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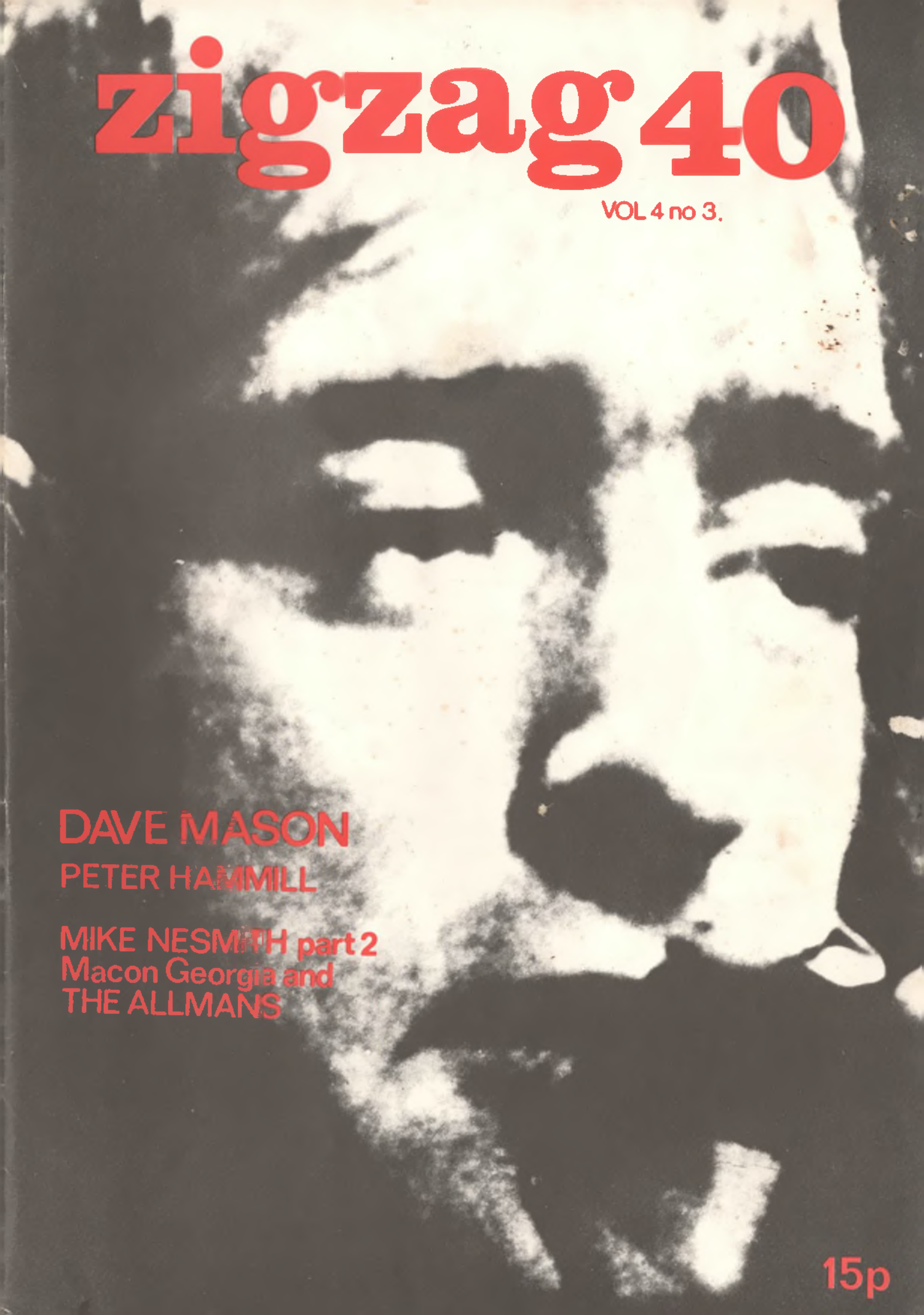

DAVE MASON

PETER HAMMILL

MIKE NESMITH part 2
Macon Georgia and
THE ALLMANS

15p

The interview with **Dave Mason** comes at exactly the right time, since he has got a beautiful new album out. It wasn't possible, because of time limitations and his somewhat clouded memories, to cover all aspects of his career as fully as we would have liked, but, as they say, there'll be another occasion soon. Chris Briggs wrote the article, and the wonderful bloke in charge of Island's 'old' photographs sent us the pictures. The whole thing starts on page 4.

The recorded output of **Michael Nesmith** is discussed by John Tobler on page 12. It is meant to be read in conjunction with the interview that we published last month. Old Tobler nearly went berserk trying to write an article that would have the effect of making every reader race round to the nearest record shop and lash out £14 on all the albums, but finally managed to get it down on paper. For what it is worth, his opinions about the quality of the music that Nesmith has made, are shared by most of the ZigZag staff.

We've had a lot of requests for an interview with **Peter Hammill**, and we've finally found a writer to tackle it. Brian Rivas has talked to Peter many times, and we've amalgamated his efforts into one article. Peter is on the Charisma label, with which ZigZag is associated, through Spicebox Books, and has just had a book of his poems and stories published called 'Killers, Angels, Refugees', which contains one of the most powerful accounts of the deadening effects of being on the road, that I've ever read. Even if you don't fancy reading the entire book, do try to read that piece—it's called 'Audi'. The interviews are on page 18.

In spite of the hassles and general bad vibes surrounding the cancellation of the Allman's tour, it still seems as though they are really trying to create an alternative context for their music, without, perhaps, being as ambitious as the Dead. Their success derives, in large part, from working apart from the traditional nexus of the music business, so the article deals primarily with the town of **Macon, Georgia**, Capricorn Records, and the managers, staff, and bands on the label. It appeared first in a Canadian paper, Great Lake, was written by Ritchie Yorke, and is on page 24.

We write features about music and musicians because we think that their work is worthy of examination, and because we feel that their music can be usefully illuminated by documenting the circumstances in which it came to be made. That's the entire philosophy of ZigZag, and one hopes that it is always upheld. But I have never been so convinced of its usefulness as an approach, as I am by the case of **Nick Drake**. As you will see from the article we had to abandon our normal approach of interviewing the artist himself, and to talk to all the people who have been involved in his career. In the course of doing this I came across an incredible amount of interest in him and his work from very diverse sources, and also a great amount of gratitude to us for tackling the subject. The first part of the results of a very personal odyssey are on page 34.

The month's records, or part of them, are discussed on page 10, and the general leg-pulling, hyping, and gossiping is on page 37.

The nucleus of ZigZag continues to be **Me, Pete Frame, John Tobler** and **Michael Wale** (editorial), **Julian Stapleton** and **Nick Lumsden** (production), and **Jim McGuire** (ads and business generally). We're still printed by **The Chesham Press, Germain Street, Chesham, Bucks**, and distributed by **New English Library, Barnard's Inn, High Holborn, EC1.**

All the best.

Connor McKnight

JUST A YOUNG BOY GIVING IT ALL AWAY

What do we really know of Dave Mason—his disagreements with Winwood, ructions with record companies and his move to America is about all. His recorded output has been minimal while law suits have further aggravated his career. The last we saw of him in England were half a dozen under-rehearsed gigs with Traffic that became 'Welcome To The Canteen', for posterity only.

He appeared a cryptic and cautious individual in a recent interview, not about to give away his innermost secrets lightly. However, as the first English white face to cross the Atlantic in search of the off beat and a founder member of the band that initiated 'getting it together in the country' he must, we figured, have a story or two to tell.

His first band of any consequence was The Jaguars—all local Worcestershire boys in their early teens playing Shadows instrumentals. A single is rumoured to exist on Pye. His next band, The Hellians, had quite a pedigree. Jim Capaldi on drums, with whom Mason has always maintained some relationship, Luther Grosvenor, a guitarist now posing heavily as 'Ariel Bender' for Mott the Hoople. Luther played with Art, who became Spooky Tooth before he did a short solo disappearing act. Then there was Poli Palmer, later of Eclection and briefly of Family, currently rumoured to be part of Ric Grech's latest project which is decaying in a country house a stone's throw from the M4. They based themselves around Evesham, where Jim came from. Somehow they managed to record under the corrupting influence of Kim Fowley (shudder). A single, 'Daydreaming Of You', written by Jackie de Shannon, escaped. Dave Meredith and Gordon Jackson gigged with this illustrious crew until Poli, Jim and Dave went off on their own to become Deep Feeling. Capaldi sang and played congas, Mason sang and played guitar, with Palmer adding flute and vibes. They stood in for Cream on one of that band's famous non-appearances at the Penthouse in Birmingham many millions of dollars ago. Our man with the long memory, Martin Hall, said they were 'Jolly good'. Dave dismisses the memory with an aside—'That didn't last, and I played with Julian Covey and the Machine for a while. They were one of those bands you just find if you turn up late for rehearsals.' It's fair to say that Machine featured two drummers and can also be remembered for ripping off Don Covay's early material, 'Sookie-Sookie' etc around 1966.

'TRAFFIC REALLY FORMED A YEAR BEFORE IT REALLY FORMED IN TERMS OF WHEN IT REALLY FORMED"

ZZ: You roadied for Spencer Davis for a while?
DM: Just for about two months to make some money. I wasn't doing anything except waiting for Steve to leave, so we could form Traffic. Almost a year before he left Spencer Davis, we decided to get Traffic together. It was just a question of waiting around for him to do it.
ZZ: Did you participate musically with Spencer Davis?
DM: I sang on 'Somebody Help Me' and hit a tambourine on 'I'm A Man', I think.
ZZ: Any recollections from those days?
DM: No, not really. Steve always remained apart from everybody else. He knew he wanted to leave but no one said anything. It was all strain and tensions because of that.

Mason provided three songs for the 'Mr Fantasy' album, 'Utterly Simple', 'Hope I Never Find Me There' and 'House For Everyone'. He also wrote their first hit single, 'Hole In My Shoe', which made No.2 in the charts.

DM: One wet afternoon we were all in this photo session and Steve and Jim said they wanted 'Coloured Rain' for the single. The office people wanted 'Hole In My Shoe'. I just wanted anything that would hold the band together.
ZZ: So the rift developed that early on?
DM: Yes.
ZZ: How geared were you to commercial success?
DM: We were hoping for hit singles, hit albums. We wanted it to be *the* best group. Just like every other time when you first start. You always go in with the highest intentions.
ZZ: How did you meet Jimmy Miller who produced the 'Mr Fantasy' and 'Traffic' albums?
DM: Chris [Blackwell, head of Island] brought him over from America.

'THEY EVEN TOOK MY PICTURE OFF THE AMERICAN 'MR FANTASY' COVER'

ZZ: You first left Traffic in December 1967. Were the break-ups always as laden with anguish as the press portrayed them?
DM: When I first split I just said that I had to get away. Get out of this situation.
ZZ: You sidestepped?
DM: Right. Some people are a little slower than others. I just wanted time to think about what was happening. That's why I kept jumping out of situations. I didn't want to get caught up in something I had no control over. I wanted to go away and maybe write and think a little. On the road full time you just don't have the opportunity to do that. It's so easy to lose that writing . . . . habit? I don't know that anybody understood that . . . I don't think that anyone in the band understood it either. The only way I can write is to be on my own. They [Traffic] wrote out of jamming together. So I said, 'That's cool, but understand I have to do it this way, because it's the only way I know how.' Everything has to be blown out of proportion in the papers. Things have to be made larger than life. Otherwise people don't notice it I guess.

FAMILY, A SINGLE AND 'TRAFFIC'

ZZ: After the first split you got involved with Family. How did you come to produce their first album, 'Music In A Doll's House'?
DM: I met them through John Gilbert [their manager in the early days]. I'd thought it might be interesting to get into producing. At the time it was good. We really went in and *used* the studio. It was only 4-track. Solos being dubbed on afterwards, backward Mellotron . . . .
ZZ: It was very advanced, technically for its time.
DM: That was probably the problem. It was too far over the top technically. It was kind of experimental.
ZZ: Why Family?
DM: I wanted to do it because they were so unique.

That album established Family as one of the most important bands to come out of that era. Mason having no permanent band recorded a few things on his own. A single, 'Little Woman/Just For You', was released in early 1968 by Island—it was used to open 'Last Exit' which as the title implies is where everyone expected it to end.

ZZ: Were you planning a solo album when you recorded 'Little Woman'?
DM: It was on my mind but I can't remember specifically.
ZZ: Could you tell us something about Island Records in the early days?
DM: Relationships were OK then. You felt part of Island because that's the way Chris Blackwell did the whole thing. You know—'I'm starting a label and hey, we're all together and you're gonna be the band that launch the whole label,' stroke-stroke [laughs]. You kinda felt you were part of something. In between that time I wrote the songs that were on the second Traffic album. We got back together in New York and came back to England. We were recording some things, so we decided finally to do the second album. [Mason wrote four songs for 'Traffic II'—'You Can All Join In', 'Feelin' Alright', 'Don't Be Sad' and 'Cryin' To Be Heard'.]
ZZ: Why did you first go to the States?
DM: Just went there to hang out. No real reason.

'A BAD ATTEMPT AT TRYING TO BE TRAFFIC AGAIN'

DM: We went to America to do a tour [in 1969?]. It sort of fell apart after two gigs in New York. Steve decided . . . —well I don't know what he decided . . . He was just pissed off and wanted to come back home. When he got back he said, 'I don't want you in the band any more'. So I said O.K. I was really brought down about it at the time. So I hung around for a while and decided to go back to the States. I was there for two weeks when I got a call from Jim saying Steve had left the band. I said, 'I thought he'd do that'. So Jim said 'Come back over here and we'll form a band'. Now I didn't really want to do that, because it would be like trying to form another Traffic. Jim decided we'd get together with Wynder K. Frogg and I thought, 'Oh no! That's gonna be like playing with Traffic with a substitute'. Not to put Wynder down, he's a good musician, but from where I was seeing it, things didn't look right without Steve sitting there. It didn't feel like the record company were behind it, because Steve wasn't involved any more. It just didn't feel right. Mason, Capaldi, Wood and Frogg as they were known, vainly attempted to record (with Miller) and gave up. One gig with Hendrix at the Albert Hall stands out.

DM: It was a very strange evening all round. So I said, 'This is no good,' and returned to the States to do what I originally intended to do.
ZZ: Can we step back to the second Traffic album? They picked your song for the single again?
DM: 'You Can All Join In' was supposed to be the single. Either Chris or Steve didn't want it out. I didn't give a shit what they put out, but if you are going to put out a single then release something that is commercial. I thought it was kinda dumb putting out 'Feelin' Alright' because 'You Can All Join In' was a better single for that time. Nothing was ever stated but these strange decisions were going down that I couldn't figure out.
ZZ: Did the fact that your songs were picked for the singles add to the tensions?
DM: It just happened that what I wrote, when played by that band came out really commercial. Maybe they were uptight because I was writing the commercial songs but so what? I wish I could have written some of the songs they did. It's all so stupid. But I don't know the real reasons because no one said anything . . . . I do know that when we finished that second album I was talking to Steve and he said—'Well, I don't really like it anyway' [laughter]. I said, 'Why didn't you say that before we did the album?' [shrugs] Everybody was going through weird changes, me included. But the main thing was all the changes were happening for and around the band. We were very young at the time—just growing up. It's like Daltrey's song, 'Just a young boy, giving it all away' . . . it was just like that.
ZZ: So for you, that was the end of Traffic for about a year and a half?
DM: Yes. When I came out of it I had to pay £6,000 back to Chris Blackwell. So I said to Steve, let's get a band together and do a tour of America . . . because I haven't got any money. We all owed money back. Blackwell was record company, management, agency, publishing. You can do that in England, but you can't in America. You can constantly be moving money around from one corporation to another. Offsetting one against the other.
ZZ: Wasn't there some conflict of interest having all that going on under one roof?
DM: It's true the royalty we were on was shit. In America it was worse—it was half of the English one. The deals he made on behalf of us as a manager were ridiculous. I don't even get my full writer's money for 'Feelin' Alright', I finished up with half. That song is something that's helped him build up that whole thing which I was originally part of. And although I drifted away, I only did that because I was being recognised for my talents, in the light cast by Steve Winwood. The only reason I started writing songs was because I didn't want to ride on Steve's back. I wanted to say, 'Look, I'm throwing my lot in too'.
ZZ: Was Traffic treated as Steve's band by the record company?
DM: They might have done. I don't know what they saw after I wrote 'Hole In My Shoe'. That just threw a spanner in everything . . . . It just offended some egos I think. Everyone realised that we were going to get a certain amount of recognition and success because Steve was in the band but I didn't think that was the idea. So I thought, 'Let's see what I can do'. If it was gonna be a band where everyone was equal and was going to be treated equally then everybody better be doing their bit, equally, to make it work. It's in everyone's interest, artistically and financially, to make the thing as incredible as you possibly can. You can only do that by finding out what everybody can do and putting it into the band together. That's what I was trying to do—probably without knowing it. They were really crazy times.
ZZ: Following the second album and the Mason, Capaldi, Wood and Frogg episode you returned to the States and met Delaney & Bonnie. Had you had any contact with them before?
DM: Yes. First time I came back from America I told Chris that there was a band over in California and he'd better get his arse over there and sign them. You see, the whole thing with Island was that it was a young company. I thought even if I'm not in a band . . . . I was trying to say, 'Chris, be straight with me and I can be an asset to you, because there are things I could do for you'. Even if I'm not in a group I could write and produce. All that potential just gets stronger and stronger as you get older. So I got cheesed off. Whether he recognised it or not, I don't know. Maybe he was in that position where he would have been put in the middle with regard to the conflict between myself, and Steve, and the band—even though I'd removed myself from the band and tried to establish something with him. His alliances were obviously more with Steve because he'd been with him since he was fifteen. So I stayed with Delaney and Bonnie for six months, and went on the road with the Blind Faith tour. Chris sold my contract to Blue Thumb and I took up with Delaney and Bonnie's management. At that time I was still having problems. I'd just written 'Only You Know And I Know' and needed to get it protected. The only place I knew was Irving Music, where Chris did his sub-publishing deal in the States. So I signed this piece of paper not knowing what it was, and later found out I'd given them the copyright on the song. So I split from them by which time the song was number 30 on the charts and the album ['Alone Together'] was

around number 40 . . . . That album really should be re-released over here. If Chris Blackwell had any brains he'd put it out.

ALONE TOGETHER: MASON IN L.A.

'Alone Together' was Mason's first real solo effort, made with the help of his new chums (who could all play on the off beat); it provided real proof of his individual talent as a musician and writer. Harvest released it, in November 1970, at a silly price and managed to lose it completely. Promotion was minimal, Mason's auntie bought a copy and it was deleted. The musicians credits read like a Who's Who of L.A. session musicians and in fact comprised most of the 1969 model Delaney & Bonnie band. At that time the names meant very little. That lasted until Eric Clapton took a hand in their collective fate.

DM: They were mainly session men from the South. Just a bunch of people I got to know. I was in between doing nothing and wanted to do something. For example Blind Faith needed a lead guitarist so I went on their tour. Eric and Ginger would come on the bus and get drunk and we'd play . . . Well . . . Eric decided . . . Blind Faith were just like puppets, letting themselves be Stigwood's and Blackwell's game. But *someone* had to be in control. There was no focal point in terms of the band having a leader. No one in it—I'm talking of them as people—to give it a strong direction. Neither Steve nor Eric wanted to step out and take the limelight. They wanted to hang back.
ZZ: It never really looked as if Clapton wanted to lead a band.
DM: He doesn't. He just wants to hang in the back there and just pick. What he doesn't understand is that he's forced into all that because of his playing. It's what took him there in the first place and it's what'll always keep him there. To play that game with yourself . . . . In other words, you've gotta go through that thing and take control at that point and realise that he is better than most. He decided to just screw all that, 16,000 people and all that crap, and just play clubs. So he joined Delaney & Bonnie with the intention of becoming a side guitarist. So he joined them and his joining is almost like he's trying to escape himself, which is impossible. Then George [Harrison] got involved and it became a whole big scene. They were being managed by this manager who ensured that it *became* a big scene. He was into the glamour of the whole trip. So suddenly all the people in the band were famous as well.

The tour came to England and we all remember Eric Clapton with Delaney & Bonnie. Mason was hiding up the back somewhere, playing his legs off but the combined charisma of Harrison and Clapton rather swallowed everyone up. There really was no escape.

DM: The record company—if you got people playing on your album—say, 'Hey, we gotta use that'. They think that it will sell albums. When in fact if the music ain't making it, people won't buy it.
ZZ: What was Leon Russell up to in the 'Alone Together' days?
DM: Leon was hidden in a house at the time. He hardly said boo to anyone. A complete introvert.

So Delaney & Bonnie split that band and a few of them (Radle, Gordon, Whitlock, Clapton and the hero of our story, Dave Mason) became Derek And The Dominoes . . . . But not for long.

ZZ: Why did you drop out of Derek And The Dominoes so early on?
DM: Because there wasn't enough work being done at the time. At least for me there wasn't. They said, 'Let's form a band,' and for me it looked great. The first thing that had come along since Traffic that looked potentially original, creative and exciting. I guess I got too pushy again. I wanted everybody to say 'O.K., let's get it on and rehearse every day and do it'. But Eric would be up in London doing George's album, 'All Things Must Pass', and nothing was really happening. Eventually we did a few sessions with Phil Spector which I played on. 'Tell The Truth' was one of them—though it was changed later, and another version of 'Roll Me Over'.
ZZ: Who has those tapes now?
DM: I guess Eric does. We did that Lyceum gig and shortly after I left. I mean, I would sit down and start talking to Eric. Just to say, 'I want to find out where you are at as a person, what you're into,' and he would just . . . [shrugs].
ZZ: Do you think all that media adulation got to him? Eric Clapton is god, and all that crap?
DM: He must have believed it, or it wouldn't have screwed him up. Even though he didn't believe it, it was in his head. He read it and it had gotten into his mind. 'Eric Clapton is God', 'Eric Clapton is God'. Is he, isn't he? Is he, isn't he? I mean why get so hung up about it? Instead you ought to say 'Bugger that!' It's like good and bad record reviews. It doesn't make any difference because it's only one person's opinion. It's pointless to get hung up about it. Just because you're in that position you're a target for everything. Just because you stepped out front, either because you're into show business and all, or because you perfected an art of playing and it happens to have been music that carried you out in front of people. I'd love to hear him do more than he does—he's an incredible guitarist. I love to listen to him, I'm pissed off that he doesn't play any more. I want to hear him do something new. Playing is fun and he's missing out on all the fun. It's like anything—like your magazine. You do it for fun or forget it.
ZZ: After Derek And The Dominoes you went back to America?
DM: Yes . . . . It had felt weird. I had my opinions about things and Eric had his. It didn't seem that we could ever argue about them on a creative level. In other words, the gulf was very great. It's nice to have those differences but only when you can create on them. So I want back to America to get my album organised.

Following his brief involvement with Clapton, Mason returned to America. Early in '71 he met up with Mama Cass and recorded with her. Among the few appearances they made together a memorable Andy Williams Show is lodged in my mind.

DM: That happened about six months after 'Alone Together'. It was just a summer of throwing frisbees, outdoor barbecues and parties, and singing, and playing. Generally hanging out and having a good time with friends in L.A. The album was just something that came out of that.
ZZ: Was Ned Doheny involved?
DM: He should have been. Paul Harris, later with Manassas was on keyboards. Brian Garofallo played drums and Russ Kunkel on bass [both from The Section], made up the core of the band we used. It didn't last very long.

Mason's last positive achievement had been 'Alone Together'. Since that time he had been on the road with Delaney & Bonnie, tried a spell with Derek And The Dominoes and joined up with Cass. He drifted back to England and ended up playing with Steve Winwood again.

ZZ: You did six gigs with an augmented Traffic that produced 'Welcome To The Canteen'?
DM: Right. It could have been a lot better. We didn't rehearse enough. Rehearsals were real sloppy. Jim Gordon and Ric Grech and Reebop were added to the original line up. I suggested we record it—we could have done better. For three years I was trying to put Traffic back together the way it was but there were too many personal conflicts between me and Steve for that ever to happen. The first of those gigs was at The Fairfield Hall, Croydon on June 6th 1971. It was a brief re-unification which took in an Oz benefit, and Glastonbury. The album, released by Island, contains some excellent playing. A good version of 'Shouldn't Have Took More Than You Gave', and 'Sad And Deep As You', both from 'Alone Together', with Chris Wood playing flute, are the two Mason compositions featured on the record. Mason returned to America again to complete 'Headkeeper' and form a band. Jim Gordon almost got involved but didn't make it. Dave met up with some musicians in San Francisco and started playing live and rehearsing for the second solo album. Mark Jordan, keyboards, now with Boz Scaggs, and Ric Jaeger, drums, formerly with A.B. Skhy and still with Mason joined the show. Lonnie Turner, hero of early Steve Miller albums, played bass and Felix Falcon provided percussion. Mason planned to call the band 'Destiny' but it ended up as plain old Dave Mason.

HEADKEEPER: THE CONTINUING SAGA. SPLITS WITH BLUE THUMB

DM: Then we started the 'Headkeeper' album. At the time I wanted to leave Blue Thumb. My manager was taking tapes and locking them up. A court ruled that the tapes belonged to the record company but before I could give them back they'd already mastered an album of rough mixes and out-takes. 'Headkeeper' was originally intended to be one live album and one studio album in a package sold for maybe a little more than the price of a single album. That all got cocked up. It pissed me off.
ZZ: Any specific reason for leaving Blue Thumb?
DM: I don't like them. [laughs] I'm still waiting for an accounting of how many albums I sold. I don't believe them, after what they did to 'Headkeeper'.
ZZ: You really have had something of a stop/go career to say the least.
DM: There have been problems. That's why it looks the way it does.
ZZ: Did you ever consider going somewhere else to finish the 'Headkeeper' project as you had originally intended it to be?
DM: I couldn't do that. It was just a question of getting away. I eventually signed with Columbia. Then I went on the road again and started writing some new songs.

Mason might well be displeased with the goings on that surrounded the making of this album. On the musical side however it was probably the best move he ever made. The band add that edge, a misture of crisp playing and feel, that really gives life to Mason's melodic writing and guitar work. The live version of 'To Be Free', particularly, encompasses everything that was right about this line up.

Before we got on to his most recent work for Columbia, 'It's Like You Never Left', we talked about his involvement, with various other musicians, as a session guitarist. He has recorded with Crosby & Nash and more recently on Nash's 'Wild Tales'. He played on 'All Along The Watchtower' for Hendrix and on Capaldi's first solo album. He also played a variety of instruments for the Stones on 'Beggar's Banquet'. 'Beggar's Banquet' was really the first Stones' album that incorporated rather than imitated American R&B and came across as something of their own.

DM: That's what I said to Mick at the time. 'This sounds like you. It doesn't sound like a copy of American R&B. It's got the balls and you've kept the rock'n'roll and made something original.'
ZZ: All that 'Lady Jane' stuff was a bit 1966 Kings Road.
DM: [laughs] Definitely.
ZZ: Before we talk about the present, any thoughts on 'Scrapbook' [a double compilation of all Dave's songs from the Traffic days plus a selection from 'Canteen', 'Alone Together' and 'Headkeeper']?
DM: I don't know anything about that. It's one of Chris Blackwell's efforts. The version of 'Feelin' Alright' on there isn't the one that was used originally. It sounds like a bad take. I was wondering why they did that. 'Alone Together' and the new one are the only real albums. The rest in the middle is bullshit.

IT'S LIKE YOU NEVER LEFT: LOOKING AHEAD

ZZ: Have you formed a new band?
DM: Yes. Bob Glaub, a bass player we found in L.A.—he's only twenty-one. He was doing sessions with Lennon. Ric Jaeger is still with me. He knew Jim Krieger from 'Frisco who's joined on second guitar and Mike Finnegan replaces Mark on keyboards.
ZZ: Except for Ric they're not very familiar names.
DM: You'll know them when you hear them. They're the best bunch of musicians I've ever played with.
ZZ: Was that whole thing with American rhythm sections something you consciously sought out?
DM: That was basically the thing that took me to America. It used to be my main gripe with Traffic, especially live. It was the main thing we tried to get, that feel. It was something I had heard on American albums, like Delaney & Bonnie. It was a black feel. Those rhythm sections don't exist in England.
ZZ: When was the current album recorded?
DM: Through April, May and June of 1973. It was released in the States around November. I've already started on the next one. Don't ask me what it's like. Someone asked me that this morning and I told them just to listen to it.

The new album contans a new version of 'Headkeeper' and a reworked 'Here We Go Again' entitled 'Silent Partner'. It appears that at last Mason has settled. He is happy with his present label set up and has found a bunch of musicians that are mutually compatible. Rumours suggest that a British tour could be expected around May. It would be good to see if the old man has survived the ups and downs that have scattered themselves over the past seven years. He is certainly not the only artist to have felt unjustly treated over the years and doubtless he will not be the last. It seems to be an occupational hazard. Musicians and record companies both often feel that neither party has done its bit towards establishing a relationship of mutual respect. In a business that is so closely involved with the problems of personal compatibility it must come as no surprise that people will fall out with each other. Nils Lofgren summed it up in a recent ZigZag interview when he said, 'I can see that you could get someone to say almost anything about anybody at one time or another'.

Chris Briggs

A normal subscription (in the U.K.) costs £2.00, so you score this newie for a quid! See page 38 for details.

THIS MONTHS SUB. OFFER

Here's a brand new, high-powered album, just for a change! Ronnie Montrose has played guitar for three of Zig Zag's heroes, Van Morrison (on "Tupelo Honey" and "Saint Dominic's Preview") Edgar Winter Group (on "They Only Come Out At Night") and unreleased sessions with Boz Scaggs. Montrose bass player Bill Church was also on Van's "Tupelo Honey" and "Saint Dominic's Preview".

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18 THE GROUNDHOGS, STEELEYE SPAN, ON THE ROAD WITH QUIVER, LOU REED, CHUCK BERRY, STEAMHAMMER

19 ROD STEWART, DUSTER BENNETT, HELP YOURSELF, THE ALLMAN BROS, ROLLING STONES, GENESIS, THE GRATEFUL DEAD

20 MOUNTAIN, JEFF BECK GROUP, the J. GEILS BAND, PHILIP GOODHAND-TAIT, WILD MAN FISHER, MELANIE, ALBAN 'SHOOPY' PFISTERER

21 MARC BOLAN, JO MAMA/DANNY KOOTCH TREE, AL KOOPER Pt 1, AMAZING BLONDEL, BUFFY SAINTE MARIE, THE INCREDIBLE KEVIN COYNE.

22 JACK BRUCE FAMILY TREE, MOTT the HOOPLE, THE ALLMAN BROTHERS, ALICE COOPER, DONOVAN TREE, TERRY RILEY, LINK WRAY.

23 JOHN SEBASTIAN, COLIN BLUNSTONE, BIG BROTHER & the HOLDING CO, RORY GALLAGHER, FAIRPORT CONVENTION & STONEGROUND TREES.

25 ELTON JOHN, LOU REED, FLAMIN GROOVIES, FRANK ZAPPA/MOTHERS FAMILY TREE, LOVE TREE, PINK FLOYD'S EARLIEST DAYS.

26 HAWKWIND, JOE COCKER, GREENWICH VILLAGE, DAVE VAN RONK, BREWER'S DROOP, DAN HICKS, CHARLATANS, SAN FRANCISCO TREE.

27 JIMMY PAGE, BRIDGET ST JOHN, STEPHEN STILLS, PROCOL/TRAFFIC FAMILY TREE, DUCKS DELUXE, THE KINKS, The BYRDS Pt 1.

28 LED ZEPPELIN, THE NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND, KIM FOWLEY, STEALERS WHEEL, SOFT MACHINE FAM TREE, AYERS, BYRDS 2.

29 GENESIS, THE EVERLY BROS, THE EAGLES, BURRITOS FAM TREE, SILVERHEAD, THE BYRDS part 3, JOHNNY SPEIGHT, BEEFHEART

30 PROCOL HARUM, NEIL SEDAKA, ELTON, ROCKFIELD, RY COODER, THE BYRDS part 4, FAB FAWE RAVE PIC OF PETE FRAME!

31 DON McLEAN, MICHAEL MURPHY, FAMILY/YES MONSTER FAMILY TREE, JAC HOLZMAN, JONATHAN KELLY, THE BYRDS part 5.

32 PINK FLOYD, STEVE ELLIS, THE STORM OF SPIRIT, CLIFFORD T WARD, JOHN CALE, ROY BUCHANAN, THE BYRDS part 6.

33 McKENDREE SPRING, ROBERT PLANT, BOZ SCAGGS, CLARENCE WHITE, STEVE MILLER/BOZ/SIR DOUGLAS FAMILY TREE

34 FAMILY, LOU REED, CAPTAIN BEEFHEART, ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL, THE DILLARDS.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE: AT PRESENT THERE ARE NO COPIES OF Nos 1-16, 24, 35, 36, 37

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REASONS TO LIKE MICHAEL NESMITH

The story so far - Michael Nesmith, a Texan singer and guitar player, has left the Monkees, the manufactured group brought together to make television series, records, and multi-millions of dollars for both the group's constituent members and its creators. Nesmith, although in his own words not to be singled out as the most talented Monkee, is to my mind the one member of the Monkees to whom music is second nature as opposed to acting – after all, he was the one who threatened to break up the group if they continued miming to their songs. He has a record contract with RCA, which he will probably be signed to for many years yet, and . . .

But wait, because we're going a little too fast, past 1968, when Dot released an album with the title 'Mike Nesmith Presents The Wichita Train Whistle Sings'. It was released here, and can still be found in record shops, although it's now deleted and mainly available in cheap or bargain racks. However, I think I should warn you that any resemblance between the work of Michael Nesmith now, and this record, is purely coincidental. As I have proved more than once in these pages, jazz just ain't my meat. I suppose that this record is loosely jazz-type music, although I don't want to be a category monger. But that seems the clearest way to put over what you should expect when you play the record.

As you may have read last month, some fifty or so musicians were involved in making the record, among them all the top Hollywood sessionmen of the late sixties, and what they're playing is ten songs, all composed by Michael Nesmith, apart from one which was a collaboration of Nesmith, Carole King and Gerry Goffin. At least seven, perhaps eight of the songs can be found on other albums by either the Monkees or Michael Nesmith. One track is called 'Carlisle Wheeling', which deep down Monkee fans will remember is what Nesmith signed his picture with on the rear sleeve of 'The Birds, The Bees And The Monkees'. In fact, it's a bizarre thing to write when your colleagues have been inspired enough to put 'David', 'Love Peter Tork' and 'Micky Dolenz', the latter in writing which is not joined up. Hmm.

Right, now it's back to the matter between the ridges. Now if this were by anyone else, I'd have taken it off before

the end of the first track, and put on a Michael Nesmith record. I trust you see my predicament. If, however, you are not in the position of having to keep up with what's happening I can imagine that this album could be described as a 'grower', for on my third time through, I was certainly getting a good deal more than on the first occasion. Makes me think of an interesting situation, possibly true, where the guy from Dot rushes back to his boss, waving the piece of paper with Nesmith's signature, presumably obtained in return for a not inconsiderable sum of green and folding, and is feted like the man who scores the winning goal in the Cup Final, only to have to bring the finished product in some months later and spend several sleepless nights attempting to understand it, in order to justify the enormous cost. That's not to say that this record's a load of crap–I just don't relate to it sufficiently to be able to judge, and I should imagine that Dot didn't really listen when Michael told them that the record wasn't likely to sell in the same quantities as a Monkees record.

'The Wichita Train Whistle' could be a film soundtrack. There's a bit at the beginning of 'Carlisle Wheeling' which would be appropriate to the opening shots of a shapely chick's bum waggling down a street accompanied by the credits, a sequence shot in the country with a fine bit of bluegrass banjo (Doug Dillard?), interspersed with here come the marines/fleet/airforce and a final bit of 'Cripple Creek' rip-off, all in one track, 'Don't Cry Now'. Add a bit of Big Top Circus music in 'You Just May Be The One', and several love themes, including a 'Summer Place' soundalike in 'Papa Gene's Blue' and a Bread soundalike in 'Don't Call On Me', which also contains some pre-Richard Perry drumming and there's your film. But please, don't think I'm sneering. There's something far more significant in this album than the sum total of the black plastic bit, for this is, as far as I'm aware, the first nearly successful fusion of a rock rhythm section and a brass front line. There's a bit in 'You Just May Be The One' which is so much like what Blood, Sweat and Tears do that I can hardly believe that 'Spinning Wheel' was conceived without it. I don't know whether my assumption is in any way correct, but . . . .

The big mistake on this record is the quantity of musicians, which at times make the sound a little unwieldy to my ears. As a result, some fiercely competitive blowing takes place, particularly from a trumpet player attempting to play notes only dogs can hear, and more than one track ends up in what sounds like nothing more or less than chaos. Perhaps with a restricted brass section, it all would have been a lot clearer to me, but it's not, so there's nothing I can do about it. Ah well . . . on to the real Nesmith records, those made post Monkees, and with vocals, which the 'Wichita Train Whistle' doesn't boast, a fact which I discover I've so far neglected to mention.

The first album by Michael Nesmith and The First National Band was 'Magnetic South', released in 1970. The band consisted of O.J. 'Red' Rhodes on pedal steel, John London on bass, John Ware on drums, and a little assistance from Earl Ball on piano, backing up Michael Nesmith who sings and plays guitar. Eight of the ten and a bit tracks are composed by Michael, and most are a positive joy. There's a sleeve note on this record, a rarity for this artist, so it would be churlish not to quote from it.

'Hank Williams, Jerry Lee Lewis and Jimmie Rodgers are to me something of a musical triumvirate. Somehow I always get back to them. They, like Dylan, Presley, Cash and the Beatles, had, and have, a clearly defined musical position–a pure approach to what they have sung and written–free from euphemisms and alive with their own emotions.'

Obviously a man with taste, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I have at least two albums by each of the artists mentioned, in my collection. Therefore, I'm going to like 'Magnetic South'. Cogito ergo sum, or whatever. So what have we on the record? First of all, three tracks without a gap, 'Calico Girlfriend', 'Nine Times Blue' and 'Little Red Rider'. Each is excellent, and leads into the next as if born to it. The one that I remember best is 'Little Red Rider', which has brilliant steel playing from Red Rhodes, incorporating some interesting effects, and a chunky backing which might have been ripped off by Redbone, although it's fair to say that almost everything has been used before in the music of the seventies, and any mention of similarities can only be used as a point of reference, not an accusation of plagiarism. Thus the fact that the vocals on 'Nine Times Blue' sound like Joe Brown singing 'A Picture Of You' is a definite plus for me. Side one, track four is 'The Crippled Lion', which has some backing guitar a la the Shadows in 'Foot Tapper', the first appearance to my jaundiced ears of Earl Ball on keyboards, and additionally makes me feel that the pedal steel guitar is an instrument of a particular uniqueness, in that it appears to be playing two or three things at one time, creating something quite beautiful. Next is 'Joanne', a million seller as a single, and the definitive Nesmith song type. His voice is at its magnificent best on the more plaintive things, and this is an example which brings out ecstatic sighs in me, with its finely controlled falsetto. One of those songs that is just perfect. At the end of side one is the 'bit', titled 'First National Rag', a commercial break which maybe doesn't seem like such a good idea four years later, but is nevertheless a pleasant little bit of instrumental.

'Mama Nantucket' starts the second side in the manner of Messrs Williams or Rodgers, with some yodelling, which, interestingly, sounds a little like Alan Price. It is followed by 'The Keys To The Car', which is a very Nashville sort of song, with more yodelling, and the sort of sound Jerry Lee gets on 'Crazy Arms' or 'It All Depends On Who Will Buy The Wine'. Even so, it's probably my least favourite track here, together with 'One Rose'. Those two are separated by 'Hollywood', which might be a complaint against the plasticity which is available to the unsuspecting stranger in Hollywood. 'Now I'll go back to some place I know where things don't just start to end,' sings Michael, and the track goes into a freak-out condition which the rest of the record leaves the listener ill-prepared for. Perhaps that's the intention. Certainly 'Beyond The Blue Horizon' is Michael's gimmick track, presumably aimed at something in his past, as it contains a whole heap of getting up in the morning sound effects around the fairly straight singing of the old song. A quiet and somewhat mysterious ending to a very fine record.

Have you noticed that American records rarely quote dates? It's most annoying when you're doing something like this, and you know that looking through a veritable pyramid of elderly newspapers will be too time consuming, because you don't have a hope in hell of not getting side tracked. So a big plastic 'ZZ Good Guy' badge to whoever put the date of 1970 on the sleeve of the second album by Michael Nesmith and the First National Band, which was called 'Loose Salute', was not released here, and whose American number is RCA LSP4415.

Not the first thing to strike you, but one which is likely to stay with you as long as you have a sense of humour, is the sleeve painting, which is by one Charles Bragg, and is entitled 'Salute'. It portrays a somewhat elderly and overweight general, or some other high ranking army person, saluting with his left hand, while astride a rather downtrodden looking rat, who has a red, white and blue tail. To my mind, a rather more impressive sleeve than on 'Magnetic South' (south?), while continuing the cover concept of that album, which is of a circle, perhaps a mirror, in the horizontal centre, but slightly below centre going from top to bottom. On 'Magnetic South' there is a piece of embroidery, with a design featuring an eagle, which I take to be some sort of comment on the American coat of arms, although heraldry is such a weak point with me that I'd be hard pressed to recognise St George even if he were slaying dragons across the street, let alone by his shield design. The album features only one personnel change on 'Loose Salute', the substitution of the famous Cricket, Glen D. Hardin.

Ten tracks for our delectation, nine of them by Michael Nesmith, and seven out of the ten are great, including the whole of side one. Best, though, is the updated, small group version of 'Listen To The Band', whose history you should have read in the last issue. It begins very quietly, at 'has my hi fi gone wrong again?' volume, with some unsteady notes from Red Rhodes, then gets beautifully louder until it's right up where you thought it should be. The brass parts of the original are taken on pedal steel with no loss to my ears, and when Michael sings 'Play the drums a little bit louder', old John Ware does just that. A fabulous track, and one that'll definitely be in my top twelve when I'm a superstar or something. If you are already fortunate enough to possess this album, put the track on so that the quiet bit at the beginning doesn't sound quiet, and then just watch your head get blown off when it really comes through. I did.

Almost equally good, although in a totally different vein, is 'Conversations', which is a much quieter piece with lyrics that really got to me, like 'I pored through the files taken off my mental shelf, and dusted off some memories of you'. Or 'How the phoenix of our love first flapped its silken wings'. And how about 'The hours of silence while the perfumed candle glowed, and both our thoughts meandered on for miles', which is a lovely way to say 'We were so gooned out of our tree that we couldn't speak'. Just a beautiful song, in the same league as 'Harmony Constant', which you'll hear about later and which made more of an impression on me than any other piece of writing in 1973.

These two particular high spots are garnished by other surrounding goodies, like a couple of nice chunky rockers in 'Bye, Bye, Bye', and 'Dedicated Friend', the former of which makes me think of a Commander Cody sound but superior, although I'll admit to some bias there. There's a 'nearly-reggae' track, 'Silver Moon', where the Alan Price voice comes up again, and I noticed, for the first time, the occasional Nesmith pronunciation of the definite article, 'thee' instead of 'ther', which is the way it's said in the West Indies. He also says it like that on 'Listen To The Band', 'Bye, Bye, Bye' and 'Lady Of The Valley', which is why I thought it worth mentioning. Other nice things are the only non Nesmith song, 'I Fall To Pieces', which I know I've heard before, but don't have the energy to check out; it's the sort of song that maybe J.C. Fogerty (Jean-Claude?) might do with his famous mirrors act, the Blue Ridge Rangers, but, blindly prejudiced again, he wouldn't do it nearly as well. Finally, listen to 'Thanx For The Ride', which gave me the thought that the 'Wichita Train Whistle' thing didn't work as well as it might have due to the lack of vocals (although contractually I'm sure they couldn't have been used at that time). As a tune, 'Thanx For The Ride' is average, but with words, it becomes a goodie. It's helped, after the singing, by an interesting descending passage played by Red Rhodes which only just manages to stay on the right side of being maniacal, but is all the better for that reason. Another one to look for in your shop is 'Loose Salute', but don't forget that it's an import.

1971 brought the final part of the apparent trilogy, 'Nevada Fighter', again on RCA (SF8209). Interestingly, English releases were only given to the first and third of the series–'My name's William Shakespears and I've written these three plays, "Henry IV, Parts One, Two and Three".' His publisher decides to put out only the first and third parts, and leaves the whole of England totally confused. 'But what happened? Was it dirty or something? Or libellous?' Oh, never mind, because Michael himself isn't too worried; in fact, he didn't really seem to know too much about why it was a trilogy anyway. My guess is that it's because the sleeve concept is carried through, with the mirror thing again, this time portraying a large painted eagle perched on a branch with a small painted Indian in his left claw, the Indian looking a bit dead. The sleeve was designed by another ZigZag hero, Dean Torrence, who you'll be reading about in the fullness of time, and the photo on the back sleeve was taken by Dean and Mr and Mrs Nesmith, and shows a very straight road going for miles until it finally loses itself in the Californian mountains. There's also a lot of stuff I don't like to comment on about 'the Great People of the Navajo'.

The music is divided neatly into two, the first side being Nesmith compositions, and the second masterworks by others. I think that I prefer the first side overall, for there's a certain something about the composer doing his own songs that seems really special, even though I can only get totally behind two of the five songs, 'Here I Am' and 'Propinquity', which are both slowish, but undeniably great. 'Here I Am' features some soaring falsetto harmony double tracked by Michael, and simply cries out to be covered by someone else–it's strange that there are so few covers of Nesmith songs, but the reason, more than likely, is that he does them so well himself that other versions would be redundant. In fact, 'Propinquity' has been covered, by Ian Matthews on the 'Valley Hi' album. More of that in a subsequent part of this story. Of the other three tracks on side one, I quite like the Chuck Berry-ish 'Grand Ennui' and 'Only Bound', a familiar sounding waltz, but I'm far less keen on the title track 'Nevada Fighter', which is a fast one, with hot guitar playing and some Jerry Lee Lewis piano, but with almost totally inaudible lyrics, the first track we've discussed where such an accusation can be made. In fact, there's somewhat of a difference in the make up of this album, due to the fact that the faithful Johns, Ware and London, decided to seek different pastures during the making of the record. So, as was noted last time, the basis of Elvis' band was used for some of the sessions, comprising James Burton and Al Casey on guitars, Joe Osborn and Max Bennet on bass, and Glen Hardin and Michael Cohen on keyboards. Together with Ron Tutt on drums and the omnipresent R. Rhodes, this pick up band makes a much fuller sound, and although I would hesitate to criticise such celebrated gentlemen, I think they are not fully in sympathy with the sound of Michael Nesmith. There's a distressing lack of space and warmth from time to time, most notably on the title track, and without really knowing which tracks were made with Ware and London (or rather without the Elvis bunch), I think my favourites are the sparser things.

Anyway, on to side two, which starts with a Michael Murphey/Owens Castleman song called 'Texas Morning' which is nice, but not, I think appropriate to Nesmith. It doesn't appear on either of Murphey's albums, but I'd like to hear him singing it. On 'Nevada Fighter', this is one of the tracks which appears to have more Burton than Rhodes, and as such, could have been better, but there's still a fine pedal steel outro leading on to 'Tumbling Tumbleweeds', which is very well known to me by probably Slim Whitman. Here it's strictly Roy Rogers music, with clip clopping hoof beats, and a severely Western treatment, but the multiple vocals rescue the track from total disaster, together with the custom-

ary great steel playing. The third track is somewhat of a surprising choice, 'I Looked Away' from the 'Layla' album. Michael Nesmith sings Eric Clapton . . . . With such a combination it's obviously good, and the song's dramatic stops and starts unexpectedly sit happily with his style. This track however is overshadowed by the highlight of this side, Nilsson's 'Rainmaker', which you can hear on the composer's own 'Harry' album, and also on the Dillards' 'Copperfields' LP. Nesmith's version is very well thought out, with thunder and lightning effects produced variously by steel guitar and drums, and a great ending culminating in a shuddering fast fade, into a short Red Rhodes instrumental called 'Rene', which is short but predictably excellent. All in all, my least favourite First National Band album, but still pretty good, especially for the two recommended tracks on the first side.

My somewhat less than enthusiastic feelings concerning 'Nevada Fighter', at least in comparison with its father and grandfather, are magnified several times when we come around to 'Tantamount To Treason Volume 1', which is the famous 'Beer recipe' album. As far as I'm concerned, the recipe is one of the outstanding things about the album, which, to be brutally frank, is somewhat disposable, and far less pleasing to my ear than any of the other Nesmith albums, before or since. In fact, it's difficult to believe that there could be any connection between this and the two albums that follow it, but we'll get on to them a little later, and I'll try to explain why I don't care for this album.

First, the personnel, whom I have nothing against, except for the fact that I don't think they do too much in the way of complementing the songs or compositions, with a couple of exceptions. Michael Cohen is on keyboards and moog, and Mr Nesmith spoke of him in glowing terms in the interview. He was not so effusive, but still complimentary on the subject of Johnny Meeks, bass player and ex Blue Cap, and Jack Ranelli, drummer. These gentlemen, with the addition of the omnipresent Red Rhodes and the leader, formed the Second National Band, and they are occasionally augmented on this record by Jose Feliciano on congas. It is to my advantage to note that this is the only record on which the Second National Band are featured, but I feel that Michael himself may have felt less than blissful about the recorded results produced.

Side one consists of four Nesmith compositions, starting with 'Mama Rocker', a cross between 'Johnny B. Goode' and 'Nadine', but never much more than average. Then there's 'Lazy Lady', which initially sounds better, but tails off into very little of note, leading directly into the best track of the side 'You Are My One', which is, in the context of what surrounds it, quite brilliant, although no lyrical astonishment is in store, the words consisting solely of the title, repeated several times, and punctuated with long instrumental passages of great relaxation and peace, often very effectively phased. Almost good enough to qualify for a 'Best Of' compilation, which is more than I can say about the final track on the first side, 'In The Afternoon'. I must confess to being somewhat confused by this one, which ends with countryside noises of birds and animals, and is, as far as I can tell, the only song to bear much relevance to the treason of the album's title, which I take to be some sort of ecological message from the evidence of the sleeve design, which shows some graphically nasty rubbish dumps, dead fish and sewage.

There's no relief from the start of side two, either, which is a Michael Cohen composition with the odd title of 'Highway 99 With Melange'. It appears to consist of snatches of loud music forming a bad dream sequence, which develop into a heap of non sequiturs. It seemed to me a little like the Mothers at what kind people call their most 'experimental', but I found it incomprehensible, so I can't call it bad. 'Wax Minute', the work of one Richard Stekol, doesn't get to me much either, and it's left to 'Bonaparte's Retreat', a country oldie, to bring the record back on to some sort of straight and narrow. This is pretty good, with a nice vocal sound and some pleasantly dramatic instrumentals a little reminiscent of the Doors. 'Talking To The Wall' isn't much, and the record is rounded off with 'She Thinks I Still Care', which is done fairly straight, with a good bit of Red Rhodes. Thank goodness I've finished that.

Now, when Pete and I were in California, we met a whole lot of really great people, but I think we were most impressed by Michael Nesmith. He was just the most amazing person I've met in years, and the best interview, as well as being a man who knew exactly what he was doing. As a result, I've tried very hard to listen to this particular album, on the basis that, if he liked it, there must be a large amount of good in it. Unfortunately, I can't find too much, and that hurts too, because Michael and his fabulous wife Phyllis, who he calls April, were most hospitable to us, giving us coffee and wine, and playing us some of the things we had heard, like the Area Code 615 tapes, and the two most recent of his albums, as well as the Red Rhodes album, about which more in a subsequent part of this magnum opus. We were introduced to the beef jerky—next time anyone of you talks to Pete, ask him about the jerky and the conga key . . . . But really, it grieves me to have to say that I really don't like this album, and I'd like to think that perhaps Michael will write to me and tell me where I went wrong. If he does, of course, we'll let you all see it.

After that, the low point for me, let's zoom up to the very highest peaks with the late 1972 album 'And The Hits Just Keep On Comin'', for which I can find few words to convey just how much I'm in love with it. First of all, let me quote from the sleeve a little note from Michael to the listener, which says a great deal in a few words about the conception of the album.

'One of the great advantages of being an artist is that I am able to utilize my craft periodically to write messages to myself. Basically that is what this album is all about. I have tried to be as skilful as I could in the hopes that you as a listener would not feel left out. I have tried to make music as honest and beautiful, as harmonious and graceful as I know how to make music . . . . But I am afraid that I must admit, and somewhat unabashedly, that I did it for me. I hope that on whatever level of unfoldment this music may find you that it will reward your attention and contribute something to your consciousness. I personally enjoy singing along to it all . . . But then it's very easy for me. I know all the words. Papa Nes.'

I may have spoken at length and in glowing terms about most of the others, but they were merely excellent. This is unbelievably brilliant, and a record I would protect with my life to prevent it leaving my possession. The number of levels on which it succeeds astonish me—on one record, you get nine songs out of ten which are lyrically extraordinary, in several cases putting into words with such neatness and precision many of those thoughts that often occur, but which are all too frequently banished quickly due to their apparent remoteness from reality. I don't honestly know if you can understand that, but some of the songs on this record are positively

an inspiration if you're feeling that the world has a huge collective grudge against you personally, and I quite seriously feel, with all the might of my English 'A' Level behind me, that I have very rarely read such poetry, particularly in the work of a twentieth century writer. I'm not going to quote any of the words here, because they're all written out for you on the rear of the sleeve, but I'd particularly like to recommend 'Harmony Constant', 'Two Different Roads', 'Keep On' and 'Roll With The Flow', although all the others are well worth a portion of your attention, which will be richly repaid.

Another interesting point is that the album is the work of just two men, Michael Nesmith and Red Rhodes, with the help of an engineer. Michael wrote all the songs, sings them and plays guitar, and produced the record. Red plays at his most exceptional best, and despite the lack of any rhythm section, the bass and drums aren't missed at all, and seem to be there even though you can hear that they're absent. Just out of this world . . . .

Stepping off my cloud for a moment, a little information concerning two of the songs, 'Two Different Roads' and 'Different Drum', which were composed respectively in 1963 and 1964. Michael's publishers are Screen Gems, Don Kirshner's company, I believe. I'll bet they had no idea that they were getting a writer of this calibre when they signed him up. Lucky Screen Gems. I shall say no more about 'And The Hits Just Keep On Comin'', except that you miss it at your peril. Really, please try, even though it's only available on import at the moment. The number is RCA LSP4695, and I just don't know what else I can say to make you check it out. Now, I'll just get back on the cloud, and listen right through again. Bliss.

And now we're just about up to date, about to consider the most recent Michael Nesmith album, 'Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash', which it is rumoured will be released here by about the time you're reading this. If it hasn't, and you're impatient, the number on my American copy is RCA APL-0164, and I've seen it in several import shops. After the sparse but totally effective instrumentation on the previous album, there's a complete turnaround here, with backings provided by the magnificent Countryside Studio band, that is, the men who perform the backings as a kind of 'house band' on the records produced by the Countryside label. As well as Red Rhodes, there's Dr Robert K. (Bob) Warford on guitar and banjo, Jay Lacy on guitar, David Barry on piano, Billy Graham on bass and fiddle, and Danny Lane on drums. Although Rhodes and Warford may be the only ones you've heard of, let me assure you that they are all certainly masters of their craft, for proof of which you might listen to this record, of course.

Although I like this record a great deal, I can't rate it quite as highly as its immediate predecessor, although that's tantamount to saying that a Ferrari isn't quite as nice as a Lamborghini, if you take my drift, and the high spots are certainly high, although I feel there are less of them. The first thing to mention is that here, for the first time available to the public, is the composer's own version of probably his best known song, 'Some Of Shelly's Blues'. Before we heard it, Pete and I were somewhat sceptical, both believing that the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band had done that song the ultimate justice on their 'Uncle Charlie And His Dog Teddy' album, which also, incidentally, includes 'Propinquity' from 'Nevada Fighter'. Michael was unsure–I think he said he felt their version was a bit slick or twee or something, and I couldn't really get behind that notion. Until I heard Michael's own version. Now I know that there are two dynamite versions of the song, and I have to say that I prefer the one from 'Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash'. I can already sense, weeks before you read this, the scepticism creeping over you all, but you'll see. Also, we were told that this song had cost close to fifty thousand dollars to record, as it had been destined to be on each Nesmith album, but this was the first time that it had come out just the way Michael wanted it. The wait was worth every penny, I'd say.

That track is the centre piece of three tracks which open the album, all seeming to continue the vein of the previous album. The first is called, appropriately enough, 'Continuing' and the other one is 'Release', where you can hear one of Michael's latest prides and joy, the twin lead guitars wielded by Lacy and Warford, the latter with his Clarence White string bender. We talked about the way Quicksilver had maybe originally thought out this idea, but it seems that this is the first time that the concept had been used in country music, and it works very well.

After those three, the mood changes gradually, starting with 'Winonah', a collaborative song written by Michael, James Miner, about whom I am ignorant, and Linda Hargrove, who has recently had her own album out in the States on Elektra, called 'Music Is Your Mistress'. It wasn't released here, but a single called 'Fallen Angel' may have attracted you when Noel Edmonds played it. 'Winonah' is O.K., but not as good as what has gone before. The second side is all other people's songs, starting with 'Born To Love You', a good country song with a 'Zorba's Dance' introduction, and more of the twin lead. The beauty is that Lacy and Warford never obstruct each other–it's always complementary, and they're just the spearhead of a backing group who could make an ordinary song, which this isn't, into a memorable record.

What follows is the oddity of the album, a combination of the traditional 'The F.F.V.' and Bill Monroe's 'Uncle Pen', collectively titled 'The Back Porch And A Fruit Jar Full Of Iced Tea', the significance of which eludes me at this moment. 'The F.F.V.' is a spoken piece with very sparse backing, being a little along the lines of 'Wabash Cannonball' or 'Casey Jones'–the train theme, you know. This eventually develops, after the death of George, the victim of the train's crash, into the story of the fiddle playing Uncle Pen, which is rather more of a song than a monologue in contrast, and there's a fine bit of Red Rhodes. The track finally goes into some neat bluegrass banjo picking by Bob Warford, and the band stretch out for quite a while. Odd, but pleasant, is my summing up. Finally, there's 'Prairie Lullaby', which may be a put on, because it's Gene Autrey or Roy Rogers music. Am I dating myself there? Even if I am, I like it, because it's good good night music, easy paced and relaxed cowboy music, and it makes you feel warm and comfortable. It also makes me think of warm California evenings, like the one we spent with Michael at the Countryside ranch, and there's nothing much nicer I could ever want to think about. Sweet memories, indeed.

It is, I suppose, possible that the vast number of words that I've used about the seven Nesmith albums will fail to convince you of the pleasure he offers. If so, I'm sorry, but I really don't know any other way I can put over my vast enthusiasm for the man and his music. There's a good chance you'll disagree with my personal tastes and judgements, but, I repeat, if you don't do something about listening to Michael Nesmith, you are really losing out badly.

Next month, the Monkees' records. Bye for now.

John

4 interviews with the enigmatic Peter Hemmill

interview 1

One thing is for sure: you can't just sit down and expect to understand any of Peter Hammill's music on first hearing. O.K., but the trouble is you probably won't understand it on the 101st hearing either.

Well, I'm not going to sit here and try to explain it–partly because it doesn't have cut and dried explanations as such, and partly because if I did I'd only come out with a lot of pompous and meaningless generalisations. Instead we'll just get straight into the interview, in which we talk quite a bit about his music anyway.

ZZ: What was the beginning of your writing?

PH: The very first things were poems, I think. No. The very first song I ever wrote was when I was at prep school, when I was 12. At the end of the Christmas term there was a day with no classes, so they thought up various things for people to do, like making cribs and so on, drawing pictures and that sort of thing. One of the sub-categories was writing a Christmas carol. Well, I was in the choir, so I reckoned I'd have a go at writing a Christmas carol, so I did. I just wrote some words and remembered my tune, and so on, you know. Then I had to go and sing it and I won that little competition. That was my first-ever song.

I didn't write any more music. I used to write poems a bit, between then and 15 or so.

ZZ: What sort of things were the poems?

PH: Oh, rubbish! I don't know, I can't really remember but I know that's what it was at first. And then at around 15 I got myself a plywood guitar, and I started playing this plywood guitar one string at a time. I didn't know at the time you played chords on guitars.

ZZ: You just sort of learnt it yourself.

PH: Yes, that's right. There were two or three other guys I used to play with. This was kind of playing blues, all of us playing one string at a time. Very exciting stuff.

ZZ: What school was this?

PH: Beaumont College in Berks, which is a Jesuit School. Yes, I did that for a bit and then–oh no, sorry, sorry, it gets very confusing. Before I got the plywood £5 guitar I got a harmonica because I liked Sonny Boy Williamson and so on. I used to play that a little bit and I used to sit up in bed at night after lights out–this was about 13 or 14–writing songs in the dark, kind of just thinking up lyrics. I suppose they all had the same tune, more or less. I just used to write them on bits of paper in the dark with the result that I'd find I'd written like two on top of each other in this strange, scrawling, spiderish hand. Those were the first kind of proper songs.

ZZ: Were they kind of blues-orientated things?

PH: Oh, totally. Totally. Their only concession to music was the fact that they more or less adhered to 12 bars. Then three or four of us started playing together and I just kind of started writing songs. I think they were protest songs at the time, because that was the vogue. But very strange, you know. I mean, you can imagine–a 14-year-old's protest songs . . . .

ZZ: Were they because you felt protest songs were the thing, or were they something you wanted to protest about?

PH: Well, a bit of both, but perhaps a bit more on the former. I find that particular age a bit difficult to relate to. All boys go through very funny things around then. All boys at that time think that they're it. So I think they were songs with a view that I was it.

ZZ: Did they have any sexual undertones or overtones?

PH: Oh, no no no. No, completely unimportant at that stage, you see! In terms of like writing something, you know.

ZZ: Did you do anything with these songs?

PH: The only one that really survived was 'Running Back'. That was a bit later, because this went on for about two years.

ZZ: That's on 'Aerosol Grey Machine'.

PH: That's right. This period went on for two or three years with nothing really coming out of it. One song was more or less the same as the next one, and they all used more or less the same chords juggled around a bit.

ZZ: What, sort of the three basic chords mainly?

PH: Yes, but that was interesting, because my three basic chords were the folkies' chords rather than the blues-players' chords, although I did have the blues-players' chords for a bit: E, A and B7. Then I got the folkies' chords, which were C, F and G.

I was still writing poetry at that time and a few other things, and I founded a society at school called 'The 231st Chorus', which was the title of one of Kerouac's poems. That was a kind of music and poetry symposium.

I can't really remember much more. You know, it can be dismissed in as many words as that, but that was the start. And the fact that starting writing these songs and starting playing the guitar was essentially a kind of pressure-valve situation. If I got uptight about things I could always go and play the guitar, write a song and so on. I would consciously think 'I will write a song,' and this was something that carried on for five or six years after that. The last few years I don't feel that so instantly, it's not such a conscious thing that I can write a song if I decide 'I will write a song'. At that time I used to write about four or five 'songs' a week, and maybe two bars of those combined 'songs' might be all right, and two words might be all right. I was always quite into titles, and getting a song out of the title.

So that was that. I wrote four or five that were all right, and 'Running Back' kind of stood out a mile. And then I got involved in A levels and so on–a bit–and just kind of school life.

ZZ: What sort of things were you best at at school?

PH: English and maths. In my first three years at public school I won the English prize, and in my last two years I won the Maths prize. And I won a couple of religious doctrine prizes along the way, for some strange anarchic reason. I suppose I was an academician rather than anything else. In all my school life I won at least one prize every year, from when I was eight. And they were all for English or maths. While I was at school I had my first band, which was in the last couple of years. There were a couple of other guys who wrote together, and their stuff was of about the same standard as mine, except with rather more Beatles influence. I was very into the Beatles, a complete Liverpool maniac.

ZZ: I suppose the Beatles had just started to get big at that time?

PH: Yes, in my last couple of years at school. Anyway, we had this band, it was called The Hex. We had two performances, the first one was in the pantomime at the end of the Christmas term each year, in the charge of the second-year sixth. In my year of pantomime I co-wrote it. We had four or five people writing it. I co-wrote it, choreographed it, danced in it and did the music for it. The music was provided by The Hex, and we had about a ten-minute spot in the middle of it, which was a great success, with the result that the next term we did a charity concert for which about two-thirds of the school turned up. And this was kind of wild scenes, because this being the time of Beatle-mania I think everyone thought the right thing to do at a concert was scream. I was presented with this prospect of 200 or so schoolboys screaming, and afterwards they had an auction and auctioned the shirt I had worn for charity. We were kind of an imitative cross between the Beatles and The Who. I blew up the headmaster's amp and blew somebody's electric guitar, but nobody seemed to mind too much. Then I left and tried to get into Oxford or Cambridge, but the headmaster wouldn't

have me back for the extra term.
ZZ: Why was that?
PH: Because I was, quote: 'A disruptive influence on the school'. Something like engineering or sociology I was meant to do, so I studied at home for this under a tutor. I took the exam, but didn't get it, which was all right. Then I worked for IBM for six months, programming, down in London. I had been accepted by Manchester University, so I could just bum around in the meantime or do something else. I was living at home at the time and my father thought it would be a good thing if I did something. He wanted me to work at Courtaulds, as they had a factory at Derby and so I could stay at home, but I didn't want to stay.

When I went to IBM I really started writing. I really got into writing then and wrote a lot of things—most of the things on 'Fool's Mate', actually. That was the amateur period, if you like. It was still these four or five songs a week, but by now it meant that one or two a month were going to come out all right. 'Child' and 'Vision' were written about then.

And then that finished, as I didn't really get on with IBM too well, and they didn't get on with me. And then I went up to Manchester, and that's where I met Chris Smith, who wrote, and also Nick Pearne, who was on the same course as me. We just started playing around, but again my memory's getting a bit hazy about it. Somebody was getting together a band to play in the union and we all joined this, about 20 people running on and off the stage. It varied between rock and other things, and then we started doing a couple of my songs. Then a split developed. Chris and I wanted to do my songs and the others wanted to do blues, rock'n'roll and so on.

So we did that, and that was Van der Graaf Generator. The first band was called Van der Graaf Generator, but it was our name, so we kept it.
ZZ: It was Chris who thought of the name, I believe.
PH: Yes, Chris had a list of 50 or 60 names. This was his thing—he didn't write songs, he thought up names for groups.
ZZ: Wasn't one of his ideas to call the band Zeiss Manifold and the Shrieking Plasma?
PH: Yes—which I extended to Zeiss Manifold and the Shrieking Plasma Exudation! But that one wasn't really on. He had this list and I picked Van der Graaf Generator.
ZZ: I suppose it would have meant that you were Zeiss Manifold? Fancy signing an autograph Zeiss Manifold.
PH: Yes, it was rather at a time when groups were called So and So and the So and So's, when there was no actual So and So. I've thought of writing under that pen name though!
ZZ: So the first Van der Graaf Generator consisted of you, Chris Smith and Nick Pearne?
PH: Yes, that's right. Nick played organ and guitar, Chris played drums and I was on electric guitar.
ZZ: Chris has told me you were very influenced by Arthur Brown.
PH: Arthur Brown was the great hero because it was going to be a theatre band. You know—all kinds of strange things. Chris used to turn into a vampire on stage and play with burning drum sticks and so on. On one occasion Chris and I presented Arthur Brown with a bouquet before his set, which he still remembers actually.

But we didn't do all that much at the time. We got involved with a so-called manager who got us a so-called contract and so on. We rehearsed a bit and did one gig where everything went wrong. They got about 500 too many into the hall. Everyone in the university knew about Van der Graaf, it was the first time we had played and there was just a load of drunk medical students who were kind of freaking out, people were wandering all over the stage pulling out plugs and so on. My guitar wouldn't come on and shortly after Chris lit up his drum sticks the bottles started coming at us so we left.

The first recording we did was at this manager's house with an old Ferguson or something like that—an old battered tape recorder—and a couple of mikes. I was singing in the garden to get separation, Chris was drumming in the room and Nick was playing a really old and wheezy harmonium. My guitar was going through a television set as amplification.
ZZ: And it worked?
PH: Well, it kind of worked—something came out. At some point after that we did a session in Manchester which was quite fun, and I wish I had the tapes. There was 'Firebrand' which was the other side of 'People You Were Going To' and 'Sunshine'.

interview2

The next logical step would be to carry on talking to Peter about the formation and life-history of Van der Graaf. Well in fact I did this, but in retrospect I think it's a bit irrelevant to what we're trying to get at here. In any case it would be a story in its own right, and there obviously just isn't the space for it here.

The final and most successful line-up in Van der Graaf was Peter, Hugh Banton, Dave Jackson on saxes—electrical and acoustic—and Guy Evans on drums. They made three albums: 'The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other', which contained the immortal 'Refugees'; 'H To He Who Am The Only One' and 'Pawn Hearts', which featured the epic 'Plague Of Lighthouse Keepers'.

As for the early Van der Graaf line-up, I don't know what Nick Pearn's doing now—but I do know a bit about Chris Smith. He still has a great love of names and titles, but he's also been doing a lot of song-writing and recently finished recording an album which Peter helped him with. I've heard the tapes, and it's really extraordinary music. Peter describes Chris as 'one of the undiscovered geniuses of the world'. I'm inclined to agree, and if nothing comes of the album it would be a bloody shame.

But before we leave the Van der Graaf business I just want to mention a couple of things: firstly, as I'm sure you all know, Hugh, Dave and Guy still record with Peter on his solo albums—but that should not be taken as indicating some kind of continuation of the band. Secondly, one of the big mysteries was the break-up of Van der Graaf as a working unit. In my first interview with Peter, shortly before the release of his second solo album, 'Chameleon In The Shadow Of The Night', I asked him about this Now, as we'd never met before it was obviously impossible to suss out all the vibes behind it—and even now, nearly a year later, I don't seem to be much nearer the truth. Anyway, here's an extract from that interview.

ZZ: Can you explain the break-up of Van der Graaf?
PH: If I were to talk about the break-up of Van der Graaf and cover it properly it would take about four hours. I'm unable to talk about it really because in order to get it across it's necessary to get the whole thing of Van der Graaf—like what was between us. It was a complete meshing thing—I always say it was like a spiritual thing, and it was, because when we were together, all four of us, it was like there was a fifth person as well who was also Van der Graaf. This was so to an extent where sometimes the four of us would be together, kind of sitting somewhere and talking, and then we'd all sort of feel there was somebody who was still not there.

And things like mixing in the studio: we'd all come together and no one would know where the direction had come from. We had a name for him at some time actually, I can't remember it, but we actually named this fifth . . . person.

And at the end we all knew that if we carried on it wasn't going to be like that any more. To carry on would from many points of view have been a good thing. It would have been good financially, in terms of audience. I'm sure if we had carried on it would have doubled or trebled the audience we had.

It was great while it lasted: it was amazing. And I think it's still there a bit when we get together now, but if we'd stayed together and kind of forced ourselves to carry on, that wouldn't have been there any more and it would have become like just work, instead of the joys we knew. But if you try and write that down on paper like I've just said then it won't mean anything.

Sometimes I think 'Why was it? What exactly led up to it?' But there was a moment when it was the right thing to do.

I think that's about as far as we can go into the break-up of the band. Peter told me recently he didn't believe anyone outside Van der Graaf would ever be able to really understand it—and even they had their own individual interpretations of it.

interview3

This next interview was made shortly after Peter's first British tour since the end of the band. 'Chameleon In The Shadow Of The Night', much of which was recorded in his own home, had been on the market for a few months and was selling moderately. I suppose a lot of people were expecting Peter's stage performances to be something akin to Van der Graaf, and it must have come as a bit of a shock to see just one guy playing grand piano or acoustic guitar on an otherwise empty stage.

But the tour did a lot of good. I mean everyone realised he really was on his own, and I've since been told that sales of 'Chameleon' have doubled.
ZZ: The tour you did last September was really your first solo one. Right?
PH: First solo one here, yes.
ZZ: How did you feel about it afterwards?
PH: Very good. Yes, the two big gigs were very successful.
ZZ: The big ones were Manchester and the Commonwealth Institute?
PH: Yes. The others were kind of smaller, but all of them had the same kind of contact level. I mean contact level isn't really something I'm that much consciously aware of when playing. I never was with the band that much aware of contact level with audiences, because like in live performances, as in recording, as in writing, there is a way it will be right. In live performances there's the time thing a lot in that it's right on a particular night, and so obviously the audience comes into that. But I haven't been aware of a kind of inter-action before. This may be due to playing in Europe where the words-thing isn't so instant.
ZZ: But there was a contact-thing at the Commonwealth, wasn't there?
PH: Oh certainly, certainly. It was a vibrationist contact rather than a physical contact with everybody getting up and dancing. The Commonwealth was the biggest kind of theatrical experience really, because it was the night on which everything was together: the lights were together, the sound was together, and the playing was together. The soul mood was right, in my view.
ZZ: I suppose a lot of people who haven't heard of you, came along out of curiosity to see what it's like?
PH: Who haven't heard of me by myself? Yes, that's probably true. Maybe Andover was slightly different in that the band never played much in that area, but most of the places were places the band had played in quite a lot.
ZZ: You've done several tours of Italy. Are audiences a lot different out there?
PH: Yes, they are. They're much more demonstrative, much more shouting and so on, much more of a kind of star-treatment really, which is in some ways strange. It's an entirely different world really: you've got the language thing as well and the star thing isn't so impossibly hard to understand because stardom trips come out where there's really projection. Normally here I'm kind of playing in this schizoid introvert way in as far as the actual playing is introverted because the playing is this rightness thing, and it's all channelling, but the very fact that I'm doing it in front of an audience is the exact opposite. So it is rather schizoid.

There it has to be much more of a presentation. I don't mean in a stage presentation sense, but I think I'm aware I have to put over a lot more simply on personality, because I can't do it so much on the words.

But all of this is in the abstract, because playing live is such a different thing. It's impossible for anyone who hasn't actually played live for a time to understand it—and the time is probably two or three years. You have to keep on going back and doing it, because it's like a drug.
ZZ: I've noticed that a lot of numbers you do on stage—especially those from 'Fool's Mate'—are totally different to the album. They're a lot more savage.
PH: Of course, because they're in a different context and a measure of savagery comes into them because they're played with all the other numbers in the set. Like the set takes over as well as my stage person. The set itself takes over and determines how things will be, however much one might think the thing would be a nice kind of gentle interlude.
ZZ: Now we haven't talked much about the music itself yet.
PH: I'm usually pretty evasive about it because one can talk about oneself and so on, but when you get down to talking about the music it's such a subjective thing. It's very hard to describe music in terms of getting any closer to it, both in the structural thing and the emotional effect. Similarly it's also pretty hard to talk about having done it, because I suppose it's the elements of mystery that are involved.
ZZ: No, it's not very easy, I know. Well, your music's changed a great deal from the early stuff that you were doing.
PH: The early Van der Graaf stuff?
ZZ: Yes, and the 'Fool's Mate' stuff, which was all quite sad—gloom, kind of thing. But it developed more so, didn't it? Was this a thing you tried to develop, or did it just naturally progress?
PH: No, it all just followed on. It was just a kind of natural progression. In fact you can see the progression really, in songwriting terms. The things I've

written have in some ways been a self-education of how to play things by constantly writing at a level one above what I can comfortably play.

Of course the 'Fool's Mate' songs were written at about the time of the 'Aerosol' ones, and if they came out now they'd be kind of singer-songwriter songs. And then, with the band, as instrumentation came in, gradually things started coming with that in mind.

ZZ: The sort of music you're doing now is obviously quite difficult for most people to understand, isn't it? And it seems to be progressing more and more that way.

PH: Well, it depends what you mean by understand, really. If what you mean by understand is like the meaning of every line I've written–like what each line means in relationship to the others . . .

ZZ: Well, no, not quite that. Not breaking it down to that.

PH:No, not quite that far. If one reached that stage, then understanding would be very difficult. Really the understanding comes from somebody listening to it and what they're feeling.

ZZ: It can become no more than a feeling, I suppose. Sort of so many words that conjure up a feeling.

PH: Oh precisely, precisely. That's the kind of way I like to do things. I always like to use words in that way. At some point in the Van der Graaf thing I suppose it was very much a question of you know, 'What's the meaning? Let's find the meaning'. Some of the things did seem to be designed that way. But now, since I suppose, 'Lighthouse Keepers', it was a question of the overall feeling, of the words just taking their effect.

Now I mean something like 'Lighthouse Keepers', nobody–nobody–would have a chance of like really sussing it out. But then on the other hand it's not meant to be really sussed out: it's mean to be enigmatic. It's enigmatic right the way through, and from that point as I say, it was just a question of the overall feeling–of words taking their effect as words rather than as kind of statements, or tracts of thought or something like that, or framework for a meaning. Although the meanings are still there, obviously: for my own satisfaction I've got to suss out the meanings so they stand up on that level, but I think in terms of people listening to it it's now probably more a question of what they actually feel in the course of it.

ZZ: This is the way I feel about it, but it took me some time before I realised this. On first listening to your music I thought 'What does it mean?' and would tend to play it through again and again, thinking 'What can he mean by that?' I'm sure it's because people do this that they're either very much into your music or not at all.

PH: Yes, it does require a certain amount of work, I suppose. I know I thought the band's did, and I suppose now that mine does as well. It's difficult talking about all this now, because it is *mine* now and it's a bit of a dangerous area to be talking about, the way you think that people listen to you.

ZZ: You got very much into using electrics for effect–I think even more so now.

PH: Yes, for effects.

ZZ: This is a side people tend to abuse, though, isn't it, to make up for rather poor songs?

PH: Using electrics was one of our vices in the band, and it does carry over for all of us. Hugh's always been an effects-man you know, building things and so on. I've got into it because of the recording, Guy's got into it also because of recording, and of course Dave had all his repeat-echo and wah-wah and octave-splitters and so on, so we're all very much into it. Quite often we just do free passages of electronics.

Of course it's been abused, and at times we may just have abused it, but mostly I'm very into it because I'm very into sound.

ZZ: I especially like the effects on 'Red Shift' on the new album.

PH: Oh yes, 'Red Shift' is really amazing, with the onus on the depths of the galaxy . . .

ZZ: Sort of pulsating . . .

PH: Yeah, it's like very kind of visual. If you use effects like that, if you use painting and so on, then it becomes like music, because music works just on your hearing. I think it's the fullest of the media, because it's working on your hearing: it's got lyrics so it's working on your critical and intellectual faculties or whatever. And you've got the visuals too, it does work on your visual sense and nothing else does that. Reading poems doesn't do that. But using effects and using positioning like that does do visual things.

When we mixed 'Pioneers Over C' we did that visually. You know at the start there's all that 'eeeee', it all kind of comes and goes? Well there were five of us sat at the desk with each of us assigned something. We just sat there and decided to do a visual mix. I sat in the middle, we put all the lights out and mixed it visually in the sense that I was saying what was happening. There was a spot of light coming very far away, then it just comes closer and suddenly you're in it, and it's like shooting past you–a light meteor or something, like going through a cloud: you're actually in it, it's shooting all around you, and then it's up behind you and down and then sweeps away. So we just did this, and nobody was marking where they were going, but just doing it according to the story.

ZZ: Your songs really come to painting pictures with words, don't they? Is that something you find comes naturally, or is it something you had to work at?

PH: I suppose I had to work at it, yeah. The first ones aren't very visual, they're just kind of simple things. I think it all came together really. In order to have lyrics that would be anywhere near satisfying to go with the music they had to get into visuals because the music was getting so into it. I mean, people sometimes go on about the gloom and the depression of it all, but I mean what else can you write that goes with the music? You know, I don't really have any options, they're kind of so together even though I may sometimes do them separately. They're about these things, because that's the things they're about, and the alternative would be to have simply instrumentals.

ZZ: When you write something how much of it is used and how much do you throw away?

PH: Well, each set of lyrics usually goes through about four write-outs, the music when it slots together usually slots together pretty well all right. The success-rate in all is high. Like once the song is finished it's used, but it's gone through lots of individual components–it's rather like putting together a model actually.

ZZ: Your music never seems tailored to sell, if you see what I mean.

PH: No, it's not tailored to sell–but then it's not tailored not to sell, either; it just 'is'. One moment it's not there, the next it is, and I don't really have any options –only of doing it or not doing it. I don't have the option of changing it to make it more commercial or less commercial, more erudite or more plebian.

ZZ: People obviously wonder how much of these songs are you. Are you really a gloomy person?

PH: Well, sure I am, or I wouldn't write it. But I'm lots of people . . . .

ZZ: So the only way people would see that side of you is through your songs.

PH: Yes.

ZZ: Can you not elucidate on that a bit more?

PH: I don't think I can just at the moment.

ZZ: I think from other people's points of view it's probably quite important, although I appreciate it's possibly not that easy to go into.

PH: Well, it's not really an important question. It's not really me, it's not really *my* album–it's kind of like its own, you know? And each performance, actually going on the stage, is like walking through a time-door. And there's normal gloom–like normal depression, normal reality depression–and then there's inanity and so on all the way down. But that's looking at it in that way–and I can't really look at it in that way because it's all just one, so to answer the question 'Are you a gloomy person?' Yes, I am a gloomy person–but yes, I am also the person who goes on stage; yes, I am also the person who's a channel–or whatever–for the things arriving; and yes, I'm a person sitting here; yes, I'm a person who plays 'Campaign' and likes making models. They're all different, but in saying that they're different it seems to imply that I go from day to day and say, 'Ah, right: today I'm having a writing day: today I'm having a model-making day: today I'm having a gloomy day: today I'm having a happy day.' It kind of sounds like that to me, if I say that I am sectional and I am all these different people. I don't mean it like that. I am like a blur across this spectrum–I'm like a spectrum trace, you know, it runs one into the other.

ZZ: But you–your ego–takes on as great an importance for the people who really get into your music as the music itself. The fact that your music is a very personal kind of thing means you can't separate the two.

PH: Well, I mean, that's it: I am . . . a spectrum, like a trace, and you're looking for certain elements. Everybody's got a spectrum and depending on what elements there are in them their spectrums show up to greater or lesser degrees. Well, my kind of highs, I suppose, are writing and music, and then there's a corresponding high in model-making and games–those are all in an activity spectrum. And also vegetablisation: I like to vegetablise and get away from it. In a personality thing corresponding to the highs there's a kind of depression factor, which is strong but kind of sudden. Would that be reasonable? Well, I'll finish and you can say if it's reasonable or not. There's a thing that corresponds to the games factor–a situationist thing, and corresponding to the vegetablisation there's an inanity. They run kind of parallel, you know?

Effectively what you're asking for is a psychoanalysis, isn't it? I mean this is what you're really getting at you know: the ego's important, but in order to know me, one would have to have a psychoanalysis of me–and a physical analysis probably as well.

Well, the tape was about to run out and in any case the conversation had reached a natural end. Actually you're probably right, Peter, a psychoanalysis is just about what I was asking for.

Peter said the interpretation of his songs is really in the minds of the listeners, but in this next–and final–piece we discuss two songs from his latest album, 'The Silent Corner And The Empty Stage', and we learn the motivation behind 'The Lie', which I think is the most important song on it.

interview 4

This interview was done in January. Peter had just completed an Italian tour, and that to me is really another story in itself, because I was with him as roadie–and a bloody green roadie as well, I may add. Anyway, I've kept clear of any references to it, as it's all a bit too subjective.

Hugh Banton was present for the interview, and takes part in it.

ZZ: If we could talk a little about some of the songs on the new album. In 'A Louse Is Not A Home' you refer to 'the faceless watcher'. What is the faceless watcher?

PH: Well, the whole thing is 'I', so the faceless watcher is 'I' as well. If you take the house conception then the faceless watcher is the subconscious–the subsonscious drive or whatever.

[By 'house conception' Peter is referring to the way he often uses houses as people, as in 'House With No Door'.] To me it means that, but it could be anything–God, or superstition, or anything of the unnameable order. As H.P. Lovecraft would have it, the faceless watcher is the unnameable. Of course the whole of 'Louse' is presented cinematically you know.

ZZ: It's a very menacing kind of song–well, it is to me.

HB: 'Louse'? It always makes me laugh. It never used to, but the first time I heard it played back after the remix I just cracked out laughing. I don't know why.

PH: It's very on the edge. It's difficult for me to think about reactions to it from myself, because there are so many phases you know–rehearsing, recording, mixing–and all these things are different experiences so that at the end I'm lost as far as any reactions to the songs are concerned.

Peter then spoke in more general terms about the meanings of songs and the meanings people find in those songs–something we have already gone into in this piece–but it led him to this:

PH: As soon as you do something and give it to people, in the sense that you make it public, you have to relinquish the copyright on its meaning in the same way that you relinquish your rights not to have criticism of it–good or bad–and you also relinquish the right to have your meaning in it. Anybody who writes something is not really in control of what they write, what the real meaning is. In relationship to music, or to a painting, or a poem, a novel or anything, it's an interaction between the person who reads it and everything that contributes to them and whatever there is in the piece that they're interacting with. So it's always individual.

If it was as simple as that, that there was just one meaning in things, then it wouldn't really be necessary–except as a platform–to make a song, to make a painting, to write a book. One could simply say, 'I believe that this is this'. But you don't really find that many statements so specific in any novels or any paintings, because the function of creation is largely that of groping in uncertainty. And you've got that something and think, like, because you've written it it's yours, that this is the way you feel. But it's mutual–the song writes *you* as *you* write the song. I know from experience that when I actually want to say a specific meaning it's incredibly hard–it's probably because I'm not disciplined enough–but it's incredibly hard for me to say a specific meaning in a specific line. I can write the line very easily, and if the meaning seems wrong to me then I can just scrawl out the line.

HB: I remember when we were talking about 'The Lie', and I didn't know what it was about.

ZZ: What is it about? I don't really know either.

PH: You say your conception first, Hugh.

HB: Oh well, to me it was the school version of religion, like the sort of religion you receive at school.

PH: Actually that's very close, that's much closer than my explanation would be: the school version of religion–precisely. Yes, it's kind of adolescent religion. In my adolescence I got very into religion at one point, but I was into it from the point of view of being in love with all the female saints. It was a great confusion of sex and religion, which is what the song is about.

ZZ: It sounds very strange.

PH: There's the spiritual thing there and the carnal thing, and they can get very confused. This is where it starts getting complex and the meanings wouldn't come through to other people, but I know what it is, and this is like an actual statement of my beliefs that in fact behind the panoplies of religion–not just Christianity, but because I was brought up a Catholic that's the one that I know so that's the one that I write about–there is truth, but the truth is completely masked in all the outward pomp and circumstance of religion.

HB: It's like becoming so-called religious at the age of 17 or 18, then 'The Lie' is what you find just after that.

PH: Well no, not even that. The lie is actually the religion in the way that it is presented to you, because it does hide the truth and I believe that the saints got to the truth, but they certainly didn't get to the truth by going to Mass every morning and benediction in the evening–that wasn't the truth, which is how it is presented to you at school. Exactly like the class rota, you know?

And the same kind of barrier exists in sex, exactly the same kind of thing exists. In the same way as there are so many mythologies and cults and–not hang-ups exactly–but taboos about religion there are as many about sex, and it's for the same reason: that that moment of insanity, the orgasm for some, is also a part of the same truth. I'm not saying behind religion exists The Truth, or behind sex there exists The Truth–but it's all the same truth, it's all the essential force; that, in there, is the centre of the circle and we live our lives on the outside of the sphere and are prevented from getting at the circle by the taboos that have been thrown up around us.

The statue of St Theresa is a sexually ecstatic statue, which purports to be religious ecstasy. St Theresa herself described her state of religious ecstasy as 'The wound of love', and so that's really what the song is–it's talking about that, again in personal terms. And, of course, in the end it comes out saying, 'Well, I would–I'd like it,' you know. Anybody would like the security of getting to that, of actually accepting the way that it's presented, that's a very secure situation. But it would double the lie. If you believe that it's a lie then it doubles the lie if you accept it.

Like 'Chameleon', 'The Silent Corner' was recorded partly at Peter's home in Sussex and partly at Rockfield Studios in Wales. Actually most of the songs on those albums were written more than two years ago, but his next album, which he's now working on, will feature new material–but it's a bit early to be talking about that.

On a longer-term project Peter is collaborating with Chris Smith in writing a musical on the triangle between Richard the Lionheart, Berengaria and the minstrel Blondel, plus an opera based on Poe's classic 'The Fall Of The House Of Usher'. But all that won't come to fruition for some time.

By the time this is in print his book of poems, lyrics and short stories called 'Killers, Angels, Refugees' will be on sale, but as I have only glanced at it in Connor's office it wouldn't be fair to make any comment. One interesting point, though, is that Peter does write a few words on the basic motivations behind each set of lyrics.

Meanwhile I hope you're all going out and buying 'The Silent Corner'. Take it home and listen to it in the quiet of your room–its true meaning is whatever you find.

Brian Rivas

MACON, GEORGIA

part one

This huge old Southern mansion has seen much better days. The dozen giant columns which surrounded it are flecked by peeling paint, grimly revealing the grey tin beneath. The verandahs are littered by clumps of leaves and fading newspapers. The gardens are spoiled by weeds. Everything man-made is parched of paint.

A red and white sign hammered in the front lawn says 'Lease or Improve'. The house has been deserted for years, my colleague informs me. We snap a few shots then flash a look around to determine if our presence has been noticed. The occasional car glides by on College Avenue but there isn't a soul in sight. The only sound is the breeze brushing through the hundreds of massive trees which flourish in this stately old Southern street.

We cautiously stroll up the drive to the marble steps and ascend to the foot of the columns. Still not a human sound. We proceed around the verandah to a side entrance, past the boarded windows. There is a broken window next to the door; a welcome opportunity to explore an antebellum mansion, these Gargantuan Grecian-styled palaces of the Southern monied aristocracy in times gone by.

It takes a few seconds to adjust to the lack of light in this small side hall. Everywhere there is dirt and debris, glass and old clothes. Certainly the owners do not live here, but they would appear to have more than their share of uninvited lodgers.

A door leads towards the front of the house and one of the four stairways, a marble and wood construction of remarkable beauty. Beneath the stairs is an exquisite marble fireplace, filled with litter. The ceiling is out of vision. Our eyes are drawn to a large hole in the wall over the stairs. At one time the hole was an 18-feet by six-feet window filled with hundreds of panels of apricot milk glass.

All that remains is somewhat less than half of the original glass. The rest has been shattered by sticks and stones. The late afternoon sun streams through the gaping hole lighting the floor around our feet.

We must have stood for five minutes absorbing the vibrant feelings of the room, which survive despite its deplorable condition. It was a memorable experience. Suddenly our tranquility was broken by the sound of an agitated male voice.

'Alright ya'll, come right on outa there right now. Ah know you're in there so you better come out quick now before Ah call the police.'

Reluctantly we climbed back through the hall window and were greeted by a middle-aged man in a dark suit and hat. He escorted us to the front of the property and enquired after our motives for trespassing in his house.

It turned out that he not only owned the mansion, but the one next door (a charming old brick cottage with a swing and rocking chair on its verandah and a monstrous magnolia tree in the yard) and another antebellum house up the road.

Upon learning that my colleague worked with the Allman Brothers Band and that I was a writer from the far north, the man provided us with considerable background on the property. It had been built by a Macon banker midway through the last century. Nobody had lived in it for almost a decade and its condition was admittedly on the rapid decline. The owner did not want to invest its restoration. He would be happy to sell the mansion at the same price he paid. Which, he said, was $54,000.

'Why don't ya get the Allman Brothers to buy this house and fix it up into what it should be,' he asked my colleague, extending an invitation for us to explore further if we wished.

There were a dozen bedrooms and bathrooms, almost all with individual fireplaces. What stunning testimony to the grandness of the old South. Even the piles of rags and other remnants of tramp occupation could not take away the grace and charm which this mansion possessed.

A tiny brick outhouse, at one time the slaves' living quarters, nestled at the back of the yard amid vines and overgrown shrubs.

As we put our cameras back in the car, the man gave us a reminder to rap about the house with the Allman Brothers.

* * * *

In Macon, everyone knows the Allman's and their manager/mentor Phil Walden. The city's mayor, Ronnie Thompson, went as far as to observe recently that Walden and his associates have 'literally put Macon, Georgia on the map.'

A few weeks earlier, the Allman Brothers Band on the occasion of their 4th anniversary, had played a benefit concert for Macon charities (including the Salvation Army and the Drug Centre) drawing 11,103 people (one 70-year-old man made a four-hour drive from Tuscaloosa, Ala.) and raising more than $55,000. Despite the length of their hair and the volume of their music, the members of the A.B.B. are regarded locally as damn solid citizens.

Macon, a slow'n easy town of some 120,000 people, is less than half an hour by air from Atlanta yet it has retained many of its authentic Southern traditions. If Atlanta is the gateway to the South, Macon is the first step into the real South. An admirable sense of the past pervades these parts.

Unlike Atlanta and most other Southern centres, Macon was not razed to the ground in the dying days of the Civil War. Almost all of the mansions built by wealthy planters and businessmen escaped the torch. The city resisted two attacks by Union troops but was eventually occupied by the Federals in 1865. By some miracle it was left standing, a serene little city serving as one of the few surviving sites of old Southern style, that same style which has captured the finest emotions of so many sensitive writers over the years. The purest essence of the old South has somehow been maintained in Macon even against the enormous pressures of what our parents called progress.

It is this jaunty juxtaposition of the old plantation tradition and the new rock identity of Macon which immediately captivates one undergoing even the most cursory inspection. If only those founding fathers who in 1823 settled the area on the site of prehistoric Indian tribe camp and burial grounds dating to 8000 B.C. could have known that rock music would be the vehicle by which the name of Macon would rebound around the 20th century global village.

* * * *

Beside the Allman Brothers, Macon can boast several other claims to international artistic fame. The late and literally great Otis Redding made his home here and Phil Walden was his personal manager. Soul man extraordinary, James Brown, was born in Macon. So was Lena Horne. The city was also the birthplace of the outstanding 19th century Southern poet, Sidney Lanier, Tennessee Williams finished off his 'Glass Menagerie' in Macon while wooing a local young lovely.

Another Macon visitor was Richard Penniman. In true rock'n'roll style this Negro youth composed a striking piece of American pop cultural history while washing dishes at the restaurant of the local Greyhound bus station. The song was 'Tutti Frutti' and the writer later became world famous as Little Richard. Another of his lesser-known tunes 'Miss Anne' was penned about a nearby club called Anne's Tick Tock. Quite clearly, Macon is an important part of rock history. Rock'n'roll was born in Southern cities like Macon, Memphis and New Orleans. The feeling lingers on. And I strongly suspect that Macon is going to occupy a significant role in the future evolution of this music of ours.

* * * *

The home of rock music in modern day Macon is Capricorn Records, located on Cotton Avenue, a fascinating assortment of tiny restaurants, a barbers and stores catering to the whims of a mixed population. 'Cotton Avenue, street of dreams' is how Capricorn's executive vice president, Frank Fenter, describes the company's business address.

In an era when vast communications complexes (such as Columbia, RCA and Warner Bros) control almost all of the music industry, Capricorn is a welcome return to the old days of rock when independent organisations were the lifeblood of the scene.

Not only does Capricorn produce records—the company is also involved in artist management, booking, promotion, the operation of a studio (one of the finest in the country) and publishing.

Its records are distributed internationally through the vast resources of the Warner Bros organisation. Capricorn has recently had chart success with Wet Willie, Martin Mull, the Marshall Tucker Band and the Allman Brothers Band. Its track record is among the best in rock music, from both quantitative and qualitative standpoints.

Prior to setting up Capricorn, Walden had been closely involved with the Southern music scene since organising a booking agency while still in college. One of the bands he booked was Johnny Jenkins and the Pinetoppers, a group whose line-up included a vocalist who doubled as a roadie. At the end of a recording session in Memphis early one morning, the singer asked if he could cut a couple of tunes of his own. As glib as it may sound, that is exactly how Otis Redding's magnificent recording career started.

Redding ultimately recorded some of the finest all-time classics of R&B (including, in brief, 'I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop Now)', 'Try A Little Tenderness', 'Respect', 'Pain In My Heart', and 'I Can't Turn You Loose'. His career blossomed like no R&B singer before him and the combination of Redding's superb recordings and Walden's astute career direction led him to unprecedented heights, particularly in foreign markets.

Otis Redding was just breaking the pop market wide open in December 1967 with '(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay' when he was killed in an air crash in Wisconsin. Elaborations on Redding's potential at that early stage are nebulous at best; suffice it to say that he was unquestionably the most significant male vocal star to have emerged from the R&B scene in the South.

Although Walden was by this time also managing a flock of soul superstars (such as Sam and Dave, Percy Sledge, Arthur Conley, Clarence Carter, Eddie Floyd and Johnnie Taylor), the tragedy of Redding's death was a bitter blow. It is the sort of experience which provides a man with a completely new perspective on life. Few can handle it. Walden, to his eternal credit, gained new wisdom and hope as the months went by, learning to live with what would turn out to be the first of two enormous tragedies in his life.

The nature of Redding's contribution can perhaps be best summed up in the opening lines from his highly emotional rendition of the late Sam Cooke's 'A Change Is Gonna Come.'

'I was born by a river
In this little old tent,
Oh and just like this river,
I been running ever since.
It's been a long time comin',
But I know a change is gonna come.'
(lyrics by Sam Cooke, copyright Kags Music, BMI).

'I swore I'd never get so involved with another artist—until Duane Allman came along,' Walden once said.

Capricorn Records was formed in 1969 on the advice of Jerry Wexler, one of the founders of Atlantic Records, which was bought by the Warner Bros group three years ago for $18 million. Walden was proceeding with a plan to build a major studio in Macon and Wexler urged him to start a label. Walden was none too keen to get into a label situation but Wexler—a staunch believer in the talents of Southern stock—worked on him,even to the point of offering a distribution deal for the product.

They called the label Capricorn because both Walden and Wexler (along with singer Arthur Conley, one of the first signings) were born under that sign. The original intention was to release soul singles, a market with which Atlantic had close rapport.

The concept was to change radically a few weeks later when Walden received a call from Wexler and heard Wilson Pickett's stinging version of 'Hey Jude' for the first time. The next day Walden found himself headed for Muscle Shoals, Ala. to meet with a young studio guitarist named Duane Allman. By any account, it was a historic occasion.

* * * *

Like Phil Walden, I too was introduced to Duane Allman's impeccable guitar playing by Jerry Wexler. A real go-getter when it comes to turning others on to startling new discoveries, Wexler called me one afternoon at the Toronto Globe and Mail and played a copy of Pickett's 'Hey Jude' on his new phone phonograph. I would be understating the case if I said I was

knocked on my arse by the sensational slide guitar playing on the record.

I was convinced that Wexler had uncovered a new B.B. King during his scouring of the South. Jerry took measured pride in informing me that Duane Allman was a white boy with streaming blond hair living in Jacksonville, Fla.

My first meeting with Duane took place in Muscle Shoals in the summer of '69 when Ronnie Hawkins was recording his first album with Jerry Wexler for Atlantic—that LP contains for the discerning collector, two incredible jam tracks with Allman and harmonica master, the King Biscuit Boy, entitled 'Down In The Alley' and 'Who Do You Love?'

The second occasion was a session at Miami's Criteria studios where Wexler and Duane Allman were working on Aretha's 'This Girl's In Love With You' (if you want absolute proof of Duane's unique ability on slide guitar check out 'Dark End Of The Street' on that album).

But it was Phil Walden who had the vision of Duane Allman's limitless potential as a leader and member of his own rock group. While in Muscle Shoals, they cut an album of Duane and musician-friends at Rick Hall's studios but eventually decided it was too R&B-oriented.

Walden persuaded Allman to return to Macon where they began to put a band together. Summer was spent in several months of rehearsals and then the Allman Brothers Band went to New York to cut their first album at the Atlantic studios. Believing that the only way to break any new act in the U.S. is by personal appearances, Walden sent the group out on a gruelling and relentless tour. It paid off handsomely.

By the time the band's third album ('At Fillmore East') gave them their first gold disc award (the first two releases—'The Allman Brothers Band' and 'Idlewild South' were ultimately certified gold), they were being widely acclaimed in the underground press as America's best-ever white blues band.

They had just begun work on the 'Eat A Peach' album when Phil Walden was struck by the second tragedy of his lifetime.

Duane Allman was killed in a motorcycle accident on a Macon street on October 29, '71, aged 24. Like Otis Redding before him, Duane had only just begun to receive a measure of the success due to him. Both died before their prime and we can only ponder on just how much they would have given us if time had been on their side.

Perhaps you can get some indication of Duane's potential from the following comments by Eric Clapton, on being asked by this reporter how he rated his contemporaries:

'Duane Allman is just incredible. When I first heard him playing on Wilson Pickett's 'Hey Jude', it scared the pants off me. He's so good it's ridiculous.'

Clapton and Allman later collaborated on the Derek and the Dominoes' rendition of 'Layla', a modern rock classic.

Most bands would have capitulated at the loss of such a talented leader, but Greg Allman and the rest of the band decided the only way to ease the pain was to keep on playing. 'Eat A Peach' (so named, according to Frank Fenter, after Duane told a reporter in the north: 'When I come back to the state of Georgia, I eat a peach for peace') was completed and released, the new band hit the road and returned to Macon at the end of the following summer, to rest and rehearse their fifth album.

One year and 13 days after the Duane Allman tragedy, bass guitarist Barry Oakley died in a traffic accident that was almost an exact replica of the first death. But still the band kept working, almost as though driven by a sense of new responsibility to their two departed brothers. You don't hear rumours anymore about internal dissension or personal hassles in the A.B.B.

* * * *

Phil Walden, now a youthful 33, lives with his second wife and two kids in a modern, architect-designed mansion filled with tastefully-collected antiques and the rural Georgian oils. Located simplistically in a woodland setting, Walden's home includes a conservatory in which he grows giant lemons, a projection room (his hobby is collecting old movies) and a charming living room with authentic French chateau furniture. A Rolls Royce rests in the spacious driveway.

It is very late at night and we are sitting around rapping about rock music in general. It is by no means an interview and many of Walden's observations are clearly not intended for publication. We're just rapping off the top, so to speak.

Walden does admit that Duane Allman's death did not come as a total shock. 'Duane was a genius at what he did, but he was the sort of guy who liked to live life to the fullest. He wasn't happy unless he was getting the maximum enjoyment out of everything. He pushed himself to incredible horizons.

'Duane had incredible drive. He would push himself to the limit in everything he did, his personal life, live gigs, recording, everything.'

Walden paused and gazed into the trees outside. 'I mean, the band continuing and all that. Duane always said that he had it made as a guitar player. Every time he'd play something nice he'd get credit for it, and every time Dickie Betts would play something exceptionally good, Duane would still get credit for it. 'Shit,' he'd say, 'I got it coming from both ends.' Duane would always say that Dickie Betts was as good as he was.'

Betts, it's worth noting, recently married an Ojibway Indian girl from Canada, one Sandy Bluesky. There's a song about her on 'Eat A Peach'.

* * * *

At the present time, the A.B.B. are one of the top groups in America and Capricorn executive VP, Frank Fenter, goes into considerable detail to prove the point, as well he might.

Fenter came to Macon from London early in '70, after Walden had been favourably impressed by the former's efforts as U.K. label manager for Atlantic. He and Walden were already firm friends, a relationship which has grown into one of the most effective executive unions in the U.S. music industry.

A native South African, Fenter is a tireless man with vast resources of energy and expertise. He is the sort of guy who can be an artist's best friend; with his dedication behind even a glimmer of talent, success is just a matter of time and luck.

'The Brothers are now making millions of dollars a year,' he notes. Fenter always refers to the A.B.B. as 'The Brothers'. 'On a pro-rata basis, I would think they are the highest-grossing band in the U.S. They sold out an April date at the Boston Gardens—18,000 people bought tickets in two hours. It took the Stones 12 hours to do the same thing.

'They hold the record for the largest-grossing day in New York at Gaelic Park—24,000 people last year. They'll be doing three nights at Madison Square Garden this summer. They earned $60,000 at a recent gig in Charlotte, N.C.'

The Brothers' biggest album was 'Eat A Peach' which is now a platinum record with sales of more than 1,000,000 units of a double LP. Their new one, 'Brothers And Sisters' came along and topped them all.

The fact that a band which can sell 18,000 tickets in two hours could not get play on AM radio raised many perplexing questions about the state of the music media scene in general, but in the dutiful interests of keeping this article to the subject in hand, we shall avoid drawing any of the rather obvious conclusions.

Fenter sits back and puts his blue-jeaned legs on the office desk. 'There it is man—four years, two tragedies and there it is. They're still together and bigger than ever. That says something.

'There's no good bullshitting. This has been no easy trip, especially for the Brothers themselves. It ain't no fashion show when they get up on stage. If you step up there, you'd better be able to play. The trip is making great music. The Brothers are motivated by a lot of things and it goes deep down inside them.'

That fact should be obvious to even a tin ear. The Brothers' music comes from a rich and uncompromising heritage.

* * * *

Quality of music is an essential detail to each of Capricorn's 40 staff members. Naturally every record company pays lip service to its own artist roster but at Capricorn there is rare recognition of what really is good. The label has already gained an industry-wide reputation as a prime producer of valuable and note-

worthy new talent. Along with Geffen and Roberts' Asylum Records and Britain's Charisma and Chrysalis labels, Capricorn is one of the big three of independent rock music-making organisations.

Like his colleagues at Asylum and Chrysalis, Walden is a staunch believer in the new-wave philosophy that putting an act in front of the public is the key to the rock highway. Then if the act has the necessary talent and the timing is right, it will all come together. Walden is not interested in one-shot quickie hit single acts, here today and golden oldie tomorrow. He and Fenter want to develop things that will last.

'I've always felt that you should let the public decide about an artist for itself. You should not have to depend on a single hit. Records and concerts should not depend on one another for survival—they should supplement each other,' Walden notes shrewdly.

This policy reflects the new attitudes of visionary people in the music industry—stop trying to please the radio programme directors and play what you think the people want, to the people. Plenty of superstars have made it without radio play, the Allman Brothers being one of the more topical examples. Don't filter your energy to fit the abominable standards of the average Top 40 station, just lay your music out like it is and people will accept it or reject it for what it is. In any case, records produced to suit the taste (or lack of taste) of KHJ in Los Angeles or WLS in Chicago are bound to be a dishonest and frustrating effort.

'We've never considered the competition,' Frank Fenter notes, 'We only think about our own acts.'

And in a wordy piece of PR handout prose, Phil Walden is reported to have once said: Whereas Capricorn Records maintains an autonomous and aesthetic structure within today's world of record conglomerates, the label prefers to maintain a low profile with the emphasis on the music of its artists.' Honesty in art. Real pure stuff.

part two

Frank Fenter has a fairly strong viewpoint on almost any subject you care to name (in the manner of almost all forceful people) and the issue of people who decry the state of the music industry is definitely one of them.

'There's a set of rules in the music business,' he claims, 'and if you don't like it, don't go out on the tennis court. It's like Harry Truman said: "If the heat gets to you, stay out of the kitchen".

'Some people have put us down for being distributed by Warner Bros. That's bullshit. We couldn't operate without a company like Warner's. Some say they already have too much product. If Warner's had 55 albums on the best-selling chart, I couldn't give a shit. They believe in our artists and their strength in the marketplace gives us access to places we could not get by ourselves.

'Also, independents traditionally cannot collect money owing to them by retailers. To collect from big rack jobbers, you've got to take them to court in every state, every one of them. I mean, there's just no way.'

It's late in the afternoon and Fenter is taking a hit from his first scotch and water of the day. 'Coming to the American record market from Britain three years ago was like stepping out of kindergarten and into university. I always felt that the English music scene was wide open for innovation because of the general lack of enthusiasm. They used to treat music like the banking business. Then you come to America and face the sheer awesomeness of this business. The sheer volume of it is staggering. It's like being in front of a bulldozer all the time. But I dig it man, I really do.'

I asked Fenter if he felt there was any business formula which could be applied to making a new record company a going concern in America.

'Nuh, not really,' he says. 'I'd say that 10 percent on hard work and 80 percent on good luck. No matter what anybody says, that's the way it is. Bands come and go like the wind.

'The big advantage we have here in Macon is access to talent. The South is full of top-rate rock talent. Phil Walden got the whole thing moving in Georgia and now all the majors seem to be opening up offices in Atlanta.

'There is a deluge of talent down here,' he continues, pointing to a foot-high stack of tapes on his desk. 'That's a week's load of new Southern talent. Southern bands cannot afford to go to New York or Los Angeles to check out the scene.'

Therein lies most of the reason for the recent emergence of hot new acts from both the South and strangely enough, the far north (viz, main centres of the music monolith, N.Y. and L.A.) the talent had to stay where it was and just keep on playing. The bands may have thought it was a terrible drag at the time but it now turns out to be a blessing in disguise.

If there's one common denominator about the artistic growth of rock musicians anywhere in the world, it is the fact they invariably get better the longer they stick at it. The Band and the Allman Brothers Band (from the north and south, respectively) spent considerable time staying home improving their instrumental skills. By the time they hit the centre of the music scene they were so accomplished that they made their competitors look lame.

'I think that's a fair theory to apply to the success of Southern musicians. If you're a band based in New York or L.A., you usually make a record within six months of starting out. But down here, musicians have time to mature a little. They start out copying other people's material, then they move into part originals and finally all originals.

'I really do think we have a distinct advantage down here. Of course it took a while for the major labels to pick up on it but they're really getting into it now. Muscle Shoals and Memphis have a great reputation for singles and R&B product, but we're leading the way in the rock album field.

'When we started out, there was tremendous concentration on making it with what we had. And what we had was rock album artists so that's the route we went. First things first. Now I think you'll see us getting back into some things like R&B. It's our greatest love and we'll be back there again soon.

'Phil and I aren't worried about the major labels moving into Atlanta or Macon. They're welcome to join us. I still think that we'll continue to be the frontrunner in this part of the country.'

* * * *

Unless you have been given the totally incorrect impression that Capricorn and Macon is the Allman Brothers full stop, allow me to provide you with short profiles of the company's current artist line-up.

Greg Allman has recently completed a brilliant solo album which is a positive sensation. When Phil Walden plays the tapes for you he looks as pleased as punch. The first two tracks more than account for his enthusiasm.

Maxayn, a funky band from the West Coast, includes a former Ikette, Paulette Parker, in its line-up.

White Witch is a five-man band from Tampa, Fla. gaining ground rapidly.

Wet Willie are already established as one of the hottest new names on the American rock scene. Their recent tour with Jeff Beck did much to boost their national following.

Captain Beyond may be the next California-bred super group. The group's personnel includes two former members of Iron Butterfly, an expatriate from Deep Purple and a player from the Johnny Winter ensemble.

Martin Mull is virtually indescribable. Suffice to say that he was the originator of that recent tongue-in-tuba take-off on 'Duelling Banjos'.

Another fine Southern act is the Marshall Tucker Band, reminiscent of the A.B.B. only in their desire to play a fierce, pure brand of hard rock. You don't need to be a genius to predict big things for this outfit.

Hydra is also a group of Southern musicians with a big following in Southern states and particularly their home town of Atlanta.

Capricorn's newest signing is Eric Quincy Tate, a four man blues band originally from Corpus Christi, Texas, now based in Atlanta. The group recorded a debut album for Atlantic and then switched to Capricorn.

But despite such a heavy flow of talent, Capricorn's great strength is in its diversification. The company looks after the booking and management of many of its acts. While other companies make records and hope for hits

(or at least pray that the artists will agree to tour as an opening act with a superstar), Capricorn puts its acts to work right from the start. As a result, the artists continue to grow and improve as creative entities and their names are usually familiar by the time their albums are released. This concept of Walden and Fenter might be definitively described as taking the bull by the horns.

The Capricorn people are also open-minded enough to occasionally manage and book artists which they do not record. Dr John has been with Phil Walden for years. An incredibly-talented musician, Dr John has only in recent weeks begun to receive the true level of record (both single and album) that has long been his due. A few months ago, Walden observed that 'nobody has ever made any money with Dr John but both Jerry Wexler and I believe in his talent and really dig him as a person too. He just has to be one of the world's greatest personalities.'

Capricorn also manages and books England's Hurricane Smith, who topped the charts earlier this year with 'Oh Babe What Can You Say'. The fast-emerging new R&B star, Bobby Womack, is booked by Walden's agency.

And as Frank Fenter likes to point out, this is just the start. In the record business there is one trusty old proverb. 'When you're hot, you're hot.' Right now Capricorn is hotter than the climate in which it has been reared. You don't talk about the potential of Macon any more. That aspect has been realised beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Now it's simply onto bigger and hopefully better things.

* * * *

A couple of hundred yards down the Hay House hill through the mist of scores of sturdy rose bushes exuding a melancholy fragrance, you come upon number 15 on the 88-point Macon Heritage Tour, the Old Cannonball House.

It too is a beautiful monument to the Old South but on a diminutive scale. There are only four Ionic columns but they enclose a quaint little porch and a small balcony over which is draped the Rebel flag.

The Old Cannonball House, as you may have guessed, is famous for its unusual survival through the Civil War.

Built in 1853 by Judge Asa Holt, the house gained its name after it was struck by a cannon ball from Union forces under General George Stoneman during the battle of Dunlap Hill in 1864. The shot was fired from three miles distant. According to official records, the cannon ball 'struck the sand sidewalk, passed through the second column from the left on the gallery and entered the parlour over a window, landing unexploded in the hall. Its course may be traced by the mended column, a patch in the parlour plaster and a dent in the hall floor.'

Mrs Holt kept the cannon ball displayed on the parlour table until she presented it to the Macon Volunteers who participated in the city's defence.

After Pickett's death, Walden swore off other artists till Duane Allman, above, came along.

The irony of it all is almost too much for me.

* * * *

Frank Fenter is shuffling through the papers on his desk, deciding which documents to take home with him for the weekend. He and Walden are linked by a special phone system and business continues night and day. Dedicated people prefer to operate like that. There isn't a designated work-time period. There's only time for living and loving and doing and changing.

'This is about the longest period I've stayed in Macon without doing any travelling,' Fenter is saying. 'I've been down here for 28 days. My mother has been making her first ever visit with us from South Africa and I decided to stay off the road a while.

'But now I can feel the slack out there. It's time to go out and freeze a few noses.' He chuckles at his summary of the state of the music scene in Los Angeles. Both Fenter and Walden clearly favour the environment of Macon over any of the glamour of Hollywood.

Walden told one writer recently that getting his gig done in Macon brings it down to 'just you, the music and the people that create it. I think it really gives you a chance to cut all the bullshit away and gives you a chance to relax.'

It comes as no surprise to learn that there has been plenty of pressure for Capricorn to relocate in L.A. or New York.

'How the hell can they hope to be part of the in crowd when they're stuck down in the swamps?' whisper some cynical observers, usually behind their backs.

The answer is that neither Walden nor Fenter have any great desire to be part of the nose-freezing Hollywood trip. 'I don't particularly care to be involved in the social aspects of the music industry,' Walden notes caustically.

'New York and L.A. are only a phone call away and we've now opened our own office in Hollywood,' Walden says. 'We're also getting together a bunch of regional promotion men to work specifically on Capricorn. But we like making Macon our base because it puts you right next to what you're making, the music. It removes you from all that superfluous crap surrounding the merchandising of the music. We know it exists and we have to deal with it but we prefer to do it from down here. Making the music is what we do best.'

Cynics might also snigger that Walden only digs it because he grew up there and it's in his blood. Yet that surmisal is ruled out by the fact that most of his executive staff came from elsewhere, and have settled down comfortably and contentedly in Macon.

Frank Fenter came from London at a time when it was the capital of the hip world. Mike Hyland, director of publicity and artist relations, is an expatriate New Yorker. Dick Wooley, the national promotion director, is an Atlanta import. And the musicians come from all over the country.

'Oh sure we'd like some more Chinese restaurants in Macon,' Fenter allows with a wave of his arm. 'But shit man, you can eat out a whole lot when you're on the road. I think it's right to say that we're all damn happy to call Macon home. I just don't see us leaving here ever.'

'Macon attracts people. And it's different enough for people to want to get into it. Southern hospitality is the real thing man, not just the superficial bullshit that you get in the big cities.'

Nonetheless Fenter and Walden understand what grease makes the big wheels turn. When they come to Sunset Boulevard to check out progress on their product, they have the trip down pat . . . the limos, the Beverly Hills bungalows, all the accessories of the rock'n'roll big time.

They can speak the language of the harried and hustling record company executives. But they can also withdraw from that trip and strip off its frothy veneer. Down here in Macon,cricket bat in hand, having a few hits on the backlawn with his son, Frank Fenter can get right down to it. Just as Phil Walden can, laughing at old Hollywood movies in his projection theatre. But the laugh really is on Hollywood.

* * * *

As the Atlanta-bound Delta Airways 727 rips off the runway and Macon is gobbled up in its dense forest of trees, a thought flashes across my mind.

It really would be nice if the Allman Brothers Band or Capricorn or Phil Walden would acquire that beautiful old antebellum mansion on College Avenue and apply a few coats of paint and a weekend volunteer work force of caring young citizens to restore its magnificent memories.

Its rooms could then be turned into a museum of Macon's tremendous contribution to the pop culture of the world. It would be audacious of me to suggest what items could be displayed therein but I would imagine there is a vast amount of available material from which to assemble a catalogue.

We voyagers in the rock spaceship have done far too little to document the course of the past 20 years in American pop culture. The Establishment has generally tended to ignore us and our achievements are too often restricted to filler fare on Top 40 radio stations.

The paradox of old and new in that grand home would also be fascinating. These Southern mansions are one of the few remaining monuments to the delightful literary image which I suspect will remain close to our hearts and those of our children and their children, just as long as there is an America.

The South has also given us rock'n' roll and that, I believe is a gift of uncharted proportions. Our destiny is allied to this music more than most of us care to believe.

The Macon Music Museum could be a valuable documentation of a lot of things. The music, after all, is Macon's heritage of tomorrow. Many people believe it is America's future heritage.

And that says a significant amount about the creative environment of a small city in the South where rock'n'roll and old mansions can live in perfect harmony.

Ritchie Yorke

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Lesley Duncan

Everything Changes

Carefully, obscured amongst the endless stream of artistes that clamour for attention is a lady called Lesley Duncan.
Now is the time for a change, a chance for her music to gain the recognition it has been denied.
Lesley Duncan's new album on GM Records is called 'Everything Changes.'

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Henry Miller once said that he couldn't think or write about Shakespeare because he found it impossible to divorce his reactions to all that had been written about Shakespeare. That's pretty much how I feel about Dylan's new album, **'Planet Waves'**. I really find it difficult to listen to the album truthfully, because I can't get all the other stuff out of my head; but for what it's worth (and I ought to say that I'm the sort of strange fellow who thinks that 'New Morning' is great, almost his best album), I think the album is stunning. But then again, I liked the album that CBS put out recently. It's plainly deceitful for CBS to have put it out against his wishes, but I think it's a clear case of what Beefheart said (discussing 'Strictly Personal') 'the music shines through like a diamond in the mud'. What does emerge from both the albums is evidence, if it were needed, that his ability to get straight to the core of a song, embellish it with almost accidental ease, and then sing the bugger, is unique.

Unfeigned enthusiasm reigns in the household for two Warner Brothers albums: **'Takin' My Time'** by Bonnie Raitt and **'The Beach Boys In Concert'**. Bonnie Raitt's album of last year is one of my definite favourites, and her singing is impeccable. There is a fabulous, joyful warmth about the record which seems to come from her own exultation in singing. Really excellent. When I talked to Joe Boyd about Nick Drake he told me that Maria Maldaur (who is the only person that he produces now), Bonnie Raitt, and Linda Ronstadt were all good friends, and that they had sung together. If those three ever got together it could conceivably be the greatest singing record ever made. The Maria Maldaur album should be out in this country soon by the way. About bloody time.

Another lady that can go a bit is Chi Coltrane. Apart from being extremely sexy (alright, it is a sexist comment) which will no doubt be played up to the full when she starts to take off, her new album is better than her first too. Again it's very much a case of voice; unlike Bonnie Raitt I find her material a little pokey, and her piano playing is exceedingly reminiscent of all kinds of people, but she has got a great voice. The real successor to Janis if that doesn't seem too glib. The album is called **'Let It Ride'**.

In the interview, Dave Mason expressed himself reasonably happy with his new album, **'It's Like You Never Left'**, and I think he's got very good reason. He seems to me to be a really formidable talent. He's stuck off in a side room somewhere strumming a guitar, putting a few words together, just kind of moseying along, but when the whole thing gels, as in 'Alone Together' and this album, it's truly great. Listening to Capaldi (no offence, but I'm meant to be a critic) prompts all kinds of reflections along the lines of 'God, I wish that . . . .' The way, other things being equal, he could have handled Traffic's later stuff, and the way *they* could have played his songs is heavily inducive to wishful thinking. Graham Nash sings on the album, which seems to be what he's best at, in the light of his new record, discussed here by Mr Gonk himself, along with a few others.

'Wild Tales' really is a *nice* record. Clever rhymes, funk-thump rhythms, not very heavy but absolutely respectable licks, good guest slide guitar (David Findley) and all the right sentiments. Too nice really.

However many good intentions Graham has, they never drown my screaming doubts that his 'sincerity', 'simplicity' and his 'honesty' aren't being advertised as the end rather than the means to making the world A Nicer Place. In fact I can't help feeling that they are counter-productive, inducing apathy and cynicism instead of commitment and enthusiasm.

When he sings 'It's all right you'll find a way to get there' I feel like shouting that it'll be without his help thanks very much.

That's the trouble with these singer-songwriter up-front-laid-back-personal-testimonial-ecological-exhortation albums. You can't really help worrying that a lot of people are hurrying very thoughtfully to the bank.

Dave Elliot does the same kind of think on **'Solid Ground'** but with much more bash and flurry. He sounds like a Real American—everyone from Dylan and Don Maclean to Bobby Darin and not a moment of Real Doubt on the whole album. Small print buffs might find that he attributes his success to Floyd Kramer and Sonny Terry. They will be pleased. At least he doesn't print the words.

Donovan can actually sound like Roger Miller—surprise, surprise—but with that lantern jaw he can't really look like anyone else. His tunes are much tunier. The sort of things that Musical Comedy Theatre Critics declare to be 'memorable' after one sitting. How many sittings you can take depends on your attitude towards such paeons as 'Sing of the Dignity of Man and the Joys of Motherhood' repeated about fifteen times. I wouldn't dare say whether this is campery or not because in these days of instant decadence you can't really be sure about anything. All I can say is that once you've heard Lou Reed sending it all up you can't really take this simpering stuff seriously. Maybe you don't need to. The sleeve photos of Donoval show him trying to look like a kung fu guru. Maybe he is one. He doesn't sound like one but then, like Graham and David, he's on the Right Side. Isn't he? Aren't we all?

Next month, I will finally get around to recording my reactions to all this music from the Common Market, together with an assessment of how the so called pub rock outfits have made the transition to the recording studio.

17 Mayall Chart, Rambling Jack Elliott, Roy Harper, Brinsley Schwarz, Stooges, Quintessence, Wild Angels.

18 The Groundhogs, Steeleye Span, On the road with Quiver, Lou Reed, Chuck Berry, Steamhammer.

19 Rod Stewart, Duster Bennett, Help Yourself, The Allman Brothers, Rolling Stones, Genesis, The Grateful Dead.

20 Mountain, Jeff Beck Group, The J.Geils Band, Philip Goodhand-Tait, Wild Man Fisher, Melanie, Alban 'Snoopy' Pfisterer.

21 Marc Bolan, Jo Mama/Danny Kootch Tree, Al Kooper Pt.1, Amazing Blondel, Buffy Sainte Marie, The Incredible Kevin Coyne.

22 Jack Bruce Family Tree, Mott the Hoople, The Allman Brothers, Alice Cooper, Donovan Tree, Terry Riley, Link Wray.

23 John Sebastian, Colin Blunstone, Big Brother & The Holding Company, Rory Gallagher, Fairport Convention & Sonteground Trees.

25 Elton John, Lou Reed, Flamin' Groovies, Frank Zappa, Mothers Family Tree, Love Tree, Pink Floyd's Earliest Days.

26 Hawkwind, Joe Cocker, Greenwich Village, Dave Van Ronk, Brewers Droop, Dan Hicks, Charlatans, San Francisco Tree.

27 Jimmy Page, Bridget St John, Stephen Stills, Procol/Traffic Family Tree, Ducks Deluxe, The Kinks, The Byrds Pt.1.

28 Led Zeppelin, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Kim Fowley, Stealers Wheel, Soft Machine Family Tree, Ayers, Byrds Pt.2.

29 Genesis, The Everly Bros, The Eagles, Burritos Family Tree, Silverhead, The Byrds Pt.3, Johnny Speight, Beefheart.

30 Procol Harum, Neil Sedaka, Elton, Rockfield, Ry Cooker, The Byrds Pt.4, Fab Fave Rave Pic of Pete Frame!

31 Don McLean, Michael Murphy, Family/Yes Monster Family Tree, Jac Holzman, Jonathan Kelly, The Byrds, Pt.5.

32 Pink Floyd, Steve Ellis, The Story of Spirit, Clifford T. Ward, John Cale, Roy Buchanan, The Byrds, Pt.6.

33 McKendree Spring, Robert Plant, Boz Scaggs, Clarence White, Steve Miller/Boz Scaggs/Sir Douglas Family Tree.

34 Family, Lou Reed, Captain Beefheart, Asleep at the Wheel, The Dillards.

35 Grateful Dead, Part 1, Gram Parsons, Commander Cody, Don Nix, Free Genesis record.

36 Van Morrison, Stan Tracey, Kevin Coyne, Grateful Dead Part 2, Byron Berline on Don Nix.

37 Charlie Watts, Mighty Baby, Grateful Dead Part 3, Nils Lofgren, Country Joe.

38 Quicksilver, Ben Sidran, Richard Greene Family Tree (Frame doing some work at last), Loggins & Messina, John Stewart, mini-Beefheart.

39 Monster interview with Mike Nesmith, Steve Miller, ZigZag Poll, Ralph McTell, Evan Parker.

spot on

I'm sitting in the local trying to write this column, but I'm being continuously interrupted by an insane collection of dingbats sitting next to me. There are two blokes and a bird, both the blokes about 50, and dressed in that manner which characterises ordinary ratings in the Air Force during the war, who are trying to pretend that they were officers. They are carrying on in the most boorish, offensive way imaginable. The three of them are pissed out of their minds and one of the blokes is trying to fondle the other bloke's bird, only his aim is so bad that he keeps missing with his gropes. Somehow it's symbolic of the month, since it has been dominated by other things besides music. First comes this farce of an election, and then comes the news that in 1974 the government of Russia tosses out of the country its foremost writer, on the grounds that he is a tool of the West. Both events typify the bankruptcy of conventional political leaders. The idea that Solzhenitsyn is a pawn manipulated by the CIA is laughable. The idea that the economy of Britain is being sabotaged by the miners, equally so.

It is no surprise when these three people emerge from their conversation as complete reactionaries—it goes with their general demeanour. But what really surprises me from an assiduous eavesdropping is just how bloody unhappy they are. Their discussion of the election and their view of a reasonable attitude toward it seems to be derived completely from misery. Every bitch that was levelled at British society (like uppity bus conductors and things like that) were all based on some terrible experience that they had undergone, which left them even more twisted than usual, and, needless to say, even more desirous of consuming another stiff drink.

I was playing golf recently with a few mates, and after finishing the round, we went into the clubhouse for a sandwich and a beer. While we were at the bar waiting for service, some completely nasty bollocks said to the barman, 'Henry, I think you should serve our lady members first,' and all his idiot geriatric cronies fell about in admiration at his all round wit and savoir faire. Ten years ago, the worms came out to complain about long hair, but at Highgate golf course, it's still a burning issue apparently. And lunkheads like that with their puerile prejudices might explain why we are going to get a Tory majority tomorrow of between 50 and 5, but at least if they do, I'll collect £80.

Our resident professor of gonzo behaviour and geek writing sends this dispatch from the trenches:

'I ought to call this Vitriol Ramblings or Whatever Happened to that Rock'n' Roll Revolution Everyone Was Promising Not All That Long Ago, incorporating a brief guide to Britain's lesser known hobbies.

'When does a hobby become a career? W.C. Fields, or S.J. Perelman, or James Thurber or was it little Mickey Rooney once said that music was a nice business, but keep your daytime job. What that wonderful trade paper the MM calls being a semi-pro. What nasty people call indoor busking.

'And talking of trade papers, I was conversing with a man from Sounds the other week and I said, 'Is Sounds a trade paper?' He looked horrified and began to swing his pool cue dangerously near my throat. It was as if I'd asked him how life was on Plumbers' Bag or Dynorod Dregs.

'Well, the next question I want to ask you, on the same postage stamp, no special pages for polls this month, is do you regard ZZ as a magazine for a Special Interest, a Hobby or Subversive Politics?

'That strangely successful and speedy young oldie Jimmy Savile knows what side of the bread is all marged up. He nearly got himself in a Bit of Bother during the election campaign. Somehow got himself on two party broadcasts, one Liberal, one Tory. His brother was standing as a Liberal and natch, blood is thicker than water, so Jimmy did a little personal appearance (what a nice hobby to have). Also it seems he just happened to be passing in the street when the Tories were out and about with cameras and mikes and asked him to utter, which he did, never being at a loss, etc.

'Well, I dare say there are plenty of transcendental folk about who think What A Larf, good old Jimmy, done the Establishment again, what a card.

'But wait. As they say in the Sun.

'Later interviewed about all this in an in-depth (two inch) interview for the Sunday Times Jimmy revealed his true political colours in a rare moment of off the cuff Nixon-style honesty, as opposed to carefully rehearsed but uncontrollable sincerity. It still needs a little deciphering.

'In the old days when Jimmy worked "down the pits" he was, of course, a Labour man. Then, as we know, it all happened and He Made It, or as the man himself puts it "the world changes". Nowadays things are different and he prefers to 'take the prevailing situation' which is a disguised reference to one of Jimmy's favourite songs of the Fifties, 'Thanks very much but I'm doing nicely'. To "explain" this change of heart, soul and mind, Jimmy says that he's 'the sort of bloke that gets on with things. I look for the party that'll let me get on with it. Right?' Right indeed. Or in the immortal words of a song that even Jimmy may not be old enough to remember: "The working class can kiss my arse I've got the foreman's job at last".

'Who says rock'n'roll has nothing to do with politics?

'Oh, and by the way, here's yet another warning for all those of us who are looking forward to turning a thriving Art Form into a Middle Aged Man's Hobby, rock'n'roll has once again been pronounced dead. The verdict this time came from the lead singer (whose name will always escape me) from Cockney Rebel. When interviewed on the LBC Arts Programme 'Sounds Off' he announced that Cockney Rebel had nothing at all to do with rock'n'roll. That was all finished. Cockney Rebel was to do with Show Business. The rest of the interview was taken up with a graphic sequin-by-sequin commentary with instant-lame playback of what he and the boys in the band would be wearing around the country.

'We have been warned.'

Thank you, Tug Scuffard—I only wish I knew what you were talking about.

Three months ago I made a plea for more letters, and was somewhat taken aback by the response, which is nothing more than a preamble to an apology for not replying to them, but rest assured, for tomorrow, the day after the election, I'm off to Switzerland to do a bit of skiing and I'm taking all the letters with me for an extended bout of answering. Many of the suggestions made were helpful and encouraging, just what I needed. Thanks.

Most of our Wednesday lunchtimes are taken up with a monster session with the music weeklies, with Jim exploding in a fit of anger when he discovers that another paper has got an ad that he had been told the record company were not spending time or money on promoting, and screaming out in his best East End voice, 'I'll pull that so-and-so's head off. 'E told me they weren't doing anything for that band,' followed by threats to go back to the States. I just sit there trying to calm him down, and intermittently trying to scan the pages to see how much Frame and Tobler are doing to improve the quality of the Melody Maker, without getting too much ink all over my hands; I must confess that New Musical Express seems to be improving with every issue. Most of the geezers who write for the paper are pretty odd to say the least, heavily into striking poses, adopting positions and generally being fairly daft, but they seem to be able to turn out good features without too much trouble, and when they use outside things like bits of Ian Hunter's diary, it's usually pretty good. The rest of the papers just amble on in their sloppy way (with those famous reviews where the gonk who put all his thoughts down, plainly hadn't listened to the record), cocked up captions and so on.

No doubt you're all aware of the books put out by Abacus recently, Jerry Hopkins' 'Elvis', Anthony Scaduto's 'Dylan', and Michael Gray's 'The Song And Dance Man' about Dylan's songs.

I can't really get into all this interpretation guff, so I suspend judgement about the latter but the first two I mentioned are really good, especially 'Elvis' which contains some weird stories about all the guys who worked for Elvis as companions-cum-functionaries, and the way they used to keep Elvis amused. A bit of Scaduto's book appeared in Rolling Stone some time back, but the entire book is well worth reading. It's meticulously researched and incredibly illuminating.

Two smug bits and pieces. The first a letter from Dan Loggins who is the head of A&R at CBS in this country, and brother of Kenny Loggins.

Dear John & Connor,

This will, I hope help to answer two questions you raise in ZigZag, Vo.3, No. 12. Firstly, a letter to the magazine to encourage you to keep it up–especially now–while the 'Nationals' lead *with the music stories, and as the 'Music Weeklies' stammer in cynical despair, ZigZag keeps the faith–as exemplified in the Van Morrison piece: brilliant!*

As for 'The Hard Nose The Highway' LP, and 'Green' by Joe Raposo. Joe has been the major contributor and composer of music for the television series 'Sesame Street' and besides 'Green', which I believe was originally sung by Kermit the Frog; (a beautiful version was also recorded somewhere by Lena Horne), the major song to emerge from the children's series was 'Sing' which was a bit hit for The Carpenters and Barbra Streisand among others. I guess Van just dug the song. (Whether it is the 'unifying factor of the record'–I wouldn't speculate.)

For any people who appreciate Van's kind of music, I would recommend any of Boz Scaggs' LPs, as well as both Jackson Browne's (very comfortable), and the incredible new LP from Bruce Springsteen, 'The Wild The Innocent And The E-Street Shuffle'.

As I write this, Steve Miller has the number one single and LP in the States with 'The Joker'–after nine LPs, his first gold record. (I would like to recommend that Ben Sidran put him on the path back with 'Recall The Beginning'.) Hopefully this success will perhaps guide people to try to locate the all time classic 'Sailor' LP if they think 'The Joker' is hot–they could be in for a treat.

Again, carry on–God knows the next few months ahead–how increasingly important music *will be to help us keep it together. Your magazine helps enormously by continuing to be informative, positive, and best of all a* joy *to read.*

Love,
Dan Loggins

The second concerns John's encounter with Al Kooper who he met at his house, which, John explained, contains some extraordinary gadgets. He's got a juke box that contains 50 albums for a start, and also a device that automatically turns down the hi-fi when the phone rings. Anyway Al Kooper explained that a couple of months before John's visit, he had been reading the issue on Boz Scaggs and it chanced that he found himself in the office of Tower Records on Sunset Strip very soon afterwards, and who should he meet but Boz himself. Al and Boz fell to talking and Al said, 'I saw the story that they did in that little English magazine ZigZag, and I thought it was very interesting.' Boz agreed and after a further period of discussion the consensus emerged that on the whole they thought it was a good magazine, with a very healthy approach to music writing. So there you go.

It's about five years since ZigZag burst on the scene and so we're going to have a little party. It will basically be an occasion to say thanks to all the people who have helped in one way or another, musicians, business people, and you–our loyal readers. The problem is that we can't ask you all, but it is difficult to think how best to arrange some kind of selection procedure that isn't a straight imitation of a cornflakes competition, or a quiz that would obviously reflect my own tastes and obscure knowledge, so what we will do is invite the readers who submit the fullest list of link-ups between Zappa and Beefheart. Send the entries to me marked 'Competition'. I should add that the party will be held on April 22nd, in London and we'll have a couple of very nifty little bands to play for the evening. We don't know who yet.

And, of course we'll have lots more grist to heave at you in the way of articles.

Finished at last, now a heavy dose of election special, and then two weeks skiing. I feel like a kid at the end of term.
Connor


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