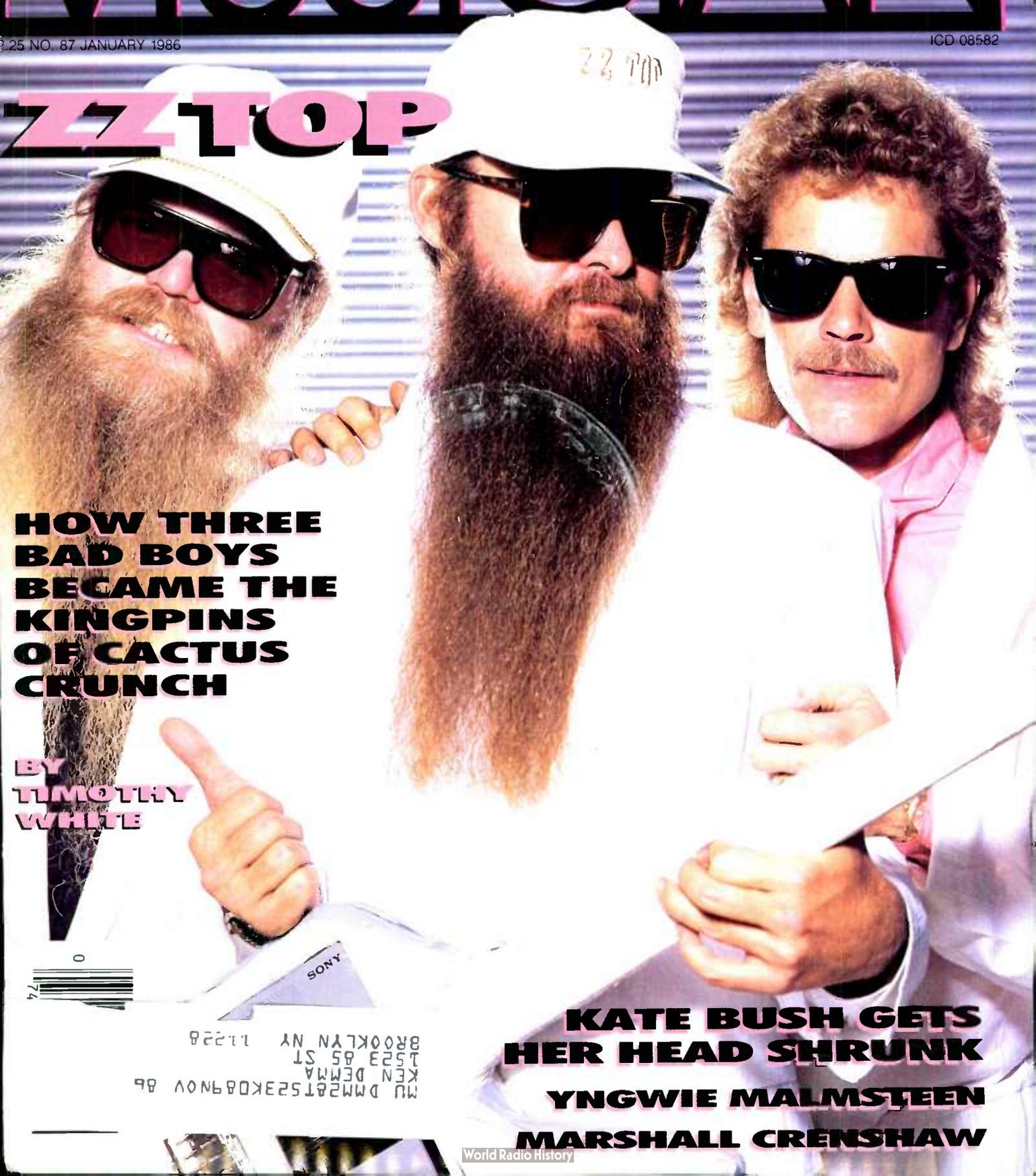


MUSICIAN

2.25 NO. 87 JANUARY 1986

ICD 08582

ZZ TOP



**HOW THREE
BAD BOYS
BECAME THE
KINGPINS
OF CACTUS
CRUNCH**

**BY
TIMOTHY
WHITE**

**KATE BUSH GETS
HER HEAD SHRUNK**

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

MARSHALL CRENSHAW

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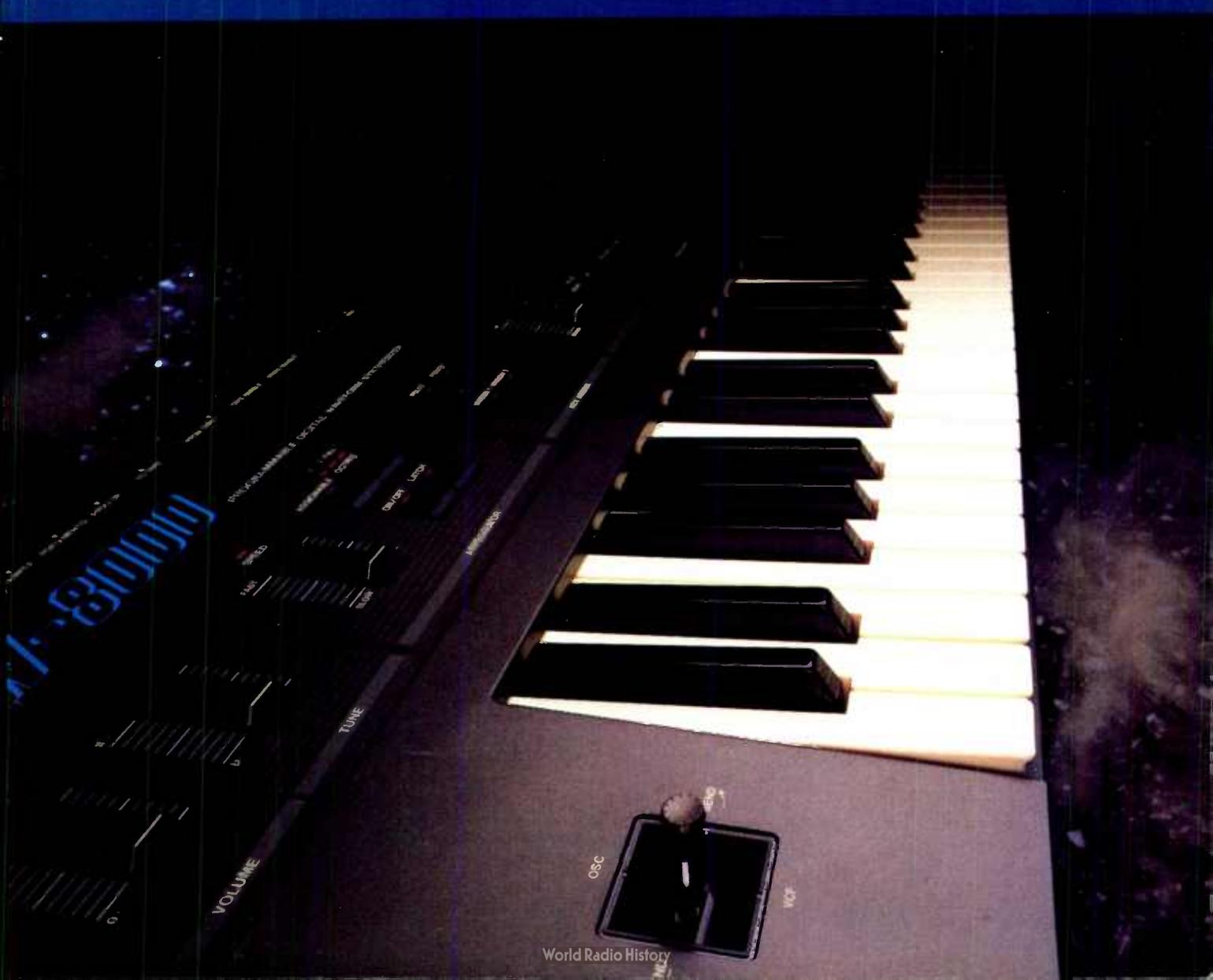
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ZZ Top 54

A passage into the dark, dangerous heart of Texas.

By Timothy White

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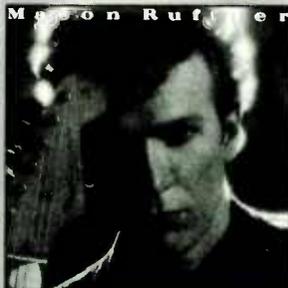
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1984

Cougarrants

Every once in a while when I finish reading an article about a musician I think to myself, "As a musician, that's the attitude I want to have." That is the way I feel after reading your October interview with John Mellencamp. Thank you *Musician* and thank you John Cougar for your great rock 'n' roll.

Thomas B. Morgan
Dearborn, MI



Although I recently enjoyed the well-written article on John Cougar Mellencamp, his inappropriate remarks concerning the supergroup Yes made it quite difficult for me to do so. The day Mr. Mellencamp matures beyond his trademark I-IV-V progression, then I will take into consideration his criticisms of one of the superior forces in rock music.

Marc Lionetti
Middlesex, NJ

You really outdid yourself in the John Cougar Mellencamp interview. He's one of my heroes because I've been hanging out for the past couple of years trying to make the pieces fit, much like he did when he was my age. Now maybe if I show the interview to my parents, they'll stop worrying about me. I also loved the photographs—Steve Marsel did an excellent job.

Harlan C. Fredenberg
Kalispell, MT

Who is John Cougar Mellencamp's fashion consultant, Peter Buck? Buck's been wearing a Future Farmers of America jacket for years, and on the covers of his records too. Not that Mellencamp can't wear anything he pleases, but his lack of individuality is showing up in his

wardrobe as well as his records.

Julie Boyles

Review of the Native

Thanks to Bob Giusti for his excellent interview with Stewart Copeland. If Sting is the heart of the Police (like many people believe), then Stewart has to be its soul. My only regret is the interview wasn't longer. Next time more Stewart and a lot less John Cougar.

Jim Creasy
Louisville, KY

Concerning Michael Shore's scathing review of the "Rhythmatist" videotape: Does this man have a sense of humor at all? It is clear from the beginning of the tape that this is a spoof on documentaries, with Mr. Copeland poking fun at time-honored documentary clichés, as well as himself. As for Mr. Copeland's alleged "elephantine ego," who wouldn't want a little ego massage after sitting through Sting-mania for so long? Stewart Copeland is a talented musician who receives little enough credit without the remarks of thesaurus-pounding critics like Mr. Shore. If you don't like Mr. Copeland's arrogance, you can suck my socks. I dare you to print this.

Melinda Higgins

[At least you didn't dare me to suck your socks — Ed.]

Tips Talk

Some months ago I read Freff's *101 Recording Tips* and have since used a few. The tip on using specific eq cut/gain combinations for voice, synth and bass has yielded clarity in my demo projects. Of special note is the use of headroom specs when noise reduction is not in use. This tip has helped make drum transients and horn passages much hotter and defined. De-emphasizing low frequencies when recording bass tracks helps a great deal in keeping kick

drum/bass combinations clean and audible; before the two frequencies added up to a rumble the E train could not equal! I think you should give him more frequent similar columns and a raise!

Glen Namain
Passaic, NJ

Take that, mister

Why does a magazine that features extensive quality journalism on such innovative and little-known artists as Brian Eno, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Keith Jarrett, Van Dyke Parks, and Laurie Anderson consistently sell out by putting mega-pop-stars (e.g., Paul McCartney, John Cougar, Ray Davies, and Phil Collins) on its cover? My guess is that next month's cover will feature Tina Turner or Madonna.

Scott A. Ronan
Columbus, Ohio

[Oh, we get it: If Ray Davies were unpopular his music would be better. And if Van Dyke Parks becomes popular it means his music is worse. And here we thought quality wasn't related to sales! Thanks for setting us straight, pal. And a Tina cover sounds like a great idea.—Ed.]

Pino Plug

I was glad to see Rob Tannenbaum's article on Pino Palladino—it's always great to read about a bassist who really plays the bass. Just one thing, though. Amid all the hoopla about Henley, Paul Young, etc., Pino's nifty playing on David Gilmour's *About Face*, particularly "Murder," is not so much as mentioned. Wha' happen?

Jonathan Aul
Thousand Oaks, CA

Stevens Redux

Steve Stevens' recent quote (July '85) about jazz having no heritage received some harsh criticism from some of your readers [*Letters, October '85*]. It appears that this quote was interpreted slightly out of context. Of

course jazz has a heritage. But Stevens was comparing jazz to classical guitar which certainly has much deeper roots than does jazz. There is a history that can be found in classical guitar which could never be found in jazz because it is too young. The same can be said of rock.

Mabusha Masekela: With Stevens' background in music, he is anything but uninformed and ignorant about music history. Learn a little more about the guy before you condemn him.

Nola Wilson
Gainesville, FL

Ferry Annoyed

I enjoyed Timothy White's revealing interview with Bryan Ferry. But does Mr. Ferry really believe that England is an island? If so, he does a grave injustice to his many Scottish and Welsh fans. I would like to believe Mr. Ferry's statement was a mere slip of the tongue and not another example of the arrogance of the English.

June Sawyers
Chicago, IL



What Do They Win, Don Pardo?

Congratulations to the Pat Shеды Project, winners of round two in the *Musician!* JBL "Best Unsigned Band" contest, and over \$6500 worth of JBL sound equipment; and to Joe Gambesca, Tracey Price and Stephen St. Pierre, winners of our Sony CD giveaway. Prizes that all sound as good as they sound!

Erratum

Due to an editing error, John Oates was mistakenly identified as a former member of the Magnificent Men in our December issue. Oates was in fact in the Masters.

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10,000 MANIACS

BY BILL FLANAGAN

FOLK ROCKERS SAY GOODBYE TO THE OL' HOMETOWN

Jamestown, New York is nine hours northwest of Manhattan, on Lake Chautauqua between Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Buffalo. In March it was still snowing up there. The farms and vineyards along the road looked like they'd been barren for a century.

Dennis Drew, keyboard player with 10,000 Maniacs and a hometown boy, navigated the icy roads in his father's car and pointed out landmarks. "That's the village of Lillydale," Dennis said, gesturing to a cluster of white wooden buildings. "It has the country's greatest

concentration of psychic phenomena."

Who can disprove a statistic like that?

Dennis drove down a red brick street, past an enormous cemetery, to Natalie Merchant's mother's house. ("There are more people in that cemetery," noted bassist Steve Gustafson, "than there are in the town.") At Merchant's house, Natalie, the Maniacs' lead singer and lyricist, got into the car distraught. She'd heard that a Comfort Inn was going to be erected across from the graveyard. "The cemetery," Natalie said, "is my favorite place. I go there and sit for hours."

For three years 10,000 Maniacs have been playing to hip rock crowds in New York, London and Atlanta, and then returning to another world. No wonder their music is such a strange mixture of youth and age. No wonder their songs sound like tunes taught to children by ghosts.

Natalie Merchant fits no rock 'n' roll cliché. In a world full of third generation Jagers and second class Springsteens, there's no obvious precedent for her haunted romanticism. Though her love for Sandy Denny comes through in live performance, Natalie is possessed of that rarest of virtues, an original voice.

That voice was first apparent on "Tension," the one song on both the Maniacs' self-made EP (*Human Conflict Number Five*), self-made LP (*Secrets Of The I Ching*), and new major label album (*The Wishing Chair*). In "Tension" Natalie spoke in the voice of an old woman, used to the losses that accumulate as life nears its end but not reconciled to them. After ticking off markers along the years ("dress lengths, assassinations, fractured family ties, christenings") with a stiff upper lip, the singer delivered this zinger:

*The early hope for permanence
The words, the rings, consistency...
Local posts will list your friends
In order of disappearance
Lawn scattered tins feed birds
The portion baked for absent guests.*

10,000 Maniacs are not an ordinary rock band in style or sensibility. Despite their hard-core name, the group's eclectic style has evolved from vaguely new wave/reggae to folk-rock of the sort Denny's Fairport Convention made popular fifteen years ago. Guitarist John Lombardo notes, "We're as close to the Band as we are to Blondie."

Natalie Merchant and fellow Maniacs: precocious children taught by grown-up ghosts.



So far out they're in, the six Maniacs have built followings in style centers such as Atlanta (where they briefly lived), London (where the press went wild and their single "My Mother The War" was an indy hit) and New York (where they signed to Elektra Records). About the only place 10,000 Maniacs aren't accepted is their own home town.

"The only hostile audience we ever had was here," Natalie sighed.

"People would come up and say, 'You'd better not play any of that punk shit or there's going to be trouble!'" John recalled. Such admonition could inspire the Maniacs to break out their Clash covers.

After about three years playing clubs from Canada to Florida, 10,000 Maniacs were signed to Elektra in the fall of 1984. They chose Joe Boyd as their producer—Boyd produced Fairport Convention and, in recent years, Fairport alumnus Richard Thompson. (The Maniacs turned their friends R.E.M. on to Fairport, and R.E.M., too, recruited Boyd.)

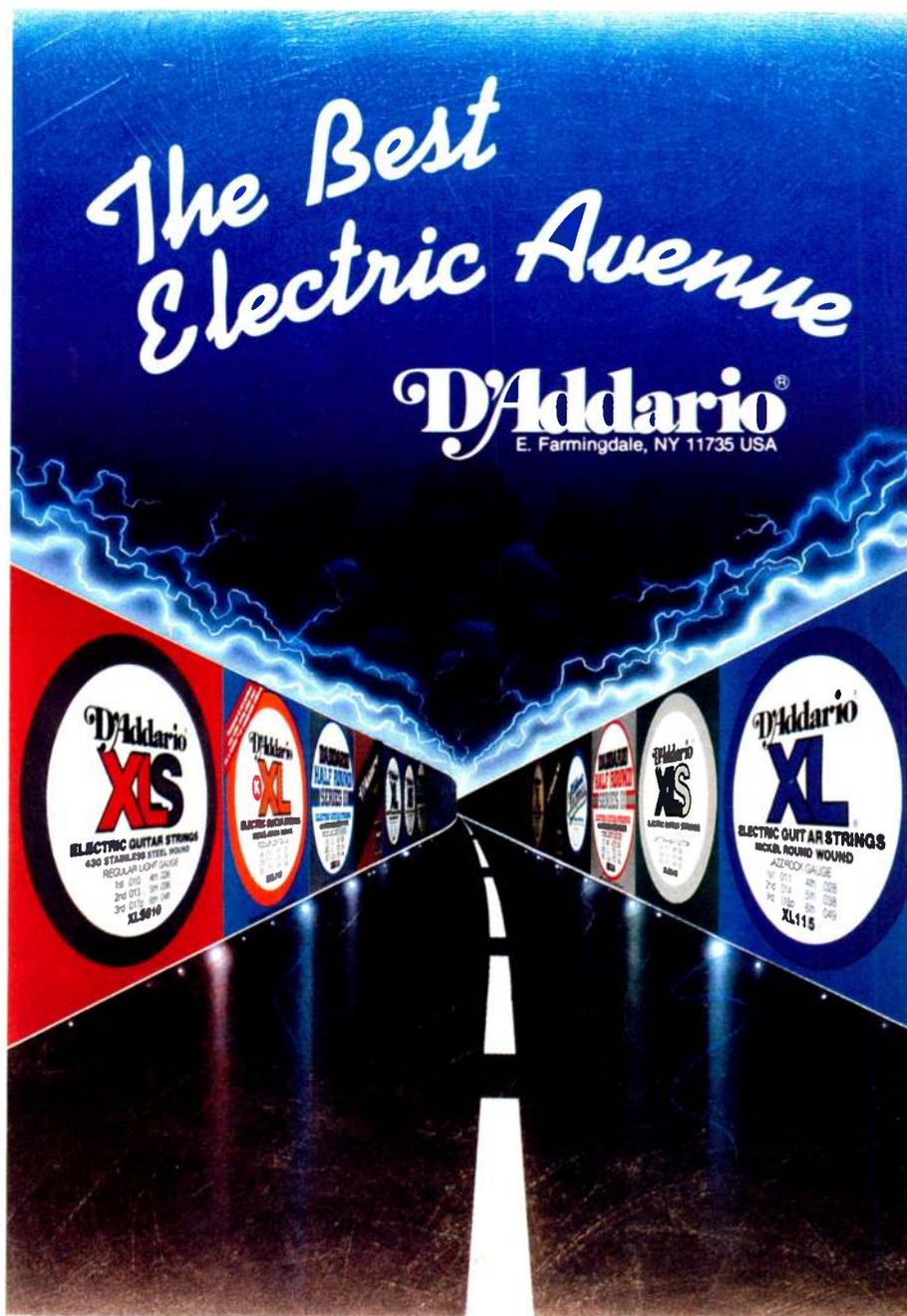
When the group settled on the producer, around Thanksgiving of '84, Boyd was tied up with other projects until April of '85. This left 10,000 Maniacs with a whole winter to pass between signing the deal and going to London to record. Some young musicians

would use this hallowed time between draft notice and boot camp to go wild, run up big bar bills, and blow their advance on fast cars and loose love. Others would play every gig available, honing their stage chops while expanding their geographic base. Others—maybe most—would strike the time-honored stance of new stars ascendant: They'd buy sunglasses and stand in the back of the local rock clubs, allowing well-wishers to come up and congratulate them.

But 10,000 Maniacs, bred among the farms, grapes and piety of the north country, used the winter hiatus to get down to the woodshed. The band returned to the isolation of Jamestown and the low-cost living of their parents' homes. They put themselves on a tight budget (ten bucks a day according to Dennis Drew) and rented a cabin they nicknamed Big Stink on the wooded shores of Lake Chautauqua. Then they set out to rehearse.

The cabin was turned into a makeshift studio. The band cleared out the small living room and set up their instruments. Percussionist Jerry Augustyniak made a drum booth out of a tiny breakfast room, using old mattresses as baffles. The dining room became a recording booth full of new equipment the Maniacs bought with the advance money less serious bands spend on bongos and flash pots. At the center of creativity were two Fostex Series A reel-to-reel tape recorders, a 2-track and a 4-track. On these the band worked out their new material and tried new approaches to old. When they got to London to begin their album, the Maniacs would be held to a recording budget of 56,000 dollars. A good chunk of that would go to producer Boyd for his services. What remained was a tight allowance for a major label album, a budget too trim to accommodate goof-ups or experiments. All the exercises, arrangements, rehearsals and rewrites had to be done in advance, in Jamestown.

Some band members supplemented the rehearsals with exercise regimens at the local Y, and all took private music lessons. Devotion to art was certainly a prime motivation, but boredom cannot be discounted; in such enforced hibernation, the band's music began to improve with remarkable speed. 10,000 Maniacs went through about three years' worth of musical development in six months. When they were signed, different Maniacs often went off in different directions on the same song. Fills overlapped, one player's lead line wouldn't fit into another's chord. Every part made individual sense, but there were sometimes several musical conversations going on at once. The Jamestown hibernation gave the Maniacs a chance to



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take the songs apart and study them. By the time *The Wishing Chair* was finished the band was playing as a solid unit; the acoustic tunes were airy, the rockers solid and, on the anthemic "Scorpio Rising," downright ass-kicking.

Natalie's lyrics, often incomprehensible on the independent records, were now clear. Dennis Drew once joked that the reason 10,000 Maniacs were so often compared to R.E.M. was that you couldn't understand what the singer in either group was saying. Producer Boyd admonished Natalie that he wanted to be able to make out every word on the demos, and damned if the new articulation didn't pay off six months later, when *The Wishing Chair* proved accessible at first listen.

Returning to their hometown, their parents' houses and a child's way of living had an unexpected effect on the Maniacs' new songs: They are filled with an adolescent's sensitivity to change, a precocious nostalgia for lost childhood combined with anticipation of endless new possibilities.

In "Can't Ignore The Train" a young girl delights in private fantasies and dreams of escaping the teasing of little boys. In "Back O' The Moon" grown-up Natalie implores a little girl to sneak out in the moonlight, play some games and enjoy being a child while she can. There's a dark side, too—a political comment just below the surface. The song implies that the best part of childhood is being killed by the fear that today's kids won't live to grow up:

*Yes that was a sigh
But not meant to envy you
When your age was mine
Some things were sworn to
Morning would come
A calendar page had a new printed
season on the opposite side.*

"I wrote that song for a little girl in my neighborhood," Natalie explained. "I was trying to interest her in these wonderful books with gorgeous illustrations that were printed in the twenties. She just wanted to watch *Dukes Of Hazard*. I'd say, 'Let's jump rope, let's play hopscotch.' She'd say no. I'd get so frustrated. I started out the song trying to say, 'Oh, Jenny and I have so much fun together.' But I realized we *don't* have fun. One time we were looking at the moon, and I was telling her about the sandman, the man in the moon, and she said, 'Are they going to put guns on the moon and point them down at us? I heard that on the radio.' Sort of takes the fun out of it."

On the last night of winter it was snowing. Jerry came over to the cabin to break down his drums for the passage to London. Dennis and Steven went into

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World Radio History

town to hit Jamestown's one rock club, where a top forty band was slugging through "Dancing With Myself." The cover charge was a dollar. A local yokel eyed the Maniacs suspiciously and said to the doorman, "Punk bands should have to pay double."

When the Maniacs made their first independent record Natalie approached the disc jockey at this club and asked if he'd play it. He told her to "fuck off."

That night Dennis got bounced out of the bar for attacking the DJ. Jamestown's a beautiful place, but it's easy to see how a winter there could drive someone of an uncoordinated sensibility around the bend.

Steve the bassist woke in the cabin at 11:15 the next morning, just as winter became spring. The snow was gone, the temperature was high, and the weather on the lake was beautiful. Steve had to get to the bank and get his money out for England. Natalie was leaving the next day, and the rest of the band three days later. Steve took Rob's car and, on an impulse, snuck into the Chautauqua Institute, an old fundamentalist retreat/summer resort.

The fenced-in village was right out of *The Twilight Zone*. Streets were lined with perfectly preserved nineteenth-century houses, interrupted by an occasional Greek temple. It was as if a giant child had constructed a play town with mismatched toy buildings. Along the lake shore the land had been molded into a miniature reconstruction of the Holy Land, complete with scale-model Bethlehem, Jerusalem and other an-

continued on page 30

Tools from the Asylum

Rob Buck plays a Gibson Sonex Artist through Roland's SDE 1000 and Super Distortion Feedbacker, and an MXR limiter, graphic equalizer and envelope filter. He keeps a foot on all that sonic affectation with his Ernie Ball volume pedal. His amps are a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Roland JC 120. Rob's mandolin is custom made. **John Lombardo**, on the other hand, plays a Fender Telecaster through a Jazz Chorus-120, and an Ovation 12-string. **Steve Gustafson** plays a Rickenbacker 4001 bass, through an Ampeg SVT head and two 15-inch JBLs. **Dennis Drew** plugs a Korg CX3 into yet another JC-120 (must've been a warehouse close-out). **Jerry Augustyniak's** drums are new Sonors, but his cymbals are old Zildjians, except for one crash which is a mysterious Ufip, from Italy.

When recording in the woods the Maniacs' tape recorders were run through a Fostex graphic equalizer and a model 350 mixer. They put the drums through the Roland digital delay from Rob's effects rack. They used two JBLs as monitors, a Crown D-75 amp, and ran off proof of their progress for the record company on a Technics cassette deck.

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World Radio History

MARSHALL CRENSHAW

BY SCOTT ISLER

A SINGLES MAN FINDS HIMSELF ON A ROCKIER ROAD

Marshall Crenshaw? A songwriter's songwriter. Ask anyone—except Crenshaw himself. "I'm a musician first, and a songwriter eighth," he modestly insists. "I think of myself as a practitioner of pop music. I just write songs to perpetuate that."

Bette Midler, the Dirt Band and Robert Gordon would disagree. They're among the growing crowd who have recorded one or more Crenshaw compositions. Since his own recording debut four years ago, the thirty-two-year-old pop fiend from a Detroit suburb has attracted plenty of critical attention. His songs typically look back to the 50s and 60s for a rustproof chassis underpinning airflow melodies, V8 propulsion and power (guitar) breaks. His lyrics don't shy away from the more complex problems of the love-tossed. He's even had a top forty single—once. Which might explain why Crenshaw is now in Austin, Texas, opening a show for Howard Jones.

"We've been really excited about coming to Austin," Crenshaw deadpans after opening with "Someday, Someway," his lone hit. "We're dying to entertain you." The audience, mostly of high-school age, may or may not catch the humor. But they give Crenshaw and band a more than tolerant response. Some are even familiar with his songs.

The singer/guitarist is on the road with Jones to promote a new album, *Downtown*. "From a pragmatic point of view it made a lot of sense," Crenshaw says of his opening-act status. Crenshaw is a pragmatist. Yet he can't help but be ambivalent about the turns his career has taken since he signed with Warner Bros. Records in 1981.

Crenshaw's first, self-titled album included "Someday, Someway" and sold over 200,000 copies, according to manager Richard Sarbin. It's a stunning debut, full of memorable phrases (verbal and musical) and rhythmic byplay. Crenshaw's band consisted of bassist Chris Donato and brother Robert Cren-



"True love is a great topic; there'll never be enough songs about it."

shaw on drums. "I listen to it now," Marshall says in his Austin hotel room, "and it just sounds like guys who are scared to death trying to make a record. I remember how impossible it was for me to get a guitar sound, how upset it made me, and how under pressure Chris Donato felt. The only thing about it that didn't make me happy was that it didn't go platinum."

He got a ruder shock the following year when his second album, *Field Day*, didn't do as well as the first. Producer Steve Lillywhite was roundly criticized for the record's overblown sound; a single, "Whenever You're On My Mind," never charted at all.

"Let's be honest—I was shook up

about it," Crenshaw admits. "I never really figured it out. The only disappointment that still lingers is that the single never went anywhere. All I ever really cared about was that we had hit singles. I don't really care about reviews." He blames a "political thing" at Warners for hurting the single's chances.

Field Day was issued in spring, 1983. *Downtown* didn't appear until well over two years later. "I wasn't doing much of anything" in 1984, Crenshaw says. "I was taking a rest. When our first album came out we were already on the road, and we stayed out there for about a year. Then we stopped and made another album. Then we went back out again, and stayed out for another year.



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When it got to be time to start thinking about another record, I found I had just no idea what was going on. I felt really disoriented and exhausted, spiritually and physically. So I decided to hang it up for a while—give up show business. You gotta pace yourself, otherwise you're dead."

A self-confessed homebody, Crenshaw "hung around the house." (He married his high-school sweetheart eight years ago.) The year wasn't totally lost; he did a session with producer Mitch Easter that yielded "Blues Is King" on *Downtown*. But when he got serious about the album last winter, there were changes made—starting with the band.

Crenshaw first thought about expanding his trio two years ago. "It's really a matter of practicality. The stuff on this album, I don't think there's any way the three of us could play it and pull it off. We had a bit of a time doing stuff on *Field Day* too; it was really difficult for us to execute the songs in concert. I didn't think I was cuttin' it anymore as a guitar player in a three-piece band. It was too much of a load on my shoulders."

To relieve that load, Crenshaw and *Downtown* co-producer T-Bone Burnett recruited some acquaintances: Crenshaw knew guitarist G.E. Smith and drummer Mickey Curry, of Hall & Oates'

band, from touring with them. NRBQ's rhythm section is on "Yvonne," Crenshaw's first recorded twelve-bar. Burnett asked keyboard player Mitchell Froom, bassist David Miner and drummer Jerry Marotta. Robert Crenshaw drums on two tracks. Donato isn't on the album at all, and he doesn't mind telling you how he feels about it.

"Well," Crenshaw drawls, "they felt probably how you would imagine they felt. It's kind of a crummy subject. But it just became absolutely necessary in order to have the record come to exist. We hadn't played together in a long time. We were out of touch with one another. We tried some stuff and it just was impossible to get anything done. I had to kind of break that habit."

On tour, though, Crenshaw is reunited with his brother and Donato—plus guitarists Tom Teeley and Graham Maby. Teeley is a friend of Crenshaw's since they toured together in a *Beatlemania* road show in the late 70s. Maby, Joe Jackson's longtime bassist, met Crenshaw on a Jackson tour. Crenshaw picked them as much for their singing as instrumental abilities; the expanded group's vocal harmonies are in evidence as they run through "Cathy's Clown" at a sound check. "We took our thing as far as we could as a three-piece group," Crenshaw says. "I think we have one of the best rock 'n' roll bands out there right now. I'd like to get this band into a studio as soon as possible."

When Crenshaw says "rock 'n' roll," he doesn't mean Led Zeppelin. "More or less, I hated all contemporary rock music from about 1970 to about '78," he states. His favorite guitarists are Bo Diddley and Duane Eddy. He's recorded songs originally done by Gene Vincent, the Jive Five and Buddy Holly. Holly used to be a favorite critical comparison, although the resemblance stops at the fact that both wear glasses. Indeed, despite his love of 50s sounds, Crenshaw is no copycat revivalist. He accomplishes the much harder task of writing contemporary music rooted in the values of past craftsmanship.

"I find a really good technique is just to pick up a guitar and start beating on it and give it absolutely no thought beforehand. You start with the germ of an idea and just sorta build it up from there. The best ideas are the ones that materialize out of nowhere. Those are the ones I try to capture and develop. All over my house I have work tapes of me humming in front of a cassette machine. The idea behind songwriting and making records seems to be that you have to really labor at something in order to make it sound spontaneous."

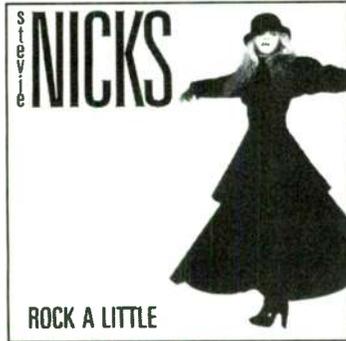
He doesn't have a fixed m.o. "I'll start something and not finish it for two or three years. Or I might throw something



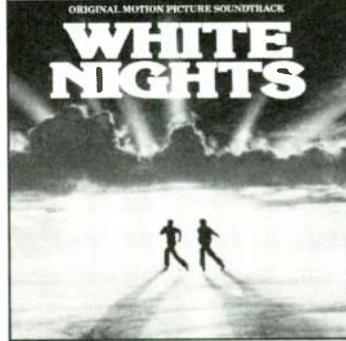
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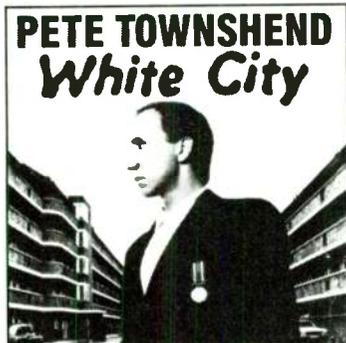
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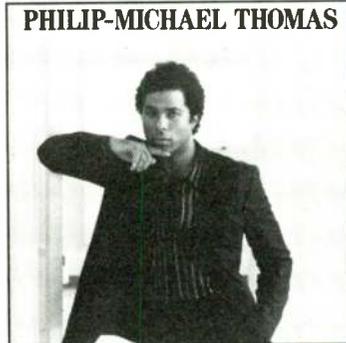
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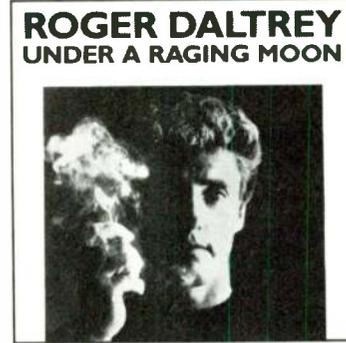
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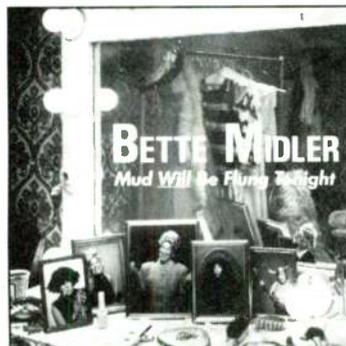
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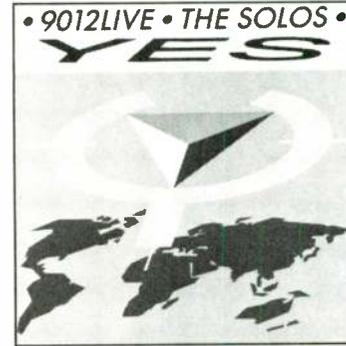
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together in half an hour." He claims "Someday, Someway" took five minutes. On the other hand, "sometimes I'll find I'm editing and fooling around with something even after it's on a record. I'm still changing the lyrics to 'Our Town' [on *Field Day*]."

Surprisingly, Crenshaw began songwriting in earnest only two years before his first album. At first, "I was really concerned about making every song as short as possible. I thought if I could get 'em down to four seconds that would probably be a good thing. I don't even remember why anymore. I guess it was just in emulation of 60s rock. Finally one day I realized my brain was turning inside out. Now I can be more objective about what I'm doing. I don't use a formula anymore...I just sit down and try to come up with something that moves me."

That almost always means a love song. "True love is a great topic for songs. I don't think there ever will be enough songs written about it. True love is probably the only thing in the world that isn't corrupt. It's not all there is, but what else is there?" he laughs.

Still, the music comes first. Instead of "songwriter," Crenshaw prefers the term "manipulator of musical sounds." "As far as words go, I feel I'm just groping along, trying to finish the songs. Music is a much more powerful form of communication than language. There are hundreds of songs I love, and I don't know what the lyrics are.

"I was listening to a song today: 'Who'll Stop The Rain,' by Creedence Clearwater Revival. It's a beautiful song, I love it, but I don't know what the hell he's saying. You just get your own impression, and that's cool with me." He regrets the printed lyrics on *Field Day*'s inner sleeve. "It's a rotten way to listen to a record."

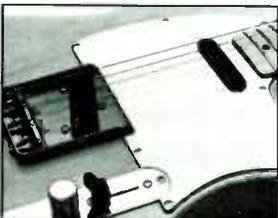
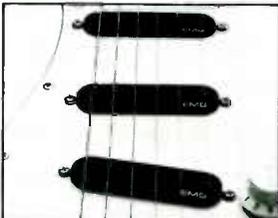
For Crenshaw, music is a language—one he's been familiar with almost as long as he's known English. From a musically inclined family, young Marshall played with his father's guitar until he got his own, at age six. His childhood taste in pop veered toward rockabilly. It wasn't until 1963 that, inspired by "Wild Weekend" and "Louie Louie," Crenshaw got serious about making his own music. Even now, he says it's a tie between listening to music and playing guitar for his favorite activity.

After high school Crenshaw played in a bar band, an oldies band, a country band, a Hawaiian band, and even accompanied authentic, transplanted rockabillys like Jack Earls. "Mostly in the 70s I was listening to Chuck Berry and Phil Spector, Les Paul—anything but Uriah Heep."

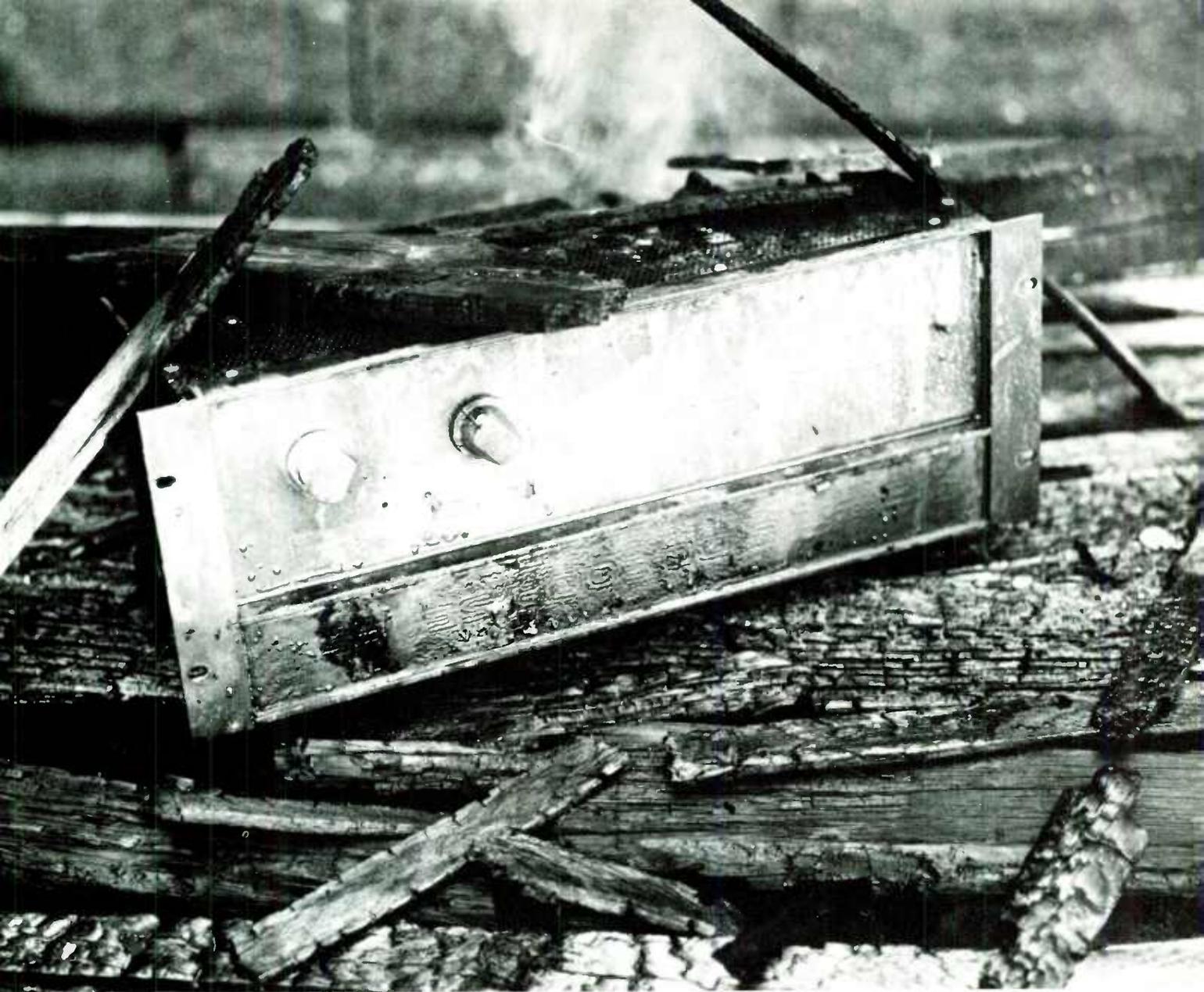
A trip to Los Angeles in 1976 didn't pan out. Two years later Crenshaw had

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better luck auditioning for a John Lennon role in *Beatlemania*. After eighteen months of the Beatles, however, he was ready to make some music of his own. Reunited in New York with his brother Robert—they had played together in the Detroit oldies group—Crenshaw found a bassist (eventually Donato) and began gigging in clubs.

At the same time he was shopping demos of his tunes to anyone who'd listen. One who did was producer Richard Gottetehr—who liked what he heard enough to have Robert Grodon, whom he was producing, cut five Crenshaw compositions. Gordon liked Crenshaw enough to record another three of his songs, after Gordon and Gottetehr split up, for the album that finally came out. (One was "Someday, Someway," a single for Gordon a year before Crenshaw's version.)

A 1981 single on the Shake label increased Crenshaw's audibility. Warners came calling, and even agreed to let him produce his major-label debut. Crenshaw was familiar with four-track equipment from a Detroit studio he owned with his early-70s band. But the driver's seat wasn't for him, and Gottetehr took over. *Downtown* lists Crenshaw as co-producer with Burnett and engineer Larry Hirsch. "I wanted to produce this album," he recalls, "and it was

almost a replay of what happened with the first album. Let's just say I'm completely cured of wanting to produce my own records."

The new record maintains Crenshaw's melodic flair on both uptempo rockers ("Little Wild One"—the current single that's going nowhere—and "Yvonne") and pensive slower tunes ("Blues Is King," "The Distance Between," the countryish "Like A Vague Memory"). This album's Everly Brothers

Hold the Keyboards!

Marshall Crenshaw, a self-confessed guitar lover, keeps a harem of thirty instruments. On the road this fall, though, he narrowed it down to three Mosrites: a 60s-era twelve-string, and two new six-strings (one blue, one sunburst). He uses Dean Markley custom light-gauge strings (.009 to .046), and plugs into a Vox AC30 amplifier. "The sound has a real character to it I can't find in any other amplifier," Crenshaw states. "Plus I like the way they look." An MXR DDL box provides echo.

Tom Teeley plays a 1964 Fender Stratocaster with D'Arco Ten strings (.010 to .046). He too has an MXR digital delay, and MXR Dynacomp, going into a volume pedal and Vox AC30. His acoustic guitar is a Guild, his flat picks heavy-gauge.

Graham Maby also strums a Guild acoustic, with medium-gauge strings (high G tuning) and a bridge pick-up. His own guitar is a blue Ovation special edition.

tribute, "Lesson Number One," was even submitted to the Everlys for possible use on their *EB84* album. "I wanted more than anything for them to cover one of my songs," Crenshaw sighs; "Run With Me," also tailored for the duo, was recorded by the Dirt Band instead.

With the Bellamy Brothers, no less, recording "You're My Favorite Waste Of Time," Crenshaw's future may lie within the unlikely skyline of Nashville. Man-

continued on page 30

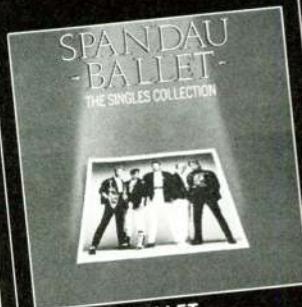
On a couple of numbers Maby switches to a Fender VI six-string bass, or plays the band's Samson wireless.

Left-handed bassist **Chris Donato** plays a 1969 Fender Jazz, and a Precision with a redone neck and Seymour Duncan pickups and pots. Strings are medium-gauge GHS Boomers. Donato plugs into an old SVT tube amp and two Music Man cabinets, front-loaded with four twelve-inch Electro-Voice speakers in each. **Robert Crenshaw** has a twenty-inch Gretsch drum kit, with twelve- and thirteen-inch rack toms, and a fourteen-inch floor tom. Heads are white Ambassadors. Yamaha hardware includes the tom-tom mount and bass-drum legs. Aside from a sixteen-inch Paiste pang (special effects) cymbal, Crenshaw has Zildjians: a sixteen-, eighteen- and twenty-inch ride. He uses a LinnDrum triggered by the kick drum and rack tom, and Promark 5B sticks.

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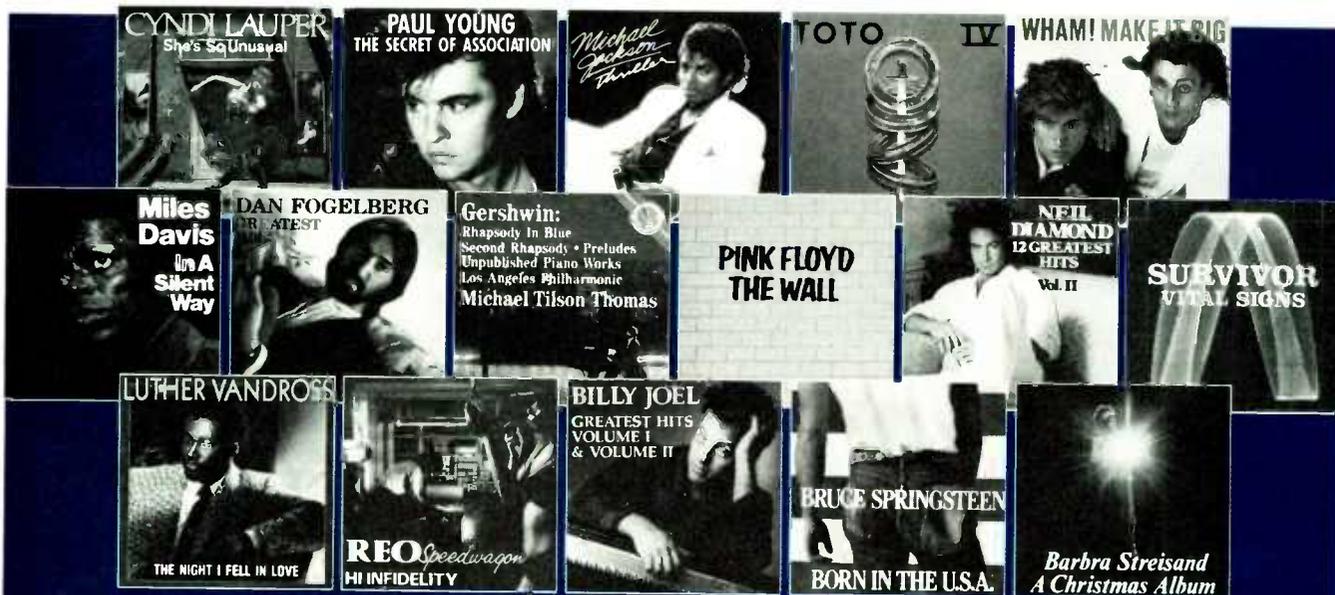


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HOW TO BUY A CD PLAYER

By J.D. CONSIDINE

HARDWARE HINTS: THEY DON'T ALL SOUND THE SAME

Almost everyone who fancies him- or herself an audiophile has a favorite story about buying a CD player. One of my favorites has to do with the computer genius who ran out to buy a CD player the minute he found out about them. No sooner did he plug the player into his megasystem than he fished up his first CD—the Telarc recording of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*—and cranked the volume to await audio nirvana.

Oh, the sound was wonderful, so realistic that when the first cannon went off, he almost swore he smelled smoke. Unfortunately, by the next big boom he realized that he was actually sniffing the scent of fried woofer. According to legend, first he swore at having crippled his speakers, then leapt for joy that his new player so easily humbled his high-end equipment.

Another story you might have heard had to do with the nationally-known consumer magazine that filled six pages with test results on CD players, only to conclude that there were no significant sonic differences between them, and therefore they should be bought on the basis of price and features.

That first story probably didn't happen, but it should have; the second ought to be true, but unfortunately isn't. Sure, a consumer magazine actually printed that, but in fact there *are* audible differences between CD players. The real question to consider when shopping for such a machine is the extent to which you'll notice that variance.

Granted, we're dealing with musical minutiae here, stuff that can't be easily quantified. You can quibble justifiably over a lack of detail in extreme high frequencies; it's when you get to the notion of "musicality" that you wind up in bar fights. Just as one man's meat is another's excuse for vegetarianism, so too does one listener's ideal sound often seem colored or inaccurate to somebody else's golden ears. This, we

should remember, is how God keeps equipment manufacturers in business.

It might be that you won't hear any difference between CD players; or you may hear it on the system at the hi-fi shop, but not on your own aging stereo. Nor should you preclude the possibility that what you hear might not strike you as being \$300 worth of difference. What you're going to need is some background, and a battle plan.

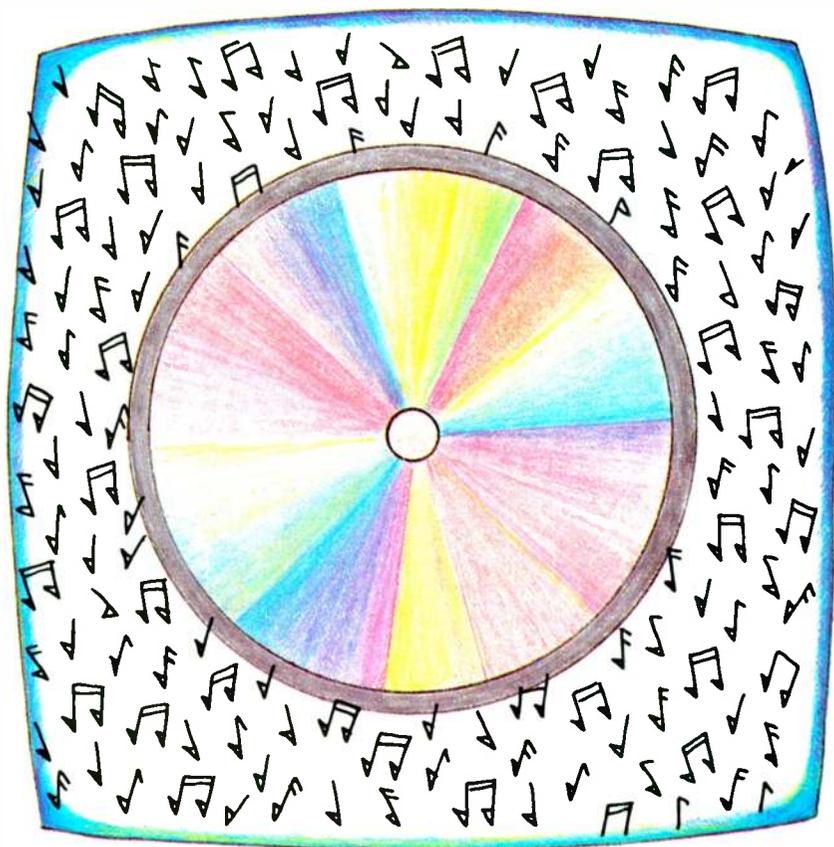
HOW THEY WORK, AND WHY THAT DOESN'T MATTER

Digital audio is about as basic an idea as you'll find in hi-fi. True, almost any electrical engineer can explain it in terms guaranteed to make your head ache, but only masochists or other engineers need subject themselves to that kind of torture. Reduced to its basic elements, the digital process simply takes sound "samples" and converts them to

being particularly bright, doesn't recognize those things—give it pits, or leave it alone—so it gives an error reading.

This is where the trouble begins, so an error-correction system was designed. Mainly the work of Sony, the error-correction uses a sort of computer buffer to hold the last good piece of information, and drop it in the hole left by an error. Happening as this does in a microsecond, the substitution goes by unnoticed, so the player can skip over dust and smudges. Peanut butter, however, remains a problem.

As usual, some engineers weren't content with mere error-correction, so a secondary system, over-sampling, was devised. This strategy, which first turned up in a Yamaha player, had not one beam but *three* scanning the disc. The idea, essentially, was to compare input on a best-of-three basis, figuring that would drastically reduce the possibility of bum sound. (This is no Yamaha



binary code, which can then be stored for playback later.

How it manages that playback, though, is not so simple. The binary data is stored on the compact discs as a series of microscopic pits that are read by a laser. So far, so good. But, like most readers, the laser sometimes makes mistakes. Maybe there's dust on the disc, or a smudge, or part of your peanut butter sandwich. The laser, not

exclusive; Sony's CDP-302, among others, also has triple beam tracking.

Once the disc has been read, though, the player has to do something with all the binary code—namely, convert it to the analog signal the CD player feeds into your amplifier. But the conversion process is not without waste by-products, and something must be done to sift the sonic trash out of the signal. Filtering is the answer, but some

machines use digital filters while others use analog filters.

Which is better?

Beats the hell out of me. Perhaps the most amazing thing about CD technology is that any one of the competing methods can be applied to generate excellent sound. There are perfectly wonderful CD players using single-beam systems and analog filters (the Luxman D-03 immediately springs to mind). Where the three-beam system and digital filtering have an edge is in delivering sonic refinement cheaply; the Yamaha CDX-3, for example, offers a sound nearly as vivid as the Meridian at less than half the price.

One persistent failing in CD players that particularly annoys hard-core audiophiles is the lack of a realistic "soundstage." In other words, when you sit in the "sweet-spot" between the two speakers, can you hear a realistic representation of depth?

There are at least two machines that go out of their way to correct that. One is the Meridian, an English-built machine that essentially refines the circuitry of the Philips CD player (which itself is sold as a Magnavox over here); the other is the Carver CD player, which adds a switchable "digital time lens" circuit to a Yamaha CD-2. Despite their similar intentions, the two sound quite

different. The Meridian is tremendously detailed, and succeeds largely through precision. The Carver, by contrast, exaggerates a bit, giving greater depth at both left and right, but at the cost of imaging in the center.

But the most telling aspect of the Carver circuit is the way it alters the CD's sound. The idea was to take a bit of the edge off the highs and add some oomph to the lows, but what it really does is lend the CD some of the warmth of vinyl. Those who have grown fond of the extreme dryness of "digital sound" find that warmth off-putting in orchestral recordings, but recordings like Yo-Yo Ma's *Bach Solo Suites And Partitas* (CBS) sound more realistic with the circuit on than with it off.

If you like talking tech, you can doubtless get several years of good arguments out of the Carver circuit or whether dual digital-to-analog converters are a necessity or a redundancy. Otherwise, simply remember that triple-beam tracking and digital filters are more likely to give you better sound for less money, and you'll be able to ignore the rest of the high-tech hoodoo that stereo salespeople throw at you. After all, what you'll really want to do is *listen*.

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The first step is to consider what you're going to be listening to, and go out and buy some CDs. This may seem like buying gas before shopping for a car, but you'll want to have reference points for listening, and shouldn't depend on the dealer to have your favorite discs.

Think about your listening habits, though. Although it will be tempting to go for digitally recorded and mastered CDs, unless you listen to a lot of classical, your choices will be limited. Try to pick well-recorded albums you know very well, and re-listen to them before you go shopping. Recommended pop digital CDs: Madonna's *Like A Virgin* (Warner Bros.); Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* (Warner Bros.); Peter Gabriel's *Security* (Geffen); Charlie Haden's *Bal-lad Of The Fallen* (ECM); and Archie Shepp's *Ballads For Trane* (Denon).

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the sound of acoustic instruments. An electric guitar, after all, can be made to sound like a lot of things, but a piano is a piano is a piano. Trevor Pinnock's harpsichord anthology *The Harmonious Blacksmith* (Archiv) is an excellent tool, because the brittle attack and piercing harmonies of the harpsichord will quickly show the weaknesses, if any, in a player.

Next, go out and look around. Don't waste the salesperson's time; just explain that you're shopping for a CD player, but aren't ready to buy yet. If you can manage to do this during slack sales times (mid-day, mid-week), that shouldn't earn you icy looks. Be sure to take notes as you listen, though; not only will it help you remember specifics, but it will reassure the sales staff as to your seriousness.

Once you've narrowed the field to a

few favorites, try to arrange a listening session with the dealer. Ideally, you should be able to hear A/B comparisons between players over a system identical or close to yours, but if that's impossible, always compromise *up*. What you don't hear can hurt you.

Try hard to hear differences between the players; play 'em soft, play 'em loud, play 'em *hard*. Bump the table while it's playing, and see if it causes the laser to mistrack (it probably won't, but like kicking the tires on a used car, the act is tremendously fulfilling). Get the sales clerk to demonstrate all the features. And listen as critically as you can.

In a way, those who don't hear the difference between machines have it easier than the rest of us, because they can pick and choose purely on the basis of gimmickry. Remote control is fairly common, as is programmability,

fast-forward and reverse, but there are variables. Almost any player will let you skip tracks—if you hate hearing Andy Summers moan "Mother" every time you play *Synchronicity*, this is the feature for you—but some restrict the way the tracks can be ordered. Be sure to ask first.

Another common feature is the repeat, whereby you can repeat either the whole disc, or just a portion of it. Imagine, for instance, the ease of being able to "loop" a guitar solo, so you can practice along. (While we're on the subject, here's a suggestion for the industry: Since pitch is not a function of playing speed for CDs, as it is for albums and tapes, how about a feature that *slows the music down* to half and/or quarter speed? That would make learning licks off records so easy, you'll make a fortune off the cover band circuit



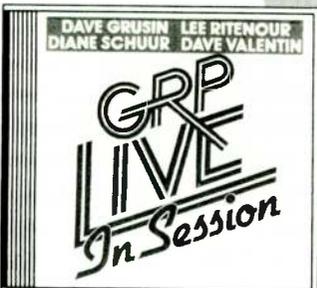
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CD from previous page

alone.)

Then there are the arcane items, like Sony's CD-5, a Walkman-sized CD player, Toshiba's twin-drawer XR-V22, or Magnavox's CD boom box, the CD-555. The utility of these players is a bit dubious—are you really that desperate to play *The River* without having to get up and change discs? And, following in the footsteps of the Pioneer CLD-900, which plays not only CDs but video laser discs, expect to find more multi-purpose options.

A final word, though. Once you've bought a CD player, you run the risk of contracting CD fever, an ongoing madness that makes it impossible to hear the words “Compact Disc Sale” without being overwhelmed by the urge to buy. As the demand for CDs outstrips the supply, there may be nasty moments in the browser-bins as crazed customers clamor for the last remaining copy of *The Best Of Bread*.

Remember, you've been warned. ☑

10,000 Maniacs from page 15

cient meccas.

A couple of Amish workers were the only people around. Steve approached the amphitheater where he and Dennis graduated high school. It's used by the Institute for concerts, too. A rule says that all operas performed there must be sung in English. Natalie had better keep working on her pronunciation.

“I'm just taking a good look now,” Natalie said the day before she left. “Because it's not going to be here later.” ☑

Crenshaw from page 22

ager Sarbin is pleased about wrapping up a publishing deal recently with Screen Gems: “When it comes to getting songs with Dolly Parton or George Jones or Eddie Rabbit, you just need a larger company.”

Regardless of his career's unpredictability, Crenshaw is unperturbed. “The really odd thing to me about us,” he reflects, “is, when I started doing this I imagined that we would be a singles band. I still think of us as a singles band, even though we've only had one single that got in the top forty. My impression was that we would be like Abba or Creedence Clearwater. It just hasn't fallen that way, and I'm at a loss to understand why. But life goes on, and I'm still more than happy to be doing things the way I'm doing them. This is a really weird business, a heartbreaking business. I wanted to make records all my life, so I'm not complaining.” ☑

SEE READER SERVICE PAGE 86

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RENE & ANGELA

Happy Together... And Apart

Singing together" used to mean just that. The song of the moment was simply a romantic showcase for pairing two exquisite voices. It would be unfair and inaccurate to say that Rene Moore and Angela Winbush can't sing, but it is worth noting that their singing seems less the star of the show than it might have been with some of the duo's 60s

and 70s counterparts. Here, singing competes with stalking synthesizers, relentless hooks and—in the smash hit "Save Your Love (For #1)"—a propulsive rap courtesy of Kurtis Blow. Rene & Angela sing against one another as often as *with* one another.

Angela agrees that the music she makes with Rene could be somewhat jarring to folks who think of male-female duets only as frilly little two-part harmonies. "I think what we've done is blended two different flavors and chemistries together,

and then we try to show those in all capacities," she says. "We sing together, then we can sing apart. We play together, we can play apart, and we play off that onstage and in our records."

Rene & Angela are cousins, although they didn't find it out until after they teamed up in late 1977. Angela is a St. Louis native whose roots run deep in gospel. She has also done live and studio session work with the likes of Lenny Williams, Jean Carn and Dolly Parton. Rene, the "serious" musician of the team, is a graduate of the Los Angeles Philharmonic's minority training program and has performed with the likes of Leon Russell, Ella Fitzgerald, John Denver and Billy Eckstine.

The pair started recording on Capitol in 1980 under the tutelage of Rufus bassist Bobby Watson. Their records didn't take off until they joined PolyGram and released the *Street Named Desire* LP. Through Watson's urging, the twosome hired engineer Bruce Swedien to polish up their semi-finished product. Why not just hire him to work on the songs from the beginning? "Caviar work on a beer budget," Angela explains. Rene is happy simply to have Swedien on the team: "Bruce is...like trying to get God to come to dinner."

With "I'll Be Good" skirting the top forty, Rene & Angela expect to be able to hire Swedien on a more regular basis. Regardless, they will no doubt continue to redefine the male-female duo of the 80s. "We don't agree all the time," Rene acknowledges, "but on certain musical ideas we agree. She has hers, I have mine, we agree on the best one and that's the direction we go in."

— Leonard Pitts, Jr.

Stevie's Plagal Cadence?

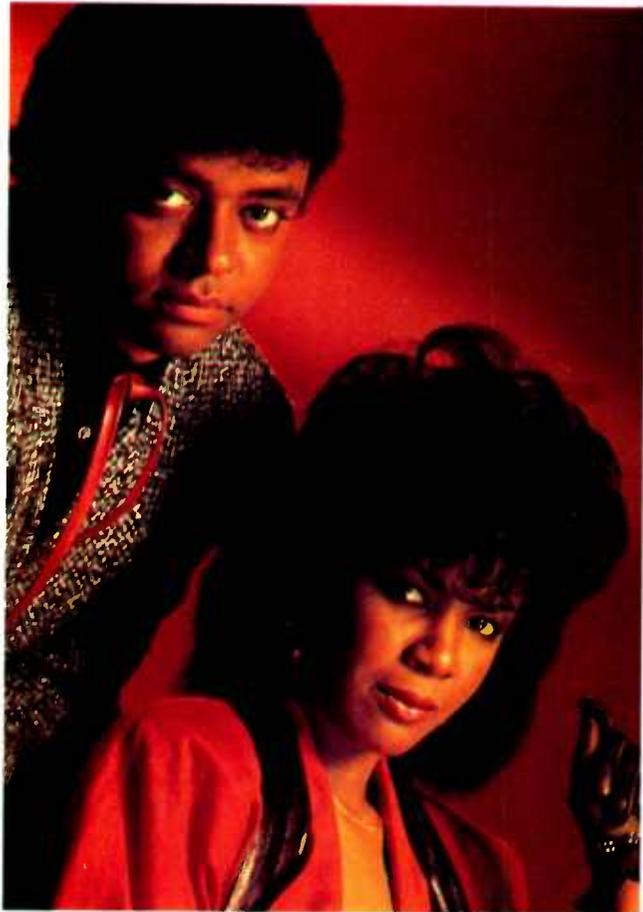
Lee Garrett just called Stevie Wonder to say "I'm suing your ass!" Garrett and fellow songwriter Lloyd Chiate filed suit against Wonder in October, claiming he plagiarized "I Just Called To Say I Love You" from them. For starters, they want \$10 million in damages.

Garrett is no stranger to Wonder. Both blind, they have known each other since they were teenagers. Wonder even reportedly saved



Garrett from suicide once. The two co-wrote "Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours," among other 70s Wonderecordings.

The lawsuit charges that Garrett and Chiate wrote a song called "I Just Called," which they demoed for Wonder in 1978; they registered the tune for clearance with BMI a year later. Wonder copyrighted his song in 1984. His recording, used in Orion Pictures' *The Lady In Red*, won an Academy Award, and was then picked up for GTE Sprint Communications commercials. Orion and GTE are also named as defendants in the suit. If Wonder establishes that his "I Just Called To Say I Love You" preceded Garrett and Chiate's "I Just Called," he stands to lose his Oscar; an Academy Award-winning song has to be written for a movie. Depositions for the case begin in December.



PAUL COX

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT LOVE

SHRIEKBACK

They Live For Chaos

Shriekback's permanent state of mind is complete panic,"

Barry Andrews says. In light of recent events, it's hard to disagree. The British band fired producer Hans Zimmer halfway through sessions for *Oil And Gold*, their fourth album; singer/keyboard player Andrews finished the "harrowing" job. Then they unexpectedly parted company with guitarist Carl Mash on the eve of a major U.S. tour. Andrews, Dave Allen (bass) and Martyn Baker (drums) hurriedly drafted a replacement, but sacked *him* after just four dates. With four days in New York to reconstitute the group, they added Eve Moon and Ivan Julian. Along with keyboard-



ist Steve Halliwell and backup singers Wendy and Sara Partridge, Shriekback was ready to meet America.

To create Shriekback material, Andrews says, "You start with the rhythm. You draw out all the implications that are in that rhythm until you end up with a song." Inherent in those rhythms are songs like the morbid "Nemesis," with references

to "priests and cannibals/prehistoric animals" and a rhyme with "parthenogenesis." Its author says the song concerns moral perversity; "Nemesis" is a British comic-book alien (portrayed under license in the video).

Live, the Shrieks burn with a rising level of volume and mania. Andrews' brilliant playing prods the chaos into a diabolically captivating

roar. The rhythm section provides an ominous anchor, while Julian adds wild, Belew-like noises. The band's combination of analytical intelligence, rampant imagination and unrestrained rhythmic fury makes for a mind-altering experience. Behind Shriekback's simple melodies and chord structures are deep and disturbing ideas and emotions.

— *Ira Robbins*

CRUZADOS

If at First You Don't Succeed...

Tito Larriva remembers when it seemed like every L.A. band but his was getting signed to a label deal. X, the Blasters, the Go-Go's—one by one they went down the road to renown. But the Plugz, singer/songwriter Larriva's Chicano punk outfit, could only wave from the sidelines.

By 1983, the Plugz had had enough. Larriva and drummer Chalo (Charlie) Quintana formed a new band with guitarist Steven Hufsteter and bassist Tony Marsico, rechristened themselves the Cruzados (Spanish for "crusaders"), and soon found themselves recording an album for EMI.



Legal hassles sank that project, but this time the gods were on their side. A re-recorded version of that LP bowed on Arista in September, quickly landing on playlists around the country.

"The kind of stuff we wrote for the Plugz," Quintana says, "was real heavy and simple, like a punch in the face. Now we put a lot more

thought into the music. Cruzados songs are more emotionally mature."

Album aside, the industrious quartet has scored several movie soundtracks, including the cult fave *Repo Man*. Marsico and Quintana backed Bob Dylan on his David Letterman TV show appearance, and recently finished sessions for Joe

Ely's latest LP. And Larriva's just wrapped up an acting role in *True Stories*, David Byrne's directorial debut.

"I play Ramón," Larriva says, "a character in the computer plant, who plays organ in the local Tex-Mex band—as well as at Sunday Baptist services. He's always flirting with all the girls."

— *Moira McCormick*

GLENN PHILLIPS

A Different Kind of Success

Our music isn't that complicated or intellectual," guitar ace Glenn Phillips says, "but it is different. I've never heard another group sound like us, which may just be because

nobody else wants to!"

Or it may be that few can straddle styles as adeptly as the Glenn Phillips Band. As heard on their new *Live* LP, they display the fluidity of fusion without the self-indulgence, and the immediacy of rock without the boorishness. "I tend to describe us as an instrumental rock band," Phillips notes. "When you say 'jazz' today, it often means Muzak. Fifteen years ago, when I listened to a lot of Mingus and Coltrane, I wouldn't have been so squeamish about a jazz con-

notation."

Fifteen years ago, the sky was the limit for Phillips and the other members of the Hampton Grease Band (not to be confused with Joe Cocker's Grease Band). A gonzo aggregation that crossbred blues grit and avant-garde weirdness in the same vein as Captain Beefheart's Magic Band, the Atlanta-based quintet debuted on Columbia Records in 1970 with an ambitious two-disc project, *Music To Eat*, and waited for fame. But label and management has-

sles sapped the group's vitality, leading to their demise in 1973. After that "devastating" experience, Phillips struck out on his own. "My goal was to capture the exhilaration of rock 'n' roll, even though I played a different kind of music," he recalls. "What disgusted me about ninety percent of the instrumental stuff I heard was the elitism. I wanted to relate to people on a gut level."

Phillips has done just fine, thank you, over the last dozen years, touring steadily and making LPs without major-label support. "I've had offers from record companies from time to time, but they've always told me to add a vocalist, which means they want the group to become more like a heavy metal band with a flash guitarist. I've resisted that; if you're doing something a little different, you should stick with it.

"People say to me, 'Don't you want to make it?'—as if the band was a flop. We've been together over ten years, we still love playing, and people seem to be affected by what they hear. To me, that's success."

—Jon Young



Record Ratings: The Vinyl Solution

After weeks of negotiations and one canceled press conference, on November 1 the Parents' Music Resource Center, national PTA and Recording Industry Association of America announced an agreement on the controversial subject of identifying recordings with "explicit lyric content."

An RIAA statement says "member recording companies will identify future releases of their recordings with lyric content relating to explicit sex, explicit violence, or explicit substance abuse. Such recordings, where contractually permissible, will be identified with a packaging inscription that will state: 'Explicit Lyrics—Parental Advisory'...or such recordings will display printed

lyrics." For LPs, the inscription is to be placed on the lower quarter of album back covers. There are no placement guidelines for singles or cassettes. When an album displays printed lyrics, either as a back cover or on a sheet inserted under the plastic wrap, the cassette version will bear the imprint, "See LP For Lyrics." For their part, the PMRC and PTA plan to point out the good within the recording industry, reserving future criticism for recordings that don't observe the RIAA guidelines. They intend to assess the RIAA policy in a year's time.

The agreement would seem to defuse the implicit threat of government intervention (courtesy of the PMRC's strategically placed husbands) the group of Washington wives has held over the record industry's collective head. It appears that in this no-win situation

the RIAA essentially stood its ground while the PMRC/PTA coalition backed down from its insistence on a scarier warning label than "Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics" (the RIAA's original wording). The PMRC wanted a one-time panel to set criteria for "explicit lyrics"; the agreement allows individual recording companies to determine which releases qualify, and provides a sizable loophole with the phrase "where contractually permissible." In agreeing to provide printed lyrics—but only for those albums deemed "explicit"—the RIAA met the PMRC one-third of the way, after first protesting that song publishers, not record companies, owned lyric copyrights.

Among the twenty recording companies to accept the RIAA policy statement are MCA and A&M Records, who earlier refused to sticker

their product. "Personally, I think it's a mistake to compromise at all with these people," says Danny Goldberg, whose Musical Majority has led the counter-attack against the PMRC, but "none of the artists object to people reading their lyrics." As for the "explicit lyrics" inscription, "We don't feel any record company has the right or wisdom to interpret lyrics."

Meanwhile, the September 19 senate committee hearing on record labeling has inspired at least two recordings of its own. "Explicit Lyrics" by the (Scott) Blackwell Project sets various voices, some taken from the hearing, to a boom-box beat. The ubiquitous Frank Zappa uses senators' comments from the same hearing on "Porn Wars," the single from his new album, *Frank Zappa Meets The Mothers Of Prevention*.



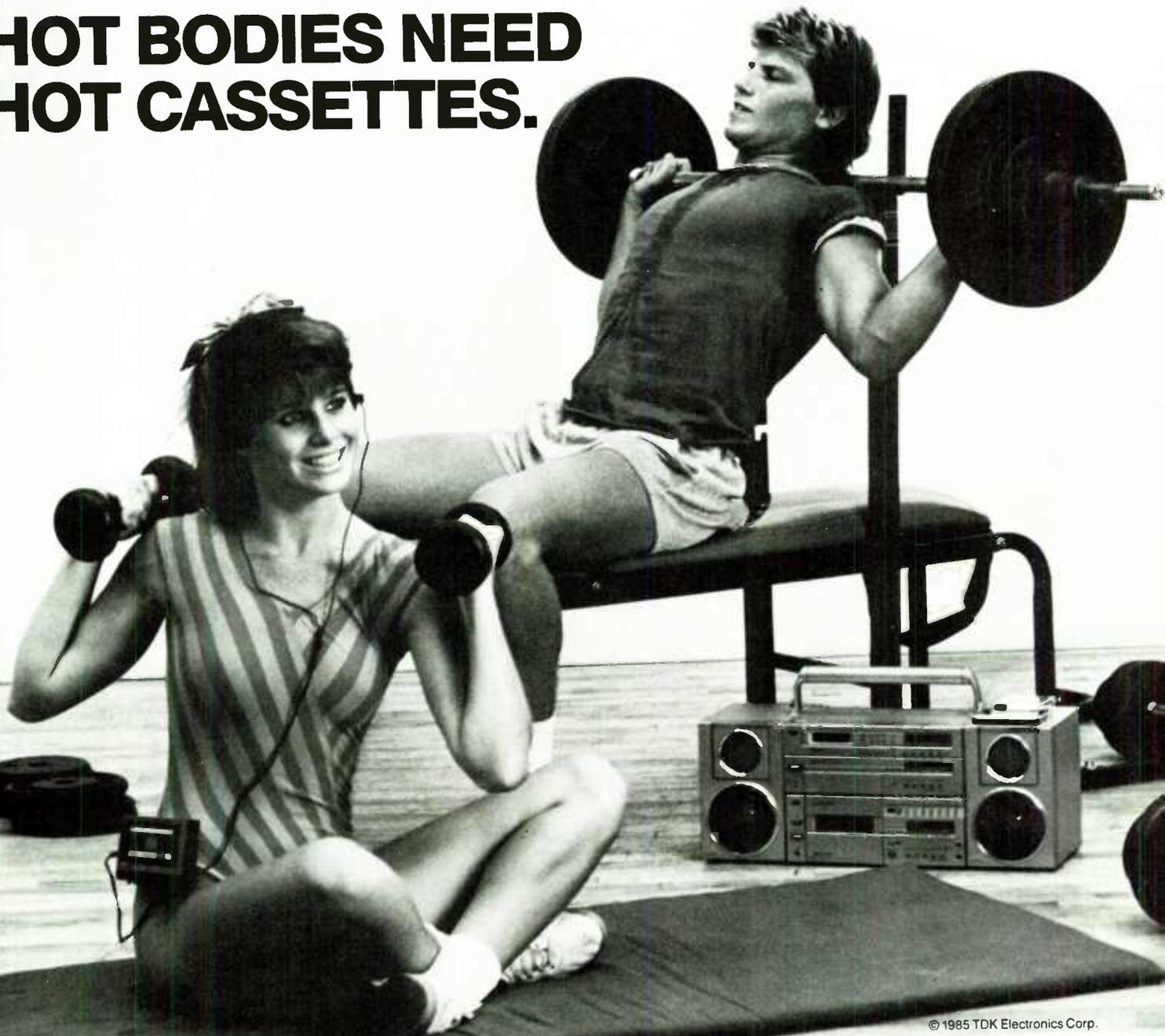
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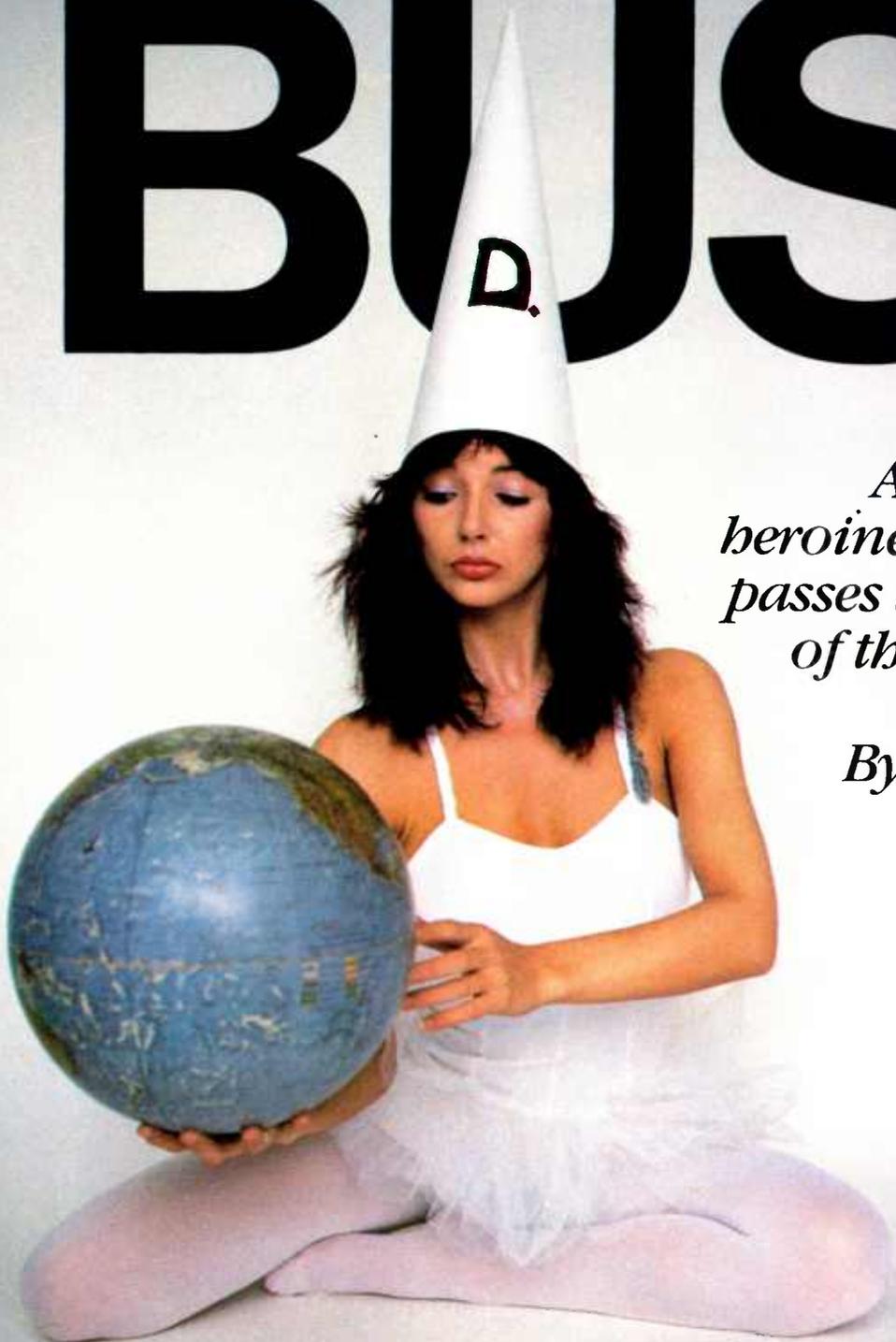
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World Radio History

KATE BUSH

*A British cult
heroine-turned-superstar
passes through the realm
of the subconscious*

By Peter Swales



After playing with Kate Bush for nearly a decade, bassist Del Palmer still recalls their first meeting: “I’d heard about Kate from her brother Paddy, whom I’d known for some time, but I’d had this impression that she was older, more mature.

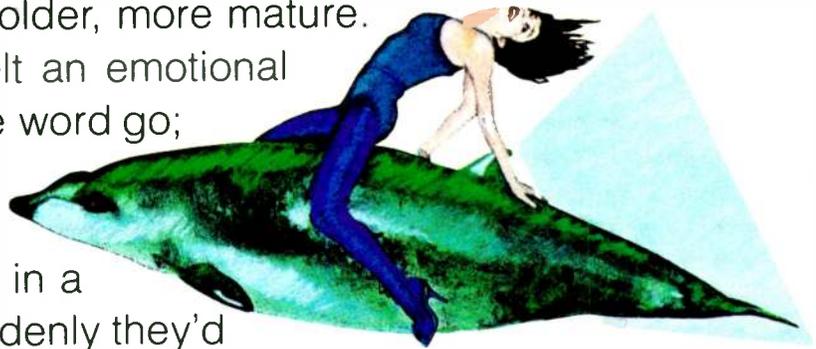
At our first rehearsal I felt an emotional involvement right from the word go; but I also thought, ‘Shit, this girl is like *eighteen*.’

Her songs all started off in a familiar way, but then suddenly they’d leap somewhere completely different and you’d think, ‘How could you think of going *there*?’

“It was a phenomenon completely different from what anyone else was doing,” Palmer declares. “I’ve never had any desire to work with anyone else since.”

He’s not alone; though Kate Bush remains an acquired pop taste, she certainly seems to satisfy the musical appetites of those who’ve acquired it. Since her recording debut in 1977, when Kate was all of eighteen, her unique amalgam of impressionistic, frequently mystical imagery, a piercing four-octave soprano, and densely atmospheric instrumental arrangements has captivated a large and notably resolute international following. In Canada her fans hold conventions and publish a Kate Bush magazine; in England her newest LP, *Hounds Of Love* (EMI) recently debuted on the charts at number one. And though she’s never toured or enjoyed much radio support in the United States, Kate’s appeal is apparently infectious; upon its release, her video “Running Up That Hill” moved quickly into steady MTV rotation, while critical response to her previous records, notably *The Dreaming*, has been little short of rhapsodic.

If Kate Bush inspires extreme reactions, it may be because her own compositions are themselves unusually ambitious. Even on her first album, *The Kick Inside*—in most respects a conventional collection of piano-based ballads—Bush’s unusual narrative fantasies, in which she bespoke intimacy with characters ranging



from Heathcliff to Jesse James to Beelzebub and Zeus, suggested grand designs. After failing to realize any of them on the studio-slick *Lionheart*, she took matters into her own hands: *Never For Ever*, her transition LP, signaled the arrival of Kate Bush the producer and shaper of elaborate pop constructs, surprisingly cohesive musical tapestries that mixed synthesizers with esoteric folk instrumentation.

Her songs deepened as well. Early records had focused on various angles of love and lust, but *Never For Ever* plumbed subjects as diverse as Freudian psychology ("All We Ever Look For"), nuclear annihilation ("Breathing") and Lewis Carroll-styled child infatuation ("The Infant Kiss") with eerie familiarity; the overall effect was like being taken on a tour through exotic realms of the unconscious. That, coupled with Bush's elaborate stage shows and her own striking physical presence, helped create a persona as much mythical as musical. So perhaps it was inevitable that she should follow that with an LP entitled *The Dreaming*, a knotty but ultimately rewarding musical tour de force. Like her compatriot Peter Gabriel, with whom Bush is often compared (she sang on his third album), Kate's bent for theatricality and rococo musical textures can be as off-putting to non-fans as they are enveloping for her legions. But like the aboriginal concept of dreamtime on which *The Dreaming* is based, Kate Bush's music deliberately conjures a world apart from the mainstream.

Three years had passed since *The Dreaming* when I interviewed Kate Bush at her home studio in the British countryside. Spurred by occasional reminiscences by her brother and long-time musical cohort Paddy Bush, Kate spoke with candor about her upbringing, musical development, theatrical ambitions and of course *Hounds Of Love*, not only her most sophisticated and commercially appealing album to date but one whose spirit is as uplifting as *The Dreaming*'s was macabre. "I felt I wanted to write songs that had a very positive energy this time," she explained. "It's important that each album be different—otherwise you're not exploring but staying in a rut. And now that it's all done," she sighs happily, "I can sit here and enjoy it."

MUSICIAN: Do your songs just burst out of you like so many Athenas out of the head of Zeus or do they cost you a lot of suffering and effort to construct them as finished-art pieces?

BUSH: It's different every time. With the *Never For Ever* album, I had to work hard—it would take me weeks and weeks just to get a chorus or the words. But when we went into the studio, it was spontaneous and very quick. Whereas with *The Dreaming*, I just sat down at the piano, got a rhythm, and literally wrote the songs. I couldn't believe it! The words probably weren't there, but the idea was, and all the tunes. That was the first time I'd actually demo'd the songs while writing them—I put the piano down, put a voice down, put backing vocals down, and I had a song! And apart from "Houdini," which nearly killed me, the rest were so easy it was frightening. But then, as soon as I hit the studio, all that speed and spontaneity seemed to evaporate and turn into something completely different. The recording became really, really hard work, and it was very intense.

With the new *Hounds Of Love* album, the songs took quite a lot of time and effort to come out. Now that I've got my own studio, a lot of the writing process is very much the recording process so, rather than going in with a finished song, I write the song in the studio.

MUSICIAN: Is there a lot of stuff which you begin recording but which you dump halfway through?

BUSH: That's not happened much. There's only been stuff dumped on *Lionheart* and *Never For Ever*—and I prefer to think of that stuff as *resting* rather than being "dumped." On the new album, there was actually a lot that didn't get on.

But it was in a very embryonic stage, or else I felt it too ordinary. The hardest thing was making one song flow into the other, 'coz creating dynamics in one song is very different from building it between seven. You have to pace it very differently and yet hopefully keep interest. By the second stage, when things had already begun to be sort of sprinkled on the tracks, I realized certain songs weren't working. [Laughter] So I had to totally rethink the thing and say like okay, look, this song has got to go. But maybe it can be used sometime in the future.

MUSICIAN: So it's not as if you're so abundantly creative that we're being deprived of a whole wealth of songs that never get onto disc?

BUSH: I wish I was! Usually with every album I'm in a situation where I *scrape* together the songs. The first album was the only one where that wasn't so—then I had literally hundreds of songs to choose from as I'd been writing from about the age of eleven. But I think the longer I'm around the harder it is for me to find something convincing in my art. There are all kinds of subject matters which I think I could probably have enjoyed at an earlier time but which now I find trivial. You can't really control what comes out, other than rejecting or accepting things and putting them into different bits of order. It's not something that you actually own. Really it's the lyrics that take me a long time—the lyrics are like a big process that keeps on happening right from the word go 'til I've done the last lead vocal. Still then I'm playing with little bits here and there that maybe weren't quite right....

MUSICIAN: Does that account for the three-year gap between *The Dreaming* and *Hounds Of Love*?

BUSH: Yes. Also it takes me a long while to come out of the wake of one album and into the energy of a new one. It would be wrong, I think, to be in the same frame of mind. You've got to get some new inspiration in between. But another big reason why the new album took so long is side two, "The Ninth Wave"—it was incredibly difficult to be brave enough to go for it. I knew that, if it didn't work out, then I'd have wasted all that effort for nothing.

MUSICIAN: I miss that very young and enchanting, almost ecstatic voice on the early albums. You don't often sing in that high register these days but rather an octave or so lower.

BUSH: Albums are really very autobiographical, and at that time I was writing and experimenting to try to *push* my voice higher and into different areas. I'm not really sure why, but at that time I felt my voice was strongest at that pitch. When she was really young Joni Mitchell used to sing very high, though now she's very low and jazzy. I think when it's lower you tend to listen more to the words and a little less to the voice as an instrument.

MUSICIAN: You've got so many different voices and a four octave range, but how do you keep it in shape? It's not like you're getting practice doing performances.

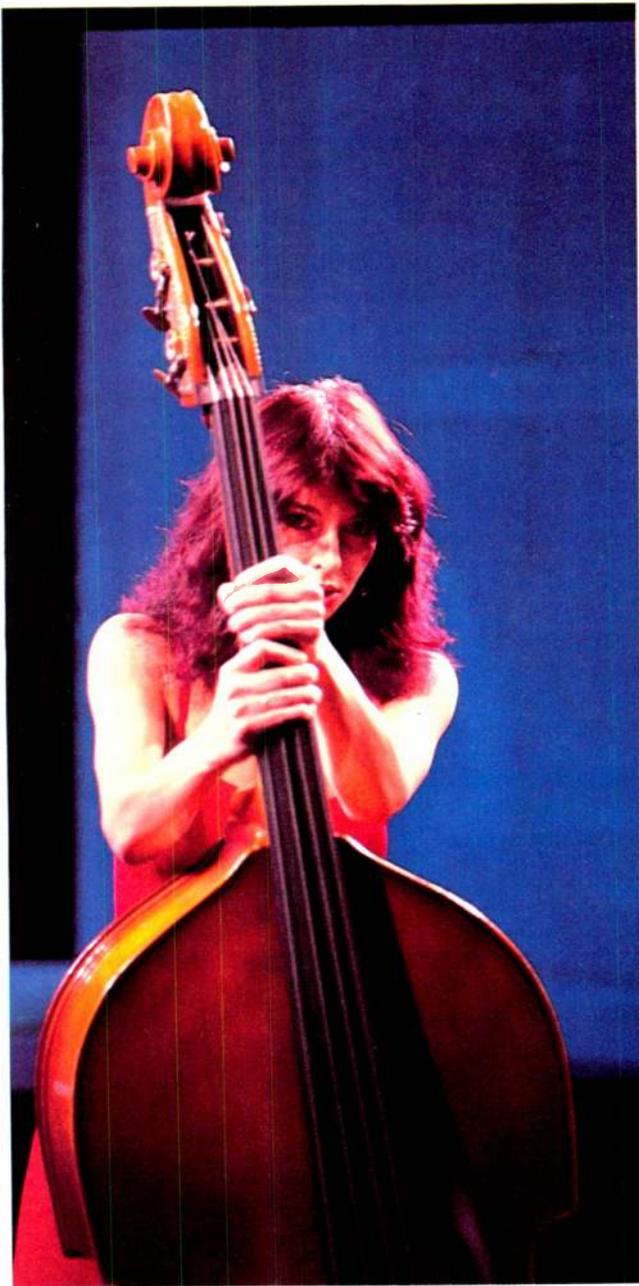
BUSH: No, no, that's right. Well, the hardest thing is to do the vocal with the right emotional feeling. And the hardest thing for me is to be able to feel relaxed enough to be uninhibited. So sometimes I do get a little drunk.

MUSICIAN: So can I assume you're pissed out of your head on "Big Sky" on the new album?

BUSH: Yes, I might be getting drunk on that one—the ad-libs on the end, that was where I had to get drunk. And definitely on "Waking The Witch"—I was very drunk doing that!

MUSICIAN: Despite basic rock instrumentation, your music doesn't owe much to American sources. You're one of a few popular artists to have evolved a uniquely British kind of music.

BUSH: Yes, I think most of the stuff I have liked has been English. With the majority of other people—well, they were listening to Elvis and people like that and most of their heroes were American. The artists I liked, such as Roxy Music and



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I think the way people distort their attitudes is the most fascinating thing to write about. I like finding an area of the personality that is slightly exaggerated and, if I can identify with it, to perfectly cast a person with that particular character trait."



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David Bowie, were all singing in English accents and, in fact, were among the few in England who were actually doing so at that time. I mean, Elton John, Robert Palmer and Robert Plant sound American when they sing.

MUSICIAN: *Paddy, when did you become aware not simply that Kate was musically gifted but that she was also a force to be reckoned with?*

PADDY: She was about ten years old at the time.

MUSICIAN: *And did you attempt to cultivate this gift?*

PADDY: Oh no, no—it cultivated itself. To cultivate music you have to spend a lot of time *by yourself* making a lot of very strange sounds over and over again. It's not the sort of thing you go hammering into others. When there's a family all in one house and you're getting your music together, normally the others in the family close the doors and try to keep the sounds out. And when you've got several people playing instruments in the same house—well, things can get a bit complicated! I remember having things thrown at me during the early days because I was playing the same tune for six months. It would get people down! And when Kate began working on the piano, she'd go and lock herself away and wind up spending five or six hours, seven days a week—just playing the piano.

MUSICIAN: *And did this begin to assume almost pathological proportions and start alarming the family?*

BUSH: Pathological!

PADDY: Yeah! But *no!* Because of the heavy Irish tradition in the family, I think it was escapism on her part. Our mother is Irish and I think Kate maybe felt that there was a slight obligation to learn something to appease the Irish spirit. And somewhere out of my mother's imagination came the idea that Kate should learn the violin. It seems to be a tradition that the violin is *forced* upon people—I mean, there are few who take it up of their own volition! And Kate was certainly one of those who took it up only under pressure. So the piano was a way of exploring music in dimensions diametrically opposite to what the violin must have represented—pure escapism! The command would be, "Go and practice on that violin Kate"—but the piano music came out instead! I think perhaps we Bushes are a bit like that....

MUSICIAN: *Who are some of your more direct piano and voice influences?*

BUSH: When I was about twelve, I was a big fan of Elton John. I think he was my first musical hero. I was just starting to write songs and he was the only guy I'd ever seen who wrote songs and accompanied himself on the piano. And his playing was brilliant—and still today I think so.

I thought Bryan Ferry was brilliant, the most exciting singer that I'd heard. His voice had limitations but what he managed to do with it was beautiful—I mean, b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l. For me it covered the whole emotional spectrum and I just couldn't get enough of it.

MUSICIAN: *But your music has a depth and complexity, and a certain opulence, which aren't easily attributable to pop music. Is there a different set of aesthetic values that you've assimilated somewhere along the way, perhaps deriving from classical music or opera?*

BUSH: In a way classical music is a superior form because it has so much space for the listener to move around in. As soon as you have words in a song it's somewhat restricting for the listener. I really love listening to classical music—I find it quite inspiring for my work. So maybe because I love those things so much, they rub off on me. When I hear something really beautiful I think God!, wouldn't it be great if I could write something even just a little bit like that. It's not really copying, but rather wanting to produce that same vibe.

MUSICIAN: *Did you have much formal musical education?*

BUSH: I do know what chords are, but I've not really had classical training. My knowledge of theory comes from when

I learned the violin when I was little—and that's about it.

PADDY: Our roots are in the oral tradition. That's the way music is carried on in our family.

BUSH: I think there are an awful lot of major influences deriving from traditional music, especially English and Irish folk music. When I was very little my brothers were devoted to traditional music and it's something I've always loved. Especially Irish music. I think I was always impressed by the words in folk songs. They're always stories, each song is a story—not like the lyrics of most pop songs.

MUSICIAN: *On different album tracks you've featured not only Irish musicians but also an array of other ethnic sounds. Does this betray a lot of your own listening?*

BUSH: There was a period when I used to listen to certain ethnic music. But I don't think I was ever really an avid listener. Paddy is much more of an avid listener to ethnic stuff—he listens to it nearly all the time.

PADDY: It's very, very hard to give any sort of adequate description of what folk music can *mean* to you if you're not completely involved in it. It's a way of life. It's like swimming—once you've learned the art you can't go and forget how to do it. You know, somebody goes "dum-dee-diddle-dee-dum-dee-da" [*Paddy breaks into an Irish jig*] and you're off! It instantly makes sense! If you're born into a tradition of playing some particular kind of music, you can branch out into all kinds of other music. But the tradition is something that's always there and just never, never falls apart.

MUSICIAN: *And is it then you who's responsible when you add one of those instruments to one of Kate's tracks....*

PADDY: Yes, when it comes to unusual and ethnic instruments. I come in with the suggestion, Kate then listens to it in the context of the track—if she likes it, it stays; if she doesn't, I try and find something different.

MUSICIAN: *Is your production a benevolent dictatorship where what you say goes?*

BUSH: [*trying not to laugh*] Well, quite honestly, I think it *is* sometimes. But in most cases, I really do know what I want....

MUSICIAN: *You must command the respect which induces all these fellows to willingly subordinate their own egos....*

BUSH: [*laughter*] Well, there are never really any serious problems 'cause the fellows I work with are great and I think they just find amusing all of the things that I like and ask them to do. I mean, I've never really been able to communicate properly like those producers you see sitting there talking about A flats, "Now take it from the A-coda," and all that. I don't find that comfortable at all because, for a start, there might be one of the band (like me!) who doesn't know what you're saying. So I talk in really basic language. Obviously I have to identify chords and things like that. But the most important thing for me is to convey the *atmosphere* of the song, the *feeling* that I want them to produce. So rather than saying to each of them "You do this" or "You do that," I spend a lot of time trying to explain the story and the atmosphere.

MUSICIAN: *You don't have staves with whole lines of music written out?*

BUSH: No—the only time I did that was for the cello parts in "Hounds of Love." I stayed up all night to do it and wasn't sure if I could. But I worked them out on the Emulator and wrote out the chords that I played in the treble clef. Then the cellist Jonathan Williams helped me out by working it an octave lower.

MUSICIAN: *So often you exploit the technological possibilities of the studio, such as the Fairlight, yet your music tends to sound natural and organic.*

BUSH: Well although the Fairlight is called a synthesizer, so many of its sounds are actually of natural source. I think there's perhaps not such a great gap between the Fairlight and natural music as there is between synthesizers and acoustic music. Like what you thought might be a koto near the start of "Cloudbusting" was actually a banjo which I

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played on the Fairlight. And, as an album, *Hounds Of Love* is really quite different because the Fairlight was very involved—rather than, as on the last albums, all the tracks being written at the piano. But “Waking The Witch” I actually wrote through a guitarist, Alan Murphy, because it needed to be written from a guitarist’s point of view—a piano was wrong for that one.

MUSICIAN: *Certain of the new songs, like “Dream Of Sheep” and “Hello Earth,” strike me rather like Hollywood show tunes—they’re cinematic.*

BUSH: I think in a way they’re probably the most visual songs I’ve written in that, when I was writing them, I had in mind what potentially might be done with them, visually—which isn’t normally the way you go about writing a song. It’ll be interesting if we can ever actually turn it into a film, which is what I’d like to do.

MUSICIAN: *Do you think in your writing you’ve gradually departed structurally from the standard pop-song formula?*

BUSH: I don’t know! I suppose I have in some ways. The constant rhythm with fewer breaks is more in evidence on the new album. Though the music is changing, the rhythm keeps on going, and in a way I think that actually makes it a little more commercial.

MUSICIAN: *It seems to me that perhaps Hounds Of Love doesn’t cohere so organically in terms of texture and emotion as The Dreaming.*

BUSH: I think the problem with side two, “The Ninth Wave,” is that it is an overall concept, and ideally I would have liked two sides of an album to develop it. I wouldn’t like to feel that the album was just lots of little cameos put together, but rather that it flows. It’s true—the first side is made up of separate songs. But it’s interesting what you say because so many people have had just the opposite reaction in that they found *The Dreaming* terribly difficult. I just don’t think they could understand it.

MUSICIAN: *In America it got a lot more attention and acclaim than anything you’d ever done.*

BUSH: The media in America reacted so differently from the media in Britain. There was such positivity and acceptance towards what I was doing on that last album from America. Whereas all the earlier albums, which I’d have said were far more easily listenable and commercial, had no response from that country. And that seemed to me completely contradictory to what I’d been told about the American record market—you know, it’s said that Americans are terribly conservative in their tastes and that they like things which fit easily on the radio. Yet, they really did like it....

MUSICIAN: *In one or two of the American reviews of The Dreaming, your music was described as “schizophrenic”—and it seems to me that, in a manner of speaking, your music does represent a virtual compendium of psychopathology, alternately hysterical, melancholic, psychotic, paranoid, obsessive, and so on.*

BUSH: [Laughter] I think that is the most fascinating thing to write about—the way that people distort their attitudes. And it’s really fun for me if I can find an area of the personality that is slightly exaggerated or distorted and, if I feel I can identify with it enough, to try to cast a person as perfectly as I can in terms of that particular character trait.

Take anger for instance—it’s really fun to write from that point of view. Like in “Get Out Of My House” on the last album. Because I very rarely show anger, although obviously I sometimes feel it. The same with “Waking The Witch” on the new album: What fascinated me was the idea of a witch-hunter hiding behind the priesthood, as a guise, and coming to get this woman who isn’t a witch. The girl closes her eyes to get away and goes to a church where it’s safe and secure—you know, churches are supposed to be places of sanctuary and their doors are never shut, even perhaps for people

being chased by the Devil—but the priest himself turns out to be the witchhunter. I didn’t really have any heavy experiences like that. It’s based on other people’s imagery of Roman Catholicism—you know, the kind of oppression, even madness, it can create. My school was Roman Catholic so there was a big emphasis on religion but it wasn’t incredibly strict and I didn’t go to church an awful lot.

MUSICIAN: *But does this ever backfire on you? Do the forces which you unleash or the identities which you assume begin taking you over?*

BUSH: Obviously there must be a bit of me in them or I simply wouldn’t be able to come up with them, but I don’t think they actually take me over. I think I was affected by “Breathing”; and, when I was making the last album, I was very affected by “Houdini.” It was *really sad* trying to be Houdini’s lady: He must have been an amazing person, someone trying to escape not only throughout his life but also in death.

MUSICIAN: *Before Houdini died, he promised he would send back from beyond the grave some signal of his continuing existence if it proved supernaturally possible to do so. And so you have incorporated that moment in your song when you have him finally speak to his lady from the spirit world—I’ve got the right interpretation?*

BUSH: Absolutely, yes....

MUSICIAN: *Well, are people clued in enough to pick up on these subtleties and allusions in your songs? Do they show a good understanding of the concepts?*

BUSH: I think that the majority of people do. Because, if they bother to listen, then after about three or four times they start putting the words or the ideas together. We did a video of “Breathing” and the idea was of being in this huge inflatable; and I was at this conference somewhere and there were all these women in their forties and fifties, real Monty Python sort of women, and they all came up and said [Kate affects a strong London accent, which requires merely an exaggeration of her normal one]: “Oh, we loved your video!” And then one of them says: “But listen, you must tell me, I had this, you know, this argument with my daughter; you were meant to be in a womb, weren’t you? I mean, that is what it was meant to be, wasn’t it?” And I said yeah!

MUSICIAN: *You mean she got it?*

BUSH: Yeah, she got it! And she said: “There you are—didn’t I tell you it was a womb.” And I thought yeah, that’s fantastic! I wouldn’t have even expected her to sit and watch it....

MUSICIAN: *I must confess, I find it difficult to watch your performances. It seems to me so much of your music flows right out from essence, so to speak, whereas all the acting, all the theatrics, by their very nature they’re artificial and contrived. Also, because there’s often a flagrant sexual element to your performance, the viewer is automatically thrust into the position of being a voyeur.*

BUSH: Wow, yeah—that’s h-e-a-v-y. But I have only consciously projected the sexual element in a couple of characters and if that’s present for you in every performance—well, that is worrying for me. It’s not intentional.

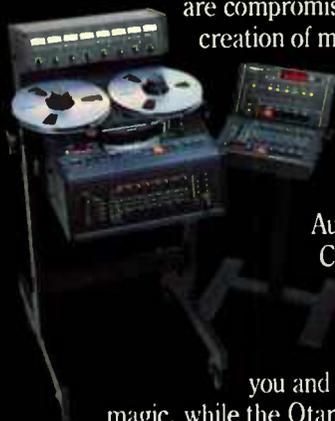
MUSICIAN: *I wonder if these theatrics might not detract from your potential for being taken seriously as a musician.*

BUSH: It’s a big problem. I don’t think I’ve been completely happy with any visual performance that I’ve done except for “Army Dreamers” and perhaps “Running Up That Hill.” But they were videos which took a lot of time and work and control. Usually the problems are lack of time or money. If anything, though, I think my performances help audiences understand the music better—especially the lyrical aspect—and the tour of Europe definitely caused a change in attitude both among the public and the media. Many people began to take me seriously as a musician for the first time. The audiences could see me there singing and dancing, leading

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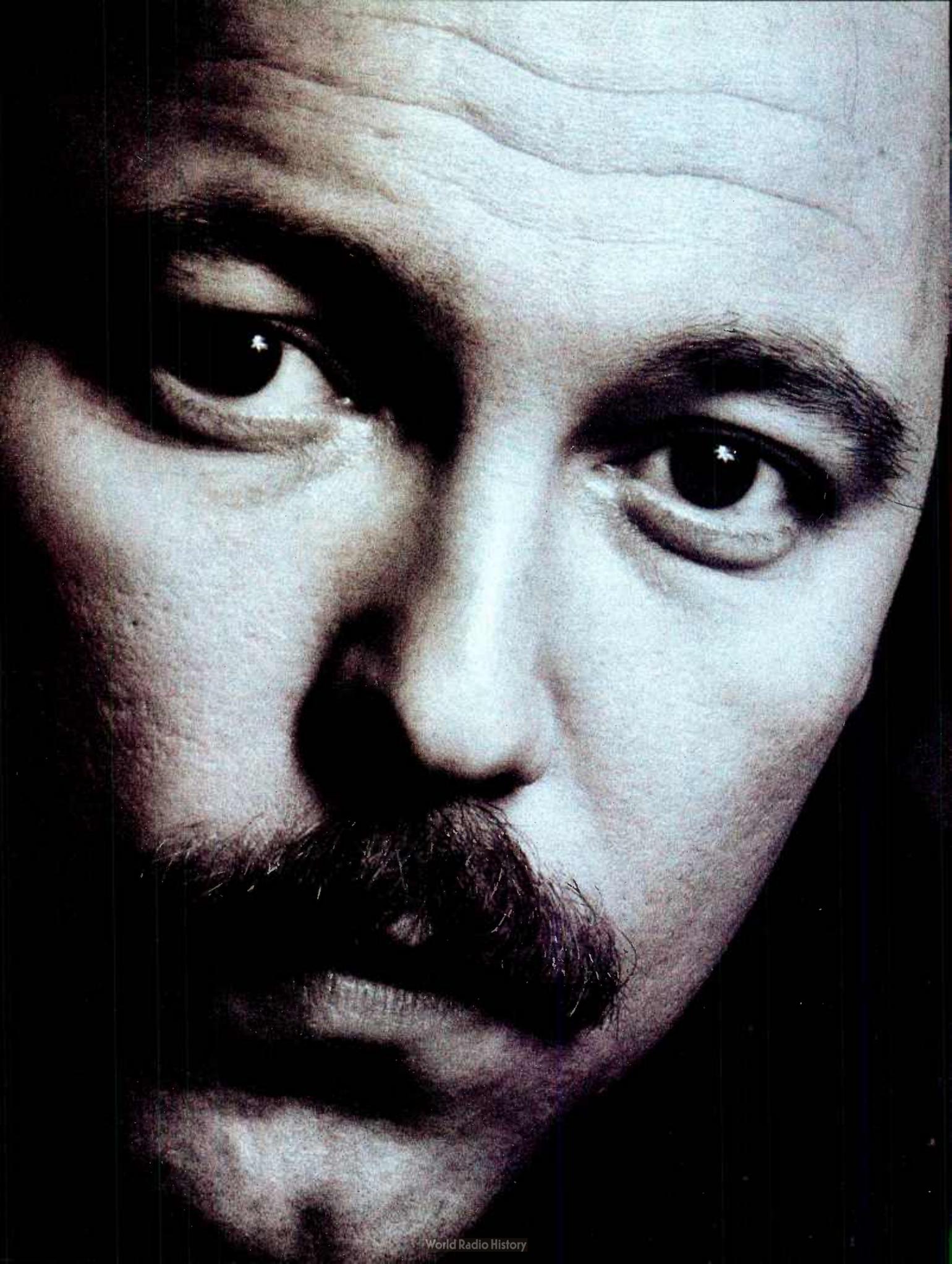


Rubén Blades wants to be the first Latin-American artist to exert a vital influence on mainstream pop music. Also, he would like to become the president of his native Panama. Neither ambition seems beyond his grasp. Since arriving in the United States ten years ago to play with salsa stars Ray Barretto and Willie Colon, Blades has carved an indelible niche in Latin music; his *Siembre* LP with Colon outsold every other title in the famed Fania catalog (which includes top names like Tito Puente and Johnny Ventura, among others), while "Pedro Navaja," an imaginative barrio re-working of "Mack The Knife," has become the greatest salsa hit of all time.

Blades' musical talents are complemented by a sturdy political idealism rare for any musician, a vision exemplified by songs like those found on his two recent Elektra LPs (*Buscando America* and *Escenas*), his efforts to improve the working conditions of his fellow Latin musicians, and most recently by his star turn in the critically acclaimed film *Crossover Dreams*. On screen Rubén portrays a musician who receives a sobering comeuppance when he sells out his music and his friends while chasing the chimera of commercial success. The real Rubén figures he can chart such success on his own terms, and his recent triumph at Carnegie Hall, which drew sizable proportions of both English and Spanish speaking fans, supporters from Bronx barrios along with more well-heeled followers like Lou Reed and Robert DeNiro, would seem to support that notion. He is convinced that the power of his music, his message (and perhaps, his spirit) will topple the barriers of language and rhythm which have so far ghettoized Latin music. To fulfill his own ambitions, which include a return to Panama and an active engagement in

By Enrique Fernandez

Photographs by Teri Bloom



political life, he knows that it must.

"In Latin American we still evaluate our local production in terms of its international accomplishments," he explains. "If I don't go back to Panama with an aura of power and fame earned here, no one would pay me any mind. They would say, 'Yes, the guy's good, but he can't compete with those people.' You have to make good here before you can go back there and be heard."

Rubén Blades is thirty-seven years old. His heritage is multicultural (blacks, whites, Americans, West Indians, Cubans, Colombians). His parents, themselves once musicians, initially discouraged his desire to become a singer and composer of popular music, so Rubén effected a typically ambitious compromise: He earned a law degree at home, then moved to New York to ply his musical talents (he's since received his master's in international law from Harvard). Through the 70s he made his reputation turning out hits for Fania, the Motown of salsa, but inevitably locked horns with the company when he attempted to fight what he regarded as corporate exploitation of the city's Latin musicians. Two years ago he left that label, incurring a lengthy litigation in the process.

More happily, his visibility in *Crossover Dreams* alerted Elektra to the possibilities of a musical crossover as well. Blades' 1984 debut, *Buscando America*, offered unabashedly politicized vignettes of modern Latin American life—the morning routine of a state police officer, the assassination of a progressive priest, the plight of the "disappeared." *Escenas* takes a more personal tack, but its narratives are no less forceful, while its musical innovations are, if anything, more radical. Instead of salsa's normal brass configuration, for example, *Escenas* features synthesizers, a startling departure from salsa's conservative musical traditions. And Blades' beat, while still grounded in that tradition, ignores salsa's strict rhythmic codes. "Silencios," a slow duet with Linda Ronstadt, takes the form of a pop ballad instead of a bolero. "Muevete," the album's hottest dance track, typifies Blades' merging of musical and political concerns—not because the tune comes from socialist Cuba, but because the *songo* beat is the progressive sound of the Spanish Caribbean, salsa's musical "left."

That shouldn't surprise either, for Blades is one pop artist who always knows not only what he's doing, but why. Imbued with a strong sense of purpose and social responsibility, he's more than willing to articulate it, which helps explain the attentions he's suddenly receiving from the U.S. establishment press (*Newsweek*, the *New York Times*). Of course, his timing is impeccable: Here is a Central American who is becoming a pop star just as his part of the world seems targeted for a U.S. invasion, and a composer whose music is reaching all corners of the Spanish speaking community even though it originates, not in Latin America, but in the U.S. Finally, the man himself intrigues—good-looking, charismatic, quick-witted, cultured and, as the following interview suggests, aggressive, self-confident, and driven to excel.

MUSICIAN: *The Latin record industry has grown a lot, particularly with the entrance of major companies into the Latin market. However, the kind of music they make is not your music, it's not Caribbean music, it's not roots music. It's much more orchestrated, romantic music, ballads, the Julio Iglesias sound. Where do you fit in in all this?*

BLADES: Well, what I'm indicating through my work for Elektra is that there's a wider range of tastes in Latin America and a greater possibility of expressing Latin cultural reality than what the format of these romantic ballads allows. One reason why these companies have backed this kind of music is that it presents no problems. Basically, it's music that doesn't sweat, that has no smell. Well, perhaps it has an aroma.

MUSICIAN: *Julio Iglesias has come out with a fragrance.*

BLADES: It's called "Hey" [*the name of an Iglesias hit song*].

MUSICIAN: *That's also the name of his dog.*

BLADES: Well, maybe that's how it smells. Julio Iglesias sells a lot of records as a balladeer and the companies say "This is what the people want to hear." In this party only people with coat and tie are allowed. What they're trying to do is pretend that Latin America is just that, a grouping of rooms where the residents wear coat and tie, talk about winters and autumns, and drink beverages internationally recognized for their sophistication. In my opinion, it's nothing but a reflection of certain social classes that are finally disappearing, the ones who've been in command politically and economically, and who have caused the disaster we are living today in Latin America. That image is obsolete and indefensible. Perhaps there was a time when they could not be opposed for practical reasons, because we were resigned to it: The lord up on the hill and we down here eating caca but happy because our life is the right one and will take us to heaven. But that's over. Those who pretend to find a musical reflection of those old realities are in complete ignorance of the history of Latin America, and most importantly, are ignoring the future of Latin America, which is going to be the rise of an integrated Latin American society.

MUSICIAN: *The music fan who doesn't know Latin music may hear a lot of rhythm and something very hot but has no idea how this music is structured and how it evolved. How would you explain it?*

BLADES: Basically it's a music of African origins, complemented by the Spanish experience—which isn't hard to understand since Spain already had a lot of African influence, from the days of the Moors. A *guaganco*, [a traditional Afro-Cuban dance beat] for example, has on the one hand the African drum and on the other the voices of Andalusia in southern Spain, gypsy voices: Aeeé, eeé, eeé. Cuba is where these influences came together, that's why we call the music "Afro-Cuban." There's a tremendous variety of rhythms, but basically within a structure of three and two beats, the *clave*, a way of encompassing African accents within a rational, European beat.

Later on, this music was called "salsa" because it was impossible for many people to know the enormous variety of rhythms. I've never liked the term salsa. It merely points to the festive nature of this music without taking in consideration the lyric content. But as society becomes more complex, as the *barrio* becomes part of what's happening nationally and internationally, the music begins to assume another shape, influenced by jazz or music from south of the Caribbean. The structure and the presentation of this music changes. And the lyrics are not just about the ghetto, but about the city and the world. The day is coming when this music will have a more contemporary designation, leaving the "Afrocuban" adjective to identify the point of departure.

MUSICIAN: *In Panama salsa has been "popular" music, in the Latin American use of the term: people's music, of the working class, the peasants, the poor. And salsa caught on more than Panamanian music.*

BLADES: Originally, yes. Since Cuba was one of the first Latin American countries to make its own records, Cuban music began to arrive in a big way in the 30s and 40s. The people didn't have enough money to buy records, but they did listen to the radio. Figures like Beny Moré, Celia Cruz, La Sonora Matancera, Casino de la Playa, were all identified and accepted. And local bands began to follow these models. Afrocuban music took over. The *tamborito* and the *cumbia*, the cultural heritage we had inherited from Colombia [Panama was once part of Colombia] was only heard during national holidays. It was said that Panamanian music was for hicks. Afrocuban music was foreign and thus it had a certain air



“When I came to New York, full of hope, I realized my songs meant nothing here. In Puerto Rico they did, but not here. And I found that the musicians were being kept ignorant of the impact they were having outside New York. We’re a minority, but we have a *majority* outside. That’s where the schizophrenia begins.”

of sophistication, while our national music was for peasants and for moments of patriotic effervescence.

And in Panama what was always present was American music. Afro-Cuban music presented an alternative, not only to celebrate but to create a popular voice through music.

MUSICIAN: *What did Panamanians listen to when you were coming up?*

BLADES: The whole American big band sound, and singers like Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Mel Tormé. Plus Beny Moré, La Sonora Matancera, Daniel Santos, Billo’s Caracas Boys. When rock ‘n’ roll came in it had a tremendous impact on young people. I started out with rock, singing and trying to play the guitar. The movies *Rock Rock Rock* and *Rock Around The Clock* were decisive. It was the first time we saw kids like us making music, singing and having fun.

MUSICIAN: *When you switched to salsa and moved to New York, what did you find?*

BLADES: In Panama we were very impressed by the degree of sophistication of New York salsa: the tremendous variety of arrangers and musicians. We believed that here in New York there was a cultural movement, a grand design, not only to use music as entertainment, but as a means of estab-

lishing a cultural identity within a country that wasn’t ours. Which led us to believe, erroneously, that there was total compatibility between American Latins and Latin Americans.

When I came here I realized this was not the case at all—that to many, music was exclusively a business, that record companies only thought of making money, that there was very little information here about Latin America. And it was no coincidence that the song lyrics did not have a Latin American tone. The connection with Latin America was exclusively through the music’s Afro-Cuban origins.

Paradoxically, since one expected New York to be in the vanguard, there had been a group in Puerto Rico to point the way: Rafael Cortijo with Ismael Rivera. Cortijo, may he rest in peace, was a man in love with his country, with its traditions, its culture. Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena* [two traditional Puerto Rican dance forms] came into Panama like a hurricane. The songs didn’t have that folkloric tone of the old Afro-Cuban lyrics. All of a sudden, there are other beats, other intentions. Mon Rivera starts singing about how the strike is coming, that there’s no work at the shop. He starts presenting social conflicts and transforming the music into a medium not just for dance, but also for reflection. He would

create these little chronicles about Puerto Rican characters that could be easily recognized in Panama. And his songs offered solutions, positions. Like he would criticize the non-sense of not using our own language and would urge us to avoid substituting one culture for another.

MUSICIAN: *When did you first come to the U.S.?*

BLADES: In 1970. In Panama the movement of Cortijo and Mon Rivera had lost momentum and there were other elements in the scene: Eddie Palmieri, Willie Colon, Joe Cuba—whose singer, Cheo Feliciano, along with Ismael Rivera, had the greatest influence on me. And Ricardo Rey, a classical pianist who took traditional music and changed its tone, utilizing jazz harmonies.

MUSICIAN: *On your last LP, Escenas, there are some departures from your previous work—more synthesizer, for instance, and no vibraphone. Why?*

BLADES: Two reasons. One, we can travel a lot better. The vibraphone is extremely difficult to transport; it's very big and very fragile. The other is that the vibes made us sound like a second Joe Cuba sextet so we had to find something with a different sound.

Basically, we wanted to find a way out of the Afro-Cuban brass configuration—the American big band format that has so influenced salsa. Why not present the sound of today? We no longer dress the same, nor think the same, nor act the same as forty years ago. We want to present our culture and our music using a contemporary language.

MUSICIAN: *Since you separated from Willie Colon, you've chosen a small group. That has practical reasons; it's easier to travel with them than with a big band. But why these specific musicians? None of them is a big salsa name, like the Fania All-Stars.*

BLADES: One: musical talent. Second: their attitude. They're guys who want to work, who want to exercise their art under different conditions than the usual ones, and this makes them accept my way of being. Third: They don't have the problems that usually wear out the superstars, problems with drugs or with being irresponsible in their work. Their character is in many ways like mine. They are also extremely versatile.

It's a band that can go in very many different directions. And it saves me a lot of the headaches of a big band. You know, you become the psychiatrist, father, mother, social director, friend, enemy, tyrant, everything. And it allows us to travel to places where it would be economically unfeasible to take a big band.

MUSICIAN: *You've made the film Crossover Dreams, and there's been a lot of talk about you crossing over. That usually means a Latin or black who wants to cross to the mainstream American market, which may not necessarily be bigger, but provides more money and prestige.*

BLADES: There's definitely an economic situation. The markets within which the U.S. Latin artist subsists are very limited because we're a minority that has not yet been taken seriously; the Latin musician wants to leave this economic ghetto and look for the broad market.

But what's even more of a determinant is the search for a cultural blessing, which is something that exists whenever one group has been subjugated to another. One looks for a recognition of one's worth by a boss figure—in this case the Anglo public. We look for an approval that we are like you, that we can do it like you do.

Right now I'm doing everything I can to be understood by people who have traditionally ignored Latin America. And as a musician who's eventually going to return to Panama, I know the power of the media: I too need that cultural blessing. But I'm not going to dye my hair blond nor stop speaking Spanish nor stop writing and performing in Spanish because now everything has to be in English.

MUSICIAN: *However, you've been criticized for living in the*

U.S. and not in Panama, for not living in a Latin neighborhood but on gentrified Columbus Avenue, in a comfortable apartment, living a comfortable life.

BLADES: Look, whoever thinks I moved here from Panama to improve economically is crazy. I was a lawyer in Panama. I would've been the youngest lawyer in Panama's foreign service when in '74 I was interviewed by the Panamanian ambassador for the job of legal counsel to the embassy. I turned it down while I was making \$73 a week working with Ray Barretto. I left Panama motivated by artistic, not economic reasons. I left because Panama did not have the recording technology, nor the international record distribution, nor all those musicians I admired and I was going to learn from.

As far as how I live, brother, I came out of a one-room apartment, my father out of one that was even smaller, and my mother from a household of twenty-two people—you can imagine what that was like. I come from a family of working people where one always tries to improve the lot of those who come after you and where there is one constant: honesty. I've never believed that one has to vulgarize oneself under subhuman conditions in order to have the right to express a popular feeling. That's a story the ruling classes made up in order to keep everyone else at that level. That is, be poor because the poor are happier than the rich. That's fiction. Money corrupts: False. Money unmask. Whoever is corrupt can be corrupt without any money. Power corrupts: False. It also unmask. It only gives whoever is evil the power to do evil at a larger level than when he didn't have a penny in his pocket.

Where does one live? One lives where one can have the greatest assurance of living in peace. I've been living in this neighborhood for eleven years and I've stayed because I like it. I know where I can buy plantains, I have credit at the La Caridad diner. But if I could afford to move upstate to a place with lots of land, a beautiful house, a pool, sure I'd go. *Everyone wants to live better than they did before.*

MUSICIAN: *But doesn't that mean that you're more and more among Americans and among the jet set. Aren't you isolated from your own people?*

BLADES: No. Becoming a lawyer in Panama put me in contact with people who were much better off than me. But what I learned then is that one can physically live in a ghetto but mentally one doesn't have to. And I've never lived in a mental ghetto; I've always read, I've always been convinced of what I can do, I can talk on a first-name basis with anyone. And something else I know; my background has allowed me to get here and the moment I abandon it I'd go down, not only artistically, but as a person.

MUSICIAN: *In Crossover Dreams your character Rudy is very naive, which is why he swallows the whole world of glamour and hype. Do you think that people who see Crossover Dreams and don't know you will think that this is the Ruben Blades story?*

BLADES: People will make the association. I have gone through the same situations. The difference between Rudy and me is that Rudy did not create enough alternatives for himself. I created them through study and thanks to a background that was much more protected. In my neighborhood people didn't drop dead from an overdose of heroin or get murdered in the streets with a gun.

It was a tough neighborhood; you could get beaten up or have someone break a stick or a bottle over your head. But some things were not done. You got in a fight with another guy and you would punch it out in the street. All by hand. That relative peace gave me a chance to think and correct my errors along the way. Although the problems with record companies, with promoters and managers, the problems of musicians who make no more than forty, thirty, twenty bucks per night, I went through all that.



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MUSICIAN: *Has that situation changed since you started out?*

BLADES: I believe it's still going on. Probably because there are no associations, outside of Local 802, that protect the interests of Latin musicians in this city—even though I and other musicians tried to create one. There are many musicians here who are in the same situation as Rudy, or myself back in '74.

MUSICIAN: *You've had a very problematic relationship with the Fania label. Through them you became an international figure. Yet you've been involved in litigation with them, even after leaving the company.*

BLADES: The relationship between the Latin musician and the record company in this city is a feudal relationship, one in which there is a master and a serf, where the serf is allowed just enough of the crop to feed himself and his family so they can stay strong enough to keep serving the master. Once a promoter told me that without the record company I could not exist. And I told him that I can have a phone at home to handle my own calls, I can make my own contract, I can make my own work arrangements—but you can't sing. So please reevaluate the situation. That was basically the problem I had with Fania. If you asked for foreign royalties they told you they hadn't arrived, and it's not that they didn't arrive one year, they never arrived. They gave you the checks after a thousand threats. Musicians were not encouraged to get legal representation. And the people who ran the company lived extremely well. While we musicians have to put up a collection whenever one of us dies.

Within this framework, I never allowed them to treat me like a racehorse. And even though initially I had to sign a contract where the company took the lion's share, because it was a take-it-or-leave-it situation, I was very clear about what I was doing and who they were: simple administrators of a talent pool without which they could not live. When they sued me for money they said I owed them, they were trying to make me see the power of the company. It was settled out of court and I wound up recovering all my publishing rights, plus \$10,000 they owed me. It was the first time an artist from Fania recovered his music.

MUSICIAN: *What's next?*

BLADES: The first English-language numbers, for the Gamboa Road Gang project. The idea is to communicate and to play places where we never played before, in places where Latin bands never perform. Los Lobos have done it to a certain extent, but I don't see them having a Latin American projection. Now, Gamboa Road Gang will have nothing to do with my present band,

Los Seis del Solar. When I'm playing with Los Seis del Solar I won't sing in English. I'm not going to get people confused nor send an alarm that Ruben is going over to the other side: We're losing another one.

MUSICIAN: *And the musicalization of Marquez's stories? You met with him recently. What will be his contribution?*

BLADES: Well, his first contribution is to let me do this kind of work. Though from a strictly legal point of view I didn't need his permission; I'm not making a faithful adaptation of his stories into song. What I asked for was a kind of blessing. When I tried to talk to him about the stories he said no because then I would never finish them, he would give me suggestions and he knew, as a writer, that this would delay the project. What he did say is that now he was going to sing through me; he always wanted to sing. Right now I'm trying to convince him to appear on the cover with me. I don't know if this will be possible, because Gabriel is extremely cautious about people taking advantage of him. But it's important because it will indicate at an international level that there is a collaboration between two characters who are popular, each one in his field, and who form part of that same Latin American condition and the same popular background. We can end that notion that intellectuals and popular musicians are like oil and water.

MUSICIAN: *In Escenas you have a song about cocaine, "La Caina." You have an anti-drug reputation in the Latin music world, where, just like in American music, there's a lot of drug consumption, perhaps because coke gives you an artificial, chemical machismo. Do you think people are going to hear your song and reconsider?*

BLADES: The song is directed at those who haven't used it yet or who need another type of reinforcement to not get into it. The drug problem in Latin America is not the use, but the abuse. Everybody drinks coffee and that's a drug; it riles you up chemically. The problem is not drinking coffee, but drinking ten, twenty, thirty, cups of coffee and not being able to function.

I think that those who party and snort around will keep on doing so. I don't think they're going to hear my song and say, "How badly I've been acting." Maybe some who do it by imitation will hear this and reconsider if they think that the artist needs to take drugs to be an artist. For the record, never in my life have I had a hit of cocaine. Not even to find out what it's like. I'm not interested in drugs, I don't take pills even if I'm in pain. I don't like them. Man, I'm so set on assuming control of my life, so totally obsessed with always being

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ZZ TOP

The grandmotherly desk clerk at the HoJo's Motor Lodge across the street from Get Down Brown's Bar in Beaumont, Texas presses the door buzzer with grave reluctance, admitting the sunglassed man with the pennant-length whiskers and his slick-looking entourage. Beside the narrow highway, the teeming ginmill's large gravel entryway is a study in raucous shadowplay, as shifting headlights catch fragmented glimpses of intoxication, sexual horseplay and the wages of rock 'n' roll.



"Would you look at that mangy bunch go at it," says the mysterious bearded man in the blue serge suit, momentarily lowering his Ray-Bans to better appraise the inky frolics in the opposite parking lot as he signs the motel's guest register. His sudden smile shows two rows of aristocratically even pearly

**BY
TIMOTHY WHITE**



THE ONGOING LEGEND OF TEXAN ROCK'S ROUGH BOYS

PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON RAPOPORT

World Radio History

whites as he adds, "There'll be nothing but flat-out beer drinkers and hell raisers at Brown's for *this* soiree."

Inside the spacious tavern, there are plenty of strapping young men and long-legged women pressed hip-to-hip at the beer taps and chest-to-chest before the smoke-beclouded bandstand. It's an older crowd, ranging in age from mid-twenties to triple that, most of them attired in Urban Cowboy mufti—jeans with gleaming oval belt buckles, Tony Lamas boots, cotton plaid shirts—and most are agreeably shit-faced. The Cotton-Eyed Joe, Texas Two-Step and a host of other post-midnight mating dances are getting under way.

Beaumont is an often-sinister city that's been manufacturing its share of dashed hopes and delusionary windfalls since the discovery in 1910 of limitless oil deposits at Spindletop; most of the rewards from these oil strikes went to investors and speculators in far-flung locales, while the defeated hands who worked the rigs sedated themselves in honkytonks. Around such mundane sorrows there grew up a network of dives and strip joints between Beaumont and Port Arthur (four miles down the coast), featuring country & western, Tex-Mex, blues and R&B performers, and, in the 60s, an electrified, agitated brand of white man's combo blues that borrowed heavily from the Linden, Texas-reared heart of Aaron "T-Bone" Walker. Late in the decade, the raw-boned rock 'n' roll of the region merged with all of the above and a double-dose of psychedelics to addle the timing of a new and otherwise bored-to-the-bone generation of bar bands: Fever Tree, Thursday's Children, the Clique, the Countdown Five, Horace & the Snakes, and Moving Sidewalks.

The ride was a wild one while it lasted, leaving a lot of sordid police blotter dispatches and half-inch obits in its wake. Several talented participants actually crossed over into some corner of the motley underground media corona that was the rock big time of that period, bringing their colorful excesses along with them. The most ravenous, like Port Arthur's Janis Joplin, succumbed. Others burned out and returned to day jobs. But a very few bit the bullet and bided their time until another decade's worth of wild rides began....

"Oh my Gawd!" yelps the head barkeep. "ZZ TOP JUST WALKED IN!"

Sure enough, palming his HoJo's room key with one hand and the wire waist of a comely, raven-haired lady named Debbie with the other as he strides into the heart of the fray is Billy Gibbons himself. The lead guitarist for That Little Ol' Band from Texas strokes his beard in the eye of the tumult, shoots an idle glance in the direction of the loudmouth tending to the thirsty patrons and then moves onward, guiding his guests through a maze of beaming well-wishers.

Although there was no mention of it in this month's installment of *Texas Monthly's* hip "Around The State" entertainment guide, tonight marks the reunion of the Boogie Kings, among the hottest white soul bands in the South in the late-

(1968-72) of the Beaumont club scene.

"Mind you, these folks are mighty, mighty ripe for a blow-out," warns a gleeful Gibbons, talking out of the side of his mouth as broad-shouldered buddy Jimmy Hammond runs interference to wedge Billy's party into a row of tables beside the dance floor. "See that bald-headed fella over yonder?" Gibbons asks, tipping his crumpled khaki golf hat in the direction of a graying bespectacled codger with a drink in each hand. "That guy's Al Caldwell, a deejay at KAYC in Beaumont. When ZZ Top was getting started down here, he used to introduce us at the Knights of Columbus dances! This was our primary territory, a town where we could always draw when no one else would have us, and just about everybody in this place caught our act in one or another Beaumont hall or hole. Before that, I had my psychedelic band, the Moving Sidewalks, and we had a straight R&B and rock act with no horns—which was unheard of in Beaumont then!"

"That's the truth," says Jimmy Hammond, who was the bassist in such rival bands as Horace & the Snakes and Sage. "They had a row to hoe when I met Billy on his birthday [December 16] in 1967 during a Sidewalks gig at the Crown Room at the King Edward Hotel, because a soul horn section was an absolute must if you wanted to avoid trouble. They had two singles out [on the Wand label], '99th Floor,' which was Billy's response to what the 13th Floor Elevators were doing with songs like 'You're Gonna Miss Me,' and another tune he wrote called 'Need Me.' They were hippie weirdos but they were tolerated because they were known."

"It was a re-recorded version of '99th Floor' that got us on a cool 1968 tour with Jimi Hendrix and the Soft Machine," says Gibbons. "We were trying to go the 13th Floor Elevator thing one better with a blues edge, and we topped the Houston charts. We tried to do everything the English guys were doing, with Carnaby Street striped suits and epaulets, but the Elevators were the most freaked-out act Texas had seen, and you didn't dare say you disliked them. They were a bunch of nuts from some tourist trap in Central Texas and the word was they drank Listerine all the time. Every band was in a race to be crazier."

"We all used to hang out at the old Get Down Brown's which eventually burned down, and then we'd move on to Our Place, a real shitkicker's bar," Hammond continues. "One Christmas Eve Billy and Johnny Winter swung into Our Place and the usual brawl between rednecks and longhairs broke out—only that night things got outta hand and Our Place burned down too!"

"ZZ Top clicked from the git-go though," he says, "cause of the nasty sound of the guitars. I knew Billy had gotten it down right, same as when I first saw Merle Haggard at Port Neches in 1963."

The reminiscences are interrupted by two barmaids who bring no less than 32 brimming cans of beer for a party of six.

"This Egyptian kid comes over to beg money, stops, stares, and then whips out a cassette of *El Loco*."

60s/early-70s. Billy and company have made a sentimental sojourn all the way down from Houston to catch the ten-piece Kings, a Beaumont legend led by singer-trumpeter G.G. Shinn and Jerry "the Count" LaCroix. The former gent, who boasts a five-octave vocal range, is a onetime member of the jazz-rock trumpet band Chase, while the latter is one of several Kings who are alumni of Edgar Winter's White Trash. Indeed, Winter was born and raised in Beaumont (his and Johnny's parents still live off Thomas Road) and as Billy Gibbons makes his way through the throng, old cronies and drinking partners shout out anecdotes about the local exploits of Billy and the Winter brothers during the heyday

"Good Lord," says Billy, strikingly slim after a strict diet that enabled him to shed thirty pounds, "we've got our hands full 'n then some!"

"Everybody wanted to buy you a round, honey," says one of the buxom, micro-mini-skirted waitresses with a slow wink.

"Oooh boy, this reminds me of when Billy owned a saloon in Durango, Mexico in the mid-70s," says Jimmy. "It was called the El Dorado Bar—there's pictures of it in the inside sleeve of *Tres Hombres*—and John Wayne and all these other actors used to drink Tecati and tequila there and check out the house *norteño* band when they made western movies in the area."



Dusty Hill and Billy Gibbons: "Mind you, these folks are mighty, mighty ripe for a blow-out."

"Good times," says Billy, nodding and patting his luxuriant chin-warmer, "good times. Why I—"

Gibbons is interrupted by the Boogie Kings, fresh from their first break of the night and eager to exchange bearhugs. At length, a frail, snow-haired grandmother of one of the band members is eased to the head of the line and introduced to the guest of honor.

"Billy my darlin', I got a personal question I have to ask you in front of your girl," she says solemnly.

The crowd around the table is hushed.

"Do you sleep with your beard *under* the covers or *over* the covers?"

ZZ Top is currently one of the biggest bands on the planet and unquestionably among the most beloved. Domestically, the Texas trio has sold nearly six million copies of *Eliminator*, released in March 1983, with overseas numbers at four million. The LP has once again begun climbing up the *Billboard* survey as their tenth installment, the incendiary *Afterburner*, blitzes both the record charts and, across the board, the formats of national radio, where five to six of its tracks are being added to playlists. And since Warner Bros., ZZ Top's label since 1978, has acquired the group's 1970-77 London Records catalogue (*Z.Z. Top's First Album*, *Rio Grande Mud*, *Tres Hombres*, *Fandango!*, *Tejas*, *The Best Of ZZ Top*), there is every possibility that sales of the fabled old product and the subsequent Warners albums (including *Dequello* and *El Loco*) will also be reactivated.

Nobody doesn't like ZZ Top, from yuppies who admire their renegade marketing (there are over forty items in the band's merchandise catalog—"All of them created as a result of specific letter campaign-type demands from fans," according to Lone Wolf Productions Minister of Information J.W. Williams, "and we'll do a half-million in the keychains alone with *Afterburner*") to hippie holdouts, heavy metal helots,

techy connoisseurs of exquisite rock guitar invention, and any observers who get a vicarious rise out of the Ghosts of Christmas Present persona they evoke on their ongoing Keys-to-the-Eliminator video series.

What prevents ZZ Top from disintegrating into mere comic book familiarity are the artful self-deprecation and coy wit with which they invest their ferocious musicality, the elusive nature of the men themselves, and the treacherous Texas rock 'n' boogie brazos from which they emerged.

Their appeal is as universal as the thrust of their message: It's all in fun, pardner—'cept for the music.

"Dusty and me, we just got back from a vacation in Cairo," says Billy Gibbons one sunny Houston afternoon, he and his cohorts arranging themselves on sofas and stools in the living room of a friend's house.

"Billy and I zoomed over there to relieve-the-tension after we finished the record, but we couldn't find any Cleopatras with headphones and shades," Joe "Dusty" Hill chimes in with a toothy chuckle. The beefy blond bassist is referring to the sexy Egyptian collage art on the sleeve of "Sleeping Bag," the *Afterburner* single that exhorts listeners to "sleep beside the Pharaohs in the shifting sands."

"I couldn't make the trip," says the muscular, clean-shaven Frank Beard with a Jack Nicholson leer, "'cause I had myself a prior commitment that wuz just as ancient."

"We'd been planning the visit for quite a while," says Gibbons, smoothing out the wrinkles in one of the loose-fitting, expensive European suits he enjoys lounging in when off-duty. "After doing Bobby 'Blue' Bland stuff forever, we figured it was high time we checked out the *original* Memphis, the tomb of the Boy King and the Great Pyramid at Giza, because we'd always been fascinated by the general fascination others have with these things. The morning we hit the G.P. on camels, this young Egyptian kid comes over to beg some money, stops, stares, and whips out this bag with a cassette

of *El Loco* in it. He even had a Walkman! But the local stuff the boy played us lacked, we thought, a heavy backbeat and was a bit nasal—" All three men abruptly lapse into a unison, four-second whining drone that resembles a fakir's pipes.

"Yeah, it wasn't awfully commercial," a redfaced Gibbons deadpans, his eyes gleaming with suppressed laughter, "so they were anxious for a helping of our moving groovin' beat. They're not really keen on dancing, that kind of social activity being taboo, yet they were curious about our latest material. But I don't see Egypt as a place where a heavy backbeat fits in; time is irrelevant over there, particularly in light of the fact that the Islamic faith dictates that prayers to Allah occur at midnight and then again at 4 a.m., in addition to three other times during the day. They've got these cheap exponential loudspeaker bullhorns mounted on roving vehicles that remind you it's time to drop to your knees and pay homage. Man, it's jarring."

"Screwed onto the dressers in the hotels are these metal discs with a welded arrow on them pointing East," says Dusty intently. "That's to remind you where Mecca is at. The morning we were leaving Cairo it was just before sunrise, and as I was packing my gear the whole city started to wail, a huge portion of the city's twelve million chanting until it became a weird wash of sound. It was the strangest chord I ever heard.

"We had a guide named Sahib—we called him Sam—who was worn out one afternoon and depressed with a sick headache. He took his shoes and socks off, washed his hands and feet, went off and did a prayer wail and came back completely rejuvenated. Looked years younger; it was amazing."

"That routine could come in handy for you after some of those long nights in downtown Houston," cracks Frank Beard. "Texas has its own funky deserts and rejuvenating wails."

"No *shee-it*," Dusty nods, twirling his wispy golden moustache around a stubby index finger. "After all I've learned 'tween here and Dallas over the last twenty years about the art of reviving myself, I could go on back to Cairo tonight and be the next King Farouk!"

Dusty Hill was born on May 19, 1949 in East Dallas, the son of James Ernest Hill, a truck driver who divorced Dusty's mother when the boy was eight. He was raised by his mother, "a Kate Smith-type singer with big bands before I was born," and stepfather T.C. "Top Cat" Allen, an assembly-line worker in the local Ford plant. One of five kids by both fathers, Dusty had an independent bent and at thirteen was a familiar paleface at the all-black Ascot Ballroom on Hall Street, sitting in with Freddie King, the Gilmer, Texas electric blues great. Dusty had already taken up a Harmony solidbody (boasting but three strings for an extended period) to earn a slot in the Deadbeats, a combo formed by his guitarist brother Rocky, but within the year he was spending as much time backing bluesmen.

"There was an after-hours club in Dallas called the Kay-Jon that got going after the beer joints closed," says Dusty, "and I started frequenting it because you could meet the main black musicians there. I got to know Freddie King and his wife pretty well and I'd go over to have dinner with them and their fifteen-odd kids in South Dallas.

"At the time, I was going to Woodrow Wilson High, which was in a nice area called Lakewood," says Dusty. "But I didn't fit in. I was up every night at 1 a.m. listening to blues and Tex-Mex stuff from this Mexican station down in Del Rio. There were no regulations or restrictions on stations south of the border and the show was incredibly raunchy with commercials advertising goat gland operations to restore your sex life. The next day after school I'd go from Sampley's, the old general store where the East Dallas kids hung out, to Harold's, a drugstore and soda fountain in a shopping center in Lakewood where you could corner cheerleaders.

"But these kids would be talking about some stupid pop singer and their virginity when I'd been up to no good the previous evening until Kay-Jon shut down. It was bullshit, it made no sense. My mother, who was a waitress in some of the beer joints I played in, would say, 'You gotta get an education!' but I took care of the school problem in tenth grade and my free time expanded."

Dusty promptly filled his newfound unstructured hours by joining up with Frank Beard, a native of the Dallas suburb of Irving (birthplace of Jimmy and Stevie Ray Vaughan) and the son of the office manager of a Ford dealership. Frank had been the quarterback for the Irving Tigers, but at fifteen he was barred from all extra-curricular activities after school administrators learned of his shotgun marriage to a classmate; his pregnant wife was expelled. It was the summer of 1964 and he had just gotten himself a \$200 set of blue pearl Lyra drums from Montgomery Ward, a move inspired by the sight of Ringo Starr's casual rimshots on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

"I knew the marriage wasn't gonna last that long," says Frank, another devilish Nicholson grin growing on his thin lips, "and I was looking for a new way to get pussy. I thought, 'These Beatle guys get a lot of pussy; I'm gonna take this up.' I was going to school half-a-day, and then working in the sporting goods department of a K-Mart kinda chain called International Super Stores from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. for \$100 a week. Within six months from the time I got that set of drums, I was working in Fort Worth at a strip joint called the Cellar for \$15 a night. Things started dropping out of my life, school first, then the sporting goods job, and finally my marriage."

These involvements were replaced by drinking problems, a drug habit (that would later lead to years of heroin addiction), and Dusty and Rocky Hill. Frank blew in the Cellar one night in 1967 and caught the Warlocks, a band fronted by Dusty and Rocky that had issued two singles "Splash Day"/"Life's A Mystery" and "If You Really Want Me To Stay"/"Good Time Trippin'" on the Paradise and Ara labels, respectively. "Another Year"/"Poor Kid," another Ara 45, which aped the British rock of the era with the help of an English siren named Lady Wilde, caused a small stir in the area.

Beard was impressed with the Warlocks and signed on when their drummer left to tie the knot. After the band lost its limey singer it reformed as a hard rock outfit, American Blues, and opened at a quasi-sister club, the Cellar Door, up in Houston. A band member named Phil Vickery suggested they dye their hair blue as a gimmick and everyone but the keyboardist, who opted for a wig, acceded.

"We didn't mind that the keyboard guy, whose name was Sharkey, wouldn't go along with the dye job," says Frank, "since he was good in a grocery store when it came to stealing steaks. As for the rest of us, we were all blonds and we had to bleach our hair white before this Roux No. 10 would take hold. I had to do seventeen bleaches, and it burned like hell."

The Cellar Door proved a source of steady work, and a curious twilight lifestyle evolved as American Blues took up residence in the Wilby Hotel, a fleabag hostel located four blocks from the gig.

"Depending on finances and fiancées, we rented rooms by the day or the week," says Dusty, a blissful expression blossoming on his broad face, "and so we changed rooms a lot. The blue dye in our hair would wash out but it stained anything our heads touched, so it rubbed off on the pillowcases and the hotel tried to make us pay for the damages. Then they'd go, 'Wait a minute, there's only five of you guys. How come we found dye in fifteen beds last night?'"

"It was because all the waitresses in the club lived there too, and we were aces at hopping up and down the hallways," Frank explains, popping another can of the diet soda he sips incessantly since he swore off alcohol.

"Before long, we got bounced from the Wilby," says Dusty,



Got Them Under Pressure

After much deliberation, soul-searching, late-night telephone entreaties, take-out Mexican food and bitter-cold cerveza in Lone Wolf Productions' war room, Billy Gibbons, Dusty Hill and Frank Beard agreed to convene in a secluded loft on East 13th Street in Houston's lowrider sector on the afternoon prior to the national release of *Afterburner* for an exclusive and unprecedented on-the-spot unveiling/self-assessment. They arrived solemn-faced, in separate Mercedes, bearing a metal Dolby cassette and several gifts; a set of Billy Gibbons' Lone Star Slims guitar strings ("Used by the great and the near great"); a set of Dusty Hill's Majestics bass strings ("The string with that Dallas tone!"); a pair of Pro-Mark hickory Frank Beard Tub Whacker drum sticks; one 10 oz. Low Down 'n' Funky Java Mug with salmon print; and a 1/24th scale unassembled Monogram Eliminator model car kit (glue not included). Word was that both Dusty and Frank had firearms on hand, but tucked away where the sun don't shine.

As the cassette was cued on the loft's tapedeck, the trio seemed nervous, sipping distractedly at Miller Lite and Tab, but as the first humming thuds of "Sleeping Bag" invaded the room, Billy smirked, Dusty began polishing his huge rings and Frank whistled low and murmured a protracted "FAAAAAHNNN" that resembled a Goodyear radial singing along a curbstone. The symposium boasted that antic charm of an old Beatles press conference and the wry roadhouse banter of a row of unsentimental stool sages.

The gifts were withheld until all comment on the album had been completed, all refreshments consumed, all hands shaken with fierce conviction. With the bat of an eye, Tres Hombres vanished into a sudden, dusky Texas drizzle, taking their precious tape with them, but leaving one last memento twinkling on a tabletop: One chrome-plated three-inch by one-inch ZZ Top key chain, laid across a sepia souvenir 1915 Pancho Villa recruitment poster ("El Liberator of Mexico offers weekly payments in gold to dynamiters, machine gunners and railroaders!") courtesy Leo's Mexican Restaurant at 2203 South Shepherd. There was the merest spot of 'mole sauce in the lower left hand corner.

"and wound up on the North Side on Airline Drive in the Northline Drive Hotel, which was *whoa*—three dollars a night and grossly overpriced. The Cellar Door, which was one shaky place, started getting to us too.

"Like in a lotta Texas clubs, the stripping and topless dancing were an impromptu thing. The waitresses at that time were *rilly risque*; they just wore panties and a bra, and my eyes usta pop. You couldn't get liquor by the drink in Houston, so you had to buy a bottle and the house provided the mixers, and the crowd would sit there and get fuck-faced as the night wore on. Funny thing was, they dug the music, but not without the stripping.

"Sometimes we didn't go on until 12 p.m., so we'd ride thirty miles down to Dallas to do a quick gig and then turn

"Sleeping Bag"

Dusty: "Well, that's kind of an all-purpose romance rocker with a little local Egyptian color and Land of the Pharaoh's scenery thrown in. Some people say that Napoleon had an out-of-the-body experience when he slept in the Great Pyramid at Giza, but for a little guy who slept around a lot, I figure he had a lot of those."

"Stages"

Billy: "The track was written in the studio, and the tempo and melody retained the same initial bounce we started out with. The hook line was 'Phases keep on changing/Stages rearranging/Love.' We tried a hundred words instead of 'love' but nothing fit as tight and sweet. The hook of the tune comes off the C suspended 9th chord in 'Legs,' that slender honey of a turnaround chord. Catchy, eh?"

"Woke Up With Wood"

Frank: "It's a philosophical traveling song with a basketball reference. I woke up one morning, pogo-sticked to the bathroom and had a vision."

Dusty: "We've always been into cabinet-making, wood-working and comfortable furniture for car, home or office."

"Rough Boys"

Billy: "For 'Rough Boys,' we had a fairly pretty track and it was really *hard* for ZZ Top to do a ballad, so we had to come up with extra-tough words and an earthy, deep-bluesy guitar solo to counteract the music, otherwise nobody, no way, would buy it from ZZ Top."

"Can't Stop Rockin'"

Dusty: "That's a favorite a' mine 'cause I sing it. Lyrically there's nothing there at all, but it's a nice, muscular kick-ass reflection of the stuff we put on our earliest albums. You can hear the Roland guitar synthesizer a little on this and a lot of the other tracks; we got a nice charge out of it. Guess that's almost a musical critique, huh?"

"Planet Of Women"

Billy: "Ohhh, boy. That's where the ZZ Girls, thousands of them, come from. It's as far out in the solar system as you wanna get."

"I Got The Message"

Dusty: "On the streets, your so-called friends, they can tell you, 'That woman, she don't dig you,' but you wanna hear it straight from her, right? Well, this track is the same way, 'cept you don't get the groove until you aim your head at the *source*."

"Velcro Fly"

Dusty: "It's an amazing material for zippers and other parts of clothing. Plus, it's a great dance you can do at home."

Frank: "The drums in "Velcro Fly" were done in a local racquet ball court, which makes a poetic sort of sense."

"Dipping Down In The Lap Of Luxury"

Billy: "I hope this song isn't too obscure to grasp. You either discover the theme of it the first time out, or you never do. It's in the eyes, ears and arms of the beholder."

"Delirious"

Frank: "I use my *sneaky* drums on this track, those quick-shift switches I like to slip in. The fact that we're a three-piece doesn't allow me to get off and do a lot of big rolls, and anytime I try, things tend to grow slack, lose their crucial tension, and sag apart.

"So I jes' continue to develop hand and sticking tastes off the cymbal bells, and other devices that constitute stops without actually stopping the time-signature and the straight-ahead beat. The tricks create necessary space and an elastic quality that pulls the listener on into the heart of the music.

"Gee, boys, I hope we ain't giving away too damn much!"

around. One night we got back and everybody in the bar was plowed, especially the girls. Frank had gotten hisself a new set of drums and as we started playing a fat girl jumped up on the bandstand and started to wiggle. He leaned over to me and hissed, 'If she falls on these drums, I'll waste her.'

"Sure enough," says Dusty triumphantly, "she lost her footing, went backward, and drums and cymbals flew everywhere out of the path of her enormous ass."

"I whupped her," Frank recalls. "But I did it more for her being ugly than anything else. It's bad enough doing thirty-nine choruses of 'Walking The Dog,' without dealing with a huge ugly tush in your face, half of it sticking out of a giant hole in a sad pair of bloomers. *Shee-it!*"

American Blues put out a single in 1978 on the Karma

label, a cover of Tim Hardin's "If I Were A Carpenter," which KLIF, the key Dallas top forty station, spun a few times. *American Blues Is Here*, an album on Karma, drew the interest of Uni Records, then doing well with a psychedelic pop act from California called the Strawberry Alarm Clock ("Incense And Peppermints"). An attempt was made to recast American Blues in the beads-and-Indian-kaftans mold of the Clock, and Uni floated a single, "Melted Like Snow" as well as an album, *American Blues Do Their Thing*.

The highpoint of the whole hopeless exercise came when the group landed a guest spot on KTRK-TV's *Larry Kane Show*, a popular Saturday teen program in Houston. They had done three post-Witching Hour sets at the Cellar Door the night before and then scattered, Dusty awaking that afternoon in the arms of a female acquaintance who lived

"Lyrically there's nothing there at all, but it's a nice, muscular, kick-ass reflection of our early stuff."

outside the central city. Naked and terminally hungover, he lurched over to the TV set and clicked on Channel 13 to see the happy host boasting that American Blues would be on right after the next commercial. Despite having no idea where the TV studio was located, Dusty and his pre-dawn sweetheart somehow dashed over just in time for the assembled membership to deliver an abysmal performance.

After an uneven stint at the Fillmore West, backing up Freddie King on a ten-day split bill with the Electric Flag, Blue Cheer, Buddy Guy and the Ike and Tina Turner Review, American Blues disbanded, all personnel flying off in separate trajectories. Dusty landed the most memorable employment, supporting Jimmy Reed for a series of dates between Houston and Galveston. Because Reed liked to suck up the sauce and then tumble keister-over-harmonica clamp into Dusty's bass amp, club owners adopted a word of mouth policy of no booze for the gravel-voiced Mississippi blues harpist/guitarist.

"I always used to carry a little bottle in my guitar case," says Dusty, "and when Jimmy walked into my makeshift dressing room on the third night of the roadtrip and saw that whiskey, it was 'Dusty ol' buddy o' mine, com'eer boy!' From then on, I played bass, carried the bottle, and answered the hotel room door when the manager screamed about the drunken all-hours jammin'.

"Although," Dusty adds, "a coupla nights when these backroads Texas innkeepers peered in and saw that it was Jimmy holding court, they actually said, 'You just go on the way you been, Mr. Reed. I'll throw the res' of the goddamn lodgers out if they complain again!'"

While all this was transpiring, Billy Gibbons was coming of age in an upper middle class family in suburban Houston. Father Freddy Gibbons was a pianist and orchestra leader who had relocated to Texas from his native New York because of his wife's failing health. His father graduated from bar mitzvahs to society galas and conducting the Houston Philharmonic, and Billy and his sister Pam often found themselves in the presence of Hollywood royalty, from Dick Powell to Humphrey Bogart. Billy's mom revived and went on to become a member of President Johnson's Texas staff. Billy himself got a leg up on the Christmas morning in 1963 when his pop presented him with a Gibson Melody Maker and Fender Champ amp.

The family maid, nineteen-year-old Stella Matthews, steered the lad in the direction of Little Richard, whose all-Houston band was pounding out "Bama Lama Bama Loo" in a Fourth Ward hooch parlor two blocks from her house. Billy tuned in to soul station KYOK and never looked back.

Before long, he was picking out the Wayne Bennett leads on Bobby "Blue" Bland songs like "Ain't Doing Too Bad" and "Blind Man."

Both those mid-1960's Bland singles were issued on the Duke label, a Memphis-based record company owned by a hard case named Don Robey. On Christmas Eve 1954, while backstage at the Houston City Auditorium, twenty-four-year-old Duke star Johnny Ace reportedly drew the losing slug in a game of Russian roulette and died the next day.

Gibbons, who later had contact with the imposing Robey while leading such green bands as the Saints, Billy G. & the Ten Blue Flames, and the Coachmen (who cut the first version of "99th Floor"), does not hold with the usual account of the demise of Johnny Ace.

"I heard it wasn't Russian roulette that kicked [Ace] and

that that was just a version that got trumped up later," he counsels, discussing an alternate scenario widely accepted in Houston inner circles. Namely, that Johnny Ace, riding high with the success of "The Clock" in 1953 and "Please Forgive Me" the following year, had informed Robey just before he was due to take the City Auditorium stage that he was quitting Duke and going to New York to secure a deal with Atlantic. Robey reportedly decried such ambitions and produced a pistol, which he pressed against Ace's temple. With his girlfriend Evelyn still seated on Johnny's lap, Robey splattered the singer's pipedreams across the dressing room wall.

"I'll tell you this," says Gibbons of Robey, who ran Duke until two years before his death in 1975. "He was a tall *mean* albino. You'd take your demo tapes over to his nothing-much studio off Erastus Street, where he'd cut stuff with Gatemouth Brown, and he'd bark: 'Show me your damned song!'"

Houston was still a wide open town record biz-wise in the 50s and 60s, and if you didn't watch your step somebody else would do it for you. Eager to keep his own head low, Gibbons hooked up with booking agent Bill Ham shortly after Moving Sidewalks' 1969 *Flash* LP fell by the wayside. Ham was handling an appealing but less than flashy singer from Lubbock named Jay Boy Adams, and when Vietnam ensnared several of the Sidewalks, Ham and Gibbons hatched the idea of a new group, built around Billy, Sidewalks' drummer Don Mitchell and keyboard player Billy Ethridge. They knocked out two tracks, "Salt Lick" b/w "Miller's Farm" for Ham's Scat label. After more auditions, in which Ethridge recommended Dusty Hill, who in turn tapped Frank Beard, ZZ Top (a nonsense name reflecting such blues appellations as B.B. King) was pared down to the current threesome. Late in 1969, Ham took the boys to London Records, proclaiming, "I've got the next Rolling Stones for you."

London gave them a contract, pressed "Salt Lick" and provided some seed money that the group used to purchase a pair of Marshall Super Lead stacks, model 1959. They swept through Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico and California, getting louder and prouder with each tick of the odometer. Their first sizable hit came in 1973 with *Tres Hombres*' "La Grange," an ode to the brothel off Rt. 95 between Austin and Houston later immortalized in the stage show and film, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*.

By 1974, they were drawing 80,000 rowdy fans in Austin (and getting themselves banned for another eight years). By 1975, they were breaking Rolling Stones' attendance records at arenas in the Deep South with the help of the unsubtle "Tush" off the live *Fandango!* More odes to nooky, lowriders and dipsomania ensued: "Nasty Dogs And Funky Kings,"

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World Radio His

"Mexican Blackbird," "Arrested For Driving While Blind." Come 1976, Ham devised a ZZ Top World Tour featuring a menagerie consisting of a live buffalo, a longhorn steer, buzzards and sidewinders that grossed \$11.5 million, outselling Elvis, Led Zeppelin, et. al.

When extricating themselves from the modest London Records contract became problematic, ZZ Top went on sabbatical for three years. Dusty did some fishing in Mexico. Billy traveled around North Africa and Western Europe, pausing in Paris to assist a group called *Artiste Contemporaine* in composing ambient electronic music for a show of Xerox art. Frank sought to improve his personal life.

The group reemerged on Warner Bros. in 1979 with *Dequello*, scoring a hit with "Cheap Sunglasses" and dominating FM radio with "I'm Bad, I'm Nationwide," and then "Pearl Necklace" (yes, a sharp-dressed man's euphemism for a blow job; from *El Loco*). But it was MTV that raised ZZ Top to their current august profile.

Gibbons and Hill had been hazy on the concept of a 24-hour rock channel, but Frank Beard was initiated into the phenomenon as he and his third wife Debbie were home tucking themselves in for the evening:

"It was a Friday night and we'd just gotten into bed. I was flipping the dial and saw a music video. We thought that was cool, and then another came on. And another. An hour went by, and we wondered how long the show was. Four hours went by. We looked at each other and said, 'When in the hell is something like this gonna be on again?!' We kept on watching. The sun was coming up and videos were still coming and we were freaking out. It was like a telethon—except nobody was giving us a number to call!"

MTV was less than a year and a half old when Ham and company went out to Burbank, California a few weeks later to screen the output of leading video directors. They settled on Tim Newman (Randy's cousin) to illuminate *Eliminator's* "Gimme All Your Lovin'" and thus inaugurated what would be the music network's nearest answer to a quality sit-com. At about the same time, the gods acquired their chariot, the 1933 Ford three-window coupe with the Cadillac-dynasty-red enamel paint job....

As a boy, Billy Gibbons had been obsessed with automobile culture, building scale models of designer Ed "Big Daddy" Roth's Monster dragsters and devouring issues of *Rod & Custom*, *Car Craft* and *Hot Rod*.

"It was in 1978 during the layoff period," says Gibbons, puttering around his half-million dollar townhouse in a swank enclave of Houston, "that I realized that I could finally afford the toy I'd always wished for."

He sits down before a coffee table in his living room on which is laid a just-completed goldleaf scale model of the Robert E. Lee paddle wheeler. Scattered around his digs, a two-story habitat dominated by a stone and wood-paneled atrium, are various other gewgaws ranging from an antique shotgun mounted on the mantelpiece to a surfeit of western memorabilia. In the foyer stand two lifesize mannequins in meticulous mummy wrappings, one holding a skull in its outstretched hand. Taken together, the tableau seems like a best-forgotten sub-basement at Neiman-Marcus.

"So what I did," says Gibbons, pushing his slippery red-framed tinted shades back up the bridge of his long nose, "was fly out to Los Angeles with a friend for the LA Roadsters' Father's Day Show with the intentions of buying a hot rod and driving it back to Houston. A guy on the grounds of the fair directed us to Don Thelan of Buffalo Motor Cars of Paramount, California and I told him I wanted a facsimile of a car I'd seen on television, Peter Campouris' famous California Kid. Thelan talked me into keeping the project totally original and he promised me a finished car fashioned from scratch within six months.

"Four-and-a-half years later," he says with a sigh, "the cost

was up to \$100,000 with no end in sight, and it was too late to turn back. At the same time, a fella contacted us about writing music for a hot rod movie he'd done and it was then that we thought of naming the car and the next album after a drag racing term. The month before the record was to be released, Thelan phoned to say the coupe was done. We wanted to use the car in a photo shoot for the album cover, but because we still owed Don money, it had to stay where it was, and we settled for a drawing of it on the jacket. By the time we took possession of the coupe it had become our 'Top Eliminator,' our 'Top Icon' and our top priority."

Back in 1978, Houston, Texas was at the top of its game—tops in the oil boom sparked by the OPEC scam, with the price of a barrel of crude soaring to \$36; tops in real estate peddling, with farmers north and west of the city getting \$100,000 an acre as sleazy Mexican politicians sought to stash fortunes in pilfered government treasury funds in the security of high-rise hotels and condos.

Now, Houston is tops in home foreclosures, with 3,000 posted in Harris County during the week that *Afterburner* hits the stores. Crime is up, unemployment too, and Gibbons concedes that, "Unfortunately, it wouldn't be wise or even possible to take the Eliminator out on Highway 610 for a zip around central Houston." Indeed, James A. Michener's bestseller *Texas* is rife with telling exchanges about the fearsome state of the frontier metropolis' thoroughfares:

"Six-ten is a jungle, worst highway in America. You know that during the rush hour the police won't even enter it to check on ordinary fender-benders. They got beat up too often by enraged motorists, sometimes shot and killed."

Realizing that he couldn't take his prize toy out for joy rides, Gibbons bought himself a '66 Chevy Impala lowrider with a remote control riser. He'd head out onto 610 with his pals, gun the engine and drop the skid plate so that roostertail sparks shot out the back to lengths of twenty feet. But just a short spell ago, some troopers witnessed the whole elaborate display and nailed him. Seeing that both his registration and his out-of-the-state plates had been expired for five years, the patrolmen were about to haul Billy off to the lockup when one of them recognized him and offered a proposition.

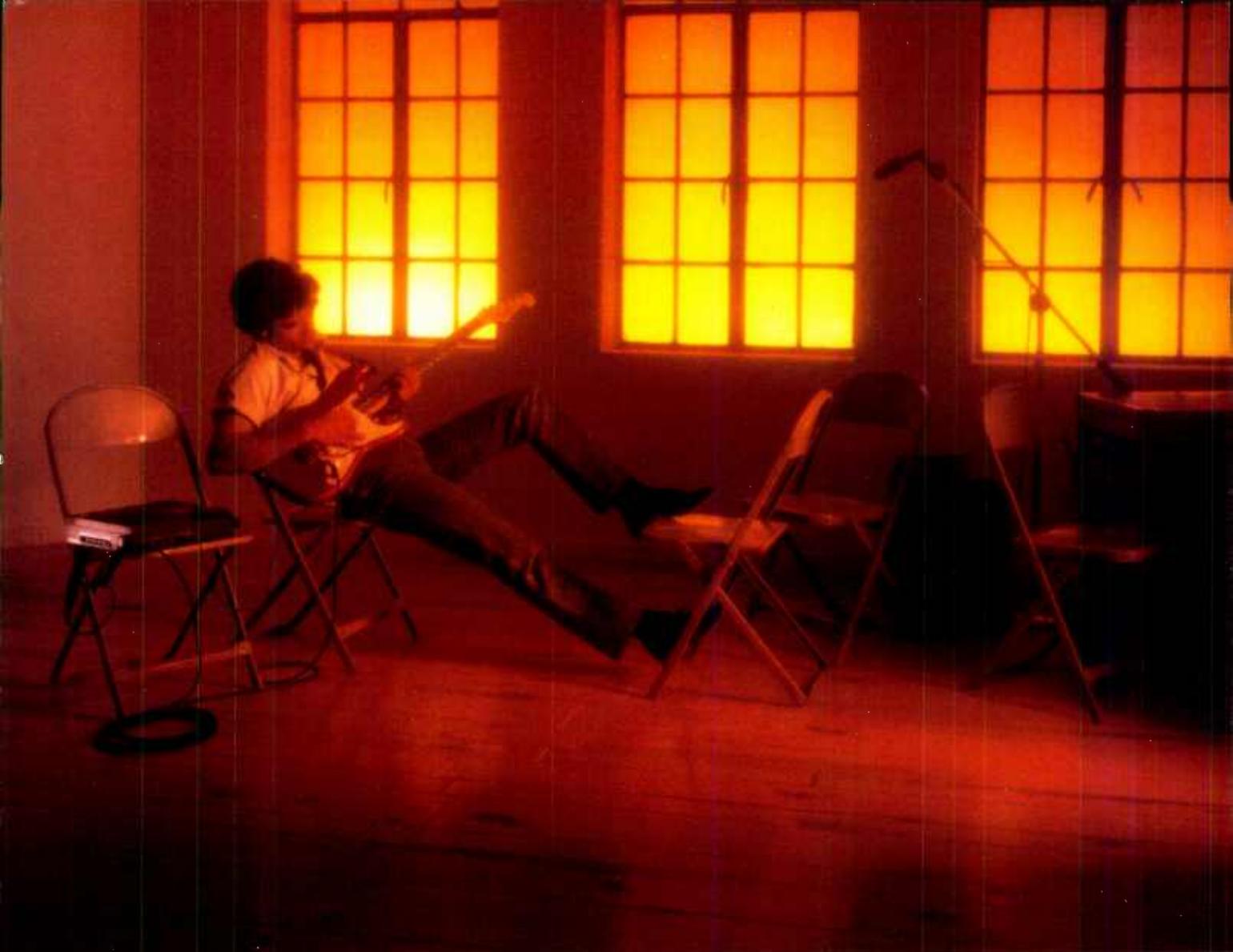
"It was late at night, they had a newly promoted sergeant down from Chicago that they hated," says Gibbons, "and they wanted to bust his balls. So they called into headquarters and said they might have a highly suspicious stolen lowrider on their hands and needed his assistance."

Gibbons and friends were stowed in the trooper's patrol car, along with the remote control button, and when the boss pulled up the cops suggested he take off his spanking new sergeant's hat, place it on the road, and check under the chassis to see if it held any contraband. After he had done so, he was rising to his feet when the trooper gave the signal to Billy, who pushed the riser button, the car crushing the good officer's expensive chapeau into the asphalt.

As the hatless and choleric sergeant drove off, the troopers and Gibbon shared a hearty guffaw before they let him off—but not without delivering a stern admonishment to assure him that the hardassed character of East Texas endured intact: "Y'all better head straight down to Westheimer Road from here and use this heap to harass some queers, or you can bet we'll be comin' to get you."

As the sun sets on another unsettling year in the Lone Star State, its car radios simmer with the sensuous strains of "Sleeping Bag," as well as news bulletins that two former friends from greater Houston are battling in court over the \$10,000 reward posted by loved ones seeking information leading to the arrest of the murderers of a local folksinger and his girlfriend, who were shot and slashed to death in the house where they ran a large-scale drug operation.

The 15th anniversary of ZZ Top is drawing to a close, the band having outdistanced or overcome every demon and



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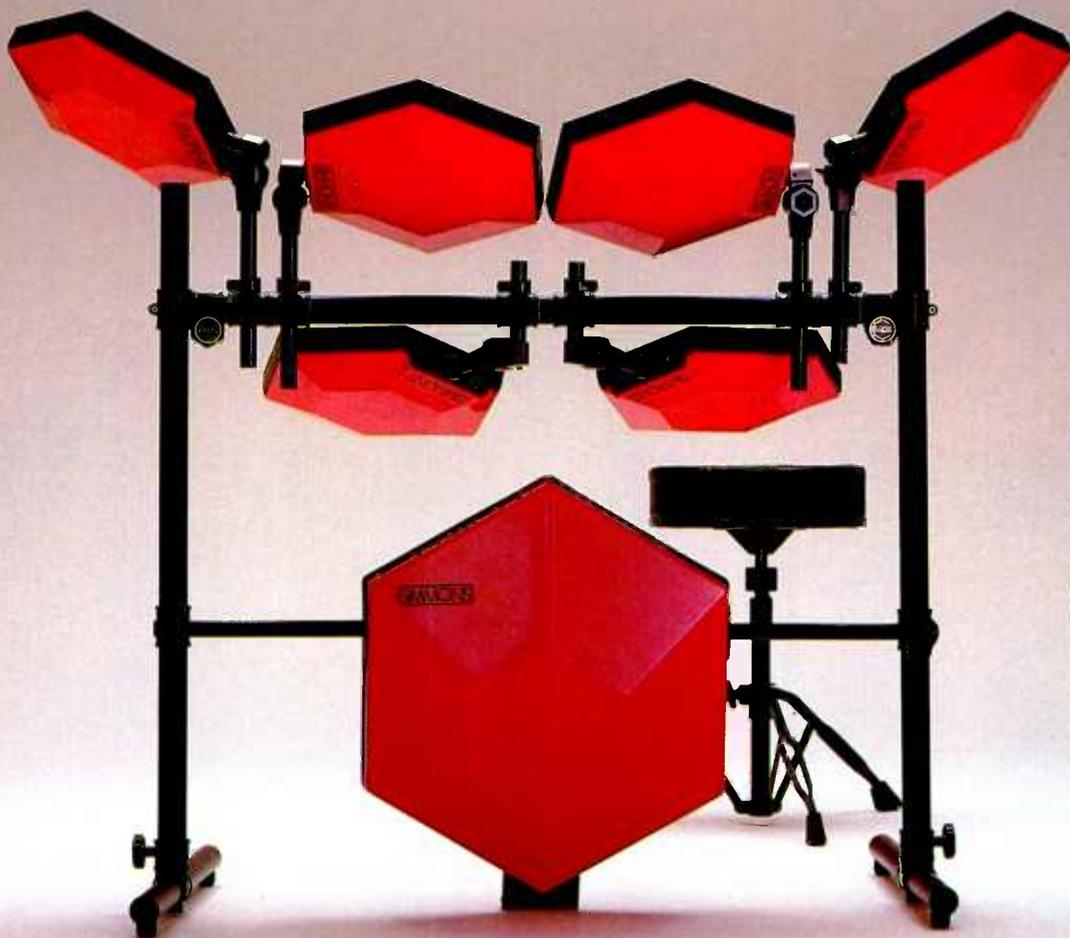
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obstacle time and Texas could hurl at it. Heading out to Japan on the first leg of yet another world tour, they are content and satisfied with the path before them. Dusty Hill has recovered beautifully from the intestinal damage he suffered last December when, as girlfriend Jane Ellen Henderson was pulling his boot off, the .38 caliber Derringer he kept in it hit the floor, and a bullet pierced his abdomen wall. Frank Beard, blissful father of a four-week-old infant, has recently been reunited with two daughters from whom he was long estranged, and is at the peak of his golf game. Billy Gibbons is determined to stay slim, is mulling over some independent producing prospects, and is looking at a film property for the group.

But what is most heartening to the boys is that the *Afterburner* liner notes divulge no more about the way ZZ Top renders its singular sound in the studio than did the enticingly oblique prologue on the otherwise furtive *Z.Z. Top's First Album*: "In this day of homogenized rock, synthesized music, retakes, overdubs, multi, multi-tracking, an honest recording by accomplished musicians is a rewarding pleasure."

"You know," says Billy Gibbons, stretching out on the couch in his living room, the lazy Buffalo Bayou River eddying past the back patio over his shoulder. "I gotta hand it to that Mark Knopfler for the 'Money For Nothing' number on that last Dire Straits album. That guy must have called me three or four times to find out what I did with my guitar so that he could copy it for that song."

He pushes the brim back on his golf cap and smiles, the flawless pearly whites gleaming.

"He didn't do a half-bad job, either, considering that I never told him a goddamned thing." 📺

A Battle-Dressed Band

On tour, **Frank Beard** parks his tush in front of an 11-piece custom-built Tama kit that features an *Afterburner* flame motif ("Airbrushed in oranges, yellows and reds by Houston's finest graphic artists," according to longtime assistant production manager Don Stuart). All hardware has an anodized black finish.

The set includes five rack toms: 8-, 10-, 12-, 13-, 14-inch; three floor tomtoms: 14-, 16-, 18-inch; two bass drums: 18- and 20-inch; and an 8-inch wooden snare. Cymbals are black Paistes: one 16-, two 18-, four 20- and one 22-inch, with two 14-inch cymbals on the high-hat.

He also uses a Tama electronic synth drum.

Dusty complements the live beer drinking and hell raising with a spanking new array of custom made basses whose necks conform to the specs of a vintage Fender Precision. Besides a new *Afterburner* flame guitar, his fresh lineup will also sport a "Sleeping Bag" Mummy model with a Sony Watchman built into the body.

Billy gives you all his lovin' via an army of new *Afterburner*, Mummy-Watchman and assorted other models of custom guitars, whose necks conform to the exact dimensions of a '58 Les Paul.

Both Billy and Dusty play through different combinations of the ten tube-type 120-watt Rio Grande amplifiers Billy bought in the mid-70s from a now-defunct establishment on the Gulf Coast called Jake's Bait and Amp Shop. These amps are then aligned with sundry Peavey Max bass amps and Marshalls as the mood swings. Nonetheless, "nothing blows harder than the Rio Grandes," assures veteran production manager Jimmy Emerson. Gibbons also practices through a Scholz Rockman.

Lastly, Billy and Dusty use no guitar pedals, so y'all jes' keep on a-guessin' 'bout the secret ZZ Top sonic recipe!

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Kate Bush from page 42

the band and in control of the whole act. And that's quite different from the kind of controlled, far-away image that one gets through the media....

MUSICIAN: *Do you not feel that you could tour America just with your band and play more or less straightforwardly, without a big show and expensive props?*

BUSH: No, no—I would feel that that was such a cop-out. I don't think I'd have any effort or sense of challenge left in me. I don't feel that happy doing something unless I've really pushed myself to the limit. When we do videos, I don't feel right unless we're all filthy and exhausted by the end of the day. Otherwise it doesn't feel like you've put enough effort into it. When you hear an album you listen to the music but when you go and see a show, you're going there to see that person or that band come alive and hopefully give you everything that they've got. If I was just going to stand up there, what is the audience getting apart from seeing me that they can't get on an album? On the albums, they get much better arrangements, much better vocals that are in tune.

MUSICIAN: *Well, artists can give a straightforward performance and still invest it with something special.*

BUSH: You see, I don't want to be up there on the stage being me. I don't think that I'm that interesting. What I want to do is to be the person that's in the song. If I can be the character in the song, then suddenly there's all this strength and energy in me which I wouldn't normally have. Whereas if it was just me, I don't think I could walk on the stage with confidence. It's very hard for me to be me on a stage—I just stand there and twiddle my fingers.

MUSICIAN: *It seems to me that all those in the States who've taken Kate Bush so deeply to heart—they love that so much of your music is so deeply personal.*

BUSH: Well, that's great. But I can't help but feel it's very important to give people something visual. And I don't think, by any means, that the tour which we did some years ago was perfect. But I think we did explore new territory, visually speaking, and the reaction was so positive—I think that probably opened up more people to listening to my stuff than the records themselves ever did. Partly, I think, because people didn't expect me to be quite like that and they all enjoyed it. Had they not enjoyed it, then that would be different. But I've had an extraordinary amount of encouragement from people not just on the musical side but also on the visual side—maybe even more so! And when eventually I get the time and money to do another show, I hope we'll continue combining music with dance and with theater. I think that's a very untouched area in rock and it has great potential.

MUSICIAN: *Are there any such role-playings on the new album?*

BUSH: I think "Cloudbusting" was quite like that. God, it must have been nearly ten years ago, when I used to go up to the Dance Center in London, that I went into Watkins' [occult] bookshop for a look, and found *A Book Of Dreams* by Peter Reich. I'd never heard of his father, Wilhelm Reich, but I just thought it was going "Hello, Hello," so I picked up the book and read it. It was so inspirational, very magical. So when I wrote and recorded the song, although this was about nine years later I was nevertheless psyched up by the book—the image of the boy's father being taken away and locked up by the government just for building a machine to try to make rain. It was such a beautiful book!

MUSICIAN: *Is reading a passion of yours? Sometimes I describe Kate Bush as being the Doris Lessing of rock.*

BUSH: Doris who?—[she stifles a laugh]. I'm sorry, I don't know the author. When I was about eight or nine, for about three years I got through dozens and dozens of books, mostly fiction. But as soon as I began writing poems at school—basically, as soon as I started getting into writing songs—everything else seemed to go out the window. When I'd sit down and read a book I'd think how I could be writing a song. ☐

MUSICIAN

Pop Rock

Thompson Twins 68

They became what they reviled: the circuitous road and simple triumphs of a pop music juggernaut.

Chops Rock

Yngwie Malmsteen 76

Heavy metal's latest six-string hero unleashes a viking assault with some beef.

Jeff Berlin 80

Former Dreg T Lavitz talks to the man bassists are calling the four-string champ.

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THOMPSON



TWINNS BY ROB TANNENBAUM

In Ireland, the *Late, Late Show* is so popular it nearly crippled the country's economy, its Saturday night time slot leaving pubs emptier than a Mormon whorehouse. After pub owners staged a modernized Whiskey Rebellion, the weekly variety show was changed to Friday. It's a program the whole family can watch, with just a taste of controversy—Carson with a brogue. Silver-haired host Gay Byrne interviewed two lesbian nuns this summer, and all of Ireland was talking about it by the next morning. By tonight's early October broadcast, lesbian nuns have been supplanted by mobile icons—all of a sudden, dozens of people throughout Ireland have seen religious statues moving. Byrne is amusing the audience during a commercial break, milking the icon story and spicing it with jokes about Bob Geldof and lesbian nuns.

Backstage, the Thompson Twins wander around, munching on fruit and nuts and fighting boredom. Black Twin Joe Leeway is trying to avoid Blonde Twin Alannah Currie, who is choosing outfits for drummer Steve Goulding and bassist Mark Heyward-Chaplin, and demanding that Leeway shave before the band goes onstage. And Red Twin Tom Bailey is considering the unpleasant task of miming to a song in front of television cameras: "There are plenty of stupid, idiotic, facile things you do in the name of progressing your career. Lip-synching is one of them." For the Twins it's now as easy as sneezing. They'll consider it a good night if the host doesn't make some joke about how they're not *really* Thompsons and not *really* twins.

They became what they reviled:

four years ago, punks

Joe Leeway, Alannah Currie
and Tom Bailey

wouldn't be caught dead

doing mom & pop TV.

Now they're global
village megastars.

What happened?

Finally, after a stale comedian and a song about fives and green hills and roving, the Thompsons squeeze onto a tiny stage, painted glossy white with strips of gold leaf. During the commercial, Bailey strums the jittery riff to Chic's "Good Times." Then Byrne introduces them: "They call themselves Twins, but they're three. And they used to be seven!" The audience titters and a tape of "Doctor! Doctor!" begins; Bailey breaks a guitar string, but it keeps on playing. By the middle of the second chorus, Byrne is waving a pencil to the beat and singing along. This happens wherever the Thompson Twins go: The band plays and people hum along or smile or dance or throw flowers. Their status as one of the world's most accomplished pop bands—and their ample catalog of CHR hits—will be further augmented by the new Nile Rodgers-produced *Here's To Future Days*, which adds a more aggressive edge to their expert melodicism.

When the Twins saw a four-year-old concert video from their days as a seven-piece recently, it was like watching a



Bailey: "Tom's the cornerstone. He's our musician."

different band. "I thought we all looked so healthy," says Bailey. "I had a tutu on," says Currie. "I could not relate to it," says Leeway. Back then, the group was motivated by the punk proposition that all bands are created equal. Playing on a television show would have been out of the question. So what if foresight were as easy as hindsight, and the Twins of four years ago could have watched tonight's program?

"In the innocence and naivete of those days, we'd have slagged it off as being too commercial, or something silly like that," Bailey replies. "We are now, in many ways, the thing that the punk revolution sought to get rid of."

During the British Invasion of 1981, the pop charts were dominated by Anglo bands, a number of whom have demonstrated as much staying power as the Knickerbockers did in an earlier British Invasion. ABC, Soft Cell, A Flock Of Seagulls, Haircut 100—none matched the success of their first single. Meanwhile, the Thompson Twins have proven to be reliable, if unrevolutionary hit-makers, the Dave Clark Five of England's second wave.

So why the Twins and not Kajagoogoo? The difference, it's been suggested before, is the presence of Tom Bailey. The singer/composer/producer/multi-instrumentalist is typically blunt about the matter. "There's something going around that I'm particularly *clever* musically"—Bailey pronounces "clever" the way Reagan pronounces "communism"—"and the other two aren't, so why don't I just go off and do a solo album. But it's a chemistry. A common name provides a channel for three very disparate approaches."

What if the Twins were a pair, and one of the trio left? How would the band differ? Bailey: "Without Alannah, it would be internationally successful and there would be a trouble-free environment." "The off-the-wallness wouldn't be there," suggests Leeway. "And the words wouldn't be there, for a

bloody start," Currie adds.

"Without Leeway," she continues, "there would be fewer good bass lines and vocal arrangements, and the set design wouldn't be as interesting."

And if Bailey was gone? "Tom is the cornerstone, and if he wasn't there, a lot of our confidence would be gone," she says. "If you're from *Musician*, well, Tom's our musician."

Tom Bailey's parents have never seen the Thompson Twins live. When he was born, twenty-nine years ago in Sheffield, England, the Bailey household was unswayed by a television, and pop music "was pretty effectively banned. I missed early period Beatles; the first I remember is *Magical Mystery Tour*." But there was a piano in the house, and Bailey began banging on it at age two, "or so I'm told." His father, a doctor, spent much of his free time building lutes and restoring old harpsichords and church organs. Once Tom had started school, he also began piano lessons, followed by guitar and clarinet lessons, church choir and school orchestra.

Somewhere in the midst of the classical training, Bailey brought home a second-hand Kinks' 45, and was soon playing in a rock band. Looking for a new challenge, he went to India. "I wanted to study the sitar, but I found it very difficult to get anyone to take me seriously there because it's a lifetime job. It's not like pop culture at all, where you've got to be young and happening and it's all over in five years." Bailey did learn to play tabla but he also contracted three different types of amoebic dysentery. Using whatever money and energy he had left, he returned to England.

He earned a music-teaching certificate at Cheshire College in the west of England, where he met Joe Leeway. Leeway, born to a biracial couple in London and raised by foster parents in Kent, was studying acting, but left Cheshire to join the Young Vic theater ensemble in London. When Bailey returned to Sheffield in 1977 to teach, he found a few friends who "had been inspired by all the recent anyone-can-do-it opportunities" of punk tempest, and they formed the original Thompson Twins, named after a pair of inept cartoon detectives. "I remember us agreeing that we'd never do gigs or become a real band," Bailey recalls with a laugh. When they realized the band "was more exciting and satisfying" than their day jobs, the Twins packed for London.

"Everybody was warning me against it," Bailey explains. "You've got a career, you've got security, money. But when I came back from India, after going so far and chickening out at the last minute, I felt like I really shortchanged my courage. After all was said and done, I'd ended up in a teaching job which I didn't enjoy. I had failed my original rebelliousness. So when it came to the choice between teaching and the band, I said, "You fucked up before, don't do it this time. Go with what you feel is right. Even if you have to live in a squat with no food."

It's still early after the *Late, Late Show*, so the band loads into a van and heads out to Newtownmountkennedy, a small village about twenty miles outside of Dublin where they've rented a big house until their European tour begins. The town's youth club has a dance every Friday night, and the Twins have gotten in the habit of visiting the kids.

"We did it partly for selfish reasons, at first," Bailey confesses as the van leaves Dublin. "We figured that if we got on the kids' good side, they wouldn't come hassle us. It was a p.r. exercise, really. Then we got to be good friends. They're a lot cooler than the city kids you meet in the street."

Nonetheless, a mild hysteria reigns at the Newtownmountkennedy youth dance. The local DJ plays a copy of "Don't Mess With Doctor Dream," an anti-heroin parable the Twins wrote after a gang of eight- and nine-year-olds in Dublin offered them drugs. As the wildest vocal intro since Blue Swede's "Hooked On A Feeling" rattles the walls, keyboardist/guitarist Felicia Collins tries to dance despite the circle of kids closing in on her like a taut lasso. Tom Bailey is

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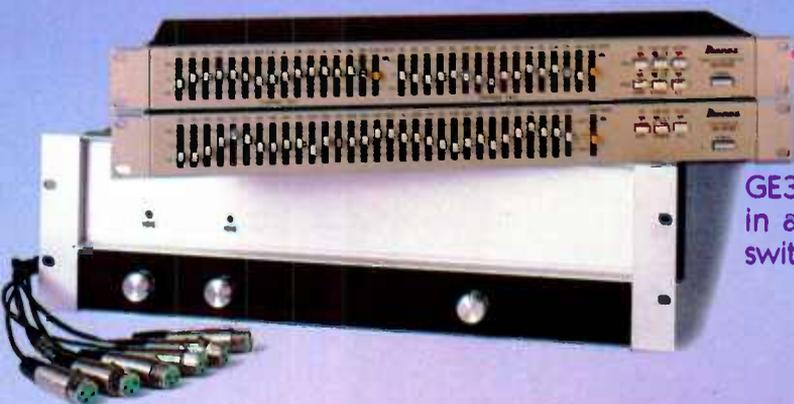
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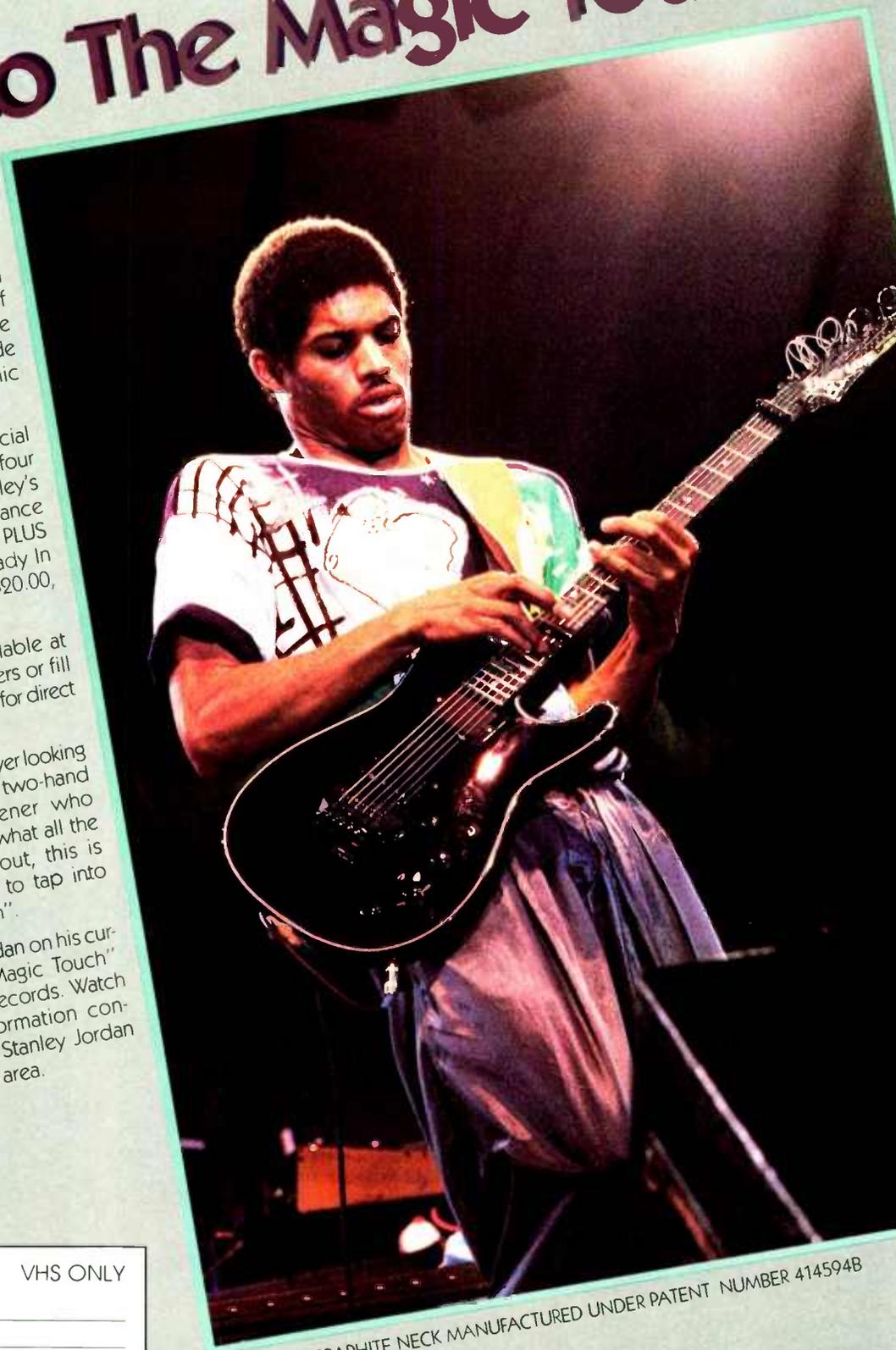
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smothered with kisses, and is in continual danger of having his earrings nicked as souvenirs. And Alannah visits the town's token punk.

"Since pop culture has become really big in the media, it's really had a condescending attitude towards places like this," says Bailey later. "The media has forced areas like this to lose their innocence. The kids grow up feeling that where they are is an absolute handicap to their development. Everything they hear about is coming from America or England, so it's difficult to be comfortable where they are."

"You're making too much of it," interrupts Alannah. "Some people like staying where they are, some people have itchy hands. That's all. If you want to move to the city, you do it."

Currie grew up near Auckland, on the north island of New Zealand, where "everybody had cows and a quarter acre of land. I was a writer. I used to play my brother's bongos in the back of the garden, but I also got thrown out of the school choir for talking too much." Ever since childhood, she's had itchy hands. "I wanted to leave when I was five years old, because I saw a picture of the hanging gardens of Babylon and I knew it was in the northern hemisphere and I was in the southern hemisphere. I hate the suburbs. I still have nightmares about being suffocated by wall-to-wall carpeting." After stints as a factory worker and a tobacco picker, Currie went into radio journalism "to please my mum." But Lou Reed threw her tape recorder across a room one day, and soon she was headed for London with \$300 and a friend's address.

She discovered the squatter's paradise of south London, where anyone with a sturdy axe could knock a door down and have his or her very own dilapidated, unheated apartment. Currie ended up on the same street as both Leeway and Bailey. "It was full of bands that were eventually to become relatively notorious," Bailey says. "The Slits lived right next to Alannah. The Pop Group lived there too, and half of Thunderclap Newman. We even had an imaginary football team, called the Clapping Pop Stars."

Currie caught punk fever, but had trouble going to gigs because she had no money. So she got by for a while by hopping over Tube turnstiles, talking her way into clubs and shoplifting when she needed clothes. She saved up enough money to buy a saxophone from a secondhand shop and began to make "vicious, horrible sounds on it. At that time in my life, I was extremely angry" Currie explains, "because of the constant harassment of being a woman out at night in London, of not being able to get jobs because I was from New Zealand and had an accent, of being poor. I found a channel for the anger, through the saxophone. That's why I wasn't interested in playing pretty melodies."

Along with a few girlfriends who were also squatters, she formed a band—the Unfuckables. "It was a group of young women who were squatters, and because we didn't have money for cabs, we'd have to walk home late at night and get harassed. So we started playing together and going out together, having a good time *without men*. That was what the Unfuckables were about: 'We will not be fucked over.' Not literally fucked. 'We will do as we please, *when we please*, and fuck to you.' The Unfuckables were total punks: They didn't announce or publicize their shows, wouldn't play on a stage, didn't rehearse and didn't even play proper songs. "Chasing the ultimate radical image," Bailey suggests. "The band that wasn't a band."

It was this same stubbornness that inspired Currie to learn percussion, perhaps the most male-dominated instrument there is. "I had a couple of lessons with a friend of Joe's, who gave me a lecture on how there are no solid women percussionists. 'Sorry, you may as well forget it. But I'll give you a few pointers.' That whole patriarchal attitude started right from the beginning."

Meanwhile, the five Thompson Twins were making a go

of it: Bailey, guitarists John Roog and Peter Dodd, drummer Chris Bell and saxophonist Jane Shorter. When Joe Leeway met up with his old school friend Bailey, he joined as a roadie. The Twins were more structured than the Unfuckables, but their first London shows were often anarchic, featuring a shifting line-up that often included audience members on spontaneous percussion. They went out on tour with the Teardrop Explodes, and one night Leeway slipped out onto the stage next to Dodd and became a real Twin. "I think it was in Aberdeen," he recalls. "Teardrop were all tripping."

They recorded a debut album, not released in the States, and although the song credits were group compositions, it's obvious (especially on the Indian-influenced "Make Believe") that Bailey was doing most of the writing. Next they began their assault on professionalism by acquiring bassist Matthew Seligman, a former member of the Soft Boys, balancing his skills by letting Alannah Currie join as well. And Steve Lillywhite was assigned to produce a second album, which would be their first American release.

Toward the end of the session, they still needed one more song. One night, after the other four had left (Shorter was an ex-Twin by then), Bailey, Leeway and Currie wrote a perky dance chant called "In The Name Of Love." The threesome had already appeared together as the Black Arabs, doing dub and rap songs in local clubs. Their first studio collaboration, a number one dance hit, made them realize that they didn't really need the other band members.

Bailey is uncharacteristically circumspect about seceding from the others, some of whom were great friends. "The world is littered with great musicians who never make it because they don't confront the other important sides of the job necessary to musical success. It's sometimes embarrassing to see such talent busking on the streets. But they won't get off their butts. You've got to do without your hometown mentality."



Currie: "Bailey sucks and his hair isn't real at all."

They had all sworn never to be in a "real band," but three of them changed their minds. "I just got so depressed by the dirty-raincoat brigade," Bailey says. "After six months, you get bored and learn how to play," Currie adds. Explains Leeway: "I saw the Adverts down at the Marquee in London, and Gay Advert said, 'If you don't stop gobbin' on me, I'm not comin' back.' And she went off. Before that the more you were covered in green gobs, the better it was. It just turned."

Since it was practically a new band, they considered a new name. "At the time, scams were the big thing in England. Instead of saying why we broke up, we went to a little cottage in Norfolk with a mobile studio. We were going to escape from the rest of the band," says Leeway, "by taking a boat to Cuba and not coming back. They'd send out a search party and find us with our clothes all torn off. And we'd change the name to..."

"Don't, it's embarrassing," Currie moans.

"...to Bermuda Triangle. So we wrote 'Lies' about that."

"Lies" was released during the first month of MTV. Along with "Love On Your Side" and the rest of *Side Kicks*, it made the band big in the U.S. Next came a world tour, then another album with three hit singles and another world tour, then another album which would have been finished sooner if Tom Bailey's nervous system hadn't exploded in early 1985 like an overloaded electrical socket.

Alannah Currie dislikes touring as much as Bailey dislikes doing television shows. "Everything's planned out beforehand in rehearsals, so once you set up and play, it's not a particularly creative thing." In a huge theater in Dublin, the Twins are working things out beforehand. Their world tour begins in exactly a week, and the set Joe Leeway has designed is still being built. It's got a Bauhaus mood about it, with lots of indifferent grays. On an elevated tier, Bailey sits behind a piano and begins the melody of "Hold Me Now." Currie doubles the motif on xylophone, and Leeway beats a simple pattern on congas. It sounds harder than the record, probably because of the four extra musicians they're touring with: Goulding, formerly of the Rumour and Gang of Four, on drums; bassist Heywood-Chaplin, who's played with Thomas Dolby and Lene Lovich; Felicia Collins, a friend of Nile Rodgers who had an indie club hit of her own this summer; and keyboardist Jan Pulsford, a session veteran in London. The two women are in the band at Alannah's insistence, because Currie finds a mixed band "much more balanced. When men get into groups, no matter how 'new man' they are, they revert to pathetically childish behavior. All these men's bands get so precious about their bloody music," she snorts. Currie gets her post-punk revenge by "writing 'Bailey sucks and his hair isn't real at all' on women's toilet walls."

Bailey hums through the lyrics, saving his voice for the long tour. As the song ends, a half dozen round white pods inflate over the stage. Bailey, Leeway and Collins pick up guitars, and suddenly the Twins look like Molly Hatchet. They slash into "Revolution," the John Lennon song they recorded on the new album and also played at Live Aid.

"If we chose to, I'm sure we could out-Ramone the Ramones," Bailey says later over a vegetarian dinner. None of the three eats meat, and only Currie drinks or smokes. In between rehearsing, they relax by playing indoor badminton. Thompson tours have little in common with Led Zeppelin tours.

After his collapse while recording in Paris, Bailey is taking it especially easy. "We'd never had a setback in the development of our careers," he says. "But it gave me a chance to realize that I wasn't enjoying anything other than being a Thompson Twin. I was in Paris, and I wasn't seeing anything except the view of the Eiffel Tower from my apartment."

Fortunately for the band, Nile Rodgers wanted to finish producing the album. "He flattered us," Currie says. "We were all depressed and feeling sorry for ourselves, Tom was gasping, and Nile was full of enthusiasm. 'These songs are great!' Bailey recuperated in Barbados, in the company of Sting and Eddy Grant, then the Twins finished recording in New York with Rodgers. The City gave them a fresh inspiration. "We decided to make it a really positive album. Our friends in London were saying, 'Oh, the bombs are gonna go off.' But if you channel your energy into a vision, you're creating something tangible to aim for," Currie exclaims.

In their native England, the album was savaged. "The dependable old Thompson Twins reshuffle their pack of mouldering ideas," sneered one review. Was anyone this nasty to the Dave Clark Five? "They don't listen to the music," sighs Leeway, "they review us as Yuppie millionaires." There's been particular objection to the cover of "Revolution," which they played, quite badly, at Live Aid, with Madonna on backing vocals. "When we came offstage, I thought our careers were over," Bailey admits. But he offers no apologies for recording the song: "We thought the Beatles did it really badly and we

could do a better version ourselves."

If, as Leeway suggests, the Twins are viewed by many as careerist Yuppies, the Harvard Business School entry in the pop race, maybe it's because of Bailey's bluntness about his professional aspirations. "Did your life flash before your eyes?" a magazine asked him soon after the collapse. "No, my career did," he answered. "We don't see any point in releasing a 45 that we know isn't going to be a hit," he told another interviewer.

"I'm wary of placing too much importance upon music as the solution to the world's problems because in one very important sense, it's just entertainment. It's what people do when they're not working. Pop music embraces an entire spectrum, which includes absolute disposability. You can't say it's so important that it must never be corrupted by something as facile as a TV show. Especially in the pop world, you can't be a closet communicator. The Clash are basically a spent force because they won't do that stuff."

Bailey recounts, without shame, hearing the Twins dismissed as a "limey, fag-rock band." He recognizes the irony of having been inspired by punk, only to grow into everything punk hated, but it doesn't prevent him from declaring, "We're a fucking pop band, and anyone who says otherwise is just crawling up his own ass." He can discuss North German classical harmony and the orchestral origins of the marimba and the xylophone, but he also likes the Carpenters and Foreigner. Bailey is a Twin by choice rather than by necessity: "If I wanted to play Bach, or form an experimental jazz band, I'd do it. But we've gotten into international pop music."

"People say, if you write love songs, does it really make any difference to somebody who's just had their house knocked down by an earthquake? The answer is yes. People survive catastrophes by the love letters between them that strengthen the personal bonds. At that point, politics makes no difference."

Currie insists that the Thompson Twins' symbolic integration of black and white, male and female is a statement in itself. Paul Weller has denounced the band as the ultimate in pop worthlessness, but Currie finds his didactic approach equally distasteful: "Why doesn't he just sit and write essays?"

"With 'Doctor Dream,'" Bailey interjects, "we didn't want to go [sings], 'Heroin is bad for you! Ooo-ooo-ooo.'"

"You can't change the world with a fucking pop song," Currie continues. "If you make it fun, people will listen. Maybe they'll get it, maybe they won't. But they'll enjoy it."

The sunrise the next morning is pastel pink and baby blue, real Mists of Avalon stuff. On their way to a TV appearance in England, the band drops me off in the center of Dublin, where I get a cab to the airport. The middle-aged cabbie figures out that I'm American, and starts talking about some American journalists he saw on last night's *Late Show*. I ask if he saw the Twins' song.

"Aye," he answers. "They're not quite my age group, mind. But they looked good and they had a nice sound." 📺

Twins' Toys

Tom Bailey uses a Fairlight CMI, an Oberheim OB-Xa, a Movement MCS-2 drum computer, a Yamaha DX7 and CP7, a Casio CZ-101 and CZ-5000, an ESP Eclipse guitar, and an ESP Pocket Studio.

Joe Leeway uses an Emulator II, a Linn 9000, an ESP Mirage guitar, an ESP Pocket Studio, a Z-bass and hand-made congas.

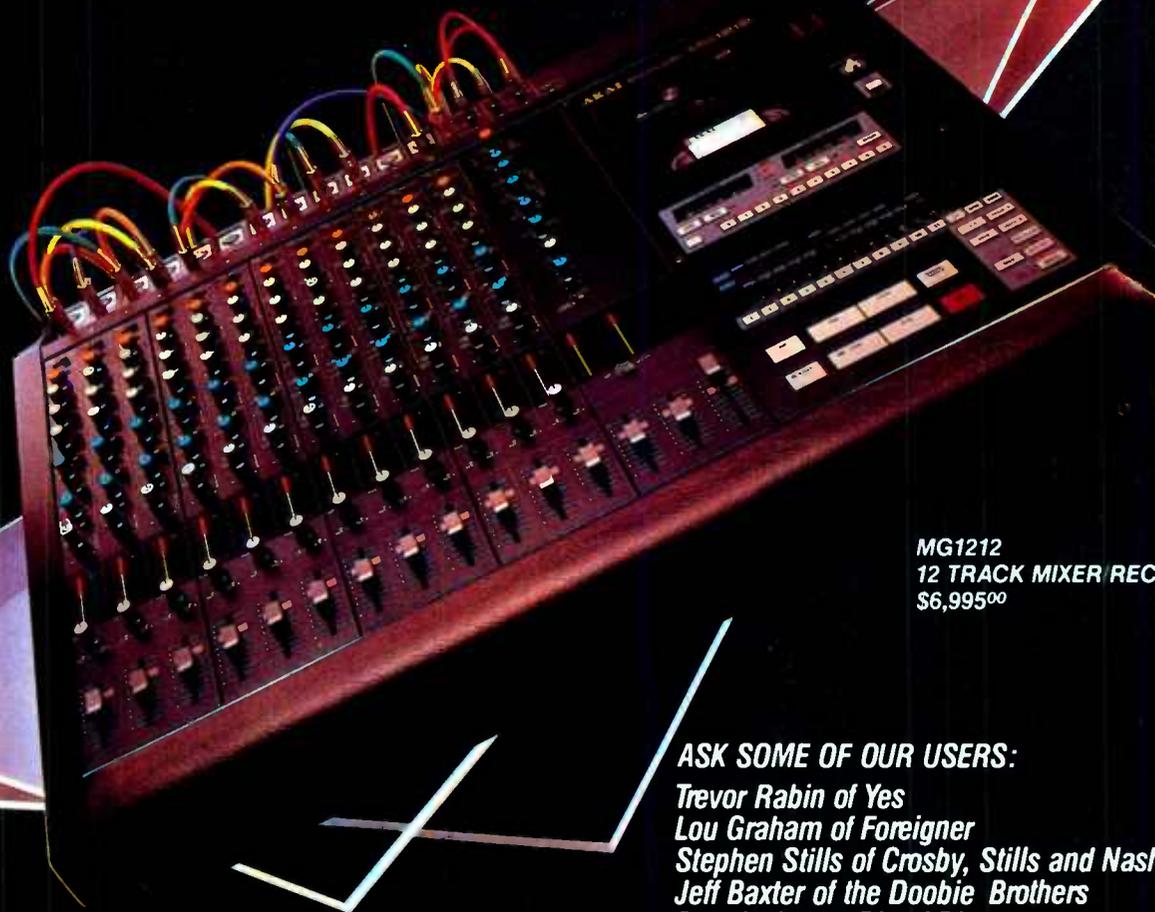
Alannah Currie plays Remo toms, Tama Octobans, Rhythm-tech tambourines, Paiste percussion frame, Latin Percussion timbales, Joppa cowbells and Bergerault marimbas through a DGS MIDI Scan. All three use Nady wireless units and Roland JC-120 amps.

Felicia Collins plays ESP guitars through a Music Man 112 and Roland JC-120 amps. **Mark Heyward-Chaplin** plays fretted and unfretted Music Man Stingray basses through a Trace-Elliott amp.

Steve Goulding plays a Simmons SDS 7 drum kit, SDS pads through a Syncologic PSP, Gretsch and Slingerland snares, and Zildjian cymbals. **Jan Pulsford** plays an Oberheim OB-Xa, Yamaha DX7 and Casio CZ-5000 keyboards through a Roland DDL.

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YNGWIE MALMSTEEN'S VIKING ATTACK

From Paganini to Power Chords, a Rising Guitar Gladiator

By Josef Woodard

Parents, lock your doors and windows, get the kids to bed early, stock up on the holy water...the Bach Choral Society is coming to your town. In fact, the damage may already have been done. Tonight in Phoenix, Arizona, the supposedly innocuous B.C.S.—better known as Yngwie Malmsteen's Rising Force—is continuing its blitzkrieg across America open-

ing up for AC/DC, trampling the grapes of sonic wrath.

This is a tour to separate the wheat from the chaff, what with heavy metal under the pall of the PMRC's Orwellian influence and AC/DC tainted by the affections of L.A.'s alleged Night Stalker. But heavy metal eats controversy for breakfast (preferably at about one in the afternoon), and despite an irate city council and a major venue shift, tonight's Phoenix show has become "the concert that couldn't be stopped." Nonetheless, the Malmsteen entourage, fearing for its hotel reservations, retains its Bach moniker.

In Malmsteen's case, the baroque connection is not at all inappropriate. Johann Sebastian himself appears right after Jimi Hendrix and Ritchie Black-

more on his short list of pivotal influences. And after Bach comes Niccolò Paganini, a particular weakness whose tape of virtuosic violin capricci Malmsteen listens to at volumes usually reserved for, say, AC/DC; says he with a bent sneer, "Paganini makes me dangerous in traffic."

Lest the reader suspect highbrow name-dropping, check this guy out; over his credible mold of art-rock and standard alloy metal music, Malmsteen solos with a strikingly pristine harmonic code and, most obviously, a furious dexterity—fingers of voltage-controlled lightning. But with this delirium of speed come less typical fixations like control and perfection.

All this in a twenty-two-year-old Swede, a heavy metal wunderkind? It's true. Malmsteen is here to give the genre the shot of credibility it sorely needs. On vinyl, his first, largely instrumental *Rising Force* LP established his instrumental prowess, while the recent *Marching Out* (now with a band he calls Rising Force) is a more calculated attempt at commercial metal, with echoes of progressive rock and stock-in-trade vocals. Such themes as "Disciples Of Hell" and "I Am A Viking" simmer in their quasi-gothic regalia. Proceed directly to the guitar playing, do pass the lyrics.

Live, as he goes through his wild gymnastics onstage, trotting his wireless Strat all about, tossing it in the air, throwing it over his neck 360 degrees and still executing those 32nd-note flurries through several teetering Marshall stacks...the scent of New Heroism is in the air. If Eddie Van Halen delivers the whirligig equivalent to his bounding Yankee grin, Malmsteen is a whiz kid of the stiff upper lip school. Rock 'n' roll is not all fun and games. It must be right. It must be supreme. It must be, well, musical.

For Malmsteen, even the party aspect of heavy metal business is a cog in the musical process. "I find that the best way to do it is to OD on everything that's bad, and let your willpower take over," he says in the Phoenix hotel room of his road manager, Count de Monet (an alias, of course). Nursing a bottle of Bailey's and occasionally fielding a kiss from his fetching girlfriend Greta, Malmsteen is, surprisingly, open and talkative. Not surprisingly, his intensity is right there, all over his sleeve.

"If I criticize myself harder, and tell myself I'm not allowed to make mistakes—even though what I'm doing is improvising—I do one mistake and it

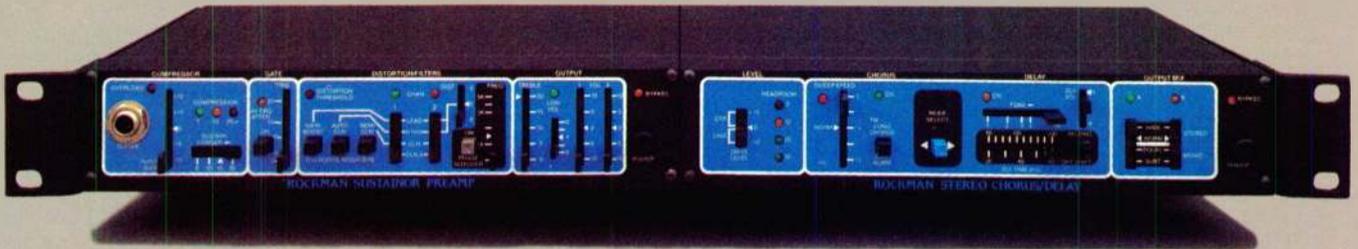


Whiz kid of the stiff-upper-lip school: Hegel meets Van Halen.

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pisses me off, makes me cold and I begin to work on autopilot. That's why I play better if I'm fucked up," he laughs nervously. It's not good to be too clean, because it's boring."

Of all Malmsteen's most primal instincts, the flight from boredom tops the list. "I'm into extremes in every sort of way," he claims. "I want to not only be a creative, sensitive artist, but also an entertainer. I want to have a meaningful statement, but at the same time, have something that a fourteen-year-old can relate to. As much as I am a classically-influenced musician, I still love rock 'n' roll for the rawness. I love to kick stacks, run around and smash my guitars up.

"But then rock 'n' roll became so limiting and guitar players sounded like all the others, because each guitar player listened to another guitar player and it became, you know..." Incestuous?

"Yeah. I was going to say that, but it sounded too harsh." He lets out a grin.

Born into a musical family in Stockholm, young Yngwie leaned more towards draftsmanship and a love of the macabre, drawing skeletons in glorious detail. He bucked attempts by his mother to teach him piano, trumpet and/or the guitar. Until, that is, he saw a Hendrix special on the telly at the ripe age of seven.

"He wasn't playing fucking accord-

ion, you know. He wasn't like some old nerd playing trumpet on TV, in an old 30s movie. He projected such an impact as a personality that I could look up to. That's what made me take the guitar off the wall. From then on, I was possessed with music."

Malmsteen quickly turned his attentions away from the psychedelic joy of Hendrix and Cream to the classically-tinged bands of the day—ELP, Deep Purple, Genesis and Yes, which led to pure classical models, notably the more formalist rigors prior to the winds of Romanticism and Modernism: Malmsteen, had he his druthers, would have lived in the Rhineland, pre-1840.

In many ways, Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) was a rock star before his time, and a paradigm for someone of Malmsteen's inklings. A virtuoso violinist, Paganini was an enigmatic long-hair who caused the ladies to swoon and dazzled audiences with his rich, innovative techniques. He also composed some of the instrument's most challenging repertoire, as well as some lesser-known guitar works. Yet there was a dark side to his psyche; some suggested that he made a Faustian pact with Lucifer for his unearthly talent, thus making him—in Rising Force parlance—a "disciple of hell."

Malmsteen claims that he has been almost entirely self-taught, the result of intensive fretting behind closed doors during his formative years. "I got fascinated with just musical dexterity. I found

continued on page 106

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Yngwie's Maelstrom

Malmsteen swears by the metal orthodoxy of a Strat pumped through a floating number of Marshall stacks, but he's realistic about the foibles of both classics. Of the Marshalls, he likes their "weird combination of a warm but biting, metallic, heavy-but-still-crisp tone. Quality-wise, they're shitty, but the sound you get when they work is absolutely incredible. Same thing with Strats. They're not a 'good guitar,' Gibsons are better made, I suppose. But I wouldn't play anything else." His numerous Strats are equipped with Floyd Rose systems, but without the clamping nut. Pickups are custom from Larry DiMarzio; he helped design Aegis 3, a double coil, stacked model.

Strings are from Ernie Ball, gauged from .008 to .048, and he uses Fender extra heavy picks, which he tends to throw by the handful to the crowd any given show. Though he normally sends a straight signal, he is routed through an old Roland echo unit, a Korg SDD-1000 and a Boss Octaver. He also uses a set of Moog Taurus bass pedals.

For acoustic work, Malmsteen has a variety of axes at his disposal, but tends to like the steel-string Ovation acoustic-electric and a special Gibson solid-body nylon-string model.



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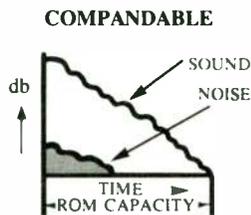
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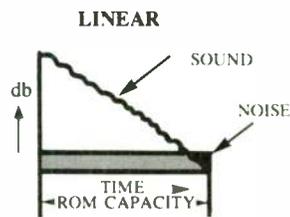
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JEFF BERLIN: THE CHAMPION MEETS MR. T

Has the Bass Crown Been Passed From Stanley & Jaco?

By T Lavitz

Since he was present at the creation of Jeff Berlin's fine new Champion LP, we asked one-time (Dixie) Dreg and present-day blue-chip keyboard freelancer T Lavitz to tell us how and why Berlin has become the bassists' bassist. Here's what he told us.

Bass is a funny instrument. On one hand it's in the background, plowing through the bottom of a tune, punctuating new harmonies as they occur. On the other hand, it's a rhythm instrument, and along with drums, guitars, and keyboards can be a pulsating force behind a good section. Then on the third hand (and sometimes this guy sounds as if he has one) there's the few like Jeff Berlin who aren't satisfied with the ordinary functions of their axe. One of the many joys of playing music is in having the ability—and musicality—to do some “stepping out.” You know, copping a little of the spotlight. Not to be a “lead hog,” but it is nice to be able to groove *and* play a melodic solo. It's no news to Jeff though, because he's been doing all of this for a while now. Some people say that when he's rocking out, his bombastic bass bashing can equal that of Stanley Clarke, or some of Jaco's finest slippery soloing. The fact of the matter is, and I should know, he sounds exactly like Jeff Berlin....

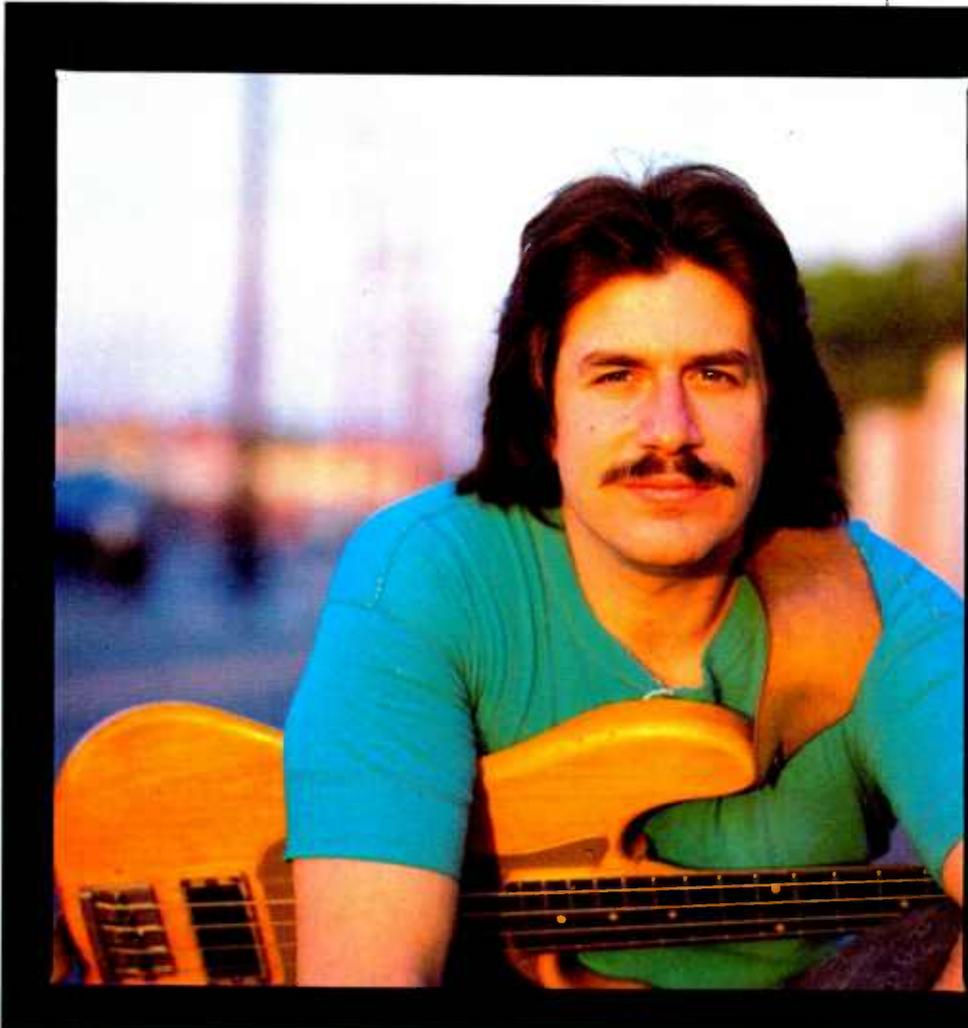
Jeff's specific style and technique is, he admits, “not so concrete. It's more pertaining to what the music says I have to do at any particular time. My whole aspect begins and ends with the notes themselves, not any style or technique. My idea was just to learn as much music as I could, to study what sounds good harmonically. Consequently, my technique had to improve, or else I'd have never gotten the music out. But technique is probably the most over-rated aspect of music these days. A lot of young guys now go right to the technique, but they haven't any notes to back it up, so they get frustrated. The notes have to come first.”

Born thirty-two years ago on Long Is-

land, New York, Jeff's musical roots go back to his father, an opera singer. “I was always singing,” he remembers. “In fact, I used to sing Italian opera before I could speak, because they played it in the house.” One thing led to another, which was violin, and young Berlin played it until the Beatles turned him around. He wanted to be a drummer, but “I wasn't allowed.” He took up guitar, “but changed my mind 'cause there were too many frets and I didn't understand all those extra strings. So I

what the possibilities were and it just seemed to extend itself, so when I got a bass, I didn't immediately settle into a groove or a proper function of the bass. I instantly started playing high up on the neck, trying chords, ya' know all by ear because I had no idea what tonality was at the time, except for classical. So I would try to duplicate Mendelssohn on the bass. I played some of Beethoven's piano sonatas on the bass, usually a bass note and a melody.

Lavitz: So it was your violin background



“It's a temporary thing to be the greatest; one to two is a long fall.”

simplified my choice to bass. I wanted to become the greatest bass player that ever lived in about two weeks.”

Lavitz: Why was that?

Berlin: Because I was always adventurous on my instrument. Even on violin I would do weird things in order to see

that led you to play faster than most bassists....

Berlin: I always wanted to play notes in rapid succession, and that did come from my violin playing. It's natural for a violinist to get from a low G to the highest note in about a second. And when I got to electric bass, I thought, “Why



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World Radio History

favorite tunes?

Berlin: The hardest thing for me to do is writing. I just don't know how musicians can sit there and write two or three tunes a day. I slave over every note and bar I've ever written. Vox Humana slayed the people every time. One concert drew interest and I got signed. When it came down to doing a record I wanted to find musicians that were voices on their own. For yourself, as an example, as far as I'm concerned, you are one of the most visible pianists in a rock/jazz idiom. When I told people that we would be playing together, they got really excited. I also had Clare Fischer play some keyboards—what he's forgotten about music, I haven't learned.

One of the things I did *not* wish to do on the record was to make a bass album. I'm very concerned about hearing a record when a bass player or drummer gets a deal. It's probably the biggest bombardment of sound on a listener's ears when they pump licks, bass grooves and fast tom-tom fills on a listener. It's just a personal thing of mine and I decided I'm not going to be guilty of it, 'cause I got such...I got you, I had Neil Peart, Steve Smith, Neal Schon, so why am I going to dominate when I got you guys? I just wanted to showcase everybody in a compositional aspect.

Lavitz: *Champion is now your most definitive recorded statement. What was your favorite recording prior to it.*

Berlin: I've played in so many bands, I'd have to think about it. Gigs just come and go. I've never really been in a band other than Bill Bruford's and Allan Holdsworth's. I've played with everybody for a day and a half, from Van Halen and Rush and Journey to Mike Stern and Dave Liebman and Pat Metheny. People seem to like *One Of A Kind* by Bruford, but I personally like *Gradually Going Tornado* a lot better. It seemed to groove harder. Bill on that record seemed to suddenly grasp the real importance of a groove, for me.

Lavitz: *Does your playing change when you work with a simpler, groove-oriented drummer?*

Berlin: Sure. If I get a drummer with a strong, solid sense of time, I feel compelled to be as percolating as a coffee pot. I can't stand still because what goes on between bass and drums is so exciting! Vinnie Colaiuta and I used to do things together that were phenomenal. I don't think I've shared that kind of rapport with another drummer.

But I also really like drummers who explode, whose concept includes not only time but also sound and melody, a Bruford or a Neil Peart. But you can't classify Neil. He really surprised the hell

out of me on my record, because he came in and laid down a real authentic rock groove on his two tracks and I thought he just smoked them! He could only stay for one day, so it was a matter of first takes. It was an incredible rush job. [The editors disclaim any responsibility for this awful pun]

Lavitz: *Now for the "investigate-Jeff-Berlin-closely" section of the article. You're often accused of being on a big ego trip. What do you say to that?*

Berlin: Okay. A guy will come in and say, "Oh, are you Jeff Berlin? I think you're the greatest bass player in the world. I love your playing, I love your records"—but they are polite and enthused. I'm

continued on page 98

The Champ's Gloves

Jeff Berlin plays a blond lacquered Fender Precision body with a rosewood-on-maple neck from his disassembled black '62 Jazz bass. Jeff swears by Badass bridges, Bartolini pickups (his is a custom job), and especially Carl Thompson bass strings (gauges are .040, .060, .080 and .100.) He also used a Tobias bass on the LP and calls the Kubicki "a very nice instrument." His amp and effects are Yamahas ("top-of-the-line stuff"): a PB-1 preamp, PB2200 power amp, 2x15 cabinets, and three E1010 analog delays. He also has two small 12-inch Electro-Voice cabinets he adds for high end.

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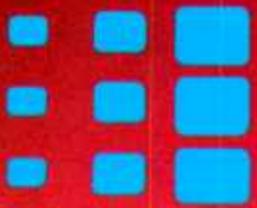
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SOFTWARE CITY

By Freff

After considerable waffling, I finally did it. I went and bought a Macintosh. Cue fanfare and lots of nifty programs, including the two I'm going to cover in brief right now: **Total Music**, from Southworth Music Systems, and **Sound Designer**, from Digidesign. Be warned before you start drooling: neither of these is for the faint of wallet.

Total Music is a program aimed directly at the musical equivalent of the corporate computer "power user." It's meant to be a Maserati, not a VW, and—for the most part—it succeeds.

What is it? A single hardware/software package for the Mac that serves as sequencer, editor, transcriber, DX7/TX816 librarian...take your pick. That's where the "Total" part of the program's title comes in. It's also where some of the difficulties come in, because each of those tasks is a complex problem, and the program isn't equally adept at handling all of them.

Distinctly in **Total Music's** favor: its MIDI interface has two MIDI IN ports, so you can record duets live in a single pass (nothing else available can do this); it translates from recorded tracks to notation more smoothly than I have ever seen on a microcomputer, with a resolution up to 32nd-note triplets; you can edit any MIDI information except for System Exclusive data; you can adjust for all manner of MIDI and synth deficiencies (especially those related to timing accuracy and "data clogging") with its filter, channel split, and track sliding features; and its 179-page manual is direct, well-ordered, comprehensive, and more than a little pithy. Kudos to author Paul Lehrman.

Distinctly not in Total Music's favor: it *only* works with its own hardware interface, and not those available from Assimilation, Opcode, or Musicworks (this was done to give the program hardware-locked copy protection, and a part of me sees the need, but it's a pain for those who already bought another interface); screen updating is, at times, slow; and certain functions involve lots of disk drive activity...which runs from reasonable (on a 512K Mac with internal hard disk) to stooooow (on a 512K Mac without) to absolutely impossible to tolerate (on a 128K Mac; avoid these like the plague).

In sum, at \$500 **Total Music** is a ton of power, perhaps the best of its kind on the Mac. But there is still room for improvement, especially in the use of

the Mac's screen and the editing procedures; and learning to use the program to any worthwhile extent will take a solid investment of time and practice.

Sound Designer, at \$1000 a shot, is the most expensive piece of consumer software I'm aware of. It's worth it.

Take one Mac with Sound Designer. Add an Emulator II (you've got to have that particular sampling instrument, and no other). Add a Hyperdrive internal disk for the Mac (optional but highly recommended). Total pricetag for all these components is maybe \$11-12,000 if you shop intelligently, which is pretty expensive...but put them together and *presto*, instant \$40,000 digital synth.

You want power? Brothers and sisters, this is POWER. We're talking easy-as-a-breeze editing of digitally sampled sounds, all the way down to fiddling with *individual samples* (when you consider that the Emulator packs over 27,000 samples into each second of recorded sound, you get a sense of the program's scope). Sixteen-bit editing resolution. Being able to listen to edits through the Mac's audio if the Emulator II isn't around. Merging two or more sounds together or fading from one to another (your choice, smooth or abrupt). Perfect looping. Cut, copy, paste, and gain adjustment routines that make for previously-impossible high-quality sampling. Visual access of up to three waveforms at a time, with up to ten movable (plus *nameable!*) markers in each. Extensive frequency spectrum analysis. A Karplus-Strong digital synthesis algorithm, with more algorithms promised in future. Total control of all Emulator II functions, making that instrument even easier to deal with than it already was.

I could rave for hours about **Sound Designer**. In fact, there are only three "negative" things about it I can think of.

First, you really need a Hyperdrive hard disk in your Mac. The Emulator II has seventeen seconds of sample memory, enough to fill two 400K floppy disks, so editing even short sounds on disk is slow and aggravating. Second, the program is copy protected in a fashion that doesn't let you make working backups. At the price, and considering the "built-in" hardware protection (the Emulator II and the special interface cable), that inconvenience is unreasonable. And third...

...third, now I'm going to have to go buy an Emulator II to keep me and my Mac happy. It never stops, you know?

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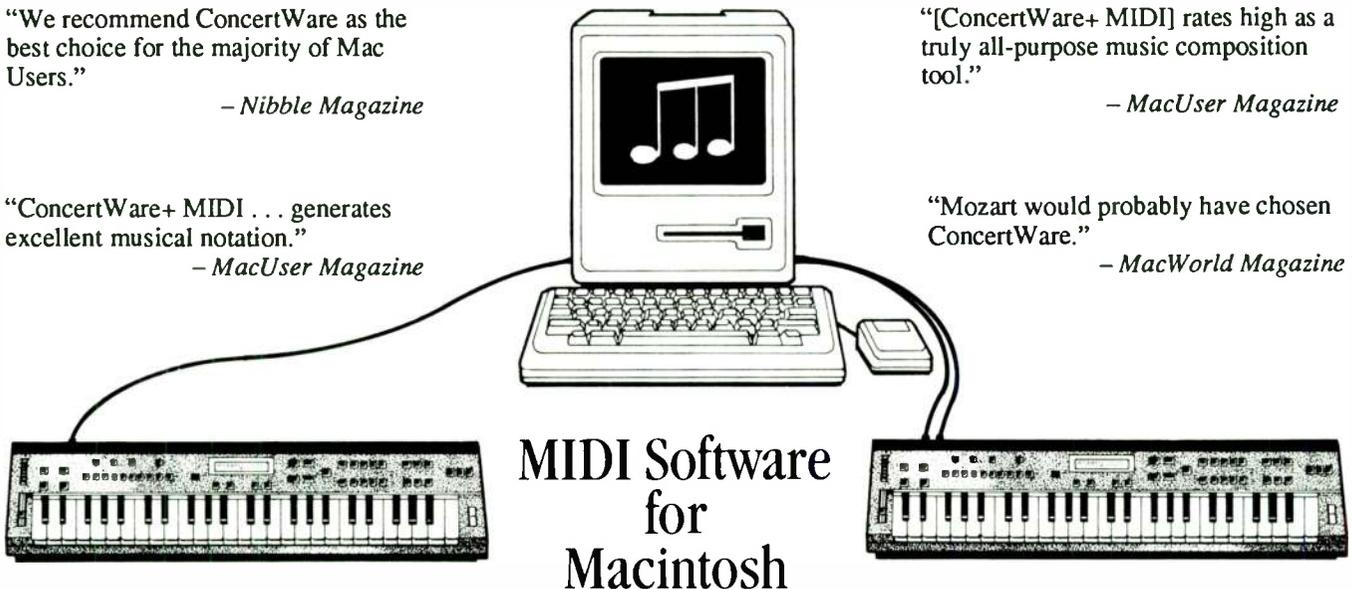
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DEVELOPMENTS

By Jock Baird

The week before this fall's **Audio Engineering Society** show in New York, I went out and played every state lottery number with an even square root. I wasn't looking for millions, mind you, but a couple of days looking at the latest in pro audio technology can make you feel like you're only wearing



Mirage Multi-Sampler

a barrel. This time, though, I wandered AES' aisles and hotel corridors with a secret smirk, counting my imminent winnings and viewing the instruments of its rapid disposal. What a difference a bet makes!

For example, in my previous poverty, would I get all worked up over **Lexicon's** brand-new PCM-70 digital multi effects processor? I think not. But this time, my heartbeat quickened. The night before, the Lexicon PCM-60 digital reverb had won a *Mix* magazine reader's poll on the best product in recording technology, beating out equipment costing well over ten times its \$1,500 price. Now here was a delay, reverb and miscellaneous effects line, with full MIDI capability, at a more than reasonable price of \$2,295, from a company with superb high-end technology. After listening to a twenty minutes of different sound programs, I got even more worked up, and took note of Lexicon's address and phone number: 60 Turner St., Waltham, MA 02154; (617) 891-6790.

Naturally I would need a new mixing board—my Heathkit's becoming an embarrassment around town. AES had some compelling new under-\$10,000 models that got my attention. There was the Series 65 from **Trident**, a major-league British firm of proven reputation. The 65s, which start at \$7,900 for a 16/4/2 version with 8-track monitoring, boast enhanced bussing and "group assign" capabilities and plenty of eq and auxiliary sends on each channel. If my bets yield a bit less return, there's the T-Series from another fine U.K. company, **Soundtracs**, which start at \$3,800 and have plug-in expansion modules. Nice cosmetics, a readily accessible patch

bay on a slanted top panel, and plenty of control make the T-Series a potent home studio contender.

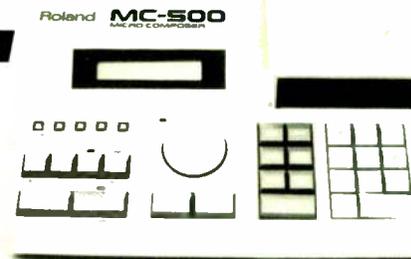
Then there's the **AHB CMC Series**, a 16-track version of which lists for \$4,300. The CMC uses a Computer Aiding Routing System (CARS) to put all your patching and muting under the control of an on-board computer system that can be interfaced with a Commodore 64. It's not exactly Necam, but it's a long way into automated mixdown for that kind of money. A **Seck** series of portable consoles from **Connectronics** caught my eager eye as well, especially their ultra-thin look and nice flexible layout; an 18-input 1882 model goes for an even four grand. **Electro-Voice** surprised me with their 8400 Series of pro mixers, intended primarily for reinforcement and therefore extremely road-worthy, but also endowed with lots of studio-friendly qualities. A 16-track model goes for \$4,185. Of course, as a hedge if none of my numbers win, I took a good look at a new Electro-Voice 4-input ELX-1 mike/line mixer with more controls packed on its little 1.75 inches of rack space than medals on an Air Force general. Between built-in limiters and power supply, color coding, headphone plug and a transformer-coupled outlet that will hold open phone lines for news hounds like myself, there's a lot packed in here.

Roland caught my expanded wallet's attention with a new 40,000-note sequencer, the MC-500 with pin-point punch in/out on four tracks. It also sports a disk drive, song chaining, a



MESA/Boogie Mark III

20-character, 2-line dot LCD display and full MIDI implementation. Roland also showed a new piano synth module with truly impressive, warm sound quality courtesy of their Structured Adaptive Synthesis sampling technology, which was devised especially for acoustic and electric piano patches. Then there's



Roland MC-500

their inexpensive TR-505 rhythm machine with sixteen drum sounds and memory for 48 programmable patterns. Of course it's MIDI'd. Roland also beefed up its software offensive with an IBM-PC-based voice editing system for their MKS-80 Super Jupiter synth module that boasts 1280 patches. Prices were still not available at press time, but if you have to ask....

Speaking of MIDI, three new products have been creating a bit of conversation. One has been around almost a year, **360 Systems'** MIDI Bass unit, a controller-less synth module with four primo (and, from a burgeoning chip library, interchangeable) bass sounds, but because of the recent MIDI acceleration it has only now come into the limelight. Viva specialization! Another is **Kawai's** success in building MIDI into a top-of-the-line electric grand piano, the EP-308M. It allows two independent channel assignments in either Dual or Split mode, and is velocity-sensitive. Oh yeah, it's also a damn nice electric grand piano (an upright's also available). And **Ensoniq** put its Mirage 8-voice polyphonic sampler with disk drive into an expander module (and threw in a sequencer) for those who already have a fave keyboard controller. Best of all, the price: \$1,400.

And while I'm at it, I need a new guitar amp. I think I'll go with an updated classic, the **MESA/Boogie Mark III**. It incorporates foot-switching between three sounds: clean rhythm, crunch rhythm and lead—and when a Boogie says "lead," better tie down loose objects onstage. Sure I may be conservative, but give me those basic Boogie values, like their high-tech preamp, state-of-the-art cooling system, voltage surge protector, constant voltage effects loop and "sus-4" shock mount in the combo model in case I have a little too much to drink at the party celebrating my winnings and drop the amp off a tailgate. Now that I'm a man of means, of course, I'll insist on options like the 100/60-watt switch, Simulclass modification, reverb, graphic eq and a dovetailed wood cabinet.

So, you ask, did I hit on any numbers? No, but somehow it didn't bother me that much once I got home. After all, with N.A.M.M. around the corner, I can still dream, can't I?

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Tom Whisner (owner) MANTICORE

In the Laboratory The Carver PM-1.5 was rigorously tested by Len Feldman for MODERN RECORDING (February 1985). His laboratory test results also prove that the PM-1.5 really delivers. The following quotes from the Lab Report are reprinted with permission of MODERN RECORDING & MUSIC:—

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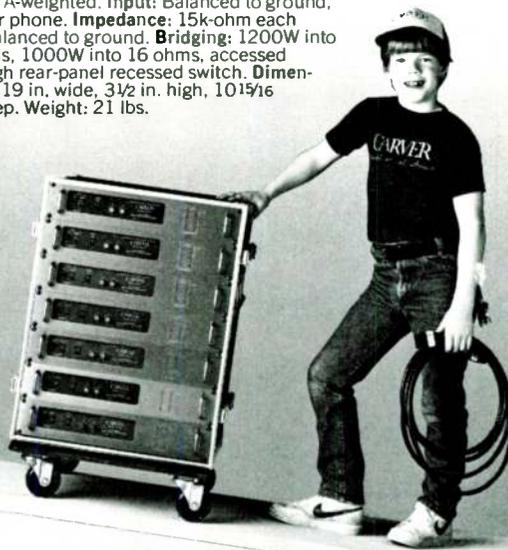
"The amplifier delivered a clean 480 watts per channel into 8-ohm loads with both channels driven for its rated harmonic distortion level of 0.5%. Even at the frequency extreme of 20 Hz, power output for rated THD was 470 watts as against 450 claimed by Carver. Furthermore, at rated power output, distortion decreased to an insignificant 0.015% at mid-frequencies and 0.007% at 20 Hz. When connected to 4-ohm loads, the PM-1.5 delivered 750 watts per channel for rated THD of 0.05%—far more than the 600 watts claimed by Carver. Clearly, when it comes to specs for a professional amplifier, Carver has taken a very conservative approach... All (manufacturer's claims) equaled or exceeded published specifications—usually by a wide margin."

"Carver has managed to deliver a tremendous amount of power in a small lightweight package at a very reasonable cost..."

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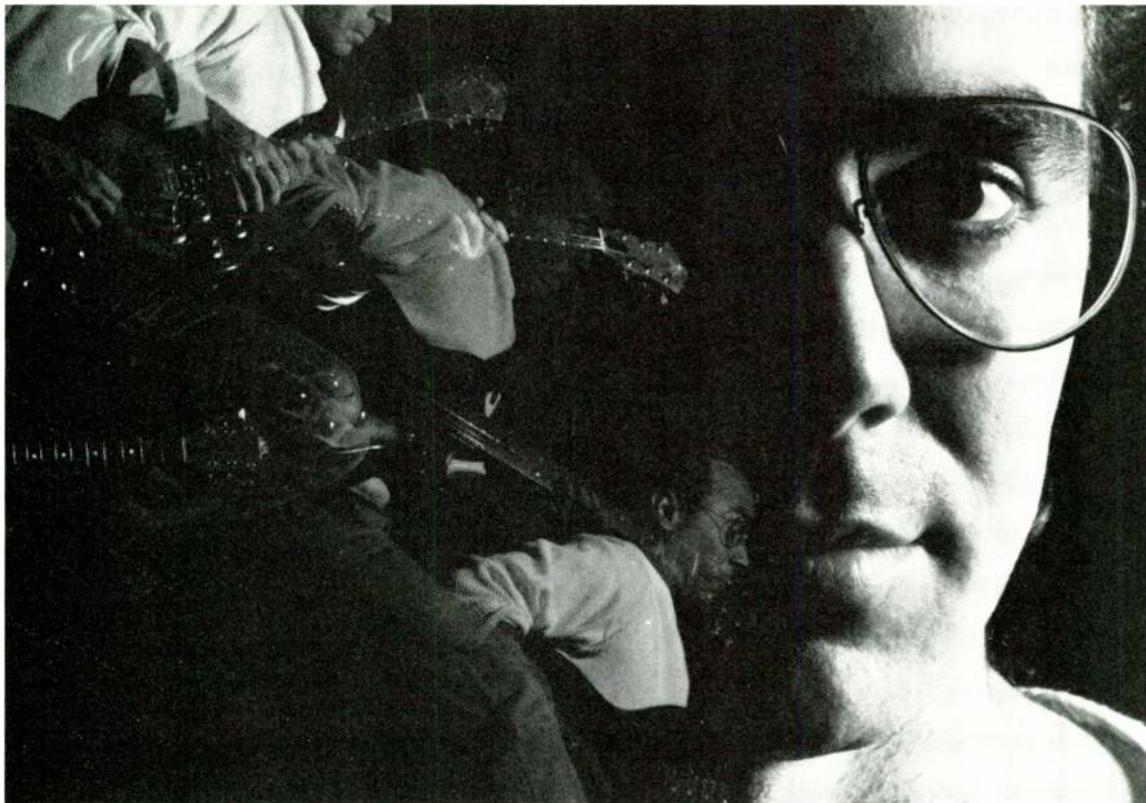
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OUT OF THE ASHES:
JOE STRUMMER ROCKS,
MICK JONES SWINGS



THE CLASH

Cut The Crap
(Epic)

BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE

This Is Big Audio Dynamite
(Columbia)

Mick and Joe couldn't have planned it any better if they'd hired Don King as promoter. Two years after the Clash's bitter split, brothers-turned-foes Joe Strummer and Mick Jones are back in action and headed for a showdown. Who will survive the confrontation? Will Strummer's Clash, boasting a hard left,

fell the challenger, or will Jones' Big Audio Dynamite dethrone the aging warhorse through fancy footwork and surprise strategies?

On the basis of sheer energy, *Cut The Crap* makes Joe's boys the victors. Joined by old buddy Paul Simonon, (bass) and three able, anonymous recruits, Strummer clings to the old ways, his garbled HEY YOU! vocals dominating the attack. Familiar tales too, though after the brutal buzzsaw boogie of "Dirty Punk," you may wonder if Strummer really has something to say, or just enjoys a commotion for its own sake. In either case, *Cut The Crap* is a lively show that recreates the hurlyburly feel of the Clash's youth without resorting to slavish imitation. Producer Jose Unidos (hmmm...) has fashioned more of an homage to their early punk sound than an exact replica; compared to such Clash classics as "1977" and "London's Burning," nouveau anthems like "Cool Under Heat" and "Movers And Shakers" seem almost restrained.

But this isn't just a nostalgia trip. Despite a retreat from the risk-taking of *Sandinista!* or even *Combat Rock*, the band incorporates synths, acoustic and wah-wah guitars, and other relatively daring items into grungy funk ("Fingerpoppin"), reggae ("Three Card Trick"), and an affecting ballad ("North And South"). And if the lilting "This Is England" finds Strummer becoming a distinguished middle-aged eminence in the mold of Ian Hunter, so be it.

Big Audio Dynamite (a.k.a. BAD) couldn't be a less apt moniker for Mick Jones' new band. Where Strummer favors a full-frontal assault, this gang makes its points with finesse and understatement. Gone are the harsh gestures of Mick's Clash days, replaced by light, jangly guitars and crisp rhythms that bounce and skip instead of rock. Jones' scrawny if likable voice shouldn't have to carry an entire LP, and Don Letts' pervasive effects, ranging from scratching to bits of movie dialogue to gunfire sounds, make an odd substitute for traditional lead guitar. Yet the group swings so skillfully it's hard to resist 'em.

The tunes on *This Is Big Audio Dynamite* tend to run together, underscoring a style so distinctive it deserves its own descriptive catchphrase. (Maybe MTV could hold one of their contests.) The real kicker, though, is Jones' pointed lyrics, which survey concerns from AIDS to South Africa to Reaganomics minus the sensationalism of his ex-partner. "Sudden Impact," for example, offers this succinct putdown: "Listening to a metal music prank/ That leads straight to the bank/ Each grunt and groan took literally/ Some tired old rock star's fantasy." BAD is *bad*, and that means good.

And the new champion is? Both combatants maintain their dignity, so let's wimp out and call it a draw. The real winner, of course, is the listener. Maybe the Clash should have ruptured sooner. — Jon Young



CHRISTOPHER "CHIP" TURNER



ZZ TOP

Afterburner
(Warner Bros.)

ZZ Top represents the optimum balance between gonads and technoglitz. All musicians everywhere should steal their secrets, which they are apparently loath to disclose (see cover story). Nonetheless, having studied *Afterburner* closely in the day and a half since I was asked to review it, I am going to reveal several of their secrets as a public service so that in the future there will be no excuse for bad rock 'n' roll bands.

ZZ TOP SECRET NUMBER ONE: Have the Correct Attitude Toward Your Dick. Lots of ZZ Top songs are about sex, a not unprecedented subject of rock 'n' roll scrutiny. But ZZ Top is distinguished by the artfulness of their boners. I had to listen to "Woke Up With Wood" three or four times before finally asking Timothy White, "Hey, is this song about waking up with a rod?" It is. The words are also slurred enough so Tipper Gore can't prove a thing.

ZZ TOP SECRET NUMBER TWO: Relate New Social Phenomena To Your Dick. Last week I tried on this pair of shorts and they made this horrible ripping sound. I discovered it was a velcro fly, my first experience with a development that is apparently smiting the zipper industry. But only after hearing "Velcro Fly" on *Afterburner* did the ramifications become clear: Velcro flies have "just enough of that sticky stuff" to hold your wood in, but come apart real fast if you want it out.

ZZ TOP SECRET NUMBER THREE: Have Frank Beard As A Drummer. This guy kicks massive ass, more ass than anyone since John Bonham. And Frank Beard is about half Bonham's size. He compensates with technoglitz (compressors and sundry formations of electronic drums) and amazing taste. The music being blues-based electric boogie, he has less opportunity to show off. Yet every time he gets a chance for a little fill between verses, or to set the beat for ten seconds at the start of a song ("Sleeping Bag"), he clobbers it with a minimum number of maximum

thuds, so you think you know what's going on. Meanwhile, he's dropping in some strange rhythmic twist, so you don't know what's going on at all.

ZZ TOP SECRET NUMBER FOUR: Have Dusty Hill Play Bass. Such a minimalist he makes Dee Dee Ramone sound like Stanley Clarke, Hill does almost nothing except pulse. If the drums are going to be a second lead instrument, *something's* got to pulse.

ZZ TOP SECRET NUMBER FIVE: Have Billy Gibbons Play Guitar. Unlike AC/DC, who play the same old stuff the same old way every time (which is okay if you like that same old stuff a whole lot), Gibbons recycles old stuff and semi-new stuff with new noises without ever losing sight of his ultimate purpose of caving your head in. Best song on the album is "Can't Stop Rockin'," a title that in other hands (say Loverboy's) would be instant nap time. Here it's the best encore since "Good Night Irene."

The mental image I get of Gibbons' guitar playing is that of a sixty-foot wave breaking over my head. Dusty Hill's bass is my heart thumping right out of my chest, and Frank Beard's drums are the great white sharks snapping at my toes over the edge of a surfboard. What more can you ask of an album? And with their secrets exposed, what excuse can you now offer for not sounding exactly like ZZ Top yourself?

—Charles M. Young



BILLIE HOLIDAY

Billie Holiday on Verve 1946-1959
(Verve)

There are jazz singers, there are pop singers, and there is Billie Holiday. Twenty-five years after her death, her music presents an irrefutable challenge to those who would champion technique before emotion. Even in youth, before drugs and an urban gothic lifestyle tore away what vestiges of range and timbre she originally possessed, her vocal prowess wouldn't have intimidated your average glee club. Yet Billie sang with such clarity of feeling that she made most of her rivals sound like they should

have stayed in one. Sarah was sassier, and Dinah brassier, but rarely have they elevated these jazz and pop standards beyond the realm of elegant confection. When Billie sang, standards became matters of love and death.

Maybe this sounds a bit heavy to those listeners familiar with only the early Holiday, the ingenue whose lilting romantic paeans sweetened the swing of the Basie, Goodman and Teddy Wilson bands. This ten-record Verve collection, effectively chronicling her last decade, tells a different story. Mostly she's working with small, sympathetic jazz ensembles here, re-investing favorites like "Lover Man" and "What A Little Moonlight Can Do" with dimensions of irony and longing, and mirroring, as on "What's New," her own increasingly tragic circumstances. Her voice, frayed at the edges, plumbs the deepest pools of emotion, though a few sides reveal more than traces of her ultimate disintegration. Hearing them is painful, unless of course one enjoys pondering how America's greatest singer happened to die a broken junkie.

The vast majority of these performances (135 in all) are transcendently soulful, thanks in part to the sensitive assistance of pros like Benny Carter, Sweets Edison and especially Jimmy Rowles. Pressed on Japanese vinyl, their sonic quality is superb. Beauty, wrote Milan Kundera, is a rebellion against time; decades pass, while Billie Holiday's music remains as lovely and as fragile as a freshly-cut gardenia.

—Mark Rowland



SKEETER DAVIS AND NRBQ

She Sings, They Play
(Rounder)

Well hey, if this isn't a match made in heaven, what is? Skeeter Davis owns the most ingenuous set of pipes this side of the flying nun. Even when she sings a song about being a whore in love with daddy, she sounds like a good girl. And despite NRBQ's multiple musical personas, they're sentimental country boys at heart. Put 'em together and

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Skeeter wrote some of these tunes and sings on all, while pure country musicians Larry Packer and Buddy Ammons sit in on fiddle and pedal steel; still, elements of NRBQ's patented power-of-non-sequitrial-thinking manage to creep in. These ain't no simple lovin' country songs; though Davis sings her parts straight, the band provides plenty of colorful variations. On a typically pathos-laden lament called "Everybody's Clown," for instance, Terry Adams unleashes one of the corniest baseball-and-franks organ solos heard in these here United States (and that's corny). And in a fit of gentle perversion sure to cause more of Miles Davis' hair to fall out, the band has also concocted a 2/4 country version of "Someday My Prince Will Come," with a great bop pedal steel solo and Davis (Skeeter, that is) rapping country-style over the last few bars. Other upstanding croonings include "Heart To Heart," wherein Davis and criminally underrated singer Al Anderson trade sentiments. (Davis: "I like puppies." Anderson: "I like machines." Together: "We disagree about a lot of things/ But we're in love"), and "Temporarily Out Of Order," ("She's temporarily out of order/ Since he told her/ They were permanently through"). An obscure Hank Williams song called "May You Never Be Alone" provides a nice closing touch.

Not all the tunes on *She Sings, They Play* are memorable, and some are too coy for cute. But if Skeeter And The Boys seem like the looniest combination to come down the pike since an RC Cola met a moon pie, the music they make here is every bit as tasty.

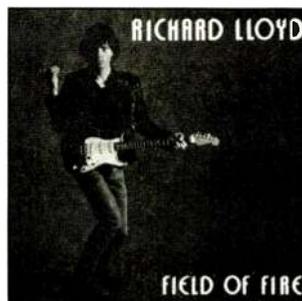
— Peter Watrous

party music "Here I Am (Come And Take Me)" or "Sha La La (Make Me Happy)" provided. In that regard, *He Is The Light* is a troublesome triumph. Musically it's Green's best work since *Belle*, cannily encapsulating the best of the Hi sound while at the same time making the most of his current strengths. On the other hand, it is adamantly a gospel album, and the inclusion of the semi-secular "You Brought The Sunshine" (which fit the Clark Sisters far better than it does Green) hardly lessens the blow. To be blunt, those who don't like to hear Jesus songs are not doing to be seduced either by Green's singing or Willie Mitchell's production.

But that's their loss, because Al Green sings sweetly enough to make a convert out of anyone. True, he and Mitchell play a little heavily on past pop successes—"True Love," for instance, cops hooks from "Look What You Done For Me"—but that recognition only intensifies its pleasures. Gospel singing, after all, has as much to do with remembrance as with hope. And to hear Al Green skip across Sam Cooke's "Nearer My God To Thee" is to know a kind of salvation soul music could never promise. — J.D. Considine

ened and frayed by age and a well-documented career of excess, Lloyd bites into these hook-studded compositions fervently, taking every opportunity to spin out dizzying, ardently constructed choruses on his Stratocaster. Echoes of Television's tolling, twisting riffs may be heard in such memorable new songs as "Watch Yourself" and the dramatic "Pleading," while a more formal approach braces the keen-edged rockers "Soldier Blue," "Keep On Dancin'," and "Lovin' Man." The record's most profound and exciting moments occur on the title track, an eight-minute centerpiece which, like Television's "Marquee Moon," affords Lloyd a grand canvas to splash his solo strokes. Lloyd does his best singing ever on this statement of personal and artistic rebirth, and his two lengthy guitar excursions rank among his best recorded performances.

After such lengthy obscurity, Richard Lloyd is forging a comeback of astonishing and unexpected force. Certainly his prowess, as displayed here, deserves a larger audience. One hopes a domestic label will eventually offer Lloyd another forum for his staggering six-string feats. — Chris Morris



RICHARD LLOYD

Field Of Fire
(Mistlur import)

Guitarist Richard Lloyd perfected his crystalline tone and rhapsodic phrasing in tandem with Tom Verlaine in Television, the lamentably short-lived punk guitar band that cut two superb albums before cracking up in 1978. While Verlaine has recorded four solo albums since the split, Lloyd has gone virtually unheard: His only venture was a slight, pop-inflected LP for Elektra, *Alchemy*, which did little to show off his improvisational talents.

Six years after that disappointing project, Lloyd is again staking his claim as a soulful and impassioned guitar stylist. The unlikely vehicle is *Field Of Fire*, produced by Lloyd and Stefan Glaumann in Stockholm with a sharp Swedish back-up band. His voice hard-

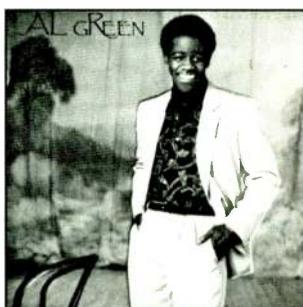


THE REPLACEMENTS

Tim
(Sire)

Unlike most people who write about rock 'n' roll for a living, I do not love the Replacements' three independently-released LPs. Each album has some terrific individual tracks, but they're also all sloppy, amateurish, and ultimately unfinished. *Let It Be*, which garnered near-unanimous raves, seemed fundamentally flawed by what sounded like the band's conscious refusal to think out their material.

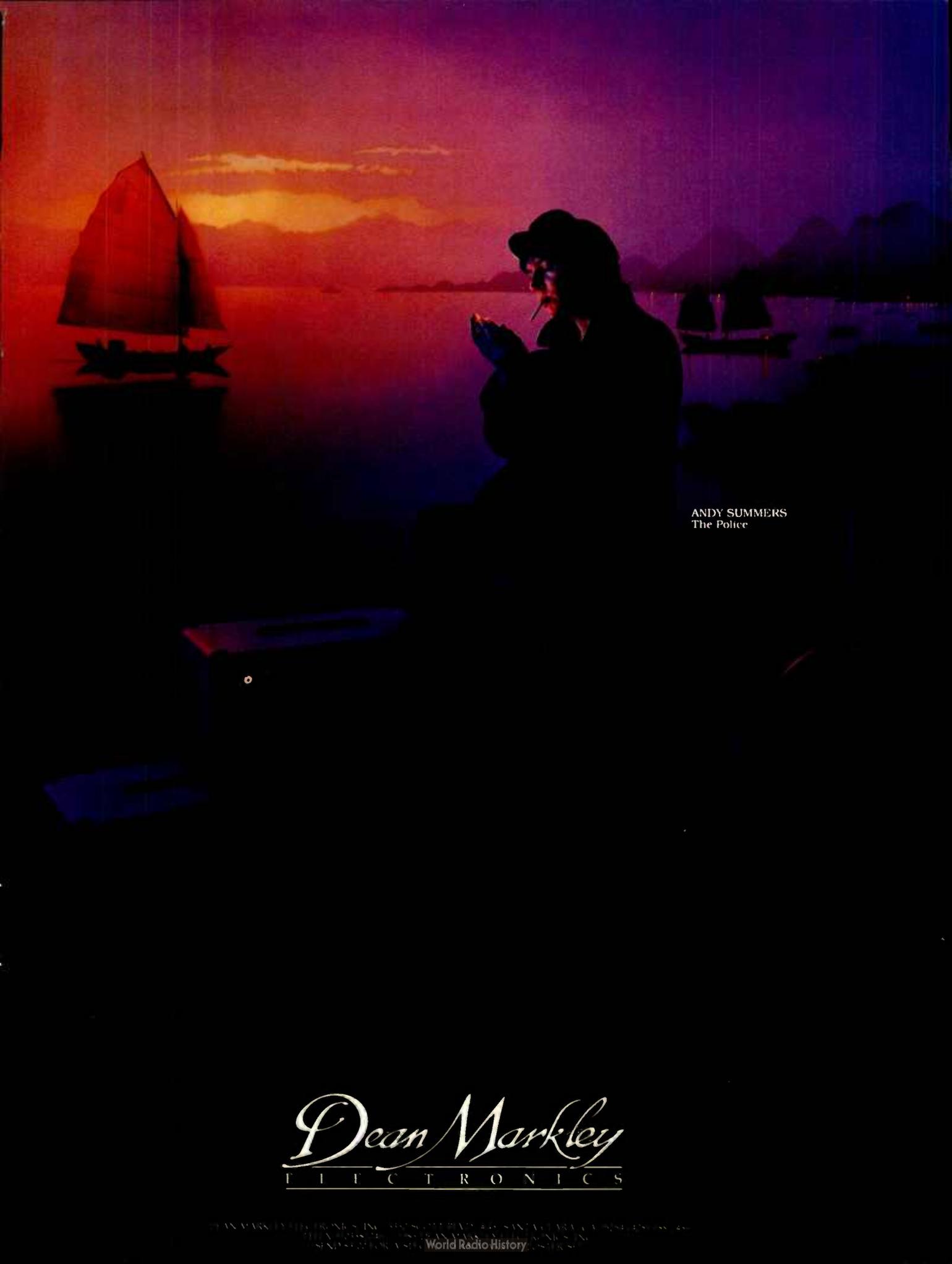
In that context, *Tim*, the Replacements' major label debut, is a shock. The songs are uniformly solid and tersely structured, while Tommy Erdelyi's Ramonesish production replaces the lazy excess of the band's Twin Tone work with a streamlined attack that gives the songs more clarity



AL GREEN

He Is The Light
(A&M)

Al Green's gospel recordings never really turned on his pop following, in part due to their uneven quality, but also because hosannas, no matter how heartfelt, do not make for the kind of

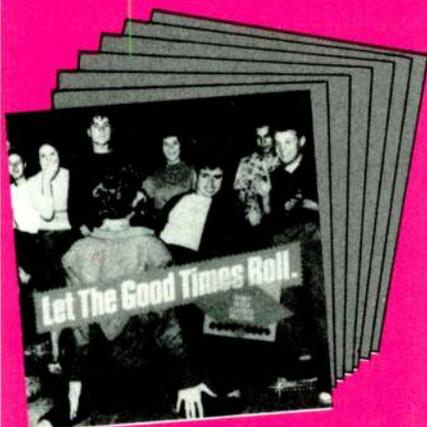


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and emotional punch. When Erdelyi throws Paul Westerberg's righteous voice against a wall of guitars on such no-quarter rockers as "Hold My Life" and "Bastards Of Young," they fit together like the old friends they are.

But Erdelyi's production wouldn't matter if the band members hadn't matured. Westerberg has discovered subtlety, and the guitar lines he trades with Bob Stinson reinforce lyrics without overwhelming them. His voice has also developed: On "Swinging Party," he describes the bring-your-own-lampshade event in a tone more mournful than exuberant, while on "Waitress In The Sky," a skiffle rewrite of Johnny Rivers' "Mountain Of Love," he channels his sneer into a striking lament. *Tim* shouldn't be mistaken for *The Replacements Grow Up*, but they have tightened their sound without losing their DIY charm, making music that's more accessible without discarding their punky raunch. It also provides a compelling example that underground bands can broaden and tighten their sound without compromise.

— Jimmy Guterman



DIVINYLS

What A Life!
(Chrysalis)

Some groups you just naturally identify with a time of day. Abba are an eight in the morning band; Springsteen, he's a five p.m. man. Marvin Gaye was always a midnight man. But Divinyls, they're three in the morning.

Part of that mood is lyrical; singer Christina Amphlett places many of the ten songs on *What A Life!* in the long hours before daylight, when memories and hopes are the only alternative to pills and booze. It's also her growly voice, thicker than vegemite, which sounds as though she'd been woken from a deep sleep and forced to sing before she had a chance to brush. Then there's Mark McEntee's brutish guitar chords, the obvious result of an amplifier that's been left on for too many days. The bars of Australia are tough and loud, something like the set of *Mad*

Max, and bands as different as AC/DC and Midnight Oil have come out of that environment with an aggressive edge. On their second album, Divinyls prove they can temper that tempestuousness with a bit of radio gloss and make a grabby album that doesn't sacrifice any of their character.

Amphlett sets the stakes on the first song, "Pleasure And Pain"—(written by Holly Knight, the Aaron Spelling of pop music). If the song's structure and Mike Chapman's production seem customized to meet the Standards For Acceptable Hits, listen to how Amphlett brays "Please don't ask me how I been gettin' off" and tell me that's a sell-out. She's at her brassiest on "Casual Encounter," while "Motion" works as a snarling rip-off of the Stones' "Empty Heart"; on "Don't You Go Walking," McEntee flirts with an acoustic guitar on the bridge before accelerating past Rick Grossman's punkish bass and into a long demolition solo.

Producer Gary Langan, a Trevor Horn protégé, introduces a few weird twists on his tracks, notably "Dear Diary," the surreal dreamscape written by guitarist/keyboardist Bjorne Ohlin which closes the album. Langan constructs a perfect setting with a circus organ, acoustic bass and carnival barker; the song ends with an eerie chant about "struggle and strife," set to the melody of "Three Blind Mice" as McEntee simulates the farmer's wife's carving knife. As a grim hallucination, it's a flip side of the beautiful "Sleeping Beauty," where Amphlett suggests that salvation from physical abuse, rejection, separation and boredom can only come in a dream. Or, she should have mentioned, in a good rock 'n' roll album.

— Rob Tannenbaum

Blades from page 52

on the alert. Besides, my obsessive character would have killed me if I had gotten into drugs. But my talent and spirit are going to take me to something more important than snorting coke in a john. I've found my own way of having fun, reading or playing dominoes, or having a drink on the corner, or hearing stories, or sitting on a park bench watching people go by and hearing them talk. So my direct message to Latin American youth is that whoever is going around snorting let them do so, they must have their reasons, but the idea is to articulate another kind of reason and another kind of attitude so we won't lose our force for renovation, which is our young people. And if a pop figure is worth anything, given the failure of our political institutions, it's to assume a responsible posture; a posture of salvation. ☐

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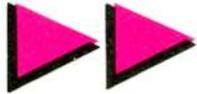
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Berlin from page 84

as flattered as all hell. I can enjoy that. I guess because I speak my mind, some people can't appreciate that. I suppose I've got a rep as a hard case, but I'm not. I love people and our fans.

Lavitz: A lot of people have called you a busy player. How would you reply?

Berlin: Well, I've done about forty records in my life that I can remember. I've done three Bill Bruford albums and one with Allan Holdsworth. My reputation as a musician seems to be based on these records. I would have to say that at the time with Bill, I was feeling my oats and with Allan I was playing more maturely. On these records I played a lot and I played strong. However, I'm conscious of the performance that I have to put in with whom I'm working. I'm a functional section musician. I know that people are going to say, "Oh, there he goes again, ego-ing out," but it's not an ego thing for me at all when I know that I can play funk as good as anybody. I can play jazz as well as or better than almost anybody. That was my decision to pursue it. Now, if I do a thing with somebody, I don't have to be featured. However, if you need 650,000 notes in a two-bar phrase, I'll give them to you.

Lavitz: I've heard people say that you are the greatest bass player in the world. How does that affect you?

Berlin: It's a funny thing, when the greatest seems to come along, 'cause the greatest always seems to go away. Stanley was the greatest, Jaco was the greatest, Jack Bruce was the greatest. Some people think that I'm the greatest. It's a temporary thing to be the greatest. One to two is a long fall, two to one is a great climb, but...I've come up with some real different things that I think I may showcase on our next record. I may play a little more bass on the next record...I appreciate it all, but I absolutely do not live by it.

Lavitz: Who are some of the other greats?

Berlin: The first and foremost bass player that I enjoy is a guy who never solos, [Tower of Power's] Francis Rocco Prestia. I consider him the inventor of the 16th note staccato bass concept. Geddy Lee as a rock bass player is absolutely outstanding. So's Billy Sheehan. And Jack Blades from Night Ranger—he's one of the killerest popping string bass players you'll ever see. Andy West is a great groove bass player. Jack Bruce, because he taught me. To this day I still regard him as the great voice of rock 'n' roll, the greatest instrumentalist of rock 'n' roll, and a great composer and bass player...he's just a breathtaking talent. And McCartney...somebody told me that my name came up in a conversation with him and he said he liked me. That really got to me! To even be mentioned by someone like him....

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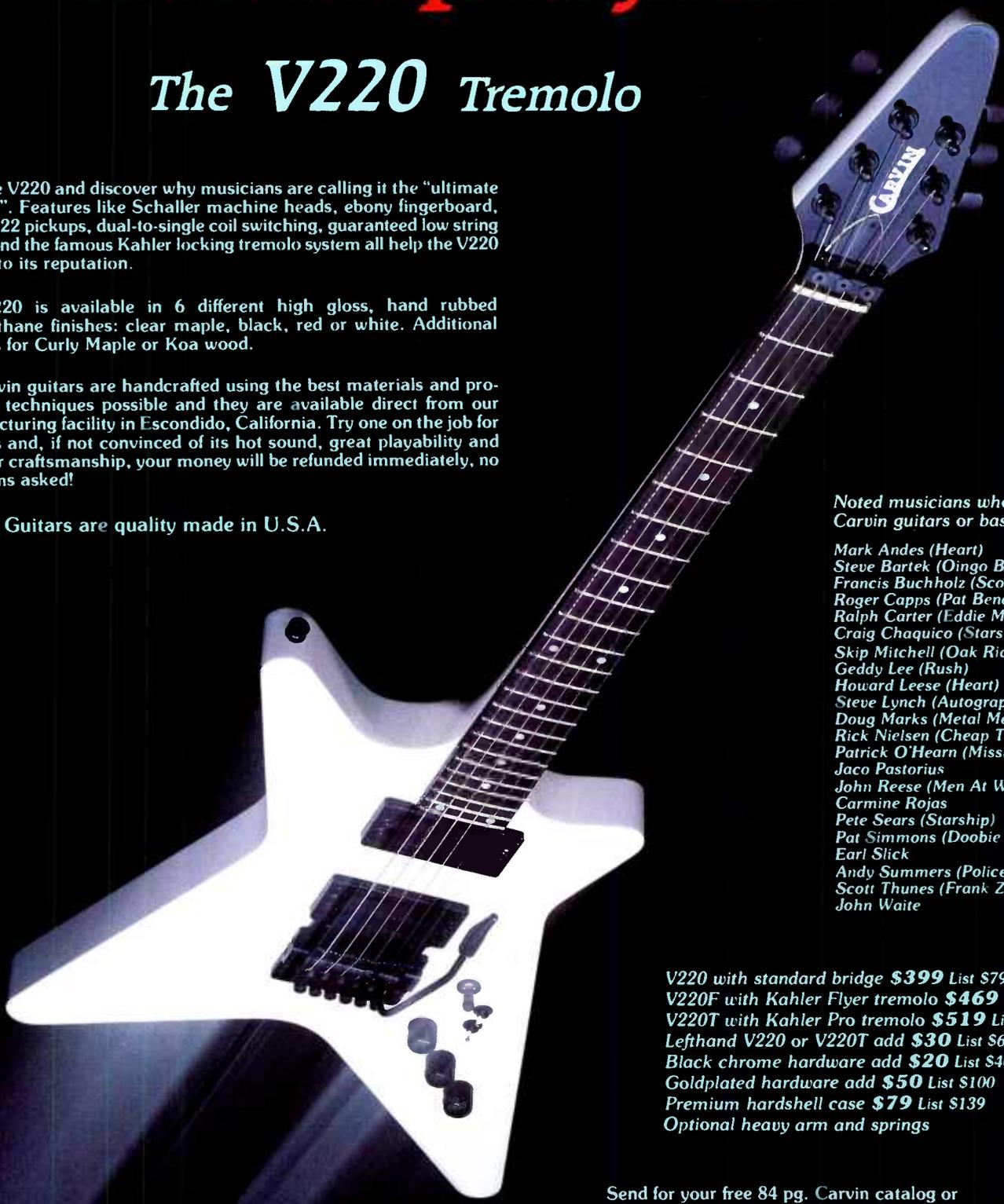
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Loudon Wainwright III*I'm Alright* (Rounder)

Wainwright's writing boasts the same vituperative sparkle as Roy Blount's best, plus good melodies. This LP has the added attraction of producer Richard Thompson, who deftly parries Wainwright's thrusts with droll arrangements, from a polite parlor-orchestra approach on the caustic "Lost Love" to the daffy Dixieland of "Daddy Take A Nap." Not to be missed. (P.O. Box 154, N. Cambridge, MA 02140)

Various Artists*Miami Vice* (MCA)

This shoot-'em-up mutation of MTV may make for primo prime-time, but on vinyl, it's just another soundtrack. Granted, Jan Hammer does a decent Lalo Schifrin, but here he's surrounded by songs you already have—"In The Air Tonight," "Better Be Good To Me"—or songs you could do without. Besides, if man were meant to buy TV soundtracks, why would God have created VCRs?

Sheena Easton*Do You* (EMI/America)

Easton is the perfect Nile Rodgers production vehicle, a voice of striking anonymity. That's a problem when applied to "Jimmy Mack"—no Vandalas material here—but when left to the semi-Chic grooves of "Do It For Love," Easton does.

Simple Minds*Once Upon A Time* (A&M)

Although almost every track is built around the same galloping groove as "Don't You (Forget About Me)," the band never seems monotonous—in part because their rich textures still sparkle, but mostly due to their balance between gospel fervor and art-rock elegance. And though Jim Kerr remains one of rock's most mannered singers, such soulfulness suits him.

James Taylor*That's Why I'm Here* (Columbia)

Calling this Taylor's best album in eight years is not saying much—you thought maybe *Flag* was a classic?—so perhaps it would be wiser to stress how fresh this sounds despite its familiarity.

Taylor, after all, has few new tricks to offer, yet everything here is presented with such confidence and grace that he ends up sounding better than ever.

Morris Day*Color Of Success* (Warner Bros.)

You gotta figure a guy who'd dream up a dance craze like "Oak Tree" ("Now shake your leaves!") is either a genius or a lunatic. Day is doubtless a bit of both; his handy revamp of the Time sound shows intelligence, even though his laugh makes him sound like he ought to be committed. Still, hits don't grow on trees, and while there are a few other tracks as addictive as his dance craze, Day's *Success* is limited.

The Fall*This Nation's Saving Grace* (PVC)

The Fall has never been anybody's idea of a pop act, yet the songs here are surprisingly hook-laden. Granted, the guitar lines invariably dive into dissonance, and Mark Smith's vocalizing is abrasive at best, but there's an underlying melodic sense to the album that recalls PiL's *Metal Box*. (3619 Kennedy Rd., So. Plainfield, NJ 07080)

Rush*Power Windows* (Mercury)

Sure, they're intellectually overweening, and from the dubbed-in orchestra to Neil Peart's precious punning this album reeks of overreach. But they have finally figured out how to write pop songs, making this better-than-average radio fodder.

Diana Ross*Eaten Alive* (RCA)

Michael Jackson's title song ought to provide plenty of grist for the armchair psychiatrists in the audience, even ignoring the sexual innuendo. But that's as interesting as this one gets, thanks to ho-hum material and Barry Gibb's formulaic production. And will somebody tell this woman to stop wheezing?

INXS*Listen Like Thieves* (Atlantic)

These Aussies once seemed prime candidates for Duranhood, and given

the right mousse-and-makeup treatment, they may yet become preteen pin-ups. Here's hoping they don't, because the band's sonic edge is too adult to spoil, even as they're too stylish to resist. It's nice, after all, to hear aggressive guitar over a rhythm bed as slick as the title tracks, or feedback as delicious as on "Kiss The Dirt."

Jerry Goodman*On The Future Of Aviation* (Private Music)

The title is a wry allusion to Goodman's days with the Flock, and though the music is completely contemporary in its electronics, it boasts the same down-home eclecticism of Goodman's pre-Mahavishnu playing. Not to mention the most gorgeously evocative violin tone in pop music. A soaring success. (220 E. 23rd St., New York, NY 10010)

The Waterboys*This Is The Sea* (Island)

There's a majesty to Mike Scott's writing that transcends his dense, opulent arrangements. Sure, the sense of "Don't Bang The Drum" never quite lives up to its sound, and "Be My Enemy" is a direct Dylan rip. But the power and passion of "Old England," "The Pan Within" and "Trumpets" more than makes up the difference.

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds*The Firstborn Is Dead* (Homestead)

Given the indulgent chaos that marked the Birthday Party, it's almost a shock to discover that Cave is a champion of the delta blues tradition. Not that he's another John Hammond, Jr., mind you. "Tupelo" may allude to John Lee Hooker, but Cave's fire-breathing delivery is in a class by itself, and that gives *The Firstborn* its visceral punch. (P.O. Box 570, Rockville Centre, NY 11571)

The Del Fuegos*Boston, Mass.* (Slash/Warner Bros.)

You can dress 'em up, but you can't take the garage out of their sound. Unfortunately, that goes for their writing as well, for as much as the Fuegos love rock roots, they've yet to come up with anything of their own that doesn't sound like a bad cover version.

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Cecil Taylor
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Winged Serpent
 (Soul Note)

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Ben Webster
The Complete Ben Webster
On EmArcy (PolyGram)

Ben Webster plays with the Ravens. Ben Webster plays with Jay McShann's orchestra. Ben Webster plays with Dinah Washington. Ben Webster plays with Benny Carter. Ben Webster plays with Johnny Otis. And if every solo here isn't perfect, well, they're all damn close. Jewels in slightly weird settings.

Gunter Hampel New York Orchestra
Fresh Heat—Live At Sweet Basil
 (N.M.D.S.)

Hampel leads a swirling, hard-swinging orchestra which in a perfect world would be really rich and famous. This album abounds with A.O.K. solos, but, as if to prove that composing and orchestrating are really more important, it floats on brilliant, roaring, and convoluted charts. Thankfully, the ubiquitous Smitty Smith shows no rhythmic mercy, kicking the band all over the joint.

Duke Ellington
Harlem (Pablo)

Duke Ellington All Star
Road Band Vol. 2 (Doctor Jazz)

Recorded live three months apart in 1964, both records have their share of unusual tunes—"A Happy Reunion" and the suite "Harlem" on *Harlem*, "Guitar Amour" and "Timon Of Athens" from *All Star*. *Harlem* has the advantage of being tighter and featuring some slippery Paul Gonsalves solos, but *All Star* shows the band loose, and by loose

I mean unraveling. Take your pick: They're both Ellington.

Zoot Sims
In A Sentimental Mood (Pablo)

An achingly beautiful, intimate record. In this trio setting (with Red Mitchell on bass) Sims plays himself, which is plenty, while tossing in echoes of Ben Webster and Lester Young. Believe me, those are some echoes.

Dennis Gonzalez/John Purcell Octet
Little Toot (N.M.D.S.)

Conclusive proof that intelligent jazz life exists outside of New York, namely in Dallas. This octet sounds like Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition, only less slick. That means a riff band with three-alarm soloists and a willingness to disassemble rhythm. Collective improv, waves of background riffs, articulate songs, and a thumping rhythm section make for an exciting record.

Steve Coleman Group
Motherland Pulse
 (JMT/PolyGram Special Imports)

An extremely powerful debut for a saxophonist whose gigs include Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition, Dave Holland's Quintet, and David Murray's big band. Coleman charts out his solos like Benny Carter, and boasts the first truly distinct alto sound since Arthur Blythe. Support includes bassist Lonnie Plaxico, pianist Gerri Allen, and the ferocious drummer Smitty Smith.

Steve Lacy
Steve Lacy Nine: Futurities
 (hat ART/N.M.D.S.)

Lacy's stiff settings for twenty of Robert Creeley's poems seem at odds with the poems' droll qualities, and Irene Aebi's arch delivery doesn't help, either. But the rest of the music—featuring the inexplicably underrated Steve Potts on alto, George Lewis, and drummer Oliver Jackson—gets tangled up in a beautiful way, while Lacy's dry-martini soprano etches lines above the fray. Available from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

Herb Robertson Quintet
Transparency (JMT/PSI)

Another strong debut. Cornetist/trumpeter Robertson can mix it up: proof's on saxophonist Tim Berne's exceptional records for Soul Note. Here he's featured with Berne and Bill Frisell on a record that has everything—swing, a variety of moods; intelligently written passages, and high-octane solos—plus, unfortunately, a touch of ECM ethereality. But only a touch.

Out Of The Blue
Out Of The Blue (Blue Note)

Blue Note's grouping of jazz up-and-comers has a couple of things going for it: It's interracial, which is more than can be said for most groups these days, and all the players—Ralph Peterson, Michael Mossman, Kenny Garrett, etc.—can *play*. But good musicianship has never been synonymous with originality, and neither has youth, so it's not much of a surprise that the record has the feel of a mix-60s Freddie Hubbard date. Still, I'll bet everyone here goes on to better things.

The Horizon Quintet
Gumbo

The Robert Watson Sextet
Jewel (both Amigo/N.M.D.S.)

Both groups are formed around Watson's fiery alto, Curtis Lundy, Mulgrew Miller and (again) Smitty Smith, which makes for unarguably solid, even exciting, mainstream records. Sometimes though, my soul craves not the past or even the present, but the future. Just a teeny glimpse of it.

Bo Diddley
3 Dozen Super Numbers (Down Home)

I always wondered if Bo ever did anything as good as the stuff on the ratty sixteen greatest hits records I lug around, stuff like "Mona" and "Bo Diddley." Well, he sure did. One tune's called "Bo Meets The Monster," and if that don't get you then "Cops And Robbers" will. Free association rock 'n' roll. From Down Home Music, 10341 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530

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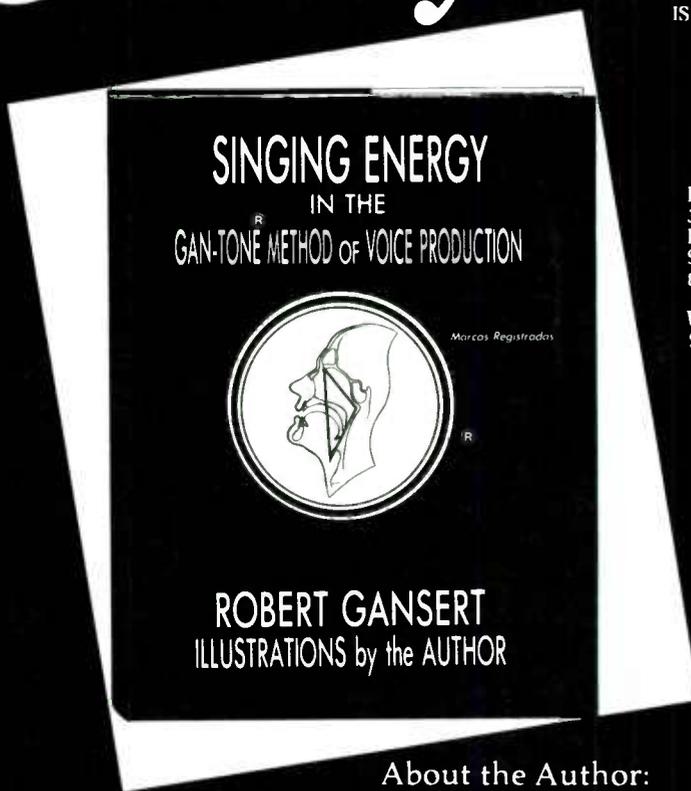
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About the Author:
Robert Gansert has been a performing vocalist for over twenty years, and has been featured in numerous concerts and recordings. His work has been internationally acclaimed. He is currently a noted instructor at the Carnegie Hall studios.

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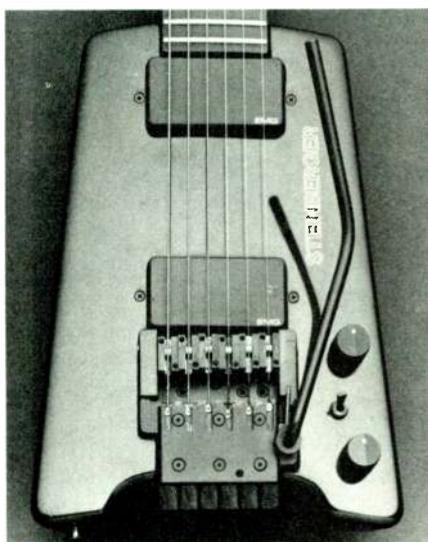
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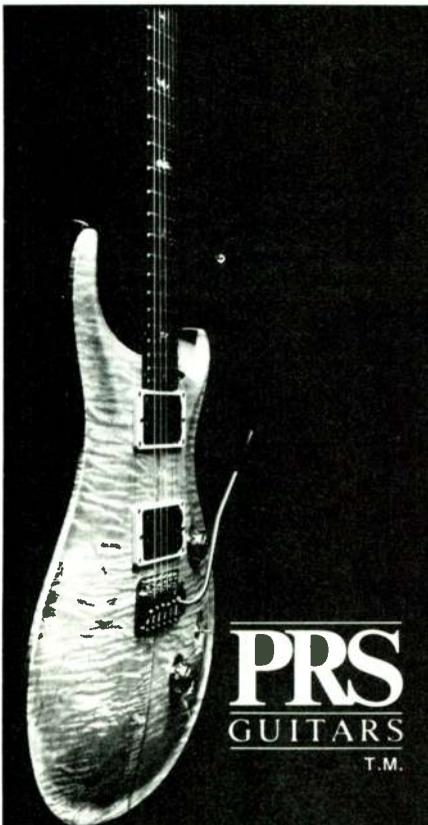
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Yngwie from page 78

out all my musical theory—the relative scales, major to minor, Phrygian mode, harmonic and melodic minor, suspended chords to make smooth transpositions, inverted chords—just by playing. I didn't know what to call it all, I just knew what it sounded like. I had somebody tell me all the names for these things, because I was hungry to know theory. I ended up saying to myself, 'I already knew all this.'"

As the teen Swede burrowed into the sanctuary of music, "I was the total black sheep of my whole family, an out-cast from society. People just shook their heads when they talked about me. Nobody believed that I would amount to anything. I screwed off school and work, messed up my relationships. I just practiced in my basement. Two years later, all the big Swedish papers are writing about 'our hero.' Now they're taking pride in the Swede made good."

The good road began essentially by Malmsteen sending a tape to *Guitar Player's* talent scout Mike Varney, who was so wowed that he flew the guitarist to California in 1983. Recording an album with the L.A.-based Steeler, Malmsteen was fast becoming the toast of metal town. The new kid on the block gained in vertiginous ability what he lacked in English syntax.

He was restless, though. A stint with the group Alcatraz yielded two records and broader exposure, but it was a sinking vessel. "It was such a weird combination," Malmsteen recalls none-too-fondly. With his creative urge surfacing and dread boredom underfoot, Malmsteen plunged into his own project.

There's no pretense of democracy in Rising Force: It is, first and foremost, the vehicle for Yngwie Malmsteen, writer, gymnast, master of tonal tumult. "My ideas and ideals are so strong, I don't want to compromise. I don't want to be half-assed. It works," he professes. "Everybody in the band thinks I'm a great guy, because coming in, they knew what to expect. They don't have the right to argue with me. Instead of working at Burger King in Stockholm, they can now play in front of 20,000 people every night." Retreating just a bit, he allows that "I am a very loyal person to my friends, a jolly good fellow, but when it comes to my creation, I'm very demanding."

There are decidedly two sides to the man. On the limo ride to the stadium, he is the giddy twenty-two-year-old star, rattling off excerpts from the *Truly Tasteless Joke Book*. On the plane ride back to Los Angeles, he starts singing quotes from the official tour album of the Bach Choral Society: Frank Zappa's *Overnight Sensation*. Lyrics to songs are printed in the Society's tour itinerary,

and now the powerhouse manager Andy Trueman (alias G.T.B.—Good To Be—King) is giving Yngwie his weekly quiz. Amidst a tidy group of Southwest commuters, Malmsteen is singing out, "moving to Montana soon, going to be a mental toss flycoon." It's a rock 'n' roll fantasy on a plastic platter.

To contrast this side of the guitar marauder, Malmsteen can get downright didactic on the subject of music, mincing no words, sparing no opinion. For instance, on the subject of his evident penchant for high fretboard speeds: "Well, if I play something fast, it would still have musical value if it were played slow, whereas most rock guitarists play good, nice things slow, but as soon as they get fast, they play pull-offs on two strings [*rolls his tongue like a broken Uzi*] and it's totally worthless, musically."

Somehow, it's all too fitting that Malmsteen's star has risen in the same year as the 300th birthday of Bach, the mention of whom sends the plectrist into a rhetorical frenzy. "I could compare the situation to architecture," he winds up. "Today, somebody gets big bucks for building a house that looks like a fucking matchbox. Whereas back then, they would build a church that would make you feel *this big* [*scrunches his thumb and forefinger*]." That was architecture. That was creating. The knowledge they utilized and what they had to go through to do that is a lot more respectable than what they are doing today.

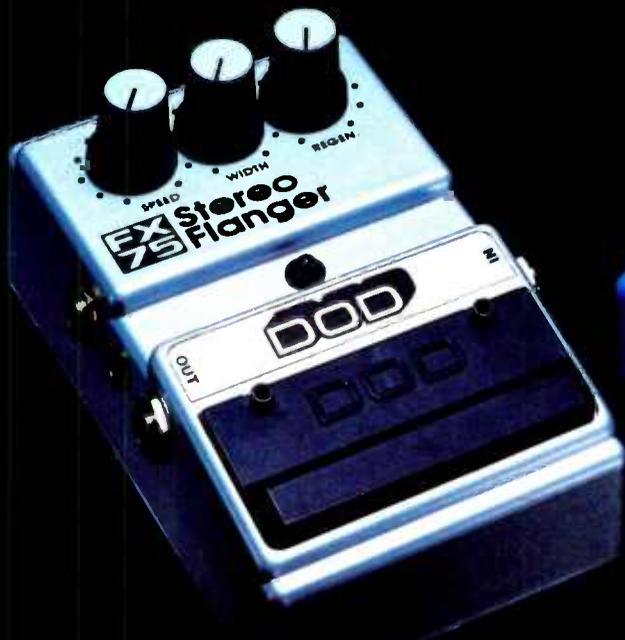
"The same thing goes for music. Some fucking new wave band goes on to bang out a song with three chords and everybody goes wow. They being musicians, actually play something that people who are not musicians can relate to without using more than two brain cells, which is the key for manipulating people to buy the fucking record. Whereas people who do things that are very involved, like jazz musicians, don't sell anything. But you know the reason why? Because they stand there with their fucking glasses and their half-bald heads and beards, doing their bullshit. If they would do the same thing and be a little more energetic and try to relate to people they'd do better."

"Being a musician who only plays advanced things might as well be sitting there wanking off, you know what I mean? At the same time, the people who don't have any musical ability but who become successful anyway—that's not right either."

"The goal is not to educate an audience. I'm just doing the only thing I can do, creating something and at the same time reaching out, making it a mutual thing between me and the audience."

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