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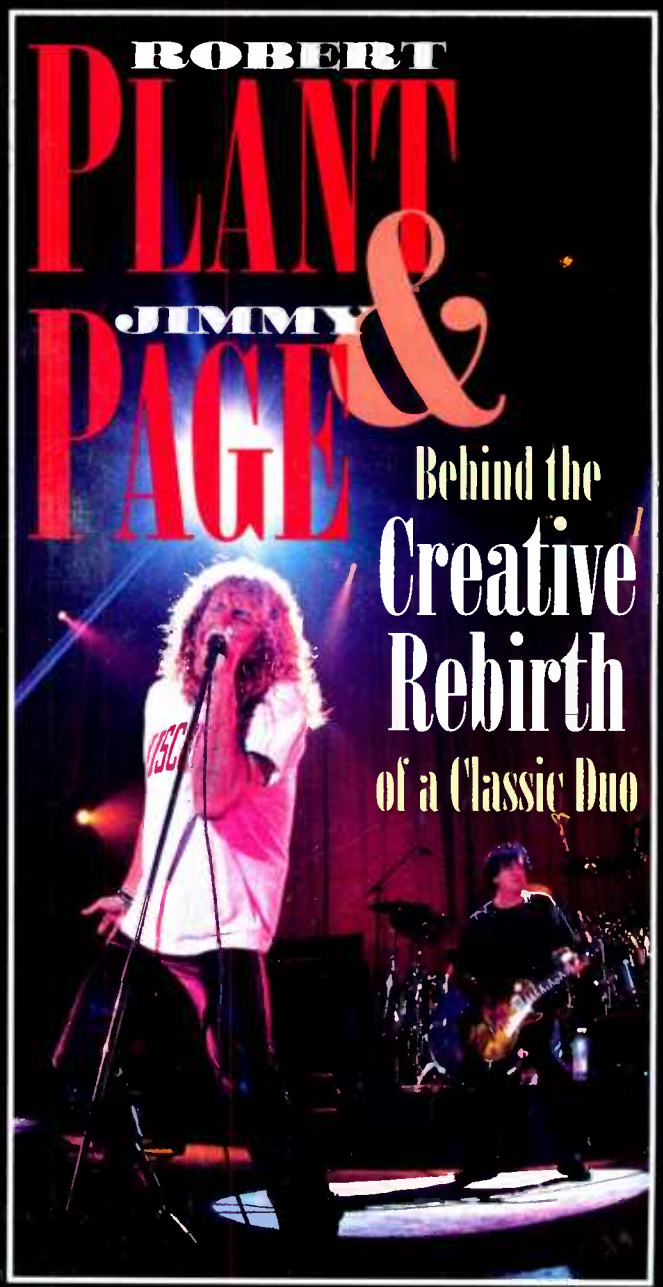

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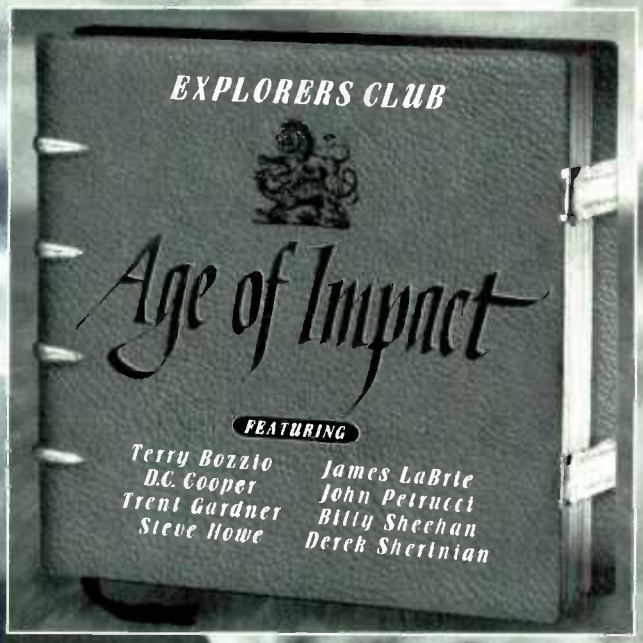

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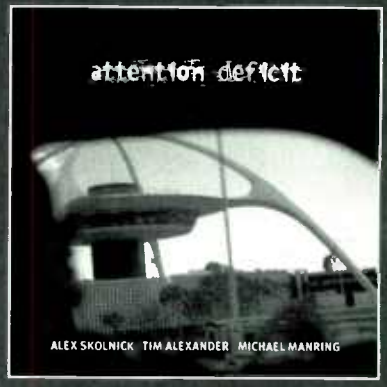

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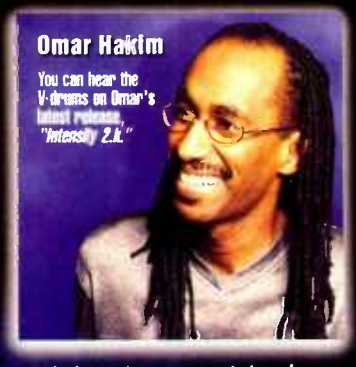

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September 1998/issue no. 238

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letters

lawyers & music?

I am writing to set the record straight regarding the first paragraph of your article profiling Peter Paterno and me (Business, July '98). Rampant drug use truly is a scourge in our industry and must be discouraged. We would clearly prefer that our clients not use any drugs. Both Peter and I have seen first-hand the pain, sadness, and untimely death that drug use has caused our clients and friends, and we both are active in the rehabilitation effort for numerous current and former clients.

Once I got past the first paragraph, though, I enjoyed the article. Keep up the good work.

Eric R. Greenspan
Myman, Abell, Fineman & Greenspan
Los Angeles, CA

[The article in question began with this sentence: "Peter Paterno and Eric Greenspan, two prestigious Los Angeles lawyers, are in a plush suite in New York's Plaza Hotel, calmly reasoning why it's better to have a client on cocaine than heroin." Musician regrets any negative interpretations this lead might have suggested.]

As a lawyer and musician, I was disappointed that you glorified the careers of Peter Paterno and Eric Greenspan. They may be hard-working attorneys who can make the bad shit "go away," but they also represent everything that's gone bad in the music business. Predatory music attorneys now run record companies, manage bands, and for all realistic purposes control the A&R decisions. The feeding situation has gotten so crowded that attorneys, in an ethically-challenged version of ambulance chasing, now directly solicit bands for services. Next time you do a story on music attorneys, please dig a little deeper and give us information about unfair billing practices, unethical shopping deals, lopsided contingency payments, incomprehensible contracts, and potential conflicts of interest. That type of information would be more helpful than learning whether Paterno and Greenspan prefer their clients on heroin or cocaine.

rich stim
Rwstim@aol.com

your music on tv

I really enjoyed Paul Feinberg's article on how TV shows are using new and (mostly) undiscovered talent to fuel their shows (Business, June '98). One great example of this changing trend is the refreshingly left use of mainstream talent that can be found on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The compilation of songs that can be heard weekly on this show often better exemplify the new energy in music than what we hear on MTV and radio these days. If some executive over there in Buffyland would consider putting out a compilation CD for the music used on the show, I'm sure more people would wait in line for it than you could shake a stick at.

By the way, this was my first time reading *Musician*, and all I can say is, why didn't somebody tell me about you guys?!

michael cooley
sunkingg@gte.net

wendy & lisa

Great interview with Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman (Sidewomen, June '98). As a working female session musician myself, I know we are few and far between and don't always get the credit we deserve. Your interview stayed focused on the fact that they are competent musicians before anything else, whereas a lot of magazines want to focus solely on female artists' clothes, hair, love lives, and so on. Thanks for taking the more respectful (and relevant) approach

terri brown
GTRGRL3@aol.com

bubbers update

As a composer of symphonic and jazz music, I was delighted to have been one of the winners of *Musician*'s 1997 Best Unsigned Band contest. Thanks to *Musician*, I've gotten some nice press as well as a soon-to-be-broadcast interview on National Public Radio's *Artbeat* program. I'm hoping *Musician* will be kind enough to allow me to announce that my website, www.tom-taylor.com, supplies several sound clips and score excerpts from my CD, which features David Grisman and the Kronos Quartet. My fellow readers might be interested in some of my textural and contrapuntal techniques as an alternative to repeated chord progressions (known as *chaconnes* since Bach's time) fortified with the inevitable backbeat.

I really appreciate your well-written and insightful business and technical articles. Keep up the good work!

tom taylor
tomtaylor@mci2000

[Thanks, Tom, and congratulations to you as well. To all BUB winners: Please keep in touch. We're happy to run updates on your career here on the Letters page.]

Send letters to: *Musician*, 49 Music Square West, Nashville, TN 37203.
Email: editors@musicianmag.com.

from the editor

Why did you start playing music? Not to get rich, I hope. More likely it's because you saw somebody else doing it-on a video, in a club, or from in your home. These experiences taught us that music is fun: We saw other people having a good time with it, and we wanted in. At least that's how it seems to me.

Unfortunately, that's often the last real lesson you learn at that visceral level. Seeing the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan* or a stageful of talented women at Lillith Fair doesn't lead you to the next level, which is to figure out how to find a way to pay the rent, put food on the table, and discipline yourself to become an artist. The impetus to play comes from watching your heroes in action; the rest comes from within. Right?

Not as long as *Musician* is around. One very big part of what we're doing involves acting as a conduit between the real-world working musician and the artists who have been on the scene long enough to pick up some wisdom they can share. This guides our approach to each Interview feature—where else but in *Musician* will you find tips from Keith Richards on how to rehearse with your band? And to do the job even more successfully, we're launching a new feature this month that's designed to bring the artist's insights directly to you.

We're calling it Shop Talk, and here's how it works. We've selected several essential topics, from how to survive a band tour to how to save time on a record date, and formed them into questions. Then, in each issue, we'll run these questions by a different artist or band. That's really it: simple Q-and-A, with nothing getting in the way between the artist and you. It starts this month on page 28, with Tom Maxwell of Squirrel Nut Zippers. Other performers are already in line for future Shop Talks. Be sure to check 'em out and let us know who you'd like us to question in the months to come.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

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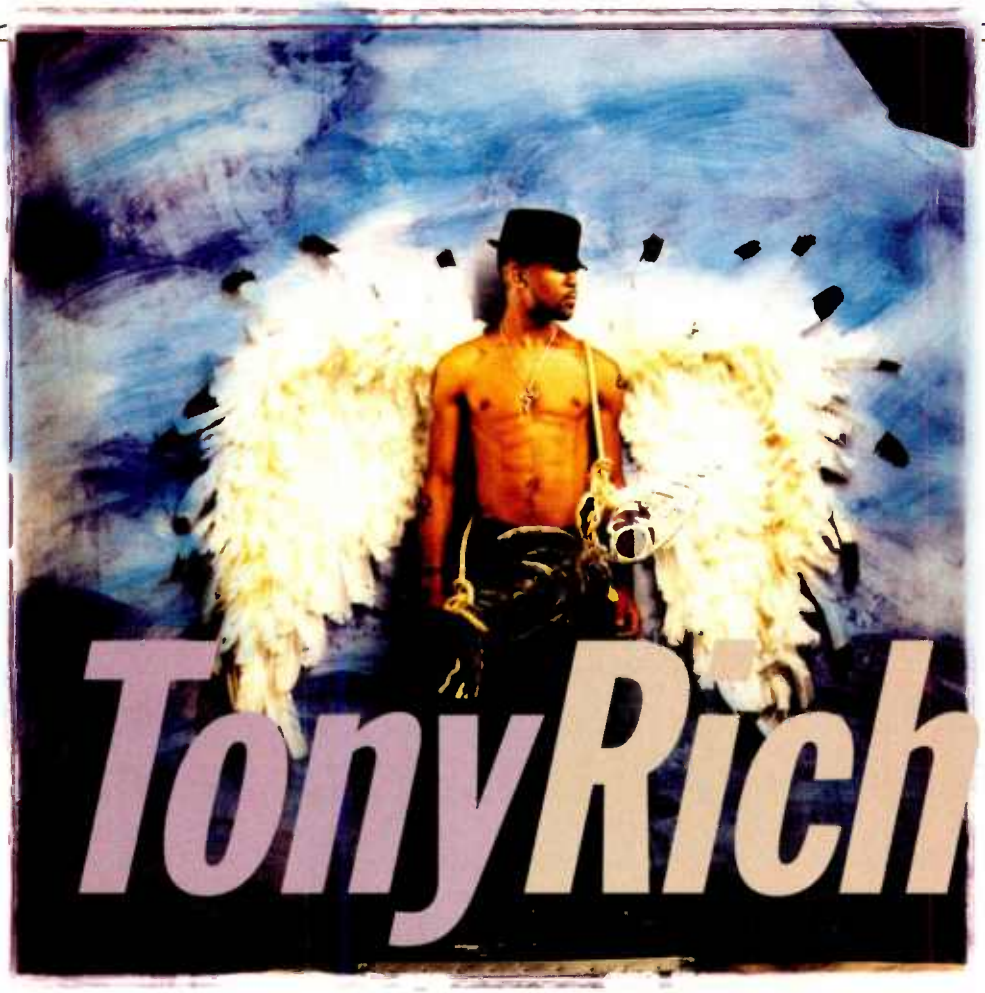


Tony Rich

"When I put an album together, I think of a woman lying in a tub."

Your mixes on your new album Birdseye, *like those on your first album* Words, *emphasize acoustic textures, with electronic parts kept low in the background.*

That's because technology gets dated. Acoustic instruments will always be around, no matter what happens. Now, I'm into electronics: I just got the [Digidesign] Pro Tools system for all my editing and mixing. But I have the greatest respect for acoustic instruments.

You can hear that in your drum tracks, which are much more understated than the heavy gated backbeats that define pop rhythms today.

I don't put a lot of emphasis on drums because I'm so drawn to keeping the focus on the vocals and the chords. I want folks to hear what's being said. On a lot of records, if you take the drums out, all of a sudden you lose the song. It's all about the drums.

Ironically, by downplaying the beat, you draw the listener more into it.

Exactly. That's my whole thing. I don't listen to the radio because I don't want it to influence me. People are listening to heavy rap records, heavy beats. If you listen to that, you're gonna try to mix that into what you do because you think it'll help you survive. I don't like to do that. I want to go against the grain and change things.

But you're in a position to innovate. New artists may have to conform to current trends if they want to build an audience.

Well, when I did *Words*, I wasn't concerned about whether people were going to love it. I just did what I wanted to do. See, if you do what you want, you may not have an instant hit, but a few years down the line things might be different. It takes a little longer to work original music, but when it pops, it pops big and lasts longer.

Did you go through a formative period of emulating the artists who influenced you?

Nope [*laughs.*] What's funny is, when I came to Atlanta I played some music for L.A. [Reid, producer at La Face]. I played him something that sounded just like what he and Babyface did—the production, the writing, the whole thing. Then I said, "Here's some stuff that Jimmy and Terry [Jam and Lewis] would do. Here's some stuff that Teddy Riley would do." Then I played him this song called "Long Way to Travel," a country song that my brother Joe wrote, and I said, "This is what *I* do." It was totally different from everything I had played for him.

So that got you accepted as an original act.

Not right away. Working at La Face, my brother and I would always get pressured to do records that would hit *today*. We always caught flak for these records we were bringing them, but then I told my brother, "Man, all we got to do is chill out for a second. Let's give 'em this easy stuff they want for now, but this here [*i.e.*, their original music] is what's gonna prevail." And that is what prevails today.

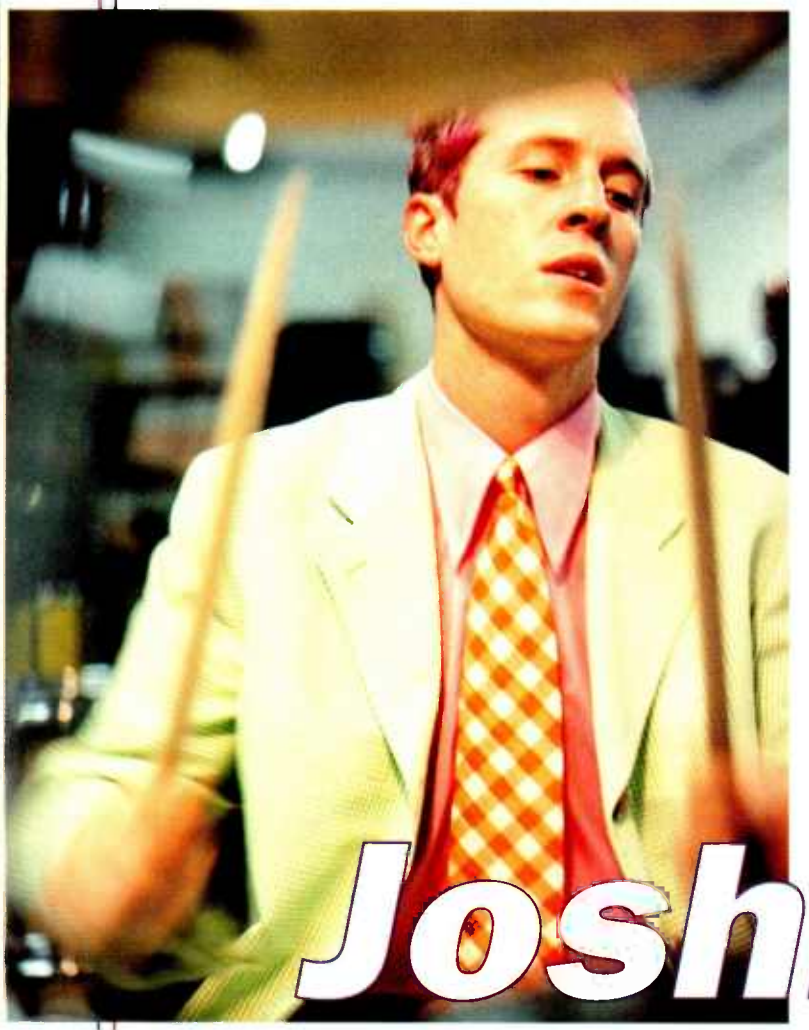
You also like to run ends of songs into the beginnings of what follows.

I don't want my mood broken. When I put an album together, I think of a woman lying in a tub, listening to the music. She wants things to flow. You don't want a second where you don't hear music, if you're in a tub. I want it to go that smooth.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE!
To read more of Robert L. Doerschuk's interview with Tony Rich, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

Photo: Tom Smugala



Josh Freese

"Most rock and pop arrangements aren't exactly rocket science."

One of your earliest gigs was in a band at Disneyland. How did that come about, and what was it like?

I played in the Top Forty band on Tomorrowland Terrace—the one where the stage comes up out of the ground—at age twelve. It was the coolest thing. It's been all downhill from there. We used to play the most hideous Huey Lewis covers to Simple Minds. Five sets a day. My dad hired all the entertainment at Disneyland, including a band that was all young kids. I hung out with them, and we all listened to Devo. I played electronic drums at the time, and they asked me if I'd like to join [to] have two drummers in the group.

What role does serendipity play in this business? How much is it a matter of being in the right place at the right time?

Well, my band, the Vandals, and I just toured Australia for a month with 311. Their drummer fractured his wrist playing football after the third show—it reminded me why I don't play any sports and sit as still as possible when not playing the drums. They were going to fly home. I ended up listening to their CD for about 45 minutes before our first "rehearsal"—a show in front of ten thousand people in Sydney.

How did you learn to learn a song so quickly?

That was the good thing about doing all the studio work I do. I got to be a quick study through all the studio work I did. Also, I was in a band with Dweezil Zappa from age fifteen to eighteen, and I used to have to learn these eight-minute instrumentals *à la* his dad's work. After doing that for three years, it was pretty easy to do a three-minute song that goes verse, chorus, verse, chorus, guitar solo, chorus, ending. I can listen to a song once or twice, then go in and bash it out right away. In rock and pop, most of the arrangements aren't exactly rocket since. And I've got a pretty good musical memory. Some things are tougher than others.

How important is it for a drummer to play other instruments or be able to read or write music?

It helps me as a drummer that I play guitar and bass and I write lots of music. Most of my drum heroes now are guys who don't just play drums—they're guys who can write songs, produce records . . . guys who understand music. Stewart Copeland, Hunt Sales, Charley Drayton: These people really understand songwriting and arranging and music in general. So when they play drums, it's so much more tasteful because they get it instead of [being] a drummer who just wants everyone to notice him. Which is exactly what I was when I was seventeen. I had no regard for anyone. I was stepping on everyone's toes. But now I've taken more of a back seat—it's a much more mature position to take.

You can read music, and you've got some serious chops from early training, including jazz drumming. How necessary is all of that on today's sessions?

An old jazz drummer who was one of my teachers always told me I had to [be able to read music] if I wanted to do sessions. I've only had to read twice out of 2,500 sessions, both for a Japanese artist who was very precise. Producers don't want to know about your jazz background, but the fact that you have it in your back pocket can come in pretty handy. I just did a jazz-loungy record with John Doe producing, where I used brushes. So having that background gives you an added technique you might need to use somewhere.

—Chris Rubin

résumé

Paul Westerburg
Suicidal Tendencies
Rickie Lee Jones
Juliana Hatfield
Meredith Brooks
Tracy Bonham
School of Fish
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PEAVEY

Hanft (left) with Sexy Death Soda

VideoSmarts

For the aspiring musician, making a music video can be a shot in the arm or a shot in the foot. Either way, you can be sure of two things: Playing to a camera is different from playing to a crowd. And the project will wind up costing more than you expect. This month, we deal with the first point in our Private Lesson. The dollars-and-cents facts of shooting a video are tackled here.

Fact is, film and processing alone can run you into thousands of dollars—far more than most bands have in their entire marketing budget. And even with significant label backing, every penny spent on getting your mugs on MTV is not recoupable. But the news isn't all bad: A little ingenuity and resourcefulness can go a long way toward slashing your expenses. Just ask ***Steve Hanft***, director of five Beck videos, including the award-winning "Where It's At," along with dozens of other MTV staples. "When I did the 'Loser' video I was an expert at no-budget

Wyndorf

MONSTER MAGNET'S DAVE WYNDORF

IF I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW...

. . . I wouldn't have worried about writing songs, or always having something in the can. That doesn't bother me anymore. If I force myself I can come up with something. But that used to really bug me; I'd think I'd have to be goddamned Mozart, when in actuality if you're forced to write, you *will* write.

I used to believe that I had to write a song for the purpose of pleasing a lot of people, and that was pretty daunting. I'd think, why should I even write a song if people aren't going to like it? But a a reaction to working that way—I actually took off couple of years from music—I decided to writ songs because I thought something would mak *me* happy first and foremost, and ever since then hasn't been a problem. I know that if I get too bus to write, which happens all the time with Monste Magnet—we're going on the road constantly—know it's not going to be as big a deal, knowing tha

Photo: Paul Natkin (bottom)

filming," he remembers. "I had just finished shooting a feature on my own [*Kill the Moonlight*]. I did every job myself. I bought really fast film so I wouldn't need extra lighting or crew. It turned out all grainy, but I liked that raw look."

A graduate of the Cal Arts film program, Hanft formed a band in school while his peers were busy "freaking out about their careers." Beck, who scored one of Hanft's early film projects, joined the group a few months later. Loser, as the band was originally named, evolved into the "spazz rock" sensation Liquor Cabinet. Then, in 1994, Beck asked Hanft to translate "Loser" to video. Hanft's disjointed, surrealist eye fit neatly against Beck's blunted folk and bricolage lyrics. The success of "Loser," the music video, earned Hanft steady work directing for other bands. With a résumé that grew to include Veruca Salt's "Number One Blind," L7's "Andre," Rocket from the Crypt's "Born in '69," and Stone Roses' "Love Spreads," Hanft eventually dumped his regular nine-to-five and moved back to his hometown of Ventura, California, to surf and launch his own band, Sexy Death Soda.

With an album, *California Police State*, under their belt and an established filmmaker in their ranks, shooting a video would seem like the obvious next step. But Sexy Death Soda's label, Bong Load, won't commit to an allowance just yet. "They want to see how many records we sell before they give us a thousand bucks for the film," Hanft explains. And so goes the old chicken-and-egg conundrum: When you combine a great song with a brand-name director to produce a killer video, and that video breaks into the right playlists, sales will soar. Without a video, you have no guarantees.

So Hanft is considering alternatives. Perhaps he'll intercut some surfing clips from filmmaker Richie Lehrer with live video footage of Sexy Death Soda as a video for his surf ode, "Sick Tube." Whatever he does, Hanft doesn't lament his constraints. For one, he's not sold on the major label approach to videos.

"An underfunded band can beat out a well-funded band with their time," he explains. "A band with a big budget is actually limited to one- or two-day shoots with some guy like me doing it as quick as he can. On your own you can spend more time and kick ass with your ideas. Just get a Super-8 camera and start filming a bunch of weird stuff. That's when a band's artistic nature shows through, when they make their own videos."—***Sam Cannon***

I'm going to make myself happy first and other people happy second. It'll be a good place for me, as opposed to [going into] an intimidating situation where I have to think like a marketer.

If I knew back then that so much work had to be done outside of just playing, it probably would have made me wait less for inspiration; I would've forced my inspiration. You just do it. It's like exercising a muscle. If you're struggling with a song, pass it over and start something else. If you hit a block with a song, the best thing to do isn't to fight that song. Just put it aside and work on something else. I used to stay there with the song, and that bummed me out. But I learned that by putting it aside and working on something else that I liked—maybe a garage rock song—the exercise of writing would psyche me up enough that when I went back to my tapes and picked out stuff that I didn't finish before, I found it easier to finish it.

Work as hard as you can for as long as you can, but if you hit a brick wall, you just dump what you're doing and move onto something else. The trick is to not stop working once you sit down to work, no matter what you're working on. Even if you're working on something that nobody is going to hear, like some spaghetti-western instrumental. It's more the exercise of doing something that helps you with everything later on.—***Michael Gelfand***

copyright — ON THE — internet?

While the congressional corridors in Washington echoed most of last year with the lamentations of tobacco companies, a far less megalithic but equally important group called Musicians United for Strong Internet Copyright (MUSIC) has been lobbying Congress in hopes of ensuring that the music we create is protected online.

Founded by Billy Joel, Bette Midler, and a handful of other recording artists with the assistance of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), MUSIC's priorities are to make the public aware of the need for online copyright protection and to secure the means for all musicians to gain and retain recognition and profit for their work.


Kennedy

Joel Flatow, RIAA's vice president for government affairs and artist relations, says the group is encouraging the implementation of the two World Intellectual Property Treaties that were negotiated at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) conference in Geneva. If ratified, these treaties would require other countries to strengthen their copyright laws and extend copyright protection to cyberspace.

Most artists would see approval of these treaties as a no-brainer for Congress. But Maura Kennedy of the duo ***Pete & Maura Kennedy*** stresses, "It's not clear-cut ratification, because the phone companies are trying to establish limited liability." As of press time, neither the Senate nor the House of Representatives has voted on ratification. To aid the cause of MUSIC, call, write, or email your representatives in Congress and encourage them to support strong Internet copyright laws.—***Jason Zasky***

Photo: Cindy Wilson (top right)

SHOWMANSHIP, PART 2

The Perils of Flamboyance

It takes a lot of work to get your band ready to perform in public, but many bands spend so much time rehearsing that they don't realize until the last minute that their image onstage can add to or detract from how their musical performance is perceived. As we noted in last month's Working Musician, some bands draw attention to themselves via some form of visual flash—sequined jackets, fire-breathing, self-mutilation, and choreographed melodrama are just a few common devices—but if your band is ready to move out of the garage and doesn't have the cash to accessorize or isn't too keen on wearing spiked platform shoes and piling on the makeup, what are you gonna do to capture the audience's attention?

For a young band like ***Gloritone***, the key to a successful live show is to be true to the music. "There's no gratuitous gear throwing or climbing on things," explains singer/guitarist Tim Anthonise. "We basically try to play as well as we can and feel it as much as possible on any given night. We're usually pretty straightforward: We don't have any shtick onstage, we don't have any wild shirts or clothes or [planned] maneuvers. None of that stuff interests us. We're really a straight-ahead rock band."

Tuscadero, on the other hand, has gone from shtick to substance over the past four years. With a laugh, singer/guitarist Melissa Ferris explains that the band initially opted to go with costumes to distract folks from their music. "We actually had someone pull us aside one time and say, 'You're good enough now that you don't have to wear the costumes anymore.'"

The members of Tuscadero point out that working as an opening band—they recently spun through the States opening for Superdrag—helped them sharpen their stage show. "Opening can definitely help you get a little more energetic," says drummer Jack Hornady. "You know those kids aren't really there to see you, and you get pumped up and then try to go out there and play loud and fast and aggressive."—***David John Farinella***

Tuscadero

Alexander the Great (Technique)

With all the hard knocks and competition out there, musicians already have a pretty rough life—that's why it's so shocking to think that we're actually our own worst enemies. At least that's what F. Mathias Alexander (right), an Australian-born actor, discovered after repeatedly losing his voice during recitations. After doctors continually failed to discover the source of his problem, Alexander embarked on a ten-year study that involved close observation of his body movements. From these studies he developed the Alexander Technique, which musicians like Sting and Gary Burton have used to relax and optimize their bodies for better performances.

Martha Bernard, a vocal/Alexander instructor at HR Studios in Manhattan, explains the method: "We observe a student's movements during activities such as sitting, standing, and walking, and we use our hands and words to help students feel what they're doing so they can learn to prevent what is unnecessary." Diane Young, who teaches the technique to music majors at Stony Brook College in New York, says students may notice changes for longer periods of time without experiencing pain or fatigue. It all stems from what Alexander practitioners call "use of inhibition," which is the prevention of automatic habitual responses. "It's a gradual way of changing," says Bernard. "Releasing just a little bit of our contractive habits can work dramatically to free the voice."—***Kris Nicholson***

For more information and a list of teachers of the technique, call (800) 473-0620.

Photo: John Falls (top)

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robyn hi puts

A performing veteran discusses playing it for the cameras.

Everyone who's ever set foot on a stage knows about the anxieties and difficulties involved in live performance. But what happens when you add a film crew to the equation? No one would dream of grabbing a guitar and wailing away in the spotlight without first putting in plenty of practice time, yet lots of bands dive into their debut video shoot without any idea of how to get the most out of the experience.

So what do you do? Our search for the answer led us to a former carpet store on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan some two years ago. There, we found Robyn Hitchcock asking another important question. . . .

"Is my hair okay? All right, let's go." With those words, Hitchcock, brandishing an acoustic guitar and harmonica, turns swiftly to the mic and springs unaccompanied into the intro of his song "The Devil's Radio." This solo performance is unorthodox in three major respects. First the audience, though clearly audible, can't be seen. Second, Hitchcock is playing with his back to an uncurtained floor-to-ceiling storefront display window that looks out on a busy New York street. Passersby stop at the window, peer in on the scene, make puzzled faces, then continue on their way. Third, all the action's being captured by a film crew led by noted director and ardent Robyn fan Jonathan (*The Silence of the Lambs*) Demme.

That, more or less, describes the opening sequence of a new performance film. Appropriately titled *Storefront Hitchcock*, it features fifteen songs that span nearly all of Hitchcock's two-decade career as a singer, songwriter, guitarist, and cult hero, interspersed with several surrealistic tales of the type Robyn's been regaling audiences with for years. Though it's primarily a solo outing, Hitchcock is joined at times by violinist Deni Bonet, guitarist Tim Keegan, a couple of orange traffic cones, a spinning mirror ball, a single bare light bulb, a candle on a tall stand, and a large fiberglass tomato. The result is a sort of visually enhanced version of a typical Hitchcock concert, in which elements that are initially distracting—like that guy toting a big blue garbage bag past the storefront window—gradually blend together to create a unique atmosphere as the viewer is drawn in by Hitchcock's inimitable music and personality.

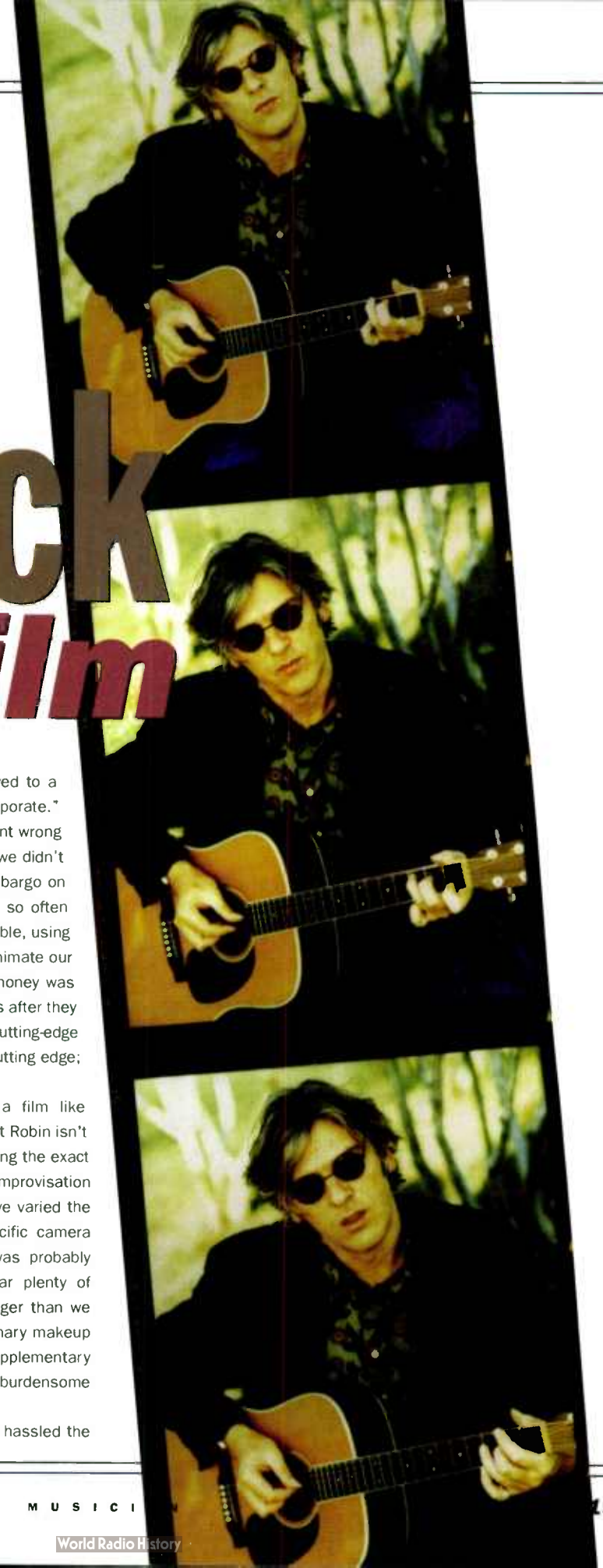
Fast forward to March '98, one day after *Storefront Hitchcock*'s premiere at Austin's South By Southwest music conference. With the work and the festivities behind him, Hitchcock is in a reflective mood. "Doing videos is not a stimulating experience," he muses, "unless they've built some incredible tableau for you to cavort around in. All you're doing is repeating fragments of a song and miming to it. I guess if you're really high on yourself, you can rave around and holler and look good. But significantly, the last time I did a video, the only thing the director kept in the final cut was all the outtakes; he didn't use any of the parts we were miming."

In contrast, doing a live performance rather than a video is "more demanding but also much more stimulating. You're not going to sit there halfway through the day, thinking about what order you're going to wash the dishes in when you get home or whether you need to get a spare gerbil—you're caught up in it. I'd think that most performing musicians would enjoy and prefer this method, doing a live promotional film rather than a video."

Of the videos he's done, Hitchcock remains most pleased with his earliest efforts, which were shot on Super-8 for practically nothing.

by mac randall

tchcock
it on film



Once he and his band at the time, the Egyptians, moved to a major label, the videos became, in his words, "too corporate." What went wrong? "Oh, lots of things, but what really went wrong was that for the first time we had a budget. The reason we didn't lip-sync in the early films wasn't because we had an embargo on lip-syncing; we simply couldn't do it on Super-8. But as so often happens, your limitations actually liberate you; we were able, using gimmicks like stop-frame, to have fun and, in a sense, animate our lives as they were. When we got to A&M, much more money was being spent, but the fun was gone. Interestingly, two years after they told me I couldn't use Super-8 anymore, it became a cutting-edge thing to use lots of Super-8. But we didn't use it to be cutting edge; we just couldn't afford anything else."

Many people might find the process of making a film like *Storefront Hitchcock* just as grueling as a video shoot, but Robin isn't one of them. True, he did have to play four shows featuring the exact same 22-song set list over two days, but "at least some improvisation within the songs was possible. I still think we could have varied the menu a bit, but then again, Jonathan had some specific camera angles in mind for certain songs, so the repetition was probably necessary." And yes, all the participants had to wear plenty of makeup ("That's why we all look about ten years younger than we are," Hitchcock quips), but the work involved—a preliminary makeup session before each day's filming and the occasional supplementary dab during breaks—was relatively minimal and "less burdensome than when they make you up to do a video."

Also on the plus side, no one in the *Storefront* crew hassled the

Photos: Tony Nelson

performers about what clothes they should wear—a frequent concern in videos. The only catch was that whatever Robyn wore would have to be worn for all four shows, for continuity's sake. Considering the stress factor inherent in performing, added to the close proximity of hot film lights, it sounds like a recipe for discomfort. But Hitchcock was prepared.

"I went on a diet for three weeks beforehand, just so my skin would be looking good," he explains. "I didn't have any toxins or fats, no coffee or tea. To be honest, I was sweating so little during the filming that I didn't even have to change my shirt between shows. I did put on a different shirt for the last song, which reflects the fact that I normally change my shirt for the encore when I do a live gig. But normally live, I'm drenched in sweat. The fact that the weather was cool certainly helped. Also, the lights weren't actually that hot. Still, we thought beforehand that my glands might be so stimulated that I'd be sweating all over the place. But they weren't, and I think that was because of the very clear diet I was on."

Hitchcock also claims to have had little trouble dealing with the potential intimidation of the cameras. "That part was fine. After the first show, Jonathan told me to include the cameras a little bit, so I looked directly at the camera more, with often comic results. I really disliked being photographed, but I don't mind being filmed. I'd rather face four movie cameras than one 35mm Nikon anytime, because the movie cameras will catch you in motion and you don't have to worry so much about how well your face composes in a single shot."

Once editing was completed, Robyn viewed the finished product at a private screening. "It was a real shock the first time I saw it," he says. "It does reflect how nervous I am at the beginning of shows; I think you see me smile for the first time about three-quarters of the way through. If I was doing it now, I'd make sure that I was more relaxed. I've tried to smile at shows a lot more ever since I first saw it, because my face looks better when I smile." So playing for the cameras can help you evaluate and possibly improve your performance abilities? "I think so."

As Hitchcock notes, the music industry's attitude toward promotional films and videos has changed in the past few years. "Ten years ago, if you got signed to a record label, you had to make a video no matter what, but the stakes are upped a bit now. They don't want to put the money into a video these days unless they feel you're going to have a hit." That being the case, it's more important than ever to "try and maintain as much control over these things as you can. Once they get out of your hands, people will start coming up to you and saying, 'Oh, I'm your biggest fan, I love what you do. . . . Now, why don't you stand over there with a bucket on your head?' You need to have some say in the direction of your visual presentation. Mind you, your ideas might be terrible; in that case, it might be better if a director strong-arms you into something. But you should at least be given the chance to voice your own ideas. Of course," he adds, "if you're working with someone you know you can trust, it's much better to defer to them."

Not everyone is lucky enough to have someone as trustworthy as Jonathan Demme direct them in a feature film, but lots of musicians find themselves in front of a camera at one time or another. What should they keep in mind on such occasions? "What's most important to remember," Hitchcock says, "is that musicians aren't actors, and you shouldn't feel pressured to become one. There are people whom the video genre suits, like Michael Stipe, but videos involve miming, which you don't do in real life. Live performance is what music is really about, not acting. Even in front of the cameras, you've got to be you. A good director like Jonathan can help with that, because he likes to capture that personal essence, so you don't have to be an actor.

"What was really nice about *Storefront* was that we got the best of both worlds. Capturing a live performance does away with the sterility of video, but doing it in something other than a standard live situation, so you don't have the usual sweaty discomforts of a club gig, was brilliant. I'd recommend that approach to everyone.

"So in conclusion," Robyn adds with a cheeky grin, "I'd say to any aspiring musician, go out and get Jonathan Demme to make a film of you. I've got his office phone number if you need it, and I'm sure he'll be 'round in a shot with the van."

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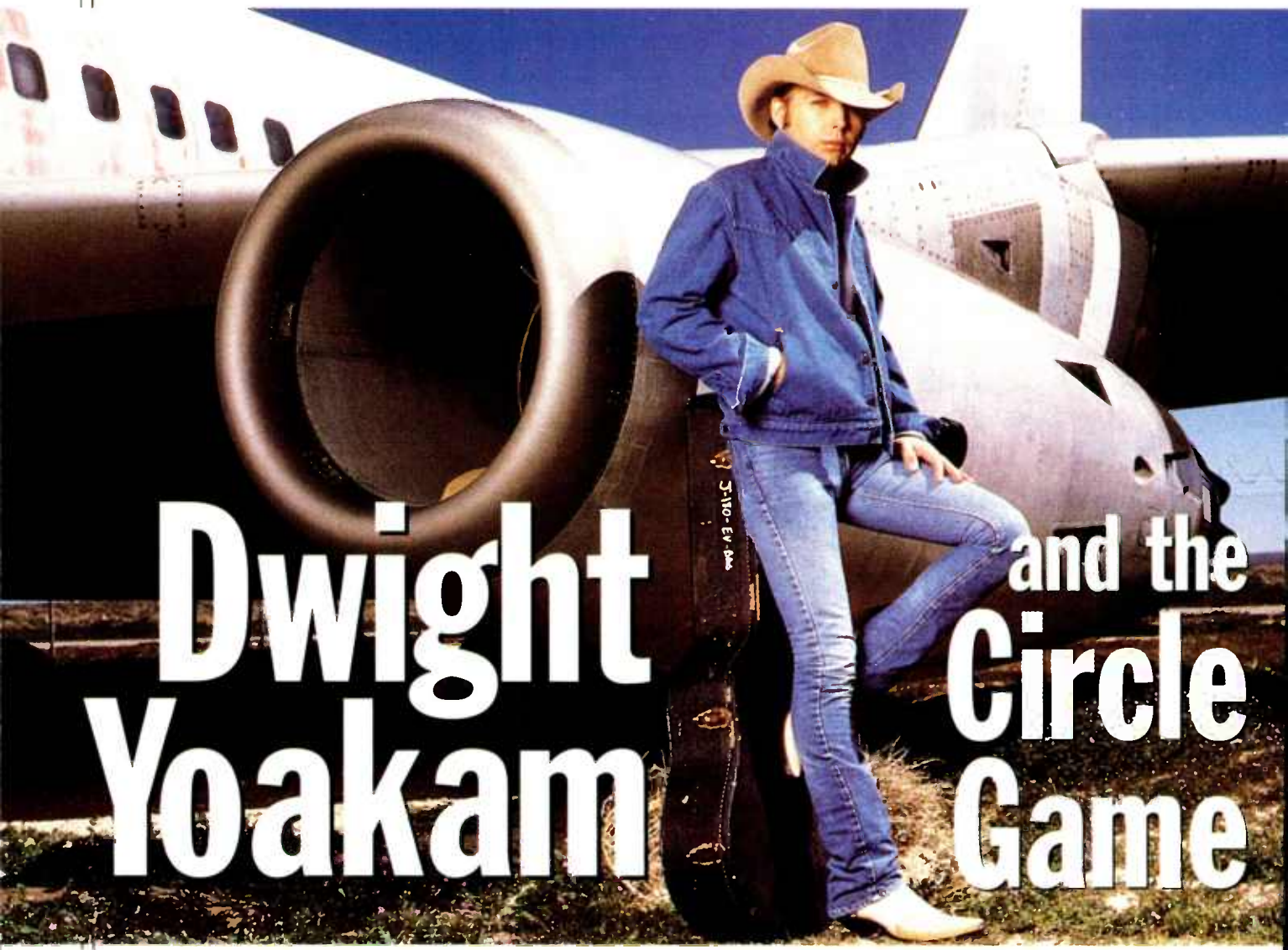


Dwight Yoakam and the Circle Game

Dwight Yoakam is about as unpredictable as a country music superstar can be. He astounded audiences with the restrained ferocity of his acting in *Sling Blade*, which led him to star, alongside Ethan Hawke and others, in *The Newton Boys*. It was while filming that movie that he wrote most of the songs that make up *A Long Way Home*, his eleventh album, which he co-produced with his old friend Peter Anderson.

Although Yoakam assumed he would be so engrossed in the film that he didn't even bring along a guitar, he soon found himself with ample time on his hands and a profusion of musical ideas that sparked some of the most personal and intimate songs of his twelve-year career. It's his first album of original songs in almost three years, and the first one ever in which he avoided collaborations to write all the material on his own.

Yoakam's country songs, whether they rock, swing, or shuffle, succeed in being both timely and timeless, reflecting the real legacy of country music while also looking forward toward the century's end. We suggested this to him one day in his gleaming office, high above Hollywood. It made sense to him: "I call it cosmic cowboy music for the new millennium," he says with a smile.

When working on a song, do you bring active, conscious thought to what it should mean?

Sometimes. Once I've established the thesis. I allow the thesis of the song to come from a more subconscious place. "Listen" [from *A Long Way Home*] was that way. [*With his big Martin acoustic in hand, Yoakam sings and plays the opening.*] It was started with just the word "listen," nothing else. I wasn't sure if that was going to be the song, but that was just where it started.

The best thing is to follow your instinct, because that instinct is there for a reason. That's what I'm learning. That subliminal, subconscious inclination to express whatever that was, led to the

Photo: Randee St. Nicholas

song "Listen." It seemed so abstract: What am I singing about "listen"? Listen to what? I had to listen [*laughs*], and I found out. "Things Change," which is the first single, was the same thing. The initiating sentiment usually becomes the thesis. And that I tend to let spring from the subconscious.

"Things Change" is about as sad as a song can get, and yet it's also triumphant.

There is a triumph in the acknowledgment of the reality of the things discussed between those two people. The first time the chorus is sung, it says, "Forever's a promise no love can survive." Well, that's not really the case. I've considered this now, and I've changed it to "Forever's a promise we couldn't survive." *Us. This* instance. I'm not going to say all love can't survive; it just wasn't for us. So there's a certain resolution to it, an acceptance of what can't be changed.

Do you always write songs with the guitar?

As a singer, the guitar accompanies the instrument that I write music with, which is my voice. What I've learned to do, too, is to throw a series of guitars and small cassette machines around in a smattering of different rooms in my house—even in my office here—so that I will respond in the moment. I'm reconditioning myself to not wait until I find an environment or until I can go to the environment that I normally would write in, so that I can respond to the spontaneous moments that happen. When they happen.

A master of modern country reflects on the persistence of tradition.

by paul zollo

When you say you write with your voice, do you mean you work on melodies separately from guitar, or do you generate them by playing guitar chords?

I will do both. More times or not I probably will write on an acoustic guitar, which offers me a lot of rhythmic possibilities. It also offers me options in regard to doing things melodically, based on riffs. For instance, the first track on the album came from walking through the room after I went out and got a guitar: I got this [*plays the song's bright A-major opening riff*] and then immediately started hearing the counterpoint steel guitar that we ended up putting on. Then I started with [*singing*] "I'm just the same fool, the old fool, the one fool you won't fool no more." See, immediately it sets up patterns of rhythm that I was able to use. Sometimes I'll pick up the guitar and play it as a means of [*laughs*] casting, like in fly fishing. I'll catch a guitar riff, and that will lead me to think, "What am I going to sing to that?" Then, because I'm predisposed to being a singer, I'll respond with melody.

Pure melody, with no words?

Sometimes. "Same Fool" was the distillation of some lucidity in the swirl of a confusing amount of activity emotionally, intellectually, and mundanely.

Does the country music idiom ever limit your writing?

No, because any restrictions are self-imposed. Any songwriter should only be constrained by the parameters that embrace them and cradle the work at the moment. A song will take you where it needs to go. For instance, "These Arms" was a song I wrote after we tracked everything. It wasn't in the original stack of ten songs. It was an eleventh track I ended up writing. I got home, and I was so keyed up and enthusiastic, living off the energy we had in the studio. [*Sings opening of "These Arms."*] It's that groove with a shuffle, and it took on its own life. I let my voice take me wherever it wanted to go, without regard to my natural inclination off of the instrument to move somewhere else. I let it be unorthodox. It was a shift for me in writing outside of what would be considered the traditional parameters for a country shuffle. There's this one part that goes from E to G to A. Pete suggested that I change it, but there's a darkness in going from that E to that G. By allowing my melodic curiosity to take me someplace else, I transcended what would have been the traditional parameter. So the parameters that I work within are an outgrowth of an organic experience in the moment.

Do you think that country music has moved too far away from its roots and into an area that's basically indistinguishable from pop music?

I don't concern myself with that. At this point, I'm able to focus on what I hear and what inspires me. We've always maintained a fundamentalist, roots-oriented approach to what we're doing, in that we know what the cornerstones are for what we're doing, and from those cornerstones you can build a block house or, perhaps, the Taj Mahal. The beauty of our experience is that we are able to start with these cornerstones each time, and build from scratch the structure that rests on them. For that reason, I don't think [the issue of commercialization] is a positive thing to concern myself with.

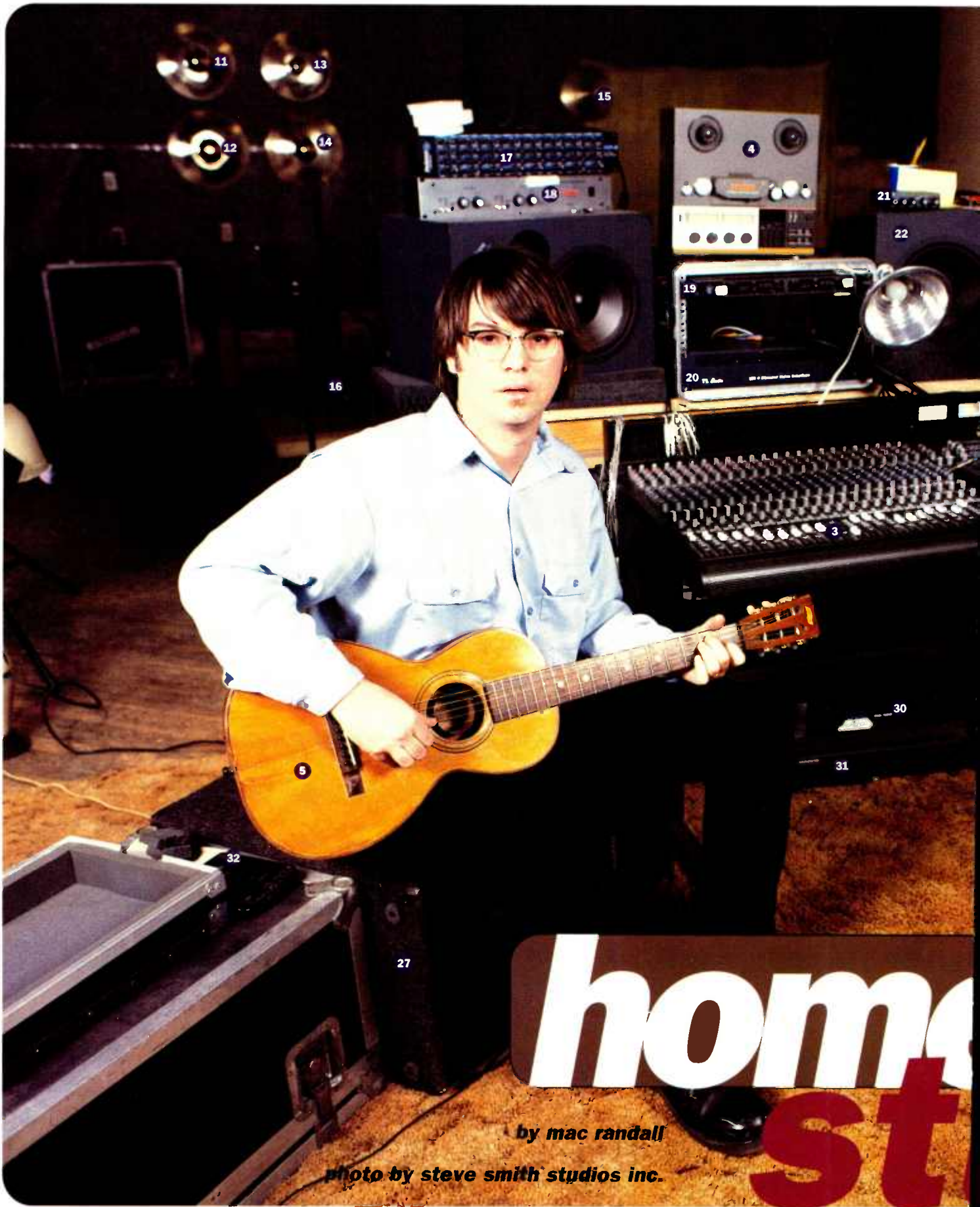
When you're working on a song with a strong connection to tradition, does it feel like you're finding something that's already complete?

It feels more like something to be completed. What I usually stumble upon is the sum of the parts that will make up the whole. I try to be still enough to hear those parts, reach out, receive them, put them together in my own way, and deliver them with my own fingerprints on them. One of the great gifts we're afforded is to be able to express ourselves in that way. It's a subjective selection [of parts]. I don't possess anything but subjectivity in regard to this material. That's my task: I have to be totally subjective and immerse myself in that moment of writing.

The resonance of tradition in your music is comforting as we approach the century's end.

That's interesting. I think this speaks to the ability of this music as a vessel of access to a larger collective consciousness that we share in this experience. I believe we exist beyond here, that there's a conscious existence outside of this moment. That's probably why I keep exploring things that, on the surface, can appear to be dormant and old. But, as they say, what's old is new again.

Contributors: *Paul Zollo is a songwriter and author of* Songwriters On Songwriting: The Expanded Edition *(Da Capo).*



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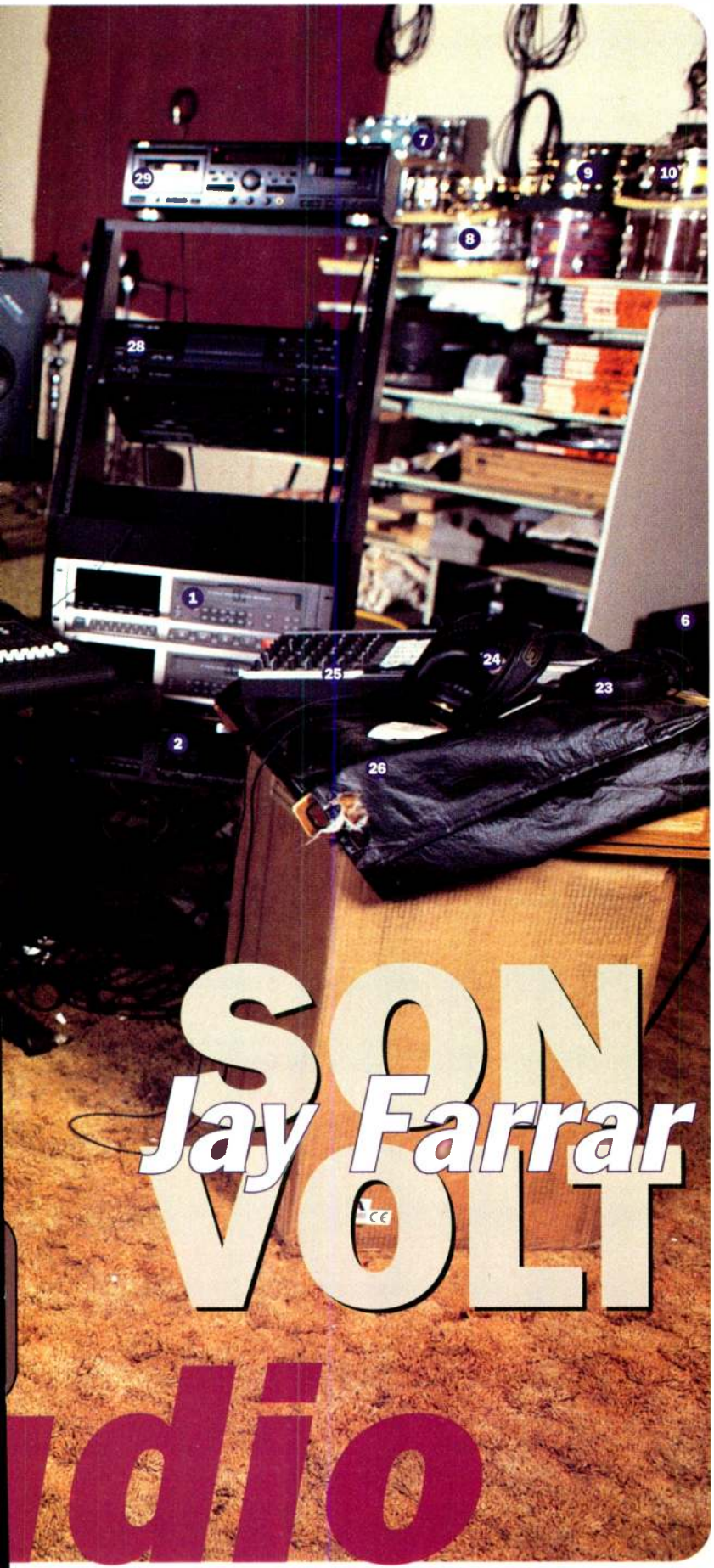
by mac randall

photo by steve smith studios inc.



Listening to the music of Son Volt, you can't help but picture big skies over open country. Sometimes you might even imagine that leader Jay Farrar's lonesome voice only reached your stereo speakers after drifting across miles of windswept plains. So it's not much of a surprise to discover that the place where the band recorded its upcoming third album on Warner Bros. is on a quiet street in the small town of Millstadt, Illinois, a few miles east of St. Louis and just minutes away from acres of rolling farmland dotted with ancient Indian burial mounds. "I've lived in this area nearly all my life," Farrar says simply, and it shows in the music he makes.

Strictly speaking, Son Volt's private Millstadt hideout, which consists of a vast L-shaped room on the ground floor of a nondescript warehouse building, isn't a home studio, as no band member actually lives there. Yet it's close enough to home for Jay's purposes. "I used to go to grade school right down the street from here," he says, "so I knew about the building. Originally it was a women's lingerie factory. When I was looking for somewhere that the band could rehearse, I thought of this place right away."

After about six months of using the space for rehearsing, Farrar and his bandmates decided they didn't need to go anywhere to make their next release. They brought in a bunch of recording gear and built a wall down the middle of the place, thus converting one giant room into two very large ones. Yet any distinction between "live" and "control" rooms is purely nominal in a studio where the drum kit is just a few steps away from the mixing board, with no sonic barriers between them. "We put up baffles on the drums when we were recording," Jay says, "but they still bled into the other mics. It didn't matter that much, though. We wanted a real live room sound, and we got it—the high ceilings in here really helped."

But the band quickly found that its choice of such an industrial location for recording resulted in more than just instruments bleeding into mics. "There's a wood shop on one side of us and a sign maker on the other," Farrar chuckles. "And these walls are paper-thin. We could hardly record at all during the daytime because the saws would start going, and you could hear it on tape. So we were forced to work mostly at night." He pauses and grins. "I keep on listening to hear if any saws are on the finished mixes—sometimes they almost sounded in tune with what we were playing."

The center of Son Volt's nocturnal operations consists of two **Alesis ADAT XTs** ❶ and one original **Alesis ADAT** ❷, paired with a **Mackie 24•8** console ❸. A **Fostex A2** two-track 1/4" tape machine ❹ came in handy for loops and backwards guitar tracks. The studio's extensive collection of guitars is located mostly in the "live" room; among those most frequently used are a Fifties Gibson J-50, '57 and '59 Gibson

Les Paul Juniors, a Gretsch Rock Set, a Harmony Stratotone, a Gibson Melody Maker (used for low tunings), an Airline acoustic, and an old **C. C. Nightingale** acoustic ❺, which was discovered in drummer Mike Heidorn's grandmother's attic. "The guitar belonged to her," Farrar says. "It was pretty beat up, but Mike took it to a luthier and got it fixed. I'm not sure how old it is, but on the inside it says the design was patented in 1893. That tin cone in the soundhole is supposed to help projection. It seems to work."

Bassist Jim Boquist favored Fender Precision, Hagstrom, Epiphone, and Silvertone basses during the sessions, plugging into either a late-Sixties silverface **Fender Pro Reverb** ❻ or Ampeg SVT. Other amps scattered around the studio include an Ampeg Gemini I, a Fender Vibro Champ, a Crate Acoustic 125D, a Sears Silvertone, and a Dwight Devon EH-35, used in conjunction with a lap steel that also goes by the name of Dwight. "Dwight was a guy from East St. Louis who sold amps," Jay explains. "His full name's Sonny Dwight Shields. He somehow managed a deal with Epiphone that let him put his own name on their gear. Dwight stuff isn't easy to find these days, so it can be pretty valuable."

Near the Dwight stands the not-so-imposing form of a Marshall MS-2 mainstack—you know, those cute little amps that you can hook onto your belt. "We plugged a Harmony lap steel into that for one song on the new record," says Farrar, "and it sounded great." Next to the MS-2 in the live room is a pile of guitar stompboxes, including a Dallas-Arbiter Fuzz Face, a Voodoo Lab Tremolo and Overdrive, and a Marshall Drive Master. A keyboard setup is in the same room: a Wurlitzer electric piano, organs by Magnus and Lowrey, a Hallet, Davis and Co. spinet piano, and a Kawai F5610 electronic keyboard. Back in the control room is the aforementioned drum kit, a new Mapex Orion Traditional Series. On a nearby stand are a few extra snares—**Gretsch** ❼, **Premier** ❽, **WFL** ❾, and **Ludwig** ❿—while the accompanying cymbals, all by **Sabian**, hang on the back wall: **AA medium thin crash** ⓫, **AA crash ride** ⓬, **AA medium crash** ⓭, **AA rock crash** ⓮, and **AAX Studio Hats** ⓯.

As for microphones, Farrar has a **Shure SM58** ⓰, but other mics used during the sessions included several Lawson L47s—and, on one track, a pair of Sony Walkman headphones. "We were looking for a real boxy vocal sound, so we tried setting up the headphones and I sang through them," he explains. "It was surprisingly clear." Extra clarity and oomph comes courtesy of a **PreSonus ACP-8** compressor/noise gate ⓱, a **Bellari RP220** tube mic preamp ⓲, an **ART Dual MP** tube mic preamp ⓳, a **TL Audio V11** valve interface ⓴, and an **Alesis NanoVerb** ㉑. While the band was in the midst of recording, David Barbe, the former Sugar bassist who served as the album's principal engineer, brought in a lot of his own outboard gear, which has since been removed.

Jay monitors his work on **Alesis Monitor Twos** ㉒. He also uses **AKG K240** ㉓ and **Audio-Technica ATH-M2X** ㉔ headphones; along with an **Oz Audio Q-Mix** headphone amp ㉕, they rest on top of a **Peavey XR-100** live mixing console ㉖, which Farrar confesses is "used pretty much as a coffee table." Clues to the studio's origin as a rehearsal space include a set of Crate UFM-15H floor monitors powered by a Mackie M•1200 power amp that's perched near the drum kit, and a **Carvin 973** PA speaker ㉗ that Jay seems to favor more as a stool these days.

When it's time for mixdown, the Son Volt boys turn to a **TASCAM DA-20** DAT machine ㉘ and a **JVC TD-W718** double cassette deck ㉙. The whole operation is powered by an **Alesis RA-100** reference amplifier ㉚ and a **Mackie** 200-watt power supply ㉛. And whenever Jay gets tired of listening to himself, he can check out some of his favorite tunes on a **Sony D-121 Discman** ㉜.

Now that their first private studio experience is complete, is Son Volt planning to keep using the place? "That remains to be seen," Jay says. "Besides the noise problem, there's a fairly serious dust problem in here too—it just seems to find its way in. But it was definitely a good experience to work this way, being in familiar surroundings, taking our time, and not having to deal with the clock. We'll probably do something similar next time."

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Squirrel Nut Zippers

Artist interviewed: Tom Maxwell
Home Base: Chapel Hill, NC
Style: vintage jazz references enhanced by emphatic Nineties sensibility
Latest Album: *Perennial Favorites*, scheduled for Aug. 4 release on Mammoth

What is the secret to successful touring?

You have to be a successfully collaborative, cooperative entity—really, that's the secret of being in a band, not just touring. Most of us had played in bands for years before we got into this one, and we had learned a lot about the delicate maneuvering that one needs to do in order to be in a band, which basically involves subsuming one's ego, expressing one's criticisms or opinions productively, and to be enthusiastic and complimentary, to show people how much you appreciate them and to listen when they talk.

Also, you need to find a soundman with whom you can work and to consider him another member of your band. I've seen tremendous bands go down in flames onstage because they were working with the house soundman, who didn't have a clue. What saved our ass was that we found a good soundman who understood us, and immediately took him on the road with us.

How do you get the most out of your rehearsals?

It's good to have beer. Beer and food. When this band started out, it was as much a covered-dish affair as it was a rehearsal. Of course, if you have too much alcohol, you're not gonna get anything done, although you might have a few laughs. But people tend to ease up when they feel comfortable.

How do you write a good song?

As time passed and we started to gel as a live unit, I began to understand where the band's strengths were and to write for that. It actually made things a little easier for me, because I had guideposts to keep in mind as I was writing. For instance, I learned that Kathy [Whalen] could sing the hell out of a certain kind of melody. If a song doesn't work for your band, you should be able to abandon it and move onto something that's more appropriate without feeling like your whole life has been wasted.

How can you save time and money when recording?

Home studios are the way to go. Or you can get a digital workstation, like a Roland VS-880, and demo the hell out of your stuff, so by the time you get into the studio you know how you're gonna sing and play your parts. Only bands like U2 can sit there and write songs in the studio, because they have obscene amounts of money to lavish on six-month recording binges. That would drive us insane; we would all lose our minds. Also, try playing everything live. We do spend some time tracking, but we don't slave over it. We cut all our vocals live on *Hot*. It might take some doing to talk an engineer into using two overhead mics on the drums and letting everybody play, and you might get some clams in there, but if everyone keeps the emotional content of the song in mind, you'll find a keeper.

How do you find the right management?

I don't think that bands starting out should give a second thought to that. New bands should do it themselves, only because that's how they'll learn enough about the business to not get screwed over later.

What's your most indispensable piece of equipment?

We're a pretty low-tech band, but I will say we've got three little Ampeg Jet amps. When we did our tour of Europe we had to rent some Vox amplifiers, which were so shitty that I couldn't wait to get back to my Ampegs.—***Robert L. Doerschuk***

Photo: Jay Blakesberg

Peter Frampton's New AJ-30CE & '64 Texan

Peter's beloved '64 Epiphone Texan has been his primary acoustic instrument and songwriting vehicle since forming Humble Pie thirty years ago. He has written almost every song of his career on it, including "Show Me the Way" and "Baby I Love Your Way" from the multi-platinum selling *Frampton Comes Alive*, (A&M, 1976). So when Peter decided to "semi-retire" his priceless Texan to protect and preserve it, he once again looked to Epiphone for an advanced jumbo acoustic with the same legendary tone and inspirational qualities. Fortunately, he found what he was looking for in our new Advanced Jumbo AJ-30CE acoustic/electric.

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the ODD COUPLE

Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, abetted by the alternative aesthetic of producer Steve Albini, break new musical ground on *Walking Into Clarksdale*.

by maureen herman
photographs by melanie weiner

Maybe it was inevitable that Robert Plant and Jimmy Page would come back together again. Such is the fate of many great partnerships that have gone asunder. But if all the reunion does is regurgitate past triumphs, then it runs the risk of self-parody or, even worse, irrelevance.

For what Page and Plant did in the past was some of the most relevant music of its time. Their pairing not only built the pillars of one of the greatest bands of any era, it also launched an entire genre of music that would thrive for decades to come. Without Page and Plant, there would have been no Led Zeppelin; and without this band, much of what we listen to today would either sound just a bit different or perhaps would never have been played at all.

So what would the Page/Plant reunion of '98 hold in store? Looking at the tea leaves before the release of their album *Walking Into Clarksdale* (Atlantic), one could see signs for concern. This wasn't their first collaboration since drummer John Bonham's death hastened the end of Zeppelin eighteen years ago. But much of what they did together since then had a nostalgic, looking-backward feeling, as in their brief blues/oldies indulgence

with the Honeydrippers, or was in fact a Zeppelin flashback, including a Live Aid appearance in '85 and a glitzy performance at Atlantic's 25th anniversary celebration in '88. Even their *Unledded* album in '94, while commercially successful, stuck to what had become a familiar formula for high-voltage rock bands who had made the trek to *MTV Unplugged*.

Luckily, though, the new album turned out to be a departure from the old formula. While Page's guitar and Plant's vocals were easy to identify, the musical context was more adventurous than we might have expected. From exotic Middle Eastern modalities integrated smoothly into an aggressive rock context to swooping string arrangements that actually sharpened rather than blunted the band's rhythmic edge, and in its judicious use of sampling and potent references to early punk, *Clarksdale* proved that Plant and Page remain vitally creative. Their past, in other words, is past.

And one way they put it behind them was to find input from a purely contemporary sensibility in the form of producer Steve Albini. His turf is more grit than glam, with landmark albums by Nirvana, PJ Harvey, Superchunk, and—as Albini puts it—"about a thousand bands you've never heard of"— to his credit. A match with two definitive stadium rockers seems from afar like a clash of aesthetics. In fact, that's more or less what it was, which is why *Clarksdale* turned out to be such a surprise and a success.

The impact of their encounter lingers in the current Page/Plant tour. One hot night last June, Page and Plant took to the stage at the Nashville Arena with two younger and gifted players, drummer Michael Lee and bassist Charlie Jones. Yes, they rattled the rafters with big arena-rock gestures. Yes, they recycled "Heartbreaker" and "Whole Lotta Love." But they also brought their new repertoire to life, with songs that are in no way half-baked Zeppelin echoes.

Significantly, they came across as a four-piece band, not as two sidemen backing up a couple of superstars. Fact is, *Clarksdale* was written by all four musicians together, fueled with what Albini describes as their shared interest in breaking new ground. Certainly, though, Lee and Jones are aware of what it means to gig with these two older icons. "I do kind of sit back and think, 'This is pretty intense,'" admits the 26-year-old drummer. "It's also intense because the first time I ever went to see the movies, my friends took me to see *The Song Remains the Same*, and I just didn't understand it. I was too young. I was, like, 'What's going on?'"

Actually, we had the same question as we met with Page and Plant at the Soho Grand in New York. Fresh off the Concorde, they played their roles skillfully, with Plant as the jocular but sometimes less-than-forthcoming chief spokesman, and Page as the enigmatic and, well, sometimes surly instrumental wizard.

How did you hear about Steve Albini and his work, and what led you to decide to work with him?

Plant: I bought his records way back.

Like Big Black?

Plant: Yeah, and *Rapeman*. And then I heard [PJ Harvey's] *Rid of Me*. And Jimmy and I, we were looking for somebody who could be as simple and as direct [as Albini], with no frills, and who could take what we knew we could do and put it on tape as quickly as possible without all that producer/engineer personality complex thing, which a lot of English people have.

How did you know he worked like that? Was it through demoing him, or was it through just hearing about him?

Plant: Once we contacted him, he sent us reams—in fact, whole forests of trees—telling us about the way he saw everything and the way he saw stuff for us. Then he sent us examples of what he thought were good acoustic sounds. He was very meticulous and detailed. He seemed to be very capable—almost to the point of fanaticism, really, about his work. We figured a guy who had it that much together without even really having a telephone conversation with us, must have the kind of diligence that would allow us to do what we normally do. I mean, we worked with such competent engineers way back, who didn't even have a business card or an office or anything; they were just naturals. It was a

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE!
To read more of Maureen Herman's interview with Plant and Page, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

— STEVE ALBINI —

AN INDIE ROCK LEGEND PRODUCES TWO ICONS OF ARENA ROCK

How did you get the call to do this project?

I'm not really sure how they decided to call me. Initially I was asked if I could come to London for a meeting. Although I was flattered and a little intimidated, my schedule was already full, and I couldn't justify kicking someone out of a session so I could fly to England and meet some famous people. I spoke with Robert and Jimmy on the phone, and they seemed on the level. During my first conversation with Robert, he got a traffic ticket for driving while talking on the phone. I suggested that Jimmy and Robert listen to a representative sample of the records I had done. I sent them some things—Gastr del Sol, Palace, Smog, Auteurs, Silkworm, Breeders, PJ Harvey—I can't remember what else—and if they liked it, we could try a short session to see how we got along. That short session took place at RAK studio [London] in June, and the results were promising enough that they asked me to continue in September.

You first did a demo session before they hired you—who else was being considered and what was that process like?

I don't know for sure who was being considered. It's not really my business, but I didn't get the impression there was a big hunt afoot. The first session was a condensed version of the Abbey Road sessions—fewer songs, less experimenting, faster-paced—but otherwise very similar.

On the surface it seems an unlikely pairing, but given the commitment both parties have to artistic control generally and recording specifically, did you find there was a parallel vision about doing this record, or was there some adjustment to each other's working styles?

Fundamentally, I think we all appreciate the same things in music: An honest expression by a unique creative talent who is making music because it gives his life meaning. Music is a way for a listener to participate in an expression or ecstatic state the musician is experiencing first-hand through performance. If there are too many layers of artifice between the two of them, there is no longer any communal experience, there is only show business. Vaudeville. Making a record should be about providing a conduit for that legitimate common experience. I think they appreciated that I was concerned with getting it right, not being in control—that I was willing to make my ego subordinate to the recording process and get on with the task at hand without a lot of nonsense.

From a practical standpoint, I had to be prepared for whatever recording, editing, special effects, or other approach might spring to mind, and be ready to jump on anything at a moment's notice. They don't like sitting around. If anybody is in the studio, there's going to be action. There were so many things on the go at any time, I might be asked to mix, make copies, edit, do an overdub, record a vocal, set up a specific effect or record a new song from scratch at any time.

I really enjoyed the process. I enjoy getting results quickly and working under pressure—it makes you pay attention and do your job better knowing you could be fucking up a moment that can't be recreated.

What part did the other musicians seem to play? In other words, is this a band *or is it more Page-Plant?*

The bass player, Charlie Jones, has been playing with Robert for many years, and the drummer, Michael Lee, has been playing with Page and Plant since before the Unledded tour. They definitely work as a band, not as stars with lackeys.

How long was the recording process? Did you ever feel pressure or intimidated during the project or was it more like another session?

The calendar was a long one (September 9 to December 21), but there was a two-week hiatus in the middle, during which I did a tour of the Mediterranean with Shellac and recorded the new album by Sicilian rock collective Uzeda, and there were a lot of revisions made to the song list, the songs themselves, and the recording method, so the time was all used to good effect. On top of all that, Robert's mother died during the session, so he

(continued on page 36)

different time. We just played in those days, and that's what we did now.

Did you come to the studio with songs and arrangements pretty set?

Plant: Well, we had frameworks of songs. Some of them we played exactly as they were, apart from lyrics, which we do last. Other ones just got turned upside-down on themselves. It was great, because Steve didn't get in the way of any of that. Without turning this into a Steve Albini fan club interview, he did exactly what he said he would do: He laid back a lot to begin with as he got to see how we were, and obviously when you first start recording, there's an element of nerves in the thing—you know, you're a bit jumpy, you don't know what you're in for. And we've all worked with people who weren't really appropriate, so he was just magnificent. Also, more than anything else, more than all the technical aspects of it all, I think he liked the holiday. I don't think he ever worked so little over such a long period.

Because the working days were short?

Plant: Plus, it was so organic. We were changing numbers around prior to the recording, and we needed to be right on top of it. But, yeah, you don't want a long day either, because the thing becomes a chore rather than a pleasure if you're working against the clock. We still did it in a short space of time; it's just that we didn't break our necks doing it. The poor guy didn't know what to do [*laughs*]. He'd have care packages sent in from Chicago: bands on the edge of suicide, all these rumbling buildings being demolished on CD—just to keep his cred nice and sharp, very cutting-edge. In the end, with us, he'd be playing three-dimensional Scrabble while we were sleeping. Have you heard the Rolf Harris story?

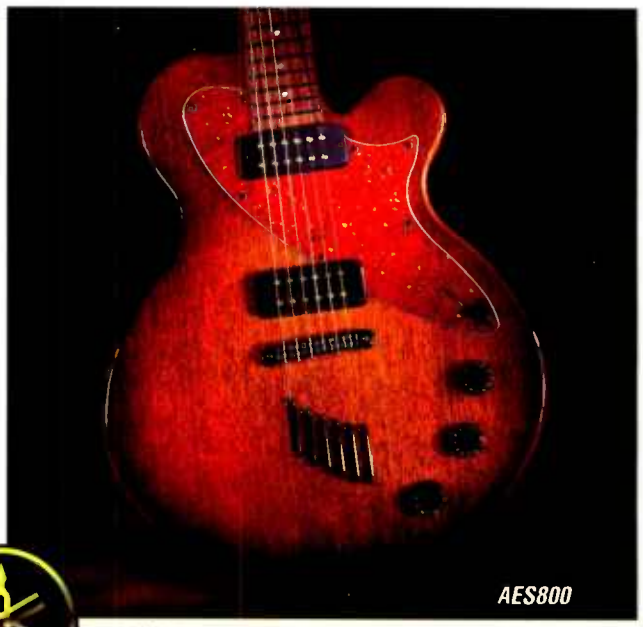
Uh, no.

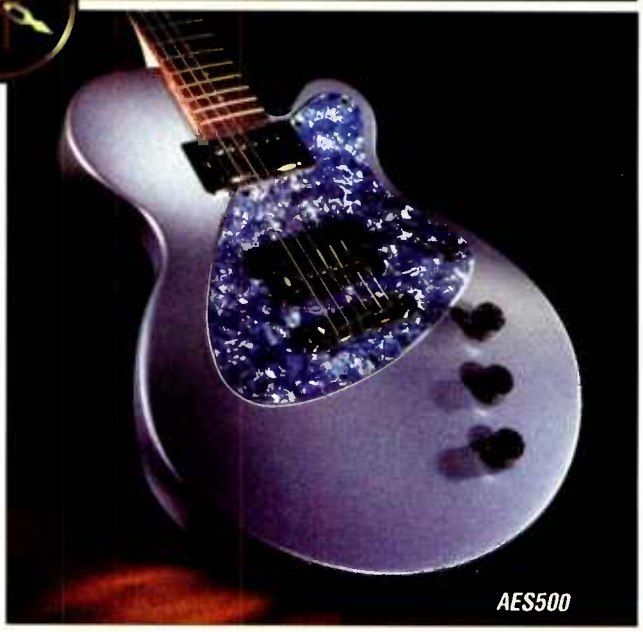
Plant: Well, Rolf Harris is this great all-around singer, comedian, magician, painter, and sort of pathological good guy. I'd heard of him years ago, when I was a kid. About once every ten years he makes a record. And eight years ago he covered "Stairway to Heaven" on a wobbleboard. . . .

Page: That's like a big piece of plywood that you wobble back and forth to get that wobble sound.

Plant: . . . and he's very camp. For

GUTS AND GLORY.





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YAMAHA GUITARS

(continued from page 34)

needed to take some time off.

Normally, on records of this stature, the engineering, producing, mixing, and technical chores are split among a number of people. I have always done entire projects myself, and for me, it wasn't an uncomfortable work load. I have more confidence in a session if I'm the only one making the mistakes—they'll be familiar mistakes I know how to remedy in that case.

After spending a lot of time with them, what is your insight into their musical taste, awareness of new music, and relationship to each other?

The thing that impressed me about both of them is their genuine enthusiasm for music, even after being bombarded with it daily for so many years. They were constantly talking about their favorite records and bringing in new discoveries. Robert alone probably buys as many as fifteen records a week. They are absolutely genuine people.

What was the recording process like?

Typically, the band would start rehearsing a song, and I would try to be ready so I could record the rehearsals as well as the proper takes. The three-piece band would play live, and Robert would always sing along with them, even if he was inventing lyrics for unfinished songs, as this gave Jimmy and the others a guide for the placement of accents and the overall "temperature," or intensity of the song. These guide vocals were used as masters on several songs, including "When I Was a Child," and "Heart in Your Hand." Once the song was mounted, they would play it until they were content, and then we would review the recordings. There were usually at least two takes; at most four or five.

Most of the time there was an obvious "best" take, although there was occasionally a great guitar solo or something that would be preserved from one of the rehearsals or an otherwise unused take. I would be asked to make whatever edits were necessary, and the master would be discussed. Very few songs required more than one attempt in this fashion, and those were due to someone suggesting an alternate arrangement or style of playing that would suit the song better.

Once we had a library of masters, we would flip between recording masters, overdubbing, recording vocals, making rough mixes, experimenting with alternate arrangements and the like on a moment-to-moment basis. After the basic recordings were done, the overdubbing sessions were usually split with Jimmy having a day and Robert having a day, so they both had time to work on ideas at home and had sufficient time in the studio to make a meal of a particular song. Mixing was done piecemeal: As a group of songs were finished, they would be mixed, interspersed with other activity. This avoided a gargantuan mix session at the end of the line, and allowed for reflection and revision as necessary.

Were there any interesting equipment, effects, instrumentation, or recording techniques that stand out?

Jimmy has been responsible for some of the groundbreaking recorded moments of our generation, so I relished the moments when he would say "I've got to get this specific Supro amp in for that ['Upon a Golden Horse']," or "That acoustic guitar [on 'Please Read the Letter'] wants to be recorded through one of my RCA limiters." I learned a lot from him, and I was continually impressed by his ability to hear in detail and remember very intricate specifics of every song.

Robert has a radically creative mind, and generates ideas faster than they can be put into action. When he hits on a perfect permutation of things though, you can bet it will be unique, and he will work it to an extreme and make it totally *his*. He came up with the idea of using a distorted drum loop as a rhythm element in "House of Love," and was quite directorial about the use of the additional elements in "Most High" and the orchestra in "Upon a Golden Horse."

On "Most High" the percussion is a recording Robert brought in. I don't know where he made the recording. The Eastern instrumental voices came from a compact keyboard called an Oriental Keyboard, that has quarter-tone tempered tunings and an assortment of Eastern instrument sounds. It's unbelievably cheesy looking, but the sounds are really cool. The reed sound, the accordion sound and the church organ sound all came from that little keyboard. It also has little touch pads that play people shouting "*Ayayayayayayay!*," "*Doof!*," and something I forget, but which probably means "Kill the white devil!"

example, one of the lyrics is, "Sometimes all of my thoughts are misgiving." And at that point, through the curtain comes a lady who gives him something, and he says, "Thank you, Miss Given!" *Ba-boom!* So Steve, desperate to keep in with the Swans the Einsturzende Neubaten and all these things, he didn't know that we were taking him to see this kind of act. And there were all these reporters from *NME*, and we're rolling with laughter while Steve is trying to shrink back by the door. A photographer comes by and says, "Can we take a picture?" We say, "Yeah, okay. Wait here." Then we ran out the door and down the street by the side of the canal, and the photographer was furious. Now, since the pen is always mightier than the sword, we got this big slagging in the paper the next week because he couldn't get the picture: "Plant, Page, and Albini Drink the Bar Dry at Rolf Harris Gig!"

Page: They said we'd been pogoing in the front row. I don't think it'll help him too much on the next Swans album [*laughs*].

How did you hook up with the other guys in your band, bassist Charlie Jones and drummer Michael Lee?

Plant: Well, Charlie and I have been playing together for eleven years, and Michael was playing with me before the *No Quarter* project. When Jimmy and I started working together again, we were totally on our own, working just with loops. Once we'd explored that area and gone through the very sensitive period of seeing whether we could handle each other as friends and co-conspirators, when it was time to work with humans they were the first guys we turned to.

Page: But once we'd taken the *No Quarter* project on the road and we'd played as a band, even though we had the restrictions of [working with] the orchestras, we really got to know each other musically and they got to know me, which is important because they already know you.

Plant: Right. So when we actually got together in the rehearsal to do some writing for this new album, it came together really fast.

By that point you didn't have to go through that awkward politeness that new bands have to wrestle with.

Plant: Well, they're quite retro in what they've listened to. It goes forwards and backwards, from David Holmes to the

Guitarists feel that the best tone comes from a hand-built, all-tube amplifier.

We agree.

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Dwarves and the Airplane. They're listening all the time to every kind of music, and they listen to a lot of music that surrounded us when we started playing together, although they missed the music that we grew up on. So what they do is, they come in from a kind of tangential angle and give us a mixture of all those times put together.

Page: Being a four-piece is wonderful, because it gives us the freedom to move in any direction we want.

Where did you begin your current tour?

Plant: We spent three weeks in Eastern Europe.

Why did you choose to start your tour there?

Plant: Well, I didn't look at is as a warm-up. It's something I've always wanted to do. I knew that during the communist regimes that our records represented something they couldn't get their hands on and weren't allowed to appreciate openly. You would be fined heavily or thrown in jail for possession of a Led Zeppelin album.

Page: Really, and it cost the equivalent of one month's wages on the black market. So people would get together to buy the album, then they'd listen to it, hide it, and pass it on to the next person, who'd listen to it and hide it and so on. You could be denounced and thrown in jail for that.

Plant: You have no idea from this viewpoint. Because we're English, we're a lot closer to that stuff [than Americans]. You don't see it on the news. How long does it take to fly from New York to Chicago?

Three or four hours.

Plant: Well, you can fly from London to Turkey in that time, and you'd have gone all the way across the Eastern European areas that were dominated by the Soviets. You get off the plane and you hear the sound of people being called to [Muslim] prayer. So, if you go to Boise, Idaho, you know, you're in Syria.

We are a lot more homogenous here, that's true.

Plant: In fact, you're very isolated, aren't you? I mean, I don't know how you get on with this Asian music scene. Do you have a big Asian music scene here?

Uhh . . .

Plant: See, there's a real good link between Asian and Arab music and English music, so there's a lot of stuff going on that's quite experimental, and it's really moving into the mainstream. You've got bands like Cornershop who have number one singles for weeks on end in England—and then somebody did a remix on one of their earlier singles, and *that's* gone straight to number one. They're not a particularly good example of the blending, because the lyrical content is culturally essential to them. But a lot of other music, that's mostly instrumental, is very exciting—almost as exciting as Prodigy.

– WALKING INTO THE EQUIPMENT VAN –

The amount of equipment this show takes on the road is stupefying, but here's a distilled version of the stuff they love the most.

Guitars: Les Paul Transperformance, Yamaha Jimmy Page acoustic, Ovation double neck, Gibson double neck, (two) Les Paul B. Benders, Washburn 12-string acoustic, Danelectro, Fender Stratocaster, Martin acoustic, Alvarez electric/acoustic, Ernie Ball strings.

Guitar Amplifiers: (three) Vox AC30s, Marshall JCM head with Marshall 4x12 cabinets, Marshall Micro, Matchless head w/Matchless cabinet, Fishman Acoustic, Fender Champ.

Basses: Fender Telecaster bass, Warwick Streamer, Warwick Corvette, Fender Precision, Elite strings.

Bass Amplifiers: Marshall Jubilee w/Marshall 2x15 and 4x12 cabinets, SWR w/SWR 8x8 cabinet.

Drums: Ludwig custom built drumset, Remo drum heads, ProMark custom drumsticks, Zildjian cymbals (16" Concert, 16" Medium Crash, 17" Crash, 18" Crash, 19" Crash, 20" Crash, 24" Ride, 22" China).

Keyboards: Korg SGPROX, Korg X5, E-mu Classic Keys module, Hammond BX2 organ.

Microphones and Miscellaneous: Sennheiser MD-421 and MD-409U mics, Shure SM-57 and SM-58 mic, Theramin, Ovation mandolin, Echoplex echo unit, Whammy, Rat, TC Electronic Chorus, Lovetone effects, and Boss LS2 pedals, Boss and Korg tuners, Akai S300XL sampler, Alesis D5 drum machine, Roland VG8 guitar synthesizer.

Jimmy, what kind of music is exciting you now?

Page: I've been listening to Kenneth Williams and New Panic. And Steve Earle.

You show some eclectic instrumental influences on Walking Into Clarksdale. *On "Most High," for example, you use something called an Oriental Keyboard. What exactly is that?*

Plant: That's exactly what it is.

Well, besides that, was there anything else other than guitar, bass, and drums on the album?

Plant: That's the way things started. There's a loop on a couple of numbers, "Most High" being one of them, and also on "House of Love," where Michael put the loops together himself on the last verse or two.

Steve Albini was also telling me . . .

Plant: I don't want to hear anything more about Steve!

Page: Well, let's have it. What did Steve say?

He said that your relationship to each other is unique, that you complement each other both in terms of your talent and your sense of humor.

Plant: What a wanker! I can't believe it! What a sleazebag!

The question is, though, whether that simpatico history you have made it easy for you to come back together again.

Page: Well, we had toured for a year and a half after we'd finished recording *No Quarter* and filming in Morocco, so we'd settled in.

Plant: But we'd also changed again.

In what way?

Plant: We'd just changed. Everything changed. Forever changes. I think that even since we've worked with Steve we've changed again. The heat's off now, and we're having a really good time. We've finished the record and we like it. We did it in 35 days and it didn't hurt. We even escaped with our brains intact. At times it was a little hard for me. I think Steve didn't understand how emotionally tied up I was in vocal sounds and effects. He wanted everything to be pure voice. But he had fifteen or sixteen albums of my voice to know that was never going to be the case. So we worked it out and loaded the limiters and the compressors up to a degree. So there, Steve! I've found out exactly what to do with a Urei compressor: You push all the buttons in and turn all the knobs to the right.

In the end, what does Walking Into Clarksdale *represent in the history of your joint projects?*

Page: I think the *Unledded* project says *how* we came back together, and the new album says *why* we came back together.

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A Minute-by-Minute Guide to Scoring TV Commercials

- BY - Mike Levine

In part 1 of this article, published in last month's Musician, *we looked at how to find work composing and scoring commercials. This month, we'll examine what you can expect on an actual job and offer advice on how to handle it all.*

Composing an underscore or jingle for advertising involves more than just writing and arranging. Naturally, you've got to be skilled in those areas, but first and foremost you'll need to be able to maintain your creativity under enormous time pressure. On a typical assignment you generally have no more than a couple of days to compose, arrange, record, and mix your assignment. What's more, you're often working with the added pressure of knowing that you're competing

against anywhere from one to fifteen other composers to see whose version gets the final nod.

You also need to be able to work under someone else's creative direction. If you've gotten the job directly from an ad agency, then you'll take your direction from the agency producer and other members of the creative team—the creative director, the copy writer, and so on. If you're freelancing for a music production company ("music house"), you'll report to the producer there. In any event, as a composer-for-hire, you'll have to accept that you won't have ultimate creative control.

To give you a sense of what it's like to do a commercial composing job, let's look at a typical assignment, step by step. Because (as we explained last month) freelancing for a music house is the easiest way to break into the business, we'll use a freelance assignment as our example. Still, most of the advice and information offered here also applies if you get an assignment directly from an ad agency. Since most commercial jobs are underscores (instrumental music written to fit the picture) rather than jingles, we'll use a scoring job for our example.

But before getting into the details of this assignment, let's examine what equipment you'll need, at a minimum, to do this kind of work.

"We've got a job for you. It's an underscore with some sound design aspects. And it's due the day after tomorrow at ten in the morning. Can you do it?"

Gear Lowdown

First and foremost, you'll need a studio capable of recording and manipulating both MIDI data and audio, with the ability to lock up to SMPTE timecode coming from a video deck. The most elegant solution is to use a computer-based, digital audio sequencer, but you can also use a MIDI-only sequencer in conjunction with a stand-alone multitrack—if you have the necessary hardware to sync them up to external timecode. For a video deck, you can get by with a good-quality, hi-fi stereo VHS unit, although the current industry standard is the more expensive (and rapidly obsolescing) 3/4" format. Whatever you get, make sure that it can shuttle backwards and forwards, one frame at a time.

You'll also need a good sonic palette at your disposal so that you're ready to handle a wide variety of assignments. This means having a selection of synths and synth modules, as well as a sampler. Naturally, you'll want a quality mixing board, a decent mic or two, and an assortment of outboard gear including compressors and digital effects processors. Another necessity is a good pair of near-field reference monitors, and because you'll be doing mixes that (hopefully) will end up on TV, you'd be wise to also get a pair of smaller speakers, such as Auratones or Radio Shack Minimus 7s, that more closely approximate the sound of a typical television speaker.

The Assignment

Now let's go through our hypothetical assignment step by step. You receive a phone call; it's the producer from one of the music houses where you sent your demo reel. "We've got a job if you're interested," he says. "It's an underscore with some sound design aspects as well. We have a piece of reference music and a picture [video], and we'll pay $200 for the demo and thirty percent of the creative fee if your version wins. Can you do it? Oh, by the way, it's due the day after tomorrow at ten in the morning."

You're thrilled to get offered this assignment, and you're nervous about the short turnaround. Can you get the job done in time? In spite of your worries, you throw caution to the wind and accept the job. "I'll overnight you the picture and a cassette with the reference music," says the producer. "Call me once you've looked at it."

The fact that you're getting an actual video to score on this job is a good sign. There are many times when you might be asked to write your demo to a voice-over (VO) only, or sometimes just a storyboard (a scene-by-scene drawing of the proposed commercial, with dialog and voice-over printed underneath); this can mean that the commercial hasn't been ultimately approved by the agency and client, and they're still trying out different ideas. Although the music is usually written after the spot has been edited, there are occasions—mostly with jingles—when the picture will be edited to fit the music rather than vice-versa.

First Things First

The package arrives the next morning. The first thing you do is to pop the video into your deck and make sure that you can lock up your sequencer with the SMPTE time code that they've striped onto one of the audio tracks. (The dialog and voice-over is on the other.) By locking your sequence to the timecode, you assure that your music will play in sync with the video, which is crucial for scoring.

We'll assume that the video locks up with no trouble. You then watch the spot a couple of times and observe that it's thirty seconds in length—most TV spots are—and features a sweaty man and woman stumbling through a desert, looking lost and parched. There are the typical shots of rattlesnakes and cow skulls. Our heroes appear to be in dire straits. They then come upon a bottle of the sponsor's ice tea, drink it, and are transported into a cloud of sparkling light (reminiscent of the transporters from *Star Trek*) to a tropical resort where they dance poolside with bathing suits on and bottles of iced tea in their hands.

You listen to the cassette of reference music that came in the package with the video. The first cut sounds as if it's taken from a movie soundtrack CD. It features ethereal synth pads and ominous tubular bell hits; this is apparently the direction the agency wants for the desert scene. In addition, they've included UB-40's "Red Red Wine," which is clearly meant as reference for the tropical scene.

Agency people often use reference music because it gives them a convenient way to communicate what they want musically

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without having to know technical musical terminology. More often than not you're asked to use the reference or "temp" music as a loose guide for what you're doing, but there are occasions when they'll want you to do a "knock-off" of a piece of existing music that sounds as close as possible without getting into the realm of copyright infringement.

You call the music house producer, and he tells you to use the first piece of reference music as a guide for the desert scene and to come up with a good whooshing sound effect for the transition from desert to poolside. "When it gets to the pool scene," he says, "they want something a little heavier than the obvious calypso steel band thing—that's why they included the UB-40 cut. It doesn't need to sound exactly like that, but the agency people kept stressing that they wanted it to sound reggae, high-energy, and kind of edgy. And don't forget that it needs to hit the super at the end." What he means by the "super" is the product logo, which is superimposed on the picture near the end of the spot—a common feature in most commercials.

Working with the Picture

The next step is to go through the picture and write down the SMPTE locations (hours:minutes:seconds:frames) of the important visual events. You do this by freeze-framing the video at the start (and sometimes the end) of each of these events and writing down the timecode numbers, which are often superimposed ("burned in") on the work video you had been given. (If not, you can get the numbers from your synchronized sequencer.) These numbers correspond exactly with the actual timecode that resides on one of the audio tracks.

In the case of our example, you notate the timecode location of the start of picture, the start and end points of the transition from desert to swimming pool, the super, and the end of picture. You then enter these SMPTE times as "markers" in your sequencer so that you have a frame of reference while you're figuring tempo and start time for your sequence.

Your goal when scoring is to write a piece of music that feels good with the picture and "hits" (accentuates) the important events. It always works better and feels more seamless when these hits occur on or close to a quarter-, eighth-, or (sometimes) sixteenth-note beat. Once you have a basic tempo established, either from an idea you've composed or a piece of reference music you were given, experiment with variations of that tempo and the SMPTE start time of your sequence, which for a commercial should range anywhere from four to nine frames past the first frame of the spot. (For technical reasons, a few frames of picture must go by before the audio can start.)

The easiest way to do this is to then lock up to the video and watch the spot with your sequencer's metronome clicking quarter-notes. At that point you can play around with minor adjustments in tempo and start time until you find the best combination.

For our hypothetical iced tea commercial, you have the advantage of being able to break the spot into two sections: the desert scene and the poolside scene. Because of this natural division and the fact that the clients are asking for two different types of music, you have the option of using a different tempo for each scene, which gives you more flexibility towards getting your "hit points" to fall on a beat.

From time to time, in order to make an important hit fall on a downbeat (which is especially useful when "hitting" a scene change or cut), you'll have to put in some odd bars, such as 5/4 or 3/8. But you should try to do this as little as possible, because you want your track to sound as smooth and musical as it can. It's easy to get absorbed in the minutiae of tempo, meter, and start time, but don't forget that writing a compelling piece of music is ultimately what's going to win you the account.

In the case of our example, you use the tempos from the two pieces of reference music and work out a start time and tempo map that makes all the important hits. You then get out a piece of manuscript paper and make a musical outline for the spot, writing down measure numbers and putting rhythmic notations of where the various hits are. This helps give you a framework to use when composing. After that, you begin to write and arrange the music for the desert scene. What you come up with is a sustaining open-voiced, swirling synth pad punctuated by a low tremolo guitar sample, a low synth bell sound, and some digitally delayed shakers that sound reminiscent of a rattlesnake. You create some additional sound effects by recording yourself breathing, putting it into your sampler, pitching it down about an octave, and adding a long reverb.

For the shimmering transition from desert to pool, you mix a howling wind sound that you found on a sound effects CD with a high-pitched, metallic, whooshing synth pad, which you trigger with a MIDI note that you set to start at the beginning of the transition and release at the end of it.

At the end of the whoosh, you start the music for the pool scene, which you've written as a reggae feel loosely based on "Red Red Wine," featuring an acoustic kit from your drum module, an electric bass sample, an electric piano sound on the upbeats, and a synth melody. Your arrangement builds harmonically up to the "super," where you hold on the V chord and then vamp out to an abrupt fade at the very end of the spot.

Once you have a rough version together, you call the

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producer and play it for him over the phone. He likes your approach and tells you to finish it up and mix it. As a general rule, it's always good to keep in touch with whoever is hiring you on a particular job so that you can get your major ideas approved as you go along.

The Mix

When you're ready to mix it's about five in the afternoon on day two of the assignment; your tape is due by ten o'clock the next morning. After listening carefully to each track individually and cleaning up some little glitches you find, you begin mixing. You do most of your level setting and EQ changes while monitoring on your near-field monitors, but you occasionally switch over to your little speakers and listen in mono to simulate how it would sound coming out of a small TV. You also listen to your mix along with the voice-over to make sure that none of your mix elements are getting in the way of the spoken part. When you have set your levels, EQ, and effects, you play through the mix a number of times, making sure that none of the instruments stick out or sound out of place.

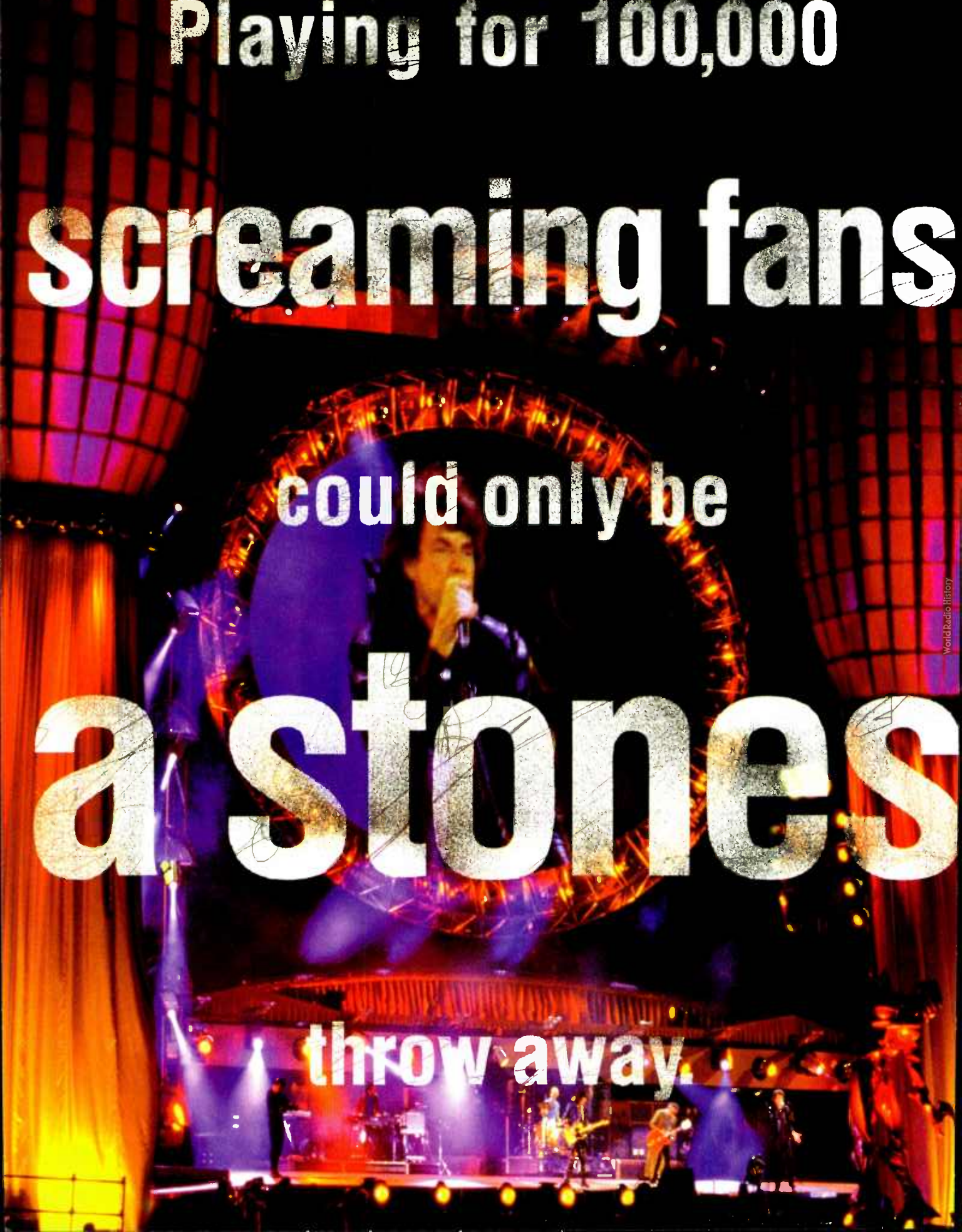
When you're satisfied with the mix, you check it out on your car stereo and on a boombox to make sure that it translates well to other systems. At 10:30 that night you put your final mix onto a DAT while locked up to the video, and you include the "2 beep" (the loud beep at the end of the countdown that occurs two seconds prior to the start of the spot on the work video); this lets the music house accurately "lay back" (combine) your music to the video. You also record each instrument onto the DAT separately, with the 2 beep preceding each individual track. This gives the music house the option of dumping these "strips" (solo instrument tracks) to a digital editor, lining them up with their 2 beeps and remixing if they want to. You carefully label all the mix information on the DAT case, including DAT ID numbers. Before shutting down for the night, you save and back up all your data in case the music house asks for any changes.

The Reaction

The next morning, you bring your DAT to the music house and give it to the producer. He seems to like it but says that the agency won't make their decision for a couple of days. You then begin the toughest part of the job, which is to wait for the result. A few days later you call the music house and they tell you that although the agency people liked your version best, the client vetoed it. Why? Because the pool music sounded too "edgy."

Chalk it up to another day in the ad biz. And be ready to do it all again, wiser for the experience, when the phone rings with another assignment.

Contributors: Mike Levine has composed and played on numerous national commercials. He's also the author of How to Be a Working Musician, *published recently by Billboard Books. Visit his website at www.mikelevine.com.*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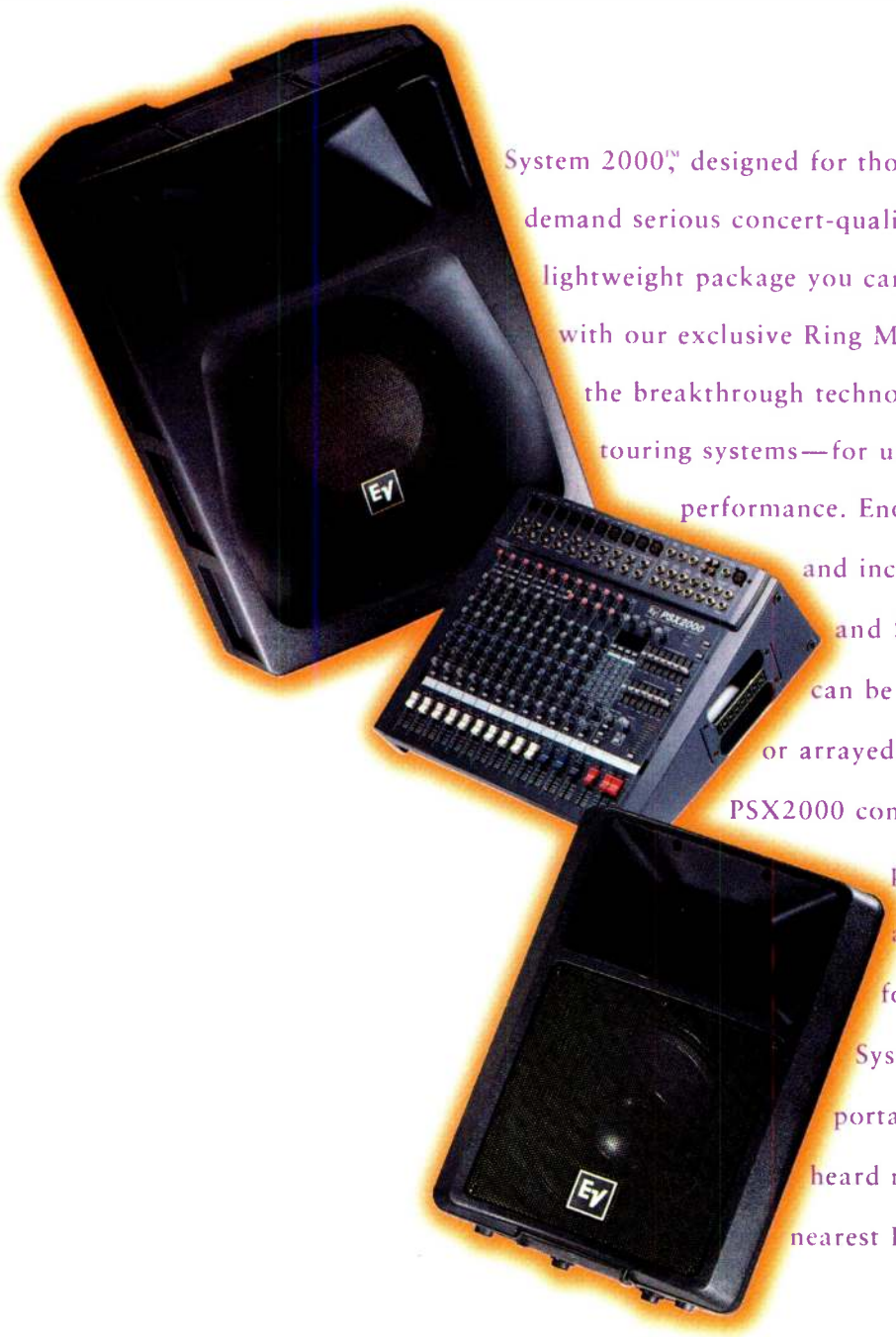

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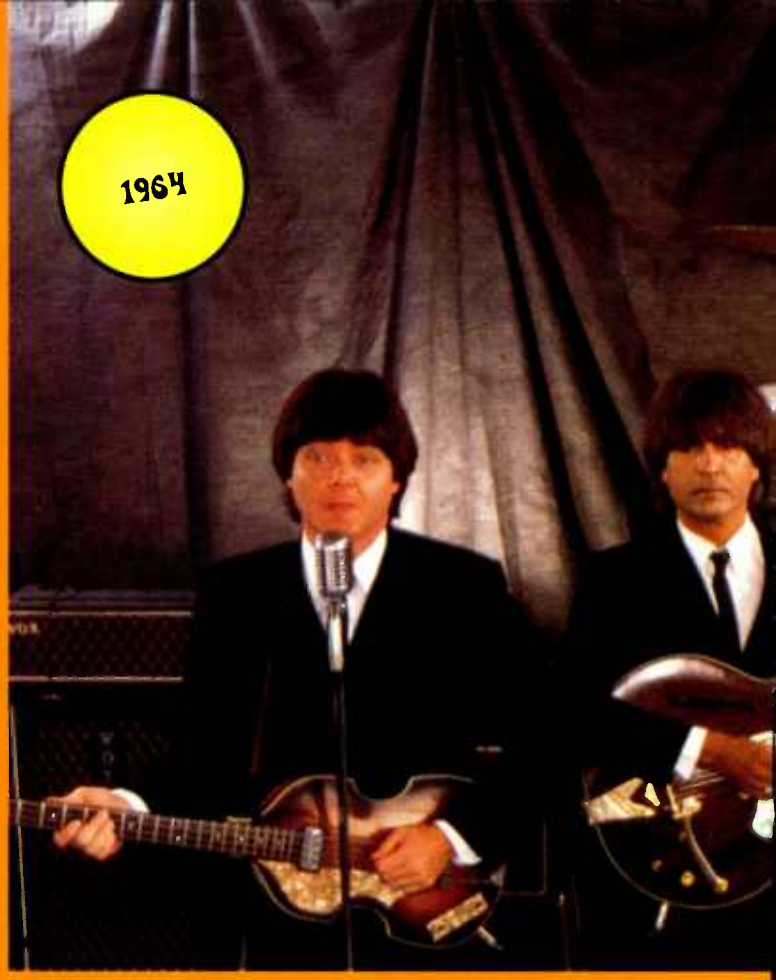


COME ON! GET HAPPY!

The strange world of tribute bands

(and why you should consider playing in one).

BY JASON ZASKY

Want to make a musician laugh? Try these words: "tribute band." But don't be so quick to snicker. Sure, low-grade acts have ruined the genre's reputation, but believe it or not, plenty of reputable players are earning a living in tribute bands. In many respects they've got a head start over groups who are agonizing over original material: They play familiar songs, have a ready-made fan base, and appeal to club owners who don't mind it when their venue is packed to the rafters. Some hard-working outfits have even earned their own share of fame through paying tribute to someone else.

Yet several questions remain. One—"How can anyone stand to play in a group like this?"—you'll have to answer for yourself. The more fundamental issues—namely, defining what exactly a tribute band is and how they earn their living—we can tackle right here.

The first factoid to absorb is that tribute bands and cover bands are entirely different animals. "A cover band just plays

the songs of other artists, whereas a tribute band actually tries to recreate the persona of a band," explains Howard Pattow, producer and member of the Partridge Family tribute Sound Magazine. "The best example would be *Beatlemania*, the Broadway show, which was a prototype for what we do. Four guys who looked, dressed, and talked like the Beatles—they gave you the impression of *being* the Beatles."

"The number one reason why there are tribute bands is the fans," says Rich Fox, creator of the Tribute Band Mania! website, which provides information and links tribute bands all over the world. "A lot of times the musicians do it out of necessity, because they can't make enough money in their original bands." Tributes also appeal to audiences who follow a band that doesn't tour often, or don't want to shell out the kind of money many headliners charge for their shows. "You go see the real band, it might cost fifty bucks and there might be fifty thousand people there," Fox explains. "You go see the tribute band, it might cost five bucks and there might be only a hundred people there, which gives you a much more intimate experience."

Probably the main reason fans have for following a tribute act is that the band on which that act is based doesn't exist anymore. Fox, who is currently working with partner Kris Curry on a feature-length documentary about tribute bands, paused to reflect on this aspect of the phenomenon after shooting a recent show by Queen imitators Sheer Heart Attack. "Since Queen no longer exists, the fans have transferred their affection to Sheer Heart Attack. "They've been able to get much closer to the tribute band than they ever could to Queen. They follow the band obsessively whenever they play."

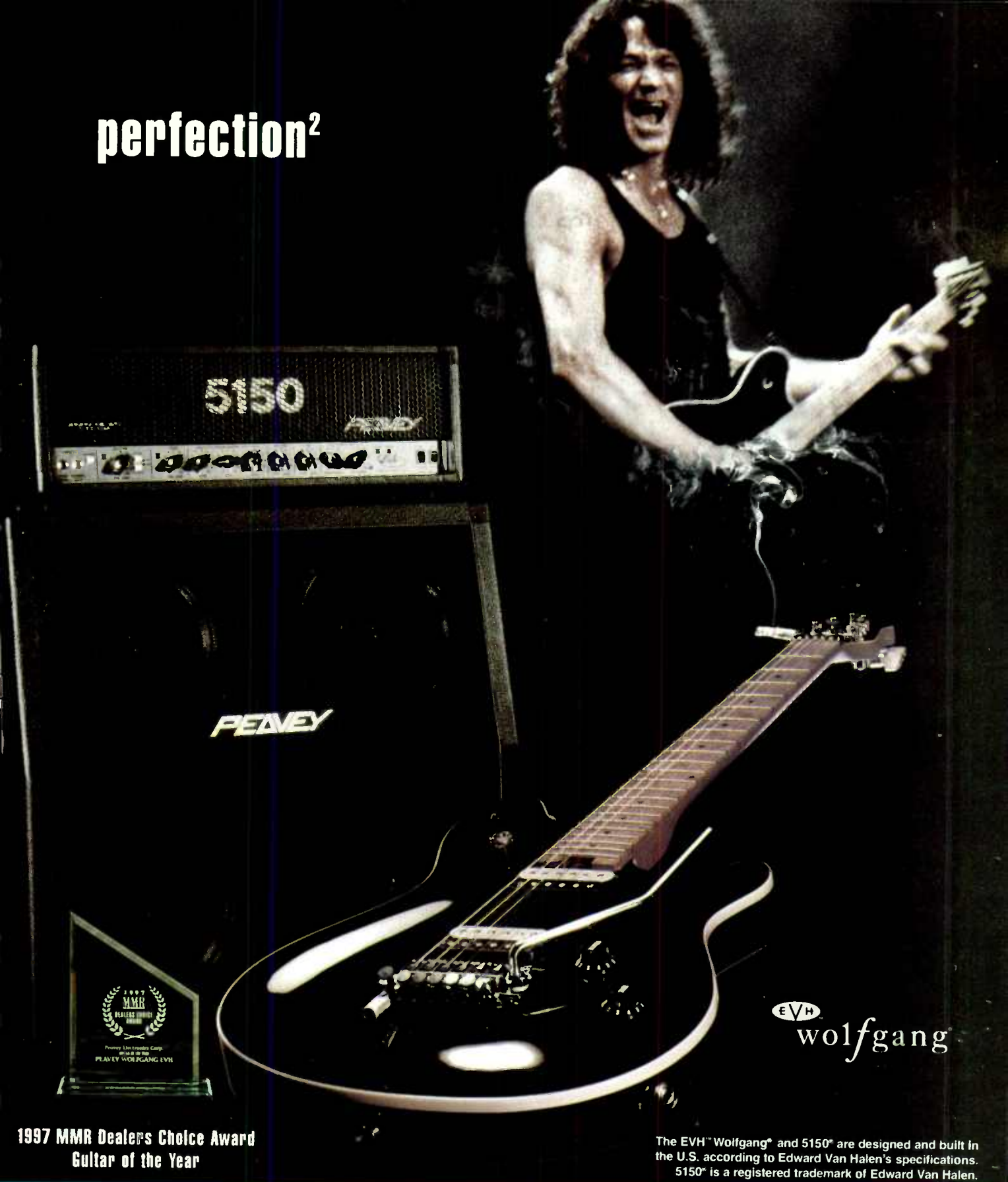
You can take this a step further: "Interestingly, Sheer Heart Attack has broken up, but they're doing reunion shows now," Fox observes. "So, much like a Who fan waiting for the next Who reunion, there are people waiting for the next Sheer Heart Attack reunion. They get very, very excited, especially when they can get backstage and hang out with the band in the green room."

In this surreal world of art—or something like it—imitating art, a strange kind of creativity sometimes emerges. "Sheer Heart Attack is very nostalgic in that they'll play all of Queen's old songs and they'll dress up like Queen used to," Fox says. "But they'll also do things that Queen would never have done. They'll play an entire side off Queen's second album or do a medley, and hardcore fans want to see that kind of stuff."

Creativity, in fact, often separates the great tribute band from the merely good one. Björn Again (Abba) is undoubtedly the world's most popular tribute. They've released several CDs (including *The Greatest Hits of Abba are Björn Again*), played concerts in more than thirty countries, performed in front of festival-sized audiences, and even entertained at the ceremonies where England handed Hong Kong back to China. Guitarist Björn Volvo-us says the band has "taken some great pain to make the details of the show very much like Abba, but we have more of a rock & roll edge than Abba had. We sometimes try to improve on their wonderful formula." And in what might be unprecedented for a tribute, Volvo-us says they "may even do some songs that might sound like what Abba would have recorded if they were recording as Abba today."

Similarly, Super Diamond have also added a rock & roll edge to their act, doing amped-up Nineties versions of Neil Diamond classics, which can be heard on *Super Diamond: 14 Great Hits*. Meanwhile, Sound Magazine's first stab at creativity is their Partrified version of Kiss' "Shout It Out Loud," which was mixed by Bob Ezrin for the Kiss tribute CD *KAOL 2: Creatures of the Net*.

In one well-publicized case, a tribute band singer actually took over the job of who he was impersonating. In 1995 Tim Owens, a longtime Judas Priest fanatic, was doing his Rob Halford impression in a Priest tribute called British Steel. Two women in the audience videotaped his gig and, afterwards, told Owens they were going to send the tape to Judas Priest itself. Owens' response was, "Yeah, right." What he didn't know was that one of the women was dating Priest drummer



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Scott Travis, so in fact the band did wind up seeing Owens in action. They were so stunned by his performance that they invited him to audition for the open vocal slot. The tryout lasted through one verse of "Victim of Change" before Glenn Tipton announced, "You've got the job."

Maybe this story isn't so surprising. The most successful tributes almost inevitably come to the attention of the corresponding artist. In the case of Kiss tribute Black Diamond, they actually began with the blessings of Paul Stanley. Guitarist Benny Doro relates the story: "In 1987 I got a demo tape of my [original] band to Paul. He managed us for seven-and-a-half years, but around 1994 he said, 'What we're working on isn't valid anymore.'

"So I said, 'I'd like to do a Kiss tribute.' He said, 'Do you think you can do a good job?' I said, 'I've been on tour with you, I've spent a lot of time, I'm a huge fan. . . . Yeah!' He said, 'Then go for it.' I said, 'Can I use the sign? Can I use the logo? What can I do? What can't I do?' He said, 'You have free rein on everything, but we'll cut it off if we feel you're standing on our shoulders, and if we feel you're not doing a good job, we'll tell you.'"

How do Stanley and Gene Simmons feel about Kiss tributes in general? "I think they're happy [about them]," Doro says. "It's free marketing for them. I know the tribute bands—and not just us—had a lot to do with their decision to put the makeup back on. When we toured around, I used to send Paul and Kiss' management reports of what was happening in the cities, [which included] reports of record sales for old material going through the roof once we left. They started paying attention to that stuff."

Other artists also recognize the value of the free publicity. When Neil Diamond was asked about Randy Cordein (a.k.a. Surreal Neil) of Super Diamond, he said, "I should send Surreal Neil a thank-you letter because I've noticed a lot more young people at the shows." (Vince Charles, Diamond's current percussionist/steel drummer, also appreciates the band: He has been known to sit in with them, as has ex-Diamond drummer Dennis St. John.

The more successful tribute bands often wind up meeting the artists they're impersonating. Pattow remembers telling David Cassidy about Sound Magazine: "The look on his face was a mixture of, 'Gee, I'm flattered you guys are doing this,' and 'You guys are out of your minds.' I also spoke to Danny Bonaduce. His reaction to Sound Magazine was"—and here he falls into a Bonaduce voice—'You've got a Partridge Family tribute band? . . . *Why?!*' He then asked which character I portrayed. I tried to explain that we were like the Partridge Family grown up—I said, 'We don't have a little red-headed kid playing bass.' And he goes, 'Well, neither did the Partridge Family.'"

The irony doesn't escape Pattow, who admits, "We're actually doing a tribute to a band that never existed."

Dave Russell, who plays Sammy Hagar in the Van Halen tribute act 5010,

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SO YOU WANNA BE (SOME OTHER) ROCK & ROLL STAR: HOW TO BREAK INTO THE TRIBUTE SCENE

If you'd like to form a tribute band, the first step is to choose an artist on which to build your act. The best bet is to pick a band that is or was very, very popular and has had a long career. People have created shows based on relatively obscure artists, but let's face it, that Letters To Cleo tribute probably won't last too long. Also, keep in mind that very visual acts are the easiest to emulate.

You can find players for your tribute band through the usual routines, most often by meeting them in musical circles and bonding over an artist you both admire. Or you can run ads in local magazines and newspapers. Nicole Carmen got her gig portraying Alanis Morissette with Jagged Little Thrill through an agency; she relocated across Canada to take the job. And sometimes the act is together before you even know it: Believer started out as an original band but turned into an Ozzy Osborne tribute after audience members kept commenting on how much singer Mickey Towicz reminded them of the Oz man.

Once you've decided on the artist, you have to settle on your approach. Are you going to really try to *be* that band, or are you going to be a caricature? Faithful recreation is the most time-consuming and expensive route. Recreating the look, obtaining the same equipment, learning stage moves, and mimicking mannerisms takes some serious effort. The other school of thought is to follow the light-hearted path. Surreal Neil of Super Diamond sees the serious approach as "kind of pompous, because you're never going to be that band. The whole attitude of 'We give them something they can't see anymore' is just way too serious. Having a mixture of cheese and really great songs makes it a fun show."

The last thing you need to ask yourself is whether you're really cut out for this kind of work. According to J'nanne Maxwell of AAA Entertainment, "You really have to be into the artist." You have to be able to stand playing the same material over and over. You may have to put up with condescension from other players. But, hey, when you get tired of doing one band, just change artists or work up a whole new act. One New York group leads double tribute lives as Pink Floyd (the Wall) and Rush (Xanadu). If worse comes to worse, try trading members with another band. Kiss tributes are notorious for swapping members; it's not too unusual, according to Believer's Towicz, to hear one such act tell another, "I'll trade you a Gene and a Paul for a Peter to be named later and an undisclosed amount of money."

has met both Hagar and Eddie Van Halen. According to Russell, "Sammy thinks it's cool that we're basing our tribute around his era." And Eddie? "He doesn't give a shit."

As for Björn Volvo-us, "We met Abba. They saw Björn Again as being a little bit of a parody, a bit like Spinal Tap meets Abba. It was reported once that Abba sued us for six million pounds. This is not true, actually. You can play their music, as long as you fill out forms at the end of the gig and the appropriate money is paid to Abba."

Some tribute bands haven't exactly endeared themselves to the artists they celebrate. In fact, legal hassles have been known to erupt over tributes. Take 1964, a Beatles act that was sued by Apple Corp. for trademark infringement. Mark Benson, who plays the John Lennon role, says, "They spent two-and-a-half years trying to make us cease and desist completely." The case was eventually settled, "and as far as I know, we're the only group with court documents stating that we have an agreement with Apple Corp. to continue doing what we do. We follow guidelines that we all agreed to, like not using the name Beatles other than in a descriptive way."

Now in its fourteenth year of playing 150 to 180 shows annually, 1964 is a prime example of how far the best tributes will go to do an accurate recreation. "We called the Beatles original tailor," Benson reports, "and he gave us a lot of help with the designs and patterns of our suits. We use the old Vox AC30 tube amps, all the same instruments, the same type of strings they used. Our stuff is the real McCoy: vintage, same year, same model."

One major obstacle 1964 had to overcome was the need for a left-handed bass player who could sing like Paul McCartney. But even this tall order didn't stymie the group. As Benson points out, their bassist, Gary Grimes, is "not left-handed, and he's not a bass player. But he learned to play the bass left-handed." (Shades of Stu Sutcliffe!) Benson also notes that "Ringo is left-handed, although not a lot of people know that, because he plays right-handed. Our drummer is left-handed, but he didn't grow up playing right-handed, so he had to switch over too. Our entire rhythm section plays totally off from their natural feeling. For the first six months, we looked great, but nobody was dancing, believe me."

Why would anybody put themselves through such contortions? Surprise—tribute bands can make a lot of money. Compensation varies from city to city and act to act, but to give you an idea, Nicole Carmen, who presents herself as Alanis Morissette with Jagged Little Thrill, says her act earns from $1,000 to $1,500 a night, and 5150 reports earning up to $4,000 a night. Tributes that can sell out large clubs will bring in over $10,000 with each appearance, and the superstar tributes earn even more.

Then again, for some acts, money isn't the issue. Several Species, who recreate the Pink Floyd experience, travel as eight

musicians with a crew of seven—predictably, they struggle to break even. Sometimes love *is* all you need. . . .

Which brings up another, um, fringe benefit of the tribute biz. As Benny Doro of Black Diamond puts it, Kiss acts often have to deal with "tons" of groupies. "Most of the time," he reveals, "they don't even want you to take the makeup off." Volvo-us confirms the report: "Between you and me and all of your readers, there are a lot of groupies at the back of the stage, and sometimes they want more than just an autograph."

Of course, the act has a lot to do with the action. Adam Keeney of the J.S. Bach Experience—a guitars/bass/drums outfit that dons powdered wigs and plays heavy rock versions of Bach compositions—laments that "there's a very small female contingent who are at all interested in this group."

Perhaps the biggest plus to working this circuit is longevity. Even as original bands flame out with one- or two-album careers (if they're lucky), it's not unusual to find tributes who have been working for ten or fifteen years. And there's no mistaking when the act has run its course. As Volvo-us puts it, "If you're no longer popular, it's time to hang up your platform shoes."

So how do you break into this intriguing line of work? It helps to connect with agencies that specialize in tribute bands. A few of the bigger houses are the Booking House (2484 Spruce Needle Dr., Mississauga, Ontario, L5L 1M6 Canada; [905] 569-7281; www.bookinghouse.com), Acclaim Entertainment (1190 Metcalfe St., North Bay, Ontario P1B 2R4 Canada, [705] 472-0070), and AAA Entertainment Consultants (32 Robbins Rd., Springfield, MA 04401; [413] 736-3830). If you want to impress these agencies, you need to supply a cassette recording or video and a professional press package, which should include a photo, a bio, a song list, an equipment list, and your logo. If you've already been playing tribute gigs, a concert video, a list of past appearances, references, and sample mailers are also highly recommended. But do *not* contact an agency until you've polished your act—agents estimate that approximately half the bands that apply get rejected.

If you are retained, be ready to work. It's not uncommon for an established band to be listed by different agencies, as each company tends to focus on the region where they are based. Beyond finding gigs, these companies can provide guidance, direction, and some occasional unexpected help. Pattow says that an agent arranging a Sound Magazine job in New York happened to own a replica of the Partridge Family tour bus. "I asked, 'Does that bus run?' He said it did, so I said, 'Then it's clear. We have to make our entrance driving up in the bus.'"

Contributors: Jason Zasky is a freelance writer based in New York. He paid his tribute dues on guitar with Black Velvet Frog, who played lounge versions of early Eighties Southern California hardcore classics.

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- Check or money order for $30.00 per song (U.S. currency only) payable to John Lennon Songwriting Contest. If paying by credit card, $30.00 per song will be charged to your account.

Entries must be postmarked no later than August 31, 1998.

1. Each song submitted must be contestant's original work. Songs may not exceed five (5) minutes in length. No song previously recorded and released through national distribution in any country will be eligible. Songs may have multiple co-writers, but please designate one name only on the application. **Contestant may submit as many songs in as many categories as he/she wishes, but each entry requires a separate cassette, entry form, lyric sheet, and entrance fee. One check or money order for multiple entries/categories is permitted.** (Entrance fee is non-refundable. JLSC is not responsible for late, lost, damaged, misdirected, postage due, stolen, or misappropriated entries.)
2. Prizes: Twelve (12) Grand Prize Winners will receive $2,000 in cash, $5,000 in Yamaha project studio equipment, and a $5,000 advance from EMI Music Publishing. One (1) Grand Prize Winner will receive $20,000 for the "Song of the Year" courtesy of Maxell. Thirty-six (36) Finalists will receive $1,000. Seventy-two (72) Winners will receive portable CD players.
3. Contest is open to amateur and professional songwriters. Employees of JLSC, their families, subsidiaries, and affiliates are not eligible.
4. Winners will be chosen by a select panel of judges comprised of noted songwriters, producers and music industry professionals. Songs will be judged based upon melody, composition and lyrics (when applicable). **The quality of performance and production will not be considered.** Prizes will be awarded jointly to all authors of any song; division of prizes is responsibility of winners. Void where prohibited. All federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.
5. Winners will be notified by mail and must sign and return an affidavit of eligibility/recording rights/publicity release within 14 days of notification date. The affidavit will state that winner's song is original work and he/she holds all rights to song. Failure to sign and return such affidavit within 14 days or provision of false/inaccurate information therein will result in immediate disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Affidavits of winners under 18 years of age at time of award must be countersigned by parent or legal guardian. Affidavits subject to verification by JLSC and its agents. Entry constitutes permission to use winners names, likenesses, and voices for future advertising and publicity purposes without additional compensation.
6. Winners will be determined by January 15, 1999, after which each entrant will receive a list of winners in the mail. Cassettes and lyrics will not be returned.

I have read and understand the rules of the John Lennon Songwriting Contest and I accept the terms and conditions of participation. (If entrant is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.)

Signature _____ Date _____

Live CRUNCH for Homebound Guitarists

The Lexicon Signature 284 will change the way guitarists make music from here on out.

by michael gelfand

If you're like me, inspiration rules your creative world. Whether it comes in the middle of a band rehearsal or in the middle of the night doesn't matter—each flash of this divine fury must be seized. If I'm at home when lightning strikes, I'll walk into my home studio to record the big moment. But when my muse tells me to crank up the guitar amp, I know there's going to be an even bigger problem: Either I'm going to do what the muse commands (which means that my landlord will present me with an eviction notice the next day) or I'll have to make sonic concessions that'll undermine the integrity of the moment.

At least that's how it used to be.

Enter the Lexicon Signature 284 ($1,099), an all-tube stereo recording guitar amplifier that's poised to change the way guitarists make music from here on out. The Signature 284 was created to give guitarists the ability to record whatever tone our heart desires—sweet jazz stylings, ballsy overdriven crunch, and everything in between—without requiring a speaker cabinet to convey that sound or a microphone to capture it. And—surprise, surprise—it does exactly what Lexicon says it'll do.

But before you start wondering whether the Signature 284 is a one-trick pony, consider this: While the 284 was designed primarily as a recording amplifier, it ably drives small- to medium-size speaker cabinets and can be slaved for use as a preamp (in tandem with a power amp) for more power-hungry speaker setups. The fact is that no matter how you use it, the Signature 284 performs with so much soul that you'll have to consider whether you'll ever want to return to using a standard guitar rig again.

methodology

When designer John McIntyre and the folks at Lexicon (with input from legendary producer Eddie Kramer) set about to create the 284, they agreed that it should remain pure in form and function, opting for intuitive controls and an uncomplicated design that would enable the 284 to look and behave like a typical tube amp. That's good, because I took the immediate gratification route and had the 284 hooked up and sounding great within a minute; I did so because I generally detest manuals, but I found out days later that this one happens to be clear and full of helpful suggestions.

The 284 resides in a black, fan-cooled chassis (fitted with rack ears) that fits in a two-unit rack space and provides the tubes and precious innards with all the protection they'll need from overheating and other serious mishaps. Three 12AX7 tubes form the basis of the 284's high-gain preamp section, while two EL 84 tubes in a Class A configuration deliver three watts rms to each channel.

Front panel features are simple and self-explanatory: chicken knobs for GAIN (with pull-on BOOST), BASS, MIDRANGE, TREBLE, and PRESENCE

(continued on page 64)

(continued from page 63)

offer finite tone-shaping, while knobs for LEFT and RIGHT VOLUME determine the overall level of your sound. Other front panel features include a 1/4" guitar input and on/off switches for STANDBY and POWER (with a cool, multifaceted blue light indicator).

The rear panel layout is just as clean. Each channel's 1/4" speaker output is equipped with a switch that allows you to alter the amp's output impedance (8- or 4-ohm). For recording direct, each channel has a compensated XLR output (+4dB) with small push-buttons for GROUND LIFT and BRIGHT; each channel also has an uncompensated 1/4" output for slaving to a power amp. The EFFECTS LOOP can be used in mono, stereo, or for running different effects in each channel. A conveniently located 1/4" jack offers a rear-panel guitar input that's bypassed whenever the front-panel input is in use.

For testing purposes, I tried out the 284 with an Ibanez Talman (as well as a Rhodes keyboard and a '67 Rickenbacker 4005 semi-hollow-body bass just for kicks); pedal effects included a Boss DD-2 digital delay, a Lovetone Meatball envelope filter, and a TC Electronic stereo chorus/flanger/pitch modulator. For recording purposes, I ran the signal coming from the 284 into my ADAT via a TASCAM M-1508 eight-track mixing board; monitoring was handled by a pair of Yamaha NS-10s that were powered by a Furman HA-6 headphone monitor amplifier. With a Shure 57 mic, I compared the 284's direct recording signal with its own miked sound (played through a Lexicon SB 210 2 x 10" split-baffle, closed-back stereo speaker cabinet ($499) and contrasted that miked sound against those produced by a Seventies Ampeg V-4 100-watt amp played through a Seventies Acoustic 2 x 12" and a small Fifties Silvertone combo.

the results

I'm a sucker for cool gear, and I fell hard for the 284. Like any highly respected tube amp, it sounded good from the get-go and sounded better as I tweaked it further. As you'd expect, your picking attack will dictate your sound: A light touch will deliver sweet, glassy tones, while really digging in will coax out all sorts of growl. Once you've learned the feel of the 284, you'll find that its tone controls are extremely effective in further shaping your sound. (None of the pots exhibit the sweet spots or humps that other amps are saddled with, and the 284's PRESENCE control was surprisingly useful when playing the Talman in neck- and bridge-position humbucker configurations.) If the tone controls don't seem to be doing everything you want, check the position of the BRIGHT button on the rear panel—otherwise you'll be spending time trying to compensate for an EQ curve you don't want.

The 284 sounds great in every imaginable tonal setting, thanks in large part to the unobtrusive speaker simulation circuitry that'll never let you know it's there. But it truly excels at getting monstrous distortion. The preamp was designed to offer lots of gain, which lets you craft dirty sounds that range from Sixties skronk to Stevie Ray's Texas blues scream to modern, searing overdrive. (The 284's recording outputs initially gave my mixing board a hard time: Their output overloaded it until I figured out the proper balance between my board and the 284's GAIN and master volume controls, but once I got it right there were no more problems.) Needless to say, it doesn't take much to get the 284 to break up—and that's with the BOOST control off—but if you're committed to taking advantage of the BOOST control's inherent heat, strap yourself in for the ride of your life.

Once you've become comfortable with the amp's sonic qualities, you owe it to yourself to play around on the 284 with a good stereo chorus—all I can say is, "Wow!" If a stereo chorus, flanger, or delay still leave you wanting more, one listen to the harmonic overtones produced by a Meatball pedal should satiate you. And if that still doesn't work, suffice it to say that the 284's effects loop doesn't step on your tone at all, which means that you'll be shocked at how pure your tone is while your effects swirl around your head—that is, when and if you break down and try some out, you purist.

As I stated earlier, the 284 was designed as a recording amp, but it has no problems driving a speaker cabinet. Lexicon's SB 210 2 x 10" can handle up to 35 watts a side, but the 284 had no problem delivering all the juice that was needed to get the speakers moving and sound good. I did notice a tonal difference—a slight low-end drop-off—between the direct sound coming through my NS-10s and the sound coming from the SB 210, but this probably has as much to do with my monitors and mixing board as it does with the SB 210. In any case, the 284 doesn't provide enough power to let you use it for a gig, but it sounded great for practice purposes and can be hooked up with a power amp to provide with you as much oomph as you'll ever need. Basically, all you need to know is that if you plug the 284 into a cabinet and close your eyes, it sounds like any good, low-power tube amp. It had a character all its own and sounded as good if not better than both of my other guitar amps.

I do have a couple of minor complaints. If feedback is a huge aspect of your playing, you'd better be prepared to play the 284 through a cabinet or within close proximity to your studio monitors. If you're planning on recording Hendrix-like pyrotechnics, the 284 will feed back brilliantly in these scenarios, but if you think a feathered hat and a contorted face is all you'll need to get your guitar to squeal, you're in for a rude awakening.

My only other problem here is that the 284 doesn't have channel-switching capability. In keeping with McIntyre's design aesthetic, Lexicon opted to keep the amp's design simple, but how much harder would it have been to add this feature? Remember, though, that this is primarily a "recording" amp and you can get around this slight shortcoming with the aid of an overdrive pedal or a line driver. That said, there are plenty of small, simple, traditional tube amps out there offering this feature, and hopefully Lexicon will consider making channel-switching an option on future models.

Minor complaints aside, the Lexicon 284 is an awesome tool with enough character to make any home studio recording sound better. It is solidly built, easy to use, sonically diverse, and able to serve as an everyday amp for virtually any purpose, recording or live, as long as you're prepared to add on a speaker cabinet and possibly a power amp. And just because it was designed with guitarists in mind doesn't mean you can't put bass, keyboards, or vocals through it. I tried all of them, and the 284 added something good each time. So the next time inspiration makes you rush into your home studio in the middle of the night to rip through some Pete Townshend windmills or a progression of lost chords, you can smile knowing that the only one hearing your heavenly sound is you. And what a sound it is. *Kerrang!*

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fast for

1 Fender Cyclone guitar

As though Fender hasn't already done plenty to further the world of guitar design, their new Cyclone ($599) is radical enough to turn some heads. Along with a vintage-style Tex-Mex Strat single-coil pickup in the neck position and a high-output Atomic-Humbucker in the bridge position, the Mexican-made Cyclone delivers a varied selection of tones from a rather unconventional design; the Cylone's most distinguishable features are a slightly larger than normal headstock, a 24-3/4" scale length, and an offset-waist contoured poplar body. Other notable features include a one-piece maple neck with 22 medium-jumbo frets, a synchronized tremolo system, and vintage machine heads. And lucky you, a deluxe gig bag comes included. ➤ ***Fender Musical Instruments Corp., 7975 N. Hayden Rd., Scotsdale, AZ 85258; voice (602) 596-9690***

2 Lexicon MPX G2 guitar effects processor

There's nothing worse than getting a great live sound only to have it escape your grasp when it comes time to record it in the studio—nothing except for maybe having a great studio sound that can't be duplicated in live situations. Thanks to Lexicon's custom shop, such problems are a thing of the past—their MPX G2 guitar effects processor ($TBA) can be used with or without an amplifier (for direct recording or stand-alone programmable duties) and features digital *and* analog effects that can be placed anywhere—in front of an amp, in an effects loop, or both—within two individual audio paths. An optional MIDI remote controller enables hands-free control of all features and programmable relays for amp switching. ➤ ***Lexicon, 3 Oak Park, Bedford, MA 01730-1441; voice (781) 280-0300***

3 Ensoniq ZR-76 keyboard

Keyboard samples will come and go, but nothing is as enduring as the natural sound of a top-quality piano—that is, if you can get your hands on one. Unfortunately a Steinway D grand piano costs more than some small countries' national debt, but Ensoniq is offering the next best thing, and at a far more affordable price. Their ZR-76 ($2,795) is a 76-key, weighted keyboard that uses William Coakley's Perfect Piano soundcard to deliver one of the sweetest piano sounds this side of Carnegie Hall. Features include three expansion slots for additional EXP boards, a built-in programmable drum machine, a 16-track recorder with PATTERN and SONG modes, 24-bit effects, and an "idea" pad for recording your spontaneous creations on the fly. ➤ ***Ensoniq Corp., 155 Great Valley Pkwy., Malvern, PA 19355; voice (610) 647-8908***

ward

4 WD Deep 6 baritone guitar neck

If you didn't already know, a baritone guitar combines the foundational thunder of a bass with the midrange twang and playability of a guitar, but you don't have to buy a baritone guitar to learn why they're quickly becoming the trendy, hybrid equivalent of the snowboard for guitarists and bassists—you can simply convert your Strat- or Tele-style guitar into a baritone guitar with the help of WD's Deep 6 baritone guitar neck ($300). Designed by luthier Joe Veillette, the Deep 6 is made from hard rock maple and comes with a 24-fret (medium-jumbo) rosewood or maple fingerboard and a satin finish (gloss finish is optional); the single truss rod and 27.67"-scale length ensure the proper string tension for that inimitable tone. Nut not included. ➤ ***WD Music Products, Inc., 4070 Mayflower Rd., Fort Myers, FL 33916; voice (941) 337-7575***

5 Opcode Studio 128X MIDI interface

Compatibility issues often dictate what types of MIDI gear we can—and can't—use in the studio, but thanks to Opcode's Studio 128X cross-platform MIDI interface ($429), home studio neophytes and professional studio rats alike can mix and match old and new MIDI-based gear into their studio setup without disrupting the harmonious interplay of their current system. The 128X is designed to work with Mac- and PC-compatible systems and offers eight fully independent I/Os for up to 128 channels of simultaneous MIDI action. Other notable features include full support of Open Music System (OMS) protocol (which means you can use the 128X with virtually every Mac sequencing program out there), read/write functionality for SMPTE time coding (in all formats), and full MIDI patchbay capability. ➤ ***Opcode Systems, 3950 Fabian Wy., Ste. 100, Palo Alto, CA 94303; voice (650) 856-3333***

6 Kurzweil KPK-9 electronic drum pad kit

Drummers used to recoil in horror at the thought of playing anything but an honest-to-goodness acoustic drum kit, but recent technological advances have begun to blur the lines between traditional and synthetic drum kits, bringing the sound and feel of electronic drums much closer to what purists demand. Kurzweil is on top of the beat with their KPK-9 accessory percussion kit ($1,995), a nine-piece component-based system that's fully compatible with a slew of popular drum modules (including Roland's V-Drum, TD5, TD7, and Yamaha's DTX). The KPK-9 consists of four 8" single-zone trigger pads, three 8" two-zone switchable trigger pads, a variable-control hi-hat pedal, a kick pedal with a foldable assembly, and a full mounting system (including arms, clamps, required tools, and 1/4" interconnects). ➤ ***Kurzweil, 13336 Alondra Blvd., Cerritos, CA 90723-2245; voice (562) 926-3200***

SURROUND PART

There may be no sure things in life except death, taxes, and Madonna reinventing a new image for herself every year, but it's a safe bet that we'll all be listening to music in surround sound in the very near future. The main reason is that digital technology is finally at the point where it allows audio recordings to be stored and reproduced in multiple channels. Another, perhaps more cynical reason is that speaker manufacturers make considerably more profit off the sale of six speakers than they do from the sale of two. Be that as it may, surround sound—where audio is coming from six speakers strategically positioned around you (front left, front center, front right, rear left, rear right, and a subwoofer)—makes for a listening experience that's much closer to reality than the decidedly artificial stereo format (where *all* sound originates in front of us) we've become accustomed to over the past fifty years.

DVD-video, which provides its audio portion in "5.1" channels (the subwoofer is the ".1" channel), is slowly starting to gain market share, but it's the imminent arrival of DVD-audio (which will provide much higher-quality multi-channel audio) that has caused professional studios around the world to begin investing heavily in surround-sound gear. Major record producers like Elliot Scheiner, Dave Tickle, and Bob Margouleff are spending a lot of their time doing surround-sound remixes of classic albums and MTV music specials, and a few new productions (such as Alan Parsons' *On Air* and Dave Grusin's *West Side Story*, produced by Phil Ramone) are beginning to make their appearance in 5.1 format (DTS-encoded CD and/or DVD-video) as well as in traditional stereo CD. Surround also perfectly complements today's electronica and techno music, where dense layers of loops and beats can come flying at you from all angles.

But surround-sound production need not be the province of the high-end studio alone. In this article—the first of a two-part series—we'll tell you how you can set up your home studio for 5.1, and how much it's likely to cost. In the second installment next month, we'll describe wiring interconnections and talk about some of the different approaches you can take to this exciting new art form: the surround-sound remix.

Genelec's 1029As—self-powered monitors for a real-world surround-sound budget.

the components

Let's start with the basic requirements. To do surround-sound mixing, you need the following:

1. A mixing board with six busses in addition to the stereo bus. This could be

SOUND, ONE

How to set up your studio for mixing in 5.1 format.

by howard massey

any analog eight-bus console, such as the Mackie 8•Bus series, or any of the new digital boards, such as the Yamaha 02R or 03D. In a pinch, you could use *any* mixer that has at least six aux sends, but that's an awkward and inelegant solution.

2. A place to store six tracks of audio. Typically, this is a dedicated eight-track MDM, such as a TASCAM DA-88 or an Alesis ADAT, but it could also be any six-track-or-more hard disk recorder, or any analog multitrack, for that matter. Bear in mind that these six tracks have to be in *addition* to the multiple tracks you'll be mixing, though they don't have to necessarily reside in a separate machine. For example, if you have two ADATs (which provide a total of sixteen tracks), you can use ten of those tracks for recording the song and use the other six for storing the surround mix.

3. Five full-range near-field monitors and at least one subwoofer, plus the appropriate power amplifiers to drive them. If possible, the five speakers should be the same make and model—though if you have two great stereo speakers that you love and want to integrate into the system, by all means do so, and then buy another three speakers that are as much like them, in terms of frequency range and response, as possible. The best option is to use self-powered monitors, so that the amplifiers are perfectly matched to the speakers they are driving. This also simplifies setup by eliminating the need to run speaker cables; you simply send a line-level signal directly to each monitor.

Note that we said at *least* one subwoofer. Most industry experts recommend the use of two wherever possible, and producer and surround-sound evangelist Bob Margouleff agrees: "If you can afford two subwoofers, that's a better way to go. It gives you more dispersive energy so you don't have to work them as hard; therefore, you get a better transient response."

4. A healthy dose of creativity. Surround-sound mixing is a whole lot more than just deciding which guitar track to put in front of you and which to put behind you. There are in fact numerous pitfalls to avoid, but there is also a whole new universe of sonic possibilities waiting to be explored.

One thing you *don't* have to worry about is an encoding device. The corporate moguls are still at war on this issue, and no one knows yet which data compression scheme (*i.e.*, Dolby AC-3 or DTS) will win out. Perhaps none will; rumors are that the not-yet-completed DVD-audio spec will provide for multiple

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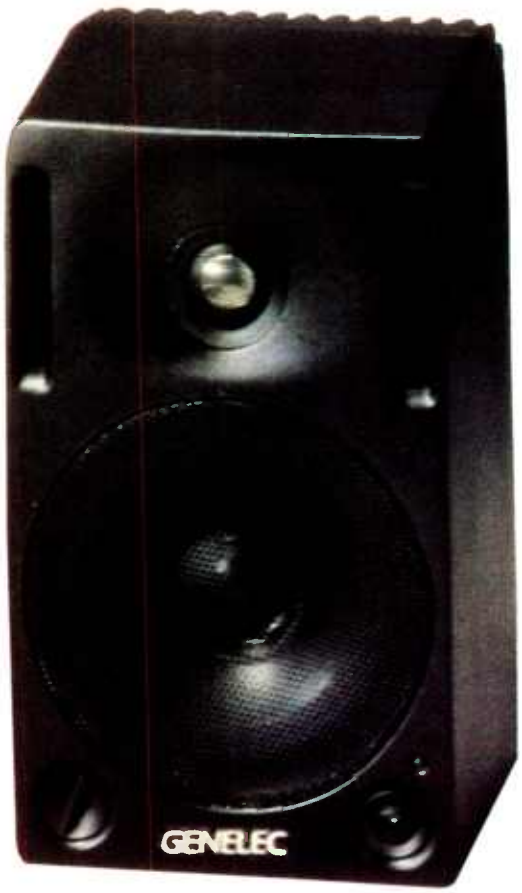
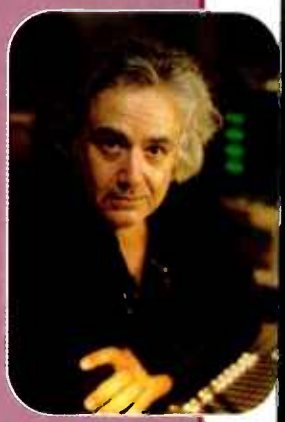


'Step forward into this technology'

Bob Margouleff on the past, present, and future of surround sound

Producer Bob Margouleff is best known for his work in the early Seventies with Stevie Wonder and for groundbreaking projects in the Eighties with artists such as Devo and Oingo Boingo. These days, he's a leader in the front lines of surround sound, producing DTS 5.1 remixes of Boyz II Men, Marvin Gaye reissues, and numerous classical recordings.

"The recording industry is now a hundred years old," Margouleff observes, "but what happened a hundred years ago is that we gave up one of our most important sensibllities: what I call 'vector'—that is, where is the sound coming from? That's one of the most powerful sensibilities we have. Even in a crowded party with everyone around you chattering loudly, you can hone in on a conversation between two people talking in a corner—especially if they're talking about you!



"Music is not only the sound of the note—the pitch and loudness of it—but its movement as well. Up until now, we have been attempting to create a three-dimensional image inside a two-dimensional space. That's why we invented panning, reverb, echo, doubling, and flanging: to create the illusion of depth in space. I think of stereo as being an objective experience: We create as much illusion of depth and space as we can, but in the end it is a two-dimensional medium, and it lives on the wall, like a picture. Surround, on the other hand, is *subjective* audio. It allows the listener and the performer to occupy the same space.

"Don't forget," he points out, "that a hundred years ago Berlioz wrote the *Symphonie Fantastique*, which was scored for the horns in the rear of the hall. Wagner wrote his mightiest works for orchestras so large that musicians had to play under the stage, in the foyer, out in the audience. And of course, church and sacred music has always been three-dimensional, and that's the reason it's so magical and mystical: The pipe organ was in the back of the church and the choir was in front, with everything designed to fill the space surrounding them. That is a very, very powerful force that we threw away for a hundred years. Now we're finally at a place in the technology where we can deliver it."

Margouleff's home studio doubles as his living room. Nestled among overstuffed sofas and wall hangings is a Yamaha 02R digital mixing console ("the most natural, open-sounding board I've ever used"), a pair of TASCAM DA-98s ("real workhorses"), and a modest assortment of outboard processors. Strategically positioned around the console are five Genelec 1032A self-powered monitors ("for me, Genelecs are the Rolls Royce of speakers"), and unobtrusively hugging the far wall are two subwoofers.

"My studio," he comments, "came in from the garage. Everything converged in my living room, and I think that many home studios will ultimately do the same, sharing the same platform with the home theater. Your computer, your console, your television, and your speakers will all live in the same space."

Margouleff concludes, "Where I want to be going, and where I think a lot of musicians are going to want to go, is to write for this medium, to create new material based on the fact that we are no longer living in a two-dimensional space. We are going to return to the third sensibility. The cat's out of the bag, the horse is out of the barn, the genie's out of the bottle. I don't care how you say it—and believe me, I can deliver a million metaphors a minute—but we *are* going to step forward into this technology, and very soon."—***Howard Massey***

Photo: Brian Paumler

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channels of completely unencoded, uncompressed audio data. Ultimately, this will be the function of the mastering studio, anyway; all you have to do for now is get your six-channel mix together (for the time being, we recommend that you do it in addition to—not instead of—your stereo mix), then wait a little while for the suits to decide how surround-sound mixes will ultimately be distributed to the masses.

the cost

All of the above items except the creativity can be purchased at your local music or pro audio dealer, and for less money than you might expect. For example, the home studio I put together for this article consists of the following: a Yamaha 02R mixer with two ADAT interface cards and one D/A A/D card (list price: $10,096), two Alesis ADAT-XTs (list price: $6,998), five Genelec 1029A self-powered monitors (list price: $2,675), and two Genelec 1091A self-powered subwoofers (list price: $1,360). (Note: For additional information about these products—all of which have received Editor's Pick awards—see the Oct. '96, May '96, and Nov. '97 issues of *Musician*, respectively.) Throw in another five grand or so for an Alesis BRC controller and a couple of modest effects boxes (the 02R has comprehensive EQ and dynamics for every channel, plus two internal effects processors of its own), a few hundred bucks for cabling, and for a street price of around $25,000 you've got a fully equipped, thoroughly professional surround-sound studio in the comfort of your own home. Go in with a bandmate or two, and it's not that high a price to pay for a piece of the future. Besides, you'll easily save that much money over the cost of hiring a professional studio when it comes time to record and mix your debut album.

Genelec's 1091A subwoofer—the "1" in "5.1."

Join us next month as we describe how to interconnect all these components and explore some surround-sound mixing techniques, with input from veteran producers like Elliot Scheiner and Bob Margouleff.

Special thanks to Bob Margouleff, Elliot Scheiner, Will Eggleston, Peter Chaikin, Jim Mack, Buzz Goddard, Greg Braithwaite, Michael DiCosimo, Dave DelGrosso, Robbie Clyne, Lisa Vogl, and Hal at Zeep for their assistance in preparing this article.

Photo: Marcello Coehlo

Total Recall

The Dust Brothers' time-saving tips for the Yamaha 02R.

Imagine life as a member of one of the busiest and most influential production teams on the planet. After you've mused about the creative and financial rewards, the mountain of cool gear that surrounds you, and the avalanche of phone calls from magazines like *Musician*, you'll realize you might actually have to budget something—your time.

Such is life for the Dust Brothers. John King and Mike Simpson have been making innovative sonic gestures for nearly a decade, teaming up with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Beck, and the Beastie Boys at their home studio in California. As King puts it, with considerable understatement, "I'm real busy."

King (left) recently switched from his venerable Soundcraft Spirit mixer to a pair of Yamaha 02R digital consoles linked together, in large part because the 02R's extensive automation features let him use his precious time more efficiently.

While many boards provide some type of automation, Yamaha has been at the forefront of offering low-cost digital consoles with complete automation of virtually every part of the signal path: Fader, pan, EQ, dynamics, and even the internal effects can all be tweaked in real time and/or stored as a "snapshot" for later recall. "The total recall is one of the most exciting features for me," King explains. "The 02R is even quicker than an expensive Neve console—which I love to work on. But even on those

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by e. d. menasché

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boards, full recall takes a while, and you have to go in and manually reset the knobs. With the 02R, you just have to press the RECALL button and, *bam*, you're there."

With all that power, King says he was pleasantly surprised that the board was so intuitive to operate. "I started using the board without reading the manual, and I'm working professionally using it that way."

The capability to change gears instantly means increased productive time for the Dust Brothers' variety of projects. "The 02R can hold a bunch of mixes in memory," King says. "Right now I'm working on three songs with this group Lucy Nation, and the 02R lets us hop around between the different songs. For example, their guitar player just flew in from England, and we popped from one song to the next to the next without losing the rough mixes we had going. And it takes a matter of less than one minute: only like a second for the board to reset, and getting my outboard together takes the rest of the minute."

In addition to producing and mixing album projects, the Dust Brothers produce music for commercials. In the past, juggling the two very different tasks posed some problems. "When we'd do a label project, we'd leave the mix in place until the artist and label approved it, which might take days," King explains. "It meant we were essentially down until the approval came. If we wanted to do anything else, we'd have to document the mix by hand, which is a real pain."

King finds the 02R's internal effects especially useful on commercials. "I have old boxes, like Roland Space Echoes and old Eventides, and I tend to use those things [on album projects] because I'm used to them. But the internal effects on the 02R are pretty cool, and when you do the recall you don't have to set up anything with the outboard; it's all there. Let's say you're slipping a commercial between record label projects: It's more important that the mix can be recalled for changes, because with commercials [the clients] always want changes. *Always*."

While the duo's trademark sound relies on "lo-fi" sampling and vintage gear like the Roland TR-808 and -909, their studio is anything but low-tech, with 24 tracks of Pro Tools, eight channels of Sample Cell, Opcode Studio Vision Pro, and a bevy of classic outboard gear from the likes of Neve, Mastering Labs, and Summit. King takes advantage of the 02R's mix of digital and analog inputs, keeping Pro Tools in the digital domain while still having analog inputs available for Sample Cell, his drum machines, and other goodies. The board's ability to handle a number of sources and formats comes in handy. By the time a project gets into King's hands, tracking has often begun at another facility. "If the preproduction is good, we'll use some of those tracks," he says. "We'll get them in sync with Pro Tools via MIDI Time Code and then start adding stuff."

King generally bypasses the board for tracking, relying on his outboard microphone preamps and compressors to feed Pro Tools. But he monitors Pro Tools through the 02R, where he can fine-tune the sound with the Yamaha's extensive EQ. "Using the EQ on the 02R is pretty much like using the EQ on any board except that it gets memorized with your mix, and you get a visual display of the EQ curve that you're creating. It's also a four-band fully parametric EQ, meaning you can adjust both frequency and "Q" for each band, which is pretty high-end compared with most boards. I find the visual display really helpful because I like to use visual cues, as I do when I use Opcode Studio Vision Pro, for instance. I like to see what I'm editing in addition to hearing it. The display shows the overall EQ curve with the sum of all the bands you're working on: If I'm, say, boosting at 200Hz and rolling off at 800Hz, I can see that instantly, which makes me quicker and more accurate in what I'm doing."

His only gripe? "Only the first eight channels have inserts for hooking up analog gear. One of the reasons I had to buy two boards was to get access to more insert points. I knew I would need more analog channels because I use so much analog outboard gear. Otherwise, I would be able to fit my whole system onto one 02R."

Though he's in no hurry to part with his classic analog outboard gear, King gives the 02R's onboard dynamics processing high marks. "For someone on a tighter budget than I am, the onboard dynamics and effects could be really useful. They're very transparent-sounding. This board has more functionality than I use, but I like that it's there. Nothing else offers the same functionality at the price."

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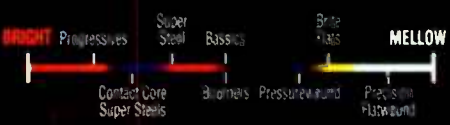

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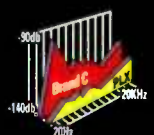

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do cables matter?

by brent butterworth

A hands-on test shows how cables can affect your sound.

Musicians have so much to worry about: which singer to hire, how much compression to dial in—and, oh yeah, what notes to play and when. And now we're hearing that we should worry about cables as well! All of a sudden the stores are selling cables designed just for jazz, others made specifically for bass, and microphone cables that cost six times the price of a generic cable.

Several months ago, a company called MIT (Music Interface Technologies) came out with a new guitar cord they say sounds better than any other. The price? $100 for a mere ten-footer. How can any guitar cord be worth that much? Ask any audiophile: they often pay $50 a foot for speaker cables.

Are these people insane? Probably . . . but that doesn't mean they're wrong. There just might be a world of difference in how any two or more cables affect your sound. Even if all cables do sound alike, there are still differences between them that you need to consider next time you're in the market.

Technically, there's not that much to worry about. The three main electrical properties of cables are *resistance*, which is how much the cable impedes the flow of electricity; *capacitance*, which can have the effect of attenuating high frequencies in a cable; and *inductance*, which can also diminish high-frequency response. Obviously, each of these things can lead to problems, but be assured that even cheap, generic cables seldom have enough resistance, capacitance, or inductance to affect audio frequencies.

Monster's Studio Pro 1000 mic cable.

Any working musician can tell you what the number-one problem with cables is: They break! Guitar and mic cables contain thin little wires. If you abuse your cables by pulling them out by the cable itself instead of by the plug, or by doing the Roger Daltrey "whirl-the-mic-like-a-lasso" thing, you'll stress those wires to the point where they break or come unsoldered. Even the braided shield that surrounds these thin wires can break with sufficient abuse. Almost all plugs have some sort of strain relief to protect their connections, but all strain reliefs aren't created equal. Cheap plugs have just a couple of little pieces of metal that crimp around the cable. Good plugs add a spring or a piece of rubber. Great plugs, like Neutriks, have a plastic clamp that grips the cable tightly, along with a beefy rubber strain relief on the end.

The cable itself should be made with a pliable, rubbery jacket, so it's flexible. Almost all cables are wrapped in a wire braid to shield the inner conductor from radio and electromagnetic

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interference; the best also have a foil shield for maximum rejection of radio interference.

sound off

To look into the differences between these products, I rounded up seven samples of mic cables and ten samples of guitar cords, all at lengths of 18-1/2' to 21'. I kept the testing gear as simple as possible. Tests began with the mic cables, each of which I ran in turn from a Røde NT-2 mic to a Samson Mixpad 4 minimixer, then straight into a Philips CDR 870 CD-R machine through two short Canare cables. With each one, I recorded tenor sax, acoustic guitar, voice, and the most beautiful instrument I've ever heard: my Kamaka ukulele. I cautioned the musicians who played with me to perform in exactly the same way for each test recording.

With the mic cables, the differences were subtle but clear. I got the most neutral sound with the **Monster Studio Pro 1000** ($129.95) and one of my homemade **Canare L-4E6S** cables (about $23 with Neutrik plugs). **DiMarzio**'s **EP2720SM** ($53.25) and **EP2720BK** ($49.95) also sounded very neutral. (They're both jacketed in woven fabric, but the more expensive EP2720SM has a slick-looking silver jacket.

Using the **Whirlwind Accusonic +2** ($22) and the **ProCo Guardian Merlin** ($67.50), I got a slightly mellower sound, with a little softer treble. The **ProCo Ameriquad 424B** ($43.85) sounded the most idiosyncratic; it added a nice brightness and presence to the sound, kind of like a Shure SM58 microphone does, but on a more subtle level. All these cables are tipped with excellent XLR plugs, and the DiMarzios, the Studio Pro, and the Merlin come with handy cable ties (a $2 value!). The Merlin is even reinforced with Kevlar; I don't know what that'll do for day-to-day durability, but I guess you're protected from disgruntled listeners who try to cut your mic cable.

I tested the guitar cables by hooking them up between an Ibanez Talman guitar and a Tube Works Blue Tube preamp, and then straight into the CD-R machine through another short Canare cable. Using the guitar's humbucking pickups, I recorded mellow jazz passages and distorted rock riffs. I then switched to the single-coil pickup for some clean funk chording. I was very careful to pick in exactly the same place on the strings every time, so the tone wouldn't vary.

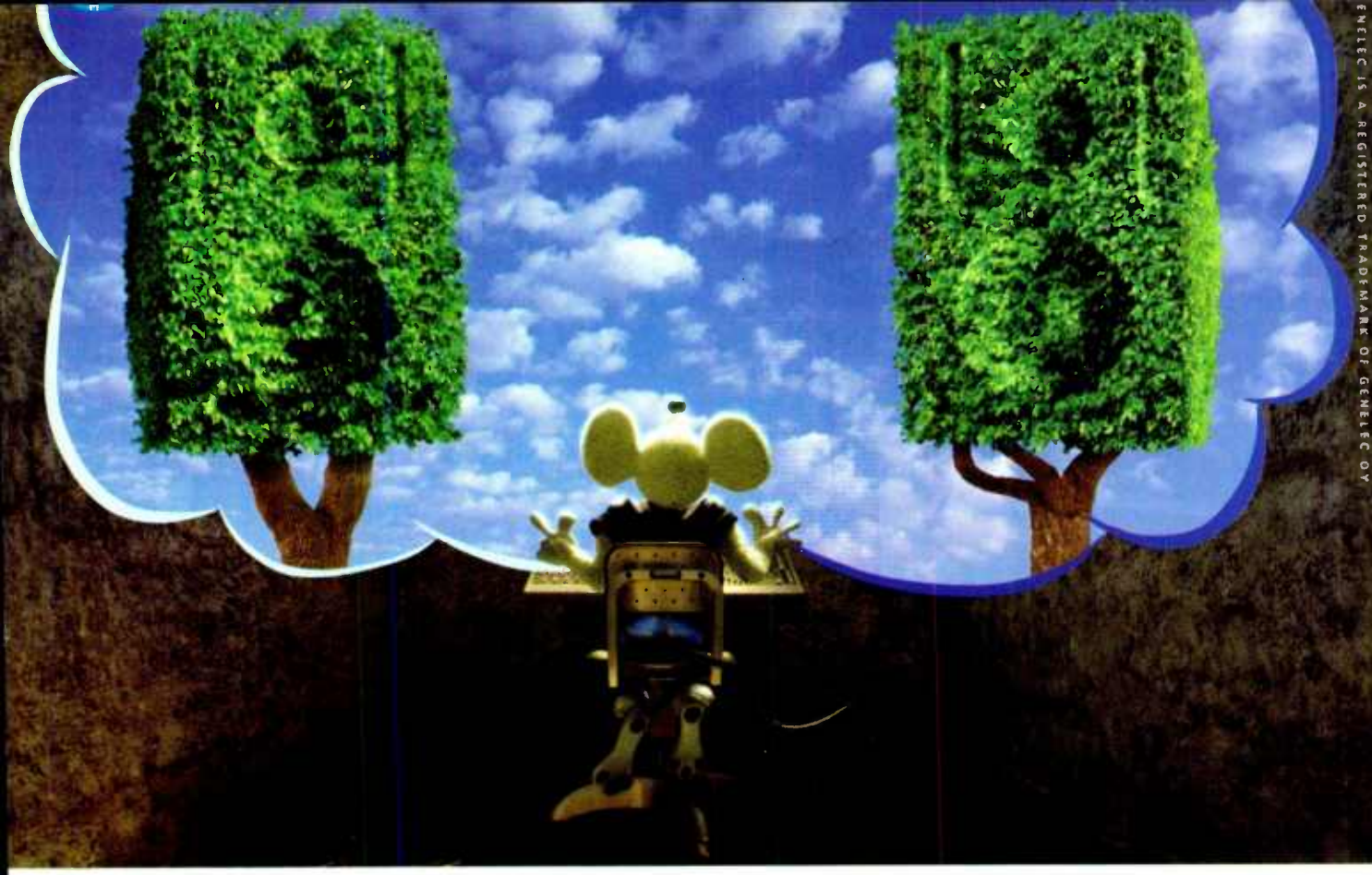
After more takes of Led Zeppelin's "Rock and Roll" and Charlie Parker's "Scrapple from the Apple" than I care to remember, I found that guitar cables do indeed different from each other. **Whirlwind's Accusonic +1** ($15.50) and **Leader** ($16) sound clean and clear, if slightly thin; they were my favorite cables for rock. **MIT's Ripcord** ($130) sounded cleanest, although the tonal balance was thinner; it really brought out certain sonic subtleties, which would be good if you're recording some precious old treasures like a Gibson Johnny Smith. **ProCo's Excellines Musicmover** ($16.35) and **Spectraflex** ($39.95)—which came wrapped in a cool multicolor woven jacket—sounded more mellow, with a little less energy in the treble. **DiMarzio's EP1718** ($32.95) and **EP1718N** ($42.94) also sport woven jackets and, like the company's mic cables, sound extremely neutral; they're perfect for those who don't really want to think about the sound of cables. The more expensive of the two uses Neutrik plugs instead of Switchcrafts.

My favorite cable overall, though, was **ProCo's Guardian Sir Tweed** ($65), whose distinctive "vocal" tone emphasizes the midrange and is colored by a slight phasiness; though being a bit out of phase must be considered a technical drawback, I still really liked the effect. Sir Tweed is also wrapped in a hip-looking tweed jacket. (It's labeled "For Professional Use Only," though, so you weekend wankers had better steer clear.) Both Monster cables sounded great, but wouldn't ya know it, I liked the very neutral, full-sounding **Monster Jazz** ($59.95) better on rock, and the clear, detail-sensitive **Monster Rock** ($49.95) better on jazz. Go figure.

DiMarzio's EP1718 (left), EP2720, and EP1718N cables.

Is it really worth spending a lot extra for these subtle sonic differences? Probably not; you'll get a bigger difference by just moving your pick a quarter-inch or twisting a tone control one notch to the right. But the pricey stuff is built better, and it gives you nice extras, like cable ties, longer warranties, and cool looks. All in all, I'd say paying a little attention to your cables is worthwhile—I'll certainly be happy to have that ProCo Ameriquad next time one of my mic feeds sounds a little dead, and I'll play twice as well on my next gig because I'll feel so damned slick with Sir Tweed hanging out of my axe.

Contributors: *Brent Butterworth is editor of* Home Theater *magazine.*



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THE BOYS ARE BACKIN TOWN

Photo: Ryan Murphy

Beastie Boys
Hello Nasty
(Grand Royal/Capitol)

"Nothing sounds quite like an 8-0-8!" they emphatically declare on "Super Disco Breakin'," the jet-fueled opening track on the Beastie Boys' first album proper in nearly five years. And it's no coincidence that the influence of the classic fifteen-year-old Roland TR-808 drum machine so heavily favored by electronic artists and hip-hop groups is rivaled only by that of the Beastie Boys themselves, a band whose contemporary influence spans popular music from Beck to the Chemical Brothers.

On their last album, *Ill Communication* (1994), the Beasties revisited some of their punk roots, while on *Check Your Head* (1992) they picked up their instruments and grooved with Meters-inspired funk. But it was their 1989 effort, *Paul's Boutique*, co-produced with the Dust Brothers and largely recognized as a sampladelic masterpiece, that inspired a generation of electronic-based artists to approach the sampler as a bona-fide instrument. With *Hello Nasty*, Ad Rock (Adam Horovitz), Mike D (Mike Diamond), and MCA (Adam Yauch) return with longtime producer Mario Caldato Jr. to craft a *Paul's Boutique* for the 21st century—a kaleidoscope of live instruments and crazy samples.

"Intergalactic" opens with a phased vocoder and dual turntable scratches from Horovitz and Yauch, then proceeds to sample, among other things, a Crusaders bass line and an orchestral string and timpani stab lifted from the Seventies' Stephen Sondheim musical *Company*. "The Negotiation Limerick File" benefits from tidbits from a cappella and sound effects records, and especially from a Horovitz vinyl discovery called "Poor Old Trashman" by Barbara Lynn. "I bought this record without a cover for 25 cents," he says. "It only had the song titles, and there was this really funky song with just acoustic guitar and drums."

The standout track, "Song for the Man," segues magically from the Beach Boys to the Doors, and features the band playing live—keyboardist Money Mark Nishita plays a Hammond and Farfisa simultaneously—alongside horns, sitar, and party favors left over from Caldato's birthday party. Says Horovitz, "It was one of the first songs we've done in a really long time where someone wrote out all the music and lyrics before bringing it into the sessions. It was fun, because unless we're doing a hardcore song or something, the structure doesn't usually come until we're mixing."

Work on *Nasty* began a couple of years ago at a subterranean practice space, which they've nicknamed the Dungeon, in New York City's Little Italy. Using a TASCAM DA-88 digital eight-track recorder and a Mackie 1604 mixer, they recorded demos and jam sessions (not to mention an unreleased country album and musical along the way). "We then came back to the studio to overdub some scratching and percussion," says Caldato, who describes that process as "the three of them and Eric Bobo all playing with drumsticks on the floor and on the walls of the studio."

But much of *Nasty*'s overall sound is also attributable to Horovitz's obsession with the Akai SP1200 sampler, with which he collected uncountable snippets, beats, and riffs. "We used about the same number of samples as usual," Horovitz guesses, "but just the smaller pieces. The SP1200 only stores about six seconds of sound, so it wasn't like *Paul's Boutique*, where we'd use endless samples: the largest sample here is about one bar of a song."

The results don't always hit their mark. "Three MCs and One DJ" is redeemed only by the skills of guest DJ Mixmaster Mike, while "I Don't Know" seriously challenges the idea of whether Yauch should continue singing. But "Song for Junior," a groovy War-meets-Santana Latin jam with vibes, flute, and dreamy vocals from Luscious Jackson's Jill Cunniff, and "Mr. Lee, Ph.D.," a

fantastic reggae number with vocals and percussion from Jamaican dub legend Lee "Scratch" Perry," round out this wonderfully nasty mix . . . nicely.
—Dev Sherlock

Christian McBride

Family Affair (Verve)

Bassist Christian McBride's third album for Verve revisits the Seventies, and attempts to nudge R&B and funk tunes towards jazz. "When I started putting it together in my brain, I knew I wanted to have some kind of element of R&B and soul in the CD, but I didn't know how I wanted to fuse the two," McBride explains. "After talking with [producer] George Duke, the guys in the band, and the people at the record company, I narrowed it down to picking a few popular R&B songs and trying to turn them into jazz tunes. I think there are enough other elements in the album to make it not like the usual, straight-ahead traditional jazz album. But there are not enough R&B elements, at least I hope not, to turn off someone who only appreciates traditional jazz."

Unfortunately, this neither-here-nor-there hedging ultimately dilutes the music and confounds the final product, yielding a vacuous hybrid: kinda jazz. It is also an outgrowth of the anxiety that is surfacing as jazz confronts the millennium and finds it has fewer and fewer tunes to bring to the table. So it raids other genres—funk, soul, R&B, pop—and sometimes its own archives (*e.g.*, the "tribute" album). In McBride's case, the goods were in his own cupboard: His dad played bass with some of Philadelphia's most renowned R&B groups, and Christian, who is 26 and exceptionally talented, sounds thoroughly happy and capable playing this material, mostly on electric (a five-string McBride J5, custom-made by Ryuou Motoyama) and fretless electric (Pensa four-string) bass. But really, what is the point of a kinda jazz treatment of Sly or Kool and the Gang? It can neither improve upon the original nor break new ground for jazz.

According to George Duke, McBride sought him out for this project "because the Rhodes [electric piano] and the fretless and electric bass were out of his normal realm of record-making, and he wanted support in that area. My basic job was to not get in his way. I wanted this to be Christian's record, not my record, so I let him have free rein to bring the music about." Duke cites "laying out a palette for them to explore" as the method for choosing timbres for synthesizer overdubs.

The shouts, stomps, and party-type noises that permeate the opener "I'm Comin' Home" (popularized by the Spinners) were Duke's idea, though, and probably his least subtle. The title cut is lively, but the melody line, repeated on Tim Warfield's sax, gets tiresome and cloying, and prompts invidious comparison to Sly's gritty vocal. "Brown Funk," one of several McBride compositions, is dedicated to master bassist Ray Brown but comes off as a clichéd retro-funk exercise. The band's free adaptation of "Open Sesame" sparks some fire (it was "the farthest I went toward

completely dismantling a song," McBride notes), but it's thoughtlessly sequenced back to back with the other "out" performance, "Wayne's World."

Although Joe Sample's vintage Rhodes was used for this album, the acoustic piano, when it surfaces, sounds better to my ears. The basses are nicely recorded throughout; Sony stereo mics were used for the acoustic, which was a Juzek with D'Addario helicore pizzicato series strings. McBride uses (always deftly) a John Norwood Lee French bow; D'Addario XLs are on both electric basses.

The keeper on this album is the straightforward, just-as-it-was reading McBride and guitarist Russell Malone give Earth, Wind & Fire's "I'll Write a Song for You." It is lovely and affecting, but one can't help but note the irony of its title. This is what young jazz musicians need to work on, and doing it well presupposes having something of one's own to say. Without compelling new material, jazz will die a protracted death, to the tune of "and so on and so on and doobee doobee doo. . ."
—Karen Bennett

Arnold

Hillside (Creation/Columbia)

Lots of people in the recording biz like to romanticize about the good old days, before the advent of close miking and multitracking, but I bet few of them would really want to go back to such relative primitivism for any length of time. Then again, there's Arnold. *Hillside*, this semi-rustic British trio's full-length debut, features a brief but fetchingly down-home number called "Country Biscuit," for which the band sat themselves around a single microphone, sorted out their respective volume levels, and pressed RECORD. What they played into that mic is exactly what you hear: a couple of acoustic guitars, some jaunty whistling, and a raspy vocal by lead singer/drummer Phil Morris. No overdubs, no remixes, just one track—in glorious full-dimensional mono, of course.

"We were using the 24-track machine," the band's single-monickered guitarist/singer/songwriter Saxby explains, "but we used only one track for that tune and we did it in one go. That's the best way of making a record: sitting around one mic at half past three in the morning and playing a song like a proper band from the olden days. If you get it right, it mixes itself. It's nice to do that in so-called big studios, because it shows that you're not intimidated by all the equipment. Some people get in there and feel obliged to use all 48 tracks and every effects device in the building to justify their being there. But we treat all recording the same way: Studio or Portastudio, it doesn't really matter."

None of the thirteen other tracks on *Hillside* had quite as simple a genesis as "Country Biscuit" (though "Curio," a cute piece of pop sketchwork set to an elementary drum machine rhythm, comes close), but every song here does share a loose, lived-in feel that's most appealing. The looseness, Saxby says, comes from speedy recording: "Once I've gotten a song in my head, I want it finished right away so I can listen back to it. Instead of spending ages getting a bunch of guitar tracks bang-on, we just say to each other, 'Come on, let's get it done,' so within a couple of hours we can sit back, put our feet up, listen to it, and say, 'Oh, this is sounding lovely.' It's impatience, really, but it gives the album a certain something."

For want of a better word, I'd call that something fragility. Though Saxby does occasionally indulge in fiery electric leads and eerie ambience, the guitars are predominantly acoustic, and gently strummed at that. Morris' voice—high and wispy, reminiscent of Pink Floyd's David Gilmour circa *More*—is backed by band harmonies that are similarly gorgeous yet somehow imperfect. When these elements combine with an aching melody, as on "Windsor Park" or "Goodbye Grey," the effect is something like what Crowded House might have produced if they'd decided somewhere along the line to share a cottage in the English countryside with Radiohead.

For all its pastoral splendor, *Hillside* is in the end a peculiar album, reveling in its own unpolishedness and in its weirder moments, such as Saxby's stream-of-consciousness rant on the vaguely sinister "Rabbit." But given the benefit of a few close listens, Arnold's distinctive charm comes through soft and clear.
—Mac Randall

Tripping Daisy

Jesus Hits Like the Atom Bomb (Island)

The best thing Tripping Daisy does on their third Island recording—and their first in three years—is to avoid predictability. Not even the band knew what to expect when they entered Woodstock's Dreamland Studio with producer Eric

Photo: Eric Johnson

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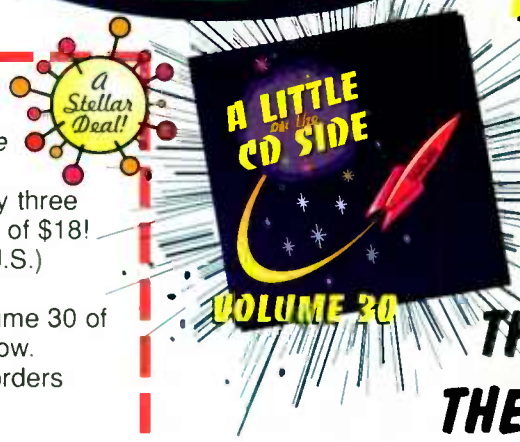

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Drew Feldman (Pixies, Captain Beefheart, Deus) and a backpack full of ideas. Sure, they had roughed out a few songs. But rather than enter the studio with firm arrangements and decisive production ideas, as they had on *I Am an Elastic Firecracker*, singer/songwriter Tim DeLaughter chose to leave large gaps in the band's songbook, hoping for, wishing for, serendipity.

His gamble paid off. With an amended lineup and a new attitude, Daisy's performance on *Jesus* rocks with a kind of juicy spontaneity they've never before shown. Here, the Dallas quintet sounds like everything great about the late Sixties: *Sergeant Pepper*, the Hollies, Vox AC30s, acid-head psychedelia. They may not pound out many accessible hooks along the lines of today's blasé modern rock, but they do come up with some substantial sounds, powerful riffs, and intriguing ideas. "The way we came into the best sounds was by pure accident," says DeLaughter. "All mistakes were welcomed. We recorded this stuff live and just decided to step out and try lots of different things. When you have people who test the bounds of sound, this is what you get."

What DeLaughter insists Tripping Daisy got was "truth": missed notes, extra notes, wrong notes, even some spot-on notes, with lots of "anything goes" noise to keep the mix scruffy and unpredictable. "If Wes [Berggren] was cutting a guitar track," he smiles, "we'd mess with his knobs, his timing; we'd do anything to get him from playing straight." Thanks to the band's tomfoolery, in-the-studio jams like the pop-punky "Mechanical Breakdown," the quirky guitar workout "Field Day Jitters," and the tripply, Beatlesque "Your Socks Have No Name" sound like the product of a great party in Woodstock. Berggren and second guitarist/new member Phil Karnats never double their parts, instead criss-crossing and interlocking with devilish imagination. And though the mix is dense, Feldman leaves ample room for DeLaughter's kitchen-sink keyboards: "We used two Korg synthesizers, a Wurlitzer organ, a Yamaha CP-70, a family organ that belonged to my mother-in-law, along with an obscure Acetone [organ]."

DeLaughter embellishes his songs like a lab-happy mad scientist, with new-wavy melodies ("Mechanical Breakdown"), counter lines ("Sonic Bloom"), or simple surface noise ("Indian Poker Parts 2 & 3"), which adds a goofball dimension to the band's sound. At times Tripping Daisy echoes crazy psychedelic outfits like the Flaming Lips and Mercury Rev—in other words, bands who most likely can't remember how they made their own albums.

"We're having trouble right now reproducing the sound of the album for the tour," DeLaughter admits. "A lot of this stuff, I couldn't tell you how it was done." To paraphrase what they say about those halcyon times: If you can remember what happened, you weren't really there.

—Bob Gulla

Caetano Veloso

Tieta do Agreste (Blue Jackel)

Movie soundtrack albums can be a problem: Frequently, the most you can hope for is one or two breathtaking tracks, surrounded by too many versions of the same themes, alongside too many tracks that sound like someone being chased or the army charging over the hill or some other event you don't want in your house. You usually admire the composer's ingenuity in solving the movie's dramatic problems more than you actually enjoy listening to the results.

Still, a great soundtrack album is a satisfying thing, and *Tieta do Agreste* fills the bill. Producer/arranger/orchestrator Jaques Morelenbaum worked closely with the renowned Brazilian songwriter Caetano Veloso, who provides, with six fine songs, the basis for 24 tracks of percussive Brazilian pop laced with gorgeous, sultry string writing. Though the main themes are repeated, sometimes as many as four or five times, they are so gracefully and sometimes radically recast, and so well-written in the first place, that you never get tired of them. It's a swaying tropical breeze as sunny and vibrant as its colorful package.

The signature sound here is percussion with strings, and the percussion on much of the album was provided by the thirty-piece all-female Dida Banda Feminina, who are the cream of the crop of the 100-piece Dida, who are in turn again the female section of the even larger percussion band/social club Oludum, the Salvador-based group who appeared on Paul Simon's *The Rhythm of the Saints*. They are exponents of the Timbalada movement, in which street clubs of as many as two or three hundred people form massive percussion units centered on the use of the *timbau*, a form of timbales that is three or four feet high and carried between the legs.

Morelenbaum says that even this relatively small version was more than the local studio in Salvador province could handle, so all the mics and wires were carted out to the parking lot in mid-summer for a grueling three- or four-hour session that yielded an hour of percussion tracks. Veloso's vocals were redubbed later in Rio. The film *Tieta* is set in Veloso's home turf of Bahia in northeastern Brazil, and Morelenbaum points out that "some of the songs intentionally have a strong sense of the music of the northeast—for example, the augmented fourths and minor sevenths in the major scale of 'Construcao de Casa (Coracaozinho)'." They also suggest a strong sense of space, as in the open vistas of "Cardo Vai Embora (Imaculada/Vento)," and refinement, as in the stately classical sound of "Perpetua." Morelenbaum asserts that the use of Neve valve preamps played an important role in enhancing both effects. What it adds up to as a whole is cinematic Brazilian ear candy of the highest order.

—Thurston Kelp

Cheri Knight

The Northeast Kingdom (ESquared)

There are two strangely compatible passions operating in Cheri Knight's life: farming and music. On *The Northeast Kingdom*, the farmer/singer/bassist's second solo outing, she uses the first love to fuel the second, her poignant melodies and personal lyrics congealing into a rootsy sound that transcends current rock or country fashions.

Helping Knight put that sound together was the Twangtrust: the producing team of Steve Earle (ESquared is Earle's label) and Ray Kennedy. At Nashville's Room & Board studio, explains the plain-spoken Kennedy, "we use no processing

Back to the Future
with the Black Crowes

The snarling gridlock traffic that snakes through midtown Manhattan during lunchtime could drive a pacifist to commit bloody murder, but as the Black Crowes walk into Avatar Studios it's apparent that the city's pressures haven't ruffled their feathers. That's because the Crowes' sober, early-bird work ethic has them focused on the prize: They've spent the last couple of months working diligently from 1:00 P.M. until 8:00 P.M. with producer Kevin Shirley (Aerosmith, Rocket from the Crypt), recording a song a day for the making of *By Your Side*—their first record on Columbia and fifth album overall. "I hate to say it, but it's been logical and very adult of us," admits singer Chris Robinson.

Shirley's presence behind the glass is one of many signs that point to the Crowes' redeemed sense of purpose since changing their lineup and leaving American Recordings earlier this year. "We really wanted to work with someone who can come in and say, 'That's not good,'" says guitarist Rich Robinson. "We wanted someone to bounce stuff off of, and I don't think that we've really had that since our first record. If Kevin says something I disagree with, he'll be the first one to say, 'Hey, it's your song,' but it's healthy for me and Chris to have him come in and be as excited about our songs as we are and say, 'Okay, that's cool, but what if we tried this?'"

Once the Crowes have finished prepping themselves with coffee, orange cream soda, and cigarettes, they enter the cavernous main room of Studio A to tackle a driving ballad called "My Head Hurts." As drummer Steve Gorman, keyboardist Eddie Harsch, and new bassist Sven Pipien warm up, Rich Robinson searches for a "dirgey, overdriven, feedback" guitar—in this case, a crusty Les Paul—from among the twenty or so guitars that line the perimeter of the isolated room. Once Chris Robinson is ready in his vocal booth, Shirley dims the studio's overhead lights, and with the help of Christmas bulbs, tapestries, and candles, the studio is transformed into an Amsterdam coffee shop.

Shirley's hands-on style becomes apparent after the tentative first pass through the song: Tweaking the click track tempo, he begs Gorman to hit the drums more aggressively and urges Harsch to prolong his noodling Hammond B-3 outro. The Crowes play the song a few more times, and each performance grooves more than the last, but Shirley still thinks the arrangement needs help and suggests inserting a break before Chris Robinson's lead. The band concurs and records another take with the new arrangement before deciding to break for lunch.

Soon after mulling over a sushi menu and discussing the pathogenic nature of marine parasites with the rest of the band, Chris Robinson enters the control room to listen to some of the finished songs that'll find a home on the album. As gut-crunching riffs blast from the monitors, Robinson begins bouncing in his chair, pausing momentarily to conduct a choir in one song and to point out a section where he plans to use the Dirty Dozen horn section in another. "We're an American rock & roll band," he screams into my ear, "and *this* is what we should do." Slapping me on the back, he points over to the far corner of the room where Shirley has lost himself in a rather exaggerated leprechaun jig. Apparently American rock & roll is where it's at.***—Michael Gelfand***

whatsoever. No reverb. There's no electronic gadgets. It's all analog tape and preamps and picking really good instruments and really good microphones. For Cheri's vocals we used a custom-made tube mic: a Fred Cameron, a rebuilt Neumann. And we don't overdub very much. If you can get the tracks and the vocals at once, you've got ninety percent of the record. And there's no way to fake it."

There's nothing remotely fake-sounding about the dozen dynamic, elemental songs here, as rendered by the rest of Knight's regular band—guitarist Mark Spencer and drummer Will Rigby—plus an impressive array of guests, including Earle, Emmylou Harris, and E-Street Band alumnus Gary Tallent. The latter plays bass on a swinging, old-fashioned shuffle called "White Lies," which also boasts evocative pedal steel stylings from Tommy Hannum

Such mood-invoking touches lend *The Northeast Kingdom* much of its charm. On the irresistibly gutsy "Black Eyed Susie," for instance, Kennedy plays, literally, rocks. "An Indian friend of our guitar tech dropped by, and he had some slate rocks in his truck, so I just borrowed them," he recalls. "Because of what the song was about: having your hands in the dirt. It's an unusual sound, but it fit."

The kickoff track, "Dar Glasow," also called for aural accessories to solidify the Celtic mood, which came courtesy of a hurdy-gurdy and a Harmonium. "When you use them together, they're drone instruments," explains Kennedy. "They don't do a lot, just sort of a background sound. But the way they work together, it's more than the sum of the parts."

The Northeast Kingdom was made in two weeks—ample time, apparently, to capture Knight's wistfully confident and congenial vocals and beautifully rendered tunes. Anyhow, there wasn't more time to do it: Knight is a farmer, and she needed to return to her own northeast kingdom to sow new seeds for both her music and her land. ***—Katherine Turman***

Don Caballero

What Burns Never Returns (Touch & Go)

Ancient mythology warns of giant octopods that periodically rise from the briny deep to capsize ships and devour drunken sailors. While such creatures *could* be roaming the seven seas, definitive evidence of their existence has never turned up. . . . That is, not before Don Caballero finished working on *What Burns Never Returns*, where the aggressive rhythmic assault launched by drummer Damon Che (a.k.a. Octopus) proves that kraken are real after all. But who knew they could play the drums so well?

From the furious 5/4 salvo of "Don Caballero 3" through the conclusive Bonhamesque shuffle of "June is Finally Here," Che is on fire, propelling bandmates Pat Morris (bass), Ian Williams (guitar), and Mike Bandfield (guitar) through the polyrhythmic chaos of eight atonal instrumental escapades that tap the spirits of prog, experimental, and hard rock. Che's canny beats and uncanny ability to shift between time signatures and tempos makes *What Burns* sound complex and jagged on the surface. But once your ears grow accustomed to his adrenal grooves and the contorted jangle of bass and guitars, the sound seems to slow down, revealing an inner calm that can only be likened to the way time slackens in the moments before your car rear-ends a flatbed truck.

The flash and bombast of Che's playing seems to suggest that he's the "creative" Don, but the frenzy of *What Burns* was fleshed out by the entire group after months of jamming and charting out arrangements on a blackboard during three weeks of pre-production. "Nobody's in charge," explains Che. "It's always a group arrangement over things. It's a thesis/antithesis method of getting anything done. Some people may look at it as arguing, but it's the only way we know how to work. There's a lot of individual creation that gets shared and then turns into something else . . . and then there's a lot of spontaneous arrival."

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Don Caballero spent six days recording *What Burns* at the White Room studio in Detroit with the help of producer/engineer Al Sutton. With the exception of "Delivering the Groceries at 138 Beats per Minute" (a reference to vintage sexual braggadocio from David Lee Roth) and "From the Desk of Elsewhere Go," every song was recorded as a complete take. Sutton employed a less-is-more miking strategy to capture the room sound of Che playing his Pearl Export kit: He miked the kick, hi-hat, and snare directly, using a Neumann FET47, an AKG C28, and a Shure SM57, respectively; overhead duties were handled by a Schoeps 221 tube condenser mic and a pair of B&K 4006s. A Sennheiser and a pair of Telefunken 47s—which were heavily squashed by Neve 32264a compressors—served as distant ambient floor mics. All of these mics were ultimately summed together onto six tracks.

"You don't want to miss anything he does," says Sutton, noting Che's strong double-stroke rolls and intricate cymbal work, "but you want to get it without miking every individual instrument. Rather than disassembling sound [with individual mics] and putting it back together, I prefer the natural character of the sound." Make that supernatural.
—Michael Gelfand

Linda Ronstadt

We Ran (Elektra)

Blessed with a big voice and a restless heart, Linda Ronstadt has spent the last fifteen years skipping from one genre to another, performing Gilbert and Sullivan, standards, country, Mexican, Philip Glass, and children's songs. Coming full circle, *We Ran* evokes the pop-rock style that once made her a superstar, thanks in part to the presence of veterans like Waddy Wachtel, Jim Keltner, Russ Kunkel, and Bernie Leadon. Ranging from Sixties soul to twangy country laments, *We Ran* feels like a mainstream project, not another tangent. What it doesn't feel like, in most cases, is heartfelt: Ronstadt's amazing pipes notwithstanding, this technically impeccable effort offers freeze-dried perfection rather than actual emotion.

linda ronstadt

A throwback to the days when many singers interpreted rather than composed, Ronstadt leaves her stamp on material the way great stylists like Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald did. But she prefers Ella's elegance to Billie's sizzle, which doesn't always suit the songs she chooses. Rendered as a lullaby, Bruce Springsteen's gorgeous "If I Should Fall Behind" shimmers with genuine tenderness, while the wistful "Dreams of the San Joaquin" features a wonderfully understated performance—not to mention backing vocals by six other Ronstadts. But for every shining moment, there's a major dud, the most glaring being "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues." Muting the corrosive bitterness of the original to pretty up the song, Ronstadt accomplishes the considerable feat of making Bob Dylan's anguished lyrics sound silly.

Given her love for rootsy sounds, Ronstadt

don caballero

Photos: Robert Blakeman (top), Andy Vogt

can be amazingly stiff. Comments by Glyn Johns, who produced seven of the eleven tracks here, hint at a likely cause. Though offering nothing but praise for his client, whom he laughingly calls "the loudest singer I've ever heard by miles," Johns admits to differing philosophies. "She likes to spend her time learning the song in the studio, doing it over and over again until she's got the phrasing the way she wants it," he says. "Linda's not a fan of live vocals, and I'm grateful that she trusted me and grudgingly agreed to sing with a live band on a couple of tracks." It can't be a coincidence that those two songs, John Hiatt's "When We Ran" and "Icy Blue Heart," are the album's most compelling.

Johns' equipment needs varied from song to song. "In general, I like to use a U47 for the vocal mic, but I didn't have much luck with that here; maybe it was the particular one I had. I used other things in addition to a 47, including a 49 and a 269, which are all Neumanns, and a Telefunken 251." While conceding that Ronstadt's "extraordinary dynamic range" posed engineering problems, Johns declines to reveal his solutions, though he does note, "I used Vacrac mic amps, limiters and equalizers. They're all tubes and extremely good."

We Ran confirms a couple of things about Linda Ronstadt: She's still got a knockout voice, and she still doesn't know what to do with it. Except for the rare times she meets her material halfway, this perplexing artist remains easy to admire and hard to love.

—Jon Young

Josh Wink

Here Hear (Ovum/Columbia/Ruff House)

Why are the champions of electronica almost exclusively British? While limeys from Coldcut to the Chemical Brothers constantly cite such seminal U.S. acts as Afrika Bambaataa and Public Enemy, current U.S. electro-jockeys (Jamie Myerson, DJ Dara, Hardkiss) have failed to ignite media attention or Soundscan sales. Philadelphia's Josh Wink thinks he has it figured out.

"The electronica that has been accepted in the U.S. mainstream has been more rock-oriented," he points out, "like Chemical Brothers, Prodigy, and the Propellerheads. They sample guitar and bass; it's very rock. You'd figure that U.S. electronica would be even more rock, but America has a big underground and [we] go everywhere."

Make no mistake, Wink's much anticipated album debut, *Here Hear*, is not a rock album. His allegiance lies with the Euro canon of Kraftwerk and Stockhausen, leavened with the house-heavy dance grooves of the Detroit scene (and with a nod to the early synthesizer sounds referenced on "ELP and the Fifth Dimension"). Wink also attempts a broader sound spectrum, with vocals by Trent Reznor, Sweet Pussy Galore, and the Interpreters. The album embraces electro ("Sixth Sense"), drum & bass ("Young Again"), free jazz ("Hard Hit"), house, and ambient music, surrounding an essentially dark core with ethereal moodiness.

Recording in his Philly home studio before mixdown in a professional room, Wink maneuvered classic synths: Moog Source, Memorymoog, Minimoog, an unidentifiable Roland Juno, and a Roland Jupiter-8. Freshly unpacked synths included a German-made Dopsler MS404 analog synth, an Ovation Super Bass Station, and a Super Drum Station. Other drum tracks were created on standard Roland TR-909 and -808 machines and a Boss Doctor Rhythm, with supplemental samples from a live drummer and Wink's "environment." "I did a couple tracks where I sampled metal scratching noises, using that combined with a snare," he explains, "or my voice tweaked up and used as a hi-hat."

Here Hear squirms, shimmies, and shimmers with all matter of style. But you couldn't call it futuristic like Goldie, or cinematic like Photek, or funk-frenzied like Roni Size. Wink is mindful of the past while safely dipping a foot into a uniquely American urban soundfield that reflects deserted mall parking lots, cookie-cutter suburbs, and humid night air made electric by clashing radio waves. "My album is very maternal, very warm, the kind of music you might listen to inside your mother's womb," Wink offers. "It's like floating in embryonic liquid." Call it soul on ice.

—Ken Micallef

Photo: Paul Natkin

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The soundtrack game is an increasingly mortal form of commercial combat, and I a humble foot soldier in its desultory ranks. On my shoulders you'll find no epaulets, on my breast no gleaming medals. Scars? Oh yes, those I have in abundance, and like any proud warrior I'm only too willing to bare them for all to see (as long as you promise to gasp and swoon!).

Well, okay, it ain't all that bad, truth be told. While the life of a Hollywood music supervisor can be a crown of thorny frustrations, there are days when an inspired idea actually comes to fruition, the song and the scene jell like chili and onions, and everyone goes home happy.

But, alas, such days are as rare as courtesy in a post office.

In between those anomalous moments of grace are weeks of waiting to hear back from prevaricating managers, who are often besieged by seven such scoundrels as myself, all vying—dollars a-flying—simultaneously for the same eleven hot acts to populate their fantastic new soundtrack album.

Then there's the label brass: "We need a crossover act for the first single. We've got to cross it from Modern Rock to Top Forty to Adult Alternative to Country to Classical. And what have you got that'll work in Asia?"

Oh, happiness.

Now you've got your film studio types checking in with more demographic tips: "The film is geared to 23-to-32-year-olds who brush regularly, travel abroad twice a year, and mostly buy front-wheel-drive vehicles. Any suggestions?"

Yeah, get a job.

Finally, we have the honest songsmiths who, without benefit of a record deal or manager, send unsolicited songs to anybody's attention in the bootless hope that someone with an ear and a moment to spare will take notice.

For the *X-Files* movie soundtrack, which I finished recently, these songs are inevitably about aliens or political skullduggery, and sometimes both, with titles like "Martians Killed the Kennedys" and "The Truth is Out There." The latter title is a real one, and should stand as an object lesson in how *not* to write a song for a movie.

The last thing a director or producer wants from a song is a direct torpedo hit on the theme of the film. For instance, if you were penning a potential classic for one of them darling *Mighty Ducks* hockey pictures, the idea would be not to write a song called "Two Minutes for Slashing." (Actually, that has a ring to it—consider it copyrighted.)

X-Files *star David Duchovny and creator Chris Carter.*

You think 'The X-Files' is weird? Try figuring out the psychology of movie soundtracks.

Better to picture some bony Canadian foghorn belting out one of them eternal love anthems that work with anything from ship sinkings to killer asteroids. Vagueness and dime-store sentiments should always prevail when writing for the movies. Then arrange for a bigger mailbox and watch the royalties flow like the mighty Blue Danube.

And don't forget your humble correspondent when that fabled day arrives. Send my share of the profits to Offshore Songs Ltd., St. Croix, c/o Capt. Morgan. Bottoms up!—***David Was***

Bassist: Rob Thiessen
Band: Noise Therapy

On the music:
I would describe our sound as very over the top. Very heavy groove. We've invented a name for it; we call it heavy pogo groove.

On playing bass:
Our music is built on a foundation of bass and drums. So I have to have a really thick, amazing tone for my bass to get that across. I can't have some thin regular bass tone. I need a huge bottom that really cuts through.

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