MUSICIAN

PLAYER & LISTENER

GENESIS

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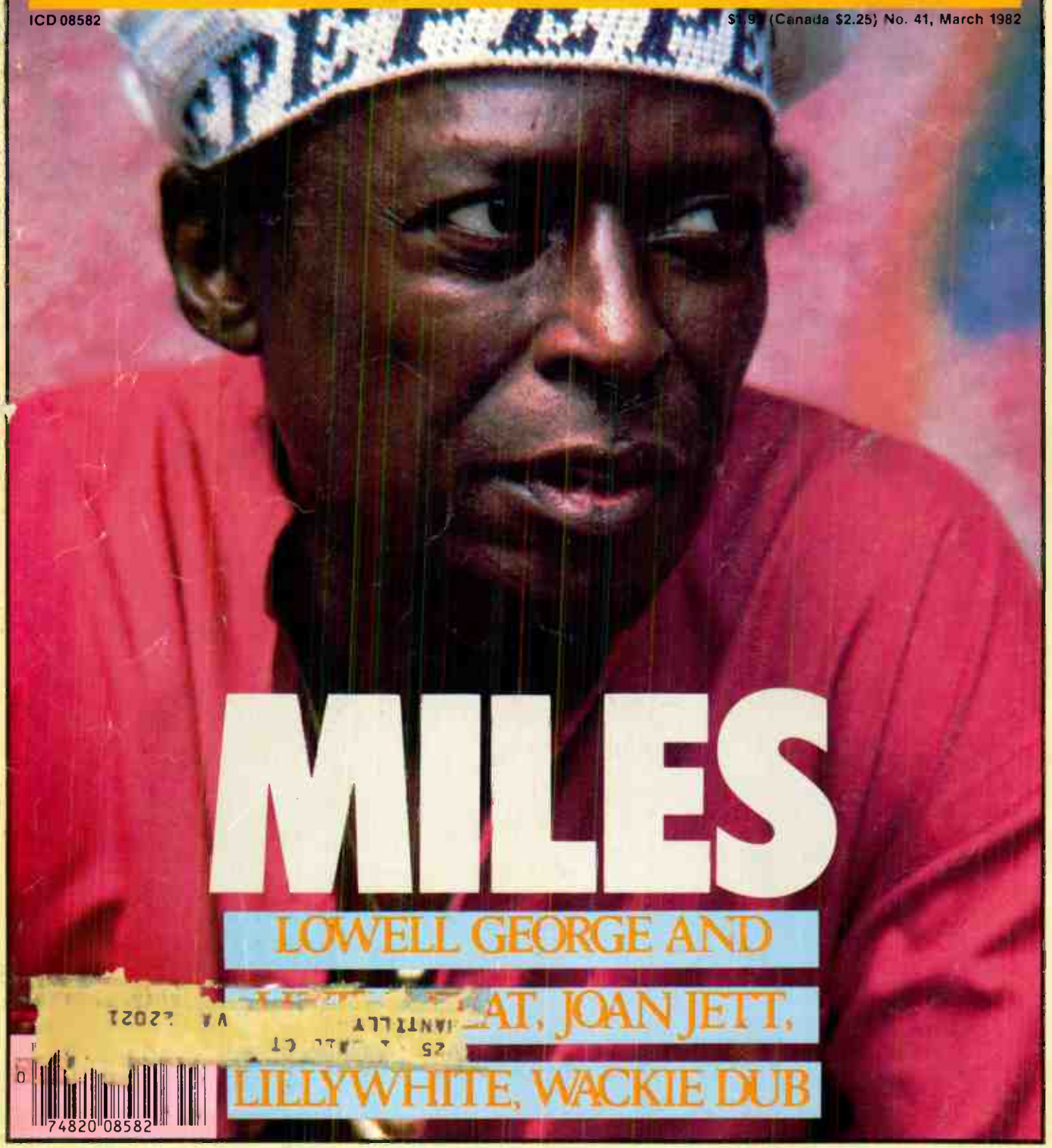

MILES

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Threat To Music Establishment Very Real Says Administration

'Unassailable Evidence' Cited With Release of Four New Warner Bros., Sire Recordings

UPI

"We're taking this threat very seriously," said the Secretary of State. "These individuals are out to make us dance while they call the tune. Immigration officials have been instructed to restrict the travel of all foreign lead guitarists and synthesizer players until the crisis has been alleviated."

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Another Day,
Another Dollar.
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Roland

We Want You to Understand the Future

MUSICIAN PLAYER & LISTENER

NO. 41, MARCH, 1982

Genesis has moved from its prototypical art-rock label, taking Phil Collins' muscular innovations of face value. The result is a fresh new interplay of sounds and ideas, and the punchy but tastefully textured "Abacab."

Miles Davis is back and there's dancing in the streets, particularly to his funky new sound. Cheryl McCall, in an exclusive interview, talks to the sublime genius of jazz and gets a unique Miles-eye view of music and the world.

Lowell George and Little Feat ended up the '70s firmly entrenched with some of the best slide guitar and backwoods soul singin' and stompin' that we'll remember that ever soaked down the eardrums. The story of Lowell as told by his friends and players, and one of the last interviews with the hero that time left out.

Table of Contents

Columns & Departments

Features

Studios

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MUSICIAN
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instruments By

Shown above clockwise: Prophet-10 synthesizer, Remote Prophet keyboard, Prophet-5 synthesizer, Poly-Sequencer, Pro-One synthesizer.

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LETTERS

POETRY AND PARANOIA

Though I've followed the Pretenders closely since they first hit America, your article is the most in-depth of any ever printed. I can't believe that she doesn't think her songs are profound. They *are* a form of poetry and I often think of her lyrics without the music. Her songs may be just "pop" to her, but they do change the way I look at things. She says she's pretty ordinary, but her way of being such an interesting person ignoring the world around her fascinates me. If she doesn't want her lyrics to say anything at all, why doesn't she sing nonsense that truly hasn't any meaning (like the B-52's or the Plasmatics)?
Dan Schutzer
Pittsburgh, PA

DON'T BE PISSY, CHRISSIE

In reply to Chrissie Hynde's remarks in Jon Pareles' interview with the Pretenders: honesty may be the best policy, but please temper it with tact and politesse. I'm tired of hearing about performers who try to put an interviewer on the spot. These people should have the foresight to see that in a prestigious magazine like *Musician*, they may be only a few pages from another interview with a musician or band that has the sense to discuss the business at hand and not veer off into an exercise in rudeness and circumlocution.

While it's true that a fan does not lay claim to a performer's personal life just because they bought an album, the performer also has a responsibility to his/her following and the proper use of the media which bridge the gap between fan and artist.

If American audiences are such "dullards," then maybe they should become dim enough to forget to buy Pretenders' concert tickets and albums; that way, Ms. Hynde could go back to the privacy she so clearly wishes to embrace.
Brian Delgross
Philadelphia, PA

THE ROSE, THE BLADE

The rose: I enjoy the Police's freshness and depth just as much as the next guy's little sister. Their color is so needed in such a mundane, current pop music wasteland.

The blade: are Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Coltrane or Parker "athletes"? Miles Davis could blow "34 demi-semi-quavers every second." At least we know that he had that musicianship in his quiver when needed. Why do the Police have to tell us they're such good musicians? Why can't they just show us?
Duff McGrath
Provo, Utah

IRRESISTIBLE MAURICE

Enlightening, enchanting and encouraging all describe your interview with Maurice White of my favorite group, Earth, Wind & Fire. I had never bought *Musician* before because I have always felt that your magazine caters mostly to white rock 'n' rollers, but seeing the words "Earth, Wind & Fire" on the cover made it irresistible for me. I just hope in the future you will feature more black artists; how about a cover picture next time — forget your editor.
Ingrid Gavin
Washington, D.C.

ODE TO A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

I find it very disturbing that the letter writer in issue #38 thinks that "Journey possesses a soul and a feeling in their work" and that "others... are more sterile and contrived... and shallow!! This is disturbing because it is quite apparent that not only have the promotion and advertising specialists sold you this pulp, but they actually have you believing in it. Congratulations must go out to these people, for they must be able to sell *anything* to *anybody*, provided the buyer is gullible enough.

Caveat Emptor.
Marc Anglin
Fort Lauderdale, FL

BRUFORD'S AVENGER

DIARY OF A *MUSICIAN* READER
November 25th, North Dakota HQ.

The Robert Fripp article is really getting to me, so I'm trying to understand how he works.
1. He figures out a concept about music performances and puts all his energies into proving he's right.
2. After he's convinced himself, he imposes his ideas on everyone he can.
3. He takes a lot of space in a good magazine talking about his aunts and his mummy. Jeez!

So I've drawn up some suggestions:
1. Any concept you have about music or communication in general is the wrong one: absolutum, obsoletum.
2. Remember, you're not the only creative impetus in King Crimson, only one part.
3. If you must tell Bill Bruford how to play the instrument he plays as well as anyone in the world, don't; just get another drummer. Many people like drama and fills and dynamics and rhythm and phrasing together and cymbals.
Kevin Dammen
Minot, ND

EXPLANATION, PLEASE

I especially enjoy reading Robert Fripp's articles — he is an extremely sensible man whom I hope will make some difference in this rather screwed-up music business.

There was one area I was rather disappointed to see Fripp not touch on: signing the band to a label. Fripp passed up PolyGram Canada, his previous label, for the corporate biggie, WEA. Since PolyGram Canada gave Fripp's solo projects an incredible amount of support, to the point where the albums went gold (pretty good for such original stuff), I'd like to hear Fripp's explanation as to why he signed King Crimson to WEA; seems a bit of a kick in the teeth, and not what one would expect from an artist who's usually pretty upfront.
Name Withheld
Victoria, B.C. (Canada)

TEN YEARS AFTER

Robert Fripp has *always* been controversial; he always will be. His only problem is being exactly ten years ahead of his time. Consider that arena-rock acts like Oreo Speedcookie, or Stux, or Jerky, can only *now* begin to approach what Fripp, Wallace, Boz and Collins accomplished with astounding ease in 1971.

Although I'd like to think that all the people with room-temperature IQ's would eventually accept Fripp's approach, I know they never will. Thank you, Robert. I still have trouble understanding your albums on first listen. Please keep it that way.
Lanny Thomas
Terre Haute, IN

POSSESSIVE LONGING

I find your slick, intelligent, professional magazine both treat and torture. The features cover everything from conception to personnel to attitude to performance to recording and marketing. Kudos and praise (and a buckninetyfive a month).

But in these strengths lay the magazine's failure for me. I can't afford to pursue all the new music you suggest is worthwhile. And worse, the gloriously all-music advertisements are like a year-round Christmas toy catalog, sponsoring deep longing and the ache to possess. As a guitarist, how can I resist a new device every month? As a keyboard player whose once respectable stack has been rendered so many tinkertoys in a mere three or four years, how can I not weep jealous tears at new instruments and technologies leaping up overnight? As a studio owner and engineer, how am I supposed to feel about new parametrics, eq's, effects, mics and boards? I feel like I'm missing out. My creativity is stifled by my technology (or lack of it).

Of course, this is not all your fault. As Emily Litella so succinctly phrased it, "never mind."
Tim Harman
Lancaster, OH

Erratum:

Roy Trakin mistakenly stated that George Jones had penned "Stranger In The House" from Elvis Costello's *Almost Blue*; Elvis himself is the song's composer.

Photographed in a dressing room at the "Whisky"

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Steve Morse
of The Dregs

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THE SOUND THAT CREATES LEGENDS

By Roman Kozak and Jock Baird

The Blues Foundation, based in Memphis (where else?), selected **Johnny Copeland**'s *Copeland Special* as the winner of the W.C. Handy Album of the Year award. **Albert Collins** and **Koko Taylor** took best male and female artist awards.

Selected Billboard awards (based on record sales alone): **Phil Collins**, New Pop Album Artist; **Steve Winwood**, New Pop Singles Artist (?!); **Stevie Wonder**, Top Soul Singles Artist, **Grover Washington**, Top Jazz Artist and Best Jazz Album (*Winelight*); **Rodney Dangerfield**, Top Comedy Artist; **Stanley Clarke & George Duke**, New Soul Album Artists (?); **Hall & Oates**, Top Pop Singles Group. Other big rakers, as you'd guess, are REO, Kenny Rogers, Kim Carnes, Pat Benatar, Diana Ross & Lionel Richie and Rick James. What, no Dead Kennedies?

Polish rock artist **Krystof Krawczyk**, who has sold 12 million records, mostly in Eastern Europe, is a bit confused about the prospect for his latest hit, "Solidarity." Krystof, who moved to Indianapolis last year, cut the song in July with American musicians and likens his sound to Bob Seger and Boz Scaggs. Despite some pre-crackdown airplay, he is not wildly optimistic about making the Polish top ten and has shelved his tour of Poland planned for the summer.

Dire Straits are giving all the royalties from the sales of their records in South Africa (over 100,000 copies worth) to Amnesty International, the human rights watchdog group. **Mark Knopfler** and the boys felt it was the only meaningful way to express their concern for "political instability and injustice, not only in South Africa, but in other parts of the world." Now how about some other bands putting their money where their mouths are?

Island Records, reggae bottlers extraordinaire, are starting a jazz label called Black & Gold and have inked a few hot possibilities: **Ornette Coleman**, **Anthony Braxton**, **Ben Sidran**, **Jo Anne Bracken**, **the Heath Brothers**, **Phil Woods** and **Bereli Lagrene**, a 14-year-old gypsy guitarist. Not bad for the first pass.

You probably won't see **Steve Miller** on the cover of *People* or the *National Enquirer*. When he isn't recording or touring, he retires to his farm in Oregon, which doesn't give gossip columnists much to write about.

"It takes a lot of work to be a celebrity. And I haven't needed that. Also I don't feel like a celebrity. I don't feel that I'm celebrity picture material. I also learned at a very young age that the people who took being a celebrity seriously got exhausted very early. If the music is there, then the people are there. If the music isn't there, then you have to start wearing a green suit, have bodyguards, and drive green Cadillacs."

Ian Hunter Band keyboardist **Tommy Mandell** recently suffered an aneurism in a posterior communicating artery in his brain. "It is like a bubble on the artery of the brain. And it leaks. I had five cc's of blood down into my spinal cord."

Mandell collapsed while at center stage during a concert by **Ian Hunter** in Cleveland recently. "It was in front of 6,000 people. You know how it is when you stand up quickly, and you sort of get faint in the head. It felt like that. And then it was like a TV set that was turned off. And the next thing I knew I was looking up at my roadie."

Two weeks after a dangerous and lengthy operation he was as good as new and now is embarking on a solo career.

George Wein, the impresario who turned Newport to Kool, held an open meeting/panel discussion with agents, producers and press to air complaints and proposals for next year's Kool Jazz fest. Grappling with the problem of how to incorporate the new music into mainstream settings and still keep the paying customers, the discussion managed both to shamelessly plug and promote, and to suggest thematic concerts, nicer halls, "better" scheduling and unique double-bills. Everyone happily agreed that it was important that they all agreed to have a meeting.

CHART ACTION

The album charts, frozen as solidly as upstate New York for most of last month, have been treated to a major icebreak in the last few weeks, chiefly caused by AC/DC's *For Those About To Rock*. This plopped into #8 as a new entry and in two weeks had the top spot. The heavy hitters, Foreigner and Journey, quickly regrouped and took first and second place back from these upstarts, but the Big Shift had begun. Recognizing the significance of this LP, we at *Musician* put it on the office turntable and cranked the volume. The effect was instantaneous. The proofer's fist came right through her office wall. Our production manager went catatonic at her board. The entire sales department dashed out into the halls and danced passionately. The publisher pulled out his sticks and began drumming on his desk top. The editor just sat shaking his head. For a few seconds, orgasmic explosions and heavy metal Sturm und Drang crashed around us, then a crazed typesetter threw himself at the stereo and the sound ceased in a careening skid. We all stared wide-eyed into the shell-shock silence.

We weren't the only ones. The Police, Olivia Newton-John, Rush and Genesis took precipitous plunges, and their contending places were quickly assumed by disco London Philharmonic's *Hooked On Classics* (gulp!) and J. Geils' *Freeze Frame*. Oblivious to all this chart action were Earth, Wind & Fire, who never budged from #5, and Stevie Nicks, camped at #7. The Stones took a punch but stayed in the ring. Meanwhile, the Cars peaked at #9 and Rod Stewart got to #11 before losing momentum. Big expectations for Crimson's *Discipline*, Rossington-Collins' *This Is The Way*, Ringo's *Roses*, Prince's *Controversy* (all heralded in these pages) and the Bee Gees' *Living Eyes* were not realized, but *A Chipmunk Christmas* was the top holiday album. Sigh.

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So if you've been turned on by the Portastudio concept of a full-function multi-track cassette recording system, wait till you see how far the idea's gone now.

But then, with a name like "Portastudio," it could hardly be expected to stand still.

The New Tascam 244 Portastudio.

JOAN JETT'S BAD REPUTATION

Joan Jett, explosive rock 'n' roll contact hitter, leads her hordes of Joan clones into a fight to be themselves.

By Toby Goldstein

LAURA LEVINE

A quintessential rock communicator, Jett digs simplicity and audience involvement.

Joan Jett calls them, with a great deal of affection, the "Joan clones." They are the young women, overwhelmingly teenagers, who crowd around her dressing room with the reverence of the faithful, dressed in imitative vestments, eager for the magic to be shared. "Every concert we do," she enthuses in her streetwise accent, "they're out there, down to the tennis shoes! They'll be wearing Pro-Ked black high-top sneakers. The bracelets, the sweat band, the black leather jacket. They'll have black hair and be wearing their makeup the same as mine.

"I get lots of fan letters saying, 'My friends tell me I look a lot like you and I should be in a band.' It happens all the time," says Joan Jett, with the wonder of a child who's been handed a very beautiful but complex puzzle that she can't totally understand, except to speculate that her followers' emulation may stem from their desire "to become another person for a night," but what is one person's fantasy can be another's ambition.

Just as the teenage Joan Jett believed she could carve out a non-traditional female identity as the guitar-playing leader of a rock 'n' roll band after seeing Suzi Quatro do it, so do Jett's fans, female and male, identify with Joan's accomplishments and independence. Jett is no untouchable icon like Pat Benatar, revealing every contour in spandex and beseeching her audience to hit her with their best shot, or Stevie Nicks, elevating herself as some witch queen of Beverly Hills.

Quite to the contrary — Joan Jett dresses from anyone's Army-Navy surplus store, contrasts her ink-black hair with pasty white makeup, put on with a lack of subtlety that teenage girls everywhere can recognize as one of their own rebellious signposts. She doesn't mince and prance, pull seductive poses or whine — she orders "Don't Abuse Me," taunts "Do You Wanna Touch Me" and pronounces "I Love Rock 'n' Roll." Her assertiveness becomes an admirable trait to the boys who, when they see a Benatar, are forced to lust, but when they hear the clarion of Jett's neighborly rock, can't help but like the girl and wish they were in her band.

It's not every female rocker who could inspire a male acquaintance of mine to rename himself "Mick Jett," in the hope that those who see his band might think he and Joan were related. The description of that eager guitarist prompts Joan to laugh so vigorously she almost tips over a glass of champagne with which her second album, *I Love Rock 'n' Roll*, had just been toasted. Jett doesn't make halfway moves. She roars when she's pleased, curses when she's pissed-off and sulks when she considers the years of maltreatment and verbal cuts she's received at the hands of the music business, spanning from A&R departments to the press.

Joan Jett first received attention, if not respect, as the dark-haired exception in a quartet of California blondes called the Runaways. In a fit of managerial manipulation that would not be equaled until Malcolm McLaren loosed the Sex Pistols upon the world, the Runaways were packaged as a hot new variety of rock jailbait. They were all under 21, sassy if not too articulate, and offered a repertoire featuring gems with titles like "Cherry Bomb." Really subtle. And if the girls couldn't play or sing all that well, those minor annoyances were given second place behind their supposedly nubile nature.

Jett recalls her training ground with a balanced assessment and the satisfaction that one of her least compromising songs, "You're Too Possessive" stems from that period. Jett's bottom-line judgment is that playing in the Runaways gave her a sense of what could lie within her grasp. "I was just so happy to be in a rock band. It was a dream, and that's the way all the girls felt. We didn't notice we were getting bad press. Well, we knew it but we didn't realize what the consequences of it would be. We knew we weren't getting airplay, we knew the record company wasn't doing its job, but we didn't understand the implications until it was too late. And that's when we gave up and I quit the band." For a time, after original Runaways leader Cherie Currie departed, Jett led the group, a task that prepared her for the leadership role she now assumes.

The Runaways, with their heavy-rock sensibility coupled to an American girl-group mystique, had done reasonably well in Europe, and Joan spent a good deal of time overseas when she set out on her own. She recorded several songs with former Sex Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook, including her declarative version of Leslie Gore's "You Don't Own Me." While she was assembling bits of her first solo album in various London studios, Jett was also gaining notoriety as a loudmouth even within the raucous punk community. Her well-publicized verbal battles with the Damned's drummer, Rat Scabies, didn't provide U.S. labels with the sweet-faced demure type of woman they felt most comfortable signing. You couldn't picture neck-chained, leather-clad Joan Jett swooning over some "magic man."

Jett's outspokenness, a quality which usually enhances a male performer's

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reputation as a "colorful personality," was the direct cause of her *Bad Reputation* album being refused U.S. release. "Sure is funny, isn't it," she states without too much bitterness when reminded of all the spoiled boy-brats in the music business and how the outbursts of a Rod Stewart or a Meatloaf are deemed starlike while hers were just plain trouble.

"No one would listen," she recalls. "As soon as they heard it was Joan Jett, 'Oh, *her* from the Runaways,' they wouldn't even put it on their turntables. And we had people calling in favors and every label still wouldn't do it. Finally, Steve Leber (manager of Ted Nugent and Aerosmith, and a friend of the family to Joan) suggested we put it out on our own Blackheart label, so at least we'd have product, because we were just about to start a big tour."

That lengthy tour took the Blackhearts across the U.S. for months, at one stop billing them in New York's Palladium theater as opening act for XTC. Jett's honest approach to audience communication, her clever sequencing of original songs and cover material that mined mid-60s top forty and early 70s English glitter, and her relentless determination to force that sophisticated audience to participate succeeded to a degree that left XTC facing a crowd in which musical dynamite had been exploded. Joan Jett's sweaty, clapping and chanting-style performances cleared away any remaining Runaways' cobwebs, and eventually prompted Boardwalk Records' president Neil Bogart to release her first album as well as the follow-up, *I Love Rock 'n' Roll.*

"I love the whole style of early 70s glitter music," states Jett. "Slade, T. Rex, David Bowie and especially Suzi Quatro and Gary Glitter. Suzi Quatro's bass playing gave me the final kick in the ass to go out and play guitar. And Gary Glitter, I like him best, his songs and his style. I saw him play in England once; his audience was all punk rockers and they knew every word.

"That whole style of music has very upfront drums, so it's danceable. The stories in the songs aren't really too hard to understand. Who wants to think for a million years what a song's about? I can't enjoy music if I have to sit there and figure it out. I like it to be simple. Nice little songs that people can understand and identify with.

"Songs like 'Touch Me,' 'Doin' All Right With The Boys,' or even Tommy James' 'Crimson And Clover' are full of hooks and very melodic. I think that makes them extremely sexy, when you picture everyone chanting and dancing around. I find that music very attractive and I still listen to it all the time." Despite the fact that other cover songs, such as "You Don't Own Me" and the Dave Clark Five's "Bits And Pieces" are almost as old as Joan herself, Jett's chord-heavy bashing and her gang-girl voice mitigate their antiquity, making them as contemporary as her torchy, but far from sentimental ballad, "Love Is Pain."

Joan Jett fills the need for an obvious performer who does not condescend, overelaborate or stun. She uses no stage props other than her surprisingly petite but healthy body marching back and forth, addressing the crowd like a coach. While her Blackheart band — bassist Gary Ryan, drummer Lee Crystal and guitarist Ricky Byrd — gives her solid yet fairly anonymous support, Jett covers every inch of the front rows, exhorting her troops to jump, scream, dance or simply be inspired. "So many times, it seems to me that a band alienates its audience. We've always tried to involve them, make them feel comfortable. We use lots of eye contact; I'm always talking to the audience, getting them to sing along with us. They are part of the show. There's no pretentiousness, just a lot of fun."

And afterwards, her makeup long sweated away, her face shiny and open and showing not a day over its 23 years, Joan Jett will invariably move out among the Joan clones, propelling the shyest ones to action by her presence, helping them understand that self-reliance can often suffice. M

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BRIT-ROCK PRODUCER STEVE LILLYWHITE

Steve Lillywhite has won reknown for his sci-fi sis-boom-bah productions of Peter Gabriel, XTC, Psychedelic Furs, U2 and Joan Armatrading.

By Jon Pareles

When I saw a producer's credit to "Steve Lillywhite" on XTC's 1979 album, *Drums And Wires*, I was sure it was a pseudonym. After all, XTC were just witty and ingroupy enough to try that sort of joke, and the production was obviously pro quality. Once I was alerted to it, though, I recognized the Lillywhite moniker on albums by Ultravox, Siouxsie & the Banshees, the Brains, the Members, the Psychedelic Furs, and later U2 and Peter Gabriel. Anyone doing that much work under a pseudonym wouldn't have time for another career. And whoever this Lillywhite character was, he was all over the arty end of the new wave, until he threw a curveball by producing Joan Armatrading's *Walk Under Ladders*.

It was easy to hear why Lillywhite was in demand. His records sound big but not bloated, weighty without being ponderous; even on mediocre songs, the sound insists that something important is happening. Lillywhite's trademark, now widely imitated, is a mammoth drum sound — he gets it by distant-miking the kit in an echoey stone-walled room at London's Town House Studios, and compressing the live sound — and he uses great gobs of reverb to, somehow, isolate and define individual instruments. His records are thick in the mid-range, but not murky. With high-impact bands like U2 or the Members, Lillywhite gives the listener enough distance to discern what's going on, yet with high-irony-content acts like XTC or the Brains, he makes sure you feel the kick. Either way, his productions make room for peculiar, exotic noises, electronic or otherwise; they might almost be conduits from the experimentalists to the hip mainstream. Obviously, the guy was a master tactician, and I was sure that when I spoke to him he'd have a handful of strategies, oblique or otherwise.

More fool me. Lillywhite is not junior Eno — he's a 26-year-old child of the music business. He's worked in recording studios since 1972, following the standard trajectory, which starts in England with the position of tape operator: "make the tea, that sort of thing." Perseverance and hanging out upped his status to engineer, and he points to his work with Roy Wood and Wizzard on Spector sound-alikes including "See My Baby Jive" as a source for his booming drums. His "musical awakening," he says, was London's punk explosion of 1976, "going to the clubs and seeing all the people. Nobody had any money, and we were all living on floors, things like that. It was fun, but not something to go back to; you've got to grow up sometime." On the club scene, Lillywhite met some of the people he'd later produce, including Ultravox. Demos he made with them during free weekend studio time netted Ultravox their contract, and Lillywhite got his first production credit on their debut.

Mr. Fun: Steve Lillywhite, avant-producer, tries to get everyone to relax, refine and experiment.

Like most music-bizzers, Lillywhite espouses cliches more easily than theories; like most careerists — he'd love to produce Bruce Springsteen and Linda Ronstadt, and he asked eagerly whether I thought *Walk Under Ladders* would be a U.S. hit — he's anxious not to offend anyone. While the stuff in his grooves is aggressively different, most of Lillywhite's rationales could come from any old-waver. Herewith, a garland of producer cliches:

1) "I'm not very technical."

2) "I try to make the music stand out, not the production."

3) "In the studio, you can squeeze too much life out of a song and make it sterile."

4) "I try not to be typecast."

5) "I'm never a hundred percent pleased. Whenever I listen back to my records right after they're finished, I only hear the mistakes. It's got to be a good two, three months before I can go back and say, 'I quite like that.'"

6) "I try to get the right atmosphere in the studio."

To hear Lillywhite tell it, though, atmosphere is everything. "The less that's planned, the more fun you can have in the studio," he says. "And that's what it all comes down to, is fun. I've been in studios since I was 17; it's the place I feel most at home. That helps, especially when I'm working with new bands, because they see me relaxed and everything and it inspires confidence. The idea is to get everyone enjoying themselves, instead of being serious about 'we've got to make a product.'

"Lots of producers treat their job as quality control, just sitting there and making sure that everything is in tune and everything is in time. For me, there are wrong notes and there are 'wrong notes' — little things that aren't quite right don't bother me that much. If you spend all your time worrying about whether or not a bass drum and a bass guitar are absolutely in time, that's like being an accountant — that's not really much fun.

"A lot of people are really scared of producers, they think they're ogres. Like Bob Ezrin, from what Peter Gabriel told me, is a real dictator. I'm not the sort of producer who'll go around changing arrangements just for the sake of changing them. And if the band and I disagree about something, I'll try to make my point, but if the band is adamant about it, it's their record — they have the say. Nine times out of ten it's something that won't affect the sales or commerciality of the album — maybe it's a tempo, or whether a vocal's good enough — and who am I to tell them what they should sound like? It's their music. And I very rarely change lyrics. I'd never want to be a songwriter — you're just laying your heart open, aren't you? And to have some producer walk in and say, 'That's not a commercial lyric,' that's a load of rubbish."

That sounds downright utopian — and a little too good to be true. No band hears itself the way an audience does; each member hears an individual part, while a songwriter may hear the song rather than the rendition of it. As any producer will tell you, it's easier to make an album when the band's songs are complete before they enter the studio, even if they then require considerable revamping. "I

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like working with first-time bands," Lillywhite says. "For the bands I've done two albums with, the first one is always more fun. Most bands get their record contract on the basis of a live set, while on second albums, the material normally hasn't been played that much onstage, so you don't quite get the right idea."

Nor does Lillywhite bang out instant albums. His average time, he says, is five to six weeks of full-time work, and projects like *Peter Gabriel*, in which many of the tunes were "written in the mix" by using the elements recorded on the master tape a few at a time, take considerably longer. When he talks about "fun" in the studio, I suspect that part of what he means is that he wants everyone in a let's-try-it state of mind. On U2's debut album, for instance, somebody got the bright idea of upending a bicycle, spinning its wheels, and sticking a knife in the spokes to get the mechanized ratcheting sound at the end of "I Will Follow," which also includes bottles being broken at the bridge. And on *Peter Gabriel*, some of the oddest altered sounds come out of a gadget dubbed "the 995;" synthesist Larry Fast was using an Archer radio amp to tune his electronics, and Gabriel and Lillywhite liked its tinniness. The sophisticated circuitry had set Fast back $9.95.

The Gabriel album also involved larger-scale experiments. "No Self-Control" was mixed in nine separate parts that weren't joined together until they were completed, Lillywhite says. "Nobody actually knew how it would sound until we played the whole thing back. But when we did, we were so knocked out that we invited people from all the other studios to come and listen. You get different ideas if you don't know what's going to happen next. On other records, the sound has sort of evolved: if a drum sounds good a certain way, then that sort of governs what you do to the song — the song is molded around the sound as it evolves. And I never know what it's going to be like until we finish."

Lillywhite's easy-going atmosphere also pays off in less concrete ways. Joan Armatrading's *Walk Under Ladders* seemed, in prospect, to be an unlikely collaboration — her intimacy against his sci-fi sis-boom-bah — but Lillywhite was so eager to do it that he solicited her. "It was the first time I'd ever done that," he says. "The first thing she said to me was, 'Blimey, you're a bit young, aren't you?'" Armatrading demos her songs by herself, playing rhythm machine, guitar and Prophet-5 synthesizer, and according to Lillywhite, "none of her producers has changed Joan's arrangements." What Lillywhite did, however, was to put her voice out front — "She doesn't think of herself as a singer; when we were mixing I was always pushing the voice up and she was saying, 'No, no, no'" — and, somehow, to find a light-hearted quality in it that had never gotten onto her albums.

Of course, it's not all playing around. For vocals and solos, Lillywhite often goes through the process of assembling a composite take. That is, the musician will sing or play the part all the way through on four or five tracks, and the finished take will be chosen, phrase by phrase, from the multiple choices. "There are so many records being made now that you have to spend a little bit longer making sure the quality's good," Lillywhite says, "whereas back in '76, for me, it was all wham-bam, everyone rushing around like mad. On the first Psychedelic Furs album, I think the vocals are really, really bad, and I think it's my fault because I didn't push Richard (Butler) enough. He wasn't a very good singer then, and when he said, 'Oh, that'll do,' I let him. I have to push XTC quite a lot with the vocals as well."

So vocals are the toughest part of making a record? "Nothing's really tough. I try and make it not tough. And hopefully, because everyone involved is talented, it'll come through without having to analyze what you're doing all the time."

Well, fun's fun, I guess. And it certainly works for Steve Lillywhite. Maybe he should try Linda Ronstadt after all. M

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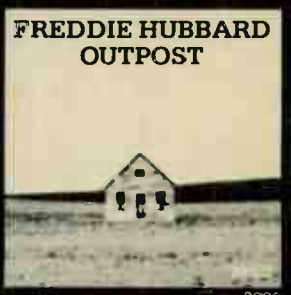

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DUB IN BABYLON

Live from the Bronx, Bullwackie's dub hypnotically hulks along with "ya a youthful sound fe come mash y'down."

By George Rush

Modern Jamaican music started out at a pretty fast clip (as the syncopated ska), then slowed its tempo and leveled its beat (as rock-steady), slowed some more and cranked up its bass (as reggae), before lately decelerating into a creeping, knocking sound called dub. Ska was like a leprechaun but dub is like the Hulk. Dub is mostly instrumental and, right now in Jamaica and in England, it's very popular. It's popular in New York, too — especially among the city's Jamaicans, who numbered just over 55,000 in the 1970 census, and who now number, according to the Jamaican consulate, maybe 250,000.

Naturally, most dub records come from Jamaica. A few, though, are recorded here, in the Bronx, on White Plains Road near 241st Street, at Wackie's House of Music. The front half of Wackie's is an active record shop. (And many local Italian pedestrians who never heard of Bob Marley know the force-field of mojo that shields Wackie's sidewalk.) In the back of Wackie's are the recording facilities. They are cramped and consist of an office, an engineer's control room and a performing studio. The owner of Wackie's is Lloyd Barnes — sometimes called "Bullwackie" — a tall, thin black man in his mid-thirties with a grey-flecked beard and a relaxed, almost imperceptible way of moving. Barnes recently was supervising a recording session; filling his dimly lit studio were the smells of incense and marijuana and the sounds of organ, bass, drums, guitar and the voice of John Holt. Back in the mid-1960s, when he was with the Paragons, Holt helped write Blondie's recent hit "The Tide Is High." The day of his session at Wackie's, Holt was recording a reggae version of Grover Washington's hit, "Just The Two Of Us." It sounded great, though there was a small mystery in where the drumming was coming from — there didn't seem to be anybody in the darkness of the drummer's wooden booth. But then Lloyd Barnes reached into the booth and flipped on the light, and suddenly a young man appeared. He wore a red stocking cap puffed six inches vertical with hair and he continued his slow drumming without opening his eyes.

Trance-inducing and psychedelic are terms sometimes applied to dub, which, like a lot of today's brainy minimalist music, is repetitious and curious about electronics. "Dub's mental," Lloyd Barnes explained later in his office cluttered with boxes of Scotch and Ampex recording tape, "but the drumming keeps it physical." Barnes said that one of Jamaica's top engineers, King Tubby, started dub around 1965. "Tubby, you see, would experiment with the acetate plates — the dub plates as we call them in Jamaica — that you use to press records. He'd made several different acetates of a song — different mixes, without so much voice — and then he'd take them to a disco, or what we call a sound system. The first dub was not, I would say, that exciting. But then the other engineers started doing it, and Tubbs had to get technical."

PETER SIMON

Augustus Pablo is one of Wackie's many dub warriors.

Today's dub uses lots of special effects. To illustrate this, Barnes left the office for a minute and came back with a black, tambourine-shaped device about two inches high and six inches across its rubberized head. It had several knobs and words around its side.

"This is a syndrum," he said. "It's battery-powered and, over here, it plugs into the engineer's console." Barnes put it down and, next, threaded a reel-to-reel tape recorder with a tape of "Wackie's Warrior's Dub" — something he helped engineer and which should be out soon on Wackie's Records. Gradually, out of two speakers overhead, came a trundling bass, a measured, echoed drum and occasional echoed voices. Occasionally, also, came an electronic percussive sound like that of a computer game.

"Hear that?" Barnes asked, noting the sound, "that's a sweep. It comes from the syndrum. We also use an echo unit and a reverb unit. The reverb makes a sound denser. It gives a snare drum slap a sort of water atmosphere, what we call a splash. When I'm dubbing, I'll be concentrating on the splash with my left hand and then I'll reach over with my right hand and kick up that echo." Barnes grabbed an invisible knob and quickly twisted his wrist. "Bam!" he said.

Taking King Tubby's cue, Jamaican producers started releasing singles with a performer's song on the A side and the song's dub or "version" on the B. In 1972, an engineer named Herman Chinloy (a.k.a. Aquarius) made the first dub LP. Some of today's dub specialists are King Tubby, Lee Perry, Prince Jammy, Augustus Pablo and Scientist, a young man who has, says an album in Wackie's shop, "ya a youthful sound fe come mash y' down."

Now, according to Barnes, dub has three uses. You can use it as background music, for puttering around the house or frying eggs, since dub, kept low, needn't distract you, and it has a warmer feel than muzak. You can also, if you visit a sound system with huge, blasting speakers, dance to dub. "A sound system DJ might spend $30 to $100," Barnes said, "to get a one-of-a-kind dub plate of a hit song — just to get that edge on the other DJs." Dub can be used, thirdly, for "toasting." In toasting, a DJ uses a microphone to rhyme, squawk and scat-sing over a dub

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record. One of Jamaica's favorite DJs, Ranking Joe, came to Wackie's this year to record some toasting tracks, including his "Tribute To John Lennon." ("John Lennon was a great entertainer/ ...Good thing John Lennon never killed by a black man/Else that would cause a racial war.") A local performer who calls himself Clive Field Marshall (as George Jessel called himself Toastmaster General) also recorded recently at Wackie's. His new album includes a song about Jimmy Carter and the hostages, and one that tells the true story of Clive Field Marshall getting a speeding ticket from a state trooper on the New Jersey Turnpike. ("I say the ticket it a was twenty dollar/I pay the ticket and I never really holler/ ...Because he never made a search of the car.")

Wackie's has pressed 500 copies of Clive Field Marshall's album. It's pressed 1,500 copies of a dub album by Barnes' friend and engineer Douglas Levy, a stocky black man in his mid-twenties who joined Barnes in the office. The Wackie's label has released ten or twelve 12-inch LPs and 45s over the past three years. "Our largest pressing has been, oh, 5,000 or 6,000," Barnes said. "I've just been experimenting up till now, doing my research. We distribute the records around here by taking them to other reggae shops, who sell them on a consignment basis. I don't have the connections in the Caribbean, so I send them to Randy's Records down there and they distribute them — to Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago..."

Barnes was interrupted when one of the half dozen people continually passing the office stuck his head in and handed Barnes a brown Grolsch beer bottle. He handed Levy a Golden Blossom Honey jar. Both containers were filled with a milky liquid.

"Irish moss drink," Levy explained. "It's got linseed, green peanut, honey, lots of good things."

"We've got, I would say, twenty people who help out here," Barnes continued. "They work up front, or if, say, we need a drummer, someone will fill in. Just about everybody does some engineering. We have a strong unity force here, a roots force. But I tell you, if I had to pay them for one week, I'd have to run away. We charge $80 for an hour of studio time. Leroy Sibbles, Ken Boothe, we've got some big names here. Sugar Minott — he had a hit in England with 'Sometime Girl,' which was pirated off our label. Who else? Roland Alphonso, Dillinger, the great Augustus Pablo. But a lot of times, I won't take their money. Because someday they may do a song for us. We do own a lot of tapes; we're just waiting for the right time."

Barnes, as he talked, opened some mail. Out of a blue *Par Avion* envelope he pulled a letter and two photographs. The larger photo showed a thin teenager standing in a bravado pose against a fence.

"That's my son," Barnes said. "He lives with his mother in Jamaica. I first came here in 1967. I opened my first studio eight years ago, a little farther down White Plains Road. We couldn't get a good sound there, so, five years ago, we started producing here. We have a Teac four-track and an Ampex eight-track. I remember before we got the first studio, we'd help engineer reggae records at independent studios. The engineers there, man, they couldn't give us what we wanted. You'd ask them for certain cycles...you might want the bass to go down twenty, and they'd say, 'You can't do that, that's too deep, man.' Or usually, you know, they use a parametric equalizer to get rid of excess sound, to make a drum or guitar sound cleaner. But we don't want it so equalized, synthetic. We want a real roots sound, sort of rough and coarse."

A shrill sound came through the wall from the record shop.

"They're playing King Tubby," Levy said. "Hear that siren? *We* put that on records — siren, airplane, a door closing."

"If a record doesn't sound like it came from Jamaica," Barnes said, "we go back to the studio. Right now, I think we've finally got a sound that can fight with anyone. We're pressing 10,000 copies of 'Wackie's Warrior's Dub.' I say to people, we *must* be able to make it. We *are* Jamaicans. We have the culture. Why not? Plenty of electricity here."

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HANDS AND VOICES: AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS

Ms. Meyers' keyboard artistry and vocal skills weave a web of ethereal longing and raw, expressive bounce.

By Don Palmer

Listening to Amina Claudine Meyers is like hearing two, or maybe three, musical spirits speaking through two hands. She maintains a precarious balance between the blues, the church and the avant-garde that, when successful, illuminates other worlds. There is no hint of maudlin cliches in Meyers' organ playing, as her distinctive bass runs well up, like the bass and baritone sections of the sparsest of a cappella gospel and R&B groups, to challenge the treble figures. Her treble runs on organ and piano, whether the considered plaintive musing of the blues or the bifurcated ramblings of the avant-garde, gracefully annotate the link between the secular and the spiritual, the actual and the possible. Lined beneath all this are often the African tones of drummer Pheeroan akLaff to further enhance the earthy quality of Meyers' music.

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Gracefully eclectic, Meyers has one foot in a rib pit and the other on a cloud.

Amina Claudine Myers, like many of her associates who have passed through the Midwest's music conglomerates (St. Louis' Black Artist Group and Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians), is deeply influenced by the blues. Musicians such as Lester Bowie, Kalaparusha, Lester Lashley, Henry Threadgill, Julius Hemphill and Philip Wilson have worked in carnivals and the bands of Albert King, Little Milton, J.B. Hutto, Left Hand Frank, Ike Turner and numerous less-than-famous if not nameless R&B bands. Ms. Myers spent the better part of three years as an organist with two of the giants of the tenor-organ combos — Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt. And, like the many black women whose musical creativity was channeled through the church, Myers' early musical life included "playing for church" and forming "several gospel and R&B groups."

Myers, a native of Little Rock, Arkansas, started playing around with the piano when she was four years old. "There was always a piano in the house. My uncle sang in the church and he had gone to Tuskegee and studied. He started me off in music with rhythms and things of that nature and at seven I started taking classical lessons." Yet Myers wasn't raised to be a musician or inundated with music. There are no stories of family bands, Arkansas juke joints or musicians tramping through on their Southern tours.

To the contrary Myers states, "We never did have a lot of music going on at my house. My home was quiet. I was raised by my great aunt and uncle a lot in my earlier years, along with my mother, and often I was the only one in the household. They weren't religious fanatics or nothing but they'd go to church. It was a quiet type of atmosphere, and I think that has an effect on me now."

This quietude comes forth in both Myers' music and personality. She is reserved almost to the point of shyness — at least until she has checked you out. Her playing is eclectic, but balanced with a reflectiveness and grace keeping it from being as frenetic as Mingus or as raffish as Sun Ra's music. The music is anchored in a solid foundation and built from there methodically and patiently. Myers seems to have one foot in the rib-pit and the other in a cloud. There is the feeling of informed reticence and longing in her voice that fades with each subtle embellishment. It is like an elder slowly recounting a story and savoring the impact of each dramatic twist. Myers' music possesses a rawness and sophistication that accommodates both the haunting vocal/harmonica plea of a Forest City Joe and the swinging communal Golden Gate-oriented praises of the Davis Sisters within a compositional structure.

In fact, in Arkansas Myers "used to hear the blues. I mean the kind of blues I like really is the real, real country blues. And I like rhythm and blues — you know, Sam Cooke and all those people. I used to do all that. I always dug that." She also dug groups like the Gospel Harmonettes, the Clara Ward Singers and organists Jimmy Smith and Jack McDuff, although she wasn't out to copy any particular style.

As Meyers noted, many women "could play and sing but they may sing in the church, or play around the house, but never go any further than that." However that was not her fate, although she has garnered neither the fame of the biggest gospel groups nor the glamour and elusive fortune that is all too often part of the slinky packaging of R&B singers.

During the summers, while a student at Philander-Smith College, Myers played piano in jazz and rock 'n' roll bands. After receiving her B.A. in music education, she left Little Rock, and by way of Texas, moved to Chicago to teach school. For the first few years her musical activity was limited but she was singing Handel's *Messiah* every Christmas, doing solo work and playing in clubs. It was in 1966 that fortune smiled on Amina Myers.

"I became a member of the AACM. That's where I started developing my writing abilities — really stretching out writing and working with the various members. I also studied with Muhal Richard Abrams."

She wasn't singing because "singing improperly had messed up my voice so I

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had to stop for awhile. I was more or less concentrating on playing, and organ was very popular during that time, so I was dealing the organ. When I became a member of the AACM I found out I could write music for this. I had studied all the instruments in college but I didn't really get a chance to experiment or have someone play my music without any hassles. I started writing for the quintet first. Then I decided to form a voice choir and I wrote a musical, and they put this musical on. That's how I got into the voice thing."

It was also the beginning of several lasting musical relationships resulting in recordings with Abrams, Kalaparusha, Threadgill and Bowie. In addition to developing ties within the AACM, Myers worked with drummer Ajaramu at the Hungry i in Chicago before going on the road with Stitt and then Ammons in 1970. Then she caught the Chicago-New York AACM express and joined Bowie's band. In New York Myers discovered that things didn't happen as quickly and that the sense of community wasn't as strong as in Chicago, the result being that she doesn't play as often as she should in New York; nevertheless, Myers is satisfied if one or two projects are completed each year.

She taught and directed a gospel choir for a year at SUNY at Old Westbury and she directed church choirs although "now it's a little too restrictive." Of course there's her Voice Choir that performs on occasion and three albums — *Song For Mother E, Poems For Piano* and her newest *Salutes Bessie Smith*. Myers also has a solo spot in Abrams' arrangement of "Notturno" on the recently released *Amarcord Nino Rota* on Hannibal — a tribute to the late film score composer. But Myers is most pleased with the Bessie Smith recording, saying, "That album is my overall favorite. She wrote stuff that's always contemporary. You can't put an age to the music to me. For instance, now you can make it rhythmic, Latin, a ballad or you can swing it. And, it is the latest thing I've recorded."

Myers chose to swing this set of slow, austere blues. The lyrics, naturally down-and-out and strained through Myers' breathy nasal shout, jut proudly between her percussive piano vamps and Cecil McBee's vigorous popping bass. Instrumentally, Myers draws upon the skipping, jubilant rhythms of a pit pianist and the urbane brooding boogie-woogie of Jimmy Yancey. There is also a long wordless vocal, "African Blues," on which she moans, cries and hums, evoking a soulful earthiness of a sort I've heard only once before — at an Ethiopian restaurant where there was a tape of contemporary Ethiopian music. It sounds like a possessed member of a Holiness Church speaking in tongues while gyrating to a Memphis soul groove accompanied by talking drums. Or on a more parochial level — and if "African Blues" was a dance track rather than a sultry wail — the sense of unity between Myers' vocals and piano and Jimmy Lovelace's drums approximates that of another Arkansas groove-maker, Jr. Walker, whose vocals, tenor and body movement are inextricably linked on a good night.

The album, though not the best in a year with several superb blues albums, is one of the best. Yet aside from the chant on "African Blues" it is strikingly different from her work with the Voice Choir. The Voice Choir is the truly vocal counterpart to the numerous experiments with sound started by AACM members. Certain elements of the Art Ensemble's music, Leroy Jenkins, Roscoe Mitchell and Abrams come to mind immediately.

Myers dispenses with words because "the voice was the first instrument. Sometimes words can be distracting. You are trying to listen to the words and then may miss what they're saying. I try to hear voices just as sound, not even as voices. Words are not necessary because the music is supposed to, or I would like for the music to, speak for itself."

The notion is nothing new as Louis

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Armstrong proved with scat singing, Billie Holiday proved by providing maudlin lyrics with more than a shroud of credibility and Louis Jordan proved by instilling nonsense lyrics with the rhythmic drive of a small locomotive. But the question for Myers is whether it can be done with an ensemble of voices. Surely the most successful group at instrumental tonal coloration was the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Ellington managed to layer the music with varied emotions without becoming confusing, loud or shrill.

The performance I attended at the Kitchen in New York was successful at avoiding these same pitfalls. Myers accompanied the eight vocalists on piano and organ. The vocals spanned the range of human expression. There were screams, sighs, whispers, laughs and the sounds of phantoms in the night, in tones that ranged from the most classical to free-bop to the most abject down-and-out blues. All the voices were strong and sure of tone if not always sure of rhythm.

Myers explained, "For the music that I write, you have to get strong singers that know how to use their voices. If not, they'll be hoarse. They also have to know how to improvise and have the feeling. I just tell them what I want and they do it. It's just a matter of feeling and understanding it because the music is supposed to tell a story."

The piano and organ accompaniment carried the rhythm for the voices that concentrated on call-and-response and soloing. Myers played swinging bop, gospel and fractured, pounding lines behind the singers. Her organ playing was the most pleasing because of the powerful bass and fleeting rhythm. Myers mused that, "Maybe playing gospel music helped because you got to have that rhythm going. I have my left hand playing bass but also my foot is doing something. So it's like two basses."

So for Amina Claudine Myers, it always comes back to her blues and gospel beginnings, no matter how abstract or basic the music. She's not into "one particular bag but you're gonna hear the gospel in even the so-called classical music." M

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FACES

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ROMEO VOID

LAURIE ANDERSON

Laurie Anderson looked like some kind of punk mystic as she stood on the stage of the Market Street Cinema in San Francisco. Her brown hair was cut short and spikey a la Johnny Rotten. She had on a black silk jacket, a man's black dress shirt, black tie, baggy black pants and black shoes. There was a faraway look in her eyes.

But Anderson has nothing to do with punk. She has nothing to do with rock 'n' roll, either. Which makes her recent move from world's best-known performance artist to international pop star all the more surprising. Anderson's seven-inch EP, which includes "Oh Superman," a top ten hit in England that uses Anderson's voice, multiplied and doubletracked, to create a hypnotic statement about alienation, disconnection and government violence, has sold over 300,000 copies in the U.S. and Europe. Not bad for a record that was initially pressed by the obscure New York indie, One Ten Records. Now, Anderson has a deal with Warner Bros. (who are also distributing "Oh Superman") and who will release a Laurie Anderson LP early this year.

On the San Francisco stage, Anderson began to speak to the audience. But the amplified voice did not sound like her own. One heard a mechanized, technologically altered man's voice: Jack Benny as a robot. "Good evening. Welcome to difficult listening hour... That impenetrable sound of unlistenable music. Get set for some diff-i-cult music. Ooh la, ooh la."

Laurie Anderson is a woman of many talents. She is a sculptor and a poet, a singer and a musician, an actress and a filmmaker, a photographer and now a pop star. Part Brian Eno, part Patti Smith, part William Burroughs. The performance, a kind of 21st century vaudeville, combined singing, the spoken word, music and electronic effects, shot through with healthy doses of sarcasm, humor and some cultural and political commentary: all performed by Laurie Anderson using a violin, vocoder, synthesizer, tape recorder and a few harmonizers and filters. Everything was manipulated by electronics. Nothing was what it seemed. She played her violin and it sounded like a banjo. She sang and it sounded like a violin. At one point, she put on sunglasses that contained a pickup and played her own head like a drum. By using pre-recorded material and devices that repeat, multiply and/or alter the pitch and tone of her voice, Anderson, alone on a stage, becomes a futuristic orchestra and chorus, creating a modern, appropriately gloomy soundscape. Still, one gets the impression that she has a hell of a good time doing these things.

LAURIE ANDERSON

DEBORAH FEINGOLD

"I like combining as many things as possible," she says of her performances. "And with most of those things, you're not seeing what you're hearing. Just the way we receive information through TV, telephone, radio, conversation, advertising, pictures — all of this barrage coming in. What you may be seeing is a picture of an incredibly contented couple and they may be trying to sell you some *really* horrible insurance. And it's a way of trying to use that technique, that mode of perception to say a couple of different things at once that appeals to me. Have them resonate against each other. Or with each other. So it becomes a much more complete situation."

Anderson tells stories: offkilter, surrealistic tales set in a landscape of Americana. Dolly Parton and Superman, Mom and Dad, telephone answering machines and airline pilots instructing their passengers on proper seating methods, snake charmers and fed-up lovers. They all populate her work. She pits the cliches of America against cool technology. For one of the pieces Anderson performed in San Francisco, her voice became a metallic caricature of Dolly Parton's voice as she sang "Walk The Dog," a song with a creepy, tense melody and a minimal drum beat. "I turned on the radio and I heard a song by Dolly Parton," talk/sang Anderson in the high-pitched, chirpy, twangy voice that has endeared Dolly Parton to millions of Americans. She was perched at the edge of the stage on her knees, strumming a violin that sounded like a banjo. "And she was singing, 'Wow! I feel so bad. I feel so sad. I left my Mom and I left my Dad. And I just want to go home now.'" Suddenly the music faded away and there was a stark drum beat. "Well *you* know she's not going to go back home. And *I* know she's not going to go back home. And *she* knows she's never going to go back there."

Laurie Anderson ended "Walk The Dog" like this: "Close your eyes. Okay. Now imagine you're at the most wonderful party. Okay. Delicious food. Uh-huh. Interesting people. Uh-mm. Terrific music. Mm-mmh. NOW OPEN THEM!"

Since 1977, examples of this 34-year-old artist's recorded work have been popping up on anthologies of performance artists and poets. But it's only with "Oh Superman" that Anderson has left the esoteric confines of the avant-garde art world for the much larger pop world. "Obscure art basically leaves me cold," says Anderson now. "One of my goals is to communicate." — *Michael Goldberg*

ROMEO VOID

With little fanfare, Romeo Void takes the stage of New York's tiny Mudd Club. Ben Bossi plays a snatch of snakecharming soprano sax which is immediately usurped by drummer Larry Carter's tribal-bolero tom-tom tattoos. Frank Zincavage picks up the rhythmic momentum with a throbbing, muscular bass line, reinforced by Peter Woods' biting Strat guitar chords. Instantly, an atmosphere of thick melodic menace floods the smoke-filled room, and the small Sunday night crowd instinctively gathers closer to the stage. I'd heard Romeo Void on record — their *It's A Condition* LP on Frisco indie label 415 Records (P.O. Box 14563, San Francisco, CA

94114), one of the best debuts of this young decade — and had been mightily impressed by Deborah Iyall, a singer as tough and sensual as Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders, and a much more profound and intriguing lyricist. The comparison is made more apt by Romeo Void's sound: eclectic, enlightened and energetic melodic pop-rock but deeper and more organic.

Romeo Void's lead singer Deborah Iyall takes the stage and I'm surprised to see that those provocative lyrics and that sexy voice belong to one very hefty lady. Iyall doesn't actively command attention in a physical or vocal way. In true new wave fashion she plays her "lead singer" role down, effectively becoming merely the vocal focus of a taut ensemble. And what an ensemble! Peter Woods' terse, edgy guitar, descended from surf music and early Brit-invasion, frequently evokes the brilliant, spare "weird chord" effects of the Police's Andy Summers and the Cure's Robert Smith. Bossi's adept sax provides a keening foil for the understated thrust of Iyall's voice and Woods' guitar. The rhythm section, whether purringly restrained, friskily motivating or solidly driving, is always there, propelling things along with great tensile strength.

The band's elegant, tasteful restraint and brooding power form a perfect backdrop for, and complement to, the ambivalent, moody examination of modern-romantic alienation that's Iyall's predominant theme (the name Romeo Void should clue you in to that). What's most fascinating about Iyall is her involved-observer stance: while her breathy, sensual vocal neat calls to mind a Hynde or an Annette Peacock, she obsessively accretes telling details from her own at times bruising (physically and/or psychologically) adventures with a coolly ironic detachment that flares into barely-restrained palpable emotion. It's as though she's reliving her diary as she reads through it, the band cinematically fleshing out her haunted discourse.

Live though, you don't have to know all this. All you need are ears with which to hear what a sleek, tasty, accomplished outfit this is. From forced-rhythm punky raveup ("Fear To Fear") to eerie mixed-mode balladry ("White Sweater"), with lots of nice affecting/effective songs in between, Romeo Void succeeds in making accessible rock vital and interesting, lending it depth and edge. With each successive number, the Mudd Club crowd's response via both dancing and applause grows. Romeo Void ends up kicking ass, in a manner of speaking, but mainly because they've provoked the mind enough to let the body follow. A great group. — *Michael Shore*

JOHNNY HARTMAN

Oh, Mr. Hartman. No one can match the silky smoothness and opulent depths of your ravishing baritone voice. It's little wonder that Coltrane chose you to share with him the creation of an album of some of the lushest ballads ever recorded (*John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman*, MCA). So what if you're still singing most of those same tunes nearly twenty years later, because no matter how many times I hear them, they still send tingles up and down my spine.

RITA RIFF

JOHNNY HARTMAN

"I had to hear *that* voice live to be convinced that it wasn't just created in the studio somehow," a friend once told me. Amazingly, that voice is even fuller live. To hear that sweet voice again, in the intimate and plush atmosphere of Fat Tuesday's, was almost fattening. But what raises Hartman miles above just another gifted cocktail lounge vocalist is that he knows how to use his voice very artfully. His intonation is impeccable and he manipulates it with stunning effectiveness. Also, his choice and treatment of often wilted evergreens is always tasteful. Taking an old standard like "On Green Dolphin Street," he will give it a bouncy Latin turn or shape "Wave" into slow-motion freeze frames. With Billy Strayhorn's immortal "Lush Life," Hartman imbibes it with more bittersweet melancholy essence than any other vocal rendition I've ever heard. The classic interpretations of "Lush Life" still belong to Coltrane and Hartman, and what classics they are! When he wants to pick up the tempo on a tune like 'One For My Baby (And One More For The Road)," he's still able to maintain all the poise and full-voiced emotion of his ballads, a step many balladeers never make.

But unfortunately, Hartman is part of the dying species of male jazz vocalists. There simply aren't any young turks waiting in the wings anymore (I'd even settle for a few young Hungarians). Hartman reflects a romanticism of a bygone era; today's romantics seem to have settled in the realm of soul, a natural enough migration, I guess. Here I am getting nostalgic about an era I never lived through, but there really is something very touching and so human about a vocalist of Hartman's calibre. His voice melts like butter but leaves no sticky residue sentimental yet far from naive. I, for one, will go hear Hartman every chance I get. — *Cliff Tinder*

HUMAN SEXUAL RESPONSE

A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but a little education can also be a dangerous thing. In the case of Human Sexual Response, a septet of young punk Brainiacs from Boston where higher learning is a way of life, a B.A. is equal parts well-meant b.s. and championship post-punk balls — sort of Rotten Goes to College. And graduates with honors.

Human Sexual Response are a strange mixture: Romantic Poetry and Mythology 101 meet the class clown motor-boogie of the Ramones and the smart-aleck sabotage of PiL. The lines were not so clearly drawn on HSR's 1980 Passport Records debut *Fig. 14*. There, the group's pop tones (the exhilirating charm of "Guardian Angel"), prankish humor ("Jackie Onassis" and an ill-advised cover of "Cool Jerk") and the exotic allure of their alien gospel-cum-Jefferson Airplane four-piece vocal front line were obscured by indifferent production and oppressive images of death and perfunctory or unfulfilled sex.

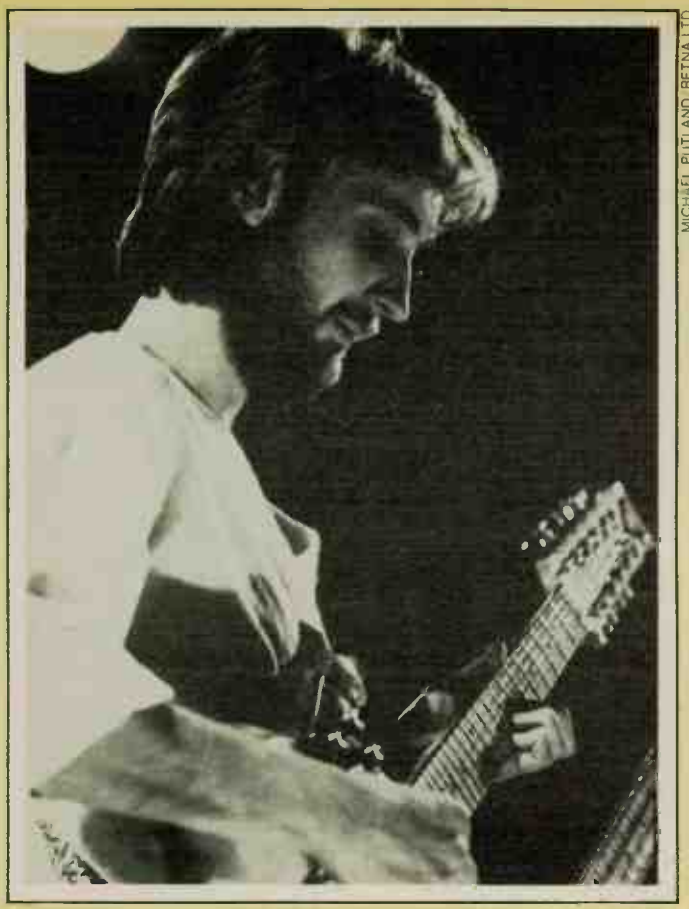
The new album *In A Roman Mood* shares the same concerns. Lead singer and lyricist Larry Bangor writes his own Greek tragedy — spiced with a little Oedipal complex — in the funereal "House Of Atreus," turns "12345-678910" into a shopping list of love, and equates sex with brute force in the violent Gang (of Four) bang of "Pound." But on this record (produced by Mike Thorne of John Cale and Wire fame) and on stage, Human Sexual Response counter their clinical and somewhat overeducated lyrical approach (invoking Zeus and Clytemnestra in "Atreus," "the restructured Freudian psychodymanics" in "Keep A Southern Exposure") with a mighty physical charge in voice and rhythm worth more than any of their ten-dollar wordplay.

Bangor writes about his love-and-death wish colorfully enough in "Blow Up" — "Are you a joybang or are you a killjoy?" — but he sings about it in a mad hyper-yodel against the wailing wall of vocalists Dini Lamont, Windle Davis and Casey Cameron (a she) while drummer Malcolm Travis introduces the song with a furious slam-dunk beat right out of Led Zeppelin's "Rock And Roll." Guitarist Rich Gilbert fills that massive space between the singers and the rhythm section with the ghostly harmonic echoes of PiL's Keith Levene, Pete Townshend's bionic thrash, and the strangled romantic whine of Tom Verlaine. At the Ritz, he tapped out the fragile chords of the sunny but hopelessly pretentious "Land Of The Glass Pinecones" with a Heineken bottle before erupting into a climactic Verlaine-like solo while playing effective tricks with detuned strings and tuning pegs on the primal-beat poem "Public Alley 909." And while the manic go-go dancing of the singers throughout the set seemed a little forced, it is hard *not* to be moved by the propulsive fury of the Gilbert/Travis/Maclachlan rhythm axis.

Human Sexual Response are to be admired for their intellectual reach, but their greatest moments come when they come up with an ace hook, band it up, and hoot it out as they do with the poppy poignant story of the student suicide "Andy Fell," a highlight both of the Ritz show and *In A Roman Mood*. After all, it isn't what you know, it's how you rock with it. — *David Fricke*

HUMAN SEXUAL RESPONSE

DEBORAH FFINGOLD



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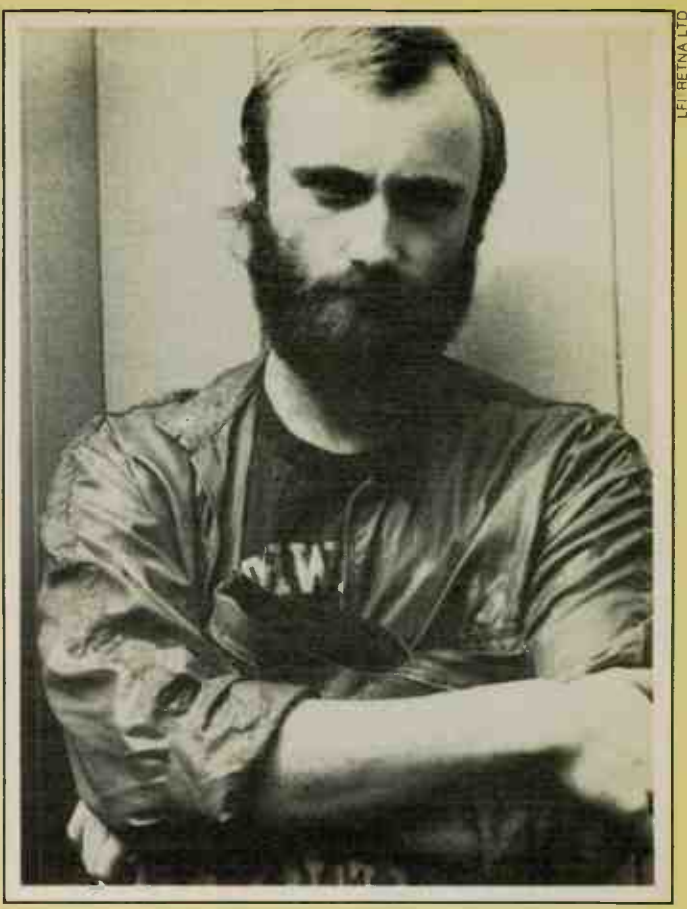

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GENESIS

J.D. Considine

Seminal art-rockers in the 70s, Genesis takes off in an exciting new direction, leaner and more aggressively funky, yet moody and lyrical, led by Phil Collins' fiery vocals and rhythms, and Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford's taut new sparseness and melodic urgency.

Late July, 1978: Genesis was on the road, touring behind *...And Then There Were Three*. Onstage, of course, there were actually five, as Genesis members keyboardist Tony Banks, drummer Phil Collins and guitarist/bassist Mike Rutherford found it necessary to use guitarist Daryl Steurmer and drummer Chester Thompson to cover parts left over from the band's early days as a quintet, when it would have been Peter Gabriel upfront instead of Collins. Gabriel, with his mime-based acting and repertoire of costume changes, gave the band a theatricality unheard of in rock. By '78, most of that was gone. Collins sang one song in a trench coat at a prop bar, but the bulk of the dramatics was given over to the band's fog machine and elaborate lighting rig. In fact, the lights were set on hydraulic lifts and swung around during the show, while the musicians stood and played, peering out through the mists like mannequins abandoned on a moor.

The music that came thundering through the haze had a similar air, implying vast movement without actually achieving it. Dense clouds of synthesizer chords hung in the air as the drums thrashed against the beat; guitar and bass darted through the ensemble, adding ornamentation like they were being paid by the semi-quaver; in all, it was like listening to a fusion band stuck in the mud, gunning its engines but unable to move. At times, the songs seemed almost inconsequential to the performance.

ANNE FISHBEIN, PHOTO RESERVE

IS

Late November, 1981: Genesis on the road again, this time behind *abacab*. What a change! The fog is still there, but instead of the lumbering lighting rig they sported in '78, Genesis now has small, quick, computer-controlled Varilights to do the job. Likewise, the whole show has lightened its step. Collins is mobile, almost manic when fronting the band, and the music resolutely avoids the ponderous. In part, the change springs from the new album, which is lean, funky and more interested in melody than dense, orchestral texture. But even the older material has taken on a new alacrity and edge. Instead of playing like they had something to prove, Genesis was playing like its members had something to say, and were interested in the rest of the conversation.

Curiously enough, this change didn't come about because of the new wave/punk revolution that turned the British art-rock movement into living fossils. While Genesis' compeers were clutching at straws — Emerson, Lake & Palmer added a disco beat, Yes hired the Buggles — Banks, Collins and Rutherford were enjoying enormous commercial success playing the same stuff as before.

What happened between *...And Then There Were Three* and *abacab*? If you look directly at the band's output, it would be easy to assume that the key was *Duke*, released in 1980. But *Duke* wasn't a real change so much as "the year we should have changed," as guitarist/bassist Mike Rutherford put it. "We started to on *Duke*. To me, some of the songs on *Duke* were the end of an era, and some were the start of another era."

But if you want to hear the transition itself, you have to go not from *Duke* to *abacab*, but from *Duke* to *Face Value*, Phil Collins' solo album. Compare the *Face Value* version of "Behind The Lines" to the one on *Duke*; gone is the heavy flash of the instrumental introduction, the ham-fisted syncopation of the verse, the melodramatic overplay of the synthesizers. Instead, you've got an arrangement that focuses on the melody; a bright, danceable shuffle keeping things rolling; and a horn section (borrowed from Earth, Wind & Fire) punching home the accents over a wisp of synthesizer chords. The leap from that version of "Behind The Lines" to "No Reply At All," the first single off *abacab*, is too direct to be accidental.

Still, if you ask what brought about the change, all you get is polite self-deprecation. "We're just slow," was keyboardist Tony Banks' sheepish answer. "Our tastes change, and since we really make the albums just to please ourselves, it's a question of how we respond to things."

Besides, they were beginning to get typecast, and didn't want to turn into cliches. "We were discussing a double album," Rutherford recalled, "and most of the stuff that didn't go on was the stuff that was most like Genesis. Most of the tracks that didn't go on I could take and say, 'That's a bit like an old song,' and that's a worrisome thing for a band when you can say that."

"We've been bunged into this bracket of art-rock, pomp-rock, classical-rock, whatever you like to call it," added Collins, "and we're not at all. We write songs. Some are very straight songs, some have fantasy ideas, lyrically. I thought it would be a good idea to suddenly jar people, take more from Earth, Wind & Fire, and try to get something a bit different. It just stops people from thinking, 'I know where Genesis are — they're over there.' Suddenly, they're not over there. And it makes people think."

If you concentrate on the reasons the band members give, such as wanting to make a break in their sound or do something different, you can get a good idea of the *how* of *abacab*. To get the *why*, we must look at the catalyst in the band's change of direction: Phil Collins.

That Collins would turn out to be an agent of change should hardly come as a surprise. He has maintained a surprising range of outside activities since joining Genesis in 1970, ranging from session work with Elliot Murphy, Brian Eno and Peter Gabriel, to playing part-time in the fusion band Brand X. Obviously, there was more going through his head than Genesis. Just how much more became apparent in '78, when I related to him the Nick Lowe comment that "bands like Genesis and Yes are about as interesting as a used Kleenex."

"Well, I mean, it's fair enough," Collins said. "Sometimes I think we're as exciting as a used Kleenex. We all have moments of wondering what we're doing. There's either good or bad music, as opposed to all this pigeon-holing. To me, he does some good stuff, and I would have thought that he would better appreciate another band that maybe didn't do the same kind of material."

Collins' extreme politeness and deferential view of his work ("we all have moments of wondering what we're doing") may explain why his outside interests were so late in manifesting

MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA LTD

Art-rock Genesis in 1974. Go on, call them a dinosaur; it's becoming a critical pastime: Banks, Collins, guitarist Steve Hackett, Rutherford and, in front, about to change costume, Peter Gabriel.

themselves in Genesis' music. Perhaps because Collins did less writing than the others, his sideman instincts tended to overpower his creative impulse; in any case, he didn't start writing for the band until *Duke*, to which he contributed "Misunderstanding."

Ironically enough, though, the first glimmerings of the sound Collins was to introduce to Genesis turned up on Peter Gabriel's third solo album. The cut that opens the album is "Intruder," and it's built around a simple six-note drum pattern Collins is credited with writing. Not only is the pattern leaner than his work with Genesis, but it drove home the idea that a simple drum part could be melodic, something that adds to the music instead of merely propelling it.

"I think I sing like a drummer and drum like a singer," he reflected. "I wish more people were drummers. I wish that they would appreciate how certain drums should sound, how important they are, and just write from a drummer's point of view sometimes. I'm just talking about things that have come up in the recent past, how we've recorded tracks, how sometimes the drummer gets lost in the mix because someone doesn't understand the importance of the drums."

Certainly Collins understood. Perhaps the most adroit display of the importance of drums on his solo album was "In The Air Tonight," a quiet, moody ballad that is ripped open by a burst of concert toms. The drum sound is huge, yet the playing is, as Collins put it, "simple as anything."

The other notable shift that turned up on *Face Value* was its absorption of R&B rhythms and ideas, a direct result of Collins' fondness of Earth, Wind & Fire and Weather Report.

"Now that there are no Beatles," he enthused, "I think Earth, Wind & Fire and Weather Report are two of the classiest bands in the world. You forget about the tunes, almost. It's just the way it's done — you can have two chords, and if it feels good, it's wonderful.

"You can have the best song in the world, but if it feels like crap, then there's no way you're going to salvage it."

That may have been Collins' message to Genesis with his remake of "Behind The Lines," although he was too much the gentleman to say so. But he did state categorically that the chain of ideas that led from Peter Gabriel's "Intruder" to the Genesis album *abacab* were among his best and brightest.

"I'm very proud of what I did with Peter's album," he said. "I played well on that album and I'm proud of it, I'll leave it at that. But that album, the new album with Genesis — definitely, that's the stuff I'm really happy with."

Once it's been established that it was Collins who led the way to the change in direction on *abacab*, it might seem tempting to assume that the commercial success of *Face Value* led directly to the stylistic changes in Genesis. But the workings of Genesis are a bit more complex than that.

For one thing, Rutherford argued that "without the solo stuff, we'd have stopped by now. Because if you've got one album each year — fifty minutes at the most — and if you write a lot, it's just not enough. You're going to arrive with so much material... it was actually stifling Genesis. Because it would be eight songs for me, eight songs for Tony, and Phil was writing more and more, too. By doing the solo stuff, you arrive at a Genesis album with much less material, and if you've just put out a whole album of your own, you don't worry about the stuff you've written. You're into doing Genesis stuff. You're into writing together, and Genesis is about the chemistry of the three of us when we jam around and write together — which was how most of the new album was written."

Just goes to show what sports these guys are; rather than turn jealous after Collins' success (particularly in light of the less-than-tremendous sales of Banks' *A Curious Feeling* and Rutherford's *Smallcreep's Day*), the other members of Genesis see the whole thing as good for the band. Still, it's worth noting that, competition aside, they each keep an eye on the bottom line when it comes to self-expression. "I enjoyed making a solo record, and I was very pleased with it from my point of view as a writer," admitted Banks of his *A Curious Feeling*, "but it didn't do very well. And if I released another one and it

did the same thing again, I'd feel sort of stuck in a situation about solo albums. I'll perhaps end up doing it differently, but I don't know quite how."

The gold record sales of *Face Value* may have lent more credibility to Collins' ideas, but that in itself didn't put him in the driver's seat. He assesses his current role by noting, "I'm more dominant than I used to be, so the three of us are much more equal.

"We did go from being very, very feminine, very anemic. It depends who's dominant. I mean, Tony's — nothing personal — but Tony's the feminine side musically, right? Wonderful chords, wonderful melodies, but it's feminine as opposed to masculine. So you get my masculine side of it, talking purely musically, and if you meet them in the middle, you're going to get great chords with a bit of bite."

Collins' rise to dominant equality didn't just add bite to the music — it also led to the lean, direct sound of *abacab*. But Collins was quick to insist that it wasn't his lead the band followed. Rather, he felt that the band's newer, interactive writing style deserved credit. "The music that we write together is much different from the music that everyone writes individually," he said. "Because when you're on your own you fill in the gaps. When you're there with a drummer, there with another guitarist, you don't play as much.

"'Man On The Corner' (from *abacab*), for instance. I wrote that song, and my knowledge of the keyboard restricted me to what I could play; therefore, it was simple. 'In The Air Tonight' was simple. All my stuff is simple, fundamentally simple.

"But you get 'abacab' — lots of gaps. 'Keep It Dark' — lots of gaps. 'Another Record' — lots of gaps. 'Who Dunnit' — lots of gaps. But it's a very corporate unit."

So in other words, *abacab* wasn't necessarily an attempt at simplicity, at least not in the way *Face Value* was; it was an exercise in not getting in the way? "Right. There are those gaps because you're listening to somebody else playing."

As it turned out, those gaps also sparked a change in the band's conception of how their records should sound. "The first album we ever produced ourselves is this one," Rutherford reflected. "Having to work through someone like Dave (Hentschel, who produced *Trick Of The Tail, Wind And Wuthering, Seconds Out, ...And Then There Were Three* and *Duke*)... I didn't know it at the time, and I think you should mention that it's no reflection on Dave, but having to work through another person held us back, because he had fixed ideas, and the fact that this album has changed has a lot to do with the sound rearrangement. Some songs are definitely a new style of Genesis writing; some songs, like 'Dodo' and 'Lurker,' we could have written six years ago, but we've done it in a different arrangement.

"We've been bunged into this bracket of art-rock, pomp-rock, classical rock, whatever you like to call it, and we're not that at all. I thought it would be a good idea to suddenly jar people, to try to get something a bit different."

— Phil Collins

"Dave had a *sound*, whereas the rest of us vary so much from song to song, with no preconceived ideas of how the mix should be. Things go everywhere, a lot of space.

"We built this new studio, right? Fisher Lane Farm, which is near to where we all live. It's just for us — we converted a cowshed. And it's like, we put on *Duke* and it sounded ghastly compared to *abacab* or the live tapes that we're working on. So we played the master tape, thinking it must have been the cut; sounded as bad. We then put on Michael Jackson and Steely Dan, because they're two artists who have very true sounds, reliable sounds. And compared to them, *Duke* sounded so lacking in top and *oomph*! 'Turn It On Again' especially sounded awful. And *abacab* sounded quite similar

PAUL COX RETNA LTD

Fiendish Phil Collins delights in staggering the listener with terrifyingly huge drum entrances.

(to Michael and the Dan), so that encouraged us."

The principal device used to give *abacab* its oomph is something called the Anderson Kepex. "A kepex," Rutherford explained, "is if you've got a note (he draws a sine wave in the air), you can cut it off (he chops the imaginary wave), so it won't start till there, and stops there." In other words, any part of the drum sound below a certain volume level doesn't register, thereby eliminating the excess reverberation as the residual sound bounces around the room, but still capturing the full impact of a live sound.

"You get the ambient stereo drum mikes, and we record in a very live drum room, and then you gate the ambience. So it starts and stops. You mix that with straight kit, and it gets the sound."

That results in the huge drum sound that Collins had on his solo album. But it also means that Genesis no longer has to stuff its arrangements to get the body of sound the band likes. One of the biggest things missing from *abacab* is the blocky synthesizer chords that so typified the sound of *Wind And Wuthering* and .. *And Then There Were Three*

"I made a decision to play a lot less block chords on this album," admitted Banks, "and to just try a few different things. I also tried to avoid speed, and to go for slower parts, because I felt things can work just as well like that. And I also felt we were getting a little pushed into a corner, that this was what we're supposed to be doing. You find yourself looking for something to play on an album that will be a bit like something in your past, one of your trademarks or something.

"See, a lot of the size thing, which is what I was trying to create with the old keyboard parts, on *abacab* is taken over by the drums, because it's such an ambient sound. It's very big. On a song like 'Dodo,' if you take away the ambient sound, I tell you it sounds puny."

The real irony of *abacab* is that by making a conscious break in their sound, the band is going back to the impulse that fostered them.

Genesis began as the merger of two bands, the Anon and the Garden Wall, at the Charter House School in affluent Surrey, England The Anon, which featured Rutherford and

guitarist Anthony Phillips, was a blues band; the Garden Wall, which included Banks and Peter Gabriel, was into the Beatles and James Brown. Yet as Genesis, the first thing they did was turn their backs on the blues.

"When we set out," Banks said, "we really did try not to sound like anyone else. We obviously were influenced by the Beatles, just in terms of certain structures and things; and in terms of sound, maybe a little bit of Procol Harum and Family and the first King Crimson album all had their effect on us. But we consciously tried to steer away from all of that.

"When we played in England, it was during the blues boom, everyone was playing blues. We used to go into the blues clubs and play our stuff. It was a strange sort of scene, but we slowly picked up a following of people who thought, 'Hey, this is something different.'"

Different, indeed. Aside from Gabriel's use of mime, the band incorporated bits of English folk (but without sounding like Fairport Convention), church organ flourishes (without sounding like ELP), nods to the Elizabethan era (without coming off like Jethro Tull), and unorthodox rhythmic constructions (without attempting profundity like Soft Machine). As the personnel changed — Phillips was replaced by the more fluid, less anachronistic Steve Hackett; Collins added rhythmic assurance when he replaced John Mayhew; Gabriel's departure left more space to concentrate on the music — the band's sound evolved, until it seemed to settle into the ornate, self-possessed style of *Trick Of The Tail* through *...And Then There Were Three*.

"We sound less English now," admitted Rutherford. "When I say 'English,' I think of how we used to sound, and that to me sounds old-fashioned. Come back to 'Firth Of Fifth,' which is a good live song — we're playing it this year and enjoying it — but there are certain passages that I couldn't write now. I can't write lyrics any more about what I used to write about, sort of fantasy, princes and fairyland kind of things. I can't write that anymore. I grew out of it. I'm not saying I'm better now — I may be worse, that doesn't matter. But I've grown out of it, I'm different.

"And Genesis, having started out by writing long pieces, we're going in what's left of the other direction to go in. We can't go one way anymore, so we go in the other direction."

Going for feel is the major change in Genesis' new material, and the biggest reason it sounds so different. Otherwise the band is going about its business in much the same way it has all along.

Basically, the band starts off by jamming and lets the musical ideas develop spontaneously. If the jam is successful, the themes will emerge instrumentally, along with an idea of structure. Once the band decides a jam is worth developing, it will commit the basic tracks to tape. Once the instrumentals are down, then the band goes ahead with the melody and lyrics.

"Some melody has got to come from key phrases in the song, and the lyrics tend to come from that," said Rutherford. "The way I do it, I listen to a song and think to myself, 'What does this suggest?' But the lyrics themselves don't come from the melody of the song. They come from what the song suggests to you, and you think of some ideas.

"The *abacab* sessions were different only in that the band stuck with the melodies in the instrumental tracks, and didn't try to write a great lyric and a great melody, which often screws it up because there isn't room for a great instrumental and another great melody on top.

"Take the first track on the new album, *abacab*," continued Rutherford. "I did the melody and the lyrics for that, and the

Genesis Equipment

There may be only three people in Genesis, but all three have enough equipment to make up for 13 years of personnel changes and then some.

Take Phil Collins, for example. "I've got all kinds of drums," he says, "lots of drum kits. I've got four drum kits and fifty-odd cymbals. Lots of snare drums — I've got snare drums for all occasions.

Some specifics: His concert toms are sized at 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18, all Premier. These kits (he has two) are used onstage and in the studio; he also has an old Gretsch kit — "It's like a kid to me" — and recently bought a new one. Among his many snare drums are a new bronze snare given to him by Bill Ludwig, several standard Ludwig snares and a Kemper snare drum. He always uses clear skins, never with a black dot, with Remo Diplomats on the high toms, and Premier skins, either medium thin or thin, on the others.

His cymbals are Paiste and Avedis Zildjian. "I had a deal with both companies," Phils reports, "and Paiste came up to me and said, 'One or the other.' And I said, 'Okay, I'll have Zildjian.' 'Cause I crack Paiste. Chester Thompson (who drums with Genesis on the road), on the other hand, uses Paiste and cracks Zildjian. There's a moral in there somewhere..." Sizes? 14" hi-hats, 14" splash, 22" swish with rivets, 16" crash, 20" ride, 18" crash and a 20" upturned Chinese cymbal. All are Zildjian brilliants except for the hi-hats, which are regular New Beats.

Mike Rutherford, as both guitarist and bassist, has a lot of gear, although his basic guitar is the Fender Stratocaster, of which he has two, both with pre-amp boosts attached to the volume controls and Avatar pickups, "although I'm not using the Avatar this year onstage." He also uses an Ibanez guitar with double-coil pickups when he has buzz problems with the Strats.

His bass is an Alembic, although he still uses a special interchangeable double-neck Shergold built to his specifications. "What happened was I used to use a lot of different tunings, plus I was playing double-neck." The cost of several double-neck guitar/basses being a bit prohibitive, Rutherford had Shergold build him a bass with slots so the road crew could simply slip the required guitar into place as the set progressed. "And when I was not on the road, they had bits that went back on them to make them proper guitars." He also uses Taurus bass pedals when he has to play bass and guitar simultaneously. His guitar strings are Rotosounds, either medium or light gauge, and his bass strings are Superwounds.

As for effects, on guitar he uses Colorsound Superfuzz, MXR flanger, and Lexicon echo, all through two Yamaha G100112 amps. The basses also go through a Colorsound fuzz box, as well as an ElectroHarmonix Screaming Tree for the treble end of the Shergold. The basses are fed through a four-channel mixer and into Crown amps, which drive custom built speakers.

All that is only for the road, mind you; in the studio Rutherford uses MXR digital delay on the bass pedals; a harmonizer; and a Moog string filter to equalize the sound. "It's like a very sophisticated tone control, really." He also uses the Roland guitar synthesizer, to the point where it has almost completely replaced the Arp Avatar. He also uses the Roland CR-78 drum machine for writing.

Keyboardist Tony Banks has a surprisingly simple setup. Onstage, he uses the CP-70 Yamaha piano, the Arp Quadra, the Prophet 10 and the Roland Vocorder-Plus. "I also have a Prophet 5 on the other side of the stage that I use for one number. I could use the Prophet 10, but I want to be in a different place onstage." His effects include an MXR Stereo Chorus, two MXR Phase-100's, one on the Quadra, one on the Prophet; and two Colorsound fuzz boxes. "They're the kind of fuzz I like — low quality. Much as I like MXR, I don't like their fuzz boxes. I find that they're too good. For some reason, the better the box, the worse the keyboard sounds.

He does his own mixing onstage through an Amek X-1000 board, which feeds into a Crown DC 300A amplifier, and a speaker system composed of ATC bass speakers and JBL horns.

In the studio, he uses pretty much the same setup with the addition of the Yamaha CS-80, which he admires particularly for the pitch-bend controls built into the keys.

JILL FURMANOWSKY RETNA LTD

Not yet out to pasture: the band at their studio/cowshed, Fisher Lane Farm in Surrey, England.

"By doing a whole album of your own, you arrive at a Genesis album with much less material. You're into writing together, into the chemistry of the three of us when we jam around and write together."

—Mike Rutherford

backing track was so damned good that our main objective was not to get in the way of it."

Not getting in the way was also central to the band's instrumental approach. "Now it's a lot of playing lines," Banks reported, "and once you're playing a line, anything you've got on top of it has got to refer back to that line. Otherwise it's going to start going against it. If you don't think about it at all, it's not going to work."

Consequently, each member of the band plays fewer notes to greater effect. "I'm playing less and less," Collins maintained, "because the drums are taking up more room. Strangely enough, it's getting simple as anything, and yet you're playing with sound. You hear a sound and you're playing with that, rather than playing a part and then doing the sound. So you play a *dijshhhhh*," he said, imitating a drum hit, "wait for it to stop, and play another *dijshhhhh*. You don't play *dijshdijshdijshdijsh*..."

Working together also made the writing more immediate, and that affected the group's sound in less perceptible ways. When writing on his own, Tony Banks said, "I tend to start off on the piano, and the first stage is to try to transfer it to something else that it will actually come across on. The next stage is using instruments to play lines and as colors.

"But other songs will totally arise out of the instrument that you're playing it on, like that song on the album called 'Who Dunnit?' That has a particular way of using the Prophet 5 where I'm doing things like changing the tone, then changing the note, changing the tone — so you get a very strange effect going. Obviously, if I played the same part on a piano, it would sound terrible."

Furthermore, the reliance on interplay has led to less preparation by each musician, resulting in a more spontaneous sound. "The art of recording," reflected Rutherford, "is to be adaptable. I would go away and work on a part, spend a couple hours with a tape recorder working on a part I played bass on, developing some ideas. I'll get in the studio with a whole part worked out...and it's just not happening. So a musician reaches a certain maturity where he says, 'to hell with it' and starts again. You do it till it feels right.

"That's the sort of thing we would do in the past — no one would compromise. You have to be adaptable in the studio. You can't *make* ideas work."

"*abacab* is Genesis this year," Mike Rutherford warned me, lest I draw too many conclusions. "Next year — God knows!"

God knows, indeed. As much a departure as this album may seem, Genesis still has a long way to go before overcoming all their collective weaknesses. The *abacab* tour, despite the new material, was still loaded down with lights, fog machines and bombast, and although it no longer crawled at a snail's pace, it didn't get your heart pumping like a Springsteen show either. Not that Genesis should become like Springsteen, mind you, just that it wouldn't hurt if they got a little looser. Already Phil Collins' between-songs repartee has enough spark to make the going lighter, and it shouldn't be too difficult to infuse some of that irreverence and wit into the music.

But you never know. One of the things that Rutherford said that sticks with me was that "had this album died the death commercially, I wouldn't have blinked an eyelid, because Genesis at the moment is so strong — stronger than we've been for a long time." That Genesis could afford to take a chance, did, and came out ahead ought to mean that there's more change, more risk in the offing. If it leads to music as provocative and exciting as *abacab*, we may yet see the day when Genesis makes Nick Lowe seem "about as interesting as a used Kleenex." M

MILES DAVIS

From bop to cool to out,
From blue to fusion to funk,
The epic voice,
The cutting edge,
The very finest.

One hot midnight last July, two friends took me to New York's Savoy to hear Miles Davis play. I could dismiss Mark Rothbaum's evangelism because he manages Miles but my other friend, Bob Neuwirth, a songwriter and musician whom I greatly respect, had no vested interest except to expand my horizons. Or something like that. There was a palpable, contagious excitement in the hardened cynic Neuwirth, and I noticed folks like Rickie Lee Jones, Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts in the audience.

The concert was sensational. Miles took more chances than he had a couple of weeks earlier at the Kool Jazz Festival. He pushed his reviving chops to their limit, freely mixing tunes like "All Of You" with his contemporary material and even, during a long exploration of "My Man's Gone Now" that used three tempi (slow funk, mid-walk, fast four), took an extended solo on Fender piano that had a wealth of imagination in it and more than enough technique. If Herbie Hancock ever needs to hire a piano player, he might be the man.

Miles' band, which had taken unprecedented flak from the press of three cities, had begun to metamorphose into a flexible and free-associative performing unit. Saxophonist Bill Evans soloed more comfortably than he had either at Avery Fisher or on record, and the much-maligned guitarist Mike "Fat Time" Stern finally had a chance to show how much he loved bebop.

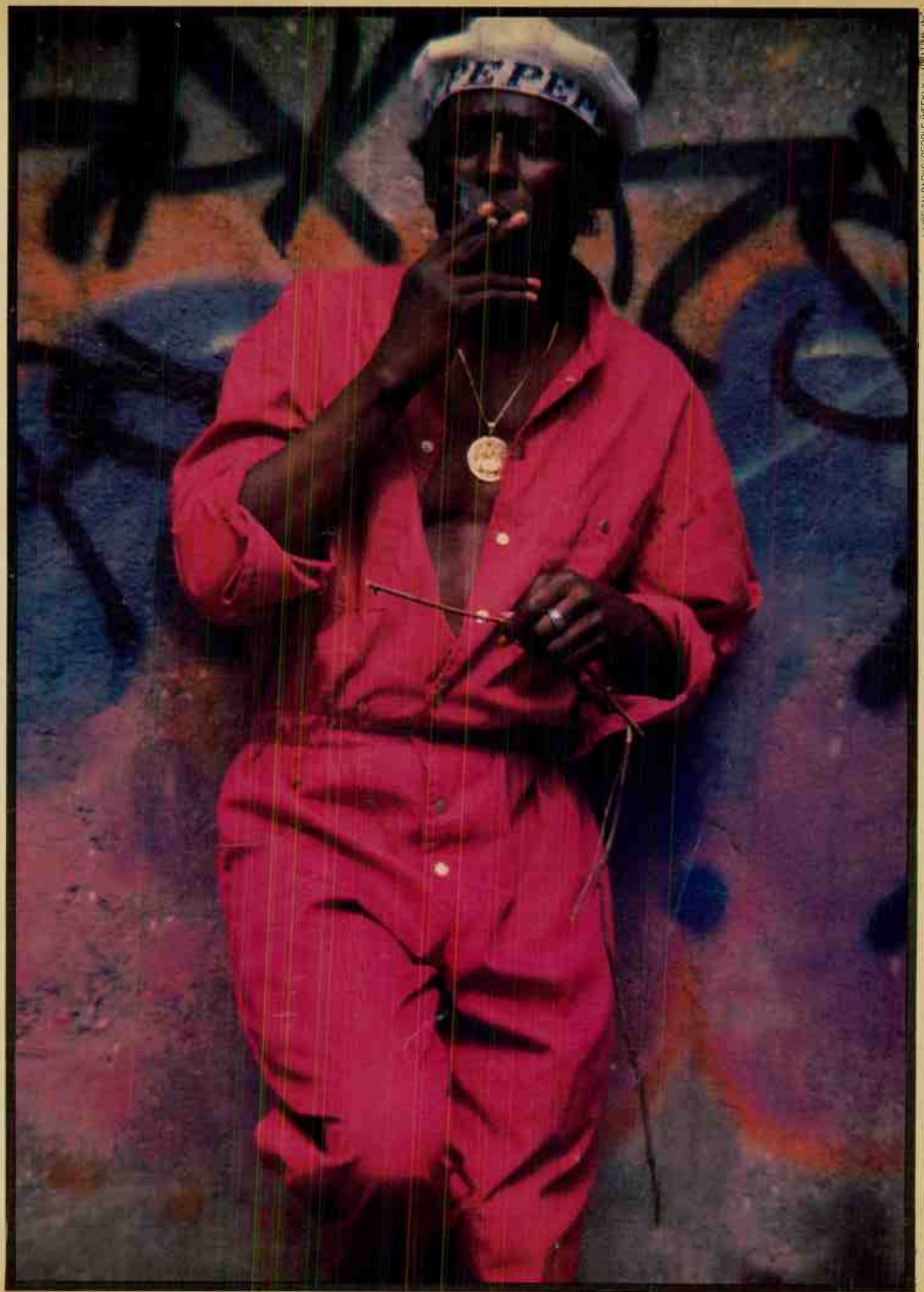
Miles was full of energy and uncommonly extroverted onstage, and acknowledged the existence of the audience to the extent of French-kissing a blonde in the front row in the middle of one of his *moments musicaux*. When I went backstage, I was shocked to find Miles Davis in a state of collapse, sweating like a prizefighter between rounds and similarly attended by men with towels, drink, encouragement and aid. A while later I found my way back to the street, dazed, went home and listened to his albums until long after dawn had broken on the Hudson and the adrenalin had stopped flowing. Next midnight we returned to the Savoy and sat transfixed again until the final abrupt note.

For weeks, Mark Rothbaum had been trying to convince me to write an article for *People* magazine about Miles — who wouldn't talk to the jazz critics — and Neuwirth had urged me to do it, but I had resisted on the legitimate grounds that I'm not a jazz buff and did not know enough about the man or his music. That night, still apprehensive but thoroughly intrigued, I told Mark I'd do an interview if Miles agreed.

Before meeting him, I read reams of clippings and articles dating back to the late 1940s and was left with the impression that Miles Davis' influence as a stylist and composer exceeded even his immense talent as a musician. He is an unforgettable figure on the landscape. The way critics fumbled for adjectives and exhausted their store of superlatives to describe his live music and sixty recordings convinced me that my own visceral and enthusiastic reaction to the Savoy dates had been the appropriate response. He is still a looming, if reluctant, presence on the cutting edge of jazz, capable of boosting his music over the hump of public indifference and winning popularity polls without losing serious critical acclaim. Canonized by the press and respected by his peers, Miles had sounded the clarion calls to new eras in jazz for decades, from bebop to the cool to third stream to fusion. He was never known to make a foolish move.

But the compelling myth surrounding Miles made him

By Cheryl McCall



appear, in print at least, a fearsome, blunt man of few words, most of them hostile epithets. Even though he'd been cordial backstage at the Savoy, I didn't know what to expect the weekend we drove out to the Montauk cottage where he and Cicely Tyson were relaxing while his New York brownstone was being renovated. Of the thousands of people I've interviewed over the years, from fascist dictators to sports stars to mass murderers to supercelebrities, I'd never felt the trepidation gnawing at my insides that I felt that day. With Mark and Bill Evans, I entered a house that was already full of people — Miles, Cicely, his road managers Jim Rose and Chris Murphy — all watching boxing on TV. Miles said Hi, and when I didn't know what to say, he picked up on it with a degree of sensitivity that my researches had not led me to expect. He did everything to put me at my ease. Can I get you a beer, Cheryl? he asked me, using my name to include me in the family unit. He walked by me, brushed my wrist in passing, continued for five paces, then turned around to show me my wristwatch in the palm of his hand. "That's one of the tricks I picked up in the old days," he said in his hoarse whisper of a voice, and it was impossible not to laugh and begin to relax. Usually when I do an interview I spend some time getting to know the person first, but Miles quickly said, "Let's do it," gave me a beer and led me to a screened-in porch overlooking the ocean. As we talked he waved to people outside, leered extravagantly at passing women, clowned.

When the interview was done, I spent that weekend with the Davis entourage in Montauk, where he continued to disregard his sullen stereotype. I had expected to see everyone waiting on him and found the reverse: Miles the host, providing food, beer, conversation and humor; Miles the joker, sparring with everyone who passed, sneaking Bill Evans' ring off his finger, palming my lighter, engaging in conversation with his invisible alter ego Leroy: "Hey Leroy, what's happening?" and clown Leroy answering back, Interlocutor and Mr. Bones.

When I went on tour with Miles and the band, the enveloping warmth of the home situation continued. He could not have been more affectionate with his band, hugging them, reassuring them, defending them fiercely from the bad reviews. He taught Bill Evans how to dress for the stage, how to tap his foot heel first — "Now *that's* cool" — instead of leading with the toe. He always made a point of including me, introducing me to his sister Dorothy Wilburn, his daughter Cheryl and his brother Vernon at the family reunion in Chicago, playing me tapes after the concert, telling me to notice this, listen to that. I've traveled with a lot of bands in my time, but I've never encountered anything like the atmosphere of reciprocity and love that Miles Davis brings with him. Cicely Tyson says he's always been like that and that the toughness is all facade.

His health was not good. Sometimes he was so stiff he was not able to bend sufficiently to put on his pants; the band had to help him. Concerts often exhausted him, but he had made a real commitment to working, his band, and even the audience. In Chicago and Detroit, Miles had to take oxygen from a portable tank in order to get through his concerts. He contracted pneumonia after a date in Ann Arbor, and although he's been a famous no-show in the past, got out of a hospital bed to make a gig in L.A.

For all the warmth of his presence, and for all his humor — he does not stop inventing little bits of business with whatever props come to hand — there is still an air of inconsolable grief about him, which I think Cicely has finally touched. People see it in him and want to protect him; because he trusts them, he gives it back redoubled. At the Chicago reunion, where he introduced Cicely to his family, I spoke with childhood friends of his from St. Louis, who were familiar with his loneliness from way back. He was so shy in those days, they told me, you almost never heard him talk. "I didn't have anything to say," he said. When he's happy about something he smiles like a child, and lights up, if not the world, the room. The single time he was angry with me his face shut like a steel door. After the tour I was no longer afraid of him but I still found the mystery impenetrable. I doubt that I'll ever encounter anyone as complicated, mercurial, quixotic, enigmatic and hip.

After the American tour, he took off on his seven-dates-for-$700,000 tour of Japan, from which he returned in shocking health to play a set on *Saturday Night Live*. In November, 'round midnight of a Wednesday fading into Thanksgiving, at Bill Cosby's house, in a ceremony presided over by the Reverend Andrew Young and attended by a few friends like Max Roach and Dick Gregory, Miles Davis and Cicely Tyson were married.

The day we did this interview, I admitted up front that I was a jazz *naif*, afraid of him and worried about his famous temper. He never raised it. When he realized that I was worried that his voice was not being picked up by the recorder, he picked it up and held it to his mouth while he paced back and forth. Chain-smoking and talking for two hours, he discussed his seclusion, his motivations for coming back, his friends, his loves, and his early life. His talk was full of Geminian mindplay: if I'd say he was like this, he'd say no, I'm like *that*. I incorporated the interview into my article for *People*; here it is in more nearly complete form. I'm still no authority on Miles Davis and I certainly don't pretend to be his good friend (like dozens of people I've met who exchanged words with him once) but I came away understanding as much of him as he allows. It was a privilege.

For full effect, the interview should be read in a hoarse whisper.

MUSICIAN: After five years, what made you start playing again?
MILES: Bill Evans, Al Foster, Dizzy and them gettin' on my ass talkin', "Man why don't you play this trumpet?" That didn't really make me play, I just felt like playing now.
MUSICIAN: What were you doing for those five years?
MILES: Nothin'. Gettin' high.
MUSICIAN: But you had some medical problems and operations, didn't you?
MILES: One leg operation...two, yeah. That's what stopped me. That operation, man, I was so *disgusted* I just said fuck it for a while. I needed the operation. I was in Japan, and I was taking this codeine and morphine and didn't even know it. They gave it to me to help my leg.
MUSICIAN: What happened to your leg?
MILES: It's just a black disease where your bones get so brittle that they break off. Broke off, yeah, in the hip. Which is very painful, you know. It just chips. First they did a bone graft and then they put a cap on it. Dr. Wilson did it, my doctor Philip Wilson, he's great...A doctor told me in Sweden — *he shot me right in the leg* — he said I know how many girls want to come over here and give you a *shot*. I said fuck that if I don't feel better. He said tomorrow you'll feel better, or the next day. But I didn't know I was sick from this morphine and codeine until I got to St. Louis and I started throwing up blood, and my *boys*, Dr. Weathers and a few friends of mine, they run the hospital, and they said, come on, and put me in the hospital.
MUSICIAN: What made you throw up blood, the morphine?
MILES: No. You see, your liver gets fucked up, plus drinking, plus the pills...you throw up. And that blood, it just sits in those little blood vessels down there...
MUSICIAN: So you were in bad shape for five years?
MILES: No, I was all right. It was just that I took so much medicine I didn't *feel* like playing the trumpet, didn't *feel* like listening to music. Didn't want to hear it, see, it, smell it, nothin' about it.
MUSICIAN: Was that tough? Music is your whole life, isn't it?
MILES: That's not my whole life. Music is three-quarters of my life...ninety percent.
MUSICIAN: You must have gotten really depressed.
MILES: *Bored* is the word. So bored that you can't realize what boredom *is*. I didn't come out of the house for about four years.
MUSICIAN: That would drive me crazy.
MILES: I *was* nuts.
MUSICIAN: What did you do for four years in your house?

"Anything you want you can get it... try it." Miles got bored hanging around the house for four years.

I'm not going too far from New York. I love it. I love the noise. I can't sleep without noise. I can't sleep without lights. I can't sleep without New York. I would never leave New York. Never ever ever ever never.

MILES: Nothing! Everything would come to my house. You know, anything you want you can get. All you have to do is ask for it. I didn't go to the store, I didn't go anywhere... Try it sometime.

MUSICIAN: So how did you get the band together? You must have gone out to listen a little bit.

MILES: You can get a band together. Just ask somebody, "Who can play?" I asked Dave Liebman, he's a good friend of mine, who would you get if you wanted a saxophone player? He said Bill Evans. So I asked Bill, who would you get if you wanted a guy to play the guitar? He said there's a guy named Mike Stern, he's excellent. I said okay. Now, if Bill plays that good, he's got it all, and Mike plays that good, I'm goin' to play. Yeah, we played downstairs, and it was *nice*.

MUSICIAN: And that got you excited about playing, or did they get on your case?

MILES: ...Nobody gets on my case. *Mark* (Rothbaum, his manager) gets on my fucking case, that I can stand. Nobody else can tell me *shit* — except the musicians in my band. But Mark — the reason I did it really was just because Mark didn't think I was gonna do it. Smartass motherfucker.

MUSICIAN: You must have been writing pieces.

MILES: Yeah. I can write when I hear what's happening. Then I can write.

MUSICIAN: How do songs come to you?

MILES: *In tens*... Actually, see, you never retire from an instrument if you've been playing it since you were 12 because it's always in your head. I wasn't hearing any melodies or anything, 'cause I wouldn't let myself hear anything, and all of a sudden these melodies started coming back to me. I just wrote one on a piece of paper bag, called "Love Without Time." Different types. It was good to lay off.

MUSICIAN: Do you think laying off made a big difference to your music?

MILES: Yeah.

MUSICIAN: When do you find music coming to you? In the night, or — when?

MILES: Anytime. Mostly at night. I write it down on anything if I have a pencil. I could write it down on your hand. Also, I do like Gil Evans told me to do, years ago, say "Always keep the tape recorder on." Yeah, I'm never gonna turn it off. You don't know what you might stumble upon and you can't — on the gig, you really can't go back to it because you don't know what it is.

MUSICIAN: And if it's on tape —

MILES: It's like a mind bank. Music bank. I could write a piece on what I just wrote down here.

MUSICIAN: I see. You don't draw the bar lines...

MILES: No. I don't know what tempo I'm gonna write it in.

MUSICIAN: It must be a heavy burden to be the guy that's supposed to lead everybody else.

MILES: Who? *Me*?

MUSICIAN: People look to you to be in the front, the avant-garde, to take a new direction and they'll follow it.

MILES: I don't know what people think and I don't care. Especially that phrase avant-garde — you can look to so many people for that. Just certain people I care what they think.

MUSICIAN: But you're aware that with your comeback, all the critics are waiting to see what you're going to do, and you're either going to get shot down or praised for something new. That must be tough on a musician.

MILES: I don't know what to say to that because I don't look at critics. I don't say hello to 'em, I don't know what they're gonna write, I don't care what they're gonna write because I can only do what I can do and that's it. I'm not gonna tell them anything...

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Miles in 1964. "Don't say jazz. I don't know anything about jazz."

MUSICIAN: When you read bad reviews, doesn't it bother you?
MILES: No. You know why? I don't read them. I know what they're going to say.
MUSICIAN: And when they knock your band for no reason?
MILES: One guy did it 'cause I wouldn't do an interview with him. He kind of upset my guitar player. I said, man, look at me, I've been called a black motherfucker, and black this and that, some of this here and that there...Man, you just ignore it. The best thing is not to say anything at all.
MUSICIAN: I don't know how you see yourself, but you must realize that in some ways you're in a class by yourself.
MILES: I am. It's no burden, it's just that I can't play like anyone else, I can't fight like anyone else, I can't do *anything* like anybody else. I'm just myself. And I don't fuck around with music because I love music. That takes up ninety percent of my life. The other part is Cicely and some more people I know. Mark, Bill, all of my guys. Fat Time, Al Foster I stay in constant touch with Al no matter where he is. Santana. I *try* to. See what they're doing and what it's like. Al called me up from France and said you should see the hotel I'm staying in. I said *I told you about that.* Why would you stay in a bad hotel, you don't live in a bad house? You lose half your money just trying to find a bed. He said, it's not like when we're traveling with you, chief, 'cause you had us the best food and rooms. I said,when you're with the best you get the best.
MUSICIAN: Let me see if the tape is picking up your voice.
MILES: (picks up machine and talks directly into it) Can you hear me *nowwwwwww*? Do you want me to say *green beans* like Bill Cosby?
MUSICIAN: Is that your phone ringing?
MILES: I don't answer the phone. I *never* answer the phone.
MUSICIAN: You've taken some flak in the past for hiring white musicians. Is it the same now?
MILES: Just a few musicians who can't play ask me why do I hire this guy and this guy and he's white? I say he's white but he can play, just listen to him. What difference does it make what color he is, he's black
MUSICIAN: What do you look for in a person to play with you?
MILES: His carriage...first. His carriage of the instrument. You can tell whether he plays or not by the way he carries the instrument, whether it *means* something to him or not. Then the way they talk and act. If they act too hip you know they can't play shit. So you don't bother with them. Can you hear me now on that thing? (He picks up the tape recorder, puts it under his mouth and begins walking around with it.)
MUSICIAN: You like to move around a lot, don't you?
MILES: Yeah, I can't be still. It's a trait I've had since I was a kid. Since I was a chi-yi-yild.
MUSICIAN: Mark told me you went out to see Willie Nelson in Vegas.
MILES: Yes. It was nice. I *love* the way Willie sings, the way he phrases is great. He phrases sometimes like I do.
MUSICIAN: Yeah, I've always thought he had some kind of jazz phrasing.
MILES: Don't say *jazz.* Jazz is like saying nigger phrasing. If you say jazz, automatically you think of what? You think of a black person, right?
MUSICIAN: No I don't. I think of music.
MILES: *Come on now, come on.*
MUSICIAN: I think of New York City, dawn on the Hudson, the sound of a saxophone...
MILES: Well then you're not the average person. Too bad you can't play an instrument or you'd be hired.
MUSICIAN: What kind of music do you listen to? You seem to incorporate a lot of different elements.
MILES: Gil Evans is my favorite. Anything he does, writes... He's also one of my best friends...He also guides me when I ask him what should I do. He's a nice guy to ask a question 'cause he'll say, "I don't know." (laughs) His favorite answer. He's all right. He's some person, he's quite a man. There's no words to describe *Mr. Evans.*
MUSICIAN: How much practicing did you guys do before you cut *The Man With The Horn*?
MILES: Me? None.
MUSICIAN: You just went right into the studio?
MILES: I did.
MUSICIAN: And the chops came back, just like that?
MILES: They don't leave. Feel that? (Presses my hand to his lips.) Keep feeling it. It took me thirty or forty years to build that. When you practice you take the *edge* off something. We don't practice, we *rehearse*, there's a difference. We rehearse and throw things around. After a couple of times they get the idea. And that's it.

Max Roach gave me $200 and told me I looked great, and I'm high and he knows it. It just embarrassed me to death. I looked in the mirror and I said, Goddamn it Miles, come on.

MUSICIAN: You played quite a bit of piano at the Savoy, and you also use the piano to cue the band.
MILES: That's right. Because all the guys I have play the piano.
MUSICIAN: You had Bill Evans play some piano at the Savoy too. You pushed him over to the piano and he looked like, Does he really mean it?
MILES: Bill Evans plays great piano, he used to play classical piano and give concerts of Rachmaninoff and stuff like that when he was 16. People don't know that. I wouldn't ask him to sit down if he couldn't play. He's one of the greatest musicians I've ever come upon. He and Gil Evans. There must be something with those Evanses. Must be a *breed.*
MUSICIAN: Isn't it uncanny that his name is Bill Evans, the same. I thought they were related or something.
MILES: It's too painful for me to think of *Bill* Evans and his piano. He's one of my favorite pianists. Or he was. But...that's the way it goes.

Miles live at the Fillmore West, 1972 and the Savoy, 1981. "The fact is, Miles Davis is never going to play anything banal." — Max Roach

MUSICIAN: Could you have ended up like Charlie Parker, dead that prematurely?
MILES: I'm not as selfish as he was.
MUSICIAN: Or you don't have that self-destructiveness
MILES: Some people say I do, but I'm not that selfish. Bird was really selfish. If you had some dope he'd want all of it. If you had some food, he'd want all of *that*.
MUSICIAN: There had to be a real self-hatred or —
MILES: I don't think so. People just say that kind of thing He loved life, you know. He had a lot of fun. If people had left him alone, he would have been all right.
MUSICIAN: If who had left him alone?
MILES: People saying you can't use this dope and to keep from getting busted you have to use all of it. You have to use all of it because if somebody catches you they'll put you in jail. What could be any worse than whiskey? It's got my liver all fucked up.
MUSICIAN: How is your health generally?
MILES: All right, because I didn't eat meat for seven years and I box.
MUSICIAN: What got you off meat?
MILES: A doctor went to check my blood pressure and he said, Where is it? Do you *have* any blood? Really? (laughs) He told me to eat some bread so I could get my strength up and have my blood. I had to have a five-hour operation and I needed strength for that.
MUSICIAN: Do you think your health can withstand all this touring now?
MILES: No.
MUSICIAN: What about Japan? Will you be playing every night?
MILES: I can take it.
MUSICIAN: Are you happy to be touring again? Do you enjoy it?
MILES: Not really. It's just playing with Bill and those guys. It turns me on. It makes the adrenalin start flowing. It's such a great bunch of guys, they play so well, it's a pity to let them down, you know. And Randy Hall, and my nephew and little Bobby, they all write great music for me. I need a bubble-gum song, I just call up Randy and say, Randy send me a bubble-gum song. Like "Shout."
MUSICIAN: What's the jazz scene like in Japan?
MILES: I don't know anything about jazz! You keep asking me about jazz! I've been in Japan and most countries. Japanese people are funny. They like anything that's good. You can't bring no bullshit over there. They know you're not coming back so they're gonna listen. So they can *copy*. You know how Japanese people are. They *copy* And when they copy, they copy the *best*. And they *want* the best. They don't settle for anything but the best.
MUSICIAN: You've said that you're not an entertainer. Is that still true?
MILES: Yeah, I'm an entertainer. I got a certain amount of ham in me. I don't know. I'm doin' what I'm doin' but I know I'm a big ham. It doesn't take away from the music, because I just enjoy what I'm doin' at that particular time, and now that I play so *different* you have to put in something for the rhythm that you don't play inside of. You know what I mean? It's like subtracting and puttin' in other beats. Because I play very strange I've heard it from my band, I play — you know how I play, mostly like sanctified people will play in a church, or the way a hillbilly sings songs. They sing songs to please the lyrics, and not to people, or the rhythms. And the words fall on *funny beats*. So that's the reason I come in like old Bill Cosby with his *green beans*. I love to hear him say that.
MUSICIAN: Do these guys really work you? The guys in your present band?
MILES: Shit, I be wringing wet after I get through playing with them. Dirty motherfuckers. (laughs) I got to play all these notes on account of they did this, they did that.
MUSICIAN: I've seen you backstage afterwards. You're full of energy onstage and then two seconds later you look like you're going to pass out.
MILES: Well, you have to relax. You can't stay that tense, you know?
MUSICIAN: And you have to try to live up to yourself as an artist.
MILES: Well, I always try to have a good tone, 'cause I know if I don't it's gonna drag me, and it's gonna drag people I respect a lot, people like Dizzy and Freddie Hubbard and all the trumpet

Memories of Miles

Sonny Rollins:

Every trumpet player was like Dizzy when I came up, and when Lowell Louis told me about Miles, he said, "This guy has a different sound." And I listened to him on the records at first, and I liked his lyricism and introspective approach. He was a strong individual from the beginning. When I joined Miles I had already done some little things around, with Bud Powell, for example. I learned just by being around Miles. I feel very close to him musically, I also feel very close personally, because we were both living uptown and there were a lot of personal things. I've always loved Miles and been inspired by him, and I will always defend him, as I've done throughout my career. And by the way, Miles gave me my nickname of Newk.

He was always a resourceful musician who was able to use whatever was around for his own sound. He doesn't like to be typecast, so what you would call his rock period was very natural. Miles' playing is never dated, and as a whole his expression is timeless, so that it can fit with anything. He hates cliche music, and so he probably didn't want to keep playing the way he did in the 60s. The music had gotten to a standstill insofar as a lot of guys were playing cliches other people had done over and over again. The music that Miles was playing was perfectly compatible with the guys that were coming up at that time, like Billy Cobham, John McLaughlin and Chick Corea, and I'm sure he was a hero figure to them. Miles always looks to get the best accompanying musicians, horn players first, as I know from my own experience. He's tops in my book.

Jackie McLean:

Miles made me grow up musically and not try to be a kid on the scene. I remember once he asked me about a tune he called and I didn't know it. My excuse was that I was still a young cat and there was a lot of tunes that I didn't know. He just told me, "That doesn't mean shit, being a young cat. I'm telling you this is the tune. Just learn it."

At the time when he was very young and on the scene, he was in the company of some very strong trumpet players. They had other things that Miles didn't possess at that time, yet he remained toe to toe with them — players like Fats, Kenny and Clifford. He didn't have the greatest technical ability and the greatest range for sustenance of high notes at the time. He got all that together as he developed on through the years. It was the way he spaced his phrases, his choice of notes and how he used the silences that made his music so great.

We were friends, you know. We laughed a lot and had a lot of other aspects to our relationship. We used to go to the movies together. One movie we used to always imitate, a character that was in *Union Station* — it was one of Charlton Heston's first movies. The heavy had a way of holding his head and Miles and I used to do that.

SONNY ROLLINS RON CARTER JACKIE McLEAN SONNY FORTUNE MAX ROACH

Red Garland:

Miles came to see me in Boston and said that he wanted to form a new group. He wanted me on piano, Sonny Rollins on saxophone. He didn't get Rollins so he asked me if I knew a saxophone player. I said, "John Coltrane."

He said, "Coltrane? Can he play?"

I said, "Well if he couldn't I wouldn't even mention his name."

Miles told me, "You pick up Coltrane and meet me in Baltimore. I have a young bass player out of Detroit named Paul Chambers." So we met him and Philly in Baltimore. We had one rehearsal at a place called Anchors Inn and went to work that night. It was just a natural thing.

He was a gentleman, a guy to have fun with. We'd hang out together during the day — the whole band. We'd go eat, stop off at a bar, walk around the streets and just have fun. We liked each other. Local musicians would organize a jam session and we'd go to those during the day.

I didn't have any idea as far as feeling exceptional, no. Miles didn't show it. We didn't change. Everybody just went along with it.

Ron Carter:

In the rhythm section at that time I was probably the oldest of the young bunch (Tony Williams and Herbie Hancock). I may have been thrust into the role of the rhythm section leader. But the context we were playing, it seemed to me clearly that the bass player should take an active role in its direction. In developing this kind of concept, Miles evidently was aware that the bass was now taking a new role, not just in his band but in music.

Sixty percent of this was the band taking a new direction and forty was Miles recognizing this, and, while not being able to predict it would go a certain way, understanding that it was definitely taking a turn. I think he was happy to take a back seat and be an inspiration but not hold the reins too tight, and give the horses their head knowing that it would work out all right.

It may have been Miles was into electronic music. It may have been Herbie was into electronic music. It may have been any of these factors. I was leaving the band and we had all talked about leaving. Maybe Miles felt that if he couldn't find guys who could carry on the tradition we had set up playing acoustically, he could find a whole different kind of sound from guys who maybe didn't play as well but had enough electronic interests and the control to be able to contribute to his new band.

But as far as my playing with Miles, it was an exceptional time with some exceptional players.

Sonny Fortune:

Miles has a certain kind of control in music, a certain kind of awareness, that I'm still trying to reach. I call him "Black Magic." Working with him was like looking at a house from the exterior for years and years and really admiring it, but then you have the opportunity to go inside and sit down and still you're satisfied.

Miles seems to allow you to perceive it how you choose to perceive it. He sets up the theme and allows the artist to interpret it as his own interpretation. At the time I was in the band he was really moving off a theme, as opposed to, say, a composition.

The audience was mostly rock as opposed to jazz. I've seen him in the two different settings. In the jazz situation he wasn't necessarily as visual as he was in the rock or fusion. For example, in the jazz situation, I remember Miles would play and walk off the stage after he had finished. But certainly when I was working with him in the band, he would never walk off the stage. The band was louder and Miles played fewer notes but whether all of that was because of the rock setting or a matter of ifs, I can't say. Those things did happen but they may have more or less evolved to that.

Max Roach:

The history of the word "jazz" is that is was "jass" first, from the jazz houses in the red light district of New Orleans: prostitution and drugs. I don't think Miles was using drugs when he first came to New York, but by 1949 he was an old man. I was playing with him by 1942. New York is tough. He was very young and had ideas and we were doing new things. The critics didn't necessarily like what we were doing and we weren't making records. I don't think New York just opens its arms up to somebody. Miles was a heroin addict with a stable. I don't know the details, but I knew he used drugs and he had to do everything he could to take care of his habit because you couldn't support it by just playing music.

I always knew that Miles would come back. I never even thought about it, because he's the best that ever did it so he's got to come back, though it must be painful for him touring, with all those operations he's had. Maybe he's widening the audience. He knows that if you play things with a familiar ring to them, there's a market for them. The fact is that Miles Davis is *never* going to play anything banal. He's going to play his way. But he's good at marketing, and if this is what the public will buy and accept, then he'll play that too.

players.
MUSICIAN: But your first responsibility is to yourself.
MILES: Yeah, your first responsibility is to yourself (a girl passes by outside) and girls like that one right there ...(laughs) Ah, yeah.
MUSICIAN: You get these young guys in your band, and they go off in other directions.
MILES: I didn't know they were that young. I don't pick a guy because he's young.
MUSICIAN: You pick them because they're good.
MILES: Coleman Hawkins once told me not to play with anybody old because they'll be hard to bend to the way you want them to play.
MUSICIAN: So you do what then?
MILES: I don't do anything. I just keep 'em from goin' out the door.
MUSICIAN: But you lead them, right?
MILES: They pay attention. And they're all professionals, so professionally they know if they miss anything, it's gonna fall right back on them. Everybody in my band could have a band right now. I don't tell them what to do, I just *suggest* something and if they don't like it they'll suggest something else. Say, we can do this *and* this. Or they'll know what I mean and add something to it that makes it better.
MUSICIAN: Have you taken a lot of heat because you were the first, or one of the first, to be a superstar?
MILES: Am I a superstar? I don't know that.
MUSICIAN: Why do you think everyone's so excited that you're playing again?
MILES: I thought they liked the music
MUSICIAN: You're one of the first to bring jazz to a lot of people.
MILES: Well, I don't know, see, 'cause Columbia is so *vague* and *cheap*. Now they're not cheap anymore, they think I'm a genius. They thought I was a genius before, but now they're *convinced*.
MUSICIAN: Because you're number one. You got on the pop charts.
MILES: AND I'M REALLY MILES DAVIE! They had me for three years. (sings to the tune of "Bette Davis Eyes") 'Cause I got...Betty Grable's legs...They wouldn't let me *sing*. Next album I'm singing Sure. I'm going to siiiiinnng some soooulful ballads. "Love Without Time." (sings) "Love without time. Just don't give me no limit. Don't need no limit"...I have it on tape
MUSICIAN: Have you got any nagging regrets about things you've done or haven't done?
MILES: No. (Pause.) No. No. No. No. No. I'm happy now. I could have been happy years ago if I had married Cicely. But years ago...no. Time takes care of that, time takes care of everything. If I had married Cicely she wouldn't have been a star now.
MUSICIAN: Wasn't she a star then?
MILES: Yes, but she was too involved with me to be, you know, to keep her mind and body and work on it. And *I* work. And besides she's very smart. I know a couple women like that who are very smart and I try to stay out of their way — even if I do love them. Because they're living the way they want to live. If they love you, it's bad. You have to keep asking them, "Do you love me...today?" Tuesday the same thing. You have to ask. Well, that's the way people do. I'm thinking of in general. Not me. I don't go around asking anything. Or anyone.
MUSICIAN: Were you completely alone those five years?
MILES: *I'm never alone.* I was...yeah, I was alone. I was alone most of the time. But I hate to be alone. I call up some of my friends. Gil, Bill Evans, Dave Liebman, Al Foster used to come by all the time, telling me what's happening out on the street.
MUSICIAN: Did you feel you wouldn't play again?
MILES: No. I knew if I felt like playing I would play. Even if it was just once. I didn't go places and sit in. Nobody had anything I wanted to sit in *with*. I went down to the Vanguard once and sat in the brass section, played everybody's trumpet, just once. I knew what was happening out there. I didn't have to hear. I'd take their word for it. When Al Foster would tell me ain't nothin' happening, or Dave Liebman, or Gil Evans, I know it isn't nothing happening.
MUSICIAN: Did life turn out the way you thought it would?
MILES: *I never thought about life.*
MUSICIAN: When you were a kid, what did you think you were going to be?
MILES: I thought I was going to be the greatest thing I ever attempted, in whatever I attempted. I thought I was going to be one of the best.
MUSICIAN: Were you the oldest child?
MILES: I was the oldest *boy*. My sister was the oldest.
MUSICIAN: You were a middle child? Middle kids are always stuck in between.
MILES: Stuck where? I had my paper route, making money, doing everything.
MUSICIAN: Middle kids sometimes need to achieve more, I've heard.
MILES: Well, that's what they say. I don't know what *they* say, or who says it. Maybe now, but not then. I know whatever I did, if it wasn't good, my father was gonna strangle me.

Just a few musicians who can't play ask me why do I hire this guy and this guy and he's white? I say he's white but he can play, just listen to him. What difference does it make what color he is, he's black.

MUSICIAN: He was a real perfectionist?
MILES: Well, he was a professional surgeon. An oral surgeon. Yeah, it was strict. Not religion, but it was strict. I couldn't fuck around, but they never did stop me. Guys used to come over to my house, like Clark Terry — he's my favorite trumpet player, Clark Terry — and I was about 14. He used to come over and ask my father could I go out on a jam session with him. My father would say yes. We ran a jam session because the guys coming up on the riverboat from New Orleans would jam all night. I'd tell Clark, "Go and ask him." 'Cause I wasn't afraid of my father. He'd never spank me or nothin'.
MUSICIAN: You were lucky. A lot of kids get spanked.
MILES: For what? I never did do anything.
MUSICIAN: You were perfect.
MILES: I'm *always* perfect. I was buying his clothes and fixing his false plates and all that shit. In the lab. That's *tedious*. Then I had a paper route, and I was jamming. Making six dollars a night.
MUSICIAN: When you were fourteen?
MILES: Fourteen I was making three dollars a night. Fifteen I was making six. Sixteen I was making $100 a week. When the guys come off from the boat, we'd jam. Clark and I would go to a club called the Moonlight Inn. We'd be in there about ten minutes and the place get packed. They'd say come on, Miles and Clark are jamming — wheet! — everybody would come.
MUSICIAN: Were you ever afraid that you weren't good enough?
MILES: Good enough for what? I was in a *band* (Eddie Randle's Blue Devils), paying me $100 a week to rehearse the band and to rehearse the show, 'cause all the guys had to go to the steel foundry so I was musical director. I didn't care what the guys off the boat thought.
MUSICIAN: You must have picked up the horn awful fast. You started at twelve? Thirteen?
MILES: Twelve. I knew I could play.
MUSICIAN: I've read about you spitting rice all the way to school and back to build up your lip. Did you think that up?
MILES: My instructor, Mr. Buchanan, Elwood Buchanan of East St. Louis, Illinois, he told me to do that. I had a mouth full of rice, or I'd take some beans and break them up in my mouth and spit out all the way to school. About a mile and a half.
MUSICIAN: So you did three miles a day of spitting. Was

there a band in school? Did you play there too?
MILES: Marching band. We'd march and the trumpet would go all over my fucking lip. (laughs) Marching. Me and my brother got — I taught him how to play trumpet. He was in the band. He plays trumpet, piano. He went to the conservatory. My mother played piano, my sister played piano. I don't think my father did anything, but watched everybody. My father taught us all to draw. I always like to have a pencil and paper around. You look at a paper and see things in it and I just draw.
MUSICIAN: What was your mother's name?
MILES: Cleota. She was a very beautiful woman. My sister and brother used to give *shows* every night and I was the audience. They would sit me down and say, "You ready, Junior?" I said, "Yeah I'm ready." Here they come, dancin', comin' out, you know, like — (makes tapping sound). I said, "No, you'll have to do better than that shit, you'll have to get some better steps than that to come out here with." They say, "Don't you like that?" I said, "No, I paid my money, come on, give me something." (laughs) Then they'd do some steps again. They said, "How do you like that?" I said, "That was good." I'd applaud. That would go on every night. It was very funny.
MUSICIAN: You grew up with a lot of good influences, Miles.
MILES: We had the wrong books. We didn't have any Negro histories. We had a school teacher named Miss Wilson who used to slip in, teach us Negro history, Marcus Garvey and things like that. And my father ran for state representative, my father did, of Illinois.
MUSICIAN: Did he win?
MILES: Of course not...My mother was pretty and very...blank-faced. Just like you're looking at me...*no expression*. She looked at me when I played the trumpet. She'd say *when are you gonna play something that I can understand*?
MUSICIAN: She didn't like it?
MILES: She didn't say that. If she didn't like it, she used to tell me to go down to the basement. And my big band would come, we would rehearse. I had a big band when I was about 15. With 18 musicians, and I had to pay 'em. It was the school band, swing band. The swing band was in the marching band.
MUSICIAN: And you organized it.
MILES: 'Cause I had the basement. My basement, my band. (laughs) And I used to copy the music off the records. I was the leader. We never did play *any* place but in the basement. We used to have some gigs, but it was only four of us would play.
MUSICIAN: So you knew pretty early in life what you wanted to do.
MILES: I couldn't help it, 'cause I played trumpet so bad, had to keep playing to clean it up...My mother said, "He's crazy." My father told her, he say, "Remember that. Now leave him alone." My father was a riot, boy.
MUSICIAN: What was New York like when you first arrived?
MILES: *Oh man*. I was very excited when I first came. I used to walk in the rain. I'd never seen a place like that before. *Subways*. All sorts of pastry, until I tried all the pastry, and it tasted like shit. It wasn't scary, because I wasn't looking *up*. I had one thing to do, was go to Juilliard. I was getting an allowance, I'd get the bus and go to Juilliard. I'd get $40 a week...when I *got* it. I blew it, takin' care of Bird and Dex and all them guys. They didn't have any money, *I* had the money. Got so bad I used to call them, just keep some of it, 'cause those guys asked me for money.
MUSICIAN: You were rooming with Charlie Parker?
MILES: He roomed with *me*. And *please* put in that I was born May 26, 1926. Somebody tried to fuck that all up.
MUSICIAN: Bird and Dex were putting all their money in the arm? Is that how you got into it?
MILES: No. I just did that — Gene Ammons and I done that, we just started doin' it. First we started snorting it, then we started shooting it, and I didn't even know what was happening. I should have thought about it a little bit. I stopped after about three or four years. I stopped...*cold turkey*. My father bought me a new five-gaited pony. We had 500 acres near St. Louis, in Milstead, Illinois. I stayed out on the farm for about two and a half weeks until I was straight.
MUSICIAN: What made you finally decide to stop?
MILES: Max Roach gave me $200 and put it in my pocket, say I looked good. It drug me so much I went right to St. Louis. I said that motherfucker gave me $200, told me I looked good and I'm fucked up and he knows it. And he's my best friend, right? It just *embarrassed* me to death. I looked in the mirror and I said, Goddamn it Miles, come on. So I called my father to send me a ticket, and he sent me a ticket.
MUSICIAN: Did he know you were strung out?
MILES: My sister told him. *She tells him everything*. I said, You bitch, you fucking whore. She said, Well somebody had to tell him, and I just told him. I said, All right, all right, all right...He asked me — we walked out in the pasture and he said, "If you were with a woman and the woman left you, I would know what to tell you, you could get another woman. But this you have to do by yourself, you know that, 'cause you been around drugs all your life. You know what you have to do..." So I said, "Do I look like I have a habit to you?" He said *yess*. He had a set of rooms like this and a big large farm house, colonial type farm house, and I went in there and shut the door and didn't come out. The maid said, "Junior you want some breakfast?" I said, "*Get* outta here." I did that for about two weeks.
MUSICIAN: Was that the worst you've ever been through?
MILES: Yeah. Oh, it's terrible.
MUSICIAN: I had a friend who lived across the hall from me in Detroit who did that. He was screaming, begging...
MILES: I wasn't doin' none of that shit, 'cause my father was next door and I was sure not gonna let him hear me holler and scream...Had a plan though, see, I'm gonna jump out this window, and luckily I'll break my leg and they'll give me something for my leg and I'll be cool, you know? Yeah, maybe I'll hit my head on something, knock me out for awhile...I said, No, I'm gonna break my right arm, can't play the trumpet, fuck that. I'll just stay here. (laughs) So each day it got better and better.

I couldn't help playing, 'cause I played trumpet so bad, had to keep playing to clean it up. My mother said, "He's crazy." My father told her, he say, "Remember that. Now leave him alone." My father was a riot, boy.

MUSICIAN: That's what I was asking before. Why did you end up not going the way Charlie Parker went?
MILES: 'Cause he didn't stop. I got tired of lookin' at myself. I was a pimp, I had a lot of girls, I was doin' this, doin' that...I had more money then than I have now. Yeah, I had about seven girls, made a lot of money. Can't 'call the names, though.
MUSICIAN: I never understood why women would turn the money over to a pimp.
MILES: They wouldn't give me their money. They just give me money to take them out. They made a lot of money...screwin'. They didn't give all their money to me, they just said, "Miles, take me out. I don't like people I don't like, I like you, take me out..." That's like a family they like to be in. I know, I can understand that. Yeah, that's what it is. (pause) Question.
MUSICIAN: What makes you angry?
MILES: Everything.
MUSICIAN: What makes you mad?
MILES: Everything.
MUSICIAN: What makes you happy?
MILES: Little things, you know. Everything doesn't make me mad, angry. It takes a lot to make me angry enough. It's not that I'm angry, it's the way I speak. I don't *lie*, so it comes off like that. I ask people, when I say something, they think that my voice every time I'm straining to talk sounds like I'm drunk or high or something. So I just...When I get on the phone they say, "Yes ma'am, what did you say?" They think I'm a woman. (laughs)

"I know I'm a big ham;" Miles is not totally unaware of his mystique.

MUSICIAN: There's a real reactionary swing right now with Reagan and the Moral Majority.

MILES: It's a swing, yes. But the people still, they test you and see how you are...and they let you know that they're not prejudiced. Which takes quite some time, it's like 15, 20 minutes. Then you know that they're all right.

MUSICIAN: You've been hassled by cops, been beaten up.

MILES: It's the way I talk to them. I gotta buy a Ferrari, it's red. right? They stop me and they say...I was standing outside Birdland once and a cop asked me to go *in*side. I said for what? He said *for what*? I said, "That's what I said." He said, "Because I said so." I say, "I just got through doing a broadcast for the armed servies, I'm trying to dry off, get some air, it's smokey down there..." He said, "You're a wise guy aren't you?" I said, "Yes, you know I'm wise because I don't have that funny looking blue suit you got on." He said, "Ohh here we go, you're under arrest." And two guys jumped out of the crowd and started beating on my head.

MUSICIAN: There's a picture of you all bandaged. You made a good remark. They asked you if the cop dropped his nightstick and did you pick it up, and you said, "If I picked it up I wouldn't look like this."

MILES: Right. They asked me did I hit him.

MUSICIAN: And once someone shot at you in Brooklyn.

MILES: I didn't know what that was all about. The agency knew, 'cause they were having an agency war. I didn't know it. I was talking to Marguerite. If she had gotten out of the car she'd have got killed. But I had just kissed her in the car, you know? And I look around and this guy is staring at me — (makes the sound of a gun firing) and I said *shit*, this is...

MUSICIAN: Did you think it was her husband?

MILES: I don't mess with married women.

MUSICIAN: Was that the last major thing that happened to you of that kind?

MILES: Yeah, but I used to get arrested all the time. (spars with Mark Rothbaum, who is passing through) Violence gets you nowhere, Mark. Great guy, Mark. My managerrrrrr.

MUSICIAN: Bill told me you're a good cook.

MILES: Very good. Because the women I had couldn't — bitches couldn't cook. I picked it up from my father actually. although my mother would cook. He would say, "Come on, go in there with me," and we'd go and he would cook something...else. I have a French cookbook and anything I taste, I could tell what's in it. I get a kick out of doing it, you know, for them (the band), 'cause I don't eat that much. I don't like a lot of food.

MUSICIAN: What do you do in your leisure time?

MILES: I haven't been to a movie in ten years. Maybe longer.

MUSICIAN: Do you read much?

MILES: No. But I can *sing*. I read music books. And, uh, different things. Dirt. Like in *People* magazine (laughs) and the *Enquirer*, stuff like that. I'm a real New Yorker, I want to know what's happening out there in Hollywood.

MUSICIAN: Well here's the *New York Post*'s big headline: SEX FIEND IS LOOSE!

MILES: That means all of us are loose.

MUSICIAN: Do you still box?

MILES: That's my pastime. Everybody comes to see me. All the ex-fighters are Moslems. I'm not Moslem, but I lean toward Islam. They're a great people, you know.

MUSICIAN: Do you know Ali?

MILES: Sure I know him. He's crazy. These guys in Islam, they say he and I act alike. I say nobody acts like me. I don't act like anyone — Hey, Jim! What happened to the hamburgers?

JIM: You ate the hamburgers. Or Chris ate them. I can put two more on.

MILES: No, you know, just — I'd like to have a *thin* hamburger, not a thick one. And I want an onion. Hey, Marko, I want an onion, a thin slice of onion, and a tomato — piece of tomato, and mustard...and an old pickle. An old Jewish pickle. Not PLO...POL.

MUSICIAN: What are your plans now, Miles? Are you going to stay active, doing this gig?

MILES: I'll stay active till I *die*, now.

MUSICIAN: You're not going to go back into...

MILES: Seclusion? No, I had enough of that. I did what I wanted to do. Stopped for awhile, give the trumpet a rest, give my head a rest. Relax. That was it. Do I get paid for this (the interview)?

MUSICIAN: How does the world look to you?

MILES: I don't know about the world, you can see it's already fucked up. They still practicing genocide with the black people, nobody ever says anything about that, they always talk about the Jews. They never talk about the black people gettin' fucked up. Been that junk for years, starvin' and all that shit. That's one of the things you don't speak of, speak about.
MUSICIAN: Are you politically involved now? You gave a benefit concert or so back in the sixties?
MILES: CORE. For CORE I did it. For SNCC. I helped out the African Foundation. I just did one concert. It was a double concert, but I'm not going that way again. I think the government should take care of their own people. They took my son, fucked *him* up in the war. I don't even want to say which son.
MUSICIAN: Is there anything you want that you don't have?
MILES: You, Cheryl, I want you, but I know I can't have you.
MUSICIAN: Besides that.
MILES: I want a cigarette boat.
MUSICIAN: A cigarette *what*?
MILES: *Boat*. Speedboat. I want me a solar energy house.
MUSICIAN: You'd have to go someplace where there's more sun in the winter. Would you miss New York if you left it?
MILES: Sure. I'm not going too far from New York. I love it. I love New York. I love the noise. I can't sleep without noise. I can't sleep without lights. I can't sleep without New York. I would never leave New York. Never ever ever ever never never never never. (sings) "That's why New York's my home, da dela de dadah..." (makes knocking sounds with mouth)
MUSICIAN: Do you ever think about teaching people?
MILES: I teach people all the time. Don't I teach you. Bill Evans? Bill Evans, have I ever taught you anything?
EVANS: Everything.
MILES: Asshole. Fuck. (laughing) There's my favorite pupil. They're teaching me right back. Puts you right back on it. Bill's my *right hand man*, boy. Without him I don't know what I'd do. Isn't that right, Bill? Without you I wouldn't know what I'm doing, would I? Without you and Leroy.
EVANS: No. Leroy does all our business.
MILES: If Leroy was out here today, what d'you think he'd say, Bill? What do you think Leroy would say about this place out here? *Where all the pictures at? There's no pictures? Let's go.* Want me to call up Leroy? (horse passes by) Hi, horse.
MUSICIAN: I don't have any more questions, Miles. Just tell me what you think you're about.
MILES: About WHAT?
MUSICIAN: You always sound like...do you feel you're misunderstood?
MILES: I didn't say that. It comes across like that because they're white and I'm black.
MUSICIAN: It even comes across like that when you're interviewed by a black man.
MILES: Well, it must be a guy who's trying to act black, guy trying to act black and he's really white and has a black face. Should we go into that?
MUSICIAN: I just want to know who you think *you* are.
MILES: My brother says I'm King Tut...reincarnated. That's what he calls me, King Tut.
MUSICIAN: Who do you think you are?
MILES: I don't know, I think I'm a fellow.
MUSICIAN: Well then, what moves or motivates you?
MILES: When I hear some good music it motivates me to the...*nth* degree.
MUSICIAN: But you also create the music.
MILES: I know. I'm King Tut. I write the music and I create the music and I play the songs that I love. Can I go now?

Discography of a Champion

By Rafi Zabor

Let's say in front that no living musician has a better record collection, and that this discography is avowedly casual because it would take a bigger fool than I to attempt something definitive. If it's ineffable, don't eff with it.

The first recordings to go to are those Davis did with Charlie Parker from 1945-48, which are available under Parker's name on *The Savoy Sessions (Master Takes)* and *The Complete Savoy Studio Sessions* (two and five records respectively, on Arista/Savoy) and *The Very Best Of Bird* and *Charlie Parker* (two and six discs each, Warner Bros.). The first myth to be explored is that of Miles' lameness on these sessions. It's true he doesn't sound as good as Parker, but then neither do you. Also note that the last person to tell you how Miles was still under the influence of Freddie Webster never heard Freddie Webster. So let's look at the record. It's round and dark. When Miles does sound lame with Parker it's almost always when his horn is wearing a cup mute — unflattering to his tone and lacking the icy pathos of the later Harmon mute. Although he was Bird's apprentice Miles' open horn already was a remarkably identifiable *voice* for his age, one of the very few of his generation to pick up the gauntlet of originality where Bird had thrown it down.

Later Davis appearances with Charlie Parker are available on a number of live dates, can't keep track of them now, and a series of studio recordings for Verve, which have been available in a variety of reissue formats. My favorite sample, and indeed my favorite of all early Miles Davis solos, is on "K.C. Blues," by which time the trumpeter had divested himself of every trace of awkwardness and grown even more sexy than Lady Day.

This brings us to Miles' first great *coup* as a leader, which hindsight has retroactively entitled *The Birth Of The Cool* (Capitol). It is also the first public sign of how brilliantly collaborative a bandleader Davis could be, and how inspired an opportunist, in the highest sense of the word. Miles had been intrigued with the charts Gil Evans had done for the Claude Thornhill Orchestra, met up with Evans and his circle, and conceived with them the idea of a nine-piece band that might aerate bebop with an unprecedented orchestral breeze. The results were both brilliant and influential, but of more interest to us here was how conspicuous a departure from the known precedents Miles was able to make of his first outing as a leader.

In the meantime, Miles had developed a Habit that would make the next few years his darkest. He eventually kicked but lost his early eminence on the scene. A series of twofers on Prestige contains virtually all Davis' most important recordings in these crucial years of his development, 1951-56. He had to unlearn bebop and invent himself, and these recordings in particular show Davis divesting himself of the obligatory notiness of bop and securing for himself a context in which less might be made to mean more. On the one hand he needed to do this because he could not, after all, play like Dizzy; on the other hand, his tone had (by 1954 certainly) become unforgettable. He could sink a note into the heart of life, make a silence speak volumes.

When you hear a great side from 1951, you wonder why Miles should have had to labor in obscurity at all. The indispensible early album is *Dig* (Prestige), recounting the 1951 collaboration with the young Sonny Rollins and the younger Jackie McLean. Valuable transitional material can be had on *Miles Davis Volumes 1 & 2* (Blue Note), 1952-54, including two superior sextets and some classic quartet material featuring Horace Silver, Percy Heath and Art Blakey. Further Rollins meetings ('51, '53, '56) are heard on *Collectors Items* (Prestige) (one of them even featuring some so-so Charlie Parker on tenor), but more essential are *Tune Up* and *Tallest Trees* (Prestige), which *belong* in your record collection. *Tune Up* features, in addition to a quartet session that extends the Blue Note dates, the ultraclassic 1954 "Walkin'," which, when released on a Prestige 10" and played live at Newport '55, showed the world to what a high and lonely place Miles had

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The Legend of LOWELL GEORGE

and LITTLE FEAT

A tale of low down, tequila-guzzlin', slide guitar romance, hollywood heroes, vanilla grits and one fantastic rock 'n' roll band.

By Bill Flanagan

Lowell George was one of the great talents of rock. After a brief stint with the Mothers of Invention, he founded and led the epic 70s group, Little Feat. He was a gifted songwriter ("Willin'," "Dixie Chicken" and "Roll 'Um Easy" are among his best-known compositions), guitarist (he played on sessions for James Taylor, Bonnie Raitt, Robert Palmer and many, many others) and record producer (the Grateful Dead, Valerie Carter).

But it was Little Feat Lowell loved, and it is for Little Feat he is remembered. Originally a quartet that souped up blues and country-rock foundations with Lowell's remarkable, soulful vocals and distinctive "backwoods" slide guitar playing, the band evolved into a mature sextet capable of weaving sophisticated vocal and instrumental melodies over a funky black bottom.

This remarkable music was always overlaid with laughter. The wit of the lyrics, a humor consistent with Little Feat's whole image, combined with the music's boozy raunch and high spirits to make the band as agreeable to boogie enthusiasts as to pop aesthetes. Lowell George's love for the *possibilities* of Little Feat was the driving force in his public life, and adds the poignancy of the unfinished to his early death at 34.

Lowell George's childhood was, from all accounts, hilarious, sad, and completely atypical. Born in 1945, he grew up in Hollywood where his father, Willard, was a top furrier. Lowell's dad was a pal to the big movie stars of the day. Martin Kibbee, a childhood friend, says that Lowell's father "used to hang out with W.C. Fields and Wallace Beery in the old days when America was really America and waste was rampant."

Lowell had an older brother, W. Hampton, Jr., whose bullying made the chubby younger boy miserable. "Lowell said he was picked on by everyone," his wife Elizabeth recalls, "including neighbor Errol Flynn's monkey, who would swing down and steal Lowell's apples." He studied harmonica at the age of five, appearing with Hampton on "Ted Mack's Amateur Hour." "He went on to flute," Elizabeth explains, "studying classical flute from the age of 12, and then getting into jazz. He used to go to the beatnik clubs on Sunset strip when he was 13 or 14 and just sit and listen."

"Lowell was always a musically gifted kid," Martin Kibbee recalls. "He was a fantastic flute player, but he gave it up when he saw Roland Kirk. He was a funny guy. He liked to be best at whatever he did, so he was discouraged by excellence along parallel lines. His flute style was similar to Kirk's, but the guy blew him away. So he switched to slide guitar."

Lowell graduated from Hollywood High in 1963 and majored in art at Valley College. On his 21st birthday he came into an inheritance from his father, and used the money to leave

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school and put together a band, the Factory, with Kibbee on bass and a fellow named Toronado Turner (real name Warren Klein) on second guitar. They found drummer Richie Hayward through an ad in the *L.A. Free Press*, and were managed by Herbie Cohen, whose star talent was Frank Zappa. Factory opened shows for Zappa's Mothers of Invention. Zappa eventually produced sessions for the Factory, and if George was much impressed by the head Mother's professionalism and musical discipline, he was most influenced by Zappa's approach to running a band, dismissing any hippie notions of artistic democracy. Lowell became a great believer in that one-leader method.

Despite their admiration for Zappa, Lowell and the Factory became disenchanted with Herbie Cohen. Entrepreneur Marshal Lieb signed them to Uni Records, where the band was urged to cash in on the popular folk-rock sound of the day by adopting a Byrds-like style. Lowell resented the departure from his Howlin' Wolf-inspired blues-rock, but was convinced to listen to the pros.

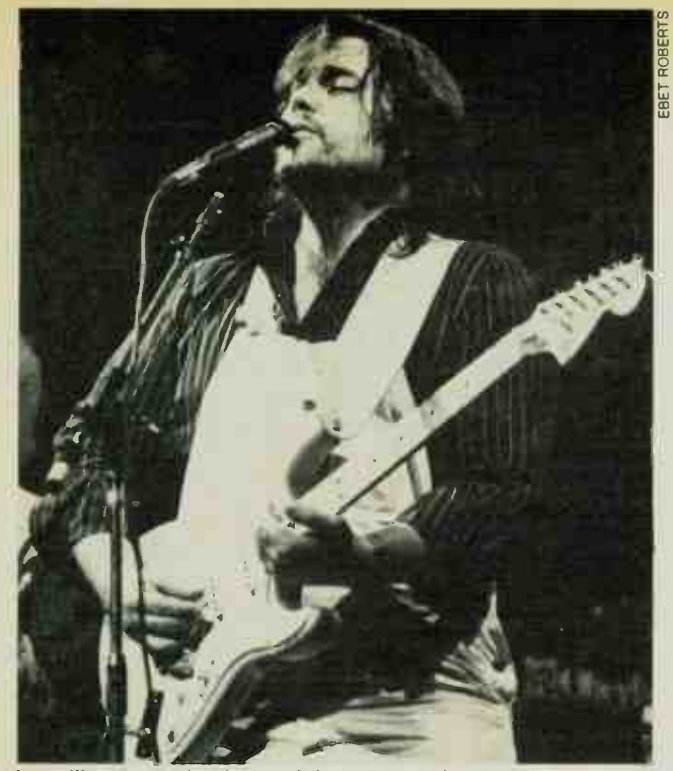
"Lowell wanted a grittier sound," Kibbee explains. "But Lieb tried to homogenize us into an extremely white kind of thing. That was against Lowell's instincts, but he went along with it 'cause the guy promised us shoeboxes full of hundred-dollar bills."

The Factory album (dismissed by *Billboard* as "another jingle-jangle folk rock group") bombed. "That had a very heavy effect on Lowell," Kibbee goes on. "We were young and he allowed himself to be pushed around by this guy who had a Cadillac and a Piaget watch. We all thought he knew what he was doing, but as it turned out we knew better. We just hadn't realized it."

Lowell left Factory and did session work, played briefly with the Standells ("Dirty Water") and went back to school. This time he chose L.A. City College and a music theory major. He supplemented the curriculum by studying sitar with Ravi Shankar.

"Lowell was semi-political on the campus, too," Elizabeth George recalls. "I had known Lowell since high school, but at this point he became my neighbor. He was into building model airplanes. Lowell had some idea of bombarding Mayor Yorty with remote control model airplanes. He was trying to figure out ways to get them to fly through the mayor's office window."

George also used his hiatus to return to a favorite hobby, the martial arts (Hampton had come back from the air force to find his sibling victim not only proficient, but instructing classes in self-defense.) "Lowell was heavy into karate," Kibbee explains. "And very much into the Oriental master riff with his karate teacher. He had a Japanese bamboo flute which he



EBET ROBERTS

Lowell's stingingly sleazy slide guitar and "white boy got the woo-woo's" voice were his bread and butter.

studied. I guess he was centering in on himself during those years."

Eventually George drifted back to Zappa, joining the Mothers for nine months in the late 60s and playing on *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*. By the time George wrote "Willin'," his country-influenced ode to drunk driving and controlled substances, Zappa suggested that the guitarist was ready to form his own group, dubbed "Little Feat" by Mother Jimmy Carl Black.

Richie Hayward agreed to join Lowell in his new project. Martin Kibbee did a brief stint as bassist but, "at that time Lowell had become very determined to become leader of the group, Frank Zappa style, and I wasn't goin' for that so I quit." Lowell's childhood pal continued to contribute to the band by co-writing with Lowell such Feat classics as "Dixie Chicken" and "Rock And Roll Doctor" under the pseudonym Fred Martin.

George raided the Mothers for a new bassist and came away with Roy Estrada. A few months earlier a 21-year-old pianist was hanging around Bizarre Records, Zappa's label; a secretary there told the young man about the new band. Bill Payne was more interested in Zappa-type compositions than in the stark Americana of "Willin'," but the pianist channeled his energy into the unexpected jams that grew from, and unusual changes he could work into, the band's superficially traditional compositions.

"Roy knew the bass very well," recalls Payne. "Frank had had him playing everything under the sun, and his being an ensemble player really helped. With the four of us, there were nights when it was as hot as anything I ever played in. Other times it was not that good. 'Cause none of us ever played the same thing twice. Maybe I might overplay on some things. And Richie certainly did to a degree also. But that's the fun thing about playing in a band. You can make mistakes, and sometimes those mistakes lead you to something you'd want to try again."

With his band more or less assembled, Lowell, whom the others trusted to make the business decisions, set out to negotiate a recording contract. "Lowell and I went out to Lenny Waronker's office at Warners and literally did a song and dance," Payne remembers. "Lowell brought an acoustic guitar and there was a piano. We played Lenny eight or twelve tunes. We said, 'Yeah, we have a band.' He said, 'Great,' and he signed us. Russ Titelman was involved as producer. Man," Payne laughs, "I thought, 'Six months from now we'll be riding around in limousines and buying houses!' Seven years later..."

The first self-titled Little Feat album, produced by Titelman and released in 1971, made hardly a ripple. The compositions (George and Payne were almost evenly represented) were strong, but the production — the execution — seemed tentative, as if the band were holding back their flights of originality to better fit a marketable blues/country-rock style.

It was 1972's *Sailin' Shoes* that alerted critics and hard core insiders to Lowell George's quartet. Produced by Ted Templeman, *Sailin' Shoes* featured a definitive "Willin'" (a rather half-assed version had appeared on the first album) and later Feat standards such as the title tune and "Apolitical Blues." George was established as lead vocalist and principal songwriter, although it was the Payne/Hayward "Tripe Face Boogie" ("Gonna boogie my scruples away") that was often quoted as evidence that Little Feat were a band infusing standard rock forms with quick wit and a personal, personable style.

Little Feat were musical subversives, hanging unusually sophisticated changes and literate lyrics on blues structures. The band's musicianship and range of influences carried them beyond the blues cliches that are the pitfall of many rock soloists.

If *Sailin' Shoes* (Warner Bros. balked at Lowell's suggestive original title, *Thank You! I'll Eat It Here!*) was the world's real introduction to Little Feat, it was also the end of the original band. *Sailin' Shoes* sold only about 15,000 copies, Roy Estrada soon departed for Captain Beefheart and three new members came in. Kenny Gradney, who had just left Delaney & Bonnie, auditioned for the bass spot. He got the job, and brought along a friend, percussionist Sam Clayton. The group decided to add a second guitarist, and remembered Paul Barrere, who had auditioned for the bass spot in the band's pre-Estrada days. Asked why an ensemble that wasn't making much money as a quartet would expand to a six-piece, Payne laughs and answers, "We didn't have a good grasp of economics."

The new Little Feat debuted before 100,000 people at Hawaii's Crater Festival. Their second gig was before an enthusiastic hometown crowd at the Fox Theatre in Long Beach. Payne jokes that those two shows were enough to fool the new members into thinking they had lucked into a real big-time band. In fact, Little Feat were supplementing their income by backing up and recording with other artists like Chico Hamilton and Robert Palmer and even doing an extended date at a private strip club on L.A.'s Eighth Avenue. The new members introduced a new, heavier syncopation to Little Feat. The group began work on *Dixie Chicken*, an album that saw George assuming the role of producer, confirming and apparently consolidating his leadership.

In reality, the expanded lineup and the group's sound diversifying away from Lowell's voice and guitar planted the seeds for Bill Payne to question Lowell's one-leader concept. Payne was no longer a kid. His keyboards, a distinctive part of the group's sound, were gaining wide recognition, and he was writing more songs than the band was finding room for. Payne enlisted Paul Barrere, himself a fine composer, for a *coup de Feat*.

Dixie Chicken was a triumph critically, artistically, cult-ally; every way but commercially. The album did not break through to a wide audience and frustrations were setting in. Payne was offered a place with the reorganized Doobie Brothers, who had just nipped Skunk Baxter from Steely Dan. Richie Hayward broke his foot. Little Feat broke up.*

*Chronicling Little Feat's many breakups is confusing, as even the participants have trouble recalling the right dates. The big shake-up is often referred to as having taken place in 1975 — between *Feats Don't Fail* and *The Last Record Album*. What seems to have happened was that there was a second — perhaps staged — breakup at that time, from which Lowell negotiated for a better deal for the band with Warner Bros. It seems likely that the changes ratified in 1975 were actually started, quietly, more than a year earlier.

But not for long. Lowell George could have maintained his one-leader concept by starting a solo career, but he seemed to love Little Feat to the point of subverting his own convictions. It is remarkable to consider that an artist as gifted as Lowell George may have believed he *needed* Little Feat. The band agreed to reunite, but only as a musical democracy. (The Doobie Brothers, losing Payne, took Baxter's suggestion and added Mike McDonald.)

During this period Lowell was frequently in the company of Van Dyke Parks and John Sebastian. Sebastian says of the '74 changes, "That was an ongoing procedure. Part of the chemistry of good rock 'n' roll bands is friction, and counter-irritants. Little Feat, being one of the best, did have those periodic things. But what differentiated them from so many other superstar groups was that it was always done with the overlay of hilarious laughter. Granted, everybody was ready to kill each other, but I never saw that sense of humor really wane. Everything was done in good, rather aggressive humor."

Lowell still produced *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*, the aptly titled follow-up to *Dixie Chicken*. But after that LP Little Feat entered their third era, the time during which George seemed almost outside the band. 1975's *The Last Record Album* (talk about subtlety...) contained only two and a half Lowell George compositions, and although he was still listed as producer, Lowell wrote in the liner notes, "I'm lowell george the so-called producer slide guitar player who sings but let that end right there cause all i did was sit in the control room and watch the rest of the folk in the group bring forth an identity that represents the so-called musical statement about the whole being the sum total of its parts."

Lowell's drinking was blamed for a bout with hepatitis, and on 1977's *Time Loves A Hero* he contributed only one and a half songs.

By 1976 Lowell was traveling separately from the rest of the band. He paid for a motor home and while the others flew, Lowell would travel with only Gene Vano, his friend and driver. The mobile home was equipped with a four-track recorder, drum synthesizer and digital delays.

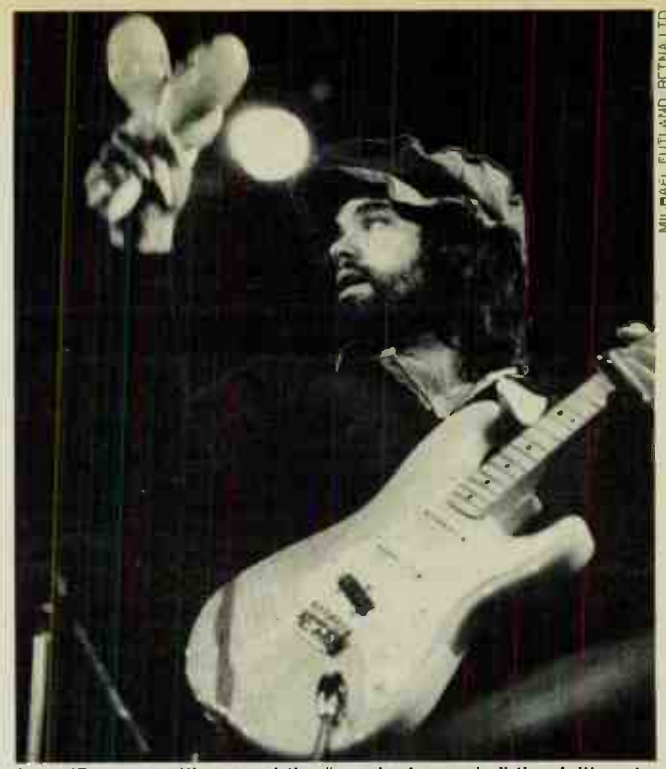
Says Bill Payne, "Lowell didn't like flying a lot. Plus, he wanted to be in an atmosphere to write. Which is kind of weird, 'cause he didn't write that many songs in the later years. Sometimes you're just not going to come up with the stuff. You run into periods of being dry for any number of different reasons. But nobody in Little Feat ever aced anybody out of writing anything. If you came up with the songs, and they were good enough, they would appear on an album. There was never a song that that guy presented to us that he wrote that didn't appear. He just wasn't coming up with a lot of things."

Dylan wanted me to work for him. He said, "You could be as big as Jackson Browne!" I said, "Man, do you listen to Jackson Browne?" He said, "No." I said, "Well...?" The next day I came back and there were Jackson Browne records all over the place.

"I started out driving the motor home for Lowell in 1976," Gene Vano remembers. "Just he and I. Everyone else flew. Lowell was not crazy about airplanes. Bonnie Raitt rode to a few dates with us. Lowell had no ludicrous reasons for not liking airplanes. His hearing was fairly sensitive and his ears would go blooey with the altitude. So whenever he could, he chose not to fly. He was a very complex man. On another tour I drove one of the semis, and he would ride with me in the truck. For the same reason. To get out of the mass movement and the plane situation."

Gene and Lowell would drive as far as the 900-odd miles from a show in Mississippi to a show in Virginia in a night and a half. When they had a break they would pursue Lowell's greatest love, fishing.

Bonnie Raitt sensed Lowell moving apart from the rest of the band during that period. "I had always foreseen more problems with them getting along from the first time I met them," Raitt says. "I was opening for Little Feat on a little mini-tour through the Southwest. Lowell was traveling in a separate mobile home, and I traveled with him for awhile. He had a whole miniature studio set up in the GMC. He was playing stuff like Scottish bagpipe music, Eastern European folk music, records of people singing really weird chants. And then he'd segue into old blues albums of people doing field hollers, and notice the similarities of the scales. Lowell was real esoteric. He was really into Indian music, and he was a scholar of the kinds of music blues came out of, which has to do with a certain kind of scale and bending notes. He pointed out similarities between Scottish, Indian and Eastern European music, and blues. I had really enjoyed those types of music before I met Lowell, and I thought it was uncanny that he pointed out the ways in which they share the same kind of singing.


MICHAEL PUTLAND RETNA LTD

Lowell's songwriting used the "cracked mosaic," the deliberate disassembly of the verse-chorus-bridge pop songform.

"I know that had Lowell lived he would have gone on to do incredible things utilizing his knowledge. That was also the first time I realized how serious the rift in Little Feat was. He was talking about that. Plus, Lowell's habits really irked other members of the band who were not prone to the same lifestyle. That's as subtly as I can put it. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about, but I'd better watch what I say."

Lowell's rift with the other members of Little Feat was deepened by the effect his style of living was having on his ability to perform. Having tried many drugs, Lowell's weight problem and cocaine use were taking a toll.

"Lowell was only able to sing three or four songs a night on the last tour," Payne says. "There were times, like D.C., when he could sing more, and he inevitably got himself up for those shows. But there was a gig, I think in Iowa, where he didn't sing at all. I kind of felt that the guy was the focus of the thing, and if he wasn't feeling well enough to sing the songs, I wasn't sure what we were doing out there."

"I was asked about Timmy Hardin recently," sighs John Sebastian. "Timmy was a clear-cut case where he could have been dead 15 years before he died, at any day along the way. I did not think of Lowell in those terms. Even though he was snorting a lot of cocaine, it didn't seem as destructive in him as I've seen it in a lot of others. I know only about three or four

people who've been able to go through cocaine use with any sense of humor at all. That's the first thing that departs. And because Lowell kept his sense of humor, I think I wasn't as worried as maybe I should have been."

In early 1979 Lowell finally finished the solo album he had been working on in his spare time for three years. He delivered the record to Warner Bros. calling it *Thanks, I'll Eat It Here*.

But Lowell's principal concern was the new Little Feat album (*Down On The Farm*). He was producing again, and completion of the record was awaiting the return of Payne and Barrere from a tour they had gone out on backing Nicolette Larson. Upon their return Payne and Barrere told George they were leaving Little Feat, perhaps to maintain the band they had formed to support Larson. "There was a difference of opinion," Bill Payne says. "Not only on the production of *Down On The Farm*, but on our whole direction."

"Lowell never wanted to leave Little Feat. He was not the easiest communicator in the world. He sometimes didn't have the tact and diplomacy he should've had. But he never wanted to leave the band."
—Gene Vano

So Lowell put together a touring band and headed out, in the late spring of 1979, to prove that he could still cut it as a band leader and front man. If he felt trepidation at the outset, he was understandably delighted when the *Thanks, I'll Eat It Here* tour drew rave reviews. Feat fans, far from being angry about the reported breakup, were delighted to have Lowell George back up front for the whole night.

Gene Vano, by this time promoted to Lowell's road manager, recalls, "He was excited about the fact that the solo tour was successful. We did some knockout shows. With the kind of shyness he had before he went on the tour — Lowell hadn't done anything without Little Feat in so many years — perhaps he doubted it could happen. And it was good. And yet, as soon as it was good, Lowell was excited about the chance to get back with the band and make Little Feat happen again.

"Perhaps somehow in the problems within Little Feat, not the least of which were caused by Lowell, he might have had some feelings of inadequacy. A feeling of, 'Gee, am I really contributing?' And all of a sudden, when he could do it alone, I guess he felt stature again.

"Part of the real bottom line problem," Gene suggests, "was that the band was always afraid Lowell was getting ready to leave them. If there were any problems they thought Lowell would leave. And Lowell *never* wanted to do that. Lowell was not the easiest communicator in the world. He sometimes didn't have the tact and diplomacy he perhaps should have had. But he never wanted to leave the band. He liked being in Little Feat. And when it was right, it was very, very right."

For the last couple of weeks of his life Lowell George had, at least, a bad cold. He identified his illness as "an upper respiratory difficulty." His chest was congested, and he had trouble breathing when he woke in the morning. But by evening he was clear enough to perform, and his singing was terrific.

Gene Vano was, in his own words, "the cop." He was a loyal friend who charged himself with keeping drugs away from Lowell. But the drugs were usually there, provided (and this is really the cruelest joke) by people trying to be friendly to the singer, fans who loved George's music and thought they were doing him a small favor in return. Lowell's illness was aggravated by the exhausting schedule he maintained during the solo tour. He was granting lots of interviews, and when the band got to Washington, D.C., he agreed for the first time to allow a radio broadcast of one of his concerts.

Lowell was determined that if he was going to play live on the radio, he'd do it right. He decided, after performing, to work through the night getting things perfectly coordinated. Gene Vano recalls that at 4 a.m. he and Lowell were telephoning recording engineers in Atlanta to get their help. By 6 a.m. Lowell was calling engineers in California. George was also ingesting over-the-counter antihistamines to ward off the recurring congestion. At about 7:30 on the morning of June 29, Vano suggested they call it a night and get some breakfast. Lowell agreed, but upon reaching his hotel room (where Elizabeth and their daughter Inara were sleeping), changed his mind and decided to go to bed. Vano went to sleep in his own room, next door.

Two hours later Elizabeth sent the maid for Gene. Lowell was having trouble breathing and his wife could not wake or move him. Vano pushed Lowell over on his back, and his breathing seemed to return to normal. Gene went back to his room, but a short time later Elizabeth shouted that Lowell was no longer breathing at all. She called for emergency help while Vano tried desperately to revive his friend.

"Within two or three minutes," Vano remembers, "people on the hotel staff who were trained in first aid were there. The hotel engineer, the guy who runs the boilers and stuff, was giving real good artificial respiration. While he was doing that, a woman who worked for the hotel grabbed Lowell's wrist and said she felt a pulse.

"He didn't seem to be breathing, but he was still warm and sweaty. A minute later the emergency squad came in the room with portable life machines. They threw Lowell on the floor and put two disc things — I still don't know what you call them — on his chest. Within a minute they were wrapping up their stuff and leaving. I said, 'What are you doing?' They said, 'There's nothing we can do for him.' I blew my cool. I went bananas. I'm saying, 'Hey, fellas! Bullshit! Come on!' Then I got crazy and started giving him mouth-to-mouth. They left me, then. Everyone left us in the room. Just Lowell and me. I just blew it. I couldn't get anything to happen. I was so unknowledgeable about what to do."

In retrospect, Martin Kibbee thinks that Little Feats' de-emphasis on Lowell George was less a decline on his part than a blossoming of the other musicians in the band. "Lowell was putting up with some pretty talented guys there," Kibbee states. "Mainly Billy, who had a definite direction of his own. So I think democracy prevailed. Much for the worse." He lets that sink in and adds, "I know Lowell felt that way."

"Like anybody with a big appetite," Bonnie Raitt offers, "Lowell enjoyed things so much. He was an extremist in everything: in his devotion to music, to his family, and to whatever he was interested in."

Martin Kibbee, friend since age nine, adds a qualifier to the popular image of George as a man who lived too fast: "On one level that's true, in terms of lifestyle. But on another level — artistically — he husbanded himself for the long haul. Which, to me, is the great tragedy. Lowell was in for the twenty-year plan, and most of his good work was yet to be done. He was really just hitting his stride at the time of his death. Lowell was actually holding back on the artistic side. He was less worried about this album than about what to follow it with. He was reluctant to come out with his best stuff right now. He was always saving it for the coming year. And next year never came."

The following interview took place in Providence, Rhode Island, in June 1979, just 11 days before Lowell George died. Lowell was in town for a show with the band he had assembled to promote his first solo album, and had read an enthusiastic story I wrote about him in the *Providence Journal*. He graciously suggested the two of us adjourn to a back room and do an interview. What emerged was a funny, somewhat unconventional, occasionally convoluted venture into the Wit and Wisdom of Lowell George.

MUSICIAN: Your singing was great tonight.

GEORGE: Thank you. I've been trying. That's the thing that I do on the solo album. My idea wasn't to break off from Little Feat. Parts of that album have been in the can for three years. I remixed it last December, but the record was started three

Rock 'n' roll doctors: up front, Paul Barrere, Bill Payne, Lowell, Kenny Gradney; out back, Sam Clayton and Richie Hayward.

years before that. I signed the contract for a solo artist three and a half years before. The Little Feat albums always took precedence over any individual project that I was doing. Like the Grateful Dead record I did (*Shakedown Street*) was such a smash — ha!

MUSICIAN: That was the first Grateful Dead album I've bought in years.

GEORGE: Well, okay, do you want your refund now or later? I'll tell you. What my intention was with the album was to get them back to where they should have been. Where they are the most comfortable. The Grateful Dead is a loose band, and when they got off into that kind of English rock sound it didn't suit them at all. Did not suit their identity one bit.

I thought I could render the band the way that they play. The best renditions of their songs are fast, straightforward, no bullshit. That's what they play.

MUSICIAN: You didn't know Little Feat was breaking up when your solo album came out?

GEORGE: No, no. The (solo) album came out and I was in the midst of recording the (next Little Feat) album. The band broke up in the middle of the third quarter of recording after the guys had returned from the road with Nicolette Larson.

MUSICIAN: What's to become of the unfinished Little Feat album?

GEORGE: It'll come out.

MUSICIAN: It'll come out as the last Little Feat album?

GEORGE: Um — no comment. Who knows what's gonna happen?

MUSICIAN: If you had realized that *Thanks, I'll Eat It Here* was going to be the first solo album by Lowell George would you have done it differently?

GEORGE: Uh — yeah. Yeah, I would've done it differently. But I didn't. What did Socrates say? "In time all things go wrong." Murphy's Law: "If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong."

MUSICIAN: You signed your solo contract three and a half years ago. Was that related to the fact that at that time....

GEORGE: Little Feat broke up then, too? Yeah. And I wanted to put the group back together. And in order to do that they wanted me to sign up as a solo artist. So that if it broke up again they'd have something to fall back on. And now they have something to fall back on. 'Cause I've got a good five more records to do for them.

MUSICIAN: Up till that first breakup, Little Feat was perceived as being Lowell George's band, in the same way that the Band was Robbie Robertson's.

GEORGE: See, I never thought of the Band as being Robbie Robertson's band. I never perceived it that way. I thought it was Levon's band if it was anybody's.

MUSICIAN: Okay, the way Dire Straits is Mark Knopfler's.

GEORGE: I don't know. I'm not really that well acquainted with Dire Straits. I thought it was Bob Dylan's band. As a matter of fact, Dylan and Dire Straits are recording together.

MUSICIAN: Dylan does seem to grab them all.

GEORGE: I know. He wanted me to work for him. He said, (Lowell affects Dylan voice) "You could be as big as Jackson Browne!"

I said, "Man, do you ever listen to Jackson Browne?" He said, "No." I said, "Well...."

The next day I came back and there were Jackson Browne records all over the place. (laughter) I've given Bob a hard time but I'll tell ya, he's the most prolific writer.... He sat down and played me some of the tunes that he was gonna go out on the road to do — the new ones — unrecorded ones. And he played about 45 songs back to back. I went, "Oh, yeah.... Okay." Then he said, "Now here's the *unfinished* ones," and he played me about that many more. Eighty pieces of stuff! And I really spun off in back of that. I was...humbled by that.

And when I saw him here I kept wondering why everybody was bad-rapping him. Bad press. "Bob Dylan Gets Bad Press." I thought he was *great*! I thought he was so great! I thought it was the hottest thing I'd seen in years! What did you think of it?

MUSICIAN: I just think it was "time to dump on Dylan." They do it every few years.

GEORGE: Yeah. Everybody dumped on John Sebastian for a while. The record companies would go, (whines) "Oh, here comes Tie-Dye again." And the guy was writing some real pretty songs. He went off on his own thing for a while and did his tie-dyed routine and now, undoubtedly, regrets it, or at least looks back on it and goes, "Boy, was I cuckoo!" I've done it too. Once you reach a certain stage you walk out on the street to buy a newspaper and somebody says, "Oh, he's a commie! He's reading!" It's hard to say how the public's gonna react.

I mean, I know people are gonna compare what I'm doing now with what Little Feat was doing. And some of it will undoubtedly be unfavorable. Quite honestly, what I say in an interview like this is maybe, to the public picking up a magazine, interesting. But I've done it for 12 years and been interviewed and picked them up and gone, "Did I say that? Oh God!"

For instance, I did something for *Feature* [*Crawdaddy*'s final incarnation]. Oh, boy. I said some really funny things. I was as funny as you can get in an afternoon. And not one of those moments was captured. Not one little tiny bit.

MUSICIAN: And *Feature* has folded as a result.

GEORGE: At least I put 'em out of business. They deserved it. 'Cause they had a schlump — sorry, sweetheart — who reviewed the album and got me in a *lot* of trouble. Went and talked to Van Dyke Parks and...it's *degrading*. How does that sound?

MUSICIAN: Could you tell me about the time, four or five years ago when all five Stones asked to join Little Feat onstage and you supposedly said no?

GEORGE: Yeah, I supposedly said no and I did, too. They just showed up. If one of them had come up individually and said, "Hey, can we do something? Can we play with you guys?" just to play, I would have said yes. But they had some roadie come up and talk to me: (George affects a snotty, dripping accent.) "Do you think the *guys* could come up and play a little *ditty* with you?" I said, "What are we gonna do? 'Mona' all night?"

To me the decadence of them not being one to one with me was rude. It was rude to me and I just decided that the last thing I wanted was to have the Rolling Stones sit up there and play out of tune.

MUSICIAN: Did the Warner Bros. publicity department pull out their hair and say, "How will we ever break you if you send Mick and Keith away?"

GEORGE: Probably the best press we ever got. No kidding.

MUSICIAN: It must be a relief for you to be back in full control of a band after Little Feat became so democratic.

GEORGE: No shit. Tell me about it. Yeah, it's much easier on the old nervous system. It's not as stressful. And everybody now is really taking care of himself. I'm not trying to keep a couple of other guys in order while trying to keep myself in order. I just have to take care of myself. Everyone else is really on the ball. That's a big relief. And it makes me less abusive to myself.

MUSICIAN: And if you reunite Little Feat without Bill Payne and Paul Barrere, will it be with the understanding that you are the boss again?

Instrumentals in that form, or chord progressions and textures, are done well by a few people. Herbie Hancock, Weather Report, they're the best at it. But if you shoot at something and you know it ain't anywhere near as good, why bother?

GEORGE: Even more so this time. 'Cause I realize that by getting as democratic as it was, the decision-making aspect of it always got me in trouble. Because whatever decision I made turned out to be wrong for somebody. If the decisions are taken away from everybody else, it just turns out to be my decision. No two ways about it.

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CHARLYN ZLOTNIK

Feat fanatics welcomed Lowell's 1979 solo album and tour as a return to the undiluted, genuine George.

I realize that by getting as democratic as the band was, the decision-making aspect of it always got me in trouble. Because whatever decision I made turned out to be wrong for somebody.

I'm being very cut and dried about this. But in fact, I haven't screwed anybody over in the business yet. I have been screwed myself. But my plans are to be in this business for a few more years and I don't want to make enemies.

A lot of people in this business get off by being sleazy. That is not how I get off. I get off by playing sleazy guitar. The business has so many jerks in it already. And sharks and barracuda and various reptilian types, that I figure the best thing I can do is try to be honest and sincere in all my dealings with people.

But if tomorrow somebody said, "Well, this is the group and it's going to be a democracy and everybody's going to help make the decisions," I wouldn't be in it.

I would do it with *one* other person I had respect for. For instance, we're not necessarily musically in the same ballpark, but if Jackson Browne wanted to put a group together I'd play with Jackson. I'd be a sideman. Because I know that he has similar feelings to me. About everything, really. Except in some musical areas where I take a few more chances than he does.

That kind of sums it up. It's such a drag to sit around and go (whines) "I don't care, what do *you* want to do?" And when you finally do come to a decision it's undoubtedly wrong. It's the wrong move to make.

It's like the E.L.O tour. We went out with E.L.O. and they had what had to be the worst sound system of all time. The cheapest. They had that English concept of "Let's go in and rake up some bucks and get out of there." That's basically what their attitude was. And they played down to the audience. They didn't try to get anybody to think.

The guy never took it outside. Never took it some other place where that 14-year-old girl in the third row who's frothing at the mouth and almost achieving orgasm *learned* anything from it. It was purely tactile. Visceral.

MUSICIAN: I have to say that I sometimes had that same reaction to some of Bill Payne's playing in the Little Feat shows. (Lowell rolls his eyes and says nothing.) You may hit me for saying that.

GEORGE: Why would I hit you? (another long pause) I'd have to say that was one of the things that I really, really disliked about playing with Little Feat. To be very honest with you. I thought that it was.... Oh, boy, I'm really spillin' the beans now.

One time we did a TV show with Weather Report ("Midnight Special"). Little Feat were the hosts. Weather Report was warming up and Jaco Pastorius and the old percussion player they had were just crackin' loose. Breaking into it. I went, "Yikes! Who needs the band?" Then Bill drops into one of his "A Day At The Dog Races." I just got out of there as fast as I could. It was embarrassing.

Instrumentals in that form, of chord progressions and textures are done well by a few people. Herbie Hancock, Weather Report; they're the best at it. But if you shoot at something and you know it ain't gonna make it and you know it ain't anywhere near as good, why bother? Unless you do it in your garage for yourself with the local guys.

And it didn't fit. It made me crazy. The rest of the guys got off on it, I think, but I sure didn't. It was completely the antithesis of everything else Little Feat played. And it approached boredom to the extent that I had to leave. I had to get offstage and go

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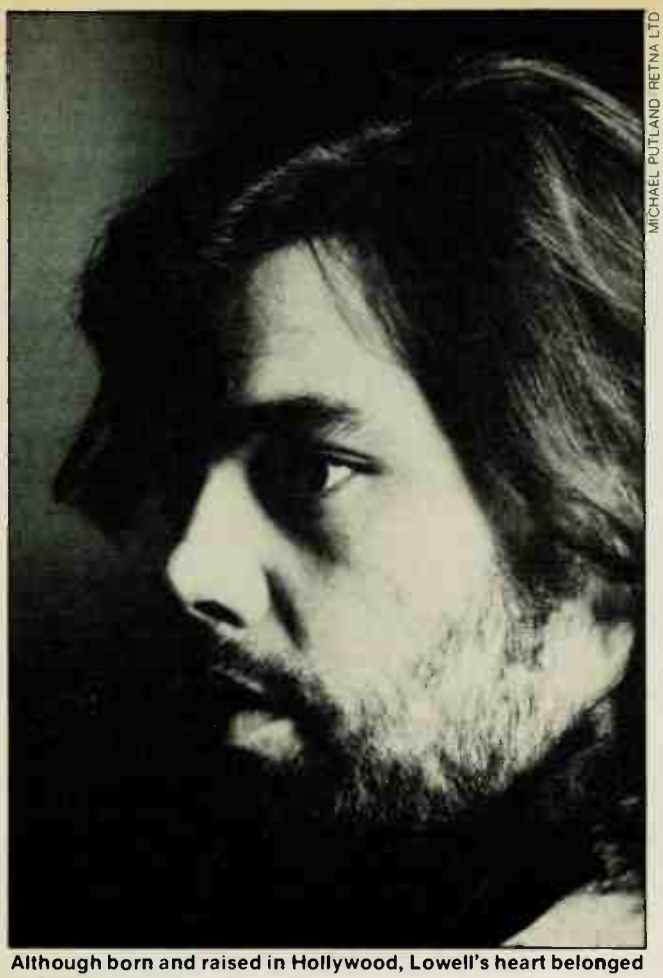

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Although born and raised in Hollywood, Lowell's heart belonged to Dixie.

elsewhere.

Occasionally it made it, though. I would say that later on, one out of six was real hot and came across. But the other five you had to sit through.

MUSICIAN: Did Payne know you felt this way?

GEORGE: He had to. I mean, I used to say it. I couldn't come out directly, but one time I said, "Bill, these songs you're writing...." I was real blunt with him one time. Let's just say that. And right after that he came up with "Oh, Atlanta," which to me is a very successful song. Okay. But, boy, that was the beginning of the end right there. That was when he lost all respect for me because I had been so blunt. I had *tried* to be tactful about it, but it never seemed to get across. 'Cause he was really into it. And he may succeed at getting it right. He's getting closer every day, but he's at a very formative stage. Now maybe he has a band who can play that stuff. So we'll see. I hope it works. 'Cause when he's good at it and everything's working right for him, boy, it's great. It's good. But when Little Feat was doing it, if you put it up against somebody who was doing it right. .whew! Funny you should say that.

MUSICIAN: Which versions of your songs by other people do you especially like?

GEORGE: A Swedish girl did a cover of "Roll 'Um Easy" that's really beautiful. (Lowell starts singing falsetto Swedish; laughter) Clarence Gatemouth Brown did "Dixie Chicken" and the first verse cuts every version I've ever heard of that song. Mine, John Sebastian's, Little Feat's....

MUSICIAN: Jack Jones?

GEORGE: Jack Jones. He was close. Real close (laughter).

MUSICIAN: I saw him sing that on the "Mike Douglas Show" and I almost fell off my chair.

GEORGE: Somebody told me about it and I almost fell off mine. I went, "What?" But you know, it's a real honor to have somebody do something like that. It's like (nonchalant voice), "Really? He did?"

Linda Ronstadt's version of "Willin'" is pretty good, except she gets a little bit (Lowell affects a breathy, Ethel Merman-type voice) "WUHEEDS, WUHITES AND WUHIIINE." Linda was a little bit too "on." (laughter) I'm foggy. I just finished working 87 hours straight.

MUSICIAN: Are good songs still as important to success as they once were?

GEORGE: I got a chance to talk to Clive Davis. I have to say, I really admire the guy. Here's this guy who did amazing things at Columbia Records. Did amazing things. And because of his — I wouldn't say "greedy." He was "aggressive." How does "avaricious" sound? He was aggressive to points beyond — he scared off a lot of the higher-ups in the corporation, the guys in CBS television. I have a feeling they were afraid for their jobs. And old Mr. Paley put a stop to it.

And we talked about songs, which I think are the real hub of the music industry. On a real "music biz communication vibe" level. The whole music business generates around good songs. It makes a Maria Muldaur have a hit record with "Midnight At The Oasis." We could probably name five or six groups or individuals who aren't that talented who put out songs that were gigantic records and made tons of money. Not that Maria's in that class. I think she's real good.

MUSICIAN: Go ahead. Name somebody.

GEORGE: Strawberry Alarm Clock. Is that close enough? It's the song itself by whoever does it that puts someone over. I mean, look at Richard Harris, (sings in soapy, profound voice) "Someone left the cake out in the rain." I mean, give me a break! Are you *kidding* me? And then a follow-up?

It's those ingredients put together in the right order at the right time that makes it all happen. Record companies could be run out of somebody's garage. Which they have been. Rod McKuen and his whole recording career and all that poetry bullshit came right out of a garage. No doubt. There are lots of instances of that. It was just the right time for him.

Another example is Richard Pryor. An example of the opposite kind of thing happening. Here's a guy who — 12 years ago I walked into a little restaurant on Sunset Boulevard when the Byrds were first happening, and Arthur Lee and Love, and Bloomfield was playing with Butterfield. Bob Dylan would walk into the restaurant, look around and say (affects Dylan rasp), "Oh, man. I'm gettin' out of here." Right? That kind of stuff was goin' on. LSD. Whatever that was. (laughs) I just *heard* about it. So here's Richard Pryor. He's been on "Johnny Carson." He's said "F_____ you" to the wrong person. He was really great back then. Just as good if not better than he is now. And he said the wrong thing to the wrong guy and *voop* — Richard Pryor's gone for almost ten years.

Then he had his TV special and said, "F___ you" to the wrong guy again. No more Richard Pryor TV specials. But the material he had — not songs, but ideas are Richard's songs — came around at the right time in the cycle. He'd made enough enemies at one point and he came full circle and made friends with them again. And he'll come around again and again.

I mean, I'm waiting for Nancy Sinatra to make her move, y'know? Disco *Get On Outta Here*. I'm working on it. [Lowell wasn't too far off. Nancy recently released a country duo album with Mel Tillis.]

So anyway, the idea of material — of a particular song at a particular time done with either complete believability or a complete sense of humor is the main ingredient. And Clive Davis is one of those people who knows that more than anybody in the record business. Especially a high executive. 'Cause usually when they get up there among the higher executives, those folks don't know any more. They *really* don't know. They don't know a good song from (George affects a hyped-up Hollywood accent): "Hey, have I got somethin' for *you*, Boss! Listen to this:" (picks up phone and imitates dial tone) "EHHHHHHH! The Telephone!" (slams down phone) "It's a hit!" (affects deep voice of record company executive): "I'll go for it. How much?" "Two hundred thou." "Great! Sign 'em." That's what happens. Literally, that's what takes place.

continued on page 82

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RECORD REVIEWS

John McLaughlin
Belo Horizonte (Warner Bros.)

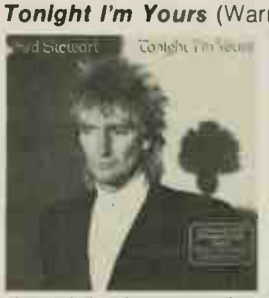
McLaughlin's long association with CBS is over, and his new label is making a big deal out of the instrumentation on this record. The Warner Bros. A&R staff may hear "acoustic guitar in an electric band," but a closer listen (or a quick look at the credits) reveals that "electric keyboards in an acoustic band" is a lot closer to the truth, since all the instruments except the synthesizers and Fender Rhodes piano are unamplified. McLaughlin's nylon-string classical guitar is supported by a mostly French band (the album was recorded in Paris) of traps and percussion, acoustic bass, sax, violin and keyboards. This instrumentation imparts a light, spacious quality to McLaughlin's compositions, which are full of classic Mahavishnuisms. The lightning tempos, rapid unison melodic statements and angular harmonies are all here, but those seeking the Wagnerian epiphanies that drove the boogie hordes wild are in for a disappointment. Instead of the usual MO, with its densely packed textures, there's a sense of depth and breadth in the music that allows the individual voices room to breathe.

Jean-Paul Celea's acoustic bass has a lot to do with this. Since the upright bass can't articulate the tempos the drums are playing, he plays half- or quarter-time lines, leaving a lot of space on the bottom and allowing the melody to float over the rhythm instead of driving it. Meanwhile Katia LaBeque and Francois Couturier play poor man's London Philharmonic on synthesizers, layering broad sweeps of color that sound very much like another major fusion band. Sunny and warm today, scattered clouds, with a chance of thundershowers in the afternoon....

The foreground is given over to whoever is soloing and, of course, most of the time it's the leader. McLaughlin's playing has rarely sounded better, and again the instrument makes the difference. Most guitarists would be lost without the sustain of an electric instrument, but McLaughlin plays so fast that the notes blur together in a whirlpool of overtones. The short decay time of the classical guitar suits his style perfectly, allowing the melodic lines to emerge from the clouds of notes he likes to use.

I guess I should be ashamed of liking this record, since as we all know, fusion has been dead for years, killed off by the invasion of the quick-buck imitators from the dreaded Jazz Planet. However, I've read that there was an awful lot of garbage being marketed as bebop for a couple of years in the late forties when everyone thought that fast tempos and flat fifths were the Next Big Thing after the big bands. The music itself seems to have survived its moment in the sun quite nicely, and to have evolved into a classic form which very few people can play well. It's too soon to tell if something like this will develop out of the innovations of the seventies, but this music is a hopeful sign. — *Chris Doering*

Rod Stewart
Tonight I'm Yours (Warner Bros.)



Rod the aging Mod is one rock icon who's more than taken his lumps from post-punk revisionists. Depending on which side of the fence you're on, *Tonight I'm Yours* may sound like Stewart's pathetic attempt to update the well-worn commercial formula or his best effort since *A Night On The Town*. That I tend to side with the latter is only because the anonymous El Lay session-cats backdrop, which Rod has cultivated since leaving the unpredictability of the Faces, finally achieves the transparency necessary for Stewart's always-expressive vocal vulnerability to come across. Rod hasn't sounded this involved in years.

So who's going to quibble because Stewart takes what's been successful for him in the past and milks it? The choice of cover material (Ace's "How Long," done plaintively, and Dylan's "Just Like A Woman," with true yearning) only seems obvious because Rod's treatments make it so. Sure, "Only A Boy" is an attempt to recreate "Maggie May," right down to the mournful fiddle, but it might just be Rod's most personal song since then, too. Finally, cast in the mold of *A Night On The Town*'s ambitious scenario of homosexual murder, "The Killing Of Georgie," comes "Sonny," a passionate love song about what sounds suspiciously like a bisexual romantic triangle (co-written with new partner Bernie Taupin, Elton's ex. Hmmm).

Call *Tonight I'm Yours* a definite comeback, a step in the right direction. After all, why shouldn't the wealthy and famous get to play the fool, too? — *Roy Trakin*

Ian Dury
Lord Upminster (Polydor)

This is Dury's first genre album — he went to the decidedly un-North-London-like Bahamas to record it with the stark dub rhythm section of reggae masters Robbie Shakespeare (bass) and Sly Dunbar (drums). It is also the reunion of Dury and his witty songwriting cohort, Chas Jankle. It is *not*, however, the strong comeback album many have anticipated it as, simply because Dury has never really gone away.

Those who wait in vain for "Hit Me Again With Your Rhythm Stick" or "Reasons To Be Cheerful Part IV" may well complain that the Dury/Jankle reunion is a disappointment just as those who justifiably felt the addition of guitarist Wilko Johnson on *Laughter* was a great idea now lament his exclusion on this record. While it would be great if the brilliant one-off R&B single "I Wanna Be Straight" were released over here, there's no point in asking Dury to retrace his steps.

So the wit and the playing are a little

more straightforward than last time around, perhaps in an attempt to arrive at a more commercial sound. The concept and delivery are nonetheless delightful. "Spasticus (Autisticus)," the tub-thumping anthem that certainly ranks with Dury's wildest moments of apocalyptic humor, was originally intended as Ian's contribution to the Year of the Disabled campaign. But the song was perceived by BBC programmers (who obviously were unaware that Dury is partially crippled from a childhood bout with polio) as *insulting* to the disabled and banned it from airplay, prompting Dury to perform a series of "Not The Year of The Disabled" concerts.

"Red (Letter)" is a simple and beautiful sing-along. "The (Body Song)" contains a line worthy of the best Dury/Jankle poetics ("The leg, a source of much delight/which carries weight and governs height"), and side two grooves along at a disco/dub cruise pace that reaches a sublime moment on "Funky Disco (Pops)." So what more do you want? — *John Swenson*

Chic
Take It Off (Atlantic)

Along with drum collaborator Tony Thompson, Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards have helped revitalize and focus the function of the contemporary rhythm section by undermining the traditional roles of guitar, bass and drums. Edwards' bass carries the melody with a terse, witty backflow, anchored to Thompson's bass drum and his ever-shifting yet direct afterbeats. Just behind them, stage right in the mix, is Rodgers, his undulating chord passages punctuating and directing the flow, translating rhythm to harmony and melody with a sweet, silvery snap, as if your sock cymbals could modulate backwards through the cycle of fourths.

They're method actors, that's what they are, and their R&B scenarios have a different set of particulars than the street per se, although that's where they're coming from (and trying to get back to, if you want to give *Take It Off*'s snappy minimalism a metaphorical context) All that chic, high society primping and class represent more than just the bourgeois trappings of upward mobility, otherwise they'd still be mining the by-now stylized cliches they invented on those counter-insurgency classics "Le Freak" and "Good Times." Chic's music aspires to humanism and their poses are more parody than posture.

continued on next page

White Punks on Funk

By Jon Pareles

If Diogenes were an A&R man, he'd still be looking for the ultimate funky white boy. It's been the same quest since Elvis: to find an act that goes beyond mimicking mannerisms (David Sanborn, Hall & Oates) and invents a manner as individual as its sources (the Rolling Stones, Bill Evans). Purity isn't the question — in American music, it never has been, especially since the more loyal a white boy is to black styles, the sillier he sounds. And every move he makes is fraught with stereotype and history; one boy's polyrhythm may well be another's cultural imperialism. That's what pop is all about. But while we're in stereotype territory, let's note that white funk tends to lag behind black funk by between three and ten years, slightly less in New York City. And while it's still a stereotype, I'm becoming convinced that most white funk just doesn't cut it unless it incorporates the White Boy's Burden: a heritage of Uptight. After they've learned where the offbeat is (not having natural rhythm, heh heh), white funkers have to figure out where they connect to it. The best ones strike while the irony is hot.

Not just white but British — uptight squared — Medium Medium (*The Glitterhouse*) cop to their handicaps in "Further Than Funk Dream," in which their vocalist whines, to a JB's-style backbeat, "I wish I could bring back the harmless noise of the bravado boys." But he knows he can't so Medium Medium chip away at the rhythm tracks, add percussives and atonal guitar and sax (a la Contortions), and work themselves up to a perpetual snarl. "Hungry So Angry," the Contortions in Motown, is the dance-club hit since it's the most conventional cut. The most promising one, however, is the instrumental 'That Haiku,' funky in the most abstract way — implied polyrhythms galore — with ethnic cross-references to boot, and a lot spookier than any of the lyrics.

Blurt (*In Berlin*) is a lot closer than Medium Medium to being the neo-Contortions. The drummer sounds like he's whaling away at trash cans, and sax-man/vocalist Ted Milton is an exemplar of literal honk and shout. Far more tonal than Medium Medium or the Contortions, Blurt also includes a power-chording guitarist, so that when they latch onto straight 4/4 bashing in "Get," Blurt can sound like Mitch Ryder discovering Sade. The lyrics are dumb/funny/pretentious dominance and submission outbursts, but if you toss out the lyric sheet you won't need to pay any attention to them; the beat and the general squawk level are Blurt's main assets I've played it a lot, and I can tell it's a good funk record because I still can't distinguish side one from side two

Neither Blurt nor Medium Medium makes any pretense of higher-than-average melanin content; they go out of their way to grate Pigbag and Spandau Ballet (*Chant No. 1*) are more openly imitative of black models. "Chant No. 1" is the only Spandau Ballet track I can tolerate, which may reflect my taste in retreads (thumbs up for Kool & the Gang, thumbs down on Giorgio Moroder) or the fact that I saw the video the first time I heard the song — and the dense, horn-heavy mix dovetailed nicely with their images of urban paranoia. Horns and all, though, Spandau can't touch Pigbag (*Was, Not Was*), an English band who've heard enough African rock to play it convincingly. Like an updated Osibisa, Pigbag are a little more frantic than Fela et al., yet they've got a fix on the way Africans write horn parts (unisons and gawky open intervals) and don't care if they get a little out of tune. The Pigbag EP includes three multi-segmented instrumentals — Pigbag don't jam much, they write new themes instead — and makes me look forward to their new album due soon.

The Brits get a good beat going when they work at it, and sometimes they can't help being funny. But they could learn a lot from two Motor City guys named Weiss and Feigenson, a.k.a. Was (Not Was), whose modus operandi seems to be a white-boys' switcheroo on George Clinton: 'Free your mind and your ass will follow." So they've written a bunch of smart, non-sequitur-laced songs connected by contempt for the rich and heartfelt sympathy for the deranged, then found real (as opposed to tutored) funk musicians to sing and play them The results set Was' mad libs to an anthology of modern funk beats, from the P-Funk march of "Out Come The Freaks" (featuring the Brides of Funkenstein, tape-looped) to the rap of "Oh, Mr. Friction!" to the Norman Whitfield-Temptations-style "It's an Attack!' Marcus Belgrave, David Murray, ex-MC5 guitarist Wayne Cramer and a slew of others make cameo appearances, and the whole album makes delusions and paranoia seem worth dancing to — the kind of project it takes white boys to think of. "Shoes fall through the morning haze and splat like eggs amongst the crowds. Can you see it, boy?" Bring that lantern a little closer...

The trouble with being method actors — and the Rodgers/Edwards/Thompson axis comprises about the hottest repertory company around, the collective yawn about Debbie Harry's fine solo notwithstanding — is that though the premises may change, your roles remain the same. Rodgers and Edwards want to be revolutionaries ("Nevertheless, rebels are we...."), but they're too cool and polite to *demand* your attention; they prefer just to *engage* it. The subtlety of their arrangements, the openness of their sound and the lack of clutter in their mix come from hours and hours *behind the board* guiding other musicians through the head arrangements, layering substance and details on their flexible yet functionally inert rhythm tracks.

Like the Police, Chic are avant-sneaks, burying all the tensions and dislocations underneath a candyapple pop crunch. That they're able to portray such cool, calculated control, yet sound like they be jammin' is testament to their perfectionist rigor, yet in working so hard to sound casual, they polyglycoat a hard sheen of craft about their work that is mistakenly taken for lack of feeling.

It takes time to sink beneath the surface glitter of *Take It Off* to discover the depths of this music. It's formula but it ain't formula, and the jagged jigsaw puzzles of rhythm they're now working with stand in sharp contrast to the loping strides of Chic's earlier grooves. If anything, *Take It Off* is even more minimal and syncopated, and there are several potential radio anthems here... but my ears are suspect — I thought *Real People* would be a killer too. The dislocated stutter steps and elegant Wes Montgomeryisms of "So Fine," the tongue-in-cheek Batman/Hendrix parodies of "Your Love Is Canceled," the slow grind and sentiment of "Flash Back" and the Funkadelic-like cheerleading of "Burn Hard" add up to expert pop, and Mike Brecker's banshee tenor adds jazz swagger to "Just Out Of Reach." Some touring, and perhaps a live album, would put the undercurrent of innovation here in better perspective. — *Chip Stern*

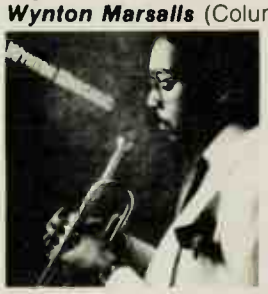
Dr. John
Dr. John Plays Mac Rebennack (Clean Cuts)

As the title implies, this is Dr. John being himself, stretching out on the piano and doing what comes naturally. At the same time, there's the hint of coyness that would lead a man to express himself by talking out of both sides of his persona. Mac Rebennack, like most folks who grew up in New Orleans Mardi Gras tradition, understands putting on a costume to be yourself and has finally applied that understanding to his music.

Gone are the *shticks* that came with the Night Tripper, the warped conceptualist of *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, the hip raconteur of his sophisticated period; in their place are simply the licks he picked up with each incarnation. But rather than the musical props they had once been, what we hear on *Dr. John Plays Mac Rebennack* is how those licks have taken root in his/their fertile imagination, and emerged in full flower. The slippery bass lines that, on clavinet, gave a funky edge to "Right Place, Wrong Time" have been reborn as a talkative rolling bass on "Memories Of Professor Longhair," sniping at the barrelhouse convention of the right-hand phrasing while fueling the beat; the rambling hoo-doo of the Night Tripper's stage show takes control of "Saints," turning it into a boogie-woogie rhapsody that occasionally winks at "When The Saints Go Marching In." Throughout, Mac and the Doctor trot out more keyboard tricks and rhythmic flourishes than Huey "Piano" Smith even alluded to, and yet never seem at a loss for something to say with them.

The worst you can say about the album is that it's a bit self-indulgent. Rebennack delights in false endings, tricky cadences and thematic elaboration. But since it's never ornamentation for its own sake — each flourish turns up yet another twist, a fresher idea — that's nothing to carp about. Besides, it underscores the basic feeling behind the album, which is Dr. John having some fun at the piano. It's his party, and we're lucky to have been invited. — *J.D. Considine*

Wynton Marsalis
Wynton Marsalis (Columbia)



This morning I picked up a New York newspaper which enlightened me to the fact that in 1982 affluence is in vogue and poverty is passé. Well, somebody better tell Wynton Marsalis about it, 'cause everybody knows you can't make big bucks playing jazz in that straight-ahead way. Without a lead foot pounding a heavy four on the bass drum or some yahoo screeching over a clap track, your contract is terminated and it's back to the day gig and weekend club dates. But I guarantee Wynton won't listen; Marsalis simply isn't interested in compromising the music he loves. He's not a product of industry trends or fusion delusions. At age twenty, he proves himself a man with principles who believes in the tradition of the music known as jazz. So, you ask, can he play this music? Oh yes.

After being swamped by the mounds of hype, what impresses me most about Marsalis is not his technique (which is outstanding), or his ability to duplicate the styles of his predecessors (Miles, Clifford and Woody Shaw to name a few). What really gets me is his sense of composure at any tempo, in various situations. This is a skill that develops with time and experience, a trait rarely found in a player his age (or any age for that matter). On Ron Carter's "RJ," Marsalis blows through the Harmon mute *a la* Miles and though the attack is frightfully similar to Miles', Marsalis isn't as sparse as Davis would be. Though he may play one too many eighth notes, he can make a phrase dance while bending pitches at any given point. Marsalis has got more than just chops working for him; he has control. This control is apparent on "Father Time," where he leaps across registers effortlessly while blasting quick licks in the fashion of my favorite sly fox, Lester Bowie. And just when I thought I'd heard one too many renditions of "Who Can I Turn To," Marsalis unleashes a fat, breathy tone that breathes life into the melody which leads into a slow swing that's made to order for the New Orleans trumpet whiz to feast on. Of course, not everything clicks. On "Hesitation," the trade-offs between Wynton and brother Bradford's tenor never really get off the ground. Fortunately, the piece is salvaged by the ferocious brush work of Tony Williams.

Quite frankly, parts of this recording remind me of the Miles Davis-Wayne Shorter quintet collaborations of the 60s, but I believe Wynton Marsalis has both the vision and tools necessary to eventually establish himself as a separate, distinguishable extension of the tradition. And be aware that, though there are two different rhythm sections on this album, it's the Hancock/Carter/Williams triumverate that proves most supportive. — *Peter Giron*

Lester Bowie
The Great Pretender (ECM)

We have here one of those rare opportunities in which a Distinguished Artist can comment on his own music. From a forthcoming interview in this magazine, Lester Bowie has this to say about himself in general: "I like people to enjoy the music and then have to think upon hearing it, 'What? What the fuck was *that*?'" The case could not be better put.

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with a questing, out-of-tempo introduction and then, after a few demented cackles from Bowie, saunters into a wholly marvelous statement of the theme — and what a great tune it is — replete with triplet-beats from drummer Philip Wilson, a doubling of the bass part by Hamiet Bluiett's baritone sax, and the wordless, gospelish backup vocals of David Peaston and Fontella Bass. Atop all this shambling glamor, Bowie states the melody, abridges, illuminates and strangles it with a straight reading and his repertoire of half-valve vocalizations: it is a classic performance, which I hope ECM has the sense and resources to issue as a single and convey to all the jukeboxes of the world, where it truly belongs. I would love to hear it in an old unfashionable diner while staring into the grease spot in my coffee, or on the luminous Mississippi roadhouse jukebox covered three inches thick in flies where I first heard "In The Midnight Hour" and "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag." This music belongs in America, a piece of living historiography complete with '51 Fords, hi-fi and war in Korea. From the theme statement, the band breaks into a standard jazz six over which Bluiett solos — the music here has the ragged integrity of a Mingus session — until Bowie enters with a trumpet solo of surprising lyricism and beauty. We should not forget, amid all the laughter, what a gorgeous trumpet player he is. His distillation here of lessons learned from Miles, Clifford Brown and Kinney Dorham among others is genuinely affecting. The expected free-jazz shambles precedes the flag-waving repeat and cackling conclusion of the theme. Is this really ECM?

You may understand what place a rendition of "Pretender" might have in Bowie's work, but when "Howdy Doody Time" turns out to be just that ("*Hey kids! What time is it?*"), you may well wonder what can possibly be done with it. Well, something short, with room for Bowie to dance prettily over the top of it until the side ends. Side two is taken up with a pretty salsa-cum-bossa with, again, very pretty multi-note playing from Bowie and good *esprit* from the *corps*. "Rose Drop," the long free piece that closes the album, may make the casual listener, or any listener who has decided he knows the shape of Bowie's house from the album so far, pose the question Bowie wishes him to: "What?" The piece makes good use of long mysterious notes in a static milieu, and cannot be read for easy irony, lyricism, lighthearted fun, serious music, or whatever else you've got on your customary shelf. It helps bring home how completely Bowie has made the language of free jazz, and jazz in general, his own playground, and how much we all benefit from his freedom. — *Rafi Zabor*

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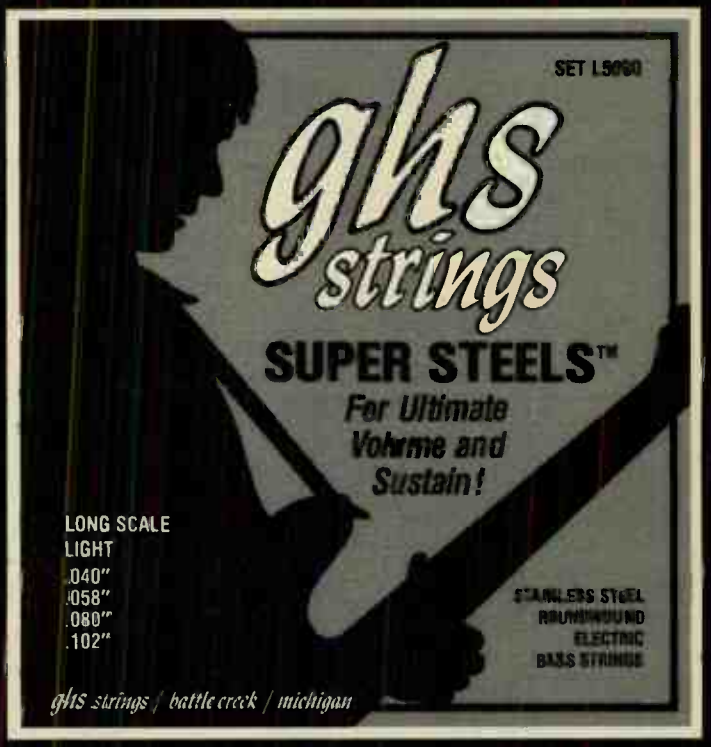

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Grover Washington, Jr.
Come Morning (Elektra)

Off the front page of *Billboard*, the headline bellowed the birth of a new, improved radio format: Urban Contemporary. This melded adult contemporary with black MOR and "soft-rock" into an expansive potential market of hip metropolites striving to "feel so good." Moreover, this new universal medium could not only soothe one through breakfast, but could also appear in snatches as "Today" segues or pauses for commercials during a basketball telecast.

Reflection on this epochal event, the Birth of a Genre, made me suspect that this was really something the industry had cooked up as a tribute to Grover Washington, Jr. and his newest release. I mean, who could deserve it more? Here's a guy *nobody* dislikes. He's got that splendid, liquid, dancing tone and sure, conversational phrasing it's easy to love, yet still knows how to play real-life jazz (check the fade on "Mister Magic" or see him live if you've forgotten). Thus it was that *Come Morning* became the first great Urban Contemporary album (you read it here first).

Come Morning is everything befitting such an honor. Steve Gadd, co-producer/conspirator Ralph MacDonald, Eric Gale, Richard Tee, Marcus Miller (loud applause from the Miles Davis and Luther Vandross sections) and Paul Griffin (on synthesizers)... hell, the first team. Grover reaches into the same magic bag he pulled Bill Withers ("Just The Two Of Us") out of and reveals drummer *Grady Tate* (!?), who turns out to be an excellent vocalist. Grady torches the ballad "Be Mine (Tonight)" (already enchanting the Urban Contemporary airwaves) and does a great Al Jarreau on the manhattan-calypso "Little Black Samba." Because this is the *first* UC (ah, doesn't it look great in initials!) album, the vocal tunes are allowed to run 6:38 and 5:42 (watch that next time though, Grover).

Grover, the only soloist, expertly uses the remaining instrumentals as personal vehicles, particularly his haunting intimacy on the title cut, "I'm All Yours" and my favorite, "Making Love To You." It was during some of the more homogenized cuts, however, that I found my attention distracted by a commotion outside the banquet. There, uninvited and troublesome, was a new Grover Washington, Jr. *Anthology* from Motown, culled from his days in the trenches with Creed Taylor. The songs, occasionally scruffy and squawky, still spunkily loped along, revealing some swell guest guitaring (including a smoker from a poor, starving boy named Benson) and Grover actually equalling Marvin Gaye on *Marvin*'s songs (a herculean task). None of these tunes, however, could ever survive as background music, and would've certainly burned the bacon. So I sadly returned to the party, wondering what would become of those feisty lads.
— *Jock Baird*

Old and New Dreams
Playing (ECM)

Playing (you can always tell a Charlie Haden title a mile off) is Old and New Dreams' third album, its first live one, by far its most sprightly and easily its best. In fact it's the best I've heard this band live or on record, and must be accounted a particularly felicitous conjunction of opportunity and event, and one of the year's best albums.

The sparkplug seems to have been Ed Blackwell, who is first off the launching pad on Ornette Coleman's "Happy House." His drumming propels Dewey Redman into one of the finest tenor solos I've heard from him, which, although as usual all middle, is a lot less stoic than the standing Buddha of the tenor's usual outings. By the middle of the cut, Charlie Haden seems to have caught up with the flying Blackwell and Don Cherry is making with the wit among sputters and fragments. Which is to say that the album is home early, and the band at the top of its form.

A Cherry appropriation of a balafon riff from Mali follows, then a mid-tempo Ornette line that makes you wish that Coleman still played this kind of music now and then and glad that this band does. The second side opens with a fast Redman piece that could also have been Ornette's, then comes Coleman's "Broken Shadows," which provides us with the album's most privileged moments. Blackwell begins one of his ghost marches on mallets, Haden does the strangest things and Cherry and Blackwell eerie the air on trumpet and musette respectively. The long Haden solo that provides the bridge to the title piece is positively hair-raising: using a combination of the bow in the right hand and plucked strings upneck with his left, Haden produces sounds that seem even more ancient and venerable than the whalesong of the last album, a primal, pre-worldly music that predates cetaceans and psychology, the root undifferentiated sound of which all others are fractions. The title piece is a happy chaos over fast bass and drums.

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There is a built-in disappointment factor in the statutory absence of its progenitor Ornette Coleman — who is that fifth who always walks beside you? — but this album successfully demonstrates, if demonstration is needed, that Old and New Dreams is far more than the warehouse of preharmolodics, and that the band has a voice of its own, one of the finest in the music now. — *Rafi Zabor*

George Benson
The George Benson Collection
(Warner Bros.)

George Benson has emerged as one of the world's finest pop - soul crooners in the five years since his version of Leon Russell's "This Masquerade" catapulted him to new commercial heights. The success of the song suggested that the enormously talented guitar player had more of a future as a singer than as the instrumentalist whose chops were the most talked-about since Charlie Christian's.

Benson toiled in the trenches for years at CTI as a living jazz legend during a seemingly endless tenure with Creed Taylor, whose ponderous Don Sebesky-arranged productions consistently sabotaged the guitarist's brightest playing. But his career took a dramatic turn when he signed with Warner Bros. in 1976. Paired with producer Tommy LiPuma and conductor-arranger Claus Ogerman, the association yielded the triple-platinum *Breezin'* LP, and suddenly the bop terrain Benson plowed in relative obscurity for years was supplanted by a commercially accessible synthesis of pop, jazz and R&B that won him the scorn of critics along with an international audience and millions of dollars.

The scope of *The George Benson Collection* is a tribute to the breadth of his musicality. Excluding his first quartet recordings with producer John Hammond for Columbia in the mid-60s, the collection spans most of Benson's recorded history. Included are some of the better numbers which Benson cut with Creed Taylor, Michael Masser, LiPuma (who compiled the disc), Arif Mardin (duets with Aretha Franklin and Chaka Kahn) and Quincy Jones. The addition of the hit single, "Turn Your Love Around," a mellow pop-soul song, reinforces the notion that his current musical sensibilities lean more in the direction of Stevie Wonder than Mr. Christian. Unfortunately, pastel rugs and Harvey's Bristol aren't for everyone, but this anthology includes enough of Benson's early work to satisfy even the most shrill critic of the stellar guitarist's jazz-to-riches climb. — *Leo Sacks*

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MPS

JAZZ

By Rafi Zabor

SHORT TAKES

Hey there angelheaded hipsters. Are you burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night? Waal, let's see what's in the feedbag this month. I've been trying for some time now to find my way into the recordings of tenorist **Joe McPhee**, having heard so much about his excellence live, and finally an album has come along that gives me ingress and pleasure. *Po Music* (hat ART via NMDS; 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012) features McPhee with a largish ensemble of, you know, Europeans (most of them from hat Hut's continental contingent, whose albums I have likewise labored in vain to appreciate/enjoy) and for starters they play some good ol' free jazz — honks of horror, bizarre whickerings, voices gibbeted with terror, hey ho — and that makes it, but what I like best are McPhee's two ballad features. He formerly struck me as a strong musician whose attack was forbiddingly harsh even by 60s standards, but this playing is coherent, impassioned and grand. Some of the freeblow successfully recalls the derangement of the great Ayler sessions, there are shortcomings among the Yurpeens when bop is attempted (like a bassist with weak time on a spookily successful "Pithecantropous Erectus"), and the half-hour title piece is a series of recitatives less effective than the music on disc one. Recommended.

Likewise, naturally, the second volume of Inner City's superb **Django Reinhardt** issue, *Solos/Duets/Trios*. You hear the guitarist in tighter close-up than with the usual quintet, and the greatest revelations come from the five solo selections, in which Reinhardt's romanticism, usually distanced by brilliance of wit in a group context, breaks almost violently free of formal constraints, particularly on the impassioned 1937 "Improvisation." There are also unexpected echoes of Spanish gypsy music (flamenco). Genius you expect from Reinhardt, but not this kind of power and willful depth. One of the best records of this or any month. Of course.

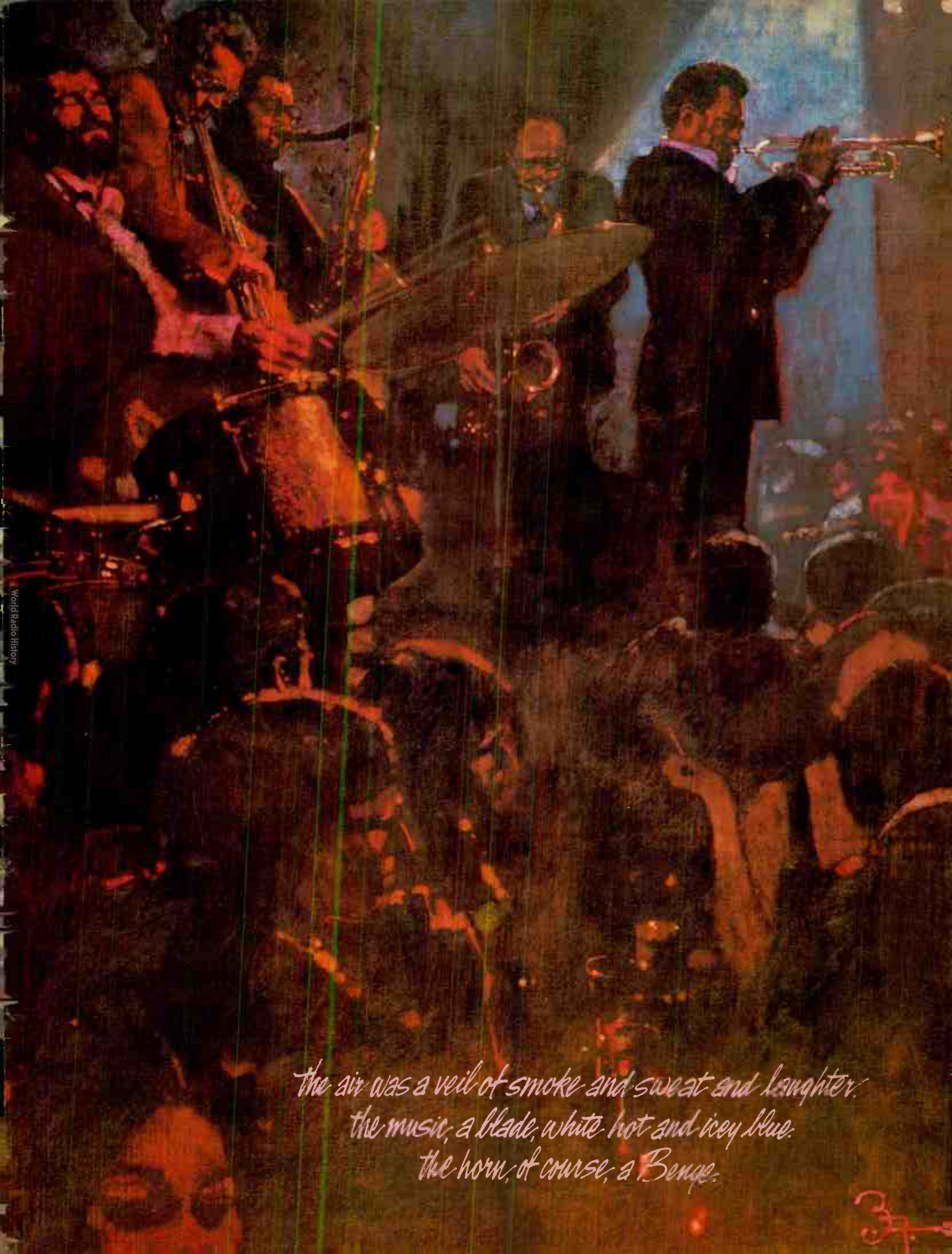
There are a number of straight-ahead albums of excellence this month, two of them from **Art Blakey** and the edition of the Jazz Messengers including the young trumpet phenom Wynton Marsalis. *Straight Ahead* (Concord Jazz) is a California live date on which Blakey reserved the Messenger book and had the band play standards (which leads me to wonder how Concord deals with publishing royalties). It's a spirited affair, everyone plays well and Marsalis, who outplays everyone except Papa, gets the traditional Messenger ballad feature ("Once In Awhile" for Brownie, "Blue Moon" for the Hub) with "How Deep Is The Ocean," and doesn't let history down. *Album Of The Year* (Timeless, now distributed by Rounder), a studio date from Paris, uses Messenger originals and is a sprightlier and better album, Blakey himself being in notably classic form. If I didn't know Blakey so well I'd be amazed at the inexhaustible energy of his drumming and bandleading. At his age and half deaf, he can still play all the younger, fancier drummers in town under the table, and the Jazz Messengers are still, after 25 years, the best hard-bop band in the world. **Tommy Flanagan**'s *Super Session* (Inner City) is a trio date with Red Mitchell and the quite mad Elvin Jones, who boots the proceedings into the next dimension and gets Flanagan to play as fluently but more viscerally than usual. Like Blakey, Jones is one of the greatest drummers in the history of the instrument, and has come, amazingly, to be somewhat taken for granted of late. I'd like to see him take over some of the ECM caseload from DeJohnette. Now that would be interesting. Flanagan has been taken for granted forever, and on this album he deserves it as little as ever. Mitchell is fine. So buy a copy already. **Bob Wilber** *and the Bechet Legacy* (Bodeswell; Box 624; Brewster, MA 02631): being an archivist in jazz, the very music of the breaking wave, seems an odd game, but Wilber's reconstructions of his mentor's music finds come fully to life, not in the exact and affectionate charts but in Wilber's own solo work, easily excellent enough to transcend the occasion.

ANDY FREEBERG/ENCORE

George Adams

On **Eric Dolphy**, *The Stockholm Sessions* (Inner City), you'll find the greatest alto playing out this month. It's amazing how unimpeded Dolphy was by the European rhythm sections he recorded with so often, powered by his own inner music into unexampled brilliance and flight. The legacy is intact; for all the superb altoists we've seen in the last few years, no one has touched him. Not to mention bass clarinet. I used to enjoy **Bob Brookmeyer** quite a lot in the old days, despite his faintly corny humor and the sneaking suspicion that to play valve trombone is to cheat the gods of slide. Now that he's back from a 15-year slumber in the studios of the Empire with albums like *Through A Looking Glass* (Finesse), I'm floored. He's writing fine, genuinely original material, and his playing has emotional resonances I'd never heard before — same burry tone, but sadder and more telling. The album features (FEATURES! how many times a month do I have to use the goddam word FEATURES? Reader help solicited.) an excellent sextet with guys like Tom Harrell and Jim McNeely — fine, burnished, melodic jazz, but it sounds like it was mixed by Mel Lewis' mother ("I want to hear more of my son's cymbal, it sounds so nice. No, not so much trumpet, such a headache it gives me."), despite a fine initial recording job. A fleet, superaccomplished album comes from the **George Adams-Don Pullen Quartet**, *Lifeline* (Timeless), which also FEATURES (expletive deleted) bassist Cameron Brown and the mighty Dannie Richmond. Adams is at his most muscular but also his most intelligent — at times he can seem a powerful but

continued on page 80



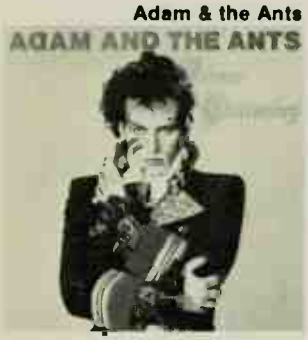
the air was a veil of smoke and sweat and laughter.
the music, a blade, white hot and icey blue.
the horn, of course, a Benge.

ROCK

By Roy Trakin

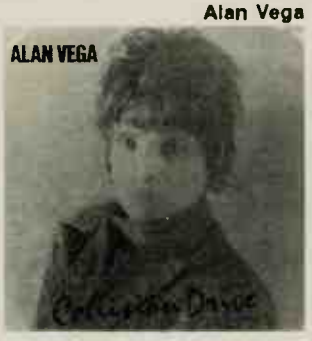
SHORT TAKES

Adam & the Ants



Bush Tetras

Alan Vega



AC/DC

Adam & The Ants — *Prince Charming* (Epic) You gotta hand it to the Man They Call Ant — he refuses to rest on last year's quite unexpected epidemic of Antmania. Shedding his trademarked buccaneer uniform for eyeliner and nail polish, Adam threatens to gross out his teeny-bopper following altogether with his new Flamenco wimp sound and oh-so-fey demeanor. Beneath *Charming*'s camp veneer, though, is a moralist who takes his responsibility as a pubescent role model in an oddly serious manner. Shot through with puritanical advice and cheesy samba rhythms, this LP is bound to get ridiculed for its brave, if foolhardy, departure from a successful formula.

Polyrock — *Changing Hearts* (RCA) And then there are the albums you put on late at night to help you get to sleep. Maddeningly even-handed, undeniably clever, these downtown Noo Yawkers sound like they wanna rock out, but avant producer Philip Glass just won't let them. Sharp and subtle, but, like Gene Hackman says about French director Eric Rohmer's films in *Night Moves*, "It's like watching paint dry."

Glen Branca — *The Ascension* (99 Records) Like listening to paint dry, except magnified a few thousand times. A soaring sonic wall-of-bombast essayed by the new darling of the downtown N.Y. avant-garde, with the apparently monolithic slabs of sound giving way to textures that are stunningly orchestral and even classical in scope. Heavy metal for intellectuals or avant-garde for cretins — however you slice it, guitarist Glen Branca is onto something.

Bush Tetras — *Rituals* (Stiff Records EP) These lovable Butch darlings of the N.Y. underground proved their no-wave funk mettle with last year's dance-floor hit, "Too Many Creeps." This time around, producer Topper Headon (the Clash's feisty drummer) has lightened the Bush T's bottom, though nothing could erase these gals' undeniable white soul. Quirky *and* chic, this three-girl-and-one-guy outfit has carved its very own trademarked sound, with one side of this EP marked rhythm, the other paranoia. Modern urban bloozepeople, the start of a new race.

Joan Jett — *I Love Rock 'n' Roll* (Boardwalk) When she's not strutting her mock macho, heavy-metal poses, this erstwhile Runaway represents all that's right with El Lay pop-rock. On her second solo outing, Joan doesn't quite come up with the savvy choice of cover material which made her debut such a startling and pleasant surprise. While that self-titled LP correctly revved up Gary Glitter, this one tries to trashify Dave Clark and Tommy James, a hopeless redundancy. Still vulnerable after all these years, though.

Alan Vega — *Collision Drive* (Ze) Suicide's leather-lunged vocalist once again pays tribute to the King with a be-boppin', finger-snappin' echo chamber of hiccup cool. "Be Bop A Lula" artfully meshes Gene Vincent and Peter Gunn while "Viet Vet" is a wrenching "Frankie Teardrop"-style saga of the sort that no one else in pop would dare attempt. As beautiful as it is unlikely, Vega's second LP shows how delving into rock's past can still enlighten the present.

Romeo Void — *Never Say Never* (415 Records EP) Much of what made this S.F.-based quintet interesting and unique has been eliminated on the title track, where the group's jazzy, telescopic approach has been hardened into yet another pseudo-funk variation on the successful Bush Tetras cum Gang of Four angular rhythms. Singer Deborah Iyall is still as smokily evocative as ever, though, and producer Ric Ocasek does finally manage to provide the band with the aural canvas which allows them to stretch to their impressive instrumental capabilities. Romeo Void's strength has been the fact that they don't sound like anybody else. Forcing them to follow trends may be commercially advantageous, but it certainly does a disservice to the band's undeniable link to its nonconformist beatnik past.

AC/DC — *For Those About To Rock (We Salute You)* (Atlantic) Absolutely the most uncompromising, raucous, hell-bent rock 'n' roll that ever stormed its way to the top of the charts. These vulgar Aussies bang heads with the best of 'em, reeling off one thunderous riff after another, pausing not one split second for reflection or self-consciousness. In by-passing literary devices like metaphors to directy link sex and war in one savage power chord of a double-entendre, AC/DC lubricate their heavy metal narrative with Barthesian gusto. Cannons as cocks. Explosions as orgasms. Creation as destruction. Never has a band worked so hard to provide a well-deserved catharsis for its audience as AC/DC has.

Bob & Doug McKenzie — *Great White North* (Mercury/PolyGram) SC-TV's Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas don their toques, light up a smoke, crack open a bottle of Molson's and fire up the Coleman burner for some back bacon, eh?, in this send-up of a mythical Canadian talk-show starring two dim-witted brothers. If you're familiar with the late-

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night TV program, where this bit got its start, you know what I'm talking about when I call this the funniest comedy album of the year. If you're not, like, where've you been, hoser? Features Geddy Lee of Rush on the hit single, "Take Off."

Germs — *What We Do Is Secret* (Slash EP) Outtakes and tidbits from L.A.'s most lovable hard-core losers, featuring the late Darby Crash self-destructing before your very ears. Savage, terrifying, sad, heartfelt. If you think this is fake punk-rock or a pale imitation of something else, guess again.

Black Flag — *Damaged* (Unicorn/SST) Carries a marvelous disclaimer from the MCA executive who quashed its release on that label: "As a parent... I found it an anti-parent record...." Only if *Rebel Without A Cause* or *The Wild Ones* were anti-parent movies. This is the apogee of the L.A. punk point of view. At once a searing, teeth-gnashing denial of being ("Spray Paint," "Thirsty And Miserable," "Police Story") and a gut-wrenching, courageous affirmation of life-in-the-suburban-void ("Rise Above," "Life Of Pain"). The most apocalyptic rock since Iggy's *Raw Power*, with guitarist Gregg Ginn making James Williamson sound like he's playing acoustic.

Kiss — *Music From "The Elder"* (Casablanca/PolyGram) In which our masked heroes find themselves on a steady decline of popularity, forced to drop ten yards and punt a concept album downfield. The once-reigning comic book kings of the heavy metal hierarchy go the progressive route, lamely approaching the mendacious mundaneness of the Moody Blues or Styx. Where once partying all night was Kiss' sole preoccupation, the boys desperately grope for the rock-opera solution to their commercial doldrums. Sure, this is a bold stroke to enter the hallowed halls of mass appeal, but wouldn't it have been just as easy to remove the Max Factor from their faces? Better leave it on at that. It'll help hide the egg that's bound to follow. M

Jazz Shorts *cont. from pg. 76*

unthinking player — he not only hollers a blues but croons a hopeful ballad, Pullen sounds great, Richmond flies....

Fine albums likewise appear in the odder crannies of the music. *Kew. Rhone.* (Europa via NMDS) is a welcome reissue of an obscure 1977 Virgin album by **Peter Blegvad, John Greaves** and **Lisa Herman**, the lost child, perhaps, of *Escalator Over The Hill.* It's a brilliant piece of work, FEATURING Carla Bley, Michael Mantler and some of their gang, and though Greaves and Blegvad's music owes a great deal to Bley, they wrote it and she didn't and it's great, so there. Blegvad's written that supposed ubiquity but actual rare bird, really good surrealist lyrics ("Peel's foe, not a set animal, laminates a tone of sleep," "Attached to his toe, shackles below the surface hold a neophyte fast who ogles aghast a bone of gold emblazoned with his name"), which Greaves' tunes and orchestrations suit and Herman sings ideally. Makes me feel like hollering, "What a great album! Who are these people?" Too smoothly accomplished, perhaps, to be primary, but full of death's famous opposite. What a great album! Who are these guys? One of the strongest new albums of the month FEATURES some of the same musicians. *Coup De Tete* by **Kip Hanrahan** (American Clave, NMDS) is a streetwise, low-profile-rather-than-minimalist conjunction of SoHo smart-rock, recent jazz and some of the best percussion playing (Daniel Ponce, Jerry Gonzalez, Dom um Romau, Anton Fier, Ignacio Berroa) you'll ever hear. Over the cleanly articulated percussion parts, the excellent bass playing of, alternately, Jamaaladeen Tacuma or Bill Laswell, and insect guitar noise from Arto Lindsay and Henry Kaiser, flit low-key vocals, tenor solos from Chico Freeman, John Stubblefield, Carlos Ward. Hanrahan's place in this is as composer/producer and, less centrally, vocalist; he sings the way you and I do, to ourselves, and doesn't disguise it. Lisa Herman sings a few too, and Carla Bley does one at the bottom of her range. The album's strongest piece, which has stayed with me as tenaciously as anything I've heard lately, is "Sketch For Two Cubas": percussion, guitar skronk, a stunning dark Sibelian synthesizer wash, and just when you start wondering what Miles Davis would sound like over this, Mike Mantler plays a striking, fire and ice trumpet solo that gives the piece everything it needs.

Well Tex, time to get out there in the north forty and round up all them Yurpeen ECMs this mag ritually neglects, chauvinistic yellow press that it is. **Jan Garbarek**'s *Eventyr* seems easily the Big Freeze's warmest album. Joined only by John Abercrombie and Nana Vasconcelos, Garbarek makes the most genuinely interiorized music I've heard from him, virtually always because the pieces (haunting, modal) are based on traditional folk melodies that supply the emotive substrata that Garbarek on his own too often lacks. Enjoyed *The Amazing Adventures Of Simon Simon*, by **John Surman** too. The album, a suite of duos with the always-excellent Jack DeJohnette, stands on the strengths of Surman's command of his multi-reeds and that of his (haunting, modal) written themes. The improvs have their appointed place but are weaker. I kept wishing for, oh, David Murray, someone with fewer scruples and a bit more thrust.

Ohm: Unit Of Resistance (RPM; P.O. Box 42373 San Francisco, CA 94101) is the second promising album from **United Front**, another AECish ensemble out there in the so-called world. A tighter

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unit than Kings, this quartet bears some watching; they're adept, smart, play well, and I expect them to get underivative soon.

Other innaresting oddments include **Van Manakis**, *Love Songs* (Rounder), a tuneful Metheny-chaser with an excellent rhythm section (Bob Moses, Mike Richmond). Manakis is quite gifted, and when he learns Metheny-chasing is a duff's game, look for more. **Rocket 88** (Atlantic) is a bunch of English rockstar types (Charlie Watts, Jack Bruce, Ian Stewart) enthusiastically and not-badly playing barrelhouse 8-to-the-bar and like that. The album provides some dated, plodding fun, but please, **Joe Turner**, *Boss Of The Blues*, with its unforgettable reading of "Piney Brown" only came out last month and hasn't gone platinum yet. Nice, though, to finally hear Charlie Watts play "jazz." This month's sentence in Turkish is, "Git ve bashsiz, gel," and that's all folks. Ⓜ

Lowell George *cont. from pg. 64*

I've seen it hundreds of times. I've seen groups go right through, make an album, then they're in the basement — gone.

For a while it was New York. I mean you could walk down the street in New York and (Hollywood voice): "Hey! Come 'ere a minute! You look good. Sing this." Fabian: "I want to be an actor." "Shut up!" "But I wanna be an actor!" "Shut up and sing this!"

That kind of thing doesn't happen anymore. People have really got to have a little more talent than that. What gets people signed to record companies now is a *song*. Warner Bros. signed me initially because I wrote "Willin'" and signed Rickie Lee (Jones) because I did "Easy Money." Gordon Lightfoot, Arlo Guthrie, Randy Newman and Steve Goodman all got signed that way.

MUSICIAN: How did you come to do Rickie Lee's song?

GEORGE: I live in Topanga Canyon, and there was this little joint called the Post Office that had a Fender amplifier with two microphones plugged into it in the corner. This girl got up and sang "Easy Money." I went "Holy moly! That's a great song!" So I cut it a couple of months later. That was two years ago.

She got a manager and he took her to Warner Bros. The folks there had heard that I had done one of her songs. So they listened to her. Usually, you could be Neil Young but if you haven't recorded anything or had anyone do a song of yours it's, "Yeah, just wait there and we'll get right to you!" or, "My secretary's not in, I can't talk." But she went in and did her songs for them and was signed and did a record and here we are. She's gone platinum.

MUSICIAN: The funny thing is, now that she's so hot, people will say, "Oh, Lowell's covering Rickie Lee Jones!"

GEORGE: Yup. It's a wonderful biz. Ⓜ

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Japanese guitar makers long ago gave up chasing Yankee giants and developed some original new guitars that challenge the classics in great sound, easy playability and quality construction.

By J.C. Costa

Early morning in a hotel room corridor before the third day of a recent NAMM (musical instrument manufacturers) trade show. Fighting through a neurasthenic cloud resulting from late-night wretched excess, my attention is drawn to an eerie ensemble moan wafting out of a suite. A group of very serious gentlemen representing a prominent Japanese manufacturer are already greeting the new dawn with some heavy chanting while the rest of us are trying to get our lungs started. This brief glimpse into the passionate, spiritual commitment of the Japanese to the greater good of the company they've dedicated their lives to provides an initial clue to the music industry success story of the last decade — the meteoric qualitative evolution of Japanese guitar manufacturers, eventually resulting in dominance of the world market.

In the late 50s and 60s, the Japanese had nowhere to go but up. The Nanyo Boeki Trading Company made the initial plunge with copies of lower-priced acoustics that were, above all else, *extremely* affordable. Hoshino Gakki (exporters of Ibanez guitars and Tama Drums) came along in the early-to-middle 60s with lower-priced electrics and acoustics intended for major American retail chain stores. Other names like Telstar, Taisco and Kingston on cheap copy guitars that were often unplayable, with sound ranging from fair to horrible, started popping up in music stores as lower-priced alternatives for the beginning player. The Ibanez guitars made the first legitimate sortie onto 48th Street (New York City's MI mecca) with some rather unwieldy items featuring necks made of multiple plywood laminations and other oddities.

With Ibanez pretty much leading the way, the initial conceptual thrust for Japanese manufacturers centered on knocking off classic American electrics like Strats, Les Pauls and ES-335s. Sensing a void in the middle and upper-middle price ranges, partly due to the leading U.S. companies' unfortunate "fat cat" tendency to coast on their reputations in terms of price/performance ratio, more and more Japanese firms jumped into the fray. Moving up in price meant increased quality and more input from British and American musicians — at this point the Hendrix/Clapton/Beck/Page Guitar Hero was firmly established in the rock 'n' roll firmament — as to what players *really* wanted. Having committed themselves in full, the Japanese organized their work force (always a principal asset) and aggressively chased after the best woods from all over the world. A variety of trading companies were set up to more accurately interpret fast-moving marketing trends for what was an unparalleled post-war baby boom surge in the MI market. As the Japanese companies became hipper to what was going on, the guitars got better.

Two of the finest Japanese originals, the Ibanez George Benson, the Yamaha SBG-2000

In fact, some of the copy-style instruments got so good with respect to value for dollars spent, they started putting a real scare into the American "sleeping giants." Willing to look the other way for years, these founding father companies were being bought up by major conglomerates and, already concerned about brand name diffusion, were not in the mood for further encroachment on territory they had already laid claim to. Ominous rumblings about lawsuits and patent infringement coursed through the industry and the Japanese were quick to pick up on the message. Spearheaded by the efforts of Ibanez, Yamaha, Aria and others, the emphasis for Japanese guitar construction quickly moved away from obvious copies to brilliant *rethinks* of classic American models.

Yamaha (Nippon Gakki), supported by a major corporate organization making a wide range of top quality audio equipment and keyboard instruments, took the high road into the American guitar market. Surprisingly good acoustic flat-top guitars were followed by two of the most exceptional Japanese electric instruments ever to come into this country — the Yamaha SBG-2000 solid body and SA-2000 semi-acoustic guitar. The former avoided the obvious territory represented by the Strat and Les Paul to focus on the brilliant but flawed Gibson SG double-cutaway design. An offshoot of the Les Paul, the SG is a lightweight, resonant instrument with an elegant body shape offering excellent access to the upper registers. Usually made of mahogany (neck and body), the guitar is a bit *too* light to produce the characteristically thick Gibson sound (Pete Townshend overcame this with massive UK amplification) and the "whippy" nature of the neck-to-body ratio caused tuning problems. Yamaha came up with a stunning double-cutaway design featuring a thick mahogany body with a maple top and a maple neck/centerpiece running the length of the instrument. Crisp and sensitive humbucking pickups were teamed with massive hardware to boost the SBG-2000's prodigious sustain capabilities. Finishing and detail work (frets, inlay, etc.) was up to traditionally excellent Japanese standards.

The SA-2000 "Acoustic Electric" guitar embodied the same kind of top drawer re-conceptualization, this time keyed to the more flexible semi-hollow body format. Besides firmly establishing Yamaha in the electric guitar market, these guitars served notice that there

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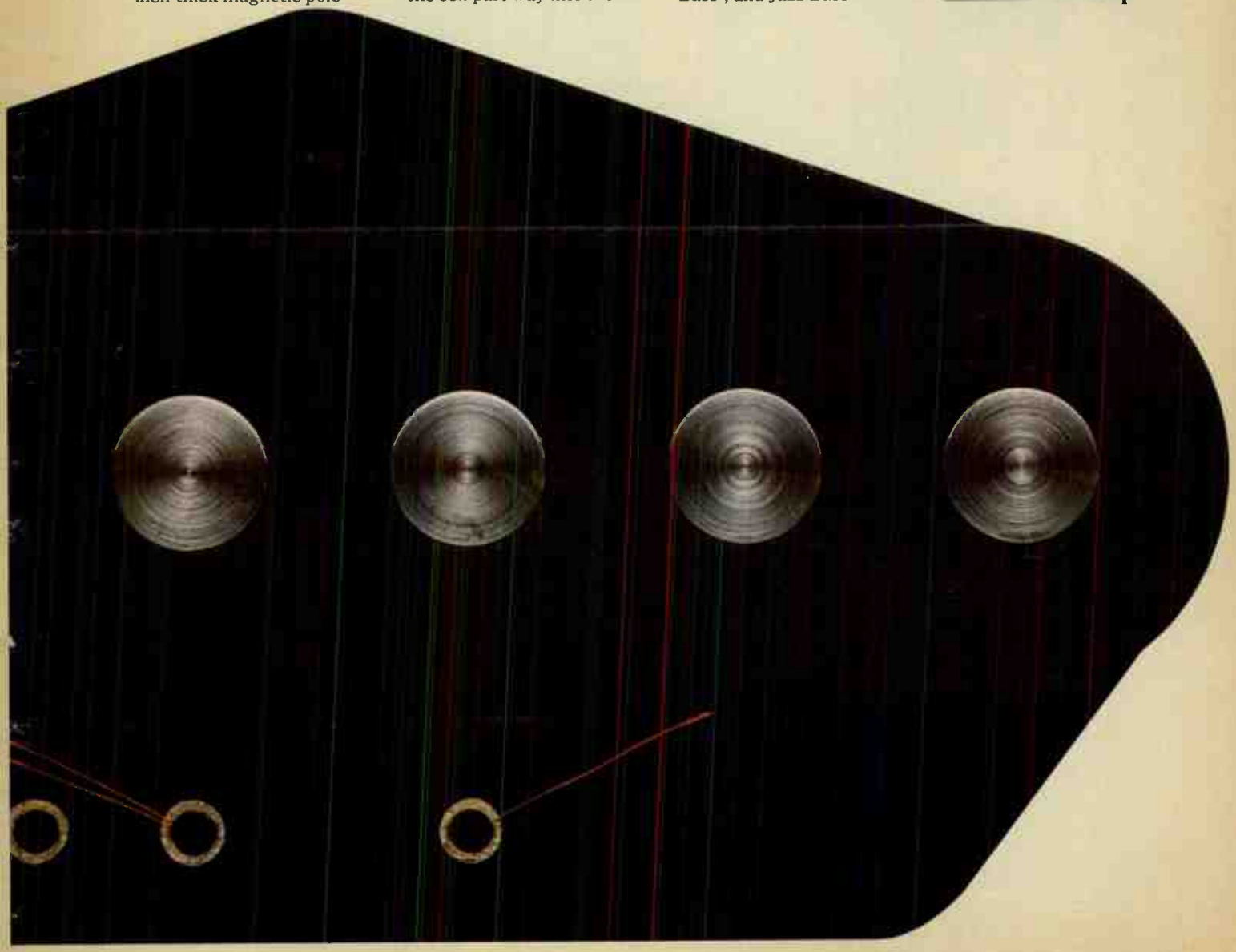

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was a Japanese company willing to compete head-to-head with leading American manufacturers in the top-of-the-line price category. Justifiably proud of the end result of years of intensive research and development and consultation with musicians in all styles of music, Yamaha didn't feel the need to *undercut* U.S. competition in terms of pricing. And although the consumer was subtly made aware that leading players like Carlos Santana were using Yamaha, the company avoided official endorsements (a basic strategy for other Japanese firms) in the belief that the guitars would succeed on their own merits.

Yamaha's singular decision to go its own way and not ape the competition played a major role in gaining upper-echelon credibility for all Japanese companies. Having started at the top, Yamaha has followed up their trailblazing efforts with a mid-priced line of electrics (SBG500, SSC500, SHB400) offering the same type of quality in a more pared-down format. If this company has any real problem, it is simply the fact that they have defined themselves within the context of the middle to upper price brackets — not exactly the most viable market share at this point in time.

Smaller companies like Ibanez and Aria, lacking Yamaha's across the board corporate clout, have had to take a slightly different road. Ibanez (made by Fuji Gen-Gakki in Japan) and Aria Pro II (made by Matsumoku) have concentrated their efforts on bringing in well-made instruments with all of the time-tested popular features (fast action, open-coil pickups, coil splitting and phase switching, custom colors, brass hardware, etc.) at lower prices than American competitors.

Ibanez spent a lot of time refining their flashy and serviceable Artist Series solid bodies, the latest and most successful being the AR300CS "Tiger Flame" guitar featured in a comprehensive ad campaign. Like many of their instruments, this guitar is a triumph of marketing trends expertise, with every popular wrinkle conceivable to the human imagination included for the young rocker. Their "signature" series, kicked off by the innovative George Benson GB-10 hollow body guitar and soon followed by a Joe Pass hollow body and Lee Ritenour semi-hollow body guitar, added considerable prestige to the Ibanez line. Future developments for the company include new finishes and colors for the popular Artist and Blazer Series guitars as well as a Flying V-style instrument dubbed the Rocket Roll (RR-50, RR-400). Even though Ibanez has suffered from the economic malaise affecting all guitar manufacturers in the middle to upper market demographic (caused by factors like product saturation, shrinking youth market, a notice-

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able lack of new instrumental stars and general economic blahs), their vast product line and manufacturing flexibility will help them through the next phase of development.

Aria Pro II guitars (a division of the Arai company, but this particular designation is exclusive to the U.S.) have developed along the same lines as Ibanez. Like other Japanese companies, these guitars have benefited from that country's judicious blend of computerization and superior handwork to produce competitively-priced electrics designed to offer all of the best modern sounds and textures which can be extracted from the instrument. Also like Ibanez, Aria has relied heavily on extensive endorsement advertising to penetrate all levels of the American market. In fact, they are currently running a heavy push on their excellent new Aria Pro II PE-R (PE-R80 and PE-R60) solid body, featuring players like Mike Pinera (Alice Cooper), Robin LeMesurier (Rod Stewart) and Neal Schon. They also appear to be the first to make extensive use of crossover promotion (why hasn't anybody in MI done this sooner?) with record companies to help sell their guitars.

The International Music Corporation (importers of Hondo and Tokai guitars) is in a better position than most because of their specialization in the lower-priced segment of the guitar market. Relying more and more on Korean-made instruments (85% in 1981 versus 15% Japanese) because they can be priced even lower than Japanese instruments (Korean labor is cheaper than Japanese which is now on a par with U.S. labor in terms of costs, *not* productivity), IMC moves a phenomenal amount of instruments to 72 countries every year. Capitalizing on what is the most viable share of the market right now (up to $200 price range), the company will be expanding their already awesome line of guitars with new V and Explorer-style guitars, a reproduction of the classic Django Reinhardt Selmer Macaferri guitar (with built-in transducer) and the Hondo 3X "Nomad" guitar with a built-in amplifier-speaker.

Under the heading of "contract" guitar companies, we have American firms like Washburn, Westbury, St. Louis Music and Vantage that import guitars from Japanese heavyweights like Matsumoku, designed and built to their specifications. These have had a significant, if not intrinsically original, impact on the American MI scene and space limitations preclude an extensive evaluation of what they have to offer. Suffice to say that they offer a wide range of presentable electrics in terms of price and features. Of course, the extensive input of the American companies into the Japanese manufacturing process in this context can either be beneficial or totally counterproductive, depending on the company involved.

Just a passing note, of interest mainly because it represents the final realization of the copy guitar syndrome, is the recent and trendy emergence (both over and under the counter) of Japanese "clone" guitars. Led by names like Tokai (who has its own original line of "official" U.S. guitars), Fernandes and E.S.P., this phenomenon involves the scarily accurate recreation of popular American vintage guitars down to the most finite detail. E.S.P. is already developing an extensive parts business (check out their "Flicker" tremolo bar) just in case the legal beagles come sniffing around. Controversial as these are, they should be viewed as an extremely well-executed testimonial to Yankee ingenuity providing a humorous footnote to the whole "copy guitar" mentality.

On a more positive and sensible note for the future is Roland's recent involvement in the guitar business as part of their futuristic new Roland GR *Electronic* guitar system. Roland is the first and only company to bring out the electric guitar synthesizer in a user-oriented, affordable format. Using a unique hexaphonic pickup on a variety of well-made electrics based on popular styles, these guitars interface with several Roland synthesizer modules designed to create an entirely new vocabulary of sounds for the instrument. Polyphonic from the outset, these guitars stand on their own as viable traditional electrics (an important marketing factor because no one wants to spend extra bucks on *another* guitar just for synthesis). Roland also offers conversion kits for those who can't bear to part with their original instruments. The company plans to break a "no endorsement" tradition in the near future with extensive promotion featuring future-think players like Robert Fripp, Andy Summers, Jeff Baxter and Jimmy Page who are already using the GR System on record and in live performance. Capping off this high-tech approach to the evolution of electric guitars will be their new GR-700 system offering all of the features found on Roland's Jupiter 8 keyboard synthesizer. Rumor also has it that New England Digital is working on a digital synthesizer which will interface with the Roland GR system.

Whatever direction Japanese manufacturers intend to take, their efforts will be characterized by an energetic and full-hearted dedication to expanding and refining the quality of their instruments. The best way to grasp what the Japanese have accomplished in such a short time is to trundle down to your local music store and sit with one of those remarkable instruments for a while. Then you'll begin to realize why "Made In Japan" doesn't mean run for cover anymore. M

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PITFALLS AND POTHOLES: SOUND ON THE ROAD

Out on the road with a different house system every night, bunky? Sparks off the pan controls, squeals in the monitors and beer in the pots got you down? Here are a few of Uncle Marc's sure-fire secret remedies.

By Marc Silag

Though life on the road may seem a romantic route of exciting nightlife, exotic travel and exhilarating lifestyles to some outsiders, most touring musicians and technicians know better. Adjusting day to day from one club to another and, more to the point, from one sound system to another, is as wearing as the boring hours behind the wheel of a temperamental rental truck and the faded shag carpet in each hotel along the Interstate to stardom. In the case of the nomadic soundman, the goal of good sound out front and a happy band onstage is an elusive proposition. A different P.A. and monitor system every night can wreak havoc with one's aural perceptions. The question is, how does one cope with so many variables?

Having recently completed a short tour in the Northeast with the Jan Hammer Group, we thought it might be prudent to note some of the pitfalls a traveling sound engineer might face while on the road, while offering some potential remedies to ill-sounding systems.

On this occasion the band was a power trio: Hammer's single synthesizer; bass guitar and a double-kick drum set. The requirements were as follows: 17 channels for the house mix, while only 8 channels were required in the monitors, although ideally each player required an independent mix onstage. In many cases during the tour we were fortunate to find clubs or P.A. companies prepared to comply with our requests. On the other side of the coin, we often made do with equipment that in polite circles could only be described as minimal.

Club owners have recognized the importance of quality technical facilities since the mid-70s when clubs like the Roxy in L.A. and the Bottom Line in New York established new standards for club or cabaret sound installations. The logic here was two-fold: on the one hand to provide sound pleasing to the paying customer's ears, but also to insure artist comfort onstage, an important consideration when it comes time to rebook an act that did well at the door last time around. Economics prohibit a club's updating of the in-house system every time a newer, better board or crossover unit becomes available, so what might have been considered state of the art in 1976 is not always up to the job in 1982. Fortunately for both musician and technician, there are few promoters around these days who feel their only obligations to the band are to open up the doors for the afternoon load-in and to pay them at the end of the night. We found there was generally one person at each venue responsible for maintaining the P.A. and helping out during the soundcheck and set changes during the show. Such personnel are invaluable and most go out of their way to provide all concerned with the guidance necessary to get the show up and do it right. These people can be as vital to good sound as the board you mix on. But in the end, the soundman's existence is often based on compromise.

The soundman, having solved another pesky problem, relaxes at the board, a job well done.

Compromise #1: *You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you get what you need.*

The tour began in a well-known nightspot in lower Manhattan, known more for honky tonking than Hammer's rock 'n' roll histrionics on the keyboard. The first problem was the house board, a Soundcraft 16-channel mixer whose faders had been lubricated with more than a few beers over the years. The gain pots on the board were also sorely in need of a proper bath. A little pot cleaner applied to all channels dissipated the sand block effect when levels were increased. Monitors were mixed from the house mix position which compounded an already difficult situation. The monitors themselves were suspended over the stage, crossfiring to the band, providing minimal coverage, especially in light of the fact that the board offered only one monitor send. In an effort to provide drummer Greg Carter with an independent mix, a little repatching and a quick decision to forego the use of the echo unit on the vocals provided the required mix utilizing the echo send on the board.

Another New York booking provided idyllic circumstances: two Yamaha PM-2000 boards, one each for the house and the stage monitors. When used for monitors, the Yamaha unit provided up to eight separate sends for stage cabinets. No complaints here. The house technical staff of three made life easy and uncomplicated.

Compromise #2: *I got work to do . . .*

Travel prepared to perform mundane maintenance chores. You don't know what calamities the board you're going to use has encountered before your arrival. A well-equipped tool box is a wise investment, although the tools selected should be "disposable," such items have a tendency to disappear rapidly while on tour, so leave your Jenson tool kit at home. Cheaper, less sturdy tools and test equipment can accomplish the task required just as well as their more expensive counterparts and cushion the loss of "misplacement." The aforementioned pot cleaner, along with Q-Tips and alcohol are handy aids in the relief of system indigestion and, along with replacement fuses, tubes and spare cords should be considered standard to any traveling sound magician's bag of tricks.

Speaking of test equipment, don't forget a cord tester and a voltmeter. After leaving New York we headed north to upstate New York to a not-so-small club that services the local college crowd's thirst for bands and booze. While the band and the accompanying personnel enjoyed the one-night stand, they were plagued by an annoying buzz in the monitor system and a grounding problem in the electrical system that rendered this reporter's arms numb for about three hours after he "manually" checked the ground between amps and microphones plugged into the P.A. A voltmeter will prevent such shocking

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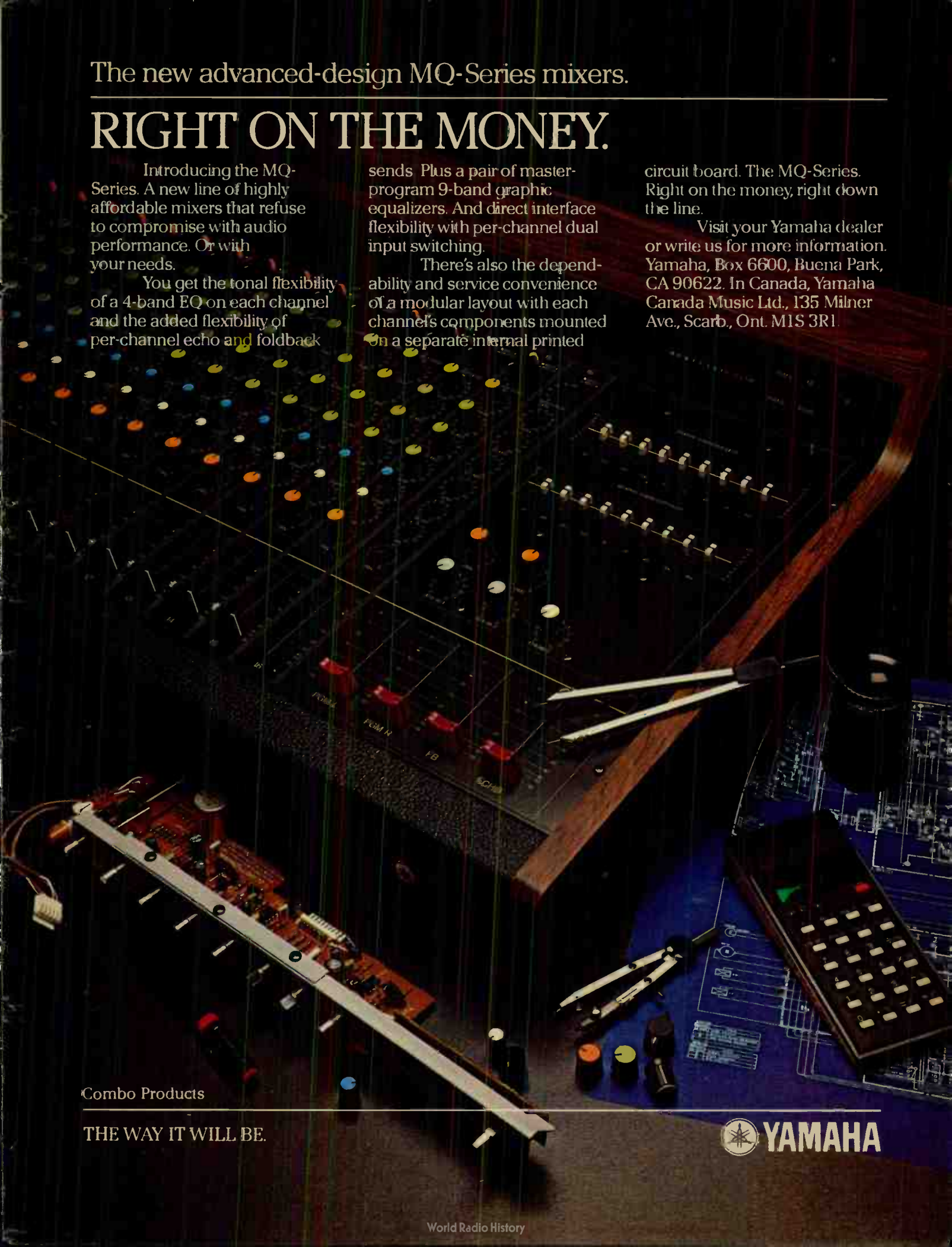

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experiences that have too often proved fatal to performers and technicians alike.

The upstate venue provided a Kelsey 20x4 console of British manufacture. From its appearance and performance one might have thought it to be a survivor of the Blitzkrieg! While Tom Arrigoni, Hammer's monitor mixer, worked with the house crew (i.e. the soundman) trying to isolate the buzz in the monitors, we took some time to study the board. Simply laid out and easy to follow, it provided basic three-band eq and four submixes. As was the case at the New York honky tonk, the board had some gain controls that sounded like a bowl of Rice Krispies, while all faders lost any sense of linearity above -10 db. This meant that as fader levels were increased, volume levels jumped erratically. Hammer's setup incorporated both a direct input from the synthesizer to the board as well as a Shure SM-57 mike (the only choice at this venue) on the amplifier. The lack of linear faders made it difficult to utilize the intended effect of the two synthesizer inputs — the direct to be used during the quiet solo passages with the mike ready to supply the raunch of the Marshall 200-watt head, aided by the use of the recently marketed Power Soak by Boston guitarist Tom Scholz, a truly wonderful device that adds distortion to any sound without increasing the volume of the amplifier. The only solution to a problem like this was to get used to it during soundcheck and hope that no one would notice during the show.

Compromise #3: *Tommy can you hear me...?*

Oh the luxury of a soundcheck! As many opening acts know, soundchecks are rare when supporting a major headliner. As openers for the Allman Brothers at a college show, there was little likelihood that the band would get an adequate soundcheck, despite the Allman Brothers' deference to soundchecks. Clair Brothers of Lititz, Pennsylvania provided the sound for the show and to their credit tried to provide the band with three monitor mixes with little preparation — all the while working around the Allman Brothers' setup. The Clair Brothers systems are so cleanly engineered that the only thing the one-time mixer had to concentrate on during the show was his "innate skill" to get optimum performance in the hall, in this case a cavernous gymnasium suitable for the storage of a gaggle of 747s, conveniently alleviating the need for electronic echo or reverb.

The Clair Brothers board is a custom unit built and designed by the Clair Brothers' engineering staff. This differentiates it from the "homemade" board. This variety of console can be a real headache unless there is a house technician who can explain the functions of the switches that usually show signs of having once been labeled with Dymo tape, long since peeled off by bored soundmen. Spending a good amount of time with this board before soundcheck proved to be a great asset in getting the most out of the system. What at first might appear to be a clunker of a console may actually turn out to be a hot board to operate. After the echo from the Allman Brothers show had worn off, we encountered such a board in a small club in Poughkeepsie and found it to be exceptionally clean and responsive. No wonder. It had been designed to specs provided by the Grateful Dead and had once been their monitor board when the band was in the P.A. business!

Other boards we encountered on this all-too-brief tour were a newer model Soundcraft which provided four bands of parametric eq and smooth controls throughout. An American-made Kelsey proved to be a delight to operate, quiet in all its functions, although the outboard eq in that particular system was noisy — a consideration worth noting if the system is going to reinforce an acoustic soloist.

One quick way to prepare for a road tour of club venues is to read up on the specs of boards already mentioned as well as consoles built by companies like Shure, Tangent, the Ramsa Series by Panasonic, Tapco, Peavey and so on. Outboard equipment varies from place to place, but MXR equalizers are common as are the proven units manufactured by Urei and Klark Technics.

It might be useful to bring along a good pair of headphones for soloing channels and balance reference of the mix. Although most boards have headphone outputs, we found that few clubs had 'phones that worked, let alone suited our idea of comfort. A pair of tried-and-true Koss Pro 4A s served our purposes quite nicely, but there are more than a few good pairs of "cans" suitable for reinforcement applications.

The last date of the tour found us playing a well-known club in New Haven, whose P.A. is well maintained, with one exception. During soundcheck, the club-supplied direct box for Colin Hodgkinson's bass amp was buzzing terribly and we elected to go with just a mike on the bass cabinets. During the first set that night, Colin's amp head blew a fuse and precious time was lost as Arrigoni replaced the blown head with a spare. Had we carried a spare DI box we could have continued the set uninterrupted by pumping that DI in the house mix and through the monitors. So it goes.

Compromise #4: *I get by with a little help from my friends.*

Work with the house staff. They are there to help you put on the best show possible. Short fuses get poor results. We noticed that when the shows sounded good, most of the boredom of road life quickly disappeared. M

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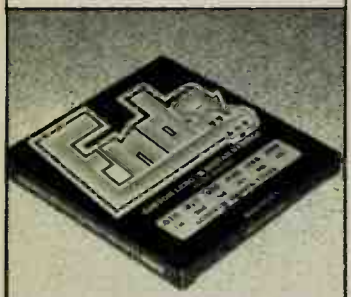

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The Source, introduced by **Moog**, is a microprocessor-controlled programmable monophonic synthesizer. The Source contains two digital sequencers, each capable of storing up to 88 notes. A new feature stores any sequence of voice program changes to automatically change programmed "voices" during the playback of either prerecorded note sequence, and a new concept in arpeggiators allows programming and instant changing of arpeggio patterns in performance. Sixteen programs are stored in memory for instant access, and editing of all functions is immediately available through use of touch panel and single incremental knob. All programs, note sequences, program sequences and arpeggios may be saved with standard cassette tape recorder. Besides the cassette interface, the rear panel also contains both S and V Triggers in and out and control voltage in and out, which allow The Source to control other instruments as a synthesizer or as a sequencer. Moog Music, Inc., 2500 Walden Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14225.

Tama Drums announces the availability of the AW458, an 8" x 14" snare drum. Developed for the drummer who prefers the deep sound of an oversized drum, the AW458's six plies of specially selected birch provide outstanding resonance and durability. Ten "Hi Power" lugs offer fast and dependable tuning utilizing an internal rod lock bushing. This nylon retainer eliminates the rattles and resonances that can occur with metal spring retainers. Other features include "PC" high pressure die-cast hoops and spring-loaded rollers on both sides of the strainer which offer positive throw-off action with quick lever adjustment. Hoshino U.S.A. Inc., P.O. Box 469, Bensalem, PA 19020.

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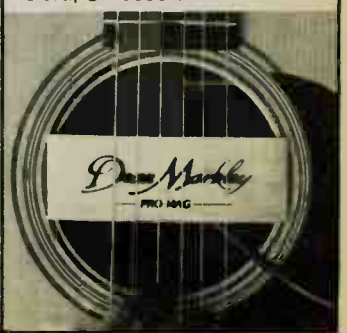

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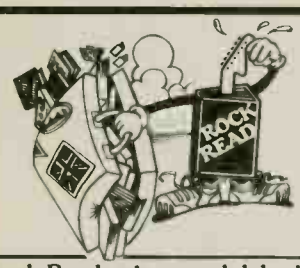

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BACK ISSUES

No. 18 **Pat Metheny**, Jazz Organ, Dire Straits
No. 20 **Steely Dan**, Session Players, Jeff Lorber
No. 21 **Brian Eno**, Reggae Festival, The Bear I
No. 22 **Stevie Wonder**, Rock and Jazz in the 70s
No. 23 **Sonny Rollins**, Townshend, Bonnie Raitt
No. 24 **Bob Marley**, Sun Ra, Free Jazz & Punk
No. 25 **Bob Seger**, Julius Hemphill, Tom Petty
No. 28 **Mark Knopfler**, Roxy Music, DeJohnette
No. 29 **Mike McDonald**, Capt. Beefheart, Oregon
No. 30 **Bruce Springsteen**, Best in Rock & Jazz
No. 31 **Steely Dan**, John Lennon, Steve Winwood
No. 32 **Talking Heads**, Brian Eno, Air
No. 33 **The Clash**, Lindsey Buckingham, RS Jackson
No. 34 **Tom Petty**, Wayne Shorter, L.A. Punk
No. 35 **The Doors**, David Lindley, Carla Bley
No. 36 **Grateful Dead**, Koolathon, Skunk Baxter
No. 37 **Reggae**, The Rolling Stones, Rickie Lee Jones
No. 38 **Police**, Bassists, Pretenders, David Murray
No. 39 **Cars**, Keyboardists, Earth, Wind and Fire
No. 40 **Ringo**, Drummers, Devo, Rossington-Collins

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PICK HITS OF 1981

Now that 1981 is *really* over, we've asked five of our writers to come up with their favorite records of the past year, along with comments on '81 and what they'll be watching for in '82.

Dan Forte

1. **David Lindley** — *El Rayo-X* A debut album as important as the 15-year career that led to it.
2. **The Go-Go's** — *Beauty And The Beat* The most enjoyable album to emerge from the new wave
3. **Lindsey Buckingham** — *Law And Order* A quirky, unpredictable work of genius
4. **Pat Metheny & Lyle Mays** — *As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls* Two masters of melody team up with one of the world's greatest percussionists, Nana Vasconcelos
5. **Fabulous Thunderbirds** — *Butt Rockin'* Still not as hot as those Texas blues boys' club appearances but they're getting closer
6. **Jerry Jeff Walker** — *Reunion* The year's most stunning comeback LP from progressive country's most unlikely candidate
7. **Stephen Grappelli & David Grisman** — *Live* The master of swing violin teams with a Gypsy soul for the second time in his long career
8. **The Neville Brothers** — *Fiyo On The Bayou* At last an album that consistently represents what's so good about New Orleans' premier R&B family
9. **Steve Winwood** — *Arc Of A Diver* Another fine comeback by rock's finest vocalist

Best Concert: Frank Zappa playing "Whipping Post" at Berkeley Community Theatre, December 10, 1981.

1981: seemed to be the year of Dire Straits Even though the group didn't release a new LP lead guitarist Mark Knopfler's Stratocaster sound and linear writing style influenced everyone from Rod Stewart and Santana to Steve Miller and Eric Clapton

1982: With new groups like the Raybeats and Jon & the Nightriders — not to mention the return of the Ventures and the Surfaris — instrumental rock is no longer just a nostalgic novelty Yes, 1982 will mark the Summer of Surf You heard it here first.

J.D. Considine

1. **Tom Verlaine** — *Dreamtime* My rock dream-come-true
2. **James Blood Ulmer** — *Free Lancing* Got the funk, and the notes too
3. **The Psychedelic Furs** — *Talk Talk Talk* Music that says, "Listen, listen, listen."
4. **U2** — *Boy* A celebration of precociousness.
5. **Black Uhuru** — *Red* Genuinely soulful reggae
6. **Au Pairs** — *Playing With A Different Sex* Gang of Four plus vocals.
7. **Plastics** — *Plastics* Techno-rock you can dance and giggle to
8. **The Police** — *Ghosts In The Machine* Making the airwaves safe for thinking musicians
9. **The Go-Go's** — *Beauty And The Beat* Genuinely likeable pop rock

Best Concert: Gang of Four, Washington, D.C The Gang of Four gave up the funk, which in itself was exhilarating enough, and then came back for a series of encores that gave more to the audience than most bands give in a year.

1981: For me, the two most promising developments of the year were not musical but technological. First, music on cable TV has shown that not only was radio's view of what type of music could be sold to the masses was wrong (which we figured), but that radio is not necessarily the future of broadcast music (which we had hoped). second, the use of microprocessors and digital technology in synthesizers, which will expand the horizons of possible sounds while simultaneously lowering the technical proficiency needed to play music Not bad for an off year.

1982: Adrian Belew, Kraftwerk, Luther Vandross, Laurie Anderson, Kix

Brian Cullman

1. **UB40** — *Present Arms.* A two-tone with the spirit, a memory and a beat, non stop
2. **Yoko Ono** — *Walking On Thin Ice* An awesome single, more than dancing, less than time Yoko's finest recorded vocal and a dazzling guitar solo by Lennon
3. **The Specials** — *Ghost Town* Kurt Weil gone ska, in Thatcher's London
4. **Pete Shelley** — *Homo Sapien* The best dance song of the year Euro-pop from a once and former Buzzcock
5. **Grace Jones** — *Nightclubbing.* The best dance album of the year
6. **Elvis Costello** — *Trust* His strongest since *Armed Forces*
7. **Laurie Anderson** — *O Superman* An 8-minute tour de force that made it to #2 on the British charts Why not here?
8. **Material** — *Memory Serves* Attitude of the year
9. **The Raybeats** — *Guitar Beat* Enio Marriconi goes surfing

Best Concert: Split decision Johnny Copeland in Harlem / Black Uhuru, N.Y.C

1981: "No matter how simple a man might be the obvious cannot go on astounding him forever." — Thomas Merton

1982: Pete Shelley, T-Bone Burnett, ESG, Prince, UB40

Vic Garbarini

1. **The Rolling Stones** — *Tattoo You* Only rock 'n' roll, and I loved it Recipients, Prodigal Sons Award, Rock Division
2. **King Crimson** — *Discipline* Hendrix meets McLaughlin, live from Burundi. (As interpreted by the Venutian Symphony Orchestra.)
3. **The Clash** — *Sandinista!* The Boys from Brixton grow up without growing old. A bit overproduced, but delivers the goods in the end
4. **Black Uhuru** — *Red* and white, and black all over Best reggae of the year. Hell, the best since the Wailers' *Burnin'*
5. **Tom Petty** — *Hard Promises.* The Great White Hope of mainstream rock And the vocal on "Woman In Love" proves he *means* it, man
6. **Steve Miller** — *Circle Of Love* Chuck Berry and Mark Knopfler reminisce about the Summer of Love from the back of a chrome-plated jeep
7. **The King Kong Compilation** — *Heart And Soul* Finest reggae anthology since *The Harder They Come*
8. **The Go-Go's** — *Beauty And The Beat* Top Pop-Top Pop
9. **Romeo Void** — *It's A Condition* Battle of the Bands winner, Angstville Jr. High. Best S.F. group since the early Airplane

Best Concert: King Crimson, N.Y.C Fripp finally lets down his (avant) guard, and all hell (and heaven) breaks loose 'Bout time

1981: It's always darkest just before the dawn Song of The Year the Kinks' "Better Days." The last rock song that made me cry like that was "Born To Run." Thanks, Ray, I needed that

1982: King Crimson, Prince, Laurie Anderson, Clash, L.A. Punks, Material, Pigbag, Joan Jett — and audiences who can give as well as take

Rafi Zabor

1. **Archie Shepp & Horace Parlan** — *Trouble In Mind* This is one album about which I feel unequivocal, a classic distillation of the blues
2. **Shannon Jackson & the Decoding Society** — *Nasty* The best new working band in years gradually learns how to record
3. **Old And New Dreams** — *Playing* A fine band's best album, and an excellent, sprightly registration of a live concert
4. **Lester Young** — *"Pres" Vol. IV* Finally realized how great the whole series was. Superb 50s Lester
5. **Art Pepper** — *Winter Moon, Landscape* and *Friday & Saturday Nights At The Village Vanguard* Taken one at a time the albums are good. Together they add up even more impressively.
6. **Carla Bley** — *Social Studies, Fictitious Sports* and *Amarcord Nino Rota* Same deal You need all three albums for a full portrait of a composer who always manages to elude the frame
7. **Various Artists** — *Phases Of The Moon* I'm not sure about the orchestral authenticity, but this album of Chinese traditional music is so unembarrassed about the fullness of its emotions, it's made me hear everything differently
8. **World Saxophone Quartet** — *WSQ* Four of the best saxophonists in the music make their best record together A jump band for the 80s
9. **McCoy Tyner** — *La Leyenda De La Hora* An old standby takes a forward step, especially on the ballad "Jacara."

Best Concerts: Ornette Coleman, N.Y.C Shannon Jackson & the Decoding Society Yonkers, Pat Metheny & 80/81 Band Woodstock, N.Y. Miles Davis, N.Y.C

1982: The Big Four (Miles, Rollins, Ornette, Cecil), Shannon Jackson, Anthony Davis, George Lewis, James Newton, Odean Pope, Henry Threadgill Sextet

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The Commande Series embodies the implicit corporate philosophy at MXR. From day one, we've understood our products to represent more than mere hardware in the music-making process. Our signal processing devices are intended as individual instruments for the musician to use much as an artist uses a palette and a paintbrush. Colorations to enhance the music and focus a musician's individual means of creative expression. Transcending the hard-line parameters of electronic technology where signal processing becomes an art form in itself.

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