessly by the worst band in the world. If you think our records are bad, wait till you see us live.' That should pull in crowds. And we'll put up posters saying: 'Not even worth seeing for free, but you've got to pay.'"

(As it turns out, there's good reason for Ham to laugh loudly at the scenarios he's just devised: earlier this morning he'd been informed that the Men's two shows in Lon- don, at the Lyceum, sold out within hours.)

As for *Cargo* vis-a-vis *Business As Usual*, Ham notes in his matter-of- fact way: "There's not much you can say, except to hope that people will see it as an album in its own right. See, in Australia we released 'Dr. Heckyll and Mr. Jive,' which was a hit, then 'Overkill,' so the con- tinuity followed, whereas the rest of the world didn't get 'Jive' or 'Be Good Johnny' as singles. Right after 'Down Under' they're getting 'Overkill.' I must admit it was a bit reassuring that it came into the American charts at number 28, so at least the album has some sort of chance."

Ham has good reason for appear- ing somewhat detached from *Cargo*. Recorded over nine months ago, *Cargo*'s release was delayed when *Business As Usual* refused to vacate its lofty chart spot. "People keep saying, 'Boy, I bet you were really freaking out trying to follow up a number one record,' but we weren't. It was recorded well before that happened. If I'm not mistaken, at the time CBS wasn't even sure it wanted to release the album in the States."

Perhaps CBS would have been more enthusiastic were the Men not so ordinary-looking—you know, something marketable, like a flock of haircuts. Ever thought of chang- ing your image, Greg, and going for a more glamorous look?

"Who us?" Ham gasps, directing

the reporter to a magazine photo of the band. "Good luck."

REES LAUGHS when told of Ham's comment. "I'm lucky because I'm not stuck with the amount of interviews that Greg and Colin have to do. I'm not as funny or as quick as they are. Colin has this great ability to come out with some classic lines, and he and Greg have this rapport. They just break me up during rehearsals. One time in America Greg was pulling this interviewer's leg by saying that as you travel up the Australian coast to the north, the babies are born wearing bermuda socks—and this guy was taking it all in!

"It really is funny how people seem to know so little about Australia, even in these days of satellite and media coverage. So many people I met on the first world tour thought that Tasmania was off the coast of Africa."

Rees wanders through his near- empty flat. Lining the hall outside his door are huge cardboard boxes spilling over with his belongings, waiting to be picked up.

"This is my last day here," he ex- plains. "The lease will run out by the time I come back. When I return I want to either buy or rent a camper- van, so when the mood takes me I can just drive out into the outback. It's such a beautiful place. Have you seen that video for the new David Bowie single, 'Let's Dance'? It really isn't relevant to the song, but I can imagine how he would have been knocked out with something as magnificent as the Australian bush.

"I really miss Melbourne when I'm away," he continues softly, as if he were talking only to himself. "I miss my friends and most of all I'll miss not having a base to come back to where I can put my feet up and listen to my music and just unwind. Really, to have that feeling of being alone."

"You can't get that on the road. You have your own room, but little privacy. Someone's always taking

your photograph or coming over to say hello. Still, we're all good friends in the band, and on tour we play cards, or watch videos together. I usually read, or play my Carssica keyboards or play Chinese puzzle games."

For Rees, then, the rewards of stardom are hardly worth the price you pay. Even winning a Grammy as Best New Artist was something less than the crowning moment of a glorious year. Rees says it was "strange being up there accepting that award. It was great that we had dressing rooms next to our personal hero, Miles Davis—we could hear him practicing. Jerry Lee Lewis was down the corridor; he popped in to say hiya and good luck.

"When we were on stage, I was looking out at my idols, like Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Zappa—he wasn't there, actually, but Dweezil and Moon Unit were. I stood up there in that glitter and thought, 'I feel like a real chook' (slang for idiot). I mean, it was a prestigious award and all that, but what on Earth has that got to do with us? We aren't a product of the American scene and just for that night we were a part of it. It was both a strange and funny feeling. We weren't even going to do it at first, but thought it might have been taken as some kind of insult."

But isn't it exciting to have had a number one hit in America, espe- cially your first time out?

"Oh, I'm excited," Rees avers. "But that's not the be-all and end- all. *Business As Usual* far exceeded every expectation and it's certainly a dream for any band, but we didn't put Men at Work together to try and make a number one record.

"I don't mean to downplay our excitement. The first time we heard about the Grand Slam, we were in Germany, and our roadie called room service and ordered two bot- tles of champagne. Turned out each of them cost \$150. We didn't mind though."

Rees pauses for effect. "We just sent the bill to our manager!"

Ah, that's the spirit. Now hold that pose. ○

Christie Eliezer is features editor of *Juke*, an Australian rock newspaper published weekly in Melbourne.

Consumer Guide to Rock Videos



Duran Duran

Unsuccessful as a touring band and critically tagged as just a bunch of U.K. "new romantics," Duran Duran has emerged instead as the '80's first true video stars. This compilation of 11 clips (some new, some old) reflects both the growth of the band and the new music-video art form.

The hits "Rio" and "Hungry Like The Wolf" are Duran Duran's video masterpieces. Both directed by the estimable Russell Mulcahy, the works are remarkable for their exotic locales, outstanding production values and nonstop videomatic action.

"Rio" follows the band aboard a jet-set Caribbean sailing ship, on a cruise replete with wide expanses of raw flesh and sky blue waters—vistas that are heightened by some precision editing effects meant to dazzle the eyes. "Hungry Like The Wolf," shot in Sri Lanka, is an action-adventure clip featuring a "wolf"—that is, a female tribal spirit—prancing through the jungle in what is a fine example of non-literal music-video translation.

The most provocative work, however, and the one that has been taking some heat from prudish communities as a video 45 release by Sony, is the uncensored version of "Girls on Film," featuring ice cubes rolling over girls' nipples, naked mud wrestlers and models in various stages of undress. Directed by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, ex-of 10cc, the clip is raucous, erotic and unlike anything rock video's ever seen before. Two performance pieces, usually the duller form of rock video, are also handled with a great deal of finesse.

If all video LPs were this classy and consistently exciting, music-videos for the home would totally take off. First-rate. *Director: Various. 55 Minutes. Thorn-EMI Home Video. \$49.95. (Stereo) —Alan Hecht*

Toni Basil: Word of Mouth

One of rock's early dance pioneers (she choreographed the legendary T.A.M.I. Show, David Bowie's *Diamond Dogs* tour and Bette Midler's *Divine Madness*, among others), Toni Basil was the first recording artist to debut with the simultaneous release of audio and video LPs, both titled *Word of Mouth*. The video features the pliable Basil gyrating her way through conceptual production numbers, such as "Mickey," the visual interpretation of her hit single seen frequently on cable TV. Basil's rendition of Devo's "Be Stiff" finds a creature named Spazz Attack, a 6'6" lead guitarist with orange hair, doing standing 360-degree somersaults, while Poppin' Pete, formerly of the Basil-created dance troupe the Lockers, robot dances with unabashed delight. Fun vaudeville and a hit dance tape sure to get the feet going and the body moving. *Director: Toni Basil. 30 minutes. Chrysalis Video. \$29.95. (Beta & VHS) —A.H.*



The Who Rocks America: 1982 American Tour

A re-package of the Who's putative "Last Concert" broadcast live via satellite last December from Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, and a less-than-sterling performance at that. The group's rock still has a certain amount of pull, and Pete Townshend's stage antics are always fun to watch, but Roger Daltrey's vocals are inconsistent, and Kenney Jones' workmanlike drumming simply provides no Keith Moon-like catalyst for a Who explosion.

Director Richard Namm's approach, though never adventurous or provoking, is basic, clean and provides a wide variety of multiple perspective coverage. A high crane shot from the back of the arena lends majesty to the proceedings.

Freed from the constraints of a live shoot, Namm's home version toys with surrealism. In a mix of stage close-ups and arena shots, Townshend and Daltrey play to each other at the base of the drum risers while, bleeding into the background, are images of the roaring crowd (with lit matches raised) and the rotating footlights sweeping the hall. For transitions, the director employs some freeze frames, variable speed action and posturization effects (the painting of video images). The latter produces several still shots that approach video art.

The climax is the musical break to "Won't Get Fooled Again," in which an animated montage sequence appears on the screen of an arcade game while a young boy with his back to the viewer bangs away at the buttons. A montage of historical Who stills flies by. A series of shots of Keith Moon builds to a freeze-frame of him beating his cymbals. Effects colorize the image, then it explodes.

As a collector's item, *The Who Rocks America* catches an extraordinary band on a fair-to-middling night performing its greatest hits. As a definitive concert tape, it leaves much to be desired. *Director: Richard Namm. 114 Minutes. CBS/Fox Home Video; CED Videodisc. \$39.95 (Beta & VHS), \$29.98 (Videodisc). (Stereo) —A.H.*

The Rolling Stones: Let's Spend The Night Together

In a theater, the 90-minute condensation of The Rolling Stones' 1982 U.S. tour was unbearable. Scaled down for home video, however, it has far superior sound to the theatrical release and a more realistic sense of scale. On the negative side, the musicians' flesh tones are washed out, as are the bright colors of the scrims and backdrops used on stage. Suffice it to say, though, that with the sound mixed properly, *Let's Spend The Night Together* is a sizzling concert video that could start anew that old argument about who is the world's greatest rock band. There's still no excuse for intercutting shots of student protests and violence in Vietnam, but these lapses in context seem less objectionable when the music's working as well as it does on this small-screen version. *Director: Hal Ashby. Embassy Home Entertainment. 90 minutes. Beta & VHS: \$39.95. CED & VHS: \$29.95. —David Manners*



The Compleat Beatles

In the realm of rock videos, *The*

Film

And Raise A Glorious Voice

Say Amen, Somebody

(United Artist Classics)

Understanding George T. Nierenberger's *Say Amen, Somebody* is much easier if you know straight off that the title is a joke. Rev. Thomas Dorsey, the great gospel composer now in his eighties, is recalling his days as the bluesman Georgia Tom and as a sideman for Tampa Red and Bessie Smith. He recites one of his own lyrics—"The blues ain't nothing but a good woman feelin' bad"—and points out that the Christian charity it suggests ("Go and make her feel better!") is not necessarily incompatible with the message of his hymns. As he finishes this delightful bit of sophistry, Dorsey slyly looks around him. "Say amen, somebody!" he implores with a wicked wink.

Such unsanctimonious moments abound in this film, so much so that it is hard to know whether to laud Nierenberger more highly for preserving such fine, expressive music, for capturing such rich, homely dialogue or for giving us such intimate, honest glimpses into the lives of some very special people: Dorsey, Mother Willie Mae Ford Smith and such younger gospel singers as the brilliant Zella Jackson Price. In the end, it's the music—and what the performers have to say about it—which wins out.

It is fascinating to hear Mother Smith discussing the early days of Rev. Dorsey's gospel choir innovations, when their lively, rhythmic music was considered outright blasphemy. "You might as well be Bessie Smith or Mamie Smith, bringing the blues into church," she remembers being told. "I've been thrown out of the best churches," she adds.

But now she is revered, and with good reason. To see Mother Smith move to the microphone, filled with pain and suffering, and then sing the achingly beautiful "Singing in My Soul" is to understand something about continuity and tradition in American culture—the kind of insight which is generally denied us.

Nierenberger's direction—which involved shooting concerts and some staged but improvisational domestic scenes—gives us an unaccustomed entree to the situations from which such music grows: Mother Smith drives round St. Louis with her grandson, arguing a kind of instinctive feminism; her children visit a train station and weep with the grief of remembering their mother's many travels; Zella Jackson Price confronts her anxieties about going on tour. In one of the small, tidy but overstuffed rooms in which all the singers seem to live, Rev. Dorsey and his one time manager and duet

Compleat Beatles (a video companion to the two-volume book set of the same title released in the fall of '81 by Delilah Communications) ranks as one of the oddest, or perhaps most schizophrenic, entries on the market.

It is the Beatles, but in no way is it complete (or compleat, as it were). For one, the band's original drummer, Pete Best, isn't even mentioned until he is replaced by Ringo Starr. This, despite every other member, including the late Stu Sutcliffe, having been profiled and despite the inclusion of concert footage of the group, with Best on drums, during its pivotal appearances in Hamburg, Germany.

There's also a curious lapse in continuity beginning with the time the Beatles withdrew from concert tours. Up to that point, care had been taken to place the band in some musical and sociological context—to show how they related to the life and music going on around them—and the resulting portrait of four rock 'n' roll musicians shaking a large part of the civilized world to its very foundation has not only a certain ineluctable momentum, but

also a generous helping of comedy and tragedy, pathos and bathos. But just as the Beatles isolated themselves from their fans, so do the filmmakers choose to isolate the world from the Beatles. That is, there's precious little information as to how one reacted to the other and vice versa in the Beatles' later years when the changes taking place in society were notably tumultuous—a severe oversight in a film that concludes with the thought that the Beatles were a product of the '60s and not meant to last beyond that decade.

On the other hand, there are wonderful concert scenes from the Beatles' early days, as well as the inclusion of some intriguing videos shot post-*Sgt. Pepper*. The one constant in *The Compleat Beatles* is producer George Martin, whose eloquent recollections of working with the quartet in the studio and helping them develop their ideas are just about worth the price of admission. As it is, one is forced to admit—hate to say it, but it's all too true in this case—that the books were much better. *MGM/UA. 119 minutes. \$69.95. —David McGee*

partner, Sallie Martin, listen to a 78 RPM recording of their "If You See My Savior" and begin to harmonize, a sad and precious moment.

Again and again the film comes back to the music, which is fine indeed. The O'Neal Twins and the Barrett Sisters have established reputations, which their work here will only enhance. Rev. Dorsey and Mother Smith deserve to be recalled anew. But the music that fills me with the most hope and pleasure is that of Zella Jackson Price, the youngest of the singers featured and, in some ways, the most impressive.

Her vitality and dedication, shining through especially on the soundtrack album (DRG Records), demonstrate that Mother Smith and Rev. Dorsey are only the first links in a chain that remains unbroken.

That tradition is nurtured even now with their exacting discipline and devotion. As she tries to teach a young singer her methods, Mother Smith offers the finest definition of singing I have ever heard: she says it is "a spell you cast upon the people with your enunciation." *Say Amen, Somebody* casts a spell you'll never forget. —Dave Marsh

Much Dance, Little Flash

Flashdance (Paramount)

Alexandra, known as Alex, is a stunning, fiercely independent 18-year-old girl who works as a welder in a Pittsburgh machine shop; reads *Vogue* on her lunch hour; lives in an old warehouse with a trusty dog; yearns desperately to be a prima ballerina; works nights as a dancer in a combination working class bar/punk club/strip joint; goes to confession regularly; moves from virgin to sexual dynamo in one night; has a heart of gold, and accomplishes all this without breaking a fingernail. If there is on this planet or any other planet a creature resembling Alex—or for that matter any other character in this mess of a movie—I'll eat this review.

Flashdance, directed with flair if not intelligence by Adrian Lyne and written by Tom Hedley and Joe Eszterhas, is devoid of emotional reality and populated by characters who aspire to stick figure status. It is painfully maudlin, juvenile, choppy and banal, not to mention shamefully dishonest.

The phoniness reaches its zenith when the male love interest informs Alex (Jennifer Beals) that "When you give up your dream, you die."

It's a theme restated countless times in 95 minutes, and it's sheer nonsense. Though love may, indeed, mean never having to say you're sorry, find me one person who has died of disappointment. When a dream fades, a person feels lousy for a time then either becomes more cynical or sucks it up and discovers a new dream.

Evidently, the creators of *Flashdance* were too lazy to rise to the level of cliché.

Not one location or plot device rings true—from Alex working in a photograph in a wash of multicol-

ored fog, to the bar, which George Lucas ought to appropriate for his next fantasy. There's also the kindly older woman, an ex-ballet star, who urges Alex to pursue her dream and then conveniently dies on the eve of the big audition. Of course, there's a wise-cracking male friend, bemused parents and a cretinous antagonist.

Meanwhile, the editors eliminate any threat of drama by jump-cutting the film to pieces, rather than letting even one scene develop.

Nevertheless, *Flashdance* does have one attribute—its musical score. Although music is generally superfluous or irrelevant to the on-screen action, it does make for an enjoyable aural experience—one that can be far better obtained from the soundtrack LP.

A final note: Several scenes in the film, notably a new wave dance number involving a beautiful woman and a TV set, are pointedly aimed at the MTV market. These scenes add little to the film's continuity and give the term made-for-TV-movie a bad name. —Mark Mehler



Alex (right) and her beau aspire to stick-figure status.

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After A Bout Of Leukemia, Steve Goodman Hits The Road

By David Gans

LOS ANGELES—Red Pajamas Records is a one-act label with a one-title catalogue. But Steve Goodman, proprietor and Red Pajamas recording artist, doesn't mind too much that his album, *Artistic Hair*, is sold only at his shows and through the mail instead of in record stores. "It keeps body and soul together, and it feeds three kids," he says, "so we're cookin'."

Singer-songwriters—especially those who play acoustic guitars, tour solo, write sensitive songs with humorous lyrics and cover old swing tunes—aren't exactly what you'd call "hot" in the industry these days. But "before we panic," Goodman cautions, "we should remember that there is an audience for this music. The demographics of it may not be as large as John Cougar's or Michael Jackson's, but as long as there's an audience, I don't think we have to worry that the majority of them are more than 14-years-old."

After being "discovered" by Kris

Kristofferson and Paul Anka at Chicago's Quiet Knight in 1971, the 34-year-old author of "City of New Orleans"—a song usually associated with Arlo Guthrie, whose 1972 version was a huge hit—cut two albums for Buddah and five for Elektra/Asylum. The latter label dropped him and his friend, collaborator and fellow Chicagoan, John Prine, in 1981, driving two more nails into the coffin of acoustic music, at least from an industry perspective. Goodman is more forgiving than the fans: "I felt misunderstood at times, and I'm sure there were times when they felt I didn't understand what they were trying to do," he philosophizes. "Maybe that wasn't the right place for me."

Goodman plays solo in clubs and small auditoriums, sometimes sharing the bill with Prine and occasionally opening for other artists such as Johnny Cash. Before Goodman takes the stage, the audience is treated to a short film hosted by Martin Mull in which friends and fans, in-

cluding Steve Martin, Jimmy Buffett, Bonnie Raitt, Carl Reiner, Mull and Jackson Browne check in with Friars Club-style testimonials to the artist (Reiner: "Steve Goodman is the first Muppet to make it on his own").

"I don't think we'll be able to retire," Goodman notes, "but everything's going very smoothly. People have been buying the album after the shows, and Nancy (his wife) goes to the post office box and gets 75 or 80 letters a week. I'm going to have to order more albums." Performances are being recorded for the next album, which will include some of the new material Goodman's been writing. "I've got one song I wrote with Sean Kelly—the guy from *National Lampoon*—about a post-nuclear nuclear family. It's called 'Watching Joey Glow,' and the reason we wrote it is that from what I can see this movement doesn't have a 'Feel Like I'm Fixing To Die Rag.'"

"You can't be too sincere about something like the end of the



Steve Goodman: "You can't be too sincere about something like the end of the world."

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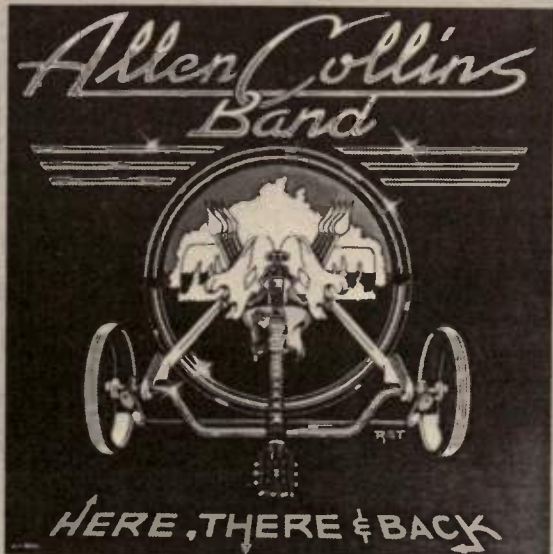
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world," Goodman opines. "It's hard to accuse someone of over-sincerity about that, even if your own taste leads you to believe that it's so. Anybody who lines up on the human side of that issue is okay with me." There's also a "beach song" called "Don't Get Sand In It," which will be on the next Nitty Gritty Dirt Band album. "I hadn't written any beach music since I've been out in California, and I know how much we need more surf music, right?"

The next Goodman record will also include "A Dying Cub Fan's Last Request." Goodman, a native of the Windy City, wrote and released the song as a single on Red Pajamas (backed with "Take Me Out To The Ballgame") during the 1981 baseball players' strike, but it's destined never to go out of style as long as the Cubs maintain their tradition of keeping Wrigley Field uncontaminated by pennants.

The cover photo of *Artistic Hair* shows a nearly hairless Goodman leaning against the window of a barbershop of that name. It's not a look that he would have chosen for himself, though; it's a "chemo cut," an unfortunate side effect of the chemotherapy Goodman has been undergoing regularly since his leukemia returned last year.

"This thing is from 1969," Goodman explains. "I had six years of chemo, and it was never a big deal because I never missed a concert. Then I missed one in New York last summer, and I was diagnosed again and had to check right into the hospital. I missed the Harry Chapin memorial that his wife had written and asked me to play at, and it hit the wire services."

"I got a humbling amount of mail—very encouraging, but embarrassing just the same," Goodman says. "I don't mean to intrude on people's time that way." He was in a New York hospital for several months—"not a picnic," he concedes—"but I'm in remission now. I do go for treatments regularly, but I'm making all my concerts and everything's fine."

And hold your sympathy, America: "You know, twenty-five percent of the population in this country is eventually going to have to deal with something like this," Goodman says by way of deflecting excessive concern. Too, "there are other people out on tour—perhaps they don't wish me to discuss their problems—but let's just say I'm not alone." Goodman would rather we turn our attention towards the people who work in the hospitals and laboratories and deal with cancer victims daily. "I have so much respect for those people. They're so dedicated—I feel like I owe it to somebody besides my family to do the best I can." His continued ability to perform is testament to their work, he insists. "I certainly don't mind waving their flag." ○

The 'Boss' Keeps Rollin' On: Joe Turner In The Studio

By Doc Pomus

(Ed. note: in 1941 in Brooklyn, a 16-year-old saxophone player named Jerome Felder heard a recording of "Piney Brown Blues" by Joe Turner and it changed his life. The song inspired Felder not only to continue pursuing his fledgling musical career, but also to begin writing his own material. At the time, Felder was playing gigs at a club around the corner from his parents' house, and had adopted a pseudonym to be used on the club's marquee in order to save his folks the embarrassment of discovering that their son hung out in a joint. Doc Pomus, as he called himself, went on to write blues songs that Turner and Ray Charles, to name a couple of prominent examples, recorded, and in the mid-'50s teamed with a young songwriter named Mort Shuman and penned some now-classic songs for Elvis Presley, the Drifters, Dion and the Belmonts, the Mystics and others. In recent years Pomus has been involved as a co-writer on Mink DeVille's acclaimed 1980 album, *Le Chat Bleu*, and on B.B. King's Grammy Award-winning 1981 LP, *There Must Be A Better World Somewhere*. Recently, though, Pomus found his career coming full circle when presented with the opportunity to produce an album Joe Turner was preparing to record for Muse Records, with instrumental backing supplied by Roomful of Blues. The LP, *Blues Train*, should be in release by the time this article reaches print. We asked Pomus to give us a brief overview of how the project came together and an inside look at the sessions as well.)

Last summer Joe Fields, the owner of Muse Records, a small but highly respected jazz label, contacted me about the possibility of doing a session with Big Joe Turner backed by Roomful of Blues. Fields knew of my long friendship and musical relationship with Turner and figured correctly that I'd be the perfect liaison between the artist and the record company and the music and the musicians. I had two things going for me: number one, Turner trusted me completely; number two, I was going to do everything for nothing and pay for the rehearsals. It was also agreed that I would co-produce the album with Bob Porter, a noted jazz producer who has worked with the likes of Sonny Stitt and Gene Ammons.

Roomful, a tough, soulful, veteran rhythm and blues and blues band, had performed with Joe many times. And unlike most young white groups of this nature, they perform urban blues and swing instead of the Delta and Chicago thing. They know all of Turner's material and play it with love and understanding. I worked out the business details with Turner and Fields and promised I would work with Joe in selecting material, and would even write a new song for the occasion.

Joe and myself decided to get together once a week for several months with Stuart Hemmingway, a fine piano player and a neighbor of mine. He plays jazz and blues expertly, learns songs and grasps concepts quickly, and is easy to get along with—no tantrum displays or ego sailings.

In early October, before we started the first rehearsal, I went through endless Turner recordings on Atlantic, Pablo, National, Savoy and other labels, trying to resist the temptation to suggest to Joe that he rework some of his classics ("Chains of Love," "Shake, Rattle and Roll," "Flip, Flop and Fly"). Finally, Joe and I agreed on a grouping that sounded dead center: "Crawdada Hole"—a favorite of Joe's that he hadn't performed for many years; an old Dixieland song called "Morning Glory," which Turner wrote and titled "Cock-a-Doodle-Do"; a jump blues of many verses from the old "Mad Blues," plus pieces of other uptempo songs that fitted just right and could be added

on at the session according to inclination or necessity (during the sessions Turner titled the song "Here Comes My Baby"); "Red Sails In The Sunset," a beautiful old ballad with a beautiful new arrangement and interpretation—Joe had previously recorded the song as a jump or swing-time ditty; a new version of an old, slow blues titled "I Know You Love Me Baby" containing one of my favorite lyrics: "I live across the street from a juice joint, baby/and all night long they play the blues"; my new blues, "Blues Train."

Teaching Joe the new song was my first and major task. He hadn't learned a new lyric in over 15 years and needed help sharpening his 72-year-old memory. Now Joe doesn't exactly read—and Stuart is legally blind—so the learning process was a wee bit difficult. I would sit next to Joe with the lyric in my hand, prodding and coaxing him. We'd repeat the song again and again; I would sing and Stuart would play, Joe would sing and then we would all sing, then sing and play, again and

again, and again and again . . . and slowly, but very slowly, and after much pain and confusion, it came together.

Roomful was always on the road, so we never had a chance to get together and sketch songs or plot arrangements. I taped Joe doing "Red Sails," "Blues Train" and "Cock-a-Doodle-Do," and sent the cassettes ahead with suggestions to Albie Copley, Roomful's piano player and arranger. The group wanted me to decide who was to take what solos and when. This way no one could accuse each other of trying to hog the spotlight. Ah, well . . . the beat goes on.

The Session: January 26, 1983. Wednesday, noon. Jac Studio, 45 West 57th Street. The studio is small and funky, reminiscent of the old-time New York blues studios like Beltone in the Walcott Hotel, where we used to do everything live and in one take: it was warm and intimate and loose and tight at the same time. The engineer, Malcolm Addey, figured that 16 tracks for



The author (left) and Joe Turner

this kind of session would be sufficient. He was so right: The blues most surely don't need 32 channels and 10 overdubs.

Joe sat down and sang "Crawdada Hole" and the session caught fire. Everything was done in one or two takes. One song flowed into another, one idea found another, and another, and everyone chipped in and kept the pot boiling. And every time it simmered down a bit, someone came up with something fresh and the stew got hotter and hot-

ter . . . hmmm, I realize my prose (and girth) bespeaks a preoccupation with food!

The new song, "Blues Train," came together for the first time. I sat in front of Joe, with the lyrics in my shaking hand, ready to mouth or whisper them, but it wasn't necessary. Joe sang the lyric without a single hesitation or mistake. The old pro came through.

At four o'clock in the morning Dr. John wandered in and we put

Continued on page 29

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All The World's A Stage (And The Cosmos, Too)

BY ROBYN FLAN

MAURICE WHITE TAKES STOCK OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE'S SELF- CONTAINED UNIVERSE

We're not a funk band. We're a universal band. My background is that of the world, not a neighborhood."

So said Maurice White of Earth, Wind & Fire on one of those rare occasions when he had taxied into planet Earth to reassess EW&F's current state of affairs and take stock of his own cosmological status at the moment.

Actually, there's two Maurice Whites. One is given to grandiose statements and mega-produced flamboyance (see above), while the other is the straightforward, clear-headed businessman and artistic force behind one of contemporary music's most popular bands.

That's also the guy who set out to be a music teacher 23 years ago while attending the Chicago Conservatory of Music. He changed his mind, though, and took a job as a session drummer for Chess Records. After backing some of the label's most prominent artists—among them Chuck Berry, Billy Stewart, Sonny Stitt, and the Dells—White joined Ramsey Lewis' group in 1966, and went on to become Lewis' producer as well. In 1970 he left Lewis and formed his own group, the Salty Peppers, which had two regional hits before relocating to Los Angeles in 1971. There the Salty Peppers became Earth, Wind & Fire, a name that reflected White's growing interest in spirituality and man's relationship

to the elements. EW&F was signed to Warner Bros. and released two albums (*The Need of Love* and *Earth, Wind & Fire*) of comparatively straight-ahead, street-style rhythm and blues.

But success eluded the group until it switched to Columbia Records, expanded its personnel and streamlined its sound. 1974's *Open Our Eyes*, though marred by stylistic inconsistencies, did point the way to the future in attempting to strike some kind of balance between rock music and what we now know as funk. The following album, *That's The Way Of The World*, found all of the elements coming together—the full, rich employment of percussion and horns, the vocal interplay between White's gritty tenor and Philip Bailey's rich falsetto, the seamless production—and gave the band its first platinum record. At that point EW&F became a hit factory—the platinum albums *Gratitude*, *All 'n' All* and *I Am* followed, as did the hit singles "Celebrate," "Shining Star" and "After The Love Is Gone"—and found itself playing to what was perhaps the most racially-mixed audience black and rock music had ever seen—so much so that the term "crossover" seemed an inadequate description of the degree to which the band had surmounted the musical race lines of America.

On 1982's *Raise* and the recently released *Powerlight*, however, White has taken something of a critical beating over the increasingly polished, pop sound of those records. White himself shrugs off such criticism of his work: "You know, you're cool on one album, and if you don't repeat that same performance

on another album, you're doing something wrong. But if you repeat the same performance on another album, then you're copying something you did before. So what can you do?" The question's really rhetorical: Maurice White intends to do exactly what he wants to do.

Dressed casually in jeans and a sweater, and speaking in a low-key but forceful manner, White took time between sessions of an album he's producing for Jennifer (*Dream Girls*) Holiday to comment on the evolution of Earth, Wind & Fire, the problem of being a black businessman in the entertainment industry and an artist's responsibility to his audience.

If there's a constant about Earth, Wind & Fire, it's change. One critic has described the early EW&F, circa 1971, as "a straighter R&B version of the Art Ensemble of Chicago." When you moved from Warner Bros. to Columbia in the mid-'70s, the look became flashier, the sound more mainstream black pop, yet you continued to incorporate elements of other musics. And on your latest album, *Powerlight*, you've gone to South America for some of the rhythm patterns. Is this change simply for the sake of change, or do you have some grand plan dictating EW&F's evolution? Where is the band going?

What you're hearing on each album is a reflection of what was happening at that time and also a reflection of where I was personally. Life is continual and it's constantly expanding; you learn each day, and that's what application's about. Right now I'm into the technology

of electronics—the technology of the world—so that's reflected in the music.

Even the graphics on our albums reflect the studies we're into. The pyramids on *I Am*—I was studying Egyptology at the time. The chakras on the new album reflect my ongoing investigation into different theories of life.

Beyond that, it's necessary to remain innovative, to just keep trying new things. It gets boring if you try to reproduce the same sound over and over again. We've employed the Brazilian sound, the African sound and the sound of American streets, and brought all of that together. Normally, when I go into the studio to do an album, I cut 15 or 16 tracks. Then maybe the eight most commercial tracks make it onto the album. But there's a lot of other stuff that I have, even from this album, *Powerlight*. I have some unbelievable stuff that I didn't put on the record because it would probably have been unacceptable to the public. That's very stifling, because I might be doing something of an experimental nature that's far beyond what anyone else is doing at the time.

Would you say that the music that didn't make it onto *Powerlight* is radically different from any we've ever heard from Earth, Wind & Fire?

Yeah, but I'll take little bits and pieces of that material and use them later on.

Could you be more specific about the components that make it so radically different?

It's a matter of using the technology that's available to us. I'm trying to fuse the intellectual with feeling, with the human element. That's the thing I work on all the time. Everything is so synthesized in this era, but if the human element is left out, we lose the feeling of the music. In doing this I tend to work on a level where I like to think I take unbelievable chances without worrying about the music being commercial. Considering what radio wants, though, you have to do a certain amount of things that will get their attention.

Isn't it frustrating not to be able to release, say, only half of what you record for a given album, especially when you think so highly of it?

Sometimes it's frustrating, but you have to be aware of the realities. So you cover yourself on one hand and you experiment on the other. You do some things that are uplifting and fulfilling to you as a musician, and you do some things that are ful-

filling to your fans. It's a share that you witness within your work. You can't be a selfish musician; you are, you go out with the truth. We've seen bands come and go, have one hit, one big album, and disappear. We've been pretty consistent in what we do, and I think that's because of the human element and care and dedication we have for our music.

You founded and took control of Earth, Wind & Fire as both an artist and as a businessman. At the time you did this, the idea of an artist managing his group's non-musical affairs was almost unheard of. What kind of obstacles have you encountered as a black businessman in the music industry?

There were many obstacles in the early days. For one, labels were accustomed to black bands only selling singles, not albums, so as a result they only pushed singles. They wouldn't even push a black album. Black FM radio was a great instrument for exposing a wider range of expression in black music in the early '70s, and I think EW&F, along with Stevie Wonder and Don Hathaway and a few others, helped convince people in the music business that black artists were album artists.

We also had problems because black bands had never toured in the fashion we're touring nowadays. We'd always toured in a very local economical scene with one spotlight in the middle of the stage and that was about it. So we changed the whole presentation of black music on stage. It was very hard. I mean, find it very hard even nowadays because there's so much racial prejudice on radio.

You also have, or had, your own record label. What's the status of ARC today?

I formed ARC because I had dreams of trying to bring new talent to the forefront and doing it in a way that would keep certain talented individuals together and help them come into the recording industry the right way, rather than having to go through the whole big conglomerate trip and be messed around wanted to try to present something good to people. That didn't quite work out, so last year, in June, I phased ARC out and re-established my production company, Kalim Productions.

During the time ARC existed, I was both a performer and an executive. The executive part I didn't like. I'm a performer; I'm a creative person. Now I'm producing and doing what I do best and I have the freedom



PHOTO: CHRIS WALTER/REINA LTD.

Maurice White: "I'm trying to fuse the intellectual with feeling, with the human element. That's what I work on all the time."

om to go back and forth between my company I want and work with some of the talented artists I've always wanted to work with. When I had ARC I was producing for ARC exclusively. But having a company like that for two-and-a-half years as a great experience.

ut you still function on some level as a businessman within Earth, Wind & Fire. How do you strike a balance between art and commerce with your relationships with the rest of the band members?

e've been together such a long time that it's really not hard. We're r and up front with each other, and that creates unity. I brought most of these guys into the business and it's grown from that point. You learn by trial and error. I learned through years of playing behind people, playing in other groups, trying and seeing all the great stars do it wrong. And I'd sit back and say, "Okay, I won't do that." But at the same time, you have to realize that when success comes, it's not that it's always cracked up to be. There's a lot of responsibility that comes with it and it's something that forces you to search for and identify with the Creator, with the spiritual life force within you. You're going to go through changes and you're going to say yes and no to certain things and get hung up here and there, but that's alright.

You see, it would be better if we had creative people running this industry, but we don't. We have business people handling it who have different attitudes about creativity. They're in the business to make money and that whole trip has nothing to do with art. Creativity is an art, but we have business people who get involved and create gimmicks. That lessens the amount of good art people could be exposed to if we didn't have these strange business people who create illusions in the minds of the creative people. So they lay a trip on us and here we go. But if creative people were running the industry, humanity would be getting something great because there wouldn't be as many illusions. You could sit back and teach the one coming behind you, "I can run it to you because I've lived it," and that person could believe you. There would be communication because there'd be no bullshit happening.

But how would the man on the street recognize it as different?

The music would be different; it would be better.

You mean radio might play some of that material you can't put on Earth, Wind & Fire records now?

Yeah, right, we'd hear that. We'd hear a lot of that. People draw energy from music, and I think we'd have a greater country and a greater

world if music were just totally free. But we have the economic trip going on and all of these illusions in the world—like everybody has to be skinny and have real smooth skin and a head full of hair. It's not real. It's this whole commercial trip; it's a lie we're trying to live with and that's why we have the problems we have. The things we're taught are lies, and we try to live lies, but lies are not everlasting. Somewhere it falls off and we fall with it. We don't accept people from the heart. We accept them according to how they look, and that's why a lot of people are unhappy. They're caught up in this trip and they don't know how to get out of it. They're really beautiful inside, but nobody takes the time to look. They're only concerned about "What are you wearing today? How much money do you have in the bank?" That's what people are concerned with—false principles. If some of those were broken down the world would be a happier place. But we deal with ego and we haven't learned to put ego in perspective. When will it be?

In your songs and in conversation you often make references to the Creator and to spiritual matters. What sort of spiritual orientation do you have? Are you involved in organized religion?

My grandmother planted the seed in me when I was about four years

old—made me aware of the Creator—and the seed started to mature. I was raised a Baptist, in a Christian environment, and that was good for me until I reached the age of 19 or 20. They tell us to go out in life and practice all these things we've learned about—the fundamentals—apply them to life and they'll work. Well, I tried applying some of those things and I came to find out they didn't work for me.

What sort of things?

Oh, like turn the other cheek and that kind of stuff, be meek and all this. So I came to find out that they didn't really know what they were talking about. So I started to create my own laws, universal laws. Then I started to study Eastern philosophies and watch people of that order. So I unlearned and took notes and tried to make new laws for myself, things that would work for me, and tried to find the good in life, apply it and see what happened. Then I also tried to stay in tune with my feelings. I'm still in the same place. Basically I'm a spiritual person, but I'm not one who would lay my laws on someone else and be judgmental and say, "Hey, you do this and do that and everything will be alright." I can't do that because each and every one of us has a different thumb print, so I'm just applying certain things to my life and watching it work.

And music is part of your ministry?

about music, it works as a ministry. There's many ministries. It's just a vehicle for passing vibrations. That's really all music is, so it more or less amplifies what you are. If you're a drag, then your music is going to be a drag. (Laughs)

In what sense do you feel an artist has an obligation to set a moral example for his audience? How do you feel about the Ozzy Osbournes, the Rick Jameses, the Princes and the David Lee Roths of the world?

I think each artist has something he's trying to say, and I could be judgmental and say he's not doing it right, but that's not cool. These people are reaching someone with something. Maybe it's not my taste or what I would consider good, but obviously someone is digging it. So whatever it takes for that person to break through.

But is it okay simply because it's reaching someone? Where do you draw the line? Would you condone an artist inciting his audience to commit acts of violence?

Well, look at it this way: a lot of people go out to those kinds of concerts because that's their whole bag—they're into that space of violence. I'm not saying I condone it or dig it. It's not for me. But my only responsibility is to the people I'm appealing to. That's as far as I can take it. It's hard for me to be judgmental. If I were that way I'd be like the reviewer who was saying, "Well, he really should do this." I can't say that because they're doing their music for a reason and if they're still around they must be appealing to someone. To each his own.

That's a diplomatic answer.

Well, there are things that I don't like, but it's hard for me to put them down if the music's appealing to someone. Each one of us has his own way of bringing into his vibration the things he needs in order to grow. Some of the things are a drag, some of the things are good, but we gravitate to certain frequencies and we pull things in that we want and we need. There are things I went through as a teenager that I needed to experience in order to grow, but as far as my parents were concerned those things were a drag. They didn't know what I was doing, but it was good for me. Experience helps you grow into whoever you are destined to be.

As Earth, Wind & Fire becomes more successful and you become more visible, there's a lot of talk about you going solo, or at least making a solo album. Would you care to address this matter definitively?

I get this question even on the street. Ladies will come up to me and say, "Well, when are you going to do it?" "Do what?" "Come out with your solo record." "Well, why?" "Because Lionel did one." So I guess I'm next. It's a very strange thing. Even if I wanted to do a solo record now I wouldn't do it because it would be following a trend. Everybody's doing a solo record now. I'm just going to space for awhile, wait until this whole fantasy is over. Then I'll do my solo record. I think a solo record is something special and shouldn't be done just because an artist needs the exposure or wants to make a lot of money for himself. You do solo records when you have something different you want to say. It would be a drag for me to make a solo record and have it come out sounding like I sound with Earth, Wind & Fire. If I give my public a solo record, I want it to be a contribution, so they'll say, "Oh yes, that's where he's at. This is what he wanted to say that's different from what we've been hearing all these years." That's precisely what I'm going to do. When I give you my solo record it's going to be *bad*. Believe me, I'm going to take time and work on it and it's going to be something different. But I'm going to space for now. ○

Sound Signature

John Fahey, Primitive Picker

By Dan Forte

John Fahey has been rightfully called a musical genius, a term often accompanied by adjectives like "eccentric" or "erratic." In concert he's been known to sit and play, seemingly in a trance, for more than an hour, weaving one composition into the next without ever stopping to acknowledge the audience's presence. He's also been known to leave his Martin six-string on the stand next to him and discourse, in his rambling way, on politics, art, metaphysics or whatever's on his mind at the moment. But more often than not, the word that best describes the man and his music is *inspired*.

John Fahey is the spiritual father, the hardbound edition, of the open tuning/steel-string school known as American Primitive Guitar—mentor to Leo Kottke and a legion of Kottke and Fahey clones. He may not be as flashy or gymnastic as Leo, and not as melodic or structured as, say, William Ackerman, but Fahey plays with more feeling, more imagination, and more *depth* than any of the fingerstylists who've followed him. Part of this is due to a solid blues base that most of the others are lacking. Fahey has the unique ability to extend the three-chord form—adding chords, altering changes, repeating turnarounds—to sound both more progressive and more primitive than a conventional 12-bar blues.

"What I did," Fahey states mat-

ter-of-factly, "was single-handedly make the steel-string American guitar a respectable concert instrument. That's the tradition I started, really. I don't particularly care what you do with it, what kind of music you play on it. I was just trying to get my music respectable, of course, but also the instrument. And now it is. I used the term American Primitive Guitar because I was self-taught—like in painting. It just means untutored."

Although he recorded a slew of instrumental albums in the '60s and '70s, on labels such as Vanguard, Reprise, Riverboat, and Warner Bros., Fahey is best known for his LPs on his own Takoma label, which he started in 1959 with a solo guitar album entitled *Blind Joe Death* (named for his alter ego who reappeared on several subsequent releases). In addition to Fahey's music—which combined elements from blues, country, and Indian ragas—the label released such esoteric albums as *The Psychedelic Saxophone Of Charlie Nothing*, an album by Eddie "One-String" Jones, and the first recording by pianist George Winston, which Fahey produced. (Takoma was later bought by Chrysalis, but has apparently been put to rest. Fahey's latest release, *Christmas Guitar, Volume One*, on Rounder's Varrick label, featuring newly recorded versions of Christmas Carols originally released on *The New Possibility*, is one of the most inventive collections of Christmas interpretations ever recorded.)

With his roommate, Al Wilson,

who later founded Canned Heat, and business partner Ed Denson, now the head of Kicking Mule Records, Fahey was instrumental in "rediscovering" several country blues greats, including Skip James, Bukka White, and Robert Pete Williams. While studying folklore at UCLA, he also wrote a master's thesis on blues singer Charley Patton, later published in book form. "It was very revealing, writing that book," he says, "because I found out why Charley Patton's music is so exciting. He's unpredictable. He'd go 4/4, 4/4, 6/4, 4/4—with the accents all on the offbeat. He was really brilliant."

Fahey lists Patton and "a lot of bluesmen" as major influences on his guitar style, but admits that was also affected by a lot of white country players, such as Sam McGee and Frank Hutchinson. "Actually, the person I *tried* to model my playing after was McGee," he points out, "but I'm not as clean or fast as him. I tried to learn songs note-for-note off old 78s, but I never could, so they became my versions. Try and play a Blind Blake song the way *he* played it—it's impossible. Every twelve bars it changes."

Even though his music often leans heavily toward extended, seemingly stream-of-consciousness opuses, the guitarist stresses that "everything I play is set up, very little is improvised. I play it so it's exciting and dramatic, and I make it sound like maybe I'm improvising."

John currently travels with two guitars, a mid-'70s Martin D-35 and



John Fahey: "Fourteen frets is fine for me."

a "cheap model" Gibson with a raised nut for playing slide Hawaiian-style. "On slide I only play in open G, called Spanish tuning (DGDGBD), or open D (DADF#AD). On the Martin I play in standard, open G, open D major, open D minor, and open D modal. You just tune the third string down

a half-step for minor, up a half-step for modal."

Asked if he's ever considered commissioning a luthier to build him a customized John Fahey model guitar, the guitarist shrugs: "I'm not that good a guitar player to need cutaways and all that. Fourteen frets is fine for me." ○

Kottke: The Art Of Surprise

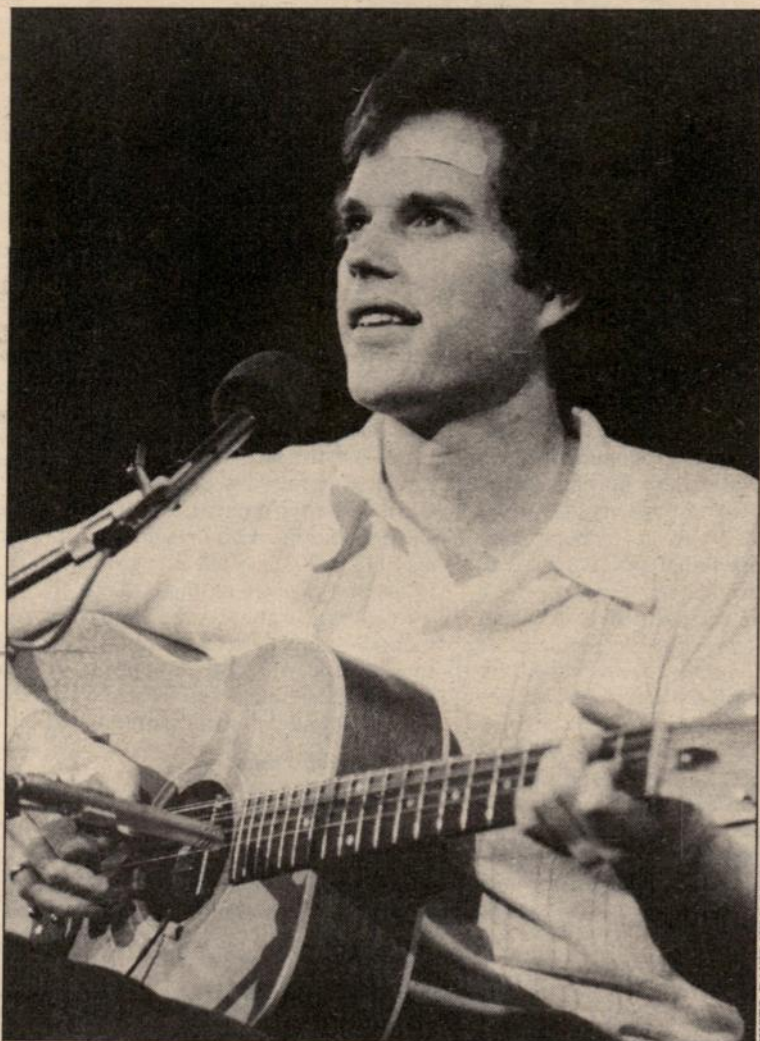
By Chris Doering

Leo Kottke's debut album, even more than that of his discoverer, John Fahey, inspired legions of lonely acoustic fingerpickers to explore the possibilities of the steel-string "folk" guitar. The word appears in quotation marks because, although rooted in the alternating bass and constant thumb of traditional fingerpicking styles, Kottke's sophisticated chord progressions and melodic lines, as well as his steely-fingered virtuosity at breakneck tempos, hardly classify as folk music.

Today, after a dozen albums and at least that many years of concert tours around the world, Kottke has evolved far beyond the shy virtuoso who could barely bring himself to announce the titles of his compositions to an audience. From his relaxed, confident presence before a packed Carnegie Hall audience to the way he switches guitars without getting off his stool, he appears the complete professional, mixing dryly humorous song introductions and a few vocals in with his instrumental compositions. The years have seasoned Leo Kottke, but as the concert opens with a twelve-minute guitar instrumental that shifts between thumb-driven folk melodies, classically oriented chromatic fantasies, and delicate atmospheric, it's obvious that he still knows how to surprise.

"Surprise is probably central to the kind of art that I like," Kottke explains. "My favorite kind of music, especially in pop music, is the stuff that implies a direction until it's blue in the face and then at the last second goes somewhere else that winds up feeling better. It's a real old idea—tension and release is probably the best name for it."

Another kind of surprise, to those who remember his old description of his singing voice as "geese farts on a muggy day," is the strong and confident baritone Kottke now displays in concert. Leo feels that he's learned "not how to sing, but how to



Leo Kottke: "I have hunches about what I might be capable of."

feel when I do sing. I think singing is more of a head trip than anything else. I enjoy it now, and when I run into the old problems I used to have, like losing my pitch in a big auditorium or to adjust every night to a different kind of sibilance, it just doesn't bother me any more. I also found out that if you look 'em in the eye while you're singing, it's tougher at first but easier in the long run. That's what I mean about its being a head trip. You really expose yourself when you open your mouth. I've always liked a certain kind of voice that you don't hear any more, for

example Buddy Knox, who had a kind of flat, plain voice, but I thought had a very Midwestern something or other. There wasn't a lot of style or persona to it but it was convincing, it seemed to mean something without any histrionics. I've been looking for that for myself for a long time, and I think I've gotten closer to it."

Time Step, Kottke's latest album, has plenty of evidence of his newfound vocal prowess. In fact, nine of the eleven cuts on the record are vocals. Did Kottke find it a risky decision for a performer known for his

playing to feature so much of his singing? "The problem with answering that question," he replies, "is that I don't really make decisions about what I play or write or what I intend to do. I have hunches about what I might be capable of, but I have to depend on . . . inspiration is a little too high-flown a word. I guess I take what's available, what happens to be around, and this time around it happened to be a lot of vocal stuff."

Kottke claims his new record was "the easiest one I've made. I started by looking for David Kemper to play drums, because I'd heard him on T-Bone Burnett's record. My new manager suggested that I have T-Bone produce it, as long as that's what I was looking for, and it worked beautifully. We did it all live except for the harmony vocals by Emmylou Harris and Albert Lee." The album was recorded at Harris' Magnolia Sound studio in L.A., which Kottke likes for its live sound. At Magnolia, the rhythm section was set up in a large room, while Leo recorded his vocals and guitar live in "The Silo," where Emmylou records her own vocals. "The result," he feels, "was terrific. It's the first time I've ever gotten the sound of the room on tape. It runs totally counter to the popular notion of how to record, but I think proves itself. I could see and hear the rest of the band through a glass door, so we didn't use any phones. There's a lot of bleed on the record, but if you do it live and you know what you want in the beginning, the bleed actually helps. That astringent separation that you have to have for rock 'n' roll destroys a lot of feel."

Having finally found a frettable twelve-string that he can use, Kottke has abandoned six-string guitars both live and in the studio. He tours with two Martins, a D12-20, and a cutaway modified by Jon Kundberg of Berkeley, California, that he uses for slide. "What I like about both of them is the mahogany back and sides for me provide a lot better sound than rosewood or maple. But I'm not happy with them and I'm always trying things." Among Kottke's experiments are an arch-top L-5 twelve string made by

Gibson, and a gut-string twelve by Jeff Elliott of Portland, Oregon. His next project, in conjunction with luthier Daniel Farrington, will be a combination of old and new. "I want to copy the old Gibson braces, which are very thin and tall. I haven't found a Gibson with that design that I didn't like. We're going to try and build a silk-and-steel strung twelve using some of his ideas, like asymmetry."

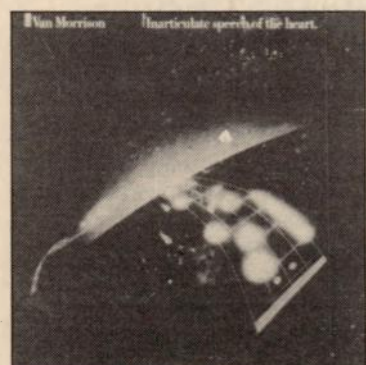
Kottke feels his two Martins are "good guitars and I get a nice sound live when I've time to get everything set, but they're neutral. Anything you get from them you have to play. I had a guitar once that practically played itself, and I'm looking for another one that has a lot of character of its own, and also has that note that kind of starts inside the guitar and swells out, like it's coming from under water. So many guitars today sound like a rock being skipped off the water, sort of bland."

Along with his search for the perfect instrument, Leo continues to expand his musical and technical horizons. He's recently started reacquainting himself with music theory and reading, and playing scale studies, with the aim of reading the music of Leo Brouwer, "who's a Cuban classical guitarist and maybe the best composer for classical guitar around right now. Unlike a lot of those highly trained players, he's retained his ability to write a tune, and he's writing some of the best stuff I've heard." He also mentions jazzers like Pat Metheny, Ralph Towner and John Abercrombie, and Telecaster players Albert Lee, Roy Buchanan and Larry Flakke as part of his listening diet.

Meanwhile, those distinctive Kottke compositions keep on coming, mostly by themselves, the way Leo tells it. "It's a matter of playing every day, several times a day," he says, "absent-mindedly, really, and just keeping a third ear open while I'm doing it. Every now and then something pops up. I don't really think of it, it just seems to be built into the guitar or just part of the general musical territory. It happens by accident, I guess, although the more I learn about music and guitar the more those accidents happen." ○

and the Dawg-funk of "Rotagilla" (that's alligator spelled backward), are equally impressive. Despite the multiple overdubs it took to accomplish the layered textures and instrument changes, this is one of the most organic, homespun albums of the new acoustic movement.

One would assume that an album comprised entirely of solo acoustic bass instrumentals would be as esoteric as *Peruvian Whistling Vessels*, and unfortunately *Solo*, Rob Wasserman's debut Rounder release, will probably be ghettoized into the "exotic" bins as a result. But Wasserman's melodic, rhythmic, structured songs (they're not really "pieces") are far from inaccessible. As a bassist, he has opened a whole new arena for the instrument; as an album, *Solo* is sure to be essential listening for bass players of all styles. Anyone with ears, however, should give a listen.



Inarticulate Speech of the Heart
Van Morrison
Warner Bros.

By Crispin Sartwell

In the last five years, Van Morrison has walked a variety of well-worn spiritual paths. While none has proven to be a philosophical or musical dead-end, neither has any led him to Truth, or to great rock 'n' roll. *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* is informed by L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology; Morrison's gift of melody and his great pop growl are here, but his already high bullshit threshold has been raised another notch.

Though the streetwise r&b singing and hot horn charts that Morrison devised in the sixties and early seventies continue to exert a strong influence on mainstream American rock, *Inarticulate Speech* is so slow and cerebral that it falls completely outside the tradition Morrison created. Despite Scientology's doctrines concerning reincarnation and transmigration, there's precious little soul on this album. As Morrison centralizes spiritual values, musical values are consigned to the periphery. On three songs—"Connswater," "Celtic Swing," and "Inarticulate Speech of the Heart No. 1"—he doesn't even bother to sing. Listening to *Inarticulate Speech*, like listening to inarticulate speech, is a frustrating and ultimately unrewarding experience.

"Rave On, John Donne" is a tuneless summary of English literary history from Donne to Yeats and beyond. If that doesn't sound much like "Wild Night" or "Kingdom Hall" to you, join the club. It's not precisely pretentious—Morrison draws no morals, and seems genuinely conversant with the subject—but it's hardly interesting or engaging. And that magnificent voice is held to a mumble.

Morrison appears to be following in Donne's footsteps: from brilliant, scandalous young spark to passionate clergyman. But while Donne's poetry can flourish amid mortification of the flesh and abstraction of the intellect, Morrison's rock 'n' roll cannot.

Three good songs on side two—"Irish Heartbeat," "Cry for Home," and "The Street Only Knew Your Name"—recall the artist in his better days, but the rest of the material lacks thrust, grit and humor. It's the trap that awaits many spiritual seekers: loss of intellectual independence, loss of laughter, loss of a taste for the physical and the questionable.

These liabilities have been accumulating for some time (at least since 1979's *Into the Music*, and through 1980's *Common One*, and

last year's more satisfying *Beautiful Vision*), but they've never been so pronounced. One senses little emphasis on or commitment to the music itself on *Inarticulate Speech*; rather, the commitment is to what can be accomplished through it. The point is enlightenment, not entertainment. When Morrison was helping to invent contemporary rock, it was the music that mattered, and the music was as visceral and as sensual as he could make it.



A Child's Adventure
Marianne Faithfull
Island

By Crispin Sartwell

Marianne Faithfull possesses virtually no technical ability

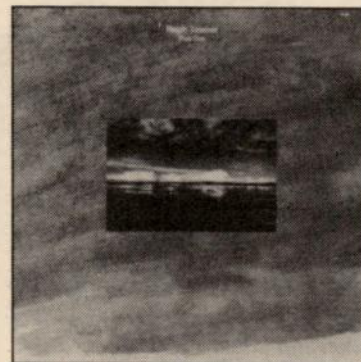
beyond a rudimentary sense of pitch. She sings with little range or tonal purity; but, as in the case of many great singers, it is not Faithfull's technique but the intensity of her expression that rivets and repays attention. Witness her performances on *A Child's Adventure*, where she establishes such an intimate rapport with the melodies and lyrics that it becomes impossible to imagine another singer in her place; voice and song merge utterly.

That voice is a shattered rasp that speaks of years of self-destruction. Her theme is loss: of youth, of beauty, of innocence. But rather than resort to self-pity, Faithfull sings with an uncompromising realism in a style that is deeply flawed and richly eccentric—and absorbing for precisely those reasons.

A Child's Adventure is neither as unblemished as 1981's *Dangerous Acquaintances* nor as lacerated as her 1979 comeback gem, *Broken English*. It is far more insistently imperfect than the former; witness the descent into alcoholism described in "Times Square" and "She's Got A Problem." And, like the latter, it displays the willfulness that keeps Faithfull from fitting into any trend. *A Child's Adventure* beats a strange retreat toward folk music; jangling acoustic guitars provide the instrumental frame-

work for "Falling From Grace" and "Ireland." Like all of the songs on this album, these report fascinating snatches of interior dialogue and exterior confrontation.

For all its problems, *Adventure* lays bare the soul of a woman as with a scalpel. It is that rare rock record: a work with the power to move and re-make its listener.



Blue Sun
Ralph Towner
ECM Records

By Steve Futterman

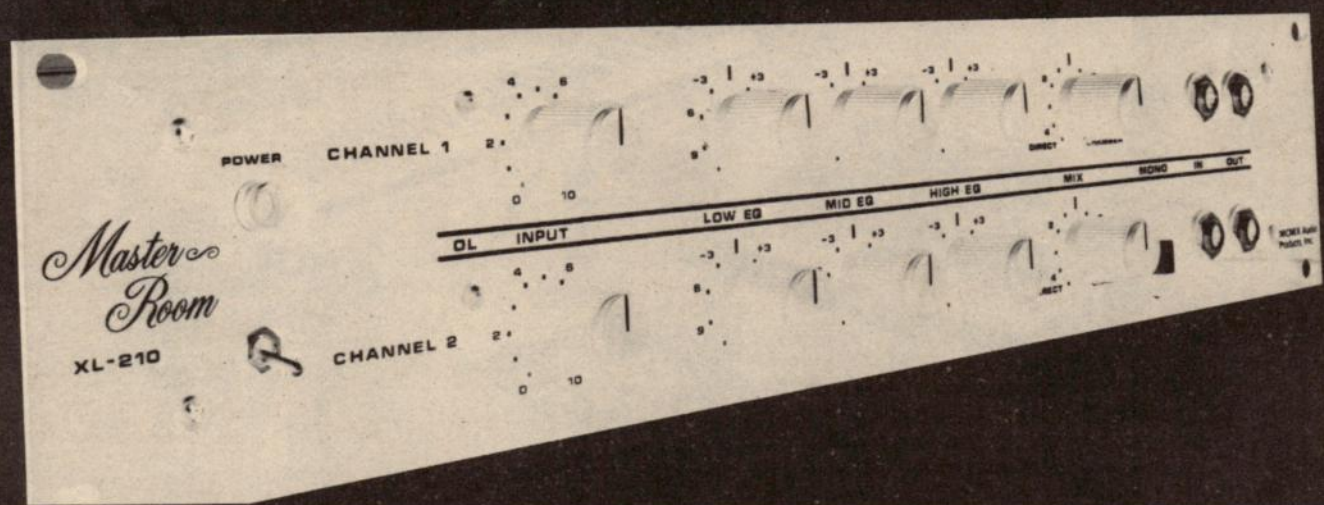
Ralph Towner's *Blue Sun* presents the artist as one-man band, overdubbing himself on French horn, cornet, percussion, piano and Prophet 5 synthesizer, as

well as his accustomed 12-string and classical guitars. Towner pulls off this studio wizardry with the taste and expertise expected from the ECM clan, but with a new vigor that adds sorely needed gusto.

While never really indulging in any healthy reckless abandon, Towner is finally acknowledging that the meditative and the reflective are not the only moods that improvisatory music can take. While always immaculately played, some of *Blue Sun*'s pieces actually kick up some dust. "C.T. Kangaroo," with its jumpy synthesizer-percussion, proves that Ralph has been doing his share of Weather Report listening. This buoyant spirit surfaces again on "Wedding of the Streams," a 12-string workout that would sound fine on any Leo Kottke album, and "Shadow Fountain" which also uses the Prophet 5 for its perkier rather than portentous nature. Towner actually sounds like he's having fun, and this unexpected levity takes some of the deadly weight off his formidable technique.

Except for the slightly ponderous 11-minute closer, "Rumours of Rain," the more ruminative pieces also work well, never losing a rhythmic momentum that refuses to let time stand still. Ralph Towner is loosening up, and his art is all the better for it.

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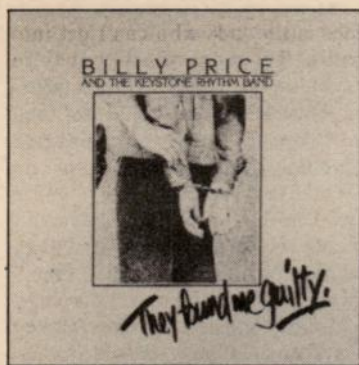
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They Found Me Guilty
Billy Price & the Keystone Rhythm Band

Green Dolphin

By Geoffrey Himes

Outside the media markets of New York and L.A., a rhythm & blues revival has been gathering steam for several years now. Young white bands have sprung up to satisfy a growing craving for classic, sophisticated bar music in cities like Austin (Fabulous Thunderbirds, Double Trouble), Washington (Nighthawks, Catfish Hodge), Richmond (Bill Blue, Skip Castro), Toronto (Downchild Blues Band), Providence (Roomful of Blues) and Vancouver (Powder Blues). Delaware's George Thorogood is the most prominent alumnus

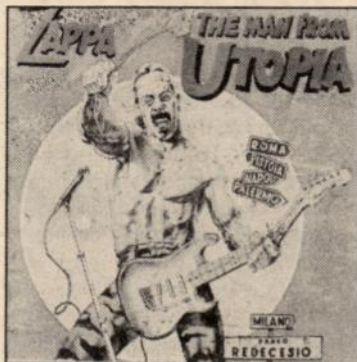
of this scene.

The best singer of the bunch, however, is Pittsburgh's Billy Price. His voice has that graceful glide that allows a soul singer to overwhelm a note without seeming to try. When he needs to, though, he can summon up a shout that will deliver a climactic kick to a song. Unlike so many blues revivalists, Price is not just an imitation of older, better singers—he's the real thing.

Neither of his two albums on his own Green Dolphin label capture the full power of Price's live shows, but *They Found Me Guilty* is the best vinyl evidence available of this great voice. Rather than recycle well-worn classics, Price digs deep into the Memphis soul bag to pull out rare chestnuts by Bland, Johnnie Taylor, O.V. Wright and Al Green. Pushed by a tight rhythm section and punchy unison horns, these songs, especially Wright's "A Nickel and a Nail" and Green's "I Feel Good," inspire Price to deliver ever more impassioned performances, all at a runaway clip.

He excels at wrapping several old songs into a wonderfully melodramatic monologue about love gone wrong, demonstrated on this album with the closing 11-minute medley, "The Jury of Love." Accused of falling in love, Price brings the medley to a climax by pausing and then

shouting: "They found me guilty!" In that shout, he achieves the paradoxical blend of total abandon and complete control characteristic of outstanding soul singers. If he ever finds the right original material, Price could secure a place in soul history. (You can contact Green Dolphin Records at P.O. Box 4810; Pittsburgh, Pa. 15206.)



The Man From Utopia

Frank Zappa

Barking Pumpkin

By Dan Forte

It should come as no surprise that on his latest album Frank Zappa makes no attempt whatsoever to duplicate or follow up his (and daughter Moon Unit's) hook-filled

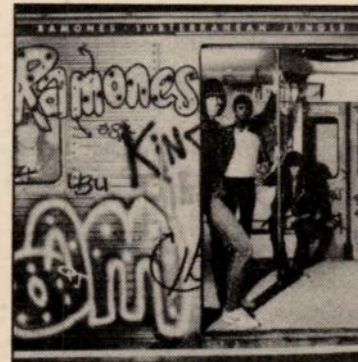
novelty hit of last year, "Valley Girls."

Utopia, however, contains some of the best material Zappa's released in recent memory, along with the sort of overly familiar, non-descript numbers that have marred some of his recent efforts. The semi-improvised free verse style of "The Dangerous Kitchen" and "The Jazz Discharge Party Hats" puts them in the same category as "The Blue Light" (from *Tinsel Town Rebellion*) and "Drowning Witch" (from *Ship Arriving Too Late To Save A...*). Likewise, the cynical good intentions of "Sex" are diluted by a melody lifted from the Zappa catalogue, and "Stick Together" is so repetitive it makes 3:50 seem like a small eternity.

On the plus side, Zappa deftly lampoons the upper-middle class drug chic with "Cocaine Decisions," which opens side one. "Mogio," featuring some intricate keyboard and guitar work by Mars and Vai, and "Tink Walks Amok," with Arthur Barrow playing three bass parts, are two of the more interesting instrumentals Zappa has recorded lately.

By the end of Zappa's last American tour, more than a year ago, he had incorporated a half dozen or so R&B covers into his show—some drastically rearranged, some played

with fanatic authenticity. His medley of Donald Woods' "Man From Utopia" and Young Jessie's "Mary Lou" and a fiery R&B/surf-flavored sax instrumental he wrote, "We Are Not Alone," are done with such passion and conviction they make most of the album sound like filler by comparison. Maybe it's time for another LP by Ruben & the Jets.



Subterranean Jungle

The Ramones

Sire

By Christopher Hill

The Ramones—those apostles of the teen-geek world-view—have reached their own kind of awkward age. To their fans, after seven albums, they're almost an institution; to partisans of the newest of the new waves, they look a bit dated, what with their leather, guitars (guitars!) and their resolute non-funkiness, while to the great majority of American record-buyers, they're near-unknowns, still a bit of New York oddball esoterica. The Ramones' response to this? As evidenced on *Subterranean Jungle*, it's to simply keep on being the Ramones. This new album has their black Forest Hills humor, the minimalist revelations, the sheer high-energy pleasure of their best work. At the same time, there's a feeling of stasis, a suggestion of spent resources.

It's when the Ramones are at their poppiest that they work the most magic with their spartan elements. "I Need Your Love" is a fine example of the way their power drone ecstatically three-dimensionalizes a simple Merseybeat riff—power and melody as simple as can be, yet creating an exhilaration decidedly greater than the sum of its parts. "Time Bomb" eschews the British Invasion for pure American garage sound—great cruising music on the line of "Rockaway Beach." And in covering the Music Explosion's 1967 hit, "Little Bit O' Soul" and the Chambers Brothers' 1968 classic, "Time Has Come Today," they fashion a suggestion of rock 'n' roll glory out of two schlock-pop oldies.

Too much of this record, though, is made up of something the Ramones have never really cared to create before: filler. For the Ramones, this amounts to an over-reliance on the obverse of their inventive "pop" side—the churning, non-melodic drone intended to reflect the dank, heavy metal marshes of teenage psyche. "Psychotherapy," "Outsider," "Highest Trails Above" and more depend on sheer riff force. An art as barebones as the Ramones' needs all the resources one can bring to bear; when the Ramones choose not to create tunes, however simple, they lose half their interest.

Fans should have this record—there's some solid work on it, particularly from Johnny Ramone, whose consistent inventiveness puts him on the road to becoming a near-great in the Johnny Thunders/Fred "Sonic" Smith ashcan school of lead guitar. Newcomers are referred to the band's 1980 LP, *End of the Century*, the Phil Spector-produced project which melded basic sledgehammer Ramones stylings to a guitar-driven updating of the legendary Wall of Sound. To those who already find the Ramones old hat, this record's irrelevant, anyway. But those of us who have found the band at its best to be essential and at its worst ignorable can only hope *Subterranean Jungle* does not signal an exhaustion of its form, but rather a temporary flagging of energy in what has been, on balance, a consistently exciting career.



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R.E.M.

Continued from page 1

considers the artistic aim of it all. "One song might be really sad for me and for a person in the audience. Or for Peter it might be a real uplifting type of song. What's being said doesn't matter that much. It's the feeling, the mood."

The R.E.M. story starts out in 1980 in a rotted church in Athens. Or ex-church. It used to be a church; for a spell it served as R.E.M. living quarters, then it was trashed by the band before they moved out. "I'm kind of ashamed," says Buck "cause it's not something I'd normally do." Still, he adds quickly, "If they burned it down it'd only be marginally worse than the way we left it." No ghosts, but plenty of rats, drafts and empty beer cans scattered about the premises.

Athens, says Stipe, is a college town like any other college town—little industry, swarms of transient students. The band members, native Georgians all, at one point attended and dropped out of the University of Georgia, which, says Buck, "is known all through the south as a place where if you couldn't hack it anywhere else you'd go there and fuck and drink your way through school."

R.E.M.'s master plan was hatched this way, according to Buck: "Michael and I were friends and we just said, 'oh, should we

form a band?' " They met the other two in a club, and Stipe declared, "no fucking way am I gonna be in a band with these guys," so they joined up with those guys, practiced and in three weeks made their public debut.

As it was the first band experience for all involved, it's not surprising to find that the quartet was uncertain

leap to make historical rock associations. "I'd heard 'Turn, Turn, Turn'—period," says Stipe. "I heard 'Do You Wanna Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star?' by Patti Smith before I heard it by Roger McGuinn. The first time I heard 'Eight Miles High,' it was a commercial for a window cleaner in the late '60s. That's how I remember the

played for two hours—'Honky Tonk Women,' 'God Save the Queen,' we played 'Roadrunner' for 15 minutes."

Like practically every band, R.E.M. is wrestling with the what-do-we-do-for-our-rock-video dilemma. Unlike practically every other band, R.E.M. isn't too hot on the idea to begin with. Buck calls them

ence is the kids who can't get into clubs. But most of what they're watching is Pat Benatar and Missing Persons and Triumph and stuff like that. They probably imagine they have a pretty good handle on what's going on right now in music and they don't."

"These are horrible nothing bands and, frankly, I don't care," explodes Buck. "We never wanted to join any party, be part of any group. And MTV is nothing but another way to sell records. If we can't make it to our satisfaction on the strength of our performances and records, I don't want to make it being cute boys in a video."

If big league success—that elusive quality that struck label-mates the Go-Go's and (to a lesser extent) Wall of Voodoo—comes calling, how will R.E.M. answer?

Stipe figures he'll cross that bridge if and when.

"I'll be off sipping wine with Mick and Jerry on the Riviera," chirps Buck immediately.

"I don't know," he adds. "We don't think about it at all and I could shit care less when you come down to it. It's not why we do it. If we get it, that would be nice. It would make my future life more comfortable, but I don't really care, much. It's more important to me that people own our record." ○

Michael Stipe: "If you want to talk about politics or your love life or social problems or what it's like to live in 1983, then you should do it somewhere other than the stage."

of what it wanted to sound like. "We could just as easily been a Public Image-type band," says Buck, who notes R.E.M. still periodically wallows in the joy of noise in concert. Another influence would be everybody's favorite these days, the Velvet Underground. "It's one of my favorite bands," says Buck. "You know their whole thing about having this guitar that sounds like a maelstrom and then having nice little chimes over the top of it. It works. It sounds good."

Um, but not the Byrds, a favorite reference point for those of us who

psychedelic era."

(With their tongues in cheek, R.E.M. will perform the odd Byrds' cover only in Athens, where, they say, the in-joke can be appreciated.)

R.E.M. debuted at their home, the decrepit church. "We expected 125 people and 600 showed up," says Stipe. "And the floor fell out. It was really fun. A nice evening. I don't remember the last half of it."

Buck fills in the missing details. "We knew 18 songs, 15 of them ours. We did that set and then got really loaded. People would say 'play again' and we said sure. We

three-minute commercials.

"We did a video ['Wolves, Lower' from the EP] kind of against our will," Buck says. "The record company is talking about us doing one from the album. It's real up in the air. Today, I'm leaning towards not ever doing a video."

"If we end up doing one," says Stipe, "it's not gonna be the format MTV or the rock discos expect."

"No lip synching, no dwarves, no girls in lingerie," says Buck, ticking off a few of the obvious clichés.

"The only attraction MTV has," asserts Stipe, "is that its major audi-

Joe Turner

Continued from page 15

him to work. He remembered how, years ago in Los Angeles, he had played "I Wanta Little Girl" with Joe. They did it again, only this time in the key of F—yet another different key for Joe—and it was a rare and precious moment.

Monday, January 31, one p.m.: Greg Piccolo, Doug James (the baritone player), Bob Porter, Malcolm Addey and yours truly made it to the control booth at Jac Studio and mixed and edited the album. One saxophone solo was spliced and placed into another take. But very little had to be done because sharp Malcolm, very hip to the colors and nuances of the blues, did most of the mixing at the actual session and made notations about each song. We all agreed to the final versions, and four hours later we had a finished album.

Don't describe this session to any of the hot-shot producers or to major record companies—they swear albums take six months to record and cost at least \$250,000. There's an old street expression: "Don't hip a square—it'll only confuse him." ○

Rod Stewart

Continued from page 1

pink negligee with a soccer ball cradled in one arm.

Personnel for the tour will be the same as the lineup that backed Stewart on his 1981-82 tour of North America (and appeared on *Absolutely Live*), except for guitarist Wally Stocker, who's been replaced by keyboardist-guitarist John Corey, formerly of Silver Condor. This will enable the band to cover the three-guitar sound of Stewart's earlier solo work, as well as the more modern-sounding, multi-keyboard approach of *Body Wishes*.

It has also been reported that a "seven-figure" settlement was paid to Stewart by his former manager, Billy Gaff, ending a legal battle that began last year when Stewart fired Gaff and charged him with mismanagement and self-serving financial advice. Stewart has also regained complete control over his publishing, recording, television and other video rights from Gaff and his companies, Riva Records and Riva Music.

—David Gans

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On Stage

Marvin Hits A Weird Groove

Marvin Gaye
Fox Theatre
Atlanta, Ga.
May 1, 1983

By Anthony DeCurtis

Five years off the road have done little to temper the... eccentricity of Marvin Gaye's stage show. The second of Gaye's two Sunday night sets began 90 minutes late and saw the singer introduce a costume change by declaring he had "to go to the bathroom." Gaye later dispatched a troop of flashlight-waving guards into the orchestra pit to find a diamond that had apparently jarred free from his ring during a fierce rendition of "Distant Lover." Such weird touches rendered Gaye's show far from seamless, but those who overcame the distractions and attended to the wonderful one's performance were well rewarded.

After a thumping set by funk stalwart Hamilton Bohannon, Gaye

opened tough, rasta-chanting the intro to "Third World Girl" as he skanked down a winding stairway to front the seventeen-piece orchestra and four female vocalists heating up the crowd for his entrance.

Looking sharp in a silver-trimmed black tux, Gaye evinced little of the jitteriness that plagued his live shows in the past. Obviously enjoying himself, he strutted, rapped, spun, jammed, and bumped his way through a set drawn primarily from his most recent album, *Midnight Love*, and his early Motown hits. Gaye's voice lacked its full power ("throat problems" prevented the singer from joining Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young at a ceremony in his honor the day after the shows), but he sang with range and fervor through a nearly 90-minute set.

A scorching "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" followed "Third World Girl," and the audience erupted when for his fourth number Gaye eased seductively into "Let's Get It On." A treatment of "Inner City Blues" found roots when Gaye

improvised a jazzy piano solo. On this number, and in general, a streamlined band with more rhythm and kick would have served Gaye better than the bloated soul orchestra he assembled for this tour.

The show's centerpiece was a Motown medley, including "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing," "Your Precious Love," "If This World Were Mine," "Once Upon a Time," and "If I Could Build My Whole World Around You." Schmaltzy supper-club arrangements drained much of the sass and innocent directness from these tunes, though background singer Paulette McWilliams saved the day by burning through her duet with Gaye on "If I Could Build My Whole World Around You." She inspired his best singing of the night; he was clearly moved by her charged rendering of the part originally sung by Tammi Terrell, who in 1967 collapsed in Gaye's arms on stage and died soon after.

"Sexual Healing" provided the show's theatrical apex. Having emerged from the "bathroom" in a black silk robe and pajamas, Gaye stripped to his bottoms and whipped the ladies into a frenzy with hip grinds that left no doubt about the therapeutic benefits a few private moments with Marvin would impart.



Marvin Gaye: He had to go to the bathroom.

All in all, Gaye delivered and more, but he could not dispel nagging questions about his ability to sustain a grueling tour. If voice problems are cropping up after two weeks of shows, more than sexual healing will be needed to carry this

man into his August dates. However, Gaye's raw talent has a way of defeating even his self-generated adversities. If he hits his true groove down the line, diamonds from his ring will be the least of the gems his audiences will snatch. ○

Martha and The Muffins In The Art-Funk League

Martha and the Muffins
The Channel
Boston, Mass.
May 7, 1983

By Jim Sullivan

Remember "Echo Beach," Martha and the Muffins' graceful, gorgeous, wistful pop tune of three years ago?

Say goodbye. Martha and the Muffins, a Toronto-based band now touring as a seven-piece, are a completely different outfit—in terms of personnel and in terms of musical direction.

Personnel matters first. Singer Martha Johnson and guitarist Mark Gane are the only members remaining from the original unit. Johnson and Gane, the group's songwriters, have added two players—bassist Jockey In Lanois and drummer Nick Kent (not the English music writer) to their "core" unit, and are using three others—saxophonist Wayne Mills, guitarist Michael Brook and percussionist Merle Quammie—as sidemen.

Now, the music. The emphasis is still toward the dance floor—you do want to move your body—but in-

stead of a gentle sway and a mild bite (circa '80), we have denser sound, busier arrangements and melodic lines that are more overtly abrasive. It's all a little knotty, more a collision than a smooth glide. Martha and the Muffins are playing in an art-funk league that includes Talking Heads, Gang of Four and Medium Medium.

At the Channel club, the last gig of a 15-date North American jaunt, Martha and the Muffins did appear a much more confident band. In songs such as "Danseparc" (their opening salvo), "Women Around the World" and "What People Do For Fun," they established a churning, tight funk base. Mills and Gane worked away from that—Mills spewing out braying, swaggering leads, Gane twisting around Mills' squalls or slicing knife-like through the rhythmic net.

There were several problems though, number one being Johnson's poor vocal mix. Bits came through—"Out of reach, out of love, stepping out of bounds," she sang, carrying the Pretenders-like mystery of "Danseparc"—but too much got lost in the swirl. The other problem was that the Muffins' emphasis on dense, dissonant texture had a wearing effect. Most songs had the same sort of flavor.

"Echo Beach" ended the concert with a soft blast back to earlier times. Nice, and spiced by a five-person percussive break. But I couldn't help wishing that, as satisfying as their set often was, they'd retained something of their penchant for melodic pop. ○

Just Another Loud Rock Band

Roxy Music
Universal Amphitheatre
Los Angeles May 2, 1983

By John Ned Mendelsohn

On record, Roxy Music trades in perhaps the most artfully blended and subtle pop of the '80s to date, an intricate interweaving of delicate rhythms and ethereal melodic motifs. In their first performance in Los Angeles since Before Punk, though, they came across as just another loud rock band with too many sidemen and a sound mixer who ought to be held underwater until he struggles no more.

It was easy to picture the mixer being unable to chew gum and walk upright simultaneously. If, for instance, Andy Mackay's reeds were audible, you can bet that Guy Fletcher's keyboards weren't.

Rendered positively thunderous by the sound mixer's predilection for boomy bottom, drummer Andy Newmark displayed not a hint of the restraint that has characterized his work for the group on record, bashing every last trace of wistfulness

out of all the group's post-*Manifesto* material.

And so little could be heard of the three background singers that one wondered if they'd been brought onstage just to look ecstatic about the experience.

Or to provide—in the form of the deliciously garish mermaid gowns in which Tawatha Agee and Michelle Cobbs evoked the memory of the *Siren* cover—the glamour that Bryan Ferry seems now to disdain (the co-inventor of Glam removed his suit jacket just like an ordinary sweating mortal early in the show, and shortly thereafter rolled up his sleeves).

Certainly the performance wasn't without its pleasures, chief among which for this reviewer was the discovery that Ferry isn't being ironic when he makes those peculiar faces and dances those peculiar dances in the group's frequently exquisite videos. It is with the rapturous grimace of one who has something itchy in his clothing, but isn't certain he dislikes it, who lacks the grace not to appear to be dancing in a room with a very low ceiling, that pop's most elegantly sentimental fool strives sincerely to get down. ○



Bryan Ferry: an ordinary sweating mortal.

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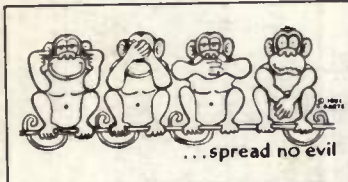
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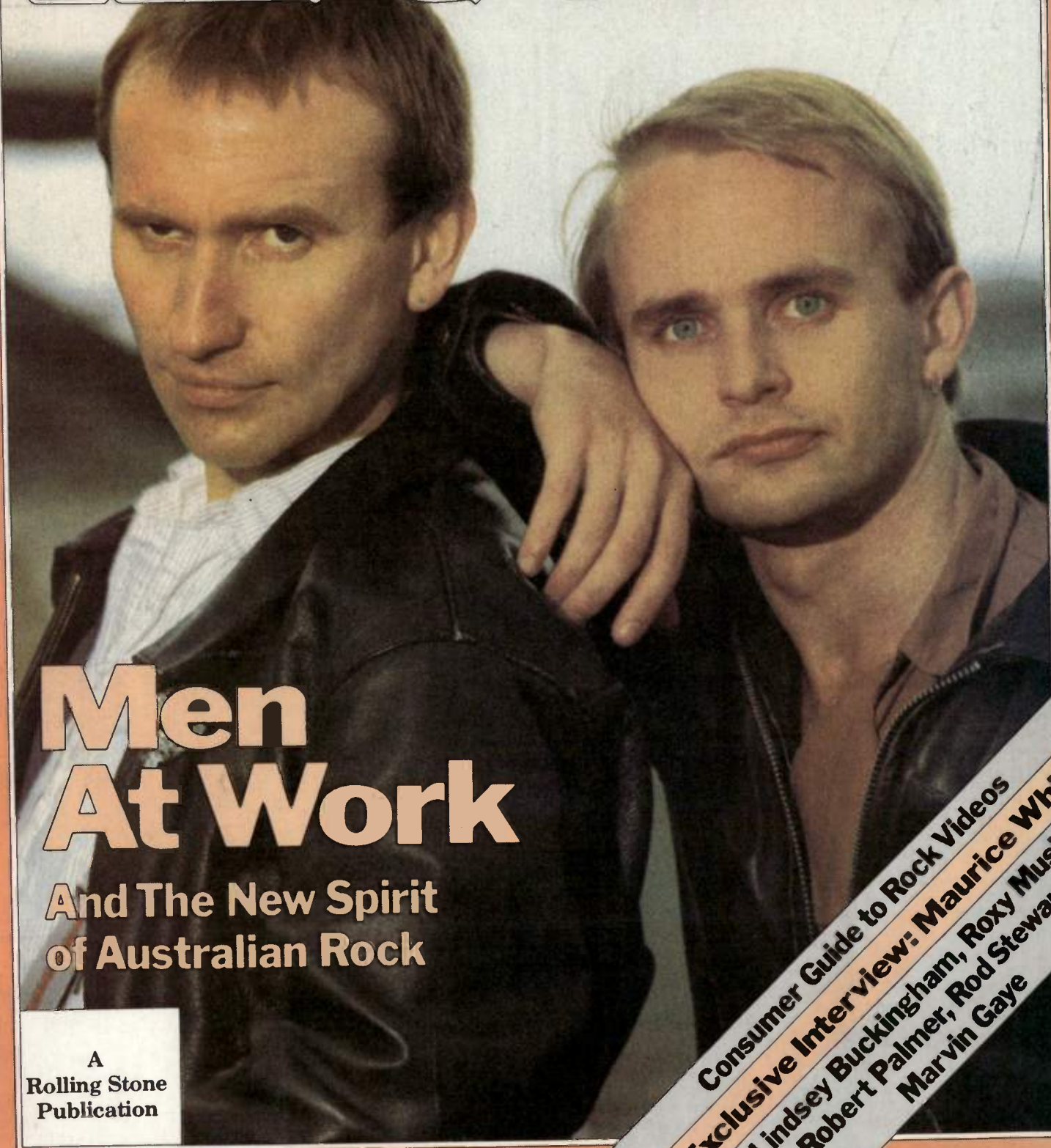
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