Mothers Family Tree Pure Prairie League

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ZIGZAG

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JESSE COLIN YOUNG. STRAWBS. THE MAGIC BAND. COUNTRY ROCK PART 2.

GENESIS

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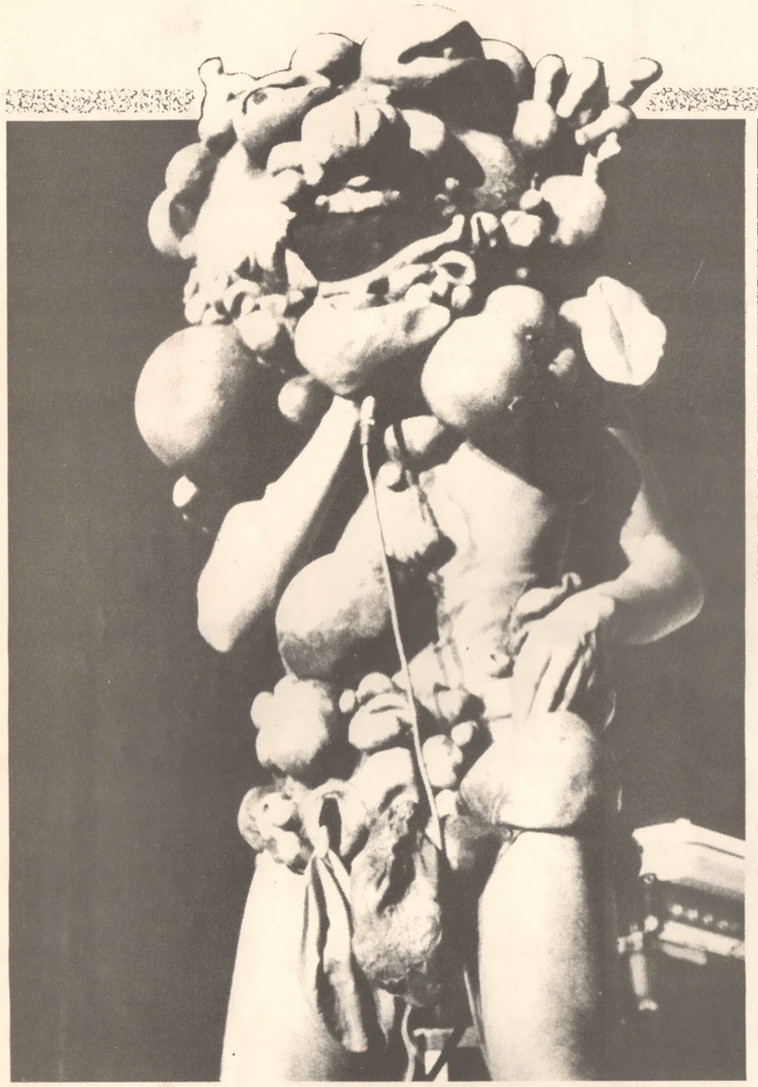

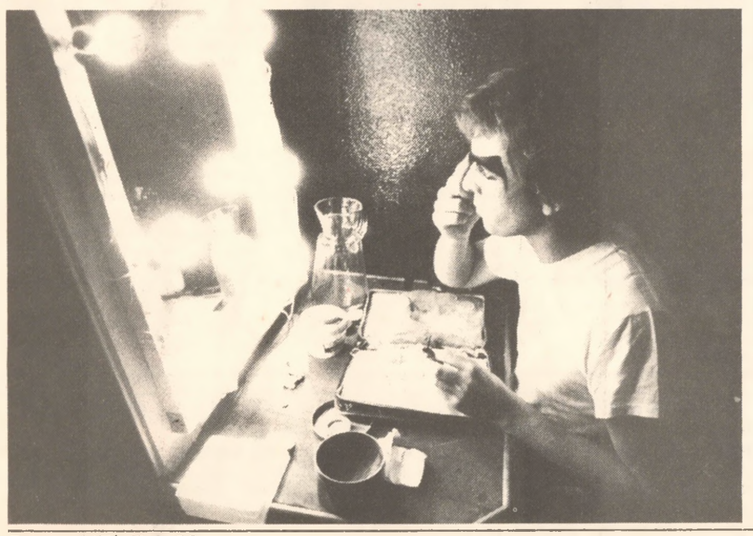

GENESIS

"I THINK SOME PEOPLE have a rip-off concept of us," Peter Gabriel remarked with a touch of cynicism as if he'd just had a revelation. "The concept goes like this: There's this band sitting round doing nothing. They look at who's pulling in the big money. There's Yes, they've got several golds. And Alice Cooper, he's got quite a packet. How 'bout ripping off Yes' music and Alice Cooper's visuals and then," he pauses for dramatic effect, "we have Genesis. And of course, that's what happened."

Well not exactly. Conception took time and thought. While Yes and Alice Cooper experienced premature birth pangs, Genesis were born. They emerged on the tail end of the age of Aquarius just when flower power began to wilt. Back in '69 when strobe lights and acid complemented love-your-brother consciousness, Genesis were your average bunch of struggling musicians, low on funds and high on ideology. Create something different and some people call it pretentious. But it really wasn't like that at all.

Void of contacts with the big business machinery of rock, Genesis began when Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks, Peter Gabriel and Anthony Philips were still at school. Public school no less, the very same public school that later asked the musical question: Can public schoolboys *really* rock'n'roll? Money in your pocket, food in the belly and several classics in head, didn't blend well with archetypal visions of lower class kids who work out frustrations and aggressions on guitar and later grow up to be Alvin Lee. But Genesis had no aspiring Alvin Lee. They didn't even want to be famous. All they wanted was to write pop songs. Period.

Visions of the top twenty danced in their heads but no one else's. Success was accidental. They wrote the songs. It soon became apparent they would have to play the songs as well. Having failed at modern day tin pan alley, a band was the only solution. This situation was both exciting and unnerving.

"Well we began as songwriters at school," Gabriel says with an air of dreaded familiarity. "No, no I've *never* said this before. Of course I don't mind. Well I've been through the history maybe *once* before. I don't like doing interviews. The problem is you usually end up repeating the bio anyway."

From the start, it was obvious their approach was totally unorthodox and more than a little eccentric. Even today, Genesis approach success more backwards than forwards. They were the naive rockers that insisted on bringing tea and crumpets to sleazy backstage dressing rooms. Dreamlike, lyrical visions nicely complemented the closed world existence they followed with devotion.

"We'd have never been like we are if we'd been in other bands and involved in the music business before we met," says Michael Rutherford. "Before we knew anything at all about the music business or even spoke to any record companies, we had established the band's direction. It's good to be removed from the business. People tell us to get out more and see people but it's better to do it on your own. Then if you hit on something, it doesn't seem ripped off."

This childlike innocence was both a blessing and an obstacle to the big time. Fairytale visions added romantic feelings and an aura of fantasy to the music, while naive understanding of jive-talking promoters prevented success from happening too quickly.

"A Genesis cult just grew," Peter says mysteriously. "If our success had happened a lot quicker people would have bothered checking out what we were about. As it happened ours was a slow rise. Possibly there's less excitement due to the slow nature of success. The evolution," Peter says with a confident nod, "has been gradual."

Yet the slowed-down swing added permanence to each step up. They have never been one-hit wonders, single success all but eluding them except for some quirk of fate which put 'I Know What I Like' into the British top ten several years back. And those controversial visuals grew slowly, the good ones winning by default.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. It was time for an album. Enter bubblegum guru Jonathan King, veteran teen king producer. An unlikely choice but valid save for the fact that he gave them their first piece of vinyl, *From Genesis To Revelation*, and a group name. The album sounds more like a Moody Blues/Procul Harum synthesis than avant garde funk but maintained its own infectious aura that promised good things for the future. The lyrics were slightly obscure, stained with sixties idealism. The music was good but hesitant, afraid to take chances.

The King coalition lasted a short time followed by a record deal with Charisma in 1970. A subsequent album shortly followed which began to establish a more ethereal musical quality in addition to a good bit of aggression. *Trespass* featured drummer John Mayhew and founder member Philips who were both soon to depart. Closely involved from early schoolday conceptions, Anthony Philips contributed greatly to the basic Genesis premise.

TRESPASS was integral to the group's growth for several reasons. For one, the album featured what is to this day considered a Genesis classic, 'The Knife', a superb example of pent-up aggression and futuristic violence. The cover was the first of many animated visual musings, coupled with similar lyrics, it contributed heavily to the drug culture myth which followed the band with the same plague-like determination that made disbelievers mumble 'pretentious' at the first sound of a wandering mellotron. Aided by numerous treks round Britain, the cult began to grow.

"We lost money in those early days refusing to support," Rutherford recalls fondly. "It's taken a long time but now I'm glad we did it that way. In the very early days when we were supporting we'd go down well because people would expect nothing of you."

Trespass was a beginning although the band continued to pursue long range goals with hesitation and doubt. The real breakthrough arrived with personnel changes. Driven by an inbuilt fear of success and its problematical traumas, founder member Anthony Philips left the group, subsequently received a musical degree from university and began to teach music as well as private guitar lessons. At the same time drummer John Mayhew left, leaving Genesis with two holes in need of plugging.

These personnel departures ironically strengthened group bonds as the replacements miraculously boosted underfed morale. Phil Collins arrived in time, bringing with him a more versatile, professional percussive ability, an angelic voice perfect for harmony which greatly complimented Gabriel's strained vocals, and an all important optimistic outlook and enthusiasm integral to group survival. Shortly after, guitarist Steve Hackett replaced Philips, adding less to group idealism but more to overall ability. Hackett passed up egocentric temptations to do a progressive Alvin Lee forsaking them for his adeptness to blend in with the band, adding much colour to musical construction, learning how to work *with* Tony Banks which to this day forms the bulk of the musical tension integral to their overall effect.

With the personnel changes came another album, *Nursery Cryme*, a marked improvement from past efforts, heralding a more majestic group sound. Stubbornly, the band stuck to original concepts, and aided by better musical technicians came up with one of their finest albums. The album was crucial and marked the beginning of several important changes and growths. Genesis began to mature. At the same time, the group began experimenting with concert production.

"After a gig in Cambridge a guy came up to us and said it was obvious that after *Trespass* we all took acid. They said the album saved their lives," Phil Collins says in disbelief. "People do get *weird* impressions. Even now, people just sorta stare when we come out of the stage door, expecting to see me holding some amazing religious book under my arms!"

"People are convinced that we moved from ordinary dope to acid from *Trespass* to *Nursery Cryme*," Rutherford says echoing Collins' impressions with much amusement.

YET THEY were hardly the tripped-out messiahs their public envisioned. While other groups received chemical inspiration, Genesis resorted to plain old creativity.

"I think I disappoint people that I don't do drugs," says Gabriel referring to the rock star mystique that thrives on the pleasure principle. "A small glass of milk is the most potent thing I do. I had a talk with someone once who was convinced that I was the angel of the annunciation. I gently lowered myself in their esteem. There's nothing like a good nose-pick for removing immortality."

Humour remained an integral part of the Genesis world. On and off stage, in conversation and satirical song introductions, in lyrical content, the band began to advocate an infectious off-the-wall sentiment which added greatly to the fantasy. With *Nursery Cryme* Gabriel began to perfect his wry penchant for far-fetched lyrics owing more to rhyme schemes than philosophical ramblings. To this day Peter's wife admits to never knowing just exactly what 'Harold The Barrel' was all about, aided by the fact that onstage Gabriel began to develop an entertaining but garbled vocal delivery.

"I'm a great believer in mumble-jumble sense," Peter admits. "I prefer things that give an air of meaning rather than meaning itself. You can't look for meaning in some of the lyrics, they just present an atmosphere."

Yet it was atmosphere that began to make Genesis tick. While the band played a movie soundtrack, Gabriel began to project a cinematic scenario. In the beginning he would mime in improvised fashion to the more storybook lyrics, but as a concrete story line began to emerge, the visuals became more clearly defined.

Theirs was an intriguing dilemma. The group wholeheartedly believed in the music yet realised extra initiative was needed to reach massive audiences. In a last ditch attempt for recognition, Gabriel began to develop into a first class front man, gifted with the ability to pull the audience into their world while the band added to the dramatics. The fantasy was beginning to make sense. And *Foxtrot* was the right vehicle for working out animated expectations.

"The first time people see us they think of us only as a visual act. But to us," Gabriel says passionately, "it's all music. The visuals only succeed if the music is satisfying as well. It's a means to an end with us. The only reason you're there is to communicate and you're better able to do that with movement," he points out rationally. "Still I'd like to think of myself more as a writer than a performer. That's what I derive more satisfaction from."

FROM THE START, the band stressed the primary importance of the music, always taking elaborate pains to explain that the visuals while entertaining, are just a necessary ploy to make the music more accessible.

Still the group was always aware of the danger of falling prey to cute theatrics or coy dramatic effects. Avoiding over-indulgent aspirations, Genesis strived to satisfy both audiences and themselves, reaching out towards a visual/musical synthesis. Slowly they began to succeed. *Foxtrot* begged for experimentation.

"We'd never dismiss a piece of music if we thought it inadequate for visual presentation," Tony Banks had said in a reflective moment. "Visuals come *after* the music. Visuals are only considered once the piece is finished."

"You hate to think of the overall concept of Genesis being visuals," Steve Hackett rightfully admitted. "I don't want people thinking they're going to see some glitter band."

Understandable sentiments from the musical camp. Still early stage shows were reaching for something that wasn't quite ripe. The first attempt at staging *Foxtrot* elicited lots of oohs and ahs while still managing to give diehard cynics breathing space. There was Peter Gabriel decked out in similar gear as the fox/woman cover illustration, bearing little relationship to thematic content but looking good. It was the autumn of 1972 and Genesis found themselves guesting on a goodbye Lindisfarne tour.

By February of the following year, Genesis were evolving rapidly, poised on the brink of becoming very big indeed. With their first prestigious London Rainbow show, everything came together. Worldwide success seemed inevitable. And all because of a twenty-minute futuristic opus entitled

Genesis

Genesis. Left to right: Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford,Tony Banks, Peter Gabriel, Steve Hackett.

'Supper's Ready'.

"Old Michael walked past the pet shop which was never open into the park which was never closed," Gabriel somberly addressed the intrigued gathering. "The park was full of very smooth, very clean grass. Michael took off all his clothes and began rubbing his pink, flabby flesh into the wet, clean grass. Beneath the ground the dirty brown worms interpreted the pitter-patter as rainfall. In worm world rainfall meant two things: bathtime because worms like to keep clean and mating time because worms like to keep dirty. Within seconds the park was covered with dirty, soggy, writhing brown worms. Old Michael was quite pleased humming a little tune. Jerusalem boogie to us perhaps but to the worms it meant that supper was ready."

Nonsensical gibberish perhaps, delivered in droll tones, but it sure beat the hell out of saying "and for our next number . . .". Genesis began to explode at alarming rates. 'Supper's Ready' was a monumental tour de force. The band played on with renewed expertise and spirit while Gabriel sprang to life, parading around the stage in a myriad of costumes which unlike the previous foxhead strut, fit perfectly with the lyrics.

"When we first started doing 'Supper's Ready' onstage it didn't go down very well, until Peter started wearing a few costumes to demonstrate the characters," Tony remembers. "Suddenly it became the strong point of the act.

"We'd been doing the same thing for three years and suddenly with the visuals we started getting attention. We were very surprised how easy it was to get the front page of *Melody Maker* just by wearing a flower on your head," Phil says slightly stunned. "We didn't even see Peter's costume till the night of the gig."

IN A DEMOCRATICALLY RUN five-man band, one could rightfully wonder how the band agree on stage presentation, assuming that Gabriel could hardly turn up one afternoon decked out in his flower regalia, ready to do 'Willow Farm'.

"Well actually," Peter says, a snice snicker all over his bemused face, "that's what happened. I very much wanted to get a character across. I knew if I put it to the group vote it would get turned down. So I sneaked into rehearsal one day with this big package with all the masks. The band just looked on in astonishment."

Still the band is adamant about becoming too elaborate. The music is first on everyone's priority list.

"We don't want Genesis to go over the top," Gabriel said very much aware of the precarious situation. "We still consider ourselves as writers who only play at being musicians and then play at being presenters."

Which ultimately is where group strength lies. With Genesis there is no one man band, no technical whiz kid. Like all great groups, their strength lies in numbers. Individually they are not virtuoso instrumentalists but together they are unbeatable. Feel is not reproduceable, and with Genesis the feel is more than abundant.

"We're trying to stress a group thing and it is difficult. Much of the publicity rests on Peter but we want to be known as a five man band rather than a backing group for a singer," Tony stresses. "People get bored and they need something new to impress them. I hope we can sustain interest in the band. *That's* the hardest part. There are places when the show turns into a slightly different thing with just the band playing. It's nice that the attention is on you even if it's more conventional."

THEIR ALBUMS take months to make, pieced together in jig-saw fashion, each member contributing various segments and sections. Only 30% of the material makes vinyl, such are the rigors of their weeding out process. Blessed with an inbuilt ability to criticise each other, the finished product is representative of five minds, stronger because of it.

"We're a very equally spread band," Phil Collins points out making sure that one-man band misconceptions are rightfully destroyed. "It brings us down that people can't see beyond the superficial thing of Peter wearing funny masks. It's all related to the music. People seem to forget that all of us write music and lyrics. What annoys us intensely is when people come backstage after a gig, ignore everybody else, go up to Peter and say 'Amazing show man—really dug your music'."

"Sometime's your ego's had a real down and they're all talking about Peter Gabriel and not the band," Rutherform continues expressing similar sentiments. "Well that's alright as long as it doesn't come into the writing. There's a feeling among the band that one has to prove themselves and in writing you tend to do what's best for the band. The thing that bothers the band most is when people assume Peter writes all the numbers. I'm not so proud as a player but as a writer I don't take criticism well," he grins.

Yet there's no denying Gabriel's omnipotent talent. He is unique, alone among more flamboyant contemporaries. His onstage evolution is just as curious as the band's musical dexterity that continues to become increasingly flexible.

Gabriel is a curious performer. While expressing verbal distaste for the whole proceeding offstage, he carries himself like a born natural onstage, acting out character traits and fantasies with such ease you'd swear they were his own. Blessed with the ability to retreat into his own world, Gabriel will often look directly at you in conversation yet never hear a word you are saying.

Yet his onstage debut was less than auspicious, as an r'n'b drummer. "I enjoyed drumming. There was quiet a lot of physical action as well as expressing music. I didn't like being close-up, getting attention. When

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I began to write songs, I wanted to sing them. Most writers have an idea of how they want something to sound. Still it took me quite a while to enjoy the formal aspect of it. I enjoy performing more now but I consider it a bit like training an animal," he says softly, "except the animal is me."

Like the rest of the group, Gabriel keeps proper perspective on himself. He does not play the temperamental prima donna, lacking a phoney show-biz veneer. He is flamboyant only onstage, always tempered with a good deal of humanity.

"I don't feel comfortable with a large group of people. The first few times I was onstage I felt embarrassed. Once or twice in the old days I'd come out of myself at a party, do a sort of flash, arrogant routine, lots of dancing," he smiles snidely. "I enjoyed that and perhaps I now have an outlet for that onstage.

Despite the fact that compositions are group written Gabriel does contribute healthy doses of eccentric oddity coupled with offbeat humour. Lines like 'Me I'm just a lawnmower/you can tell by the way I walk' work for him only. In a world of entertainment where mediocrity thrives, idols created to destroy, Peter Gabriel is an enigma.

"I spent quite a lot of time as a child in my own world dreaming. Perhaps the distinction between what is real and what is not is less clear to me than others. I had a continuing battle between what I believe and my education. I was always taught to control emotions," he stops to collect his thoughts as one flashes on his therapeutic onstage outlet. "I had to find a way out somehow. When I was in a situation I didn't like, which was quite frequently, rather than rebel outwardly I would withdraw."

Much of his early childhood frustration was later channelled into his creation and portrayal of Rael in *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*, a character painted with such large doses of reality that the listener often withdraws in sheer exhaustion from his all encompassing portrait.

Still the visuals and music needed to merge together, until they were feeding off each other automatically, until everyone in the band was working on the same emotion, running on similar rhythm patterns. *Selling England By The Pound* was an important transitional album for the group. Gabriel took a necessary back seat, allowing the group to fully develop and expand. That album was a tremendous breakthrough in sheer musical professionalism, each member exhibiting a new found adeptness. Genesis began to realise group strength, gaining the necessary confidence to exploit it. The results were impressive.

Like the *Foxtrot* album before, *Selling England By The Pound* took the better part of summer 1973 to write and record. Die-hard fanatics were disappointed by the absence of extravagant parables like 'Supper's Ready' or 'The Musical Box' but appreciated the grown-up musicianship. Guitarist Hackett seemed at last fully integrated, together with Banks providing much musical mirth on tracks like 'The Cinema Show' or 'Firth Of Fifth'. While less fantasy orientated, the songs nevertheless continued featuring large doses of unorthodox Gabriel rhyme schemes. Onstage audiences were treated to a preview of things to come in 'The Battle Of Epping Forest' with its rogue-like violence.

YET THE BAND still felt something lacking. With improved musicianship, the visual antics at times seemed to detract from overall concentration rather than add to it. Gabriel's various stage postures while never static became too busy. The synthesis could come closer together still.

At this time Genesis began extensive tours of America, success happening just as gradually but permanently as it did in Britain. Adamant about supporting, forced to squeeze group concepts into half-hour segments, Genesis stubbornly insisted on headlining, even when their audience didn't warrant that status. They began with university tours, guaranteed some percentage of a student audience, and later progressed to legitimate rock venues, eventually selling out. Before long the curious arrived in large numbers to view the talked about stage show.

In a country where sham thrives, Genesis were careful not to play up the stage show, purposely playing down more spectacular attributes for fear of sounding like dreaded hype. American attitude towards the group were more open. No one even mumbled the word pretentious. It was like nothing they had ever seen before, and the audience was entranced from start to finish, captivated by 'Supper's Ready'.

While European tours increased worldwide popularity, the band were far from rich. Growing years had cost more than they made, constantly spending more on stage production costs than ticket returns. Persistently, the band strived to perfect their concepts.

Ironically the album that finally put the seal on greatness owed more to earthly leanings towards rock, than anything the band had previously attempted. *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* was not a concept album, not even a rock opera. But it was a natural progression for a band who had always experimented with related concepts and ideas. With both musical and lyrical themes running throughout the work, the piece was conducive to stage production treatment, begging for adaptation.

Again taking the better part of the summer to make, *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* was strong musically and lyrically: even dubious fans could be satisfied. Instantly more adaptable for stage, the subsequent show made their contemporaries look ancient. Here was that omnipotent synthesis of visuals/music/back-drop projections/professional lighting that lots of bands mumble about but never explore. There was no one man virtuoso to cover up inadequate side-men. There was no out of place visual constructions, nothing resembling sheer gimmicks as each piece fitted like glove in hand with the thematic content of the show. There were no Yes-like Roger Dean creations whose sole purpose is to stand stationary, a tribute to unlimited funds. There is no ELP-like battery of equipment, no emotionless cold armour attack of the Pink Floyd. Genesis had moved out into the open at last.

"THIS ALBUM has spirit," Gabriel announced with a good deal of pride upon completion of the two record set. "It's a much wider album than past efforts. In the past our records haven't come off as strong as I would have liked; it's been down to live performances. But this has the best the band has to offer. On the right wing there are conventional pop songs and on the left wing more sound pictures drawn by the music which we'd only done before in rehearsal, never on plastic."

Still, jaded disbelievers mumbled pretentious while yawning in blase bursts of boredom. Genesis are perhaps the most misunderstood band working in Britain and easily the best. The sixties have been over for five years now, yet you'd never know it looking around at the bulk of major musical talents. But most of our premier groups are growing too old to rock, moving too far away from the consciousness of their audience. Sooner than not there will be no more Rolling Stones and no more Who. Replacements don't happen overnight.

The present day rock'n'roll hierarchy begs for reorganisation. Devout followers of more established bands hear more what they want to hear rather than actual notes on disappointing new releases. Unlike the bulk of their competition, Genesis are still on the way up, pursuing long range goals and ideals with all the determined enthusiasm of a less experienced musician, thankful for a chance at the big time.

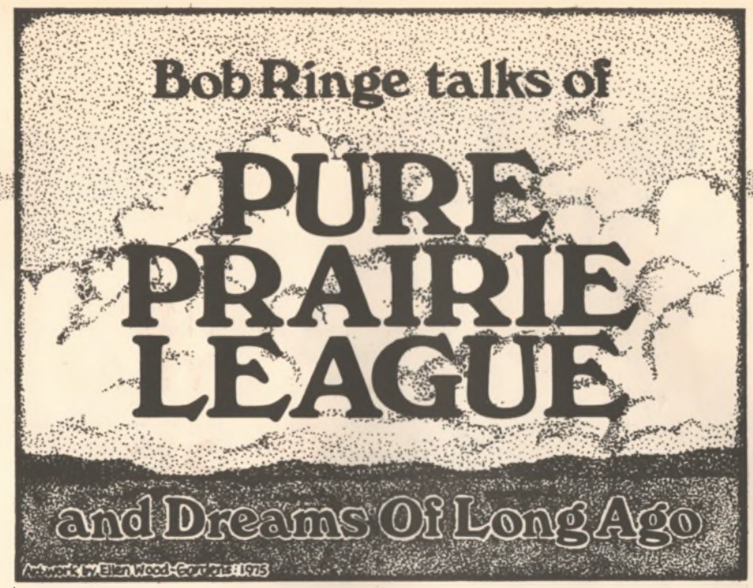
"There are people who believe that the costumes, props, and slides we use are crutches to hold up the crippled music," Peter says calmly but confidently. "They think we had to resort to things like that. They don't realise we actually *prefer* it. Visuals are rubbish unless they are integrated with the continuity of the music. You can't put layers of make-up on a beautiful face unless the features are there in the first place."

You could call it any number of things. Call it pretentious, artificial or cosmic. Call it theatre rock or rubbish. Call Gabriel a twit. Call the band cosmic warriors. Call it anyway you see it. But make sure you call it good.

☐ **BARBARA CHARONE**

ALBUMS

From Genesis To Revelation—Decca
Trespass—Charisma CAS 1020
Nursery Cryme—Charisma CAS 1052
Foxtrot—Charisma CAS 1058
Genesis Live—Charisma CLASS 1
Selling England By The Pound—Charisma CAS 1074
The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway—Charisma CGS 101



This is going to be no lengthy preamble. The phoenix-like return of Pure Prairie League has provided some of the new year's most welcome news. Equally good news was that the producer of the group's first two albums was living and working in London. A couple of telephone calls led to the interview that follows. Have those two albums (*Pure Prairie League* RCA LSP-4650 and *Bustin' Out* RCA LSP-4769) close at hand while you read. Personally, I prefer the first one, but that probably has something to do with my obsession for pedal steel guitar. There's a lot of good music about. You'll discover plenty of it on these albums and, hopefully, some good reading to go with it. If you do, all the credit goes to Bob Ringe . . . to him, thanks for everything.

ZZ: Let's start at the beginning. Did you meet them, or what?
BR: I was working at RCA in New York as A&R person and . . . oh, that's a long time ago. Their manager at the time was in Cleveland and he sent me a tape of six songs that the band had recorded, a demo tape, and I liked them. I really liked them! The outstanding song on that particular tape was a song that Craig had written called 'You're Between Me' which was their first single, and that was it. I liked them, and at the time the fellow that I was working for, who was the head of A&R, a very good friend of mine today, a fellow by the name of Dennis Katz, who now manages Lou Reed who we also signed at RCA. I went out to see the band and they were out in Cincinnati. They played and I listened and we got to be really good friends and eventually I got them to sign to RCA, with Dennis's help, and that's how I found them.
ZZ: How come you produced them? Presumably, working in A&R, you hadn't done any producing, or am I completely wrong in that?
BR: Well, slightly wrong. I had recorded two albums prior to my finding them. The first album that I worked on was a band called Boomerang, which was part of the recently broke-up Vanilla Fudge. After that I did an album with a lady called Annette Peacock, which was a synthesiser album. And then came Pure Prairie League.
ZZ: Before we start talking about recording the album and the tracks on it, if you can remember all that time back, can you tell me anything about the background of the individual members of the band?
BR: Well, the basis of the PPL was always Craig and George. That's who the PPL was. Everybody came after, but Craig and George, like Adam and Eve, came first. Craig [Fuller] comes from Ohio, a place called Waverley, Ohio, and George [Powell] comes from Bluegrass country in Kentucky, and they're just really nice mid-Western guys.
ZZ: How old were they at that time?
BR: I would say early twenties. I mean, they were not kids. They had been playing locally with various people. They had been writing. They had been hungry. You know, they had been paying their dues. The usual trip that all musicians go through. Then there was John Call, the steel player, who is one of the finest unrecognised steel players around. John was married and he had a job also. It was very difficult making music and competing with John's job, and that was the reason why John eventually left the band. But I'm really glad that he's back with the band now, because he's great. I have really fond memories of John and the problems with that particular situation. Jimmy Lanham. Where did Jimmy Lanham come from? He's in LA now, still knocking around. Good bass player, got married, got divorced, played on a lot of sessions. I don't know, Jimmy, what can I say about him? Personality conflict, I guess, with the rest of the guys. I think that Jimmy was from the East but I don't really remember. 'Koffe' [Jim Caughlin] was just another one of the fellows from around in the Ohio, Cincinnati, Kentucky area. Again, after that first album, personality conflicts. I think that Craig and George really saw a different direction which took us to the second album. It was a great band. It still is a great band.
ZZ: What were they like live?
BR: It all depended, really. One of the problems with this band was that we never really had any money, as it is with so many bands. It was a scrimping type situation. I was the lucky one because I had my gig at RCA that was paying the bills, and I was paying some of their bills, and their manager was putting in a lot of money, and the record sales really didn't warrant much more. The first album came out and did, maybe, 35,000, which is not good in America. Got some nice airplay,

well received. I would say the guys played great live, when they were in the proper situation. They had to fight a lot for gigs, and sometimes when they got them they played in front of the wrong audiences. I remember their debut gig in New York. They played Carnegie Hall with somebody like Santana. The audience was filled with 50% Puerto Ricans and really heavy street people. These five country kids came out to play and it was . . . but when they played, like, in Memphis or Cleveland, places with the right bill and the right audience, they were magical. They really were! It was great. I used to go on the road with them and they were great, really. They were good funky musicians, and when they got off . . . !

ZZ: So then you had to do this difficult thing of transcribing that from a live thing into a studio.

BR: Well, we tried to do that with 'Country Song'. That was what they were live . . . I think! George wrote that. It was funny, because George didn't write that song to be seven minutes and thirty-seven seconds long. That just happened. We tried it a number of times in the studio, and it happened, so we put it on.

ZZ: Had any of them had recording experience before they went in to cut the album?

BR: I don't think so. Except Craig. Now, Craig . . . did you ever hear of a band or an artist called J.D. Blackfoot?

ZZ: To be honest, no.

BR: Well, he has an album out now in America that is making some noise. He comes from that mid-Western area also, and about two years before this, the first PPL album, J.D. had recorded three of Craig's songs, 'Angel', which is on *Bustin' Out*, and two others. Craig played guitar on the LP and John may have done a couple of local sessions, but that's about all.

ZZ: So tell me about the first album.

BR: The making of the first album. Hmmm. Craig and George stayed at my house, I remember that.

ZZ: This was done where?

BR: This was done in New York. In RCA Studios in New York. One of the difficulties with RCA is that when you sign with them in America you must record in their studios because they have union problems. The first two albums that I did were recorded in their studios and I was very unhappy. The Prairie League and I didn't want to record in their studios, but we had to, and that's where we did the album. I would say it took us about six weeks, with two weeks of rehearsals. We'd been rehearsing in Ohio, and then we'd be going out on the road and we'd rehearse, and then we went in and did it.

ZZ: How big was their repertoire? From how many songs did they select?

BR: Well, we had weeded out a number of tunes. You see, there were a lot of tunes that the boys did live that were great that weren't their own material, and I felt that they were good writers, and they were going to develop as good writers, and the only way to develop them was to record their material. They did a version of the Youngbloods' song, 'Sugar Babe', that they did as good, or sometimes better, as 'Country Song'. John used to wail on steel. It was great. I have those tapes. They did a live radio concert in Ohio, and they'd do 'Sugar Babe'; they'd do two Paul Siebel songs.

ZZ: There's a fine artist.

BR: Phew! A great songwriter that was never recognised. Craig used to find all these things. This is where is head is at. 'Losing Blues'? It's off the *Woodsmoke And Oranges* album. 'Lonesome Blues'. [I think this must actually be 'She Made Me Lose The Blues', the album's opening track.] Great! People used to stand up and cheer, and they used to do a Bob Dylan song that Craig used to like and people, when they played live, would just go crazy. But they had to develop as writers, though 'Woman' was not written by anyone in the band. 'Woman' was written by a friend of Craig named Adam Taylor, who had a band in Boston, during the 'Bostol revolution' of all those bands that came out of there like Orpheus and things like that that never happened. Adam was an engineer, a really good guy, and he almost played with us, but couldn't get it together. But we loved that song and that was their second single and it came close. It really came close, but didn't make it. Anyway, the first album was split between Craig and George. The second album, I think, shows you where the strength of the songwriting was. One song of George's that almost went on that we cut is still in the can. Maybe they'll put it on the new album. It's a great song called 'Kentucky Good Girl'. Phew! Classic! For some reason we just never got it right. We did it, Goddam, maybe forty times. My recollections of the second album are more vivid than of the first, so if I stray away from it . . . .

ZZ: I'll pull you back!

BR: OK. We must have tried that song forty times. Either George wasn't happy or our engineer wasn't happy or I wasn't happy or something. We tried it many different ways. Fast and slow and we brought in musicians. For instance, Tom Rush's guitar player, Trevor Veetch, who played on many, many Tom Rush sessions. Great, great slide guitar and dobro player. We tried it with him for a couple of days; anyway, it's still in the can and I hope the new band does it 'cos it's a great song. But we needed a hit single. We really needed a hit single, and we didn't get it, but if we had got it we wouldn't have been dropped from RCA. So that's really what we were looking for, and really the only reason we put 'Jazzman' on was that it was such a good song, Craig loved it, everybody loved it, so we did it.

ZZ: I'm going to pull you back to the first album.

BR: OK. I guess I should tell you, maybe, who some of the people are who are listed on the album sleeve here. It says, "Thanks to Westy, Starr and Barbara". Well, Westy was our roadie, and he was a great roadie, he was one of the band, took care of the band. Starr and Barbara were these two chicks from Ohio. Really tough ladies. Like, Starr was a Janis Joplin type. Great singer, great boozer, slapped you on your back! They were friends of guys in the band and they wanted to come up and sing on the track, so we did it. Hugh McCracken, I'm sure you know, is one of the best known studio session guitar musicians in New York. Played with McCartney and everybody from God! Hugh was a good friend of Jimmy Lanham's, and Jimmy asked him if he'd like to play on the track. It was great. He came in, plugged in his amp and three takes and it was over. So he really was great. Great, great, great. What else can I say? The cover was picked for us; I mean, it was agreed by everybody, but it was found by our good friend Dennis Katz, who was a great believer in the band and in me. He worked out all the problems with Norman Rockwell and his estate, and it really said for us what we wanted to say. It was funny, because in our later days when we thought about doing a third album before we didn't get the opportunity, we were going to call it *Dreams Of Long Ago* from the record [held by the cowboy in Norman Rockwell's painting] but we may use that some day. It tells you on here where the name comes from [some discrepancies with Bob, in fact]. I don't know who the hell wrote this thing; I don't really remember.

On the back it says, "John Call: sho-boo steel guitar". Well, they made a mistake when they printed the album cover. It's Sho-Bud. You know that. People who know pedal steel guitar would, but to this day people still ask him, and people that know about the band, "What is a sho-boo steel guitar?" That's really funny.

ZZ: Could you quickly run through the album track by track?

BR: Well, 'Tears' was a song that the band always did live. Again, we thought that it was a good commercial song and tune. We released it as a single also. Didn't make it! The Earl Scruggs Revue cut that on a Columbia album that they did, maybe two albums back, Craig was very pleased about that. 'Tears' is Craig. That's really where it's at. It's Craig putting out what he feels. If you really get into a lot of these songs lyrically, Craig writes and sings about his feelings. George writes more earthy. He's a much sweeter more laid-back kind of a guy. He's got a beautiful wife and lots of dogs. That's where George is at. If you listen to the songs, that's what you'll see. So 'Tears' is Craig talking. 'You're Between Me', I told you, is the thing that I really loved initially. It talks a lot about Ohio and Kentucky and where Craig was brought up. I think it's really a moving song . . . sounded great on the radio! I think it is one of the better songs that Craig has written. 'Woman', like I said, was written by Adam. 'Doc's Tune', which is a strange way to open up an album, I just felt that the people had to hear how well these fellows played guitar. This was capturing something ethnic. It's too bad we could only do a minute and twenty-two seconds. Then 'Country Song' was the fellows really playing live. There's no overdubs on that, it's just the fellows playing.

ZZ: How many takes?

BR: It's hard to say because I recall that we did it a number of times. There were times that we would get up to a section, and then we could keep, you know, like the first half of the song. If you remember in the middle with the drum part, we could always stop there and change the first half of the song and then always pick up on that drum beat. We could break it up.

ZZ: You could cheat if you wanted to?

BR: Well, seven and a half minutes doing it ten, fifteen times! The guys played a lot, they used to like to play and the vibe was good in the studio. RCA had just remodelled the studio. It was very strange but it was OK. 'Harmony Song' again is really Craig's feelings coming out. This was, in a way, the band's song. Everybody went around singing it. Then, 'It's All On Me'. George lamenting, really; if I remember correctly, that song went on last, because we wanted another one of George's songs and he was in the middle of finishing it, or something. It was a really good song and in depth, I think it's George inside himself. It's really where George comes from. If you listen to the words it's . . . he was married at the time, times were a little bit difficult so . . . and that's really all I can tell you about that album.

ZZ: The running order on an album is crucial really to get the pace of an album . . . .

BR: Absolutely, yes.

ZZ: Was it very difficult, or did you have it in mind?

Pure Prairie League. Left to Right: Mike Connors, John Call, Bill Hinds, Mike Riely, George Powell, Larry Gorshon.

BR: No. It's always difficult, and naturally it's got to be in the grooves, but sequencing an album is vitally important and I never did it till after the mix, because the mix could change something so radically that it would seem out of place with something else in sequence, so never until the end.

ZZ: So who ultimately decided?

BR: I would say myself and Craig and George.

ZZ: It seemed to work.

BR: I hope so.

ZZ: That was a deliberate understatement!

BR: No, I really do hope so because . . . I'll give you an example. Another client that I represent here is David Essex and Jeff Wayne, his producer, and I sequenced the *Rock On* album for them. Not because they couldn't do it, but because sometimes when you have an outside point of view after you've been working on something so long you lose perspective of it. I played them what I thought it should be and they loved it. It's a flow, just a flow and, Jesus, it takes a long time because it's like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. But when you listen to it through and you see that it's something . . . phew! It's great! A great feeling.

ZZ: How do you view that album now?

BR: I can't listen to it! I don't listen to any of it any more.

ZZ: That's terrible, it's . . . .

BR: Well, not really. I'll tell you how I look at it. I put my life into those albums, and so did the rest of those guys. I think that had we been given the opportunity to continue and, thank God, three years later, we will be given that opportunity . . . I'm sorry that it will be in splintered pieces but there were things that we wanted to do but time didn't allow. RCA, now that I look back on it, they were good to us. When I was there I had a lot of fights with them, because I wanted to see it on the charts just like I wanted to see Bowie on the charts and all the new things that we had signed. But the first album never recouped. The fellows were into RCA for a lot of money and the second album cost a fortune to make. People might laught at that, but it cost a considerable amount of money to make. It was done in a fantastic atmosphere, and one of the things I'm really glad about now is there's a hit single in America; the album in the last two and a half years, because it's been selling a little bit every couple of weeks, has done over two hundred thousand so it's paid for itself and I'm really pleased about it. That's the thing you feel good about, but I wish that we could have gone on, as I'm sure that many bands that break up due to various reasons feel the same way. I felt that we were on the right track. The problem with today's business is that you've got to be on the right track quicker, you've got to do something first. Again, like I said before, we could have done some songs that the fellows did great when they played live, but they weren't theirs, and they had to develop as writers.

ZZ: So how long after the first album did they cut *Bustin' Out*?

BR: I would think it was about a year. They went back out on the road, they toured across the States with Badfinger, and they played some dates with Quicksilver. They never really had a shot with good bills or anything like that, but they played.

ZZ: During this time the band changed. People dropped out and . . . .

BR: Yes. After the first album they went out touring. Then they went out and toured again, and then difficulties started to arise because, like, there wasn't enough money to keep John and his family going and nobody really had any money anyway. There were problems with Jimmy. The guys were all living in one house with their families and they had to have a big house with all the dogs, and each one had a car, so it was an expensive proposition. It was easily a thousand dollars a month, just for the rent, and

there was food and . . . it was difficult. So the remnants, like I say, became Craig and George again. The PPL was Craig and George. I think it will always be Craig and George.

ZZ: Anyway, you persuaded RCA there should be a second album.

BR: Well, like I say, the first album did thirty-five thousand and it was very well received, got some good airplay, the band was out touring, RCA was ready to go with another album. Any record company that is foolish enough to sign an artist for one album and then not go with the second, shouldn't have signed them in the first place, because they're not giving the artist a shot. Neither to develop, nor to increase his audience or do anything, so they went with the second album. RCA wanted it, we didn't have to pressure them into it or anything, but with that album I had to take a stand and I refused to do it in their studios. Hence, we got to Toronto.

ZZ: And hence, how in England, you got the reputation of being a Canadian band, would you believe?

BR: That's very possible. A great friend of mine is Bob Ezrin, who produces Alice Cooper and has produced Lou Reed and many great artists. Bob had recorded a lot in Toronto and is from Toronto, and I told him what my problem was, and he said, "Why don't you come to Toronto to record?" So I said, "OK, I'll go up and take a look at the studio". So I went up, and I went to this one studio that shall remain nameless, and was very impressed. It looked like a spaceship, but the atmosphere just wasn't right for where we were at. Then I went to RCA Studios and I met, who was later to become a great friend of mine and the band, Mark Smith, an engineer up there–'Smitty'. There were a number of things there that I disliked about the studio, but I loved Smitty, and he was just what we were looking for to work with. I flew him down to meet the band and they loved him. I shouldn't say 'the band', because at that time it was just Craig and George. I haven't seen George for about a year now, but I'm sure he is just the same. They are two of the easiest guys you ever want to meet. All they wanted to do was play and have some money. One of the positive things about the two of them and the band was always the fact that they were instantly liked when you met them. They just had that mid-west southern charm that really got to you. Anyway, Smitty just melted right into that, so that was it. We made our decision, and RCA were very pleased because they were putting pressure on me not to record outside of RCA, and it worked out. Bob and Arlene, his wife, were of immense help. They found us a ranch to rent about fifty miles outside of Toronto. We had decided to record the album in the summer, so we went up there the beginning of June and stayed till the end of August. They rented us this beautiful 66-acre horse ranch. Big house where we all had our own different rooms, just great, and we drove in every day and we drove back. It was really conducive to where we wanted to be and the kind of music that we wanted to make. That's where these pictures on the back of the album sleeve were all taken. These people, the Davis Family, owned the house and the ranch and rented it to us for the three months that we were there. We went into rehearsal and . . . for about a month before we went up there, Craig was staying at my house in New York. We were going over tunes, then George came up and he stayed for a while. Then he went back, got his wife, then he came up with some of the other fellows. It was just prior to going to Toronto that Billy joined the band, Billy Hinds, the drummer. Again, Billy was another friend that had been around in that area of mid-west musicians. I remember that I went down to meet Billy, and we listened to him play, and he was really a good dude, good vibe, fitted in well, he was in the band! So there we were, going to Toronto to make an album with no bass player, Craig and George and a drummer, and no steel player. Problem A arose when we needed a bass player. Jimmy Rolleston was a friend of mine who was a travelling bass player; he used to commute, like, between New York and California. He had played with Tom Rush for a couple of years, and we were all into Tom's records and his music. Jimmy came down, met us in New York, he auditioned, came up to Toronto, and we decided to use him as a session man. Al Briscoe is one of the better session steel players in Toronto. He's played on a number of Lightfoot sessions, Poppy Family, some other things in Toronto. I guess the thing that you have to take into consideration is we were . . . because we had really lost our band to a great degree, we were changing our image and we were changing our style. In getting the tunes together we felt the steel not playing such a prominent role in our music. As you can see on the second album, it's only on two tracks. It was just a direction change that we envisioned because of the type of material that both Craig and George were writing. Also, one of the reasons why they changed drummers, and changed bass players, was because they wanted to go in a heavier direction, as witnessed by 'Angel No.9'; 'Leave My Heart Alone' is George's song, again done really rocky. There was a wealth of ideas coming out of them that had to be captured. We just felt that what we wanted to say musically could be said in other ways. The first album, I would say, leans very heavily towards country and western. I have a recording of them doing 'White Line Fever' that you'd think is Merle Haggard or The Burritos. But they were starting to write a little more sophisticated. One of the things that you should know, which may help you to understand the writing a little bit more, is that Craig was a conscientious objector. All through the making of the second album his court case was going on. 'Angel No.9' is about his problems with the Draft and his feelings about it. I guess that really caused Craig to leave the band, because for the last two years, ever since I've been in England, Craig has been working in a hospital in Kentucky, working off his sentence for being a conscientious objector. Through all this time of the PPL, this was a tremendous burden on his head, and it was again starting to come through in his music. Also, Craig had been through a number of love affairs between touring and being back in Ohio. 'Boulder Skies' is about one of those particular situations while they were playing in Colorado. 'Angel', like I told you, was written and recorded in 1969 or 1970, recorded by J.D. Blackfoot. 'Jazzman' was recorded by Tom Rush. 'Call Me, Tell Me' was an experiment that, well, I don't know if it worked or didn't work. It was a lot of fun to do. During the time I was at RCA, like I mentioned before, Bowie was one of the people I was involved in signing, and became good friends with David, and better friends with Mick Ronson. When Craig wrote 'Boulder Skies' he wanted strings on it, so I said, "OK, Shall we get Mick to do it to add a different blend and touch and so forth?" Well Mick came up, and he was supposed to stay a week and he fell in love with everybody. Mick is that kind of a guy. He ended up staying three and a half weeks. We used to get frantic phone calls from David and de Freis thinking that Ronson was never going to come back. But he just fell in with all the guys, and the weather was beautiful, the ranch was great, and he loved it. So he did the strings on 'Boulder Skies' and also on 'Call Me, Tell Me'. Ironically, if you listen to *Ziggy Stardust*, and you listen to the end of that album, the last track on the second side, the strings end the same way as 'Call Me, Tell Me' ends. Ronson wrote the same ending for both songs!

Again, Ronson and Craig got very close, and he decided to stick around because he was having a good time and we loved having him and it was really great. He played bass on 'Amie', which nobody knows about, and he's doing one of the back-up vocals. When he did the strings it was very funny because Mick is such a nice guy and he was very nervous, and he had to walk in to this thirty, forty string Toronto Symphony Orchestra and do this thing. He handled it so well, he was so pleased with himself, it was really a great day and he was great to have with us. Really a great thrill. Then, let's see, then there's Michael Connors, piano player. Michael is in the new band, and was a session musician from Woodstock, very good piano player. We sometimes didn't see eye to eye on things, but a good musician. He was later to bring in Michael Reilly, who is the bass player with them now, and who we took on after we made this album. See, things really didn't work out with Jimmy Rolleston on bass and in the end, like I say, Ronson played bass on 'Amie', Craig played bass on a couple of other tunes, and we didn't make Jimmy an integral part of the band. After we did the second album and we were going to go out and tour, we needed a bass player and Michael, who we liked so much from the sessions, we asked him to stay with us. He had nothing going in Woodstock and . . . we were a very open bunch of guys. If somebody liked playing with us, and we really liked them, the vibe was right and the music was right, then they joined the band. That was where it was at. One time we had more people in the band than we knew what to do with. Anyway, Michael joined the band and that's how Mike Connors came about, and that's really the basis of the new band. Billy Hinds, Mike Reilly, Michael Connors, George, and John Call rejoined, and Larry Gorshon. Larry, I think, at one point played with Craig. I can't remember exactly, but I do know their paths crossed. Anyway, so there we were in Toronto doing our second album, and working with Smitty who was great, and we worked eighteen hours a day, every day. Then we'd pack everybody in and we'd drive

Continued on page 44

Kristofferson & Coolidge

Micky Newbury

Sammi Smith

Waylon Jennings

Tanya Tucker

Charlie McCoy

A ZIGZAG BEGINNERS GUIDE TO COUNTRY ROCK PART TWO

AS WE HAVE already discovered – I mean, those faithfuls who have stuck with the previous ramblings of this ponderous (?) epistle – country music is a hybrid creature: all manner of sounds stemming from all manner of sources. Let's not try to turn this into a lecture but the basic country origins have been fused with creativity arising from numerous other realms and the resulting critical reactions diverse. I won't go into it here but simply mention the most astonishing reaction. Country music, itself, at the best, tends to get played down and, at the worst, simply ignored or condemned yet mix it with rock and the praise never appears to stop flowing. (Even stranger, look at the critical and public success of Country Gazette: astonishing – yet tell me the *instrumental* difference between this four-piece outfit and their mentor Bill Monroe.) Anyway, that's all by the by!

The preceeding 4,000 (or so) words on the subject of country-rock undoubtedly brought up many names familiar to the readers of *ZigZag*. This time around we come into my territory proper – the real nitty gritty, Nashville – and I hope that I can lay upon you some artists, musicians and writers who are on a first acquaintance basis. There's a general feeling of conservatism surrounding the Nashville scene . . . but don't be fooled. Sure enough there's the general run-of-the-mill, honky-tonking, broken love affairs and bar-room cheatin' country singer (they're the backbone of the industry) but there's also a hell of a lot else. To start the transition gently, let's first have a look at

The Musicians

and what (or who) could be more appropriate than Area Code 615? They're defunct now but still existing, if you follow me. Occasionally the nucleus of this outfit rears its head as Barefoot Jerry – but each member of the group is still very much in demand as hot members of the Nashville session musicians' scene. In fact Area Code 615 could never have existed as a 'road band' because of that demand from the recording studios but their work is still to be heard, and wondered at, through the Polydor double album *Area Code 615/A Trip In The Country*.

The two albums by Area Code 615 are sounds performed by musicians' musicians, work – when it first appeard – which gained high critical acclaim but left the country enthusiasts more than slightly befuddled. John Grissim, in his excellent book *Country Music: A White Man's Blues*, describes the outfit's sounds as "a near perfect blend of Country Rock and Memphis Soul". It was strange at the time (1969) but now, on reflection, fits perfectly into the pattern of evolution. Similar sounds can now be heard with growing regularity against the backgrounds of recordings by Kris Kristofferson, Lonnie Mack, Dianne Davidson, Casey Kelly, Larry Gatlin, Mickey Newbury and Steve Goodman, just a few of the names that exist in the outer fringes of country music. Then, of course, there's the endless listing of more standard Nashville recordings in which these musicians all provide their invaluable contributions.

How about a few facts? Drummer Kenneth Buttrey and guitarist Wayne Moss were the force behind Area Code 615 and, to its strength, they recruited David Briggs (piano), Mac Gayden (guitar), Charlie McCoy (harmonica), Weldon Myrick (steel guitar), Norbert Putnam (bass), Buddy Spicher (fiddle) and Bobby Thompson (banjo). The credits were minimal: the versatility of these musicians is shown as each doubled, trebled or, even, quadrupled up on other instruments. The results were impressive: the tracks were recorded at Moss' Cinderella Sound Studios, situated some eight miles outside of Nashville, and the group brought about fresh interpretations of both country and pop standards as well as a number of originals. You have only to listen to McCoy, Myrick, Moss and

Spicher–known collectively as the Goodlettsville String Sextet, a popular trend giving names to groups within groups–creating the impression of a full string section or to Thompson leading the heavy rhythm section and providing bluegrass among the rock beats.

AS I'VE ALREADY STATED (and face the consequences for repetition) the Nashville session guys are a pretty versatile lot. The Lovin' Spoonful, in '66, had informed the world about the Nashville Cats but 'outstanders' (a non-discriminatory term, mine, for non-Nashville residents) were soon to be discovering their talents for themselves. Nashville had already moved closer to pop via the productions of Chet Atkins and Owen Bradley, among others, and the reverse happened in 1967 when Dylan recorded his *Blonde On Blonde* double at Columbia's 17th Avenue South Studios. Joan Baez and Buffy Sainte-Marie followed fairly quickly afterwards–and then the floodgates just opened. You have only to check the list of artists who visit, or make, Nashville their recording base during the course of a year. Anyway, that's all a drift away from the matter in hand.

The aforementioned Charlie McCoy is just one of those versatile musicians and really brought that frequently overlooked band of people to the fore when, in 1972, he was voted Instrumentalist Of The Year by America's Country Music Association–an award that, in previous years, had gone to 'name' artists. Gratefully he accepted the award, on behalf of himself and those "unsung heroes of the music business". A similar dedication is to be found on the back cover of his first Monument album release which is titled, simply, *Charlie McCoy*: now he has six albums available in the United States but, shamefully, not one released on this side of the Atlantic–so check out your local import dealers.

McCoy's talents don't however merely rest with the harmonica–or harp, if you prefer. He's been around in Nashville for well over fourteen years, which proves, yet again, that success is no overnight thing, and is equally a master of the guitar, vibes, organ, bass, recorder, percussion or just about anything else! Having been influenced by Slim Harpo and Sonny Boy Williamson in particular, he started out playing rock'n'roll in Miami and then moved on to a recording career as a vocalist for Archie Bleyer's Cadence label. Now he rates as a recording musician in his own right and a back-up musician for just about everybody else. You just have to glance through the sleeve credits on any Nashville recorded album–and I'll take a bet that Charlie McCoy's name will figure prominently on the majority of them.

LLOYD GREEN has a career that's equally illustrious and, out of all the musicians who regularly flit from one studio to another during the course of a Nashville day, he's probably the one who has had the most limelight in terms of an individual recording artist. Naturally enough the steel guitar has always been around with country music: once it sounded very much the same as the instrument that had originated from the Hawaiian islands: now it possesses pedals, unconventional tunings and a range of sounds that appears to make it the most omnipotent of all instruments. Once it was practically the sole possession of the country music industry–now, as other musicians tend to become more involved in country traditions, the steel guitar similarly is finding a place in heavier line-ups. Lloyd Green has also found his own rightful place there. In his own rights he started cutting albums for Aubrey Mayhew's Little Darlin' label in the mid-sixties (as well as providing valuable back-up on the earliest recordings of Johnny Paycheck for the same label), and subsequently has had material released on Prize, Chart and, more latterly, Monument.

Incidentally, whilst in passing, Monument–having been mentioned twice in three paragraphs–is currently proving itself the most interesting of the Nashville recording companies in terms of the singer/songwriter and the musician). Green's two releases via this outlet–*Shades Of Steel* and *Steel Rides*–fully display the ease in which he moved the instrument into a contemporary setting, mingling country with shades of pop and rock music. The moog has a place in the proceedings as does Billy Swan's 'I Can Help', Paul McCartney's 'Sally G' and Kenny Loggins' 'Danny's Song'.

Then there are the others, far too many for details or–for that matter–to even credit. Musicians like Johnny Gimble who relived his western swing traditions with his Capitol album *Fiddlin' Around*; Pete Drake, with innumerable steel albums behind him; Billy Sanford; Reggie Young; Henry Strzelecki; Buddy Harmon; Pete Wade; Chip Young; Jerry Carrigan; Tommy Jackson; Joe Allen; Dale Sellers; Dave Kirby; Jerry Shook. There's also those who have been around for a longer period, names like Grady Martin, Vassar Clements, Josh Graves and Bob Moore. Perhaps there's not an Area Code 615 around every day to grab the critical acclaim but the unsung heroes still make the sessions. Space, as ever, doesn't allow for full discourses (at least, at present) but take note of the sounds and read your sleeve notes. It pays off! In the meantime, on to another matter . . . .

Songwriting– The New Breed

Darrell Statler, songwriter and recording artist of the second division, really came up with the goods when he wrote about the 'Honky Tonk Stardust Cowboy' back in 1972: he recalled those country tunes of bygone days; the flashy boots and rhinestone suits; the bars and honky-tonks; and dreams of the Grand Ole Opry. A successful country title, the song was later adopted by Jonathan Edwards who built an album around it on Atco. So how's that for cutting across musical realms. The underrated Steve Goodman put tongue in cheek and came up with 'You Never Even Call Me By My Name', a song that made use of every country cliche in the book. (And those he missed the first time around, he incorporated into a final verse which, unfortunately, was never recorded. He'll sing it to you though, should you ever have the chance to meet up with him.) Why mention these two songs? Well, no particular reason except that, to many people, they reflect what the country music lyric is all about. They also reflect–perhaps even mourn–the passing age of the standard country lyric: such songs are still around, and will always be, but Kristofferson's 'Help Me Make It Through The Night', Alex Harvey's 'Delta Dawn', Billy Joe Shaver's 'Old Five And Dimers', Kenny O'Dell's 'Behind Closed Doors' and David Allan Coe's 'Would You Lay With Me (In A Field Of Stone)' are just a few of the titles that indicate that country has passed through its own age of innocence.

WHERE THE HELL do you start with the songwriters, where do you finish–and who do you mention in between? Once again the briefest survey, otherwise the whole of this edition will be devoted to the Nashville examination. The mid and late sixties was the turning point and fitted in with the rise of the musicians who moved away from the basic country sounds and those producers who started to take the non-Nashville artists into the Nashville recording studios. Tom T. Hall, although country by all definitions, fits well into the plan of things: earlier in the decade he had been turning out material for Dave Dudley and Jimmy C. Newman among others but, in 1968, he wrote 'Harper Valley PTA'. It was an instant hit: a best selling record within one week, it made an overnight sensation of Jeannie C. Riley, who had been waiting in the wings for a couple of years, and thrust Hall right to the top of the ladder as a writer and, later, as a recording artist. He's been called a 'musical journalist' and his frequently poignant observations have reached out for attention by artists beyond the Nashville syndrome.

But, when you get around to writers *who have really broken through*, then Kris Kristofferson must make an appearance into things. In fact Kristofferson helped change the face of Nashville itself. It's that air of conservatism all over again: how does a long-haired, jean-clad, struggling 'hippie' writer, sweeping the studio floors and emptying ashtrays break through facing odds that put down his complete lifestyle? Simply, by success–and success can help alter the establishment that surrounds him. It was at the time of "the bad old days" to quote Kris, "and a lot of people were bumming around". One such person was Johnny Cash, but he wasn't bumming around but, rather, "bouncing off the walls of the recording studio". His health was at its lowest ebb, his family and friends were deeply concerned (and even considering having him committed), and he started to write religious poems which he carried around with him. Nobody, however, wanted to know. Kristofferson, feeling this sense of non-communication wrote 'To Beat The Devil': happily, Cash beat his devil. Johnny Cash also recorded one of Kristofferson's songs–'Sunday Mornin' Comin' Down'–and, following in the wake of his San Quentin and Folsom Prison concert recordings, was even more geared for the top. The record made it, and walked away with the 1970 CMA Song Of The Year Award. The old establishment was dying: you could feel the rumblings as

Kristofferson, head drooped and nervous, walked on the Ryman Auditorium stage–jeans amidst the tuxedos–and collected his award. Around the same time Ray Price had cut 'For The Good Times' and Sammi Smith 'Help Me Make It Through The Night': both were to become most impressive biggies. Some four years later Kris Kristofferson sets his own pace–a stack of laid-back albums; *Billy The Kid*; *Alfredo Garcia*; Rita Coolidge; et al. Who knows what the truth is to be found in 'Slow Down', that fun cut of Kris and Rita's latest album *Breakaway*?

THE THING about the contemporary Nashville songwriters (though it also applies to a great many of their predecessors) is that they don't just write. They also sing–the singer/songwriter syndrome really started here! What about Mickey Newbury, a writer who appears destined to be continually slated whenever a new album appears? Newbury's material hasn't attracted as much attention, recording-wise, as many of his compatriots, but all of his releases rate as subdued masterpieces and remain as endearing today as they did at the original date of release. There's a quality and a presence about a Newbury song: ''Frisco Mabel Joy', 'Heaven Help The Child', 'Remember The Good', and 'Lovers' all help prove that quality is very much the earmark of his material. His earlier recordings on RCA and Mercury mixed Nashville and out of town recording techniques, his latter day output on Elektra is much more basic and lets his lyrics be heard against a background of superior, refined musicianship. For instance, Dennis Linde produced and Wayne Moss engineered his *'Frisco Mabel Joy* album–and the Nashphilharmonic (steel guitar, organ and fuzz tone guitar, shades of Area Code 615 all over again) brings that effective degree of solemnity to the proceedings. And that, perhaps, is why Mickey Newbury is (unfair) game for the knockers: his music doesn't possess instant appeal. As I said, it is endearing . . . sit back and take it all in leisurely.

BEFORE MOVING ON, how about a few more in brief? . . . just to whet your appetite and, hopefully, perhaps stir a few readers to look out for the material or, even, the albums. (Then I would feel the cause is justified–I already know that–but confirm to your editor that the space has been put to good use!) Billy Joe Shaver, a name that we've already mentioned, had a beauty of an album out on Monument–yet again–named after his hit title 'Old Five And Dimers Like Me', and some liner notes written by Tom T. Hall, the like of which I cannot recall on any other country release. Bobby Bare 'discovered' Shaver, and the latter co-wrote with the artist a memorable song entitled 'Christian Soldier': a hell of a song reflecting the Vietnam experience but equally poignant now that it's all over. (It's to be found on Bare's Mercury album *I Need Some Good News Bad* and, besides containing five items by Shaver, also features material by Hall and Kristofferson. Perhaps the presentation is more standard Nashville but the words say far more than the country lyrics of decades gone by. For that matter Bobby Bare is no mean writer himself, but I'm digressing . . .) Kristofferson produced Shaver's album and that should be recommendation enough. He's now departed Monument and signed with MGM, but all is quiet. Billy Joe Shaver has too much to say to be silent.

On the Elektra front, which has always set paces, the Nashville office–under the auspices of producer Pete Drake–has cultivated the talents of one Linda Hargrove. First of all the credits, two albums to seek out on the label–*Music Is Your Mistress* and *Blue Jean Country Queen*, both imports–making up twenty-four tracks, all Hargrove originals although a couple have co-writers including Mike Nesmith's 'I've Never Been Loved Before'. In fact it was Nesmith who set Linda Hargrove on the pathway to the recording studio as an artist in her own right: previously she had been in the studios as a musician. Hailing from Tallahassee, Florida, where she worked in a rock'n'roll band, Ms Hargrove was writing in Nashville when Nesmith came looking for material. He wanted her back in Los Angeles to play on his forthcoming album and that's where she met up with Russ Miller, A&R at Elektra. Although quite a lot of her material has been picked up by the pop and country artists, she has yet to break big with the country-rock outfits. But, believe me, the day will come. And, whilst with the label, how about Buzz Rabin, a guy who's been rodeo rider, disc jockey and a hit songwriter. His album titled *Cross Country Cowboy* sums it all up. He wrote 'Beaucoup Of Blues' which, as you all know, Ringo Starr picked up and laid down during that Nashville session of '70, and the majority of his material skilfully blends basic country sounds with contemporary lyrics. Shamefully, at the time of writing, Buzz Rabin doesn't hold a recording contract.

Want some more? Okay! Back to Monument (no folks, it's not journalistic payola) and two albums from Larry Gatlin, *The Pilgrim* and *Rain Rainbow*. He recently stirred up a lot of activity with 'Help Me', fast becoming a standard, whilst making the charts himself with 'Delta Dirt'. If you dig Kristofferson, then Gatlin's certainly worth investigating. Troy Seals started out in rock, writes a lot of material in the company of Don Goodman and had an album out on Atlantic titled *Now Presenting Troy Seals*. That's brief information, now seal the deal by noting that it was produced by David Briggs for Area 615 Productions and includes his own version of the penetrating 'We Had It All', the song that he and Donnie Fritts penned together and made a unique experience by Waylon Jennings. At times Troy Seals is almost white soul as a vocalist whilst for me, as a writer, his finest hour came with Sammi Smith's rendition of "the girl gone wrong" saga lived in 'Girl In New Orleans'. At least, that's my humble opinion but I'm sure there's gonna be many finest hours in the future. And how about David Allan Coe?–if prison sentences are going to be your press handout yardstick, then Coe's got Haggard beat! A former condemned man on Death Row, he spent 23 years in prison or reformatories commencing at the age of nine. His notoriety, used pretty exclusively as part of the initial press campaign, does not concern us here but rather his musical directions which include 'Would You Lie With Me (In A Field Of Stone)', just one of the songs that has put sex on the country map and personified through the astonishing recordings of Tanya Tucker. Coe's debut album on US Columbia–*The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy*, which includes a number of originals as well as a spine-tingling version of Guy Clark's 'Desperados Waiting For A Train'–is breath-taking and his second release is about to descend upon us. (Previously he had two albums out on Shelby Singleton's SSS label.)

There are, of course, many many more: if anything Nashville appears to be the current breeding ground for the new generation and they're being energetically backed by musicians willing to mix their skills with the lyrics and producers wanting to experiment. The writers who record complete their own creative cycle but it needs the name artists, in many cases, to really break the writer and the song through to the mass public. That's what we're into now–

Out Front, And Leading The Band

Perhaps, in many people's view, it is the artists who are deserving the lion's share of this examination of the contemporary Nashville and–space-wise–they may appear slightly cut short. That's if you go around adding up the words in each section. However this is where, in many cases, *we go back* to some of the names that have already made appearances in passing references.

IF YOU'RE INTO Waylon Jennings you would be well aware that he's made well over twenty albums since first stepping into the Nashville scene in 1966. You'll be equally well aware that he's also passed through a number of musical directions: once almost your actual pure country entertainer, he did a brief stint in an easy listening bag (one album with the Kimberlys, a four-piece vocal group from Oklahoma, titled *Country-Folk* and included such material as 'MacArthur Park' and 'Mary Ann Regrets') and then began setting his own pace in country-rock. To many people, though, Jennings' own reputation was set back in '58 when he met up with Buddy Holly and worked with the Crickets. After Holly's death, up until his Nashville move, he remained in Phoenix, formed his own outfit The Waylors, cut records for a number of local companies and created a sound that crossed country with rock'n'roll. Anyway, back to the near future and anyone not yet into Jennings is advised to seek out any of his recordings of the past couple of years–*Honky Tonk Heroes*, which is nine tracks written by Billy Joe Shaver and the definitive 'We Had It All', and production by Jennings aided by Tompall Glaser, Ronny Light and Ken Mansfield; *This Time*, a finely laid-back production by Jennings and Willie Nelson,

Continued on page 43

OVER the GARDEN WALL

HAVING RECENTLY RETURNED to the Auld Sod after spending most of the last two and a half years bobbing around on a flimsy yacht in various oceans and ports, I feel somewhat out of touch with what's hot in the rock world. I feel like the original anachronist . . . watching something like 'Top Of The Pops' is like being from another world. Who are all those people? Is irredeemable rubbish like that really popular? What's going on here?

Though I helped build the shaky foundation on which *ZigZag* was originally built and scribbled regularly during the first few years, my recent contributions have been sporadic—mainly because my chief sources of music have been cassettes which Frame used to send me from time to time.

Anyway, the point of this boring prologue is to establish exactly why I bludgeoned Childs into allowing me the unprecedented pleasures of a monthly column all to myself—so I can attempt to veer back on course, re-establish some kind of rapport with the current *ZigZag* readership and discover their prejudices, and to whip out a few of my own jaundiced opinions along the way.

The first thing I want to instigate is a running poll. *ZigZag* has had a couple of polls in the past, both of which were unsatisfactorily handled by the powers-that-were. A running poll will obviate any of the problems which marred its predecessors, and will ensure that results are printed pronto. We'll deal with only one category per issue—kicking off with the obvious favourite . . . GUITARIST. Send me a list, in order of preference, of your favourite 10 BRITISH GUITARISTS—as soon as possible. I will correlate the information in time for the result to appear in this column next issue, when we will investigate the results and launch another category. Please think hard before submitting your list—don't just pick pickers because you think you ought to . . . *ZigZag* doesn't follow, it leads!

Since you are all (I hope) submitting a poll entry, how about a second line of attack too? If you wish, also list your 10 favourite piano tracks . . . for example Larry Knechtel on '1 2.30' by the Mamas And Papas, Little Richard on 'Good Golly Miss Molly', Rick Wakeman on 'Sir Lancelot's Laundry Bags' etc, etc, You got the idea? Add brief notes if you wish.

Send your letters off as soon as possible so we can list the results in the next issue. I love lists . . . we must have lots of lists.

Some sweet young local female, an avid *ZigZagger* is leaving the sinking island to go to Canada and is very foolishly selling her *ZigZag* collection to assist her passage. She wishes to auction them—so please send bids, care of me. She has numbers 1 to 26 complete, plus various duplicates—including the monstrously rare number 24! An unrepeatable offer—so write to me now, as Horace Batchelor used to say.

OK—that's it for this month. Look forward to hearing from you with poll entries, piano tracks, and any views/comments/ideas you may have . . . who knows, we may even start a letters page. See ya next month.

The address to send entries and all other correspondence arising from this column is to Mac Garry, c/o Yeoman Cottage, North Marston, Buckingham MK18 3PH.

☐ MAC

THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE MOTHERS
JUST ANOTHER BAND FROM L.A.

In terms of fax and info, this is hardly the most spectacular family tree we've printed in ZigZag, but on the other hand it does offer a detailed chronological breakdown of the Mothers' pre-fame incubation period — complementing the more recent history depicted in ZigZag 25.

All quotes are Frank Zappa's, lifted from an obscure interview he did in Spring 1968.

"The Mothers project was carefully planned some eighteen months before it actually got off the ground. I had been looking for the right people for a long time.

"I was in advertising before I got into ....ha,ha.... show business – and I'd done a little motivational research. One of the laws of economics is that if there is a demand, somebody ought to supply that demand – and they'll get rich ... ho,ho.

"I composed a composite, gap filling product to plug most of the gaps between so-called serious music and so-called popular music.

"Next I needed my own group, so that I could present this music to the public – and that group, which was to be called the MOTHERS, was working in a little bar in Pamona, California (The Broadside) when I came across them."

"In the three years since then (early 1965), we've come a long way – but these are still the very early stages of the group's development".

"The instrumentation of the ideal Mothers rock'n'roll band is two piccolos, two flutes, two bass flutes, two oboes, English horn, three bassoons, a contrabassoon, four clarinets (with the fourth player doubling on alto clarinet), bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass saxophones, four trumpets, four French horns, three trombones, one bass trombone, one tuba, one contrabass tuba, two harps, two keyboard men playing piano, electric piano, electric harpsichord, electric clavichord, Hammond organ, celeste, and piano bass, ten first violins, ten second violins, eight violas, six cellos, four string bass, four percussionists playing twelve timpani, chimes, gongs, field drums, bass drums, snare drums, woodblocks, lions roar, vibes, xylophone and marimba, three electric guitars, one electric twelve string guitar, electric bass and electric bass guitar, two drummers at sets, plus vocalists who play tambourines.....and I wont be happy until I have it".

"I think people are entitled to hear that kind of music live; if the concert halls would change to more modern programming, they would find the place crawling with people."

"I know something like this couldn't happen overnight, but I have studied my audiences carefully enough to see that were making some headway in that direction".

"Our music is fairly logical; even our spontaneous outbursts are planned. They have to be – if you take an eight piece band and let it run free, the result can only be chaos.

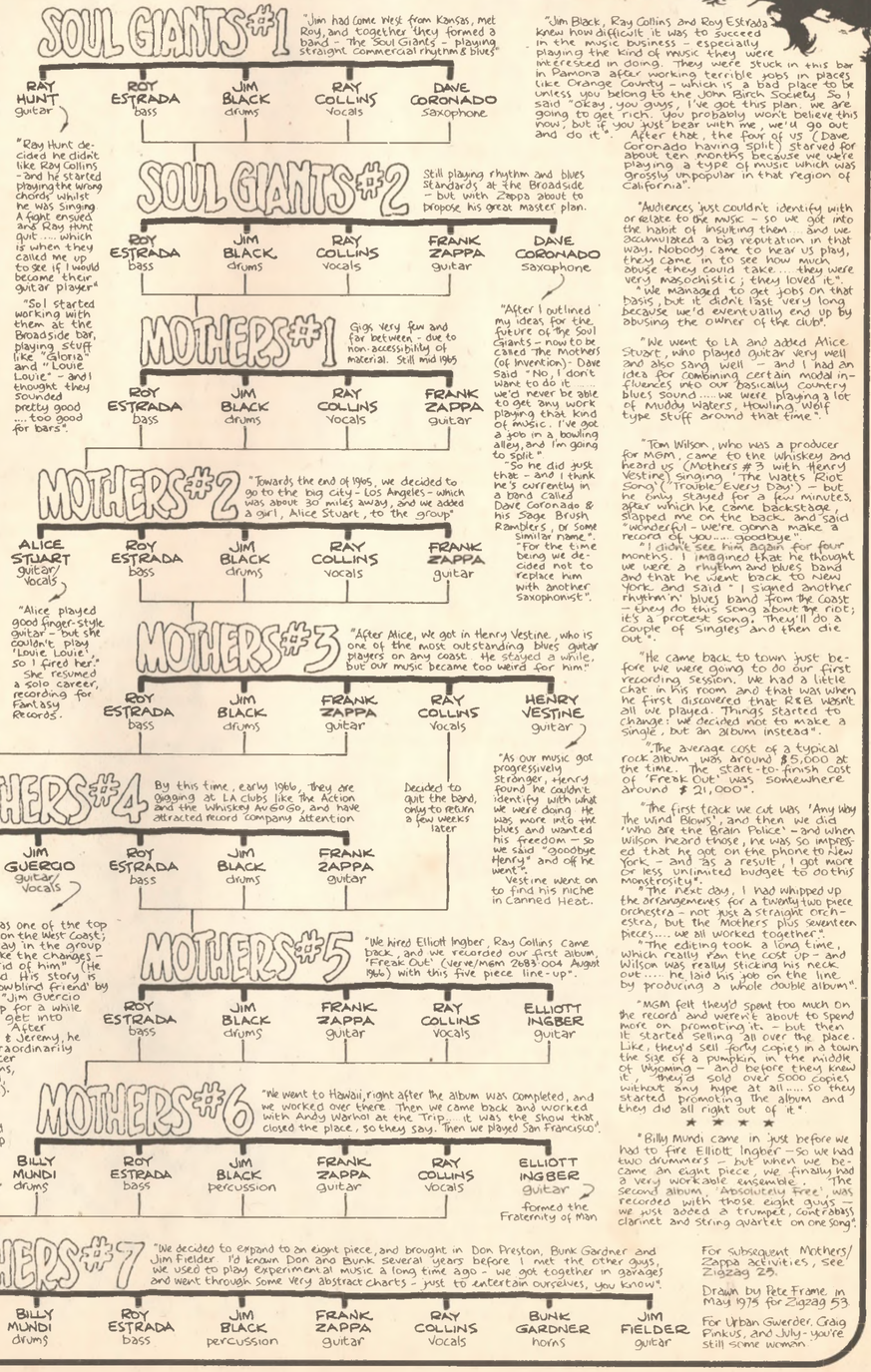
"We rehearse an average of twelve hours on each song; we learn them in sections. There's the front part, then interlude A, interlude B, and so forth – and the band has to remember certain cues for each section.

"Each set we do is conceived of as one continuous piece of music, like an opera. Even the dialogue between numbers is part of it – and the sets run about an hour and a half, which is about opera length.

"A better description of what we're doing, might be a theatrical presentation with music.

"This summer, I'd like to present a show on Broadway. It's a musical science fiction horror story based on the Lenny Bruce trials. He was a friend of mine.....he was a saint. What the Big Machine of America did to Lenny Bruce was pretty disgusting – it ranks with civil rights as one of the big pimples on the face of American culture.... but nobody will ever really find out about it, I guess."

Frank Zappa was always seven years before his time, I guess.



"Jim Black, Ray Collins and Roy Estrada knew how difficult it was to succeed in the music business – especially playing the kind of music they were interested in doing. They were stuck in this bar in Pamona after working terrible jobs in places like Orange County – which is a bad place to be unless you belong to the John Birch Society. So I said "Okay, you guys, I've got this plan. We are going to get rich. You probably won't believe this now, but if you just bear with me, we'll go out and do it".

After that, the four of us (Dave Coronado having split) starved for about ten months because we were playing a type of music which was grossly unpopular in that region of California".

"Audiences just couldn't identify with or relate to the music – so we got into the habit of insulting them. And we accumulated a big reputation in that way. Nobody came to hear us play, they came in to see how much abuse they could take... they were very masochistic; they loved it".

"We managed to get jobs on that basis, but it didn't last very long because we'd eventually end up by abusing the owner of the club".

"We went to LA and added Alice Stuart, who played guitar very well and also sang well – and I had an idea for combining certain modal influences into our basically country blues sound.... we were playing a lot of Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf type stuff around that time".

"Tom Wilson, who was a producer for MGM, came to the Whiskey and heard us (Mothers #3 with Henry Vestine) singing 'The Watts Riot Song' ("Trouble Every Day") – but he only stayed for a few minutes, after which he came backstage, slapped me on the back, and said "wonderful – we're gonna make a record of you.... goodbye".

"I didn't see him again for four months. I imagined that he thought we were a rhythm and blues band and that he went back to New York and said "I signed another rhythm'n' blues band from the Coast – they do this song about the riot; it's a protest song; they'll do a couple of singles and then die out".

"He came back to town just before we were going to do our first recording session. We had a little chat in his room and that was when he first discovered that Ray didn't want all we played. Things started to change: we decided not to make a single, but an album instead".

"The average cost of a typical rock album was around $5,000 at the time. The start-to-finish cost of 'Freak Out' was somewhere around $21,000".

"The first track we cut was 'Any Way The Wind Blows', and then we did 'Who Are the Brain Police' – and when Wilson heard those, he was so impressed that he got on the phone to New York – and as a result, I got more or less unlimited budget to do this monstrosity".

"The next day, I had whipped up the arrangements for a twenty two piece orchestra – not just a straight orchestra, but the Mothers plus seventeen pieces.... we all worked together".

"The editing took a long time, which really ran the cost up – and Wilson was really sticking his neck out.... he laid his job on the line by producing a whole double album".

"MGM felt they'd spent too much on the record and weren't about to spend more on promoting it. – but then it started selling all over the place. Like, they'd sell forty copies in a town the size of a pumpkin in the middle of Wyoming – and before they knew it, they'd sold over 5000 copies without any hype at all.... so they started promoting the album and they did all right out of it."

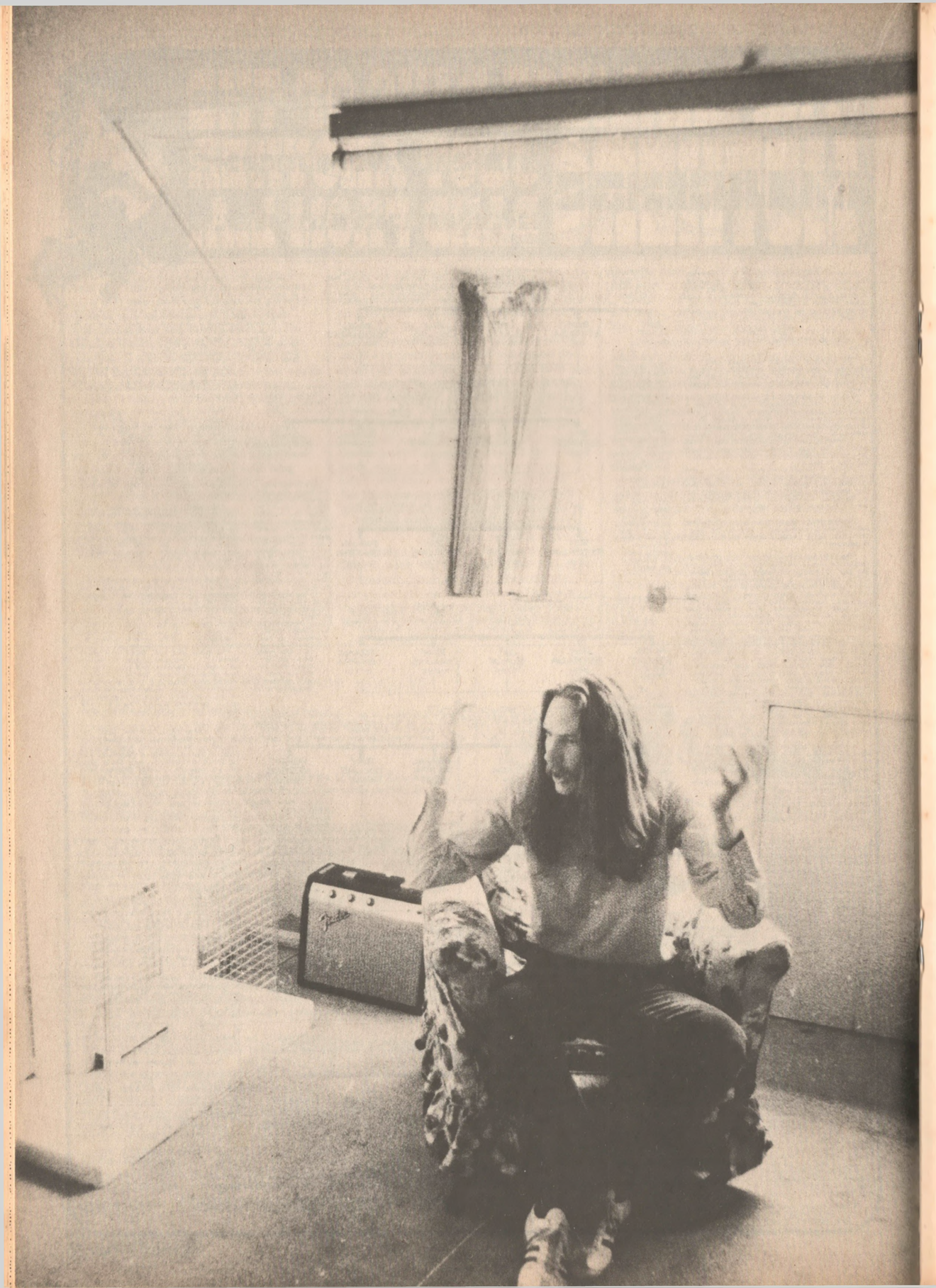
★ ★ ★ ★

"Billy Mundi came in just before we had to fire Elliott Ingber – so we had two drummers – but when we became an eight piece, we finally had a very workable ensemble. The second album, 'Absolutely Free', was recorded with those eight guys – we just added a trumpet, contrabass clarinet and string quartet on one song".

For subsequent Mothers/Zappa activities, see ZigZag 25.

Drawn by Pete Frame in May 1974 for ZigZag 53.

For Urban Gwerder, Craig Pinkus, and July – you're still some woman.



THE MAGIC BAND

DIARY OF AN UNLOST WEEKEND

FRIDAY

The 19.30 fast train to Plymouth left Paddington 15 minutes late, and *ZigZag* is proud and privileged to be able to report that of the 25 passengers on the restaurant car partaking of British Rail's grotesque refreshments, their reading matter broke down like this:– Crappy paperbacks of the *Shoot Out At Dead Man's Gulch* variety 27%, *Accountancy Age* 18%, *The Civil Engineering Weekly* 35%, *The Real Estate Times Incorporating How Not To Solve The Housing Shortage* 12% and the evening newspapers accounted for the remaining 10%. The outlook for trees is pretty grim.

Arriving back in London on Monday after spending the weekend with the old Magic Band, and having heard the incredible music they're putting together, I'm glad to report that the outlook for music is altogether brighter. I heard only the basic tracks of ten numbers, but not even the prospect of almighty amounts of egg all over my face can deter me from announcing that this album will be seen as the first album from a truly mighty band.

Round about the Wiltshire border my mind wandered, in its usual aimless fashion, away from assessing whether the Stonehouse affair, the Common Market referendum, Princess Anne's forthcoming pregnancy, or her brother's forthcoming marriage deserved the nomination as Bore of the Year, onto the thorny problem of Don Van Vliet–how do you try and understand a man who's incredibly generous and yet capable of acts of spite that would make even Ian Paisley demur; a man who gave the world some of the greatest lyrics ever penned and yet has been responsible for driving two of the best L.A. musicians–Roy Estrada and Artie Tripp –out of the business; a man of awesome intelligence and yet a man who could describe Angela Davis as a "picccaninny on a pogo stick"; a man who would deplore the evils of the music business machine in most scathing terms, and yet a man who had no hesitation in training some very heavy artillery in my direction to stop me reporting that statement. Finally, after thrashing vainly towards understanding this ambivalence, what are we to make of a serious musician who can produce works of genius (yes–*genius*) like *Trout Mask Replica*, and yet a musician who can let some worn out hack fart like Del Simmons take 10 minutes to parade every clarinet cliche ever invented on a foul gimmicky rendition of 'Sweet Georgia Brown'. I could go on interminably framing and pondering the paradoxes about B'heart, to reach a conclusion, the train would have to be out in Manchuria somewhere: and most likely the conclusion I'd come to would be something like–"Well folks, that's the price we have to pay for genius" or "Well folks, that's the other side of the coin that is a genius mind". And God only knows how true an observation it is. The only iddy-biddy reservation I have is that the progress of a genius–like that of a comet–so often leaves a legacy of profound damage to other people. Parents, husbands and wives, and friends are actually made to suffer excruciating torments. Syd Barrett nearly killed his girlfriend by hitting her head with a mandolin–*that's* the other side of the coin, not the kind of engaging dottiness that is normally put out–"Don't you know Eamonn–that Brendan Behan's a real character".

Beefheart is a genius; the word is properly used to denote the sort of person who can write lines like–

Rather than I wanna hold your hand
I wanna swallow you whole
'n I wanna lick you everywhere it's pink
'n everywhere you think
Whole kit, kaboodle 'n the kitchen sink

and it's no surprise that he has damaged people. Thank Christ the damage hasn't proved irreparable.

The train pulled into Exeter 3 hours out of Paddington. As tiredness was closing in, I abandoned my attempts to examine Beefheart in neo-Freudian terms and got on with reading my guide to Islamic Asia, which incidentally contains this pretty chilling little observation: "A survey by the Consumers' Association in Britain (1972) showed that one out of five responding to the questionnaire on driving their own cars to the Middle East (including Islamic Asia) stated that they had either been physically assaulted or cheated on the road. Frontier guards were little better than highwaymen in some cases, and pretty girls needed constant attention." There's four in my little family–and I was idly wondering where I could clandestinely lay my hands on a rifle, a couple of sidearms, tear gas, a submachine gun, and some grenades when we pulled into Newton Abbot station, and there on the platform to meet me was Bill Shumow and Bill Harkleroad.

I'd first met these fellows in 1972 when I'd gone to a few Beefheart gigs with them, an occasion that had a profound effect on my life (see *Omaha Rainbow* 3's interview with Pete Frame for full details). Bill Shumow was then Beefheart's road manager; by that term I don't mean a roadie, Bill was much, much more than that, really a salaried manager undertaking tasks like equipment and instrument hire, collecting money from promoters, checking that Warner's had put up enough promotional stuff for the albums and blowing reveille in the morning. He was also a really nice geezer, and judged by the purely logistical aspects of journalism, he knocked most 'professional' publicists into a cocked hat–attentive, encouraging, open, and accommodating–a great guy. Bill Harkleroad was the guitarist in the band–and was known then as Zoot Horn Rollo. Bill is about 6ft 10ins tall and weighs about 8 stone. At that time he struck me as being very much under Beefheart's spell. He echoed, almost verbatim Beefheart's judgement on Ry Cooder–"He's digging into the past". And he was a very shy person, wary even of my amateurish enquiries. But, and I should have realised the importance of this event, I'll always remember Bill plucking away at a great big red Gibson, working out a terrific tune–and that's the right word–called something like, I recall, 'California Timber'. And he was doing it with Mark Boston (then known as Rockette Morton) while Beefheart held forth to the assembled journalistic multitude about what an impossible person Frank Zappa was. And yet there were all the composing credits listed as Van Vliet.

A year later the band was over here for another tour, and during a long conversation with Beefheart, he uttered the prophetic words, which time has rendered as hollow as, at one time, they seemed the selfless expression of his esteem–"Shit man, if Bill and Mark left me, I'd follow them".

During that tour I managed to tear myself away from golf to catch a few of the band's gigs–and what magnificent gigs they were! Not even the absence of Beefheart's awesome sax playing could detract from the brilliance of that music. One night–Tuesday, I think–at the Rainbow was staggering. They played their normal set to perfection, and returned for the first encore–'Big Eyed Beans'; but the enthusiasm of the audience literally wouldn't let them leave–this was a genuine heartfelt cry for more, not the contrived clamour you find at most concerts. So the band trooped back, plainly at a bit of a loss as to what to tackle, and ripped straight into 'Steal Softly Thru Snow', 'Hobo Chang Ba' and an instrumental based on 'Japan In A Dishpan'. All played at a furious level of intensity which left the band whacked, and the audience silenced. It was a truly majestic finale; I was still short of breath, with shaking hands several hours later.

The band seemed to have reached a new peak. This was what Ian MacDonald wrote in *NME* and it was typical of the critical reaction. "Playing material from every album except *Strictly Personal*, this version of the Magic Band is the one you've all been waiting for and once the equipment difficulties are straightened out this will be a musical exper-

ience only a nutcase would turn his nose up to. No put-ons, no weirdness–not that there ever were. This is some of the most *natural* music in the world and it's got to be heard."

THEN, IN 1974, came the news that Beefheart and the band had split up. He formed a new band, or rather had a new band foisted on him by his then management–The Di Martino boys, and toured this country. The effort was pretty disastrous. It had always been very hard to assess the contribution of the band, because Beefheart's presence was so dominating, until, that is, one had the chance to see what Beefheart was like without them–and then it became painfully clear that their contribution had been of paramount importance.

Anyway, I didn't hear anything until about two months ago when Bill Shumow's mother rang to say that Bill and the Band would be in England in a week's time, and would I give them a ring–would I? Christ I could hardly wait. Eventually, I established contact and got the story. The band had effectively dispersed around October, leaving Bill and Mark stuck in Northern California working at odd jobs to buy the beans, wondering what to do, and where the money to do it was coming from. Then, like the proverbial fairy godmother Jethro Tull arrived in L.A. to sell out the Forum five nights on the trot, and earn the other supreme accolade that all musicians aspire to–a slagging from the peurile splenetic Nick Kent.

Anyway, during Tull's stay, Mark called at the Regent Hotel in his 1955 Pickup truck to take Ian Anderson out into the desert for a spot of bike riding, and the upshot of it being that Tull offered their support for the making of an album. The Magic Band and Tull had toured together in the South of America doing about fifteen dates in 1970. During this time, a complex web of friendships grew up that as far as I can assess is based on mutual respect, friendship, but perhaps most of all the Tull band's unashamed admiration for the musicians in the Magic Band. In 1972, at Beefheart gigs, it was usual to find a couple of wopping great black motors stacked outside the stage door, which had ferried various members of Tull to the gig. That, in my experience, evinces a degree of support that in this business, bedevilled as it is by awful childish rivalries is bloody great.

Tull are anxious to play down their involvement, but I think everyone who hears the band's new album will feel a special debt of gratitude to them–because not many bands with their financial muscle would use it in such a constructively selfless way. It's part of the drab rhetoric of much of the radical criticism levelled at rich rock musicians, that they never put anything back into the culture or business or movement or whatever, that has made them rich. Well, here is an example of a band who have done exactly that–and my reluctance to upset the benefactors isn't going to deter me from expressing admiration, "Hats off to Tull".

Naturally, the band accepted–their efforts to get the support of the L.A. music business had been plagued by the business' belief that they were irredeemably weird, odd, crazy loonies, hopeless to deal with on a business level, unsaleable on a musical level. What rats most business people are.

So that, briefly, was how I came to be meeting the two Bills at Newton Abbot station. We travelled back to the house they were living in, and I learnt that the recording was going as satisfactorily as could be expected, given that the people manning the studio were showing an alarming tendency to smash anything on four wheels into the nearest hard object, and the band members were possibly being distracted by their comprehensive research into Rough Devon Cider and darts playing.

AS WE ARRIVED Artie and Mark emerged from downstairs, and it wasn't long before reminiscing began. There was, among other things, the topic of, in Artie's memorably terse phrase, "that f**king Elliot". Elliot, as you are probably aware is Elliot Ingber, known in his Magic Band days as Winged Eel Fingerling.

"Jesus, that Elliot," Artie goes on, "he was really weird. I once went round to his apartment, man, and he had every f**kin' heater in the place turned on, he even had the oven on and the door open, and it's the middle of the Californian summer–and he's taking a hot shower–can you believe that? And I walked in, and he gets out of the shower and asks why I'm sweating."

This tale has everyone present in stitches, and Artie only has a chance to add, imitating perfectly Elliot's earnest mien, "Hey Art, you want some seaweed". Collapse of conversation. "No kidding, he used to have these great big discs of seaweed, and as soon as you bit into them, they broke up leaving little bits of the stuff everywhere."

Michelle Shumow added, "His records! In his apartment he only had a bed, a little card table that he ate off, and the rest was just records." Bill explained, "He once shared the apartment with some guy who owned one of the largest collections of pre-1960 records in the world which he moved into the apartment. And then he disappeared, leaving all the records with Elliot, and I think Elliot probably knows as much about post-war black music as anybody in the world; and rockabilly, and pop and Texas music. He's just got thousands of these records, which he listens to all day."

"But he could play, man," Artie resumed, "Bill, did we ever keep that long version of 'Alice In Blunderland'? You should hear that –whew! old Elliot really let go on that."
"No," Bill replied, "Don kept all the tapes."

The mention of Beefheart cast a momentary pall over the gathering, but I thought it might be a propitious time to see if any of the people present could help me solve the Beefheartian paradoxes that had been rolling around in my head earlier in the evening. The response was immediate, like a Greek chorus.
Artie: That thieving arsehole.
Mark: The old fart.
Bill: Oh f**k man, I can't figure him out. He's certainly a great musician–really great–but he treated us pretty badly. I'm just glad we are finally away from him and able to work on our own.

The responses were amplified in subsequent conversation. Artie was definite. "Man, I've worked for two of the worst people in the business–Zappa and that f**kin' Vliet. The only reason I even *thought* of coming over here was because these guys' music is really fine, and the only reason I actually came over was because they gave me some money in advance. I've been f**ked so often and for so long by so many people that I have to be like that about it."

Mark's sentiments were similar, although, being the easy-going amiable fellow that he is, they weren't expressed in nearly as venomous terms. One remark, however, remains in my memory from what he said before we turned in on Friday night, "Well Connor, we're just hoping that this album might be the start of a new career for us."

SATURDAY

A combination of the Spartan bed, Artie snoring in the upper bunk, and all those country noises that seem to the city dweller even noisier than garbage lorries and clapped out sports cars, had me wandering around the house at some unearthly hour, and deciding to set out for a mooch about the place.

The house and outbuildings were beautiful –maintained in the way that only a successful rock musician's income can ensure. The setting was superb–on a south-facing slope of a valley which meandered off towards the coast providing some sublime perspectives of that terribly neat type of English countryside, which I always find so captivating. The recording was taking place in a barn decked out with about a hundred army surplus blankets tacked to the wall. I clouted Artie's drum kit a bit, producing the sort of horrible racket that one would expect from someone who had never come nearer to a set of drums than being struck by one of Keith Moon's wayward sticks. What was a revelation however, was to fiddle about with the marimba–what beautiful instruments they are, and what devastating use Artie was to make of it later in the day. After breakfast–rampant American profligacy –twenty-four eggs between five people?–it was over to the studio to start recording. The track they were putting together on Saturday morning was called 'Road To Morocco'. And I'll say now that this track will be the killer track on the album. To my mind–and I must be one of the few people that can actually hum bits of 'Peon' and 'Alice In Blunderland', this tune–it has no vocals–is part of that great tradition. It has the same beautiful, spare, elusive quality that at a descriptive level, characterises most of the band's work. And at an amateurishly musicological level, it also has the band's trademark of exotic chord changes, outrageous patterns of accents, and also, and this only struck me crouching in the corner of the barn–their masterly use of pauses, not only to envelop the phrases, but also to give the number a real dramatic shape. And it's this latter quality in the band's music that prevents it becoming a king of quasi-jazzy self indulgent ramble. Still, back to the recording session. Most of the morning was taken up with rehearsing the tune with Artie –the drum part is extraordinarily difficult, but by about noon, it was sufficiently together to record. I nipped back to the mobile to hear the number mixed through the monitors. One two . . . one two three four, bang, and they were away. When it was over everyone trooped into the mobile to hear it. Bill listened intently, thought for a moment, and made some comments . . . 'It's a bit quick Artie, and on the fifth beat can you put something a bit more flashy on? . . . cymbal as well . . . no, better still, I'll do a little twiddly bit to give it a bit more body". Back to record and then back to hear it through. This time it's near perfect, but Bill still has some doubts.

"There's some interesting mistakes in that track. We'll keep it, but try the whole thing once more." Off they troop, but the issue is finally decided by Bill, "Let's use the first version, with the mistakes. I'll add another guitar part."

At lunch volunteers were called to man a detail to collect a piano for the afternoon's work. The band had become friendly with some of their neighbours, to whom they had turned after Shumow spent an entire Saturday morning trying to hire one locally. By this time the band's new singer, Sam Galpin had emerged, and he joined in the journey. A local builder lent a lorry, the detail did a lot of grunting, "down-a-bit"-ing, "no Artie I'll take the weight"-ing, the outcome of it all being readiness to start work on the penultimate track which would you believe, was an old Floyd Cramer tune, 'Desperadoes Waitin' For A Train', a version of which is on the latest Linda Ronstadt album; Artie's comment was apposite, "Man, there's no way a woman can sing this song", even if it does imply a difference between men and women.

MOST OF THE AFTERNOON was spent working out the piano part that Sam was to tackle on 'Desperadoes', and since the piano was in the house not the barn, and Bill has his own unique cryptographic style of writing music which requires trying what he's taken down from the record in about six different tunings, it took quite a while, during which I went out into the cow pasture to smack a few eight iron shots here and there. Earlier, one of those weird community of interest things arose when it was revealed that Bill was a keen golfer. So I'd lent him a few of my old clubs and some cut balls to fool around with and they were still lying about when I arrived. We whiled away quite a time marvelling at the pro's on television comparing Weiskopf's elegance with Nicklaus' brutal functionalism . . . but since the only type of bore worse than a golf bore is a car bore–"goes like a snake, it's easy with all that power you've got at your command", or maybe a drug bore–"Wow man, that mescaline we scored last night was really heavy; I needed about four hits of coke before I came down, man, and then a shot of tequilla to start my heart beating again"–I'll stop. But it still strikes me as being noteworthv in a footnotey sort of way that such a diverse collection of ex-sixties freaks as Alice Cooper, Iggy Stooge, Roger Waters, and now Zoot Horn all suffer from serious fantasies about scoring a round under 80.

Finally it was time to record the song. Back into the mobile for a listen and after two try-outs it's right first time. All I can say in a critical sense is "I don't know much about whether it's the Magic Band we all know and love, but I know what I like, and I like this." Sam, who doesn't really talk–it's more like a simmering volcano–put it as succinctly as I could when he said, after hearing the playback, "Shit, we'll all go down to Nashville and clean up–that's what they've been trying to do for f**kin' years" and he was right, the way the band managed to be 'laid back' without toppling over, was remarkable. And unquestionably, the presence of a few songs more obviously locatable within the mainstream of 'rock' styles won't be at all bad for their career and if it upsets a few diehards then too bad.

Just as that take got took, along comes a piano tuner to do his bit, and via the foldback system, as they say in recording circles, the following exchange is heard . . . .
Sam: Oh f**k. What in Hell's this?
Voice offstage: Er sorry, I've come to tune the piano. Is this it?
Sam: Sure is, man.
Bill (in the barn): What's that?
Sam: Says he has to tune the piano.
Voice: Oops, what was that?
Sam: A mike stand. Bill?
Bill: If it's the tuner, tell him to wait.
Sam: You'll have to wait.
Voice: I have to tune the piano. Do you want concert pitch or continental?
Bill: Tell him to wait Sam.
Sam: He's starting. I can't stop him.
Bill: Shit, don't let him touch it. I want it out of tune.
Sam: He says you're to leave it alone for a while.
Voice: But you can't play it if it's out of tune.

Oh yes you can Mr Piano Tuner, and after listening to that take of 'Desperadoes', the unanimous verdict of the assembled critical multitude is that the out-of-tune piano gives the number a good earthy, dirty feel, which should be kept. Yet again, the band troop off to have another try but it's the first version that's kept.

SO BY MID AFTERNOON two numbers had been finished for the day, leaving only a new version of 'Peon', the vocals, and a couple of guitar overdubs to be added, and then the album will be ready to be hustled around the record companies. Artie was leaving on Sunday to meet his in-laws in Manchester for the first time, so the period remaining to him was at a premium. It's decided that Artie will do the marimba parts on Saturday evening and additional percussion tracks on Sunday, but before tackling that task, it's time to play all the tapes to allow some kind of review to take place of what's been accomplished to date.

Thus it was that amongst cups of coffee, tea, Cokes and scrumpy, the huge fat reels were ceremoniously unpacked and *ZigZag*, not the IPC weeklies, but that modest little venture dismissed by the dregs as too uncritical etc, etc, is given the exclusive, sneak PREVIEW of the new album.

But first a personal interlude . . . or rather a ham-fisted, initial attempt to say what rock'n'roll is all about . . . or rather what I think it's all about. Rock'n'roll is all about sensuality. It's about the kind of gut-pleasure that induces sweat glands to start secreting in bits of your body that you didn't even know had sweat glands–wet eyelids?–simply because listening to the music is so exciting that the *body*–not the intellect, nor one's taste or powers of discrimination–but the *body* can't stop reacting. That response gets expression in a multitude of common phrases. "It was magic", "I got off on it", "It turned me on", "It did me in"; and the remarkable lack of invention of the phrases is simply because it's the experience, not any formal qualities in the music that delineate rock 'n' roll. (For a fuller treatment of this theme, see forthcoming interview with Robert Wyatt, 'Towards A Rock Aesthetic'.)

Sitting in that mobile trailer, I went through the whole spectrum of excitement-induced reactions; in the back of my mind, as I'd journeyed down, was a tiny nagging feeling that maybe Beefheart had been the source of all that was great in the old band's music and that what they were putting together in Devon, without him, would prove lifeless and disappointing. A minute into those tapes and these doubts were dispelled completely. This was glorious music made by musicians who for too long had floundered in their old singer's shadow. I managed to jot down the titles, and a few brief notes, but after only a couple of listens, I only really have impressions and it's pretty clear in what direction they flowed.

Highlights for me were a tune called 'Winged Tuskadero', an irresistably jaunty, strutting sort of song featuring Mark on spoken vocals, 'Back On The Pavement' with a nice pizzicato type of picking, and a solo guitar track that Bill wrote, as a love song, called 'Yellow' which features a widely differing set of styles and sound textures interleaved amongst each other. Finally, Bill and Mark have re-recorded 'Peon'; I wouldn't have thought it possible to improve on the version on *Decals*, but they have by the simple and obvious expedient of turning it into (if it wasn't that to start with) a slow lyrical number. They took the amps down to the river and the track has as a kind of sound backdrop, bird calls, rustling trees, and stream noises; it's truly beautiful.

After the tapes finished, Bill enquired as to my reactions. I couldn't conceal my glee, lapsing into gibberings like, "F**kin' great, if you can't start a new career with this under your belt then I'll give up in despair." The only thing I can add to emphasise my feelings is to lapse into Tobleristic imperatives–"Check it out–I guarantee you won't regret it."

AFTER THAT I had to go out and have a few drinks, a natural reaction since I was already feeling totally drunk. I hitched a ride with the car that was taking the piano tuner back to Exeter and stopped off at the local pub. Unprepossessing as these establishments are, they're still so much more welcoming than the usual urban smell parlour, that I was immediately caught up in a bunch of locals playing darts. I was glad that I'd had five pints by the time I heard the bad news that Liverpool FC had been beaten by Middlesborough, virtually guaranteeing Derby the title. It was a sad affair, although the departure of Shankly, Paisley's decision to buy Ray Kennedy, thereby breaking up the Toshack/Keegan partnership which had, after three years, started to look very dangerous, the injury to Phil Thompson all mitigated against their hopes. Still next season, with . . . Hang on. What was that about golf bores, car bores and drug bores? Stick football bores in there as well.

Late Saturday night saw the saga known as 'The Hijack Art Tripp III Episode'. It transpired that whenever there had been a particularly good day's work put in, Artie was wont to commemorate this achievement

with a visit to the local pub, where, since he is a pretty agreeable sort of fellow, he had fallen in with a bunch of locals who were only too delighted to help him continue his celebration on into the night. While this was an unexceptional enough thing for a man of Artie's pedigree to do–he was after all an original Mother of Invention–it had a somewhat deleterious effect on the recording schedule, besides which it necessitated Shumow knocking on countless village doors asking "Is Artie there?", a routine he was beginning to find a little tiresome. I'd already been cautioned against revealing my destination earlier in the evening with the injunction, "Don't let Artie know you're going to the pub". All restraining measures, alas, had proved in vain, and as soon as the marimba parts had been completed, Art had shot off. This boded ill, especially since Bill had decided to re-record a number, 'South Of The Valley', with a different type of drumming, and the prospect of trying to do it with a wasted and hungover Artie Tripp was occasioning formidable wariness.

I was only trying to dispel the gloomy forebodings when I suggested, "Well why don't we set up a search party, and go and rescue him". There was a marked lack of enthusiasm for this idea–the others being anxious not to incur Artie's displeasure, but eventually we set off to spend the next hour surreptitiously peering in through kitchen windows, watching the natives at their innocent pleasures and trying to spot the large, Hawaiian-shirted shape of Art Tripp. The search had to be abandoned, but as we were making our way back to the farmhouse, our prey was located in the very same residence from which the piano had been borrowed. Closer examination revealed that Artie had fallen into a very mellow mood, and was busily nibbling away at a bottle of whiskey and equally busily recounting some of the more amiable moments he'd spent with Zappa and the mudsharks. It was an opportune moment to make our entrance and gently disentangle the errant drummer. But then different, and possibly wiser counsel prevailed. "Look," it was suggested, "he's a grown man; we should respect his wishes." I suspect that all members of the search party were relieved that no physical intervention was necessary, but as we trooped back many a silent prayer was offered to the night sky that they'd have a halfway decent drummer to work with on Sunday.

The night was the sort that summoned up visions of ribbons of moonlight, and highwaymen rap-rap-rapping at stable doors, if I remember my school poetry book alright. Bill Harkelroad wondered aloud about the wisdom of putting 'Peon', a track identified with the Beefheart period, on the new album. "We're trying to get away from that period, but it's a beautiful song and I think we could really add something to it now. And it might get Don a few bucks–because I've heard that he's really hard up." After all the trauma of splitting up, bad-mouthing each other, and both parties having to endure periods of acute adversity–in the middle of the Devon countryside, on a Saturday night, one of the chief protagonists wants to push a bit of the publishing royalties Beefheart's way, because he's broke. It was a testament to decency, a noble note on which to end the day's proceedings.

SUNDAY

The prodigal percussionist's return for breakfast was greeted with sighs of muted relief, a few derisory cracks, and the announcement that his kit awaited his attentions in the barn. The first task was to remake 'South Of The Valley' with a different drum part, and Artie, in spite of his protestations that the tune wasn't worth this extra effort–an aversion stemming one suspected, more from his desire for an easy day's work rather than his aesthetic values–manfully met his obligations. If he can drum like that after a bottle of whiskey, then either he was drinking disguised iced tea, or he's got a spare liver. The new drum part was a real Ringo effort, unfussy but metronomic, the tune itself generating a slow, languid feel–another Nashville job, showing Sam's voice at its mournful best.

A considerable amount of thought was needed for the percussion tracks, since there was no percussion instruments available. Bags of noodles were rattled, and various kitchen implements struck, scraped and banged. The experiments produced some notable innovations, the best–soundwise–being scissors snipping. Unfortunately, to pick up the sound through the mike would have meant Artie holding his breath for the duration. Another possibility, taping the cows eating the grass, a fabulous noise, was also technically unfeasible. The final choices were Coke cans filled with gravel, and a drum with a bag of stones on the top, that was rocked to produce a noise not unlike a very badly functioning Rhythm Master.

During one of the idler periods, Mark asked if I'd like to go out with him and throw a few knives together. My immediate thought was that maybe those L.A. music types were right–the band were a bunch of crazies, but it emerged, thankfully, that this pastime didn't involve me standing by a tree, while Mark did a carnival type routine planting the blades round my torso, but was a perfectly normal competitive activity, akin to darts. In spite of getting a substantial start, Mark easily won, but it's a surprisingly pleasant activity and not that difficult to get the buggers to stick in, once you've learnt to tumble the knife just the once.

OVER LUNCH, they discussed the sort of press coverage they should aim at. I'd volunteered my services as a publicist, since they couldn't afford a professional, and I was fairly sure that there would be considerable interest from a few journalists, but they found this hard to believe; so it was agreed that a press release should be put out, and that I'd follow it up with some phone calls to specific writers, an activity which, mercifully, wasn't needed. Four *ZigZag* writers–Tobler, Briggs, Jerry Gilbert and Al Clark–perform this function for various record companies, and all I can say is I hope they don't go through the torments I went through every time they have to ring someone up, to hustle them into doing an interview–and I didn't even have to do it–just thinking about it was bad enough. Anyway, as you will have seen, there was sufficient interest and several writers wrote some really nice features on the band in the weekly papers.

Further discussions took place around the question of which record companies should be approached, a discussion that revealed some fairly startling insights into the relative importance attached by musicians to the various components of the record company's job. I have no idea whether this kind of information is of interest to *ZigZag* readers, but the one thing everyone present was adamant about was the distribution provided by record companies–not the A & R function nor the financial resources at their command, not the press office, nor whether the company has good TV and radio promotion, but whether records will get to retail outlets quickly, and accurately. Another topic to be broached was finding a suitable keyboard player for a couple of the tracks, and having sorted through the possibilities, getting hold of him and persuading him to do the job. The bloke in this case was John Bundrick, who I last heard of when he was in the final version of Free. Perhaps it's an inaccurate impression, but it seems to me that making an album is really about 80% administration and only 20% music.

Sunday evening, an expedition was made to Dartmoor to visit a pub just down the road from H.M. Nick, and while pints were supped, and feet warmed by the open fire I had a chance to talk to Sam, the new singer. He didn't reveal that he'd been in the Chamos, as emerged later, describing his part career as "twelve years of lounge singing, man–round Vegas, Reno, sometimes the Coast." I wondered what this existence was like because Alex St Claire had also worked on that circuit in between spells in the Magic Band and he'd led me to believe that it was a fairly wild existence–plenty of drinking, a lot of promiscuous sex, a general style based on earning quite a lot of money by playing fairly conventional bar-type music, and spending it in as lawless and uproarious a way as possible. "Yeah man, it is like that, but towards the end, it really got me down. The only way I could get up on the stage was just to get redded out every night, and I was nearly f**king dead. I saw what was going to happen and stopped. I went back to L.A. where I worked on doing demos, until I got this phone call from Bill, and here I am." It couldn't have been as simple as that so I asked for details.

"Well man, in my line of work, you get a hell of a lot of people just ring you up out of the blue with propositions, and they're usually just a f**king joke, touring with some shitheap who had a hit during the war, who is going to work as a clown in a kid's holiday camp and all this work for about a hundred bucks a week, after some arsehold manager has taken his cut and when this guy just rings up and offers me some job with a rock band, I dismissed it. But he kept going on about coming to England, and how we'd get a recording contract, and all this shit, that I just thought it was another one of those scenes. So I said, 'Sure man, sure,' and forgot about it. The next thing is Bill, Mark and Shumow turn up, and give me this same number, and again I'm saying 'Sure man, sure'. And later Shumow rings me up and says could I meet him at the Passport Office, and then I started to wonder if maybe they weren't serious. So I turn up and get a passport, and a f**kin' ticket to England, and I still wasn't really sure, but what I said was, 'Look, if I come with you, I'll have to have some money to pay the rent and buy the groceries while I'm away.' And the next f**kin' day there's a cheque which doesn't bounce, so it was for real. The next thing I'm sitting in a f**kin' jet on my way to England."

From further conversation it emerged that Sam's qualifications for filling the vocalist's shot were admirable–because in reality he has none. He asked me "What was this Beefheart like, man?" And when I'd picked myself up off the floor I replied, "Haven't you heard the records?"

"No, man, they won't let me listen to them, because they just want me to sing it all the way I feel I should."

"Well," I added lamely, not wanting to destroy the artfully constructed edifice of his ignorance, "He was a sort of far-out R'n'B singer and he was also really good on stage."

Sam grinned slightly an posed another floorer of a question: "What goes on at these rock concerts? I've never been to one."

"What, you've never been to a rock concert and you're going to start a career as a rock singer?"

"That's right, man," he smiled wryly. "I have an old friend who works in the Edgar Winter Band, and they were playing in Vegas, and I went along, but when I got out of the car, the car park was full of these terrible wasted kids, man, and they were doing drugs all over the place, and collapsing even before they got into the auditorium. I walked towards the entrance and it was just too heavy, man, so I left, and that's the nearest I've ever got."

As I said, no qualifications at all, which means that when Sam gets up on stage he'll be free of all the neo-Cockeresque physicals which together with the obligatory bare chest, seem to constitute the rock singer's equipment these days. Sam will just sing, which on the evidence of the recordings I heard, he'll do excellently.

Sam, however, wasn't to be in a position to share my knowledge and went on to further discuss his role within the band.

"I'm getting a bit nervous about doing the vocals, man. I've been here for two weeks not doing any work at all, just stalking round like a caged lion, and I have to start tomorrow."

I ought to add that the imminence of doing the vocal tracks was clearly emphasised by the rigourous discipline to which he was subjecting himself–regular gargling with a fearful liquor called something like 'Johnny Hurricane Extra Special Bourbon' and chain-smoking (with inhaling) bloody great fat cigars. "It just loosens my voice up, man."

Since he'd raised the subject, I had a chance to divest myself of one of the weekend's deepest revelations–the emergence of Bill Harkleroad as a formidable musical intelligence, which seems to me now like the way (I remember being told this in countless children's books) a bear comes out of hibernation, stretches up and measures the growth that has taken place during the winter.

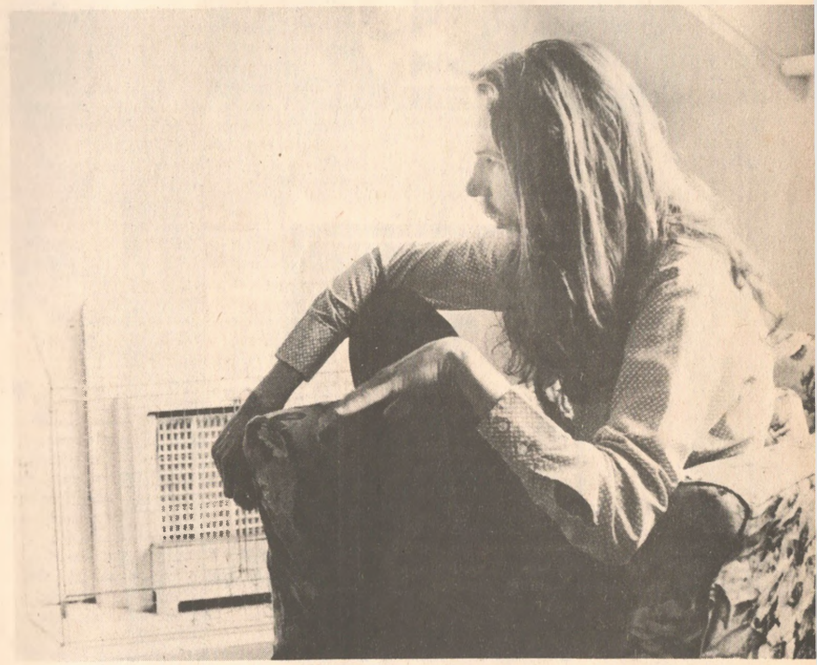
"Shit, Sam, just trust Bill," I offered.

"Yeah," he gave that wry smile again, "I don't suppose I have any choice."

"No kidding, I think he's a really talented guy, you must know that. You've seen him at work on the production–you must know that he's got a really huge musical ability."

"Yeah, I just hope you're right, man, I really f**kin' do."

With that prayer Sam went back to priming his vocal chords, and I had a game of darts, reflecting during the match that with Sam's voice, and his undeniable ability to get on with people, and cope with situations in an adult fashion, he shouldn't have too much trouble with his new career.



IN SPITE OF one of the band's local acquaintance's insistence on driving back from the pub at an idiotic speed through the country lanes–which produced the following exchange, of positively dialectical proportions:

"Don' worry Connor, I can seay the 'heartlites'." "Listen, Ray you bloody ratbag, slow down", we got back to the farmhouse in one piece. Artie was going back to London on Sunday and after wishing him godspeed, together with some more prosaic wishes about seeing him in the autumn when the band tour, it was off to bed.

MONDAY

The vocals were due to start on Monday, but problems with the recording equipment meant a postponement. Bill and Mark went off for a walk, Shumow and I decided to set off for London ahead of schedule, and Sam heroically decided to keep his vocal chords in shape with Johnny Hurricane.

The drive back to London was uneventful except for being introduced to the privileges one can acquire in a motorway cafe if you blurt out 'Transport'. It was a bit of a reproach to my vain ideas of being English that after thirteen years in this sceptered isle, it took an American, with about four month's residency behind him, to point out that everything costs about half the price if you're a lorry driver.

I don't really know how to end this little article except just to record three observations

Observation The First
I went to see Beefheart at the Albert Hall in 1972 with a chum, for whom I have the greatest admiration and affection. As we walked back through the park he said, "I was feeling really disillusioned about the rock music scene, but that concert has gone a long way to restoring my faith." I have many really poisoning reservations about the music business, but spending a weekend with that group of musicians, and hearing the music that they have made, has gone a long way to restoring my faith. The chum's name by the way was Pete Frame.

Observation The Second
Shumow told me, as we drove back, with a slightly wistful, bewildered tone, "Man, do you know that only eight weeks ago, Bill was going to give up music? Isn't it strange, and now we're here making an album, just like none of that shit had ever taken place?" A-f**kin'-men to that.

Observation The Third
I, personally, can't think of a more gratifying way to spend a weekend, than to stay with musicians who have made, are making, and will continue to make music that is incontrovertibly *good* music; to spend a weekend with people who are incontrovertibly *good* people; and then to come back to London and be able to write about it for *ZigZag*.

☐ **CONNOR McKNIGHT**

PHOTOS-Penny Smith.

Ten Years Of THE STRAWBS

Part Two 1970-1975

THE STRAWBS were the first band to really find commercial success from within a folk environment. Dave Cousins was always clever in his adaptations of traditional themes but by the middle of 1970 it was Rick Wakeman who was causing most of the attention. After only a few months in the band he was picking up rave press reviews, having dominated the Queen Elizabeth Hall concert which was taped for the *Antiques And Curios* album. Added to that, his boyish looks and long blonde hair gave him an automatically strong visual personality onstage, while offstage some say he was even able to outdrink Cousins.

It was good to see such a beast as the Strawbs so magnificently incongruous, making a name for themselves. Wakeman sitting amidst an organ-piano-harpsichord set-up, Cousins barefoot playing banjo or dulcimer and the balding Hud finding plenty of space to add a little Eastern promise, doubling on sitar and hand drums.

"Rick was clearly the pop find of 1970 and *Antiques And Curios* I think was quite daring," Cousins remarked.

"It was also the first album to be released in America but it really didn't sell very well. Basically though the biggest asset of Rick's was that he took a lot of the pressure off my shoulders because I was getting fed up being general dog's body and singer. We always worked very well together and I know he liked my songs."

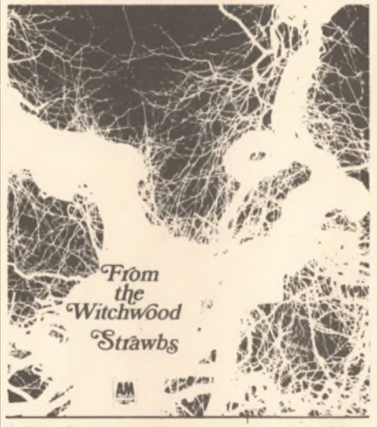
The end of 1970 closed another chapter for the band–it had been their most eventful year yet and by February of the following year they were set for further experimentation as Wakeman took his mellotron and synthesiser into Air Studios for the *From The Witchwood* sessions.

One useless piece of information for those who treasure such things: the final part of the 'Antique Suite' was completed in a van which Dave Cousins was sharing with Roy Harper. Both musicians were writing, and simultaneously Harper put the finishing touches to his epic 'Me And My Woman'–talk about a conducive writing environment.

It was never easy to apply Rick's classical upbringing to songs basically written on acoustic guitar and in some cases–'Song Of A Sad Little Girl' for instance–he was forced to play runs since chording was out of the question. But Cousins maintained that this would probably be the final line-up of the Strawbs–he doubted that the line-up could change again.

In the meantime he continued to write his socio-political songs, and the sequel to 'Martin Luther King's Dream' which had become his pride and joy well before the start of the next album was 'The Hangman And The Papist' (another stirring 'conscience' ballad over a basic folk guitar strum).

IN JANUARY 1971 the band returned to the Q.E. Hall to appear with an orchestra from the Royal College of Music and a full choir, and the following month they started work on the toughest album they have yet recorded. It was a situation where everything went wrong and ultimately proved to be such a mental strain on Cousins that he collapsed at a gig shortly after the sessions had been completed, and was advised to rest.



"The whole thing was a great strain. It had always been relatively easy to make albums in the past but this time it was different. Half the ideas hadn't been worked out properly and there were a lot of conflicting ideas in any case.

"It was a wonder we got down to recording any songs at all and it's an experience I never want to go through again."

It was at Luton that Cousins walked offstage and duly collapsed. "I couldn't face the audience–everything had got on top of me. I did the first number, then went into the second without a word. After four numbers I did a song on my own, then apologised to the audience and walked off. I just sat backstage–I don't know what I was thinking–and even when I came back on at the end I couldn't bear to face the audience."

From The Witchwood was not a notable album–the songs were by and large OK and there were a few notables like 'Witchwood', 'Glimpse Of Heaven' and 'In Amongst The Roses' but it was sadly lacking in continuity. The electronics of Wakeman, use of the full drum kit for the first time by Hud, compromising use of non-Cousins songs for the first time all added to the confusion and all the while it looked as though Rick Wakeman would soon be moving to bigger and better things.

"I knew we could keep Rick for as long as we were able to keep him musically interested–after a year we knew we weren't progressing at the same rate as he was," remarked Cousins.

"Around the time of *Witchwood* the others started to come up with songs. John had always written, then Hud started but Rick was appaling–in fact we still have a Wakeman track in the can from the *Witchwood* time. But there again it had so many different keys and time signatures and chords that it must have been something of a forerunner although there was no room for it on the album.

"I still had definite ideas about what I liked and although Hud's songs were alright–I really liked 'Canon Dale'–John's song 'Thirty Days' I really hated. I hated it because it bore no resemblance to what the Strawbs were all about and that's been my argument all along. I don't think anyone should impose a totally alien song on a certain style and that's why the new band is writing so much better. With John and Hud it was a case of Hud's style being very spiritual whilst John was the master of the catchy tune."

Cousins was eventually to come to blows in a difference of songwriting policy and the outcome of that you know about. There was no room for the Hudson-Ford 'hit'-making machine in the Strawbs; Cousins maintains that he didn't necessarily want success to be on his terms (and later took the decision to put out 'Part Of The Union'), but in the general confusion John and Hud quit, taking a whole bunch of stockpiled material with them. The immediate impact that Hudson-Ford made with 'Pick Up The Pieces' not only did justice to their talents but also their decision to quit.

For Dave Cousins wouldn't have approved of the kind of songs that graced their first album appearing in the Strawbs' repertoire although it should be added that within the friendly precincts of Arnakarta Music, 35 Homer Street, W1 there is little bad blood these days and the combined forces of the Strawbs and Hudson-Ford have been known to partake of mutual sport in the pub across the road, the squash courts in Kensington and on the football pitches at Wormwood Scrubs, all of which has done very little to reduce Dave Cousins' waistline.

One final thought on the *Witchwood* album before passing on. Both 'The Hangman And The Papist' and 'Sheep' were amongst the heaviest songs Dave Cousins had written–the first, prompted by the worsening situation in Ireland and the second employing a different polemic–using loud distorted sound as the expletive. "I think I write songs to deliberately shock people sometimes," he said. "And writing those really gave me the creeps at the time."

TOWARDS THE END of 1971 moves were being made to issue the old Sandy and the Strawbs album with Dave Cousins' co-operation although it was a couple of years later before it finally surfaced. The reason for the delay I'm not quite sure about although Dave muttered at the time that Sandy "shivered with horror" when the suggestion was put to her.

In any event the band appeared to have restored equilibrium by the turn of the year and *Grave New World* was issued by A&M in January 1972. If there was any indication that the Strawbs were destined to become big and famous then this was it. The title track 'New World', which survives in the

Strawbs

Strawbs' set to this day, was an epic in the classic Cousins mould and 'Benedictus, another long surviving and highly compelling Strawbs song looked as though it might become a hit single. On the other hand a John Ford pop song 'Heavy Disguise', with its obvious overtones, seemed indicative of the kind of song that Dave Cousins *would* find a place for in the band, particularly since if ever a concept album was made by the Strawbs then it was *Grave New World*. Tony Hooper helped out with the lyrics (to Dave Cousins' relief), it was superbly arranged, Sgt Pepper style, and later found a new lease of life when Hudson-Ford took to the road.

Grave New World extended the use and the range of the keyboard set-up – but in the meantime the inevitable had happened and Rick Wakeman had moved on to bigger and better things with Yes. His replacement was a quiet Welshman called Blue Weaver who had worked consistently with Andy Fairweather-Low, first in Amen Corner and later in Fairweather. He was quickly drafted into the band in October and went straight into Morgan Studios to start recording. Three months later the album had been released with a beautifully illustrated sleeve and booklet to explicate the latest group theme.

Left To right; Chas Cronk, John Hawken, Dave Cousins, Dave Lambert, Rod Coombes

Blue Weaver appeared to have little difficulty filling the seat vacated by Wakeman – in fact he revelled in a freedom he had never been given in previous bands. At the time it had been said that everything coincided nicely Wakeman quitting the Strawbs, Weaver quitting Fairweather and then bumping into Cousins, by chance, a couple of weeks later; but it is nearer the truth to say Cousins and Weaver were complete strangers (Blue may even have answered an ad to get the job) and he certainly knew nothing about the Strawbs music although he did recall hearing 'Hangman And The Papist' on Top Of The Pops and noted that it was strikingly different from the mainstream of events.

"We'd been expecting Rick to leave for months and quite honestly I was glad when he went because it was a relief . . . you know we'd kept up this pretence that everything had been great but really it wasn't and in the end it was a great weight off my shoulders," Cousins recalled.

IT WAS at this point that the Strawbs' plans really began to take off. They were still awaiting their first American tour but in the meantime Dave was busy thinking about his solo album and the possibility of writing a play based around 'The Hangman And The Papist' which, as far as I know, was well underway but never saw the light of day.

At the same time the band's new expansion on record was matched by a lavish stage show which incorporated extravagant lighting, a ballet interpretation of 'Flower And The Young Man', and Tony Crearer, and old friend of Dave Cousins from Arts Lab days, doing mime. "The idea was to have the songs interpreted visually so that the senses would be stimulated musically and also visually with the aid of films, ballet and mime."

By 1972 it was significant that whilst the Strawbs' music had changed radically, Dave Cousins was still employing the same songwriting technique. Whilst other commentators of the middle and late sixties had given up their cause Cousins seemed to thrive on making weighty statements as though to justify a 'once protest singer always a protest singer' line. He was fastidiously conscious of his lyrics and still borrowed heavily from his folk background to come up with the goods every time. "If *From The Witchwood* was folk-rock then *Grave New World* is rock-folk," he quipped at the time of that album's release. "As far as I'm concerned I am still writing the same kind of songs as I was five years ago. I hope that lyrically and melodically they're improving but there's still that thread you can link between them with 'Jesus', 'New World', 'Martin Luther King' and 'Hangman And The Papist'.

"Don't forget that all the people who were writing protest songs are growing up with families and kids that they care for, and this comes out in Dylan's writing, you know when he writes 'a couple of little kids to call me pa' this must be what it's all about. You can't carry on for ever being a guy who's living in a basement flat in the middle of the city. I think most of the people who were writing protest songs were writing about the environment they found themselves in and as they grow older so their environment changes as does their attitude.

"Generally speaking I write from personal experience – I find it very difficult to write songs that don't affect me or mean something to me personally, I wish I could because I come up with plenty of pretty tunes which would do well as pop songs if the lyrics matched – but my lyrics have become a bit intense."

At around the same time Cousins said he could see no end to the life of the Strawbs. "I pride myself for finding good people – we've always had excellent musicians and picked them before they've made a name for themselves. We found Sandy, Clare Deniz was an amazing cellist, we had Rick Wakeman, then came Hud and John and now Blue Weaver who is exceptional, but he's been hiding under a pop group light for too long just as a backing musician. I think that the band we have now is the ultimate line-up of the group I said that about a year ago but then the balance tilted; as far as I'm concerned this is the best band the Strawbs has had."

WITH ALL problems temporarily resolved and the band riding the crest of a wave, Dave Cousins found himself slipping more and more frequently down to his new country retreat in Devon to write songs in comparative solitude. Finally, it seemed, with Strawbs' recording plans temporarily shelved, he would find the time to prepare the much forecasted solo album for which he promised some re-makes of old numbers (a promise he failed to fulfil).

Dave Cousins' solo album was called *Two Weeks Last Summer* – a testament to the two weeks in June 1972 that were used for the recording of the project.

It was a realistic departure for Dave Cousins. He was able to get out of London and away from the Strawbs, although he did call on members past and future, for in the studio line-up were Rick Wakeman, and an old friend from Hounslow called Dave 'Lampoon' Lambert who had been the prime figure in a South London band called Fire and later went on to join the King-Earl Boogie Band.

By the time the album was released in October 1972 Lambert had become a fully fledged member of the band, adding some much needed zest in terms of personality. He jammed with the band at the Chelmsford Folk Festival at the end of the summer, and duly moved in to replace Tony Hooper for whom, it seemed, there was less and less scope as time progressed.

Tony claimed at the time that he wanted to be a producer, besides which the Strawbs had far outgrown his original vision of the music and thus his role had become more perfunctory than practical. Even his occasional little nostalgic cameos like 'Ah Me Ah My' added little to the new-look Strawbs and in any case Cousins and Lambert had more in common since they possessed latent superstar tendencies and they were definitely on the look out for a bit of belated glory.

"Dave joined before *Lay Down* and I think that the fact we suddenly became very flash was inspired by him," explained Cousins.

In any event that October was equally good and bad for Dave Cousins. *Lay Down* started to take off and Dave's solo album became neglected in the process. On the outside everything looked great – fronted by Dave Lambert sporting a newly acquired streaked wave (very much in vogue at the time) and obviously having the time of his life, the band went into the studios to try and complete the much postponed *Bursting At The Seams*.

Maybe the frustration had all been a bit too much for Dave Cousins because the tension grew and the growing unrest between the Strawbs' leader and Hudson and Ford was exacerbated by no small degree. "It came down to a clash between 'Burn Baby Burn' which they wanted to do and 'Down By The Sea', one of my songs and that seemed to epitomise what the band was all about at the time. I had to force them to do 'Stormy Down' and 'Down By The Sea' to establish a continuity of sound before going ahead with 'Part Of The Union'."

In the end it was 'Part Of The Union' that came out as the follow-up single, and whilst Cousins has no bad feelings about the song itself he complains that the timing for such a non-typical follow-up was a little off-beam.

This led, inevitably enough, to a total rift in the band by the summer of '73 and oddly enough it was similar in the way it happened to the split within Lindisfarne, inspired as it was by a not very successful American tour.

"*Bursting At The Seams* had been a traumatic experience and at the end of that American tour we just fell apart," Cousins recalled. Initially he was going to start completely from scratch whilst Hudson, Ford, Lambert and Weaver wanted to keep the name, The Strawbs. In the final analysis Lambert wanted to remain with Dave Cousins (in much the same way as Ray Jackson changed his mind from joining Jack the Lad, finally agreeing to support Alan Hull in the new Lindisfarne).

"The result of all this was that poor old Blue got left out in the cold and this led to another chapter of unfortunate experiences," went on Dave, not at all perturbed by being asked to summon forth some of the less desirable episodes of the past.

In the press Blue Weaver started to bad mouth the Strawbs – whether with or without justice I don't know – claiming that the band had possessed his equipment and that he was unable to get it back. The Strawbs' management responded by putting out statements to the contrary and all in all the issue was given far more editorial space than such a slanging match deserved. The Cousins story is this: "The group bought his equipment as is usually the case – expensive things like a mellotron and even Dave's guitar at the time was owned by the group. Blue certainly didn't own his."

THUS ANOTHER ERA reached an unfortunate end and to many people the Hudson-Ford split meant the end of the Strawbs, period. In spite of the fine music the band have subsequently produced, that long lay-off at the back of end of summer '73 took its toll and when the band struck out again they had to create momentum all over again.

"In a way I think there's regret on both sides that we had to break up – it was a stupid thing to do really. I think in the end it was the frustration that sparked it off. The solo album got neglected but one of the songs on it, 'Blue Angel' is among the best songs I've written and I wanted to do that song on stage but the others didn't."

Another little known but highly significant fact is that whilst Dave Cousins was away in Oxford recording his solo album, Hud and Ford went into the studios with Blue Weaver and Dave Lambert to record 'Part Of The Union' which they had already written, with a view to putting it out in their own name. "But when it came to doing *Bursting At The Seams* we were really short of material, and although we had never considered 'Part Of The Union' to be Strawbs material, in the end we had to put it on that album because we were so hard up for songs," explained Hud at the time. "We completely re-recorded it and it came out quite a bit different from our own version."

Back home in Devon, Dave Cousins systematically set about re-forming the Strawbs that summer and one by one the pieces fell into place. John Hawken was the perfect replacement for Blue Weaver, reluctant at first to break loose from his tight formal background on the grounds that he was too old for such behaviour. Hawken had done a bunch of fine things over the years in Nashville Teens, Renaissance (remember that first fine Island album?) and latterly with Vinegar Joe, which had been something of a harrowing experience. Rod Coombes, who generally tends to let his drums do the talking, was of equally fine pedigree, and his recent past, too, had been a trifle ill-fated as Stealers Wheel never got off the ground as a live band. The only real unknown was Chas Cronk, coming in on a recommendation from Rick Wakeman who claimed that he was "the finest bass player who wasn't actually playing in a band". To qualify that statement, Cronk had been doing a lot of session work, which is how he came to meet up with Wakeman.

Down in Devon that summer there was a calm optimism as the band set about regular rehearsing in the local village hall. Characteristically, Cousins claimed it was the best-ever Strawbs, and with such a line-up of musicians around him he had every reason to hope that the band would scale unprecedented heights in the autumn of '73.

BY SEPTEMBER they were ready to hit the road again and a European tour was booked out as a forerunner to an English tour which they hoped would consolidate their position with British audiences.

I wondered, as I boarded the plane bound for the vast Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, whether the Strawbs were making quite the right move. Were they that big in Holland that they could fill the famous Concertgebouw in spite of such a bad year?

The answer was an emphatic 'no'. The hall was three parts empty, support band Esperanto, despite their cosmopolitan line-up and fairly opulent array of instruments, were unable to rouse that dodgy old Amsterdam audience who were at their ultra-coolest that night. The Strawbs took the stage decidedly shakily, they looked under-rehearsed and they had already found that 'Shine On Silver Sun' was not going to emulate the success of the the previous two singles.

It was far too ambitious a task, and the embryonic newcomers to the Strawbs' repertory of songs were never really given a chance and only the hit singles and 'New World' were able to evoke much response.

Back in England the situation was growing grimmer by the moment. The expected tour failed to materialise and instead the band decided to try an old successful formula. They split to the Rosenberg Studios in Copenhagen to start work on *Hero And Heroine* with Tom Allom producing.

Songs like 'Shine On Silver Sun', 'Out In The Cold' and 'Lay A Little Light On Me', were beginning to make their mark onstage as was Dave Lambert's appealing little 'Just Love'. The result was an album rich in texture and sophistication, their best since *Grave New World*.

Early in 1974 the band toured America and A&M released the album Stateside to coincide. In April 1974 it finally saw the light of day over here but it did little to springboard the band back into favour with the British public. The problem was that they hadn't been seen by a British audience in over a year and when they finally went on the road in April 1974 it was noticeable that they weren't the crowd-pulling act they had been at one stage although their stage show had improved tenfold.

I remember seeing the band at Leicester with Colin Scot supporting. I can't recall seeing any permutation of the Strawbs perform better, but without a hit single or a British appearance for over a year the odds were heavily stacked against them. Even so, the chilling, eerie 'Out In The Cold'/'Round And Round' and 'New World' cut through and the people that had bothered to come along were treated to a rare feast of fine music that night.

The year from May 1974-May 1975 can be glossed over fairly quickly. Another new album came along at the turn of the year and Dave Cousins announced that the band wouldn't be playing England whatsoever in 1975. Clare Deniz made a brief return to help out on the *Ghosts* sessions and the title track was as majestic a pastiche as Cousins has yet used to announce his latest album.

IN THE SUMMER of '74 an album called *Strawbs By Choice* was put out by A&M as though to remind folks that whilst the band were temporarily in a rut there had indeed been many great moments over the years. The album was a splendid compilation album from Dave Cousins representing not so much the Strawbs' greatest hits but highlighting the significance of the changes that the band had undergone over the years. Starting with 'The Man Who Called Himself Jesus' and closing with 'Lay A Little Light On Me' the album also contained 'Forever', 'Benedictus', 'Here It Comes' and 'Lay Down'.

In the meantime the band concentrated largely on building up their following in the States and they are currently in the middle of their sixth tour in just three years. All members of the band share a fervent belief that success will come in America, where they have not had the sort of fickleness of audiences brought about by a couple of hit records to contend with. Instead they reckon that they'll make it slowly on their own terms and on their own merits, and in October they'll start work on their seventh tour.

In the meantime they plan to record their next album in the summer with what Dave Cousins calls "a new lightness of writing" on his part.

But before moving on entirely to present and future events, a word about *Ghosts*. It contains acres of fine music which clearly represents the new co-operative Strawbs. Cousins is happy with the musical composition of John Hawken, Dave Lambert and Chas Cronk but as such maybe some of the impetus has gone out of his own writing. *Ghosts* is a fine trilogy but for all the fine tapestry of sound the band create the title track remains unmatched.

Cousins predicts a change this summer when the Strawbs start work on the next album. "The material will be good. I have more of an open mind towards other material these days but I still have a yardstick to what I think is a good Strawbs song. You know, in the past there's always been an epic – a song that features mellotron heavily. But my songs have changed incredibly of late, they've become a good deal lighter in feel and have come together in most peculiar ways. Like I'll come up with a really startling phrase and then just let my mind wander off.

Continued on page 42

The Story Of Jesse Colin Young And The Youngbloods

I wouldn't vouch for its veracity, but this is a good story; while he was studying journalism at university, somebody gave Jesse Colin Young a T-Bone Walker album. The effect was shattering.

"I went to the Dean's office and said 'Dean, they call it stormy Monday–but Tuesday's just as bad. You'll never know what that means to me! I'm quitting school'."

THE SOUL OF A CITY BOY

When the same word is used to characterise a bra, the Thames by moonlight, and the writings of Saint Exupery, it may not mean much. The word is 'romantic' . . . one of the most punished cliches in English. To punish it further, I shall apply it to Jesse Colin Young, who seems to me one of the likeliest rock world contenders to wear such an adjective/noun without discomfort.

Born Perry Miller in Manhattan on 22nd November 1941. Raised in Queens and Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Educated at Philips Andover Academy, Ohio State, and New York University. Intended to become a writer. Dropped out in 1963 to pursue a career in folk music. Assumed the name Jesse Colin Young. Played the New York/New England coffee house/club circuit as "a middle of the road ethnic folk singer".

After a few weeks on the scene, our man had the good fortune to be spotted by pianist/composer Bobby Scott at the Gaslight. This led directly to his first album, *Soul Of A City Boy*, produced by Scott in one 4-hour session at New York's A&R Studios, and released by Capitol almost ten years after its initial appearance in May 1964. It's not bad.

Youngblood, a second solo album ("which was worse" says Mr Young) featuring John Sebastian on harmonica and Pete Childs on dobro, came out on Mercury in May 1965. Despite the slight beefing-up, it was old hat; the times were a-changing. Folk rock had struck. The Byrds were happening, the Lovin' Spoonful was happening, the Trols were happening (locally–in Cambridge–if not nationally), and trendbender Dylan had plugged in. What was a poor boy to do?

Should he side with the purists and pray that electric folk was no more than a passing ship in the night? Or should he form a band and roll with the flow? Initially, he went half way.

Though living on the Lower East Side of New York with various Fugs and Holy Modal Rounders, he made frequent forays to Massachusetts–and it was during one of these visits, June 23rd to July 4th 1965, that he decided to form a duo with an established Cambridge folkie called Jerry Corbitt.

To quote the overblown hyperbole of an old press release, "They discovered that Jerry's deep, ragtime vocal style blended perfectly with Jesse's fluid, mellow voice".

Last year, when he came over to play the Crosby Stills Wembley gig, Jesse ran down the details for me. "I was getting tired of playing by myself; in 2 or 3 years, I had gone as far as I wanted as a solo, and I was interested in scoping out a little. I used to stay at Jerry's house when I was in the area, and we became good friends; we'd sit around, picking and singing harmonies–and we decided to gig together.

"After a while, we had put pick-ups on our guitars and we were getting into electrified folk–and almost immediately, the limitations manifested themselves. We dug what we were doing, but it was plainly obvious that we needed a drummer, a bass-player and maybe a keyboard player . . . we were looking for wider canvasses and different textures. Playing by yourself is almost like pen and ink, or like Japanese bamboo painting . . . simplicity and clarity is the whole thing; the fewest lines to suggest a form.

"That was alright for a while, but then we wanted to paint these great abstract paintings –with big splashes of blue and yellow. We got a band together . . . we had to."

Youngbloods 1970. L-R; Banana, Joe Bauer, Jesse Colin Young.

DOWN IN NEW YORK CITY

JESSE COLIN YOUNG and the Jerry Corbitt Trio begat Jesse Colin Young and the Lonely Knights begat the Truck Farm (for one gig only) begat Jesse Colin Young and the Youngbloods begat, ultimately, the Youngbloods, who crept out of weeks of rehearsal to make their debut at the Gaslight in January 1966.

When their original bassplayer had proved unsatisfactory, Jesse switched to bass. Jerry played rhythm guitar, Joe Bauer played drums, and Banana played piano and lead guitar.

Banana, nee Lowell Levinger, was leading the aforementioned Trols, a development of the original Banana and the Bunch, but split the group to join Jesse. "He's a good musician, and he's also got a very strong practical sense; he could see that our group was going to happen, whereas his was going nowhere fast."

Joe Bauer, who'd come to New York to seek work as a jazz drummer, found himself in a rather less suitable position–working as a night watchman in a chocolate factory. After shuttling about the East Coast for a couple of years, he joined the Youngbloods (who were then based in Boston), later admitting that he'd originally joined to eat. His traditional jazzer's prejudice against rock was eroded however, and he adapted his attitude and style with gusto.

The group's initial recordings were conducted by Mercury Records who still owned the unexpired term of Jesse's contract–but the tracks, five in total, remained in the can until June 1970, when they appeared on an album called *Two Trips*. This was hastily withdrawn when the Youngbloods slapped a fifty thousand dollar suit on Mercury for false representation, though hundreds of them subsequently turned up in deletion racks. Due to the present rarity of the work, however, I'll refrain from subjecting it to detailed Toblerian analysis.

In order to make the big time, to follow the Spoonful's stairway to the stars, they moved to New York, to Jesse's apartment near the Bowery, and signed with Herb Gart, who also managed a string of folkies including Buffy Sainte Marie, Don Maclean and Patrick Sky.

Their initial gigs were folk haunts like the Gaslight and Gerde's, but Gart landed them a residency at the Cafe Au Go Go, where they worked up their repertoire and attempted to seduce offers from visiting record company big wigs.

"We played there for five months, during which we had to fight like crazy for rehearsal time. You couldn't rehearse in your apartment in New York and rehearsal facilities were either non-existent or expensive, so we'd fight the Blues Project or whoever–because we all needed time to practise. We'd often play for six hours during the day, then play our regular sets in the evening . . . but we were getting real tight. Paul Rothchild from Elektra wanted to sign and produce us, but we went with the wrong label . . . RCA. They heard the ragtime influence in the stuff Jerry was singing–like 'Grizzly Bear'–and they must have thought we were another Spoonful. Once we were signed, however, they were scratching their heads and wondering where we were at . . . . I mean, we weren't Eddie Arnold or Elvis Presley, so they were a bit stumped, you know."

Felix Pappalardi, already a Greenwich Village stalwart, was selected to produce their first album for RCA.

Jesse: "What happened was this: we tried Felix out when we were looking for a bass player. He was ideal, of course, but he decided not to join–and Harvey Brooks, who was the other top notcher in New York turned the gig down too . . . which is why I ended up on bass. Anyway, we'd met and were quite friendly with Felix, who was just getting into production after being basically

a session man and accompanist.

"Our contract stipulated that we nominate our own producer, and we chose Felix, thinking it would be a good match. As it turned out, our relationship eventually deteriorated, but at the outset, we were well matched; he was very much into our music and style and roots, and he was at the same learning stage as us. We all wanted to prove ourselves; we were hungry and ready to go . . ."

In fact, the first album (*The Youngbloods*, subsequently re-released as *Get Together*) took over two and a half months to complete and cost RCA a fortune—though by today's standards, it was not an unreasonable amount of time to spend.

"We rushed back to New York, spent a month finishing the album, and as soon as it was in the can we moved to California, lock stock and barrel . . . that would be around the fall of 1967, by which time *Get Together* was a hit out on the coast."

The second album once again amply reflected their eclecticism and versatility, but any sparkle was subdued and tense; instead of rinsing out like the Spoonful, they seemed to be holding back, playing in muted tones rather than letting it rock. The restraint of the lead instruments is largely responsible, but the studio situation, combined with their anxiety to get the hell out of New York, were obviously contributing factors.

The Youngbloods at the time of break up in the Spring of 1972. Left to right; Joe Bauer, Michael Kane, Jesse Colin Young, Banana.

"We'd been working on the tunes for about a year—and we wanted to get them down as well as humanly possible . . . we wanted a good album, and I think we got one. The difficulties arose because we'd never been through the process before, and we got hung up by the technicalities of the studio—like how to preclude the ringing of the snare drum, getting rid of buzzes in the amps, changing over speakers, all those kind of trivial things which seem to eat into a session."

The album sold reasonably, despite an appalling sleeve, and a single, 'Grizzly Bear', became a regional hit in various parts of the country. Promotional tours were arranged and they slowly gigged their way across to San Francisco, where they played to ecstatic audiences.

Their reception on the coast, compared with New York's tepid and blasé audiences, just freaked them—and their romance with the area was strengthened by their being able to stay with Joe's brother on a farm in Marin County. It was light years away from the habitual horror of emerging from the Lower East Side slums each morning, but there were contracts to fulfil and they returned to New York to continue their residency at the Cafe Au Go Go and to start work on a second album, *Earth Music*.

Recording was interrupted by a second cross country tour, and this time the lure of the Pacific was too overwhelming.

"We weren't too happy with the way Felix had conducted the sessions; I think he was getting into Cream at that stage and he had to rush off—so we decided to produce ourselves. I guess you could attribute most of the drawbacks to our inexperience."

UP IN CALIFORNIA

"SAN FRANCISCO was a complete turnaround—a great big beautiful scene. New York could be characterised by brash discotheques which played non-stop Stones tracks, whereas San Francisco had these roomy ballrooms and a preference for live music, bands who'd just go on and blow away. We felt at home immediately."

Elephant Mountain, their third and last RCA album, was rehearsed in San Francisco and recorded in Hollywood—and the change is marked. Gone is the tension and urgency, that trite edge which marred their potential, and instead the Youngbloods display and new found maturity, a relaxed assurance on an album which, six years later, still shows no sign of growing old.

"It's strange that you should say that: when it first came out, it got a luke warm porridge review in *Rolling Stone* . . . but now people are beginning to rave about it. Some people are regarding it as a lost classic and are raving about it. The thing about that album was that we weren't trying to hit the audience in the face so they were gasping for breath; we were aiming at a settled, steady record—and only now is it starting to grow on a lot of people who tended to dismiss it back in '69."

Jerry Corbitt had "kinda freaked out" during the recording of *Elephant Mountain* and left the group after contributing a harmony vocal to one tune, some rhythm guitar and "a guitar lick" on 'Quicksand' and the group decided to continue as a trio. He went solo.

The other big change was their break with RCA, who subsequently got maximum mileage from the 35 tracks which comprised the three albums. They re-released the first album as well as putting out three compilations! Including a double album!

Over here in rainy grey London, only the *Best Of* compilation and *Elephant Mountain* were released, the latter being subjected to the most excruciatingly inept advertising. The record company, only discovering the "underground audience" in Autumn 1969, had their agency design an advertisement to attract "the hippies". Lumped together with albums by the devastatingly unsuccessful Grapefruit and Andromeda, the wording revealed that "a short *trip* to your record dealer could really *turn you on*. These albums are really going *high*—care to join them?" I think we should give an Academy Award to the bright spark who devised that codswallop.

Entrenching themselves into the Marin County laid-back lifestyle of isolation, dope, relaxation and recording studios in every back yard, the group began to cut down its travelling, restricting gigs to their half of California as much as possible.

In the meantime, they signed with Warners who, in a mad burst of generosity, gave them their own label. So as well as Youngbloods albums, Warners agreed to press, distribute and promote any master tapes they were given . . . a move which can't have been too rewarding in terms of financial gain.

"We wanted complete artistic freedom all the way round—and, lo and behold, they gave it to us. So we started the Racoon label without really realising the responsibilities which are consonant with complete freedom; it took a while to get those together. Meanwhile, we went zooming off into a lot of obscure corners."

The first two Warner/Racoon albums were live recordings: *Rock Festival* (Racoon 1) was recorded in California between March and July 1970 and was released in October 1970, and *Ride The Wind* (Racoon 4) which had been recorded in New York back in November 1969, was put out in August 1971. (Racoon having no separate label identity in Europe, the records came out on Warners over here.)

These two albums are so laid-back, they need scaffolding to lift them up—but they are pleasant enough and contain one or two almost-classic tracks like 'On Beautiful Lake Spennard' and 'The Dolphin', though by restricting themselves to a trio, they denude the sound of any verve or jaggedness. All is mellow, smooth and rolling easy. (Lifeless and dull, some might say.)

Jesse isn't too keen on the recorded evi-

Continued on page 43

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Kevin Coyne

Matching Head And Feet
Virgin (a likely story) V2033

READERS WHO have survived from the Golden Age of *ZigZag* will probably know that I'm a bit partial to the outpourings of Mr Coyne. However, since he has become what we can parenthetically call 'A Star', I haven't seen him very much. Not, in fact, since his first Virgin album was lobbed on to the market. On the other hand, if I were a star, I wouldn't want to see me very often, as Groucho Marx once nearly remarked. The point being that I'm unsure whether Kevin is really out of his box this time, or is playing his injured role so well that he's totally convincing and convinced. Still, let me quote to you what I wrote down as I listened to this new album for the second time. The first time, I had a cassette of it, and no lyric sheet, which was a mistake. Believe me, if you want to even have the *faintest* idea of what it's all about, you need the lyric sheet.

'Saviour'. A highly repetitive song, which could be a spoof on gospel type singing. The vocal becomes a little out of control during what is described as the 'middle', and the ending is interminable. Retrospectively, a very bad choice for side one, track one.

'Lucy'. Or 'Little Lucy'? Much more straightforward than the previous, and really boogies on the chorus. Better.

'Lonely Lovers'. Changes as used on 'Lonesome Town', and great guitar parts by Gordon Smith. This is one of Kevin's great songs–"You got your siamese cat, and that's fat, and that's that" runs the chorus. The customary bitterness shows.

'Sunday Morning Sunrise'. Slower, but vaguely happier. A sad love song, with an ace chorus. Is it the cry of a man whose wife has just left him, or is that over-presumptuous? Nevertheless, a stand out track, like the one before.

'Rock'n'Roll Hymn'. A sort of 'It Will Stand' copy, which is not done straight enough for its own good. Harmonica a la '7 Brides For 7 Brothers', and slightly disturbing string parts which seem to have escaped from a Mike Oldfield session. Who let 'em in? Shortage of balls is the problem. Sounds like a Palais Band trying to rock. Is Kevin getting as old as the people in the song?

'Mrs Hooley Go Home'. Odd song, very likely a personal reminiscence, but then perhaps most of these are. Peculiar scat singing matches strangeness of song.

'It's Not Me'. A looney 'Charlie Brown' song. Session men brass parts are noticeable. Not especially special. Nowadays, Kevin can say "You swine", and it hasn't got any weight. You should have heard him before . . . .

'Turpentine'. The first time listener to Kevin, having previously heard of his mental hospital connections, might be forgiven for thinking that he was an inmate, rather than a member of the staff. A good example of what I mean is this track. If I hadn't met him, and didn't think of him in affectionate terms, this would make me less than eager to make his acquaintance.

'Tulip'. Immediately sounds good, and continues similarly. Not terribly certain what it's all about, but it's interesting and sort of gripping.

'One Fine Day'. Perhaps similar sentiments to 'Sunday Morning Sunrise' (his, not mine). Refer back to the great 'Marlene' just before the end. OK.

To sum up–Gordon Smith on slide guitar is consistently good, and it's a shame that he's no longer in the band. Instrumentally, everything on this record is always very good, if sometimes a little lifeless a la the singer surrounded by session men. N.B. Gordon Smith is a notable exception. No-one, even those like me who profess to be on friendly terms with Kevin, is safe from a verbal swipe. I'll bet that song about the dog on *M Razorblade* wasn't totally unconnected with me. Sometimes, I naturally think that Kevin's sense of what's right and wrong is a little over developed. The final paragraph says that whatever I think about this record, and I don't think it's his best, that being the U.S. version of 'Strange Locomotion' which includes 'The Stride' and 'Lillian', Kevin's records are about the only thing on the Virgin label which I can listen to without a sense of duty creeping in. I don't think he wants to please me particularly, mind you, but he's been a lot closer to it before . . . .

☐ **JOHN TOBLER**, Lieutenant in the 'Ban Principal Edwards' League.

Danny O'Keefe

So Long Harry Truman
Atlantic SD18125 (Import)

AT THE VERY LEAST, I'm intrigued by this bloke. A quick historical bit seems to be the answer, because it's very difficult to encapsulate all the vague feelings and thoughts I have about Danny, and this record in particular, which is his fourth solo album. His previous albums–first *Danny O' Keefe* on Cotillion, backed variously by either the Muscle Shoals crew of Hinton, Johnson, Beckett and Hood, or an odd pick up bunch including Doug Hastings of Springfield and Rhinoceros fame, and Chris Ethridge. Released in 1971. Second, *O'Keefe* on Signpost, made in Memphis with some Nashville men like Reggie Young and Bobby Emmons, and the unlikely addition of Eddie and David Brigati (the former was in the sometime young Rascals). Third, *Breezy Stories* on Atlantic, made in New York in 1973 with the help of Donny Hathaway, Pretty Purdie, Hugh McCracken, Dr John, David Bromberg and a lot of other names. Fourth, this one, made in L.A. and Seattle (!), with all the Eagles, Linda Ronstadt, Larry Knechtel, Andrew Gold (see Ronstadt), Jim Fielder (see Hastings), Sneeky Pete (see Ethridge), Gary Mallaber (see Van Morrison etc), John Boylan (see Rick Nelson), John Guerin, Richard Greene and David Grisman, and even David Lindley.

You will surely see that Danny O'Keefe has used just about every star session man that there is in America, as well as a few people who are stars in their own right. Therefore the music that he purveys is of a certain known quality in its performance, to the extent that the artist himself, who is a good guitarist, is frequently found *not* playing guitar on tracks where he reckons somebody else could do better. He gets points for that. Then the songs. This fellow has written three songs which he seems especially keen on, as they each appear twice over the four albums. Two of them, originally on the first album, and done by the Muscle Shoals gang, are reprised on the fourth album, 'Steel Guitar' this time played by Frey, Meisner, Henley and Lindley, and 'Covered Wagon' by Knechtel, Fielder, Henley, Mallaber, O'Keefe and a lady named Joyce Everson. It should not be difficult for the regular reader to imagine the contrast.

A quick few thoughts about the individual tracks–'So Long Harry Truman' is the second song in a month which concerns that political gent, the other being by Chicago. 'Quits' is a beautifully sad song and one of my four favourites from the record. 'Rainbow Girl' is a lovely idea with a lousy tune. 'Delta Queen' is just accompanied by Roger Kellaway's piano, and is a sort of "hear them shuffling along", Uncle Tom, type song, which mentions the word Calliope, which was interestingly enough the name of O'Keefe's group before he went solo (album on Buddah, 1968). 'The Kid/The Last Days' is an intriguing musical Western set in Mexico, where the sung and spoken words don't match the lyric sheet. End of side one.

'Covered Wagon', obviously an earlier song, comes as a bit of a shock in its contrasting simplicity, and has a nice bit of guitar. 'It's Been A Good Day' is about the most Californian song I've ever heard. Just super relaxing, difficult to relate to in an

RECORDS

English April and all that, but fabulous and another fave. As are the next two–'Fiddler's Jamboree' inevitably features the great R Greene, and is another of those Black and White Minstrel oriented songs, while 'Steel Guitar' is dedicated to country singing lady Barbara Mandrell, and has some amusing trad jazz licks in it. 'Hard Times' is a brooding and unhappy track which you can't ignore.

At sorting-it-out time, we have the following. Danny O'Keefe seems interesting lyrically to the ear of this beholder, but I couldn't be held responsible if you don't agree. His tunes verge from good through to bad through to totally forgettable/imperceptible. I like him, but not to distraction.

The question is, what is it all about? Rarely, if ever, have I felt so confused, not only about the recorded matter, but about the man. If there's anybody out there who can help me piece it all together, I'd appreciate it. Seemingly, there's not much to read on the subject, so a little explanation would gain a little appreciation.

☐ **CONFUSED OF KNAPHILL**

Be-Bop Deluxe

Futurama
Harvest SHSP 4045

IF YOU'RE STILL searching for a band capable of combining hard rock with haunting melodies and intelligent lyrics, then maybe Be-Bop Deluxe is the answer. Since they were formed in late '72 they have been through a number of personnel changes, finally arriving at their present line-up of founder member and song-writer Bill Nelson on guitar and vocals, Simon Fox on drums, Charlie Tumahai on bass, and keyboard player Simon Clarke, who joined the band shortly after this album was finished. *Futurama* is Be-Bop's second album, although the first with their present line-up, and besides containing some of the most exciting rock music you're likely to hear, demonstrates perfectly the ability of Bill Nelson to write lyrics which are sincere, poetic and at times humorous, without being too clever or self-indulgent. The lyrics however, are only of secondary importance to the music which is the first thing to leave any sort of lasting impression, largely thanks once again, to Nelson whose abilities as a guitarist become quite clear from the first cut onwards. The production was handled by Roy Thomas Baker, best known for his work with Queen, and the album was recorded at Rockfield studios in January of this year.

'Stage Whispers', a lively rocker about the superficiality of performers' stage images, sets the album off at an energetic pace, followed by a mellower and sadder song, 'Love With The Madman'. The next track, 'Maid In Heaven', is a pure rock'n'roll masterpiece–fairly simple and straightforward but charged with an irresistible force urging you to get up and dance, or whatever it is you do to such records. The free style of Nelson's guitar playing bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Hendrix in places, as he wails and tumbles this way through a couple of minutes of enjoyable and energetic music. The opening two lines provide us with a glimpse of Nelson's humour–"She's a maid in heaven/He's a knight on the tiles"–and this tendency to juggle with words is repeated elsewhere on the album with lines like, "I'll silver and steel you away to my island . . ." from 'Between The Worlds'.

A song in praise of Jean Cocteau, not surprisingly entitled 'Jean Cocteau', provides the album with its most melodic and restful cut, with some beautiful floating acoustic guitar and echoing vocals. Praise of a different kind, this time of physical ecstasy, is expressed in 'Swan Song', at times violent, at others revealing moments of beauty, Nelson's guitar providing the soft and hard textures while the orgasmic frenzy of physical love is expressed in such lines as "With our bodies on fire and our heads in a spin,/We pressed close to the moment,/We were siamese twins in ecstasy . . . ."

Hopefully, after an album as good as this, the name Be-Bop Deluxe will soon be on the tongues of all lovers of good music. Bill Nelson has all the necessary qualifications for becoming a cult hero and he plays guitar like a madman, so it may not be too long before their name becomes universally synonymous with that of good rock music of the '70's.

☐ **TREVOR GARDINER**

John Prine

Common Sense
Atlantic K50137

AN INTERESTING phenomenon is John Prine. Two years ago it seemed as though nothing would halt his progress. He was the most fashionable new songwriter to arrive in New York since the great man from Hibbing, Minn himself and was promptly patronised by said gentleman who frequently turned up at gigs to cop an earful of early greats like 'Sam Stone'.

Alas Prine went the way of all worthies who are hailed rightly or wrongly as the new Dylan and joins luminaries like Loudon Wainwright, Bruce Springsteen and Elliot Murphey in an unlikely society of writers who are destined for very little in the way of reward.

Nor can we expect too much from Prine's oppo from Chicago, Steve Goodman, whose career temporarily seems to be confined to playing acoustic guitar on John Prine albums "by courtesy of Asylum Records". Al Bunetta what are you up to?

Goodman lives in Prine's shadow while Anka, the man who discovered them, cops the performer's glory. Bit of a turn up for the books when you recall how great SG and JP worked together at the Cambridge Folk Festival two years back and the way in which Elton and Bernie sat awe-struck in front of the Speakeasy stage when Atlantic threw a reception for Prine on his first visit.

What went wrong? Both the *John Prine* and *Diamonds In The Rough* albums were great testaments and *Sweet Revenge* had its moments of magic. Now, listening to the latest album *Common Sense* I think I'd rather leave it to Dylan, Kristofferson and Elton to champion John Prine's career for if they can't get ears to listen then I'm damned sure this review won't do much to convince people either.

Steve Cropper has produced this time around, and of course there's a slight change of environment, the setting having shifted from Nashville to Memphis and L.A. The result is a nice blend of hot Memphis rhythm men and neat L.A. harmony singers . . . there's even a duet with Bonnie Raitt which is straight out of the Gram Parsons/Emmylou Harris bag.

Maybe John Prine has now resigned himself to being just a good country and western singer because this album doesn't really stray beyond being a good country and western album. Quite how a guy out of Chicago can pick up so many Southern traits is a little baffling, for his delivery is dry, his humour paradoxical and his lyrics and song titles reading like an A-Z of the Grand Ole Opry. Still who knows–maybe 'Wedding Day In Funeralville' and 'He Was In Heaven Before He Died' and 'Come Back To Us Barbara Lewis Hare Krishna Beauregard' will get written into the annals one day. And there's at least another three songs that deserve to for Prine has the unique gift of making the most awkward lyrics run ballad style into the simplest of three chord C&W fireworks.

And that's clever.

☐ **JERRY GILBERT**

RECORDS

SNEAKERS
Flamin Groovies

Sneakers
Skydog MLP FGG-003 (Re-release)

BACK IN the heady days of the late sixties when it seemed that for several precious months San Francisco became the rock music centre of the world, any band that hailed from that fabled city was treated with the utmost respect. Some obviously deserved it of course, but many, the majority in fact, didn't. But in what seemed at the time like one mad rush every major record company swooped in to sign their very own San Francisco band, or rather those that conformed to the vague conception of the 'San Francisco Sound'. When the dust settled, all the major bands had landed themselves with contracts . . . all but one that is, the Flamin Groovies. The Groovies were a San Francisco band but they didn't sound like it. While everybody else was taking three hours to say what they had to say, the Groovies were taking three minutes, and their medium was good old fashioned rock 'n' roll. And nobody wanted them. But undetered by the general lack of interest, the Groovies went ahead and formed their own label, Snazz Records, and made their own ten inch album for the few people who were smart enough to recognise the beginnings of a great band. Only 2,000 copies were pressed at the time (1968), and for years it's become the most sought-after collector's item from that period. Up until now that is, because the admirably enterprising Skydog Records have just re-released it.

There are seven tracks altogether, all roughly recorded in mono, and all packed with energy and excitement that you'd expect from a bunch of stoned American punks reared on rock 'n' roll, good-timey jug-band music, and British R & B.

Side one blasts off with 'Golden Clouds', a fulminating explosion of raw, frantic rock 'n' roll designed to rip your head apart, followed by 'The Slide' – four minutes of complex jamming that represents the only indication of their West Coast roots, loosely structured as it is in the style that so many Frisco bands employed ad infinitum. The first side closes with a very short throwaway instrumental curiously titled 'Prelude in A Flat to Afternoon of a Pud'. Rock 'n' roll commences side two in the form of 'I'm Drowning' with a lot of typical flash guitar work from Cyril Jordan. Their affection at the time for jug-band/rag-time light-hearted music is shown up in the next cut, 'Babes In The Sky', and the last one, 'My Yada', and in between is squeezed a fond glance towards 50's vocal harmony rock 'n' roll in the form of 'Love Time'.

I don't know what you think about the Groovies, but they're one of my favourite American bands of all time, and I'm really glad to have this record at long last. Of course their line-up has changed a bit since the early days and the band that made 'Sneakers' was Cyril Jordan (guitar), Roy Loney (vocals), George Alexander (bass), Tim Lynch (rhythm guitar), and Danny Mihm (drums). Incidentally, Roy Loney wrote all the compositions and he left the band after the 'Teenage Head' album'. I wonder what he's doing now?

☐ Andy Childs

Other Releases

TWO SIDES OF THE MOON–Keith Moon (Polydor 2442 134)
SOUTHERN NIGHTS–Allen Toussaint (Warners K54021)
TIME AND TIDE–Greenslade (Warners K56126)
I'LL PLAY FOR YOU–Seals and Crofts (Warners K56116)
HEARTS–America (Warner K56115)
SQUIRE–Alan Hull (Warners K56121)
SOUTHBOUND–Hoyt Axton (A & M AMLH 64510)
WILL O' THE WISP–Leon Russell (A & M AMLS 68309)
TOM CAT–Tom Scott & The L.A. Express (Ode 77029)
CHICAGO VIII–Chicago (CBS 69130)
FLASH FEARLESS VERSUS THE ZORG WOMEN PARTS 5 & 6–Various (Chrysalis CHR 1081)
YOU CAN'T GET OFF WITH YOUR SHOES ON–Barefoot Jerry (Monument MNT 80695)
IMAGES–David Bowie (Deram 3017/8)
TOGETHER IN CONCERT–Pter Seeger & Arlo Guthrie (Reprise K64023)
LEGEND OF ROCK–Duane Eddy (London DLL W 5003/4).
DARK SALOON–Rabbit (Island ILPS 9289)
COMMANDER CODY AND HIS LOST PLANET AIRMEN (Warners K56108)
THE VIEW FROM THE TOP–Cat Stevens (Deram DPA 3019/20)
SONGBIRD–Jesse Colin Young (Warners K56110)
BACHMAN-TURNER-BACHMAN AS BRAVE BELT (Reprise K54036)
GOIN' HOME–Ten Years After (Chrysalis CHR 1077)
COLD ON THE SHOULDER–Gordon Lightfoot (Reprise K54033)
ANDY NOGGER–Kraan (Gull GULP 1009)
LET THERE BE MUSIC–Orleans (Asylum SYL 9023)
JUDITH–Judy Collins (Elektra K52019)
GREATEST HITS OF 10CC–10CC (UK UKAL 1012)
BYE-BYE PRETTY BABY–Susan Webb (Anchor ANCL 2006)
DIAMOND HEAD–Phil Mauzauera (Island ILPS 9315)
THE BALLAD OF LUCY JORDAN–Dr. Hook & The Medicine Show (CBS 80787)
TALES FROM THE BLUE COCOONS–The Neutrons (United Artists UAG 29726)
PUT IT WHERE YOU WANT IT–The Average White Band (MCA MCF 2705)
GUITAR MAN–Duane Eddy (GTO GTLP 002 (2321 102))
USA–King Crimson (Island ILPS 9316)
AT HIS BEST–Dave Mason (ABC ABCL 5122)
FROM THE BEGINNING/TWELVE GREAT PERFORMANCE–Melanie (ABC ABCL 5124)
16 GREAT PERFORMANCES–Ike & Tina Turner (ABC ABCL 5123)
I NEED SOME MONEY–Eddie Harris (Atlantic K50127)
DISCOTHEQUE–Herbie Mann (Atlantic K50128)
HIJACK–Arnon Duul II (Atlantic K50136)
LIVE AT THE OPERA HOUSE–The Pointer Sisters (ABC ABCL 608)
FOX–Fox (GTO GTLP 001 (2321 101))
JANNE SCHAFFER'S SECOND LP (Vertigo 6360 118)
SNAKEHIPS ETCETERA–Nucleus (Vertigo 6360 119)
SOUTHERN COMFORT–The Crusaders (ABC ABCD 607)
PANIC–Zzebra (Polydor 2383 326)
TOMORROW BELONGS TO ME–The Sensational Alex Harvey Band (Vertigo 9102 003)
BLACK SHIP–Sadistic Mika Band (Harvest SHSP 4043)
LOVERS–Mickey Newbury (Elektra K52017)
HEADSTONE–Headstone (EMI EMC 3037)
RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX–Bloodstone (Decca SKL 5202)
GORILLA–James Taylor (Warners K56137)
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK FROM 'JANIS'–Janis Joplin (CBS 88115)
STARS–Cher (Warners K56111)
ANVIL CHORUS–The Kids (Atlantic K50143)
SPECIAL DELIVERY–Polly Brown (GTO GTLP 003 (2321 103))
COME AND GET YOUR REDBONE–THE BEST OF REDBONE (Epic EPC 22003)
BLUE SKY NIGHT THUNDER–Michael Murphey (Epic EPC 80741)
WITH A GIRL LIKE YOU–The Troggs (Silverline DJML 047)
AL'S BIG DEAL: UNCLAIMED FREIGHT–An Al Kooper Anthology (CBS 88093)
OSCAR–Oscar (BUK BULP 2001)

Strawbs

"For instance I've gone back to dulcimer, come up with a couple of old dulcimer tunes and written meandering lyrics to go with a very Eastern style tune."

But still he says the band won't appear in England this year unless they do a Festival Hall concert around Christmas.

It seems that in the UK at least their days are numbered.

☐ JERRY GILBERT

Country Rock

and here featuring titles by Nelson, Jennings, Shaver, J.J. Cale and Lee Clayton among others; and *The Ramblin' Man*, an all Jennings production laying heavily into the rock beats with Jennings' clear-cut vocal work leading all the way. Jennings is certainly deserving of his own piece within these pages and, hopefully, we can return to him at a later date. (But, before finally departing, note the name Mirriam Eddy, the former Mrs Duane Eddy and now Waylon Jennings' lovely lady. In her own right she performs as Jesse Colter and, back in 1970, had a choice album out on RCA titled *A Country Star Is Born*. It was one of those cases of a release but no real promotion, and it got lost. Now Ms Colter has forsaken Mirriam Eddy as her writing name and, five years later, has her follow-up album–*I'm Jesse Colter*–out on Capitol. Produced by Messrs Mansfield and Jennings, it shows the lady off as a beautifully stylistic vocalist, a fine musician (piano) and an outstanding writer. *Make sure that this album doesn't sink into oblivion.*)

ONE THING leads to another and we've already come across the name Tompall Glaser whilst discussing the (partial) recording career of Waylon Jennings. Don't let the past soft tones and countrified, easy listening harmonies of Tompall and the Glaser Brothers disturb your thoughts: Tompall's now into funky country rock and already has three MGM albums to back the statement, *Charlie* and *Take The Singer With The Song*. His most recent release, just out, is, simply, *Tompall* and is another album that wholly entails the material of Shel Silverstein. At times, because of the full studio comprising of musicians, singers and friends, it reminded me of the work of Dr Hook And The Medicine Show and guarantees fun straight out because Silverstein is the mind behind the lyrics. Glaser, himself, is into the recording business–he produced *Tompall*, along with Silverstein, at the Glaser Studios–and has lent a hand with innumerable worthwhile releases. For instance he lent a hand in the first Barnaby release by Doyle Holly–a former Buck Owens' Buckaroo who's now making it as a solo singer, but generally underestimated by those outside normal country circles–which includes the hit single recording of Shel Silverstein's 'Queen Of The Silver Dollar'. This album, and the second, *Just Another Cowboy Song*, were both produced by Ken Mansfield and, by now, it's becoming rapidly clear that Nashville has its own cliques of creative talents. Before we become too involved we'll move away in a different direction . . . .

Let's have a brief stopover with the ladies, always providing plenty of favourable appeal, and come back to one or two names mentioned earlier in this piece or, previously in last month's *ZigZag*. If anyone has really shaken up the country music music business during the past couple of years, then all honours must rest with Tanya Tucker. Now a veteran at sixteen years, she kicked off her recording career on Columbia with 'Delta Dawn' and, at the age of a mere thirteen, laid down the version that's left everyone else standing at the starting post. She then followed on with titles that included 'Blood Red And Goin' Down', 'What's Your Mama's Name' and the aforementioned 'Would You Lie With Me'. (Grab yourself a copy of *Greatest Hits* for all the biggies in one bag, or, better still, a copy of each of her three albums. The titles are *Delta Down, What's Your Mama's Name* and *Would You Lay With Me (In A Field Of Stone)*; sorry for the repetition but I'll guarantee it'll lead to a really memorable experience.) What's even more astonishing is the concept behind the recordings: Tanya Tucker, aided by her producer Billy Sherrill and a voice that gives no indication of her age, has engineered sexual permissiveness to the forefront of country music. Perhaps she didn't do it single-handedly but her recordings bring about an awareness that didn't appear to be around before. And it paid off; Tanya Tucker is a success in every sense of the word . . . front cover of *Rolling Stone* (plus a lengthy feature); photography and comments in *Time*; a shattering stage routine which includes take-offs of Presley; and the pick of the new material. In other words she's already a superstar. Now signed with MCA, her debut release is aiming straight at both the pop and country markets: time will tell how she makes out under the new regime.

ANOTHER LADY who broke over to both markets was Sammi Smith who, back in 1971, notched up the million selling 'Help Me Make It Through The Night' and helped put Kristofferson in the position that he now holds. You just have to listen to this version–*the original*–and you'll realise that you've been short changed by the versions that did make the British charts. We've already mentioned her shattering version of 'Girl In New Orleans' earlier and, for all beginners, I can't really do any better than recommend the Pye release of *The Best Of Sammi Smith*. (It's a different compilation to the US release and contains more tracks.) Other delights to be found on this album are 'The Weight', Newbury's 'Here Comes The Rain Baby', Silverstein's 'For The Kids' and a haunting version of her own original 'Willie'. Britain hasn't yet picked up on Sammi Smith and the only regular air plays (apart from the country progs) appear to have stemmed from Charlie Gillett's 'Honky Tonk' (Radio London). That's another injustice, for her husky styling, backed by the heavier accompaniments and occasional strings, deserves to be enjoyed by far more than just the country aficionados. And, talking about injustices, it would be just that if I finished without a mention of Melba Montgomery. (Or is that just a spot of self-indulgence?) Possessing a rich Southern voice, she's been pretty well entrenched in country–on the recording front–since the early sixties but it wasn't until she moved over to Elektra a couple of years back that she started to make the transition. Now she mingles the straighter Nashville product with material from the pens of writers such as Sorrells Pickard, David Allan Coe and Linda Hargrove as well as numbers from her own considerable writing output. Strangely enough the song that really broke over to the pop buyers in the States–'No Charge'–was full of basic country sentimentality. On this side of the Atlantic 'Don't Let The Good Times Fool You', together with an album of the same name, didn't make it (yet) but who knows what can happen in the future? The record had regular air plays and there's a tour coming up in the autumn.

SO THAT'S IT and before anyone starts putting pen to paper and forwarding the complaints, *I know that I've left a hell of a lot of names out*. To present some sort of apology, there's Johnny Cash who appears to come up with a fresh project linked with every new album; Tammy Wynette, at last breaking over, who has already gained a considerable underground following through press coverage in certain publications and films like *Five Easy Pieces*; Jerry Reed, a masterful musician–originally a session man–who now covers all fields; Earl Scruggs, formerly with Bill Monroe and Lester Flatt, now mixing the rock beats with bluegrass; Johnny Paycheck, an artist with considerable vocal range, lingering on the heavier side of the Nashville sound; Joe Stampley and Freddy Weller, who both keep their rock'n'roll past active in their recordings; and . . . and . . . .

As *ZigZag* has moved to title this feature, this is only the beginner's guide to country rock and, 9,000 words later, we've covered the outer fringes. I'll leave it at that, hope that you get the point that there is more to country than meets the eye (or, rather, ear) and look forward to meeting up again the second time around!

☐ TONY BYWORTH

Youngbloods

dence of their days as a three-piece. "I felt *Rock Festival* was a mediocre album. I thought we could make a better record, but we'd been signed to Warners for a year and the other guys were pressuring to get an album out . . . . I sort of became a minority in my own band. I was out-voted, and the record came out–really against my wishes. When we first made *Ride The Wind* and I heard the tapes, I thought it was pretty good–but when it eventually came out two years later, I didn't think much of it."

Many hardcore Youngblooders that I know, think that the essence of the group's loose jamming, easy flowing style is caught perfectly on these albums, and that they constitute the most representational documents of their career.

"That's certainly how we sounded on gigs during that period, but I'm not sure that it comes across on record . . . mind you, I was carefully avoiding doing any of the mixes on those records . . . there were a lot of ego problems around that time. Our shows had developed into long two- or three-hour sets; spread out and rambling, not particularly powerful, but with a few peaks. We'd play some rock'n'roll, then we'd do 45 minutes of bluegrass and country, then some acoustic things, some instrumental jazz things, back to rock, and then some old Youngbloods favourites.

"We were promised a European tour in our contract with Warners, and we almost came to support a Faces tour, but our set had evolved in such a way that we simply couldn't do support gigs. When we started, we had a 39-minute set of 3 minute tunes, but by this time we did 2½ hours average–and nobody wanted that for a support gig.

Youngbloods

"On the other hand, our Californian audiences were into long sets; they didn't want all flash and big explosions on stage, they wanted to reach some kind of euphoric state and enjoy being together.

"When we moved to San Francisco in 1967, we gave up our stage suits and guests for hit singles, and we just concentrated on playing exactly how we wanted—which is why *Elephant Mountain* came out so nicely. Eventually though, I got a little frustrated by being confined to bass; I wanted to swing with the drummer and get back to a full-time guitar role . . . so we decided to bring in a bass player, which would allow me to do that."

BACK TO FOUR

IN SPRING 1971, along came Michael Kane to play bass, and he appears on the final pair of albums: *Good And Dusty* (December 1971) and *High On A Ridgetop* (December 1972) (neither released here).

These see a reversion to chunkier, rhythmic rock and trace the direction the Youngbloods were heading before they broke up, shortly after recording *Ridgetop* in Spring 1972. Between them, the 23 tracks on the albums can be broken down as follows:

Versions of late fifties hit singles:	35%
Versions of folk and blues classics:	30%
Contemporary songs by other writers:	17·5%
Original material by the band:	17·5%

Extended piano-dominated jamming had been superseded by short, structured songs. I liked them fine. Jesse obviously did, but with reservations.

"I got to the point where I didn't want to make any albums I wasn't proud of—so I realised, I had to be back on my own."

By this time, his first solo album, *Together*, had just been released and rather than tour with the Youngbloods, Jesse put together his own backing band and hit the road with them—leaving the three remaining constituents to plod into oblivion as Banana and the Bunch.

Jesse: "As Soon as I'd done that first solo album for Warners, I realised that the Youngbloods were finished . . . it was so much more fun, so much easier."

A rather gloomy epitaph for a legend of 6½ years and 7 albums.

☐ **SANKEY PHILLIPS**

Next issue: Solos, Racoons, Discographies, Family trees, Trivia, Memorabilia, Fax, Info, Maps, Fragments, and all that jazz.

Pure Prairie League

back to Aurora which is where the ranch was. Get to bed at 3, 4 in the morning, get up, drive back in to the studio, another eighteen hours, it was a killer, it was really a hard album, spent a lot of time in the studio, and we came out with something we were pleased with. I mean really pleased with! We knew we had changed direction. We thought we had done something a little bit different, and everybody that we played it for loved it. Said it was really well done, the music was great. Ironically, it sold less than the first album. Got great reviews again but just didn't take off. First single that we released was 'Early Morning Riser' which was a unanimous vote by everybody, including Craig, and then we went with 'Call Me, Tell Me'. Didn't make it either. That was it. But a few people never gave up their belief in it. Mick Ronson was kind enough to cut 'Angel No.9' on his last solo album and does it live every gig. I think that, along with Craig's songs being recorded, and the band working without Craig, got them to this point.

ZZ: When did Craig actually leave?

BR: Well he never actually left. He tried to play with them and there were management problems, there were personal problems, and it is still really an unresolved problem. Craig and I have sat back and let RCA do this whole number with the new band, because Craig's going to make it anyway. That's really my attitude. We don't want to hurt them. There may be differences of opinion and so on and so forth, but collectively they all make great music together, and maybe one day they will do again. So I really don't know what's going to happen. You see, Craig's problem thing at the hospital is over this August, and then he's free to do whatever he wants to do. But I've got off the album . . . I'll get back to the album for you. It's easier for me to give you a track breakdown on this one because it's so much closer.

'Jazzman' is all Craig. He does all the vocals, lead, back-up, plays all the guitars. 'Angel No.9' is Craig on guitar, George on rhythm guitar. Great track, cut it live a number of times, and finally decided to go with this version. Al's on steel. You can't really hear him though. They used to do it great live. It's about Craig's problems with the Draft keeping him tied down and things like that. 'Leave My Heart Alone', one of the best songs George ever wrote. Great jam at the end with Craig on lead guitar, it's George and Craig on acoustics. Excellent song. Dianne Brooks, a really great back-up singer in Toronto did the back-up vocals for us. 'Early Morning Riser', again, Craig's lament. He writes beautiful songs, great lyrics; a lot of overdubs on 'Riser'. George came up with that great banjo sounding part in the middle section there, playing that on his Strat. 'Falling In And Out Of Love' and 'Amie' is really one song. We broke it down into two but it gells at the end and it's really one. I'm afraid you're going to have to ask Craig about that one. 'Boulder Skies', I believe her name was Zora, but I'm not sure, and that was about a lady out there. 'Angel' he wrote a long time ago. 'Call Me, Tell Me' I think he wrote in my flat in New York when he was staying there before we went to do the album. I don't know what else I could tell you about that. We had a lot of great parties! Like I say, it took a long time to do, and it was a hard album to do, and I'm pleased that the results have finally borne some fruit.

ZZ: You must have very mixed feelings about this belated success of the single and the album.

BR: Why do you say mixed feelings?

ZZ: Well, if only it had happened within two or three months of the album coming out rather than . . . .

BR: That's rock'n'roll! That's really rock'n'roll. You just never know. At least it's happened. That's really all that's important. I really don't have any mixed feelings, just elated feelings. One, because the thing that I bet on and believed in and gave blood for happened and brought some enjoyment to people, and two because now Craig will be given the opportunity to do whatever he wants, having this foundation. George is with the band, and they're going to have a good launching as the PPL. We're all interested to hear what their next album sounds like. I'm sure it will be great. John Boylan is a good producer and again, if they can keep on working hard, and they can get a hit single to follow it up, it's in the bag. With Craig, we're going to keep going on down the road, and I'm sure you'll be hearing from him because he's got a lot to say. He's a fine writer, he's written a new album which is yet to be recorded, but he's been writing it for the last couple of years, and at the moment we're talking with a number of musicians of good standing to put together a really good band, and we'll see what happens. This time next year I hope you'll be having a Craig Fuller album. Not Craig's alone, maybe, but with his songs on it. Craig's seen the band play a number of times and they're playing all the songs from the album, so I think it will be OK.

ZZ: There's one thing I must ask, though I'm sure I can guess the answer already. Who's Little Bobby Ring?

BR: Oh, that's me. That was Craig's idea. We did it to Mick Ronson also. That's Mick, and we put that down as back-up vocals. But I should tell you who these people are, right? Barry Keane was head of A&R for RCA in Toronto and gave us a lot of help. Dennis Katz I've mentioned before. Tom Cossie was the head of album production who was behind us a lot. Carol McNichol was my secretary who worked many, many hard hours. Bob and Arlene Ezrin, Alice Cooper's people. Barbara Fulk is Dennis's assistant and always a great fan of the band, and was on the road with them for a long time. The rest of the people were just the people that were really good to us in Toronto and Canada. It takes more than the band to do an album, especially when you do one over a couple of months. This particular band had to be in a really good atmosphere, and I think it helped. It gave them confidence. Regardless of how it's been done, the PPL still goes on after six years now.

ZZ: It's a bit like the Burritos in that way, isn't it?

BR: Yes. We would never classify ourselves in the same category as the Burritos, because they were great, their songs were so strong, and the musicianship. We were just a country band trying to make some good music and . . .

ZZ: Succeeding!

BR: Well, we tried. But I'll tell you one of the disappointing things. We never liked the pressing of the album. The final master tapes and the pressing of the album were two completely different things. The tapes are crystal clear, and we had a lot of pressing problems. I remember Craig and I going out to the plant one day driving those poor people crazy. But it was fun. We've all survived, thank God, and hope it will go on.

☐ **PETER O'BRIEN**

BLABBER'N SMOKE

Who would ever have thought that two of the greatest Zigzag West Coast guitar heroes would appear together on the same bill at London's Roundhouse? Well I'm scribbling these notes only a day or so after such an event has taken place. As Pete forecast last month Man have played three nights at the Roundhouse with guest guitarist John Cipollina, and second on the bill was ex-Country Joe & The Fish axeman Barry Melton. Cipollina was just amazing. . . . as flash and arrogant as could possibly be - he changed his guitar about three times and his shirt twice as he leapt backwards and forwards across the stage waving his arms about like a demented conjurer, bouncing loud screeching chords off every wall of that ramshackle old railway shed. Let it be said though that Micky Jones was just as impressive in his own way. Barry Melton on the other hand played a good-humoured solo acoustic set consisting mainly of songs about dope, politics, and getting busted - very different from the sort of stuff you're going to hear on his new solo album when it eventually gets released. The album has been recorded at Rockfield and last week I spent a day and night down there viewing the proceedings and listening to what is shaping up to be a very fine record indeed. Those of you who are familiar with Barry's distinctive guitar style will be delighted to know that there's plenty of guitarring on the album. . . . . almost every 'Meltonism' has been incorporated and used to great effect. Also another point of interest to Zigzaggers is the musicians that Barry's used on the album. They are Dave Charles (drums), Ken Whaley (bass), Ray Martinez (guitar), and Tommy Eyre (keyboards). Altogether I had a very enjoyable time down there because apart from the excellent music going on, Rockfield is such a relaxing friendly place to visit, and my thanks must go to Charles and Kingsley Ward, Dave Charles, and Barry for their hospitality.

Now what else exciting has happened this month? Well there have been a number of very good concerts. There's the fabulous Flying Burrito Brothers of course. . . . I saw them three times altogether and they were great. Chris Ethridge and Gene Parsons in particular impressed me and they carried off all the old Burrito favourites in grand style. The Kursaal Flyers, who supported them on two of the gigs I saw, were a gas too and they're getting better all the time. They're now signed to UK Records and have an album coming out shortly, so look out for it. Other excellent gigs I've been to recently are John Martyn at Fairfield Halls, Croydon (brilliant as always), John Cale at Drury Lane (lunacy), and the Feelgoods at Hemel Hempstead (mass hysteria and uncontrollable excitement).

In a desperate attempt to liven this page up, I'm introducing a new idea. Every month I'm going to talk about my ten favourite album tracks of the moment and try and recommend some albums, old and new, that we haven't covered in the record section. Right, the ten tracks I'm playing most at the moment are:

1. 'Down With My Face On The Floor' by Emitt Rhodes. One of the most interesting and enlightening features I think we've carried in Zigzag recently has been Ray McCarthy's piece on Curt Boettcher and all the albums he's been associated with. I've since been frantically searching for all those LPs and so far I've got the Curt Boetcher solo album on Elektra which is superb, and the almost as good 'Emitt Rhodes' (Dunhill), from which this track is taken. It's got a brilliant piano riff, great melody, and of course flawless vocal harmonies. Five stars and ten out of ten.
2. 'Someone To Love' by Speedy Keen. This is in fact Speedy Keen's new single on Island, and like everything else he's done (Thunderclap Newman, and a superb solo album, 'Previous Convictions') it's of the very highest quality. I'm supposed to be talking to the man within the next week so we should have a piece on him soon, and not before time too.
3. 'One Thing To Try' by Robert Hunter. Taken from Hunter's second solo LP 'Tiger Rose', this piece of jelly has a lazy reggae beat and Jerry Garcia playing very attractive synthesizer. Hunter the lyricist is undeniably classy, whereas Hunter the singer is conceivably not everybody's cup of tea. There are however a handful of tracks on both his solo albums that I find engaging and very enjoyable, and this is one of the best.
4. 'L. A' by Neil Young. I've had a very sneeky listen to Neil Young's new LP 'Tonight's The Night', and it's another gem, but more of that next month. 'L. A' is from the live album 'Time Fades Away' - a much maligned LP but one that I find quite excellent. There's a rough, powerful feel to this album and this track in particular that makes the likes of 'Harvest' sound almost bland, and like all Young's work, when you get down to the actual songs, they're all great.
5. 'They're Making A Monster' by Copperhead from the album 'Copperhead' (Columbia KC 32 2 50 Import). One of the great rock albums of the 70's. Every time I play it I end up with a different favourite track, but this one makes me wish I'd had the opportunity to see them live. To my mind, one of Copperhead's greatest merits was to state emphatically on record that you don't have to be dull and boring to be really heavy, and the guitar work on this track is just. . . . phew!
6. 'Back It Up' by Nils Lofgren from the album of the same name which I talked about in some detail last month. I still haven't grown tired of it, and I seriously doubt if I ever will. If you haven't already got it, for God's sake take advantage of our subscription offer elsewhere in this issue.
7. 'Southern Nights' by Allen Toussáint. Another single and also the title track off his new album. I'm not intimately conversant with Allen Toussaint's past work, but this is a gem of a song - seductive, melodic, atmospheric. . . . think of your own suitable cliché and apply it.
8. 'Who Am I' by Country Joe And The Fish. An oldie, but as appealing now as when it first came out. The most distinctive part of it is the guitar work, and on the sleeve of the album from which it's taken, 'I - Feel - Like - I'm - Fixin' - To - Die', David Cohen is credited with lead guitar on this track. Now I'd always thought that that was a drastic bloomer, because it sounds so much like Barry Melton as to be beyond argument. But I asked Barry about it and he said that in fact it is David Cohen : "I got fed up with playing it, walked out, and David ended up playing it just like I would have". Nonetheless it's beautiful, and the song is one of my favourite Country Joe numbers.
9. 'Taking It All Away' by John Cale. Judging by his concerts, interviews and songs, John Cale appears to be a a rather eccentric and highly gifted loony. He writes truly great tunes and then plants them on top of lyrics so obscure and abstract as to be quite disarming at times. This track is probably the most easily accessible and instantly likeable from his new album 'Slow Dazzle' and could even be good for a single. At the other end of the scale though there's a cut called 'The Jeweller' which is very similar in structure to 'The Gift' on The Velvets' second LP, and that could easily turn up in this column next month.
10. 'My Man' by The Eagles. It takes me approximately six months to fully appreciate a new Eagles album, and even now I'm only beginning to realise how good 'On The Border' is. Bernie Leadon wrote this track and I hope and pray that they'll play it at the big Wembley shebang this month.

There now, wasn't that interesting? I wish I had a radio programme then I could play all this great grist and you wouldn't have to suffer my interminable ramblings.

A new magazine has recently blossomed to join the ranks of the 'underground rock press'. It's called Liquorice and it's quite refreshing in that it aims to concentrate mainly on British music. The first issue contains articles on Richard Thompson, Bryn Haworth, and Bridget St. John plus the usual records and ramblings pages. It's all nicely laid out with some excellent graphics by Chloe Alexander, and it costs 20p from 7-34 Victoria Centre, Nottingham. Well worth investigating.

Once again I've got to get down on my knees and make grovelling apologies for the lack of certain articles this issue. What's happened is that for various reasons connected with the state of the printing industry we've had to cut what would have been a 52 pager down to 48, and that meant reluctantly leaving out my piece on Ernie Graham and Clancy, an article on the sad demise of Brinsley Schwarz by Myles Palmer, an interesting piece on Jim Morrison's grave would you believe, and loads of other stuff as well like Alan Hull, Simon Stokes, and Larry Knechtel. If only I had about 64 pages at my disposal each month. Still, all these articles will be in next month's offering which will be out, I would guess, in about a month's time.

Right that's it, oh, and before I forget the third Pure Prairie League album is out now on import, so gather up your pennies and hurry forth.

Andy.

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS

new album

'STAMPEDE' is gonna take some stopping!

so is their runaway single
'TAKE ME IN YOUR ARMS'

from WB WARNER BROS

JAMES TAYLOR

HIS MIGHTY NEW ALBUM

'GORILLA'

backed by the might of
DAVID CROSBY: GRAHAM NASH
CARLY SIMON & LOWELL GEORGE

from WB WARNER BROS