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FAMILY

LOU REED CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

THE DILLARDS

ASLEEP at the WHEEL

FAMILY

IT'S ONLY A MOVIE

FAREWELL ALBUM RELEASED SEPTEMBER 7

SINGLE 'SWEET DESIREE' OUT NOW

RAFT

Rob Townsend

Roger Chapman

Jim King

This Article Is Dedicated To Ten Musicians Who Have Given Us Some Marvellous Music And They Shall Be Remembered As Family

Ric Grech

John Weider

John Wetton

Poli Palmer

Jim Creggan

Charlie Whitney

Tony Ashton

How do you start to write about Family? It's a bit like trying to explain the finer points of cricket to a Japanese dancer—you know what you want to say, but how do you actually put the words together. Just what the hell does constitute a sweet late cut? So in the worst traditions of waffling I'll just tell you what my reasons are for taking twelve pages of ZigZag to do something on them. Firstly they embody a large hunk of my musical heritage. And what I mean by that is that I have memories of seeing them that are as clear and as strong as an electric shock. And tracks from their albums, and singles have in many ways become the past. And in addition to that, they have reflected many of the musical/showbusiness styles of the period; yet rarely have they let an influence force their music-making into crude mimicry.

From the opening bars of 'The Chase' (remember that half frantic keening) until the last number on 'It's Only A Movie', 'Checkout' they have made six albums of incomparable musical quality. They have made music that is musical without ever being predictable or facile; music that's complex but not confused and most important of all they have, to my mind, never let their ambition breed self-indulgence. And that's just the music! What about some of Roger Chapman's words? I'll just quote a few lines. They speak for themselves.

A shadow of the evening
Your baby at your side
A sadness as within you
Your eyes refuse to hide
You lay beside my body
And you love until you cry

Since I've been arguing that they're important because they are interesting at a fossil level and because they made some excellent music, I have to emphasise the importance in both a musical context and an historical one of Roger Chapman's voice. I personally think that of the five great voices that came out of sixties music in Britain—Cocker, Van Morrison, Stewart, Paul Rodgers, and Chapman—Roger Chapman's voice is the best. Great singing is not a matter of attaining pitch, it's a matter of using the voice's tone qualities, and phrasing to add depth and extra rhythmic firmness to a song—and that Chapman does to perfection. Of how many singers can you say, 'The song wouldn't be different without him singing,' and I reckon it's bloody nearly all of them. They simply don't use the voice to contribute any musical ingredient—their crutch probably looks inviting, but they don't sing.

The members of Family also happen to be very pleasant blokes. I did interviews with Roger Chapman (who is, with startling originality, referred to as RC in the text) and Charlie Whitney (CW), and I never once got an answer that I felt avoided the issue or I knew to be untrue, and that honesty is a very rare thing in this crazy business of image maintenance, and ego preservation.

Finally I have to say that the real reason—although I didn't know it at the time—why this is so long is that they are splitting up, and it's just a satisfying way to say thank you. So put on the first side of 'Fearless' and salute a bloody great bunch of musicians.

Connor with help from Al Clark/photos by kind permission of the Rob Townsend collection.

Normans

Bands that spend a lot of time together often tend to build up masses of verbal shorthand, that gets refined over years of use into an almost unique language. Family are no exception, and their most famous word is Norman. Typical usage extends from general disapprobation of an activity or person, to more recondite examples, such as refusing an invitation to go out to a club with the disclaimer, 'No, my name's Norman'. We asked for an explanation.

RC: Oh Lord. We were on a gig somewhere, up in Doncaster—one of those places off the A1 I think. And we left there and we were pretty hungry; and there was absolutely nothing open, only transport caffs, and we stopped at this little place that was just like a wooden shack. So we went in and we weren't allowed to play in the games section because we weren't members—it was called Normans, and the gaffer was called Norman. Actually, the whole thing was down to Willy Weider—because when the waiter brought the first order of food, Will goes 'Yeah, that's mine,' and when we'd all finished, Poli realised that he hadn't got anything, and it rapidly became obvious that Will had eaten both his own and Pol's, and ever since then, to behave in a similar manner, has been known as doing a Norman. But it developed into 'a cup of Normans' meaning tea. The tea there was so bad, that the name stuck—the whole place was really grotty, so that now if someone really bugs you he becomes a right Norman.

Comings And Goings

Family have an engagingly unique way of recruiting new members, and a disarmingly straightforward attitude to departing members. The typical procedure for adding a new member goes something like this; find someone who is a friend, take him out for a few beers, and see how he handles an evening's drinking and cavorting, make sure that, as a musician, he is sufficiently strong and individual that he is going to add to the music [rather than most bands' approach which thrives on finding someone who is innocuous enough to fit in with whatever the other members want], and then ask him to join and treat him as an equal. When someone wants to leave, you try to understand his motivation, and wish him all the best, and like with Ken Whetton, you have him back on stage, as Family did at Alexandra Palace. A refreshing and unusual approach.

ZZ: Jim King left in October 1969. How did that happen?
RC: I've only seen him once on the last couple of years, but Charlie saw him on the train coming down from Leicester. He was with his folks heading down to spend a few days in the south. He's not been working much at all. I think he's been ill, but he's coming out of it now. He was great—I hate to say it, but he was doing it before we'd ever thought of it. That was it really—but so was his head, you just couldn't catch up with him at all, that's really why he split.
ZZ: You offered him back his job, didn't you?
RC: No. No, it would never have worked. It's sad really because such a lot of talent went to waste, but his brain stopped ticking over—I think he saw too many bad things, it was as though he had acid in him all the time. He had a down on things all the time; this was shit and that was shit, but in the meantime he still wanted to do it even though he thought it was bad. And he couldn't make up his mind. He was mentally fighting himself all the time; and yet I suppose that's why he played such amazing stuff.
ZZ: Why did Ric leave?
RC: Because he wanted to join Blind Faith—easy as that. Clapton on one hand, Winwood on the other, and Baker at the back. What a temptation. And he couldn't resist it. It was like playing with his musical heroes. And those guys were. Steve had been his favourite since Spencer Davis, but I suppose he's a favourite with most people.

Family #2 posing in front of typical psychedilic window

Writing (And Singing) Words

ZZ: Did you start writing lyrics before you started to work with Charlie?
RC: Yeah, a bit, but it was a different generation of lyrics, 'Baby, That's Alright'—very different.
ZZ: Why do some of your lyrics rhyme and some don't?
RC: I've no idea—just that it seems to make sense at the time. When you start to put it down you pursue a train of thought and just ramble on.
ZZ: Do you work in the Bernie Taupin tradition of jotting down a lyric and handing it to Charlie to see if he can write anything?
RC: That has been done sure, and it happens the other way too. Charlie has a sequence, and I'll work on the words, or we may do bits and pieces at various times.
ZZ: Is there any special reason why the words that are printed on the sleeve often seem to bear only the most tenuous relationship to what you sing?
RC: I wasn't aware that they did differ all that much. I can remember a track on the live side where I forgot the words and sang the same verse all the way through.
ZZ: You take the words down off the rough mix, don't you?
RC: Yes I do, but sometimes I improvise a bit and forget to change the words that we send off to the publisher, and the other thing is that coming from me they pass through about four of five different pairs of hands, before they finish up on the album, so anything could happen, and very often bloody does.
ZZ: Yes indeed. For some bizarre reason one of the songs on 'Family Entertainment' has quotation marks, most odd.
RC: That was probably us throwing moodies in there, so that we can get people like you wondering why we've done it.
ZZ: A lot of your images seem to deal with landscapes, and weather.
RC: Sure, I like working with those images. Don't ask me why. 'Strange Band' is a lyric that I feel very pleased with. It's not about anything—just this desert, strange people and strange things happening—but in a very lonely way, a very desolate way.
ZZ: I think that three of your most accomplished lyrics recently have been 'Spanish Tide', 'Burning Bridges' and 'Coronation'. Were they written beforehand perhaps, because they have an extraordinary unity and coherence.
RC: 'Coronation' started off as ramblings, and some of that—a couple of verses—was done before, by getting into a certain mood all based around one chord. I can't really play guitar, but I work on chords and they either hit me or they don't, and I got into a Staple Singers kind of thing, with this seventh added on, and the mood of it just set me off. But 'Spanish Tide' was a very bitty thing, Charlie had two or three lines, and probably Ken shoved a few in, and when I got them they seemed maybe a bit too lopsided and I tried to bridge it, but it still was a bit scrappy. 'Coronation' started off from the flat that I lived in, and I was generally in a bit of a blue mood, and those little things build into a ramble and then I can construct them to fit around a sequence.
ZZ: When you write lyrics, do you think of what would sound good or what's got style on its own?
RC: I don't consciously think of singing them but since I'm a singer, I'm pretty sure that anything I write will feel comfortable when I come to sing it. I've never had to rewrite, to make it sing better. I'm writing with my own phrasing in mind anyway.
ZZ: Are there any lyrics that you like especially?
RC: Hendrix—I really like his words. There's a line of his, 'Well I stand up next to a mountain/And I chop it down with the edge of my hand'—that's so strong, and there's another one about hippies.
ZZ: 'If Six Was Nine'.
RC: Yeah, what a fantastic song. And what he had is what music is all about, putting allusions into music. All the other people are straightforward choices—The Beatles, Dylan. I love Dylan's humour, if that's what it is. Leiber and Stoller—the best working class lyrics. Do you know a song called 'Three Cool Cats'? It's beautiful and very simple—three cool cats met three cool chicks walking down the street, eating a packet of potato crisps—and that kind of thing sets me up with an image that I can relate to.
ZZ: Apart from the obvious ones, can you think of any unpardonably bad words?
RC: Oh, quite a few. I ain't into Marc Bolan's lyrics—I think he's unpardonably bad. He's got a lot of bottle though, because I'm sure that he thinks they're unpardonably bad. He isn't stupid enough to write lyrics like that and think they're any good.

Rob Townsend and Tony Gourvish at Montreux Festival

Managers

Tony Gourvish, Family's manager—and almost the sixth member of the group, is a good snooker player and a competitive, if erratic golfer. On one occasion on the golf course, after his playing partner—on whom his hopes of victory rested—had hit a particularly bad shot, he turned to him and said, 'I don't want to undermine your confidence, but I want to change partners'. He had replaced John Gilbert as the band's manager.

ZZ: How did Tony become your manager?
RC: Well actually he was the housecleaner. Tony came down with us from Leicester because he'd been friends with us up there. We were probably a bad influence on him because we were going down to London and we said to him that he could come down with us if he looked after the house—he'd have his own room, but that was his job, and after a couple of months he was coming on the road and helping us with the kit, and then he started to do work for Gilbert, who was then our manager, and he then became Gilbert's personal assistant, and it got to the point where we wanted to give Gilbert the elbow, and Tony seemed the logical thing. He was a guy that we could trust. Thinking strictly in managerial terms he probably wasn't the best we could do, but as far as someone we could work with, and could trust, it was him and he knew a lot about the business by then, and that's what we wanted more than anything—trust, there was so little of it then.
ZZ: What happened when you gave Gilbert the push?
RC: Oh we went through it all. The glossy manager bit trying to sue us for £80,000, and when it finished up I think he owed us two grand. All the usually silly things. It was a big blow to his ego, being blown out by these snotty little Leicester louts. He couldn't believe it.

Bandstand

ZZ: One of the best tunes on 'Bandstand' is 'Coronation' and it's credited to Whitney/Chapman/Whetton. Can you tell me what everybody did?
CW: Ken wrote section two. I wrote the opening part and we got together to write section three, and Roger wrote the words. I find it a lot smoother, more back to 'Entertainment', and 'Doll's House', but the biggest thing was that I think we started to get the mixing together.
ZZ: Where did you get that photo that adorns 'Bandstand', where you all look as though you're waiting in a hospital for news of a good friend's brain transplant?
CW: It was taken at Olympic studios, and there was a lot of hassle because of that, because everyone looked so pissed off.
ZZ: Was the character in 'Burlesque' another dapper type?
RC: I don't think so. I only did half the lyrics on that one and tidied up the rest. That was basically Charlie's idea—the guy wears spats. Rita and Greta were a couple of old rags that Charlie used to get together with at the Burlesque in Leicester.
ZZ: There's a couple of songs on 'Bandstand' about very beautiful and superior women—I'm thinking of 'Broken Nose' and 'Glove'. Do you have a fascination with those sort of women?
RC: There's a difference—in one song he pulls, and in the other he gets a punch in the nose. One he scores and one he don't.
ZZ: A very profound difference.
RC: 'Glove' is really about nervousness. He sees his chance and wonders whether he can get it together, and the other is just a young lech, kind of sneering every time she walks by. You know you see them all the time on building sites yelling out.
ZZ: 'The day that I stopped loving you/ was the day you broke my nose' is a great couplet.

Experiments

Like most bands, Family have at some stage been tempted to try something different in the way of stage presentation, or at least constructing a 'show'. They didn't work for the reasons that Roger and Charlie enunciate.

ZZ: What was the idea behind the Festival Hall concert with jugglers and so on?

RC: It was our first big solo concert and I suppose that we just wanted to try something different. Instead of having a support on, we had this vaudeville thing in the first half. Some of it came off and some didn't. For a first go it was worth doing. It had a boozy feeling—people booed and people cheered—it was like a Mack Sennett film. And the solo spots pinpointed just what everyone in the band did, which we were glad to have done. A lot of people wanted us to do a tour with it, but half the fun was because it was just a once only thing.

ZZ: Now you also worked with The Will Spoor Mime Troupe?

RC: It was just a thing that we got into because Gilbert suggested it, so we gave it a try, but for me they just did mimes to what I would describe as levelled out backing tracks of a couple of our numbers, which on a musical level meant nothing, because that's not what our playing live was all about. It did more for them than it did for the band, we weren't creating at all. I wasn't even part of it—I think I played a bit of harp and that was all. You were just waiting for somebody's cue to come in—it was all very methodical. But we all thought it was quite interesting, but it just wasn't what we were into. We've got our own theatrics which actually stem from the music. I think that both those experiments showed us that we have to rely on our music to excite, rather than other things. But they weren't experiments really, because we couldn't stretch the music.

CW: It was a Giorgio Gomelsky thing. We were with the Paragon agency at the time and they were bringing these guys over from Holland and they asked if we'd do the back up for them. We played 'The Breeze' to the leader and he liked that, but they were very strange. Did you see them with all those giant phalluses? A lot of people thought that we were into that kind of thing, but it was a straight business thing. It was the same with drugs—everyone always thought that we took acid all the time, but we're much more of a working class band. Sometimes we'd go down to Middle Earth and they'd look at Roger and say, 'He's gotta be on acid...he must have taken five black bombers....'

Anyway And Old Songs New Songs

ZZ: Did you intend the whole of 'Anyway' to be a live album, even though one side was cut in the studio?

CW: We did the gig, and it would have meant reissuing old songs like 'Weaver's Answer' again. As it happened, side 1 of the actual record was nicely filled up by the new songs we had. What we should have done was to record 4 or 5 gigs because it could have been really good. Even though some things are good, it could all have been better.

ZZ: The Fairfield Halls, because just about every musician that I've ever talked to has commended the sound there.

CW: Yes, it has got an excellent sound, but it's a bit like the Festival Hall with all those seats, but the sound is very good. Maybe it's the size of the stage—which is marvellous to work on.

ZZ: Apart from 'Holding The Compass' which is announced as a new song, were all the other songs stuff that you hadn't been doing much before?

CW: They were all one-offs, which is why we should have recorded them on five different occasions, rather than just the first time.

ZZ: Did you pick that painting on the cover?

CW: Sure. Hamish and Gustav brought a book along, but we all thought it was great.

ZZ: Who's this Williamson, who co-wrote 'Strange Band'?

CW: Oh God, that's an oldie. He's an old Leicester friend of ours, more of a friend of Roger really, because he used to play with Roger years ago in 1958. He used to play guitar. At one time Roger used to stay with him when he went to Leicester.

ZZ: He isn't the guy in the song 'Lives and Ladies' is he?

CW: Yeah he is. He's not the salesman. Oh no, he is—you're right.

RC: A lot of that is different now, because no sooner had I written that than they all went to pieces. One left his missus, the other went in the nick.

ZZ: Norman's is about Norman's, right?

CW: Yes, do you want to hear the full story?

ZZ: Roger has told us all about it. Were you influenced by those Zappa records, 'Hot Rats' and 'Burnt Weenie Sandwich'?

CW: There used to be a guy in Town Records who really used to rave about those records, but I don't think that I was influenced that much by them. I heard them a lot, but I never owned them.

ZZ: How was that remarkable percussion effect on 'Anyway' achieved?

CW: It's like a set of vibes keys, every time you hit a drum, you get a different note. I think they're called something like a Boom-Boom, but they were in the studio and Poli, being a vibes player, also a drummer, he could well go to town.

ZZ: 'Part Of The Load' seems to suggest that life on the road is a necessary evil but pretty wearing.

CW: You'd best ask Roger that; what I tried to get was a stop-go effect, which I suppose you could describe as like being on the road.

RC: Well, that was done in an American motel. And over there it's just complete boredom, unless you're superstars, and you go through some very trying times on a long tour of America. It takes all your time just to hang on, and not to argue with people. After four or five weeks everybody gets a little moody, sitting in their rooms for a couple of days, and that was when I was going through one of those periods, trying to mentally pull yourself back. And the way to cope is to say that if you accept this gig, then you have to accept part of the load.

ZZ: Do you find that frustration element a productive starting point for writing?

RC: Sure. Anything like that where you get in a strong mental state—depression, boredom, anger—anything where your brain is not just simply ticking over can be a start.

ZZ: What did you think of 'Anyway'?

RC: I liked 'Compass' and 'Strange Band'. But the other two I've never got off on really. 'Good News, Bad News' had power and all that, but if I listen to it I have to fall back on the musical content, instead of taking it for what it is. If I can listen in that way it seems OK, but musically it isn't there. If I listen to those tracks now, I realise how good they could have been, but that's that couple of extra years experience speaking.

ZZ: Was there any special process of selection involved with 'Old Songs, New Songs'?

ZZ: We just wanted a well mixed selection of our songs, I suppose. There was a few things that we wanted to do. As I said earlier, if we'd had our way we would have gone in and mixed 'Family Entertainment' again—we'd do it now if we had the chance. So we got our hands on 'Don't Look Down' and 'Weaver's Answer' and 'Observations From A Hill' and redid them.

ZZ: Was anything re-recorded apart from the vocals on 'Observation From A Hill'?

CW: I put a couple of guitars on 'Don't Look Down'. There was also a new bass on 'Observations From A Hill' and a new guitar on 'Weaver's Answer'.

ZZ: Why was Ian Ralfini mentioned on the sleeve?

CW: He's been a good lad to us. I think we were the first band that Reprise had, and he became manager of the company just as we joined. They had one small room in Oxford Street at that time and he's always looked on us as his boys.

Other Musicians

Perhaps the commonest question ever put to musicians is the one that goes, 'What records are you listening to at the moment, and what other musicians have influenced you?' Maybe it is a common question because the answers are always interesting.

ZZ: You were the first to pioneer that abandoned style on stage. You seemed to take that Mick Jagger, Eric Burdon thing a stage further, and then all these guys like Cocker and Stewart came along and made it their trademark. Did that piss you off at all?

RC: Well I think I was the first, but you never like saying that, because it makes you look a bit mean.

ZZ: Do you feel abandon on stage?

RC: Christ yes. I know that I can get people off on it. I don't think that before I go on, but I've realised that fact because I know I'm pretty strong on stage, and I feel strong on stage; but it's like any musician, somebody gets into a lick, and it's like a big boot up the arse. You take off from it. In a way I'm only doing what people think that, say, a drummer does. A drummer might put in a nice phrase and everybody comes flying in, but from my point of view, I do it vocally. I've always thought of myself as a musician, even though I stood up on the stage and maybe people watch me more, but I always think of myself as part of the group and building with the other musicians, and taking off and interacting with the other guys. So I've never thought of myself as just standing on the stage being the singer.

ZZ: I saw you at the Rainbow when Beefheart was on, but you didn't say anything. Did you like him?

RC: Yes I did. It was the first time that I'd seen him and I really dug his band, but after about half an hour I'd had enough. He had great presence on the stage. The band with that really straight geezer and the geezer flying on with his guitar, and the crazy drummer and I liked that rhythmic thing they've got, but after half an hour I wanted to go and have a drink.

ZZ: What albums have you really enjoyed recently?

RC: I suppose the most recent has been J.J. Cale, after that I haven't listened to many sounds, because I've been so involved with the new album. But I'm always digging back to the blues—there's certain things that are always there—a bit of Miles. Things that I keep coming back to are 'Blonde On Blonde', 'Electric Ladyland', Muddy Waters—but I've got quite a few like that. There would have to be some Beatle albums in there. I was influenced totally by American stuff in the early days. Blues, rock'n'roll—I was a complete American music snob—wouldn't look at anything English. Then later there was that amazing spell of British music—Traffic, Hendrix, but there wasn't too much happening before that, except for The Beatles.

Rob Townsend's early group The Beatniks

ZZ: How about later American bands?

RC: A lot of the stuff that The Byrds did I like. And The Doors too. I didn't like everything that they did but I liked them because they were so strong, Morrison was really strong. The Dead I've only got into recently, after I saw them live at Wembley. I'd never liked what they'd done on record, but after I saw them I felt that now I knew what they'd all be talking about for the last five or six years. When I got there they were just starting up their last number of the first half, and they need like about an hour to get warmed up, and the second half was fantastic; but to get back to influences I think The Byrds most of all, I know they influenced Charlie a lot with McGuinn's twelve string. But as far as my influences, vocally, go it will always be people like Ray Charles or Jerry Lee Lewis who still blow me out.

ZZ: Your favourite guitarists in the NME poll were Clapton, Bo Diddley and...

CW: Gotta be Chuck Berry...

ZZ: Yes, it was. Yet you've never sought to emulate them in Family.

CW: Well I'd like to think that I do, but maybe I don't. They're really the musicians who have impressed me. But it's so difficult. I could name you fifty guitarists who are all brilliant.

Carol Osborn, press assistant at Warner-Reprise, married Rob Townsend, drummer with Family, on Saturday. They are pictured above at Kens[illegible] where the wedding took place.

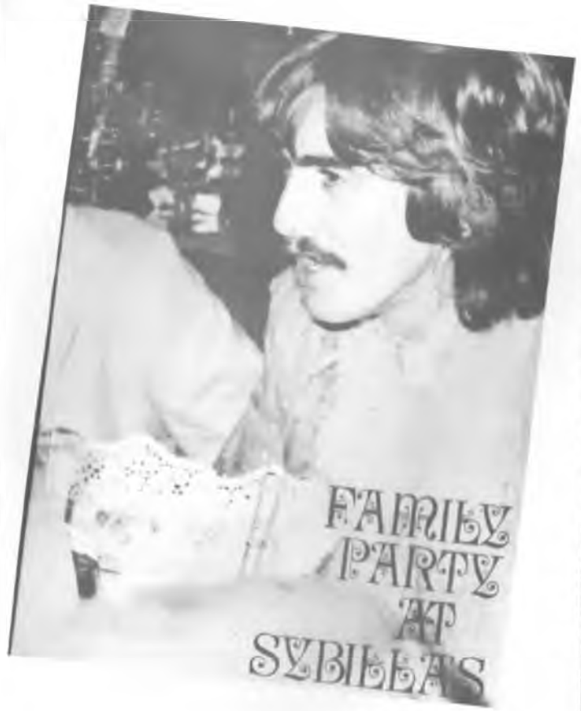
Music In A Dolls House

ZZ: What about Dave Mason's role as a producer?
CW: We'd met him when we did our first single, because he played on it. Now when we came to do 'Doll's House' Jimmy Miller was producing us, but he began to get involved with the Stones–'Beggar's Banquet'–and I think he and Dave got together and Dave decided that he would like to take over producing the album, so he did. He had lots of ideas. For example, 'Voyage', all those feedback violins were his idea–backward Mellotron. You must remember that style was the thing for that time. A lot of people say that the album was over-produced, and I agree that for 1973 it sounds over-produced, but for 1967, I think he was doing something that was valid for then.
ZZ: Were the 'Theme From' interludes his idea?
CW: No, that was our old manager's idea, Gilbert.
ZZ: Miller was credited with co-production on a couple of the numbers. Was that the extent of his contribution?
CW: More or less, he became involved again, in the sense that he was with us in the studio, when we did the mix. I think he mixed 'The Chase'.
ZZ: Was there a lot of difference between what you had played when you were The Roaring Sixties, and what you played when you became Family, at Kim Fowley's suggestion I think it was?
CW: That's right–it was his idea. The big difference was that we began to write. Up till then we'd take old blues things, and rearrange them. I'd always had the flash that I could write, but I could never get it out; once we'd started, it was like diarrhoea.
ZZ: Roger was credited as playing sax on the album. Did he do much?
CW: Not really. He never thought of himself as a sax player. His playing was very much a means to an end, because when the soul band vogue grew up–James Brown–it was nice to have two saxes, so we went along to Roger's building site and said to him, 'Do you want to join the band, but you've got to play the sax?' and he said OK. It wasn't a problem because Jim sang, and Ric sang, so there could be three voices, or Ric and two horns, or any mixture of that.
RC: It was on '3xTime' when we added some piano, and two honking out of tune saxes–well that's me.
ZZ: How did the combinations of styles evolve on '3xTime'?
CW: That was actually how it was written.
ZZ: Now, wasn't that album the first to be released in stereo only?
CW: No. I think there was a mono version, but it had to be pulled out because it was so bad. It kept jumping the grooves, so they withdrew it. There was some interesting things on the mono version, because in those days when you did the final overdubs to a song, since it was only four tracks you had to do your final overdubs--say a few bars of guitar–while they were actually mixing. So the guitar bits were different from mono to stereo, and some of it was much better on the mono mix. I think it was on 'The Chase'.
ZZ: Was 'The Chase' an attempt to compare relationships between men and women to a bloodsport?
RC: Not really. It was just a hard luck love story. A chick who does a naughty on the geezer. It's not a general picture, just that one type.
ZZ: 'Voyage' seems to suggest the outer extremes of tripdom.
RC: I know, but it never was intended to be like that. It was done when Charlie and I first started to write and I was going through a lot of changes, from working on a building site to being in a group, and a lot of it was random, so it may have seemed to be drug suggestive, but it wasn't.
ZZ: What about the concert that you did at that time?
CW: It was going to be a tour. Tim Hardin just couldn't do it. It's a real shame but he just couldn't do it. Apart from that tour which never happened, it was always things like Portsmouth Birdcage and a few gigs at all these little psychedelic clubs.
ZZ: Steve Miller was in the studio at the same time wasn't he?
CW: Yeah, but we didn't do much together. We'd go in and have a listen and they'd come in and listen to us, but that was it–we didn't know them very well. By the time that we came to do the second album, Glyn Johns had just finished doing...'Sailor' was it?
ZZ: Yes.
CW: Well he brought the acetate round here and played it, and there was that incredible instrumental at the beginning.
ZZ: Did you feel that people were maybe a little surprised when you did a song like 'Mellowing Grey', when your image had always been fairly violent?
CW: Well we never did 'Mellowing Grey' on stage, so the contrast wasn't as clear as you suggest. We'd have loved to have played it on stage, but we never did.
ZZ: Did Dave Mason 'persuade' you to do his song, 'Never Like This'?
CW: That again was a Gilbert thing. He suggested that we do one of Dave's songs. And Dave got it together. It ended up a bit like we were the session men to his song. We never got involved with it really.
ZZ: Whose idea was it for Ric to do the vocal on that?
CW: It isn't Ric.
ZZ: Really. I could have sworn it was.
CW: No that's Roger, and the high voice on 'Peace Of Mind' and '3xTime' was Jim King. Jim was a very good singer. When we did it live, Roger probably sang the whole thing, which is why you thought it was him.
ZZ: Was there any argument as to where people should go in the Doll's House on the cover?
CW: No. That was another Gilbert trip. We were really naive you know. If he said to me now that I was going to dress up in a red pyjama suit with a bowler I'd tell him to get lost, but then we were five greenies down from Leicester, so we said, 'Sure Mr Gilbert'.
ZZ: Why up to 'Fearless' are you called John Whitney?
CW: My nickname has gradually taken me over. It's an old Leicester nickname since I was about twelve. Only my parents call me John now.
ZZ: Whose idea was the metronome on 'The Breeze'?
CW: Dave Mason's, but it wasn't a metronome–it was a drumstick on the side of a snaredrum.
ZZ: Were you aware of the sophistication in the music?
CW: Not really. We just went in and did it.

Down To London

After years of working around Leicester and points north, Family arrived in London to break into the big time. Contrary to the impression that may be gained from the music that was made during the period, the actual musicians were the only novel element around. The business side was still run by sharp agents, publishers and promoters, although there were some notable exceptions. To be successful still meant drinking in traditional music bizz haunts, clinching deals in cigar-smoke infested offices, and paying severe obeisance to the gods of Tin Pan Alley. And that world was in London.

ZZ: As the Farinas, what sort of material were you playing?
RC: When I joined it became two saxes, lead, bass and drums. We did blues, sort of Ray Charles material and then we grew into doing soul. We played mainly in colleges and clubs which we booked ourselves, and we had an agent in Manchester. We worked for about £30 a night. But as soon as we got this manager he was getting us £60 to £70 a night.
ZZ: What was it like to come to London? Was it a big upheaval?
RC: Well it didn't happen overnight, because we had started to work down here a bit more, and by that time we had a new manager–John Gilbert–and we were all ready to do our album. We'd done a couple of gigs at the UFO at the Roundhouse, after the one in Tottenham Court Road closed, and we got very good reviews. Now, also at that time we'd just started to write our own material–we would still do a couple of blues songs–but the change in our stuff happened at the same time that



Spot the celebrities

we started to work down here more.
ZZ: You must have recorded the single on Liberty at about this time.
CW: We were still living in Leicester and we were coming down to work with Jimmy Miller. Roger and I had written a couple of things, nothing really serious, just silly things. We came up with one side, and the other was just a straight blues. It was Family and Traffic on that record, because all members of both bands played. It was done at Olympic on four track. The titles were 'Scene Through The Eye Of A Lens' and the other was called 'Gypsy Woman'.
RC: Yes. It's funny that you should mention it, because we were in the studio a few weeks ago, and George Ckiantz, our engineer, was bringing the tapes up from downstairs, and he'd found it downstairs, and we had a listen to it. It wasn't bad at all.

inside london life

ZZ: But you didn't get carried away by being in London?
RC: No, we were very staid in them days. We'd been on the road for some time, and we'd been fairly popular from Newcastle down to Leicester, so in a sense we'd been through most of it–it was more a business decision to come down–to get contracts and so on.

Stars Of Groupie

It was a natural result of the underground scene into which Family found themselves pitched, that documentation of some description would not be long in arriving, and one of its first manifestations was the book 'Groupie' by Jenny Fabian. It is a grippingly frightful account of the musicians that the author seduced/had an affair with, or in her own inimitably awful prose 'had a scene with'. Writing with all the grace of a mutant elephant, Miss Fabian details her relationships with Syd Barrett of the Pink Floyd, Jeff Dexter, someone in the Fugs, members of The Nice, and of course, Family, cunningly called Relation Most of her encounters with the band take place in their London house and the two members of the band who figure prominently are Ric Grech, and Tony Gourvish, then their personal manager, and now their fully fledged manager.

ZZ: I think that we are getting to the stage where we are going to have to talk about 'Groupie'. Her picture of the house.....
RC: That was a good house. In Lots Road in Chelsea it was. Gilbert lived around there so it was OK by us. London was just London–we didn't know the difference between one bit and the other. It was a big house and we just lived in it, it wasn't like we came down to London and hired a house so that we could turn it into a house like what was in the book, although I suppose that it might have turned into that when we started to meet some people and started socialising a bit. It was bloody funny because everybody had a little number in their own rooms.
ZZ: Was it an accurate picture of Ric and Tony?
RC: Well I don't know about their relationships with Jenny. I think it was exaggerated a bit, but from the flashes that I got it seemed fairly accurate. Tony used to have this room–tiny–with a huge mattress that filled the room. When you entered you stepped straight onto the mattress, and he had a sink hanging over the end. Of course, he had the tele, so everyone used to gather in there.
ZZ: I wasn't thinking so much about his personal life but Tony emerges as a fairly amusing, high speed kind of bloke, racing around like crazy.
RC: I remember that Jenny used to ring up on a Sunday afternoon and old Tony would be a bit out of it, and she'd ask if she could come over and he'd go, 'Yes if you bring me some drugs–if you haven't got any drugs, don't come over.' But I think she enjoyed it, or at least they knew where they stood towards each other.
ZZ: She wasn't a real groupie though, was she?
RC: No. She was just a part of that whole underground scene–but she certainly wasn't what I call a groupie.

Fearless

ZZ: Who did the arrangements on the album?
CW: Roger Ball from the Average White Band.
ZZ: Didn't they get a bit pissed off at playing some of it—like that brass band stuff on 'Sat'dy Barfly'?
CW: That wasn't them on that track. It was just some guy who played the tuba. They played on 'Take Your Partners' and 'Save Some For Thee'.
ZZ: Was the co-production credit on 'Fearless' because of George Ckiantz' growing involvement?
CW: His involvement has been pretty much the same all along, but he does a good job, and we just thought that it would be a nice one to give him the acknowledgement.
ZZ: Why does John Weider get credited with 'guitars, vocals, contracts and keyboards'?
CW: When he joined he had so many contracts, he had a law suit going on with his old band and God knows what else about this and that, so it was just a joke about all the legal stuff he was going through at the time.
ZZ: The cover by John Kosh is amazing, as is his work on 'Bandstand'. Have they ever won any awards?
CW: I think they both won awards. A lot of people complained at the time that it was wasteful, but we liked it, and it all came out of our money. The American one was better because it was on better paper and the design was printed more accurately. There was a lot of fuss. He went bananas because the design on the edge didn't line up, he really went mad.
ZZ: It seems to me that your last two albums ('Fearless' and 'Bandstand') were in a way, the culmination of what I've always regarded as Family's style, which uses a very broken structure to the songs, and employs a lot of pauses in the instrumental notes to give it that 'fractured' feel. Do you think I'm talking rot, or have you been aware of the development of that style?
CW: I'm not really aware of it. I don't consciously think of two verses here, middle and an end—I don't see things as that, I see them in sections. What worried me about the time of 'Song For Me' and 'Anyway' was that there was a lot of moods but there was nothing anchoring it. So I've tried to get some basic rhythmic thing anchoring it and the top things can go through all their trips.
ZZ: You would also seem to be getting into sound effects judging from what I've heard of the new album.
CW: I've always been into that. Things that have really impressed me have been songs like 'Tomorrow Never Knows' and a couple of things that The Byrds did. (Maybe 'CTA 102' or 'The Lear Jet Song') If there's ever a chance to do that type of thing I'll be into it.
ZZ: Is 'Sat'dy Barfly' a dapper lad about Leicester?
RC: No, it's a dapper 1958 spade driving around Chicago, more than Leicester. I really dig all that Coasters stuff—their imagery. Finger popping stud with a big car. That thing about spats is that they're dapper, not now so much. Maybe it was Leicester because I remember the guys we used to knock about with—with mohair suits and a couple of chicks on the game.

Family #1 at Hyde Park. (Note the small P.A.)

Family Entertainment

ZZ: When you came to make 'Family Entertainment' you must have felt that you would do things differently having accomplished 'Music In A Doll's House'?
CW: Certainly we did. We hadn't known too much about making albums, and I suppose that the biggest feeling was that we had made all the songs in little blocks, and now we wanted to have a few blows—stretch out a bit. Another thing was that Gilbert had got Glyn Johns to engineer it, and he wasn't too keen on working with Dave Mason, which left us to work with Glyn on our own. Gilbert had pissed off to Rome to do a film or something. After we'd recorded it we went off to Scotland or somewhere, and when we got back, Gilbert came round to the house with the acetate, and we were meant to have done the mix! We just played it and he mixed it.
ZZ: Yet you didn't give him the elbow for some time after that.
CW: Wasn't for the want of trying.
ZZ: 'Second Generation Woman' seems very feeble to me.
CW: On reflection the backing track does seem a bit weak, but it was Ric's song and he was into his Dylan thing. It's very hard to say about these decisions. 'Observations' is my song and Jim King singing it is a joke—I think it's terrible. He was a good singer, but it was all wrong. That was a terrible mistake.
ZZ: 'Summer '67' is a great song, but it differs from all those songs that tried to evoke that mood by being almost Arabic rather than Indian.
CW: That's interesting what you say because the real reason that it wasn't Indian was because I'm not that good a sitar player to play it, so I used strings. But the idea came from a tape I'd heard of Ravi Shankar with the All India Orchestra which was unbelievable.
ZZ: What was Nicky Hopkins like?
CW: He's very good to work with. He'll walk into the studio and you'll play him the back track and he'll ask what key it's in, and he'll get a piece of paper and he'll go 'Right, A minor,' he'll get all the bars together, figure the whole thing out and he's away. It's frightening. To have that kind of ear. But actually Glyn brought him in—he really is fantastic. We didn't have to ask him to redo stuff, because he did exactly what we wanted straight away.
ZZ: Is that a mandolin, or a banjo on 'Dim'?
CW: A banjo, speeded up,—I played it.
ZZ: Is 'Processions' the only number that you've ever written without the collaboration of other guys?
CW: No. There's been a few. How that came to be put down solely to me I don't know. There are some songs that Roger wrote completely, where I would just put in a chord or something, and there'll be songs that I write, and he only writes a bit of lyric. But usually we just put it down as Whitney/Chapman.
ZZ: What's that 46 in 'Dim'?
RC: It's three doors away from 40, which was our house in Lots Road and the other lads were 46.
ZZ: It sounds like the 46th position from the A-Z of Spanking.
RC: Yes, it could well be that too. There was a bit of lechery down there. We were always in and out of the two houses.
CW: Christ yes. They used to run the electricity from our house to their house over the roofs.
RC: They used to have about three tents in the living room, didn't they?
ZZ: Was 'The Weaver's Answer' about anyone in particular?
RC: No it was a story, and I don't really understand how I got that together. I was working frantically, beating out my brains, to get it written out. And the next day we were going to Hull in the van, and I finished it during the journey. I never had to do any more work on it.

Family #1 in the halcyon days of kaftans.

The Break Up

Of all the recent splits, and partings that seem to have fallen on the business like a summer stormcloud, the news that Family were to break up came as the saddest, and yet as the most promising, because there can be no doubt, on the evidence of their last three albums, that the fierce streak of originality that has characterised all their music is still in full flow. What is sad, I suppose, is that they had to dismantle such a richly productive ensemble, because of the public's indifference; what is heartening is that the elements have not been lost.

ZZ: Do you plan to go back to the States this year?
RC: No, because we're going to split soon.
ZZ: What! You mean split up. That's terrible.
RC: Well we want to spread out a bit. We've been committed to it for so long—especially me and Charlie and Rob as well. All our committments have always lain in Family, and we feel we have to commit ourselves to ourselves a bit more. I wake up every day and I think 'What's Family going to do?'
ZZ: Do you think that if you'd been more successful, you might have got the space to relax a bit.
RC: I think we're in a bit of a lethargic state at the moment. We dig gigging together and we have some really nice gigs together, but Tony has got his production thing and Jim's got his things with Linda, and we've got Family which isn't working and the business senses it. The music is still there, but for four years, we've stayed the same, and haven't overcome the hassles whatever they are—not musical, but the other ones. We've always been six people, Tony Gourvish being the sixth, because he isn't like a ten percent manager, and in the business where groups are such a big business that is a very freaky situation. We've made ourselves a little bit of an island, and we aren't able to get into the other part of it. It's a bit like England is to Europe—there's this little stretch of water that keeps them apart.
ZZ: I think the old creative punch is still there.
RC: Oh sure. But we want to go to America. We don't want to go in style. We just want to go there and play, and we can't, which is stupid. We had the tour, and nobody to back us, and without that backing you can't afford to do it. It costs a lot of money—and that's the frustrating state we've been in for four years.
ZZ: But then again, if success comes too easily, it can have a disastrous effect, because a band like The Faces have dried up as far as I can tell, and that's because of the ease with which they make their music successful.
RC: But they're only playing to an image—I don't think they play on a musical level, and I think that they'd be the first to admit it. But we've always been determined to play good music.

A Song For Me

ZZ: I must say that 'A Song For Me' is Family's least interesting album? Was it because maybe you had a lot of problems producing it yourself?
CW: We were learning, and I think that we still are learning about sound and the techniques of recording. So I do think that album was thin for a lot of reasons; one, the mix is not too hot. Two, Will Weider as a bass player was a bit too far up the neck, and doesn't anchor it too well.
ZZ: Do you attribute some of the problems to Jim King being replaced by a totally different set of instruments—vibes and piano?
CW: It's really hard to say this without being too knocking, but that album was done as a three piece—Will Weider, Rob and me. Jim King did not play on any track. We put the back tracks down as a three piece, which is not a good idea anyway, and we'd come to do his overdubs and he was just getting worse and worse. He just could not get it together—no way. So in the end we just had to say 'OK Jim that's it'. And we got Poli in and he had to put his overdubs to our backtracks which is not too good. There's things on the album where we had flute on and it would obviously have been better if it had been soprano sax or a tenor. If the songs had been written with him in mind, or he'd have rehearsed with us, the songs wouldn't have turned out like that.
ZZ: Yes, on one track, Roger sounds as if you recorded him out on Richmond Common.
CW: 'Stop For The Traffic'.
ZZ: Right. That was another symptom of the troubles, I take it?
CW: I can't believe that track. I think it's terrible.
ZZ: Was Bradgate Bush set up so that you could get a piece of the action?
CW: Yes. We set that up with Tony when we split from John Gilbert.
ZZ: Is it a part of Leicester?
CW: Bradgate Park is in Leicester, and Shepherds Bush because Will Weider is from there. It could just have been called Shepherds Park.
ZZ: Can you say a bit about the dedications?
CW: They're all pretty odd. We know who they are, but I'm not sure if you'd be interested. It's all Leicester folklore. There's a guy who was a heavyweight boxer who knocked out Joe Erskine in the first round, so he was like the King of Leicester at the time. Len Glover was a Leicester winger, who was the local star at the time. Jenny is Jenny—the famous Jenny. There's a couple of queers who run a hotel in Plymouth. The Boss and his missus of the local snooker hall in Leicester, my mum and dad, just old friends and heroes.
ZZ: There are two little couplets on the cover of 'A Song For Me'. Do they have any significance?
RC: I used that later in 'Children'. At that stage, it was just like a bit of a poem.
ZZ: It seemed a bit odd at the time because most people would think that if a child came near you. you'd bite its head off.
RC: I like kids and it was jealousy as much as anything, because I often wish I was back there.
ZZ: Why did you do 'A Song For Me' as a long end piece, because you'd always managed without one before.
CW: We'd always played it live. Not that, but that song evolved from 'How Many More Years', a Howlin' Wolf number. We'd always played that live from Family 66 to then. It sort of evolved. There's a particular riff to 'How Many More Years' which we gradually changed, and Roger changed the lyrics, so it became the last blow number on a gig. I don't think that the recorded version worked too well.
ZZ: You don't seem to play banjo in a normal way, which I always think of being very percussive, almost bluegrassy.
CW: Well I can't play banjo that well. It's really a guitar banjo. You play it like a guitar and it sounds like a banjo—a trick really.
ZZ: Where does the title '93's OK J' come from?
CW: That's the name of the house where we lived, Willy and myself. 93 Oakley Street in Chelsea, which used to be known to us as OK Street.

American Traumas

Success for an artist can mean many different things—the opportunity to continue making music which is satisfying, getting that music appreciated by as wide an audience as possible, enjoying the leisure to forge new material, or at its crassest level, making lots of money.

And while by most of these standards, Family have been successful, it has been a Phyrric success because it has eluded them in the USA. Why, remains a mystery, for the band have everything that is needed to become widely appreciated in the States: tons of good material, an exciting stage act, and mystique. And the irony of it is that they probably will be successful after the Americans have lost the chance to enjoy them live. Still, it's their loss.

ZZ: The book ended with the band going off to America for that disastrous tour. Can you tell me what happened?
RC: Well, Ric split which created a few difficulties, but we were there for about eight weeks, and we had a few nice gigs; what really ruined it was the disaster on the first gig, because we got an elbow at the Fillmore. We had a row with Graham, and although he didn't actually go round putting the heavy word out about us, he was such a force in those days, that a lot of other promoters took their lead from him, and after the row, he raced down to the front and took all our publicity material down. And all the business people who had come to see us at that gig, who normally, if it had gone all right, would have helped us, got put off. I'm sure he didn't do it maliciously—he just ain't that sort of guy—he's hard, and a very good businessman, but he wouldn't do something like that. He isn't vindictive—just very hard.
ZZ: How did the row flare up?
RC: I was doing one of my numbers with the mike, and he'd just arrived at the side of the stage to see the last number and it came as a complete shock to him. It was like someone jumping on your back in a dark passage—even if it's a friend, you react, and it just blew his head off, and he raced down the corridor and started ripping posters down.
ZZ: How did it affect your subsequent tours?
RC: Not much I don't think. The tour that we did after that one, we did some dates for him and he would come up beforehand and hint that there wasn't to be any moving of the mike stand—which created a few problems for me, because it took me mind off singing, since I had to remember not to do it. And during the last tour with Elton John, he came up to me and asked me about it. He said, 'Every time I read about you I read that there's this thing going on between you and I,' and he begrudgingly added about the gig, 'Very good,' which was nice of him.
ZZ: Is it as important as everyone says to succeed over there?
RC: Yes, it's everything. But I don't know why we didn't take off. We were going to do a tour with Deep Purple recently, but we hardly got any support from the record company, so we had to pull it out. 'Bandstand' did quite well—about 180 thousand—and we were building up quite a good following—it wasn't huge, but it was there—DJs like us, probably because we haven't been big live over there, and they've heard a few tales about us, so that since they like the music and there's a bit of an aura it could have helped. But you have to go out on the road—especially a band like us. It's the only way to get through to the audience, it doesn't really matter what people in the business think of your records, you've got to give the audience something.

Friends Forever

Family radiate—and it is the corniest thing that you could ever read—a true Family feel, as I hope our photos and conversation reflect. The overriding impression that one gets from meeting and talking to them, and watching them in the dressing room after a gig, is of an extraordinary closeness between them all. And that feel must have accounted for something—although I don't know what—in the music. And although the band is to break up, it will still be there in the future.

ZZ: What's the tie-up between you and Linda Lewis?
RC: She was on Warners too and things weren't working out too well for her, and then Tony asked us if we'd mind if he managed Linda and we thought it would be a good thing for him to have a sphere outside of us, and we had known Jim before that, because he used to play with Poli, and Jim and Linda's relationship was there, and then Ken left, so Jim joined because he was a friend, and the whole thing seemed to have grown closer naturally, it just grew up. And she's also on our label, Raft.
ZZ: There seems to be this feel to a lot of what the band does—a real Family?
RC: Yes it's like what I said earlier—we're a little island stuck in the middle of this amazing business, which on balance has been a great thing—a terrific source of strength.

fallen knights and fallen ladies

The interview with Lou Reed was conducted in 1971 but is still of sufficient interest to be worth printing now. The article Fallen Knights and Fallen Ladies is reprinted from No One Waved Goodbye to be published in October by Spicebox Books. The book is an attempt to illuminate the self destruction that afflicts so many musicians and the article furnishes considerable insights into Reed's attitudes to music and musicians.

At the age when identity is a problem some people join rock and roll bands and perform for other people who share the same difficulties. The age difference between performer and beholder in rock is not large. But, unfortunately, those in the fourth tier assume those on stage know something they don't. Which is not true. It simply requires a very secure ego to allow yourself to be loved for what you do rather than what you are, and an even larger one to realize you are what you do. The singer has a soul but feels he isn't loved off stage. Or, perhaps worse, feels he shines only on stage and off is wilted, a shell as common as the garden gardenia. But we are all common as snowflakes, aren't we?

Brian Epstein built an empire but lived long enough to have a lot of time on his hands. Those who hate the nine-to-five regimen do not know the blessings that it holds. It masters the mind and protects it from itself. It soothes the ego. *This* is what I do. I have a family and I provide. When one has free time one tries to enjoy it, if only for its rarity. We are a race that needs to work. Brian Jones died for the lack of it and Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix from too much of the wrong kind.

I remember the early days of The Beatles well. I had recently been asked by the Tactical Police Force of the city

which housed my large eastern university to leave town well before graduation because of various clandestine operations I was alleged to have been involved in. In those days few people had long hair and those who did recognized each other as, at the very least, a good guy and one who smoked marijuana. And so I was lining up medical proof in order to evade the draft when along came the moptops, with their pictures in every window and their records on the jukebox where the local poets furrowed their brows and read to each other, where sophisticated elderly townies came to prey on callow youth and where I often went to drink alone to that week's lost anything. It was the world of Kant and Kierkegaard and metaphysical polemics that lasted well into the night and it was into this world that the Beatle music came, first as novelty and later as the style, the Spanish heeled boots, the banged haircuts, the accents (so delightful, cooed the girls to their Wellington-footed American counterparts), a style which was to proliferate and finally dominate the Sixties.

I had recently been introduced to drugs at this time by a mashed-in Negro whose features were in two sections (like a split-level house) named Jaw. Jaw gave me hepatitis immediately, which is pathetic and laughable at once, considering I wrote a famous amplified version of the experience as a song. Anyway, his bad blood certainly put an end to my abortive excursions and consequently tempered whatever enthusiasm I might have had for pop music at this time. The Beatles were innocent of the world and its wicked ways, I felt, while I no longer possessed this pristine view. I, after all, had had jaundice.

This other-worldly approach vanished however, and after my mind and my liver kept me from the Army, I, too, danced to Beatle music. Had Epstein realized what he had unleashed on the world? Did he tie his kite to their comet or was it vice versa? Had it been a sure thing any fool could have bumbled through or was the whole enterprise a masterful scheme of plotting (ten records in the Top Ten at once!)? We will never know and if John or Paul do, it does not seem they are talking.

If Brian Epstein had nothing to do, really, with The Beatles' success, one can understand his death more easily. We see him worthless, feeling, perhaps, the pawn of circumstance, to which he had not added his true bit of fuel. Feeling that he had nothing to give. After all he did, in his autobiography, describe himself as bland, as having only come to life through them. Had he not failed at becoming an actor? I remember him on the old *Hullaballoo* TV show looking so pale and wan and out of place. So quiet! Was this the mastermind tycoon, the successor to Col. Parker, the new Barnum?

But perhaps he was the genius some say, filling up his day with devious and splendid machinations, plotting and coursing the trail of our idols so that they did eventually blaze above each and every one of our heads. If he was a great businessman, expressing his will through four musicians, bringing honesty and integrity to an otherwise murky business, how he then must have suffered when The Beatles decided to tour no longer. What left after two movies and no tours? No more organizational meetings, plots, plans and devices. Does one pore endlessly over monstrous manuscripts praying to find the sacred words, to resurrect once again the excitement, the glory, and the power?

Or do you spend your time flitting from one party to another, continent to continent, experimenting with this or that, savoring the fruits of one's endeavours but endeavouring no more? Do you find new groups, Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Cyrkle, Cilla Black? There is only one group. And they do not want to perform.

I remember him best for a story that may or may not have been true. In his mansion Brian Epstein kept Spanish servants, none of whom could speak English. Let that be a lesson to us all in discretion.

After The Beatles came The Stones and of The Stones one could never have ignored Brian Jones with his puffed up Pisces, all-knowing, suffering fish eyes, his incredible clothes, those magnificent scarves, Brian always ahead of style, perfect Brian. How could Brian have asthma, a psychological disease (we're told) and certainly something strange for a member of a rock and roll group. We read in interviews that Brian saw himself as the original lead Stone, a position he held until their American tour singled out Mick for the honour in the hearts of the American female.

Can you remember 1964 when The Stones were called homosexual for long hair? (Were you?) Brian, with two fourteen-year-old girls draped on each arm, must have laughed. And yet, the centre of attention was drifting. In a group the attention may be evenly distributed (we all knew and loved John, Paul, George and Ringo) but in The Stones it was to be Mick. Now normally in a group an instrumentalist can never overshadow a lead singer. (Exception: The Yardbirds where Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page did just that to poor Keith Relf.) In The Stones there was Mick, the pivotal centre. Charlie and Bill were for gourmets. That left Keith and Brian. Lead guitar always, always beats rhythm guitar for popularity, so that left Brian, who one assumes therefore turned to more and more exotic instruments to establish his presence both to himself and others. This is what I'm worth. Let me see *you* play the damn thing.

It would be a mistake I think for someone to compete with Jagger on his own terms. Jagger has literally rewritten the book on strut scowl and scruffy and the role of street urchin versus society he played perfectly and mercilessly. Had Brian thought of competing it would have been a mistake. No one can overtake the lead vocalist.

New drugs, new countries, new sounds, back to the blues, my own music (everyman's conceit and dream), I must redefine myself because the self I wanted to *become* is occupied by another body. And still he was identified as a Stone which was contrarily identified as Mick's group, a backup band, a sideman. Now connoisseurs of course know that the band is a Band, but the great mass looked to Mick not Brian to be their leader through this Fall from Grace. And how can you take that? "But I started the thing," you might say. "It was my records in the first place, I turned them on, must I be a damn singer to turn on the world?" Yes. Or the champion of guitar.

Then, of course, there are more problems, the drug arrests, the constant mental turmoil. What if they tour without me? Financial. Could I starve? (He died well in debt.) If they play without me I shall be disgraced and have nothing whereas if I leave and strike out on my own I'm out before they get me (how sad! how inevitable!), and I create my own myth, style, voice, the eyes will be on me, I have a future, there's so much I know, music, music, music, who would know it from THAT, I can do it, I have to do it, I will do it, I must do it.

And of course the disorientation, am I backwards, forwards, the asthma attack (I am going to choke), the fall (where is the pool?!) and everything settles like a quiet bubble coming in spurts and then thin streams until finally the last one has popped itself right out of earthly existence.

Do people realize that at the age some of our entertainers are, most people have settled into a life-style from which they will reap rewards the rest of their lives? That is security of job and family. Most have found their soul-mate and are busy with one child, if not two, and life seems ordered and with purpose. No strange meanderings for them. That is for lesser or greater or at the very least different mortals from you or I. And yet there is no son more delinquent, no family more in chaos than the audience which comes to sit at the table of rock. Who else withdraws emotions so arbitrarily? And yet if the audience is just one big person, it should not be thought any more or less dependable than anyone else. Therefore performer beware. If you come looking for love, come prepared with a thick skin or a thick heart. Or, as my analyst put it, don't depend on anyone, not your lover, your friend, or your doctor.

Hendrix, that most supple of guitarists, the true electronic extension, depended on his audience to take him anywhere but where he was. But, as he insisted on taking their trip rather than taking them on his, he was ultimately forced to face a vision of himself which screamed clown. One cannot get to the top and switch masks. The lover demands consistency, and unless you've established variance as your norm *a priori* you will be called an adulterer. You can accept illogic as logic if it's presented all the time but not when sprung as a ripe pomegranate in a grove of erstwhile peaches.

Hendrix was at the mercy of so many people one wonders how he stood it as long as he did. He was the other side of Joplin's coin. If she traded off the black, he was trading off the white. When his management brought him here from England with two white sidemen, the die was cast. For Jimi Hendrix could never have been accepted in white America as a first-rate phenomenon had he had an all-black band.

When Jimi Hendrix came over the most striking thing besides his truly incredible guitar virtuosity was his savage, if playful, rape of his instrument. It would squeal and whine going off into a crescendo of leaps and yells that only chance could program. (See, we *are* extensions of Mr Cage, it's all so modern and primitive at the same time, how simultaneous.) Anyone who does that night after night must go mad. It was the frenzy of self, for frustration can only so long be acted out in violent ways, never mime. If any part of it becomes sham, then vital energies are used to mimic the worst aspects of self and both mind and body are soon exhausted.

Jimi Hendrix's shows became sex shows, the idol erotically gliding, so... diffident, through a performance with two playmates clearly not in his league. Bitterness developed over attention to the star. But he was the star, wasn't he (lead guitarist and vocalist)? So the group dissolves. Comes the amorphous dawn and he realizes, I am not a stripteaser, an Ann Corio con artist of the pelvis, I am a guitar player, now that I have, uh, arrived *why don't they take me seriously?* The zenith of burlesque wants to play rock Macbeth and so, they say, do all comedians, ha, ha, want to be tragedians. But I! Am! An! Artist! I! Can! Play! And he could (running counter to the Cassandra-like predictions of management) have played a sinewy Lear or a sweet and loving Hamlet, for Jimi played music beautiful music every waking minute moment, noon and sun-music permeated his every thought and action and it had to be, I repeat, *had* to be, that he would have to say I must play real music or shrivel up and die one wind-swept morning.

And so, as Joplin is to do also, he forms a new band, to play what he attempts. And yet, there is no money for that, it is not so successful (where are the fans?) and so the old band is sporadically reformed for jobs in Oregon and the need to perform for an audience goes on, only this time to be forced to, this time, knowingly violate the self and soul (the body is the temple that houses the soul activated by the spirit which is energy) it was all right before, *when we didn't understand what we were doing* (the Shadow of Men witnesses all we do), when we had to get there...but to break the principles (so newly discovered) now! the spirit breaking, now! And so one runs back to the room to clarify the goals, *get one's head straight, get it together,* sort it all out, and dimly, dimly, may or may not perceive that management was lying.

Who can you talk to on the road? Long-haired dirty drug people wherever you look. The boy passes over a bag of green powder (for Christ's sakes as Holden would put it, Samwise come protect the master) and passes out. Don't take that, it has horse tranquilizer in it. Oh, I shot up to your song. I got busted to your song. Oh please bless me and touch me and make it all go away. I loved to you.

Who did Janis Joplin talk to on the road? She brought excesses of feeling into moribund white music. On the road when one sees only nights, never the pretty days of a flat midwestern sun. And all your companions are drugged and hip and so sophisticated (we talk on such a high level only dogs can hear us) about the scene and who did what to whom and three puns on why, far out...She's so...twisted. Who can you talk to when you're famous and alone and all the people idolize you and want...to... get high with you and show you that they too are HIP, that they KNOW what is happening and watch let's get her drunk she's so funny when she's drunk you'll love her do you remember...

I remember people who do encore after encore and after being pressed into a role they may have wanted, either consciously or unconsciously emulate a pattern, gradually become the persona and, then alone, have to live up to it because the wretched THEY want it and what if they are right? Perhaps I should die, after all, they all (the great blues singers) *did* die, didn't they? But life is getting better now, I don't want to die. Do I?

And if it's true all so true that you can't live up to everyone's expectations, and if it's true you cannot be all things to all people, and if it's true you cannot be other than what you are (passage of time to the contrary), then you must be strong of heart if you wish to work the problem out in public, on stage, through work before "them" who fully expect and predict in print their idol's fall. And if it was true it was inevitable and oh yes we know sad, and oh nothing could be done about it after all that's how she started out she just realized too late the habits of years are not undone in days, then if it's true that princesses are besmirched, then all of us are fallen knights.

I was working as a songwriter for Pickwick. We just churned songs out, that's all. Never a hit song—what we were doing was churning out these ripoff albums, in other words, the album would say it featured four groups and it really wouldn't be four groups, it would just be various permutations of us, and they would sell them at supermarkets for 99 cents or a dollar. While I was doing that I was doing my own stuff, and trying to get by, but the material I was doing, people wouldn't go near me with it at the time, I mean we wrote "Johnny Can't Surf No More" and "Let The Wedding Bells Ring" and "Hot Rod Song". This was in 1965, surfing hadn't finished in the States by then, it was big where there wasn't any water. I was into sleeve music originally. I really like a cappella five part vocals, and I also like pop music a lot, top forty. There were really some amazing things on the radio.

When The Velvet Underground first started, I suppose you could say we produced a primitive sound. Nobody was doing that—we were into volume and that whole thing. The bottom layer, the rhythm structure of the songs was based on rock music a la Chuck Berry, then we put this other structure on top, but if you listen to it hard, you'd hear Bo Diddley things running through it, Chuck Berry, all that was mixed around in there. I liked them a lot, and all the Old Sun records, and Ricky Nelson's guitar player is the guitar player that I really love; James Burton. To this day, I fall over when I hear him play. I used to sit and

OUT TO BE FAR OUT OR NOT TO BEEFHEART

In September of 1970, I moved into a new flat in Bayswater. It has about it an air of what indifferent novelists invariably call faded gentility. All our neighbours seemed very old and very quiet, but it was still a nice place. Now one evening when I was sitting on the toilet, of all things, a faint trace of music wafted through the door, and upon closer listening it bore a great similarity to 'Space-Age Couple' from 'Decals'—in fact it was 'Space-Age Couple.' 'My god, Beefheart has made it onto Radio 1' I thought, and all life's certitudes evaporated. I mean if Captain Beefheart can be on the radio then they'll have Dan Hicks doing the news soon. Fortunately for my peace of mind, when that number was finished I wasn't greeted by some jerk like Terry Wogan (can you imagine, 'That was little old Don Van Vliet, and Don would like to tell you the recipe for his Blimp cookies . . .'), but by the strains of 'Whiskey or Rye,' but since someone has borrowed my copy I can't be sure of that. Now with piercing logic I grasped that there must be someone in this building who was playing 'Decals' and that someone I had to meet—so by dint of a lot of voyeuristic listening at letter boxes, I tracked it down to the flat below mine, and with great trepidation I knocked, half expecting a little old lady to come to the door and scream as by this time I was in a state of frenetic, eye-rolling curiosity. The door opened and there was just another long-haired, wild eyed Beefheart freak standing there; an instant friendship developed, and when the band were over here earlier this year I asked Tony if he would like to write it all up. He did, and what follows in the result. It is a bit of a departure for us since it isn't a fax and info article at all, but with your customary friendliness, you'll doubtless let us know if you don't approve.

Connor

Maybe there are all kinds of Beefheart freaks but two I know about. There's the original—got-it-from-from-John-Peel-in-1967 generation—the days of "Safe As Milk", the heavy boogie blues band with the weird singer and the weird words. And there's the "Trout Mask Replica" people. Fans [is that the right word for a Beefheart follower?] who were prepared to throw themselves into the weirdest stuff around and come up smelling of sunshine.

Now there's a whole new lot of people discovering Beefheart through "Clear Spot" and "The Spotlight Kid". Doing the heavy boogie SAM thing, but backwards. Well I'm somewhere there in the middle getting squeezed from both directions, but the thing I find myself getting nearer and nearer to [although I still run away from a lot of it] is good old Trout.

The point of this ramble is just to say that even though a lot of people would prefer to forget that Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band ever recorded "Trout Mask Replica" or "Lick My Decals Off Baby", they are there. Also to all those people who wish he had never recorded "Clear Spot" but had gone on laying down more Trouts the same thing applies. Those Far Out Stuff records exist. Nobody's gonna take 'em away. Keep on ordering your replacement copies and remember just because you dig back it doesn't mean you live in the past. One way or another this "Clear Spot"/"Trout" matter came up several times when I met the band. Some of us may not realise just how much it costs to make Far Out Stuff records like Trout and Decals. According to Artie Tripp [Ed Marimba], Bill [Zoot Horn Rollo] nearly died and Mark [Rockette Morton] was too starved to get out of bed for months. They were eating welfare dogmeat. A long way from the coffee shop of the Marble Arch Holiday Inn. So if any of you think that Going on Tour with the Magic Band Star is a bit like that Flo and Eddie stuff—you know—mudsharks and being filmed by Andy Warhol and Truman Capote and immortalised by Raoul Duke—well forget it. The nearest think I got to the big gonzo experience was shooting the ticket on the way back from Bristol. That's blackjack. I lost £2 to the Captain.

The first thing that hits you about American tourists of any kind whether they be little old ladies looking for Harrods or horror-show rock magicians seeking a snort, they are incredibly polite. The British are brought up to believe that they have the most impeccable manners in the world and that Americans are just brash trash. Not true. Inside nearly every redneck, hardhat, Ivy Leaguer or fazed out freak there is a Southern Gentleman eager to get out and shake hands. When they're over here anyway. And let's face it on a five week tour of Britain there's a lot you've got to be polite about. The waitresses in the new motorway service cafes actually apologise *before* you eat your food. After they've been open a few weeks they say "I just work here". But nobody in the Magic Band could be persuaded to say anything really nasty about the way travellers are forced to feed in this country Come to think of it it may well end up as force feeding. Give a thought to our truckdrivers and travelling salesmen.

Britain is a little country still trying to remember how to act big and Americans are incredibly polite about it because they know that it's not really all our fault, that we probably think it's theirs, so they don't rub salt in. Anyway that's by way of saying that all the time I was with The Magic Band they never once made a heavy complaint about the appalling way we handle things over here. Maybe because we're not armed.

I met Captain Beefheart after the second Rainbow gig. He was upset by the PA growl that messed with the latter part of the act ["Will the audience please stop humming"] and was drinking a bottle of Courage Light Ale by the neck and being politely hustled away by John Peel who was giving him dinner in a restaurant that didn't take orders after 11.30pm. He was lucky enough to have a paper cup. Backstage at the Rainbow is like after a freak's wedding in a wasted carpark. You look at the ground and expect to see cider-stained cinders. You certainly feel them in the air. Nobody said anything. Maybe they assume we suffer in silence because we just *know* something better is going to turn up. Micawberism—the creeping British disease. The most contagious one anyway. Don't worry about the revolution/the apocalypse/the millenium, man, it'll

turn up.

Anyway, we can't complain because now we have a full set of Holiday Inns. The Magic Band stayed in the brand new one—a Miami-style cheesecake-on-its-side, hidden in there behind the Cumberland. There's another one at Swiss Cottage. There'll be more and more everywhere soon. Watch out for them. Last year Colonel Sanders, next year Howard Johnson.

Artie Tripp was seen wrastling with a rasher-style steak in the Coffee Shop. Before I told him I was writing this he informed me that he was thinking of getting some Holiday Inn stock. "At least you know where you are." One of those remarks you can take any way you like. He also told me that the band had suffered terribly from doing that Far Out Stuff Weird Shit music, but more of that...

Once the bus was underway and the Boys In The Band are Shooting the Ticket, I cornered the Captain. Let me tell you, that as I write that, I can still feel his presence. He's one of those heavy people who's always laughing. His eyes are bright blue and they burn. He shakes his shoulders when he's made some truly cosmic verbal outrage and he draws and draws and draws while we chase a thunderstorm towards Swindon. He uses a felt-tipped marker and notebooks of various sizes with tear-out pages. The drawings come through fuzzily on the other side of the paper too, so each picture has a mirror-man image. "Some people like them one way, some people like them the other. There's another."

He holds up a flock of golder birdies, then a shoal of fish. There's a primeval tortoise giving a ride to a black-faced rabbit.

"What's he doing there? Oh, my God, look at that poor guy." He has drawn a man with an impossibly lumpy head.

"I write a hundred and fifty pages a day. Today I only did thirty."

"How do you do all that and work?" I ask.

"Work?" he says flinching, "It's all play."

"Some people think it's a terrible thing being a human being," he says ruminating over the lumphead.

"But you don't have to be Weird to be Weird." Again we are getting into the Too Far Out area. Maybe he still wears the Trout Mask but he's into stomping his feet now, boogieing around the stage, letting some of that funky stuff hang out. Maybe it's because the Trout Mask was really a carp anyway.

After the Bristol gig he was interviewed by a reporter from Radio Bristol—Pete Johnston. The Captain remembered him from last time.

"What about the possibility that some of your audience are on hard drugs?" asked Pete. Pause. "Marijuana grows by the road," said the Captain. Not that he was being smart-ass to dumb questions. Captain Beefheart talks to anyone who wants to talk to him. Backstage at Bristol was like a family party with the local far out freaks jostling with lads who'd come down from Cardiff, the Bristol bouncers getting autographs for their daughters and the support band Beckett all loosening up together.

The Captain has things to say. He doesn't want interviewers to go away with fleas in their ears, and stars in their eyes. Whales of course get their plug. As he said to Pete, dogs never used to go swimming out to sea to catch and eat whales so why should we do it for them? "A whale has a fourteen and a half pound brain, think about that."

Captain Beefheart has a hawk's eye for animal oddities. Drawing with one of them and watching out of the window with the other he spotted a beagle pointing in the middle of a football field. Also a smart tree. "I know a smart tree when I see one."

The Magic Band live up in North California where they used to have millions of sequoias—the giant redwoods—forests of them. "Redwood trees purify the atmosphere." Roy Estrada told me that there was a lot of oxygen in North California. People are always pressing the Captain to talk about Zappa and acid. I didn't ask him about either but he told a story about the time he was given a spiked drink during a street acid test in 1966. It was pure Sandoz. One minute he was walking down the street the next minute he was all over the Universe. And he didn't know why. Then it happened again. Another time somebody spiked a drink with some other [unspecified] stimulant-intoxicant just before he was due to go on stage. He played and sang for two hours and when he walked off he literally walked off into the auditorium, right off the stage, in mid-air. He was that high. He doesn't touch that stuff now. I didn't ask him about Zappa but Roy Estrada told me that in the early Mothers days when the band wanted to play lots of funky rock Zappa used to stop them and tell them they were ruining his music, even though it was theirs too.

Not Far Out Enough?

Beefheart probably does worry about what people think of his current act. He's sure that "Too Much Time" should have been a hit single, but maybe not that sure. It wasn't included in the tour act, because there were no backing singers. He's had hit problems before. He says there were seven or eight hit singles on "Safe As Milk". I said what about "Big Eyed Beans From Venus". He said he thought it was a little Too Far Out. Artie Tripp on the other hand thought it was "easy to get off on." There it is again, exactly what is and what isn't TFO or Weird Shit?

I told him about a 17 year old Greek I'd met on an island. A long-hair waiting to go into the army for two years. He knew all the words to "Lick My Decals Off".

"Hey Bill," said the Captain, "come and listen to this." I told the story again.

"Wow," said the Captain, "that's far out." He thought I'd said a 70 year old man. I wish it had been that way.

Beefheart worries like hell on tour. It has to be right. I watched him do over an hour of testing on the PA before the gig at Bristol.

"It's got a key of it's own," he veiled

at the mike. "Can't you hear it?" He belted out some "Low Yo Yo" and stopped abruptly, the band did too. He cocked his ear up. "You hear that?" Something was echoing around the hall.

"It's too thoroughbred. I can't get intimate with it." The problem was solved when Beckett's singer Terry Slesser lent him his mike. Afterwards he asked him what PA they had. "Kelsey Morris" said Terry. "That's expensive isn't it?" said the Captain. "We couldn't afford one of those right now." Terry grinned and admitted that somebody else had paid for theirs. Good old Bread Up Front. Beckett may have been spared their dogmeat days.

The Captain told me he'd been through 5,000 dollarsworth of Hohner harps in order to get three right ones for this tour. Now they were almost worn out. He played a few scintillating screams on two of them to prove his point. The first one sounded incredible. The second fantastic and the third out of this world.

"They don't make them like they used to. Ever since the Beatles."

Would he do another double album? Yes, but people can't afford them. "Getting this band together is what I want to do before anything else."

"Do you extemporise when you record?"

"Isn't that a dog's disease?"

He's the only man who can sing and whistle at the same time with a cigarette in his mouth, and make it sound like a Moog Synthesizer. "Put Don Preston out of a job," I joked. "That arsehole," he joked back in that affectionate way he has of talking about certain other musicians. The next week he was off to Holland to do Dutch TV. "A touch o' the Dutch," he said. "Hey Mark, write that

down. Two ways—'A Touch o' the Dutch and a Dutch uh the Dutch'." Mark got it both ways.

Back home where the big roads flow Captain Beefheart drives a 1972 Chevvy Corvette Stingray. He used to be a racing driver, before he was a sculptor. "I can get it up to 170 without it fading away."

Something more abrupt than a fade-out stopped them playing their Southend University gig. The roadies pronounced the hall electrically unsafe. Alex later told me he felt a latent power surge, as if someone Up There was waiting for them to plug in, strike a chord, and then ZITT! no more Magic Band. That's something else Americans are politely sure we don't understand here—electricity. So much so that before he sings it Captain Beefheart gently recites the words of "Electricity" to his audience. Some of the venues on this tour were a bit of a farce, not just echoing ancient Victorian barns but brand new ones. Take Canterbury, the last gig. It was played in a huge brick shithouse also used as some kind of basketball gymnasium. Presumably there isn't a concert hall or suitable auditorium there. Why not? Well because people Up There still think that students are better off playing competitive games than listening to Far Out Stuff in comfort. They'd be better off with neither, wanking's better than art if it's done better!

Anyway, my last memory of Canterbury will not be Captain Beefheart at all, but the tearful, wasted, hopped out figure slumped alone at the front of the plywood stage, almost broke down at the thought of it ALL BEING OVER FOR ANOTHER YEAR. Beat your hands raw boys. By the way, apart from the short hair that he [Connor] displayed, the Captain also digs baggy pants. "I don't want to display my sex organs in a cloth window."

So, time now to get back to that Too Far Out Stuff syndrome. Why is it the Melody Maker said 'Clear Spot' had no beef, no heart? Why is it some people don't like the Captain trucking around the stage exhorting the audience to "Git up" [he didn't have to at Canterbury, they already were]. Why is it that Artie Tripp says that the next record will be "even simpler" than 'Clear Spot'? Well, Artie, who certainly is something of the powerhouse that drives the Magic Band to new boogies, says that 'Alice In Blunderland' and 'Steal Softly Through Snow' and all those other Far Out Stuff Numbers that were played as encores on the second night at the Rainbow are fun to play but that's all. They leave 90% of the audience cold and if that happens for long, it's back to the dogmeat. And we all know that even if we love the idea of an artist starving to produce his art, would he mind not coughing himself to death on our doorstep?

Yes folks, it's cynical money talk time. For every person that says go on do another 'Trout' there are fifty more who will go out and buy 'Clear Spot'. Maybe people don't like Artie Tripp doing his paper-tearing act, or Rockette Morton wearing an electric toaster on his head ("A toast from Rockette Morton") or Beefheart finding and killing a fly on the mike and then dropping it on to Zoot's strings to launch them into "Lo Yo Yo". Maybe they'd rather Captain Beefheart just retired to a mountain top to utter infrequent but world shattering gnomisms. The truth is that they dropped "Alice" and "Snow" from the repertoire. The only Far Out Tune left at the end of the tour was the set-piece feature duet-duel between Rockette Morton and Zoot Horn Rollo, "Peon" but by now everybody can take that.

There's a lot more rhythm around. There's a lot more guitars. Three on most numbers, sometimes all of them with bottleneck stitching. Artie Tripp gets through three sets of sticks on "Big Eyed Beans" and everyone looked like a crocodile had been sucking it.

The act was less like a dangerous circus. The jokes were more cosy, TV comedy type jokes. Last year at the Albert Hall the Captain wore a blazing satin cloak and he played a lot of sax. This year he wore a red tee-shirt with his own head on it, a black leather jacket, baggy corduroys and he hardly combed his hair. He certainly didn't play the sax. When asked about that he gave the impression that he's leaving all that Weird Shit to Roland Kirk.

He doesn't like Alice Cooper's act because it's mean to animals. Sure, he's still a free flow giant tapped into the continuing cosmical metaphor rolling around the Big Roof (Pseud's Corner Entry 341006b) and he sees things coming that some of us might miss on a pint of peyotal ale. He was here with the heaviest, most musically original and classy rock band in the business and yet not once when I was with him did he ever mention the word rock, let alone 'rock'n'roll'. Maybe he was being obscurely polite again. After all the British talk about it as if they invented it and it really must be embarrassing for those polite people from Big Muddy to hear us going on like the half-brain hicks we all are.

Maybe sometimes Beefheart sounds like someone who digs dogs and trees more than he does people. There's a lot of that around at the moment and you can see why. My only piece of advice on that is that you can't have congress with a tree and shouldn't need to have congress with a dog.

Personally I don't care if Captain Beefheart sings from a hammock—all tinselled up like a Christmas tree. He has already *been there*, sixteen sides of the most electric music ever made. If he misses a new audience because he thinks he's Too Far Out and goes Too Far Back to meet them they should have the sense to cheer anyway. Especially here since we are in danger of becoming a nation of rock critics anyway. Next year the music will be simpler. Between then and now he will have been to Japan, and who knows he may record a single like "Abba Zabba" or "Big Eyed Beans" and rip the charts apart.

While Hopson & Bates ad agency is trying to persuade the MCC that the good old English game of cricket should go Blow Football, long hair and Groovy, we can't really expect any sense anywhere, I suppose, but at least the Captain came and he did play some Far Out Stuff and he took £2 off me towards its upkeep.

Tony Barrell

HERB PEDERSON & THE DILLARDS

Perceptive readers, which I'm sure you all are, will have noticed my enthusiastic reports of a press reception I attended, actually on May 24th this year, to see Johnny Rivers, with what was described as his L.A. Boogie Band, which consisted, according to the invitation, of Johnny Rivers [guitar], Michael Melvoin [piano], Jim Horn [flute and saxophone], Jack Conrad [bass], Dean Parks [guitar], Chuck [described as Chuch] Findley [trumpet], and Jim Gordon [drums]. Those with long memories will also recall that at the very same time, another band of musical colossi. the Kentucky Colonels, was making what has most unfortunately proved to be its final tour of England in the form we would really like to see it, with all due respect to the remaining members. That band was advertised as consisting of three White brothers, Roland, Eric and the late Clarence, plus Herb Pedersen, once the lightning fast banjo picker with the Dillards, a long time favourite band of mine, but one about which I knew relatively little. In fact, sometimes it's better if you don't know too much, because excessive fax and info can often come dangerously close to stifling the music, than which there is nothing worse. Reverting to the Kentucky Colonels, they didn't arrive with Herb, which disappointed me, not for musical reasons because his replacement was Alan Munde, whom I had last seen as part of the Bogus Brurito Brothers, which later turned out to be the Country Gazette, but I'd very much wanted to talk to Herb so that I could clear some of the wool out of my head concerning the Dillards. Imagine my surprise and delight, then, when I arrived at the super trendy Valbonne Club, (Playboy Club castoffs and so on), and saw, on the minute stage, not seven, but eight people, and the eighth one, standing next to Johnny Rivers, was Herb Pedersen. The music that night was unlike anything I have seen for a very long time, although my enjoyment quota has since been equalled, by the similarly superb Van Morrison and his Caledonia Soul Orchestra, whom you'll very likely be reading about in this space soon. I have remembered most of that night ever since, and sometimes as I sit vainly trying to grasp even one per cent of what some hopeful bunch are trying to do on their first LP, I wish that a necessary qualification for making a record was to see a band like Rivers and his Supermen, just so that they understood what music is supposed to be like. For example, there's no need to write obscure songs, which, however original they may be, are no match for the stuff that's lying around on old, and even quite recent records. Rivers led his team through songs by Johnny Otis, Chuck Berry, Huey Smith, Curtis Mayfield and Gene Clark, and he even did "Knock On Wood" and made it sound like a masterpiece. I suppose that the band's repertoire was similar to that of the infamous "pub bands" circuit, but I'm willing to bet that all those pub bands put together couldn't get within a thousand miles of the quality that Rivers' lot produced..The reason seems simply that each bloke on the stage was a session man, and that's the last time I'll ever accept the argument that the session scene produces sterility among its members. If you're interested in two of the finest records that are likely to be made this century, check out "L.A. Reggae" and "Blue Suede Shoes" by Johnny Rivers on United Artists, and then maybe you'll understand what I'm getting so obnoxiously excited about.

Sill, there was Herb, and he was singing backup vocals, and playing acoustic guitar, with a little faster than light banjo picking thrown in, and he was just as great as all the rest. So I organised an interview, and with my faithful friend Rocky, wandered around the West End looking for the horrifically named Holiday Inn, a phenomenon which certainly appears to have reached this fair isle, bringing with it a noise level almost comparable to that of computers, resulting in small portions of the interview being drowned by a five million watt P.A. system occasionally requesting Mr Blah-Blah to call at reception, answer the phone or spend some more money. What I could hear on the tape is described below, coupled with some historical and musical notes on the Dillards and so on. If you're interested enough to carry on, I suggest that you arm yourself with Pete's Eagles chart in ZigZag 29, because it'll probably help a lot.

BACK PORCH BLUEGRASS

A nice title, and also the title of the Dillards' first LP, of course on the magnificent Elektra label, and released in 1963 in America, although I'm not sure about here. The Dillards came from Salem, Missouri, or at least Rodney and Douglas Dillard did. Dean Webb, the mandolin player, was from Independence, Missouri, and Mitchell Jayne, bass player and ace compere, was a radio announcer in Salem, although I'm not sure about his previous history. However, there has come into my possession a press handout on the Dillards, relating to the period when they were released on Anthem Records, about which you'll hear later, and it seems to bear considerable relevance to the subject in question, as well as being pretty funny, so I'm going to quote from it quite extensively, with thanks to Bob Chorush, who wrote it.

"The Dillards bring to the American musical scene an entire rich history of inbreeding and backbiting, Ozark backwoods soul and funky bluegrass, back home ignorance and ass-backward philosophy. The Dillards' history began back with the almost legendary Uncle Genital Dillard. He was a musical phenomenon back in their home town of Salem, Missouri. His rendition of "Beautiful Dreamer" on the cupped hand and armpit was the climax of many a Salem hoedown. It became obvious that the Dillards would have to live in the shadow of their uncle's fame if they remained in Salem."

There's an equally good piece on the Dillards in the Phonograph Record Magazine by R. Serge Denisoff, and it's also worth quoting in parts. "Of all the folkie acts—ethnic or otherwise—the Dillards were the genuine thing, with credentials reserved for legendary Nashville acts. The Dillard boys grew up in Salem, Missouri, the land of Quantrell's Raider with momma playing guitar and daddy on fiddle. Instruments were always around, and the guitar at times became a 'truck' during playtime. In Carter Family-Bill Monroe tradition Dillard is quick to note, he listened to 'lots of country music and Segovia'. Geographically and musically, the Dillards were ideal candidates for folk revival acclaim, but they were not 'ethnic' duplicators. Instead, they were a strange mixture of a successful stage comedy act and a high powered bluegrass band. This rather unusual combination offended nearly all of the spokesmen of the folk revival. The only people, outside of New York Times critic Bob Shelton, who liked them were the paying customers at concerts or night clubs. The Commercializers labelled them as a good act, but their music was too hillbillyish. 'Why don't you do it like the Smothers Brothers?' By appearing on the Jack Linkletter ('everybody sing') Hootenanny show, they alienated the New York folk Establishment then boycotting the program. That was but one problem. Their other image problem was more severe and acutely felt. The Purists strongly objected to any group which toyed with tradition. The Dillards laughed in church. They were from the country, not like the citybillies, and they refused to authentically copy old material note for note. 'Sacrilege' yelled the Little Sandy Review, the guardian of musical traditton."

Still, we're going a little bit fast, and events seem to have overtaken the Dillards for a moment, so let's go back to Bob Chorush. "The Dillards pointed their noses west, and looked destiny in the eye. At about that same time in 1962, the Dillards thought they saw destiny looking back at them, so they put their life savings in their pocket, and hit the road. Their life savings was only $9.50, so they only needed one pocket. They also brought a few bottles of moonshine whiskey and their music. 'We started out here,' says Mitch, 'in a 55 Cadillac and a one wheel trailer. We brought a cooked turkey with us that Rodney's mother had cooked for Thanksgiving, because we knew we were going to need it bad. We whittled on it all the way through to Arizona, and then we forgot about the damn thing. Then one day I went out there and all these ants had marched on it military style.' 'We got as far as Oklahoma City,' interrupts Rodney, 'and Mitch went on down to Texas to paint signs, while Dean and Douglas and I slept in an oil field for two nights. Then we moved into the Y.M.C.A. with no money. We had a dollar and a quarter, and I used it to get myself a haircut. Then I got everybody jobs. Dean and I used to go down and stand in the Manpower line with all those drunken winos and everything. They were always getting the jobs 'cause everybody knew them. So we finally got a job setting up voting machines. I betcha they never had an accurate count in that election. We set 'em all up crazy, all screws in wrong.' Mitch takes up the story again. 'I came up and joined them, because I figured I'd just as soon starve in Oklahoma City as in Texas. We worked at an Alice Chomers factory or something. We were supposed to be taking inventory, counting nuts and bolts. I thought, what in hell are we doing here? We managed to tough it out though, so we got $350 for a week's work for the four of us. We got to California on that.'" Los Angeles, actually, where they signed up with Elektra, and made that first album, which was produced by a man whose name should be familiar to all those who are eagerly following Pete's Byrds chapters, Jim Dickson. Dickson was a producer for World Pacific Records, who in the early sixties had several heavy country names on their books, not least the Kentucky Colonels, which consisted mostly of the White Brothers, and the now somewhat unhip Glen Campbell, who was a session musician of considerable note at the time, even at one point joining the Beach Boys for a few live performances. Dickson's most celebrated productions of the time were probably the Elektra single for the Beefeaters, the "Preflyte" album for the Byrds and the Hillmen album, featuring Chris Hillman, Don Parmley and the Gosdin Brothers, which must surely be due for release here now that "Preflyte" has finally escaped into the shops. While we're at it, there's probably several other interesting records made on the Together label, which Bumble (whoever they may be) could now put out to a nation of L.A. music followers.

Here's a bit more from Bob Chorush: "Once in Los Angeles, the Dillards set about doing what they'd always done back home. They cooked up some moonshine whiskey, and carefully disguised its giveaway odour with their own painstakingly soiled socks, and when the moonshine ran out, they drank the antifreeze from the Cadillac. They sat around stoically waiting for success. Destiny may have looked them in the eye, but success was out to lunch. When the antifreeze ran out, the Dillards decided to do something about their careers. Rodney wanted to go back to the tractor factory (he said it was a job you could always count on), but Mitch convinced him that he could smell success lurking around the corner. What was lurking around the corner wasn't success, but it was a recording contract with Elektra Records. With the help of Elektra the Dillards found themselves in the Schwann catalogue right between Bo Diddley and Dion Dimuci. The only place the Dillards found success was in the dictionary, between subway and succinct.' Ho, ho, ho. But I must admit that he's dead right, because they sure enough come between Diddley and Dion in my collection too.

At this point, Chorush completely ignores the first three albums the Dillards made, out of a total of six at the time that he must have written that piece. That may mean that he hasn't heard the albums, which is his loss, but I have, and I'll tell you about them. "Back Porch Bluegrass" (Elektra EKS 7232) is not available in England currently, although you may be able to get it on import. It has fifteen tracks, most of them obviously fairly short, the two longest boasting an interminable two minutes forty-five seconds each. (By the way, I feel that timings on records should be obligatory, but there are few companies who deign to spare the time, Elektra being one of the obvious exceptions. If you've ever seen John Peel eating his breakfast and simultaneously struggling with a stop watch, you'll understand what I mean. And, of course, the timings should be accurate, unlike, I'm unhappy to say, a particular track on the "Love Masters" album which I compiled. Sorry, but it wasn't really my fault.) Back to the Dillards. There are seven instrumental tracks, mostly featuring the excellent banjo playing of Doug Dillard, and I must admit that I find these rather more acceptable in 1973, for two main reasons. Firstly, I'm afraid to say that the vocal tracks haven't worn as well as they might, and when put next to a later Dillards track, seem over hurried and nervous, and secondly because when there are vocals, less can be heard of Doug's banjo.

However, there are two exceptions to that, in "Dooley" and "Old Home Place". The former starts off with an instrumental break very reminiscent of "Whole Lotta Lovin'" as purveyed so well by Fats Domino, and "Old Home Place" boasts one of those classical chord changes which we all grew so sick of in the fifties, only to discover that they were the best ones available, and that all songs without them seemed to be missing something. Lonnie Donegan would have made a good job of it, and that's a compliment. Mitch Jayne wrote some excellent sleeve notes by each song, and I'll pinch a few of the details to give you some idea of what the album was aiming at.

"The Old Man At The Mill" is an old pioneer song from the time of play-party get-togethers. This song is spaced with dancing directions, and has an old-time, neighbourly feeling. "Banjo In The Hollow" is a tune invented by Douglas Dillard, and built upon a variation of "Cripple Creek" (That's as in Buffy Sainte-Marie, not as in the Band. Back to Mitch). This particular musical invention is a good indicator of Douglas Dillard's banjo genius in that the difficulty of execution is only a minor measure of the song's value. Only a uniquely creative banjo-picker could have been able to imagine "Banjo In The Hollow" in the first place. "Ground Hog"—a song of purely mountain origins, this version incorporates some of the old-time drop thumb banjo picking widely used before the advent of three-finger styles. This was the type of tune the mountaineers loved.

In addition to those, I found several other tracks interesting, both for musical and other reasons. For example, there's a track called "Duelin' Banjo", which is in fact the very same thing that Eric Weissberg and Steve Mandel did in "Deliverance", and sold a million copies as well. It's doubly interesting to note that "New Dimensions In Banjo And Bluegrass", which had "Dueling Banjos" added to it (their spelling) and became the "Dueling Banjos" album, was also on Elektra, with the catalogue number EKS 7238, which means that it was released a few months after the Dillards did their version. Maybe they should have got Doug Dillard for the film . . . But wait, there's still more, because one of the tracks on "New Dimensions In Banjo And Bluegrass" is called "End Of A Dream", and if that isn't "Duelin' Banjo" as well, I'll start a brain-surgery course, or become a politician. Also, there's a very good instrumental track called "Hickory Hollow" which is certainly nothing to do with O.C. Smith, but in fact is Doug Dillard's tribute to a radio show which Mitch Jayne presented before the Dillards were formed. The show was also called Hickory Hollow, and was broadcast on station KSMO in Salem, the group's home town. What about that, then? Altogether, "Back Porch Bluegrass" is a nice record to have around, and obviously a must for Dillards appreciaters, although I would rate it below all but one of the band's albums thus far released.

'LIVE! ALMOST!'

The title of the second Dillards album, released in the States in summer, 1964, and in England in, would you believe, 1968, on Elektra EKS 7265. And what a very fine and funny record, too. The album was recorded at the Mecca, Los Angeles, and boasts a sleeve note by John Stewart, (yes, *the* John Stewart), at the time advertised as "of the Kingston Trio". R. Serge Denisoff had some things to say about the Dillards on stage, and here they are: "Rodney Dillard, with some anger, accused one well known Los Angeles club owner of operating a 'live museum' where 'museum pieces play and don't change anything'. Mitch Jayne adds 'people in New York . . . try to preserve Indians, and don't understand what Indians are'. This is especially true when the subject of Doug Dillard came up. Doug was the 'fastest picker' around, and according to Mitch, 'one of the best'. But purists wanted Flatt and Scruggs, or the Stanley Brothers. The Dillards were neither of these. Early on, they decided there was little to be gained by imitating the likes of these musical giants. 'On the Grand Ole Opry, there was Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs and that was it'. Cut off by the folkie Establishment, the Dillards were left with their humour.

"The Dillards stage act, while exhibiting some of the cornball Nashville bass player routines used for decades to warm up audiences, had considerable substance to it. Rodney played the moron, Mitch was the establishment figure—perfect Laurel and Hardy. As Rodney explains, 'it was a parody of society . . . picking on a lesser'. The pay-off in classic slapstick was the put-down of the authority figure. Rodney, as did Stan Laurel, constantly flaunted, outwitted and destroyed Mitch with harmonica blasts during monologues and other upstaging ploys. The 'Almost' in the album title naturally refers to Rodney." Thank you, R. Serge. I've just spoken to Pete, who tells me that he met Mr Denisoff, who is a reasonably nice person of around our (advanced) age, and is definitely one of the good guys of the American rock writer scene.

This album is actually so good that I'm determined to describe it in some detail, so ensure you're in a comfortable position, and off we'll go. It starts off with an instrumental version of "Black Eyed Susie" and with some superb banjo from the inevitable Doug, and the clarity of the recording makes it difficult to believe that the record is really live. If it isn't, it's certainly well disguised, unlike another in my collection, the rather odd "Chuck Berry On Stage", which is so obviously studio recordings with a crowd scene from "Ben Hur" dubbed on after each track. At the end of the track, after the clapping, there's the first of the Mitch Jayne monologues, introducing the band. "We're hillbillies. I tell you that just so you won't think we're the Budapest String Quartet." Each member of the band is introduced normally, except Rodney. "We have him here to remind you that every sixty seconds mental illness strikes." Then he gets around to talking about the next song, which is "Never See My Home Again". "It's sung by Rodney, which is appropriate, because they'll never let him back." That's the first of two numbers written by Mitch Jayne and one or other of the Dillard brothers. Both are unsensational but pleasant songs, each with urgent vocals and good backup, generally consisting of Douglas on banjo and Dean Webb alternating lead (the latter on mandolin), with Rodney and Mitch providing the rhythmic backing. Nice songs that are easy to listen to.

Then comes what I think is the high spot of the record, at least as far as the introductions go (and they go quite a

long way, thirteen and a half minutes as opposed to twenty-seven and a half of music, but they're very well worth it). It's "Old Blue", a song which has been done, as Mitch remarks, by a large number of early sixties folkies. He talks about the time that they saw Joan Baez do it, and she had everybody crying "and foaming at the mouth–Rodney bit Pete Seeger on the leg . . ." But the Dillards don't do it like that, because they have different ways of treating their dogs in the Ozards. "You need four or five of them in the front yard, scratching, for the tourists and all." Then he gets to talking about the sort of dogs that they had in mind, when they started doing the song, dogs that were quite stupid (here, he obviously gestures at Rodney, it is evident from the shriek of laughter), and from time to time would find themselves in your privvy. Now, I don't know if you're familiar with the term in this highly civilised drainage system of ours, but a privvy was a toilet, lavatory or convenience (what a giveaway!), to which no drainage was attached, consisting of a wooden cabin with a bathroom china or similar as the main piece of furniture. If you need to know more, may I recommend a book by one Charles Sale entitled "The Specialist" which is a treatise on the life of a privvy builder. In the Ozarks, these privvies were located about a hundred yards from the house, which "in the winter was a hundred yards too far, and in the summer, was a hundred yards too near." I'm sure by now you have the picture, but should you get the chance, this is one of the great introductions, in fact totally eclipsing the song which follows, although it would need to be supersensational to even match its build up. It still beats much of the first album, and it's followed by another Doug Dillard extemporisation on the general theme of "Cripple Creek", but this time called "Sinkin' Creek", and still very, very good. It's best to explain at this point that I'm a total sucker for bluegrass music, without really knowing too much about it, although I can, of course, claim a certain expertise on the subject of privvies. When I hear a five string banjo being picked by an expert, I can very soon become sympathetic with its player, so perhaps I'm not totally unbiased. Anyway, the first side ends without too much more humour, but with two tracks, "The Whole World Round" and "Liberty", the latter of which is a very fine instrumental featuring Dean Webb and Rodney Dillard again. On his excellent additional sleeve note, Mitch Jayne says "'Liberty' is a good example of the sort of thing by which you can reach people regardless of musical tastes–a piece of music that gets inside anybody and makes them listen. I love to play this for anyone who thinks hillbilly music is degrading and simple, for I never heard a piece of music that had so much to say." Thank you, Mitchell, you're dead right.

Side two starts off in best Dillard instrumental fashion with Don Reno's "Dixie Breakdown" which is very fast, and achieves more than most ten minute tracks in two minutes and five seconds. That's followed by a Bob Dylan song, "Walkin' Down the Line", which strangely doesn't appear to be on any of the Dylan records I have, although I was sure I remembered it. Mitch gives the obligatory and justified verbal acclaim to the song's writer, remarking as well that when he sings, "he has a voice very much like a dog with its leg caught in barbed wire", and I'm sure we all know what he means. I hesitate to admit it, but for some years in the early sixties, I proclaimed that I was fonder of Dylan as a songwriter than a performer, preferring Peter, Paul and Mary, Johnny Cash (wash your mouth out!) and the Turtles (that's a bit better) doing Dylan's songs. I have since grown older and wiser, you'll be glad to hear. Back to R. Serge Denisoff for some wisdom on the subject of this track. "'Live' contained a Dylan song, 'Walkin' Down The Line', produced by Jim Dickson, later to be a major influence on Jim McGuinn and the Byrds. Both Rod and Mitch claim credit for much of the harmonies on 'Preflyte', the Byrds' demo, and 'Mr Tambourine Man': 'Byrds got harmony from us. Every one of those guys really liked what we were doing when we went on tour with them back in 1965.' Dean is believed to have recorded the harmonies for 'Tambourine Man' on a demo for McGuinn. Dewey Martin played drums on a cut for the Dillards prior to joining the Buffalo Springfield. On one billing, the Dillards followed the Byrds, but were followed by the Buffalo Springfield."

A good performance, and one about which I don't think Bobby would complain, and the same performance level is maintained in "Jody's Tune" a Rodney D./Dean Webb composition, where the two writers play "twin mandolin" and Douglas plays banjo. The tune is something like a "Third Man" type thing, or alternatively the type of material that would accompany a silent film. That's followed by the introduction to "Pretty Polly", a pregnant single lady who is murdered by the father of her prospective child, but with a pocket knife. The album, we get the "Rodney finally plays his harmonica" bit, followed by a medley of "Taters In Sandy Land" and "Gimme Chaw T'Baccer", which are apparently compositions of Daddy Dillard, named Homer, who was apparently a fine old time fiddle player. Then there's the outroduction, if you see what I mean, with a few more cracks, one about Dean Webb being so thin, that "if he stood sideways on and stuck his tongue out, you could mistake him for a zipper." Then it's "Buckin' Mule", where "Douglas makes the sound of the mule braying with his banjo, and Rodney . . . imitates the other end." The records spins to an end with a verse from everybody, and of course, Rodney forgets the words. I'm sure you get the picture, and I'll say again that this is a very fine record, which is to my mind by far the best of what we might call the "original" Dillards. R. Serge Denisoff produces a couple of quotes that seem to wind this section up fairly well. "'Douglas is probably the greatest banjo player that ever was,' exclaims Rodney. Mitch interjects 'the banjo itself was not enough to establish the Dillards as world beaters. Period. The comedy kept us alive, the banjo certainly didn't.'"

PICKIN' & FIDDLIN'

With Byron Berline, actually, and as you've more than likely guessed, that was the title of Dillards' album number three, released in the USA in early 1965, and originally with the catalogue number Elektra EKS 7285. I'm not too sure whether it was ever released here, but in this case, I'm not too sure whether it mattered much either, because in my opinion, this album is only of interest to what Jonh Ingham would call "Dillards completists". Sure, the picking's not bad at all, and good old Byron (A ZigZag hero for his many great works, including the Byrds, "Country Honk" off the Stones "Let It Bleed" album, and, of course, the fact that he's with the amazing Country Gazette) wields a mean bow at times, but after the hilarity and good vibes (although the term probably hadn't been coined when the album was made) of the live album, this is nothing more or less than a great big let down. The reasons are indistinct at this range–maybe it was a token attempt to get back in favour with the folkie aristocracy, although why they should bother, I really don't know. I can't really recommend this album in any way, for the reason that it is a clinical attempt to recreate in a sort of Cecil Sharp type way the styles of old time country fiddlers, like the strangely named Eck Robertson, who sounds as if he may have been the real life event behind the story about the vicar, doing a christening, who is stung on the nose by a wasp. Still, there's a bit of biographical stuff on the sleeve of the record by Ralph Rinzler which I'll document here concerning Byron Berline.

He was born in Caldwell, Kansas, in July 1944, and grew up on a farm in Oklahoma. His father, Lue Berline, was of German/English descent, and was also a fine fiddle player, winning a great number of contests, something which Byron has echoed, as you'd appreciate if you'd ever seen him play "Orange Blossom Special", which I was lucky enough to do when he came over with the Bogus Burritos. A live recording is available on "Last of the Red Hot Burritos" (A&M AMLS64343), and it certainly wouldn't hurt you to check it out, because it's very good, and much better than "Pickin' And Fiddlin'" So there you have it–the first bummer from the Dillards, and, I'm happy to say, the last up to this point. Something much more significant happened to the Dillards at around this time, because Doug Dillard decided to leave. R. Serge Denisoff: "Rodney's desire to artistically move in different directions clashed with Doug's wish to continue in the bluegrass idiom. Over time, nearly two years, Douglas left the group, joining ex-Byrd Gene Clark in The Expedition. Ironically, both of their collaborations for A&M were no less removed from the traditional than what Rodney's sense of direction dictated."

Expedition was a group which didn't contain Gene Clark, although the first Dillard and Clark album was called "The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard and Clark". N.B. to Pete–Expedition, not Journey. Be that as it may, the two albums, both released here on A&M, and both now deleted, were very good indeed, and well worth having. The only remnant is a budget album on Mayfair called "Grass Roots" (AMLB 51038), which has a side each of D and C and the Burritos, together with a mis-spelling of Gene Clark's surname with an E. Since then, there has been quite a lot of silence from Doug Dillard, with only the occasional session mention, as on the Aztec Two Step album. Actually, if you check out your copy of "Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones Ltd." by the dread Monkees, you'll see Doug's name there among the credits, along with Paul Beaver (of Krause fame), and Fast Eddie Hoh. Still, that's by the way, and more to the point are the following: "The Banjo Album" on Together ST1003, featuring Doug, John Hartford, Don Beck, Bernie Leadon, Gene Clark etc., and "Early LA" (Together ST-T 1014), with Doug, Dino Valente, David Crosby, the Byrds pre-Tambourine Man Trio, Canned Heat, Leon Russell, Larry Knechtel, Hal Blaine and so on. Both never yet released here, and I haven't heard them myself, but they sound useful. Another one I haven't yet heard is "Duelin' Banjo" (again!), which is Doug's solo album on 20th Century Records. I'm not sure who releases them here, if anyone, but I've ordered an import today, and in the fullness of time, I'll let you know.

Right, now if Herb Pedersen ever gets to read this, he'll probably be wondering just where he gets a mention, and it's here.

Herb was originally from Berkeley, and he was around during the formative years of the San Francisco scene. I asked him whether he knew Jerry Garcia. "We all had a band, a kind of bluegrass band, called the Pine Valley Boys, at the same time as Garcia had another bluegrass band. In our band, apart from me, was David Nelson, who is with the New Riders, Butch Waller, who was later in High Country (two albums on Raccoon, not released here, but reportedly not amazing), and the bass player was Jeff Levin, who was later in a group called People–I don't know if you remember them, but they were out three or four years ago. We would all get together, and do gigs here and there in the Bay Area." I've got one album by People on Paramount, where there is a bass player called Levin, but it's Robb Levin. Still, if you're interested, it's in the bargain bins. OK, Herb. "It was just before the big San Francisco boom, and I think that's one of the reasons that I left the area, because it was really getting into that whole freakout trip, and I just got tired of it, and wanted to get into some music where I could really listen to everything that was happening. The acid music back then was very free form and loud, and I just couldn't get off listening to it. Some of the tunes were really good, but a lot weren't, they were just jive, you know."

From the West Coast, Herb moved to Nashville. "I was living there for about one and a half, two years, from '67 till about summer 1968. I was in a group called Carl Tipton and the Mid State Playboys, which I'm sure you've heard of (sarcastically). They did an hour bluegrass TV show every Saturday from 12.30 to 1.30 on Channel 8 in Nashville. I was very lucky in Nashville, though, because I had only been there six months, and was on the TV show, when Earl Scruggs saw me on it one afternoon when he was home, and got my name from the union. Then he called me over to his house, and asked me if I would replace him with the Flatt and Scruggs band while he was in hospital. It was a great opportunity, and fortunately, I had learnt most of the tunes that they did, ages before. So I worked for Lester Flatt for a while, because Earl was in hospital having a hip operation."

That's really falling on your feet, I'd say. Did Herb move to Nashville out of some desire to be close to the roots of bluegrass? "Not bluegrass, so much as country music in general, because I really wanted to get into the country approach to country music rather than the city approach. To get more of a basic understanding of what it was at, because most of the country bands from the city have that city sound. I think you really have to get into an area and live it, so I did it for a couple of years. Of course, it wasn't very much time, but I saw a lot of very natural country situations, like playing on the top of snack bars and drive-in movies. At that time, Flatt and Scruggs were doing gigs like that, playing in school houses in very small towns, like very small grammar school auditoriums, where everything is scaled down."

WHEATSTRAW

Now we've placed Herb's past, and we're up to the latter part of 1968, when Herb actually joined the Dillards. The first album of the new regime was indeed "Wheatstraw Suite", and it came out here shortly after ZigZag started, that is maybe the summer of 1969, about six months after its American release. The number is EKS 74035, and I think it's absolutely essential, so place your orders now. R. Serge Denisoff: "The Dillards replaced Doug with Herb Pedersen in 1968, and produced 'Wheatstraw Suite', which included drums and pedal steel. The Dillards maintained their roots, and moved however slowly to a new horizon. They kept the buckskin shirts and Rodney was still the stage buffoon. 'Suite' the group rightly considers one of their finest albums on Elektra. In fact, it is one of the premier country folk-rock albums." Yes, indeed, a brilliant piece of work, and one which I strongly urge you to investigate. By this time, Jim Dickson was no longer producing them, and I must apologise at this point for not informing you that he did, in fact, produce "Pickin' and Fiddlin'". The new man in the chair was Jimmy Hilton, and he did a fine job, assisted by Rodney Dillard, with, another innovation material culled from much wider sources than before. It was apparently a case of Hilton being the engineer and Rodney doing the playing, and between them, they worked out something very good.

Of the thirteen tracks, I like nine to distraction, which is a pretty high ratio, so I'll just pick out a few high points, in the belief that some of you will be sufficiently interested to check it out yourselves, and thereby get the full story. There's an accapella version of "I'll Fly

Away" (famous more recently as performed by another fine Elektra band, the late lamented Plainsong), which starts the record briefly, and is again briefly revisited during a very strange "market report" which begins the last track, "She Sang Hymns Out Of Tune", which I originally heard (and maybe the Dillards did too), on the first and arguably greatest Nilsson album, "Pandemonium Shadow Show". The song, however, isn't a Nilsson original, as it was written by a Mr (or Miss) Lincaid, about whom I have no information. Then there's a quite splendid version of "I've Just Seen A Face", which I'm sure you all know came from "Help!". I know, because I've just looked through my Beatles collection, and guessed right first time. Similarly well done is Tim Hardin's "Reason To Believe" (now there's a bloke I'd like to talk to), and Herb gets the chance to show that he can pick pretty well on "Bending The Strings". The songs written by members of the band are also much more generally accessible, and I particularly liked "Nobody Knows", "Little Pete" and "Hey Boys".

For this record, the Dillards also decided they'd use some of the session "heavies", and among them are Buddy Emmons, whose pedal steel can be heard to good effect on "I've Just Seen A Face", Joe Osborn on electric bass (Mitch plays stand up acoustic bass), and Jim Gordon on drums.

Right, that's all I intend to say on that one. Now, listen!

COPPERFIELDS

The final Dillards album on Elektra, released in 1970 on EKS 74054, and still available. Andrew Lauder, who has enormous good taste which is seemingly unblunted by the amount of crap he must have to listen to from time to time, named this as one of his five favourite albums in 1970, which is a great, but well deserved compliment, and may have something to do with the fact that the band are now signed to United Artists, but we'll come on to that later. I'd better let R. Serge start off again: "'Copperfields' was even a greater step away. Paul York, a drummer and a friend of Herb's, joined them. The majority of the songs, written by Rodney, as well as the harmonies, clearly announced that the Dillards were no longer tied by the past. Rodney and Mitch both violently object to being categorized as do all music acts, and retort 'we don't sound like the Byrds', or 'we were here before the Byrds or the Buffalo Springfield'. Still, they were in the folk-rock-country-western genre."

Again, there's more good music in this album than you'll find in too much of your 1973 elephant manure (which you'll gather is several times bigger, presumably, than horse manure), and the group written compositions vie with the outside material, in this case by Lennon and McCartney, Nilsson and Eric Andersen, in creating a well balanced and memorable record, with a heap of high spots. Again, I'd rather let you listen than do a boring old track by track, but I'll mention that there's a remake of a track from the first album, "Old Man At The Mill" which I'm still not sold on, a very nice instrumental called "Sundown" which sounds like a vintage Duane Eddy B-side, which is some accolade, but definitely a compliment coming from me, "Ebo Walker", which I believe to be nothing to do with Nigerians, but which is a great song, and the beautiful title track, composed by Herb Pedersen. The whole thing was produced by John Boylan, who Herb tells me is also Linda Ronstadt's producer, and she's really good. Another one to check out, groan, groan. John Boylan and his brother Terry were involved with the Appletree Theatre, about which I've long had a desire to know more. Did Herb know anything?

"I have no idea, because that was before I knew John, and when he recorded us, we were too involved in our own trip to get into what he had done before. But I've heard the album, and I thought it was really good. Since that one album, Terry has put out another one, that I think John produced."

ROOTS & BRANCHES

And now, we're up to 1972, and there's a lot of changes around. Let's give Bob Chorush first go this time. "At this point, Herb Pedersen got married, so he left the group. His wife said she didn't like the company he was keeping. Rodney makes some obscure allusion to Yoko and the Beatles when he speaks of Herb's wife. Mitch said that he didn't like the company that Herb was keeping, but that he would never say anything about it. Dean said that he doesn't like company at all, because they rattle his frogs.

"Paul York was an old friend of Herb Pedersen's. Shortly after Herb joined the Dillards, Paul did likewise. But with Herb gone, the Dillards sorely needed a banjo picker. The only peerless pickers present were already purposefully employed by Dillard and Clark, those being Doug Dillard and Billy Ray Latham. Billy Ray decided to change Dillards in mid-stream."

Now you, R. Serge. "At this point in time, Herb Pedersen departed the group, not desiring to go on the road. The reasons given for this are not clear. Mitch only says Herb left because his new bride opposed the tour. No member of the Dillards could logically block the group's only avenue to the public and continue with them. Billy Ray Latham replaced Herb. Banjo pickers in the Dillards share the fate of San Francisco drummers, being the first to go. After "Copperfields", the unit left Elektra, and joined Anthem in search of a new image, a hit, and a company which would promote them. Even their staple "Rodney the Buffoon" bit was eliminated early this year, as it interfered with their 'more serious music'."

Herb has apparently never had the chance to state his side of it before, so here it is. "I quit them in May or June two years ago, for a number of reasons. I wanted to kind of expand in different directions. I respected Rodney for his direction, but I wanted to try other things. I was more into a country oriented area, and he wanted to get into really hard rock, but flavoured with the Dillards kind of stuff. I really couldn't see the point of just punching a time clock, because I wasn't into it that much. I thought that I'd be dead wood if I remained and didn't have that much of a say in what we were doing, because it was his group, and he should do what he wants with it.

"What happened next was kind of a weird scene. I was one of the original members of Country Gazette—when Douglas and Byron split up, Byron asked me to join him. That was at the end of Dillard and the Expedition, so it was comprised of Roger Bush, Billy Ray Latham, Byron and myself. I kind of organised the harmonies for them, and got them pretty tight, and through a few other people we got a record deal. At which point, I said 'OK, that's all I want to do.' I just wanted to get them off their feet, and I had told Byron that in the beginning, because I still wanted to pursue my own thing. So then they started off and it was building up to something really terrific, but then Billy Ray in the interim switched from the Gazette to the Dillards because of my absence. Actually, I told Rodney that he ought to try Billy, because he sang tenor and played banjo, which is what I did. Then we got Kenny Wertz to join the Gazette (from Scotsville Squirrel Barkers) but now Kenny is leaving, and Roland White, Clarence's brother is going to join the Gazette. And that's how it stands as at this five minutes."

Then there was the change of record company. Herb being the only unbiased individual available, I asked him about it. "We were kind of shelved, you know. They (Elektra) had Judy Collins, the Doors and Bread, and that kept them pretty busy, and so, as a result, we wanted to get somebody with a little more individual attention, and that's when they went to White Whale." Further questioning produced the information that White Whale was in fact Anthem, the name apparently having been changed to protect the guilty, or so one might believe when talking to the Turtles. On the other hand, the Turtles also told me that they were the only act which produced any good records on White Whale, which I now know to be untrue, as the Rockets (later to develop into Crazy Horse) were on that label. One must charitably presume that Howard and Mark had forgotten that.

Back to "Roots and Branches", which was released in 1972 on Anthem in the States, and on United Artists here (UAG 29366). R. Serge Denisoff: "It is a return to the roots of rock. Steppenwolf and Three Dog Night producer Richard Podolor mixed it. This is an important step, since nearly all previous production has been done by those in the folk-country category. 'Get Out On The Road' is a pure undiluted rock and roll song. No hyphen of any kind in front of it. 'Last Morning' is a haunting arrangement far beyond anything they have done before. They hope it will be released as a single, and become a monster hit for them. Mitch makes note of the fact that artistic success is marvellous, but money is nice too. The album, much to Mitch's delight, defies labelling—'our music evolves in such a difficult way that I can't imagine it sounding like anybody elses.' Rodney calls it 'an intermixing of sound'. As the title of their album indicates, the Dillards are younger than yesterday. They look forward to new challenges, but are proud of their heritage." Well, that's a little heavy. Personally, I would never boast about producing a pair like TDN and the Wolf, because they are emphatically not my cup of tea, but it's true to say that Podolor, who in fact produced the record, according to the sleeve, has used many well worn techniques much beloved of bands in a somewhat heavier league than the Dillards. In fact, there's a singular lack of information on the sleeve, like who sings lead on what, etc, so perhaps Denisoff is right. But all that's nit picking, if the record is good enough. However, I don't think it is.

Problem number one seems to be a lack of material. There are five songs on each side, amounting to just under thirty-two minutes of music. That might be all right, except for the fact that on too many of the tracks, there are almost interminable fades. Mr Denisoff seemed to be quite keen on "Get Out On The Road"; I have to admit that I hated it after I'd heard the title line sung about thirty times without any apparent variation, and it's a pretty pointless song too, as far as I'm concerned. One thing I'll agree on, and that's the thing about the album being difficult to label. Unfortunately, that's because, in my mind at least, the direction, if any, that the Dillards are following seems to lead to nowhere in particular. They've obviously aimed for a change of image, as evidenced by the cover photos, where instead of the country boy look, there's a bearded bunch of very experienced looking blokes, standing outside a country shack, very much a la Cat Mother on "Albion Doo Wah", which you should listen to for an amazing track called "Strike A Match And Light Another". The sound has similarly become more consciously L.A., with no sign at all, as far as I can hear, of a stand up bass, and the few bits of banjo and mandolin well back in the mix for the most part, with Paul York's drums very much to the fore. True, there's some nice songs, but most of them aren't that memorable, with a couple of exceptions like "Last Morning", which is a Shel Silverstein song. While listening, it seemed to have a definite Dr Hook theme to it, and sure enough, there it is, on "Sloppy Seconds". Another good one is "One A.M.", which was the single from the album over here, and it was written by one Paul Parrish, whom Pete says has been recommended somewhere by John Stewart, which of course, can't be bad. "Big Bayou" is OK as well, were it not for one of those interminable endings, and the fact that it's credited to Gib Gilbeam, who I think we must assume to be Gib Guilbeau, who was in the legendary Nashville West with Gene Parsons, Clarence White and Wayne Moore.

Oh, this isn't getting anywhere. The record is quite listenable, and words to describe it come pretty easily, like refined, respectable, thoughtful, and unfortunately, most appropriately, sterile. A dreadful thing, but in laying to rest those bluegrass roots, so proudly mentioned in the title, they've picked up some branches . . . of the Co-Op, perhaps? It's a drag, but it sure enough won't convince me. In the final track, "Man Of Constant Sorrow", credited incidentally to Rodney Dillard, who has got to be kidding, they say "Farewell to old Missouri", and maybe that's what it's all about. A final word on the album from Pete Frame. "It's not bad, but it certainly isn't another 'Copperfields'." Right on, whatever that means.

HERB PEDERSON

And that's not the title of an album, at least not yet. The original objective of this piece was to give you some news on Herb, so that's what we'll do next. My first (and most obvious question) was how had he got involved with Johnny Rivers?

"I met John in a music store that we both go to, and he happened to be there the same day I was, and we started talking. I told him who I had worked for, and we got into conversation about what he had done, and he said 'Well listen, I'm putting an album together, and I would like to use you on vocals and some acoustic guitar,' so I said 'Fine,' and gave him my name and address, without really expecting to hear from him again. But he did call, and I did the "L.A. Reggae" album with him, and it has snowballed since then, and we've just done another one, the "Blue Suede Shoes" album. In the States, we go on the road as a duo, acoustically. I bring my banjo along, and John will go on first, and do maybe ten or fifteen minutes by himself, and then he calls me out, and we do the rest of the show together." It seems that Herb and Johnny got together initially in November 1972, which leaves a little over a year between leaving the Dillards and joining Rivers. "I was with Linda Ronstadt, doing vocal sessions for her, and doing local gigs with her in L.A." You can hear the excellent music produced on "Linda Ronstadt" which is on Capitol, where she's backed by a positive galaxy of L.A. talent, including all the Eagles, Sneaky Pete, Gib Guilbeau, Herb of course, and even Dean Webb on "I

Still Miss Someone".

"At the time I quit the Dillards, I wanted to get into a more personal trip, writing, because my wife writes lyrics and I write music, so we got together, and made up a package of our material which we are trying to sell to a label right now." There's a good example on the Country Gazette album, "A Traitor In Our Midst", and Herb sings and plays on it a bit too. He also mentioned that he did some sessions with Judee Sill, which was presumably on her first album, as I can't find his name on "Heart Food".

What are Herb's plans now? "To do as much studio work as I can, and keep writing, as well as working with John and with other people, and just expand, not channel my energy into one particular trip. I'm playing a dinosaur right now—there aren't many calls for banjo, so I was personally getting it off knowing the banjo, and not thinking about a monetary situation. If I was a drummer in L.A., like Jim Gordon, for example, you can get into a whole lot of different fields. I think doing vocal sessions and playing banjo with different outfits, and just recording in general is what I want."

In fact, Herb has made an album, although at the time of our conversation, he didn't know which label it might be on. "My wife has written the lyrics to the album—she doesn't perform, although I'm teaching her guitar, so she's getting into that, but she professes not to be a musician. On the record with me are Ed Carter, who has been on the road with the Beach Boys for several years as a bass player, Chris Smith, who is a local musician in L.A., and Al Perkins, who plays steel."

He doesn't just play it, he's a bloody magician. When I saw Manassas, he totally stole the show. It would seem that the people mentioned already have commitments, so what about going on the road? "Ed is ready to join me whenever I land the deal, and I think Al is too, because we did the Troubadour together about a week before we came over here, and he really enjoyed himself. I hope it all works out, because he's a terrific guy."

Now, that would really be something to look forward to. By the way, I've seen an album on MCA called "The Revolt of Emily Young" by a group called Foxx, which has an Al Perkins as part of the group. That's 1970. Anybody know whether it's him?

FINALE

While I was doing all this, the news came through that the Dillards are to finally do a tour of this country, promoted by the mighty Iron Horse Agency, later in the year. There will probably be a new Dillards album on United Artists, where the band are now signed for both Britain and America, and there will also be a compilation album of the Dillards' Elektra material, selected by me, and featuring twenty-four tracks, which should, if nothing else, be value for money. It's culled from "Back Porch Bluegrass", "Wheatstraw Suite" and "Copperfields" only, because I didn't want to split up the live album, and there is nothing on "Pickin' and Fiddlin'" which seems sufficiently good. So if you're interested enough to want to hear some of the Dillards, and can't find the earlier albums, don't despair. And the compilation will be a mid-price thing, so it may even attract those who already have one of the later albums.

Well, thanks for getting this far. You'll note that there's no conclusion. Perhaps that's the best way to leave it, as we wait for the Herb Pedersen album, the new Dillards album, and even maybe for a new Johnny Rivers LP. And Johnny Rivers and his band are coming back to England soon, so you'd better save up for that as well.

Too many Byrds spoil the broth, say I, and so we propose to have a brief (two issue) rest before pressing on with chapters 7 - 16 of the Byrdsaga. In the meantime we thought we'd take the opportunity to have a look at the two pronged vanguard of 'Country & Western Rock' (spearheading a dreadful deluge, no doubt). Next month we'll be taking the lid off Commander Cody and his unruly flight crew, but in view of their imminent tour (they'll be coming over in November - keep your fingers crossed) we thought it would be appropriate to introduce you to Asleep At The Wheel (though if you're on the ball you should already be familiar with their recently released UA album 'Comin Right At Ya') through this ace Ed Ward article, which originally appeared in Creem Magazine of Detroit earlier this year.

ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

by Ed Ward

Doin' that Steel Guitar Rag

It's sure taken me a long time to sit down and write this story. The main reason is that a couple of months ago I was passing through Cincinnati and, on an impulse, I walked into Will's Pawn Shop on lower Vine and casually inquired whether they might have a steel guitar for sale. Not a pedal steel, but a lap, or Hawaiian, steel guitar. Will went into the basement and hauled out a dusty case which contained the most beautiful National double-eight I'd ever seen. We dickered some on the price, but Will's heart was clearly not into bargaining. After all, who, in this day and age, would be buying an outdated instrument like that?

Somebody who had gotten zonked out by Western Swing music, no doubt. And I had been. Watching Asleep At The Wheel Tuesday after Tuesday at the Longbranch had given me a kind of fever.

What a good investment that axe turned out to be! I don't play it particularly well, but I do play it well enough to satisfy myself, and I've passed a lot of time these past few months working out classics like "Remington Ride," "Hillbilly Bebop," "Steelin' The Blues," and so on, playing along with records, or just plain jamming the blues. Not sitting at the typewriter.

In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)

I knew Ray Benson in college, but he dropped out after six months and after that he disappeared from my consciousness until one day at a Commander Cody gig Cody's manager, Joe Kerr, came up to me raving about this band they'd gigged with that had blown them off the stage. An old college friend of mine was in it, he said, and I thought he might be referring to a band I once dug called Ed Chicken and the French Fries, but no, he said they were a country band called Asleep At The Wheel.

"That part about us blowing them off stage is simply not true at all," says the Wheel's steel player, Lucky Oceans. "Yeah," Ray adds, "they'd just never played with anybody who played country music before." In fact, Joe was probably being charitable. Ray had been writing him letters about how good the band was, and Joe was taking a kind of I've-heard-this-one-before attitude, so that when he heard them at last, he was probably pleasantly surprised.

But Ray had had the idea for the band in his head for some time, and somehow he got a rent-free 1500 acre farm near Paw Paw, West Virginia. He collected Lucky, with whom he'd played in high school, Leroy Preston, who had grown up on a farm in Vermont with his father's collection of Hank Williams and Ernest Tubb records, a piano player named Ed Freeman (who was on vacation from Ed Chicken), and a bass player named Hal. "We didn't have electricity," Ray remembers, "so we got a generator. For the first three months, all we did was rehearse; we didn't try to get gigs." They rehearsed in a packing shed where the temperature was kept at freezing. "I was playing steel, but there wasn't nothing you could kick when you were playing steel, so I became the drummer because it was the easiest way to keep warm," says Lucky. Leroy, who had drummed in a high school rock band, switched to guitar.

Somewhere along the line they moved to a smaller farm and decided they were ready for the public. The Sportsmen's Club in downtown Paw Paw (population 706) was a bar that featured rock and roll on Saturday and country music on Sunday. The oldsters came on Sunday, and the kids came on Saturday. The rock band was terrible, but it was all there was. Ray managed to talk the club owner into letting them play a Sunday night and pass the hat, and at the end of the evening they were $50 ahead - $15 of it kicked in by the proprietor himself. The next week they got $75, and then they played both weekend nights. They still weren't all that good, but they were deeply appreciated by young and old in Paw Paw. "It was real funny to watch the old geezers dancing with the hippie chicks," Ray remembers. For a while they played rock and roll. Sometimes what transpired bore very little resemblance to music, but you know how those things go.

"Then we got a call from the Hog Farm," says Ray, "and they wanted us to play at the Medicine Ball Caravan, and we didn't know what the fxxk, so we said sure. We'd only played the Sportsmen's Club, and suddenly we were at this ... this, *thing*, and I got dosed, and ... it was totally ridiculous." Gigs with Poco in Washington D.C. followed, and they picked up a small following. Then Lucky and Ray's brother got caught breaking and entering the week after the Manson murders broke into the news, and the Justice of the Peace suggested they move out of the county. The bass player and piano player left, and Ray called his friend Fitzhugh in Boston and asked him if he'd like to play with them. Fitzhugh said sure, and then two girls showed up at the farm wanting to sing backup vocals.

You better believe Ray's glad he took them on. The two girls were named Chris and Emily, and Fitzhugh and Emily left, but Chris O'Connell stayed on. "I'd just gotten out of high school, and I knew I had to leave Arlington (Virginia - Jim Morrison's parents lived in back of the O'Connells) because I didn't want to be a secretary for the rest of my life. I like to sing, and I thought there was something I could do with it, but I needed a push in one direction or another because I had no self-confidence at all. But I'd sung harmony to Emily's lead singing, and I think that's why I stayed and she didn't - she didn't have the ear for harmony." But with the bass player gone and no piano player at all, the band was still in trouble. They'd lived off the land all summer, eating vegetables and poached deer, but as winter approached, Joe's repeated invitation to go West looked brighter. Finally, they decided to go, and on their way across the country, Ray took a chance and picked up Gene Dobkin, a bass player he'd known in college. Ray knew they'd have to be on the West Coast for at least a year, but the band was so reluctant to leave the security of West Virginia that he told them they'd only be gone six weeks or so.

"And so," says Ray, "we starved. We lived in Joe's back yard, a basement ..." "We had a pigeon coop for a while," Chris adds. "Except for the fact that we were starving, it was real neat. Somebody was always around, and there was the volleyball court ... Then Gene ran into this fiddle player who came over to jam and wound up offering us a gig with Stoney Edwards. Now, there's 1500 bands in the Bay Area, and Cody helped us out as much as they could, which was a hell of a lot, but we were still starving, and we weren't even making a slight living. So we went with Stoney and made a worse living, except that we ate."

Poor Folks Stick Together

Stoney Edwards is a country singer who sounds a hell of a lot like Merle Haggard. He is the victim of incompetent management, living in northern California, and the fact that he's black, but he is a warm human being and a top-notch performer. He calls his band the Poor Folks after his biggest hit, and he tours incessantly, playing the lower-echelon country gigs - military bases, cowboy clubs in the Southwest, and dingy bars with live entertainment. The band is whoever he can get to back him up, in the grand country-and-western tradition.

The Wheel backed Stoney at the 1971 Country Deejays' Convention in Nashville (the same one at which Cody debuted), and then went off on a thirty-day tour with him in a Winnebago camper that had such a low ceiling that 6'10" Ray couldn't stand up in it. Part of the tour was a package deal, and the Poor Folks not only got to back up Stoney, but also artists as Freddie Hart (Chris sang harmony on "Easy Lovin' "), Connie Smith, Dickie Lee and LaWanda Lindsay. "We worked hard on that tour," says Ray, "sometimes six hours a day, and we didn't get paid a cent." "I had to wear those damn shoes with the five-inch heels," Chris says. "Boy did my feet hurt." They were learning the business they wanted to be

in, but they weren't exactly getting rich or famous, and being a bunch of hippies backing up a nigger at a country bar in the middle of nowhere, New Mexico, with not a cop for 125 miles around tends to wear down your nerves somewhat. And like Ray said, they weren't getting paid.

So they went back to California, no poorer, but wiser.

Swinging Doors

"I remember the first night we were gonna play the Longbranch, we got here at about 9:30 and they said there wasn't no use settin' up till some people showed up, so we waited around until 10:30 and nobody'd showed yet, so we just packed up into the truck and went home." The Longbranch Saloon is truly one of Berkeley's dingier holes, made up in mock-old-Western style, with a bar that serves wine and beer that one patron notes you don't so much drink as lease for a while. Across the street from a Chinese MSG parlor on the southern stretch of San Pablo Avenue, the Longbranch used to be known as Babylon, and in times gone by Country Joe and the Fish played there. Now it is mostly a hangout for bikers and wasted dregs of the Berkeley streets, with a sprinkling of college students on dates on weekends.

But on Tuesday nights these days the Longbranch is where Asleep At The Wheel plays. The whole thing got off to an inauspicious start, but it wasn't long before the word got around that there was actually a place in Berkeley where you could get drunk and dance and have a fantastic time, all to some of the most wonderful music the East Bay had heard since Commander Cody was getting started. The word began to spread and pretty soon a hard core of 20 to 30 fans could be expected to show up every week – many more, if things were right. The Wheel began getting known around town, and pretty soon, there were nights when the Longbranch was so packed that condensation poured down the walls and it was too hot to dance, even if there had been room to.

What events those nights were! Everybody from local musicians like Elvin Bishop and Mike Lipskin to suburban teenagers flarbed out on sopors to a flock of weird Mansonoid chickies between 10 and 20 years old in transparent dresses and about $10,000 worth of turquoise jewelry to equally weird bikers to an old black guy named Doc who likes to talk about Texas and how to grow popcorn to various members of the Cody entourage to a cowboy or two to local country pickers . . .

Ray took care of booking and so forth, and consequently the second bands were usually pretty good, too. Up-and-coming country-rock bands like Tokapila from Sacramento, a strange folk-rock group called Oganookie, local faves like Alice Stuart & Snake and Knee Deep (formerly the Crabs), a guitarist from a local country TV show, Billy Charles and, inbetween sets, Dave the Juggler juggling balls, frisbees, and – gulp – flaming torches, or Bill White, a 60-year-old landscape gardener for the state, playing hoedown tunes on harmonica. One night the Wheel just played three long sets, and a (working!) television set was raffled off. Admission was, for the longest time, $1.50, which got you in and entitled you to a free beer.

But the best part was that you could get out there and shake it till you break it, drink up, and come back for more.

Texas Playboy Rag

Lest you have been harboring any wrong ideas, let me set you straight: Asleep At The Wheel bears absolutely no resemblance to Poco, nor are they particularly like Commander Cody. They are a Western Swing band.

Western Swing was a form of music that started in Texas in the 30's, and reached its greatest popularity in California in the 40's. It's the "western" half of country and western, pioneered by such artists as Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, Moon Mullican, king of the hillbilly piano players (who taught Jerry Lee everything he knows), Tennessee Ernie Ford in his early days, and little-known artists like Hank Penny and Mel Cox. Big Western Swing bands like Spade Cooley's and Bob Wills' often featured clarinets, saxophones, and trumpets along with the piano, guitars (steel, rhythm, and lead, or "take-off"), accordian, vocalists, and two to four fiddles. Merle Haggard, to name but one, has been immensely influenced by it, and even cut a fantastic album called *A Tribute To the Best Damn Fiddle Player In The World* using ex-Texas Playboys. Bob Wills is about the last living star in the field, and he is nearly immobilized by a number of strokes. (Hank Penny is reportedly running a restaurant in the San Fernando Valley, but I wrote him a fan letter and never heard a word.)

Western Swing is much more jazzy than Nashville C&W, with an off-beat that pushes the music along in a way you'd expect more from Count Basie than Conway Twitty. There is a lot of instrumental soloing, and at its best, it's hot, hot, *hot!*

The Wheel also does straight-ahead Nashville-style country music, and their original tunes are written in both styles. "Space Buggy Boogie" is a swing tune, while "Before You Stopped Loving Me" could show up on the country charts tomorrow. Probably will, in fact. For make no mistake about it – while the band loves you long-haired creeps out there, they also love the people who think CREEM is what separates out of milk and think Jimmy Dickens plays better guitar than Jimi Hendrix.

Poor Folks Stick Together (Reprise)

One of the best things that happened at the Longbranch was that the band finally got a piano player, in the person of Floyd Domino, who was born and raised near Berkeley, and started hitching East one day. He got as far as Stevensville, Montana, a town with four bars, two of which have pianos. He settled there and played piano on weekends in one of them, boogie-woogie and taught piano during the week. On a visit home, he dropped in at the Longbranch, and a week later he was in the band.

Another epoch-making event occurred when Stoney Edwards agreed to appear at the Longbranch one night. The event was publicized on the local country music station, but not many of their listeners made it that night, and the crowd was just about the usual one. Stoney wasn't all that confident when he mounted the stage, backed by his latest Poor Folks, who included Cody's old steel player, the West Virginia Creeper. Two songs into the set, though, he had them conquered. At the end of the set, the audience just would not let him off. After about the fourth encore, Stoney had to beg them to let him go, since his voice was about gone, and finally they relented. A whole new flock of Stoney Edwards fans gathered around him, seeking autographs and shaking his hand. To put it mildly, he was overwhelmed by it all.

They Built the First Atomic Bomb in Tennessee

All summer long, the band dickered with United Artists Records, which had just re-opened their Nashville office under the direction of Kelso Herston, and finally, just before the important Deejays' Convention in mid-October, they signed. The Convention is an important part of the commercial life of country music, with deejays coming from all around the country to be wined and dined by the record companies who put on shows in the Municipal Auditorium for the purpose of showing off old and new acts. As soon as Asleep signed, they were allotted a place on the UA show, which opened the Convention.

I got to my motel late and had just enough time to note that the guitar-shaped swimming pool had been drained, but rain had filled up part of it, and a healthy mess of green stuff was growing there. Grabbing a cab, I zoomed off the Municipal where, since UA had forgotten to register me (and the band!) as a participant, I sneaked in through the garbage room. Once by the stage area, I was introduced to my first Nashville celebrity, Buddy Spicher, super-session fiddler, who, along with back-up vocalists the Nashville Edition, would be aiding the acts on the show. He had rehearsed with the Wheel, and had been so impressed that he demanded to play on their album. "He ain't exactly hurting for sessions, either," Ray noted.

ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL: Back row. . . Gene Dobkin – vocals/bass, Ray Benson – vocals/lead guitar, Chris O'Connell – vocals/rhythm guitar, Floyd Domino – piano/organ. Front row. . . Lucky Gosfield – pedal steel, Leroy Preston – vocals/drums.

The show got off to a slow start. Billy Bob Bowman, aka Biff Collie, UA's Nashville Promo man, MC'd. Billy Mize exemplified what a whole lot of acts would be doing by singing the Eagles' "Take It Easy." Country music seems to be undergoing an identity crisis, and a lot of old and new rock hits are making the charts in slightly different versions. Then Doc and Merle Watson did some clean guitar picking and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band took the stage. Louder than anybody'd ever heard in that town, they did a slick, facile, showy, and emotionally empty set, with fiddler John McEuen springing around on one foot like Doug Kershaw. Since the band at least put on a show, and because the audience was shocked, there was thunderous applause. I was worried – how could the Wheel follow them? Jack Reno took the stage and struggled through "Hitching A Ride," and then the Wheel set up.

Ray looked more scared than I'd ever seen him, and Chris looked like the wooden Indian maid Hank Williams' cigar-store Indian Kaw-Liga fell in love with. "Hello," said Ray, "we're Asleep At The Wheel," and they launched into the Ernest Tubb classic "Driving Nails In My Coffin." The applause was weak. Next Leroy sang one of his own tunes, "Hillbilly Nut," which went over a little better, no doubt because the tale of the country boy attempting to cope with the city hit home. Then Chris took the third and last song, another original about a country singer who lets fame go to his head, "Your Downhome Is Uptown." When Chris is on, she has a voice that can go as deep and mellow as a viola's lower range and bring it right up into a clear, powerful, bell-like soprano, but she was scared and it showed. The sound crew fxxked up bad, and Floyd's piano solo was lost, as were the backup singers. When it was over, they got off stage, and we split without hearing Del Reeves or Slim Whitman. They were expected to show up at a party at UA's Nashville studio, the Sound Shop, on Division Street near the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Chris, Lucky, Gene, Floyd, and I piled into a cab. The mood was one of resignation – they'd done their best, under the circumstances, and they didn't seem to have gone over too well. I didn't even want to try and talk to Ray, because there was a large black cloud over his head. We got to the studio, and shortly Ray arrived, walked up to the portable bar, and slugged down three huge shots of whiskey in a row. We sat around making small talk and waiting for the deejays to arrive. Pretty soon they started trickling in, and Ray was standing alone, glowering, when some guy walked up to him with an outstretched hand, saying, "Well, if it isn't the new Ernest Tubb." He couldn't have picked a nicer thing to say – not only does Ray look a lot like him, but Tubb is clearly one of his big heroes. All Ray could do was stammer "You, you mean – you *liked us?*" "HELL YES," the deejay bellowed, whomping him on the back. Ray caught his breath. "Well all *right!*" And from there on in the convention went just swell, with the band signing hundreds of autographs, including several in Braille for a young blind girl, and deejays telling Leroy how much they liked "that song about the nut," and asking everybody when the record would be out. It was grand.

Honky Tonkin'

Broadway is dying. As John Hartford has noted, they're tearing down the Grand Ole Opry, and nobody eats at Linebaugh's anymore. The Merchant's Hotel is closed, leaving its resident crew of winos, has-beens and would-bes to find a more copacetic climate, and across the street from Ernest Tubb's Record Shop, a huge storefront lies vacant. Tootsie's Orchid Lounge is more for tourists than pickers now, but there are still signs of life if you choose to look around. Little Roy Wiggins' Music City sells fine steel guitars, and during Convention time, features some of the finest picking you'll ever hear. Tubb's is one of the most complete country record stores in the nation, and Buckley's across the street offers amazing rare 78's for a buck apiece. But the Ryman Auditorium, long-time home of the Opry, is being torn down, and in 1974 the show will move to Opryland, a plastic amusement park outside town. This move is being sponsored by several local businessmen, including Roy Acuff, whom some consider a country legend, and others an obnoxious honky whose prime is long past. "He said he'd personally remove the first brick from the Ryman if it'd get the Opry out there any quicker," snarls Chris in a voice that leaves no doubt as to what might happen to Acuff if they were to meet. And once the Opry's gone from Broadway, it will turn back into the Skid Row it's been trying to be for so long.

All week long, it's seemed like a party alternating between Cody's digs at the Holiday Inn (John Sinclair was along for the trip) and the record company parties and hospitality suites in the hotels. By Sunday night it's all over, and the deejays and bands are pulling out of town. The Wheel is staying, though, to make their record under the eye of veteran swing producer Tommy Allsup, and I'm gonna go out for one last night on the town before I split.

Ray and Hank, a fat, jolly steel player from Jim Ed Brown's band, show up at the motel loaded to the gills and suggest we head off to a jam session at Deeman's Den, a funky Boradway bar around the corner from the Merchant's Hotel. We walk in and a band is playing, but half of them are sick with flu and more than glad to hand over the stage to these new pickers, so at intermission Ray, Hank, and Bobby Herold, a local guitarist, along with some other people, set up on stage. Two pedal steel guitars, drums, guitar, and Ray on bass. Members of the Wheel and Cody's band show up to jeer, and in no time they're off. "Here's little number we recorded in . . . The Merchant's Hotel!" Laughter. "One take!" "Yeah," says Ray, "after we finished recording it a wino came up and stole our instruments." And into the whackiest version of "Loving Her Was Easier" that you'll ever hear, with Ray making up the lyrics and Hank laughing so hard that he looks like a beet, he's so red. Next victim is that bar-band classic, "Proud Mary," a song that Merle Haggard's band has written into their contract they will not play under any circumstances. But it's quickly brought out of the mire as the steel players get into a duel, with breathtaking licks zooming around and grins spreading across the faces of all concerned. By the end of the set, everybody's so weak with laughter they can hardly applaud. Somebody calls "Last call fer alky-haul" and we stumble out into deserted rain-soaked Broadway.

Epilogue:
Space Buggy Boogie

Cody's steel player, Bobby "Blue" Black, and his brother own a recording studio just south of the San Francisco airport, and it's a Sunday morning as members of the Wheel, Bill Kirchen from Cody's band, and some friends gather to hear the first mix of the Wheel's album. It's beyond anyone's wildest expectations. Three fiddlers – Buddy Spicher, Johnny Gimble (who once played with Bob Wills), and Cody's Andy Stein – fill out the sound admirably, and every performance is sparkling fresh. The hard work in Nashville has paid off, and when the tape is over, Kirchen slaps Ray on the back. "You got yourself a hit record, boy." Ray is relieved, as is everybody, that it sounds so good. As I'm leaving, Ray calls to me, "Hey, Ed! You still gonna write that article?" Sure. "Tell 'em we still need a fiddle player." Okay. They still need a fiddle player. But even without one, they're the finest country and Western Swing band in the land.

Always wear a great big smile,
never do look sour
Travel round the country, playing
music by the hour
"Take Me Back to Tulsa," Bob Wills

Postscript

Just as we were going to press we heard that they'd finally found themselves a fiddle player – how about that?

Hello, people, and a happy September to you, although, as you've probably gathered, it's in fact still August as I'm typing this, due to the necessity for professionalism and other things at one time somewhat alien to our wondermag. It hasn't been a month packed with meetings with superstars, although Connor and I did get to meet Van Morrison, and in the fullness of time, you'll be hearing all about it. Speaking of Van, his Monday night concert at the Rainbow was quite brilliant, sharing with Johnny Rivers the distinction of being the best music I have seen in far too long. It's interesting that Van and Johnny share another distinction, that of being the two best Van Morrison interpreters around. Both gents have new albums, Van's being "Hard Nose The Highway" and Johnny's "Blue Suede Shoes", and I believe that vast amounts of good music are available in both, to which I must add that I am a total freak for Van Morrison, and these recommendations are meant to be taken totally seriously.

Now some more records, just for a change. I've gone on before about the gems available in cheap racks, and I'm just going to list that which I have gleaned from such sources in the last few weeks. I might add that I bought them all, no swops, and that few, if any of them cost more than fifty pence, and some were a whole lot less. Unless it says otherwise, they are American imports, often still shrink wrapped. As a help, I'll also list the significance of the record if it's not clear. Right, off we go.

"Breakout" by Mitch Ryder; "Reflections In a Golden Horn" by Steve Douglas; "Try It" by the Standells; "Bunky and Jake"; "Psychedelic Guitar" by Friar Tuck (Curt Boettcher and Gary Paxton are involved); "The Great Memphis Sound" by the Mar-Keys; "Colours" by Ken Nordine; "Little Bit of Sunshine" by Judy Henske; "Newbury Park" (contains a track called "ZigZag People"); "Birth Announcement" by Danny Cox (on Together Records); "Stillrock" (featuring Don Preston); "Hold On" by Dee Clark; "Dues to Pay" by Wayne Talbert and the Melting Pot (ex Sir Douglas); and that's about half of them. But I hope you get the picture that there's loads of interesting stuff around that won't break you, and it's nearly always in very reasonable nick. Keep searchin', as Del Shannon may once have said. Which is a clue for a plug, and I don't mean electrical shops, ho, ho, ho. Actually, the not very famous Contour Records, suppliers of discs to off licences, fish shops and so on, were at one time going to put us on the mailing list for albums they were re-issuing or compiling in which we might be interested, but it came to naught, as so often happens. However, I think they deserve a big bouquet of plastic flowers for their quite excellent Del Shannon compilation, which costs seventy something pence, and contains the original recordings of all my favourites by Charles Westover, Del's real name. (Don't he know a lot!) Forget the embarrassing live stuff you cringed to on the Whistle Test—this is why the man is a legend. Also on the label is a Surfaris compilation, including "Wipe Out" and so on, which the surfin' birds among you might be interested in. Another cheaper label is Checker, who are doing good things like "Best of Dale Hawkins Vol.1", "Muddy Waters at Newport" and a good Bo Diddley collection (not the awful London sessions). Cheap reissues are often the only thing preventing me from despair.

Despair, unfortunately, is the best I can manage in response to a review I read in the otherwise excellent "Sounds" by Rob Mackie concerning Albert Hammond's "Free Electric Band" album. First of all, we're told that it's Albert's first album, which is incorrect. Then we're informed that Albert's writing partner is Lee Hazlewood, which is not quite true, as it's Mike Hazlewood, which is pretty different, although in fairness you can see the similarity. Such inattention to detail pisses me off pretty badly—you'd think the bloke would take a little care. Ah well, that's why ZigZag was started, although at one time, there were definite signs of improvement in the rest of the press. Incidentally, I'd like to record my thanks here to Richard Williams for his generally excellent writing in "Melody Maker", and wish him well working for Island. If you ever feel moved to write again, Richard, don't forget to ask us first, because we need a smart young lad. Another smart young lad is Andy Childs, who produces "Fat Angel", which I like to think is another ZigZag in embryo. You can buy the paper at Virgin most easily, and all the ZigZag staff read it, than which there is no higher recommendation.

Now, some newer records which I like, in no particular order. Capability Brown, who played a very good press reception, Michael Murphey, Albert Hammond (as mentioned above), Freddie King on Shelter (although I'm less keen on the Leon Russell triple—he seems to have lost direction), "Back In '72" by Bob Seger, McGuinn, Mott, Roy Wood, Kootch, Miracles Greatest Hits Vol.2, and B.J. Thomas, who uses very fine backing musicians, and is no slouch himself.

On to films for a para, or at least one film, "Let The Good Times Roll", which is very good visually in its flashback sequences, but musically often disastrous. The old firm from the fifties of Fats Domino, Little Richard etc., was so much better than the live stuff they did for the film, and Little Richard was positively embarrassing. The best moments for me were the genuine emotion displayed by the leader of the Five Satins, after the tumultuous applause they received for "In The Still Of The Night", which was quite beautifully performed, and the sight of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley duck-walking across the stage towards each other, which is my conception of an essential scene in any film about rock'n' roll. Still, it's probably worth seeing, because the good bits are very good. Among the performers in the film was Chubby Checker, and he was rank, but a couple of days after, I received, from a long-time reader, Phillip Barnard from Lexington, Kentucky, a long and interesting letter to which I haven't yet replied, although I'm going to soon, Phillip. Before I do, I'd like to quote you a bit from it. "I am a guitarist, with Chubby Checker, and I drop in here [Kentucky] whenever we play close enough, and, among other things, pick up the copies of ZigZag that have come since I was last here. About two weeks ago, Chubby noticed the copies I had in my suitcase, and asked me what they were. I told him, in a few words, about ZZ, and gave him a couple of copies to read. He looked at them for a couple of minutes, tossed them away, and went back to slouching in a chair, with a cheap transistor radio held to his ear (a la fifties), which is how he spends all his time off stage. I asked him what he thought of them (the ZigZags), and he mumbled "Unhh?" which is what he would say if you told him he was going to die in an hour. Oh well—count him out—he'll never make a comeback."

Phillip, if we gave away LPs for good letters, you'd get one. I'll reply soon.

Some more best wishes, to Jac Holzman, one of the very nicest people you could ever wish to meet, who has stepped out of Elektra Records to look into quadrophonic and video things for Warner Communications, and a ZigZag "Hello!" to Mel Posner and David Geffen, who are going to take Elektra and Asylum to even greater success in the next few years. Two quality labels joining forces cannot fail to be dynamite, so watch out.

Now a few more records. I've forgotten to mention before Phillip Goodhand-Tait's very fine single, and I'm looking forward to hearing his album. Come on, buy his records, because he's a real talent, from whom I get a great deal of enjoyment. Last month, I mentioned the Horslips album, which I have subsequently played, and find to be a mixture of excellent and rather odd, but definitely worth hearing to see whether or not it might be to your taste. Queen I was prepared not to like, because of their name and so on, but as they're on Elektra in the States, I felt obliged to at least listen, and they are in fact a very promising band, with a freshness which is quite staggering. First impressions, as Jane Austen might say, are often totally incorrect. Neil Sedaka's album is a thing of great quality, and you would do well to have a listen, and then you'll probably buy it. There are all too few of his genius around. All those who like the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and that should be large numbers, would do well to investigate a new United Artists album by Doc and Merle Watson, which will make you

drool if you're into supremely good finger picking. Finally, there's a compilation double album by the Impressions, under the title of "Curtis Mayfield—His Early Years With the Impressions" which I must confess to liking rather more than his later ghetto, drug, wah-wah things, which seem to sell better. Maybe it's my advancing age again.

An amazingly recondite piece of information; Mike Oldfield once played a benefit for ZigZag in Aylesbury, at which, incidentally, we lost money. We also ran one of the first features ever on his old band 'The Whole World'. What a magazine!

Some quick ZigZag family news. Pete has now inherited Ian Hunter's dog, Dude, who joins the unruly McGuinn (a dalmatian with no brain), and the well behaved Fido, who has won a championship in Aylesbury for his obedience. Apparently, Dude is following Fido, rather than Guinny. Carole has thankfully given up appending facetious comments to my columns, and, apart from deserving the credit for training the canine trio above, is making Pete work very hard organising a dog show. Connor doesn't seem to have any animals; perhaps it's because they eat them where he comes from. Michael had a cat at one time, I think, but he seems to have lost it. The Tobler household has recently regained our rabbit, Roscoe, who was donated to a school for mentally handicapped kids, but who was being mistreated by them. Although it would be churlish to blame the children, the people who supervise them piss me off pretty badly, if they can allow such things to happen. OK, that's it for now. Lizzie and Jayne (respectively fans of Donny Osmond and Gary Glitter) both have chicken pox at the moment. I hope they get better soon, but I can't help feeling that poetic justice is being done in response to their taste. Maybe they'll grow into Arthur Lee and Van Morrison.

John

SPOT ON AT READING

WHALEY

How did we get there? Well, there's this enormously bicepped roadie called Dixie who loaded the magazines between String Driven Thing's equipment (they were playing for nothing at Windsor) and off we went. Except that Dixie said he knew the best pub outside London. It turned out to be The Target along from Northolt airport and it wasn't really very pleasant, but Dixie had a large glass of water and seemed to enjoy himself. The lunchtime locals obviously knew where we were heading for, and reacted in a drug squad manner. Besides Dixie there was Connor, Julian, inch-wide photographer and visualist, and myself.

When we reached Reading there were signs from the AA saying Pop Festival. I suggested that they should read 'Pop Festival—Right On.' Nobody thought this funny and I'm thinking of putting it on a cassette and sending it to Tony Blackburn. At the site we were following this incredible motor coach hired by Phonogram Records with tables in it, and a bar, coffee making machinery. Dixie's van merely drops diesel.

The tent itself was great, and we shared it with some people who make their own jewellry and I really liked it and wanted to buy some, only I'm not Elton John. They kept us supplied with herbal tea and bits of food which was really kind, and immediately we knew things were going to be good. Dixie mumbled something about freedom and disappeared in the direction of Windsor and there we were. Personally I'm shit scared of selling the magazine. We'd tried once before at the White City when it was pouring down with rain and someone said to me 'You and Julian go out and sell in the stands.' Well, we went out and I'm just not Bernie Cornfield. Evidently I wasn't pushy enough and I sold three. Later on we got a guy who is good at selling called Steve and he sold 100. So that shows you where I'm at. It's a good mag, but how can you tell people?

Anyway things were different at Reading and we had visits from Zigzag friends almost immediately, many of whom obviously knew much more than we did. Still they liked Connor playing a white label of Family on our sound system.

The first band to play on Friday was Embryo from Germany, really refreshing because they weren't represented by anyone there and there was therefore no hype. To start a festival at four o'clock on the Friday afternoon is not a very easy job, but they did it very well. They're interesting for several reasons, because they live as a commune and their manager pitched his tent like anyone else on the site. They come from Munich and last year the German Government sent them to Africa on a grant as a good example of current German rock music. Could you imagine the British Arts Council doing that? While in Africa they picked up a lot of instruments like the bass-marimba, which is a mellow sounding xylophone and the saz, which sounds very like the sitar. They have now incorporated many African sounds into their work. Like many continental groups they are influenced by jazz and their organ player has played with Dizzy Gillespie. They intend to tour here next year, but meanwhile they have a superbly independent attitude to record companies, refusing big deals offered to them because they feel the companies would wish to influence them towards commerciality. As their agreed spokesman, Christian Burchard, says: 'We can earn enough money to keep us in Germany. I don't see why we should sacrifice what we want to do just for a record company.' Despite their views they have had four albums out in Germany, and I found their work original and worthwhile. They also got the festival off to a good start, and it's the one position no group wants to play.

O.K. ever since Focus the British record companies have been searching Europe for another similar success, but I did find that among the unknown bands the continental groups had most to offer, added to the fact that no-one was aggressively telling you how good they were.

Which is how I came to find Tasavallan Presidentii from Finland. Amazing because there was this huge estate-type American car, battered and bruised and driven all the way from Helsinki. Bukka Tolonen is their guitarist and composer, and a total Zappa freak. He'd seen Frank just a few days before in Helsinki and admits the group are very much influenced by him. That is not to say they don't have their own style, and I found them the most impressive of the visiting groups, because they are able to blend a jazz feeling with rock without pretentiousness creeping in.

The French band Ange got a really great response on Sunday morning, which was heartening as I heard that they had had food thrown at them at that citadel of musical intelligence, the Speakeasy in London, at an earlier appearance. I'm afraid I found Magma, also a French group, just a little bit too much to take on account of them inventing their own language. Still they are masterminded by Giorgio Gomelsky who found the Rolling Stones all those years ago and couldn't get it together to manager them, and then managed the Yardbirds. I've always thought Giorgio a genius and madman. He made some great records for the Marmalade label a few years back, and his ideas are always speeding ahead of reality. Although I don't find Magma the answer I'm sure he'll come up with something and intend interviewing him in the very near future. Nonconformers should be supported.

There were, of course, obvious successes like Rory Gallagher on the Friday night, who played some stuff from his new album, and Gerry McEvoy in particular on bass played a very fine set; Genesis were also good but we have to wait for their new work, but Festivals are really about surprises, and George Melly was certainly that. He nearly didn't get on at all, because the contracts, quite rightly, stipulated that artists had to be on site an hour before they went on stage. After a bit of a hassle George got on and once again it was a case of lunacy defeating sanity. As Ronnie Wood lent over and said to me: 'He's got personality.'

Spencer Davis too came back, and it is really good to see him working again with musicians like Pete York on drums, Charlie McCracken on bass and Eddie Hardin. Before this degenerates into one of those music paper pieces, I'd just like to answer a query put to us on the stand (Yes, we had many ranging from the score of the Arsenal-Manchester United match, to where you could personally score). The reason why no encores were allowed is to be fair to the lesser known groups. Otherwise all the well-known groups eat into the time of the guys trying to tell us about their music. All that is left to say is that basically the police were a lot cooler this year on orders from an inspired chief, and congrats to Harold Pendleton and Jack Barry for the organisation. It was really great meeting our readers. Sometimes we wonder if they exist. Of course we know they do, but when you write, it's the loneliest occupation in the world, and basically we're anonymous. We enjoyed you. I hope you continue to enjoy us, and notice has been taken of all your suggestions, and I really think you should edit and run the paper yourselves you're so bloody knowledgeable. Pop Festival. Right On. AA. Over to you Connor for some far more sane and relevant thoughts.

THE SPOTLIGHT KID

Besides the pleasure of talking to the friends of ZigZag who called at the tent, and the pleasure that I personally got when I saw people who had never heard of the magazine, yelp with pleasure and buy two copies, the highlight of the weekend for me was to see three musicians of varying, but exceptional talent. On Friday, Commander Cody lugged his massive frame up the rather sharp inclines of the ramp at the back of the stage, and proceeded to belt out some gloriously uninhibited music. All the musicians in the band played well but I particularly liked his steel player, and the guy who played fiddle and sax. It was a treat and a half to stand at the back of the stage, and hear two of my favourite tracks, 'Down To Seeds And Stems Again' and 'Beat Me Mama Eight To The Bar'. They're playing the Rainbow on the eighth and Dingwall's Dance Hall later that week, so be sure to catch them.

Saturday I was pretty busy at the tent so I missed most of the bands, except for The Faces, who were depressing in the extreme. As one of the 350 people who was totally ensnared by a gig at the Fox Club in Croydon a few years ago, and raved about 'Gasoline Alley' and 'Long Player' until I started to lose all my friends, maybe my impressions are wrong, but I get the feeling that they aren't enjoying their music much any more, and that the work that they have put in (and it's been phenomenally tough) has left them jaded and tired. Their material now seems to lack that killer quality—from Bobby Womack and David Ruffin to what they do now? Phew wotta fall.

Sunday was made for me by seeing John Martyn and Tim Hardin. I'd heard some of John Martyn's records before but stupidly I'd always dismissed him as 'another folkie'—I mean how stupid can you get? And although that's meant to be a rhetorical question, the answer is 'not much'. Anyway—I hate to drop names—a well known musician was telling me that he'd seen him in America, and was impressed by his guitar playing, so I took some time off and it was well worth it—he really is a breathtaking guitarist. It's not often that you can see a guitarist play from about six feet and still not be able to figure out what the hell is going on. The range and variety of the tones that he accomplishes, and the splendour of the shape of his songs left me speechless. So after I've finished cranking out this front line report I'll ring up Island and get them to send the rest of his records and I'll get down to a long interview. If they haven't got his left hand insured for as much as George Best's foot, I'll be very surprised.

A small dose of Ange followed, and they seemed to get a good response, though I'm damned if I know why—then Leslie Duncan, and then the magnificent Tim Hardin. I can honestly say that I've never been so moved by watching a musician play as I was when Tim Hardin sang 'If I Were A Carpenter'. He looked like death—overweight, fearfully apprehensive and with a pallor the colour of bleached calico—afterwards he was drenched in sweat, and looked like he was about to spew out his entire intestines, but by goodness he sang beautifully. The notes were steeped in all the human agony and suffering it is possible to endure, and still survive. And when he sang those lines 'Would you marry me/ Would you have my baby?' I wept. the way he squeezed out the notes was a perfect expression of the lacerating humility of love. I don't care what people think about him, or say about him—and they say some despicably insensitive things—it was one of the experiences of my life to witness his nobility. And if you were one of the people who yelled out to him to get off the stage, the only thing I can offer you is my pity.

The festival site itself, was exceptionally well organised and the music ran like clockwork which in some ways was a bad thing for us, since long set-up times between each band would really have helped our sales but there you go, I suppose it is more important to have well presented music, than enormous sales for ZigZag.

One criticism that I think could be made was the lack of adventure in the programming of the acts—there really wasn't anything that constituted a risk in the way of acts, and it all seemed a little bit directed to what would go down most easily—Status Quo coming on with all that heaviness just at the time that the crowd needed to get up and boogie to keep warm—that kind of approach is the corollary of having businessmen run it, but so is a good unobtrusive, efficient organisation. One thing especially needs to be commended and that is the quality of Rikki Farr's PA, which from where our stall was situated, and indeed from the front of the press bit, kept up a solid level of volume without reducing every instrument to a kind of sludge. The Thames Valley police did their usual ludicrous number, using ill-disguised hippies to grab miscreants for tiny amounts of dope, while the good burghers of Berkshire drove their three litre Rovers with immunity at lethal speed, and equipped with a headful of gin.

I'd like to apologise for the cock-ups in the last issue—the misplaced pages in the middle of Boz Scaggs and the Pink Floyd thing, and I'd like to print Al Clark's letter to me which he sent the day that he received his copy.

A month ago I submitted an article called "Rhymes and Ruminations" which, as implied by the title and as solicited by yourself, was to deal briefly with my six favourite tracks recorded by the Pink Floyd as part of a larger scheme which detailed their discography and achievements.

This has appeared on its own with the title "The Music Of The Pink Floyd", a subject which should I ever feel sufficiently ambitious to attempt writing, would necessitate an entire issue of the magazine. Furthermore, the two photos feature neither *of the individuals about whom I wrote.*

Could the ominously blank half-page not have been filled with Syd Barrett or Rick Wright or drawings of gnomes or what have you? Could "The Music Of The Pink Floyd" disappoint readers who expect more than 1,000 words about six songs? Could I be dreaming? Could you?

Well Al, my old mate, all I can say is that it was of course my intention to include it as part of a larger piece, but for one reason and another the other people who were meant to provide a similar set of reflections, were not as efficient as your good self. Sorry.

ZigZag will shortly be distributed in the United States, and we have great hopes that it will not be long before the ZigZag staff will be jetting off to LA to corner Mike Nesmith and other worthies. It's all about as likely to happen as that I will be joining Record Mirror to write features on Keith Emerson's dog, but the lucky Americans will be able to buy this journal soon in their local record shop or bookshop, which will, as they say, be a nice one (ugh).

Next month is Van Morrison, and need I say more.

Some records that I think you should all seriously check out are Tony Joe White, Jerry Jeff Walker, The Doobie Brothers (Ted Templeman, who produced that record as well as Van Morrison and Little Feat, not to forget 'Clear Spot' told me that the band are well into being Beefheart's biggest fans, hence the title 'The Captain And Me' and their sporting of those Beefheart type hats), but as far as I'm concerned this issue can close where it began, because without doubt, the best album that I have heard this year is the new Family album, a fitting tribute to a great band.

Connor

ZIGZAG

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21st September	Reading Town Hall	1st October	Dunstable Queensway Hall
22nd "	Cambridge Corn Exchange	5th October	Birmingham Town Hall
24th "	Southampton Guildhall	6th "	Newcastle City Hall
29th "	Dagenham Round House	8th "	Sheffield City Hall
30th "	Guildford Civic Hall	9th "	Bristol Colston Hall

Further dates to be announced.