RECORD

DECEMBER 1983 VOL.3 NO.2 $1.25 U.K.70p.

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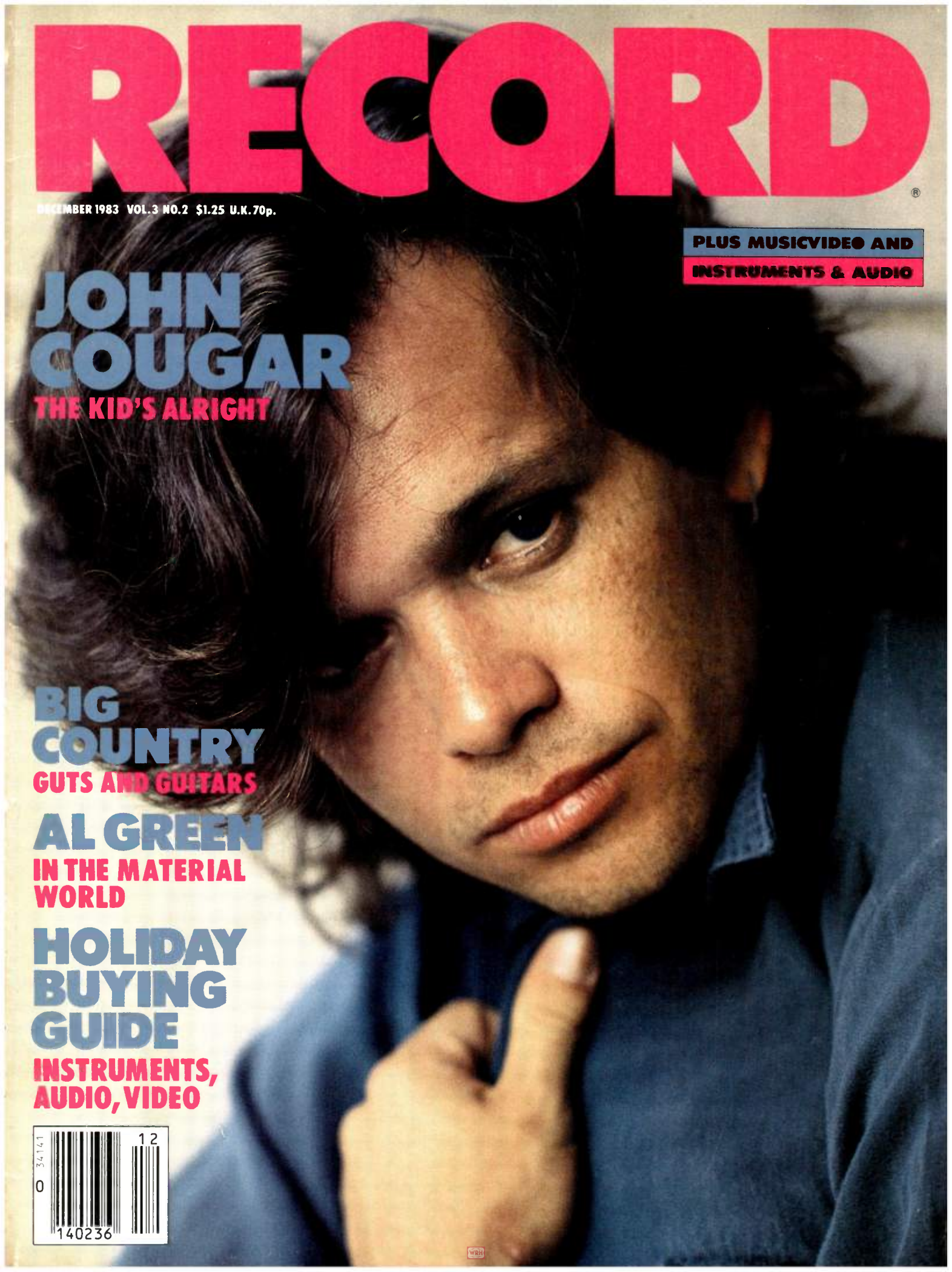

JOHN COUGAR
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16

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22

RECORD

DECEMBER 1983 VOL.3 NO.2

TO: **Anyone Who Enjoys Listening To Records**

FROM: **The Makers of REVEAL**

SUBJECT: **How To Make Your Records Sound Better**

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COLLEGE OF THE RECORDING ARTS

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POINT-COUNTERPOINT

DEBORAH FROST'S PERspectives column ("Do You Know Where You're Going To?", October RECORD) was nothing more than a disgraceful, racist attack. As a native of Buffalo, New York I have had the pleasure of knowing Rick James professionally (he plays our instruments) and as a community member. Rick James has consistently and actively been involved in charitable causes for many years. His philanthropical and benevolent actions should serve as a role model for the entire entertainment industry.

I suggest Frost look inside and examine her own fears and prejudices and not be so quick to point fingers and impose judgment on people she knows nothing about.

ROBBIE KONIKOFF
Artist Relations
Moog Music Inc.
Buffalo, NY

IT WAS REFRESHING TO read such a concise, well-written and thoughtful article as Deborah Frost's "Do You Know Where You're Going To?" She makes some good, valid points concerning the attitude of some in the music industry towards their communities. Perhaps it's time the business became more sincerely responsible.

JAMES BENNEYAN
Greenfield, MA

IT'S *ONLY* ROCK 'N' ROLL?

I JUST READ J.D. CONSIdine's review of Elvis Costello's *Punch The Clock* (October RECORD) and can't tell if it's a record review or a psychiatric profile. J.D. must worship at the same altar of rock that Dave Marsh is so fond of visiting.

It's only rock 'n' roll, fellas, not the savior of the world. Sure, there have been a lot of rock lyrics over the years that have meant very much to me, and I've been saved (for awhile)—but that's because I stopped inspecting, dissecting and trying to get inside of a performer's head. Instead, I just toned down my crazy brain, got up and moved my body to the music.

Throw down your typewriter and dance, J.D.!

H. McHALSKY
Oconomowoc, WI

RACISM IN ROCK

I AM SICK AND TIRED OF hearing about "racist bastards" (to quote Bob Giraldi in the October issue of RECORD) at MTV. I really don't think it's fair to criticize a new music format for not playing Earth, Wind & Fire or Rick James—when I want to listen to either of them I turn to the station that I know plays them.

I know the argument is that a cross section of music should be presented. But if that argument were to hold true, why stop at R&B or soul or disco? What about country rock, MOR, big bands, easy listening and on and on? And why categorize it as black music? What about brown or yellow or red? Give me a break. Let's talk about music, period.

And just for clarification, I am not black or white. I'm full-blooded brown.

MONICA OROZCO
Santa Barbara, CA

DAVE MARSH'S COMments regarding Linda Ronstadt's South African concert (American Grandstand, October RECORD) indicate he has such a hard-on for racism that he seems perfectly willing to overlook other forms of oppression. I have yet to see him take a whack at, say, Elton John for playing Russia, a country that's undeniably more racist than South Africa could ever be (ask any Soviet Jew). Persecuting people for their political or religious beliefs is hardly more tolerable than hating someone for the color of his skin. Further, if South Africa is so intolerable and oppressive to blacks, why are so many blacks going to extreme lengths to immigrate from other African nations?

We as a nation have a long and continuing history of racism, as Keith Richards pointed out in his interview. Should the Beatles and particularly the Stones, whose music helped make R&B acceptable, have boycotted the U.S.? Or even the South? I think not.

Indeed, were I a South African politician, I would go to whatever lengths necessary to stop white, foreign, non-party line (i.e., overtly disapproving of apartheid) entertainers from having access to the minds of large numbers of young Afrikaners. While music or culture in general won't have a huge effect, every bit hurts and radical ideas do have a way of catching on and becoming very difficult to eradicate.

Incidentally, I would be very happy to play Sun City for $1,000,000. Maybe, like the late and great Lester Bangs, Mr. Marsh is a thwarted rocker and just envious.

THOMAS J. STREAKS
Overland Park, KS

Dave Marsh replies: I'm quite proud of my "hard-on for racism." Anyone who thinks the system of segregation in the southern U.S. or the lack of civil rights in the USSR are of the same order of terror as the denial of all rights to more than 80 percent of South Africa's population would be well-advised to get it up himself. It should be added that rock 'n' roll is not in and of itself "radical." When it is used to undercut international boycotts of a pariah nation it's subversive in all the wrong ways. Mr. Streaks is also a lousy psychiatrist; all of my creative frustrations are literary.

YOU KNOW, I GREW UP when it seemed as if a record only had to be good to get on the radio. What's sad is that several other generations may now grow up not appreciating or understanding how rich and vital a contribution black musicians have made and continue to make to the music. If Dave Marsh cares to point this up in every issue of RECORD and *Rock & Roll Confidential*, then I say right on. We should all be so concerned.

GARY HAMILTON
Tulsa, OK

CORRECTION

THE OCTOBER LETTERS section misidentified the company affiliation of respondent Robert Dupree. It is Square Zero Productions.

TOP 100 ALBUMS

1. SYNCHRONICITY — The Police *A&M*
2. THRILLER — Michael Jackson *Epic*
3. FLASHDANCE — Soundtrack *Casablanca*
4. AN INNOCENT MAN — Billy Joel *Columbia*
5. PYROMANIA — Def Leppard *Mercury*
6. LET'S DANCE — David Bowie *EMI*
7. SPEAKING IN TONGUES — Talking Heads *Sire*
8. THE CROSSING — Big Country *Mercury*
9. WHAT'S NEW — Linda Ronstadt *Asylum*
10. FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF NIGHT — Bonnie Tyler *Columbia*
11. PUNCH THE CLOCK — Elvis Costello *Columbia*
12. THE PRINCIPLE OF MOMENTS — Robert Plant *Atlantic*
13. REACH THE BEACH — The Fixx *MCA*
14. LAWYERS IN LOVE — Jackson Browne *Elektra*
15. THE WILD HEART — Stevie Nicks *Modern*
16. THE PRESENT — The Moody Blues *Threshold*
17. MENTAL HEALTH — Quiet Riot *Epic*
18. ELIMINATOR — ZZ Top *Warner Bros.*
19. STAYING ALIVE — Soundtrack *RSO*
20. RANT 'N' RAVE — Stray Cats *EMI*
21. FLICK OF THE SWITCH — AC/DC *Atlantic*
22. SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS — Eurythmics *RCA*
23. TEXAS FLOOD — Stevie Ray Vaughan *Epic*
24. COLD BLOODED — Rick James *Gordy*
25. ALPHA — Asia *Geffen*
26. RHYTHM OF YOUTH — Men Without Hats *MCA*
27. TRUE — Spandau Ballet *Chrysalis*
28. SHE WORKS HARD FOR THE MONEY — Donna Summer *Mercury*
29. CARGO — Men At Work *Columbia*
30. KEEP IT UP — Loverboy *Columbia*
31. MIKE'S MURDER — Joe Jackson *A&M*
32. FRONTIERS — Journey *Columbia*
33. NO FRILLS — Bette Midler *Atlantic*
34. LITTLE ROBBERS — The Motels *Capitol*
35. DURAN DURAN — Duran Duran *Capitol*
36. 1999 — Prince *Warner Bros.*
37. HELLO BIG MAN — Carly Simon *Warner Bros.*
38. THE REAL MACAW — Graham Parker *Arista*
39. TWANG BAR KING — Adrian Belew *Island*
40. WAR — U2 *Island*
41. KISSING TO BE CLEVER — Culture Club *Virgin/Epic*
42. EVERYBODY'S ROCKIN' — Neil Young *Geffen*
43. THE HURTING — Tears For Fears *Mercury*
44. PLEASURE VICTIM — Berlin *Geffen*
45. FASCINATION! — Human League *A&M*
46. MURMUR — R.E.M. *IRS*
47. CLOSE TO THE BONE — Tom Tom Club *Sire*
48. CUTS LIKE A KNIFE — Bryan Adams *A&M*
49. LISTEN — A Flock Of Seagulls *Jive/Arista*
50. STATE OF CONFUSION — The Kinks *Arista*
51. MADNESS — Madness *Geffen*
52. GET IT RIGHT — Aretha Franklin *Arista*
53. NAKED EYES — Naked Eyes *EMI*
54. PLAYS LIVE — Peter Gabriel *Geffen*
55. IN YOUR EYES — George Benson *Warner Bros.*
56. BUSINESS AS USUAL — Men At Work *Columbia*
57. ALBUM — Joan Jett & the Blackhearts *MCA*
58. TRASH IT UP — Southside Johnny & The Jukes *Mirage*
59. KILLER ON THE RAMPAGE — Eddy Grant *Portrait/CBS*
60. H2O — Hall & Oates *RCA*
61. TAKE ANOTHER PICTURE — QuarterFlash *Geffen*
62. BODY WISHES — Rod Stewart *Warner Bros.*
63. FIELD DAY — Marshall Crenshaw *Warner Bros.*
64. PIECE OF MIND — Iron Maiden *Capitol*
65. INFORMATION — Dave Edmunds *Columbia*
66. LIONEL RICHIE — Lionel Richie *Motown*
67. GIRL AT HER VOLCANO — Rickie Lee Jones *Warner Bros.*
68. TOO LOW FOR ZERO — Elton John *Geffen*
69. TRAVELS — Pat Metheny Group *ECM*
70. OUTSIDE INSIDE — The Tubes *Capitol*
71. YOU BOUGHT IT, YOU NAME IT — Joe Walsh *Full Moon*
72. WHAMMY — The B-52's *Warner Bros.*
73. WHITE FEATHERS — Kajagoogoo *EMI*
74. SECRET MESSAGES — ELO *Jet/CBS*
75. KIHNSPIRACY — Greg Kihn *Beserkley*
76. THE KEY — Joan Armatrading *A&M*
77. THE HIGH ROAD — Roxy Music *Warner Bros./EG*
78. JARREAU — Al Jarreau *Warner Bros.*
79. NON FICTION — The Blasters *Warner Bros.*
80. NEW GOLD DREAMS — Simple Minds *A&M*
81. KILROY WAS HERE — Styx *A&M*
82. SCANDAL — Scandal *Columbia*
83. DEEP SEA SKIVING — Bananarama *Polygram*
84. THE FINAL CUT — Pink Floyd *Columbia*
85. ROSS — Diana Ross *RCA*
86. SPECIAL BEAT SERVICE — English Beat *IRS*
87. LOW RIDE — Earl Klugh *Capitol*
88. ALLIES — Crosby, Stills & Nash *Atlantic*
89. THE DISTANCE — Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band *Capitol*
90. BUILT FOR SPEED — Stray Cats *EMI*
91. AFTER THE SNOW — Modern English *Sire*
92. LEGENDARY HEARTS — Lou Reed *RCA*
93. THE GOLDEN AGE OF WIRELESS — Thomas Dolby *Capitol*
94. NIGHT AND DAY — Joe Jackson *A&M*
95. RETURN OF THE JEDI — Soundtrack *RSO*
96. QUARTET — Ultravox *Chrysalis*
97. LIVING IN OZ — Rick Springfield *RCA*
98. THE INARTICULATE SPEED OF THE HEART — Van Morrison *Warner Bros.*
99. SHABOOH SHOOBAH — INXS *Arco*
100. SUBTERRANEAN JUNGLE — The Ramones *Sire*

TAKING THE COUNTRY BY STORM!

You've got to think big when the critics are talking like this.
"The new act that record business insiders are betting on most heavily this fall is the militant-sounding British rock quartet Big Country, who have already had two English hits. Their hard, guitar-based, folk-rock is built around two lead guitars that suggest the flare of electrified bagpipes."
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Here's a big-noise guitar band from Britain that blows the knobs off all the synth-pop diddlers and fake-funk-frauds who are cluttering up the charts these days. Big Country mops up the fops with an air-raid guitar sound that's unlike anything else around."
—ROLLING STONE

BIG COUNTRY.
Taking the country by storm with their new album, "The Crossing."

Produced by Steve Lillywhite.

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'WE'RE SIMPLY A GUITAR BAND'

True West fights off psychedelia and other categories

LOS ANGELES—Backstage at the Music Machine after True West's triumphant Los Angeles concert debut opening for the Dream Syndicate, the band is descended upon by several new-found supporters. These range from a kid from an Oregon college radio outlet seeking a True West station ID to a head honcho from Bug Music, which publishes the work of such artists as Iggy Pop, John Hiatt and T-Bone Burnett.

To paraphrase a key line from *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*, who *are* these True West guys? True West is a Sacramento-based quintet, two of whom (Russell Tolman and Gavin Blair) are former members of the Suspects, a Davis band that featured original Dream Syndicate bassist Kendra Smith and Syndicate leader Steve Wynn. True West is often lumped conveniently—and somewhat erroneously—with such new psychedelic bands as Green On Red and the Dream Syndicate.

"I don't really like labels like 'psychedelic,' " explains songwriter/guitarist Tolman, "because once you start worrying about it, you might not end up writing the song you started out to because you don't think it'll fit, that it's not psychedelic enough. We're simply a guitar band."

And a fine, tough, invigorating one at that. In only a bit more than a year's time, True West has created quite a stir in adventurous rock circles across the country, primarily through the release of a cover of "Lucifer Sam," the vintage Syd Barrett/Pink Floyd tune, and a five-song self-titled EP, both of which have received enthusiastic response from alternative music publications as well as from college and progressive radio stations. The EP demonstrates that, while the quintet does share some sensibilities with the new psychedelic groups, True West forges a distinctive musical path, gliding confidently in and out of the '60s, '70s and '80s.

Live, the band opts for a solid, no-frills approach—aggressive, but not overbearing. They recently completed a six-week tour of the East Coast, and are now hearing from some major labels. Things are going very well very fast for True West.

True West: but can it happen fast enough?

"It's nice to feel something's happening, to get the favorable reaction," Tolman says. "It not only gives me a little more confidence in my songwriting ability, but also allows us to heave a sigh of relief. Other days, though, I say 'Damn, I wish things were going even quicker.' "

—Duncan Strauss

GETTIN' DOWN WITH REALITY

The Heartfixers deal the living blues

ATLANTA—Musical trends reflect broader social developments in complex ways. So as new technologies emerge and synthesizers and videos dominate the scene, traditional music also makes a resurgence. As things change, people want reassurance that some things will remain. Or as Bob Nelson, veteran vocalist/harp player of Atlanta's blues-breaking Heartfixers puts it: "1943 and 1983 are the same: Whiskey and women's gonna be aroun' till the end of the world."

PHOTO WONDER GRAPHIC SHOLMS

The Heartfixers (from left: Nelson, McCauley, Bullard, Ellis): real people "doing the blues"

Southern audiences have rocked their blues away with The Heartfixers since early 1981, when the break-up of two groups brought Nelson, guitarist Tinsley Ellis, bassist Jim Bullard, and drummer Mike McCauley together. Now with the release of *The Heartfixers Live at the Moonshadow* (Landslide Records, 450 14th Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30318), the band hopes the rest of the country will come around too.

Unlike the New Orleans-born Nelson, who was raised on the blues and came of age in Chicago and Cambridge, Massachusetts, playing with such greats as Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker, the 26-year-old Ellis was led to Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters through '60s British invasion bands. A B.B. King show Ellis caught in his native Florida at the age of 14 sealed his fate. "Blues is really guitar music," declares Ellis, whose fretboard fireworks are the highlight of The Heartfixers' sound. "Guitar is made for blues. A guitar is a sexy, expressive instrument, and blues music and that goes together real well."

Yet for The Heartfixers, the truth of the music does not lie in critical definitions, but in emotion and communication. "You gotta be a real person to do the blues," Nelson explains. "You gotta be willin' to think of reality and not go into a fantasy world. You gotta let it all hang out. Let the people know you know they feel the same way you do." Like whiskey and women, music that does this will be around till the end of the world.

—Anthony DeCurtis

FLEETWOOD MAC: A BAND APART

Solo projects precede group's next album

OAKLAND, Ca.—The second round of Fleetwood Mac solo projects has begun to come to fruition. While Stevie Nicks tours to her *Wild Heart*'s delight, drummer Mick Fleetwood has quietly released *I'm Not Me* (in the name of a band he calls Mick Fleetwood's Zoo), keyboardist/vocalist Christine McVie is breezing through a project in Montreux, Switzerland, and guitarist/vocalist Lindsey Buckingham works on his second solo album at home in between trips abroad to kibitz on his bandmates' albums.

PHOTO: SAM EMERSON

McVie: "It's all going too right, you know?"

"It's the Mick Fleetwood School of Band Forming," jokes the rangy drummer on the phone from his record company's office in Los Angeles. Bassist George Hawkins and guitarist Todd Sharp, who played on *I'm Not Me* and Fleetwood's 1981 solo debut, *The Visitor*, are now in Switzerland backing McVie on the long-awaited followup to *Christine Perfect*, released in 1969. "She got to know them when she played on my record, and they've all become great friends," says Fleetwood.

"I was really scared about this project to start with, but my fears have been completely dispelled," says McVie from the control room of Mountain Studio in Montreux. "It's all going too right, you know? I'll go skiing and probably break a couple of legs or something."

McVie characterizes her album's sound and feeling as "very rock 'n' roll," but insists the hot tempos aren't a reaction against her balladeering image in Fleetwood Mac. "It just happened that way. For example, we just started jamming in rehearsal one day and came up with an amazing groove—which we turned into a group composition called 'Too Much Is Not Enough.' " Producer Russ Titelman and engineer David Richards "make me sound like a million dollars. If there's anything to complain about it's that there aren't enough B sides." Really? Ten singles? "Let's not exaggerate—let's just say eight," laughs McVie.

As thrilled as McVie is with the work she's done in Montreux, there's one track left to cut that will cap the experience and fulfill a longtime fantasy. The entire production team had plans to go to England to spend a week at Steve Winwood's, writing and recording. "I've known Steve for about 20 years, but I haven't seen him in about 15," says McVie. "Of all the people I've ever wanted to sing with, he's the optimum person. I'm his biggest fan. I'm quite nervous at the thought of writing with him, but he's so sweet that it's not going to be a problem at all."

The guest-star action might get a bit thicker before the album is finished. "There's been a bevy of people through here," McVie notes. "Christopher Cross was in Geneva and came by to listen to the tracks; I'm going to try to get him to do something. And Simon and Garfunkel are playing Basel (Switzerland)—Russ just produced their album, so there's every chance they'll pop in as well." Buckingham, in Europe looking for an engineer to help him finish his project, dropped by the McVie camp to add some guitar and vocal touches. "It's Celebrity City here," says McVie. "I'm sure if I were recording in Van Nuys I wouldn't have so many people visiting."

The as-yet-untitled LP should be completed by the end of November and in the stores by early January, and the Christine McVie band—the same basic quartet that made the record—will tour in February and March. MTV sent a British crew to Switzerland to film the recording process for an upcoming McVie special.

Before George Hawkins hits the road with McVie, he's got plans to tour a bit with Mick Fleetwood's Zoo. "I hope it's going to be an ongoing situation," says Fleetwood. "I suppose it depends on how things go with the album and on the road. We have worked as a band, so I know for sure it's happening musically." The Zoo began as The Cholos, a pickup band assembled by Lindsey Buckingham for his appearance on *Saturday Night Live* and consisting of Fleetwood, Hawkins, and guitarists Steve Ross and Billy Burnette. They've played a few gigs since then, giving Fleetwood the impetus to put them on record.

How does a musician who neither sings nor writes music end up leading a band? "Although I don't write, I do have a fair amount to do with how the songs turn out," says Fleetwood. "I think my strength is in being objective. When somebody asks me for an opinion of his song, I can give an opinion and have it accepted because I've got no axe of my own to grind."

As for the fifth member of Fleetwood Mac, bassist John McVie is, according to Fleetwood, "feeling the pinch a little bit. He doesn't do anything besides Fleetwood Mac and sailing his boat, and he's starting to complain about the fact that the band isn't working. It's hard for him, because it's been his life. But Fleetwood Mac has got to be able to breathe. We've done it once without the band's breaking up, and now we're going through a second cycle of solo albums.

"In the overview, it's a lot more healthy than *not* doing all these projects—but that doesn't take care of John. Basically, he and I are gigsters. Four or five months without doing anything and something in the body tells you something's wrong.

"Christine's record will be released by Christmas, and Lindsey's should be out early next year," notes Fleetwood. "So I imagine soon after that Fleetwood Mac will be thinking about going in to record another album." **—David Gans**

DO YOU HAVE A RECORD?
These people do...

André Cymone "Survivin' In The 80's"

André Cymone is as bad and as beautiful as he wants to be. Now he's wanted in all states for the true Minneapolis sound—found on his latest album, "Survivin' In The 80's." Featuring "Make Me Wanna Dance" and "What Are We Doing Here."

Tommy Tutone "National Emotion"

These mugs go under the moniker Tommy Tutone and are personally responsible for hordes of admiring fans scrawling the number of their hit single, "867-5309/Jenny," everywhere. Now Tommy Tutone are instilling a similar crime wave on "National Emotion," their newest malign fiesta of excitable melodic pop.

Paul Young "No Parlez"

Paul Young operates in his native England under the alias "Pretty Boy" where his smouldering good looks and compellingly soulful voice cause mass hysteria and made him #1. His debut U.S. album, "No Parlez," includes his already giant hit, "Wherever I Lay My Hat (That's My Home)." Decidedly criminal tendencies, this one.

Al Di Meola "Scenario"

On Al Di Meola's latest album, "Scenario," he's masterminded a daring escapade with friends Phil Collins*, Bill Bruford†, Tony Levin and Jan Hammer that will steal your soul away. Al Di Meola enters the age of high technology, and the world trembles at his next move.

Eddie Money "Where's The Party?"

The man whose very name screams avarice now adds disorderly conduct to his M.O. as Eddie Money asks "Where's The Party?" A brawling, sprawling compendium of after-hour hijinks. For all the action get there early.

On Columbia Records and Cassettes.

A GRAB BAG OF ROCK BOOKS

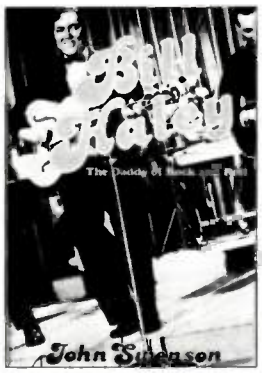
It doesn't take a genius to look at the bookshelves these days and pronounce rock books a flourishing field. Anyone with (and many without) something to say about the music seems to get published, and therein lies the problem for the holiday shopper. Separating the wheat from the chaff in '83 is no mean feat, but several titles in the biography and reference categories stand out as notable, if not always successful, achievements.

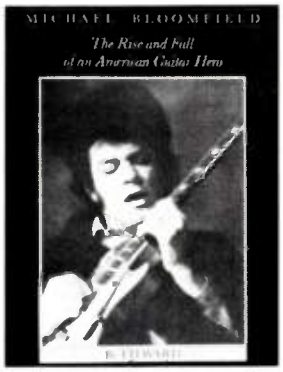
In biography, the justifiably acclaimed account of reggae superstar Bob Marley, **Catch A Fire: The Life of Bob Marley** (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, $9.95 paper, $16.95 hardcover), is one of those books that defines the term "essential." Author Timothy White's extensive contacts with Marley's family, associates and the most important Jamaican musicians makes for reading steeped in history, local culture and well-drawn personality portraits. Because of its scope, *Catch A Fire* becomes almost as important as its subject.

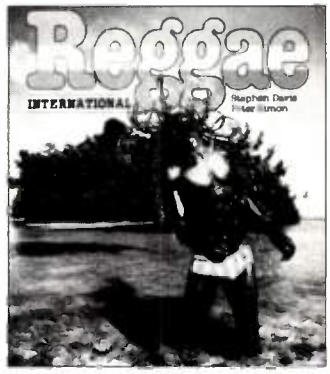
Another veteran rock journalist, the indefatigable Dave Marsh, tackles a former passion and comes out bloody but unbowed in **Before I Get Old: The Story of the Who** (St. Martin's Press, $10.95), a portion of which was excerpted in the November RECORD. Since the breadth of the Who's history has never been sufficiently explored, Marsh fleshes out the early days with an eye for detail and a willingness to take on every contradiction, but (ahem) peters out in the mid-'70s. If the book never quite satisfies or resounds like his earlier and shorter Springsteen bio, the effort remains admirable.

Ed Ward's **Michael Bloomfield: The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero** (Cherry Lane Books, $8.95) combines the impassioned reporting of the author with a clear and clean layout by Toby Byron. Not a minor, cultist's biography of an undeservedly forgotten musician, but a book which breathes life back into the times which shaped Mike Bloomfield and produced so much stunning music. Like John Swenson's Bill Haley book (see below), Ward's is a reworking of history which fills a void that no one, prior to its appearance, even knew existed.

On the surface he was the most innocuous of rock 'n' roll stars, always milquetoast next to other seminal rockers such as Elvis and Jerry Lee, but Bill Haley led a truly tragic life that escaped public scrutiny until after he died. In **Bill Haley: The Daddy of Rock and Roll** (Stein and Day, $9.95 paper, $18.95 hardcover), John Swenson offers an enterprising and sorely-needed look through rock's back pages.







Bill Haley: The Daddy of Rock and Roll, Michael Bloomfield: The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero, Reggae International

Previously known for quickie paperbacks far below his proven journalistic talents, Swenson redeems himself here with a solidly researched and often moving account of Haley's sad story.

One of the first rock journalists to move into books, Jerry Hopkins, is represented currently by **Hit and Run: The Jimi Hendrix Story** (Perigee, $8.95). Never one to let good writing get in the way of good reporting, Hopkins clears up many of the mysteries surrounding the guitarist's life, but anyone searching for the heart of Hendrix' music is better off with David Henderson's **'Scuse Me While I Kiss The Sky** (Doubleday/Dolphin), a truly formidable rock biography.

New York Times columnist and Rolling Stones compadre Robert Palmer offers a respectable, readable if rudimentary summation of the "World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band" in **The Rolling Stones** (Rolling Stone Press/Doubleday, $29.95). If Palmer's text falls a bit short of the standards set by Geoffrey Stokes (*The Beatles*) and Dave Marsh (*Elvis*) in the Rolling Stone Press series, the photos, as always, sparkle and seduce. (Marsh's *Elvis*, by the way, is now available in paperback at a $14.95 list.)

Bay Area Music (*BAM*) magazine editor Blair Jackson applies some skilled reporting and researching techniques to the group which could most benefit from a straight approach in **Grateful Dead: The Music Never Stopped** (Delilah, $7.95). Unlike previous books on the subject, aimed square at that curious brand of fanatic known as a Deadhead, Jackson's almost accomplishes the impossible for the equally devout non-fan: he makes one want to actually hear the Dead again.

In the reference section, **Reggae International,** edited by Stephen Davis and Peter Simon (R&B Books, $14.95), is a thorough and essential primer to a much-discussed but little understood style of music. The text, written by many of the most respected British and American writers, is a veritable "everything you alway wanted to know" for the uninitiated, chronicling the roots of Rastafarianism, the early days of ska and bluebeat, all the greatest bands, vocal groups, sessionmen, deejays, dub poets, women, the expanding global impact of the music and, of course, the ever-present ganja. Unreservedly recommended.

The Trouser Press Guide To New Wave Records, edited by Ira A. Robbins (Scribner's and Sons, $12.95 paper, $24.95 cloth), is a dense, if esoteric, critical guide to most American and European new wave recordings from 1976 through 1982 by the editors and writers of the decade-old magazine. The writing, relying more on facts than analysis, is serviceable; the only major flaws are the lack of photos and index, plus one glaring omission: those black records which most influenced today's "new music" are conspicuously absent from the book's perspective.

Rolling Stone Press has three new titles available: **The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll,** edited by Jon Pareles (Rolling Stone Press/Summit, $12.95 paper, $22.95 limited edition hardcover), is a solid compendium of available knowledge emphasizing artists almost to the exclusion of places, events, trends, the business, etc.; **The New Rolling Stone Record Guide,** edited by Dave Marsh and John Swenson (Rolling Stone Press/Random House, $12.95), is a followup to the groundbreaking 1979 *Record Guide*, updated and better organized, but minus the jazz section, which is due for its own separate volume in '84; **The Rolling Stone Almanac** (Rolling Stone Press/MacMillan, $10.95 paper, $19.95 limited edition hardcover), a detail-filled chronology of rock, cites the most important dates for each month from 1954 through 1982, and also contains weekly Number One chart positions for singles and LPs (both British and American) plus rhythm and blues 45s. **—George Bailey**

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IRA ROBBINS

PHOTO FOLLIES

Beer companies sponsor national tours. Groups generate huge income via sophisticated and far-flung merchandising and licensing arrangements. The record industry easily enlists the support of many artists in an aggressive effort to penalize home tapers and recover allegedly lost income. Yes, it's obvious—rock 'n' roll has shed all vestiges of its erstwhile anti-establishment spirit, and now fully embraces the naked commercial aspirations typical of any lucrative business. The days when rock stars feigned embarrassment at becoming wealthy and made an effort to not seem overly concerned with their finances are long gone. In the 1980s, being a sharp businessman is as cherished a talent as being able to play guitar, and only a few are ashamed to admit it.

Typical of this burgeoning cynicism is the push for total career omnipotence. For years, groups have fought with record labels and other adversaries to obtain more say in the creative and financial aspects of their lives, to equalize the relationship between artist and employer. Given the miserable way musicians through the years have been outrageously exploited—or simply robbed—it's easy to sympathize . . . up to a point. Obtaining creative freedom and insuring honest and fair treatment are reasonable goals. But when the desire to control all aspects of a career extends to restricting and interfering with legitimate press coverage, musicians—or any other public figures—go beyond the realm of self-protection and become incipient despots.

As groups have gained considerable power, the rock press has seen its influence diminish. Artists once anxious to offer their views in print are now less inclined to grant interviews. Also, since general-interest and news magazines discovered rock 'n' roll sometime in the '70s, the competition for access to big stars has reduced the number of coverage opportunities. Nowadays, major bands generally view the rock press with little more than casual indifference and suspicion.

Recently, several big-name groups have begun claiming exploitation, confusing their merchandising efforts with the functioning of an independent press. It has even been mooted—so far, only semi-seriously—that photographers should pay a royalty to the groups they photograph. Having already exacted the right to approve photos before they can be submitted for possible publication, powerful managers are looking for more ways they can control the press' coverage of their acts. The tendency now is to restrict photography as much as possible—not allowing any cameras at concerts, limiting authorized photographers to three songs during which they may shoot, using one photographer for an entire tour and refusing all freelance requests for credentials. By largely co-opting the integrity of rock publications and making it nearly impossible for freelance photographers to ply their trade, short-sighted managers have crassly disregarded artistry, attempted to limit press freedom, and generally interfered with the audience's ability to see what their favorite groups really look like.

Photographers arriving at several New York concerts in recent months have encountered a chilling new wrinkle: a legal agreement they are required to sign which stipulates conditions on the sale and use of photographs taken at the shows. The intent is to limit the photographer's sale to only the publication which assigned them in order to keep the available free-lance work an editor can consider to a bare minimum, and to exercise maximum control over the use of photos in unauthorized books and articles.

> . . . a rock star who gets up in front of thousands of paying customers, works the talk show and press circuit every new LP, and employs a p.r. firm to assure notoriety shouldn't complain about the coverage he or she receives.

Citing the commercial use of photos for posters and fan books, the claim is that managers are simply protecting their artists from exploitation without payment. In truth, they are aiming to reduce freedom of the press—one of our constitutional rights alongside free speech—as it suits their needs. Why should they only view photographers as their enemies—shouldn't interviewers, by the same illogic, be expected to turn over transcripts for expurgation before being allowed to write articles?

It is possible to share the desire of public figures for fair press treatment. No law forces people to grant interviews or pose for photographs. But there is a law that guarantees the press' right to cover and depict celebrities with or without consent or cooperation. Unauthorized books and articles may be irritating or unflattering, but there is no legal basis for objection, except perhaps libel or sedition. And even if a pop star's picture and quotes may indeed have a substantial impact on the sales of a magazine issue, that in no way conveys the right to expect any consideration—royalties, prior approval, etc.—in return. The press is just funny that way. It's not like other businesses.

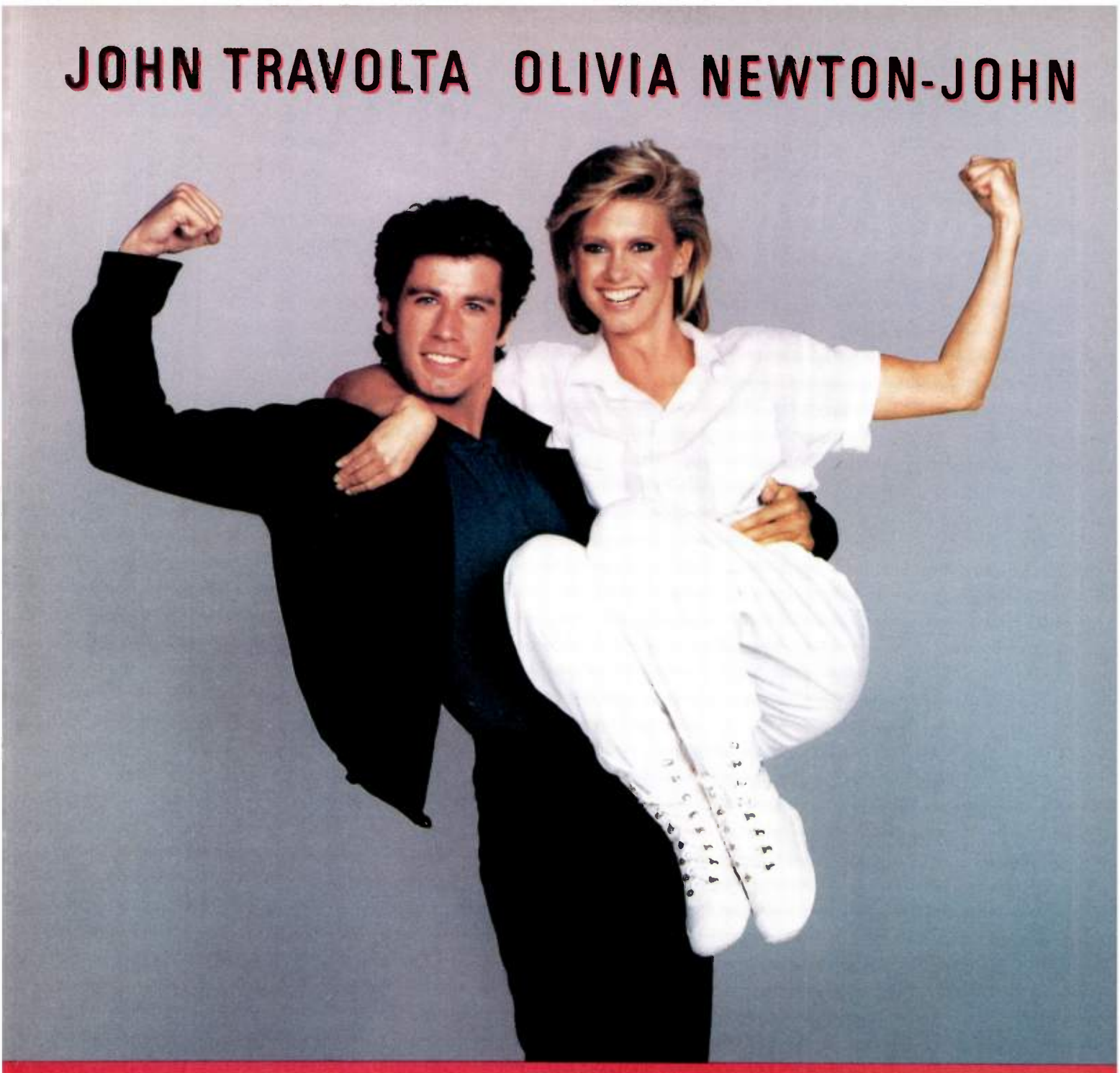
Only by deciding which publications, writers and photographers they will cooperate with can an artist exercise any editorial input; trying to make it impossible to obtain photographs legally is just an underhanded way to achieve that. Certain celebrities have made themselves unavailable, and have worked hard at remaining private citizens despite their fame. But a rock star who gets up in front of thousands of paying customers, works the talk show and press circuit every new LP, and employs a p.r. firm to assure notoriety shouldn't complain about the coverage he or she receives. Bands who now claim to be exploited and abused by the press had no objections when they were unknowns and glad for the free publicity. To my knowledge, no publication has ever demanded a percentage of the record sales generated by its coverage of an artist.

Free-lance rock photographers must be viewed the same as any newspeople. They cover public figures for public communication. Shooting pictures at a concert is essentially no different from recording an assassination, and no more deprives anyone of income than it steals souls. It's sad to realize that rock 'n' roll and free speech no longer seem to have much in common. ○

Ira A. Robbins is the Publisher and Editorial Director of Trouser Press *magazine and the editor of* The Trouser Press Guide to New Wave Records.

Perspectives is an open forum for anyone wishing to express an opinion on an issue relevant to contemporary music. Manuscripts should be no more than 1000 words in length, typed, double-spaced and accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Send to RECORD/Perspectives, 745 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10151.

JOHN TRAVOLTA OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN



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'THERE ARE RIDERS APPROACHING'

THE CONTINUING TRANSFORMATION OF AL GREEN, MAN OF GOD

PHOTO WALTER MCBRIDE/RETNA

BY JAMES HUNTER

On a tepid evening in June a church full of people in Charleston, West Virginia sat waiting on Al Green. They squirmed in the hard unpadded pews, they stood and sang free-moving congregationals, they applauded performances by the church choir and by assembled local groups, they made frequent trips to the rest rooms, and one woman sprinted the entire length of the sanctuary a couple of times as she roared out a testimony to Jesus. Never, not as the soul-man *auteur* of "Let's Stay Together" and "Call Me" nor as the gospel star/evangelist, had Green appeared in West Virginia's capitol city. So, The First Baptist Church at Lewis and Shrewsbury Streets held a special Monday evening service to welcome him there, at last, and into the state where he would commence a four-day revival meeting the next night in Beckley, sixty miles south.

At the First Baptist they waited for Green's flight to arrive at Charleston's Kanawha Airport, from which he would be driven to the church. The service began at eight o'clock; by nine, a stalling flow of announcements about Wednesday prayer meetings and church-league basketball games was enlivened by excited bulletins like "We've just received word that Rev. Green's plane has landed." When he finally strode in from the back of the church, wearing a maroon velvet blazer and open-necked shirt, shaking hands with people in the aisle seats, they had waited over two hours. When he sang an unchartable, utterly unreal *a cappella* "Amazing Grace" at the pulpit, shaping the familiar song's phrases into a love offering of raspy high-throat sound that Green alone in the universe could make, the wait suddenly seemed like two minutes. "He took the rock 'n' roll and the twisting the night away from me," Green beamed, talking about his Lord in a cuddly, tuneful tone devoid of fire-and-brimstone rantings, "and gave me a new song, a song the angels can sing, and I want you to know His name is Jesus." With one arm raised limply into the air, he was, among other things, charisma incarnate; nobody moved.

A few days later a smiling Al Green, dressed in white and looking through magenta-framed eyeglasses, walks into a room at Laurel Lodge, a Beckley motor-inn no one could mistake for a real hotel, and whispers that he feels "exquisite." But it's one in the afternoon, he's just finished taping a local TV talk show to publicize the revival, and he's starving—the minister of Memphis' Full Gospel Tabernacle who is also the Last Soul Singer in America has skipped breakfast and is dreaming of lunch. This much is apparent when he sits down to explain why he went to Nashville to make his fourth gospel record, his first ever recorded outside of Memphis.

"It's the ingenuity there," Green says. "I think it has a different flavor. Nashville is country, it has a kind of hungry feel to it, like bacon and eggs, hot coffee . . . " Then, lost in his own wishful catalogue of foods, Green bounds off the couch, in mock pursuit of a meal. "A couple of pancakes," he laughs, "no problem."

Since signing a multi-record deal with Myrrh—the religious label affiliated with the sprawling Word, Inc. Christian organization in Waco, Texas—Green has virtually redefined notions of pop and of gospel. 1980's *The Lord Will Make A Way* is the most insignificant of his gospel albums, but the dusky rhythmic churn of the title song, as raw and downhome as anything Green cut during his Hi years with producer Willie Mitchell, made it clear that gospel for Green wasn't going to result in artistic suicide. *Higher Plane*, which followed the next year, was an all-out triumph of original material and standards like "Battle Hymn Of The Republic," both expressed in the sweetest, frankest tongues of pop,

AL GREEN RECALLS HIS GLORY DAYS IN POP: "THE ONLY THING I REMEMBER IS LIGHTS, PLENTY OF LIGHTS, ALWAYS PSSSH, PSSSH – SINGING SONGS AND JUST LIGHTS...THIS HUSTLE AND THIS BUSTLE. YES. SO, SO MUCH GOING ON."

Green-style. 1982's *Precious Lord*, a loving and painstaking collection of hymns, showcased some of Green's most thoughtful, gorgeous singing ever. And *I'll Rise Again*, his new album, works slow and bluesy moods into a greater context of upbeat "contemporary gospel" buoyed by tricky melodies and scrappy beats, proof further that pop fans cannot afford to ignore Green's gospel records.

On the one hand, these albums are shorn of the sly, slippery sexuality that distinguished numbers like "Look What You Done For Me" and "Let's Get Married" as much as Green's part-honey, part-scratch falsetto. The sensuality of his voice now seems smuggled in. But on the other hand, Green's religious sides excel at pop that's never bloodless, never too far removed from unsaved sounds on the radio. The records are definitely alive with something; Green would call it God.

When the Last Soul Singer in America looks back on the time when he sang secular material he admits, "There are things on the pop records that I wouldn't do again, things on *Truth n' Time* (his last studio recordings of secular material) that I wouldn't say now. It's a different outlook in the meaning of the music, the input of the music, the feel of the music, the seriousness of the music. Before, you didn't have this real quickening of the concept—you were not aware, you were really not aware. So, you went into the studio feeling pretty good because you might have a couple of songs. And that was that. Now, you go in there, well, like with 'In The Garden' (on *Precious Lord*)—you can't just go in there and go BOOM BOOM! Now you have to concentrate on it, pray about the aesthetics of what you're doing. An art form is what we're doing now, and some people appreciate art, and some don't. The difference is a firm commitment to what you believe in. For me, it's a responsibility, it's a duty. There are riders approaching."

Born in Forrest City, Arkansas, the 36-year-old Green grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the son of Baptist gospel singers. It was to his parents' records—most notably Sam Cooke's (who was then with the Soul Stirrers) and the Reverend Claude Jeter's—that the young Green began listening, taking lessons. As the Ink Spots' Bill Kenney is to Elvis Presley, so is Claude Jeter to Al Green: a formidable, though largely unacknowledged, influence. The ear-opening falsetto cries and whispers that have become Green's most obvious vocal characteristic are, in fact, pure Jeter.

With a Grand Rapids friend named Palmer Jones, Green formed a band called the Creations. In 1967 he cut Jones' "Back Up Train" for Hotline Records, on which he suggested that if at one moment his voice could be the earth itself, the next moment it could be the clouds; the record made top 40. The turning point—a turning point—came in 1969 in Midland, Texas, when Green met Willie Mitchell, a trumpet player and staff producer for the Memphis-based Hi Records. Mitchell took Green back to Memphis and teamed him with a crack studio band—bassist Leroy Hodges, keyboardist Charles Hodges, guitarist Tennie Hodges, plus Howard Grimes and the late Al Jackson (of Booker T. & the MG's) on drums—that would eventually mirror the rare motions of Green's voice in what was arguably soul music's most perfect synthesis. Starting out, they had some success—a 1970 remake of the Temptations' "I Can't Get Next To You," for example, rose to number eleven on the soul charts. But in 1971 Green hit with his own "Tired of Being Alone," an elegant, snaking single, half-complaint and half-dream. It sold a million, crossed over everywhere, and established him as the contemporary epitome of a line of sensual, sensitive black male singers that begins, in modern times, with Clyde McPhatter and includes Sam Cooke and Smokey Robinson.

But "there are riders approaching." In 1973, nearing the peak of his commercial success, Green rediscovered the religion he'd mostly left behind in Grand Rapids. Tragedy struck in 1974, when a woman companion who felt scorned by Green showered him with hot grits before killing herself. Then the hits stopped coming. Still, Green's albums from this period—*Al Green Is Love*, *Full Of Fire*, and *Have A Good Time*—all contain passages of undeniable grandeur. But his on-stage behavior, always as idiosyncratic as it was charming, grew unnervingly introverted—his energy was focused so inwardly he seemed in danger of imploding.

In 1977, Green began to make sense of his obligations to God and mammon on *The Belle Album*, a much-celebrated exploration of his own soul and roots. "*Belle* was the start of what we're doing now," Green says. "The religious naturally goes with art because they're both so *ancient*. I think *Belle* was the kind of record it was because it channeled both, religion and rock 'n' roll, and it channeled them so well."

But Green seems to see the record as an artistic illusion of a moral impossibility. "We all know from Christian experience," he points out, "that rock 'n' roll and religion really don't mix—they're like oil and water. *Belle* kind of channeled them too well, really, like a perfect blend.

"What *was* it about *Belle*," he asks, sounding genuinely puzzled, "that hung so many people up? In Tokyo, Japan there was a kid who asked me about *The Belle Album*, and he was very, very impressed. And I'm trying to say, well, OK, great. It was a very good idea, but mostly it only suggested a time period in my life, a balance I was at concerning pop-gospel. That's what we were cutting at the time, pop-gospel. To use 'baby' a little bit, 'my girl' a little bit—talking to the girl Belle, who was a real person, although 'Belle' was a nickname. It was explaining to her that He's my bright and morning star—who is she to compete with the Lord?

"I don't see anything wrong with records like that," Green says of pop-gospel. "In fact, I'm dickering around with them now. Because we've been put together here into a whole package of stuff that's wonderful. But when you come to an 'In The Garden' or a 'Precious Lord' it's a bit more concrete, like BOOM! the hammer comes down, establishing the fact that 'Rock Of Ages' is *it*."

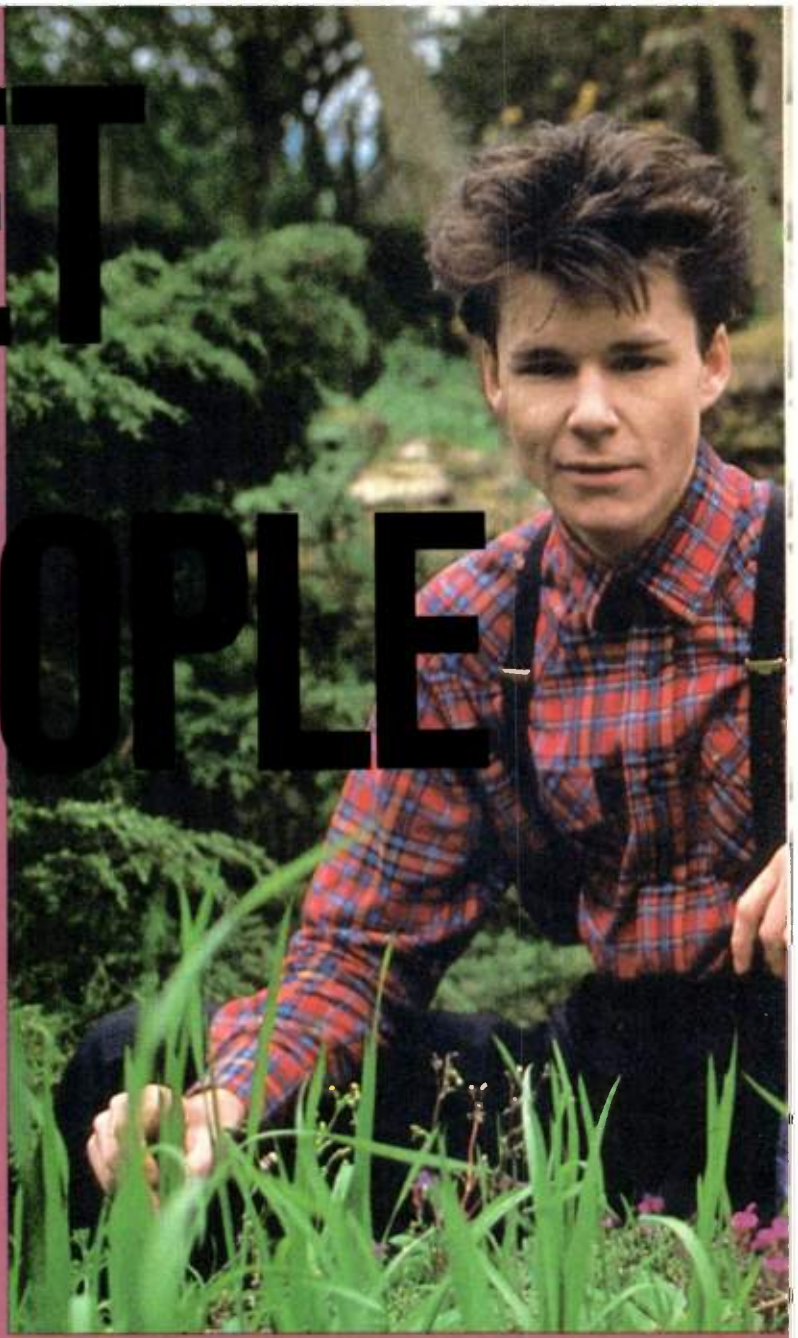
Yet, this is an artist who, prior to his Myrrh affiliation, sold 30 million records, who made a lasting contribution to black pop. Ask him if he listens to pop radio now and he answers with a simple "yeah." But inquire as to his attitude toward pop music today and his reply becomes more complicated. First, he qualifies his earlier assertion that rock 'n' roll and religion don't mix: "Let me say religion and punk rock don't mix." (Though Green describes the sound of some punk music as "exquisite.")

He continues: "Physical music has a tendency to deal with physical things. Gospel, Christian music has a tendency to deal with spiritual things. The physical cannot see the spiritual, and the physical cannot

Continued on page 34

AND LET THE PEOPLE HEAR

In Big Country, pain and truth are things that really matter



BY ADRIAN THRILLS

Towering above sticky tarmac streets and steaming manhole covers, the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts is an imposing building. One of New York's major cultural complexes, its arched facade is the most striking landmark on a west side skyline glistening in the bright September sun.

Beneath the monolithic monument of concrete and glass, the city's Sunday morning strollers seem almost insignificant. But, as is always the case in this madhouse of a town, they are far from dull or inactive.

A mumbling Broadway bum rustles through a garbage can before aiming a wild kick at a passing cyclist for no apparent reason; the driver of a Checker cab unloads his cargo of Japanese tourists onto the sidewalk completely oblivious to the impatient honking of a dozen car horns in the jam behind him . . . and two former punk rockers from the other side of the Atlantic sit barefoot beside an ornamental fountain debating whether or not to take a cooling dip.

It's only eight in the morning but the Manhattan thermometer is already rocketing into the lower 90s. By the middle of the afternoon the temperature will have reached a stifling 97 degrees Fahrenheit, the highest autumn reading in 50 years. This is what one might call a heatwave.

Stuart Adamson curses the two watchful armed cops preventing he and I from plunging into the ornamental pool and contents himself with cradling a chilled can of Budweiser in a brown paper bag, it being a punishable offense to openly consume alcohol in the street.

"You wouldn't get Simon LeBon doing anything like this," the Big Country singer and guitarist jibes, his sharp jawline cracking into a wide grin.

That much is undoubtedly true. Then again, there are not too many similarities between Adamson and any of the members of Duran Duran, as becomes more and more apparent on hearing the craggy Scot in the sleeveless tartan shirt talking about music with fervent passion and an effusive, infectious warmth.

"I don't have any great plan about music. If music is important, it has to come down to emotion. It should be a human thing. Maybe that has something to do with coming from Scotland, where music has always been really close to the heart of the community. I certainly don't see it as something escapist. It can have a deep emotional effect.

"I've never seen it as a great quest for the

Big Country (from left: Adamson, Butler, Watson, Brzezicki): Where the value of love meets the power of pride

PHOTO: M. REINA

world with Big Country, either. It's still something small and innocent. It doesn't matter to me if I'm playing to one person or a thousand people. It is still just a matter of sharing some songs. Music should be a simple, emotive human language.

"I don't really see what all this fuss is about half the time. For me it's just about making a record to show people what your feelings are. If those feelings connect, then the record sells. It's not about creating a fashion, it's just about . . . ah, I don't really know. Sometimes the whole thing just leaves me totally confused."

The quivering brogue breaks off for a moment. It is a struggle to fully articulate something that is essentially a case of instinct and inspiration. Adamson pauses and tries again.

"It's hard for me to theorize about it. It should be a natural thing, not something you can take apart like a set of building blocks. The idea for a song will come to me in a momentary flash. I could never just sit down and deliberately set out to write some songs.

"It's not that I'm flippant about it. Far from it. But I sometimes think that sitting down and analyzing it all can be slightly demeaning. I always feel that I'm making a real fanny of myself when I try and explain it in interviews—the big rock 'n' roll star telling kids where his head is at! At the same time, interviews can help to break down the myth that there is something special about people in bands. There's nothing special about musicians and songwriters. They might sometimes make some magical music, but that doesn't make them better people.

"But I think it's great that a lot of kids in their early teens are buying records like ours as well as buying the Duran Duran and Kajagoogoo stuff, because there's nothing lightweight about our songs. If there is any future for music, it has got to come through young people being shown that you can express yourself honestly through music."

Words like "soul," "honesty" and "passion" have been so debased through overuse by the young saps and old lags of the pop world that they now mean next to nothing. Adamson, though, is one of the few performers who can still make them ring true. His sheer enthusiasm is usually enough to bring even the most tired phrase to life.

"I can only write songs the way that I feel them. If the words that describe those feelings have become cliches, I can't help that. I can't help the way I feel. I certainly don't think I should have to apologize for it, because I've never made any great claims about our music. There are no great ideologies in our songs. If there is one overall thing worth emphasizing, it's just the importance of people. That's about it . . . and that water in the fountain looks so bloody cool!"

The courtyard outside Lincoln Center is rapidly becoming too hot and humid to

handle and—with the two cops still eyeing us from a distance—the lure of an air-conditioned hotel on nearby Central Park West is too much to resist.

As we head back across Broadway towards welcome relief from the heat, Adamson permits himself one last glance at the five impressive arches of the buildings behind us.

"I just don't ken some of these Americans. They put up this great center for the arts, but they've never produced a thing worth calling art themselves! They've had to borrow everything from Europe . . . even punk rock, they even took that!"

The previous evening Big Country had played the second and final night of their brief New York residency, working for the Yankee dollar in the faded grandeur of the Ritz. As live rock music goes, it had been something truly special, one of those rare occasions where everything clicks miraculously into place and a band is able to cut through the suffocating barriers between the stage and the floor like a hot knife through butter. Almost alone in the rock arena, Big Country can still send a shiver down the spine.

Their performance had begun badly. Chronic sound problems drove them off the stage after only four songs; but, while a lesser band might have wilted, Big Country turned adversity to their advantage. They simply crouched by the footlights and chatted with the crowd while matters were rectified before returning to resume their set at its beginning.

In responding with guts to a situation that could so easily have spoiled their prestigious date in downtown Manhattan, Big Country grew almost visibly in stature during their hour-long set. Adamson is the volatile vortex of the group, standing stage center in a white vest and rolled up jeans, a Fender slanted obliquely across his torso. He leads the group by example, and, when things threaten to turn sour, his three cohorts—guitarist Bruce Watson, bassist Tony Butler and drummer Mark Brzezicki—seem to draw inspiration from his powerful presence at the helm.

But Big Country is no one man band, and one of the more satisfying aspects of their performance was the spectre of all four members of the passion patrol pulling *together* to keep the undivided attention of their audience for the entire duration of an effervescent, impetuous show.

Putting the Big in the Country club is down largely to the heroic six-string dynamism of twin guitarists Adamson and Watson. A rousing barrage of inventive guitar work has become one of the band's hallmarks and on stage they strike a perfect balance between booming cacophony and stinging, melodic grace. A similar combination of powerful combustion and more delicate, subtle polyrhythmic interplay extends to the rhythm section, while Adamson is also improving as a singer, compensating for his lack of range and tonal perfection by the force and character of his vocal delivery.

Old Father Rock, of course, has become *tres* unfashionable over the past couple of years. The emergence of a band like Big Country, however, emphasizes how dumb it is to make rules about music. To regard all guitar-based rock as a reactionary evil would be sheer stupidity. The fact that most of it is indeed rotten to the core is irrelevant: inspiring and original rock bands do still exist in 1983, and, in that particular field of fire and skill, Big Country is already threatening to leave almost all the other contenders floundering in their feedback.

But there is a lot more to Big Country than just the sound of blazing guitars. The real heart of the band is in the songs of Adamson and the spirit with which the group plays them. Drawing both on the healthier aspects of recent British rock history from the Jam to Joy Division *and* on his own Scottish Highland heritage, Adamson has forged a highly original musical framework on which to hang his songs of justice, freedom and pain.

Big Country is sometimes criticized for being a progressive rock band dressed up in modern trimmings. In fact, they rarely veer anywhere near the overwrought musical delivery of the mid-'70s, making a virtue instead of precision and economy: apart from their two mini-epics, "Porrohman" and "The Storm," all the songs in their set have the same crisp immediacy and cohesion as their four singles, "Harvest Home," "Fields of Fire," "In A Big Country" and "Chance."

The songs themselves are musical parables, taking tales from Celtic folklore, highland history and *Boys Own* adventure to explore deeper themes of love, fear and pride. A strong sense of continuity runs through their work, bolstered by the recurrence of certain elemental images—one can hardly scan a line of the lyric sheet that comes with their debut album, *The Crossing*, without being struck by references to sun, sea, wind, rain or fire.

But for the receptive crowd downstairs at the Ritz, it was the music rather than the words that was the main concern, and Big Country did not disappoint. They were in inspired form, the first rock band since the Clash that actually made me want to dance through a 13-song set that showcased every track on the LP plus single flipsides "Angle Park," "Balcony" and a cover of Smokey Robinson's "Tracks of My Tears."

Though born in Manchester, England, Adamson was raised in the small village of Crossgates near Dunfermline, Fife; hence the undeniable Scottish edge to the Big Country beat. Adamson recalls his mother having "a lot of old Irish and Scottish folk records lying around, so it's something I've been brought up with. There would always be folks around on Friday and Saturday night after the pubs and dancehalls shut and everyone would have to get up and sing or play a song. There would be guys up there playing guitars, bagpipes, accordions and fiddles, so I suppose some of the things I write go right back to that.

"It's not as if I've decided to sit down and write something *really ethnic*. I think it's a bit dilettantish to *adopt* style like that. It would be dishonest of me to play electro-funk or disco. Not that I've got anything against it, but just because it's not something I've grown up with."

The impact of punk pricked Adamson into seriously putting together a band of his own. After assembling bassist Tom Kellichan, drummer Willie Simpson and young vocalist Richard Jobson, he launched the Skids in 1977; and though the rhythm section subsequently underwent a series of changes, Adamson and Jobson remained together until 1981.

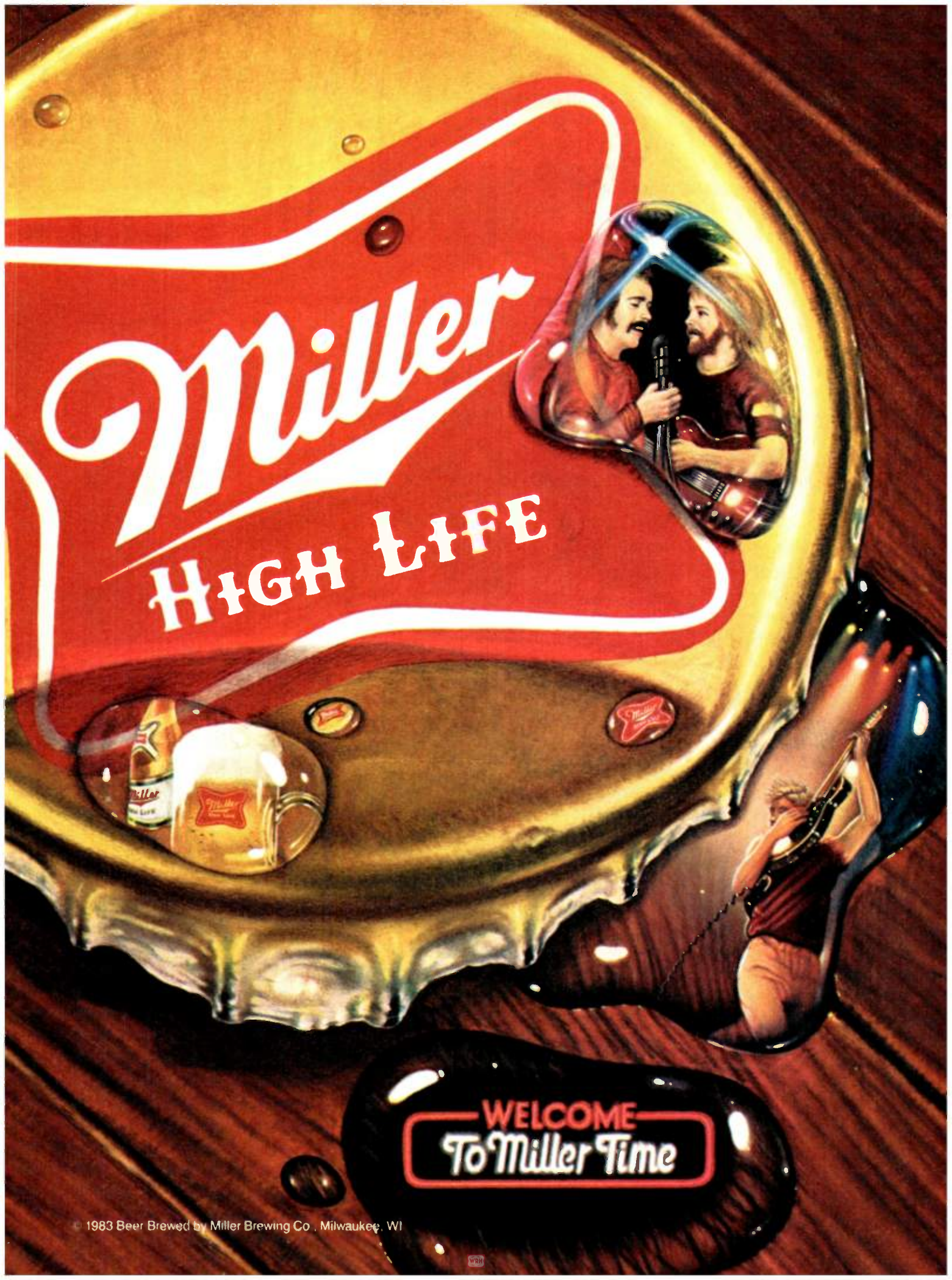
The Skids were an intriguing group. The creative tension between Adamson's passionate, almost earnest drive and Jobson's cultural hooliganism produced three albums, all on Virgin, in as many years. Their debut, *Scared To Dance*, was rich in spikey promise but neither the futuristic *Days In Europa* nor the more rounded pop of *The Absolute Game* lived up to its potential, leaving a string of stirring singles as the most enduring testimony to their talents. Though they received neither the credit nor the commercial success that they perhaps deserved, the Skids proved to be a firm foundation for what Adamson is now doing in Big Country and Jobson in his new band, the Armoury Show.

After the Skids broke up, Adamson quietly went back underground in Dunfermline. His wife gave birth to their first child and he began writing songs with guitarist Bruce Watson, a flame-haired young firebrand whose two previous bands, the Delinquents and Eurosect, had often supported the Skids on Scottish dates.

The pair worked for months in a portable studio beneath a community pool hall, perfecting the blueprint that was to become Big Country. By the end of the year, they were ready to test the prototype and extended their lineup to embrace a rhythm section and keyboards. But their initial appearances—one in their home town and two down in England supporting Alice Cooper—were waking nightmares and, within two weeks of being formed, Big Country Mark One nosedived out of existence.

Mark Two came about when Phonogram Records talent scout Chris Briggs offered Adamson and Watson some demo time in a London studio. Lacking a permanent rhythm section, the pair called in a

Continued on page 34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High Life
WELCOME
To Miller Time
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Salem Spirit!

ON THE BEAT

GUIDO HARARI LGI

RON WOLFSON LGI

Mick Jones (left), that man dispossessed from the Clash for having "drifted apart from (the band's) original idea," seems to have found temporary shelter in the new group General Public. That band, formed by one-time English Beatsters' guitarist Dave Wakeling and vocalist Ranking Roger (right), now includes former Dexys Midnight Runners' keyboardist Mickey Billingham and drummer Stoker. Busy beavers that they are, General Public are reported to have at least ten songs ready to go right now, and an LP could hit the stores as soon as early 1984. Jones' role in the outfit is, for now, open to speculation; after all, at last accounting, he denied being booted from the Clash at all: "I'll be carrying on . . . as in the beginning."

THE VINYL WORD

Billy Joel's chart-topping "Tell Her About It" is now available in a specially remixed 12" version. The new extended dance mix was supplied by **John "Jellybean" Benitez,** red hot DJ at New York's Funhouse disco, and the man responsible for remixing some of *Flashdance's* hottest tracks. Added bonus: besides featuring "Easy Money," his title song written for Rodney Dangerfield's box office hit, on the flip, Joel's disc also includes a live rendition of Sam and Dave's "You Got Me Hummin'." Speaking of which: with the Eurythmics having already covered "Wrap It Up" this year, isn't it about time someone took **Sam Moore** and **Dave Prater** and "revived" them a la Gary U.S. Bonds or Mitch Ryder? Calling Miami Steve Van Zandt . . . Despite the **English Beat's** late summer disbanding, I.R.S. went through with plans to release a meaningful U.S. compilation. Entitled *What Is Beat,* the package includes the best of the influential early work ("Twist and Crawl," a cover of Smokey and the Miracles' "Tears of a Clown" and others originally brought out by Sire in the States), plus some live cuts and British-only singles previously unheard on these shores. In addition, the cassette will include three more tracks, two of them new . . . **Translator** have an extended psychedelic remixed 12" out of a song from their latest LP, *No Time Like Now,* called "Break Down Barriers." Like Billy Joel, the San Franciscans offer real value for money by serving up "Cry For A Shadow," their version of a Hamburg-era Beatles' tune, and the non-LP "Eraser," on the B-side . . . The ever-trenchant **UB40** took time off from their usually politically-obsessed reggae to cut *Labour Of Love* (I.R.S.), an LP sporting cover versions of reggae they grew up on during the years 1969 through 1972, when the Jamaican music first caught on in England. Included are remakes of "Cherry Oh Baby," an Eric Donaldson song familiar through the Rolling Stones' *Black And Blue* treatment, and "Red Red Wine," a tune penned by Neil Diamond (!). Following an arrangement made popular by the obscure Tony Tribe, UB40 scored a British Number One with the latter platter in September . . . Hot Welsh act the **Alarm** put out a new single, "Sixty-Eight Guns"/"Thoughts of a Young Man," in the UK during September. Look for it to be released here soon, and for the band to open some dates for the Pretenders in early '84. The powerful quartet also have tentative plans to film a Yuletide performance in an Abbey Road Studios' rehearsal hall for later theatrical or television release. ■

CINEMA

Hollywood, ever eager to jump on a bandwagon, has been immeasurably impressed by the big bucks made off a so-called "street" film like *Flashdance* (which is why you'll soon be suffering through *Flashdance II*). One movie that sounds more legit than exploitative is **Beat Street**, which recently began photography for Orion Pictures. The screenplay of the film, scheduled for release in the spring of '84, is being put together by *Village Voice* writer **Steve Hager**, who's kept his finger close to the pulse of those scenes which spawned the break dancing, rapping, and hiphop that highlight the production. The music shouldn't be too shabby, either; musical supervisor is **Arthur Baker**, entreperneur/producer of the sizzling New York indie label Streetwise, and whose credits include New Edition's fabulous Jackson Five-styled "Candy Girl" and Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force's "Planet Rock" . . . If the producers of *Eddie and the Cruisers* deny the Springsteen implications of their rockin' turkey, then why was the film premiered nationally on Septem-

ber 23, the Boss' 34th birthday? . . . Having basically bombed out on the summer concert circuit, one-time soap opera heartthrob **Rick Springfield** will make his movie debut in Universal Pictures' *Hard To Hold*, scheduled for an Easter release . . . **John Lydon** (formerly known as Johnny Rotten) a movie star? Sounds unlikely, but he's in something called *Order of Death* with favorite Martin Scorsese tough guy **Harvey Keitel**, just opening in London. While back in Londontown, perhaps the bitterest PiL member can clear up those nagging **Sex Pistol** reunion rumors (unless one considers his alleged "What'll we do? Dig poor Sid up?" comment to be the final word on *that* subject). ■

BOOKS

Three rock photo books of note have been put out in the last few months. Most impressive in layout and reproduction is Rolling Stone Press/Pantheon's *Annie Liebovitz: Photographs*. The handsome book, priced at $35, includes many of Liebovitz's famous celebrity shoots for *Rolling Stone*, like Bob Dylan, the Ono/Lennons, Bruce Springsteen and the Rolling Stones (collectively and individually) . . . Of keen interest to the Led Zeppelin cultist is *Led Zeppelin: Portraits*, a limited edition collection of tour photos by the band's official concert photographer **Neal Preston**. The book is available by mail order only through Rock-At-Home, 150 E. 35th Street, Suite G3, New York, NY 10016; cost is $25, plus $2.50 postage and handling. Former rock journalist Cameron 'Ridgemont High' Crowe wrote the intro . . . *John Lennon: Summer of 1980* (Perigee, $8.95) captures the last months of the man's life through the works of eight photographers, notably Bob Gruen, Allan Tannenbaum and Paul Goresh, the freelancer who took the last shots of Lennon alive. The introduction is touchingly written by the widowed **Yoko Ono**. ■

TELEVISION AND VIDEO

Future rock cable TV specials include **David Bowie** and **Men At Work** (taped in early October at Los Angeles' Greek Theater) on HBO, and the Police due to appear on Showtime. All are performance specials, and all will screen in early '84 . . . As of December, MCA Home Video will market all its Beta format videocassettes in Beta Hi-Fi. Claiming to be the first manufacturer to do so across the board, the company will also upgrade its audio on selected back catalog items . . . Watch for the rerun of the **Jerry Lee Lewis** *Salute!*, hosted by Dick Clark, which first aired in late September. The syndicated program, vaguely resembling *This Is Your Life* in its set-up, had Mick Fleetwood and Keith Richards backing the Killer on "Your Cheatin' Heart," "Little Queenie," and "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On." The renditions were raw but refreshingly real, with Keith—decked out in a tux on the occasion for "the first time in (his) life"—goading Jerry Lee into playing at a hotter pace than the Memphis madman's doctors probably appreciated. The other highlight of the show, besides some ancient clips, was a gospel duet sung with the Reverend Richard Penniman, better known to all as fellow piano basher Little Richard. One quick question, though: whose idea was it to have Jerry Lee Lewis running through a duet of "Breathless" with Ruth Buzzi, of all people?. . . When **Asia**'s scheduled 11:00 P.M. worldwide broadcast from Tokyo on December 6 inevitably runs past midnight, will the sight of sweating roadies turning Carl Palmer's "revolving" drum kit suffice as revenge against the Land of the Rising Sun on the 42nd anniversary of Pearl Harbor's bombing? ■

Recognize the above? Didn't think so—unless you're a diehard Beatlemaniac, import record fanatic or Canadian or West German citizen, odds are you won't recognize this as the cover shot from Richard Starkey's latest release. Ringo, who was last heard from on Boardwalk Records with his 1981 *Stop And Smell The Roses*, has released *Old Wave*, but so far only RCA Canada has bothered to press it up (unconfirmed reports also have it being issued in West Germany). The title of the record tells the story, and except for some decent moments on side two, the disc, with appearances by John Entwistle, Chris Stainton, Joe Walsh, Russ Kunkel, Eric Clapton and other '60s' veterans, confirms the instincts of U.S. labels in not picking it up. There's still something left somewhere in Ringo, but, after this, who knows when anyone will hear it again.

TRANSITION

Stephen Goulding is now pounding skins for the Gang of Four. Our Gang had been operating as a threesome before adding the ex-Rumour drummer . . . **Bow Wow Wow** have sacked lead singer Annabella Lwin. The former Antpeople (if you've got your scorecard out, note that the remaining three pooches backed Adam Ant way back when) "asked her to leave and she decided to do so," according to the official press statement. The group will stumble on, a solo career for the outspoken Ms. Lwin is planned, and maybe now MTV will stop playing the putrid "Do You Wanna Hold Me" video . . . It had to happen: after announcing his retirement, Soft Cell's **Marc Almond** no longer "vants to be alone" and has again applied for membership among the musically active. ■

THE KID'S ALRIGHT

BENEATH ALL THE BLUSTER, JOHN COUGAR TURNS OUT TO BE AN AVERAGE JOE TRYING TO MAKE A LIVING AND HAVE A GOOD TIME—NEITHER OF WHICH COMES EASY THESE DAYS.

BY DEBORAH FROST

THE YOUNG black television executive standing on the steps of the Indiana University Auditorium is nervous. Like the camera crew assembled in front of him, he hasn't slept for a week. They've been working straight 27-hour shifts and the cable rock show he's been sent out from New York to oversee is still a day-and-a-half behind schedule. Which is partly because the star of the show insists on filming this complicated project—involving not only a half-hour this-is-your-life documentary, but two elaborate song videos—on his home turf. Consequently, the sort of problems that are solved instantly in Los Angeles or New York—hassles with sets, equipment, locations and the University's union stagehands—become interminable delays here. They don't shoot rock videos in rural Indiana. They do take exception to folks who are in the wrong place after dark, as the executive found out the previous night when confronted by a shotgun-wielding local while filming a scene in a trailer park. Still, that was tame compared to what's going on today. All week, the rock star has refused to film the standard introduction to the cable series, mostly because he saw Linda Ronstadt do one and thought she looked pretty lame. Finally he drags the executive into his dressing room, forces him to put on the star's jeans and Ray Bans and threatens to pierce his ear if a suitable screwback earring cannot be found. The executive protests that he has a plane to catch, but the star, oblivious to one who doth protest too much, calmly hands the executive the final, essential item of his wardrobe, and an authentic *objet d'art* it is: a motorcycle jacket emblazoned with provocative drawings painted by the star's favorite tattoo artist. One one side is a naked woman with her hand on her crotch. On the other is a leering red devil with a gigantic erection. The executive must face the camera (not to mention half of America, his mother, and, he is afraid, his soon-to-be ex-bosses) and say:

"Hi. I'm John Cougar Mellencamp, and this is my new album, *Uh-Huh*."

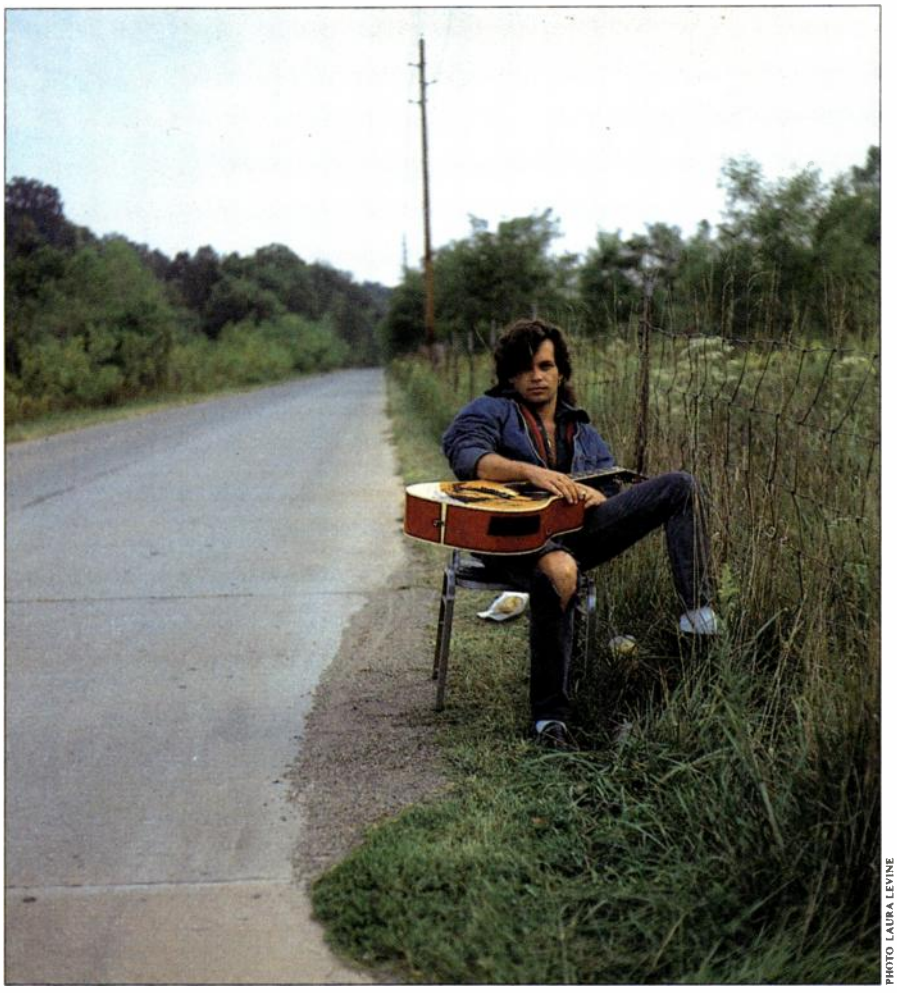
On the other side of the camera, the real John Cougar Mellencamp, whose customary torn jeans, Bass Weejun penny loafers and petulant mug make him look like a mutant Andy Hardy or a mutant David Johansen or a mutant cross between both, cracks up. He laughs so hard that he knocks over a can of Big Red, his favorite beverage, a noxious soft drink that tastes like carbonated bubblegum and can't be found anywhere outside of Indiana except Waco, Texas (it's probably illegal to transport the stuff across state lines). It stains the nice clean sidewalk outside the I.U. Auditorium so dark it looks like somebody was just murdered there.

John Cougar Mellencamp has a pretty bizarre concept of a joke. And no wonder: for most of his career, he has been one. It took this impulsive, insistent smalltown punk (who once collected enough record company rejection letters to paper an entire wall) over twelve years not only to understand the music business but to figure out what he was trying to say and exactly how to put it across.

"Let's face it, John Cougar has made about every mistake there is to make. But when you come from a little town like Seymour, Indiana, you really don't know what the rock scene is all about," says Cougar (as he's been known ever since former manager Tony DeFries changed his name on what Cougar now calls his "hilarious" MainMan debut, *Chestnut Street Incident*, in 1976) while strolling about the massive Indiana University theater, which he was using in lieu of a Hollywood soundstage. His attention to every detail of the the video production—from camera angles to the height of the parking meter props—and his perfectionist approach to the performance of a new song, "Crumblin' Down" (his band teased him that if he couldn't cut it, they'd call Michael Jackson to do the footwork. Jackson's services, however, were not required. Like Cougar says in his song, he's "a real good dancer"), immediately belies the impression Cougar has often created in the past. This was no ignorant, arrogant—or just plain lucky—country bumpkin. Perhaps it's as easy to misread his statements (as when he told *Rolling Stone* that writing songs was just like a hard-on—what he meant was if you think about it too much it won't come) and his actions (such as throwing a drum set off the stage in Canada, or walking off a TV show in New York) as it is to misinterpret his deceptively simple songs. Cougar likes to tell tales. He also likes to argue, as everyone (including himself) will tell you. Where he comes from, there ain't much else to do.

But though *American Fool*, his fourth record and first self-produced effort, was the best selling album (over three million copies) of 1982, a good many people—including the artist's critics—may only begin to understand Cougar upon hearing *John Cougar Mellencamp . . . Uh-Huh*. Maybe that's because Cougar sounds like he's beginning to understand himself. "Crumblin' Down," "Warmer Place to Sleep" and "Golden Gates" explore adult priorities while paying off debts to youthful influences the Rolling Stones. And in "Pink Houses," Cougar has finally articulated the vision of America he's been groping for ever since *Chestnut Street Incident*. With *Uh-Huh*, Cougar, now 32, has not only refused to make a formula follow-up to the teen anthems ("Jack and Diane," "Hurts So Good") that made him famous,

PHOTO LAURA LEVINE



John Cougar: "Let's face it, it's hard to have a good time."

fashioned music as raw, honest—and often funny—as the emotions it encompasses. As raw, honest—and funny—as the man himself. All in all, an extraordinary revelation from a guy who, given the odds (and that hilarious first album), should never have made it out of Seymour and into the cut-out bins—never mind beyond them.

"I think the reason I became successful is that I'm persistent," Cougar explains between takes of the "Crumblin' Down" video. "Sometimes I wish I didn't have this drive. But I always thought, well, if you quit, it's never going to happen anyway. It wasn't because my records were so good or my songs were so great. But, to quote a stupid phrase, they done used everybody else up."

While the union stagehands cut the parking meter props down to Cougar-size, Cougar bums cigarettes—which, along with Big Red, are his only vice ("You think I'm an asshole now," he says, "you should've seen me when I was drunk")—and kibitzes with numerous cronies and relatives. Some work for him, some are just hanging out. Almost all of them sport wild pompadours or wild tattoos or both. Even 58-year-old Aunt Toots just had "Hurts So Good" embroidered on her thigh.

Among the employees are Cougar's ex-wife Priscilla (and mother of his 13-year-old daughter, Michelle), who wears a modified version of the ducktail favored by Cougar's Indiana Mafia and runs Cougar's office full time. Current wife Vicki, a beautiful blonde (and the mother of two-year-old Teddi Jo), is taking still photographs for the cable company. The two women are, in Vicki's words, "like sisters."

"I don't believe in all that divorce this-belongs-to-me-this-belongs-to-you stuff," says Cougar, grinding a butt beneath his shoe. "I've known Priscilla since I was 15. Just because you change, you don't tell a friend to get lost."

Cougar actually seems happier talking about exploits of his family and friends than his own ups and downs. And he's more interested in relating what happened when two girls pulled up next to a T-Bird driven by his brother (and road manager) Ted and his nouveau rockabilly hairdresser Danny Ross than he is in pursuing life in the fast lane on either coast. (Two Girls to Ted and Danny: "Look, there's Lenny and Squiggy!" Danny to Two Girls: "Look, there's two fat stupid cows.")

"This, out here, is what's real," asserts Cougar, indicating his compatriots and motioning toward the rolling hills and fields directly outside. "All that Hollywood stuff isn't what's real. That's why, on the new record, there's a song that sorta makes fun of it, that goes 'this is serious business, sex and violence and rock 'n' roll.' And I'm sure certain critics, who are never gonna understand my sense of humor anyway, are gonna hear it and go 'Oh, *real* good, John.' But they're not gonna want to hear the song, they don't want to hear the truth. Like, I think it's sad that the only reason we probably ever heard some great songs like 'Papa's Got A Brand New Bag' is because somebody put something up somebody else's nose. That's been the music business since day one; it's probably any business. I could sit around and write cute songs, I know what's current and what's not. And if some people think what I'm saying is offensive, tell me Eddie Cochran didn't offend people. Isn't that what rock 'n' roll's about? And yeah, I'm a little ashamed of some of the things I did. But that's sometimes why you write about it, that's how you deal with it."

Rock 'n' roll once provided Cougar's only escape from (what he then perceived as) the workaday humdrum of Indiana, where his parents and in-laws belittled his fantasies and most of his classmates gave theirs up when they graduated from high school. Now, his home town is his only retreat, and, as he says in a new song, he would "trade in his ambitions for a warmer place to sleep."

"I think I used to be like that Chance Wayne character in *Sweet Bird of Youth*," muses Cougar, who often refers to Tennessee Williams as his favorite author, partly because he's not a great reader (last book he remembers is a Jerry Lee Lewis bio) and mostly because he recognizes Williams' smalltown characters and their smalltown craziness in the people he has known all his life. He also identifies with Paul Newman, who played Chance Wayne in the film, and like Cougar, is small and compact.

"When he started out he was even a bigger joke than me!" exclaims Cougar, popping another Big Red. "Newman once said it was good James Dean died, 'cause otherwise he wouldn't have gotten any work. But you know how Chance Wayne would have done anything to win that woman? That's how I was with music."

Which is how he got bilked out of $2,000 for a demo by a music biz hustler, put up his rejection letter wallpaper, and why, when he finally met up with Tony DeFries, he let the "idolmaker" (a characterization of DeFries' tenure as David Bowie's manager) give him a coat of lip gloss and a new name. And although Billy Gaff, his current manager and owner of Riva Records, with whom Cougar signed in 1978, "never tried to tell me what to do," producers and engineers did. For awhile, he listened.

"Then I just got tired of talkin' to all these guys," he explains, " 'cause all they've ever done is make my songs sound sillier than they really were. If a song didn't sound like a hit, they didn't even want to work with it. It's kinda like me

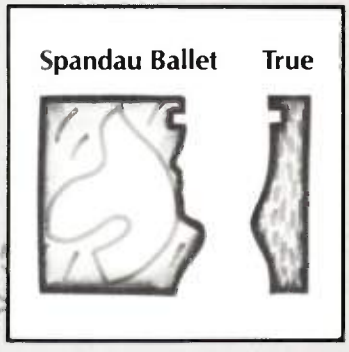
Stop POISONING YOUR EARS!

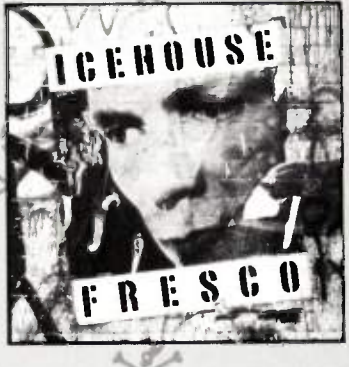
With so much new music out on the streets these days, you can't always be sure your ears are getting the quality of music they need. A recent outbreak of the dreaded M.M.A.[1] has shown exactly where this kind of continued ear abuse can lead. That's why we recommend these new releases from Pat Benatar, Spandau Ballet, Huey Lewis and the News and Icehouse. Turn the dull throb of M.M.A. into a burning sensation for C.R.A.[2] Now!, while your ears will still listen.

Keep an ear out for the new Billy Idol album release 'Rebel Yell'.

Chrysalis Records & Cassettes

[1]M.M.A. 'modern music apathy'
[2]C.R.A. 'Chrysalis recording artists'





coming to your house and saying 'Y'know, I don't really like the way your house is decorated, it don't suit me.' "

Although his second Riva record (the first contained the song Pat Benatar later covered, "I Need a Lover"), *Nothin' Matters and What If It Did*, spawned two hit singles ("This Time" and "Ain't Even Done With the Night"), Cougar considers it the lowest point in his career, the one time he almost gave notice.

"The singles were stupid little pop songs. I take no credit for that record. It wasn't like the title was made up—it wasn't supposed to be punky or cocky like some people thought. Toward the end, I didn't even go to the studio. Me and the guys in the band thought we were finished, anyway. It was the most expensive record I ever made. It cost $280,000, do you believe that? The worst thing was that I could have gone on making records like that for hundreds of years. Hell, as long as you sell a few records and the record company isn't putting lot of money into promotion, you're making money for 'em and that's all they care about. PolyGram (Riva's distributor) loved *Nothin' Matters*. They thought I was going to turn into the next Neil Diamond."

Until 1981's *American Fool* Cougar didn't have the experience—or the confidence—to produce himself. But given the chance, he proved himself perfectly capable of furnishing his own aural interiors. The result barely sounded like it came from the same man whose name was on a slick conventional studio product like *Nothin' Matters* and 1979's *John Cougar*. On *American Fool* (which Cougar claims PolyGram hated upon first hearing), Cougar rolled up the rug, got rid of the knick knacks and exposed his touring band's rock steady foundation. The album's success had less to do with the teen-oriented lyrics than the live, natural sound—huge guitars, fat drums and monstrous riffs that spoke for themselves. Most people who picked on the words missed the point, anyway. In "Jack and Diane," Cougar wasn't saying, as one cynic suggested, that there's no life after 16, but rather to hold on to the spirit of 16, that time in life when dreams are real and possibilities seem infinite.

And while the changes he talks about in "Jack and Diane" did "come around real soon" for Cougar, who was a married father at 18, this is also a man for whom the spirit remains tangible. You can see it in his style, detect it in his attitude. One day, for example, he dons sunglasses and a Jim Morrison t-shirt, kisses his wife and baby goodbye, hops into his little grey Corvette and soon has it jacked up to 80 MPH, passing pickups blind on a two-lane highway leading to a covered bridge not far from his boyhood home, where he'll spend a long day shooting a video for another new song, "Pink Houses." Along the way he talks about ambition and success and says he's "probably stupid" for not "being out there capitalizing on my hit and raking it in. But even when I was poor, I always had a good car that went fast and a motorcycle. Now, in materialistic terms, I have everything I need, everything I ever wanted." And after playing "in every bar in America since I was 15—you should've seen me then," Cougar intends to do only 20 concerts in 1984. Unpredictable as ever, he also wants hair stylist Ross (co-author of *Uh-Huh*'s "Play Guitar") to open a show that will include a 45-minute set of Cougar and band doing Cougar's favorite oldies ("Under the Boardwalk," Brenton Wood's "Gimme Little Sign") before playing Cougar's greatest hits.

At this point Cougar's interest lies mostly in production, and possibly management, "but only something I'm excited about. Only because I liked what they did, not because I want to impose my stupid ideas on anyone. I've always been real good at giving advice—even though I've never been any good at following it. You got a problem with your love life, sex life, money—you can come to me. And I could steer somebody, work the record company, 'cause I know all the pitfalls."

"If some people think what I'm saying is offensive, tell me Eddie Cochran didn't offend people. Isn't that what rock 'n' roll's about? And yeah, I'm a little ashamed of some of the things I did."

Since *American Fool*, Cougar and his co-producer/engineer Don Gehman have been offered—and turned down—numerous production projects. The one Cougar couldn't refuse was Mitch Ryder, whose *Never Kick a Sleeping Dog* was released earlier this year. Cougar explodes at the suggestion that he was imitating Bruce Springsteen (to whom his vocal style and anecdotes are often compared) by resurrecting a burnt out case.

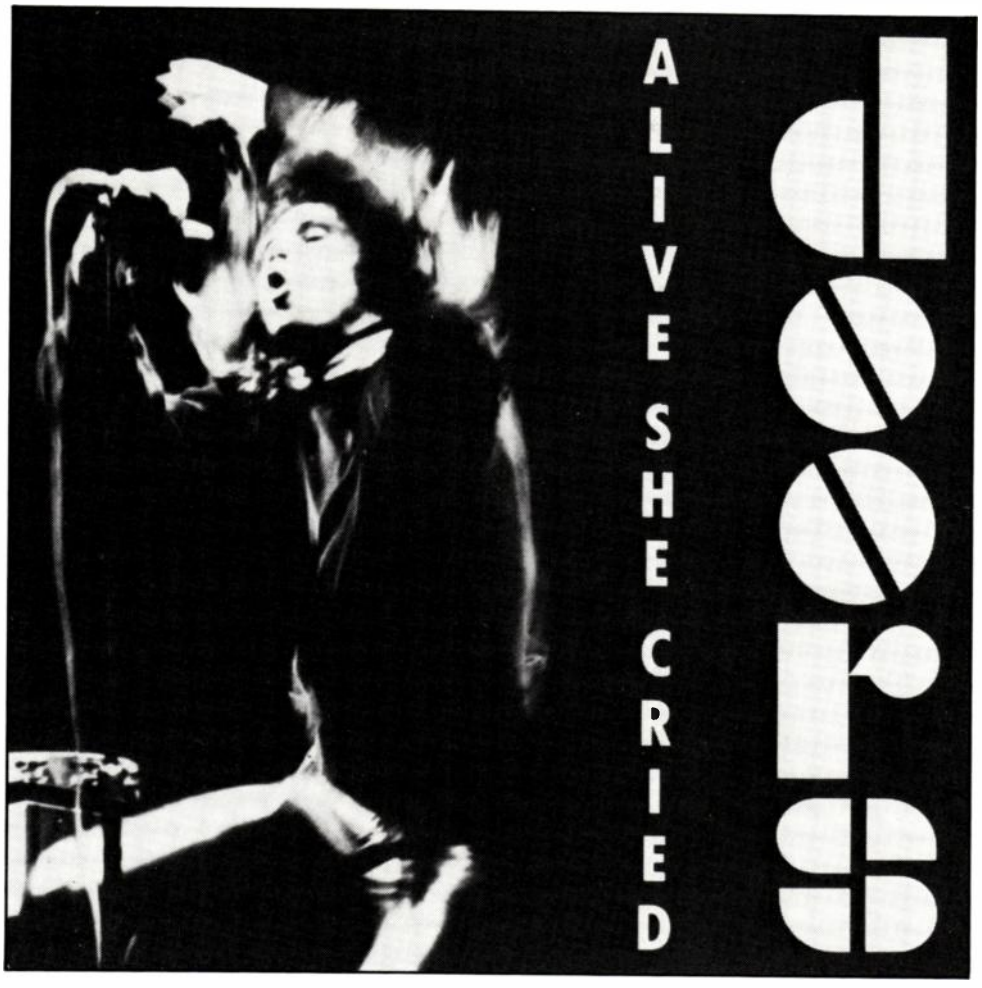
"Who the hell is Gary U.S. Bonds?" he demands. "He had one song that I heard. And Tom Petty doing Del Shannon—gimme a break! Mitch and I did a rock 'n' roll record. So what if it wasn't the greatest record ever made? I thought Mitch was one of the greatest rock and roll singers who ever lived. When he asked for help, I was obliged. Mitch loved the record and that's what was important. And it was worth it just to get him and Marianne Faithfull together. These two people have not only been in rock 'n' roll forever, they have been through it *all*. When they were in the studio doin' 'A Thrill's a Thrill,' it was *scary*. But the point is, I feel like I did somethin' for somebody great."

Cougar, who says he'll compete with anybody on anything ("except maybe tennis or golf") clearly loves a challenge—"When *American Fool* sold so many copies, I thought uh-oh, now I'm the guy that I hate. I think I kinda like being the underdog;"—although success hasn't been so easy on the family. Drunks frequently race up the driveway at 3 A.M. screaming "ROCK 'N' ROLL!!!!" As for the question of whether he's found a love that doesn't drive him crazy, Cougar answers in the affirmative and adds, without hesitating, "The only thing that comes between Vicki and me is the music business. Maybe I'm pretty old fashioned but I think if you're gonna do a job, put 110 percent into it or just don't do it. So I have a hard time saying OK, this is *my* time now. That's what I'm talking about in 'Golden Gates' when I say I don't have the strength that I need to live the way I want to."

And Michelle, who lives with him (and, according to both parents is a basically well-adjusted 13-year-old into boys, clothes and the Clash), sometimes wonders whether people like—or dislike—her on account of her father.

"I've done some shitty things to Michelle," Cougar admits. "Like reading her diary. I just want to know what she thinks. And I told Michelle I'm just a jerk doin' a job. Just because I'm your Dad don't make any big deal. Think about it, Michelle—everybody in the world has got a Dad. That's when I started getting along with my Dad—when I realized he's just some guy. When I was younger, I hated everything he stood for. He was the enemy. Now I realize that he's just some guy like me trying to make a living and have a good time. And let's face it, it's hard to have a good time."

And then John Cougar Mellencamp picks up his beat up old Gibson Dove, puts on his favorite ratty old denim jacket, and saunters into a bean field next to the longest covered bridge in Indiana to try to make a living and have a good time, too. The wind is bending the beans so they look as if they're dancing with him. The crickets are singing. The camera is purring. The soundtrack to which he will lip-synch swells. "Ain't that America?" ask the voices on the pre-recorded tape of "Pink Houses," probably the best song he's ever written. And John Cougar Mellencamp, great grandson of an illiterate Dutch immigrant farmer, raises his fist and shouts out loud—"Oooooh, yeah." ○



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WHY? (WHY NOT?)

Was (Not Was) assembles a rogues' gallery for a most unusual album

When a group is named as paradoxically as Was (Not Was), you might well expect some self-contradiction in its sound. But the range of styles found on their latest LP, *Born To Laugh At Tornados*, is extreme even by their own eclectic standards. Bubblegummish pop, funk and supperclub jazz all coexist here, rendered with the assistance of such guest vocalists as Mitch Ryder, Ozzy Osborne, Mel Torme . . .

Mel Torme? On the same record as Ozzy Osborne??

David Weiss and Don Fagenson, the so-called "Was Brothers" who form the band's core, realize they're overstepping normal musical bounds this time. But for these native Detroiters, avoiding the predictable means following instincts.

"You have to walk that extra few feet in order to make anything worth your while," declares Weiss, Was (Not Was) lyricist. "My mother used to say, 'Don't you know when it's enough, already?' And I *don't*. If there's any philosophy that guides this band, that's probably it."

Fagenson, bassist/keyboardist for the unit, continues: "You can't think things out too much. When you do, people can sense it's fraudulent, that something got in the way of the flow of ideas. We recorded this album a song at a time, and it reflected what we were feeling at the moment."

Those familiar with Was (Not Was) from their initial single, "Wheel Me Out," and their 1981 debut LP, *Was (Not Was)*, know the group as an avant garde funk outfit. Marrying the compelling rhythmic textures of George Clinton and Chic with a darkly humorous lyrical sensibility, the Was Brothers came up with a memorable sound. From the beginning, the band had a rotating membership—among those contributing to the first recordings was former MC5 axeman Wayne Kramer and Funkadelic percussionist Larry Fratangelo.

A similarly funky follow-up album was to be expected—so what happened? "I got bored with funk this year," says Fagenson. "It was our intention to do a funk album, but, in the end, everything we planned went to hell—this album bears no relation to what I envisioned."

It was with some trepidation that Weiss and Fagenson rounded up their guest stars. Asking heavy metal hell-raiser Osborne to rap his way through lyrics like "You can't sing underwater/You can't have the boss' daughter . . . " took courage. "When we went to play the song for him, I cringed," Fagenson. "Our lawyer had arranged the whole thing because he represents both of us. But when I put the tape on for Ozzy, I could see the guy moving his chair away. I thought Ozzy was going to throw us out the damn window, but he was really excited to do something different."

PHOTO: LARRY WILLIAMS

The Was Brothers (Weiss, left, and Fagenson): avoiding the predictable is a matter of following instincts

Several of the other guest stars were old pals of the Was Brothers. Doug Fieger, who's heard cooing a sinister pop ditty ("Betrayal"), graduated from the same Detroit high school as Weiss and Fagenson. Ryder and Weiss go back to the '60s. "Mitch turned me on to tobacco when I was 13," David says with a guilty grin. "It was at a bar mitzvah on my block where Mitch's first band, the Rivieras, was playing. I used to carry his equipment to the gigs."

Tornadoes real coup was gaining the services of Mel Torme. The number he sings, "Zaz Turned Blue," is not the sort of composition he normally chooses—the song describes how a young man copes with brain damage. "One of the real gasses of my life was to fly to Miami Beach, pick Mel up after a show and take him to the studio," says Fagenson. "After the session, Dave and I walked up and down the beach. I *couldn't believe* I was holding the tape of the song in my hands!"

Was (Not Was) has become a viable enough project that Weiss plans to give up his "straight job" as jazz critic for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* ("I can't objectively feel the experience of attending a concert. When that happens, you owe it to the people who take you seriously to get out."); Fagenson, meanwhile, continues to handle outside production duties—last year, he worked on a solo album by Sweet Pea Atkinson, part of the Was (Not Was) sidemen circle. Currently, he's cutting tracks with David Lasley and Jules Shear, with more sessions for Atkinson's new LP upcoming.

There's a refreshing air of winning amateurism about the Was Brothers, who consistently defy music biz conventions in the name of having fun. Where others would blanch at releasing such a wild potpourri as *Tornadoes*, they plunge ahead, taking chances, remaining true only to their own quirky visions. Was (Not Was)? Make that Why (Why Not?). ○

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ANTHONY DECURTIS

ATLANTA

HEAR THE MESSAGE, AND TAKE HEED

An inspirational visit with Dennis Brown and friends

An elevator door opens onto the lobby of Atlanta's Hotel York and out saunters 26-year-old, velvet-voiced reggae singer Dennis Brown, flanked by two members of his tour band and looking decidedly incongruous in dreadlocks and fatigues amid the room's fey, art-deco elegance. For reasons never revealed, our interview is actually going to *take place* in this lobby, though the absurdly public setting cramps Dennis' style not a whit. Throughout our conversation his fingers play with a half-smoked, unlighted joint—*spliff*, excuse me—as if it were a prop from Trenchtown central casting.

PHOTO: ENET ROBERTS

Brown: "We don't come to fight skin, flesh and blood, but spiritual wickedness in high and low places."

Brown's two highly genial companions lend further weirdness to the scene. Neither Brown nor the record company exec escorting me (rounding out our intimate little interview group at a trim five) introduces them; their primary function seems to be providing moral support for the boss. They laugh appreciatively at Brown's "jokes" and greet his frequent references to Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, the 12 Tribes of Israel, and the prophet Gadman with clenched fist salutes, elbows to each other's ribs, chortles of exquisite delight, and energetic cries of "Jah!"

The occasion for this diverting get-together was Brown's Atlanta stop nine dates into the American tour he has undertaken in support of *The Prophet Rides Again*, his third LP on the A&M label. A native Jamaican who now lives part-time in London, Brown was the child of parents in the entertainment industry and has been an active performer well over half his life. He became a Rastafarian at 13 (his two buddies acknowledge his spiritual precociousness with much head-shaking and smiles of wonder and amazement), and a pilgrimage to Ethiopia at the end of last year provided much of the inspiration for *Prophet*.

"It was due to my affiliation with an organization called 12 Tribes of Israel and through the teaching of our prophet Gadman there in Jamaica," states Brown to explain the evolution of his decision to visit Africa. "There's a land grant that was granted to all the people in the West who wanted to repatriate back to Ethiopia. Now this land is in a place called Shashamane. It was an opportunity to get more inspired because that is going *back home*."

In Ethiopia, Brown wrote some of the strongest material on *Prophet*, including the hypnotic "Shashamane Living (Country Living)," "Historical Places (Ethiopia)," and the prophetic "Storms Are Raging." These songs appear on the LP's second and much stronger side, which was recorded at the Joe Gibbs Recording Studio in Kingston. Side One was done in Miami with American musicians and contains such notables as "Out of the Funk," an attempt at disco crossover nearly desperate in its blatancy, and the hilarious and very worldly "Jammin' My Way to Fame" (inspirational verse: "Fortune and fame / Is the name of the game / With a litte fame / It won't hurt my name").

A mention of the apocalyptic quality of "Storms Are Raging" and "The Prophet Rides Again" prompts Brown into a free-associative, millenarian rap: "We call them message songs, because if you check what is happening now in the world today, even yesterday we saw on the news where a Korean plane was hit by some Russians. Storms are raging, especially here in the West. Storms are raging. You have kidnappings, hijackings, bombings, wars all over the earth. So it's manifestations. Fulfilling. Fulfilling time now."

Yet even in these last days it's apparently still important to move product and have the profit rise again. "Live shows help to boost record sales," Brown says, "because there are times when you might be listening to a record ordinarily and if you should go and see a live show of the same artist doing that song, sometimes it's just magic . . . One thing about the record is that it's formulated in such a way that you can't take anything away from it when it's already packaged. But with live shows now, you can do so much."

Brown's own show was extremely engaging. Backed by an eight-piece band, including a hot horn section, he opened with a first-rate take on the wonderful "Halfway Up, Halfway Down" from last year's *Love Has Found Its Way*, offered up a tasteful Marley ("our brother who died the other month") medley, and even tossed off a couple of verses from Michael Jackson and Paul McCartney's "The Girl Is Mine."

"I'm tryin' to get through to all people, all people," Brown asserts, his spiritual ambition and quest for fame finding a genuine common ground in this effort to reach as large an audience as possible. "So who hears the message and lets it go by, good luck to them. Who hears the message and take heed"—a mild chorus of "Jah!"—"we give thanks. But, like I say, we don't come to fight skin, flesh, and blood, but spiritual wickedness in high and low places. And just to make people aware of the things they do and say in these times we live in, the purpose for living, etcetera, etcetera."

Vol. 83 No. 10

"GOOD AFTERNOON, MADAM. My name is John Hiatt, and this is my new recording—it's called *Riding With The King.* Much time and care was put into it—the finest quality playing and singing. I believe this is the finest example of rock & rhythm & blues songwriting available, and, just before your husband died, he ordered this copy—embossed with *your* name. Of course, this is the special $20 version..." That's how John Hiatt would sell his new album door-to-door, according to joking comments in a recent interview. But *Riding With The King* has a pitch all its own—with Nick Lowe production on one side, Ron Nagle/Scott Matthews production on the other and a list price of $8.98. On Geffen...

OH BRITTANIA... With two "whaps" and three "thunks," it's *Construction Time Again* for Depeche Mode, England's premier electro-pop band. Mode fans "Just Can't Get Enough," but the group's new Sire LP, an upcoming U.S. tour and the single/video "Everything Counts" should help ... And, the Gang Of Four finally is. *Hard* is the latest LP from this U.K. threesome, who have added drummer Steve Goulding (ex Lene Lovich) to the line-up for a North American tour. Everyone loved the Gang's "...Man In A Uniform," now consider the single question: "Is It Love" or is it just *Hard*?

THIS IS Advertising?

John Hiatt Pitches, English News Snitches, Kid Creole's Tales, Laurie Anderson's Males And More!

MACHO IS PERVERSE, per August Darnell (a.k.a. Kid Creole), explaining that Kid Creole & The Coconut's latest album is called *Doppleganger;* that a "doppleganger" is the ghostly double of a living person; and that "The Kid is the perverse side, the macho side of August Darnell." Oh. Explanations aside, K.C.&T.C. are known for their rock/R&B/jazz/Latin/so-you-can-dance music, and the single "If You Wanna Be Happy" drives that point home. Try to catch the Kid, Andy Hernandez and the voluptuous Coconuts in concert; be sure to catch them on Sire/ZE records...

"I LOVE THE WAY HE YODELS," says Laurie Anderson of Peter Gabriel, who appears alongside Adrian Belew of King Crimson on Anderson's new 4-song disc, *Mister Heartbreak.* "All the songs on it are about love in some way," she says, citing Thomas Pynchon, William Shakespeare, Betty Boop and Cuban rhythms as current influences. *Mister Heartbreak* (specially priced) is Anderson's first work since the completion of *United States,* the performance piece that gave birth to the album *Big Science* and the hit "O Superman..."

BLACK SABBATH HAS BEEN *BORN AGAIN,* and we're not talking baptisms. Vocalist Ian Gillan, lately of Deep Purple, is the new voice of Black Sabbath, and drummer Bev Bevan (ex ELO) is joining the group on tour. The heavy metal sound of Black Sabbath is heavier than ever—on *Born Again,* they're hitting below the Bible Belt.

"ONE AND ONE-HALF WANDERING JEWS" /Free to wander wherever they choose/are travelling together/In the Sangre de Cristo/The Blood of Christ Mountains/Of New Mexico" So begins the title cut of Paul Simon's new album, *Hearts And Bones.* From the surrealism of "Rene And Georgette Magritte With Their Dog After The War" to the seeming simplicity of "Cars Are Cars" to the driving force of "Allergies" ("But my heart is allergic/To the women I love/And it's changing the shape of my face"), Simon has created some of his finest songs to date, songs that jump effortlessly from simple motifs to genuine insights. Don't miss this record.

IT'S A VINYL JUNGLE OUT THERE..."This Is Advertising?" has been forced to return your checks. *We* can't sell you records, although all items mentioned here should be available from your local record store or one of several national mail-order clubs. We've even heard about a new phone-order service (1-800-HOT-ROCKS) that's open 24 hours a day and guarantees one-week album delivery. What'll they think of next? Of course, you can *still* drop "TIA?" a note (and small, unmarked bills) at P.O. Box 6868, Burbank, CA 91510.

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PIONEER
Because the music matters.

AL GREEN

Continued from page 15

understand the spiritual. On a scale of one to ten, I'd give the physical a two, because of the very physicalness of it—'baby I wanna make out, I wanna make it with you, I wanna touch your body,' you know, blasé scooby scooby doo.

"So, for a guy to come out and use a schizophrenic type of an attitude on a record, such as using the points of 'freaking out' and all this trip, well, if this is what you want, go out and buy yourself a hotel and have yourself a party. But you don't have to tell the world. I think these things are used to sell records—what do I care if I pollute the minds of young people, as long as I sell records? A lot of people, they just simply want to make it. I'm not concerned about making it."

But what about the days when a young Al Green did want to make it? He remembers his own early career yearnings as part of a different process. "Oh, I had an idea I wanted to make it, all right," he admits. "I had *asked* to make it, so I thought I would. I have always been religious, and I asked that I would have these things. So, I started coming on."

What a coming on it was. But Green says much of his glory days in pop is now a blur to him. "The only thing I really remember is lights, plenty of lights, always lights, always *psssh, psssh*—singing songs and just lights. I don't remember which days, which nights—who came where in what car, I don't remember."

But it's a "very positive" blur, from which Green continues to draw some core of energy in his ministry. "It's good, the power of lights, just like waking up off a dream—this *flood* of lights. People screaming, The Apollo Theater, roses, this *hustle* and this *bustle*. Yes. So, so much going on."

Al Green's eyes—dark, shining things when he talks sincerely about his maker; darting and lustrous when he knowingly acknowledges, in a trance-like ecstatic monotone, the magnificent break in "Let's Get Married"—seem to retire from his face at such moments. Putting both hands up to the sides of his head, he shields the eyes, and leans forward.

"No regrets," he says emphatically of his pop career. "It was wonderful. It was bringing you to where you can understand what you're doing now. I love 'Let's Stay Together,' I love 'Love And Happiness.' They're good songs that won't drive people to war."

By this time, Al Green simply has to eat. Still, he lingers outside Laurel Lodge for a few minutes, checking out a shiny car parked on the lot, a Saab the color of emeralds. "Nice," whispers the Last Soul Singer in America, a man whose suave tuxes and cobalt blue cummerbunds now flash as the robes of a rare pop ministry. ○

BIG COUNTRY

Continued from page 18

session team known as Rhythm For Hire—Tony Butler and Mark Brzezicki—for the task. The first song they played was "Harvest Home" and that was all it took to convince Adamson that this was the group he'd been striving for.

Butler recalls the studio scene as "something special. It still amazes me to think of it today. We just did the one song and decided there and then that we had the makings of a group. There was just something *right* about the whole thing. Not only musically, but also personally, it was the best thing that could have happened for us all."

Stuart Adamson: "I still believe music has a very important part to play in people's lives. If we ever do anything that helps to give people an idea of self, then we'll have done something worth doing."

Butler and Brzezicki had been together for some time, having played in Simon Townshend's group On The Air and worked with Simon's more illustrious older brother Pete on the *Empty Glass* and *Chinese Eyes* solo projects. Though still in their mid-20s, they were a part of the old school of sessioneers—the *real* musicians—before they joined Adamson and Bruce.

"The music we were playing before was technically proficient beyond belief," Butler relates, "but there was something misguided in our whole approach to it. Meeting Stuart proved to be a revelation because he had a totally different approach to the one we had grown used to. Having missed out on punk completely myself, Stuart showed me something new. When he was with the Skids, you could see that there was something special about the way he played. He had an ability to lift an audience, not just the people in the front rows but those at the back of the hall, too. If we've taken anything from the Skids, I hope it's that power to generate hope and optimism."

Big Country is frequently mentioned in the same breath as other guitar bands such as U2 and the Alarm, although Adamson shies away from comparisons, preferring to see them as part of a much wider sphere that also includes Echo and the Bunnymen, Dexys Midnight Runners and the Style Council.

"If there are any kindred bands," Adamson notes, "it is those who are presenting music as something to be shared. I think we should be wary of making an anti-fashion into a fashion. One of the reasons certain groups are being lumped together, ourselves included, is that there is still a certain innocence about what they do. A lot of people still feel very deeply about music and that's a good way to be."

At the core of Big Country lies an assertion of basic human values such as pride and dignity. Adamson's songs are inextricably linked to his family life and the small town community that surrounds him, although he can hardly be accused of turning a blind eye to universal concerns. He says his family has "always been a source of inspiration," and adds that "having a son has also made me even more automatically aware. I really want to have the chance of seeing him grow up. Since the Second World War we've had to learn to live with the fear that we could all be blown up tomorrow, and I think that's put a lot of barriers between people, making them more selfish.

"But the hardest thing to come to terms with, as far as the nuclear thing goes, is the fact that it would be a human being that presses the trigger. It wouldn't be a quirk of fate or an accident. It would be a supposedly rational decision. That's the most terrifying thing."

Such acute awareness of life's fragile nature informs Adamson's work without being explicitly stated. Better that music be used as a force to define and assert spirit and individual enterprise. "Scotland is steeped in trade unionism and a socialist history, and I think some of those socialist values, that sense of fair play and justice, come across in the songs.

"Up in Dunfermline, they're killing off all the old industries and putting nothing in their place. At the same time they're educating all the kids in a Victorian work ethic, giving them the idea that they are going to be able to walk into a career of their choice when they leave school. The truth is that they will be lucky if they get a job that lasts a couple of months. To slap school leavers in the face like that is disgusting. If there are no jobs, then we should be showing people how to express themselves and be creative with their leisure time."

Concludes Adamson: "I still believe music has a very important part to play in people's lives. If we ever do anything that helps to give people an idea of self, then we'll have done something worth doing."

A big country: where dreams live with you and the value of love meets the power of pride. Play it loud; play it strong. And let the people hear. ○

CONTENTS

MUSICVIDEO

THE CLUB SCENE: WHERE THE FUTURE IS YESTERDAY

By Merle Ginsberg

A survey of trendsetting venues where video environments are being reshaped in dramatic, futuristic ways

BACK IN THE DARK AGES of musicvideo—meaning the mid- to late-'70s—you didn't have many choices. Rock on network television was pretty much limited to *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* and *Midnight Special*, with the occasional blast of fresh air coming from a guest star on *Saturday Night Live* (Elvis Costello, for example, deciding after the first few notes that he didn't want to sing "Less Than Zero" and opting for "Radio, Radio" while the show's producers fumed in silence). At the same time, though, some adventurous artists had begun not only videotaping songs and concerts, but actually interpreting their music conceptually on video. While Kirshner was busy introducing the likes of Angel, the more enterprising rock clubs began drawing people away from the tube by sandwiching video clips between live acts and dance records, albeit on the most primitive of projection systems.

But with musicvideo now proliferating on cable and network television, several trendsetting clubs in major cities have set out to reinvent the video environment in dramatic ways. Clearly, the alternative programming, the state-of-the-art projection systems and the hyper-street-sensitive video disc jockeys at the Ritz in New York, at Larry's Hideaway in Toronto, at Park West in Chicago, at the 9:30 Club in Washington, D.C., and at Revolver in Los Angeles will likely set the standard for clubs in other parts of the country; by the same token, at the very moment one video environment becomes the *ne plus ultra*, the clubs mentioned above will have streamlined it and augmented it even further, creating an entirely new standard in the process. In these establishments, the future is yesterday.

PHOTO: PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

Park West's Howard: "We're using video as light sculpture in itself."

There are a number of elements separating the trendsetters from the pack followers, chief among them being the function of the resident video jockey. Once required to have little more than the ability to press the "Play" button on a club's videocassette recorder, today's hip VJs work on musicvideo's cutting edge, shaping a club's personality by creating original programming, designing projection systems and "mixing" clips to create sensible video segues for the purpose of building momentum, just as disc jockeys do with records. Or as Chris Holland of Larry's Hideaway puts it: "Club video has become a social lubricant. My function is to excite people with energizing video. I set the whole mood for the evening."

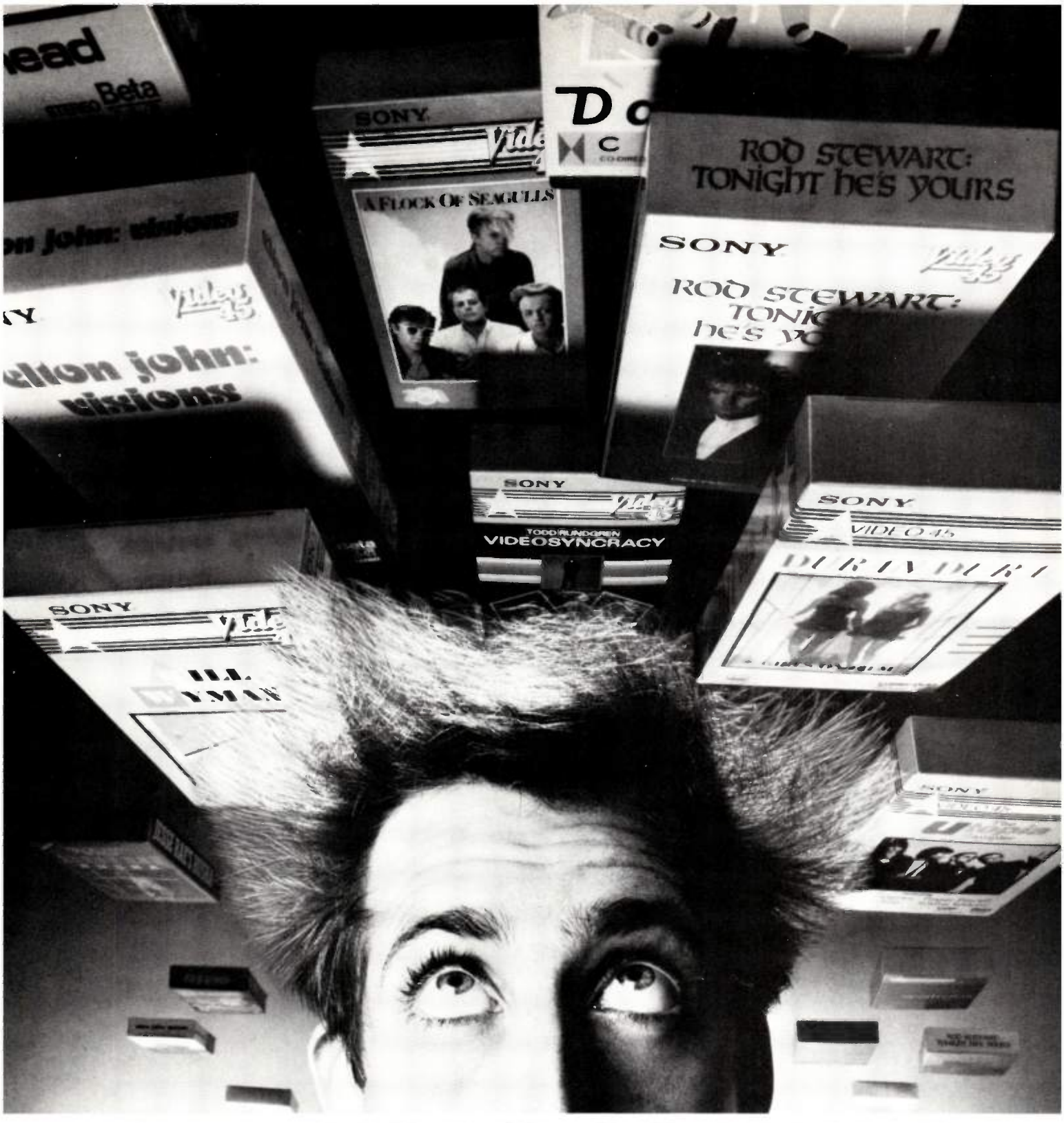
Whether by design or by necessity, VJs have managed to find unique ways of creating moods. One method involves combining music with found footage (cartoons, commercials, old movies, newsreels, abstract visuals, images unrelated to the music that are often swiped right off the television set). Chris Dunham of the Ritz, who spends much of his days procuring found footage, has become something of a cult figure among VJs for his skill in mixing and synching unusual images to the latest club hits (one of his clips features Fred Astaire dancing in perfect time to a rock song). Asked about the appeal of these clips, Dunham answers unequivocally, "People come to the Ritz to see the original stuff."

On a less-exalted plateau, some clubs now offer regular "videvent" nights featuring obscure, racy and/or theme videos as the sole source of entertainment. Chicago's Park West introduced all-video nights in 1981, but to underwhelming response at the time, according to the club's video producer, Shelley Howard. "People weren't ready for it," says Howard. "We recently started them up again and people are finally accepting video as a dance music art form in itself. Now we're doing phenomenally well on those nights."

Washington D.C.'s 9:30 Club, noted for its broad spectrum of video programming, offers videvents as often as possible. VJ Kevin Doran, though, looks forward to "more evening-length concept videos like ABC's *Mantrap*. I think that's the future. People want to see more creative musicvideos that aren't selling records."

Variations on the all-video night are starting to develop, too, such as the "rap and break" night featured regularly at the Ritz. On these nights the audience is filled with novice breakers who dance along with break dance videos. Indeed, this interaction between the video screen and the live audience is fast becoming the major focus

Continued on page 44



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By Alan Hecht

BRIAN GRANT: THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

A rock video pioneer dissects the methods of his madness

HOW DO YOU GET TO BE one of rock's premier musicvideo directors? Would you believe by spending three years as a cameraman on *The Muppet Show* "pointing (a camera) at Kermit's hands?" Thus the humble beginnings of Brian Grant, the British director who ranks as one of the seminal creative forces in musicvideo.

A self-proclaimed Mod, Grant, at the age of 14, was the drummer for a Motown-influenced band called the Motion. Three years and one album later, the band broke up, but not before Grant had learned enough about rock 'n' roll to give him more of a musical background than almost any other musicvideo director.

A passion for soccer pushed Grant into video when he realized that the people filming the games were allowed free admission. Using "brute force and ignorance" to hustle a job with ATV, one of England's independent television stations, Grant spent the next 11 years shooting everything from period dramas to Kermit the Frog.

Restless, he began moonlighting and met producer Scott Millaney while on a concert shoot for Island Records. A few beers later, the two went into business together, rock promotional clips a specialty. Their breakthrough project was a clip for the group M, commissioned by MCA Records, even though the label said the single "wasn't going anywhere." In one day Grant shot and edited the video for "Pop Muzik"; four days later it aired on *The Kenny Everett Video Show* (produced and directed by one of Grant's current partners, David Mallet, in the firm of Millaney-Grant-Mallet-Mulcahy, or MGMM); a few months later the song was an international hit. Since then, Grant has shot, he estimates, nearly 170 videos.

Catching up to Grant usually requires talking on the run. One conversation took place while he was in the editing room, and one on the phone between takes. Finally, when a holiday forced him to take a break from editing the new Donna Summer HBO special, Grant sat down to discuss his style of and approach to rock video.

PHOTO: LISA LEAVITT

Brian Grant: "Your films have to be about you or have something to do with you. You can't ape people."

In Donna Summer's video "She Works Hard for the Money" you had the artist play a relatively minor role. How did you convince her to do that?

When I presented the story to Donna she said, "Great. What I am doing in it?" (laughter) and I went "uh . . . " (sharp intake of breath). But I explained that I felt the song was about somebody else and it would look dumb for her to wander around looking awful and doing all these terrible jobs that this lady had to do. She wrote the song about a lady she accidentally came across in the powder room; it was really about this working lady. So I said, "it would be silly for you to be in it, when you're Donna Summer. If you're trying to say something with this song, then let's try and say something with the video." I managed to persuade her to watch the proceedings and be in it vaguely.

Do you dread presenting the storyboard to the artist?

Yeah, but it's a moment of truth all directors have to go through. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. With Donna, I told her what I felt the song gave to me. I would have been silly to just pander to what I thought she would require. It's much better to be honest, to say what you think.

What did Donna Summer see that impressed her?

She saw my showreel, which has clips like Peter Gabriel ("Shock the Monkey"), and Olivia's "Physical." One of the things I seem to get to do a lot is women (laughter).

You're getting a reputation as a women's director.

I don't mind that at all. I happen to like women full stop for all the obvious reasons and for some of the not so obvious ones. I happen to enjoy their company a lot.

What are some of the not-so-obvious reasons?

Well, they're easier to deal with on a certain level. There isn't as much competition

when you're surrounded by women. All of our producers are women and with a female producer you can scream at them, ask them to get you coffee *and* cry on their shoulders, which you can't do with a man. Well, I can't anyway. So there's a different sort of empathy with women. I've learned that the key to shooting women is that they're very much more concerned with what they look like. Much more. I mean, I did a Stevie Nicks video that *nobody* has seen. You're going to ask me about that and I'll gladly tell you.

I understand that the concept for the piece was Stevie's idea and it didn't work.

No, that's not it. Stevie had the roughest outline of a story for "Stand Back." But it was just vague lines on a paper. It didn't have anything going for it. We sat down and expanded it into a huge story which is like *Gone With the Wind* in three minutes. It's set in the Civil War with eleven locations, cannons, soldiers and God-knows what else. It's enormous. We put it together quickly and Stevie had a great time. She even gave me a present at the end of it. The problem was that she did it before she went on tour and she felt that she looked overweight. Now nobody else that I've shown this film to even notices that she's a few pounds overweight but woman's vanity came into play and she decided to scrap it.

So it wasn't the concept or the execution that didn't work?

No. I think she looks an awful lot worse in the one she ended up doing! That's me being vain perhaps. But what really pissed me off was that we'd also written a script for another song called "If Anyone Falls in Love," which was going to be the next single. Now we find that they're using *our* script with somebody else. That's rude! Downright awful. I'm not happy about it at all.

Do you think that goes on more now because there's more competition?

Certainly. What's interesting in America is that we've been doing clips for so much longer—at least three years before MTV—and therefore when I come here and watch MTV I see myself three years ago. I don't mean that to sound arrogant, but it's a process that everybody has to go through. There's going to be some great American directors soon, but they seem to be going through a period of 'aping.' I mean, Russell Mulcahy is everywhere. But the only way to make a mark in this business is to really be yourself. Your films have to be about you or something to do with you. You can't ape people.

What were some of the problems and pleasures in shooting "She Works Hard for the Money"?

The neighborhood we shot in, Watts in downtown Los Angeles, was difficult. It was hard finding a house in a black part of L.A. where we weren't looked at suspiciously. I went to thirty houses and managed to gain access to only two in order to find one for a kitchen interior. The pleasure for me was working with actors and actresses. I was a cameraman for 11 years and spent most of my life talking and working with actors. For the last three years I've spent nearly all my time with musicians. Which is fine but there's a different mentality, a different ego with a musician. A rock star spends his entire time projecting himself and an actor spends his entire time hiding behind somebody else's persona. It's easier to deal with actors because they can dial themselves into a part. Some rock stars do too, but not many.

Which ones?

Peter Gabriel's one of the best—he knows how to deliver. Olivia's very good. It depends on what you want in a film.

Is that something you'd like to see more often? Do you favor placing the emphasis on something other than the band if you don't have performers as skilled as Peter Gabriel?

Definitely. It's a question of trying to give the band a role that's sympathetic to their ability. They'll look much stronger if they do something they can really pull off. The trouble with a lot of videos is that there's too much ham acting. But it's a question of trying to deal with egos.

I think one of Russell Mulcahy's most effective pieces is "Elton's Song," which doesn't have Elton John in it at all.

Brilliant. It's a proper film. What I've always said is that there are two different type of clips on MTV—films and videos. And it doesn't have anything to do with what they're shot on.

Could you define those differences?

Some people might say "mini-movies" rather than films. They're shorts. "She Works Hard for the Money" is one, whereas Olivia's "Physical" is a video. "Pop Muzik," which I did years ago, was the archetypal video clip.

Would you say that video clips tend to feature artists singing on a "video stage," where there might be some vaudeville skits or concepts happening around them, while mini-movies involve much more acting?

Yeah. It's the difference between a comic and a newspaper, maybe. A lot of videos are like comics—they zap you.

In the '60s and '70s people were first introduced to songs on the radio or from records. Now they may see the video first. Do you feel there's a difference between the impact a song has on the eye and on the ear?

Yes. The only thing that worries me about it is that kids watch clips on MTV and get blitzed by it. I wonder how discerning they're becoming. You can listen to the radio, grooving around the kitchen, and suddenly a great song comes on and grabs your attention. But if you're sitting there endlessly watching MTV, a great video might grab your attention, but whether the song is doing that on its own I don't know.

What are your feelings about MTV?

It's done a lot of good inasmuch as it's brought video to a huge audience. It's opened the record companies' eyes to its potential and given directors a chance to show-off.

What about MTV's playlist?

They ought to introduce more black acts. It's terrible that they don't. We're having trouble with my new Donna Summer piece, "Unconditional Love," which co-

Continued on page 41

By his own estimation, Brian Grant's directed over 170 rock videos. The following list indicates those clips most representative of the evolution of Grant's style. The titles are arranged alphabetically by artist name.

ABC
"Look of Love"

ELVIS COSTELLO
"Little Fool"

DAVE EDMUNDS AND THE STRAY CATS
"The Race Is On"

PETER GABRIEL
"Shock the Monkey"

LANDSCAPE
"Norman Bates"

M
"Pop Muzik"

OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN
"Physical"

B.A. ROBERTSON
"Flight 19"

SPANDAU BALLET
"Two Cut A Long Story Short"

SPARKS
"Beat the Clock"

SQUEEZE
"Black Coffee in Bed"

ROD STEWART
"What Am I Gonna Do"

STRAY CATS
"Little Miss Pretty"

DONNA SUMMER
"She Works Hard for the Money"

KIM WILDE
"Kids in America"

XTC
"Ball and Chain"

RCA's Stereo Videodisc Player

SUPERIOR AUDIO AND VIDEO IN ONE UNIT

By John and Joellen Tierney

JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOUR stereo system is perfect it's time to take another look. There's something new on the market that will truly complete the picture—RCA's Selectavision Stereo Videodisc Player (SJT 300, list price: $449.95).

The key word in that lengthy name is, of course, stereo. The Selectavision provides great pictures, but the sound improvements go unnoticed on an ordinary television hook up. The full sound potential can only be enjoyed through a stereo system. You can then hear excellent stereo quality, equal to that of the Beta Hi-fi (see October RECORD).

RCA's SJT 300: An inexpensive way to join the video revolution

The CED (Capacitance Electronic Disc) uses a groove/stylus arrangement similar to common LP records where a diamond stylus tracks a spiral groove on a 12-inch disc. In order to reproduce both stereo sound and video images, however, the CED must hold much more information than an LP record. A standard LP has only about 250 grooves per inch while there are 10,000 grooves per inch on a video disc. The signal is recovered by sensing small variations in the walls of the groove. These variations, less than .000003 inches, cause changes in capacitance between an electrode attached to the stylus and the disc itself. In order to detect these minute oscillations the stylus tracking force is set at a very low 65 milligrams. The changes in capacitance are FM demodulated and the video/audio signal is reproduced.

The stereo audio is encoded with the video signal much like the Sony Beta Hi-Fi. This technique eliminates wow and flutter problems and is capable of good dynamic range and frequency response. This design, along with the built in noise reduction system, results in sound that rivals some of the half speed master LPs currently on the market.

Fortunately, this impressive audio system is coupled to an equally good video design. We judged the video quality to be excellent. The SJT 300 did not exhibit the chroma flutter and noise normally associated with home video machines, and it handled very high contrast values without any picture tearing. Although some background noise in the picture was observed, it was not visible at normal viewing distances.

Because the disc system is delicate and extremely susceptible to dust and scratches, the discs are enclosed in a plastic housing, or sleeve. The entire sleeve is slipped into the machine where the disc is automatically pulled into the player, loaded, and the empty sleeve is ejected. Discs are removed in a similar fashion to insure that they will remain dust and fingerprint free.

The disc player's physical design is very simple, and the electronic controls are a great improvement over the mechanical ones of earlier models. There's a digital display which flashes to indicate what mode the disc is in—L (load), UL (unload), P (pause), E (end),—(standby)—and numbers 0-60 light indicating the disc's running time. Other lights identify the side being played (1 or 2), and whether or not the disc is in stereo. The videodisc player automatically selects the proper playback mode for monaural, stereo, bilingual or special dual track discs. For the last two disc types an A/B button permits selection of either the primary track "A" or the secondary "B" track.

The main controls can be handled by the infrared wireless remote. It enables you to control visual search, high speed scan, and pause. In visual search the picture moves 16 times normal speed while at high speed scan it moves 120 times normal speed. Both speeds provide clean pictures in forward and reverse but the sound is muted. Pause is really more a stop/play control since the video doesn't freeze, it simply disappears. Press the button again and the program continues.

RCA simplifies hook-up procedures by providing a clear, heavily illustrated manual. Large block diagrams for almost every conceivable home configuration make installation of the SJT 300 very easy. The back panel contains video, stereo, and antenna loop jacks.

The problems we encountered seem to lie in the CED format, not this particular machine. The grooves on the discs are microscopic and not impervious to wear. A piece of dust may damage the disc when the stylus tracks over it. This results in the machine skipping tracks which is very annoying when watching musicvideo. Many of the discs we viewed displayed some skipping. This means the software library you build will have a limited lifespan, not unlike standard record collections.

The RCA SJT 300 Selectavision is, however, an inexpensive and good way to join the video revolution. The CED discs are available in a wide variety of programs priced reasonably enough for you to build an extensive library. It gives you the chance to own your favorite films and musicvideos and to enjoy them in stereo. ○

BRIAN GRANT

Continued from page 39

stars Musical Youth. And it's because there's lots of black people in it and it's set in the ghetto. That's getting politics into music, which is not a very good idea. There's also a lot of shit on MTV. You can quote me. There's as much shit as good stuff. Because they're on 24 hours a day, they're not being picky enough. So they promote terrible things like *Flashdance*. Trashdance, I call it. It's the worst movie I've ever seen in my life. And *Staying Alive* is like *Rocky III* with legwarmers.

Most people feel that both those movies are extended music videos. Do you believe you can take musicvideo from a short form to a long form?

Yes. They did it brilliantly in *West Side Story*. But if you're going to take musicvideo into a long form, it has to have substance—characterization, emotion, story, beginning, middle and end. *Flashdance* didn't have any substance. It's a bubblegum film and not even a good one like *Grease* was.

Do you have any musicvideo features in development?

I've just been commissioned to do another one-hour piece with Olivia Newton-John. With *Physical*, it was purely a question of having ten clips from an album and slamming them together into a compilation. What we're doing with this one is writing an entire story first with all the scenes worked out. Then Olivia and Roger Davies are going to find songs to fit the piece. So it's gone the other way around. It'll be a thriller shot in the Caribbean and Australia next summer. And it'll be conceptual from beginning to end.

What other artists would you like to work with?

I'd love to work with Bette Midler. She's so theatrical it's unreal. It might be too much for video!

Tobe Hooper recently directed a Billy Idol video. Do you feel more feature film directors will jump into musicvideo?

Yeah, but they're just big boys playing with little boys' toys. They're saying "Let's have a go at your toy, guv; I've made millions, now I want to play around for a while." Tobe Hooper or Steven Spielberg won't become serious MTV directors. They might do the odd one. The major influences for musicvideo will come from the second and third generation directors who get into it for its own sake.

What else do you see for musicvideo in 1984?

It'll become more sophisticated and be even more competitive, which is good. All the networks are seeing the pot of gold and are leaping on the bandwagon, as they always do. I hope it doesn't get too ordinary and become like FM radio did in America. When it all started it was wonderful and then it became normal. I hope that doesn't happen to musicvideo.

I understand you're working on a script based on the book *The Nighttime Girl*.

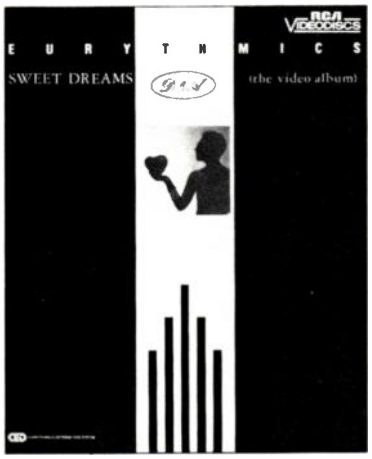
I've got one deal at Universal, but I'm not under any illusions about it. It will either go or it won't.

Will you continue to create musicvideos?

Oh yeah. Got to earn a living, guv.

So when Bette calls . . .

I'll jump out of the hotel naked, mate. ○



SWEET DREAMS: THE VIDEO ALBUM
EURYTHMICS

Like the David Bowie of yore, or the once-and-future Frank Zappa, Eurythmics trade heavily in persona, and thus are well-suited to the medium of conceptual video. The clips comprising *Sweet Dreams*' lengthy middle section and the final minutes are packed with action, intriguing images and, yes, even soul.

In "The Walk," for example, singer Annie Lennox belts out a throaty gospel number, while in the foreground Dave Stewart conducts the proceedings with baton in hand. This clash of spontaneity and discipline works both as performance and as a neat rock 'n' roll metaphor. Each clip is a self-contained drama.

However, the concert segments (taped at London's Haven Club) forming the bulk of *Sweet Dreams* are less gripping than the clips. Shot in warm blues and ambers, these scenes lack dramatic tension—the band seems unable to connect with its visibly unenthused audience until the last three numbers, "I Could Give You (A Mirror)," "Somebody Told Me," and "Wrap It Up." Here Lennox, who has been content to remain virtually motionless, starts to move to the groove, so to speak, and pump the audience with heavy blasts of real or imagined funk. When she sings "How can you be so cold," something starts to happen, finally, and the audience responds with raised hands.

Yet the club footage, static as it is, fails to undermine *Sweet Dreams* as a whole. Thanks to director Derek Burbidge's imaginative use of clay animation, vivid color and texture, this is a conceptual video wherein interesting music and first-rate production values combine to tantalize the mind and please the eye. *Director: Derek Burbidge. 68 minutes. RCA VideoDisc (CED). $19.98.* **—Mark Mehler**

THE WALL

A decade ago, Pink Floyd perfected the art of the concept LP with their *Dark Side of the Moon* album. Blending rock and abstract narrative, Floyd created an audio experience with the impact of a classic novel. With the home video release of the group's 1982 film, *The Wall*, Floyd has once again defined a new rock form—the musicvideo feature.

In effect, the musicvideo feature is the '80s equivalent of the concept LP. Seething with alienation, *The Wall* LP spilled its guts through the character of Pink, a psychotic rock star tortured by an overwhelming pessimism about the "wall" between him and other human relationships.

In his adaptation of the album, director Alan Parker ("Midnight Express," "Fame," "Shoot the Moon") lets loose a full arsenal of styles. Uninhibited cutting, special effects, animation and fantasy combine in a series of individual video clips where each song becomes a new scene. Thus "Thin Ice" becomes Pink's suicidal nightmare of floating in a pool of blood, and the title track a hallucination about his school days in which hideously masked children march along a conveyor belt into vats of boiling ooze.

Parker's vision has the advantage of a visual antecedent—Floyd's astonishing 1980 stage production of the concept LP featuring Gerald Scarfe's visceral animation and puppet monsters (which also highlight the movie) and the brick-by-brick construction of a 60-foot wall across the stage. Nevertheless, Parker's translation of the nonliteral narrative style of the LP to a

MUSICVIDEO TOP TEN

1 **DURAN DURAN**
DURAN DURAN
Thorn-EMI Home Video

2 **POLICE AROUND THE WORLD***
POLICE
I.R.S. Video

3 **WHO ROCKS AMERICA: 1982 AMERICAN TOUR**
THE WHO
CBS/Fox Home Video

4 **STEVIE NICKS IN CONCERT**
STEVIE NICKS
CBS/Fox Home Video

5 **LET'S SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER**
ROLLING STONES
Embassy Home Entertainment

6 **OLIVIA IN CONCERT**
OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN
MCA Home Video

7 **THE ADAM ANT REVUE***
ADAM ANT
CBS/Fox Home Video

8 **FLEETWOOD MAC IN CONCERT: MIRAGE TOUR '82**
FLEETWOOD MAC
RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video

9 **THIS IS ELVIS**
Warner Home Video

10 **SHEENA EASTON IN CONCERT***
SHEENA EASTON
Thorn-EMI Home Video

*Denotes new entry
The MusicVideo Top Ten indicates the fastest-moving sales and rental titles as reported by the country's leading video retail outlets.

VIDEO CLIP TOP TEN

1 **BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE**
TALKING HEADS
(Sire) D: David Byrne

2 **SHE WORKS HARD FOR THE MONEY**
DONNA SUMMER
(Mercury) D: Brian Grant

3 **SAFETY DANCE**
MEN WITHOUT HATS
(Backstreet) D: Tim Pope

4 **EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE**
POLICE
(A&M) D: Godley/Creme

5 **SWEET DREAMS**
EURYTHMICS
(RCA) D: Dave Stewart, Annie Lennox, Jon Roseman

6 **FASCINATION**
HUMAN LEAGUE
(A&M) D: Steve Barron

7 **ROCKIT**
HERBIE HANCOCK
(Columbia) D: Godley/Creme

8 **BEAT IT**
MICHAEL JACKSON
(Epic) D: Bob Giraldi

9 **PIECES OF ICE**
DIANA ROSS
(RCA) D: Bob Giraldi

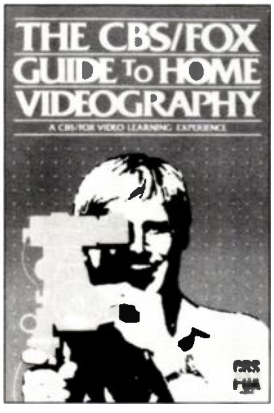
10 **TRUE**
SPANDAU BALLET
(Chrysalis) D: Russell Mulcahy

Compiled by RockAmerica (27 E. 21st Street, N.Y., N.Y., 10010), the Video Clip Top Ten indicates the most popular rock video clips being played in over 250 clubs, colleges and record stores. In addition to title, artist and label, each entry includes the name of the clip's director. These charts reflect video play for the month of September.

movie almost entirely without dialogue is a virtuoso visual performance.

Parker also got lucky in an area where musicvideo features have had the most trouble—acting. While he wisely kept Floyd off-screen, he handed Bob Geldof, lead singer of the Boomtown Rats, the unenviable task of turning Pink's soul inside out without uttering a word. Geldof delivered, taking the art of rock mime to a new level by sustaining a believable performance over the course of the 95 minute feature.

In the movies, the intense intimacy of *The Wall* was sometimes too disturbing. On the small screen its extremely personal nature is more manageable. On any screen, *The Wall* is a musicvideo experience not to be missed. *Director: Alan Parker. 95 minutes. MGM/UA Home Video. $39.95 VHS & Beta.* **—Alan Hecht**



THE CBS/FOX GUIDE TO HOME VIDEOGRAPHY

As a beginner's guide to the intelligent handling of a video camera for home use, *The CBS/Fox Guide To Home Videography* is a well-conceived and -compiled primer. Focusing on the trials and errors of the nerdish Arthur (a foolish Everyman who figures to "just turn (the camera) on and point it"), a female voiceover points out Arthur's mistakes to him and the viewer, and offers simple advice on ways to avoid and correct them. After each of the five sections ("Camera Movement," "Framing and Composition," "Lighting and Sound," "Planning a Production," and "The Art of Video"), a male voiceover runs through the steps again. The script, clear and rarely condescending, offers the right words for the nervous novice who's just plunked down a few hundred smackers and wants to get the most from his investment. And, unlike with a manual or a book, being able to *see* the right and wrong ways to assure a quality production makes this low-priced "how to" videocassette a worthwhile buy. With a booklet enclosed which leaves room for notes and jotting down the tape counter numbers for each section for later quick reference, *The CBS/Fox Guide To Home Videography* gives value for money. *CBS/Fox Video. 45 minutes. $29.95* **—Wayne King**

THE CLUB SCENE

Continued from page 36
of videvents.

At Park West, VJ Howard will sometimes segue from a clip to a live performance and back to video. He might, for example, go from Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" video to the same song performed by a Jackson impersonator ("It really enhances the video, makes it come alive"). He also increases the audience's sense of involvement by mixing the clips live; that is, spontaneously jamming images with music, matching his cutting to the movements of the dancers. A special effects generator allows Howard to feed in abstract images along with found footage. This type of "free form" programming is similar to Laserium shows and underscores the flexibility of the more sophisticated projection systems.

As yet another alternative to the small screen home video experience, clubs have begun installing large- and multi-screen projection systems. At the Ritz, a 15- by 20-foot Aquastar projection screen, extending from the bottom of the club's stage to the top of the ballroom, serves up images larger than those of most movie theatre screens. Park West employs a multi-screen system with a 15- by 20-foot screen set over the main stage and two 9- by 12-foot screens flanking it.

"We play the screens like a light show," explains Howard. "We love to do psychedelic effects by intercutting all three pictures. We're using video as light sculpture in itself."

Other venues, though, have abandoned massive projection systems in favor of more intimate environments. First created by video artist Kit Fitzgerald, the video lounge is designed as an extension of the living room. D.C.'s 9:30 Club, for example, features eight 20-inch monitors in small booths along the walls of the L-shaped club, plus two more monitors flanking the stage. Unlike the multi-screen setup, where each screen might feature a different clip, the video lounge concept calls for the same programming (the club channel) throughout the room.

"I don't think you need more than one program of videos happening at one time," VJ Doran says in defense of lounge programming. "The images in music and art videos aren't linear like we're used to on normal TV—they're holistic. Tons of images wash over you at once. They're making the idea of linear images obsolete. To complicate what's already there is unnecessary."

But what comes after original programming, high-tech projection systems and video lounges? In a word, videotheques. Los Angeles is the home of the preeminent videotheque, Revolver, a primarily gay club currently packing in the customers without the benefit of live music or

PHOTO NEIL ZLOZOWER

Revolver's Candace Brown and her "airplane cockpit"

records.

"We're open 14 hours a day starting at noon," explains Candace Brown, one of Revolver's seven VJs. "In the evening there are lines around the block. This is the most sophisticated video club anywhere. Once you get in you're glued to the screen. We get cable execs, foreign club owners and hotel chain reps in here trying to learn everything about what we do."

Brown likens the system in the VJ booth to an airplane cockpit: five VTRs, a laserdisc player, an audio cassette player, two Studiomaster mixing boards and a video-switcher. In addition to one giant screen, there are three small monitors in the club and one in the expresso bar. Jocks work five-hour shifts and program from 80 to 90 pieces of material a shift. Computerized programming enables them to handle such an extraordinary number of changes and also enables them to EQ each tape before it's played. Everything—music clips, comedy, film footage—is mixed live by the VJ. "I used to be a model," says Brown, "but this is more exciting. You'd die if you saw our guest list."

Revolver has very few seats, and only a few bar stools. The packed house seems oblivious to discomfort; patrons stay for hours on end. But there's enough turnover to keep the crowd interesting and the spirits flowing. "We know how to program," Brown says of the customer mix. "We know how to make people stay or leave, drink or not drink. We've studied the crowd and really have it down. Video bars are definitely the future. And we don't have to pay bands."

Still, there's a disturbing underside to all this video-in-public. Just as Alex and his droogies were soothed by the narcotizing milk-plus drink at the Korova milk bar in *A Clockwork Orange*, so are the habitués of video clubs entranced by the images on the screen. "I worry that all this video is going to sedate people," says Chris Dunham. "I mean, people go out to meet people. The reason the Ritz still works is that we balance bands with records and video."

Park West's Howard opines: "We've created a watch/not watch environment. I think of it as anti-television. We mean for people to move and talk and not watch all the time."

Yet video's hold on the public seems unlikely to diminish right away. RockAmerica (the leading supplier of rock video to clubs) reports requests for programming from such diverse quarters as skating rinks, Holiday Inns, record stores, colleges and drive-in theatres. "I'll tell you where you're going to see video," states RockAmerica founder and president Ed Steinberg. "Everywhere."

Can the Korova milk bar be far behind? ○

(Next month: a report on the social factor—or lack thereof—in video clubs.)

RECORD'S

HOLIDAY

BUYING GUIDE

AUDIO
INSTRUMENTS
VIDEO

● **A.** Audio Technica's Mister Disc portable phone system will play albums and singles for up to 12 hours or more on three "C" batteries, or can be plugged into a wall outlet with a DC 9 volt converter. Comes with lightweight folding stereophones, carrying case and features stereo outputs for recording or listening on standard home stereo or portable tape recorder. The Dual Magnetic cartridge features a polished diamond stylus. $149.95

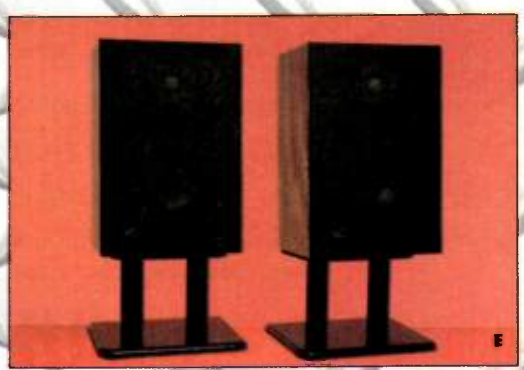
● **B.** Technics SL-V5 direct drive automatic vertical turntable system incorporates microcomputer and optoelectronic controls for the operation of the automatic lead-in, speed and disc size selection with search, auto-return, auto-stop and repeat functions; height and width equal that of an LP, thickness is three inches. $220

● **C.** Teledyne's Acoustic Research AR Turntable is belt-driven and suspended via three-point spring design. Comes equipped with optional tubular tonearm with oil-damped cueing in either walnut or oak veneer. $300 with tonearm, $430 without tonearm.

● **D.** Shure's ML140HE cartridge features a new design that includes a Dynamic Stabilizer to compensate for record warp while removing dust and static electricity from record surfaces, plus a Side-Guard Stylus Protection System. $190.00

● **E.** Infinity's RS 9 loudspeakers feature a Polycell dome tweeter for better reproduction of high frequencies. $109 each, $218 a pair.

● **F.** JBL's B380, a specially designed bass system, offers definitive reproduction of the lowest musical tones and covers the same frequency spectrum (25-70 Hz) as JBL's larger model B460 (not shown). The cabinetry is hand-crafted and finished in oiled American black walnut veneer. The heavily-braced enclosure can be placed either horizontally or vertically, and a platform base that elevates the system one inch from the floor is included with the loudspeaker. $495



● **G.** Jensen's new line of car speakers includes (clockwise, from top left) the Triax 3033, a 6" by 9" 100 watt speaker with a bi-amp capability to further enhance power handling and minimize distortion ($159.95); the J3013 6½" Coax speaker with 75 watts per channel ($109.95); the J3023 6½" Triax speaker, also with 75 watts per channel ($139.95); and the J3003 4½" Coax speakers with 50 watts per channel ($89.95).

AUDIO

● **H.** Pioneer's F-90 FM/AM Digital Synthesized Tuner and A-90 Stereo Amplifier: Pioneer recently brought innovation to audio componentry via the new Digital-Direct Decoder applied first in the new F-90 tuner. This new circuitry eliminates the need for conventional noise filters. The real advantage is improved FM station selectivity, especially in crowded urban locales. Its component teammate, the A-90 amplifier, pumps 200 watts per channel with the power rated at 20 to 20,000 Hz at 8 ohms. F-90 is $300, A-90 is $1,025.

● **I.** NAD 7150 AM/FM Stereo receiver with Schaltz Detector Circuit. $1030

● **J.** AIWA's AD-F990 Stereo Cassette Deck with Dolby B-C NR System includes Automatic Recording Level control that eliminates manual adjustment of recording input levels, an All-Mode Tape Remaining Time Display and Memory Rewind and Repeat System. $595.00

● **K.** Fostex X-15 Multitrack Recorder also works as a hi-fi cassette deck. Battery or AC powered, four-channel cassette recorder with built-in mixer. $495

● **L.** Sanyo's M9818 AM/FM stereo radio portable cassette recorder with detachable speaker boxes. 99.95

● **M.** Beyerdynamic Omnidirectional Microphone for use with home or personal cassette recorders, video cameras and film projectors. Comes with ¼" phone jack, foldable tripod table stand and mic clip. Model shown, M1-K, lists for $47.95; other models available—M1-K3 ($47.95), M2-K ($59.95), M2 – K3 ($59.95).

● **N.** Lightweight headphones from Beyer Dynamic: the DT 880 weighs in at seven ounces and lists for $134.95, while the DT 220 tips the scale at 6.8 ounces, with a list price of $74.95

● **A.** Yamaha's FG-340II acoustic guitar (top) features three-piece back and mahogany finish. The 6-string jumbo lists at $275. Below, Guild's 12-string acoustic guitar.

● **B.** Suzuki's OM-27 plays complete musical arrangements and includes built-in amp/speaker, drum machine, walking base line, 27-chord button and an auto-harp-like touchplate which lets you "strum" the selected chord. List price is $189. The TR-27 (not shown) is similar but does not include bass and drums. List: $89

● **C.** Guild's new electric guitar, priced at $250.

● **D.** Marshall's 5005 Solid State Lead Amp with Celestion 10" speaker, 12 watt R.M.S., 8 ohms, 120 watts. $199.95

● **E.** Yamaha's DX7 makes digital synthesis available to the masses. Suggested list is $1,995.

● **F.** Yamaha's PortaSound PS-400 with a built-in Yamaha speaker system can be connected directly into a home stereo unit if you don't want to take it with you. Battery operated, the PortaSound also has a jack for AC/DC converter; features include a four bar variation, chord sequence, memory, duet and a 10 tempo rhythm section. $279

E

● **G.** From Electro-Harmonix, a 16 Second Digital Delay ($675), with optional foot control ($125). At left, the Patch of Shades from Stick Enterprises combines external signal processing with a few tricks of its own. $295

● **H.** Electro-Harmonix' Instant Replay Digital Recorder (right) stores and replays virtually any sound. The replay is triggered by tapping the external pad at left. $299

● **I.** Banana's Guitar Chord Computer displays over 500 chord positions and 48 scales on a piano keyboard display screen. Battery-operated. $49.95

G

H

INSTRUMENTS

C

B

A

D

● **A.** Panasonic Omnivision VHS videocassette recorder. $495

● **B.** Sanyo's VCR 4500 videocassette recorder offers a multitude of features, including front loading, freeze frame, Betascan, 8 function wired remote control, seven day/one event timer, 12 station preset electronic tuner with 82 channel capacity. $449.95

● **C.** RCA's SJT 300 Selectavision videodisc player provides superior video and audio reproduction. $449.95

● **D.** Sony's SL-2000 Betamax portable videocassette recorder with BetaScan II and Videola Search. Includes battery pack and shoulder strap. $700

VIDEO

● **E.** Panasonic's JR-200U Personal Computer. Features include 8 Color Graphic capability, high speed cassette interface, three independent sound generators, Sure-Touch Keyboard, built-in 32K User RAM, RS-232C interface Port (option). $399.95

● **F.** Commodore's 64 personal computer includes a sophisticated music synthesizer chip which can be programmed in BASIC. Several companies offer musically-oriented software for the 64. $595, but often discounted to around $200.

● **G.** Recoton's V612 solid state electronic video control center allows for switching and dubbing between multiple signal sources (VCR, videodisc, video game, cable television, computer). $199.95

● **H.** Amiga Corporation's Joyboard Power Body Control puts you into the game. Compatible with Atari 2600, Sears Video Arcade, ColecoVision Expansion Module #1 or Coleco Gemini. $50

● **I.** Essential rock video: *The Complete Beatles* (MGM/UA, $69.95), *Girl Groups* (MGM/UA, $59.95), *Duran Duran* (Thorn-EMI, $49.95), *The Kids Are Alright* (MCA Home Video, $39.95).

● **J.** The latest in games from ActiVision: *The Dreadnaught Factor* space battle game is compatible with Intellivision and Sears Super Video Arcade (list: $39.95); *Decathlon* (not shown) allows players to compete in all ten events of the modern decathlon, and a gauge on the screen measures actual performance against a scale of maximum potential—a score of 1000 or more points merits a trumpet fanfare. Compatible with Atari 2600 and Sears Tele-Games Video Arcade (list: $34.95); *Robot Tank* is a tactical battle between squadrons of cybernated attack tanks in the year 2019. Compatible with Atari 2600 and Sears Tele-Games Video Arcade (list: $34.95).

HEARTS IN THE REAL WORLD

MOVING HEARTS
Dark End of the Street
WEA International (Jem Import)

By John Swenson

The search for living music can be a frustrating quest, especially in a pop world where costuming is considered far more important than musical content. In this light the new Moving Hearts album is an important event.

The two import-only LPs released so far by the group have made them one of Ireland's—and Europe's—most important bands. What sets them apart from other Irish groups is that Moving Hearts combines elements of traditional Irish music and instrumentation with a willingness to use popular music forms. This is significant because the best young Irish musicians have up until now insulated themselves against pop music, choosing to keep what they feel is a sacred tradition alive by playing in coterie settings and avoiding amplification or the introduction of such rock 'n' roll conventions as trap drums.

Moving Hearts was formed in early 1981 by two members of Planxty, one of the finest recent bands playing traditional Irish music—Christy Moore, an extremely effective vocalist, and Donal Lunny, a virtuoso multi-instrumentalist noted for his work on bouzouki, guitar and coloration instruments like harmonium, pan flutes and pan pipes. Their idea was to build the group around a conventional rock rhythm format which included Brian Calvan on drums (replaced by Matt Kelleghan on the second album); Eoghan O'Neill on bass and Declan Sinnott on lead guitar. By adding an Uileann piper, Davy Spillane, and saxophonist Keith Donald, the band was able to retain the distinctive sound of Irish music.

Lunny's most brillant conceptual stroke was to switch to synthesizer as his main instrument in Moving Hearts, using it for a variety of effects including some which were based on traditional Irish musical ideas. The sound of the jigs and reels associated with acoustic Irish bands is recast dramatically in unison passages played by pipes, saxophone and synthesizer, backed with a crafty and smoking rhythm section that brings a stirring urgency to the songs "Hiroshima Nagasaki Russian Roulette" and "Remember the Brave Ones."


PHOTO: COLM HENRY

Dark End of the Street is a compilation of tracks from the first two records. Though the anti-American track "Allende" is omitted from this collection, the group's deeply political convictions flood through nonetheless. The sensibility of war-ravaged Irish musicians is strikingly reminiscent of the commitment many American bands evidenced in the anti-war era of U.S. politics during the late '60s and early '70s. Moving Hearts goes as far as referencing that era with an emotionally apt reading of Jackson Browne's "Before the Deluge" and a chilling rewrite of the Quicksilver Messenger Service vehicle, "What About Me." In its new title, "What Will You Do About Me," and its new lyrics, altered to fit the modern techniques of, "social control" more explicitly, the song literally changes meaning. Dino Valente's vocal performance with Quicksilver sounds like the impatient whinings of a selfish kid next to the stark, insistent challenge Christy Moore spits out here.

Moore and Sinnott departed the band after making the second album, leaving this compilation as a document of an important band in transition. Instead of add-

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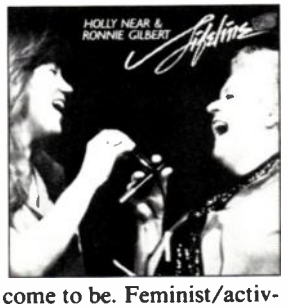
IT'S WORTH IT.

ing another lead guitar, Moving Hearts has brought in a second piper, thus welding its music even closer to Irish roots. New vocalist Mick Hanly is a strong songwriter whose material had been recorded by Moving Hearts even before he came into the fold. Clearly this is a group marshalling its strength in anticipation of big things.

Don't look for Moving Hearts on MTV—you'll find them instead in the real world, where trends come and go, empires rise and fall, and the music never dies.

LIFELINE
Holly Near and Ronnie Gilbert
Redwood Records

By Laura Fissinger



In the best of all possible worlds, this is how music would always come to be. Feminist/activist musician Holly Near was weaned on the Weavers, dedicating her second album years later to Ronnie Gilbert, "a woman who knew how to sing and what to sing about." Ronnie's daughter spotted the record and sent it along. Now Holly is co-owner of her own record label, which has just released this superb document of Near and Gilbert's widely-hailed (and ongoing) concert tour.

In that same best of worlds, *Lifeline* would do wonders for the two careers involved. Neither Near nor Gilbert is without roof or reputation, yet each has been limited for too long. The uncoolness of social conscience in the '70s pushed them both toward special interest audiences, as did Near's lesbian-feminism and Gilbert's freeze-frame in musical history. Not only does *Lifeline* fully validate them as performers connected to the mainstream and the present moment, but it uses profound emotion as a marker to trace the broad-based history of "radical" thought and action in America.

The emotion is empowered exactly as it should be: by Gilbert's mournful, trembly contralto, Near's clarion soprano, and some terrific songs. In key supporting roles are pianist Jeff Langley (absent too long from Near LPs), bassist Carrie Barton, and the audience. Near and co-producers Jo-Lynne Worley and Joanie Shoemaker made sure that judicious use of audience noise would show the undeniable current between stage and seats. The stillness during eye-reddeners such as "Goodnight Irene" and "Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida" is thicker than cold syrup.

For those not fond of music hall/Broadway show whiz-bang, there will be discomfort with the strangely assembled love song medley and Gilbert's "The Activity Room," although Langley's kinky chordings and Gilbert's gift for last-minute restraint save these cuts from overkill.

As for the bugaboos of who Ronnie sang with and who Holly dates, both are presented as part of the picture, rather than the frame around it. Near sticks "For Me and My Gal" in the medley; "Perfect Night" makes knowing fun of the parallels between gay and straight dating. The perfect link of Gilbert's past and present is in "Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida," a lament by Near that galvanized viewers of the Weavers' documentary, *Wasn't That A Time*.

Indeed, the emotional continuum of humanist conviction is the star here. Even those who have found this sort of approach to "political art" corny in the past will feel the emotion on *Lifeline*. These two women sing about their ideas of the best of all possible worlds; suddenly the only special interest group seems to be the human race. (Redwood Records, 476 W. MacArthur Blvd., Oakland, CA 94609.)

SPECIAL REQUEST AND A POPULAR DEMAND—A DEE-JAY EXPLOSION, PART TWO
Various Artists
Heartbeat

ROCKERS VIBRATION
Various Artists
Heartbeat

BEST OF STUDIO ONE
Various Artists
Heartbeat

By Ken Braun

It's been distressingly clear for more than a few years now that the major American record companies dismiss reggae, at least as it is played by its Jamaican originators, as unsuitable for American listeners—this despite reggae's ever-growing popularity in the United States over the past decade and the increasing demand for authentic reggae records. It's heartening, then, to recognize that a number of small, specialized record companies—notably Shanachie, Alligator, Nighthawk and Heartbeat—have emerged in recent years to nourish the growth and maturation of America's reggae audience, mainly by re-releasing Jamaican albums in this country but also by compiling unique anthology albums of various artists who might otherwise be overlooked. Heartbeat has just issued three anthology albums that deserve the attentions of American reggae fans and also of those who are not yet in the fold.

Special Request and a Popular Demand is a sequel to last year's *A Dee-Jay Explosion inna Dance Hall Style*, a landmark record and an impressive achievement for Heartbeat, the first album ever to present reggae the way it's commonly heard "live" in Jamaica: that is, played by record-spinning, jive-toasting dee-jays behind the microphones of blaring sound-systems in crowded dance halls on hot Kingston nights. Like its predecessor, *Special Request* captures a succession of dee-jays very much alive and at work, each one "on" just long enough to drop the needle into his or her favorite grooves, dub out the vocal tracks, pick up the microphone, and let pour a patter of rhymed and rhythmical salutations, jokes, news flashes, sermons and advertisements for him or herself before passing the microphone on to the next in line. The effect of either of these albums on the listener at home beside his stereo is overwhelming, but less because of their musical merits than because of their *audio verité* authenticity. The scratched records the dee-jays play, the malfunctioning sound-system, the hall's atrocious acoustics, the various disruptions by the dancers and the fundamental looseness of dance hall proceedings make these albums vivid aural experiences (sociological, if you will), but at the same time militate against them being enlightening musical experiences. Heartbeat should be applauded for its vision, but let the casual dabbler in reggae and the tender-eared be advised: only listeners seriously *committed* to the music are likely to appreciate fully the virtues of the two *Special Request* packages.

For those who like their records a little more sensitively crafted than crude live recordings allow, and their reggae slightly less intense than the dance hall style, *Rockers Vibration* showcases the work of one of the best of the dee-jay toasters of the 1980s, Mikey Dread. Unlike most dee-jays, Dread is a songwriter and producer whose services are sought by many singers and groups (even the Clash), and he records his own instrumental tracks (dubs). He's not an instrumentalist himself and not exactly a singer (although he's probably the most tuneful, musically adroit vocalist of the young toasters), but he's certainly a musician. He works with instrumentalists (always the top Jamaican freelancers) the way a master conductor does, bringing out of each player precisely what he wants, and singers adapt their styles to his. It seems that no matter who the featured singers or groups are, when they record with Dread At The Controls (his label) they come out of the sessions sounding more like Dread than like themselves.

Consequently, while *Rockers Vibration*

includes Dread-written and -produced selections representing seven singers and groups in addition to Mikey Dread and the Dread At The Controls Stable, there is less variety on it than one expects to find on an anthology album. Furthermore, Mikey Dread fans will recognize many of the instrumental tracks from previously-released Dread At The Controls records. Never mind: Dread is characteristically clever and appealing with what he does with these tracks, and his collaborators—who don't always have material this good to work with—have put in exemplary performances (especially Hopeton Lindo and Sugar Minott). The generally high quality of the selections makes up for the lack of variety, and fans won't mind hearing familiar tracks the way they're shown off here.

Best of Studio One, the strongest collection of the three, also exhibits the work of a producer, Clement "Sir Coxsone" Dodd. An influential dee-jay in the 1950s, and a trailblazing studio boss from the early '60s through the end of the '70s, Dodd played a crucial role in the career of damned near every important figure in the Jamaican music of those decades. His professional relationship with these figures was entirely different from Dread's to his clients: Dodd's genius was in making records, not in making music; in recognizing talent, not in shaping it—he left that to the artists.

To compile a mere single LP of the "best" of Dodd's productions for his Studio One label must have been a daunting task. Heartbeat chose not to represent any of the most famous names on the Studio One roster (Bob Marley & the Wailers, Toots & the Maytals and Burning Spear, for example). One can think of a dozen or more artists more deserving to be represented than one or two who are, or contend that Slim Smith, the Termites and Dennis Brown recorded better songs for Dodd than the ones included here, but on the whole *Best of Studio One* is a worthy tribute to one of the grand old men of Jamaican music.

The selections range from a perfect example by the Cables of the lilting rhythms and soulful, three-voice harmonies of 1967-vintage rock steady, to Judah Tafari Eskender's synthesizer-heavy rocker of 1980. The span of years and styles gives American listeners the opportunity to hear now-familiar artists like Marcia Griffiths, Sugar Minott and the Wailing Souls in the early stages of their careers, while a selection by Larry Marshall introduces a wonderful singer who never became well-known. Other selections are among the touchstones of reggae—the Heptones' "Party Time," the Gladiators' "Roots Natty," and Michigan & Smilie's "Rub-a-Dub Style," the 1978 hit on which the two dee-jays toast over a 10-year-old dub from an Alton Ellis Studio One recording. Comparing "Rub-a-Dub Style" with the Ellis selection on the album helps to explain the timelessness of Dodd's work and indicates that it will continue to influence the course of reggae even now that Dodd has retired from making records. (Heartbeat Records, 186 Willow Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144).

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10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1
Midnight Oil
Columbia

By Jim Green

Midnight Oil's always been just a bit flaky for a heavy metal band. Not unlike fellow antipodeans Rose Tattoo, whose singer, Angry Anderson, has a billiard-ball pate every bit as shiny as the Oil's Peter Garrett's, the band's Down Under hordes of head-banging admirers would claim for them Oz's hard rock throne; yet Midnight Oil comes by its hard-nosed musical attack more from a distillation of pre- and quasi-metal antecedents (Who, Stones, Bowie) than from the Zeppelin/Deep Purple catalogue of leaden riffs, or the amped-up Slade routine of AC/DC, Tattoo et al.

Garrett's no Gillan or Plant ringer either; his lower-pitched voice has a brittle, sometimes strident, yet vulnerable quality to it more reminiscent of some British new wavers, and is a vehicle for articulate, personal statements of conviction (or doubt) which are aggressively Australian in outlook (with many local references) and often pointedly political. Just as the six-foot-five Garrett would stick out in a crowd of Andersons, so does Midnight Oil distinguish itself from the hard rock multitude.

With *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1*, its U.S. debut, the quintet expands its musical horizons. The usual two-guitar format is bolstered by violin and brass coloring as well as by prominent use of keyboards (played by one of the guitarists), but it's the manipulation of these musical elements that yields startling and effective contrasts.

On "Outside World," the dominant high and lonesome synth sounds help Garrett fuse longing and foreboding convincingly. "Scream in Blue" is a stretch of cinematic psychedelia which abruptly becomes a quiet, chilling evocation of murderous psychosis. Until its bewilderingly idyllic coda, "Only the Strong"—about the breakdown (if anything) of the macho inage so dear to the Oils' peers—interfaces hard rock instrumental expertise with a punkishly sparse, emotive outburst. The bouncy, uptempo "Read About It" is actually a condemnation of apathy in the face of a rapidly degenerating world. "The Power and the Passion" is semi-reggae so catchy it could be a hit single (with an edit) were it not for its naked contempt and anger; the bile of "Maralinga" (named for Australia's controversial nuclear test site) is no less effective for its slower, almost anthemic, mock-stateliness.

The production of Nick Launay (whose previous clients include PiL) helps keep the group's ambitious visions from getting out of hand, and even the flaws earn admiration for their intent. *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1* grows bigger with every listen; it may be Australia's first "important" album, and it's certainly one of its best.

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HIGH RISE
Ashford and Simpson
Capitol

By James Hunter

Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson are a couple of bona fide black-pop wizards who, since 1973, have directed their remarkable songwriting and producing talents toward themselves, turning out savory soul/body music that's enslaved by a runaway romanticism, often personal to the point of quirkiness, and sometimes simply transcendent. At Motown in the late '60s, conjuring something as soulfully relaxing for Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell to cuddle up in as "Your Precious Love," Ashford and Simpson were masterful; as architects of the supremely disco Diana Ross of *The Boss*, they were brilliant; on their own records they've been unusually consistent (1977's facile, sinuous *Send It*; 1978's *Is It Still Good To Ya*, a panorama of adult desire moods) and often extraordinary (the pop-gospel miracle groove of "Found A Cure," on 1979's *Stay Free*). But lately, as much of black-pop has become as arch and functional as it was once celebratory and emotional, Ashford and Simpson have been stubborn; they like dancing as much as the next people, but they refuse to forsake their up-scale spiritual-bedroom aesthetic-aroused voices and exploratory melodies in comfy-condo settings.

On *High Rise*, half the numbers trace the couple's deep take on romance. These songs are, by turns, lulling and analytical ("Experience (Love Had No Face)"), dramatic and tender ("I'm Not That Tough"), and agile and elegant ("My Kinda Pick Me Up"). But "Still Such A Thing," a strapping gospel-fired ballad ready to take over the heartless world with impassioned affirmations of "we're still dreaming," ranks with "Ain't No Mountain High

Enough" as naked sentiment dressed to the black-pop nines.

Still, their groove tunes have never been more winningly sung, more keenly cascading out of Simpson's astringent piano bases, more stung by shadowy-tinged melodies, more sweetly run on mean rhythm power. All this happens on the awesome title cut, on the slyer "Side Effect" — listen to Ashford's voice, as open as air, break out of the beat with the line "You needed love" — and the roller-coaster funk of "It's Much Deeper." It's all sharp, up-to-the-minute stuff, but it could only be Ashford and Simpson's. *High Rise* is their best album in five years; a couple of love spirits dancing their way through the material world.

NO PARLEZ
Paul Young
Columbia

By Anthony DeCurtis

If you don't think this soulful British face-man is going for the burn, try to come up with another modern popster who on his debut LP would cover a country-folk chestnut like "Love of the Common People"; the Gaye/Whitfield/Strong composition "Wherever I Lay My Hat (That's My Home)"; Joy Division's unsentimental masterpiece of emotional despair, "Love Will Tear Us Apart"; and Booker T. Jones and Steve Cropper's intimidatingly hip "Iron Out the Rough Spots." Despite a hitch here and there, Young's smoky-voiced assurance carries him through this self-imposed trial of fire. He emerges a very formidable talent indeed.

Young's band—The Royal Family—is synthesizer-based, and keyboardist "The Reverend" is not above the occasional electronic cliché. But the arrangements here (as well as Laurie Latham's production) are so full and intelligent that the occasional excesses aren't unduly bothersome. And despite a tendency to emote, which trivializes his reading of "Love Will Tear Us Apart," Young sings with impressive originality and interpretive power throughout. His backing vocalists, Kim and Maz (the—get this—Fabulous Wealthy Tarts), are an added treat. They come on with the brassy sexiness of new wave Raelettes.

Young sometimes allows himself to slip into generic synth-funk Bowieisms ("Ku-KuKurama") and snooze-inducing "indictments" of social hypocrisy (e.g., on the dance-club fave, "Sex": "You can watch it on TV/But just don't let your children see"). But for ambition, smarts, and sheer skill in a first outing, *No Parlez* sets itself an admirably high standard and meets it with grace and style.

WHAT'S NEW
Linda Ronstadt
Asylum

By J.D. Considine

With its lush strings, understated rhythm and whispering vocalisms, *What's New* makes a big show of assuming the mannerisms and style of high-brow '50s pop. The well-heeled listener is supposed to recognize the suave packaging, appreciate the sophisticated values, and applaud Linda Ronstadt for her artistic maturity. This is genuinely adult music, we are to understand, and utterly befitting a performer of Miss Ronstadt's depth and importance.

Yeah, and if you believe that, you probably let Ricardo Montalban talk you into a new Cordoba. It isn't that *What's New* is a particularly bad album, although it would probably help if it were actually a *good* one; rather, it's that both Ronstadt's performance and her intentions are so contrived. *What's New* does not connect Linda Ronstadt to the tradition defined by Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Mabel Mercer, it simply gives her the opportunity to ape that tradition. She may do it well, but she will probably never do it right. And more to the point, she really doesn't have to do it at all.

Let's look at the specifics, shall we? Ronstadt's song selection is canny enough, consisting of quiet, slightly mournful ballads, to give the album the properly smokey aura. None of the songs are so well known that Ronstadt would risk damagingly obvious comparisons, nor are any so difficult as to genuinely tax her vocal skills (as "All Through the Night" or "Let's Face the Music and Dance" would). In short, these are songs easily crooned, and croon is what Ronstadt does. Her delivery is pretty enough, full of breathy asides and carefully shaded vibrato, but it's far from convincing because it never seems anything more than affected. Her time is pretty much right off the lead sheet, making her phrasing oddly mechanical, and her coloration, particularly on "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance With You," "Good-Bye" and the title track, maddeningly unpredictable, as if Ronstadt understood how other singers weight their notes, but not why. Worst of all is her inability to finesse her big notes, so that she ends up bellowing when she attempts to cap a phrase with a moment of vocal intensity. By comparison, even the most strident Streisand seems subtle.

Still, that sort of musical nit-picking is beside the point, because what is by far the most objectionable aspect of *What's New* is the notion that it needed to be done in the first place. It's one thing for rock singers to update an old sound for their own purposes, as Joe Jackson, Roman Holliday and even the Stray Cats have done with various eras. It's quite another to leap headlong into the style of an earlier era and bring nothing of your own, particularly when such a leap is trumpeted as an act of artistic growth. By so playing up her dip into "the standards," Ronstadt is wittingly or not supporting one of the most pernicious lies ever told about rock 'n' roll—that it, like acne, is something to be grown out of. Instead of connecting herself to an older tradition, what Ronstadt has actually done has been to betray the notion that rock 'n' roll has its own, equally meritorious tradition. And, unfortunately, there's nothing particularly new about that.

RHYTHM OF YOUTH
Men Without Hats
Backstreet

By Jonathan Gregg

One of the more pleasant surprises among the current hemorrhage of synth-pop bands, Men Without Hats' chief assets are a disarming sense of humor and a decent flair for hooks, in that order.

Distinctly less funky than most of their peers, but no less danceable, this Canadian trio uses a more lightweight, streamlined keyboard sound, occasionally sprinkled with melodic guitar lines. The Soft Cell-tinged "Safety Dance" and "I Got the Message" are prime examples of the MWH syllogism: dance is good, no dance is bad, we make you dance, we do a good thing. No heavy messages here, and far from offering any solutions to the world's problems, MWH take pride in their disorientation. This benign chaos, contained with mock seriousness within their bouncy, deliberately naive songs, accounts for much of *Rhythm of Youth*'s charm, and is explored to good effect on "Ideas for Walls" and "I Like." "Cocoricci (Le Tango des Voleurs)," a whispery mood number reminiscent of Curved Air, suggests that less frivolous achievements may be within their grasp as well, should they ever tire of celebrating their foolishness.

Mind you, this is not the work of a major talent. Even the good songs start to sound the same, and hats or no hats, some of

them just go in one ear and out the other. Still, for that fun occasion when Heaven 17 or Ministry seem a little self-conscious, Men Without Hats might do the trick. Not a milestone, but a pleasant rest stop, nonetheless.

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TRY TO BEAT THE HEAT
B.B. Spin
Cactus

By Christopher Hill

Chicago is a big town for food. But not the toad's-breast-stuffed with puree of nasturtium-in-walnut-vinegar kind of food. Chicagoans, God love 'em, have an inborn unease with trends, a trait that makes such cookery a pretty dicey matter in the Windy City. No, the really good stuff is tucked away in little knotty-pine places or storefronts in odd neighborhoods where you can get a whole roast chicken with dumplings or a steamed pike for $4.50. Places where the food's always great because they've been refining the materials at hand for decades. It's like that with music, too. To see a group of smiling, innocent young Chicagoans gamely going at the synthesizer/haircut routine is to be reminded of those *Beverly Hillbillies* episodes where Jethro would appear in a polka-dot sportcoat and oversized shades, having decided he was going to be a star. Endearing, but the fit just never seems right—the toad-breast effect, you understand. Now, a band like B.B. Spin, on the other hand, is the musical equivalent of the great little neighborhood restaurant. Their first album, *Try to Beat the Heat*, is a mumbo sauce/pierogi/Italian beef kind of record that dishes up lots of warm, hearty fun by freshly and lovingly blending the vintage R&B and rock 'n' roll ingredients that are always on hand in Chicago.

"I Want You" starts things off by demonstrating what B.B. Spin does best—lifting conventional material above the ordinary with an extra bit of oomph, be it a clever brass or guitar figure, an extra flash of humor from singer Johnny Moe, or the winning verve of the ensemble playing. On this track it's the insistent but easy-rocking physicality of the beat and the warm earthiness of the melody and the voices that win you over. And then (as you come to expect on this album) they throw in an extra treat—Jay O'Rourke's lead break, a simple but tasty series of rapidly repeated clusters of trebly notes, just enough to make the ears prick up and take notice. "She's That

Girl" pokes its nose into that region of urban sentimentality that Willy De Ville has made his own. Moe doesn't have the chops to challenge De Ville on this turf, but there's a simple conviction in his delivery that allows us to suspend comparisons and bask in the stylized heartbreak of this genre.

Of course, likeability and enthusiasm aren't always enough. "The Phantom" has the band trying to show a rockier face, but it never rises above its heavy, trundling inertia and blustering blues-isms. "Crazy Mad" is an essay into rockabilly whose basic ordinariness resists all the band's energy. B.B. Spin will be no nine-day's wonder—as Johnny Moe says, they "advocate the long relation." Those in search of the novel, the ingenious or the intense must look elsewhere. But *Try to Beat the Heat* is a pleasant reminder that sometimes the best stuff can be found right back in the old neighborhood. (Cactus Records, 975 Webster Lane, Des Plaines, IL 60016)

JERKY VERSIONS OF THE DREAM
Howard Devoto
I.R.S.

By Duncan Strauss

Howard Devoto has an impressive, if not particularly widely-circulated, rock resume: With Pete Shelley, he founded the Buzzcocks and after leaving that group formed Magazine, an outstanding outfit that never received its proper acclaim.

Since Magazine folded in 1981, little has been heard from Devoto, though he did collaborate on a recent album by French avant-garde artist Bernard Szajaner. Now the enigmatic British singer-songwriter further updates his credentials with this solo debut, *Jerky Versions Of The Dream*.

Supported by a solid backing unit that includes ex-Magazine keyboardist Dave Formula, Devoto sculpts enticing pop operas. The music on *Jerky* sounds at once foreign and familiar: Devoto takes some standard rock traits, gives them a twist, then goes a step further by adding novel textures and melodies.

This approach yields a range of winning material, from the gorgeous, propulsive "Rainy Season" to the pulsing, cinematic "Topless" to the languid Lou Reed-ish "Out Of Shape With Me." The other music here is likewise intriguing and refreshing upon first listening—more so after repeated spins.

But where Devoto really distinguishes himself is with his lyrics. He is a gifted wordsmith whose observations demonstrate an acute understanding of people and relationships. With innovative, occasionally bizarre images and metaphors, Devoto chronicles every thing from the quirks of romance to the workings of a very fragile psyche: "Just keep this paradise between you and me/An excellent mystery to consume" or "You're like a mirage I could learn to hate" or "You've been knocking what you need/Your unhappiness is guaranteed."

It's nice to have Devoto and his jerky versions of music around as a reminder that rock can still be irresistible, delightfully offbeat, probing, and essential.

BIG DADDY
Big Daddy
Rhino

By Dan Forte

Having recently released such vinyl artifacts as *The Best Of Johnny Crawford*, three volumes of *The History Of Surf Music*, and a green vinyl Turtles EP in the *shape* of a turtle, Rhino Records is obviously not overly concerned with Grammy nominations or platinum units. But with the debut release by the Los Angeles quintet Big Daddy, Rhino may have stumbled upon a bonafide hit. At the very least, this will become a cult classic.

With so many contemporary artists scoring with cover versions of '50s and '60s material, Big Daddy has reversed the trend with a collection of twelve '70s and '80s hits played and sung as they might have been in 1958 or '62. "I Write The Songs" is sung to the tune of "At The Hop." "Hotel California" is given a Del Shannon cum Gene Pitney treatment, "Whip It" is done in a street-corner, finger-snapping doo-wop style, and "Ebony And Ivory" sounds perfect pounded out a la Little Richard.

The band's most imaginative interpretations are the ballad rendition of Rick James' "Super Freak," the Duane Eddy-twanged "Star Wars," and a ballsy rockabilly romp on "Bette Davis Eyes" that sounds more appropriate for Jackie DeShannon's lyrics than did Kim Carnes' megahit.

But *Big Daddy* is no mere gimmick record, though that would be enough to immortalize it. The band is composed of first-rate players and outstanding vocalists. The a cappella arrangement of "Eye Of The Tiger" ("Eye-yi-yi of the tiger . . . ") sounds as soulful as most of the Persuasions' recorded material. Keyboardist Bob Wayne's production respects the genre without being too reverential. This is more than a '50s parody or a '70s satire—*Big Daddy* is a marriage of new and old, of sophistication and innocence, of self-consciousness and reckless abandon.

COLD BLOODED
Rick James
Gordy

By Anthony DeCurtis

For dirty-minded Prince, who shares hegemony in the punk-funk field with Rick James, sex is vision, the primal fact informing and unifying all experience. For the literal-minded Slick Rick, sex is purely and simply *sex*. It doesn't underlie experience, it *is* experience and requires no interpretation. More is better than less; kinky (but always hetero, please) better than straight.

For this reason, Prince is clearly the more subversive of the two. Despite his much-vaunted "freakiness," James trades on traditional—even conservative—notions about sexuality. His titillation in "Super Freak," for example, by "the kind of girl you read about in new wave magazines" is little more than an updated take on the leers of '60s' straights anxious to bed "hippie chicks."

But like many mucho macho men, James brings an appealing boyish enthusiasm to his projects, and when his energy and blustering sexiness come together with material that grips him emotionally—as on 1981's *Street Songs*, his largely autobiographical rock-funk milestone—the results are powerfully good.

Cold Blooded, James' latest effort, doesn't rise to quite that height and breaks little new ground, though it has much to recommend it. "U Bring the Freak Out" effectively reworks the proven James formula of riffing synthesizers, muscular guitar chords, punchy horns, a commanding vocal, and lyrics about a girl who (she's so nasty) wants it even more than you do. "Ebony Eyes," featuring a characteristically elegant vocal spot by Smokey Robinson, and the touching "Tell Me (What You Want)" find Rick in his balladeering mode, which he handles with always surprising success, though the latter tune is nearly destroyed by Billy Dee Williams' unbearably cloying whisper-vocal cameo.

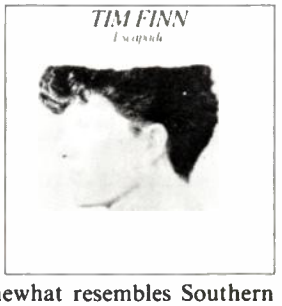
"New York Town" paints a street-level portrait of the Apple, while "1,2,3, (U, Her and Me)" is a pitch for a threesome (the slick one and two ladies—not another guy, please); and "P.I.M.P. the S.I.M.P." hauls in Grandmaster Flash to help James mourn the loss of a friend who walked the

streets as a "hoe" and paid the price of death. Rick's modest solo on voice and piano for the 1:50 ballad, "Unity," that closes the record is unpretentious and affecting. Two of the album's most ambitious tracks, however, the title cut and "Doin' It," mine a very tired groove and go nowhere. These songs are the clearest examples of how James' imagination has stalled. The sound he's got down, but nothing very interesting is on his mind.

James' production and arrangements throughout *Cold Blooded* are excellent, the sort of work that would be a strong complement to the truly top-grade material he is capable of and has generated in the not-so-distant past. Being slick, however, only takes you halfway. Some new ideas are needed to bring James up to previous form, and *Cold Blooded* displays precious few of these.

ESCAPADE
Tim Finn
A&M

By Barry Alfonso



I've been told that the populous east coast of Australia somewhat resembles Southern California, both climatically and culturally. Never having journeyed to Oz, I can't confirm this. But listening to Split Enz singer/keyboardist Tim Finn's solo LP, *Escapade*, I'd believe L.A. and Aussie vibes are indeed on similar frequencies.

Though evolving away from the more overt weirdness of their early albums, Oz's Split Enz still retains at least the aura of a progressive Genesis-like band. *Time and Tide*, their most recent release, was awash with the dark, ominous shades any "modern" group apparently needs in order to seem hip. On his first venture alone, though, Enz-man Finn turns away from gloom 'n' doom affectations in favor of unadulterated pop. *Escapade* is sunny and good-natured in a most un-'80s way.

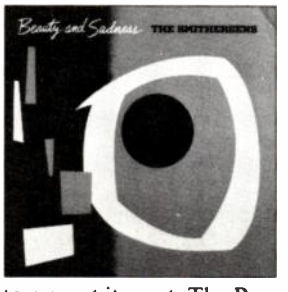
For the most part, it works. Finn has a fine instinct for hooks, albeit sugary ones. "Fraction Too Much Friction" matches a brotherhood homily with a pleasant reggae lilt, while "Through The Years" applies the same treatment to '50s pop/soul—the chorus harmonies lift the tune into singalong cheerfulness. In these and other styles, Finn sings with vigor and charm, but never intensity. In praising a ladylove, he declares she "made his day"—that's about as dramatic as the language gets here.

Perhaps because of producer (and former Beach Boy) Ricky Fataar's input, *Escapade* ultimately resembles a mid-'70s California soft-rock record. Those familiar clip-clop conga lines beloved by Doobie Brothers and Pablo Cruise fans, for example, crop up all over this LP. Maybe the sound is terribly unhip and atavistic, but Finn and his cohorts make it palatable. After a decade of enz-splitting, he's entitled to an exercise in mellowness.

BEAUTY AND SADNESS
The Smithereens
Little Ricky Records

EDDIE AND THE CRUISERS
Beaver Brown
Scotti Brothers

By Laura Fissinger



Watch rock 'n' roll wriggle with discomfort while learning to respect its past. The Perpetual Now is no longer rock's one true God; rock artists who do solid work in older, classic sub-genres are beginning to be taken seriously. It's coming slow, but it's coming.

Bands like New Jersey's the Smithereens are right in the thick of things, wrestling with the paradox of preserving musical vernacular originally intended for short-term pertinence. Their *Beauty and Sadness* (on the independent Little Ricky Records, 1133 Broadway, New York, NY 10010) is a five-cut EP founded on formalism, built with roiling joy. Brought to us by the same avant-moguls connected with early Marshall Crenshaw (primarily producer Alan Betrock), the Smithereens share Crenshaw's pioneer's burden: in the melodies and lyrics of seminal rock 'n' roll, what's time-locked cliché and what's archetype? When we thought we'd die before we got old, nobody cared.

By and large the Smithereens draw from the first British Invasion, lending a somber cast to that genre's native high spirits. Solemn baritone vocals counterpoint the sprightly melody of "Tracey's World." "Much Too Much" out-rockabillies the Stray Cats by making the guitar tones dark and the singing real-life sloppy. "Some Other Guy" puts no cheery spin on its jealous depression; the chord progression, like the song's hero, is most interesting in its failure to be light-hearted.

The Beatles circa *Revolver* is the stylistic source for the title track, done once with vocals and once without. The beauty is with the melodic turnaround at the top of the refrain; the sadness is in the lyric, where the present turns and sees how little of the past it is willing to forget. The group needs to write more words like these, less of the girl/boy gee golly that hurts the record elsewhere. All in all, a derivative record that promises much for a future LP.

Derivative would be a kind assessment of the movie soundtrack *Eddie and the Cruisers*. Beaver Brown has long been a big-deal East Coast bar band, reportedly respected by past and present Jersey shore musical heavyweights. One can only assume that it was a movie man's idea to make 90 percent of this record into a *Born to Run* rewrite. Only on a few covers like "Runaround Sue" do we get a chance to glimpse writer/singer John Cafferty's high spirits and innate gift for letting the rock basics breathe. The rest of it isn't going to make anyone look good—the movie, Cafferty, Springsteen, or anyone who believes that rock's languages can be made newly vital each time they're spoken.

COME ON OVER
Freddie McGregor
RAS

IRIE FEELING
The Melodians
RAS

INVASION!
The Mighty Invaders
Rave

By Crispin Sartwell

A Washington, D.C.-based distributorship and record label known as RAS Records is quickly making more and better reggae available to U.S. enthusiasts. The company has been especially successful in promulgating reggae in northeastern cities which have growing Caribbean populations. These three albums are outstanding for their emphasis on artistic values; the performers are showcased with respect and restraint.

Freddie McGregor is a singer, writer, and producer who has long been one of the finest Lover's Rock artists; he sings sweetly and utterly without affectation. Inexplicably, he never released a U.S. album until *Come On Over*. Here, he offers up the usual love songs, as well as more biting rockers and protest songs. "Shortman," for instance, sports a pile-driving dub rhythm track, presumably composed by Scientist, who's credited as an engineer.

However, a good deal of *Come On Over* is *too* sweet; "Are You Crazy" and "Reggae Feeling" fail utterly to rivet the atten-

tion. There's half an album of fine material here, and RAS has more consistent, if not as joyous, albums to offer.

The Melodians were a seminal reggae band in the late '60s and early '70s who, like McGregor, suffered from a lack of U.S. exposure. They still play roots music that's dominated by horns and chintzy organs. *Irie Feeling* is steadfastly old-fashioned reggae. It compares favorably with the best of the recent roots revival as recorded by Nighthawk Records, which last year issued fine albums by the Itals, the Morwells, and the Gladiators, among others.

The Melodians fall firmly into the Jamaican tradition of vocal trios (a tradition that numbers the Mighty Diamonds and the Abyssinians among its excellent current practitioners), and Tony Brevett, Brent Dowe, and Trevor McNaughton provide simple, sparkling harmonies throughout *Irie Feeling*.

The Mighty Invaders are a group of young Baltimoreans of Caribbean origin who make reggae that, due to the differing demands of club audiences in Jamaica and Baltimore, is somewhat more accessible to Americans than most of the Jamaican acts. Like Black Uhuru, a group that burst from the D.C. club scene to national prominence, the Mighty Invaders feature rockish instrumental tracks and deft ensemble singing.

In fact, on *Invasion!*, recorded in Jamaica at Tuff Gong, their sped-up inversions recall English ska bands, especially the Selecter. But the rhythm track of "Hatred" or "Ku Klux Klan"—both of which feature Ishelle Cole's powerful singing—show that this band could blow the Selecter away. Despite occasional weak moments, *Invasion!* is a work of authority and authenticity. (Rave is distributed by RAS Records, P.O. Box 40804, Washington, D.C. 20016.)

WRAP YOUR ARMS AROUND ME
Agnetha Fältskog
Polydor

By Christopher Hill

In thinking about ABBA, it's important to release all impressions you may have of ABBA's homeland as the California of Europe. In fact, Sweden is one of Western Civilization's sleepier backwaters. The cultural spasms, quirks and obsessions that have pop as their end product in Britain and the States are not comprehended there, for all that sheer sound—when sufficiently deracinated—is loved. After the basic ABBA formula was arrived at, none but the most inescapably monstrous of musical trends, i.e. disco, ever penetrated their sound. Last year, ABBA singer Frida Lyngstad, aided by Phil Collins' incisive production, managed to challenge and extend her talent on a solo album without forcing it into impossible efforts. She was luckier—and cannier, one must suppose—than her partner, Agnetha Fältskog. Agnetha's new album, *Wrap Your Arms Around Me*, despite some pleasant moments, not only fails to find any new revelation in her talent, but isn't even as interesting as an ABBA album.

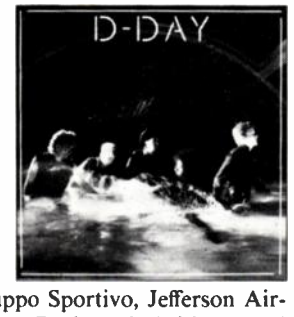
Neither the material nor the sound of this record force Agnetha to tap anything new in her range of expression. Producer Mike Chapman has previously demonstrated a facility with pop production for acts ranging from the Sweet to Blondie, but here he unaccountably opts for leaving all instrumentation as a thin, tentative background to a singer whose voice has always depended crucially on context. Frida and Agnetha take their styles from their setting; Phil Collins understood this, and actively created an environment around Frida. Chapman doesn't, and so Agnetha is left to flounder, coming up with hollow, fourth-hand impressions of American show tunes in "To Love" and rote paeans to some Scandinavian notion of tropical high-life in "The Heat Is On."

There are moments when you almost feel as if some indication of a distinct taste is about to cohere. Agnetha seems to like black pop—"Wrap Your Arms Around Me," "Stay" and "Mr. Persuasion" are nods to Barry White, Gamble-Huff and Motown respectively. "Mr. Persuasion" is actually kind of catchy, though so insubstantial it feels as if it might just drift off the vinyl at any moment.

There is evidence on *Wrap Your Arms Around Me* of better things than we get to hear. That's too bad, since neither the artist nor the producer has been willing to go after those qualities in Agnetha Fältskog's talent that might have made this album anything more than ordinary.

D-DAY
D-Day
A&M

By Jonathan Gregg



Occupying a musical territory loosely delineated by Gruppo Sportivo, Jefferson Airplane and Burt Bacharach (with a good deal less humor, provocativeness and melody, respectively), this Texas quintet's eponymous debut is cool, sleek and rather more correct than inspired.

De Lewellen is a well trained vocalist of considerable power, but though her technique is impressive, it is rarely exciting. Delivered with more verve than reserve, her strong, uniform vibrato instead tends to add to the overall polish, which is often heavier than the material. To wit, "More Than That," one of the album's best tracks, which owes its propulsive mood to the melodic fills of the arrangement rather than to the melody of the song itself. Furthermore, the bland lyrics never manage to inform the music with any character or emotion.

Still, D-Day may have a promising songwriter in bassist Jim Keller, who provides "More Than That" and "Secret Worlds," and Lewellen's undeniable pipes make "Desperation" the highlight of side one, along with the breezy "Dance It Off." Of the musicians, only keyboardist Glover Gill plays with any distinction, making the addition of horns on several cuts a most welcome one. Hardly to blame for overproducing, Bob Sargeant (English Beat, Haircut 100) has done the best one could hope for with a band whose potential is not only not fully realized, but not yet even fully apparent.

NO TIME LIKE NOW
Translator
415/Columbia

By Wayne King

Translator, a California quartet whose vibrant debut last year, *Heartbeats and Triggers*, successfully straddled their dipolar geographical/stylistic bases of Los Angeles and San Francisco, has fallen short of the breakthrough promised by that record's brightest moments. Where the first album walked a fine line balancing the broad rock outlines of the best Frisco and Los Angeles music (respectively, brooding, political, eclectic and bright, airy, seamless), *No Time Like Now* struggles and stumbles, tripped up by its own earnestness and self-importance.

The link which connected *Heartbeats*' varied mix of sounds and tempos and feelings was a sense of freedom, of an abandon which rammed home its most intelligent and impassioned points. Almost every song on *No Time Like Now* is just too *considered*, too fully aware of its high purpose. Consequently, the somber "I Hear You Follow" becomes somnolent, a latter day Moody Blues dirge. Worst offenders in this

category: "About The Truth" and "Break Down Barriers," both complete with melodramatic hushed vocals, and the latter even featuring corny '50s-ish saxophone.

The frustration of hearing the band's best instincts get the better of them is only heightened by the presence of songs (notably "No Time Like Now" and "Everything Is Falling") whose simple pleasures come from snug-fitting ideas that aren't shoehorned in. Even "L.A., L.A.," a virtual throwaway, stands out by virtue of its sheer rejoicing; singer/head songwriter Steve Barton shifts his Adam's apple into high gear for the double-time bridge, and then explodes into the last verse. Yet such moments, unfortunately, are simply not experienced often enough. The talents of Barton, guitarist/vocalist Robert Darlington, bassist Larry Dekker and drummer David Scheff are still charming, almost seductive in their proficiency and diversity. But the songs refuse to stand still long enough for us to grasp their intended meaning.

So simple, and yet so hard. Creating transcendent rock is both child's play and an excruciating, demanding discipline, and achieving a balance is something few come close to. If *No Time Like Now* disappoints deeply, it's only because Translator still show the promise of reaching the lofty goals which, for now, obscure their way.

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GOOD FOR YOUR SOUL
Oingo Boingo
A&M

By Nick Burton

For sheer energy and musical muscle, *Good For Your Soul* is Oingo Boingo's most successful offering thus far. Songwriter/vocalist Danny Elfman makes good use of his eccentric musical influences here (which range from African and funk rhythms to hard rock), giving the band a more clearly defined sound focussed on Steve Bartek's whip-crack guitar playing and Boingo's previously under-used horn section.

But despite Elfman and producer Bob Margouleff's best intentions, *Good For Your Soul* still only hints at what this band is really capable of. The hyper "Who Do You Want To Be," "No Spill Blood" (featuring lyrics inspired by the film *Island of Lost Souls*), and the brief but excellent African beat rave-up of "Cry of the Vatos" are the most satisfyingly frenzied songs Elfman has ever delivered. But Elfman's more conventional tunes such as "Fill The Void," "Nothing Bad Ever Happens" and the title cut are nothing more than watered-down New Wave items that detract from the album's often overpowering attack.

Danny Elfman is more than just a clever musician (although his vocals leave a lot to be desired), and *Good For Your Soul* indicates he has better things in store for us in the future. One hopes he will be able to deliver an album's worth of solid material next time around, and settle on a more certain musical direction.

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SIXTEEN
Stacy Lattisaw
Cotillion

By Laura Fissinger

In an unfortunate way, *Sixteen* is a fitting title for Stacy Lattisaw's third album. Like lots of young women at that curious age, the record tries terribly hard to find a cheeky, winking ease with womanhood in general and carnal knowledge in particular. The ballads, such as the popular "Miracles," have an equally tough time with the issue of lifelong commitment; Lattisaw is straining for the vantage point of a woman ten years older. This isn't the first time in pop music that a kid with a beautiful voice has been denied lyrics that would allow for a gradual and healthy interpretive development.

Inside all this generic MOR soul it's hard to determine Lattisaw's fundamental capabilities. Certainly she's using more muscle and bravado than ever before, more push behind that urgent, androgynous sound. But her startling plain-spokenness only gets a shot in one cut, an uncomplicated mid-tempo story song called "Johey." Producer Narada Michael Walden may be able to write and choose songs for big girls like Angela Bofill, but Lattisaw needs someone to steer her toward more sweet tales like this one. Johey is a nice guy who's moving out of town, and Lattisaw knows she's not ready to go along, broken heart or not. "I'm so afraid of being left behind," she sings, packing the line with believable pain.

Sixteen's second single release, "What's So Hot 'Bout Bad Boys" has the beginnings of a terrific teen anthem. Lattisaw and guest Kathy Sledge crow and chortle at the notion that jerks make good boyfriends, that cool is the key to hot. It *would* be a teen anthem, if the words were as flip and easy as the music, and less obviously written by a grown man. Contrasting Sledge with Lattisaw also shows up the latter's lack of interpretive distinctiveness. A few more years and some songs worth singing could make quite a bit of difference.

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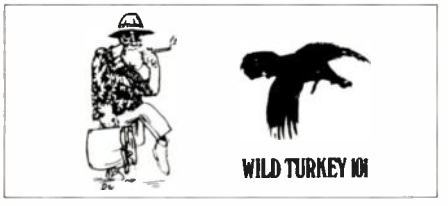

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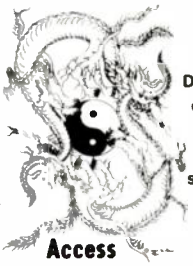

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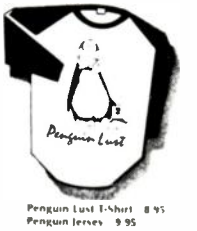

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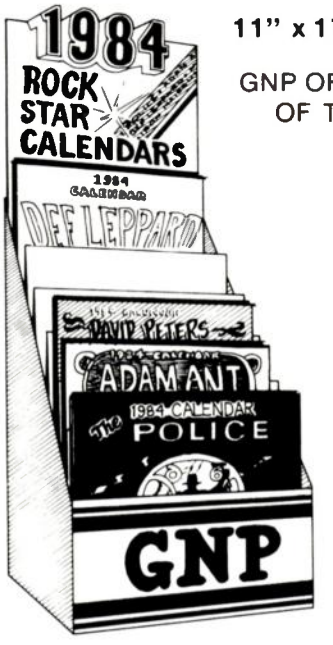

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THE LONESOME DEATH OF FLORENCE THOMPSON

DAVE MARSH

Florence Thompson was 32 years old in 1936, a widowed mother of six children, living in a migrant farmworkers camp in San Luis Obispo County, California. The Thompsons lived in a shabby tent, from which they ventured to pick peas for wages that added up to less than starvation, so poor that they'd sold the tires off their car for food. When the photographer Dorothea Lange, on assignment for the Farm Security Administration, came into the camp, Florence Thompson was feeding her children vegetables that had frozen in the fields and a few birds that the kids themselves had killed.

"I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her," Lange later wrote, "but I do remember she asked me no questions . . . There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it."

The photo that Lange made of Florence Thompson's haunted face, wearing a cloak of weariness and worry that offered no more protection from the camera lens than from the elements, staring with dignity while cuddling children with their faces averted, was entitled "Migrant Mother." Sometimes referred to as "The Madonna of the Depression," it became one of the most powerful and painful symbolic images of that era.

As the epitome of Dorothea Lange's penetrating, humane style, "Migrant Mother" was by far her most famous photo. Yet it doesn't tell us anything like the "truth" of Florence Thompson's life. In the other shots from the series, we see the environment in which it was taken, the pure squalor and filth of the camp, the full shabbiness of the lean-to tent, the utter lack of anything as tidy and green as the camp depicted in John Ford's film version of *The Grapes of Wrath*. (The pictures are reproduced in *Photographs of a Lifetime* [Aperture, 1982], with a loving essay on Lange and her work by Robert Coles.)

That doesn't mean Lange's camera lied. She saw (or used) what was needed to make plain the dignity of the ravaged, not the fact of their misery. It's only today, when the reroutings of American streets and highways have made the poor and their pain invisible to us, that the mere facts of the matter become crucial. The real point is that we know almost nothing about how Florence Thompson felt that evening, or in the months and years afterwards when her face became famous.

We don't really expect to know, which is shameful. I've always felt that one of the secret strengths of rock 'n' roll was that it provided a voice for the forgotten and disenfranchised. In a way, Florence Thompson's face will serve for all the others. At least in its beginnings, rock was one of the few ways that poor people, country people, black people and Southerners had of making themselves visible in a country whose media increasingly depict it as solely urban, affluent, white and Northern. Rock's threat to spill the beans about such fictions is one reason why it remains so dangerous today in the minds of Albert Goldman, James Watt and their ilk.

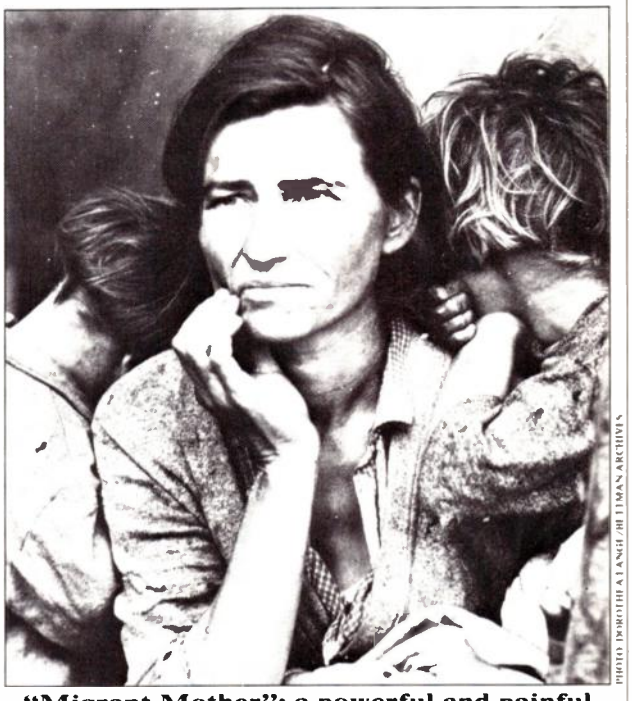

PHOTO: DOROTHEA LANGE/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS/FSA ARCHIVES

"Migrant Mother": a powerful and painful symbol of the Depression

Yet you can stare for long into the face of Frances Thompson without encountering a suggestion of the abandon and recklessness of rock. That surely doesn't mean that there was no music to tell her story. Although sometimes the world seems to think it British, rock grew from a tradition of American music which had something special to say for "Migrant Mothers" and their ilk: bluegrass, gospel music, all sorts of blues. And in these days of renewed Depression, I have found—often to my surprise—that these forms speak as eloquently as rock. As history unravels, this is becoming more the case.

So when the news of Florence Thompson's death in early September came to me, I immediately turned to the music of the Stanley Bros., to my mind the finest bluegrass singers, and to their greatest song, "Rank Strangers," which seemed to say everything necessary about such a life, and its consequences, and the consequences the rest of us might face for not paying more attention. "Rank Strangers" is about the scariest song I know, more chilling than the blues of "Voodoo Chile" or the cold-blooded "Nebraska" or even Dylan's "Percy's Song." It shares with those stark numbers a sense of doom that is not so much immediate as eternal—constant not as a possibility but as a promise.

The Stanleys' songs are filled with death and imprisonment, like the Scotch-Irish ballads from which they derive. But "Rank Strangers" takes what's scary about such tunes into a new dimension, akin to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* more than "Matty Groves." Carter Stanley sings in accents so stately it's hard to believe the song and the performance were created after World War II. But the concept—desolation more complete than that surrounding the Thompson's labor camp—is as contemporary as Belsen, Nagasaki or Palestinian refugee camps.

I wandered again to my home in the mountains
Where in youth's early dawn I was happy and free
I looked for my friends but I never could find 'em
I found they were all rank strangers to me.

Florence Thompson may not have known those lines, but she would surely have understood each syllable of the song. Until just before her death, she lived not in luxury but in a trailer park. So does America honor genius and beauty. ○

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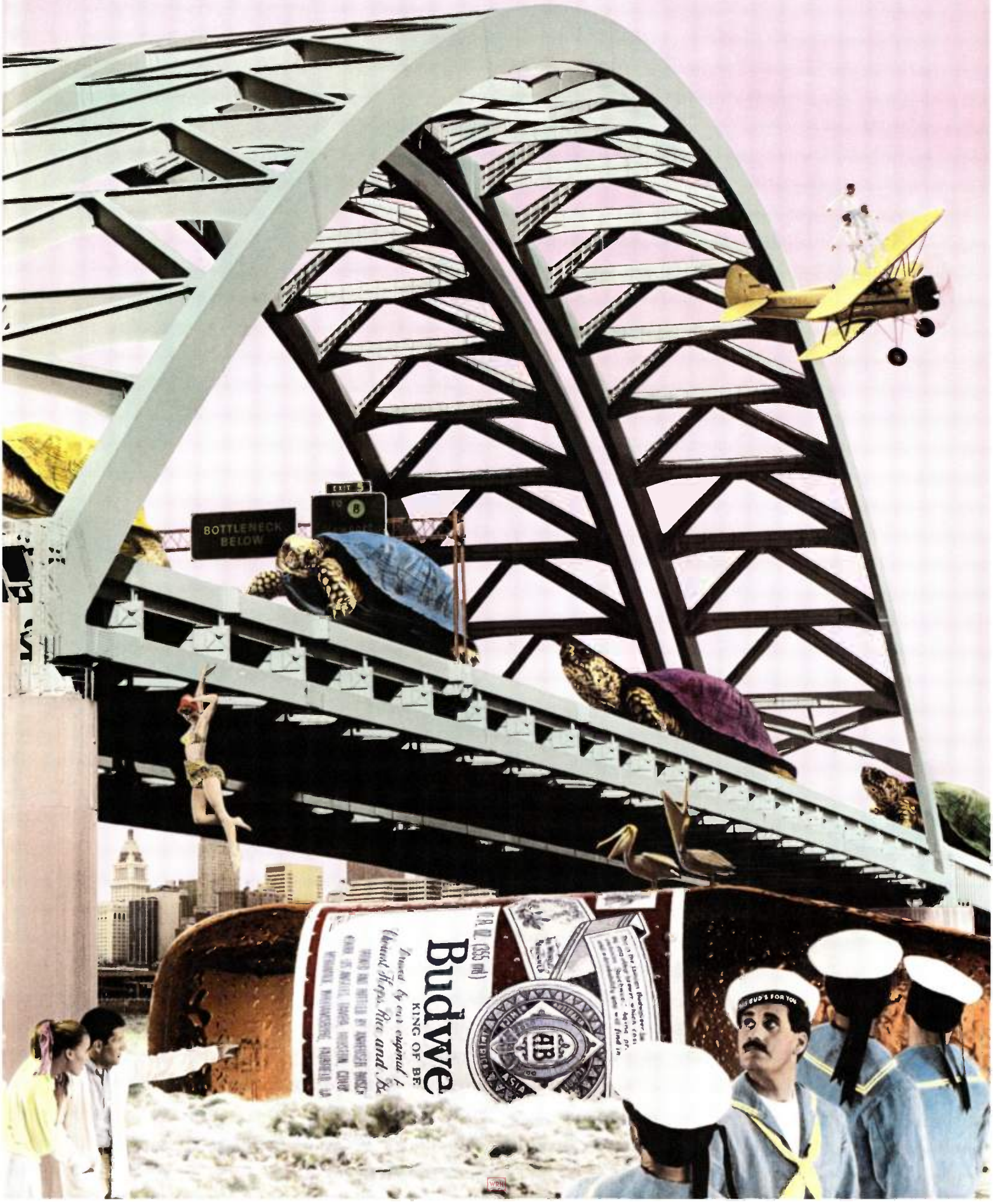

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