

# MUSICIAN

\$1.95 No. 50.  
DEC., 1982

ICD08582

## Billy Joel

BY TIMOTHY WHITE

*A Native Son Revealed*



Inside 15 Years of Floyd

## Elvis

BY DAVE MARSH



### The Failure of Corporate Rock



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World Radio History

th.  
Anniversary  
Issue

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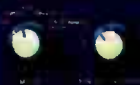


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# MUSICIAN

NO. 50, DEC., 1982

**Pink Floyd** led by bassist/vocalist Roger Waters and guitarist David Gilmour made the most unique and arresting space rock of the 70s. David Gilmour in a rare interview, with David Fricke, reviews the Floyd's work in minute musical detail, from the psychedelic days of Syd Barrett to the disturbing imagery of *The Wall*. Page 48



**Billy Joel**, who has successfully made the "transition" from pop stylist to rock n' roll superstar, now focuses his keen songwriting skills on America's crisis of confidence and produces his finest album to date. Timothy White talks to Joel about his new opus, his irreverent band, his shifting personal life and some basic beliefs. Page 58



**Corporate rock**, the safe, stork-vapid AOR rock that presently dominates our airwaves and album charts, has ossified into a whole way of life for labels, radio stations, promoters, retailers and especially artists. A search for the complex causes of this debacle and a look at the heroes and villains, and future of an industry in crisis. Page 72



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 Elvis—Michael Ochs, Corporate Rock—Robert Grossman

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**Each one breaks the three-minute song barrier,  
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**Music that makes its own time.**

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On Warner Bros. Records & Cassettes.

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# BUDDY RICH IN A CLASS ALL HIS OWN.

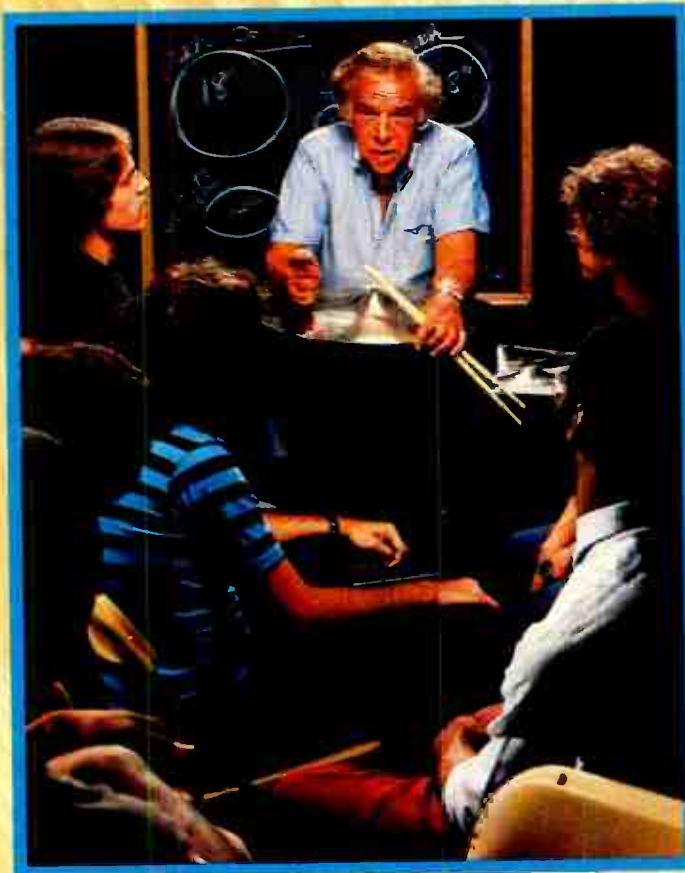
Buddy has been described as a "Blindingly gifted performer - his talent begins where other drummers' ends." No, Buddy didn't say that - he would have, but he didn't. Recently we sat in with Buddy and a group of students during a classroom session in New York. Here's what Buddy did have to say:

## On The Drummer's Role.

"When I get on the bandstand, I have to play for my band. Listen, if I don't play good for them, they can't play good for me. So all I am, for the first hour and twenty minutes that I'm up there is the drummer in the band. When I play my solo, that's different, but up until that time, I have to approximate my band's sound. And that's what a drummer is for. The drummer is a timekeeper."

**On Practicing.** "Practice as long as you feel you want to practice. As long as it's a kick. If it's only 15 minutes and you feel like you don't want to play anymore, put the sticks down and go out. Play stickball, go out and do whatever you want. But then go back when you feel the urge to play, and really play! Remember, there's no substitute for practice."

**On Technique.** "What you do with one hand you should be able to do with the other. It will help you to get around



*Buddy's no stranger to higher education; he was recently awarded an honorary doctorate from Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music.*

the set better and make you more versatile as a drummer."

## On The Crash Cymbal.

"It's got to be fast. When the brass plays a figure, the crash has to accompany it. It isn't something that you hit after the brass; it has to be right there. It can't be obtrusive, and it can't be more cymbal than brass. The cymbal has to sound like the brass sounds, so that's why I use a higher pitched 18" Medium Thin Crash on the right side and a lower pitched 18" Thin Crash on the left."

## On Zildjians.

"Why do I play Zildjian cymbals? Because they're the only cymbals that are playable. You just have to listen to them to know what I mean. I started playing

Zildjian cymbals when I was ten years old - I've never used another cymbal in my entire life."

If you're a serious drummer, chances are overwhelming that you, like Buddy, are already playing Zildjians. Zildjian: a line of cymbals played by drummers on six continents - a line of cymbal makers that spans three centuries.

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M-12/82



# LETTERS

## MILLER'S SUSPICIOUS INFLUENCES

You've got to love Steve Miller. Someone offers him a microphone for an hour and a half interview, and we get to hear all about how Steve had blues greats over for dinner, how Steve taught everyone everything they know and how Pete Townshend is a wimp. It's kind of fun listening to Steve Miller proclaim himself king of modern-day guitar, and of course, it's easier than being talented.

Just for kicks, let's recap the artists who Steve has been "influenced by" and the songs those "influences" appear in...

"Rockin' Me"—"I'm Alright Now," Free  
"The Stake"—"Rocky Mountain Way," Joe Walsh (Walsh threatened to sue)  
"Abracadabra"—"I've Got The Music In Me," Kiki Dee (lyrics)

"Take The Money And Run"—"Sweet Home Alabama," Lynyrd Skynyrd

The list goes on. Arrogance will never replace originality, the same way "The Joker" will never replace "My Generation." Steve himself must know the difference between an artist and a pop mimic. Artists endure. Musicians like Miller are remembered only as long as their last radio success. See you in Tahoe, Steve. You know, just around the corner from Las Vegas.

George Manos  
No Address Given

## EDDIE GETS RESPECTABLE

As a long-time Eddie Van Halen fan, I was most appreciative of your September cover story. In the past five years, most critics have apparently been unable to look past David Lee Roth's obnoxious image to recognize the truly amazing talent of Sir Edward. I find it unfortunate that Eddie is just another victim of guilt by association.

It is about time that a "respected" music magazine offered fair and objective coverage of Eddie Van Halen. *Musician* and J.D. Considine are both to be commended for exhibiting rare insight. Steven Simmons  
Niagara Falls, NY

## ANOTHER SIDE OF WINWOOD

Thank you very much for the Steve Winwood interview. Since the early 1970s I have been a great fan of the man and his music, although little information existed concerning the former. Now, with Timothy White's reporting and, of course, the release of his last two albums, it is clear that Mr. Winwood is not only one of the most gifted artists in rock, but also one of its most eloquent spokesmen.

Mike Harrington  
Van Nuys, CA

## FRIPPLESS FRIEND

Where the hell is Fripp? Why is it that whenever I actually pay for your magazine, there is no Fripp? Oh well, everyone has to have a few bad days. Good work, Kristine McKenna in pointing out that there is a person named Eno. And to Mike Shore on Bruford, cheers. But please drag Robert back, okay. Yay *Musician*, you're still my best friend in the whole wide world.

Mike Bowers  
No Address Given

## WHO'S OLD?

I would like to thank *Musician* for a truly enjoyable and enlightening interview with Pete Townshend. I enjoyed every aspect of the conversation with one of rock's truly amazing elder spokesmen except one: why does Vic Garbarini imply that Bill Wyman is old?

John Riemenschneider  
Kenilworth, IL

## HAD HIS FILL

In regard to your September *Musician* cover question. "What's a bad boy like Eddie doing in a nice magazine like this?"

The operative word is "filler."  
Sebastian Ibanez  
Houston, TX

## PLAY-BY-PLAY

As a reader since #21, this is my first offering letterwise, so I'll be short and sweet with it: Mr. Livant was way off base in his comment on October's letter column. Fripp was *perfect*, if not exceptional as a choice of interviewer. Since both are spiritually disciplined guitarists and tops in their areas, it was like reading a jam, rather than hearing one.

McLaughlin has found peace and sits Buddha-like during the frittering of poor Fripp, who can't accept his ego, yet plays lead; then McLaughlin lays down some acoustic frills and eventually they reach a common plane. Any other interviewer would have only *interviewed* McLaughlin.  
Stephen Garner  
Elk, CA

## BABBLING BROOKS

Who is this Steve Miller guy, anyway? So the new wave boils down to the Go-Go's (???) , huh? And here I thought the Go-Go's were just a lightweight, no-substance band. But hey, just listen to Steve's rich-white-kid-blues-rooted solo in "Abracadabra" and you know he's qualified to speak out on modern American music. Oh well, now I know why the guy makes such lightweight, no-substance AOR music. What was that saying about shallow brooks babble loudest?

K. Higgins  
Humboldt, AZ

## PONTIFICATION GENERATION

What is it with your magazine? Are you people old hippies or rock establishment? Maybe the two are synonymous these days. A sad confirmation of the fact is Peter Townshend, who once again is pontificated as the godfather of punk in yet another music magazine. Rock established? Dignified? Respectable? How silly! Never, not even behind masks! How ironically Paul Weller's comments about the state of American music, and Townshend, and by association, your magazine, illustrate my point. That's why the Jam and countless musical alternatives are never heard.

Bob Baker  
Lindsborg, KS

## SOMEBODY'S WATCHING YOU

The combination of jazz and rock in your magazine is cool, but why is it that with all the lip service your critics give to black artists, you've only had two black artists and one jazz artist on the cover in the past twenty months? (And no women artists either!) Just thought you should know some of us are keeping track. I dare you to print this letter. Better yet, I dare you to do something about it.

Richard Ruby  
Albina, OR

## THANKS, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE

Being female musicians, Rosanne Cash's name on the cover of the October issue caught our eye. Although none of us are really into country music, we opened it with interest. "A sign of the times," we thought, a "serious" article on a woman artist. Well, by reading into the second column, we see that the times *haven't* changed for women in the business.

G. Himes makes a point of telling readers how in real life Rosanne's face doesn't live up to her "mesmerizingly photogenic" album covers. None of the other people, i.e., men, in this issue were judged by their cosmetic qualities. And pray tell why it was necessary to write about making chicken salad and watching Rosanne breast-feed her baby?

If there is a subtle message to it, we're sure it's completely irrelevant to music. As far as representing women in your magazine—thanks a hell of a lot!  
Mary Angeline, Julie Efron & Sheri Masor  
Pittsburgh, PA

*Erratum: The Ibanez ad in the November Musician gave the wrong dates for Lee Ritenour's clinics. The correct dates and dealers follow: Nov. 18, Bizarre Guitar, Reno, NV; Nov. 19, Hanich Music, West Covina, CA; Nov. 22, Brook Mays Music, Dallas, TX; Nov. 23, Atlanta Discount, Atlanta, GA; Nov. 24, Sam Ash, Hempstead, NY.*



# Donald Fagen

# The Nightfly

At 4:09 a.m., silence and darkness  
have taken hold of the city.  
The only sound is the voice of  
*The Nightfly*.

Worth waiting up for, it's the new  
solo album from Donald Fagen.  
*The Nightfly* sees more than  
daylight offers.



Donald Fagen: *The Nightfly*.

Produced by Gary Katz, who also  
produced Fagen's work with Steely Dan.  
Featuring the single, "I.G.Y. (What a Beautiful World)."  
On Warner Bros. Records & Cassettes.



music

industry

news

By Jock Baird

## *Home Taping Royalty: A Report from the Front*

After a summer of hearings before House and Senate subcommittees, the home taping royalty fight is starting to resemble a slogging, turtle-paced stalemate; the bill will be going nowhere this lame-duck session. The hearings at times seemed unending and occasionally endless. At least half a dozen were held by each branch's subcommittee, with testimony from virtually anybody who wanted to come down to Washington. A knowledgeable observer to the festivities offered these insights into the game and descriptions of some of the key players:

"A lot of the action is behind the scenes, as the lawyers for both sides try to convince a battery of staffers of their positions. Most of the staffers are younger legal types in their early thirties; a lot of them tend to act like Congressmen themselves. You can see the success of an argument when it shows up in a legislator's question.

"The big winners so far have been the lawyers; millions have been spent on attorney's fees by both sides. Arnold & Porter, the firm that's representing the record industry's R.I.A.A. (and who also represents other show-biz and sports organizations), just built a new building. Their big gun on the case is James Fitzpatrick, a bear-like, curly-haired, bespectacled Irishman in his early fifties. Fitzpatrick is sort of friendly, smiles a lot, but boy is he good! The lawyers from the tapers' side will make what appears to be a great point and Fitzpatrick'll stand up and make them look like Buffalo Bob. But the taping group, the Home Recording Rights Coalition, has Charlie Ferris heading up their team, and he's also very good. Ferris was recently the head of the FCC and looks and acts an awful lot like Phil Donahue. The head and mouthpiece of the taping coalition is Jack Wayman. He's a golly-gee, pink-

faced guy with a snow-white hair-do; he's got a leprechaunish orator's voice, a high, reedy tenor, and he tends to be real glib at times. In his testimony and in his press releases, he uses lurid verbs and purple prose—his stuff makes great crapper reading. A lot of the inflation of the size of the tape royalty that's going on in the media and TV traces back to Wayman.

"The subcommittee chairmen themselves really come off as pretty good guys. Senator Charles Mathias (R-Maryland) has been a long-time champion of copyright protection and he's known as the *author* of the new revised copyright law. He has a basset-hound type of face, with droopy, wet eyes, but he's dry and urbane and likes to try to get witnesses to come to the point. Representative Robert Kastenmeier (D-Wisconsin) is not as much of an ivy-league intellectual type; he's more dogged and slow, but he shows concern and listens. He's more like a Gary Cooper, almost a little priest-like. He's very good at using the P.A. system, coming right up on the mike for impact or turning his head slightly to make an off-color remark.

"Kastenmeier has publicly committed himself to getting out some kind of bill to protect copyright owners. He also came out right away against a recent study by the Electronic Industries Association, but that says more about the study than about Kastenmeier's leanings. It was *blatantly* slopped together, obviously in not much time. Let's face it, when your opposition can take your \$75,000 survey and flop it on its belly side... well, that's not your supreme document.

"One new development is that Strom Thurmond, who's head of the Senate Judiciary Committee which the Senate subcommittee reports to, has said that he'll support the bill if the votes are there. Don't forget also that if some Senators

and Congressmen are defeated in November, they can come back and be more easily persuaded to vote for the bill since there's no public risk anymore. As far as the size of the royalty that's being discussed, no one will be specific, but the media's statement that a cassette's price will double is ridiculous. After the bill is passed, the actual size of the royalty will be arbitrated by the Copyright Royalty Tribunal and we'll go through this whole thing again. It would be another year at least before a firm percentage would be decided on."

Radio reformer **Rick Carroll** and his client, L.A.'s KROQ (discussed elsewhere in this issue), has finally vanquished AOR heavyweights KLOS and KMET in the latest Birch figures. In Boston, the new summer Arbitrons brought the urban-contemporary-spiced-with-new-music WXKS ("Kiss") to the FM top spot over John Sebastian's WCOZ. In New York, Doubleday's WAPP, which promised totally commercial-free broadcasting, did very well in the summer sweeps, but dipped sharply in the new Birch survey once the ads came on again.

The surprise pairing of the month: the Police's guitarist **Andy Summers** is planning a recording project with the lead guitarist of the Go-Go's, Charlotte Caffey. ... With the success of the all-star Asia, a new band is being put together for more guaranteed sales featuring the Stones' **Ron Wood**, ex-Stone **Mick Taylor**, Cream's **Jack Bruce** and the Who's **Kenny Jones**. The name of this stellar conglomeration? The Dinosaurs. ... **Marvin Gaye's** eagerly anticipated new album is ready to go. ... **Jaco Pastorius** is recording a solo LP in Miami.

### Chart Action

John Cougar, that Segeresque chronicler of Midwestern teen nostalgia, has rolled over the singles and album charts with "Jack And Diane" and *American Fool*, the latter LP having done it five weeks and counting. Steve, Lindsey, Christie, Johnny & Mickey have been no *Mirage* at #2 all month, followed by fellow heavies Steve Miller and Asia (who are still mopping up after *six months* near the top). But four members of last month's top ten took shots, two of them devastating; horribly mutilated was Robert Plant; mortally wounded was Crosby, Stills & Nash; REO Speedwagon was a surprise casualty, falling ten places, while Survivor, a three-month bully, did the same. Their places were eagerly filled by the Robert Plant-like Billy Squier, Michael McDonald and Alan Parsons. The Go-Go's extended their *Vacation* in the top ten, as did the revamped Chicago. The Who's *It's Hard* popped into #10 in three weeks, while Aussie Men at Work and Brits A Flock of Seagulls parlayed hard-won singles action into album sales.



# PERFECTLY WRAPPED.



**PAT BENATAR'S  
NEW ALBUM & CASSETTE  
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Help protect Pat.

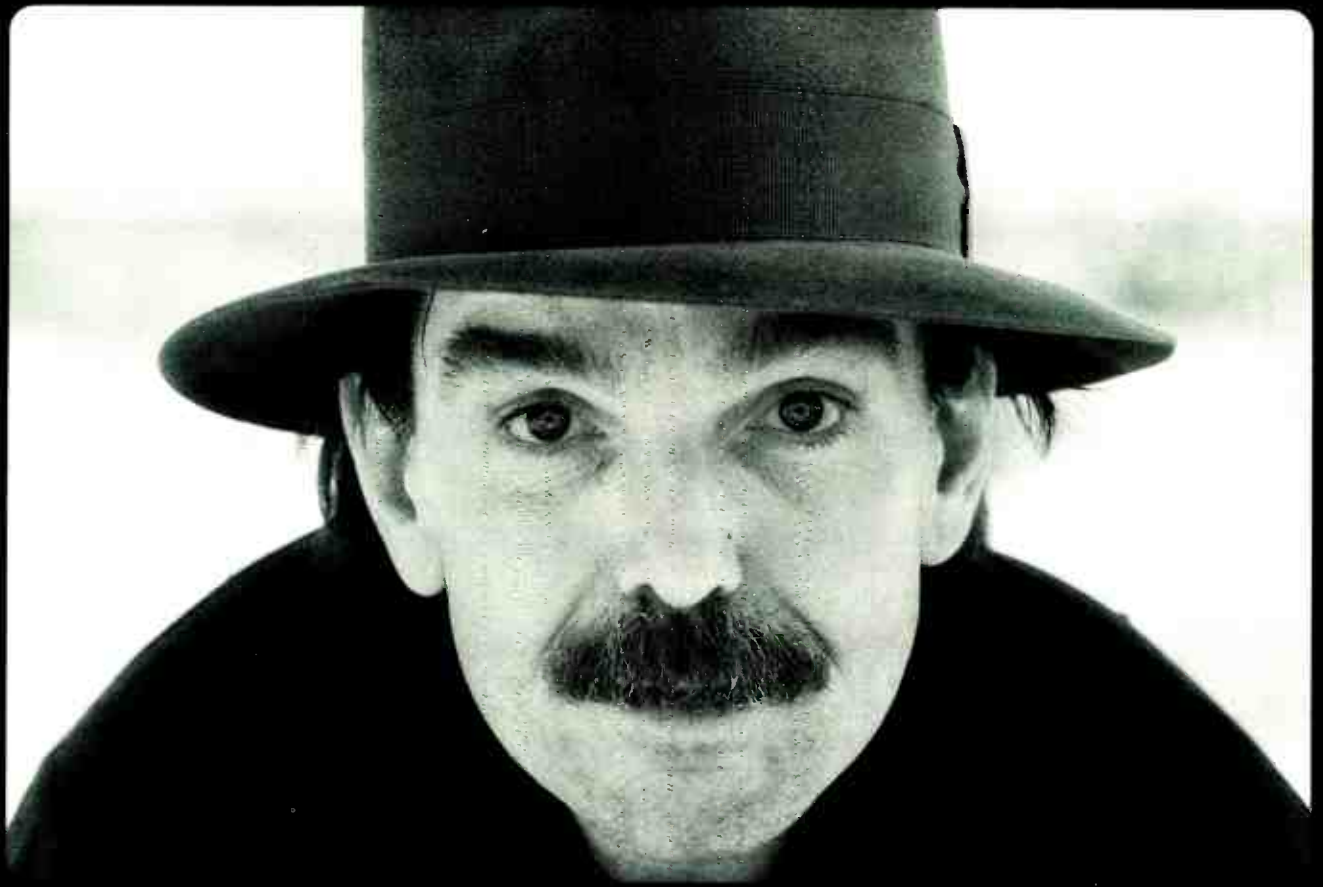


**Chrysalis**  
Records & Cassettes

The single CHS 2647 The album CHR 1396 Produced by Neil Geraldo and Peter Coleman  
Management: Rising Star Enterprises/Rick Newman & Richard Fields

ALSO AVAILABLE: "IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT," "CRIMES OF PASSION," & "PRECIOUS TIME."





## Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band: Sonic Sculpture in the Mojave

BY KRISTINE MCKENNA

**D**on Van Vliet was born in Glendale, California on January 15, 1941, the only child of Glenn and Sue Van Vliet. Don began showing artistic talent at a very young age, but Glenn and Sue were none too keen on the prospect of having an artist in the family ("Cause you know, all artists are faggots," is how Don explained the rationale), so they moved to the Mojave Desert, an isolated, harsh environment guaranteed to bleach the creative juice out of anybody. But Don Van Vliet just had too much to dry out. The drive to translate the world around him (and the one inside his head) into music intensified, his imagination blossomed and then...voilà! Don Van Vliet introduced himself to the world as Captain Beefheart.

Beginning with his 1966 debut LP *Safe As Milk*, and continuing through ten sub-

sequent albums, Captain Beefheart tossed conventional approaches to language and music out the window and replaced them with an astonishing system of his own design. His startlingly original music marries rural folk tales, voodoo, ecological propagandizing, punning and free association to a spectrum of sound that stretches from Charles Ives, Stravinsky, jazz and blues to the natural sounds of the Mojave Desert, where Beefheart has lived in a mobile home for the past seven years. A free-wheeling and wild soprano saxophonist, Beefheart has a five-octave vocal range that allows him to slip into diverse characterizations as he ruminates on his pet themes: the wonderfulness of women, nature, man's stunning stupidity and spiritual sloth, and the splendor of every damn thing in the galaxy, from Haley's Comet to a rusty nail. Careening from a wistful, dark vision of American life evocative of Randy Newman, into an atonal, primordial mind-frame, Beefheart makes jolting leaps in

rhythm and mood. Disjointed and vulgar, lyrically poetic, ominous and euphoric all at once, his music jumps out at you and hollers boo, then whispers something sweet and funny in your ear.

Often dismissed as a charming eccentric, Beefheart has never fared too well in the marketplace. A major shifting of perceptual gears is required to even hear his music, much less figure how to market it, and an indifferent record company allowed his last album, the brilliant *Doc At The Radar Station*, to die on the vine, a fate suffered by many of its predecessors. He recently signed with Epic Records (his eighth label) who will distribute his new LP *Ice Cream For Crow*, and although Beefheart feels it's one of the best albums he's made, he remains skeptical about its commercial potential. "Well, here's hoping the album goes platinum," I enthused. "Yeah, sure," he laughed.

*Ice Cream For Crow* signals no major stylistic changes for Beefheart, but it does differ from his last LP in a few ways



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## Paul Motian\*



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✧ "With hand-in-glove interplay that verges on musical ESP, the (Paul Motian) group shifts directions faster than a video game space invader" (*Lawrence Journal-World*). *Psalm* is the latest recording from drummer Paul Motian (ex-Keith Jarrett, Bill Evans, etc.), and features his current group—saxophonists Bill Drewes and Joe Lovano, guitarist Bill Frisell and bassist Ed Schuller.

## David Darling\*



Cycles  
ECM 1-1219

✧ His first recording, *Journal October*, was one of the best received recordings of 1980. For his second album, *Cycles*, cellist David Darling brings together Collin Walcott (sitar, tabla, percussion), Steve Kuhn (piano), Jan Garbarek (saxophone), Arild Andersen (bass) and Oscar Castro-Neves (guitar).

On ECM Records & Tapes. Manufactured and distributed by Warner Bros. Records Inc.

worth noting. The music feels looser—there's more air and space to it—and somehow, sadder. Beefheart has lost none of his bite and is still mad as hell about the horrors man has wrought, yet his anger seems a bit more forgiving and benign. The album includes a gorgeous instrumental guitar composition entitled "Evening Bell" (which is magnificently performed by Gary Lucas), a spoken word piece, and of course, a handful of tunes so ferociously fired-up and complex, God only knows how the Magic Band mastered them.

Beefheart is notorious for the dictatorial way in which he runs his band and he doesn't try to deny those rumors. It's *his* music, it demands absolute precision and the band is to play each note exactly as he tells them. As might be expected, there are former Magic Band members with bitter tales to tell, yet difficult as it may have been to work with Beefheart, none of them questions the genius of his music. The incarnation of the Magic Band I've come to know—Jeff Tepper, Gary Lucas, Richard Snyder and Cliff Martinez—are a remarkable bunch indeed. In addition to being first-rate musicians, they're exceptional people, kind, humble and intelligent, and all feel a deep commitment to Beefheart and his music.

Having decided to retire from touring, Beefheart intends to promote his new album with a video, so on August 7, he and the Magic Band gathered in the desert to perform one of their new songs and had Daniel Perle, the cinematographer who shot *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, film it with Ken Schreiber producing. Plonked in the middle of the Mojave, nothing but Joshua trees and sand as far as the eye could see, they filmed from sundown to sunup. I spoke with Don during the interminable waiting periods that are part of filmmaking.

Beefheart makes unexpected conversational segues that parallel his music; talking with him can be like struggling with a jigsaw puzzle. He'll make a baffling declaration, you'll give him a confused look and he'll add the clarifying link. Example:

**Me:** Boy, those kids hooked on Pac-Man are like zombies.

**Him:** Yeah, I always want to check and see if they have navals.

**Me:** Huh?

**Him:** To see if they're human!

He's a funny man with a remarkable memory, who's had to wage a fierce battle to preserve and protect his music, and he's rightfully, defiantly proud of the work he's done. A child in many ways, he's apt to find the task of ordering his lunch befuddling, yet he's incredibly wise when it comes to the big issues.

Lip-synching for the video camera, he was constantly doing double-takes on himself. He'd perform a gesture, be struck by the absurdity of the situation,

step back and mimic himself. As take after take was required, his behavior flip-flopped between that of a patient professional, and a restless child whose attention span had reached its limit. "Hell," he exclaimed at one point, checking his watch, "I've got to be on Mars in fifteen minutes!" If anybody knows how to get there, I'd bet even money that it's Don Van Vliet.

**Musician:** What was the central idea that guided you through the making of *Ice Cream For Crow*?

**Beefheart:** Probably the image of black crows and white ice cream, just the idea of black and white. God, you should see some of these birds! Those ravens with those tuft things under their beaks like a double chin. Pretty hip. I wanted to have some crows in a video I made a few weeks ago in the desert but they're too smart and they wouldn't come around when we were out there with the cameras. When people show up they start laughing, ha ha ha, then they split.

**Musician:** How do you compose? What comes first? A lyrical fragment? A sound that appeals to you which you'll build a song around?

**Beefheart:** Usually the complete composition comes to me. Flash! Bang! It's just there. If I have an idea that I don't think is really living, I get rid of it.

**Musician:** Do the songs ever take on lives of their own and evolve in a way that surprises you?

**Beefheart:** No, I'm always in control, disgustingly enough. Wouldn't it be funny if all of a sudden they said, "Hey, I have a place for you to go!" That would be nice.

**Musician:** How do you convey to the band what you want them to play?

**Beefheart:** I'll try anything. Long tedious explanations, I'll paint it out—anything to get it to resemble the way I want it. I'm real stubborn. The band is actually pretty quick at picking up on what I want.

**Musician:** How collaboratively are the songs worked up in rehearsal? Is the band allowed any creative input?

**Beefheart:** None, but they're not like slaves. If they have something they want to do, I let 'em go all the way out. I mean, hit the damn stuff to hell! That's what I require—somebody that really wants to beat it out.

**Musician:** What step in the music-making process do you most enjoy?

**Beefheart:** Probably giving it to somebody else and hearing it back, getting as close to the flash as possible. If the initial flash burns out to the edges and it gets up close—wow! I do enjoy the collaborative part but I don't enjoy collaborating with an audience. I'm there doing what I do and it has nothing to do with an audience. I'm not enough of an exhibitionist or a voyeur to enjoy audiences and they're actually more a distraction than anything. That sounds horrible,



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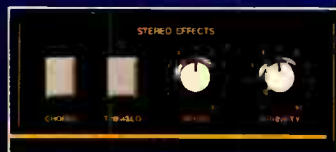
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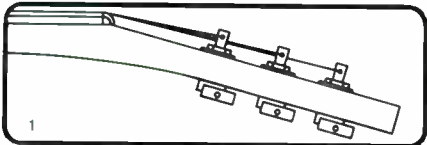
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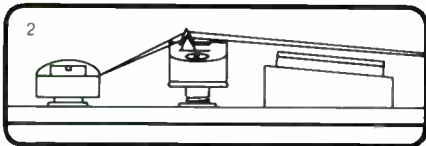
## PITCH



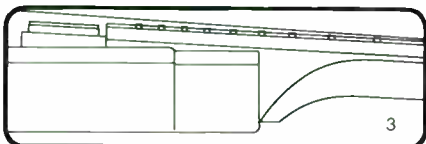
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doesn't it? I sound like a real jerk, but maybe artists are jerks. Selfish and inconsiderate.

**Musician:** What's the key to a great vocal performance? To let your senses take over and lose yourself in the moment? Or discipline and intense rehearsal—to concentrate and sing with your mind?

**Beefheart:** To just completely let go, but I think if you do let go, your mind is in control. I think soul is a mathematical mistake.

**Musician:** Rock critics have lumped you in with the Delta blues singers. Do

more than that, but for the instrumentation he used, I think he really did it. Amazing. My aunt also played a lot of Al Jolson. I heard that stuff in my basinet as I lay there being rocked back and forth.

**Musician:** Have you ever had a productive relationship with a producer?

**Beefheart:** No, it was always something I had to fight.

**Musician:** Is there anyone whose opinion you trust more than your own instincts?

**Beefheart:** Yeah, my wife Jan. She's always right, to the point that it scares me sometimes. She's a very good paint-



Joshua jam: (l. to r.) Richard Snyder, Gary Lucas, Van Vliet and Jeff Tepper.

you think there's any truth to that?

**Beefheart:** No way, that's just ignorant thinking. And the idea of thinking itself! I mean, it's extremely difficult to think about something somebody else is doing. I have a lot of compassion for anybody who's got that job. I wouldn't have the nerve to do it! Pin something on me and I'm another way a minute later. Yeah, lumping me in with the Delta blues guys is a joke. I wouldn't go over somebody else's painting. How could they think I would? You know who really moves me as far as blues singers go is Lightnin' Slim. He was wild. Ever hear that song of his called "Bed Bug Blues"? "Lord them bed bugs sure is evil/ They sure don't mean Lightnin' no good/ They thinks they am a woodpecker/ They mistakes me for a chunk of wood." Isn't that nice? That's frightening. A really good sculpture. I like Lightnin' Hopkins too. And Martin Luther King. He was a funny fellow—a good blues singer.

**Musician:** Was there music in the house you grew up in?

**Beefheart:** My aunt used to play a lot of the current stuff, like Glenn Miller. I thought it was wonderful then and I still like that music. He's almost sculpting that stuff. I'm wilder and like to tear up

er herself, although she hasn't painted in quite a long time because she's been trying to help me, which is a terrible burden on me, guilt-wise.

**Musician:** Which of your work functions as a central reference point for you, something you measure other work against?

**Beefheart:** I've never reflected in that way—I'm afraid to. I don't want to get caught by myself.

**Musician:** How do you see your music evolving over the years?

**Beefheart:** I don't know that it really has. The only difference between the new record and the last one is that the guys in my new band play better. They're real good. Cliff Martinez, my new drummer, is just incredible and Jeff Tepper's gotten awful good—but he was awful good to begin with.

**Musician:** Since you feel so good about your current band, why have you decided not to tour?

**Beefheart:** To be perfectly truthful, I don't care if the public hears this music or not. I do it for me! I have to. I mean, if I don't get it out—good God!

**Musician:** So how do you feel about your audience? Do you feel any sense of kinship or respect?

*continued on page 122*



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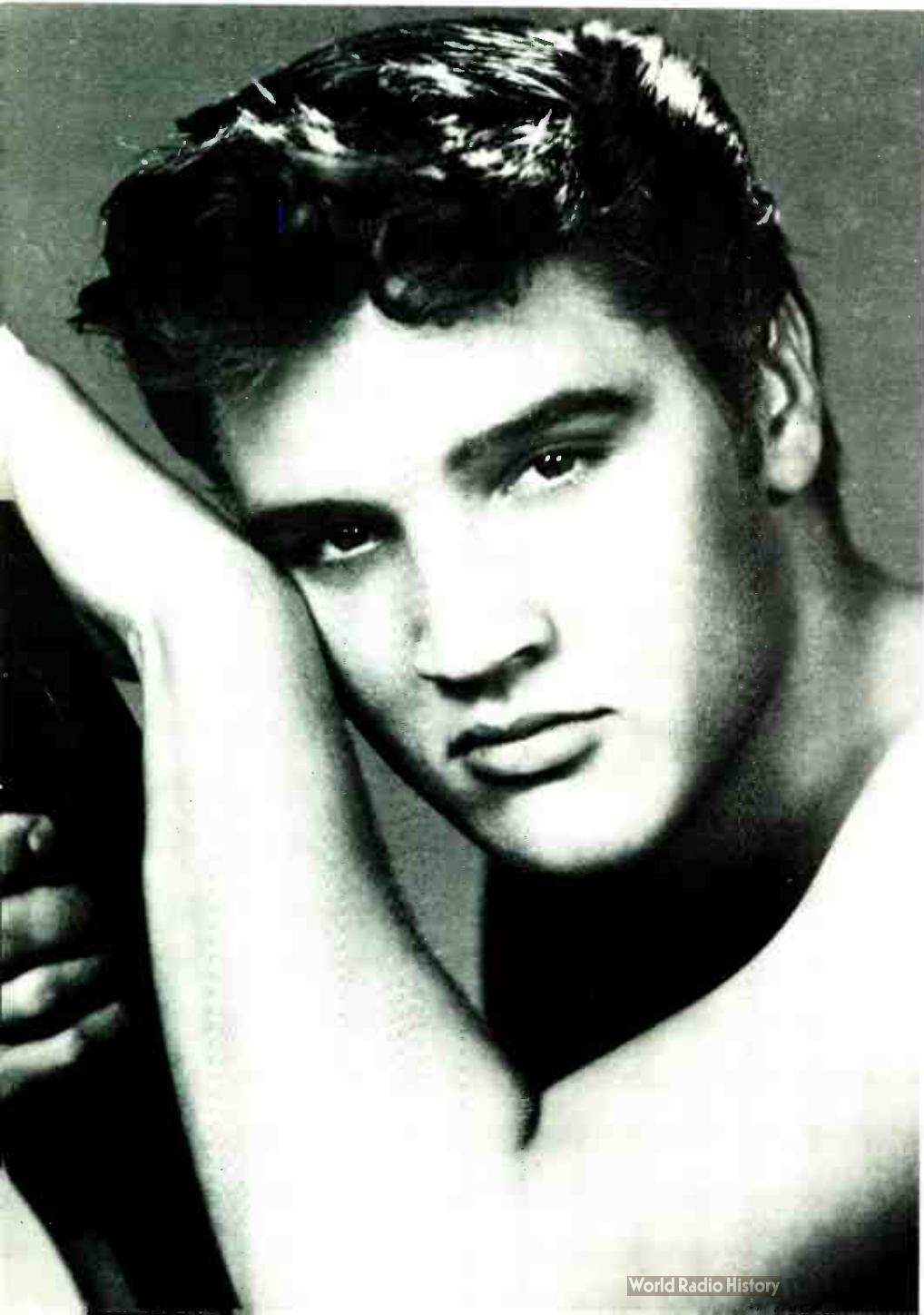
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# ELVIS

## *The New Deal Origins of Rock 'n' Roll*



BY DAVE MARSH

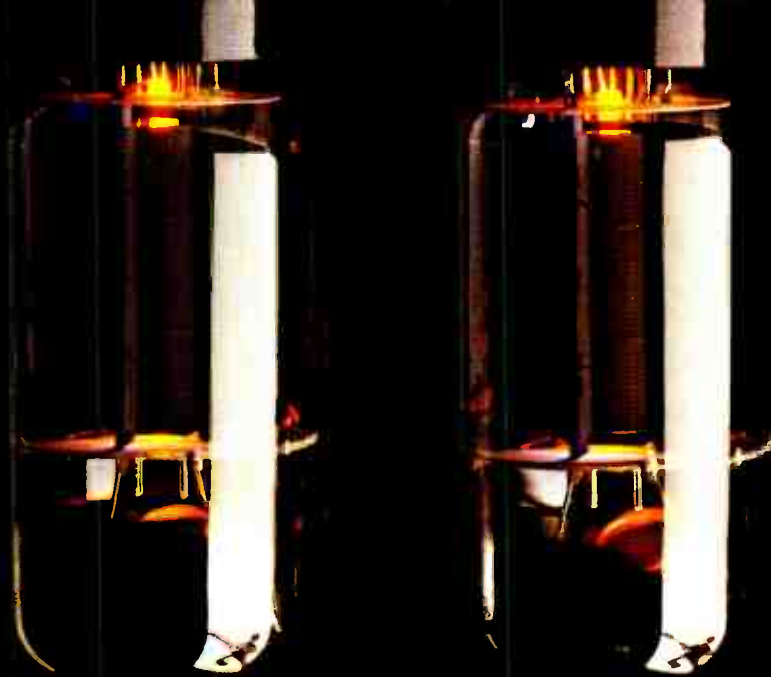
**E**ach year, on August 16, the anniversary of Elvis Presley's death, Memphis State University hosts a memorial service and seminar in his honor. The memorial service, which takes place in the early afternoon, includes testimonials and fervid witnessing from a great many of Presley's friends and colleagues, including the disc jockey George Klein who acts as host, and even Sam Phillips, the somewhat reclusive producer of Elvis' great Sun recordings. The seminar, which immediately follows, is a rare occasion (in America) for serious public discussion of popular music issues, centering around a dialogue on the state of the Elvis image.

This year, coinciding with the publication of my book, *Elvis* (Times Books), a critical biography, I was asked to deliver a speech on the state of the Presley image. The article which follows is a reworking of that speech; it sticks fairly closely to the original text, though I have added some detail and cleaned up some of my rather inelegant verbal grammar and syntax.

I thought the speech worth reprinting for a couple of reasons. First, because it places Elvis in a context in which he is rarely seen, and second, because it removes him—and in consequence, the music he founded—from the cultural isolation in which it is often trapped. Quite frankly, ever since a letter appeared in *Musician* several issues back questioning the appropriateness of references to Reaganism in a music magazine, I have been seeking a way to respond.

Like everything else, Presleymania has a political dimension. I hope this analysis suggests some of the richness of that dimension, not only for those who care about Elvis, but for anyone who cares about rock—or what is happening



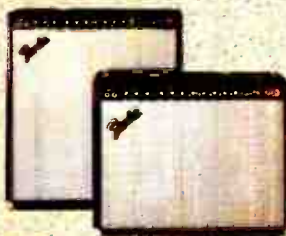


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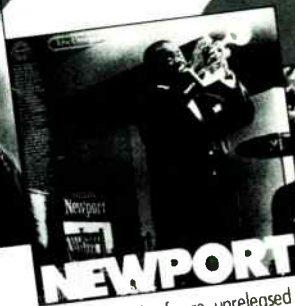
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to the United States at the moment. At the very least, it reflects a perspective on the origins of rock which I do not believe anyone has suggested before.

Unfortunately, the only place to begin is with the rather ugly fact that Elvis is dead. We take this for granted, or avoid it with slogans such as "Always Elvis," but the fact of Elvis' death ought to astonish and outrage us. If he were alive, he would be only forty-seven years old, which is the very prime of life for a singer. Until we recover our sense of outrage about this loss, we will not begin to come to terms with Elvis' life and work.

Elvis didn't simply become sick; he did not have a terminal illness. Elvis Presley died of abuse, the majority of it self-inflicted, which had its source in his isolation, in his final years, from the rest of the world and in his absolute inability to connect sufficiently to share the details of his experiences with anyone else.

This is about the saddest thing one could say about anyone, much less someone who led the sort of public life that Elvis Presley did. So please forgive me if I refuse to look at Elvis and his life and image in isolation, as we usually do with stars. The only way I know to do homage to the singular nature of Elvis' fame is to place him *in* the world, not above it or beneath it.

Like any Elvis fan, I sometimes find it comforting to imagine him still alive. Despite all my mental pictures of how I might reach him and help him go on to make great music once again, this comfort never lasts long or even completely cheers me up. That's because the circumstances that caused Elvis to die young haven't been altered. We haven't learned the most fundamental lessons that the Elvis Presley story has to teach. So if Elvis did return, he would still wind up a lonesome wreck.

In any event, Elvis isn't coming back, or, if you believe otherwise, it will be too late when he does arrive to make any difference. But Elvis fans, from the very beginning, have had another related hope: we have always wanted to be like him. That doesn't necessarily mean that we wanted to look or dress or sing like him; we wanted to *be* like him, to tap into the same freedom, the wildness and dignity that Elvis combined so beautifully, allowing many of us to glimpse the concept of such a mixture for the very first time. In this sense, wanting to be like Elvis means creating a world that operates the same way that his music does: a world in which everyone would have the chance to be like Elvis. But this leaves some questions unanswered: Who was Elvis? What would be the terms of living in such a world? How close have we come to creating it?

Elvis Presley grew up in Tupelo, Mississippi. The Presleys were extraordinarily poor, the sort of people who, according to most of the cultural estab-



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ishment of America, are not supposed to have creative voices in public life. Somehow, however, Elvis found a little more breathing space in which to think through his ambition than those who had come before him. His father, Vernon, was untrained and often ill (he had a bad back). Frequently, no one in the Presley household had a job; for a time, they actually lived on welfare, and for a while they lived in a government-sponsored housing project. Even so, Elvis didn't have to quit school and go to work when his father was laid up; he worked part-time but he continued his education because the family's minimal income was supported by subsidized housing, and when things were at their worst, by welfare money. As a result, Elvis Presley became the first person in his whole family to finish high school. As another result, Elvis Presley not only dreamed of being a singer, but also found time to look for ways to realize that dream.

The amount of talent that Elvis brought to this project was quite remarkable—unprecedented and, in my opinion, utterly unequalled. But the opportunities I have outlined weren't merely the product of Elvis' dreaming and scheming; they were the result of living in a society which, by design, offered people as poor as the Presleys a chance for that breathing space.

This design was the product of the realization that everyone was entitled to something more than just food and shel-

ter; they also had the right to a certain amount of dignity. That is, society realized that it gained by relieving the poor of the social and economic humiliations, by giving them a chance to be productive and creative. And the proof that this system worked was named Elvis Presley.

The name for this design was the New Deal. It was absolutely instrumental in shaping the world that Elvis knew. Without it, I don't believe that he would have had the leisure in which to become a singer. For one thing, he would have been forced to go to work full-time much earlier, and for another, he might not have been able to maintain the idealism so crucial to his music.

Certainly it wasn't an accident that the great breakthrough for indigenous American music, built on the music styles developed in this country over two centuries, occurred precisely twenty years after that New Deal began. Not only Elvis but Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and just about every singer at Sun Records grew up in an environment the New Deal shaped: a world in which TVA, WPA and rural electrification played a central role, and a world of increasing personal dignity as a matter of policy. And what these singers had to say—about dreams and freedom, the way the world works and the way it ought to work—was also a product of that climate.

It should be obvious that the worst

betrayal of the spirit of Elvis Presley and his music is occurring right now, with the deliberate dismantling of the New Deal's social programs and the simultaneous reneging on the social ideals those programs—and this music—represents. Those New Deal programs gave people more than food and shelter and some small income. They gave them the possibility of retaining some dignity even in the face of the worst poverty. And if that dignity is not the central kernel of what we loved and admired in Elvis Presley—well, then, you saw a different sort of hero than I did. It's the spirit of a waking dream of freedom, an easy conscience, self-respect and most of all, equality among all people that calls to us from those records.

Thus, it isn't any surprise to me that the greatest effect Elvis had on American culture was to integrate it: to create an art so democratic that within it any kind of person would be treated on the same basis as any other, viewed with such compassion that it could finally be seen that what we had in common was far more important than those things that divided us.

For years, we have been told by those ignorant of the real history of this country's popular music, that Elvis Presley simply ripped off the innovations of black musicians, that he was not a musical original, but simply a thief, a usurper of rhythm and blues. That nothing could be further from the truth may be demon-





strated simply by listening to the original versions of the songs that Elvis first recorded, and by comparing them with the Presley records. "That's Alright Mama," in Arthur Crudup's hands, is a simple country blues; in Elvis Presley's style, it becomes something more complicated, more free-flowing, without losing its sense of the blues emotions, but with an additional edge of freedom and grace. You can say something similar about Wynonie Harris' "Good Rockin' Tonight," and about Junior Parker's "Mystery Train," in relation to the Presley versions ("Mystery Train" just might be the greatest single Presley recording). None of these comparisons will reveal Elvis as a thief. All of them will show that he radically altered black blues and R&B styles, and not only by adding a component of country & western accents.

What Elvis actually did was to *integrate* these styles, which is the reason that he is disparaged by people who do not find Johnny Ray or Benny Goodman or Pat Boone—all of whom *did* rip off black styles—at all offensive. Elvis wasn't a threat because he stole from black people—when has a white American ever been condemned for that? He was a threat because, in Greil Marcus' phrase, *he performed the union*, acted out our lipservice belief in equality before our very eyes.

In this sense, the only comparable cultural blow in the movement for racial

equality of the post-World War II era was Jackie Robinson's. And for a white Mississippian like Elvis to take the heat—well, it took an immense amount of guts. And along with Sam Phillips and the other singers at Sun, Elvis integrated American music and, equally against its will, American broadcasting (at least radio broadcasting). And I know, as a person who was brought up in Michigan amidst many of the same vicious racial lies that people in Tennessee and Mississippi are taught, that Elvis Presley fundamentally altered many people's vision of how blacks and whites ought to get along in this land.

That wasn't an accident. The New Deal, with its decision to reopen certain possibilities in America, set it up, not only by giving Elvis the space a poor boy rarely has to find his artistic soul and by spurring his family in their move from the country to the city, but by proposing that, if this nation were to succeed, then it would have to be one in which all the wires crossed. Elvis was the junction.

Elvis represented integration on a host of levels. For many Northerners, including myself, Elvis symbolized the idea that this was one nation, and that people with Mississippi accents could be as great as those who spoke like the folks on TV. Certainly, he represented a kind of sexual integration, between the frenzy of lust and the absolute modesty of personal love, between secular passion and religious ecstasy. And he

incarnated the new ideal that our society should not be divided into one in which the rich spoke up and the poor shut up, but that it should become one in which all deserved a voice—even the rich, for those who think that only the poor are born funky. But especially the poor, because they have been unwelcome for so long in any area of the arts or media, except as foolish Amos 'n' Andy or Lil Abner stereotypes.

All of this and some more is what Elvis meant, and you can boil it down to one word: integration. This is the ideal that propelled the New Deal imagination and if you listen to any Elvis record from "Mystery Train" to "Burning Love," you'll hear some fragment of it. People talk about the spirit in those records: in my view, this integration is the essence of that spirit.

This is a vision as old as America—older, in fact. But when Elvis was a boy, and all through his early days, it was a spirit abroad in the United States under the name New Deal.

We have now come to the point where the exact opposite of that vision is being preached: the so-called New Federalism. What this rise of the radical right really means is the repeal of the concepts of social and economic justice that made Elvis (and all of rock music) possible in the first place. Every day, a little more of that New Deal spirit is eroded and the message is driven home that this is not one, big, integrated

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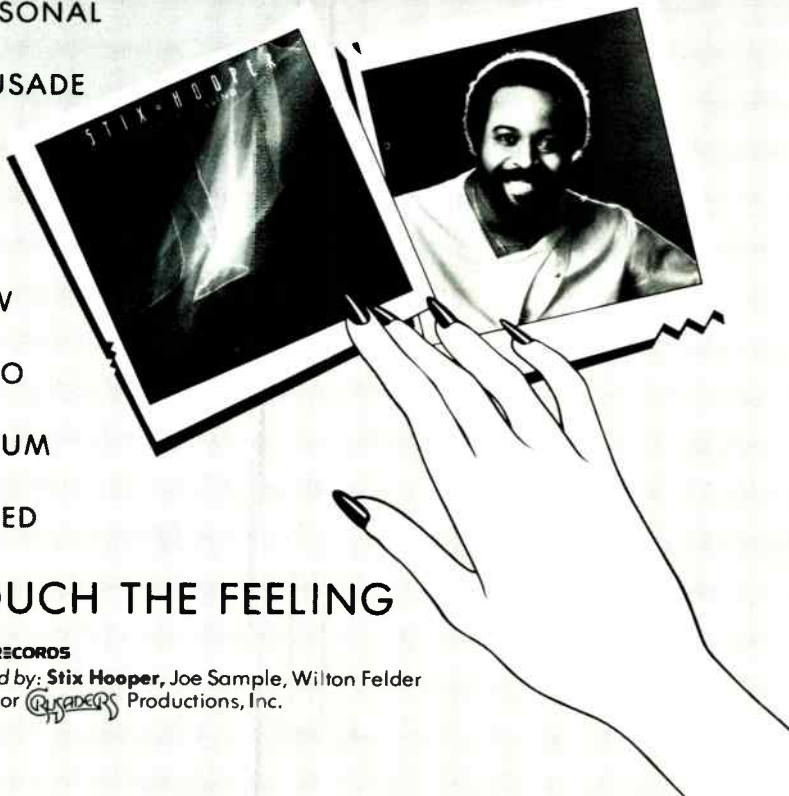
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society, but two cultures, one high and one low; one privileged, the other restricted; one dignified, the other humbled; one respectable, one contemptible. In the midst of this political counter-reformation, it's no wonder that Elvis Aaron Presley, who was the incarnation of the benefits of the New Deal and the integrationist movements, is presented as a fraud and a talentless know-nothing clown and that his audience is portrayed as a batch of ignorant suckers who fell for the biggest con job in national history.

This is the message of "neo-conservatism," which means to redefine all of our social and cultural relationships. In this respect, Albert Goldman's version of Elvis is clearly a stalking horse for the new attitudes. If people will accept that Elvis was worthless because he was Southern, because his family background was not worthy of greatness and all the rest of it, then they will also accept the other lies, the radical right sells. These lies can be heard from the lips of media commentators, educators, politicians and other "respectable" persons, and they are amplified by the absolute contempt in which popular culture, and indigenous American arts in particular, are held. All in all, what we now face is an attempt to deny that the entire cultural turmoil Elvis began and symbolized ever happened, or that what happened was meaningful. (This goes hand-in-hand with the neo-conservative denial of the New Deal-derived movements for black and female liberation, and of the victory of the 60s anti-war movement.)

Because Elvis is a great mirror of our society, it's easy for a writer like Goldman to spread the neo-conservative theory over his life. In this version, Presley becomes an example of what such people really think of the poor, Southerners, the uneducated, the unprivileged (even, most absurdly, the uncircumcised). What's delivered isn't just a message about Elvis; it's a vision of the way the world ought to work, a precise inversion of the vision expressed in Presley's music (and the rock that follows from it).

What's going on here is a constant retraction of human dignity. Under such conditions, a phenomenon like Elvis Presley would be inconceivable. Allowing this theory to prevail would thus be the greatest dishonor we could do to Elvis.

People always want to know why Elvis screwed up and died. When he acted out the high school civics lesson version of the American Dream, which ought to be true, and found out it wasn't, it was like hitting a brick wall. He gave up, and as a result he got lazy; he stopped believing, and he started abusing both his body and other people, and he died.

*continued on page 110*



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# LUTHER VANDROSS

*An R&B reconciliation of disco-tech  
and soul-era emotion.*

**BY GEOFFREY HIMES**

**L**uther Vandross curled up in the stuffed arm chair with his Wizard-of-Oz red ruby shoes tucked under his massive bulk.

When he described Dionne Warwick's singing, his eyes rolled towards the ceiling and he squealed, "Puh-leez, it was too much," as if he couldn't stand so much pleasure. His goatee twitched with glee and a big belly laugh rumbled out of his big belly.

He then spelled out his beliefs about soul music, beliefs that are now transforming that field. "Singing today," he asserts, "is not as emotional as it once was. It's not as committed to emotion. When I listen to the great singers who started out in the 60s, I hear something I don't hear in the singers of the 50s or the singers who started in the 70s. That's what I want in my records. I love for people to be moved; there's something about that that kills me."

After years as a background singer for Roberta Flack, David Bowie, Chic, Change, Ringo Starr, Chaka Khan and others, the thirty-one-year-old Vandross is now pursuing the emotional moment as the hottest new producer, singer and songwriter in soul music today. "Never Too Much," the title song of his debut solo album last year, was a number one smash single on the R&B charts and that album's consistently strong songwriting and unusual synthesis of classic vocals and modern tracks brought Van-



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to rob your house while you're listening to a ballad without you knowing it. That's an exaggeration, but that's the idea."

The singers that put Vandross into this emotional trance are what he calls "the reigning divas of black music": Dionne Warwick, Aretha Franklin and Diana Ross. "The female voice has so much dimension to me," he says with a shudder of pleasure. "Society has placed certain restrictions on males. How many songs say a man ain't supposed to cry? Ten thousand, right? So over the years I think females have been more guilt-free, less censored, less restricted, less judged. Consequently, their vocal expression has been less inhibited.

"But men are expected to do one thing: sing like a *man*. Screw that. That's

my comment on that. Listen, I have the same emotional input and vulnerability. If a family member dies, I feel as deeply as any woman does. If my lover leaves me, I feel the same way a jilted woman does. So when it comes down to the music, yes, I'm going to sing it all. When the decrescendo happens, I'm going down with it. I'm going to lead it down, as a matter of fact. I'm not afraid of that at all. And a lot of guys are afraid."

This is the other big appeal of Vandross' own records. After too many years of too many macho male soul singers, Vandross flings open the doors of the male heart and lets everyone take a good, long look. If it was true of his first solo album, it's even more true of his newest record. On the best uptempo tune, "She Loves Me Back," he sings

with wide-open anxiety about his crush on a new woman, but then explodes with surprise and elation with, "She loves me right back!" On the best ballad, "Once You Know How," he sets up the song carefully, but then takes off and improvises against the background singers, dipping below and rising far above the melody with scat vowels full of longing.

Vandross underwent a religious conversion to this emotional soul music when he was thirteen. "I used to love the Shirelles. I went to see them at a Murray the K show at the Brooklyn Fox, and out walks some woman I never heard of in a red chiffon dress, a little, short, sleeveless dress with straps. She spreads her arms out and sings 'Anyone Who Had A Heart.' I thought I would die; I really did. I said, 'Wait a minute. In this one song, I have redefined my whole standard for what is good.' Not that the Shirelles weren't good singers, but none of them was the great, great, great singer that Dionne Warwick was that day."

Vandross' teenage friends in the South Bronx housing projects included Nat Adderley, Jr. (son of the famous jazz trumpeter), Fonzi Thornton, Carlos Alomar, Robin Clark, Anthony Hinton and Diane Sumler. "We used to sing in the hallways at school," he recalled. "You know how the teachers will say, 'Okay, cut the noise.' Well, our singing was so good, even back then, that we didn't even get stopped. We actually had harmonies and concepts of who was the alto and who was the soprano and why you sing a certain part.

"My mother was absolutely into it. You have to realize one thing about black families: we all like the same artists. My grandmother, my mother and I, we all loved Aretha Franklin. Loved Dionne Warwick. Loved Lena Horne. I don't know if white families are the same way. It seems the parents love Frank Sinatra, but the kids love REO Speedwagon."

Carlos Alomar was the first of Vandross' friends to make it. Alomar got a job as guitarist when David Bowie was recording *Young Americans* in Philadelphia and invited Vandross and Robin Clark to come watch. "Bowie was recording the song, 'Young Americans,'" Vandross recounted, "and Robin and I were sitting on a couch underneath the board. I said, 'There's a big empty space there; they should put something in there.' So they played it again, and I said, 'I know what should go in there; it should go: "Young Americans! Young Americans! He was the young American! A-a-a-all night!" Bowie overheard that and said, 'That's wonderful; put that down. That's like a catchphrase. Do you have any other ideas?' And I said, 'Well, I just happen to have about two thousand.' He got me to stay in Philadelphia and do another song. Before I knew it, one thing led to another, and I did the entire album."

When Bowie invited Vandross as a

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backup singer on the ensuing tour, Vandross insisted on bringing along the rest of his New York vocal quartet: Clark, Diane Sumler and Anthony Hinton. When Bowie heard the quartet in rehearsal, he insisted they open the shows. Vandross, Sumler and Hinton were signed as a band called Luther to Cotillion Records. They released two albums with a rhythm section that included Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers (later of Chic) and Woody Cunningham and Paul Crutchfield (later of Kleeer). The albums were commercial flops, due to insufficient promotion and incompetent management, according to Vandross.

Bowie introduced Luther to Bette Midler, who used Vandross as a backup singer. Midler's producer, Arif Mardin, was impressed enough to use Vandross on records by Carly Simon, Ringo Starr and Chaka Khan. Word of mouth took care of the rest, and Vandross soon appeared on records by Roberta Flack, Quincy Jones, Todd Rundgren and many more. Vandross also sang on commercials for AT&T ("Reach Out And Touch Someone"), Kentucky Fried Chicken ("We Do Chicken Right") and NBC ("Proud As A Peacock").

"I loved being a background singer," he insisted. "It's a skill; some of our best lead singers cannot sing background. The difference is between following your own instincts unconditionally, which is

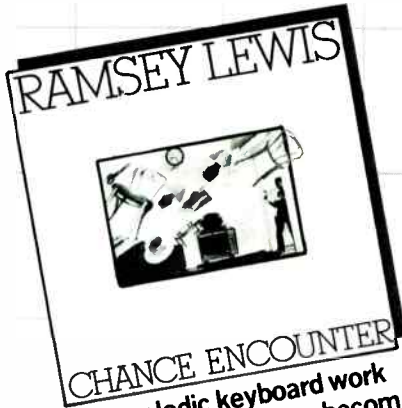
what solo singers basically do, and singing parallel to someone else. You may be able to swim your ass off, but can you join a water ballet team and dive parallel to eight other people, do the flip and land in formation? The satisfaction is that not everyone can do it.

"Usually I might come in an hour earlier before the other singers. The producer might say, 'Okay, this is it; what should we do?' I'd listen for a little bit and say, 'Okay, I have some ideas.' Then when the singers came in, I'd show it to them. I started to charge for it. A lot of background singers give it away. But I learned early on: never give away something you can sell. Not many could do it to the extent I could. Ideas are one thing, but an arrangement is another."

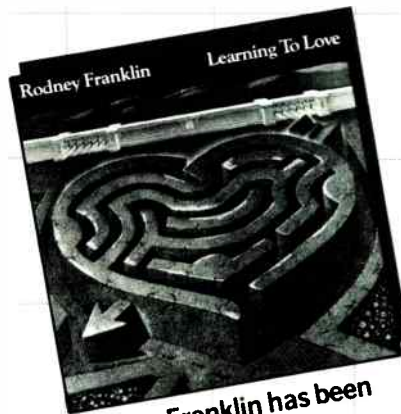
Though few people know it, Vandross sang lead on three of the best records of the disco era: Chic's "Dance, Dance, Dance," Change's "The Glow Of Love" and Change's "Searchin'." The Change hits led to a solo deal for Vandross with Epic. "Everyone wanted me as a singer, but all the record companies passed, because they didn't want me to produce; they didn't want to take a chance on a new producer. My instincts told me that I shouldn't give in to them, because eventually somebody would come around. I knew that my own way of doing things musically was a better means to a better end for me. I'm a disciple of my

*continued on page 118*

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# PHAROAH SANDERS

*A free-jazz flower child blooms in a new age.*



**BY JOE BLUM**

I got together with Pharoah Sanders recently for the first time since we played at the Playhouse in Greenwich Village twenty years ago. After exchanging formalities such as "Your hair is grey," "You gained weight" and "You have a beard!," we proceeded to get reacquainted. I had a certain amount of trepidation about doing an interview, for I knew Pharoah to be shy and reticent. I was told he avoided, nay, even shunned, the press. As it turned out, he was quite talkative once we got started, but he doesn't like to be imposed upon, rushed, pushed, or bullied in any way, all of which is understandable. Given ample time and space, he'll talk your ear off.

Pharoah's career was intimately involved at the early stages with that of John Coltrane, who seemed to take Pharoah under his wing during the last years of his life. The two of them seemed determined for a while to get every sound possible out of the saxophone. Concern for sound and technique was a strong point in common here: it seems when they first met in Oakland in 1959, they would spend days searching the pawnshops for mouthpieces. The bond between them was strengthened by the fact that they both had a deep spiritual commitment; vegetarianism, for example, was a common concern.

Since almost all past press coverage of Pharoah has seemed to deal somewhat redundantly with the subject of Coltrane, I tried to avoid it. It's been a long time since Sanders was anyone's protégé. Jazz has somehow, albeit miraculously, survived Trane's passing, as has Sanders, he has evolved into a mature artist with his own history and legend.

Sanders was born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1940, where he played in the high school band and sat in with traveling blues artists such as Bobby Blue Bland and B.B. King. Stanley Crouch referred to Sanders as a "country son whose playing is rooted in the most intense blues shouters and screamers," an observation that is well documented by his persistent return to



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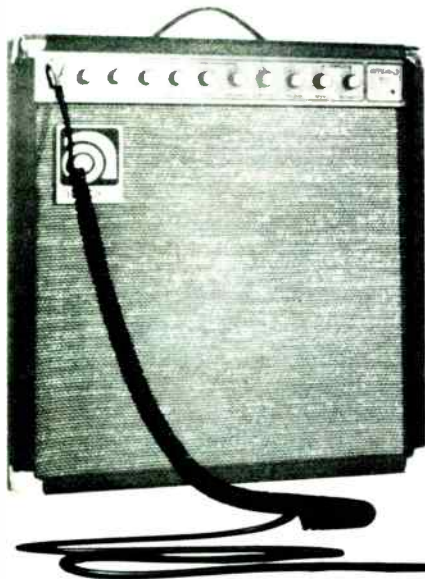
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blues playing even in the midst of the most exotic avant-garde experiments. He moved to Oakland in 1958 where he went to the city college by day and played in rock and R&B bands by night with locals such as Hughie Simmons, Ed Kelley and Smiley Waters. He soon made himself known at such clubs throughout the Bay Area as Bop City, Soulville and the Jazz Workshop, which is where he first met Trane.

His relationship with Trane continued and deepened when he came to New York in 1962. These early years were a struggle for Pharoah; he was working in the Playhouse kitchen without getting paid and catching Trane whenever he could. Even when he finally got his own group together with John Hicks, Billy Higgins and Wilbur Ware, the only remuneration came from passing the hat. But Trane kept noticing him, and his eventual inclusion in Trane's group gave Sanders the broad experience he needed. These performances are available on Impulse recordings such as *Live At The Village Vanguard Again* and *Live In Seattle*, as well as on studio albums such as *Om* and *Meditations*.

Pharoah was Coltrane's close partner during Trane's last years, and consequently Sanders' early albums, also on Impulse, were often seen as extensions of his work with Trane: heavy spiritual stuff with lots of primal screams. But if you put *Tauhid*, Sanders' first recording, side by side with any of the Coltrane works, you will find the differences at least as marked as the similarities.

Whereas Trane would establish his simple modal progressions as a vehicle for very intense rhythmic dialogues, Pharoah used such structures as a means to establish a tonal space. The quiet repetition of the piano in Sanders' compositions provides us with a mood; we then live within that space, that mood, for its duration, while the density varies and the colors change. Trane would move forward in ever-widening circles, constantly pushing back his musical horizons. Conversely, Sanders sets up his limitations and works within them. He will use repetition not to *build* tension, but to achieve deeper peace and relaxation. If Trane was the guru who challenged the cosmos, then Sanders is the flower child, guileless and innocent.

*Tauhid* was followed by *Karma* (1969), *Jewels Of Thought* (1970), and finally, *Thembi* (1971), which ended his fertile period on Impulse. Each succeeding album was a bit more complex and intricate, and more self-assured, until *Thembi*, which is a masterpiece. The album as a whole has unity, coherence, variety and a high degree of individual artistry. Sanders had stayed with his style until he had perfected it, and along the way had become something most unusual: a free player whose work was well received by the general public. He was actually popular.





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At this point, Sanders seemed to drop out of sight. It was rumored that he had serious money problems, was in trouble with the IRS, had stopped playing altogether and Lord-knows-what-else. Then in 1978 he surfaced with an Arista LP entitled *Love Will Find A Way*, which got a very mixed reception indeed. One reviewer referred to it as "a dreadful electric funk and fusion mess," suggesting that Sanders had "lost his way." Fortunately for jazz, the record didn't sell, and Pharoah left Arista to do an album for Theresa Records entitled *Ed Kelley And Friend*, which was heralded as a successful comeback effort and began a very fruitful relationship with Theresa owner and musician Allen Pittman. Also on Theresa are pianist John Hicks and drummer Idris Muhammad, and these musicians have formed the nucleus of

Pharoah's recent ensembles.

Whether or not you call it a comeback, Pharoah has certainly continued to develop as a performer, and Theresa has provided him with every jazzman's dream: an atmosphere where he can record what he wants for people who are willing to promote it. The first record with Ed Kelley, an interesting R&B-flavored effort, was soon followed by a double album, *Journey To The One*, where Pharoah showed a lot of the same stuff as of old, but with a good deal more verve and stamina, as well as more range. His uptempos are now more ambitious, his blues bluesier, and his ballads longer and slower. Call it maturity. The critics began to rave and were not to be disappointed, for last year they were presented with another double album, *Rejoice*, on which Sanders plays every-

thing from bebop to highlife. Along with these new albums have gone a series of very successful public appearances, which we can get a taste of in a new release entitled *Pharoah Sanders: Live*. Sanders is still out there and playing well, and people are coming out of the woodwork to hear him.

**Musician:** *What were you doing those years you weren't playing?*

**Sanders:** I was playing; I just wasn't recording. My contract had run out with Impulse, and I hadn't found the place.... Then we put this one out for Arista called *Love Will...Love Is...* (*struggles to remember title*)

**Musician:** *Love Will Find A Way?*

**Sanders:** Yeah, that's it. You see, there was a period where record companies weren't recording much straight-ahead jazz. You had to add a bit of a backbeat, mix it up, do something more like....

**Musician:** *More like Grover Washington?*

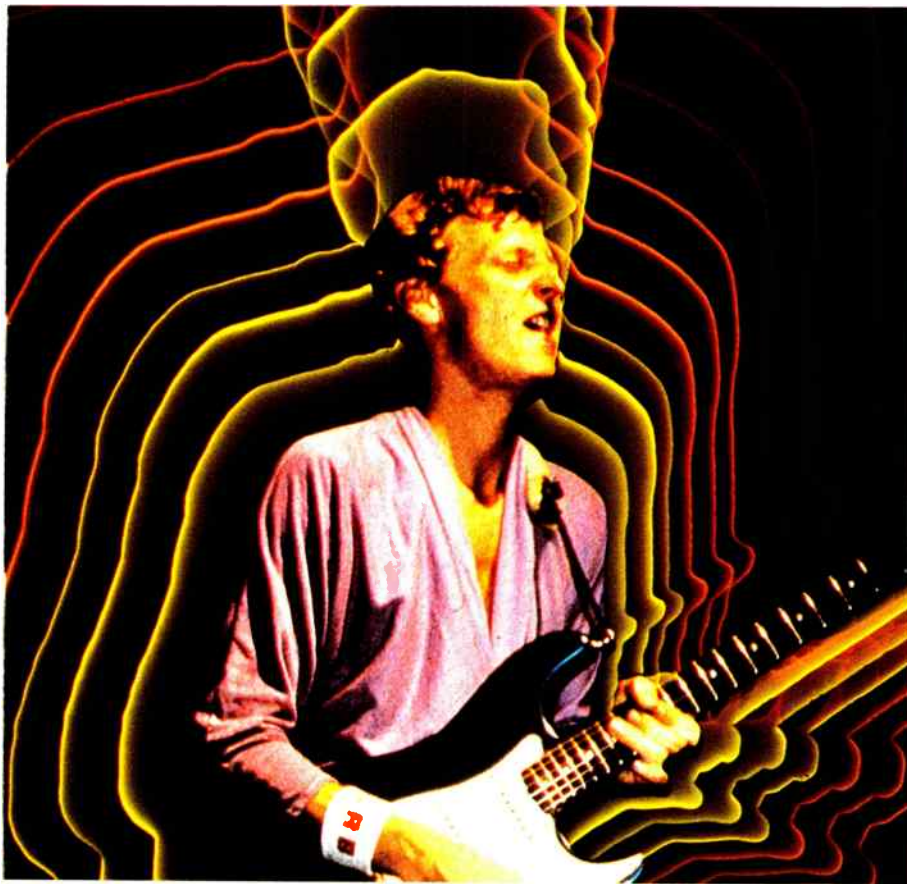
**Sanders:** Yeah. It was so hard to get any kind of decent contract. I just kinda gave it up for awhile. But I was working, you know, although maybe not as much as now. Then this Arista thing came in and I figured perhaps a commercial record would get me in circulation—I hadn't recorded for several years—so I took a chance with it. Something's better than nothing. But I conceived of it as a one-shot, I wasn't out to change my whole image, and the company knew this. So what happened, it was a pretty hot album for a short while, made the charts, but they put it out late, and didn't really follow up on it. All of which could be because they knew my heart wasn't in it. I would've stayed with Arista if they had wanted me to play some jazz, but they had their own ideas. But no one talked me into it, it was just a chance I took.

**Musician:** *I was told you had some financial problems a while back, something to do with taxes?*

**Sanders:** I had a lot of financial problems, particularly on the West Coast, but nothing as bad as what you might hear. Jobs out there, they didn't want to pay that much, and you had to use local people, or what they called local people. They wouldn't pay for the people I wanted to use, so I came back here. I missed New York anyhow, the noise, the cabs, the honking and running around. I like the energy. I don't know about raising a family here, but as dirty and unhealthy as it might be, it's a very up experience, to be surrounded by the arts, you know. I'm living in Little Rock right now, not so much to escape, but because my mother is ill. There are things that need to be done, mowing the lawn, cooking, and since there are no brothers and sisters, it falls on me.

**Musician:** *So the IRS didn't keep you from touring abroad, or otherwise hassle you?*

**Sanders:** The tax problem was a routine audit. Now they figure if you're a leader



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you're getting all that money the group is getting—they don't realize the expenses involved, *all kinds* of expenses, not just traveling and whatnot. Anyhow, they fined me and I paid up, but it didn't have anything to do with the music; I kept playing. I hate to deal with business: let somebody else handle the money, I just want to play. I haven't had any agent or manager, but I'm getting one because it just got too much for me: I was getting so irritable.

**Musician:** *Let's go back a bit. When you first heard Sun Ra in 1962, did he seem really far out to you?*

**Sanders:** No, well, I was kinda far out myself. I didn't have any place to stay, and the way I played... (laughs). I learned from Sun Ra, mainly about percussion. Then I had the idea of making my own percussion instruments so they would sound just like what I wanted, which he wasn't into. Made my own bells, all sorts of things. I was looking for bells of certain pitches that would fit in with the chord changes. I'd love to have a bell that's in tune with everything I play—some sort of magic bell.

**Musician:** *You're really into your sound. Where did you get your concern for details like mouthpieces and reeds?*

**Sanders:** Trane was a real perfectionist when it came to reeds and mouthpieces. He could always change his sound, get the sound he wanted, get the best sound out of what he was using. I took after him. A lot of cats have a beautiful sound, but they don't work on it, see how they can vary it this way or that way. I've found different ways to play on a mouthpiece, how to get a real edge, how to get a really straight sound, which is difficult. Trane helped me find that, to eliminate the superfluous, you might say. So I'm still working on it. But playing goes beyond mouthpieces. Like a lot of people would ask Trane, "What kind of mouthpiece you usin', John?" as if that would enable them to play. Bird could play on any horn and make it sound.

**Musician:** *Do you feel there are any gaps in your development because you stopped playing on changes for a while?*

**Sanders:** I don't feel I missed out on anything, I'm gonna just keep doing what I've been doing.

**Musician:** *Was it hard to move away from Trane and develop your own style?*

**Sanders:** I always had my own band even when I was with Trane. I felt no matter what Trane was doing, I had to keep my mind also on my own music. He was doing what *he* wanted to musically, but I didn't get totally lost in that, I had myself to think about. I had John Hicks, Billy Higgins, we'd play at the Speak-easy on Bleeker Street. We could do whatever we wanted.

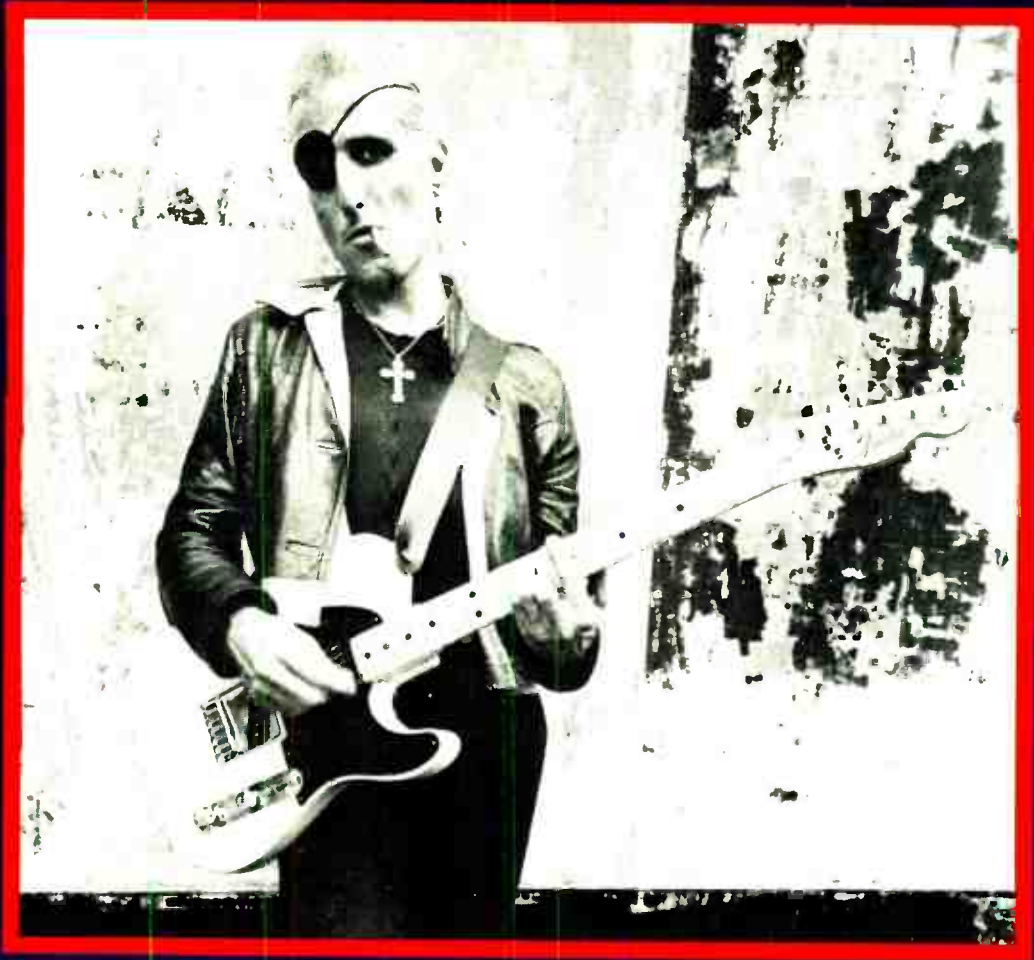
**Musician:** *Things have come a long way. In those days Cecil Taylor was probably the only free player who got any work. When you look back, do you see yourself as a pioneer of free play-*

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ing? Do you think about it?

**Sanders:** Not really. You know, I'm tired after a while of all the moving around, sometimes I think of getting out of it and opening up a business, maybe a health food store, and just play for fun the way we used to, not for money, just play. But I'm caught up in this, I have to make a living, although it's not a style of life I enjoy. It's hard, for example, to settle down with a woman. It's a corny old complaint but it's true. Maybe for some people it works out on the road, but I haven't been that lucky, and I keep feeling I'm making mistakes; maybe I'm just not cut out for this life.

**Musician:** Do you see your musical development, how much has gone on?

**Sanders:** I'm laying back right now, thinking more of the future, waiting to see what's gonna happen in the culture, in the music business, and mainly in myself—whether it's gonna be records, video, just what. I don't have an overall view of things right now. I'd like to play the soprano, harmonium, tablas, but I never get around to it because it might not go over in the clubs. I feel better when I'm playing other things than the same old saxophone. I'd like to get a big band together, play what I want to play, more blues.

**Musician:** In this computer age, what's the future for the blues?

**Sanders:** Let's see what it's gonna do. As long as people keep playing.... I don't know the future.

**Musician:** Church music?

**Sanders:** Getting better. I've been listening. More people are getting out there, getting musically educated, extending themselves, trying new things.

**Musician:** Who have you been listening to in jazz?

**Sanders:** George Coleman in particular, but I don't get around the way I used to. I might catch Johnny Griffin or Dexter if they come through. I know a lot of young cats are playing, I just don't get a chance to hear them. I stay at home, still listen to the same old records.

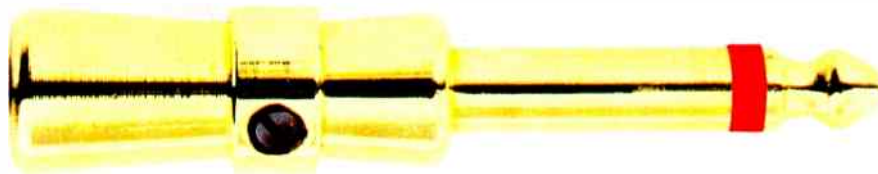
**Musician:** Have you ever thought of free music as political?

**Sanders:** I never had that conception, no. I've been categorized as part of this group, but I don't relate music and politics. Trane didn't either. Since I play free, they've spoken about me that way and I wonder about it. It's a weird way to look at music, as being political. You can wind up burying yourself in that, and then you're not playing. Trane not only was beyond politics, he didn't even get affected by other developments in music; the bossa nova came and went, it didn't bother him, he just kept on doing what he was doing.

**Musician:** Do you think it takes a certain personality to cross over to the mass market?

**Sanders:** I think you can get stuck in a no-man's land between jazz and popular music. See, if you're gonna cross over, you gotta cross *all the way over*. That's why I couldn't do it. I don't care what

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horn you give me, you could put me out in a fog and have me play fog horn, I'd still be the same. That's why I don't think McCoy Tyner will succeed with his new commercial project. It's not really what he's about. I mean if you're gonna do it, get the costumes, the visuals, go all the way. Like the spaceship they use in Earth, Wind & Fire. If someone gave Sun Ra the money, he could do something like that, he's been doing that all along. I think it just might be his spaceship.

**Musician:** *The music you play always seems so accessible, so far from arty, contrived or abstract. Is this intentional?*

**Sanders:** I'm not a technician, I'm not a nice, smooth, horn player. I might be very, very hard, disturbing. So I work on my sound to make it pleasing, so people won't leave. A lot of players have gotten very free in their playing, but their sound is like anyone else's—they don't care enough about what it *sounds like*. I work on that a lot, within my limitations. So you try to be at one with your horn, so you're not fighting with it and struggling to get things out. If I'm gonna play a high note, I know beforehand I can do it, I can hear it first. Other people could do this, but they give up and get lazy at some point instead of working it out. So maybe that's why people listen, because I'm concerned about what it sounds like. I practice scales. I also practice things on the piano first, to see where they lie harmonically. If a line has no harmonic possibilities I can use, I dispense with it, try

*continued on page 113*



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# FACES



Translator

## VIOLENT FEMMES

At first glance, they look like a bunch of Stray Cats fallen on hard times. Dressed in a weather-beaten grey trenchcoat that would embarrass even the grubbiest flasher, chubby-cheeked Gordon Gano—a mere teenage stick of a figure with the rosy face of a Botticelli angel and the crooked smile of a little devil on a Hallmark card—grips his hollow-bodied Telecaster with almost defensive tenacity and bashfully approaches the microphone as though he were addressing the school assembly. The acoustic bull thump from the other side of the stage comes from bassist Brian Ritchie, a tall poker-faced blond with a

Velvet Underground. And with the cracked, quivering tenor and Artful Dodger aura of Gordon Gano up front, the effect is like Jonathan Richman becoming the Lou Reed he always dreamed of.

But where the manchild Richman has long since retreated into a womb-like kindergarten of ice cream men and Martian Martians, Gordon Gano, (who, according to a recent *New York Rocker* story, auditioned for Timothy Hutton's role in *Ordinary People*) is precociously adult in his observations, an angel with a dirty face and a sharp, often cynical mind. His songs vibrate with an almost psychotic tension underlined by the Femmes' naked acoustic force. "Why can't I get just

Gano's frustration with the brick wall his love is up against as it does the Femmes' raucous slap'n'tickle. The loneliness and seething violence at the heart of "Confessions" explodes with dark, cringing eloquence in Ritchie's walking blues bass line—actually more like a malevolent stroll—and Gano's tense, conversational Reed-like vocal tone. The way the Violent Femmes have fashioned a unique arresting style out of such disparate influences and garage instrumentation comes through with brutal clarity on one rolling campfire ballad about a mentally disturbed father who murders the daughter he loves. Here the organic chatty country charm of Johnny Cash, the folk tradition of Woody Guthrie and the lyrical backhand of combined Reed and Dylan combines with the Femmes' stark attack to create a picture of real yet unspeakable horror.

Live and on a scrappy five-song demo recorded earlier this year, the Femmes' slight amplification displays the sharp mettle of Gordon Gano's songs and the brute naive thrust of the band to best advantage, giving a rough skiffle burnish to this powerful variation on the Velvet Underground legacy. Add to that the band's diverse backgrounds—Ritchie in Milwaukee folk-punk bands, DeLorenzo in jazz drumming and local experimental theater. The Femmes are already recording with New York producer Alan Betrock for a probable LP. Something better come out soon, too. The fatal charms of the Violent Femmes are a secret Milwaukee shouldn't keep to itself. —David Fricke



Violent Femmes

Marine-like haircut whose principal weapon is a humongous Mexican mariachi bass he plays in Larry Graham's thumb-popping style. Between them stands Victor DeLorenzo, riding hard on a minimalist trap set consisting of one cymbal, a snare and a converted washtub bass drum he calls a "trancephone."

Yet at New York's Bottom Line, opening for punk uncle Richard Hell and his latest Voidoids, this unlikely Milwaukee trio calling themselves—with simple dramatic flair—the Violent Femmes don't just steal the show. They blow a fresh wind of post-punk originality rooted in rockably simplicity, the dry folk twang of quintessential hobo Dylan, and the stark bash and graphic lyricism of Lou Reed and the

one f\_\_\_k/ I guess it's got something to do with luck," wails Gano in a mixture of horny male pleading and knowing resignation over the raw rampage of "Add It Up." The fuzzy boom of Ritchie's mariachi bass and DeLorenzo's crude snare snap heightens the song's brute sexual imagery and satiric, even desperate bite ("Can I mix in with your affairs/ Share a smoke, make a joke/ Grasp and reach for a leg of hope") before climaxing in a gangbuster chorus, instruments in full heat and Gano's brittle Midwestern drawl buoyed up by his bandmates' hearty (though a bit out of tune) background Bray.

"Prove My Love" moves with the same brisk party enthusiasm although its manic pace has as much to do with

bass in one of the Bay Area's new bands, Translator. "People are comparing the scene to what went on fifteen years ago."

Consider two of the best new San Francisco bands: Translator (pop) and Flipper (punk). They represent two poles of what one San Francisco daily newspaper calls "the new San Francisco sound." Translator holds down the pop end of the spectrum, records for the CBS-distributed 415 label and has aspirations of becoming an internationally popular group. They are the illegitimate offsprings of hippie era San Francisco bands like Moby Grape and the original Jefferson Airplane, thanks to the gorgeous harmony vocals of singers/songwriters/guitarists Steve Barton and Robert Darlington, a 60s blend of jangling acoustic and electric guitars, and an emphasis on songs, not solos. Of material like their current FM hit "You're Everywhere That I'm Not" is mostly in the pop mold typified by the early Beatles and Byrds, it does have a tougher side. One can hear the occasional dissonances of John Cale, the ominous minor chords of the Cure and the hard rhythms of the Gang of Four. "Our music is not 60s revival music," says Darlington. "It's contemporary music that is valid for the 80s."

Flipper's roots lie with two other influential San Francisco bands: Blue Cheer and Big Brother & the Holding Company. Blue Cheer, if you've forgotten, practically invented heavy metal, while proselytizing the virtues of pure noise. Big Brother was one of the raunchiest pre-punk garage rock combos of the 60s. Though the metal content is down in Flipper, they are certainly one of the noisiest bands of our time. Flipper are a dark, chaotic, underground/alternative to Translator, record for the small, esoteric Subterranean label and don't seem to give a damn if anybody hears them.

Flipper like to describe themselves as "the Grateful Dead of the 80s." Others describe them as San Francisco's answer to Public Image Ltd. Certainly Flipper — bassists/songwriters/singers Bruce Lose and Will Shatter, gui-

## TRANSLATOR/FLIPPER

The San Francisco sound, described a decade and a half ago as "acid rock," has been reborn. New bands, new sounds. The long hair is gone; so are the rambling, drug-inspired blues-jams and the piercing guitar solos. San Francisco has moved right into the modern age. "There's talk of a renaissance going on in San Francisco right now," says Larry Dekker, who plays



tarist Ted Falcon and drummer Steve DePace—offer a fresh approach to punk. Unlike the typical punk band—songs are short, chords are few, tempos are fast and attitude is *bad*—Flipper play long songs, use as many chords as they need, slow the tempo to a snail's pace and offer an almost naive idealism and faith in humankind. They like to set up a wall of noise reminiscent of a tornado ripping apart a small town, set it for a 4/4 beat and then let it drone on and on and on in the hypnotic manner of the Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray" or Steve Reich's "Music For 18 Musicians."

Flipper's onstage performances are like 80s happenings. One recent show found Lose and Shatter standing to the side of the stage smoking cigarettes and drinking beer while a member of the audience climbed onto the stage and improvised lyrics over the hypnotic drone of Falcon's punk/psychedelic guitar and DePace's powerful but basic rhythms. Translator, on the other hand, play tightly focused sets with Barton and Darlington standing right at the front of the stage, rigorously strumming their guitars as they deliver their rock 'n' roll communiques with the utmost sincerity and urgency. Flipper dare their audience to respond; Translator insist they listen.

In San Francisco, the new bands may wear their hair short and cloak their message in the sounds of the 80s. But make no mistake, the message is still peace and love. And really, who's to argue with that? — *Michael Goldberg*

## JOE JACKSON

To some ears, Joe Jackson is a talented lightweight, a crafty pop-rock songsmith with certain notable deficits—a thin voice that can sound like a pinched nerve, lyrics that far too often flatten phrases rather than turn them, and early hits like "Is She Really Going Out With Him?" and "Look Sharp" that were far too accessible and successful for any real "new music" credibility. In addition, he's had to labor under the shadow of constant comparisons with fellow British tunesmith Elvis Costello, neither a fair nor enviable position to work from.

Facing those odds at New York's Pier 84, Jackson proved himself to be a melodist and lyricist of considerably more weight than he's often given credit for, as well as a pop music contender with a shot at a long championship season. Jackson's long-term musical ambitions were evident, in fact, from the taped prelude of Sinatra's "Night And Day" that opened his set, and the proof that he could carry it off came with the first song.

"On The Radio" took on a richer tone thanks to Jackson's new band (bass, drums, two keyboard players and a percussionist), erasing some of the urgent and at times almost irritating stridency it parlayed in its earlier guitar-based, pop combo form. Likewise, "Sunday Papers" was imbued with an urban soulfulness that fits its wry, semi-protest theme (and featured

a delightful vibes solo by Jackson), while "Look Sharp" was refitted for the 80s with snappy timbale breaks on the chorus by percussionist Sue Hadojopoulos that dress the song tastefully for today's dance-oriented scene.

Jackson's new-found New York ambience, showcased on his new LP, *Night And Day*, is the result of a lengthy stay in Manhattan, where Jackson explored the variety of black and Latin musics to be found there. But unlike many recent acts, he seeks to incorporate them rather than imitate them, and the results are rhythmically compelling live on such *Night And Day* cuts as "Steppin' Out" and "Target," and downright impressive on "Cancer," where Jackson accompanies himself on piano to a chorus of percussion from the band.

"If I didn't put a lot of effort into studying this stuff and learning about it, I would feel phony," Jackson explains of his latest direction. "There's a differ-



Joe Jackson

ence between being the real thing, which I'm not, and being a tasteless pastiche of the real thing, which I also feel I'm not. It wasn't my intention to slavishly imitate this music, but instead to use elements of it tastefully and with respect for it."

And in the end, one must admire Jackson for taking chances (even when they don't work, as with his *Jumpin' Jive* LP, crippled by a rhythm section that didn't swing). He rendered his big hit "Is She Really Going Out With Him?" in 'loose, street-corner *cap-pella* style that had his fans singing along with gusto; *Jumpin' Jive's* "Tuxedo Junction" finally swung in its new dress; and Jackson even tackled the mammoth subject of the battle between the sexes from a man's point of view on "Real Men" with a touching lyrical sincerity, sensitivity and insight.

"I'm not concerned with repeating formulas for commercial success," concludes Jackson, who no doubt could have knocked off many more versions of "Look Sharp." "People think it's strange to take risks, to try different things. Why should it be so strange? I'm a musician, not a businessman..." — *Rob Patterson*

## SALSA PLUS JAZZ

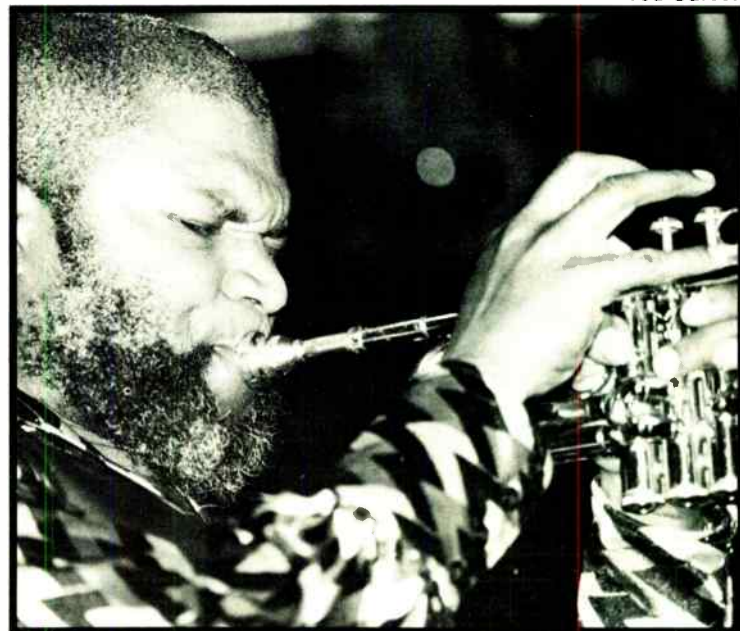
The practice of presenting a jazz soloist in tandem with a Latin ensemble is not new; it dates back at least as far as the classic meeting between Machito and Charlie Parker. The tradition has been kept alive the past year or so by Jack Hook, who has run an extremely successful weekly Salsa plus Jazz shindig at the Village Gate in New York. The session I caught featured Ted Curson as the jazz part of the format, while the Latin was provided by two popular New York combos: Jose Bello, and Casanova y Montuno. I still picture Curson as the young trumpet player with Charlie Mingus. By now, of course, a seasoned veteran, this part-time expatriate continues to divide his time as best he can between Hoboken and Copenhagen. Ted did a Latin stint when he first came to N.Y. in the early 60s, playing at the Palladium with many of the well-known *saeseros*, and even fronting his own Afro-Latin group along with trombonist Barry Rogers, so he is very comfortable with Latin music. These Village Gate sessions are done impromptu, no charts, no rehearsal, so the soloist must be "with it from the jump—no sidestepping." Simply knowing a mambo from a cha-cha won't enable a jazzman to play Latin any more than knowing three chords makes you a blues artist—a lot of ingredients go into the salsa mix and you must know the "sal" from the "pimienta." When all these ingredients are just right, you are *cocinando bien* (really cooking) and something happens which needs to be experienced to be understood. It's like the whole world falling into place with the music. I remember playing my Charlie Palmieri tapes out in the backyard, and the birds would all sing in *clave*. Honest, that's how it happens.

The only trouble with the Village Gate sessions is that when things started cooking this way (which takes time because it all depends on the rapport between the musicians and

the dancers, who reinforce each other) the set would be coming to a close. Many big salsa shows have extremely long sets; single dance pieces can run as long as half an hour without the dancers getting tired. On these occasions, the rhythmic drive becomes intoxicating and generates a series of inspired solos. The Gate is understandably trying to please an audience which includes an equal number of novices and aficionados so the sets are short. Unfortunately, the music suffers. For example, Jose Bello, a smooth vocalist whose young group has been together only a number of months, got off to a slow start, worked through a variety of *bolero, ruba, son montuno*, then really settled into a solid *guaguanco* when Ted Curson hit. The group began to swing, everyone was in *clave*. Curson was doing fine; then one fast mambo and that was that. Casanova y Montuno followed, a bigger, brassier group with a real *tipico* feeling a la Pacheco y su Nuveo Tumbao—a solid *tres* (folk rhythm guitar), trumpets alternating with *coro* and so on. The group is really showy and people started to dance; Curson came up doing a lot of lip shakes, and the group fell into perfect time, the dancers got mellow... again, a short set.

Despite this drawback, a few things became apparent. One, Teddy can really get these groups to swing. Each time his appearance seemed to settle everyone into a groove with which they kept until the end of the set. Two, there is a strong appetite for this type of music. It was a Monday night and the place was pretty full, and this apparently happens every week. Three, Village Gate patrons have a very unconservative approach to Latin dancing—if it feels good, they'll do it, even if it's a shuffle or a buck and wing. Jazz, of all music, needs more spontaneous, unrehearsed performances, whether it be Lester Bowie's forty-piece jams, or Jack Hook's Salsa plus Jazz. — *Joe Blum*

Ted Curson



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

# PINK FLOYD

*So ya/ Thought ya/ Might like to go to the show/ To feel the warm thrill of confusion/ That space cadet glow/ Tell me is something eluding your sunshine?/ Is this not what you expected to see?/ If you'd like to find out what's behind these cold eyes/ You'll just have to claw your way through the/ Disguise.... "In The Flesh" The Wall*

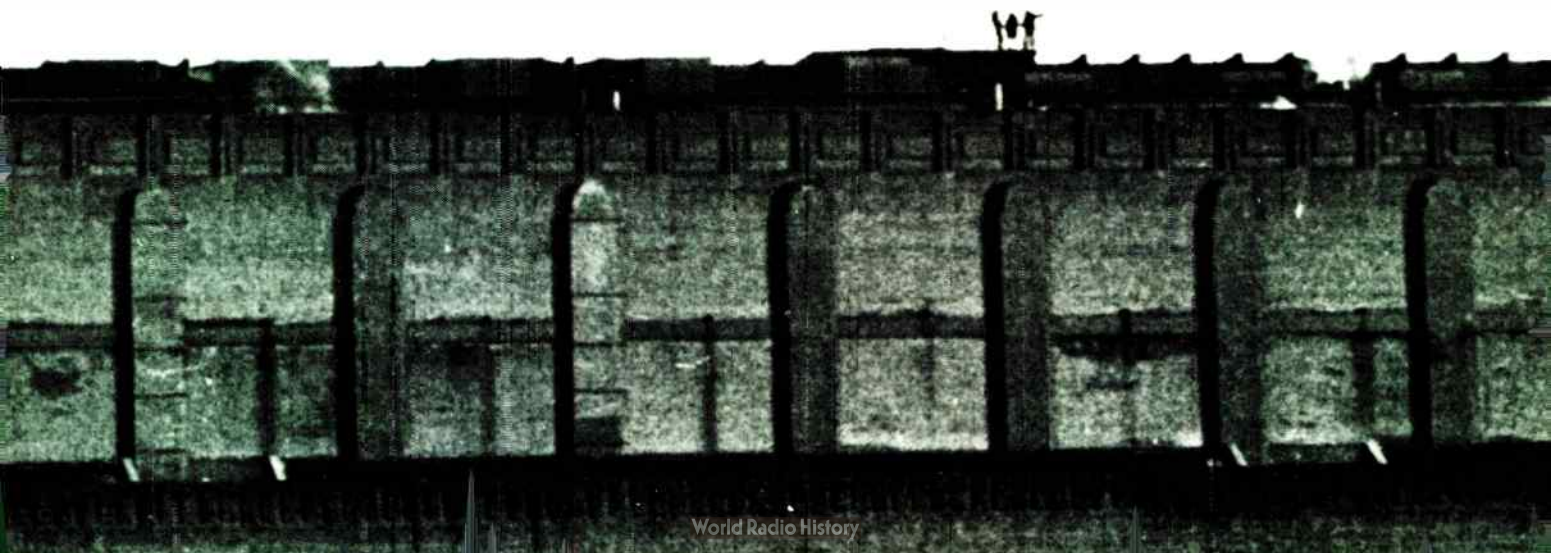
**S**omething snapped in Montreal. It was partly the strain of a long tour coming to a close—the accumulated jet lag, hotel food, pre- and post-show ennui and oppressive stadium squeeze of faceless but demanding flesh of the 1977 *Animals* tour. It was partly the strain of that lifestyle accumulated over ten exhausting years (“How about the

time at Dunstable in '67 when the audience poured beer on us from the balcony?”) and knowing it had already sucked the heart and soul out of one bandmate and friend early on. It was also partly—actually a big part—the knowledge that they were playing a bad show their last night out. What's more, the very vocal majority of people in that black hole of steel and concrete were less concerned

with what they had to play and say than with who they were. “They” were Pink Floyd and that was enough.

Roger Waters spit on a kid in the front rows that night. Pink Floyd's singer-bassist-songwriter also spent a lot of time afterward brooding on what his fame had done to him and how he came to such a scary pass. He later spent a lot of time writing it all

**By David Fricke**







down in a series of brutally confessional, emotionally graphic songs that eventually became Pink Floyd's multi-platinum 1979 seller *The Wall*.

Guitarist David Gilmour had no idea at the time that the Montreal concert had struck such a devastating chord in Waters. "None of us," he explains, meaning Floyd drummer Nick Mason and keyboard player Richard Wright, "were aware of it at the time. I just thought it was a great shame to end up a six-month tour with a rotten show. In fact, I remember going offstage for the encore and going back to the sound mixing board in the middle of the audience to watch the encore while Snowy (White), the guitar player who was with us at the time, played guitar on the encore."

But if *The Wall* is very much Waters' acutely autobiographical examination of the way not just rock 'n' roll but society as a whole feasts at the expense of its creative spirits, its roots and lessons are hardly unfamiliar to the rest of the Floyd. Gilmour remembers, with a hint of bitter resignation, the point at which Pink Floyd's audience changed from an attentive, devoted megacult hanging on *Ummagumma*'s every last resonating echo to an awesome, often unmanageable mob that responded mostly to spectacle. It was, ironically, the Floyd's 1973 hit single "Money," Waters' contemptible assessment of wealth and itself part of a fantastically successful album, *The Dark Side Of The Moon*—at this writing, 433 weeks on the *Billboard* top 200 LPs, with a bullet, no less—that was a life-death-and-reincarnation cycle in song.

Pink Floyd have, in one sense, only themselves to blame. They compensated for each leap in popularity and concert hall size from *The Dark Side Of The Moon* on with expansive stage productions shooting very real, introspective (and in the case of the savagely misanthropic *Animals*, almost paranoid) lyrical concerns into the realm of the visually surreal, like Floyd's reflection seen in some sinister funhouse mirror. What do you remember most about that *Animals* tour—Gilmour's stinging solo stretch on "Dogs" and the vengeful gallop of "Sheep" or that giant inflatable pig with the electric eyes zipping across the top of the arena like some giant fat out of hell?

As an album, *The Wall* is a direct rebuke of that rock arena psychology and its bigger social parallel. As a film, *The Wall* is an all-too-literal translation by director Alan Parker of Waters' screen- and album-play, a dazzling series of reality nightmares—a bit like one enormous Hipgnosis album cover with Gerald Scarfe's *Fantasia*-in-hell animation from the concert—heavy on the fascist implications of rock's mob complex. But as a concert, seen by an exclusive club of a few hundred thousand in New York, Los Angeles, Germany and London, *The Wall* was an ingenious manipulation of that complex to make Waters' point. The gradual building and subsequent demolition of the wall, the overhead buzzing of the plane, the grotesque inflated dolls and duplicate Floyd band were all calculated, not just to illustrate the album, but to get the same roaring Pavlovian response that first pulled Waters' hairtrigger in Montreal. *The Wall* audience was the metaphor.

The capping irony of Pink Floyd's staggering success from *Dark Side* to *The Wall* is the media and the public's insistence on categorizing the group as the last living truly psychedelic band, a "space band." Their early recordings (with and without founding member Syd Barrett) like "Interstellar Overdrive" and "Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun," aimed at the outer limits. Yet since *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, Pink Floyd and Waters in particular have concerned themselves more with a murky inner space, the battered passage of body and soul through a perilous lifetime. Where Peter Townshend is obsessed with growing old in rock 'n' roll, Roger Waters is worried more about surviving long enough to enjoy old age.

The Floyd have also become fanatical about another inner space, the recording studio. Longtime sound and sound-processing freaks (they debuted a rudimentary quadraphonic sound system at a 1967 London concert), they are meticulous recorders and go as long as two years between albums. Their imminent release, *The Final Cut*, a collection of *Wall* recordings and new tracks designed as a soundtrack companion to the film, was supposed to be finished in time for the movie's premiere back in July. Yet David Gilmour freely admits that many of the band's technical "achievements" come about simply from tinkering with whatever toys are lying around in the studio.

That David Gilmour is freely admitting anything seems remarkable. Around their inner spaces, Pink Floyd long ago constructed an impregnable wall of media silence that often leaves even their most devoted acolytes guessing. Fortunately, the New York premiere in August of *The Wall* (with Boomtown Rat Bob Geldof as "Pink") gave Gilmour a good promotional excuse to sit with me in the airy comfort of his plush New York hotel suite and talk of all things Floyd.

Relaxing in a summery shirt-and-pants outfit with a day-old beard, Gilmour is a willing, lively conversationalist, often amused by the serious, almost academic way Floyd fans treat some of the band's casual studio accidents. He maintains a strong interest in music outside the Floyd, producing a number of records for the mid-70s. U.K. band Unicorn, discovering British pop thrush Kate Bush and recording the first—aside from Syd Barrett's—of the Floyd's solo albums (1978's *David Gilmour*). According to Alan Parsons, who engineered *Atom Heart Mother* and *Dark Side Of The Moon*, he is also "the most technically minded of the four." For the 1980 *Wall* concerts, he played conductor as well as guitarist, cueing not only the band but the stage hands throughout the show. "I didn't dare even have a beer before the show," he cracks. "A concentration lapse for a second and the whole thing could fall apart."

Considering Pink Floyd's stony ten-year silence, this interview is quite an event. It may not be the last word on Pink Floyd, but at least it's one less brick in the wall.

**MUSICIAN:** From a musical standpoint, *The Wall* is a very unique Pink Floyd record. In comparison to the other post-*Dark Side* albums like *Wish You Were Here* and *Animals*, it seems to be almost conventional in its execution and songs.



*"At gigs we'd try to get really quiet to create a beautiful atmosphere and all these kids would be shouting 'Money!'"*



Where the other albums featured long, expanded pieces undergoing subtle structural and improvisatory changes, *The Wall* features relatively uncomplicated songs and often simple guitar-based arrangements.

**GILMOUR:** The idea of *The Wall* was so big and there was such a lot of stuff that Roger wanted to get across lyrically that there was no other way to do it, really. As it was, we had to struggle to get it on a double album. And also, none of the stuff had ever been out on the road before. *The Dark Side Of The Moon* was toured before the album was made. That determined things—they worked onstage before they ever got to record. And I suppose that's the difference on this thing. It was purely made in the studio.

**MUSICIAN:** What was the process by which the songs and arrangements developed?

**GILMOUR:** Roger had done a demo, at home, of the entire piece and then we got it into the studio with Bob Ezrin (producer of *The Wall* album with Waters and Gilmour) and the rest of us. We went through it and started with the tracks we liked best, discussed a lot of what was not so good, and kicked out a lot of stuff. Roger and Bob spent a lot of time trying to get the story line straighter, more linear conceptually. Ezrin is the sort of guy who's thinking about all the angles all the time, about how to make a shorter story line that's told properly, constantly worried about moving rhythms up and down, all that stuff which we've never really thought about.

So we checked out the songs and Roger was sent away to write other songs, which he did. In fact, some of the best stuff, I think, came out under the pressure of saying, "That's not good enough to get on, do something."

We worked on it like that for a long time, four months I think.

**MUSICIAN:** Were the arrangements of the songs developed during this demo process?

**GILMOUR:** Some of the arrangements are very close to how Roger originally had them. Most of them are just changed, perhaps, a bit. That's just the normal process we use. Bash things on and try 'em... move things around if you don't like it.

**MUSICIAN:** Did you feel a need to telescope instrumental or musical ideas you would normally have expanded on in *Animals* or even *Dark Side*?

**GILMOUR:** I don't think it was a matter of telescoping. It was a matter of being economical and making things say what they're trying to say, quite snappily and not waste the time. That was the mood we were in and certainly Bob Ezrin helped. Very snappy and to the point.

**MUSICIAN:** "Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2" is an interesting case in point because it is a very simple song, actually just one verse and a chorus. Yet you built it up into a powerful top-forty single with quite a radical treatment.

**GILMOUR:** It was originally a very short song. There was going to be a quick guitar solo and that was it. There was only one verse ever recorded and we put the solo stuff on the end. Roger and myself sang the verse and then we thought we'd try getting some kids to sing on it. I made up a backing track with a sync pulse up on it so we could later sneak it back in with the original track. We were in L.A. at the time, so I sent the tape to England and got an engineer to summon some kids. I gave him a whole set of instructions—ten-to-fifteen-year-olds from North London, mostly boys—and I said get them to sing this song in as many ways as you like. And he filled up all the tracks on a 24-track machine with stereo pairs of all the different combinations and ways of singing with all these kids.

We got the tape back to L.A., played it, and it was terrific. Originally, we were going to put them in the background, behind Roger and me singing on the same verse. But it was so good we decided to do them on their own. But we didn't want to lose our vocal. So we wound up copying the tape and mixing it twice, one with me and Roger singing and one with the kids. The backing is the same. And we edited them together.

**MUSICIAN:** What about the other extreme, something like "The Trial," which is very Brecht-Weillian with the violins and orchestra?

**GILMOUR:** That's largely Roger and Bob Ezrin collaborating. I think it was written by Bob with the immediate intention to do

**Roger Waters, Richard Wright, David Gilmour and Nick Mason emerge from behind the Wall to salute their fans.**



that with an orchestra, although we did demos of it with synthesizers and stuff.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's ironic that Pink Floyd has this reputation for being a "space band," making weird music, ma-a-an, because I find Pink Floyd is not so much about weird sounds, but about sound processing. You take a basic sound, even a nice piano or acoustic guitar as on the short Animals bits "Pig On The Wing," and process it, giving it a certain dramatic air.*

**GILMOUR:** I like our music to feel three-dimensional. It's about trying to invoke emotions in people, I suppose. You feel larger than life in some sort of way. Let's face it—none of us in Pink Floyd are technically brilliant musicians, with great chops who can change rhythms, fifteen or sixteen bars here, there and everywhere. And we're not terribly good at complicated chord structures. A lot of it is just very simple stuff dressed up.

We stopped trying to make overtly "spacey" music and trip people out in that way in the 60s. But that image hangs on and we can't seem to get short of it.

### Crazy Diamond in the Rough

*The child loved the spot, and Otter thinks if he came wandering back from wherever he is—if he is anywhere by this time, poor little chap—he might... stop there and play, perhaps. So Otter goes there every night and watches—on the chance, you know, just on the chance.*

"The Piper at the Gates of Dawn,"  
chapter seven of *The Wind in the Willows*

In the beginning, there was Syd Barrett. To this day, certain Floyd freaks insist he was Pink. It is certainly true that even now the spirit of Syd Barrett—for a brief meteoric period in 1966 and '67 the band's main songwriter, lead guitarist and truly psychedelic adventurer—hangs over Pink Floyd.

David Gilmour remembers that Syd—born Roger Keith Barrett in Cambridge, England on January 6, 1946—could turn heads even at an early age with his arrestingly handsome manlike looks, dark tousled hair and enigmatic smile. "He was

a truly magnetic personality. When he was very young, he was a *figure* in his hometown. People would look at him in the street and say, 'There's Syd Barrett,' and he would be only fourteen years old," recalls Gilmour, a teenage pal of Syd's. Barrett also had these deep laser eyes that shot out from early Floyd publicity photos and record covers. But that, says Gilmour with a tinge of sadness, came later.

George Roger Waters was also a Cambridge boy and a school chum of Syd's, although two years older. When a band he was playing with in London found itself in need of a new guitarist, he brought in Syd who had since moved to the city and was staying in the same flat. This was 1965. The other members of the group were drummer Nick Mason and organist Richard Wright, fellow architecture students of Waters'. Barrett came up with the name Pink Floyd, borrowing it from two Georgia bluesmen named Pink Council and Floyd Anderson. Given the times and the town, it was only natural that Pink Floyd would soon fall in with the inevitable exploding underground.

But if Pink Floyd, through their pioneering use of light shows and psychedelic theatrics, came to represent the scene, Syd Barrett surely represented its soul. His songwriting was at once whimsical and poignant—Pink Floyd's debut '67 single "Arnold Layne" was a typically Sydian compassionate portrait of a transvestite who pinched women's clothes from neighborhood washlines; the followup "See Emily Play," the Floyd's only hit single for the next six years, captured in the paisley pop pastels of Rick Wright's spooky organ and Barrett's underground fuzz guitar the free spirit and second childhood of the New Acid Age. Syd played his guitar as if he were furiously digging a hole to China, building extended improvisational rave-ups like "Interstellar Overdrive" on vicious scratching solos and stuttering guitar monologues while the band wailed maniacally behind him.

To help get wherever he was going in his mind and music, Barrett took acid, lots of it. (Ironically, Gilmour notes, the rest of the band were purely drinkers.) It got him as far as *The Piper At*

"He who comes up with the goods": Roger Waters' bleak concept epics have dominated recent Floyd output.



WARING ABBOTT





Syd Barrett, second from right, was unable to keep his brilliant psychedelic juggernaut on the tracks.

*The Gates of Dawn*, the Floyd's brilliant, breathtaking '67 debut album with its psychotic instrumental rampages and blowout rockers, meditative ballads and altered pop fairy tales. He wrote or co-wrote all but one of the songs. But even then, Syd started seriously freaking out.

On a brief, disastrous sojourn to America to promote "See Emily Play," the Floyd did a lip-sync appearance on *American Bandstand*, only Syd "was not into moving his lips that day." When Mr. Clean, Pat Boone, tried interviewing Syd on another TV show, Syd's only reply was a completely blank stare. Gilmour remembers seeing the band perform in England in the fall of '67 and thinking, "They were a piece of crap. Syd was thrashing about on his guitar terribly and everyone thinking it was wonderful."

The rest of the Floyd didn't. After enlisting Gilmour to shore up the guitar end the next January, they eased Barrett out entirely by the spring of '68. But out of a mixture of pity and genuine respect for his native talents, they never entirely gave up on him. Gilmour, with help from Waters and Wright, produced two Barrett solo albums—*The Madcap Laughs* in 1969 and *Barrett* a year later. "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," the centerpiece of *Wish You Were Here*, seemed less a tribute to Syd than a pleading to return, particularly at a time when the group was desperately floundering on a sequel to *Dark Side*.

Fifteen years after Syd Barrett came to his brief fame, he is nothing more than one of rock's great MIAs, a tragic casualty of his own daring. Yet to hear David Gilmour talk about him, it's as if Pink Floyd still holds on to a thin thread of hope that Syd will someday come back from wherever he went.

**MUSICIAN:** Do you feel Syd's mental breakdown was directly attributable to the psychedelic experience?

**GILMOUR:** In my opinion, it would have happened anyway. It was a deep-rooted thing. But I'll say the psychedelic experience might well have acted as a catalyst. Still, I just don't think he could deal with the vision of success and all the things that went with it. And there were other problems he had. I think the whole swimming pool thing in *The Wall* movie comes from one of Syd's episodes.

**MUSICIAN:** How far gone was Syd when you produced those two solo records for him? How did you deal with him?

**GILMOUR:** With extreme difficulty. EMI understood Syd's potential at the time. They knew he was very talented and could write great songs and they wanted him to carry on. So they got an EMI producer (Malcolm Jones) who started recording this album and he spent ages on it. I think it was over six months. Eventually, EMI thought that too much money had been spent and nothing had been achieved.

So Syd came and asked if we could help him. We went to EMI and said, "Let us have a crack at finishing it up." And they gave us two days to do it—and one of those days we had a Pink Floyd gig, so we had to leave the studio at four in the

afternoon to get on a train and go to the show.

But basically, Roger and I sat down with him—after listening to all his songs at home—and said, "Syd, play this one. Syd, play that one." We sat him on a chair with a couple of mikes in front of him and got him to sing the song. On some of them, we just put a little bit of effect on the track with echo and double-tracking. On one or two others, we dubbed a bit of drums and a little bass and organ. But it was like one side of the album was six month's work and we did the other tracks in two and a half days. And the potential of some of those songs... they could have really been fantastic.

**MUSICIAN:** The second solo record, Barrett, has much more instrumentation on it.

**GILMOUR:** We had more time to do that. But trying to find a technique of working with Syd was so difficult. You had to prerecord the tracks without him, working from one version of the song he had done, and then sit Syd down afterwards and try to get him to play and sing along, with a lot of dropping in. Or you could do it the other way around, where you'd get him to do a performance of it on his own and then try to dub everything else on top of it. The concept of him performing with another bunch of musicians was clearly impossible because he'd change the song every time. He'd never do a song the same twice, I think quite deliberately.

*"There was just this strange fat person with shaved eyebrows sitting in the control room for hours. No one in the band recognized him."*

**MUSICIAN:** There is a popular Syd story that he actually turned up unannounced at the mixing session for "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" and said he was ready to "do my bit."

**GILMOUR:** He did show up, yeah.

**MUSICIAN:** Did he say anything?

**GILMOUR:** He showed up at the studio. He was very fat and he had a shaved head and shaved eyebrows [note Bob Geldof's eyebrow-shaving scene in *The Wall*] and no one recognized him at all first off. There was just this strange person walking around the studio, sitting in the control room with us for hours. If anyone else told me this story, I'd find it hard to believe, that you could sit there with someone in a small room for hours, with a close friend of yours for years and years and not recognize him. And I guarantee, no one in the band recog-

*“Let’s face it—none of us are technically brilliant musicians with great chops. A lot of our music is just very simple stuff dressed up.”*

nized him. Eventually, I had sussed it. And even knowing, you couldn’t recognize him. He came two or three days and then he didn’t come anymore.

**MUSICIAN:** How do you feel about the cult lionization of Syd Barrett, with things like the Syd Barrett Appreciation Society (an English fan club of sorts that actually published a newsletter, Terrapin, after one of his songs)?

**GILMOUR:** It’s sad that these people think he’s such a wonderful subject, that he’s a living legend when, in fact, there is this poor sad madman who can’t deal with life or himself. He’s got uncontrollable things in him that he can’t deal with and people think it’s a marvelous, wonderful, romantic thing. It’s just a sad, sad thing, a very nice and talented person who’s just disintegrated.

**MUSICIAN:** That feeling comes through on “Shine On You Crazy Diamond.” It seems a very sad song, almost a pleading.

**GILMOUR:** It is sad. Syd’s story is a sad story romanticized by people who don’t know anything about it. They’ve made it fashionable but it’s just not that way.

### Acoustic Architecture

David Gilmour came into Pink Floyd by a rather circuitous route. After his star-crossed buddy Barrett packed his art school bags for London and the future Floyd, Gilmour continued playing the Cambridge club circuit with his own combo Joker’s Wild featuring drummer Willie Wilson (soon-to-be Sutherland Brothers and Quiver) and current Foreigner bassist Rick Wills. He also did time in France as a male model but got back to England in the fall of ‘67, just in time for psychedelia’s full flower and Syd’s mental collapse. When the Floyd offered him Syd’s guitar spot, he accepted for reasons that had nothing to do with rock’s brave new world. “I joined the Pink Floyd,” he grins, “for the stardom and the girls.”

But when Gilmour—who was twenty-one at the time—joined the group in early ‘68, they were actually having trouble even getting arrested. A succession of potent but inconsistent singles bombed, Syd was well into his fourth dimension, and the Floyd were about to bump their two managers. They were also saddled with an aging repertoire of Syd’s songs even as underground pundits dismissed them as nothing without him. *A Saucerful Of Secrets* changed all that.

In the great Floyd vinyl canon, *A Saucerful Of Secrets* holds a minor but pivotal position, testament that there was life after Syd. Recorded partly with Barrett and finished with Gilmour, the album’s stark primal pulse and long atmospheric instrumental brooding mark as radical a departure from Barrett’s shards of sounds as *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* was from the pop chart fluff of the day. These are not just the idle meanderings of buzzed-out space rangers, however. Crucial tracks like Roger Waters’ gravity-free samba “Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun” and the twelve-minute “found sound” suite, “A Saucerful Of Secrets,” reveal a passion for structure—not surprising for a bunch of ex-architecture students—dosed with a keen interest in open-ended improvisation. Successive recordings like the sorely underrated movie soundtrack *More* (to a Barbet Schroeder film of the same name) and the muddy but intoxicating live half of the double-album *Ummagumma* (cue Waters’ hellish scream in “Careful With That Axe, Eugene”) build substantially on *Saucerful’s* humble beginnings. Yet it is still *A Saucerful Of Secrets* which reverberates with the thrill of discovery.

*ful’s* humble beginnings. Yet it is still *A Saucerful Of Secrets* which reverberates with the thrill of discovery.

**MUSICIAN:** What was the genesis of the track “A Saucerful Of Secrets”?

**GILMOUR:** I had just joined when we started doing that track. Basically, it was the architecture students in the band. They’d sit down with a piece of paper and they’d start it like this—“It’s gotta go right here and then it’s gotta go right up there...”—and they were drawing these peaks and troughs and things on a chart, working out where the piece was going to go.

The whole first part of it was kind of like a war, I think. I didn’t fully understand it myself at the time. But it seemed to me like a war. The first part is tension, a buildup, a fear, and the middle with all the clashing and banging, that’s the war going on. The aftermath is a sort of requiem.

The start of it was done with the edge tones of cymbals. We’d get some cymbals and put a nice microphone right on the edge of it, then beat the cymbal very gently with soft mallets. That actually produces a tone not a bit like a cymbal. The whole first section is basically that, a series of those tones, with lots of stuff tacked on top.

For the next section, Nick played a drum pattern, snipped and spliced it together into a loop, and we ran it on a tape recorder for hours and hours. Then there’s me playing the guitar, turned up real loud and using the leg of a microphone stand like a steel bar, running it up and down the guitar fingerboard.

**MUSICIAN:** It’s interesting that the track was worked out as a structured piece because it actually sounds like it is just growing of its own accord.

**GILMOUR:** I remember sitting there, thinking, “My God, this isn’t what music’s all about.” I had just come straight out of a band that spent most of its time rehashing early Jimi Hendrix songs to crowds of strange French people. Going straight into this was culture shock.

**MUSICIAN:** Yet just at the time when Pink Floyd was beginning to develop a new group identity apart from Syd, you released *Ummagumma* with live “hits,” so to speak, and an album of solo tracks from each member. As career moves go, you could have done much better.

**GILMOUR:** We just didn’t know what else to do at the time. We were a bit short on material. Also, what we were very good at, at that time, was live performance. We were going out around England and Europe selling out anything we wanted to. We were one of the top drawing bands, apart from Hendrix and Fleetwood Mac in their earlier incarnation.

**MUSICIAN:** How much of the Floyd show was actually spontaneous improvisation at the time?

**GILMOUR:** A lot of it. There was a whole passage of time when we would have nothing planned. We’d just say, “We’re gonna do this” and waffle away for a little while, go, “Ready for the next one?” and nod each other into it.

I mean, we were doing stuff like “Careful With That Axe, Eugene” which is basically one chord. We were just creating textures and moods over the top of it, taking it up and down, not very subtle stuff. There was a sort of rule book of our own that we were trying to play to. And it was largely about dynamics.

### Echoes of an Endless Choir

Not counting *Relics*, a 1971 compilation of early odds and sods, the next three albums represent Pink Floyd’s awkward but intensely experimental transition from loosely organized space jams to the meticulous orchestration, concentrated songs and emotional directness of *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. With its ill-fitting horns and cathedral choir, the ambitious title suite hogging half of 1970’s *Atom Heart Mother* is the Floyd’s least successful major work, according to Gilmour.

He also thinks “Echoes,” the twenty-three minute entrée on ‘71’s *Meddle*, points the way toward *The Dark Side Of The Moon* in its liquid fusion of regulation rock progressions, purposeful application of sound effects and cohesive arrangement of concept fragments. That the Floyd had yet to



complete an album that was more than just the sum of rather inventive parts is evident on *Meddle*'s side one, which ranged from the wind tunnel rush and locomotive rhythm of the instrumental overture "One Of These Days" to Roger Waters' snide cabaret shuffle "San Tropez" and the throwaway blues coda "Seamus." Ditto *Obscured By Clouds*, the soundtrack for another Barbet Schroeder film *Le Vallee* a pleasant diversion of piecemeal delights only distinguished by Roger Waters' increasing lyrical interest in less galactic matters.

"The big difference after 'Echoes,'" Gilmour explains, "is Roger started to write lyrics with a meaning. The lyrics for 'Echoes' were just an excuse to hang the music on. I think that started—Roger suddenly realizing what he can do lyrically—on *Obscured By Clouds*." Gilmour specifically cites "Free Four," an amiable enough acoustic stroll with fuzz bass punctuation in which Waters considers with bittersweet humor the life-and-death equation, a deep concern triggered by his obsession with the childhood loss of his father in World War II. That obsession eventually came to play a crucial role in *The Wall*. More immediately, the madness of life and the fear of death would take up the whole of *The Dark Side Of The Moon*.

Given the sales records it shattered, its reputation as every high-fidelity enthusiast's greatest hit and the great commercial breakthrough it presented for Pink Floyd, David Gilmour's confession that "I thought *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, at the time, was a little weak musically" may send certain fans into deep shock. "Some of the songs," he insists, "I didn't think were that good, as chord structures. My argument, after *The Dark Side Of The Moon* when we went to do *Wish You Were Here*, was to try and get some of the feeling and musical power of 'Echoes' with the lyrical power of *Dark Side Of The Moon*.

As far as the several million fans who still swear by their battered copies of *Dark Side* are concerned, Gilmour doth protest too much. From its immaculate rich-echo-and-deep-bass production to the sensual gentility of "Us And Them" and soaring Baptist fire of guest vocalist Clare Torry's wordless wail on "The Great Gig In The Sky," *The Dark Side Of The Moon* is the archetypal Floyd album, the band's first completely successful attempt to give melodic and emotional shape to their vast musical space.

**MUSICIAN:** What was the development of "Echoes"? Coming right after "Atom Heart Mother," it seems to be a much more unified piece.

**GILMOUR:** A lot of the stuff we did in those days was just sitting around in the rehearsal room plunking around for ideas, searching for ideas, desperately trying to come out with little things and work on those.

**MUSICIAN:** Was "Echoes" one idea or a collection of them?

**GILMOUR:** It's quite a few ideas developed together. It's quite complicated. It was the first time we'd used 16-track. Take the choir at the end, the everlasting backwards choir. Have you ever heard that musical thing where they get a tone that seems to go on... you know, like those Escher paintings where the staircases go up and up and up and never getting anywhere. Well, there's a tone and it keeps going *ding, ding, ding, ding*, and up and up and the same time they are surreptitiously taking out high frequencies, so that it never gets anywhere. That's what the choir on the end does, right on the very end of "Echoes."

The whole beginning of "Echoes" was a complete accident. There was a piano at Abbey Road and they had it miked. We'd put the microphone out through a Leslie in the studio at the same time as Rick was playing it. He was just sitting there, plunking away. Every once in awhile, he'd come up with this note and it had a strange resonance to it. It was kind of a feedback thing so it would resonate in the studio. Bing! A complete accident. We said, "That's great!" and we used it as the start of the piece. At a certain point later on, where we had to go move on musically, we tried to recreate the sound and edit it together. But we couldn't get that note to resonate again in the same way.

**MUSICIAN:** Alan Parsons told me the story of how on

"Money" you got the cash registers in perfect sync with the beat. You actually measured out with a ruler the length of tape that was necessary and spliced it.

**GILMOUR:** You're trying to get the impact from the cash register, the "snap, clack, crssh!" You'd mark that one and then measure how long you wanted that beat to go and that's the piece you'd use. And you'd chop it together. It was trial and error. You just chop the tapes together and if it sounds good, you use it. If it doesn't, you take one section out and put a different one in.

Sometimes we'd put one in and it'd be backwards, because the diagonal cut on the tape, if you turn it around, is exactly the same. We'd stick that in and instead it would go "chung, dum, whoosh!" And it would still sound great. So we'd use that.

**MUSICIAN:** According to the credits on *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, you spent from June, 1972 to the following January recording, almost nine months.

**GILMOUR:** It was very, very split up. The actual recording time was probably two or three months. There was touring in the middle. In fact, we did five nights at the Rainbow Theater in London—there are bootlegs of us—doing *The Dark Side Of The Moon* a long time before we ever started recording it and the differences are unbelievable.

The whole "On The Run" section with the synthesizer was completely different. "Time" was, like, half the speed. I think the "Time" vocal was me and Rick singing in harmony, very low. It sounded terrible.

**MUSICIAN:** On *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, there are three guitar solos that really stand out. There's one on "Time" that has a real Stratocaster bite to it but with a scrappy sound....

**GILMOUR:** Yeah, it's a Strat worked through a fuzz box and a DDL (digital delay line) for the echo effect. If you just have a



A burned-out Pink, played by Boomtown Rat Bob Geldof, is visited by his past in a scene from *The Wall*.

fuzz directly through an amplifier, for me, it's usually too fuzzy. But if you put a bit of DDL on it, it smoothes it out a bit and makes it sound more natural.

**MUSICIAN:** There is also the instrumental segue "Any Color You Like," where your guitar has an organlike air to it, like putting it through a Leslie.

**GILMOUR:** I think that's through a Univibe. In those days, there were Univibes.

**MUSICIAN:** Yes, this was almost ten years ago. Equipment people take for granted now was still in the Dark Ages.

**GILMOUR:** I think the people out there who are looking back think that the synthesizers and all this stuff came out a long time before it did. In studios, up until really the middle 70s, there weren't any effects units, no harmonizers. They didn't exist. The choices you had were to get the tape players to run tapes against each other. There was another jolly good one

where you could take a track on a multi-track machine and play it off the sync-head, through another tape recorder and play with the speed of it with a vari-speed. Now to vari-speed a tape machine in those days, EMI (Floyd usually recorded at EMI's Abbey Road studio in London) had to wheel in an enormous box with oscillators and output bars and God-knows-what, with great big knobs on it, and you spent three hours plugging it into a tape machine and playing with the knob and the tape machine.

**MUSICIAN:** *Were you making a conscious effort with The Dark Side Of The Moon to make a state-of-the-art, high-fidelity record?*

**GILMOUR:** We always were. But that was the first time we actually got someone else in to give us an extra opinion on the mixing of it, Chris Thomas.

**MUSICIAN:** *Were you surprised by the way the album took off commercially?*

**GILMOUR:** The thing I remember most about the period after that was the incredible annoyance at these gigs. We were doing these places where all the young kids would be shouting "Money!" all the way through the show. We'd been used to all these reverent fans who would come and you could hear a pin drop. We'd try to get really quiet, especially at the beginning of "Echoes" or something that has tinkling notes, trying to create a beautiful atmosphere, and these kids would be there shouting "Money!"

**MUSICIAN:** *Did that kind of acceptance affect you in trying to do a followup? The pressure must have been fantastic.*

**GILMOUR:** The pressure was entirely our own, of knowing that we had to follow up that album. It was very difficult getting back in and working.

### Poison in the Machine

Call it a severe reaction to commercial success. Call it kitchen sink psychedelia. Call it just good old weird. Whatever it was, for a brief series of sessions in October and November of 1973, Pink Floyd dared to make an album of music played on everything but instruments—rubber bands, aerosol spray cans, partially filled wine bottles. They completed three tracks (bootleggers, wherefore art thou?) before conceding defeat.

The actual *Dark Side* followup, *Wish You Were Here*, released in the fall of '75, suggests that the Floyd—and particularly Roger Waters as the lyricist—deeply resented having to best themselves on public demand. Waters' sarcastic blasts at the music business in the industrial synth-grinder "Welcome To The Machine" and the Roy Harper vocal "Have A Cigar" (the record company weasel in "Have A Cigar" asking in his malevolent ignorance, "Which one's Pink?" is drawn, Gilmour claims, from a real incident) may be hard to take from a band whose lifestyle, *The Wall* producer Bob Ezrin has said, "is interchangeable with the president of just about any bank in England." Yet the chilly air of pleading desperation blowing through the thirty-minute "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," not so much a tribute to Syd Barrett as a prayer that he bless them with a bit of the uncut genius in this their hardest hour, is compounded by the cold realization that success—however limited it was for the Floyd in ye olde '67—was Syd's poison as well. What the biz giveth, it had already taken away once.

Just how deep Waters' bitterness ran is underlined by the fact that *Wish You Were Here* at one time featured "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" with the harshly vindictive "You Gotta Be Crazy" and "Raving And Drooling," a harrowing vision of brownshirt violence. The last two eventually became "Dogs" and "Sheep" respectively, part of the grim *Animals* trilogy, Waters' barbed musical application of George Orwell's fascism-on-the-farm.

But even walls are made to be broken. During his recent New York stay on behalf of the *Wall* movie, Gilmour broke with rock's megastar tradition by registering at his hotel under his own name. When a *Rolling Stone* writer took the initiative to call him up directly for some interview time, bypassing the usual publicist channels, Gilmour graciously invited him up for a chat. And when I asked him what he thought of punk rock in

general and in specific Johnny Rotten's infamous homemade T-shirt with the legend "I Hate Pink Floyd," he laughed with a mixture of good nature and serious enthusiasm. "It frightened a lot of people, but it didn't frighten me. I like a good kick in the pants. It does you good."

It's like Roger Waters, for all his apparent cynicism, says at the tail end of *The Wall*: "And when they've given you their all," he sings, signing off in "Outside The Wall," "Some stagger and fall/ After all it's not easy/ Banging your head against some mad bugger's/Wall." Even he must admit—it works both ways.

**MUSICIAN:** *Considering the anxieties of following up The Dark Side Of The Moon and the tenor of songs like "Have A Cigar" and the Animals album, is there a lot of bitterness on Roger's part about Pink Floyd becoming an industry in itself, no longer just a band?*

**GILMOUR:** You'd have to ask him, really. He certainly holds a resentment of those figures and the "attempted" control, what they tried to take over. I mean, we met some people in the record industry... we couldn't believe how they could possibly have jobs in the industry. And we still do.

**MUSICIAN:** *The world probably assumes that as the lyricist, Roger Waters speaks for the rest of Pink Floyd. Is Roger's point of view the Pink Floyd's point of view?*

**GILMOUR:** Well, that's the world's assumption and that's what we have to put up with, I suppose. It's entirely possible that I might write a song that would get onto a Pink Floyd album, but it's also entirely possible that it wouldn't fit with whatever overall idea we were working with. It's "he who comes up with the goods."

**MUSICIAN:** *What was the rest of the band's reaction when Roger came up with The Wall concept?*

**GILMOUR:** We all thought it was a very strong concept. I think there's a lot of it that's irrelevant to me. I don't feel the pressure of a wall between me and my audience. I don't ever think there's something that doesn't get through to them. I don't feel a lot of the things that happened to me in my earlier years, some of which weren't so wonderful, adversely affect my life to the extent Roger feels some of those things affected his life. Roger, for example, never knew his father. But that's his viewpoint and he's perfectly entitled to it. But I don't subscribe to it.

A lot of the other stuff, *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*, I am fairly in sympathy with. *Animals*, I could see the truth of, though I don't paint people as black as that.

**MUSICIAN:** *Is Pink Floyd's "reclusiveness" of the last several years a necessary function of your fame or just something the Floyd prefer?*

**GILMOUR:** It's not a Pink Floyd thing. That is a case of any one individual at any one time doing whatever he wants to. That's exactly what we do and we've always done. There's never been a band policy where we do not do interviews. We have had difficult times with the press and we proved to ourselves that we didn't need 'em. They were constantly trying to prove to us that the measure of our success was done through the publicity we were given by them. But we absolutely proved that wasn't so.

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you ever fear that, in spite of yourselves, Pink Floyd has been reduced by the business to a product, like a box of rock 'n' roll cereal?*

**GILMOUR:** We still make records and tours but none of that is controlled by anyone else other than us. No one says we have to make a record. No one says we have to deliver a record by such and such a date. We have never accepted any of those restrictions.

Well, once we did, but no more than we had to. When *The Wall* was running long overdue, the record company offered us a larger percentage and a larger advance if we would deliver it by a certain date.

Apart from that, we don't have restrictions. We give the record company records and they go and sell them to the best of their ability. The question of whether we are irrelevant or not is down to the public to decide. When and if they decide we are irrelevant, we won't be able to carry on with it. ☐





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BY TIMOTHY WHITE

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As with his big, remote home in the wilds of Long Island, there's more extra space in Billy Joel's life than he's really ever needed or wanted. Bought as a haven for two, now inhabited by one, the mansion is filled with trophies from a life in entertainment, scale models of motorcycles and lots of books—*The Second Stage* by Betty Friedan and John Erlichman's *Witness to Power* are among those lying open around the expansive living room.

Well-muscled and built close to the ground, the man of the house slips in and out of its large, lonesome rooms with the studied agility of somebody living the baronial life just for the practical experience; say, a working class graduate student auditing *Affluence II* over the summer. Open and funny, brimming with mugging self-deprecation, satiric impersonations of the mighty and gentle dialect send-ups of the meek, he exudes great warmth and gut uneasiness in equal measure.

William Martin Joel, thirty-three, is a winning sort of wise guy, but his most endearing quality is his essential melan-

# Billy Joel

A pained and prideful native son creates a contemporary masterwork.

DEBORAH FEINGOLD







choly, a bell-like wistfulness at the center of his personality. It's what renders him good company on a rainy September day, what makes him an engagingly offbeat observer and a gifted songwriter. You hear the often-blunt statements, see the impassioned effort he puts into the thought process preceding them and appreciate the caring behind the focus. The imperfection of his emotionalism interlocks with the stunning quality of his compositional flair and turns his best work triumphant in its individuality. *The Nylon Curtain*, his latest album, has rightly been called a masterwork, fulfilling the promise of his broody, biting *The Stranger* and the gritty *52nd Street*.

Billy Joel is a fit spokesman for America in the 1980s because in his music and through his music he both illuminates and embodies what may be the deepest single yearning in the alienated national soul: to escape the solitude of striving in harsh anonymity; to feel you are *in* the world, recognized and esteemed, by simply being yourself; not some haughty, grabby, cunning overreacher, shoving others out of the way in the cramped marketplace, belittling the heartache of humble dreams deferred. Like a lot of Americans, Joel is plagued by impulsive regret and self-doubt, slightly pissed-off romanticism and some dark little pool of hard-earned pain.

Born on May 9, 1949, the son of Howard and Rosalind Joel, he grew up in the sprawling Hicksville-Levittown, New York tract-housing grid. He was a self-described "hitter," fighting, sniffing glue and sipping cheap wine to salve the hurt inflicted by a father who abandoned the family when his son was seven, plunging the heretofore middle-class household into shabby circumstances. The Joels were as mortified by the cruel transition as the neighbors were to have them around—fearful their troubles might be contagious.

His father, a Jewish-French (Alsace-Lorraine) survivor of the Nazi death camps, returned to Europe to work as an electrical engineer, and his wife supported the family (Billy and an older sister) with jobs as a bookkeeper and secretary. They were frightened then the way so many people are frightened now, trying to make dangerously frayed ends meet.

"The new album is a profound statement about where Billy's been and what remains important for him in retrospect," says Phil Ramone, Joel's longtime producer. "He's speaking up for the people who have been increasingly ignored by the economically cynical demographics mentalities in this country, the target audience out there that no one targets anymore because they're troubled, bruised, cash-poor. They're not chic, upscale. They're his contemporaries, who came of age pumped up with ballyhoo about big scores in business and the nearness of success. Now they've been squeezed out, betrayed. They have difficulty looking each other in the eyes.

"I hate the term 'concept album,' but he wrote one without being self-indulgent; the theme was too important to overdo or clutter up. He writes in spurts and we didn't rush things. With the other albums we've done together (*The Stranger*, *52nd Street*, *Glass Houses*, *Songs From The Attic*) we'd spend eight to nine weeks of concentrated studio effort. This time we started in November of 1981 and let it come naturally. After Billy's motorcycle accident last April, we knocked off until May and then wrapped it up in July."

Joel and Ramone have a close relationship that was strengthened further during Joel's trials of the last two years, among them the separation from his wife and onetime manager, Elizabeth; the nasty motorcycle crash in which he seriously injured his hand; and the dark moods he wrestled with while trying to pull *The Nylon Curtain* out of himself.

Joel is the first to state that his records "never sounded good until I started working with Phil," but Ramone feels the breakthrough record for Billy was 1976's Joel-produced *Turnstiles*, the FM favorite that featured "New York State Of Mind" and "Say Goodbye To Hollywood." What Ramone, one of the great producers of the 70s and by all appearances of the 80s as well, did for Joel was to give his energetic lyricism a richer textural presence.

Known for his brilliant work with Paul Simon, the avuncular Ramone almost single-handedly introduced rock 'n' roll to the

*"After World War II, America was wide open. Now it's locked up tight. An unspoken promise has been broken."*

wealth of possibilities in making records in an elegantly open-minded but classically intimate setting that melded the hot, radiant immediacy of a Quincy Jones track with the ambient warmth and airy delicacy of the best Sinatra saloon albums. Suddenly artists had the highly original rock 'n' roll equivalent of a Don Costa, a Gordon Jenkins or a Nelson Riddle to turn to. And Joel's superb band—Liberty DeVitto, drums; Doug Stegmeyer, bass; Russell Javors, rhythm guitar; David Brown, lead guitar; and horn player Richie Cannata (absent from *The Nylon Curtain*)—proved equal to the task.

Most of all, Joel trusts Ramone's editorial judgments. "You work with Billy Joel," says Ramone. "There's movement in every project. So it's possible to help him turn 'Just The Way You Are,' from a somewhat stiff nightclub ballad into a haunting love song, or evolve 'Allentown' from a folk song into a ballsy anthem."

During the interview, the raspy-voiced craggy-faced Joel periodically jumped up to play selections from the new album on his Baldwin grand, interspersing them with snatches of everything from "Sh-boom" to "The Rite Of Spring." The short, powerful fingers were marvelously spry, the playing vigorous and rather uplifting. Looking over his shoulder as he showed me some Aaron Copeland chords, my eyes wandered from the scar tissue coating the backs of his pale hands to a little etching of a chambered nautilus placed on the corner of the piano top. Beneath it was the inscription, "We carry within us the wonders we seek."

**MUSICIAN:** Well, you went and did it this time. Made an album your old pals the rock critics actually admire. Far as I'm concerned, I'd almost call *The Nylon Curtain* a rock 'n' roll Grapes of Wrath.

**JOEL:** (grinning) You know, I wanted the album jacket to look like a book cover, the latest novel from Ludlum or Michener, a paperback you'd find in the racks of any airport shop in the country. That kind of accessibility. CBS wanted my picture on the front, but I'm sick of my face. I was a little worried about the sequencing of the songs, though. The album opens with four songs about, respectively, unemployment, guilt, pressure and war—the Four Horsemen of the Apocalyptic American landscape. Whew!

But man, I like the straight-force piano resonance in "Allentown," an Aaron Copeland-influenced arrangement of major 7ths that's percussive and stirring. Gives me goosebumps, it's got so much classic, shoulder-to-the-wheel Americana in it. I love Copeland's majestic kind of coloration. The original melody for "Allentown" I started writing about ten years ago, while hitting the circuit of colleges in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. That region is such a pretty pocket of the country, so spacious. A feeling of the good U.S. earth rolling around you. Coming from the direction of New York City, you pass through the Lehigh Tunnel and you're suddenly in the heartland. Allentown: the name echoes "Our Town," or sounds like "Everytown." When I was in grammar school I had this reader called *Your Town*, and in it you were told about the doctor and the grocer and the butcher. It taught you about storybook democracy in action.

Next to Allentown is Bethlehem, lying right off the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the Double Deuce—U.S. Route 22. I think Allentown is where everybody lives and Bethlehem is where they all work. A decade ago, I rode through the area and



thought, "So this is where Bethlehem Steel is—Steel City, U.S.A. And off the top of my head I got the opening couplet, "Well, we're living here in Allentown, and they're closing all the factories down." But the song stayed frozen at that stage for the longest time.

**MUSICIAN:** So it wasn't originally tied to Reaganomics and the bottoming out of the economy?

**JOEL:** No, but I had a kind of premonition about what would happen if all this industrial might was somehow silenced. I left the song alone and every couple of years the band and I would go into the studio and try to write "Allentown," but it wasn't coming because the mood in it was of a trivial "my town, your town" generalness. Then, when the series of reversals happened in the steel world, bringing on the plant shutdowns in Bethlehem, I suddenly knew what I was going to write about. It was literally the fifth time I had sat down to write it and it became a song about the solitary anguish of unemployment and the current climate of diminishing horizons. I picked up the daily newspapers and the lyrics were in the depressing headlines; proud, decent, bewildered working people found themselves stuck just killing time, filling out forms, standing in line.

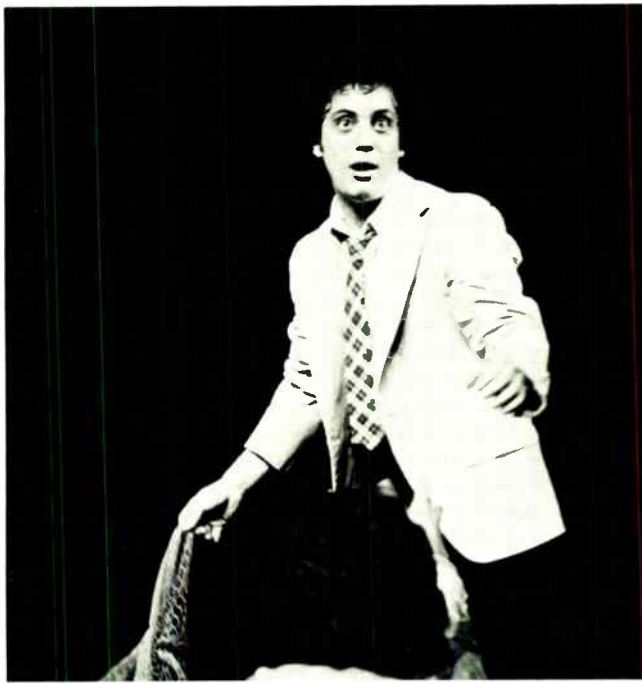
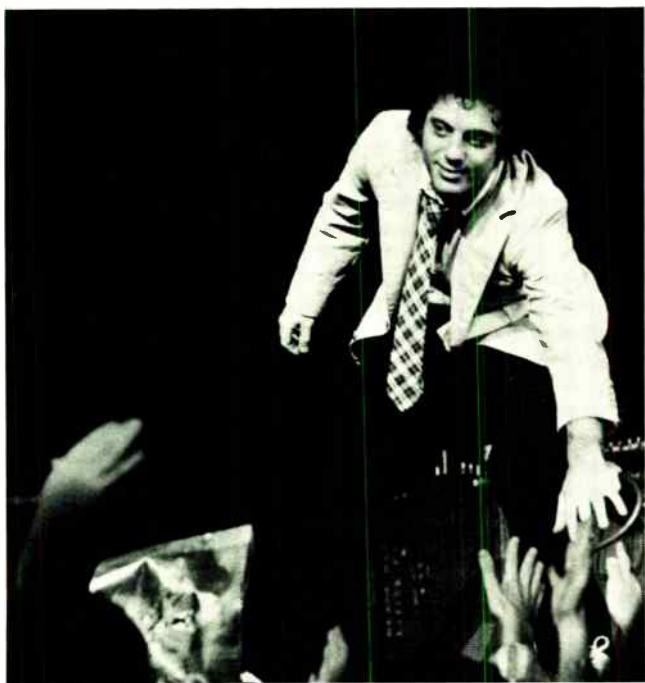
**MUSICIAN:** I've never heard you discuss your songwriting in

**MUSICIAN:** Surprisingly, the song breathes and manages to galvanize the listener; it's especially skillfully wrought in that it doesn't feel claustrophobic like the dilemma it describes. I'm also surprised it wasn't the first single off the album, considering its acuity.

**JOEL:** (pensive) I dunno; I believe it's a little piece of the American puzzle, like it or not, and I wanted it to have a sense of hope, but I didn't want to push it on people. I thought I'd let them discover it and accept or reject it without a lot of fanfare.

You and me, we grew up in the 50s. Our parents had a sense of boundless possibilities and certain rewards for strivers. After World War II, it was wide open. Now it's locked up tight. An unspoken promise has been broken. Especially for our generation. So we have to go back to where they were to get a sense of perspective of where we are now. So I figured, "Let's build to this task in the structure of the song." The lyrics emerged naturally, almost organically.

Our fathers fought the wonderful war to make the world safe for democracy and hot homemade pie, and we got stuck with the Vietnam ugliness, where the issues weren't cut and dried. That was the monkey wrench tossed into the mechanism of our spirit as a nation. They threw the American flag in our



MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA

**Joel's mad-dash entrances and exits garner him both adulation and ankle injuries.**

*detail. How did you develop a theme like "Allentown," once you'd gotten the germ of the song?*

**JOEL:** I always write at a piano, largely in the studio. I started "Allentown" at home and I wrote the bridge in the studio, which is common for me. Honestly, I love having written a catalog of songs but I hate the writing process and I don't want to waste any of my creative energy if the band isn't going to like them anyhow, so I take them into the studio to get a reading. If they really like it, which is rare, they'll go, "Yeah, yeah! That's solid!" and I'll finish inserting the bridge, which is always something of a Chinese torture device for me. They'll be standing there all the while, very much a jury, and they can really be a nasty bunch of guys. They really nudge me with their "show-us" routine, spur me on.

Thematically, I wanted "Allentown" to tie into the post-war baby boom and what happened to our generation in the aftermath. Here we are, having fought our way to adulthood while rising up through the traditional values of our parents, protesting and testing them. Now that we're prepared to go forward with our heads screwed on straight, all the possibilities are being closed off. It's like, "Huh? What happened to the everyday workingman's dreams—small, modest dreams, not big ones—that always came true in America?"

faces, saying "Well it's time for you guys to take up guns and go to war." Like taking a number in a deli. So we did it, and what did we get for the misery? Isolation from ourselves.

**MUSICIAN:** "Goodnight Saigon...." You didn't go to Vietnam, yet it seems that you caught the murky rock 'n' roll-under-scored unreality of the waking nightmare.

**JOEL:** I researched the way the battles were fought, reading books like *Rumor of War* by Phillip Caputo, an amazing and upsetting book that may be the definitive one on the war. They'd load the troops into these big metal insects, drop them into this battle zone and then pick them up at the end of the day; it was a nine-to-five war. How sick is that?! The song is framed the same way the parameters of the days were: by the sounds of the choppers leaving and returning.

For the sound effect of the rotors, we got a recording of the actual "Huey" (UH-1E) choppers. But I came to understand that the Huey sound didn't reproduce on record the way the ear hears it, so I used a synthesizer effect that had more highs. So it's a two-part re-creation: the highs are the synthesizer and the bottom is the Huey. It gave the end product greater ambience, a sense of it buzzing in your ear like a gnat; an annoying, chilling metallic sound that wouldn't let you relax, that pestered and haunted like a recurring, unwelcome dream.

I knew a lot of people who went to Vietnam. In Hicksville, Long Island, where I grew up, everybody went. People with my lower middle class background didn't attend college. You either had a job waiting for you after high school, went to a vocational technical school or joined up in the Marines. So many went the last route, winding up in 'Nam. Some didn't come back, some came back screwed up, some came back as normal people. But they weren't encouraged to talk about their experience. They got shafted because they desperately needed day-to-day catharsis from our society, some aid and comfort like any shell-shocked soldier does, but people didn't want to hear about the war or the Vietnam vets' physical or psychic wounds. Now, we have to confront these survivors and the war still in their heads before we can go on as a people. Whether safe at home or in a rice paddy in Asia, it was our war, our generation's trauma, fought, and fought against, by us. What did it do to us? How did it scar us?

I would ask my friends to tell me about 'Nam for the song but, again, it took years and years. So many images finally emerged though—"I was dropped into this quiet, steamy swamp...." Imagine going from a sunny street in suburban Long Island to a crazy, sinister city like Saigon, and then into a quiet, quiet swamp that was in the center of no place; stoned, with an M-16. Where/who was the enemy?

These guys told me, "We had no home front; the war was anywhere and everywhere. But the countryside was beautiful over there." Yet I began to notice that almost no one had pictures and I asked why. They said, (bitterly) "We had no Instamatics, we had automatic rifles. We shot bullets, not photos." They played the Doors and Hendrix, passed a bong of hash, spaced out as best they could and kept their heads down.

**MUSICIAN:** *There are strong, visceral themes in The Nylon Curtain. It's about growing up estranged in America, wanting to embrace it but realizing that even something as massive as America can be mercurial. For our generation, no place is home. I don't mean that in a nihilistic way. We've got to learn to be comfortable on the run.*

**JOEL:** Right! That's part of the American tradition. We're constantly in a state of flux, craving incessant change. You go to Europe and people have lived in the same valley for hundreds of years. Americans are always on the move, for better or worse. But we live behind a veil, a nylon curtain, separated from the goals and sorrows of the rest of the world.

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*"My band can really be a nasty bunch of guys. They are not impressed by Mr. Billy Joel one measly bit."*

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That's another American ambition: the individual desire for separateness. The fun of living way out in Long Island is partly the feeling I don't belong in this "old money" environment. I come from Hicksville; people from my background don't end up here. My friends come over in their beat up Volkswagens. The WASP ghosts in the house are probably moaning, "There's a Jewboy in here with us!"

But I'm constantly bouncing back and forth between here and the city. I usually get drawn in there to record, and I feel most at home anywhere when I'm recording. To me, where I record makes no difference. People say, "Go to Montserrat, London, Caribou Studios." Why? Once you're inside, it doesn't matter. It's an office, a factory.

**MUSICIAN:** *It wasn't until I was on the road with your band that I understood how much their aggressive musical support and keep-Billy-honest camaraderie has to do with your music.*

**JOEL:** Listen, I write the way they play! They were there when

I was nothing. We all grew up together, personally and musically. And their presence gives me an invaluable sense of perspective on my work. They look at me as the writer-nebbish in the band. And, uh, I happen to sing, too. They can walk in and go, "Shut up, schmuck. I know you; don't give me that dopey garbage." They are *not* impressed by Mr. Billy Joel one measly bit.

As the albums have come and gone, we've worked out a unique studio strategy centered around the Chinese food we order in when we're working. The recording is very scientifically divided into pre- and post-Chinese food takes. (smirking) Don't look at me that way! This, unfortunately, is not a gag.

**MUSICIAN:** *Sorry. Please continue.*

**JOEL:** So in terms of inner-band diplomacy there is a schism between those who feel the pre-Chinese tracks are superior to the post-Chinese variety. It has to do with the grease on the egg rolls and the effects of the monosodium glutamate on blood sugar, on the left side of the brain and its conceptual strengths. We've actually had some half-serious arguments, complete with hurt feelings afterward, concerning this question. Liberty got up at one point during the sessions for the new LP and gave a speech about respect for the ancient Chinese civilization, their culture, their art, their gunpowder....

Then we have a trio called the Mean Brothers, which consists of me, Doug on bass and Liberty on drums. We always lay down the basic tracks. Then the guitars and the horns come in and do their thing. The Mean Brothers have their own satin road jackets with Doberman pinschers on the back. I'm MB No. 1, and so forth. We are the elite corps, and we give the other guys, especially the guitarists, "The Ear." We sit there like Cheshire cats while they tune up and construct their parts, making taunting comments like, "Go ahead, pal, play with your toys. We're waiting. Just want to mention that we're only gonna give you *twenty minutes* to get this take before we move on." And they'll be frantic, fiddling with their cords and buttons, trying to shape up. We can really be mean.

**MUSICIAN:** *And how rotten can the band be to you?*

**JOEL:** How rotten? I'll tell you a story. I sat down at the piano one show on the last tour, and I did the whistling intro for "The Stranger." I'm in darkness and my spotlight slowly comes on. Now, I'm not a great whistler and it's taken a lot of practice to stay on key. Gradually each of the band members is spotlighted and they turn to face me. Each of them is wearing a black paper eye patch or a moustache, their teeth blackened. I blow the sensitive, plaintive whistling in front of 20,000 people, the romantic mood of lovers cuddling close shattered. My signature song, right? Humiliated, I plunge into the song and discover that the keyboard is stuck together with long strips of white adhesive tape. The gentle, melodic intro sounds like I'm walking across the keys wearing snow shoes.

Believe me, any time me or anyone else is vulnerable, these guys are guaranteed to go for the jugular. Take writing: I really get on edge, very high-strung and raw-nerved and way out when I'm trying to compose; extremely wound up and handle-with-care fragile. Recently I was out at the piano working through an intricate problem and wearing my headphones so that I could hear any supportive thoughts and suggestions from Phil and the engineers in the control room. I'm watching the band involved in what looks like a grave discussion on the other side of the glass. They're facing each other and one casually props himself against the board and pushes, accidentally, I guess, the talk button on. I begin to hear a solemn conversation that went like this:

"You know, he really worries me. I've begun to wonder if, well, if he has the knack the way he used to."

"God, please, let's not go into that."

"Then you've noticed it too?"

"Ummm, yeah, I have. Who hasn't? It's tragic. I mean, poor Billy, he used to have such a grasp of melody, such instinct...." "...It's kinda been burned out of him."

"Boy, I hate to admit it, but it looks that way."

"So what's gonna happen when we have to play this wimpy stuff on the road?"





"Well, out of loyalty to Billy we'll just have to bite the bullet and act like nothing's wrong."

"You know, he doesn't even *look* so together anymore."

"You mean the swollen eyes, the pasty face?"

"Yeah, and the blank stares. But we can't let it get to us. We can't let him know we know. It would be too cruel."

"He used to be able to knock out a song—hell, a hit!—in half an hour."

"Pretty sad, isn't it?"

I'm sitting out there, my nerves completely shot to begin with, and I'm really starting to freak, wondering if they know that the talk button is on, thinking, "Are they serious? Are they *right*? My God, am I really totally off the mark?!"

Just when I'm about to lose it, they break up laughing and shout some crap in my phones: "GOTCHA THAT TIME DUMBO!!"

It's unbelievable! But it's all intended to keep me *on my toes*. That kind of screwball camaraderie gives me the inspiration to want to knock those guys out with a great song. They don't like *anything*. They're big on Elvis Costello, Squeeze, the best of the best, and they respect craft in songwriting. If I walk in with something below par they jump all over it. I honestly believe that a lot of what's good on this album came from wanting to jolt the band, to get more out of *them*. When you can move and touch a jaded, cynical crew like that, it's a step forward artistically.

**MUSICIAN:** *Are you and Ramone studio perfectionists?*

**JOEL:** (laughing) If it sounds right, apart from a tempo screw-up, we usually leave it in. In "Allentown," and "Scandinavian Skies," there's a din down in the mix that resembles 10,000 storm troopers marching through a foundry that's going at full tilt. I kept telling Liberty that I wanted this massive noise of robot hordes clanging in unison. In exasperation he ran over to two huge percussion cases filled with tambourines, maracas, cymbals and traps and hardware, and began hoisting them in the air and smashing them against the floor, yelling "Is *this* what you want, dammit? Is *this* good enough for you?"

"That's it!" I said, "That's it!" And it was, too. Luckily the tape was running at the time and we caught it for the record—it sounds like the Krupp munitions plant going full blast. Unfortunately, everything inside those cases was shattered to bits, completely ruined. I guess it was worth it.

There are foul-ups all over the *Glass Houses* album; they're easy to hear when you're told they're in there. You can hear strings breaking in the middle of a hot lead, with that amazingly resonant, stinging PIC-COOOOWWW!, coming right in the middle of a phrase. It's an effect you could never plan on. There's other treats in there too, like drums falling over, high-hats crashing into amps, mikes shorting out.

If you want to hear a really big blooper check out "Room Of Our Own," on *Nylon Curtain*. There's a part where I sing "Yes, we all need a room of our own" before I go into the final vamp. We were cutting it live and Liberty forgot where he was and started to play the beat backwards; he was still in time but he's suddenly turned the time signature inside out. There was this look of horror on his face and Phil was waving his arms frantically to tell us "Keep going! It sounds great!"

I love this approach to recording. The Stones used to cut records like that. We call the flaws "clams," and even though it's painful for the culprit to hear his part in the playback, you know you've got to keep it if it works. Technically, we don't go by the book. It's all ear-to-heart.

On "Pressure," that noise like the horn of a French taxi cab, that strange breathless staccato beep, is actually a tape of me singing every note in my repertoire, which was then programmed into an Emulator—it's similar to a Mellotron. Then I overdubbed me hollering "PRESH-ARI!" like a RAF captain would bark "TEN-HUT!" While the master tape was running, I impulsively hit all the buttons to punch out everything but that yelling. Phil was dumbstruck, saying "God! What'd ya just do? You erased part of the song!" It was true. For that one segment, everything just stops dead but my voice, but it was just what the track needed.

**MUSICIAN:** *Does the band ever openly object to material?*

**JOEL:** "Just The Way You Are" is a good example of that. First of all, we weren't even serious about the song. Everybody was down on it and thought it was too goofy and sappy. Liberty didn't even want to play on it. "I'm not Tito Puente!" he said. "I won't play that oily cocktail lounge cha-cha/samba crap!" I couldn't explain the tune to anyone. The track never really made much sense until I added the wordless vocal that winds its way through the track, giving it some glue and some texture.

When we were cutting "Big Shot" for *52nd Street*, that fake Rumanian accent I use on the chorus was done solely as a joke, a stunt to crack up the group. I'd written the song completely differently. When we ran through the basic track, the accent and the bitchy stutter—"You-you-you had to be a BEEGSHOT!—just popped out. We always said that we'd go back and fix that up one day but I decided to leave it as it was because I'd gotten so much joy out of succeeding in catching the band off-guard and busting them up.

**MUSICIAN:** *"Big Shot" sounds like you're having fun actually telling someone off. The vocal tonalities in your best records aren't stagey.*

**JOEL:** The human voice has all this nuance, and I like to use humor to drive home points. I don't think of myself as a singer. I don't have a lot of confidence in my singing voice, so I'm constantly fooling around with it. When I have to listen to my voice cold in the studio, I cringe. I try to give it a live-in-the-arena setting on record because I think it's pretty boring. I like to compose and play in such a way that I don't have to sing all that many round notes, keeping the emphasis on syllabic bursts filled in with drum beats and guitar licks and whatever. I sound better when I'm socking out a tune to one degree or another than when I'm crooning.

**MUSICIAN:** *You don't especially enjoy your own singing?*

**JOEL:** Not particularly. I think of myself as a piano player and songwriter; my singing is all tied to my piano playing. I do all my vocals live while I'm playing, which results in leakage between the vocal and piano mikes. There's never the total separation you'd get with a first-rate mix, but that's become an aspect of my sound, a distinctive trait.

And if I must overdub sometime, I'll literally sit at the closed piano and pound my fingers on the lid. Guess the piano bone is connected to the throat bone.

**MUSICIAN:** *From a production standpoint, Nylon Curtain is an extremely eccentric Billy Joel LP. You and Phil have put more invention into it than perhaps any other you've collaborated on. Was that part of the overall game plan?*

**JOEL:** Very much so. Every song on the LP has a different vocal effect and various tricks and conscious quirks, because we decided from the start that we were going to make the studio itself work for us as an instrument, like the Beatles used to do. We wanted it to be a good headphones album, more suited to those great big Koss headsets rather than the Sony Walkman types, which have a big sound but lack torque.

On "Goodnight Saigon," I aimed for a sweet high innocent and youthful voice, using an echo chamber but with a noise gate to cancel out the normal ringing effect. The combination of the two makes the voice seem out-of-breath, frightened and agitated.

We used a lot of the panning and phasing I loved on albums like *Electric Ladyland*, and lots of exotic touches layered on top of layers. For the tag line of "Pressure" we laid six synthesizer tracks over each other, and then Phil got four Russian balalaika players from Brooklyn to come in after they'd done some orthodox wedding to play from charts we gave 'em.

**MUSICIAN:** *Are you serious?*

**JOEL:** Damn straight! Phil found these four old Russians and pulled them in for a day. They spoke in broken English. They didn't know me from Adam! (extended laughter)

**MUSICIAN:** *Getting back to a more sober plane, do you hope to elicit an emotional response with your music, to move people?*

**JOEL:** (Nodding) Let's face it. These details I'm revealing are amusing to know but we take the end product we're moving



towards *seriously*. I worked harder on this album than any other. I agonized over the message. "Where's The Orchestra" was an attempt at communicating what moves me about the difficulty of getting through this life. I've come to realize that life is not a musical comedy, it's a Greek tragedy. I'm an adult now; I've paid my admission fee to this ordeal, and I'm disappointed I didn't get a brass band in the deal.

You know better than to believe there'll ever be a brass band backing up your struggles and celebrating your victories but you never stop hoping, and that's part of what keeps life so sad, so bittersweet. For me, music is this magic acoustic element that makes perfectly rational people who have come to realize the unalterable fact that they are truly alone in this world somehow feel for fleeting moments that maybe they're *not* after all. It's this pleasant, soothing vibration we can send out or take in that keeps us company. Chopin, Gershwin, the Beatles, the lyricism in their music chases that sadness, makes me feel like part of the human family. It's a chemical reaction of some sort. A very odd thing.

**MUSICIAN:** *Some say that the only true religion in this world, the only one with absolute integrity, is the esteem of the self. Total devotion to being you, cherishing and protecting the eerie gift of singularity. You're fairly self-absorbed as an artist. Was there ever a point in your life when you suddenly recognized with great urgency that there's only one Billy Joel and that he is never going to come again?*

**JOEL:** That's been understood with me from the very beginning. I don't think there is an afterlife or a reincarnation. So I try to fulfill every margin of potential I've got. If I complete myself, I'll improve the quality of the lives that intersect with mine. When I wrote "Surprises" on the new album, I got very choked up by it, because I didn't know what I wanted to say at first; I discovered that I was thinking these angry, frustrated, violent thoughts: "Break all the records, burn the cassettes." And it became a song about human finiteness, and the rage and hurt it can bring on. Every minute really does matter to me.

The act of realizing that is the closest I get to spirituality. It's being touched by a quality within myself that I can't reason out or understand but that, when it's set in motion, *finds* me. I can't

say it any other way.

**MUSICIAN:** *I've talked with you in the past about your flip-out in your early twenties, when you flirted with suicide and then committed yourself briefly to Meadowbrook Hospital on Long Island, only to realize that you were romanticizing your own pain, and were much more together than your mental ward-mates. Have you had any other traumatic rites of passage?*

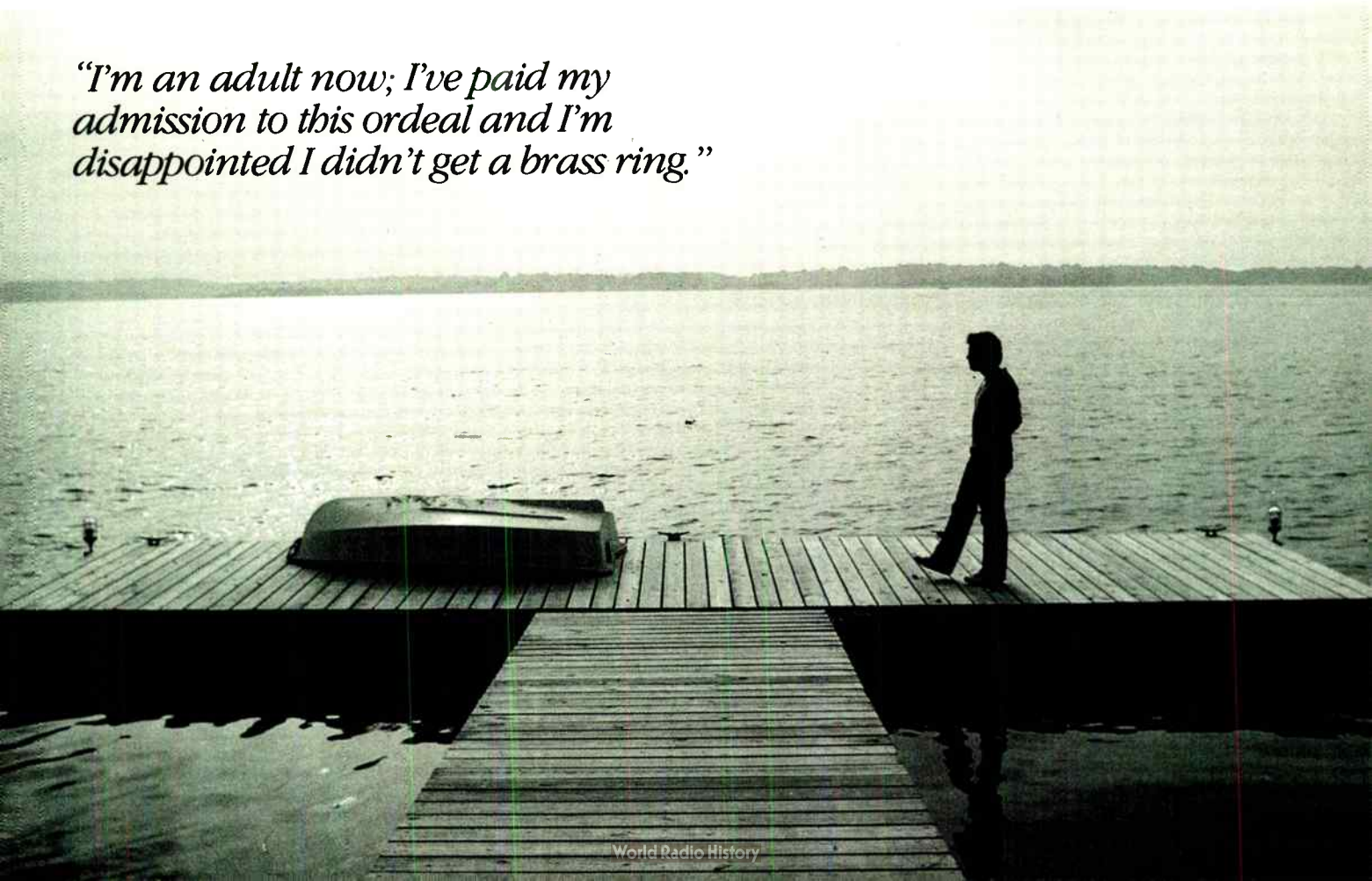
**JOEL:** (Somber) When I was seventeen, I spent one night in jail, an overnight lock-up for suspicion of burglary. I had just run away from home, deciding I had had it with the arguments with my mother and sister, the disappointment about my dad being gone, the tension from money being tight at home. I just wanted to break out in general.

I split that night, and I was sitting on the stoop of this anonymous house in Hicksville in the darkness, pondering my fate, when this patrol car pulled up. Now, unbeknownst to me, this particular house had been robbed earlier that night. The cops came up to me, grabbed me and threw me in the clink as a prime burglary suspect. Sitting in the tiny cell, I felt, "They've got me. My world is now three walls and a floor and a mattress and a stinking sink." I couldn't sleep, couldn't do anything but be scared out of my wits. I couldn't bear the sensation of loss of control. It really made me realize what life is and isn't.

Have you ever seen that movie, *The Fixer*, or read the book by Bernard Malamud? It's based on the true story of a Jew in Czarist Russia during the reign of Nicholas II who had been unjustly blamed for the ritual murder of a Christian child. He was imprisoned, chained, tortured, poisoned, and by the time the determination that he was innocent was made, the authorities had decided the wheels they'd set in motion against him couldn't be stopped. He had to be a victim to preserve the corrupt and inhumane social order. I had recently seen the movie, and I knew of course that my own father had spent time in Dachau. All I could think about—when you're young, your mind has no discipline—was that they were going to shave my Jewish head, beat me, slap the soles of my feet bloody and force me to live on gruel.

The experience and the confrontation with my own fears made me see that I was willing to fight like hell to hold on to my

*"I'm an adult now; I've paid my admission to this ordeal and I'm disappointed I didn't get a brass ring."*





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- A voice defeat system allows you to easily disable a defective voice in an emergency situation, even while playing.
- This instrument will interface with the Sequential Circuits POLY-SEQUENCER, REMOTE PROPHET Keyboard, the ANALOG INTERFACE BOX, and most home computers.

Another totally unique feature of the PROPHET-5 is the variable "scale mode" which enables each note of the octave to be tuned individually. The tuning range for each note is approximately +1 to -1/2 semitone (about +94 to -50 cents) from its normal equal tempered value. For the first time, on a standard commercially available instrument, you can use alternative scales, such as Pythagorean, meantone, just intonation, and ethnic modes. These can be stored and recalled as easily as patch programs which enables instantaneous switching from one scale or key to another and permanent storage on tape.

The PROPHET-5 is the most versatile, reliable and easy to use polyphonic synthesizer available. Extensive use in films, television, records, and live performances have firmly established it as the Industry Standard.

## ANALOG INTERFACE BOX

The ANALOG INTERFACE BOX (Model 842) allows you to control the Pitch and Mod wheels on the PROPHET-5 with foot pedals or any control voltages. This small device connects to the Analog Interface Jack and provides two 1/4" phone jacks for independent voltage control of the Pitch and Mod wheel functions.



# RIGHT STUFF!

## PROPHET-10

The PROPHET-10 (Model 1016) is a completely programmable polyphonic synthesizer with ten voices and two 5-octave keyboards. Each 5-voice keyboard has its own programmer which will store 32 sounds (64 total). This arrangement allows two different programs to be played simultaneously. The programs can be assigned to the two manuals according to any one of four keyboard modes:

- Normal — five voices and the upper programmer assigned to the top keyboard and the lower programmer and five voices assigned to the bottom keyboard
- Single — ten voices playable anywhere on either keyboard
- Double — upper and lower programs are combined into five voices playable on either keyboard
- Alternate — sound alternates between the upper and lower programs as notes are played on either keyboard

Each synthesizer voice consists of two voltage-controlled oscillators, a white noise source, a resonant 24 db/octave (4-pole) low-pass filter plus a 4-stage envelope generator, a voltage controlled amplifier with its own 4-stage envelope generator and a 3-band equalizer. In addition, Oscillator B and the filter envelope generator may be used to modulate the Frequency or Pulse Width of Oscillator A, or the Filter Frequency (via the Poly-Mod section). Each 5-voice synthesizer bank has a single low-frequency oscillator which can be applied to all of its voices for various effects.



Additional features of the PROPHET-10 include: Pitch and Modulation wheels, octave transposition switches, voice assignment LED indicators, automatic tuning, programmable volume control, upper and lower manual balance control, an A-440 reference tone, two assignable and programmable control voltage pedals which can act on each manual independently, program increment footswitch, and stereo/mono balanced and unbalanced outputs. The PROPHET-10 also comes with a built-in

polyphonic sequencer which has over 10,000-note storage, up to six separate sequences, sequence grouping, instant transposition, real-time or single-step recording, variable playback speed, overdubbing, an external clock input for synchronized playback with other instruments, and a built-in digital cassette deck for sequence and program storage. This sequencer has been adapted for use with the PROPHET-5. (For more information, see the last page of this brochure.)



## PRO-ONE

The PRO-ONE (Model 100) from Sequential Circuits offers more features at a lower price than any other professional monophonic, single-voice synthesizer. Musicians no longer have to compromise versatility and quality when purchasing a low-cost instrument. This compact synthesizer has a three-octave keyboard (C to C), Pitch and Modulation wheels, and a front panel arrangement similar to the PROPHET-5. The PRO-ONE's sound is identical to any single voice on the PROPHET-5 and includes the same features:

- two voltage controlled oscillators with sawtooth, square, and variable pulse width wave shapes
- 24 db/octave (4-pole) low-pass filter with its own 4-stage envelope generator
- a 4-stage envelope generator for the voltage controlled amplifier

In addition to this basic voice, the PRO-ONE has extensive modulation capabilities. Three modulation sources are available: the filter envelope generator, Oscillator B, and a separate low-frequency oscillator. Each can be mixed and routed for direct and/or wheel-controlled modulation of five destinations: Oscillator A Frequency, Oscillator A Pulse Width, Oscillator B Frequency, Oscillator B Pulse Width, and Filter Frequency.

The PRO-ONE's built-in microcomputer makes possible innovations unheard of on a low-cost synthesizer: a 40-note sequencer, an arpeggiator, single and multiple triggering modes, repeat and drone switches, and a unique "automatic" glide feature. In addition, an internal digital interface allows connection to most home computers.

The back panel of the PRO-ONE offers a variety of functions. The audio output can drive a monophonic or stereo amplifier, or stereo headphones. The audio input, with pre-amp and automatic gate generator, allows synthesizer processing of micro-

phones, instrument pickups, or any low-level signal. The PRO-ONE is designed with a standard one volt/octave control voltage in/out and gate in/out (which can be used with an external clock for triggering the sequencer and arpeggiator).

If this is your first synthesizer, use these "buzz words" as a comparison guide and don't be discouraged; the PRO-ONE is remarkably easy to understand and grow with. Sequential Circuits has been designing state-of-the-art synthesizers for years; starting with the first fully programmable polyphonic synthesizer — the PROPHET-5. It's no wonder the industry and musicians alike have dubbed the PRO-ONE clearly superior. Look into it and see for yourself!



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life and my mobility. I like that in myself. I'm gonna claw, scratch, bite, kick and kill if I have to in order to stay alive.

**MUSICIAN:** *You're an atheist, I know. When did you settle on that philosophical position?*

**JOEL:** Well, I wasn't raised a Catholic but I used to go to Mass with my friends, and I viewed the whole business as a lot of very enthralling hocus-pocus. There's a guy hanging upon the wall in the church, nailed to a cross and dripping blood, and everybody's blaming themselves for that man's torment, but I said to myself, "Forget it. I had no hand in that evil. I have no Original Sin. There's no blood of any sacred martyr on my hands. I pass on all of this."

I had some Jewish guilt in me already—which must have been genetically ingrained since I wasn't raised in a Hebraic

*“The definitive bomb-the-mom song has yet to be written and would exorcise a lot of demons for a lot of people.”*

religious setting—so I knew I definitely had no room for Catholic guilt too. Then my mother took my sister and me to an Evangelical church, the Church of Jesus Christ. I was baptized there at the age of twelve and it was strictly hallelujah time. But one day the preacher is up in the pulpit unfolding a dollar bill and saying, "This is the flag of the Jews." Whoa, fella! We left that flock.

Now my grandfather, whose name was Phillip Hyman, had always been a staunch atheist, and my sister Judy and I were very frightened for him, always saying, "Grandpa, believe in God! Don't die this way and wind up in Hell!"

But I was very, very close to him. He was the most inspiring presence in my life. He was a very proper, very well mannered and well read Englishman, although none of his breeding had brought him wealth or position. He was a jeweler for a little while; his family in England were tinsmiths. But he didn't have a dime because all of his energies were funneled into the pursuit of knowledge. He used to sit in bed at night and read books on trigonometry and paleontology. He didn't respect anything but knowledge and you'd better know what you were talking about or he would devastate you. He could be a pain in the neck, but he was a happy man, the only self-fulfilled soul I've ever known. He made a science out of doing only what he wanted to do.

As a result, I was motivated to become a voracious reader, which I am. And I gradually decided that just because I didn't have or couldn't find the ultimate answer didn't mean that I was going to buy the religious fairytale. As an atheist you have to rationalize things. You decide first of all that you will *not* ask Daddy—meaning God in all of his imagined forms—for a helping hand when you're in a jam. Then you have to try and make some sort of sense out of your problems. And if you try and find you can't, you have no choice but to be good and scared—but that's okay! When animals are afraid, they don't pray, and we're just a higher order of primate. Mark Twain, a great atheist, said it best in *The Mysterious Stranger*, when he stated, in so many words, "Who are we to create a heaven and a hell for ourselves, excluding animals and plants in the bargain, just because we have the power to rationalize?"

Death is death, and the ego can't handle the consequences. We should all struggle to the last to hold on to life, and religion encourages people to give up on making this life work because the supposed next life will be fairer. Religion is the source of too many of the world's worst problems.

**MUSICIAN:** *Perhaps, but isn't it also possible that most of the problems in the world are rooted in thwarted emotion? That*

*people edit their lives based on hypothetical projections of failure, rejection, inadequacy? That they maybe refuse to get out of their own way to fulfill their own desires, so those desires become perverted?*

**JOEL:** Maybe, maybe (long pause). Sounds plausible. That's a very intriguing idea. But I believe that these matters have to be settled *here*, not in the clouds somewhere after we kick off.

**MUSICIAN:** *Speaking of the preciousness of life and of personal fulfillment, was there ever any private dread following your motorcycle accident that your hand injury would seriously impair your ability to grow or even go on as a pianist?*

**JOEL:** You know, it didn't even occur to me, which seems like nonsense, but there's a reason why. I used to box as a teenager and I literally broke many of my knuckles—not to mention my nose—and suffered dislocated fingers, sprains, all sorts of hand injuries. To this day, I get pain in my fingers from those old wounds. My fingers curl up at times and become slightly arthritic.

**MUSICIAN:** *Not to be ghoulish, but could I have a close look at your hands?*

**JOEL:** (Holding them out) They're kinda weird up close. See, there's a scar over every single knuckle. I didn't realize my hand was hurt after the spill on the bike until I tried to drag it out of the intersection. I got up off the asphalt, shook my head to clear it, remembered that I'd hit a car broadside that had run a red light—my bike's brakes had just been fixed, idiotically—and I got up and went over to pull the wreckage to the curb. I found I couldn't and glanced down to see that my left wrist was the size of a grapefruit and my thumb was split open with the bone and all of this red junk hanging out. I was plenty upset, naturally, but I just thought, "Broken wrist. Broken thumb. Need a good surgeon and time to mend."

There was a metal pin temporarily inserted through the knuckles of the left hand after the accident to hold the bones in place, and it healed fairly well. But look at my thumb: looks like a hammer head, right? Crooked and rigid. I could probably drive nails with the damned thing now. In concert I used to snap the bass strings of my piano with that thumb. No joke. One night in 1980 a bass string broke, lashing out and almost decapitating Doug Stegmeyer—they whip out with such force! So now we tape the ends down so they can't fly around if they break. I don't know if I'll still be able to do that little feat, but so what—it's hardly a criteria for playing well.

Dexterity is not a problem but stamina may be. As a result of the damage that was done, certain muscles atrophied while my hand was in a cast. As the bones and muscles mended, they grew back in a different way. It's just not the same hand anymore. When I tour during the fall and winter, I still plan to do a two-and-a-half-hour set, and pump the keys to reach the kid in the last row of the arena, but I won't know my new physical shortcomings until I have to face them.

One thing's certain: I'm not going to stop riding cycles. I rode my bikes when my hand was still in a cast—I'm a firm believer in getting back up on the horse after a fall. From now on, I just have to drive defensively and not assume that people will obey red lights at intersections. I won't give up the thrill of cycles because I need the outlet, the escape, too much.

As for my injuries, I'm getting used to being injured. Nearly every tour I break or sprain an ankle tearing on and off stages. Two years ago in Pennsylvania I did an encore with a fractured ankle after I got hurt running down the steps leading offstage.

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you regard yourself as an accomplished keyboardist? Are you proud of your piano playing?*

**JOEL:** Most of the people who play piano in rock 'n' roll aren't pianists, they're piano bangers of some quality, and I fit into the latter category. My approach to the instrument is a very athletic one, because I get off on that in concert, but in my quiet moments I'll play almost anything. I like Bach, Chopin, Copeland, Traffic, Ray Charles, good top forty killers. I've got enough equipment to cover all the territory: a Baldwin nine-foot grand in my living room, a five-foot Howard "studio grand" in my home studio, Fender Rhodes Stage Model 73, the classic Hammond B-3 organ with the Leslie tone cabinet, two



*Pearl*

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Minimoogs, an Oberheim OBX synth, a Yamaha CP-80 electric piano, a Wurliizer D-40 electric piano, an Emulator, a Mellotron, a Baldwin electric harpsichord, a Parrot accordion—the brand name having no relation to the Zombies' old record label—a Hohner melodica, and an acoustic electric Ovation guitar, which I play way down in the mix of "Goodnight Saigon" because I'm a terrible guitarist who has bizarre substitutes for decent bar chords.

**MUSICIAN:** *You used to accurately mimic Leon Russell and Elton John's piano styles in concert. How would someone go about mimicking you?*

**JOEL:** That would be tough because I have no particular style, I think. I'm too absorbed in the music to be concerned with the musician. I've always sublimated whatever virtuosity I might possibly have in favor of the song. The material I write requires the involvement and friction of the band members rather than the ability to play extremely well. Technically, my band is better than the demands of the material but that makes for a nice dynamic tension.

**MUSICIAN:** *You've become a big spokesman for blue-collar America, a stalwart, vigilant voice who reminds the common man that he's better, ballsier and more committed than he realizes. Many see you as a macho cheerleader for the tough guy in all of us, but you're not really such a hard-ass at all. You've written a lot of songs about and also for women, and I hear a good deal of tenderness toward feminine sensibilities in your songs.*

**JOEL:** Well, I come from that lower-middle-class, suburban background. I think that it's noble to strive and view the working man with the romantic eyes of, say, a painter like Thomas Hart Benton. As for writing for or with females in mind, I was raised by and in the company of women, so I'm empathetic but also feel I can address them very directly. "Laura," a song on the new album, seems to be inspiring a fair amount of controversy in this area. I've seen it compared to "Stiletto" on *52nd Street*, as another of my misogynist songs. I don't agree. "Stiletto" was a song about a bitch, and there are women like that, just as there are men who are bastards. I've known a few of both varieties. "Laura," which has been described as my "Lennon-esque" song—and I would say that he's definitely in there—was actually a song meant to explore the guilt that any relative or close friend can give you. The sex of the main character or the exact nature of the tie was irrelevant as far as I was concerned when I was writing the song; it could easily have turned out to be a man. Actually, the ideal peg for the song would have been a parent, particularly a mother. The definitive bomb-the-mom song has yet to be written, and would exorcise a lot of demons for a lot of people.

Also, people seem to think that every time I mention a woman in a song it's a thinly veiled reference to Elizabeth. That's not fair. I've got a vivid imagination and have known more than one woman in my days.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's common knowledge that you and your wife are divorcing. I know you're reluctant to discuss it, but it seems unfair to simply sidestep the subject. It must be uniquely awkward and painful to be estranged from someone who was so supportive during an absolutely critical period in your life.*

**JOEL:** I understand what you're saying. My wife and I have split up, and it's not something that happened all of a sudden. It was a gradual thing. Around late spring of 1980 we were talking about a transition for both of us; it was evolving as far back as that. We just slowly, steadily grew apart and it's definitely a sadness in my life right now. She's a good friend and I hope not to lose that. I don't want to fight about the change in our lives or be unnecessarily distant from someone I was married to for nine years and lived with for over eleven.

In the last three years, I was touring for six to nine months each year, and that may have contributed to the change, but it happened in dribs and drabs, bits and pieces, until we realized we were not together as one, we were together as two.

I certainly don't have anything bad to say regarding her. It's not a Hollywood soap opera. I'm sorry that it had to occur because I'm one of these people who wanted to be married

just once and for the rest of my life; one commitment, with one common goal. Our marriage was not something either of us took lightly, and we're both unhappy it didn't work out.

Professionally, many people don't realize that Elizabeth hasn't managed me for over three years—not since 1979. It was always on a temporary basis. She was going to put things right for me contractually and administratively—which she did—and for the last three years I've managed myself in terms of career moves, with business management handled by a firm that was later set up called Frank Management.

Now, I just have to get used to being on my own. I'm dating people but I don't expect bachelorhood to change my lifestyle much. I'm not Errol Flynn; I live quietly and mostly hang out with old friends. I'd make a bad playboy. But I also want to emphasize that I'm not soured on marriage. When Elizabeth and I got together, I wanted it to be forever—I bought the dream. But I'm still open to buying it again someday. I would never knock the institution; it's still worth it to me.

**MUSICIAN:** *You've had a notoriously rough-and-tumble relationship with critics. They assert you're neither a rocker nor a pop tunesmith, or that you're both, and they think you have an artistic obligation of some sort to choose sides. Do you still read the reviews?*

**JOEL:** Anybody who says they don't is a liar in almost all cases. Sometimes I do get some constructive insights through them, to tell you the truth. Suspicions I have about my weaknesses can be confirmed. On the other hand, some reviews are so esoteric or so literal rather than musical in their outlook that they just confuse the issues involved. It must be hard for the critic and the journalist to define or describe a melody, to convey a musical idea in a literal way. I know that I don't write the words to my songs as poetry, I write them as lyrics. They are, hopefully, irrevocably tied to the tune, embellishing the notes and vice versa.

As for the rocker versus pop singer thing, I'm just a musician. I grew up listening to my dad play classical music at home on a beat-up old upright; my mom took me to see Gilbert & Sullivan and my grandfather took me to the symphony; I've had formal training in jazz improvisation and once made noise in a superloud psychedelic band (Attila). It's better to fail at different things and build up the lessons that result than to stop taking risks. I want to keep this whole business interesting for me, too. I don't want to limit my diet, sampling only one vegetable in the garden.


**MUSICIAN:** *What angers you most about critics' assessments of your, uh, musical menu?*

**JOEL:** (shaking his head wearily) The fact that the criticisms sometimes amount to a public rank-out. I'll read one and feel, "Aww, man, not in front of all my friends, my relatives, my own ego, for the damned *world* to see!" I need to get angry at times in order to lose the anger I feel. In most cases there's no context available for me to come back at the attack.

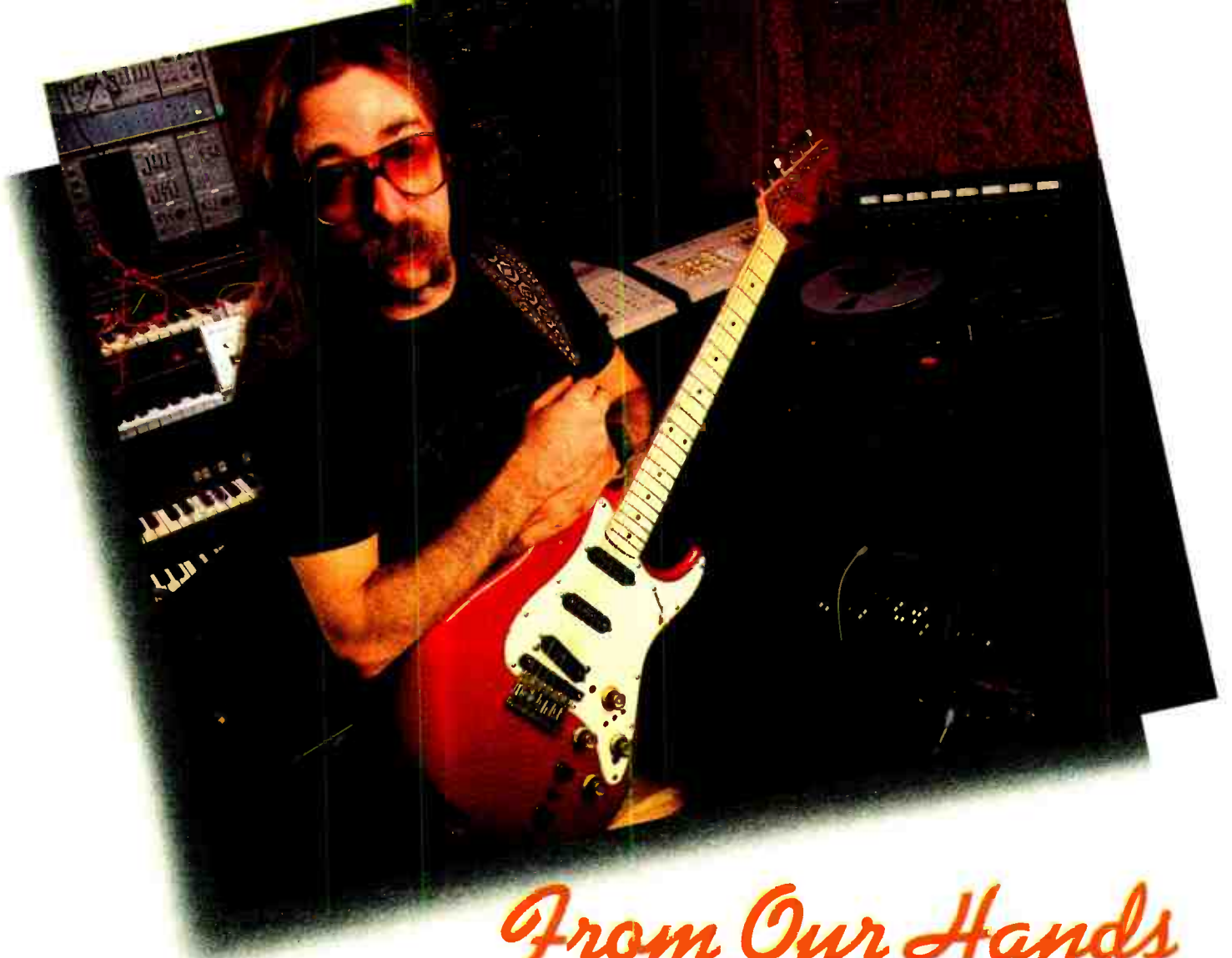
If I have a philosophy in life, it's to keep a solid grip on your belief in your own potential, to make sure that it doesn't get worn down by setbacks or hard times or mistakes. Don't let anyone or anything take it from you. A lot of good could come out of our ability to get through this bleak period. You have to keep fighting the good fight but recognize that there's more than one way to do that. We can think up *new* ways of doing it.

In time—if you live long enough—you come to realize that it's not always appropriate to play tit-for-tat and trade blows. It's embarrassing to be called out in public, for instance, even if it isn't justified, and my capacity for embarrassment has been a problem for me. But in the last few years, I've tried to listen to the critics and they have really helped me grow, have given me a lot of pushes and helped keep me challenging myself.

See, it took me a long time to accept that, to pay attention to the points behind the criticisms. It's an old Hicksville tradition to just get your basic shots in too, to be damned sure to land just as many punches as your opponents do. I'm learning, though, that the world *isn't* Hicksville.

(Small smile, nodding to himself) But then I knew that all along, didn't I? 





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*There's a lot of musical moments that have been captured on that machine ... some of which have been*

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Jeff Baxter's always been into instruments that musicians can afford. It's obvious that he's also been heavily involved at the leading-edge of recording technology.

Besides telling you his feelings about Otari tape machines, there's just one other tip Jeff would like to leave you with:

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BY BILL FLANAGAN  
AND JOCK BAIRD

**F**ew periods in the young rock mega-industry have seemed as lean and perilous as the present. A fluorescent haze of standardization and homogenization that we associate with airline food and corporate headquarters has permeated our music, choking new artists and ideas and driving out the unclonable. Frightened record companies cling to aging, overpaid superstars and classic-rock clichés even as demographic voodoo and computer censorship has made most of AOR radio one epochally indistinguishable station. The audience remains sullenly acquiescent, predictable enough to keep the new breed of pollster/seers making money but not predictable enough to save the industry by buying the records in the exponential numbers it once did. In short, the state-of-the-rock these days is poor, a once mighty and seditious art form



# The Failure of Corporate Rock

ROBERT  
GROSSMAN

now housebroken, cast in the image of that dominant feature of the American corporate landscape, the "product."

Isolating the causes of this artistic impasse is not nearly as easy (or as satisfying) as denouncing it, particularly since the tangled web of self-interest touches virtually everyone in the music industry, from artists and major labels to radio and retailers. Even the most visible villains, once cornered and confronted, seem to be only floating above deep currents in the marketplace, temporary winners rather than certified, grade-A exploiters. But the catalyst that has lately tightened rock's Gordian knot has been the hard times of the 80s, producing either creative meltdown or fiscal caution, depending on where you sit in the whole chain.

Fortunately, there have been recent glimmers of hope, signs of life beneath the plastic temple. The inability of the system to keep out the best new bands, the rise of the feisty, all-gristle independent labels, the ratings successes of reformed AOR stations (and the ratings declines of the chainsaw kings) as well as new ideas about who sees live music where (see accompanying boxes) all indicate the rock patient is fighting for its life and winning. But rock's successful recovery will ultimately require a loosening of the stranglehold that has brought it to such poor health.

### Journey's Only Solution

No band is more frequently damned as a purveyor of the corporate rock sound than Journey, yet a look at the choices and pressures that shaped their present incarnation as AOR conquerors reveals a lot. Originally a progressive instrumental unit led by Santana alumni Neal Schon and Greg Rolie and including jazz head Steve Smith, Journey added vocalist Steve Perry in 1978 and made their record company very happy. After four years of success, however, getting off the platinum bus proved to be difficult.

"The successful bands would *like* to step out on a limb," says Journey's coproducer Kevin Elson. "They would like to get their artistic licenses approved; they don't care about the money. But it's really hard. It's a vicious circle. The bands are locked into what radio will play and radio's searching for the bands who are doing what people want to hear. The big corporations are tying up radio stations all across the country. You get one chain that owns twenty number one stations and you *have* to please them. The politicking involved is *unbelievable*."

"We were in Indianapolis the other day talking to a program director, who asked what Journey's next record would be like. Journey said, 'God, we'd like to step out further, but we need your help.'

"'Let me tell you how we do it,' said the programmer. 'We take a song's chorus, put it on, and if it gets heavy phone response, we add it. That's our survey. And we also follow other surveys. I hate it. I wish to God we could just play what we're really into, but we can't do it.'

"Neal and Steve Perry said to him, 'How can bands take chances? We could take a chance, but are you going to *help* us? Is radio going to play it?' If people are going to experiment, try something new, you've *got* to have radio that will play it. But it's really hard to step out with nothing under you. There are a *lot* of artistic groups out there who are starving. They can't survive. It's a circle. The record companies' hands are tied by economics. Radio is formatted—I *hate* formatted radio. And the bands.... I'm not talking about selling out. You do music that you like, but you might bend it some to try to get more appeal."

### The New Executives

With the gradual consolidation of the record industry into two giants (CBS and WEA), a half-dozen "majors" who still have their own distribution, a few hybrid majors who are big but get the heavies to take care of distribution, and a galaxy of independents—some ample, some mere pinpoints—a new conservatism appeared. As the bottom line eclipsed all other factors, a different generation of company brass came to the

forefront. Island's Ellen Darst, a former Warners exec, describes the new topography:

"Increasingly, what's happening at companies like Columbia and Warner Bros.—the big leagues—is that a lot of people who started there twenty years ago are not tuned into what is now happening with rock 'n' roll. Now people could argue that and say, 'What's happening in rock is Asia.' But there's obviously a whole other group out there who are buying records and they're buying the Go-Go's and Men at Work.

"There are a lot more people at Warners who identify with Christopher Cross than who identify with Talking Heads, and we all know that the Heads have a lot more to do with challenging the old way and doing something new and creative. As the cutbacks occur—as they have lately in every company—it's not the fifty-year-old v.p.'s who are being let go. It's the thirty-year-old middle management people who are the record company presidents of the future. They're being shuffled into the street to start their own companies.

"For every Bob Rogehr (Warners vice-president of artist development and publicity) who's involved in progressive projects, there are two or three people who don't *know* who Tom Verlaine is and don't *care*. They don't want to hear a Tom Verlaine record. It would distract them. They'd say, 'I don't need to listen to that record. We'll put out only 15,000.'"

With what radio wants so clearly spelled out, it's no surprise that label signings are geared to the ultra-formatted airwaves. "I think that's a dangerous policy," sighs Warners' Bob Rogehr. "It's *horrible*. Look at the rise and fall of any record company. New things are the lifeblood. You have to keep replenishing it. You can't rely on a formula because the formulas change. Last year was the year of the AC/DCs, the Foreigners. Mostly reworked late-60s things. Slick, but nothing inspiring. All the fun is with the new stuff."

### Death of the Farm System

One development is particularly ominous. In taking the well-traveled highway, the major labels have decimated their minor league system, leaving them looking a little like this year's New York Yankees: a lot of high-priced superstars who have already seen their best seasons with no exciting rookies to motivate them. And like the baseball owners, the labels just may have given more than they should have. Former Mercury chief and *Billboard* writer John Sippel feels some of the labels actually got fleeced.

"Most people look at it from the artists' point of view, as if the record company were some terrible ogre. But look at some of the contracts that were signed—there was *no way* the companies could've made money on 'em. Neil Diamond just got over twenty million. The deals RCA signed with Diana Ross and Kenny Rogers have got to be way up there. A big star'll average two to three million per album; Geffen has to sell three-quarters of a million of Donna Summer's new record before they break even. Hell, CBS still hasn't broken even on the big Paul McCartney deal they signed a few years back. The companies just went out and gave the whole store away—literally. A&M gave George Harrison *ten percent of the whole company* back in '74, but they were smart enough to get out of that deal after only one album."

Thomas Noonan, former Columbia exec during the Clive Davis era and now *Billboard* associate publisher, agrees that some companies have been profligate in their spending but that because of the complex nature of modern corporations, the deals may not be as bad as they first seem: "RCA may have other needs that a deal like Kenny Rogers signing can fit into. For example, the pressing plants will stay a little busier, instead of having down-time. Their distribution salesmen work on commission—if they don't make enough, they'll be unhappy and leave; the extra volume keeps the branch healthier. Then you have the international set-up: the whole album has been amortized by the States—they have no risk whatsoever. They just pick the winners, put 'em out and sell 'em. So it's far more profitable. Also the record and tape clubs. And don't forget the prestige factor. Artists like Kenny Rogers





Warners exec Karin Berg suggests new underage clubs.

*“The real tragedy is that the record companies won’t make ends meet if they don’t take more chances.”* —Patrick Spinks

and even Andy Williams—even though he’s not selling that many records anymore—look *great* on the annual report. When a Wall Street analyst looks at the label, he’s *impressed*.”

Tremendous talent costs underscore a truth of label economics: an album like *Christopher Cross* is literally all gravy because the company paid so little to get it. An act like Fleetwood Mac or Billy Joel is not turning the profit, it seems—it’s the John Cougars and Survivors and Flocks of Seagulls that make the real money. The majors’ problems are partly a result of paying too much for getting their artists second-hand.

Not all superstar-heavy labels are in trouble, of course. A significant exception is Geffen, which has managed to get a lot more out of experienced hands like Elton John, Donna Summer, Asia, Peter Gabriel and, of course, John Lennon. Geffen has also done a credible job with relative newcomers like John Hiatt and Quarterflash. Geffen’s president, Ed Rosenblatt, is bullish on the situation: “Blaming radio is a crutch people fall back on. Listen to it; you’ll see you don’t hear a specific sound. I hear Soft Cell, Haircut 100, Ray Parker, Jr., Stevie Wonder, the Go-Go’s. I hear everything! Radio’s fine.

“Speaking for Geffen Records, we’re doing great. We’re breaking an original cast album, *Dreamgirls*. We’ve had a lot of success with Sammy Hagar as well as Elton John. These are all different sounds. New artists, old artists—it’s a whole mix. We have no problems.”

“But,” I ask, “do you have trouble breaking any *progressive* artists?”

“At this particular point,” Rosenblatt replies, “we don’t have any artists in that particular genre of music.”

### The Birth of the Consultants

In 1965, a thirteen-year-old Chicago musician/manager named Lee Abrams began handing out questionnaires to the people who came to see his bands, in an effort to pick more popular material. What he discovered was the first signs of the fragmentation of the 60s top forty audience; Abrams correctly identified what he called “vulnerable top forty” listeners who were liking only a third of the AM playlists. Yet when progressive radio hit big, Abrams noticed that it was bypassing the suburban listeners who were not current or adventurous enough for it, but still liked Hendrix and the Doors enough to steer clear of top forty.

### The Live Music Antidote/By Karin Berg

In the industry search for the reasons behind diminishing record sales, little has been said about the diminishing *audience* for those sales. High record prices, home taping, difficulty with tight airplay lists, etc., are often discussed, but the fact that fewer young people are interested in listening to music is not. They, the young audience, seem to concentrate on the musically predictable bands that come out of the arena circuit and show little inclination to explore the possibilities offered by some of the more progressive musicians and recording artists in the U.S. We seem to be in a fairly new and strange situation: the audience for newer forms of music is older, while the younger audience, i.e., teenagers, largely seems to be musically conservative. When radio stations say that they don’t want to play newer music because, “The kids don’t like it,” I don’t think they’re just defensively posturing excuses to the record companies. I think the kids really don’t like it. They don’t like it because it’s totally foreign to their daily experience.

While many factors have been discussed regarding the frustrating decline in the state of American popular music—not only its sales, but its quality—we have largely ignored the audience itself; we have largely ignored the kids.

In the 60s, live music and its audience were the center of the industry. FM radio reflected the taste developed by America and what we heard at clubs and in concerts. The record companies went out and recorded it. Big Brother & the Holding Company was selling out the Avalon Ballroom *before* they made records—a not uncommon occurrence in the 60s. With the music boom, the major record company, with its tour support budget, began to dominate the industry. The record company took the initiative from the musicians.

But the record companies no longer have those budgets, and video exposure will only take up a small amount of that slack. Until the center of gravity shifts again to live performances, we can’t develop a new audience for American popular music. The excitement of music and, more importantly, the excitement of *discovering* that music, is in first seeing and hearing it live.

The homes of the 60s acts were clubs like the Gaslight, the Bitter End, the Cafe Wha? in New York—the Ash Grove, the Troubadour, the Ice House in the L.A. area. They all served coffee and soft drinks and you didn’t have to meet an age requirement to see any local act. Those who wanted to drink did so before or after a set in any adjoining or nearby bar—in New York, those bars took on a life of their own. Those seventeen and younger couldn’t get in, but they did go to the clubs to hear the music and afterwards they would go to other nearby coffeehouses for their own conversation. It was a rich and fertile cultural experience—first the listening and then going someplace for conversation and talk about the music. The next natural step was going to the Fillmore or Avalon where youngsters could also go. A sixteen-year-old cannot go to the Peppermint Lounge or the Ritz.

We have perhaps lost most of a generation in this exclusionary process. The only place for those under drinking age to go to hear music is the stadium or arena. Small wonder their favorite bands are Kiss, Journey, Foreigner, Styx, etc.—those are the only bands they’re permitted to see live. They identify with those bands and those bands, intentionally or not, give off the implicit message that they identify with the kids. If I were fifteen or sixteen years old, I’d care about that. I don’t know how much I’d care about an artist I couldn’t see until I “grew up.” That’s one of the reasons many bands build themselves for the stadium circuit.

In the 70s, all the non-alcoholic clubs closed or changed to service the lucrative nightclub audience. But those who go to nightclubs go out for a night of entertainment, often caring little what the musical fare will be. I’m not suggesting that a return to non-alcoholic venues will solve all the problems, but it would solve two key ones: first, how do we, the record industry and the musicians (for we are increasingly up this creek together) reach a young audience, and second, and more long-range, how do we develop a knowledgeable audience?

Who will open these places? Perhaps some of those industry figures who have acquired private capital could start clubs in key cities, on the ecological principle that soil must be enriched for the land to remain fertile. Perhaps some existing clubs that have to exclude those under drinking age could open one night a week, or Sunday afternoons, with a no-alcohol policy. In fact, many adults would probably opt to attend. I do know that the exclusionary process of limiting the musical process has been very destructive. While my suggestion is not a panacea for our ills, I do believe it could be a key step in the right direction.



*“There are AOR programmers who don’t even listen to records; they just look at computer print-outs.”* — Lee Abrams

In 1971, at the tender age of nineteen, Abrams sold his format of rock’s greatest hits mixed with hard-rock top forty to Raleigh’s WQDR, thus the world’s first consultant-programmed station. Shortly thereafter, Abrams signed a major market station, WDVE in Pittsburgh. Eleven years later, there are eighty Superstar clients. As Abrams puts it, “We sort of got carried away. The original Superstars turned into IBM, started getting like big business. A lot of the other AOR stations were so lame they couldn’t compete, or if they did compete, they duplicated rather than innovated; they just tried to do what we do better and that’s no fun.”

Despite the fact Abrams no longer handles most of the details of the Superstars format (“There was a point where I couldn’t listen to our stations anymore”), many observers blame him directly for the curse of monochromatic AOR radio. Abrams knows the charge well: “It’s been going on for years. Somebody recently said to me, ‘We’d still have progressive radio if it weren’t for you!’ I blame it on the progressive stations for getting so self-indulgent they killed themselves. I remember listening to free-form stations in the late 60s and really a lot of it was bullshit, ‘cause you’d hear twenty minutes of Ravi Shankar, some bluegrass, a little jazz, and I just wanted to hear some good Cream, Yes and all that. That’s what I don’t like about the complainers. If you don’t like us, go sign a radio station and *beat* us and we’ll be out of business. The whole Superstars format came out of complaining.”

But isn’t there an inherent danger in one person programming the listening habits of millions? “Well, it’s been so thought-out—everything really goes back to the focus groups (Abrams’ encounter-group-type listening sessions): it’s really the *people* that are telling us what to do; it’s the balance of science and emotion. Everything starts emotionally—‘Hey, this is good!’—and the research tells us whether we’re right or wrong. Right now, the problem with most AOR is that there’s no emotion left. There are programmers who don’t even *listen* to records; they just look at computer print-outs. The robot program directors are the ones who make the most uninspired radio.”

### **Tree Bark or Dog Poop**

Nonetheless, Abrams’ defense of consultancy opens a much deeper and ultimately unresolvable question: should the industry always be following the audience, and especially the lowest common denominator audience? Is it always the function of art to placate and anesthetize listeners, or should it also inspire and confront them. Research, no matter how democratic or comprehensive, tends to look backwards at art, placing undue importance on what worked in the past and discounting the explosive potential of the unexpected, one of rock’s most regularly played trump cards.

“Radio has ingrained in half the people listening a feeling that nothing worthwhile has happened in music since the demise of the Doors,” says PolyGram v.p. Jerry Jaffe. “We have a new brainwashed generation who’ve been forced to listen to an older generation’s music. This doesn’t create excitement—it’s turned into rock ‘n’ roll muzak. We have four or five consultants battling it out to see who can play less new music than the other guys. All their time and research goes into researching oldies.”

Jaffe’s insight suggests the real dilemma of evaluating the validity of audience sampling: if the radio audience has grown

up listening to the same thing for the last decade, their tastes are going to reflect that conditioning. Research then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It’s a little like asking someone to choose between eating dog poop and tree bark: they’ll chose the latter every time, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that the statement, “Everyone loves to eat tree bark” is necessarily a true one. Patrick Spinks, general manager of E.G. Records for North America and manager of King Crimson, sees that, unfortunately, that twisted logic has been reaffirmed:

“The success of a band like Asia has confirmed everything the consultants believed, that they should continue to do what they’re doing and that they don’t need to take any chances. At the turn of the year, I had a feeling that radio was at the stage where it would have to look at itself and become a little more risky. As the year progressed, this clearly hasn’t happened. The real tragedy is that the record companies are cutting back to make ends meet, but they’re never going to make ends meet unless they take more chances. As the radio stations become more conservative, the record companies are going the same way. Unless something’s an assured success, they won’t spend money promoting it.”

But the basic principle of not going over the listener’s head is defended by one of the most creative and independent disc jockeys and social commentators, Charles Laquidara of Boston’s WBCN. One of the most distinguished survivors of the golden age of progressive radio, Charles recently was the top two DJs in Boston, as himself on “The Big Mattress” and as his alter ego Duane Glasscock (“You can quote me that Duane and I are two different people and I resent being compared to him—he’s a wimp!”). Despite these compellingly cool credentials, Charles feels excessive hipness can be a danger:

“Sure I play a lot of mainstream music. Take a song like ‘Freebird’ by Lynyrd Skynyrd. We had blown off ‘Freebird’ for years, probably playing it twice a year since it came out—one of the most requested songs there is, that and ‘Stairway To Heaven.’ That’s bad media. We thought we were doing great radio, but we weren’t. We were doing interesting radio, adventurous radio, but what good is the greatest radio show in the world if there’s no audience?

“I’ve had a lot of changes I had to go through. We had the big strike here in 1978 when the new owners came in and fired thirteen people. I wasn’t always this mellow about it: ‘Whaddya mean I can’t play Muddy Waters three times an hour? It’s my goddamn show and I can do what I want!’ But people said, ‘Charles, wake up! You got this whole thing about keeping your principles, but can’t you do both? Can’t you play great music and still play music that people want to hear?’ After a while, I just started agreeing with what they were saying. All of us were being too hip. We’re *all* guilty of that, and you have to make a decision. Are you really copping out playing these groups, or are you doing better radio? I think we’re doing better radio, I really honestly do. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t be working here.”

### **Passive Partners**

As consultancy resulted in sixty to seventy percent oldies airplay, and as the music gurus came up with the scourge of “passive research,” the science of avoiding “tune out” and playing only inoffensive nonselling tracks, an historical parting of the ways occurred. Island’s Ellen Darst explains: “Traditionally, the record industry relied on radio to a great extent. Rock ‘n’ roll radio, AOR radio, really grew up with the record business and for a long time our goals were the same. Well, somewhere along the way we both became big business and our goals were no longer mutual. Radio’s no longer committed to music in any real sense. They’re committed to keeping their listeners.”

PolyGram’s Jerry Jaffe elaborates further: “Now you have John Sebastian’s ‘passive research,’ promoting records into heavy rotation *not based on sales factors*. These records don’t sell, but they get played because research says they’re not offensive, not a tune-out. It used to be that when a record got airplay and didn’t sell, the company knew when to withdraw its marketing funds. They could see the record didn’t connect.



# RADIO FREE AMERICA

## Sounds of Life Among the Ashes

BY JOCK BAIRD



WBCN's Charles Laquidara and Superstars' Lee Abrams.

Against the chainsaw phalanx of AOR radio, a new generation of FM rock reformers has made convincing ratings inroads. The most successful of these have managed to combine an interest in new music with the consultants' own weapon: audience research.

Built on strong on-the-air personalities with good taste and *carte blanche*, Boston's WBCN was once the mainstay of progressive radio. Says one such personality, local legend Charles Laquidara, "If you had five or six good disc jockeys programming their own shows, the old non-format was pretty successful. But what happened was that WCOZ came in with the Sebastian format and *buried* us! So we did our own research, took our own polls. The idea was to mix the unfamiliar with the familiar, since people don't want to hear too much new stuff, but they'll sit through it to get to the next cut. We've known that for years, but I guess we were never really *doing* it until recently."

Laquidara describes the details of the WBCN rotation system: "I've got a choice of fourteen albums of the *real* popular songs (Journey, Cougar, Mac), maybe two songs per album, from which I've got to choose six songs to play in my four-hour show. The rest come from our 3,000-album library, but we'll usually only go so deep into any of those albums. If at any time we want to play an obscure song, we can do it without getting anyone's okay or looking at charts, but we can't play a lot of those an hour." WBCN also rotates their own top ten, which is voted on by listener voting every Friday morning, (the Stray Cats have just done four weeks at #1) and adds in the top three local records, also voted on at the same time.

The station plays new music, but does not entirely ignore how much airplay it is getting elsewhere: "I used to do the Big Mattress Song of the Week as a 'You heard it here first,'" says Charles. "Mistake. Now I hold back. I was going to do Missing Persons a year ago when they had their import album, but luckily I held off. I waited until they had an American album and the label starting pushing it, until it was just breaking through, and *then* I went on it. I helped the group better and I helped the station better." Charles doesn't always wait, though. His last two picks were by Lords of the New Church and the Fixx.

If WBCN borrowed a trick from the consultants, KROQ's Rick Carroll did them one better. The thirty-four-year-old program director took a page from his AM background and made it work for new music. Using very up-to-date stuff (Rick just added the British group Trio), including, and especially, imports, Carroll puts about twenty songs into a tight, three-hour rotation, which he modifies three or four times a week. He believes the listener has to get a chance to hear a new song a lot before it will stick to one's musical ribs: "That's the only way the listener can handle it, can *get* it, can make it all work," explains Carroll.

Carroll's KROQ format has already dented L.A. AOR heavies KLOS and KMET, and he now has new clients in Bakersfield and Seattle, where "the buzz has been incredible." Carroll presently has one of the highest average audience attention spans in the nation, a remarkable ninety-one minutes, and has already seen sales of KROQ-picked hits markedly increase in Seattle. The "ROQ" format is finding new subscribers in droves; Carroll plans to have outlets in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and even New York by spring.

Stung by his astonishing success, the AOR big boys are adding Carroll's hits, but Rick stays a step ahead of them: "They can play more of our records, but this new Trio record, for example, KLOS will add nine or ten weeks down the road, when our listeners will be ready for something else. They'll tell you it's new music, but how new is it? We've been playing 'I Ran' by Flock of Seagulls and the Clash's *Combat Rock* for three months already."

Is Carroll concerned that the extreme tightness of the system is

potentially vulnerable to artistic arbitrariness or even payola if it fell into the wrong hands? "Well, I think your karma would catch up with you; you can only do so much of that stuff before you jeopardize the kind of radio station you are. By the way, in twenty years in radio, I've never been offered payola. I just try to create good radio. If the KROQ thing hadn't been successful, I probably would've gotten out of radio, because it had just gotten too boring."

Boredom, even at the pinnacle of power with his Superstars format, came to Lee Abrams around 1978. He began to lay the research groundwork for a fresher format that would play less hackneyed classic rock oldies and would also accept the best of the new. Abrams bided his time until the recent crisis of confidence in AOR and got San Francisco's KFOG and New York's WLIR to go for it.

Abrams uses some of the most sophisticated research techniques around. In addition to having a library of "call-back" cards filled out by buyers of records in the early 70s (Abrams was able to find thirty percent of the buyers of *Who's Next* in '71 and got them to tell him where they were at now), Abrams runs "focus groups" of a dozen people several times a month (he personally sits in on all of them). "We just sit around and play music and talk about it," notes Abrams. "Sometimes we'll get everybody wrecked and sit up till three a.m. We get down to what synthesizer tones these people like: the nice, rich Oberheim/Prophet sounds like Thomas Dolby or Steve Winwood are fine, but the thin, Euro-pop sounds are a bit of a problem. We were surprised to discover that people wanted guitarists who took the guitar *sound* a step further, like Andy Summers, Steve Howe or Adrian Belew. That's why we'll play Talking Heads and King Crimson, old and new. We get a good sense of what people are ready for; this is definitely going to be a format that brings people along."

Abrams does not give his clients playlists, but instead cultivates a strong, "almost telepathic" relationship with the program director, who he recommends should not be "one of those average radio thinkers. I'll spend five days straight with this person, exchange ideas, talk concepts, just listen to a million things, so that by the end of the fifth day, we'll be bouncing ideas back and forth and will be on exactly the same wavelength."

Abrams is starting to sound like a Moonie: late night encounter groups, heavy indoctrination, depriving people of sleep for five days.... "No," he laughs. "We start at four p.m. and go till one a.m. It's all fun. We'll get a big bottle of wine and go for it."

Abrams himself has a soft spot in his heart for the art-rock bands of the 70s, and has even produced a Gentle Giant LP (79's *Civilian*) and a new LP for Miami punk 'n' poppers Critical Mass. But the conflict-of-interest dangers make Abrams resist the temptation to push his own productions: "The records I produced were stiffs because I couldn't really ask anybody to play them. I talked to my lawyer and he said, 'Yes, you can definitely play it yourself, because Dick Clark used to do it, but if you start *telling* stations to play it, then you're asking for it.'"

Abrams would like more stations to pick up either his Superstars 2 or the major-market WLIR format, but he has to avoid competition with the eight Superstars 1 stations, so his wait for new customers may be longer than he'd like. But since Superstars 1 pays for all the research and expenses of Superstars 2, he's philosophical about the delay.

Freedom is but a relative thing in the commercial universe, however, and only the bottom end of the FM band is truly free, inhabited by public radio and those pesky musical consciences of the nation, the college radio stations. The Intercollegiate Broadcasting Network's Jeff Tellis points out, "The whole idea of free-form, underground, no-format, whatever you want to call it, really developed in college radio. When the commercial stations discovered it was going on, they, shall we say, borrowed the concepts. Stations like WSMU pioneered the whole album-oriented-rock thing long before WBCN or WNEW. When regular FM tightened up, college radio stayed loose. Now we've come full circle and the consultants are borrowing again."

Asked whether the new reformation of commercial radio will really change much, Tellis says, "It's easy to stand back and say, 'Of course not.' Most stations play new music in purely token amounts, not in any meaningful form. College stations have *always* been doing it; it's the *mainstay* of what we do. But I wouldn't want to say something good *can't* happen. Could you have predicted fifteen years ago that there would've even been such a thing as progressive radio? Could you have predicted that the three major New York AM stations, WABC, WINS and WMCA would all be talk-radio now? So I'll pass on the prediction. I think literally *anything* can happen on American radio."

Now record companies put a fortune into 'passive hits' because of all the airplay they get. But the records don't sell. The public rejects them, even if they don't tune the record out. You can no longer count on radio to tell you when you *don't* have a hit record. That's why record companies are all losing money."

Passive research may have even more serious consequences. A syndicated "History of Rock 'n' Roll" radio show omitted the Beach Boys from a recent Labor Day special because passive research now says they are a tune-out. The same show also invariably plays white cover versions of Chuck Berry and Little Richard tunes because the originals supposedly make the listener uncomfortable. By rewriting key chapters in the canon of rock 'n' roll, passive research now seeks to remake the past in its own image.

Clive Davis, legendary Columbia exec now president of Arista, suspects anyone who complains too loudly about radio, however. "I find a lot of my colleagues feed a lot of misinformation to the press to excuse bad performances on their part. If your company's not doing well, blame it on the industry. I think the record industry today is pretty healthy, considering the economy. We're holding our own against competition for the leisure dollar."

### The Search for Alternatives

Now that the record labels know who their friends aren't, they're taking another look at some other ways to communicate that had once seemed beneath them. The importance of the nightclub as a breaker of records, a temporary fixture of the disco era, is now reviving.

"Club play helps," PolyGram's Jerry Jaffe explains. "It starts things off. But you can't go all the way with it. Obviously one of the differences between the Waitresses and the Go-Go's is that the Go-Go's took off with a national hit single while "I Know What Boys Like" was only a hit in certain cities."

"The majors no longer have the money to go and buy out the house at the Bottom Line," says Rounder Records' Marian Leighton, "and as a result, clubs like that are booking a lot of middle-level and specialty kinds of music. I'm not saying it's the major trend, but if an artist has a strong enough local following to be able to sell a significant number of tickets, they have a lot more opportunity to play a good club and have more visibility in that market than they did when the club situation was inflated by record company money put into breaking new artists."

Island's Ellen Darst sees a myriad of non-radio options: "In any situation where things become reactionary, something will rise to counteract it. College radio is increasingly important. Play in rock clubs helps, as does the use of video both in clubs and on MTV (cable TV's all-music channel). MTV is now like radio six or seven years ago. It won't stay that way, but for now there's such a shortage of video material, they've taken a broader type of programming than they will in a year, when there's a lot more video around and they can go in a narrow direction.

"It's similar to what Ian Copeland's booking agency, F.B.I., does. Two years ago he started with no major bands and organized a circuit on which bands could come over from England without even a domestic record deal, go around the country and play in front of people and *not* lose money. They had a forum which radio would not give them to establish themselves."

PolyGram's Jerry Jaffe sees that type of low-overhead self-motivated operation as a harbinger of things to come: "The Jam don't get much radio airplay, but they've built a following through persistency, through occasional touring in major markets amenable to new British music, through their videos and through a great deal of press. They ain't gonna make anybody millionaires, but the band can make some money and we make some money."

This attitude is fairly new in an industry where until recently bands booked two hundred dollars an hour recording time to *rehearse*, and companies like Columbia were said to want no

artist who didn't make at least gold albums. There is now an inclination toward the band that supports itself touring, is cost-conscious and doesn't ask the record company to do much more than sell records. Musicians and label executives alike are starting to realize that, while superstardom is fine, a modest profit still pays the rent.

### And Now a Word from our Sponsor....

As more acts return to the road to make their living, the concert business becomes less an extension of the record industry and more a vital component. Concert promoter Don Law, who dominates Boston bookings, all the way from his showcase club, the Paradise, to the cavernous Boston Garden, reports that his business is booming.

"The market is stronger than the amount of product we have to offer," Law says. "Good attractions, at least in our area, are selling as well or better than they ever have. The problem is, we just don't have enough of them. The cost of touring has made it more difficult for acts to get out and cover all the markets. It says to me that good live music is selling as well or better than it ever has. We just don't have enough."

The problem for major acts, then, is not selling tickets. The problem is absorbing the spiraling costs of hotel rooms, transportation and the hundred other expenses that chew up the profit. Not surprisingly, given the corporate climate, a solution some groups are exploring is sponsorship from Madison Avenue. Some big corporations are willing to put up tour support money in exchange for promotional considerations (like ad space on the tickets). Sunkist promoted a Beach Boys tour back in the late 70s, but the uncool taboo against such blatant capitalism was really shattered by Jovan's sponsorship of the 1981 Rolling Stones tour. Recently Rod Stewart signed a deal with Sony, and Blondie's plugging Pioneer. Shades of Bob "Texaco" Hope.

But things are far from perfect on the promoter's side; the dark lining in Don Law's golden cloud is the difficulty new bands are having. The concert business depends on a talent system continually replenishing itself. There has to be someone coming up to step into the spotlight when the public gets bored with today's arena packers. "We have a problem," Law says, "with a much more conservative climate in terms of the drinking age. This has had a significant impact in New England, making it very tough on new bands.

"Two and a half or three years ago, there were four times as many new bands staying afloat because there were so many places to play. You had all these roadhouses with an eighteen-year-old drinking age, and you could play ten different places in the course of seventy-five miles. With the raising of the drinking age, a lot of those places have dried up. A lot of clubs and a lot of bands have gone out of business. You just don't have the kids coming up in the numbers you used to."

### Retail Revisionism

Although more removed from the chain of conservatism in the past, the record retailers have recently become another significant link. This is because of another change in the industry, the move away from straight consignment. Record stores used to, for all intents and purposes, *hold* records for the labels. Stores could afford to carry everything because they could return most seconds for full credit anytime.

The idea behind full consignment was simple. The retailers got to stock a wide variety of material at little cost and no risk, and the labels could be assured their product was out there when there was demand. But by the late 70s full-consignment had turned into a nightmare. Albums that shipped platinum were bombing and coming back to the companies in platinum numbers. Inducements were offered to buyers to order in great quantity, inflating a record's chart position. Record stores that stocked tons of product all year would ship most of it back to the labels just before inventory time, creating the illusion of maximum sales with minimum investment.

So the record companies were finally forced to retreat from straight consignment and tell retailers they could only return a





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percentage of what they ordered. The effect has been a more orderly system of distribution, but a reluctance on the part of record shops to stock new or untested product. Says Warners' Bob Regehr, "The stores used to take bigger chances. Stores that used to buy in twenty-fives and fifties now buy in fives and tens. They want to be sure it will sell."

At the same time, as whole chains of record stores are increasingly stocked by regional buyers—and as the same stores are increasingly located in shopping malls—the shops are becoming like big versions of department store record sections. They stock huge numbers of hit albums, and a minimum amount of anything else.

The conservatism in retailing hurts not only the independents and the new artists, but even helps tie the hands of those supposed villains, the AOR consultants, who often have more interesting favorites than they can program. Hannibal Records' Joe Boyd explains the problem, using as an example the Act, a commercial-sounding group he signed when Hannibal was still part of Island, but had to try to sell after the company had gone completely independent.

"A lot of AOR consultants really liked the Act record," Boyd recalls, "but if they don't see a lot of money being spent on it, they won't recommend the record to the top FM stations. The consultants get paid for being *right*. They're not supposed to pick records that aren't going to be hits. And they feel a record won't be a hit without a lot of money behind it. They have to see movement out of the shops within a week to keep that record on rotation."

And that just about takes the vicious circle back to where we came in—the Album Oriented Radio consultants. The consultants' hands are tied by the record stores, whose hands are tied by the record companies, whose hands are tied by the radio stations, whose hands are tied by the consultants.

#### Epilogue: Songs for the New Depression


For all the dangerous changes in the music industry, it's possi-

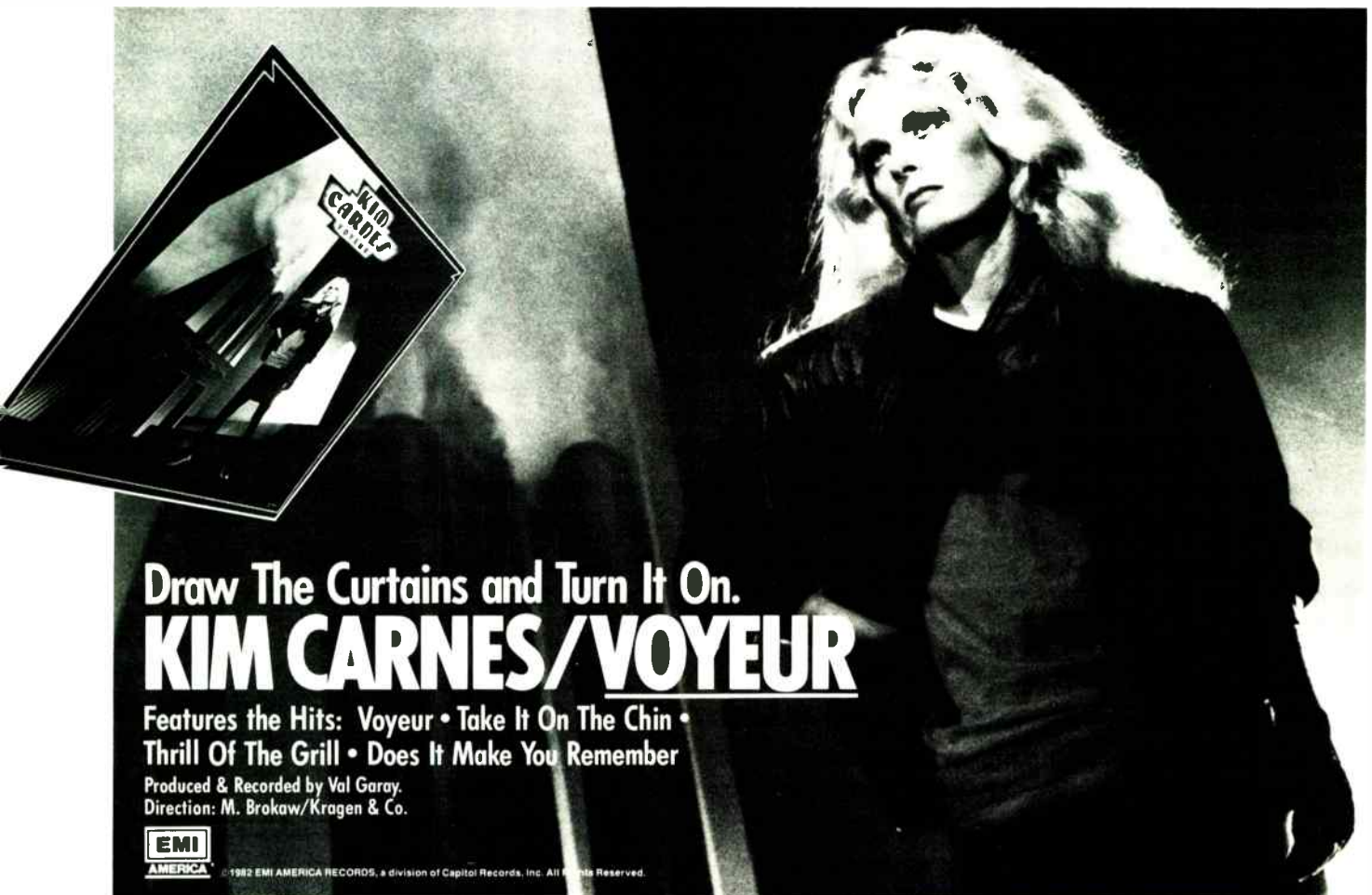
ble that we're all simply victims of another era's expectations. "Look," says Paul Rappaport, Columbia's director of national album promotion, "artists don't grow on trees. The 60s was a real happening. It wasn't a *design*. What we have now is like the 50s. Music was a *part* of my life, but it was an also-ran. I wasn't *waiting* for the next Bobby Darin album, but when the 60s came, I *waited* for the next Rolling Stones album. I *had* to have it! Today it's just songs again.

"People say, 'What happened to art? These records aren't as good!' Well maybe they're not, but when was the last renaissance in music? You can't just expect to say, 'Hey, there's ART!' every ten years. It's not like that. We're just recording what's happening. The times reflect the music and the music reflects the times."

Rock'n roller Greg Kihn may have the best analogy for the corporate seduction of the airwaves: "What are you gonna do? Get mad at radio for being itself? It's like getting mad at your little sister for staying out all night. Are you gonna chop her legs off? Radio is our little sister who goes out and gets laid. What are you gonna do?"

"Radio's a business and all businesses are in trouble right now. I'm sick of seeing articles about 'Record Business in Trouble!' Name two businesses that *aren't* in trouble. They're doing better than Chrysler or U.S. Steel. These periods of tightness are good for musicians. They weed out a lot of the carpetbaggers, the groups that get together 'cause they have the same haircut. Real rock 'n' roll bands persevere. You don't need to have tons of money and you don't need a major recording deal to be successful.


"Listen to this record: 'Gloria' by Them. It's one of the greatest records of all time but it never got higher than number sixty on the charts. Many bands now would break up over that. 'Sixty? That ain't s....t, man!' But success and rock aren't necessarily in the same league. They can coincide, but the music is the most important thing. Musical integrity is still the backbone of rock 'n' roll." 



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Produced & Recorded by Val Garay.  
Direction: M. Brokaw/Kragen & Co.

  
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### FLANGER 575

The DOD Flanger 575 produces its comb filter type of effects through the use of time delay circuitry. Using short delay times, the 575 can produce a wide range of effects from regeneration flanging and chorus to quivering vibrato, and many melodic effects in between. The 575 has a dynamic range greater than 90 db with a very wide frequency response, making the 575 a natural for studio or stage.

### COMPRESSOR LIMITER 525

The DOD 525 Compressor Limiter makes all signals which pass through it have the same average output level, regardless of the original input level. In other words, the 525 squeezes a wide dynamic range into a much smaller one. This gives an instrument more sustain by increasing the gain as a note decays, adding a more even, unbroken professional sound.



*A look back at some of the highlights and lowlifes of Musician's first five years.*

## **Bruce Springsteen** *On Being a Regular Guy*

*"The other night I went out, we were in Denver. I went to the movies by myself, walked in and got my popcorn. This guy comes up to me and asks me to sit with him and his sister. At the end of the movie he asks if I'd go home and meet his mother and father. So we get over to the house and here's his mother and father lying out on the couch, watching TV and reading the paper. He brings me in and says, 'Hey, I got Bruce Springsteen here.' And they don't believe him. 'A g'wan,' they say. So he runs in his room and brings out an album and holds it up to my face. And his mother says breathlessly, 'Ohhh yeah' She starts yelling, 'Yeah!', she starts screaming. And for two hours I was at this kid's house. They were real nice, cooked me up all this food...."*



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

## **Captain Beefheart** *Premonitions of a Tragedy*

*In the middle of a photo session with Musician photographer Deborah Feingold, Don Van Vliet suddenly clutched his head in pain. "Something terrible is gonna happen tonight," groaned Van Vliet. You'll be reading about it tomorrow morning. This hasn't happened in so long...." Three hours later John Lennon was cut down by an assassin.*

## **The Clash** *Joe Strummer on Rock Deathstyles*

*"Music's supposed to be the life force of the new consciousness, but it's really dealt death as style. The poor junkie on the street has been led into it by rich rock stars and left to die with their style."*



## **Rickie Lee Jones** *Fear of Flying*

*"I was eleven and everything was going great, then my brother got in an accident and everything fell apart. And I realized this year that every time something starts to go good, I go, 'Oh, no, you're not going to do it to me again,' and I'll stop it from being happy and working out. Because I would rather have control of messing it up than have the element of surprise catch me again."*



## Steely Dan

### *The Constituency of Weirdness*

"We get letters, phone calls—from people who 'know exactly what we mean' and they just have to tell us. We get lots of letters with very small printing and little pictures in the corner. Those weird people on the street—every hundredth weirdest one has a Steely Dan record at home. This is the heart and soul of our audience. That guy who just hijacked that crosstown bus today probably has forty-seven copies of *The Royal Scam*."



DEBORAH FEINGOLD



TOM COPI

## Wayne Shorter

### *Reflections on Electricity*

"I have something about that whole electric versus acoustic controversy. I think that electricity has water in it, electric neutrons, protons, whatever they call them. There's water inside them. Ha! So where there is water, there's acoustic! It's like a little room that's moving around, a little room that's on fire."

## The Police

### *The Little Girls Don't Understand*

"It's only the real sophisto musos who are amazed at our ability. All the little girls who like our stuff, it never occurs to them that we're incredible musicians. As far as they're concerned, they love the sound of it, they can sing along, and they think we look nice."



EBET ROBERTS



## Eric Clapton

### *Going Back to the Basics*

Irish critic John Hutchinson met up with guitarist Eric Clapton in a venerable Irish pub for *Slowhand*'s first major interview in almost five years. Over Guinnesses, Eric confessed: "I was totally fed up with writing ditties and pleasant melodies. It was time to reconnect myself with what I knew best. Whenever I get really depressed, and want to know exactly what I should be doing, I always turn to Muddy Waters. I always find in him a great well of spiritual comfort. The man is strong, you know. And that is where I belong."

## Tom Petty

### *The Garage Legacy*

"I took my kid to see the carnival down the street the other day. It was the first time I really felt successful. They had a group, like a garage band. They played the Who and the Stones and then they played this fifteen-minute version of my song 'Breakdown,' over and over and on and on. It was really neat. That's the true heritage of rock 'n' roll, when the garage bands start playing it."



EBET ROBERTS



## **Robert Fripp** *Abandons his Image*

*"In rock music, an artist's image can become even more alive than the artist, acquiring a force greater than the music itself, as in Mick Jagger's case. To reach a higher order, however, performer and audience must abandon their mutual pretensions and exert themselves towards actually touching each others' essence."*

## **Paul McCartney** *Tripping the White Fantastic*

*Editor/interviewer Vic Garbarini recalls: "I was waiting for an elevator after finishing the interview when I realized I'd left my copy of The White Album (brought along for autographing) in Paul's office. Just as I decided that I couldn't go back and interrupt his TV interview to get it, his office doors burst open and here comes Paul, tripping over TV cables as he runs down the hall, waving The White Album and shouting, 'Hey wait, you forgot this!' Was I impressed? Nah, the same thing happened to me on an acid trip back in '68. Only that time he was wearing a paisley Walrus suit and floated down from the ceiling."*



## **Brian Eno** *What I Did on My Summer Vacation*

*Brian Eno explains what he did on his summer vacation in Africa. "I often sat outside Accra in the evening with my little Sony stereo recorder and my headphones and listened to whatever was going on... insect sounds, people in the distance, nightbirds, various kinds of frogs—and from very very far away the drums would drift in and out as the wind changed. That was the thrill of going to Africa for me; those tapes are a more accurate record than any photograph would be."*

## **Pete Townshend** *Gets Abusive*

**Guitars:** *"I actually got to enjoy bashing Stratocasters because of the boinging noise they made when you bounced them off the ground."*

**Journalists:** *"And we're doing all kinds of wonderful things: buying donuts for tramps and giving shelter to sheepdogs that have just had their fur shaved off, and taking journalists out to dinner and listening to their bloody intellectual ramblings!"*

**Himself:** *"I could actually sit down with a man who murdered 500 people and grow to love him. But I can't forgive myself my own weaknesses."*







## Bill Wyman

### *The Public and the Private Stones*

**On Mick:** "He is totally different in public than he is in private life... his voice changes, and he starts talking with that pseudo-Southern accent. Sometimes he carries his public persona over into his private life, which gets to be a real pain in the ass, because you know he's full of s\_\_\_\_. So you have to remind him and bring him down... 'Come on, Mick!' And then he comes back to normal. I don't think he knows which one is the real Mick Jagger (laughs). It keeps the mystery going."

**On Keith:** "Shy. Introverted. He's very nice, really. To overcome that, he makes the appearance of being very carefree and brash. He's a bit insecure, I think."

## Jerry Garcia

### *On the Summer of Love*

"This group of people who were trying to meet each other finally came together, shook hands, and split. It was all those kids who read Kerouac in high school—the ones who were a little weird. The Haight Ashbury... became a magnet for every kid who was dissatisfied: a kind of central dream, or someplace to run to. It was a place for seekers—a sweet special thing."



JIM MARSHALL



MARK MANDER

## Lowell George

### *On Record Executive Expertise*

"They really don't know. They don't know a good song from... (George affects a hyped-up Hollywood accent): 'Hey, have I got something for you, boss! Listen to this:' (picks up phone and imitates dial tone) 'EHHHHHHHHH! The telephone!' (slams down phone) 'It's a bit! I'll go for it. How much? Two hundred thou. Great! Sign 'em.' That's what happens. Literally."

## Miles Davis

### *Turning the Tables*

Every music writer in the world had been pursuing Miles Davis for years. In typical Miles fashion he chose a total jazz neophyte, Cheryl McCall, because of a piece she'd done on Willie Nelson (!?). Cheryl protested, saying she knew nothing about jazz. "Fine, I'll teach you," said Miles and proceeded to do so over a month and a half period, introducing her to old friends, taking her to Detroit, Chicago and New York, playing her old records and patiently explaining the various nuances and transitions of his career. A remarkable interview ensued.



TERRY KELLEY

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# THE MUSICIAN

WORKING

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88

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P L A Y E R S

90

### THOMAS DOLBY

An important new synthesizer stylist makes a superb debut album.

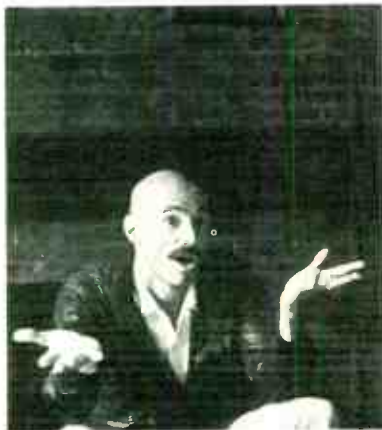


P L A Y E R S

91

### TONY LEVIN

King Crimson's bass and Stick virtuoso leaps from studio hired gun to inspired band-member.



P R O D U C I N G

92

### PRODUCER DAVID KAHNE

The producer of Romeo Void, Translator and other punk 'n' poppers shows how to make great records for a lot less.



R E C O R D I N G

94

### BARRY REYNOLDS

A Compass Point All Star who's powered Marianne, Grace and Bette offers a fresh and 'tasty' solo L.P.



# EL CHEAPO

## GUITARS

*Fantasies in Naugahyde and Metal-flake*



### BY DAN FORTE

*Well, she's metal-flake blue with a Corvette grill. Check my custom machine. Step on the gas she goes: wah-ah-ah.*

When Brian Wilson wrote "Custom Machine" in the early 60s, he was, of course, referring to the hot rod of his dreams. But he could just as easily have been singing about any one of the off-brand electric guitars built around that time. I've got a metal-flake blue 6-string

that fits the above description to a T. And when you step on the gas—I mean, when you plug it in—it goes *wah-ah-ah* and a lot of other noises.

After my article on "El Cheapo Guitars" appeared in the November '81 *Musician*, I received mail from all over the country—from players looking for a specific weird model, from amateur builders with unique ideas in design and materials, from instrument dealers with guitars I couldn't have envisioned in my wildest nightmares. I was also harassed with telephone calls like this:

"Hey, Dan, this is Fat Dog at Subway

Guitars. Some guy just walked in with a guitar for sale, and I thought you might be interested. It's this really disgusting shade of blue plastic in a sort of zig-zag pattern that you've got to see to believe, with four pickups and six Vegematic buttons—well, they're actually more like accordion switches. Dan?"

"Okay, how much do you want for it?"

This is kind of like calling a junkie and saying, "Hey, I just got a shipment of really high-grade stuff from Peru. You wanna come over and sample a taste before it gets stepped on?"

My new blue guitar (which cost me



\$125) was made in Italy by the same people who made the Diamond Rangers mentioned in the previous article. The only identification to be found anywhere on the guitar is the word "Tonemaster" on the headstock (you know it's a quality instrument when the manufacturer is ashamed to put his name on the guitar). Whereas the Diamond Rangers (similar, and possibly related to, some Goya and Eko models I've seen) feature a two-piece body construction with a plastic top and wood back, the Tonemaster is plastic front and back (but still two pieces, which gives it a sort of hollow sound). I thought I'd seen some strange guitar finishes before—mother-of-toilet-seat, mother-of-jackknife, mother-of-diving-board—but never anything like the mother-of-shower-curtain pattern on the Tonemaster.

The most interesting element of this mutant is its four-pickup construction and placement, and the combinations its six switches yield. The pickups are placed in pairs—two toward the neck, two near the bridge—and can be played in five combinations: treble-most, bassiest (which like many European models of this era contains a capacitor that automatically reduces this pickup's highs—for lounge gigs, I suppose), bass and treble extremes, the two middle pickups together, or all five. (As with every other Italian food-processor guitar I've seen, the extra button is for none of the above.) As unlikely as these positions might look on paper (not to mention how unlikely this *guitar* looks in person), it is one of the most versatile guitars I've ever played—it truly sounds like five different guitars, one for each selector switch. A work of genius. (A somewhat demented genius, but a genius nevertheless.) The only drawback of the Tonemaster—and it's a pretty big one—is that the pickups are extremely microphonic; on my Fender Vibrolux this isn't much of a problem, but play it through something like a Marshall and you'll get feedback, a lot of finger squeaks and Armed Forces Radio. Yes, kids, now you can sound *exactly* like Eddie Van Halen (or whoever else is on the radio at any given time), without even touching the strings.

With "vintage," "collectible" instruments, any modifications decrease the guitar's market value. Originality is more important than playability to guitar snobs—I mean, collectors. The beauty of the cheapos is that you can do anything you want to them and it won't affect their "blue book" price—since they aren't listed anyway. But for the most part, I'd no sooner replace the pickups on my Tonemaster than have my Naugahyde Hofner refinished.

There is not much literature available on the models the German Hofner company (famous for the Paul McCartney violin bass) made in the early and mid-60s, but my vinyl mother-of-bar-stool

solid-body *must* be their deluxe model, the top of the line, possibly a specially issued Christmas model or some such. They spared no expense on this one; they attached every piece of leftover vinyl, plastic, metal and rubber that was lying around the factory. And I paid \$180 for it, complete with a hardshell case that resembles a marital aid.

The body of this three-pickup, vaguely Strat-oid number is covered with red-brown-gold Naugahyde, front and back, in an embossed pattern that resembles wrapping paper (just tie a bow around the neck and stick it under the tree). Its "binding" is basically a strip of white clothesline. The swirly red plastic pickguard material can also be found on the headstock, a panel in the back, and even between strips of mother-of-pearl on the fretboard. All nine switches on the face of the guitar—master volume, tone controls for each pickup, an on/off switch for each pickup, a solo/rhythm boost, and a nifty five-position "treble-o-bass" knob—are labeled *upside-down*, so the player can see what he or she is doing when looking down at the guitar. Whammy bar and flip-up mute come standard (naturally). What does it sound like, you ask? Well, if I'd found this sucker three years ago, my collection might be considerably smaller—but I doubt it. However, I do use the Hofner about eighty percent of the time onstage these days. The perfect surf guitar.

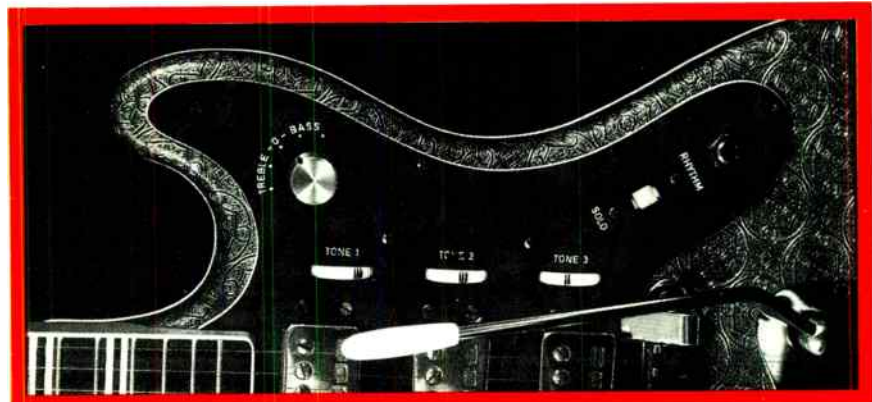
Chances are many of you will remember Standel amps, the first high-powered solid-state amplifiers on the scene. But how many have ever seen a Standel *guitar*? And how many own a Standel guitar? Probably just me and the former members of the Cryan' Shames or Electric Prunes. I've only seen two Standel electrics, and both were fire

skinniest neck I've ever held, with the possible exception of a couple of Mosrites I've played and a Kapa in my collection that has more fretboard than neck. What's puzzling about the Kapa is that its pickups (stock) are identical to those on my Hofner, although one company was American, the other, German.

One of the neat features found on cheapos such as Goyas, Magnatones and various brands from the Valco company (National, Supro, Airline, etc.) is the presence of more selector switches than pickups—activating various capacitors, filters and phase switches. You really have to get inside the guitar to find out exactly what some of these switches do. But it's enough to know that they change the resultant sound—so if you can just remember which switch accounts for which tone, who cares about the mechanics?

An example of this is a red fiberglass National I saw recently (shaped like a distorted map of the United States) with one pickup, a three-position switch, three tone controls (one for each switch position) and a master volume. Many Valcos feature the exact same pickups found on the company's lap steel Hawaiian guitars. I even saw a three-quarter-size Supro solid-body with a Dobro tailpiece; others have one or more Dobro resonators—great for bottleneck. Two of the hippest things found on *any* guitars are: the pickup-in-the-bridge design on some Supros and Nationals; and the tone/selector knob on same. Instead of individual tone controls, the two pickups are full-out and the knob blends the two.

These days so much emphasis is placed on things like high output, infinite sustain and playability. I personally find it *harder* to play fretless wonders with slinky strings and action as resilient as



**Hofner spared no expense on this deluxe mother-of-barstool classic.**

engine red plastic—one solid-body, the other (mine) a 335-shaped hollow-body with no f-holes. According to Bob Crooks, who owned Standel and now works at Barcus-Berry, only about 500 of the plastic models were manufactured, around 1966. Crooks hired two former Mosrite employees to design his guitars, hence the Standel's pencil neck and tiny frets. My Standel boasts the

melted butter. Most players who pick up my guitars cringe when they try to wrap their thumbs halfway around a neck the size of a baseball bat. Switching from one of mine to one of theirs (usually a Les Paul or a Strat) is not unlike swinging a lead bat before selecting your favorite Louisville Slugger. Me, I'd rather go to the plate with the lead bat—especially if it's blue metal-flake.

# THOMAS DOLBY'S SYNTH-FLIGHTS

Technology Encounters the Human Element

BY FREFE



"The best damned record to come out of European synth-pop, period."

Born: Cairo, October 1958

Occupation: Composer, inventor, computer programmer

Distinguishing features: Poor eyesight, absent mind

That's how his EMI-Harvest Records promo sheet sums up Thomas Dolby, to which you should add *talent*. Glance back at that birth date. He's barely twenty-four years old, but in the last three years he's established an enviable set of bona fides: stints with the Bruce Woolley and Lene Lovich bands, main synthesist credits on Foreigner's 4 and Joan Armatrading's *Walk Under Ladders* and now his self-produced debut album, *The Golden Age Of Wireless*, which has generated two British top forty singles and is the best damned record to come out of Europe's current fascination with synth-pop. Period.

Anybody who disagrees, put up your dukes. This one I'm willing to fight for. From the first snap of electronic drum in "Europa And The Pirate Twins" to the impassioned fadeout of "Cloudburst At Shingle Street," Dolby is purely amazing. And best of all, he writes songs. Not grooves, like his equally synthesized fel-

lows, but songs.

"My songs are very much observations. They're not gut-wrenching reactions. You know, 'I met this girl and she really turns me on,' or 'I hate the war in Ireland and I want to kill this or that group of people'...they're more detached than that." But detached doesn't mean distant. "Windpower," Dolby's current single, began as a rather abstract notion about windmills and alternative energy. By the time it came out of the studio it was a crackling visionary anthem about personal and cultural freedom, underlined with fierce synthesized drums, jazzy flute and a fuzzed-bass so rich it makes the spine crawl.

"It struck me that a lot of electronic drum patterns that people do are either a kind of 4/4 new wave/rock feel, or else a kind of disco thing. I remembered the excitement of the glitter-beat sound, in the early 70s, and I thought it would be a really nice thing to do with a computer."

The computer used was a PPG 340/380 Wave, hooked to a Simmons electronic drum kit. Basic programming provided a simple beat pattern, and then Dolby created the catchy syncopations by actually *playing* the rhythm (or play-

ing against it) through the computer interface.

Originally designed as a digital sequencer for Tangerine Dream's light-show, the Wave computer can also store musical sequences as control voltages. Once they're in memory you can do anything you want—change the sound or tempo or pitch, bounce tracks, multiply them, use the voltages to trigger analog synthesizers or lights or tape machines...or other things. For example, noise gates—Dolby does a lot of that, in order to humanize his rhythms. In "Cloudburst At Shingle Street," the tomtoms at the end of the song activate noise gates that let low piano notes through, giving the whole pattern a more "vocal" quality.

But though this kind of digital technology is a major tool, he hasn't been overwhelmed by it—"One thing I don't want to do is sort of disappear up my own backside doing computer programs"—or by the synth-pop approach that says older instruments and actual musicianship are obsolete. *Wireless* puts the lie to that: Andy Partridge of XTC wraps a bluesy harmonica in and out of "Europa," "Weightless" has somber piano and a kind of *film noir* vocal, and choirs ring out in "Flying North." Dolby admires performers as diverse as Joni Mitchell and Siouxsie & the Banshees and it shows. "It would be crazy for me, liking people like Neil Young and Ry Cooder, to make an album entirely of drum machines and synths. It wouldn't pay homage to a whole area that has really meant a lot."

This eclectic style goes back to his childhood. His archaeologist father traveled widely, and young Dolby followed along in a succession of cheap boarding schools, picking up pieces of living and dead cultures as he went. He met the girl whose memory inspired "Europa," taught himself piano and guitar, experimented with ham radio, got interested in meteorology...and most of all, became absolutely fascinated by the richness of the world: the different people and places, the million million different stories.

Performing became his outlet. His interest in electronics led him to synthesizers and home recording, while Brian Eno and John Cage played strange changes on the jazz and classical music he'd grown up with. In 1977, he was primed and ready for the spark. "I was living in a bed-sit with a Fender Rhodes, trying to write stuff, trying to get into bands. And after a few years of people worshipping jazz-rock, suddenly the Sex Pistols and the Clash turned up and there was so much *energy* around. Which was great for me, on a social level, to be able to go out to pubs and pogo dance around and get sweaty...but the musician in me found it res-



training to be asked to play three chords. When Television and Talking Heads made it over here, it was tremendous, because they had the kind of energy that came from punk but they retained a musicianship and originality."

Dolby played with various well-known groups, toured Europe and the States, and even wrote and arranged a hit single, Lene Lovich's "New Toy." Then in late 1980, he quit the road in order to push his solo material, the demos for which were recorded mostly at home on a 4-track machine. But the record industry didn't fall all over itself offering him a deal; in fact, things got so tense he finally just fled, clutching five pounds and an acoustic guitar, and hit out playing Neil Young and Dylan songs in the Paris Metro.

That's where he was when the god of rock 'n' roll coincidence decided to smile on him. The man who would eventually become his publisher played Dolby's tapes for another client, one Robert John "Mutt" Lange, who was back in England on a break from producing Foreigner's 4. One phone call later Dolby was on his way to America for "two or three days of work" that turned into five solid weeks of arranging, rehearsal and overdubbing. That done, he used his new professional credibility to form his own record label and license it worldwide to EMI. (Cultural aside: the label is named Venice In Peril, after the Venice In Peril Fund and a royalty from every disc sold goes toward saving that favorite city of Dolby's childhood.)

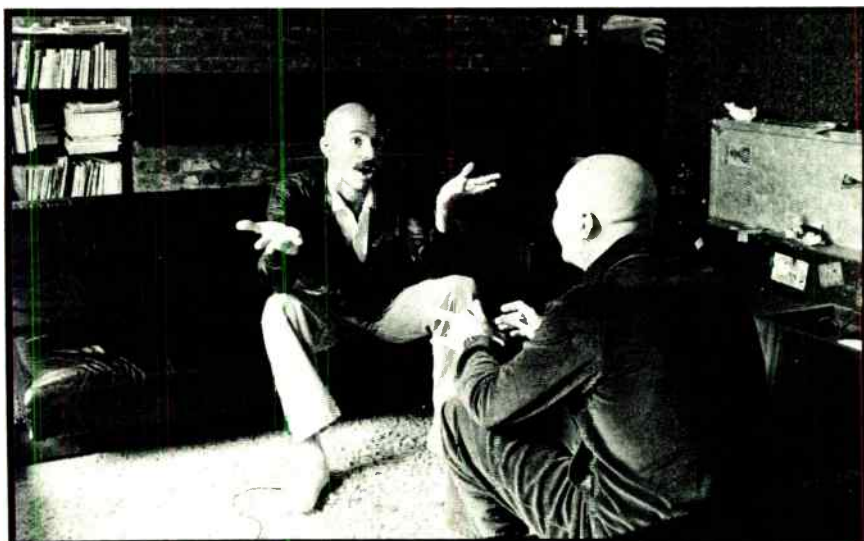
It was, at last, time to make his own album. But there was an unexpected problem: "I think it's a mistake to attempt anything with too much of a conception about how you want it to turn out," he now says. The demo tapes he had done were as polished as possible. Partially this was because he had no live band to showcase the tunes—but it was also a result of his songwriting style. Even a piece like "Airwaves," with its lyric loose ends and aura of mystery, was the result of a lot of grinding work. Originally written on a grand piano, "Airwaves" was derived from a kind of academic exercise—given one four-note motive, how many different chords could be used to voice it pleasingly? The answer Dolby came up with was seven, and that progression became the song's chorus. Developing the rest of it, with its chorus-verse key change and dense atmosphere, was slow and painstaking work. "I'd gotten the tunes exactly the way I wanted them, I'd managed a certain feel. To go into the studio and just repeat them under perfect conditions—it wasn't possible. In order to get around that, I had to spend a couple of days recording ridiculously inappropriate

*continued on page 97*

# TONY LEVIN INTERVIEWS HIMSELF

The Bass Behind Crimson, Lennon, Simon

BY TONY LEVIN



Bassist and Stick virtuoso T. Levin (l.) chatting candidly with journalist T. Levin (r.).

Mr. Levin's schedule is very busy, leaving little time for interviews, but special consideration was given to the fact that Mr. Levin himself was the interviewer.

We began on May 20, in Woodstock, New York.

**Musician:** Nice house.

**Levin:** Thanks.

**Musician:** So, what was it like playing with John Lennon?

**Levin:** What? Oh no. They told me they'd send a good interviewer. If you're going to ask that same dumb crap, you can forget the whole thing. I don't need any more inane questions from some idiot who doesn't know a thing about music.

**Musician:** Okay, okay. I won't ask that. What's a good question to ask?

**Levin:** Ask me about what I'm involved with now. Ask why I play the Chapman Stick with King Crimson. Ask how it compares with the bass. Ask how English musicians differ from Americans. Who else have you interviewed who plays in English bands and also does New York sessions?

**Musician:** Actually, I've never interviewed anyone before.

**Levin:** I could tell. Ask what music I like. Ask where I think rock music is going in the 80s. Ask how being in a backup band, like Peter Gabriel's, differs from being a full member of a band, like I am with Crimson. Don't ask what Fripp is

like. Don't ask what John Lennon and Paul Simon, Carly Simon, Alice Cooper and Joan Armatrading are like. They're all nice. So is Ringo.

**Musician:** Well, what is the English music scene like for a New York studio player?

**Levin:** Good question. Not a great question, but a good one. It has been quite an experience going back and forth between the two worlds. I think some of the basic musical ideals of the players are very different. Coming from New York to play with first Gabriel and then Crimson, I took for granted that most rhythm players sought, consciously or unconsciously, the same goal. Namely the perfect groove. I think most American drummers, bassists and guitarists would agree with me that, whatever the style, if it grooves, it's good. Not so the British rhythm players. To them the magic word is *new*. They feel it's the English tradition to set the trend in rock music for the rest of the world to follow.

**Musician:** To a large extent they do.

**Levin:** Right. But it's the stress placed on that newness that's so different from here. When I started working with English players, I noticed that I was concerned with entirely different things than they were. Grooves that have been around a long time are a common thing to me. Here, in both jazz and rock we're constantly focusing on them, trying to

play them better; to perfect the groove. But with Gabriel and then with Crimson, the old groove was not enough. I was encouraged to look for new approaches to playing, even if it meant a less solid feel. At first I resisted making the change because it put me on unfamiliar ground. Locking in with the bass drum and settling into a pocket have become second nature to me. But now I feel more comfortable with other approaches. And I've gradually come to think that taking on a new style needn't mean giving anything up. Except, maybe, my complacency about my playing. There's a lot of musical territory to be explored by combining the English and American styles.

**Musician:** *Has your playing changed much?*

**Levin:** Definitely. I listen to what I've done on albums this year and it sounds very different to me than what I used to play. I'm glad about the change, but I'm more happy about the fact that I'm able to change.

**Musician:** *How is your playing different?*

**Levin:** Well, now I don't always play what I used to see as the bass function; the pulse of the music, usually low and locked in with the bass drum. I'm freer to mix in with the guitars in their range. Or play bass melodies. Or play low but fast. Also, although I used to avoid effects, now I use them all. At last count I had about fourteen pedals onstage. I can hardly take a step without tripping over one. And I've been trying to let the effects play some of the part for me. In short, while I used to play as simple and basic a part as I could come up with, Crimson has pushed me into looking for alternatives.

**Musician:** *Is King Crimson a way of doing things?*

**Levin:** What?

**Musician:** *Never mind. Tell us about the Stick.*

**Levin:** Well, it has guitar and bass strings together on one neck. The notes are played by hammering with one finger at a time, so I can play both a guitar and a bass part, or I can use both hands on the bass end. Both of these techniques, plus unusual tuning, have helped me come up with some new ideas for bass parts.

**Musician:** *Does it sound like a conventional bass?*

**Levin:** Not exactly, but close to it. It's more percussive because each note is hammered.

**Musician:** *Was the Stick custom made for you?*

**Levin:** No. Emmett Chapman makes them in L.A. They're available through him and at some music stores.

**Musician:** *I've heard that you have an unusual stage setup.*

**Levin:** I do?

*continued on page 98*

# PRODUCER DAVID KAHNE

**Inexpensive Miracles with Translator, etc. BY MICHAEL GOLDBERG**



CHESTER SIMPSON

**Kahne's successes are based on meticulous rehearsal before the tape rolls.**

People laugh when they hear what it costs David Kahne to produce a record. They either laugh or look at him like he's crazy. The San Francisco-based producer/engineer/arranger responsible for critically acclaimed debuts by Translator, Romeo Void and the Red Rockers has produced *entire albums* for less than fifteen grand, and several for less than four grand. As he notes with a smile, "Some bands spend more than that on just the tape."

Kahne's records may be made on the cheap, they may be made fast (ten days from beginning the basic tracks to completed mixes), but there's nothing low-rent about how they *sound*. One need only listen to the moody acoustic jangle of "Everywhere That I'm Not" by Translator, the dark intensity of Romeo Void's "I Mean It," "Guns Of Revolution" by the Red Rockers or "Beatnik" by avant-synth act Voice Farm to appreciate the results Kahne gets from his rather unorthodox methods.

Seated in his windowless office (about the size of a large closet) at the Automatt in San Francisco, the thirty-four-year-old Kahne in no way resembles the clichéd image of the record producer. He does not wear his hair long or cut into Beatle bangs. His outfit does not include a satin baseball jacket with some band's logo on the back, or designer jeans, and there is no silver spoon dangling from his neck. The guy doesn't even drink coffee. His short brown hair, a button-down shirt, brown

corduroys and jogging shoes actually suggest a rather square college student.

"When you're making an album, there's the musical thing and the technical thing," says Kahne, explaining his cost-efficient technique. "I find myself worrying more about the musical context than the technical context. I generally end up with budgets that require that I work very fast once we're in the studio. So you have to work on things that you can't get with money, which means rehearsal and preparation."

Before he begins working with a band, Kahne gets a tape of the material and "I go through it as many times as it takes for me to learn every note of every song." Then he spends several weeks in a rehearsal studio working closely with the band. "I work on arrangements, compositions. I try to determine what I'm going to do for each song, what I want the snare drum to sound like on each song, all the guitar parts, solos, everything. A lot of bands will go in and lay down a track before everything is worked out and then think, 'Now we're going to figure out a guitar part.' I don't do that. I like to know what it's going to sound like when I cut it. And as much as possible I like the band to be committed to what they're going to do musically before they go into the studio."

He brings his \$110 Superscope "boombox" to the rehearsals and tapes everything. "I keep copies of the rehearsals and I put all the final versions of songs onto a tape and give copies to the band and we listen to them... 'cause I have to record the tracks for an album in two days tops. So that's not the kind of time to get back from it and decide whether you've made certain kinds of big compositional or arranging mistakes. You need to determine that prior to entering the studio."

During the rehearsals, Kahne's contributions are significant, from arranging to helping to rewrite songs. It was Kahne who suggested that Translator use the acoustic guitars that give "Everywhere That I'm Not" its ethereal 60s feel. Subsequently, acoustic guitars have become a critical ingredient in Translator's unique sound.

Once Kahne and the band enter the studio—his favorite is Studio A at the *continued on page 98*



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MUSICIAN

R E C O R D I N G

# BARRY REYNOLDS SCARES HIMSELF

The Guitar Wizard of the Island Set

BY FRED SCHRUERS



After getting Marianne, Grace and Bette higher, Reynolds now rolls his own.

There he is, guitarist Barry Reynolds, backstroking lazily ten miles out in the Caribbean, scaring himself (one presumes) and leaving this writer composing a potential new lead. "This year's best posthumously-released debut is Barry Reynolds's solo album...." Barry's just jumped into the foaming brine as it bubbles back from the bow of a racing sloop that's cutting across the sea at better than ten knots, and if he doesn't catch hold of the small motor launch bobbing in its wake, he's got no other ride home. Ah, snatched it...thereby preventing considerable personal and professional heartbreak for such people as Grace Jones and Marianne Faithfull, each now well into her third album's worth of co-writing with Barry; Bette Midler, who flew him from London to L.A. to work up some songs with her; and the people at Island Records, who prize him as part of their Compass Point All-Stars studio team and author of a sneaky-brilliant solo LP, *I Scare Myself*.

Now thirty-two, Reynolds has taken a long time to surface as a singer/songwriter in his own right. He's been at the game since he left his home near Manchester, England at seventeen and journeyed to London to begin what seemed like an endless succession of unsatisfying gigs. He backed cabaret artists, nodding incomprehendingly at the sheet

music in front of him as he played songs like "Fly Me To The Moon" by ear, and served time in various groups. "You start thinking, 'What am I doing driving up and down the motorway for twenty pounds a gig? I don't want to sleep in a damned van again.'"

But his self-taught guitar style (the Shadows' original "Apache" was an early model) got him noticed. His friend, keyboard player Dave Wilkey, was invited over to Muscle Shoals to make a record (never released) and Barry Beckett said, "Bring over that guitarist who played on the demo with you." "That was lovely," remembers Reynolds. "For me, it helped blow out the fallacy that to have 'feet' you must be black. I mean, these were the guys who had backed Aretha Franklin." Back in England, he remained obscure—except among musicians of taste. Stevie Winwood used him for session dates, then came an invitation to join Marianne Faithfull's road band, and ultimately, a pivotal role in the making of her *Broken English* album. (They continue to collaborate—Reynolds will coproduce her next LP.)

Before long, a summons came from Chris Blackwell, and Barry was installed as part of the Compass Point team featuring "riddim twins" Sly Dunbar (drums) and Robbie Shakespeare (bass), Wally



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**Reynolds** from previous page Badarou (keyboards), Mikey Chung (rhythm guitar) and Sticky Thompson (percussion). "I think what attracted Chris to Barry as a guitarist," says resident producer Alex Sadkin, "was his very hard, brilliant electronic sound. Not your standard rock 'n' roll guitar." Reynolds learned quickly that his colleagues liked to get a good track down on the first take. "The way these guys work really keeps me on my toes. Working in England, it might be, 'Yeah, good take, let's do another one.' But over here, it's like, snap. You think about what you're playing there-and-then, which keeps things fresh."

Reynolds, who travels with a cheap Gibson Firebrand (played through Marshalls or preferably, Roland Bolts), likes to record with a pre-CBS Fender Telecaster owned by Compass Point. "Barry's very much a feel player," notes Sadkin. "He likes to claim he doesn't know how many strings a guitar has. But what he likes to use is this studio Tele, played through a Pignose amp just at the point where the batteries are starting to die. It's a fat, full tone; we call it 'the trombone.'"

That nice, greasy sustain Reynolds wrings from his "trombone" can be heard on the ad lib spray of notes that kicks off the title cut on Reynolds's solo record. (It's a noise that makes one long to see him teamed with Island stablemate Adrian Belew, also scheduled to

play on Midler's record.) "Halfway through that intro," says Reynolds, "I thought, 'This isn't working, play anything.' The result sounds like a guitar falling off a chair. But the thing that originally attracted me to the tune, when I heard it on this old Dan Hicks record, was this bizarre, beautiful violin solo. I knew I couldn't compete with that."

Another signpost sound that Sadkin and Reynolds keep handy is heard on "Demolition Man," from Grace Jones's *Nightclubbing*, where Reynolds departed from habit to pluck out the chords finger-picking-style. In fact, Barry, who uses heavy Ernie Ball strings (.010 or .011 gauge) recently abandoned the piec-trum altogeter and tends to use his forefinger for rhythm playing, his thumb for soloing. Asked to name his favorite instrumentalists, he cites not guitar players but Junior Walker, Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. Reynolds can afford to play dumb about technique; his flawless instinct shines through every cut on *I Scare Myself*, from the melting slide lines of "Times Square" and spare acoustic of "Bold Fenian Man" (recorded after numerous shots of cognac) to the sizzling figures of "I Scare Myself." The way his versatile guitar work is married to tenderly phrased vocals and literate but understated lyrics more than makes him a peer of the stars he's helped out. His loop now is London to Nassau to New York to L.A., and those motorway blues are parked firmly in the past. **M**

# BORN IN THE STUDIO,



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Dolby, from pg. 91

things on top of the backing tracks, until I was grabbed by a new direction.

"As a result I made a vow never to record demos up to that standard again. I like to leave a lot of qualities unknown, because the most exciting thing is the *exploration*. Adrenalin is very important.

With the album out and a whole new level of resources at his disposal, Dolby is moving ahead. Three videos have been done based on songs from *Wireless*, the most recent of which ("Radio Silence") he not only wrote, but directed and edited as well. A new single called "She Blinded Me With Science" is finished. And there are even plans afoot to tour his one-man stage show, in which Dolby uses a hodgepodge of hardware—including a Micromoog, Solina string and Roland four-voice synths, the Wave computer, PPG and Simmons digital drums, two vocoders, echo units, mixers, computer-synchronized video and film projectors and a custom-modified 1952 U.S.A.F. compression test kit (don't ask)—to achieve a crazy hybrid of rock 'n' roll progression and conceptual art.

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**CONSOLES 32X8, 24X8, 16X4.**

continued from pg. 92

**Musician:** Yes, cameras and pedals.

**Levin:** Oh yes. Well, I do have a camera set up on a tripod behind me on the stage with a shutter release among the bass effect pedals, so I can shoot the band or the audience while I'm playing. I also keep a spare camera nearby for the odd candid shot.

**Musician:** Why is that? Are you exploring the aesthetic connection between photojournalism and rock music—with the audience as performer?

**Levin:** No. I just like to take pictures.

**Musician:** Oh. You mentioned that there's a difference between being in a backup band and being a member of a band.

**Levin:** Yes, but not as big a difference as you might expect. On the road there's no difference at all. You're told when to show up, and you show up and try to play your best. It doesn't matter whose band it is. On albums I have some input even if I'm just a sideman. The bass part can lead to a change in the arrangement, and I can suggest changes in tempos, sections and the like. But, of course, with Crimson I'm much more involved.

**Musician:** How?

**Levin:** Well, musically we're each able to try out anything we want. The group has room for experimenting in rehearsals as well as on the road. And even on the records. Also I have some say in the overall production and mixing of the album, which has a lot to do with the final product. I'm in on such decisions as the concept of the album. And the choice of studio. And which photographer should take the group pictures. And what color the album cover will be. (John Lennon never asked me about that!) And how many amps to rent and whether we need more lights for the next tour and how much the album is over budget and whether we can afford band jackets and who should do the next interview. That's a big difference—now I'm expected to do interviews. Now that I think about it, maybe I was better off as a sideman.

**Musician:** Maybe King Crimson could hire you as a sideman.

**Levin:** No. We couldn't afford me.

**Musician:** Well, tell me, do you have any advice for other bass players who might be just starting out?

**Levin:** Yes. Never believe anything you read in music magazines. It's mostly the ramblings of worn-out musicians who've just come back from a month in the studio or a year on the road. Anyone who'd base his career on that is crazy.

**Musician:** Hmm, that's very interesting. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

**Levin:** They always ask that at the end of the interview. Yes, I'd like to say hello to my Mom, and tell my wife I'll be home for dinner at seven.

**Musician:** You are home.

**Levin:** I was just kidding. Where's your sense of humor?

**Musician:** You know, you're not the easiest person to interview?

**Levin:** Oh, I'm not that bad. And you're getting much better at it, if I do say so myself. Go ahead, ask that one last succinct question that will perfectly finish up the interview.

**Musician:** Well, you know Tony, I have been a fan of King Crimson for a long time—I grew up listening to them. And I think the new album is really great. Both I and the readers would like to know what we can expect in the future from King Crimson.

**Levin:** Beats me. ☒

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**Kahne, from pg. 92**

Automatt, a large room (thirty feet by fifty feet) with a Trident 32-track board—he spends little more than an hour getting the sound right, then begins cutting tracks at a tremendous pace. He needs to get five basic tracks completed each day, so everything is recorded live in the studio in a maximum of three takes. Once all the basic tracks are complete, Kahne overdubs lead and background vocals and a bare minimum of additional instrumental parts. The lead vocal on Translator's "Everywhere That I'm Not" is a first take from beginning to end.

In the studio, Kahne does everything but play the music. "I'm real independent in the studio. I go get my own equipment out of the equipment room and I clean up my own sessions and I do all my own seconding and thirding and firsting as the engineer, which is an inconvenience. I never use more than three rolls of two-inch tape (Scotch 250). I use about four reels of ¼-inch for the mix (also Scotch 250) and I'll use the delay tape from someone else's album for my tape delay. Obviously you can't be picky about equipment. If you've got a certain reverb, you've got to use it and make the best of it. After I've been recording for fourteen hours and then I have to clean up a room, it's about all I can stand. But it's the only way I can keep the cost down. If you have to hire an engineer, you may as well forget it 'cause you're going to have to pay the guy—even someone mediocre—around \$5,000. So I don't even think about that."

(Despite his somewhat cavalier attitude towards gear, Kahne does have some favorite toys: the Eventide Harmonizer 949, the Lexicon 224 digital delay, an EMT reverberation unit and Ursa Major's Space Station combo echo-reverb device. He's also been known to use the spring reverb from a Fender amp when the studio reverb unit is not to his satisfaction.)

Kahne's wham-bam-thank-you ma'am approach to recording has certainly paid off. The records he has produced—*It's A Condition* by Romeo Void, *Heartbeats And Triggers* by Translator, *Condition Red* by the Red Rockers, *The*

*World We Live In* by Voice Farm, plus soon to be released efforts by Rank & File, No Sisters and the Pop-O-Pies—all share a certain emotionally vibrant quality. These records have a slightly raw, gutsy magic that links them to the 60s records of groups like the Byrds, Big Brother & the Holding Company, the Beau Brummels and even the early Beatles.

This is because Kahne is working the way the producers who cut records in the 50s and 60s worked. "They didn't have the tracks to do it any other way," he says. "I don't know whether or not their conception of it was that they were working quickly. I think they were just working normally. Your band rehearsed, you came in, you played and it got recorded. And you'd be done. Maybe the fidelity wasn't as good. But a record like 'She Loves You'... you could not say that record lacked anything!"

Kahne's emphasis on music and feeling over technology grows out of his background as both an arranger and a performer. At eighteen, Kahne decided he wanted to learn how to arrange for big bands. "So I got some books and did theory work and learned how music worked from a purely intellectual standpoint." He played in several rock bands and "took lessons on every instrument—piano, guitar, bass, string bass, cello, French horn, trumpet, sax, flute, percussion. I did that purely to learn the instruments so I could arrange for them." Frustrations with producers while recording some mid-70s albums as half of a rock duo, Voudrouis & Kahne, led him to try production himself. A demo of "Drivin'" he produced for Pearl Harbor & the Explosions sold 25,000 copies as a single on 415 and led to a Warner Bros. contract for the band.

Surprisingly, Kahne's ability to make incredibly cheap albums has not yet endeared him to the major labels. Aside from producing Pearl Harbor's debut LP for Warner Bros., most of his work has been for small, alternative labels like 415 and Slash. He laughs about his dealings with one established band that was considering having him produce their album for a major label. "I got a chance to produce an album that had a \$110,000 budget. The band asked me how much I thought the record would cost and I said I couldn't imagine spending more than \$45,000 and that included payments to the musicians. And they looked at me like I was a complete idiot. That was actually the wrong thing to say. I should have said, 'Oh yeah, I think we could come in at \$110,000.'"

Kahne didn't get that job. It didn't really bother him though. In the interim he's produced six albums at a total cost of much less than \$100,000. "The other band's album was started in June of 1981," he laughs. "They still haven't finished it." ☒

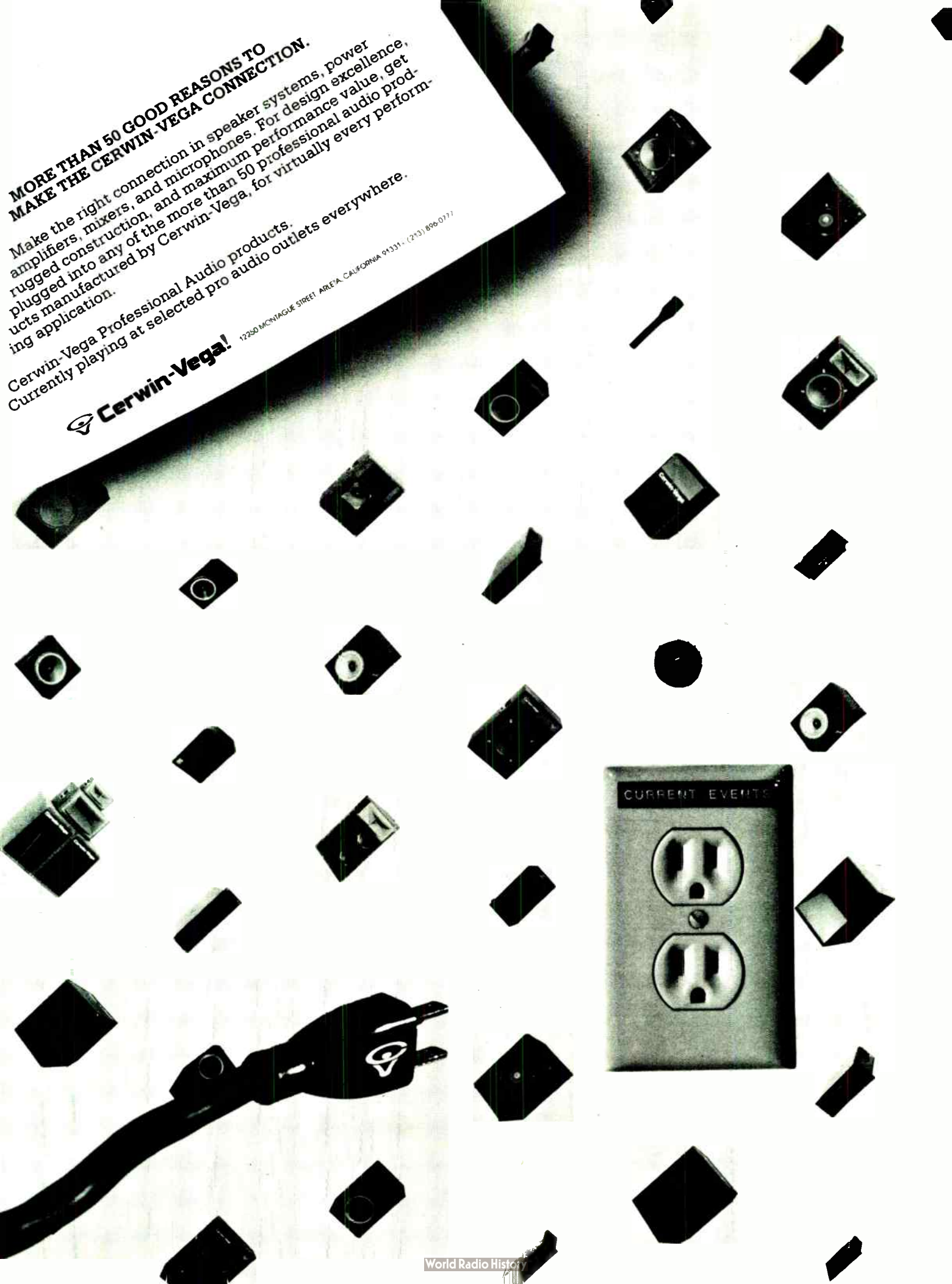


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# RECORD REVIEWS

## Joni Mitchell

### *Wild Things Run Fast* (Geffen)



After a number of awkward, adventurous, but disappointing albums, Joni Mitchell's new record is a welcome surprise: a lovely

and unaffected pop album. *Wild Things Run Fast* is a cycle of songs about time and (what else?) love, almost a progression of *Court And Spark* ten years on (though it seems to draw equally on the strengths of *Blue* and *Hejira*). With all the masks and the mannerisms and distances of *Mingus*, *Hissing Of Summer Lawns* and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* put aside, this is a return to plain, simple speech, sly autobiography and well-placed gossip.

Mitchell has always been a diarist; her albums elaborate journals of that year's events. She began as one of a number of autobiographical, self-referential songwriters who tended to write themselves into every song, carefully crafting a main character, a readily identifiable "I." It insured that the main character (the artist) would always be larger than the songs. When you hear "Big Yellow Taxi," even performed by some mushman in a bar, it's impossible to avoid the image of Joni Mitchell standing in the kitchen hearing the screen door slam.

Their experiences gathered up, bundled into song, these songwriters (James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Carly Simon...) often became translators of life or experiences for their listeners (or at least for those listeners who needed their own lives or experiences explained to them). "It seems like whenever I'm going through something, Joni's going through the same thing," ran an early ad for one of Mitchell's records—almost condemning her to a lifetime of playing to neurotic college girls.

But as most of her peers and fellow travelers have turned their art and their explorations into simple (or not-so-simple) craftsmanship or mythologized themselves into inaccessible corners, Mitchell has continued to grow and

evolve while still actively mining her life for her art, still reviewing her heart and questioning her own motives with an adolescent's zeal tempered with the maturity of age. Her (artistic) mistakes have continually been those of over-, never under-achievement and—more than any of her peers—she has sharpened and refined her musical language until it's now easily a match for her verbal gifts (a result not only of her taste in sidemen but her ability to learn from them).

Mitchell has never been a particularly gifted or memorable melodist. Since *Blue*, she's more or less given up standard song form for extended meditations and monologs, with unusual chordings and progressions following her language and her thoughts through all sorts of slippery turns. When, on "Chinese Cafe," the opening cut on her new album, she sings about sitting with friends playing the jukebox late at night, and she suddenly slips into a rendition of "Unchained Melody," the effect is startling—it's not like hearing someone go from singing one song to singing another; it's like hearing someone in the midst of a normal conversation suddenly burst into full-throated song.

But if melody has fallen by the wayside, she's put her talents to bringing very personal colors and dynamics to play on the inner harmonies of her songs, to the way different chords move against her voice. Though the new album is melodically similar to *Court And Spark* and *Hejira*, musically it's much richer than anything she's attempted before. She seems to have rooted herself not only in Charles Mingus' voicings but in the texture and spaciousness of Miles Davis' late 60s albums (*In A Silent Way* and *Filles De Kilimanjaro*); and, instead of making an aesthete's ersatz jazz album, she's expanded and enriched her own sense of pop in ways that no one since Tim Hardin has even tried.

Her past arrangements were rich but often static, the dynamics coming from the sound of the instruments against Mitchell's voice—Jaco Pastorius' bass, Tom Scott's sax, Larry Carlton's guitar. Yet here the band actively swings and swoops, more playful and more muscular than on any of her albums, the horns

jumping into high registers the way her voice used to skip up octaves on her early records. It's a quintessential Joni Mitchell band, complete with that fat, resonant bass (here played by Larry Klein), high chorded guitar (Larry Carlton and Steve Luthaker), rolling drums (usually played by John Guerin) and swelling saxes (most notably played by Wayne Shorter), but they sometimes manage to sound as smooth as the Teddy Wilson Orchestra (backing Ella Fitzgerald) and sometimes they sound like... well, like the Pretenders.

Earlier attempts at rock weren't lame as much as they were half-hearted. When, on "California," she sang "Make me feel good, rock 'n' roll band, I'm your biggest fan," she sounded coy and not entirely convincing. At least on her own music, there was always the sense that a solid beat might actually knock her over. Yet here she's in full control—there's not even a sense of her standing her ground, she moves right along with the beat, reveling in it, from the stuttered new-wave guitar intro of "Wild Things Run Fast" to the reggaefied "Solid Love." Only on a thrown away and slightly rewritten version of "You're So Square (Baby I Don't Care)" does the beat get in her way...and there only because she seems to be having more fun than the band.

She's never sung as playfully, as assuredly and as offhandedly as here. The primness, the brittle sense of her reining herself in, keeping herself in check (the way she appeared in *The Last Waltz*) has disappeared, and she seems to be enjoying herself, more intent on the seriousness of good talk, good conversation than on the seriousness of art with a capital A, edging her way through a light blues like "Moon At The Window," winking through a coy "Be Cool," treading lightly through "Love," a "Slim Slow Slider"-ish song adapted from one of Saint Paul's letters to the Corinthians ("When I was a child, I spoke like a child/ But when I became a woman, I put away childish things.").

No one is ever likely to cover these songs, anymore than someone is likely to repaint one of Paul Klee's pictures. The songs, the performances, are finished, full and strong! — *Brian Cullman*



## Dire Straits

**Love Over Gold** (Warner Bros.)



When I first noticed that "Telegraph Road," the opening track to *Love Over Gold*, clocked in at just over fourteen minutes, I was

vaguely apprehensive. When that fourteen minutes kicked off with a slow swell of strings before Mark Knopfler began singing, "A long time ago came a man on a track," I began to get alarmed. After the overly ambitious *Making Movies*, any sign of approaching pretentiousness naturally seemed to bode ill, so you can imagine my surprise when "Telegraph Road" not only lived up to its portentous opening noises but actually surpassed them.

Although Knopfler started off with the slow build-up, he nonetheless managed to forestall the inevitable climax by slowly inflating and deflating the song's progressive bulk. As the lyrics jumped from the distant past to the present, then periodically foreshadowed a troubled future, the music played off false climax against false climax while Knopfler's guitar modulated the ongoing tension. By the time he had driven the song to its cathartic conclusion, Knopfler had miraculously translated the decline of industrial England into the Dire Straits equivalent of Springsteen's "Jungleland." My misgivings having completely evaporated, I didn't even wait for the end of the side to replay the song.

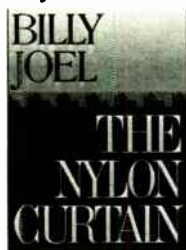
*Love Over Gold* is one of those unexpected surprises, an album which by rights should overreach yet nonetheless manages to grasp everything it sets out after. From the brokenhearted sociology of "Telegraph Road" to the determined mysticism of "Love Over Gold," Knopfler is both convincing and evocative, catching the music in the sway of his words and pulling both to a powerfully affecting conclusion. For the most part, you don't even have to follow the lyrics to get caught in the sweep of the songs, so rich are the performances. But with the lyric sheet in hand, the songs take on a depth and sensibility that recall mid-60s Dylan—a dangerous comparison to make, but wholly justified.

As intense and involving as the bulk of *Love Over Gold* is, perhaps the best moments come with the acid humor of "Industrial Disease." While "Telegraph Road" plays on the tragedy of post-industrial Britain, this song blithely plays the same situation for comedy, complete with a Rex Harrison-ish doctor's voice and such deadpanned observations as "Two men say they're Jesus/ One of them must be wrong...." Few groups could hope to capture the epic sensibility *Love Over Gold* delivers

almost offhand; fewer still could balance that sensibility with such delicious black humor. If I weren't so suspicious of unqualified raves, I'd say this was the album that assures Dire Straits a place in rock history. As it is, I'll merely suggest that you could do a lot worse among current releases, and let history decide for itself. — J.D. Considine

## Billy Joel

**The Nylon Curtain** (Columbia)



pop music's past with his own indelible melodic idiosyncracies. At the same time, his somewhat grim lyrical outlook—wherein his native Long Island serves as a metaphor for every dank-grey, end-of-the-American-rainbow *mis en scene* under the big black sun—occasionally meets those eternal synthetic hooks head on in a glorious rush of modern Americana that, at least in terms of its effect, parallels Gershwin's gift for elevating the commonplace to pop art's loftier realms ("Say Goodbye To Hollywood"). As usual, *The Nylon Curtain* contains a couple of classics in this genre, a style that Billy Joel and Elton John can still claim as their own exclusive turf.

Two songs on side one are about as fine as anything Joel's ever done, and what with several major rock stars making "personal" statements these days about society, economics, etc., it's interesting to find Joel doing so without "going acoustic" or soft; rather, he and producer Phil Ramone are at the height of their powers of pop pastiche. "Allentown" opens with factory sounds and closing-time whistles blowing, then shifts into a staccato, eighth-note rock tattoo, as the singer wails, "We're waiting here in Allentown/ But they've taken all the coal from the ground/ And the union people crawled away"—and the way Joel worries that last syllable, with melismatic references to the Spinners' great former lead singer Philippe Wynne ("Could It Be I'm Falling In Love"), burrows into the great American aural super-ego like a dentist's probe. On "Goodnight Saigon," sounds of a jungle chopper melt into the singer doing his best Scott Mackenzie imitation (cf. "If You're Going To San Francisco," 1967) to complete the mood. This is, of course, Joel's Vietnam opus, but to his credit, he doesn't point fingers or play politics; rather the song and its plaintive unison chorus ("We said we'd all go down together") evoke the emotional hopelessness and lost feeling of that era.

Joel's all-time favorite production sound is the Beatles' late-60s approach, circa *Sgt. Pepper* through *Abbey Road*. He mates this influence with a slickly twisting melody of his own on "Surprises," an eerie rumination on his own career; on "Laura," he manages to slip in a fleeting reference to CS&N's old chestnut "Our House," while venting his spleen on a sometime lover who "has a very hard time/ All her life has been one long disaster." Although this kind of highly polished album presents songs more as aural landscapes than as the sounds of a real band, Joel's combo musicians perform their appointed tasks admirably, especially Liberty DeVitto, a very hard-hitting and vastly underrated rock drummer. In fact, the only danger facing the listener here is when Joel's taut grimness momentarily lapses into the maudlin, as on "Where's The Orchestra," a "Send In The Clowns"-style weeper that's, well, a little too existential for my taste. Otherwise, *The Nylon Curtain* hangs together as Billy Joel's most serious and accomplished effort to date. —Crispin Cioe

## Donald Fagen

**The Nightfly** (Warner Bros.)



It has to come to this. Steely Dan is down to just Donald Fagen. Whatever contribution Walter Becker was making to those last couple of albums is not apparent by his absence. Everything here is Dannish. There is the mandatory extrapolated blues number ("Green Flower Street") an ode to a mysterious Oriental seductress. There are the *Aja* harmonies and Tom Scott horns. There are the usual guitarists continuing *Gauche's* trend toward staying back among the keyboards. There are the standard references to Caribbean hotels, shady characters and lunk-headed gringo tourists. There is Gary Katz's smooth production.

But for the first time the old tricks seem like tricks. By now we've caught on to Fagen's sly way of substituting nouns that sound funny in a song ("zombie," "the Eagles," etc.) for generic terms. So instead of saying he's got plenty of coffee and cigarettes, Fagen's got "plenty of java and Chesterfield Kings." But disguises—lyrical or musical—can't hide a dull idea and if one digs beyond the attractive surface, half of these songs disappear.

The real shocker is Fagen's version of Dion's "Ruby Baby." At first it sounds like a hip Steely Dan song. Then recognition sinks in and you laugh, realizing that the composer has extrapolated and spiced up a corny oldie till it sounds like

a track from *Aja*. Even the trite lyrics ("Like a ghost I'm gonna haunt you") sound wry and menacing with the singer's familiar snide delivery. It's enlightening to see how the Steely Dan method can make an empty song sound as if it contains a great deal. But then an uncomfortable notion registers: what if some of those classic Steely Dan songs were, at heart, equally empty? It's an awful thought and, on consideration, it passes. Those old records are still terrific. No, this is just a bad patch, not a cause for revisionist history.

Not that Fagen's album is without rewards. "I.G.Y." and "Green Flower Street" are both solid songs with top-notch vocals, marred only by some truly annoying synthesizer tones.

"New Frontier" is a witty description of

a Camelot-era teen party in dad's bomb shelter. But there, as on the contemporary adolescent reverie "Maxine," it seems Fagen can only manage optimism when speaking in the voice of a naive youth. One doesn't expect the worldly cynic to embrace romance with both eyes closed, but a taste of the scarred humanity of "Any Major Dude" or even "Hey Nineteen" would surely be welcome here. "Maxine," for all its affected callowness might even come close if Fagen did not strip the vocal of any trace of vulnerability by burying it under layers and layers of texturing. The same sort of padding is evident in the multiple keyboards, to the point that when an acoustic piano finally leaps up in the mix (on "Ruby Baby") it's a cause for celebration.

The radio jingle chorus of "The Night Flies," the silly galloping rhythm of "New Frontier" and the marimba groove of "Goodbye Looks" all suggest that Fagen wants his music to be as funny as his words. By the time we hit "Walk Between The Raindrops"—a hotel lounge band break-song too exact to be even ironic—one wonders if Fagen has, like Tom Waits, turned into one of his characters.

This album is a disappointment because Donald Fagen is usually so good and because the standards he's set for himself are so high. That it's still better than most rock records is beside the point. After I write this review I'll keep playing it, hoping to find a heart I've missed—hoping that the failure is not Fagen's failure to communicate but mine to understand. And hard-core fans can be thankful for two good additions to the Dan canon. He may be a little tired now, but as long as the guy can come up with lines like "You say there's a race of men in the trees? Thanks for calling," I'll keep listening and hoping for the best.  
*Bill Flanagan*

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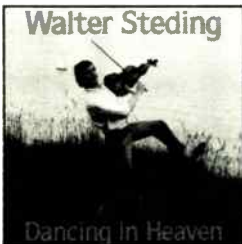
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sive powers of swing, a signature alto sound and a finger on the pulse of black musical heritage. After all, Blythe is one of the few avant-garde players with a major record contract who also comfortably fills the gap between the Apollonian and Dionysian extremes of contemporary jazz. Just because Blythe fell conveniently into the path of a handful of zealous critics (mind you, I didn't say overzealous) and became something of a mini-media creation shouldn't prevent one from enjoying his fervently boiling music. You could do a lot worse.

I mean, so what if Blythe's solos have become increasingly stylized, facile and generally very predictable ("Excuse me, time to hit my low B flat and navigate that good old convoluted ascending pattern..."), that complacency has begun to creep into that spot formerly occupied by a more searching soul. Okay, shut up, we all know that your conception of Blythe has been tainted by the memory of those smoldering nights down at the Tin Palace when he was just breaking into the N.Y.C. scene....

So what about the album? Well, it's quite good—slick but powerfully accessible. While it's not as exploratory as *Illusions*, it holds up well with his other Columbias. "Elaborations" is a sparkling, catchy tune; the unlikely "One





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Mint Julep" actually sounds fresh (Blythe has a penchant for reviving tunes previously in the throes of *rigor mortis*); and what "Metamorphosis," "Shadows," and "The Lower Nile" lose in spirit compared with their original India Navigation recordings, they pick up in fat ensemble feel and flawless delivery. I'm not so sure about Kelvyn Bell's guitar solos, but his comping is right on. Bob Stewart's tuba and Abdul Wadud's cello are, as always, superb, even brilliant. Though I'd rather hear Steve McCall's subtle sizzle, I'm getting used to Bobby Battle's gladiatorial perspective, and yes, there's only one band this time out. Now, not to be didactic myself, but come on and let's prove to Columbia that solid, soulful, mainstream (oops, there I said it, but I call 'em like I see 'em) music can still sell records. —  
*Cliff Tinder*

## The Roches

**Keep On Doing** (Warner Bros.)



With a hearty opening *a cappella* blast of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" that at once pokes girlish fun at operatic pre-tension and

reconfirms the unbeatable beauty of three gifted voices stacked up in heavenly grandeur, *Our Sisters of Harmony and Humor*—Greenwich Village parish—return with a third, immensely satisfying offering blessed once again by the *simpatico* production presence of Robert Fripp. Unlike producer Roy Halee who resorted to the tip-toe clutter of session men on 1980's *Nurds*, Fripp understands that the Roches' delicate balance of mischievously snappy patter, quiet desperate romance and angelic cooing is its own reward. For *Keep On Doing*, as he did on the Roches' eponymous '79 debut, he clears the studio air of all but the most discreet atmospheric effects and back-up tricks and lets his charges simply keep on doing what they do best.

It is a tribute to Fripp's touch that you hardly even notice the subtle pump of Tony Levin's bass here, the dash of Bill Bruford's percussion there, so striking is the Roches' own rich blend of voices and acoustic guitars. "On The Road To Fairfax County," a compelling tale of fugitive romance written by fellow Village tunesmith David Massengill, finds Maggie, Terre and Suzzy treating the song's alternating joy and sorrow with a lullaby tenderness sparked by the churchy resonance of their harmonies. "Losing True," like the first album's "Hammond Song," features the poignant whine of a Frippertronics guitar, highlighting the song's deep sense of loss yet artfully contrasting the seam-

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less choral steps in the singing. But it does not take much more than those voices and the jaunty contrapuntal pluck of some guitars to strike home the complications of the musical-chair love affair in "Steady With The Maestro."

The light, almost ticklish humor running through the Roches' repertoire comes from the seemingly ridiculous pairing of such natural, at times sobering grace, with smart-alecky story lines like "Largest Elizabeth In Thé World" and the spritely team cheer-in-full harmony "Want Not, Want Not." But it is this mesh of the unexpected—note the clever intrusion of grunge guitar and eerie synthesizer in "Keep On Doing What You Do"—with such sensitively organic music that makes the Roches more than

just superior folkies. Here's to the simple pleasures of *Keep On Doing* and the places they can take you. — *David Fricke*

**Ronald Shannon Jackson & the Decoding Society**  
**Man Dance** (Antilles)



breakthroughs, or to add that the Dec-

I doubt it's still necessary to explain that Shannon Jackson is the drummer who pushed Coleman, Taylor and Ulmer to their personal

oding Society is the urban melting pot of rhythm and dissonance he heats and stirs. It's obvious from the opening shuffle who the drummer is and obvious too—especially when first the basses, then the guitar and finally the horns pick up the drummer's roll and ride it on out, as they do on the concluding "Alice In The Congo"—that this is the drummer's band.

The Society's third album is sleeker and hugs the turns better than *Nasty*, is more expansive and mixed hotter than *Eye On You*. The extremely good separation lets you hear more of Vernon Reid's guitar chatter, more of the rhythmic crosstalk between the two electric basses. Jackson's ensemble writing here is very ambitious, and he supplements the scoring trickery arrangers have always resorted to in order to make a small group sound bigger with guitar tremolo and reverb, studio ambience and layerings of meter and rhythm. A wet Henry Scott trumpet solo, a string-popping bass line, a fiery guitar lick repeated ad infinitum—none of this very compelling in itself—all fall together beautifully on "Catman." The two horns are used as highlighters for the most part, but saxophonist Zane Massey makes striking use of what solo opportunity he gets, offering a glimpse of flexed tenor muscle on the high tension ballad "When Spirits Speak," exploiting a multi-divider well during his alto break

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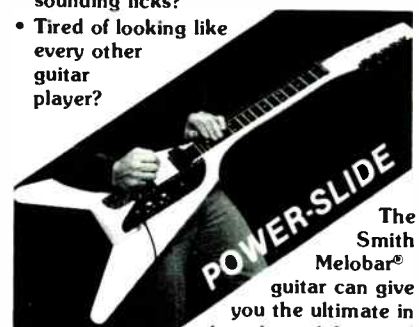
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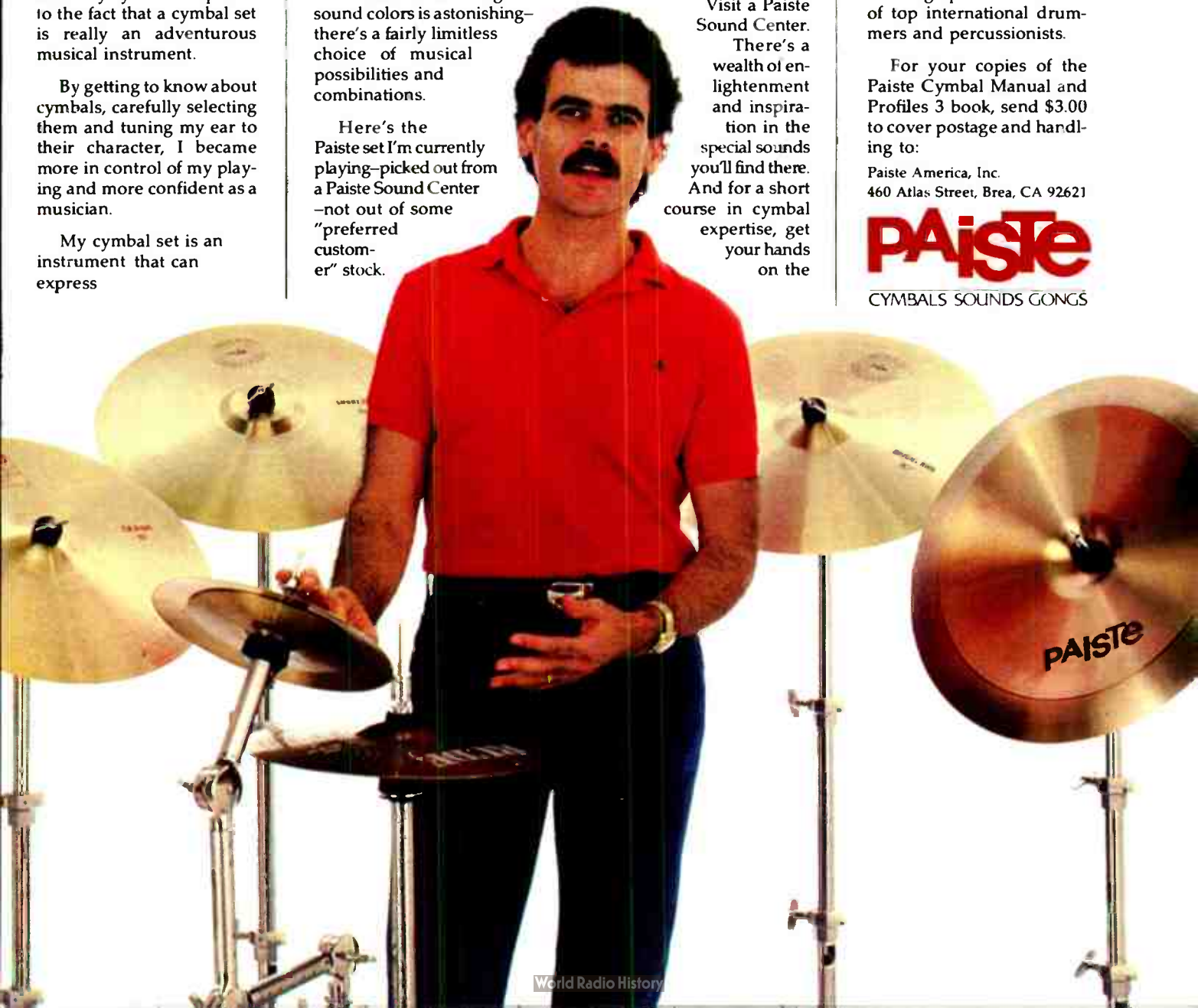
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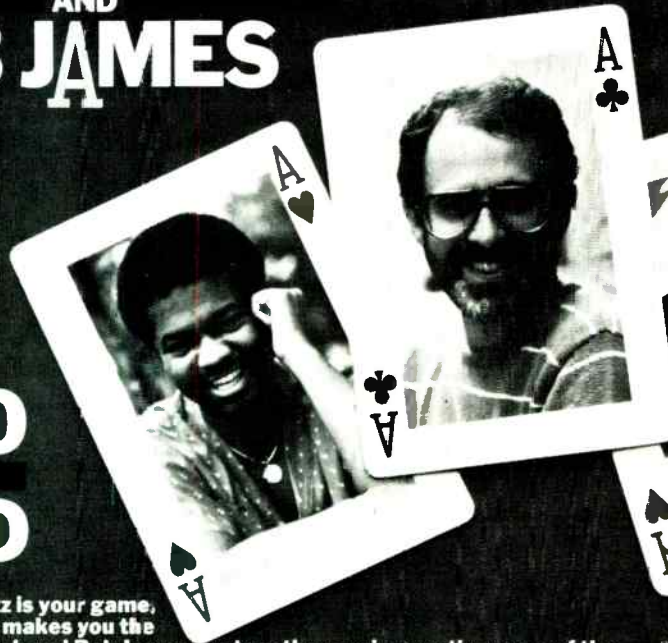
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### Linda Ronstadt *Get Closer* (Asylum)



After going out on some limbs—trilling winsomely as Mabel in *The Pirates Of Penzance*, recording (and putting aside) an LP of pop

standards, taking a fling at new rock on *Mad Love*—Linda Ronstadt is bidding to reclaim her certificate as All-Around Camper. Partly a rummage through a well-stocked carton of old 45s (The Exciters, Billy Joe Royal, The Knickerbockers, Ike & Tina Turner), partly a sampler of sweetly sung ballads and clunky rock 'n' roll, *Get Closer* is in the mix 'em up format of *Living In The U.S.A.* It's as though she scooted behind a curtain after each number and slipped into another costume: first chiffon, then leather, then calico....

Her singing, on Jim Webb's "Easy For You To Say," Kate McGarrigle's "Talk To Me Of Mendocino" and the Royal hit "I Knew You When," has a honeyed clarity that's been enhanced by her sojourn into operetta, and Dolly Parton's "My Blue Tears" (a track from the aborted Ronstadt-Parton-Emmylou Harris album and recorded in a zippier version by Goldie Hawn in 1972) is touchingly rendered, with only Harris' acoustic guitar backing the three-part harmony. But even the effective parts of *Get Closer* are glitched by predictability. Anyone familiar with "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress" knows beforehand exactly how she'll sing it, where she'll ascend from a hush to a holler. It's a controlled, fine performance; it just has no surprises.

More frustrating is the approach to those perceptively selected 60s rock and R&B songs. It displays a certain wit for Ronstadt, subject of some specula-

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tion in gossip columns and supermarket tabloids, to cover Lee Dorsey's "People Gonna Talk"; and "Tell Him" is a girl-group manifesto she should have gotten around to years ago (before Josie Cotton beat her to it), but her players' idea of rock doesn't capture the rollicking New Orleans gusto (or the assertive spunk) necessary to make them more than shrewd A&R decisions.

There's something formal and tight-collared about the music on *Get Closer*. The musicians, except for agile keyboard player Bill Payne, sound determined to have some fun without getting their cuffs soiled. In such party-poopng company, Ronstadt overcompensates by going into her routine of rearing back and shouting out, singing in italics, snapping out phrases with brittle yelps. *FM*'s live "Tumbling Dice" and most of *Mad Love* proved she could adapt to rock without being strident or mimetic. Songs like the shrill, static title cut and the duet with James Taylor on "It's Gonna Work Out Fine" revert to her old rule of throat: when the beat gets hard, respond with a stiff belt. —*Mitchell Cohen*

**T-Bone Burnett**  
*Trap Door* (Warner Bros.)



T-Bone Burnett's *Trap Door* is really the only choice to usher in Warner Bros.' innovative six-song, specially priced album format. A total-

ly satisfying refinement of the spare and evocative style first introduced on the overlooked *Truth Decay* (Takoma) album, this little gem offers us six exceptional songs and improved sonic fidelity for a list price of \$5.99 (printed on the jacket to protect the unwary consumer).

Burnett's subtle command of the genre and delicate touch give him the freedom to successfully experiment with what could be fairly conventional rock/rockabilly styles in the hands of others. The casual satiric flavor of "A Ridiculous Man" is heightened by a clever rethink of the classic descending guitar riff. An understated vocal commentary and brilliantly efficient musical arrangement magically transform the Jule Styne/Leo Robin standard "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend." The tight cross-grain of acoustic and electric guitar textures pumping out of a balanced mix laced with pristine echo and reverb lend a special sense of urgency to flat-out rockers like "I Wish You Could Have Seen Her Dance."

Besides proving once again that he is the *real* stylistic link to the Burnett (Johnny and Dorsey) rock 'n' roll legacy, T-Bone gives us a lesson in how to show your smarts without veering off into pretentious buffoonery. Which is in turn

reinforced by his label's intelligence in releasing a less expensive LP with six sure-fire winners instead of a conventional album replete with filler. — *J.C. Costa*

**Chico Freeman**  
*Tradition In Transition*  
(Elektra/Musician)



Chico Freeman easily has the chops and drive to become the latest Titan of the Tenor, but he's always been more interested in playing pretty for the people, with thankfully few lapses into MOR blandness or

slavish traditionalism. On *Tradition In Transition*, he attempts to define a post-free, mainstream jazz for the 80s, and if nothing else, he underscores the continuing influence of Eric Dolphy. Freeman's obvious inspiration on bass clarinet and flute, Dolphy is equally detectable in the shape of Chico's compositions, no less than three of which ("Free Association," "Each One Teach One" and "The Trespasser") merge hard-bop harmonies with Eric's up-and-down, start-and-stop, right-angle swing.

Freeman's compositional savvy and diversity are showcased throughout. "Mys-story"—part sour ballad, part day-dreamy vamp—is particularly attractive. But the finest moment here is a delightful cover version of Monk's 1959 recording of the marchy "Jackie-ing." Jack DeJohnette (who elsewhere splits the

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**VIC GARBARINI** Hot: **Charles Mingus** — *Mingus Plays Piano* (MCA/Impulse), **Joni Mitchell** — *Wild Things Run Fast* (Geffen), **Peter Gabriel** — *Security* (Geffen), **Dire Straits** — *Love Over Gold* (Warner Bros.), **Linda Ronstadt** — *Get Closer* (E/A)

**BILL FLANAGAN** Hot: **Bruce Springsteen** — *Nebraska* (Columbia), **T-Bone Burnett** — *Trap Door* (Warner Bros.), **Dire Straits** — *Love Over Gold* (Warner Bros.), **Gregory Isaacs** — *Night Nurse* (Island), **The Who** — *It's Hard* (Warner Bros.).

**J.C. COSTA** Hot: **T-Bone Burnett** — *Trap Door* (Warner Bros.), **Andy Summers/Robert Fripp** — *I Advance Masked* (A&M), **Peter Gabriel** — *Security* (Geffen), **Theonius Monk** — *Live At The El Club* (Columbia Legendary), **Squeeze** — *Argybargy* (A&M).

**FRANCIS DAVIS** Hot: **Muhal Richard Abrams** — *Blues Forever* (Black Saint), **Steve Reich** — *Tehillim* (ECM), **Arthur Blythe** — *Elaborations* (Columbia), **Sphere** — *Four In One* (Elektra/Musician), **Red Norvo** — *Trios* (Prestige).

dancing-drum chores with Billy Hart) plays piano here; shrewdly making the most of his harmonic prowess and limited keyboard technique, he captures Monk's spirit and sound uncannily. It's his best piano playing on record.

Cecil McBee has been Chico's most faithful sidekick on vinyl, and this LP serves as a reminder that he's one of the music's very best bassists. From his swaying Caribbean ostinatos on "Mystory" to his dark walking—*prowling*, really—under Freeman's explicitly Dolphian bass clarinet and Wallace Roney's trumpet on "Talkin' Trash," he gives the music its spine. — *Kevin Whitehead*

**Elvis, from pg. 24**

The condition of Elvis Presley's memory in the coming years depends upon recreating the dreams that he embodied. It requires a refusal of a world that is unequal and a willingness to battle for the ideals inherent in those dreams.

In his songs—which, for me, means in his dreams—Elvis Presley shows us a different world. It's tempting to say that he gave us that world, but that isn't true. That world is always present, as a hope or a chance, but no one, not even the true visionary who sees it clearly as Elvis did, can give it to us. Such a world must be seized and created, then preserved

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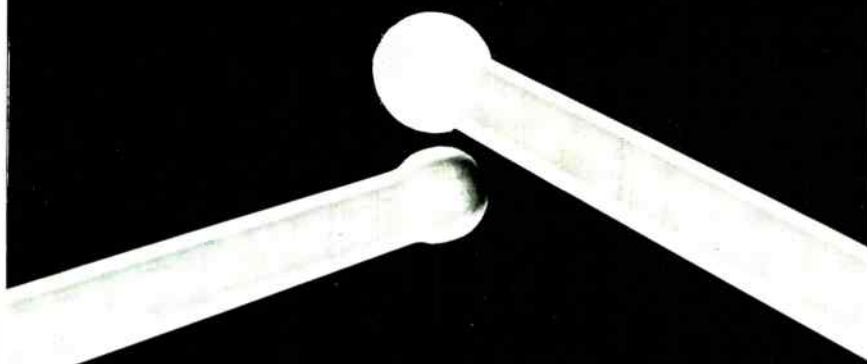


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with care and devotion by everyone who wishes to live in it. Get lazy and stop taking care, and you end up as unfortunately as Elvis did: the dream world crumbles at your feet.

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believes  
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And if we can follow that dream, wherever that dream may lead, then we will have honored Elvis Presley, and his image and music will be preserved.

But if we let our country be ripped in two, allow the spirit of fairness and equality that he represented to die, then Elvis will seem to history not a hero but only a noble fool—though even then, he'll never look as foolish as we will for letting it happen. **M**

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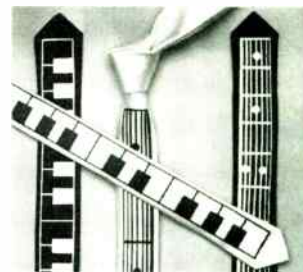
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# ROCK

By J.D. Considine

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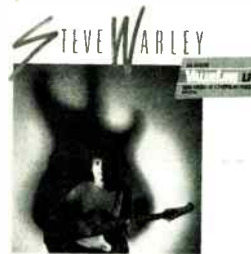
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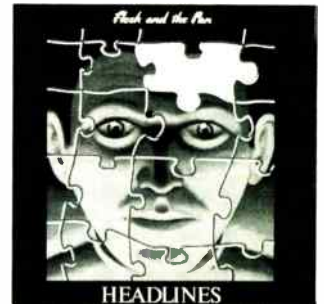
Peter Frampton



Steve Warley



Flash & the Pan



**R.E.M.**—*Chronic Town* (I.R.S.). With their poppishly direct melodies and starkly efficient guitar lines, R.E.M. seem like a lean and hungry version of the dB's at first listen. But as the songs sink in, you realize that the music is not so much hookish as simply hypnotic. Although the lyrics leave me frankly baffled, the five songs here are so completely accessible melodically that it would be hard to imagine any listener not becoming addicted eventually. In fact, the only problem with the record is that you end up wishing for a larger dose.

**Bruce Springstone**—*Live At Bedrock* (Clean Cuts single). Have you ever wondered what it would sound like if Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band did the theme from *The Flintstones*? Me neither, but Tom Chalkley and Craig Hankin have done such a remarkable job refitting the Hanna/Barbera chestnut in vintage Springsteen style, from the "when I was growin' up" intro to the Big Man sax wail at the end, that I was surprised the Boss didn't think of it himself. Funnier still is the B-side, where the original lyrics to "Take Me Out To The Ballgame" sound uncannily Springsteenian. The novelty record of the year. (Clean Cuts, P.O. Box 16264, Baltimore, MD 21210)

**Peter Frampton**—*The Art Of Control* (A&M). Funny how now that Frampton has discovered new wave, he suddenly remembered that he has a British accent.

**The Reds**—*Fatal Slide* (Stony Plain). The Reds use electronics the way great pop singers use strings—to define a mood, not to make up for lack of interest elsewhere. Which is probably why the Reds' music sounds so much more human than that of other circuit-bored

bands, not to mention infinitely more rock 'n' roll. Of course, good songs help too, and the Reds are inventive tunesmiths, although not quite as consistent as I'd like. But since the playing is generally exciting enough to take up the slack, I rarely mind. (Stony Plain, P.O. Box 861, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5J 2L8)

**Barry Reynolds**—*I Scare Myself* (Island). Reynolds' combination of kinky rhythms and obsessive lyrics has made for some hauntingly powerful songs, as anyone familiar with Marianne Faithfull's *Broken English* can attest. But as much as the title track epitomizes his creative powers, his unexpectedly lightweight voice frequently fails to deliver when competing against the ace Compass Point rhythm section, making me glad that he balances things out with some touching, if less incendiary, acoustic numbers.

**Au Pairs**—*Sense And Sensuality* (Roadrunner import). Too much of the former and not enough of the latter for my tastes, although I should add that I'm not really complaining. Granted, the rhythmic directness of the Au Pairs' first album, *Playing With A Different Sex*, added an enjoyable dancefloor urgency to their songs of sex and politics, but the lithe jazziness that has replaced it on this album seems more attuned to Lesley Woods' husky declamations. Not to mention the way the occasional vibes and horns flesh out Au Pairs' bare-bones guitar approach.

**The Scientific Americans**—*Load And Go* (ROIR cassette). As you might have guessed from the name, these are smart guys with a sense of humor and a lot of electronics. Personally, I prefer the former, which finds them opening the tape with a hokey radio show snippet, to the latter, which provides some interest-

ing noises but leads them into an absurdly trumped-up version of "Ball Of Confusion." On the whole, though, I prefer the whole thing over most of the synth stuff coming out of England. (ROIR, 811 Broadway, Suite 214, New York City, NY 10012)

**Steve Warley** (*Jive*). For a guy who sounds like Van Morrison doing the Creedence songbook, Steve Warley manages to seem pretty original. It helps that he avoids most of the obvious affectations (although he does at one point warble, "We got the mojo/ We got the gumbo"), and that he writes some very attractive melodies. On the whole, Warley leaves me entertained and eagerly waiting to see what he can really do.

**Flash & the Pan**—*Headlines* (Epic). Former Easybeats Harry Vanda, George Young and Steve Wright emerge from two albums of studio anonymity as an honest-to-God band, with surprisingly pleasant results. Unlike the first two Flash & the Pans, Wright's *sprechstimme* delivery is augmented by an occasional melody, a concession that doesn't really work, and backing vocals, which do. For the most part, the music is as wry and moody as ever, sort of like an aural version of *The Road Warrior*. Which is why I play it all the time.

**Icehouse**—*Primitive Man* (Chrysalis). As is so often the case with primitivists these days, Iva Davies has hewn his raw, uncluttered world view from the latest in high technology. By synthesizing his sonic landscapes, he gives us rough edges that are still highly finished, tribal rhythms from the global village and a sense of nature that is highly cultivated. At the same time, he never lets us forget that the first part of artifice is art.

**Altered Images**—*Pinky Blue* (Portrait).  
*continued on page 118*

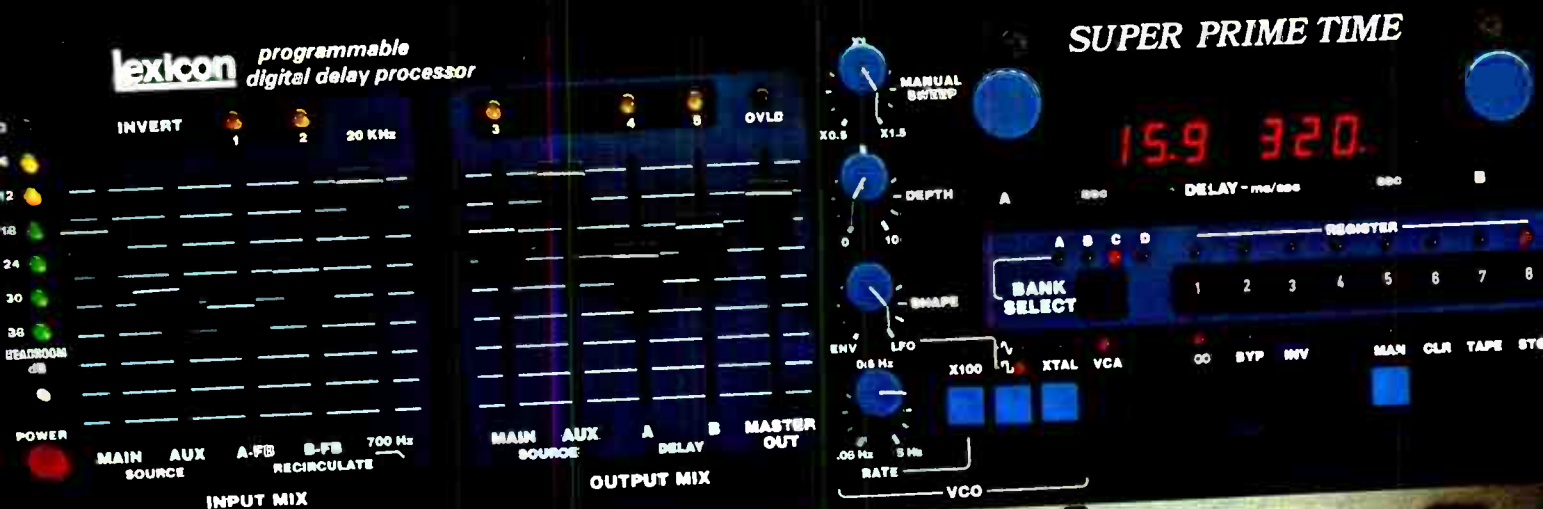


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World Radio History

# JAZZ

By Francis Davis

## S H O R T T A K E S

In no particular order, this month's new and noteworthy-for-one-reason-or-another....

**Keith Jarrett**—*Concerts* (ECM). I didn't see it myself, but I'm told that when Jarrett guested on *Today* a few years back, Jane Pauley reverently informed her viewers that the pianist makes up each note as he goes along. Well, yes and no, Jane—it's *the order they go in* he makes up, and the order they go in rather than the notes themselves that has sometimes given me qualms. So if I'm surprised that some relatively simple passages are thunderously, even clumsily executed on this three-record set, I'm even more astonished (and pleased) by the number of long improvised passages spun out with composer's logic. The first disc is available separately as *Bregenz Concerts*, though for my money, the most lyrical playing as well as the most incisive occurs midway through the Munchen event. So if you want this, you want this set.

**Sphere**—*Four In One* (Elektra/Musician). A Monk tribute even Monk might have enjoyed—loyal, sovereign, conservative, rash. Charlie Rouse and Ben Riley guarantee authenticity; Buster Williams is an asset to any date; and pianist Kenny Barron, by resisting the urge to mimic, by simply playing like no one but himself, demonstrates how all-pervasive Monk's influence remains. I'm happy this quartet tackled the more difficult Monk pieces most other jazzmen shy away from, too.

**Benny Wallace Trio With Chick Corea** (Enja/PolyGram). Another impressive, well-paced LP by a pebbly-toned tenorist who somehow combines the jagged phrasing of the 60s avant-gardists with the suavity and swagger of the great mainstreamers. Despite able assistance from Eddie Gomez and Danny Richmond, Wallace continues to experience rhythm problems, but he works hard and passionately, and here he's even gotten an honest day's work from Corea, who turns in some of his leanest, most ruffleless playing in years.

**Joe Albany**—*Portrait Of An Artist* (Elektra/Musician). Probably the best LP the elusive former Parker pianist has made since his most recent rediscovery ten years ago. Moved as I am by his somber, thinking-out-loud ballads, I'd like them

even better, I think, if there were one or two more fast-movers setting them off. And for all the mind Albany pays bass and drums, E/M might just as well have recorded him solo and saved on session fees.

**Art Hodes & Milt Hinton**—*Just The Two Of Us* (Muse). Good jazz soloists are born storytellers, but the seventy-eight-year-old pianist Hodes is even something of a raconteur, and he can hold you spellbound with his total recall of jazz piano history. He and the bassist roll off each other very nicely on this delightful program of ballads and blues. But the pressing is one of the worst I've ever heard.

**James Williams**—*The Arioso Touch* (Concord Jazz). With Blakey, Williams impressed me more as a band pianist than as a soloist, but he more than holds my interest on this trio LP (with Buster Williams and Billy Higgins). He has a flair for modalizing older tunes without distorting their pretty melodies, though I'd question the efficacy of some of his racehorse tempos.

**Jimmy Smith**—*Off The Top* (Elektra-Musician). **Charlie Earland**—*In The Pocket* (Muse). Smith's all-star gathering (George Benson, Stanley Turrentine, Ron Carter, Grady Tate) really cooks, especially on "I'll Drink To That," but the missing ingredient is the grease that used to crackle and sputter from the grooves of his old Verves and Blue Notes. This is where you'll hear Benson at his absolute best, however. The Earland (with Houston Person) is funkier but (you can't win) a lot less tasty.

**Elvin Jones**—*Earth Jones* (Palo Alto). This LP gives you more sense of the God of Thunder's power than any he has made recently, and more sense of the power he holds in reserve. But if Coltrane needed an Elvin Jones, Jones needs a Coltrane even more, and Dave Liebman and Teremaso Hino hardly fill the bill. Still, a solid modal-bop effort, and most encouraging.

**Jack Walrath**—*The Revenge Of The Fat People* (Stash). Good straight-down-the-middle bop with flashes of wit from a tight quintet sparked by tenorist Ricky Ford and bassist Cameron Brown and led by the trumpeter who played in Mingus' last band and orchestrated some of his last opuses. Walrath's own playing

and writing could use some of Mingus' vituperative spontaneity, but so could most jazz, I suppose.

**Billy Bang & Charles Tyler**—*Live At Green Space* (Anima). Not as blisteringly hot as Bang's duet with John Lindberg, but looser-limbed, better structured and just as provocative. Tyler, a former Ayler sideman, has never sounded better—on alto, baritone, even harmonica. He and folksy free jazz fiddler Bang share a penchant for minor, rhythmically charging, triplet-laden lines, and an ear for charming off-the-wall material that might sound twee in hands less stalwart than theirs ("Alouette," for example).

**Jerome Cooper**—*Root Assumption* (Anima). Ex-Revolutionary Ensemble percussionist Cooper is both minimalist and one-man-band, using bass drum, sock cymbal and African thumb and mallet instruments to create a thinking man's music thinking men so inclined could probably dance to as well. His sense of time and his hand and foot coordination are astonishing on this album-length performance, and so are many of his ideas. (Available from NMDS, 500 Broadway, New York City, NY 10012.)

**Stan Getz**—*Pure Getz*. **Woody Herman**—*Live At The Concord Jazz Festival* (both Concord Jazz). The Great Gatsby of the tenor saxophone has gradually acquired some of the eloquence and economy of expression we associate with a Hodges or Webster, and he's seldom been blessed with a rhythm section sprucer or more pulsating than the one he has on his new LP (especially the tracks with Billy Hart on drums). Not even Getz or fellow homecoming hero Al Cohn can save the current Herd from sounding mechanical and green, unfortunately.

**Sergey Kuryokhin**—*The Ways Of Freedom*. **The Ganelin Trio**—*Ancora Da Capo, Parts 1 & 2* (all Leo, via NMDS). K. is either the fastest pianist who ever lived or (my guess) the tapes have been speeded up. It hardly matters, for the effect of hearing glancing Taylor-like runs at twice the velocity and less than half the tonal weight is stunning enough to impose its own aural reality. The Ganelins are a free ("constructivist") tenor-piano-drums-and-dozens-of-other-instruments-big-and-



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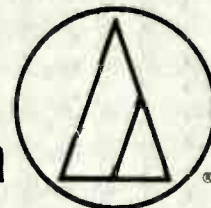
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small trio with echoes of Scriabin and a wild streak of humor I can only assume is Slavic. It was curiosity that drew me to these records from the U.S.S.R., but it's the nerve and skill of the musicians that makes me anxious to hear more, as well as reluctant to pass judgment just yet.

**Reissues:** Not many this month, but a pair of Prestige twofers are eminently worthy of mention—*The Red Norvo Trios*, resurrecting '53 and '54 sessions by one of the pithiest, most quietly interactive small groups ever, with the vibist, bassist Red Mitchell, and either Tal Farlow or the great Jimmy Raney on guitar; and *Basie Reunions*, two 1957 dates which gave some of the lesser sung Basie horns (Shad Collins, Buck Clayton, Paul Quinichette and a faltering but affecting Jack Washington) a chance to

stretch out above the All-American rhythm section (Freddie Green, Walter Page, Jo Jones and Basie surrogate Nat Pierce). Needless to say, it swings.

Next month: the new PolyGram releases, including the long-awaited *Soul Notes* and *Black Saints*.

**Rock Takes** from pg. 114

Although most of Britain's new squeaky teen pop leaves me wondering what ever happened to the Bay City Rollers, I find *Altered Images* irresistible. A lot of it surely derives from Martin Rushent's glossy production, and no doubt their ingenious distillation of Siouxsie & the Banshees' childish dissonances doesn't hurt. Mostly, though, it's because of Clare Grogan's Shirley Temple vocals, particularly as applied to nonsense like

"Song Sung Blue."

**Shoes**—*Boomerang* (Elektra). Fans of the first three Shoes albums will be happy to learn that the post-Beatles formula remains intact, with warm vocal harmonies, buzzing power chords and insistent rhythm work locked in exquisite tension. But the hooks are conspicuously absent, and, title to the contrary, none of these songs comes back to hit you by surprise.

**Novo Combo** — *The Animation Generation* (Polydor). Just like the big boys, Novo Combo is made up of faceless technicians, guys with plenty of chops and the personality of a brick. But unlike REO Journeywagon and the others, Novo Combo isn't out to make its fortune through a carefully airbrushed rehash of the last ten years of FM rock. Not in the least. Novo Combo's music is a carefully airbrushed rehash of the last three years of new wave. A big difference, you see.

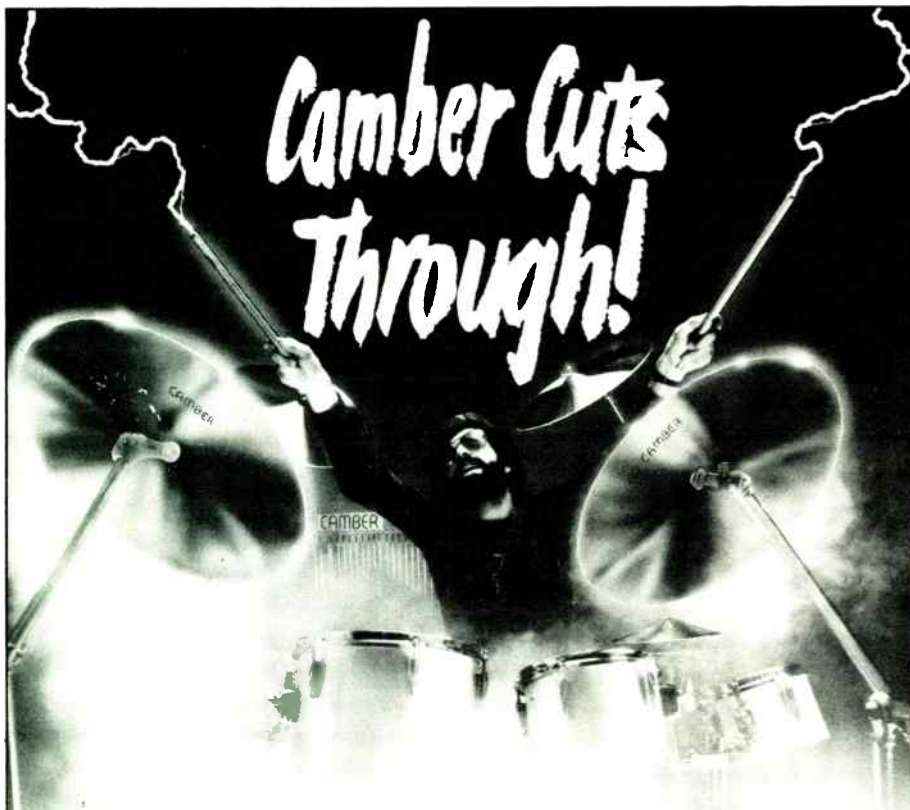
**Vandross**, from pg. 34  
instincts."

Vandross hired old friend Nat Adderley, Jr. as his keyboardist and musical director. Another old friend, Fonzi Thornton, took a sabbatical from Chic to join Vandross. Marcus Miller, Miles Davis' bassist, became Vandross' bassist and songwriting collaborator. "Never Too Much" was symptomatic of strong cuts like "Sugar And Spice" and "I've Been Working." Vandross sang his "You Stopped Loving Me," which Flack had recorded for the *Bustin' Loose* soundtrack. The album climaxed with a *tour de force*, a lung-draining version of Burt Bacharach & Hal David's "A House Is Not A Home," a 1964 hit for Dionne Warwick.

During interviews about *Never Too Much*, Vandross swore he'd wrestle Bruno Samartino for the chance to produce Aretha Franklin. Franklin called him at the studio while he was producing Cheryl Lynn. "She says, 'You know that G below high C? I don't want to go much higher than that, so keep the key in that area.' And she never raises her voice. 'And other than that, if you'll send me a tape of what you've cut before you get here, I'll be ready for you. So just do your thing. Talk to you later.' I hung up the phone, and I'm in space. She gave me artistic *carte blanche*."

"So we flew out to L.A. and I met her at the studio. I was paralyzed. She was so regular; she had on sneakers, and of course, the mink; the mink and the sneakers. She says, 'What do you want to start with?' We put on 'Jump To It.' She listened and snapped her fingers for about twenty minutes and then said, 'Yeah.' She went in there and sang, period. That was it. What you hear is one take. Most of this album is one take.

"Producing is like directing. There might be two kinds of actors. One actor, you might study the script with them and guide them through. You tell them on the



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third sentence you walk to the left and make sure the camera picks you up. And then there's Richard Pryor. What you do for Richard Pryor is just make sure the surrounding elements are correct. He has enough intuitive power and instinct to find his way around the set and use it to its maximum. With Aretha, the main thing is to make sure her back-drop is correct. She is so intuitive, so good, that that's all you have to do. The key has to be right. The groove and the background singers have to fit her. Once you do that, you've got yourself a great record before she even sings, because you know she's going to hear things correctly. She'll also surprise you and give even more depth and height to a certain section than you had planned.

"Bad Boy/Having A Party," the first single from Vandross' newest album, brings together many of the themes in his music. "Bad Boy" is an autobiographical tale of a music-mad teenager sneaking out of the house to go hear the latest sides at an all-night party. With party sounds in the background, the song slips seamlessly into Sam Cooke's classic "Having A Party," thus tying together 1962 and 1982. Vandross is now writing and singing so well that the Cooke connection makes legitimate sense.

"Yeah," he exulted, "I feel I sing a thousand times better than I used to. In terms of handling my own voice. In

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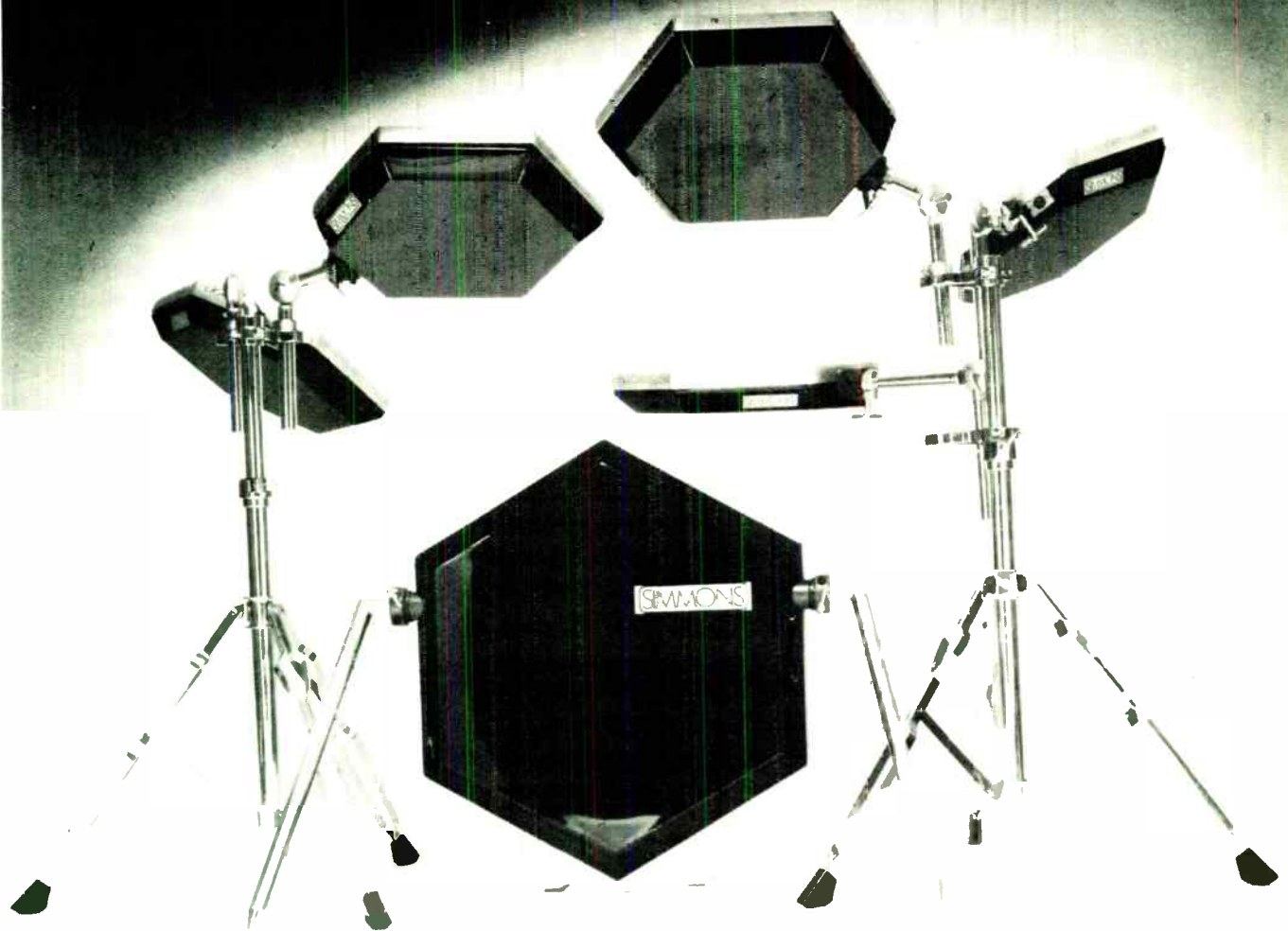
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terms of how what I'm thinking gets transmitted into what you hear. I'm no longer a victim of the highway robber along the way, along that path between your brain and the microphone. There are villains that can live in those places, and I've killed them all. They're inexperience; they're callowness; they're nervousness; they're conformity; they're the wrong priorities. The urge to impress can be the wrong priority. Singing is not coming onstage with a high note and holding it for twelve minutes and then jumping down into the first row and singing loud. It's none of that. It's the cumulative value of everything you do. If each thing you do has quality, it all adds up. I'm glad it took this long. Back then I thought I was a good singer, but I was an unrefined singer. I mean, what I was doing in the Luther days could have been the final destination for someone else, but not for me. I wanted something more." 

*continued from pg. 16*

**Beefheart:** No sense of kinship, really. I think if they want to come hear it they should, but if they don't want to, they shouldn't. I respect anybody who wants to hear something they have to go through so much hell to hear. I mean, I'm gonna holler at 'em! I'm hollering at myself, at the monster in me. It's not meant towards any humans.

**Musician:** *Is today's audience more intelligent than the one you addressed ten years ago?*

**Beefheart:** Yeah, but they're also more tedious. My records sell better than they used to but that's just because I'm becoming popular like a hood ornament or something. I have met people who actually hear the music and when that happens I ask, "Well, what did you think?" I want to know what the hell they think of it because it's just me going to the bathroom.

**Musician:** *In a very elegant way....*


**Beefheart:** The artist is he who kids himself most gracefully.

**Musician:** *Can an adventurous ear for music be learned?*

**Beefheart:** Yeah, I think it can probably be refined, although I liked Mozart the minute I heard him. I just wish I'd heard *him* perform his music. I don't want to hear somebody else's interpretation of it. The interpreters get so laid back. They always take the bite and power out of it. I heard Stravinsky conduct himself once and God, what a difference!

**Musician:** *Do you have hopes that your music will be performed by other players in the future, or are you central to the music to the point that that would be impossible?*

**Beefheart:** I expect it's impossible but I don't know if anybody's going to want to tear themselves up as much as this music demands. My band plays hard. I hate to flex and all that macho silliness but my music does take a lot of muscle.



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**Musician:** Have you ever heard your music performed by any other group?

**Beefheart:** Yeah, once. What's their name? The Tubes, yeah, the Tubes went down on one of my songs. And this British group, Magazine, did "I Love You, You Big Dummy," and they did a disgusting job. Totally missed the point! Sounded like attentive masturbation.

**Musician:** Do you attempt to stay abreast of musical trends or listen to the radio?

**Beefheart:** No! Yyyeee no! The very thought gives me an involuntary shake. You can get ear flu from pop music.

**Musician:** Why do you think the general audience tends to find your music difficult and abrasive?

**Beefheart:** Probably because they won't work hard enough to hear it.

**Musician:** If the public were more familiar with your music, say if it was played on the radio, do you think it would be more widely enjoyed?

**Beefheart:** Definitely. But it's been my experience that people who initially just ran away in horror from my music have come up to me later and were really ready to be there. I guess those are the people who are really hearing it.

**Musician:** How do you explain the adversary relationship that seems to exist between artists and their audience?

**Beefheart:** It's true that people either seem afraid of artists or they love them in that "oooh, that's wonderful" way. I saw people doing that to a Van Gogh painting that absolutely put me on the floor! I started smashing my head against the wall and all the people were calmly saying "ooh, pretty." I don't know that they meant any real harm but I don't think they could even see the painting. But then when Van Gogh was alive he wasn't treated too well, so maybe people do mean harm. They'll squash a spider! God, spiders are great. Talk about mathematics! Those things are funny.

**Musician:** How do you intend for your music to be used? What effect do you hope it might have?

**Beefheart:** I hope it gets people up and makes them move like I have to. I do it out of irritation—that's my drive. I have to do it. It's like sandpaper on a shrimp.

**Musician:** Are there days when you don't feel that drive?

**Beefheart:** I can't ever recall having a day like that. You know, I hear so damn good—I can hear through anything. No...there's never any silence. Of course if there was, I'd start screaming.

Exactly how does a musician go about mastering Beefheart's unique repertoire? Ask the man himself and he'll no doubt leave you with a poetic understanding of how he approaches his work, but the actual techniques he employs remain a mystery. In an attempt to shed some light on his working methods, and the dynamics of his rela-

*continued on page 130*



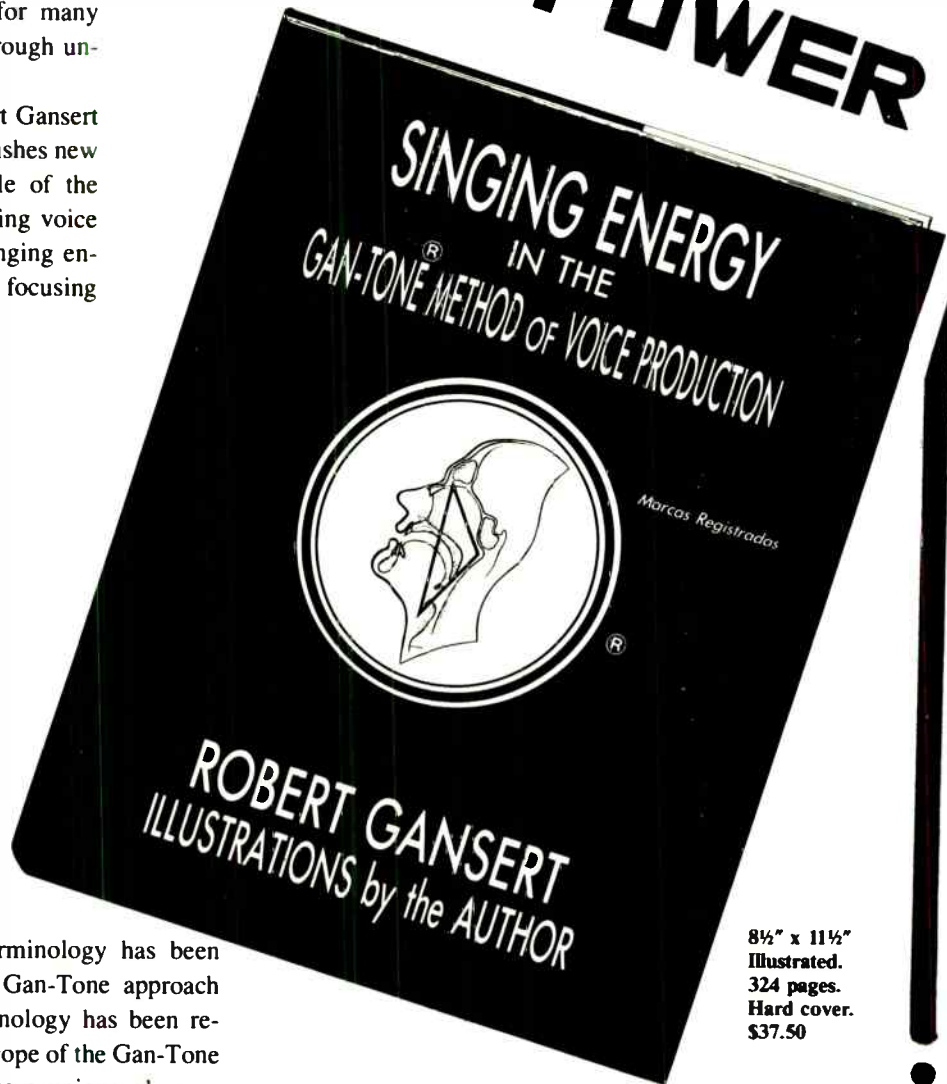
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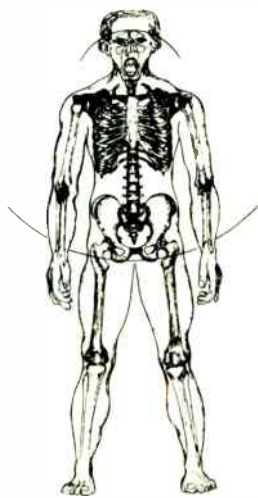
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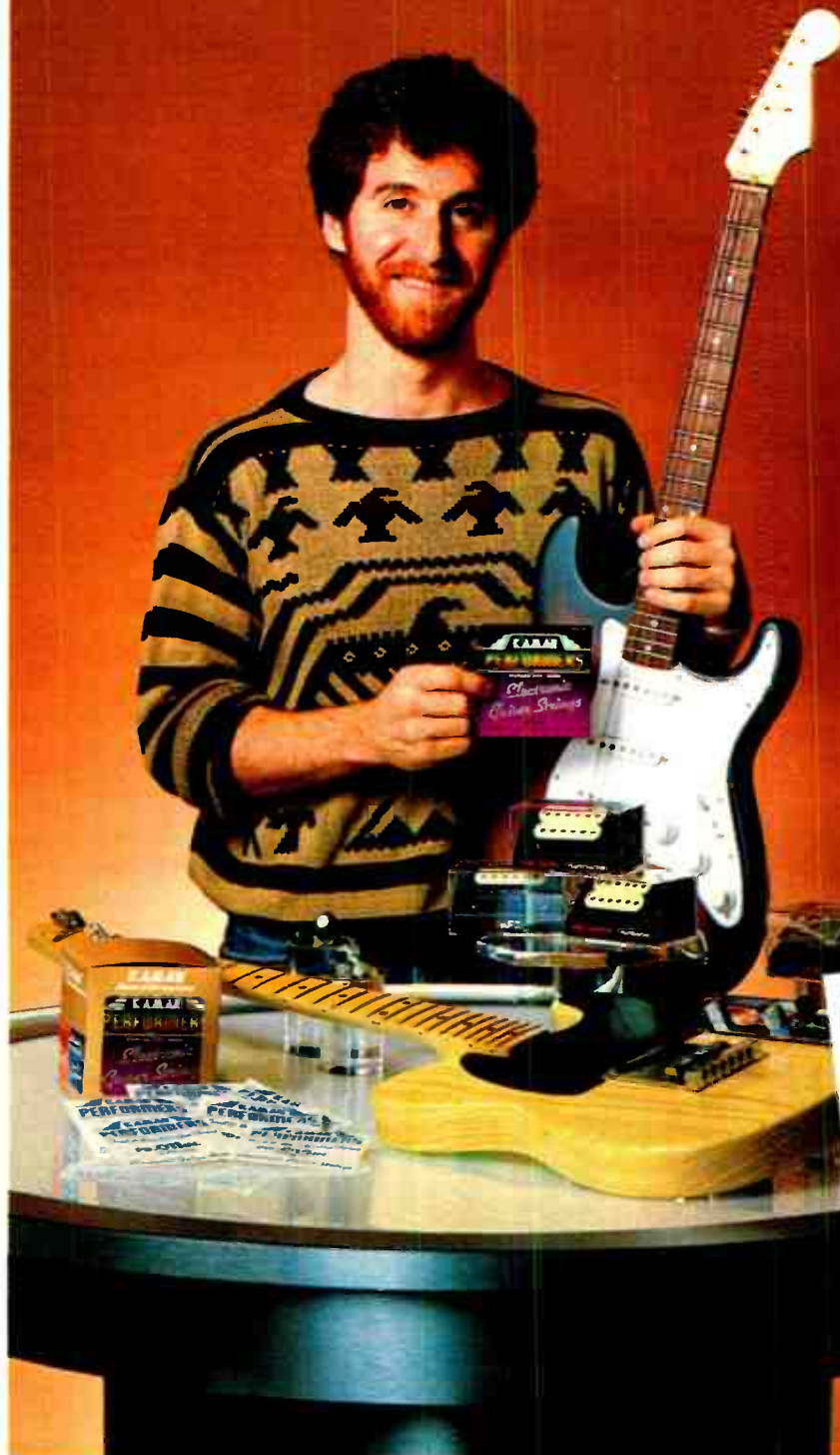
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**Beefheart** from pg. 125


tionship with the people who play his music, I spoke with four members of the Magic Band.

**GARY LUCAS** (guitarist) Don teaches us our parts in a number of ways. He tends to mold and shape the music right there during our rehearsals and he often sings or whistles our parts to us. Sometimes he'll draw a diagram or give us a tape of him playing the piece on the piano. He's able to compose at the piano very beautifully—"Trout Mask Replica" was in fact composed at the piano, by and large. I learned one cut on the new album, a thing called "Evening Bell," from a tape he gave me of himself at the piano. For six weeks I worked four hours a day trying to translate what he was playing onto the guitar and I was lucky if I could learn ten seconds of the piece a day. Don's music can be incredibly difficult to learn but for me it's worth the effort because it's great music and it's an honor to play it. He also uses great

analogies to communicate what he's after. For instance, in teaching a drum part to Cliff, he told him to play as if he were juggling a pan of BBs—funny stuff. In a way, the songs are like frozen events. It's as if a deck of cards were thrown in the air, a snapshot was taken of it, and we learn to reproduce that snapshot. If we play it incorrectly, he keeps making adjustments until it's right, shaping it as if it's a sculpture rather than written music. For us in the band it's sort of like seeing a photograph develop. He knows exactly where it's going but frequently the band won't have the overall picture until the end. Don's music appears improvisatory to most people but, in fact, everything is meticulously worked out in advance. Everything is in perfect balance and it doesn't really lend itself to improvisation. It's like a mobile with all its elements spinning in space. The only spontaneous element is Don. We provide a canvas on which he paints his stuff.

**RICHARD SNYDER:** (bassist) It doesn't bother me that we're not invited to offer ideas and opinions about the music because I really love Don's music and feel a strong commitment to it. One of the hard things about playing with Don is that being a musician, I tend to think in a musicianly way, but he's not dealing with any of that at all. Occasionally the musician part of my mind gets in the way and I won't be able to play exactly what Don's after, and when that happens I just have to drop my musician's armor and play it the way he asks. And it's almost liberating to let that go—to let the teaching go. Many musicians who've worked with him in the past have said, "I was already a proficient musician before I joined the Magic Band," and although that might be true, that's not what Beefheart's band is about. It's not that you're asked to play badly because obviously that's not happening at all. Gary Lucas does some really incredible things with the guitar on the new album. But to play Don's music, you have to drop your preconceived ideas about playing. You don't drop your *abilities* but you do drop your concepts.

**JEFF TEPPER:** (guitarist) In the seven years I've been playing with Don, I've seen his music get less melodic and less musical. His ideas and the compositions he writes now are even more abstract and broken up. His singing is less melodic—there's more talking or yelling—and the music has become more rhythmically fragmented. A song on the new album called "Cardboard Cutout Sundown" is a good example of all this. I think the music feels less oriented.

**CLIFF MARTINEZ:** (drummer) Don always tells us to "hit it to hell in a breadbasket," to play every note like it's going to be your last note. And that's one thing I've always liked about his records—they've always been sincere and had a lot of energy. Don has devised a completely unique approach to the drum kit and although not too many drummers are aware of Beefheart or Drumbo (former Magic Band drummer), I'd put him up there with Tony Williams or Elvin Jones. The drum kit as we now know it is a pretty new instrument and the way it's always been used in the recent past, in big band music, jazz, bebop and rock 'n' roll, is pretty much that the right hand plays some kind of ostinato pattern while the left hand and feet play accompanying patterns against it. What Don does that's different is he incorporates the entire drum kit—tom-toms, everything—into that time-keeping ostinato, so that the entire drum kit is playing this giant melodic pattern. Don's gone through various phases over the years and done a few albums—the two on Mercury specifically—that were commercial attempts. But his unique approach to the drum kit has remained fairly consistent throughout all his music. 



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