

September 1980

60p \$2

# SOUND

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**Kate Bush**

**Chorus/ADT Multi-Review**




**Hammond Organs - Les Paul Artist - Pearl Export Kit**



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musicians since 1887.



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Dave Crombie claims that Laurens Hammond is the man who turned the music world upside down, and tells you how.

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So what do you think of it so far? The magazine, that is. Yes, you'll have noticed by now (or you certainly should have done) that we've combined with *Beat Instrumental* to bring you a Musician's Magazine - in fact *The Musicians' Magazine*. But something that we'll certainly be carrying over from *Sound International* is reader involvement. That means YOUR involvement. Obviously the level of this involvement is down to you - what we're asking from you at first is to tell us *exactly* what you think of the magazine as it is at the moment, and how you think we could change it to make it more useful, more readable, more attractive, and generally more helpful. Are we giving you enough of all the things you want? Are there things you want that we're *not* covering? An obvious answer to this last question is to actually write an article about a subject you think isn't being covered properly (or at all) by *SI/BI* at present. But let's hear from you. Write to us now. You know it makes sense.

Tony Bacon

# AKG

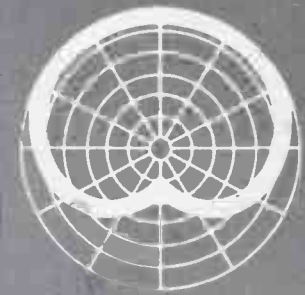
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# Turn this page and the future of music is passed . . . .



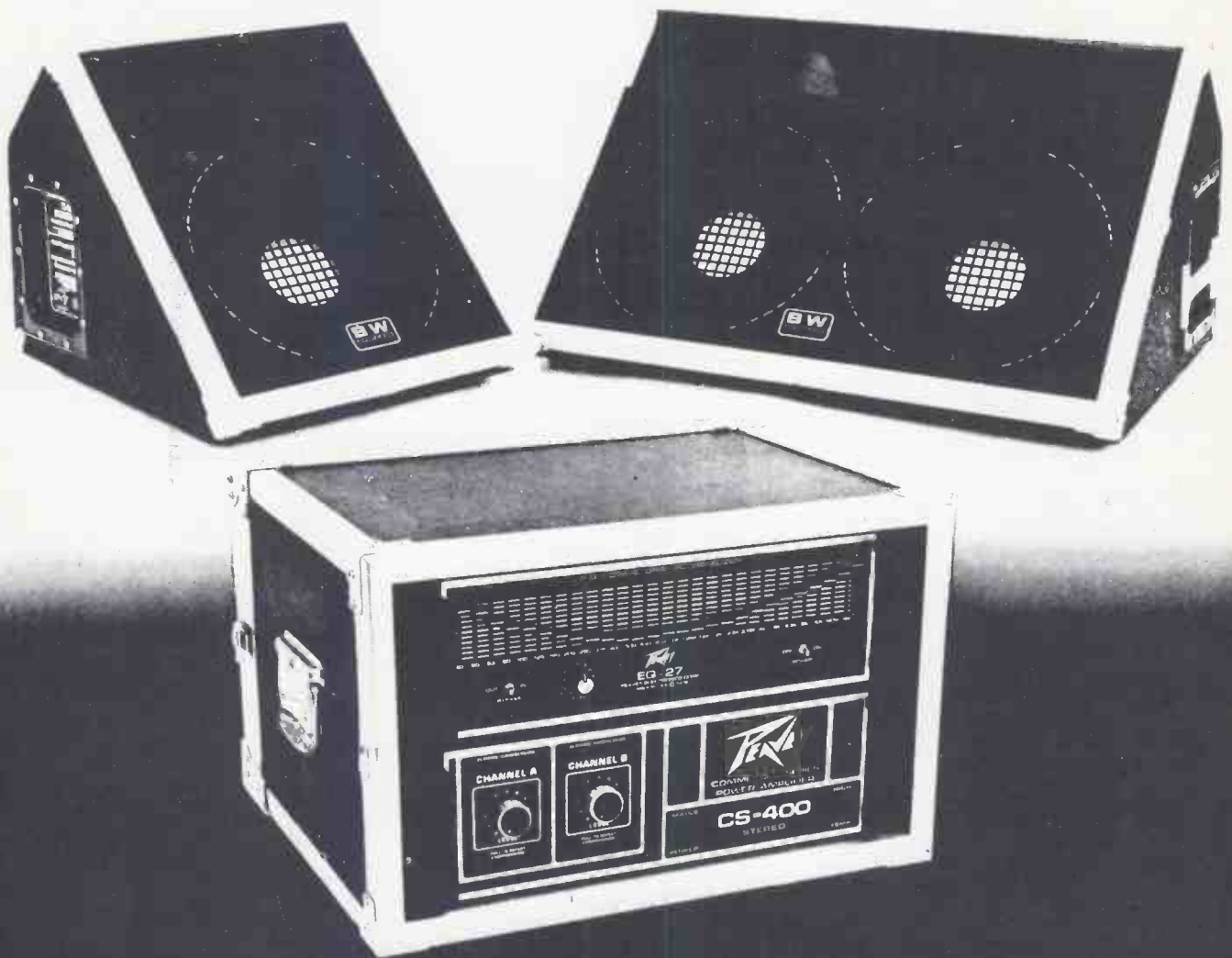
## **FAIRLIGHT COMPUTER MUSICAL INSTRUMENT . . . .**

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**SOUND INTERNATIONAL**  
 incorporating **BEAT INSTRUMENTAL** is the monthly magazine written for musicians, by musicians. We aim to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas, techniques, artistry and experience between musicians in all fields of music, and welcome your comments, opinions and contributions. It's our policy to damage your opinions as little as possible. Of course we are human, and do make mistakes, but we'll always offer space for replies and corrections, although we can't be held responsible for such errors, or loss of damage to contributions or other items. The contents of this magazine are copyright, but we'll generally give permission to reprint if you ask us first in writing.

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## More for The Few from Syco

**S**yco Systems, the UK agents for the Fairlight Computer Musical Instrument (CMI) have recently been appointed as agents for a second computer-based music synthesiser, the *Synclavier II* from New England Digital. Apart from the fact that both instruments have a keyboard, micro-computer system and floppy-disc storage, they couldn't be more dissimilar. The *Synclavier II* does not utilise a VDU for entering, setting up and modifying sounds: instead it uses a panel of illuminated buttons above the keyboard to define the area of the sound being worked on, plus a large knob coupled with a seven-segment LED display which is used to adjust the amount of the specific function that has been 'called'. The computer system also mimics a multitrack recorder, enabling overdubs, etc to be performed and the resulting mix played back without leaving the main panel! The keyboard itself covers five octaves (61 keys) and transposition range is a full ten octaves.

The device produces a number of control voltage outputs which may be used to drive analogue synthesisers: keyboard gate, keyboard trigger, keyboard control voltage, and ribbon controller; and various footpedals and switches may be interfaced to facilitate hold, repeat, sustain, arpeggiation, portamento and punch in/out (for 'recording' purposes). The pedals control volume and real-time effects. The main outputs from the unit include a +4dBm, 600Ω studio-level output, -20dB pad output, digital metronome output and sync pulse.

**Syco Systems** may be contacted at Ashcombe House, Swainswick, Bath, Avon, Tel: 0225 859687. We don't know the price yet, but expect it to be in the same region as the CMI - ie around the £14,000 mark. Only successful musicians need apply.

## Peavey announce String-Gliding

**P**eavey have finally released their guitar and bass strings called *Gliders*, and showed them off at last month's British Music Fair for the first time. They should be available in the shops very soon.

There are three sets of guitar strings and two sets of bass strings available, at £2.96 ex VAT for the guitar sets and £11.35 ex VAT for the bass sets. The guitar sets are: *Super Glides* (ultra light) .009, .011, .015, .024, .032, .040; *Velvet Glides* (light, as on T60) .010, .013, .017, .026, .036, .046; *Satin Glides* (medium, wound third) .011, .015, .020, .028, .038, .050. The bass sets are: *Easy Gliders* (medium, roundwound, long scale as on T40) and *Low Gliders* (medium). Each set comes free with a speed winder, too.

More info UK: **Peavey Electronics**, Unit 8, New Road, Ridgewood, Uckfield, Sussex TN22 5SX, England, Tel: 0825 5566. In the US: Peavey Electronics Corp, 711 A Street, Meridian, MS 39301, Tel: (601) 483-5365.



## Charge Your Session to Axess

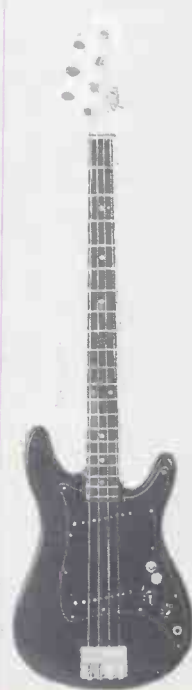
**S**ession is a new brand of British amplifiers made by Axess Electronics in Basingstoke, Hampshire. If you've been following the amp reviews in *SI* this month and last month, it should be obvious that there are a small group of British manufacturers producing professional quality, all-valve combos, and now Axess must be added to the list.

The *Session 15:30* is the first product to roll off the Axess line, giving dual output option of 15 and 30 watts, and Axess claim that their specially-designed transformers with low flux radiation to minimise magnetically induced hum and feedback is a design feature 'totally ignored by other manufacturers'. Low noise components have been used throughout the amp, and a two-position sensitivity switch gives the player the choice between quick overdrive sounds or 'gain compensation' for low level playing. Much thought is given to tonal range, too, with special attention to mid-range response and a cabinet designed to reduce sub-harmonic colouration. Output facilities are more than comprehensive and internal construction looks very safe and sound. The unit is available direct from Axess at £195 inc VAT; the obvious advantage of buying direct being the rather good price.

More info from Stewart Ward, **Axess Electronics**, Viabes Lane, Basingstoke, Hants RG22 4BU, England, Tel: (0256) 58415. Watch for a review in *SI* later in the year.

## New Fender bass launched soon?

**A** prototype of the Fender *Lead Bass* (right) which, as mentioned in last month's report, was too late for showing at the Chicago NAMM show. No prices or availability dates are forthcoming for UK distribution, but Fender USA claim that it will eventually sell at 'prices attractive to both semi-professional and the professional musician'. Pickups feature eight polepieces each, a good move on Fender's part, and the controls are pickup selector, in/out phase switch, master volume and master tone. We'll let you know when its arrival can be anticipated.





**Last month we showed you some guitars, amps, fx and percussion at the recent NAMM show in Chicago. Now Dave Crombie takes you round the keyboard exhibits shown there**

For all those who have joined the ranks of avid *SI* readers over the past couple of months, you may have noticed my, and some of my colleagues, efforts to push the keyboard to the forefront of modern music. Ever since the synthesiser came into existence back in the late 60s, electric keyboard players have become increasingly in demand, and now with runaway advances in technology, the instruments are getting so numerous and complex that it's becoming hard to keep up with all the new models. Well this is where we at *SI* can help by letting you see many of the new products, some before they're even released, and that's just what I'm going to do over the next couple of pages. The end of June/beginning of July saw the event of the year for those interested in musical instruments – the NAMM International Music and Sound EXPO. My able 'assistant', Mr Tony Bacon, took you through all the boring guitar/drum/amp etc... developments last month, but we've decided to keep the best things till last. So here we have a very comprehensive guide to all that's new in keyboards, most of which will be finding their way into the shops over the next six to nine months.

So, down to business. Let's start by looking at the keyboard company with the biggest stand at the show, our old friends **Arp**. As usual they had an excellent demonstration set-up; a modular stage with Mike Brigida, John Shykun and Bill Singer all surrounded by Arp guitar and keyboard synths, with poor Cleve Pozar and his drum kit hidden away almost out of view. Their demo was really excellent as always, and would put most pro synth bands into the shade. Hopefully most of the band will have made it over to the British Music Fair last month, so you will have had a chance to see them for

yourselves. Arp have introduced several new instruments this year, all of which Chase Musicians, the UK importers, will be stocking. Top of the ladder is the *Chroma*, which a lot of other manufacturers were talking about.

Nobody seemed to think that Arp could produce the *Chroma* at the price they were quoting, which was around \$4000 in the shops (ie under £2000). If they can get these instruments out at that price, then this will be a pretty amazing machine, although we're going to have to wait until the new year to find out. In case you haven't already guessed, the *Chroma* is a programmable polyphonic synthesiser, a product area where there seems to be an increasing amount of fierce competition. Other new things from Arp include a monophonic synthesiser known as the *Solus*, a low cost monophonic synth that should sell for under £300 in the UK. The *Solus* seems to be Arp's answer to the extremely successful Moog *Prodigy* (see review *SI* Jan '80). It is a two-oscillator instrument, with a full three octave keyboard, single ADSR, ring modulator, and interface jacks, and is neatly built into a road case. Certainly this instrument is a step in the right direction for Arp.

There is a new electronic piano on its way to us, also from Arp. Last year they introduced a rather expensive 16-voice model – well, they've got rid of some of the dead wood and reduced the number of voices to four: acoustic piano, vibes, harpsichord, and electric piano. I'm always wary of manufacturers who claim to have produced an electronic simulation of an acoustic piano, and although this first preset isn't bad, I don't think it warrants its tag at all. I'm glad that Arp have kept the wooden keyboard they used in the 16-voice, and the instrument retains its

touch-sensitivity. At under £1000, a better bet than its predecessor. Arp have now decided to diversify a little, and have produced an amplification/speaker set-up for their piano – a 75-watt/channel system that becomes available at the end of August. They've also revamped their old *Minus Noise* mixer to produce an 8/2 series mixer with built in BBD (Bucket Bridge Delay) echo unit, and 7-band graphic.

While the Arp designers have been flogging their guts out, the **Moog** team have been at work too. They've slightly modified their *Liberation* 'walking' synthesiser, that we revealed to you

first in our winter NAMM show round up (*SI* March '80). Moog's main new product is the curiously named *Opus 3*. I could find no one who could tell me why. Anyway, the *Opus* is Moog's new low-priced polyphonic ensemble. This means that it can make string, brass and organ sounds, and it did seem to do them very well; they've included a four-octave keyboard, and even a pitchbend wheel. However, there is some envelope sharing going on inside, so you do have to watch the single/multiple triggering on the filter for the brass especially. As with most products at the show, few people seemed able to quote a UK price, but I would make an informed guess at £750.03. There was a nice touch to the Moog stand in that Herb Deutch, one of their mainmen, had rummaged around at home and unearthed the very first prototype *Minimoog* and stuck it in a showcase on their stand with a host of other Moog antiquities (no, not Dr Bob's dentures).

**Yamaha** had to show their new system to the expectant world: there'd been so much talk about the digital synthesiser over the past year that if they didn't bring it out from under the wraps at this show, people would start doubting its very existence. Well it did appear, not on the Yamaha stand, but in a lobby away from the main show area, and it manifested itself in the form of two new products – the *GS 1* and the *GS 2*. Again, no-one was giving away anything, pricewise or availability, but a little bird did mention something about just under £10,000 in January, but you know what little birds are like. The '2' is a smaller '1' in a more functional case for the musician on the move (tax exile), the *GS 1* on the other hand looks more like a baby grand with knobs on. There is an 88-note A-C keyboard with a 16-note capability. There are very few front-panel controls, but the system revolves

Top: the Moog *Opus-3*, a polyphonic ensemble. Below: the Oberheim *OB-SX*, a 'preset' *OB-X*.





around a frequency modulation synthesis, the information for which is stored on metallic magnetic strips. These will store all the information needed to produce 16 different voices, and as the keyboard is both velocity and pressure sensitive, a considerable degree of control can be imparted over the final sound.

For those mere mortals like most of you and I, who haven't got 'pools win' bank balances, or a joint account with A&M records, Yamaha have one or two less expensive items in store. Recently they launched their SK range of symphonic keyboards. The SK 10 was around at Frankfurt in February, but now they've added the SK 20, which is an Organ/String/Poly synth number. The organ section features a nine drawbar slider system from 1' to 16' with 2nd and 3rd harmonic percussion; the string section is pretty basic with just level and on/off ensemble controls; but the poly-synth offers a discrete seven-note polyphonic system with both presets and manual modes. The instrument is controlled from a 61-note, 5-octave splittable keyboard. This makes the SK 20 a fair cut above the Korg Deltas, Roland 505s and Arp Omnis of this world, but then I should imagine the UK price will be over a grand, so you're into a different bracket. The SK 20 does seem to make pretty good sense as an all-round instrument, and it should appeal to both rock and cabaret musicians as well as session players. The problem is, however, that the SK 30 and SK 50D (a dual manual job) are just around the corner so people will be reluctant to commit themselves to a 20 before seeing the others. I'm afraid that with all these wonderful new machines, Yamaha seemed unable to come out with any new ultra cheap synths. Where's the CS I, I'd like to know?

**Korg** had a new polyphonic synthesiser that didn't really impress me that much. It's called the X927 (not for long I hope) and will sell for around £2000. It uses an eight-voice assignment system and didn't seem to have much new to offer. Whereas the **Roland Jupiter 8**, again heavily influenced by the ultra-successful Sequential Circuits *Prophet-5*, did look pretty good. It's an eight-voice programmable with split keyboard facilities, and a dual mode that enables different patches to be layered on top of one another, which vastly increases the possibilities of the instrument especially in live performance. Roland have decided to keep their gimmicky, though popular, arpeggiator. Roland also had a new sequencer for their product range - the CSQ 500 (about £500), with four memory locations, battery back-up to store the sequence, and sync load functions, whatever they are. There wasn't quite as much new stuff as there usually is from these orientals, however the *EP 09*, electronic piano with split keyboard, arpeggiator, and a fairly low price tag (estimated at £399), looked a good investment.

Back to Korg, and one of my favourites at the show was the *BX-3*

dual manual organ. This is basically two CX-3s (*SI* July '80) in one case styled to look just like an old Hammond B-3, but weighing a remarkable 44lb. It's going to cost just over a grand, but I'm sure a lot of people are going to be well pleased with this one.

Anyway, still on organs, I was surprised to see that **Hohner** had a new combo organ out. This one had piano and bass sections in addition and is identified by the code number C 86, though I believe that in the UK someone is calling it the 'Little Lady'. Seems a funny name to me. 61-note split keyboard, 15 preset organ sounds (that's four switches), eight organ footages, percussion and key click. I don't think it's going to be that popular especially with so much excellent competition.

I'd seen a leaflet on the new **Oberheim OB-SX** before the show, and knew that it was a preset version of the OB-X polyphonic synth, and it seemed to me that there wouldn't be that much demand for such an instrument (especially as the *Polymoog Keyboard* seemed to have died out) and I was also a bit concerned as to the sounds that would be programmed into such an instrument. I was, however, pleasantly surprised when confronted with the instrument. It had some really excellent voices in it, and I also learned that a 24- or 48-voice complement was available with the facility of having a complete new set of programs installed with relative ease. It was also pleasing to note that Oberheim were doing good business with this new product at the show. The OB-SX is a very worthwhile consideration for those who can't quite afford to get into the programmable poly synth market.

As there were so many new instruments at the show I haven't got time to deal with them all in detail so here to round up are a few...

## Quickies

New **Wurlitzer** electronic piano in '81... **Kawai** are marketing their synths under a new name Teisco, not to be confused with a certain supermarket chain, although they are looking for a new UK distributor. Five new models on show... **Crumar** introduce new synths: *Stratus*, *Trilogy*, *Toccata*, and new piano/ensemble the *Roady*, though there is still no news when the *General Development System* will be available... **Casio** announced the *301*, a polyphonic preset instrument with built-in rhythm unit. It doesn't look as good as the *201*, but it still sounds excellent... **New England Digital** had their new *Synclavier Model II* digital synthesiser, it sells for around £13,000, and already three have been sold to the UK... The *Syntar* looks like the *Liberation* from Moog, and was attracting crowds, however it didn't seem nearly as powerful... **Multivox** introduced a couple of new items, the *MX 65*, a cheap poly keyboard with piano strings and brass (£400), and the *MX 8100* digital sequencer c/w keyboard (£850 or thereabouts)... **Sequential**



Above: talking suits surround and indeed play the Hohner C86 organ. Below: the rather lifeless Moog demonstrator with the Liberation.



All photos Dave Crombie

**Circuits** relaunched their *Prophet-10*, a dual manual polyphonic with built-in sequencer and cassette machine for memory storage. They also had their new, modified, *Prophet-5* that can be tuned in any scaling mode, hence their giveaway badges saying 'My thirds don't beat'... **Rhodes** are working on an update to the Fender *Rhodes* stage piano that incorporates electronic tone generators which will parallel up with the electro-mechanical side of the instrument. Their prototype sounded really full, though the new *MK III* is going to be expensive, almost twice the

cost of a standard piano... Look out for a new teaching aid from the Canadian firm of **Lexicon**. They've come up with a computer-based system that will represent over 10,000 chords on an illuminating keyboard. Next year they hope to add sounds to the unit, so it will play what you see... There's even more you know, but we'll have to hold that over for another time. But I don't think you'll find any other magazine in the world that keeps you so informed as to what's happening. If there is let us know and we'll nick their copy... oops, I shouldn't have said that.



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**MOOG 'PRODIGY'**  
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OUR PRICE: £245



**KORG MS 10**  
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- CSQ 100: 168-Note Digital Sequencer
- VP 330: Vocoder plus Strings/Choir
- RS 505: Strings + Polyphonic Synth/Bass
- RS-09: Strings + Organ
- SATURN-09: Piano, Organ + Strings
- MP 600: Electronic Piano
- EP-09: NEW Electronic Piano - coming soon!
- GR 300: NEW Amazing Guitar Synthesizer
- BOLT 60: NEW Valve Combo - 60W 1 x 12"
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# Sound Advice at a Better Price!



## 'Ere guv, do you wanna buy a cheap guitar?

The letter concerning discounting of musical equipment from Todd Wells, Managing Director of Soundout/Frunt (see this month's letters page), raises some interesting questions about retailing musical instruments in general. Todd's point is a frequently voiced one among manufacturers these days - that musical instrument retailers are cutting the throat of these manufacturers by making *price* the main criterion in instrument sales. The discounters push for bigger discounts and longer payment terms on those instruments they sell - to enable them to do so, no doubt.

Discounters are also getting a hard time from other retailers, who claim that discounters do not offer the service that the small shop offers and that they are only interested in obtaining a high turnover on a lowered profit and thus haven't got a built-in margin to protect them from service problems.

At the other end of this particular triangle, of course, is you, the customer. Do you pay what seems 'over the odds' and buy your new instrument or amp from the local shop in the hope of getting extra service in the future? Or, on the other hand, do you take what may be a gamble and buy cheap?

I think that one point to consider here is the simple matter (!) of English Law. Under the provisions of the Sales of Goods Acts a purchaser who has a complaint about a product is to look to the *retailer* for service and not the manufacturer. This obligation falls upon the retailer who, by law, must replace or repair or refund faulty goods. So, whether you buy from a discounter or a corner shop, both types of retailer *must* be prepared to fulfil the terms of their legal obligations.

In strict legalistic terms, therefore, it shouldn't matter from whom you buy your gear. As with many things, however, the law cannot offer total protection. Discounters may go broke or simply refuse to help. Can you afford to sue? The protection of the small claims courts is being slowly eroded these days and legal costs can be high.

In my own opinion I'm not convinced that local shops are *always* prepared to honour their commitments, anyway. It would seem to me that there are good and bad full-price and discounting retailers and *either* can be rotten to deal with - or good - depending more on the personality of the owner than profit margins.

Forgetting the red herring of service then (and don't forget, even if your retailer won't help you the manufacturer usually will), do discounters really eat away the market as Soundout and many others claim?

Manufacturer's opinions seem to



vary here. Some I've spoken to (and these are their views, not necessarily mine) actively welcome discounters. These manufacturers claim that their gear has large enough built-in profit margins to allow for discounters who want to push business further by lowering their prices and that those retailers who complain are trying to perpetrate a cosy, complacent market for themselves.

On the other hand you get a company like Gigsville (Aria's UK distributors) who have preferred to lower their own prices, offering excellent service arrangements from the *company themselves* and appointing franchise-only dealers (ie Gigsville-appointed dealers) who sell at fixed prices. IN some ways this seems to be the best approach of all as Gigsville can keep an eye on their dealers and weed out any chaff from the wheat, while still proving to be more than ample competitors pricewise for other Japanese guitar importers.

By and large, I suspect, the people who really suffer from this are smaller British makers like Soundout. Another manufacturer that has these problems is Hiwatt. Dave Reeves of Hiwatt recently spent considerable venom telling me all about his problems and I must admit that I have to sympathise with him and, if this is what is affecting Soundout/Frunt, with Todd Wells too. Reeves' point is that retailers tend not to stock the smaller British lines and opt for the imported, mass-advertised gear such as Peavey, Yamaha etc. When customers come into a shop, asking for a British small-production item, the retailer either tries to steer them on to one of the bigger ranges or, if the punters insist, offers to order it for them.

The story can then get quite nasty. The retailer will sometimes telephone the manufacturer telling them what he or she wants but asking for a large discount. Furthermore, retailers may not pay bills on time which, as a small company will almost certainly be running a bank overdraft, will add to the erosion of the profit margin even further. Not a happy position for them to be in. Hiwatt, for example, now tend to sell most of their production overseas where they can get cash on the

nailed and no problems with massive discounts. And who can blame them?

In fact most big British manufacturers like Marshall and H/H tend to be all right as far as one can see. It's the Frunts, the Hiwatts and even people like Buman who are having trouble with retailers. As Todd rightly points out in his letter, the musician benefits initially by being able to get cheaper gear from the retailer who, by discounting, is squeezing the smaller makers hard. In the long run, however, those small manufacturers are being squeezed out of business - which is yet another contributory factor to the rapid decline in our home-based equipment manufacturing industry.

But, for the most part, the discounters tend to push the bigger lines, as we have seen. It is in their shops that you will find the massed ranks of Roland, Peavey, Yamaha, Norlin, & Co. Try finding a Burman or a Frunt in most discounters - very few seem to have them. Maybe the answer could lie in the smaller manufacturers adopting the Gigsville approach? Surely they could appoint good retailers in most areas (they do exist) and set up a franchise-only operation with reasonably generous profit margins, excellent service and generally mutual protection? Then they could refuse to supply to discounters (just as Gigsville do). Hence, if you wanted a smaller British product you would simply have to go to the franchiser in your area and buy from them. On the other hand, if you wanted a big line you would go to a discounter.

To an extent this is happening already: I think that it could go a lot further. In a way it is what is happening in the camera business. If you want a Konica or a Praktica or something you just shop around for the cheapest price but if you want a Leica or a Hasselblad (both professional items) you tend to go to a non-discounting specialist where you will also tend to get the sort of extra special service that a pro (who relies on the gear) will always tend to want.

Generally, I rather tend to agree with Todd's letter about the state of retailing in this country. Badly trained, rude staff who seem more interested in showing you how 'good' they are at

playing, rather than helping you buy; indifferent service; shoddy attention to learning about their products: all these abound. Also, manufacturers, perhaps rightly, tend to feel that retailers are greedy, demanding profit margins which really are over the top. I'm not sure that all retailers are like this but I do tend to feel that many of them are. The exceptions can, however, be excellent.

Todd claims that discounting by retailers is leading to a collapse of the amplification market in 1980. It's a strong view and not, I would suggest, totally accurate. What is happening, I think, is that the *really* mass market operations (whose unit costs are usually tremendously lower than home based smaller makers) are working unwittingly (I hope!) and hand-in-hand with the discounters to squeeze British producers out of the market - unless these British companies happen to be big enough to compete with the gigantic international trading corporations already. In nearly all cases they quite patently are not.

The only answer which I can suggest to manufacturers like Todd is to drop out of the price war altogether. Perhaps they should advertise their quality, use the Press (*dat's us - Ed*) for reviews (I've never been offered a Frunt for review and when I did try to get one once I was turned down due to 'short supply!') and appoint specialised retailers who *don't* discount but *do* sell quality gear at *fair* prices. Otherwise, I suspect, these smaller companies (who do tend to make the best gear, of course) *will* get squeezed out by the unscrupulous dealer. What we'd be left with, then, would be only the mass-marketed products imported from abroad. Fine though these undoubtedly are (who would knock Yamaha or Roland or Norlin's products, for example?) they are not always as innovative as the very small, revolutionary, new people beavering away to turn a brainwave into reality. A similar market to compare with would be that of hi-fi, of course.

The key to Todd's letter is, I would suggest, his line, 'Ask any large manufacturer (who attempts to compete by the economics of volume) ... I don't think that either he or other smaller companies should 'compete by the economics of volume'. They should use quality and exclusivity to sell us their gear. Let the big multinationals have their fun with the discounters. In the long run they will either make it or break it. It would be a tragedy for the smaller Brits to get destroyed by the power politics of the retailer v discounter v manufacturer controversy.

For you as a musician this is far more vital than you may suspect. The symbiosis between rock music and its equipment is self-evident. We *need* a home-based industry and we should try to support it. I don't think that, generally speaking, you'll suffer many rip-offs at the hands of the discounters, but you may eventually find that consistent patronising of them may limit your choice - especially in the area of British products. But what do you think?

# Why there isn't a Westbury in Peter Haycock's guitar collection.

To the rock world, **Peter Haycock**, guitarist with the Climax Blues Band, is a skilful and imaginative player of international status.

So you can imagine our enthusiasm when we discovered that the guitar Peter uses for both studio and live work, was a Westbury, (a Custom II, gloss black actually), quite a modest guitar pricewise, for a musician of his standing.

So with almost indecent haste, we tracked him down and asked him over the phone if he'd tell us why he chose and used a Westbury.

And could we put it in an ad?

'Sure' he replied, 'as long as you mention the Climax Blues Band's new album coming out shortly on the Warner Brothers label'.

It was a deal, and the conversation went like this:

*Peter, why Westbury?*

I think because it's such a versatile guitar, yet so easy to use... I can still get a lot of widely differing sounds quickly.

*You're obviously happy with the sound.*

Yeah, it's great, as I said, it's very versatile... used with a variety of amps you can get anything from a screaming humbucker sound to a really slicing single coil sound.

*I understand you collect guitars.*

Yeah, right, I've got sixteen so far... including an ES355—a gift from the Marshall Tucker Band, a black Les Paul Custom and a Veleno which has a weird aluminium neck.

*And yet you use the Westbury to the exclusion of the others?*

Right, I've now got a room full of guitars, just collecting dust.

*What about the old adage—you're not a guitarist till you've owned a Gibson?*

It's nice to own one... I would say try a Westbury first... you'll be pleasantly surprised... you can, over the years, spend a lot of money trying to find the right guitar... starting with perhaps a second hand Fender... through the Les Pauls, 355's etc. You'd be far better off buying a versatile one like this, as they certainly aren't a lot of money. In fact I'd say that a Westbury is a short cut to finding the ideal guitar for stage and studio work.

*Did you know the Westbury range starts at £135.00 including VAT?*

Really? That's amazing, they look and perform more like £400 guitars.

Dear Rose-Morris, If what Peter says is anything to go by, Westbury seem to have a great range of guitars. Please send me the full story.

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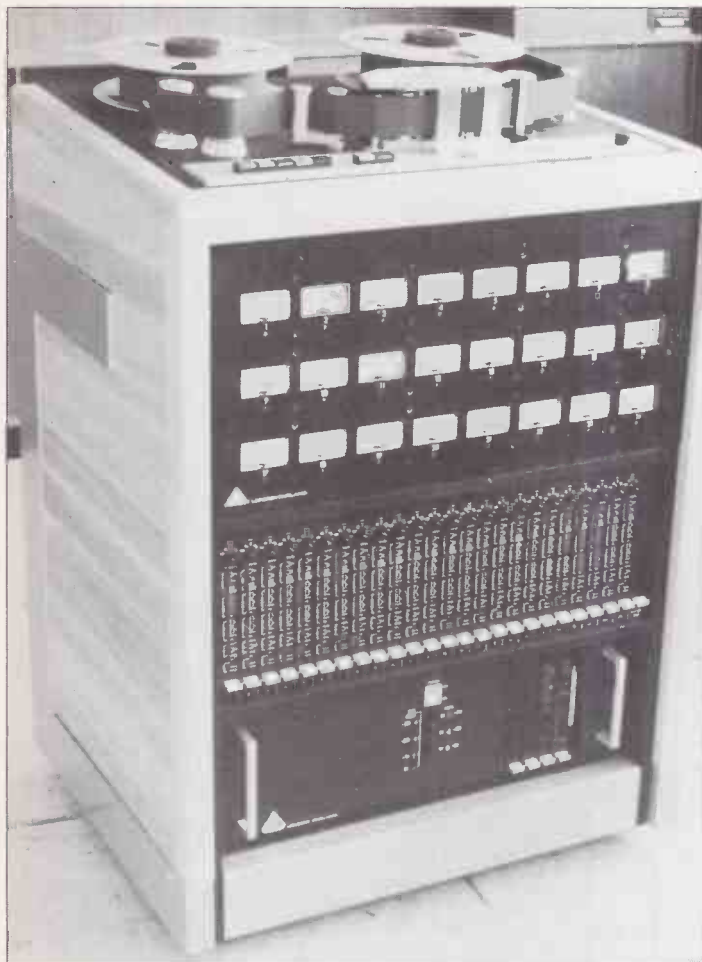
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## APRS '80 Report



There was a good showing of equipment to tickle the fancy of smaller 8- and 16-track studios at last June's APRS Exhibition in London. One of the most interesting items I came across was being shown by **Production Studio Equipment** (or PSE for short), the manufacturing division of Music Laboratory. PSE has developed a very professional looking 1-inch conversion for the ever-popular Teac 80-8 ½-inch 8-track. Priced at £1000, the conversion comprises a replacement headblock complete with long-life heads, stainless-steel tape guides and radically improved azimuth adjustment. As an added bonus the conversion boosts output levels from Teac operation level of -10dBV, to the more universally-accepted level of 0dBV. (The 80-8's braking system is also beefed up to handle the increased weight of each tape reel.)

Improved signal-to-noise ratio of a converted machine is said to be good enough to allow it to be used without noise reduction. Furthermore, crosstalk between tracks has been reduced by a significant amount, say PSE. The company can also supply a brand-new machine, to be known as the *Master Eight*, complete with the 1-inch conversion for £3000 (see right).

Also to be seen on the **Music Laboratory** stand: a new PSE stereo spring reverb, which will accommodate input levels between -10 and +4dBV, and costs just £175; a range of DI boxes fitted with switchable lowpass filter, ground lift and input

attenuation; a six-way phantom power supply unit for capacitor mics (£100); and a pair of **Tannoy Super Red** monitors mounted in armoured flight cases for use on the road (£850 each).

Staying for a moment with tape machines, **Trident** was showing off the first production model of its new **TSR 24-track** (above). Finished in the same attractive ash trim as *Series 80* consoles, the *TSR* will accommodate 14-inch tape reels and features 15/30 in/s operating speeds (plus 6-38 in/s varispeed), an extremely comprehensive remote control and **Audio Kinetics XT-24 Intelocator**, advanced record/replay electronics design, plus lots of other goodies. Price is expected to be around £18,500.

Costing a great deal less, but no less worthy of consideration, **Neal/Ferrograph** unveiled a 4-track on ½-inch version of its well-known *SP7* tape transport. Designated *SP744*, the new machine incorporates a three-motor, three-head design, full motion sensing and logic control of all transport functions. Full sel-sync switching is also provided, together with built-in headphone monitoring. Line input and outputs are all on **XLR** connectors, conveniently located at the top of the machine. The *SP744* should be available by October, at an expected price of £750; a full remote control unit will also be available for £40.

**Harman UK** had brought along the new **Teac 35-2** stereo mastering and **85-16** 16-track on 1-inch machines. Also on show was a new autolocator

for the **85-16, Model AQ-85**, which enables up to five tape locations to be stored in an internal memory, price: £400. Frank Hughes of **Harman** tells me that **Teac** is now offering a special price on a 16-track package, comprising the **85-16** multitrack, a **24/8 Model 15** mixer with 16-track monitoring, and a **35-2** mastering machine. Total cost of the package will be a very reasonable £10,000.

Amongst the products to be seen on **Audio & Design's** packed stand was the new **Gemini Easy Rider** stereo compressor-limiter, which costs £380. Occupying just 1½ inches of standard rack space, the *Easy Rider* features front-panel controls for input gain, compression ratio (1:1 to limit), attack and release times (the latter with an 'auto' or program-dependent setting.) Pushbutton switches enable either channel to be bypassed for A/B checks, or for coupling together the two channels for true stereo operation. A novel horizontally-mounted bargraph displays the amount of gain reduction occurring in both channels. As with all **ADR** units, the new *Easy Rider* stereo compressor-limiter is nicely packaged and looks simplicity itself to operate. Definitely worth a listen.

**Andy Munro of Turnkey Two** was attracting a lot of attention with details of his new range of acoustic design and studio construction services – including full reverb and spectrum analysis measurements for small studios – while across the way the other **Turnkey** (gets a bit confusing having two companies sharing the same name) unveiled a new range of budget-priced mixers. In fact these turned out to be restyled versions of **Bandive's** original *Prokit* mixers, now known as *Seck 104* (10 inputs routing to four outputs with two-band EQ, separate cue and echo sends, plus full off-tape monitoring facilities), and *Seck 62* (a relatively simple six-input stereo desk). The new design also incorporates improved **VU** metering. As before, both mixers are available in both kit form and ready-built.

And last, but by no means least, **Tannoy** unveiled a new companion to the excellent-sounding *Super Red* monitor loudspeakers. The *Little Red* (what else?) utilises a single 10-inch dual-concentric drive unit, and is claimed to sound almost identical – apart from a less lusty bottom-end response – to its bigger brother. An ideal choice for smaller recording studios, the new *Little Reds* cost £250 each.



## Maintenance

Another name to add to the list of companies offering maintenance services for small studios: **Kineo Audio & Visual** based in North London. **KAV's** Paul Nice and Nigel Vieira tell me they have been involved with several 4-, 8-, 16- and 24-track installations, and are currently doing quite a lot of work for **Turnkey**. Both of them are familiar with a wide range of consoles and multitrack machines.

Before a job can be priced, Paul and Nigel would need to have a look at your studio; final charges would depend on where the studio is located and how good a state of tune the equipment is in. They usually work on a contract/retainer basis, visiting the studio whenever a fault develops, as well as looking in every couple of months to line-up your multitrack. Paul reckons that, subject to an agreed maximum number of hours on site, a yearly retainer for a London studio would work out at about £75.

If you want to know more about what they have to offer, contact Paul or Nigel at **Kineo Audio & Visual**, 135 Kentish Town Road, London NW1 8PP. Tel: 01-485 0876.

And for readers living in South West England, **Trip Electronics** based in **Bridgwater, Somerset**, definitely seem worth getting to know. **Brian Cromer** and **Dave Goodway** have written to say that at present **Trip** do all the repair work for five local music shops, one hifi store, numerous clubs, dancing schools and discos. They are also no strangers to recording and PA equipment. **Brian** and **Dave** have their own fully-equipped 8-track mobile, in addition to carryout maintenance work for a local 16-track studio.

Minimum repair fee for stage equipment is £5, including the first hour of any labour involved. Their normal hourly rate is £5 for bench work, plus 254p/mile travelling costs if they need to be called out to a job. Assuming you can take it to their workshop, lining up a stereo machine would cost you £15, and £18.50 for a 4- or 8-track. Looking back through his records, **Brian** says that their average charge for rebuilding a completely blown transistor amp is around £20, inclusive of parts. A same-day service is also available for an extra 20%.

For more information contact **Brian Cromer** or **Dave Goodway** at **Trip Electronics**, 47 Sedgemoor Road, **Bridgwater, Somerset**. Tel: 0278-55562.

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## Slowhand's Sidekick Comes out of Hiding

Albert Lee is the guitarist's guitarist. Eric Clapton has even been heard to say that Lee is his favourite – long before they joined up for the recent tour and *Just One Night* album.

Despite the fact that Albert Lee keeps on popping up in the most unlikely of places, he is now concentrating on EC's band. 'It seems to be a full-time job, although I don't know how much of the year I'll be working. We've done the tour, and the live album recorded in Japan is out.'

Finishing touches have been put to the studio album which has been recorded over here. Tracks were laid down over a couple of months, rehearsals and touring coming right in the middle. The album is likely to be released to coincide with a possible US tour in October.

Although Lee and Clapton's styles are very different, Albert believes that they really complement each other. 'A lot of the time I'm just playing back-up, but I get a fair shot at playing what I want to play, though obviously Eric takes most of the solos. It can be inhibiting, but I don't mind because it's the overall sound that matters.'

In practice, Albert gets more than his fair crack of the whip. On stage he almost shares the limelight with Clapton, and the audience really appreciate his playing for what it is. And the 'Country Boy' tag that Albert's carried around since the Heads, Hands and Feet days is in the current set. But now it's faster, gutsier and shows off his skills to the full. Clapton is now playing a broad mixture of music – a lot of new material came out at rehearsals. 'There is a lot of country rock in the set now,' explains Albert, 'because that's what Eric's been doing recently – the *Lay Down Sally* type of thing. But because he doesn't really like to rehearse, I never know what's going to be in the set until I get on stage. However, it usually also contains some of the old stuff that he's obliged to do, along with a couple of old blues numbers.'

It's not just Clapton and Lee's different styles of playing that are apparent, but their stage presence. Clapton is right out in front, the real showman these days. Albert is in the background – whatever the band – quietly getting on with the job. Perhaps it's his aversion to the limelight which has left him unrecognised by the masses. Whether he plays with Clapton, Emmylou Harris, Commander Cody or Don Everly, the slight guy sporting the shades in the corner is Albert Lee. 'I enjoy playing, whatever the circumstances, but I sometimes feel that because of my attitude I haven't progressed as much as I would have liked. Perhaps, too, I should have been more businesslike.'

Albert modelled his early style of



playing on three or four guitarists. In particular, James Burton and Gene Vincent's old guitarist. 'I think my style is country rock, but it's more than that; it's jazzy, but it's also got a lot of swing to it. I approach the guitar a little bit like the way Buddy Emmons would approach the steel – he can play things with a jazz or country feel, but it's still his style. A lot of guitarists tend to find their own techniques, we think we've discovered something, and then we find other people are using it as well. I can't say that I've tried to copy anyone exactly, although I heard people like Atkins and Scotty Moore doing a finger scale using a thumb pick, and I could never use one. I thought I was unique for a while using a flat pick and my finger a lot. Over the years, it seems a lot of people have done that; Glen Campbell does it.'

'I also differ from other musicians in that I used to play scales a lot. I thought it would be a good way to get my fingers working, rather than just doing two-finger walking across the fingerboard. It made my playing a lot more fluid. I guess this must have come from my years of piano playing.'

Albert usually plays a *Telecaster*, and most of his 20 or so guitars are *Teles*. 'I've got a couple with B-benders for pulling the strings and a pedal steel-type attachment for getting that sort of sound.' I asked Albert if this made playing pedal steel unnecessary? 'I've always wanted to play steel, but it takes a lot of dedication. Of the two necks, the top one – the country one, if you like – is simpler.

The other neck is more of a jazz set-up, and it's difficult to master it. A lot of steel players can't play it at all. People like Roy Green don't bother with the other neck, they just have the country one.

'The first guitar that I ever bought was a *Les Paul Custom*, but I sold it to buy a big jazz Gibson *Super 400*, which I've regretted ever since. But I've gone the full circle, because Eric's just given an old one to me, which is almost identical to the one I sold 15 years ago.'

'The type of guitar that you use has got a helluva lot to do with style, and what you want to hear from it. If I had to play the same thing on a Gibson as I played on a Fender, the style would change drastically. I always try a *Tele* first, and if that doesn't quite cut it, I'll try something else. I've also got an *SG* and a *Music Man* which are good, but I haven't got them how I'd like them. As for acoustics, I've got a *Martin* which I like to use for recording.'

Last year Albert released his first solo album, *Hiding*. But why was it so long before he embarked on a solo venture? 'It was in the pipeline for years, but things kept cropping up. I got lazy and just couldn't knuckle down to it. Eventually record companies would lose interest. I started on the album and I wasn't very happy about it, so when I joined Emmylou, I didn't really have time to finish it.'

The *Hiding* album was about two or three years in the making, but it was made with the help of all the musicians that Albert admires, including Buddy

Emmons, Don Everly, Chas and Dave, Hank De Vito. The album is proof that Albert doesn't like to restrict himself to any one thing; it's a mixture of country, rock and ballads. The great surprise was the inclusion of Mark Knopfler's *Setting Me Up*. 'A friend took me to see Dire Straits at the Marquee, and I was really impressed. A few months later, I was looking around for material for *Hiding*, and when I was sent a copy of their first album, I thought "Boy, this is the kind of thing I want". But I never expected it to be so successful, it's the sort of thing that gets lost – a lot of people like it, but it doesn't sell. I was really pleased for them.'

The album also includes *Country Boy*. 'I revitalised it when I joined Emmy's band, after she'd heard a tape of it, and wanted to do it on stage. It began to sound better than it had ever done before, so when I got in the studio, I just had to do it. But *Country Boy* is the only track on the album that Albert's had a hand in penning. 'I went through a stage of being super-critical of everything I did. An idea would come into my head, I'd sit down and thrash the melody to death before I'd come up with any lyrics. If I did come up with any lyrics, then most of the time I'd sling them out.' Much the same could be said for Albert's keyboards – a little-recognised talent.

'I love to play piano, but I never really get the opportunity as people always want me to play guitar. I was with Emmylou's Hot Band two years before they realised I was capable of playing.' But one person who did use his piano skills was Jerry Lee Lewis. Somewhere on the *London Sessions* you can just make out Albert Lee Esq, backing the rock'n'roll maestro.

How does Albert find going from one band to another, adapting his playing as required? 'It's fun, but basically I play the same style whoever I'm with, although it may not sound like that. Emmylou Harris is a perfectionist, and it took me a while to adapt – perhaps she was getting used to me as well. But now I have a certain freedom playing with her, within the confines of country music. I'm a great rockabilly fan, so I sat in on piano with Matchbox at the Country Music Festival – it was great fun.'

In the meantime, Albert's got a few things down in preparation for a new album. 'I was lucky in that I've got some free studio time to give me some encouragement, but I hope to get into the studio proper during the summer. I'm hoping that this album will be more rock'n'roll. The main criticisms of *Hiding* was that it did not have enough guitar for some people, wasn't rocky enough or country enough for others. This next album should contain some more Hank De Vito songs, and perhaps some from Rod McCrow, who I've been working closely with on his album.'

While playing with so many people, with just one solo album under his belt, doesn't this cramp his own personal direction? 'I'm aware that it does, and I suppose that's where I fall down. But I do get a kick out of playing with certain people – I'm a junkie for it really.'

Nik Oakley



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## Polishing the G. Ravan Image

Polish records is something of a double pun: in the first place its label head and main producer Genya Ravan is Polish-American. In the second the label's logo proves you pronounce it the other way with a silhouetted girl polishing the logo to a nice shine.

Genya seems to have spent very little of her life sitting at home with the *Pledge*. As a personality, she is probably best explained by the American word 'feisty'. Her career has been fragmented but rarely without interest. Firstly, she was in a group called the Escorts with Richard Perry, which was, if nothing else, Big in Detroit. Then she was Goldie of Goldie and the Gingerbreads, probably the first all-female band to have a hit in Britain with their bouncy *Can't You Hear My Heartbeat* in 1965, the heart of the British beat boom, which meant touring Britain with the likes of the Stones, Animals, Yardbirds, Kinks and Hollies.

Subsequently, there were occasional records as Goldie Zerkowit, an extended spell as lead vocalist for the jazz-rock band Ten Wheel Drive, and then... not a lot until a late 70s resurgence coinciding with the new wave, which has seen her release a couple of self-produced rock albums, *Urban Desire* and *And I Mean It*, and get increasingly involved in producing some of New York's newer bands.

So 1980 finds Ms Ravan busier than ever, running a company, acting as her own A&R person, producing both for Polish and as a freelance, songwriting, and as like as not, answering the phone and typing as well.

It seems a strangely British approach for New York, where record companies tend to be giants, and there's no more unapproachable-looking building than CBS' black monolith. Indeed Stiff is one of the chief prototypes for Polish origins – particularly for its strong images and its sense of humour: the very new wave blare of constant drilling mixed with regular police sirens keeps it from seeming like a London interview, though: we're at Polish offices on New York's W57th St. Polish jokes are to New York roughly as Irish jokes are to London, and accordingly Polish's T-shirt proclaims 'Polish Records is no joke' and more poignantly on the back: 'Who do I fuck to get off this label?'

'When we launched the company last year, just for the press and radio stations, to announce the fact that we existed, we pressed 3,000 records of count-offs, and it was supposed to be everything wrong about the record. And it says: Polish records is proud to announce we're growing at such a fast pace we forgot to record our acts and we have a list of artists that asked us not to call them on the sleeve. So I called up the factory. I wanted the

holes off-centre, right, I called them up and said: Hello, this is Polish records, we're a new company... and the guy's going, "Yeah"... and what I would like to do is have 3,000 pressings with the hole totally off-centre. And he says, "Whaddya kiddin' me lady. Is this some kind of joke? Hey Harry, c'mere, you gotta hear this one." Finally he says, "Lady for 30 years I've been trying to get the hole in the middle."

'Probably I shouldn't have told him and the hole would have been off-centre anyway. In the end we had to settle for papering over the hole and having a little perforated circle over to one side.'

Having fun is one of the aims of Polish, but it isn't the same thing as going into the business light-heartedly, or half-heartedly: while understanding the Stiff philosophy, Genya is puzzled by the approach of Rough Trade. 'They just help you to make a record and that's it? No commitment? I wouldn't want us to be like that, we're an artist-oriented label, but we also make promises and if it doesn't happen in a certain amount of time, they're free to go, but if it does and we come through with what we promised them then we're just like any other record company – five years, because it takes a lot of energy to build an act and to just let 'em record and just put it out, that's lame.

'The acts that come on our label are not getting any ego-strokes or big money upfront, they know they're dealing with another artist, so they trust me. The first thing I say is if you're looking for big bucks to sign, you're with the wrong company, but if you're looking for a building process, building a career and long life, then you're at the right company. This is not take the money and run, I've gone through that already and I know what bullshit goes down. So hopefully I'll get healthy-minded acts.

'The image is really important today, that's the thing that we're lacking. That's why we don't have stars. Every big star we ever had had an image. It didn't take one record, it took three, four or five. So the first album is an introduction, that's why we need a five-year contract. We're spending most of

our money on studios and rehearsals. As you can see we don't have typists or receptionists.'

Genya has now left 20th Century Fox, a somewhat secretive label which put out her last two records, and has definitely decided against putting herself on Polish: 'Too incestuous' (whether she would find time for a personal career as well is another question).

For the time being, her full-time commitment is with the record company, which she says was 'not difficult to form'. The two significant events that led to its launch were meeting Steve Musick, who runs the business side of the company, and a phone call to Ronnie Spector, who was told, 'Hello, I'm Genya Ravan and I'm going to be your next producer.'

So it was, but it became more than just a production deal, and Ronnie became the first artist signed to Polish. Interestingly, there is more than a hint of Phil Spector in some of Genya's self-productions, and the occasional touch of the Ronettes too, notably on *I'm Wired* from *And I Mean It*, but Ronnie's forthcoming album *Siren* has a thoroughly contemporary rock band sound with never a hint of castanets.

A single *Darlin'* (which Frankie Miller had a hit with here) has been issued as the song is a virtual unknown in the States and is featured by Bonnie Raitt in the film *Urban Cowboy*, but is not being considered for England. I think a triumphant version of Chip Taylor's *Any Way That You Want Me* could do the trick here: the singing and production complement each other brilliantly, and as Genya puts it, 'I wanted to get her away from Boom, Ba-boom. I wanted a pretty off the wall sound, with some of the downtown guys playing on it, the Heartbreakers and Cheetah Crome (of the Dead Boys), but she's got a voice that's going to be distinctive whatever you do.'

Interestingly when the Ramones have just had their first hit with a Phil Spector-produced massacre of Ronnie's old hit *Baby I Love You*, *Siren* also includes a Ramones song, selected by Genya before the Ramones fixed up their Hollywood

trip. And considering the Ronettes track was on the only album Ronnie ever made, 1964's *The Fabulous Ronettes*, *Siren* is a well-overdue follow-up.

Genya's other best-known production job was independently done for one of New York's more prominent punk bands, The Dead Boys, but the arrangement was not all sweetness and light. 'I did their first album and for the second one they went and hired Felix Pappalardi. That was a demo that I did with them. I had two days to do it and Sire put it out. Pappalardi had a month, they spent tons of bread and it wasn't halfway as good as the demo I did. For the third album, they wanted me to do it. I said: No, where was your loyalty on the second album? The Dead Boys are not together now, but Cheetah Crome's putting a band together, so we'll see what happens.'

The other bands signed to Polish are 'Metromen, the Ants, whose name I want to change and another group whose name I also want to change.'

Ravan productions tend to cover a wide variety of styles and approaches, which may well be a result of not using a regular studio. 'Yes, I also never like to work with just one engineer because you learn more by working with a lot of other people, and if you always work with the same person, you develop a style that you start laying on your artist. To me, the biggest part of production is casting. The right sound, the right group, the right engineer. I have about three engineers that I like to work with. I work at RPM studios a lot, and also at Media and Electric Lady.

'So I'm not going to be doing all the reproductions for this label. Again it's casting. I just worked with a computer for mixers for the first time, and it spoiled me. I wouldn't do it recording-wise, but mixing. It saves so much time, and you get everything. It's incredible to watch those faders moving by themselves. It's great cos you can program it to every move you want. I was very leery of it, but it catches everything you want.

'This was at RPM which is the only one I know of in New York which has what's called a floppy disc. What happens is it doesn't EQ, but the floppy disc records what your final mix is. I can walk in a month later, put the disc in and it'll go back to exactly where I had it. Also it keeps everything at the same level so that if you want to splice something, you can because it's all the same level.'

What remains now is to get the right distribution and pressing deals set up (for the moment, Polish presses its own) and then see how the records do. At any rate, after years of being produced in a way she was unhappy with, Genya's delighted to be this much in control. To quote one of her more forthright lyrics: 'I made my change I rearranged and I won't sleep on the wet spot no more.'

Success? 'At the first sign of success my age will show. I'll get a Jewish accent and rheumatism, make chicken soup and buy a condominium in Florida.'

Rob Mackie





# Letters

Write to: Sound International, Link House, Dingwall Avenue, Croydon CR9 2TA, England.

## Ongoing Oranges

I read with contempt the biased, naïve article (*Oranges Are Lemons*) in Gary Cooper's column of the June issue. I feel a manufacturer should have the right of reply. The article insinuates the voluntary liquidation of Orange was of a suspicious nature: the liquidation of any company must be the most soul-destroying experience a Board of Directors has to take. The demise of Orange, as those of us truthful enough to admit, will not be the only liquidation our industry will witness in the next two years.

Yes, there is a world recession on and it's hit the music industry particularly hard in Europe. However, because for years the retail trade had expanded in total disregard to the size of the market, we enjoyed mass discounting to attract business. The consequences were a market totally saturated with products at giveaway prices plus disorganised, badly-run retail outlets who, by using persistent delaying tactics in settling their debts, caused cashflow difficulties for the manufacturers. Ask any large manufacturer (who attempts to compete by the economics of volume), there are a diminishing number of worthwhile retailers in the UK.

The discounting market put further pressure on manufacturers to supply cheaper, therefore reducing their margins substantially. Compounded with cashflow problems the result is an erosion of assets leading to liquidation or even bankruptcy. Who has gained? Well, in the short term the musician has been offered all manner of musical amplification at rock bottom prices. The standard of technology in some of the UK's better manufactured products demands a selling price well in excess of the current prices paid. I've engineered products in the process control market and knowing the costings accurately, am very well aware that the market forces dictate the price in the music industry, not the real value of product.

So the musician obtains top technology products at cheap prices. The retailer is on such a small margin he is unable to finance his operation, similarly the manufacturer. This all adds up to the elimination of both retailers and manufacturers by normal economic forces.

The lack of circuit diagrams and spare parts that Gary Cooper moans about is the 'price' now being paid for cheap goods! Discounting by naïve retailers is causing the amplification market to collapse in 1980.

From: Todd Wells, Managing Director, Soundout Laboratories Ltd, Surbiton, Surrey, England.

Garry Cooper replies: *Biased and naive are, I would suggest, the wrong words to use about my piece on the demise of Orange. Bitter and cynical*

*would have been better. I did not try to suggest that there was anything suspicious about Orange's liquidation, although the lack of plan drawings and spares is unfortunate, to say the very least. Of course I regret Orange's passing - or that of any other manufacturer. I liked Orange amps very much indeed and feel sorry for the directors and the workers involved. However, Orange's problems may not have been caused by discounting because they never were a major home market supplier, concentrating, as I understand it, on exporting. It was the strength of the Pound which must have hit them, not discounters cutting their throats!*

*Other manufacturers have suffered declines in recent months but this must be seen in context. Figures suggest that about 120 companies are going bankrupt in Britain every week (!) and they are spread across all industries, not just ones where discounting is a problem, for example in the 'white goods' (fridges, washing machines etc) market, or in the musical instrument industries. As I tried to say, Orange's collapse may well not have been too connected with most other equipment maker's problems. As for discounting, see my column this month, on p11.*

## Cheap Pianos: Overwhelming Logic

Congratulations, you've done it again. Having proved a year ago that six guitarists when placed blindfolded in a darkened room with six varying priced electric guitars can tell the difference between the cheap ones and the expensive ones, you have now made the same point regarding pianos in your *Electric/Electronic Piano Test* June issue where two of the best-selling and lowest priced electric/electronic pianos on the market (Crumar and Hohner) are rated most abysmally in comparison with two of the most expensive instruments on the market (Roland and Yamaha).

While your reviewer's comments were, as always, a model of fairness and impartiality (phrases like, 'Is good value for money', 'attractively priced if nothing else'), the overall impression created by the consensus of your pundits' opinions is as follows: 1. Cheap pianos don't sound as nice as expensive pianos. 2. Cheap pianos don't look as nice as expensive pianos. 3. Professional keyboard players if given a free hand would prefer to use expensive pianos rather than cheap pianos.

By your own admission in your conclusions only two pianos priced at £644 and £3,043 'were considered worthwhile by the panel' and you say that the panel's advice concerning cheaper pianos is, 'Forget it!'

The overwhelming logic of this kind of comparative survey is perfectly clear: money buys quality. It is, however, a great pity that your professional keyboardists cannot spare a thought for their less privileged colleagues/emulators who cannot afford more than £300 or so (and certainly not £600 or £3,000) for a piano. A suggestion for your forthcoming comparative reviews: why don't you try Yehudi Menuhin on a £30 Chinese violin outfit or Dizzy Gillespie on a 20p Kazoo?

From: Dec McLoughlin, Marketing Manager, John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd, Leeds, England.

Tony Bacon replies:

*We've never done a test with 'six guitarists... blindfolded in a room with six varying priced electric guitars', either a year ago or at any time. I suppose you mean the Copy Guitar Test published in our Nov and Dec '78 issues, where four guitarists and four bassists looked at 13 six-string electrics and 13 electric basses, or the Oriental Original Guitar Test, in our Jan '80 issue, where four guitarists and a guitar-maker looked at eight six-string electrics. Thank you for complimenting our panelists' fairness and impartiality: we do make a point of briefing the musicians quite carefully on the importance of value-for-money and general 'putting into context' of the tested instruments. I agree with your three-point summing up of the consensus of panelists' opinions - why the surprise?*

*I'm afraid it's not true when you say that our panel consisted of 'professional keyboardists' who 'cannot spare a thought for their less privileged colleagues/emulators...'. As ever, we made a point of assembling a panel of musicians from a wide area of interest: Josh Benn and Roger Phillips are not pro musicians, the other three are. Surely, if pro (or otherwise) musicians feel that, in their experience, a cheap electronic piano is a waste of time, then that is their right. I'm not saying that Dave Crombie or I necessarily agree with them, but surely they are in a position to recommend the course of action they feel to be right?*

*The panel were merely unhappy with cheaper electronic pianos: if you look at their comments on the low-priced Caslotone 201 elsewhere in the same issue, you'll see that your allegation of their bias against cheaper instruments is unfounded. Similarly, the panel in our previous multireview, the Oriental Original Guitar Test, found a good deal to praise in some of the lower-priced guitars on test - specifically the Cimar 2083BS (£173) and the Epiphone Genesis Deluxe (£142). I certainly concede that the multireview format is not exactly right yet, but we're getting there - see the Acoustic Guitar Test in last month's issue for example.*

*It would be pointless to conduct these multireviews if we were to just concentrate on one price bracket - in*

*the piano test, for example, the instruments fell into three distinct price groups: high, mid and low priced. If we had concentrated on one specific price area we would have limited ourselves in two fundamental ways: the number of instruments tested and (thereby) the prospective readership. Your suggestion for Mr Menuhin on a 30-quid Chinese violin and Mr Gillespie on cheap kazoo is more interesting, but unfortunately neither falls into our reviewing policy. I suggest Mr McLoughlin on sour grapes...*

Dec McLoughlin replies to the reply:

1 You should have realised that my reference to 'six guitarists...' was a case of literary licence and not to be taken literally.

2 You misunderstood me. I was not complimenting your panelists' fairness and impartiality - I was complimenting your reviewer's (ie Dave Crombie's) comments.

3 You ask why my surprise at the 3-point conclusion reached by your panelists. My surprise was simply that the three conclusions are so glaringly obvious as not to need all the paraphernalia of the multi-review format to be arrived at.

## Sound Advice

Coming soon in *SI/BI* your very own queries page. Now stop that sniggering, you know very well what a query is. You don't? Well, try these on for size: My Shaftesbury Les Paul has fallen in half. Am I doing something wrong? Or: What bass guitar and amplification does Denis Thatcher of the Nuclear Threats use? Or: I'd really like to buy a synthesiser but someone's just nicked my wallet. What do you recommend? Or: I've taken the front head off my bass drum and I've forgotten where I've put it. Where can I buy a replacement? Or even: Can I afford a 4-track tape recorder, and is it worth the money? Queries just like these will be answered with tender loving care every month in your magazine by the truly knowledgeable (but modest) Gary Cooper. So send your niggling problems, your irksome questions and your tedious troubles in a letter to SOUND ADVICE at the address at the top of the page. You could see YOUR NAME IN PRINT in this fine journal. Get to it.



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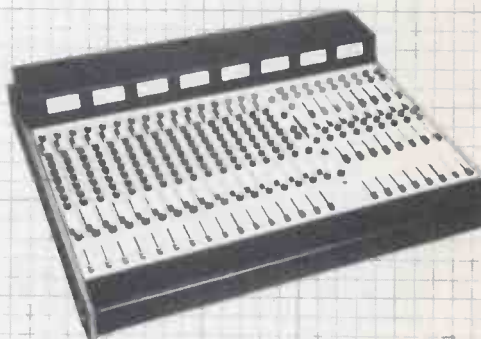
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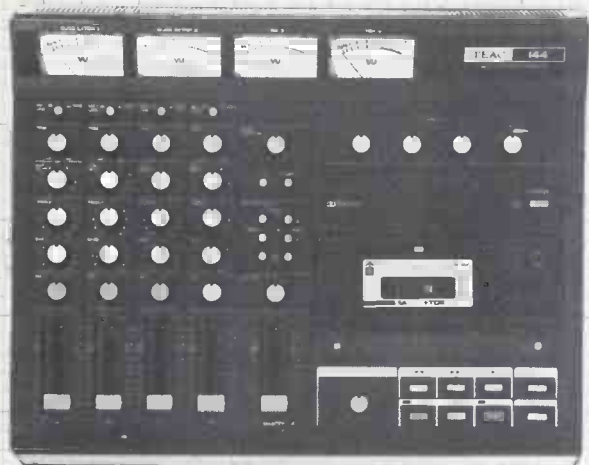
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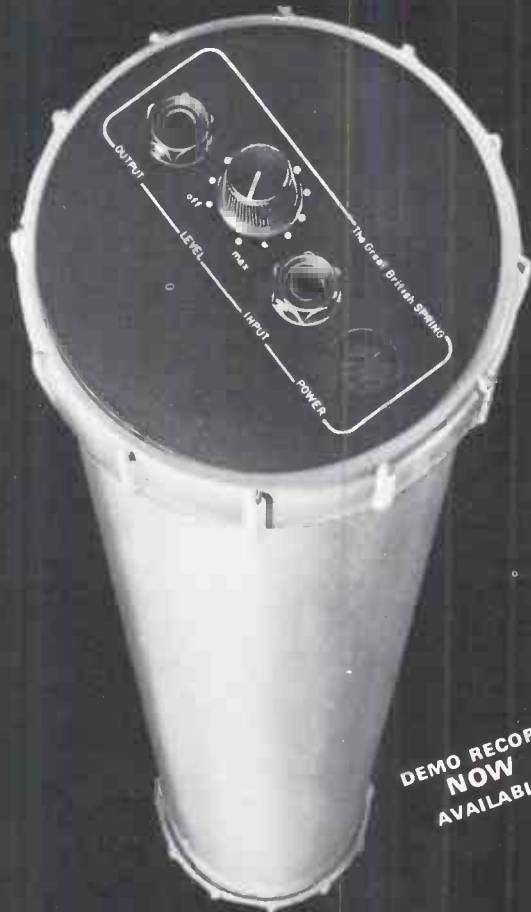
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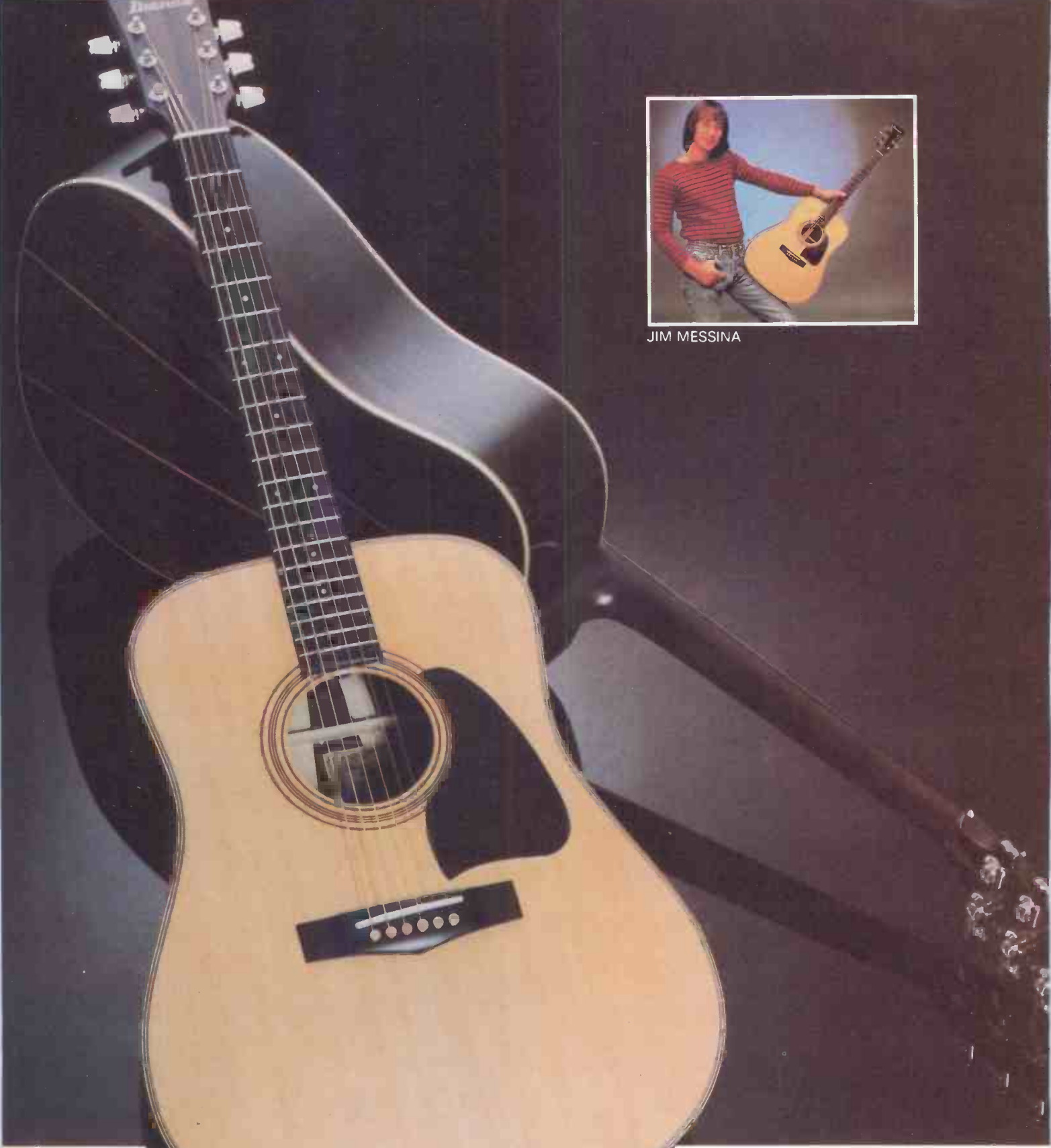
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# The Hammond Story

**Not just your average organ-grinder, Laurens Hammond developed a clock that didn't tick, a 3-D film technique and a sugar-refining process before turning his full attentions to organs. Dave Crombie investigates the results.**

There are really only two men to consider when it comes to dishing out the honours for the rise of electric and electronic music, and both these men were responsible for the hardware, and not the music itself. Back in our October '78 issue, we looked at one of these men – Dr Robert Moog, the man who really was Mr Synthesiser. The other is less well known these days, though the instruments that bear his name are still a force to be reckoned with. He is Laurens Hammond, the man who

turned the music world upside down with what was, in essence, a single simple idea – the tone wheel generator. This month we're going to look at this brilliant inventor, and the rather interesting history of the Hammond organ.

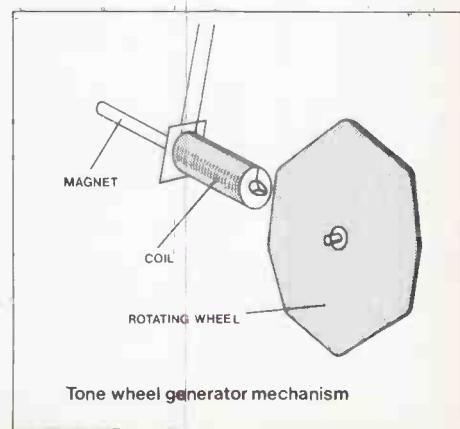
The organ wasn't the first of Hammond's inventions: back in 1909 he had developed an automatic transmission system; in 1920, a clock that didn't tick; he developed a three-dimensional film technique two years later; a synchronous motor also in 1922; and even a

process for refining sugar. The synchronous motor was to find its way into an electric clock that was the first product to be marketed by the newly formed Hammond Clock Company – it was highly profitable earning for the company annual profits of \$1.5m by 1931. The original clock company's headquarters on Western Ave, Chicago, still houses part of the Hammond empire.

During the Depression, when the market was inundated with copies of the Hammond clock, Hammond invented an extraordinary device that automatically shuffled a pack of playing cards into four piles. The machine was built into a tasteful bit of furniture, and in 1932 over 10,000 Hammond Automatic Bridge Tables were sold. The company was, however, not in the best of shapes during the Depression, but they did manage to survive. During 1933 and '34, Hammond with the assistance of an old colleague, a research engineer called John Hanert, was engaged in the development of a product that would use his synchronous motor for a completely different purpose. For those who are not too clear as to exactly what a synchronous motor is, then I shall explain. This motor is powered by an alternating current, similar to our domestic mains supply. This current can be considered to change direction at a certain frequency: in the UK it's 50 times a second, in the US, 60. The synchronous motor runs at a speed that is directly proportional to the frequency of the alternating current, so, as the mains electricity supply has a very stable frequency, a synchronous motor run off the mains will operate at a steady rate.

This new product, as you've all guessed, was the Hammond Tone Wheel Organ, which received its US patent on April 24, 1934. Figure 1 shows the workings behind this system. The synchronous motor was used to turn (in the original instrument) 95 tone wheels, each of which were about the size of a 50p piece, though they were all cut or indented differently. These tone wheels spun at a fixed angular velocity. Pointing towards the edge of each wheel was a small chisel-shaped magnetic pickup in which a tiny electrical signal was induced. This signal had the characteristic waveshape almost of that of a sine wave, ie a pure fundamental pitch. Nine drawbars, each with nine settings, enabled the player to blend overtones with fundamentals at varying volumes making it possible, so the manufacturers claimed, to create 253 million different musical tones. (I can't really see where they got this figure from, I make the number of possibilities under a million, but then maths never was my strong point.)

The organ, a Model A, had its public debut in April 1935, at the Industrial Arts Exposition



in New York's Radio City RCA Building, and received a surprisingly good reception. Many 'name' players immediately placed orders. Top of the list of customers was, however, Henry Ford, who got the first production model. The very first Hammond, an 'A', with serial no 1, was originally used as a demonstration model around America's Midwest. It was then purchased by the Paeso Methodist Church of Kansas City for a figure of less than \$1,000. After 11 years it was removed from the church, and it is now resident in the Smithsonian Institute. When the first Hammonds started to appear in '35, they were selling at \$1,250, and that was at a time when Henry Ford's cars could be got new for but \$600. However when you compare the cost with that of a traditional pipe organ, the Hammond was quite a bargain. The comparison between the two types of organs was to be made a lot more formally in a few years' time.

Hammond's first bit of trouble with the 'establishment' was an encounter with the Federal Trade Commission in 1936. New products have always seemed to put someone's back up – often it is tied in with companies that have been left behind, or by trade unions fearing that their members will be put out of work. It happened with the synthesiser in the Sixties when the American Federation of Musicians tried to put a stop to its development. The Mellotron suffered in a similar way at the hand of the British Musicians Union in the early Seventies. Well, the FTC weren't happy with the way that Hammond had called his new instrument an 'organ'. Hammond himself had said that this new instrument shouldn't be compared to any other existing instrument, and that it had a 'voice of its own'. This was back in '35 at the instrument's launch. In 1938 the company's claims did go a bit over the top, and the FTC had ordered Hammond to desist from claiming that it produced 'the entire tone colouring necessary for the rendition, without sacrifice, of the great works of classical organ literature', that it 'could cover the entire range of musical tone colours'; that 'any tone that is a sustained tone can be produced by this marvellous instrument'; and that 'an infinite variety of tones covering the flutes, diapason and reed families are instantly available to the organist'. The FTC won its case on paper, but Hammond really won as he was able to retain the tag 'organ' for his product. The real root of these squabbles lay in the economic decline of the pipe organ manufacturing industry. 1926/7 had seen the zenith of their sales, and by the time that this 'intruder' had come on to the market, their sales had slumped by a staggering 80%. The Hammond Organ was (relatively) portable, compact and, most importantly, reliable.

At the time when lawsuits were flying back and forth at a rate that compared to that of the bullets that were to follow five or so years later, a most extraordinary experiment took place in the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel. The FTC agreed to have an impartial panel compare the \$75,000 Skinner pipe organ to a \$2,600 Hammond, in order to determine if professional musicians, students etc, could tell the difference – a sort of Galaxy Darkroom Test. It was cleverly arranged so that the organ's speaker cabinet was concealed among the Skinner's pipes. This contest was judged by a panel of 15 experts (pro musicians and session honchos etc) and 15 layabouts, or students as they preferred to be known, picked

at random from the university. 30 selections were played, some on the Hammond, the others on the Skinner, and the panel were asked, yes you've guessed it, to tell which passage was played on what. The experts made about 10 mistakes each, and the students just managed to get half right (the same score if they had guessed), so the Hammond was vindicated (and the students sent down). It wasn't really that the Hammond had proved itself that mattered, but more the fact that the 'contest' had actually taken place. The establishment had accepted that the electric organ had arrived.

In the first three years of production, sales of the Hammond had topped 5000. Over a third had gone to churches, which seemed, if you'll pardon the expression, to have put a nail in the coffin of many church pipe organ manufacturers.

The *Hammond Times* was soon to appear to help promote sales, and in fact this publication still appears today – it was the first organ consumer magazine. The end of World War II saw the real boom years for the Hammond Co. Spinet organs and chord organs appeared; the company continued to bring in new innovations to their products – percussion units for rhythmic accompaniment appeared in 1955, followed by the famous Hammond Reverb Unit, that was to find its way into many other manufacturers' products. The tone wheel was kept on as the basic generation system until the mid-Sixties when Large Scale Integration (LSI) circuitry crept in at massive expense. Hammond decided to design their own 'chips' and in 1967 their first totally electronic organ appeared. It was these silicon wonders that were to mean the end of the tone wheel organs as they had become too expensive and labour intensive to make. Each tone wheel assembly required 15 machining operations, as well as the hand assembly of thousands of wires, switches, and associated parts.

Nowadays, the instruments produced by the Hammond Company are almost entirely directed towards the home organ market, with such features as Note-a-Chord, Brite Foot, Philharmonic Strings, Melody Maker Solos, and Fascinating Fingers. To the rock musician all these terms sound awful and gimmicky, and to some extent they are. The home organ market is a lot different to that of the synthesiser or other electric keyboards, and over the past couple of years it has suffered a severe decline. All manufacturers have to offer their prospective customers something new each year, and these automatic gadgets are the bait. That being said, Hammond haven't given up on other markets, but more of that in a minute.

### The Hammond B-3

I don't think that I'm being unfair in saying that the Hammond Organ made its biggest contribution in the jazz and rock fields. It offered these keyboard players something new, a chance to get away from the traditional sound of the piano. The most popular model was the B-3, which was essentially the same as the RT-3, and D-152, the C-3 and the A-105, the only difference being that they had varying styles of console, and different pedalboards. The B-3, and its European equivalent, the C-3, were the smallest in size of this group. Consequently they became the most popular with touring rock and jazz musicians. To facilitate the transport of these organs, it was often the custom for owners to have their instruments 'split'. This didn't involve the attacking of the

instrument with knives, à la Emerson, but the separation of the main body of the machine, with all the tone wheel assemblies, keyboards, and drawbars etc, from the lower section of the wooden cabinet with the pedal assembly. Many companies sprang up specialising in the splitting of Hammonds, and some of the better ones managed to accomplish the 'split' with little or no change to the organ's lines. Even a split B-3 was a heavy bastard to carry around, and I don't think that there can be many keyboard roadies about who haven't had cause to use stronger adjectives than the word just used, to describe this instrument.



The B3:  
popular with jazz and rock musicians.

Taking a closer look at the B-3 then, there are two 61-note manuals with an additional octave at the lower end of each manual in reversed colours (black naturals, white flats) that are used to select preset voicings. Each manual has 10 presets which can be set up from inside the instrument (it's really one of the first programmable instruments), and two variable from the front panel (voicings selected by the reversed B and B<sub>♭</sub> noted). These are set up on four banks of nine drawbars situated above the upper manual. These nine drawbars are pitched at 16', 5½', 8', 4', 2½', 2', 1½', 1¼', and 1'. For a more detailed explanation of their harmonic relationships, take a look at the review of the Roland VK-1 and Korg CX-3 single manual organs in *SI* July '80. The B note on the upper manual also activates the harmonic percussion that can be used in conjunction with the drawbar settings. The percussion has four tabs associated with it – On/Off; Fast/Slow (decay); 2nd/3rd (harmonic); Normal/Soft (level).

Switching on a B-3 isn't quite as simple as you may think. It's a bit like a car, as there is a starter motor to consider. This is used to get the synchronous motor up to speed so that it can lock into the mains frequency and not a fraction thereof. So to start the organ up, there are two toggle switches marked Start and Run. Firstly the Start switch has to be pushed forward and held, the motor will start to whirl, all assuming, that is, that the organ is plugged into the mains. After about 20 seconds the Run switch should be pushed forward too, and held with the Start switch. After a further four seconds or so, release both switches. The Run switch will stay where it is, and after a further 30 seconds the unit will be ready to play.

The Hammond has its own electrically induced vibrato and chorus facilities, but the most effective way to use a Hammond is with a







The B3000: an electronic B3.

Leslie (a rotating speaker cabinet). Hammond now owns the Leslie Company, and that seems to be a pretty logical development, as the two have always gone together hand in glove. The Leslie is often considered to be the organist's modulation wheel, or pitchbender, as it enables him (or her – no sexism here at *SI*, eh mother?) to add emotion and feeling to the playing. It takes some mastering – Leslie technique – but along with intelligent use of the swell pedal, it makes the Hammond a truly expressive instrument.

Hammond have, I'm afraid, stopped making the B-3 along with all the tone wheel machines. However they have recently introduced an electronic equivalent – the B-3000, which offers the same facilities as the B-3, as well as electronic key click and electronic piano stops. It unfortunately doesn't sound quite like the older Bs, as it doesn't scream up at the top end – you can always tell a good tone wheel Hammond by playing a straight C7 chord on the top octave with a 888000088 drawbar setting. Turn up the volume, and it will scream.

The Hammond has had a two-way relationship with the music industry. It has been the instrument of success for many great musicians – Jimmy Smith, Keith Emerson, our own Dave Stewart, to name but three; the list is endless (but I can only think of three). Its success has also been helped by the constant publicity afforded it by such great musicians. In many ways it seems sad that the company has moved away from the jazz and rock areas, and gone into the ever-so-commercially-orientated home organ market, but there can be little doubt of the part that Laurens Hammond has played in the musical instrument world of the 20th century. God? ■



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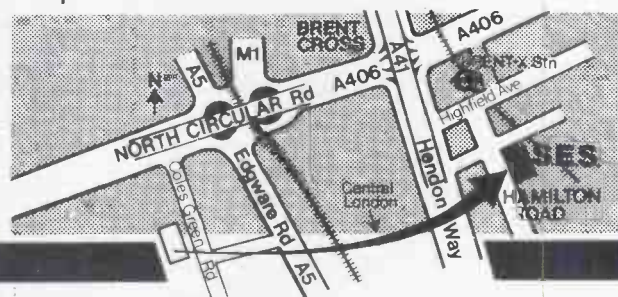
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WINGS GREATEST



# The Kate Gallery

**How Kate Bush outgrew being seen as 'this strange creature being manipulated by this huge record company' and began to gain a little respect as a singer/writer/producer. Words and pix: Ralph Denyer.**

While I listened to an understandably much-guarded advance cassette copy of Kate Bush's third and new *Never Forever* album she was completing her other interview in another room close by. That over, she came into the room I was in to use a phone and we introduced ourselves to each other. She is quite small and somewhere in between pretty and beautiful. Her manner is very friendly with none of the tough *facade* that most successful music business people develop through time. Loads of smiles and an offer to help me to the next room with my cases of equipment follow. On the way through she laughs when I tell her it's nice to have a roadie for a change.

She had just completed her new album. She has taken care of all the piano playing on the record, as usual, as well as playing a bit of synth. One big change on her new album is that the orchestral backdrops have gone. Replacing them are some of the best specialist keyboard players around. Mr Funk, Max Middleton, plays Fender Rhodes. Larry Fast defies gravity. Andy Mackay, Richard Burgess and John Walters make use of Landscape's Fairlight CMI system to provide what Kate describes as 'musical animation'.

At 21 she has this year reached the point where she has complete control over her own music. She has achieved this by taking over the artistic side of her record production, choosing to work closely with John Kelly. He engineered Kate's previous two albums, *The Kick Inside* and *Lionheart*. For the new album he continued in that role but also took care of the technical aspects of recording which would normally be in the producer's province. But more of that later.

I asked about the day-to-day decision making and what roles her family play. 'I've got two brothers (Andrew alias Paddy and John alias J) and they're both very important. My family are very close and I think there are very few family establishments left, generally speaking, that are close. It's become very much an individual society. We all love each other very much, we all love music and we've all grown up together. Even my parents, they grow up all the time too. When things started happening for me in so many ways, they were happening to the family as well because we are so close. As things were going, the most important thing seemed to be that I had control. Because one of the worst things that can happen to one's product - that terrible word - is that you become manipulated, as I've seen written about me in so many papers. They think you're a little doll who's being manipulated.'

'The public, not because of being ignorant but because of propaganda, have such strange ideas about what happens in various businesses. The only one that I get to see and be amazed by is this particular business because I am in it. The things that some people think you can do are wonderful, they really have no idea.'

The Bush family are all musical and Kate's

mother has been a dancer. Their keen interest in - if not addiction to - traditional Irish music and dance meant that Kate was exposed to music from quite an early age and was soon hooked herself. While still at school she had violin lessons and then moved on to piano. When her career started to take off, not surprisingly the whole family took an interest. Professional help was enlisted in the form of an accountant and a solicitor. At the appropriate moment a company was set up. 'Really though all the things that keep happening, different roles keep coming up. My brother J has now taken over a great deal of the business operation.'

They have now set up a fan club near Kate's parents' home in Kent. Many would consider this to be a relatively unimportant facet, but Kate has positive ideas on how the club should be run and does not intend to allow it to become the usual catastrophic mess such organisations usually degenerate into. 'Yes, well that is what we didn't want. One of my best friends is taking care of that. I think that it is only right that you should try and get control over as many areas and make sure that people get something nice and make sure they get something which is accurate. The further you get away from the public the more misinterpreted . . . the more wrong information becomes.'

'We decided that I didn't need a manager because the main reasons for having a manager are for him to give musical direction, ways in, you know, all the things that an unbroken act needs. But in my situation I'd already had *Wuthering Heights* without a

## **The public . . . because of propaganda have such strange ideas about what happens.**

manager, we'd already released the album (*The Kick Inside*) without a manager. And although everyone kept telling us that I needed one, we couldn't see the need at all!

'I thought: Good, because I want to make my own decisions and it's my life. It can be very dangerous when you are *not* in a position to make your own decisions and therefore you can be doing things that you never intended. Practically selling your soul, which should never happen. So we went along those lines and it has been taking all this time to build things up into an organisation of our own and it will continue to build, companies are always growing and organising themselves.'

'And I think we've done remarkably well. Hilary Walker is my PA and apart from the

solicitors and accountants it's just me and my family. So all the information that comes in is passed on. The stuff that they know I won't want to do they say no to. Stuff that I see I say yes or no to. And it's really wonderful to have that sort of control and not have people doing things behind your back, which inevitably happens with managers. They establish contacts here and there for their own good and not necessarily for the artist's. I'm not slagging off all managers because there are some exceptions, and there are some very, very good ones. But you know the sort I'm talking about, it's just wicked, the things they do to young bands.'

There is a surprising amount of variation between the different media accounts of Kate's beginnings in the 'biz' so I shall endeavour to set the record straight. First attempts to get a reaction from record companies were made by a friend of Kate's armed with an early demo of some of her songs. He met a blanket of rejection until 1975 when he played the tapes to an old friend from Cambridge by the name of Dave Gilmour. The Floydian guitarist reinforced his reputation for giving help to new acts by advising Kate to cut finished masters of the best three songs for presentation to companies. The tapes are often referred to as 'demos' but after exhaustive research (I read the sleeve notes on *The Kick Inside*) I can reveal that the Gilmour-financed recordings provided two of the tracks which were to appear on Kate's first album some two years later. They were *The Man With The Child In His Eyes* and *The Saxophone Song*. I asked Kate about all this as the album has a continuity that makes the two-year 'gap' surprising.

'Yes, they do fit very well on that album, don't they? Maybe there's a few reasons for that. But the thing that I notice is the difference in my voice, that's the only thing that gives it away for me. They probably fit well because Andrew (Powell) was the arranger on all the tracks. I wonder how many people would notice that because no-one commented on hearing any difference, you're the first person to mention that. No-one's commented on that before so that's very interesting.'

When Gilmour took Kate into Air Studios to record *The Man With The Child In His Eyes* and *The Saxophone Song* she was 16. When Gilmour played the tapes to an EMI executive they wanted Kate. EMI treated her well from the word go, though the media (true to form) stereotyped the situation with a standard: Big company manipulates and exploits the young innocent *etc etc*.

The company did not rush Kate into completing an album although she had some 100 songs already written. Instead they advised her to get a lawyer, an accountant and advanced her £3,000. Around that time an aunt of Kate's died and left her some money. Finding herself able to forget about immediate



monetary problems she went about developing various aspects of her abilities. Lindsay Kemp had an ad in *Time Out* offering his services as a teacher of mime and dance. Kate responded and was soon receiving group instruction for 50p a day from the *magister artis*. She was fascinated by singing in a high register and worked on singing higher and higher notes. She wrote more songs.

It was two years exactly before she returned to Air Studios to record the rest of the material for her debut album *The Kick Inside*. Virtually the last song she wrote for the album was *Wuthering Heights – The Man With The Child In His Eyes*, for example, had been written some five years earlier. Apart from the general supportive role her family plays, they make individual specific contributions to her music and business affairs. As well as taking care of business, J also photographs Kate. His shots can be seen on the *Babooshka* sleeve as well as on the back of her new album. Paddy has played mandolin, guitar, mandocello, pan-pipes and sung back-up on her albums. Kate says that her father remains a doctor first and foremost but . . . 'mulls over anything with negative or legal aspects.'

She undoubtedly is a very together person. My impression is that she does use her family as a sounding board and frequently takes their advice. On the other hand I think she frequently listens carefully to their advice before she goes on to do exactly what her instincts had told her in the first place! There again, she does not display any of the signs of an ego which forces her to do things her way for the sake of it. Her satisfaction comes from doing the best she can more than from being good at what she does. Obviously the fact that she produced her new album – albeit with the technicalities handled by John Kelly – is the major point of interest. Before talking her about that I asked about her relationship with Andrew Powell who produced her first two albums.

'Dave knew Andrew, I don't know how, and he thought Andrew was a very competent arranger and would be quite capable of taking care of the production side. So we went into Air Studios, I was about 15 or 16 at the time.'

Was she terrified? 'Yes, I was very nervous, it's a big studio. Andrew was fantastic. He was completely in control of it. I was just a schoolgirl doing my exams at the time and reeled at the prospect of someone just working on my songs. The musicians did their own thing and Andrew wrote some beautiful strings. We managed to get it to EMI and they leapt at it. Then there was the situation obviously where I was only 16, totally naïve to the business and everything and EMI were wondering what to do with me.'

'They could either send me out into the world with the songs I had – a 16-year-old – or hang on. I was more than happy to hang on because I didn't feel that I was ready. Although I was waiting to make an album at any minute, after about six months I realised that it was a long-term project so I started getting on with my own things. I decided to leave school and go fully into the business. Then I got a little group and we played around in pubs. After that came the album. And Andrew, of course, because he had done so well on the earlier tracks, was the first guy we thought of.'

'As soon as I started the first album, already three years had passed from the demos (*sic*) to the album and I'd obviously gathered a lot more self-confidence. I was beginning to understand what I wanted with my music. The songs were obviously maturing and I was

getting around and understanding the business more. Andrew did a fabulous job on the album, he really did. Even at that stage I could feel that there were areas where he was taking the music that perhaps if I had been in control, I wouldn't. That's understandable. He was the producer and therefore – he was very good and always listened to what I wanted – he would obviously plant his feelings there.'

'By the time we got to *Lionheart*, again, of course I wanted to use Andrew because the first album had been so fantastic: a great success and the feedback was wonderful. I think at that point I was beginning to become individual enough to feel differences and this was basically the problem. He's a very strong individual who knows what he wants and works beautifully with orchestras. For me – although I love orchestras – I find that the actual essence of the song can often be much



**The freedom you feel when you're actually in control of your own music is fantastic.**

more important than putting orchestras, brass, 200-piece choirs or whatever you want in the background. And I do feel that you can easily overdo stuff. On *Lionheart* I think we did come up against our conflicts and because we were both working together it was a compromise. In a lot of ways there were funny situations that happened on *Lionheart* and in some ways I feel that it was reflected in the music. Obviously for the third album I thought it was time for a change. I thought of looking around for other producers who would work with me more and who understood the way I wanted the music to go. Nothing against Andrew at all because he is a fantastic arranger but I'm getting strong – strong-minded – and I want to do it myself.'

'I looked around and spoke to different producers but they all seemed to have a producer air and were very strong-minded. I

met Eric Stewart who is a fantastic man, a really lovely guy but I felt I should be brave enough to try it by myself: So I spoke to John Kelly, who's been the engineer on both previous albums, and we've got very close working a lot together. I said: Do you think we could do it without a producer? He said: What do you think? I said: I want to do it more than anything. I want to do it by myself with you because you know the technical side and I don't. What do you think? John said: Let's give it a go!

'So last year we went in and did four tracks – which are on the album – and we had such a good time and it worked so well that we thought we'd go ahead and do the whole album. I had such a fantastic time, I mean I've learnt so much. The actual process of recording the complete album took a long time. I think a lot of that was my fault because I'm learning and in so many situations I wanted to double-check that everything was perfect. I've picked up so much and enjoyed it so much that it's fantastic. The freedom you feel when you're actually in control of your own music and you've got someone there to tell you when you're going over the top or you can't tell him where he's going over the top, it's fantastic. I think perhaps in some situations it must be very hard for a male – especially a very good engineer – to be told what to do by a 21-year-old female who's only been in the business a few years.'

'He was so understanding to me and he'd never say: You don't know what you're talking about. John always gave me a lot of respect. We had such a good time and I'm so pleased with the way that the album has come out.'

As far as I am concerned, one of Kate's major strengths – if not her major strength – is originality. That quality is evident in her song *Breathing*, released as a single earlier this year and also on the new album. The concept of writing the song in the person of an unborn child and then extending that concept to the visual side of things for the promotional film takes a bit of beating in terms of original thinking.

Just how did she get the idea? Straight out of the blue? 'Yeah, I guess it's something that automatically comes up in me when I'm searching for things in songs. I have formulae and one of them seems to be the relationship between children and parents, 'cos I tend to observe this myself in my own life. I try to observe myself growing up in the eyes of my parents. It's a very strange thing. The other thing is birth, it's so symbolic of any kind of birth. It just so happens to be a very good physical representation of any birth of something new. The actual thing that started the song was some crazy documentary on TV about a year before.'

'Everyone talks and talks about nuclear bombs . . . We have done for about 10 years. People can tell you that the world is going to end for years and years. You can understand it and take it in but it won't actually get to you because you haven't actually reached the point where you accept it. I saw a documentary on nuclear war and it got to me, it was the point in my life where I actually decided to be open enough to actually understand the reality. The reality was so horrific that I thought: God, I've got to write a song, I just can't keep it in me. And when I wrote it I thought it was indulgent, so heavy and so negative in so many obvious ways superficially. I put it down as a demo – we've got a little 8-track studio – and I played it to the family and some friends with another song called *All We*



*Ever Look For*. I thought *All We Ever Look For* was a quite commercial, nice song that people would like. I put *Breathing* there for my own satisfaction and thought that people would think it was a bit boring but that they might like it. The reaction to it was incredible, they said: 'Wow, I know what you're saying. And as people began to open to it more I thought it was pretty cool to release it as a single.'

'What that song did for me was I've had letters from people who I never would have heard from before who have said: Look, I really like this song and I've never liked any of your stuff before – this says and means something to me. And *that* is really a breakthrough for me as an artist.'

Kate helped out with some vocals on Peter Gabriel's recently acclaimed album and I presume it was through Peter that she met Larry Fast. 'We managed to get Larry before he flew off and he's a fantastic guy, wow. He's wonderful. He finished off *Breathing* for us. We got to the point where there was a deadline coming up for the release of the song as a single. So far up to then we'd been working on the tracks quite generously. When we had a guitar overdub to do we'd do all the guitar tracks for the album as you logically would. As we had a deadline for *Breathing* we put aside all the other tracks and worked on the one song until it was complete. Larry came in for a day and he was wonderful. We were all gathering such an intense vibe working on the one very nuclear song. We'd been working on it until about five or six in the morning each day for about a week. It was very intense in the studio and very nuclear. It felt just like a fallout shelter.'

For those unfamiliar with Studio Two at Abbey Road it is a huge studio with a high ceiling. The control room looks down from a top corner giving a false impression of being underground. Also the decor is basic and deliberately unchanged since the days when the studio's prime users were the Beatles. 'Larry came in in the middle of all this nuclear intensity and he was wonderful,' said Kate. 'He put on some incredibly *right* animation sounds. You see, I think of synth players like that. It's probably wrong because I'm thinking just in terms of my music. I see them as such an animation thing, they seem to complete the picture so beautifully. It's like they put the colour on the track sometimes.'

'So Larry was there for a whole day just working on the one track and built up some beautiful stuff, just sort of underneath the back of the arrangement. It was such a pleasure to work with him because I've always wanted to but he's such a busy man. I really hope I can work with him again. His standards are ridiculous, I mean he works to the clock. He'd say: Gosh, that took me 10 minutes and it's only supposed to take two! and gets really upset. He's such a professional and he works so hard, I think a lot of people can learn from him.' (See interview, *SF* March '80.)

Kate wanted to put together the promo film for *Breathing* – and did. It became a visual presentation of the subject matter, and showed her as the unborn child at the time of a nuclear attack. 'We decided to make it very abstract. I had the image of me being a baby in the womb yet not a baby because it's like a spiritual being, surrounded by water and fluid in a tank because that's what a baby does, floats around inside this beautiful place.'

Keith McMillan is the man who has been interpreting Kate's ideas and actually getting

them on film for the greater part of the 24 years she has been releasing records. He explained one or two problems to her with this particular idea. Like she might drown. Also no insurance company would underwrite the risk. Kate has total faith in McMillan and was happy to leave it with him to come up with an idea for overcoming the problems.

'He went away, he's got fantastic guys working with him who get all the props together. So he came up with the idea of inflatables which when filmed through would give a watery effect. So I would be inside one which would be inside maybe one or two others.'

'Then we had a problem with the costume because an embryo is of course naked but we couldn't make it sexual because of the innocence and sincerity of the thing. And we had a few problems with that because it is very difficult to look clothed but not clothed. Because we were working with inflatables which were basically just plastic we decided to use the same material which would be pretty cool for an embryo because it would just be flesh that was amongst all the other. So we just wrapped polythene all around me and then

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### At first I used to write so many songs in a higher octave because that was where I used to enjoy singing.

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the whole thing became this sort of transient stuff that wasn't either costume or inflatables. The next thing with the video was to get from the break into the end where the baby has come out of the womb. Because of the fallout the first thing that would happen is that the baby would be put straight into a protective suit, probably sprinkled with Fuller's earth.

'Again we tried to do that in an abstract way so that I would burst out of the bubble and land somewhere outside that was very weird. Then the two guys with the suns – the anti-nuclear sign – hand me the fallout suit as the symbolism of being in the outside world full of fallout. The end was getting as many people as I could in water – again water because that was the whole visual theme – and say: What are we going to do without clean air to breathe?'

'It took us two days of filming, one to do the studio lot and one to do the end sequence with all our friends in the water and for the nice quiet scene at the end. It was really quite an epic compared to all the other videos I've done. It wasn't that extravagant or expensive, not that long and not that anything. But as I said it felt so important because that one song for me – and quite a few people who are close – was like a mini-symphony or something. So everything had to go into it even if it wasn't going to be a big hit and that's how we felt about it. OK, people say: It didn't get into the top five.'

'But I'm so pleased with how it went because for the subject matter I was dealing with, you know my previous associations with the public: that I'm a very harmless unpolitical songwriter.'

The association of the image she projected on a totally unprepared public with *Wuthering Heights* in 1978 has stayed firmly in the minds of many: this strangely dressed peculiar person singing in a voice that can only be described as weird. At least that's how it sounded at the

time. Kate maintains that at the time – as now – she was singing in a voice which was natural to her.

'Yes it is natural for me. So many people, I guess it's stopped a bit now, but *Wuthering Heights* was the one that started it, they thought it was a bit contrived.'

It was about the time of *Wow* that I personally began to enjoy Kate's singles. Listening to the songs now on an album with lyrics in front of me I discovered there is far more to her songs lyrically than just interesting and effective hooklines. 'I think that was the big thing with *Wuthering Heights*, so many people didn't even know I was singing in English! I think on the new album the diction is clearest. You see, for me it is important that I keep changing with each album. When I was singing on that first album it was the most incredible experience of my life because it was the first *real* album. The one I'd been waiting for for five years, it was actually being made. And basically I was getting all my harmonies together in the morning before I went into the studio and just trying to sing my heart out. By the time I got round to singing on the first album I was very tired and at that time I used to write so many of my songs in a higher octave because that was where I used to enjoy singing.'

'I used to find it fascinating to write in a note that I couldn't reach and then a week later I'd got my throat into the shape that it could reach that note. It wasn't actually acrobatics that I was playing with. It was just that the songs I was writing, they just seemed to leap, that was what I wanted them to do, just fly in the air and be high.'

'The fact that people thought I was contrived – especially on the first album – worried me a lot. That there was this strange creature being manipulated by this huge record company. I think that actually as I am managing to hang around a bit longer – a year goes by and I'm still here – people are beginning to take me seriously and *that's* a fantastic breakthrough because they're realising that I'm not just a hyped product. So many people thought I was but they're realising that I can in fact churn out albums. And it's such a big achievement for me to feel that I'm actually getting through to people from *me* rather than the rumours and stuff that get around. And I'm so thrilled when people do respect me, especially as a writer.'

'Singing is such an important thing for me. I have such a strange thing about it, probably like every other artist. I really often feel that I can't sing. I know I can sing but when I hear the track back it's not what I want, it's just not. I don't get paranoid but I do get very, very worried about it because it's so important to me that I express the perfect emotion of the word because they are telling a story, and unless I feel that I fulfil the character perfectly, I should get someone else to sing it. Especially as people have been kind enough to give me awards as a female singer that I have to try so hard to make it good for them.'

'I think maybe I should relax a bit more about it, I am getting a bit paranoid. I love singing, it's just that when I hear it back on tape it is never quite perfect enough for me. But I'm sure you understand that. So many artists, like Eric Clapton, he probably thinks his solos could be better. He probably wouldn't say it but I'm sure that he feels that. But I wouldn't stop singing because I love it. All I need is for someone to say: That's great. And then I can go: Really? Then I feel all right, especially in the studio.' ■

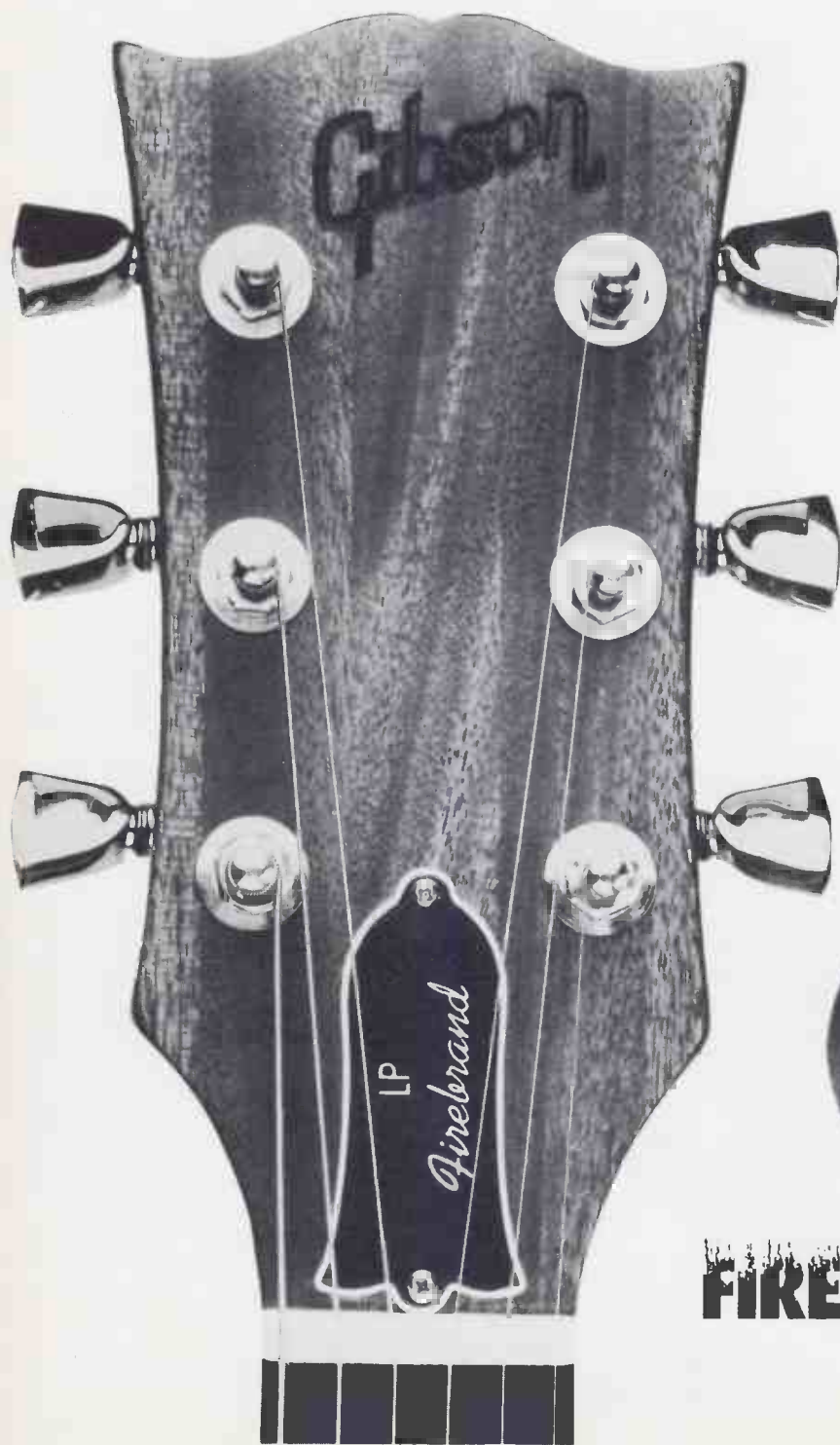


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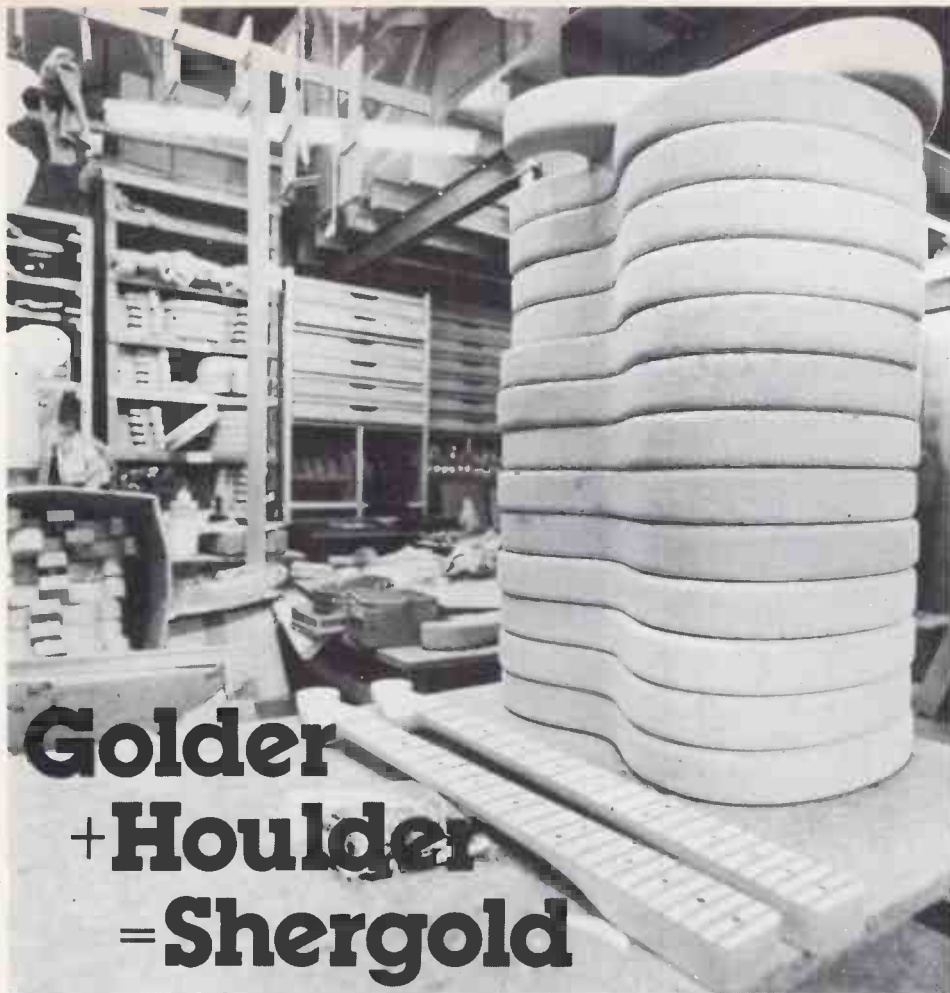
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All Pictures by Roger Phillips.

# Golder + Houlder = Shergold

Robin Millar examines the history and growth of Shergold and reviews the Modulator 12-string.

*'Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed.'* – Oscar Wilde.

This is perhaps something many so-called professional musicians should bear in mind – a cautionary parrot sitting on the left shoulder when one is taking afternoon tea (or anything else that comes into range) with an old mate, or with someone else's mate, instead of rushing out to look at the classifieds before some other hopeful clinches that coveted job as rhythm guitarist with the Shambles. It is also something that, I think, musical instrument manufacturers should consider when adopting principles of design and pricing. It's all very well for us to wander past the panes of glass gazing covetously at those gold-plated violet-sunburst jobs with the four-figure price tags – but are these jewels of the orient going to do a better job of getting us where we want to be, or will they merely soak up piggy's insides which should have been disgorged only for the rent man's evening meal?

I think, in basic terms at least, that the people at Shergold guitars have got their attitudes right on this one, although there are a few areas in which I think they themselves might look a little more care-

fully at the realities of modern life in The Music Business, where the recession is elbowing out glamour and self-indulgence to make room for a bit more common sense. As an aside to this, I should say that I reckon that over the last couple of years, musicians have developed a much clearer view of the real world of 'making it' and I think a lot of Auntie Glorias, who have always felt that little Johnny should have stuck to his technical drawing, would be very surprised to learn just how hard little Johnny is working. Anyway, down off your soapbox, humble scribe, and back to Shergold.

This company is at what they feel to be the culmination of a surprisingly long and colourful history. This may surprise a lot of people who thought they just sprang from nowhere into the waiting arms of Mike Rutherford. Don't those slim, polyurethane necks remind you of anyone? Fender, a little, yes. Think again, old boy, a little closer to the old homeland this time. Aaah, of course. Burns! Right! These very same good people were sculpting our Jim's pioneering *Bisons*, *TR2s*, *Sonics*, *Trisonics* and the rest while most of us were still wondering why Daddy had a handle on his bottom. If you look at and play a modern Shergold for just a few minutes, you'll wonder why you hadn't

guessed before. The real secret is in the necks.

Burns had a well-deserved reputation for producing fairly low-priced guitars with an uncompromisingly bright, toppy sound, but with a beautiful, slim and very fast neck. Copying the solo from *Crossroads* (Clapton not Hatch) became a remote possibility rather than the impossible dream. These necks were carved and moulded by Jack Golder and Norman Houlder. The two worked with Jim Burns for 20 years and, even when the company was taken over by Arbiter, the Baldwin guitars were the continuation of the same work. Then, some 12 years ago, Jack and Norman decided to set up on their own. Here begins a mystery. Three times the patient Jack has explained to me and my witless colleagues how they combined the names Golder and Houlder and got Shergold... we have seriously considered undergoing psychiatric observation, or perhaps we have been the unconscious victims of drug abuse, but we are no nearer to understanding this etymological poser. Perhaps Allen and Heath should have considered 'Streathall', or Rodgers and Hart 'Shortshag'. This magazine launches a monthly find-the-S competition in November's issue. 500 Sg1pftw guitars could be won.

Ah yes, I remember. 1968 and S-hergold Ltd were underway, producing necks and bodies for more than one ill-fated newcomer to British guitar making. First came Hayman: now much-sought-after, good-quality copies of famous-name axes. They went down the tube. Then came Ormston – no, not a new town off the M26, but Jim Burns' next project (and middle name). They went down the tube, too. Then say Hi y'all to Ned Callan, Notting Hill's answer to Nashville. Interesting fact number 41. These guitars were an early effort of one Mr Peter Cook to make a name for himself (or for ole Ned, whoever he was). Peter, as you all now know, makes marvellous hand-crafted,

»»



Millar (left) joins Houlder and Golder to survey handiwork.

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The Swintek dB-S Radio Microphone System will give you wireless sound so excellent it can be intercut with sound from hardwire shotgun or standard cord microphones. It will virtually eliminate "Buzz Noises," traffic noise, camera noise – the extraneous noises you do not wish to hear or record – due to the unique Swintek "Noise Gate." Its Narrow Band technology allows up to 8 mics on a set within the legal UK band, and the system range is up to 1500 feet in adverse conditions. So you get the maximum flexibility of a Radio mic system with assured top quality sound – anywhere.

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top-notch instruments from a hut – sorry, Peter, workshop – at the bottom of his mum’s garden. But Ned Callan, too, went down the same tube. This left our heroes literally lumbered: hundreds of prepared necks and bodies which were destined never to have their resin squeezed by a single arpeggio, and which are to this day lounging around on the shelves at Romford, Shergold HQ. Along with them was enough prime, matured timber to provide Francis I another stab at the Armada. What to do? Arson is illegal, and suicide was unfashionable in the era of peace and love, so Shergold decided to have done with luckless brothers-in-trade and to go it alone.

They made their first, er, instrument that year. In fact they made several of them, all the same. I suspect one of them may be that thing with which Uhura bursts into song every 20 episodes or so of *Star Trek*. Jack describes it simply as an electric solid double bass, but as the photograph above shows, that is a little like calling Salvador Dali ‘a bloke who paints pictures’. I shall not dwell on these contraptions except to say that they are not still making them, but the band on the QE2 are still wowing the pools winners with one from Southampton to the Seychelles. (*‘Ere, are we payin’ im too much? – Ed.*) Shergold guitars began to follow and the company quietly went about building good, well-priced instruments and a bit of a reputation. Then, along came Mike Rutherford.

‘I want one that comes apart in the middle,’ he said casually. Several months round-the-clock development and a couple of thousand quid later the now-

famous Rutherford de-mountable double-neck was ready. This really brilliant device looks to all intents like a normal double-neck (if any idiot thinks that double-necks look normal anyway). The turn of a hidden screw and a gentle tug, and *voila!* Two guitars for the price of, er, about seven. Concealed by a bevel are little in-built multi-pin connectors, male and female, which unite the electronics of the instrument when joined, but allow separate operation of the two parts when parted. Rutherford was so pleased that he publicised himself and the guitar together quite unprompted by Shergold – in fact, while Jack and Norman were on a well-earned holiday. Rutherford was promised a unique instrument, and so the double necks publicly available today, though similar in most respects, are not de-mountable – unless the owner decides to take the Black And Decker and Meccano to it.

Although the company has grown steadily since then, and they are now producing around 30 guitars per week, the team is a small, close one, and Jack and Norman like it that way. New guitars are designed as a common effort, round-table process. In fact, I do feel that this may be one reason for Shergold’s slight lack of flair design-wise. They perform well, but I wonder if someone with an eye for a good body – back lads, not all at once – shouldn’t have a go at, if nothing else, a bit of streamlining. However, the one thing that the teamwork *does* produce is a guitar with a real overall ability to work. All the bits and pieces are right for their job in

relation to their neighbours, and this teamwork of components gives a result sympathetic to a player who wants the guitar to be an extension of interpretive and emotive powers, rather than just a piece of machinery.

Shergold could try to bring out some warmer qualities in their humbuckers which, although very responsive, are wound for brightness and clarity, rather than for a full tonal range. That having been said, it may well be that the new active model, and the active module available on the *Modulator* (see review), will provide the solution. In any event, these guitars are so fantastically cheap for handmade instruments, starting at just over £200 retail, that the kind of nit-picking I’m doing is normally reserved for top-of-the-range US and Jap instruments at three times the price.

Sensibly, Shergold are now marketing necks as a separate product, and they really are very good indeed at this. Priced well below Fender and Music Man alternatives, they should make a real impact. I stole a random guitar from the shelf while no-one was looking, and those with stamina may like to read the brief review that follows.

I wish Shergold every success. They are constantly trying to improve in all areas of their production, and their wealth of experience and years of refinement have resulted already in a large range of individual instruments which I think many players may unwisely have overlooked. Mind you, Oscar Wilde was a very funny bloke.



# INTRODUCING



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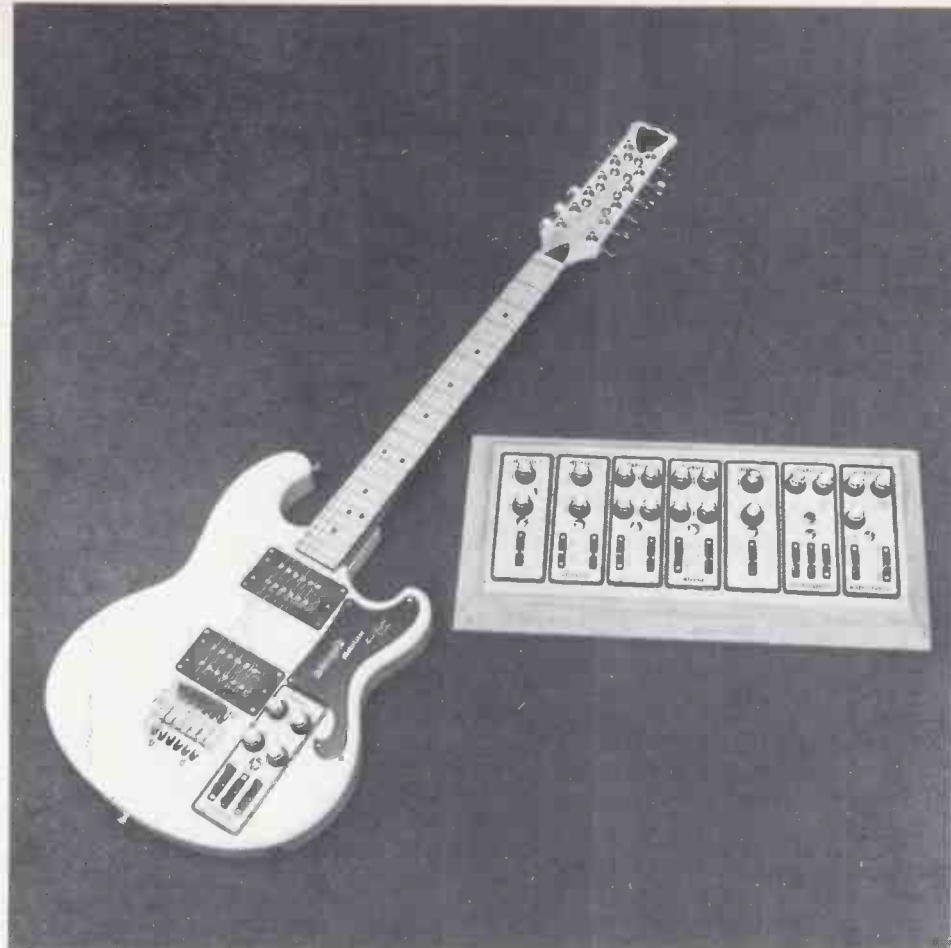
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## Shergold Modulator 12-string

£295 ex case

Really one half of a Rutherford special (see story), this 12-string is part of the *Modulator* range of six and 12-string guitar, four-string fretted and fretless bass and eight-string bass guitars. Bodies are laminate maple and mahogany, necks are maple with a high sheen, polyurethane finish on the fretboard. Machine heads are Schallers, and all models have two humbucking pickups made to Shergold's own requirements. The newest models have epoxy-sealed coatings around the windings, cutting feedback problems.

Frets are nickel silver, the nuts are bone and the tailpiece a well-designed steel and perspex combination-bridge-tailpiece with Allen key adjustment for height and length. The unique handmade truss rods provide adjustment for bowing and, unusually, for convex distortion which means that no way will the guitar need a costly neck repair, whatever the weather, unless of course you drop it out of the pannier of your Honda.

The Module Concept is canny. All the switches and knobs are mounted on a rectangular plastic plate. At the turn of a coin-operated screw the whole plate - module - lifts out of its recess on the guitar body, and can be replaced as simply as any of the other modules (currently seven) available. Most of the modules are simply variations on switching, volume and tone. Module one, with which the guitars are supplied, has simply overall volume, overall tone, and a three-way pickup selector. The modules become progressively more complex, through stereo and phasing right up to 'quadrophonic', with two stereo jack outputs. Very handy are the two rhythm/solo modules, mono or stereo, and the battery-

powered super-booster, which gives linear power boosting for real raunch. It is not intended that you buy all seven modules, but at only around £20 each, it does mean that you can tailor the guitar to each day's requirements - with flangers, active eq and more on the way, the possibilities seem endless.

The neck is beautiful - quite definitely the easiest and fastest 12-string I've used in a long while. Good access to the 21st (odd number) fret and true from top to bottom. The Schallers are as good as one has come to expect, and the bridge and pickups seemed easy to adjust, although this particular guitar, despite being picked at random by me, was impeccably set up. The guitar is nice and light, and comfortable to wear and hold. Perhaps the strings are a little close together for someone not used to a 12-string, and playing with the nails is quite tricky.

What surprised me was how gutsy the guitar sounds. I expected to find myself twiddling around in a lyrical, folksy manner, but within a couple of minutes I was pumping out rock'n'roll with great effect. I rate this guitar highly as a rhythm instrument, though it can also be quite sweet, especially when used with a Chorus or flanging unit. Even through my AC30 the sound was quite sparkling, but I think it really suits a transistor amp better.

One thing, Shergold, *a propos* my design comments in the main story. I would much rather pay an extra fiver for each module if you could find something better than the awful Woolies plastic knobs and switches. UGH! Really naff. But overall it's certainly a guitar in a class well above its price tag - and by the way, I happen to know that the *Modulator* bass is a real humdinger. ■

# TOP TEN KIT



Recent Chart Singles, 'Food for Thought' and 'My way of Thinking' by UB40 were mixed in a small northern studio using a pair of Prokit mixers and a half-inch eight track recorder. Whilst it cannot guarantee this kind of success, the mixer provides the basic facilities and quality necessary for recording and PA.

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# The Step

**Top scientist Adam Sweeting has proved in exhaustive tests with very expensive equipment that new bands tend to be interesting. Here, in his fab new series Road Works, he presents a paper on The Step, a sort of soul band.**

Imagine the scene. It's July 1980. EMI and WEA are sacking people every eight minutes. Meanwhile over at Soho Square, the vast CBS conglomerate continues to function without apparent setbacks, giving away Nina Hagen records and free lunches to homeless journalists.

So it was that a keen young band from north London began to play soul music and suddenly found itself signed with Epic (part of CBS). The Step only formed in late January this year, since when they've toured solidly and have an album ready for release even as we speak.

Three members of The Step and I met at said Soho Square. There are seven of them altogether. They also have a manager called Ray Santilli (Santilli lace? Don't be daft). Ray is very pleasant, but a little too eager to spiel forth all known biographical details and to explain what good songwriters the band are, how hard they work, what their inside leg measurements are and so forth.

No matter. Singer Paul Graham, Tony Simon the sax player and guitarist John McSkimming are respectively enthusiastic, considered and realistic.

Why, The Step, is it necessary for you to perform such a high percentage of Sixties-style soul classics? In *The Midnight Hour*, *Land Of A Thousand Dances*, *Satisfaction*, *Tracks Of My Tears*, to name but four? The band are keen to point out that they include around seven of their own numbers in their set, and will increase the number when they have time off from touring to write. Tony Simon: 'We do feel that we are a progressive band and we're trying desperately to add something. It may not be new, but so long as the Sixties soul doesn't

overshadow us . . . cos I think there's a lot to offer.'

But surely it's inevitable that songs which are known as 'classics' will overshadow new songs however good they are, simply because of the weight of history behind them? John McSkimming: 'I think because of that, people don't give our songs a break. I think we've yet to establish that we can write material as good as some of the older songs.' Tony: 'When people come around, you get a lot of echoes - their brothers used to listen to that music, and their cousins and fathers and things like that, and you get a lot of feedback from the past. And I think the same thing could happen if bands don't realise that. You get feedback from the past instead of a futuristic outlook to what we're trying to do.'

Singer Paul Graham points to the recent mushrooming of soul bands - The Scene, Q-Tips (Morrisish *passim*), Red Beans And Rice, Dexy's Midnight Runners - to support the notion that there is a demand for the music. The public gets what the public wants, or *vice versa*?

'It's great dance music,' says Paul. 'It's just, like, come and enjoy yourself. We get off on the audience getting off.' John McSkimming adds: 'I think there's been a lot of that missing over the last few years. I think it's only just started going up again.'

Having seen The Step at The Venue, I have to agree. They put on a warmly leg-twitching show, they look sharp, they sound sharp and they obviously enjoy themselves. But it has to be dangerous to ally yourself so strongly with a musical strain from 15 years ago. What about the dangers of saturating the audience with re-hashed soul? 'The only thing is to establish yourself very quickly,' says John. 'We started



very quickly. We've had one single out already (*Love Letter*) and that establishes us as a soul band along with Dexy's and Q-Tips, before too many people start to jump on that bandwagon.'

Manager Ray intervenes. 'The difference with The Step is that they're more progressive than the other bands. Q-Tips and others are doing the old Sixties classics in the same way.'

John rapidly points out here that Dexy's are also 'progressive' (a word which seemed to crop up a lot that day for some reason). However, The Step's strategy is currently orientated towards the increasing deployment of their own material.

Over to Tony again. 'Bands like Dexy's got a lot of respect in the press for doing more progressive (argh) and original material and bringing the music (*ie* soul) down to the level of the kids and what they want. It'll be interesting to see, when we actually go original, whether the fans are still going to react in the same way as they do now to the numbers.'

Whether Dexy's can expect anything but brickbats and tins from the press after their publicly-announced decision not to speak to it again because all the journalists are so stupid remains to be seen. The Step, on the other hand, recognise that press coverage has got to be important. They would prefer *NME* to listen to other groups besides Joy Division. Comments Paul: '*NME* slated our single. Then in the same breath the guy slated the Q-Tips single, and he also praised the Joy Division single to the eyeballs.' He grins. However, *Sounds*, *Melody Maker* (remember *Melody Maker*?) and *Record Mirror* were evidently more favourable. So far, The Step have not gone out of their way to sell themselves to the music papers, choosing instead to focus on teenage papers like *Jackie* and *Fab 208*. Manager Ray cues himself in. 'We thought that the music press love to slag off a commercial band.' The band have also had an independent promotion team working on local radio stations, a tactic which has brought some success. Ray: '*Love Letter* was record of the week on Pennine, Orwell, Sheffield and one or two other stations.'

Certainly in these gloomy days of recession and rapid turnover of musical fashion, image-consciousness and cunning marketing are vital to any band's survival. Especially if, like The Step, you're a seven-piece. Despite the already large line-up, the band are considering the addition of an extra member. 'We want to get maybe a keyboard or expand the brass,' Ray



'It'll be interesting to see, when we go original, whether the fans react in the same way.'





Santilli explains. 'We haven't decided yet. We were thinking of getting a trombone player – if we could find one that's good enough.'

John adds: 'We need to work out the most positive move for us. The soul sound is built on the Hammond organ or a piano or something. Perhaps a trombone would be a better idea for us, it depends on how our songs would work with it.' In their favour, The Step have a diverse range of musical inputs. John says he was brought up listening to Hendrix, Paul's mum used to play him Sam Cooke records when he was three and Tony likes Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and John Barry. Indeed, Tony and his trumpet-playing brother Peter Simon – The Step's brass section, that is – are in demand for session work, and were booked to record with a French band a few days after the interview. 'Heavy funk,' comments Ray.

To return to the trombone player. 'If we get a trombone player in,' Ray goes on, 'the trumpet player can go on to keyboards for some numbers. The brass would still sound full because of the trombone player. There's a lot of alternatives.'

Tony: 'I think bands have got to prepare for the future, especially big bands.' In other words, it's all very well to have a five-piece brass section, but the music has got to need it. 'I can't help feeling that the more people you get in the band the less versatile you are,' adds Ray. Tony again: 'Yes, we're very adaptable. But you see in the paper "10-piece soul band into Stax/Atlantic". I think: My Goodness me, what'll they be doing in six months?'

For The Step's part, they're very aware of the pressure to avoid the Revivalist trap, and also of the pressure that's on them to write material that can stand on its own. Paul Graham says: 'There's no way we'd put an original song in the set that wasn't as good as the covers we do, cos there'd just be no point, would there? You'd be cutting your own throat.'

He insists, too, that the band's versions of songs like *House Party* or *Shake* are given a new interpretation. Of their own songs I heard at The Venue, I felt that they were competent but unlikely to usurp Wilson Pickett's place in the record books.

The band's songwriting skills face a different challenge in the shape of a soundtrack they've been asked to prepare for a film called *Con*. The film will feature the story of a band, which will be played by The Step, and it seems likely that the great Larry Hagman (the hated JR) will star. I hope he's not playing The Step's manager.

Paul Graham fills in a few details with regard to this one. 'We'll be playing in the movie. It's about a band not doing an awful lot in their own country who go out to the States. They get picked up by this guy and – whoosh!'

The band were asked to do the film after one of its producers saw them play at Dingwalls. They have to write 10 songs for the soundtrack. Ray Santilli can't resist the opportunity to point out that within eight weeks of being formed, The Step had signed with Epic, landed the *Con* job and signed up with music publisher Bill Martin. If time is money, eight weeks' worth of The Step could probably buy British Leyland. But then, I could probably buy British Leyland. Better make that Peugeot.

*Con* goes into production in October. One spin-off from it has already occurred – a promotional trip by the band to the Cannes film festival, preserved for posterity in a TV documentary about the festival screened in July. While *sur le continong*, the band played a

few gigs, which by all accounts went pretty well. According to Paul Graham, there are at least four British records in the French singles charts, none of which is about lamb, apples or fishing restrictions.

Back in the UK, The Step had been on the road more or less solidly for five months at the time of writing. Given their seven piece configuration (gtr/gtr/bs/dms/sax/tpt/vcl), they do of course require a sound system of some worth to get a decent sound. This is where we get a bit more technical, so sound buffs, stay tuned! (Yours to cut out and keep.) PA companies favoured by The Step are Sound Heads and Ace. They've reached this conclusion after falling foul of numerous cowboy PA companies through the land.

Paul tells the tale of a company (who shall remain nameless) they used in Nottingham. 'They spend an hour on the drums. We had to do about nine songs, I think, before the bloke eventually got there. The ironic thing was that after about four numbers of the set the PA just went (raspberry) out front.' The source of this mysterious noise was the simultaneous blowing out of numerous bass speakers. Paul points out that if a band has to spend hours in frustrating soundchecking, it's not only exhausting but also affects the band's confidence about what they'll sound like later on.

Anyway, they now use Sound Heads or Ace whenever possible. Sound Heads will charge around £130 for a gig at the Music Machine and £100 for the much smaller Marquee. Ace, who provide a smaller and less sophisticated rig, will shake the Marquee for £45-£50. Not surprisingly, the Ace rig is hard to get because it offers such good value, though John adds that Ace's monitoring is less impressive than that offered by Sound Heads. 'We always try to get half the wattage on foldback that they have outfront,' explains Ray Santilli. 'If the band are using a 2k PA we try to get 1k on foldback. We

always try to get a monitor mix backstage so they can all get what they want through the monitors.'

John: 'We all have different levels. Paul wants his voice screaming through the monitors, and I like mine just barely audible. Steve (rhythm guitar) wants brass coming out and if we're sharing the same monitor I don't. So it's best if we have our own little separate monitors with a separate mixer.' When it comes to recording, The Step favour an essentially live approach at the core. This is reflected in the B-side of their debut single, *Love Letter*. This comprises a brace of oldies bagged in the flesh at Dingwalls via the Stiff Mobile – *Land Of A Thousand Dances* and *Knock On Wood*.

Their album consists of one side of studio-recorded material, the second side being filled with more live ware, again from Dingwalls and again recorded by the Stiff Mobile. Their imminent second single will be a two-for-the-price-of-one package, a live item and a studio one alongside it.

For now, there's not much to add. The Step are plainly optimistic, and their future depends on how much rope the punters will allow to the soul movement and on how strongly The Step themselves can develop as writers. 'I'd hate to see us ever say well, let's dismiss the Sixties – because you can't,' notes Paul Graham. Over to John McSkimming. 'Everybody feeds off something. Nothing is new under the sun.' And if bands like The Step can communicate the worth of artistes like Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett or the Four Tops to music fans who might otherwise have missed them out, this is not to be sneezed at. Tony Simon has a rosy vision of the musical future. 'You're gonna get bands who are actually thinking and trying to say something new.' If he's still saying that with conviction in a year's time, he'll be able to spot me leaping up and down at the front. ■





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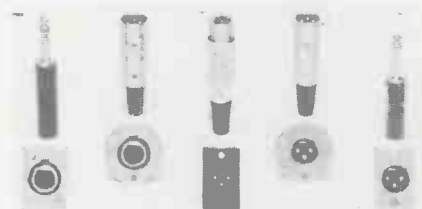
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# Shozygs, Springboards, Squeakboxes, and other Musical Instruments

by Sue Steward



Max Eastley

'The Humours of Bamboo' – automatic serial music from bamboo and straw.

Necessity may have begotten many inventions but it's just one of the many reasons behind a whole range of fascinating and original musical instruments.

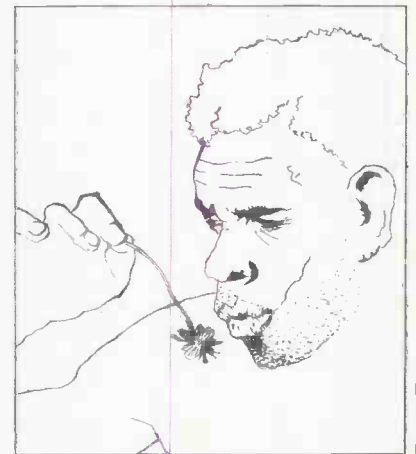
Curiosity, which makes kids pull things apart and not always put them back together the same way, is the basic starting-point for most inventiveness. It is striking that the inventors I came across were all men – a result, I suppose, of all those thousands of *Meccano* sets being thrust into small idle hands, while the girls were fobbed off with dolls. *Meccano* sets were in regular use in the studio/workshops of three people mentioned in this article!

Economics has probably always forced inventiveness; some poor American blacks got free music from a wash-tub bass or a wall 'guitar' – made by nailing a piece of string to the house wall (the house acts as a resonator) bridging it with a stone, and plucking with the fingers. More recently, where would skiffle bands have been without the diverted washboards?

The diversion of everyday materials and an awareness of the need for recycling is central to the instrument-making of many people. Hugh Davis combs electrical junk shops and the depositories of GPO cast-offs; plumber-musician Barry Leigh transforms the tools of one trade (drainpipes) into those of another; and

David Vorhaus also raises the status of the drainpipe in his high-tech *Kaleidophon*. *Avant-garde* composer Mauricio Kagel includes bicycle bells, nails and even rolls of greaseproof paper in his orchestrations.

One of the most prevalent reasons behind newly invented instruments is a dissatisfaction with what already exists: Leo Fender's solid-bodied electric guitar was a brilliant solution to the feedback problems being experienced by the newly-amplified, highly resonant hollow bodies. Instead of inventing a wholly new instrument, many people adapt existing models and transform their sound capacities – David Toop's use of the humble crocodile clip (below left) on the strings of his Fender electric guitar (a reference to John Cage's 'prepared' piano strings) expands its harmonic range and introduces new gong-like tones, while Lol



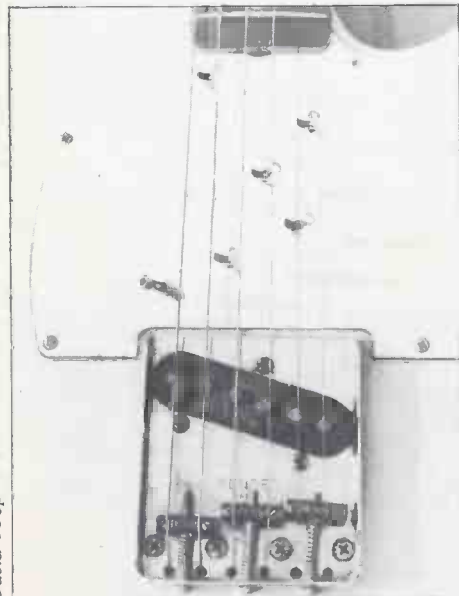
David Toop

The Sago Beetle in a New Guinea musician's hands becomes an impressive Jew's Harp.

instruments, often using colour analogies painted on to the instrument itself, each one tuned to a system using 43 tones to the octave.

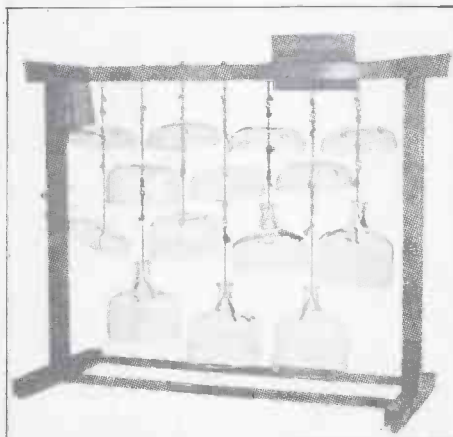
The reasons why people built musical instruments in the first place must always remain a mystery – archaeological remains reveal that Stone Age people played bone flutes and whirled bullroarers (probably for religious rather than musical reasons) but they can't tell us anything about the long-since rotted reed and bamboo, or tortoise-shell or skin instruments. However, most cultures have a mythology around the origins of music and many trace it to animals. In the beginning, of course, there was bird-song, but there are more subtle natural sounds for inspiration: broken reeds offer the wind an edge to vibrate across, seeds out of which insects have drilled their way are converted into tiny ocarinas, dried-out seedpods rattling out rhythms in the breeze... It is only a short step to harnessing these sources and building variants on them. The Greeks' myth about the first music tells how Hermes invented the lyre on his birthday: emerging bleary-eyed from a cave, he spotted a tortoise and killed it. Retaining its tendons as strings, he fashioned a lyre and, by evening, was playing 'heavenly music'.

I'm sure progress isn't always that rapid, but that story typifies the way humans pick naturally occurring objects and use them for musical ends. In most parts of the world there are trumpets made from seashells and animal horns, flutes cut from lengths of bone or bamboo, rattles carved from gourds and seed-



David Toop

Close your eyes and you'd never know it was a guitar... a crocodile clip on each string is all you need.



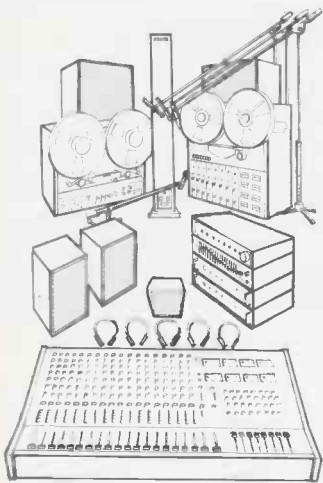
Harry Partch's delicate 'Cloud Chamber Bowls' utilise cast-off chemical storage jars

Crete and Kevin Godley invented the *Gizmotron*, which accomplishes infinitely sustained notes – without feedback. Of course, wah-wah pedals and fuzz boxes fall into this category too. Another group of people, including many of those mentioned in this article, have not tampered with any instruments but invented new playing techniques – but that is the stuff of another article.

American composer Harry Partch made many instruments, of which some were adapted (violas and guitars) and others were original models – eg *Cloud Chamber bowls*, (above) made from chemical carboys played with very soft hammers, and *Mazda Marimbas*, made from electric light bulbs. And he also worked out new notation systems for the

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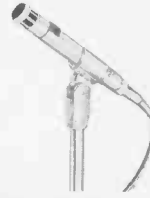
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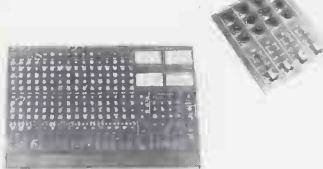
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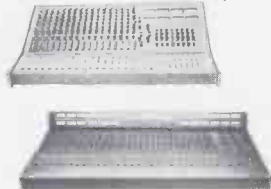
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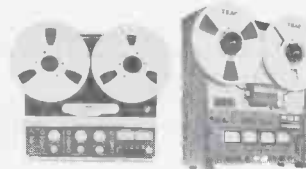
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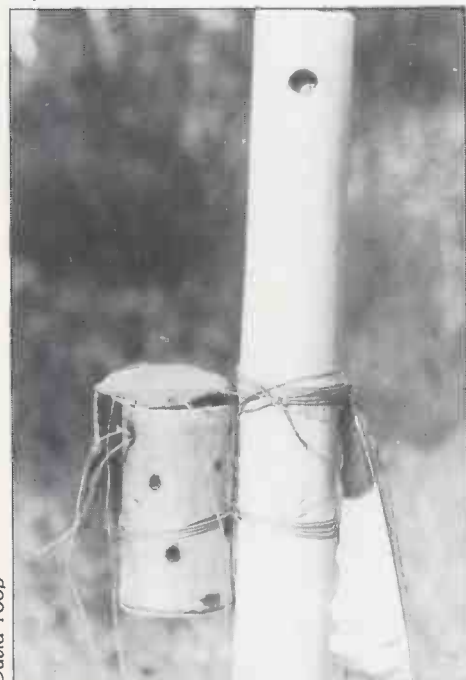
Pods or strings of animals' hooves and even birds' beaks.

One of the most extraordinary animal instruments of this kind is the Sago Beetle jew's harp played by people from the Sepik region of New Guinea (see p.39). A live beetle is tied to a splinter of wood and held in front of the player's open mouth (which acts as a resonator). By changing the shape of the lips, the player converts the vibrations of the beetle's beating wings into differing pitches and tones, making a loud, deep drone with easily audible flute-like harmonics playing around it.

In the early 1970s an interest in ethnic music and instruments led a group of six English musicians, whose involvements ranged from *avant-garde* compositions and rock music, jazz, visual arts and the theatre, to experiments with hybrid and new instruments. They exhibited examples of their constructions in a small book, now sadly out of print, called *New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments*.

These people were as much involved with changing the ideas of 'What is music?' as with 'What is an instrument?' and all now play freely improvised music on instruments as diverse as children's toys, amplified gadgets, bamboo and plastic flutes, real and homemade ethnic instruments – and adapted electric guitars and saxophones. They all bemoan the restricted view of music inherent in our educational system and for that reason often take part in workshops and lectures at schools and colleges.

Max Eastley, a former visual artist, and Hugh Davis, who was once assistant to Stockhausen, have done a lot of work with children. They evolved a system of making instruments (usually using bamboo) which had highly subversive elements, based on, 'collaborative efforts rather than competitive, which is the usual thing in schools.' Hugh Davis adds that, 'With kids who already play musical instruments you're showing them that there are other things that can be done and you can have a lot of fun without learning scales.' Harry Partch went even further; he believed that students must, 'Question the traditions and usage of the piano, for instance the tones of its keys, the music on its racks ...'



David Toop

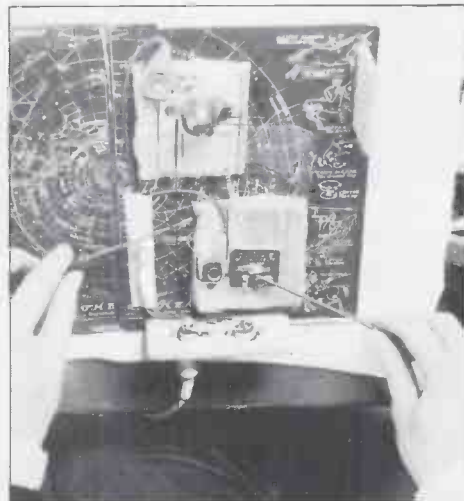
A Wasp Flute: the wasp is lured into the little aerated chamber by a lump of jam, and gives a buzzing accompaniment for the flute player. 'A pointless bit of amusing conceptualism?'

Many of that group of inventors have changed track since the early 70s. They are now just as concerned about the context into which their music goes and the purpose of making the instruments – so that exploring the rules governing group improvisations is as important as working out new methods of playing a saxophone or adding to a percussion kit. The editor of that book, David Toop, reflects: 'I really believe the experimental tradition in art to be finished and "inventorism" outside of music seems very much a part of that tradition. I now see the Wasp Flute (below left) I did in '73 to be a pointless bit of amusing conceptualism whereas the Prepared Guitar (see p.39) from the same year was conceived for a kind of playing. It is adaptable to all sorts of music, has been used by a lot of other guitarists since. It was a cheap, quick and simple way of subverting the technology of the guitar and that's why I still use it.'

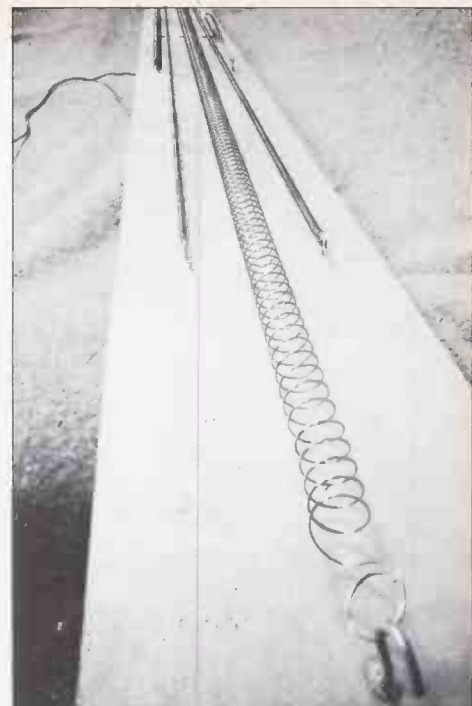
Hugh Davis is a quieter sort of technological subverter. Many of his instruments incorporate electronics: some are 'low-tech versions of existing instruments, others incorporate them into low-tech equivalents of electronic devices – filters and echo-devices.' They fall roughly into three categories: amplified instruments for performances, amplified and acoustic for lectures and exhibitions, and non-amplified toys. The *Squeakbox* is a witty example of the latter group – an office concertina file with dolly-squeakers glued between random compartments, played like an accordion.

Davis' best-known instruments are the *Shozygs* (below) and the *Springboards*. The idea for the *Shozygs* grew from an instrument he used in the late 60s, which was a system of amplified objects – combs, broken springs and light bulbs – which he incorporated into his conventional electronics kit of oscillators, ring modulators, etc. 'None were finished instruments but four or five were used together to make up an instrument like a percussionist makes a kit. In '68 I united several different objects with sufficient variety and contrast to make it an integrated whole instrument.' The original *Shozyg* was built inside the covers of an encyclopedia, title 'SHO-ZYG'.

For *Shozyg I*, Davis bought (from Woolworths) a furniture castor, fretsaw blade, assorted springs and a springy electrical fuse. With two contact mics which render every part of every object 'live' he can produce a huge range of strange and often emotive sounds and by using the combination of two mics and a small mixer, 'Indirect sounds not in contact with one mic are transmitted through



Shozyg I – every small part of this instrument lies in the range of one or other of the two contact mics.



Michael Dunn

the various bits and the rubber and the book cover and picked up by the other mic. That's the equivalent of a built-in filter.' He uses 'cheap and nasty mics' – good quality ones make the instrument 'disappear' because he chose the objects for the sounds they make with the cheap mics; a Barcus Berry type of pickup isn't sensitive enough to pick up the finer sounds.

In comparison, the *Springboards* (below) use pickups from old telephone receivers to amplify the vibrations of a set of springs fixed on a wooden board (above). The mic for the earliest model came from the 'phone in a World War II *Spitfire*, and the springs were a job lot from a junk shop.'

By leaving the springs unfretted, a smooth glissando can be produced. Each spring can be treated much like a guitar string and also 'prepared'. By stretching it in parts, it can also be tuned to create a scale and pitches, but playing precise notes isn't compatible to the way the *Springboards* were made – so Hugh Davis doesn't.

On some models, the springs are stretched in parallel, making it even more guitar-like; on others they radiate from a central point



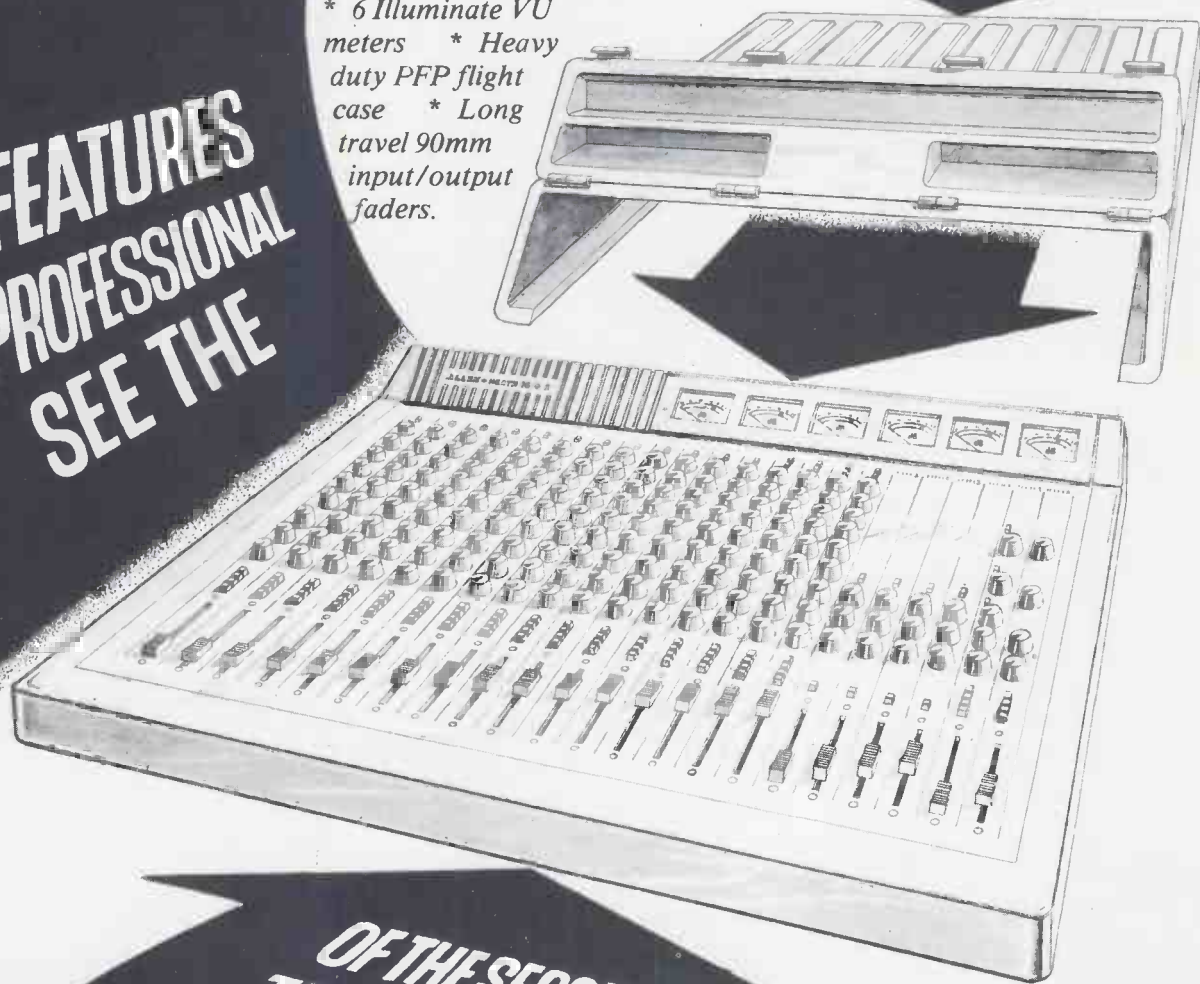
Springboards can be built in parallel like a guitar (top) or radiate from a central point (above).

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(above). In this case, those that aren't actually plucked will nonetheless resonate unless damped with the free hand – 'a nice way of achieving a built-in echo in a low-tech way,' says Davis.

One characteristic of certain inventions is that they make a conscious attempt at low technology methods. The result is a large range of instruments which are cheap and easy enough for anyone to make and to play, many of which defy the constraints of Western musical convention. In complete contrast are the creations of electronics whizzkid, David Vorhaus. His cluttered studio, wall-to-wall with high tech – including one of England's three Fairlight CMI's – gives ready support to the axiom that musical instruments in any society will reflect and co-opt the currently most advanced technology.

David Vorhaus's main inventory claim to fame is called the *Kaleidophon* (below and right), soon to be mass-marketed. There is no denying that it is a fantastic instrument, but the boast that it can do anything you want reminds me of a recent comment by guitarist Keith Rowe, that he can make the guitar sound like anything on earth – not even music; in the late 60s his experimentation on that instrument involving mechanical toys, pieces of string, electric motors, transistor radios, influenced many a guitarist.



Sue Steward

The *Kaleidophon* is a genius mixture of high and low technology. A length of bronze plastic drainpipe is opened out and held apart by a wooden block, 4in x 2in. The tension of the pipe's curve keeps the wood tightly in place without screws or glues. Fixed to the length of the board is a base layer of copper strip, and suspended above are two more layers; the middle of which is a multi-sandwich of metal-plastic laminates; above that are four 'strings' or pitch-bands which look like strips of cassette tape but are in fact made of linear conductive plastics (according to a secret recipe). For a note to be played, all three layers must make contact; the greater the finger pressure, the faster this will happen.

The 'strings' connect at their lower end to the control box (above right) which contains digital circuitry and a digital-analogue device

which can control any normal synthesiser. Without that addition, the *Kaleidophon* lies mute (or maybe 'limp' is more appropriate, considering its phallic shape and the way Vorhaus holds it – I'm sure it *could* be played flat).

The controls work as follows:

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2. Octave: The range is from sub- to super-sonic; this switch transposes the whole 'keyboard' by one octave, without need for moving the hand's position on the 'strings'. The joystick controls sound/tone parameters, acting as a wah-wah filter and as a harmoniser, particularly on the high notes.

On the retail model these knobs will be represented by four faders, and push-buttons

will replace the switches; the joystick stays.

So far, the *Kaleidophon* hasn't been used in a full performance, only on German TV shows and at an international electronics competition last year (which it won). Vorhaus intends to set up a multi-media extravaganza around the instrument, featuring it as solo and lead instrument, and using video and laser effects. Trouble is, I can't but remember Harry Partch's gloomy observation that, 'The failure (of commercial electronic instruments) has been dedicated to virtually a single purpose – substitution for the instruments we now have, new vehicles for exactly the same music we now have, hence designed for exactly the same limited scale we now have.'

Plastic drainpiping reappears as a raw material of many instruments made by Barry Leigh and Will Embling, but there the similarity with the *Kaleidophon* ends. In their hands it becomes self-amplified flutes and drums: one square-sectioned length made deep, spooky sounds reminiscent of the 6ft long bamboo instruments used by New Guinea men in ceremonies related to initiation, while a short, narrow-bore flute sounded more like the Syrian flute called a *nay*.

Barry Leigh used to work as an illustrator but became disgruntled with the inevitable isolation of his works inside art galleries, etc. He was at great pains to stress that, like those of many others mentioned in this article, his inventions are not made in a vacuum, but are reconstructed with a view to multi-person usage and collective music-making. A multi-purpose instrument can be played by several people simultaneously, so that 'each person has an equal opportunity to creatively affect the sound.' This idea is common in many cultures – in Madagascar, for instance, stone slabs used to be laid across the outstretched legs of one woman and played both by her and two others. The multi-person horn envisaged by Embling and Leigh has its precedent in saxophonist Evan Parker's never-realised idea for a communal Blown Horn in 1974.

The most successful multi-person machine made by Leigh and Embling is a form of hurdy-gurdy which looks like a glass-topped coffee-table. The *Glass Turntable* (below) is a solid disc of plate glass supported by mic stand legs and mounted on a simple bearing so that it can freely rotate. The disc is moistened with water (the equivalent of resin on a bow) and played with one of a selection of resonators (because



The *Glass Turntable* can be played by up to four people simultaneously.

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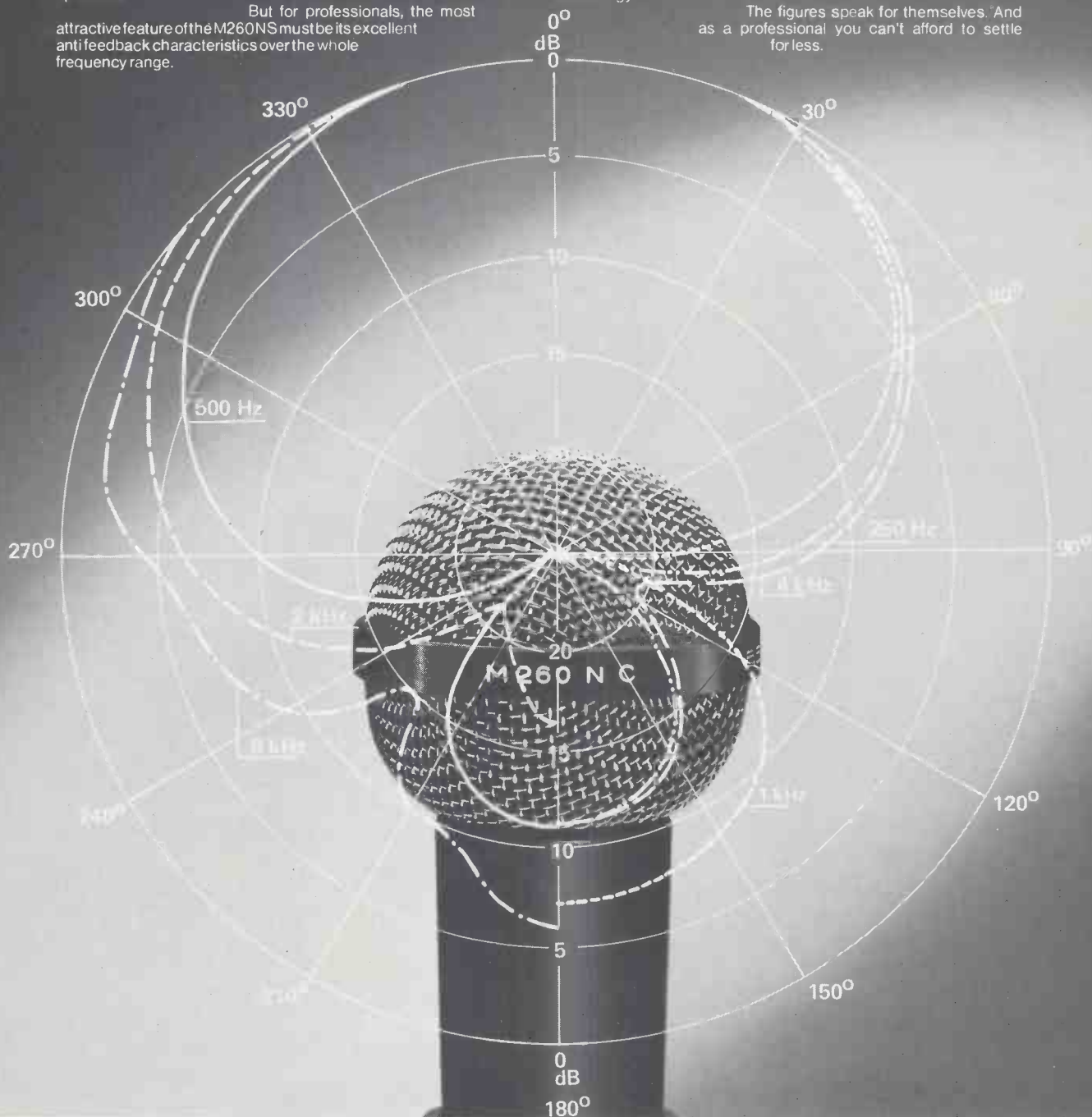
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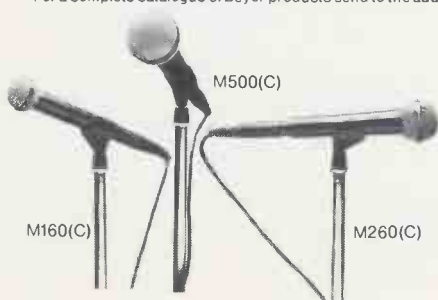
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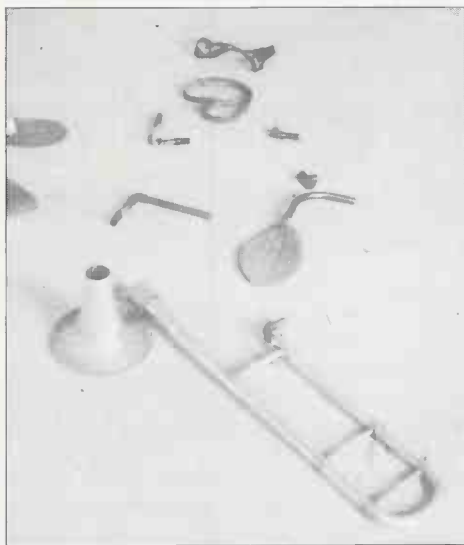
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there is a strong analogy with the sounds made by conventional instruments, they use conventional labels), wooden or bamboo stick reeds, fingers, hardboard or plywood discs attached to a handle, and variously shaped lumps of polystyrene. Sounds are produced by the friction between the glass and the resonators and amplified by the glass disc. By varying the pressure of the resonator and speed and orientation of the disc, the players can create a remarkable variety of sounds – some a bit fierce, others very melodic. Embling accidentally played a bit of Beethoven one day!

It would be impossible to mention Barry Leigh without talking about his bagpipes (below). By fitting together plumbing pieces, a football bladder and an old trombone horn, he arrived at a Heath Robinson-like instrument which sounds remarkably like the real thing.



Sue Steward

Barry Leigh's do-it-yourself bagpipe kit (plus slippers).

Echoing many of the sentiments about group playing and improvisation expressed by Barry Leigh and Will Embling are a group of French Canadians who call their instruments 'Sound Sculptures'. The Baschet Brothers, Bernard (a trained engineer) and Francois (a sculptor), 'Make shapes and sounds with which music can be produced manually, without electricity or electronics. Therefore, anyone can play them.'

Although they exhibit and perform in conventional exhibition spaces, there is none of the 'Do not touch!' element about them, and they admit no rules about *how* to play any of the instruments. The appearance of their beautiful constructions (mostly metal) is as important as the music they make. For them 'the musical sculpture-object can be considered either as a musical instrument, as an instrument easy to play, as a sculpture-object for which sound is only complementary, or even as the starting-point for working with materials.'

Many people whose roots lie in the visual arts produce instrument-sculptures where music is a by-product: William Pye's cool steel objects fall into this category, whereas Max Eastley's creations are primarily created for the sounds they will produce.

Max Eastley had a long-time fascination with 'automatophones' (instruments which play themselves under power from wind, water or electric currents). He has built many varieties of Aeolian instruments which, although built to be played by the wind, can be treated like an ordinary string instrument. In one uncomplicated project, Eastley planned to have

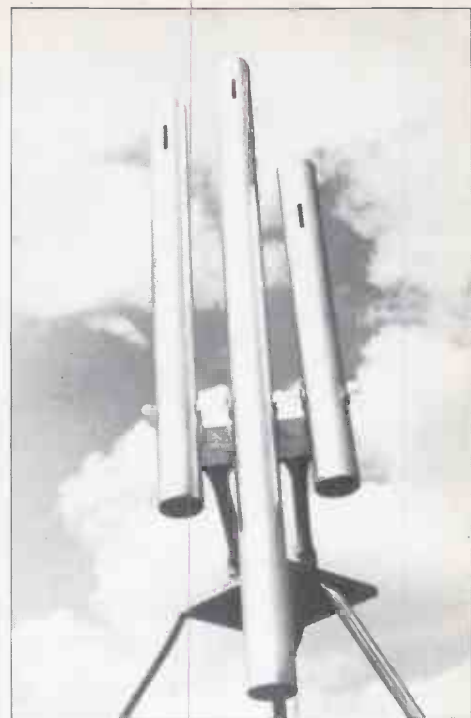
three 10ft long Aeolian harps clamped to the window frame high on a building. He currently uses a prototype of that harp, bowed or plucked, and amplified with a simple pickup, when working in group improvisations. It consists of a hollow wooden box with strings made from six pieces of clavichord wire (bought cheaply by the roll) bridged by two perspex blocks and tuned with piano rest pins (below).

The problem with exhibiting automatophones is that the wind might not perform for days. At the Serpentine Gallery in London, Eastley attached metal wind flutes consisting of 27 pipes to a high balcony (right). They only played once during the three-week long exhibition – in the middle of the night, drawing the police along who thought it was 27 demented flute players!

Not all of Max Eastley's instruments rely on the elements. His 'Humours of Bamboo' (see p.39) (humours as in moods) is an indoor installation, run on electricity. It can either be left to its own serial devices or played like a regular instrument by one or more people.

81 slats of split bamboo are arranged in a large circle on a bed of straw. The slats or 'blades' of differing lengths are arranged in groups which form melodic structures. A motorised beater bearing a small blade of bamboo passes in a circle over the bamboo and straw making rustling sounds alternated with clattering, wooden noises at pitches dependent on the length of the bamboo it hits. The musical sequences can be changed by adding or removing blades, which is the equivalent of using it as a regular instrument, making varying melodic patterns. The original idea for this instrument involved resonating stones from a Welsh river bed. The musical properties of such stones (slate) have long been recognised: a late 19th century Keswick man called Richardson invented an instrument using them, and called his ensemble 'Richardson's Rock Band'!

Many of the instruments in this feature clog up the normally well-oiled definitions of instruments. In sculptural circles, objects made by Max Eastley or the Baschet Brothers aren't taken very seriously. Eastley notices that in the college where he teaches, 'The students who make things that make sounds aren't taken very seriously, whereas a huge piece of girder that just sits on the floor is serious and accepted and reproducible in art mags... also

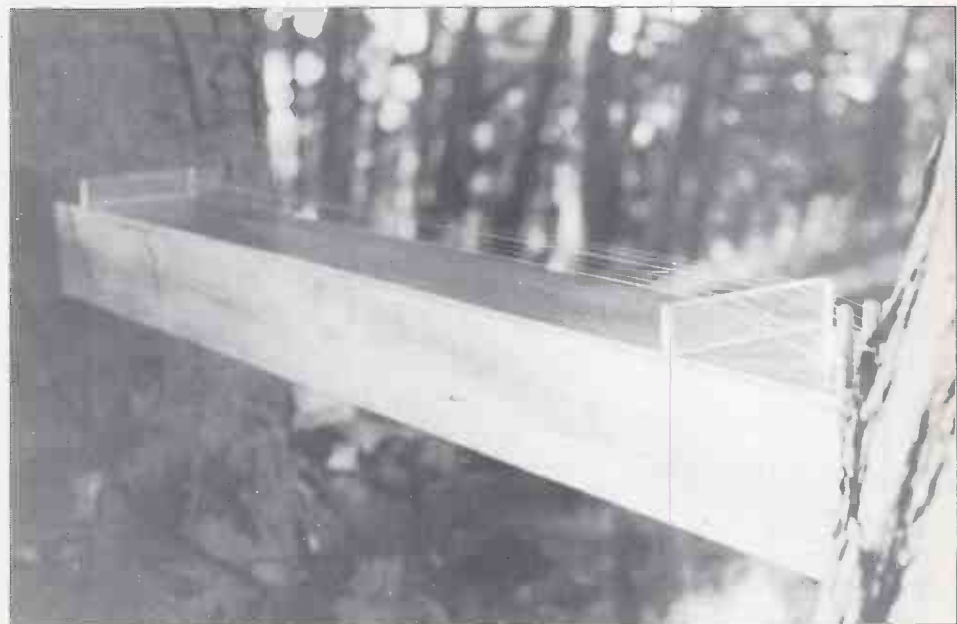


Max Eastley

Flash Gordon wind flutes taking the air on the roof of the Serpentine Gallery.

it costs a fortune to make it.' None of his instruments are worth more than a few pounds in materials; the value is in the idea.

In musical terms many of these inventors do not lay much store by the limitations of Western systems, and some make determined efforts to find new musical forms. Barry Leigh is adamant: 'I don't believe in a scale, I put finger-holes where it feels comfortable; I call that *ergoharmonics*.' Max Eastley thinks the tempered scale is 'a compromise to make things symmetrical; the natural harmonic series is quite different and sounds out of tune to someone trained in the tempered scale.' In spite of his classical training, Hugh Davis's instruments ignore tuning and scales, and for many players group improvisation is far more important than musical exactitude. In the editorial to *New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments*, David Toop pointed out that, 'Many of the significant developments within 20th century music have stemmed from revolutionary attitudes to the tools on which it is made.' ■



Max Eastley

An Aeolian harp pours wind tunes from the tree tops.



**'But where do we rehearse?' you've probably asked on many occasions. John Morrish discovers Nomis reversing the trend towards converted sewers in London by offering good, extensive, reliable facilities at a price even The Jam can afford...**

# **nomiS** the Compleat Rehearsal Complex

You've got an important gig coming up, or even a tour. Where do you go to rehearse? Your own front room? Somebody's garage? A basement? Or perhaps to one of those up-holstered sewers that usually pass for rehearsal rooms? If your name is Graham Parker or Steve Forbert, or if you're a member of The Jam or New Musik (sic), then for you at least, the problem no longer exists. You go to Nomis, a unique rehearsal studio complex that has recently opened in the heart of residential London. In Sinclair Road, W14 to be more precise, just round the corner from the Olympia exhibition centre, scene of such delights as the recent so-called British Music Fair.

Sinclair Road seems to be one of those streets that is always on the move, either up or down the social scale. Along its length frantic renovation battles interminably with creeping neglect. In the midst of all this activity, the imposing red-brick structure that houses Nomis looks like a haven of peace and stability. Only the blocked-in lower windows indicate that this building contains something other than the usual flats and offices.

'The World's Finest Rehearsal Studio Com-

plex' is how Nomis describe themselves, without, it must be admitted, much fear of contradiction. The builders only moved out in March this year, but the history of the project goes back much further than that, to a meeting between two men: Robbie Wilson, who is currently Nomis's general manager; and Simon Napier-Bell, an expatriate businessman whose name might be familiar to dedicated students of the Sixties. Both have been involved in the music business for a very long time. Robbie spent some seven years on the road with Slade before managing Eric Burdon, and since then he has been operating his own lighting and production company in America. Simon Napier-Bell has been a musician, a songwriter and a producer, managed people like the Yardbirds for a while, and is now responsible for organising the finances of Nomis, the London branch of which is intended to be the first of a worldwide series. Through working with bands, both men became aware of the need for better rehearsal facilities, and beyond that of the difficulties involved in bringing together and co-ordinating the many different services a major act

require when they are preparing a tour. As Robbie says, 'It used to take me a week to do what would take me a day if I could get everybody in the one place...' His idea was to find a place to gather together these services under one roof. By coincidence, Simon had already been looking for a site for such a complex when, in 1978, the two met and decided to team up. It was shortly after that when they came across the old warehouse that was to become the Nomis studios.

The process of finding a suitable site to start building was complicated by the two men's determination to set up in central London: 'We searched the whole of London. We spoke to British Rail about old sites in St Pancras and stuff. It had to be in central London. We had lots of alternatives, we had places like Shepperton, Elstree, the Docks... we wanted to be smack bang in the middle of London so that we were convenient, that was the main thing.' The building they eventually found started life in 1936 as a creamery, before being pressed into service during the war as a munitions store, a task for which it was well suited with its 15in thick external walls.

Today those walls are just about all that remains of the original building, the policy of architect Patrick Litchfield (no, not that one) being to rebuild from scratch inside the existing shell. Work, including the essential demolition stage, started on 26 June 1979 and was completed on 1 March this year. From beginning to end the project seems to have been virtually free from problems, which might seem strange to readers of *The DIY Studio* or for that matter to anybody else who has ever had anything to do with building. The reason for this is, of course, perfectly straightforward and easily expressed: money. When you are spending something approaching £3,000,000 on a project you can afford the very best in professional advice and service. Take the tricky business of planning permission as an example. Robbie explains how Nomis handled that one: 'Planning permission wasn't a problem, because we did everything properly. We didn't hide anything from the GLC. We had the proper people, we had very, very professional and experienced people, and you



*I see your picture, your name in lights above it...*



don't run into any problems when you're doing it properly, and spending the money in the right direction. I mean the GLC have visited me once and they've given me a certificate that covers me for everything because I did what they wanted me to do. The only time you run into any trouble is when you try and do it cheap-and-nasty and tell lies. We don't do that, we do it by the book, which is the only way to do it.'

The 'proper people' in question form a very impressive team. Mr Litchfield, the project's architect, had previously handled large-scale works for both private and local authority clients, not only new buildings but also extensive rehabilitation jobs like Nomis. Sound problems were handled by Mr A P Traexler of APL Acoustics, a highly qualified man with great experience in both industrial sound insulation and auditorium design. And Messrs Sprossan and Babbs, the builders, include amongst their completed works the new rehearsal rooms at the Royal Academy of Music.

The results of all this professional expertise are very largely apparent on entering the complex. What we see today represents only the first of three phases of construction, but already there are seven rehearsal rooms and a separate studio for video demos. These are clustered around a large open-plan reception and waiting area served by in-house catering facilities. Here also sits Nomis's computerised booking and accounts system. Along the corridor is a comprehensively equipped games room. The *décor* throughout is best described as 'music-biz tasteful': you know the sort of thing, lots of brown and beige, furniture and fittings in chrome and glass, and the kind of carpets you need snow-shoes to walk across. Huge black-and-white photos of famous pop stars hang on the walls. The lighting is gentle, the air conditioned, the atmosphere restful enough to calm the most fevered musical brow.

The rehearsal studios themselves come in various shapes and sizes, but all are finished in the same muted, even sombre, blacks and browns. All feature dimming lights and, throughout the complex, air conditioning wafts away the various acrid odours associated with creativity. Less obvious to the casual observer, but vitally important to anybody using the studios, is the care taken over the twin problems of room acoustics and sound insulation.

As sound consultant on the project, Mr Traexler's brief was to create conditions in the studios that would go some way towards simulating the acoustical properties of much larger halls. This is a rather problematical exercise, very different to designing a 'dead' recording studio, where the objective is to eliminate most forms of natural room response. The Nomis studios have been tailored to give a reverberation time of between 1.2 and 1.5 seconds, depending upon the volume of the room. To shape room reverberation at the bass end of the spectrum, special low frequency absorbers have been built into false ceilings and raised floors. At the same time efforts have been made to retain a good 'live' high frequency response. The proportions of the rooms have been carefully chosen to reduce low frequency resonances to a minimum, and wherever possible walls have been set out of parallel to eliminate flutter-echoes.

The sound in the room, though, is only half the problem. The other difficulty is sound

insulation: preventing the very high sound levels inside from reaching the outside world, and at the same time keeping the individual studios acoustically isolated from each other. Not an easy matter when continuous sound pressure levels of up to 115dB (A) have been produced by bands like those using the studios, and when there is a dearth of relevant technical data and research.

The answers come from rigorous attention to detail. Apart from the obvious measures needed to prevent sound passage through the internal and external walls, considerable care has been taken to prevent sound travelling between the studios along the air conditioning ducting. Purpose-built cross-talk silencers have been installed. And the entrance to each studio is guarded by a double-door-type soundlock. How successful Mr Traexler's efforts have been can only be judged by the undoubted popularity of the complex even in the short time since it has been open.

The complex is intended to serve any number of purposes. There are four small rooms intended for the solo artist or small (or impoverished) band. These measure about 20ft by 15ft and are simple boxes. The three larger studios are more elaborate. One features a long, toughened-glass screen dividing the area nearest the door from the main

of hours filming yourself miming to it. The results go down on to video cassette for distribution to excitement-starved A&R people, agents and so on. All very high-tech, but I can't help thinking that if most people's videos are anything like their audio demos then they're probably going to do themselves more harm than good. On the other hand, it's all good practice for *Top Of The Pops* . . . Another use that Robbie foresees for the video facility is to assist in the lengthy process of theatrical casting. What you do is to bring in your would-be Hamlets or Ophelias and put the whole audition down on tape instead of relying on memory or paper and pencil. You can go over the finished tape as many times as you like until you find the one whose face fits. Quite what Shakespeare would have thought of all this is a moot point, but then, even at a mere £30 an hour, it's extremely unlikely he could have afforded it.

Anyone using the Nomis rehearsal studios also has access to a wide range of other equipment, some of it already on the premises (for instance, various instruments, several Yamaha PAs, and a collection of Teacs and Revoxes), the rest just a phone call away: 'Our motto here is we supply anything that is requested . . . whatever somebody wants, if we don't have it we'll go out and get it . . . if I don't



John Morrish

Happy chap Robbie Wilson poised for action at Nomis HQ.

rehearsal area, presumably so that important people can be invited in to gawp at the musos without putting them off too much. The other two include a raised stage at one end so that a band can simulate a small club if they're so inclined. Seating and food and drink can be brought in to further the illusion. I didn't ask about waiters and waitresses . . . The studios are not intended to cater just for the band rehearsing before a major tour or an album, although obviously these two functions make up a major part of the complex's work. The rooms are designed also to be convenient for auditions or for showcasing individuals or bands before an invited audience.

Still more possibilities are provided by the video demo studio, which offers both *U-matic* and *VHS* format recording. The idea here is that in order to give your audio demo extra clout you bring the master in to Nomis, lace it up to one of their Revoxes, and spend a couple

have it I can put my hand on it within five minutes on the phone. Before we opened I had meetings for about four or five months with all the hire companies in London, all the limousine companies in London, and I picked out the best ones that I would deal with.' An associated company within the Nomis group handles management and publishing for bands like Japan and Opposition. For them Robbie already does a certain amount of tour co-ordination, and in future he intends to 'build up our own full-scale department dealing in all of that', which will bring Nomis even closer to being the complete service its creators envisaged.

Aside from everything already mentioned, the Nomis complex offers two more facilities. The building contains 20 individual, fully secure cages for storing equipment, making quite sure that when you're not using your



gear, nobody else is either. Then, upstairs, there are the furnished office suites, fully serviced and with switchboard, secretarial and telex facilities available, that can be hired by the hour, day, week or month. Already in residence are the business organisations of the aforementioned Messrs Parker and Jam.

Impressive as all this is, it is only the first phase of Nomis London. Phase two, the work for which should be underway by the time you read this, involves the installation of eight more rehearsal studios into the building's basement. This is expected to be complete by about November of this year, and then they can move on to phase three, the construction of a full broadcast-standard video studio on one of the upper floors. Somewhere along the line a link-up with a multitrack mastering studio is also intended. As if this were not enough to be going on with, there are plans to take the Nomis concept across the world, to New York and Paris in the first instance. The West Berlin branch is already under construction, I'm told.

Of course, there are those who might question all this expansion during times of (what shall I say?) 're-appraisal' in the record industry. Robbie Wilson has no time for such faint-hearts: 'A recession can be healthy in any business, not only the music business, because it roots out the good from the bad. A recession in the music business at the moment, I define it as everybody's being more careful with their money. The money's still there, the record companies still have the money in the bank, it's just that they're being more careful with it... We're quite proud of the fact that we're spending £3,000,000 on music, a music business complex, right in the middle of a recession.'



Being there...

Only time will tell how accurate Wilson's assessment is, but the success of the Nomis complex in its first seven weeks of operation gives some grounds for optimism. Robbie claims that the studios have been operating at 80% of their capacity since opening, and that during that time, 'I would say we'd had 75% of the successful acts in Britain.'

After all that, it only remains to talk about prices. Surprisingly, they are not quite so steep as you might expect. Robbie promises, 'We can match the prices that are being charged now for much inferior facilities,' the justification for this liberal policy being that, 'We don't want to make it too pricey for the little fellows, because the little fellows one day will be the big ones.' So, for little fellows and big fellows alike, the range of prices is as follows: To hire a rehearsal room at Nomis will cost you between £5 and £10 an hour depending on size (not yours, the room's) or, on a daily rate, between £40 and £80 for a day of up to 15 hours. There are also various introductory offers and discounts for

long-term users.

To hire a basic (3 mics, desk, bins) Yamaha PA will cost you £25 a day extra. Whether or not this represents value-for-money depends very largely on how well you use the time. Where Nomis scores over the competition is in the sheer quality and comprehensiveness of its facilities. In fact, once you're in there, there's really no reason for you to come out at all... until your money runs out. Personally, although I am delighted to see somebody making a large and constructive investment in live music, I do wonder whether there is not a danger of something like Nomis widening the gap between the successful acts and the rest. A band that has spent a fortnight rehearsing at Nomis is going to look and sound infinitely better than a band that has only ever practised in a church hall. Of course, most of the bands who use this excellent complex probably started off rehearsing in a garden shed or a hole in the road, but the danger lies in breaking the continuity between the very top of the musical world and the very bottom. If audiences are used to seeing hyper-rehearsed bands at their local dance hall, are they going to be willing to pay good money to see their mates stumbling through numbers they have never had the chance to thrash into shape? If they are not, where's the encouragement for the next generation of superstars?

Nevertheless, if I had a 40-date tour in front of me, I'd make sure my record company paid for me to go into Nomis ■

For further information contact Nomis Studio and Equipment Hire Ltd, 45-53 Sinclair Road, London W14, Tel: (01) 602 6351.

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## WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?



# The DIY Studio: Part Three

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Those hardy souls who have followed the *DIY Studio* this far will have learnt at least one unexpected lesson: that the single most useful skill the prospective studio operator can acquire is an ability to cope with bureaucracy. The complicated business of seeking planning permission for your conversion job is no exception to this rule.

Let us assume that, after many frustrating weeks and months spent searching for the perfect premises in which to open up shop, you eventually find somewhere that 'will do'. Your first impulse is to sign the papers thrust in your direction, pay the necessary monies, and start tearing the existing buildings to pieces. But wait: this is a time for restraint, above all. Before you commit yourself in any way you would be wise to consider the many formalities that stand between you and your goal, starting with the planning laws. Unless you have been lucky enough to find a ready-built recording studio that fits your exact requirements then it is highly likely that you will have to make an application for planning permission. And now is the time to consider this question, before you sign anything: being the owner or tenant of a property you cannot use because you cannot obtain planning permission would not be a very comfortable position.

Planning in England and Wales is regulated by the Town and Country Planning Acts, the most recent example being the 1971 model. North of the border the relevant statute is the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972. For our purposes the provisions of the two acts are virtually identical, but since the following outline is taken from the English law, Scottish readers are advised to check up on details for themselves.

Both Acts begin with the bald statement that, 'planning permission is required for the development of land.' But before anybody runs away with the idea that this only applies to people wishing to build housing estates or hypermarkets on lush pastures or golden cornfields, let us take a look at the way in which the crucial terms of this statement are defined. In legal terminology, 'land' includes both the bare sod and anything above or below it, for instance buildings. And the Act itself gives a lengthy and comprehensive definition of development as meaning, in the first place, 'the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations, in, on, over or under land,' and secondly, 'the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land.'

Effectively this means that if you are intending to convert an existing building into a recording studio, and if this conversion involves any 'operations' you are required to

## John Morrish continues to untangle bureaucracy just for you. This month *The Curse Of The Planning Application.*

obtain planning permission under both counts. But there are exceptions, the most important for our purposes being contained in Section 22 (Section 19 in the Scottish Act), Clause 2, Subsections a and f. These list operations or uses of land that are not considered as 'development'. The first includes 'the carrying out of works for the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of any building, being works which affect only the interior of the building, or which do not materially affect the external appearance of the building and (in either case) are not works for making good war damage or works begun after 5th December 1968 for the alteration of a building by providing additional space therein below the ground.' Subsection f makes clear a further exception from the general definition of development: 'in the case of buildings or other land which are used for a purpose of any class specified in an order made by the Secretary of State under this section, the use thereof for any purpose of the same class.'

The quick-witted will by now have discovered a legal way of avoiding the necessity for planning permission. All you need is a building previously used for an activity in the 'same class' as your proposed studio and then you are free to do whatever you like with the inside so long as you don't touch the exterior. Brilliant. The only flaw in this ingenious plan is simply the difficulty of establishing the class of use to which sound recording is deemed to belong. For the purposes of this section of the Acts, periodical orders can be made by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The order in force at the moment is the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1972, but finding a suitable Use Class within it to fit a recording studio is one of those questions along the lines of, 'Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No it's Superman!' but with no such straightforward answer. Is a recording studio 'a shop' (Class I)? Is it a 'light industrial building' (Class III)? Is it a 'general industrial building' (Class IV)? Is it included in any of the other XIV Classes you have to choose from? The only simple answer is, as you might expect, no.

You might think that this *impasse* rather puts paid to the aforementioned ingenious scheme for circumventing the planning permission requirement, but remember for a moment that this is Britain, the land where we pride ourselves on being able to put square

pegs into round holes no matter how difficult that might seem. So, your studio doesn't fit any of the use classes listed in the Order? Never mind, it can be made to fit, and *will* be made to fit, at the discretion of the local planning authority (in London the Borough council, in the rest of England and Wales the District council, and in Scotland the Town or County council). My layman's guess is that the thing it is least unlike is the 'light industrial building', Class III, but opinions differ. My local planning officers refused to be drawn on the question, saying each case would have to be judged individually as it came up. Another planner told me it would most likely be classed under Class IV, the 'general industrial building'. The only thing you can safely say is that your premises are unlikely to be lumped in with those of an 'animal hair cleanser, adapter or treater', or a 'breeder of maggots from putrescible animal matter', although, judging by some of the music inflicted upon us, there might be good reasons for categorising a studio as 'a tripe shop'.

In general it is probably simpler, and less time-consuming, to make a planning permission application than it is to find a way round it, although it is easy enough to find out for sure whether you need permission or not. Your local planning authority is obliged to inform you about this within six weeks of receiving a letter requesting a 'determination under section 53 of the 1971 Act' (s51 of the Scottish Act) as it is known. If they consider permission unnecessary, and tell you so, that is binding upon them. In practice local planning officials are usually willing to tell you informally whether or not your development will need approval. Moreover, they are also well placed to make off-the-cuff judgements about whether your application is likely to succeed. Local planning committees rely very heavily upon the advice of their officials.

The box on p54 lists requirements for a planning permission application. The whole system is well set up for the DIY applicant, though if you are using an architect he or she can make the application as your agent. Each local council has its own forms, but they all conform to the same basic pattern. The main application form (Form P) is in two parts, the first for all applicants, the second for applications in respect of 'Industrial, Office, Warehousing, Storage or Shops'. That probably includes you. If you don't intend to alter the external appearance of the premises or make any new access on to roads or municipal services, then the only drawing you need submit is a layout plan identifying the building to which the application relates. You should

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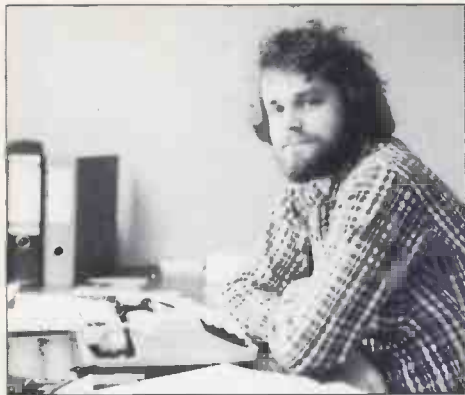
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# Who made Genesis a revelation?



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A. Andy Allan (Cave), Gary Lucas (Spaceward, right)

use copies of the appropriate 1:1250 or 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, but beware, this is copyright material. Local planning offices have a special licence from the copyright holders to enable them to make copies in connection with planning applications, so they can help you with that. The planning forms have attached to them some very useful and informative 'notes for applicants', and all-in-all you should find the process very simple. The staff of planning departments are very familiar with the non-professional applicant, and should be able to help you with any queries you may have. A recording studio is a rather different proposition to the usual pigeon-lofts and whippet-kennels that they have to deal with, but you may find this an advantage in terms of the amount of interest they show.

Unfortunately, though simple, the procedures involved are rather slow. Six to eight weeks seems a common length of time to wait for a verdict on your application. The planning authority has to inform various people and then has to wait 21 days to hear if there are any objections to the plan. If you are carrying out development in a conservation area, this part of the procedure is even more time consuming. The local authority has to give notice in the local newspaper and on a notice attached to the building, including details of where the plans can be inspected and when, and once again there is a 21 day wait for any objections to come to light.

If time is pressing, you make make an application for 'outline planning permission', which means you ask for permission to develop but reserve certain aspects of your plan for later approval. This type of application isn't dealt with any quicker, but it means you can apply, and start preparatory work, earlier, without waiting for your architect or yourself to draw up detailed plans for your project. You can apply for approval of the reserved aspects later. This type of permission is intended specifically for people erecting new buildings. In the case of a straightforward recording studio conversion, where the only aspects of the work requiring permission are a change of use and the blocking in of a few external windows, you would probably be well advised to apply for full permission from the start.

Of course, if you are under pressure to make a decision about buying or leasing a property then any time is precious. Obviously you must inform the prospective vendor or landlord that you need to establish planning permission before you can act, but it may come to the point where you are in danger of losing the premises through delays. If you have kept the planning officers fully informed they should be able to



B. Bill Ferrier (Cave).

give you a fairly accurate assessment of your chances in the planning committee. But their opinion is in no sense binding, and you must make your own decision about how best to act, bearing in mind the incidental costs that you have already accumulated in applying for planning permission which will be wasted if you lose the building, and at the same time the difficulties you will face if you secure the building but are unable to go ahead with your conversion plans. Not a decision I should like to have to make.

If your application fails you are entitled to appeal to the Secretary of State. Every notice refusing permission to develop must state the reasons why the application failed. If a technicality was responsible, you can make the necessary changes and apply again, as many times as you like. If on the other hand the council has decided it is unwilling to consider the type of development you envisage in that particular location then you will either have to appeal to a higher authority or wait for a change of council.

\* \* \*

Turning to our two examples, there seems only one lesson we can accurately draw from their experiences in this area: that the application of the planning laws is consistent only in its inconsistency. Looking at Spaceward first, we see that their application to convert 'The Old School', High Street, Stretham, Cambridgeshire into a recording studio was prepared and submitted by their architects, Messrs Twist and Whitley of Cambridge. It arrived at the Ely offices of the East Cambridgeshire District Council on the 1st of October 1979 and there it remains, available for inspection by any interested parties.

So let us take a look at the way they completed the all-important Form P. Part One, for all applicants, lists the name of the prospective developers and their agents, the location and size of the property, and requests permission for a 'Conversion to recording studio' and states that the proposal involves 'alterations' and 'change of use'. Part Two is the section for industrial and commercial applicants. Question One here asks, 'In the case of industrial development, give a description of the processes to be carried on and of the end products, and the type of plant or machinery to be installed.' Spaceward's answer is, 'Non applicable,' but I have seen applications from studios in which all the



processes carried on within were described: a rather literal-minded approach and probably unnecessary. Further questions ask whether the proposal is to replace existing premises, and about the way the floor space of the building is divided up.

The existing Spaceward premises in Victoria Street are mentioned in reply to the first query, and the response to the second is a blunt, 'Recording studio whole premises.' A more difficult question is about provision for parking, but here Spaceward are in the clear because they can offer most of the schoolyard for off-street parking within their boundaries. Fastened to the forms is a site plan as mentioned earlier (with the area to which the application relates edged in red), and a properly drawn up plan and elevations. The elevations show how the project's architects originally planned to alter the external appearance of the building, with the windows in the north-facing wall of the school blocked in with contrasting brick. Since then, Spaceward have agreed with the Planning Officer to change this to matching brickwork. Furthermore, the details of the interior have changed quite substantially during the process of final design and construction. Nevertheless, the important aspects of the original planning application have been rigorously adhered to, for instance the uses of the various rooms, the entrances and exits, and the new drainage.

On the 5th of November the application was 'approved with conditions'. The conditions are:

1. 'No advertisements shall be displayed without prior consent of the local Planning Authority.'
2. 'Permanent parking provision shall be made on site for 5 cars.'
3. 'Within 12 months of the commencement of development or as soon as practicable thereafter the site shall be treated in accordance with a landscape scheme to be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority and shall thereafter be satisfactorily maintained, such landscape scheme to include the treatment of forecourts, areas to be seeded or turfed, paving and boundary walls and/or fences.'

The fourth condition was that enough space be provided on the site for all cars to enter and leave in forward gear, and the final condition was that, 'All works shall be carried out and completed strictly in accordance with the approved details, to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.'

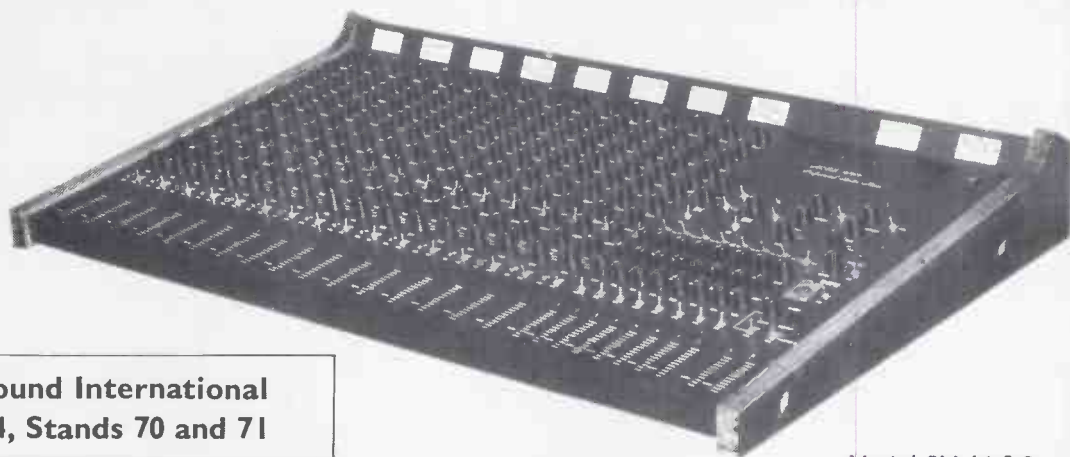
The reasoning behind these fairly tough conditions is expressed in the phrase, 'To safeguard the character of the area, and to help assimilate the development into its sur-

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# Who gives PM their RPM?



## **Premier and Carl Palmer.**

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roundings.' The village of Strettham is in a conservation area, and the nature of the planning committee's comments makes clear their understandable desire to maintain the village's rural character. It could have been much worse for Spaceward. Apart from the fact that the absence of any existing drawings of the building made it necessary for Gary at Spaceward to employ the architect to draw up a properly dimensioned plan before he could even start thinking about a planning application, he is well pleased with the way the Local Planning Authority dealt with their proposals: 'They're very helpful. I don't know whether that's because it's a village in an area where there isn't a lot of employment apart from farming ... And obviously, the local council want to get as much rates as possible.'

\* \* \*

In terms of setting, Cave Studio represents quite a contrast. A mere half-brick's throw from the scene of the recent Bristol 'riots', the location of Bill and Andy's basement seems to have counted in their favour when it came to their DIY planning application. Although they were making substantial alterations to the premises, they had no intention of changing the exterior. So their application quite rightly states that it involves 'change of use', but not 'alteration or extension'. Unusually, their application did not include Part Two of Form P, the section relating to 'Industrial, Office, Warehousing, Storage or Shops'.

Andy explains how this came about: 'We went along to the planning department, had a chat with one of the clerks there and tried to find a category which a recording studio fitted ... and nobody could do it. In fact, what we did was to take the line of least resistance: it wasn't a shop, it wasn't an office, it wasn't a factory, it wasn't anything else. So by being negative we minimised the paperwork.' Other than the basic Part One of the planning form the only additional document submitted was a site plan indicating the whereabouts of the basement in question. Personally, although I can see the justice in their approach, I still think they were fortunate to have avoided completing the second part of the form. Despite its over-specific wording, Part Two of Form P is clearly intended for all commercial applicants, and its purpose is to establish likely parking requirements, traffic loads, hours of work and so on. When you come to make your application you should certainly be prepared to answer questions on that sort of topic.

The Bristol City Council Planning Department received the application on the 8th of June 1979, and shortly afterwards Cave received a letter from the Environmental Health Dept, drawing their attention to 'Part III of the Control of Pollution Act, 1974, which refers to the control of noise. Activities carried on at the premises must not give rise to noise amounting to a nuisance. Please contact this office with further details of design and equipment to be installed'. The letter also informed them that the proposals should comply with the Health and Safety At Work Act, 1974, and the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act, 1963. In response, Cave sent the Chief Environmental Health Officer drawings in some detail showing their own designs for sound insulation and ventilation.

Eventually, on the 15th of August, Cave received notice that the proposal was 'permitted subject to:

1. The installation to the satisfaction of the City Planning Officer after consultation with the

Environmental Health Dept of satisfactory sound insulation measures to the recording studio area before the use commences.

2. There being no noise disturbance caused to the occupiers of the upper floors.

The first proviso meant simply that the Planning Officer had to give the project a quick once-over while it was under construction. The solution to the second problem was unexpected but fairly painless: 'We solved that one quite happily because we rented the offices above, as an insurance policy,' says Andy. 'We knew the offices above were available and thought, well, it'll be more room to expand in the future. It'll double our rent admittedly (well in fact it more than doubled it), but if anybody moved up there with a Xerox machine or something like that, or an offset printing machine ... it would make it hell for us down here, despite the amount of sound-proofing we put in.'

\* \* \*

Of course, faced with the prospect of all this expense and inconvenience there are those who would choose to ignore the planning regulations and set to work without permission. Indeed, I know of one elaborate studio conversion carried out completely unknown to the local planning authorities, and this in an area of considerable architectural beauty and sensitivity. The set-up is still working quite happily and will probably continue to do so as long as they keep in with their neighbours, since a local authority is unlikely to take action on planning violations except in the event of direct complaints. On the other hand, if a council does choose to act, the measures available to it range from the laughable to what used to be called draconian in the days before the Draco rehabilitation campaign got under way. A refusal to carry out or undo the work specified on what is called an 'enforcement notice' carries a £400 fine. If the offence is repeated you can be fined up to £50 per day that the violation continues. Finally, if you still refuse, the officers of the authority are entitled to come on to your property, carry out the works required, and charge the resultant costs to you. Somehow the prospect of seeing the council bulldoze down my lovely new studio and then receiving the bill is enough to make me stick to the letter of the law. But that's for you to decide.

The law on planning is one of the things the present Government has promised (threatened?) to change, so you would be well advised to check up on the current position when you come to apply. The Department of the Environment are apparently at the discussion stage of creating a new General Development Order, which may become law some time towards the end of this year. The changes proposed so far involve a fairly minor loosening of the planning controls by enlarging slightly the classes of development you are permitted to undertake without permission. Specifically, this is likely to apply to people extending the floor area of existing domestic or industrial buildings. There is not much possibility that the main structure of planning control will be affected, but we shall all have to wait and see exactly what happens before we can be certain.

So, that's planning over with. Next month we'll be taking a close look at the problems involved in buying or leasing property, and after that I solemnly promise there won't be any forms to fill in for at least another two episodes. Well, not many anyway. ■

## Making A Planning Application

The procedure for making an application for planning permission is laid down both by the 1971 Act and by periodical statutory orders from the Secretary of State for the Environment. The most recent, currently under review, is called the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977. This states that 'an application to a local planning authority for planning permission shall be made on a form issued by the local planning authority and obtainable from that authority'. In addition, the form must be accompanied by 'a plan sufficient to identify the land to which it relates and such other plans and drawings as are necessary to describe the development which is the subject of the application'. Extra copies of these documents must be submitted, up to a maximum of three excluding the original. The authority is entitled to ask, in writing, for any additional information it may require.

In practice you simply collect from your local planning office a pad containing the appropriate forms in the correct numbers and a sheet of instructions on how to fill them in. The staff here can also arrange for you to have copies made of the local plan indicating the whereabouts of your proposed development.

There is also the option of applying for 'outline planning permission' in the specific case of the construction of a building. The procedure here is much the same as for full planning permission, except that certain matters are reserved for approval at a later date. The planning authority is entitled to reject any application for outline permission if they feel it should have been submitted as a full application.

There is, at present, no charge for a planning application, but that situation is due to change in the very near future. Before the end of the current parliamentary session this month (August), the Local Government Planning and Land (No 2) Bill will have received the Royal Assent. This act gives the Secretary of State the power to make charges for all applications to local planning authorities. The size and shape of these charges is currently being worked out by the D of E, and will be laid down in various statutory orders after the Bill has gone through. The Department has just issued a consultation paper with a suggested scale of charges attached. For our purposes the salient points are as follows:

1. All fees would be paid at the time of application or the application would be invalid.
2. There would be no refund for an application where permission was refused, but local planning authorities would have the discretion to waive a fee for a subsequent revised application relating to a proposal previously rejected or to a previous application withdrawn before decision.
3. It is not 'at present' proposed that there should be charges for determinations under section 53 of the 1971 Act as to whether planning permission is required.
4. 'An application covering development in more than one category would pay the charges appropriate to each category of development. For example, a shop with a flat would pay £40 for the flat and £40 per 75 square metres of shop floorspace.'
5. Some of the proposed charges: Residential detailed: £40 per dwelling (house or flat). Householder (house extensions and alterations not adding to the number of dwellings): £30. Commercial, industrial and other buildings, plant and machinery: £40 per 75 sq m. Changes of use: £40.

This suggests that if you are intending to make a planning application you should do it now, before the charges come in. If you have to wait, you should do your best to make sure your application is likely to be accepted, otherwise it's £40 down the drain. And if you are in any doubt about the need for permission in your particular case it might be worth making a formal request for a determination under section 53. At least that won't cost you anything. NB For the time being, these proposals apply only to England and Wales.



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# Good evening, I'm from FX: ADT and Chorus Part One

by Roger Phillips

As I was. There's no other word for it, except perhaps embarrassed. There was I, innocently thumbing through an old issue of *Sound International*, and there it was in the same magazine as my piece on the Hohner HFX system, with its banal (pronounced b-à-nul) intro attempting a light hearted jibe at the narrow minded and sickeningly young cognoscenti of the London music scene. No more than five pages of copy and ads twixt that and Mr Robert Fripp's enigmatic and flowing prose on the mysteries and misdemeanours of the music biz.

Proper put me in my place, I can tell you. Not only do I find myself on a somewhat lower rung in the world of the musical arts, but Mr Fripp's discerning and perceptive postulations on pages 40 and 41 of the April issue, freely punctuated with poetic rhetoric and little nuggets of home-spun philosophy, convinced me that my grasp on the ladder of literary merit may also be just a little shaky. I just loved that bit where he said '... for anyone who would wish to go as far, music is a cosmic requirement; it is a direct language common to God and man where subtlety is inevitable. In this sense, music is the cup which holds the wine of silence ... wow! (mental note - must try harder).

This month I'm reviewing ADT and Chorus FX units and how can anyone begin to describe the elusive and ethereal quality that these items generate? For anyone wishing to go this far, ADT and Chorus effects are a cosmic experience; a double-talk language common to the Pretenders and Martha And The Muffins, where subtlety is inevitable. In this sense, ADT and Chorus effects are the cup which holds the whine of at least one more guitar than you started with. (Wow, this is great, but can I keep it up?) (No - Ed.)

Oh well, back to boring old info on controls and sound status lights etc, but first a word about the sounds themselves. If you've got a voice like mine, you're going to need all the help you can get, should you have the audacity to attempt singing in public or on the odd demo tape. For years the recording industry has been doubling up on your heroes' vocals to make their voices sound better than they really are. In the past this entailed putting down one track, then singing along with the playback - the slight differences in timing and pitch giving the voice a fuller, richer sound. Nowadays, studios use expensive digital delay machines to produce Automatic Double Tracking effects

Roger Phillips writes, plays keyboards and sax, takes great pics, you name it ... next month prepare for boxes from Electro-Harmonix, Boss, Ibanez and more.

but, for us lesser mortals, there are one or two charge coupled bucklet brigade devices on the market that won't necessarily break your bank manager's heart.

In case you're as thick as I am when it comes to the world of Modern Electronics I'd better explain that a charge coupled device is simply a series of capacitors which can hold a charge in the same way that buckets hold later. This charge can be transferred from one capacitor to the next, much like pouring water from one bucket to another, and so on down the line. The 'charge' is the audio signal from your instrument or microphone and the process of transferring this signal takes time, thus giving you your delay. Somewhere between 20 and 40mS seems to give the best double voice effect: the longer the delay, the more demonstrative the effect. If longer delays than 40mS are used the repeat becomes too distinct and separate, taking on more of a slapback echo quality.

If shorter delay times are used (say between 5 and 30mS) and the sound is 'swept' to produce slight deviations in pitch, an ensemble or multi-instrument effect is produced. This effect has come to be known as Chorus and can make a six-string guitar sound like a 12-string, a fretted electric bass sound like a fretless, and an electric piano sound richer and warmer than you ever thought possible. If you want to hear the kind of sound that is produced when a Wurlitzer electric piano is put through a Chorus pedal, listen to Supertramp's *Breakfast In America* album. There are many recorded examples of guitar/Chorus effects, but the one that springs to mind most readily is on the Pretenders' *Brass In Pockets* single.

The Chorus effect is a sound that's hard to resist, and therein lies its major drawback. Once you're turned on to the sounds that a Chorus box can make, it's a bit tempting to have the damned thing switched in all the time. But, like anything else, you can have too much of a good thing. (Or so they tell me!) Most of these stage Chorus boxes have a built-in Speed control that alters the sweep rate, just as Phaser pedals have, thus fast pitch vibrato effects can generally be obtained at the top end of the speed range, while still retaining that thick Chorus sound.

Of course, if money is no object and you've got a mixing desk and sound person to control your stage performances, you can always use one of the aforementioned studio type digital delay machines to achieve all these effects. If, on the other hand, you're just another victim of the current world recession and the economic crisis that the lunatic theories of our Lords and Masters are bringing upon us, read on.



## MXR Stereo Chorus

Price: £143.48 ex VAT. Size: 6in x 4½in x 2½in. Weight: 2½lbs. Controls: Manual, Width and Speed. Construction: Cast alloy finished in yellow. Power: Mains. UK Distributor: Rose Morris & Co Ltd, London. Country of origin: USA.

Another solidly built, high quality, and highly priced item from MXR Innovations of Rochester, New York that incorporates a switch for line-level/instrument-level operation, making it just as at home in the studio as on stage. It also boasts that it is a *stereo* Chorus unit, and with very good reason. Most Chorus pedals have two output sockets for simulated stereo effects; i.e. dry signal from one socket and effect signal from the other, but the MXR offers a different effect signal from each of its two sockets. One output is the normal Chorus effect while the other is an inverted version of it, giving a true stereo sound if two separate amps are used, or if the effects are routed to different channels of a stereo mixing desk. Both outputs can also be used for mono applications, with each one being plugged into separate channels of the same amp with maybe a different eq set up on each channel. On the other hand you can, if you prefer, use one output only, the one nearest to the input socket giving a fuller bass response than the other.

The MXR has three different controls for regulating the Chorus sound, making it one of the more versatile Chorus boxes in this review. The Width control regulates the width of the time delay sweep and is continuously ad-



justable from 0% of total delay range at zero, to 100% of total delay range when turned full on. When the Width control is set at 100% the Manual control has no effect, but when the Width is set lower the Manual can be used to adjust the centre point of the sweep range. When the Width is set to zero the sweep function is defeated and the Manual control can be used to adjust the fixed time delay. The MXR offers quite a wide range of delay times for a Chorus box, 9mS when the control is turned full on, right up to 27mS when set to zero. This means that at its longest delay setting this machine offers a good double-voice effect for vocals as well as the Chorus effects to be found elsewhere. The Speed control offers sweep speeds from 0.8Hz at zero to 8Hz full on, which allows for the thick, 12-string effects at slow speeds and a fast pitch vibrato at the top end.

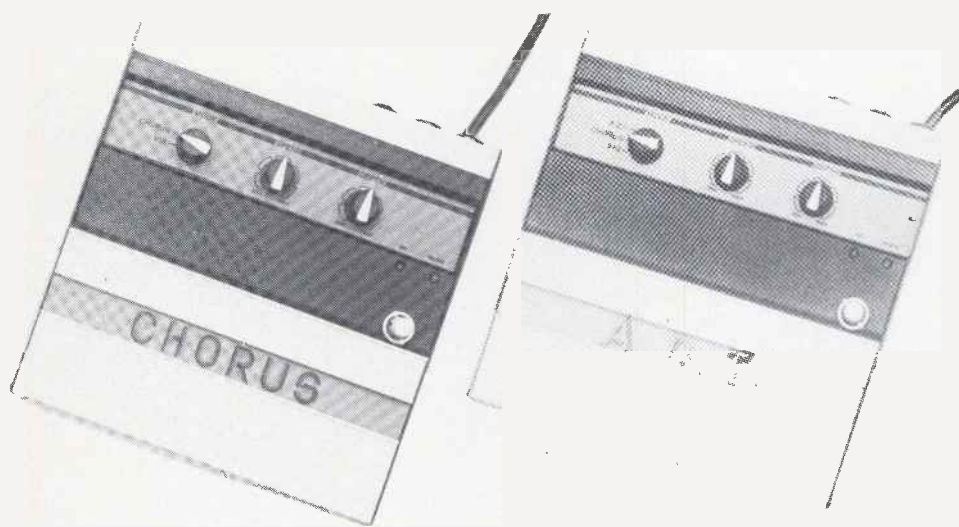
As is usual with many of these effects units, a reciprocal action is required with the Speed and Width controls to obtain the best results.

With the Width set to maximum the sound becomes distinctly warped when the Speed is taken past the 10 o'clock mark. Likewise, when maximum Speed is used to create a vibrato effect, the Width control needs to be kept below 10 o'clock. If in doubt, MXR pedals always seem to make a good, usable sound when all the controls are set to 12 o'clock, and this one is no exception. Expedient use of the controls will produce good slow-speed 12-string effects and subtle vibratos, but I did find it a little difficult to find a mid-speed setting where the amount of modulation was not too extreme for my taste. When the Width control was turned down to a point where the modulation was smoother, the effect became almost non-existent. I did, however, find that the mid-speed effects sounded better with piano than guitar, though this may just have been a question of the piano sounding more at home with a jerky, rotary speaker sound than the guitar.

As this is a relatively complex and versatile

pedal it's necessary to spend a bit of time getting to know it and reading the comprehensive little booklet that MXR provide. True, you can just plug it in, point all the controls due north and get a reasonable Chorus effect, but this instrument can do a lot more than that, and you have to know what you want and what you're doing before you can get the best out of it. However, if all you want is one good Chorus effect to make your guitar sound fat and warm, this probably isn't the best buy for you. If you're not worried about all the extra sounds, there are other Chorus units on the market that will do the job that you want for a quarter of the price of this little baby.

**TechSpec:** Maximum input level: Instrument +5.5dBV; Line +9.5dBV. Maximum output level: Instrument 0dBV; Line +10 dBV. Input impedance: 500kohms. Output impedance: 100 ohms. Dynamic Range: 90dB. Bandwidth: 15kHz. Delay Range: 9 - 27mS. Sweep speeds: .08 - 8Hz.



## Carlsbro Chorus and Carlsbro ADT

Price: *Chorus* £94.50 ex VAT; *ADT* £115.50 ex VAT. Size: 8½in x 8½in x 2in. Weight: 3½lbs. Controls: Mode, Speed and Depth. Construction: Steel and aluminium with yellow and black finish (*Chorus*); green and black finish (*ADT*). Power: Mains. UK Distributor: Carlsbro Sales Ltd, Notts. Country of origin: UK.

Other than the fact that the *ADT* unit has additional delay circuitry built in to allow for the *ADT* effects, these two boxes are more or less identical. Both share the same rugged, square-shaped case that is even larger than the *Echo*, *Phase II*, and *Flanger* units reviewed in previous issues; both have two output sockets offering direct and mixed signals for stereo simulation; both have a generous length of mains lead (over 9ft), mains indicators and sound status lights; and both sport the new Carlsbro type of control knob with a large silver pointer for easy setting.

The Mode selector on the *Chorus* unit offers a choice between Chorus and vibrato effects, and the Speed control varies the sweep speeds for both sounds, but the Depth control turns out to be a bit of a disappointment. While giving a good range of Depth settings for vibrato effects from subtle to extreme; it has no effect on Chorus whatsoever. This means that you're stuck with one depth setting on Chorus and, consequently, you can't make best use

of the unit under stage conditions, especially if you use only the 'mono' signal from the mixed output. I shall explain. Putting a mode selector on these pedals is a good idea if it means that you can rapidly switch from one effect to the other without any fuss. Unfortunately, this is not true of these units when you use the mixed output only.

If you set the Speed control for a good vibrato effect - round about 11 to 12 o'clock seems to be about right - it's too fast for a usable Chorus effect at the fixed Depth setting. The Chorus mode gives its best effects from 10 o'clock down, so it's necessary to change both controls to get the best out of both effects. There is a way around this, though, if you use both outputs. When the Direct output is connected, the Mixed output becomes effect only, so by using different eq settings and/or volume levels on the two channels, it's possible to have infinite control over the mix of the dry and effect signals. So now you can set your vibrato Speed at 11 o'clock and add more Depth to make the effect more pronounced, reduce the volume on the 'effect' channel, and the fixed Depth Chorus effect sounds more acceptable at that Speed setting too: but I'm afraid all that really is a bit of a compromise.

The Mode control is basically a two-tier speed selector, offering higher speeds for vibrato and slower speeds for Chorus, and if

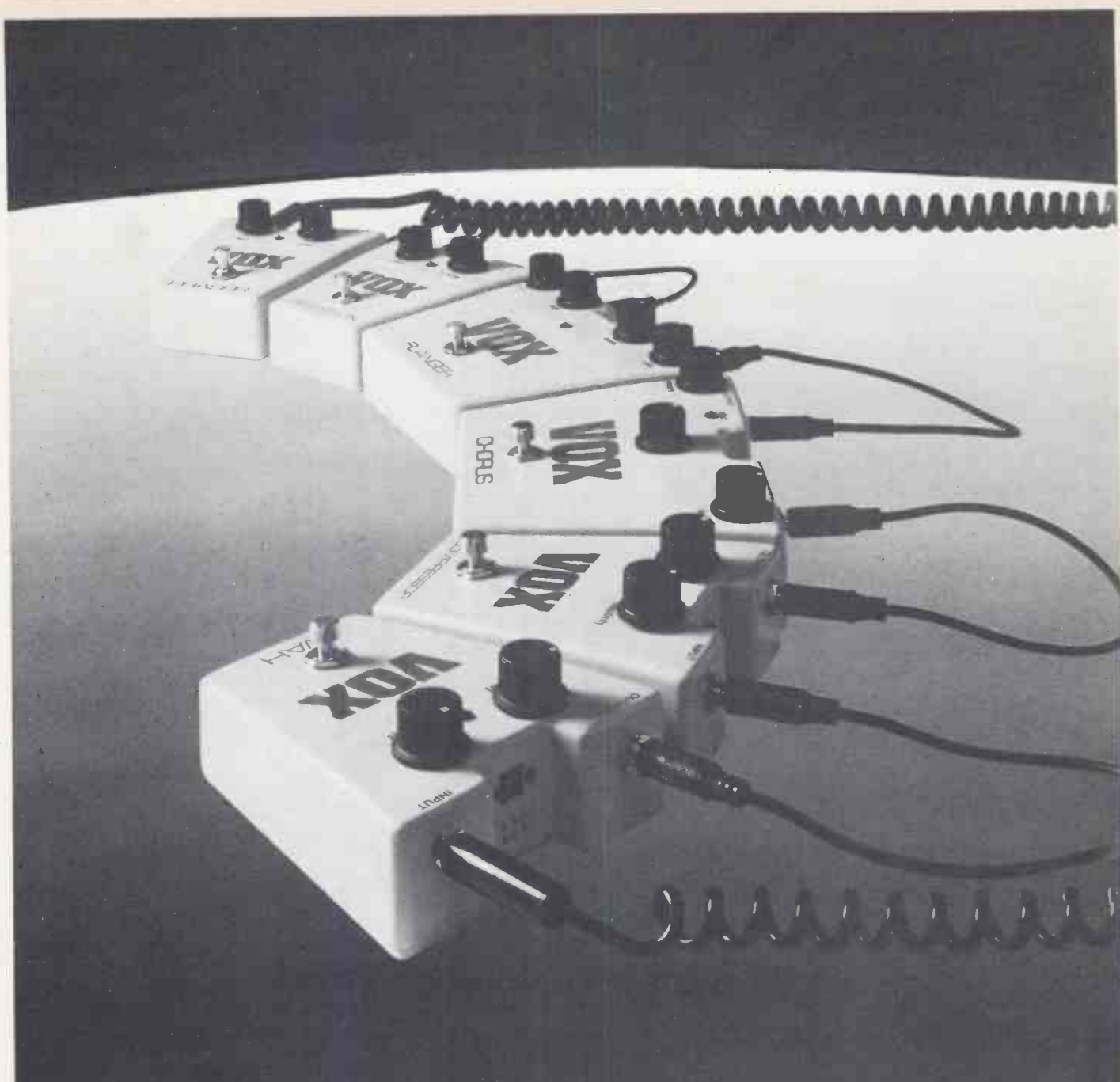
you can't get the best from each effect just by switching from one mode to the other then there's not much point in having that particular control at all. Still, this unit does produce some good slow-sweep 12-string Chorus effects and a wide range of vibrato sounds, each of which sounds good with piano or guitar.

The *ADT* unit has an extra 35mS delay facility added to give good double-voice effects as well as the 5mS delay for Chorus and vibrato. The *ADT* effect is definitely at its most useful with vocals, and the Speed control can be turned up to 12 o'clock before the sweep becomes too obtrusive but, as with Chorus, the Depth control has no effect. Guitar definitely sounds better with Chorus rather than *ADT*, the latter offering a slightly colder, reverb-like effect, but you can use faster Speeds with *ADT* without the sound becoming too warped. This means that the Speed control can be set to around 11 to 12 o'clock, giving a good vibrato speed, a full *ADT* sound that isn't too distorted for chord work, and a slightly over-modulated Chorus effect for lead lines or extreme chord effects, all at a flick of the mode selector. Talking of which, on the test model the Mode selector produced some extra effects when pressed like a push switch. When set to Vibrato, slight pressure on the Mode selector cancelled the effect altogether, and on Chorus a little pressure produced a vibrato effect of maximum Depth, that could be adjusted for Speed. I don't think this unit was meant to be like that, so don't expect yours to do it.

The Carlsbro *ADT* pedal is potentially useful if you want a versatile unit that you can use with vocals for double-voice effects, or with instruments for Chorus and vibrato, but if you only want a pedal for your guitar or piano, stick to the *Chorus*. Considering the lack of variable delay times and the fact that you cannot exercise any control over the Depth setting of the Chorus and *ADT* effects, I think it would be fair to say that both these units are a little highly priced for the facilities that they offer.

**TechSpec:** Input impedance: 470kohms; Output impedance: 470ohms. Max input signal without overload: 0.8V RMS. Gain: Unity. Chorus and Vibrato delay: 5mS. *ADT* delay: 35mS. Frequency response: direct - 20Hz to 20Hz; delay - 50Hz to 10KHz.





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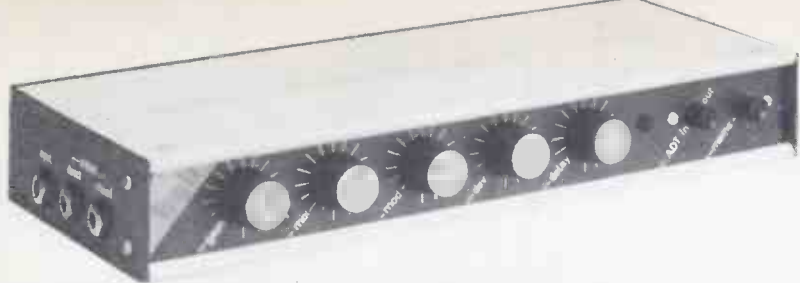
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## Bell Electrolabs Automatic Double Tracker

Price: £90 ex VAT. Size: 11½in x 5½in x 2in. Weight: 3½lbs. Controls: Gain, Mix, Mod, Dev and Delay. Construction: Folded steel finished in beige and brown. Power: Mains. UK Distributor: Pace Musical Equipment Ltd, Herts. Country of origin: England.

I can't help feeling that the people at Bell Electrolabs are doing their *Automatic Double Tracker* something of a disservice with that particular and limited name. ADT unit it most certainly is, but it offers an awful lot more than that in the way of sounds, and is also the most controllable and versatile unit in this review. Looks different to the others too, in that it's more the kind of unit you'd stick on top of your combo or mixer amp – it's definitely a hand-operated machine rather than a footpedal job.

In fact that's one of the few criticisms I have of this unit: there's no facility for connecting a footswitch, so the effect on/off switching has to be done by hand. That's OK if you're using it with a mixing desk and there's someone to operate the thing for you, but if you're playing an instrument, or even just singing, it's a bit difficult to switch the effect in and out.

My second criticism is of that switch itself. It's of the push-on/push-off variety and is exactly the same as the mains on/off switch, situated no more than one inch away on the front panel. Oh dear, we would look silly, wouldn't we, if we pressed the wrong button by mistake? What is intended to be a change of sound could become no sound at all, and easily done too, I'd say, even though the effects button is black and the mains button red. Lastly, just one more complaint before I start saying nice things: this box has no sound status light but, come to think of it, nor did the MXR and that costs a good fifty quid more. A good look at the Bell's effect push-button will tell you if it's in or out, but if you're looking that closely you can check it manually anyway.

Now for the good points, and on this machine there's plenty of them. Apart from the two pushbuttons already mentioned, the front panel boasts a mains light, an overload indicator light, and no fewer than five separate controls, two of which have very silly names that are not at all consistent with the other units in the review. The Gain control is used, along with the overload indicator, to set the optimum level of operation. The Mix control mixes the dry and effect sounds for the Mixed output socket or, if set fully clockwise, gives effect signal only leaving the Direct output to be used for the dry signal. The Mod or modulation control (first silly name) is actually a speed control which varies the speed of pitch deviation on the delayed signal. The Dev or pitch deviation control (second silly name) would be better described as a depth control as it affects the depth of pitch deviation added to the signal. The Delay control offers a really impressive array of delay times for a unit with an ADT label. These range from 4mS to 120mS and, along with the two modulation controls, they make it possible to achieve a selection of

sounds encompassing vibrato, phasing effect, ADT, chorus, and slapback echo.

The speed (Mod) and depth (Dev) controls cancel each other out when one or other is set to zero, but when both are turned full on; and the Delay set at zero, the unit gives a subtle but warm sounding vibrato. Delay can then be added to emphasise this effect and it sounds OK right up to 12 o'clock on the dial. Decreasing the speed (Mod) down to 12 o'clock, taking the Delay back to zero, and keeping the depth (Dev) on full results in a very subtle phasing sound. On the other hand, you can take both speed (Mod) and depth (Dev) down to zero and turn the Delay control full on and *voilà*, you've got slapback echo. Then you can re-introduce speed (Mod) at 12 o'clock and depth (Dev) at 9 o'clock and you end up with a very attractive echo/chorus effect.

The only time this unit makes a less than attractive sound is if both the depth (Dev) and Delay controls are used on extreme settings simultaneously; but with the Delay control kept around the 10 to 2 o'clock area, various combinations of speed (Mod) and depth (Dev) will produce warm and subtle ADT and Chorus effects that are the equal of any of the other units in this review. Sounds just as good with piano and vocals as it does with guitar, and the people from Bell have also built in compander circuitry to keep the background noise low.

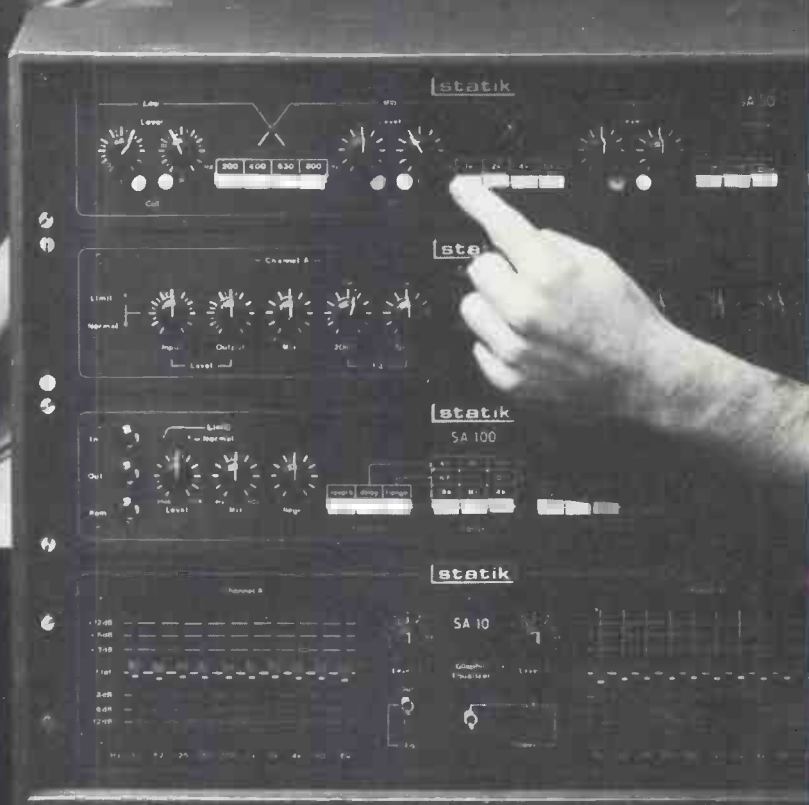
The *Automatic Double Tracker* looks good, too, with its beige and brown livery and black and red controls. There are two rubber feet situated on the base, directly under the control panel, so the unit is tilted up slightly at an angle or, if you prefer, there are four rubber feet on the rear panel so that it can be stood upright on its back. This machine is also separately fused with a fuseholder situated on the right-hand side along with the 7ft of mains lead. The fairly comprehensive operating instructions recommend a 315mA fuse, though the unit I received carried a 500mA fuse. Bell also offer a 19in flange-conversion kit so that this machine can be rack mounted, but that, no doubt, would cost you a bit more.

Now, if they could only build in a regeneration facility for repeat echos and a socket for footswitch operation, this unit would have more or less everything: a sort of poor musician's version of those expensive rack-mounting digital delay lines. Still, as it is it's got to be the most versatile box of tricks in this review and considering that, it offers pretty amazing value at only £90 ex VAT. This is definitely the one I would choose for my home recording and for use with my group's Custom Sound PA mixer amp, but whatever application you've got in mind I'd recommend that you give this one a try.

**TechSpec:** Input sensitivity: Min 30mV; Max 3V. Gain range: Unity to +40dB. Bandwidth: 13kHz. Delay range: 4 to 120mS. Sweep range: 0.03 to 1.2Hz. Hum and noise: -80dBm ref to input. Output impedance: 50 ohms. ■

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# Gibson Les Paul Artist

Robin Millar



More information from Norlin, 114 Charing Cross Road, London WC2. Gibson Les Paul Artist mp £680 ex VAT.

Robin Millar is big in France with his band Extraballe, and we suspect he may be slightly potty, too.

He inhaled instinctively as the long, slim fingers passed over the already taut denim, pausing briefly before slipping gently between them . . . sorry, for a moment I inadvertently slipped into the guise of Erik Schonn, star writer for *Sinnews* magazine. Lucky you spotted that, Ellen. So here we go:

'Go and catch a falling star/Get with child a mandrake root/Show me where all past years are/Or who cleft the devil's foot.' - John Donne.

Of course, as was typical with the metaphysical poet, the obsession with the passing of time, together with overtortured imagery is - shit! that's my Laurie Yeats piece for *Rhyme Times*, not due in till next Friday. Apart from the Amanda Bouter-Dogge piece for *Mews Life*, I'm stranded. Well, come on, chaps, have a heart, how would you like to have the task of an unbiased appraisal of a Gibson Les Paul?

I am going to make several presumptions. First, anyone who can afford to pay this much for a magazine must be serious enough to have played a Les Paul before, at least. Second, quite a few of you will have owned or will still own one. Third, you probably think they're pretty good. I will here and now state that I have used a mid-Sixties Custom as my main stage guitar for three years, so I suppose I can make a reasonably informed comparison. There doesn't seem a lot of point to going into detail over those aspects of the guitar which have already made this model unique.

When I were a lad, and Hovis were still made in't modern factory, instead of by two master bakers at 4m in stone basement off cobbled yard in Rotherham nowadays (*get to the point* - Ed) my heart would leap into my mouth everytime I saw the Gibson logo adorning the extremity of some TV or recording idol's axe. To me, the Hofner Verithin at 82 gns with Bigsby was the ultimate goal, a Les Paul no more than some fantastic dream. The feeling I got when I handed over £50 deposit at Top Gear and was handed my Deluxe, all gleaming and new, was that rare combination like when you get into the taxi after the Italian meal which has ruined you for two weeks and she simply gives the driver your address instead of saying, 'And then on to West Kensington.' Know what I mean?

I have changed Les Pauls many times since then and frankly (and fortunately) they are fairly consistent, so the glamour had worn pretty thin by the time there was a knock on my door two weeks ago. 'Gibson Artist from Norlin for Mr Millar, sign here.' The case was identical with my own, in fact I'm thinking of swapping - don't tell - so I almost casually unclipped and opened. The taste of Bolognese mixed with coffee and too many cigarettes was unmistakable. Wow! Even the most hardened Old Gibsonian cannot fail to thrill to the sight of the Artist Active. It's so bloody flash, it's

ridiculous. Metal everywhere, and a vintage sunburst that outshines even the original L5. It didn't even smell like another Les Paul.

Briefly, size, shape, neck, number and spacing of frets, pickup selector, badge, pickups and machines are exactly as with a Custom, so I won't dwell on them here. There are, however, several significant physical differences, which I shall round up now to give an overall picture and then come back in detail to those that merit explanation.

Starting at the head: usual gold-plated Kluson machines and very pearly Gibson logo. In place of the usual sailing-boat-mirrored-in-water *motif du milieu* is a highly ornate but rather pleasant LP insignia. The eye cannot then help but descend to the gleaming gold truss-rod cover. At first I thought the engraving would read, 'To Dennis and Linda on your wedding, 27th April 1979 Love from Sidney and Rita'. In fact it reads simply: *Les Paul Artist*.

If you turned it over, it would be the perfect place for those who like to give their Gibson a girlie name to inscribe Lucille or Beryl or whatever. Just below this is a chamfered - no Eric not camphor, no good for your nose trouble at all - brass nut. The whole headstock therefore looks like it should be on sale to Arabs in 'arods rather than strummers in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Nut-to-body, straight Les Paul Custom. Bizarre tailpiece with blackheads (*ibid* or *viz* or *qv* or whatever the hell it is - I'll talk about that later, OK?). Those nice new perspex knots with voyeuristic see-through numbers. Only three of them? And then, three little switches, all in a row, just below the tailpiece. Well, doctor? Hmmm, turn over Mr Paul, Les have a look at you. Well, you're a good healthy colour, a beautiful rich mahogany all over. But what's this . . . plastic backplate grossly enlarged with a central lesion! I may have to operate.

OK. Pick it up, put it on, plug it in: it's a little heavier than the Custom, which in my opinion means it's too heavy. An hour on stage and your left shoulder will look like the Rother Valley. Never mind. Here we are in passive mode - the guitar, that is - Vox AC30 humming as usual, and we're off.

I'm going to stick my neck out a bit here. I reckoned that at over £700, the electronics had better be pretty fancy. What I hadn't reckoned on was that I would find the best sounding and playing Les Paul made since 1961, and I've tried most of them. The pickups have been designed especially for this guitar and the sound, though identifiably Les Paul on all three pickup positions, has a pure strength and tonal range quite unheard of before. I enjoyed myself so much that I actually forget all about the actives for a good half-hour. And there's the rub. I very much hope that Gibson make all their normal Les Pauls just like they have this one from now on. It's a genuine



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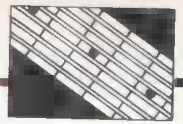


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Gibson among the gardenias... well, actually they're daffodils and I think that one there is a tulip. OK. Gibson among the greenery. No, it's black and white. Er...

improvement. Solid mahogany body; ebony fingerboard; maple neck and a Rolls Royce of a sound.

Now to the actives. The switch uppermost as you play turns on the active EQ. This consists of treble and bass controlled by two rotary tone-switches, each marked -5 through central 0 to +5. A nice touch is that these knobs have a subtle braking system on them at the zero position, so that you can feel with your fingers when the tone setting is flat. Very useful on stage. Rotate clockwise from here and you boost treble or bass respectively; anti-clockwise and you cut. The thing is that the normal tone-range of this guitar is so good that these circuits have a pretty extreme effect. They don't distort or muddle, but full treble is like having a circular saw attached to each eardrum, and full bass necessitated a re-cone on the Vox. No kidding. But with careful use, a player would be able to arrive at a pretty juicy 'favourite sound' whatever the inclination.

Next is the Expander. Flick it and the initial attack of a played note increases to an almost out-of-phase double clank, which is actually rather good, and the decay is cut off quickly afterwards: very good for picking or country

rock soloing where note-identification is at a premium.

Last of the three is the Compressor, and this is the only part of the guitar about which I have reservations (apart from the price). The blurp from Norlin advised me to turn down the volume pot (the third rotary control - one pot controls volume of both pickups, which is a necessary simplification, and a sensible one for the practical instrument). Good job I did. Like all compressors, it has a tendency to high frequency feedback. This one is particularly bad in this respect, and since its activation doubles the volume of the guitar, this could prove pretty annoying on stage. The compressor is set to high efficiency. The attack of a played note is cut drastically to the point of an automatic volume cut and the decay is then swelled electronically to give a long, even sustain. In fact, the sustain is more or less infinite. Gibson say that owners can adjust the compressor to suit them by looking inside. OK. Hmm. Beautifully designed and prepared circuits neatly arranged - but exposed. Really, to invite a musician to attack these entrails with a screwdriver strikes me as very foolish and highly dangerous.

Why on earth not put a small rotary switch near the Compressor tap so that such adjustment could be made a) without necessitating dismantling the guitar and possibly damaging it and b) as and when the player needed a slight change during a performance or session. Daft, that. In any case, after careful consideration I think a £50 Compressor pedal is better, more versatile, and more rational - for stage purposes at least. Most players use compression in certain passages of songs only, and you can't be pinning the giddy heights of your best solo as well as turning off a switch with your right hand. That's what guitarists' feet are for.

Interesting fact: these actives are powered by a 9V battery and the Compressor became much more usable when the guitar had been left for an hour or two. Why, oh, why don't all companies making active circuit guitars provide a cannon socket for alternative power supply and a variable voltage one at that, as this guitar actually is more at home with about eight volts going through it.

The Compressor and Expander together, although you would think they would cancel each other out, in fact work very like an MXR sustain unit, and make a good brash high energy sound for soloing. But once again with hand control, strictly studio stuff.

Sorry Gibson. I know it seems like I'm being hard on you but you have a lot to live up to, including price. Who on earth conjured up this violin-style tunable tailpiece? Yes, folks, at last it's here. Are you fed up with the same old routine? Tuning your guitar with the same boring ease using the left-hand and the excellent Kluson machine heads? Well now, thanks to advanced technology, you can tune the guitar again with the right hand. Only this time the little black knobs are so close together, and since you can't pluck and turn at the same time, you'll turn the wrong one at least 50% of the time, so putting your guitar out of tune again, and so enabling you to go through the whole exhilarating process again. I gave it time and serious effort, but really if you can't tune a guitar with one hand, why the hell should you fare any better with the other?

Maybe some people's right hands have a better sense of pitch. I'm not even going to say any more about this silly boffin's gadget, except that I would rather the guitar was 40 quid cheaper.

One other thing, and this is not an insult. I think it would be nice for Gibson to start putting coil-taps on *Les Pauls*. I have put my own on my *Custom*. It's very simple (though I wouldn't advise the guitarist in the street to have a go) and inexpensive, and it really does increase the versatility of the guitar a great deal.

To sum up: a gorgeous hunk of beefcake that floats like an armoured car and stings like a swarm of Corsican hornets. A great *Les Paul*, and if you can afford it, worth buying even if you never intend switching on any of the extras. I want it.

Now, where was I? Oh, yes... before slipping gently between his smooth... what? Oh, OK. Just coming...

Test amps: Vox AC30 and Fender Twin Reverb. □

# GRAHAM PARKER & GUILD

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# Setting Up – 2

Paul Henderson

'Prevention is the best cure.' It's a saying that you hear on many occasions relating to just about everything, it seems. But it's a fact. Generally, the more attention you pay to the former, the less you will have to worry about (and spend money on) the latter. So let's consider taking care of your bass so that repairs will hopefully be few and minor.

Unless you're a Pete Townshend type, your guitar will usually be fairly safe when it is around your neck, being played. Unfortunately, most guitars spend relatively little time in this position, and most of the time are stowed away in a case or propped in a corner somewhere. Just about every gig I go to these days I see guitars propped against speaker cabinets, balanced precariously on top of amps, or simply flat on the floor. Now it doesn't take much common sense to figure that none of these are very safe places for them to be. If a guitar falls over or gets stomped on you might get away with just having to retune it. On the other hand, bye-bye guitar. Prevention? Put it somewhere *safe*. Simple as that. Guitar stands are cheap but, it seems, uncool. A broken guitar neck and a cancelled gig are also uncool.

During playing, your bass, particularly the strings and fingerboard, collects sweat and dirt. After each playing the guitar should always be wiped clean. Use a piece of soft flannel or chamois and wipe the strings, fretboard, body and all hardware. Always do this before returning the guitar to its case and you won't have to work so hard when you get around to giving it an overall good clean up. Without a clean after each playing the strings particularly will get clogged with dirt and become uncomfortable to play as well as losing brightness and harmonic range. And *do* always keep it in a case when not being played. Getting into this habit will ensure that the guitar doesn't get left in the sun, or where something could spill on it, someone can sit on it or countless other things might happen to it.

And even when it's in a case you need to be careful where you leave it. Temperature and humidity can have disastrous effect, so take care not to leave it against radiators, hot pipes *etc*. If you leave it in a cellar in winter then you probably can't read anyway so there's no point my telling you not to. If your instrument is going to be stored for some length of time or if it's going to be transported, loosen the strings to relieve the tension on the neck.

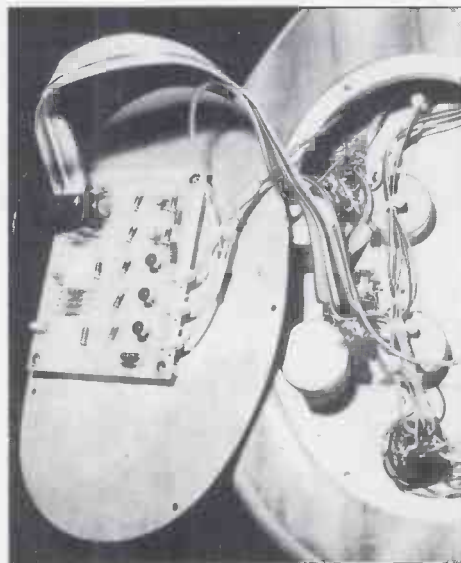
Three or four times a year you should set about giving your bass a thorough overhaul and clean, so let's have a look at some of the things you should do on these occasions, which will also cover some minor repairs that may be necessary.

As well as getting a good set of screwdrivers to fit all the different screws on your guitar (which I mentioned last month) you'll find that a couple of neck rests are invaluable. Make

sure the guitar is well supported and on a clean, smooth surface before you start any work on it. Other useful items are small pliers, small files, a small soldering iron and a large budget.

For proper access to the fingerboard you'll need to remove the strings, so while they are off give them a good clean with methylated spirit. Check them for winding breakages and worn spots. If they look OK and, before you removed them, sounded OK, then you need not fit new ones. With the strings off you can, unless you need to do some work on it first, give the fingerboard a clean in the following way. As dirt will have collected against the sides of the frets it is necessary to do a little more than just wiping with a cloth. Wipe the fingerboard very carefully with some very fine sandpaper or steel wool and linseed oil. The linseed oil will prevent the wood drying out, but make sure you remove all the excess oil.

One of the jobs you may need to do before



*Fiddling with the innards of an Alembic – not a job for beginners. (Not a bass for beginners, either, mate...)*

you clean the fingerboard is fret levelling. It's a job that often needs doing, even on new guitars, and luckily it's quite a simple operation.

Using a 12in smooth file, work the frets back and forth along the entire length of the neck, with the file used lengthways along the neck. Take care to apply an even pressure throughout the operation. This will level out the high points and smooth out small string grooves, but will also leave sharp edges. Use a small fret file a few times on each fret to round these off smoothly. If there are any frets sticking slightly out of the edges of the fretboard, file these down at an angle until they are flush. Finally, buff the entire length of the fretboard with fine sandpaper and steel wool as described above for cleaning. In all sanding and polishing rub the *length* of the board. Rubbing across will cause scratches.

For polishing the body of the bass there are many commercial polishes on the market and I

don't think it matters which one you choose to use. They all have instructions on the can and all seem to do the job just as well. If you still can't decide which one to use, choose the prettiest coloured can or the one with the nicest smell. Polishing is also about the only thing you can do to the machines. If a machine isn't holding the string securely the only thing to do is replace it. Repair personnel seem to be divided as to whether to lubricate machines: some say that oils wear certain metals, others say that regular lubrication is necessary. So I'll sit on the fence.

If you are ever in a position of needing a whole new set of machines then good ones are going to be expensive, although what you get for your money with the best models is, I think, worth the expense. But before you purchase any, make sure that (a) they will fit on to your make and model of guitar; and (b) that you can do or can afford to have done any work on the head that is necessary for them to be fitted. In fact, before you decide to do any repair job yourself consider the saving in doing it against what the cost might run to after you've botched it. Be brave, but be sensible.

Personally, the faults that I find most annoying with guitars are the ones to do with the electrics. You know the sort of thing: You plug in, switch on and... nothing. So you fiddle with all the controls on the guitar and amp, jiggle the lead, try a new lead *etc* and you still get nothing. And after you've finally hunted out the tool kit you give it one more try and it works perfectly. The reason I find these sort of things most annoying is because they have the effect of making the guitar totally useless, can happen just any time without warning, and yet can often be repaired in a matter of seconds once you get to the electrics. So even if you've never had any problems with electrics on your bass I still recommend that you give them a regular check and clean.

To get at them, remove the cover plate or the plate to which they are attached. Lift it off very carefully to avoid pulling any connecting wires loose. It's often the case that there are some connecting wires, usually earthing wires, which are so short that it's impossible to turn the plate upside-down to be able to see what you're doing. The best thing to do here is to disconnect them. Make a note of which wires come from where, and then use a soldering iron to free them from their connections. You can then take the whole thing away to a suitable work surface. It really does make things so much easier when you're not fiddling around trying to check things that you can't even see properly, never mind get your fingers to.

If it's the first time you've looked inside at the electrics it's a good idea at this point to make an accurate diagram of the components and their connecting wires. If there are several wires the same colour you can colour-code them with adhesive tapes and mark them on the diagram. If you ever find that any wires have broken from their connections it will, of course, be much easier to put things back in order with a diagram to refer to.

The pots (rotary control units) are the most likely to be, or become, faulty. Noisy pots, or ones that cut in and out are usually the result of

*Paul Henderson has been in bands throughout the 70s as well as being a roadie, a sound engineer and most things in between.*



dirt or wear. For cleaning them, get a can of *Electrolube* or some other spray electrical cleaner, and simply give a couple of squirts into the pot. Then, before the cleaner dries, rotate the pot control several times. Do that a couple of times and it should eradicate the problem.

If you ever need to replace a pot which has broken or completely worn out, take the old one with you to the shop to be sure of getting the correct replacement. If you have made a diagram of the wiring as mentioned earlier then there should be little problem in fitting the new one yourself. But if you're a real fingers-and-thumbs merchant and/or don't want to replace components yourself, roadies usually love messing about with soldering irons. So pop round to your local pub gig one evening and ask one of the genre for help. But be prepared to sit through a lecture of how they completely rebuilt the band's PA *etc, etc*, nodding attentively and feigning admiration.

When switches get dirty they cause a static-like noise when turned on and off. This, too, can usually be cured or prevented by cleaning with the spray cleaner. Spray some cleaner on to both sides of a small piece of paper and then slide the paper between the contacts with the switch in the closed position. Do this two or three times to ensure that all dust is removed.

The connection points on the jack socket can also be cleaned with a piece of card coated with spray cleaner. At the same time, make sure that the long connector of the jack-socket springs firmly and securely against the plug when the plug is inserted. And while we're on the subject, give the jack plugs a clean and a check.

If the soldered connections on the plugs look messy or loose it's best to unsolder the wires, remove the old solder, snip off the end of the wires and make fresh connections. If the lead itself seems faulty then the only good solution is to replace it entirely, unless you can locate the break close to either end. In that case you can cut off the faulty section and replace the jack.

Damage to leads is most often caused by carelessness. So when removing the lead from a guitar or amp, always grip the plug itself rather than yanking the lead. Plastic jacks are a waste of money: tread on them once and they've had it. Don't buy leads with moulded jacks either, because you can't get inside them. It's worth the expense to buy a good, heavy-duty lead with metal jacks. If you are going to bother doing the maintenance that I've been talking about, don't let something like a faulty lead ruin a gig for you.

As far as pickups go, looking after them is really just a matter of giving them a clean to remove dirt and grease from the polepieces or from the pickup as a whole. If they do go wrong I'm afraid that replacement is the answer. Rewinding is a thing of the past and would probably cost more than a new one anyway. If you need to fit a new pickup and decide on the same type as the old one, then with your diagram you should again be able to do it yourself. If on the other hand you decide to fit a different model, then unless you are *sure* about how to connect it, take it to a shop and get it done professionally. Or try the roadie again! Bear in mind that to fit a different type may also mean enlarging the slot in the guitar body or

electrics plate, getting a new electrics plate or whatever, and could therefore work out to be a bigger, more difficult and more expensive job than you anticipated.

If at this point you are wondering why I haven't mentioned important items like the bridge, truss rod, nut, setting the action *etc*, I haven't forgotten, I talked about them in last month's article on setting up. And if there's something I haven't mentioned this month or last month, then yes, I have forgotten.

When you consider how long guitars spend in cases and the amount of protection a good case can provide for a guitar in transit or storage, I'm surprised that a really good case is still considered to be an unnecessary luxury. What's the point of spending a lot of money on a guitar, time doing the above jobs on it, and then, when it's most vulnerable, 'protecting' it in something with the durability of a bin liner? Forget soft cases except for using as bin liners.

It makes sense that the more valuable a bass, the more it's worth spending on a case. Flight cases are the best deal going in that they afford greatest protection and are good value. A flightcase may cost three times the price of a chipboard one but it will outlast more than three of them. So you save money in the long run and also know that even in the hands of roadies your flightcased guitar has a good chance of survival.

Finally three words: *get it insured*.

So, now that it's all clean and working amazingly well, you've got time to do some practise before cleaning it again

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# Pearl Export kit

Pearl drums first arrived in the early Seventies, and were initially imported into this country by Dallas Arbiter, and then by Norlin. They have now established their own factory in sunny north Acton which was opened in September 1979 – the two men from Norlin who had done the most to pioneer the name of Pearl in Britain, Gerry Evans and Glyn Thomas, were installed at the helm.

It was to the factory that I went to try out the latest kit to join the Pearl range, the *Export*. The kit was formally unveiled at the recent trade show in Frankfurt, but has only been available in Britain since June. The kit that I tried out has a 14in x 22in bass drum, 8in x 12in and 9in x 13in mounted tom toms, 16in x 16in floor tom, 6½in x 14in snare drum, one upright cymbal stand, one cymbal stand with a boom arm, a hi-hat stand, snare drum stand and bass pedal. No stool or cymbals are included.

With the exception of the snare, the drums all have 7-ply wood shells. The bass drum has 10 rods and claws on either side. The hoops are metal and very sturdy and an additional plus is the small rubber strip located on the batter head hoop for fixing the bass pedal to. This allows the pedal to grip the hoop securely. There is a felt strip provided as a damper, but most drummers I know prefer to install their own damping devices (cushions to foam rubber). As with all bass drums with two complete heads on, the sound was rather boomy, but it was possible to get a really good bassy response even on a concrete floor. Removal of the front head revealed the interior of the wooden shell to be of a good workmanlike finish with no obvious faults or cracks. The spurs fold away and once adjusted are held in position by a strong wing-nut. They have rubber tips which, if desired, screw back up the spur to expose metal spikes for extra purchase.

The drums are all double headed, the mounted toms with six lugs either side and the floor tom with eight. The tom tom holder is of the high quality for which Pearl has become renowned. A large receiver plate is set towards the middle front of the bass drum holding a single post. This post in turn has two clamp sockets and two more tubular posts inserted into these sockets and the tom toms respectively. The clamps are Memrilock so that once you've achieved your ultimate setting, there's no fear of losing it. There are wing-nuts for adjusting the joined sections. The whole system



## David Sinclair

works extremely effectively and is as solid as a rock – some remarkable hardware for a kit of this price.

The floor tom is pretty much what you'd expect; the three legs angled outwards at the bottom, knurled at the top for extra purchasing power from the wing-nuts that hold them in position. Personally, I found that the toms sounded a bit dull when slightly damped – though it's a sound I've heard a lot of drummers use, especially for recording purposes. (Also, I might add, the acoustics of the Pearl factory are a far cry from those of most recording studios!) With the dampers completely off they assumed a far more characterful tone, especially the floor tom (again a deep resonant sound) which, used in conjunction with the bass drum, provided a lot of power at the bottom end of the noise spectrum.

The 6½in x 14in metal shell snare is again an impressive piece of equipment when one considers the overall price of the kit: a 20-strand snare held firmly in place by a tough nylon strip, and a throw-off action, all fully adjustable. It has a good crisp sound and a feel of quality. All the drums are fitted with Remo *Ambassador* drum heads.

The stands on this, the deluxe version of the *Export*, all have double brace legs which naturally increase their stability. The snare stand is the basket type, and can be easily angled. However, one slight fault was that the stand failed to maintain the snare drum angle when subjected to even a small amount of pressure. A good firm ratchet at the bottom of the basket would be an improvement. I found the same problem with the boom cymbal stand

where the boom arm locks into the upright. An above average heavy cymbal being pounded for any length of time would begin to slip, I think.

The tilters on the cymbal stands were fine, however: strong and easily adjustable, ensuring a clean cymbal sound. The hi-hat stand had a comfortable footplate, and a good snappy response. I could find no fault with it.

The bass pedal has a simple spring mechanism that provides a lot of power. Unfortunately, on the pedal I was testing the cast block (holding the beater) mounted on the cam assembly was missing the Allen screw which is instrumental in holding the block to the crosspiece of the cam. Accordingly the block (and therefore the beater) kept slipping from side to side. An easy problem to rectify, provided you've got a spare screw and Allen key (an Allen key is provided with the kit). All the same, I wouldn't relish the thought of trying to fix this in a hurry on a darkened stage. This aside, the pedal is a model of simplicity and efficiency, and I particularly like the steel link between foot pedal and cam which I prefer to a fibre strap. There is an adjustable toe-stop, and two screw-in spurs keep the whole thing firmly in place.

Having thoroughly checked the kit over and played it myself I asked Kendal Kay, a talented drummer who works at Pearl, to have a quick bash to let me hear the sound 'out front'. It was an extremely agreeable noise, and confirmed my opinion that this kit has got what it takes. Visually, too, the kit was a delight to behold. The yellow flash set off by the *Black Beat* front bass drum head, the double brace stands, and the inclusion of a boom stand, all conspired to give the kit a look that belied its extremely modest mp. Pearl have obviously given this aspect a great deal of consideration. The kit is available in a variety of colours (silver, gold, blue, red, green, orange, and wine red).

The companion *Export* kit, the *0522*, offers the same drums except the snare (5in x 14in), single brace stands (with no boom), *Soundmaster* heads, and a slightly different pedal for £325 (inc VAT). The kits are all made in Taiwan, which must go part of the way to explaining the very modest prices. I think Pearl are on to a winner here – there doesn't seem to be much competition in the field of fully professional kits in this price range. Gerry Evans at Pearl claims that the only problem he's encountered so far has been supplying the drums fast enough to satisfy the demand in the shops, and on the basis of my study of them I find no cause to doubt his word. □

David Sinclair is drummer with *The London Zoo*.

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# Matamp V-14

Gary Cooper

Regular readers of both *Sound International* and *Beat Instrumental* will recognise the name behind this month's review – Matamp – for very different reasons. *SI* readers will possibly recall that Matt Mathias (hence Matamp) was the man who made those excellent early Orange valve amps, and *Beat* readers may possibly recall a devastating review some time back of this particular amp by Jimmy Bain. So why look at it again? The reasons are simple. I was surprised by Bain's review of this amp; he really took exception to it for reasons which didn't seem to be those necessary in assessing amplification – like its weight, for example. Secondly, I've used Matamps before and always liked them – could Matt have got it so wrong? It was a bit like hearing that the latest Aston Martin had a weak engine. I had to find out for myself. For *SI* readers anyway, it's news. For *Beat* readers, another point of view to mull over.

In fact, the Aston Martin analogy isn't a bad one. Matt's tiny operation, based in Huddersfield, is very much in that English coach-building tradition. His products are hand made, carefully crafted and very expensive. There's not much semi-pro mileage in a combo costing £553.72 inc VAT, but that's no reason to disparage a piece of equipment. Quality costs money and, put alongside traditional professional guitar amps from the States (Mesa, Fender, Music Man, Ampeg *et al*), this Matamp seems pretty much in the same price range for a quality built product. The Matamp's competitors are from that league if you're talking about American products, and something like a Burman or Bird Brothers if you're talking about British amps. To put it another way, you wouldn't buy a Matamp V14 if you were out shopping for any old combo – you'd hunt one down and pay the price.

The V14 is massive. Betraying its Yorkshire origins it has that solid, no-nonsense look. 'Made in Britain' is screaming out of it – it invites you to take a pair of hobnailed boots and kick it – challenging you to prove that it's stronger than you are. You think I exaggerate? Not at all. As Jimmy Bain pointed out in his review for *Beat*, the Matamp is heavy, so heavy that it really is a struggle to lift and carry. But does that matter? You see this isn't one of those interminable Nasty Transistor Combos with all the output of a Hong Kong tranny radio with a duff PP3 – no, this V14 is as loud as a stack and you've got to compare the exceptional weight of it with lugging, say, a 100 watt head and a 4x12 around, not with some solid state 30z wonder. Anyway, the sort of guitar player who can afford one of these will probably not have to lug gear to gigs in the back of a rusty Mini. This is a pro amp and it will

probably travel in an aluminium flightcase with plenty of hands to get it into position. It isn't that heavy for heaven's sake, anyway. I carried it up and down my stairs to photograph it and I haven't had to seek out my truss – yet!

The causes of the Matamp V14's weight are simple. It has four EL34 valves and massive transformers to regulate the juice that the beastie thrives on. It has a 15in speaker and particularly solid framework in the cabinet. Put that all together and you must have weight – if you haven't, you have every right to expect that someone has scrimped somewhere along the line. Matt hasn't, and the V14 is solid and workmanlike in its construction, impeccably well made and sturdy.

Following the modern pattern, the amp has two Protex flightcase handles, which are infinitely better than the thin plastic shopping-bag handles screwed on top of cheapies. These Protex handles are expensive but, as any of you readers with flightcases will know, they don't fall off!

The V14 has an open back which, as I said when reviewing the Burman last month, is one of those examples of practice defeating theory. Some will argue that open-backed enclosures are a cheat. I maintain that all my favourite combos have them. So does this one. Un-

fortunately, the open back on this model does invite my first criticism. It's just one of those compromises where, I suspect, Matt has gone for easy cooling of the output valves by leaving them very accessible. Personally, I like to see totally enclosed electronics. The provision of a rubberised metal grille across the back of the V14 would make it totally safe. I called Matt to discuss this with him and he tells me that he is already thinking the same way and that this might be done later. I hope so: the amp would be far safer if it were thus protected.

The on-board 15in speaker is of British manufacture and is a reasonably excellent one. It is joined in the bowels of the cabinet by a Hammond Accutronics spring reverb and a Velcro-sealed pouch in which you can store the footswitch, an integral part of the amp's working as I shall explain later. Back panel facilities are fine. The amp has a captive mains lead (which I prefer), a variable input voltage (by a plug-in system), one 1A HT fuse (with the safety conscious legend, 'Do not use slo blo,' inscribed by it), one 3A fuse for mains, a DI/slave output jack socket, a five-pin socket for the footswitch, variable output impedance selector (again a male/female plug-in type to prevent accidental mistaken impedances



Gary Cooper is a regular writer on equipment for *UK* and *European* magazines, and is an ex-editor of *Beat Instrumental*.

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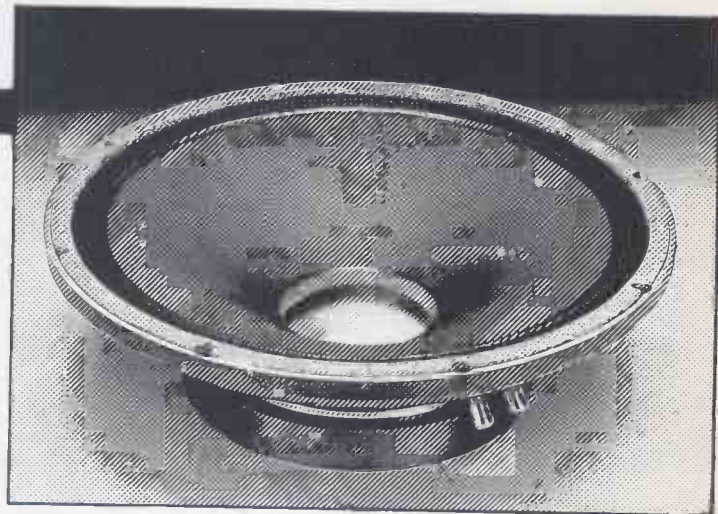
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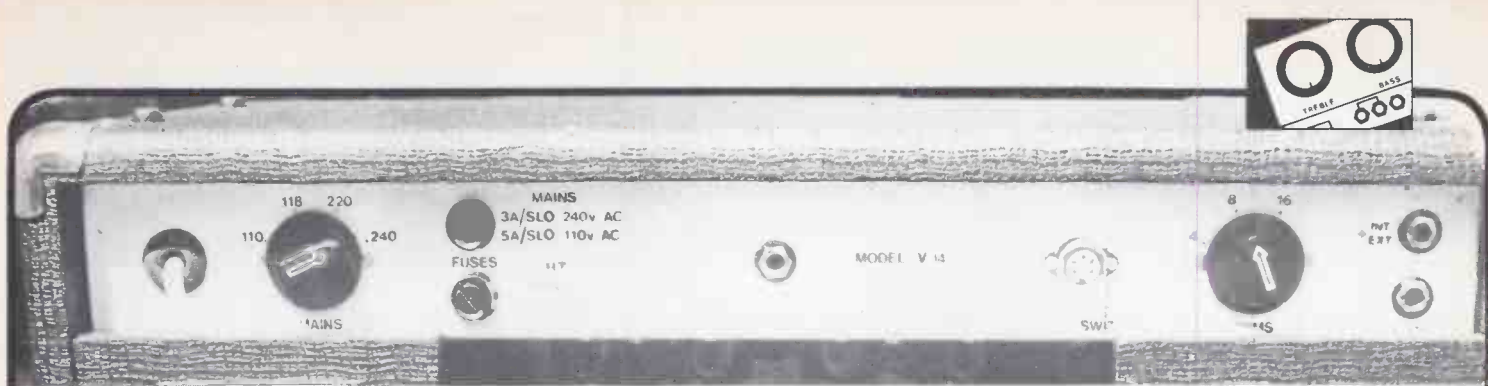
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being set) and finally a jack for external speakers only and another for internal plus external speakers. All you'd really ask for, then, and very nicely done.

The front panel features twin inputs, twin volume controls, a bright switch, boost switch, master volume, bass, treble, middle, presence and reverb controls and a single on/off switch. Matamps have never featured standbys for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Matt feels, they are rarely used as people do not leave amps on for hours and, anyway, a valve amp only takes 30 seconds to reach operating levels and, very curiously but quite rightly, he is inclined to question the thought of 500 volts shooting across the normal standby switch when it is flicked on. Matt reckons they can arc, especially when the contacts get worn, and I'm inclined to accept this worrying logic which, I must admit, had never occurred to me previously.

The V14 is not as simple to use as it looks. At first sight you'd be tempted to plug in to channel one, flick the boost and bright switches in, stamp on the accelerator and off you'd go. This is what I did first off and hurt my ears in so doing. Point one. The Matamp V14 is the loudest combo I've ever heard. I don't give a damn what else there is on the market, this is bloody painful, probably working at around 120 watts *before* clipping and the gods alone know what thereafter. In fact, this *isn't* how you're supposed to use this amp. What you do is use the footswitch. This is a three-switch, very heavy-duty, stove-enamelled job with little LEDs over the buttons labelled 'boost', 'override channel' and 'reverb'. The trick is to plug into channel two, set that against the master volume for your rhythm sound and then balance volume one against volume two and the master. Then, using the footswitch, you bring the relay-controlled channels in and out to obtain the sound you want, using either channel two with or without boost, on its own, or with channel one. The effect is to enable you to get some of the raunchiest rock guitar sounds that I've yet heard and thus to enable you to switch between a sort of Keith Richard rhythm sound and a screaming lead solo tone with one silent push of a button. That doesn't make the Matamp unique, but it does make it very workable.

The tone controls on the V14 are active and effective. Curiously, the middle and presence do by far and away the most impressive jobs of the lot (well, perhaps it isn't *that* curious) and provide the Matamp with excellent tonal variation. Before I really get down to the question of sound, however, I'd just like to mention the reverb. This is one of those excellent (and ubiquitous) *Accutronics* lines but (as you may well have noticed if you've used many of them), they don't all sound the same. The point about spring-line reverbs is not so much what they are as how they're

driven. According to Matt, Hammond advise manufacturers who use them to drive them hard. Matt doesn't. Driven fairly low, the Hammond is so clean as to be almost a revelation. On the other hand, it will feed back in the V14 if used flat out with the amp up high, and this low-driving of it may be helping that to happen. But it is such a deep, clean reverb that I cannot imagine anyone wanting it to be set up high enough to feed back, so we'll let that one go. Come to mention it, I'm not at all sure that I can imagine anyone wanting to use the amp up above about number 2 on the 10 point volume scale but there are just a *few* nutters around, aren't there!

So on to the sound. I described the V14 as having one of the raunchiest guitar sounds for rock that I'd heard and, indeed, this was my initial reaction. After all I *like* rock and so I tend to start there and work backwards when I'm testing amps. So, having knocked myself out with a rock sound, I was somewhat astonished to find that I could get this creature sounding so sweet and warm that there was plenty in it for a jazz guitarist too. Yes, and even country despite a 15in speaker.

In fact this business of the 15in speaker is odd. For bass I love them: the best size there is, I reckon. For guitar, well, I'd normally have said that a 15in was just too bassy. Certainly there is excessive bass here if you want it and I can see that Matt has *had* to use a 15in speaker as I doubt that any speaker maker would guarantee single 12in designs to soak up this sort of output power. I really *do* mean this, by the way – the V14 is painfully, almost ridiculously, loud. Having opted for a 15in speaker that could take the juice without blowing after a few weeks on the road, Matt must have realised that the treble would drop a bit. He could have gone for metal-domed speakers (and he did tell me that he has tried them), but these are probably too harsh for anyone who wants a sweet tone. What he's done, therefore, is put a bright switch into the circuit which more than compensates for the presence of a 15in.

The only problem is that the bright switch is at the 'hot' end of the circuit and Matt has declined to put a footswitch function on the board to handle it due to the problems of noise. In practice this doesn't seem to matter. I used the switch 'in' all the time and got an amazing variety of tones, but I would have liked to have seen it included, somehow, on the footswitch panel. Used all the time, the bright effect is fantastic and you really wouldn't notice that you were driving hard through a 15in speaker. The Boost, too, is effective. It really drives those valves hard and injects a thoroughly roguish overload into the sound which is quite suitable for laying waste one's audiences ears.

In short, then, I found the Matamp V14 one of the most rewarding combos I've ever tried, certainly on a par with the American imports

and quite capable of standing up against the British competition and holding its own. This is all rather disturbing for me, because I went on record last issue as calling the Burman 501 combo the best there is. I would now have to accept that the Matamp V14 is up there with Burman and, while admitting that there are differences between the two, I would strongly suggest that anyone thinking of buying the one should also investigate the other. Both have so much to offer. This constant re-appraisal of what the Yanks call 'the state of the art' is a natural part of life, I suppose, but it is very disturbing for a conservative soul like me. I like to have my heroes set and feel secure that nothing can challenge them, at least for a while. Now I've found yet *another* amp which can take on anything else and give it a pretty hard time. Oh well, so it goes.

The question is, how can two reviewers like Jimmy Bain and myself disagree so violently? The answer is, I just don't know. The Matamp is heavy (which seemed to be Bain's main objection to it) and it is expensive. But, as I've already said, it is as loud as most 100 tops and 4x12s so the weight seems a bit of a non-starter to me. Its price is not much worse than quite a few other amps I've tried in this quality range. This one will just have to go down to the 'different strokes for different folks' principle, I suggest.

On summation, then, I contend that the Matamp V14 is a brilliantly designed, incredibly well made amp which can stand in any company whatsoever. They aren't easy to find in the shops (particularly in the south of England). Matt's telephone number is Huddersfield (0484) 34575 in case you feel sufficiently inspired to give him a call. Honestly, if you've got this sort of money to spend and you want a versatile, loud, valve combo of unshamed quality, you really must do yourself the favour of not buying anything else until you've checked out one of these. I'm not saying that you won't prefer a Burman or a Mesa (although I'd be *most* surprised if you did prefer the latter!), just that this V14 is in the same league as those two and deserves equal consideration.

The Matamp V14 proves to me that Britain is still parsecs ahead of the Americans when it comes to turning out guitar amps, especially if you add the one-off or small-volume people like Matamp into the equation. Furthermore, having now found two amps in my first two reviews for *SI* which appear to set new standards, I'd suggest that our home-based manufacturers are pulling further ahead – now isn't *that* a rarity? What we need to do now is to see if we can do the same thing with guitars! (See Shergold article on p31.)

I do promise that I'll try to find something a little less raveworthy for next month, otherwise this reviewing is going to get boring. I'm being spoiled for heaven's sake! □

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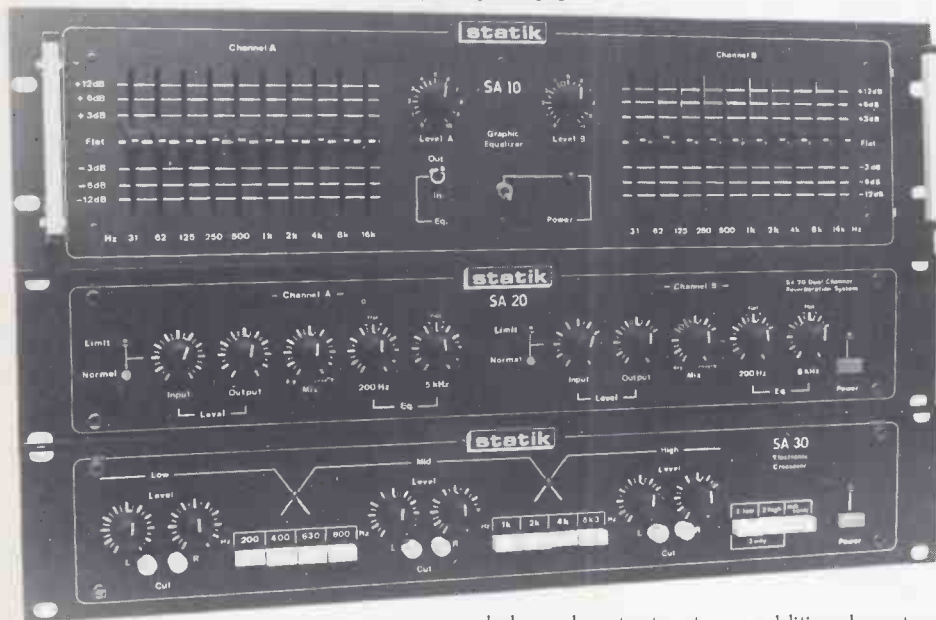
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# The Statik Range

Mel Lambert



Klark-Teknik hardly needs any introduction as a manufacturer of excellent graphic equalisers, analogue and digital delay lines. DN27 mono  $\frac{1}{2}$ -octave and DN22 stereo 11-band graphics have become almost an industry standard in large recording studios and PA rigs; and the DN34 Analogue Time Processor – see George Chkiantz' rave review in the June 1979 issue of *SI* – is considered by many engineers to be one of the most flexible and nicest-sounding ADT/flanger/vibrato/chorus/echo units around. There's no denying, however, that, on price at least, most Klark-Teknik gear is aimed specifically at the big-league studios and up-market PA facilities.

Good news then for the small-studio fraternity and live-sound operators, because a recently-formed sister company to Klark-Teknik, known as Statik Acoustics, has come up with a nice range of moderately-priced ancillary and effect units, designed especially for the more cost-conscious end of the market. At present the Statik range comprises the Model SA10 stereo 10-band graphic equaliser (£280), SA20 dual spring reverb (£340), and SA30 stereo 3-way active crossover unit (£280). (Also under development, and which should be available within a couple of months: the SA100 analogue delay/flanger/ADT processor, expected to cost in the region of £550.)

Being the first unit to come off the production line, model SA10 graphic is clothed in a slightly different package to the SA20 and SA30. In contrast to a combination of beige rear chassis and black front-panel found on the reverb and crossover, the graphic's case is all-black with carrying handles mounted on the front. The SA10's front panel occupies 5½ inches of standard 19-inch rack space, while the other pair measure 3½ (or 2-U) in height.

Also the graphic is provided with unbalanced inputs and outputs on  $\frac{1}{4}$ in jacks, while the reverb and crossover come with electronically-balanced inputs, plus parallel XLR and jack connectors for added flexibility. Units can also be supplied with transformer-

balanced outputs at an additional cost of £16.50 per channel. All inputs are of high impedance (typically 47k $\Omega$ ) and outputs will drive into loads down to 600 $\Omega$ ; no problem with interfacing Statik units with all but the most perverse consoles, amplifiers and other studio or PA gear.

I understand, however, that in the not too distant future the SA10 is due to appear in an identical case to the reverb and crossover, complete with XLR and jack input/output connectors.

External construction and internal electronics layout of all three presently-available units are of the highest calibre. Front-panel layout throughout the range is clear and uncluttered, making it very easy to find the required control without too much difficulty. Mains input is via a rear-panel IEC-style plug, located next to a clearly marked fuse holder. All three units look as if they would withstand a hard life out on the road, as well as in the less traumatic environment of a recording studio.

## SA10 Graphic Equaliser

Controls fitted to the front panel comprise two rows of vertically-mounted slide faders, calibrated on standard ISO octave centres from 31Hz to 16kHz, and offering up to 12dB of cut or boost at each centre frequency. Centre-detent positions fitted to each fader make it easy to find the off position at each setting; all faders proved extremely smooth in operation with just the right amount of stiffness or resistance to movement. Each channel also features an input level control, which enables up to 15dB of make-up gain to be applied before an input signal passes to the bank of filters. Unity overall gain is provided at an input level setting of 6; turning the control below this value attenuates the input level setting of 6; turning the control below this value attenuates the input, and above offers up to 15dB of boost. This is particularly handy when working with recording or PA consoles equipped with, for example, -10dBV monitor outputs, since the input can be boosted to maintain a decent

signal-to-noise ratio or, in the case of, higher output levels, reduced to prevent overload distortion.

Equally useful, an EQ in/out switch retains the overall gain setting, but simply bypasses the entire filter section for quick A/B comparisons. And to protect your power amps and loudspeakers, a relay and timer circuit waits a couple of seconds before connecting up the output after mains supply has been turned on. (No more loud thumps and blown HF drivers due to sudden mains surges, or DC offset voltages appearing across the output during the first few seconds of operation.)

I tested the SA10 graphic with a variety of music and found it to be very smooth and controlled in operation. During what must surely be the most extreme test of any graphic equaliser, I cut every frequency apart from the 2kHz band, which was then boosted to a maximum of 12dB. Even with such a bizarre overall response, the resultant sound was still precise and well-behaved; no nasty ringing or 'squashing' of the peaks at all. While not for one minute would I suggest that such conditions will ever be encountered in real life, nevertheless it's still nice to know that at extreme operating conditions the SA10 behaves itself and doesn't louse up the sound in any way. Stereo image stability was also very good, with no perceptible wander around the soundfield. And so long as a reasonable input/output level is established, there should never be any problems with transient information being clipped or otherwise distorted by the graphic.

Technically, the SA10 stood up well to a couple of measurements I made. With all faders flat, overall frequency response was found to be well within  $\pm 0.5$ dB from 20Hz to 20kHz, crosstalk around 84dB at 1kHz, equivalent input noise 92dBm (A-weighted) and total harmonic distortion under 0.01% at 1kHz (unity overall gain with 0dB input/output). A creditable performance from any graphic, let alone one costing only £280.

## SA20 Spring Reverb

Containing two totally independent channels of reverberation, the SA20 features front-panel input, output and mix controls (the latter continuously variable from 'dry' to 'reverb'), plus a useful two-band EQ section for each channel. Setting up the correct input level really couldn't be simpler: input gain is increased until a 'normal' LED remains permanently on, and a companion 'limit' LED just begins to be illuminated by the occasional transient or peak. It's practically impossible to overload the input to each spring unit, since a built-in limiter – which signifies its beginning to come into operation by flashing the limit LED – does its best to stop any nasty transient that could so easily lead to the characteristic boings, clangs and crashes produced by most spring reverb units.

The output from each spring can be individually tailored by means of the two-band EQ section, which provides up to 10dB of cut or boost at 200Hz and 5kHz. These allow more warmth or 'body' to be added to a sound – by boosting the low end – or to take out some top-end sparkle – by cutting back on high-

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frequencies – before the resultant output is mixed with the dry, unprocessed signal and passed to the rear-panel connectors.

Some extended listening tests of the SA20 were also carried out at Gateway Studios in Wandsworth. Using a stereo echo send from Gateway's Soundcraft 1624 console, I was able to investigate the stereo stability of reverb patterns created from a mono source connected to both inputs. By monitoring the resultant echo return on its own as the send was being panned between left and right outputs, I could listen out for image shifts as the sound died away in the stereo soundfield. I'm pleased to say that the SA20 passed such tests with flying colours. Not only is the reverb pattern extremely realistic – given the limitations of any spring-based system – but it remains smooth and stable during the decay period. I would estimate the decay time to be around two seconds, just about right for most instruments and vocals. Due to a certain amount of high-frequency crosstalk, which cannot be avoided in spring reverbs, image stability was slightly worse for female vocal tracks and other material containing a reasonable proportion of top-end frequencies. Given this admittedly slight limitation, however, the SA20 is capable of producing a very pleasant and stable stereo reverb pattern on most material.

At full monitor gain the SA20 was found to be very quiet indeed; no problem with hiss and other grot clouding up your final mix. Also it proved virtually impossible to overload the spring with fast transients. The only times that the unit protested and produced a characteristic 'twang' sound came while working with a high-level snare or cymbal input. I suspect that the limiter's attack time isn't quite fast enough to stop such short-lived transients, which pass through undetected and cause the occasional nasties. However, by reducing the input gain – or rolling off the top end when working with cymbals, in particular – the effect can be reduced quite significantly. It must be remembered that reverb on drums and other percussive instruments, which may cause one or two problems, will almost certainly be well down in the final mix, and the odd rattle or two should go unnoticed.

Because of the inherent limitations of crosstalk at high frequencies, setting up each channel to operate independently of one another has to be done with some care. You can run into problems, for example, while trying to process a vocal through channel A then panning the echo return hard left, while simultaneously using channel B to provide echo on a snare or cymbal panned hard right in the final mix. What you end up with is a slight spread of vocal and snare reverb across the centre of the soundfield. However, so long as you don't ask too much of the unit – such as expecting complete isolation between channels, and refrain from panning echo returns to extreme edges of the mix – it can, at a pinch, be used to provide two reasonably-independent channels of reverb. Rely on common sense and you shouldn't go far wrong.

One particular aspect on which the SA20 can be faulted, however, is on its degree of isolation from mechanical vibration. Like any spring system, it is rather prone to picking up air and floor-borne vibrations, particularly if mounted in a rack unit close to monitor loudspeakers. Each reverb unit has been

suspended inside the metal case on short springs which, to my mind at least, could have been a little stiffer, and probably incorporate some form of damping (perhaps a piece of rubber or elastic to reduce the amount of spring bounce). As it is, you need to be careful not to jar the case, or mount it too close to any loud sound sources. Once again though, so long as care is exercised in finding a permanent or temporary home for the SA20, you shouldn't experience too many difficulties.

Running a few test tones through the unit, I found that the reverb channel had a bandwidth of approximately 35Hz to 7.5kHz, and a signal-to-noise ratio of 80dBm A-weighted; once again a pretty respectable performance from a

The SA30 stereo crossover is a three-way active unit with pushbutton selection of the two crossover frequencies. The low-frequency crossover point can be set to 200, 400, 630 or 800Hz, and the upper to 1k, 2k, 4k or 6.3kHz. In this way it is possible to tailor the passband of each output to suit the bass, mid-range and tweeters you plan to use, both now and in the future. In addition, each of the three channels features a separate level control for left and right outputs, plus cut switches to allow each amplifier feed to be heard on its own. A sub-sonic filter, which provides a steep 46dB/octave cutoff below 22Hz, can also be switched in to remove unwanted low-frequen-



spring-based system, and one of the quietest – both subjectively as well as technically – that I have come across.

### SA30 Electronic Crossover

Until somebody comes up with a loudspeaker drive unit that is capable of handling all frequencies from 20Hz to 20kHz at reasonable sound levels, we are going to have to make do with crossovers. By splitting the audio spectrum into discrete bands, a crossover ensures that each loudspeaker unit – bass driver, mid-range horns or treble tweeters – is only fed with the particular range of frequencies it can comfortably handle. Cheaper passive crossovers may be perfectly satisfactory for domestic hi-fis, but will seldom be able to cope with the kind of levels encountered in live sound rigs, or for studio monitoring. Passive crossovers are particularly prone to overloading around the crossover points, and can easily cloud up the bottom and top end. Also very few offer any means of adjusting crossover frequencies or output level to each individual drive unit, which means that tailoring a design to work with a chosen monitoring configuration is often very much a matter of compromise.

A far better approach is to insert an active crossover between the console output (or after

cy rumble and, to a certain extent at least, troublesome mains hum. Like the SA10 graphic, a built-in relay and delay circuit ensures that powering up the crossover doesn't provide a nasty thump in your monitors. Also available as an optional extra is a clear plastic security cover which, once installed, prevents access to all front-panel controls except the mains on/off switch.

The SA30 is factory-adjusted to accommodate standard 0dBm input and output levels, and provides unity overall gain with output controls set to maximum. A pair of internal presets may be adjusted to suit the operating levels of almost any console/monitor amp combination. (Statik quote a nominal operating range of -20 to +21dBm using various combinations of input gain trim and output level settings.)

The crossover can also be used with a two-way or bi-amplified monitoring system. By selecting the appropriate front-panel pushbutton – labelled two-way low or high – different frequency bands will be presented to the low-, mid- and high-frequency outputs. In the two-way low setting, all frequencies below the lower crossover point are routed to the low-frequency output, and those above to the mid-range output. Or by selecting the two-way high position, all frequencies below the upper



a graphic equaliser if you're using one) and monitor amplifiers. By making use of electronic circuitry to provide separate line-level outputs for low-, mid- and high-range power amps, the degree of overall control and operational flexibility is far greater than that offered by a passive device. A good active crossover should offer a reasonable choice of crossover frequencies, and also enable each output to be varied in level to suit the matching requirements of subsequent amplifiers and drive units. (Sure you can often adjust the input level on each of your amps, but how much better to have all the relevant controls grouped together on one front-panel.)

crossover point appear at the mid-range output, and those above at the high output. This allows either a high or low crossover frequency to be set up for different monitoring requirements.

With only a rather limited amount of time to carry out subjective listening tests, I was only able to try the crossover on my own home-built Wharfedale monitors. Normally these are fed from a Revox A78 power amp through a passive crossover into the separate 12-inch bass driver and 5-inch mid/high tweeter. Having set up the SA30 as a two-way high-frequency (2kHz) crossover, I then used the



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# STUDIO FOCUS





A78 to drive the two bass drivers and a Quad 405 for the pair of tweeters. The resultant difference in sound was almost like chalk and cheese. Bottom-end response, especially, became more full and rounded, while the high frequencies were less brittle and clouded by inadequate separation from bottom-end signals. Transient response was also very good; no trace of clipping or intermodulation distortion could be detected at all.

To check out the phase response at the crossover points – an important consideration if you want to maintain linear phase across the entire audio spectrum – I inverted the phase of the crossover input relative to the output from

my Teac Model 5 mixer, and then returned the low-, mid- and high-range outputs to separate input channels on the desk. By combining all three outputs with the original, I was able to listen out for phase anomalies in the 'processed' signal. Results, considering the price of the unit, were very good indeed. My only complaint would be that the mid-range suffers from more than a little phase shift around the crossover points, but during subsequent listening tests these didn't appear to be lousing up the overall sound to any noticeable degree. To ensure perfectly linear phase response at all frequencies (or as good as is technically possible) would necessitate the use of higher-

order Butterworth or even Bessel-function filters, which simply don't come cheap. All in all, the SA30 does a respectable job of sorting out the different frequency bands, yet doesn't cost the earth.

Turning to technical matters, total harmonic distortion at any output level up to +10dBm was found to be well under 0.01%, signal-to-noise ratio less than -95dBm A-weighted; a creditable performance. I also plotted the frequency response of each crossover filter at 0dBm input and output, which are shown on this page together with the mid-range output for a low-frequency crossover point of 630Hz and a high of 4kHz. As can be seen, each curve provides a smooth roll-off above or below the respective crossover point at a slope of 18dB/octave.

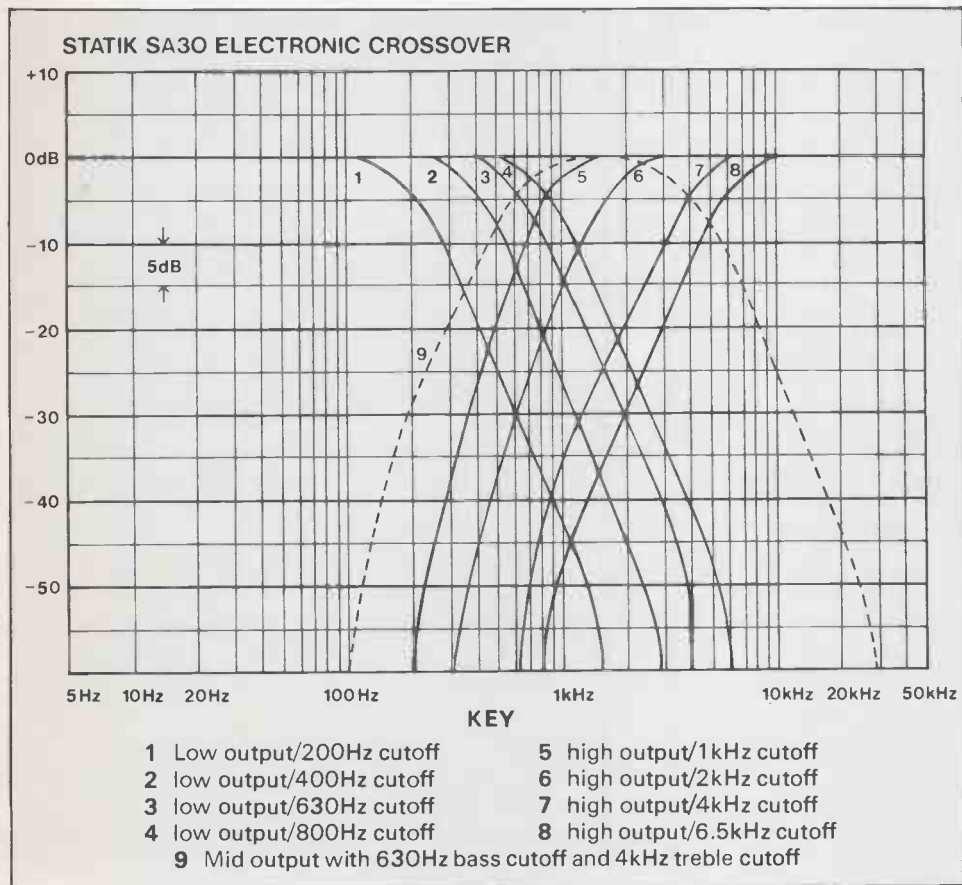
### In a nutshell

Each of the presently-available Statik range of ancillary and effects units is well constructed and represents very good value for money. All front-panels are well laid-out and extremely easy to operate. Apart from slight reservations regarding the degree of mechanical isolation provided on the SA20 spring reverb, and the location of certain switches on the SA30 active crossover, each device should prove trouble-free and reliable in use. An ideal choice for the cost-conscious small studio and PA operator who is on the lookout for high quality at a reasonable price.

### Prices and Availability

The SA10 stereo 10-band graphic equaliser is priced at £280, the SA20 dual reverb unit £340, and the SA30 stereo three-way active crossover £280. Output balancing transformers for each unit cost an additional £16.50 per channel, while an optional security cover for the SA30 crossover will set you back £12.50. (All prices without VAT.) □

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## The Crying Game

Sniff 'n' the Tears  
*The Game's Up*  
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No doubt about it, it's difficult not to think of Dire Straits when you hear Sniff 'n' the Tears. The songs inhabit that same relaxed mid-tempo area, the vocals are measured and introspective.

But Sniff do offer more for your money than the turgid Deptford ensemble. True, there's no quicksilver guitar from Knopfler M, but there's more funk, some neat keyboard work and some simple but memorable songs.

Still, it surprises me how much I've been listening to *The Game's Up*. Despite absurd lyrics like 'the room was hazy and the tension building/as I looked across at her/as the ball dropped into the slot at Zero/she smiled a secret smile' etc. your correspondent might find himself cueing up a track or two while shaving or turning the fire-hose on the beef-burgers. Why?

Largely, Sniff's appeal comes from their deft and economical playing, with Mick Dyche's tearing guitar leads supplying a little needed adrenalin and Mike Taylor's keyboards sprinkling an atmospheric haze. My favourite track on the album is *5 And Zero*, whence the above-quoted lyrics were derived.

Paul Roberts sings it, as he sings almost everything here, with a sort of relaxed croak. It is sadly reminiscent of the appallingly self-absorbed singer with Live Wire but successful in this context. The song is built on a trusty A/G/D chord progression which gradually builds up considerable momentum. Taylor stretches warm, simple organ chords over pleasantly chipped rhythm chords, while Roberts isn't afraid to sink himself in the soap-opera lyrics with apparent conviction.

*Moment Of Weakness* stands out because it introduces a light-hearted loping feel to counteract a preponderance of slow tempi. Very nice too, though again Paul Roberts' lyrics (he wrote everything on the album) make no effort whatsoever to rise above the forgettable. 'We'll meet up in the same old place/ we met a hundred times before ...' Yes, I think I know what you mean.

Wedge'd by the back bar of the Marquee, it came as no surprise to find that Sniff's live show was a near-perfect reconstruction of their recorded sound. The incredibly-named Loz Netto had failed a fitness test and was replaced on this occasion by Clem



Tears: Warm, simple chords, soap-opera lyrics.

Clempson, who seemed to fit in comfortably enough. Still, the lead guitar work was dominated by Mich Dyche, whose crisp, sparse lines were perfectly in sync with the band's overall approach.

It was an enjoyable if undemanding evening, standout songs being *5 And Zero* and the driving *One Love*. I fear, however, that Sniff may have given the game away with *Rodeo Drive*, off the new album. Plainly their competent and comforting sound is going to land them in the American charts before very long, but *Rodeo Drive* is all too obviously tailor-made for the job - all slickness and FM shimmer, great background music for people trying to have sex after wading through a firkin of coke.

So what am I saying? Not a lot really, just that it's a shame that a band like Sniff 'n' the Tears are automatically pushed towards the States, branded as 'competent' or 'slick' because they haven't polarised themselves towards computer music or The New Austerity. But the band seem happy enough to play along, right down to the disgusting rapist's fantasy album sleeve. State of the art, 80s-style.

Adam Sweeting

## Key To The Highway

Peter Guralnick *Lost Highway: Journeys and Arrivals of American Musicians*.  
Omnibus Press

There are few good books on music in the blues and rock 'n' roll traditions. Although rock writing abounds, it is rare for the weekly or monthly journalist to include amongst his or her armoury of skills the intellectual stamina necessary to complete a convincing full-length work of biography or criticism. Happily there are exceptions, and none rates higher than Peter Guralnick whose last book *Feel Like Going Home* is universally recognised as a classic. Now he has produced another collection of biographical and critical portraits, grouped together under the title, *Lost Highway*.

*Lost Highway* is a much longer and more discursive book than its predecessor. Whereas *Feel Like Going Home* concentrated on many of the household names of blues and rock 'n' roll, the new book takes us deep into the less well-known regions of Guralnick's most recent enthusiasm, country music. Many of these pieces have appeared in print before, in

magazines and in the *Rolling Stone Illustrated History Of Rock And Roll*, but the author has chosen to group them in such a way as to cast light upon the somewhat protean idea of 'the road' that gives the book its title.

The 'journeys and arrivals' documented here are often the real ones involved in the central ritual of the continuous tour: Guralnick concentrates upon musical performance and the types of communication it can involve at its most (and least) successful. But beyond that the idea of travelling assumes a metaphorical significance, becoming a means for examining a musician's career and the way goals can change as they are approached or achieved. At the furthest remove the idea of a journey comes to suggest the slow and indirect progress of history and tradition and it is this basis which Guralnick uses to structure his story, moving from the pre-rock generation of blues and country musicians, through rockabilly, the first genuine fusion of black and white musics, on to the revitalised 'roots' country music of the Outlaw movement, and finally completing the circle by returning to look at the fate of the blues. At each stage the slow and mysterious workings of influence are brought to light.

This is no stiff and clumsily applied thesis: indeed, for the most part the central idea of the 'highway' sits very lightly upon the material. Guralnick is too meticulous a craftsman to allow a mere idea to strangle the essential individuality of his subjects and their musics: he recognises that the unique value of each of these performers lies in their fidelity to the individual combination of personal and cultural history that they represent. And he lets them speak for themselves. Most are glorious eccentrics, and first-rate storytellers who respond to the personal and intellectual honesty of his approach by relaxing and opening up. To me, much of the music discussed represents a closed book: my idea of country music, until now, relied upon Altman's *Nashville* for its inspiration. Lamentable as this ignorance now seems, it did not prevent me gaining a great deal of enjoyment from Mr Guralnick's cast of characters. Like, for instance, Cowboy Jack Clement with his Three Universal Truths: 'The first, of course, is that all people from Memphis speak in parables. The second is that women don't like steel guitars. And the third? You can't sing a three-minute song in a minute and a half. You'd be amazed at how many people try!' Or there is his planned new version of Shakespeare, to be called *As You All Like It*. Then there is the fascinating Stoney Edwards, a

black, illiterate country singer with a remarkable gift for lyrics. Or the story of the critically-acclaimed songwriter James Talley taking a party of Capitol executives round to the rat control station where he used to work and showing them some specimens.

To some this might sound like some kind of freakshow, but so respectful is Guralnick's handling of his subjects that nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, if the book has a fault it is that the author's sensitivity, his scrupulous fairness, the reverence of his tone, all seem a little reserved when dealing with such rebellious and forthright music. Sometimes the reader yearns for a bit of cynical mockery or angry condemnation, but none is forthcoming. Beyond that the book's only other problem is the disappointment the Guralnick aficionado feels when coming across a chapter that is not new: in particular both Elvis Presley essays are well-known.

These flaws pale into insignificance when set aside the very real achievements of the book. Guralnick is a marvellously aware and self-aware commentator as he shows in his introductory chapter, in particular in a section called 'Some Things I've Learned' where he presents a complete and concise summary of the difficulties facing music (and the writer about music) in an age of passive consumerism fostered by technological 'advancement'. Elsewhere these profound and often disturbing thoughts, like his undoubted erudition, are not allowed to disrupt the flow of his flexible, self-effacing style. For the most part he is content to allow his subjects to speak, since, as he says, 'Some people tell you no more than they want to, most a great deal more than they mean to.' The author's role is a subtle one, adding the occasional cross-reference or note of dissent, binding themes and ideas together, and producing those rare insights for which his work is valued: 'There is no real star system in the blues. Neither reputation nor technical virtuosity has ever been prized so much as honest emotion and depth of feeling. It is the kind of music where if mistakes are made, they are made sometimes with such force and conviction that even the wrong notes can ring true.'

The book concludes with a chapter about Sam Phillips, and there, in that one man, Guralnick's concerns come together. Above all the primacy of the blues is stressed, as a tradition and an attitude, a part of society and a part of the individual. Only now does the full argument of the book become clear, as the many aspects of the 'Lost



Highway' are drawn together. The mass of the book's theoretical material is contained within the first and last chapters; all the people in between can be seen as just the case-histories, the evidence upon which the theory is based. But they are more than that: their very individuality and variety constitute the argument itself. *Lost Highway* is a plea for personal and cultural nonconformity in the face of a society dedicated to homogenisation. It is a plea for personal freedom. As Sam Phillips says: 'One of these days, though, I may not live to see it, maybe you all will, but one of these days that freedom is going to come back.'

It only remains to say that *Lost Highway* also contains hundreds of fascinating photographs, is excellently printed and can be whole-heartedly recommended even to people as ignorant of country music as I am.

John Morrish



Gillespie: lean, pared-down vitality.

## Northsea Gas

An event that made the most jazz festivals look like pub gigs, the Northsea Festival, succeeded in staging over 100 concerts within three days, all in one building. The distinguishing feature was the enormous variety of jazz styles represented: traditional, big bands, be-bop, *avant-garde*, blues, gospel, cajun, and for the first time this year, jazz-rock.

As with all festivals it was the big international stars who drew the most attention. Fats Domino and Ray Charles played peerless if predictable sets. Oscar Peterson, joined by Joe Pass, Niels Pederson, and surprise guest Toots Thielemans on harmonica, demonstrated the versatility and dexterity that has made him the world's premier jazz pianist. Living legend Muddy Waters played a warm, loose set on the roof of the building to a packed crowd; one of the most pleasing performances of the festival.

The eagerly awaited concert by Stanley Clarke And Friends proved to be a disappointment. Guitarist Charles Johnson played unimaginatively, and Clarke, despite his undoubted ability and occasional melodic flair, played dumb repetitive riffs at high volume for much of the performance. With keyboard player Steve Bach a virtual passenger in the wings, it remained for drummer Simon Phillips to salvage what little he could with his superb playing throughout. This is a fairly new band, and Clarke needs seriously to rethink his material if they're going to stay the course. The audience gave them a decidedly cool reception.

Other fusionists who fared better were the Brecker Brothers Band, on tour for the first time with their present line-up. They reminded me of early Landscape (plus guitar) with their rocky brand of jazz funk. One number, *Sponge*, stood out particularly – an outrageous slab of funk power. Didier Lockwood Quintet played dynamic jazz-rock music a bit in the Bruford vein. They combined highly developed technique harnessed to a flair for composition, with the ability to hang together as a band. We will be hearing a lot more from this band!

The contrasts were dazzling and endless. The Dizzy Gillespie Quartet showed that an old hand can keep up with the times – his band were a model of lean pared-down vitality. The Benny Carter All Stars provided some beautifully relaxed good-time swing, playing medleys of old favourites that the crowd adored. The Odean Pope Trio were one of the most forceful acts I saw – a blast of high power heavy jazz with an *avant-garde* feel and some demented drumming from Cornell Rochester. Across in a different hall, Humphrey Lyttleton and his band somehow managed to transform their area of the Hague Congress Centre into a smoke filled jazz club somewhere in London. Queen Ida and the Bon Ton Zydeco Band played good time French-American bayou blues with verve and vigour, Queen Ida treating us to some delectable accordion. Defunkt, a funk band from New York, beat all-comers for sheer raunch.

I could go on. The big attraction of the festival is that you can make your own choice. One observer has commented that this suit-yourself eclecticism is typically Dutch; certainly the organisation of the festival left no doubt that it was taking place somewhere other than Britain. Concerts ran to schedule, food and drink were plentiful and accessible right up till the very end, and there was accurate up-to-the-minute information on television monitors throughout the building.

The Northsea is unique among jazz festivals for compressing so much music into such a short time and for its wide range of musical styles. Organiser Paul Ackett deserves full praise for staging an event that is so massive and yet so enjoyable for the individual.

David Sinclair

## Walker in the Night

'Tell 'em Mr. Sax is back' runs the catchline on the cover of J Walker's latest album *Back Street Boogie*, and to underline the fact Junior and his band undertook to play Dingwall's recently. On a previous visit, Walker supported The Temptations in a much bigger venue. This time

around there was little fuss over his visit, and the crowd at Dingwall's, though respectably large, wasn't exactly huge.

But the gig managed to provide intimacy as most of the people present crowded forward into the tiny dance area fronting the stage to catch the legendary Walker's party music. Only a few minutes into the set everybody was sweating and bopping as Walker's masterful horn punctuated the rhythms set up by the band. It was interesting to note that most of the audience were on the high side of 25, or so it seemed. No sign of the new generation of soul fans, the kind who dig Q-Tips and UB40, were present.

Junior was looking a bit old, but when you consider that his last hit in Britain was way back in '73, then it's surprising to find him still blowing at all. Age affects ability, though, and as much as the band smoked behind him they couldn't disguise the loss of immediacy and vitality in Walker's blowing. The rough edges may well be gone, but they've been replaced by smoothness and greater assurance. I didn't detect one goof all evening, hardly surprising for one of Junior's years. His tone remained constant throughout and tuning was spot-on all night. More and more as the set progressed Junior would throw in beautifully virtuoso harmonics and vibrato to highlight his rich and sensuous playing. His biggest drawback is still his vocal ability. Maybe a singer is needed in the band.

Despite his new record, the audience still demanded to hear oldies such as *Shotgun*, *Walk In The Night* and *Roadrunner*, further indications of the audience's age. But Walker nevertheless conspired to include new cuts, including *Back Street Boogie* and the mawkish *Girl I Want To Marry You*.

All the while this was going on, folks were skipping and jiving at the front and the heat level rose. After each new height reached by Junior he would pretend to be on the verge of playing his last number, inspiring the crowd to scream for more. Eventually he did leave, but was called back for two genuine encores, much to his evident pleasure.

What was most apparent from this performance was the dissimilarity between Junior live and Junior on record. At the hands of producer Norman Whitfield, who is also responsible for Rose Royce on his Whitfield label, Walker comes over as just another disco star with just another disco sound. He proved at this gig that he is much more than that, and that dance music doesn't have to be disco. Perhaps a new approach to record production, that captures the spirit of his live work, would be in order. With so many young pretenders on the scene it would be nice to see Junior back in the charts.

Steve Brennan

## Records Received

Ronnie Lane *See Me* Gem GEMLP 107 Not a match for Lane's wonderful and underrated Slim Chance record for Island, *See Me* is still a very worthwhile addition to Lane's independent and distinctive

output. Production this time is more orthodox and the songs slighter but as usual the light slightly rustic touch to playing and singing is infectious. **Southside Johnny & the Asbury Jukes** *Love Is A Sacrifice* Mercury 9111 081 A further move towards self-government for the Jukes, and more specifically the combination of Johnny Lyon and lead guitarist Billy Rush co-producers and writers throughout. Honest and emotional songs abound, and Rush's addition has resulted in a more contemporary, cleaner production, including occasional, strong female backup vocals – as an album, their fourth winner in a row, though it may be difficult to find an obvious single. As usual, the best horn charts around. **Doug Sahn** *Hell Of A Spell* Chrysalis CHR 1249 After Chrysalis' success with the Fabulous Thunderbirds from the US Takoma label, is too much to ask for them to bring over the great King of Southern crossbred music now that he's dropped by on the same label, which must be his umpteenth. It has to be admitted that the record isn't his best. At times the band sounds as stiff as Sahn looks in his silver waistcoat on the sleeve, and producer Dan Healy is clearly after a hard-driving blues album rather than Sahn's usual relaxed meander across musical boundaries. But give him back Augie Meyer at the organ and some lucky English clubs could have a night to remember. **Peter Gabriel** *Charisma* CDS4019 Gabriel proves with this magnificent, well-worth-the-wait album that while he has increased his claim as the orchestrator of rock (and that doesn't mean string arranger), he still has a sharp ear for the set piece, like the unsettling *Family Snapshot*, or the ironically merry *Games Without Frontiers*. The collection of music here draws on wide influences and styles, and incorporates a breadth of sound (from Larry Fast, especially) that can only be envied: listen to *Intruder*, for example, which makes an uncanny but powerful start to the album and leads on to the structurally fascinating *No Self Control*. This record marks a winning combination between Gabriel and producer Steve Lillywhite (see double interview *SI* Dec '79), and has to be a strong contender thus far for album of the year. **Robert Fripp** *God Save The Queen/Under Heavy Manners* EG EGPL105 Fripp contributes to the previous *PG*: here, under his own banner, he is further on up the road to '81, a Revox under each arm and trionics attached. Here is Frippertronics – *God Save The Queen* provides sufficient inspiration for the best example of this – and Discotronics – to which David Byrne, the Talking Head, adds suitable vocal coverings. The two styles are joined effortlessly at their edges by cunning use of black vinyl, while Robertronics pins back your ears and presses the play button. File under Humour. **Grace Slick** *Dreams* RCA PL13544 Like her old outfit the Starship, Slick is wasting her considerable talents on desperately inferior material these days. The songs, mostly by Slick and her guitarist Scott Zito are wordy and rapid and the combination of overwrought vocals, over-elaborate production by conductor Ron Frangipane and non-insightful lyrics is generally unpalatable.



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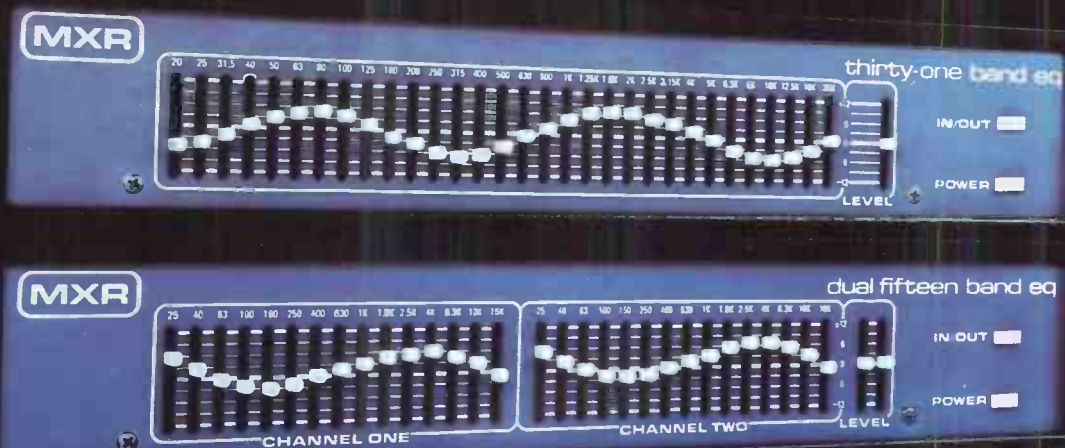
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