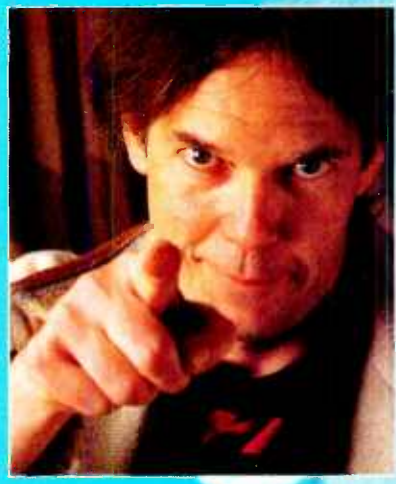


GIVE THE DRUMMER SOME: A SPECIAL RHYTHM SECTION

MUSICIAN

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Nothing Stops Neil Young



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ARTISTS OF 1988
ARE WOMEN
the major labels
change their tune



Sinéad O'Connor



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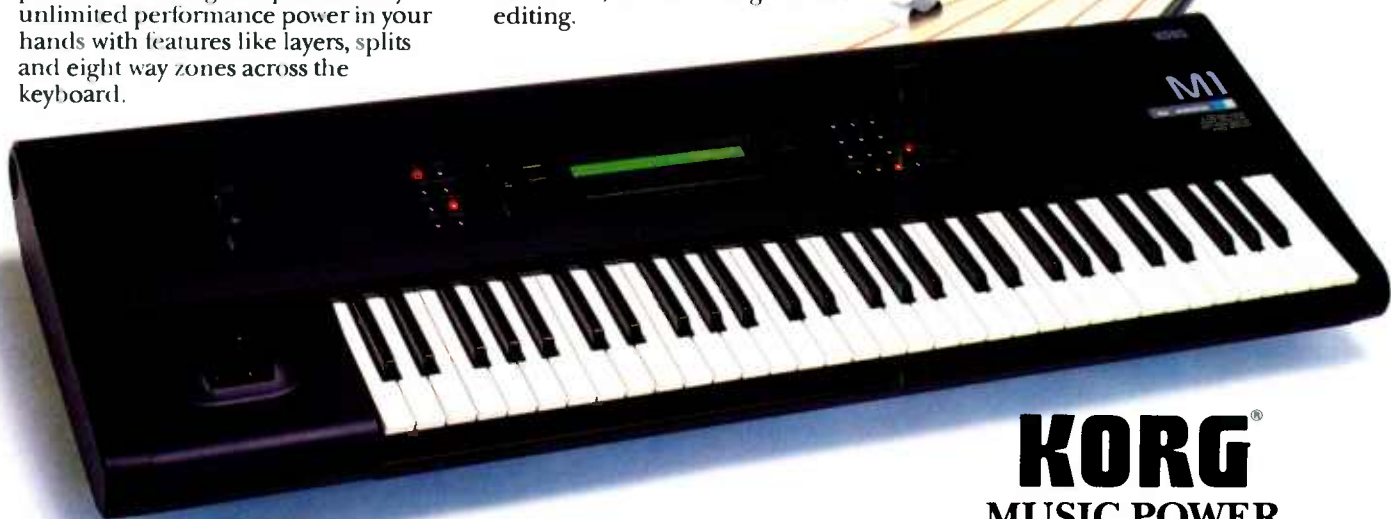
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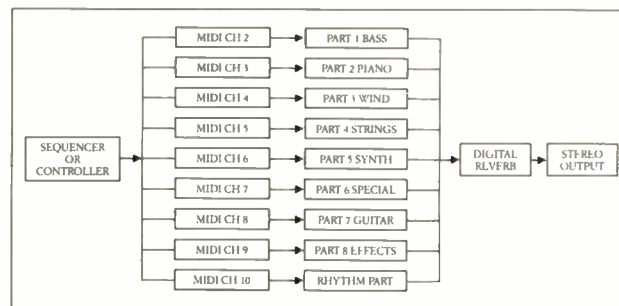
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THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT OF 1988**

Suddenly the major record labels are releasing first albums by thoughtful female artists in serious numbers. Any season that brings debuts by talents like Sinéad O'Connor, Tracy Chapman, Michelle Shocked and Toni Childs is worth celebrating, but why were some women locked out for so long? **36**

TRACY CHAPMAN
Gets political **39**

MICHELLE SHOCKED
Gets lucky **41**

TONI CHILDS
Gets honest **43**

WHY NOW?
The A&R perspective **46**

SINÉAD O'CONNOR
Playing—and selling—well is the best revenge. **50**

**CLAPTON CROSSROADS
GUITAR CONTEST** **68**

**GIVE THE DRUMMER SOME:
A RHYTHMIC SALUTE**

JACK DeJOHNETTE
Special Edition: Two heavy-weights trade eights and remain sitting.
by Rafi Zabor **80**

NEAL PEART
Rush's rhythmist holds forth.
by Chip Stern **89**

PETE THOMAS
Confessions of an Attraction.
by Josef Woodard **94**

NARADA MICHAEL WALDEN
The drummer as hit producer.
by Robin Tolleson **99**

HOW TO THINK LIKE A DRUMMER
A mental guide for the chronically unrhythmic.
by J.D. Considine **103**



NOTHING STOPS NEIL YOUNG

Wherein our anti-hero hits on the blues. You mean you were surprised, especially after country, punk, computronics and metal? In a freewheeling exchange, family man Young talks about guitar, CSN&Y, Crazy Horse, songwriting, rock sponsorship and raw energy.
by Mark Rowland **62**

OLD STYLES, NEW VOICES
by Peter Guralnick **17**

A&M'S GIL FRIESEN
by Bud Scoppa **22**

STEPHANE GRAPPELLI
by Jerome Reese **27**

UNSIGNED BAND CONTEST
Presenting the semi-finalists in Musician's Best Unsigned Band Contest **130**

MASTHEAD **8**
LETTERS **8**
FACES **12**
RECORD REVIEWS **114**
ROCK SHORTS **122**
JAZZ SHORTS **124**
INDIE SHORTS **128**
CLASSIFIED **128**
AD INDEX **130**

COVER PHOTOS: O'CONNOR, MIKE OWEN; INSET, PETE TANGEN. THIS PAGE: O'CONNOR, ANTON CORBIJN. ILLUSTRATION: MARTINE LIEBERMAN.

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PLANT'S PLAIN

CHARLES YOUNG'S INTERVIEW with Robert Plant (Mar. '88) was insightful. Perhaps the secret to Plant's success is that he possesses the greatest gift of all: He doesn't take himself too seriously.

*Robin Shulim
San Francisco, CA*



SHAME ON ROBERT PLANT! HE should know better than to badmouth Whitesnake, Beastie Boys and the Cult for nicking ideas.

Led Zeppelin's whole catalogue is sprinkled with stolen riffs. Zep's first album was so closely modeled after Jeff Beck's *Truth* album that it squeaks. Everyone knows Page and Plant didn't really write "Whole Lotta Love." And what about "Black Mountain Side," a direct steal of Bert Jansch's arrangement of the old English folk tune "Black Water Side"?

Same thing for "Since I've Been Loving You"; Zep filched that from Moby Grape. Even 1979's "Hot-dog" is suspiciously similar to Stefan Grossman's song of the same name.

Plant knows better than anyone that the best rock 'n' roll always builds on what's come before. That's how the form evolves and grows.

*Peter Grainger
Saskatoon, Canada*

SOUND MIND

WHILE I'M FLATTERED BY THE Lord-Alge brothers' reference to me, I find it revealing that they noticed my jokes were good but didn't seem to notice how good the sound was. I know the producer in

question *did*. It seems stupid to suggest that an engineer could, would or should try to fool the producer.

I try to keep my sessions relaxed and enjoyable. But if, after all this so-called "subterfuge," the stuff doesn't sound great, the real joke's on me.

*Neil Dorfsman
New York, NY*

BOYS WILL BE PIGS

THE MARCH ISSUE SHOULD have been called "Boyz Life." Has testosterone poisoning set in or what? The amazing sexual exploits of old farts Zeppelin à la Mr. Plant; how to be an asshole in business and not really care by despot Miles Copeland (isn't he a loveable so-and-so?); the Lord-Alge brothers... pinball games and fast cars... golly, do they sit around playing "Mine's bigger than yours"? What was really missing was a photo spread of Motley Crue and their favorite cars (filled with lotsa L.A. babes, of course). As JB said, "It's a man's world"—but a woman shouldn't have to read about it.

*Ellen Houston
Chicago, IL*

JACO ON TAPE

IN A LETTER TO *MUSICIAN* which appears in the April '88 issue, Tracy Lee refers to an audiocassette featuring Jaco Pastorius which was advertised in December 1987.

I would like to make sure that anyone who may have seen this letter does not confuse the product to which she refers with a videotape produced by DCI called "Modern Electric Bass." Our tape is a documentary of which we are proud, and was made out of respect for Jaco.

*Paul Siegel
DCI Music Video Inc.
New York, NY*

MILESTONES

A LOT OF PEOPLE MAY DISLIKE Miles Copeland's opinions, methods and his need for control (Mar. '88), but it's hard to argue with his success. So

L·E·T·T·E·R·S

let's give the man his due. At least he cares and is involved with his artists. That's a hell of a lot more than most major labels could truthfully say.

*Bill MacKechnie
Random Bullet Records
Greene, NY*

HAVING HAD AN EXTENSIVE business relationship with Copeland and his companies, I know only too well the kind of man he is.

I have wondered how long it would be before the consequences of Copeland's business behavior would come to haunt him. With the virtual exodus of acts from his I.R.S. label, the breakup of his L.A.P.D. management company, and his seeming insistence on showing the world just how small and vindictive he can be, I now take heart that some of his chickens are coming home to roost.

*Larry Grenman
(Wazmo Nariz)
N. Hollywood, CA*

I READ WITH AMAZEMENT THE article on me in the March issue of *Musician* magazine. It was such a misrepresentation of the truth, what I believe in, my attitudes and of I.R.S. Records in particular, that it filled me with disgust and total disrespect for the level of exploitive and sensationalist journalism to which *Musician* has sunken. Propaganda is the art of telling half-truths, using convenient omission to distort reality. Your writer is obviously versed in the art. My only consolation is that it should be obvious to any intelligent reader as it was to those who read your equally one-sided and biased article on Sting, that your writer actually sought to create dirt, con-

trovery and nothing else.

First, talking to a disgruntled manager, whose artist did not succeed and is therefore down on the label, WITHOUT talking to the vast majority of artists and managers who are very happy, tells you nothing about I.R.S. We currently record 35 artists. You choose to highlight only the few who would say something negative, and made no attempt to balance the article by talking to (for instance): R.E.M., Timbuk 3, the dB's, Dave Wakeling, The Alarm etc. You show me any label in the USA and I can name you an equal number of dissatisfied acts on that label. As for being innovative in promotion, you were correct. As for being cheap, the actual fact is we spend more dollars per record sold than any other label in the country, often to the concern of our fine distributors MCA. If your writer had taken the time to look at an Alarm, R.E.M., Timbuk 3 or Belinda Carlisle budget, he would not have made such a grossly erroneous statement.

Second, if it is true that I am, "brilliant in finding acts, but not good at keeping them," then how do you account for the fact that R.E.M., Dave Wakeling and Ranking Roger have been with us from the beginning and as a manager I have continued with members of the Police, as a group and as individuals from 1977 to this day, as I have with the Bangles and Squeeze.

Third, as to your reference and inferences to my "Politi-

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TOMORROW PEOPLE

THE MELODY MAKERS

cal Views," it is interesting to note your writer never asked me about my political views but chose to use comments by some extreme left wing (some in the USA would call them Communist) British musical personalities. Remember, in England free enterprise and individual freedoms are not held in the same regard by the leftist intellectual community. Thank God the British public have rejected such ideas at the polls. I should be proud that my views are considered "repulsive" by the "Red Wedge." But for your writer to suggest that my views are "repulsive to some" without mentioning what views and who he

means by some is the grossest form of biased propaganda writing technique I have seen in a long time.

Fourth, worst of all is your statement inferring that I laugh at musicians that support Amnesty International. Of course I laugh at some naive political beliefs of some naive musicians. But I am very much a supporter in members of the music industry being involved in charitable works, from raising money for cancer to Band Aid, etc. I support Amnesty International and all of the efforts Sting, Peter Gabriel, U2 and the others have lent to this organization. I, more than most Americans, am aware of what

it's like to live in a country where voicing political views could land you in jail. Most of the first 25 years of my life were spent living in such countries.

On the issue of South Africa, I admit having a different opinion than many of those in the music community, particularly Little Steven. I think his work has been counterproductive. That is my opinion. Of course I knew he went to South Africa, but it is a shame that his ignorance of the real world led him to unfortunate conclusions. Much to the detriment of the blacks in South Africa and much to the delight of those in power in South Africa (who do not *want* rock groups coming there to play to mixed audiences and make anti-apartheid statements). They are all very happy for them to be demonstrating in the streets of New York or London and not Johannesburg. As for Little Steven's cheap shot about black artists on I.R.S., I would have thought this was beneath him. He should know that I have never hired, fired, signed or not signed any person or act on the basis of color. The fact that at this time just over 10 percent of our artists are black is about as relevant as the number of white acts Motown had in their first 10 years of existence.

Fifth, calling my father a prototype of Oliver North is a bad joke. My father took the time to become an expert on his subject before making decisions. I can tell you this: The CIA in his day would never have even contemplated sending arms to what is tantamount to America's worst enemy, the Ayatollah. Oliver North, being ignorant of history and of fact, committed one of the worst, if not *the* worst, blunder in an already shabby history of American foreign policy. To mention my father's name and Oliver North in the same sentence I find highly insulting.

The last comment I have to make is a correction that Sting made me aware of. Sting did not say I was at the beach eating sharks; he said I was at the beach scaring the sharks.

Miles A. Copeland III
I.R.S. Records
Universal City, CA

Let's get to the heart of this: We interviewed you, and you attacked a number of people by name. We gave those people a chance to respond. That's not ganging up on you, that's just being fair. For you to say that Little Steven should have been bigger than to take a shot at you after you called him, among other things, "a fuck-ing cunt" is silly. You're not mad with us, Miles. You're mad with yourself. - Ed.

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KINSEY REPORT

Rejuvenating the Blues

We see ourselves as bluesmen for the masses," says Ralph Kinsey of the Gary, Indiana-based Kinsey Report. "Especially for the younger audience that Robert Cray seems to catch—that's what we're shooting for."

Like Cray's blues-flavored *Strong Persuader*, the Kinsey Report's *Edge of the City* is getting album-rock airplay, but there similarities end. *Edge of the City* is indisputably the blues—brawny,



blistering '80s blues, gritty as a Gary steel mill.

The Kinsey saga would make one swell mini-series. Relocated Delta slide guitarist/harpist Lester "Big Daddy" Kinsey had his three sons playing blues as kids, a family act which toured until 1972 (occasionally appearing with Gary's first family the Jacksons). After Donald's subsequent stint

as Albert King's rhythm guitarist, he and drummer Ralph joined bassist Busta Jones in power trio White Lightning, who signed to Island Records. Through island, Donald met Peter Tosh and Bob Marley; he spent several years touring and recording with both, and was nearly killed in the infamous 1976 assassination attempt on Marley.

Shaken, he returned home, where he, Ralph and longtime friend Ron Prince formed the Chosen Ones, a reggae/funk outfit. Then, during one last road stint with Tosh, Donald realized that though his career had taken productive side roads, they all led back to the blues. "I called home and said, 'Let's start back doing what we always did.'"

Donald, Ralph and Prince regrouped with bass-playing kid brother Kenneth Kinsey as the Kinsey Report and backed Big Daddy on a 1984 LP. (The family patriarch continues to perform regularly with them.) They're now taking their supercharged show

on the road, hoping to turn on a new, young audience to the blues.

"Right now, there's hardly any blues role models they can identify with," Donald says. "Hopefully, we can change that." Success or no, however, the Kinseys will never change their vocation. "If I could turn around tomorrow and be a doctor," he grins, "I'd say, 'Forget it.'" — *Moirra McCormick*

BETTY WRIGHT

She's Gotta Be Her



Betty Wright comes on the phone to talk about her new hit single, "No Pain, (No Gain)," a record that breaks almost a 10-year drought for her. But she hasn't been on the phone 30 seconds before she starts talking instead about the reasons for that drought.

"A lot of the 'soul' singers started doing something else," she says. "And I just refused to sing during the time when they stopped accepting black music for what it was. It's not about the money. I can't get up there and do no show off of no empty music, or soundin' like Barbra Streisand. Nothing wrong with Barbra Streisand. Nice, young, Jewish, white American woman. But I'm talking about Betty Wright, and I have my own view of me."

If that view coincides with popular perception, Wright—best known for '70s hits like "Clean Up Woman" and "Tonight Is the Night"—sees herself as a quintessential Southern soul queen, in the mold of Millie Jackson and Gladys Knight. That is, an old-fashioned, hands-on-the-hips, tell it like it is soul sister with a

voice full of gospel spirit and a rolling neck full of attitude.

As proof, consider her new LP, *Mother Wit*. From its title (an old bit of black slang meaning common sense or psychic vision) to its music and even art direction, *Mother Wit*, though uneven in parts, remains noteworthy for its lack of pretension. "It's very raw," Wright concedes. "I didn't put a lot of slickness or class into it."

"I've never sought to follow fads," she adds. "When I go in the studio, I go for sound. If it takes only three instruments to make that sound, I'm not scared to put that song out with only three instruments on it. Who knows? Maybe it takes away the personal appeal when you have too many voices or instruments."

Wright knows that such old-fashioned attitudes seem almost quaint now. It's a throwback to the days before black singers sang with one eye on the demographic studies, fearfully polishing out anything that might mark their music as "too black." Wright dismisses those singers curtly.

"They're confused," she says. "I'm not." — *Leonard Pitts, Jr.*

3 MUSTAPHAS 3

Not Balkin' at the Balkans

Exactly who *are* the 3 Mustaphas 3? Depends whom you ask. Their British label, GlobeStyle, maintains that the six fez-topped men surnamed Mustapha are indeed a "family orchestra" of eastern European musicians transplanted to London. To the English music press, they're "the Ramones of the Balkans," a mysterious band of exiles eager to keep their identities under wraps.

Explaining their music isn't any easier. The bedrock is the whirling-dervish instrumentation and complex meters of eastern-bloc folk music, but you'll also hear synths, drum machines, lyrics sung in Arabic and French, accordions and surf guitars. On their first full-length album, last year's *Shopping* (just released in this country on Shanachie), they even tackle rap.

Speaking for the band since they have "difficulty with accents," GlobeStyle's Ben Mandelson says stories about the family's background have been exaggerated. His official version is straightforward—sort of. The Mustaphas hail from the border town of Szegerey ("somewhere between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria") and arrived in London six years ago to play music and repair refrigerators. Their new 12-inch, "Linda, Linda," sports a remix by the "legendary Balkan DJ" Trouble Fez.



In fact, the "family" is a group of British musicians led by Mandelson, who bears a suspicious resemblance to guitarist/bouzouki player Hijaz Mustapha. As contrived as the concept sounds, though, it allows this truly warped ensemble to set World Music on its ear in much the same way the Pogues uproot Celtic traditions. "I think it's important to put these records out," Mandelson says in a rare moment of solemnity. "It's like vitamins you have to add to your diet. This kind of World Music is a good supple-

ment to the bland Top 40 stuff."

For the record, 3 Mustaphas 3 consist of Hijaz, Houzam, Niaveti, Isfa'ani, Sabah and Kemo Mustapha. Also for the record, Mandelson denies any involvement, admitting only to taking the guest role of twang guitarist "Duane Mustapha." He will concede, though, that he will accompany the Mustaphas when they embark on their first U.S. tour this spring. "It's too good an opportunity to miss," he says. "And I have to make sure they get paid."

— David Browne

There aren't likely to be too many videos about Fairport Convention, so fans of the British folk-rock group should be doubly thankful for *Fairport Convention: It All Comes 'Round Again*. This nearly two-hour videotape sandwiches the band's history (in first-person interviews) between

generous helpings of music—both vintage clips and performances from last summer's 20th anniversary reunion concert in England. It's worth it for Richard Thompson alone, and there's a whole lot more than that. (Available from Fairport Associates, 163 Joralemon St., Suite 1156, Brooklyn, NY 11201.)

Seventeen years after their break-up, the Velvet Underground hasn't stopped influencing self-conscious rockers. Latest proof is *Feed-Back*, a 100-page group biography written by a Spanish fan. Most of the photos have been reproduced better elsewhere, and the book's main primary source is rhythm guitarist

Sterling Morrison. The faithful will want this nevertheless; it looks cool, comes with an English translation and the first 200 copies include a flexi-disc of the band flailing through a live "Sister Ray." (Velvet Underground Appreciation Society, 5721 SE Laguna Ave., Stuart, FL 34997.)

— Scott Isler

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THE DYNATONES

The Stax Revival Starts Here

They look like Wayne Cochran backed by five Willy DeVilles. They sound like the Stax-Volt Revue guesting on "Miami Vice." They're the Dynatones and they're here to prove that soul music has a place in the modern world.

"I wanted the feel, the energy of a '60s soul act," explains drummer Walter Salwitz Jr., the band's founder. "That kind of sound and look, but I didn't want to be an oldies act. So I tried to get that, but with guys that understood where music is today." Salwitz and the other Dynatones came together in San Francisco in 1982, released two albums on Rounder, and played every roadhouse, dance hall and dive in the country.

After signing with Warner Bros. last year they began work on the recently released *Shameless*, with Huey Lewis producer Jim Gaines. A veteran of Stax Records, Gaines brought along an old friend to the Dynatones' sessions: legendary Booker T. guitarist and songwriter Steve Cropper. "This was the first project that Jim and Steve had a chance to work on together since 1970 or '71," Salwitz says. "Just watchin' the two of them in the studio was great."

The resulting album features two new Cropper songs among other covers. But equally interesting are the LP's two original Dyna-

tones, which show the guys can write 'em like they play 'em. "Everybody in this band has always pretty much played R&B or roots music," Salwitz says. "I'd like to think that if Stax was still pumpin' out music, maybe it would sound like what we're doin' today." — *Thomas Anderson*

R.E.M. to Warners: Buy the Sky

R.E.M. has left I.R.S. Records. The band signed to Warner Bros. Records in a "very advantageous, substantial deal," according to an R.E.M. spokesperson.

"It wasn't an easy decision" to leave I.R.S., and it wasn't easy for Warners to grab the group. Columbia, A&M and Arista Records were also interested in signing R.E.M., and I.R.S. was interested in holding on. But over a two-month period starting in February, the band ironed out negotiations with Warners that have evidently left both sides satisfied.

"There was nothing negative as far as I.R.S. is concerned," the spokesperson said. The Warners shift, however, "was the proper opportunity for this moment." — Scott Isler

Together, Wherever They Go

This is the thing about it, this is the thing." Grandmaster Flash is talking real fast about hatchets buried. About his reunion with Mele-Mel and the rest of the Furious Five. About how, even after business hassles blew the group apart first time around, "we still *cared* about each other, you know?"

The sultan of scratch, Flash makes no bones that he and the Five invented rap during the late '70s. With tracks like "The Message," they shot from the block parties of the South Bronx straight into the charts and *Time* magazine, only to call it a day prematurely by early 1984.

But the sum is often greater than its individual parts. So four years later there's a new album, *On the Strength*, typically covering both the silly and sublime. Paeans to foxes in flashy cars. Tirades against snatching gold chains off New York subway riders. Tributes to Martin Luther King, Jr. "We're not preachers," Flash says. "We just give advice. To

influence kids is an important responsibility. Even if you're talking to 10,000 people and only get through to one, you've done something positive."

Mind you, rap's biggest impact remains inner city, a problem for both its practitioners and their record labels. To white suburbia—pleased as punch to fill the coffers of the imbecilic Beastie Boys—rap's stark urban monotones remain as alien as the surface of the moon. Still, Flash views rap-rock hybrids as a welcome sign of expansion. Accordingly, the six have reached back to Steppenwolf for "Magic Carpet Ride" on the new album. In its rhythmic crunch Flash heard "a cover tune I wouldn't have to do serious body work to, like making a Volkswagen out of a Ford."

Calculated? You bet. But you've gotta survive. Whether the reborn Furious Five can regain their old turf remains to be seen. As the future unfurls, Flash expects more "trials and tribulations. Ups and downs. But this time we will *not* break up. This is the thing, right? We're gonna weather the storm together." — *Dan Hedges*

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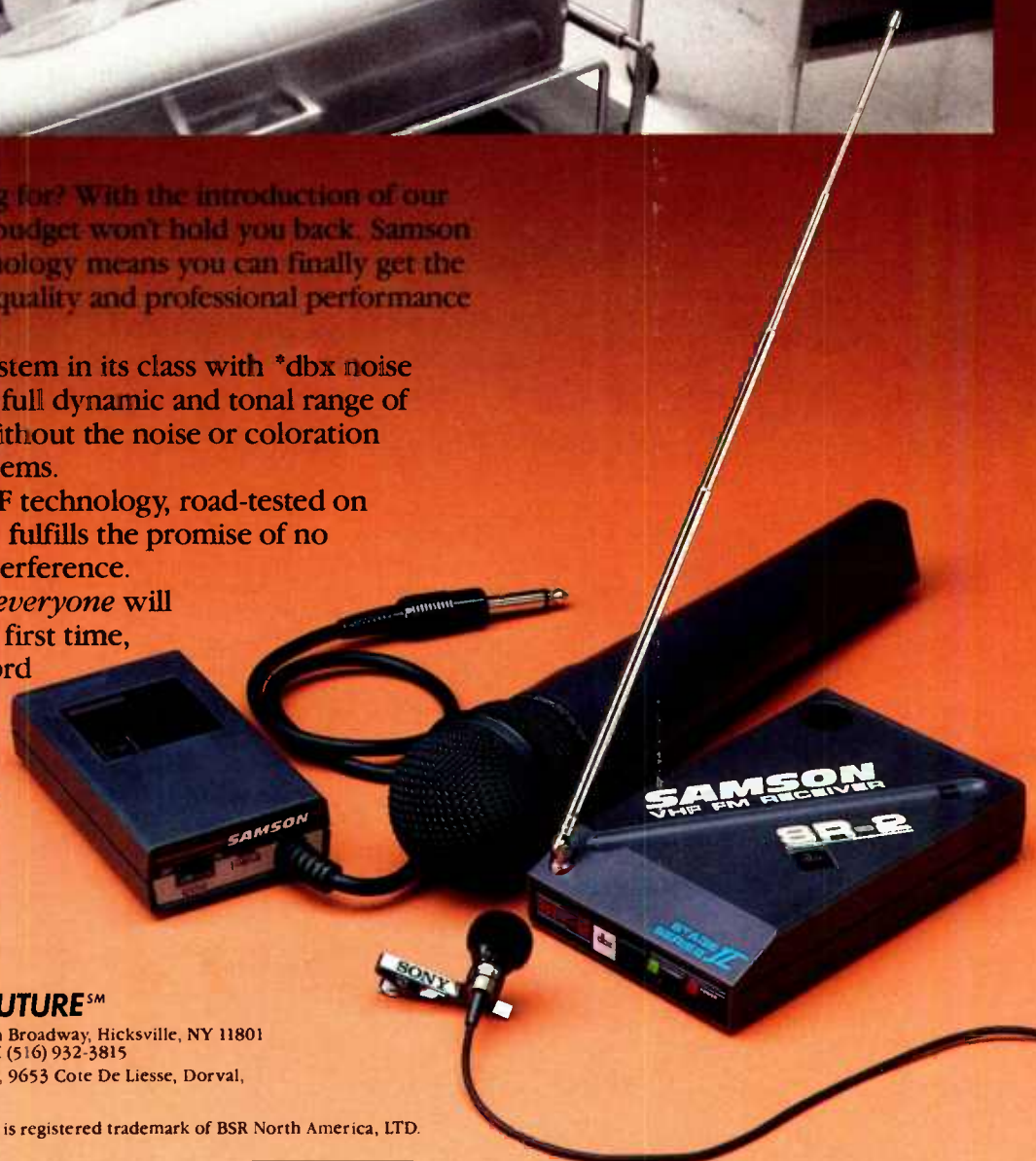
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OLD STYLES, NEW VOICES

by peter guralnick

*Making Personal
Statements in
Traditional Forms*

The first time I saw Terence Trent D'Arby, in Boston last fall, the main topic of conversation was whether or not he could live up to all the hype. "Well, what do you think," said one would-be critic after the performance, "is he the Next Big Thing?" I don't know how you answer a question like that—although current sales figures would suggest that he might be—simply because *it's the wrong question*. We have only the evidence at hand, as William Carlos Williams put it, "nothing but the thing itself." When I saw him that night, Terence put on a good show with some rough edges. It was raw and exciting and filled with the kind of insistent, explosive tension that left you unsure as to just what was going to happen next. There were, certainly, dramatic bows to James Brown and Jackie Wilson and Joe Tex, along with more predictable echoes of Prince and Michael Jackson (who have, of course, performed their own homages). But so what? It was, in the end,

Trad Rads:
Terence Trent
D'Arby (top)
and Lyle Lovett
working toward a
common humanity.

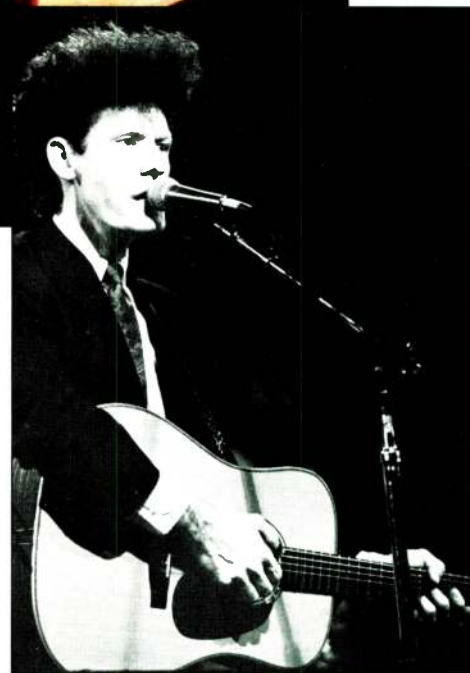
Terence Trent D'Arby, and the success of the show stood on the undeniable energy of the performance, the fierce joyousness of the voice, the strength of the original material and the conviction put into its delivery. No amount of hype could create the excitement implicit in those songs and that performance, and no amount of hype should be able to take away from them. But, obviously, for some people it does.

We are constantly involved, not just in our popular culture but in our so-called high culture, too, with ratings games. Everyone is always making lists, and I certainly don't except myself. But I do



fault myself. Seeing Terence Trent D'Arby this fall, and then again in March on his triumphant cross-country tour, I was struck for perhaps the thousandth time by how hard it is to develop an individual style in the midst of this critical rush to judgment, this insatiable need to analyze and assess, and then assess some more. What would it have been like, I often wonder, if a reporter, or worse yet a rock critic, had been present at Elvis Presley's first Memphis appearance? "In an obviously derivative performance," the first dispatch might have read, "Presley paid his respects to his elders and betters, succeeding more with some than with others. While 'That's All Right' may well work as a fairly febrile reinterpretation of the classic Arthur Crudup blues, ironically enough Elvis does not appear to know just how to acknowledge his own hillbilly heritage, as the hash that he makes of Bill Monroe's seminal 'Blue Moon of Kentucky' makes perfectly clear..." Etc.

Perhaps I'm not being fair. But developing a personal style can't be forced; it needs room to develop. And it can't be expected to just spring out of nowhere, either. Nothing does. Elvis Presley was



as much of a synthesizer as Elvis Costello. Terence Trent D'Arby is no more of a borrower than James Brown, the man whom he is doing much of his borrowing from. The only thing that really matters is: Does the final product work? In Terence's case I think it unquestionably does, in a mix of showmanship, shameless self-promotion and spirituality that blends James Brown, the Rolling Stones and the Sam Cooke of the gospel Soul Stirrers.

In the case of Lyle Lovett, who is creating his own version of New Wave

country, we get an equally powerful performer of an entirely different stripe. Lovett, who appears to be a solo artist who fortuitously found the perfect band, has released two albums on the MCA label, *Lyle Lovett and Pontiac*, which have, surprisingly, found not only a cult but a popular audience. Like Terence's, both are almost entirely self-written, and while they feature frequently swinging big band arrangements from the jazz-oriented Phoenix, Arizona group he met in Luxembourg, they are also relatively austere, recalling something of an antic cross between James Talley, John Prine, Jimmy Buffett and Randy Newman.

If you ask me what happened, this is what i'll tell ya. this english fellow came down to the Kerrville folk festival where me and my friends get together every year to show off the songs we've written during our travellin', trade stories, see how much we've grown. well, he asked me to play some of my tunes for his tape recorder machine and i was of a mind to play that night so i kept right on singing, even after his batteries ran out. i figured that would teach him a lesson, but something about mad dogs and englishmen... anyways, i'm hanging out in new york city with some squatter friends of mine when next thing i know i get a letter from him saying would i come to england and play at the queen elizabeth hall and is it alright if he makes that recording we did into an album, because he played it for all his friends and they really like it and he thinks it will sell a lot of records.

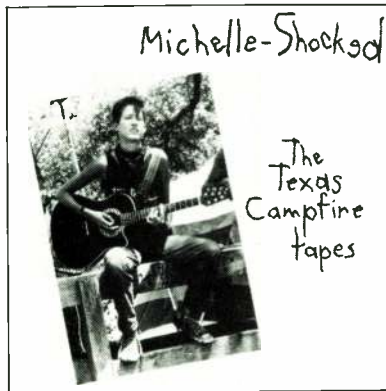
i wrote him sure, go ahead good luck, i'll see ya on the 8th of january (that's a fiddle tune) and dropkick me if it didn't go to the very top of the independent album charts the very next month. which really to me says something about peoples sense of humor, seeing as how the damn things got crickets chirping like mad the whole way through and joe don's pickup

What sets the music apart from anyone else's is a deadpan humor, a cockeyed (by which I do not mean eccentric so much as unsparingly honest) view of the world which might not be ideally served by any form of conventional record production, but which appears to be at odds with the very clean, and slightly antiseptic, production given to these two albums.

In person, on the other hand, Lyle Lovett and the band show a surprising warmth, an even less fettered willingness to cross boundaries of taste, genre and sexual role expectations—to the point where the set's closing number is a

truck making the most godawful grinding noises with his gears in the background, and how come he didn't ask ky hote, or frank hill, or emily kaitz, or pearly gates for that matter i'll never know but you asked me, so i'll tell you it's all those folks and more what's in the spirit of the texas campfire tapes.

it's like i told those journalist fellows in london who were always wanting to make interviews with me. i don't know what all this fuss is about, and if you like it so much, well, there's plenty more where i came from. the end.



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"The good old book lies on the shelf and if you want anymore you can sing it yourself."

-Jean Ritchie



heartfelt version of Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man" sung in a manner that suggests almost Borgesian levels of irony by appearing deliberately to deny them. In fact, Lovett comes across in person as a Steven Wright romantic (yes, that's Steven Wright the comedian), a subtle and somewhat skewed Bruce Springsteen whose apparent cynicism on record is tempered by a generosity of spirit, a wild streak of surreal humanism and a willingness to turn stereotypes on their head. Listen to "She's Hot to Go" for an ironic replay of the old Bo Diddley "she's so ugly" routine. For me, though, the showstoppers remain the two best-known songs from the first album, "God Will" and "An Acceptable Level of Ecstasy (The Wedding Song)," which demonstrate Lovett's propensity for both the absurd ("Ecstasy") and the jugular. In "God Will," which it seems has become an almost instant aphorism in Lyle Lovett circles, the singer poses a series of questions to a faithless lover, such as "Who keeps on loving you/ When you've been lying," and then provides the unexpected answer: "God does/ But I don't/ God will/ But I won't/ And that's the difference between God and me."

Jimmie Dale Gilmore wouldn't be capable of delivering a line like that, as far as I can tell (not many people would, I suppose), any more than he would be capable of going pop with Waylon Jennings's proverbial mouthful of firecrackers—but not because he is any less idiosyncratic. A member of the same Lubbock generation and scene that produced Joe Ely and Butch Hancock, Gilmore is more earnest than Ely, more fun-loving than Hancock, and a lot more straight-ahead than Lyle Lovett. His music is traditional country in a sense—but *only* in the sense that Jimmie Dale Gilmore brings to it as fresh and free a voice as Terence Trent D'Arby or Lyle Lovett bring to their material. Like them, he's building on the past, not seeking to recreate it, discovering new possibilities in old forms.

Fair and Square, which was produced for the Hightone label by Joe Ely in the same rough-and-ready fashion that he produced his own *Lord of the Highway* last year, represents a debut of sorts, though Gilmore was in a group called the Flatlanders with Ely and Hancock which recorded for Shelby Singleton 15 years ago. It's a wonderful album, put across with absolute conviction from its opening Townes Van Zandt cut to chestnuts like "Trying to Get to You" and "Singing the Blues." The heart of the album, of course, stems from that Lubbock con-

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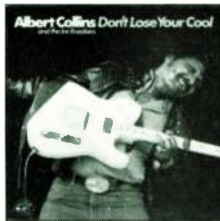
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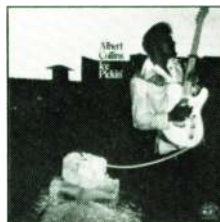
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nection, with the usual quota of paradox, poetry and philosophy from Ely, Hancock, long-time sidekick and guitarist David Halley, and Gilmore himself. But here, too, comparisons can be invidious, because as much as Jimmie Dale Gilmore comes from a rich and largely undiscovered tradition (Lubbock is not yet on the tip of everyone's tongue), even when he sings Joe Ely's "Honky Tonk Masquerade," he sings it in his own voice: a warm and engaging voice, a voice that finds a certain narrative charm in a song that had always been set in my mind in a kind of cool limbo, a Dylanesque version of hell. There's none of that here, even *with* Joe Ely producing; there's just an artist with a serene sense of himself and his message, and an immensely engaging on-record personality.

The point about each of these albums, I suppose, is that they are all personal in the *auteur* sense. You know exactly whose artistic intelligence is behind each one of them, and it's no accident, I think, that you can imagine each of the artists interpreting his work in a solo setting, as Ely has (and continues to do even within his band set), as John Hiatt, yet another of the new breed of maverick traditionalists, frequently does in presenting his fresh brand of Southern soul, as Elvis Costello, who might be considered the weathervane of this whole post-modernist movement (as Dylan was the original progenitor), has done in recent years to such riveting effect. I don't mean to make too much of this solo bent—though even Terence Trent D'Arby often ends his show with an intensely moving version of Sam Cooke's "Wonderful World," accompanied only by guitar—except that it signifies how much it's the music, and not the trappings, that is the real point. In the case of each of these artists, one feels, it's simply a matter of using any means at hand to get the music across.

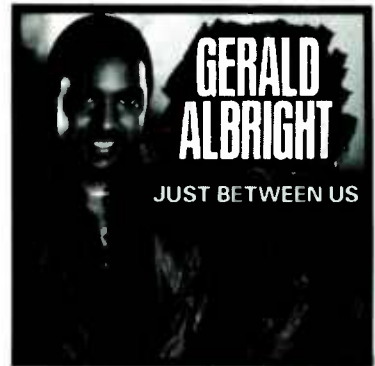
Johnny Adams at first glance appears to be a very different case. Known primarily as an R&B artist who had his first hit, "Losing Battle," in 1962, he is a singer of enormous technical virtuosity whose soaring falsetto cries have become his trademark in the same way that Roy Orbison's high notes have become a formal expectation in nearly every one of his songs. In many ways this vocal prowess has obscured the emotional impact of Adams' music, and I know the one time I saw him live it was, like Orbison's shows, more of a recital than a fully engaging performance. In recent years, under the guidance of Rounder producer Scott Billington, who initiated the label's fine Modern New Orleans Masters

continued on page 74

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**GERALD ALBRIGHT
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As a saxophonist and bassist, Gerald Albright has played with the best: Anita Baker, Philip Bailey, Patrice Rushen, Rick James and Janet Jackson. *JUST BETWEEN US* is his debut album, and it's a smash. Hugh Wyatt of New York's *Daily News* raved: "Move over Kenny G and Grover Washington and make room for Gerald Albright." Includes the singles "So Amazing" and "New Girl On The Block." Produced by Gerald Albright for Bright Music. Management and Direction: Raymond A. Shields, II.



**PAUL JACKSON, JR.
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Since he began his professional career at 16, Paul Jackson, Jr. has played guitar on hundreds of sessions by the biggest names in music including Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones, Whitney Houston, Anita Baker and Luther Vandross. Now he steps out on his own with *I CAME TO PLAY*, and when Paul comes to play, you know he's serious. Features the single "I Came To Play." Produced by Paul Jackson, Jr. and Cornelius Mims.

**MIKE STERN
TIME IN PLACE**

Mike Stern "might well be the jazz guitarist of the late '80s," *Guitar Player's* Jim Ferguson wrote about the former Miles Davis and Jaco Pastorius sideman. Ferguson claimed Stern's 1986 debut, *UPSIDE DOWNSIDE*, was "an uncommonly strong debut work that promises greater things ahead." *TIME IN PLACE* fulfills the promise, featuring such noted players as Bob Berg, Michael Brecker and Peter Erskine. Includes the track "Before You Go." Produced by Steve Kahn. On Atlantic Jazz.



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GIL FRIESEN

by bud scoppa

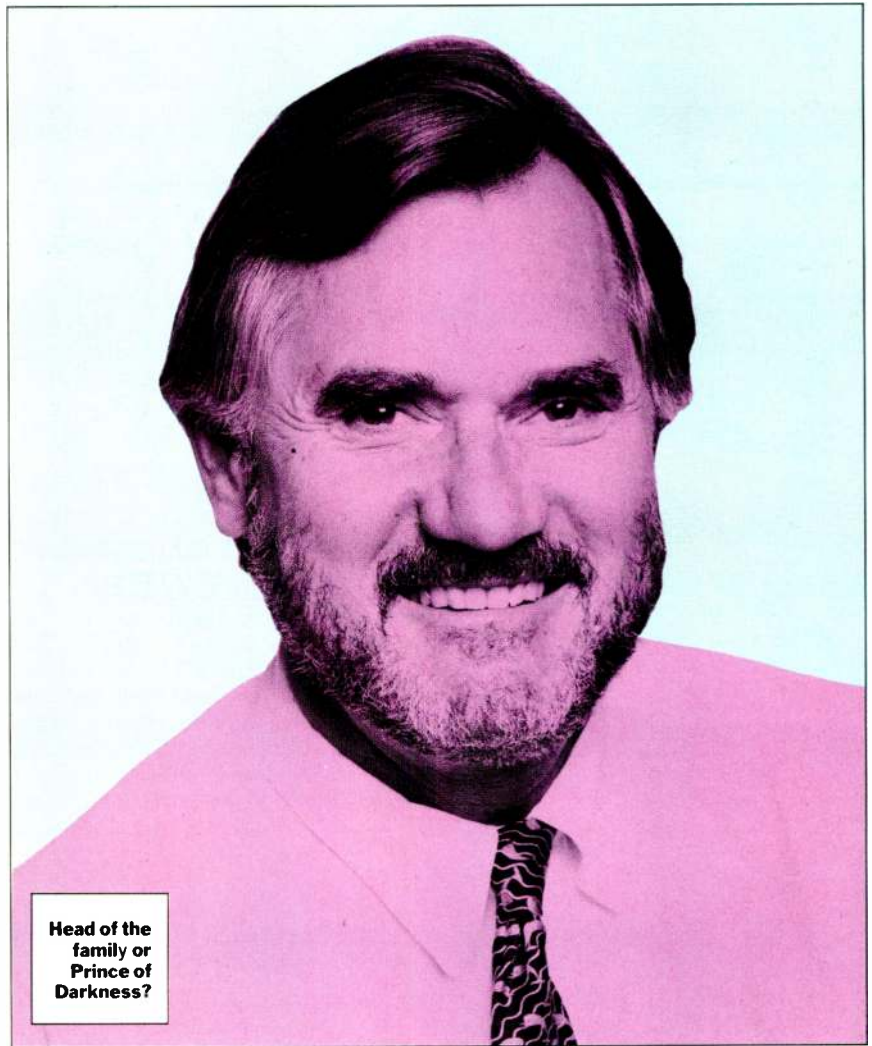
*A&M Records'
Hot President
Plays It Cool*

HOLLYWOOD—It's just 8:15 a.m., but already there are a half-dozen cars parked on "the Lot," A&M Records' low-rise, low-tech, open-air headquarters. The fanciest road machine in sight is a white Mercedes 560 belonging to Gil Friesen, president of the 25-year-old company—by far the most successful independently owned and operated label in America. Friesen likes to get in early to make his calls to New York and Europe—and it pleases him to see that certain members of his executive team are already in their offices as he pulls into his prime parking space in the walled, diligently guarded complex at 1416 N. La Brea.

The 50-year-old businessman has been with A&M since 1964, when his friend and neighbor Jerry Moss—the "M" of A&M—hired Friesen (who was managing P.J. Proby at the time) as general manager of the fledgling label. Trumpeter Herb Alpert is the "A" of A&M; many would argue that Friesen is the ampersand.

"I was inventing the job then," Friesen says. "Jerry and Herb knew they needed somebody else, but it wasn't clear exactly what needed to be done. But I figured out rather quickly what I thought needed to be done, and I think I've been doing that ever since."

By midafternoon a steady stream of visitors will have passed through Friesen's office. Members of the inner circle often exit through a side door emblazoned "PRIVATE" in raised silver letters. Between appointments the restless Friesen frequently slips out through this door to make unscheduled stops around the Lot. "It's great to pop in on people and have a chat," he explains. This activity delights some and strikes fear into the hearts of others.



Head of the family or Prince of Darkness?

Friesen is bearded, graying and impeccably turned out. He sits at an imperial-sized table that serves as his desk. (Bigwigs don't need drawers; they have secretaries to keep track of the paperwork.) The only items on the table top are a pair of legal pads, one pink, the other gray; every so often, without warning, he dashes off brief notes in a bold print. Behind him is a spiffy fresco of the HOLLYWOOD sign.

During the 1970s this journalist, then an in-house writer at A&M, spent many hours with Friesen in an effort to translate his formal pronouncements and offhand remarks into plain English for the uninitiated; it was not a simple task. Friesen's words and body language reveal the strategic opacity of a wily gamesman. Imposing yet self-effacing, conservative yet adventurous, articulate yet convoluted, he's a genuine enigma.

You might expect a "family" label like A&M to be headed by a fatherly type like "L.A. Law"'s Richard Dysart—or at least a hi-vis cheerleader along the lines of Capitol's Joe Smith. Friesen is nothing

of the sort. He's a tall, imposing executive whose brooding style has inspired nicknames like "the Baron" and "the Prince of Darkness," as well as the more heartfelt "that bastard!" According to skeptics—and there are many, on and off the Lot—A&M's just-folks image is a candycoated facade that hides the relentlessly coldblooded activities of "the boys' club": Friesen's exclusively male, exclusively white and absolutely loyal management team.

The reality of A&M Records lies somewhere between these two extremes. "Gil has created an executive team in running this company, which is a very difficult task," explains inner-circle mainstay Michael Leon, senior vice-president, head of East Coast operations and longtime Friesen ally. "Like any great executive or general manager in professional sports, he's created a balance of personalities and responsibilities that complement one another."

After securing a beachhead in the 1960s via Alpert's string of instrumental hits, A&M acquired instant hipness in

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1968 through a farsighted deal with maverick mogul Chris Blackwell's Island Records, which yielded such acts as Joe Cocker, Procol Harum and Free. Through the 1970s, A&M built a largely deserved rep as an artist-oriented boutique label that endorsed taste over tonnage while moving plenty of the latter. During that period, Friesen was senior vice-president and head of creative services. He was appointed president in 1977, after Peter Frampton's double album, *Frampton Comes Alive*, set industry sales records. As the decade turned, Friesen—aided by protege Jeff Ayeroff—established A&M as argu-

ably the most stylishly innovative record label. This prevailing sense of style proved a perfect match for such adventurous acts as the Police, Squeeze, Joan Armatrading and Joe Jackson.

Indeed, breaking new acts continues to be an A&M specialty. The recent success of Suzanne Vega provides a classic example. Like most such phenomena, the Vega/A&M symbiosis was far from automatic.

"We went after A&M specifically," Vega explains, "because we had heard that they were interested in artists for the long run. They turned us down twice, but we kept going after them and

sending them press."

Undaunted by the rejections, Vega's manager Ron Fierstein resubmitted Vega's demo tape directly to Friesen through the intervention of a mutual friend, former Cat Stevens manager Barry Krost. Friesen forwarded the tape to Nancy Jeffries, then an East Coast A&R rep for the label.

"We all had some doubts," Jeffries recalls, "because you're scared of signing a folk singer in 1985, or whenever it was. But then I go down to see her, and before she's through with three lines, I'm in love. I just *have* to sign this person; I don't care how crazy it is or how it flies in the face of everything. Everyone [at A&M] went through the same cycle with me: 'Oh my God, it's a folk singer—what are you doing?' Then they'd see her and instantly it was, 'Okay, let's make this work.'"

"The entire company had made a commitment to Suzanne Vega," Friesen muses mock-mystically, "through some mysterious and magical proposal she made to us—or some mandate we gave to her. The timing was right: She wanted it, we wanted it, and there was a lot of mutual energy and cooperation." As for Vega's hit single "Luka," Friesen sounds almost blasé. "It was great to have done that," he says of the commercial breakthrough, "but I'm not *surprised* at our ability to do it."

Friesen's verbal approach takes a bit of getting used to. He puts so much spin on his remarks that it's difficult to tell whether he's being facetious, serious or both. Some of his associates never figure him out; perhaps he doesn't want them to. His realm can be divided into two groups: those who "get" him and those who don't. Members of the latter group—many of them female—either keep their distance or move to more accommodating corporate environments. Those who claim to understand Friesen either love him or loathe him—sometimes a volatile combination of the two. Eventually certain members of the boys' club get the hell outta Dodge, having had their fill of mixed messages and inner-circle politics.

"Gil and I get on well," says Bryan Adams, a satisfied A&M customer. "He has a great knowledge of music, and I value his opinion. It's not like I walk in the door and say, 'Here's my record.' There's a whole association. I mean, Gil comes to my house."

And does Adams return the visits?

"I've never been to Gil's house."

"Personally, I don't like the word 'family,'" the Baron says enigmatically. M

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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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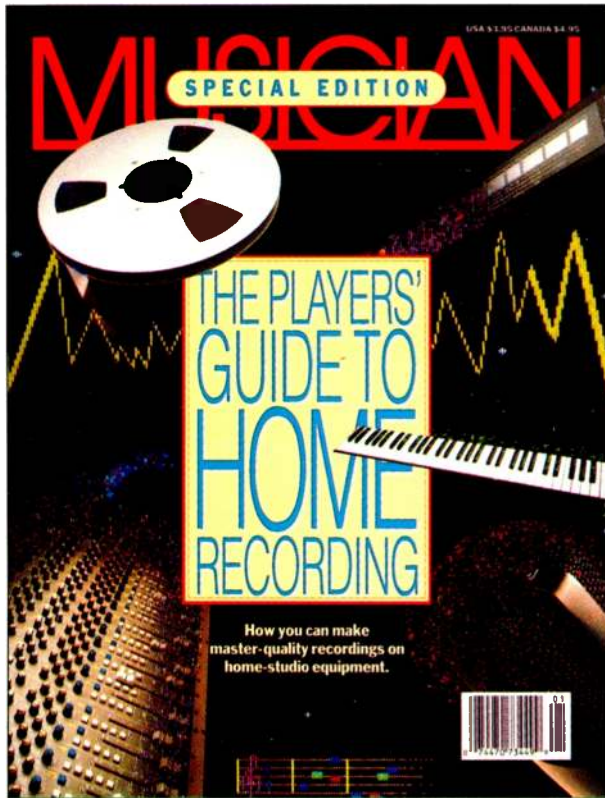
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STEPHANE GRAPPELLI

by **jerome reese**

*Embroidering
on Django
and the Jazz Life*

Paris, January 1988. Stephane Grappelli, the most popular—and arguably the finest—violinist in the history of jazz, is back in his home town to celebrate his 80th birthday with a week of sold-out concerts at the famed Olympia Theatre. He manages to prop up his feet in his city apartment about once a year, spending nine months on the road (he performs up to 300 concerts) and at his home on the Riviera. There are flowers throughout the unassuming flat, but few records and no momentos from a lifetime of touring: flowers in vases, on his colorful shirts, as a motif on the wallpaper and the furniture. Grappelli is crazy about flowers, and there has always been something a tad flowery about that luminous tone he produces on the violin. His “embroidering,” as he calls it, suffused with a sentimental yet soaring lyricism, has made Grappelli one of the most celebrated violinists of the century, right up there with Yehudi Menuhin, with whom he has made six albums.

“Playing with Django was the pinnacle; everything since then has been anti-climactic.”

Stephane has been playing professionally since his teens, and he’s recorded with a veritable galaxy of jazzmen since coming into the limelight in 1934 with co-leader Django Reinhardt, the legendary Gypsy guitarist, of the Quintet of the Hot Club of France. The dazzling music created by the gruff, temperamental guitarist and the suave, refined violinist proved that by the mid-’30s jazz had become an international phenomenon. Peers like Stuff Smith and Eddie South may have swung a bit harder, and today’s practitioners of the instrument such as Leroy Jenkins, Billy Bang or disciple



Jean-Luc Ponty may have taken its possibilities a step further; no other violinist, however, matches Grappelli’s all-around artistry and command of the jazz repertoire. (He’s also an excellent pianist.) His still-infallible memory is capable of reeling out hundreds of standards, yet the ever-youthful Stephane continues to put himself in new and unusual situations. A quick look at his discography reveals collaborations with Duke Ellington, Quincy Jones, Gary Burton, Paul Simon, bluegrass stars Vassar Clements and David Grisman, Brazilian guitarist Baden Powell, the sessions with Menuhin and duo albums with practically every jazz violinist from Joe Venuti to Ponty and Didier Lockwood.

Coincidentally, the two inventors of jazz violin, Venuti and Grappelli, were both born to Italian parents, Joe on a boat taking his parents to the New World, and Stephane on the Montmartre hillside of the city where his father had just moved. Today Stephane lives around the corner from where he grew up, and remains deeply attached to the area. And no wonder: During Stephane’s childhood Montmartre practically gave birth to the contemporary arts, with Picasso’s



“Bateau Lavoir” atelier, Toulouse-Lautrec’s “Moulin Rouge,” and the numerous cabarets where Debussy, Ravel, Satie and Stravinsky went to soak up ragtime and cakewalk. Much of Grappelli’s own life suggests this sort of fairy-tale quality; Frank Capra could have made a wonderful movie of it. It is a life peopled with kings and queens, jam sessions with Fats Waller, dance classes with Isadora Duncan and achingly funny escapades with the inimitable Django. But Stephane, who is not only a patient and gracious host but also a born raconteur,

tells it best himself, with the sparkle and verve found in his joyful music.

"I remember quite vividly the day I discovered music. I was six, and I was wearing a tunic, sandals and a crown of roses, dancing to Debussy's 'Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun,' on a beautiful sunny afternoon in the gardens of a chateau outside Paris. You see, my father, once an aspiring dancer but most of the time involved in unsuccessful business ventures, loved the arts, and had enrolled me in Isadora Duncan's dance class. Isadora's patron and lover was none other than Singer, the man with the sewing machine fortune, who thought nothing of hiring a classical orchestra for the day to play Debussy. What gorgeous music! Though my father wanted me to go into the ballet, I knew right then and there that I wanted to play music. I didn't get my first violin until six years later. My mother had died when I was three, and my father was mobilized during World War I, and with Isadora's school closed I spent four years in orphanages until my father returned. One day he had the idea of offering me a little violin an Italian was selling on the corner, and that's how everything started for me, at the age of 12. I'll never forget it. I

hugged the violin so hard all the way home I almost broke it!

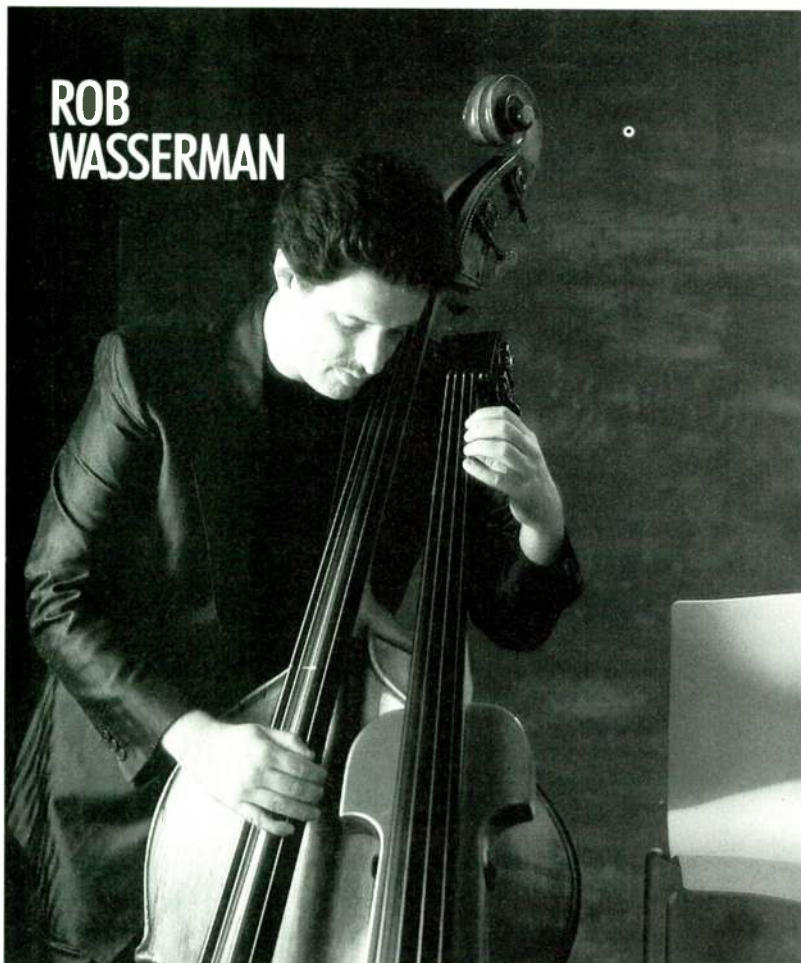
"I learned by myself. I never had a professor. After a few days I was already playing melodies on the violin. But I did learn solfege for a year at the Conservatory, because my father wanted me to be a true musician and to be able to read music. Later, I managed to land a spot with a cinema orchestra. At the time, the little cinemas had a piano accompanist, and the bigger cinemas had a little orchestra. We played seven days a week, six hours a day. The orchestra leader was very eclectic: If the movie was a costume piece we played Mozart, if it was a comedy we played ragtime and cakewalk. That's how I got much of my musical education. That, and playing Debussy and Ravel, the source of my music. It was a great time. After a few days we knew the music by heart, and we would play while twisting our necks so we could watch the movie.

"The money helped. You see, my father was the very first hippie I ever met. He was a philosophy professor, but as soon as he'd make a little money he'd run off to translate Virgil or other Greek or Latin classics. He claimed his translations were better than the official ver-

sions. So we were always hungry. When I wasn't playing in the cinema I was playing in courtyards—in all weather—for handouts. Let me tell you, it was rough. The coins people tossed out their windows could cut your head open! That's how I first met Django. He and his brothers were well-known in the neighborhood. We almost got in a fight over who was going to play in a courtyard one day. This was in the late '20s. I never dreamed then that I would one day play with him.

"Next door to the cinema where I was playing in the early '20s was a cafe which had a new machine; you put in a coin and it played a record. I always chose Gershwin, but one day I chose the wrong record. It was something by a certain jazz band, and what I heard overwhelmed me. I still play that tune, "Stumbling," today. I discovered Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke on that same machine. They are my biggest influences, especially Armstrong's singing and Bix's piano-playing. I had started playing piano at that time, partly out of frustration from always having the violin drowned out by the orchestra.

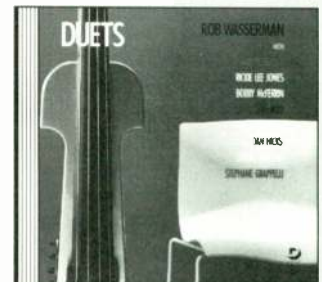
"I didn't discover Venuti until later; he had an impact on me more as an inspira-



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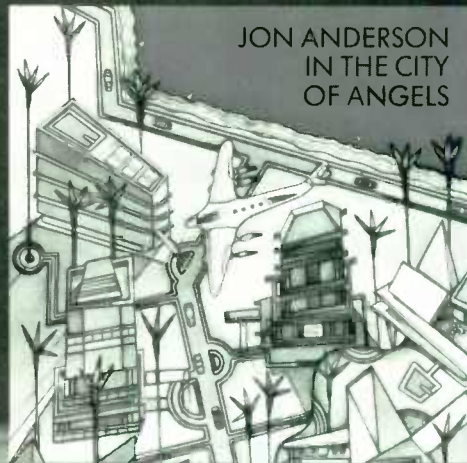
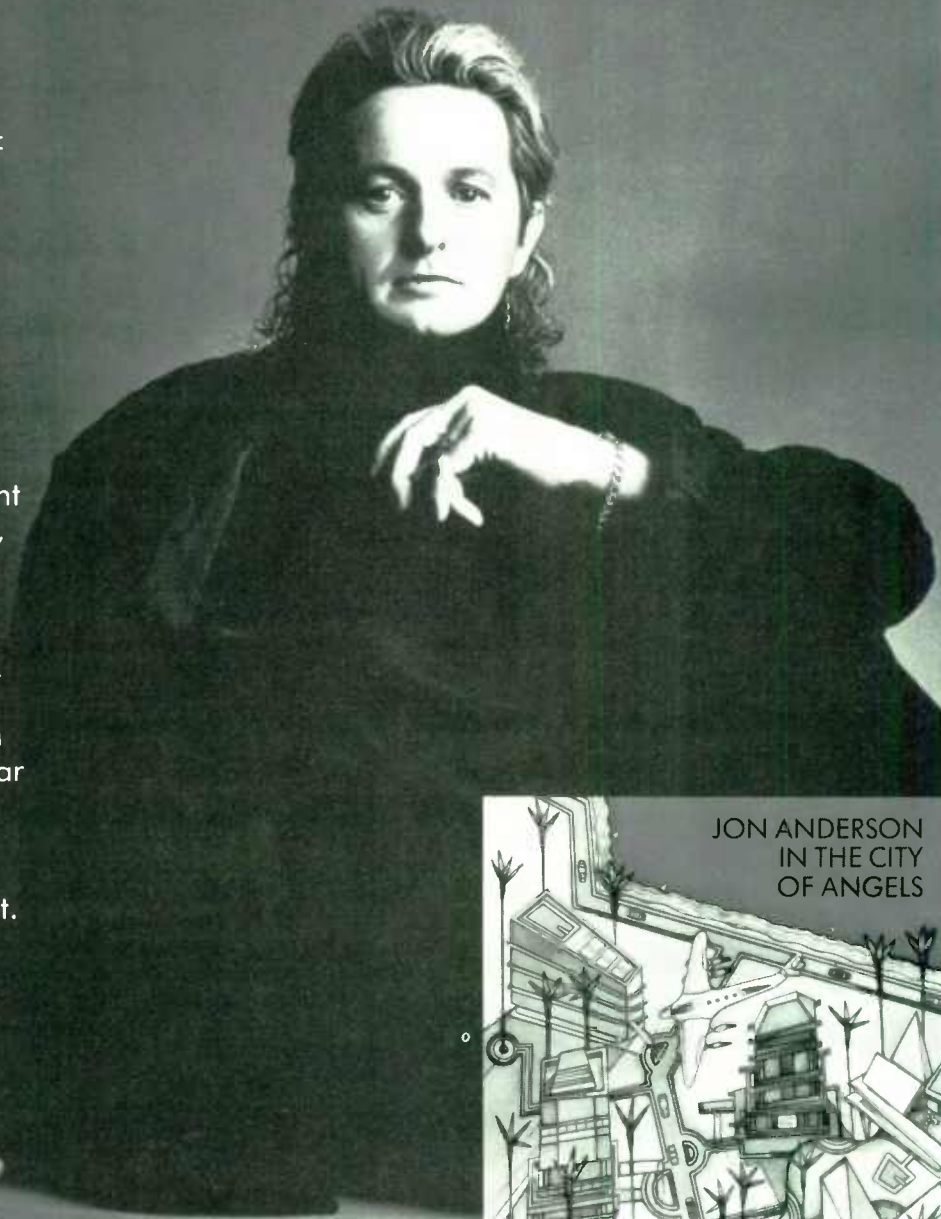
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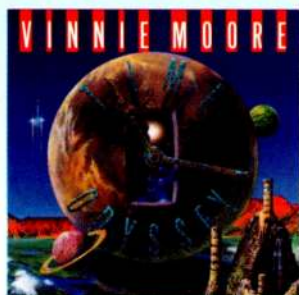
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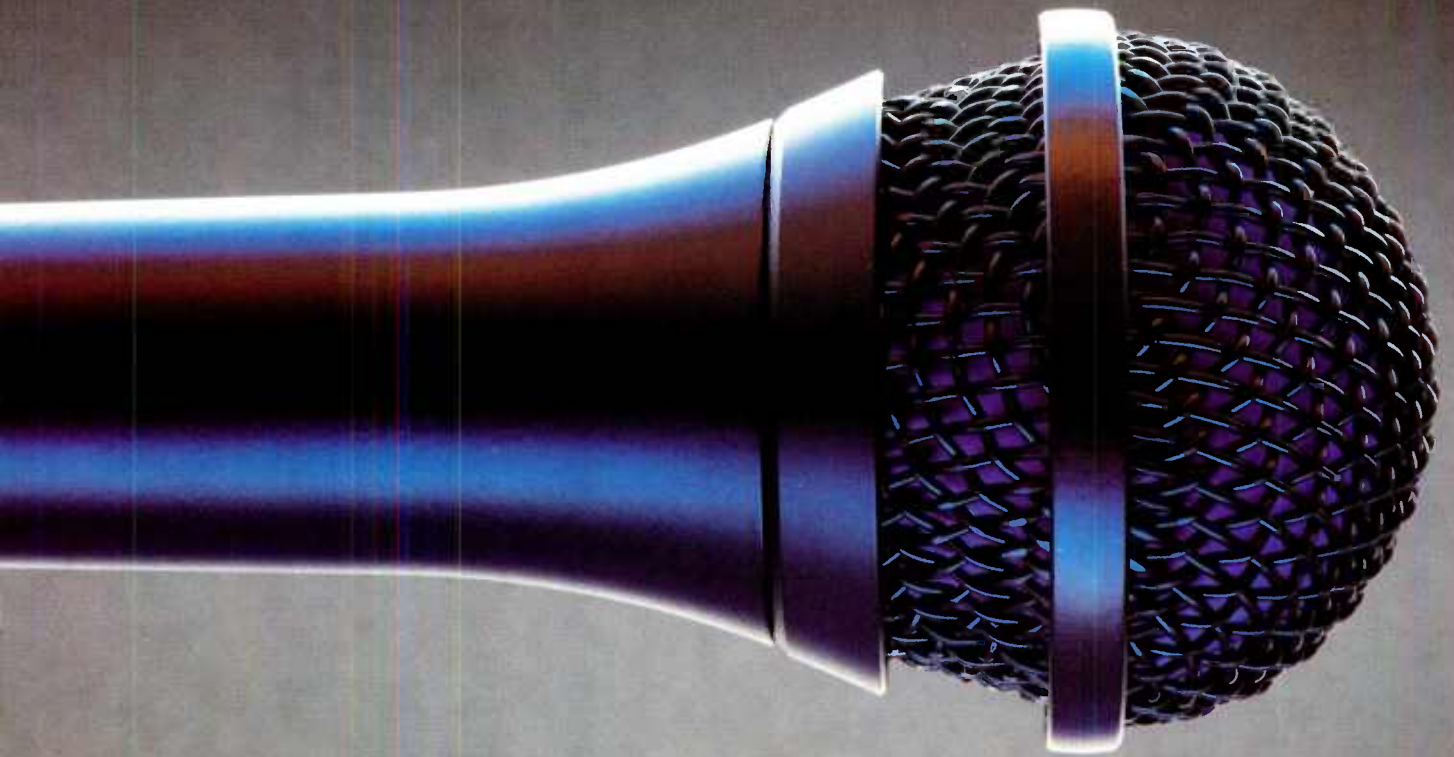
tion than as a violinist. Mostly I tried to embroider on my own, while accompanying Charlie Chaplin movies or when I played tangos in dance bands. You know, trying to be a jazzman in the '20s was like being one of the first Christians in Rome—but without the risks!"

Grappelli first hooked up professionally with Django Reinhardt at a recording session early in 1934. Shortly after that they found themselves playing a tea dance. Grappelli broke a string, and while retuning he jokingly improvised a chorus. Django responded with a chorus, and their partnership was born. In September 1934, the Quintet was formed and began recording. But for Grappelli, an event the following summer was just as decisive:

"It was at the Deauville Casino, in the summer of 1935. A young man was playing records on the beach. What I heard was so extraordinary I ran up to him to find out what it was. And that's how I discovered Art Tatum, for me the greatest musician of our time. Since then, I have lived only for him. Whenever I'm upset I put on one of his records. Never one of mine—I can't stand them!"

"Hearing Tatum helped me to play with Django. You see, I just fooled around on the violin until I began seriously playing all the time with Django in 1937. We played a club called 'Bricktop's' in Montmartre and everyone came to hear us: Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Cole Porter, etc. That's the only place in Paris where there was real jazz. And that's when Django began to realize just how good he was.

"Django and I were so different. He liked drinking and gambling and staying up all night. Or he'd go fishing or stay in his caravan, while I was collecting antiques and going to London. To be sure of Django's presence somewhere you had to sleep in front of his door! At our first recording as the Quintet he arrived almost two hours late. I'll never forget it. Since we were unknowns, we had to record in the morning. And to get Django somewhere at eight in the morning was an incredible feat to accomplish—you have no idea. The sound engineers were stiff old men who were used to recording the popular songs of the day. They thought we were playing noise. For our first recording contract we each received the equivalent of twenty cents today. Needless to say, we weren't in it for the money, but for the adventure. We huddled around one microphone that sounded like a frying pan when you approached it, and played. I must say



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GRAPPELLI

that I don't like recording studios today—too many mikes and machines...

"Django and I had our ups and downs, but in spite of his wild ways he was good-hearted, and very intelligent. He looked up to me, even though he was twice as big as me, because I was two years older than him. For Gypsies, birthright is everything. That's the only way we ever got anything done. He would look at me and say: 'You're educated, you can read the paper.' I taught him to sign his name. So he'd sign his name everywhere, on the walls of hotel rooms, everywhere. Just like a kid. Ah... [*Stephane sighs deeply*] Once we were supposed to play for the president of France, and Django forgot! We had to rush to his caravan and wash him to get ready for the performance. The sloppiness of it all almost made me go insane on occasion. I tried so hard to keep him from staying up all night playing cards, telling him that we had to compose something to be remembered by. To no avail.

"Yes, playing with him was the pinnacle of my career; everything since then has been anticlimactic. But I felt freer when I wasn't playing with him anymore. He had such a strong musical personality that you had to wait for him to finish saying what he had to say. Now I can do what I want to do. And I ended up being more of a nomad than Django!"

Grappelli, who had begun his love affair with England in the '30s, made it his home during the '40s and part of the '50s, working with pianist George Shearing, who he remembers with great fondness. He and Django rarely played together anymore; their last gig was in 1949, four years before the guitarist's death. By then Stephane had assimilated bebop and was moving away from the Quintet's repertoire, recording new tunes and composing many charming "vignettes," as he calls them. During the '50s and '60s he was a mostly-forgotten figure, but constant touring and television performances helped make him a household name again. Ellington came to Paris in 1963 to record *Jazz Violin Session* with him, and in 1971 Grappelli began his ongoing collaboration with Menuhin: "Those are some of my best-selling records. Yehudi and I get along very well, even though our temperaments are very different. And he is incapable of improvising. We have to write everything out for him. Which is why he admires my playing very much. And I of course admire his extraordinary virtuosity."

These days Grappelli plays a 1742 Gagliano violin or a Barcus-Berry electric
continued on page 76

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*Why the Best New
Rock Acts of 1988
Are Women*



Musician receives dozens of tapes and albums every week from record companies, managers and independent publicists soliciting stories about unknown acts. That's not news. Sometimes, not often enough, a new performer jumps out from the pack and excites real enthusiasm, real curiosity. Things have been good lately: The Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor's debut album, *The Lion and the Cobra*, held up to a whole winter of scrutiny and moved up the charts with a steadiness that mocked radio's refusal to play it. In March O'Connor arrived for her first American shows, which sold out at once and knocked out those who crowded in. Unless she makes some unexpected mistakes, O'Connor promises to be an important figure in 1990s rock. Also on the bright side, PolyGram has signed Texas iconoclast Michelle Shocked, whose first studio album (out in August) slides from folk purity to rock loopiness with at least one quick stop at Top 40 pop. Elektra is justifiably enthusiastic about Cambridge folkie Tracy Chapman, and A&M is pushing a striking L.A. performer named Toni Childs. Add in the first Warners albums by Canadian cult favorite Jane Siberry, nuthouse sweethearts Throwing Muses, and Virgin's Beatle-like Sam Phillips: The early months of 1988 have provided extraordinarily fruitful listening.

There's a saying in New England: "Dawn breaks on Marblehead." Sometimes it refers to morning at a beach north of Boston, and sometimes it refers to enlightenment coming to a particularly dim person. Well, dawn broke on the marbleheads at the *Musician* office when we finally looked at each other and said, "Hey—all these great new artists are women!" That led to a second observation: "The big record companies have been avoiding serious women for years!" Obviously a lot of talented women have had plenty of time to woodshed, write songs, play live and get real good. But why is the renaissance suddenly being subsidized by the major labels—and what was wrong with the first six years of this decade? The quick answer to the first question is simple but not wrong: Suzanne Vega. Her success broke a taboo. As Vega says in this issue [page

24], record companies were scared to go near her in the first half of the '80s, not because she wasn't good, but because she was a folkie (she was a she, too). Folkies did not sell records in the MTV era. Which suggests what was wrong with the years 1981 to '86: that poor old whipping boy MTV.

Okay, okay, MTV gets blamed for everything from "Miami Vice" to the stock market crash. Surely MTV did some good in busting open rock radio's late-'70s atrophy and introducing new music to the American market. But the music business never accepts a new craze as simply a useful marketing tool. A new craze—be it disco, radio consultants, MTV or CDs—is always *the future of the industry*. And so whatever doesn't fit the new craze gets shoved aside until that craze burns itself out. As crazes go, MTV was pretty versatile—it could contain many styles. But one thing MTV did require was a strong visual image. MTV demanded glamor. And for women who wanted to be taken seriously in an industry dominated by the sort of men who read *Playboy*, glamor was anathema.

Here sexism, or at least restrictive gender expectations, comes to the surface. The male singer/songwriter could ride out the MTV era simply by strapping on an electric guitar and tight jeans and baring his angst standing up instead of sitting down. John Mellencamp, Mark Knopfler, Bruce Springsteen and Sting could all have played Folk City in an earlier era, but it was easy for them to strike video-friendly rock hero poses. However, when a woman tried the same transition the camera blinked. Joan Armatrading picked up her Fender in 1981 and made some rocking videos. They never got past light rotation. Kate Bush should have been perfect for a visual rock medium, but MTV rarely played her clips. Joni Mitchell got only token attention.

But at least Armatrading, Bush and Mitchell continued to record. Other important female singer/songwriters seemed to disappear as video imagery became the rock industry's coin of exchange. Rickie Lee Jones has released only one album since 1981. Laura Nyro and Patti Smith, both of whom remained signed to major labels, released

"Maybe women are just starting to tell you some of the stuff they're going through, and it's hitting you. Maybe it just happens to be now, or maybe it's a time when people are taking a basket and dipping it into a sea of women and saying, 'Okay, let's see what these have to say.' They're starting to pay attention a little bit more. It might be considered a trend, it might be that this will keep happening. There's a lot of female musicians out there who've been playing for a long time!"

— Toni Childs, March '88

none. Bonnie Raitt spent most of this decade in record-company limbo. The only indisputably adult woman songwriter to meet MTV's standards without compromising her own was Chrissie Hynde. That's one. One of anything isn't a breakthrough, it's a novelty.

Let's go back to glamor. Why was video's demand for glamor more of an impediment to serious women than men? Call it a sign of the times. While male rock stars didn't mind joining a gym and having their hair done, women who had struggled to overcome the traditional demand that *girl singers* be overtly sexy had a tough time compromising with MTV's show biz demands. In her promo clips Armatrading looked like she was ready to kick the camera man, Rickie Lee Jones like she just wanted to finish the shoot and scrub off the makeup. MTV demanded cute, and no one figured out a way for a mature woman to appear *cute* enough for the video decade, while retaining the dignity that is the personal songwriter's defense against mawkishness.

The women who have made it biggest in the MTV era—Madonna, Tina Turner, Cyndi Lauper, Annie Lennox—have played up to MTV's expectations: They've presented themselves in cartoon images. That is not to deny their talent, or the genuine strength each has displayed in commanding her career. But the MTV stars have satisfied marketing demands first, and then if they can slip a subtle feminist message into "She Bop" or "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," great. The serious message, though, has been a subversion of their music, not part of the music's essence. Tina Turner's life may be an inspiration to abused women, and Cyndi Lauper has used the fame generated by her pop success to speak out for noble causes—but in the best rock the music itself is the message. In the case of the MTV stars the music has just been a vehicle for getting famous enough to convey the message some other way.

Like Prince, Billy Idol, Michael Jackson and others who have achieved similar success through video marketing, MTV's female stars have created and exploited images that skirt self-caricature. However, while aspiring male musicians still had their U2s, R.E.M.s and Robert Crays, the young women of the '80s have had few rock gender models who were not presented as cartoons. Even a singer/songwriter as emotionally open and creatively serious as Aimee Mann of Til Tuesday was presented to the public in full MTV regalia. The resulting confusion about just what Til Tuesday was kept the band from capitalizing on the out-of-the-box success of their first single "Voices Carry." At the heart of the band were Mann's clear-eyed, incisive ballads ("Sleep," "You Know the Rest") and Bob Holmes' edgy rock guitar, but group advisors felt the market demanded lighter pop songs. The pop songs didn't set the world on fire, and Til Tuesday's best material has still not had a fair shot.

Now that climate is changing. The major labels are signing serious female singer/songwriters faster than Led Zeppelin clones. Some degree of coincidence may be conceded, but a trend is taking shape. And in the record business new trends are not motivated by good taste or guilty consciences.

Someone thinks that serious women can sell records again.

So what has changed? Why are smart women now being allowed to display their intelligence and dress from their own closets? First is that Vega factor. When "Luka" became a hit single the "I love it but it won't sell" argument collapsed. The early days of 1988 found Suzanne Vega nominated for three Grammy awards, a sign of industry acceptance having sunk through to the average rack jobber. Simultaneous with that were two more subtle but not unrelated events: Sinéad O'Connor and 10,000 Maniacs both cracked *Billboard's* Top 100 with albums that had been released months earlier with little record company support.

Sinéad O'Connor's success was fast, and not expected by her American record company. Chrysalis picked up the Irish songwriter's debut album from their British Ensign label and released it without fanfare last fall. It was not a priority for the company, which believed that O'Connor was too odd for American tastes. Chrysalis president Mike Bone said that if O'Connor's album ever sold 50,000 copies in the States he'd shave his head as bald as hers. By March the LP, *The Lion and the Cobra*, had sold 200,000 copies and hit the *Billboard* top 40 without even a single. (At that point Chrysalis belatedly released the song "Mandinka.") In late March O'Connor took an electric shaver to Bone's scalp, with relish.

10,000 Maniacs took longer to break than O'Connor. The band's first Elektra LP, 1985's *The Wishing Chair*, got good reviews but slight push from the label. When *In My Tribe* appeared last summer it was not a priority. College radio and the Maniacs' support slot on the R.E.M. tour earned the album a couple of months in the lower reaches of the top 200, but by mid-November *In My Tribe* had slipped to number 200 and seemed sure to fall off the edge the next week. Then the Maniacs scored a PR coup—they appeared on the "Tonight Show" and the "David Letterman Show" in one two-week period, and their record jumped 50 spots. Since then it has kept its bullet, leaping about eight spots a week. On February 20th Elektra took out a double-page Maniacs ad in *Billboard*, full of glowing quotes from critics around the country. The ad was more than a nice gesture; it was a way of announcing to radio stations and the industry in general that 10,000 Maniacs were now, finally, a priority. Translation: Money will be spent. By early April *In My Tribe* was number 54 and climbing. Elektra was using that success to open a doorway for Tracy Chapman, who was given the opening slot on the Maniacs' spring tour. In a generous gesture, Maniacs singer Natalie Merchant went to England to be the opening act at Chapman's debut London concerts. This made the British media sit up and pay attention to Chapman, whose LP had not yet even been released. The week after Easter—two months after Elektra sent out tapes to critics—the album was finally shipped in America. It was greeted with major articles in the Sunday *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*, which inspired other general-interest papers and magazines to follow. Progressive radio stations jumped on Chapman's haunting "Fast Car." Elektra had figured out how to market serious women.

It's interesting that Chapman and Toni Childs both show the influence of Joan Armatrading—who's never been a commercial titan. It's more telling that Reprise is pushing the band Longhouse by saying leader Lisa Herman is *a new*

continued on page 121

"The MTV era demanded glamor. And for women struggling to be taken seriously in an industry dominated by the sort of men who read Playboy, glamor was anathema."

Tracy Chapman

Fulfilling the First Responsibility

"Suzanne Vega came along at a time when people were looking for music that said something real to them," comments Tracy Chapman, a 24-year-old Boston-based folk singer whose music is rooted in a sense of social responsibility similar to Vega's. "She opened the minds and ears of radio programmers to a kind of music that had gone ignored for quite a while, and in some ways she opened the door for me."

The door certainly appears to be open to Chapman, who recently returned from a successful British tour, and whose debut LP is garnering rave reviews. Produced by David Kershenbaum, *Tracy Chapman* showcases 11 strikingly simple songs that explore racism, domestic violence, the dead-end reality of America's middle-class dream, and that venerable cornerstone of popular music, unrequited love. Singing in a rich, trilling voice evocative of Joan Armatrading, Chapman evidences a wisdom beyond her years in simple stories that illuminate the foibles and follies that have plagued this global village for centuries.

Talking with Chapman in her manager's L.A. office, she comes across as an uncommonly dignified young woman who means what she sings, yet is not without a sense of humor. "I think there is humor in my music," she insists, "though I know some critics have written that there's not. Yes, my songs do have serious messages, but I often deliver them in a tongue-in-cheek way."

Born in Cleveland in 1964, the younger of two girls, her musical education of standard AM radio fare was supplemented by five years of clarinet lessons and a few guitar classes. Growing up in a lower-middle-class neighborhood, she had first-hand experience with the plight of the have-nots in America—a theme that recurs in her songs.

"My mother raised my sister and me on her own so we didn't have a lot of money," she recalls, "and as a child I spent a lot of time alone. I was shy and didn't have much in common with the kids in the neighborhood because I wasn't interested in watching TV and going to football games. I had other things on my mind so I started writing songs, poetry and short stories to amuse myself. I was never happy in

Cleveland, and from the time I was young was intent on creating a life for myself that was different from the way I grew up."

Chapman's ticket to a different life came when she was 16 and won a scholarship to a high school in Connecticut where she encountered other folk musicians for the first time and began performing publicly. Her education continued at Tufts University, where she majored in anthropology and had a fortuitous encounter with a classmate.

"A schoolmate named Brian Koppelman—who I didn't know at the time—approached me and told me that his father [Charles Koppelman] had a publishing company called SBK. They offered to help me get a record contract and got in touch with Elektra, who wound up signing me in the fall of 1986.

"It took a while to find the right producer," she continues,

"but once we settled on David things moved pretty fast. David and I held auditions to find the core players [which include bassist Larry Klein, drummer Danny Fongheiser and guitarist Jack Holder], then we recorded for a month and mixed for a month. My central goal with the record was to present a slightly embellished version of the songs, while still conveying a clear idea of what I've been doing as a solo artist. The songs could've come off sounding much more pop but David and I were careful about not letting the music become too overblown."

In explaining how her songs take shape, Chapman comments, "I don't have structured writing habits. I've written hundreds of songs and have enough material for three albums so I don't see writing as a problem. I play my guitar every day and always have fragments of ideas floating around my head, but I never force a song into being. My songs aren't autobiographical, but they usually combine a variety of things I've seen, heard or read about. Occasionally it will be something that happened to me, but I'll combine that with other things."

One assumes that the allusions to racism that crop up in her music came from personal experience. Has she encountered racism in the music business?

"Surely," she replies, "I haven't had any head-on confrontations with it in making this record or dealing with record companies, but it shows up in subtle ways on the Boston folk scene. I'm one of the only black performers working on that scene and I'll often find that people want me on the bill as the token black.

"I address these things in my songs, some of which are highly political," she continues, "but I'm not personally

continued on page 129





SEE HOW THEY GROW

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Michelle Shocked

Anarchy, Jail and the Lucky Break

"I didn't remember saying this," Michelle Shocked says, "but somebody quoted me saying at a show that I write about cities the way some people write about lovers. Joni Mitchell's always in and out of love affairs; well, I was always in and out of cities."

Michelle Shocked looks like a punk, but when she sings her songs live, accompanying herself on acoustic guitar and fiddle, she sounds like Woody Guthrie's long-lost daughter. It's possible then to believe that events had to conspire to nurture this talent in a time warp: Michelle's fundamentalist Mormon mother forbade the kids to watch TV, and the singer was discovered through a tape made on a Walkman at a Texas folk festival, the 1980s equivalent of one of those old Alan Lomax field recordings. Pete Lawrence, the Englishman who made that cassette, took it back to London and pressed it onto vinyl. *The Texas Campfire Tapes* hit number one on the British indie charts shortly after he tracked down Michelle to tell her she had made an album. This is all true, and it's why there's a temptation to see Michelle Shocked as pop music's last innocent.

But in August, when her first studio album is released by PolyGram, everybody will know that Michelle Shocked is a complex and sophisticated talent. *Short Sharp Shocked* extends Michelle's folkie aesthetic without killing its purity; a good comparison would be to Tom Waits' last three albums, which used his songwriting as a base but took the arrangements out the window. Shocked has not gone avant-garde (though her gonzo LP opener "When I Grow Up" is close), but she's fleshed out her musical skeletons with subtlety and wit. There are a couple of lovely folk tunes, a hardcore reworking of a *Campfire Tapes* song, some roadhouse rock and one genuine, beautiful hit-ready ballad with a B3 sound from "Positively 4th Street" and strings that would tickle Anne Murray; "Anchorage" is a flat-out bid for Top 40 popularity with a subtle feminist message. It's brilliant pop. Michelle Shocked and producer Pete Anderson have assembled a perfect package. Now PolyGram just has to get her to sit still.

"When it comes to it," Shocked says, "I have to confess I'm not that committed to the medium of making albums. It's a nice means, but it's not the end as far as I'm concerned. If it gets people to the live shows where I can spit my two cents

worth of politics, it's done the job. I don't want people sitting around playing it backwards listening for me going 'Hang Reagan' or whatever." Shocked is in a Greenwich Village restaurant on a stopover between her old home in Texas and her current home on a London houseboat. She jokingly refers to herself as "another kneejerk anarchist," but she seems to be one leftist musician whose money's where her mouth is.

"What was real funny," she says, "is that PolyGram offered me an advance of, I think, \$130,000. I knew if I was going to keep the album as simple as I wanted, it was never gonna take that much money. I also started from the political principle that the less expensive I could make the album, the more chance that anyone else who had something equally important to say could afford to. So I started telling them I didn't want any advance at all, and I wanted all the artistic control. It was real funny: They wrote back and insisted on advancing me \$50,000. It let them know I'm not in this for the money. It said a lot more about me than I knew at the time. I was going on the principle that if I didn't take a lot of the resources there might be more for other people to use."

Clearly Michelle Shocked is an unusual sort of musician. And though she says she's only 25, her life story is already the stuff of movies. Her father, she says, was an English teacher at a mostly black, segregated school in East Texas—a late-blooming hippie who smoked pot with his kids and dreamed of building a boat and sailing away. When Michelle's mother divorced him, he got a book on boat-building and spent years trying to construct his Mark Twain dream—a boat called "The Godot" that would never be completed (and if it were, where would he have found an ocean?). The dreamer, literary father remained a distant and romantic figure to Michelle, whose mother married a soldier and took the kids from base to base, settling for a while in Germany before returning to Texas. Her song "Memories of East Texas" contains the autobiographical line, "What'd you let them break your spirit for?"

"It's funny being raised fundamentalist," Michelle smiles. "My mother was kind of a Tammy Bakker character: lots of makeup, really spent hours fixing herself up. For some reason I was going through all of high school with no makeup, my hair real straight—just kind of the introspective book worm. I was one of those kids who read a lot, wrote poetry, took herself too seriously. Now imagine being an army brat traveling around, new kids, new schools all the time. And all the kids would always go, 'Hey you! Are you a boy or a girl?' Finally I just really let it get to me. I stopped having

continued on page 56





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World Radio History

Toni Childs

The Virtues of Saying No

Toni Childs says that the day in 1985 that she finally signed her first full-fledged solo-artist contract deal with A&M Records was the worst day of her life.

Not, you have to understand, because signing to A&M was so awful. In fact, it was the culmination of 12 years in which Childs fronted bands with just about every known rock musician in Hollywood, including an early, aborted group with hit songwriter Holly Knight, a stint as the first lead singer of Berlin and a two-year job fronting a power-pop outfit called Toni & the Movers that, according to Childs, went through at least 50 line-up changes during its duration and which at the end included Bangle Micki Steele and Red Hot Chili Pepper Jack Sherman.

So Childs was thrilled to be getting a contract as a solo artist at long last. But, she says, "after hearing my lawyer tell me every single detail of this humongous contract, I felt like I'd been bound, tied, gagged and stuffed in every orifice!"

Upon which, she adds, she immediately had to spend six hours at the dentist, after which she was subjected to a date with a jerk to see Sting's concert at the Forum, from which she and said jerk were forcibly ejected.

But that very same night, says Childs, she called up David Ricketts, of the band David & David, with whom she had recently worked on the soundtrack to a film called *Echo Park*. "I went over to his house that night just to talk," she says, "and I never left. I moved in with him and we became boyfriend and girlfriend for about a year."

The liaison with Ricketts turned out to be more profitable creatively than emotionally. Ricketts ended up co-writing and co-producing Childs' first solo album, *Union*, though the couple broke up long before the project's completion. *Union* took two-and-a-half years to write and record, during which Ricketts scored his own hit album *Boomtown*. There were countless hours of frustration and attempted collaborations with other writers while Ricketts was unavailable due to *Boomtown*'s success. Searching for the end of the creative tunnel took Childs from L.A. to England to three weeks in Africa, where she laid down vocal tracks with a Zambian choir. How did A&M feel

about the delays and the journeys?

"They were *not* happy," shrugs Childs. "I mean, it's a very difficult thing for a record company or manager or even a publisher who has signed you and is giving you all this money in advance for a product that's not even there yet to trust you about something they haven't heard! And a lot of people were wondering what the hell I was doing...my A&R man [Aaron Jacoves] wasn't that thrilled with the stuff I was turning in to him! But I just kept saying, 'It's worth it to me to wait. I can't write with other people! I'll attempt to write with anyone you want me to, but I just know it won't work unless they can fill this gap I've got now.' And I did try. But everything I did, I'd go, 'This doesn't feel right. It feels phony, it feels fake, it feels like I'm trying to write a hit song. And I'm trying to do so much more than that!'"

But isn't having hits the whole idea? "Yeah," Childs says,

"I know that is the idea, but I think there's something else if you're an artist. I don't have a desire to be Madonna..." She immediately regrets saying that. "I don't want to use her name 'cause I think she's special, she's the first of her kind and now a lot of people sound just like her. I get confused 'cause I don't even know which one is Madonna anymore. Something becomes so formulaized that I could do it, but I don't want to imitate somebody. I can understand hits. I want people to like my music, I want them to have something to relate to. But there's another part of you as an artist that goes, 'I just can't do that. I have a point morally that won't allow me to do that. I can't!' And I've been like that since I was signed. That's why I thought they signed me; my demos from England were in keeping with this record. The reason I listen to music is to hear some truth or real experience in it."

It takes a lot of strength of character to stand up to the fury of a record company scorned, but strength of character is something Childs, now 30, has plenty of. Born in southern California and yanked all over the country by errant parents during her adolescence, she ran away from home for the first time at age 14. She lived for a time with

a bunch of hippies in northern California, then with an artisans community in Huntington Beach, where she sang the blues with a bar band; along the road she also wound up in juvenile hall. Before she was 17, Childs says she had lived in an apartment in Polk Gulch in San Francisco "with three gay guys and a transvestite who, for three months, I never figured out was a man," and in the old Valentino mansion in Laurel Canyon.

She'd also figured out that she wanted to be a singer with a rock 'n' roll band after seeing Pink Floyd at the Cow Palace in 1972 while peaking on acid. "I also saw the Rolling Stones



TONI CHILDS

there around that time, but even though I really liked the blues, I was really bored by their act. It didn't say anything to me at all."

Childs formed Toni & the Movers in 1979, to "live out some kind of typical rock 'n' roll fantasy I had around then." She refers to the group's music as "more negative" than what she currently writes—a self-pressed single was titled "Bitches and Bastards"—and adds that the band was more of a live outlet than a recording unit: "I was really out there. I'd drink six kamikazes and go onstage, throw myself across the tables, dance on the counters, all that stuff."

She realized the music wasn't right at one early-'80s performance while, once again, tripping on acid. "I just realized that I hadn't written any songs that were really honest yet—that had reached deep inside me and said what I wanted to say. I didn't know what I thought yet."

So, sick of the Hollywood scene, she decided to go to London. She managed to get a publishing deal with Island Records that paid for the trip over and set her up with recording sessions on the other side. "It was great," says Childs. "I'd never been to Europe, but I knew one person over there who happened to own a recording studio. So I exchanged my cleaning services for a place to live there, and by doing that I managed to meet all kinds of musicians and people in the scene—it's much more open and challenging over there, too. The live scene is awful; you have to pay to get a gig, but the recording scene is great, very generous. For the first time in my life I was meeting people with as much drive as me—people who were pushing me."

Island tried, unsuccessfully, to sell some of Childs' compositions to Marianne Faithfull, and a few numbers were

recorded by Latin artists. When her publishing contract ran out, Childs felt she'd gained enough studio and songwriting skills to try for a recording contract. A demo of her best work from London hooked A&M.

Union is the result of Childs' odyssey through the labyrinthine confines of the music business. With its slow ambient mood, African rhythms and background vocals, and reflective lyrics about life and love sung in a deep raspy voice, it is a far cry from the record she might have made with Toni & the Movers, Berlin or Holly Knight. "I've never considered myself a folksinger," Childs warns. "All that stuff like Janis Joplin, Joni Mitchell is what people older than me were listening to when I lived in the Canyon; that's what they could relate to. I liked David Bowie and Deep Purple."

On *Union*, her influences sound more like Peter Gabriel (Gabriel guitarist David Rhodes, a London friend, played on the album) with overtones of Paul Simon's and Sting's polyethnic fusions. Lyrically, she adds, "you're getting it all. The years I've laughed, all the lives I've ever seen, all the innocent things I've done, and all the malicious ones, too...you're certainly getting my whole relationship with David Ricketts, for one thing. Now that I know how to, I'm just trying to look at each moment and let it come out as honestly as it can, in the music."

There's a certain amount of confusion expressed on *Union*: the song "Tin Drum," for instance, convincingly evokes everything Childs has been struggling with in its chorus of "What is it I think? Am I beating on a tin drum/ Marching to a cause/ When I don't know what it is I believe?" The point is, says Childs, that her confusion is now expressed. Like

continued on page 60



The exuberance of discovery is evident on every groove of Arthur Blythe's newest LP, "Back To Basics." From the earthy tones of "Autumn In New York, Parts I & II," to the passionate articulation of "Heart To Heart," to the eloquent phrasing of the Monk classic, "Ruby My Dear," which is enhanced by the brilliant addition of a string quartet, Arthur blows us all back to the future with his daring return to tradition.

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Why Now?

The Record Company Perspective

Four women, one goal: success in the music business. Apart from that shared aim, little else unites the careers of Tracy Chapman, Toni Childs, Sinéad O'Connor and Michelle Shocked. But their various ways of getting where they are now are instructive of how the record industry works.

Chapman's story is fairly straightforward. The singer started playing the Boston/Cambridge coffeehouse circuit while majoring in anthropology at Tufts University. One of her fans was another student, Brian Koppelman, whose father is Charles Koppelman of SBK Entertainment World. "The hardest part was convincing Dad to see her," Koppelman *files* recalls. But Dad did, liked what he heard, and signed Chapman to a publishing and record production deal.

Brian Koppelman recorded Chapman demoing four songs on acoustic guitar. Charles Koppelman called Bob Krasnow, chairman of Elektra Records. The former insisted the latter meet Chapman as well as listen to her demos. "I said, 'Charles, I hate to do that.'" Krasnow says. "Because if I don't like what I hear, it's real embarrassing." And he said, "No, I promise you you're gonna like this—which is what everyone says, of course."

Nevertheless, Krasnow went along with the plan. He heard the demo tape—"and it knocked me out completely. He brought Tracy in and I was totally overwhelmed by her. She was just so—real." They made a deal on the spot.

Back in March 1985, Toni Childs' manager sent a tape of *her* songs to Aaron Jacoves, now director of A&R at A&M Records. "They weren't fully developed songs," Jacoves says, "but they were really good ideas." Apart from her lyrics, he was also impressed with Childs' voice. Jacoves got in touch with her manager: several songs and demos later, Childs signed to A&M.

Jacoves, though, later found he and the singer were "butting heads"—"I was too involved," he says now—and about a year ago David Anderle stepped in for him. As head of the A&R department at the time, Anderle was concerned about the expenses Childs was running up: "a lot of studio time," he says, and such not-so-hidden costs as recording in Africa. Anderle declares himself "thrilled" with the finished album, though, even as he finds it hard to describe Childs' appeal. "Nobody was ever able to get a real fix on who this artist was," he says, "because there's elements of folk in there, there's elements of R&B....She really is unique."

Peter Lubin, vice-president of A&R at PolyGram Records, wasn't so easily convinced of Michelle Shocked's appeal. Indeed, he heard Shocked's *Campfire Tapes* album on radio last spring and "didn't like it." However, the record's strange

history—recorded on a portable cassette player around a campfire in Texas and released in England—piqued his curiosity about the artist.

PolyGram A&R rep Sue Drew caught Shocked that summer in New York and was impressed. She told Shocked's manager to see Lubin: he did the next day, and Lubin eventually attended a performance in London. He returned a convert. Although Lubin says he doesn't consider Shocked a "folk artist," he admits he "was looking around for something else to get interested in" following his success with Robert Gray and consequent immersion in blues. Ironically, Lubin considers Shocked "a country blues singer by nature," and is afraid "she's gonna get labeled 'folk singer.'"

Sinead O'Connor's long road to her current popularity underscores the patience and faith required for an A&R job. In February 1985, partners Nigel Grainge and Chris Hill of London-based Ensign Records went on a talent hunt to Dublin, Ireland. One of the local acts they saw was Ton-Ton Macoute. "They were dreadful," Grainge says, but he did admire their female singer's "great voice." About six weeks

later, O'Connor—the singer—wrote Ensign to say she had left Ton-Ton Macoute and offered to demo her own songs (which the band hadn't performed). Ensign sent her a ticket to London, and Karl Wallinger—then just leaving the Waterboys, an Ensign act—produced a four-song demo that got O'Connor



signed to the company.

"Over the course of the next 18 months," Grainge says, "we pulled enough songs together which formed the nucleus of the album." In October 1986, O'Connor entered a recording studio with producer Mick Glossop. "She became pregnant at this time," Grainge says, "and recording didn't go at all well. The vocal performances weren't good, and the feel wasn't even as good as the demos." They decided to scrap what they had and let O'Connor produce herself. Grainge: "We didn't stretch it. We used quite a cheap studio—and the recordings went very well. The whole album was completed within three months; she actually completed the album two weeks before she gave birth.

"As you can imagine, working this way is hideous financially," Grainge continues. "No matter how small the deal will be when you go into it, it takes a lot of time, and a lot of recordings have to be shelved." To alleviate cash-flow

Chrysalis staffers celebrate Sinéad O'Connor's success. Says O'Connor: "It makes fools out of them, not me."

By Scott Isler



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problems, Grainge sold Ensign to Chrysalis Records worldwide in April 1986. He claims Chrysalis' U.S. creative service departments were enthusiastic about O'Connor's music, "although I don't think at the top there was the belief that she would actually sell records."

Is it a cultural sea-change that gave O'Connor a Top 40 album? That encouraged the flowering, not to mention the signing, of women like Chapman and Childs? That (to go all the way back to last year) made a hit of Suzanne Vega's "Luka"? The A&R people involved with these new acts cringe at the notion that they're trend-followers. "Luka" was still a gleam in Vega's eye when O'Connor and Childs were signed. Lubin makes clear that he's no Vega fan, even as he wonders about the coincidence of these records appearing at roughly the same time.

"There appears to be a proliferation of female artists right now," Anderle acknowledges. He points out the cyclical nature of such a swing by mentioning the 1970s heyday of Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Rita Coolidge and Carly Simon. The current batch, Anderle adds, crosses musical barriers to include Debbie Gibson and Tiffany as well as the newcomers profiled in *Musician*.

"Maybe there is something socio-economic about it," Lubin thinks out loud. "Maybe it is the marketplace: We're responding to too many males and not enough females. I could just be a tool of the industry, a medium through which these phenomena correct themselves. But it's not why I signed Michelle Shocked. I signed her because of the artist that she is."

And Shocked says she chose PolyGram for one reason: "In a word? 'Peter Lubin.' I went in and said, 'I'll do this album but only if it's gonna be subversive.' He said, 'It can't be

subversive enough as far as I'm concerned.'"

The bad news: In April Lubin took a job at Elektra Records. The good news: At press time both labels were working toward an agreement which would allow him to continue to work with Shocked at his old label.

Of the women's movement of 1988, Shocked says, "There's certainly a strong base of support to give it a chance

Tracy Chapman: "I play a Fender F65 acoustic guitar. It doesn't have a pickup—I just mike it. I also have an Ibanez hollow-body electric that I've played onstage a few times."

Michelle Shocked plays "an old Yamaha FG180 or G180, if there's such a model. Michelle Shocked uses Albion strings!"

Toni Childs used David Ricketts and all his equipment to make *Union*. David contributed a Roland Juno 60 and Fairlight, a Roland digital piano, an E-max sampler, his Strat and his talents. Toni, too, plays a Fender Stratocaster but, says David, "Hers is white 'cause she's a girl." "I never play acoustic guitar," Childs adds. "I'm not a folksinger."

Well, you can call Sinéad O'Connor a folkie if you want—but not to her face. She plays a Takamine 12-string acoustic onstage, and an Epiphone semi-acoustic plugged into a Session amp.

to grow—that's usually what it takes—from the women's network. Women who don't necessarily require that the writer in question subscribes to their brand of thinking, but support in general the notion of women expressing themselves. This whole thing will need time to grow and develop, create its forms and traditions, but it's got that solid base.

"A lot of the men singer/songwriters are really resenting it," Shocked laughs. "They say, 'I think affirmative action's gone a little too far.'"



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THE BEST REVENGE

Sinéad O'Connor Wins on Her Terms

"I would never write something down exactly the way I would say it," Sinéad O'Connor says. "I would pretend I was talking about something else so that only I would know what I was really talking about and you would only get an idea of, the mirrored image of, what I might be talking about. I don't mean metaphoric and all that; I just mean I would never tell my secrets."

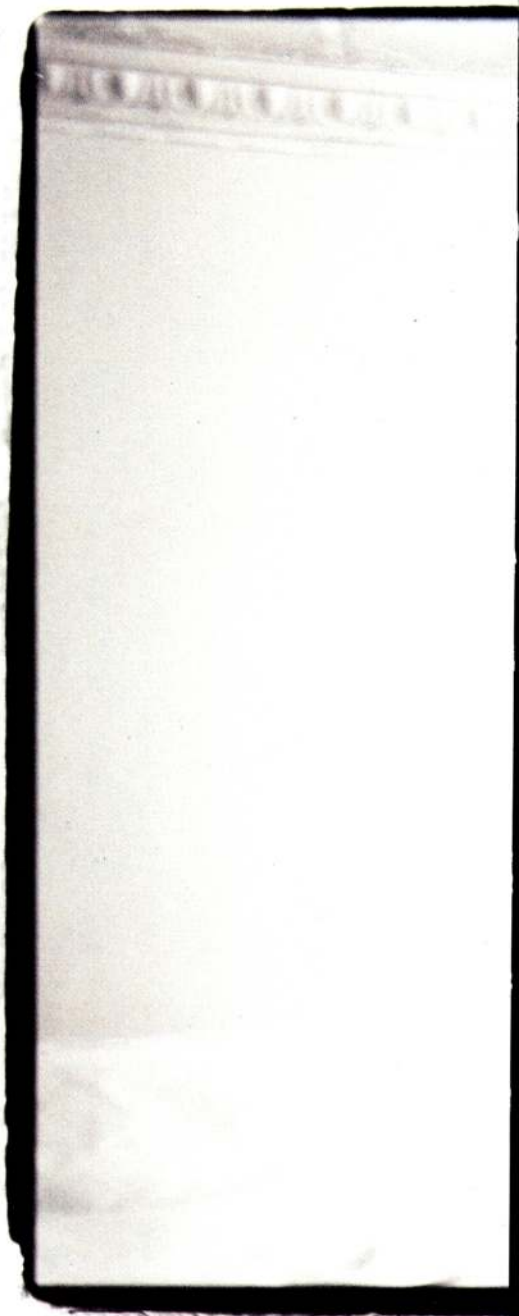
It's difficult to hear *The Lion and the Cobra*, the debut album from Sinéad O'Connor, and believe that she isn't letting us willingly into her world of love, pain, mystery and angst. O'Connor's music is painfully honest and raw. The intensity takes you for that ride on the ol' emotional rollercoaster, lifting you up, bringing you down, leaving you exhilarated and exhausted.

"I think it's a good album in the way that it's very, very diverse," O'Connor says through mouthfuls of Thai cuisine in a midtown New York restaurant. "It shows people that women don't have to be looked upon as being one type of person. That they don't have to be simply demure or simply wild. They can be all sorts of things and they can be all sorts of different people within one person. Just because a woman is

wild doesn't mean she can't be sensitive, and just because she's sensitive doesn't mean she can't be wild."

O'Connor wild? Nah, one could never guess from the worn black combat boots or her T-shirt, which shows two men fist-fucking under the caption "Fuck Your Mother!" Sensitive? No, not Sinéad O'Connor, the 21-year-old proud mother who has brought her 10-month-old baby Jake over from England to accompany her on the U.S. leg of her first tour. Her audience and her reviewers tend to promote the image of O'Connor as a mystical beauty who spends her day in lotus position, lighting incense and reflecting on the double meaning of the world. "I am sweet and innocent and charming, but

by Bill Coleman
Photograph by Laura Levine



Sinead O'Connor



'm also outspoken, wild and steamy," says O'Connor. Steamy? Anyone who's been fortunate enough to talk with her about anything besides the weather or seen her live performance could understand how steamy this sweet innocent can get.

Playing to sell-out crowds, O'Connor is (wearily) evolving into a major star. Her success is surprising to her, as is coming in direct contact with the folks who put her there. The singer is still learning to trust all these strangers who suddenly love her. "It's a constant source of amusement to me that all the people show up and a lot of people go out and buy the album," says O'Connor. "It's hard to know what to make of an American audience. I don't mean it insultingly, but they *are* different. They are far more into playing the role of the 'adoring fan' and making you into the 'adored goddess.' It's all very unreal. There's all these girls or boys who ask me for an autograph and I say yes and they go, 'Oh my God!' So in that way I don't trust an audience in America because I don't really know whether they're doing it because they think they should do it, or because they actually feel it. It's a very strange thing."

O'Connor's first taste of the live experience was opening for INXS last December for two weeks in England. "It was different in that I walked onstage and nobody had a clue who I was and nobody clapped a bit. But by the time we got to the end of the set, the audience were really happy and they really liked us. I trust that kind of reaction much more." At that point O'Connor was virtually unknown. Her success means she will probably never again take an audience by surprise. She's not losing any sleep over that.

"Of course it doesn't worry me! Jesus. If I were to sit here and say, 'Yes, it worries me,' it'd be bullshit. Of course I enjoy it; of course I really like it when people start screaming and are all happy. It confuses me but amuses me as well. I don't know what all the fuss is about. It just makes me laugh whenever I go onstage and a whole lot of people start screaming or jumping up and down or singing along. I never expected it."

Perhaps her audience feels an affinity for the intensity of her lyrics and vocal passion. In concert O'Connor swings from unembarrassed lust ("I Want Your Hands on Me") to the personal catharsis of "Troy":

*I never meant to hurt you. I swear
I didn't mean those things I said;
I never meant to do that to you
Next time I'll keep my hands to myself instead.
Oh does she love you.
What do you want to do?
Does she need you like I do?
Well you should have left the light on.
Then I wouldn't have tried, you'd never have known.**

It's compelling stuff—and it's understandable that audiences take it personally. O'Connor didn't expect that. "Because to me, I wrote some songs and I know what they're about, but nobody else knows what they're about. I don't ever think about what [the audience] is thinking. I think about what Fachtina [O'Ceallaigh, her manager] would think or what John [Reynolds, her boyfriend and Jake's dad] would think, but I don't think about the audience. Therefore I don't behave in any particular way or do anything to make the audience impressed. And I don't do anything to make the audience unimpressed. I just play the stuff.

"When we do 'Troy' I start playing the guitar and nobody has a clue what I'm doing. Then, soon as I say the first word, all these people just go 'wow' and what can I do? It just makes me break up and start laughing." "Troy" is extremely personal, based on an autobiographical incident. One imagines that reliving and recalling the tale of a love gone awry night after night could be difficult. "The way I handle doing it is that I get the lighting guy just to light a small light so that I can't see any of the audience. Then I can pretend I'm doing it to myself."

On many of her songs O'Connor uses her remarkable vocal instrument to shake up any preconceptions about her music. "Just Call Me Joe" and "Jerusalem" find O'Connor blending sensitive soul and screaming banshee. "The loudness of my vocal? That was a complete accident; it started because I used to sing Bob Dylan covers in pubs in Dublin, believe it or not. I used to get really annoyed when people would talk while I was singing so I used to just shout. I thought one day, 'This sounds quite good.' It really frightened people. Because I was quite small and had nice long hair, they would think when I came onstage that I'd be really sweet and demure. It used to really frighten them, which I enjoyed."

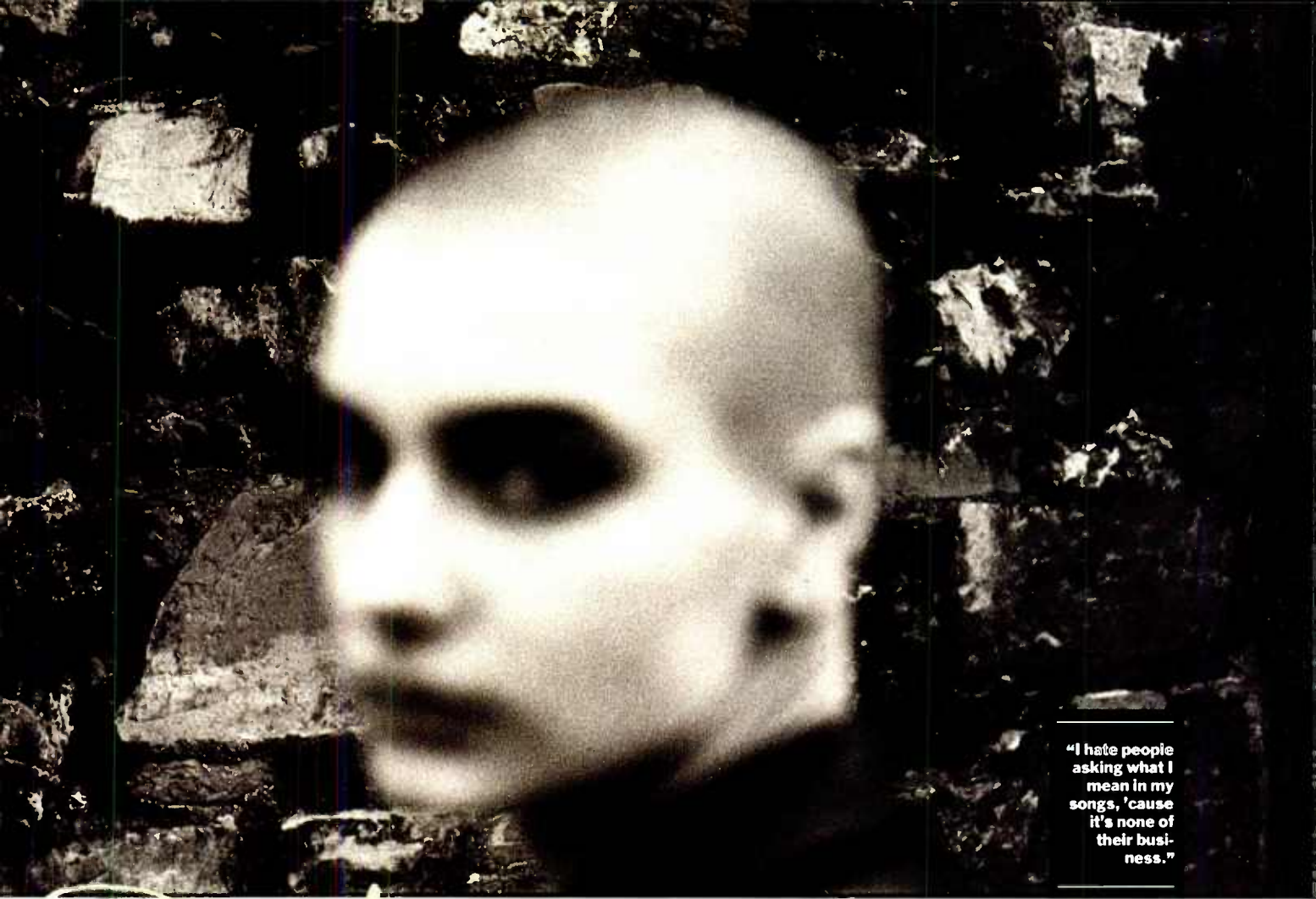
O'Connor seems to get pleasure out of not being what people think she should be. Her album's title is taken from Psalm 91, which says we'll "trample on the lion and the cobra," which to O'Connor means that overcoming obstacles and difficulties will make her the person she wants to be. "I think most of the songs on the album are about my adolescence, which wasn't a very enjoyable time for me for many different reasons, all a bit personal, really." Born and raised in Dublin, O'Connor was one of eight children. "Our parents used to sing to us all the time but it isn't what I *imagine* a musical background to be like." O'Connor was steered toward ballet class, tried voice lessons ("I didn't enjoy it very much and I didn't do very well in it") and hated school. During her early teens she was sent to a "school for difficult children" until she dropped out to front a local band called Ton-Ton Macoute, whose music she describes as "shite."

When asked how she got her big break, O'Connor deadpans, "I fucked the manager and director of Ensign Records." Really? "No. My first big break came when I was offered my record deal, which was when I was living in Dublin. Ensign Records came over to see me in this band and they thought the music was crap and the band was crap, but they thought I was wonderfully brilliant."

O'Connor wasn't planning on a career as an artist. In one interview she said, "I wanted to be a nun, then I wanted to be a dancer for a while. I always wanted to do something like act but I didn't know what...Music just suddenly became a big deal."

"I suppose I must have influences," she concedes. "I don't know who they are, though. I listened to records, but I never gave a fuck about them. I didn't start listening until I was about 16 or 17. I liked them, but I didn't care about them. I didn't rush out to record shops and buy them. I would say my mother is far more responsible for encouraging me to sing than my father was. My mother was the most influential person in my life...I think everyone's mother is."

O'Connor's mother was killed in a car crash four years ago. That was the first of a series of rapid life changes for Sinéad that included losing her virginity, becoming a mother and, now, getting famous. These quick extremes are reflected on *The Lion and the Cobra*. The album's varied style was not preconceived. "No, it's just the way it turned out. Probably because I started writing the songs years and years ago. There are songs on there that I wrote when I was 15, so



"I hate people asking what I mean in my songs, 'cause it's none of their business."

they're bound to be different from the songs I wrote when I was 17 and 18."

The first version of O'Connor's album was scrapped (see page 46). O'Connor explains, "I didn't know how to do anything, but I knew I didn't want it to sound the way it sounded. I didn't say anything for weeks and weeks because I thought, 'Well, if the record company are happy with it, they know more about this than I do, so I shouldn't say anything'; then *they* said they didn't like it. It was just shit, it was all fucking Irish, ethereal and mystical." Says O'Connor of original producer Mick Glossop: "He's a fucking ol' hippie. He wanted to make a Grace Slick sort of album." So O'Connor took over production and surprised everybody with her ability to adapt. She further surprised her record companies on both sides of the Atlantic by turning out a hit. According to her manager, Ensign's Nigel Grainge told Chrysalis president Mike Bone he should expect U.S. sales of 25,000. Now that *The Lion and the Cobra* has passed 200,000, O'Connor says coldly, "I was encouraged, such faith."

"Those songs were written under very little pressure and over a two-year period," says Ensign's Grainge of *The Lion and the Cobra*. "Right now her life isn't her own. If she goes into a nervous situation where she can't make it [a second LP] happen, there could be problems." Not that Grainge has ever inspired tons of confidence in O'Connor. "We had quite a lot of disagreements over her getting pregnant," he says. "I was worried she was going to go through such changes by having a baby: Was it the right thing? We went through a lot

of personal acrimony about this which still, in many respects, continues today. She's not the easiest person to get along with. She's very much her own person."

It's easy to sense the distance in attitude between O'Connor and the Ensign chief. America's Chrysalis Records did not initially demonstrate great understanding of the singer, either. In early '88 the record company sent out postcards with a number of celebrities sans hair as a Sinéad promotion. Then *Billboard* ran a photo of the Chrysalis staff with skull caps on. O'Connor doesn't take to this kindly: "It's embarrassing. It makes fools out of them: it doesn't really make a fool out of me. It's a stupid thing to do. It's not even a put-down: it's just if they have ever read one interview that I've done or if they have ever even listened to the record then they would know that I'm not concerned with trying to sell records and trying to be a fucking pop star and be successful and get involved in their stupid fucking male-chauvinist jokes. That's just proof as far as I'm concerned that they have no clue what I'm about and that they probably never listened to the record in the first place." O'Connor suggests that Chrysalis execs would never don Elisa Fiorillo or Pat Benatar wigs to promote their albums.

"It insults my intelligence. When they meet you they go, 'I love your album, I really like you and I really respect you.' When in fact they don't, because if they did they wouldn't treat you disrespectfully. They don't have enough respect for the artist in the first place to ask you about it. Well, they do now—since we saw the postcards and went in there and went fucking mad." O'Connor's temper has risen. "It makes me

In Boston, April '88, from sensitive soul to wild banshee in eight bars.



think that my record company are assholes—which is not a good thing to make the artist think if you want her to be on your side and want her not to try and get you for every penny she can.” O’Connor went through a similar experience with the U.K. company who now “wouldn’t dream, wouldn’t dare do anything without asking Fachtna about it.” The picture sleeve for her single “Mandinka” was touched up to add a pink shade to O’Connor’s lips. She explains, “That was the art director in the English record company who decided that a woman should have nice pink lipstick. He decided that in the original photograph the lips were too dry. He went down and asked one of the secretaries in the A&R department if she thought my lips were too dry and she said, ‘Oh yes, I do,’ so he went upstairs and retouched them. He has since been verbally punished.” New pressings of the single will feature the original photo, absent the lipshade. “The only reason things like that piss me off is because it’s complete misrepresentation of the artist and it’s not fair to do that because the artist is the one who has to answer for it. I have interviews with women who really, really like me because I don’t want to be packaged as a sex symbol, then they come back to me and say, ‘Well, how come you got pink lipstick on your record sleeve?’ or how come this, that or the other thing? And I have to say, ‘Well, that’s a whole other stupid, jerk-off, bald-man record company shit.”

O’Connor also expresses displeasure with the American album cover: “The American album cover concept was not mine, and I don’t like it and would rather have nothing to do with it, frankly, and I much prefer the English cover. It’s the same kind of picture ‘cept I’m screaming. The American album cover is too subdued and it’s not me but I do understand why they wanted it to be that way.” Chrystalis president Mike Bone lets O’Connor’s anger pass. He says simply, “Chrystalis Records has sold more copies of *The Lion and the Cobra* in North America than the rest of the world combined. Sinéad O’Connor is one of our cornerstone artists for the future.”

And finally, all her aggravations are with surfaces—the essence is the album, and on that matter O’Connor is satisfied. “In general I am very, very pleased with it in many ways,” O’Connor says. “It’s individual, but I never claimed that it’s original or something new. There are things that I think could be much better, naturally, because I’m not very

learned as a producer or anything, but next time...”

O’Connor has been performing two new songs on her tour dates that may appear on her next project. One, as yet untitled, is an explicit tale of an awkward sexual experience (somewhat of a sequel to “Hands on Me”). The other is the sexually frank “Jump in the River,” which she guesses will be released as a single after *The Lion and the Cobra* has had its run. Beyond that, the next album is as much a mystery to O’Connor as anyone else. “I don’t know what’s going to happen to me over the next few months or years. Whatever happens will be reflected on my next record.”

O’Connor finds performing the new numbers exciting. “In ‘Jump in the River,’ I say ‘fucking,’” O’Connor smiles, “and people really like it, they get real happy and smile and perk up ‘cause I said a bad word. Like it’s a really big deal. I like doing it because it kicks in the face the idea that a lot of stupid idiot journalists have that I’m this sort of ethereal Irish woman. One reason I very much like saying real crude things onstage is it tells them to fuck themselves.”

The untitled track was co-written with Andy Rourke, her bass player, who along with drummer Mike Joyce came to O’Connor’s band from the Smiths. One would think that it would be difficult for a young singer to have members of an established group under her direction. O’Connor says, “It was exciting and everything but it wasn’t so I felt like ‘How can I tell these people what to do?’ They are not intimidating; they just treat me like their sister. They’re just like anybody else, a pair of slob. The only problem is there are girls all over the place that you can’t get rid of that are taking their knickers off in dressing rooms behind the stage. You should see the collection of condoms in everybody’s bedrooms.” The band have dubbed this the “Safe Sex Tour.”

At a recent Boston press conference O’Connor shocked reporters by announcing her support for the IRA. Yet she does not discuss Irish politics in her songs. “I find it completely difficult to write about political things because I feel as if I’m being cliché. There are things that I would feel really, really strong about, but I don’t know how to write about them without it sounding like everything everybody has been saying for the last billion years. I don’t know how to write a song about it without sounding sappy and flower-childy. Because that’s not how I feel about it at all. I would rather write violently about it.”

“I’m not an admirer of folk music, of Suzanne Vega and Joni Mitchell. All that stuff is wishy-washy as far as I’m concerned...I like hip-hop.”

O’Connor has already collaborated with label-mates the Colourfield on their B-side “Monkey in Winter.” She sang and co-wrote “Heroine” with the Edge, on the U2 guitarist’s soundtrack to the movie *Captive*.

She’s not sure the collaborations were a great idea. “That’s something I have to be careful about doing because I think, accidentally, I’ve earned myself a reputation for being somebody who does things with other people. I want to wait until I’ve established myself in some small way as being an artist in my own right and then do things. I mean, there are people I’d really love to work with, but I have to be very careful and make sure the time is right. I’d like to work with Morrissey, I’d like to work with Prince as well, and I’d really, really, really love to work with Madonna.”

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Her collaboration with Edge left her with a sour taste. "That's something I'd like to forget about to tell you the truth. I've blocked it out of my mind." Why? "Because I'm tired of U2 and I'm tired of talking about U2 and I really wish that I'd never met them for the simple reason that I'm now constantly dubbed as being their protégée or being in some way linked with them, which I don't like." Many artists would give their eyeteeth to be associated with one of the most popular groups in the world. Sinéad O'Connor would not. "I find it disrespectful when people say somebody is somebody's protégée. You're saying that they don't have any talent of their own."

O'Connor would prefer not to be lumped in with any category or linked to any one band. She's been compared to Kate Bush, Patti Smith, Lene Lovich, Karen Finley, Marianne Faithfull, Suzanne Vega and the list goes on. O'Connor comments, "It bothers me because it's boring. It's a habit of journalists and reviewers. They only do it because that's the way things are done. I don't think they do it 'cause they actually think it."

QUESTIONS SINÉAD O'CONNOR HATES

Just call her Joe, but don't call her "religious," "ethereal" or "mystical."

"I hate people asking me about the religious overtones on the album, 'cause there aren't any. 'Jerusalem' is the song that I get asked about most as far as religious aspects are concerned, purely because it's called 'Jerusalem.' That's the only song on the album that is about nothing; it's just words. I swear to God. I just wrote some words that I thought sounded nice; it's the only time I've ever done it. I mean, there's one verse in 'Jerusalem' which means something, but the rest is just shit."

"I hate people asking me do I feel it's important that I'm Irish, because it's always followed by 'There are very few Irish influences on your album!'"

"I hate people asking me what I mean in my songs, 'cause it's none of their business."

"I also hate being asked, 'How do I feel being a woman in rock.'"

"Why did you cut your hair?"—I get soooo bored with that question. People ask me why did I try to make myself look ugly by cutting my hair—which is very flattering."

ANSWERS YOU'LL GET

"Yes, Bono is the father of my child."

"I'm not an admirer of folk music. I'm not an admirer of Suzanne Vega and Joni Mitchell and Joan Baez. All that kind of stuff is just wishy-washy as far as I'm concerned, and I obviously don't want to be seen as wishy-washy. I like hip-hop stuff much better than I like anything else because it's realistic and honest and really young and fresh and exciting. It just sort of *screeams* out at you. It's in its own era, there's nothing like it and there will never *be* anything like it. It's really new and wonderful." O'Connor recently enlisted the services of Brooklyn female rapper MC Lyte to add a rap to and appear in the video for the 12-inch remix of "I Want Your (Hands on Me)." Says O'Connor, "I'm really pleased to work with MC Lyte; she's *my* heroine. I absolutely adore the ground she walks on. I think it lends a certain 1987 quality to the album which sometimes it lacks." Not only will the new single feature O'Connor's favorite female MC, but the sleeve will depict her obsession—Mickey Rourke. "I love Mickey Rourke and I'm going to get him. I'd just like to fuck him; I

wouldn't marry him or anything. I told John he could fuck Nastassia Kinski if he meets her and that it would be fine with me. It's not every day you would get the chance."

O'Connor doesn't frequent clubs that much in England, which she now calls home. "In London, it's sort of old-fashioned. I think that there's a few hip-hop clubs on certain nights during the week; the rest are soul clubs and stupid disco clubs, where all these women hang out in pink wigs. It's very posey and lots of people only go to certain clubs because they're cool and George Michael might be there. I don't really like that. The thing is, I have a child. And because I work most of the time, whenever I'm not working I have my kicks with him."

With her talent and her uncensored honesty, O'Connor could very well come to mean a great deal to a lot of people. "It's something that I've only become aware of quite lately," she admits. "It's not something that I thought of at the time I was making the album. I think if somebody comes to see me and gets the idea that they can do whatever they like or don't have to be a certain way, then that's great and that pleases me. I just do what I feel like doing. I just write songs for myself, I don't do them for anybody else and I don't have a great big message to give anybody. But if somebody finds me an influence in the way that I would like to be an influence, then of course that makes me happy and really flatters me." She pauses and adds, "But I wouldn't want to be responsible for the actions of half the world's teenage girls." **M**

SHOCKED from page 41

an identity at all. I got more and more introverted, more and more angry."

Michelle made one attempt at performing her songs for her peers, at the Yamboree—a Texas fair and celebration of the principal local crop, the yam. The act on before her was the most popular girl in eighth grade singing a Stevie Nicks song. When Michelle came out to do an original tune the kids all left. Adding to Michelle's outsider feeling was her mother's prohibition on ordinary teenage pastimes like TV. "We weren't allowed to have a TV, but my stereo for some reason could pick up NBC and I'd go up to my room and find 'Saturday Night Live.' My mother caught me one Saturday night and I was grounded." The only break came in the summers when she'd go to Dallas to visit her father, who took Michelle to bluegrass festivals and encouraged her guitar-playing. Finally, at 16, Michelle ran away from her mother, moved in with her father and started school in Dallas. Then she entered the University of Texas.

"That really started the cycle of homelessness. I just needed to get through school and I'd do anything. It started with relatives and friends, then I'd get thrown out and start living with boyfriends, then as I'd get thrown out I'd start living with complete lunatics. There was a brief respite in Austin when I was living in a housing co-op, a '60s kind of student bag. I got somewhat politicized, but it was a real liberal save-the-whales kind of thing. Then I left for San Francisco and that's where things fell into place." In San Francisco in 1983 Michelle fell in with local hardcore bands, who were entwined with a squatters movement.

Michelle explains, "There was a six-story beer brewery that had been abandoned, and all the hardcore bands were living there. It was tied in with the anti-nuclear movement, too. San Francisco was ripe for that. We ran our own soup kitchen, put on free shows. It was homelessness with a very political edge." Michelle did not join any of the bands, though, as she decided being in a band compromised the true

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hardcore spirit: "Punk was merely the entertainment of the squatting culture. You could be a punk without actually playing. When evictions came down, a lot of those bands said, 'No, no, we'll go quietly—'cause our equipment's in the building.'"

Michelle drifted back to Austin and took up residence in a bookstore. She says she was having a wild time and some friends got worried she was too far out on the edge—so they contacted her mother. "It was the opportunity she'd been looking for," she says coldly. "There was every reason for her to believe I was in the throes of some devil-

worshipping cult. I'd left home when I was 16, in 1979, but in 1983 I was shocked to find she had enough authority over my life to have me committed to a psychiatric hospital in Dallas.

"It's very typical for homeless women. From society's point of view, it's a crime. It's why I'm naming this album *Short Sharp Shocked*. You know the principle of the short sharp shock? It's a behavior theory that says you don't have to change someone's thinking, just change their behavior. They'll put 'em in prison for six months and say, 'This is a taste of what you'll get next time!' With women it happens a

lot that you'll get put in the psychiatric hospital, and by the time you've been there a month you'll do anything to prove that you're sane."

How did Michelle escape? "The insurance ran out! I love that side of it. You're crazy as long as the insurance is there." Though Michelle jokes about being committed—and about three subsequent jailings for political protests—being locked up left scars. She says it was during three days in jail in Dallas that she adopted the name Shocked (get it—"shell shocked") and cut herself off from her mother forever: "Ever since she put me in the hospital I've had nothing to do with her. I don't think she knows what's become of me."

During the winter of 1984-85 Michelle lived in New York and saved money to get out of America. She finally made it to Amsterdam and settled in with the Dutch cousins of her San Francisco squatting friends. "I was never gonna come back. If I could actually survive in a foreign country with no money, taking care of myself, I couldn't be crazy."

Rambling around Europe brought Michelle to Italy, where her dreams crashed. "I was raped," she says evenly. "That kind of burned me out on the whole romantic expatriate notion. But I really couldn't live here. I find this to be a really apolitical society. Maybe there's little havens like this scene on the Lower East Side, but otherwise, this society... I just don't like it." Still, after Italy she decided in 1986 to return to Texas one last time to attend the Kerrville Folk Festival she had always loved, and to say goodbye. "This was kind of my last dance with the music that I grew up with and loved, and the people who played it best," she says. "I just hadn't found that living in New York or Amsterdam."

And at the festival a British independent record entrepreneur named Pete Lawrence heard Michelle singing around a campfire, asked to record her on his Walkman, and then took the tape back to London. The next time Lawrence found her, through an address in New York, it was to tell Michelle that she was happening in London. Michelle got there in early '87, played some shows, and *The Texas Campfire Tapes* became an underground smash.

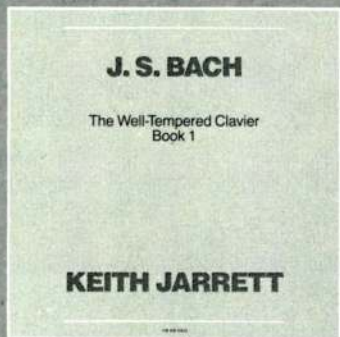
"That's the irony of it all for me," she says. "I would never have put it out. I had very definite ideas about the function of albums in the society. I see so many people putting out not only the vanity press, but also a lot of *let's be artistic and barely get by and make a*

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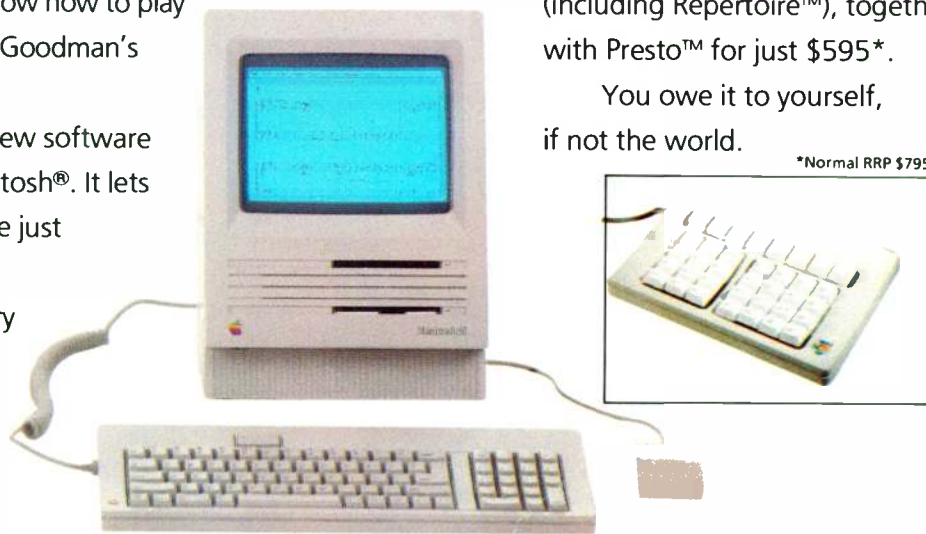
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living from these records that only elitist esoteric motherfuckers listen to anyway! But if by putting out the plastic you could make a lot more people aware of some of the environmental politics involved, then you would be justified. So when Pete wrote me and said what do you think of this? I said, sure, go ahead. I wouldn't have ever done it, and yet it is lucky it was a success. It's a lot of really positive momentum to work with."

When the major labels came knocking, Michelle Shocked knew who she was and what she wanted. PolyGram's Peter Lubin was a real fan and intro-

duced her to Dwight Yoakam producer/guitarist Pete Anderson. Shocked admits she picked some fights to test Anderson, who amazed her by proving to be a soulful, instinctive musician. "I was set for this power struggle, and he said, 'Listen, your intuition tells you that Fairlights are wrong for this album, we won't have the Fairlight.' And almost immediately upon him saying that I was like, 'Oh well then, let's have the Fairlight! It can't hurt.'" They cut the whole album in two weeks, about half of it live in the studio in the first two nights. In April PolyGram released the *Campfire Tapes* in

America. Now Michelle Shocked just has to wait for August and the release of the studio album. She knows that people who love the folkie simplicity of the first LP will be shaken by the second. She doesn't care. But she is a little concerned about the change that comes when a hobby becomes a career.

"Understand that a lot of the songs on *Campfire Tapes* and on this new recording were never intended for the studio," she says. "I'm really starting to suspect that corruption doesn't come from changing your ideas, but from your motivations changing. I was only writing songs for myself: now I'm writing songs for an album. I never had that for a motivation before, and it's reflected in my approach to writing. Now it's more like a discipline. It's work. That's okay, I don't mind. It's a compromise. But I think I'll always be nostalgic for the time when it was very innocent."

Could she preserve that innocence by holding back something from the music? "No," Michelle says, "I can't ever imagine keeping it back. I think the *Campfire Tapes* reflects completely the joy of sharing the songs with someone. And there's no such thing as a song too personal to share." ❧

CHILDS from page 44

many women, Childs has a hard time asserting herself, for fear of being dismissed as a flake or a bitch. "I have always tried to be as honest as possible with everyone I've worked with, because I don't want them calling me a bitch behind my back," she admits. She says recording *Union* helped her learn to assert herself, but she has a way to go: "I'm still really striving to have better working relationships that way. But I want to make this really clear: It's never been somebody else that's stopped me from having something happen [on the record]; it's always been me. I have the facilities. I have a mouth. And I can get mad. So it's me who's kept me from making a scene."

But for the most part, Childs had the courage to stand up for her own ideas—for her right to wait, as it were. "I'd waited this long to get the right deal," she shrugs, "so it wasn't hard to make them wait—I mean, I'd been waiting my whole life.

"I'm so glad it took this long. If I'd gotten a contract with Toni & the Movers, I think we might have had some success. But we would never have grown. You have to do your growing first, I think." ❧

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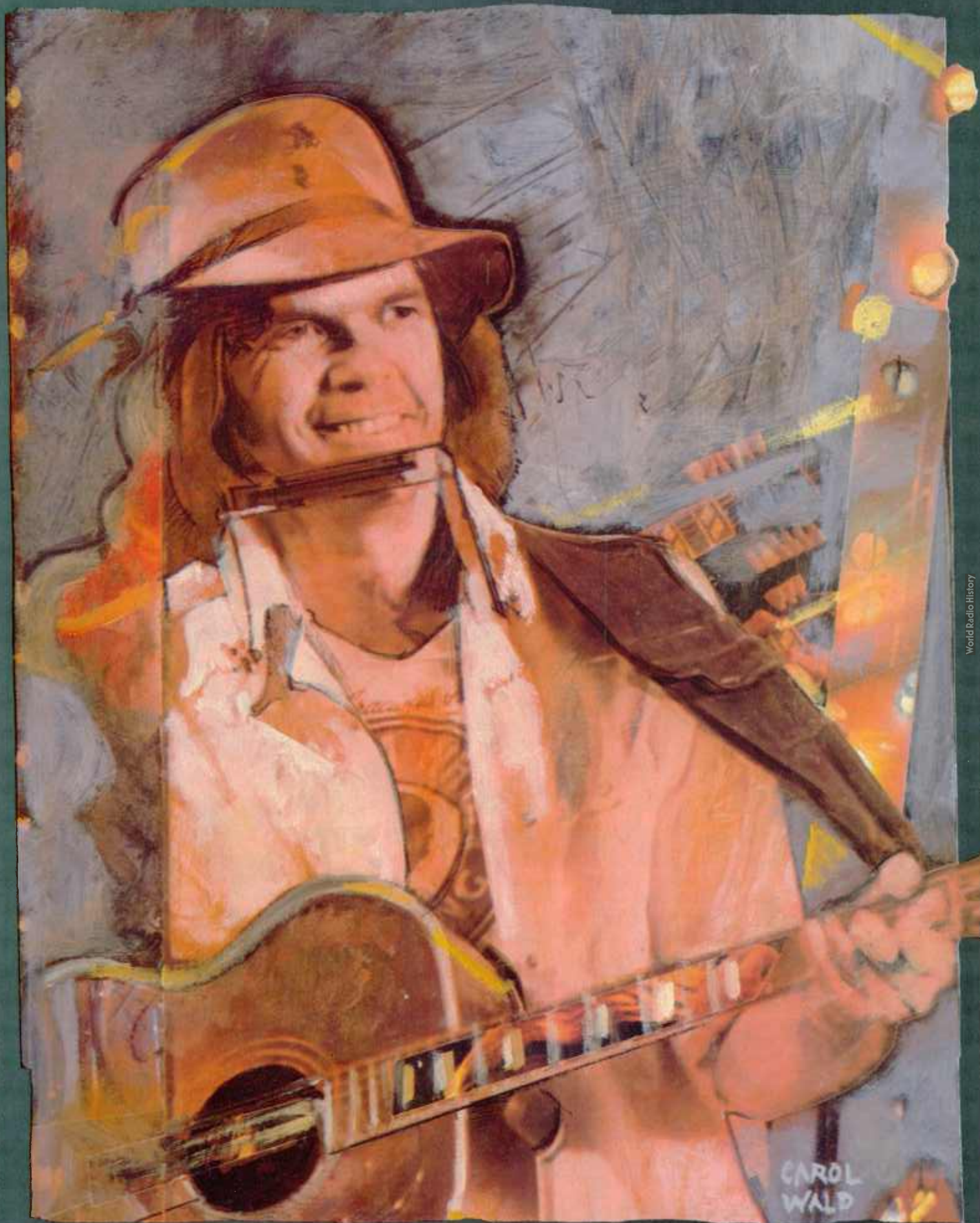
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Cruise CONTROL

Even in Los Angeles, where cool cars are as common as Taco Bells, you can't help but ogle the elegant black and chrome Caddy limo parked hard by the entrance to Barney's Beanery. Collecting antique autos seems a likely avocation for a troubadour as well-traveled as Neil Young, and in fact the Caddy is but one jewel in a pendant that includes a '34 Bentley

and a convertible Buick, a LaSalle, even a Rolls Royce station wagon. Experienced roadsters provide a comfortably rolling environment for writing songs, or for transporting a modest entourage that on this evening includes Neil's wife of 10 years,

Neil Young's Lonesome Drive

by Mark Rowland

Pegi, his engineer Niko Bolas, and his veteran driver, identified only as Wog. It certainly boasts more legroom than the booths at Barney's, where this quartet is currently scrunched.

Barney's is a local institution, a place where you can drown your thoughts in a few hundred brands of beer, or survey a bible-sized menu that emphasizes the quantity if not quality of choices available in the field of diner cuisine. Back in the '60s it was a favored watering hole for a musical community that included the Byrds, the Doors and the Buffalo Springfield, but Young isn't here for sentimental reasons. "I used to come here with the Springfield," he recalls, "but it's not what it was then. I just figured there'd be a lot of noise, and we could be part of it." He smiles, and adds wryly, "I don't really fit here any more than I do anywhere else."



That remark is equally applicable to Young's career, which has taken more twists and confounded more expectations than Jesse Jackson's. The first half, culminating in the stunning three-record retrospective *Decade*, displayed a vision broad enough to encompass *Harvest's* soothing popcraft and the chilling rock noir of *Tonight's the Night*. Young's recent journeys have been, if anything, more jagged. Following the gorgeous folk stylings on *Comes a Time*, Neil embraced the punk ethos with his *Rust Never Sleeps* album and tour, and since then has plumbed such diverse sources as gabardine-era rock 'n' roll (*Everybody's Rockin'*), computronics (*Trans*), sledgehammer rock (*Reactor*) and are-you-ready-for-the-country narratives (*Old Ways*). Some of his non-musical maneuvers have raised eyebrows, too; the man who wrote "Ohio" in the wake of the 1970 Kent State massacre allowed 10 years later that he'd become a qualified fan of Ronald Reagan.

For all that, certain aspects of Neil Young's persona stay remarkably constant. Dressed in a broadbrim felt hat with an Indian band, shaggy hair and enough patches on his jeans to recall the back cover of *After the Gold Rush*, the character ordering the turkey plate at Barney's is about the only guy who still looks like he might have been there in 1969. More to the point, Young's music, for all its variety, never seems to lose its emotional spark. He writes songs for himself and for those who'll listen, not to tease a demographic. It's the kind of stubborn integrity that prompted Neil's previous employer, Geffen Records, to sue him for being deliberately uncommercial. The result is a body of work that, virtually alone among his peers from the '60s, still crackles with the sound of surprise.

"I haven't stayed strong and committed to one 'form' of music, which most songwriters do," Neil points out. "So I've been able to expand my life span. I have a very strong survival instinct. As soon as I start feeling boredom I try to find something else."

Young is presently absorbed by the blues. The 10 original blues songs he wrote for his new album, *This Note's for You*, are performed by a 10-piece band, appropriately dubbed the Blue Notes, that he's about to take out on tour. The dectet includes Crazy Horse guitarist Frank Sampedro on keyboards, Albert King alum Rick Rosas on bass, six horns and some of the happiest, foot-stomping arrangements Young has constructed in years. As the sole guitarist, Neil shows a bluesman's instinct for concise, piercing lines, but the music here isn't just another jam; ballads like "Twilight," with its dynamic shifts and subtly layered brass arrangements, combine raw feeling with more sophisticated compositional textures.

The album's release also marks Young's return to Reprise Records, a turn of events he welcomes with almost palpable relief. Perhaps by way of celebration, the Blue Notes are about to embark on a brief tour of old ballrooms, "places where the big bands used to play," Neil notes proudly, and where fans can order a drink and pound the parquet to the Blue Note beat. Their first gig, unannounced, occurred in a small Mexican restaurant in the L.A. suburb of Montebello. "We were a big hit there," he enthuses. "In fact, the concert experience rose to new heights during our last song, as people came up while I was playing, and this guy took Polaroids and sold them back to

the people for five dollars a shot. Middle-aged Mexicans playing air guitar—he, we live on things like that. That's what I'd like to project now," he continues more seriously, "a pride in playing good music, in the people that come to see me; the fact that they're still here, and I'm still here, and that the whole thing is worthwhile."

Away from the stage, Young tends to keep a veil around his private life. Always something of a rustic, he lives on a ranch of several hundred acres in the hills southeast of San Francisco with Pegi and their two children, Ben and Amber. Zeke, Neil's oldest child, is from an earlier relationship with actress Carrie Snodgrass.

A few years ago, however, Neil's father, a well-known Canadian journalist, wrote an illuminating book titled *Neil and Me* (McClelland and Stewart), about their relationship. Among other things, it revealed in detail Neil's many medical trials—from polio to epilepsy—and the challenges faced by Neil and Pegi when their young son Ben was diagnosed as a victim of cerebral palsy. The pair spent up to 16 hours each day leading Ben through a specialized program of exercises. Neil gave up music entirely for two years. Ben's progress has been significant but slow, the challenge for his parents unyielding.

Pegi now runs a school for children with similar handicaps. Neil has resumed his career, of course, but says that "in essence it took about six years to recover the [musical] intensity from taking two years off. Because we'd focused so heavily on our son and helping him achieve his potential—which we still do, but not to the utter extreme that we stop living the rest of our lives. So it did interfere with part of the natural flow that I had going. But in a lot of ways, it's responsible directly for the strength I have today. When you see a little guy who can't talk, or walk, or communicate—well, he can communicate now, that's what we're working on—but you see him working so hard, who has so many things to overcome, it makes you realize how small life's problems really are.

"So you don't get stopped," he says softly. "Nothing stops me. Because I know what it's like to fight, to make an uphill battle. We've seen someone really fight for survival."

"Don't get the wrong idea," Pegi chips in. "It's been very rewarding too."

"Oh yeah," Neil says, brightening. "He's got a great little smile, that's what keeps us going. And we became much more committed people, really, because of him. He's a special needs

"I liked the *Tonight's the Night* guy and I liked the *Everybody's Rockin'* guy. I think they may be related—like Jerry Lee Lewis and Jimmy Swaggart."

child, and he's a great little guy, and I miss him when I'm not around, just like with any other kid. He's made us a lot stronger, and it's really that simple."

Neil's manner is friendly, direct, alert. He looks his 30 years, but he also seems healthy and fit, the result in part of thrice a week workouts. "I got to the point where I was kind of emaciated," he admits. "My guitar was getting too heavy to pick up, and my arm was hurting and my hand was numb. All kinds of things were going bad with my body. Plus, Ben can't walk, and he's getting heavier, and I don't ever want my wife to have to pick him up if she's not able to. So I just had to take my body more seriously.

"I sort of dragged it around the first 38 years of my life, you know," Neil Young laughs. "Now it's helping to carry around what's left of my mind."

MUSICIAN: *What inspired you to put together a blues band?*

YOUNG: It just started happening on the tour with Crazy Horse last year. I was getting just a little tired of doing it, so I started working on an acoustic set. Really, the idea came from trying to find a transition to play between the two, which were both things that I'd done before. I thought I'd like to play a little set of just some "down" things, and it got so I was looking forward to that, every night.

And I always remembered Mike Bloomfield saying to me that I should play and sing the blues because it seemed so natural to him for me to do; Paul Butterfield more or less told me the same thing. It kept coming back to me what they said. And the more I played the more I loved it.

I wrote "This Note's for You" on that tour and people were digging it. And I wrote a couple of other songs, "Don't Take Your Love Away" and "Big Room," that aren't on this album, but they're real good songs of that type. When I got home that's all I wanted to do. I got to play my guitar but I didn't have to be a guitar hero.

MUSICIAN: *You felt a pressure to be a guitar hero?*

YOUNG: It's the consciousness of playing the guitar in a stadium situation; it's a different way of playing. Not so much playing more from your soul, 'cause I always try to do that. But with rock 'n' roll you got to throw the notes against the back of the building. You have to reach the people in the gray seats. With the blues, you feel you're reaching out even further, but you don't actually have to project the guitar like a missile.

MUSICIAN: *And solos aren't as central to the spirit of the music.*

YOUNG: They're just as important to me with the Blue Notes, but you don't have to go for that mass power assault. I don't think there are blues guitar "heroes," you know, though there are great blues guitarists.

MUSICIAN: *Your approach is more spare with the Blue Notes.*

YOUNG: The real difference is, I dropped my pick, and started only playing with my fingers—and that's much more expressive, you know? When we started practicing to play the Bay Area shows that we did with the Blue Notes, I noticed that I got off a lot more if I played really quiet, just with my Silvertone amp and no pick, so I could really feel everything. I'm able to express myself here. I don't have to be loud, don't have to be a big powerful thing, and I could just play the blues.

MUSICIAN: *Blues is so much the music of accrued experience. Could that be why it's taken you this long to come around to it professionally?*

YOUNG: I think so. I've played many kinds of music, as you probably know, and I think country music and rock 'n' roll are great derivatives of the blues. In high school I always loved Jimmy Reed, he was one of my favorites. And John Lee Hooker. Bruce Palmer in the Buffalo Springfield used to play these great blues things—he's one of the best blues guitar players I ever heard. And then Bloomfield, Butterfield—I always loved those two guys and the *East-West* album—so it was always there. Whenever I wasn't doing anything professionally, that is what I'd do. It grew into being what I loved.

MUSICIAN: *So many songwriters will unify an album with an emotional theme. With you the emotions are wide-ranging and the unifying theme often a generic kind of music, at least lately. Is that by accident or design?*

YOUNG: I don't give a lot of thought to it, but I think it's by design. Because I approach each album like I think an actor would approach a character. I try to immerse myself in whatever it is I'm doing, and be singular in that way. Each album to me is a different guy. But the Blue Notes—I think this guy is going to be around for a while. This guy is too comforta-

ble, he's not going to go anywhere now. I was searching for something that felt good to me for a long time, and this feels real good.

MUSICIAN: *Are these old songs or fairly new?*

YOUNG: "Sunny Inside" I wrote in 1982. That's the only song on the record I didn't write during the evolution of the record. All the others I wrote on Pegi's guitar. She has this old Gibson that she carries with her everywhere, and we've been married for 10 years, so you know, we're very close. [laughs]

MUSICIAN: *You're allowed to borrow her guitar?*

YOUNG: Yeah, and it feels just like her! [laughs] When she's not around I have that. So I wrote them all on her guitar—that's what holds them together.

"One Thing" and "This Note's for You" came on the tour last year. "Coupe de Ville" I wrote in a hotel during the sessions; "Life in the City" I started writing during the winter just before the sessions started. "Twilight" I wrote in the car on the way to the sessions. "Married Man" I wrote in the Caddy limo, on Highway 5—I like to be in it, I take it everywhere.

MUSICIAN: *You seem to write a lot of songs in your cars. Are particular cars better for eliciting songs than others?*

YOUNG: I think old cars make me feel good. Seems like the back seat of that limousine is a good place to write songs.

"Ten Men," "Downhill Slide"—which is a B-side of all the singles now—"Married Man," "Hey Hey," I wrote them in the car. I wrote "One Thing" in the bus. All in the last eight months before the record. I have had all these Blue Note songs from before, that I've been writing since high school. There's 11 others that we performed in the Bay Area with Bill [Talbot] and Ralph [Molina] from Crazy Horse. Then I changed rhythm





"There's certain feelings that you don't talk about, you can only sing 'em. And you can't sing about them directly, only around them."

With Crazy Horse it's always been like that. Once we got it down we could come back to it and nail it. But this kind of music just didn't flow with them. It was my mistake though. They're great musicians in their own way; I just misused them.

MUSICIAN: *Wasn't it hard for you to drop the other members of Crazy Horse from this project once you began with them?*

YOUNG: Well, I've changed my musical styles over the years, and they've come and gone. But it *was* difficult, because I'd wanted to work with them. I gave 'em a real chance, I mean, I chose them first. I never want to tell a guy that I'd rather work with someone else, or just not call them when it comes to playing—I'm chickenshit about most of that stuff anyway.

Because they are great players. What am I gonna say, I don't want to play with you? I do want to play with them, just not this stuff. If I want to play with someone I call them up, and if I don't want to, I don't call them. So I called them, and then I didn't.

MUSICIAN: *It must be frustrating for them.*

YOUNG: Oh absolutely, but let's face it, there's records of mine they would have sounded ridiculous on. Even I sounded ridiculous on some of them. [laughs]

MUSICIAN: *You do have Frank Sampedro in the band, but he's playing keyboards instead of guitar. It recalls a similar gambit you pursued with Nils Lofgren on After the Gold Rush.*

YOUNG: When the Blue Notes were ready to play, Frank had broken his hand after a workout. Frank and I lift weights together; this time he was all jacked up, I guess, and he swung around and hit his hand on the wall and

broke two fingers, so he couldn't play guitar. But we never let anything like that stop us [laughs]. So he started playing organ. There's no real need for a rhythm guitar on most of the songs anyway. This is the way I envisioned it.

MUSICIAN: *Do you prefer having a keyboard player who isn't so much of a technical whiz?*

YOUNG: Oh yeah, I like that better. Guys who know a lot of riffs and know how to get around on the keyboard usually don't turn me on as much. With one notable exception, Spooner Oldham, who I think is a great organist. I often think what it would be like for him to be in the band if Pancho [Sampedro] was just playing guitar, but it's not economically possible. Frank is not as accomplished as Spooner, but they both have the taste to play in a very simple way. "Ten Men" has a great organ part, it's really primitive, but if you had a bunch of blues riffs in there it would kill it. You just have to hear the organ and then *not* hear it. He has a feeling and understanding of those musical textures, not "Hey, I know all these chords."

If you listen to Howlin' Wolf's records, you don't hear any riffs. You hear a rhythm groove, and very understated melodic hooks. You can almost hear him saying to someone who tries something else, "Listen man, I don't know *what* you're playing, but it doesn't do a thing for me." His stuff is so beautiful the way he puts it together. He knows what he wants and the people who play with him better do it that way.

sections and wrote new songs. But I want to do the other songs in the live shows, and try to do a live Blue Notes album of new material, because the Blue Notes are very good live.

MUSICIAN: *It sounds like you wrote a lot of songs on the album while you were putting the band together. Are you normally that confident of your ability to come up with new songs?*

YOUNG: Once I got on a roll I knew everything would be okay. I put myself in a situation where I'd write a song in the morning, come in in the afternoon and we'd try it out. Sometimes we cut it that day, sometimes the next. I had my boat in L.A., in the Marina, so I'd go home each night, light the fire in the pot-bellied stove, get with Pegi's guitar, play a few things, then go to sleep, wake up in the morning and start playing again—usually I'd have it by then. I wrote "Can't Believe You're Lyin'" in five seconds or something. It happened so fast it was like "wow." We tried it a few different ways with the guys, and got it the next day on the second take.

Because these guys can handle the job. There's no problem like somebody smoking so much grass they can't handle the changes, which is okay with a three-chord rock 'n' roll thing, but I was throwing more curves than usual. And it was real exciting for me when I threw the changes and they got 'em. I didn't have to spend a whole bunch of time teaching people their instruments, to do stuff. Which has happened several times in the past.

MUSICIAN: *Will you include non-blues songs in your concerts?*
YOUNG: We're thinking of doing "Mr. Soul" and maybe "On the Way Home," and—hey, the sound of that turkey hitting the table sounded good, didn't it?

MUSICIAN: *It seems to have real weight.*

YOUNG: It reminds me of this turkey sandwich I had once on the road—remember that sandwich, Wog? Wog drives the bus. Remember I was lying on my face in the green grass of the rest area, barfing? That was a bad one—whenever I have a turkey sandwich I think of that. Let's hope this one ain't like that.

MUSICIAN: *You're not easily dissuaded.*

YOUNG: No, I keep goin' back.

MUSICIAN: *"This Note's for You" has a fairly pointed message for corporate sponsors.*

YOUNG: Just kind of came out like that. For months I heard this line—"I ain't singin' for Pepsi, I ain't singin' for Coke." And I was riding along in the bus, and I was singing it to myself, and thinking, "I like that." Then when I thought of the line, "This note's for you," I laughed my ass off. For miles and miles. It was just me and Wog and the bus, and I'd say, "Listen to this," and just laugh like hell. And just sit back with Pegi's guitar and groove along down the road. And go, "What's that dog, you know that Budweiser dog, what's his name? We gonna get him in here too." That was a lot of fun.

MUSICIAN: *You're not worried they'll get on you for appropriating their hook?*

YOUNG: Let 'em attack me. They'll never get me. You know, I may not be playing the Miller Hi-Life concert series [laughs] but—maybe I will. The thing about those things is that it makes you think that the group is actually endorsing the product. Miller beer, you know? That's not true. We're working for the promoter and the promoter is being paid by them. I have nothin' to do with those guys, I'm just doing my job. And these people are hornin' in on the other end. That's all right. But I don't want anyone to misunderstand, which they could easily do, seeing the name on the ticket and everything.

I've been drinking Budweiser onstage for years and they never gave me anything. Why the hell should I give something for them? [laughs] They gave me a guitar, but I won't play it in front of people. It looks like a Budweiser label. But I play it at home. It's a good blues guitar. I think it would be really '80s if one of those heavy metal bands got some brand of condoms for a sponsor. "When we're on the road..."

MUSICIAN: *I read the book your dad wrote about you and was curious about your reaction to it.*

YOUNG: Well, what would you think if your dad wrote a book about you? [pause] I learned a lot about myself that I didn't know, because I saw myself through his eyes. And that was a real learning experience—to see myself as a kid now that I'm a parent. Pegi and I look at them and see how my dad was looking at me. I enjoyed reading the book.

MUSICIAN: *Learned about yourself in what way?*

YOUNG: What my father and my mother were thinking when I got polio. Little things, personal things.

MUSICIAN: *You both share a restless nature, but it seems as if your dad's manifested itself a lot in personal relationships, and with you it's channeled through music.*

YOUNG: I think I owe the fact that I'm so happy at home and have such a beautiful family to my music. To a great degree. I think if I didn't have my music I would be a really crazy person, and not able to hold everything together. It's a way of life, and my family understands me and what I go through with my music, and so it's possible for us to stay together. The kids support me and Pegi supports me. She's gone through all these changes with me, you know. All of a sudden when I was telling everyone I was never going to play rock 'n' roll again, and only gonna play country music... She's really been with it all the way through.

MUSICIAN: *I think a lot of the music you've made in the past few years is concerned with the importance of responsibility and commitment. Do you agree?*

YOUNG: Yeah, I would. I feel that my commitment to country music, when I was going through that phase, had a lot to do with that. I felt country music was really a family thing. It represented family values in a lot of ways, and real-life stories of families. That's why I related strongly to it, and I still do. Country music is still a big part of my life even if it's not a big part of my music at this time. I don't think country and blues are that far apart. It's two different colors of the same thing.

MUSICIAN: *As you get older, is it more of a challenge to keep a creative charge?*

YOUNG: People get old; sometimes they get tired, and they don't change. It takes strength to change. Sometimes when people get older they don't change because they lose that energy. I have lots of energy. It's definitely energy—that's all there is. Either you take care of yourself and you keep your



"I would like to produce Frank Sinatra next. He's great! I've asked Reprise about it. It's been received with stony silence so far..."

energy healthy, or you just shit it away and it's all gone and you don't change and you become a relic. It's pretty simple.

MUSICIAN: *You claimed about a year ago that you were working on a new Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young record that would blow away what the group's done before. How's that coming?*

YOUNG: That says it. I still stand behind that. We're working on it right now. I don't know when it's going to be finished. But it's going very well, and we've recorded eight songs so far. But I don't know if we're going to record 10 songs, or 30.

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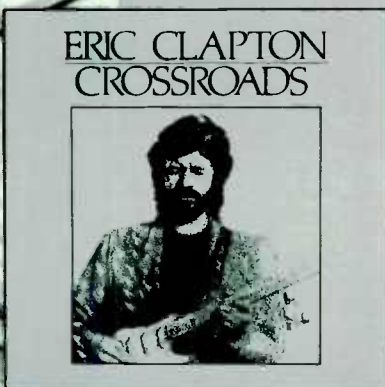


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World Radio History

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We're between the variables right now. I know we're trying to make it our best. I think CSN&Y is a different thing than Crosby Stills & Nash. It's not just me and Crosby, Stills & Nash, it's not an addition. It's a different thing. On the first CSN&Y record I was only on four or five cuts. This one I'll be involved on every song and my presence will be felt strongly. And my commitment to making the record is very strong.

MUSICIAN: *It sounds like you don't feel there's really been a CSN&Y record to this point.*

YOUNG: In a lot of ways that's true.

MUSICIAN: *Is it true that you challenged David Crosby to get straight for six months as a condition for your involvement?*

YOUNG: I wanted him to get straight, no matter what happened. But it didn't matter what I wanted, it had to be what he wanted. Luckily, they put him in jail and gave him enough time to think about it, and put him in solitary confinement, gave him the opportunity to come to grips with himself, which he did. And he's able to do a great thing. He's very strong now, and that's great to see. But even though I said, "I won't do CSN&Y until you're straight," that had nothing to do with Crosby being straight. He did it on his own.

MUSICIAN: *But that was an attempt to prod him in that direction.*

YOUNG: Everybody had a different way of trying to make it happen.

MUSICIAN: *How are you relating musically to each other now?*

YOUNG: I bring a lot of my kind of production technique, my kind of musical balances. We're dealing with guys who can really sing. And whatever people say about these guys—and let's face it, their lives have been like an open book for people to rip the pages out of—there's a lot of soul there. I'm trying to make sure everyone hears it, because it's always been partly, or completely, covered up, depending on how you look at it.

MUSICIAN: *How receptive have they been to your influence?*

YOUNG: Well, we are doing this together. But in another way, I am coming in and doing what I want and not laying back for a minute. The only time I stop is when they all look at me and say "no!" It's been a long time since they made their last record, and I've made, I think, almost 30 records. So it's something I know how to do. My digital techniques with my crew are very advanced. We bring a lot of savvy and experience. However, whatever I've tried to do in the past has been like audio-vérité; I just want to capture the moment. Rather than build this massive monster for everybody to be so impressed with—that's not my job.

Niko and I would like to do Frank Sinatra next. He's great! We've asked Reprise about it. It's been received with stony silence so far, but we're reaching out our hands. A modern record with Frank, and maybe the Blue Notes. Who's to say he can't make a contemporary record that goes right up to the top of the chart and grooves like "Ten Men"? Maybe he can be refreshed with a couple of young pups like us. [laughs]

MUSICIAN: *As a singer and soloist your style has always been very direct, even raw. As you grow more sophisticated as a musician, does that become more difficult to achieve?*

YOUNG: I'm just more experienced, not more sophisticated. Nothing has changed. On *After the Gold Rush* I started singing and playing live. And really, it's the same today. There are a

few exceptions, like *Trans*, obviously—you can't vocode live very much—but there's no overdubbing on most records. It's like a live record with no audience.

MUSICIAN: *On your last album with Crazy Horse, Life, you used three of your oldest associates, David Briggs, Tim Mulligan and Jack Nitzsche, as co-producers. For someone with such a strong will, I'm curious about their role.*

YOUNG: Briggs has been after me for years to perform without Crazy Horse and find new people. I'd always say, "I can never be comfortable with anybody else; they know who I am and what I'm doing, they're solid." So he'd work with us, but after the sessions he would just get my performance and that's what he would feature in the mix. There are a lot of songs on *Zuma* that are obviously like that, like "Barstool Blues," where my performance is the performance of the song, and the guys were just learning it.

MUSICIAN: *A few years ago Jack Nitzsche was charged with assaulting Carrie Snodgrass. Wasn't it hard to work with him after that?*

YOUNG: Oh, that was total bullshit! None of that stuff happened. She made it all up. Had nothing to do with reality at all, absolutely nothing. I love Jack, he's always been a friend of mine. He's a wonderful artist and a great human being.

MUSICIAN: *Did she do that to get at you in some way?*

YOUNG: I don't know, I wasn't over there. Thank God.

MUSICIAN: *It's interesting that you titled that record Life, and composed a kind of suite about global politics on one side. Were you feeling somewhat sheltered from spending so much time at the ranch and away from music—was that your way to re-enter the world?*

YOUNG: To relate to the world, you mean? I think what you're describing is probably what I was going through when I wrote the songs. I don't know what else to say. I think you're right.

MUSICIAN: *What made you want to do that?*

YOUNG: I don't know. I watch TV, I travel around the world... [laughs] I get the same input as everyone else. *Landing on Water* was really claustrophobic, really personal, inside—not very happy. *Life* is more like the news of the day. But I didn't start off thinking I would do this—there was no concept.

MUSICIAN: *How did you put together "Around the World," which begins with such a simple sentiment but ends up as musically complex as "Strawberry Fields"?*

YOUNG: I wrote it in Daytona Beach when I was real sick with the flu—I had to cancel five dates. And I wrote that song when I woke up.

MUSICIAN: *"Coup de Ville" seems centered around one image: a guy waking up in a room and hitting the wall.*

YOUNG: Things weren't working out for him. [laughs] I felt sorry for the guy.

MUSICIAN: *Is it hard for you to adopt a character like that, now that your own life is more secure?*

YOUNG: It's not hard. That's part of being a writer, to put yourself in other people's places and draw on your life's experiences. Just keep your eyes open. Your mind is working all the time. Out it comes.

I wrote that song in about 10 minutes. I woke up and I was in the room... I started writing the song and I came to that line. I

I have a different amp. I'm not using my Fender Deluxe and my Magnatone, which I used for so many years. I switched over to the Sears Silvertone, with six 10-inch speakers. It's an interesting amp because it has one preamp, but two different power amps, one for each set of three speakers, and there's no independent controls. So it's a great punchy little sound, you know? It's not very loud, but it does have those six speakers, which it proudly proclaims right on the front of the amp. I bought them from Larry Craig, who collects instruments, about 10 years ago, and I never really used 'em. But out here in the country we have a power problem sometimes; because of the wind we'll have a brownout, where the power will go way down. So I don't like to bring out my good amps. About five months ago we were practicing, and we decided to try the Silvertones. When the power came back on the music sounded so good, I thought, 'Hell, I play totally different with this thing...' So that's the new sound. I still play Old Black though."

BLUES POWER

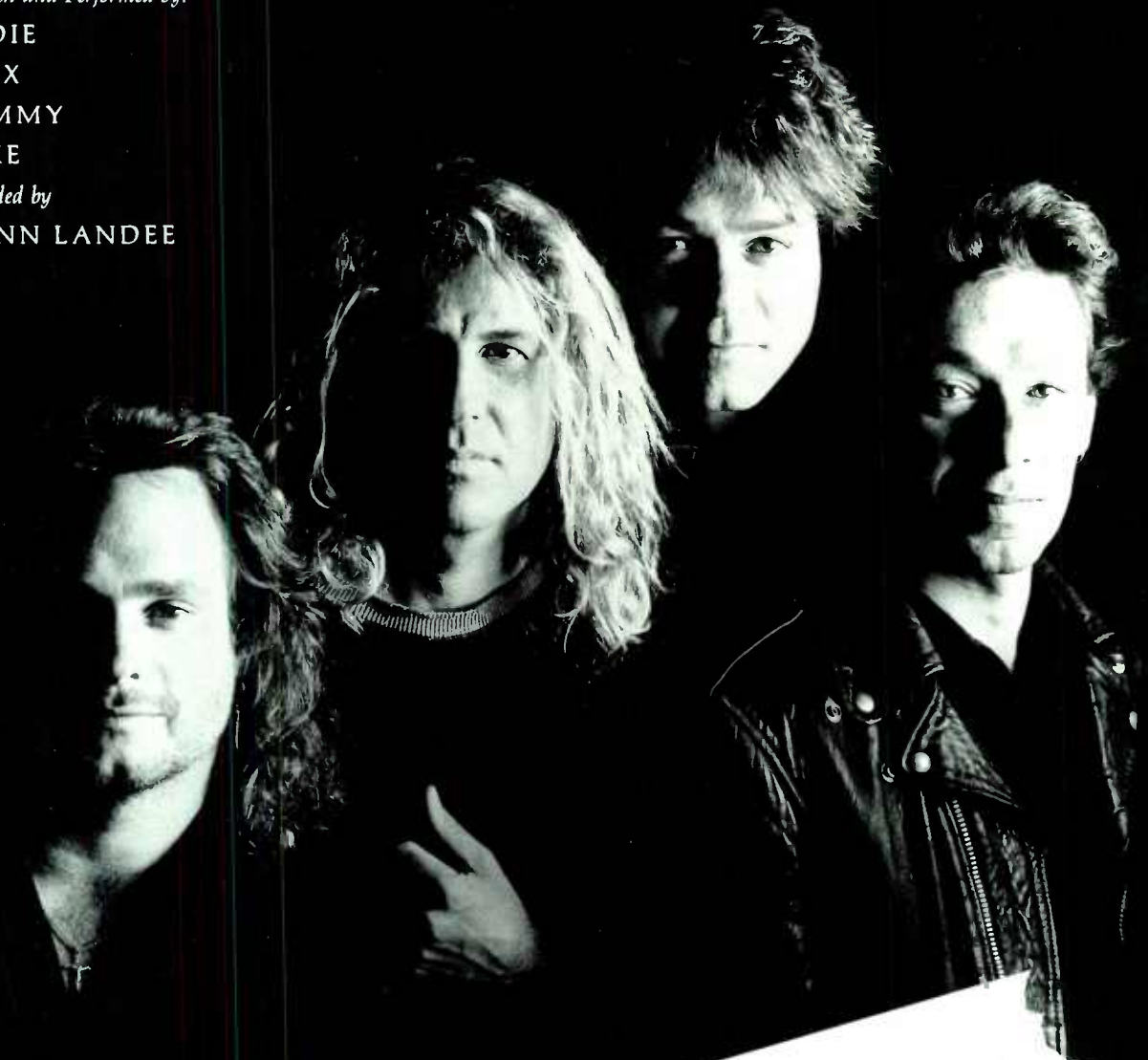
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World Radio History

NEIL YOUNG

couldn't figure out what the line was. And I'd been working really hard for a number of weeks, and I was very tired, I hadn't been sleeping that well. And I was up early and writing the song. And breakfast came, I started eating, and then I started feeling dizzy and really sick. And I thought to myself, "I'm hitting the wall," you know? Shit, I can't take any more, I've pushed myself so hard, I should go home. Then I went back to bed and started to go to sleep. And then I realized—"that's it." I hit the wall, that's what it was. And I was right back up and finishing the song. It was over before I remembered that I had gotten dizzy and felt sick. So then I went back to sleep. That's how those things happen. There's no method.

MUSICIAN: Yeah, well, a lot of people who felt sick would not get out of bed to finish a song.

YOUNG: But the thing is, when I'm sick, when I have a temperature or feel ill, that's usually the most creative period for me. Once in 1968, back in my house in Topanga, I wrote "Down by the River," "Cowgirl in the Sand" and "Cinnamon Girl" when I was sick. In one afternoon.

MUSICIAN: You must have had a pretty high temperature.

YOUNG: It was a high fever, yeah. 103. But that doesn't happen very often. You gotta be right there.

MUSICIAN: You must have some ambivalence about illness.

YOUNG: Well, I don't write a song every time I'm sick. But something opens up. Once I start writing a song I never think about anything else. I don't ever think, "Is this a cool song?" or anything until I'm finished. If you get an idea for a song and somebody calls you up and you start talking on the phone or you go out for pancakes or talk to a guy about buying a car—well, you're just kidding yourself. That's not doing it. I stay with it till it's done. And I never work it out. That's taboo. I

don't think, "Oh, I've heard this rhythm 150 times before"—that's too bad! I don't know why I'm playing in that key or that rhythm or whatever. But if I'm open and go with it, then a few ideas come, and you start laughing, "This is cool, this is cool..." and you're singing away, you write a few words—and pretty soon you've got something new. Ten minutes ago you're thinking, "Why am I playing this piece of shit?" and now it's "What a great song!" There's no way to explain it, really. The thing is not to stop. And not be self-conscious about it. People don't want to hear what I think a cool song is. They want to hear a song that I wrote.

MUSICIAN: In a song like "Twilight" you juxtapose a joyful lyric with a musical mood that's sorrowful, poignant.

YOUNG: There's certain feelings that you don't talk about, you can only sing 'em. And you can't sing about them directly, only around them. And it comes out "poignant." It's good we have music, otherwise we'd only have those words.

MUSICIAN: Do you find yourself becoming more of a reporter, less autobiographical over time?

YOUNG: I think it's presented that way more now. You can only do so much about yourself. It wears thin, and becomes less valid, the more there is. So I guess I evolved out of that to a great degree, though it's still part of my music.

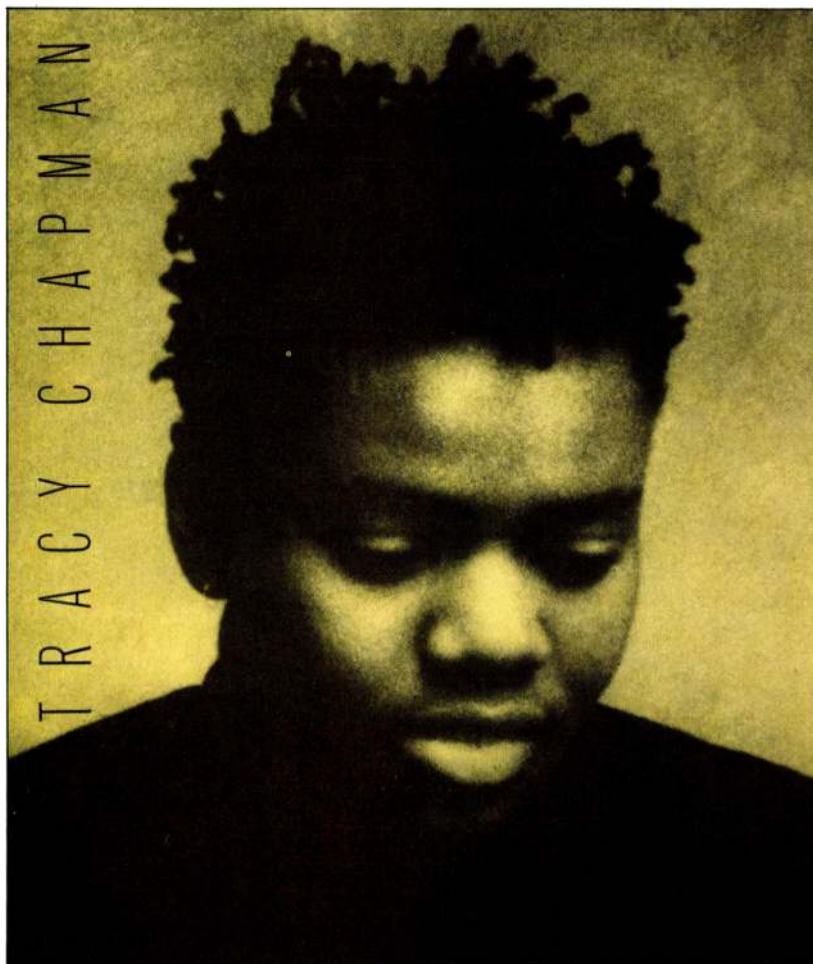
MUSICIAN: You took a lot of flak for supporting Reagan a few years back. Were you surprised by the response?

YOUNG: I never really noticed. [laughs] I noticed more the way my wife talked to me about it.

PEGI: Reagan's not my favorite person. He is not a man of the people.

MUSICIAN: So you were properly chastised at home?

YOUNG: I suffered greatly.



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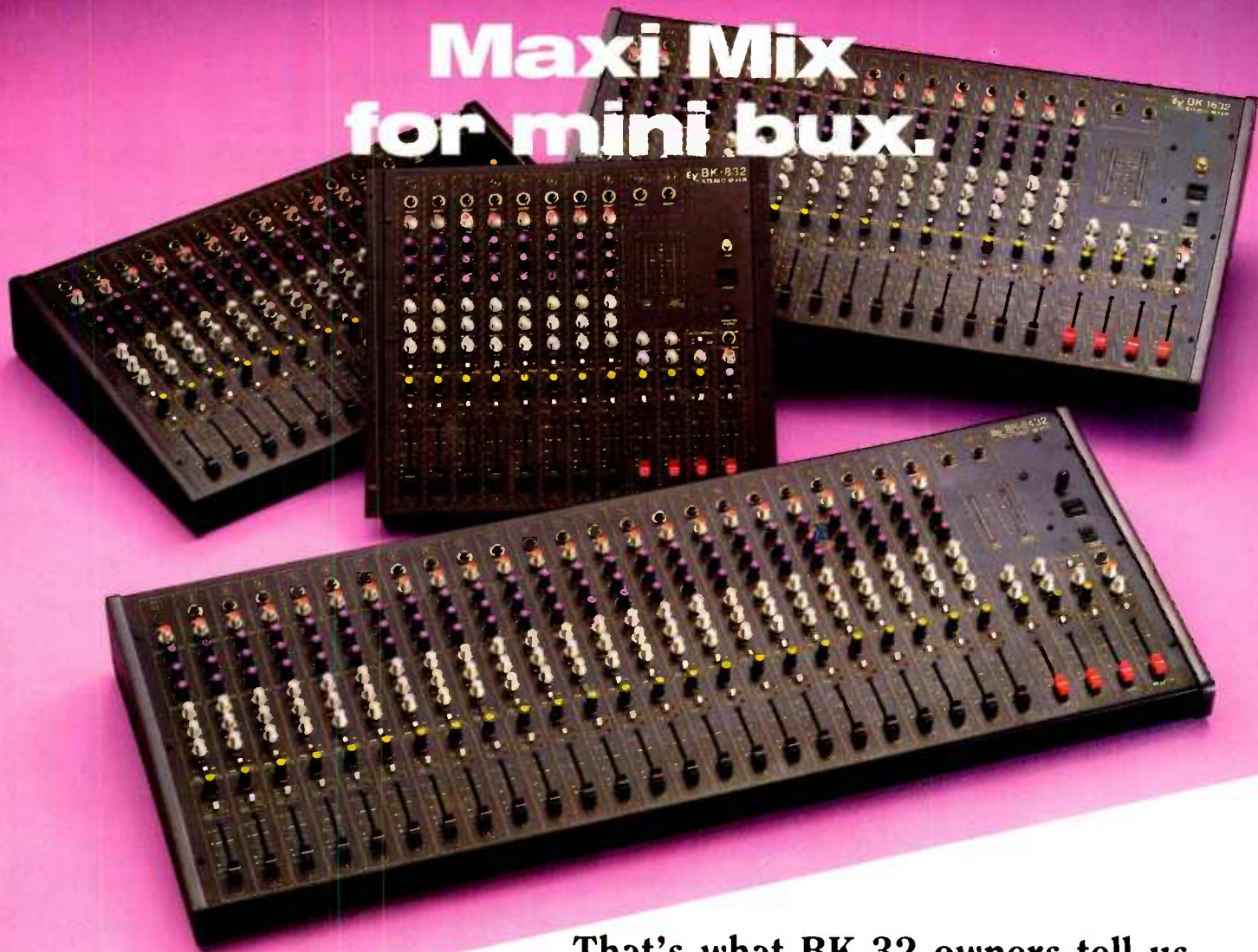
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NEIL YOUNG

MUSICIAN: *Though I can see how you'd sympathize with the idea of shouldering responsibilities and moving ahead, which he claimed to represent.*

YOUNG: I think a lot of people felt that way, when he started.

MUSICIAN: *You sound disappointed with him.*

YOUNG: It's been eight long years. Politics...I'd rather think about the Blue Notes. Maybe I should be thinking about the Sandinistas and the contras, POWs, Tutu and unrest in Pakistan and Afghanistan. I watch the news nearly every night and I think about those things, but they don't always enter into my musical world.

Just to put this all in perspective, David Crosby has this book that's about an inch-and-a-half thick. And what it contains is all the documented nuclear accidents around the world. There's three or four per page and there's hundreds of pages. You can just open it up anywhere. A guy drops a wrench in Arkansas in a silo and sets off a Titan missile. It blows up, kills the guy and two other guys, blows up in the silo, detonates this whole area. Because he dropped a wrench, okay?

So it's hard to get a perspective on the news, is what I'm trying to say. News is where you are.

MUSICIAN: *You were one of the few veteran rockers who embraced the punk movement in the '70s, and were accorded some respect in turn. Is it getting harder, in your view, for rock music to startle, or outrage?*

YOUNG: You know the Perry Como show back in the '60s? Where he'd come out and sit on the stool with his cool sweater? That's where rock 'n' roll is today. There are a few exceptions. But generally we've got this crap produced by dicknoses, I mean, people putting out what they know will sell and people saying "play that" to 150 radio stations who can't make up their

own minds and are paying these idiots to tell them what to do. It's a wild situation. Coincidentally, every once in a blue moon I'll come out with a record these people like. That seems to be what's happening now. But thank God for Reprise Records for giving me a chance to continue my life's work. I never realized how grateful I was for that chance, until I went to Geffen.

MUSICIAN: *What are your favorite albums or characters?*

YOUNG: Well, I like the *Tonight's the Night* guy, and I like the *Everybody's Rockin'* guy. I think they may be related—sort of, like Jerry Lee Lewis and Jimmy Swaggart?

I liked the *Transformer* guy when I was doing that tour with the dark glasses and the vocoder—he was sort of interesting. But really, they're all just different parts of me that are able to come out through the music. Back when I was in grade eight, we used to have an art class once a week on Tuesday afternoon. We'd go in there, and each time, all year long, I used to draw the same picture, over and over. It was this funky-looking guy; he had hair everywhere, and big dark glasses. You could never see his face because of the hair and the glasses and everything. And you know what? It was me!

So even then I knew who I was. Now, of course, I'm more relaxed about the whole thing. ♪

NEW VOICES

from page 20

series, he has made three albums for Rounder, of which the latest, *A Room with a View of the Blues*, is not only the best, it is also in many ways the kind of personal statement—even if it remains an elegant, slightly formal one—that each of the above artists has chosen to make. What Johnny Adams has accomplished here, in a way that he frequently found impossible

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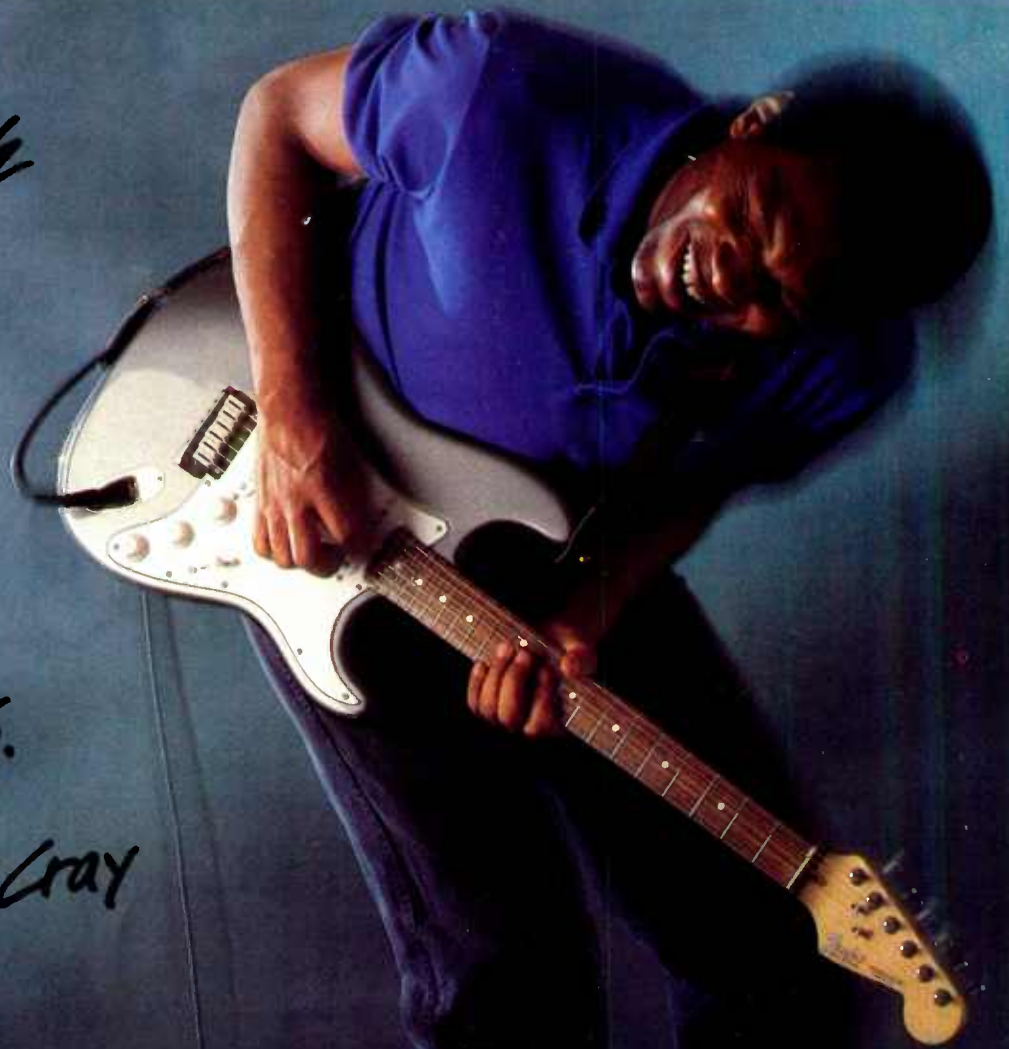
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before the Rounder association, is to eschew technique for the sake of technique, to put all of his formidable technical skills at the service of the song, whether it's a blues like the Lowell Fulson-Billy Vera title cut, an R&B standard like Percy Mayfield's "The Hunt Is On," a lush ballad like "Neither One of Us (Wants to Be the First to Say Goodbye)" or a tailored original from Doc Pomus and Doctor John, "A World I Never Made." Without having written any of the above songs, he claims each one (and every one on the album) as his own. What strikes me most about his music, and most about the music of Terence Trent D'Arby, Lyle Lovett and Jimmie Dale Gilmore, is the extent to which it continues to aspire to something higher. In an age when it's often considered cool to hide your aspirations, Johnny Adams is not content with merely showing off any more than Lyle Lovett is content with cynicism or Terence Trent D'Arby with showmanship. What each is concerned with, at least in part, is a common humanity, a spirituality if you will, and this is what comes across in the best of their music. ❧

GRAPPELLI from page 32

tric model. He never practices.

"Never. Not since my youth. I open the case to make sure all the strings are there before going to the concert, but I never touch the instrument when I'm home. I'm dying to play when I go onstage, but if I practiced several hours before I wouldn't have this desire. And I rarely listen to music at home. If I do, it's Tatum, Erroll Garner, and my beloved Debussy and Ravel. I always listened to piano players, someone like Martial Solal, who is a remarkable musician. When I play with him I have to be very careful, he's constantly creating problems for me, and I like that very much."

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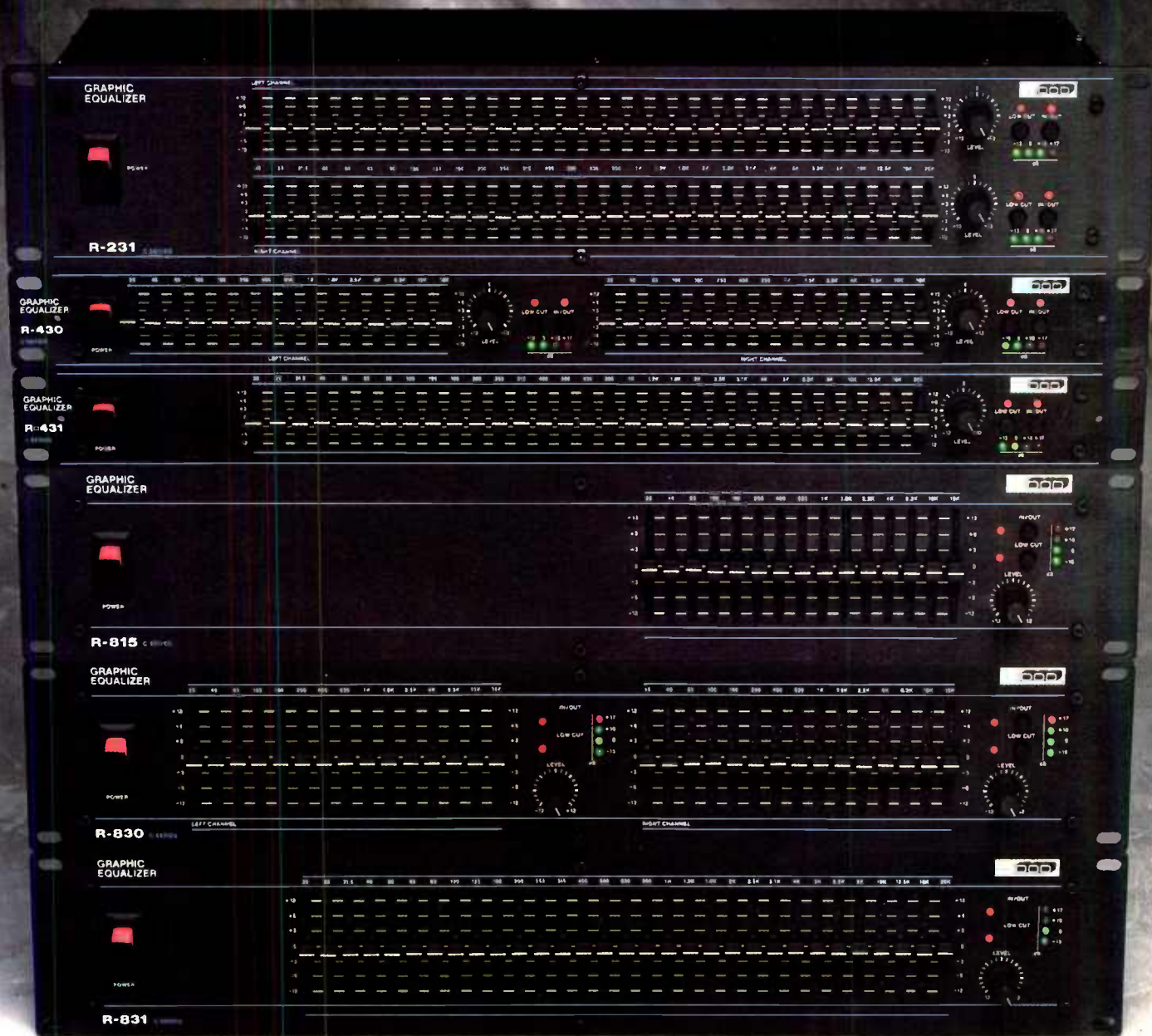
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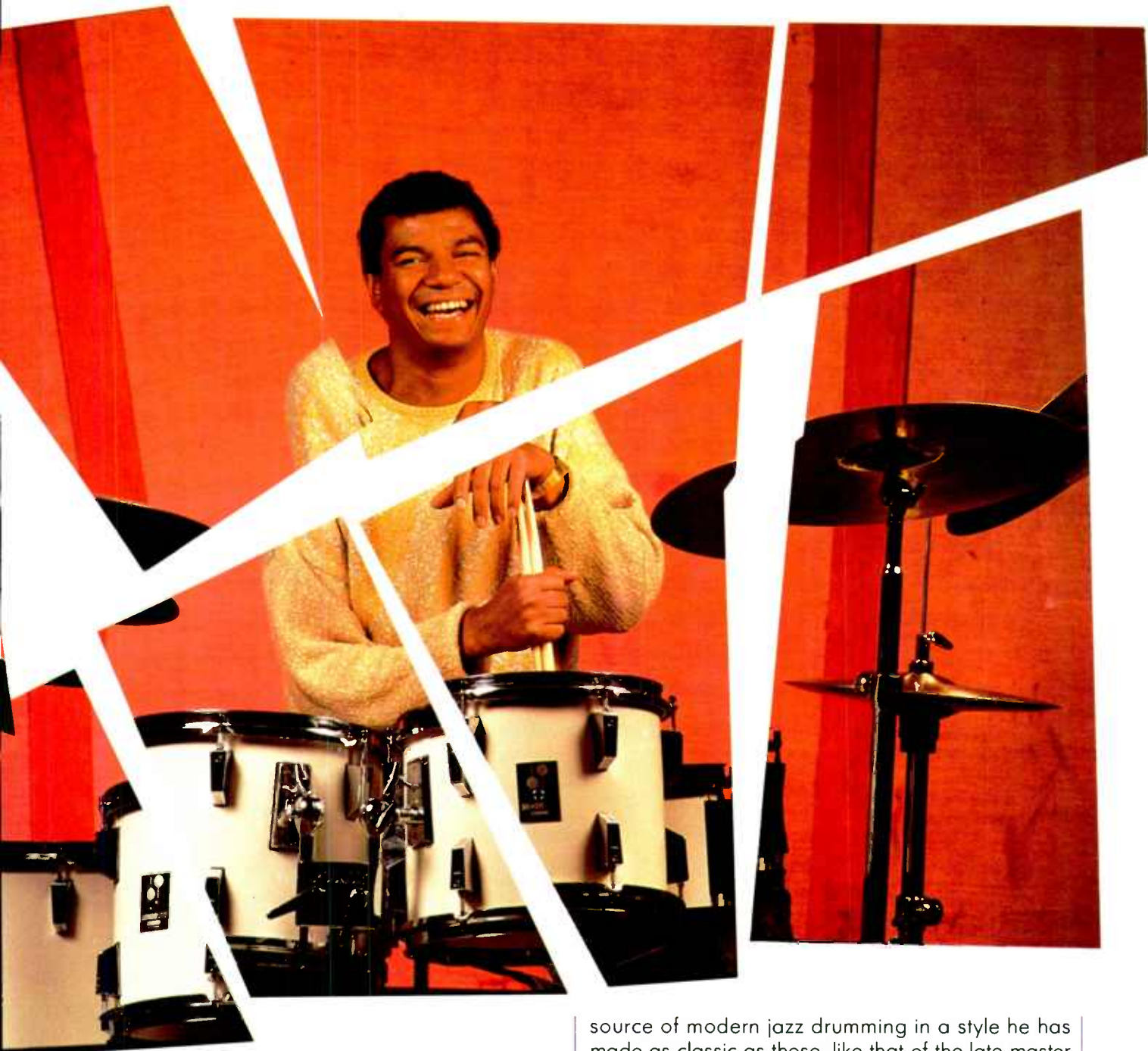


Jack DeJohnette's ORCHESTRAL MANEUVERS

The drumset is white and compact, solar discs of cymbals arrayed about it like shields. From all sides an improbable complexity of gantries, bent inquisitively at the waist, present their microphones. Above them rises the knotty-pine asymmetrically septagonal dome of the Power Station, Studio A, and at the center of all this geometry sits Jack DeJohnette at the drums, rear view. Beyond him Dave Holland and altoist Steve Coleman stand behind the respective windows of their acoustically-isolated condos, microphones before them and instruments at the ready. While waiting for word from the control room, DeJohnette riffles through a note-perfect Philly Joe Jones impression: a solo from some record I can't place, full of irregular phrasing one would have thought inimitable and lots of tricky sticking. He's even

RICHARD LAIRD

BY
RAFI ZABOR



got the drumset sounding like one of Philly's. Then the tape is ready to roll, there's the necessary pause and the band strikes up Duke Ellington's blues "Take the Coltrane," and although it's only the first take of a two-day recording session, the trio already sounds good, Coleman perhaps a little hesitant at first but getting on it after three choruses; Holland, whose date this is, playing clear-toned, resilient time; while DeJohnette, whose article this is, looking admirably relaxed, casually deploys what seems like every known re-

source of modern jazz drumming in a style he has made as classic as those, like that of the late master from Philadelphia, that have come before.

His accent-shifting cymbal beat is neither Elvin's nor Tony's, to cite its two principal antecedents, but an insinuating third variant whose cutting edge is nicely sharpened by the dry, dark brilliance of the cymbal. His drum accenting is an internally coherent cross-commentary keyed, it would seem, to every nuance of Coleman's alto solo and Holland's own increasingly independent bass support; free to begin its own inventions between the beats, unusually placed within the bar—I'm reminded of the way Ali boxed in his



Cassian youth: keyed to off-rhythms, throwing his punches between the steps of an unpredictably subtilized body-time with a force you would have thought interdicted by such grace—and of course DeJohnette is famously aware of the melodic and orchestral possibilities of the drums; there are occasional explosions around the set and lightning storms amid the cymbals that seem completely to defy the bar-lines and forsake the pulse only to end unexpectedly back in the center of a rhythm freshly ionized by the electricity of the interruption. I watch this almost frighteningly virtuose drumming—and DeJohnette is just coasting, calling no particular attention to himself, a long, long way from onslaught—with its sleek contours and beautiful co-ordinations, and I almost begin to feel sorry for Steve Coleman. We're into the second take now and Coleman is playing better and better, but there are very few mere soloists in jazz, it seems to me, capable of playing anything as interesting as what Jack DeJohnette is putting down. It's something I used to resent about his playing years back, before I resigned myself to how damned good it is. What are we supposed to do, make him play with a handicap?

My eyes wander over to the board and I notice that 11 of the 14 tracks in use are taken up with one or another component of the drums, and in the busy arcade-machine of my mind a penny drops. One of the triumphs of DeJohnette's mature style is its continuous articulation of detail in the midst of its furies, and he has undoubtedly been fortunate that the evolution of multi-track recording has coincided almost exactly with his own, lucky that in the decades over which his ear, touch, independence and conception have developed to their current pitch, a technology has emerged capable of doing them some justice, though let's be clear, the stylistic evolution takes easy precedence. It's one of the things we talked about in a series of interviews staggered between the Dave Holland date for ECM, a Michael Brecker session for Impulse later in the week and some time spent upstate later on. Because *Musician* published an extensive interview in issue #28, a mere seven-and-a-half years ago, that detailed his biography and his musical associations with, among others, Charles Lloyd, Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett and Miles Davis, DeJohnette and I both decided to forego that route this time and talk more directly about the music. The first installment, focused for the most part on the drums, goes like this:

DeJOHNETTE: We were listening to the playbacks of this date with Dave and Steve. Now, Dave Holland and I have this way of playing together as a rhythm team, and it occurred to me that what I do, and what Dave does, is comparable in some ways to certain things done in visual art. We break up space, but we break up space *in time*. In, under, around and through time. Dave and I break it up together, and it's always in contrary motion: I go one way, he goes another, and it's complementary. Dave and I always had that. The guys in my band Special Edition have that too.

MUSICIAN: *But you said once that what you do has nothing to do with drumming as such. What did you mean by that?*

DeJOHNETTE: I'm playing *music*. It goes beyond the instrument. I see the drums as more than just percussion. It's percussive because you're hitting something, but the tones and harmonies are there all the time, with the cymbals particularly. I see the drums as a fine musical instrument, like the piano, which I also play. The drums can be soft, evoke quiet moods, sad moods, jubilation, humor. You can evoke all the emotions out of that instrument. I'm just beginning to find the threads I'm drawn to.

MUSICIAN: *I went back and listened to some old records, like Mountain in the Clouds with Miroslav Vitous, and at your peaks you were playing very close to something you might play now, but what was different was the sensitivity to sound. It's not only that you started playing more beautiful cymbals but that you started to be able to give so much attention to individual notes and ideas even when they're coming thick and fast. Maybe that's one way you've developed.*

DeJOHNETTE: You nailed it right on the head. It's the drums coming across as a melodious and orchestral instrument when



it's accompanying other people. I think it's hard for a mass audience to appreciate that. I think that some critics have a particularly hard time understanding what I do and how it relates to the band. Now, as you get older you make everything count more. So no matter how much or how little I play, each idea means something, it's not just for show. If I play a complex barrage it's a complete idea, and the technique and the idea, the heart and the intellect, are merged together to paint this complete...scape.

MUSICIAN: *How did you learn to do that?*

DeJOHNETTE: I always heard lopsided, I guess. And it had a lot to do with piano, and listening to people who thought different, played unusual ideas. Piano players, drummers, horn players—Sonny Rollins is a great example of someone who plays colors, creates space, melody, harmony, and if you listen closely you can hear all that. I also hear the drums as a *harmonic* instrument. People talk about drums as a melodic instrument, but there's also a way they relate to the harmonic structure of a tune, a solo, a bassline. Elvin Jones got into that when he was with Trane. He related intuitively to the harmonies of those pieces. Elvin is very sensitive. After he left Trane he played with other musicians who weren't as heavy as Trane and he didn't overpower them. He was criticized for playing so loud with Coltrane, but he had to. The music demanded that of him. Elvin always plays what's needed. He swings, he's got those African polyrhythms, and I love to hear his solos. He doesn't play the way he did with Coltrane. He moved on, the same way Philly Joe Jones moved on after those classic records with Miles. I heard Joe about a year before he died with Red Garland and the stuff he was playing was totally fresh.

MUSICIAN: *I heard him with Bill Evans and it was some of the greatest piano trio drumming I've ever heard. Some very brilliant, very funny playing. And for once Bill Evans wasn't bent over the keyboard. He was looking right across at Philly Joe and grinning like a kid.*

DeJOHNETTE: He used to do that when I played with him. He liked for a drummer to get in his butt, and Philly would do that for him. I loved the way Joe and Sam Jones played way back on *Everybody Loves Bill Evans*. I loved the trio with Paul, and I love Paul Motian. I heard him play with Bill's early trios, and then I heard him when Keith Jarrett had the trio with him and Charlie Haden, and Paul knows how to break up space and has a great sense of humor too. His playing taught me something about the direction I was going in. Paul is an original, and his playing with Bill affected a lot of drummers at the time.

MUSICIAN: *Roy Haynes is another great trio drummer. A great drummer, period.*

DeJOHNETTE: Oh man! Please, yeah!

MUSICIAN: *Your playing is similar to his not so much in terms of its sound but because you both produce an extraordinary number of discrete ideas when you accompany a soloist. Within the general impression created by the style, there are all these individual details.*

DeJOHNETTE: You might say that Roy is one of my big influences for *that*. I used to be fascinated by the fact that no matter how fast he played you could hear every detail. Roy should be paid a million dollars just to sit down at the drums, the crispness he gets out of the snare, the articulation, and also Roy has his way of breaking down time, the way he overlaps bar lines and knows song form. He knows music very well. He plays harmonically. I love to hear Roy play. We used to go to boxing matches together. He's a great man.

MUSICIAN: *He's a great listener, a great responder.*

DeJOHNETTE: He always plays *against* the music. In other words, if a guy plays a phrase, Roy won't play that phrase back at him. He'll play his own counter-ideas. Tony plays that way

“What Dave Holland and I do is break up space, but we break up space in time. In, under, around and through time.”



too. That's the way I like to play. People often ask me if I know in advance the kind of thing I'm going to play, but when I'm playing I don't know what I'm going to play next. I don't know how things are going to turn out when I'm improvising. I know the tune, I know the forms, and if I'm playing free I'll create a form out of the so-called "piece without structure."

MUSICIAN: *You've developed yourself technically to the point where it seems you can play anything you hear.*

DeJOHNETTE: The idea was to get the facility so that it didn't sound academic.

MUSICIAN: *Mingus once said that after he was 18 years old he didn't have to think about the bass as an instrument anymore, that he could just play the music.*

DeJOHNETTE: That was the place I wanted to go. Danny Gottlieb was talking to my wife Lydia once, and he said, "Jack doesn't know any rudiments, does he?" [*lots of laughter here*] She said, "Of course he does, he just doesn't spell 'em out." I never wanted to sound rudimentary. I wanted to sound *musical*. So a lot of my stuff is camouflaged, but not on purpose: I'm just playing the expression of the idea. None of it has to do with paradiddles and flams. It goes beyond that.

MUSICIAN: *Then how do you see the relationship between technique and the ability to make music? For instance, a drummer like Billy Higgins doesn't have an overwhelming technique, but he's a fantastic drummer.*

DeJOHNETTE: He has the technique to play what he hears. You should never let your technique rule your ideas. If you develop more technique than what you hear you're gonna be in trouble. You're gonna go for showstopping stuff, like running singles around the drums as fast as you can play them. There are a lot

of people who love to hear that, but then you won't be playing *ideas*. Your technique can overrule your ability to reach a higher level of expression. Or a deeper level. You should only have enough technique to play what you need. Billy Higgins doesn't need as much technique as I have to play what he needs to play. He has technique. People say Elvin's not technical. *Elvin's got technique*. Elvin's got a lot but he doesn't show it off. He's into playing the musical idea, the same way Roy Haynes is. Roy has the finesse and facility to play whatever he needs to play. I always wanted enough technique to be able to play something very simple or sloppy if I wanted, and enough to rip off some shit that's technically difficult if I want to, but to play it smoothly and play it in a way that's not obvious. You know, once it goes by, "Did he really play that?" Dave Holland plays stuff like that with such ease, you have to go back to realize that it was difficult technically.

MUSICIAN: *At this point do you ever come up with an idea you can't execute?*

DeJOHNETTE: It's only up to my imagination. I just have to sit down to the instrument and conceive the idea. In other words, the idea is not conceived until it's played. Okay, there are some patterns and combinations that will set me up to go into unknown territory, something that hasn't been played before, but once I get past that point I don't know what's gonna happen next. I get to a point where I play so fast that the pattern becomes a *sound*, this rolling thing, and I embellish other patterns and ideas on top of that. Miles said it sounds like some drunk cat falling up the stairs.

MUSICIAN: *Elvin always sounded like that to me.*

DeJOHNETTE: That's some of Elvin's influence on me. A drummer in Chicago named Wilbur Campbell influenced me when I was young. He had that same ability to put so much shit into four measures and it was all saying something, and then get back out and just swing. And I realized that the important thing was not breaking it down into the micro-rhythms but what sound pattern was created, what wave pattern was

→
 "I see the drums as more than just percussion. They can be soft, evoke quiet moods, sad moods, jubilation, humor, all the emotions."

created *via* that collage of all those speeded-up rhythms. If you listen to it as a complete wave of sound, then you hear the music. I hear waves of sound. The same way they called Coltrane's playing "sheets of sound," you might describe some of what I play as sheets of sound, but on the drums.

MUSICIAN: *But within that there are still all those details, each with its moment, in addition to which you're responding to other musicians. I wonder what sort of state of consciousness you're in*

when you play, to be aware in so many directions.

DeJOHNETTE: It's a very relaxed state of consciousness, a total being-at-one with the music. In other words you're relaxed and confident enough to let go of any preconceived notion of what you're going to play, other than that there's some written composition. But as to what's going to happen inside that, you have to be completely open.

MUSICIAN: *You might say that our usual consciousness is heavily edited. Is this something unedited, or perhaps less severely edited?*

DeJOHNETTE: Not really, because things are being subconsciously edited out and put in in the split second. You talk about computers being fast, but if you realize how fast our brains are processing information in that split second, when something's going by for the first time... Maybe it's not the first time, maybe it's the first time we're hearing it. The way I conceive it is that after my doing so much playing for 20-odd years, the subconsciously creative aspect of my brain has assimilated patterns that I've not played yet, that it has filed them away for certain situations and I'm not conscious of it. It just switches on. My conscious self switches off while my subconscious goes into high gear. It's on sensitivity alert to what's happening with the other musicians and with what I'm playing, which sets off something else and when I listen back to it I'll think, "How the hell did I ever think of that?" It happens to me on piano. I'll sit down at the instrument when my chops are really in shape, and things I've been working on, technique and all... I just sit down and play it. It's a kind of cybernetic thing that happens.

MUSICIAN: *Clearing the mind of preconceptions so that something new can happen reminds me of Ornette.*

DeJOHNETTE: Well, that's why certain people... There's a Zen thing that says, "He who comes full of opinions is an empty vessel." And, you know, there are a few people around who resemble that.

MUSICIAN: *You think so?*

DeJOHNETTE: Otis Ray Appleton came to hear me one night at the Vanguard—I like Otis Ray Appleton's playing—and Ray came to me, he sat down after the set and said, "That's what makes you different from other drummers. You've got a dialogue going on with yourself as well as with the band." He pointed it out to me and I'd never thought about it that way. I guess it's similar to Eddie Blackwell. Blackwell does it in another way. He plays a lot of stuff on the toms, but the pulse is still here.

What I play can have a pulling effect on other musicians. On Leo musicians particularly, because I'm a Leo. Pat Metheny's a Leo, Greg Osby's a Leo, so is Charlie Haden, but with horns or hornlike instruments... I had this conversation with Greg the first time he played with me and he said, "Man, I have to stop listening to you because you pull my ideas. The stream of ideas you come out with is so fast, when I play one thing you play four or five in answer." Of course, we've played together a lot since then. And then with Pat on the *Song X* tour, Pat came to me and said—you know, sometimes I can be guilty of playing too much, although I tend to do it less now than when I was younger—Pat said to me, "You know, man"—he was trying to be polite—"You know, you've got this way of playing. I kind of like to get my swing from the cymbal," he said, "and you know, I'll play an idea and before I know it I feel like I got... a cattle prod in my ass." [laughter] I said, "You mean you want me to play less, Pat?" [more laughter] I said, "Pat, no problem. I'm a professional."

MUSICIAN: *But I've heard you and Pat play together up in Woodstock and you sounded like one musician, twinned. It sounded fantastic to me.*

DeJOHNETTE: You know why. I love saxophones, I love

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guitars, I love the guys out front, and since I play piano I phrase like a horn. With Keith Jarrett it'll sometimes happen that he'll start a phrase and I'll start a phrase and we'll play the exact same rhythm. That happened on this record date with Dave. Steve Coleman played a phrase and I played something and later he said, "Yeah, I noticed you were really singing. You should be playing saxophone." Well, I attempted to play horn, but it's a little late for me to start and there are so many cats out there playing already. I've got my hands full with drums and piano. I have a flute, but I only play it for my own enjoyment.

MUSICIAN: *Why do you think Pat gets so little respect as an improviser when clearly he's so good?*

DeJOHNETTE: Oh, he's getting it, after *Song X*, trying to hold his ground with Ornette, and I think he did it pretty well. I have to say Pat's done a lot to help people too. I did some video soundtracks with him; he's been very generous. He's a cat that's been giving it back. He went and got Ornette, did all Ornette's music, did a tour that exposed Ornette to Pat's audience. He didn't have to do that, and it gave Ornette's career another boost.

Okay okay okay, that's enough for a first installment. We do have to edit this stuff, you know, we do have to make it fit into the magazine, although it's a very unsatisfactory way of doing things. My apologies therefore to all the drummers both mentioned and appreciated and then left out: Pete LaRoca, Jo Jones, Max Roach, Milford Graves, Rashied Ali, Andrew Cyrille, Jeff Watts, Smitty Smith, Terri Lyne Carrington and others, all of whom had to give way before an elucidation of what I would maintain to be Jack DeJohnette's far more than cybernetic connection to the world of inspiration and radiance, but there you go, reading an interview in a magazine is a lot like buying a record in a shop. For years I've been grousing in private at the inadequacy of the recording medium *vis-à-vis* the nature of actual jazz, and here I am after spending two days listening to the sessions of what should prove an excellent ECM record for the Dave Holland Trio—Lee Townsend producing and James Ferber engineer, both of them extremely hospitable to the wandering scribe—and I mourn what will be left out of the product, all the variations, the even better solos on less well-balanced takes and, more to the point here, what might be learned from watching Jack DeJohnette at work and play beneath a flock of microphones. I'm not such a novice to be surprised at how one take differs from the next, but one thing I might expect of a drummer, any drummer, is some consistency in the handling of each tune's written head. I couldn't have been more wrong, and DeJohnette couldn't have better illustrated his openness to whatever might be coming next. On one take of "Take the Coltrane," which I don't for other reasons expect to see released, he accompanied the out head with an outrageously sustained floor-tom roll that exploded back into time intermittently and to startling effect; the next take, the probable master, featured some almost equally weird stutterings and delays. I also watched DeJohnette look as surprised as I must have on listening to the playback of a series of mad, time-defying four-bar exchanges that it seemed he could never have resolved, and did. Then there was that bizarre drum solo, played almost entirely on the bass drum and climaxed by a thunderously irrational crescendo on the toms. All of it was wildly unpredictable. It wasn't even one kind of drumming. It wasn't even two or three.

Then there was Michael Brecker's more complicated—quintet, sextet, septet—session later in the week, on which for me the prime attraction take-to-take was the just about unbelievable inventiveness of Herbie Hancock and the furious oracular responses of DeJohnette and Charlie Haden, which

left me walking away shaking my head and muttering about the greatest piano trio playing I'd ever heard. Brecker, no slouch either, should have a great record there, but it's a shame we'll be missing the hilarious, free, 10-minute codas to a tune that wasn't supposed to have a coda at all, much less one in which Hancock, having plucked his share of strings and knocked sufficiently upon the wood, ended up shaking the piece's score at his microphones. (Producer Don Grolnick's *mot*: "Well, he's only playing what's written.") It's not a bad way for a listener to spend a week. I was never wild about being a jazz critic, but membership has its privileges.

An endless diversity beckons but time marches on, and so must the record, the article, the progress of civilization, the show, and were we to treat Jack DeJohnette only as an inspired and encyclopedic drummer we'd be missing a great deal, since he has been, for the last 10 years or so, one of the finest bandleaders in the music and no mean composer into the bargain. Frankly, I've walked away from his last couple of bands muttering things about the best improvising band in the music—yeah, that's right, I mutter—and so have others, but we've tended not to say it in print, possibly because other bands have seemed conceptually larger or more "significant," or possibly because we're cautious, too politic and a little

continued on page 110

Jack DeJohnette plays Sonor drums exclusively, currently favoring the new Sonorlite Hi-Tech drums, with black matte hardware, a 14"x6½" snare drum, 12" and 13" rack toms and a 14"x15" floor tom, choosing either an 18"x16" or a 20"x16" bass drum, depending on the needs of the music. The electronics used on Special Edition's new music necessitates the larger bass drum. The smaller was used at both recording sessions described in this article. "Sonors have their own distinct sound, they're well constructed, and the Lites are really great. I just call them the Rolls Royce of drums."

DRUMS AND OTHER TOYS

At the moment he is using a combination of Sabian, Istanbul and Paiste cymbals, and although prototypes of his new cymbals have arrived, we can't yet specify the company. The new ride cymbal is a dark, unpolished, unbuffed, unlathed and unhammered cymbal additionally dulled and darkened by spills of sulphur applied to the hot metal, with the result that it looks as if designed for use as jungle camouflage.

DeJohnette uses Korg synthesizers and drum machines. Among them: SG 1D Sampling Keyboard Grand, DW 8000 synthesizer and expander module, Korg Digital reverb 2000. Drum machines are two DDD-1s and a DDD-5. Newly arrived are the compact Performing 707 keyboard, a multi-timbred eight-voice unit, and the eight-track, 6400-note SQD8 sequencer. Also recently acquired is the DSM-1, the rack-mount version of the DSS-1, which is a keyboard sampling machine; this also comes with a number of hard-disk sampling programs, including orchestra, etc. "Fortunately it's not just limited to keyboards now, and we're at the crossroads with sampling, which has gotten so sophisticated now, where you really have to ask when you hear something, is that an actual instrument or a sample. But I think the most important thing is that we should never lose the immediacy and the personal interaction of the musician with the audience. If we get to the point where we have to sit there and have a machine play for us, forget it. These pieces of equipment are only as good as what the players put into them. Pat Metheny, when he got his Synclavier, said it was scary, because now he had no excuse. Because now your imagination is tested. You can't say, 'If I had access to an orchestra, if I had access to this or that...' It's up to you. It can go as far as your mind will take it."

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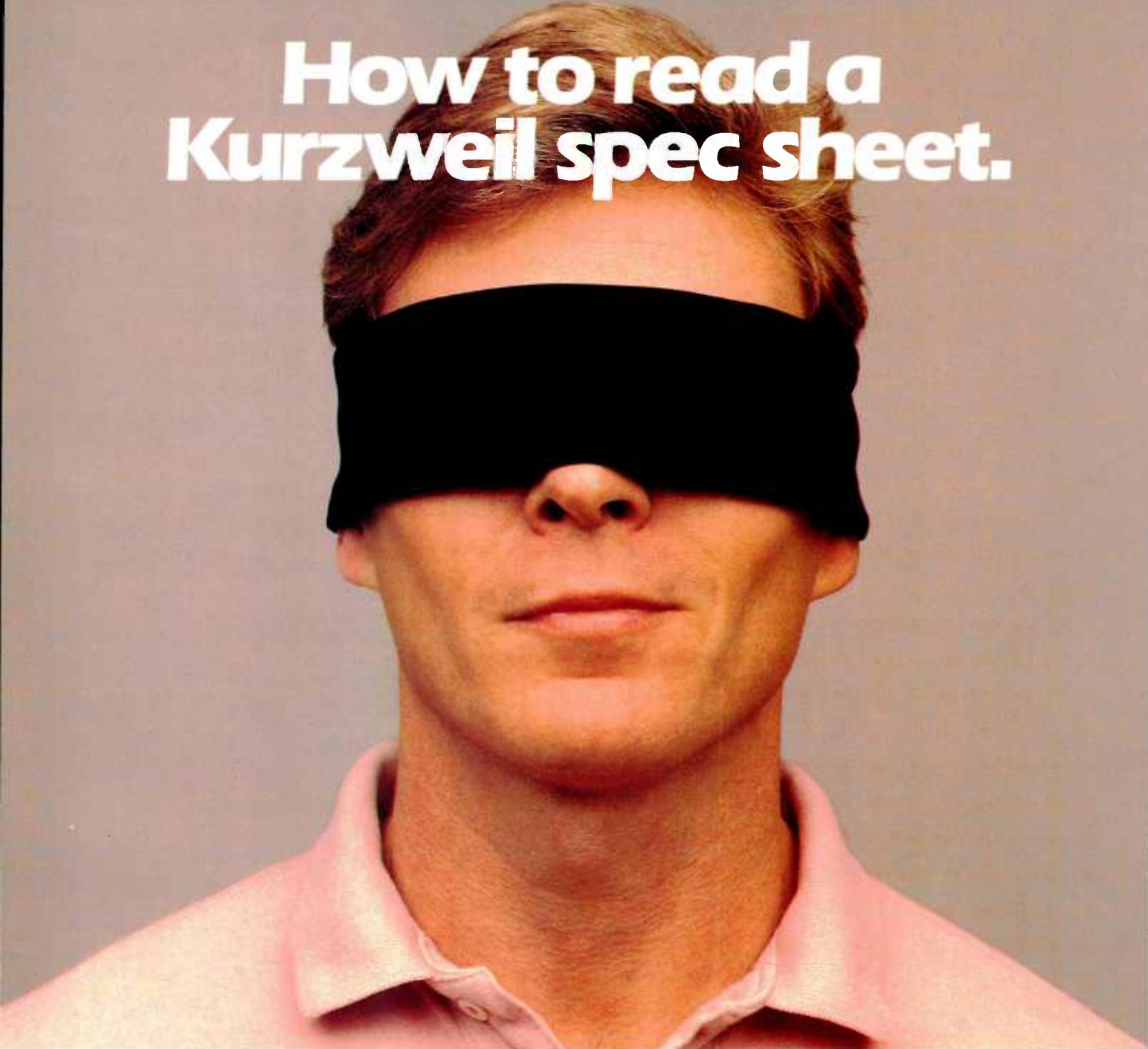
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NEAL PEART'S HEADY METAL



Rush's Rhythmist Holds Forth



BY CHIP STERN

We're not calling for a jihad against digital sampling, but our love affair with robotic techno-rhythms has obscured the simple beauty of a human heartbeat—an odd development in a music so long distinguished by blues, blackbeats and sophisticated, sensual grooving.

However, in a curious confluence of odd bedfellows and kindred spirits, it has fallen upon jazz and hard rock rhythmists to defend the dignity and beauty of the acoustic drum: for jazz drummers, because the tonal nuances of their drum kits remain an integral aspect of the music's collective energy; for hard rockers, because when you're riding herd on a stampeding wall of sound, nothing lassos in the beat or moves air quite like a resonant set of acoustic drums.

And can anyone name a more forceful, musical drummer in the hard rock genre than Neal Peart? As chief lyricist and rhythmist for Canada's premier power trio Rush, Neal Peart has brought a sense of refinement and nuance to a genre whose drummers are celebrated primarily as missing links to the DNA code of Alley Oop. Peart's big blue-collar beat is powerful enough to induce nocturnal emissions and cave in your rib cage at 10 meters, but there's a pushy Italian inner-city doo-wop/R&B thrust to his groove, and an orchestral/big band dimension to his crushing fills and metric displacements that set him apart from the average headbanger.

Peart's journey into rhythm began in a quiet industrial suburb of Toronto. "Conformity was an enormous power in the community," Peart recalls with rueful humor. "It was felt from pre-school right through to maturity—a very difficult environment to grow up in and preserve your balance, self-esteem and creativity. It was difficult to be anything other than what everybody else was. That transition—between adolescence and maturity, innocence and experience, dreams and disillusionment—is a major theme in our lyrics, because that particular passage is *the* crucial bridge you cross in your whole life. In our song 'Subdivisions,' the blue-collar background that all three of us grew up in is the common denominator—that's probably influenced our different phases of escapism and fantasy, and I see our audiences being congruent with us through many of these phases. There's certainly that commonality—it's a question of background, and of needing certain things to alleviate that background."

So for Peart—like bandmates Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson—his life's focus, and his literal escape from the monotonous grind of a smokestack routine, came through music. "I remember when I was around five years old, my dad came home with this hi-fi record player—I guess the wedding of music and technology was the omen contained in that. Initially I would have heard

Frank Sinatra and big band music, which my father listened to all the time. The '30s and '40s was just about the only time in history that the best music has also been the most popular. The best musicians were playing the most adventurous music, with great arrangements and wonderful craftsmanship and solos on every song. It happened again in late-'60s rock—where that was the best and most adventurous music, and also the most popular. But that's about the only time I can think of in the history of rock music when that's been the case. When my father grew up it must have been such a different tempo of life, whereas today we have such a mechanical motivation, where rhythms generally drive forward—straight down on the beat, subdivided into small increments of sixteenth and thirty-second notes. But at that time it was all that dotted eighth note/triplet feel—you know, swing and sway.

"It's funny, but rock never happened for me until later in my development. Music, to me, was an abstract that wasn't stylistic at first, and as a young teenager I didn't like rock music of the time, because it was so formulaic—the whole so-called British invasion. And that includes the Beatles; they were so schizoid—their angelic phony side repelled me more than John Lennon's creative/experimental side attracted me.

"The late '60s is when I finally did get into it, when everything got blown wide open, and it was a total scene of rebellion—musical and otherwise—with bands like the Who and Cream and Jimi Hendrix and John Mayall and the Yardbirds and Led Zeppelin and King Crimson. It was totally uncompromising music that just sort of hit you in the face, and you had to either like it or get out of here.

"I packed up my drums and my records and moved to England when I was 18, thinking I'd just find a band. I was a big fish in a small pond, and threw myself into the biggest pond possible, musically speaking. I was made aware of reality very quickly, and that was a very important stepping stone between adolescence and maturity—realizing that I wasn't going to just walk in there and get picked up and be in a great band the next week. It was all very depressing and very educational, in the school-of-hard-knocks sense: going around and doing auditions out of *Melody Maker* and slogging around from management offices to record companies in the rain; and being humiliated at auditions, too. Not by design, but in trying out for a band I'd discover that they were far, far over my

head in technical knowledge, in their mastery of the language, and also in their snobbery—and I'd just go away feeling like a piece of dirt. A very clarity-inducing experience."

So like so many other drummers, Peart paid the day-to-day dues of a musician determined to go for broke and give his muse free reign; discovered what he could use and what he must lose; crafted his powerful sound and technique and searched for an appropriate context—which came in the summer of 1974 when he joined Lifeson and Lee of Rush on the eve of their first U.S. tour. Fourteen years later, Peart's creative input continues to shape Rush's arena-sized gestures.

"As a drummer, certainly, I'm not very happy with music without rhythm in it, and I don't mean implied rhythm—I want



"I want real rhythm and real people playing it."

real rhythm and real people playing it. As far as playing the drum kit, Rush is such an all-enveloping stylistic thing. I've never felt frustrated about anything; there's never been a style of music I became even slightly interested in—from Nigerian rock music to big band jazz, to reggae and ska—that I haven't been able to sneak in. There's nothing that I don't get to play with Rush.

"I think that the cause and effect of knowing the lyrics so well gives me a unique advantage as a drummer," Peart notes slyly. "And I sneak things in very

much with a mind towards the lyrics and towards where the vocals are going to fall. I'll even work together with Geddy to find out where his phrasing is actually going to be. I think there is certain ground that is sacred territory, and I wouldn't dream of overdeveloping anything underneath the guitar solo or underneath the vocal line—it's just a matter of politeness, if nothing else. And I have no problem with that. And it's great to reverse the roles. On the new album [*Hold Your Fire*] we have two songs where I actually play a drum solo while the other half of the rhythm section and the lead instrument keep time. And I think that's the most wonderful thing in the world, and that's what most bands wouldn't get to. I mean, it's obviously not a gift we've been given to do that—it's something drummers fought for and demanded to have.

"I kind of feel a new rhythmic wave rolling in, too, as exemplified by someone like Manu Katché, that's based a little on reggae, but has a new syncopation about it—a *kind of implication of the beat, rather than playing on it*. It's ethnic, but at the same time it's very cosmopolitan. Manu's a perfect example of that, because he's half-French and half-Ivorian, which is from the Ivory Coast, and he was brought up in Paris. It's a cliché to point this out, but a kind of world music is emerging in that style of rhythm, and I think more and more drummers and bands will probably be jumping on that stylistic approach."

Above and beyond the rhythmic sophistication Peart brings to rock, the single most alluring aspect of his style is his sound: sonorous, curvaceous and round, with a warm, powerful attack that rings to the rafters in even the most cavernous venue. Peart's sound carries. Not just because he has the chops and endurance to play at full extension—his wrists snapping like twin cobras—for hours on end. That's not the focus of his playing, as it is for so many missionary position thwackers. Neal Peart plays with *touch*, eliciting a wide range of tonalities from a single drum, so that when he unwinds on his big orchestral kit, you can not only feel the beat in the small of your back, you can hear each drum's note clearly articulated: good taste as a corollary of careful tuning.

"It's a lot of trouble to learn how to tune that carefully; and it's a lot of trouble to learn how to mike double-headed toms. A lot of sound men are lazy and a lot of drummers are lazy—it's just a whole lot easier to shove a mike up in there. When I first started I used to employ damping a lot; then gradually less

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and less, until now I use none. I recognize it as a function of increased perception and increased ability to tune. Now I wouldn't have wanted to hear that when I was putting bits of tape on drums, but in retrospect that's what it was—I couldn't tune very well. Now I can tune accurately enough that nothing ugly is going to get out. I try to get the whole instrument in tune with itself as much as possible, which means top head to bottom head, and which means around the perimeter of each of the two heads, the resonant head as well as the batter head.

"Actually, in my main kit I've always

used double heads. The only open-headed drums I've ever used in the last 12 years were concert toms of six, eight, 10 and 12 inches, and lately I'm employing them as closed toms, too. So as far as I'm concerned, two-headed is the way unless it's for an effect, like a timbale or a gong bass drum—which I use single-headed. To me it's a question of how many voices you want. If you just want to have one good easily reproducible, easily recorded sound, then open-head is the easy way to go. Or if you have no PA system at all and you want to be heard, it helps get a little more attack out there.

When I was with small groups that were trying to be louder than me, I found that not having bottom heads provided more attack, and consequently I could be heard better—and I could hear myself better.

"But given the best of all possible worlds, I much prefer double-headed drums, because you have a choice of voices and you can go to the rim and you can choose the amount of force with which you want to push the head in, and depress it, and even detune it. I like to have all of those options available to me, and I like to have that sense of delicacy about playing. Whereas with open-headed drums, it's like the first Simmons drums—all you can do is wallop them.

"About two years ago I went down to the Percussion Center in Fort Wayne, set up six drum sets side by side and put the same heads on them with the same tuning; to my surprise, Ludwigs were the winners. They had a certain quality of resonance I was looking for: an exciting, snappy throatiness. The Ludwigs just had that little tiny nuance of something special. They're the new Super Classic Shells—the strength of the tonality and the definition of their resonance finally won me over. Lately I've been using the new Evans heads. They're not hydraulic heads, but single plys. I'd previously been using Remo Ambassadors, which are actually too thin for me. I prefer a single-ply head when I can get one that's durable enough. Because I don't like changing heads a lot. I don't subscribe to that new-heads-for-every-show business—that's absurd. So I use Remo Diplomats on the bottom, and either Remo Emperors or the new Evans on top. I really like the resonance of the Evans.

"And cymbal-wise, it's all Zildjian, with the exception of a Wuhan Chinese. I think that the next big thing is going to be the decay-less cymbal; Terry Bozzio's been a pioneer of this—he built a drum kit entirely composed of Chinese and splash cymbals. Manu Katché's use of Chinese and splash cymbals on the new Robbie Robertson is great, too. Manu will play a little triplet on his splash cymbals and it's so effective—I love the feel of it. Stewart Copeland's done a lot with this; very short sounds, where you can actually play rhythms on cymbals."

And while some drummers see the synthesized clock-beat of digital samples and rhythms as a threat to the human element, Peart can hear the ghosts in the machine. "I don't see why it has to be an either/or situation. I think machine-made music simply needs someone who is

continued on page 108



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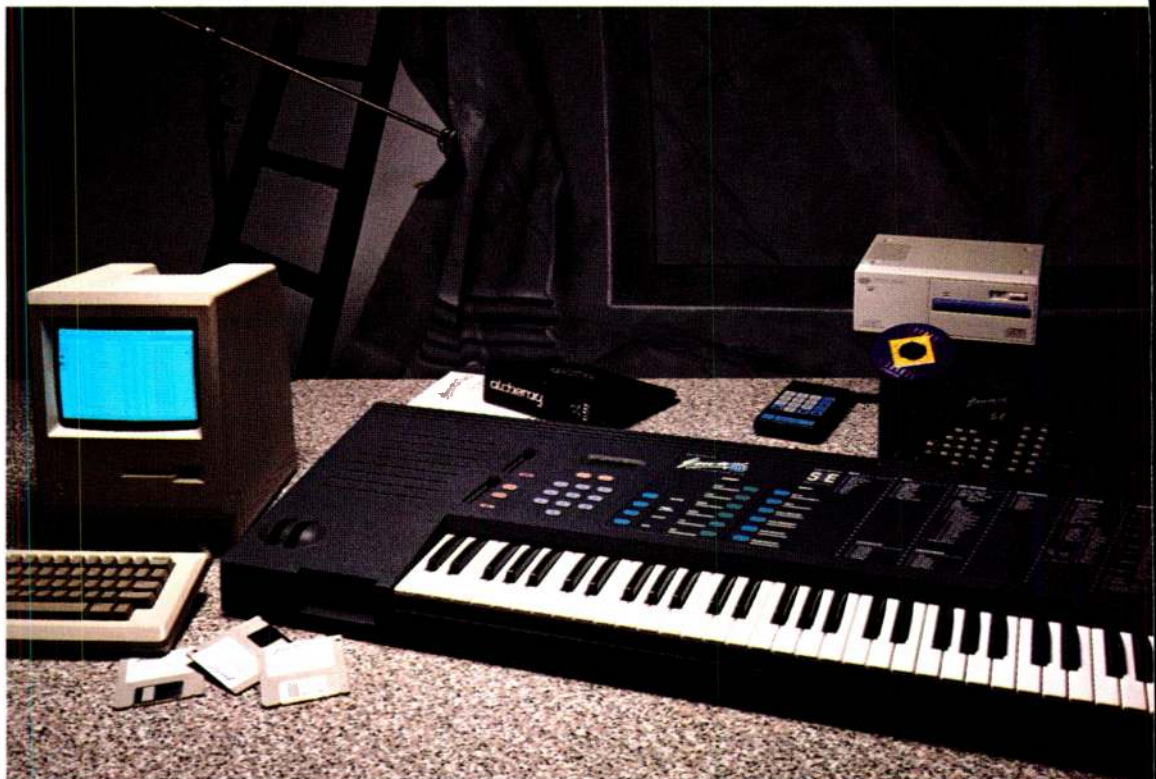
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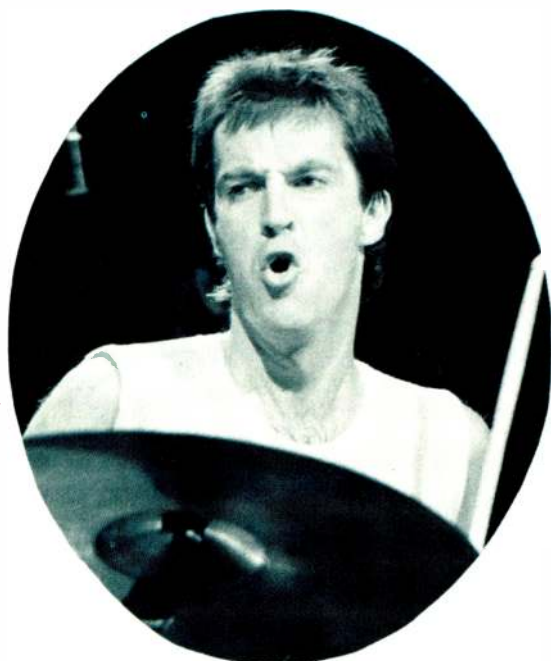
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PETE THOMAS, ATTRACTION



Direct Hits from an Unsung Groover



BY JOSEF WOODARD

In his own parlance, Pete Thomas, the anchor of Elvis Costello's Attractions for a solid decade, is a bit of a "murgler": i.e. one who creeps mischievously about in hallways. The same goes for his approach behind a drum kit. You don't hear him bashing and flailing much in the rhythm bed beneath his boss. Instead, he's a sly dog of a drummer, driving home basic feels while injecting fire, slink and truth into Costello's witty songfest. Clearly this is one of rock's great unsung groovers.

Thomas is also quick to quip or throw sobriety into disarray. He is antsy if he can't fall into a groove with his sticks on the furniture, and he's likely to snatch the questions out of an interviewer's hand or otherwise behave like a boy with a problem. "Pete Thomas on the road," he cackles with a music-

tabloid snarl, "boozing, drinking, wenching and rockin'. The truth about the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world!

"Essentially, the whole drumming thing is about getting as in shape as possible for that two hours," he reveals. "No sex, no wanking. It's the legs, mate. It's very important to stress that. Any drummer that has sex the night before he plays is being unprofessional. They tell a lot of athletes the same thing. Women weaken legs. My wife will love that.

"I like good tempo," Thomas continues confessionally. "There's nothing in life without good tempo. But I don't have natural tempo. People talk about this sort of metronomic clock that every good drummer's supposed to have, but with the Attractions it just doesn't work like that. Elvis' clock is more like a cuckoo clock. I'm the grandfather clock. Steve [Nieve] is going backwards in time."

Back in his own time, Thomas discovered early on that drums were his calling: "When I was nine, I got *With the Beatles*, and my grandma bought me a honky old drum and an old cymbal. That's it isn't it; what more is there? A drum, a cymbal and *With the Beatles*. Has the world really come on much further?"

Learning wasn't as appealing as doing. "I'm quite good with paradiddles and all of that. I was lucky. My parents twigged that it was something I wanted to do and put me in this music college when I was 11. I got all that..." he dishes out some fast rudiments on the couch. "And then I did the best I could to forget about all that stuff and get out there."

A good Englishman, Thomas' first musical loves were the Mersey Beaters—the Fab Four and Billy J. Kramer—and the Stones. He makes no bones about borrowing from his heroes. "I know that *Blood and Chocolate* sounds just like the Beatles. There are conscious Ringos on there, desperate." At age 15, Thomas "nicked off school" and hitchhiked to Mitch Mitchell's house: "I thought I was in fairyland. This was after Jimi Hendrix had died. He was still being a total pop star. He put me in this

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room full of tapestries and zebra skins. All around the floor, he had the most brilliant African drums. And then he put this Elvin Jones drumming on in quadrophonic sound and we drank vodka and oranges. That's when I thought, 'Uh-oh, I think this could be okay.'

His Anglo sensibility was broadened early on when he landed a gig with John Stewart, which meant moving to SoCal for two-and-a-half years. An eager 19-year-old, he managed to jam with Lowell George in his garage. "I was terrified, and awful as well. No imagination. He had to show me how to play reggae. I was completely wrong."

During his Stewart stint, Thomas met up with his old pal Jake Riviera, manager and founder of Stiff Records. Riviera was putting a band together for a young English genius christened Elvis Costello. Thomas got the gig. "It's called landing on your feet. We were very *new wave*," he sneers. "It was brilliant. Can you imagine, all of a sudden being in this group and being new wave as well? 'Oh, I think I'll go get a jacket and a haircut.' I'm not new wave or anything. Being Pete Thomas is bad enough. It was kind of fun being new wave, though. We could go around punching people for about three years."

Is Costello a groove-conscious songsmith? Does he dictate what it should sound like, or is it a matter of the band getting together and arranging his tunes? "It's about like you'd imagine it would be. He comes in and has this song, says, 'Well, you know...' We've got this song that's almost a joke thing. We'll go into it and Elvis will turn around and say, 'Okay, shuffle...rock...reggae and 3/4...' We've learned really well."

Not given to equipment changes, Thomas is a confirmed Gretsch drum and Sabian cymbal user. He does go through a lot of snares. "You've got to see my snare where I do my rim shots. It's the only rim in the business that actually has this big dent in it. I've almost split it; it's about two-thirds of the way through. Every beat's a rim shot. I've always done that, which is very adult, isn't it? I've never been able to really hear the snare drum properly on record. Little *dinks*. *Spank!* That's how my beat goes. *Spank!* "Shabby Doll..." *Spank!* "Temptation..." *Spank, spank!* "Beyond Belief..." *Spank, spank, spank!* See me *after college.*"

Part of the Attractions attraction is the rhythm section teamwork of the Thomas non-brothers: Bruce's often melodic basslines and Pete's anchoring wallop. "It's a love affair beyond love affairs of any other kind. It's beautiful, if anyone

wants to make a fuss about it. I mean it's horrible. We don't talk. We hate each other. But not so it shows. It's groovy in a way. Once it gets going. It's exactly like a marriage. You have good and bad days, but there's always something there, this *thing.*"

Thomas would not get on well with Nancy Reagan. While he swears by the importance of being "tip-top" on the gig, he has stories about the symbiotic relationship of intoxication and creativity: "*Trust* is one record you could truly say was done constantly under the influence of everything. I love it. There's something to be said for taking drugs and being at your best because when it works well—that one time out of 10—you transcend so that the light is coming in from heaven into the top of your head and out the end of your sticks." [*Don't try this at home, kids—Ed.*]

Thomas' drumming on "Beyond Belief" from *Imperial Bedroom* is especially fervid, building up to an orgiastic frenzy of cymbal tinkling, shminking and spoinking. Chalk it up to demon drink—during the cutting of the album, Thomas went on a bender on a weekend off. "I was absolutely howling ripped for two days. My friend got me into the studio at about two on Monday. Elvis took one look at me and went 'hmmm...' But he's good, Elvis; he said, 'Right, what do you want, Pete?' [*in a hushed voice*] 'Vodka.' So he got me vodka, got me on the kit and we did 'Beyond Belief,' first take. I haven't got a clue what we did. But it's all bluffed, the whole thing. After that, they kicked me out.

"I tried to play it the next day when I was sober—no idea at all. On that one, it's this thing that Levon Helm does that's an absolute monster. It's those *ands* on the bell. It's like cutting across, but you can't do all of it cutting across. You can get around the beat and come back to it."

Thomas is a good deal less enthusiastic about how the production strategy of *Goodbye Cruel World*. "That was like going to the dentist every day. It was the sort of thing where, if you started having fun, you felt guilty. 'Oh, oh, I better get away from here. I'm in grave danger of telling a joke. Oh, no, I feel an opinion coming on, call a cab.' We all decided that our stuff always sounds better when we've been on the road for a while and worked it up a bit. So we did this tour of France—playing these *Goodbye Cruel World* numbers. On the right nights, it was a monster groove, very, very nice. But then when we came to make that album, they screwed it up.

continued on page 108



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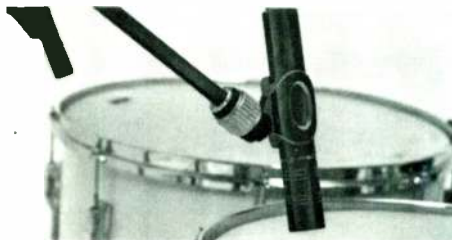
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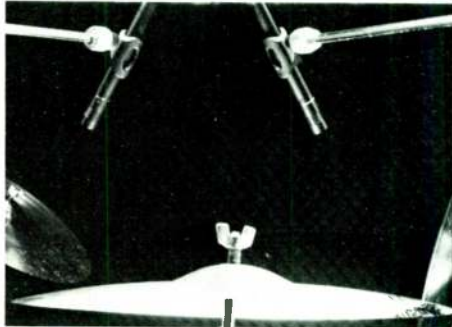
More than any other factor, it's what sets acoustic drums (and drummers) apart from the crowd. Beyer Percussion Mics like the



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The drum set generates every frequency in the audible spectrum. The extended frequency response of the MC 713 condenser and the



other Beyer Percussion Mics accurately reproduces all of them.

Get the whole story More information on how drummers, engineers and other audio professionals can select and employ the Beyer Percussion Microphone Group for optimum results is available in *What every Drummer Should Know About Miking Drums*, a poster-size manual. It covers mike selection, tips for proper placement, and presents a range of setups to accommodate every playing style (and every budget). For your copy, send \$3.00 to: **Beyer Dynamic Inc., 5-05 Burns Avenue, Hicksville NY 11801.**

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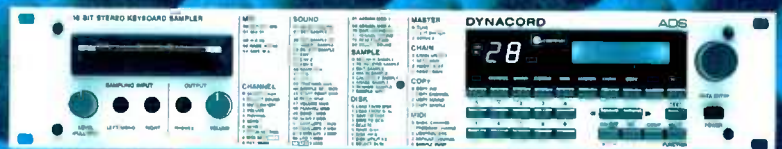
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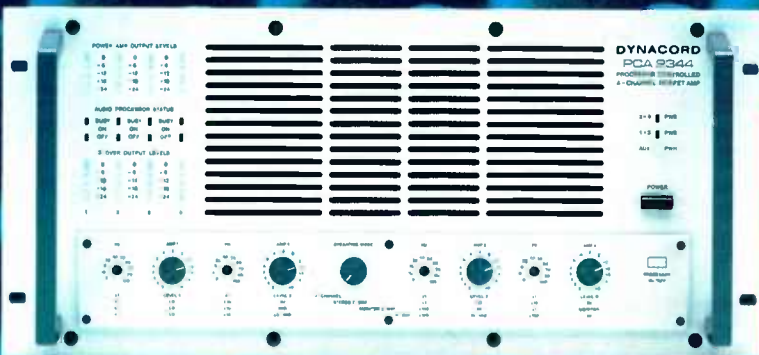
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NARADA WALDEN HARNESSES TIME



The Drummer as Hitmaker



BY ROBIN TOLLESON

Times and priorities have changed for Narada Michael Walden since he moved to San Francisco nearly a decade ago. Back then he was first and foremost known as a fusion drummer, initially for filling Billy Cobham's chair in the Mahavishnu Orchestra and thereafter for stick-wielding stints with Weather Report, Jeff Beck, Robert Fripp, Tommy Bolin and many others. When he first moved to his Masonic Street digs, there was one gold record on his wall, Beck's *Wired*, for which Walden wrote four songs. Now space is at a premium on Narada's walls, with gold and platinum records for the likes of Whitney Houston, Aretha and the Starship glutting the corridors, to say nothing of a shiny new Grammy for Producer of the Year. There are phone messages from Quincy and Lionel,

Barbra Streisand is coming over this afternoon to hear some material, and Walden is headed to L.A. tonight to record Eddie Murphy. No, Narada's decision to take on full-time production has had a definite effect on his drumming, as he'll freely confess:

"My chops do get a little rusty. I'm very used to playing on a high level. If you don't play all the time, the same level of proficiency is no longer there. Now I'm writing songs, producing, in the studio trying to get a good vocal. So it's not playing the drums the way I used to. But I have the same love for it. And what I have gained is a deeper respect for time.

"When I was with the Mahavishnu Orchestra, I had great ideas, but the time might skate along. Now I have more appreciation for the simplicity of it all, and when I say something it's because I really mean to say it. That doesn't say I'm a lame duck and I'm not playing anything, because I enjoy playing all kinds of fills, but I think in my case of having so much energy, I've gained a deep respect for just how laid back into a pocket something can be, and put my energy in that, which is really a powerful experience."

Walden will admit, however, that when he gets behind a drum set, as he does for his new employers as well as his old, he still fights a powerful temptation to go wild: "The artist in me might want to hit all kinds of drums, but the producer in me says, 'Wait a minute. The energy you were going to do that with, put right here.' That's how I've made hit records. The same spirit I put into Mahavishnu Orchestra or Weather Report, in which I would play some incredibly wild drum fill, I just harness it on these records. That's why it sounds unique. I'm really blessed at having some experience at really stretching it out, knowing the full tree. Now because I know the full tree, I can just take this one branch and devour it."

Walden's successful transition from jazz to pop must have had something to do with his childhood in Kalamazoo, Michigan, halfway between the fertile music meccas of Detroit

and Chicago. "Listen to any of that stuff," Narada enthuses. "Those were some serious jazz musicians who could play anything. And they would harness that mess for the chariot ride to the Top 10. James Jamerson could play some of the baddest upright bass in the world. There's so much to learn from those people. Now that I'm in the pop field, I know why I was born there, to hear all that."

Walden so wanted to be like Stevie Wonder as a youngster that he claims to have stared at the sun once in an effort to blind himself. "My drum teacher, Harold Mason, actually went to Detroit and joined his band," says Walden. "He

and Stevie came upon this groove, and they would wear audiences out. It's on the bass drum and the crown of his cymbal. And when I was a little kid, that was it. It was like rock, but with a serious funk attitude, man. And the kick drum on all the upbeat. Monstrous."

Walden loved drums from a very early age. "When I was a kid I had to go to mass every morning in Catholic school. I took my little Slingerland or Gretsch catalog, and while they were praying during mass I was praying for drum-sets." Narada's grandfather answered his prayers with a \$100 kit—a bass drum, snare, cowbell, wood block and a

cymbal. While Narada now plays electronic drums most of the time, he recommends that youngsters start playing on an acoustic kit, "because you've got to learn how to physically play some drums, how to hit them. There's a real art to it."

How Walden the drummer hits his drums is something Walden the producer worries least about. It's not that he doesn't care about them; it's just such a relief to know that you can come up with "the killer groove" when you need it. The grooves on *Divine Emotions*, his new solo album, are among his best. The disco feel of some of his late-'70s, early-'80s work is gone, in favor of the fat R&B on "But What Up Doh?" and "Explosion." There are subtle drum machine intros that kick into monster grooves, little hesitations in rhythms that propel them along. Back door fills that come around on the "2" spark "Can't Get You Outta My Head," and the drum flourish that ends the song sounds programmed, but it's played live by Narada.

He plays mostly on Simmons pads, and hasn't tried to adjust to the harder playing surface. "I play the same way. I play hard," says Walden. "It's hard for me to play kind of light. With Simmons you can play light, but the feel is not the same. I'm just used to playing the acoustic drums, and no matter what I play I have to play like that. And the Simmons respond to it."

Walden can keep his Simmons and Pearls set up most all of the time now
continued on page 129

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When Narada plays acoustic drums, he uses Pearl's GLX Super Series, a 22" bass, 6 1/2 x 14" snare, 9 x 13", 10 x 14" and 16 x 16" toms. His pedal is a Drum Workshop double bass job. Walden plays Paiste cymbals, and prefers smaller cymbals like 8" and 10" for quick decay.

PERFECTION PANS

For recording, Walden mostly plays Simmons electronic pads and triggers sounds from an Akai S-900 sampler. "I'm triggering all kinds of mammoth sounds. The snares are a combination of three or four snares. The kick is three or four bass drums," he notes. Walden is also MIDI'd into an E-mu SP-12 (via a Roland Octapad), which gives him the capability of quantizing his parts, auto-correcting the time. "I run two sets of tracks for my drums. One is a live set that's going directly onto tape. The other is being quantized. If there's a certain section of the music that I want to really have strict time, I might use quantization. It's important because I like to make records that have a sense of perfection about them."

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HOW TO THINK LIKE A DRUMMER



Becoming a Drumhead in 6 Easy Lessons



BY J. D. CONSIDINE

So, you got yourself a drum machine. Join the club. These days almost everyone who can afford to has bought one of the little buggers. And why not? With no miking to worry over and negligible set-up time, they're much easier for home-demo work than real drums. Moreover, with machines now offering dozens of different drum sounds *plus* sampling capability, it's possible to pull sounds from that little box which no mere drumset could produce.

But if these machines are so great, why is the drum track on the last demo you cut so awful? Sure, the *sounds* are impressive—dark, resonant toms; a clean, bright snare; a tight, deep bass drum—but the pattern itself? Somebody get me a doctor!

Going back over it, though, it's hard to see where you went wrong. The bass drum part seems solid enough, with a nice

funky stutter on the verse and some flashy sixteenths on the bridge, while the snare whacks the backbeat (and a few extra accents here and there) in perfect synchronization. Plus, there's that nifty high-hat pattern you worked out, with its thirty-second-note flutters and carefully articulated chokes, and also that tom-tom thing, which adds a sort of samba feel to the rhythm.

Great ideas, even if you do say so yourself. Yet as impressive as it was when you programmed it, your drum track just doesn't work when the rest of the music is added. What happened?

"A lot of people, when they program machines, they don't think as a drummer would play," says Dennis Chambers, a man who has thought like a drummer (and played like one, too) in groups ranging from Parliament/Funkadelic to John Scofield's current band. "The mistake is, they program all this stuff and make it sound like it's two sets of hands playing one drum. For instance, they've got sixteenth notes on the high-hat and then they've got tom-tom fills going with the bass drum and snare. If a live drummer would have to play that, it would be impossible. Because, first of all, you can't play sixteenth notes on the high-hat and play tom-toms at the same time."

Sometimes, of course, coming up with a part no human can play is a plus. Says jazz great Tony Williams, who has used drum machines on some of his recent albums, "You could program a drum machine to play something that you could never play, and when you hear it, it will inspire you to think of something else."

But that's an advantage only if the music you're playing is rhythmically complex by nature. If it's just a standard rock/pop tune, less definitely means more. Here's how Max Weinberg, the man responsible for putting the big beat behind Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, puts it: "Being a rock drummer—strictly a rhythm-and-blues-based rock drummer—my idea of what the drummer is supposed to do is lay it down. By that, I mean to play simple and steady."

You mean like a metronome? "No, I mean in terms of being able to be counted on," he says. "Rhythm and blues music is not very improvisational, so it's important to be predictable. Gary

ALDO MAURO



P-Funker Chambers:
"Don't make it sound like two sets of hands."

Tallent in our band once said of me that he always knows when I do a fill, I'm going to come in on one. He knows where I'm going to stop a fill."

Machines, of course, are notorious for not worrying about relations with other musicians, but maybe that's an advantage. Consider how Stewart Copeland, the noted rhythmist, soundtrack composer and former sparring partner for Sting, answers the musical question: What's the first thing one should keep in mind when attempting to think like a drummer?

What do you listen for in a song, then, in order to give it what it needs? "A number of things," he answers. "How is he presenting it to you? Playing it on the piano? Listen to his left hand. That's going to give you a sense of the rhythm.

"If he's playing it on the acoustic guitar or on an electric guitar, is he playing broad quarter-note type of rhythms, or is he playing a sixteenth-note rhythm? The first time I heard 'Tunnel of Love,' the main rhythm of that song is the acoustic guitar—jing-jing-jing-jing, sixteenth notes. So you key into that.

"Very often, when I hear a song for the first time, I think of what song it reminds me of. If it reminds me of a song I've heard before, it'll kind of bring me back to that. That gives me an indication of the tempo, it gives me an indication of where I should place the beat, if it reminds me of something else.

"You of course have to listen to the vocal. The vocal is going to give you the indication of where to put fills, if at all. I've streamlined my drumming tremendously in the last five or six years. I'm much more groove-oriented than I have been. Our records in the '70s tended to be a little...on the drums they tended to be a little busy, but that's what was wanted, that's what was needed. So that's kind of the way I played.

"On other songs, you have to work. I've done sessions in the past where maybe the song was weak so there needed to be more in the rhythm, more fill. More external excitement. One of the things that makes great songs work is the internal tension, is the drummer *not* releasing the beat by doing a fill. These are the things that I look for.

"Also, when I'm working with Bruce, the story is completely important. I listen to what he's singing about. I need to hear the words; I need to understand the story. There are emotional cues there that give the drummer a way to go. It's got to complement what he's singing about. Is it stark, is it energetic, is it a little down? That's very important. When you're playing songs you cannot discount that.

"Levon Helm, who was a master at sort of evoking those sentiments on the drums, was able to really key into what the songs were about, paint a picture with the drums. That's what I try to do—paint a picture."

Williams goes even further, suggesting that the harmonic structure itself should have a role in determining how the drummer's part should go.

"Depending on where these chords fall in a bar, or where they fall in eight bars, it all means something. It all has different rhythmic value. A structure is a rhythm. You have eight bars, eight bars and then four bars, six bars, five bars and then three bars; that's a rhythm itself."

Furthermore, a drummer's playing should reflect what's going on harmonically. "When you get to a certain part of the song, if the feeling is changing, then the rhythm can change. If you're just going along with a song, and it goes from G minor 7th to, say, a D dominant 7th, and then to something like a B-flat major 7th, it's going to get brighter. It's going to go from dark to bright. [So] the rhythm can change, because it gives you an uplifting feeling.

"In a lot of pop music, they don't do that," he adds. "The person doesn't get a chance to do that. But if you have imagination and you are clever, you can suggest those kinds of things."

"Your number-one enemy is usually the singer of the group," he says. "It's a constant battle. The singer will try and sing all over your drum fills. Usually just before the big chorus, which is your big opportunity for the major fill, they want to sing 'oh, oh babe' or something inane like that.

"What you do is you have to start your drum fill two bars before the chorus, so they run out of breath. By the time they run out of breath, you're still banging

away. Then you hit the big chorus."

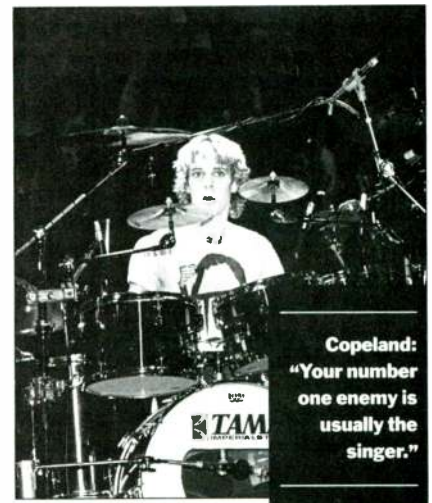
What about drum machines, then?

"The drum machine is your friend," he insists. "What it means is you can put all the other instruments down [on tape] and do the drums as an overdub. Just like real musicians. Before drum boxes, you had to actually play with the band and [have] them all getting bored and frustrated while you figured out your part. And then, if there's any problem with an overdub, they'll say, 'Well, I can't play with that drum fill—it's speeding up!' Or, 'It's slowing down!' Or something. With the click track, you can overdub like everybody else."

Admittedly, Copeland's views have something of a sardonic edge to them, but, as he says, "Now that I can play a little banjo, I can be very deprecating about drummers."

Seriously, though, Copeland does believe (if grudgingly) in keeping the singer's needs in mind when working out a drum part. "I suppose the first thing that needs to be established is the tempo," he points out, "and the singer will whinge on about how they have to sing it in the right tempo so they can articulate the words correctly. Since drummers are usually big-hearted, they'll allow the singer this one detail.

"Once you've figured out the tempo, you have to figure out what the most effective beat for it is, which is slightly



Copeland:
"Your number one enemy is usually the singer."

more tricky than it appears. Very often a song will come into a band with extensive demo-age, meaning that all the parts are pretty carefully worked out already. Either it works, in which case you go with it, or it doesn't work, in which case you come up with something else."

Without a specific demo to work from, though, what Copeland pays most attention to are the words, and the way they're sung. "Articulation of the words

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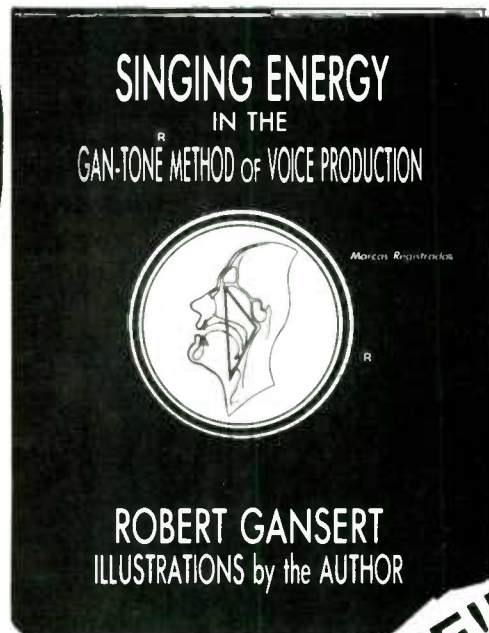
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really should determine the overall riff of the whole thing. You kind of have to start from there.”

But how? The Beatles spring to mind. “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da, life goes on,” Copeland quotes, stressing the last-syllable accent which the melody lends the phrase. “‘Ob-La-Di’ has an accent, ‘Ob-La-Da’ has an accent, ‘life goes on...’ sort of leads you into that ska feel. There’s a definite scansion to those lyrics, which is probably why they ended up playing a ska beat. In fact, that’s one of the first examples of white reggae.”

“Al Jackson said it best when he said the drummer should serve the singer and the song,” affirms Weinberg. To his way of thinking, the drummer’s role in a song is largely determined by others: the singer, the songwriter, the producer, the other band members. It’s something of a self-effacing position to take, but it works. “I’ve always had my best successes keeping that in mind—you know, playing as an accompanist. Russ Kunkel said the most brilliant thing to me once. He said, ‘All I want them to hear from me is the sound of the drums the way they want to hear them.’ And that’s your job in the kind of thing that I do.”

But then, says Williams, “Rock drummers play beats; they don’t necessarily play the drums. They don’t get a chance to play subtle kinds of things in the background, or double-stroke rolls. You never see a rock drummer play a double-stroke roll, except in a solo.”

Then again, he says, “Most jazz drummers can’t play rock or pop.” Still, he’s quite firm when he insists that “most rock ‘n’ roll drummers can’t play jazz.”

What do they do wrong? “One of the biggest mistakes is the way they approach the cymbal beat, and the way the four limbs are structured. To play jazz, you have to have each limb playing at a different volume. The cymbal beat is at one volume and one type of technique is in the right hand, the left hand is another technique with the traditional grip, which is not a match grip; the left foot is on the high-hat and that’s at another volume, and the bass drum foot is at another volume. When I teach people this, I show them how to do it and it’s very difficult for them to learn. It’s a different kind of coordination than people really realize, that people have never even thought about.

“In any kind of music you play, the best players are the players who sound most convincing. To get an authentic sound, you have to address the thing that is the most dominant, and the thing in jazz drumming that’s most dominant is the cymbal beat, which comes from the

old Charleston feel. So if that’s nebulous-sounding and uncertain—because they’ve never played with jazz bands, they’ve only watched guys or listened to records and said, ‘Yeah, I can do that’—then it’s going to sound unconvincing.”

Nor do jazz drummers have a monopoly on building patterns off the cymbals. “That’s all over,” says Copeland. “That’s in rock, that’s in reggae, in jazz; that’s in just about everything.”

“Up until reggae, the drum rhythms were basically the same—kick on one, snare on two, cymbal or high-hat sixteenth or possibly eighths. That’s the basic form of all drumming. During the progressive days people tried different time signatures, throwing in different things. But those have been smallish aberrations. The basic format has always been the same—still is. The only type of music that steps outside that is reggae, which has a completely different function with the kick on three only, and no snare, snare being just sort of an additive.



“The backbeat goes through everything: jazz, funk and rock—you name it, there’s a backbeat.” Even so, he adds, “The snare drum and the kick can reverse roles amazingly easily, much more easily than most people imagine. If you imagine that the high-hat or the ride cymbal playing sixteenth notes are the glue, a lot of the context within which the snare and the kick are in dialogue, the two sides of the dialogue can be reversed. Very often in the stuff I’ve done I’ve simply reversed the roles of snare drum and kick, and people write long articles on reinventing rock ‘n’ roll.”

But back to the cymbals. In Cope-

land’s estimation, “a lot of the expression that’s possible on drums comes from the high-hats. The kick and the snare are for filling a function. The power, the funk; strange things can happen from the kick and snare, but there are not too many things that you can do with hitting that backbeat. You can put it in a strange place, but you want to hit it pretty much the same way. Every time you hit it, you want them to be pretty much even, even if you put them in odd places.

“With the high-hat, there’s room for a lot of expression. Every micro-hit has its own character. You’re varying the pressure of the two cymbals pressed together, you can throw in little roughs and drags, you can open them for one hit—there are a million things you can do.”

By contrast, he says, “The tom-toms can only be introduced just before the chorus, or whenever you do your fill. They come in every now and then, but the high-hat is constant. It goes all the way through. You’re constantly saying something. The tom-toms are good for interjections, usually for stepping all over some skinny singer.”

Then there’s the matter of feel to contend with, and that’s where the shortcomings of drum machines become most apparent. “First of all, how can you get a machine to feel?” asks Dennis Chambers. “Machines are so cold. One of the things they’re working on right now is trying to get a machine so you can program it to get a feeling like a human.

“A human, just playing two and four on the snare drum and sixteenth notes on the high-hat, is not going to be perfect. It’s not going to be precise on every beat. I don’t care how great your time is; it won’t happen like a drum machine.”

Flesh-and-blood drummers, when heading into the chorus on faster songs, tend to speed up a bit, while drum machines remain constant. As a result, says Copeland, “Without the surges into the chorus, you actually feel that it’s slowing down. There’s an unnatural lack of surge.”

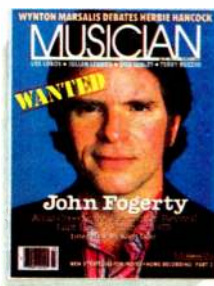
So, should you just toss out the machine and start practicing your paradiddles? Oddly enough, the consensus is that real drums and drum machines are equally important. Although Weinberg admits that “the reason I play drums has nothing to do with programming buttons; it has to do with the feeling I get when I hit the drums,” he also believes that every drummer should know how to program a drum machine. He, after all, did as much drum machine programming as actual percussion work on Springsteen’s *Tunnel of Love*.



40 **Ringo Starr**
Drummers, Devo, Rossington-Collins



41 **Miles**
Genesis, Lowell George



77 **John Fogerty**
Marsalis/Hancock, Los Lobos



84 **John Cougar Mellencamp**
Bryan Ferry, Maurice White



105 **John Coltrane**
Springsteen, Replacements



69 **Michael Jackson**
R.E.M., Charlie Watts



103 **U2**
Stevie & Jimmie Vaughan, Rick Rubin



71 **Heavy Metal**
Dream Syndicate, George Duke



110 **Sting**
Jaco Pastorius, Peter Tosh

BACK ISSUES

- 45... **Willie Nelson**, Jahn McLaughlin, the Matels
- 53... **Tom Petty**, Culture Club, Thompson Twins
- 57... **Bob Marley**, the Ramones, Dan Henley
- 58... **The Kinks**, R.E.M., Marvin Gaye
- 60... **Elvis Costello**, Joe Walsh, Culture Club
- 61... **Jackson Browne**, Eurythmics, Keith Jarrett
- 64... **Stevie Wonder**, Reggae 1984, Ornette Coleman
- 67... **Thomas Dolby**, Chet Baker, Alarm, Marcus Miller
- 70... **Peter Wolf**, King Crimson, Bass/Drum Special
- 71... **Heavy Metal**, Dream Syndicate, George Duke
- 77... **John Fogerty**, Marsalis/Hancock, Los Lobos
- 79... **Jeff Beck**, Jimmy Page, Arthur Baker
- 80... **Phil Collins**, Joan Armatrading, Josef Zawinul
- 82... **Brian Wilson**, Sting II, Jerry Garcia
- 84... **John Cougar**, Bryan Ferry, Maurice White
- 86... **Joni Mitchell**, Simple Minds, Hall & Oates
- 87... **ZZ Top**, Kate Bush, Marshall Crenshaw
- 89... **Elvis Costello**, Al Green, Mick Jones
- 90... **James Brown**, Tam Petty, Brian Setzer
- 91... **Rolling Stones**, INXS, Bangles
- 92... **Joe Jackson**, Bob Seger, Jahn Lydon
- 93... **Peter Gabriel**, Steve Winwood, Lou Reed
- 94... **Jimi Hendrix**, Prince, 38 Special
- 96... **Tina Turner**, Paul McCartney, Frank Zappa
- 97... **Eric Clapton**, Ric Ocasek, Paul Simon
- 98... **The Pretenders**, the Clash, Mick Jones
- 99... **Boston**, Kinks, Year in Rock '86
- 101... **Psychedelic Furs**, Elton John, Miles Davis
- 102... **Robert Cray**, Los Lobos, Simply Red
- 104... **Springsteen**, Progressive Percussion
- 105... **Coltrane**, Springsteen, George Martin
- 107... **Robbie Robertson**, Tom Petty, Big Guitar Special
- 108... **U2**, Tam Waits, Squeeze
- 109... **George Harrison**, Mick Jagger, Crazy Horse
- 110... **Sting**, Jaco Pastorius, Peter Tosh
- 111... **R.E.M.**, Year in Rock, 10,000 Maniacs
- 112... **McCartney**, Bass Special, Buster Poindexter
- 113... **Robert Plant**, Joe Strummer, INXS
- 114... **John Lennon**, James Taylor, Raby'n Hitchcock
- 115... **Stevie Wonder**, Sonny Rollins, **Joni Mitchell**, Johnny Cash



94 **Jimi Hendrix**
Prince, Let's Active



111 **R.E.M.**
Year in Rock, George Michael



86 **Joni Mitchell**
Simple Minds, Hall & Oates



89 **Elvis Costello**
Al Green, Mick Jones



91 **Stones**
INXS, Bangles

- 21... **Brian Eno**, Reggae Festival, Weather Report
- 24... **Bob Marley**, Sun Ra, Free Jazz/Punk
- 32... **Talking Heads**, Brian Eno, John Fogerty
- 33... **The Clash**, Ronald Shannon Jackson
- 34... **Tom Petty**, Carlos Santana, Dave Edmonds
- 36... **Grateful Dead**, Hard Pop, Miles Davis
- 37... **Reggae**, The Rolling Stones, Rickie Lee Jones
- 40... **Ringo**, Drummers, Devo, Rassington-Collins
- 41... **Miles Davis**, Genesis, Lowell George
- 42... **Hall & Oates**, Zappa, Jaki Byard
- 44... **Nick Lowe**, Graham Parker, Lester Bowie

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MUSICIAN, P.O. Box 701, Gloucester, MA 01931-0701 ****DO NOT SEND CASH****

"It's important to know as much technology as you can," he says. "You're certainly going to increase your employment opportunities."

It can also help the drummer's standing within the band, adds Copeland. "Very often, the drummer regards the drum box as a threat to his existence," he says, "which means that the keyboard player goes out and buys the drum box. Then it's open warfare."

"Really, the drummer should be the first guy in the band to go out and get that drum box and play around with it, get good at it. They're so useful. The drummer should regard himself as a rhythmist, not just a banger of drums." ❧

NEAL PEART

from page 92
sympathetic, like the way Thomas Dolby or Peter Gabriel can program a drum machine with a true sensitivity towards rhythm. That's so rare, and you hear so much machine stuff that has no drummer's temperament about it. But I think they're a great tool, and while I don't have any use for them, I'm glad that Geddy and Alex have one so that I don't have to sit there like a hack while they try and figure out an arrangement. I can go away and think of something else, and when there is something to work on I can take the place of the machine and go

forward and orchestrate it.

"I see electronic drums as conveniently packaged colors—I can have a whole orchestra of African sounds, Indian sounds or keyboard/percussion sounds in a way that's impossible to achieve otherwise. To me that's the great magic of it—it allows you to move beyond the physical limitations of analog sounds. I do think of them separately, though, and I even kind of segregate them a little bit, where all the electronic stuff is in the back. Why do I send them all to the back of the bus? Because they're effects rather than instruments; you can't really play them—you can only hit them." ❧

THOMAS

from page 96
"Still, it's the last actual hit record we ever had. But Elvis doesn't want that anymore. He doesn't mind about the backing or the arrangements, as long as he personally gets it out of his own mouth."

Blood and Chocolate, Costello's 1986 record with the Attractions, has a stripped-down rawness that illuminates the band in their spontaneous glory. "That whole album is live," Thomas says. "What you hear is exactly what happened." The agenda is stated from the opening cut, the deceptively and

dogmatically simple "Uncomplicated"—Thomas pounding out quarter-notes. "Boink, boink, boink, three equal strokes of exactly the same timbre. That's all there is to it. It's an early clue to the new direction, the Attractions' barbecue voodoo deal. While we were doing it, we made a big thing about how simple it would be."

Out of Your Idiot, a new British compilation of Costello's songs and outtakes, reveals the degrees of change which Costello's songs can go through between demo and album, as witness the brisk Motownish version of "Blue Chair" played by Mickey Curry versus Thomas' more relaxed lope on *Blood and Chocolate*. And there are constant quirks and detours in the songs; for instance, on "Honey Are You Straight or Are You Blind?" he plays the beat inside out, with the snare on one and three. You can't do that.

"I can. Some call it divine inspiration. Some call it genius. Some call it one of Nick [Lowe's] ideas," he laughs. "He's great about that, because he doesn't know anything about drums. He says, 'How about if it went ka-koom, ka-koom, ka-koom, across the beat?' That take is actually really shabby, but Nick went for it because it's got the charm. He's got this thing about the natural atmosphere of a track."

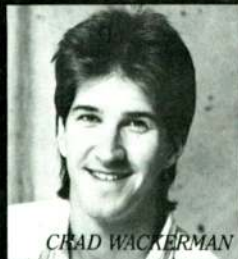
Rightfully, Thomas has no false modesty about his band's contribution to the annals of rock, if not twentieth-century culture. Thomas would like to see the music world make use of the Attractions as a valuable resource. "We haven't made the comfy crossover into the groovy world of session guys. We're still this *band*, still like the Velvet Underground or the Lovin' Spoonful or something. It doesn't matter how fantastic you are."

By now, Thomas has his hubris mojo working. "The Attractions have driven America crazy for the last 10 years. Mission: Impossible, forget it. The Attractions can take care of the problem. If you want a cancer removed by musical force, we can do it. We are the bad-assed heartbeat of Elvis. With the Attractions, there are no prisoners taken. The Attractions can kill at 10 feet. It's not like the Sex Pistols. We've been doing it for 10 years. It's not a drill."

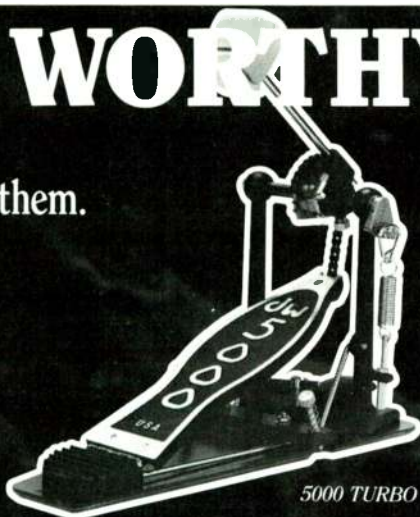
He's on a roll now. "Pete, it's so great to finally talk to a drummer who's really stupid. Everybody thinks drummers are stupid, and I'm here to tell them that...they are. That's what they're supposed to be. Intelligent drummers worry me. It's like a contradiction in terms, like dancing about architecture." ❧

ROAD WORTHY.

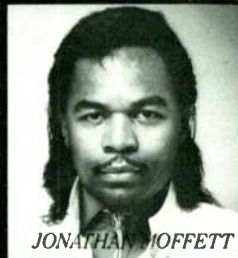
DW pedals and the drummers who use them.



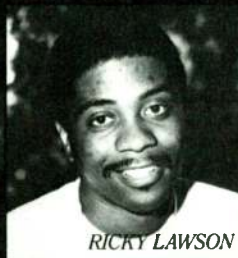
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DeJOHNETTE from page 86

idiotic. As DeJohnette said to me during a well-considered criticism of the critics, some of which I hope to fit into the publishable confines of this article, he always seems to fall under the heading of "and of course Jack DeJohnette."

And of course Jack DeJohnette has had a terrific band in Special Edition since 1979, sustaining a singular ensemble style through a number of personnel changes and the notable evolution of DeJohnette's ability to write music for it. Even in his earliest work for Special Edition, in which he kept his thematic material minimal and unimposing, DeJohnette showed a tendency to write suites for his improvisers, pieces inspired more by the example than the materials of Mingus, that would give his soloists a range of rhythms and harmonic materials to work from; but the progression from, say, "One for Eric," recorded in 1979 and still in the repertoire, to "Third World Anthem" from *Album Album*, cut in '84, demonstrates a surer hand with melody and the expanded orchestral palette that turns up in his less extended pieces now as well. The tendency toward multithematic pieces and parallel melodic lines has almost certainly been accelerated by the electronic keyboards currently proliferating in the DeJohnette basement upstate, amid the looming northern forests; and the integration of electronics into the Special Edition lifestyle that began on *Irresistible Forces* has continued through nearly a year of touring and turns up fully documented on *Audiovisual Scapes*, a two-record set that I would like to say Impulse is bringing out about the same time as this article, but which won't hit the stores until autumn. The front line of Greg Osby and Gary Thomas, two of the most brilliantly accomplished young saxophonists in the music, has gotten itself synthesized by means of pitch-riders, multi-viders and other instruments of the devil; Mick Goodrick's guitar has been analogously equipped, so it's hard sometimes to hear who's playing what; and DeJohnette himself has gotten more adept at working his own keyboards and other gear into a performing, improvising band led from the drums. Special Edition, present formulation, doesn't sound remotely like anything else out there, bears little relation to any known genres, perhaps most especially "fusion," still swings like mad and provides some of the best straight jazz improvising to be heard anywhere these days. It's one convincing version of a band for the '90s. It plays the kind of hard-edged, uncompromising music, with occasional remissions in the form of bossas and ballads, that we've come to expect from DeJohnette; and this time it's multidirectional with a vengeance, encompassing the cerebral savageries of a reinterpreted avant-garde, all the fertility of the mainstream, and not a few funk rhythms that seem sleek futuristic extensions of the kind of things our drummer used to play with Miles. Sometimes it happens all at once, as it did over the course of an intense weekend at New York's Bottom Line. If the band doesn't play your settlement or reservation soon, or even if it does, try to find the album in September.

DeJOHNETTE: This band I've got now, since it made *Irresistible Forces*, has made tremendous leaps, and the new record demonstrates that. The band is stretching out more as a unit and there's also a growth in the individual playing. There's no comparison between what Greg, Gary, Mick and Lonnie are playing on this record and the first one. The band hadn't worked then, but I think we put together a strong, polished record. It met with mixed reviews, but I liked it. I think if people go back to listen to it in four or five years they'll see the seeds that were planted there.

MUSICIAN: *I thought the CD-length version was fine, because*

with "Third World Anthem" added, between that and "Osthetics" you had enough straight-ahead blowing to balance the writing.

DeJOHNETTE: Well, with this record we'll be going to a two-record format, and people will get the full spectrum. I've always felt that one album was not enough to demonstrate the range of what I'd like to do. The band is really excited about this one. You know, "I hope you can get all of this out." MCA Impulse is also going to release *The Zebra Album*, on which I collaborated with Lester Bowie. That comes out in May, and I'm real happy with it. I'm using drum machines for percussion, and synthesizers. And Lester's playing trumpet. It was written for a long Japanese film of nothing but zebras. And of course Lester Bowie is one of a kind, a character. He has this life about him, whatever he does. When I had Lester in my New Directions band, some people used to complain about him, saying that he couldn't play changes, and I had to tell them he could. Lester plays some stuff that's off the wall, but he *means* it, and he makes it work. You have to remember that before he developed that style he used to play sessions and listen to Freddie Hubbard and played all the solos off the records. And he's got such a beautiful sound. Every one of those guys, Lester, Roscoe, they made a choice to go left or right after a certain point. When I met Roscoe Mitchell in Chicago he wouldn't play changes, but he'd play you a *tape* of him playing changes. [*laughter*] They made a choice to say there is an alternative. When I was in Chicago I heard both of those worlds, and that's reflected in what I do now.

MUSICIAN: *But let's get back to the current band for the moment. How did you hook up with Greg Osby?*

DeJOHNETTE: I met Greg through Terri Lyne Carrington. Greg is a creative player. I like the way he breaks up space, harmonically and otherwise, and he and Gary are investigating electronics the same way I am. They want electronics to enhance certain things, not to let it overpower the music. There's nothing I love better than acoustic instruments, but I also see the beauty of electronic enhancement.

Greg brought Gary into the band, and he's one of the most exciting cats I've heard on tenor to date, of the younger players coming up. I like his sound, and he has an original way of playing. It's a challenge for me to play with these guys, because if I were playing horn I'd play the way they do, and if you play with people who play the way you do, you have to figure out how to have the dialogue go on and make sure that if it gets a little thick there's still clarity.

MUSICIAN: *Where do you see Greg and Gary coming from harmonically?*

DeJOHNETTE: It's hard to say. They know all the players, but when they start to play they go their own way. I wouldn't know who to compare them to. I could say Dolphy but it's not Dolphy. I could say Coltrane, but it's not really the sound of Coltrane even though you can hear him in Gary. They both have original approaches, harmonically and otherwise. Gary is more aggressive, Greg more deceptive and subtle. They try to contrast with each other. Some listeners might pick out one to like or the other, but I hear them both and it's pretty balanced. We should also be talking about Lonnie Plaxico, who is a consummate young bass player. The stuff he's doing on the new record is ridiculous, so supportive. He has the technical ability to play anything he wants, he's got imagination, he's right there with me and I can take risks with him. I can do what I like, write any kind of way, and he can do anything. He plays great electric bass too. He was what I needed on bass.

MUSICIAN: *How does Mick Goodrick fit in?*

DeJOHNETTE: Mick is a colorist. For him it's a matter of trying to find the spaces, particularly since the guys have got these synthesizers. That'll probably mean he'll have to play a little

T E C H N I C A L E

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Tap in buttons which also double as 'kit select' instantly selecting one of sixteen kits.

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Custom one bar auto trigger accessed at all levels.
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Speed set 40—180 BPM
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Selection of built in useful patterns, eg single drum, all 16 drums in succession, bass/snare alternate, etc.
Functions—stop, start, clear.

The Kit Select

Maximum 16 x 16 drum kits. (Each drum can have 9 samples (Bass + Rim = 3)—i.e. each kit can access 132 different samples).
Footswitch select kit left/right.
Play and load kits simultaneously from memory or disk.

The Kit Mixer

On screen, 96 function, 16 into 2 mixer.
Individual channel controls for length, tune, pan l/r, volume, mute and solo.
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Special functions:-
Set all mutes/solos off.
Pots and slider ranges use definable—fine, medium, coarse, very coarse, extremely coarse.
Single keystroke to initialise mixer to 'normal settings' for length, tune, pan, level, mute and solo.
Forms the basis for automated mixing in the sequencer.

The Kit Configuration

8 pad types (icons) bass, snare, rim, tom, cymbal, hi hat, pitched
Individual inbuilt voice robbing modes for cymbals, toms and snares for natural playability.
MIDI note/channel individually assigned in each kit for all pads.
MIDI note range for pitched pads—16 pitched pads = 16 splits, all sixteen voice polyphonic (or assignable as required).
16 voice outputs. Voices assigned as required on a kit by kit basis
Special functions:-
Pads as default (normal kit)
All pads pitched.
Default voice assign—(1 voice bass, 3 voice snare, 1 voice rim, 4 voice toms, 7 voice cymbals/hi hat).
Assign all voices to all drums.
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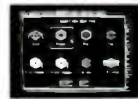
Icon representation of drum pad in a 3 x 3 position/dynamic matrix.
Maximum 9 samples per pad.
Zone (position) and dynamic sample switching
Individual pitch and level control for all samples for perfect matching of samples with a drum.
Sample loading from memory or disk.
Visual display of sample selected.
Movable 'dynamic bar' for programming of sample dynamic switch point
Special function:-
Sets all samples the same. ('soft outer')

The Sampler

16 bit linear sampling at 44.1 khz, 22 khz, 11 khz.
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Maximize sample amplitude 0 + 10 db to control clipping
4 function looping screen features forwards, forwards/backwards and x-fade looping
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Zero crossing loop points
Automatic loop gain and x-fade adjust for glitch free looping
Preview input gain function for clip free samples.
User definable sample trigger threshold.
Bar graph display of maximum sample amplitude.
Review sample 'raw' or with envelope processing.
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The Drum head

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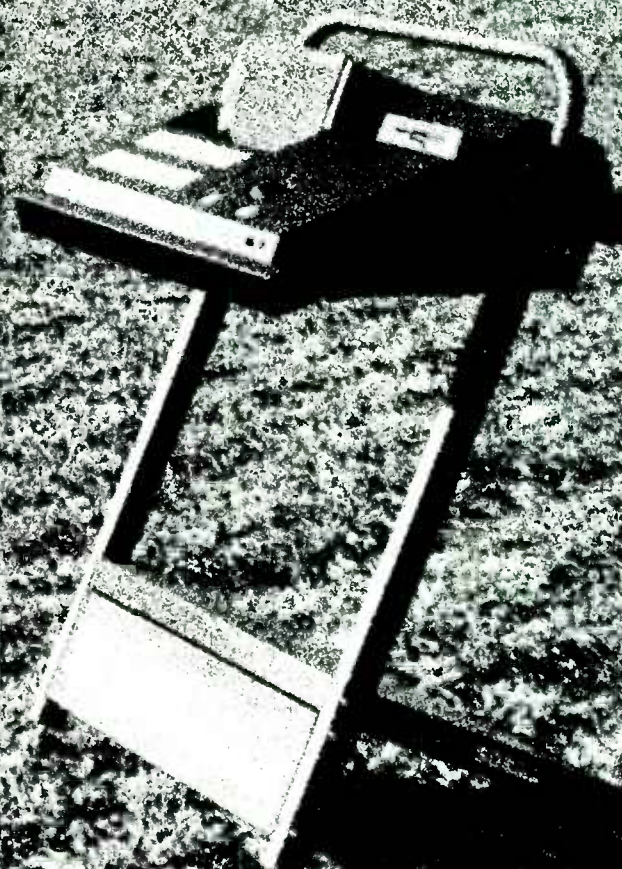
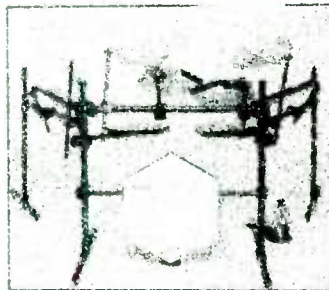
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more sparsely. He plays with his fingers, not a pick, so he gets all these colors and sounds. Since a lot of my stuff is chordally-based, I like what he contributes harmonically. He's a melodic soloist, and he's also got all that warmth. He comes out more aggressively on the new record, but I wouldn't want him to lose the lyrical, warm singing side that's his trademark. It's a nice contrast to the horn playing and to my aggressiveness too. I think there are some surprises to come from Mick.

MUSICIAN: *So really what you have in this band are musicians more like yourself, with a range something like your own.*

DeJOHNETTE: Yes, and as I said before, that sums up the challenge. I'm learning a lot from the experience and I hope they're learning from me. It's an exchange. That's what's so nice about the *Audiovisual Scapes* record; and if people don't pick up on it that's their problem, but everybody in the band feels that the band's potential is represented there. That's what we thought might be there, and there it is.

Please imagine here long discussions of Keith Jarrett, Pat Metheny, Ornette Coleman, Charlie Haden, Gary Peacock, Cecil McBee, Mingus, Bill Evans, Miles Davis, Ahmad Jamal, John Coltrane and so on. It's the nature of the medium and, again, akin to what you get when you buy a record. We'll finish up like this, with the mention of a musician who deserves far wider recognition than he usually gets, and then a stretch of reminiscences to close.

DeJOHNETTE: Dewey Redman is an original, just like Ornette. Ornette's *New York Is Now* with Dewey is one of my favorite records. Dewey, he's one of the geniuses, he's a national treasure. The solos he plays are gems, they just seem to flow out of him. Dewey's such a soulful cat as soon as he puts the horn in his mouth. It's always fascinated me that some musicians tend to be so together, so *meticulous* when they play, and then when they're not playing they're just the opposite, so loose. Coltrane with that Carolina drawl, "Where's the beer opener," but when he played that horn he became such an eloquent speaker, a musical orator. Trane, Dewey, Ornette, Miles, Sonny Rollins, Wayne Shorter, they became *eloquent speakers* of this music, of this tradition, and it's beautiful just to be able to appreciate it. One of the greatest joys I have is just to be able to listen to these people. When I'm not playing I love to listen. I just become absorbed. To be able to play with them, that's extra icing on the cake. Sometimes I don't even want to play. Sonny or Dewey will play some stuff and you could just *forget* to play. Dewey should have much more recognition than he does. When he and Michael Brecker were on Pat Metheny's 80/81 tour together, each one was saying that he wished he could play like the other. Dewey was saying, "Man, I need some saxophone lessons," because Mike has this incredible technique. But on the other hand so does Dewey, to get out what he gets out. Mike and I were scratching our heads; we didn't know how he could play what he did.

MUSICIAN: *Musicians love him. You just have to look at the faces, say, of the guys in the Liberation Music Orchestra when he takes one of those solos. Maybe he hasn't got a big audience because he's not a very dramatic player. His solos don't build in the usual way. They're all middle.*

DeJOHNETTE: A continuous stream of ideas.

MUSICIAN: *And you really have to know the music to know how personal and unusual the phrasing is. And, as you say, how soulful and eloquent.*

DeJOHNETTE: It could make you cry. But then we're talking about the fine art of music, like the fine art of painting. And I lie somewhere in the middle of all that too, between the rawness and the sophistication of that. I've chosen to be there. I wish I

could say that that kind of playing was for the masses but I think it's an acquired taste. I don't think I'm fashionable.

MUSICIAN: *You seem to thrill an awful lot of people.*

DeJOHNETTE: You know what I'm saying.

MUSICIAN: *It's true the more you know about drumming the more there is to appreciate.*

DeJOHNETTE: But the harder it is for the layman to pick up on. That's why I try to put a wide spectrum of music together.

MUSICIAN: *We haven't gotten to your piano playing yet. In Chicago, before you came to New York, you were playing about as much piano as drums, weren't you?*

DeJOHNETTE: With Muhal Richard Abrams and Roscoe Mitchell and those guys I played some piano, but mostly drums. Otherwise as a pianist I was doing a variety of jobs. I played free piano, cocktail piano, I had my own trios and quintets, I backed up singers, did all that. I used to sing standards myself. I was doing a lot of experimenting in Chicago, so it really primed me. And there was always this thing about going to the Big Bad Apple. Muhal told me, "You're prepared, you're ready to go," and that the only difference between Chicago and New York was that there was more of everything, all the same thing, just more of it, intensified. And when I came to New York in the early '60s I didn't find it that hostile. Musicians were cool. There were some that weren't but you stayed away from them. I was befriended by people like Charles Tolliver and John Patton. Charles was responsible for me getting the gig with Jackie McLean. Jackie's a beautiful guy and a beautiful leader. Playing with Jackie hooked me up with Cecil McBee and Bobby Hutcherson. Jackie loved the younger players. He was like a guide. I was playing loud with him, under the influence of Elvin. I was overplaying, and he called me aside and said, "Listen man, what you're playing is great but you're playing too loud. I can't hear myself." I said, "But Elvin plays loud," and he said, "Yeah, but that's different, he's got to do that with Coltrane. He doesn't play that way with anybody else." And I thought, yeah, he's right. Whenever you can't hear the soloist then you'd better think about it. But it was the *way* he told me to cool out. He didn't say, "Listen, you sad mother..." He was firm but friendly. His record, *Jackknife*, was the first record I ever played on but it didn't come out until years later. Jackie was always a family-oriented kind of guy. He was always helping the community, young guys getting in trouble, getting on drugs.

...[pause] People were real kind to me when I got to town. If you could play, it was the universal language. People can recognize each other no matter where they come from. I came to New York to play drums and piano but I got hired as a drummer, and I took that as an omen. This was going to be my calling from now on. I continued to practice the piano, used to go to the Y and practice for hours. So I never let the piano go. Now I take a keyboard with me when I travel. It was a good time to come to New York. Birdland was still there. They had those Monday night sessions. I turned up there and it was the first time I saw all the musicians I'd heard on records, Hank Mobley and Freddie Hubbard, Al Grey and Billy Mitchell. I sat in the first time I was there with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell. First I sat in on piano and then I played drums. It was terrific. This was the place where Trane played, there was Pee Wee Marquette, a bunch of guys hanging out in front. So I got a chance to check Birdland out before it became a disco. Slug's was also one of the first places I went to. I sat in there with Hank Mobley and Kenny Dorham. I sat in and I'll never forget Kenny. He finished a solo and jumped right off the stage, did a kind of flip, he spun around and pointed at me and said, "Where'd *this* cat come from?" And right away, you know, the grapevine, there's a new cat in town. ■

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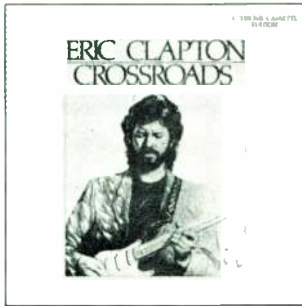


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RECORDS

HITS & HISTORY OF THE HOLY GHOST



ERIC CLAPTON

Crossroads
(Polydor)

It's telling that Polydor's massive six-LP, 73-track, 25-year retrospective devoted to Eric Clapton, better known as "God," takes its title from a Robert Johnson blues. Clapton's famous rearrangement of the haunted Mississippi Delta singer's 1936 "Cross Road Blues" with Cream in 1969 is a mighty totem of virtuosic blues-rock ecstasy. Johnson's song—stark, terror-filled, the very essence of blues mysteries—is at once emblematic of Clapton's deepest inspiration as a singer and guitarist and of what's been lacking in his music since the white fretbuster's halcyon days.

Crossroads offers a fairly complete musical portrait of a young Englishman whose ardent devotion to black American blues reached near-religious proportions early in his career; Clapton's staggering chops made him one of the preeminent instrumentalists of his era, though he was scarcely out of his teens. The set charts these early triumphs, but also delineates a subsequent failure of vision. At about age 30, Clapton, for undeniably personal reasons, largely rejected his gutbucket inspirations for more relaxed sorties through J.J. Cale's Tulsa rambles, subdued reggae and rock forms, and denatured pop. *Crossroads* is as much a history of retreat as it is of triumph.

What was glorious about Clapton's early musical career remains so. The Yardbirds' 1963 demos offer a guitarist with an undernourished tone and a tentative approach to soloing; sides cut only three years later with John Mayall's




Bluesbreakers (following a fast split from the Yardbirds, whose pop pretensions offended Clapton's purist sensibilities) depict a budding stylist whose dense solos on "Hideaway" and "All Your Love" are faithful homages to those songs' originators, Freddie King and Otis Rush.

Clapton reached the first apex of his celebrity while making his first rapprochement with pop in the power trio Cream. Annotator Anthony DeCurtis cites Clapton biographer Ray Coleman's telling phrase about the band: "They made musicianship hip." Clapton's mastery of the fast-developing guitar technology of the late 1960s is apparent in such antique pieces of period psychedelia as "Sunshine of Your Love," "Tales of Brave Ulysses" and "White Room."

After stints with the misbegotten supergroup Blind Faith and as a sideman with Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett's band (who supported Clapton on his sporadically excellent first solo LP), Eric metamorphosed into Derek and scaled new heights.

One may make the argument that Clapton has made a better record than Derek & the Dominoes' *Layla*, but I won't listen to it. That two-record monolith of blues-soaked misery, which found Clapton wailing his heart out for George Harrison's wife Patti, is incontestably the supreme revelation of his personal style as player, singer and writer. Only the title cut from the 1970 album appears on *Crossroads*, but some unreleased Dominoes tracks (a punchy rearrangement of Howlin' Wolf's "Evil,"



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someone should have
thought of before.

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an endlessly inventive, incomplete studio take of "Got to Get Better in a Little While") are the best of this set's hitherto unheard material.

The Dominoes' legendary excesses buried the group practically at its genesis, and Clapton sunk into a three-year hiatus of heroin-induced torture. When he emerged, clean, in 1974, he began a 14-year haul of uninterrupted solo work, notable for a general absence of deep passion, a lessened commitment to the blues and a pronounced disposition towards comfy, shuffling tunes. While *Crossroads* demonstrates that Clapton could still take a rip in the gutter when he felt like it (witness the live versions of "Further On Up the Road" and "Double Trouble"), his latter-day style is best defined by three flaccid hits from 1977's *Slowhand*—the chirping "Lay Down Sally," the gooey "Wonderful Tonight" and the repugnant "Cocaine." In middle age, Eric Clapton has become... a bit of a dweeb. It isn't surprising that the last song on the set is a track cut for a beer commercial.

There is plenty of music on *Crossroads* that sets fire to the nerve endings, but it's finally a sobering history, made all the more so by its chronological arrangement. Like his friend and contemporary Bob Dylan (whose own multi-volume retrospective *Biograph* was wisely arranged thematically), Eric Clapton is a musician whose late career reflects losses as often as it does victories. Sadly, they might as well have called this retrospective *The Road Not Taken*.

— Chris Morris

MAL WALDRON

Update
(Soul Note)

Mal Waldron can unravel a convincing blues story without resorting to the workhorse 12-bar form loved by millions. He can conjure up ample doses of feeling without hitting the prescribed—and too often misused—"blue notes." His is a blues based on implication, a blues that believes it's not what you play but how you play it. Every note is blue: The pianist's attack carries a hollow, unfinished resonance that seems destined to fundamentally affect whatever enters its path. Not exactly Instant Melancholy; more like Instant Contemplation.

Waldron has spent 30 years sending out these well-aimed alpha waves, and kept pretty good company along the

way. Billie Holiday liked the sound of Waldron's hugely significant block chords; though the true-blueness of his approach probably stemmed from a previous stint with Charles Mingus. Later, with Mingus alum Eric Dolphy, Waldron refined the blues into spare elegance, turning their Half Note sessions into explosively literary jazz conversations that to many ears have no equal.



In a group situation, as on last year's *From the Git Go* and the more revealing trio setting *Plays the Blues*, Waldron functions as guide rather than commander, leading his rhythm sections through so many bated-breath suspensions and rubato interludes that moments of finger-popping swing stand in welcome relief. Waldron's music has grown more emphatic and percussive since a nervous breakdown sidelined him in 1963, and now—particularly evident on *Plays the Blues* and the duet with Steve Lacy, *Sempre Amore*—it builds tension through reiteration. This pianist doesn't pan for ideas; they tumble forth and he works them into an exhaustive theme-and-variations inventory, relying on a charged group interplay to sell each one.

You'd think, then, that without the push-pull of at least one other warm body, Waldron might fall flat. Not so. More than on the landmark *All Alone*, the new solo document *Update* finds Waldron giving his old influences and even older tunes some needed air. Not all of *Update* turns this trick: "The Inch Worm" is overly expansive, its tempo catching Waldron a bit rough in the chops. But on "A Night in Tunisia," hardly the kind of tune you'd want to hear him play, the pianist surprises with an arrangement that floats effortlessly between tempos and solo sections in which the melodies reflect surprising bebop discipline.

His past few albums suggest that Waldron is moving out from the long shadow of Monk, his most direct influence. *Update* continues that progression, and at the same time points to an interesting change of tack; two songs

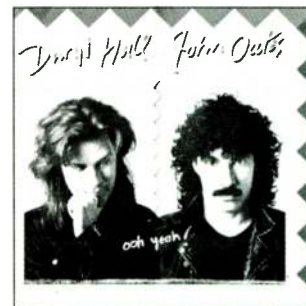
here are dedicated to pianist Cecil Taylor. "Free for CT" is the album's highlight, an improvised suite that finds Waldron evoking Taylor's seldom-heard lyrical side. It begins with a simple and regimented waltz figure, decomposes into a series of parallel chord voicings that suggest new harmonic paths with each note, then into a repose section shot full of "what's not there" tension. The improvisation that follows takes a number of Taylor-esque turns—a cartoonish walking theme, a Mingus blues riff—before returning to the grand opening statement.

"Variations on a Theme by Cecil Taylor" is less meaty, a 14-minute excursion built around a rock-like descending chord progression. Even though Waldron reinvents the piece with his trademark subtle repetitions, it doesn't take 14 minutes to get the sense of the whole, rough spots and all. But the rough spots are part of the romance of Waldron, and here they're out in the open—the passionate stretches of one of improvised music's most essential characters. — Tom Moon

DARYL HALL/JOHN OATES

Ooh Yeah!
(Arista)

As critics and fans take turns blessing George Michael's forays into blue-eyed soul, it's easy to forget how roots, chops and purity of purpose ultimately separate soul food from junk food. One listen to the steak-and-potatoes splendor of Daryl Hall and John Oates' *Ooh Yeah!* is a reminder that, back when gorgeous George was still a toddler in Hertfordshire, John Oates' band was co-headlining Philly record hops with the Five Stairsteps, and Daryl Hall was doing Sigma Sound sessions with the Stylistics, the Delfonics and Clyde McPhatter.



Granted, it's been nearly half a decade since Hall & Oates last recorded to-

gether, or enough time to wonder if this duo still mattered. But no amount of skepticism will prepare you for the enthralling shock of *Ooh Yeah!* Not only is it the finest LP this pair has ever recorded—surpassing *Abandoned Luncheonette*, *Bigger Than Both of Us* and *Voices* in one electric leap—but for once they really are a pair, with Oates nearly stealing the show from Hall's transcendent singing. His two compositions, "Rockability" and "Keep On Pushin' Love," confidently integrate narrative, edgy dynamics and ultra-elastic vocal harmonies in a way that reaffirms H&O's "rock 'n' soul" slogan as much more than a slick boast.

One key ingredient, of course, is densely filigreed singing. The amber bottom of Oates' voice is not a conventional complement for Hall's porcelain falsetto. It's the sheer surprise of hearing them converge so deftly that tugs at the ears; their ingenious movements within the arrangements do the rest.

But there's no H&O signature on *Ooh Yeah!*, from rich unison vocal surges to bopping ballad structures, that doesn't justify itself in the service of their songs. Atmospheric club ravers like "Downtown Life" and "Realove" are plotted to yield cadent subtleties and unanticipated aural twists, so that the bridge of each actually feels like an emotional plateau. Even Hall's full-throated star-turns, like "I'm in Pieces" and "Everything Your Heart Desires," possess a new humility of concentration that makes his fervor sound genuinely plaintive. The latter song, with its sinuous lockstep tempo, sparks more honest combustion than anything since "She's Gone."

We may never know how much toil and anxious sweat went into bringing *Ooh Yeah!* to this state of grace, but the results suggest that Daryl Hall and John Oates took this project *very* seriously. For all the hard knocks they've taken along the way, one also suspects that only Hall & Oates have the know-how and heritage to make blue-eyed soul this visionary. — Timothy White

RODNEY CROWELL

Diamonds and Dirt
(Columbia)

That Rodney Crowell happens to be one of the finest songwriters on the Nashville skyline is a wonderful mystery. He doesn't say anything new, nor does he say anything old in a new way, yet he manages



Like A Snapshot From Old Friends

From 1964 until 1974, the Siegel-Schwall Band were a Chicago institution. At the forefront of the 1960s blues revival, they pioneered a lighthearted, folk-inspired interpretation of the blues that was both unique and enduring, from their first performances on Chicago's South Side to encores with the San Francisco Symphony, and spanning 11 albums.

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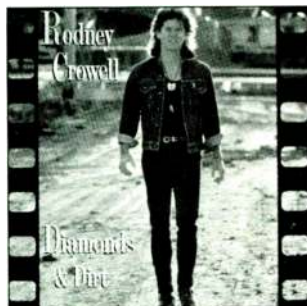
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to reassemble the standard vocabulary of country clichés in a manner that's vibrant and fresh, while exuding a deep respect for the musical traditions that inspire him. Making his professional debut in 1975 as a member of Emmylou Harris' redoubtable Hot Band, Crowell has written a handful of modern country classics (most of them hits for other artists) and recorded four generally acclaimed albums. This, his fifth LP, isn't the one where everything falls into perfect sync, but *Diamonds and Dirt* has plenty to recommend it.

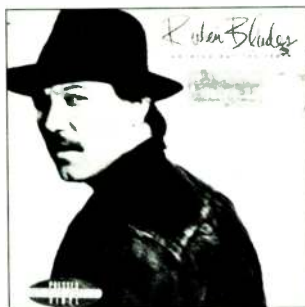
A country boy whose mind was blown at the age of six when he heard Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" on the radio, Crowell is a master of the mid-tempo rocker and his best tunes are usually tethered to a rowdy backbeat. Three songs here—"I Know You're Married," "She's Crazy for Leaving" and "It's Such a Small World"—fall into that category, and will no doubt spawn many cover versions and plenty of royalties. Crowell's co-writers here include Guy Clark and Will Jennings, but his most engaging collaborator is his lovely wife Rosanne Cash; when she puts her two cents in on the LP's first single, "It's Such a Small World," she lights the tune up like a Christmas tree.

Crowell has described *Diamonds and Dirt* as "a return to my rodeo dance days in Texas." The bands at those dances always toss off a few bum tunes and *Diamonds* has its share of clinkers which, like most bad country songs, are rooted in the bloodied but unbowed "survivor" mentality. "There were ways I should have thrilled you/ There were days when I could have killed you," he moans on "After All This Time," a song that evokes an image of two chain smokers in a dingy tract home. "Yeah honey, we been through it all," the song seems to say, "the black eyes and the beer



brawls and we're still hangin' tough." It's not a world you want to spend too much time in. But, even as three songs sit crying in their beer, the seven remaining cuts roar down the highway into the

wind. It wouldn't be country without a sprinkling of tears and regrets, so this record looks built pretty good from here. — Kristine McKenna



RUBÉN BLADES

Nothing But the Truth
(Elektra)

Nothing But the Truth is the first English-language record by one of the biggest stars in Latin music, which means it's bound to be applauded as cross-cultural fusion and derided as sell-out. It's a provocative record that doesn't fit any particular market niche, which means Rubén Blades will be christened by some as this year's patron saint of the Brilliant Yet Unmarketable. And it's a canny, forceful synthesis of Latin and Anglo musical elements, which means it's one of the first records to make the long-touted idea of world pop seem like more than contrived exoticism. Oh, there are plenty of reasons why you're going to hear about this record. But will you hear this record?

You'd better make a point of it, because *Truth* is one of the two or three best albums of the year so far, a fully-realized song cycle about love, politics and everyday experience. The songs vary widely in lyrical and musical tone, but they're bound organically by Blades' insistence that love and politics belong together, that both are aspects of everyday experience. None of the American rockers who've taken socially-conscious turns in recent years have done this compellingly for an entire album, perhaps because none of them have realized that the best political songs are love songs first (well, John Mellencamp may know this, but he doesn't know he knows it).

Take "In Salvador." The title suggests an anti-interventionist broadside, but what Blades delivers is infinitely more instructive—an accounting of the emotional cost of living under state terror and being unable to trust even your neigh-

bor. *Truth* also includes the year's most bracing anthem ("Calm Before the Storm") and one of the best songs about male friendship pop music has yet produced ("The Letter"). And Blades' sweet, clear voice, which exudes a not-so-common admixture of warmth and moral urgency, is the perfect instrument for driving it all home.

At first listen, I pegged this for a record fated to fall through the cracks. There's no killer club track, no surefire CHR hit, and the Lou Reed collaborations—great as they are—have only a marginal chance to reach what's left of AOR. But if watching Jesse Jackson's campaign roll up grassroots support in recent months has proven anything, it's that there are a lot of people who have fallen through the cracks themselves and are looking for a new voice. In music, as in politics, word of mouth can start a brushfire. That's where you come in.

— Steve Perry

THE SMITHEREENS

Green Thoughts
(Enigma/Capitol)

Take guitars, bass and drums. Apply vigorously to melodic, carefully wrought rockers dealing with love's trials. Not exactly a daring formula, is it? When you're waxing this familiar, you better have a good excuse, not just a well-indexed collection of Beatles licks.



Somehow, where more ambitious bands have failed, the Smithereens triumph. Lacking major flash, and without truly killer hooks, Pat DiNizio and company still breathe new life into power pop conventions on *Green Thoughts*. The reason has everything to do with commitment, an unquestioning dedication to getting a style precisely right.

Pretty engaging style it is, too, semi-tough axes churning away briskly as DiNizio plays the forlorn suitor in "Only a Memory" and "House We Used to Live

In." Sometimes his callow sincerity recalls the fine young McCartney; occasionally Pat's dignity slips, revealing a secret lust for the florid theatrics of Eric Carmen. (Though he doesn't begin to approach the icky vulgarity of "Hungry Eyes" or "All By Myself.")

Maintaining one's composure becomes crucial when trading in subject matter this woeful. Whether enduring a world of pain, choking on lies or choosing between death and utter misery, DiNizio carries emotional distress to grotesque extremes. Self-absorbed to a fault, *Green Thoughts* isn't about relationships, it's about one person's response to them. Even the relatively upbeat "Spellbound" has a narcissistic, enraptured-by-the-mirror quality.

No matter, 'cause DiNizio's crisp melodies take the chill off his morbid

romanticism, lending an appealing resonance to the most obvious borrowings. "Something New" teasingly begins "It is time..." then pauses, just like the Kinks' (or the Pretenders', if you must) "Stop Your Sobbing." The airy "Especially for You" suggests the Rascals' plaintive "How Can I Be Sure?," while "If the Sun Doesn't Shine" basks in the glow of warm backing voices, recalling the Beach Boys' "Darlin'." Cutest of all, "Elaine" could be the greatest hit Nick Lowe never had, thanks to chipper vocals and breezy execution.

On balance, *Green Thoughts* stands as a pleasantly modest affair. Don Dixon's typically sensible production emphasizes strong guitar textures and vocal presence, not big-bang effects. For their part, the Smithereens play perfect pure-pop miniatures, secure in their own little

world. Believe it: Small can be beautiful. — Jon Young

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Hurricane Zouk
(Virgin/Earthworks)
Heartbeat Soukous
(Virgin/Earthworks)
Brazil Is Back
(Celluloid)

America's dominance of the world music scene is eroding as various Third World musics penetrate Western pop. A kick drum may stay on the fours but only as reference point for a universe of syncopations drawn from the spectrum of Afro-Caribbean rhythms; melodies owe more to bubbly, major-key Euro-pop than to American rock 'n' soul. It's a big party

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CHUCK MANGIONE combines his trademark sound with soulful melodies and sweet harmonies on his new LP, "Eyes Of The Veiled Temptress." With the brilliant touch of coproducer Thom Bell, Chuck reaches new heights with a record that's contemporary and unique with a universal appeal too tempting to miss.

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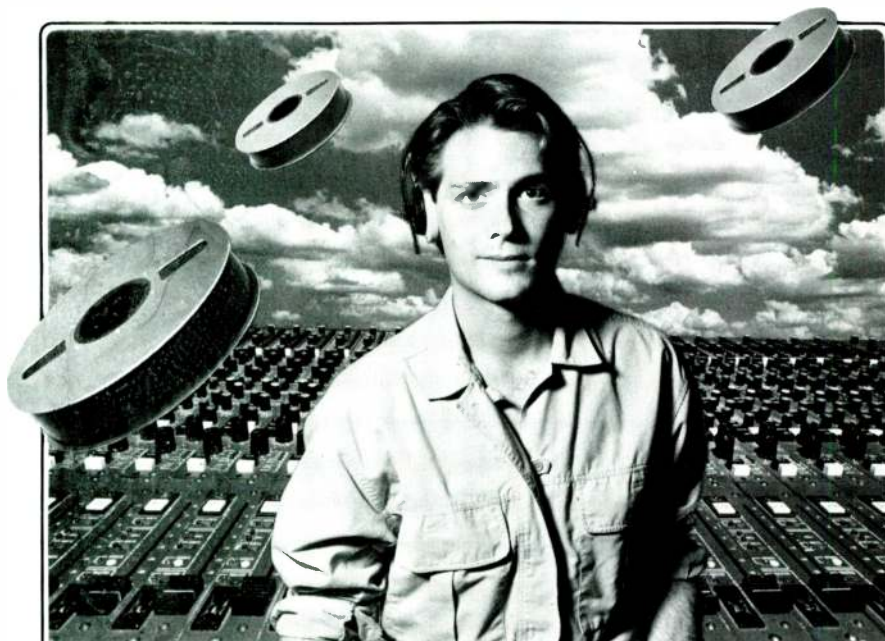
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out there which most of us have been missing.

Zouk, a kind of Afro-Caribbean fusion, was pioneered by the French Antilles group Kassav in the early '80s. Recorded mostly in Paris by a floating roster of African, Caribbean and French session musicians, zouk uses drum machines and synthesizers along with horns and chattering guitars. *Hurricane Zouk*, an ideal introduction, leads off with a prototypically hot cut by Zouk Time: A hellacious groove driven by percussive synth licks and percolating trap drum underpins a call-and-response between the insidiously hooky female chorus and male vocalist Kanda Bongo Man. Best experience the LP standing up—even blander cuts will suddenly make sense.



Soukous has evolved during the last 30 years from Cuban rumba derivations and Zairean lilt to a tight, energized Paris-based formula and remains pan-Africa's most popular music. So pervasive is zouk's influence, however, that two cuts on *Heartbeat Soukous*, Kanda Bongo Man's "Belle Amie" and Pepe Kalle/Nyboma's "Zouke-Zouke," mix the more lyrical Zairean soukous with zouk's percussive urgency. *Heartbeat Soukous* is third-phase soukous at its best; skin-tight dynamics take it out of MOR territory into dancer's heaven.

Brazilian pop has occasionally made an impact in America; with new Brazilian LPs from Manhattan Transfer and Sarah Vaughan (and Quincy Jones' public endorsement), it may happen again. But as the patchy, wide-ranging *Brazil Is Back* sampler demonstrates, a lot of Brazilian pop is excessively sentimental and formulated. With the exception of cuts by multi-faceted charmer Gilberto Gil, the atypically pan-African Obina Shock and rootsy samba-iste Martinho Da Vila, the styles showcased on *Brazil Is Back* typify Brazilian weaknesses (enervated tempos, languid vocals, four-square melodies) rather than its strengths (lyrical phrasing, intriguing rhythms and earthy sensuality).

— Randall Grass

ANIMA

from page 38

Laura Nyro. The record companies are clearly changing their standards. But enlightenment has not come in a divine burst. A cruel demographer might tell us that this latest market aberration is just a reflection of the record biz shifting its promotional attention from MTV to CDs. CDs are now the hot market, and they are so far the fancy of older, baby-boom consumers with money to spend. A cruel demographer might tell us that we are all bobbing rudderless on a sea of marketing waves, our compass fixed not on art but dollars. Well, so what? Artists have always hung on the coattails of investors, and great rockers have often piggybacked on moneygrubbers. The good news is that circumstances have aligned to make possible a resurgence of bright, adult rock music made by artists who are individuals to *begin* with. And that must be good news for a rock audience who have lately felt like chaperones at the sophomore dance.

The four women we have chosen to focus on are not part of any movement. They are good examples of a happy trend. It is interesting that during the time the U.S. market was closed to serious women, Shocked, Childs and O'Connor gravitated to London. It is much harder to explain the weird coincidence that all three say they were runaways, and all three say they were institutionalized—Childs and O'Connor in juvenile halls, and Shocked in a mental hospital. Smart journalists take colorful origin stories with a grain of salt, but the implication is that we still live in a culture where creative young women run the risk of being locked up.

Survey articles always ride on the rim of oversimplification, and pieces on "Women in Rock" inevitably squat astride the twin goon gods—Sexism and Stupidity. But look around—intelligent adult female singer/songwriters are suddenly being signed up and promoted by record companies who two years ago wanted only soul divas, eight years ago wanted skinny-tie new wave bands, 10 years ago wanted disco crooners. These periodic openings are fascinating for what they tell us about the fluctuations of the pop marketplace, and maybe about our culture. Trends come and go, and we'll find out later whether this one represents a coming movement or just a brief opportunity. Here's the important thing: These women have been locked outside a long time. And they've used that time to get really good. — *Bill Flanagan*

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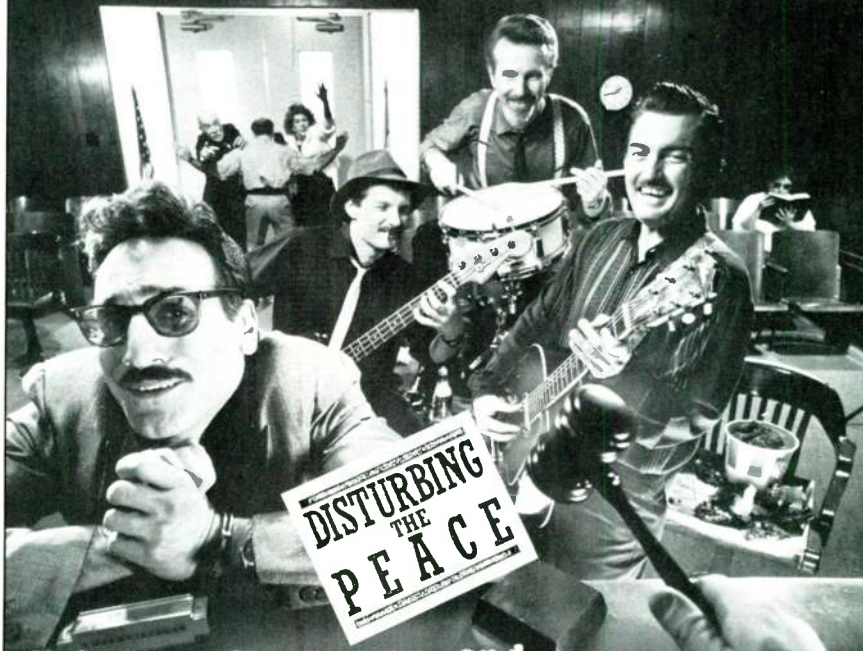
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ROCK

SHORT TAKES

drivin' n' cryin'

Whisper Tames the Lion (Island)

BECAUSE IT HAS THE EASY FAMILIARITY OF an old favorite, you'll swear you've heard "The Friend Song" somewhere before. You haven't, though, and that's what makes drivin' n' cryin' such a find. Not only does the group move smoothly between the beefy jangle of the title tune, the countrified twang of "Catch the Wind" and the raucous overdrive of "Powerhouse," but it does so while delivering songs that are always at least twice as good as the playing. Could these guys be this year's Smithereens?

JERMAINE STEWART

Say It Again (Arista)

EVER THE MORALIST, STEWART STARTS OFF by insisting "Don't Talk Dirty to Me," and proceeds from there to address post-marital sex ("Don't Have Sex with Your Ex") and overt flirtation ("She's a Teaser") with equal approbation. So how come he sounds every bit as funky as the bad boys who celebrate the above? Must be his gospel background; whatever the case, it's exactly what keeps a made-for-radio single like "Say It Again" from drowning in its production values.

DWEEZIL ZAPPA

My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama (Chrysalis)

FOR AN UP-AND-COMING ROCK STAR, Dweezil Zappa seems to have it all: great chops, a famous name and a genuine gift for album titles. All he needs now are real songs to use in place of the semi-metal sludge that currently sets up his solos, and who knows? Maybe he'll even have hits.

DAN REED NETWORK

Dan Reed Network (Mercury)

THIS IS THE FIRST ACT SINCE MOTHER'S *Finest* to come up with a credible fusion of hard rock and funk, and while the songs here aren't likely to land them in

Bon Jovi-land, this debut provides a handy bridge between Billy Squier's groovier bits and Funkadelic's stabs at hard rock—which makes even the obvious AOR moves seem forgivable.

FIREHOSE

if'n (SST)

FALSE ALARM.

TINA TURNER

Tina Live in Europe (EMI)

BECAUSE AN AWFUL LOT OF THE ENERGY Turner generates in concert is strictly visual, much of this ends up like a TV show without the picture. But just as you're ready to switch channels, she adds a twist: special guest duets. So what if, aside from Robert Cray's two oldies, none of the performances stand up to the originals? Or that David Bowie ends up flogging one of his hits? At least she deserves points for the concept.

JOHNNY HATES JAZZ

Turn Back the Clock (Virgin)

YEAH, WELL, J.D. ISN'T TOO WILD ABOUT Johnny, either.

THROWING MUSES

House Tornado (Sire)

THE PIXIES

Surfer Rosa (Rough Trade)

EMERGING FROM THE SAME SCENE WITH A similar dependency on quirky sounds and prolix lyrics, these bands seem like two sides of the same coin. What sets them apart is more than the difference between girlish introspection (the Muses) and boyish guitar noise (the Pixies). While the Muses' songs seem to hinge upon Kristin Hersh's emotional expressionism, the music's real glue is the sophisticated instrumental work. By contrast, the Pixies seem stuck on the guitar fury that animates their sound; despite the solid hooks in "Bone Machine" and "Gigantic," most of the writing is undercut by willful obscurantism. Which may be why *Surfer Rosa* makes a

great first impression, only to fade, while *House Tornado* just gets better with each listen.

JOHN WHITEHEAD

I Need Money Bad (Mercury)

EVEN THOUGH THE PRODUCTION CREDITS are 100 percent New York, the sound is pure Philadelphia—which is as it should be, given Whitehead's background as the voice behind McFadden & Whitehead (remember "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now"?). Producer/partner Gene McFadden hasn't done much to modernize the approach, but the rich, gospel resonances buoying Whitehead's delivery don't need elaboration—singing like this is timeless.

THE FALL

The Franz Experiment (RCA/Beggars' Banquet)

NEVER MIND THAT THE FALL'S "VICTORIA" ends up almost as pop-oriented as the Kinks' original; this is no crossover attempt. With its dense layers of rhythm and melody, the sound is as difficult as Mark E. Smith's lyrics are impenetrable. Why bother, then? Because for all the music's complexity, the band's sound is kept clean and uncluttered, giving this latest Fall an edgy intensity earlier incarnations would've envied.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

World at a Glance (Island)

BETWEEN DAVID ILKU'S HABIT OF RECALLING Iggy Pop and Bono Vox in the same song, and the band's well-practiced jumble of light metal and not-so-new wave guitar licks, *World at a Glance* sounds unfortunately like half the club bands in America right now. So why even bother? Because the one thing that's *not* formulaic about these guys is their writing. From the urgent "Burning Out" to the insistent "Night Away," these guys know how to write a hook and make it stick, leaving the listeners humming along in spite of themselves.

BY J. D. CONSIDINE



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S H O R T T A K E S



Buffalo Chips: Swing—The Best of the Big Bands (MCA Home Video). These four volumes of mismatched video footage from the Universal vaults juxtapose brilliant jazz with campy period nostalgia, a blend unlikely to captivate anybody. The producers were so infatuated with their jive graphics and special effects (like freeze frames that delete the beginning and ending of each clip) that they annihilated any semblance of continuity. Why follow **Benny Carter**/**Nat "King" Cole** with **Rosemary Clooney** and **Tony Pastor**; mitigate **Duke Ellington's** glow with ciphers like the **Blackburn Twins**; contradict **Count Basie's** "Swinging the Blues" with **Jimmy Dorsey's** droopy "Am I Blue"? Feature hardcore jazz footage on one tape (and the make-believe ballroom on another) and you'd have a helluva buy, but as presently configured, no sale...

The Max Roach Trio Featuring the Legendary Hassan (Atlantic): A local legend in Philadelphia, **Hassan Ibn Ali's** polytonal piano playing echoed bebop (and mentor **Elmo Hope**) in the pulse, but his Monkian harmonies suggested vertical hand grenades exploding above the conversational polyrhythms of **Art Davis** and **Max Roach**—like a more swinging version of **Cecil Taylor**. The emotive angularity of the late pianist's surging cross-rhythms allowed Roach to fulfill his democratic ideal: the drummer as an equal voice. This is strong, spiritual, innovative music. So how come Atlantic has yet to re-release this historic 1966 session? And where are the tapes from a subsequent session with **Odean Pope** on tenor?

Trios in Brown: When it comes to bass violin, there is no more dynamic, resilient player than **Ray Brown**, and these three fine releases showcase his

distinctive sound. **George Shearing's** *Breakin' Out* (Concord) benefits from the superb production standards of this classy indie label. The sound is remarkably rich and detailed as Brown and young drum mentor "**Smitty**" **Smith** frame the bluesy side of this elegant piano stylist with understated verve and power... **James Williams** is a young veteran whose assured mastery of the modern piano repertoire is grounded in a supple, sanctified kind of bluesiness that listeners may associate with **Horace Silver**, **Bobby Timmons** and **Wynton Kelly**—but his glistening touch and harmonic colorations are singular. On *Magical Trio I* (Verve), Williams reunites Brown with his ex-employer **Art Blakey** for the first time. Brown's rhythm has always tended to push ahead on the beat, while Blakey's lags teasingly behind—suddenly goading and exploding. It's fascinating to hear their loving give-and-take as they accommodate each other, and how Williams orchestrates the accord... Finally, you ought to pick up on the new CD version of *Way Out West* (Contemporary), **Sonny Rollins'** maiden voyage in a trio format with Brown and his soulmate **Shelly Manne**. There's a new alternate of "I'm an Old Cowhand" that features more expansive variations on the theme—their collective interplay is relentlessly swinging throughout. If your system's equipped with a sub-woofer, the resounding resonance and punch of Brown's bottom will scare you (and your neighbors) to death.

Stanley Jordan—Standards (Blue Note): Jazzbos faintly praise Jordan's technical innovations while dismissing him conceptually. Let's cut the young man some slack. Yes, his improvisations tend to fall on the strong beat, but you might be grabbing hard on the one, too, if you were trying to play the guitar pianistically with both hands—it's like a new instrument. And to me, he's not a

sentimentalist, but a romantic (look it up); and if this lyricism relates more to folk, baroque, rock and R&B than jazz per se, so what? Listen to the carillon edifice of "Moon River," the rhapsodic opening voicings of "Because" or the fanciful percussive maelstrom of "My Favorite Things" and dig what an imposing challenge Jordan's posed for himself.

The American Jazz Orchestra/Benny Carter—Central City Sketches (Musicmasters): Seventy-one minutes plus of classic swing settings by the eternally modern master of the big band language. Benny Carter harmonizes his reed sections so that they move with the elliptical melodic grace of a single voice, and his brass writing affords structural buoyancy to the groove by sidestepping blaring clichés in favor of opaque tonal colorations that are as understated and tasteful as the man himself (which might explain why there isn't more feature space for Benny's bulbous alto stylings—try the MCA CD of his classic octet, *Further Definitions*). Digital remasterings of analog material also magnify the nuances of jazz orchestrations (while allowing you to cram two albums worth of material onto a single CD).

Duke Ellington—The Private Collection, Volumes 1-5. Sessions from 1956/1962/1963 portray the Duke's unwavering evolution, and while the master choreographer's opulent designs invite repeated immersions, the voluptuous suites on volume five (1968 and 1970) and the unadorned bounce of a 1958 dance concert (on volume two) are the most alluring. Ellington's sweeping evocations of color and movement on "The Degas Suite" and his ballet score "The River" are a fitting benediction to his autumnal bloom—a must buy. And the solicitous, imperturbable grace with which Duke and the boys groove a one-nighter at Travis Air Force Base—as the celebrants talk to and through the band—makes for goofy, swinging fun. (LMR, 40 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10019)



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SHORT TAKES

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Carnival Time
We Got a Party
(Rounder)

THERE'S BEEN A FRENZY OF ARCHIVAL NEW Orleans music releases in the past two years, somehow ignoring till now the rich treasuries of the feisty Ric and Ron labels. From 1958 to 1962, these companion companies helped define the sound of '60s soul without compromising their artists' regional integrity. Collectors will want both discs, but for a pure shot of joy, pick up the funkier *Carnival Time*, an upbeat gathering of hot novelty numbers (including the great Eddie Bo's "Check Mr. Popeye"), perky love songs and simmering tear-jerkers like Johnny Adams' "I Won't Cry." With cuts from Irma Thomas and Prof. Longhair, *We Got a Party* has more star power, but a slightly lower fun factor. Still, the Party Boys' title track ably captures the spirit of playful decadence that makes the Crescent City so delightful. (1 Camp St., Cambridge, MA 02140)

— Ted Drozdowski

MOSES RASCOE

Blues (Flying Fish)

JUST ANOTHER PREVIOUSLY UNDISCOVERED 70-year-old bluesman who plays and sings with the offhand assurance of Mississippi John Hurt, Rascoe's debut was recorded at a club, but the audience soon enough includes your room. The songs, mostly blues and gospel traditionals, include a couple of telling Jimmy Reed covers ("Bright Lights Big City"); familiar turf, but that's part of Rascoe's charm. With the soothing but insinuating voice of experience, deftly weaving contrapuntal bass and melody lines, his versions vary from quietly comfortable to near-definitive. (1304 W. Schubert, Chicago, IL 60614) — Mark Rowland

TOM RUSSELL

Road to Bayamon (Philo/Rounder)

THIS IS RUSSELL'S FOURTH ALBUM, ALL ON obscure labels, and if the last three are anywhere near this one, some big-league A&R guys in Nashville and Austin ought to have their ears boxed. Russell sings in a rich baritone without unseemly sentiment, letting songs like the title track and "The Joshua Tree" create their own sadly romantic undertow. His countrified narratives roam the territory of a born troubadour, from the rust belt ("U.S. Steel") to "William Faulkner in Hollywood," the latter a cautionary tale of genius and ruin that, typically for Russell, is delivered with disarming clarity and simplicity of style. Meanwhile, a veteran band featuring one Fats Kaplan on pedal steel, fiddle and accordion, and the extremely tasty pickings of guitarist Andrew Hardin, comes across like a honky-tonk dream. This album is a gem. — Mark Rowland

SZAKCSI

(GRP)

CAN'T SAY I'M NORMALLY DISPOSED TO SOLO piano records designed for the "Wave" demographic, but Szakcsi's ain't your average wallpaper. Maybe it's the subtle smattering of Baltic folk idioms (he's from Hungary), perhaps the spare, evocative melodic touch (he's a film composer there). Or maybe, for all the Satie atmospherics, it's because he's capable of true grit; "Peace for Pas-torius" is an understated eulogy, while "Good Times/Old Times," aided by percussionist George Jinda, edges a lot closer to Les McCann than George Winston. Really. — Mark Rowland

OFRA HAZA

Fifty Gates of Wisdom (Shanachie)

HAZA, 31, SELLS GOLD AND PLATINUM AND wins Israeli Grammys for her singing at home. Here she and arranger Benny Nagari update the traditional public songs of Yemen, from which her parents immigrated to Israel. The emphasis is on

update, too. Nagari's instrumentations may intertwine Yemenite tin and tambale with economic woodwinds and strings, but the new internationalist percussion drives the gorgeously detailed Middle Eastern melodies. Haza, effortlessly and with unmistakable heart, aces those; she sounds like no intricacy is beyond her, and her transparent tones and wide-awake phrasings are hard to shake. Not that anyone would want to.

— James Hunter

BEAT HAPPENING

Jamboree (Rough Trade)

IN A WORLD THAT REWARDS ASSIMILATION and professionalism, two guys and a girl from Olympia, Washington are giving primitivism—on purpose and across-the-board—a shot in the arm. Despite its way-out-of-stepness, this collection of seemingly offhand ditties connects. Maybe it's because the "who cares?" attitude of these Shaggs-esque campfire tunes, childish soliloquies and lame rhymes ("Laurie, Laurie, what's the story? Let's go do some apple coring") is buffered by subliminal hooks which claw their way out of the minimal drum/guitar/yelp context. If they weren't constantly reminding you that ineptitude is their raison d'être, Beat Happening would be much closer to the Jonathan/Iggy nexus that informs their sandbox skronk. As is, they sound like rock music (and its accompanying star system) disintegrating. Jovial contempt. — Jim Macnie

REPERCUSSION UNIT

In Need Again (CMP)

HERE'S A SEXTET OF PERCUSSIONISTS who've combined the minimalism of Terry Riley with the antic humor of Spike Jones, a concept previously unimagined. Toons range from pretty pop ("The Plane Story") to oddly introspective ("Square One") to the not-so-lovely "Lemon Sisters," which stirs together ideas gleaned from Bali, Ghana and the Lawrence Welk show. An impressive panoply of instruments, including steel drums, marimbas, shakers, frying pans and the obligatory programmed synth, gives these formally constructed but happily inviting sessions renewed resonance with each listen. It's a find. (P.O. #1129, 5166 Kreuzau, F.R. of Germany) — Mark Rowland

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CHAPMAN

from page 39

involved in any specific movement." Chapman is, however, in L.A. to participate in an April 9th march commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King. "Clearly some things have changed for black people in America, but whether they've changed fast enough or as much as they should is debatable. All these years of the Reagan administration certainly haven't helped black people in this country."

Chapman's own fortunes look to be on the verge of a major change—which she greets with considerable reluctance. "The idea of being famous doesn't appeal to me because I hate parties and it seems like it might be one big party. I value my privacy and I'm not used to dealing with lots of people. The prospect of wealth is scary too. When you're poor your first responsibility is to yourself, but when you have money you have to think about other people—and other people are definitely thinking about you!"

Asked if she expects that age-old music industry bugaboo, sexism, to impede her progress, she says, "Obviously there is sexism in the music business. Women in this industry have had to do things to get their music heard that most male artists aren't required to do. Playing the kind of music I do, I naturally address the issue of sexism, and most of my songs are from a female perspective. But I'm not furious about being a woman. I like being a woman!"

"Many of the people who've written about me have described me as an

angry, young, black protest singer, but I think they're missing some of the things in my music. Yes, I am angry about certain things and, yes, I am young and black, but I'd hate for people to think that's all there is to Tracy Chapman. For me, all is not gloom and doom. The stories in my songs may appear negative on the surface, but the message I'm trying to convey is positive and hopeful." **M**

WALDEN

from page 100

that he owns Tarpan Studios, some 20 minutes north of San Francisco. "It's all really happened these last couple years, having our own place to come every day and just hammer," Walden notes. "And we work really fast here. We like to just keep kicking it out. Bring the cats in and put it down while it's fresh."

For all his production priorities, though, Walden still has one true love. "Drumming is the thing I cherish the most," he says firmly. But he doesn't see it as an either/or choice anymore: "I would like to have a successful solo career where I can do pop music and turn around and do some fusionary stuff if I want to. I'd like to be part of a super band, where I could just rock out and travel around the world doing that. I'd like to write for symphony or for voices, where it's just for the higher world, just for the purest expression that would come out of me. Not with a lot of backbeat, but if it happened to have a backbeat that's cool too. There's a lot of love in the backbeat. Actually, God digs a backbeat." **M**

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Finally, the Semi- Finalists:

Listed below are the semi-finalists we've chosen in the 1988 *Musician* unsigned band contest. We received 1,962 entries, and for the past few months we've been swimming through cassettes, separating the best from the rest and hoping our weary ears don't skip the next Prince. We heard an incredible number of talented performers, and most seem to have access to some sort of home recording system.

The percentage of jewels to turkeys was no worse than that racked up by any major record label. So what was wrong with most of the bands that got disqualified? Some had good song ideas but sounded very tentative. That's not to say we were judging by chops, but even a simple song can be played and sung with authority.

At the other extreme were bands who played great but couldn't come up with a song to save their lives. It made us wish we could set up a referral service to connect the people with good songs and bad chops with the bands with strong musicianship but no songs. Even when the music wasn't too good, many tapes conveyed the sort of real emotion that only rarely gets through record producers and big-time studio budgets.

Listening to these tapes was a remarkable experience for us at *Musician*, a healthy reminder of what being a musician means for 99 percent of all players. Nothing ever made us feel as close to our readers; nothing ever made us as proud.

And here are the semi-finalists (winners in 60 days):

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