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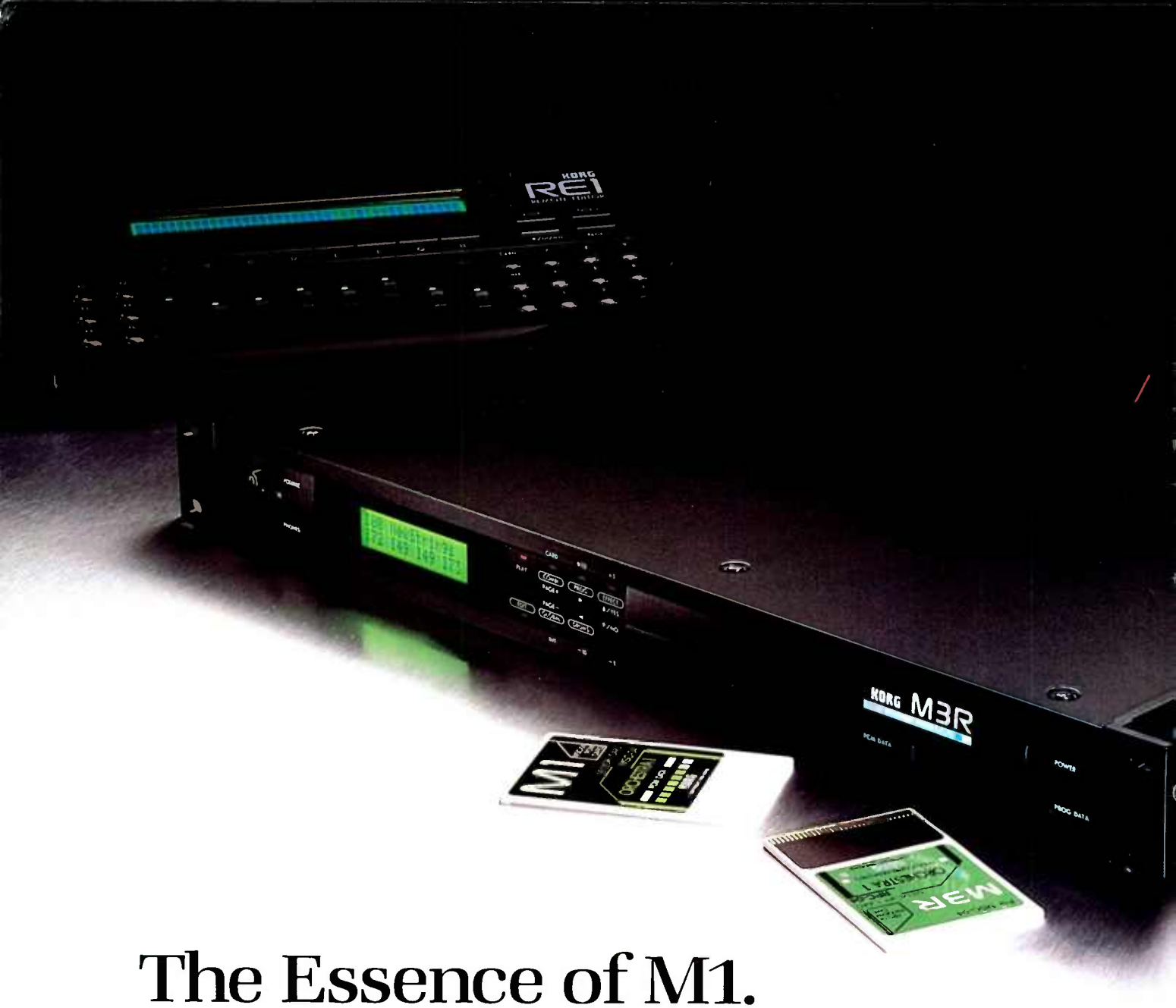

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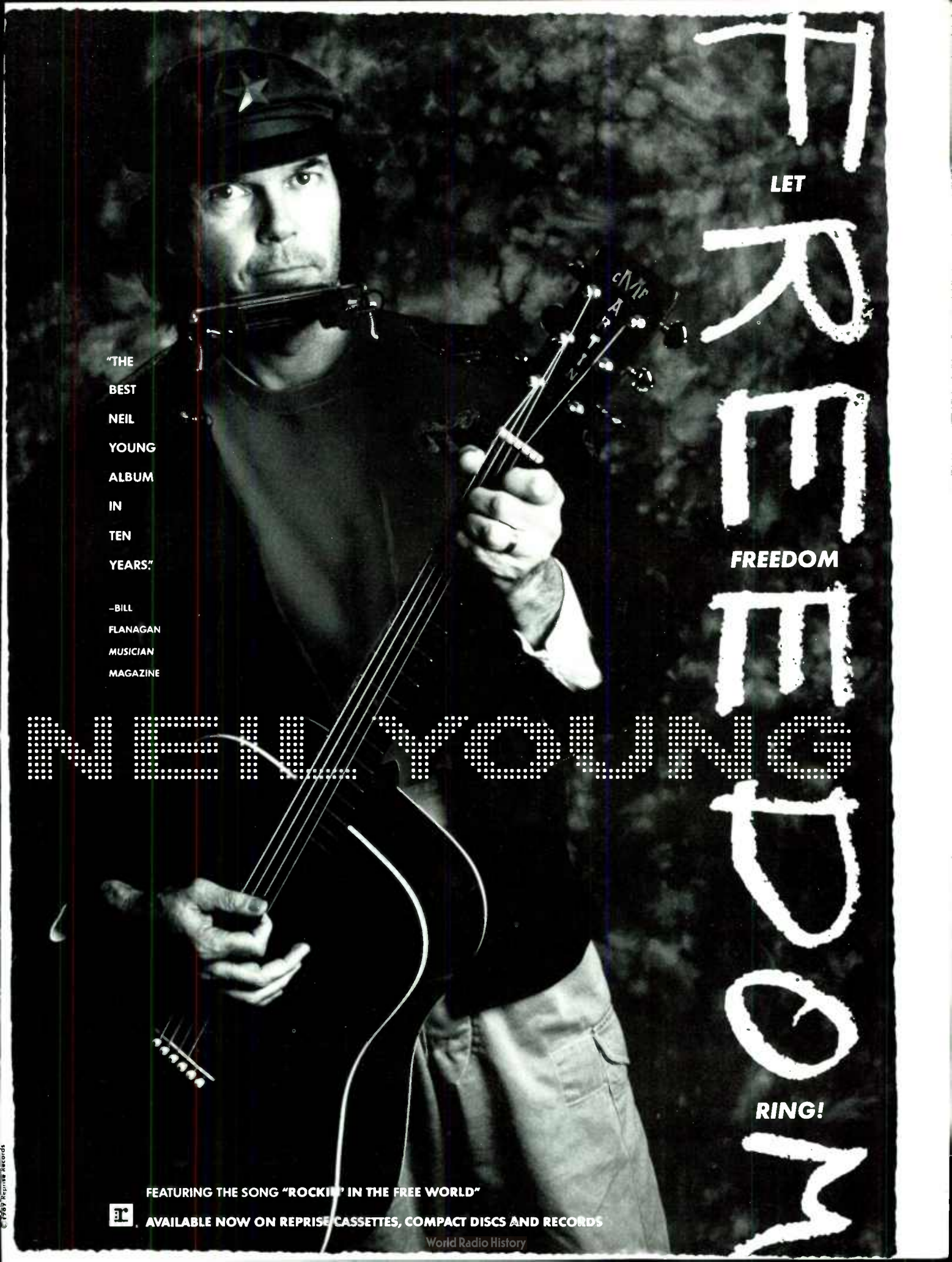

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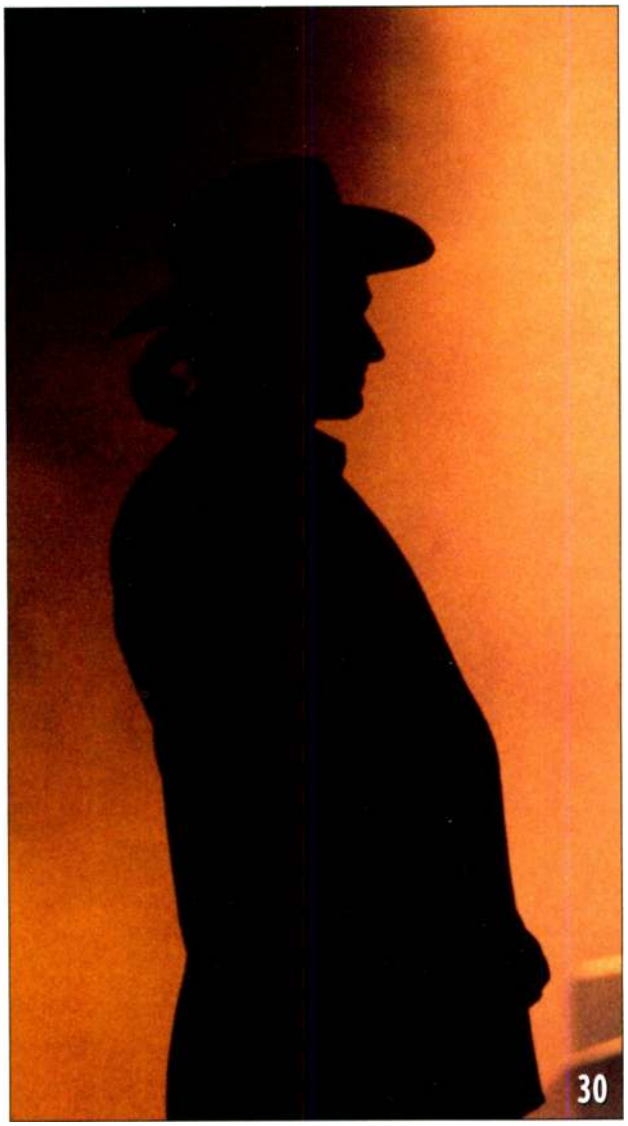
INSIDE MUSICIAN

A Billboard Publication *No. 133 • November 1989*

Special Section

The 1980s

When this decade began Led Zeppelin was together, Lennon and Marley were alive, punk was raging and albums were still records. What happened? Video! U2! Boomboxes! Live Aid! Pretenders! Hip-hop! Van Halen! Prince! CDs! Guns N' Roses! Marsalis! *Born in the USA*! R.E.M.! Walkmans! The Police! Bobby Brown! The Clash! Drum machines! Tracy Chapman! *Musician* serves up the instant history.



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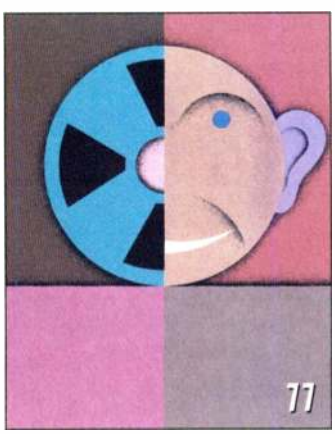

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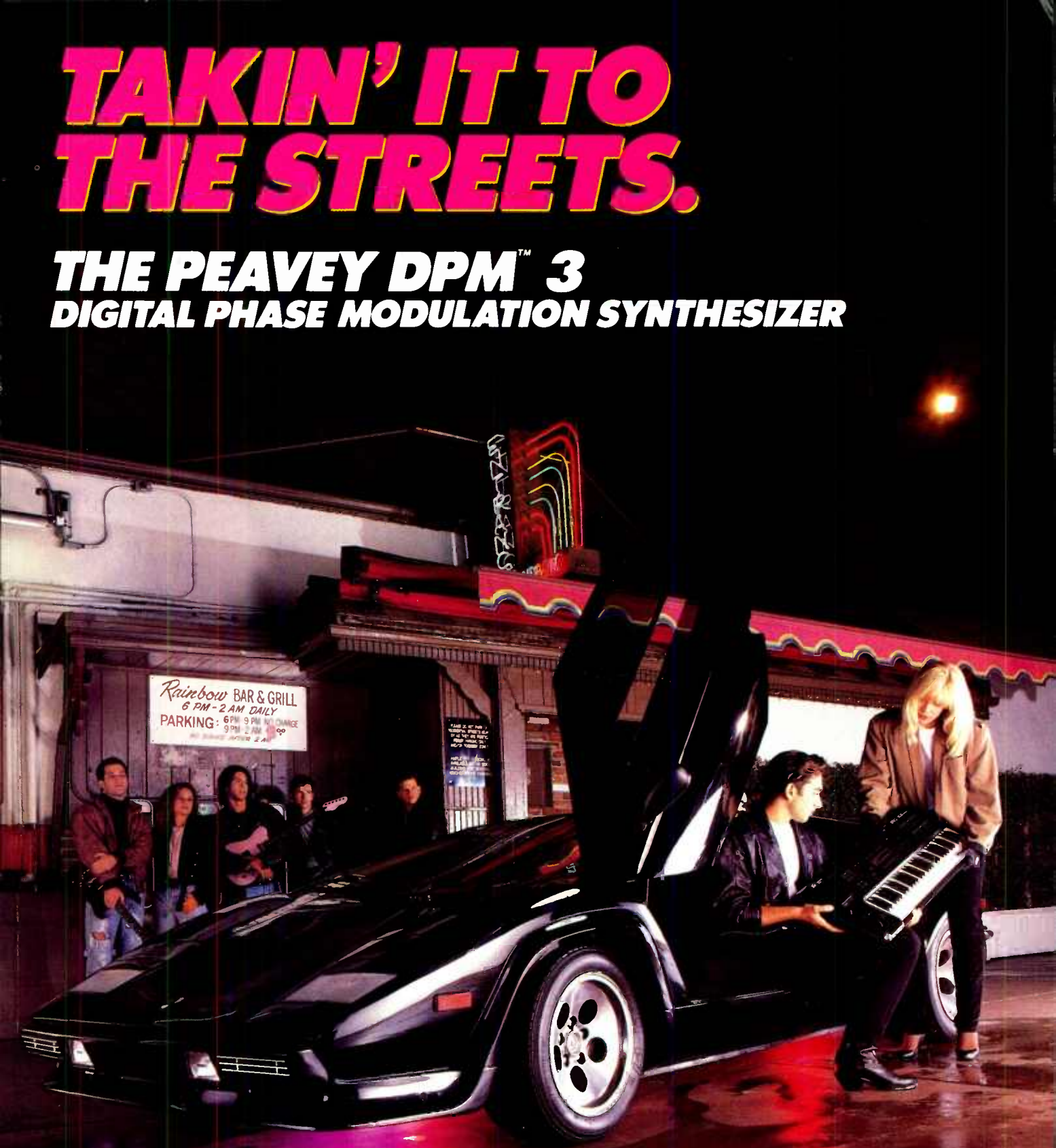

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LETTERS

9,999 *Maniacs*

THANK YOU for your cover story about 10,000 Maniacs (Aug. '89). It's great to see that they've come so far without compromising their artistry or losing their humanity.

You did make one error: Jerry was not yet with the band when they recorded *Human Conflict No. 5.*

Barri Falk
Burbank, CA

00,001 *Maniacs*

NO COMPLAINTS, just a question: Why are some of the photographs in the 10,000 Maniacs article reversed? Or did the "boys" switch their watches from their left wrists to their right in the middle of the photo session? It doesn't make sense to reverse a photo, especially if it shows the boys practicing and playing guitar.

Ellyn Standish
Hanover, NH

Mellencholy Baby

10,000 MANIACS and Maria McKee in the same issue? Thanks for making my month, but next time please leave that whining John Mellencamp (Aug. '89) out of your otherwise great magazine.

Christine Rowe
Danville, IL

SO JOHN COUGAR Mellencamp (Aug. '89) is upset with his life. A month or so of living in a Third World refugee camp would be a sure cure for his malady.

A. Nejim
Quartz Hill, CA

RATHER THAN subjecting the readers of this magazine to his humorless whines, John Cougar Mellencamp might try spending a portion of his many millions on a competent therapist.

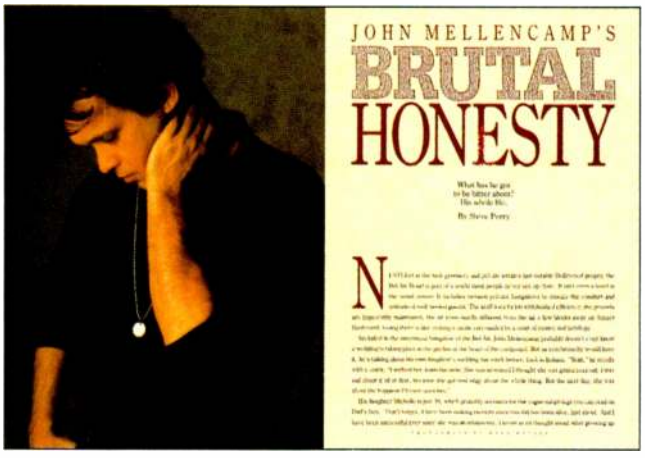
Roxanne McGuire
New York, NY

I'M 40 YEARS OLD and for years I was in a Midwest rock 'n' roll band workin' days, playin' nights and investing every spare nickel into recording. I probably had the same dream John Mellencamp once had . . . makin' it! Now I'm back working construction and raising my three kids.

I'm sure he knew a long time ago being a star doesn't isolate you from the mistakes and frustrations of life we all share. But at least he's making a living, living his dream.

C'mon, John, it's a dirty job but somebody's gotta do it!

Mike Moberg
Santa Maria, CA



"THERE AIN'T NO rock 'n' roll bands today"! What the hell does John Mellencamp think he's talking about? Just because Big Daddy is having a midlife crisis doesn't mean he has to drag U2, R.E.M. and the countless other great bands on the scene today down with him.

Jeff Root
Eugene, OR

JOHN COUGAR'S RIGHT about one thing: He needs to write more for himself and less for the rest of his audience. But he's sure off-base on the "what's it all about" issue. Whoever said everybody's life had to be some easy-to-read novel with an obvious meaning? Could be that we're too busy trying to read between the lines instead of just reading the lines themselves.

So what if his grandpa died in "some town he never got out of"? Mine died in a small-town cafe he ran for 20-odd years. Maybe neither one of them made the hall of fame, but mine served up some good food to a lot of folks and his tarred some roofs that kept some people dry, not to mention that they both were grandpas, a worthwhile endeavor in and of itself.

It's all relative, John. Like you said, there's millions of years ahead and millions behind. Might take a billion for the big picture to take shape. Just add what you can and stop thinking so much.

Gary Cole
Durham, NC

A *Spell of* Remixers

"THE SONS OF JELLYBEAN" (Aug. '89) made interesting reading, particularly (to me) the part about my grandson, Mac "Quale."

It is a shame that Quayle was misspelled and in justice to Mac, as well as our vice-president, would it be possible to make a correction in your next issue?

Harold Quayle
Suffolk, VA

SO THIS is what dance music circa 1989 has degenerated to: 120 beats per minute, stuttering samplers and insufferable vocalists, subservient to the lockstep rhythm. No wonder I don't go to dance clubs anymore, let alone listen to the radio much.

Frank Doris
Ronkonkoma, NY

The Raitt Stuff

CHEERS TO Mark Rowland for letting us all in on his chat with Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt (Aug. '89), two artists whose music has always hit my heart in the right place. I have seen Bonnie Raitt perform live several times over the years and have always been blown away by her slide guitar playing. While *Nick of Time* is her best record in years, I still think the only way to ever make a "raw" Bonnie Raitt album is to make a live one.

Laura Lombardi
Bethpage, NY

Wordpower

YOUR MAGAZINE has two of America's best writers and I thought it was time someone thanked you.

The opening paragraphs of a Charles M. Young piece get me rocking like the intro to any Stones record. And Peter Guralnick has the sly soul of the great musicians he helped me discover; he writes quietly but every word stings deeply.

These guys are treasures of our generation, and can make my day as easily as any wonderful musician can. Whether I agree or disagree with anything they think, I'll buy *Musician* anytime Peter or Chuck has something to say.

Fred Seibert
New York, NY

Brrrr!

RE J.D. CONSIDINE'S article on the Proclaimers (*Faces*, Aug. '89): Irish speak with a brogue; Scots speak with a *burr*. A brrrash mistake in an otherwise brrrainy article.

Gloria Brady
Blue Point, NY

PLEASE SEND LETTERS TO: *MUSICIAN*, 1515 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY 10036.

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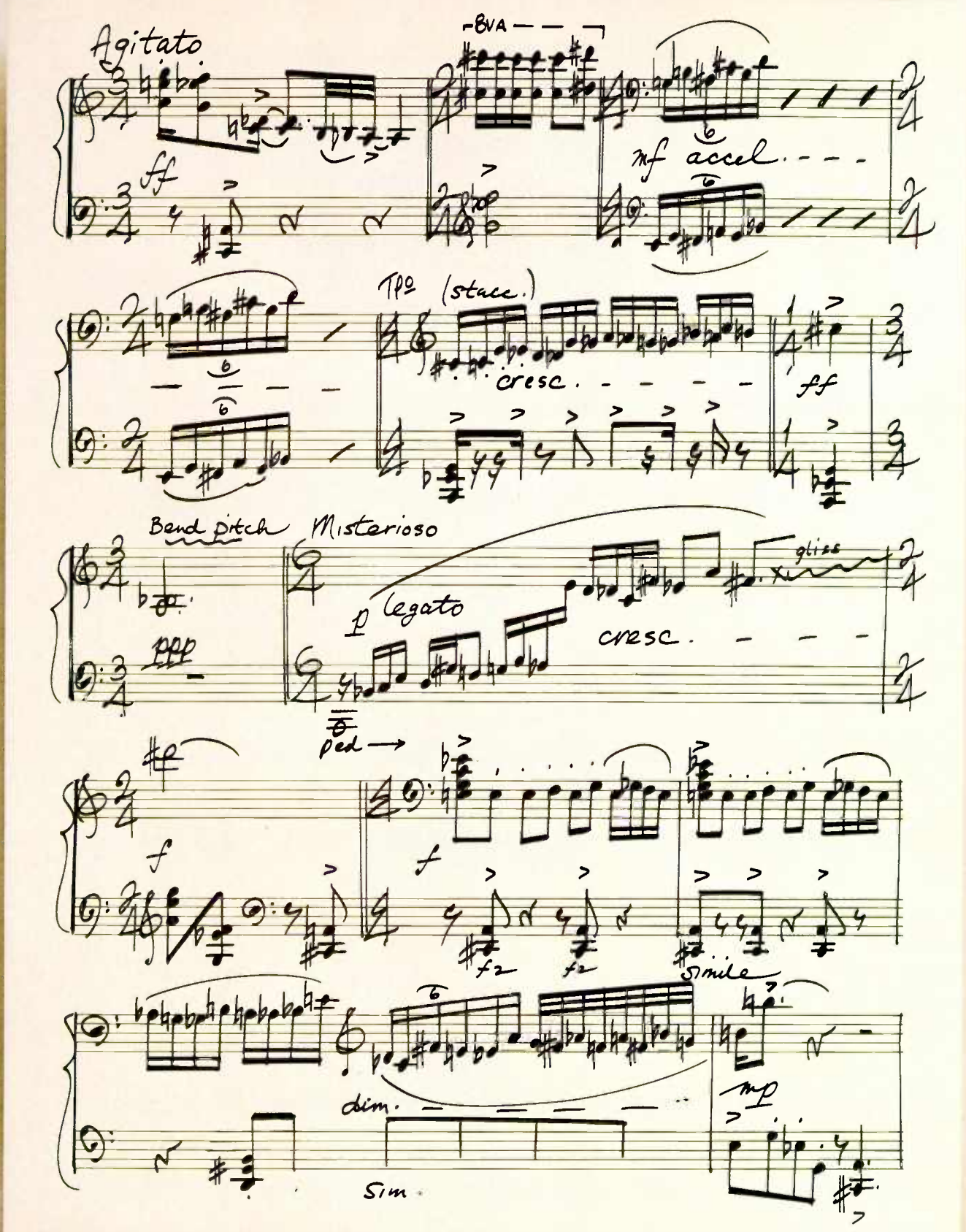
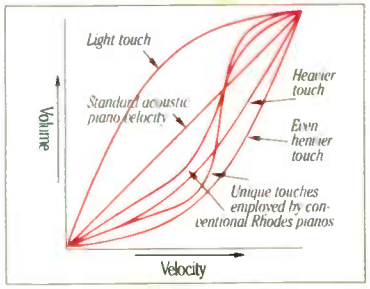


Ditto.

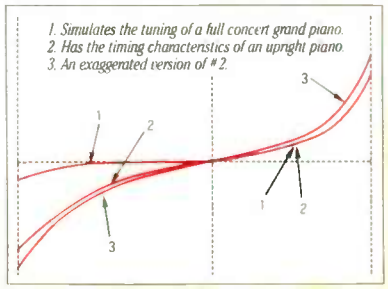
If you want to read the other side first, go right ahead. You're exactly the kind of person we're looking for, so we're more than happy to wait for you.

Now that you're back, get ready to find out all about the new Rhodes MK-80. Or as we like to think of it, your next keyboard.

What makes us so confident that you're going to want this keyboard? Two things, really. The fact that our ingenious stretch tuning method accurately duplicates the inharmonicity of an acoustical piano. And the equally remarkable fact that our Advanced Structured Adaptive synthesis actually allows you to modify the harmonic content of your sounds.



It's one thing for a keyboard to have a nice feel. It's quite another for a keyboard to have six, all of which can be stored as parameters in the user memory.



These are the stretched tuning curves that give the new Rhodes its unique sound. If you want to find out how they work, read the ad.

Either one of those is quite a technological breakthrough. Together, they're only slightly less impressive than cold-fusion.

The MK-80 comes standard with perfected digital versions of the sounds Harold Rhodes himself pursued as "ideal": The classic tone, with its thick sustain and sharp attack; a modified sound with a higher harmonic content; a blended sound that's a combination of the first two; and a contemporary sound with bell-like qualities of synthesizer-based Rhodes sounds. Add to those four other extraordinary sounds — concert grand piano, electric grand piano, clavi, and vibraphone — and you've got an instrument that's ideal for performing.

As extraordinary as these sounds are, however, you may only want to use them as starting points. Which is fine. The MK-80 is equipped with tremolo, chorus, EQ, and phaser, as well as a three-band equalizer with parametric mid-range for advanced tonal adjustments. You can even edit the harmonics of the tones using a Macro Edit function on the ASA Operator level. And an Auto-Bend parameter allows you to apply a velocity-sensitive pitch envelope to your sounds.

What this means is that you can create all the legendary Rhodes sounds of the past 20 years, as well as new sounds you never imagined possible.

Then, once you've sculpted the sound you want, you can save it, along with 55 of its comrades, in the user memory. With variations on everything from Macro Edit, parameter settings and effects on/off switching to MIDI messages.

As if that weren't enough, the MK-80 is also a formidable MIDI controller.

There's plenty more. For example, we didn't even begin to tell you about the smaller, yet equally impressive, MK-60. (Just to whet your appetite: We packed many of the same features into a 64-note keyboard that uses an octave shift to play the complete 88-note range.)

But since you've read this far, it's fair to assume that you're interested in seeing the new Rhodes firsthand. In fact, you're no doubt already wondering who in their right mind is going to take your old keyboard off your hands.

Probably someone who wasn't lucky enough to read this ad.

Or good enough.

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FACES

McCartney Takes New York

BEATLEMANIA came back to Broadway on August 24, only this time it was no simulation. Getting in shape for his international tour, Paul McCartney had booked the 86-year-old, 924-seat Lyceum theater for a week. The climax of his stay was a 90-minute open rehearsal with tickets distributed free to fan club members.

A couple of days earlier Macca had a reunion with another Mac: songwriting partner Declan Mac Manus, better known as Elvis Costello. "Are you getting as sick of these questions about me as I am with questions about you?" McCartney joked to Costello. He added that his reply, when asked for similarities between Costello and John Lennon, was, "Both wear glasses."

If the rehearsals were any indication, audiences at McCartney's shows will get a good dose of Beatles tunes. The band—Robbie McIntosh, guitar; Hamish Stuart, guitar and bass; Wix and Linda McCartney, keyboards; Chris Whitten, drums; and McCartney himself switching between bass, guitar and piano—ran through "I Saw Her Standing There," "Can't Buy Me Love," "Got to Get You into My Life," "The Fool on the Hill," "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," "Let It Be," "The Long and Winding Road" and a medley of "Hey Jude" with—no kidding—"The Hustle" (not a Beatles song). Other songs in the repertoire are roots-rockers like "Blue Suede Shoes" and "Ain't That a Shame"; solo greatest hits ("Band on the Run," "Jet," "Coming Up"); and selections from McCartney's current *Flowers in the Dirt* album.

At both the open rehearsal and a press conference the same day, McCartney played to a full house of adoring fans (although the rehearsal audience screamed louder). Among those in attendance at the performance was an attentive Axl Rose of Guns N' Roses. Nobody doesn't like the Beatles.—*Scott Isler*

Katrina & the Waves

Sick of happiness

KATRINA LESKANICH vividly recalls that moment of divine insight several years ago. "I was on the golf course—that's where I get a lot of my ideas," she laughs—"and I remember thinking, 'It's gonna be a long haul for us, because we don't have a gimmick.'"

Sure enough, Katrina & the Waves have struggled to stay afloat the last few years, despite an early success many bands would kill for. This half-American, half-British quartet made a joyful noise on the charts back in '85 with "Walking on Sunshine," a rousing dose of big-beat pop highlighted by Leskanich's exuberant vocals. So what could go wrong?

"When we originally signed with Capitol, they were extremely frustrated that there wasn't a box they could stick us in. You know how little imagination these record companies have," she notes matter-of-factly. "At first we were supposed to be the new Pretenders, but that didn't work out because 'Sunshine' made us seem like girl- and boy-next-door types. But we weren't that either. We were a traditional rock 'n' roll band, and all that happy crap made us feel sick to our stomachs. Capitol thought we just weren't cooperating."

After a second LP failed to take off, Katrina and crew found themselves on the receiving end of pink slips. "We were so naive," she says.

"When we got dropped, I thought, 'I'm glad, because now we can get a good label.' But offers were not forthcoming. That was the worst, hearing companies say our material wasn't strong enough." This despite the fact their tunes have been covered by the likes of Starship ("Rock Myself to Sleep") and the Bangles ("Going Down to Liverpool").

Broke and depressed, they retreated to England, sorted through 200 songs and cut *Break of Hearts* without a contract. Fast-forward to a happy ending: a deal with fledgling SBK Records and a hit single in the form of the rollicking "That's the Way."

"Now I think this is the greatest band, but at one time I was so disillusioned with the group and myself that I felt pressure to try something else on my own," Katrina admits.

"I probably would have been a half-assed solo performer, though. I don't think I have that much to offer. And look at the competition. Whitney Houston? There's no way I could fit into one of those dresses."—*Jon Young*

Photograph (top): Bob Gruen

GRAYSON HUGH

Soul in the suburbs

IRONY FANS, please note: The soul man is a dinosaur in decline, right? Al Green went and got religion, Dennis Edwards is in exile from the Temptations again and, let's face it, Luther Vandross is way too cool to sweat.

So who's left to save the genre? Some down-and-dirty black powerhouse who grew up in a suburb of Hell, singing in the local church? Not quite. He's a white guy from a suburb of Hartford, Connecticut. And the first time he was ever in a black church and saw somebody whip out a tambourine, he jumped a mile. Meet Grayson Hugh and the music he likes to call "poetry with an attitude."

"That's sort of a phrase that I've come up with that seems to be very applicable to some of my music," he says. "It's loud and it's a little audacious and it's moody and it's in the setting of a band playing live. It's not just a beat with empty words."

Nothing empty about Hugh's brilliant debut album, *Blind to Reason*. The single "Talk It Over" is a smooth, deftly executed Sam Cooke reprise; the album's title track is brutal, raw-dog blues. Nothing empty about his résumé either. The gravel-voiced 31-year-old grew up with the prerequisite love for black music. Unlike so many other "blue-eyed" soul men, though, he followed that music to its spawning ground, walking in "audaciously" to apply for a job as pianist at a little black church.

"Y'know," he says, "the first few times [I played] people were a little amazed to see me, being the only white and really young. But after two or three Sundays I remember this woman, the mother of one of the singers, got up and just said, in the middle of the service, 'I know this boy is doing something a little different, but he sounds okay to me.'"

Of course, after nine months they fired him, Hugh says, because "they really wanted an all-black church."

He survived. And roughly a decade later Hugh is back with a debut album that serves notice: Of the currently active soul men, he is, arguably, the best in class. It's hard to improve on what the woman said: Yeah, he's doing something a little different, but he sounds okay to me.

—Leonard Pitts, Jr.

LARRY PARNES, R.I.P., AND THE NAME GAME

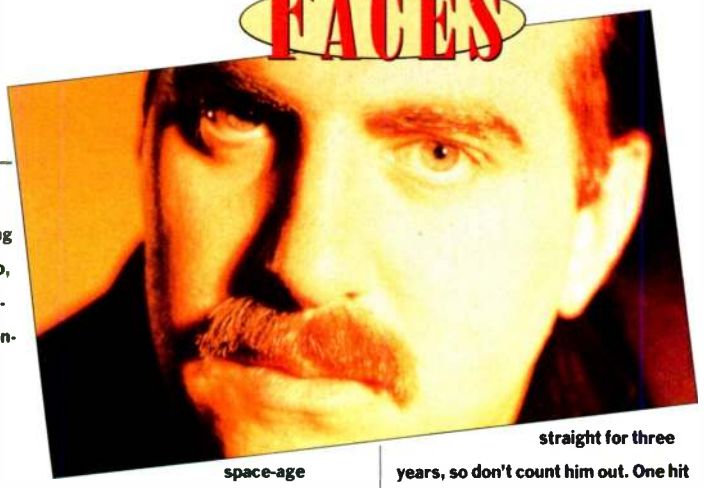
IF THERE had never been a Larry Parnes, Laurence Harvey would have had to invent him. But there was, and he inspired not only the domineering rock 'n' roll manager in the play and film *Expresso Bongo*, but also an era of chart-fast, flop-young male British singers with ridiculous pseudonyms.

In the late '50s and early '60s Parnes had a virtual monopoly on English pop idols. He'd started with Tommy Steele, that country's first rock 'n' roll star (much to the consternation of any Americans who heard him). Some of Parnes' signings—notably Billy Fury—were genuinely talented. Others' names—Vince Eager, Johnny Gentle, Dickie Pride—are apparently all history has left us. Marty Wilde passed along his Parnes-made surname to his more internationally famous daughter Kim.

In 1961 Parnes refused a partnership with Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager. As the five-year contracts with his stable of boys expired, Parnes shifted from pop music to theater. We'll never know if he would have renamed Johnny Leopard and Paul McCougar. Parnes died in London July 30, aged 59.—*Scott Isler*

Photograph: Ebet Roberts

FACES



ARTHUR BAKER

Back from the hits

WHEN THE TELEPHONES ring at Arthur Baker's studio, they sound like video arcade effects. Fitting, considering that as gurus of the dance-music underground in the early 1980s, Baker and his electro-bop sidekick John Robie practically invented android chic. They produced the percolating "Planet Rock" and a stunning sequel, "Looking for the Perfect Beat," both huge, influential hits for the Soul Sonic Force.

Back to the phones: Baker admits they remind him of the monster he helped create, but he bought them "so I could throw 'em when I got mad, and they wouldn't break."

Almost overnight, Baker and Robie spawned today's sound by grafting space-age scratches, samples and chugging drum machines onto gritty, Philly-soul-styled harmony vocals. Baker went on to orchestrate dance remixes for Bruce Springsteen, Cyndi Lauper, New Order and Hall & Oates, then pulled together the *Sun City* project. He was Top Dawg, drunk with success, until he crashed on cocaine.

Now, like so many innovators, he wonders whether his best work isn't behind him. But he says he's been straight for three years, so don't count him out. One hit from his new album, *Merge*, featuring guest singers Al Green, Jimmy Somerville and Andy McCluskey, among others, and the phones should start ringing again. Rich, dark, tender—*Merge* is no-frills Baker at his best.

"A lot of people want to see me fail, and on my down days, I think, 'You blew it,'" he laments. "Maybe it's paranoia, insecurity. People have seen my worst; now I'd like them to see my best."—*Leo Sacks*

CLEVELAND FIGHTS

(for its right to party)

AT THE RATE Cleveland was raising money for its Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the music was going to *need* a museum. Which is why in May the New York-based Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation issued a November 15 deadline for the Ohio city to come up with $40 million of the required $48 million. In three years officials had raised under $16.5 million.

The situation improved on July 26. On that day Cleveland's City Council okayed a $15-million tax plan for the Hall, and authorized an application for a federal Urban Development Action Grant that would add another $7 million. In our lifetime? Well, maybe our children's.—*Scott Isler*

AIRPLANE FLIES AGAIN!

Jefferson Memorial

ONCE AGAIN Marty Balin and Grace Slick faced off, singing right at each other—only now their mikes were wireless. Once again the smell of burning marijuana wafted gently through the air, and ushers scrambled to kick usurpers out of other people's seats. The Jefferson Airplane was back.

In this Year of the Reunion, the Airplane's comeback held out the least predictable results. Indeed, the original band's shows some 20 years earlier were just as unpredictable: Audiences never knew if they were in for an evening of cosmic chromosome damage or merely aimless thrashing. One of the band's most appealing traits—their lack of affectation—meant that if the Airplane was having a bad day, they made sure the public knew it.

The public's been faithful, requiring a second show at the band's New York stopover, the 6000-seat Radio City Music Hall. Like other 1989 band reunions, this one didn't stop with original members. Besides Balin, Slick, singer/guitarist Paul Kantner, guitarist Jorma Kaukonen and bassist Jack Casady, the group included guitarist Peter Kaukonen (an original Jefferson Starship alumnus), drummer Kenny Aronoff and two (!) keyboard players (!!).

Despite the keyboard apostasy, the band sounded fine . . . like a band! (The last reunion this writer attended was the Who's.) At the first New York show, on August 29, the Airplane came out blazing with a trio of songs from the *Surrealistic Pillow* album. The two-part, two-and-a-half-hour show included 10 other vintage Airplane tunes, about half the new *Jefferson Airplane* album, a Jack-and-Jorma duo interlude and one song from the 1986 Kantner Balin Casady Band album.

It wasn't quite 1967 revisited, regardless of the parents and kids wearing off-the-rack tie-dye. The few attempts at a light show were pathetic. Aronoff, no slouch on drums, doesn't have the jazz background that Spencer Dryden employed to raise the late-'60s Airplane into the stratosphere. The band understandably hadn't recaptured its original cohesion, and downplayed the furious jams of the past. Jorma seemed unduly reticent; Peter Kaukonen's guitar solos were from the more-is-less school. There were two keyboard players.

Balin and Slick, though, still had the firepower, and the vocal harmonies—including Kantner—retained a curdling intensity. How long this Airplane will fly is anyone's guess, but they're worth checking out—and not just for old times' sake.

—*Scott Isler*

Photo (below): Todd Kaplan/Star File

Syd Straw in the Spotlight

The queen of back-up steps up front

BY

Michael Corcoran

SYD STRAW is late. I'm not worried, though; I know she'll show. I just met her the night before, backstage after her remarkable performance at McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica. There in the basking glow of achievement and adulation I pegged Syd Straw as a person who would not keep someone waiting long on her behalf. It's 12:20 and we planned to meet at noon at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel pool. I've already checked out of the hotel and I'm feeling pretty ridiculous lounging poolside in my street clothes next to a suitcase, but I just know she's coming. Out of the corner of my eye I watch a man with no legs and one and a half arms turn on his side three loungers away.

And then she arrives, carrying a clear plastic bowling-ball bag as her purse. Pleasantries are exchanged and Syd strips down to her daiquiri-colored bathing suit. "You really oughta change into your bathing suit, get out of all that black clothing. You look like you're going to see the Cure," she says and then gasps barely audibly. She sees the man. "God, that guy must've stepped on a mine or something. Can you imagine that happening to you?"

I tell her that he seems pretty happy. He's been joking with his friends and laughing a lot. "Probably the worst part is that everywhere he goes people stare at him. God, that must be awful," she says. "Remember last night when I gave that little speech about how lucky I am to be able to sing for people and live out that dream? Well, Jesus, my luck goes a helluva lot further than that."

"It felt really good to yell at my manager last night."

Last night. Last night makes me want to use words like "intimate," "magical," "enchanting" and "poignant," but I'm a rock critic, not a goddamned ad copy writer. Let's just say Syd Straw blew me away in concert—if you could call 75 people in the back room of a guitar shop a concert. She holds a crowd like Bette Midler does, with humor, drama and a "please love me" undercurrent. Bette has better costumes, but Syd sings better. She also has a better band: Providing the musical spritzer were Dave Alvin (Blasters), D.J. Bonebrake (X), Willie Aron (Balancing Act), some guy I hadn't heard of on bass and Al Kooper sitting in on piano.

Straw's always had a way with, as she puts it, "names too big to drop." During her three-year stint with the Golden Palominos she shared stage and studio space with such heavies as Michael Stipe, Richard Thompson, Bernie Worrell, Bill Laswell and the band's leader Anton Fier. Those gents—plus Marshall Crenshaw, Benmont Tench, John Doe, Ry Cooder, Brian Eno, Daniel Lanois and Van Dyke Parks—appear on her debut solo album, *Surprise*. She's no modern-day Nicolette Larson, though, this *femme de la crème*. Out of the album's 11 cuts, she had a hand in writing all but two, and co-produced all but one.

I wondered if any of these big stars had a problem taking her "suggestions." "Not really. I have kind of a strange credibility," she says. "It's probably because I've been around so long and I've never been out to get someone. If you're secure with yourself then other people become secure with you."

SOME STORIES are too sad to tell. This is not one of them. Susan Straw Harris was born in Hollywood, the child of actor parents who divorced soon after she was born. Her father, Jack Straw, gave his stage last name to each of his three children as their middle name. As a teen Sue Harris lived in Vermont with her mother and

Photograph: Melanie Nissen

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grandparents. When she graduated from high school she moved to New York to become an actress. She took lessons, joined the Screen Actors Guild and did several walk-on roles, including a couple on "Saturday Night Live."

"I never had any lines on 'Saturday Night Live.' I was usually just in the background, but I made sure I was standing right behind the person who had the biggest part in the scene. See, I was always pretty much the leader of the walk-ons because I didn't snivel, 'I'm an ac-tor with an SAG card, I studied with Lee, I should have some lines.' My attitude was always, 'Far out, I'm a walk-on, let's have some fun.' I've never had a problem with backing someone up. I'll back 'em up, front 'em up, side 'em up—it don't matter to me."

Doing token acting work and subsisting on a medley of shit jobs, Straw needed a stage name. She was gabbing on the phone with a friend, an addiction she has been unable to kick to this day, when she reached for a container of expensive hand lotion. (Straw's the type of woman who'll spend her last $25 on toiletries.) As she tilted the bottle for that sacred dollop, she saw it! Her new name was right there in small type at the bottom of the bottle: Sydney, Australia. She dropped "Australia," perhaps thinking it sounded too much like the name of one of Prince's back-up singers. Syd Straw was born.

Still an actress-in-waiting, she went to a nightclub one night to see some highly-touted singer whose name she won't reveal but it's probably Lydia Lunch. To steel her courage, she drank a shot of Jack Daniels for the first time in her life and jumped onstage and started improvising with the band. Oh, wait, I'm sorry, wrong new-woman-in-rock. What Syd Straw did was take a long look at the star attraction and think, "I could do that better than her." Sounding like Patti Smith with four years of voice lessons, she practically stole the *Luxury Condos* compilation with a song about Elvis and became a fixture on New York's post-punk scene as sort of a hyphen between Debbie Harry and Karen ("Yams") Finley.

After auditioning her on the phone, Van Dyke Parks hired her to sing back-up. In the audience at one of the New York shows was Anton Fier, who asked her to be a Golden Palomino. "He came up to me and said, 'You stink, do you want to be in my band,' or words to that effect," Straw remembers. When asked what it was like to be a Golden Palomino, Straw scratches 10 numbers on a piece of paper and says, "Here's Anton's number. Ask him."

Nearly two years in the making, with most of the time spent having Syd's people call her guest stars' people and all that, *Surprise* was released to near-unanimous praise. It is even getting played on some commercial stations, and word of Straw's live shows is spreading like deviled ham. Still, there's a cloud for every silver lining.

"I love my little life, my little apartment, my little neighborhood and all that, so I'm having problems coping with the role. My role in my life is changing and I sometimes wish it wasn't." She adds with a smile, "It felt really good to yell at my manager last night."

Straw folds her hair inside her swimming cap, puts on Devo goggles and dives into the warmish blue water. Ⓜ

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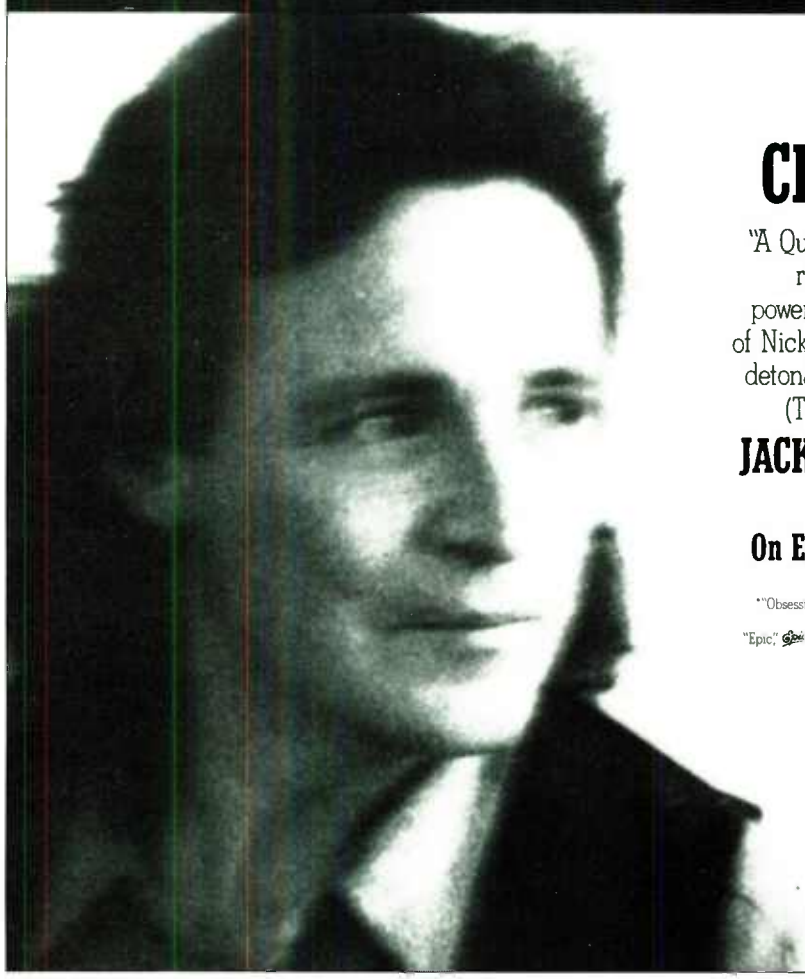

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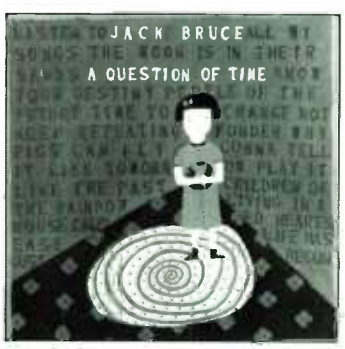
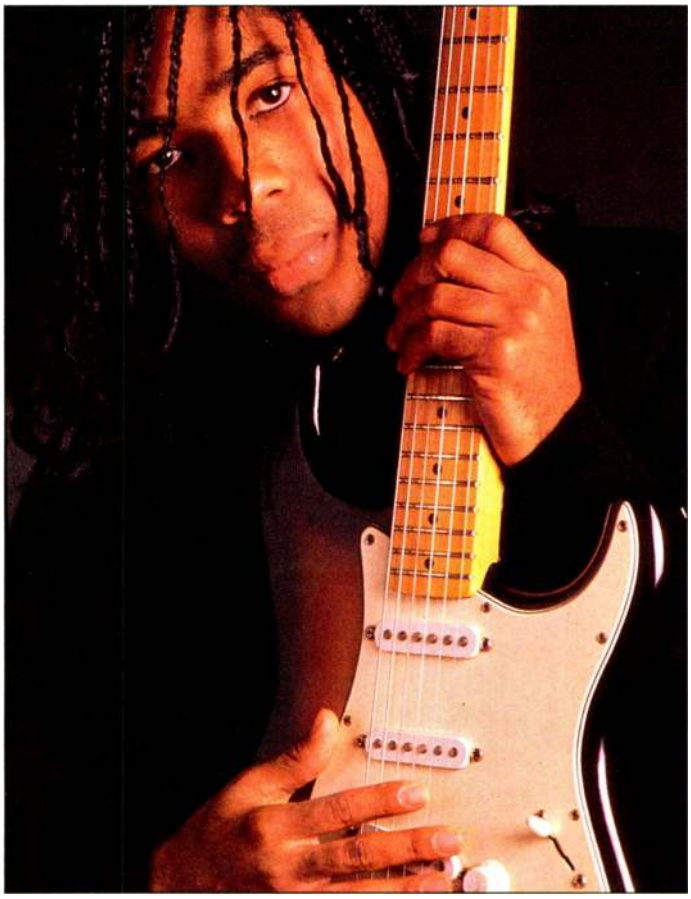


The Shape of Blues to Come

Chris Thomas wakes up a venerable tradition

BY

Peter Guralnick



"Hendrix knocked me out —but then I found all these guys had done it before."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING to Joe Tex: the First Rule of the Road:

"I'd been playing gigs with Joe Tex all through high school. He had a son, Joe Jr., growing up in Baton Rouge, and we had a band together. One thing Joe told me, he set me and Joe Jr. down, and he was telling Joe Jr. that he didn't really want him to get out in the music business, you know, he'd prefer for him to do something else. But he said, 'If it's in you, you gonna do your own thing, no matter what I say.' So he said, 'Man—you gonna have the women coming at you—make sure that you wear a condom. And what you do when you finished, you go in the bathroom and put some water in it, and you bring it back to her and show her and say, "This thing never busted, so don't you be calling me about no baby." If you gonna be out here, just make sure you do that. That's the first rule, man.'"

AND A COUPLE OF THINGS I Bring to the Blues:

"A couple of things I bring to the blues—you see, blues guys, a lot of times they don't have a lot of theatrics, they don't put on a show, you don't see guys dance too much. But I put a lot into my performance. The other thing is, blues right now—a lot of it is just singing about 'my baby left me' and that kind of stuff. That's fine, but I'm bringing something else to it. Blues is a music that comes out of oppression. Well, I just have things that I believe in more than just love songs. That's something that may be unique."

—Chris Thomas, Baton Rouge bluesman

IMAGINE A BLUES ALBUM that's a blend of Jimi Hendrix, John Lee Hooker, Sly Stone, Prince, Son House, Marc Bolan and the Rolling Stones. Imagine a young black bluesman with the spectacular dreadlocks and quite a bit of the panache of Terence Trent D'Arby, both offstage and on, with a veneration for tradition, a living sense of history and a fierce belief in himself. Try to conjure up a kind of blues that looks forward as much as back, that shows a degree of social awareness that hasn't really been in vogue for quite some time, that employs rhythm, electronics and a contemporary sensibility to further the age-old message of the blues . . .

There's been a proliferation of good young blues talent in the last few years, spearheaded to a large extent by the success of Robert Cray. At this point you can get any kind of blues you want reworked in strong contemporary terms, from the Texas country blues of Lightnin' Hopkins (John Campbell: *A Man and His Blues*, produced by Ronnie Earl for the German CrossCut label) to the late-'40s sound of Little Walter on the Parkway label (*Extra Napkins* by the James Harman Band on Rivera). These are almost dazzlingly accurate re-creations, and lots of fun, too, infused as they are with a spirit of their own that makes them listenable far beyond any question of fidelity to their sources. Thirty-one-year-old Kenny Neal, scion of a noted Baton Rouge blues family (his father Raful is a legendary Louisiana harp player with recent recordings of his own, and several of his brothers play with him on record or on the road), carries on the Muddy Waters tradi-

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tion—not to mention the T-Bone Walker, Buddy Guy and B.B./Albert/Freddie King traditions as well—in convincing, gruff-voiced fashion on his two Alligator LPs, *Bad News from Baton Rouge* and *Devil Child*. Lil' Ed, nephew of J.B. Hutto, brings much of his uncle's irrepressible enthusiasm and good will to his two albums on Alligator (*Roughhousin'* and *Chicken, Gravy and Biscuits*), each of which is laced with lots of driving slide guitar and Lil' Ed's highly developed sense of general nuttiness.

Meanwhile Joe Louis Walker, Robert Cray's labelmate on Hightone, has expanded subject, repertoire and technique on each of his three albums (*Cold Is the Night*, *The Gift* and the not-yet-released *Blue Soul*). His musical world encompasses blues, soul, a prodigiously fast single-string guitar technique now augmented by slide, a touch of zydeco, a pinch of country, all interlaced in a style that was originally compared to Robert Cray's for its unquestionably contemporary sensibility. Lucinda Williams' eponymous album on Rough Trade takes the blues and adapts it idiosyncratically to her own ends in much the same fashion that Van Morrison has always used the music to project his own feelings and experience. And Delbert McClinton and Doug Sahm are still out there belting away their own bittersweet blend of rollicking (and sentimental) blues and R&B standards and unmistakable originals, as evidenced by Delbert's new Alligator release, *Live from Austin*, and Sir Doug's *Juke Box Music* on the Antone's record label.

But the blues music that has really moved me most in recent months, the one album that has made me sit up and take notice, is an unreleased tape by a 25-year-old musician who, like Kenny Neal, is from Baton Rouge with an equally illustrious heritage in the blues (his father Tabby performed with such swamp blues legends as Rudy Richard and Silas Hogan, not to mention Lightnin' Slim and Slim Harpo, and in 1980 opened a blues club in Baton Rouge, Tabby's Blues Box). Chris Thomas has one previous album to his credit, *The Beginning* on Arhoolie, which is pretty much what its title suggests. What jumps out at me about the new music, though, is that Chris Thomas appears to be the possessor of a truly original voice, in much the same way that Muddy Waters or Jimi Hendrix or even, I think, Robert Cray introduced something altogether new into the blues equation. You don't have to like the voice necessarily—that's just a matter of personal taste. You might well be more comfortable with more familiar styles—I know I often am, and, of course, that's the story, if not the glory, of all great stylistic (and sometimes commercial) leaps forward. But I think anyone who hears Chris Thomas' new album when it is released early next year will recognize that this is something new.

"I never thought much of blues as a kid growing up. For me it was almost like you'd get together with your grandmother and she'd sing these little songs—and that's what the blues was, something you did around the house. I didn't know any better. I'd never hear it on the radio. I didn't see it on TV. My daddy never played records in the house. I didn't know who Muddy Waters was. Slim Harpo used to come by the house. So did Lightnin' Slim. I was always playing onstage with my dad, on bass or keyboards or drums or something, but it wasn't fun or exciting or anything like that. It was just my dad."

What changed his perspective was going to Europe with his father in 1983. "I think then I saw blues in a whole different light. Over there it was the way that contemporary

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music was back home. That gave me a whole different outlook. You see, all through high school I had my own band, playing contemporary music—Ohio Players, Graham Central Station, Top 40 stuff. Even back before that I used to have pictures of all these rock guys in my room, Peter Frampton and all that kind of stuff. Anybody who came through Baton Rouge, I used to see them in concert, from James Taylor to Willie Nelson to Chicago, I'm not kidding, man. I'm telling you, one time my dad came into my room, and he said, 'Man, you making me sick. You need to take all this crap off the wall. I'm tired of passing through on my way to the bathroom and having to look at this kind of stuff. Why don't you listen to Jimi Hendrix, man, he was one of the best, that's who you need to listen to.' Well, that was kind of surprising—I mean, Jimi Hendrix! But I went out and got a Jimi Hendrix album, and I listened to 'Red House' and it was like a whole different thing. You know, he was like a young guy, he made it fresh. Well, a week later all those pictures were gone. And to tell you the truth, I haven't hung up a picture since—though I might be putting up a Bob Marley picture pretty soon!"

Between Hendrix and the European tour with his father, Chris got turned around in a way that many white middle-class kids will be familiar with. He dropped out of school (Southern University, where he was studying music, not very successfully, with Alvin Batiste) and embarked upon his own form of education. "Hendrix really knocked me out. But then I found out, man, Freddie King, Magic Sam, all these guys had done this stuff before. So I went back further—to Elmore James to begin with. and then I said, 'Where did he get *his* thing from?' So I went back to Robert Johnson and Son House and, even further, to Charley Patton. Until I realized, 'Man, not all this music got recorded.' I started trying to read about it; I took it back all the way to the late-nineteenth century, I'm telling you, man, I was on a quest! And just around that time I had a little money from some gigs, and I decided to go in the studio myself and record some songs, because Robert Johnson, T-Bone Walker, they had recorded when they were very young men. And I said, 'Man, I'm a young guy, I'm gonna make a record. If I don't make but one record, I'm going to do it now.'"

That was how the Arhoolie record came about, more or less. Chris cut a couple of songs in November of 1984, he played them for his father, and his father told him, "Man, that ain't shit." Discouraged, he let the tape sit around for six or eight months, then pulled it out one day, listened to it and thought it sounded all right. He took it down to DJ E. Rodney Jones. When Jones played it on the air, "My dad got real excited—he couldn't even get his own records played on the radio." So he and his father put the record out on his father's Blue Beat label, folklorist Nick Spitzer sent the 45 to Chris Strachwitz in California, and Strachwitz wrote a letter, saying "'Man, I'd love to make a record with you. That is the most fresh and soulful sound I've heard in years,' is what he said. So we corresponded through the mail, and I went back in the studio the latter part of '85." He tried to get some of the players from his contemporary band, Exit, to play on the album, "but they wouldn't play with me—not on a *blues* record. They treated me like I was Slim Harpo, man, they acted like I was something laughable." So he went ahead and made the album on his own, playing all the instruments himself. Strachwitz put it out, and Chris got to tour Europe

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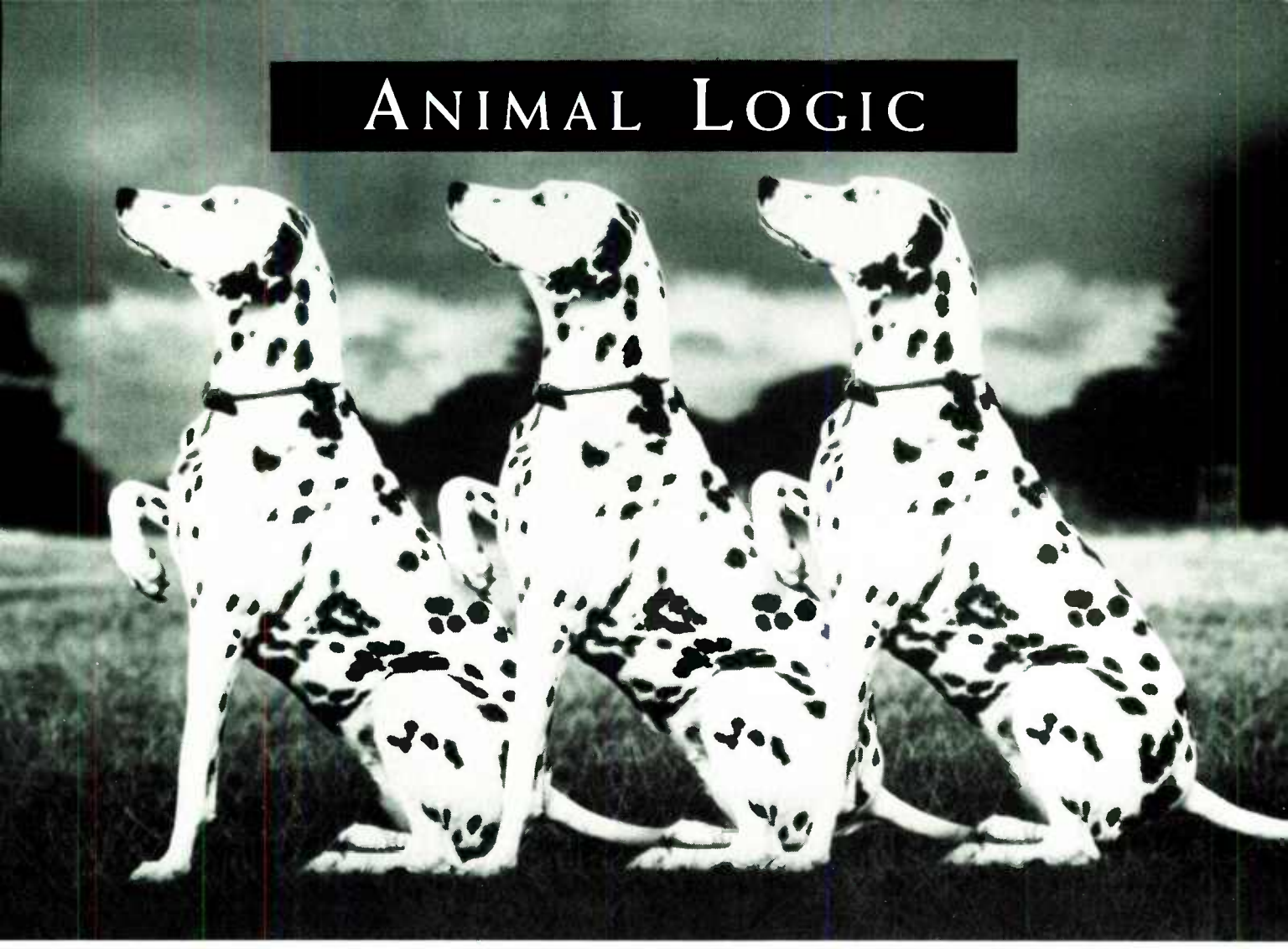

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on his own. "I felt like if I never made another record at least I had made that one."

The new record is light years beyond his Arhoolie debut. As Chris says in hindsight, "My biggest problem with the Arhoolie album was trying to fuse what I was doing with my Top 40 band with what I wanted to do in the blues. I just didn't know how to take those ingredients and put them all together." The way the new album came about was that Chris moved to Austin with Kevin White, his bass player and boyhood friend, and in Austin, not surprisingly, he hooked up with the blues scene at Antone's. In the fall of '87 he went out on the road with the first version of Antone's touring Blues Revue, and Hightone producer Bruce Bromberg saw him in L.A. without ever having heard the Arhoolie record. Bromberg, who co-produced all of the Robert Cray albums to date and has not only a remarkable ear for talent but an openness to all *sorts* of talent along with the knack for getting it out, was as knocked out by Chris as he had originally been by Cray, despite their obvious differences as people and as performers (Cray appears to be as introverted and cool as Chris is brash and hot). "Magic Sam was one of my big heroes," says Bromberg, "and when I saw Robert for the first time I said, 'There's my Magic Sam. He can take it farther.' When I saw Chris, it was almost like this little bell went off: 'Okay, man, there's the next one.'"

The new album, a Hightone production that has just been placed with a major label, has it all: soul and drive, rhythm, energy and deep feeling. From its opening riff it is like an all-out assault, exploding at you on so many different fronts that you cannot deny its impact or power. There is little evident similarity between its jagged tensions and the smoothly crafted production that has been characteristic of Cray's albums, save for the uniformly high song standard on each and Bromberg's obvious ability to hear new sounds and faithfully reproduce them. Certainly you can hear echoes of all the influences that you might imagine, and some that you might not, from T. Rex to Robert Johnson, but somehow they all meld together into the whole. At some point you may catch a glimpse of Dylan crossed with classic soul, other times you'll get a homemade blend in which Jimi meets Otis or Terence meets the Buffalo Springfield. These are *interesting* songs; even when they don't totally work they possess real heft and weight, both musically and lyrically. Once in a while the echoes of other eras may become a little intrusive—the Rolling Stones crop up a little too often, and a little too obviously, for my taste, and the Hendrix references, direct quotes and indirect allusions, come fast and heavy at times. On balance, though, the territory is so uncharted and vast, the feeling so spacious, the voicings and dynamics so consistently right, that one would have to be a mean-spirited critic to call attention to faults. This is truly music you can listen to, again and again.

Which for me I guess is the point. This music—blues, I mean—grabbed me the first time I heard it, and so far it hasn't let me go. No doubt, if you become familiar enough with any genre, it's bound to lose a little of its freshness, or some of its novelty, anyway. But I know what I'm looking for increasingly in the blues is something that will leap out at me in some way, something that will startle by its difference, just by being itself. In the last year or two, there have been a number of blues albums that have captured me and stayed with me, unself-conscious music for the most part by unself-conscious bluesmen—or at least bluesmen [*cont'd on page 121*]

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MUSICIAN

The Age of Excess

FROM CONCERT TOURS TO RECORD SALES TO CHARITY EVENTS, EVERYTHING IN THE 1980S WAS THE MOST, THE BIGGEST, THE LONGEST, THE BADDEST

BY BILL FLANAGAN

"London calling, now don't look to us. Phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust."
—The Clash, 1979

IN THE NEXT CENTURY, when we're old, no one will talk about the '60s and '70s and '80s as distinct eras. The whole heyday of the post-war generation will surely be remembered as one period, with the differences between Woodstock, Watkins Glen and the Us Festival too subtle for anyone but a trivialist to keep straight. The 1980s are wrapping up now, giving us a chance to take our own temperatures and write reports about what just happened to us. Looking at the trajectory of a decade, it's easy to imagine a design. The '80s began with the remarkable sight

Illustrations: Dennis Irwin

of most of the important bands of the '70s breaking up, almost consciously clearing the runway for new groups. Maybe it was the lesson of the Beatles (who disbanded at the opening of the '70s, forever securing their '60s myth) and Hendrix and Joplin (who died in '70) that inspired the Eagles, Led Zeppelin, the Doobie Brothers, Little Feat, Earth, Wind & Fire and Steely Dan to quit while they were on top. Disco—which had revolutionized the way nightclubs were run, records were produced and the sound of Top 40 radio—dropped dead unexpectedly.

As the '80s began there were suddenly a lot of openings at the top. There was no shortage of new bands hungry for promotion. The punk movement of the late '70s appeared ready to seize the record business. Both Graham Parker and Elvis Costello seemed unstoppable. Parker had spent 1979 supporting a great album, *Squeezing Out Sparks*, with pandemonious live shows. Costello had ripped into the public consciousness with three superb albums in rapid succession, each selling more than the one before, as rock's old guard rushed to cover, compliment or confer with him. The CBGB bands who'd been scoffed at by the mainstream were plotting their revenge. Patti Smith had invaded radio with "Because the Night," Blondie was getting hit singles and Talking Heads were selling more records than anyone ever expected. The Police and Dire Straits had made hotshot debuts the year before, and both Sting and Mark Knopfler were harboring creative ambitions far beyond "Roxanne" and "Sultans of Swing." But the prime contenders were the Clash. Legendary before they ever hit U.S. Customs, the Clash kicked the new decade's door open with *London Calling*, a bone-crunching double album that won instant comparison to *Exile on Main Street* and seemed to announce an unstoppable assault on rock's pinnacle. The pop world always wants heroes, larger-than-life figures to symbolize the audience's notion of itself. And the Clash struck the pose of righteous liberators, storming the castles of the debauched kings of the '70s. As the '80s began the future looked pretty clear.

But the future never does what history tells it.

The Clash got as far as accepting the torch from the disbanding Who at Shea Stadium in 1982, but then, as Joe Strummer said, he dropped it on the ground and broke it. Parker could not sustain his momentum. Costello probably could have, but he did the one thing no hot celebrity barreling toward the top can afford to do—he began to doubt his ambition. Questioning whether becoming a superstar was worth living as a speeding, mean-mouthed punk, Costello traded a saleable, one-note image to become a real person and a complete musician.

The so-called punks who did take over did it by embracing mainstream values. Try telling a 15-year-old today that Sting, Dire Straits and Tom Petty were once considered part of a subversive musical movement. Like U2, who appeared in late 1980, those musicians decided that they were not going to limit themselves or pretend that playing music every night does not make you a better musician. As Chrissie Hynde sang in 1981, "You don't listen do ya, asshole? Don't be a punk all your life."

In time "successful punk rocker" turned into an oxymoron. As soon as a band was successful people claimed they were never really punk. Those who were in those bars and at those early shows know that punk was not at the time as limited a term as instant history has tried to make it. But if anyone wants to get picky about it, okay—the Police and Elvis Costello and Talking Heads and even the Clash were not *real* punks. There were only two real punk bands—the Sex Pistols in England and the Ramones in America. And being real punks there were only two things they could do; they could be like the Pistols and break up after one album (and one overdose), or they could be like the Ramones and stand there forever, wearing the same clothes, playing the same song, and never changing.

"Black, white, Puerto Rican, everybody just'a freakin'"

—Prince, 1980

IT IS a measure of how completely the rock audience was expecting the messiah to appear as a punk that when Prince began performing miracles there were desperate attempts to claim him for punk, too. After being described as new wave or a funk punk once too often, Prince finally broke his detached facade long enough to explain to an interviewer the difference between the Clash and him: "I can *sing*." No kidding.

As the '80s began rock had become segregated. That owed to the collapse of Top 40 radio and the subsequent narrowcasting that stuck Aretha Franklin on one radio station and the Rolling Stones on another. It owed, too, to the collapse of disco and the contempt the diluted, post-*Saturday Night Fever* disco had inspired in defensive fans of traditional rock 'n' roll. To some degree the segregation was even an outgrowth of the '70s movement among the black promotion staffs of major record labels and among black record-makers to aim their music at black audiences, rather than cross over. All of which is not to forget sheer racism; in America you can never forget racism.

In that environment, Prince was a shock, the last thing anyone expected. He had made two conventional funk albums in the late

'70s, doing his duty by the black promo staff and black radio, earning a shot at trying something a little experimental on number three. *Dirty Mind* fulfilled its commercial obligations with a solid dance single called "Uptown." But the rest of the album—*holy smoke*—Prince broke every rule. He did the Beatles on "When You Were Mine" and Smokey Robinson on "Gotta Broken Heart Again" and Henry Miller on "Head" and "Sister." Nobody reading this has to be reminded of how powerful Prince's entrance was, but what might have been forgotten is how startling the sight of his audience was. Crowding into nightclubs to see the *Dirty Mind* tour were blacks and whites, straights and gays, disco-lovers and hard rockists. Like Prince's music, that was a revelation and a relief.

For all the excitement new music was generating in nightclubs and the press, though, mainstream radio had become completely moribund. Top 40 was dead and FM rock had fallen into the hands of the dreaded *consultants*, corporate big shots who programmed the same lobotomy-rock formats coast to coast. The consultants did not want rock radio to be exciting; they wanted rock radio to be inoffensive. Their worst fear was that music might engage someone to the point where they might *notice* it—because if you notice music, you might not like it, and then you might change the station. To the consultants and their clients the whole point of radio was to sell commercials, to form habits, to not touch that dial. So in the early '80s, while Prince, U2 and the Pretenders were packing nightclubs, the American airwaves were full of Journey and Toto and Air Supply. Programmers and record company execs shrugged and said that punk/new wave just hadn't caught on. "A group like the Stray Cats may get big in England," they'd say condescendingly, "but that stuff could never sell in America." It's easy to forget now just how conservative U.S. radio was. Bruce Springsteen did not get his first real hit ("Hungry Heart") until late 1980. So the notion of bands as weird to American tastes as Flock of Seagulls or Soft Cell ever getting within crooning distance of the airwaves seemed ludicrous.

Men at Work was considered an experimental longshot by CBS, but as they were recording for an Australian record company, their album could be picked up cheap. A big reason why the vast majority of the progressive artists at the turn of the decade were foreign was that U.S. record labels had little interest in paying to develop new bands, but might license the American rights to a pre-existing foreign product. Had the Police or Costello had the bad luck to be based in the States, they might never have been signed. Then America got the biggest hip radio station of all time. America got MTV.

The Single-Bullet Theory

MUSICIAN's Top 25 One-Hit Wonders of the 1980s

Big Country—"In a Big Country"
Eddy Grant—"Electric Avenue"
Dexy's Midnight Runners—"Come On Eileen"
Modern English—"I Melt with You"
Rockwell—"Somebody's Watching Me"
Lipps, Inc.—"Funkytown"
Nena—"99 Luftballons"
John Waite—"Missing You"
Naked Eyes—"Always Something There to Remind Me"
Toni Basil—"Mickey"
A Flock of Seagulls—"I Ran"
Club Nouveau—"Lean on Me"
Berlin—"Sex (I'm a . . .)"
A-ha—"Take on Me"
Men Without Hats—"Safety Dance"
Falco—"Rock Me Amadeus"
Pet Shop Boys—"West End Girls"
Kajagoogoo—"Too Shy"
Vangelis—"Chariots of Fire"
Michael Sembello—"Maniac"
Cutting Crew—"(I Just) Died in Your Arms Tonight"
Re-flex—"The Politics of Dancing"
Tiffany—"I Think We're Alone Now"
Survivor—"Eye of the Tiger"
Kim Carnes—"Bette Davis Eyes"

"All over the world at the very same time, people sharing the same cheap sensation. The thrill of watching somebody watching those forbidden things we never mention. The satellite looks down right now and forever. What it has pulled apart let no man tether."

—Elvis Costello, 1989

MTV WENT ON the air in August 1981. Because there were barely enough rock promo videos to keep a 24-hour music channel occupied, MTV had to play whatever they could get—and as video clips were already popular in England, MTV played a lot of British new wave. Now a funny thing about cable television is that the smaller the city you live in, the easier it is to get. If someone wants to bid on a cable TV franchise in Beetlebrow, Montana, chances are there won't be much competition. Pretty soon everyone in Beetlebrow will have MTV. However, in a big city like Chicago or Los Angeles where a cable franchise can be worth a fortune in ad revenues, those licenses are hotly contested and can be wrestled over in court for months. It was such market discrepancies that led to one of the strangest delayed reactions of the rock era: While kids in the boondocks were feasting on the new MTV, dying their hair green and rushing to the mall to demand Kajagoogoo albums—no one in New York knew what MTV was. And MTV was based in New York.

The record companies weren't paying attention to MTV, the big radio consultants weren't paying attention to MTV. Until those record companies noticed that, "Hey! We sold 5,000 Kajagoogoo units in Beetlebrow!" And those big radio consultants said, "Hey, our Beetlebrow station is getting requests for something called Kajagoogoo? Who told the kids they could like that?" For a while there was confusion in the boardrooms of Manhattan and Hollywood. Until some marketing genius noticed that the hick towns being infected by new-wave fever were the hick towns that had MTV.

And then came the gold rush. Stray Cats, Soft Cell, Adam Ant, Men at Work, Culture Club, Human League, Duran Duran, Modern English, Eurythmics, Flock of Seagulls, the Fixx, Bow Wow Wow and on and on and on. The early '80s were like the early '60s in that a lot of new bands got very famous very fast, had the sort of face-recognition only TV can grant, zoomed from clubs to theaters to stadia, had several hits, then skidded, faltered, flopped, broke up, made solo albums, reunited and tried comebacks. We're not talking about one-hit wonders here; we're talking about entire careers—from first gig to reunion tour—accelerated to a ludicrous velocity.

Good things happened: American radio started playing new music and U.S. labels started signing new bands. But then a bad thing happened. The labels decided that if MTV proved new music could sell after all, then *everything* had to be new music. And the artists who did not fit in with the new video age—the Bonnie Raitts and Gil Scott-Herons and Leonard Cohens—could just clear out to make room for Rick Springfield and "Sunglasses at Night." Many people blamed MTV for this exiling of the old intelligentsia, but MTV wasn't to blame. All MTV had done was figure out a way to sell the music the American music business had been unable to sell. No, any blame for the purges of the ancients must be laid on the record companies, who switch loyalties more often than fascist Italy. Rather than say, "Great, now we can sell this new stuff, too!," the labels said, "Great, now we can sell this new stuff *only*."

The non-MTV rock stars learned the lesson the disco stars had learned a few years before: Gratitude is the reward for favors about to be received. The other old guys—including dignified artistes such as Tom Waits and Paul Simon—got those videos cranking. Capos and direct boxes had to push over to make room for wigs and girdles. The Curse of Glamour had descended, and bit by bit the last traces of punk were drained from new wave, as new wave went from meaning Talking Heads to meaning the Cars to Squeeze to Duran Duran to, finally, Wham! And that was a sad day, the day you turned on MTV and saw George Michael dancing around in a white sweater singing "Wake Me Up Before You Go Go." You couldn't kid yourself that this was anything remotely progressive. All of a sudden Michael McDonald seemed pretty good after all.

"Middle of the road is no private cul de sac. I can't get from the cab to the curb without some little jerk on my back. Don't harass me, can't you tell I'm going home. I'm tired as hell. I'm not the cat I used to be, I've got a kid, I'm 33."

—The Pretenders, 1983

ONCE MTV WENT from being an alternative means of record promotion to being the principal means of promotion, the shape and content of MTV programming became a political—and financial—issue. From having to put on any video they could find to fill their air time, MTV had achieved the power to pick and choose between a wealth of submissions. The station was delighted when older rock legends like the Who and the Stones began submitting to their format, but MTV was also becoming very particular about its image. The station had learned early on that reggae videos did not go over as well as new wave. As MTV emerged as a superpower in record promotion, they made a point of ignoring middle-of-the-road pop artists like Barry Manilow. No one in the rock community objected to that. But as everyone got used to MTV, it became apparent that MTV was ignoring black music. Funk rocker Rick James launched a public assault on the network, demanding they play his videos. MTV defended itself by saying it was a rock network, open to airing videos by rock artists of any color, but defining almost all black music as soul or funk or R&B. This argument collapsed when it was pointed out that MTV regularly ran clips by acts such as Hall & Oates, R&B singers who were white. MTV occasionally aired a Joan Armatrading or Busboys video, and used this as proof that they were not racist. As Rick James' accusations got wide attention, MTV showed videos by Prince—who was then seen as James' great rival. (In the early '80s James was selling millions while Prince was still a cult figure. Prince toured as James' opening act for a while—regularly blowing the older artist off the stage. Their competition increased as both men produced albums for girl-group protégées, and both announced plans to make films starring themselves and their entourages. The great irony of James' campaign to get on MTV was that he perhaps cleared the way for MTV to adopt Prince—both as a defense against James' accusations and a slap at him. MTV finally started playing videos by black acts, but they never did support James. Without MTV, his career faded.)

It was into this racial/promotional crossfire that CBS Records launched Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. It was widely rumored that CBS threatened MTV with the loss of all CBS support if MTV refused to run Jackson's videos. MTV agreed to put Jackson on the air—and the result was an avalanche of money for everyone involved. Nothing eases prejudice faster than profit. Jackson's success was—measured by sheer size—historic. (Of course, so was the Bee Gees' in the late '70s.) He sold more copies of his record than anyone had ever sold, maybe more than anyone ever will sell. But while the best of Jackson's work—"Billie Jean," "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," "Beat It"—was remarkable, his enormous fame seemed to have less to do with his music than with his recreating himself as the perfect product for a decade when surface was trumpeted over substance and the media feasted on soundbites. When we think of Michael Jackson we think of the white glove, the moonwalk, the cosmetic surgery, the hyperbaric oxygen tank, the bid on the bones of the Elephant Man. It is naive to suppose this cartoon image prospered in spite of Jackson; he promoted it. Like Ronald Reagan, Jackson's talent was real, but his

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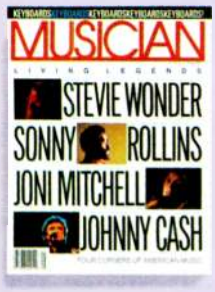

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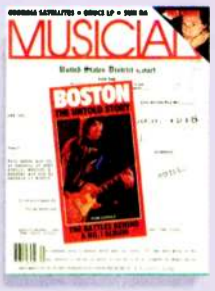

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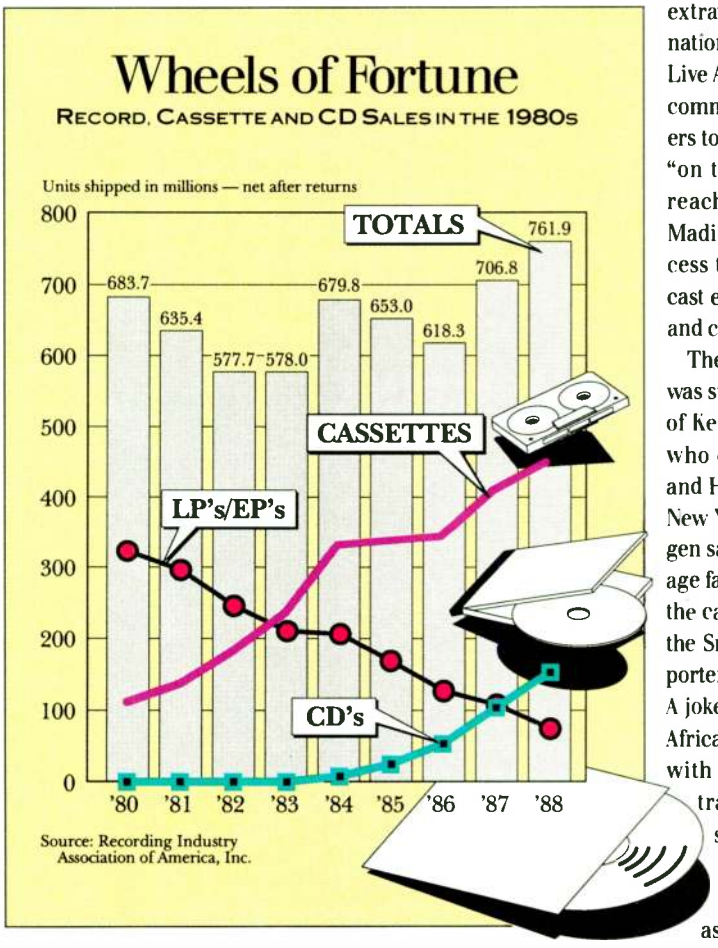
talent was only one component in a package so carefully market-tested and controlled that the substance became almost irrelevant.

Michael Jackson's incredible success created a musical bull market. Excess was in. This fit the mood of the nation as that mood was portrayed in the booming trivia media—from *People* magazine to "Entertainment Tonight." The sign of the times was not simply that photogenic lightweights were now becoming stars; it was that musical heavyweights had to learn how to behave like photogenic lightweights. By mid-decade greed had become fashionable and glamour ubiquitous. So perhaps it was inevitable that rock's liberal conscience would finally be aroused. Leftist politics had fueled rock from Dylan and Lennon to Costello and the Clash; to whatever degree rock's new glamour industry had political leanings, those leanings were progressive. But just as Reaganism had reduced American conservatism to the simple TV pieties of flags and tractors, the MTV era had repackaged rock's liberal politics as something glitzy and vague—Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder singing "Ebony and Ivory," or U2's heartfelt but ambiguous anthems. Even Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.," for all its power, said nothing very controversial—in 1984 no one doubted that the Vietnam War had been a mistake and the vets got a bad deal. The controversies with which the '80s rock audience in America felt comfortable were either foreign (South Africa and Margaret Thatcher took plenty of lumps) or anachronistic (celebrations of Martin Luther King). It was the flash of radicalism without the risk.



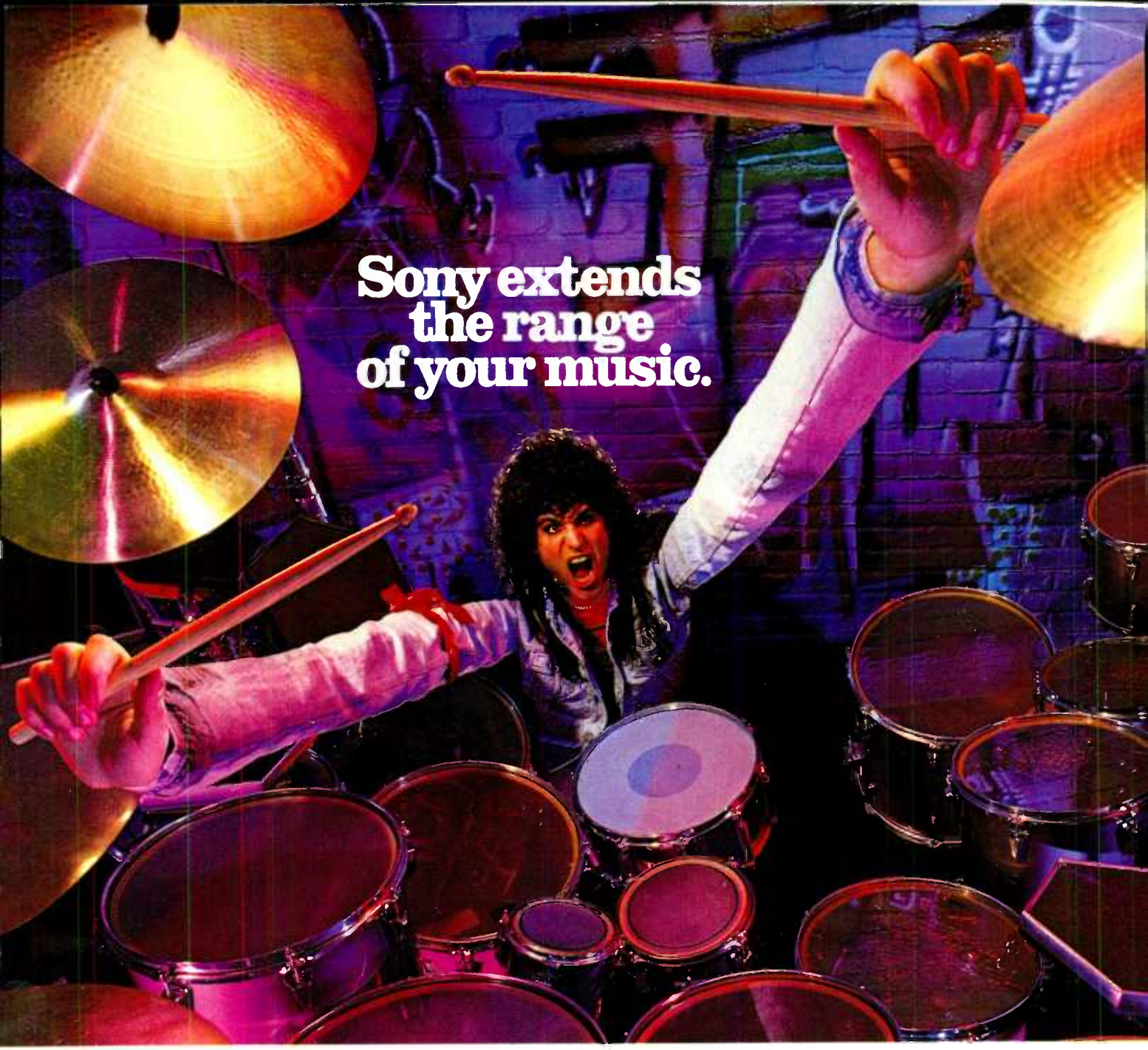
White rock wasn't the only style looking to bypass the barricades for the mansion on the hill: Rap was also checking real estate prices. Once punk had been homogenized into MTV new wave, the only consistent American protest music had been the rap movement led by Kurtis Blow and, especially, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Black oral protest poetry has a rich tradition, from Langston Hughes to Ntozake Shange. In the late '60s and early '70s that tradition had been upheld and expanded by recording artists such as the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron, who combined linguistic flash and wit with political sharpshooting. In the early-'80s reggae world, dub poets like Mutabaruka stoked up compelling, ecstatic righteousness. So when "The Message" and "White Lines" erupted in the early '80s, it looked for a moment as if American rap was going to be a continuation of that rebel poetry tradition. But success did to rap what MTV had done to punk: replaced its fangs with dentures. The rap that made it big was street-corner braggadocio, *I'm biggest, I'm baddest, I'm richest.* As sounds, samples and beats became all-important, the lyrics became nearly irrelevant. The rhymes were often childish and the only fighting was about the right to party. No less than new wave, rap was buying into the big-bucks tenor of the times.

What popular music had lost in edginess, though, it made up in sheer financial clout. Which is why "Do They Know It's Christmas?," though no "Ohio," was important. In late 1984 Bob Geldof assembled a bunch of young British pop stars (Phil Collins was almost alone among the older generation in joining) and made a single to aid African famine victims. Hollywood responded with "We Are the World," and by the summer of '85 Live Aid had made charity glamorous. That was a great thing, even if the U.S. media—engorged on the TV patriotism of Reagan/Bush, Lee Iacocca and a dozen songs with "America" in the title—seemed unable to grasp that these charity extravaganzas were global, not national, efforts. TV coverage of Live Aid was interrupted by local commercials exhorting consumers to buy the sponsors' products "on this day when Americans reach out to help the world." Madison Avenue could not process that so important a broadcast event was based in England and conceived by an Irishman.

The Hollywoodizing of charity was summed up by the approach of Ken Kragen, the L.A. bigwig who conceived USA for Africa and Hands Across America. In a New York press conference Kragen said that he planned to manage famine just as he'd managed the careers of Kenny Rogers and the Smothers Brothers. (One reporter whispered, "With payola?" A joke, Ken, just a joke.) USA for Africa had raised tons of money with an album comprised of tracks donated by Springsteen, Prince, Tina Turner and other big breadwinners. When Kragen was asked if there might be a second album made up of the unused songs donated by Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and others, Kragen said no, because that album might not go to number one and it was important to go to number one. At times the '80s rock charity craze seemed to owe a lot more to the Jerry Lewis telethon than to Mother Teresa. Every new cause had to have the *most* stars, the *biggest* names, the *greatest* revenues, the *highest* ratings, the *longest* show.

But . . . so what? As Murray Slaughter once said when Ted Baxter took a heroic stand, "When an elephant flies you don't complain if he doesn't stay up too long." The bottom line was that Kragen, Geldof and all their allies managed to raise a lot of money and consciousness. And they inspired political activism and fundraising from Farm Aid to Self Aid to AIDS benefits. The censorship of rock's anti-apartheid efforts by the U.S. TV systems covering them (PBS backed out of airing a special on the making of the "Sun City" record and

Chart: John Ian Pelt



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video, the Fox Network tried to cut all references to Nelson Mandela from their broadcast of the Mandela concert) suggested that, despite all the amputation, rock activists could still become thorns in the side of political chickenshits. More importantly, somewhere there's a child alive who, without these efforts, would not be.

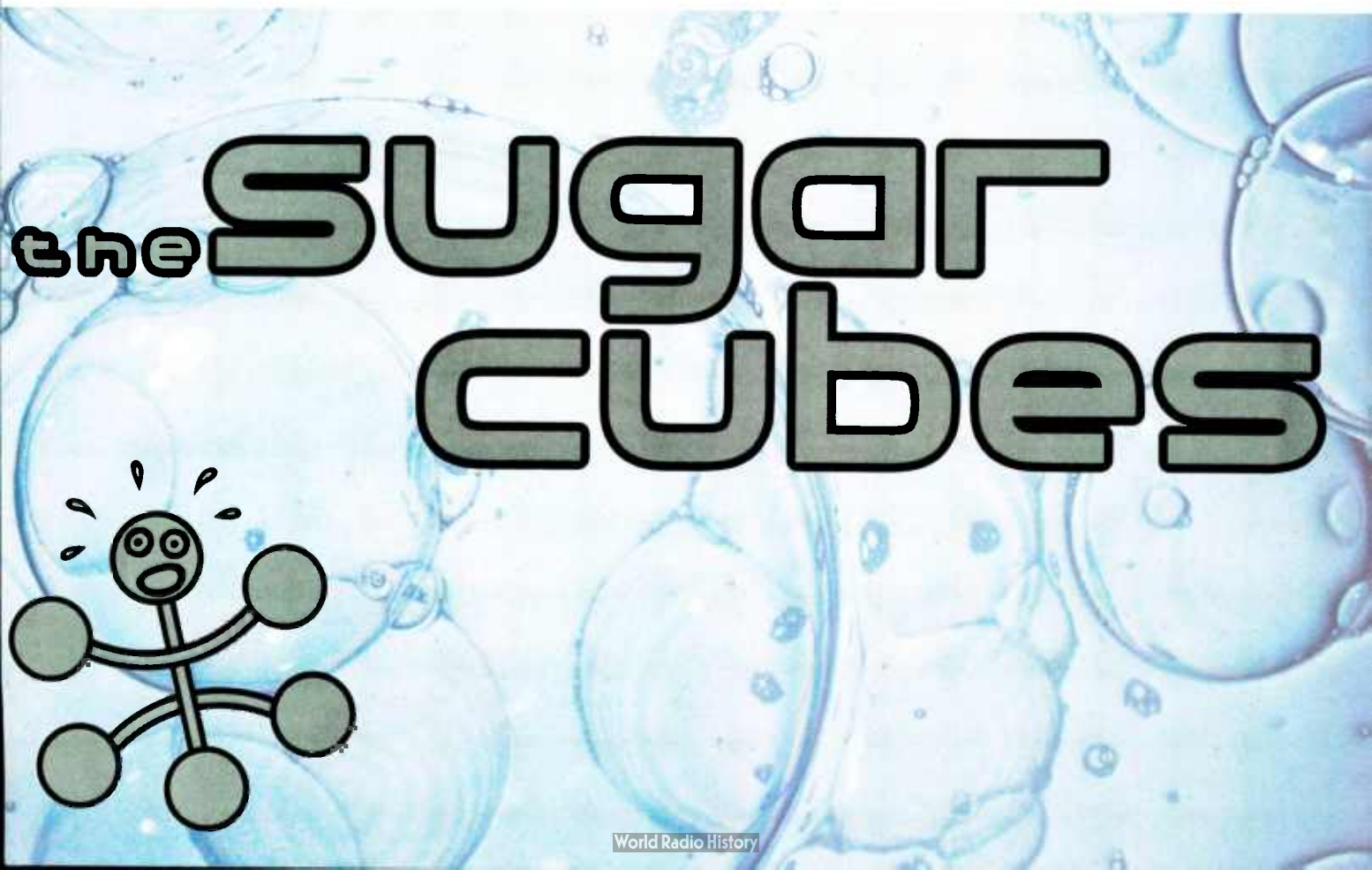
"There is a new breed of man. He's got a wife and some kids. He works behind a desk. Beside a computer. He watches a lot of television. Belongs to a health club. Drinks things like Cutty and 7, whatever that is. He wears faded Levis and Gucci loafers. His hair is long and perfectly groomed. He smokes the best marijuana. Wears a gold coke spoon in his pocket. And his speech is riddled with jargon like: Far out, Do your own thing, I hear you, Into it, Blow my mind and Freak. You know, I'm a sports Freak, I'm a jazz Freak, I'm a video Freak."

—T-Bone Burnett, 1983

THE POWER ROCK displayed at Live Aid and the subsequent big media charity events was not lost on Madison Avenue. Any force that could light so many candles could also cook a lot of TV dinners. In the '80s rock 'n' roll was used to sell every product from beer (they always seemed to hire alcoholics and drug addicts as spokesmen) to Prince's spaghetti sauce (who tried to trade on *Purple Rain* fever). "Greed is good!" said a character in the movie *Wall Street*, quoting a famous real-life financial trader. Only in the '80s was there such a thing as a famous financial trader.

Fiscal acquisitiveness was changing the shape of the corporations that manufactured records, too. No company was too big to be gobbled up by some bigger company. Germany's BMG bought RCA and Arista, PolyGram bought Island and is making overtures to A&M. EMI bought Chrysalis, MCA bought Motown, Warners merged with Time Inc. and—in the biggest mind-blower—Sony of Japan bought CBS Records. That was a little like Iraq buying Iran, as Sony was a leading manufacturer of tape recorders and CBS Records had been leading the fight against allowing Digital Audio Tape recorders into the U.S. market. CBS claimed such perfect taping would cripple record sales. But once Sony bought the store, CBS became more agreeable, and in '89 a deal was struck to allow DAT into the U.S.A.

In fact, the lesson of the '80s may be that musical trends are now shaped more by delivery systems than by any act. The next Elvis or Beatles may be a technology. The '80s began with the death of disco, a music crafted to take advantage of a new way of selling records—through dance clubs rather than radio. Throughout the '70s disco (originally based on such R&B groups as Tower of Power and AWB) had been modified to comply with its marketing, the bass and drums getting louder until the style was redefined and encoded. The means of delivering music ultimately affects what sort of music is delivered. At the end of 1979 Sony introduced the Walkman, a personal cassette player which, together with its overgrown brother the boom box, set off the long demise of vinyl. During the '80s cassettes became the medium of choice for American album buyers. A more portable,



disposable medium for a faster culture.

The cable TV revolution that MTV was part of softened American resistance to customizing their TV programming, and VCR sales exploded. Americans were purchasing music in new formats—laser discs and videocassettes. You could now sit home and watch *Hard Day's Night* or *Purple Rain* rather than listening to albums. When it came to new formats, the '80s was a whole series of tech revolutions playing "Can You Top This."

So we should not have been so surprised by the CD upheaval. We were, though. Who would have imagined a new delivery system that would convince aging rock fans to re-purchase their old records, apparently condemning vinyl to the boneyard and making the world safe again for all those middle-aged artists booted out by MTV? Suddenly Leonard Cohen and Bonnie Raitt were hot again. MTV even had a second channel—VH-1—for the thirtysomethings. Artists such as Tracy Chapman who were unglamorous by early MTV standards could become enormously popular almost overnight. Something amazing had happened—different audiences were gravitating toward different delivery systems, and all sorts of styles were finding acceptance.

Even beleaguered MTV, which had gotten fat on its profits and lost its novelty, found new life by shifting away from mainstream rock to program rap and hip-hop and lots of heavy metal. The late '80s turned out to be a time of a folk boom, a metal boom, a rap boom, a disco boom, a protest boom (in folk, of course, but also in rap, which was growing new teeth with groups like Public Enemy and N.W.A.), a jazz boom and even a '60s nostalgia boom. (Radio had ossified again, this time into oldies formats. Veterans from Ringo to the Who returned to the road.) That all these different styles could boom at once suggests how diverse and complicated the rock market had become. Such diversity makes the end of this bizarre decade a very healthy time for music: Tone-Lōc and Indigo Girls are both hot young acts—when else would that range have been possible? No doubt something—some new technology or financial system or musical style—will soon come along and force a new focus. But for today, anything goes. And that fits the end of the '80s as well as glamour and excess fit the Reagan years. After all, this is a moment when the Soviet Union is testing free elections, when the U.S. is letting Latin America decide its own future, when Lech Walesa is forming a government in Poland and Chinese protesters are risking death to raise their own statue of liberty. It's a weird moment of freedom and diversity in the world—why shouldn't it be a weird moment of freedom and diversity in our little corner of it? It's too much to expect such openness to last, so let's at least take a minute to enjoy it.

If someone had told us 10 years ago that the age of watered-down disco, Don Kirshner's rock concert and AOR consultants would give way to a new music explosion, 24-hour rock TV networks and the expulsion of independent promotion men, we'd have called that a golden age. We should be proud of the good things that have been accomplished, but also a little humbled by how mixed these blessings seem when seen up close. Looking ahead to the '90s, let's be careful of what we wish for. Ⓜ

The Decade in Jazz

CODES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

BY PETER WATROUS

THEY'RE COMING, wave after wave, a Chinese army of young jazz musicians. Thousands of them, 18, 19 years old, an infestation, working where they can in New York, maybe trying something new, maybe not, but certainly coloring the end of the 1980s. The 1980s: After nearly a decade of eclecticism in jazz, there's a consensus among the young generation, and with consensus come debate and argument, and jazz will once again be on the move, contentious. The 1990s are going to be wild, take my word for it.

But wait. It wasn't like that before, and when I came to New York in 1981—and the tale of jazz in the 1980s, from my view, almost necessarily has to be the tale of jazz in New York—jazz was a rambling mess of equally marginal ideologies. Young musicians were few and minor; there were few places to play; musicians had limited access to the mainstream media and no label support.

Trad Wynton Marsalis (right) and rads David Murray (left), Steve Coleman & Greg Osby (below).

The early 1980s featured mainstream jazz, the perennial brilliance of Tommy Flanagan, Kenny Barron, James Moody, Sonny Rollins and more—including the resurgence of the ever-divisive Miles Davis—just like it does today, and just like it did in the '70s, and the '60s. But, at least in New York, a whole pot-loft scene grew out of the Tin Palace and Sweet Basil and the Greenwich House and the Public Theater. That scene has been forgotten, was never recorded, probably never toured and will exist only in the memory of musicians and lucky audiences. Craig Harris, Olu Dara, Henry Threadgill and Hamiett Bluiett, among others, shared group members, clubs and approach. The music, a roiling return to an imagined New Orleans-style polyphony bolstered by rock and funk rhythms and a loose improvisatory approach, had people dancing and hoping for a brave new world. The rhetoric that came with it—the mixing, and therefore, the empowerment, of pop culture and jazz—stuck around. But because of the personalities involved (several musicians received invitations to record but declined), the fact that there were few labels interested, a limited audience, and unwieldy and long jams that made it hard to record the stuff, little of it turned up on wax. It's now just a collective memory.

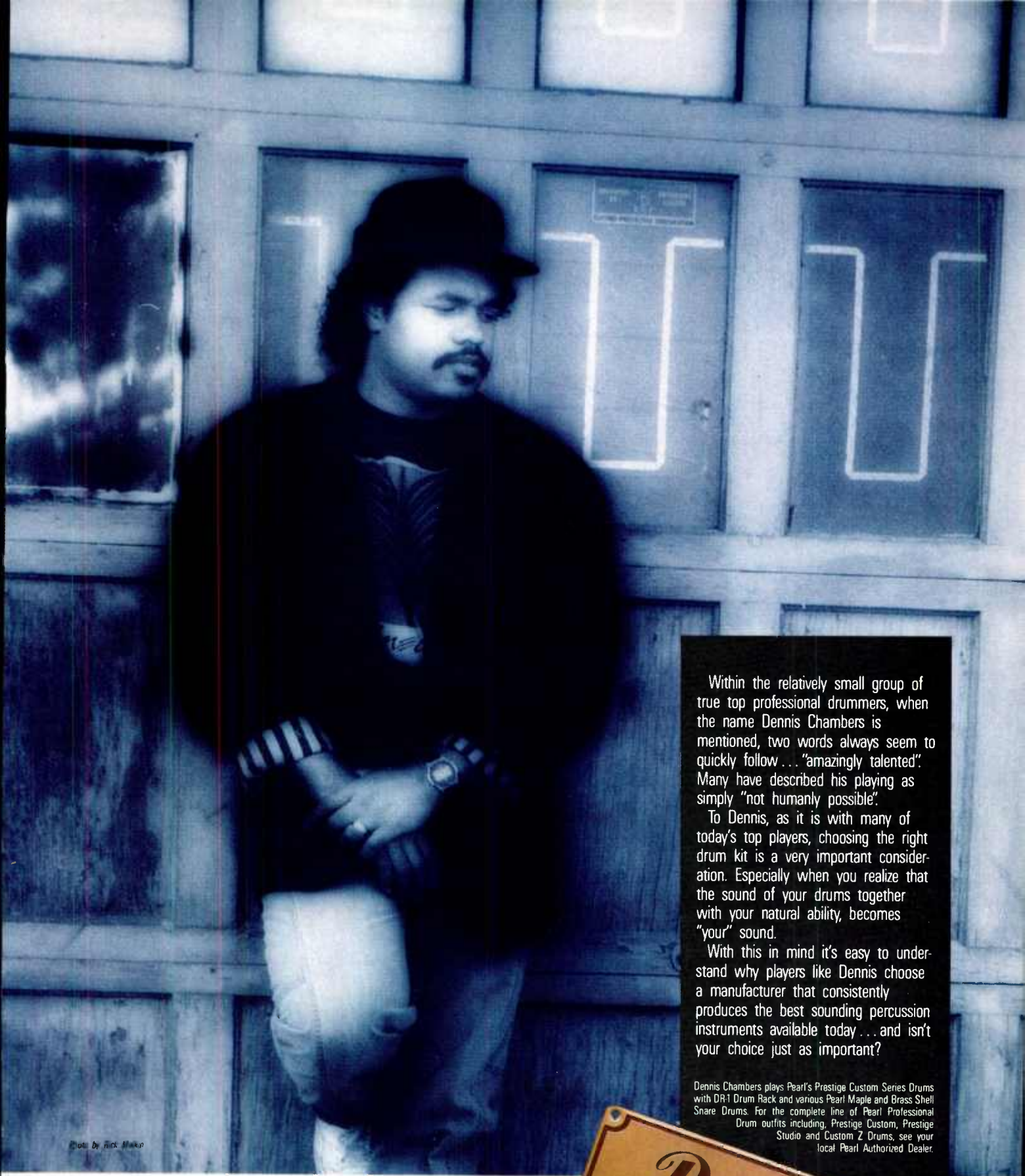
At the same time the AACM, having moved from Chicago to New York, was in the middle of splintering and losing its aesthetic forward motion; the Art Ensemble of Chicago put on a few amazing concerts; Lester Bowie started Brass Fantasy, a group that never translated onto disc either; and Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman narrowed their scope, wandering into more academic and European classical fields. But the rise of the World Saxophone Quartet out of the wreckage of abstract expressionism—a result of a renewed interest in song form by the jazz audience, the broadening of jazz's audience and the marketing genius of Nonesuch Records—pointed out that something fundamental was happening in jazz.

And in the early 1980s that phenomenon could most easily be seen in David Murray, the powerhouse tenor saxophonist who had come up playing mostly free improvisations—still his strongest suit—but who started an octet and a big band playing tunes with arrangements by Butch Morris; loose, the group managed to merge the spontaneity of free music with more controlled song forms. After a write-up in *Newsweek* and a huge push by PolyGram Special Imports, Murray's next record sold a solid 5,000 copies. Stillbirth.

But the stage was being set. The story of mainstream jazz activity has been the story of an explosion, of a huge new market for mainstream music, a market that has caused PolyGram, Blue Note, Columbia, RCA, Epic, MCA, A&M and other major labels to sink more money into jazz than had been done in decades.

The reasons are obvious. Jazz has always been a barometer of the nation's cultural and political mood. In the Reagan years, when the mainstream became more politically conservative and culturally backward-looking, Americana became a hot item, whether it was

Photographs: Bill Douthart (top left); David Seelig/Star File (top right); Russell Fine



Within the relatively small group of true top professional drummers, when the name Dennis Chambers is mentioned, two words always seem to quickly follow . . . "amazingly talented". Many have described his playing as simply "not humanly possible".

To Dennis, as it is with many of today's top players, choosing the right drum kit is a very important consideration. Especially when you realize that the sound of your drums together with your natural ability, becomes "your" sound.

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Photo by Rick Malkin

Dennis Chambers has performed with such diverse artists as; Parliament-Funkadelic, John Schofield, Special EFX, Bernard Wright, Thomas Dolby, Michael Brecker and David Sanborn.

Texas bar-b-que, California wines and cuisine, antique furniture or all forms of indigenous music. (Blues and honky-tonk country music, as well as jazz, are exploding now.)

Reissues also went haywire, certainly after the advent of the CD. Even the most recalcitrant labels—MCA, RCA, Columbia—embarked on reissue programs (often marred by idiocy, incompetence and a sheer uncaring attitude) that used Fantasy Records as a prototype. Fantasy has 700 reissues available in its catalog. How many have they sold? They won't say.

Luckily, a marketing dream wandered onto the scene at the same time. Wynton Marsalis, sold as an angry young man with a horn and a suit, captured an audience's need to feel cultured and dignified. As the future became intimidating, the past became secure; Marsalis offered it in the form of verities. And though ultimately his biggest contribution might be the return of an audience to jazz, he offered something else as well: a return to music as pleasure, the return of swing and the entertainment that connotes—yet another indication of a fundamental shift in perspective by both the public and musicians.

At the most extreme, this reverence for the past translated into reappreciation of a dormant movement that has been intermittently visible through jazz's history: the repertory concept. Started by critic Gary Giddins, the American Jazz Orchestra presented shows of classic and obscure Ellington pieces, arrangements by Sy Oliver and more. At Lincoln Center critic Stanley Crouch, along with Marsalis, shepherded a series of programs that were either recreations of famous works—Ellington suites, large pieces by Max Roach—or tributes to Tadd Dameron and others, including Benny Carter.

There is no absolute hegemony by one movement, and thankfully the current uniformity in the younger musicians has also been challenged. The extraordinary music put out by the jazz-related white avant-garde—Tim Berne, Miniature, Hank Roberts, Wayne Horvitz—used jazz as a separate reference, one of a series of options that allowed them to fit into the major cultural movement of the '80s, postmodernism.

Closer to the jazz tradition was the M-Base group, including pianist Geri Allen, saxophonists Steve Coleman and Greg Osby, singer Cassandra Wilson, trombonist Robin Eubanks and cornetist Graham Haynes. They offered another synthesis of black popular music and jazz that is still in the working stages and used as a context for the most radically innovative jazz styles of the decade. While M-Base has its elements of puffed-up rhetoric, the basic organization—a group of friends trying to do something different—formed a support system at a time (the early- to mid-'80s) when the musicians were struggling not only to find an identity in the face of a mainstream aesthetic, but simply to work.

The mainstream movement has safely fit into the lower level of the jazz scene—let's except Wynton from this—with sideman spots being filled by younger musicians two or three generations removed from the Johnny Griffins and Sonny Rollinses. The M-Base and avant-garde white musicians, meanwhile, have circled around New York's Knitting Factory, a place that has acted like a coral [*cont'd on page 72*]


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The Artists on the Decade

WHAT DID IT ALL REALLY MEAN?

Johnny Marr: "The '80s are best forgotten because the decade was just so retrospective. A lot of bad things were born out of sort of stealing from the old days. Rap music is one of the best things about the '80s."

Jeff Beck: "I've been listening and I've been checking MTV and stuff. If that is really what's going on, I can't believe it."

Ornette Coleman: "Time, space and motion have not been affected by the '80s."

John Mellencamp: "I think corporate intervention into the music business will probably be the most significant thing my generation left. The selling out of rock. I don't know what's gonna turn that around, or if it can ever be turned around, or if people want it turned around. Maybe I'm just an old warhorse. Maybe it's time for rock 'n' roll to get out of the way for pop music, and let's just forget about rock 'n' roll and let the kids dance."

Jon Bon Jovi: "This was the decade of us, that's for sure. I don't know. I think a lot of the innocence that there was in the '60s and maybe the confusion of the '70s all solidified in the '80s. It seems like every commercial has a serious tone to it, every presidential speech has an MTV background to it."

Bonnie Raitt: "I think besides a political consciousness returning to music—the success of U2, the Clash, Dire Straits, Bruce Hornsby, just to name a few people I think are quality artists—for them to have success is heartening for me. And I think it's great to have these benefits regardless of whether some people get tired of them. The world needs some attention. I think it's great that the musicians' community is doing what they can for Farm Aid and Amnesty International. I think it makes a big difference."

Mark Goodman (ex-MTV veejay): "MTV showed the music business how to make money in this decade. Rock 'n' roll was counterculture and aggressive, and MTV took it more into the corporate arena. It brought music to more people, it was important and vital and fun and did a lot of good. But it also signified to me that what we wound up buying was sizzle, not steak. Because it opened people's eyes up to music, in some cases it might have shut down their ears. That's a function not of MTV but of the audience."

Mike D. (Beastie Boys): "You can't really isolate the '80s. In the '60s everyone got into experimenting and questioning the rules. All of a sudden it became a clean slate. The effect of that was in the '70s, when everyone would just do a bunch of coke and freak out and swap wives and go to Plato's Retreat. The aftermath of *that* is the '80s, which gives you music you can go to Alcoholics Anonymous by."

Afrika Bambaataa: "You still see a lot of prejudice or racism in the music industry. A lot of radio stations don't play music for what it is, so you still have your black radio stations and your white radio stations; this one will want to play rock and this one wants to play hip-hop or funk and another one don't want to play nothing at all but Top 40. If things don't change for the better, the 1990s are gonna be pure hell."

Mike Score (A Flock of Seagulls): "I'm glad the '80s are almost over. Although it was a great time, most of the bands that seemed to be doing well in the early '80s seemed to have been swamped by their own copies. The early '80s were like the early '60s, when a lot of original bands broke through. It seemed like the whole jigsaw could be put together and finished. Then suddenly someone lost a couple of the pieces. But I think it's the industry that kills bands. It builds them and then it kills them. It tried to kill me but I ain't dead yet."

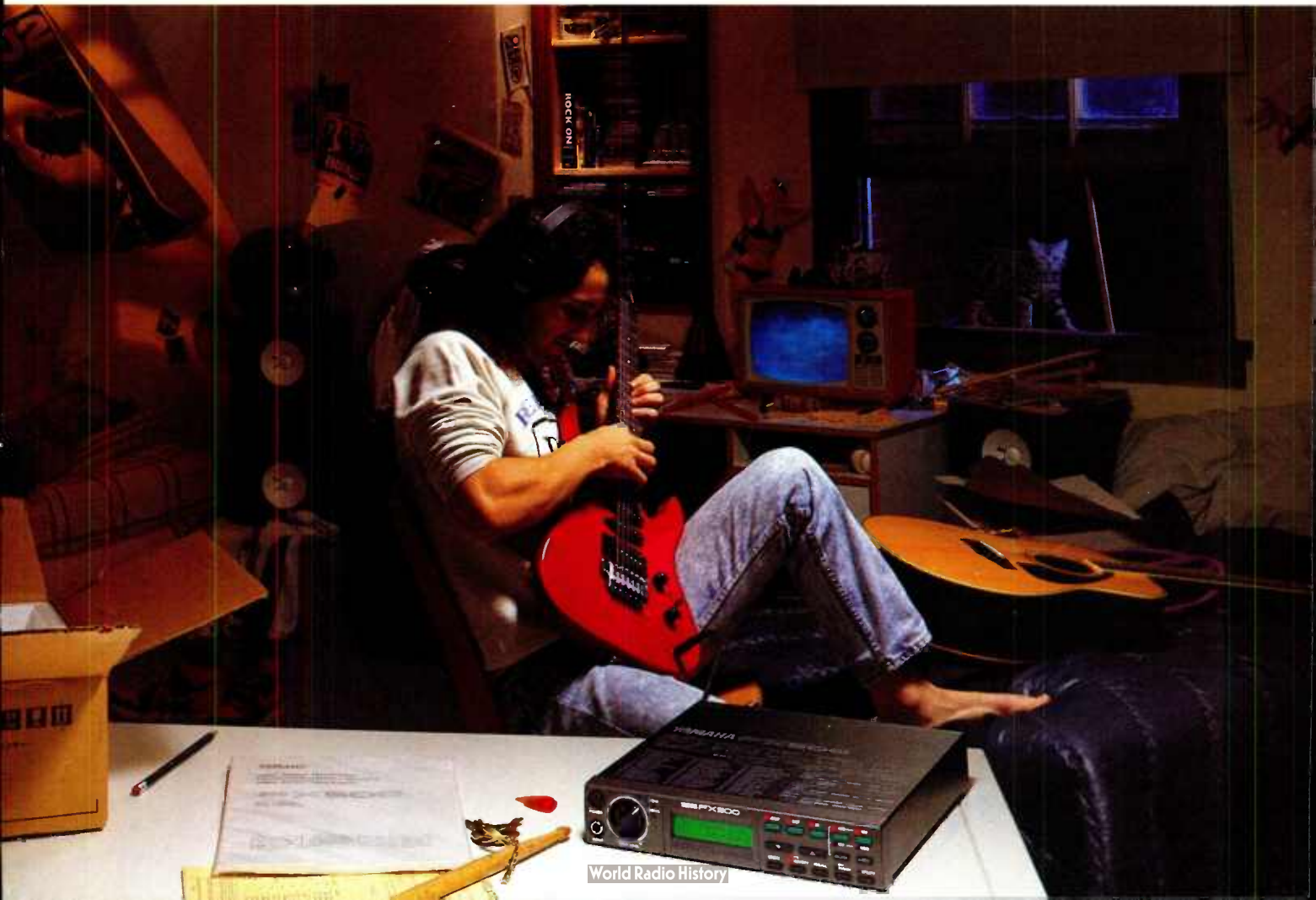
Robbie Grey (Modern English): "The early '80s were definitely the most creative part of the '80s. You had Joy Division and Wire, U2 and Simple Minds—those are the last of the great bands, in a way. The late '80s seem to be geared towards commercial output: who can sell the most records. Stock, Aitken & Waterman just about sums the '80s up for me. Everyone seems to be fighting to be given a chance to make a hit single. If that doesn't happen, they're finished."

Eugene Chadbourne: "What I have been seeing is that there is a whole generation that you have to give up on in terms of being a listening public, going to a lot of shows, buying a lot of records; it just seems to be something that people grow out of. Although I do have to say that there are kids coming along."

David Murray: "I didn't think the music changed that much in the '80s. I think it could have been more creative. There were creative people out there, but they didn't get hired. Jazz got smoothed over; it was more of a rehash of bebop, a tainted version of bebop, and it was neglecting the more vanguard sound that had been projected in the '70s. The audience is ready. It's just the business opting for certain-sounding groups."

Robert Smith (the Cure): "As a decade, it doesn't really have an image, does it, the '80s? At least not for me, not like the '60s or the '70s, musically. In fact, the first group that springs to mind when people talk about the '80s is Human League: *Dare* is about the only record I can think of that couldn't be made any other time. Sequencing, stuff like that, probably distinguishes the '80s from the '70s."

Tom Petty: "The '80s were better than the '70s, not as good as the '60s."



The Decade in Tech

IT WAS THE AGE OF MIDI—OR WAS IT?

BY JOCK BAIRD

FEW EVENTS in the '80s have been more exhaustively extolled than the MIDI revolution of the mid-decade, and for the most part it's lived up to its advance billing. Six years after the MIDI standard went on-line to the music-making public, it now pretty much does what its adherents always promised it would. Of course countless hours have been sacrificed to manual reading, gadget fiddling, calls to help lines, but at decade's end it is indeed true that with a plausible investment you can make CD-quality digital recordings at home with a micro-computer, a DAT deck and a supporting cast of MIDI modules. Whole sections of the soundtrack and jingle world have become MIDIized, and much big-studio track laying has been taken over by sequencers, synths and samplers.

But other than these profound changes in the musical *process*, MIDI technology has had less effect on contemporary rock than one might've expected. For example, when Stevie Wonder was able in the early '70s to layer his own records, performing everything from drums to harmonica, the resulting albums were unforgettable. Surely there were more geniuses out there, and once they became empowered by the MIDI/digital revolution the land would bloom with unbelievable music. Yet this incredible power has yet to produce one certifiable genius, let alone a batch of them. Oh sure, Howard Jones is a likable sort; Thomas Dolby's done some good work; Jan Hammer had a great run on "Miami Vice"; Mark Isham and Joe Zawinul use MIDI well. But come on, where are the Hendrixes, the Coltranes, the Van Halens of MIDI? Forget the theme from *Beverly Hills Cop*, or "Rockit" or "Chariots of Fire" we want the real thing. Perhaps we don't recognize this new type of MIDI superstar—maybe it's Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, or L.A. and Babyface. In any case, the consummate MIDI superstar will now be part of the '90's story, not the '80's.

Tascam's Portastudio, Yamaha's DX7 and micro-computer-based MIDI sequencers all brought more power to the average musician.

MIDI wasn't the only industry highlight of the '80s—just the brightest. Year by year, here are some of the decade's big trends.

1980: The Portastudio

Home studios have never been the same since Tascam kicked off the decade with a four-track cassette recorder/mixer, the Portastudio 144. Despite the vast changes in the following 10 years, no product has had such a profound effect on the way artists write and demo songs; virtually every major star now employs them. The breakthrough was in tape head technology, or how many tracks could fit on a given piece of tape, and Tascam/TEAC and Fostex began a decade-long race to extend that revolution to eight-track, 16-track and even 24 tracks.

1981: Cheap Synths and Drum Machines

The microprocessor revolution had already given us polyphonic programmable analog synthesizers and drum boxes, but suddenly they became affordable. The cheapo hand clap became a radio staple and hundreds of young Brits got haircuts and started careers as one-finger musicians.

1982: The Plausible Drum Machine

With the advent of the LinnDrum and the Oberheim DMX, the live drummer could be replaced with drum samples and often was. This gave producers far more potential for success (or failure) and brought some restraint back to the percussionist's chair. Also in 1982 appeared the Scholz Rockman, the Walkman-like guitar practice preamp that offered studio-ready distortion for all citizens.

1983: The DX7

The first affordable digital synthesizer, the $2000 Yamaha DX7, helped revive a slumping industry, with upwards of 150,000 sold. It also spawned a whole new cottage industry of patch programming. FM synthesis is still a Yamaha staple seven years later.

1984: The Cheap Guitars

While the MIDI revolution was starting quietly, the MI market was gobbling up genuinely fine $200-$400 solid-body Japanese guitars, epitomized by the Fender Squiers and the Ibanez RoadStars. Although Japan would go on to dominate the MIDI market, it was already revealing it had come of age as a manufac- [*cont'd on page 73*]

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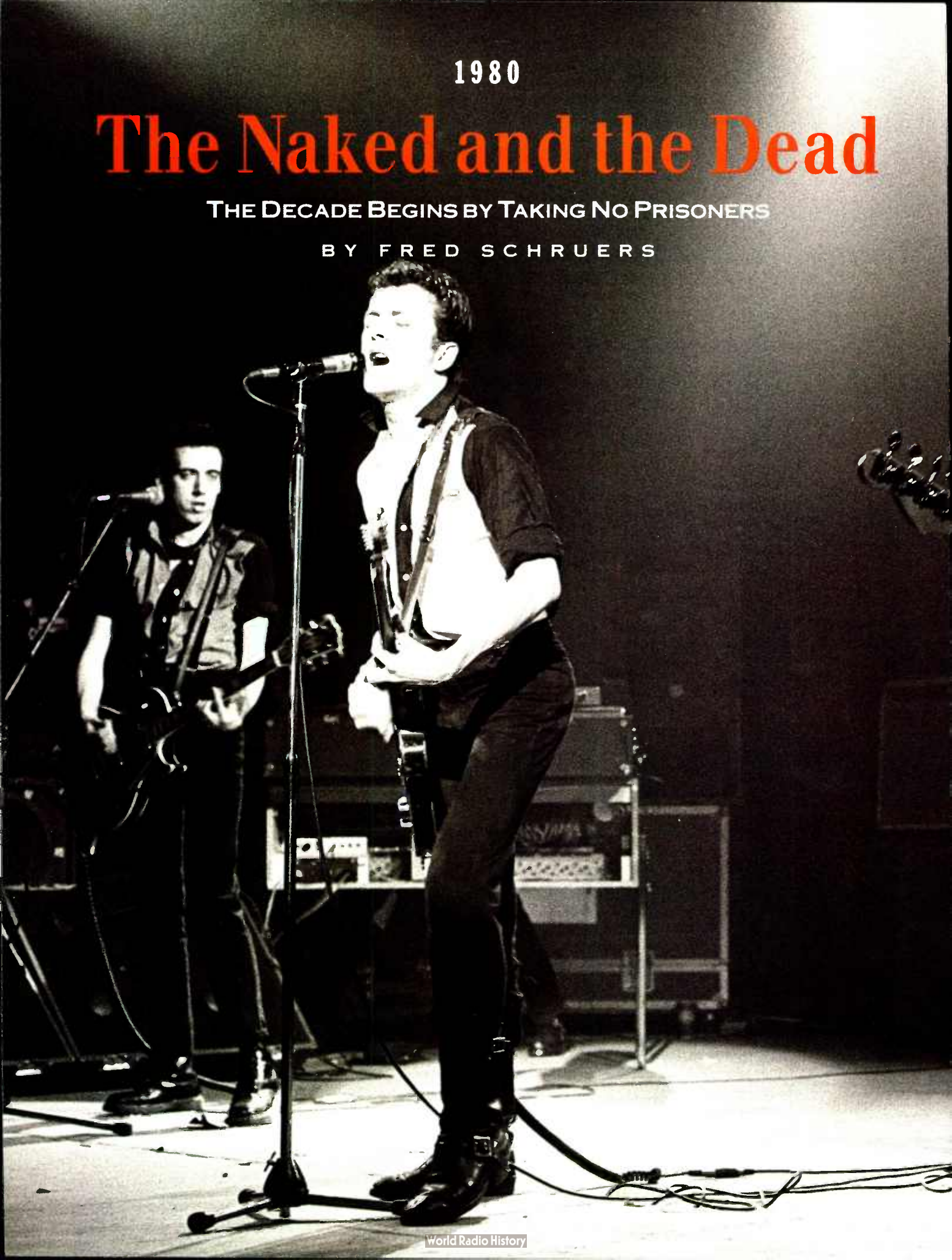
1980

The Naked and the Dead

The Decade Begins by Taking No Prisoners

BY FRED SCHRUERS



IN THE EARLY FALL of 1980 I went to Bob Marley's room in the Essex House Hotel on Central Park South to join the singer for a day he planned to spend greeting fans from a rolling sound truck in the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn. Marley was dressed up, red-gold-green tour jacket and all, but sat in a wooden chair looking quizzical and frail. This was a man who used to swim out into the Caribbean till he was too exhausted to continue, just to see if he could make it back, but that day he looked tired, body almost used up, and his great spirit was just barely visible in a small smile of greeting. Marley would play one more date—in Pittsburgh, curiously enough—but the next time I saw his face was as he lay in state in Kingston's National Arena a little less than a year later, claimed by brain and lung cancer.

Sadly, it was that kind of year, the year of Jim Carroll's all-too-topical "People Who Died" single. He debuted it onstage in June at the (literally) underground club Trax, with Keith Richards slinging out serrated, down-spiraling chords; much later that night, the photographer friend I'd been sitting with before the show was saved only by a stomach-pumping. 1980's necrology was extraordinarily tragic: Joy Division's Ian Curtis (suicide by hanging), Inner Circle's Jacob Miller (car accident), balladeer Tim Hardin (heroin overdose), Led Zeppelin's John Bonham (alcohol overdose) and of course, on December 8, John Lennon's assassination in front of the Dakota. As with any great and sudden loss, we remember such days in the first person, and I recall making my way to West 72nd where I saw fellow writer Chuck Young. We stood uncharacteristically mute amid the other fans who chose that vigil as a way to bear witness to their outrage and hurt. Although arena-rock was certainly on the rise, things were more personal then, and Bruce Springsteen's performance at Philadelphia's Spectrum the next night ("... It's hard to come out here and play tonight, but there's nothing else to do") was delivered and received with almost unimaginable fervor.

In fact, the music would restore itself, with the Lennon/Yoko Ono single "(Just Like) Starting Over" already a keepsake hit in December, and with ample new-found talent. If punk was fading—Johnny Lydon sparring with Tom Snyder, Patti Smith marrying and going out to pasture for most of the decade—the Clash had become the rage of the U.K., with a correspondingly intense cult following in the U.S. A February tour would bring them to the fore here. "Okay, Strummer," growled Mick Jones challengingly in the total dark of New York's Palladium just before the stage lights came up to the avalanching intro of "London Calling." The three-record *Sandinista!* set was a statement that Clash fans mattered more than the bean-counters at their record label—a rare sentiment today. The Pretenders' "Brass in Pocket" kicked off London's 1980, as Chrissie Hynde's throbbing, worldly-wise vocal gave notice of a voice to pay heed to. The look was mascara-and-motorcycle-jacket, and the sound was breathless-with-sex. It sounded like Ms. Hynde knew something we all didn't—that '80s women would be better survivors

◆ Gone with the '80s ◆

◆ The Clash, busy changing the world ◆

Photographs (l to r): Ebet Roberts; Bob Gruen/Starfile

Talking Heads got bigger, got rhythm

than the men. Of the three high-spirited British yobbos who played with this American girl, two would be dead, one fired, before the decade was done.

Good news pressed in. In late fall a staffer from Island Records shanghaied me from Heathrow Airport to a gig at little Southampton College where a baby band called U2 played their new single "I Will Follow" to several dozen students in a cafeteria. Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks" became the second crossover hit (the first was the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," with a backing track from a Chic hit) of what was just beginning to be called rap—a street-born hybrid that came out of house music and began blowing away the disco cobwebs of the '70s with a strutting, spare rhythm and a vocal braggadocio commandeered from the DJs at Bronx house parties.

Black music, world music, was having substantial impact even as the pop charts were stuffed with disco's closing gasp and the likes of Christopher Cross, the Captain and Tennille and Kenny Rogers. Thus the Talking Heads, after a spell of dissension, reconstituted themselves on *Remain in Light* with African beats (via Eno) and a nine-piece band of hot, polyrhythmic urban instrumentalists (memorably filmed by Jonathan Demme in *Stop Making Sense*). The Police spent much of 1980 touring such little-visited (by rockers) countries as India and Mexico, where their *Zenyatta Mondatta* hit "De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da" required little translation. Michael Jackson's "Off the Wall" was one of several hits from his album of the same name, and bigger things were coming, but a fascinating stripling named Prince erupted raunchily with *Dirty Mind* and its dirty-sweet "When You Were Mine." Meanwhile dinosaurs like Yes and Emerson Lake & Palmer were dying in the tar pits of their own pomposity. Perhaps the logical hinge point of a half-numbed year was the Stones' mid-summer hit with "Emotional Rescue"—its disco-fied, archly enunciated verses carried a kind of comfort. But the likelier image for the year came out of the LP's second hit, "She's So Cold," with its anti-heroine who's "so cold, cold, cold . . . like a tombstone."

1981

Running Hot

NEW HEROES (AND ANTI-HEROES) FOR THE AGE OF AOR

BY CHARLES M. YOUNG

APRIL IS the cruelest month, and in England April of 1981 was the cruelest of the decade, promising so much for the Thatcher era, delivering so little. For a brief moment the news lit up with a vision that fulfilled everything the Sex Pistols and Bob Marley had promised: Babylon was boring, and Babylon was burning. The riots started in Brixton, a London neighborhood with a high percentage of second-generation blacks, unemployed and squatters, who preferred their all-night "blues" (reggae) parties to wage slavery. The police naturally took keen interest in this chaotic social brew of alienation, and the locals naturally interpreted this interest as harassment. One afternoon the bricks started flying. By evening, there was full-scale burning and looting. By July, "shopping without credit cards" had become the rage in a dozen cities across Britain. The Tories and Labour tried to blame each other, both citing lack of jobs as the root cause. The anarchists demanded blame all for themselves: "We want to riot, not to work" was their cry. But subsequently they didn't riot or work. They wrote long analyses of how to prolong the revolutionary moment. Whether they came up with anything will be determined in the '90s when the debt structure topples.

One month after Brixton, on May 11, Bob Marley died of cancer, ending a renaissance era in Jamaican music. Half black and half white, native of an island culturally hung between Africa and America, Marley embodied all of popular music, not just reggae.

Marley's ghost

Although reggae then went into a long fallow period, his spirit did inspire "two-tone" music in '80 and '81. A cross between reggae and rock, two-tone made its statement by mixing styles and races, leaving the lyrics light for optimum don't-worry-be-happy dance effect. Bands like the Specials, Selecter and Madness made a splash in Britain, but the waves didn't knock over many on the other side of the Atlantic.

MTV debuted at midnight on August 1 with a song called "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the

Photographs (clockwise from left): Melissa Hill/LGI; Ebet Roberts; Ron Delany; Adrian Boot/Retna

Buggles. The brag was accurate, if slightly premature. AOR (Album Oriented Radio) stars like Styx were doomed, not because their music was annoyingly bombastic, but because they weren't pleasant to look at. A format created by white men to promote white men, supported by astonishingly stupid demographic research, AOR turned bands like REO Speedwagon into superstars. Over the next two years, MTV turned them into has-beens.

At the time no one knew MTV would do that, least of all MTV. It was created by some of the same people—with the same prejudices—who created AOR. Fortunately for the music, the biggest AOR bands had little video ready for rotation. As MTV reminded us 24 hours a day, it was on 24 hours a day, and they needed massive product to fill time. In their first year, any garage band could send in a tape and likely find itself programmed at 4 a.m., even if they didn't have a recording contract. Out of sheer economic necessity, they opened a road for a whole new generation of bands. That's to MTV's credit. To its discredit, almost none of those bands were black. The only two-tone group to receive any significant exposure, for example, was Madness, which was actually one-tone in racial composition; namely white. Even at its most conservative, however, MTV was light years beyond AOR.

1981 was a transition year for metal. John Bonham had died the previous fall, ending Led Zeppelin's long reign as kings of metal. Though difficult to envision in these days of glut, there were then just two contenders for the throne. AC/DC hit their peak with *Back in Black* in 1980, one of the finest hard-rock albums of all time. Their followup in '81, *For Those About to Rock We Salute You*, was a disappointment, however. They could beat a great riff into submission, they explored the further realms of Dionysian frenzy, yet lacked that essential element of mystery. Unlike Led Zeppelin, who inspired a best-seller and kept a hundred rock 'zines moving on the newsstands, no one particularly cared where AC/DC's crunch came from.

Not so with Van Halen. With three platinum albums by '81, critics began to notice (well behind the fans) that guitarist Eddie Van Halen had something special: a sense of melody to rival Jimmy Page, and new techniques like those lightning double hammer-ons that left audiences awestruck. He was the first guitar revolutionary of the decade, and everyone wanted to know how he did it. Everyone was also entertained by singer David Lee Roth, a blond physical specimen who combined the warm extroversion of Robert Plant with the hambone bellow of Al Jolson. They were the new metal kings.

The Rolling Stones had a great year. "Start Me Up" was their best single in a decade, they recorded with Sonny Rollins, they toured, they didn't bring down any governments or get busted. Two older bands were quick to figure out video's impact and had terrific years: After a long career of minor-hit-followed-by-big-miss, the J. Geils Band had a number-one album with *Freeze-Frame*, and Daryl Hall & John Oates were in the Top 10 all year with various singles. Rick James carried on the funk/rock/raunch tradition with *Street Songs*, while Kool & the Gang had their biggest hit with "Celebration," which greeted the hostages returning from Iran on January 26. It was the last great year for Blondie, who scored number-one hits with "The Tide Is High" and "Rapture." Kim Carnes became the one-hit wonder of the decade with "Bette Davis Eyes."

On the negative side, it was a great time for Eddie Rabbitt, Sheena Easton, Juice Newton, Stars on 45, Air Supply, Rick Springfield, Lionel Richie and Olivia Newton-John. Overall did the swill outweigh the swell? No. It was a pretty good year.

New metal kings David Lee Roth and Eddie Van Halen

Ron Wood, living every boy's dream

1982

Ebony Meets Ivory

CROSSOVER AND MTV REMAKE THE RULES OF THE GAME

BY MARK ROWLAND

PUNKS WERE TURNING into bards, MTV was turning English synth-poppers into stars, while "heartland" rock was planting the seeds of future conquest. But above all, 1982 was the year that AOR—Apartheid Oriented Radio—finally cracked. With the release of one brilliant record after another, black artists broke down the artificial barriers radio programmers had come to rely on for demographics' sake, supplanting tired pop formulas with concepts of rhythm and style that have since come to define the sound of the '80s. In that respect, it was the year the decade really began.

The spirit if not the tone of the revolution was signaled by "Ebony and Ivory," a saccharine duet by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder. It topped the pop charts for seven weeks that summer, which made it, along with Joan Jett's "I Love Rock and Roll," the biggest hit of the year. Aretha Franklin teamed with up-and-coming talent Luther Vandross and got everyone else to "Jump to It." George Clinton went solo and produced a masterpiece, *Computer Games*, whose single "Atomic Dog" pollinated rap more than any tune this side of James Brown. Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five showed just how powerful that form could be with "The Message," arguably the first rap song to transcend its genre, and seven years later, arguably the most effective.

◆ Michael bids for the Elephant Man ◆

Then there was the really hot stuff. Prince as usual was everywhere, masterminding Vanity 6, producing the Time's breakthrough LP *What Time Is It?* and ultimately releasing the supremely influential *1999*. The great Marvin Gaye returned from a hiatus of several years to establish, with the LP *Midnight Love* and the anthem "Sexual Healing," his primacy as a balladeer and romantic symbol. He would die in April of 1984, shot by his father.

Finally, the coup de grace: In November, Michael Jackson put out *Thriller*—record of the decade, changed the face of pop, propelled Michael into the Forbes 400, broke every other record on the *Billboard* charts and probably released enough energy of one sort or another to create the rings around Triton. Yes, *Thriller* had everything, even a duet with Paul McCartney more insipid than Stevie Wonder's. At this point there's not much you can say about the record that hasn't been already written—among other things, Michael-mania created a boom in the field of quickie pop music books—so let's just restate the obvious: It was the first moment since the Beatles broke up that virtually everyone connected to popular music agreed on something. And if that wasn't magic, it was at least pretty neat.

In retrospect, it feels like *Thriller* really exploded the night "Beat It" premiered on MTV. Or maybe it's the other way around; maybe that was the night MTV became a star. In 1982 the future of a 24-hour video channel still seemed uncertain. The station was losing millions, there weren't all that many videos around, and were they really going to matter and sell records? There wasn't so defined and restricted a video language as there is today, and as a result MTV was a lot of fun to watch. Because they had to depend on the small piles of videos available, you'd see bands that weren't particularly popular. What happened next, of course, was that some bands became quite popular simply by dint of MTV exposure.

The most obvious beneficiaries were a slew of young, photogenic British groups like A Flock of Seagulls, the Human League, Thompson Twins, ABC—the haircut bands. Unlike the punks or their early new-wave brethren, these groups didn't want to change the world, they just wanted their piece of it. Their ticket was smooth, synth-laden hooks and a metronomic beat even white boys could dance to. Yet their success paled beside Men at Work, an unprepossessing quintet from Australia whose self-satiric video of "Who Can It Be Now?" began drawing comparisons to the Beatles, with sales figures to match. After *Business as Usual* topped the *Billboard* LP charts for seven weeks in a row, record companies were sprouting video divisions faster than you could say "tax shelter." The rules had changed for good.

In the middle of the year Bruce Springsteen released the spare *Nebraska*, a commercial disappointment at the time, though praised critically. At the same time a young upstart named John Cougar was enjoying startling success with *American Fool* and the hits "Hurts So Good" and "Jack & Diane," much to these same critics' chagrin. It

Photograph: Andy Freeberg/Retna

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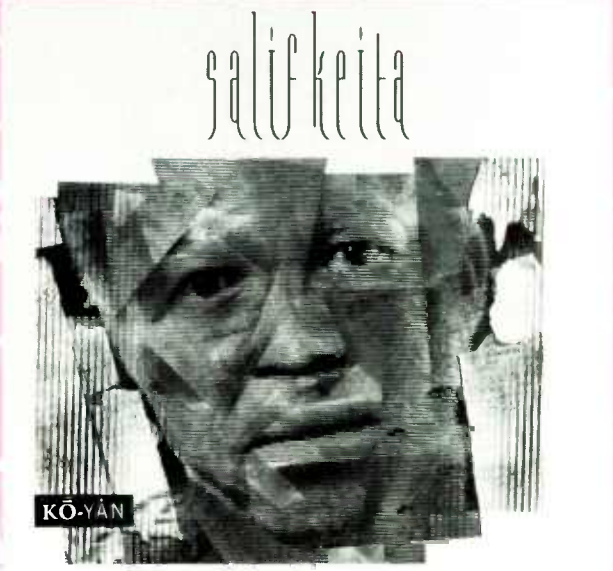

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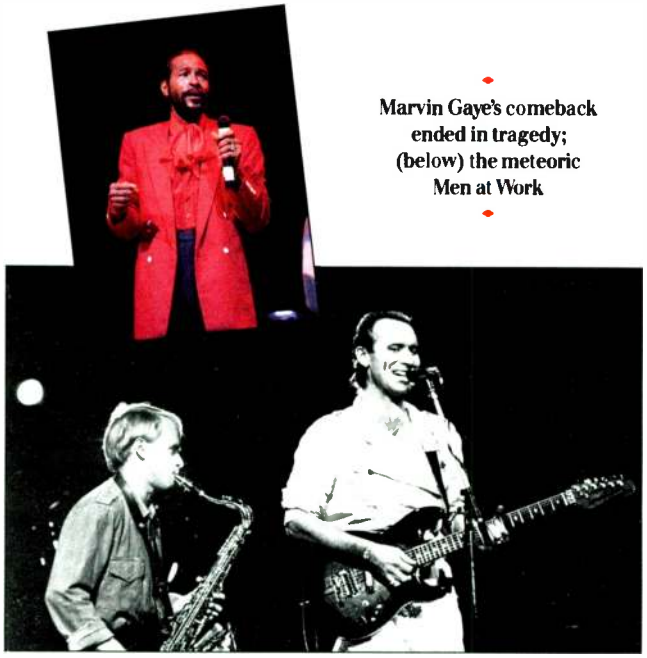


Marvin Gaye's comeback ended in tragedy; (below) the meteoric Men at Work

would take a while to realize that both records weren't merely traveling the same road but creating a new one.

But that's the thing about pop: Its pleasures are so immediate, its values so mysterious. How could you resist in 1982 the jukebox savvy of Kool & the Gang or Hall & Oates? (It was an axiom of the time that Hall was a pop genius.) These records sold far better than Kate Bush's *The Dreaming* or Roxy Music's *Avalon* or Peter Gabriel's *Security*, all of which sound as fresh today as Hall & Oates seem dated. Similarly, a predictable raft of new faces appeared on the scene with little fanfare. Most left by the same route; others, like Janet Jackson, Was (Not Was) and Los Lobos, eventually cast longer shadows.

The fresh breeze sweeping through the year rustled more than mainstream pop. The virtuosity of trumpeter Wynton Marsalis—the only artist to win a Grammy award for his jazz and classical repertoire—stamped him as an exemplar of what became known as jazz's "new traditionalism" (or for those less impressed by Marsalis' conservatism, "jazz in suits"). Debates over whether Marsalis would ever change the face of the music in the manner of trumpet legends Louis Armstrong or Miles Davis (talk about lofty missions!) obscured the very tangible virtues of his intelligent, tight quintet, which included Branford Marsalis, Kenny Kirkland and Jeff Watts.

1982 was notable for one other prophetic event: the Who's Farewell Tour. A transparent ploy to rake in the moola one more time, it served notice that, like everything else in the Age of Reagan, rock 'n' roll was officially for sale—and that its heroes could be as morally bankrupt as members of any other profession. Corporate sponsors and contrived stage shows are now so much a part of the landscape it's hard to get worked up about it, but for pure shamelessness this tour set the standard—that is, until the 1989 "one time only" Who Reunion Tour. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—some things anyway.

1983

The Revolution Televised

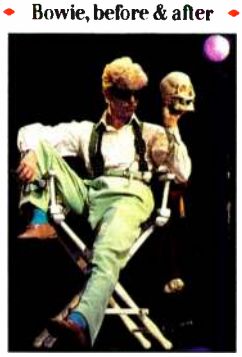
BIG STARS, BIG TOURS, BIG VIDEOS AND BIG DREAMS

BY JOCK BAIRD

ONCE VIDEO had made the world safe for a whole new herd of British invaders, it wasn't long before rock's power structure latched onto it. Formerly the province of a few free spirits working on the cheap, rock video now became an offshoot of Madison Avenue, with big-name directors and budgets of up to $75,000 per clip. The artists who harnessed it for their greater glory were no longer upstarts but superstars. It was no accident that the first major blow-out of 1983 was engineered by David Bowie, patron saint of the perversely visual.

Let's Dance was inspired by American black music, produced by Nile Rodgers and supercharged by blues phenom Stevie Ray Vaughan. The single and an arresting video shot in Australia rolled over everything in their path. *Time* magazine declared it the cornerstone of the "New Music revolution," fueled by the Big Beat, and it was true that many of the British invaders cut their teeth on R&B and knew the importance of the dance floor. But equally important to 1983's sea change was the importing of international music styles into the rock idiom. Following King Sunny Adé's critical raves, the legendary Fela Anikulapo Kuti came back from musical and political exile. The last real Marley album, *Confrontation*, appeared. Talking Heads, who two years before had invented the "techno-tribal" genre, released *Speaking in Tongues*, their most successful record. Not surprisingly, David Byrne showed uncommon skill as his own video director; who can forget the image of the kid on his back while he's trying to play guitar, or the shot of his face projected onto moving road? And a host of other hyphenated world music exponents like Eddy Grant, Musical Youth, Juluka and Afrika Bambaataa had their moment in the sun.

Bowie, before & after



But it was the Police who took the flowering interest in third-world music to its most sublime and successful fruition. *Synchronicity* was not the most provocative or best of the five albums they'd produced in five years, but it turned them into the most popular rock act in the world. Behind the scenes, *Synchronicity* was a result of

Photographs (from top): Linda Matlaw/LFI (inset); Ebet Roberts; Anastasia Pantsios/LFI

◆ The Police, already going off in different directions ◆

a group decision to concentrate more on Gordon Sumner/Sting's songs than on the textural and polyrhythmic triumphs of LPs past, and it turned out to be only a temporary truce in the often tempestuous musical differences in the band. But even though singles like "Every Breath You Take" and "King of Pain" were fairly straightforward by Police standards, the album showed a depth and maturity that left overt imitators like Men at Work in the dust.

The triumphs of *Synchronicity* and *Let's Dance* spawned the first mega-tours of the decade. These dates were almost entirely played in baseball or football stadiums, not the arenas of years past. Kicking off in Massachusetts' Sullivan Stadium and New York's Shea Stadium, the Police were utterly transcendent, wielding their immense catalog with consummate skill. If *Synchronicity* erred on the side of the polite, Stewart Copeland's savage drumming brought the equation back into balance. Unfortunately the world tour was run into the ground; 18 months later the show had become a tired, mechanical satire of its original magic. The Police broke up afterwards, with each member musically productive in his own right but never approaching the economy and raw impact of the band. Bowie's "Serious Moonlight" tour was less ambitious musically—Stevie Ray Vaughan jumped ship before it opened—but was more than able to fill the ballfields and football stadiums. Its success refined the blueprint of the Big Tour, and set an upper limit: Seldom would the market allow more than two a summer.

But bigger than the Big Tour was the Big Video, and no video star was bigger than Michael Jackson in his "Beat It"/"Billie Jean"/"Thriller" trifecta. Money and flashy production effects were now proven aids in selling more records, and established artists such as Billy Joel, Pat Benatar and Donna Summer had unlikely second careers as video stars. But no matter how fast rock video got taken over by Broadway dancing or blatant sexploitation, 1983 was still a year when Godley & Creme automatons could turn "Rockit," a little Herbie Hancock/Material romp, into a monster hit, and the world could see Prince ("Little Red Corvette") in all his unholy glory.

Photograph: Ebet Roberts

Despite these determined American successes, it was mainly a good year to be British (or at least from the British Isles). Overnight stardom came to bands like Big Country, Boy George O'Dowd and his Culture Club, the Fixx, Duran Duran and the remarkable Eurythmics. Overnight oblivion followed the success of bands like Spandau Ballet, Stray Cats, a Flock of Seagulls, Yaz, Madness, Dexy's Midnight Runners, Haircut 100 . . . the list seems endless. The Stones raised hackles with their Central American violence video, "Undercover of the Night." Even Ray Davies managed to look good in the MTV era, and Bryan Ferry was rehabilitated. And although not as photogenic as the foregoing, U2 had their first American hit with the magnificent *War*. To add insult to injury, the best American album of the year, Bob Dylan's *Infidels*, had been produced by the U.K.'s Mark Knopfler. Decaying British music royalty like Beck, Page and Clapton turned out in force for a concert to benefit ARMS and Ronnie Lane, clearly the social event of the season. Of course, British colonies counted too, and up from Australia came INXS, the Divinyls and Midnight Oil's extraordinary *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1*.

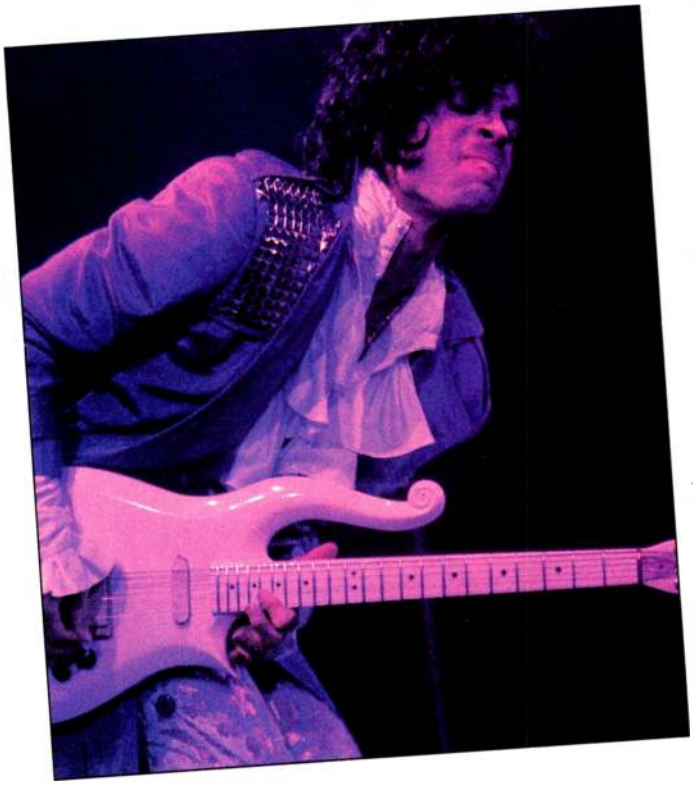
While Britons hogged the spotlight, some young American bands managed to prosper in what was codified as the New Music Era. A bunch of bands in the neighborhood of Athens, Georgia were doing something that had little to do with synths and klieg lights, led by R.E.M. with their charming LP *Murmur* and joined by the likes of Let's Active, the Bongos, the dB's, 10,000 Maniacs, scene founder the B-52's and scene hero Alex Chilton. Similarly, the West Coast nurtured the Blasters, X, Wall of Voodoo, Romeo Void, Berlin, Translator, Wire Train, Green on Red and Los Lobos. There was a neo-psychedelic revival with Dream Syndicate, Three O'Clock, the Fleshtones and Rain Parade. There were "country-punkers" Rank & File, Jason & the Scorchers and Rubber Rodeo. And there were neo-punks like Minor Threat, the Minutemen, Hüsker Dü and Violent Femmes. Most of these bands championed the guitar, had small wardrobes and talked up indie-label success. Unfortunately, all this independent idealism burned brightest at the exact moment the economics of the star system were making it even more restrictive, and many American new-music bands proved as permanent as their blow-dried British counterparts. But by year's end, a whole new seedbed of rock talent had been planted amid a vastly changed landscape.

1984

When Hits Were Hip

Top 40 Experiences Its Second Golden Age

BY BILL FLANAGAN



THE LAST TIME Top 40 radio sounded this good the Beatles were still together. 1984 opened with epiphanies for the MTV generation of overnight stars and built to major commercial breakthroughs for the '80s' best rock artists. Driving along with your car radio in the early nights of '84 you could hear the Pretenders' "Middle of the Road," Van Halen's "Jump," the Cars' "You Might Think" and "Drive," Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time," John Mellencamp's "Pink Houses," Big Country's "In a Big Country," UB40's "Red Red Wine," Lennon's "Nobody Told Me," ZZ Top's "Legs" and Huey Lewis & the News longing for a new drug. All great 45s, and all balanced on the line between substance and fluff where the best Top 40 lives. When that moment passed Lewis would get so light he'd float away (who told him "Happy to Be Stuck with You" was a good career move?) and Van Halen would get so heavy they'd never have to worry about being pop again (the deposing of David Lee Roth stemmed in part from the rest of Van Halen's fear that he was leading them down the road to easy listening). Like Lewis, Lauper seemed to become paralyzed by the prospect of following up her unexpected success, and what had sounded spontaneous became labored. The Cars (who had plucked "You Might Think" from their first album's leftovers) would finally run their pop machine into the ground. But that winter the hits just kept coming.

• Multi-media maven Prince at the height of his Purple reign. •

Photograph: Jeff Milrod/LGI

Elle —that linked athletes and rockers. In a business full of musicians who wanted to be Oscar Wilde, Springsteen and Knopfler both seemed to wish to be Bart Starr.

(maybe best of all) blasting out of every boom box on the beach. It was amazing how many of the bands sounded really good, an unexpected bonus in a multi-act live set-up. Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, the

Photograph: Larry Busacca/Retna

In the spring, the radio gave us those rare, wonderful moments when you hear a song for the first time and have to pull over to the side of the road to listen. Simple Minds' "Waterfront," though never a

• Mark Knopfler and 1985 sweatband chic •

Pretenders and David Bowie all turned in terrific sets in non-star time slots. (Gossip about celebrities whose egos would not permit them to play except in prime time swept the biz for weeks after. Rod.)

Live Aid was, on top of all its importance in the real world, the moment when rock's old guard and new—who had circled and often insulted each other since the punk explosion—were reconciled. If that meant that the angry young men had joined the old club (Elvis Costello played a Lennon/McCartney song—what foreshadowing), it also meant that most of the musicians had outgrown the need for rivalry, personal or generational, and realized that the only valid competition between artists is to see who can create the best art.

Want to hear an inside joke? This was the rock critic trick of the '80s. At the climax of London Live Aid David Fricke, late of *Musician* and now of *Rolling Stone*, was standing in the wings as all the English greats moved onstage behind Paul McCartney, Townshend and Geldof to sing "Do They Know It's Christmas?" Fricke thought about it for a minute and marched out with them. At the height of his triumph, with his dream realized and the whole world watching, Bob Geldof looked back at the mighty chorus swelling behind him and did a double take. While St. Bob mouthed, "*What the fuck are you doing here?*," Fricke just did what everyone else was doing. He sang, "Feed the world," smiled at Geldof and had a great time.

1986

Cross Cultures

TWO WORLD VISIONARIES TOWER ABOVE A SEA OF RETRO

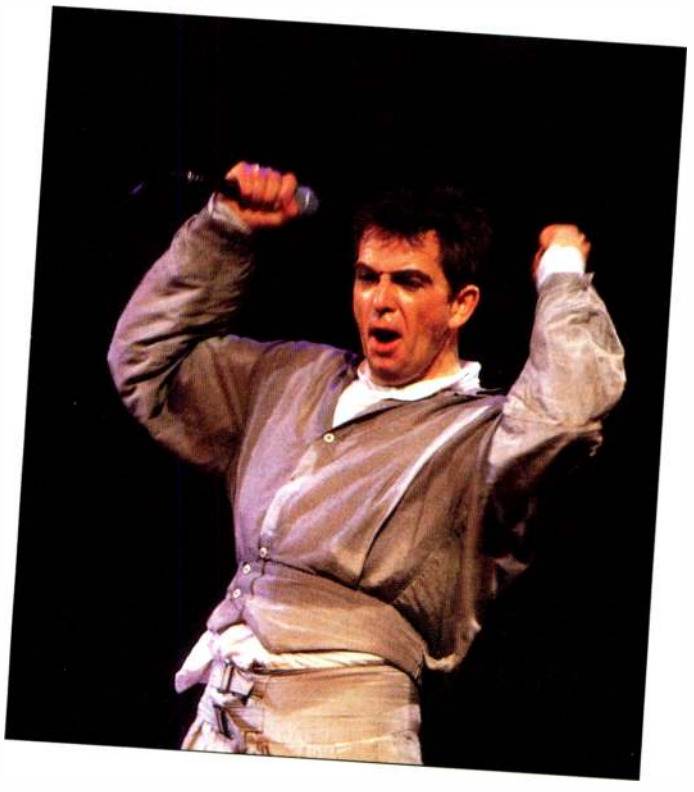
BY SCOTT ISLER

IT'S ALWAYS HEARTWARMING—not to mention critically reassuring—to see a Nice Guy Finish First. Certainly in the pop-music world, as a flick of the radio dial or a glance at the record charts will prove, the cream doesn't inevitably rise to the top. In 1986, however, we had the spectacle of not one but two pop auteurs finding as much favor with the rock-crit establishment as with the benighted masses who actually pay money for music. In both cases the hit albums were thoughtful, even troublesome—far from the escapism that usually fuels million-sellers.

Peter Gabriel's career seems to show a willful disregard for commercial success. He left Genesis, which he co-founded, just in time to see them turn into a pop institution. On his own, Gabriel released dark, moody albums that guaranteed him a faithful cult following. Not even "Shock the Monkey," a 1983 surprise disco hit, could lift Gabriel's *Security* album to gold status (half-million sales).

His 1986 offering, *So*, looked like it would repeat the pattern. Gabriel's up-front vocals pondered various neuroses, none of them likely subject matter for the Top 40. But helped by "Sledgehammer," its least ambiguously upbeat track—which was in turn helped by a clever video clip—*So* went over the million mark.

Paul Simon, of course, was no stranger to the winner's circle. In 1986, though, he was looking to come out of a career slump: His



• "I want *more* MTV!" (Peter Gabriel acts out.) •

Photographs: Ebet Roberts (top); Ron Delany

WHAT GUITAR HEROES ARE PLUGGING THESE DAYS.

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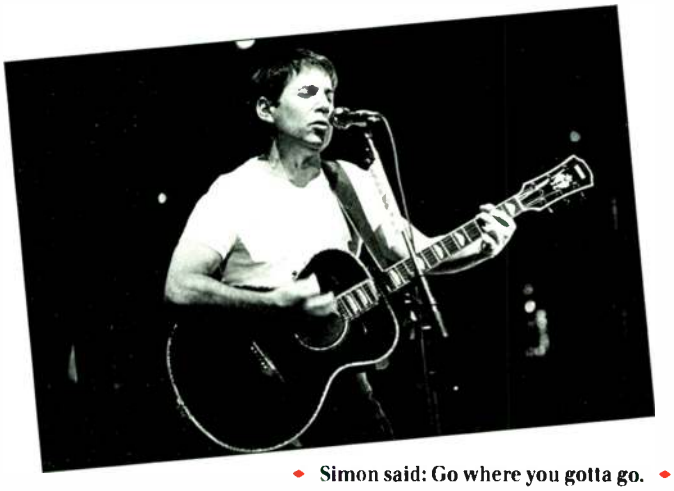


Simon said: Go where you gotta go.

EC pays his respects: Two albums, no hits, in '86.

previous album had been the disappointingly received *Hearts and Bones*. Violating a United Nations boycott, Simon went to South Africa in 1985 and recorded with three groups, in some cases adding his lyrics to pre-existing music.

There was more to *Graceland* than the South African sessions, but Simon's conception pulled it all together. He employed musicians and styles from other parts of Africa, and stateside ethno-rockers Los Lobos and Rockin' Dopsie & the Twisters. Simon's name and Warner Bros.' clout put across mbaqanga music to people who couldn't care less how the word was pronounced.

Both Simon and Gabriel had long shown interest in music from other cultures. Gabriel is the more explicitly political of the two (e.g., "Biko"), but their backgrounds are so dissimilar that comparisons are perhaps unfair. Gabriel's roots are in the British art-rock scene, Simon's in "Hey, Schoolgirl" and "The Lone Teen Ranger." Hardliners denounced Simon's South African trip as disingenuous and exploitative. Simon (who was generous with credits) countered with an artist's explanation: He had to go.

With *Graceland*, the ends justified the means. South African vocal group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, showcased on the album, went on to make their own recordings for Warner Bros. In opening American ears to African music, Simon had scored a major political victory of his own.

On Gabriel's *So* the third-world musical touches were much less obvious. One song's rhythm track was recorded in Brazil; another included Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour (also on *Graceland*—small world!). In both cases the "guest artists" were subservient to Gabriel's predetermined songs, the opposite of Simon's approach. But both albums were cultural straws in the wind, proving that in the late 1980s the frontiers are now only in our minds.

A foreigner looking at a 1986 list of bestselling albums would conclude that the hottest act around was a band called Soundtrack. The year swept in with *Miami Vice* and racked up a number of spin-off hits from movies, notably *Top Gun*. In other respects 1986's pop music was deadeningly status quo: Lionel Richie, Whitney Houston and Barbra Streisand sold millions of albums; Mr. Mister, Starship and Dionne Warwick had number-one singles. Elvis Costello released not one but two impressive albums, yet didn't increase his audience measurably.

There were the usual share of comebacks, though none so bizarre as the Monkees: Fueled by MTV reruns of their '60s television show, the disbanded group sold a million copies of a newly-released compilation album. What else could they do but reunite and tour?

At least all the Monkees were still alive, which is more than can be said of other 1986 hitmakers. The Beatles revisited the charts with "Twist and Shout" (another soundtrack tie-in), while Jimi Hendrix received posthumous certification that his first four U.S. albums had now sold at least a million copies each.

Radio is always a convenient whipping boy for explaining musical doldrums. By 1986 the airwaves' arteries had hardened to sclerotic bliss. Album rock stations commonly relied on playlists that were 60 to 80 percent oldies. Further contributing to the situation was the major labels' frightened suspension of independent record promoters following the whiff of a payola scandal early in the year. Without these indies to tell them what to play, radio closed ranks more tightly around beloved superstars and/or dinosaurs, depending on your point of view.

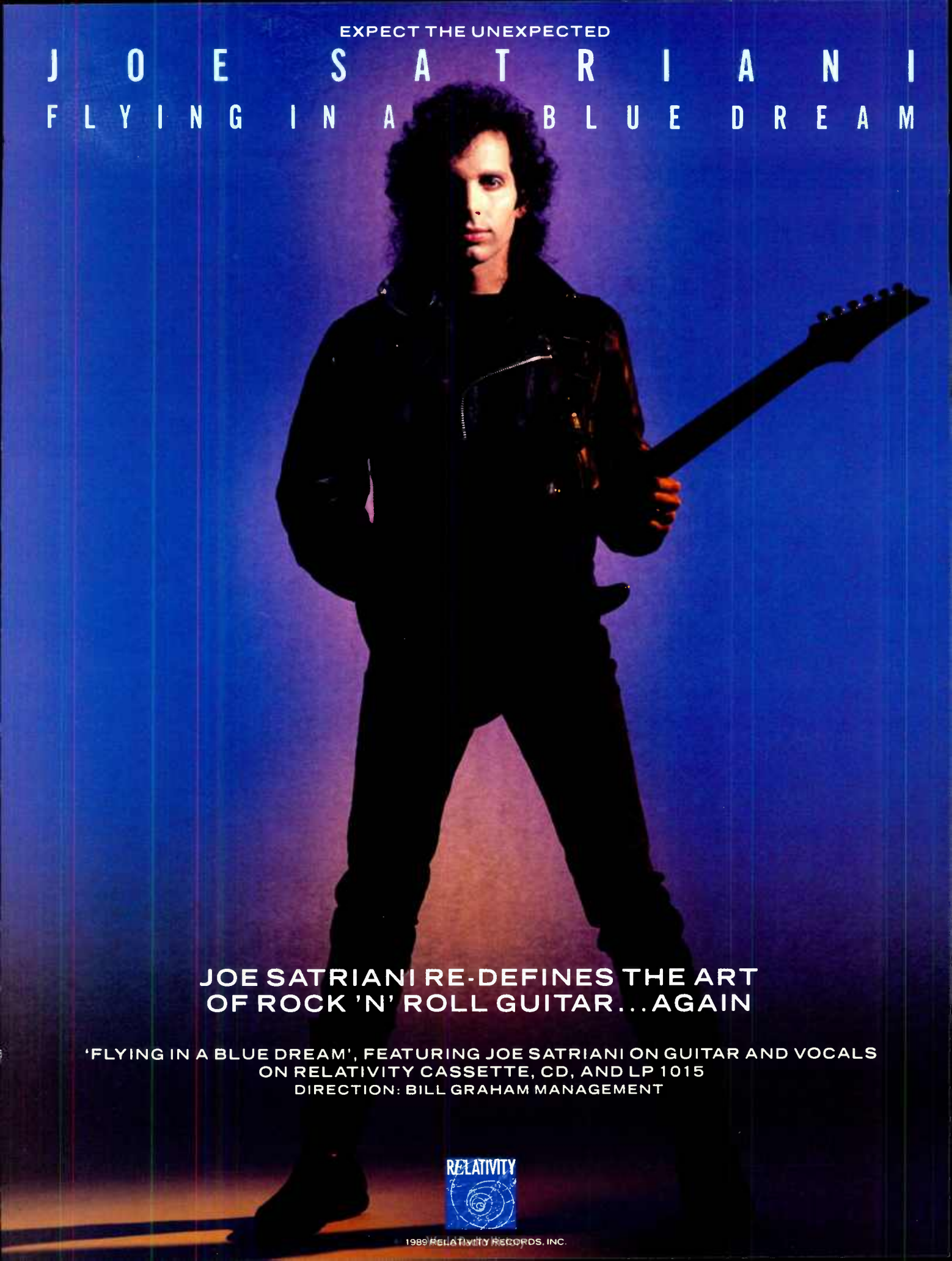
On a more vital note, Run-D.M.C. sold two million copies of *Raising Hell*. The best-selling hip-hop album up to that time—soon to be superseded by the Beastie Boys' *Licensed to Ill*—was undoubtedly helped by the crossover appeal of its "Walk This Way" single. No such explanation could account for the success of Doug E. Fresh & the Get Fresh Crew's "The Show"—one of a mere half-dozen singles that went gold in 1986. "The Show" was on a small label and received minimal airplay. That it could sell 500,000 copies when the singles medium was facing extinction was an exciting comment on the burgeoning popularity of the '80s' one formal innovation—and the true descendant of rock 'n' roll.

Photographs: Larry Busacca (top); Julie Kramer

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

J O E S A T R I A N I

F L Y I N G I N A B L U E D R E A M



JOE SATRIANI RE-DEFINES THE ART OF ROCK 'N' ROLL GUITAR...AGAIN

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1987

The Brass Ring

A Climactic Coronation Crashed by Gritty Guests

BY STEVE PERRY

For U2, the Big Breakout of 1987 was more a triumph of hard work and circumstance than anything else. They'd spent the decade building a loyal cult that had far more to do with their live shows than their records; their last tour, in support of *The Unforgettable Fire*, had generated enough excitement to put them at the threshold of mass success. And it was all coming together at a time when the arena-rock powerhouses of the '70s had passed away, leaving a lot of fans in the lurch.

U2 also benefited from changes taking shape at radio. It was predictable enough that *The Joshua Tree* would be embraced by AOR—or what was left of it in the wake of the new "classic rock" oldies format, anyway. The surprise came at Top 40, where a series of U2 tracks that sounded nothing like hit singles became hit singles. "With or Without You," "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" and "Where the Streets Have No Name" were all brooding, ethereal rockers that bore the stamp of producers Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno; all of them did time at or near the top of the pops. Together with records like Suzanne Vega's "Luka," they signaled a breakup of the old order at hit radio that would only become more intriguing over the next two years.

But if U2's big sound and their patina of moral authority made them seem like the new Who, the sudden rush posed a few problems for them too. Faced with the mantle of rock hero he'd always courted, Bono seemed uncertain what to do, waffling between a modesty that seemed at odds with his ambition and a goofy portentousness that seemed at odds with good sense. When that side came through in concert, as it often did, the result was as insufferable as the Doors on one of Jim Morrison's bad nights. On a good night, U2 was still the best band on the road in 1987, if only because Prince's *Sign o' the Times* revue never toured the U.S.

While Bono was mopping the sweat from his furrowed brow in front of crowds the world 'round, bands like Bon Jovi and Poison were defining a new strain of pop metal. And like U2 they were surprise hits at Top 40—which seemed a bad idea when "You Give Love a Bad Name" struck, and a good one when "Livin' on a Prayer" followed it.

This new Metal Lite was a singles music, but beneath its Top 40 incarnation a grittier, more ambitious metal renaissance was happening. The underground speed metal scene, born in the early '80s from one strand of postpunk thrash, had matured to the point where it was producing bands as varied and (relatively speaking) accessible as Metallica, Anthrax and Suicidal Tendencies. These bands lacked the blues influence that defined the first wave of heavy metal in the late '60s, partly because the guys in them had grown up during the arch segregation of the punk/new wave era; this limited their appeal to the older generation of metal fans, but the adrenaline riffs and often apocalyptic lyricism made perfect sense to a generation of suburban teens, many growing up on the economic margins—and not just boys either.

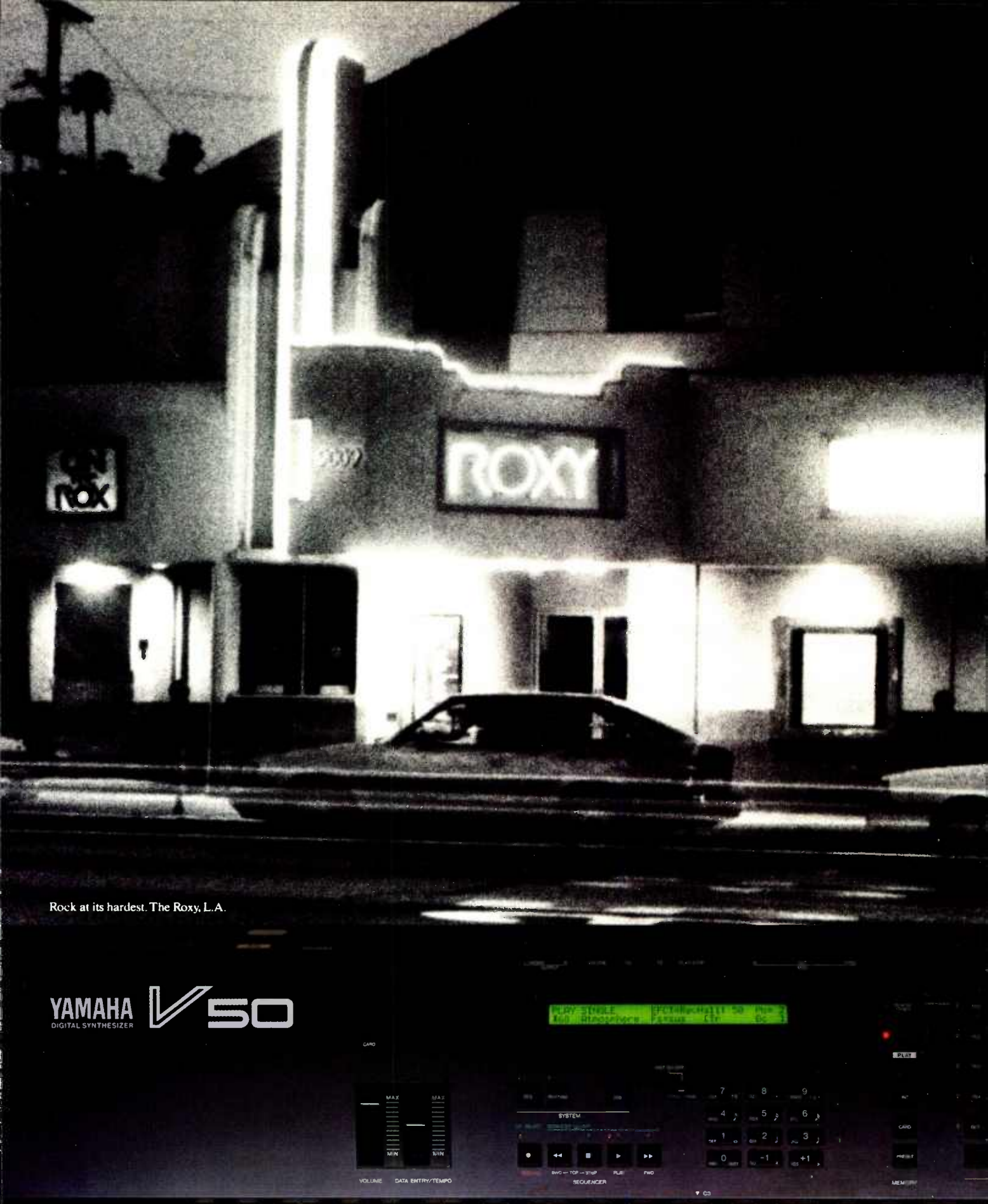
As metal mushroomed, so did hip-hop. The pop crossover of Run-D.M.C.'s "Walk This Way" in '86 suggested the stylistic and commercial potential in rap, and in '87 its breadth became even more obvious: There were Eric B. & Rakim's "Paid in Full," M/A/R/R/S's "Pump Up the Volume," L.L. Cool J's second album, Public Enemy's

Photograph: Lex van Rossen/Retna

first. And as hip-hop and metal asserted themselves in the marketplace, a curious demographic fact emerged: Despite the polar differences in their original audiences—inner-city black kids and suburban white kids—rap and metal proved to have crossover legs in both directions, which may account for some of the hate and trepidation both kinds of music have encountered from censorship forces such as the PMRC and the Reverend Donald Wildmon.

Meanwhile, the postpunk rock scene that dominated college alternative playlists through most of the '80s was falling apart. Most of its avatars were either breaking up (Hüsker Dü, which opened the year by releasing the double-LP *Warehouse: Songs and Stories*, would soon follow suit), crossing over to a pop success that made them suspect to cultish postpunkers (R.E.M. hit with "The One I Love," the nastiest love song to grace CHR radio in a while), or just plain tiring of the constraints of postpunk style.

No band struggled harder with this last problem [*cont'd on page 72*]



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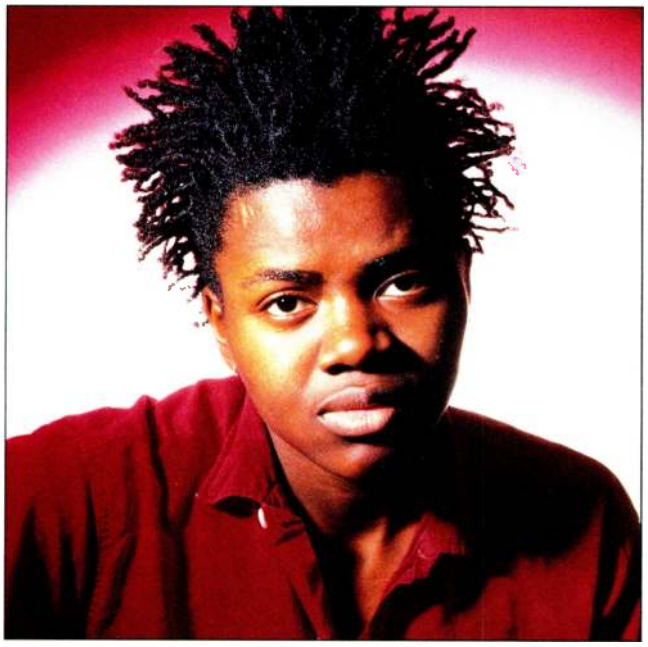
1988

The Gender Bender

Female Voices Freshen Up the Old Boys Club

BY MARK ROWLAND

For decades rock 'n' roll was a boys' club, about as open to the contributions of women as the war room in the Pentagon. There were times in 1988 when the opposite seemed to be the case, at least when it came to touting fresh young voices. From the fierce Celtic swagger of Sinéad O'Connor to the hobo homilies of Michelle Shocked, the mainstream manifestos of Edie Brickell to Toni Childs' more introspective revelations, the flood of talented women suggested the bursting of a dam. Which it was, sort of. Major labels had been dragging their feet for years, reluctant to sign female singer/songwriters until someone else came along to make it seem worth their while. That someone was Suzanne Vega, whose success the previous year loosed the A&R floodgates, setting the scene for '88's promising debuts.



Tracy Chapman wanted to be someone—and succeeded.

The most dramatic entry, of course, was Tracy Chapman's, whose self-titled album sold over two million copies. In a decade increasingly defined by slickly produced, danceable grooves, Chapman sang deeply felt, often politically charged songs with little more than folk-guitar accompaniment. No doubt that was part of her appeal, along with undeniable sincerity and the startling pull of the songs themselves. With its undulating tension of verse and chorus, "Fast Car" evoked emotional responses with its music as well as its narrative, which was compelling indeed. Whether Chapman will fulfill the tremendous promise of her first record or settle into a respectable/predictable songwriting niche remains a question; her second album, just released, suggests the answer is somewhere in between.

The warm reception accorded Chapman's songs of social conscience was no aberration. For all the loose talk about '60s idealism, there had never been a series of collective efforts to raise money for good causes to match what transpired throughout the '80s. Chapman participated in a series of concerts around the world to benefit Amnesty International in 1988, along with Sting, Peter Gabriel, Bruce Springsteen and Youssou N'Dour. Whatever their musical worth, these stadium-sized affairs raised a lot of money to protect human rights on the strength and commitment of those headlining performers. Pop/rock musicians, once castigated by "conventional" society for promoting mindless rebellion, became the true conservators of Judeo-Christian values in the '80s, while sanctimonious government officials kept busy funneling arms to the contras, raping the environment and looting the coffers of HUD. Gee, guess it's still protest music after all.

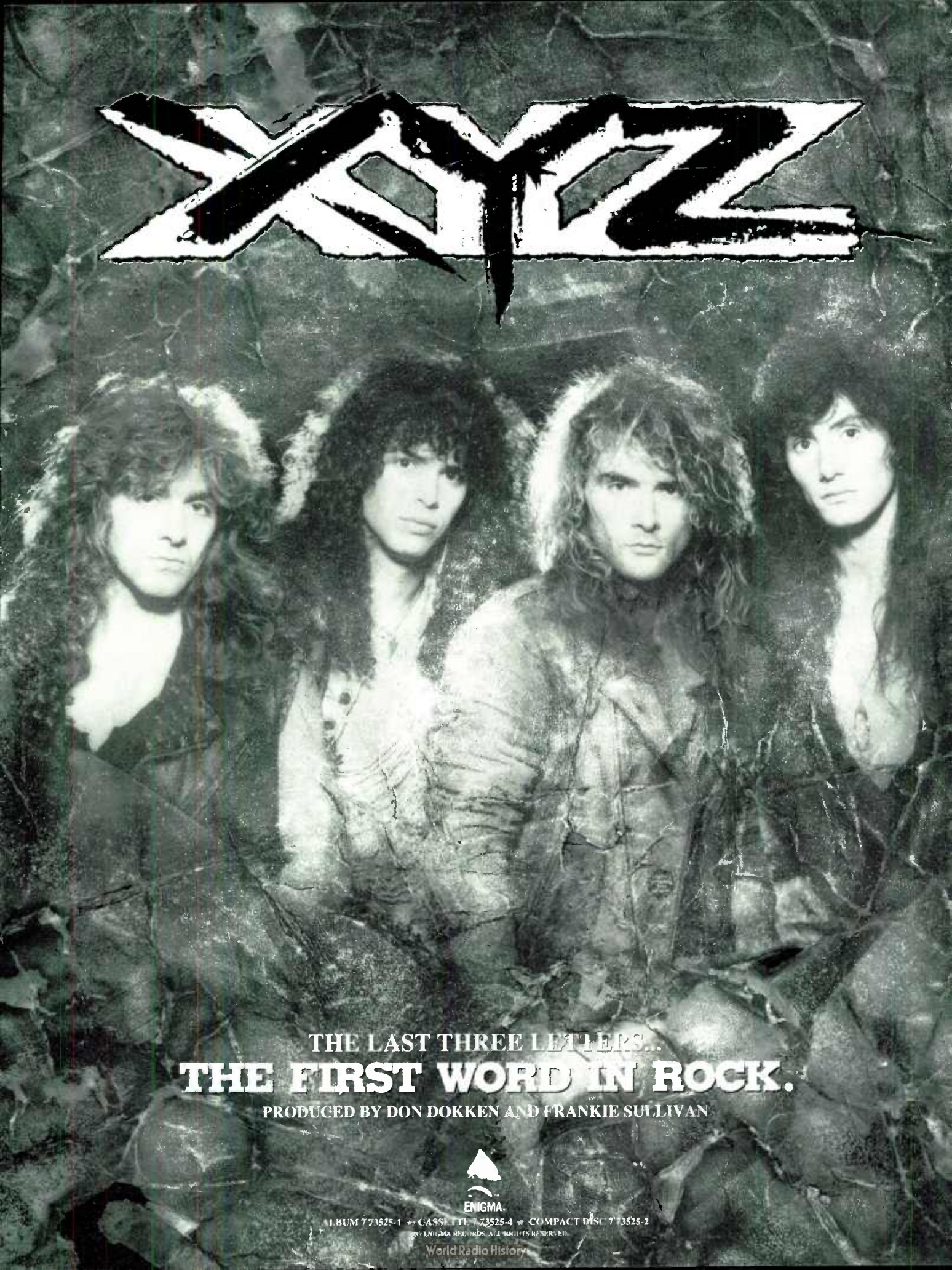
But not to worry, there's no shortage of mindless rock hedonism. 1988 witnessed yet another massive metal upsurge; at one point in June, five of the top six records on the *Billboard* charts—by Whitesnake, Poison, Guns N' Roses, Motley Crue and Ozzy Osbourne—could fit comfortably under that rubric, though only Ozzy, the original "Bat Man," would happily admit as much. Anyway, the true headbanger kings turned out to be Metallica, the most musically inventive band of its kind to come along since Van Halen, whose stature they pretty much usurped during the summer's "Monsters of Rock" tour, provoking a welcome sigh from pop critics, who will herald Metallica as metal artistes for years to come while ignoring the rest of the genre.

Guns N' Roses, a quintet that owes at least as much to Aerosmith and the Stones as to Led Zeppelin, was easily the most controversial and popular band of the year. Though their debut actually came out in the middle of 1987, the band really caught fire in '88, sparked by the power chord manifesto "Welcome to the Jungle" and the irresistible "Sweet Child o' Mine."

What made them matter more than, say, Bon Jovi, was the sense that their narratives of life on the streets, however crude, had the ring of experienced truth, an outlaw honesty that spoke to alienated young white kids as effectively as Public Enemy's potent *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* connected with disenfranchised black kids. Unlike Guns N' Roses, however, Public Enemy took its leadership role seriously, putting together songs that at once sought to entertain, educate and cut artistic ground.

Once again, rock's aging dinosaurs refused to f-f-fade away. Steve

Photograph: Tom Sheehan/LFI



Street heroes Guns N' Roses had more valor than discretion.

Winwood's "Roll with It" was the biggest single of the year, supplemented by a video in which he gigs out in an all-black bar. Back in the real world, James Brown was arrested for PCP and currently languishes in a South Carolina prison. Robert Plant showed Kingdom Come how to really rip things off, turning his "Tall Cool One" video into a Coke commercial. Meanwhile, Neil Young's great vid of "This Note's for You," with a message skewering the likes of Plant, couldn't get played on MTV. George Harrison's return from retirement was more than respectable, while Keith Richards' solo entry showed Mick who's really the boss.

But the nicest surprise was the appearance of the Traveling Wilburys, an easy-rocking congregation that melded the talents of Harrison, Jeff Lynne, Tom Petty, Bob Dylan and Roy Orbison seamlessly and with a contagious sense of fun. The album shot into the Top 10 and spawned a couple of hits before the fun ended when Orbison passed away. Meanwhile INXS, R.E.M. and the Cure reached arena-level status, marking them as possible Dinosaurs of the Future.

Biggest tempest in a teapot concerned Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry Be Happy," a trifling tune that somehow acquired sinister implications when George Bush tried to hornswoggle it for his political campaign. McFerrin took the heat; no one seemed to think a presidential candidate odd for wanting to be associated with such a fatuous message. Then again, maybe Bush just wanted to buy it for Dan Quayle.

Oh yeah, and Michael Jackson put out another record. Didn't he?

1989

Do the Right Thing

A Black Music Sprint to the '80s' Finish

BY BILL FLANAGAN

Living Colour's first album, *Vivid*, had been kicking around since the spring of '88, with a lot of press attention and soft sales, when MTV picked up the video for "Cult of Personality" and Vernon Reid's band became a Top 10 rock act. That proved wrong all the A&R men who had passed on Living Colour with the excuse that you couldn't sell a black band playing hard rock. Combined with the success of Tracy Chapman in 1988, Living Colour's triumph suggested that rock's racial barriers were crumbling, that what could not be overcome by appeals to morality might be overcome by market politics: If they can make money with it, the entertainment business will get behind it.

The notion that black music *is* the mainstream American music was further boosted by the enormous success of Bobby Brown, whose hip-hop pop was just gritty enough to avoid slickness and just smooth enough to make the teenager a butt-shaking sex symbol. Perhaps tired of being taken for granted (his image was getting dangerously close to Brian Wilson's—the nutty musical genius), Prince reactivated his own dance grooves for his *Batman* album. It was almost certainly the weakest album Prince has ever made—there were more good ideas in any cut on *Sign o' the Times* than on either side of *Batman*—but the record sold like suntan oil in hell. It blasted to number one and sat there. What a sweet victory for Prince, after so much of his brilliant late-'80s work met with commercial indifference. What a way to end the Purple Decade! From *Dirty Mind* to *Batman*, P.R. Nelson had released 10 LPs of original material, three movies, the much bootlegged *Black Album*, a host of non-LP singles and tons of productions, playing and songwriting for other artists. No wonder the public had trouble keeping up.

But just when you thought all this had purged rock of racism, along came the double whammies of summer. Public Enemy, the rap group who had led the movement to bring strong political content back to the form, got painted into a corner by their "Minister of Information" Professor Griff, who told a reporter that Jews were to blame for the woes of the African-American, that Jews in fact had financed the slave trade. Public Enemy leader Chuck D was slow to condemn Griff's bigotry, and—if you could make such matters worse—apparently did so only after being pressured by CBS Records. Equivocation became the new dance, as Griff was in and then out and then back in, and Public Enemy announced they

New Yorker Reed

Photographs: Larry Busacca/Retna (top); Gary Gershoff/Retna

Color them Vivid: Living Colour's Muzz Skillings, Corey Glover and Vernon Reid play Black Zeppelin

were breaking up but changed their minds.

Still, if Public Enemy was tongue-tied, Axl Rose seemed ready for the funny farm. In the winter Guns N' Roses had released an EP, *GN'R Lies*, that closed with a song called "One in a Million" that had the lines, "Police and niggers get out of my way, I don't need to buy none of your gold chains today" and "Immigrants and faggots make no sense to me. They come to our country and think they'll do as they please. Like start some mini-Iran or spread some fuckin' disease."

Geffen Records let out a big sigh of relief when the song didn't get much attention. Then Guns N' Roses agreed to play an AIDS benefit but were asked to withdraw when that song lyric was brought to the attention of the organizers. Again, Geffen braced for a storm of negative publicity and again they were spared. So what did Axl do? Did he thank God for his undeserved good fortune? Nope, he decided that he wanted to go on the record and do an interview explaining his feelings about the minorities he maligned. Now Geffen really started climbing the ceiling. They begged him to shut up. But Axl had a pal who wanted to get an article published in *Rolling Stone*, and Axl saw this as a chance to speak to a sympathetic ear and help his buddy's career in journalism. *Rolling Stone* liked the idea, and Axl got a public forum to make statements like, "Why can black people go up to each other and say 'nigger,' but when a white guy does it all of a sudden it's a big put-down? I don't like boundaries of any kind. I don't like being told what I can and I can't say. I used the word *nigger* because it's a word to describe somebody that is a pain in your life, a problem. The word *nigger* doesn't necessarily mean black."

Many people will tell you that in a world where rock 'n' roll has become middle-class and middle-aged, rap and metal represent the last vestiges of youthful rebellion and street credibility. In some ways that's true—and both Public Enemy and Guns N' Roses are pretty great at what they do—but it's a short drop from living on the street to living in the gutter.

The state of urban pain and moral decay was also the subject of the best work two of rock's veterans had done all decade. Lou Reed's *New York* opened 1989 with a barrage of violent wit, skewering the state of urban man in the ninth decade. *New York* was the best selling album Reed ever made, and maybe the best. With *Songs for 'Drella*, his collaboration with John Cale, scheduled for the end of the year, Reed owned a big chunk of 1989. So, unexpectedly, did Neil Young. Young was the only major rock artist as prolific and willfully eccentric as Prince in the '80s. But there was one big difference: While Prince was brilliantly versatile, Young was mostly just erratic. In a *Musician* interview he compared his jumping from style to style to a moth banging against a lightbulb. Each of Young's nine '80s albums had a great moment or two, but it was not until the autumn of '89 and *Freedom* that he recaptured the fire and brilliance of *Rust Never Sleeps*, his classic closing-of-the-'70s salvo. On *Freedom* Young surveyed a ruined landscape of drugs, hypocrisy and infidelity. The man who had opened the '80s with *Hawks and Doves* and its declaration, "I'm proud to be living in the USA" ended the decade by singing, "We got a thousand points of light for the homeless man and a kinder gentler machine gun hand." While their '60s peers, from the Who and Stones to Paul and Ringo, were revving up the old hits one more time, Reed and Young were still growing. In September music-biz voters gave Young MTV's Best Video award for "This Note's for You," a video that savagely mocked—and had been banned by—MTV. No doubt about it, the '80s were over: tattered, battered and shot full of holes.

Photograph: Beth Gwinn

1987

[cont'd from page 65] than the Replacements. At once a loyalist to his hardcore fans and a devout lover of all the different pop strands he grew up on, Paul Westerberg yearned to stretch out stylistically but feared repercussions from an audience that valued amateurism and anti-populism above all else. You could hear the tug and pull on *Pleased to Meet Me*, which ran from drunk-and-stupid genre pieces like "Red Red Wine" to such risky business as "Nightclub Jitters." But the record ended by suggesting the course that Westerberg would follow in the future, however reluctantly—with a smart, fully realized pop song, "Can't Hardly Wait." When the horn charts kicked in it sent a shudder through old-time fans not unlike the one folkies must have felt when Dylan plugged in that electric guitar at Newport.

Whether Westerberg can keep the courage of his musical convictions still remains to be seen, but 1987 produced at least one pop star who had no qualms about the big time. After a stunning success in Britain, *Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby* got off to a slow start in TTD's homeland; the first single, "If You Let Me Stay," only got as far as #68 on the *Billboard* pop chart. But then "Wishing Well" went to number one, thanks largely to a front-end boost from black radio, and D'Arby was off to the races. An amazing vocal talent and a staunch opponent of every kind of stylistic barrier, D'Arby mixed rock, soul and technofunk with utter assurance. But his postpunk (or is it post-Bowie?) moves—self-conscious, detached, prone to placing style before emotional substance—sometimes contradicted the best impulses of the music he was making, and made him seem cold. Like Bono and Paul Westerberg, he made it clear in 1987 that he was not only a major talent but potentially his own worst enemy. Ⓜ

JAZZ '80S

[cont'd from page 42] reef, attracting people from all over and giving credence to the idea that economics plays the ultimate role in spawning a scene. Without the Knitting Factory there's a good chance that Steve Coleman, Cassandra Wilson and more might never have gained the attention they have, nor the experience, nor the work from the European circuit where they earn their living.

The question obviously is what is to become of these two movements. If they live up to their potential—the mainstream jazz musicians producing a different aesthetic out of the past and the M-Base group coming up with as sophisticated a language as the mainstream offers—there will be progress. If the mainstream movement produces, workshop-style, competent player after competent player, it'll quickly become dated, a blip in the cultural consciousness. If the M-Base group admits to their sophistication instead of playing down to their audience, they will move forward. And if they listen to and smooth the rough edges off each other, we're in for a treat, because there's brilliance on both sides. Perhaps, if we're lucky, fire meeting fire will combust into an explosion. Meanwhile, the torrents of young jazz musicians continue, methodically, raising hope, and a bit of fear. Ⓜ

TECH '80's

[cont'd from page 46] turer of quality music products.

1985: The MIDI Sequencer

Pioneering programs from upstarts like Dr. T, Jim Miller, Passport and Syntech showed how much MIDI sequencing a microcomputer could do. It was a year of debugging and a dozen interpretations of the MIDI spec, but Something Big was clearly under way.

1986: Samplers

Keyboard samplers like the Kurzweil and the Emulator had been around for years, but suddenly there was a raft of great-sounding 12-bit machines from companies like Roland, E-mu, Korg, Sequential and Akai. Drum sounds changed forever. 1986 was also the year of the Great MIDI Guitar snafu, when expectations that guitarists could easily and inexpensively hop on the MIDI bus were raised and dashed. The resulting anger made MIDI guitar a sideshow from that point on.

1987: The Cheap Digital Reverb

Software really came of age—you could find nearly every type for every computer. The Atari ST came out and sold like hotcakes. This was also the year when the Roland D-50 knocked every other synth for a loop. But more importantly, professional-quality 16-bit processors like the Yamaha SPX90 and especially the incredible $200 Alesis MicroVerb brought good sound to Everyman in his basement studio.

1988: The Workstation

As the dizzying flood of technological breakthroughs began to ease up, assembling and refining these capabilities proved the biggest challenge. The Korg M1 led the way, companies like Ensoniq and Roland were quick to respond. As MIDI slowed down, the Great Analog Revival began, and the guitar/amp culture began to generate renewed sales.

1989: The Multi-Processor

Manufacturers like Digitech, Roland, Korg, Yamaha, ART, Alesis and Peavey now tried to sell 16-bit digital to the unconverted guitar legions. Some companies finally succeeded in getting nearly every popular guitar effect into one rack-mounted box. "Dynamic MIDI," the ability to put these effects under real-time MIDI control, made them more than the sum of their stomp-boxes.

The 1990s: The Decade of Education

Clearly the changes in the mid-'80s were so profound that most musicians haven't fully integrated them into their working lives. Some products are still too hard to use; some are too complex; and some innovations, like Digital Audio Tape, are still too expensive. But even though the real MIDI breakthroughs seem over, a steady stream of musicians will finally accept the new technology and adapt it to their own uses. In that sense, MIDI may have as much effect on the '90s as the Portastudio did on the '80s.

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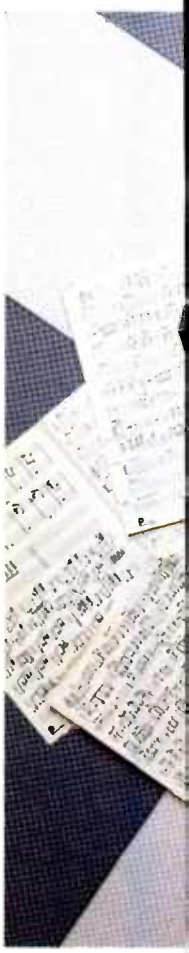

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TRUTH: A lot of monitors "color" their sound. They don't deliver truly flat response. Their technology is full of compromises. Their components are from a variety of sources, and not designed to precisely integrate with each other.
CONSEQUENCES: Bad mixes. Re-mixes. Having to "trash" an entire session. Or worst of all, no mixes because clients simply don't come back.

TRUTH: JBL eliminates these consequences by achieving a new "truth" in sound: JBL's remarkable new 4400 Series. The design, size, and materials have been specifically tailored to each monitor's function. For example, the 2-way 4406 6" Monitor is ideally designed for console or close-in listening. While the 2-way 8" 4408 is ideal for broadcast applications. The 3-way 10" 4410 Monitor captures maximum spatial detail at greater listening distances. And the 3-way 12" 4412 Monitor is mounted with a tight-cluster arrangement for close-in monitoring.
CONSEQUENCES: "Universal" monitors, those not specifically designed for a precise application or environment, invariably compromise technology, with inferior sound the result.

TRUTH: JBL's 4400 Series Studio Monitors achieve a new "truth" in sound with an extended high frequency response that remains effortlessly smooth through the critical 3,000 to 20,000 Hz range. And even extends beyond audibility to 27 kHz, reducing phase shift within the audible band for a more open and natural sound. The 4400 Series' incomparable high end clarity is the result of JBL's use of pure titanium for its unique ribbed-dome tweeter and diamond surround, capable of withstanding forces surpassing a phenomenal 1000 G's.
CONSEQUENCES: When pushed hard, most tweeters simply fail. Transient detail blurs, and the material itself deforms and breaks down. Other materials can't take the stress, and crack under pressure.

TRUTH: The Frequency Dividing Network in each 4400 Series monitor allows optimum transitions between drivers in both amplitude and phase. The precisely calibrated reference controls let you adjust for personal preferences, room variations, and specific equalization.
CONSEQUENCES: When the interaction between drivers is not carefully orchestrated, the results can be edgy, indistinctive, or simply "false" sound.

TRUTH: All 4400 Studio Monitors feature JBL's exclusive Symmetrical Field Geometry magnetic structure, which dramatically reduces second harmonic distortion, and is key in producing the 4400's deep, powerful, clean bass.
CONSEQUENCES: Conventional magnetic structures utilize non-symmetrical magnetic fields, which add significantly to distortion due to a nonlinear pull on the voice coil.

TRUTH: 4400 Series monitors also feature special low diffraction grill frame designs, which reduce time delay distortion. Extra-large voice coils and ultra-rigid cast frames result in both mechanical and thermal stability under heavy professional use.
CONSEQUENCES: For reasons of economics, monitors will often use stamped rather than cast frames, resulting in both mechanical distortion and power compression.

TRUTH: The JBL 4400 Studio Monitor Series captures the full dynamic range, extended high frequency, and precise character of your sound as no other monitors in the business. Experience the 4400 Series Studio Monitors at your JBL dealer's today.
CONSEQUENCES: You'll never know the "truth" until you do.

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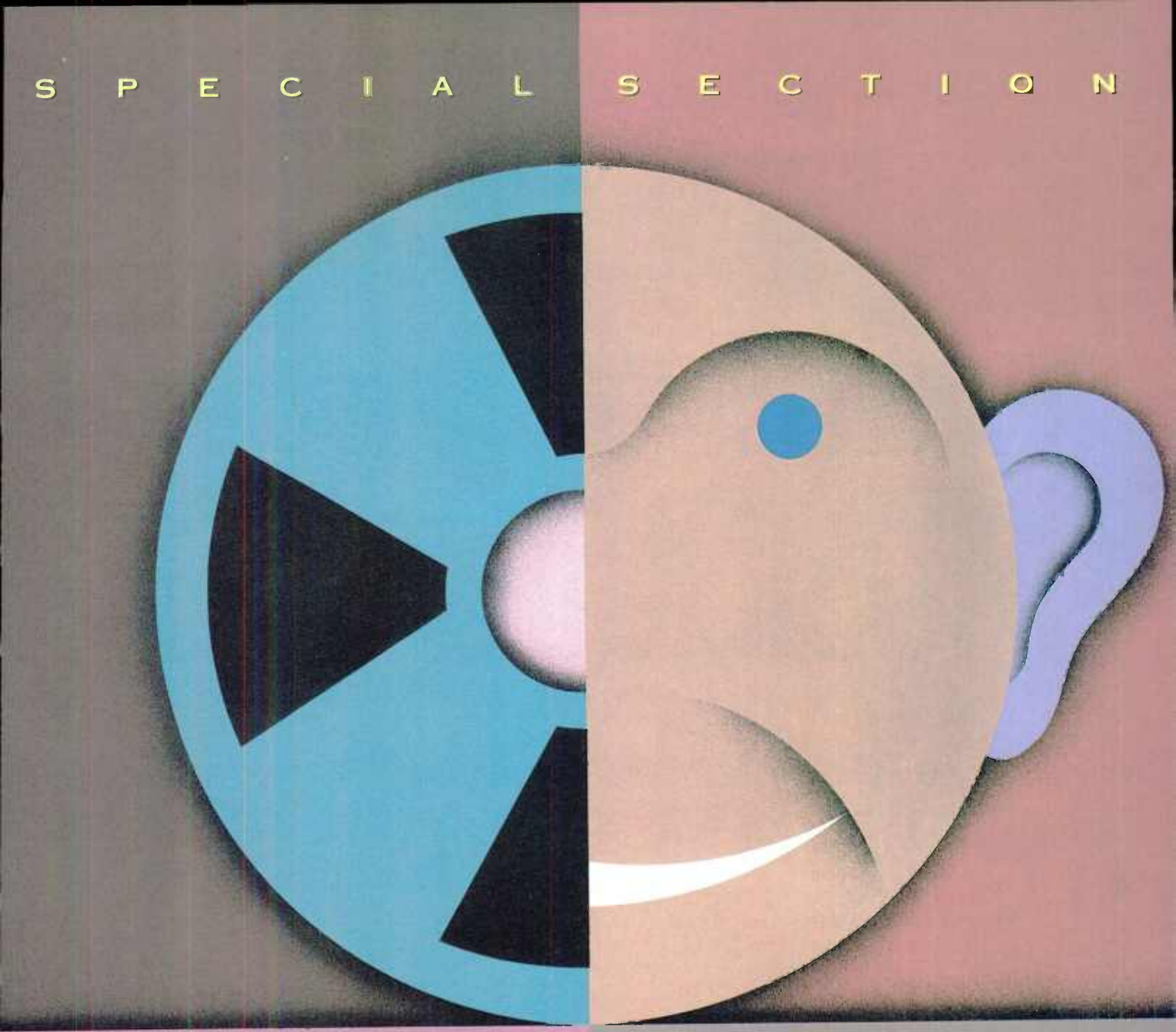


AUDIO AUTEURS

NO TWO people hear music exactly the same way, and no two producers record music the same way. Oh sure, maybe music producers don't get the autocratic control film directors do, but they nonetheless leave their own indelible stamp on any piece of music they handle. Here are four audio additions to the great "Auteur Theory."

Illustration: Terry Allen

DANIEL LANOIS' MUSIQUE NOIRE

The Producer of the Decade Steps out of the Control Room and into the Light

By John Diliberto

DANIEL LANOIS PUTS a cassette into his portable DAT recorder and sticks the headphones on my head. Even with the morning sun streaming through the Santa Monica hotel window, I'm projected into a world of dark, haunting drones, whining guitar and Aaron Neville's pure voice singing "Amazing Grace" from the edge of time. This is not your traditional gospel hymn.

"It's this very traditional song with a whole new approach, a very futuristic approach," says Daniel Lanois gleefully. "It almost sounds like someone has

Tinting: Jessica Trevino

made it to another planet and somehow they've remembered the song, this one folk song called 'Amazing Grace,' and they are singing it, in a wonderful new world."

Lanois took the same approach to his new album, *Acadie*, that he's used for years on productions of U2's *The Joshua Tree*, Peter Gabriel's *So*, the Neville Brothers' *Yellow Moon* and Bob Dylan's latest, *Oh Mercy*. There's a sense of space and depth, an all-encompassing sound stage that sweeps the listener into a turbulent landscape full of hallucinatory, film-noir shadows and shadings. I'm reminded of Paul A. Rothchild, the producer of most of the Doors' albums, who said that he liked to create a sense of theater in the studio.

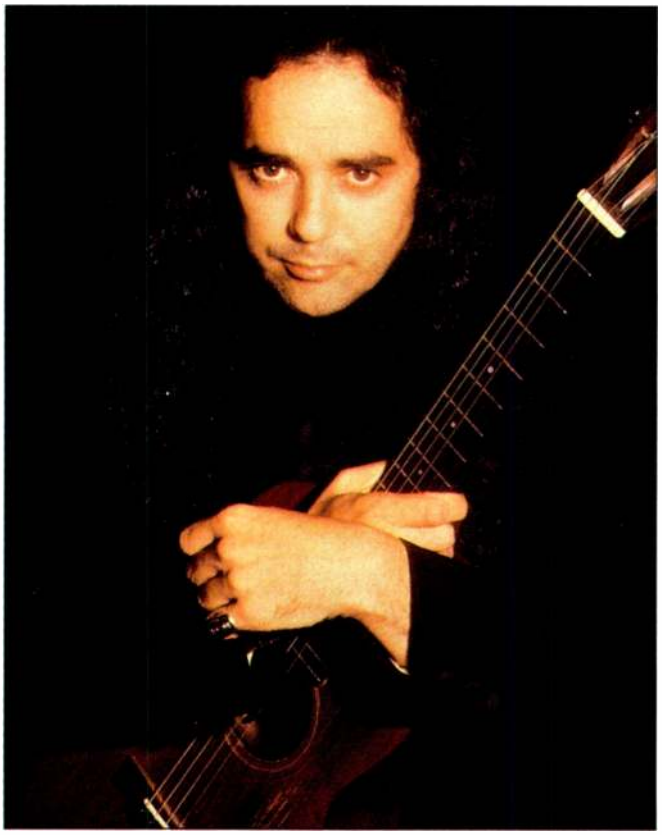
"That's a nice thought, isn't it," reflects Lanois with an agreeable laugh. "I mean, the Doors are a fine example of a group that created an atmosphere. And really without too much jiggery pokery. They didn't have a lot of effects—a bit of echo and some spacey keyboards. The band just had that approach to begin with. I love the Doors material. That's a reference point for me because it definitely transports the listener to a place, and if I manage to achieve that with the records I work on, then I'd consider it a success."

Lanois' measure of success has less to do with platinum records by Peter Gabriel and U2 than creating an intimate, expressive moment that is charged with portent and atmosphere, be it a high-profile production with Bob Dylan or the relatively obscure, fourth-world trance music of trumpeter Jon Hassell. "I think there is an ongoing theme of some kind," avers the producer, "and it's probably that of mystery and darkness."

Those are the operative words for Lanois, who wears a black Western hat over his long black hair, color-coordinated with black shirt, pants and boots. He reads from a book by the poet of depression, Leonard Cohen, a couple of times a week, and when he's not producing, he's composing turgid, ominous rhythm works like "Tension Block." He doesn't seem like the kind of producer who'd be anywhere near the Top 10 hits like "Sledgehammer" and "Big Time."

"Comedy is not my forte," he laughs quietly. "I love to laugh, but I don't like to be standing up there telling jokes necessarily. 'Sledgehammer' I had no trouble with, because I was playing guitar from the beginning on it, so there was always that element of groove. And 'Big Time,' I think that was more Peter's baby than mine, okay?"

Lanois, who evinces a shy but affable serenity, is more comfortable speaking in a hoarse drawl about processing, surrealism and moods. It's a sensibility he's brought to an array of projects since he began working with another purveyor of mood and ambience, Brian Eno, about a decade ago in Hamilton, Ontario. Eno recorded the body of his late-'70s and early-'80s work in Lanois' Grant Avenue Studios, including some of the influential Ambient Music series. They worked together on *The Plateaux of Mirrors* and *The Pearl* with pianist Harold Budd, *Dream Theory in Malaya* and *Power Spot* with Jon Hassell, Roger Eno's *Voices*, Michael Brook's *Hybrid* and Eno's own records, *On Land* and *Apollo*. "The Grant Avenue Studio very much suited Brian's personality in a sense that it was just a single control room," recalls Lanois, still holding fond memories for the studio that was his base until he sold it three years ago and moved to London. "It was not like a multi-complex operation. It was in a house, and it was sort of run like a small Italian restaurant that you call your own. So it had that feeling where it was run by people who really care and pour their hearts into it. I think Brian got a kick out of it and he was being productive."



"There's an ongoing theme of mystery and darkness."

It was a studio that had been built literally from the ground up with his brother Bob, in Hamilton. "We started a very small studio in the basement of my mother's house, where you could hear the washing machine in the next room going all the time," he laughs, "you know, one of those places."

They eventually moved out and up to 24 tracks, all the while playing back-up musician to rock and country acts as well as producing everything from gospel to new wave, including sister Jocelyne's group, Martha & the Muffins, after their minor hit, "Echo Beach." It was on these earlier Eno recordings that Lanois' tendencies as a sound manipulator came to the fore, using the studio to take a simple, direct and pure performance and then amplify, refract and transmute it in shadings, echoes and reverberations of the soul. "I loved what he was doing and we would spend days and days in there just wrapped up in these pieces of music and the world would go by and we would be so involved in what we were doing," enthuses Lanois, who claims he had never even heard of Eno before 1979.

They shifted sound through a palette of effects and processes, creating ghostly choirs, sensual, rumbling percussive overtones and fragile, angelic melodies that seemed to emerge out of vapor. It often sounded like music performed by no known instruments.

"Some of that can be had out of processing existing instruments to the point where it doesn't sound like the instruments anymore," he explains. "It sounds like something else.

"In fact, on a lot of it, the sources are not even in the mix anymore," he laughs slyly. "That's how you get great results from treatments. It's not, 'Well, let's put it through this reverb, yeah, that sounds pretty nice.' That hardly ever happens. It's more like, 'Put it

Photograph: Lynn Goldsmith

LOU REED is a longtime fan of the Shure SM58, and for good reason. No other microphone can match the SM58's legendary reputation for clarity, punch, and durability. And when you're singing rock and roll that matters, you need the SM58's ability to bring the vocals out front and the message home.

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through that, that sounds alright.' Put it on the tape so it gets printed and then you put that treatment through a couple of other boxes and 'Hmmm, now it's starting to sound like something.' So you print that and it goes through the boxes again. 'Oh, it's turning into something I've never heard before.' That's when it gets interesting, when you go through generations of processing. It develops a life of its own. It becomes organic and interesting to hear.

"It would be like the difference between just putting a filter in front of your camera or a certain kind of lens that everybody is familiar with," he exclaims. "It's like, 'Okay, that's not so thrilling, what else have you got?' But if you take that and you put it through the lens again and yet another time and then you project it and you put it on an angle and you re-shoot it with 16-millimeter and then maybe you just draw stills from it, then it gets thrilling and mysterious."

Even in the beginning, Lanois wanted to surprise his artists, take them into alien terrain and watch them find their way out. On *The Pearl*, Harold Budd played piano to an orchestra of effects arranged by Eno and Lanois. "Some of it he would be oblivious to," recalls Lanois. "He wouldn't wear phones or anything; he'd just be playing. And on other tracks we would suggest that he play with what we were doing. There'd be maybe 10 different treatments up, and as Harold was performing a piece of music we would introduce new sounds. Almost as if you were a support musician for somebody and you were sensitive to every move that the player made."

Working with Jon Hassell's surreal blend of African rhythms, Indian structures and heavily processed trumpet, Lanois had an even wider palette to draw upon. He recorded and mixed Hassell's newest album, *Flash of the Spirit*, done with the African percussion troupe Farafina. "The way it happens with Jon is he does a bit in performance that is already treated," says Lanois. "He has his rack of effects gear and the people he works with are also creative and inventive in the same way. Like Jeff Deane has a very complicated acoustic-electronic percussion drum hybrid system. So anything else that is done in the control room is an add-on; to have that to begin with is wonderful 'cause it sparks ideas. You hear one thing and you think what would happen if we put it through this or if we slowed it down or if we sped it up. And Jon encourages that kind of behavior. Like, 'Impress me, what else have you got?'"

Lanois can sound like a techno-head until you realize that many of his processes are almost archaic. He often uses tape manipulation, unusual miking and live chambers rather than elaborate digital reverbs and processors. "Yeah, I'm not a big fan of reverbs," he says sourly. "I use them. I try not to use them on drums. It's not a bad policy to try some new processing ideas. It's just as exciting to set up a great room sound and put everything through that room as it is to put a different digital reverb on every instrument. I'm not impressed with stacks and stacks of reverbs.

"On [U2's] *The Joshua Tree*, all the recordings were done in good-sounding rooms. And a lot of the processing was done through live chambers. And I think live chambers have something to offer. There's a certain power and organic punch you get through live organic processing that you just can't quite simulate with the gadgetry."

One wouldn't think these avant-garde techniques would lead to pop hits, but they certainly did with U2 and Peter Gabriel. Lanois and Gabriel had already worked together on the soundtrack to *Birdy*, reprocessing Gabriel's existing tracks, sans vocals, into the haunting themes of that score. They took the same approach to *So*, but with radically different results.

"There's a lot of subtlety in those songs that came about from processing and meticulously chipping away," claims Lanois. "There's not a lot of information on 'Red Rain.' The instrumentation is relatively simple. But when you listen to it, there's this storm going on in the background that, believe it or not, was created mostly just out of Peter's piano through this process of regeneration of the treatments whereby they are on the edge of breaking up as the song is developing. We would push these treatments to the point of saturation, where they were almost unusable to get this sense of a storm raging, screaming at you. And with all that whiskeyness in his voice, it adds up to a very good feeling."

Lanois didn't participate on Gabriel's *Passion*, which seemed like an obvious place for him to work his mystery magic, but his impact was felt nevertheless. "I saw the film [*The Last Temptation of Christ*] and I recognized a couple of tracks on the film that I had worked on with him," says Lanois. "There were drum tracks from something or other, they were very turbulent—possibly mixes that we didn't use.

"But Peter's his own scavenger, you know." He smiles knowingly, because it's one of Lanois' own favorite devices. "The sort of thing that I do a lot is to find a texture or undercurrent that works with the song and just put it in a track. Or some of it is stuff we just had on the shelf already, textural work that I've had in my library for a while."

Nowhere is that better heard than on the Neville Brothers' 1989 triumph, *Yellow Moon*, produced by Lanois in New Orleans. The opening track, "My Blood," signals that this is a different Neville record, enveloping their roots-rock and soul gumbo with a brooding,

LANOIS' TRAVELING ROADSHOW

LANOIS travels with his own studio, setting it up in houses, castles or wherever the right sound and mood strike him. At the core of his system is a 24-track Studer A-80 with Dolby A noise reduction. He uses a Neve and API to record and a 36-channel Amek to monitor.

Catching the right room reverb requires the right mike. In Lanois' collection are a Sony C-35 tube microphone, Beyer 88, AKG 414 and Neumann U-47. Processing includes an AMS harmonizer, two Lexicon PCM 70s and Teletronix LA2A compressors; "they're tube compressors that we use on everything," he says. A Delta Lab DL2 delay, a Yamaha SPX90 reverb, Drawmer gates and an Eventide 3000 Ultra Harmonizer 3000 round out the effects. The final mix is run through Decca compressors. Lanois mixes direct to Sony TCD-10 DAT and uses a half-inch Studer A-80 two-track for editing. It's all monitored on Tannoy Golds from the mid-1970s with Lockwood cabinets. "They cut through all the doubt of mixing," claims Lanois. "They sound good in the studio and they still sound good when I hear them on other systems." A Hitachi Boombox is used for small speakers.

Lanois' own instruments include a National guitar and dobro, Fender Telecaster and Stratocaster, all powered through a Fender Bassman, Vox AC30 and Fender Vibrolux.

Keyboards include a Steinway grand piano, purchased for the Dylan sessions, a Wurlitzer electric piano, a Yamaha CP-70, a Yamaha CS-80 synthesizer, a Yamaha DX7 with a "bunch of sounds Brian Eno gave me" and an Akai S900 sampler. "I only use the cello sounds," protests Lanois. "I don't even want to know about other sounds."

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tangible atmosphere, like a mirage in the New Orleans heat.

"The most interesting aspect of 'My Blood' atmospherically would be the source that we used to cut the track to," confesses Lanois. "Initially the Neville Brothers would play that song very much in a Caribbean style. It had more of a soca beat and I didn't think that was interesting enough for this record, so I pulled something off the shelf that Brian Eno and I had started years ago and never used. It's just a great atmosphere and beat that we used like a pulse for the band to play to. And it gave them an opportunity to play their song from another point of view."

The Nevilles' recording of Dylan's "With God on Our Side" derives its strength from Aaron Neville's gospel soul, but places him at the end of the world. "It's got that sort of other-world quality," admits Lanois when I compare it to his own rendition of "Amazing Grace." "That's a song that Aaron always loved and wasn't thinking of putting on the record. We just sort of did it at the spur of the moment. He, Brian Stoltz [Neville's guitarist] and the engineer, Malcolm Burn, we were the only ones in the studio at that point and we decided to lay this thing down.

"When Aaron was leaving the studio he said, 'Do you think you could put some church bells on this?' I thought, 'How am I gonna get church bells on this?' But as it turns out, when I visited his house the next day I noticed he had a small set of wind chimes on his front porch and they sounded beautiful so I said, 'Aaron, let me borrow these and I'll see if I can turn them into church bells.' So through a process of harmonizing them, slowing them down, that's what the track has in it. Sort of a distant thundering, cannons in the distance, that's what that sound is, those simple little wind chimes that have been heavily manipulated."

Lanois' free-flowing strategies, which often completely recontextualize an artist's sound, have found many critics who complain of his thick textures, his use of ambiences and the way he often records live tracks, ignoring concepts of pristine stereo separation. No doubt those same critics will be circling after Lanois' production of Bob Dylan's latest, *Oh Mercy*.

It's an odd meeting, with Lanois' studio manipulation playing off against Dylan's poetry. As Lanois recalls, it was Bono who recommended him to Dylan, even though Lanois admits that Dylan doesn't have the image of someone who takes a lot of care with the sound of his records.

"He's been a traditionalist in the sonic end of things and this record has that in it also," he concedes. "You know, acoustic instruments and simple electric guitars, straight-ahead, fat bass sounds. But along with that a very definite mood is captured with every song. It doesn't just sound like three country guys picking away. Everything has a mood to it. Some of it has to do with atmospheric superimpositions, other bits of it have to do with how the instruments were played and the effects we had on the instruments."

Of course, producing for an icon like Bob Dylan presents its own unique problems. "Well, when someone has made as many records as Bob Dylan, what you have to deal with is the fact that it's not as special anymore," says Lanois. "It's not a novelty any-

ES-50 synchronizer and RTS 14 rack sold separately.

more when you're making your thirtieth album or whatever it is. So the challenge is to make the recording interesting for someone like Bob. It was kept real simple. We did it in New Orleans in a simple environment and it was good fun to play and it shows on the record. We just sat around and sang and played guitars and there's a clarity and honesty to the music because of that."

The album uses local New Orleans musicians, including the Neville Brothers' rhythm section, and they recorded right in the control room of Lanois' home studio. "After a while the equipment became invisible and you're just in there playing and singing," recalls Lanois. "We had the drums right in the control room—Willie Green was a few feet away from me, Bob right next to me, [bassist] Tony Hall standing right there. It's a great communication. It's almost like string-quartet communication, where you're not having to rely on a can [headphone] mix. You just bounce yourself acoustically."

And what's the mood of the Dylan album? "It's got a sinister quality to it, a darkness," says Lanois. "It's got a steamy quality and it's got mystery to it. The vocal really jumps out. It's got a great whiskeyness to the voice."

Like Timothy Leary in his psilocybin experiments, Lanois is concerned with set and setting. He's retained the single control room and intimate recording concepts of his Grant Avenue Studio days, and now takes it on the road, recording U2 in Irish houses and castles or renting homes in New Orleans for the Dylan and Neville Brothers records. Creating a mood on record requires a mood in the studio.

"Yes, mostly in the setup, not so much with turn-on-the-mood lights," he says with a disparaging smile. "It's more in the overall approach of choosing to not isolate the players from the recording process. To give you an example, bringing the studio to the artist rather than putting the artist in a funny place that he didn't feel comfortable in."

Another technique Lanois employs is to record vocals with speakers right in the room, so the artist is playing to the sound of a band right in the room with him, rather than in the rarefied, isolated world of headphones. That's the way U2's *Joshua Tree* was recorded. "You are not hearing crowd sounds on there," he avers, "but on most of that record you are hearing performances captured off the floor. Generally the tracks were done with everybody out there playing, Bono singing, capturing tracks. They don't sound incredibly live at the end of the day, but the approach is definitely of live playing, of people playing their instruments simultaneously.

"The whole record was made up of peaks," he says, fondly recalling what is now a three-year-old production, and the source of Lanois' first Grammy Award. "You are not hearing valleys on there because we didn't put them on. But I'd say just about all the vocal performances were captured at peak moments. Certainly the tracks were. The song 'Exit' is a good example of a moment captured at a peak. That track is a live performance off the floor. There are very, very few overdubs on that. It's just something that the band had worked up to and we managed to get it on the tape at a given moment. In fact, that track is made up of two very long performances where it just went on for about 20

minutes. And it's made up of these lows and highs and builds and if we hadn't had the tape rolling or if we hadn't been in that frame of mind at the time, I wouldn't have captured it. There's something in the air that's captured in that track. The kind of thing that could never happen if you did one track at a time. You know, lay down the drums, lay down the bass and so on. That would never happen in the same way. So it's one of those wonderful captured moments and that track will live on because it has that something a little special about it where when you listen to it, it conjures up images. And just going back to what we talked about earlier, records transporting you to a place, that song does that."

It's his combination of spontaneity, low-tech and film-noir ambience that sometimes brings out the best tracks in his artists. "Somewhere Down the Crazy River" from Robbie Robertson's album was a meeting of instinct and cheesy technology. "Things like 'Somewhere Down the Crazy River' were born in the studio," declares Lanois. "That came out of my suggesting that Robbie get a [Suzuki] Omni-chord, this little toy instrument, and from that he came up with a couple of interesting chords. And he was working on a soundtrack for Martin Scorsese's film *The Color of Money* and I suggested to Robbie that the thing on the Omni-chord conjured up all sorts of images of a swampy, hot, steamy place. Why not do a song for the record? And one night we were all real tired in the studio, the track was running and Robbie started talking, describing this place to me that he had been to. I said, 'Let's put a microphone over here.' And as he was telling me the story of this place that was below sea level and it was hot and sticky. It was somewhere down the Crazy River and the talking became part of the track and that's how it developed."

Happenstance works into his own album with "White Mustang," which originally appeared on Eno's *Music for Films Volume II*. In the middle of recording he walked outside the studio, heard New Orleans street musician James May playing and invited him in to overdub a muted trumpet solo.

Lanois admits to a certain amount of commercial pressure depending on the artist he's working with. "Well, there's a certain lack of pressure working with someone like Jon Hassell in the sense that there are probably fewer people with expectations hovering about," acknowledges Lanois. "So you are really making the music to please yourself and the artist. And ideally that's how it should be with everybody. But practically, when you're working with artists who sell a lot of records, no matter how isolated you try to be, there are others around that have certain expectations."

Lanois faced many of these dilemmas on his own *Acadie*. "I don't think people are expecting me to put out a pop record," Lanois says, "but I'm sure there are exotic expectations and I'll try and live up to that."

Unlike his instrumental works with Eno, or his own pieces on *Music for Films Volume II*, his new recording features mostly vocal pieces, many of them sung by Lanois, although there are appearances by Eno and Aaron Neville. "There's a blend of traditional sounds, traditional songwriting, but with not-so-traditional approaches and moods.

and I believe I've hit on something unique. There's a combination of joy and sadness. There's a bittersweet quality to the record."

Acadie sounds like it arose out of the American Midwest. Many of the songs, like "Siliam's Hill" and "O Marie," are dominated by acoustic guitar played in an almost rural blues style. Lanois sings laments of travel and dislocation with a fragile, raw voice. "It talks about migration and travel," he says quietly. "People on the move, families selling the farm, families going their own way. So it has a lot to do with the past. What has happened with myself and my immediate family and a lot of the French people from Quebec. A lot of those people have moved on to find work in other cities so it's about people and stories about people."

It sounds like it could be out of a Dylan sketchbook. Lanois often talks about his past as one of uprooting, moving from French-speaking Quebec to English-speaking Hamilton when he was 10, and now several years on the road as a producer. One reason for his affinity with New Orleans, where he's worked for the last year and a half, is its blend of the English and French languages. One song, "O Marie," is sung in French.

Playing his music for Dylan, Lanois learned more about his own creative process. "It was a big help to have him around," he says. "He really loved the songs I played for him and he made a few good suggestions, not specific ones but just broader, overall record suggestions. Working with him, I could see the possibilities of changes. With him, he pretty much sticks to an idea but it's not really sacred. Some writers will write a line and you can never get them to change it. For him, he throws out his own lines, and great lines, just to change the idea or put something else in. It's pretty much the same way that I deal with sound. Sure, that sounds great but this serves the song better. So it's sort of gotten me reviewing my own lyrics."

Lanois has always been a musician in his own right. His guitar touches can be heard on the Neville Brothers' *Yellow Moon* and Eno's *Apollo*. When I mention the similarity between U2's "Wire" and his own guitar sound on "Amazing Grace," he laughs shyly and says, "Yeah, I have to admit, it's a direct steal from what Edge does and I have no qualms or regrets."

Lanois also plays pedal-steel guitar, an instrument whose malleable sound and speech-like patterns would seem perfectly suited to his more impressionistic ideas. But he finds he can't take the country out of the pedal steel. "Years ago it was my second instrument when I was playing country-and-western gigs in Canada," he says. "To this day I play a country style on the instrument and I'm trying to shake it because there are so many possibilities on a pedal steel. But I seem to always go back to a North American country sound."

Lanois' approach to his instrument mirrors his most basic values as a producer: "What I do is very organic in the sense that I play a clear and simple guitar," he explains. "But then I combine that with all the processing that I do. The tendency for me in the studio is to just turn on a few of the gizmos and keep messing around until something comes by. So it's a combination of a fairly purist approach along with applying modern technology of the control room."

FULL FORCE'S SMOOVE INTENSITY

A black music production powerhouse mixes the modern with the traditional

By Leo Sacks

THE TIGHTLY-KNIT family that stays together, plays together. And no one marries technological brinksmanship and black-music traditionalism quite like Full Force. Their productions for James Brown, Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam, Patti LaBelle and Cheryl "Pepsii" Riley manage to make utterly idiomatic black music sound thoroughly modern. Kingpins of a music production empire, Full Force has recently finished cutting new tracks for Philip Bailey, Howard Hewitt, U.T.F.O., Pepsii Riley, Doctor Ice, Jasmine Guy and a new vocal group known as Royalty. There's also talk of collaborating with Rick James. "Right now we're fortunate enough to produce who we want," agrees singer Paul Anthony.

Co-leader Bowlegged Lou explains the Full Force method: "With each artist, we go into their archives, when they were really at their best, and bring out that quality. Elevate it. Inject it with some Full Force juice. Then it's good to go."

Anthony does not like to coax. "No, a better word is push," he says. "I might say, 'I hear you singing, but you'll never sell me a car. I don't believe you, *make me believe you*, I want intensity, not volume. Intensity. Now live that.'" Egos never clash, he explains. "People have been intimidated by our physicality, but then they see how we are, that we both want the same thing."

He adds: "A good producer is one who can record three different people, and you can't tell the productions are his. Because a producer shouldn't overshadow anyone. When people say they know our 'sound,' that surprises me; I don't think we have one."

Full Force definitely has a sound on their new album *Smoove*. It's sleek, supple, infectious dance-pop, a striking affirmation of their talent as *artists*, which until now has drawn mixed reviews and only modest commercial success. *Smoove* is layered with rapping, singing and sampling, back talk, sound effects and melodies that snake through rebellious bass lines on deliberately sparse productions. There's "Don't Waste My Time," so high you can't get over it; a swirling, evanescent "Ain't My Type of Hype"; the lovely spin of "Friends B-4 Lovers"; an irresistibly catchy "All I Wanna Do"; or the jaunty, clipped, percussive "It's Been a Long Time."

And then they move in for the kill with those gorgeous, silken harmonies. Six-part vocals so pristine, so rich, that they sound like one person singing six melodies simultaneously. How do six individual musicians work so closely together?

"It ain't easy," breathes Anthony.

"We're all so close, because we're all so crazy together," laughs Bowlegged Lou. "When we finish a project, we don't go our separate ways. We're each other's best friends. We connect with each other."

In the beginning there were the brothers Bowlegged Lou, the Clown Prince and Great Communicator of the Full Force cause; Paul Anthony, the bodybuilder with the transcendental voice; and B-Fine, percussion master. Their parents, Lucien and Carmen George, were born in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Lucien sang with various gospel and doo-wop groups around New York City and would shepherd his boys into the subways to sing.

"We'd sing for money at the Lenox Avenue stop on 125th Street, and on Fulton Street in Brooklyn," Paul recalls. "'Ooh Baby Baby,' the Temptations' 'Cloud Nine' and 'Runaway Child.' We was kicking."

Anthony's memories at age nine are even more vivid: "My uncle *owned* Fulton Street. And I'll never forget how he stood me on top of a garbage can on a winter day and I sang

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Smokey Robinson's 'If You Can Want' in front of the neighborhood hookers and pimps and dealers and users, in their fur coats and jewelry and feathered hats and platform shoes. That was the neighborhood, man."

Now Anthony is a music historian, a Keeper of the Flame. "Roll it off, drop something on me, and I should be able to sing something from it," he beams. "Because we didn't just come into this thing overnight. Even at 12 and 13, we were music librarians, which carries a lot of responsibility. It would be foolish not to give it back."

Living in Harlem, they yearned for a date at the Apollo Theater. And as the Amplifiers, they got it, winning four consecutive Amateur Night shows on the strength of an uproarious "Cloud Nine." On to Brooklyn, where the family moved and their cousins lived. Practicing in a basement slightly bigger than a shoebox, Full Force took shape with Curt-t-t on guitar, Shy Shy on bass and Baby Gerry on every conceivable keyboard. B-Fine played drums, Lou and Paul sang—and they hit on something. "All of our neighborhood friends laughed at us, but that just gave us strength," offers Lou. "Now, those same people are either working for us, or working in the business because of us. Life is so funny."

Tapes were going out, tapes were coming back, but Lou kept the Cause alive. "I'd spend all my money on the group," he says. "For motivation, anytime we were down, I'd say, 'All right y'all, I got . . . *T-shirts!*' Or, 'I got . . . *jackets!*' We went through about six sets. Just to keep the morale up."

Smoove's inner sleeve includes three early Full Force publicity photos, a hilarious view of the Way They Were in 1980 (a.k.a. Life After Disco). Lou takes a hard look at the photos and flashes on how difficult it was to book a date at Club Ecstasy in Brooklyn. "The gig was a really big deal for us, sort of like playing Radio City Music Hall. So we used bullhorns to create some commotion."

Robert Ford Jr. was a true believer. "Rocky" to his friends, Ford and his partner J.B. Moore—as Kurtis Blow's producers—"carried" the group for three years, sinking $40,000 into demo tapes, before Full Force finally landed on Columbia. He feels Full Force is "the single most progressive black band since EW&F. Unfortunately, they've

FULL HOUSE

FULL FORCE goes to bat on an SSL desk, mostly because of its ability to save settings in the middle of whatever they're doing. Usually, the group needs 48 tracks to record, so they slave two Studer A800s, then mix down to a Studer A820. "It sort of smoothes things out, rounding out the bottom and the top," engineer Tony "Fly Boy" Maserati explains. For effects they use the Lexicon 480L, Drawmer gates and compressors, Lexicon PCM70 reverbs, and Neve Prism and Focusrite equalizers. Neumann's U-67 microphones "really seem to bring out their different vocal characters and personalities," Maserati adds. For speakers, they use a pair of AR18s. "They're real flat, they don't have a bump anywhere," the "Fly Boy" says.

SHY SHY, also nicknamed "Wires," enjoys telling this story about a James Brown session that Maserati engineered: "Tony accidentally erased a lyric we had been working on for a long time, and when James didn't hear it on the playback, he asked Tony what his name was and where he was from. Tony said, 'Boston,' but James meant his ancestry. James said, 'What are you, Italian or something?' Then he started rambling on in mumbo-jumbo Italian, for like, 10 minutes. So now, any time Tony messes up, from the corner of the room you'll hear someone say, 'Where you from, Tony? Where you *from?*'"

strayed from that mark because they're obsessed with finding the hit, that career-breaker. And they'll never find it, either, if they don't stop looking for it."

It took a declamation from Bob Dylan, plus the prospect of some honey-money from Warner Bros. president Lenny Waronker, to finally motivate Columbia, who had already rejected them five times. The band was busy backing Kurtis Blow on his *Party Time* record when Dylan heard their harmonies and invited them to sing on his *Infidels* album.

"It was absolutely the worst song Dylan ever recorded," Ford relates. "'Death Is Not the End.'" Happily, Ford says it did not make the record. It did goose $9,000 from CBS. "We were so into the hole that we were chomping at the bit, even though it was only for a 12-inch. But then Lenny heard a tape and when he flipped, CBS caught wind and came back with a package worth about $500,000—almost unheard of for a new black act."

By the time they signed with Columbia—April 14, 1985—Lou says, "We were too tired to celebrate."

Their co-manager, Steve Salem, had implored them to produce in the interim. "He saw it as a way of facilitating a deal, but I fought tooth and nail against it," says Lou. "I thought, *'Screw it! I wanna be an artist!'* Then our productions for U.T.F.O. and Lisa Lisa took off. He was right."

Ford adds, "They [CBS] were almost embarrassed into signing us."

Paul Anthony feels that that artist-first attitude helps their ability as producers: "We know what it feels like to be there, how to exercise more patience, how to be stern, how to push to get more out of you."

But how hard can you push someone like James Brown? "We've met everyone in the industry, superstars and rising stars, and no one has ever put us in awe," laughs Stanley. "But when we met the Godfather"—he serves up a guttural *huh!* for emphasis—"well, that was it. To write, produce and direct someone who has revolutionized music, that's a mind-blowing thing. We looked down the hallway and there he was. In glasses and a full-length fur coat. By himself. James Brown. Coming to see *us*. You could feel his apprehension. Here we are, youngbloods. And sometimes James is, uh, out of touch. But we just looked him in the eye and said, 'Mr. Brown, straight from the heart, we love you. *We love you.* Everyone from Mick Jagger to Run-D.M.C. has benefited from what you put out there. All we ask is that you believe in us the way we believe in you, and we'll put you right where you're supposed to be.'"

I'm Real was JB's biggest black album in 15 years, a frenzy of funk featuring the title song, "Static" and "Time to Get Busy." Lou remembers that James—ever the acrobat—did a daredevil split for photographers on the final day of the session. "And just as fast, he got right back up. And the photographers were screaming, 'Mr. Brown! Mr. Brown! Do it again!' James told them, 'Shoulda got it when I did it. Shoulda got it when I did it.'"

Another payback for Full Force was their production of EW&F's Philip Bailey: "To be able to suggest certain things to Philip, and have him accept them . . . wow," marvels Anthony, who arranges the bulk of the band's harmonies. "Learning his voice was a per-

sonal treat because every time he'd do a certain riff, I'd let him know it was now part of my memory bank *forever.* You don't try to take Philip anywhere because you'll slowly find out . . . he's been there. What you try to do is open the door that he left. Say, 'Philip, this is your thing. Let's get back to it.'"

Then there was Patti LaBelle. The boys were busy when her people called their people, asking about their availability. The next day, Paul recalls, "a limousine pulls up to the studio and who walks up to see us? Straight from Philly she came. She said, 'Fellas, keep doing what you're doing. I'll be right here in the next room. 'Cause y'all gonna help Miss Patti with her album. *You're gonna help Miss Patti with her album.*' Then it dawned on us exactly who we had said no to."

Psychology is important, they maintain. "You use a different kind of therapy with each artist," Paul opines. "Everyone has their makeup. Samantha Fox is rarely uptight. She's loose, humorous, and the tracks show it. She's a good singer—not great—but she has fortitude, *she wants it,* and that's all we need to know. We'll meet her right in the middle." In contrast, Lisa "can be tense, then she's *intense,* she doesn't want to quit. And attitude is what makes the difference. And with Pepsii, I say, 'Give me two,' and she gives me eight. That means"—Paul lets sparks fly in a melismatic flash—"she'll always give me more than I ask for. She has such an instrument. I call it a Ph.D. in Vocal Gymnastics."

For better or worse, Full Force is a democracy. "Musically, it works because they complement each other so incredibly," Rocky Ford says. "I'm constantly amazed." However, like any democracy, he says there are inherent inefficiencies, noting that when it comes to simple decisions like hiring an engineer, the debate is potentially agonizing. "Getting them over to my house for a drink is an even bigger production."

Well, how *do* six guys think like one mind? Most times, Anthony says that the majority rules. "But if the vote is five to one, and the opposition feels strongly about it, we'll reconsider. Being family cuts out a lot of garbage. We know each other's breaking point, each other's shortcomings, so we use the give-and-take system *a lot.* But we always lean towards the person who wrote the song or spearheaded it. We rely on him first, then entertain other suggestions. In the end, the Full Force braintrust always prevails."

One important part of [*cont'd on page 102*]

KEVIN KILLEN: ROUGH & READY

Stoking up the heat of the moment for the likes of Costello, Bush, Gabriel and U2

By Alan di Perna

SOMETIMES A ROUGH-and-ready engineering approach can bring the emotion out of a song better than when you strive for the ultimate technical perfection," says Kevin Killen. The Dublin-born engineer/producer has convincingly demonstrated his hypothesis on records like Elvis Costello's *Spike*, Bryan Ferry's *Bête Noire*, Roy Orbison's *Mystery Girl*, Peter Gabriel's *So*, U2's output from *War* through *Rattle & Hum*, and albums by such significant others as Kate Bush, Howard Jones and T-Bone Burnett.

"As an engineer, I try to work really, really fast. I never spend a lot of time getting sounds because I find it a destructive way of working. I prefer to keep moving, get an overall picture and then alter things wherever I feel it's appropriate. And I think that when you're used to that, it's easier to get involved on the production side. You quickly get things sounding the way you want and then you can concentrate on the musicality of what's going on in the studio."

Not that Killen negates the value of good

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engineering—as even a casual listen to any of the above albums will prove. His own grounding in the discipline includes two years on the staff at Dublin's first 24-track facility, Lombard Sound, and four years at the SSL studio that has become the city's pride, Windmill Lane.

"Working in Ireland is a bit like working in the classical field. Because of all the traditional Irish music that's recorded there, you get a lot of experience recording acoustic instruments. Also, when I started working at Lombard in 1979 the whole punk thing had happened in England, so there was a huge explosion of bands. There were lots of opportunities to learn." U2, of course, was one of the young new bands that put Dublin and Windmill Lane on the map during the early '80s. Killen had grown up on the same street as U2 drummer Larry Mullen Jr.

"We lived not 400 yards apart, so we knew one another quite well. When the band realized I was working at the studio, they asked for me to work on *War*. We already had an established relationship, so it was easier for me to take some chances and really get involved in the album. When I was asked, I would always express my opinion—even if it wasn't one that everyone would see as being constructive. Sometimes that kind of honesty works to people's advantage."

Kevin's tendency to get emotionally involved ultimately led him into co-production, starting with Mr. Mister's *Go On* LP. By this time he'd gone independent as well. His move to producer's chores, he feels, was expedited by his engineering philosophy.

Producer/artist T-Bone Burnett found plenty to like in Killen and his engineering outlook. Killen worked on T-Bone's own record, *The Talking Animals*, and the two collaborated on discs for Roy Orbison, Sam Phillips and, of course, Elvis Costello.

"T-Bone doesn't mind somebody like me coming in and definitely taking the bull by the horns," Killen notes with approval. "He *wants* me to get involved in the music, even if I'm just being hired as a mixer."

On Elvis Costello's *Spike*, though, Kevin did much more than mix. His participation merited a full co-production credit. In Costello, Killen met someone whose attitude toward the studio is even more rough-and-ready than his own.

"One of the first things I learned about Elvis is that he has a distaste for reverb. He doesn't like his tracks to sound really wet. Before we even started he said he wanted a close, intimate feel—especially on songs like 'God's Comic,' 'Tramp the Dirt Down' and 'Any King's Shilling.' On other songs, the

KILLEN'S CHILDREN

KEVIN KILLEN likes his consoles either very old or very new. In the vintage department, he's a fan of old Neves. "Anything from the 8038 up through the 8078 Series. Anything after that, even though it has the name Neve on it, it has a completely different character." At the other end of the spectrum, Kevin also favors the new SSL G Series console. "The automation is more flexible, and I like the way the dynamics section sounds." He also speaks highly of the AMS Audiofile workstation.

As for mike choices, says Killen, "I like to use a lot of old microphones, like Sony C-500s and the usual array of [Neumann] U-47s, [Shure] SM-57s and [Telefunken] 251s. If I'm not carrying my own mike preamps, which are Hardys, I'll rent some Jensens or some GML mike pres. I basically go straight from the microphone into the mike pre, maybe through a Pultec [compressor] and [Teletronix/UREI] LA-2A [tube limiter] and go straight into the tape machine. But here too, it all depends on the situation. I don't have any rules."

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request was for something different. But I think, overall, that album was recorded in quite a traditional way.

"Elvis works incredibly fast—faster than me. He'll walk into the studio, pick up his guitar and say, 'Okay, let's go.' He won't even want to take two minutes to tune the guitar. So a lot of times we were rushing around. The tape machine would be in 'record' all of the time. I think we had 'Tramp the Dirt Down' in two or three takes and 'Any King's Shilling' in about four or five. There was no time to agonize over things, so I used my instinct a lot. When you come from that acoustic background, you know when something sounds good, or when it sounds accurate for the instrument."

Many of *Spike*'s edgy lead vocals were also flung down fast. "That wasn't the original idea," Kevin explains. "But [*cont'd on page 100*]

KILLER B'S HIT N.Y.!

Are programmers producers? Ask Jimmy Bralower and Jeff Bova, who put the sting into high tech.

By Jon Young

"WITH CYNDI LAUPER'S *True Colors* LP people made the discovery that if they put Jimmy and me in the room at the same time, we could take it a lot further," says Jeff Bova. "We'd jam out parts together so that some of the spontaneity got built into the machine. The electronics come with the job, but the main thing is still being a musician. We didn't practice our instruments all those years just so we could push buttons."

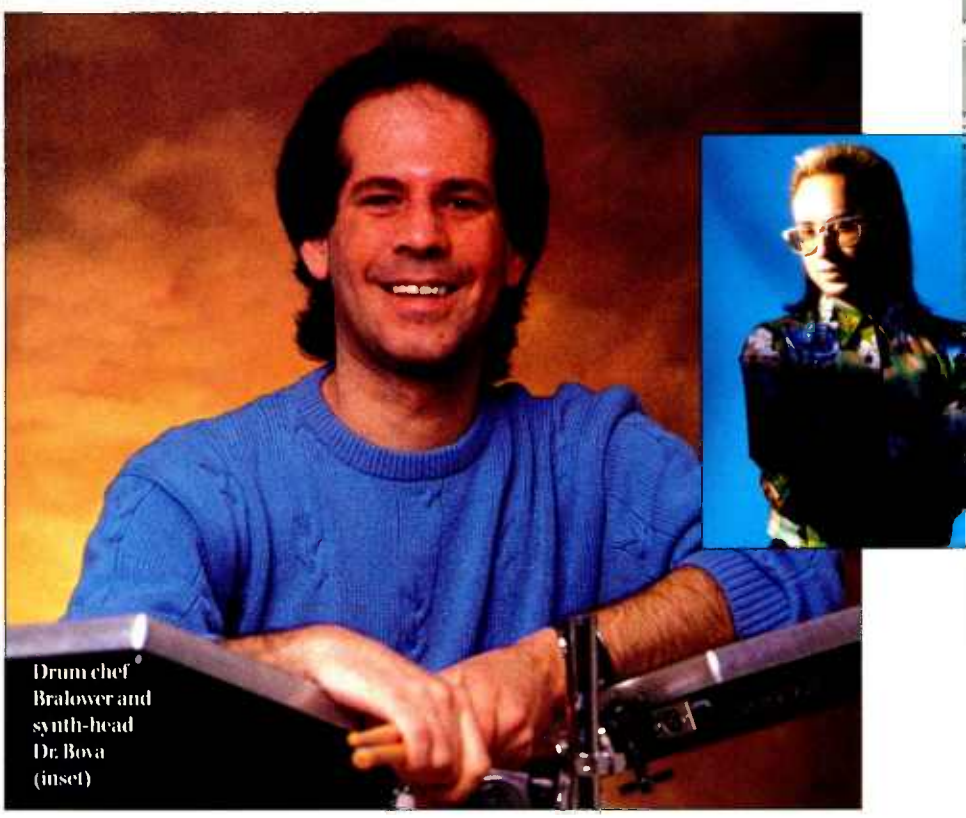
Meet Bralower and Bova, the Killer B's. Regarded by many as the leading drum programmer on the scene today, Jimmy Bralower has compiled a dazzling list of credits in the '80s, from Chic and Madonna to Paul McCartney and Jeff Beck, with dozens more in between. If you've heard the *Cocktail* soundtrack, Brian Wilson's solo LP or Laurie Anderson's *Home of the Brave*, you've heard Bralower at work. Keyboardist/programmer Jeff Bova boasts an equally impressive résumé: Robert Palmer's *Riptide*, tour dates with Herbie Hancock, Billy Joel's *The Bridge*.

What's so unusual about two session musicians working *together?* In today's high-tech studio world, where parts are commonly laid down one byte, one player at a time, plenty. The Killer B's, as they've been dubbed by their peers, encourage producers to give them first crack at a tune in tandem, laying out percussion, keyboard and bass sections that mesh by design, rather than leaving a producer to try to match notes from disparate sources, which often results in that sterile electro-music we all know so well.

Explains Bralower, "When producers and performers hear Jeff and me working together they can get a better sense of what their record will sound like, rather than fixating on details. We're trying to bring the focus back to music again, go one step beyond that technical mentality—and get back to the feeling of a bunch of people in a room working with their ideas." Asked how he's managed to master all the subtleties of modern technology, he smiles and makes a confession. "I *don't* understand it all," he laughs. "That's part of the joy of doing it."

BRALOWER'S SUCCESS can be traced in part to his ability to read the writing on the wall, to negotiate career detours and adapt to new situations. "It used to be that you'd go into the studio and play, and when it felt good you were done. When multitracking started coming in back in the '70s, people were listening with different ears, because now you had the capability of isolating individual performances. It changed the whole procedure. Recording became more of a craft than a performance-capturing medium."

Meanwhile, Bralower had seen his original dreams of rock 'n' roll glory go down in flames. When yet another band had fallen apart after coming *this close* to a record deal, he came to a conclusion. "I decided I had to control my destiny a little more than just being in somebody else's band, so doing sessions became the natural thing to pur-



Drum chef Bralower and synth-head De Bova (inset)

Photographs: Kevin Mazur

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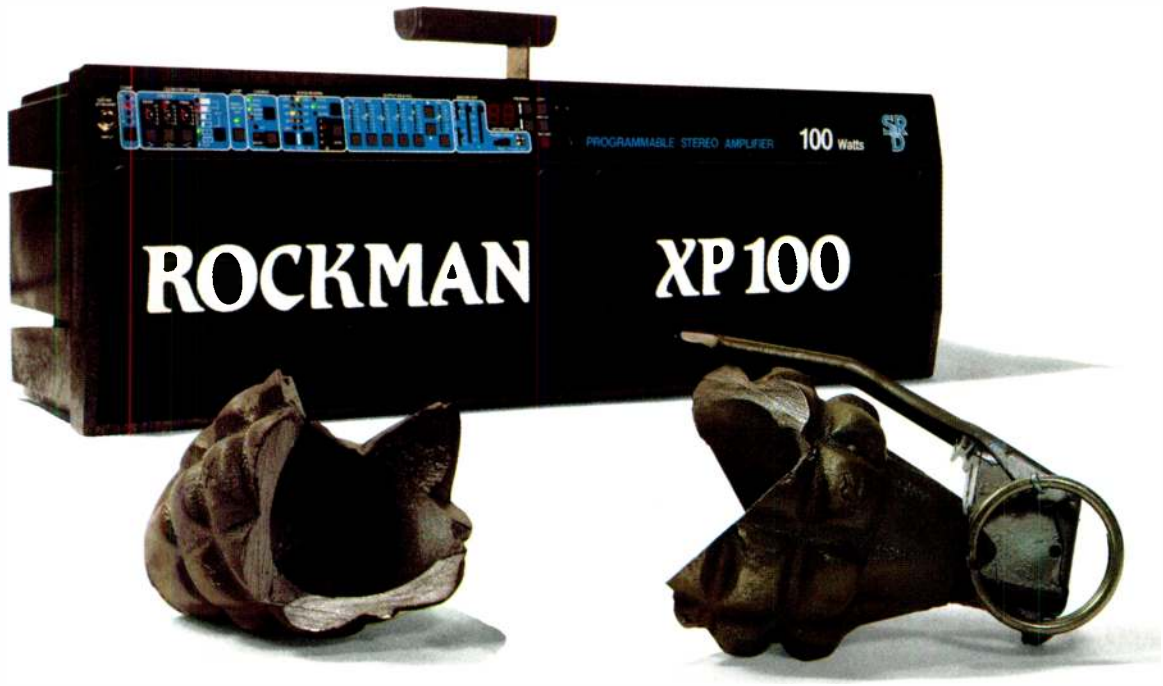

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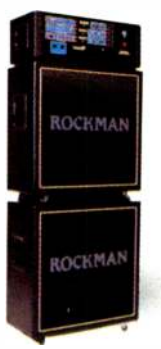

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sue." Among his early dates were jobs with pioneering rapper Kurtis Blow, including the 1980 hit "The Breaks." Recalls Bralower, "Originally a lot of rap stuff was lifted from Chic, which had a James Brown flavor anyway, so for me it was just like playing R&B, coming up with grooves and sitting on 'em.

"People were looking for ways to perfect recording, by microscoping, breaking things down into really small denominators. I was using the skill I had to knock sounds onto a tape piecemeal—doing kick and snare parts, overdubbing high-hats, doing it all piece by piece. Seven minutes of playing the same thing in the studio is a torture drill. I was saying to myself, 'This is crazy!' There seemed to be a desperate need for a machine that didn't exist at the time.

"About the time of Kurtis' second or third album, one guy came in with a beat that had a very busy bass drum. He'd created it on the Roland TR-808—the original cheesy drum machine. I was playing it and started getting a cramp in my leg. The song was called 'Tough,' which was how it felt to me! We wound up using the bass drum and handclaps from the drum machine while I played live snare drum and high-hat. And that was my first experience with machines. It was obvious that they were the answer. I realized it wasn't a matter of being able to play it all at once, but whether it sounded right."

In 1982, Bralower spent his last $3,000 on a LinnDrum. He began hanging around the Power Station during mixing, hoping to snare the odd job. Jason Corsaro, one of the engineers there, was working with Nile Rodgers of Chic. And when Rodgers needed help with a Linn machine, Corsaro called on Bralower's expertise. "That was my break," he smiles.

Bralower went on to work with Rodgers on albums by Southside Johnny (*Trash It Up*), Chic (*Believer*) and Madonna (*Like a Virgin*), and soon his phone was ringing off the hook. "I quickly discovered most people don't like to read manuals," he recalls. "That helped me get work early on, because I'd read the book. I knew how the machine worked."

Bralower established his modus operandi in the studio early on, usually sitting down with the producer before the rest of the players came in to chart out the tracks. He learned that hitting a kit wasn't the same as working a machine. "What you do as a player doesn't always come back the same on the machine. If I was at a kit, I'd have to stop hitting a high-hat during a fill, but it'd be overly obvious if you did that with a machine, so you don't. The bottom line, as somebody said to me, is that if you had three hands you wouldn't stop a kit high-hat. You only do it because you have to physically.

"Then I went back and listened to old Beatles records. There's drum overdubs like crazy on them, more than one kit going on, two snares, all kinds of wild stuff. You just never pay much attention to it. In 'Lady Madonna,' for example, there are two different drum kits in each channel. They were probably the first to say, 'We're not playing a concert. We're gonna apply different standards to the songs.'

"Jason Corsaro had this over-the-top sound that I helped him get sometimes. I had my machines modified so I could change chips for every sound. I was a madman, leaving chips loose in their sockets, overloading things, breaking circuits, stuff that would make some producers cringe. Jason inspired me to throw caution to the wind. He told me not to worry about the meters going into the red, as long as it doesn't sound distorted, because you're not listening on a scope, you're listening on speakers."

One of the highlights for Bralower was Steve Winwood's "Higher Love," because, he explains, "instead of making it a technology record or a band record, they decided to use a bit of both. I put the drum machine on first, then John Robinson came in and played a kit. He's one of those guys who can play like he owns the track, even when there's a drum machine. There's all kinds of stuff going on at once and it's hard to tell what's what. I don't even know who's doing what half the time, but it doesn't matter—it works.

"And that was the beginning of my saying my gig is to come up with new ideas all the time. Don't worry about where they're going—you're being paid. It's a lot better to keep that creative flow going than trying to hold on to one good thing. That's a short-term approach."

In exchange for a full disclosure of his ideas, Bralower requires more creative involvement upfront. "My stock-in-trade is getting records started," he explains, "finding out what people want their records to sound like—trying to project a lot of stuff that's not there yet. I encourage them to tell me what they hear in their minds." Taking the concept of record-starting one step further naturally occurred to Bralower when he met Jeff Bova and recognized a lot of the same attitudes toward technology: "When

Jeff and I work together we allow accidents to happen and then get them into the memory of the computer. You can go only so far with your own ideas, which is why most people benefit from interaction."

Classically trained on both trumpet and piano, Bova attended the Berklee and Manhattan schools of music before allowing himself to be sidetracked by less sober pursuits. "There seemed to be little future in classical trumpet playing, with so few orchestras around," he explains. "Otherwise I might have kept at it."

An early synth enthusiast, Bova augmented his traditional lineup of Fender Rhodes and Hammond B3 with an Arp 2600. Then he bought an Oberheim OBX and sold his B3. "That began the whole process," he recalls. "I had a natural inclination toward computers. In high school I'd studied formal electronic music, musique concrète, which involved cutting up tape and using electronic sounds, and that gave me a good foundation for going into synthesizers. That's really the roots of sampling."

He even had a revelation of sorts one day while listening to Kraftwerk's *Computer World* LP. "It hit me and I said to myself, 'That's it! We're going to be integrating ourselves with computers.' I'd been thinking of synthesizers and computers as being separate before, and that put it all together."

One of Bova's most important acquisitions, circa '83, was a Rhodes Chroma. "That was a big help in getting me a job with Herbie Hancock, because he was using one on record and needed somebody with a knowledge of it to recreate some of the parts onstage. I ended up doing a lot of live work with his 'Rockit' band." He reunited with Hancock last year for something completely different. "I never thought I'd do any film scoring, but I ended up working with Herbie on *Colors*," he says. "He wrote the themes and I did a lot of the underscoring. It's not at all like a session—there's the immediate pressure of having to deliver a product. Sometimes I'd have to work all night because someone was coming at seven the next morning to pick up a tape to take to Lucasfilm."

On other jobs Bova can be limited to programming or adding sounds to pre-programmed patterns. On Riuichi Sakamoto's 1988 LP *Neo Geo*, the Yellow Magic Orchestra vet furnished tape that contained a stripe of pre-sequenced performance and Bova added the sounds. But it isn't simple, he says. "You might have a sound that's great when you play it on your own machine, but when somebody else plays it, it's not gonna act the same way."

B&B faced one of their biggest challenges yet working on the upcoming album by Jim Steinman, of Meat Loaf fame and Wagnerian aspirations. In one case, Steinman wanted to build a nine-minute track around a free-form piano solo by E Streeter Roy Bittan, as opposed to laying down rhythm tracks first, the way normal people do. The challenge: match the other instruments.

Explains Bova, "Roy played on a MIDI'd grand piano, recording his part into a computer. Then we recorded him against SMPTE code, so that each note he played could be referenced against a particular point in time. That made it easy for us to place all our overdubs accurately, even though Roy was pushing and pulling the tempo. I could go in and extract part of Roy's piano performance, then assign a synth to double it and play exactly as he did. In all, I ended up adding about 20 separate tracks to the song. I'd say working with Jim Steinman

has taxed our equipment the most."

Jimmy 'n' Jeff would like to carry their partnership one step beyond playing, into production. They've already done that with some Japanese pop singers, though they haven't landed any major accounts here yet. Sighs Bova, "Record companies have been recognizing engineers as potential producers, much more than some of the musicians who play a big part in the tracks. People assume that if it sounds great, it's gotta be the engineer. But Jimmy and I have been making records from the ground up—arranging, playing, turning somebody else's song into a finished product."

Until some savvy artist gives 'em a call, Bova has another project to keep him busy. He's one-fifth of Distance, a real-life group, not a studio gig, which he describes as "serious rock 'n' roll." Also featuring British singer Robert Hart, Eddie Martinez (guitarist on Run-D.M.C.'s groundbreaking "Rock Box"), and Chic alumni Tony Thompson (drums) and Bernard Edwards (bass), the band should release its debut LP in October and go on tour thereafter.

"Jeff and I are both players with roots in the '60's who got involved with electronics while maintaining a traditional outlook," Bralower adds. "Some people are convinced all this new technology is something they've never seen before, but it's really just another way of doing the same old thing.

"If you get too knowledgeable or too studied you lose the spontaneous side. A lot of people fall into that trap with electronics, 'cause it's so easy to craft something to perfection. I believe you should learn just enough about the machines to abuse them a little bit—all this stuff is too perfect otherwise. A drum machine will sound the same every time if you don't watch it."

It's only rock 'n' roll, y'know. "Tony Bongiovi once said, 'It's just a record. Three minutes of music that gotta entertain somebody for two months. No big deal.'"

KILLEN

[*cont'd from page 96*] when we put down all the basic ideas for the songs, Elvis would usually go in and sing a vocal. And the musicians started playing to the way he phrased those vocals. So when we eventually came to see if we could upgrade the vocals, the new takes just didn't have the same emotion. Therefore a lot of those rough vocals ended up becoming the masters. We might just fix a word or phrase, but essentially all those vocals were first takes. They weren't labored at all. He's the kind of performer who can deliver. It made T-Bone's job and my job somewhat easier."

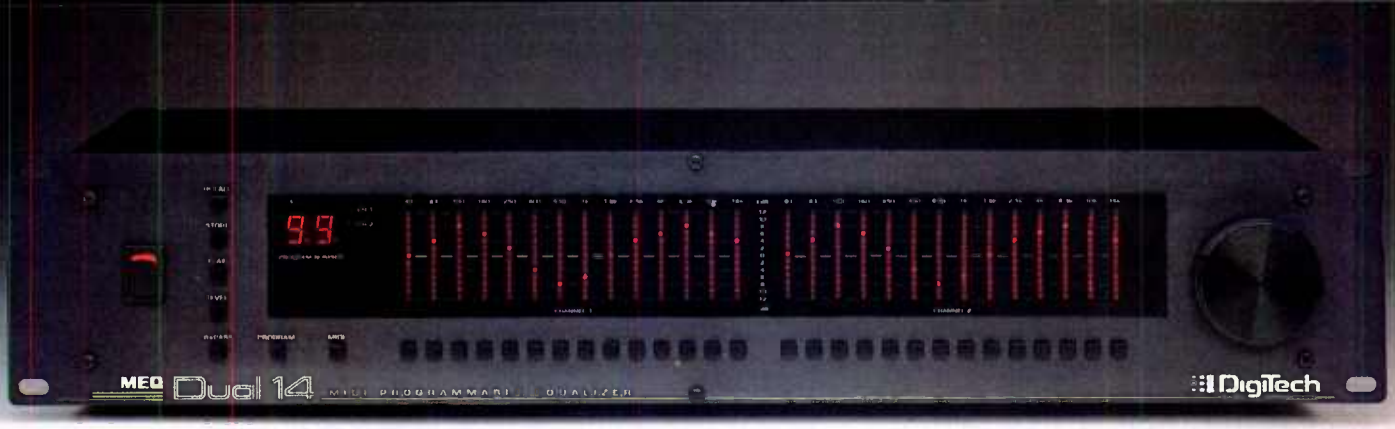
From an engineering standpoint, though, the vocals were more challenging: "Elvis said his prior engineer told him he had the most unrecordable voice in the history of the music industry. There *is* a certain rasp in his voice, when he sings out, that will cut your head off from 10 yards away."

Killen admits that recording with relatively "high-tech" artists like Gabriel and Kate Bush involves a different discipline. "Working with Peter or Kate, the albums definitely grow over a period of time. They have a much longer period of fruition, from inception to completion. Somebody like U2, I don't know if they've ever spent more than four months recording an album, whereas Peter or Kate take at least a year. So with them, you get into that thing where every day is not as crucial. It gives you more room to experiment, but obviously it also allows you to put off making the important decisions, which can be both a good thing and a bad thing.

"Peter always ends up involving a lot of musicians in the recording process, and all the musicians play on every song. So you end up with a situation where every song has multiple slave reels and you end up having to compile performances back to the master tape. As a result, you get some bizarre combinations. One song on *So* has Stewart Copeland playing high-hat and Manu Katché playing cymbals on a track where Jerry Marotta is the main drummer."

Apart from *So*, Killen has worked with Gabriel on the live "Biko" single released in 1987, and he's recently finished cutting some live tracks in Greece with the artist—tracks that should eventually emerge as the audio portion of a long-form video. Killen's intuitive, spontaneous approach to engineering makes him ideally suited for live recording, which he's done for U2 and Peter Gabriel. Another thing he's known for is his mixing skills, although he has (pardon the phrase) mixed feelings about this aspect of his reputation.

"It's nice to be known in the industry as someone who can mix, but my preference is for doing whole projects from start to finish. The thing about mixing is you're in and out in two or three weeks—you come in and you're the hired gun. But there's no chance to really get to know the artists and what



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they're about. So you can miss the whole point of the album."

Killen suggests that current pop might be less bland if more personal involvement went into the record-making process. As it is, engineers are often called in to mix music they have no particular affinity for. Or worse, "people are asked to mix projects because the songs aren't that great, and the only way to make them seem great is to overwhelm the listener with sonic beauty. The industry has gotten so much into the sonic end of things that it overlooks the importance of great music and great performances."

They may have little in common stylistically, but Killen finds that clients like Costello, Bush, Gabriel and U2 do share one trait: "Most of them are very normal people. This is the surprising thing. They've got great sensibility about them. They're very sensitive to other people and to world events—to life in general. They've all got an uncanny knack for knowing what other people are feeling, for expressing themselves both verbally and through their music. But they really are very normal people when you strip away the glamor that the industry would like to veil them in. And from that normality, I think, comes their strength." Ⓜ

FULL FORCE

[*cont'd from page 92*] that braintrust is a strong sense of humor, but Rocky Ford wonders if it costs them: "There's a certain amount of buffoonery in a name like Bowlegged Lou, and I told him that once the *New York Times* refers to him as 'Mr. Lou'"—the way the newspaper called Meat Loaf "Mr. Loaf"—"he's got to own it, forever."

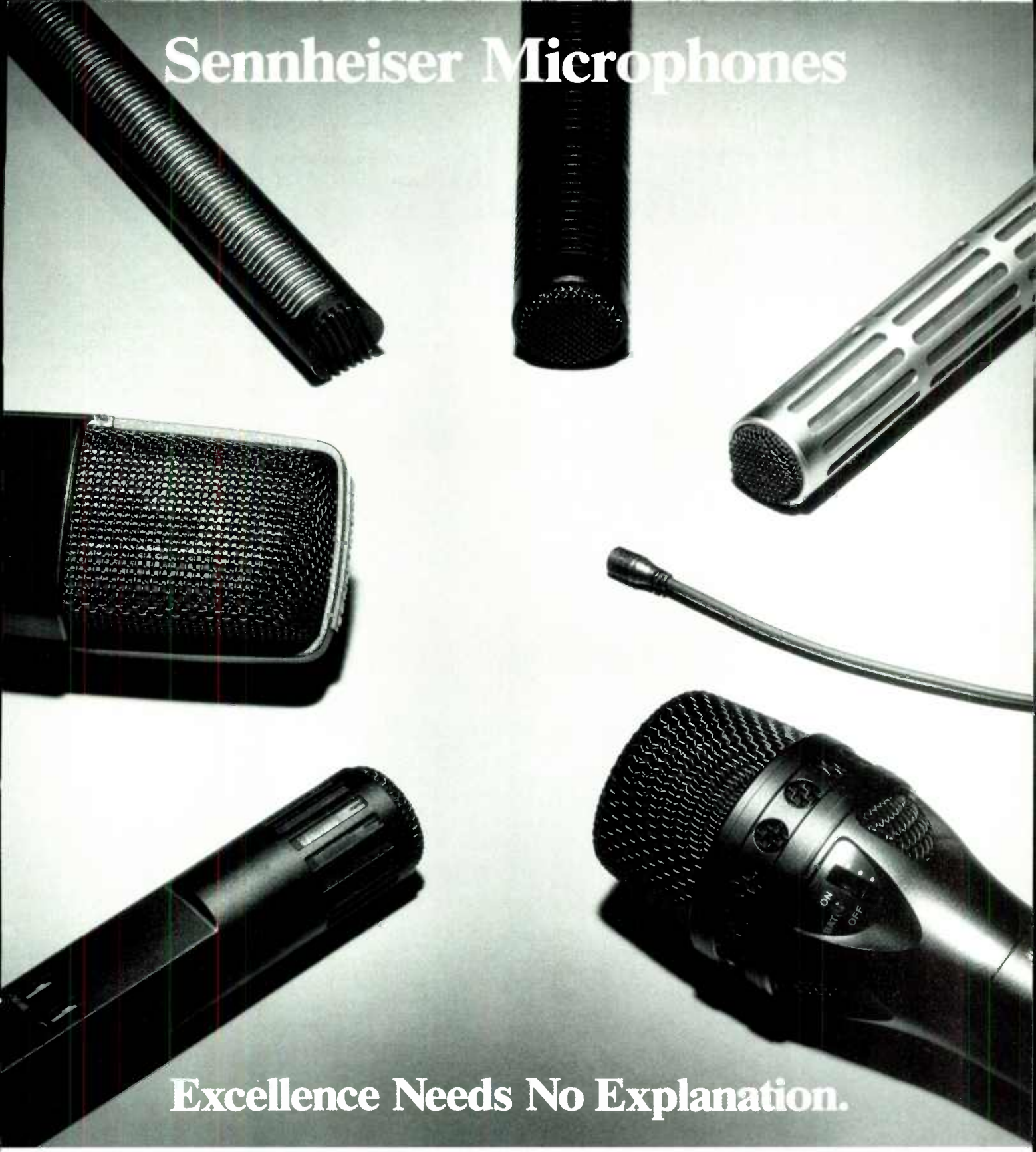
"I will *never* stop being crazy," Mr. Lou responds. "You know, diapers with fake shit. Peanuts with the snake in the can. The gorilla outfit. Screening my calls with a different voice. Hey, I was a theater major!"

Still, "change is good, and I think it's time to grow up," Anthony says. "I got tired of wearing that headband, anyway. Lou jokes that people at CBS were clapping when I took it off, and that I went through withdrawal. Well, I got tired of looking at those damn flowers on his crotch! So now we're looking more as a group, instead of six different ways."

On the back of the new album, Paul is pictured reading *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. It's no accident. "Marcus said what's being said now, only more eloquently, that *'we were here, we've been here.'* Musicians set such an important example. Sometimes people will listen to us before they listen to Jesse Jackson. So when they see Full Force dressing up a little more conservatively, cutting their hair and reading, that's a message. I'm not optimistic about the racial climate in this country changing. But I am optimistic that our social consciousness is coming out of the closet. I'm not looking for a political solution. Notice our Jheri-Kurls are gone."

They surely know how to write a pointed social message. Pepsii's pop smash, "Thanks for My Child," was a terrific tribute to single working mothers, but some civic and religious leaders saw it as promoting teenage pregnancy. Lou's reply: "It's not a pro-life song. Pepsii was a nurse working at a hospital with some handicapped children, and watching her take care of them I started feeling for single mothers, how they bust their ass to raise their kids without a mate. It's really a song about strength, how it comes from within."

For Lou and Full Force, the moral is clear: "If you feel you got it, never, ever give up. No matter how many doors get slammed in your face." Ⓜ



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HOOKING IT UP BY THE NUMBERS

Sorting out the brave new world of Digital Audio Interfaces.

By Alan di Perna

ONE DAY, music will be transmitted via direct neural contact—brain to brain, artist to listener. (I know this is true because Robyn Hitchcock said so on TV the other night.) There'll be no need to mess with instruments, effects, tape machines . . . none of that. But till then, there will always be compromises between what the musician hears in his head and what comes out of the listener's speakers.

We accept a big compromise every time we make an analog audio connection between two digital audio devices—between a digital synth and a digital effects processor or mixer, for example. It's a vicious cycle. We use digital equipment because it's less noisy and more wonderful-sounding than analog. But in order to hook all this digital gear together in a home studio or personal instrument rig, we have to make a bunch of noisy, not-so-wonderful-sounding conversions to analog and then back to digital again. The more digital equipment we have in our racks, the more of these conversions we make. And as they add up, digital purity goes straight down the crapper.

But now the good news. More and more digital equipment is bursting forth ready-equipped with digital interfaces. So rather than use those noisy analog outputs and inputs in connecting digital devices, you can keep everything in the digital domain—as clean and quiet as Sunday in suburbia. And at the end of the line, there's even more good news. DAT—the poor man's digital mastering format—is now "legal," thanks to the new Serial Copy Management System [SCMS] copy protection code. (More on this later.) Okay, this isn't exactly a direct neural link with the audience, but it all adds up to a way of digitizing your music early on and keeping it essentially unchanged all through the mixdown process. And the best part is you can do it all at home—make CD-ready masters and everything!

This is no future-tense fantasy, either. The gear already exists. You've read about most of it in these very pages. Roland's S-770 sampler, R-880 digital reverb and E-660 EQ, Yamaha's DEQ7 EQ and DMP7D digital mixer—all with their own digital interfaces. And Akai has just introduced a digital *multitrack* system, called A-DAM, which uses 8mm videotape. Even in its smallest, 12-track configuration (it goes up to 36), A-DAM is no bargain item; but then again neither were samplers a few years ago.

Digital Definitions

IF YOU have a nodding familiarity with MIDI, you already have a leg up on digital audio interfaces. Both are basically computer codes for transmitting data from one piece of gear to another. Of course, a digital audio interface is *not at all the same thing as MIDI.* MIDI carries commands, instructions that synthesizers and other instruments can use to create music. Digital interfaces carry *audio data*—the actual music itself.

Digital audio, as you may already know, is nothing but sound sliced up into very small segments of time that can be represented by a series of bits—the 1s and 0s of computer lingo. Once audio has been turned into a line of bits like this, it's an easy matter to pass the bits from one digital device to another . . . as long as both devices are using the same code. That is, as long as each bit means the same thing to the receiving machine as it

Illustration: Gene Greif

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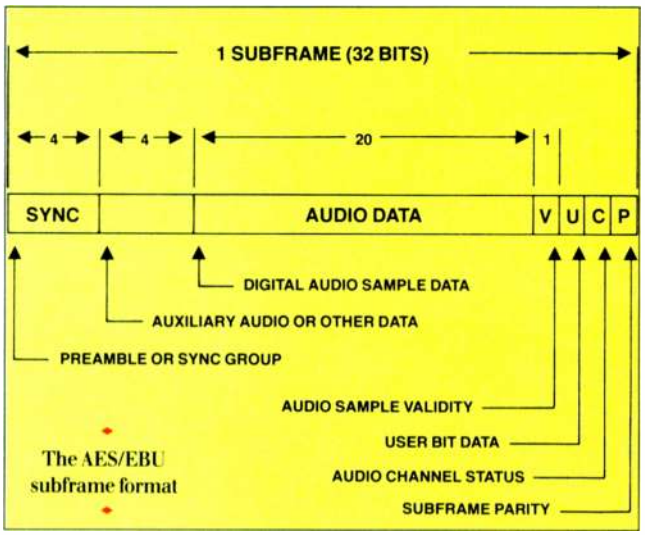
does to the sending machine.

Which brings us back to MIDI. History will recall that, before MIDI, different synth manufacturers had their own proprietary interface system. Result? You couldn't use one company's keyboard or sequencer to drive another company's synth. Solution? The manufacturers got together and agreed to use the same code, i.e., MIDI. Unfortunately, things aren't quite so simple in the mad mad world of digital audio. There are tons of proprietary interfaces but no single, universal interface standard. Don't despair though. There are a few "sort of" standards; and lots of digital audio gear can be interfaced successfully with lots of other digital stuff.



The AES/EBU subframe format

So, what *is* a digital interface already? Let's wax philosophical for a moment and think of a digital interface as having a body and a soul. The body is the actual physical wire running between two pieces of digital hardware, the plugs at either end of the wire and the sockets into which those plugs are inserted. The soul is the data format that zips along inside the wire. An interface standard or specification, then, is kind of like the Pope—it lays down the law governing both the body and soul.

You may already be familiar with MIDI's inner being: its data format—those eight little computer blips, called bits, which are organized into a data packet, called a byte or a word. Now compared with loutish old MIDI, digital audio interfaces are fairly sophisticated, uptown kind of creatures. So they use bigger words: 32-bit ones, to be precise. And the interface standard spells out exactly what kind of information is carried by each of these bits.

The other thing spelled out by the standard is the electrical properties of the interface: i.e., what kind of plugs and wires must be used to carry it. In the digital audio world, connectors are what separate the men from the boys. Thus we have two basic types of interface: **professional** and **consumer**. Professional interfaces have balanced connectors. This is mainly to make sure those fragile little data bits stay intact during their electrical hike over long cable runs—hundreds of feet in many professional studio installations. Consumer interfaces, on the other hand, have unbalanced connectors. These are usually fine for short-stuff home stereo rigs. And they're cheaper than balanced gear, which helps keep the cost of consumer equipment down.

Doing It Like the Pros

IN THE PROFESSIONAL world, there is essentially one standard interface. But it has many names. Many know and adore it as the **AES/EBU** [Audio Engineering Society/European Broadcast Union] interface format. Strictly speaking, the EBU standard insists that a transformer be included in the physical interface; the AES standard leaves that optional. Either way, AES/EBU interfaces *must* be on balanced XLR connectors. If you don't see an XLR, you ain't looking at AES/EBU. Datawise, a byte of AES/EBU breaks down like this (see figure above).

Two of these things, called subframes, make up a **frame**. One frame gets sent down the wire every sample period. In other words, the rate at which these messages skank down the line corresponds directly with the sample rate of the equipment you're using—32, 44.1, 48 kHz, etc. (Hertz means "times a second," in case you forgot.) Which means that this interface will accommodate equipment with any sample rate. Just make sure your sending device is set to the same sample frequency as your receiving device.

You'll notice that the message starts off with four bits of preamble—introductory stuff. Then you get 24 bits of audio data. 24 bits? Isn't most of the digital gear in our world 16-bit? Yes, but that's okay. If your audio is 16-bit, the first eight of the 24 audio bits go down the line as zeros—"blanks," if you will. After them come your 16 bits of audio data. Meanwhile, should you ever have higher-resolution digital audio to transmit, the format's got lots of extra seats on the bus.

Closing off the subframe we have four more "housekeeping" bits—error-checking stuff. The user bits are there for manufacturers to encode proprietary information of their own. What can you say in one bit? Well, the user and channel status bits are designed to function in blocks consisting of 192 consecutive frames. Add up the frames and they'll spell out the message—like some elaborate halftime display at a football game.

Right, that's AES/EBU. Now for some fun with nomenclature. The AES/EBU interface was adopted by the Electronic Industries Association of Japan (EIAJ), yet another august body that makes up rules for this sort of thing. And when they adopted it, they gave it a new name: **CP-340 Type I**. There's also an EIAJ CP-340 **Type II**, which is a consumer interface, but we'll get to that in a moment. Right now we must deal with still another august body, the International Electrotechnical Commission, or IEC. (No, I'm not making these up.) Not wanting to feel left out, no doubt, the IEC have also generated a standards document, patterned closely after the EIAJ document. They've given their interface standard the catchy name **IEC 958**. It too specifies a professional and a consumer version of the interface.

A Plug for Consumerism

HAVING SUFFERED through the above, you already know two of the leading consumer interfaces: EIAJ CP-340 Type II and IEC 958/consumer version. Datawise, they all look just like the subframe of AES/EBU shown in figure one. They've all got 24 bits for audio, sandwiched between two areas of four "housekeeping" bits each. They differ in the connectors they use: ordinary, lowbrow, unbalanced RCA jacks and/or miniplugs.

But there is a third consumer interface you should know about. It's called **SPDIF**, which stands for the Sony/Philips Digital Interface Format. It is not an interface *standard*, per se. No august international body parented it. Two manufacturers did: Sony and Philips. So it's a proprietary interface, but SPDIF pops up on a lot of important gear.

In their data formats, CP-340 Type II and IEC 958/consumer are identical to their professional counterparts. Which means

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they're all quite similar to the AES/EBU format outlined above. Again: a four-bit preamble, 24 bits for audio and four end bits. SPDIF has very much the same data format. It only differs in the way the channel status and user bits get implemented.

WHAT CAN YOU PLUG INTO WHAT?

AT LAST we can start to answer that question. Let's begin with one of the worst-case scenarios. Unfortunately, it's also one of the most common ones: connecting an AES/EBU-equipped piece of pro gear (like a digital signal processor or mixer) to a SPDIF-equipped DAT machine. The good news is that this *does* work. The bad news is that it only works sometimes. Basically, you're up against two problems, one of which is electrical compatibility. The only way to make the connection we're talking about here is to use a custom cable with an XLR jack on one end and an RCA jack or other unbalanced connector on the other. (The same kind of cable you'd use to plug a microphone into an unbalanced input, for example.) And once you consummate that kind of mixed marriage, no one can vouch for the electrical offspring. The data may be willing, but the signal weak. Not that you'll blow anything up. You'll just get garbled data. You've ventured outside of the AES/EBU spec *and* outside SPDIF. You're in the phantom zone. Of course, your audio data *may* just luck out and come through healthy.

But that still leaves one other problem. As we said, the channel status and user bits can be employed differently in SPDIF than they are in other formats, which can confuse the receiving machine. But then again . . . maybe not. Remember that in all the data formats we've discussed so far, the audio is always in the same place—those 24 bits in the middle. So there are times when discrepancies in the non-audio portion of the data stream will be irrelevant and the audio will get through just fine.

Elsewhere, things are a little more straightforward. You should find a high degree of compatibility as long as you're connecting any two of the above-mentioned pro interfaces. The same is true when all connections are in the consumer domain. There are two lessons to be drawn from all this. One: Digital interfacing is still very much a trial-and-error activity; the only way to know if a particular hook-up will work is to try it out. Two: Start asking tough questions when purchasing digital gear. Find out exactly what kind of digital interface is on the item you're considering. It may not always be easy to find out. But it's worth it.

WHAT'S ALL THIS DAT COPYCODE BUSINESS, THEN?

THE SERIAL Copy Management System (SCMS) is a wonderful thing. It has saved DAT from being Joan of Arc'd by the record industry. It has made DAT safe for America. (Or America safe for DAT; I'm not sure which.) How will it affect musicians and home recordists who are doing digital interfacing? If they're using pro interfaces, SCMS will not affect them at all. It will only be implemented in consumer DATs.

And even there, it shouldn't do any damage. As you now know, consumer audio interfaces include at least eight bits that can be used for non-audio data. The copy code will go somewhere among these bits, rather than messing with the audio in any way. New SCMS-equipped, consumer DAT machines will be able to distinguish among three different categories of incoming audio data. If you record from a copyright-protected source (like an album on CD), the resulting

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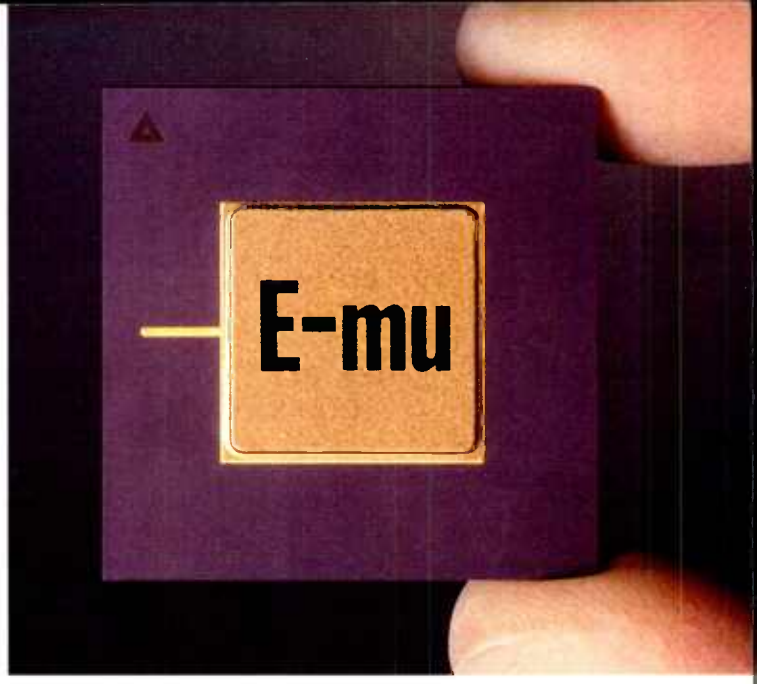

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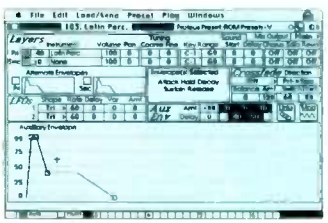

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Now, if you use the same DAT machine to make a digital recording of your own music—i.e., non-copyright-encoded stuff coming out of your digital music-making gear—it receives a classification of 0,0. (Sheesh, everyone's a critic.) This code will *not* inhibit serial digital copying; you can make copies of copies of copies till you drop dead. But what if you're mixing down from analog? That is, what if you're coming in the DAT machine's analog inputs? Then the material receives a 1,1 identification code. This means you can make one digital copy of your DAT master. But this second-generation copy then gets re-classified as 1,0 and you can't make any more copies from it.

ARE THERE OTHER DIGITAL FORMATS! ARE YOU KIDDING? Zillions of 'em. MADI (Multi-channel Audio Digital Interface) is an interesting one. Basically, it's a multi-channel version of AES/EBU (which is only stereo). Then there are the proprietary formats like those used by Akai, Mitsubishi and Yamaha. The latter is what comes out of the Digital Cascade jack on Yamaha's DMP7 digital mixer. Can these formats be plugged into any of the semi-standard interfaces discussed above? Only if you have an appropriate format converter, such as Yamaha's FC1, that turns the proprietary Yamaha format into AES/EBU, SPDIF and a third format called **SDIF-2**. But this leads us to one final question . . .

CAN YOU REALLY MAKE A CD MASTER ON A DAT MACHINE! YES. THE WORLD-STANDARD digital tape machine for preparing CD masters is the Sony PCM 1630. And it uses the above-mentioned SDIF-2 format. The letters stand for Sony Digital Interface Format—no Philips, you'll note. The numeral indicates that this is the second version of the format.

It is a relatively simple business to get the digital output from a DAT machine into the 1630's SDIF-2 format. An optional card for the 1630 allows direct input from AES/EBU or SPDIF coming from a DAT or any other source. And it's very common for CD mastering facilities to have a DAT machine on hand and hooked up to their 1630, enabling them to make a digital transfer from DAT.

Format conversions like these will not harm the audio signal. But sample rate conversion will. 44.1 kHz is the standard sample rate for CD. So if you're specifically interested in DAT as a means of making CD-ready masters, then be certain to buy one that can record at 44.1. Otherwise, you'll have to go through a degrading sample rate conversion when your music gets transferred over to the 1630. Most DATs let you choose between 44.1 and 48 kHz, among other frequencies. So make sure you're set to 44.1.

THE BALL LANDS IN JAPAN'S COURT IF YOU THINK the technical side of this digital interface stuff is complex, you should take a look at the business side. Now that MIDI has more or less saturated the market and is no longer selling M.I. gear in the phenomenal numbers it used to, a new interface has to look pretty damned fetching to high-tech M.I. manufacturers. But DAT does add a lot of validity to the idea of the all-digital home studio—by supplying a final, affordable digital link in the [*cont'd on page 129*]

BEST UNSIGNED BAND

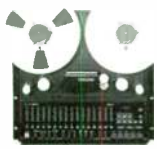
CONTEST

Calling all bands! MUSICIAN Magazine, in cooperation with Warner Bros. Records, invites all unsigned artists to submit their best on cassette to our 1989 Best Unsigned Band contest.

JUDGES All entries will be reviewed by the editors and publishers of MUSICIAN Magazine. Semi-finalists will then be submitted to this year's panel of all-star judges, featuring LYLE LOVETT, BRANFORD MARSALIS, LOU REED, VERNON REID, and ROBBIE ROBERTSON.

PRIZES Finalists will appear on the MUSICIAN-Warners compilation CD, BEST OF THE BUBs, to be produced in early 1990 and delivered to thousands of music industry professionals. A home recording studio featuring JBL, TASCAM and SHURE products will be awarded as grand prize for the one song that our judges agree to be the cut above the rest.

RULES All entries must be received by December 15th, 1989. All music must be original. One cassette per artist/band. Maximum 2 songs per cassette. Name, age and address of each band member, photo of band/artist and a $10.00 processing fee must accompany each cassette and entry form (or facsimile). If chosen, artists are responsible for final mix to appear on CD. Artists cannot be signed to a label. Tapes become property of MUSICIAN Magazine and will not be returned. Artists retain rights to their music. All decisions are final. Employees of Billboard Publications, Inc., Warner Bros. Records and participating sponsors are not eligible. Void where prohibited.



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Out of *Control*

Janet Jackson's No Five-Hit Wonder

Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814
(A&M)

YOU CAN'T call them underdogs, but Janet Jackson and company have a few things to prove on *Rhythm Nation*. After all, who needs a superstar from three years ago when you've got Bobby Brown? And haven't producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis been eclipsed by Teddy Riley, not to mention L.A. and Babyface? Heck, A&M Records itself has plenty at stake. The label hasn't enjoyed a certified chartburner since, well, Jackson's 1986 breakthrough *Control*.

In light of the presumably intense pressure to hit a home run, you can forget about spontaneity or the thrill of discovery, i.e., the kind of goosebumps caused by the first few hearings of "What Have You Done for Me Lately?" Instead of innocence or surprise, *Rhythm Nation* offers more monster beats, enough hot tunes to overshadow the weak ones and Jackson's authoritative presence. It's a successful sequel, with all the strengths and limitations that implies.

In any case, get set for another string of high-class hits. The first single, "Miss You Much," draws its wicked oomph from a herky-jerky tension reminiscent of Prince's "Kiss," accenting the teasing sass in Jackson's voice when she purrs, "I'm not the kind of girl/Who likes to be alone." With its hyper pulse and stripped-down arrangement, the scorching "All Right" emphasizes the taut efficiency of Jam and Lewis' sound; even the background static pumps up the excitement. In a poppier vein, the lovely "Escapade" sports a textural richness that recalls the Purple One's sweeter moments.

What Jackson doesn't have is a counterpart to

CONTENTS

Illustration: Margaret Kasahara

Prince's audacious persona. In fact, she's retreated from the defiant stance that gave her last opus a bracing edge. Instead of insisting on control and pondering nasty things, Jackson has grown warmer and more accessible—too accessible. Gorgeous or not, "Lonely" and "Come Back to Me" are mild romantic goo. An obvious follow-up to "Let's Wait Awhile," the sultry "Someday Is Tonight" closes the show with an invitation that's more kind than alluring, thanks to serious heavy breathing by the leading lady.

Grooving in the love mode has prompted Jackson to develop her social conscience, with mostly convincing results. Dance-floor thrillers like the title track and "State of the World" survey the ever-worsening plight of the underclass, issuing a call for unity and understanding. In the tradition of Kool Moe Dee's recent work, "The Knowledge" promotes education as a weapon against prejudice and ignorance; the sketchy tune might have turned out better as a straight rap. Unfortunately, Jackson and crew undercut the message with fake news reports and schlocky samples of crying kids, sensationalizing genuine concerns. And though it's nobody's fault, Janet's reedy tone sometimes suggests a younger (ugh) Diana Ross: However well-intentioned, the gentle "Living in a World (We Didn't Make)" sparks unpleasant memories of the repulsive "Reach Out and Touch (Somebody's Hand)."

So Janet Jackson turns out to be a more conventional artiste than we might have hoped. (Guess Michael hogged the family quirks for himself.) Big deal. After all the slammin' production touches, after all the errors of taste, JJ still stands triumphant as her own woman, firmly in command of her *Rhythm Nation*. She's no one-hit wonder anymore.—Jon Young

The Rolling Stones

Steel Wheels
(CBS)

STEEL WHEELS is being hailed as a dazzling return to form, and while it's a respectable enough effort (it seems downright noble in light of the Who's shameful resurrection of *Tommy*), all you adoring Stonesheads have to face the fact that this is no *Exile on Main Street*. Though the boys' chops are in order, they haven't jumped on any of the musical bandwagons currently passing through town, and Keith's trademark guitar riffs still sound great, the album lacks a unifying idea or point of view, as well as any sense of urgency or necessity. It's simply a collection of new songs—a requirement in order for the Stones to hit the concert trail again with any dignity—and while several of the numbers in the jumbled grab bag are better than average, a few are downright awful.

Oddly, it's on the ballads and gentler tunes that this record really shines. The tone of weary wisdom and regret that colors the slower songs has an authenticity that makes the "we're gonna rock this joint!" numbers seem desperate by comparison (the Stones must come to grips with the fact that they're no longer dangerous). "Blinded by Love," reminiscent of "Back Street Girl," features the most imaginative vocal on the record. Mocking the inflections and phrasing of country singing as he exploits them, Mick turns in a wonderfully mannered performance that's at once moving and amusing.

Keith cops second prize with his touchingly ragged rendition of "Slipping Away," a blown-out ballad that would segue neatly with "Wild Horses." "Terrifying" has a similarly appealing vulnerability, as does "Almost Hear You Sigh," a heartbroken shuffle built on the same groove that drove "Beast of Burden."

It's when the Stones kick out the jams that one winces and wants to look away. The uptempo barn burners—"Sad Sad Sad," "Hold on to Your Hat," "Rock and a Hard Place"—are utterly routine and feel as if they're trying too hard. Then there's "Continental Drift," an "experimental number" that sounds like a bad outtake from *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. A sort of whirling dervish rhythm that accelerates as the song progresses, "Continental Drift" has inane lyrics (they basically boil down to "love comes at the speed of light") and no hook or groove whatever. It's one of the worst things the band's ever committed to wax. But then, the Stones' willingness to experiment is what's enabled them to chart out new musical territory for the past 26 years, so let's not judge them too harshly for this lapse in taste.

While *Steel Wheels* suggests that their days as innovators may be behind them, the Stones have too much pride to trade on nostalgia; they still take rock 'n' roll seriously, so they may surprise us yet. In the meantime, *Steel Wheels* is a serviceable way to launch their fall tour.—Kristine McKenna

Various Artists

For Taylor Storer
(TS Records)

TAYLOR STORER was 29 when he died in 1985 after a three-year battle with cancer. A passionate, tireless and selfless promoter of jazz and New Music, his influence was felt well beyond the shores of Manhattan. This limited-edition LP, a tribute coordinated anonymously by friends and peers, is part of his legacy. It's also a fundraising project for New Music Distribution Service (NMDS), the eclectic nonprofit outlet for alternative music that owes much of its early success to Storer's idealism and organizational skills.

Storer started working at NMDS while still an undergraduate at Columbia University, and within a short time found himself running the place. Philip Glass, Dewey Redman, Carla Bley and Steve Reich are just four of the artists whose paths crossed Storer's during the decade he spent in New York, and each of this LP's previously unreleased "live" performances makes it a collector's item of historical interest to fans of contemporary instrumental music.

Carla Bley, the brilliant composer/arranger/bandleader who co-founded NMDS in 1972, wrote "Ups and Downs" for Storer during his illness. While not as idiosyncratic as some of her compositions can be, this blues, recorded in 1984 by North German Radio, features strong solos by saxophonists Steve Slagle, Tony Dagradi and bassist Steve Swallow. Redman, one of Storer's favorite

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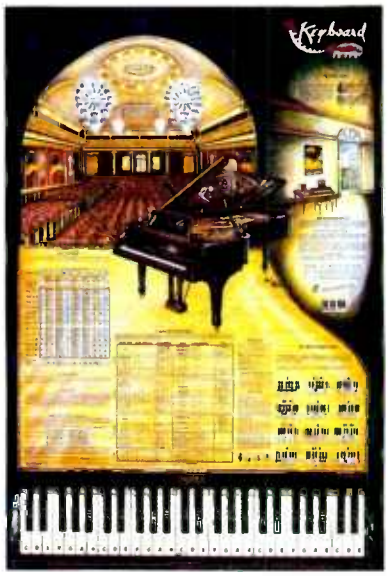

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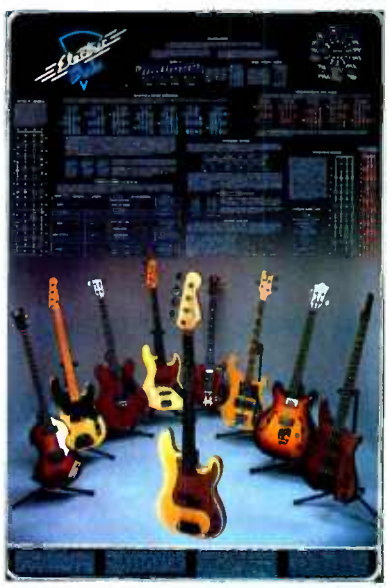

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artists, also contributed a blues, "QOW," as well as a 16-minute version of Charlie Parker's "Dewey Square." Storer helped record both performances, which feature the intriguing instrumentation of saxophone, drums (Ed Blackwell) and piano (Fred Simmons), while working as a stage manager at the Public Theater in 1979.

Glass' version of "Solo Movement from *Dance*," which captures the composer playing Carnegie Hall's mammoth organ at a benefit concert for WKCR Storer co-produced in 1979, is much more vibrant than the one on *Dance Numbers 1-5* released by Columbia in 1988. The interpretation of Reich's intricate, sublime "Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ," recorded at the same concert with an ensemble featuring percussionists David van Tieghem and Glen Velez and vocalist Jay Clayton, is impeccable. Taken as a whole, these performances reflect the integrity and resonance Taylor Storer exhibited in his too-brief career. (Available on LP from NMDS, 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012)—Mitchell Feldman

Lenny Kravitz

Let Love Rule
(Virgin)

LET LOVE RULE is an audacious, ambitious debut album that demands attention. Lenny Kravitz paints his music with broad strokes, coming up with dense, precise songs that use their sources as starting points for wild, original journeys.

Kravitz sounds determined if nothing else. He puts across all 13 tracks on this sprawling, 56-minute opus as if nothing else in the world concerns him at that moment but the song, building an internal logic so compelling that when he does something droll (like rhyming "reach" with "teached," in "I Build This Garden for Us"), it adds to our perception that Kravitz's world has its own rules worth following.

His repetitive method is powerful but ultimately insular. Kravitz plays nearly all

the instruments, and the control that comes from such an approach lets Kravitz look inside too much for his own good. Some of the tracks go on too long, solos and riffs offered up more for Kravitz's pleasure than that of his listeners. This isn't always the case: When he finally loosens up and looks outside himself toward the end of the album on "Blues for Sister Someone," a straightforward depiction of a prostitute, it's a welcome shock.

What will undoubtedly entice most listeners to *Let Love Rule* is not Kravitz's detached studio wizardry, but his riveting voice. It sounds like Kravitz learned to sing from listening to John Lennon's *Plastic Ono Band* (not accidentally the ex-Beatle's most inward-obsessed work), and also picked up that album's insistence on truthful delivery over anything else. Kravitz spends much of the record singing at or just above the top of his range, and the tension he revels in way up there lends every track an extra kick. *Let Love Rule* calls on sources as diverse as Curtis Mayfield and Elvis Costello, but the one voice that it makes inescapable belongs to Kravitz.—**Jimmy Guterman**

Max Q.

Max Q.
(Atlantic)

THIS DECEPTIVELY modest, ostensibly techno-rock dance album isn't being promoted as INXS frontman (and international sex symbol) Michael Hutchence's solo bow, but that's kinda what it is. A world-beat-styled collaboration between Hutchence, fellow Aussie Ollie Olsen and 19 others, the LP manages to sound nothing like INXS, while tossing the very same musical elements into its melting pop—sinewy R&B funk grooves shot through with metalloid rock guitars. Where INXS aims for the sure-fire appeal of MTV-styled imagery, Max Q. opts for the groove thang and the cool anonymity of club-floor disco.

"Sometimes, you gotta take a chance on

yourself," chants Hutchence, but he consciously plays things low-key here, immersing his pop-idol persona in the thick, tribal mix. Like Ric Ocasek taking a busman's holiday with Suicide, and not unlike Sting's yuppie jazz away from the Police, INXS' most visible member places a melodic stamp on each of these minimal rhythm tracks, which build to almost classical climaxes in several cases. The Euro and Afro traditions collide, combine and cross-fertilize throughout the record's 11 cuts, with samplers and synthesizers sharing aural space alongside Tibetan thighbone trumpet and "screams."

The first song, "Sometimes," incorporates an African pop framework reminiscent of Byrne and Eno's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* experiment. Snippets of radio broadcasts and musical samples create a collage of sound on the first single, the blatantly apocalyptic "Way of the World," which juxtaposes lines like "Whether it's God or the bomb/It's just the same/It's only fear under another name" over a whip-crackling syndrumbeat. Pretty heavy sentiments to contemplate while shaking yer booty, no?

If the disc starts out as forbiddingly cold as the Max Q. moniker, it eventually opens up, thanks to the *Psychedelic Shack* Tempts soul of "Everything," the "Shaft"-like wah-wah guitars on "Concrete" and the old-fashioned gospel voices which curl through "Zero-2-0" like blue smoke rings. By the end, widescreen epics like "Monday Night by Satellite" and "Tight" lead us through the big bang of technology to the gentle whimperings of a plucked acoustic guitar, vamping to fade-out.

INXS may well be the poor man's Rolling Stones, but Michael Hutchence has already made a better "solo" record than Mick Jagger . . . and it doesn't even sound like he was trying.—Roy Trakin

Cris Williamson Teresa Trull

Country Blessed
(Second Wave)

IF YOU'RE of the opinion that a girl's best friends are her mother and her horse then this is the album for you. A country-rock song cycle celebrating the joys of nature, monogamy and the feminine gender, *Country Blessed* is a record by, for and about capable women who know how to lasso steers and harvest wheat. To call this music feminist would be inaccurate; rather, these songs take the point of view of women

who've walked away from the gender battles of the cities and carved out their own country paradise. They've got no bone to pick with anybody because they're too busy baling hay.

The vocals and writing credits are evenly split between Trull and Williamson, but these women share a strikingly similar stylistic approach. Mixing equal parts *Joy of Cooking*, John Denver and Laura Nyro,

Country Blessed ambles from a homage to mother love to memories of taking refuge as a misunderstood child in an idyllic shady glen, tributes to Calamity Jane and a particularly noble and well-loved horse named Fertanga. Slickly produced by Trull, the music's glossy veneer is at odds with a message that's earthy, sweet and touchingly innocent. This is very much a young girls' record, dreaming as it does of perfect love and beautiful ponies galloping across an unfenced, unpolluted range. (4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608)—Kristine McKenna

Toad the Wet Sprocket

Bread & Circus
(Columbia)

The Questionnaires

Window to the World
(EMI)

FROM SANTA BARBARA and Nashville respectively, Toad the Wet Sprocket and the Questionnaires are new quartets who rock the old-fashioned way—with intense drums and guitars, pretty much, and tunes and harmonies that don't sag. Both groups are young, promising and touchy. "I'm not deaf but I/Can't hear everything," Toad's singer and lyricist Glen Phillips warns

as he and his mates barrel toward a chorus that suddenly starts to float in their song "Unquiet." The Questionnaires' leader Tom Littlefield similarly declares at one point that "I don't explain my state of mind" as he tears through the love song "Here Comes Trouble's Friend."

Both bands are clearer with textures than words. It's part of Toad's game plan: Although never so abstract that you wonder if their fuzziness is a crutch, the songs on *Bread & Circus* leave blanks and favor indirection. This is true when they tackle tough situations, like the bad lovers' fight that lurks behind "When We Recovered" and the pathetic violence that prompts "One Little Girl." It's also Toad's way when Phillips wants to tell his girlfriend that she isn't quite as deep as she thinks she is, yet worries how his frankness may affect her—and him—on "Always Changing Probably." But this reticence fades because of Toad's music, a rich autumnal flow of steely strumming and rhythmic momentum that Phillips stamps with full-throated urgency. Toad takes their music where they want it to go, landing in places that are both new and timeless.

The Questionnaires are more straightforward but also more diverse. Toad's music comes from the suburbs of southern California, where everything looks the same but in fact houses real differences. The Questionnaires' tunes are southern as in Tennessee; the band believes that a stomping, shook-up version of the Flamin' Groovies' "Teenage Head," a finely detailed ballad like "Laugh"

and the traveling harmonies of the compassionate title song are all part of the same story. Littlefield's voice, often too buried in the mix here, doesn't shrink from fun or seriousness—it's the tenor of an Aerosmith fan who likes Tom Petty's songs and Brian Wilson's blends. Littlefield thinks and feels in hooks, he's got his band playing the same way, and that's what Pat Moran has emphasized in his production of *Window to the World*. You'll hear more from the Questionnaires and Toad the Wet Sprocket. They're naturals.—James Hunter

David Bowie

Sound + Vision
(Rykodisc)

REVIEWS OF BOXED SETS like this one get redundant after a while: No one's going to argue the point that the artist involved merits special treatment, and if there's any quibbling, you can bet it's over the inclusion/exclusion of specific tracks. So let's get real and discuss this album for what it is: a shit-hot marketing maneuver that, if you'll excuse the biz speak, should shift Bowie units well through 1991. These three CDs and one CDV are a prelude to 1990's Grand Year of the Bowie Catalog Unveiling, in which small-but-smart Ryko will methodically release every one of Bowie's past RCA albums in all three audio configurations—most bolstered by enough Bowie B-sides and rarities to wear down the wallets of even those collectors hip enough to have bought the original RCA CDs before they vanished from the marketplace four years ago. And because Ryko is issuing this sampler first, and has yet to announce specifically what tracks will be added to the future Bowie reissues, any fan worth his weight in powder will snap it up in case the oddities within—including (on the CD version) eight previously unreleased tracks, four others available only on hard-to-find 45s, and a "1989 remix" of "Helden," the German version of "Heroes"—aren't included later.

Still, as a piece of product this really can't be beat. Kurt Loder's liner notes, found in a 72-page pic-packed booklet, are informative enough; overall art direction reeks of "deluxe" treatment; the bonus inclusion of a CDV with the CD set is not only forward-looking, it happens to contain Bowie's best-ever video, "Ashes to Ashes"; and track info, where these things usually try hard but blow it, is relatively complete.

As for the music—which along with marketing admittedly plays some sort of role here—consider *Sound + Vision* a smartly-produced Bowie refresher course. You'll spot the usual highs and lows: The tracks with Mick Ronson sound better than ever; the *David Live* cuts remain negligible, though the live band on *Stage* cracks royally; and while *Station to Station*-era Bowie still

sounds timeless, his hijinks with Brian Eno sound disappointingly weak—notably on the David Byrned-out *Lodger*. You'll also notice that Bowie's *sound*, however varied it might be, has typically influenced music a significant time later. That's his gift, and now Rykodisc wants to make it yours.

For the extra tracks, for that groovy 45 version of "Rebel Rebel," for the obvious care that went into this package, for Rykodisc's innate marketing savvy and, most of all, for your shopping pleasure, have a Thin White holiday season and drive home safely, won't you?—**Dave DiMartino**

THOMAS

[*cont'd from page 26*] I *presume* to be unself-conscious—like Big Jack Johnson (*The Oil Man* on Earwig), the Hollywood All Stars (*Hard Hitting Blues from Memphis* on High Water), the Holmes Brothers (*In the Spirit*, coming out this fall on Rounder). For each of these musicians and singers it sounds to me as if the music is fresh and new; their blues have a force and a *necessity*, almost as if the music is being invented as it is being played. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not, but it's as if you're hearing it *for the very first time*. It's not just true of downhome bluesmen either. That's the way a far more sophisticated singer like Johnny Adams sounded to me, too, on his two most recent albums for Rounder (last year's *A Room with a View of the Blues* and a forthcoming, and loving, tribute to Percy Mayfield); each has a compelling logic of its own, that same sense of inner necessity. With Chris Thomas the logic, necessity *and* energy all virtually explode out of the speakers; you feel for once that he isn't choosing the music, the music is choosing him.

"I want to say this without sounding like Trent D'Arby," says Chris, sounding very much like D'Arby but like himself at the same time. "What I'd like to do is to inspire, to influence some other young black guys to say, 'Hey, man'—I don't mean so much by selling a million records or getting all the girls, I want to move them *musically*—make them say, 'Hey, man, I want to be able to play like that.' And have them go and reach way back, buy my record and then say, 'Hey, this guy everybody says is so great—he ain't so great because this other guy was doing it before him, Magic Sam or Son House or someone like that.' I'd like them to have the same reaction that I had with Hendrix. Now that would be great."

SHORT TAKES

SO MUCH MUSIC, SO LITTLE TIME

ROCK

By J.D. Considine

Nanci Griffith

Storms (MCA)

IF RECORDING with Glyn Johns hasn't quite made a rocker of Griffith, at least it forces her off the fence, allowing her to stand confidently in the green fields of pop. These songs are probably a little too smart for the Top 40, but as the well-sketched details of "Drive-In Movies and Dashboard Lights" or the deftly polemical "It's a Hard Life Wherever You Go" demonstrate, her gift for language is as dazzling as ever. And Griffith's sense of melody is delightfully accessible, from the achingly familiar refrain of "You Made This Love a Teardrop" to the understated drive of "I Don't Wanna Talk About Love."

Cheb Khaled/Safy Boutella

Kutche (Capitol/Intuition)

WITH ITS DRONING synths and wailing, muezzin-style singing, an awful lot of rai ends up a little *too* exotic for most listeners. Not this album, however, for even as Khaled and Boutella maintain the local color with oud, bendir and tar, the Linn-driven rhythm tracks need no translation at all. Nor do many of the melodic touches. From the lilting chorus of "Chebba" to the slick insistence of "La Camel," this ends up seeming no more obtuse than the average house record—and a whole lot more melodic.

Full Force

Smoove (Columbia)

THOUGH THE PRODUCTION is the usual well-crafted swirl of hip-hop and funk, it's the vocal work that stands out, particularly the falsetto-lead singing celebrated in the "4-U" medley. Which begs the question: Why is such a cutting-edge act more at home with close-harmony soul than rap? (Or if not, why do they have such lousy taste in rappers?)

Jeff Beck

Jeff Beck's Guitar Shop (Epic)

BETWEEN THE TECH-TALK wit of the title tune and the how'd-he-do-that flash exhibited elsewhere, this is a *serious* guitar-player session—so much so that average rock fans are apt to be bewildered, if not actually put off. But so what? Not only is this Beck's best instrumental album since *Wired*, it's as focused and tuneful as anything he's done. What's more, the best playing here boasts the sort of bite few fusion albums ever manage.

Bankstatement

Bankstatement (Atlantic)

FOR YEARS Tony Banks was the only member of Genesis without solo success on the side, but that may be changing with *Bankstatement*. It isn't just that he's edged away from the orchestral extravagance of his film scores (though it helps); what makes this so bankable is his ability to match mood with melody. "Queen of Darkness" enchants with an irresistible dread, while "Raincloud" beguiles with an airy, pastoral hook worthy of Steve Winwood.

Paul Shaffer

Coast to Coast (Capitol)

THIS MUST HAVE looked great on paper: Paul Shaffer "tours" America by pop style, cutting a soul tune in Memphis, a surf showdown in L.A. and so on. Too bad he got lost on the way. Some tunes, like the doo-wop-meets-hip-hop "When the Radio Is On," collapse under their conceptual weight, while others merely demonstrate that Shaffer sings about as well as David Letterman. Somebody call the AAA.

Chaka Khan

The Remix Project (Warner Bros.)

ANY WORRY that this is simply a plot to resell old singles ought to be dispelled with a single spin, for the remixers assembled here have completely rethought the grooves, from Frankie Knuckles' retro-house version of "Ain't Nobody" to Hank Shocklee and Eric Sadler's slamming rewrite of "Slow Dancin'." Khan, meanwhile, burns brighter than ever, demonstrating that sometimes, it really is the singer and not the song.

Camper Van Beethoven

Key Lime Pie (Virgin)

AS THE MOST LIKABLE tune on this album is a not unsympathetic reflection on the life and hard times of Jack Ruby, it's a fair guess this album will get under your skin in a hurry. Maybe it's supposed to; why else would it use attitude and dissonance as hooks, instead of rhythm and melody? Or is this just more of the band's legendary inscrutability?

Sly & Robbie

Silent Assassin (Island)

WITH PRODUCER KRS-One and his Boogie Down Productions crew rapping on every track, it might seem as if Sly & Robbie have taken a back seat on their own album. But these two are used to driving from back there. Besides, who other than KRS-One is so adamant about refusing to recognize the borders between hip-hop and reggae? No wonder Sly & Robbie's grooves never sounded so deep.

Jason Donovan

Ten Good Reasons (Atlantic)

FOR THOSE who found Rick Astley too manly.

The Sugarcubes

Here Today, Tomorrow Next Week! (Elektra)

BECAUSE ICELAND'S finest shriek and warble through these tunes with such confidence and aplomb, after a while their weirdness seems almost comforting. Nothing here is as magical as "Birthday," and you may sometimes wish that the relentless Einar would just shut up (I sure did). But *Here Today* shows that the Sugarcubes are no flash-in-the-pan; now all the band needs to do is prove it's not fool's gold.

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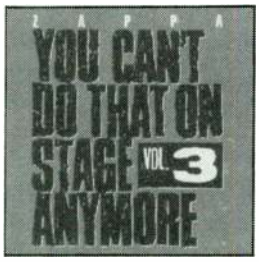

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JAZZ

By Peter Watrous

Various Artists

Exquisite Corpses from the Bunker (NMDS)

THE EXQUISITE CORPSES is a game dreamed up by the surrealists, the bunker is A. Mica bunker, a place on the Lower East Side of NYC once devoted to free improvisation and now closed. The record was made by 22 people who played there off and on, and it's pure noise joy. Here's how the record was made: A musician came in and put down a track, all improvised, then another player would come in and only hear part of the track as a cue and improvise some more. So the record was put together by chance, and it sounds good, with saxophones and guitars and drums and bassoons and electronic instruments and other stuff screeching and zooming and howling and playing melodies and more. Perhaps it's the last gasp of the improvised scene, perhaps not, but the fact that the project is structured suggests that people are tired of free improvisation, huh?

B.B. King

Lucille Had a Baby (Ace)

TRUTHFULLY, I can't get enough of this stuff. In the late '50s and early '60s, King's formula—part big-band swing mixed with T-Bone Walker, Django Reinhardt and Oscar Moore, plus a touch of the Delta—had coalesced, and he made brilliant side after brilliant side. Often recorded in California, with the great Maxwell Davis big band, the music swings deep and hard with King's solos metallic, harsh, yet rhythmically as slick as a greased government official. Other sides have a Memphis-based band, with George Coleman taking a solo; the sound quality is incredible, and though this doesn't have a picture of B.B. in shorts, like the two previous volumes of the series, it does have him holding one radically outer-space guitar. (Down Home Records, 10341 San Pablo, El Cerrito, CA 94530)

Thelonious Monk

Genius of Modern Music Volumes One and Two (Blue Note)

Milt Jackson

Milt Jackson (Blue Note)

THESE THREE CDS capture all the music Monk recorded for Blue Note. Like the Fats Navarro and Bud Powell Blue Note reissues, these tracks help define the modern age, and in their fragmentation predict '60s and '70s expressionism, though Monk probably wouldn't have agreed with free improvisation. It's possible to hear the shock these sides produced; Monk's compositions are utterly unsong-like, symmetrical but without a chance of being sung. His soloing, full of trills, empty spaces, exclamation points, abrupt hey-what-am-I-doing-here's and blues quotes, defied convention at a time when there was convention, a right and a wrong way of doing things. From the sloppy and tentative "Humph" to the jawdrop perfection of the performances on "Criss Cross" and "Straight, No Chaser," from the logical solos of Lucky Thompson and trumpeter Idrees Sulieman to the continually extraordinary solos of Milt Jackson, the music drips information.

Freddie Redd

The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Freddie Redd (Mosaic)

THREE ALBUMS of material here, one the fine hard-bop *The Connection*, which was the music for Jack Gelber's famous, long-running off-Broadway show, featuring the bitter and yet (weirdly) happy Jackie McLean. Long considered one of the better '50s Blue Notes, it was topped by the next session—the lesser known *Shades of Redd*, which featured not only Jackie Mc but also Tina Brooks on tenor. It's where Redd's arrangements, full of stops and starts, rhythm juxtapositions and long winding melodies all show up. The third date, more ambitious, and, since the band didn't really rehearse, sloppy and unconvincing, was never released, and soured Redd's relationship with Alfred Lion, Blue Note's owner. That's too bad, because since then he's only recorded twice, and two of the sessions are unreleased. A major minor figure, if only for his compositions and arranging. (35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06904)

El Gran Combo

Amame (Combo)

WE OFTEN FORGET, in a rush to canonize the next great dance band, whether it be from Haiti or Guadeloupe or Kenya, that New York's own salsa is still killing. And El Gran Combo are the acknowledged masters of classic salsa, which means that pungent and beautiful melodies, and chanted call and response by the chorus and lead singers, float gracefully over horns sprouting bouquets of charged emotion. The rhythm section, as graceful as a Koufax curveball and as effective, understands the interaction of dance and art, the connection that jazz once had and now keeps in the back of its mind.

Frank Morgan

Reflections (Contemporary)

THE LIVING are never as valuable as the dead, and my guess is that sessions like this are postmortem sessions, albums discovered as masterpieces after everyone on it—Morgan, Joe Henderson, Bobby Hutcherson, Mulgrew Miller, Ron Carter and Al Foster—is safely historical; the present is seldom as clear-cut as the past. But there's a lot here to think about: Morgan is becoming a stranger, more eccentric saxophonist every time out, alternating precise be-bop lines with splashed flurries that trail off into a reverie. Of all the bebop saxophonists, he's the one most into the profundity of pleasantness; he's not a bad-ass or a hard guy. The music is all about some dream he's had of an ideal world. Compared to the methodical, stalking style of Henderson, it shows how wildly different jazz expression can be within a limited, even clichéd—to those who don't get it—context. Never forget that Morgan is simply one of the best ballad players around; anybody doubting that should listen to "Reflections," where each statement of the melody sounds like a lover's sigh.

Atlaskopko

Atlaskopko (NMDS)

WE GO BACK to the early '80s, days of V-Effect, James Chance and more; grinding, late-night urban jazz with beat/punk overtones, electric, odd rhythms, part rock, dirty, maybe the best type of fusion around. But wait! This stuff's *Swiss!!!* And it was recorded last year. But it works, somehow still sounds fresh, driven by a notion of expressionism, as if getting everything off your chest, with rhythm, is somehow therapeutic to an audience, not just the musicians involved. (500 Broadway, New York, NY 10019)

INDIE

Swell Maps

Collision Time Revisited (Restless/Mute)

DEPENDING ON YOUR TASTE, this 27-track, 75-minute compilation CD will be an unendurable noisefest, a bracing slug of avant-punk-rock or maybe even a trip down memory lane: The British Swell Maps broke up almost 10 years ago. *Collision Time Revisited* ricochets from cut to cut with an occasionally strophic song to keep the listener off-balance. They were probably as influential as they were influenced.—*Scott Isler*

The Ordinaires

One (Bar/None)

A NINE-PERSON acoustelectric outfit with strings, reeds and a college education. Their mood shifts are drastic; it's the only way they know to tell the whole story. But their integration

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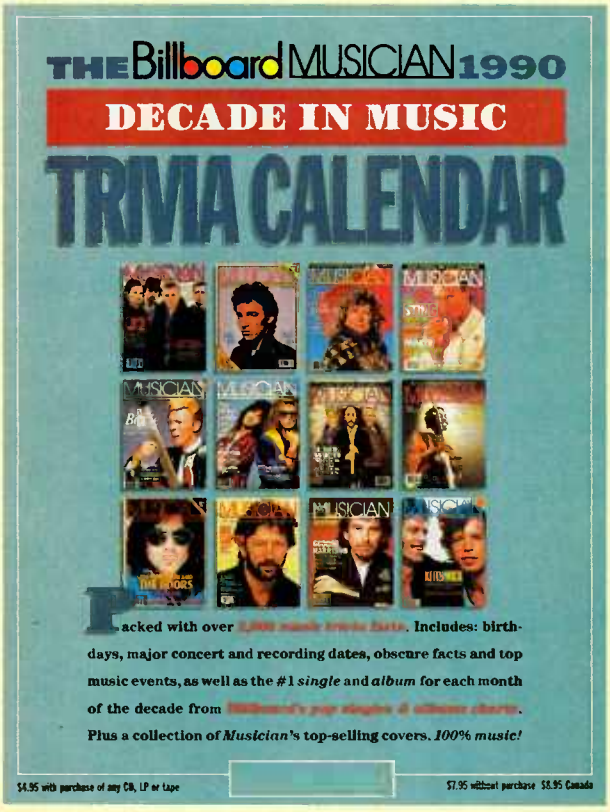

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techniques are shrewd: Marches, études and Led Zep are more than convenient references, they're partners. Though once dismissed as inept, the band carries off its rigorous charts with precision and aplomb. Not to mention a chuckle or three.

—Jim Macnie

EPMD

Unfinished Business (Fresh)

THE FIRST RECORD by these Strong Island rappers boasted maximum playosity. It took a long, long time to tire of their accents, vocal tradeoffs, and what, me worry? attitude. On number two, they get mired a bit in the pump-it-up department, but the sample sewing by DJ Scratch isn't to blame, it's just that EPMD take too long talking the shit. (The shit being the gurlies and the competition.) While they deal in rap clichés topic-wise, their specifics on such are cool. In a Batman-drenched world, their beats "kick like Kato."*—Jim Macnie*

Luiz Bonfa

Non Stop to Brazil (Chesky)

BONFA IS BEST KNOWN as the composer of "Samba de Orfeo" and "Manha de Carnaval" from *Black Orpheus*, a movie that owes its reputation as a classic to those timeless melodies above all else. Here he performs these and 13 other instrumental tunes with only acoustic guitars and light percussion for accompaniment, a spare approach that, in this era of pop bombast, is as soothing as a breeze rustling palm fronds on a hot tropic night. The tunes are as sweet as bonbons, but don't be fooled; these sophisticated, tightly woven melodies bear comparison with Jobim's. It's a sound that washes over you at first, then digs under your skin. (Box 1268, Radio City Station, New York, NY 10101)*—Mark Rowland*

Various Artists

Lyrics by Ernest Noyes Brookings (Shimmy-Disc)

THE LATE BROOKINGS was a resident of Boston's Duplex Nursing Home who began jotting down his thoughts at the provocation of artist/musician (and Duplex activities director) David Greenberger. Here we get 21 Shimmy Greenberger pals building tunes around Brookings' always capricious, often insightful musings. With a die-hard indie feel—high wackology quotient—the outer fringes are constantly being tested. Wildest: John Foster's "Elevator," which is recited over some '50s "attention shoppers" music. As readers of Greenberger's *Duplex Planet* already realize, Ernie was a gas, and many of these tunes turn out to be just as fun as his words.

—Jim Macnie

Seamus Connolly

Here and There (Green Linnet)

THE STYLISTIC TURFS that this violin master has chosen—hornpipes, reels, jigs, strathspeys—almost match the broad geographic turf the pieces stem from: Cape Breton and Scotland tunes mingle with those of Ireland, Connolly's home. His left hand is a precision machine; nothing happens that he doesn't control. But the way he mixes his intonation and dynamics proves how, as in the case of the finest classical players (a harpist and cellist round out a few tunes here), it's pure emotion that's being sought. The dignified nostalgia of "I'll Always Remember You" achieves it gracefully. (70 Turner Hill Road, New Canaan, CT 06840)*—Jim Macnie*

REISSUE

John Prine

Bruised Orange (Oh Boy)

BRUISED ORANGE (1978) is probably the best album this great and underrated artist ever made. It's certainly the most accessible. Producer/

pal Steve Goodman lined the recording with bright, ringing guitars, creating a much warmer environment than the stark country-folk settings of Prine's earlier work for Atlantic. But the main attraction is the songs. Prine's eye for detail and ear for language was never sharper. And his humor allowed him to survey the roughest emotional terrain—lost love, lost innocence, even drunkenness and wife-beating—with a Mark Twain deadpan that kept your eyes fixed on the pictures he was painting. If you have any interest in this kind of music at all—if you ever liked Bob Dylan or Neil Young or Bruce Springsteen—you really owe it to yourself to buy *Bruised Orange*. You'll play it until the CD disintegrates, or you do. (Box 36099, Los Angeles, CA 90036-0099)—*Bill Flanagan*

Dick Dale

The Best of Dick Dale and His Del-Tones (Rhino)

SUBTITLED "King of the Surf Guitar," Dale was a deft and original plectrist whose best efforts—"The Wedge," an astute adaptation of the Greek pop song "Misirlou"—reveal his fascination with Mid-Eastern scales (there's also a version of "Hava Nagila" here that ought to be de rigueur for weddings). He deserves credit for developing a self-contained pop genre, but unless you're a diehard surfhead a lot of the stuff here sounds weak or redundant, and a recent (1987) version of "Pipeline," with Stevie Ray Vaughan, only goes to show that you can't go home again. For reverb fans only.—*Mark Rowland*

GTO's

Permanent Damage (Straight/Enigma)

IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE that 20-year-old music and babbling of Laurel Canyon groupies could warrant anything more than a shrug, but this cosmic (and sexual) debris makes it on the whimsy factor alone. The topics include come-on lines, Beefheart's shoes, body odor and plaster castings of rock star's units. These "flat-chested mini-mamas" (of whom Pam Des Barres has become the most famous) are fond of unison talk/sing (like proto-Roches), and because the music is provided by Lowell George, Don Preston and Davey Jones, the ladies' digressions stack up well. And yes, sisterhood is powerful, but it's hard not to hear producer Zappa holding the cue cards in between the lines.—*Jim Macnie*

Various Artists

Wrinkles (Chess/MCA)

THIS COLLECTION of out-of-print or never-issued instrumentals offers backstage glimpses of the greats—Chuck Berry's curiously clunky rendition of "How High the Moon," an alternate version of Little Walter's wonderful "Blue Midnight." But the real treasures come courtesy of less celebrated artists, like J.C. Davis' groove-laden "Coolin' Out," Jody Williams' blues-meets-the-surf-sound "Lucky Lou" and the title cut, where Lafayette Leake shows why he's the R&B pianist's pianist. Not for collectors only.

—*Mark Rowland*

Paul Gayten

Chess King of New Orleans (Chess/MCA)

ALONG WITH Dave Bartholomew, Paul Gayten towered over '50s New Orleans R&B, a monsterfully swinging pianist with a smooth, masculine vocal style and an impeccable sense of band arrangements jazzmen could admire. The group on many of these 12 well-chosen tracks includes the great Lee Allen and Red Tyler on saxes, Earl Palmer on drums and the sorely underidolized Edgar Blanchard on guitar. For pure rhythmic drive Gayten's "Nervous Boogie" cuts anything Jerry Lee ever put to wax, and Allen's intro to "The Sweeper" will make your hair stand up. Probably the most danceable collection of tunes collected on one album you'll hear this year, this CD comprises a vivid portrait of one tremendously talented musician. If you've never tuned into Gayten before, it's time to hurry down and get some.—*Mark Rowland*

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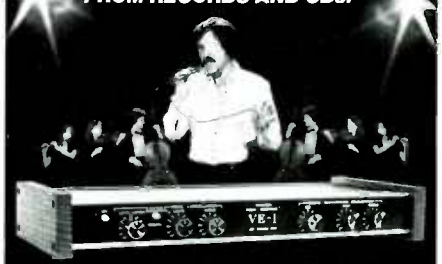

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DAT

[*cont'd from page 110*] home recording chain. Unfortunately, the unofficial word is that it'll take the Japanese giants between a year and a year-and-a-half to get new SCMS-equipped DATs into American stores. Even if consumer DAT lasts till then, it'll be some time before DAT deck prices plummet the way CD prices did.

But DAT has firmly entrenched itself in the pro audio world, so it isn't going to disappear from the face of the earth. And, as we've taken some pains to prove here, the means do exist to go all-digital at home. It just means the whole thing may not be dumped in your lap as tidily as MIDI was. Mmmm . . . come to think of it, MIDI didn't seem terribly tidy at first either. Which just goes to show that anything *really* good always requires a little effort, right? Ⓜ

A D I N D E X

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The Decade in Madonna

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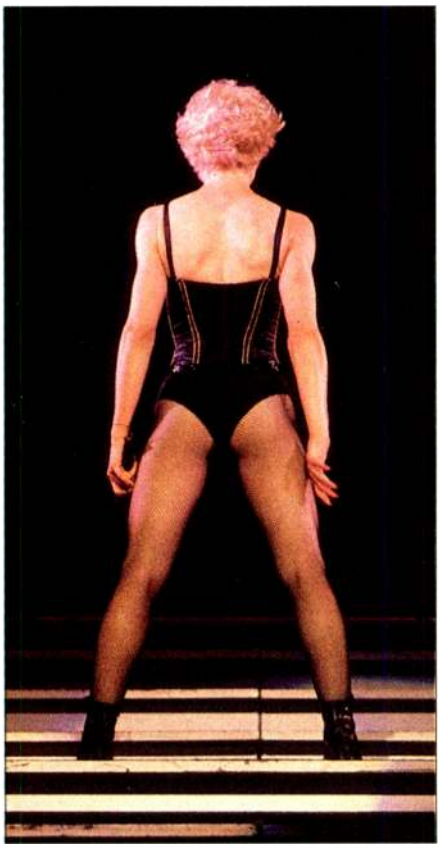
AS THE DECADE draws to a close the votes are tabulated and the winner is . . . Madonna. She, not Bruce Springsteen, is the biggest. She, not Michael Jackson, is the baddest. She, not Prince, is the nastiest. She, not Pepsi-Cola, is the shrewdest. She, not Sean Penn, is the toughest. She, not the Who, has earned our respect.



To talk about Madonna is to discover how words like "reductionism" (*"a procedure or theory that reduces complex data or phenomena to simple terms"*—Webster's) get coined. You can't argue with her triumph. It is complete. Even when her films blow dead air or her marriage breaks up or her records bomb—that's never happened—she's the winner. You can open your heart, as the song goes, and accept Madonna, or you can lump it. But there's not gonna be a recount. She *is* the winner. Though you might, at some point, wonder why.

Wondering why I've accepted Madonna in my heart got me thinking about Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Scorsese is clearly someone who took his Catholic upbringing very seriously—at one point he studied for the priesthood—and many of his movies are animated by the sort of emotional conflicts Catholic upbringings so frequently inspire. *Last Temptation* was his great labor of love in this regard, a devout meditation on the life of Christ. The result: theaters bombed, boycotts, home video under the counter.

Then there is Madonna, who also obviously grew up Catholic, titled her bust-out record *Like a Virgin* and appeared on the LP cover wearing a crucifix, a sexy bodice and a belt that read "boy toy." The record sold millions and the yahoos haven't touched her yet.

The difference, I think, is that Scorsese pays attention to the ideals of Catholicism, which makes him a dangerous person. Madonna revels in the secret "fun" of Catholicism, like how growing up in a church that tries to make you feel guilty about sex makes sex all the more exciting. Suggesting that on MTV is not so dangerous. But it's nervy enough to qualify as sharp entertainment.

Of course Madonna is sharp. More reductionism: If Dan Quayle had 17 straight Top 10 hits he'd be sharp too. She image-borrows from Marilyn and Marlene and even Judy Holliday (in the dreadful movie *Who's That Girl?*), all bombshells and extremely bright women. Madonna's luster doesn't shimmer naturally like theirs. Where she excels as an artist is her ability to pull together a whole reference shelf of favored styles into a pastiche that feels fresh, hip, even original. In that sense she embodies the reigning imperative of '80s pop music.

One thing you gotta admire about Madonna is that she made it by combining the power of pop's new format, the MTV video, with its oldest, the dance single. By contrast her albums seem uneven and shapeless, carrier-paks for fans too lazy to buy the individual hits. Almost all her singles have ace melodic hooks, beats at once funky and aerobic, are well-produced (meaning that pros like Nile Rodgers and Reggie Lucas knew enough to serve *her* vision) and, thanks to video, hang together like the episodes of a long-running serial in which the heroine changes with the scenery.

Thus Madonna segues from glamourpuss ("Like a Virgin") to streetwise urchin ("Into the Groove") to pregnant teenager ("Papa Don't Preach") to whatever it was she was up to in "Like a Prayer." Rivals as theatrical as Michael Jackson and Prince end up playing themselves in front of a camera, which inevitably becomes kind of a snore. Madonna can't match their talent, but she takes more chances with her personality, which makes her more likely to hold your attention. Which is the point.

For all her attitude and ambition, Madonna comes off pretty regular. Not like she'd be your friend—she's too driven to hang out with nobodies. But if the opportunity arose, you could relate. Like Barbie, the basic Madonna model is surprisingly free of gimcracks and weirdness. She's fun for the whole family—a savvy woman, entering her 30s, who sings like a little girl and likes to stir things up. Good/bad, but not evil.

The first time I paid attention to Madonna, just before she got real famous, was at a semi-seedy health club we both worked out at in New York. When she was there I spent most of my time watching her, not because her navel is so swell but because I have never seen anyone, before or since, work out so long and so hard. It actually seemed a little nutty at the time. But . . . you've seen the results.

Which is why, in the end, Madonna is the winner. She worked the hardest, or at least she worked out the hardest. For a while in the '80s, it was the same American Dream.

—Mark Rowland

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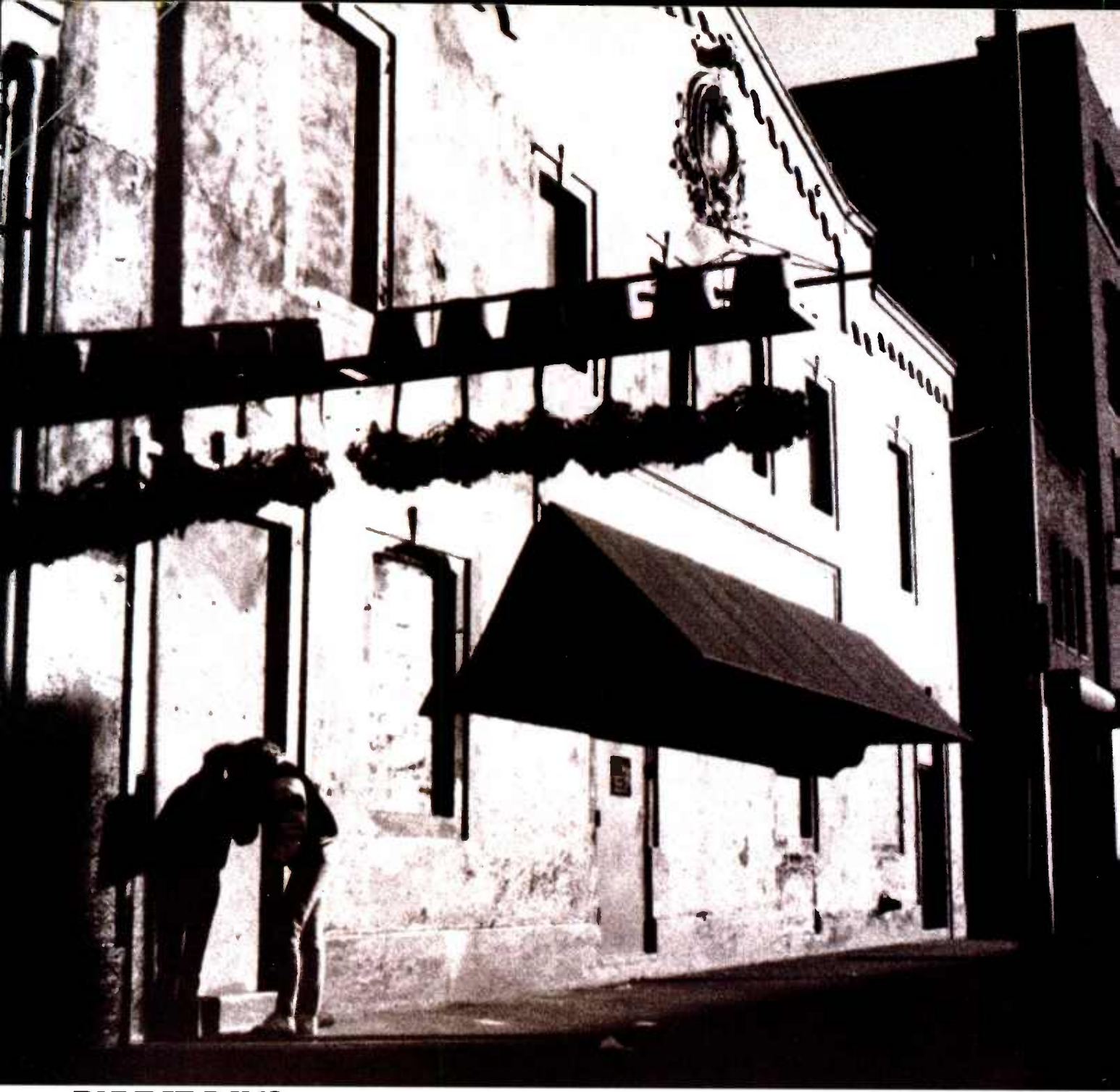

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