

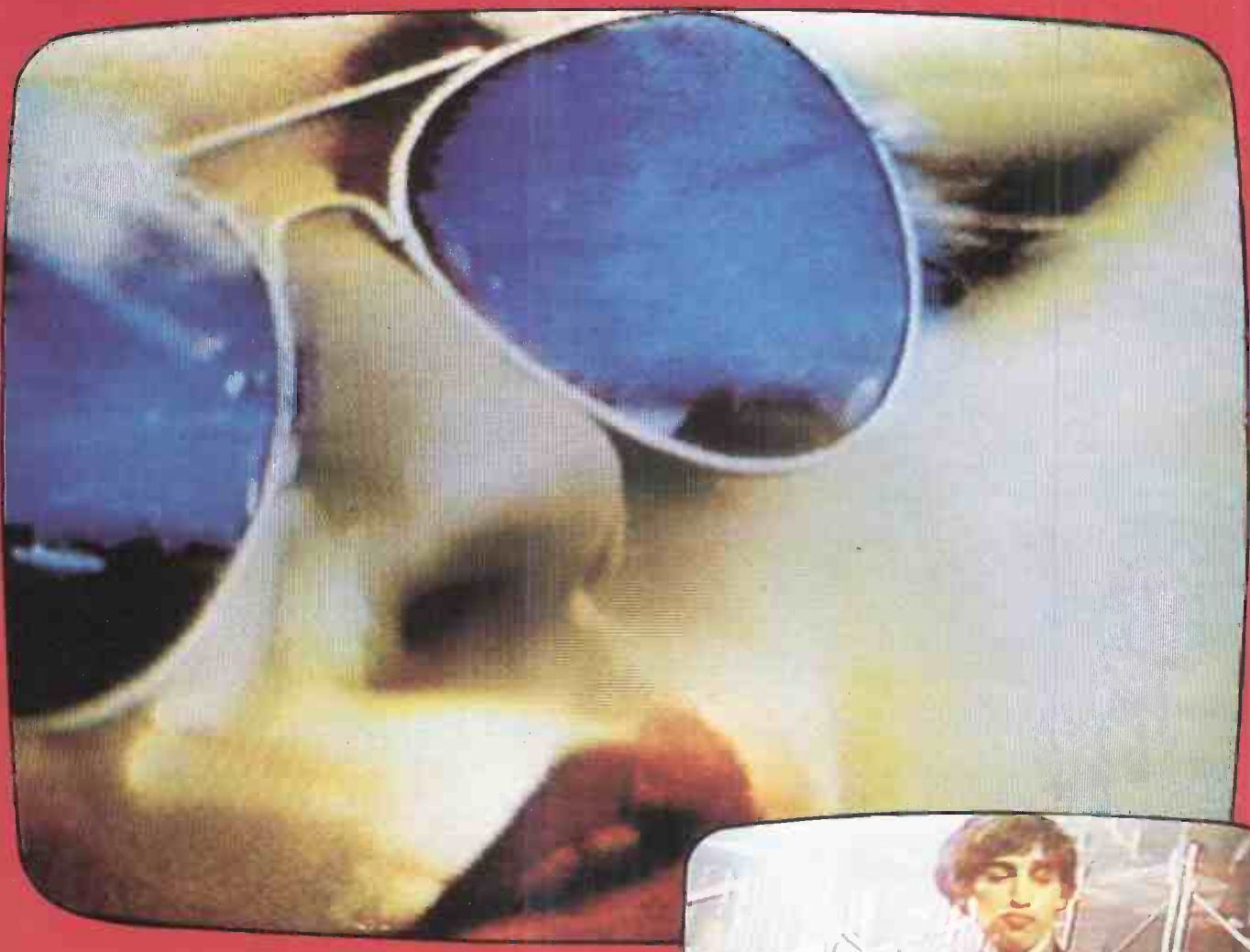
# Sound International

October 1980

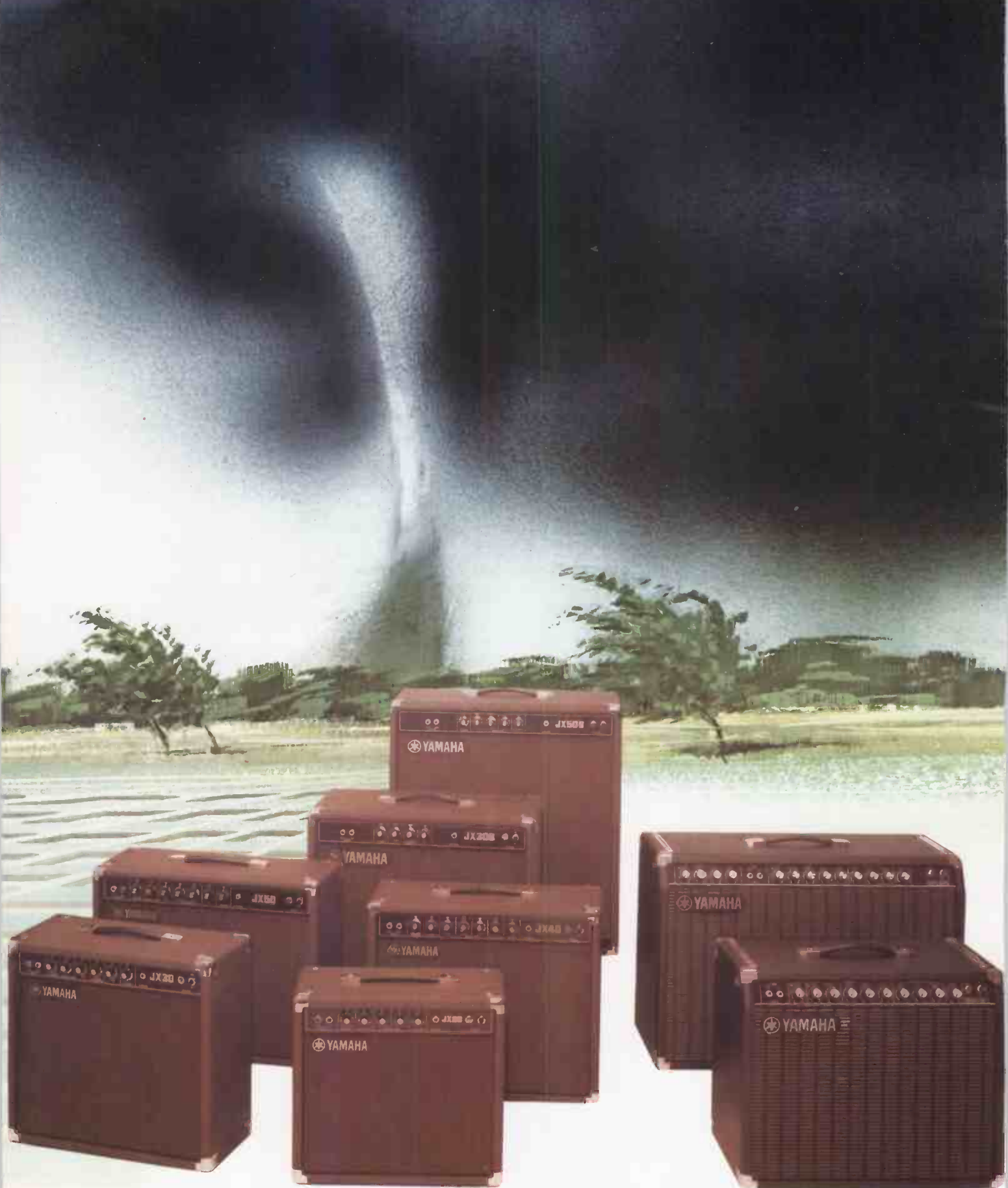
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ROCK  
VIDEO  
SPECIAL

*incorporating* **BEAT**  
*Instrumental*



**blondie's**  
**chris'n'deb**  
**human league**



Designed specifically for today's guitarist and bass player, the new JX series amplifiers provide warmth, power and outstanding definition that are perfect for contemporary playing styles. The highest quality materials and construction are used throughout, so reliability and durability are superb. But more important — the latest Yamaha music technology makes these amps amazingly responsive. They serve as an extension of your instrument — your music — so you can control the sound rather than fight it.

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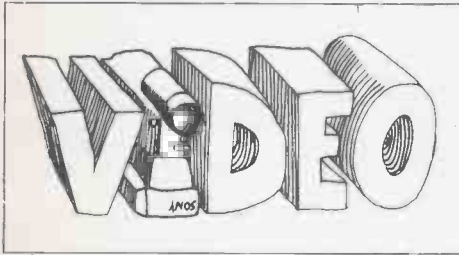
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musicians since 1887.

# Sound International

incorporating **BEAT** Instrumental

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Roger Phillips tiptoes through even more ADT and Chorus pedals and plays Double Tracks of My Tears.



## 22 Video: an Encyclopedeo

Opening up a section linking sound and vision in a hitherto unimagined way, Richard Dean pokes around behind the on-off button and presents his treatise. Is this thing called video an expensive gadget, a tiresome hurdle for your band or a valuable medium?



## 30 Fun With Deborah and Christopher

Rob Mackie hangs around in the front

parlour of Chris 'Scorpion' Stein and Debbie 'Cheekbones' Harry and discovers a thing or two about the Hans and Lotte Hass of terra firma.

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Rock video from the producer's end: not just the top-budget Superflash artistically edited end, but also whether it's worthwhile getting a £250 Super-8 Camera and trying to interest an A&R man from another angle. By Ralph Denyer.

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David Sinclair talks to the Old Grey Whistling Testicle's long-time producer on the eve of BBC's Rock Week - almost worth buying a video recorder for.



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John Morrish enters Sheffield and finds himself enmeshed in the strange world of the Human League, whose heroes appear to include David Attenborough, Gary Glitter and Steve McGarrett.

## 59 Al Kooper (who?)

Fred Dellar has a chat with the diverse adventurer amid the blips and brrrts of space invaders machines. Read this space.

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#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Did you go to the Olympia Show in London at the end of August, then? What did you think? Obviously it's difficult for a place built like an aircraft hangar to have any kind of warm, live music atmosphere. But do you think the organisers did their job of making it a real public show? If you paid £1.50 to get in you'd have expected some return on your money - so tell us what you thought of the show. Some manufacturers definitely don't want the Musician In The Street at their show - for example, those that exhibited at the Over The Road Show (or the Just Down The Road Show, more accurately) made it clear that the public were not welcome. This is of course perfectly understandable if the only thing they require is a trade show to sell their products to music shop owners. But I think that we, as the people who eventually buy these products, deserve to see things for ourselves. Next year, let's hope that companies who want an opportunity to let us poke our noses into their new toys can do so in an environment conducive to positive public involvement. Rumours suggest that this may well be a possibility. What d'you reckon? What d'you want?

Tony Bacon

# AKG

ACOUSTICS



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**. . . to all users of reverb units . . .**

Do you know of a reverb unit, which is compact, small in size and weighs only 12 lbs?

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Well, why don't you have a look at the new portable stereo reverb unit BX 5 from AKG? The BX 5 is based on the Torsional Trans-

mission Line Principle with parametric equalization and especially designed for use in small sound studios and broadcasting stations. For more detailed information, please ask your nearby AKG Consultant Dealer.



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ADV 28/11/80

# NEWSLINK bjfrets

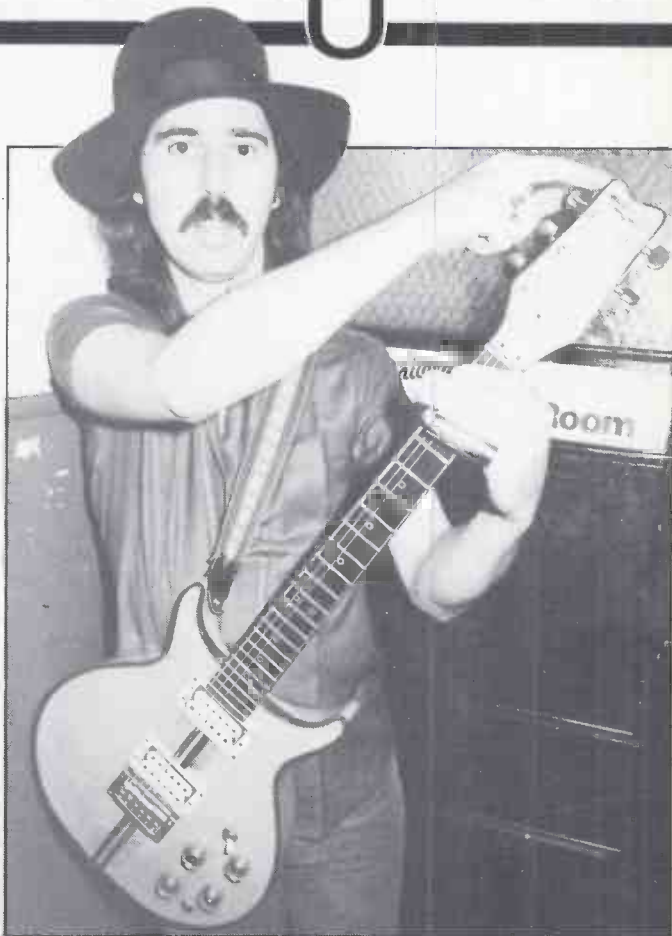
## A New Division Is Born

Brodr. Jorgensen (UK) Ltd. has formed a new division: BJ Frets. BJ Frets is responsible for marketing the high quality guitars made by Washburn and Kramer and its formation is unquestionably a major event on the British music scene. Both these names have a background of success in the demanding American market and the guitars that bear them represent a degree of craftsmanship and instrument technology that is unusual even by today's standards.

Brodr. Jorgensen is an established name in the music industry, and BJ Frets will maintain the integrity and service back-up that has made the reputation of the parent company. In addition, it will be staffed exclusively by men who speak the language of guitarists. Dave Green, the Sales Manager, has had wide and varied experience in building guitars, collecting and restoring early American guitars, playing guitar professionally, and working with other musicians as a recording engineer and producer. He

has surrounded himself with like-minded people and comments: 'The products are exactly right, and we have got the sales and service to match them. We're offering instruments of quality and personality backed by imaginative American designers and extensive research. Everyone at BJ Frets has a solid grounding in fretted instrument technology. Also, we are all guitar players.'

Already reaction to the new division from musicians and retailers has been enthusiastic. Retailers welcome the dramatic increase in sales represented by the popular Kramer and Washburn lines. Musicians welcome a company committed to intelligent assessment of their needs and continual liaison. Leading guitarists are working continuously with Frets management on product development. Moreover, dealers and players alike appreciate a distributor who attaches as much importance to quality control and 'setting up' as this one does. A separate section of the Brentford premises is devoted to these aspects of the company under the direction of Mike Baron. Each guitar is inspected and adjusted to the extent that it is 'almost customized', in Mike's words, by the time it



Micky Moody - Whitesnake

leaves the warehouse.

BJ Frets is approaching its task as a young, enthusiastic division with justifiably expansive plans for the future, but managerial policy is at the same time centred very much on the individual guitar and the individual customer. Dave Green's attitude is summed up by the following statement:

'If every musician who buys a Washburn or a Kramer recognises the care and attention to detail that has gone into his instrument both in construction and at the setting up stage and feels we've given him an excellent deal in terms of

price, then we'll consider we're doing well.'

It is of interest to note that Washburn, for example, is one of the few guitars produced in Japan by its own exclusive factory, rather than by a factory sub-contracted for the purpose. The standards that operate at the factory of origin are matched by the standards at BJ Frets itself. The new division can handle a demand that is large and continually growing, and still give individual attention. They are proud to be associated with bringing to Britain what can only be called today's great guitars.

## The Washburn Performers

Micky Moody (Whitesnake) Mick Box (Uriah Heep) Stan Webb (Stan Webb's Chicken Shack) Terry Britten (Cliff Richard Band/B A Robertson) Nancy Wilson (Heart) Randy Hansen (Randy Hansen Band) John Sloman (Uriah Heep)



Mick Box - Uriah Heep

## The Washburn Wings — A tradition takes flight

The Wing series of electric guitars were the Washburn idea of what an electric guitar ought to be, founded on more than 100 years of instrument-making experience.

They all have individual names, which accounts in part for their success because people tend to identify with names much better than just letters or numbers. You only have to look at the guitars that have been major sellers over the past fifteen years — Les Pauls, Stratocasters, etc. to see that a common link is that they all have an identity.

Opting for a well-tried body shape and conventional overall ap-

pearance, the designers of the Wing series went straight for essentials. The standard of construction had to be second to none with a degree of precision that had seldom previously been seen in instrument wood-working. Timbers and materials were selected to optimize playing characteristics and sustain, and different models were produced so that the needs of all musicians could be catered for. Finally, sound conscious as only makers of top quality acoustic instruments can be, Washburn insisted on the very finest of purpose-built electrics and electronics.



*The Eagle*

*The Falcon*

**The Raven**

Solid Mahogany Body  
1-piece Mahogany Bolt-on neck  
Rosewood Fingerboard  
Strings attached through back of body  
Brass saddles

Wine red, black, or tobacco sunburst finish

**The Scavenger**

Bass version of Raven with single P-bass type pickup.

**The Falcon**

Solid Ash body, carved rosewood or maple arch-top  
5-piece rock maple and rosewood neck  
Neck-through-body construction  
Bound ebony fingerboard with polished jumbo frets

**Brass bridge and nut**

Strings attached through back of body  
Washburn 'Power Sustain' humbuckers  
Coil disconnect switches built into volume controls  
Rosewood/maple, antique sunburst, cherry sunburst gold top finishes

**The Hawk**

Solid ash body with carved arch-top  
3-piece rock maple and rosewood neck  
Neck-through-body construction  
Polished rosewood fingerboard with jumbo frets  
Brass bridge and nut  
Strings attached through back of body  
Washburn 'Power Sustain' humbuckers

Wine red, grained brown, or tobacco sunburst finishes

**The Eagle**

Limited edition custom version of the Falcon with top quality wood, gold plated hardware, Mother-of-Pearl wing-shaped fingerboard inlays, or brass ringlets. Finishes: Black with Abalone trim, White with Abalone trim, natural flame maple top or cherry sunburst on flame maple top. Body and fingerboard bound in brass.

*All models available in left-hand*

## The Stage Series — Performance guitars

The Washburn stage series reflects the drama, the panache, and the electricity of modern music. Don't bother with them if your act tends to be pedestrian — these Washburns are design-

ed for the fast-playing, hard-hitting rock'n'roll guitarist who wants his instrument to have a bit of style without compromising its sound potential and playability. The powerful pickups are excellent for

distortion playing and, 'dirty' or clean, a Stage guitar gives the versatility you need. Remember — these guitars are made to be seen in fast company!

**A-20 Stage Guitar**

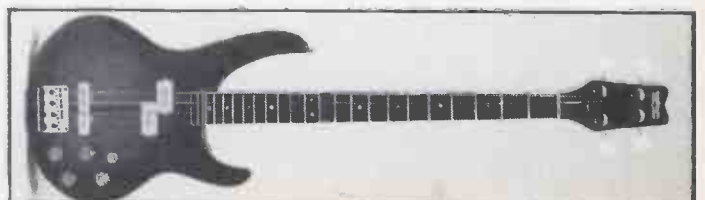
- \*2-piece book-matched flame maple top
- \*All-black finish with brass binding
- \*Neck-through-body construction
- \*Split-coil sound
- \*Version available with 'Strat-type' vibrato.



**B-202 Stage Bass**

Similar style and construction to A-20, but using one P-bass and one J-bass pickup.

**STOP PRESS** TWO NEW BASSES FROM WASHBURN WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE AUTUMN.  
**STAY TUNED!**



# A hundred years of Washburn



When George Washburn Lyon began making musical instruments in Chicago just over a century ago, mass production hadn't been invented. The only way for a luthier to make a guitar was for him to sit down and create every piece of the instrument himself.

Times certainly have changed, but the way a Washburn is constructed has not. Every product adheres to the same basic princi-

ple which George Washburn initiated in 1876...*hand-made quality*. This principle resulted in "first place" awards at Music Expositions held throughout the world. Today, the challenge for the Washburn company is to maintain a high quality, hand-crafted instrument in the face of increasing pressure for mass production needed to meet the ever-growing demand.

This challenge was accepted by an enterprising guitar maker, Rudy Schlacher, and a professional musician, Rick Johnstone. Realizing the need for quality, reasonably priced guitars, banjos and mandolins, the partners took over and expanded the Washburn Company.

The new Washburns have

been completely redesigned to meet the exacting demands of today's musicians. Over the last twenty years Japan has become the home of fine craftsmanship for many products, including musical instruments. All the Washburn designs are now translated by Japan's most experienced craftsmen, thus assuring the consistent quality and workmanship for which they are known.

The complete Washburn line provides over sixty models designed for amateur as well as professional musicians. From classic to electric, from banjo to mandolin, each instrument offers the same tradition and quality which has made Washburn world-famous.

Whichever Washburn model you purchase, you're buying more than one hundred years of instrument-making history.

## 'Festivals' Come To Town

Acoustic Electric guitar players take note. The new Washburn Festival series guitars are rather unique, because they are designed to perform equally well without bias towards either the acoustic or the electric mode. Needless to say, whether you're plugged in or playing acoustically the sound is what you would expect from a Washburn, since the guitars are carefully crafted in selected timbers and have a revolutionary high output pickup system which minimizes string noise and feedback problems without the need for a pre-amp.

There are three models of the Festival: the **EA-40 Woodstock** (6 or 12-string), a shallow-bodied all-mahogany guitar with Tobacco Sunburst or Wine Red finishes, the **EA-44 Monterey** (6 or 12-string) with shallow body, solid spruce top in Natural or Tobacco Sunburst finish, laminated rosewood back and sides and the **EA-45 Tanglewood** (6 or 12-string) with deep body, solid spruce top in Natural or Tobacco Sunburst finish, laminated rosewood back and sides.

The range offers varying degrees of volume, bass, and projection according to which model you choose, and the trade marks of these guitars include conveniently placed volume and EQ pots, compensated saddle, characteristic oval sound hole plus full length arched back and Florentine cut-away.

The Festivals are competitively priced and will make a considerable impression in the UK. At the moment some musicians may have to wait before acquiring one. The first consignment, due for import in August, will be strictly limited. BJ Frets apologise in advance for any disappointment, and intend to make it up with future monthly consignments.



The Woodstock Festival



The D-15M

## Washburn Acoustics

### — They Still Lead

Originally made in Chicago, the name 'George Washburn' has been recognised as a tradition in quality stringed instruments since 1876. Hand-crafting and meticulous workmanship have long made Washburn one of the benchmarks by which fine fretted instruments are measured.

Today, the Washburn Dreadnoughts, Flat Tops and Grand Concert guitars are still made to standards of which the original George Washburn, with his traditional tools and painstaking techniques, would have approved. The designs have changed to suit the demands of today's guitarists, and the volume of business has changed with output measured in hundreds of guitars rather than 'one-offs'. But the standards have not been altered, except where modern techniques could improve a particular feature. The materials, also, are selected with as much care as George Washburn himself would have exercised, with unusually widespread use of solid wood. An important aspect of a good acoustic guitar is that it matures and improves with age, and it is a matter of pride with the company that instruments currently being made will be as structurally sound and musically sensitive in fifty years, as their counterparts made fifty years ago are now.

The acoustic guitar series includes the D-15, D-15M, D-25, and D-25 12-string Dreadnoughts, and the small-bodied F-15 folk-shaped guitar. There is also the Washburn Solid Wood range with names like the Timber Ridge Custom and the Prairie Song Custom evoking what these guitars are about: they are personalized instruments intended to become very much a part of your music.

# Kramer

The most popular guitars of the '60s and '70s were designed, except for a few variations, in the '50s. But the signs are that many musicians of the coming decade are going to favour an '80s guitar, in every sense. A guitar for an age of high technology and fine-tolerance specifications. A guitar for music demanding precision and power in lead and rhythm work. In short, a Kramer.

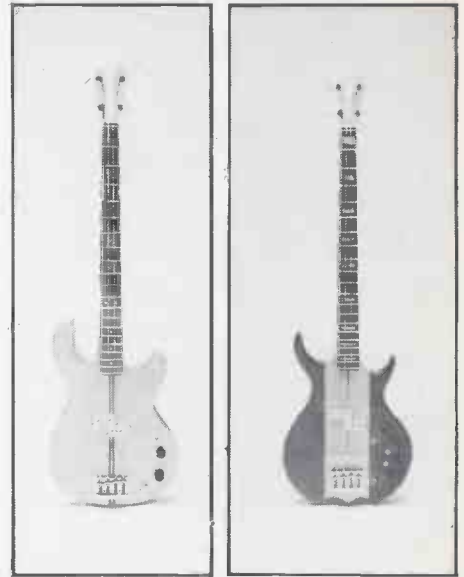
The story of Kramer began just four years ago when Dennis Berardi, a New York musical instrument retailer who had made a first-hand study of what guitarists wanted from their instruments, decided, literally, to take the concept of the electric guitar back to the drawing board.

The massive success of the Kramer guitar line revolves around the patented forged aluminium 'T' neck with wood inlays. The design creates a neck that cannot warp but still has the warm, comfortable feel of wood.

The Kramer guitar was presented to the world as an entirely new concept, and to judge by its reception, the world had been waiting for it.

After the prototypes had generated such interest, the new instrument was brought into large-scale production by Peter LaPlaca, who joined the Kramer company from Norlin music. Peter saw the product as a challenge to take a guitar with a specification that would normally have confined it to just a few very rich and very discerning professionals, and produce and market it at a price that would put it within reach of any serious guitarist. From the start, this object was achieved and from the first production

models to the DMZ Custom models that are currently so popular, Kramer have demonstrated that perfection is accessible.



DMZ-4001 Bass DMZ-6000 Bass

## The DMZ 6000G/B

### DMZ Custom Limited Production Series

The DMZ 6000G guitar and 6000B bass are precision built Kramers with DBL TM Electronics. . . not just a treble, bass, or power booster but a true active system designed with the musician in mind. Features:

- Volume and tone controls are totally independent and non-interactive
- With volume at max. the guitars' output is double that of a non-preamped guitar
- The tone control actually provides control of treble gain as well as attenuation

- Low impedance output gives ability to drive long lines without worry of hum or radio interference pickup
- Guitar output can directly drive high impedance headphones for private practice or tune-up
- Effects devices work more efficiently because they receive a larger signal
- Original "sound" of guitar is not lost. By setting all controls at "5" the preamp has no noticeable affect on the sound
- State-of-the-art circuitry provides long battery life (estimated 350-400 playing hours)

## The DMZ 4001

'the first bass with real precision' features:

- 'Dead spot' eliminating design
- Aluminium neck — cannot warp
- Stepped body joint for access to top frets
- High Performance DiMarzio P-bass pickup — punch, power, and clarity with low noise
- BADASS bridge gives ultimate action and intonation control
- Schaller M4 machine heads
- Custom tooled hardware
- Series parallel switch for tone variety
- Contoured body

Neil Murray (Whitesnake) Trevor Bolder (Uriah Heep) Dave Markee (Eric Clapton Band) Michael Rutherford (Genesis) Pete Briquette (Boomtown Rats) Alan Lancaster (Status Quo) John Deacon (Queen) Patrick Olive (Hot Chocolate) Erik Scott P.M.- (Carl Palmer's band) are all Kramer performers.



Neil Murray (Whitesnake)



Trevor Bolder (Uriah Heep)

## The Kramer Quotes (No. 1)

'All Kramer products have an evenness of response and a quality of tone that makes them ideal for studio use. In particular the 4001 delivers a great sound for any style with the minimum of studio "doctoring". This means less time and less money spent. Kramer are my first choice any time' — Pip Williams, top record producer of such varied sounds as Status Quo and the Moody Blues.



# 18000Hz, 0.9mv Pa $\approx$ 60dbm, 153dbm, 200ohms, > 10000ohms

These are the specifications that make the Beyer Dynamic M260 NS ribbon microphone the best in its field.

A specially shaped short ribbon, 0.002 mm thick, weighing only 0.000438 grammes guarantees that the M260 NS gives absolute fidelity of reproduction.

Complete absence of non-linear distortion lends startling clarity and transparency to the whole sound spectrum.

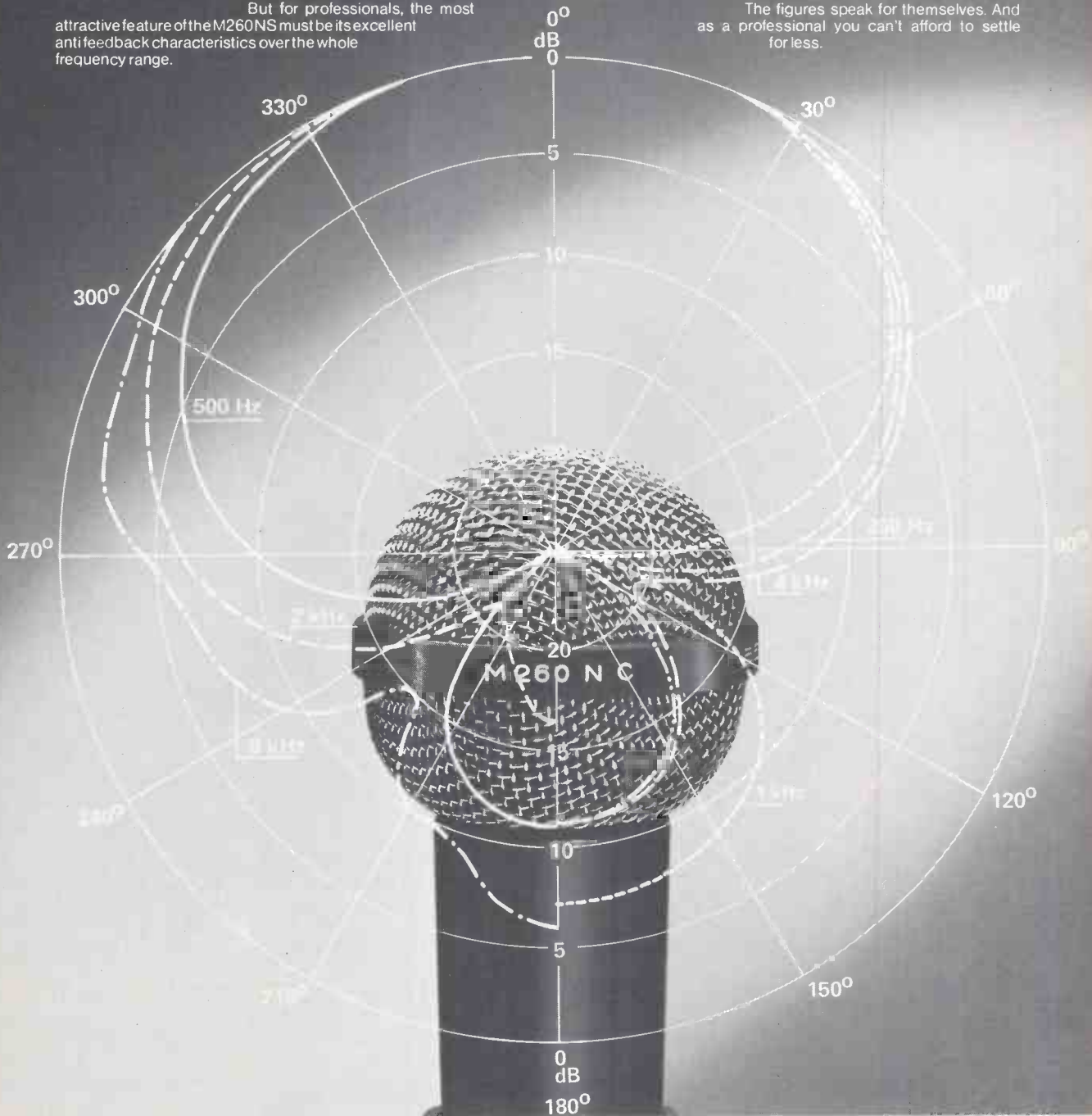
But for professionals, the most attractive feature of the M260 NS must be its excellent anti feedback characteristics over the whole frequency range.

Small wonder it is the world's most popular microphone for vocal and instrumental recordings and public address work.

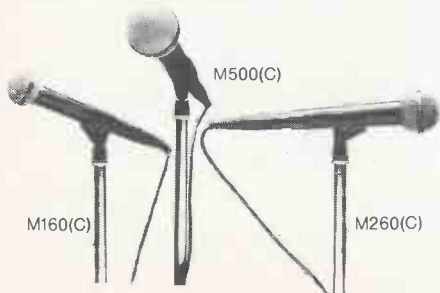
The M260 NS is only one of the range of ribbon microphones made by Beyer Dynamic.

And each one is manufactured to the same high standards, incorporating all that is best in microphone technology.

The figures speak for themselves. And as a professional you can't afford to settle for less.



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# British Music Fair '80

# Over The Road Show '80

## A Visual Report for a Visual Issue

sound and final mix by Tony Bacon

vision and visual direction by Roger Phillips



Besuited gents open the Olympia show, being (left to right) James Coppock, chairman of the exhibition committee of AMI, John Morton, general secretary of the Musicians Union, and Michael Doughty, president of AMI. Don't they look nice?



'2.1 million readers monthly,' insisted IM on their stand at Olympia, a view of which is shown inset bottom left. So where were they all, you ask? Well, our stand is shown in the longer picture...



Above is Paul Hamer of, funnily enough, Hamer guitars fame, demonstrating in front of a convenient wide-angle lens both his logo and a rather strange device called the Floyd Rose tremolo system. 'I had to wait three months to get two,' he says of the west coast whang bar which can be seen lowering the string tension on the Hamer guitar in question by 'plus or minus 50 octaves,' as Paul chooses to describe it. There are problems with the system, of course, not least those involved with the fact that the strings have to be clamped at the nut and at the bridge, and that it will set you back a cool \$400. 'But once a few people see this design then other people'll be able to make improvements on it,' suggests Paul. You can see some of Hamer's excellent guitars at the London Rock Shop, 26 Chalk Farm Road, London NW1. Tel: (01) 267 5381, or write to Paul for details at Hamer Guitars, 835 West University Drive, Arlington Heights, Ill 60004, US.



Large and amiable Keith Hand showed off guitars and basses made by Andy and Hugh Manson in their workshops in Sussex. They feature precision-engineered bridges, phase and coil tap switching, brass bridges and nuts, straight-through-neck design, Schaller machines, mahogany or maple neck section options, ash, maple or mahogany outer body options, and ebony fingerboards. They range in price from £445 ex VAT for the six-strings and from £550 ex VAT for the fretted or fretless basses. Keith still markets Gordon Smith guitars; the new Metallflake finishes now available add 10% to the cost. 'The celtic green model has already been nicknamed vomitburst,' claims Mr Hand, 'and we've got pukeburst yellow outside. The purple one we didn't have time to name - we forgave it because it was sold within three minutes of it coming on to the stand. There's pillar box red, too.' Keith was also pleased by the fact that he'd taken over distribution of the rather excellent Burman amps, as he explains, 'So that Greg (Burman, the maker) can carry on whittling away at his pieces of wood and valves and make a few more.' More info on Keith Hand lines from Keith at 219 Walmersley Road, Bury, Lancs BL9 6RU, Tel: (061) 764 1792/3.

# NEW TO YOU

## Machines ...

Dave Simmons (right) amazed visitors to the sixth floor of the Over The Road show with his astonishing new electronic drum kit. Take it away – no, keep it here – Mr Simmons: 'You're going on stage with four drum kits, basically, so you can alter the drum kit to suit the song for a change. Weird electronic sounds are there too if you want – it does away with all miking problems, overspill problems, and it packs down into one small flightcase. You can have any shape you like, any finish you like, so visuals are completely separate from the acoustics side – for the new bands, New Musik, Gary Numan, that sort of thing, it gives them a good drum sound and exciting visuals, space-age visuals: it brings the drum kit into the Eighties. Triggering is not acoustic, it's from the shock of actually hitting it, so therefore we get over the problem of other acoustic noises triggering the pads, because there's no acoustic pickups inside. You can strike any surface of the drums and they'll play – less sensitive toward the side and more sensitive in the middle portion – the transducer inside is sealed acoustically from the outside world. Response on all the drums is excellent. There are four memories on each drum so, although we've only got six playing surfaces here, we have in fact got 24. So, for example, I could change a tight bass drum sound into a loose one, or even a very, very loose one. The presets are variable, in other words you set up the sound and the presets recall them. The hi-hat is not staying like this: we've got a special hi-hat pedal rather like the bass drum pedal. Another thing to be improved, maybe, is the hi-hat sound. We're in production now – the price in the shops is £1250 for the control unit, six drums and the stands.' Look out for a review soon in *SI/BI*; in the meantime more information can be had from Dave at Musicaid, 176 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts, Tel: 56 33868 or 34321.



## People ...



Top left sits Larry DiMarzio, head of the famous New York pickup company, here giving us a private demo of a guitar totally constructed from DiMarzio parts. But don't read the name on the head. Below is Patrick Moraz who turned up to personify his endorsement relationship with Roland and to tell everyone about his new album. Co-existence, on his own Future Memories label. The album mixes the pan-pipes of top player Syrinx with Moraz's synths. Top right is Peter Cook posing with Axis guitars at the Over The Road Show. We're printing the pic because we happen to like Peter, nothing more ...



Helmut Reuter, a director of Realton, the company which developed the Variophon synthesiser, demonstrates the larger version of their instrument (above). Sounds are generated by plug-in modules that give wind instrument sounds (seven are currently available for oboe, bassoon, flute, trumpet, trombone, saxophone and clarinet), played by a keyboard (either normal as shown, or hand-held), and finally 'shaped' by a mouthpiece (separate on the larger model, but in one unit on the hand-held keyboard) which enables the player to give full wind expression. But you don't need to be, say, a sax player, as Helmut explains: 'Any child who can play the recorder can play the Variophon – that is the thing behind the idea. You do not need the special techniques like you have for saxophone or trumpet.' 'So the keyboard player in a band has got the full range of wind sounds available,' adds Ray Kitchen of Musicaid, agents for the instruments in the UK. The two keyboard options are interchangeable with either of the two control units: one will take four modules, the other six. Each individual module costs £80 each, while a combination of the smaller four-capacity control unit, the hand-held keyboard and one module will cost £499. The larger control unit plus the normal keyboard and six modules will cost £1,200. If you're interested, then you can get more information on these instruments from Ray Kitchen at Musicaid, 66 Radlett Road, Frogmore, St Albans, Herts AL2 2LD, Tel: 0727 72829.

**A Visual Report for a Visual Issue**

**British Music Fair '80**

**Over The Road Show '80**

INCORP. 'SYNTHESIZER DREAMS'

# THE LONDON ROCK SHOP

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## At last - a SPECIALIST Shop

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# Sound Advice at a Better Price!

## Stoking the Guitar-making machinery behind the Popular Song

O verwater, Manson, Lys, JD – do these names mean anything to you? Well, how about Peter Cook, Wal and Gordon Smith? Yes, the day of the small guitar maker is now well and truly upon us.

For the most part these makers are people who began their careers repairing 'big name' instruments that had either been broken or gone horribly wrong. As a natural outcome of their repair work, though, they began to see just how wrong the design principles behind some very prestigious instruments really were.

People like Peter Cook, who had been repairing John Entwistle's basses, were asked to modify existing axes and then, as the player's confidence in the repairman grew, were asked to build them specialised instruments. Some of these people are now growing into larger companies on a semi-mass production scale, some actually getting back down to a smaller size, having found that mass production just wasn't working for them. But whatever state these businesses are in, the move away from mass-produced guitars can only, for the musician, be a good one.

It's not that I've got anything against the big producers, be they Japanese or American just that I have a lot of time for craftsmanship and believe that a professional artist will always want an instrument which reflects a degree of humanity in it. Indeed, some of the major manufacturers have recognised this by making specialised instruments for 'name' musicians – although that may have more to do with promotional kudos than a genuine desire to push the hand-made image.

It's not even that the mass producers don't use hand working techniques. Martin still claim to be hand made and I believe that they are. Some Yamahas, Gibsons, Ibanez and others are obviously lovingly worked on – but they are not, perhaps, as individual as a guitar made on a bespoke basis.

There are problems with going to a one-off guitar maker, though. Not all of them operate to an equal standard – some handmade instruments I've seen have been appalling, and you don't *always* get what you want. What you have to do is to select your guitar maker by personal recommendation and by looking at samples of work and then get the maker to come up with precisely what you want. The actual translation of your idea of a concrete body with expanded polystyrene frets may not work too well in practice, and

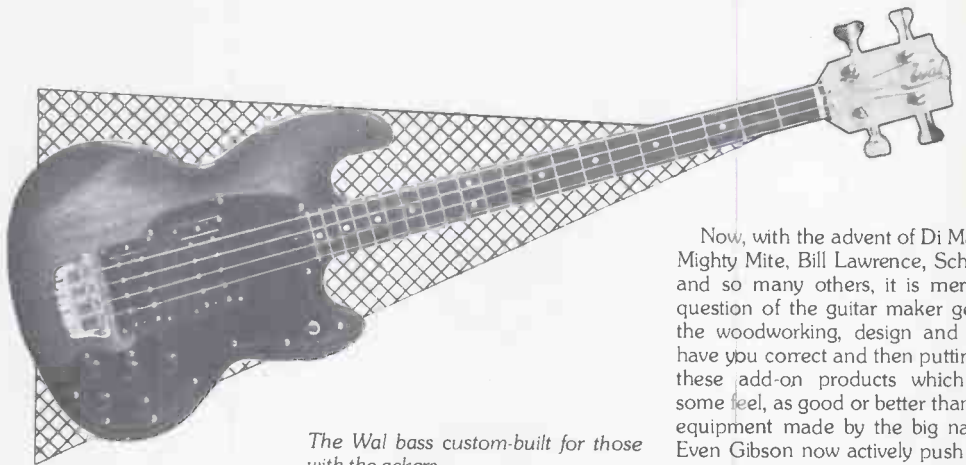
you have to accept the maker's verdict on that!

Furthermore, there is the question of re-sale value. It was Peter Cook who sparked me off thinking about this. Peter is a well known (the best known?) guitar maker and repairer and I have immense regard for his abilities and honesty. Peter was telling me a tale about a potential customer who has been coming back to him for some while now, obviously dedicated to owning one of Peter's fine Axis instruments but worried about what will happen if he is forced to sell it. Wouldn't he get more for a second-hand *Les Paul*? The answer is probably yes – but that's no basis on which to buy an instrument, although it may well be a valid financial argument.

The only reason for spending over £400 or £500 on a guitar or bass from a small maker is because you will either be getting an instrument made specially to your own design (most of the small guitar makers will do this for you) or because you are buying one of their standard products simply because it is either better for you than anything on offer from the major producers, or because you like the human, intimate qualities it seems to offer. It's an emotional decision, often, and financial considerations probably have little to do with it.

The small makers have really blossomed in recent years. Previously you had just a few people like Zemaitis, Grimshaw and John Birch turning out very special guitars to order, and then came the next generation – now it looks as if anyone with a shed, a few planks of wood and a couple of evenings a week to spare can set themselves up as a guitar builder. That has to be watched, of course, as some real dross can be made that way. But, by and large, the bespoke guitar market is getting healthier and healthier.

In fact the move has been noticed and acted upon by at least two of the bigger companies. Martin have just set up a custom workshop and Brødr Jørgensen have announced that their newish BJ Frets division will customise your Washburn for you. Gibson have always seemed open to offers on specialised ideas and even Shergold, who seem to have a foot in both camps, are now offering one-off guitars or modifications to existing



*The Wal bass custom-built for those with the ackers.*

ones.

The question is, what can you hope to get from a custom guitar? I would say that you stand to gain two things. The first is that great intangible – feel – the second is a design that suits you (even if no-one else likes it).

Part of the search for a personal style is your sound, and many of the 'name' players have gone well away from standard lines in their quest for it. Brian May has the guitar he made when he was a kid, Ritchie Blackmore carves his fretboards concave between the frets. These tricks (coupled of course with prodigious talent) enable them to be instantly recognisable and this is a vital part of establishing one's reputation as a guitarist of individuality. That is not to say, of course, that custom or customised instruments are totally necessary in attempting to stand out from the crowd – far too many guitarists of international repute have made it without them for that to be true. But it can and does help.

There is more to it than sound, anyway. A lot of guitarists develop strange tendencies in technique as their careers progress – they may wish for a wider or thinner neck than can be found standard, a lighter body, longer scale: the list is endless. By definition a mass producer has to aim products at either the lowest common denominator of the market place or, hopefully, the highest common factor. Whichever approach is taken, however, will inevitably be some form of compromise and one that can only be totally overcome by having an instrument made for you. After all, the classical maestros do, by and large, just that. They go to a luthier and have the instrument made which they need to express themselves on. Why not rock and jazz players too?

A major factor in the growth and development of small manufacturers is, of course, the veritable flood of good accessories now on the market. Back in the mid-Seventies (when I first got to know John Birch) he was making his own pickups. They weren't at all bad but it meant that unless guitar makers had John's abilities in that department (and John was an electronics man first and foremost, not a woodworker) they were forced to cobble together some sort of pickup which was never likely to rival a Gibson or Fender design.

Now, with the advent of Di Marzio, Mighty Mite, Bill Lawrence, Schecter and so many others, it is merely a question of the guitar maker getting the woodworking, design and what have you correct and then putting on these add-on products which are, some feel, as good or better than that equipment made by the big names. Even Gibson now actively push their own pickups as separate items so you could easily build your own axe and fit Gibson humbuckers to it if you chose.

What is true of pickups is even truer of bridges. Most good bridges are castings, and tooling up to produce them can be an expensive business. What happens now is that you buy a *Badass* or something similar and you're away.

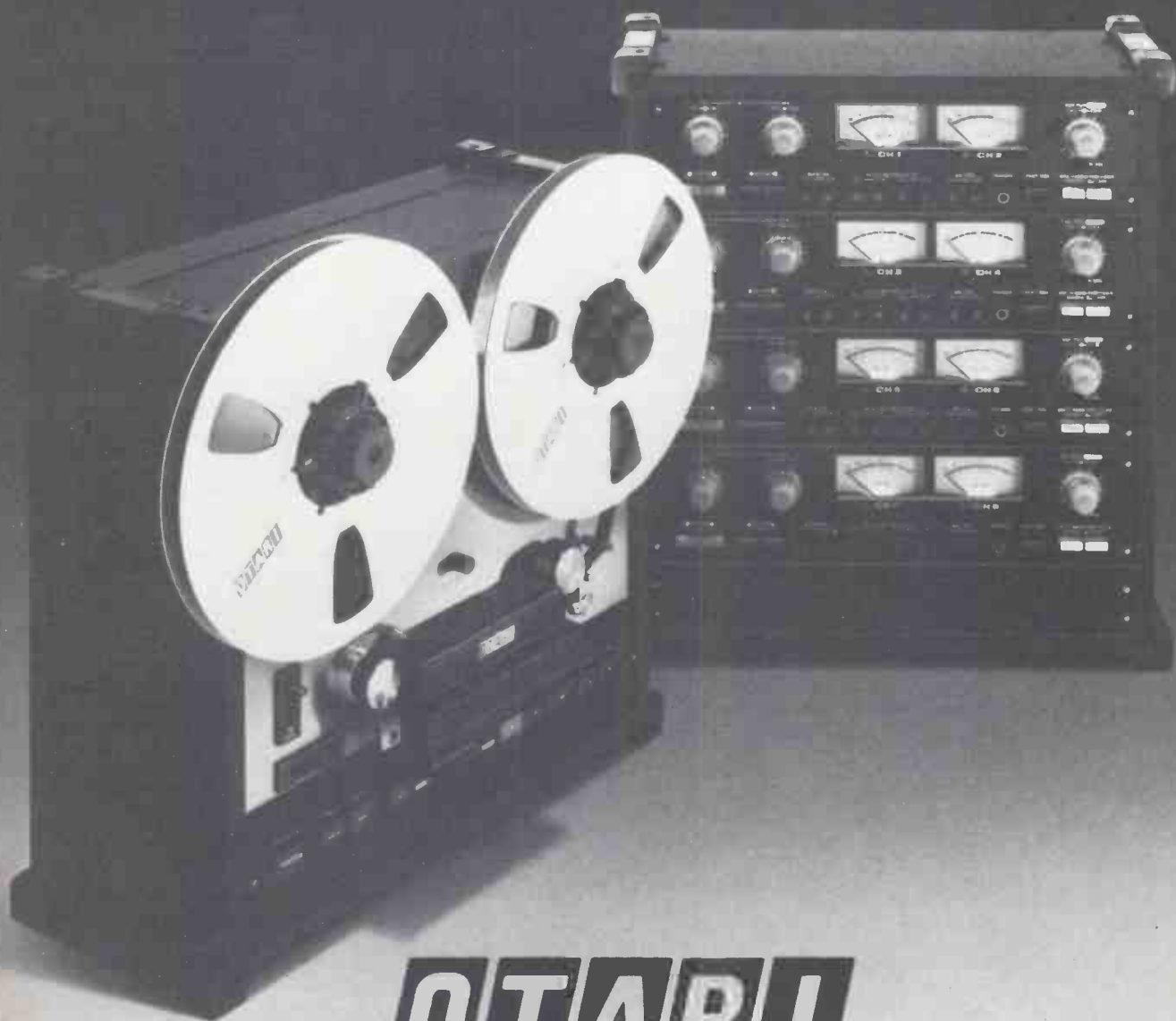
I must say, however, that I'm not trying to destroy the credibility of the mass producers here. I haven't got the sort of money that is demanded to have my perfect bass built for me and I'm perfectly happy with those mass produced axes which I find right. But, and this has to be admitted, there are nearly always trade-offs and compromises with a mass-produced guitar. The neck is just that shade too wide, the frets not quite profiled right. If I had the money I'd go straight out and have a guitar or bass made. As it is I haven't and I'm truly grateful for the modern (relatively) cheap mass produced instrument.

But what the small makers have done, and this is undeniable, is tried seemingly off-the-wall ideas which have, eventually, worked so well that the big names have picked up the ideas and, sometimes blatantly, copied them.

Either way we all benefit from the existence of these people. Their ideas, sometimes lunatic, sometimes bordering on genius, have helped transform the electric guitar and the bass into the beasts that they are today. Exotic woods, better bridges, active electronics, weird and wonderful string configurations, have all been if not invented by, then popularised and perfected by, these small outfits.

It would be interesting to know what experiences *SI/BI* readers have had with custom guitar makers either with originals or customising and repair jobs. After all, it's all very well for me to waffle on about how wonderful they can be – but how has it worked for you?

Unless I get a flood of letters telling me tales of woe, however, I shall persist in believing that the small guitar makers in this country and America (and, believe me, there are some great ones on the continent too) are taking the guitar forward in leaps and bounds. Let's hope that the economics of their work allow them to carry on developing and emerging at the current rapid rate!



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## Around the studios

**1.2.3. Music** is an 8-track basement studio located in Butetown, Cardiff. A 15ft square control room provides home for a Studiomaster 16/8 desk linked to a Teac Tascam 80-8 with BEL noise reduction, and a Revox B77 for mastering. Tannoy Ardens powered by Crown D75 amps provide monitoring; outboard effects include BEL and Accessit compressors, reverb, tape echo, flanger and a Yamaha analogue delay line. The 25ft x 20ft recording area will accommodate up to 10 musicians, and contains a pair of isolation booths for drums, vocals etc. A couple of rooms leading off the control room have also been turned into a purpose-built echo chamber. Instruments available for hire at nominal charge (between £5 and £8 per session) include a Yamaha CS50 polysynth, Hammond M102 and Leslie cabinet, Ludwig drum kit and Yamaha stereo electric piano. (A CS80 can be supplied if sufficient notice is given.)

During the three and a half months since 1.2.3. Music first opened, studio manager/engineer Dave Pierce tells me that the studio has been involved mainly with demos for local bands, plus the occasional production item for Cardiff Broadcasting and BBC Wales. Pete Brown, who was in recently to record a couple of song demos, and Tony Etorra have been regular clients. Studio rates are £8 an hour for 8-track sessions, and £5 for remix or tape copying; daily rates (8 hours) are £60 and £35 respectively. Full details of studio charges, tape costs and booking conditions can be obtained from Dave Pierce at 1.2.3. Music, 123 Bute Street, Butetown, Cardiff CF1 6HZ. Tel: 0222-373135.

Not many studios can claim to have taken their name from a breed of sheep. For **Jacob's Studio**, situated on a farm where these rare sheep are bred, the choice of name would seem eminently appropriate. Owner and musician/producer Andy Fembach previously ran a small private studio, which eventually grew into a busy 16-track. Wanting to offer musicians a spacious and friendly environment in which they could live and work, Andy recently bought a large country house in Runwick near Farnham. He has now converted a separate wing of the house into a self-contained studio/accommodation complex.

The main recording area encompasses the old stables, and is said to retain a lot of its original character. Between the different floor levels and ceiling pitches can be created a wide variety of acoustic environments. Also provided is a string overdub suite, situated in what was originally the drawing room of the main house. All studio areas, including the 500 sq ft control room located between the studio proper and the overdub suite, look out over the farm's paddocks and grounds. Clients even have access to a swimming pool and tennis court.

Control room equipment includes



## A Buying Time is Guaranteed...

**J**ackson Music, that well-known purveyor of second-hand recording hardware, is organising a rather unusual two-day sale of studio gear this month. On October 15 and 16, Abbey Road's enormous studio one in Swiss Cottage, North London, will be the venue for a special sale of multitracks, mastering machines, mixing consoles, amps and monitors, mics and stands, reverb units, compressor-limiters and dozens of other sonic goodies. Also arranged is a bargain-basement jumble sale with job lots of cable and connectors, used multitrack and 1/4-in tape, plus various items of furniture, fixtures and fittings.

a brand new Soundcraft 1624 console, Ampex MM1000 16-track with varispeed, Leevers-Rich mastering machine, Lockwood/Tannoy Red and Auratone Cube monitors, ADR compressor-limiter, MXR Flanger/Doubler and MicMix Master Room reverb. Clients also have free use of the studio drum kit, Fender Rhodes piano, Fender Twin Reverb, JBL bass cabinet and a Challen acoustic piano.

Since Jacob's opened for business last March, it has been used by Patti Palladin from the New York band Snatch, Mungo Jerry, Liquid Gold, Vox Pop and the Cadillacs (previously Racing Cars) with singer/songwriter Meic Stephens. Chief engineer at Jacob's is Ken Thomas, who worked previously at Advision, Startling and Tonstudios in Germany.

A 10-hour session costs £100 during the week and £110 at weekends; overtime is charged at £12 and £14 per hour respectively. Bed and breakfast is also available at £4 per head (minimum of £20 per party), while full board costs £8 a head. If you plan to stay for a while, the studio also offers a special weekly package, comprising seven days of open studio time

Stand-out attraction of the sale should be the auctioning of the genuine Studer J37 4-track machines used on the Beatles *Sergeant Pepper* sessions: also for sale will be the Mellotron - complete with many of the original tapes still intact - that appeared on many early tracks by the Fab Four. In addition, the compressor-limiter used by the late producer Joe Meek will be up for grabs to the highest bidder.

Full details of the greatest stock of studio equipment ever gathered under one roof (it says here) are available from **Malcolm Jackson**, on Rickmansworth (09237) 72351.

plus accommodation and full board for eight people. Total all-in price is £1500 per week.

A full rundown of the studio's attractive facilities can be obtained from Andy Fembach at Jacob's Studios, Runwick, near Farnham, Surrey. Tel: 0252-723518.

## Rock Flicks, Merton Parkas, an' that

**F**ree Range Studios in the West End of London has been in business as a 24-track facility for just under a year now, following an upgrade from 16-track last Christmas. During the down time, the 12 by 14ft control room was completely rebuilt and refurbished, and now boasts a 32/24 Trident Series 80 console working into a 3M M79 24-track complete with Audio Kinetics XT-24 Intelocator. Dolby noise-reduction is only available on the Studer B67 mastering machine, since spinning tape at 30in/s on the multitrack without Dolby is said to give very little noise and minimal print through, even at elevated record-

ing level. Studio manager Brad Grisdale says he still likes to use the Dolbys, however, but purely as a special effect. Set to encode, a Dolby unit becomes a handy compressor for sharpening up a hi-hat, or levelling out piano and brass tracks, while in decode it becomes an expander/noise gate for removing hi-hat spill from a snare sound.

Other, more conventional, effects units comprise a full complement of ADR Scamp modules, and an AMS 15-80 digital delay line with pitch-shift card (and, as soon as it becomes available, the new reverb accessory). Apparently Free Range don't believe in spending large amounts of money on outboard gear that only gets used occasionally. Better, Brad explained, to hire in what's really needed, when it's required for a particular session. Control room monitoring is handled by Tannoy HPD drivers in Lockwood cabinets powered by Quad 405 amps.

The 1000 sq ft studio, complete with drum booth at one end, has been left reasonably live, and is said to be particularly nice-sounding on percussion and drums. Screens and covers are also available to deaden off certain areas as required. The only instruments provided by the studio comprise a Steinway grand, Mellotron and HH combo amp. The trouble with studio instruments, Brad claims, is that they either get knocked about and generally abused, or they're ripped off! Once again, Free Range prefers to hire specific instruments as the need arises. At present studio rates are between £19 and £25 per hour, dependent on the amount of time booked; rates may be increased sometime soon to £24 and £30 respectively.

Another side of the studio's business - through one of its co-directors - is Rock Flicks, which has made several promo films during the last couple of years, including those for Sniff 'n' the Tears, Kate Bush and Queen. They also have plans to move into the video production field in the not too distant future.

Recent work at Free Range includes a promo film for The Blues Band, sessions with the Pretenders, Merton Parkas, Eddie and the Hot Rods, Gold, The Slits and Blue Meanies. Bob Calvert, ex-vocalist with Hawkwind, has also been in working on an album to coincide with the publication of a new book.

Contact Brad Grisdale at **Free Range Studios**, 22 Tavistock Street, London WC2 (Tel: 01-836 7608) for a full rundown on the studios rates, hire charges and other booking details.

**S**ometime in late April a sticky-fingered individual walked off with Free Range Studio's personal Fender Telecaster. Not unnaturally they'd like it back. So if you come across an off-white/cream coloured Tele, serial number 148040, studio manager Brad Grisdale on 01-836 7608 would be glad of the news.

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

by Roger Phillips

I thought the second half of this feature might be a little thin on review items with just the Ibanez CS-505 and a couple of Electro-Harmonix units on hand but, lo and behold, an all-American DOD *Mini Chorus* pedal flew in all the way from Utah, USA especially to appear in this lavish production. Not only that, but Brødr Jørgensen finally found us a spare Roland Boss *CE-2* chorus unit – seems they're selling the Rolands quicker than they can say, 'That'll be £59 inc VAT please' so we count ourselves very privileged to have one for this review. I also kept hold of the Vox *Chorus* that I reviewed along with the rest of the new Vox range in the July '80 issue of *SI*, so that I could compare it directly with the other chorus pedals in this test. There's only one ADT unit in this section to compete with the five chorus pedals, and there can be little doubt that the chorus sound is becoming as fashionable and sought after today as both distortion and phasing were in days gone by.

I forgot to mention last month that, if you care to check the flanger section of our Phaser/Flanger review (*SI* December '79), you'll find that most flangers will produce chorus effects too: so if you want chorus plus a few extra sounds, you could be better off with one of those. Similarly, if you take a peek at the two-part Stage Echo box review (*SI* July/August '79) you'll find that some of these units can be used to create ADT effects as well as the more clearly defined echo sounds. I hope to be bringing you another echo box feature in a couple of months' time, so keep your eyes open for that. Meanwhile we'll start off this month's diatribe with a look at the first of the bunch of chorus boxes, this one from Ibanez.

## Ibanez CS505 Chorus

Price: £43.48 ex VAT. Size: 2½in x 3½in x 2in. Weight: 10oz. Controls: Speed and Depth. Construction: Cast alloy finished in blue. Power: Two 9V batteries or 18V mains adaptor (not supplied). UK Distributor: James T Coppock (Leeds) Ltd. Country of origin: Japan.

Set in a similar case to the old *Phase-Tone PT999* pedal, reviewed in our phaser and flanger extravaganza (*SI* Nov '79), this Ibanez *Chorus* pedal offers a similar array of warm and subtle sounds as its sister unit, but at an amazingly cheap price for a Chorus pedal. There is nothing approaching an unusable sound on this unit and even with both the Speed and Depth controls turned full on the lazy vibrato effect isn't too harsh or distorted. Any combination of settings will produce delightfully full-bodied and rich sounds, and



just as there are no bad effects, there are no particular settings that I can pick out as *the* ones to use: they're all good.

To my untrained ear this unit sounds like the equal of the MXR *Stereo Chorus* in terms of the quality of sound, if not in terms of variety, but then the extra effects that the MXR gives aren't necessarily useful under stage conditions anyway. I would think that most FX units are used at one setting, for one particular sound, in the course of an evening's work and if you're not going to indulge in a lot of reprogramming of the controls, there's very little point in having extreme sounds built in. This is where the Ibanez scores: there are no extreme sounds in this unit, but if you don't need 'em why pay for 'em?

It's very quiet in operation too, with no hiss to speak of and a totally silent FET effect bypass switch. To be fair, though, not many of the conventional footswitches on the review items caused any electrical popping either. The Ibanez also sports a sound status light that doubles as a battery check, and an adaptor socket for an 18V mains supply. Stereo simulation is available too, along the lines of the direct/effect type used in all bar the MXR unit, though one mixed socket can be used for mono applications.

The CS505 is excellent value for money and probably best value in this entire review. It sounds equally good with both piano and guitar, and fellow muso Ken The Fender just loved the fretless quality it gave to his bass sound. It's a very compact little unit too and, apart from the fact that I wouldn't recommend it for vocal use, I just couldn't find any fault with this unit at all.

**TechSpec:** Input impedance: 500ohms. Out-

put impedance: Less than 10kohms. Input noise: -100dBm. Input/output level: 1:1.

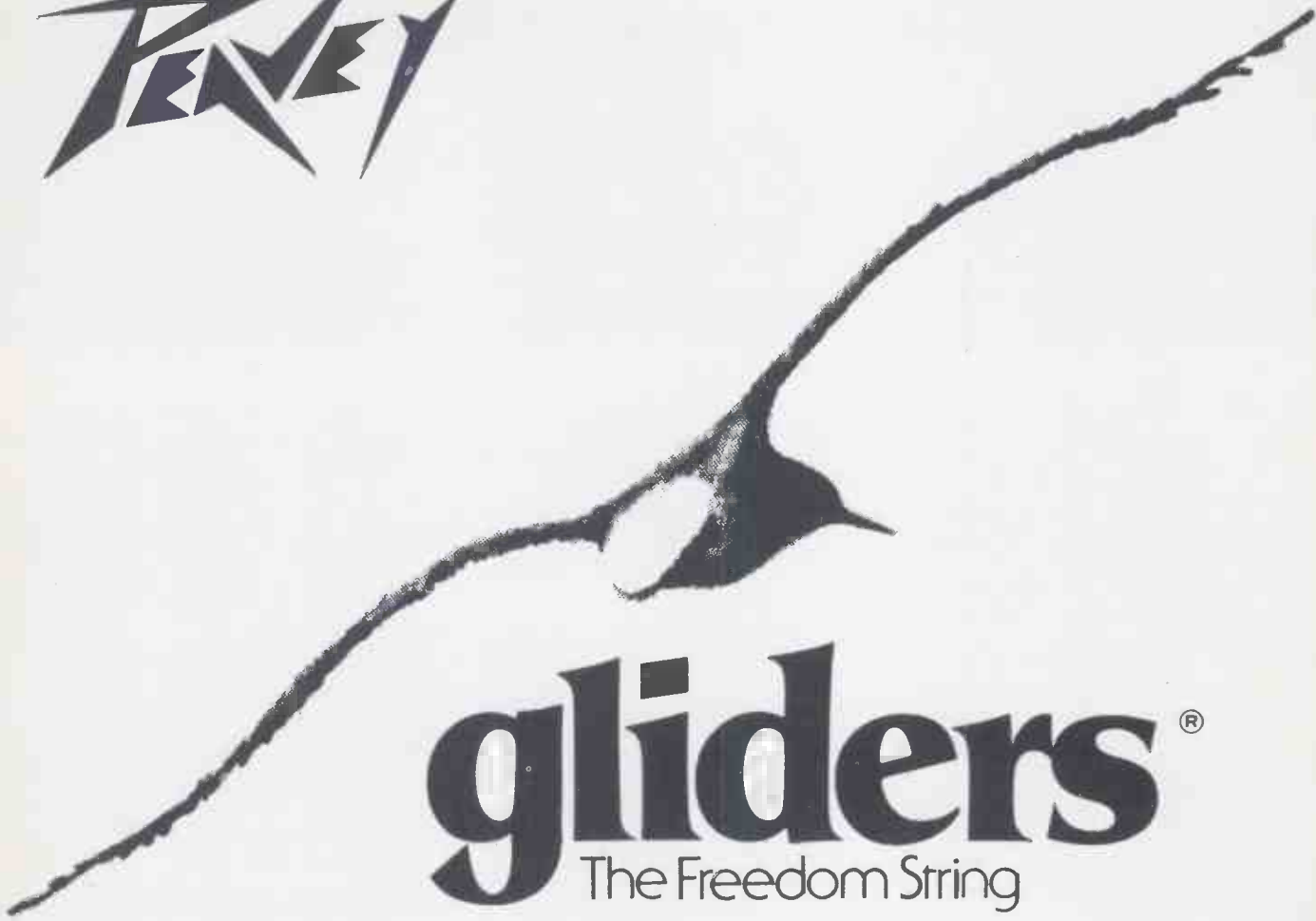
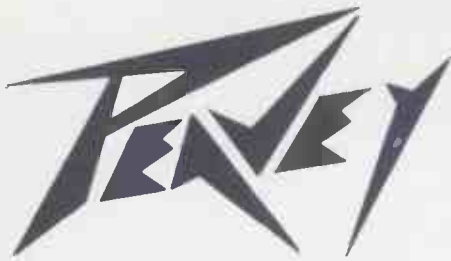
## Electro-Harmonix Full Double Tracking Effect

Price: £45.65 ex VAT. Size: 5½x3½x3ins. Weight: Just over 1lb. Controls: Blend, Delay switch. Construction: Folded metal finished in nickel plate and black vinyl. Power: Two 9V batteries or 18V mains adaptor (not supplied). Distributors: Electro-Harmonix (UK) Ltd, Dulwich. Country of origin: US.

Built into the same box as the other old favourite, the *Smallstone* phase shifter, this pedal offers limited delay effects at a very limited price. You can't get much in the way of delay machines for around 50 quid these days, so it would be wrong to expect too much in the way of versatility from this little unit. It actually offers only two delay times, which are selected by the switch located on the left of the top panel, 50mS in the forward position, and 100mS when pulled back. In the centre of the top panel is the rotary Blend control which gives direct signal only when turned fully clockwise, and delay only when turned fully anti-clockwise. Any blend of the two sounds that you require may be found between these two extreme positions. 12 o'clock on the dial offers an equal mix of both direct and delayed signal, and gives a reasonable effect on both 50 and 100mS settings.

The input and mono output are situated at the top of the pedal away from your feet and there's also facility for an 18v mains adaptor should you not wish to use the two 9v batteries supplied. In the first unit I received from Electro-Harmonix the batteries had come





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|     |           |          |
|-----|-----------|----------|
| 1ST | .009"     | .229 mm  |
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| 4TH | .024" wd. | .610 mm  |
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| 6TH | .040" wd. | 1.067 mm |

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| .026" wd. | .660 mm  |
| .036" wd. | .914 mm  |
| .046" wd. | 1.168 mm |

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|           |          |
|-----------|----------|
| .011"     | .280 mm  |
| .015"     | .381 mm  |
| .020" wd. | .508 mm  |
| .028 wd.  | .711 mm  |
| .038" wd. | .965 mm  |
| .050" wd. | 1.270 mm |

### Easy Gliders® (light gauge — long scale — Roundwire)

|     |       |          |
|-----|-------|----------|
| 1ST | .045" | 1.143 mm |
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| 3RD | .080" | 2.032 mm |
| 4TH | .100" | 2.540 mm |

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|       |          |
|-------|----------|
| .045" | 1.143 mm |
| .065" | 1.905 mm |
| .085" | 2.157 mm |
| .105" | 2.665 mm |

\*Every set of Gliders® comes with a free Speed Winder.

adrift in the box and had wrenched a couple of wires from their soldered joints. I rapidly exchanged that for a second unit, only to find that this one didn't want to work either. When I checked I found that the Electro-Harmonix batteries were not only dead, but were also leaking. Getting batteries supplied with an FX box is not necessarily an advantage and, as I've said before, it's always advisable to change the supplied batteries at the first opportunity if you want to be sure you're getting the best out of your new toy.

50mS is a fairly long delay time for a double tracking effect, the best doubling sounds coming from the 20 to 40mS region, but this unit does give an ADT effect of sorts, albeit of a rather echoey nature. Unfortunately, the more delay you mix into the signal the more background noise you get, and this hiss becomes even more noticeable when you switch to 100mS. This delay time gives a good slap-back echo which, luckily, blends better with the direct signal when the Blend control is turned down a little, thus slightly cutting the hiss level at the same time. Shame about the background noise though: with a little bit of compander circuitry added, this unit could be really useful to vocalists who want to have some control over their own sound. But as it is, I think most people would find it a little noisy.

Electro-Harmonix say that the *Full Double Tracking Effect* can be used with both instruments and voice, but, as mentioned in the first part of this review, instruments sound better with chorus rather than ADT, and also with repeat echo rather than a slap-back effect. I'd say this is definitely a vocalist's FX box: if you've got a limited PA system with no echo or reverb facility, and a limited budget to boot, you could try introducing one of these little boxes into the system to see if the pros outweigh the cons. Electro-Harmonix equipment can often be found at discount prices, so a little snooping around could pay dividends.

#### Roland Boss CE-2 Chorus

Price: £51.30 ex VAT. Size: 4½x2½x2½ins. Weight: 1lb. Controls: Rate and Depth. Construction: Cast metal finished in light blue. Power: 9V battery or 9V mains adaptor (not supplied). Distributors: Brødr Jørgensen (UK) Ltd. Country of origin: Japan.

Another quality product from this new range of Boss effects, manufactured by the Roland organisation in Japan. Like the phaser that did so well in our Phaser/Flanger test (SI November '79), this one's got silent FET switching which is operated by a footplate that takes up two-thirds of the box's top surface. A mains adaptor of one 9v battery will power this box and there's a battery check light situated between the two rotary controls that also acts as a sound status light, staying on all the time the effect is switched in. Input, output and mains adaptor sockets are on the sides of the case and the controls are slightly recessed behind the foot plate away from clumsy feet.

Boss have enjoyed a great deal of critical acclaim, over the years, for their *CE-1* chorus ensemble (reviewed in SI October '78): having produced one of the best stereo chorus pedals they've now come up with an equally good mono unit for the cheaper end of the market. The range of chorus sounds produced by the pedal's Rate and Depth controls is almost identical in effect and quality to that proffered by the Ibanez *CS-505* - even the extreme vibrato speed is exactly the same. In fact both



these pedals offer excellent sounds throughout their range and there's really not a lot to choose between them. The Ibanez is around £10 cheaper and it does offer effect and direct signal outputs for stereo simulation. The Roland is definitely mono, but only needs one 9v battery as opposed to the two that the Ibanez needs. Changing batteries is a much simpler task on the Boss, with one screw releasing the footplate allowing it to be hinged upward giving access to the battery bay. That footplate is also a bit of a plus, giving an area at least ten times larger to aim at than the Ibanez, but sound-for-sound I'd put these two very much on a par.

#### TechSpec:

Signal/Noise 90dB or more (1 HF-A). Max allowable input: 0dBm-10dBm. Input Impedance: 470K ohms. Output load impedance: over 10K ohms.

#### DOD Mini Chorus/460

Price: £60.82 ex VAT. Size: 4½x2½x2ins. Weight: 1lb. Controls: Speed and Depth. Construction: Die-cast zinc alloy finished in blue. Power: 9V battery or 9V mains adaptor (not supplied). Distributors: Strings & Things Ltd, Brighton. Country of origin: US.

This product from the DOD Electronics Corporation of Salt Lake City is most comparable with the Boss *CE-2*, being strictly mono, offering mains adaptor or battery power and having just the two controls. It is, however, £10 dearer than the Boss and therefore around £20 dearer than the Ibanez but has fewer facilities than each of these Japanese units. The DOD has no sound-status light, no facility for stereo effects, a conventional footswitch, and a slightly higher noise level than the two Japs. This is due mainly to the fact that the DOD boosts the signal volume quite considerably when the effect is kicked in, and so the background noise increases substantially as well. Mind you, an increase in volume is better than having your volume cut by an FX unit, but it's only an advantage if you want your effect to be louder than your normal direct signal. Otherwise, the range of sounds that the *460* offers is good and usable throughout from the slow Speed, high Depth, 12-string sound right through to the vibrato effect. The DOD's range is a little wider than that offered by the Boss and Ibanez, with a faster vibrato to be found at the extreme clockwise setting of the Speed control.

The die-cast zinc alloy case is somewhat rudimentary compared to its counterparts, but like them it has the input, output and mains adaptor sockets on the sides. The DOD's simple design means that the controls are not recessed, and on a small pedal like this they're a little close to the footswitch and could easily be kicked or broken.

DOD also produce a more expensive unit called the *Chorus 690* that boasts stereo outputs, compander circuitry, two independent speed controls and a speed footswitch that causes the effect to speed up and slow down like a rotary speaker. This would undoubtedly have been a more interesting unit to include in this review but, unfortunately, Strings & Things were unable to supply us with one. Maybe we'll take a peek at one of those sometime in the near future.

#### Electro-Harmonix Clone Theory Chorus

Price: £52.61 ex VAT. Size: 6½x8x2½ins. Weight: 2½lbs. Controls: Rate, Depth, Chorus Vibrato and Chorus Vibrato/Vibraflange switch. Construction: Nickel-plated folded metal with black and red control panel. Power: Mains only. Distributor: Electro-Harmonix (UK) Ltd, Dulwich. Country of origin: US.

I'm afraid I was a little disappointed with this one. The *Clone Theory* has had a bit of a facelift since it was first reviewed in SI (October '78) but it turns out that the changes are mainly cosmetic. The whole of the top surface is now black and red (the control terminology being far less readable than on the 'old' *Clone*) and it sports the new matt black control knobs that grace all Electro-Harmonix FX boxes these days.

The October '78 reviewer enthused about the good range of sounds for what was then a very reasonable price, and also claimed that the unit was not too noisy. But times change and I'm afraid that, in this case, this usually innovative and experimental company has been left a bit behind. The *Clone Theory* now competes in the same sort of price range as the new Ibanez and Roland products which both incorporate silent FET switching and compander circuitry to make them totally quiet in operation, while the *Clone*'s range of chorus and vibrato effects is far more extreme than anything offered by the Ibanez and Roland. The effects bypass switch on the unit tested made annoying electrical popping noises every



# PAUL KANTNER

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"A Guild 12 was my first guitar with the Airplane. It's what I write most of my songs on, and I've used it in the studio since the beginning. Even on an electric track I'll overdub it on top of my electric guitar for a great texture.

"I've played lots of 12-strings. I'm always looking. I haven't played a better one yet!"

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now and then, and the general background hiss level was very much higher than on its more up-to-date counterparts.

The controls are much the same as on the 'old' *Clone*, but with one minor exception. All the controls still operate between 5 o'clock and 1 o'clock as opposed to the more conventional 8 to 4 configuration, but where the 'old' *Clone*'s Rate control ranged from fast at 5 o'clock to slow at 1, the new model operates in reverse fashion. It also has a higher speed vibrato at extreme setting than that offered by its elder brother. The only other difference that I could see, was in the terminology used to describe the two-way selector switch situated at the top of the box above the three rotary controls. This used to have the odd title of Edge-On, and although the effect offered by the new model seems to be much the same as the old, the legend on the box now invites us to select between Chor/Vib and Vib/Flange.

In the Chor/Vib mode you may choose to turn the Chor/Vib rotary control to the area from 9 to 1 o'clock for chorus effects of varying intensity, or to 5 to 9 o'clock for vibrato sounds. 9 o'clock on the dial gives you a subtle combination of both effects. Rate and Depth controls affect both the Chorus and Vibrato sounds and the range of effects offered by the *Clone* is second only to the MXR in this review. Switching to Vib/Flange seems to add a deeper Chorus effect to whatever sound you're using at the time. If you've got the Chorus/Vibrato rotary control set to a normal vibrato sound, switching to vib/Flange will give you a deep chorus vibrato effect. If, on the other hand, you're already set to Chorus, selecting Vib/Flange merely deepens the chorus effect, and cuts the treble response slightly too.

Like the DOD, this unit increases the volume of your signal when the effect is kicked in but, unlike the DOD, it does offer direct and effect outputs for stereo simulation. All the inputs and outputs are at the top end of the case, which is sensible, but Electro-Harmonix have not seen fit to incorporate a sound status light into their design.

This is a versatile chorus pedal, for the price, and it does have more to offer in the way of sounds than most of the other Chorus units. I also prefer the jangly, slightly trebly 12-string guitar effect and the honky-tonk sound it gives my Wurlitzer piano, to the similar sounds offered by the Roland, Ibanez or DOD, but the background hiss and noisy footswitch definitely let it down. I think it's about time Electro-Harmonix took a look at what else is on the market these days. It's all very well to have a reputation for being innovative, but there's not much point in being 'the first', if you don't stay 'the best'.

Electro-Harmonix also produce the *Memory Man Deluxe* (see *SI* July '79) which

incorporates echo and chorus effects with compander circuitry for quiet operation.

#### Vox Chorus

Price: £50.43 ex VAT. Size: 7x5½x2½ins. Weight: 1½lbs. Controls: Intensity, Speed and Input. Construction: Die-cast aluminium finished in grey. Power: Two 9V batteries or 18V mains adaptor (not supplied). Distributors: Vox Ltd, London. Country of origin: Japan.

I reviewed the new Vox range in the August '80 issue of *SI/BI* but I think it would be interesting to see how it compares to the other chorus units in its price range. The Vox costs £58 with VAT and so is directly comparable in price to the *Clone Theory* and the Boss *CE-2* and, like the latter, the Vox is strictly a mono unit. It does have a sound status light and also incorporates an Input level control that is used in conjunction with a peak level LED indicator. The footswitch is conventional in appearance, but is of the non-click type, and is silent in operation.

The extreme Vibrato effect available on the Vox is faster than that of the DOD, Ibanez or Roland Boss, but slightly slower than the *Clone*. Extreme Intensity settings produce over-modulated sounds on everything bar the slowest speed settings, and the full range of effects available isn't far short of those offered by the *Clone* – but the Vox is a lot quieter in operation. The sweep is a little jerky even on the lowest Intensity settings – unlike the Ibanez, Boss or DOD which can be taken to extreme Depth settings with absolutely no ill effects, but the sound is not offensive.

The case was designed to sit in a semi-circle alongside its brothers and sisters in the new Vox range, so its shape is a little odd. The controls are not recessed but are generally far enough away from the footswitch not to be a problem, and all the inputs, outputs and mains sockets are on the top end. There's nothing revolutionary or new about the Vox, but if you want a greater range of sounds than those offered by the smaller pedals, and with silent switching and no hiss, this could be the box for you.

**TechSpec:** Input impedance: 250Kohms. Output impedance: 10Kohms. Delay times: 4-16ms.

#### Conclusions

To sum up this two-part review, I think it would be reasonably fair to place the ten different units into three separate categories: those that have Delay only, those that give Chorus and Vibrato sounds, and those that offer Chorus, Vibrato and Delay effects.

The first is a category of one. The Electro-Harmonix *Full Double Tracking Effect* is the sole entry in the Delay-only stakes, and despite its rather noisy performance it gives reasonable

value-for-money as far as delay machines go, I can't help feeling there's a market for a cheap but silent-operating ADT/Slap Back echo unit, with perhaps a slightly shorter delay on the ADT, and maybe a footswitch selector for the two effects. This unit's nearest competitor, price-wise, would appear to be the Bell Electrolabs *Automatic Double Tracker*, which will do all that the Electro-Harmonix pedal will do, and much, much more – but it is double the price.

In the Chorus/Vibrato category the prices of the six items range from around £45 to £95 (ex VAT) and I'm afraid it's the lone British contender that heads the list in the finance department. The Carlsbro *Chorus* is hopelessly over-priced, considering the facilities offered, and I guess this is symptomatic of the state of British industry these days in the face of Japanese competition. We used to be able to claim that although they were cheap, we would beat the Japanese hands-down on quality, but that just doesn't apply anymore. The American *Clone Theory* offers a wider range of chorus and vibrato sounds than the others, but is very noisy in operation. The Vox is also more versatile than most of the others and is a lot quieter than the *Clone*. The DOD *Mini Chorus* is very rudimentary in design and construction when compared with the Japanese representatives, and is a little overpriced for the facilities it offers. So best value-for-money in this section comes down to a direct fight between the Ibanez *CS-505* and the Roland Boss *CE-2*. Really, I could go either way on this decision, and there is absolutely nothing to choose between them with regard to the sounds. Both have various facilities and design details that work in their favour, but I guess with its remarkably low price tag of £43.48 plus VAT and its extra stereo effect capability, the Ibanez *CS-505* wins by a neck.

Only three contenders figure in the Chorus/Vibrato/Delay section and, by golly, two of them are British: a moment's silence, please, while we doff our caps, and feel our hearts swell with pride – I'd wave a Union Jack, but I might be mistaken for a Buster Mottram fan. The only foreign interloper is the American MXR *Stereo Chorus* which is, predictably, the most expensive unit in the whole review. If you want a quality stereo chorus footpedal that offers ADT effects as well, then this just might be your cup of tea, old chap, but remember you're going to have to come up with £165 inc VAT to make this beauty your own. The Carlsbro *ADT* pedal offers a somewhat cheaper alternative at £115.50 plus VAT but is nowhere near as versatile or as controllable as the MXR. The other British contender is extremely versatile and controllable and, not only that, it's the cheapest of the three units in this category. The Bell Electrolabs *Automatic Double Tracker* may not be of a footpedal design (though a footswitch jack could be built in), but if you want to make full use of a unit as versatile as the three in this section, you've got to do a lot of manual reprogramming anyway. A footswitch socket and sound status light would have made the Bell even more of a winner with me, but with its amazing range of sounds, comprehensive control facilities, and £90 ex VAT price tag, the *Automatic Double Tracker* probably offers the best value for money that I've ever come across in the area of sound processing equipment.

Altogether now 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rules...' OK? ■

# Video: an Encyclopedeo

No tales of tattooed ladies in this very, very sensible explanation of the what, why and wherefores of video by *Richard Dean*, self-styled editor of *Television & Home Video*, a Link House publication, etc, etc.

Dear Sung Incidentally incorporating Been Intamedleys:

I note from your learned journal I purchase each month that video is the coming thing. Can you advise me, where do I stand re singing on records? People say I'm not much to look at. Concerned, Anglesey.

It could happen to anybody. There you are, casually flicking through a music magazine, minding your own aspirations, when you pick up a dose of video. Respectable magazine like *SI/BI* too. Disgusting.

I should have known better, you find yourself muttering. Contracting video is such an expensive business. And afterwards you'll ask yourself, 'Was it all worth it?'

Of course, the real question is what video has to offer given its expense and the sickeningly trendy following it attracts at the moment. Is it an expensive new gadget rich kids are jumping the A & R/gig/management/tour queues with? Is it a tiresome new hurdle you have to jump in order to get anywhere? Or is it a valuable new medium which can significantly improve your performance and visual awareness?

Well, before voting on that one, it's necessary to identify the beast in the bush, as it were. Just what is video? And how does it work?

Basically video in this context is a method of recording images on magnetic tape. Sound (currently in mono) is laid alongside the picture information, so is always in sync with the action. To record you need a video camera plugged into a portable video recorder. Sound usually goes in on the multi-pin linking the two, as most cameras have in-built microphones. But you can use an auxiliary mic or line

source instead. To play back you connect the recorder to your TV aerial socket, tune the set as you would for any TV station, and watch the screen.

That didn't hurt, now did it? You don't need me to tell you that, being a magnetic recording process, you can erase other video recordings with new ones and don't need to send the tape off to be developed. But where video does differ is on the subject of editing. For all I know, you might thrill at the sight of an editing block and a set of Ever-Ready cutting blades. Putting a nice clean leader on the beginning, between, and end of tracks is all part of the fun, and cutting tracks down to their crisp and punchy best brings untold pleasure, you argue. Well, you can't do that with video tape. You risk damaging the recorder and tape, and apart from that little problem, you'll get picture disturbance at the splice point. Cue another ration of how video works at this point.

## Helical scan

Inside the recorder is a drum rotating at 1500 rpm. This contains two tiny video heads. The tape is wrapped halfway round this drum so that one head is always in contact with the tape. As the tape crawls round this high speed drum, which is slightly tilted relative to the tape's direction, diagonal video tracks are recorded across most of the tape. Though these tracks are diagonal, the process is called 'helical scan recording' due to the geometry of the tape *in situ* with the heads.

Having two heads is useful for picture continuity (ask any doctor), but in fact each handles its own part of the picture. A TV picture is made up of 625 lines of varying colour and intensity and 25 'frames' of these lines are displayed every

second (UK figures). But each frame has two contributory 'fields' of 312½ lines. One carries all the odd lines - 1, 3, 5 etc - and the other evens. The two heads on the video drum handle the odd and even fields between them.

The reason why video heads are mounted on this drum in the first place is because a high head-to-tape speed is needed to store the picture signals. Whereas a sound tape recorder might operate up to about 25kHz or so, even a humble home video recorder needs at least a 3MHz bandwidth - over 100 times the resolution of a top studio recorder. Helical scanning makes high head-to-tape speed possible without running tape at an unimaginably high speed.

In fact home video recorders drive tape at below an inch per second - substantially less than the speed of an ordinary cassette recorder. For this reason, the soundtrack on domestic video tapes - recorded separately on the bottom edge of the tape - is how you say pretty crap.

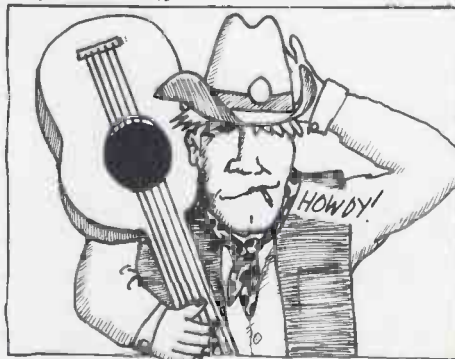
Another stationary head puts a sync pulse on the top edge of the tape. This contains a string of square waves telling the TV where to put each recorded line to make up an intelligible picture on the screen. If these are interrupted, the picture will roll or collapse into a senseless shimmer of colours.

## Editing

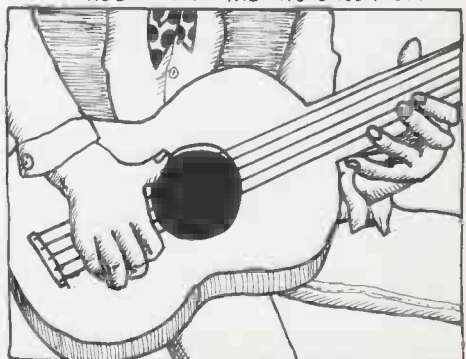
Which brings us back to editing. Physically cutting tape has already been ruled out for the damage the splice could do to the recorder's delicate video heads. But even electronic cutting between signals is not a simple matter. If you back a new recording up with a new one, the sync pulse is interrupted. You get picture disturbance of one sort or another at the join.

the Tills  
are alive  
with the Sight  
of Music

THERE ONCE WAS A COWBOY FROM THE RODEO...



WHO PLAYED GUITAR LIKE HIS DADDY-O...



This can be a real nuisance if you aspire to making tapes using several 'takes' – such as miming to a pre-recorded mix – but most musicians start off making video demos for their own use, recording straight through on each number, using a locked-up camera or perhaps somebody panning and zooming on the camera to add interest.

Even so, the answer to clean edits is a technique called roll back editing, where the previously recorded sync is compared and synchronised to the pulses (supplied by the camera) on the fresh take before recording is actually engaged. Result: a perfect cut from one scene to the next. This is only available on a mains recorder at present. A portable version of this machine (Panasonic NV-7000) arrives next January. JVC and Ferguson models with roll back editing arrive later this year. All the portables around at the moment suffer varying degrees of picture break up at the join, it has to be said.

## Formats

To think that we've gone all this way without mentioning video formats. At one time it was all we ever seemed to talk about, as I'm sure whoever's sebbing this copy would agree. Helol? Fallne aslep again. Heer comes teh Publisher!! Ah, that's better.

All domestic systems use ½in tape encased in a plastic cassette. The two most popular systems – and the only ones offering portable video recorders – are VHS (Video Home System invented by JVC) and Betamax (invented by Sony), in that order. Both use spools arranged in a co-planar fashion, like an ordinary cassette. For the record, the first domestic video recorder, Philips VCR (1972) used a co-axial arrangement (one spool on top of the other). VCR format (N1500 series machines) is now obsolete and its immediate successor, VCR-LP (N1700 series machines) is being phased out. Philips' hopes now rest on the Video 2000 format, which has just recently been launched after many months of delay. A Video 2000 portable is promised eventually, but not yet.

VHS and Betamax use all the tape width on a single recording, whereas Video 2000 uses only half. Consequently there is only one 'side' on VHS and Betamax cassettes, with a maximum

playing time of 3 and 3½ hours respectively. Video 2000 has two sides, at 4 hours each. VHS has a 4-hour tape waiting in the wings; though nobody seems sure when or if this will be released as a product.

There's not a lot to choose between VHS and Betamax, though there are more VHS portables in the shops than any others at present. Betamax has a slightly slower tape speed than VHS, so the sound quality is arguably not so good. (I use the term 'good' loosely.) Most of the state-of-the-art effort has gone into mains machines so far; portables tend to get second priority because of the smaller demand. But such features as still frame and touch-button control have been introduced on some models.

Possibly useful features yet to be incorporated on portable machines include cue and review (high speed play in both directions for searching out a required sequence) slow motion and frame advance (for analysis of a sequence), double speed (for a good laugh), Dolby noise reduction (on the newest mains VHS machines), and, of course, the ubiquitous roll back editing.

## Cameras and accessories

The best video cameras incorporate an electronic viewfinder. This is literally a miniature TV screen set into the eyepiece. It shows you exactly what's going on to tape (albeit in black and white) but just as important, will allow you to see what's on the tape, on location. So if you aren't sure about a given sequence, you can check it on the spot.

The cheaper alternatives to this are through the lens (TTL) optical viewfinders and stand-off viewfinders. The latter give only a rough indication of what you're taping and don't indicate focus accuracy. Useless the pair of them, in my view. Ha! View, geddit? Neither allow playback off-tape. The thing is that cameras with these viewfinders are usually fitted with cheap pickup devices, which commonly suffer colour fringing and low sensitivity.

Unless you intend to use the camera locked up on a tripod, that is unmanned, you'll need a zoom lens. 2:1 and 3:1 are available but 6:1 are the best. They add powerful impact and interest to tapes provided you don't overdo it.

An automatic iris is useful for per-

formances where the light level changes a lot; particularly if the camera is unmanned. It varies the iris setting to retain optimum exposure under varying conditions. Domestic video cameras are not very sensitive to light compared with what you see on the TV; winebars and dingy pubs are useless for video without additional light. Stage gigs or rehearsal rooms are preferred settings.

All portables come with a battery which lasts for an hour of recording, and a mains charger. An optional extra is a tuner/timer attachment which converts the machine to a conventional home video recorder capable of recording TV programmes.

## Sound

Here's the bitter voice of experience talking. Take a portable video recorder/camera to the average rock gig and see where it gets you. Off you go then.

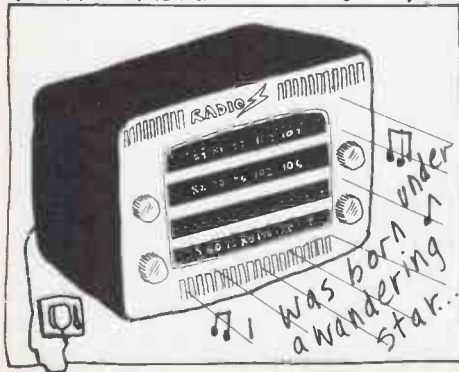
To save you the bother, you'll get pictures all right – assuming the light level's high enough – but the sound will be a real mess. OK, so the mix will be very approximate, varying as and when you move the camera. You'll get booming, you'll get unwanted crowd noise. But more likely than not, the sheer level will totally defeat the automatic gain control (AGC) on the recorder. You can't override the AGC because there's no manual alternative in the way of a knob and meter.

There are three ways round this. Either you find a way of introducing an attenuator in the sound chain (between the inbuilt camera mic and the camera input socket) which isn't easy to do let alone calculate the attenuation required; you feed another mic via an attenuator into the aux mic socket on the recorder; or you take a line feed from the stage mixer and plug it into the audio line input on the recorder.

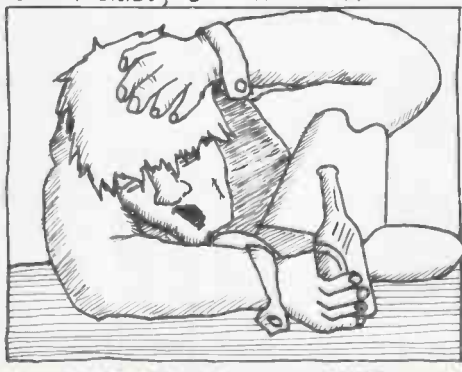
The last option is obviously the best. To do the job properly you'd need a dedicated output bus to mono the PA output, with autonomous input level controls, supplementary crowd mics, and reverb facilities. Then you'd really be talking; though to be fair nobody would be able to hear you.

Another exciting possibility is to mime to a demo, master cut, or heaven forbid, somebody else's record. The un-

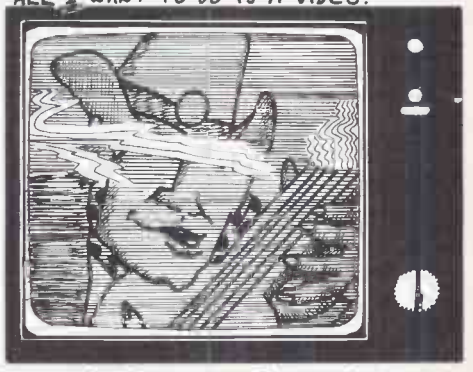
(A STAR IN THE AGE OF THE RADIO...)

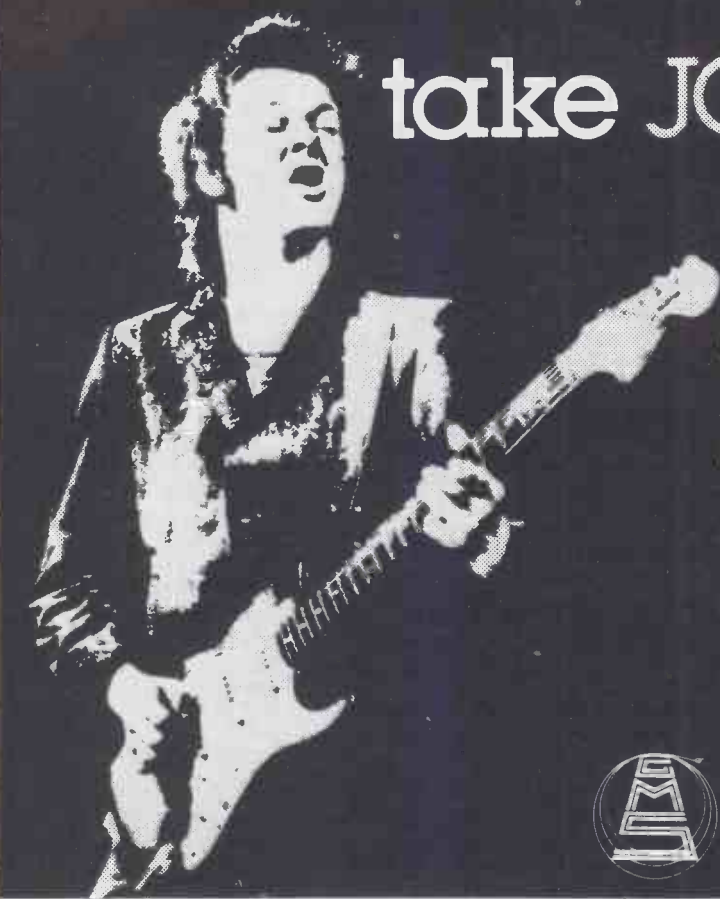


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complicated way is to feed the tape or disc source simultaneously to your monitor system and the audio line in socket on the video recorder, and run straight through the number with instruments and vocal mixed well behind the guide track.

The ambitious enterprise is to compile a multi-take tape. Here you can change locations, clothes, personnel and angle of shot between takes. Like they do on telly, I hear you chorus. It's possible on one machine, but easier using two.

It involves using the invaluable 'audio dub' facility on the final sequence. Hard work, but fun; and too involved to go into here. But if anybody's interested, let *SI/BI* know. If any of you are definitely not interested, just send £100 in used notes to my home address and we'll say no more about it.

## Cost

Firstly, video equipment is tax-deductible to many people, including musicians. Portable gear can be claimed against training and/or promotion. Equipment capable of taping off-air TV can be put down against the unsocial hours you have to work.

Buying a portable video recorder and supplementing it with a tuner/timer unit may seem like a good deal. You'll have a system capable of recording on location, and recording TV programmes at home. But if your range of locations always involves a mains supply – which at gigs is always so, of course – you'd save money by buying from the more competitively priced mains machine end of the market.

But mains recorders are naturally less robust, bulkier (if that matters), don't all connect easily to a camera, and normally don't indicate excessive humidity. So what, you ask, my guitar hasn't got a barometer on it. The thing is that video recorders – in particular the all-important head drum – are vulnerable and susceptible to condensation. Cart a machine from the occasional table to the back of a van and the solid metal of the head drum is likely to pick up condensation.

A portable recorder would indicate 'wet' or 'moist' on a LED lamp, disable the transport system, and usually switch on a heater in the head drum at this point. Meanwhile, a mains machine would stay

mum. So when you went to use the machine, the tape would try to stick to the head drum. The result could be damaged tape, video heads and transport mechanism. And more condensation running down your leg.

The mains powered Panasonic NV-7000 incorporates 'wet' indication, interfaces easily with a camera, and is packed with off-air TV recording features. It also has roll back editing as mentioned, and a Dolby noise-reduced soundtrack. The cost is about £620.

There's no direct comparison in portable machines but the new Ferguson 3V24 with roll back editing (no Dolby) and touch button controls like the NV-7000 will cost around £650, excluding tuner/timer at £250 or so.

A good colour camera with 6:1 zoom and electronic viewfinder will set you back between £600-700. The superb Sony HVC 2000P for instance (matching its *Betamax* portable and mains machines) with power zoom, auto fade up and down and many other trimmings, can be had for about £600. Top JVC, Panasonic and Ferguson cameras are more expensive. Or you could sacrifice a few features to spend between £400-£500.

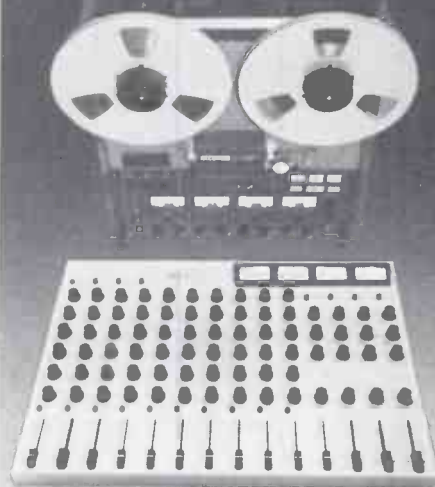
There is a thriving second hand market going on in video at the moment as people cast off what they consider to be their outdated old machines. But it's mainly in mains machines, where you can pick up a Philips N1700 for £200 or less, or an early VHS for £250-£300. The heads may be worn out which'll add about £60-£75, but amazingly enough not much goes wrong with these old 'uns as a rule.

Business is quieter on the second hand portable and camera front, as it's such a tiny market at present. Cameras can be permanently damaged by the 'etching in' of a very bright light source – caused by leaving the camera lying around with iris open where strong lights/reflections exist – so they must be thoroughly checked before buying. Our very own *Exchange & Mart* has a thriving video section dealing in all these often undervalued cast-offs.

And now you can hire. Granada TV Rentals has recently started renting out some good Hitachi gear; though it's not cheap. For normal medium term rental a portable/camera combination costs over £40 a month. Perhaps more useful is Granada's three-day hire scheme – if you've got £55 to spare. Other rental chains are expected to follow suit. Some of the smaller dealers in various regions (mainly London) have been hiring out for months, in many cases at cheaper rates.

Video's very recent emergence as an expensive and marketable new medium has largely dictated the 'overview' nature of this article, and the theme of which this is part. But there's a helluva music future in video. MCPS's Video Division will testify to that, as will any music management types that plan to stay in business. □

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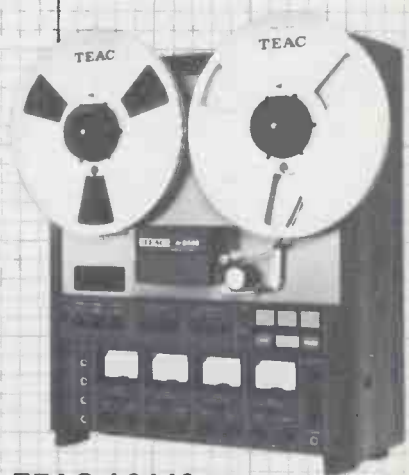
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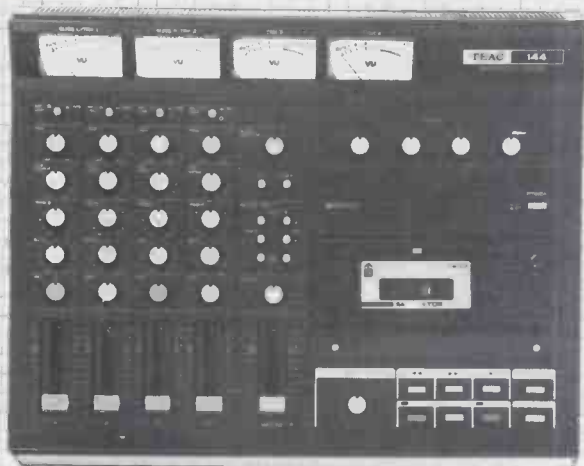
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**Fun  
with  
Deborah and Christopher**

by Robin Mackie



Daily Telegraph Colour Library

The stroll from my 33 dollars-a-night hotel past Times Square and up almost to Central Park and *Chez Harry and Stein* includes: a huge coloured lights ad for *Roadie* in which the word Blondie and the Harry visage overlook the centre of New York in red and yellow splendour every few minutes, a trailer of excerpts from the film outside the cinema where it's showing and oh, three or four posters of Debbie in living colour. Just another poster blonde except that unlike Farrah and Cheryl and Susan and Bo (not Diddley, you fool), she's the one with the expressions. Ms Harry can look confident, weary, antagonistic, mistrustful or downright bored, but still the pictures become life-size wallpaper. I feel Debbie would not get along particularly well with Farrah and Cheryl and Susan and Bo.

I suspect their lifestyles would be somewhat different too. Chris Stein and Debbie Harry's place is . . . well, pokey is an unkind word but every time Chris wants to get up from his comfortable slouch on the sofa to put a record on, he has to turn right past the keyboard in the middle of the room, left at the far end of it, being careful not to knock over the newly-delivered Capital Radio award and pick his way past the serried ranks of Jim Burns' sinister-looking *Scorpions* and *Strats*.

And so amid all the oddity of living surrounded by all these images of oneself (outdoors not in) Debbie and Chris seem to be getting along well with living normally in a cluttered sort of way, exhibiting none of the anti-press paranoia that you may have read about, and none of the sullenly defensive expressions from the *Eat To The Beat* cover. Stein in a black vest and black tracksuit bottom with holes in it is exceedingly amiable to the latest intruder, conversing in a voice that would be quiet for London and must be inaudible on the streets of Manhattan. Debbie listens quietly for an hour or so, mulling over the day's first coffee and some old copies of *SI* I've brought along: not a small-talker, she won't say things unless she has something to say, but becomes voluble if a topic grabs her. With no make-up and hair a-straggle, she looks altogether pleasanter and more relaxed than usual, like the Poster's friendly sister.

How could we do a rock in video supplement without talking to the World Champion (Panasonic/VHS) Portapak-using rock star (Stein even contributes a directorial scene in *Roadie*, handheld, of course) and the Cheekbones built for video? Are these chaps the most popular rock couple since Ike & Tina Eisenhower?

Arrangements have been made in the approved manner. A rather quaint telephone introduction is made: 'Hi, I'm Debbie Harry of Blondie' (Oh, *that* Debbie Harry). What is intended as a swift hour stretches into three. Stein makes his barefoot safari around the useful objects in search of storage space. Chris's production of Walter Steding, the slightly-bizarre violinist whose wondrous version of *Hound Dog* you may have heard is played. The Stein-Harry video machine cranks into action to unveil the celebrated Gloria Vanderbilt jeans commercial, a brief snatch of classy gloss among the non-classy dross of American TV.

Calls beam in every 20 minutes or so, ranging from the Gang of Four's Hugo through someone who likes the radio commercial script but wonders if Debbie could manage to say 'Jeans' in it somewhere through to a Big Offer which calls for a Kitchen Conference.

I'm left briefly to examine the only two photos on view - Bob Dylan in his full '66 *mysterioso* glory with Albert Grossman in the back of the big black limo; Keith Moon in his underpants cavorting with a team of nubile in his hotel room; spotting an original Giger drawing I rest my hand inadvertently on what turns out to be two stuffed cobras wrapping themselves round a stuffed mongoose. This last has apparently already had the star treatment in the *Daily Express* desperate for something to make Chris and Debbie sound glamorous or perverse.

They seem neither. They seem like polite, pleasant, humorous, easy company. Which makes their American press savaging seem rather odd. There they are sellouts to (a) Using a pretty face/body; (b) Disco; (c) Mike Chapman; (d) Ted Kennedy, and (e) Murjani jeans. *Rolling Stone* presented a Debbie so terrified as to practically qualify as a Casualty of the Rock Biz last year. Even the safe old fan book turned and bit them as Lester Bangs, between the lovingly laid-out pics in the recently-published *Blondie*, finds Chris and Debbie altogether too arty, pretentious and cold-blooded to warm the heart of an aging Ramones fan.

Odd for a couple in a band who have put together a collection of good old-fashioned hooks, used images fit for the video age, tried out a wide variety of styles, pinched a few good riffs and put on fast moving, enjoyable concerts, without, as far as I've noticed, claiming to be doing anything more elevated than that. Maybe if Stein hadn't been to art school and Debbie was less famous and they were still playing at CBGBs. Ah, well . . .

# Fun with Deborah and Christopher

## SONGWRITING

Chris: 'Songwriting is a strange thing, like a psychic thing. I saw this TV show with the Bee Gees where they asked them how they wrote songs and here were these guys in their fucking mansion in front of a marble fireplace with crystal chandeliers with their silver jumpsuits on and gold chains everywhere, and they said, "Well, we pull them out of the air, it's just like they're drifting by." The juxtaposition was very funny, but in a way I have to agree, that's what it's about, like tapping into something that's already there. It's being in the right frame of mind. Sometimes you have spurts like at the moment - six or seven songs, but another time there's nothing at all. I always write music, I'm not too good at lyrics. I never wrote prose or poetry but Debbie always has and I think she's getting better and better at lyrics. She's responsible for all the stuff that really gives it its character I think. All our stuff is taken for granted now, and that's why it's our duty now to find some new avenues.'

Debbie: 'I like to sing freestyle into a tape recorder. I improvise and listen to it back. Sometimes I get an idea, I just try to make up embellishments and it's easier with a cassette machine. Nowadays I seem to come up with attitudes and feelings first and just go with that. I just try to ad lib it.'

Chris: 'I think a real standard procedure with most punk bands was just to write out 10 titles and then make up the music.'

Debbie: 'Some of our early ones were like

that. *In The Flesh* definitely was title first. I think that's a good way of training yourself to make a controlled construction. But now I don't think that way anymore because I try to think more on a musical base because when you start on a lyrical base without music it's very limiting and the music tends to be very stilted and confined. I've outgrown that I guess: I think more in terms of music and making music flow. Lyrics basically are on top of the music and I think music should be there first and lyrics come second. I don't know whether I was afraid of that or whether I just didn't know it, but I don't think that way anymore. I've written things that are poetry and that's one thing. Ideas for songs are another thing, because poems are complete, they have like a rhythmic force. I wouldn't think of putting them to music. A lyric is simpler. It embellishes a musical theme and makes it come to life - that's the way I think now.' (Without hogging the writing credits, the Stein-Harry combine has jointly come up with a number of the band's more interesting songs including Rip Her To Shreads, In The Flesh, Picture This, Heart Of Glass, Die Young Stay Pretty and The Hardest Part.)

## VIDEO

Chris: 'You're starting to get, here and in England, video facilities at studios. This guy Moogy Klingman who has his own TV show here, he's got involved with the people at the old Bell recording studios, which were the first recording studios in New York I think, and he's making that into a video recording studio. He's starting out sort of like (Todd) Rundgren did only balancing it out more between the video and the recording.

'But in a small studio for sessions, I think it's great to have the facility. I think every studio should have it. Anybody with a sync-pulse generator that can hook up to video for soundtracking - that's going to come in so much more heavily. If anyone is reading this who owns a studio out there, go out and buy a sync pulse generator.

'It's a simple thing to get so that you can sync up a video machine to your 24-track or 16-track. Over the next few years that's going to be essential in studio work.

'Stereo TV will have to come in pretty soon too. They already make stereo videotape equipment.' (At a pinch a long DIN lead will give you the TV sound coming through in Super Double Mono.)

'On *Eat To The Beat*, some of the songs came out really good and some of them were just an afterthought, some of them became just filler. There was a big rush to get it out and then it didn't matter anyway because it all got tied up with legal things, so it's ironic. We did have it ready - it's been over a year - but it didn't get out because of certain rates that had to be fixed with the American Federation of Musicians - a union thing. It's never going

to replace just plain audio stuff. I can't see everything you go out to buy being heavily visual. It would work for compilations or a whole story that's thought out at the onset.

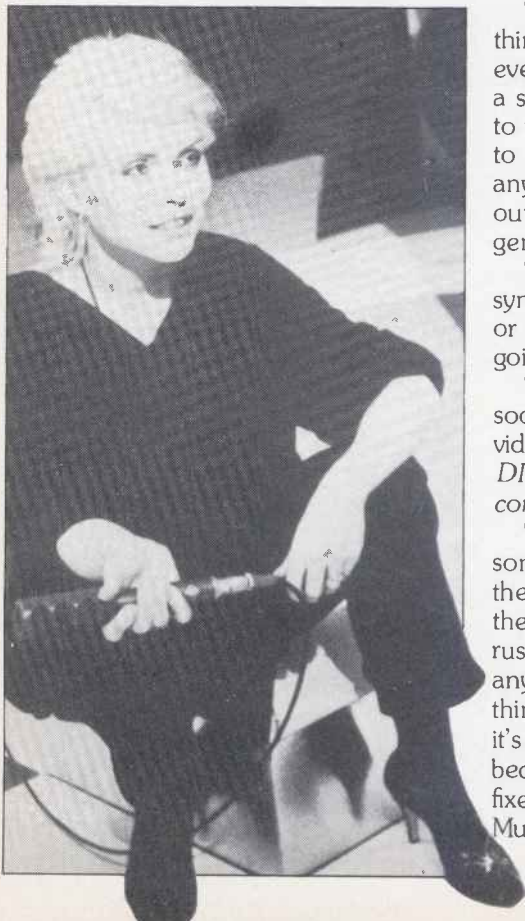
'Also I have a lot of videotapes I shot on the last couple of tours. I might put all that stuff together into something.' (Despite Stein's apparent lack of enthusiasm, the *Eat To The Beat* video is a lively and enjoyable object, especially bearing in mind the race for first place and that the album is the least interesting of the band's four to date. Clem Burke sits on his drumstool with all the relaxation of Steve Cauthen in the saddle while displaying a range of Mindbenders shirts, Kinks jackets and the like apparently straight from the Ready Steady Go 1965 wardrobe. Debbie scores on the Sexometer with the traditional mixture of sex and innocence on a circular bed while crooning her lullaby Sound Asleep directly before donning a hooded cloak and screaming her head off in the Strange Victor amid intoning Rasputin-style Russian monks. Debbie Haridan indeed! In the mind's eye, Blondie's first album with its kung fu girls, giant ants and cartoon/headline ambience was handmade for visual cassette. Another thought that occurs: if the record companies have a headache over home audio taping they'll have a colossal migraine when video recorders are more common. Heaven forbid that it should occur to any of you, but an album video of about 40 minutes currently costs around £30. A blank tape costs about £10 for three hours, which means that with two machines hooked up a copy could be done for around £2.20.)

## NOT LIVING IN THE REAL WORLD

Debbie: 'I never have any difficulty making my own decisions about what thing to do next, but in the group it's hard. I think I really have a strong sense of what's right. But it just seems like your mind is travelling at one rate and the physical world is travelling at another rate, the record business, God knows what rate that's travelling at. So by the time a record comes out it's like you're not even there any more. The record comes out and it's like "God, I have to promote this for the next six months?" I feel like hiring a bunch of clones to go out and do it.'

## LIVE SHOWS

Debbie: 'The show is a special thing, that's a life to itself. See, I would like to have shows that were sloppier in a way, just like funkier where there were areas of annoyance where the audience would want to get up and walk around. Go to the lobby or the washroom or something, and just have chaos on stage. A lot of electronic noise, and I'd like to have video areas... I really enjoy myself in shows but I know I could enjoy myself even more if







Dennis McGuire

the show was more fragmented and if I could ad lib more. The way that we structure our shows doesn't permit me to get loose or talk. I'd just like to have freakier things happening. I'd like to have people standing around on the stage for some reason. I'd just like to try different things now.'

## SEX

**Debbie:** 'I don't think I would want to jump into the audience because it's been done. Who wants to jump on the audience? I like to jump on bodies but one at a time.'

## MARRIAGE

**Debbie:** 'A friend of ours just went to see Patti (Smith) and he said that Patti's so feminine now and so friendly and so relaxed that he really likes her again and he says she's much better off now that she's married and her music is really nice. I think it happens to everyone. The pressure of the business really gets to you after a while you know. She's had a really healthy respite. 'sgood. Us old broads gotta stick together.' **Chris:** 'Patti's great really, it's just that she fell on her head, that was the only thing that fucked her up.'

## JEALOUSY

**Debbie:** 'It's really funny and ridiculous. For some reason a lot of the bands that are coming out now, I don't know where they were when we were sort of laying the groundwork for this scene - not just us but bands like us - they seem to think that it wasn't hard for us. They seem to really

hate us for having some success. There are a lot of stupid attitudes from people who weren't around, they were probably leading a cushy life in some high school in suburbia. They come to New York and put on a lot of attitude like they're struggling, starving artists and so on. They have no idea what it was like for us.' (*Chris and Debbie were both in bands by 1966, and after being in the Stiletos together, formed the first version of Blondie in '74.*)

## CABLE TV

(Eat yer heart out, Hughie and Lew)

**Chris:** 'As far as TV here is, cable is the only hope. On 23rd Street, there's an office and a receiving thing with big, powerful antennas. They receive signals from all over the country and they go into the cable and the cables go through the ground into your house. so the signals are much better and stronger, they're really purer signals than if they come through the air bouncing off buildings. Plus they generate their own signals, they have a studio there where we do our cable TV show, a live show every Tuesday night, and they put out a thing called public access. The FCC - that's Federation of Communications and something - the people who regulate all the media - the rule is if you're doing cable TV you have to have some channels for public access. Anybody can put on a tape free of charge, you only have to pay to do a live show and

that's very cheap anyway. You can put on pretty much anything and it runs the rank to soft-core - tits'n'ass, a little heavier than what you see in London, but not really. It's really developing and building, cable. Over the last two years it's grown to where there really are now 15 stations going strong that you can tune into that make movies and news - there's a 24-hour news station, which is great cos you can always have a running commentary going and find out what's happening.

'It's very cheap, just 19 dollars per month and you get movies too. I think there must be close to a million cable viewers in Manhattan. When we do our stupid show (*The Glenn O'Brien TV Show*) I've heard there's a potential audience of 50,000. Glenn's a writer who writes for *Interview* and *High Times*. It has a very loose format, it's like a zoo. We get stoned and everybody freaks out, gets drunk, does impromptu jams, famous people come on... sometimes it's totally boring but sometimes it's very exciting. And we take phone calls. And they can curse you out, you can curse them out. It's the wave of the future all that stuff. You get out of town stations as well on cable, so if there's nothing good on the local stations, you can tune into Atlanta or Boston.

'Soon it'll all get hooked up together as the satellite networks get bigger and the next thing after cable is they're going to

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have to send signals through the air and you have an unscrambler at your house, and they have a thing with call-back facilities on the box where you press a button, so you can do a vote straight off. They have that now with the phone-ins, they rate records and stuff like that.'

*Debbie:* 'They play the riff from *Call Me* a lot on sports programme links on TV here and the record gets used on cable to back up X-rated commercials - for escort services and things like that.'

## GIORGIO MORODER/MIKE CHAPMAN

*Chris:* 'Giorgio has some new secret technique he wants to try on us, some sound thing in his head. To do something like (Donna Summer's Moroder-produced) *I Feel Love* would be great. I thought that was a real milestone, about as revolutionary as any of these bands that went around screaming revolution. It broke a lot of ground, opened up a lot of things. He told us he had the riff and song for years, and nobody thought it was commercial. Giorgio's really rock-oriented, much more than disco. He's connected with that because he was successful at it, but he's done a lot of hard rock stuff. I think it's pretty definite he'll be doing our next album. Giorgio wants us to make demos this time, which is something we've never done before recording. I think that's a good idea. Somebody like Chapman or Moroder become like another member of the group, they're adding a whole other facet.'

'Chapman is a real disciplinarian and taskmaster. He makes you work really hard, but he never really told us what to do, he'd just make you develop your own parts. If the going got rough he'd interject, but that wasn't that often. Some of the groups he's doing now I think are totally manufactured. I think the Knack were pretty much how they are now, but some of the girl groups. He's doing some new wave bands as well, Nervus Rex and Shandi and various other things. But all that stuff is what I'm really nauseous of anyway. Not necessarily Chapman and those people, but the 'new wave' generally. (The band is in fact back with Chapman after all.)

## NEW WAVE (N.Y. VERSION)

*Chris:* 'It's nothing. All it is is everybody copying everybody else. The next step is for the innovation and the change to surface. All right, now it's accepted that kids from the street can get record contracts but all the fucking record companies want is more Talking Heads or Blondies, so the innovation is getting squeezed out of it very rapidly. Since the stuff became 'over the counter' and commercial, that's when all that happened.'



Dennis McGuire

## ADS, ADS, TELEVISION

*Chris:* 'We're doing this ad for Murjani - designer jeans. It's not such a big thing in Europe. Gloria Vanderbilt is just the figurehead. We're doing this whole ad campaign ourselves - a commercial TV spot and a radio spot.' *Debbie:* 'The line is "When you know where you're going, you know what to wear". I'll show you the commercial. It's like a non-commercial. There's no mention of jeans in it. It's just like Debbie walking down the street and her outfits change but that's about it. There's another jeans commercial here with a voice just like Ian Dury, heavy rhythm disco new wave bullshit. It's very funny.'

## MOVIES

*Chris:* 'Union City hasn't been abandoned as I saw in print somewhere. It's out. They took it to distributors and everyone went "Ah, the Debbie Harry movie" and they expected this big glamour thing, but it's very low-key and Debbie's role is just a role, plus it's this weird sort of underground movie. The result is they didn't get distribution yet in England. I really like it and the music was great. So far it's just got bought for Spain, which has a real up-and-coming film market now. Then there's *Roadie*. It'll be great if that's a success. I think that'll definitely be out in England fairly soon.' (Something of an oddity, *Roadie* features Meat Loaf as the eponymous roadie. Amid a lot of beer and

fight scenes and fairly haphazard plotting, he becomes involved with (among others) Alice Cooper and Blondie. The latter get to play themselves in a fight scene with a café full of professional Texan dwarves, and sing - of all things - Johnny Cash's Ring Of Fire. While they're onstage, a spectacular stunt involves Meat Loaf crashing 30 feet or so from a gantry on to his head on the stage. The stuntman reputedly got upwards of 2500 dollars for this scene alone. As he's a roadie, the damage is minimal.)

*Chris:* 'I came close to doing a film soundtrack recently but the deadline was just too tight and I can't work under all that pressure. I really wanted to do it too. I did the *Union City* soundtrack but that was different and just on a shoestring budget. I hope that movie comes out in England. I think a lot of people would like it. I think it'll have a feminist appeal too.'

'*Alphaville* we never made. It was difficult because it's a remake. I'd still like to make it someday.' *Debbie:* 'It got stopped before it got started, due to lack of co-operation.' *Chris:* 'Fripp would be a good actor, though. Definitely. Fripp is like Ralph Richardson. He has the exact accent and nose of Ralph Richardson. They sound like they're from a two-block radius.' (And we thought he was a country boy.)

## UK v. US

*Debbie:* 'Nobody in England's a hick for God's sake. England is sophisticated. People sitting around watching hour-long



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Pinter plays on TV! You take a lot of things for granted. It's part of your heritage, I guess, it's just like second nature, but it really does a lot for people when they know about all these authors. It's just something you grow up with, but it's not like that here. It's just a very different climate and that's a very nice influence. It makes you much calmer. It makes you have a broad frame of reference.'

## THE PRESS

Chris: 'Look at the way the record press is, it's like night and day really. The music press here is on the level of comic books, really, elbow in the ribs stuff. The *Trouser Press* is the only one not like that, and maybe a few small ones, but the big above-ground music press here. At least they attempt some analysis and different levels of criticism over there. The interplay between the audience and the paper that goes back and forth is what I like in England. It would be nice if there was a weekly press here, it really would be, on a fan level. In England you either get more respect or more assault, it's more severe one way or the other. Everything gets bland here but that's because they're reaching all these markets and regions here, everything gets more watered-down to reach a common denominator. The weird thing doing shows in London is sometimes it feels like doing an exam, you know, taking a test. But here you can play around for a long time and nobody will ever know about you. At least over there you get some reaction.'

## GEE-TARS

Chris: 'I once carved up a *Telecaster* very similarly to a Burns *Scorpion* and sprayed it black. It looks very similar. It's an odd coincidence. It's just a different body shape from the standard *Stratocaster* or Gibson shape without being too far in left field like some of these new guitar shapes that just get ridiculous. It's a really nice recording guitar. I'm trying to convince them to make a lighter version, it is very heavy. They make the *Magpie* as well, a

consumer guitar, but I wish they'd make a lighter version of the *Scorpion*, but this one is like a Les Paul and it does have a very nice bell-like tone. Strings I just use 10s, Ernie Ball strings. I do like a Fender guitar, a lead guitar, that's like a consumer guitar, it's only 200 dollars, it might translate to £200 in England, but I guess that's still pretty cheap.

'But Burns could do great, I hope they get the guitars over here pretty soon, cos I know they could sell a lot. People I've showed it to really like it. They just have to get 'em over here. I guess that's what's expensive.'

## JOE LOSS

Chris: 'I really want to do a big band song for our next album with a whole string section and a reed section. We never did that yet, so I'll see if I can get Giorgio to do that.'

## RECORDING

Chris: 'We're pretty fast. *Parallel Lines* took a month and *Eat To The Best* three weeks. Springsteen was in there recording his next one when we were doing *Eat To The Beat*, and he's still in there doing it!

## HERE IS THE NEWS

Chris: 'The media is always five jumps behind reality - stretching things, falsifying things. You can't ever tell what's true. Once it gets filtered through newsrooms and all that bullshit. Everything gets so tainted, it's crazy. You should see some of the things they have about Ireland here. The last thing was real pro-IRA. These guys were, Robin Hood, these guys were heroes, the British were cunts.' Debbie: 'They interviewed these real macho soldiers, career soldiers who were all for bashing small children's heads against the pavement because they'd been throwing rocks at a tank, it was just incredible.' Chris: 'Then on another channel they had totally the opposite extreme - it's extremists screaming from both sides.' (Hmmm, what these chaps need is the BBC, balance and fair play.)

## POLITICS (Aargh!)

Chris: 'Much as you always see Ronald Reagan on TV, he has yet to give anything like a lengthy speech on any topic at all. He's just there. He's just got there by spending millions and millions of dollars. Hardly anybody votes anymore anyway.' Debbie: 'Everyone is really disgusted. Every election it gets worse and worse. I don't know what the end of it's going to be but the people who are disgusted now are not just college students or high school kids, now it's people who are in their forties and fifties - lawyers, doctors, whatever, a lot of blue collar workers - they're thoroughly disgusted with the choices that they're given. They realise it's just a system of money and payoffs and they realise that somebody who is ethical or idealistic is not going to make it through this without having to pet the hand that feeds them. I think a lot of the older people had a lot of faith in the system. But now the candidates are obvious puppets. Carter advocates solar energy and gives all the grants to nuclear energy. He said a lot of things that people wanted to hear, but he didn't carry them through ...' (Debbie's political diatribe is interrupted, somewhat comically, by a phone call about the jeans commercial.)



Dennis McGuire

A few weeks after this lengthy discussion on the meaning of life, a severely jet-lagged Stein leaves Debbie to the rigours of the ATV canteen, Elstree and the monsters of *The Muppet Show* and slumbers his way in the back seat to Littleport, unassuming emporium of Jim Burns.

Stein is well-known as a Burns endorsee, but the relationship certainly extends beyond the usual financial deal. A violent opponent of factory line guitars, he's clearly pleased to be able to get involved with a real craftsman who he considers vastly underrated in terms of contribution to the history of. I suspect also the combination of Burns' maverick and eccentric qualities and the fact that his factory is in a particularly charming neck of the woods, surrounded by antique buildings and place names that W. C. Fields would have loved have a little to do with his enthusiasm.

Burns has spent three months putting together a special version of the *Scorpion*, complete with machine heads in one line, a peculiar curved head, and a slight weight loss (the instrument's weight has kept Stein from using a Burns on stage thus far).

It's the first time Blondie's guitarist has had a unique instrument of his own. His jet-lag thaws visibly. The longer head means that the guitar doesn't fit any of Burns' cases, so Stein leaves with a suspiciously machine gun-like object wrapped in corrugated paper. This year's version of the Jim Burns hat, I notice, is held together only by telepathy.

Stein takes obligatory photos of object and proud maker, distributes some signed photos, autographs some album sleeves, avoids noticing a *Sounds* photo of Debbie blowing gum on the factory wall captioned 'Every schoolboy's dream: a blow-job from Debbie Harry', and departs for London a happier and half-awake man. □

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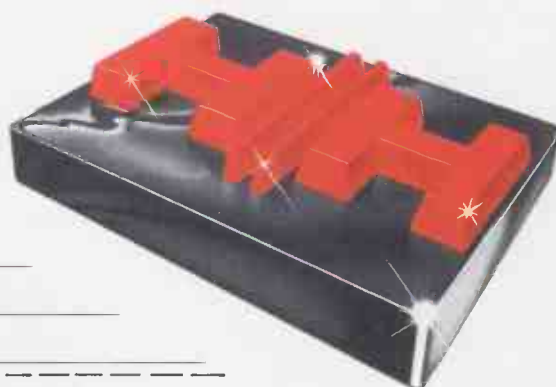


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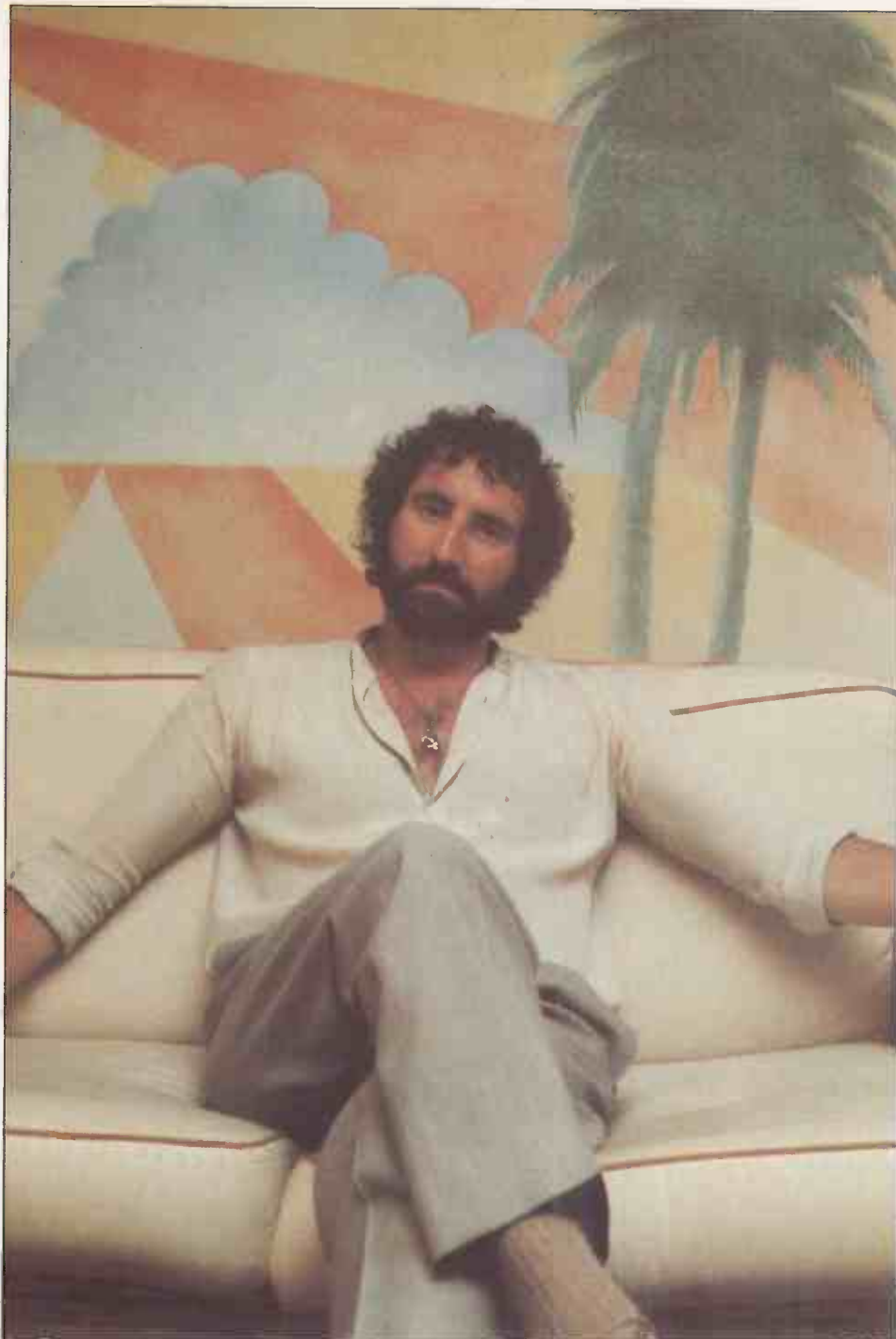
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Pic Ralph Denyer

## Jon Roseman

**Further into our video section, Ralph Denyer finds the man whose promo video killed the radio star for Buggles advising new bands to check out the bedroom mirror before shelling out on video tape.**

The use of quality promo videos has become standard in the record business. Even in the current recession the better companies and independent producers and directors are working. There is no independent promo video industry as such. An outstanding producer/director such as David Mallett may work on a commercial for television, a rock video promo or his award winning *Kenny Everett Video Show*. Some directors and producers become well known for their work in the promo field. Keef McMillan has an enviable reputation as a result of

his consistently high standard of work with Paul McCartney and Kate Bush.

One name which keeps cropping up in connection with the independent production of promo videos for the music industry is that of Jon Roseman. Working with directors of a high calibre such as Bruce Gowers, his company has produced countless videos for Queen, The Boomtown Rats, Rod Stewart, Atlanta Rhythm Section, The Buggles, The Rolling Stones and many others.

Roseman's centre of operations is in London and the building houses Offline

Editing Limited as well as a production company and an agency which represents in the region of 40 television programme and movie makers.

The competition in his field looked to me to be even fiercer than it is in the record business, if that is possible. You've got to be damn good or not bother at all. Only hard workers with extreme expertise and talent need apply.

Roseman began working at London Weekend Television as a unit manager, doing the job that is now done by a group producer. He worked on all kinds of programmes ranging right through the spectrum from current affairs to light entertainment but always working on production rather than direction. On that point he is quite candid: 'If I was going to be a director I'd want to be something really good, something really special and I know I wouldn't be. So I do what I do best. I had the opportunities to direct but I avoided them, it wasn't for me.'

Roseman left London Weekend and employing his undeniable business acumen, started his own agency to represent current affairs programme makers, reporters, journalists and directors. One of those clients was director Bruce Gowers and after a while he and Roseman became involved in what proved to be an important music project.

'We shot a commercial video for Queen called *Bohemian Rhapsody* which tended to kick off the so called Promo Revolution. Bruce had been a client of the agency and then we worked together making rock'n'roll films. Then as his agent I negotiated a deal for Bruce to go to America to work for NBC to do a series, at the same time rather destroying the production company we had built up because we didn't have any other directors, only Bruce.'

Jon scouted around for more directors and managed to find the talent to maintain the high standards he and Gowers had set. At the time promoting and selling rock'n'roll to the great unwashed was a growth industry. Big changes were taking place. The cost of touring was becoming too much for many bands and artists.

The record industry was changing and looking for cost effective ways of selling their goods and wares in a changing marketplace.

Roseman opened an office in America and produced a show for American television called *Juke Box*. The programme was in effect a compilation of promotional films made by Jon Roseman Productions spliced together as a half-hour programmes. He was not the only person to do such deals. Mike 'Cue the Spitfires!' Mansfield put together a similar series for the States. Unfortunately for America, he spliced in Twiggy to introduce each act.

While in the States Roseman became fascinated when introduced to the pro-



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cess of offline editing of video tape. 'I was fascinated by offline editing because I realised you could edit on cassettes and save a *fortune*, cos editing on two-inch tape in London at the moment costs £350 per hour for a three-machine edit. You can do one-inch at Molinaire for about £260 an hour for three machines but that's still a lot. If you want to do 10 or 20 hours on two-inch tape that'll cost you up to £7,000 or so. Some rock promo films don't even have an overall budget of more than £6,000!'

For anyone who is confused by all this unfamiliar technology, a word or two about the BBC, videotape and editing. The much maligned Beeb is the organisation which has – ever since the earliest days of radio broadcasting – set the standards which the rest of the world has followed. The BBC is – even in a climate of financial depression – continuing to set standards in broadcasting with digital radio programmes and recordings of the same classical music. With the advent of video tape the BBC set its usual high standards. 2-in tape recordings only would be used for television broadcasts, smaller formats were not on. Some would claim that it is now possible to produce broadcast quality video tapes on smaller formats.

On the question of editing, nothing is visible on recorded video tape. Editing therefore involves the use of sophisticated equipment. With film one merely edits visually, frame by frame if necessary. So editing broadcast quality video tape is a costly business involving the use of very expensive equipment.

With the growing use of video in many fields outside of broadcasting, offline editing – with the smaller format – gives more than acceptable high quality non-broadcast standard final edited cassettes at a third of the cost of the 2-in broadcast quality video.

Roseman returned to London and 'on a whim' went to see Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Records empire. Roseman raved about offline editing and the business possibilities. Branson was suitably knocked out and so the two formed the joint company, Offline Editing Limited, situated at 8, Poland Street in the centre of London's West End. The building also is the centre of operations for Jon Roseman Associates and Jon Roseman Productions.

Video is a word that has captured the imagination of many. Yet a great many video promos are in fact shot entirely on film. A very large percentage are shot on a combination of good old fashioned film as well as video tape. As all the footage is eventually transferred to video tape for broadcast or playback on domestic/commercial video playback machines, there is a stage at which video effects can be added even to the sequences originally shot on film. Roseman seemed to me to be the ideal person to explain why and when film or videotape

tended to be used.

'That is a difficult question to answer really. For a start film is cheaper than tape *usually*. There is an optimum at which it might not be cheaper. It's obviously cheaper in the editing process because for a hundred quid you can edit all week. If you want to edit videotape all week – even on offline at £100-per-hour – it's going to be expensive. Obviously film will be much cheaper.

'The thing about videotape with regard to promotional videos is that it is quick. With promos a client is likely to ring you up on a Monday, they want to shoot it on Thursday, and then they want the tape by the following Monday. You can't do that on film... well you can but you'd be crazy to attempt it. With video you can do it. There's no processing, no problems at the lab making it a week late for whatever reason. So in that way video is obviously a convenient medium.'

The video cause is being aided continually by technological development. The cameras are getting smaller all the time, the compact and light units allowing more and more mobility. The advent of ENG (Electronic News Gathering) equipment makes the video camera operator almost as mobile and versatile as the 35mm stills photographer.

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### **When you see a promo on TOTP it's very unfair because they are dropped into a show which has a day to record seven other bands**

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'Going back to the film/videotape analogy, there is a different quality with film. I prefer film for heavy metal bands and in fact for anyone live in concert. Film just gives it a better feel.

'When you see a promo on *TOTP* it's very unfair because some of them have been shot on 35mm film or expensively shot on videotape and they are dropped into a show which has a day to record seven other bands. So making a promo of a band I've had three days to shoot and five days to edit *one band!* So I have a mini-masterpiece and it's an audacity. I feel very sorry for *Pops* because the promo is then dropped into the show and the guys at *TOTP* have to sweat their bollocks off to compete.

'I know for a fact that a really good film or video presentation of an act does sell records. Meat Loaf are an absolute example of that. Meat Loaf were dead in Europe, nobody bought their album, *Bat Out of Hell*, until that film played and then they went platinum all over the place, because of the film.

'Also I know *Bohemian Rhapsody* helped to explode Queen into a bigger sales area. I can think of the Rats videos, also the Buggles thing we did, *Video Killed The Radio Star*. That obviously was a band which wasn't a band, they didn't gig or anything and here was a perfect film to

sell the record.

'There are obviously artists that it doesn't matter what you do or how much you spend, it is not going to help them. Some artists are just not visual, we've all seen them. I think that in a way ELO is not a particularly visual band, I mean they are not exactly the Rolling Stones. What I think Jet Records have done quite brilliantly – and it costs money – is use some animation and some very complicated optical effects to present the band as well as they possibly can. It's only fair that bands as good as ELO should have that kind of money spent on their films because they are difficult bands, visually. The same goes for the Atlanta Rhythm Section. We filmed them in the States. Again they are not the most visual band and you have to take a lot more time and trouble to come up with the right kind of concepts for people like that.

'At the end of the day there are only three kinds of promo. They are the story line, the bit in the studio which is obviously *the bit in the studio* or you have a live situation. That's *real* live as distinct from *fake* live. And then there's only so many ways you can shoot a live band. I much prefer to do it *real* live because you've got the audience so there is some energy going on there. The story pieces I think are not going to be done as much because the record companies don't have the money any more.'

At Poland Street they are currently experimenting with the use of Super-8 film. The actual shooting is all done on Super-8 film and then transferred to video tape. Those exacting broadcast standards mentioned earlier can be rather unnecessary if the tape is only ever going to be shown to promoters and college entertainment secs.

Again, recent technological advances in the manufacture of both film cameras and film have the result of making relatively high quality results possible with the small Super-8 format. In the right hands, that is.

Roseman mentioned a recently completed trial promo. Roseman: 'We transferred it from Super-8 to cassette and I haven't met anybody yet that we've shown it too that knew it was Super-8. They all thought it looked great and that it was at least 16mm, it looks *great*.

'The beauty of it is that a roll of stock on Super-8 costs £12 for nine minutes. On 16mm it's £108! The other thing about Super-8 is that you don't have to have a union to operate it so you can pay someone £50. So at the end of the day you can do a really great film, and I mean *a really great film*, for £1,000. I don't say you're gonna have sets and all of that because that costs more. But you can do a nice live situation promo for £1,000 which is nothing. That can not only help the band to promote themselves but if a record company wanted to get involved in in-store video and put out a track but didn't want to spend three or four grand,

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they can use this method.'

Roseman is taking the idea a stage further by offering a package deal to record companies. The idea is to get up to four bands together at a suitable venue for one day and shoot them all. No, that can't be right. Correction: shoot *film footage* of them all.

In fact that very afternoon an emissary of Roseman's company returned to base with news of the first bite at the package deal idea from one major record company. Loosely speaking, the package is expected to work out at around £3,000 for four bands. Obviously the package deal would only allow for a fairly basic approach as Roseman continued to explain.

'It's not going to look as great as if you spent the whole day filming just one band but the punters will be able to actually see what the bands look like. We've been talking to record companies and there is interest. My interest is not in the established artists because obviously the record companies tend to be involved in spending good deals of money on their video presentations. I'm more interested in bands that are about to break or who are struggling and would like to be able to present a manager or whoever with a tape and say: Look, I know you've heard it but now you can hear *and see* it.

'The Eighties is video and it is a visual medium and I think we can be of great assistance to those bands. I see it from the point of view of the future because if we've helped a band on the way and they've become vast stars or whatever, they might very well consider us to make videos for them then. So we see it as an investment. We are genuine in our attempt to try and help these bands because the only way they are going to be able to get it together now is with a nicely produced video tape.

'What video has done is to make people aware of the fact that a band can be sold – successfully – with visuals. I think that people have known for years that if you get on *TOTP* you'll sell more records. What they didn't know – because no-one tried it – was that if you spend a lot of time and money doing a video and it is really good, you'll sell not a lot more but a *fucking* lot more records.

'It's still difficult for record companies to acknowledge this particularly when record sales are at rock bottom and they're laying people off. They've got no money and the last thing they want to do is to make an expensive video because nobody has actually gone out and done a survey – as advertising agencies would do – on the effectiveness of promo videos or films. The industry could really do with it. I see it as a small investment for a major like WEA, CBS or EMI. It would cost somebody £5-10,000 to get an accurate survey of how effective these films are. And if we knew and it was in numbers on a piece of paper, then I think people would say: Well, it's not video as an afterthought for marketing, it is video as a primary

thought.'

'An advert in one of the weekly music papers must cost £1,000, *Billboard* must cost a lot of money for a full page ad. Now that ad doesn't sing at you and it is one freeze frame. Now for whatever you spend on that, you could put the money into something far more effective. I know that the people who look after the videos in record companies have a difficult time trying to screw any money out of their financial departments because nobody can prove to the financial advisers that this investment of between £4-10,000 is gonna make them an additional £25,000. I know that's the problem because unless you can actually show that, it is a case of: Why should we do it?'

Despite all the *Into The Eighties With Video* and *This Is The Video Age* sloganeering (much of it from video hardware manufacturing conglomerates who also make records) Roseman finds that it is still an uphill battle to get the record companies to think of the promo as anything more than a marketing afterthought. He has tried to become more involved with acts at an earlier stage.

'In fact I suggested that to one record company recently and they looked at me as if I was absolutely crazy to have the *audacity* to want to listen to an album and be involved in the potential choosing of the single. All I wanted to do was to give them more information.'

Roseman feels that if the promo production company were brought in at an earlier stage, perhaps when the choice of single had been narrowed down to four tracks from an album, their specialist advice could be of great value.

'Then we would tell them in order of preference, which track won't cost a fortune but will still look great, which one *will* cost a fortune . . . whatever. And that might be the additional information they require in order to choose the single.'

As we went on to talk about video cassettes of complete albums and how much they would cost, Jon pointed out that with his idea of shooting footage on Super-8 and then transferring to video at the editing stage, the retail price could be around £10 and possibly as low as £8. But is there a threshold price over which people will just not buy? I certainly couldn't afford the Blondie video currently available.

'I must tell you that it is funny that you should say that. I'm associated with a company called Audio Star who have the licensing for the Blondie video. It sells for £29.95 and in the first four days it sold 600, so somebody out there is buying them.

'However, I'd like to see our company develop in the same way as the small record labels but in the video market. Those small independent record companies take a band into the studio to record, press it and bang it out. They might sell 500 or 1,000, they may even have a big hit.

I'd like to see video go the same way. You shoot on Super-8, edit offline and put out maybe 500 copies. If they sell you put out another 500. Who knows, you may even be able to get enough orders from dealers to get maybe 10,000 copies done.

'Of course, you can't transmit any of the material because it's Super-8. A possibility is that you could record the two or three tracks that you know you are going to want to use for promotional purposes on 16mm film. Then you have got the best of both worlds.'

I asked Jon what advice he would give to a band or act about to make or about to consider making their first promo. Would he recommend making a basic single-camera video of the type advertised in the classified ads in the weekly music papers?

'I don't think there is any difference if they do it using video or a £250 Super-8 camera. It's exactly the same apart from the fact that with video you have instant playback which is good fun.

'It's very difficult, an artist or band plays on stage and they have a method of performing. When they rehearse there are no doubt parts of what they do which will be integrated into their stage act. A band is a unit and some bands have an unimaginative stage act. Some bands have a lot going for them (visually) and it's not expensive either. All a video or film does is to capture what the act does. And if you are crap, it will show that you are crap. If you are good, it will show you are good.

'It is true that a very cleverly made video will make you look better than you are and that's fair. But if you are talking about a band that just wants to develop certain visual techniques then you don't need any equipment, you can do that in front of a mirror.

'You really don't need to keep playing back a video and I think that it is very bad for bands who are not used to video to get involved in it. Their main initial job is to get together good material, perform it well, build up the following, make a record and sell. By the time they get that far they'll be old hands and when they sit down with a video producer, they'll already have ideas and feelings. They have to go through the mill and that will hone them, I really believe that.' ■



# BBC's OGWT TV's answer to VTR?

**Mike Appleton, Eminence of the Grise Whistle Test, talks to David Sinclair about a decade of producing rock for TV and unveils ambitious plans for BBC's Rock Week.**

Mike Appleton is the producer of BBC2's *Old Grey Whistle Test*. Excluding the chart single-orientated *Top Of The Pops*, the *Whistle Test*, now approaching its tenth anniversary, has remained rock music's one enduring life line to the television media in the UK. Mike pioneered the series and has produced it since its inception.

To herald a variety of coincidental landmarks (the turn of the decade, the approaching tenth anniversary, the 350th *Whistle Test*) Mike has instigated a 'Rock Week' on the BBC from 4th-11th October incorporating retrospectives, live concerts, rock films and other events in a nightly bonanza of rock music on the box. It seemed a good point at which to speak to the man who has for better or worse shouldered the responsibility of showcasing practically every major rock music talent on the most pervasive of all medias for well over a decade.

The *Whistle Test* office is not in the main BBC television house complex in west London, but is housed in a sort of luxury Nissen hut – a humble wood structure adjacent to the main gate. The programme being in recess for the summer, Mike was there alone when I interviewed him: not a single secretary or helper was present and throughout the interview he was constantly answering a barrage of phone calls, sometimes deftly juggling conversations between two phones held to either ear and answering my questions at the same time. These conversations revealed a low-key charm – never once was he curt or dismissive and even when the calls were piling in (Switzerland, America, Switzerland again) he found time to chat to someone who'd come in on a crossed line.

I asked him first about his beginnings as a music programme producer and how this led up to the *Whistle Test*. In 1964, at the outset of BBC2, Mike used to produce two occasional programmes: a 15 minute jazz show *The Cool Of The Evening*; and a programme called *One In Ten* where one artist would feature for 10 minutes. These programmes gave way to *Late Night Line*



Pix by Dave Crombie

*Up* which used to close down with a piece of music. 'The thing that really started me in doing rock programmes,' explained Mike, 'was a *Late Night Line Up* that we closed down with Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger doing *This Wheel's On Fire* – it went rather well.'

Rowan Ayers (Kevin Ayers' father), at that time an editor on *Line up*, and Mike got together and decided to start a programme that looked after music other than the pop single. This was to be *Colour Me Pop*. Mike: 'Actually, at that time the only outlet was *Top Of The Pops*; I don't even think at that time ITV had anything running. I don't think *Ready Steady Go* was going when we started *Colour Me Pop*. *Ready Steady Go* had finished by then. There was nowhere where you saw anything other than the single.'

*Colour Me Pop* lasted two years and then gave way to the strangely named *Disco 2* which was co-presented by Mike Harding, Tommy Vance and Pete Drummond. This also lasted a couple of years, before the final change. 'For a long time I'd wanted to do a sort of magazine programme that was like your *Melody Maker*, *NME* or whatever, but on

television – it would give information as well as present music. I wanted to have a lower-key type presenter. I didn't want it to be the razzamatazz showbiz *Top Of The Pops*-type presentation; I wanted it to be the journalistic approach.' Enter Richard Williams (from *Melody Maker*) with a sort of 'topical comment/news desk' slot and it was but one short step to the inauguration of *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in September 1971, initially co-presented by Williams and Ian Whitcomb.

Originally, the *Whistle Test* was produced in a studio designed for one person speaking. Those early programmes had a certain *je ne sais quoi* about them – the band huddled together in a little corner in Studio B. 'There were eight channels only for the whole studio,' Mike remembered, 'so if you had a band trying to play live music in there, you just had eight channels to play with including at least two channels which would be taken up for the announcer; because we were live one had to be there as an emergency one in case the other went down. It was very crude, because if you put echo on one channel you had to have it on all of them. It was echo or not echo. Now we've got 48 channels in the studio. What we've got now is as satisfactory as one is likely to get in a television studio. The problem, of course, is that however high a standard of sound you can reach in the studio, by the time it gets through the broadcasting chain and out on to those grotty little speakers on the set, you sometimes feel is it worth it? From a sound point of view the facilities are fabulous compared to how we started out.'

However, an area where Mike does still have problems is the budget for the programme: 'It's extremely restricting. Without going into figures we're a very limited budget programme. I stretch it to the absolute ultimate.' Another problem can be failure to secure the rights to broadcast a particular item: 'You can't necessarily get the rights. People are fairly naïve out in viewer land about things like rights and costs – there's no reason why they shouldn't be, as far as they're con-

cerned they're sitting at home watching a television programme, they're not doing a costing. But there are lots of limitations imposed, both financial and rights.'

I asked whether he felt rock music is adequately covered on TV? 'This is, I find, a very difficult question to answer because in an ideal world no, it's not. On the other hand when *Whistle Test* is going and *Rock Goes To College* is going and *Top Of The Pops* is going and usually ITV has got one thing going, that's four programmes a week dealing with rock music. I will find it terribly difficult to say "No it's not getting a fair share", when you think in terms of opera, when you think in terms of ballet. There's not four programmes a week doing opera, there's not four programmes a week doing ballet, there's not four programmes a week doing paintings. I know that rock'n'roll is much more a sort of folk-level art and there's a greater immediacy about it. It's probably a greater part of the everyday life of a certain age group than maybe all the others are because those are just part of their lives, but nevertheless at the end of the day lovers of Gilbert and Sullivan don't get a very good deal on the air, do they?'

Nonetheless, Appleton feels that there is an enormous number of opera/ballet lovers in relation to the rock audience. 'I'm sure there is. There's got to be an enormous number to keep Radio 2's figures up for that sort of light area of music.'

We moved on to talk about *Rock Goes To College*, which Mike also produces. I put it to him that perhaps college wasn't the right environment for rock to be going to at that particular time. 'Well, that depends. You ask the audiences there. I'm sure they thought it was. Who's to decide? I don't understand why that group should be segregated as not being right any more than any other. I think the principle of going to colleges is perfectly all right; there were one or two where I think I put the wrong band into the wrong college. I think The Cars was a mistake to go to Brighton because they seem to be a load of old hippies down there. They'd have been much more content, I think, with Steve Hillage. That would have been a better concert for the audience that was there. I would not take the point that it shouldn't go to a college for any élitist reasons or anything - I mean that's been put as well - I think that's crap. I think 'street credibility' is crap as well. I think that's an invention of journalists and I think it's a load of rubbish. An audience is an audience and they either like music or they don't like music and I tend to find that a lot of students are heavily involved in music. Also, there is enough 'street credibility' I would have thought within colleges and universities these days: I mean, it's no longer the stamping ground for the idle rich that it possibly was. Nowadays it's a great polyglot community inside the campuses of universities and

colleges. You're just as likely to find a peer's son as you are to find a butcher's son or a miner's son or a bank clerk's son.

'One has to bear in mind that there is usually a degree of security there. We are taking a band to a place. We've got to have the facilities. We can't just go into any old hall. There are reasons to go to colleges that are expedient... we'd have to have it all vetted by various councils and all sorts of things, and safety precautions put in there. College halls are equipped for it because they do it already, they put on gigs and therefore it's a place we can go into quite readily. It's a viable way of working. If you go to anywhere you've also got the problem of how to distribute the tickets.'



So then we booked the Stranglers...

There had in fact been some trouble recently with the Stranglers over tickets. What exactly happened there? 'There's a lot of problems with The Stranglers, it seems, wherever they go. They're thrown off every stage in the world as far as I can make out. I'm totally convinced that this was just a publicity stunt. If it wasn't a publicity stunt I want to know why the representatives of the daily press were down in Guildford at a concert. It seems to me very strange: that was the only one they ever came to. That was something that probably misfired on them (The Stranglers), I don't think it did them any good. They say that they were told one thing and there's no way in the world that they were ever told that the tickets were going to the public because the tickets go to the Students' Union secretary and he distributes them round. It's not that we've got anything against the public. The public come into the *Whistle Test* concerts that are done down at the television theatre here, but there has to be a degree of security in all these things and we go to the campus, they loan us their facilities for a very small facility fee and therefore we return it by giving them the concert. If they want to I suppose there's nothing to stop

the University giving a certain number of tickets outside. We don't specify that they have to be college students. It's in the hands of the Students' Union.'

I pointed out that the *Whistle Test* hasn't had a very happy relationship with the (hip) music press over the years. 'Well, it did have in the early days. It's like everything; I mean the music press loves things in the beginning and knocks things at the end. It actually doesn't bother me in the slightest. It really doesn't. If I had more respect for the music press then it might bother me. The history of the music press is that they put people up on pedestals and knock them off. You can see it all the way along the line. They have a disadvantage in that they have to write and talk about music whereas music is something you listen to, so they're up against it from the beginning. When I say that I sound as if I'm totally jaundiced about the music press. I'm not: I think there are lots of things about it that are very good. I question their objectivity in a lot of their work.'

Do they aspire to objectivity? 'Well maybe they don't, but I'm not so sure that they shouldn't because they do wield a lot of power. I'm not talking about in terms of *Whistle Test*, but in terms of young bands and things; they can make and break young bands. They have a lot of responsibility and I'm not sure that they always are either aware of the responsibility or that they give enough attention to the responsibility they have. And yet they're the first people to cry about the responsibility of other people in various spheres. I just have my doubts about some of them. But then I sort out the ones I do believe and respect and the ones I don't. At least people are still talking about the programme, and that's healthy.' The cuts hadn't deprived him of that yet. I wondered if at the outset he'd had any idea of how long-running the *Whistle Test* would prove to be?

'I suppose I saw it lasting quite a while,' he reckoned. 'I called it *Old Grey Whistle Test* because that was almost a timeless title - it's almost meaningless. It's the sort of thing that doesn't tie itself to any particular style of music. It's an umbrella title under which you can change your music style. I suppose I was thinking of a degree of longevity when I designed that because I've always thought that *Whistle Test* can move with various styles of music, as music changes. Now I know a lot of people said: Well, it didn't move with the new wave. This was true: it didn't at the beginning. It didn't, basically, because one of the phenomena of it was the rebirth of the single. Up until that time most people had gone straight into companies, signed contracts and done albums and taken a single off it, whereas this was bands coming up with singles and no albums.



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*Whistle Test* is an album-oriented programme and it meant that they were, strictly speaking, not available to us. If I'd started saying: All right, just for the new wave, we'll do singles, then I don't think that would've been very fair on the other bands when for years and years I'd said: No, I'm not interested unless there's an album available to the public.

'So I did miss out on those early programmes, but there were other programmes covering the new wave. So *It Goes* was totally new wave-oriented and *Revolver* was to a certain extent. Those two were covering that area, so there was no need for me to rush in and cover it as well, because there was enough still going on that wasn't new wave. When the new wave started to become available on album then we obviously incorporated it in the programme. There's still a fair old backlash from the old *Whistle Test* viewers: the main complaints are that it's too new wave-oriented, an enormous number. We (the BBC) did a survey recently and the biggest complaint of all was the involvement of the new wave. Probably the most requested item is *Free Bird* by Lynyrd Skynyrd. I really believe I could run that every week for nine or ten minutes and I'd still get letters in saying we don't see it often enough.

'There are other things that have been very successful. I was very impressed with the Siouxsie And The Banshees' set and John Cooper Clarke seemed to go down

very well, so it's not all the more traditional side of rock music that they want. But it would seem that if I actually was going just for maximising my viewership then I would have done well to steer clear of the new wave. But that's one of the beauties of working for the BBC - you don't have to go to maximise your viewership. Obviously you're in the communication business so you want to get to as many people as possible, but it doesn't have to be the criterion by which you judge the standard of the programme.'

What about the new *Whistle Test* series? Are we likely to see any changes? Again, we're back to limitations inherent in the organisation of the programme and the budget - you can't always get what you want. 'I had hoped that I might be able to get involved with an audience but there are sound level problems. There are certain rules within the BBC about the number of decibels that can be done and it's very difficult for a lot of loud bands to operate at a low level. There are lots of things I would like to put on; there are lots of things I would like to do in altering the style of the programme to make it more magaziney - talking a bit more about the cinema, basically towards the area of rock'n'roll but not totally ... towards the sort of films that people who watch *Whistle Test* would be interested in really, and where they're rock oriented, so much the better. And maybe have a correspondent talking about rock-oriented books,

just doing quick reviews, and things like that.

'I have a problem that *Whistle Test* is an outside broadcast (from Shepperton) and the facilities for playing things into the programme are very limited, in fact they're limited to one video tape machine. So I have to get everything on the one VT machine which really reduces my flexibility enormously for inserts, because they have to be done sequentially - you can't dodge backwards and forwards because it takes physical time to run between one and the other.'

As the phone rang for the thirtieth time, I took my leave. ■

#### Rock Week October 4th-11th BBC2

(All details correct at press time but liable to last minute changes. Refer to Radio Times.)

**Saturday 4th:** afternoon *Rock Around The Clock* with Bill Haley, *Jailhouse Rock* with Elvis Presley. 11.10pm *Heroes Of Rock'n'Roll* American film with Beatles, Presley, Stones, Springsteen, Bowie, Joplin, Hendrix etc. etc.

**Sun 5th:** afternoon *The Girl Can't Help It* with Gene Vincent, *Loving You* with Elvis Presley. 10.35pm *American Graffiti*.

**Mon 6th:** 10.15pm Joni Mitchell film, live footage and 'extra visuals'. **Tues 7th:** 6.55pm Kate Bush in concert at Hammersmith Odeon. 10.15pm Kinks live at Providence, Rhode Island.

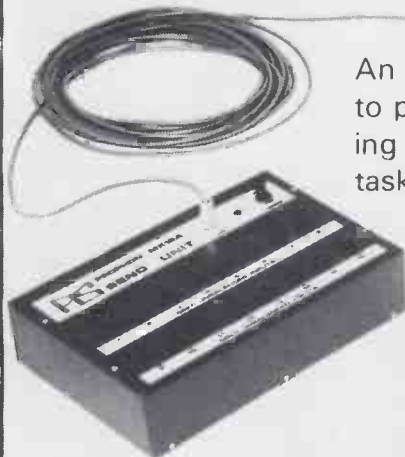
**Wed 8th:** 8.10pm rock workshop from Bristol with XTC. 10.15pm Paul Simon film, not completed at press time, but to include live footage and interview during rehearsals for forthcoming tour.

**Thurs 9th:** 7.55pm Van Morrison at the Rainbow. 10.20pm Rainbow at Donnington Castle.

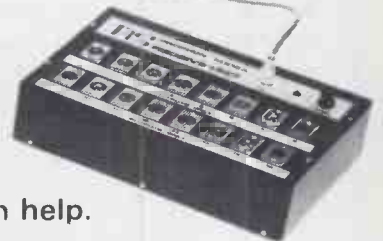
**Fri 10th:** 7.35pm *Police In The East*, the Police frolicking in the middle and far east. 10.20pm Randy Newman and the Rotterdam Symphony Orchestra live at Ahoy Stadium, Rotterdam.

**Sat 11th:** 11.20pm for two hours, the 350th *Whistle Test* looking back over highlights of nine years' broadcasts. 'Live' sessions from: Alice Cooper, David Bowie, Vinegar Joe, Roxy Music, Freddie King, Bill Withers, Rick Wakeman, Edgar Winter, Tim Buckley, Little Feat, Dave Mason, Jackson Browne, Siouxsie and the Banshees. Album tracks with visuals from: Pink Floyd, Mike Oldfield, Talking Heads, Elvis Costello, Tubeway Army. On film: Cheech'n'Chong, John Lennon, Fleetwood Mac, Steely Dan, Bruce Springsteen.

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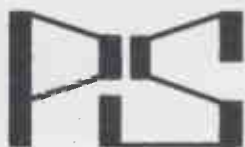
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# The Blades

**Adam Sweeting meets the Blades and asks: Why do these Dublin-reared chaps gravitate towards the more urgent feel of the troubled north of Ireland? Could it be something they ate?**

Luckily for The Blades, over three million Kentucky Fried meals are served daily throughout the world. The Colonel provided finger-lickin' relief after the band has vetoed a malodorous farrago of microwaved curry, prised with difficulty from a Fulham takeaway emporium.

The chicken chewin' Blades are a Dublin three-piece with an average age of 20. Their trip to England in August this year was their first absence from their home patch. The furthest afield they'd played up to then had been Donegal and Cork. They weren't sure what to make of London after this first brief acquaintance. 'London audiences seem a bit restrained,' said singer and bassman Paul Cleary, who's responsible for writing just about all The Blades' material. Lar Schreiber, guitar and bootlace tie, commented: 'It's a new band, and they're just steppin' back to have a look - which they're entitled to do. Audiences are the same everywhere really, aren't they?'

Well, I dunno about that. On the night in question The Blades had played a satisfying and at times exhilarating set at the *Greyhound* in Fulham. A certain amount of dancing had occurred, yet the band weren't impressed with their performance. But having seen their earlier date at the *Thomas A Becket* pub in the Old Kent Road, I'd had to look twice to make sure I was seeing the same band. The *Thomas A Becket* gig had found The Blades cursed with inaudible harmonies which rendered their often melodic songs meaningless, while a duff AC30 was chewing up Schreiber's guitar and spitting it out like a shower of rusty razor blades.

At the *Greyhound*, on the other hand, someone had realised that you can often hear harmonies better if you turn the mic levels up, while the offending AC30 had been deep-sixed in favour of a Music Man combo. Thus such songs as *Let's Go Down To The Dance* and *Ghost Of A Chance* could be savoured anew. Cleary has a strong if not unique voice, and makes the most of Schreiber's harmonising abilities to back him up. Schreiber deploys thick, ringing chords over simple bass, leaving plenty of room for Pat Larkin's crispy propulsive percussion.

So if the firm's complete, what about the caper? The Blades have perfected the sort of sound probably best known from Derry's finest The Undertones, and Belfast's Starjets work similar territory.

Paul Cleary cites both bands as favourites of his. But why do the Dublin-reared Blades gravitate towards the more urgent feel of the troubled north of Ireland?

Cleary doesn't really know. 'We always felt an affinity with the Northern Ireland bands. Not purposely, that's just the way it turned out. The records we were hearing from there just sounded like what we wanted to do - like the Undertones and Starjets.'

Waiting outside the ill-fated Indian takeaway earlier in the evening, Cleary had commented that he felt that there wasn't much future in writing about the Northern Ireland problem in songs. His argument was that the situation was too complex to make judgements about. Like the Tones and Starjets, Cleary writes mainly about lurve, though his Dublin background means that he's been isolated from the highly-charged social climate which must have been a huge factor in the development of the bands from the North.

'The bands from the North just seem to have a lot of energy. Dublin is a fairly laid-back place, and we don't really fit into the Dublin scene. Maybe there's a few bands there now who are like us, but when we started gigging a year and a few months ago there were no pop bands around. There was a band called The Vipers, who are really good. But we were playing with bands like The Atrix and D.C. Nein. They were more into . . . music of the future. More electronic, with heavy keyboards.'

One possible explanation for The Blades sounding the way they do, accord-



ing to Paul, is that they had to work within their own limitations when they started. 'It's possibly because we're not musicians as such. Well, maybe we are now, but we weren't when we started. Lar had played guitar for a year or two, just at home. I s'pose we're the way we are because when you start off not having any great knowledge, you have to keep your own songs fairly basic, whether you like it or not.'

Well, what about your songs, then? It's difficult to pronounce authoritatively about lyrics when you don't know them. However, a couple of sample titles - *Talking About Sex* and *Stood Up Again* - seem to give a clue about Cleary's direction. The Blades have a single out on Energy records, which is *Hot For You* backed with *The Reunion*. 'They're mostly love songs, you know,' says Cleary. 'They're just about feelings a lotta people go through. Maybe they can mean something to someone in the audience.'

Lar Schreiber speaks up in Cleary's defence. 'They're good lyrics though. They mean something. It's hard to write songs where the lyrics actually mean something and make sense - not just saying "I left you home tonight, I kissed you goodbye, I dreamed of you". You



Mum, I'm in a rock band now. We play what are known as 'gigs' . . .





get lots of shut-eye every evening, and ...

touch our toes every night to keep us fit, and ...

have to put a new angle on it, and Paul seems to be able to do that.'

I must admit I couldn't figure out all the dialogue on the tape around here because it was obscured by crunching and slurping noises as Cleary and Schreiber stormed through the aforementioned Kentucky Fried fodder. Consider that this took place in a sparsely-furnished house in Wandsworth at 1am, where the band were staying, and it all begins to look a bit weird. I can handle it though. 'Here's me in me element, eatin' food,' said Paul. 'It's obnoxious isn't it?' added Lar.

OK, it's after supper now and we're talking about the Blades' three-piece format and its possible limitations. Doesn't that give you any doubts about future developments? 'Well, we're not really worried at the moment,' says Paul, who not only does all the writing but almost all the talking too. 'I've still got a few love songs or whatever left in me. The time when I sit down and say I'll have to write a love song - that'll be the time to change and start writing about something else.'

'As regards musical simplicity, I don't know. Obviously we're not gonna be a three-piece pop band forever, but I don't wanna change for the sake of changing. Things need to progress - we've even changed since we started. The music's changed. The new songs are different from the old ones.' Lar agrees. 'You've got to let it develop naturally, you can't force it to be something new. Something new will come out musically, but there's no way you can force it.'

Now a few words from Blades drummer Pat Larkin, a surprisingly small and timid looking figure who nonetheless unleashes plenty of muscle on his helpless drumkit. There is, I observe aloud, a lot of room left in The Blades sound for drums. Paul Cleary explains that they've deliberately orientated the sound around a solid drum/bass axis with a dance beat. Says drummer Larkin: 'The drums are used as a beat rather than as a solo instrument. It's not complicated, just simple dance beats.'

Pat confesses to liking both Gary 'I'm back again' Glitter and the uncouth Slade.

Paul Cleary, on the other hand, won't commit himself to anything so specific. 'We just listen to all sorts. As I said, The Undertones, I suppose. I don't like groups as such in general, I just like records. I might like a record by somebody which doesn't actually mean I like the group. It's the songs. The Dooleys could bring out a song and I'd say I liked it.' It's mutually understood that this isn't very likely.

Probably wisely, The Blades haven't tried to analyse what they're doing too much - so far, anyway. Their contact with audiences is intended to be simple and direct, as Cleary emphasises. 'We don't bullshit audiences. I don't like fuckin' long raps in between songs about why aren't you dancing or you're all fools or any of that crap. We try not to bullshit on stage. That's why we try to keep everything simple.'

The music scene in the Irish Republic doesn't sound over inspiring. One relatively bright spot in an otherwise grey landscape is Dave Fanning's *Rock Show* on RTE Radio 2. (You can pick it up, in

London at least, on medium wave at about 625kHz. It runs from midnight to 2am.) One of Fanning's better ideas is to play demo tapes of local bands on the air, and The Blades were due to record a session for him on their return home.

'It's a very good show,' Cleary reckons. 'There's a lot of complaints that there's not enough of this or not enough of that, though.' In the pipeline for The Blades was a mini-tour of Ireland, which was due to include a gig in Belfast. Does this worry you, I wondered? 'It does, yeah,' replies Paul simply. 'We've heard a few stories an' that. But you can't really discriminate and say we can't play Belfast. Once you start picking out dates, where do you stop? We can't say we won't play the heavy gigs.'

The Blades' debut single on Energy is only the thin end of the wedge, since they've signed a deal with the label which will run for five years if all the options are taken up. An album will appear sooner or later, though it's vague at present. But the band aren't getting carried away with dreams of the big time. 'We like playing, basically,' says Cleary. 'I hate the sound checks and all that, I hate the whole fuckin' razzamatazz. I like playin', though.'

Despite this, Cleary bears no malice towards fellow-Dubliners the Boomtown Rats. 'I don't really like their music but I like Bob Geldof. He seems to be fairly honest. He said he wanted to be fuckin' stinking rich and now he is.' For the time being, The Blades are reconciled to playing gigs in outlying parts of Ireland where bands like folk-rockers. Horslips are the nearest thing the locals have seen to a pop group. Pat Larkin chips in: 'The thing about playing round the country in Ireland is that in some of the places you go, you have to play for two hours. You do get a break in the middle.'

It can be lonely at the top. It can also be bloody lonely on the way there. ■



eat wholesome meals at the hotel restaurant.

# Exit the Future Enter the Human League

**John Morrish takes a trip to rainswept Sheffield and finds himself charting strange seas of truth and falsehood without the aid of a lie-detector or a compass. Let the reader beware, as the future falls through a time-warp.**

It is raining heavily as I arrive in Sheffield, clutching a wet piece of paper that tells me the address of The Human League's new studio. I am to meet them there for an interview. Typically, no such address exists, so I tramp around for some time asking the locals for advice, without success. Eventually I ask in a clothes shop, and after narrowly failing to sell me a raincoat the man directs me along a particularly dark and dingy street. 'There are lots of studios down there,' he says, vaguely.

Luckily, before I am completely lost a group of damp-looking youths spring out from an apparently condemned building and begin to wave in my direction. One I recognise immediately: that famous lop-sided hairdo is guaranteed to make Philip Oakey stand out from the crowd. The rest are less distinctive in appearance, but it transpires that they are indeed The Human League.

The seemingly condemned building is in fact the band's new studio. After failing in our brief search for a more welcoming venue for our discussions we head back there. During our perambulations some initial verbal sizing-up takes place, and it becomes clear that Mr Oakey is at once the most forthcoming and the most untrustworthy. As ludicrous stories and thoughtful remarks gush forth in equal measure I find myself temporarily confused. But seeing my difficulties, bluff, bearded Martyn Ware, the band's token sensible person, makes the helpful suggestion that he will emit a distinctive 'bleep' each time the mendacious but plausible vocalist tells one of his fibs. Unfortunately Martyn has to rush off, leaving me to chart strange seas of truth and falsehood alone. So, let the reader beware: and let us begin.

The story of Britain's very first synthesiser pop band (and I realise that description isn't going to satisfy anybody) begins with compact, quietly-spoken Ian Marsh. While still at school he was attracted by an advert in the library's copy of *Practical Electronics*, saying, 'Build your own synthesiser with these easy-to-put-together modules.' And that is exactly what he did, once he'd left school and was earning enough to afford them. But the results were disappointing: 'They probably

do work quite well, but the way I put them together it didn't work so well. All the intervals on the keyboard were a little eccentric to say the least.' The easy-to-put-together modules turned out to be easier-to-put-away-in-the-attic-and-forget-about, and several years passed.

Suddenly it was 1977. Everywhere, would-be musicians were blowing the dust off those unplayed instruments and starting to make a noise. And south Yorkshire was no exception. 'I was in contact with Mr Martyn Ware, and it was a friend's birthday party, a 21st, and we said "Let's get a band together for the night" . . . So we did, we played under the name of The Dead Daughters or something. Very strange, there was a guitar, a drummer, my synthesiser and loads of tape loops, all being put through various effects units. We did things like the *Dr Who* theme tune and *Louie Louie*.'

Synthesisers, tape loops, effects units: all this in the year of punk rock. But as I point out this apparent contradiction, Philip steps in to remind me of some of the less obvious musical manifestations of that era: 'It wasn't all that strange considering that just before they started, the record at the top of the charts was *I Feel Love* by Donna Summer. And Martyn had *Trans-Europe Express* by Kraftwerk. And *Magic Fly* was in the charts.' So also was Bowie's historic *Low*, Ian reminds me.

With one impromptu performance behind them Ian and Martyn were sufficiently keen to continue rehearsing, together with a third party, one Addy, now of Clock D V A. Martyn had by now taken out an HP agreement on a 'real' synthesiser, a Korg *Minikorg 700S*: an envious Ian soon followed suit, ditching the unplayable home-assembled monstrosity in favour of two units from the Roland *System 100*. The Future, as they were called, set to work recording demo tapes to garner record company interest, without much success. At that time, synthesiser-based music was not so widely accepted as it is now: the companies showed a certain curiosity but nothing more. Moreover the band had to suffer the withering scorn of their punkier mates. 'They just used to laugh at us,' recalls Ian: 'When are you going to play your psychedelic music then lads? Ha ha ha . . .'



Philip Oakey, lone synthesist of '77.

Soon the mysterious Addy was gone, and a replacement was sought: 'We decided we needed another keyboard player, we weren't thinking of vocals in particular. And we both kind of came up with Philip as possibly the right choice. We knew he couldn't play anything, but we thought he'd have the right approach. It was more finding people who were like-minded as opposed to actual musicians to fill the gap.' Exit The Future, enter The Human League.

At first there was some confusion over the part the newcomer was going to play: 'We wondered what role he was going to have, because he hadn't got any money to buy a synthesiser or anything. He had a saxophone which he couldn't play,' recalls Ian. '*Being Boiled* was the first thing we did together. We'd got the instrumental part and he came along with these lyrics and just started singing along. So we had vocals then. I thought the lyrics were just completely crazy.'

The newly constituted band had no intention of performing in public, their aim being to release a record. Bob Last heard their demo and agreed to issue a single on his celebrated Fast Product label. The whole thing was arranged by post and on the telephone: the band only met Last some five months after the single had been released, when they did their first London gig. *Electronically Yours*, as it was

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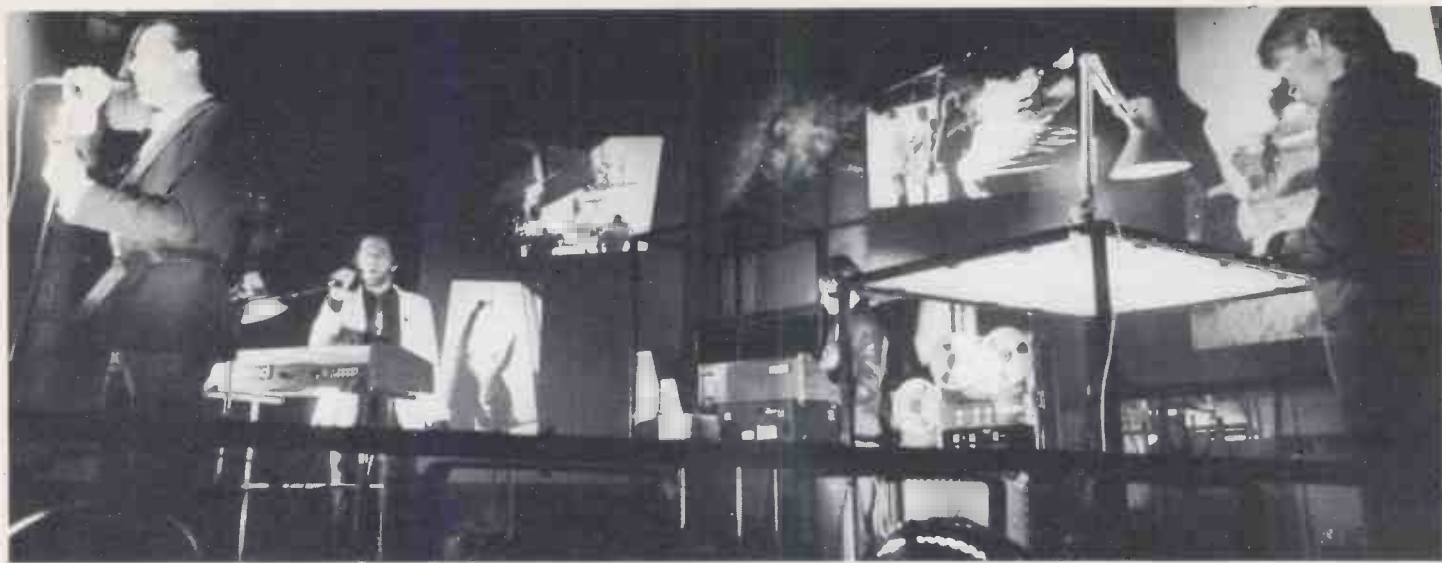
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called, was released on the then common independent label basis of profit-sharing, and sold some 17,000 copies. Recorded in mono on a domestic 2-track, the disc is a curiosity but a successful one. On the A-side is *Being Boiled*. It starts with noises like escaping steam. Then Oakey gets things moving with a simple: 'OK, ready, let's do it,' but his tone suggests he's ordering an attack on the Klingon flagship, rather than starting a rock'n'roll song. The steam shapes itself into a percussion section, a rasping, flatulent lead synth marks out the melody, a morse code rhythm line cuts across it and finally the vocalist enters and begins intoning his 'completely crazy' lyrics: 'Listen to the voice of Buddha/ Saying stop your sericulture/ Little people like your offspring/ Boiled alive for some god's stocking/ Buddha's watching Buddha's waiting.' The sound is fairly thin, and the treatment austere, but the song works all the better for it. As for 'sericulture' it means 'the breeding of silkworms' and is the product of a dictionary-browsing session on Mr Oakey's part.

The B-side, *Circus of Death*, is an even stranger exercise. Proceedings are opened with an involved announcement by Oakey, in best BBC style, describing what is going to happen in the song. And if that is not enough, the sleeve carries a further explanatory footnote. Luckily the song is strong enough to rise above all this weight of commentary. The lyrics are a typical piece of science fiction hokum, but they are carried along on a compelling switchback melody line. Although the single is long deleted, the material, in re-recorded form, appears on the two Virgin albums.

Reluctant performers, the band had to be bullied into their first gigs, which took place during the long gap between recording their single and seeing it released. Their very first gig was at the local Art College, and in the audience that night was one Adrian Wright, soon to become the band's fourth member. His comments on the occasion are guarded: 'It was . . . interesting.' It seems that the set that this assemblage of avowed non-musicians put

together for those early Sheffield dates was similar in conception to their set today: some originals, like *Path of Least Resistance* (then some seven minutes long); some covers, like *You've Lost That Loving Feeling*. There were differences, though. In those days they did instrumentals, including a number called *Year of The Jet-Packs* which differed from the rest of the set then and since, in actually being performed live on a sequencer, without the use of taped backing tracks. And their Moroderous inclinations were more pronounced at that time, coming through in numbers like *Dance Like A Star* and *Disco Disaster* now long lost. Explains Philip: 'At that time disco was just "not-yet-fashionable" so we thought we'd be the first to jump on the bandwagon, and said we were a disco band and wanted people to dance to us.'

The most unique and justly celebrated part of The Human League's stage show came later, when Adrian Wright was brought in as 'Director of Visuals'. Philip again: 'We accidentally picked up Adrian after about the third show, 'cos we were totally boring on stage. We didn't do anything. I can't dance, and when you've got a keyboard . . . Martyn likes to dance, doesn't he?' (Groans all round, and imaginative and uncomplimentary descriptions of the absent Martyn's dancing.) Adrian was living underneath where the band were practising, and as a *bona fide* art student (the only one in the band, they hasten to add) he had access to slide projectors. They started to build up their slide collection.

Adrian: 'I had about 100 slides of *Star Trek* I'd taken off my Dad's television - so the first show was just *Star Trek*.'

Philip: 'Since then it's got very important, and very specific to what we're doing.'

Ian: 'Yeah, not only do we get *Star Trek*, we also get *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet*.'

Philip: 'I think we're on *Torchy The Battery Boy* at the moment.'

The fact that Adrian had a driving licence when none of the others did, and at a time when paying a driver was out of the question, may or may not have played

a part in Adrian's arrival: certainly the rest of the band like to give this impression. It is clear that Adrian also serves as the butt for the band's relentless jokes. For the most part he takes this onslaught without complaint, perhaps because he is aware of his importance to the League's success. It is at least arguable that Adrian's slide show is the single most successful thing the band do. In its current, full-length version it is a compelling visual experience, a procession of startling secondhand images plucked from the depths of our collective media memory: snatches of old cartoons, TV programmes, films, adverts. The images are tied to the songs, sometimes by obvious specific reference, but usually by creating a richly allusive mood in support.

The embryonic stage show was honed into shape around Sheffield for a while before the band did their first London gig, supporting The Rezillos at the Music Machine in August 1978. Following that The League went on tour with Siouxsie and the Banshees, in the days when they were still a hard-core punk outfit. Fearing an unfavourable reception the band took along a set of specially-constructed riot shields, but in fact audiences were generally very good. Nevertheless, The League were forced to make some changes in their set to meet the demands of the concert audience: 'For the first few dates we did instrumentals and then we noticed that people were giving us slow handclaps and chucking things during the instrumentals, so we dropped them.'

Instead they decided to issue a set of instrumentals as their next record. The result was a 12in single with the snappy title *The Dignity Of Labour Parts 1-4*. On the cover is a picture of Yuri Gagarin in full military regalia walking along a red carpet before a crowd of loyal Russians. Inside the sleeve is a jokey free gift, a flexidisc of the band and Bob Last discussing whether or not to include a flexidisc offering a commentary on the cover photo. When it arrives the actual commentary is a statement by Oakey that the picture is about 'the individual as opposed to the group,





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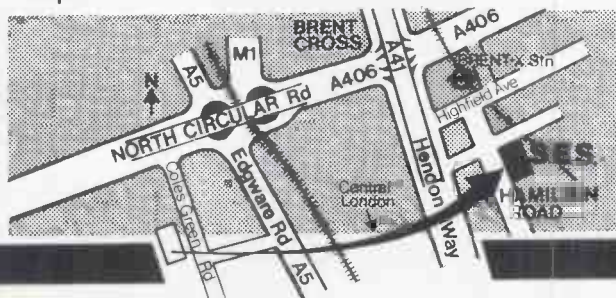
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and it's about human frailty: no matter how big you are you're going to be dead pretty soon.' As a summary of the human condition this seems slightly less profound than the typical Adrian Wright irrelevancy that follows: 'A kid's swapping a fishing rod for a Dr Feelgood album.'

As for the music, I can only say that the four instrumentals here do not appeal to me, although at the time they received a lot of favourable press. Apparently lacking any coherent construction, the music is shapeless and the textures unoriginal. The band themselves are unrepentant about the material, but Philip admits 'it was a bad mistake doing it at that time, because everyone had decided we were a pop band, and we put that out and it sounded like Amon Duul or something'.

Still with Fast at this stage, the band began to look around for a major label contract, ending up with Virgin after lengthy negotiations aimed at securing what they term 'the right control' rather than an excessive advance. Their relationship with the company seems happy, the only bone of contention being the fact that Virgin choose the singles. The Human League do a lot of covers, because they find them helpful in getting their unfamiliar textures across to a wide audience. 'But,' explains Philip, 'they're a real danger, because Virgin want to put every cover we ever do out as a single. That's very annoying. I'm getting to the point where I think we're going to have to stop doing them altogether.'

'Well, under the name The Human League anyway,' adds Ian darkly.

The Virgin connection brought with it a long European tour as support to Iggy Pop and then, in summer '79, it was back to Sheffield to record backing tracks for the debut album. This the band undertook to do on their own equipment, comprising a Studiomaster 16 into 4 mixer and a Teac, mastering on to the Revox they use on tour. The procedure was to put down three tracks of synthesised percussion and a fourth track of control pulses for

synchronising any sequencers used later. As Ian says, 'It was just rhythm really, which is quite useful to get out of the way early on.'

The League's method of composing in those early days was always to start with what they call 'the beat', and then to work out melody lines to fit. This procedure has been modified lately: by the time of the second album people had started bringing in finished tunes in time-honoured fashion, though even now, the band always start recording with the rhythm tracks.

When it came to the overdubs for the first album the band chose a studio in strong contrast to their own makeshift facilities. As good technocrats they asked Virgin to find them a studio with computer mixdown equipment, and ended up at Red Bus with Colin Thurston as co-producer. In retrospect, they all admit to a certain disappointment about *Reproduction*, as the album was finally called, and can identify certain mistakes. Like using a computer, for instance: while they declare themselves generally very impressed with Red Bus, they all wish they could have the chance to remix the album again, this time without automation. And then there is the problem of monitors and their tendency to mislead the unwary. Ian declares a dissatisfaction with the sound of the album: 'Doing it was great, we thought, "Wow, this sounds fantastic, great." It was only a few months later when we listened to it on our normal systems that we decided it was lacking in quite a major way in several areas.'

Philip is even more specific: 'I listened to it the other day, and as far as I'm concerned there are about three worthwhile things on it, I'd really like to remix those. *Empire State Human* is good, I think *Morale/Loving Feeling* is magnificent now. I was really shocked, I'd forgotten how good that was.' The band are reluctant to pin any blame for the album's failings on co-producer Colin Thurston, but when pressed they do admit

that they felt he lacked sympathy with certain aspects of what they are trying to do. Philip again: 'Colin's a bit of a purist, he goes for the purity of the voice and things, not many effects... and he doesn't really like synthesisers, I think.'

Earlier the band mentioned feeling 'overawed' by the studio. Pursuing this line, I ask whether that was due to unfamiliarity with the equipment. Ian denies this: 'It wasn't really that way, it was more, "Wow, we've made it, a real studio, great." We just lapped it up, basked around in nice comfortable chairs, had tea and biscuits brought in by slaves, had people racing out to get you meals. It felt really good: we didn't concentrate on the job at hand as much as we should have done.' But whereas that is a problem facing any new band using a big studio for the first time, The Human League, as Eno-esque non-musicians, face further complications. Their working methods are painstaking and almost incomprehensible to observers, provoking curiosity. And the band do not work well when they are being watched. Philip explains their position: 'Ian really typifies this. Ian can do something on his own when no-one's around which is really fantastic. When someone's watching him, he just doesn't do it as well. It puts him completely off.'

*Reproduction* was finally released in October 1979 to a mixed reception. It is a strange, idiosyncratic record that suffers badly from an intimidating flatness of production. And the choice of material is not such as to appeal to the casual listener. The band's undoubted humour shines through on only one track, the ubiquitous *Empire State Human*. Elsewhere the songs are dark in tone and austere in treatment. Too often they move at a plodding, funereal pace. The featureless, repetitive, rhythmically predictable nature of the synthesised instrumentation means that the listener's attention is focused very closely upon Philip Oakey's voice. In conversation, Oakey makes no secret of his preference for live singing: 'I'm a terrible singer in the studio, I can't sing in tune, it takes me hours to get into tune, and then when I've done that I'm out of time and things.' On the album Philip's technical difficulties are often apparent and sometimes damagingly so. But despite all these flaws, *Reproduction* is an album that responds to patience. Its best moments come when resonant lyrics, sensitive vocals and reserved backing combine to produce powerful and sustained moods. *Morale* is probably the most characteristic single track, a half-spoken fable of old age: 'I don't forget, though I've grown weak now/ Experience is useless unless you can learn/ And I've never met anyone who used their knowledge/ To avoid those mistakes made again and again.' It is the slow,



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quirky, least rock'n'roll songs that work best, where the synths are used to create sympathetic moods around Oakey's vocals.

Sadly, the qualities of *Reproduction* are not such as to attract huge and rapid sales. It is plainly lacking in instant pop tunes of the type that draw radio play and attract impulse buyers. Add to this an alleged cock-up on the promotion front and the result was a disastrously unsold album, and the beginning of a chain of disasters for the band including the loss of their first headlining tour. The album came out a couple of weeks before the tour was due to begin, and Virgin were waiting to promote the tour and the album together. But when the tour promoters saw the initial sales figures for the album they decided to pull out, leaving the band with an album and no way of selling it.

As an alternative Virgin arranged for The League to tour as support to Talking Heads, but the band weren't keen, coming up instead with what they describe as the 'loony idea of the automatic show', a pre-recorded audio and visual show that they could watch from the audience. A heavy investment of time and money went into the scheme, and the gear was *in situ* at the first Talking Heads date when the band were informed that their services were not required. Surprisingly, they were not downhearted. As Adrian says, spirits were 'quite high because everybody was against us and we were all really tough about it'. Philip concurs: 'We were much more solid then. Now we've got some chance of success we're all nervously ferreting away at trying to do anything we can for anyone. It's completely pathetic.'

After their experiences with the first album the band decided to try to put together a studio of their own. The enforced rest that followed in the wake of the album's release gave them the opportunity to start putting the plan into action. But as the discussion turns in that direction I notice a certain restlessness among some members of the band, and then, without further warning, they start heading toward the door. When this course of action is queried they reply that they are going to see David Attenborough. 'He's our hero, David Attenborough,' offers Adrian by way of explanation. 'He's in the slide show.' It turns out that Mr Attenborough is in a local bookshop signing copies of his latest masterwork *Life On Earth*.

When we arrive, Ian duly picks up a copy of the full-colour, specially lengthened, *Readers Digest* edition of the book in question and takes his place at the back of a very long queue. Adrian wanders off somewhere. Philip begins to tell me a series of tales of life on the road, specifically about events on the band's last Eurotour: like being pursued across Germany by a bearded lady groupie with designs on his body; like being announced at a festival in Austria as England's leading

gay band, and the embarrassing consequences that ensue. Fact or fiction, it has to be admitted that Philip tells a good story.

One curious thing about the afternoon's events is the way we keep meeting other local bands, either because they too have come to pay homage to the great man or just because they happen to be passing. In this way we meet several supporting characters from the early chapters of the Human League saga, including Addy (The One Who Preceded Philip Oakey) and Paul (The One Who Made The Human League Do Gigs). They do not show much interest in dwelling on the past, preferring to gossip at length with the garrulous vocalist. Eventually Ian returns, clutching his prize close to his heart and we wander back down the hill to the studio, which bears the grand name Monumental Pictures. Its location must remain a secret, at least until the band have saved up for a more



... but it was here in the Grand Canyon that I first came across the Human League ...'

efficient burglar alarm.

The conversation turns to the initial plan for the studio. Explains Ian, 'After the first album experience we decided there's no point why we shouldn't set up an 8-track here (or some sort of studio, it ended up being an 8-track) and do the next album in Sheffield ... so we went about looking for equipment to come up to the level of whatever budget we were being offered for the second album.' Having worked out the prices they presented them to Virgin and a deal was set up whereby Virgin would pay for the studio to be put together rather than paying for the band to record elsewhere. A sensible move, especially since the band's requirements in respect of recording facilities are fairly modest. Synthesisers are recorded by direct injection, so expensive acoustic treatment is not strictly necessary, at least at the track-laying stage. The same goes for microphones, with the obvious exception of vocal tracks.

The band managed to find a home for their studio in a large, rambling, former veterinary surgery close to the city centre. They spent several months just cleaning the place out, dismantling animal hutches, and sweeping up seemingly endless piles of dog hair. It is still fairly chaotic. On the ground floor a leaky tap is doing its best to cause a flood, and rubbish and pieces of equipment are heaped in the corners. The studio-cum-control room is in the old operating theatre. The windows have been blocked in and a lurid red and yellow paint-job applied, but the sink in the corner gives the room's origins away, with its look-no-hands taps still intact. On the same floor is a kitchen, and upstairs is Adrian's room, where all his slides are stored.

Acting on advice from Tim Pearce, their live sound engineer, the band gathered up a selection of new and second-hand equipment, including an old Ampeg 8-track, a pair of Lockwood Major monitors and an Amcron power amp. The mixer is a Trident *Fleximix*, and they still master on their well-travelled Revox. Out in the kitchen is a very expensive Neumann microphone, for it is here that Philip records his vocals, facing the painted wooden doors of a cupboard and standing between the fridge on one side and the vacuum cleaner on the other. As he says, 'I can make the tea at the same time ...'

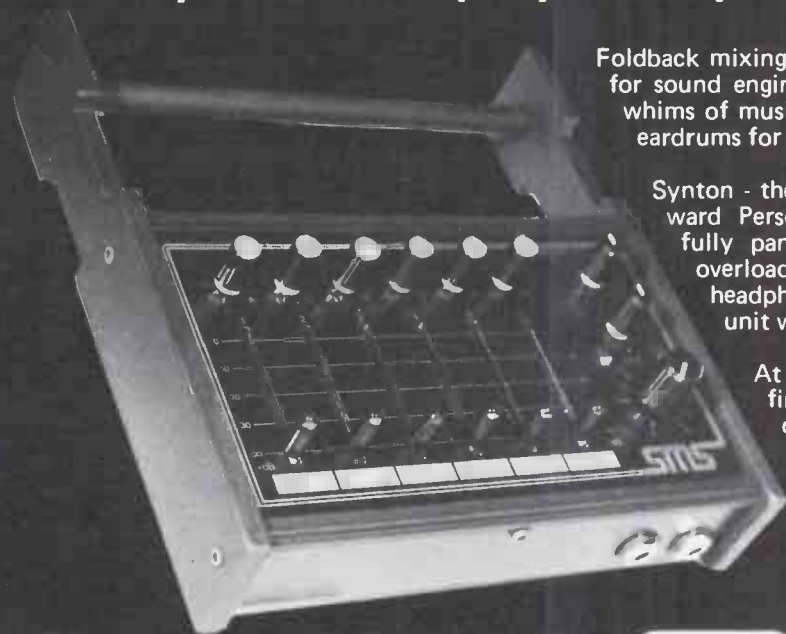
Generally speaking, the band are well pleased with the studio and the results they get. Says Philip, 'It's really great, it's a lot of fun. If we ever finally get the place properly analysed for sound so we know that what's coming out of the speakers is correct we'll be well off. We have the problem that the room's very bass-heavy and we have to go down and really work hard at the cut.' At the moment the band are still finding their way around the equipment. When the time came to put together their second album *Travelogue* Richard Mainwaring of The Manor was brought in as engineer. So great was his contribution, however, that he ended up as co-producer: 'The idea was that he came up and showed us how the equipment worked, but in fact he ended up listening to the songs and actually listening to the words and what the songs were about, and then approached them from that angle which was something that Colin had never done, for instance ... He ended up co-producing, deservedly,' says Philip.

*Travelogue* is a much more up-front, up-tempo collection than its predecessor. The songs are more conventional in construction and approach and the production is fatter and more sympathetic. Oakey sounds more confident and is further back in the mix. The synths are allowed to make some very raucous noises indeed and horrible distortion like the sound of frying transistors crops up several times to good effect. Apart from



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# BREAKER

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the lack of anything quite so daring as the slow mood pieces on the first album, my only real complaint is that the album is slightly short on new original material. There are two covers, a version of Mick Ronson's *Only After Dark*, done very straight, and one of the theme for the Gordon's Gin advert, which, they recently discovered, was written by Jeff Wayne. Then there is a re-recorded version of their first single *Being Boiled*, featuring a synthesised horn section riffing away in fine style. Then there is *Toyota City*, an instrumental from the Fast Product era: pretty, vaguely oriental but to me no more

*Empire State Human* for instance which apart from its appearance on the first album, has been issued in at least three different forms: the original 7in that came out at the time of the first album; a 12in issued to tie in with the release of *Travelogue*; and finally a double-single 7in package. Then there's the *Holiday '80* business. Originally this was a double-single package featuring five tracks including the new version of *Being Boiled*, the long-term stage favourite *Rock'n'Roll*, and an excellent, previously unreleased song called *Marianne*. This was a 'limited edition' job and was quickly repackaged

hoping for the unexpected, though. The show is necessarily pre-programmed, depending on tapes recorded in advance, and the band rarely make any spontaneous movements. Only Martyn dances, and even that is frowned upon by the other members. The result is less like 'the future of rock'n'roll', more like 'son-et-lumiere for the pop-kids': but then again, to criticise the Human League for being unspontaneous is a bit like criticising Ted Nugent for being loud. Spontaneous excitement is not the intention. Says Adrian, with some vehemence: 'Spontaneity's a daft rock and roll cliché. It's like



convincing than any of their other instrumentals. That leaves six new original songs, all of them interesting, some better than anything they have done before. *The Black Hit Of Space* is a number in the same humorous mould as *Empire State Human* but with a sharp, satirical edge, telling as it does the story of a hit record that just grows and grows and grows: 'As this song climbed the charts/ The others disappeared/ Till there was nothing but it left to buy/ It got to number one/ Then into minus figures/ Though nobody could understand why.' Hmm, I think I know the one they mean... More serious is *Dreams Of Leaving*, a dramatic and perceptive piece about political exile: some of the song's vocabulary suggests a South African setting, but the situation is sadly universal. In *WXJL Tonight* Oakey gives a thoughtful performance as the last radio DJ in a world of automatic stations, making some double-edged comments on contemporary radio from his viewpoint 20 years hence. But the most immediately appealing track on the album is *Life Kills*, a sympathetic look at someone's relentless daily round: 'Your life is like a schedule/ You run to meet the bills/ No-one's awake to tell you/ Life kills.' With its straightforward, solid construction and energetic synthesised horns and tympani arrangement it sounds like an obvious single, perhaps even the elusive hit the band need so badly.

According to Ian, the band's policy on singles was decided a long time ago: 'We're virtually going to try and release everything until we get airplay'. Add to this Virgin's peculiar policy of catering for the vinyl junkie market and you go a long way towards explaining the bewildering variety of the League's single output. Not that they have released that many different songs, just a lot of different records. Take

as one single, omitting *Marianne* and their cover of Iggy Pop's *Nightclubbing*. Unfortunately, even after a disappointingly average *TOTP* appearance, the single failed to make much impact on the charts, but more importantly *Marianne* was lost to all except those lucky enough to get the original package. But never fear, the word is that the song is about to be released as a picture disc, and after that no doubt we'll get it as a limited edition black vinyl version and so on *ad nauseam*. Anybody for the vinyl crisis revival?

Sooner or later, though, the band will get the hit single they deserve. Their material is becoming more mainstream, more conventional and inevitably more commercial. This is Philip's pet subject: 'I'd really like to write memorable songs, like Frank Sinatra songs (as Adrian would say) or love songs or something like that. Abba songs, you know: *Knowing Me Knowing You*, what a fabulous song to have written.' This is despite his unusual view of harmonic theory: 'I think chords are all right if you've got a section in the song that just needs filling in till the next interesting bit comes, really. But there's nothing to beat a single note line that'll cut through and you can hear it.' But then again, as he says, the band are still learning: 'We're just working our way towards it as we get to know what we're doing. We're complete charlatans really, especially when we began, we hadn't got a clue at all. But slowly we will get competent.'

In the meantime the band will continue to work, both in the studio and live. If you haven't seen the Human League show then you should try next time they come round. It really is a unique experience, with the visual side representing exactly 50% of the interest rather than being something just tacked on. Don't go along

saying films should be spontaneous.' Ian expands on this comparison: 'We just happen to get reviewed in rock papers, but it's not a rock experience, that's not what we're putting on... we're playing the same venues, simply because there aren't any other venues available. It is certainly somewhere between that and cinema, certainly half-way between them.'

All of which leaves me with the task of justifying writing about The Human League in what is more or less a rock magazine. Well, here we go. The Human League are important first of all because they are a good band in their own right: disappointing though some of their work is, they have recorded a lot of very strong material, and now they have their own working facilities we can look forward to even better things. In an area of music peopled almost exclusively with the pretentious and po-faced, The Human League are refreshingly good-humoured, but serious nonetheless: they are, as their name suggests, the most human of the technocrats. Secondly, the band are worth writing about because of their huge influence: where would Messrs Numan, Foxx, Orchestral Manoeuvres *et al* be without The League's liberating experiments with sound and vision? Finally, the band are to be applauded for keeping alive the delicate flame of amateurism. It is a common reaction for people hearing The Human League's music for the first time to say that, 'Anybody could do it.' The band themselves would probably agree: given the time and the equipment and the imagination, most people probably could do it.

But the great thing about The Human League is that they, a group of absolute non-musicians (at least when they started), have done it. Long may they continue to do so. ■

# Al Kooper (who?)

**You know, the guy who played keyboards on Like A Rolling Stone and adventured with Mike Bloomfield and produced Lynyrd Skynyrd . . . Fred Dellar probes this and more in just one page!**



**H**is last defender zapped by an oncoming ray, Al Kooper turns his back on Basing Street's Space Invaders machine and grimaces.

He's not used to being a loser. After all, when you've discovered Lynyrd Skynyrd, created Blood, Sweat And Tears, recorded your own albums, using folk like Mike Bloomfield, Steve Stills, Carlos Santana and The Atlanta Rhythm Section, been a session man with Hendrix, The Stones and Dylan, and grabbed production credits on albums by The Tubes and Nils Lofgren, then a few measly electronic aliens ought to be pushovers. But it seems not.

Al ambles back to the control room and readies himself for an interview. He commences by stating he's to stay in Britain for an indefinite period. 'In the States, I had difficulty breathing air both literally and politically. Also, the music scene over there is at a total stand-still. Which is why I felt it was time to go someplace else. This seemed like the most logical place.'

Recently Koop, who has from time to time appeared on disc as Roosevelt Gook, has been producing an album for The Hot Rods, who are now with EMI following a three-album stay with Island. According to Al though, this is the first *real* album with which the band has been involved.

'They've never *really* made a record before. They've always just gone in for a week or so and then put the record out. Never have they actually used a studio in order to enrich whatever they've done. I mean, I've done unheard of things with them – like getting them to rehearse! And I'm very pleased with the results. I think the record will stun everybody because it's not what they'll be expecting from the band. It's The Hot Rods, 1980, a great rock'n'roll record with a bit of R&B. A contemporary rock record, with the accent on the word "contemporary".'

He plays a master tape to demonstrate the point. The reels revolve and The Rods' niftily rocking version of Taj Mahal's *Further On Down The Road* beguiles the ears. Everyone gets enthusiastic. Me too. Demo over, Kooper moves on to mention that he's also just completed an album by Johnny Van Zandt, younger brother of Ronnie Van Zandt, the late lead singer of the Skynyrd.

'That one's coming out on Polydor. The band are all very young – no more than 18 or 19 years old – and they're all from Jacksonville. I call them the Baby Skynyrd and that's exactly what they are – pure Lynyrd Skynyrd. When Skynyrd broke up, nobody really took the ball with the kind of music they were playing. There have been pretenders to the throne but no-one's really picked up on what they were doing. But this record is great because it's not only by Ronnie's brother but also because his band is great. Working with them was just like *déjà vu*.'

Originally regarded purely as a guitarist until chance caused him to tinker with an organ on Dylan's *Like A Rolling Stone*, gaining unexpected acclaim ('My whole career is really just one funny, quite ludicrous story in which truth is even funnier than fiction'), the New Yorker says he loves to play with musicians he respects and admires.

'What I've often done is to take a player who's famous for a certain type of music and then not have them do that sort of music at all. If I go to Nashville, those guys are so glad to see me

because all they normally do is play country music – and I don't do country music. Thing is, if you put R&B in front of them, they play it as well, if not better, than the people who regularly play that sort of music in the studios. But they do it with far more fervour because they don't get a chance to perform that kind of thing normally.'

The Atlanta Rhythm Section, who worked on Al's *Naked Songs* album at Doraville's Studio 1 ('I used to own half of that place') have been buddies of Koop's since the days when they were The Candyman, Roy Orbison's back-up unit and Al was still trying to forget that he was once a 13-year-old member of The Royal Teens in their *Short Shorts* days.

'Yeah – I've known them a long time. In fact, The Candyman used to play with Blues Project in New York quite a bit. The blues – I like what The Blues Band are doing now. I wish they needed a keyboard player. The Thunderbirds are real good too, while Thorogood is great. I don't want to produce any of those acts though, there's nothing I could do for them. They're doing it all themselves and they don't need me to help.'

Among the other musicians Kooper admires are the members of the big band he employed on *You Never Know Who Your Friends Are*.

'That was an incredible experience – the most self-indulgent thing I've ever done. Just phenomenal, exhilarating! It was incredible to have Zoot Sims, Joe Farrell, Eric Gale, Chuck Rainey and Bernard Purdie be your band . . .'

He tapers off as if disbelieving the whole thing really did happen. 'You know, if I hear someone who really kills me, I'll often go seek them out. I heard Herbie Flowers on an Elton John album and I just wanted to play with him. So the first thing I did when I came to this country was to seek him out because, apart from Stanley Clarke, he's my favourite bassist. No – that's not true. I rate Larry Graham over him, so Larry and Herbie will have to be joint greatest with Stanley Clarke third!'

Though the Gook's initial *Super Session* and *Live Adventures* involvements with Mike Bloomfield proved to be massive sellers, sales of his later solo albums fell away, as he readily admits.

'I haven't made any albums since the UA one (*Act Like Nothing Is Wrong*) in '77 and I wouldn't have done that but for the fact that I had a book coming out and wanted to promote the two things at once and use a bit of synergy. I like making records, there's nothing I enjoy more. But when things don't sell, it seems pointless to put more effort and energy into doing such projects. If your records don't sell, then it's like having a certain number of people tell you something – and it's best that you listen!'

It's possible that Kooper may be making some onstage appearances in the near future. He's been putting an act together with airbrush artist Pattie Heid, who's providing the cover for the Rods' album. 'She's a good singer,' he claims. 'And we're thinking of working together here in the kind of way that Becker and Fagen did with Steely Dan. Just she and I, with any other people being extraneous.'

Finally – the big question. What ever happened to Roosevelt Gook? Koop grins at the mention of his Dylan-given pseudonym. 'Oh, I've got a new one now. Just look out for Rufus Jenkins!'

So now you know and can all sleep easy in your beds. ■

# Aria Gerry Cott

Roger Adams

Right, what do you need most of all when you're reviewing a guitar with active electronics – apart from another week before press-time! You need a bleedin' amplifier, that's what! Mine, which had been stuck in darkest Knapshill with a load of other gear during the latter part of the week preceding the time of writing, pending yet another memorable Adams performance on the Saturday night, decided, at the climax of said *tour-de-force*, right at the bit where Mad Mike Smith, our illustrious keyboardist and Main Mouth invites a round of applause for the guitarist's virtuosity, to attempt an ongoing condition of spontaneous combustion in the general area of the loudspeaker coil. In other words, I blew a speaker. Complete silence from guitar, and all I could think of was 'am I ever going to hear that Aria Gerry Cott sitting back home?' Luckily, with a display of verve and panache that would have done justice to the pit-crew of the Great Fangio, Broadway Music of Worthing put me back in action in the nick of time (thanks Nick!) with a new speaker, so here goes (you want syntax, guv? I got millions of 'em).

I remember that when the *Aria Pro II* adverts started to appear, pre-Gigsville, I got really excited about the look of the instrument. It really gave the impression that it would come to life like an old Stradivarius violin when touched by the hand reaching towards it in the photo. I wrote to Japan expressing interest, and was referred to the newly-appointed distributors, Messrs Tulett and Mabey, known collectively as Gigsville. They subsequently paid me a visit, and did me the honour of giving me a very early trial of two instruments, one which had a bolt-on neck and a gloss lacquer finish, and the 'violin-style' matt finished *PE 1000*. I was impressed, but found the strings too heavy to really judge the guitar's playability. The Gigsville men obviously knew they were on to a good thing, and showed near-reverence for their new product. Since then, the success of Aria guitars has been well publicised, and alongside the original beautiful designs have appeared a plethora of derivatives; instead of *Les Paul* copies, Aria quickly cashed in on themselves with *PE 1000* copies, and as usual the range is overwhelming.

With commercialisation setting in at

Roger Adams is guitarist with *High Profile*, and drives 3-tonners too.

such a rate, and, I suspect, with Gigsville looking for Big Bucks, as a thriving new distributor would naturally do, an Endorser was finally decided upon. Unfortunately, the Endorser, being a clever dick, thought, 'Wouldn't it be *très* punk to take that Jap guitar that thinks it's a Stradivarius, spray it metallic blue, overload it with electrics, and get me name involved.' So here it is then, folks, the *Gerry Cott*. I wonder if Les Paul had instrument reviewers making similar snide remarks at the outset of his particular slice of guitar history? More to the point, will there ever be Japanese *Roger Adams* copies!

## Chapter Two: In which the Reviewer finally gets round to Reviewing the Object of his Review

Well, it certainly is blue, isn't it. I really can't say I've ever seen a bluer guitar, not even Justin Hayward's.

Despite its blueness, however, it still purports to be a musical instrument, so let us look upon it as such, pretending that the inevitable has happened, and some divine piece of stage-lighting has nullified its grotesque colour into a shade of greyish khaki. One thing a guitar costing over £400 must do, however blue it may be, is to justify its existence as a musical instrument amongst some very classy competition. This the *Gerry Cott* attempts to do by being active. I do not refer to its ability to do press-ups or run the 1500 metres faster than Ovett and Coe; I mean that it has an onboard pre-amplification circuit, with several controls, the apparent desire to be able to sound like all guitars to all men, and a



Gerry Cott relaxes with a *PE1000* pre-spray can and soldering iron.

tendency to trash any amplifier input stage that has the misfortune to share a jack-lead with it. And as onboard valve pre-amps are not a feasible proposition, the results can be far from pleasant to the ear.

The basic guitar itself has virtues and vices, but what it certainly does *not* have is a brass nut, contrary to my expectations after examining the colour photograph used recently to advertise the guitar. The nut fitted is quite adequate, however, and the lack of a brass nut is, in my opinion, of no importance as long as it is cut for a low action and securely mounted, as is this one.

The machine heads look like Schallers, but have no adjustment screws in the side of the buttons. The tension is, however, uniform throughout the machines, which indicates a good standard of manufacture, none of the machines being sticky or unduly loose.

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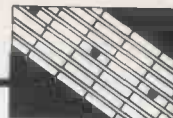
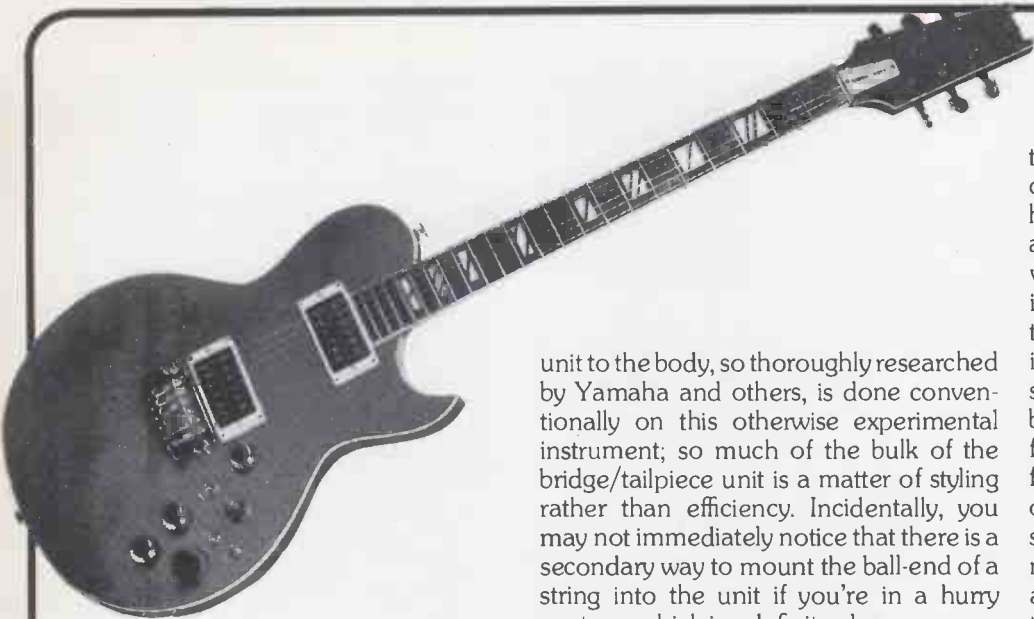
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The action is set a little low as there is considerable fret buzz on the bottom E string. Chord work is thus easy, but lacking in power and definition in the bass without the aid of the active tone-boosting circuit, which adds depth but not clarity; the latter can only be achieved at source. String-bending is not easy on this guitar, which is a major disappointment I find whenever I try a PE 1000-type guitar. I have previously put this down to unsuitable strings, yet those fitted to this instrument seem light enough, albeit extremely 'tight'. I find I can barely shift the top string with my little finger, and the third finger has to be used constantly. Wider gauge fret-wire might help, but I think the prime factor has to be the bridge-tailpiece unit, which, although theoretically offering a solution to sustain problems, shortens the length of the string. Although the scale length is, of course, only measured as far as the bridge saddle, the length of the string between the saddle and the anchoring point in the tailpiece appears to have an effect on the flexibility of the string. Strangely, the Fender-type combined units seem free of this problem. At any rate, this area of design seems to be extremely hit-and-miss; perhaps some genius could put pen to paper and enlighten many of us on the subject of string flexibility with relation to various guitar designs. (Any offers? - Ed.)

As for adjustment, the bridge/tailpiece unit has uncomfortable slot-headed height adjustment/mounting bolts, which can only be turned with a large screwdriver blade; finger adjustment with the strings tuned up is out of the question. Individual scale length adjustment is available, but not string spacing, which is unfortunate as this could have been fractionally more generous at the bridge end. The unit looks more than man enough for the job, although on close inspection it is slimmer than it looks. Also, that crucial area concerning mounting the

unit to the body, so thoroughly researched by Yamaha and others, is done conventionally on this otherwise experimental instrument; so much of the bulk of the bridge/tailpiece unit is a matter of styling rather than efficiency. Incidentally, you may not immediately notice that there is a secondary way to mount the ball-end of a string into the unit if you're in a hurry onstage, which is a definite plus.

I have called the instrument experimental, and this was true before Mr Cott attacked it with his spray can and soldering iron. The best design features are in the woodwork department, notably the heel-less neck joint, and the outstanding bit of contour design at the rear of the body, which allows access to the highest fret with absolutely no difficulty.

However, many of these points are already familiar to the guitar-buying public; what we ought really to consider further are the modifications resulting from Gerry Cott's collaboration.

### The Electrics

I am of the opinion that a fundamental error was made during the planning stage of the electrics on this guitar. Whatever may be the advantages of in-built pre-amplification, there should have been more attention paid to ergonomics. Gerry Cott comments, 'Don't be overawed by the various switches, they're positioned with a lot of thought,' so you would reasonably expect the guitar to be blissfully easy to use. If only this were true!

The problem is, although the controls have been planned with consummate logic, too many variables exist. Each control has a specific, easily understood function, but no thought appears to have been given to how all those different methods of altering the tone of the instrument interact, creating a baffling infinity of available sounds. Not only is there the usual three-way pickup selector; we find that, in addition, the pickups are fitted with a coil tap control, an out-of-phase switch, a six-way preset tone selector and a conventional rotary tone control.

There is, quite simply, no way the average complement of brain cells found in a guitarist can hope to come to terms with that number of available permutations. All of these methods of tone shaping have their uses, but to bung the whole lot together seems a little over the top -

too much of a head-trip in the design department! As a result, the instrument has no characteristic sound or application, and suffers at the hands of its own versatility. Evidently, the recording studio is the most suitable environment for the instrument, but two points spring immediately to mind. Firstly, if this is a studio instrument, why is it bright metallic blue? Secondly, as in the case of effects footpedals, all the engineer will usually ask for is a good basic sound to work on; no-one could seriously expect the kind of sound-shaping facilities found in even a modest professional studio to be built into an electric guitar. Not to mention the fact that on guitar amplifiers, the use of parametric-type equalisation in the mid-range is becoming commonplace, and the mind boggles at the amount of time you could spend trying to optimise tone settings through something like a Lab Series or Redmere Soloist amplifier.

Similarly, at a time when most amplifiers coming on the market have two, often three, stages of gain, often foot-switchable, what is the advantage of having another stage of pre-amplification, not matched to the sensitivity of the amplifier, situated on the guitar? Especially when the nature of this pre-amp is such that it over-exaggerates any selected tone, with inevitable feedback and brittle distortion problems? Now, what is really needed here, of course, is a built-in 11-band graphic equaliser to sort out the boominess of the bass and the feedback squeals. I'm kidding of course... aren't I, Gerry?

I am prepared to concede that an active-circuit guitar is a worthwhile endeavour, but with far greater attention to the genuine rather than the theory/fantasy needs of real playing, especially with regard to the control layout, the quality of sound generated and the degree of tone and volume enhancement that a musician is actually going to ask of the instrument's technology. And let's have some owning up: how many of the truly artistic exponents of guitar playing, as opposed to the many less experienced specimens of group personnel forever seeking ways to spend their advances, are really interested in so-called technological progress?

Are many of the industry's host of sales gimmicks really going to alter the course of music to the same extent as when someone first plugged a Gibson *Les Paul* into a Marshall stack, cranked it up, and bent some strings? If a player allocates a greater and greater proportion of concentration fiddling with the sound, when will there be enough time to get to the heart of

music through playing? Are instruments in fact any better, or is all this kind of re-vamping, the building of layer on layer of new, untried fiddly bits, with no cohesive, usable sound in mind, merely a poor substitute for hard-to-get craftsman-quality materials?

Finally on the subject of the electrics, a few very specific criticisms. Firstly, the six-way selector knob is loosely mounted and falls off. I would like to point out to Gigsville that this happened quite spontaneously, not as the result of rough treatment, and in view of the fact that there was a few days' delay in my receiving the instrument because their setting-up specialist wasn't available, I'm prepared to believe that such things would be noticed in the normal course of events, when one hopes the gentleman is in a little less of a hurry.

Likewise, the three-way selector's action is such that it makes contact before it clicks mechanically into place, in either direction from the central position. Most guitarists would like something far more positive to the touch.

The rotary controls are all recessed as usual on the *PE 1000*, and so also are the phase, coil-tap, and boost switches, which I find rather fussy – a nice idea done to death! Also, this recessing gives rise to two problems; the volume and tone rotaries are rather difficult to grasp in a hurry, despite grooves on the sides of the knobs for grip, the top edges of which could

cause lacerated knuckles during vigorous right-hand work. Secondly, the edges of the recesses are just one of several areas where the blue-sprayed finish has failed to cover the surface uniformly, which looks pretty messy.

Good points on the electrical side are several, despite these criticisms. If you accept that you're not going to get that intimacy of response to your playing that you get with the best conventional guitars, and treat the guitar more coldly and accurately, some nice effects are available. The six-way switch has some strong sounds, and the coil-tap and phase reversal switches are effective, although as I've said, rather over the top when taken into account with the other choices of sounds. The booster switch gives far too much extra gain full up, so the booster volume has to be backed off a bit. In practice, the amount of extra boost you can give yourself for solo work is determined by the horrified expression of your sound engineer, and I would strongly suspect that there are certain circumstances where the *Gerry Cott* may be capable of taking out an entire PA rig with one casual tweak of the booster switch, so beware! This guitar is, of course, unsuitable for transistor amplifiers, because of the way the input breaks up at high levels.

To sum up, the whole variety of sounds seems to share one common factor – that dreadful muddiness of sound displayed

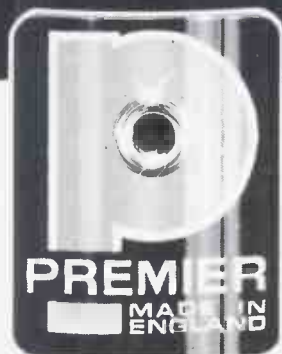
by artificially boosted bass frequencies, and despite the guitar's multitude of controls, that's one thing I couldn't tune out. I think the pickups may be unsuitable for active circuitry in this respect, as I remember the *PE 1000* being a very bassy sort of guitar in its original form, and these 'new Protomatic III' pickups look as though they were developed from those on the standard instrument. Of course, this is where the coil-taps help, but not really enough.

### Conclusion

So anyway, I'm not yet converted to active guitars. For those who are, however, the *Aria PE 1000 GC* is a fair choice, despite its 'love it or hate it' colour. With fewer controls to worry about, ie a sort of *précis* of the whole concept, and a little research into why string-bending is such an effort, it wouldn't be at all bad, but we're really talking about a different guitar now, aren't we.

As far as value for money goes, it's not bad for an active guitar, and the price, including a good case, is £419.80 including VAT. It's certainly a strongly-made instrument and should give no serious problems with prolonged use, and there is a thankful lack of background hisses or hums. Ultimately, it's got to be a personal choice, but I think I'll stick to a good basic instrument and leave the electronics in the little black boxes at the other end of the lead! □

# Who gives 'Slowhand' a big hand?



## Premier and Henry Spinetti.

THE PREMIER DRUM CO LTD LEICESTER ENGLAND



# Schechter bass



**John Knox**

Out of the many companies producing Fender and Gibson replacement parts, one name seems to have crept above the others. Schechter Guitar Research is, as the name implies, a company devoted to constant development and refinement of the art of guitar building. The founder of the company, David Schechter, was closely associated in his early days with the Grateful Dead road crew who went on to produce the famous Alembic basses. He started out repairing pickups and eventually made his own.

Brass hardware was also part of his output. The demand for these parts became so great that in 1974 Mr Schechter formed a company with partners Herschel Blanckenship and Shel Horlick. Production was stepped up and when the company made use of its contacts in the timber industry to obtain exotic woods for necks and bodies business, as they say, boomed. Research in the Schechter factory did not stop at guitar parts. The jigs and lathes on

*Telecasters, Strats and Precisions*, though the only similarity is in the shape. Gibson-style guitars are not built because of the fixed necks, though most of their replacement parts are produced. All parts for these guitars are built and assembled under the same roof. The only exceptions are the Brandley-Allen pots and Grover machine heads. Both companies have an arrangement with Schechter regarding production rights etc.

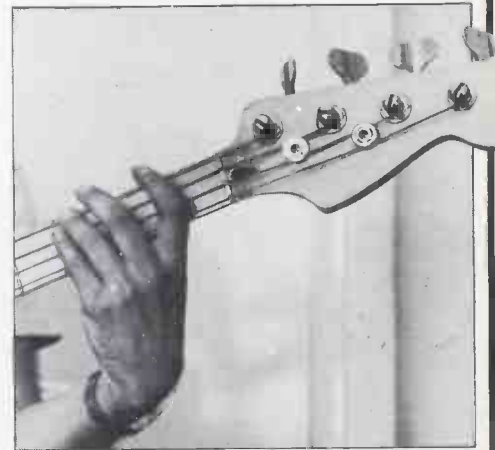
The Schechter catalogue now boasts over 900 items, including 16 bodywoods ranging from ash (£133.38) to rosewood (£270). Neck woods range from maple (£133.97) to cocobola (£350). These prices vary according to the rarity of the wood. *Jazz* and *P-Bass* bodies have recently been produced. A *P-Bass* body is basically a *Precision* with a hole cut for a *Jazz* bass pickup in the treble position and a hole in the back instead of the front for the electronics. Also offered in the catalogue are seven different types of scratch-plate ranging from black plastic to gold anodised aluminium.

My own bass is a custom-built (ie made of replacement parts) Schechter *Precision*. It has only been a complete bass for around seven months. It's only non-Schechter part is the Badass bridge. It's obviously hard to be objective reviewing your own bass; especially this one, because I love it. I have only played two Schechter basses, a factory-built model and my own. Both have a consistently high standard of craftsmanship and playability. Both sound great.

All Schechter necks are one-piece no matter what wood is used. They are supposed to 'feel' like the old *Precisions*. On my neck this is not quite the case as it is

a little too fat to feel like an old one. They are hand finished so no two necks are going to be absolutely identical. Some of the unattached necks I have handled have had a wider, flatter feel to them. The neck is made of close-grained maple with an ebony strip at the back where the truss-rod was inserted. It is dead straight and has no dead spots. I had a brass nut fitted: this is a matter of personal taste but I prefer the metallic twang it gives when funk'n' on open E.

The frets on all Schechter 'spare part' necks are purposely left unfinished. My bass is still young and therefore still



settling in and I am still having the frets occasionally stoned to my satisfaction. There is a slight fret buzz in the upper register but this will disappear with gradual truss rod adjustment and fret stoning. The buzzes are not noticeable when playing live or in the studio and there is no loss of power or intonation. On the factory model the frets had already been set and ground.

The body is made of a wood called shedua. It is a very dense, dark brown wood with a close wavy grain. Cosmetically it is very appealing and its weight gives the guitar great sustain. It is a crime to cover wood like this with varnish so it has had several applications of teak oil rubbed into it. This brings out the rich grain and the highlights which run across it. What has this to do with music? You would be surprised at how many guitars are sold on cosmetic appeal alone.

There are four *Precision*-type pickups available: The '54 single coil for *Telecaster*



which they are made are also constantly developed. An interesting fact is that a certain company (naming no names) are using the original Schechter jigs to make their new (?) line of necks and bodies.

Between 1976 and '77 Schechter started to produce fully-assembled guitars from their now-completed guitar workshop. These were based on

*John Knox can currently be heard playing bass in a band appearing at the London Hilton!*

All pix Norman Hodson





basses; the '54 *Precision* split pickup; and tapped and non-tapped humbuckers. Mine is the tapped humbucker and is basically two-in-one. A tap (ie line out) is taken from the pickup after a certain number of winds and then the winding is continued. This gives a pickup of 9000 ohms resistance on the inside coil which can be converted to an 18,000 ohm pickup when the extra winding is switched in. This supercharging has the effect of giving the bass more mid-range and also drives the amp harder giving a much ballsier sound. The switching between the two sounds is achieved via a push-pull pot on the volume control. I much prefer this arrangement to fiddly little switches which tend to break. The pickup delivers a smooth, even tone across the strings, and when played live the guitar cuts through clearly and powerfully even in the high registers. I can get any sound from a Stanley Clarke twang to a smooth, bassy James Jamerson-type tone. A Pastorius 'middles growl' can be obtained by switching the pickup to overdrive and adding a little more middle on the amp. Fans of this particular sound would probably add a *Jazz* pickup in the treble position but I have found it unnecessary so far.



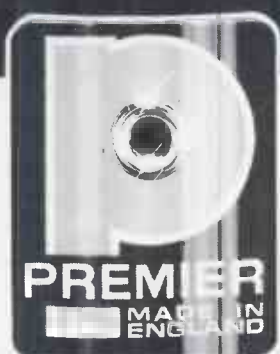
The scratch plate is made of black anodised aluminium. It has no holes provided for the badly-positioned thumbrest and pickup cover: thank God for that! I hate to see holes on a guitar – they give it an unfinished appearance. As a whole, the guitar feels really solid and balances perfectly. One has to be careful when choosing the woods for neck and body: for example, a solid rosewood neck

with an ash body would be neck-heavy because of the differences in the density of the woods.

Some people may find the weight of the bass slightly off-putting. Admittedly it is quite tiring to stand with it for more than an hour or so, but the great sound and playability more than compensate. Schecter guitar parts are not cheap, but yer gets wot yer pays for. Chandler Guitars, who are the sole distributors for Schecter in the UK, reckon they can make up a bass entirely from Schecter parts for around £400. This is based on the 12% discount they offer if all the parts are bought from them. When you consider that a new Fender *Precision* costs around £270, the extra money is well worth the extra quality. All parts carry a year's unconditional guarantee and after that it's up to the retailer's discretion. Normal availability is around two weeks, though orders for more exotic woods may take a little longer.

In conclusion, the quality of the product does, I think, justify the high price. Anyone who, like me, is a confirmed Fender-type bass player should check this stuff out. It conforms to a standard of excellence that big name manufacturers would do well to copy. □

# Who puts the thunder in Sky?



**Premier and Tristan Fry**

THE PREMIER DRUM CO. LTD., LEICESTER, ENGLAND.



Author Crombie exhibits personally landscaped garden and impresses neighbours with borrowed Moog Liberation.

# Moog Liberation

Dave Crombie

The roots of the *Liberation* reach back to 1976 and to a small recording studio in Santa Barbara, California. This was where a self-taught synthesiser technician was completing the designs for a synthesiser controller that was to become known as the *Clavatar*. The technician was Wayne Yentis and the *Clavatar* was to become almost a trade mark for legendary keyboard player, George Duke. Any of you who have seen George live will have noticed the *Clavatar* which he straps around his neck, giving him the mobility to move around on stage and not be trapped behind his impressive banks of keyboards. The *Clavatar* was basically a keyboard controller, which provided control voltages for driving other synthesisers. George used to link the *Clavatar* to both a *Minimoog* and an *ARP Odyssey* to give him a wider spectrum of tonal possibilities and to use fully the controller's duophonic facility (see interview, *SI* July '79). In addition to the three octave keyboard, the *Clavatar* had nine push buttons, five sliders and a pitch bend wheel all mounted in the neck. These could be used to control portamento, filter, LFO, quantisation and the tuning of the synthesiser.

Well, the *Clavatar* generated a considerable degree of interest in the idea of keyboard players being able to free themselves from their rooted positions

*Dave 'Receptions' Crombie plays keyboards and then writes about them, usually in that order.*

and pose around with the rest of the band. Even back in 1971, Keith Emerson was using his Moog ribbon controller to enable him to play his massive Moog modular system while seated in the front stalls. The ribbon controller provided a control voltage and trigger pulse for the synth; however, there was no tuning scale marked on the controller, so it could be used only for sound effects and silly noises unless the relative positions of notes had been learnt (in much the same way as one would study the positions for fretless bass).

As George Duke was considered Mr *Clavatar*, then Roger Powell, keyboardist with Todd Rundgren's *Utopia*, must be Mr *Probe*. Powell started using the *Probe* back in 1975 after he had expressed his need for a keyboard instrument that he could move around with. He worked closely with designer Jeremy Hill, and the resulting keyboard controller became known as the *Probe*, which Powell interfaced with his Oberheim 6-voice synthesiser. Many other keyboard 'greats' have incorporated the *Probe* into their stage show over the years, most notable amongst them being synthesiser genius Jan Hammer.

Anyway, back to Moog who seemed to think that it was a good idea to capitalise on the interest generated by the *Clavatar* and *Probe*; their product designers obviously thinking that there were enough people wanting to be liberated to justify

the investment a new product of this nature required. Originally Moog had intended to call this new instrument the *Liberator*, but the name had already been registered by another manufacturing company for some totally different product – probably a brand name for a bra – so Moog had to settle for *Liberation*, which isn't bad for a compromise.

The *Liberation* was first shown at the NAMM show in Anaheim at the beginning of this year (see show review, *SI* March '80), but despite the occasional American appearance in the course of the road tests (the most notable being the television recording of a Spyro Gyra concert, where keyboard player Tom Schuman featured the *Liberation*) the instrument has only just found its way into the shops.

The *Liberation* comes in two parts – three or more if it isn't packed properly – the controller, which includes all the synthesiser circuitry, the keyboard and controls etc, and the interface unit, which houses the heavier and more bulky power supply sockets. The interface unit sits on the floor or on top of an amplifier and is linked to the main body of the instrument by a 40ft heavy duty cable with Cannon connectors.

Before discussing the merits of the instrument's physical design, it's probably worth looking first at the synthesiser functions that the *Liberation* has to offer. There are two basic parts that go to make up the overall sound of the *Liberation* – the synthesiser and the poly sections. Both are activated when a note is pressed, ie the keyboard isn't split but they can be mixed against one another – more of that later. The keyboard is a 3½ octave F to C type, and is force sensitive, which means that if after you have played a note you then press it down harder, you generate a control voltage that can be used for a modulation or pitchbend effect.

The *Liberation* synth section is a two-oscillator job; oscillator 1 generating triangle sawtooth and pulse waveforms at 16', 8' and 4' (denoted by -2, -1 and 0 on the front panel) and oscillator 2 generates triangle, sawtooth and square waves at 8', 4' and 2' (-1, 0 and +1).

For those who are not too familiar with synthesisers, the advantage of two oscillators is quite considerable. The tonal capabilities of mixing together two different pitches and waveshapes are many, but it is in the unison mode that they become most effective. If you set the two oscillators to the same pitch and waveshape and then detune one slightly against the other, there is an effect that sounds a bit like phasing and gives the overall sound an incredible amount of depth and richness. A similar principle is employed by a 12-string guitar, where the strings are tuned in pairs, and also in the

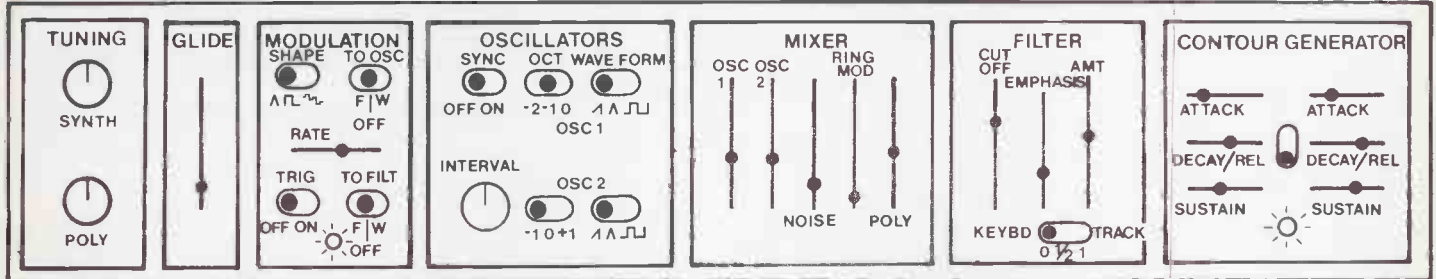


acoustic piano where two or three strings are struck each time a note is played.

The *Liberation's* two oscillators are tuned by, yes you've guessed it, a master tune control, and oscillator 2 can be set against oscillator 1 by means of an interval knob which allows for just over a fifth pitch change both up and down. The two oscillators can also be synced together for harmonic effects. The oscillators are a

the control switches that become the problem. The *Liberation* uses very nice two and three position toggle switches which are both easy to use and see, and also relatively cheap and simple to install. Four position toggles are messy and awkward, so a new type of switching would be necessary – more cost. So it's a tricky problem, and I suppose Moog have made a valid compromise, but at the

and difference of these frequencies – that's impressed you hasn't it? This means that if a signal of 1000 Hz (cycles per second) was ring modulated with a signal of 1200 Hz, the resulting sound would be made up of a 2400 Hz and a 200 Hz signal. The most famous example of ring modulation must be the voice of the Daleks in *Dr Who*. Anyway the *Liberation's*



*Liberation's* main control panel.

compromise, and, as with the *Prodigy*, they do not really satisfy my requirements. I realise that to provide square wave and pulse waves for both oscillators would bump up the price, but it would have been most useful. Also, and more importantly, both oscillators should be able to sound in unison over at least four switchable settings; by overlapping at 8' and 4' only, a lot is lost, especially at the lower end where a good fat bass sound is impossible. In circuitry terms to provide these additional capabilities would incur a minimal cost; it's

expense of the instrument's performance capabilities.

In addition to the sync facility, which as I've stated is a harmonic effect – oscillator 2's pitch locking on to the harmonics of oscillator 1 – there is also a ring modulator. It is quite rare for Moog to incorporate this circuitry into a performance instrument, however they have done so with the *Liberation*. Ring modulation is the effect produced when two frequencies are combined such that the output signal consists of the algebraic sum

ring modulator is pre-patched to work on the two output signals of oscillator 1 and 2.

The signals from the oscillators and ring modulator appear as dictated by three sliders in the mixing section. Also present here are volume sliders for a noise generator (a hiss type sound useful for wind effects *etc*) and the Poly section.

The Poly section is somewhat disappointing, although one can't expect much here in an instrument of this price. Basically it's a straight square wave output signal that works like an organ, *ie* it will only



# Which drums are chosen by the chosen few?



## Premier's Elite Outfit.

THE PREMIER DRUM CO. LTD. LEICESTER, ENGLAND.



sound while the key(s) are held. There is an independent master tune control so that the Poly section can be tuned against the synthesiser. As the synthesiser uses a high note priority system when more than one note is held down, the synthesiser will always play the highest note of the Poly section's chord; a logical and useful design feature. The poly section is therefore mixed in with the synth and noise before being fed into the voltage controlled filter.

The VCF is fairly standard and yes, it does seem to have that attractive warm Moog quality to it. The filter can be made to resonate by increasing the resonance control, so in effect, as the filter can be switched to track the keyboard, the *Liberation* has another basic sound source. Two ADS (attack, decay, sustain) envelopes or contour generators are used in the *Liberation*: one for sweeping the filter, and the other for shaping the amplitude of the sound. A master release switch is also included that can be used to effectively reduce the decay time to zero so that the note cuts out the instant the key is released.

The *Liberation* has a comprehensive modulation section, which works on the synth's oscillators and/or the filter cut-off frequency. There are three modulation waveshapes – triangle (for vibrato), square (for trills), and sample and hold (for random patterns). In addition the envelope generators can be automatically triggered by the modulation low frequency oscillator if so required, which means the instrument can trigger itself. And finally on the main control panel there is the glide control which allows the oscillators to slur from note to note at a maximum rate of two secs/octave.

## Performance Controls

These form the most important section of any synthesiser as they determine the way in which you can express yourself through your instrument. In the case of the *Liberation* the performance controls are particularly well catered for. These controls are located in the 'neck' of the instrument and are operated by the left hand. Working from the tip of the neck downward there are firstly two force controls – a Bend/Modulation switch, and an amount edgewheel. Those two are more or less self-explanatory, but at the risk of becoming boring, the switch determines whether the extra pressure on the keyboard is translated into a modulation control signal, or is used to bend the pitch upwards. The amount control determines the degree of the effect. Beneath the force control is a glide on/off rocker switch, and then the Moog pitch ribbon. This device is a simplified version of the old ribbon controller and can be used to



bend a note either up or down over a fifth depending where the strip is touched. The pitch will automatically return to normal when the strip is released. This control medium was first used on the *Polymoog* and *Micromoog* synthesisers several years ago, but it is ideally suited to this application. The remaining performance controls are all edgewheels and determine straight modulation amount, filter cut-off frequency, and volume. The filter control has a spring return mechanism, so it can only be used as a momentary effect.

Those are the facilities then, but what happens when you...

## Strap it on

First off, I found the *Liberation* heavy, and as time went by it got heavier. It weighs 14lbs, which is fractionally more than a Gibson *Les Paul*. But I'm no guitarist so the weight comes as a bit of a shock to my frame. You do get a nice strap with the instrument, and it did sit very comfortably on my person I have to admit. When it came to playing the *Liberation* I was surprised to find that it was much easier than I had imagined, and after five or 10 minutes I was coping very well. I don't know what my piano teacher would have said to my playing posture though. Funny enough I felt quite at home after a while and in a way I could imagine being able to really 'get off' when playing on stage. (It would make a change from being told to do so by members of the audience.)

The performance controls in the neck were extremely easy to operate and coupled with the force sensitive keyboard I felt in complete control of the instrument, even though my shoulders were beginning to ache. I'm not too sure how left-handers would cope with the *Liberation*. I would have said that they didn't stand a chance, but I suppose if you are used to playing a conventional synthesiser with the performance controls being operated by the left hand you should be able to adapt fairly easily to the *Liberation*.

The 40ft of cable that links the main body of the instrument to the power supply and interface unit is more than adequate. The interface unit itself also incorporates control voltage and trigger outputs so that the *Liberation* keyboard can be used to drive other synthesisers.

## Conclusions

Well it all boils down to the question, 'Are you into posing?' I don't think that it could possibly be said that the *Liberation* is anything but a live instrument. I can't see any keyboard players preferring the *Liberation* over similar priced instruments for studio work. The sounds produced are good, there is no doubt about that, but for £300 less, the *Prodigy* will do much the same. The Poly section is limited, but in some applications it works very well. I found it a pity that there wasn't a bit more range of the Poly tune control, which would have enabled the use of this section as a more versatile third oscillator as in the *Minimoog*. I think that Moog should rethink the connector between the main body and the interface unit; firstly I found it difficult to fit the Cannon plug into the socket, a nasty business if in semi-darkness on stage, and secondly there is the most goddam:n:awful buzz/hum if the lead is removed from the instrument whilst the amp is still on. I can't see why this couldn't be rectified without too much trouble: it would make life a lot easier for the *Liberation*ist.

If you are looking for a 'live' instrument and aren't too worried about cash, then there's nothing to touch the *Liberation*, basically because there is almost no competition commercially available. It's a good attempt by Moog to develop the mobility concept; however, I think they'll find that they have a very small market for this instrument, as most musicians are sensitive as to what is innovative and what is gimmickry. I certainly enjoyed playing the *Liberation*, but at £745 (including cable, interface, strap and VAT) I'm afraid I wouldn't consider buying one □



# Ludwig Carmine Appice kit

Richard Burgess



used for either tom toms or cymbals and is a single-legged stand (a monopod, I guess) that manages to remain in an upright position by attaching itself to the bass drum via an outrigger pole. The entire stand with attachments for the bass drum and (gulp) drilling instructions retails for around £68, which is £7 dearer than an ordinary *Hercules* tripod stand but does take up a lot less floor space. Personally, I shy away from things that attach to bass drums, partly because it increases the amount of things that 'ring' along with the bass drum and partly because it must weaken and even dampen the sound of the bass drum itself. Apparently, most drummers don't share these reservations (judging by the number of bass drum-mounted toms in the world) and the outrigger stand does quite elegantly solve the problem of how to fit yet another stand in between two bass drums, three cymbal stands, a hi-hat, 15 cans of lager and a rabbit's foot.

Ludwig have long been renowned for their snare drums. The 5in 400 model is a rock classic and the *Black Beauty* is in my opinion the best (production) snare drum made. It may cost you your right arm but it will certainly make single handed rolls easier to play. These drums, along with the *Super Sensitive*, the *Supra Phonic* and the *Rock/Concert* models, are still



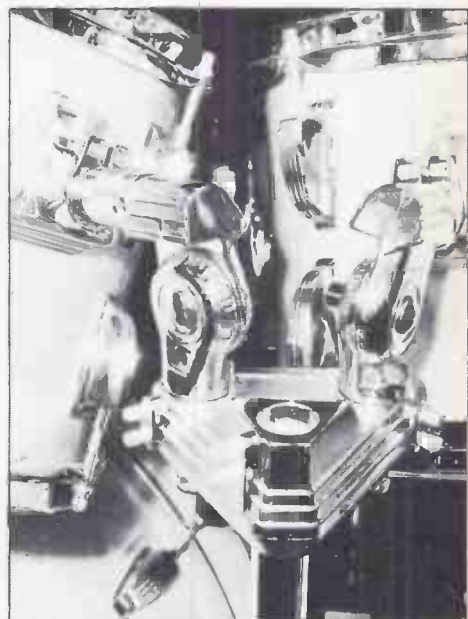
A problem facing a lot of *SI* readers is 'what to do with spare capital'. Very considerably Ludwig (under the guise of Rose-Morris in this country) have come up with the perfect solution. The *Carmine Appice* kit. Priced at around £2500 and viewed by appointment only this kit also solves the question of how to fill up some of those empty rooms in your country mansion.

The kit has been put together for the drum clinic that Carmine did on the 31st of August in London. You may also have seen it on Rose-Morris' silent 'stage' at the recent British Music Fair (see pic above). It is made up from the natural finish six-ply maple shell range and comprises two 24in power bass drums (they are 16in deep instead of the regular 14in), seven doubled-headed tom toms ranging from 10in through to the 16in and 18in overhead toms which are, awe inspiringly, slung about five feet in the air pointing down towards the snare drum. Obviously these are primarily positioned for purpose of flash. But that's partly what drumming is about and these toms very neatly utilise

Ludwig's new modular stand system.

The snare drum is the extremely tried and tested 5in x 14in metal shell 400 model and all the stands are from the *Hercules* range incorporating the new modular support system. This is Ludwig's answer to the Rogers *Memrilok* or the Pearl *Variset* type of system. The principle common to these systems is that once you have set the kit up to your satisfaction, the drums will miraculously fall into identical positions on every occasion. The whole system centres on the *Hercules* stand system of 1in and 7/8in tubing and features, as they say in the brochure, the exclusive Quik-set clamp - which is something like Rolls Royce's idea of a Jubilee clip with knobby bits. The positive knobby bits of course fit into the corresponding negative knobby bits on the base of the stands and mechanically remember the previous positioning of your stands. It's a very good system although I suspect only a Patent Lawyer with a microscope could substantiate the exclusivity claim.

Generally, the modular support system looks very sturdy and versatile. It is quite expensive but undeniably a professional set-up for drummers who demand a solid kit. A very interesting innovation in this range is the *Outrigger* stand. It can be



'Rolls Royce's idea of a Jubilee clip,' claims Burgess of the above chunky-looking Quik-set clamp on the CA kit. Next month, British Leyland's idea of sheep shearing.

Richard Burgess is drummer with Landscape.

# The Bigger



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available and offer a pretty hard-to-beat choice of high quality snare drums.

The newest addition to the snare range, the 12-lug *Coliseum* model, is also extremely impressive. It is an 8in x 14in six-ply maple shell drum and has all the power you would expect from an 8in deep drum. What did surprise me was how crisp the snare sound is. A closer inspection reveals individual snare strand adjustment (see pic right) which I'm sure must be a contributing factor to its snappiness. Deeper drums usually sacrifice a good deal of 'snariness'. The drum I tested also had die cast hoops which make for a more solid hoops and certainly more incisive rimshotting. Perhaps the most interesting addition to this drum is the tension lock nut fitted to each tension screw in a bid to prevent the constant detuning of the snare drum with every rim shot. It is a very simple seeming solution to a very annoying problem; I will have to reserve judgment on this system until I get a chance to check it out properly, but I can see no reason why it should not work perfectly well and can only say full marks to Ludwig for figuring it out.

It seems that the finishes of the Ludwig range are going to be a bit more limited in the future. The multicoloured *Vista Lite* range will go and only smokey grey and blue will be available in the see-through kits. The wood finishes are either natural maple or red mahogany - both very nice and seemingly well finished in a hard lacquer. The *Cortex* (plastic-type stuff) finish is still available in all the standard Ludwig colours.

A piece of information I gleaned while discussing the Carmine Appice kit with John Adams of Rose-Morris is that Ludwig heads are not made by Remo. They look very similar but are in fact quite different in construction. Remo heads,

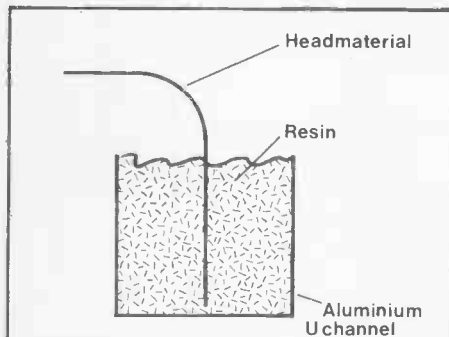


Fig 1

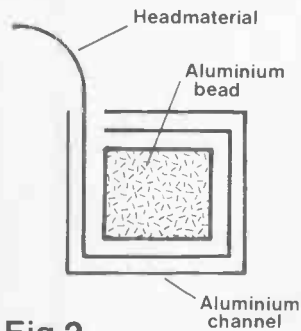


Fig 2

### X Section of head construction

very simply, are made by sealing the plastic (in fact it's Mylar or some similar substance) into a U-shaped channel with a hard resin (see fig 1). Ludwig claim this is prone to 'pulling out' and so have evolved a system for compressing the plastic into a rolled aluminium channel (see fig 2). The method uses no resin and as more pressure is applied to the rim of the head (by increasing the tension of the drum or by playing rim-shots) the aluminium actually clamps down tighter on to the head, preventing any possibility of it pulling out. To me this is of rather academic interest as

I've never had a Remo head 'pull out' on me, but I don't use very high tension on my drums anyway so it is quite possible that at least one of you out there may have found this to be a problem. If so, you would be a good candidate for the position of quality control supervisor at the Ludwig head manufacturing plant.

There's really not a lot more I can say about Ludwig: the company has been one of the most influential in the history of drumming and in the formation of the modern kit. They have maintained their own standards remarkably well and still seem capable of innovation: they are not afraid to keep up with the times. □

*Drummers read on: Got some spare fingers that just can't find anything to do? Save them from the dole queue - use them to adjust each individual strand of the Coliseum's snare. Good one, eh?*



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# Four Stereo Tape Machines part one

Reviewed by Mel Lambert

The musician wanting to record the occasional demo session, or a small recording facility, will be looking for a lot more in a reel-to-reel machine than a professional studio. While the latter is usually more interested in a deck equipped with the bare minimum of front-panel level controls and switches – after all, once the machine has been lined up to agree with the studio's standard input and output levels, nobody should be able to tinker with them – the same cannot be said of the semi-professional user. Quite often you'll be working without a mixer, in which case microphone and line inputs, with individual level controls, are essential. Also, to simplify sound-on-sound or track bouncing, it's nice to be provided with a couple of dedicated switches, rather than having to go to the trouble of reconnecting various inputs and outputs. Varispeed would also be handy – either built-in or available as an optional extra – for creating special effects and/or pitch shifting. And don't forget provision for a remote control unit, which enables a deck to be used in the same room as the recording is taking place, without too many rattles and squeaks being picked up by your mics.

The purpose of this multi-review is to take a close look at the sort of extra facilities available on a handful of budget-priced reel-to-reel machines, and to see how they compare with one another. By "budget-priced" I mean a deck that offers a respectable amount of change from £1000 – still a not inconsiderable sum to

pay for a machine that may only be used a few hours a week during mixdown or to record a demo tape. Within this fairly wide price range, it's surprising how little choice there is. The four decks that I eventually settled on – the Teac 32-2 at £434, Revox B77 (£630), Neal/Ferrograph SP7 (£611+) and Otari MX5050 (£845) – represent a good selection of what's around, and all of them have earned a good track record for reliability. (Admittedly the Teac 32-2 is something of an odd man out amongst the four, having only been unveiled last spring. But I understand that the 32-2 is capable of standing up to a lot of abuse, and is proving to be very popular with semi-pro users; it's also one of the cheapest high-quality decks on the market!

All four machines under review are 2-track stereo models capable of recording at both 7½ and 15in/s. Quarter-track decks may be perfectly satisfactory for the domestic user, but repeated sound-on-sound recordings and high-quality demo work really do need the extra tape width and higher speeds – especially if you cannot run to any form of noise reduction. To ensure gentle tape handling and proper source/tape monitoring, each machine is equipped with a three-motor transport with full logic control, and has at least three heads.

The more astute reader will be quick to notice that I haven't included any technical measurements in these reviews, for one very good reason: apart from taking up a lot of valuable space, I don't believe that tests of

frequency response, wow and flutter, noise, distortion, and all the rest, necessarily tell you a great deal. For a brand-new machine it's a safe bet that such measurements will pretty much agree with the manufacturer's published figures. Simply confirming that my test equipment is as good as theirs seems a particularly pointless exercise. And don't forget that if a particular machine isn't up to scratch – either mechanically or electrically – then the maker is duty bound to replace it under guarantee. I hope you can take it on trust that, their low price-tag notwithstanding, each of the four reel-to-reel machines reviewed here is capable of producing very good results in the spec department (otherwise I wouldn't even be bothering to look at them).

Operating controls and other front-panel features, however, are another matter. Having bought a machine, you're very unlikely to get much joy from a manufacturer if you suddenly discover that you don't like the way in which the transport buttons are laid out, or that the deck doesn't do all that you had hoped it would. Such things are for you to have sorted out in your own mind before handing over the money. So, with these constraints in mind, I intend to concentrate on how useful each machine will be to those on the look out for a reasonably inexpensive reel-to-reel that has to do more than simply record magnetic patterns on a strip of rust-covered plastic. This month, the Teac and the Revox.



## Teac 32-2

The Teac is unique amongst the tested machines in having a dual-capstan transport. Instead of just one pinch-wheel and capstan assembly, the 32-2 is equipped with a pair of them, driven by a common capstan motor. By locating one pinch wheel before the headblock, and the other just after it (in the 'normal' position), tape is kept in much better contact with the erase, record and replay heads. Also wow-and-flutter is improved since tape speed is now controlled at two points during its passage past the heads.

A pair of sprung-loaded tension arms located before and after the pinch wheels and two large roller tape guides make sure that no loops are thrown when the transport starts and stops. Both arms are fitted with microswitches that provide end-of-tape sensing: the first one turns the capstan motor off, while the second causes the transport to drop into stop mode. These ensure that the deck won't operate unless the tape has been threaded correctly, and also enable the motor to be turned off to save wear when not required.

Other front-panel features include a 4-digit tape counter and associated timer on/off switch (but not, annoyingly, a stop-at-zero

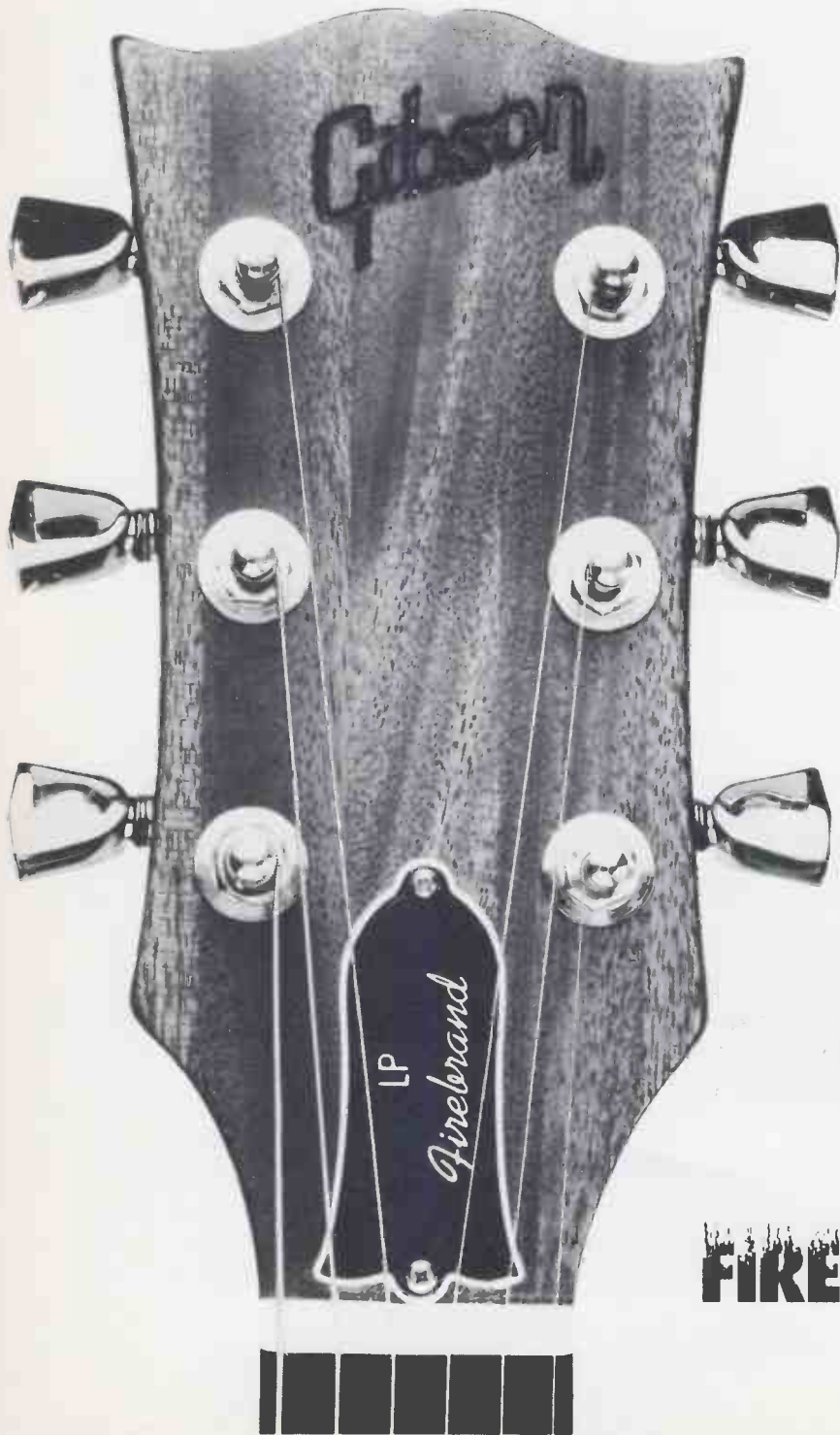


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facility); reel size selection; correct tape tension for 7 or 10in NAB reels; 7½/15in/s tape speeds; ±6% varispeed with a pull-on/push-off switch; and a cue lever which, by slightly moving back the tape guides, brings the tape into contact with the replay head for cueing and editing.

The timer switch allows the 32-2 to be set up for unattended record or replay. As soon as power is turned on from a timer mains socket, the deck will either drop into play or record mode, dependent on whether or not you've left the record safe/ready switch depressed. I suppose this feature is of limited application to a studio or musician, but it *could* be used to record a particular radio programme while you're out doing something else.

The complement of transport pushbuttons comprise rewind, stop, play, fast-forward, pause (coloured blue rather than grey), record mute and record (red), with indicator LEDs provided above the last three. Record mute enables blank passages to be recorded on tape – useful for cleaning up a particular track or for providing abrupt fades without having to reset input level controls. Transport logic proved 100% fool-proof and, despite repeated attempts, never put a foot wrong by dropping into the wrong mode or throwing a loop. Tape is brought to a gentle stop from rewind or fast-forward before play is selected.

To initiate record mode all you need do is press record and pause together, which brings the tape into contact with the heads and turns on the record lamp; subsequently hitting play causes the transport to roll into action. Couldn't be simpler. To cancel record mute you only have to press play or pause (depending on whether you want to continue recording after the gap, or stop to do something else). Drop-ins and drop-outs – using the record-mute, stop buttons and safe/ready switches – proved completely click- and glitch-free, which is just as it should be. If you can't go back and patch up a tape by re-recording just a short section without nasties appearing on the finished result, then you're faced with the prospect of having to start again from scratch.

A pair of dual-concentric mic and line input controls are provided, recording levels being monitored on a couple of large, illuminated VU meters. Signals appearing at the pair of rear-mounted line-out phono sockets, front-panel headphone socket and being displayed on the VU meters are selected by means of a source (ie input)/tape switch, located beneath a third dual-concentric output control. Other pushbutton switches select record safe/ready for both tracks (and they also cause the record LED to flash); mic attenuation (a 20dB pad being inserted between the front-panel unbalanced microphone inputs and the record amplifier); two values of recording bias and equalisation; plus NAB/IEC record/replay EQ.

The first bias setting selects high bias for tapes such as Ampex 556/406 and Scotch 250, while the second setting is suitable for formulations requiring lower bias levels (such as BASF LPR35). Similarly, set to position 2 the record EQ gives a slight boost to high-frequency signals, for tapes that are less sensitive to HF material. In this way the 32-2 can be set up correctly for two or more different tape types, without the need to re-align the machine each time you change formulations.

(Although, for best results, it goes without saying that any tape machine should be checked out and adjusted every couple of dozen operating hours. Talking of which, gaining access to the various preset record bias, EQ and level controls inside the 32-2 is simply a matter of undoing a dozen screws and lifting off the outer case. All the relevant presets are then to be found beneath a metal cover on the bottom of the chassis.)

Because you can only record on both left and right tracks together, sound-on-sound and similar tricks are impossible with the 32-2 as it stands. However, it shouldn't be beyond the ingenuity of many potential users reasonably proficient with a soldering iron to rewire the safe/ready switch to enable recording on separate tracks. This could be achieved either by adding a second switch or, just as conveniently, by using the mic attenuation switch. Since the Teac's microphone pre-amplifier will easily handle signals from high-output capacitor models, this switch is somewhat redundant and *could* be used for another purpose. (Teac's UK agent, Harman, will be happy to provide further details of this relatively simple modification.) Incidentally, a MkII version of the 32-2 is promised for later this year – to be known as the 32-2B – which will probably feature individual record safe/ready switching for each track.

On the rear panel are located two pairs of special inputs and outputs for an optional Teac model DX-2B dbx noise-reduction unit. Just as on the 32-2's bigger 4-track brother, the A-3440, these eight phono sockets, normally connected together with shorting links, enable the dbx encode and decode circuits to be inserted at the proper place within the Teac's record and playback amplifiers. In this way no special line-in/line-out matching levels are required, and all the 32-2's mic inputs, level controls and VU metering function quite normally. Also provided on the rear-panel is a multiway connector that enables the DX-2B to automatically select the correct mode of operation: encode during recording and decode during replay. (See *Sound International*, September 1979 issue, page 61, for a detailed description of the A-3440/RX-9 dbx unit combination in operation.) An optional RC-90 remote control unit, complete with 15ft of cable, also plugs into the rear panel and provides duplicate switches for all the transport functions.

Interfacing the 32-2 should create few difficulties. Mic inputs will accommodate both low- and high-impedance models, while line-level signals between 60mV and 2.5V will produce a meter reading of OVU – dependent, of course, on the input gain setting. Output impedance is high (10kΩ) and so you need to keep connecting leads reasonably short to prevent loss of high frequencies. (And don't connect too many high-impedance loads across the output, otherwise distortion will result.) 'Standard' output level – that is with the output control set to CAL – is 450mV (–5dBV) for OVU; no problems in that department.

Despite its weight of just over 44lb, the 32-2 can be carted around fairly easily using the side carrying handles. It will function just as well vertically as horizontally; tape editing is a whole lot easier with the machine laid flat on its back, since the head cover cannot be removed to

improve access for a wax crayon.

All in all, the Teac 32-2 is extremely simple to operate and – strictly as a mastering machine – offers very good value for money. It's one main drawback at present though, is that it's absolutely useless for sound-on-sound recording. A musician working on his or her own – for example, laying down a vocal plus instrumental track – will have to record them together, with the possibility of dropping in on a section you want to change.

## Revox B77

The newer Revox B77 is a great improvement on its predecessor, the trusty ol' A77. The A77's outdated relay-controlled logic – which was prone to throwing loops all over the place if you were too impatient in letting the tape come to a complete stop before hitting the replay button – has been replaced on the B77 with idiot-proof solid-state switching. Transport layout may look pretty similar to the A77, but there have been several improvements. The single tape tension arm located before the headblock has been retained, but the electronic end-of-tape sensor now sports an infrared lamp and detector. Not only is this more reliable (the A77 had a tendency to blow bulbs quite frequently) but, being based on infra-red rather than visible light, the system is practically immune from stray pick-up from nearby room or table lamps. (For background info, see *The Revox Revealed*, SI August '80.)

A proper tape-lift lever has now been incorporated for tape editing and cueing. Usefully, pulling in the switch also converts the fast-forward and rewind buttons into momentary rather than latching switches, to prevent damage to the heads by continued spooling with tape in contact with them. I'm rather disappointed that the 4-digit tape counter doesn't offer a stop-at-zero feature, a surprising omission when you consider that the majority of cassette machines come complete with one. It is a very useful facility for finding the beginning of a song during repeated sound-on-sound sessions.

Also included is a built-in editing block and scissors which, despite a great deal of persistence, proved rather awkward and slow to use. I still find a single-sided razor blade and splicing block far more convenient. Talking of which, Revox has retained the hinged replay head shield as fitted to the A77; having to push this out of the way each time you want to mark the tape is somewhat cumbersome.

Revox offer a choice of two operating speeds on the B77 – either 3¾/7½ or 7½/15in/s – selectable by two large front-panel push switches. Beneath a hinged flap in front of the head block is located a switch for selecting tension to suit different reel sizes. Other front-panel controls include input/tape and source select switches (the output from which is fed to a pair of headphone sockets, rear-panel line-level outputs and the VU meters); dual-concentric level controls for the headphone outputs; individual record safe/ready switches, each with a large red indicator lamp; and separate record level controls for each track with associated input



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Access to the various internal bias, record/replay EQ and level controls is gained by undoing four screws on the rear and pulling off the outer casing. Located beneath a metal shield fitted to bottom of the transport are the fully-labelled adjustment presets for each track.

The Revox varispeed offers an impressive  $\pm 7$  semitones of speed change (5 to 22in/s) by means of coarse and fine adjustment knobs. The remote control is rather an all-singing/all-dancing affair. As well as the normal transport control, it also features a back-space button (rewind/stop/play in sequence), various switches for setting up slide synchronisation pulses, plus a timer control that causes the B77 to drop into either play or record mode as soon as power is supplied from a mains timer socket. In addition a locking pause control has been included.

It's perhaps easy to appreciate why the B77 has become so popular with musicians and small studios. Any hardware from Studer/Revox is automatically blessed with a fine pedigree. Some thoughtful design work has gone into the front-panel layout and features – but with one or two notable exceptions. All in all the B77 is a very versatile reel-to-reel with excellent operating manners □

selector switch. A handy red LED built into the centre of each VU flashes when peak recording level exceeds +6dB relative to OVU. In the absence of proper peak-reading meters on a tape machine, at least a VU plus overload LED lets you know when it's time to back off the record level controls.

The B77 will accommodate a wide variety of signal sources: low- and high-impedance microphones via front-panel unbalanced sockets, plus DIN- and line-level inputs via a rear-panel 5-pin DIN and pair of phono connectors. Each track input can be also switched to a further position, which enables the output from the one track to be fed back to the input of the other. By a clever piece of design, if only one track is being recorded it's possible to use *both* inputs to mix together two sound sources. In this way a mic or line input plugged into the right-hand channel can be mixed with the off-tape signals from the previously-recorded track, and the result recorded on the left-hand track. Instant sound-on-sound, simply by twiddling a couple of switches; ingenuity personified. As an added bonus, while monitoring the input signal on headphones both sources will automatically be blended together in mono and fed to both headphones. And during replay you can also select either left- or right-hand track to each headphone – which does away with the need to either take off one side of the cans, or concentrate on just one track to monitor how your latest sound-on-sound pass has come out. Somebody at Revox has obviously given a great deal of thought to the requirements of the home and semi-pro user.

Since record mode can be entered either by first hitting record and play and then throwing the relevant record safe/ready switches, or doing the same thing in reverse order, the B77's switching logic cannot be considered

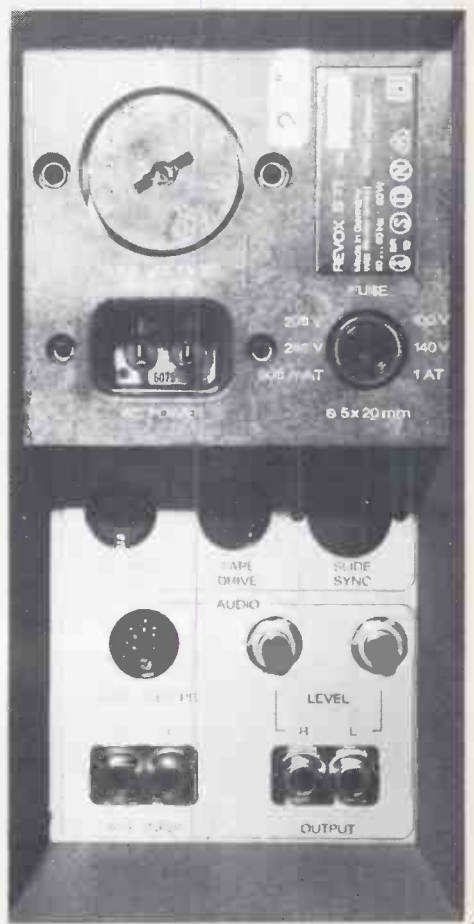
completely fool-proof. For example, should you drop out of record on a particular track by switching off the safe/ready switch, the B77 still thinks it is in record mode – even though it's not actually laying anything on tape. So as soon as you reset the switch, hey presto, you're back in business – which may not be the desired effect. Pressing the stop button will obviously cancel record mode, but you need to make sure you know what the result will be before hitting the safe/record switches. (Such, admittedly minor, peeves could have been eliminated, for example by making the safe/ready lights flash as soon as record ready mode is entered.)

This problem aside, however, the machine behaved itself admirably while in my keeping, and never once caused the slightest hiccup. The inclusion of a momentary pause button is rather bizarre, though. It's a pity that the pause wasn't designed to latch on when pressed for the first time, and then release when pressed again. Such a facility would be far more useful, I would have thought.

On the rear panel are to be found the various DIN and phono input and output sockets, plus a couple of extra DIN sockets for optional remote control and varispeed units. (Circuit diagrams are also given in the B77's owner's manuals for those who feel up to the job of building one for yourself; both circuits are relatively simple and shouldn't be too difficult to fabricate.) Also provided on the rear panel are a couple of preset controls for altering the level to both types of output socket. Set to maximum, a meter display of OVU corresponds to an output level of 0dBV (775mV); this value can be reduced by up to 26dB to match the input sensitivity of your mixer, monitor amplifiers etc. The phono line input will accommodate levels down to 40mV (for OVU meter reading) while the DIN socket,

#### NEXT MONTH:

Neal/Ferrograph SP7,  
Otari MX5050,  
conclusions.



# Sound REVIEWS

## Slits: Typically Tropical Girls

### Brixton Ritzy

The Ritzy Cinema in Brixton has the most adventurous group of programme planners in London; not only are their films put together very carefully, but their mixed events offering music and/or film and/or dance, outmatch most of the attempts made elsewhere. In July, they invited the Slits to play with others of their choice. The concert sold out two weeks before, so the Ritzy offered them another night in August.

Each occasion had a similar format: Furious Pig launched the evenings with their unusual brand of acapella singing; an Afro-English music and dance troupe followed with examples from their cultural roots. Finally, an extended recorded session from Don Letts' 'Sound System' brought the Slits, dancing on to the stage.

The Slits don't overdo their appearances and it is always a treat to see them. However, two similar gigs in a month at the same venue, left the second with less sparkle – it could have been more to do with the jungle-like humidity that night and the energy-sapping conditions that drained metabolisms on both sides of the stage.

Furious Pig, who kicked off the entertainment, are four men who look like Ivy Leaguers caught on the tail end of art-punk. They perform standing in a row, facing four mikes and the audience, very well rehearsed, tightly intertwining vocal harmonies, pieces of sound and song fragments of which were reminiscent of the 60s sound poets. Situations do come to life via their carefully interlocking vocal choreographies but the performance seemed very one-dimensional, and the overall effect was of four cut-outs jerking and staggering to cut-up tapes of songs.

The Afro-English dance and music groups were also resurrecting some aspects of African culture. They began by demonstrating several rhythm exercises, which converted the "orchestra pit" into a bobbing mass of dancers, and then the drummers accompanied dancers who enacted situation dramas loosely based on traditional story-themes.

As they filed offstage, Don Letts' and Dave Hendley's Sound Systems faded on, to blow our heads off with great reggae. During this the stage gradually filled with black and white, boy and girl dancers, who skanked with complete lack of inhibition. Gradually drummer Bruce Smith (also the Pop Group's drummer) fed into the recorded beat, then bass player Tessa Pollitt connected up, so the Slits took over and records faded out, while

Mark Rusher



one or two dancers ambled offstage.

Dancing plays a big part in every Slits performance; during the second Ritzy gig there were occasions when guitarist Vivien Albertine, her guitar hanging off her like a scarf, stopped playing and danced for most of a song. Having a strong and consistent drummer allows that possibility without weakening the music – another reggae trademark.

It is impossible to review a Slits gig without going into sartorial details, for they are as integral to their act as dancing. Each of the three 'girls' making up the core of the group, has a very strongly defined but ever-changing image. Ari Up, the singer reflects her obsession with all things West Indian: dreadlocks bunched into huge hats or tied into scarves, and neat nylon dresses or pleated skirts. At the second gig, she and dancer Nana Cherry were dressed like soul blue boleroes. Vivien Albertine has a very different identity: a very pretty circus performer crossed with the fairy-on-the-Xmas-tree. She often wears bows in her hair, sparkly sundresses, and at the second Ritzy gig wore a complete Blue Hawaii kit: grass skirt over a red leotard and teeth necklace. Tessa Pollitt, the quiet one of the group, often wears layers of loose, comfy clothes.

In recent months there has been a surprising addition to the Slits, in the form of Steve Beresford who is better known as a Flying Lizard or in the improvising group Alterations. He was brought in to make 'silly noises' on trumpet, euphonium, piano, guitar and the many toys in his collection. It comes as a surprise to see him discreetly tucked away in a corner, making sounds which are often left un-amplified – he isn't sure if the engineers think his 'noises' are mistakes or if they censor them because they don't like them! But injected at just the right moment, they can embellish the lyrics and other music perfectly.

The Slits' choice of Beresford for the group reflects their open attitude towards the possibilities of sounds in conventional songs. He doesn't just make funny noises to match the words – sound effects – his open minded approach to any instrument is very refreshing in this often rigid context. Also fitting is their shared spurning of solos and a democratic approach to the instruments and each other's playing.

A feature of each concert was the

presence of 'guests' on stage. I have mentioned Nana Cherry who seems to be Ari's dancing partner. Vicki Aspinall, violinist with the Raincoats introduced sinister elements to some songs and pizzicato rhythms on others.

Vivien Albertine is one of my favourite guitarists at the moment; she plays very sparsely with a tone that's a cross between the sound of a 50s instrumental group and the crisp, skankalong of reggae guitarists. But for all my enthusiasm about the Slits, I also have reservations. Their 'weird' appearances and the fact that they are so active and uninhibited on stage, makes them even more attractive to some men. Nevertheless, the degree to which they have managed to free themselves from the stereotyping and control that affects most other female groups in this wonderful world of rock'n'roll, is very inspiring. The very fact of women performing on stage will get some men heated up, regardless of how much care they take to disguise the shape of their body and just project the music, so there's more significance in the effect they may have on other, more hesitant women, thinking of getting up there themselves.

Sue Steward

## XTC avec les Gendarmes?

REGGATTA D'ETE: The Police, XTC, The Beat, Skafish and Scénario at the Centre Sportif, Le Touquet, France.

It is a sunny Sunday afternoon in August, the peak French holiday month. Five assorted bands, including the most successful act in years, are about to appear in the municipal sports ground at Le Touquet, a crowded seaside resort. This is Reggatta d'Été, the French leg of the current Police tour.

At about 4 o'clock the gates open and the crowd file in, and though they are not unlike a British open-air rock audience there are differences. For a start they look more, er, normal. There are no vast tribal hordes, no strange esoteric uniforms or clannish mating calls. And if they seem a little lukewarm in their anticipation, at least no-one is likely to be canned off stage for wearing the wrong clothes. But the strangest thing about this audience is

how small it is, a mere 5,000 souls. The French, it seems, are not that interested in pop music on a beautiful day like today. Perhaps they're right.

The first band to appear are Scénario, an indigenous outfit whose material comes as a shock to those who, like myself, had assumed Heavy Metal to be a purely Anglo-Saxon aberration. Admittedly the vocalist displays a certain gallic chic in his attire, but otherwise the influences have been swallowed alive and kicking. And what horror to hear the language of Racine and Corneille wrapping itself around the equivalent of 'Yeahhh, get down Babeee, feel like rockin and rollin, blah blah blah' or whatever it is these curious beddimmed creatures habitually scream at one another. The novelty lasts precisely three numbers before I am forced to seek refuge in a local bar, where the only music is a parade of 'sélections françaises' on the juke box. Ah, that's better.

So enthralling are these gems of European popular culture that I miss hearing the next band Skafish (it rhymes with crayfish). I can tell you what they look like, though. They look pretty weird: but then, doesn't every American band these days?

The Beat, on the other hand, do not look weird at all, but don't be put off by that: they are the most convincing of all the new ska/punky-reggae bands. I took a dim view of them to start with when they began their recording career with a so-so cover of Smokey's *Tears Of A Clown*, which is, as regular readers will know, an unthinkable crime in my personal value system. But having seen them live, my views have changed. Theirs is a more appealing balance of tightness and looseness than that of the 'average neo-ska band'. I saw them last in a Turkish bath in England: now here they are in a field in northern France. It is very warm, and the sun is still bright. And the Beat are the most energetic of dance bands.

*La jeunesse française*, unfortunately, are not dancing people. Otherwise, how else could they resist the exquisite rhythmic blandishments of Handsworth's best? The sound of the Beat is a rattling, clattering summation of *la Grande Bretagne* 1980, musically insidious, politically mature. Instrumental and vocal improvisation are built in, thanks especially to the enigmatic Saxa, and to Ranking Roger, quietly-spoken off-stage, endlessly buoyant on-stage. His richly-accented talkovers make no impact on this audience, but then the Beat's message, for the time being at least, is of and for Britain: 'I see no joy, I see only sorrow / I see no sign of your bright new tomorrow / Stand down Margaret'. As yet, the Beat suffer from a shortage of material. The long dub explorations work well in an enclosed space: but the outdoor audience demands novelty. One new song strikes home though, called *Monkey Murder*, and carried along on some lovely snapping and juddering guitar.

XTC are more familiar to the continental audience. They get a warmer reception and are happier for it. I don't want to say too much about this band for the moment, since they are next month's cover feature. Suffice it to say that all the subtleties remain more or less intact, and that the ferocity with which they attack a wide-ranging set of

material is an unexpected delight. They give a hard-working and efficient performance, encoring with a cheerful *Statue Of Liberty* featuring Dave Gregory and a fractious lead synth. And that's all I'm saying about XTC for this month.

But what of the Police? As their supporters will tell you, the Police sound nothing like a traditional three-piece power-chording rock band. I agree: they sound like three men and a small electronics factory. The clarity and separation of their instrumental sounds is exceptional at the Le Touquet show: but then, they are using the best gear money can buy, and they were the only band to get a soundcheck, so they had plenty of time to get it right. The Police use a lot of clever devices: continuous flanging and ADT on Andy Summers' guitar; a crafty digital delay that keeps Stewart Copeland's drums going while he scampers around the cymbals or (at one point) runs around the stage; and layers and layers of processing on Sting's celebrated voice. I am not going to criticise them for that, although it does seem a bit strange given that 'musicianship' is one of their admirers' most common catchphrases. My complaint about the Police is not about *how* they do things, but about *what* they choose to do.

The Police operate in two modes only. There is the 'hard rock' (aka heavy metal) mode, leaden and uninteresting: and there is the 'white reggae' mode, gentle, sexy, persuasive, but beginning to sound a little over-familiar. Since half their songs are in

one mode and half in the other, I only expected to enjoy about 50% of the Police show. But 50% would have been better than nothing.

Here at Le Touquet, the Police sound like a band with problems. The first of these is Andy Summers, whose guitar work is disastrous throughout the gig. Only rarely does he make contact with the rest of the band, and it is the best songs that suffer the most: he fluffs repeatedly the open-string arpeggios in *Bring On The Night*, for instance. Meanwhile, Mr Copeland thrashes any remaining subtleties out of the 'rock' songs, while Sting attempts to sound 'raunchy' but ends up like a hoarse-voiced HM hero.

It is a pity the long-awaited new material tends to lean in that direction. On the reggae songs the band are at least in with a chance, but rather than cutting their losses and keeping things economical the band opt for dangerously vague dub sections, and rhythmic impetus is allowed to trickle away. Over a disorganised mess of percussion frills and processed guitar, held together only by the reliability of the echo machine, Sting is left to indulge in a spot of lifeless call-and-response, like some high-pitched, pre-programmed Bob Marley doll. He is not happy. The show is long, but it contains a high proportion of 'going through the motions', except that 'motion' is rather an active word for what actually happens. All the singles you love (and the album tracks you tolerate) lovelessly performed before your very eyes and ears. But the audience appear well pleased, despite

the rude names Gordy Baby has been calling them.

In a seedy bar in the town, I am wearing my Police backstage pass when someone asks me, in respectful tones, 'Are you working on new material at the moment?' Fame at last... but that's one question I wouldn't like to have to answer.

John Morrish

## Records Received

**Peter Green *Little Dreamer* PVK PVL5 102** Green has ended up in a remarkably similar musical space to his old predecessor Eric Clapton after all these turbulent, mysterious years: laid-back immaculate music that it must be admitted he could have played with his eyes shut in the late 60s. On its own, it's very acceptable, though the songs often stretch way beyond their worth. Whether *Little Dreamer* represents phase two of Green's musical therapy before stepping on to something more adventurous or whether he will be content with the present simplicity will be interesting to see. In the meantime, having a wonderful guitarist back with us is enough. **Dexy's Midnight Runners *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels* Parlophone PCS 7213** The Midland soul chaps have already broken ground by being infinitely better than the inspiration they sang about and with the help of the youthful veteran producer Pete Wingfield, they have transcended expectations on an interesting first album about Behan

and Burroughs as well as bennies and bombers. A bit po-faced at times, but obviously sincere, the Runners gain from some stately arrangements and have fashioned something quite new from the 'soul revival'. Good on 'em. **The Cure *Seventeen Seconds Fiction* FIX004** A little more space has found its way into the band's second helping, along with a hello to new bass player Simon Gallup and the addition of keyboardist Matthieu Hartley. The impression is of a move from the positive song content of the excellent first album towards an accent on playing and atmosphere. The lack of marked tempo changes throughout the record and a passion for repeated lines creates a distinct overall flavour, while making long listening sessions rather fattening. Perhaps a combination of the sound base of the first LP's material coupled with the sense of harnessed adventure evident here would push this band further toward their undoubted potential, and allow Robert Smith's particular talents fuller reign.

## Burns Battle of the bands

There is a problem with the competition first run in *Beat Instrumental* of July '80 and consequently carried over to *Sound International* incorporating *Beat Instrumental* of August and September '80. No more entries are to be sent in. A fuller statement will be made in the November issue.



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# New realms of expression from MXR.

The Pitch Transposer is MXR's newest addition to our professional line. It is one of our most innovative products, and possibly the most revolutionary signal processor in the music industry today. It is a unique, high-quality unit which provides a cost effective and flexible package for today's creative artists.

The Pitch Transposer extends your musical boundaries by creating live instrumental and vocal harmonies. It has 4 presets which allow the artist to predetermine the intervals to be processed. Transposed intervals can be preset anywhere from an octave below to an octave above the original pitch. The chosen interval is activated by means of touch controls or a rugged footswitch. LED indicators display which of the four presets has been selected.

A mix control is provided, enabling the unit to be used in one input of a mixing console, or with musical instrument amplifiers. A regeneration control provides for the recirculation of processed signals, creating more and more notes, depending upon the selected interval. This results in multitudes of voices or instrumental chords. An entire new range of sound effects and musical textures, unattainable with any other type of signal processor, is suddenly at your fingertips.

With many other pitch transposition devices a splicing noise, or glitch, is present. The MXR Pitch Transposer

renders these often offensive noises into a subtle vibrato which blends with the music, and is, in some cases, virtually inaudible. The result is a processed signal which is musical and usable.

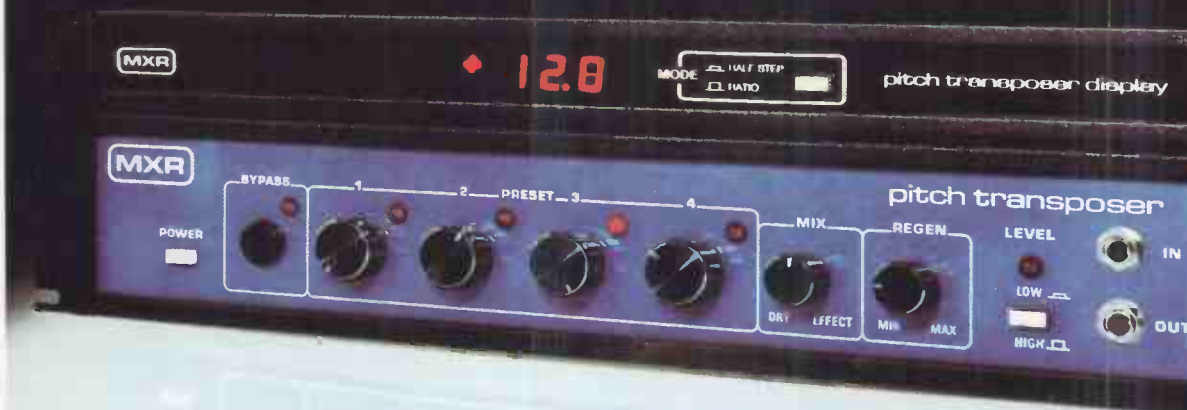
We have been able to maintain a high level of sonic integrity in this most versatile signal processor. The frequency response of the processed signal is beyond 10 kHz, with a dynamic range exceeding 80 dB.

A micro computer based display option allows the user to read the created harmonic interval in terms of a pitch ratio, or as a musical interval (in half steps). This unique feature allows the pitch to be expressed in a language meaningful to both musicians and engineers.

We designed our Pitch Transposer as a practical musical tool for those actively involved in creative audio. It reflects our commitment to provide the highest quality signal processors with the features and performance that will satisfy the creative demands of today's musical artist. See your MXR dealer.

**Atlantex Music, Ltd.**, 34 Bancroft Hitchin, Herts. SG51LA, Eng., Phone 0462 31513, Tlx 826967

**MXR** Professional  
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