

# MUSICIAN

\$1.95 NO. 66, APRIL, 1984

## LAURIE ANDERSON

MAGIC,  
SAX & VIOLINSE

BY JOSHUA BAER

WORKING  
MUSICIAN:  
GUITAR  
MADNESS  
NEW  
EQUIPMENT  
PREVIEW

AC/DC  
POLITICIZED  
CHARLIE HADEN  
CELEBRATED  
PAUL WELLER  
AMBUSHED

MUSICIAN  
APRIL 1984  
ISSUE 66  
LEWIS & CLARK  
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Yours truly  
Elliot Randall

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# MUSICIAN

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# WHEN STEVE SMITH RIDES HIS ZILDJANS, YOU'RE IN FOR AN EXCITING JOURNEY.

Steve grew up just around the corner from The Zildjian factory. Of course, for the past few years he hasn't been around all that much, what with his touring with Jean Luc Ponty, Ronnie Montrose and of course the enormously successful group, Journey. However, recently Steve took a break in his wild schedule and had a chance to sit down and talk with us.

## On Starting Out.

"I started out playing in the fourth grade when I was nine years old and had a really good teacher. When I was in high school I got serious about playing and I got a job as a paper boy to save money to buy cymbals. My teacher used to bring me to the Zildjian factory so I could go in and pick out my own set of cymbals."

**On Rock and Roll.** "After college I had a lot of experience playing jazz and fusion and I had virtually no experience playing rock and roll professionally except for some high school rock things. I really wanted to follow that direction, because

nowadays a drummer has to play rock and roll as well as jazz in order to be well-rounded as a musician."

**On Zildjians.** "The kind of music we play with Journey demands a lot of power. I've found that the cymbals in the Zildjian rock line are the only ones that can



*Flying high with the success of Journey, Steve Smith is one of the most versatile and talented drummers in music today.*

really do the job for me — that can carry the big halls and not sound thin. Zildjian cymbals have extraordinary projection but at the same time they have this wonderful, full musical tone. I also particularly like the Ping Ride — I got my first one back in the eighth grade and I've been playing one ever since."

**On Career.** "You know if you should get into music. It's something you can just feel. If you have to ask yourself the question, then don't bother. Being a musician isn't just a career it's a way of life."

"I find that most successful musicians don't think about success as much as they think about being a good player or songwriter."

To try to focus on success is a little too contrived and usually just doesn't work."

If you're a serious drummer, chances are overwhelming that you, like Steve, 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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# Letters

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## STERN JUDGMENT

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Hell hath no fury like a critic scorned would appear to be the implicit message of *Musician's* cover story on Stevie Wonder, and no wonder. Having worked so hard to get a date with the prettiest, most elusive girl at the dance, David Breskin ended up playing Rhett Butler to Little Stevie's Scarlet O'Hara...and fat chance any of us have of giving a damn.

David is a friend and a most esteemed colleague; a witty writer and a passionate observer of the music scene. But one is left wondering what compelled him to take on this difficult assignment if he didn't have the stomach for the hunt. Given Stevie's relationship to light, his compulsive insularity, his artistic muse and the readily apparent trappings of superstardom, why be so surprised when he turns out to be as vain and driven and self-referential as any other *genius*? If the man is such a dipstick, why even cover him? Lord knows there are plenty of deserving artists. Besides, David got about as much out of the man as could be expected. Why not mix that in with a little more analysis of his recent work?

Finally, why further water down one's credibility by making the ludicrous Richard Pryor/Eddie Murphy, apples/oranges comparisons? I suppose that David was trying to point out the difference between genius and talent, but it is hardly worth denigrating Michael Jackson by comparisons to the smarmy, vulgar Eddie Murphy. And perhaps *Musician* ought to think twice about its hipness quotient before calling on another mere mortal to account for his personal shortcomings.

Chip Stern  
New York City, NY

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## TECHTALK

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J.D. Considine states in "Great Polysynths" (February) that "knowing the difference between DCO, VCF and LFO is not essential to buying a synthesizer." The buyer should be warned that tiny differences in blurb can mean big differences in sound. For example, the newer digitally controlled oscillator (DCO) is cheaper than the older voltage controlled oscillator (VCO), but the customer pays a price in a much thinner sound and a lack of glide (portamento). On the other hand, a DCO-type instru-

ment does not need auto-tune circuitry or calibration. While the DCO's economy can be a plus for the beginner, a lot of players burn out on the lack of richness.

In another matter, your coverage of the boycott against musicians who perform in South Africa was unfortunately understated. How about publishing the entire list of political whores the next time? I'd like to know who not to spend my money on.

C.R. Fischer  
Pinole, CA

---

## BACKTALK

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Regarding Mark Rowland's comments in favor of the boycott of South Africa: this attitude may seem to fight the problem, but there is no evidence that a boycott would influence the South African government to change its racist policies. In the meantime, the boycott is increasing the distress of a black South African population that can little afford any additional hardship. Honoring of the boycott by black performers is particularly insidious since the black South African population, already depressed, is deprived of even a fleeting glimpse of other blacks who have earned respect, economic progress and dignity. But as damaging as the denial of potential role models is to black South Africans, the loss of jobs caused by the economic boycott is tragic.

If humanity is ever to eradicate racism, it must look beyond the expedient, self-serving solution of boycotts, which only exacerbate the plight of the oppressed.

H.R. Newmark  
Bellaire, TX

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## REC CORRECT

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Thank you very much for the wonderful review which Jim Farber wrote on the new XTC album, *Mummer*, in your February issue. One slight error, however: starting with this album all future XTC albums will be available on Geffen Records. Later this year we will also make their four previous albums available.

Ed Rosenblatt  
Geffen Records  
Los Angeles, CA

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## HOW DOES HE KNOW?

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In your DFX2 Face (January), you mention that Steve Jamal was being hired to play tenor sax; it was actually Michael Collins. Steve Jamal was hired to play rhythm guitar. Due to the influence of your magazine it would greatly be appreciated if you would note this correction.

Michael Collins  
Woodland Hills, CA

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## SOME LIKE US...

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Your interviews are wonderfully natural, and the reviews seem to be observant and written from an optimistic yet neutral standpoint. Your "Best Buys" page is a good feature for both the stores and consumers.

We enjoy the magazine.  
Becky Tillman  
Charlotte, NC

Your article about Olu Dara raised some interesting questions concerning musicianship.

It is cool to know that there are technically competent musicians who realize the limitations of craftsmanship. I have this image of technocratic musicians as ludicrously pompous, acknowledging their limitations but quickly surrendering to them. They see their art in a sacred way. Anything, when seen as sacred, is an over-simplification. I agree with Olu Dara; all music exists within its own sphere of influence. *Musician* obviously shares this view, as shown by the fact that it covers all kinds of music.

Jimmie Jupp

Just wanted to write in and say thanks for the articles on UB40 and Australian rock. You are to be highly commended for spotlighting new talent. In fact, the features on fresh talent from various cultures are the main reason I buy *Musician*.

Jim Fuller  
Jefferson City, MO

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## ...SOME DON'T

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Drop a bomb on those rookies you chose to list Pick Hits '83 in your February issue. Vic Garbarini and Timothy White were way off base when they referred to Bob Dylan as hype and a disappointment. I suggest you send your two "troopers" back to basic training.

Geri  
Royal Oak, MI

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## SHUCKS

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In "Reggae 1984" from the February issue, the photo labeled "Bunny Wailer" is actually Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace, star of the film *Rockers*. In the same issue, Ron St. Germain was billed on the contents page as the producer of various projects when in fact he was only the engineer. In addition, a paragraph in the article itself detailing five years St. Germain spent at the Power Station was omitted, giving the impression Ron has been at it for less than the twelve years he's been working behind the board.



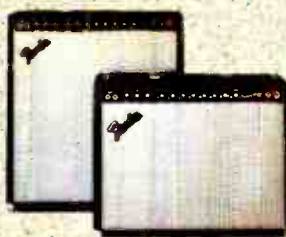


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# MUSIC INDUSTRY NEWS

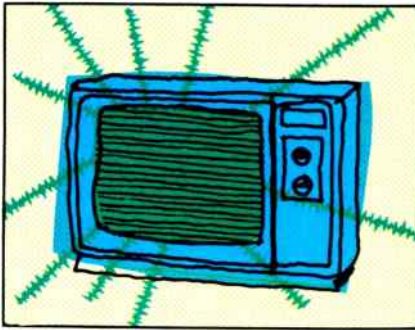
by Mark Rowland

The Supreme Court finally reached a decision in the Betamax home taping case, ruling by a 5-4 vote that home videotaping does not constitute a copyright infringement or cause financial harm to copyright holders. Although the decision does not in any way address the separate issue of home audio taping, and both majority and dissenting opinions specifically ask Congress to provide legal guidance, the Court action has clearly dealt a blow to the record industry's hopes of success for House Bill H. 1030 and Senate Bill S. 31, both of which would impose a surcharge on the sale of blank audio tapes.

The 5-4 split on Sony Corporation of America vs. Universal City Studios, a fray which created such unlikely ideological bedmates as Chief Justice Warren Burger and Justice William Brennan (for the majority), and Justices Thurgood Marshall and William Rehnquist (for the minority) was typical of a case which has managed to confuse and polarize simultaneously since Disney Studios first brought suit against Sony back in 1976; and one in which both courts and legislature have duly impressed observers with their willingness to pass the buck. After hearing the case over a year ago, and drawing more "friend of the court" briefs than any on the docket from the previous annum, the court decided to re-hear the case last fall. Meanwhile, dozens of hearings have been held in Congress on the committee and subcommittee level since bills to curb home taping by forcing manufacturers to kick back part of their income to the record industry (at guess whose expense?) were first introduced in Congress two and a half years ago. Music industry partisans claimed solace from the Court's latest appeal to Congress to

ultimately resolve the controversy, but so far not one home-taping bill has been sent out of committee; and in light of the court ruling, it seems extremely unlikely that either body of Congress would pass a bill during an election year which essentially imposes a tax on consumers for the financial recompense of large, albeit aggrieved, entertainment corporations.

There are practical and philosophical differences surrounding the issues of video vs. audio taping, of course, and recording industry lobbyists may eventually convince Congress that "audio taping does affect our primary source of income," as Songwriters Guild head George Weiss contends (at least more than video games). But the Betamax case has proved a frail stalking horse. As Gary Schwartz, a lawyer for the Electronics Industries Association remarked, "If the record industry thought they had a case to make, they certainly would be in court."



You asked for it department: A marketing survey has finally been completed to determine the favorite television programs of pop music fans. Active record buyers across the country were polled by the Steel Pulse Group, and categories were created to differentiate the tastes of AOR listeners from CHR (i.e., top forty) aficionados. Fave show for both groups turned out to be *Hill Street Blues* (twenty-two percent for AOR, eighteen percent for CHR), followed by *M\*A\*S\*H*, but after that some intriguing differences arose. *Fame*, which placed third among CHR devotees, was nowhere in evidence among AOR fans, nor were *Three's Company* or *General Hospital* (which placed ninth and tenth). On the other hand, AOR followers exhibited a distinct preference for *Saturday Night Live*, *Late Night With David Letterman* and *MTV*. What all this means we couldn't say....

We didn't make this up: ex-Thin Lizzy singer **Phil Lynott** will play **Jimi Hendrix** in a movie about the life of Kip Lambert, best known as ex-manager of the ex-Who. Mmmm, foxy.... **U2's** LP *War* was named the

best record of the year by *Contemporary Christian* magazine.... While **Sly Stone** attempts to revive his career, the other members of the Family Stone have also reformed and are touring without him as the New Family Stone.... **Steven Spielberg** is attempting to lure **Michael Jackson** to play the lead role in his remake of *Peter Pan*.... A Scottish band named First Priority has shelled out £4,000 for the opportunity to open for **Public Image Ltd.** on the latter's British tour. Get your priorities straight, guys.... **Slade** is making a comeback. A new single, "My Oh My" is currently high on the British charts. (Does this mean we'll be hearing Quiet Riot in ten years?) **Cars** are putting the final mix on a new album at Electric Ladyland.... **R.E.M.** is working on their new album, to be produced by Mitch Easter.... **Diana Ross'** signature will appear on a new line of hosiery. Now that takes muscle.... **Mark Knopfler** will produce the next **Aztec Camera** record, due in May; for the moment, he's scoring a new movie by David Puttnam (*Chariots of Fire*) called *Cal*, a thriller about the IRA....

## Chart Action

The somnambulance of the *Billboard* charts was finally roused by none other than **Van Halen**, whose 1984 catapulted from #18 to #4 this week, and should shortly be ruling the roost. To do that it need only dislodge Mr. Jackson's *Thriller* (week 59 on the charts), Culture Club's *Colour By Numbers* and Lionel Richie's *Can't Slow Down*, currently ensconced at positions 1, 2, and 3. Yes' 90125, *Synchronicity* by the Police; Hall & Oates' *Rock 'N' Soul Part 1* and Billy Joel's *An Innocent Man* hold steady in the next four positions. Linda Ronstadt's *What's New* has slipped to #9 while Duran Duran's *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* rounds out the top ten. Entry of the week belongs to the great Pretenders debuting at #25. Duran Duran, Alabama, Def Leppard, Billy Idol, Kenny Rogers and ZZTop all have three albums in the top 200. The Police have five.

Elsewhere on the globe, Paul Young's *No Parlez* is the #1 LP in the Netherlands, the *Stayin' Alive* soundtrack the #2 album in Japan, and U2's *Under A Blood Red Sky* (not to be confused with X's *Under The Big Black Sun*) the #3 disc in Australia. UB40's "Red Red Wine" is #4 on the singles charts in Canada, while Slade's "My Oh My" holds forth at #5 in West Germany. And in Britain Paul McCartney and the late John Lennon each have singles in the top ten. *Plus ca change...*



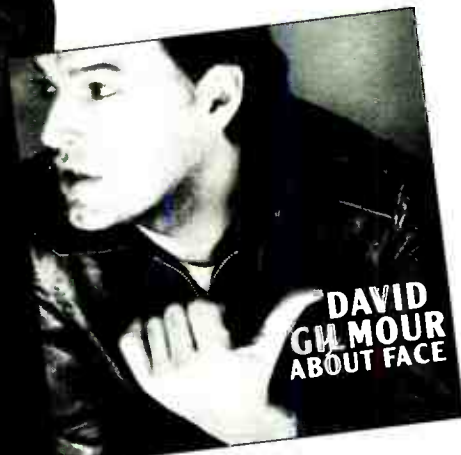
# David Gilmour of Pink Floyd does an "About Face."



"About Face." A new solo album featuring the voice, guitar and songs of David Gilmour.

Ten new David Gilmour originals. Including the single, "Blue Light," with Steve Winwood\* on organ. Plus "All Lovers Are Deranged" and "Love On The Air," co-written by Pete Townshend.

**David Gilmour.**  
**"About Face." On Columbia Records and Cassettes.**



Watch for the David Gilmour U.S. tour this spring and the new videos, "Blue Light" and "All Lovers Are Deranged."

# SPINAL TAP

## ART ASTUTELY IMITATES LIFE IN A HEAVY METAL CINEMATIC SEND-UP.

SAMUEL GRAHAM

You're at a heavy metal concert. The band is loud and guitar-dominated, their music a non-stop barrage of sonic sludge. The musicians' long hair was out of style five years ago; so was their macho posturing. But hey, these guys put on a show that's something else. Not content with the usual smoke bombs and flash pots, they've re-created Stonehenge onstage. That's right, Stonehenge—those awe-inspiring, megalithic stone monuments, symbolic of all that's primeval and mysterious.

There's just one problem. The Stonehenge model is so enormous—bigger in fact, than the real thing—that you can't even see the drummer, and the other players aren't always in sight, either. Something just isn't right, so you're not surprised to hear later that the set has been scrapped. It wasn't only the visibility factor; the models were also unwieldy, a pain in the ass to put up and broke down every day. Either Stonehenge had to be reduced to rubble or

every crew member would suffer a hernia.

Undaunted, you buy tickets to another heavy metal gig. Once again the band is loud and hopelessly out of fashion—you wonder how they can still be around after so long. But you have to admit that they, too, really work to entertain their fans.

The lead singer is draped in a long, hooded robe, intoning some portentous drivel about "the Druids" and their arcane rituals. As the band plays on, several little creatures come scurrying onstage, dancing around and evidently worshipping some pagan idol.... Why, it seems to be Stonehenge itself, being lowered right down from the ceiling. But somehow, something just isn't right—again. This Stonehenge is *too small*. Hell, it looks to be maybe a foot and a half high! This is ridiculous—who do these guys think they're kidding?

Actually, there *is* a whole lot of kidding goin' on—in one of these cases. The first one really happened: Black Sabbath, those hoary metal mongers, did take Stonehenge to the people, only to find it impractically huge. Ah, but the little Stonehenge—is it live, or is it Memorex? Truth be told, it's one of many hilarious scenes from *This Is Spinal Tap*, the filmed "rockumentary" about a veteran but mediocre English band's ill-fated tour of the U.S.

*This Is Spinal Tap* is primarily the inspiration of four writers, actors and comedians. The director (and co-writer)

is Rob Reiner, who was Meathead on the original *All in the Family*. The other three writers, who portray the leaders of Spinal Tap, are Michael McKean (the shaggy-haired lead singer), Christopher Guest (the Jeff Beck-lookalike lead guitarist) and Harry Shearer (the mutton-chopped bass player). Aside from their heavy-weight multi-media resumes (McKean was Lenny on *Laverne & Shirley*, Guest was in *The Long Riders* and various *National Lampoon* productions, and Shearer was a regular on *Saturday Night Live*), those three share an abiding love of rock 'n' roll. What's more, they play and sing well enough to have written and performed all the music in *This Is Spinal Tap*.

The way Shearer tells it, it was when he, McKean and Guest were working on a take-off of TV's *Midnight Special* a few years back that they hit on the idea for a full-length movie spoofing the entire rock scene—including record companies, managers, girlfriends, fans, you name it. From that point on, they developed an entire iconography surrounding this bogus band.

A detailed Spinal Tap biography was written: "In 1975, Spinal Tap toured the Far East and released their second live set, *Jap Habit*—three discs and two pounds of gimmick packaging...." They invented a discography, replete with song titles like "Gimme Some Money" (by the Thamesmen, Tap's earliest incarnation), and albums like *Intravenous De Milo* and *Shark Sandwich*. They played several warm-up gigs around L.A., including one date with Iron Butterfly, to get a feel for the stage before filming began. They even hired a plane to tow a Spinal Tap banner over last year's US Festival.

Funny stuff, that—but it might also make you squirm a little. Good satire isn't just humorous; if it hits close enough to home, it can also make you feel deliciously uncomfortable, even embarrassed for the, um, satire. These boys know that, so when they made their movie (improvising most of the dialogue for a true documentary effect), they used crewmen who had worked on actual rock movies, like *Gimme Shelter*. They also drew on real-life happenings, often their own.

Consider Shearer and McKean's experience with the Credibility Gap, their former comedy troupe. The Gap put out an album on Reprise Records, and went to Tucson, Arizona for a promotional appearance ("I think it was a swingin' gathering of Western states



Spinal Tap mugs at N.Y.C. cocktail party thrown by their label, Polymer: (from left) manager Ian Faith, Viv Savage, Derek Smalls, Mick Shrimpton, Polymer prez Sir Denis Eton-Hogg, David St. Hubbins and Nigel Tufnel.



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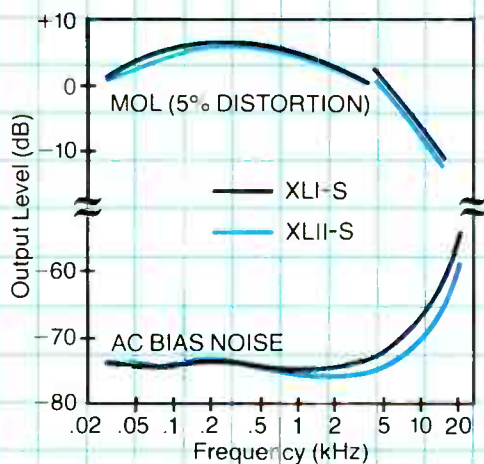
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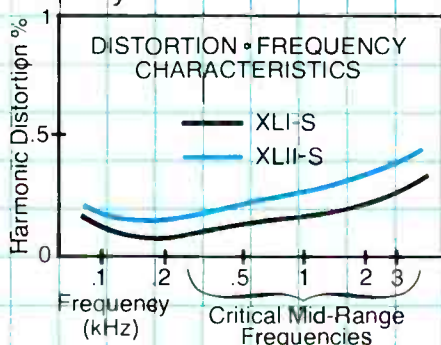


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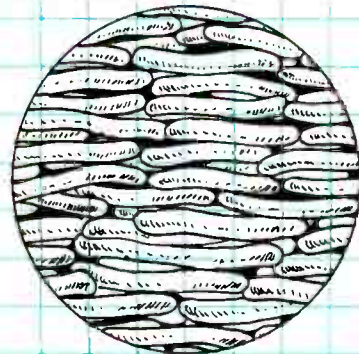
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tape merchandisers," Shearer laughs). Their show was so disastrous, technically and otherwise, that a label representative, apologizing profusely, invited them to literally "kick my ass." And sure enough, there's Artie Fufkin, the smarmy promo man in *This Is Spinal Tap* (played by David Letterman's bandleader Paul Shaffer), proffering his buns to the band after a failed in-store appearance.

Elsewhere, the writers drew on what Shearer calls the "pretty legendary" Troggs studio tapes. Seems the Troggs, on the decline after "Wild Thing," were doing some recording, and the engineer taped not just the music but also the conversations between control room and the studio. "It must have been ten hours into the session," Shearer says. "All the band members are jumping all over the guitarist, because he's blowing his part: 'You played it this morning, didn't ya? You know the fucking part! 'I know I know the fucking part, but I can't fucking play it, can I?' 'Well, what the fuck do you want me to do about it, mate?' It's amazing—it's that exact point where comedy and pathos cross, and comedy wins."

The Troggs might be shocked to see facsimiles of themselves in the Spinal Tap film. But occasionally it goes beyond art imitating life. Sometimes it's the reverse effect, when life and art become a truly circular form—when you can't tell where one ends and the other

begins—that things get crazy.

For instance, the actors had only two weeks to record the basic music tracks used in the film, and Shearer recalls several points where they must have felt like the Troggs in real life. "It was a pretty high-tension situation in the recording studio," he explains. "It wasn't identical (to the movie or to the Troggs), but boy, we all had something pretty close at hand to use when we shot that scene."

It goes on. One running gag in the film involves Spinal Tap's procession of drummers, most of whom have died in bizarre accidents. Eric "Stumpy Joe" Childs, for one, expires after choking on someone else's vomit. Absurd, right—a little gross, and definitely silly, but a laugh? Sure, agrees Rob Reiner, "but how weird is this Dennis Wilson incident? How weird is the death of a guy in Marina del Rey, drowning while he's scrounging around for lawn chairs at the bottom of an empty slip? You can't make that up."

One fellow particularly bemused by the art-life continuum in *This Is Spinal Tap* is Derek Sutton. Sutton, who has managed performers from Ten Years After and Robin Trower to Styx and Nicolette Larson, is listed in the credits as "the real Ian Faith." And while he wasn't actually the model for Faith, Spinal Tap's beleaguered manager, Sutton has personally witnessed everything that Faith suffers through: the egos and

in-fighting, the attempted take-over by a musician's girlfriend, the stupid career moves. For Sutton, the movie is often "so close to reality that it's painful."

Imagine, then, Sutton's quandary as manager of a fake band. There will be a Spinal Tap album; Sutton is the official liaison between the band, the record label (PolyGram) and the film company (Embassy). It's his job to "help promote the movie through the music, and through regular musical channels." But what do you do with music that's intentionally run-of-the-mill?

Says Sutton, "In order to satirize this form of music, they've done everything wrong deliberately, which makes the (real) record company's job ten times harder. Precisely where you would expect a crescendo in a song, there's normally a diminuendo. Precisely when you expect a repeat of the hooky chorus line, they come in with a very bad guitar solo. As a manager, I would have leaned very heavily on cleaning up some songs and making them more commercially acceptable."

That's the voice of commerce speaking. Shearer offers the artistic point of view: "We weren't trying to play out of key," he claims. "But we also weren't trying to create an album that would have seventeen number one chart-busters, because then it would have been a different movie—it would have

*continued on page 34*



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# KOOL & THE GANG

## TWENTY YEARS OF FUNK FOUNDATION AND POP PERMUTATION

MARK ROWLAND

Robert "Kool" Bell's father was a boxing man. He worked his trade on the upper west side, part of a neighborhood now long gone, Lincoln Center stands on its ruins. Young Miles Davis liked to work out in the ring between gigs. Pounding out strange, discordant harmonies in a flat above the gym was a piano player named Thelonious Monk. "My father used to joke with him: 'Man, what are you doing up there making all that noise?' He wasn't a musician himself, but as a boxer he liked jazz, liked to cool out and listen to it, and by knowing Miles and Thelonious—well, they kinda kept him up on it, you know?"

When James Taylor—JT, not the Martha's Vineyard mellowman—was all of thirteen, growing up in northern New

Jersey, Kool & the Gang were already local legends. "We didn't know each other you understand, but being very prejudiced in favor of East Coast and New York City, we wanted to indentify with someone else from there. We were hip to the Isley Brothers, and then Kool came along and continued that sound with horns and we thought, 'Hmmm, this is nice.' And so our own bass player named himself Kool, and our drummer was 'George' after George Brown, and each guy had T-shirts with the Gang's names on the back—all except me. I was always just JT, 'cause they didn't have a singer. And now when I go home, I see some of those guys in my old band and they say 'Remember those T-shirts? Now you're with the *real* guys.'"

When JT joined the real guys in 1977, Kool & the Gang had reached a career crossroads. They'd always been a strange amalgam, this dance band which employed intricate (for pop) horn charts, jazzy modalities and lengthy solo space, and a sure sense of melodic progression over spare rhythms. Yet they'd always lacked a lead singer. Commercially and critically, they'd peaked around 1974 with rollicking, funk-ed-up

dance tracks like "Jungle Boogie" and "Hollywood Swinging" (from the excellent *Wild And Peaceful* LP), but now, with the advent of disco, they were caught in a wedge—too progressive for disco and too sweet for funk.

"It was like starting all over again," Kool recalls soberly, his otherwise calm repose now broken by a subtle tension. "We had to tour all the time. New bands like GQ and Instant Funk were getting platinum albums. We had to wonder what they were doing when our music had been danceable since 1969."

"So we hit the streets," says JT. "We started hanging round at various functions, just 'hangin' out'—that was one of our songs in fact. The title of our next record, 'Ladies Night,' see, that was what was going on all over the city, every Wednesday was Ladies Night. And then 'Too Hot,' well, we don't want to get too personal, but we were watching guys go through that situation, too."

"We were trying to capture what was going on," says Kool. "Because we really feel that music, our music, is the extension of people's experience."

It's a big band: JT; Curtis Williams on

FRYT ROBERTS



Robert "Kool" Bell and James "JT" Taylor bask in the familial fellowship of the Gang.



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# Producer Series™



keyboards; Clifford Adams, trombone; Michael Ray, trumpet and flugelhorn; Robert Mickens, trumpet; Dennis Thomas on alto sax; Charles Smith, lead guitar; George Brown on drums. Ronald Bell plays tenor sax and keyboards, and arranges the horn charts. The leader, of course, plays bass. An even ten, of whom the last six have been together since the band's inception nearly twenty years ago. "And," JT notes, "these cats were hanging out together before they ever started playing. You have this family attitude. It's already established, so if you're gonna come aboard, you have to fit in."

The band's sonic groove remains every bit as solid, though it has under-

gone more rhythmic and, especially, textural permutations over the years than, say, the Isleys (for longevity and consistent commercial appeal, their only true peers). Put together by Kool in 1964 (he was fourteen), the band cut its teeth in North Jersey lounges, covering contemporary pop, notably Motown, and also jamming on occasion with jazz figures like McCoy Tyner, Leon Thomas and Pharoah Sanders. Like Motown session great James Jamerson, Kool's bass lines suggested the melodic contours of a song, while horns provided contrapuntal fills, and solos were sculpted around more traditional jazz harmonics. The result was a kind of easy-listening funk, propulsive enough

to shimmy to, but still sophisticated enough to reward more sedate appreciation.

After JT came aboard, his vocal prowess and Kool's lines gave their songs more of a rippling choral effect; you can hear it on "Midnite" from the current *In The Heart* LP, as well as on past hits like "Too Hot" and the anthemic "Celebration." Loping rock guitar rhythms and the influence of Deodato's high-gloss production have further refined their sound in the direction of MOR; the latest LP, though produced by the band, is easily the most consistently pop-flavored of their career, and its first single, "Joanna," is so utterly melodic and bereft of grit as to ensure its success on easy-listening radio formats. What saves this concoction from drowning in its own goo, is, first of all, the graceful effervescence of JT's voice, whose deceptive range, light timbre and grasp of pop nuance stamps him as a latter-day Nat King Cole; the horns, still punchy after all these years; and finally, the band's indomitable rhythm section.

"Deodato really helped us when he produced *Too Hot*," Kool recalls. "The horns had been playing a lot of lines, coming from our jazz background, though of course we'd had our hits too. But a lot of times we'd be thinking, 'Hey, let's stretch out.' Deodato decided we should focus on James as the lead and then build around that."

"It's like you can almost put your arm through the rhythm track," explains JT. "Put your arm right through there—and then you can set up whatever you want. Set the foundation. It's like anything in life, basic order. If your foundation is shaky, somewhere along the line the whole thing will crumble. But if it's solid, you can build whatever you want."

JT is slender like Kool, with a softer look, and a sly, captivating smile. Both look fairly athletic, and well they should: Kool & the Gang's stage show, which passed through Radio City for four nights in November, has the choreographed kineticism of a Busby Berkeley movie. Deodato had helped tailor the band's performance for larger venues (an additional Oberheim OB-X keyboard to fatten the sound, for instance) which now also includes some rather elaborate sets. To perform one ballad, "No Show," JT performs in a raincoat, and the heavens thunder. The horn section doubles masterfully as backup vocalists, and between turns at the mike, virtually everyone, it seems, embarks on a series of syncopated gymnastics, enough to boggle the Temptations. Not too surprisingly, they're becoming a solid attraction in Las Vegas.

Such lucrative commitments do have a hampering effect on the band's creative options, and Kool confesses to a growing restlessness.

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• **RUNNING OUT OF SALAD PLATES** does not constitute a China Crisis, nor does a breakdown in relations with Peking. The English band China Crisis makes its U.S. debut with an album called *Working With Fire And Steel*, and the title track is already an underground hit. *Melody Maker* says the band writes "subtle, melodic, memorable songs," creating "a unique sound full of defiance and pleasure." We agree.

• **"A BUNCH OF WASTED ZOMBIES** at a Mad Max/Dawn Of The Dead get-together" is how one English journalist described the group Specimen. Never ones to quibble with the conservative British press, we prefer to think of Specimen as a meeting of intelligence, glitter and very heavy metal. Their Sire debut mini-album (it rhymes with 'catastrophe') is entitled *Batastrophe*, after one of London's trendiest night haunts, the Bat Cave. "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang," "The Beauty Of Poison," "Tell Tail" and "Returning From A Journey" are featured tracks.

• **POP QUIZ #1:** Who has worked with The Byrds, The Beach Boys, Ry Cooder, Harper's Bizarre and Randy Newman? Now, don't just race through this sentence, take a minute and think about it. That's better. None other than WB's own Van Dyke Parks, a musician who gets an "A" for ingenuity and a "B-Minus" for visibility. Fortunately, Van Dyke is back in the limelight again with *Jump!*, a very musical journey through the classic Uncle Remus children's stories. Only Van Dyke could bring Brer Rabbit into the '80s, but even he can't get it on Top 40 radio. If you want to hear cuts like the title track (not to be confused with Van Halen's "Jump,") "Taps" and the long-eared "Invitation To Sin," you'll have to buy the album.



# THIS IS

# ADVERTISING

Vol. 84, No. 1

• **WHO GIVES A WANG?** Some say their name is the phonetic equivalent of the Chinese term for perfect pitch; others say it is the sound made by a deliberately struck guitar—"Wang" on the downstroke, "Chung" on the upstroke. Whatever its semantic origins, the band Wang Chung traces its geographic roots to England, and its musical roots to the critically-acclaimed 57 Men. Wang Chung's Geffen debut LP is titled *Points On The Curve*; the first single is "Don't Let Go." The music has been labeled "emotive, evocative and wholly original." We call it clean, classy and honest rock 'n' roll.



• **FANS OF THE CURE** (and we're not talking detox) will be pleased by the release of *Japanese Whispers*, a "Best Of" Cure LP on Sire that recounts the band's work during the past year. What with maxi singles, mini albums, singles and imports, collecting The Cure used to be a full-time job (and you can quote us). Tell Mom. Maybe she'll buy this one for you. "Let's Go To Bed," "The Walk" and "The Love Cats" are among the hot cuts.

• **"THE JIMI HENDRIX ALBUM** that Brian Eno never produced" is how the clever folks in Burbank are referring to *Eos*, the new collaboration between ECM artists Terje Rypdal and David Darling. Rypdal (on guitar) and Darling (on cello) create sounds that would have pleased the master—this stuff is high energy and ethereal.

• **THE FRIVOLOUS GOSSIP** contained in these paragraphs is made possible by the runaway success of Van Halen's *1984*, The Pretenders' *Learning To Crawl* and Christine McVie's new solo album, *Christine McVie*. We bid them a hearty "thank you!"

• *"This Is Advertising?"* still resides within the stifling confines of P.O. Box 6868, Burbank, CA 91510. And we still have copies of *If The Shoe Fits...*, a 12-song LP sampler of new music for only four bucks. And we still accept donations. Go well, my child.

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"We're talking now about doing a jazz record, or some kind of project, maybe under another name. Another way we've tried to work it out is by keeping one or two of the cuts on every LP kind of jazzy, leaving room for the horns to stretch out, you know, and you'll notice we do that in concert. Everyone solos. But we did also concentrate on making this record commercial. Our last one [As One] did great world-wide, but it didn't sell very well in the States. I noticed when *Billboard* mentioned us recently they said, 'Kool & the Gang, whose last album didn't reach its regular platinum status.' You know, they just had to say that," he laughs. "But it kind of puts us on the spot. We have to prove something."

"In this business, you're always proving yourself," JT remarks with a hint of exasperation. "They just love to see that pyramid [denoting platinum status] on the side of the charts."

"That's why we try not to say we ever made it," he goes on, "because you never made nothin'. You can accomplish things to a certain point, but what have you ever made? You know, there's a high spiritual consciousness in the group [several are devout Muslims] which helps keep us intact. I mean, we're human, we get crazy and go off, but our values are basically the same. We're a large family. I have eight sisters and two brothers, and when I came here I found that Kool and his brother grew up in a similar situation. We have a lot in common—poverty, hard times growing up and all—so all we have to do is look back. Our parents, when they see us going out there, can say, 'Hey fellas, you all worked too hard for this...'"

Professional relationships within the group operate out of a similar dynamic, as befits a ten-member aggregate in which everyone composes. "We set aside a lot of time for everyone to write. Then we come together, maybe go over to Ronald's house, line 'em up on the 8-track, take 'em home, study, set time in the studio. Of course, it can get personal, since everyone wants their own songs on a record. But everyone realizes you have to pick which ones will help the longevity and health of the whole establishment."

"The horn players understand what the record business is about," Kool agrees. "Sometimes at rehearsals, you know, for the first hour or two we just swing! That gets a lot out of our system. Or the horn players will play their jazz dates—Cliff Adams just did a record with Jimmy Smith. And of course Michael [Ray] used to play with Sun Ra."

"We try to keep in the fun," JT observes. "Otherwise, the whole process can be so rigid. I remember on the *Ladies Night* album, we were driving into the city and we started humming a bass line and a melody just for fun. And when

we got to the studio, we ended up laying it down as "Tonite." We try to stay near each other when we're writing. Or something will happen at a concert and we'll say, 'Hey, remember that groove we found in Birmingham? Let's play that and see what we can make out of it.'"

Such an organic approach to making music invariably reflects the Gang's general *mien*—light but soulful, warm and reflective, danceable and listenable—a "cool" which at its best can become the litmus of a larger social tableau. That was certainly the case with "Celebration," which became in its turn a giant crossover dance single, the rallying cry for numerous sporting contests and, finally, a theme to define a national mood following the return of the Iranian hostages.

"Little did we know at the time," Kool whistles.

"The idea came from 'Ladies Night' hitting so big," JT says. "At first it was our own celebration—we're back! My first record—platinum! And then that just extended through our community. People became absorbed in our success and we didn't even know about it. In concert that's our last song, and every time the audience gives us back this energy. We go, 'Whoaah, listen to this, feel that.'"

Now Kool breaks in; without realizing it, his tone and presence has become more visibly animated. "We don't even know all the energy that's in that song. We looked at it as a celebration of life—to look out in the morning and see something to be thankful for. It's timely, that's what it is. This is the type of song that was needed at a particular time, and that's what the Creator blessed us with."

It's suggested that, in another way, the song can be seen as an emblem for the power of music itself, for all that the spirit of the art can be.

JT nods slowly. "There you go," he says. "There it is." ■

### Kool Smokes

**Curtis Williams** — Fender Rhodes suitcase 73, Minimoog, clavinet Horner D6, Yamaha concert piano 80, Oberheim OB-Xa synthesizer, Moog Source and a Liberation Moog

**Ronald Bell** — Oberheim OB-Xa, Oberheim OB-X, Yamaha DX7, Selmer tenor sax  
**Robert "Kool" Bell** — Oasis bass, Alembic bass

**Charles Smith** — Les Paul Sunburst Standard, Gibson ES-335 stereo

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**Dennis Thomas** — Selmer alto sax, Gemeinhardt flute

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# AC/DC

## THE PARADOXICAL POWERCHORD ADVANTAGES OF ROCK 'N' ROLL CONSERVATISM

CHARLES M. YOUNG

Suppose this: God wakes up one morning, looks down at the world, is so overwhelmed with tedium that He wants to go back to sleep, but instead decides to change the rules. "Those dullards haven't had a new political idea since Karl Marx died," God yawns. "But when I turn on the radio—as bad as radio is—I hear somebody trying to do something original every hour or two. Why is there no equivalent of Talking Heads in Congress? I'm going to change all musical energy into political energy and vice versa, just to shake the bastards up."

So God waves His magic wand. What would happen to AC/DC?

They would become Ronald Reagan. There has been no major band more conservative. Think about that. What other band has done exactly the same thing musically and lyrically for an entire career? What other band has been influenced by *nothing*? Furthermore, both Ronald Reagan and AC/DC pack an incredible number of megadeaths per power chord/MX missile ("Back In Black"). Both feel that women have their place ("Givin' The Dog A Bone"). Both see limited possibilities for peace in our time ("If You Want Blood, You Got It"). Sound ecology rates low on their priority lists ("Rock & Roll Ain't Noise Pollution"). They want the world to know their manhood is perpetually tumescent ("Rising Power"). They agree that the wages of sin is death ("Rock & Roll Damnation"). Anyone who disagrees with them is a wimp (read any interview they ever did). They hate the press (they only gave me an hour in their hotel room). And they hold precisely the same view of musical/social change.

"Most people, when they progress, they progress up their own asses," says Malcolm Young, AC/DC's rhythm guitarist and Great Communicator.

What about Led Zeppelin? They explored new areas and managed to keep their audience.

"I remember once when we were here touring," says Angus Young, AC/DC's



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President Angus Young delivering decibel deficits and militaristic menace.

lead guitarist and Malcolm's younger brother. "The guy from Led Zeppelin, Robert Plant, walks onstage in Tampa and they do twenty minutes and it rains and they go off and they come back and they get to the last song of the evening and he says, 'You don't like it? We've progressed. I hope you've progressed.' Tough shit to you—that was his attitude."

"Their first couple of albums they were a good band," Malcolm continues. "After that, man, phew. If you want to get laid back, put on the headphones and smoke a joint, okay. But as far as getting things happening and having a party, that's boring shit. We try to keep it exciting all the time. We've never put anything different on a record, just guitars and drums. We've never expanded. Other bands are playing disco or synthesizers, or that Bowie stuff, which is disco with a little blues. We could do that, but it's got nothing to do with rock 'n' roll."

One place where the Reagan/AC/DC analogy breaks down is that I like AC/DC and I don't like Reagan. But part of my musical taste is pretty conservative. Great power chords still do it for me,

and nobody plays them better than Malcolm Young. If most guitarists are frantically chasing new noises—and they are—there ought to be room for a guy who wants to make the same old noises better. He's been doing just that for nine albums, and chances appear pretty good for more of the same on the next nine.

The AC/DC biography also has a familiar ring to it. Like many rock stars, the Young brothers pack a lot of energy into extremely short frames. They rebelled again: their rigidly conservative education in Glasgow, Scotland, and Sydney, Australia, by screwing up and playing rock 'n' roll. Like many rock stars from the American South, they rebelled only so far, bringing much of the conservatism of their culture to their art.

Besides the Youngs, AC/DC's original lineup included Mark Evans on bass, Phil Rudd on drums (recently replaced by Simon Wright) and Bon Scott on vocals. Older brother George Young and Harry Vanda produced the first five albums. They released their first American album, *High Voltage*, in 1976. It featured guitars, drums, often irritatingly





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high-pitched vocals, and a picture of Angus whacking off a guitar coming out his fly. It garnered them a reputation of stupidity that has dogged them to this day. After five albums with only the slightest variations on these themes, they dropped Vanda and Young and hired Robert John "Mutt" Lange as producer. The result was their first great album, *Highway To Hell*, in 1979. The guitars were lowdown, fat and dirty, but not sloppy. The riffs had some holes for the first time. And Scott finally learned to control his unique voice. He died at his peak soon after of another well-worn rock 'n' roll tradition: getting drunk, passing out and choking to death on his own vomit. The band rebounded with their

best album ever, *Back In Black*, in 1980. Again featuring Lange's devastating ear for getting power chords preserved in plastic and the vocals of newcomer Brian Johnson (one of the best howlers now extant), the album was all over the radio for a year and a major catalyst in the current revival of high energy/heavy metal.

"It was the first time we used the studio [Compass Point] in the Bahamas," says Malcolm. "Mutt did quite a bit of work. He wanted to get a bigger bottom end. But as far as our sound, it was the same as it always was."

It was Mutt's technique then?

"Well, we've always played around with different mike placement. You put

five or six mikes around a speaker, you get a different sound from each one. Mutt can mess around a lot."

"The first thing that was good there was the room," says Angus. "You didn't have to go to a lot of trouble to get a guitar sound. So that was half the battle. At the same time, most studios in the world were set up for disco with lots of padding around."

"That place really opened it up with a nice wooden floor," says Malcolm. "Good, live, ambient sound. Plenty of slappin' goin' on there."

Slappin'? "You know. The sound coming back. Big room sound. More like a live gig."

This is a fact: the last three AC/DC albums—*Back In Black*, *For Those About To Rock*, and *Flick Of The Switch*—make the bookshelf speakers in your living room sound like the 60,000-watt tri-amp system in Madison Square Garden. Just crank up "Evil Walks" or "You Shook Me All Night Long" or "Rising Power" or....

"We had a problem getting that fat a sound on that one," says Malcolm. "So we used these heads [dual microphones placed as far apart as human ears]. We played the whole thing through the studio and recorded it again. We've always recorded flat, straight into the desk, because we've found that if you use a lot of top, you're going to lose bottom. So whatever you're adding, you're taking away something as well. If you can get as natural as possible, you're in good shape when it comes to mixing."

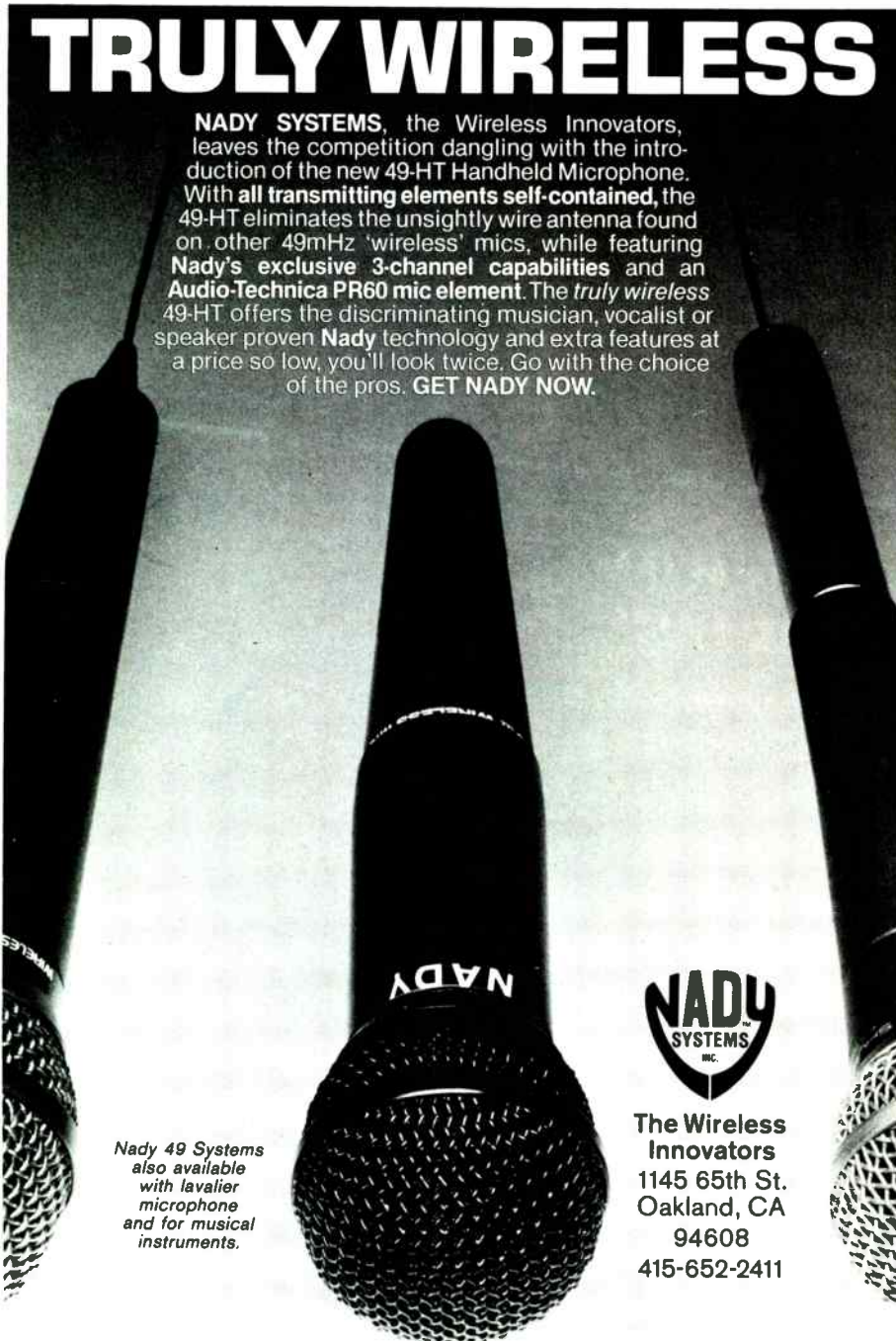
If the songs are built on Malcolm's power chords, the stage show depends on Angus' antics. After dressing up as a gorilla, Zorro and Superman in the early days, he has settled on a traditional British schoolboy's outfit which he wears to this day. When he performs he seems to be dying of terminal hyperactivity. Combine that with his utterly demented expression and habit of mooning the audience at every show, and you can see why there might have been a certain amount of misunderstanding between AC/DC and the critics.

"Nah, there wasn't any misunderstanding," says Malcolm. "Those guys are just all fuckin' swankin' off. Don't have a fuckin' clue to what's going on. We used to get called punk, then new wave, then heavy metal. All the time, we've been a rock 'n' roll band. All the time. Jerry Lee Lewis, he used to moon the audience. That's when Angus started doing it. It was a bit of an insult on the crowd one night. 'Well, fuck you, what do you want?' Went over so well, we kept doin' it. There wasn't any misunderstanding."

One theory of videos—told to me by Joan Jett's manager—is that you don't do just concert footage. You keep the

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concerts special so the kids feel they aren't getting the same old stuff at a live show. For videos, you do concepts. But AC/DC uses only concert footage on MTV.

"That sounds logical, but making a video has nothing to do with rock 'n' roll," says Malcolm. "That's why we do them live. It saves us from all that Hollywood crap."

The Youngs have slagged off bands like Kiss for their reliance on theatrics, yet Angus wears a costume and is very theatrical.

"It helps me become the character onstage," says Angus. "If I just stood there and played, I'd be totally useless. A lot of people enjoy dressing up and going to parties."

"We slag off everyone," says Malcolm. "I personally can't remember slagging off Kiss. Good luck to anybody for what they're doing. But if we slagged them off, it's because their music is meaningless. Angus gets in his school uniform in about five minutes before the show. Gene Simmons takes three hours to put on his fuckin' make-up. Has fuckin' boots this high. There's a bit of a difference, really."

"With me," adds Angus, "it's not a glamour thing."

"You can't even compare us to Boston or Foreigner," says Malcolm. "Maybe the tempo, but the riffs in it, we're miles above them. Their stuff is kid stuff. We play around for three minutes; we'll give you half a dozen riffs and be as good as

any of them. But we sit around and wait for the good ones."

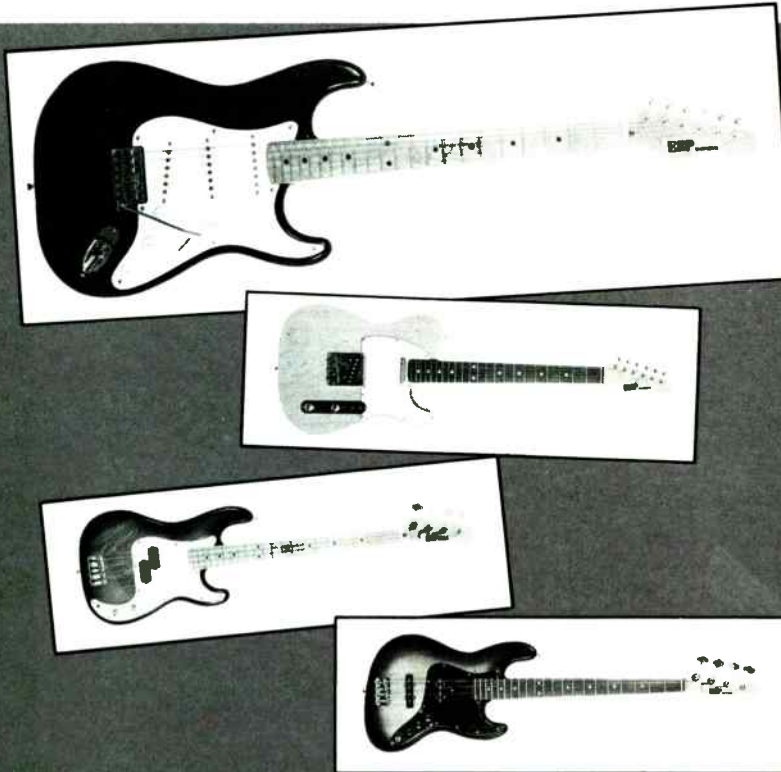
Anyone they sound like? Say, Van Halen?

"They seem like a high school band to me," says Angus. "They look like four guys who were hired because the girls like them. To me, it's like Eddie Van Halen practices. Rick Wakeman was another one. We've got a saying for guys who go on like that: 'Practice at home.' All those widdly-woos got nothing to do with the song. Just slapped in there to show they're virtuosos. I'm not saying he can't play, but if you're asking for my taste, it's like high school. He's probably a genius. But it's got nothing to do with rock 'n' roll."

You guys seems to reject everything that "isn't rock 'n' roll." How do you define rock 'n' roll?

"What we play," Malcolm laughs wetly.

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### AC/DC Plugs In

"Most guitars you find have all these different tone and volume controls," Malcolm says. "I pulled all that stuff out of my guitar. When you find a sound you like, you should just pull out all the wires that you don't need. So I've got one pickup and a volume control on an old Gretsch Firebird. I use it in concert and in the studio all the time. Right from the first album."


Through *Flick Of The Switch* you've used one guitar? "Yeah. I had a Falcon once, big white guitar. That sounded great until somebody fixed it and it never sounded the same again. So I ditched it."

What would happen if you lost it? "That would be the end of me, I suppose," he laughs with the deep 'wet chortle of a heavy smoker.

And you play that through a Marshall stack? "Yeah, just a normal Marshall. It's like a car. You can get a good one or a bad one. If it's a bad one, they can fix it."

Bro Angus is just as conservative: "I've got a lot of the same guitar, Gibson SGs. That shape, that style. It's just that they all sound *different*. It's like Malcolm said. You only find one you're happy with."

Bassist Cliff Williams joins the Young brothers in their pursuit of sonic honesty; his Steinberger bass goes unprocessed to a splitter which sends direct to the P.A. board and also to five Cerwin-Vega heads and thence to four Cerwin-Vega 2x15 cabinets and one 1x15 reflex cabinet. Simon Wright pounds Sonor drums and Paiste cymbals. Malcolm Young favors a Sony wireless unit while Angus is a Schaffer-Vega exponent. Singer Brian Johnson has a NADY wireless for his Shure SM58.

The mammoth tour P.A. is made by Britain's Hill Audio. The firepower is 72,000 watts, supplied by a Hill M-4 sound system. The main mixing board is a 24x8 Hill J Series 3 unit, while a 24x10 Hill M Series-3 board mixes the 18,000-watt monitor system. Soundman Mike Scarf admits he mixes in a faint trace of a Klark-Teknics DM-700 digital delay for the backup vocals and an Ursa Major 8x32 reverb unit for lead vocals. 



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# FACES

## CYNDI LAUPER

### *Unusual Fun*

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It's not easy being unusual. Especially when you're Cyndi Lauper and the crowd at Roseland is there to see the Kinks. Most of them don't seem to know quite what to make of the shock of orange hair tied back with an enormous pink bow, much less the red- and black-sashed, chain-belted white dress sashaying the stage with enough authority and spunk to power the amps single-handedly.

"When I sing, sometimes I feel strength from my voice, and courage. So I try to catch people's attention and give them some strength. It should be there for people who can absorb it."

"Here's the one you don't like" is the introduction for the

ukelele-backed, Betty Boop-voiced version of 1929's "He's So Unusual." The energy onstage is non-stop, even if the feedback from the dance floor lapses from time to time. The voice hiccups and slides, the woman bounces from platform to stage with an almost cartoon-inspired sense of light-hearted but sincere determination. The song, as predicted, is greeted with boos by the Kinks Krowd.

"I have an attitude of: I'll pull through, and if it doesn't work, I'll make it work. If it's a good response or a bad response, sometimes I don't care as long as it's a response. And sometimes I'll go out of my way just to get one."

The circuit bands and Blue Angel are behind her. There's a video in heavy rotation on MTV and a single breezing up the charts in the United States and the United Kingdom. Six years of vocal therapy and voice training have given her a confidence in an instrument overshadowed with natural harmonics. "Like the harmonics on a guitar, where instead of playing the note, you play the harmonic—the next pitch up. It sounds like a whistle."

Real Singers in the Lauper lexicon include: Chuck Berry ("He did some ballads you wouldn't believe"), Jackie Wilson, Big Maybelle and ("of course") Janis Joplin.

A flip of a skirt, a peek of petticoat, a dip of shoulder, a head thrown back in the joy of being there as the set sails from covers (the Brains' "Money Changes Everything," Prince's "When You Were Mine") to the almost-anthem "Girls Just Want To Have Fun"...and this time a hand-waving, attentive crowd sings along.

"Some people actually think it means girls want to have fun—Horizontal Refreshment—which is not what the song means at all." Originally a Robert Hazard

song, "I took out the things from his version that I liked and I wrote another song around that. But it's important that a man wrote this song. When one gender is free, it frees the other one. Life is fun. Fun shouldn't exclude anyone."

When Cyndi talks about fun, the word takes on an ironic, but not insincere, twist. Fun, in the eye of this beholder, can be equated with self-exploration and the opening of potential which, all things considered, should be a fun process.

The rock 'n' bop pace slows somewhat for the haunting "Time After Time" ("I picked the title out of a TV Guide I'm sorry to say"), a story of relationships and the dilemma of strong women in them, "always taking a step behind. It all takes place in REM state—dreaming." Through it all, the band (John K on bass; Sandy Gennaro, drums; Kenny Hairston, keyboards; and John McCurry, guitar) plays follow the leader.

"I wanted special people who had a good sense of music on the edge. I didn't want to copy the record because they're not the same people, and it's not K-Tel. We also use toys, like the Casio; I play a wooden recorder and the ukelele. I have the best time when I can inspire someone to go home and pick up the penny flute and play it."

Cyndi considers herself her own instrument, vibrating in a more personal way than a guitar or keyboard. "Singers deal with emotions. That's my job. I express human emotions in my voice, show a human heart."

And is *this* woman having fun?

"Oh, yeah," she laughs. "I'm having a great time." —  
**Robin Sagon**

## THE MINUTEMEN

### *Hard & Fast Combat*

"Our big message is there's always been a fight, and we're the new installment," says Mike Watt, the lanky, rubber-visaged bass player of the Minutemen. Indeed,

the music that the California-based trio makes sounds like hand-to-hand combat—quick, brutal and deadly.

The Minutemen—Watt, rotund guitarist D. Boon and





muscular drummer George Hurley—have selected a name for themselves descriptive of both the themes and form of the band. The moniker, with its nod to both Revolutionary War patriotism and latter-day right-wing reaction, reflects the group's concern with personal politics and freedom. The name also wryly connotes the brevity of their funk-driven, ferocious musical outbursts: most of their songs clock in at under sixty seconds, and they refer to their two-and-a-half minute number, "The Anchor," as "our epic."

Boon and Watt grew up playing together in heavy metal cover bands in San Pedro, the harbor city south of Los Angeles. They had their major musical epiphany in 1977, when the L.A. punk rock pot started boiling over. "We didn't even know there was such a thing as little shows, or that you could play your own songs," Watt says. "Then we came to L.A. and saw 'em breakin' strings, and we thought, 'Aw, were we stupid.'"

With drummer Hurley, the pair started the Reactionaries, a band emphasizing original material. That combo split in 1979, but the trio regrouped as the Minutemen in the summer of 1980, after the group's original drummer, a veteran of polka bands, departed in terror.

The group's songs were now short, feral, and to the point. "To me, the songs are like quilts," says Hurley. "You've got all these little patches, and you sew 'em together." The curtness was also practical, Watt adds: "In the Reactionaries, we did these four-minute fast songs. I passed out once. We can't hang the longness anymore. The Minutemen's new, strikingly different music,

coruscating with references to Wire, the Pop Group, Captain Beefheart, and Gang of Four, attracted the attention of Greg Ginn, guitarist for the L.A. hardcore band Black Flag. He invited the trio to record an EP for the Flag's SST label; to date, the Minutemen have released three EPs and two albums (*The Punch Line* and *What Makes A Man Start Fires?*) on SST, with another EP for Thermidor in San Francisco.

The group has been phenomenally prolific, recording nearly seventy songs (many included on L.A. compilations, some of which were issued on the Minutemen's own label, New Alliance Records) and penning nearly two hundred tunes. They are currently planning their most ambitious project: a two-record, forty-song set, *Double Nickels On The Dime*. The title is trucker slang for doing the speed limit.

"The record's a challenge," says Watt. "Doing three or four songs is nothin'—we crank 'em out in one week. And we can't give the audience the one song that they can run their lives with, but we can give 'em a whole shitload."

The band's music has lost a little of its bewildering speed ("We used to just haul ass," Watt says), but their new material—songs like "The Only Minority," "Viet Nam," and "This Ain't No Picnic"—remains ardently political, although in allusive rather than didactic fashion.

"Really, a band can't show you the way," Hurley says. Adds Watt, with the modesty so characteristic of the Minutemen: "A band can give you confidence—the Dils and the Clash gave me confidence. But you can't expect to show people the way." —

**Chris Morris**

## THE DIRTY DOZEN

### *New Orleans' Revenge*

Propelled by a polyrhythmic shuffle from drums, the hot, festive chorus of horns danced into muggy night air through the open doors of Tipitina's down in New Orleans. The coordinated horn riffs sounded like prototypical James Brown horns except that the trumpeter was blowing a sort of updated Dixieland solo even as the electric bass stuttered out insistent funk. But inside Tipitina's there was no bass player—only horns and drums played by the eight musicians of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. Two drummers, one with a snare and one with a bass drum, played standing up. Those booming basslines were coming from a tuba. That's right, a marching band was creating a new kind of musical parade and leading the sweating, swaying audience into uncharted musical territory.

The Dirty Dozen really did start out playing in the parades and social club picnics that are staples of New Orleans tradition. Naturally they played the standard parade and Dixieland tunes, but a curious evolution led them to play blues, funk, traditional jazz, bop, free and something that doesn't have a name—music midway between African, funk and jazz. No wonder the Rolling Stones wanted them for a pri-

vate party. And no wonder CBS (prodded by Dizzy Gillespie and Newport Festival impresario George Wein) will release the Dirty Dozen debut LP as part of its new Young Blood jazz series.

The band formed around 1979 when a resurgent social club looked for entertainment and the various musicians who came together as the Dirty Dozen (they had all been playing in other bands, including that of Fats Domino) had fun providing it. But dissatisfaction with purely traditional material led to experimentation, and suddenly some exciting new music was being created from a repertoire that includes Charlie Parker, Monk and Duke, along with Michael Jackson (would you believe "Billie Jean"?), gut-bucket blues and traditional sounds.

"I would relate our music as Afro-traditional," says leader/trumpeter Gregory Davis, "but the rhythm section tends to make the rhythms Afro-American, Cuban or Caribbean and the horns tend to change tunes to fit that."

On "Feets Don't Fail Me Now," the topside of a single they put out last year, the polyrhythmic riffing sounds close to Afro-Beat while the repeated chant of the title

*continued on page 34*



MICHAEL P. SMITH

# THE ROMANTICS

## Renovation, Rotation, & Romance

BOB ALFORD



"We're pretty passionate guys," says drummer/singer/lyricist Jimmy Marinos of the Detroit-based Romantics, a claim buttressed by the band's recent top-ten single "Talking In Your Sleep." "We attempted to put something on vinyl we could look back on in a few years' time and not be ashamed of. There's a fine line between the sexual and the sensual, and the Romantics are somewhere in between."

The Romantics roared out of the Motor City almost four years ago with the hit "What I Like About You," matching red leather suits and a high-energy live show that incorporated the band's seminal influences: 60s British Invasion groups, Detroit garage rockers like MC5, Mitch Ryder and Bob Seger, and the Motown Sound. Three years, three albums and just as many costume changes later, the band had lost that momentum, threatening to become just another touring outfit, slogging it out 365 days a year on the road. Fortunately, MTV kept them in the public eye by airing the video of "What I Like About You" long after radio stations had dropped the record from their playlists.

"We became over-confident because we were just a bunch of cats from Detroit who did what felt right and it clicked for us," admits Marinos ruefully. "So we went into the studio for the second

album a little cocky and fell into the sophomore jinx."

That record, optimistically entitled *National Breakout*, disappeared quickly, as did its successor, *Strictly Personal*. Personnel changes brought in lead guitarist Coz Canler alongside original members Marinos, rhythm guitarist/singer Wally Palmar and bassist Mike Skill. The band went from conventional black leather suits to red, purple and pink numbers before hitting the jackpot with their current wardrobe, snake skin, and a fourth album, *In Heat*.

"What pissed us off were the constant allusions to those four lovable mop-tops from England," complains Marinos from underneath the group's other trademark, their high-rise quiffs. "People kept comparing us because we wore matching suits, but bands have always worn the same things onstage until the late 60s and early 70s, when everyone wore blue jeans. Look at the Motown groups. And before that the big bands, where twenty guys wore matching tuxes. Or even earlier, the marching bands with John Philip Sousa. We just felt we were following a tradition by wearing the same thing."

Certainly, the Romantics have a way to go before their musical output rivals the Beatles, though their songs do reflect the band's own honest concerns.

"I've had an obsession to be in a rock 'n' roll band since I was twelve years old," says Marinos, who formed the Romantics with bassist Skill in 1977, but played in various groups for almost ten years before that. "We tried to come up with a musical approach for the Romantics which reflected our own roots. We all wanted to get back to the essence of what rock 'n' roll was all about, the stuff which inspired us to get into a band in the first place: to make a record, to meet girls, to be successful."

"I'm not ashamed of commercial success," he insists. "I don't think there's anything wrong in coming up with a great hook that people in

everyday life somehow find useful. You've got to realize pop music is a form of commercial art, even while it provides an outlet for people's frustrations."

The pretty-boy appeal of the group surely has not been hurt by the video of "Talking In Your Sleep," which finds the lads cavorting in a surrealistic dream landscape of nightgown-clad nubbility.

"I think our songs are all about the opposite sex because that's what really inspires me," says wordsmith Marinos. "I can't help it. If I've got three minutes to say what I want, I go for my natural instinct. After all, I'm a Romantic. You should see the way I kiss." — **Roy Trakin**

# EL GRAN COMBO

## The Salsa Standard

It's Thanksgiving Day and the telephone lines are sizzling. "Vaya, baby," chortled Penny to her good friend Magaly, "tomorrow is salsa time with *el combo*." Salsa in Spanish means sauce; a mixture of Afro-Cuban beats spiced by the resulting amalgam of the Big Apple's energy and the predominantly Puerto Rican population of New York Latinos. And when it comes to salsa, the standard for the past twenty-two years has been El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico.

Spawned from the renowned Cortijo y su Combo, the group that brought Puerto Rican folkloric rhythms *bomba* and *plena* to international recognition, El Gran Combo has set a standard for longevity and consistency unequalled among their peers. Their uncanny ability to score hit after hit all these years—even during the R&B-derived

boogaloo craze of the late 60s—is impressive in an industry where bands come and go like autumn breezes.

Credit starts at the top, with Rafael Ithier, EGC's autocratic leader, musical director, pianist, sole arranger, and exclusive producer. Ithier has led EGC with the business acumen of a J. Paul Getty. He is a husky man with a kind, craterized face, and a quick and wide smile which makes his white mutton chops—on an otherwise black-haired head—move to the beat of an imaginary metronome as he speaks. "No one is indispensable in *el combo*," he has said on more than one occasion, "not even me!" At the same time, he has helped band members through difficult periods of financial, health or emotional hardships. He also formatted the group with the artistic

*continued on next page*



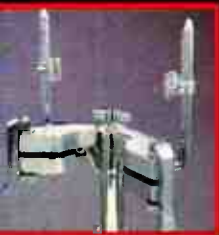
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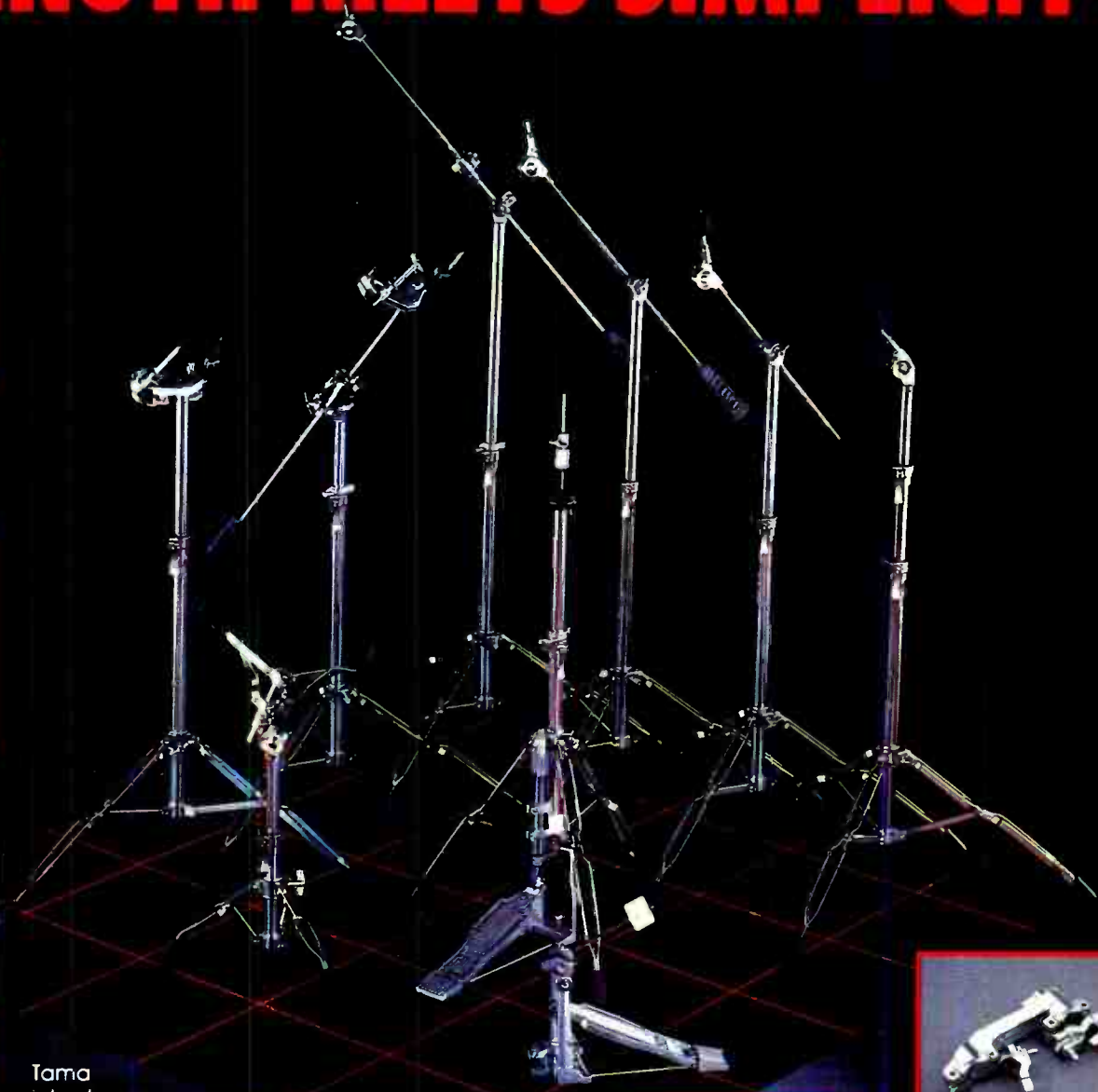
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### Dirty Dozen from page 31

phrase nudges it toward rap territory. This mix of rhythmic and melodic sophistication and danceability has been missing from the jazz scene for a long time. As a result, the Dirty Dozen has been playing everything from Kool Jazz Festivals to jazz clubs to parties. "But we don't play that many parades or street things anymore 'cause we attract such a large crowd, we can't even play," Davis says.

Three LPs are projected with the Columbia deal. The legendary vocalist Jon Hendricks has expressed interest in a collaboration and Dizzy will be involved in the second LP. All of which just goes to show that New Orleans is still a good place to learn your music. — **Randall F. Grass**

### El Gran Combo from previous page

shrewdness of a David Geffen. "Since we started I knew we could make people dance. But I also wanted to make El Gran Combo visually appealing and long-lasting." The secret of making people dance, Ithier felt, was to make the music simple. After personally choosing all the numbers, the leader sets a rhythmical structure, composed primarily of vamping piano intros which generally do not exceed sixteen bars. The harmony part of the orchestrations

rests on two saxophones which undermine the brilliant, brassy timbre of two trumpets. Fanny Ceballos' trombone, introduced to the group in 1977 but now an integral part of every arrangement, keeps things flowing with its melodic intros to the mambos—that part of the song in which the saxes trade syncopated lines. As a result, dancers get sucked into the groove by the trombone, until the full mambo force hits them, forcing the feet to explode with excitement.

EGC's visual appeal stems from their origin as a singing trio. Choreographies are designed for each number, sometimes depicting the lyrical theme of the songs, other times simply exhibiting a series of precisely coordinated dance routines. A secondary level of this choreography is carried by the subdued, but constant motion of the brass and saxophones, along with the dynamism of a rhythm section led by Ithier himself. Yet another aspect is the group's varied uniforms—a symbol of family unity as well as nattiness in an industry better known for more casual attire.

In addition to demanding and receiving top dollar for every performance, EGC is part-owner of Combo Records, the label which records and distributes their albums; each member shares in the revenues derived from their consid-

erable album sales. As a result, El Gran Combo is salsa's highest paying band, with starting salaries reported at an \$800 a week level, and in a field where \$40 per night is a more typical take-home pay. This combination of artistic and human elements has made them musical ambassadors in such unlikely salsa venues like Mexico, Japan and Europe, receiving awards from almost every country they have visited.

Their twentieth anniversary celebration in Madison Square Garden (EGC is third in number of performances at the arena, surpassed only by salsa's queen Celia Cruz, and Mick and the Stones) brought out 22,000 screaming fans, who got even louder when Ithier's gruff voice exclaimed, "We owe it all to you. With pride and decent humility, El Gran Combo wants to dedicate its next twenty years to you, and to the beautiful island of Puerto Rico." Somewhere in that throng of admirers, Penny and Magaly smiled at each other. — **Tony Sabournin**

### Spinal Tap from page 14

been about a really successful band. This band isn't terrible—they're not a shitty garage band—but they just miss most of the time. It's a quality that a lot of bands have. They continue to turn out records, but they don't have hits.

"If this were both not the greatest music *and* not funny, there'd be no point. But this is parody; we're not only re-creators but distillers, and we tried to make everything fit the outlines of this particular joke."

Clearly, *This Is Spinal Tap* treads a very fine line, attempting to succeed as humor and to some extent as believable (if not good) music. It remains to be seen if it will work. Some of the references may be too inside; some drug-ravaged heavy metal fans may not get the joke at all, and wonder why anyone bothered to make a movie about a mediocre band. Everyone else, however, is in for a treat.



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PAUL COX RETNA

S

## TYLE COUNCIL

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL WELLER



BY VIC GARBARINI

A rrogant, humorless, aloof...those were a few of the choice adjectives tossed at Paul Weller by the English music press during his seven-year tenure as leader of the Jam. Although they had little commercial impact in the States, the Jam were *the* British pop phenomenon of the early 80s. Even the notoriously fickle U.K. music press who seemingly delight in tearing down idols they help establish acknowledged the Jam's pre-eminence. This fickleness on the part of the London music papers results in a vicious circle of sorts. There's an unspoken conviction that only fresh, young bands have anything to offer, so any band that hangs in long enough to become established and successful must become compromised and artistically bankrupt.

Of course, this does often happen—a comfortable band can easily lose its creative spark—but this obsession with the new helps to bring about the very result feared: it accelerates the burnout process by feverishly hyping bands who are too green or lacking in talent to live up to that kind of billing. Which makes the Jam's achievement of staying at the top of the critics polls as well as the commercial charts all the more impressive.

Initially tagged as "mod revivalists" back in '78 for their obvious musical and stylistic borrowings from Pete Townshend, Weller and mates Bruce Foxton on bass and drummer Rick Buckler did sound like a sinewy, somewhat brittle punk version of the Who in hyperdrive. The raw fury and immediacy of songs

like "This Is The Modern World" and "In The City" evidenced their sincerity and commitment to mercilessly exposing and analyzing the economic and spiritual decline of British life.

By 1980's *Setting Sun* album, Weller had proved himself an original song stylist in his own right, but something essential was still missing. Ardently sincere though he was, Weller remained an uptight English kid. There was a certain grace, a generosity of spirit lacking in spite of the obvious passion. Sensing this lack, Weller found himself increasingly drawn back to the soul music of the 60s, especially Motown and Stax material. The essential spontaneity and emotiveness of the music was exactly what Weller had been searching for—a music that could help him get out of his head and into his heart.

These influences were strongly felt on 1982's *The Gift*. The single "Town Without Malice" was an effective Motown cop that even made an impact on the U.S. charts. But the real breakthrough came later that year with the release of what

limitation lies in its inability to offer any positive alternatives, to see that what's called for is the discovery and implementation of new values and images of community.

The current soul revival can be seen as an instinctive attempt to tap the deeper wellsprings of human feeling for just that purpose. If we were paying attention we would have noticed that something significant was spawning over two years ago. That's when David Bowie, who'd initiated the era of emotional numbness a decade ago, broke through the ice with "Under Pressure," an emotionally volatile return to positivism that went virtually ignored by everyone (probably because he recorded it with Queen, of all people). But there was no mistaking the message of last year's *Let's Dance* as Bowie went back to rock's black roots (with a little help from Chic's Nile Rodgers) to get further in touch with his own feelings. Then along comes Boy George, whom, it seems, everybody from Andropov to Judge Crater adores. But so far it's only been Weller and a few others who understand the implications of what's happening, who see clearly that this is a necessary therapeutic step towards the formulations of new values, not just another fad. And being the singleminded, intense lad that he is, Weller has extended his search back beyond Motown to black pop's real roots, gospel music. There is a raw, unvarnished purity about gospel music that finds a resonance in Weller's own soul. He is relatively free of the self-aggrandizing myth-mongering that often taints even the best English bands like the Clash and U2. His anger and criticism take on added weight because he realizes that he's got to live his ideals before he can preach them. He's also apparently secure and honest enough nowadays to let down his belligerent front and start owning up to some of his gaffes and contradictions. (Are you listening, Joe Strummer?)

Meanwhile, somewhere in the bowels of London's West End, Weller, Talbot and Style Council's expanded touring company are working their way through a rehearsal of the band's repertoire. Weller had toyed with the idea of adding some late-period Jam tunes to the mix, but decided in the end that the material from *Introducing The Style Council* (PolyGram) combined with recent songs from their forthcoming Geffen LP *Cafe Bleu* would suffice. It may be noteworthy that two of the auxiliary horn players, plus one keyboardist and a singer, are women. Though most of them look young enough to be carded by any responsible bartender, they play with the panache and precision of veterans—if not the passion. During a break I sidle over to baby-faced Mick Talbot, who's fiddling with something on his incredibly ancient Wurlitzer electric piano and Hammond A-100 organ (he modernizes his sound via a Roland Jazz Chorus, Leslie and Pro-One Sequencer). "I've been listening to old blues and R&B since I was eleven," says Talbot. "Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley, the Spinners, all that Philly soul stuff. But what really hooked me was when my dad showed me it all came down to just three chords. I've been trying to absorb it and make something of my own of it ever since." The boyishly unassuming Weller straps on his Telecaster and swings the band into a stunning rendition of Funkadelic's "One Nation Under A Groove" (real *traction* here, as opposed to the slicker Stax stuff). But the real highlight comes a few minutes later as Weller's Tele outlines a slowly ascending chord pattern and he begins a spare, gospel-inflected melody. The song is "It Came To Pieces In My Hand" and to find it you'll have to search out the Polydor import single of "A Solid Bond In Your Heart" where it holds down the B-side, since it doesn't appear on either album. The lyrics are a testimony to just how far the formerly arrogant Boy Wonder has come in the last year and a half.

*Wore my pride in the darkness  
Scratched away at the stars  
Thought I was Lord of this crappy jungle  
I should have been put behind bars  
And now I sit with my head in my hands  
Wailing to the weeping world...*



HE JAM DIDN'T  
PROGRESS AS  
SOUND AS F  
DIDN'T CAT  
RIGHT FEEL

was to be the Jam's last single. "Beat Surrender" was much more than a new credo or declaration of independence. It was indeed, as the title implies, a true surrender to the transformative power and majesty of music. It was also the sound of a formerly uptight English kid from Woking finally letting go and letting music carry him to a new vista.

But with this epiphany came the realization that the Jam was no longer an appropriate vehicle for his expanded and heightened musical perspective. As Weller himself wrote on the liner notes of the band's posthumous greatest hits package, *Snap!*, "I'm on my way... Weller reactivates his soul instincts, hears the call from all directions, sees the creation in motion lumbering uncertainly: too large to be nimble. Pull off the unexpected? Surprise and subvert? How can they? The stage set is too big, the context too constricted and the playing too familiar...." And so Paul Weller announced that he was killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Knowing that growth necessitated risk and change, he surrendered to the demands of his muse and announced the dissolution of the Jam. He was all of twenty-four years of age.

Forming an alliance with keyboardist Mick Talbot, Weller immediately proceeded to tear apart and rearrange the foundations of his musical gestalt. Talbot's steaming Hammond organ became the centerpiece of the new band's sound, with Paul's guitar relegated to a supporting role. The Style Council, as they billed themselves, took their inspiration directly from the Stax/Motown era players like Booker T. and the Bar-Kays, among others. Their first single, "Long Hot Summer" was a languid soul ballad built around Talbot's lazy, circular synth riff. The sense of grace and fluidity in Weller's vocals here and on the exuberant "Speak Like A Child" expressed emotional nuances beyond his reach during his Jam days. While Weller is no Otis Redding or Levi Stubbs, his connection with the spirit of that music rings true.

There has been a soul revival of sorts bubbling under the surface of the British pop scene for the past few years, acting as a counterbalance to the doom and gloom exuded by the post-punk synth bands. To be fair, their despair and alienation constitutes a genuine response to the spiritual and material emptiness of current British society. Music and writing that reflects this disintegration has a certain undeniable power because it accurately documents what's happening. But its



*I learned my lesson the hard way  
I thought I was king of the whole wide world  
But it just came to pieces in my hand.*

They say it's only when you let go of who you think you are that you begin to really Be.

Paul Weller is twenty-five years old.

**MUSICIAN:** *You've been accused of having an anti-American bias during your time with the Jam. You seemed almost contemptuous of American audiences at times, and last year you cut short a major interview with one of our own writers after only a few minutes. Some say it's sour grapes over the Jam's lack of success here, but I'm sure there's more behind it than that.*

**WELLER:** Well, I suppose some of the criticism leveled toward me about that is fair enough. It was irresponsible of me to put my complaints across in such a generalized way, because my main venom is directed against the American government, who I see taking over the whole of our continent—not just politically but *culturally* as well. But the way I phrased things was wrong because I don't suppose the ordinary American on the street necessarily agrees with his government on all this.

**MUSICIAN:** *Yet there has been resistance to your music in the American media, both with the Jam and now the Style Council. MTV, for instance, refused to air your "Long Hot Summer" video over here....*

**WELLER:** Yeah, somebody told me recently that they won't play that video because it's too R&B. Too R&B! Now what the hell does *that* mean? Where do you go from there?

**MUSICIAN:** *Basically, the American media brainwashed themselves into believing that the white FM audience wouldn't accept either new music or black music. Of course, as soon as both of those were given a chance, they were wildly successful. But MTV and FM radio still don't understand what's going on, even as they go along with the new tide. Basically, you could say there's a parallel here with your own acceptance of black music after years of decidedly un-funky material with the Jam. What finally drew you to this music?*

**WELLER:** It was mainly the voices. I think, I recently went to a gospel concert by an American group, the Mighty Clouds of Joy, and I just can't imagine seeing that in an English church. Now, I'm not of any particular religious persuasion but at the same time I'm not an atheist. I think the whole essence of religion is a celebration of the human spirit, and that obviously comes through in the gospel singing of the black church. You can hear in the voices of a lot of Motown and Stax singers like Al Green that they've come through that thing.

**MUSICIAN:** *Their music is also less self-conscious and contrived. It's coming from a place where they can draw on the force that flows from their struggles and joys more directly.*

**WELLER:** Yeah, it's more an instinctive than an intellectual thing. They don't appear to sit around thinking, "Why am I singing this song?" They just go out and *do* it. That's as it should be, as opposed to what happens with many groups in England and with the press here where there's always an analytical attitude towards what you do. I must admit I've been that way in the past and it's crap, really. It's enough just to go out and do it.

**MUSICIAN:** *You've expressed dissatisfaction in the past with the way the Jam handled the R&B-ish material on The Gift. Did you feel that that band was the wrong vehicle for your new musical interests?*

**WELLER:** Yeah, there was a lot of that really. I think all three of us became good musicians, but as a unit I don't think we made any progress after *Sound Affects*. There were a number of songs on *The Gift* where we didn't catch the feeling right. There was too much "let's-see-how-many-riffs-I-can-stick-

in-here" thinking going on. You can't make music that way.

If you believe in a song, then that's got to take precedence over your ego or your proficiency. If portraying that song in its best light means not playing drums or some other instrument, then that's what should be done. With the Style Council there's some songs that I'm not playing on at all, or where I've gotten another singer in to do it, because I'm not into it purely for my own ego reasons. The most important thing is just to get the song across.

**MUSICIAN:** *As much as I enjoyed your music with the Jam, I sensed something missing. There was passion, yes, but it lacked that celebratory thing you spoke of before, that joy. Then, at the end came "Beat Surrender," a remarkable exaltation and release, and a real surrender to the deeper aspects of the music. Your liner notes on the back confirmed that you'd broken through to a different level: "...at a certain point in music when all elements and patterns...suddenly explode into one...giving you a quick glimpse, a sudden realization about your purpose on this earth." People usually don't write things like that unless they're very stoned, or have really experienced something special. What did you see in that moment?*

**WELLER:** The whole thing I've been seeing about music is that it's got that special passion you speak of when you want it to, and when it's needed. There was an English soul group in the 60s who referred to music as the new religion, and that's how it is. Music has a lot of responsibility to live up to—it has to supply the fight which is missing in our culture now. As far as I'm concerned, religion is pretty much dead on its feet, and politics is just a waste of time at the moment, so young people have nowhere else to put their faith.

**MUSICIAN:** *You're beginning to sound like your old nemesis Pete Townshend. Do you ever regret any of the remarks you've made about him?*



**Weller's new Style:** "The most important thing is to get the song across."

**WELLER:** Well, yeah, I really do like him, and I've been in contact with him lately because he wrote to me and I replied. I've got a lot of respect for him, but there was a period of time where I would very self-consciously slag him off because I was constantly being compared to him. I can't even knock that, really, because when I first started off I did copy Pete Townshend because I thought his early stuff and the way he looked were brilliant.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's very easy to castigate someone like Townshend for screwing up at times. But without excusing his faults, I think you get more empathetic as you get older and have to face the same problems. It's so easy to make mistakes, but at*

the Jam. That gospel group I saw didn't have any of that stuff, and yet I came out really uplifted, a real spiritual experience.

**MUSICIAN:** *What pop groups do you feel represent the new approach you're referring to?*

**WELLER:** Animal Nightlife, for one. I like their music a lot and I also like the way they present it.

**MUSICIAN:** *What is it about their presentation that you like?*

**WELLER:** There's nothing about it—there's none of that myth thing. Most groups I like today are not rock bands. JoBoxers are very good and I like Culture Club quite a lot.

**MUSICIAN:** *Let's look at your own group. Considering your unorthodox attitudes towards the current music scene, I assume the name Style Council was meant to be ironic, or did I miss something?*

**WELLER:** It's not ironic because I do care passionately about style. But I think a lot of people get that confused with fashion. I see style as being much more classical and timeless, whereas fashion is more a trendy thing. I don't think you've had the same thing in America, but we've always had these little fads based around music and clothes. Today they're wearing certain jumpers with certain names on them, and they change them every week. I think a lot of them recognize that with the class system here a lot of psychocultural things are out of their reach, so they form their own culture. It may seem strange to Americans but in England there's a need for that kind of expression because there's nothing else.

**MUSICIAN:** *What was there about Mick Talbot that moved you to work with him?*

**WELLER:** I've always liked his style of playing. A man shouldn't define his way of playing, but he's got that soul/jazz feel to his stuff. And despite what people think, he hasn't sat down and studied Jimmy Smith that much. He just does it. He's not an enormous muso, but he understands how to get that certain feel. The sound of the Hammond organ has got tremendous spirit, a real rousing sound. And although it's considered very dated there are ways you can use it in a modern context, which I think we've proved.

**MUSICIAN:** *You compose most of the band's material, but guitar has almost dropped out of the mix on records.*

**WELLER:** I still write on guitar, a cheap Spanish model to be exact. "Long Hot Summer" was done that way, though Mick put the bass line in. But yeah, I've really just dropped the guitar a little bit this year, just got bored with its limitations. But I haven't ditched it forever. I'll be playing guitar on the live stuff we're doing in Europe.

**MUSICIAN:** *I notice you've switched guitars as well as musical styles.*

**WELLER:** Yeah, I haven't used Rickenbackers for a while now. I've mainly been using Telecasters because the style of stuff I've been doing has been quite rhythmic and percussive, and I think they're quite good for that. But I'm still using Vox amps.

**MUSICIAN:** *To me, "Speak Like A Child" sums up what the Style Council is all about—regaining that essential power and grace that children sometimes exhibit.*

**WELLER:** And the joy of it as well. The trouble is, when people get into their twenties there's a kind of threat to them in all that, and they turn their backs on that innocence and joy.

**MUSICIAN:** *What do you know now that you wish you'd known then?*

**WELLER:** I guess the main difference is that I used to see everything in terms of black and white, and now I don't see life as being that simple. I used to have guidelines for everything, I'd always have some idea of how I'd react to an experience.

**MUSICIAN:** *You're sounding more like Townshend all the time...*

**WELLER:** (laughs) Yeah, maybe so. I guess I've just generally loosened up a lot. I don't feel hemmed in by the kind of limitations I did in the past. I don't really give a shit what people think, to be quite honest. Life's just too short to sit around worrying about all that. I just going to savor what I've got. 📺

## THE MAIN DIFFERENCE IS THAT I USED TO SEE THINGS IN BLACK OR WHITE AND NOW IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE."

least you have Pete's generation around as examples of what to do and what not to do. I think you can see the damage that's done when someone like Pete falls for the myth that it's romantic or artistic to be self-destructive, instead of seeing damage and excess as a sign that many artists don't know how to handle the energies and pressures inherent in the creative process.

**WELLER:** The thing about Pete Townshend and a lot of those 60s musicians was that they placed too much faith in rock music, in that rock culture thing and that quite old-fashioned idea of "rock rebellion" that the English press is still into over here. I think you have to take it one stage further than having a face on the front cover of the *New Music Express* and saying, "This is the new face of rock rebellion!" I don't think that means shit anymore.

Rock culture's a myth, it's not part of reality. From a historical point of view, it's always been a way to escape and live out your fantasies. So you've got this singer up there who supposedly is on the knife's edge, who's always a little bit out of it and all that crap, and what to you expect? It's never going to have any substance. Sure, music can change people, but not when it turns into a fantasy machine. Too many groups are caught up in their own myth.

**MUSICIAN:** *Well, wasn't there some myth-making going on with the Jam?*

**WELLER:** Yeah, but I don't think I got particularly caught up in it. Because however arrogant it sounds, I never particularly needed people to tell me how good or bad I was, so I never took that much notice. Also, I don't think the Jam ever went out consciously myth-making.

**MUSICIAN:** *Unlike the Clash, who wound up indulging in a narcissistic pride in their own "humble" image, which spoiled something.*

**WELLER:** Yeah, but even when they first started out they were like that. I think they always had a thing about creating a myth. I mean, we never wrote songs about ourselves being the four horsemen of the apocalypse or that sort of crap.

**MUSICIAN:** *I sometimes worry that U2 is going to fall into that trap. They're intense and idealistic, but I cringe when they start telling us how pure and wonderful they are. Trumpeting your own virtues is dangerous.*

**WELLER:** I think that's true. I don't think they're contrived, but all their so-called intensity and passion is still only being made by a set of 200-watt Marshalls in the back. A lot of people confuse blaring music with real passion. Passion doesn't always come from the fact that your guitar's turned up to full volume or someone's leaping around, which I did myself with



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ELECTRONICS





# Charlie Haden

## *Liberation and Revelation: the Probing Essence of Modern Bass*

by Rafi Zabor

The radio crackles in 1939; KMA, 50,000 watts out of Shenandoah, Iowa.

*Keep on the sunny side of life  
Keep on the sunny side of life  
Keep on the sunny side  
Always on the sunny side  
Keep on the sunny side of life*

"All right kiddies, thanks friends, it's the Haden children, Carl Junior, Mary Elizabeth, little Jummy and little two-year-old Charlie entertaining on the reglar 9:30 program this morning. Now then, I want to say thanks to each and every one of you good friends who have sent in orders for the youngsters' pictures, who have written in those fine cards and letters, we do appreciate the nice things you have to say about our kiddies. I also want to thank you men who have written in to OPPORTUNITY and let me say to more of you, if you men are looking for bigger and better paying jobs, here's one business friends that needs more men and they need 'em now. It's the air-conditioning and refrigeration industry. In every community there is a growing demand for men trained in the planning, installation and servicing of refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment. Now to train young men, mechanically minded between eighteen and fifty...."

*Is that your father?*

That's him. Let me move the tape ahead.

"Now on with the program, more dedications this morning. We're gonna have little two-year-old Charlie up here now,



to sing a song for you and to yodel for you this morning. and Charlie's got numbers picked out that he's been request, and we want to do these numbers for Mr. and Mrs. Leon Paber of Kellogg, Iowa for their little son Delvin's second birthday, for Mrs. Jack Gardner of Omaha, Nebraska for grandson Charles Edward Bronson's second birthday, for Bobby Taylor, Evelyn Ingram, Darlene Ingram and Kenneth Dobbs, and Mrs. W.W. Kibbler, this is the Golden Rule Sunday School class who are listening in this morning what do you think of that? That's fine and dandy, we're mighty happy to hear from all you good friends, and now then little two-year-old Charles Edward, we believe to be the youngest cowboy singer and yodeler on the air, is gonna sing a verse of the song 'The Birmingham Jail.' All right honey."

*"Down in the valley, valley so low  
Hang your head over, hear the wind  
blow...."*

*Were you under any pressure to join  
the show?*

Oh, no. When my mother usec to rock me to sleep, she would sing—she had a fantastic voice, like Joan Baez—and I

would hum along with her. She saw that I liked it and as I got older she started teaching me the words to songs and I was there, *in her arms*, when they did the shows. She was a great singer, and still is. She sang all the great folk songs—"Barbara Allen," "Mansion On The Hill," "Wildwood Flower"—and my father was one of the greatest harmonica players I ever heard. He could improvise and all my brothers and sisters were good musicians and they sang really true.

"And now for a song and a yodel he's gonna sing a song about his old dog, Shep. 'Old Shep,' a sing and a yodel. All right, Charlie...."

*"When I was a lad and old Shep was a pup...."*

The house was full of our sponsors' products. Sparkalite Cereal. Cocoa-Wheats with Vitamin G. Green Mountain Cough Syrup. We had crates of the stuff. When I was five, my father bought a farm outside of Springfield, Missouri—I was raised in Springfield mostly. The radio studio was right in the house. I'd wake up, watch my family go out to milk the cows, watch them come back in. We'd eat breakfast and then do the radio show, every day but Sunday, fifteen minutes to half an hour. This was during the war. Later my father tired of the farm and bought a restaurant. That time the studio was upstairs.

All those songs we used to sing were very beautiful, and they've stayed with me. Some of them come back to me even now. I started improvising folk

Photo by Deborah Feingold

songs when I did the *80/81* album with Pat Metheny and recently when I was playing with Denny Zeitlin in San Francisco we played something that made me remember all these things. What I want to do now is stop in Missouri on my way back to Los Angeles and spend some time with my Mom and this time get some songs from her. I want to relearn them. Because it's really important music. It comes through this country from Europe but most people when they think of the only art form in American music, think of jazz. I grew up knowing Mother Maybelle Carter. Some of the best music I've ever heard was Maybelle Carter playing guitar and singing, and A.P. Carter and her sister, and the Delmore Brothers singing... oh, man, they were fantastic. I saw a special view of country America that you don't get in the city. I used to go to houses in rural Missouri and people would be on their porches singing and playing fiddles and blowing into moonshine jugs, playing washboards and spoons. My grandpa used to play the fiddle held under his chest instead of his chin and he used to

*“It made a lot of musicians angry; not so much angry as insecure. They had to stop and think. Fights broke out.”*

tell me stories about Frank and Jesse James, the Younger brothers and the Daltons. My grandma told me about Wild Bill Hickok in Springfield, Missouri.

We used to play a lot of revival meetings and tent meetings and county fairs on truck beds—we'd be standing on flatbed trucks at fairgrounds, and at racetracks we'd be on the grandstand performing. We traveled all over the midwest doing that when I was a kid. I was very small the first time my parents took me to a black church to hear the music. I couldn't believe it, I just sat there and listened. I couldn't believe how beautiful it was, and I didn't want to leave. I just wanted to stay.

I was raised in a place that forced you into a political awareness early, seeing

racism all around you. In the county where I graduated high school, blacks weren't allowed to remain in the county after dark—this was in 1955. There was only one movie theater they could go to, and they had to sit in the third balcony.

I sang with the family until I was fifteen, when I had bulbar polio. I caught it when we were doing a television show in Omaha during an epidemic. The doctor said I was lucky—it hit the nerve to my face and throat and vocal chords, and it usually hits the legs and lungs. It took about a year for the effects to go away and after that I couldn't really sing, couldn't control the note and hold the vibrato.

I had started playing bass when I was fourteen. I've always felt the bass was beautiful. I loved the sound of it. When I sang, I always wanted to sing the bass part even though my voice wasn't low enough. I was attracted to it more than to any other instrument. When I was in grade school, my brother Jim, who was the bass player on our show, was interested in jazz. Jim started bringing home Jazz At The Philharmonic records and Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Stan Kenton. I didn't know what it was, didn't know what improvising meant, I just knew that I loved the way it sounded. And the more I heard it the more I loved it—the harmonies, the voicings, the textures and the chords, and the first chance I got, I went to a concert. I was fourteen and we were in Omaha. My family was up there doing a television show every week and Jazz At The Philharmonic came through and I went with some friends. Charlie

Parker was playing, and Lester Young and Flip Philips, Willie the Lion Smith, Roy Eldridge, Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown and it was really something.

When we moved back to Springfield, Stan Kenton's band came through. Don Bagley was playing bass and Stan Levey drums. I went backstage and talked to them. They invited me up to their hotel. They were impressed that I was so young, in such a small town in the midwest, and wanted to play jazz. I asked them where I should go, New York or Los Angeles, and most of them, their advice was: don't play music; don't play jazz, it's a rough life; you have to go on the road and you can't have a family. But I kept after them and Don Bagley told me who he was studying with in L.A. When Kenton came back next time, Max Bennett was on bass, Mel Lewis played drums and Charlie Mariano was in the band. After the concert, I went to a jam session in somebody's house and I got to play. Before that, I had just been playing with records.

Then there was a TV show that came to Springfield from Nashville called *The Ozark Jubilee*. Red Foley was the star, and Eddie Arnold used to come up and he brought Hank Garland with him—he was a great jazz guitar player—and I played in that show with Grady Martin, a guitarist with Red Foley, and the pianist with Grady was a jazz player. I found out from him that a lot of players from Nashville really love jazz. Sometimes we would jam. Grady Martin played Bob Wills-style, western swing, sort of, but what I tried to get them to do was play Bird tunes and bebop. That was mostly my experience in Springfield. In high school, I didn't have many close friends. Most of the guys in my class were involved in Future Farmers of America. I used to bring them to my house to listen to Bird and they'd look at me like I was some kind of....

I was playing completely by ear, which is one thing I think that caused me to be introverted, shy, and soft-spoken. I felt that I didn't know enough about music, that I was inferior to the musicians I was playing with, though on the radio we had to be perfect, you know, you couldn't be sharp or flat. I applied to Oberlin and got a full scholarship even though I was completely self-taught, but then I heard about Westlake College of Modern Music, which was like Berklee and had a good reputation for jazz studies. I turned down the scholarship, sold shoes until I made seven hundred fifty dollars, said good-bye to my parents, got on a Greyhound with a suitcase and my plywood Kay bass, and went straight through to L.A. The people from Westlake met me at the bus station. I lived in a dorm off Sunset and, though Westlake had a few good teachers, I became disenchanted with the place. I met a lot of musicians right away and started working. I met Red Mitchell in a coffee shop at three in the morning—I had listened to him and Hampton Hawes on records—and we played together at his house. One day he had a record date and couldn't make a gig with Art Pepper. I covered for him and Art hired me for the rest of the gig.

The reason I'm talking about my past is to convey my need to know how people who dedicate their lives to an art form grow up, what happens to them. I would like to know what happened to Django. I'd like to know about Bach's childhood.

My father lived until 1974. He was sixty-four. We were really close. In the late 60s, when I was about thirty, I had a dream that I was on an old fashioned train. It was 1939 in the dream, but I was still thirty years old—and 1939 was the year my father was thirty. The conductor came through and said, "Shenandoah, next stop." I got off the train and there was an old train depot newsstand. Everything cost a nickel or three pennies. I went into a phone booth and looked up our name, and there was my father's name and the street we lived on. I wanted to call him, but I was afraid, so I walked out onto the street. Old cars were going by, and our car passed, our old Oldsmobile. My father was driving, and my mother was holding me, and I was asleep, a two-year-old boy. My brothers and sisters were playing in the back seat. I went into a restaurant feeling like the wind was knocked out of me, and I asked the guy behind the



counter if he knew Carl Haden. He said, "Everybody knows Carl Haden. The Hadens are on the radio here every morning." I told the guy I wanted to talk to Carl and he said, "If you want to see him come down here, I know a good way. He's a harmonica fanatic, so tell him you got some new harps for sale and he'll come."

I went to the phone, put a nickel in and dialed the number. My father answered, I said hello and he said, "Who's this?" I said, "Well, I'm in town and I've got some harmonicas for sale and I heard you might be interested." He said, "I'll be right down."

I waited. I didn't know what to do. And in a few minutes, he came in. And, man, that was worth the whole dream, just to see him. He had all his hair and he wasn't gray. He was young. He had on a pin-striped suit with a tie and one of those round collars. It was just unbelievable to see him. I was his age. We just stood and looked at each other. I wanted to say, "I'm your son!" But I didn't. We shook hands, and went to sit down in one of the booths. I stared at him. He stared at me and said, "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" And then I woke up. That dream had come out of a real yearning. I had always wanted to be able to talk to my father and be the same age as he was.

I had the dream while he was still alive, and I always wanted to tell him about it, but I never had the chance. Maybe I was afraid to tell him—now this is really strange—because he would have remembered the day that somebody called him down to the depot.

*How did you meet Ornette Coleman?*

I was playing with a lot of people in L.A., and the more I played standards the more dissatisfied I became. Especially when I played solos. Even lines behind a musician, I wasn't satisfied with the normal, traditional way of playing chord changes. Little by little I started trying to play what I was hearing. Say I would be soloing on "All The Things You Are," and maybe there was a group of notes I wanted to play off of, or a phrase from somebody's solo, or I wanted to play on the melody instead of the changes. And I tried but it was hard, because I had never tried to express it before. Musicians would get upset because they wouldn't know where I was in the song or when to come back in.

Then one night I was at a club called the Hague, I think I was listening to Gerry Mulligan's group and all of a sudden this guy gets up on stage with a plastic alto and starts playing, and the creative energy level changed completely—it was going through the ceiling, it was the most brilliant sound I'd ever heard and I said, "Who is that? Who is that man?" Someone said, "That's Ornette Coleman." I wanted to meet him. By the time I got behind the bandstand to meet him they had already asked him to stop playing and he had disappeared through the back door. But Lenny McBrowne told me how to find him.

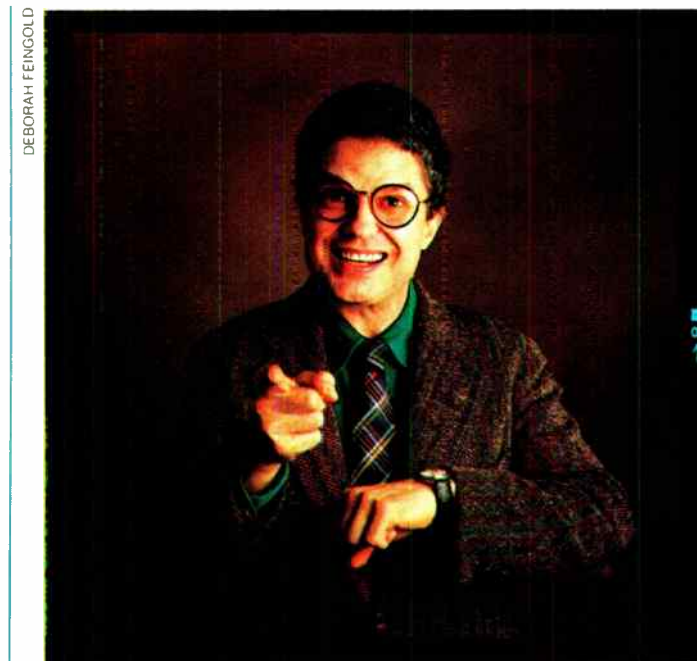
I went to Ornette's house and told him I had heard him play the other night and that it was beautiful, and he said thanks, because he wasn't used to hearing someone say that to him, and the first time we played, I found myself able to play what I'd been hearing, though I did do some struggling. It was like jumping into a pool or a creek you've never been in before—there were growing pains, trying to find which notes sounded good against what he was playing. Experiencing a fear of something because suddenly you've got an okay. It was completely different than any other experience I'd ever had, and he had that clear, natural, beautiful sound. It was like no other music in the world. This was in 1957.

I'd actually met Don Cherry and Billy Higgins before Ornette. We got together and started playing at Don Cherry's house. We would play every day and stop and talk about what we were doing and then we would play the tune over again. It was really something.

Coming to New York in 1959 was really exciting. I'd never been there before, and after checking into the hotel we went down to the Five Spot for a rehearsal and I had never seen anything like that before, derelicts lying there on the street. I

started to bend down to help one guy and one of the other musicians who was playing the Five Spot said, "What are you doing?" "The guy's lying on the sidewalk." "Hey man, you're in New York City! You can't help that man!" When we started playing every night, the place was packed with people not just from the music world but from the art world, from everywhere. There were famous painters, poets. One night I was playing—you know, I usually play with my eyes closed—and I happened to open my eyes and looked down and there was Leonard Bernstein with his ear next to my bass, right on the bandstand. He asked me where I'd studied and I told him I was self-taught and he couldn't believe that. He invited me to come up to the Philharmonic, and years later, when I was sure he had forgotten me, he was of tremendous help to me with the Guggenheim Foundation, when I applied for a fellowship in composition.

One night we were playing, Cherry was taking a solo and all of a sudden I heard the solo change direction and I opened my



**Charlie recalling significant points in time.**

eyes and it was Miles. He had gotten up on the stand, taken Cherry's horn and started playing. And there wasn't a night when I didn't open my eyes, look out at the audience or the bar and see some great bass player checking me out. Paul Chambers. Percy Heath. Mingus. Those were exciting days. Then we went on the road and scared everybody to death in the towns we played—Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia. The musicians would come to hear us, word had come down the grapevine, people were expecting something new.

It made a lot of musicians angry, not so much angry as insecure. People had been conditioned to a certain way of hearing music, and if they had to stop and think, or use their senses in a new way they got insecure. You don't think about sensitive musicians doing it, but with our music it was like that. It was so different, a different way of approaching the language of jazz that it pressed a lot of people's buttons, and fights broke out, I mean real fisticuffs broke out in the Five Spot, people arguing about if we knew what we were doing, we did vs. we didn't, then all kinds of insults were shouted, then bam bam bam and cars were set on fire and someone came into the Five Spot one night and hit Ornette... When we were interviewed, people asked us how all the controversy affected us. I answered that we didn't have time to be affected by it. We were thinking about playing, and trying to figure out other ways to play what we were hearing. Each time we played the more

sure we became of what we were doing and the more we knew that it was important to play. Our way of improvising was unique—like another language. There aren't that many people who have experienced it, just a handful of them and all of them come through Ornette's band—Dewey, Don Cherry, Billy Higgins, Eddie Blackwell, Bobby Bradford.

Coltrane used to come in and listen, wait for us to finish and then go out with Ornette and talk for hours. He was looking for a way to play what he was hearing, looking for different kinds of solutions, remedies or methods. One of the things he wanted to find out was what it was like to play with our band. He had this record date and he called Blackwell and Cherry and me to play with him. It was a great experience but I didn't know what he expected of us at first. Gradually I found out he wanted us to play as we did with Ornette. We recorded a lot that day, some of which isn't on the album (*The Avant Garde*).

Then Sonny Rollins hired Don and Billy, and I was supposed to be on that band, too, but I was incapacitated. I remember Cherry calling me up to go with them to Europe. Actually I left Ornette's band to go to Lexington Public Health Service Hospital—that was in 1960, and when I got back to New York

tionized the art of jazz in our time, is a modal style sprung freely enough to accommodate Coleman's untempered sense of pitch and unorthodox departures from diatonic tonality, a beat wide enough to unlock the gates of the bar lines when necessary, and most of all a depth of feeling capable of real response to Coleman's unforgettable, mother-naked utterance; but when I think of Charlie Haden I don't call to mind his Contribution to the Art of Modern Bass, which is formidable, but (for example) the image of him standing onstage with Pat Metheny's 80/81 band two years back at the Joyous Lake in Woodstock, his bass accompaniment rising like sap through the tree of a Metheny solo and then opening nave, transepts, arches, galleries, towers and aisles in chorus after chorus of Dewey Redman tenor while light fell in shafts from the windows and Metheny sat there on his stool in this sudden cathedral, shook his head and stared. It was a kind of playing, a kind of getting into the substance of someone else's music that goes well beyond "he's got great ears" and recalls Rilke's notion of two solitudes growing so large and deep they can include each other, an encounter of whole and unfalsified individualities unhampered by the passing chords of space and time.

But then I could have called to mind other equally articulate moments, like Haden one night on a Boston stage with Old and New Dreams playing a solo in which he questioned his notes so deeply it seemed as if at any moment they might fess up and tell him the meaning of his life. The moment produced an inconceivable hush in the hall as Haden drew us so powerfully into his world it became identical to our own. We sat there, having paid \$7.50 for our tickets, at one of the limits of music, where sound was about to give out and a world of unmeasured Meaning, from which music derives and at which it is always pointing back, was about to burst through the stable look of things and, finally, speak.

Everyone knows there are two schools of bass playing, the Fast and the Slow (that's a joke, Charlie); Haden has taken the Slow and made it into an extraordinary instrument of self-exploration. I think of him as having made himself over the years, through a mix of inspiration and catastrophe, into the kind of musician whose work attracts to itself inevitable metaphysical weight: he has intuited something central to himself as man and musician and gone forward towards it by the stripping away of successive surfaces so that you hear, in addition to the human turnings of the music through the volutions of his identity, every vibration of string, every creak and strain of wood, the labor of brain, heart and fingers in a concentrated pursuit of final essences, a consciously impassioned hunt for the ultimately real. You might object that good jazz musicians do this all the time—it's certainly true that if you listen to Johnny Hodges right he'll peel you like a grape—but the process is made so plain in Haden that he almost becomes an object lesson in how such a quest might be carried out and what you are likely to find along the way. I think it's important that what Haden finds is not merely, as so many do these days at the played-out end of Western Sievelization, reality deconstructed into its unappetizing and useless components (which then are either left lying around or get hustled into forms as rigid as they are arbitrary) but Truth, Beauty, Dignity and all the fine old things, and the thing about Haden is that he gets it all into the music with no tricky bits missing and no lies told along the way and you believe him. And to me, at any rate, that's important.

Ideal though Haden was in the early days with the classic Coleman quartet—have you noticed how much more perfect the records have gotten over the years—Haden didn't come into the full range of his voice until a few years later. Judging purely by the recorded evidence and my own awakening to him when he played in Berkeley, California with Ornette, he certainly had it together by 1970. The bassist who plays on Ornette's *Science Fiction*, *Broken Shadows* and *Friends And Neighbors*, his own *Liberation Music Orchestra*, and the over-



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Haden's pure modality transcends tune, tempo and tonality.

we made the double quartet record (*Free Jazz*)—I was uncomfortable on that because I had to play a borrowed bass and it wasn't that great an instrument—and then I got arrested in New York, lost my cabaret card, got put on probation, broke probation, left for Los Angeles. I rejoined Ornette in 1966 when I got my health back. I had been to Synanon. From 1963 to 1973 I was clean. I don't like to talk about heroin addiction because that tends to romanticize the situation. One thing I do know, drugs will not help a mediocre musician sound better and the great musicians I've known who happened to be addicted played great in spite of their addiction, not because of it. When I stopped using chemicals, my music became much stronger. It's important for me to stay healthy, not only for my sake, but for my children's. They ought to have someone to look up to. I'm not proud of any of this. If I hadn't kicked I would have died, and that's that.

For a frightening picture of Haden as dying young junkie, see the cover of Ornette Coleman's *This Is Our Music*; for what he had accomplished so young (he has since accomplished a good deal more), try listening to contents of same. What he worked out early on, in a band, remember, that revolu-



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*“Our way of improvising was unique—like a different language. Not many people have ever experienced it.”*

ture to Carla Bley's *Escalator Over The Hill* (a remarkable solo over unprecedented accompaniment) had evolved dramatically since the early 60s. His time, although it had strengthened audibly between 1959 and '60, had greater personal authority now, and he had developed a number of original devices for work in the rhythm section of which perhaps the most powerful was a multi-stringed drone which he could pivot

up or down as if on pedal point—the sound itself is enormous, like a choir of basses, and the effect behind a soloist is stunning, as if Haden were enlarging to the point of explosion the harmonic implications of the solo line while at the same time creating maximum tension between the drummer's timekeeping and his own. It's worth pointing out how technically similar to, but musically different from, guitar and banjo picking patterns this is because it shows to what personal uses the mature Haden could put his country heritage. Although a certain amount of guitaristic strumming was common to the bass playing of the period—Haden's own solo figure for Coleman's "Rambolin" providing one example (as well as the melody line for

Ian Dury's "Sex & Drugs & Rock 'n' Roll") —Haden's later appropriation of finger picking patterns sound almost nothing like their source, the kind of appropriation only master musicians seem able to manage. Country music also shows up in the sometimes surprisingly simple resolutions dramatically attenuated melodies in his bass solos will come to. Just the other day, I put on *Liberation Music Orchestra* and listened to Haden's accompaniment to Carla Bley's piano solo on "War Orphans." His probing triplet figures were so beautiful a way of playing a love duet with Carla and so perfect an expression of the nature of the bass, it took me a while to realize that nobody had played the instrument like that until Haden came along and did it. He is by now so familiar a part of modern bass playing that you can paradoxically forget how original he is.

As a soloist the mature Haden evolved an eloquent solo style that ran counter to the practices of most of his contemporaries. While virtually everyone else sought to de-emphasize the difficulty of the instrument and to demonstrate that the acoustic bass could be played as fluently, and in some hands as quickly, as a horn, Haden, in his note choices, minute variations of pitch, fingering and tone seemed almost to go out of his way to encounter obstructions to a facilely flowing solo line and the superficial resolutions of a conventionally masterful technique, as if to say, "There's a lot more to life than *that*." He arrives at an expression of beauty in which the distances traveled and the price paid are part of the statement.

Chronology, ontogeny, pharmacology. In the 70s he worked most famously with Keith Jarrett, also with Ornette on the rare occasions he was willing to appear, with Ornette's alumni in Old and New Dreams (one of this period's most classic bands), struggled to reunite the Liberation Music Orchestra, etc. His wife Ellen gave birth to a son, Josh, in '68, triplets (Rachel, Petra, Tanya) in '71, blessings which must somehow be paid for on a musician's income. Haden had been making major music for some time. Finally, in 1977 he released the breathtaking *Closeness*, the first of a series of albums of duets that should have accorded him career-making recognition at

last, but a series of traumas started him using again and he entered the Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco to kick, shaved his head, surrendered his bass, mopped floors, answered the switchboard, raised funds, two years of his life, some people have all the luck.

But let's talk about duets. "I could do duets for the next twenty years. When I think of all the great musicians I haven't played duets with I could play duets for the rest of my life."

Well, yes. And it's even obvious why. For a bassist with fabulous ears and an eerie way of inhabiting other people's music—and think for a minute what it might be like to play with him as he articulates things in your music you didn't yourself know were there, as if he could find the universal hidden in any particular and bring it out to show—it must be quite a pleasure to intensify your listening one on one, unobscured by the racket of cymbals and drums. For Haden is obsessed with communication as only someone whose music speaks out of an extraordinary degree of solitude can be, and his solitude is as pronounced, beautiful and dangerous as any musician's, even unto Miles. When he speaks of things important to him (you should know before going on), Haden's voice takes on some of the pauses, and the quavering intensity, of his bass playing. It's the voice, perhaps, of someone who has been broken to pieces past all repair and then unexpectedly reconstructed, unable to take anything for granted again, though his polio-constricted throat keeps the pitch medium high:

One of the most important parts of the creative process in improvised music is listening, and when just two people are playing you can listen so much more clearly. My focusing when I write or play is on the other people involved, not on myself, and that's in my mind the whole time I'm working, to make the musician feel so good in what he's doing that he's able to express himself to his very highest potential. I usually know the musicians well and I'm inspired by them, and that makes it easy. And if I'm writing something inspired by a particular person or place, that enters into it. And then I have the listener in mind. The only time I come into it is when I'm playing, but when you're in the midst of creating and you're close to music, that goes, too.

*Have you ever found yourself getting in the way because the music's going especially badly or especially well?*

When I have trouble with that, it means I'm not involved in my work. I want to be able to rise above my own self-needs more and more, to be able to give to others and have concern for others and rise above that ego, and I

hope that other people will be able to do that too. Did you see the notes from Hamp's album, *As Long As There's Music*? One of the things I said in that, although it might seem idealistic, was that in every human being there is a godlike quality that is creative. Every human being, when they're born, when they're a child, has potentially endless possibilities inside themselves and one of these is creative expression. With a lot of people as they grow up it gets stifled or sometimes taken away from them in one form or another and to some degree, and I want them to know that they have that inside them, and

*Playing with Ornette was like jumping into a pool or a creek you'd never been in before—there were growing pains.”*



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that they can discover it and nourish it and let it come out. And as long as there's music there will be a way for people to discover that quality inside them. When I'm making a record, when I know someone is going to listen to that record, I think about the reality of their lives and the reality of them listening to it, and I want to be able to capture them, even if it's only for a moment, and I want that moment to be as complete and honest as it possibly can. Because it's difficult for people, even when they're having conversations with each other, to listen to each other, but I've met some people in my life who really know how to listen and it's fantastic. When I write or play something and one of my children likes it, that's also very meaningful to me, because their response is genuine and immediate. The world may be lost as far as the adults are concerned. I think we have to teach children and surround them with creative thought and show them how precious life is and how we have to use our intelligence to enhance it, not just for our own good. That's one of the responsibilities of an artist.

*"If someone wanted to torture me, they could make me hear music with Ronald Reagan's ears. He must be tone deaf."*

People ask me what I think about when I'm improvising, and I have to tell them there's no thought process. You have to get to know music as you would a person, and get close to music as you would to a friend, and the closer you get, the nearer you are to touching music, and when you're really playing, when you're really touching music, if you try to remember back you'll see that your ears become your mind, your feelings become your mind and there is no thought process as far as the intellect is concerned. It's coming from the emotions and from whatever energy is passing from the music to you. The ego goes away, or should I say, you reach a place where there is no ego, and in doing that you see yourself in relation to the rest of the universe, and you

see your unimportance in relation to the rest of the universe, and in seeing your unimportance you begin to see your importance. You can't see your importance without seeing your unimportance first. You see that it's important to have respect and reverence for life and music, and in being able to do that you get closer to being honest in your playing. When someone says, "He plays great," that's what they're doing, playing honestly. And striving for beauty. When you think about inspiration it's startling, because there really are no words there. And the communication shouldn't stop with the music. You should go on from there.

*Have you changed then? Have you begun to see this in explicitly mystical terms?*

I'm interested in reading and learning about different religions from different cultures, but for myself I feel a strong need for self-reliance and for believing in something I feel close to, which is Life. It's very difficult for me to use a word that's used by hypocrites, and that's why I don't use the word God very much. That's been misused in many languages by people who are not worthy of using the word. I don't like to think of myself as having to depend on anyone else or follow anyone else in order to discover the essence of life. That's a constant discovery that never ends, and I think a guru or someone like that can be very dangerous to rely on.

*You do have a strong sense of the sacred, of the sacredness of things.*

I believe that the sacred is in the ordinary. As Maslow said, people spend their whole lives in a search for the exotic, the strange, the mystical, and in the end find that the sacred is in the ordinary, in one's backyard, family, friends. I believe that a great man is like that guy who saved that stewardess in that plane crash in Washington. He jumped into that icy water without even thinking about it, and the quality inside that man, that's godlike to me, that's greatness to me. He didn't want to be interviewed about it, he didn't want to talk about it, he just wanted to go back to work. That quality I can admire, giving in an unselfish way.

*Let's talk about the Liberation Music Orchestra. Granted that the state of the world is horrific at the moment, what can you hope to accomplish with the Orchestra?*

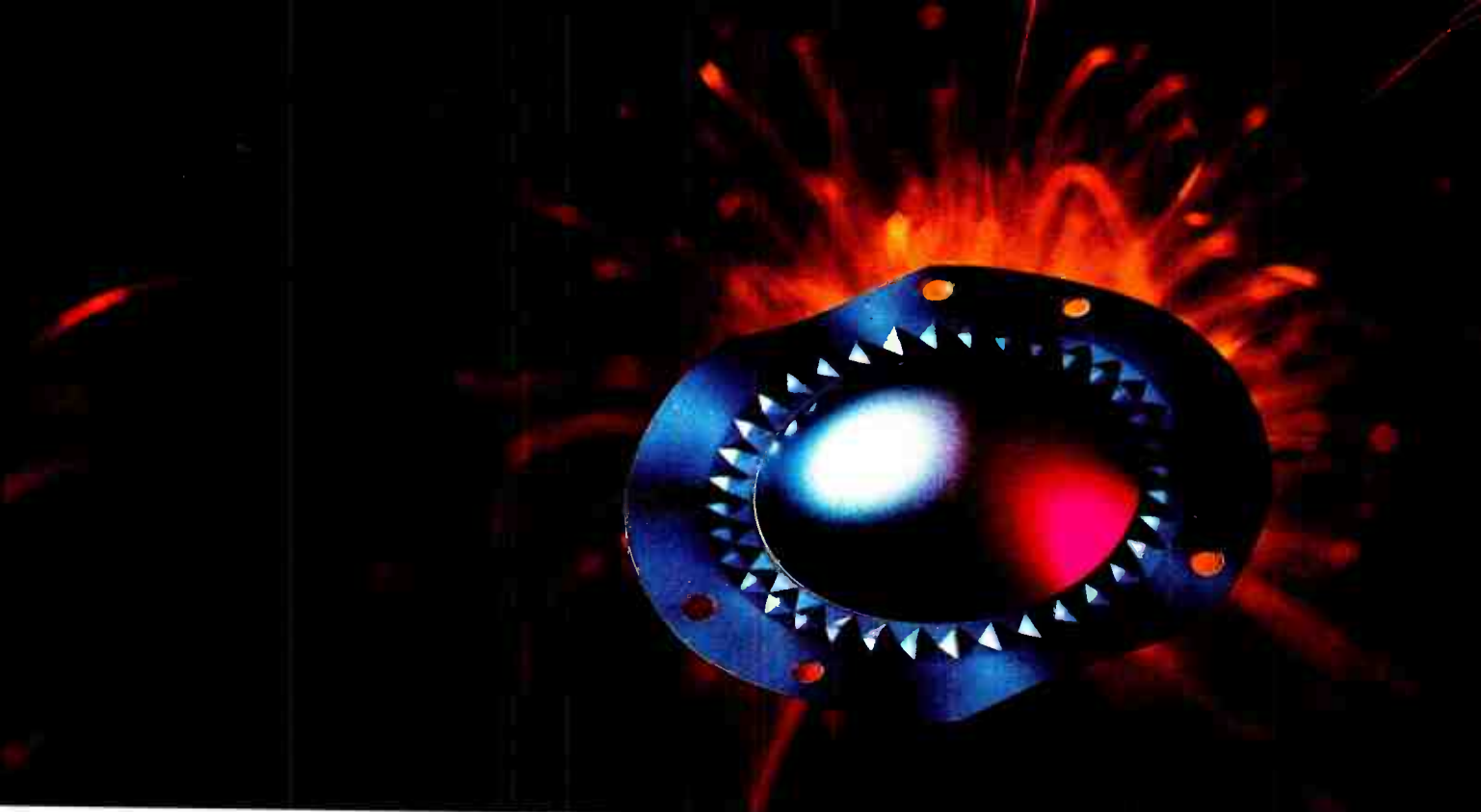
I'm not a politician. I'm a human being trying to learn about this life, and I'm a musician. But I want to play this music, to find music from different parts of the world that has to do with people fighting for their right to live freely. The music that comes from that struggle should be heard by as many people as possible. That music also inspires people to play their best, and I want to be able to inform people in a real way about what's happening in the world, the struggle in El Salvador, in Chile, in Nicaragua. We sit here in the United States and watch it on television and lose touch with the reality and I feel a responsibility to communicate my feelings in an honest way to as many people as I can, and if I can change just one person's outlook then I feel like I've accomplished something. We're in a dangerous situation. Nuclear war is a real possibility, and *The Day After*, although good, was a lightweight Hollywood soap opera version. You can see that Reagan's a figurehead, that he uses his ability as an actor to make everyone go for the invasion of Grenada, for the contras in Nicaragua, for the death squads in El Salvador... And both Kennedys are gone, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Allende....

*Do you think the left wing revolutions have worked out all that well?*

No. In most cases they haven't. I don't know what happens. If the leaders of the governments of the world were able to hear—I know this is very idealistic—if they were able to hear the beauty of the slow movement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, or Ravel, or Richard Strauss' Four Last Songs, or the Songs of the Auvergne, or Billie Holiday, Django Reinhardt, Charlie Parker, Bill Evans, Ornette Coleman... if they could really hear the beauty.... Sometimes I think about hearing music through someone else's ears and it frightens me—if someone wanted to torture me they could force me to hear music through Ronald Reagan's ears. He must be tone deaf to all that humanity. When you think about composers and painters who try to change the world with their art form, you wonder what it would be like if people like them governed the world. But, especially in America, intelligent people are not attracted to politics. When I hear great music I think, that musician, that person must have so much love inside. When I spoke earlier about improvisation, of seeing the unimportance of things—when you're playing in the moment, experiencing the moment, it shows you the brilliance in the universe, and that brilliance is in every human being. If the people who run the governments of the world could touch that brilliance inside themselves, and know that it's in everyone else and everywhere else—the world just couldn't go on the same way, the way it's going now.

The week of this last recorded talk, I managed to hear Haden twice with the New York edition of the Liberation Music Orchestra—there's another one in Los Angeles—at Seventh Avenue South, a small room which the twelve-piece band filled with music of tremendous and audible humanity. As Haden said, the material from Spain and Latin America was so packed with its own meanings and passions that the soloists were inspired to surpass themselves. I heard particularly stunning work from Dewey Redman, Baikida Carroll, Amina Claudine Myers, and Craig Harris; Carroll told me later that the





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simple music full of unfakeable feeling inspired him in one direction and the fast modernist company with its own unfakeabilities inspired him in another, which seems as good a definition of the band's working amplitude of expression as you're likely to get, short of hearing it live for yourself. The band's performance style was a lot closer to the epochal abandon of the 1970 unit than to the tidier and more stoical temper of the recent record, and if the LMO does succeed in getting its bulk out on the road as planned, I expect it to shake significant portions of the American superflux and establish itself as one of the indispensable bands of the period.

As for Haden, he sounded like a whole orchestra of basses, with an orchestra's repertoire of sonic resource: counter-melodies over varying drones, pluckings and strummings, extended radical gambits, insupportable tensions, all four strings going at once—Haden's is nothing if not a virtuoso approach to the instrument, a high-wire act on four strings. It's paradoxical, although not really surprising if you take Haden's remarks on the evanescence of the self as prelude to the emergence of the real as seriously as I do, that a musician who habitually talks of his work in abnegatory terms—of others rather than himself, listening instead of playing, effacement rather than expansion, even of drummers "so good that they're bassists and I don't even have to play"—should, more than any other bassist playing today and probably more than any bassist since Mingus, determine the coloration of any band he plays with. Add him to or subtract him from any band you can convince to play in your mind. He has learned to make an unforgettable mark.

His plans for the future include both Japanese and American tours for the New York edition of the Liberation Music Orchestra (Haden also intends to incorporate new material into the rep), tours and an album with Old and New Dreams, a solo bass album for ECM based on folk tunes collected by

Haden's mother, possibly another album for solo bass and string orchestra, a project with Herbie Hancock (presumably the fine pianist and not the appliance making records under the same name), a trio album with Pat Metheny and Billy Higgins already in the cans of ECM, and something/anything with Ornette Coleman, with whom Haden plays when he's in New York and who tells Haden he's ready to do something any time. Currently Haden's living in Los Angeles to be near his kids, teaching jazz improvisation at Cal Arts, centering on creative expression in small groups. When his children are older, he expects to move back to New York to be nearer the music. Whatever Haden does, I expect to be there listening, and I expect it to be as important to me as his work has been until now. As usual, it's a damn shame that jazz is such a minority music, because what Haden's got to say ought to be of use to anyone out there trying to learn what it is to be human. He is one of those artists through whom the brilliance of the universe is made more articulate and manifest, and this is a liberation from which others follow. Keep on the sunny side of life. ☐

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**Charlie Haden — Selected Discography**

- With Ornette Coleman** — *The Shape Of Jazz To Come, The Change Of The Century, This Is Our Music* (Atlantic); *Science Fiction, Broken Shadows* (Columbia)
- With Carla Bley** — *Escalator Over The Hill* (JCOA); *Liberation Music Orchestra* (Impulse/Jasmine).
- With Keith Jarrett** — *Death And The Flower* (Impulse), *Survivor's Suite* (ECM).
- Miscellaneous Duets**—*Closeness and The Golden Number* (Horizon). Out of print, but if you find 'em, grab 'em.
- With Hampton Hawes** — *As Long As There's Music* (Artists House).
- With Ornette** — *Soapsuds* (Artists House).
- Old and New Dreams** — *Playing* (ECM).
- Liberation Music Orchestra** — *The Ballad Of The Fallen* (ECM).

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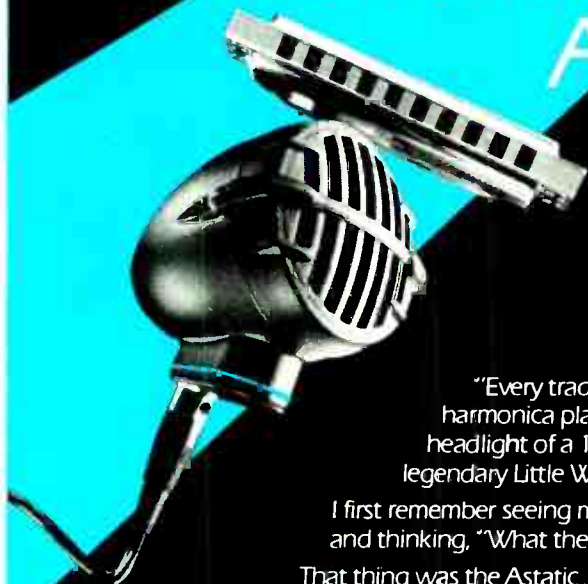
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BY JOSHUA BAER

You will be walking on a sidewalk near a subway station in a large American city. The time will be late afternoon, early evening. You will be cold, even though you will be wearing an overcoat, a muffler and a pair of gloves. There will be ninety-six cents in your pocket and ninety-six dollars in your wallet, but you will not know it. You will have forgotten that I told you.

As you pass by a newsstand you will see a woman's face on the cover of a magazine. You will stop and turn and stare at the woman's eyes and her eyes will stare back at you. You will be impressed by the size of her eyelids and decide to buy the magazine. You will pay for it with a five dollar bill and tell the

Laurie

Anderson







vendor to keep the change.

In your living room, you will  
turn on the television and sit  
down to watch the World  
Series. The Yankees will be  
playing the Expos at Yankee  
Stadium. After the

Photography  
Deborah Feingold

player introductions, a singer will be introduced. Her name will be Laurie Anderson and as you watch her speak—not sing—the words to the national anthem, you will realize that she is the woman with the large eyelids.

When will this happen?

Give me a moment. Yes, all right, I see it. I see two snowmen standing on a lawn in front of a large yellow house. It's 1988, in the fall—that's when it will happen. There will be a severe early frost, the coldest in a century. It will snow at the World Series.

Why am I telling you this?

Information comes to me. It finds me and I repeat it. I wish I knew where it came from or who was sending it, but the information isn't saying, so I'm not asking. All I know is, I have to pass it on, especially when the information concerns numbers, time or beauty. Otherwise, I get these headaches. But you don't want to hear about my headaches. You want to hear about Laurie.

I heard about Laurie from a champion, a shredder named Eric Spieth. Eric was a champion at Ms. Pac-Man. His whole approach was to take risks, go for boards, get in trouble and shred your way out. Don't worry about points and don't worry about dying. Points and dying will take care of themselves.

"You need to see Laurie Anderson," Eric told me. This was in February, 1983, at the Record Factory in Santa Cruz, California, where I was playing the store's Ms. Pac-Man machine, trying to take risks and not worry about dying. Six weeks later, Laurie came to Santa Cruz and played at the Civic Auditorium. The first thing I saw when Eric and I walked into the auditorium was a white diving board that extended from the edge of the stage out over the first row of seats. The last thing I saw that night was Laurie's face and at that point I was ready to look at her face and listen to her voice for the rest of my life.

She sang songs, she told stories, she walked, she ran, she played the sitar and she played her tape-bow violin. From time to time, as slides and films were projected onto the screen behind her and music flowed from the speakers to her right and left, she stood perfectly still, her hands at rest on the keys of her Synclavier, and watched the audience. She never spoke to us directly, never introduced any of the material or the

members of her band. It was like we were under a spell and she was under it with us, and any mention of the spell would break it.

At the beginning of the show, she wore a pair of glasses which made her blind. In the middle of the show, she stood next to a narrow beam of light shining down from the ceiling and waved a black wand in the

beam so that the letters I-N-T-E-R-M-I-S-S-I-O-N appeared to chase each other in circles. Near the end of the show, she put on a pair of glasses which had blinding light coming out of them. Then, with great care, she tiptoed out onto the diving board while everyone in the audience held their breath. I never really thought she would fall, but the light coming out of her eyes was so bright that I couldn't look right at her, and that left just enough doubt in my mind about each step she took.

Throughout the concert, Laurie appeared, disappeared and reappeared. Three or four times I was sure I was watching a shadow or a film, only to have the lights come up and reveal that the shadow was Laurie. She imitated men's voices, women's voices, Indians' voices and machines' voices. She imitated her own voice on her violin and imitated her violin with her voice. She played recordings of herself singing and playing various instruments and accompanied the recordings as they played. No one can do everything, but Laurie came close, and she did it with the kind of loose, throwaway grace that seems to show up once or twice in a generation of performers.

Comparing Laurie to anyone is foolish—her work is the only standard against which she can be measured—but she did remind me a little of Charlie Chaplin in that each of her gestures created a moment all its own, a moment that was funny while it was happening but sad once it was over. She also made me think of the way Bob Dylan came out of the relative obscurity of folk music, put together a band and revolutionized rock 'n' roll with amazing lyrics. No, I'm not saying Laurie will be as big as Bob Dylan, although that chance does exist.

The best things about the concert were the stories she told like the one about the palm reader:

*I went to a palm reader and the odd thing about the reading was that everything she told me was totally wrong. But she seemed so sure of the information that I began to feel like I'd been walking around with these false documents tattooed to my hands. It was very noisy in the parlor and members of her family kept running in and out. They were speaking a high, clicking kind of language that sounded a lot like Arabic. Books and magazines in Arabic were strewn all over the floor. It suddenly occurred to me that maybe there was a translation problem—that maybe she was reading my hand from right to left instead of left to right. Thinking of mirrors, I gave her my other hand. Then she put her hand out and we sat there for several minutes in what I assumed was some sort of participatory ritual. Finally I realized that her hand was out because she was waiting for money.*

I also remember a song called "Blue Lagoon." As Laurie spoke the words and the animated film of the palm trees and the waves lapping against the beach filled the screen behind her, I sat there and wished that Blue Lagoon would turn into a new country so I could move there and become one of its citizens.

I tried to interview Laurie after the concert but her booking agent said she didn't want to do another half-hour interview. "She's done enough of those," he said. I agreed to wait a month, but it was November before I came to see her at her home in New York. During those eight months, Laurie recorded *Mr. Heartbreak*, her second album for Warner Bros. Records. It's in the stores now, and "Blue Lagoon" is on it, along with six other songs, including the single "Sharkey's Day." When you listen to *Mr. Heartbreak*, remind yourself that what you're hearing is the sound of a performance, not the sound of a record. Everything Laurie does is a performance, and that includes recording sessions, plane trips, telephone conversations and eating ham and cheese sandwiches. Nothing is wasted. It all gets used. It's taken her fifteen years, but she's turned herself into what so many of us wish we were: a person for whom life and art are inseparable.

At her loft on the sixth floor of a gray building overlooking the Hudson River, Laurie gave me the following interview. We sat in the Lobby (her 16-track in-home studio where *Big Science* and *Mr. Heartbreak* were recorded), surrounded by monitors, speakers, tape-bow violins, ashtrays, microphones and wires. There were acoustic boards on the ceiling and walls, and gray carpeting on the floor. Laurie wore baggy black pants, a gray shirt and a black jacket. Her skin was a pale, almost lifeless gray. Her green eyes are best described by the line from her song "X Equals X/It Tango": "Your eyes, it's a day's work, just looking into them."

She smoked a lot while we talked and here too there was performance. First she would remove a cigarette from the





pack of Marlboros in her lap. Then she would pass the cigarette back and forth between her hands. Her long, slender, classical violinist's fingers appeared to be manipulating the cigarette, warming it up. After a few minutes of this, just as I would reach the point of wanting to say, "Hey, would you please light that thing and smoke it?" she would pop the filter, flick it aside and place the now filterless cigarette between her lips. Then she would strike a match, light the cigarette, listen to my next question, inhale and start talking. Her voice was like her work: very beautiful, very clear and very challenging. She gave each word its own world of emphasis, as if she were saying it for the first time.

**MUSICIAN:** *Did you have what you would call a remarkable childhood?*

**LAURIE:** Everyone had a remarkable childhood. Don't you think?

**MUSICIAN:** *But not everyone thinks that they did.*

**LAURIE:** They should think back, then. That's one of my favorite things to do. Actually, it's kind of stress-thing that I do. You get in a very relaxed state and you start thinking.... You try to reconstruct a room that you haven't been in since you were a kid. You start looking and after a while you can actually see all of the objects in the room. You can look down at your hands and they're small, you can look at all of the little objects you used—then you can start walking to school. I've gotten to the point where I can reconstruct whole days: walk into rooms, see people I haven't seen or thought of for years.... It's very amazing to do because it's deeply relaxing. It reminds you that you weren't born yesterday and that you have a sort of unbroken history of a life that wasn't always the way it's been the last couple of years. It's wonderful, when you think of all that as lost and then realize it's not lost.

**MUSICIAN:** *Why do you think the relaxation occurs?*

**LAURIE:** Well, first of all, you have to be relaxed to begin.

**MUSICIAN:** *But doesn't the reconstructing also add to your relaxation as you go further and further with it?*

**LAURIE:** Yeah, it adds to it. I spent some time in a Buddhist monastery—the rule was no eye contact and no talking—and many things happened. But one of them, which was very interesting, happened after sitting for twelve hours. I opened my eyes and saw the most amazing thing: it was basically a ceiling, but also a floor, and I could feel the space between them in a way that I never had before. I had enormous peripheral vision. I thought, Oh, my God, this is what the sculptors are seeing! And I really wanted to say to someone, "Look, look at this." Except that it wasn't there. But it was a physically relaxing experience. It was the opposite of daily vision, which is sort of the vision of desire: "I see that, I take it."

**MUSICIAN:** *In your vision, you became part of what you would have normally wanted, so you no longer wanted it.*

**LAURIE:** (nods) Yeah, because things weren't conveniently receding to this vanishing point in front of me. I realized there was a vanishing point back there, too (points over her shoulder).

**MUSICIAN:** *It seems like, in dreams and in trances, the things one sees lie somewhere between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional.*

**LAURIE:** That's true. They do.

**MUSICIAN:** *And when you look at the geometric patterns on prehistoric pots, or on the surfaces of any so-called primitive works of art, the depth comes and goes. The patterns take you to a place that's between dimensions. What fascinates me is that there seems to be a sense of well-being that comes over you when you spend time in that place. It's not so much that you get good at watching your own unconscious....*

**LAURIE:** Oh, I think you could. I really do. I mean, I was always interested in Jung on an intellectual level, but the one time I really thought it might work was one night when I woke up in the middle of a dream and—mostly I'm a dolt in my dreams; just somebody wandering through these very complicated

situations sort of stupidly—and at that moment I saw this person looking down at me, and this person was working out the mechanics of my dream. I felt like the puppet looking up at the one who has designed it all, and it really was a very canny creature.

**MUSICIAN:** *Sometimes it's hard for people to accept that there's someone else—or something else—in charge, and that he or she or it is not the conscious mind.*

**LAURIE:** Well, I think anybody who thinks about it would wonder why they're doing all this. Everybody does things that they don't really know why they do. I'd be very surprised if there were anybody who had it all figured out and made every move rationally. I wouldn't want to run into someone who made that claim.

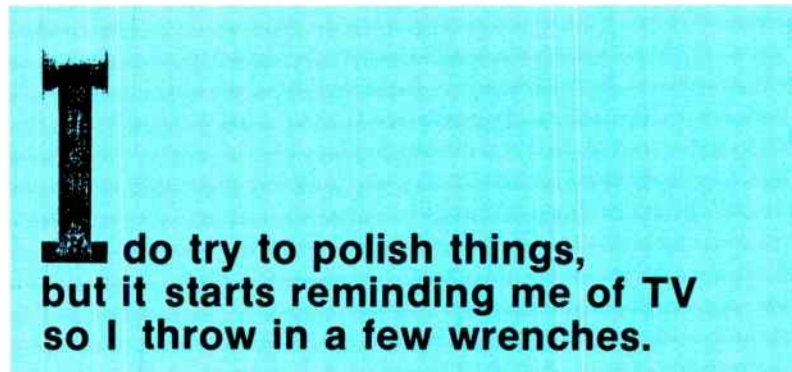
**MUSICIAN:** *What interests me is what happens when a person finds something that they trust besides their own consciousness. It's as if you know something good is going to come out of whatever you do, even though you forget what you're doing.*

**LAURIE:** (laughs) Or something bad. I think people are basically much more intelligent than they can ever guess. They know what's going on. We just pretend to be stupid.

**MUSICIAN:** *Your songs are hypnotic in that they tend to relax the listener with pleasing, repetitive melodic and percussive lines. The words are hypnotic too. The way you break your phrases, the way you say a phrase over and over, changing it a little each time—all of this suggests an incantation or a chant. Are you trying to hypnotize us?*

**LAURIE:** I suppose I mesmerize myself to write the songs. I'm in that kind of state when I write them, so it's not surprising that they seem like that.

**MUSICIAN:** *You put yourself in a trance when you write songs?*



**LAURIE:** I don't want to sound mystical about it. It's not a job for me. I try to be in a more or less receptive mood. I start all different ways. Sometimes I start something because I don't know how I'll use it in something I've already got going, or maybe I just like the way it looks. Sometimes I'll work on a melody and have no idea what it's for. But the most important thing to me is the words. That's what I consider my main work: the way the words fit together.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's like the words are the stars of your show, while the music acts more as a supporting cast, a chorus.*

**LAURIE:** Yeah, and in that way it's almost the opposite of opera. In opera, the words are not the most important things. They're not literature. For the most part, the words are pretty horrible poetry. They're an excuse for the opera singers to use their voices beautifully. My work is just the opposite. If the words are somewhat sung, it's almost like extended talking, pitched talking. It's certainly not *bel canto*. I'm much more interested in speaking rhythms and in words themselves than in singing.

**MUSICIAN:** *In your storytelling and also in your music, timing plays a crucial role. It seems like you always manage to say the word or the phrase at the moment when it carries the strongest meaning. Does your sense of timing come naturally*

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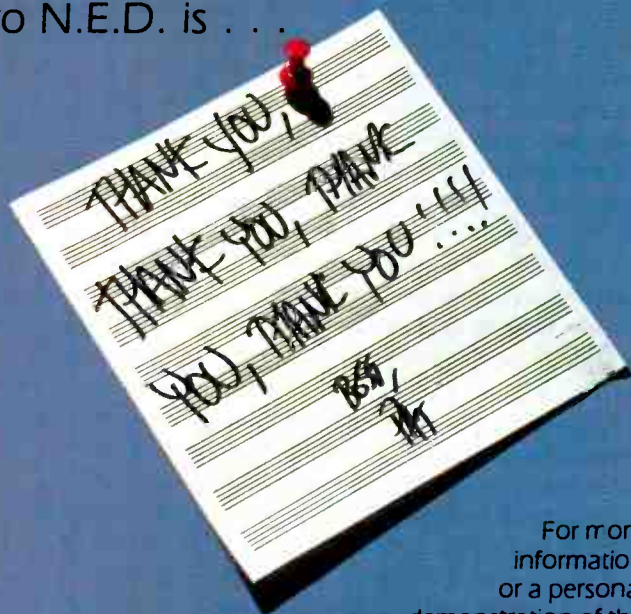
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or do you have to practice to keep it sharp?

**LAURIE:** Timing is something I work on constantly, like whenever I'm talking to somebody. I think you can tell a lot about what people say from the kinds of pauses and stutters they make while they're trying to express themselves.

**MUSICIAN:** Of all the musicians you've heard, who has the best timing?

**LAURIE:** Captain Beefheart, definitely.

**MUSICIAN:** How about your percussionist, David Van Tieghem?

**LAURIE:** David's an incredible percussionist. He's very inventive. On "Blue Lagoon," when he played the steel drums, that was the first time he'd played steel drums. Most people think of him as just rhythm because he's such a great drummer, but he has a wonderful sense of

melody which is just beginning to be a part of his own work.

**MUSICIAN:** On Mr. Heartbreak, in the song "Sharkey's Day," Adrian Belew gives the song a violent, churning quality that sets it apart from the other songs on the album. It almost sounds like you were having a party when you recorded "Sharkey's Day."

**LAURIE:** "Sharkey's Day" is a departure from the other songs. It's a very silly song. There's a lot of noise, but it's also much more musical and that's really because of Adrian, who changed the song a lot. It sounds like a party because it was one. We all smoked Cuban cigars while we were doing it.

**MUSICIAN:** Why is this studio called the Lobby?

**LAURIE:** It used to be next to the elevator and you could hear people going up and down. It was a kind of column of sound that brought up everything that was happening in the whole building: people's arguments, dogs barking—they're all on the tapes that were made then.

**MUSICIAN:** Where do you go to recharge? Is there any place away from New York where you go for rest and relaxation?

**LAURIE:** Boy, I wish there were a place. It's a good idea to go away. But I've been in this room for an awfully long time, and I've been trying to get what I need right here.

Laurie Anderson was born on June 5, 1947, in Chicago. She grew up in Wayne, Illinois, about fifty miles from the city. Her father, Arthur Anderson, operated a paint business. Her mother, Mary Anderson, bore eight children, including twin boys. Laurie was the second child. She has described her family as "habitual storytellers who were all fascinated with language. When the twins were six or seven, they had their own language. They even sang songs in it. It was a kind of verbal telepathy. I was a goody-goody kid. I wanted to be a librarian until I began to realize there was a dark side to librarians. They were like jailers, putting books out on parole."

She started practicing classical violin in 1954 and performed with the Chicago Youth Symphony at sixteen. In 1965 and 1966 she attended Mills College in Oakland, California. In 1966 she moved to New York City to attend Barnard College. In 1969 she received a BA in art history, graduating magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa.

In 1970 Laurie had her first one-person show of sculpture at Barnard. The sculptures included works in newspaper, fiberglass and resin. She also exhibited sound sculptures (untitled works consisting of tape loops in boxes placed on stilts) at the School of Visual Arts in New York. "I tried to be as quirky as I could," she has said of her work at that time.

Between 1970 and 1972 she attended Columbia and eventually received an MFA in sculpture. During this period she also taught art history at City College, Staten Island Community College and Pace University. In a course she taught on

Egyptian sculpture, she dispensed with the lecture format and made up stories about the slides as they appeared on the screen.

In 1971 she stopped working with fiberglass because of health complications and started writing art criticism for *Art News*, *Art In America* and *Artforum* magazines. "I took it really seriously. More to just go over to an artist's house, you know: meet a real artist and kind of spook around, see what was in the refrigerator."

Between 1972 and 1978, Laurie created, installed and performed a series of performance pieces which established her as one of the pre-eminent performance artists of the decade. *O-Range*, *Story Pillows*, *Rustle Book (Wind Book)*, *Dearreader*, *At The Shrink's*, *For Instants (Refried Beans)*, *Juke Box*, *Duets On Ice (Bach To Bach)*, *Numbers Runners*, *Stereo Decoy* and *Handphone Table* received scant national attention, but, in New York, where the appetite for a new art movement had never been stronger, Laurie became a famous and respected artist. (In 1979, *Handphone Table* was installed in the Projects Gallery at the Museum of Modern Art.)

In 1975, she invented her tape-bow violin. She wrote in her notes: "This is a violin with an audio head mounted on the body of the instrument. Instead of horsehair on the bow, there is audio tape. This slogan ('Ethics Is the Esthetics of the Future') was recorded on the tape bow and played back and forth. With each pass around the audio head, the phrase was heard with more completion... ending with 'Ethics Is the Esthetics of the Few, of the Few, of the Few...ture.'"

When Laurie wasn't making performance art, she was traveling. "I made a constant effort to go places," she told me, "to take trips, but not take any money; to have no plans and just kind of wander."

In 1973 she managed to visit Mexico and hitchhike to the North Pole. "I went to Mexico as a spy for my anthropologist brother. I made tortillas for the tribe, the Tzotil Indians. My Indian name was Loscha, which meant, 'The-ugly-one-with-the-jewels.' I was too white, too tall, and I had contact lenses, which they thought of as precious stones which I kept, for safety reasons, in my eyes."

When asked about the North Pole, she said, "I wanted to make a separation between the work I was doing and where I was going, so I didn't take any cameras or document the trip at all. I just took food, a fishing rod and a hatchet. I almost got to the magnetic north pole, not the geographic one, but the Air Force was there and you can't get right onto the base. I hitchhiked on bush planes. The pilots would drop me off and tell me, 'Another plane will come by in a week or so....'

"I came back because of the hatchet. I was chopping wood one day, at an airstrip out in the middle of nowhere. The hatchet fell out of my hand on the upswing and then it came down and missed my head by two inches. I was shaking for several hours, thinking, 'Oh boy, I could be walking around here with a hatchet imbedded in my head and nobody would know where I am.' But it was one of the best trips I ever took."

In New York, Laurie became affiliated with the Holly Solomon Gallery and many of the pieces listed above were installed or performed there. Toward the end of the decade, Laurie's performances became increasingly complex and musical. In 1979, her art reached a state of critical mass. All the themes and components converged and were transformed into something radically new, something beyond performance art.

A catalyst for this transformation was Holly Solomon, who commissioned a performance piece entitled *Americans On The Move* for her husband's birthday. Scored for voice, violin, electronics, saxophone, keyboards, percussion and visual images, *Americans* premiered in the spring of 1979 at Carnegie Recital Hall. In *Laurie Anderson—Works from 1969 to 1983*, author Janet Kardon wrote:

Up to this time, Anderson seems to have identified herself primarily as a sculptor; molding a space with her





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own presence could be construed as an extension of a sculptor's activity. This changed at Carnegie theatre. A performance on a proscenium stage aligns the work more with theatrical artifice and illusion, and separates audience from actors. In performance art the artist, as himself or herself, performs certain actions for an audience, often made up of other artists, in a non-hierarchical space. In *Americans On The Move*, Anderson commanded the stage, with attendant musicians as visible counterpoints to her persona and the instrumentation more strongly identified with rock music.

In the fall of 1979, Laurie conceived of her large, all-inclusive song cycle, *United States I-IV*. *Americans On The Move* was incorporated into *United States Part I (Transportation)*. In February, 1983, after the single "O-Superman" and the album *Big Science* had become popular successes, Laurie performed *United States I-IV* in its entirety at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The performance lasted seven hours. (A recording of the whole performance will be released by Warner Bros. Records later this year. The songs "Langue D'Amour" and "Blue Lagoon" on *Mr. Heartbreak* are from *United States*.)

Laurie told the *New York Times*: "Since I tour a lot, especially in Europe, I've frequently found myself sitting across the dinner table from people who ask me, 'How can you live in a country like that?' I really am defensive a lot of the time and I needed to have some way to deal with that. The idea of *United States I-IV* was to make a big portrait of the country. I divided it sort of arbitrarily into four parts: transportation, politics, money and love. If there's any through-line, it's some question about America as Utopia and trying to understand how people really feel about living here."

Included in *Americans On The Move* was a song entitled "Song For The Night Driver #3." The song contained the classic line: "I am in my body the way most people drive their cars."

**LAURIE:** I had a lot of heroes when I was a kid and I kept lists of the things that made them heroes. Courage was high on my list. I was obsessed with courage, with how people would react when something bad happened to them. I still admire people with courage. But now, I find that, with the people I know—it's funny; I wish I didn't do this—but I probably actively recognize the problems that they have more than the things that they do

well. Like, in describing a friend who might be courageous—this is an awful thing to admit, but it's really true—I would probably think first of their problems and not of the things they do that are amazing, like their art.

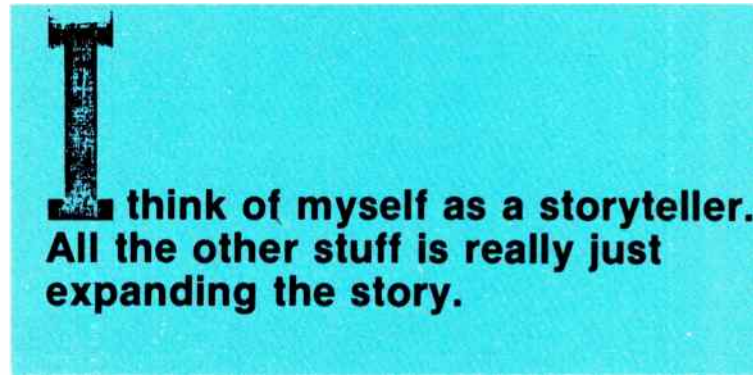
**MUSICIAN:** Do you find that artists have a hard time congratulating each other?

**LAURIE:** Sure. People are very self-conscious about

congratulations, giving and receiving. Congratulations are somehow considered too simple. I think it's competition which makes people withhold their feelings. Encouragement is the most valuable gift you can give, but the flip-side of that is that there's nothing creepier than somebody who praises you for reasons you think are awful. It's like they pat you on the back and give you things and say how wonderful you are, and you think they're an idiot, so you say to yourself, I must really be an idiot if that person likes me.

**MUSICIAN:** You've had a sort of break from the art world since becoming a recording artist. Do you have any thoughts or memories about the transition?

**LAURIE:** I hadn't decided that I could do any performances



away from the art world until I did a performance in Houston. The museum wouldn't hold the concert so they decided I should do it in a big country & western bar nearby. But I got advertised as some kind of country & western fiddler, so a lot of the regulars came. The art crowd was also there—it was a big, crazy mess—but for the regulars it was like, "Okay, here's someone who tells stories and plays the violin." They got it perfectly. I realized, after that, that I'd spent a long time being pretty snobbish about what I was doing. Later, after I stopped doing performances exclusively in the art world, there were a lot of artists and people in the art world who decided that what I was doing was completely awful. Like, "A record contract? How could you do that? That's so sleazy, so tacky—what a sell-out." I was very hurt, at first, by that reaction. Then I realized it was exactly the same kind of attitude that I had originally benefited from: a small group of people saying, "We know what's good, and those people out there have no idea." So, when I started doing things for people "out there"—people who were supposedly stupid—my old friends still had that attitude.

**MUSICIAN:** In 1981, you told *Wet* magazine: "In my work, I strive for a sort of stereo effect, a pairing of things up against each other and see myself as sort of a moderator between things. Sexuality is one of those things I'm in between." Now, you said earlier that you try to be neither male nor female, and that the neutrality was useful for being an observer. What kind of an observer?

**LAURIE:** When I'm onstage, I'm looking. I'm definitely looking at the audience. I like to see who comes to those things. And, even though I don't come on and say, "Oh, hi folks. Glad you could make it. I'm going to do a little song right now—sure hope you like it," I do hope they like it.

**MUSICIAN:** In his article about you for the *New York Times* Magazine, Don Shewey mentioned the Wagnerian ideal of Gesamtkunstwerk: "The united art work using every genre in an effort to represent the whole of human nature." Is there a way for you to incorporate your fame and your success into your art?

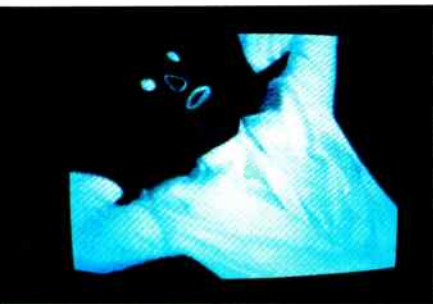
**LAURIE:** That hasn't really been a subject in the work that I've done, although I have given it some thought. As far as it becoming part of my work, it might if I can figure out how to understand it in my own life. I'm very uneasy with that part of my life and unfortunately it has made me a little paranoid because I know that people want things from me that I either don't pick up on right away or don't understand or can't give. So I've become more private, and I spend most of my time with people that I've known for a long time.

**MUSICIAN:** Is there a code, or a rule or a set or rules which you follow?

**LAURIE:** There are some rules, yeah. One is to really try not to be obscure.

**MUSICIAN:** A sacrifice has been defined as the act of making something sacred. What is sacred to you? Or maybe I should ask, what sacrifices have you made?

**LAURIE:** Let's see, what's sacred.... Depending on the day, nothing could be sacred or everything could be sacred. It





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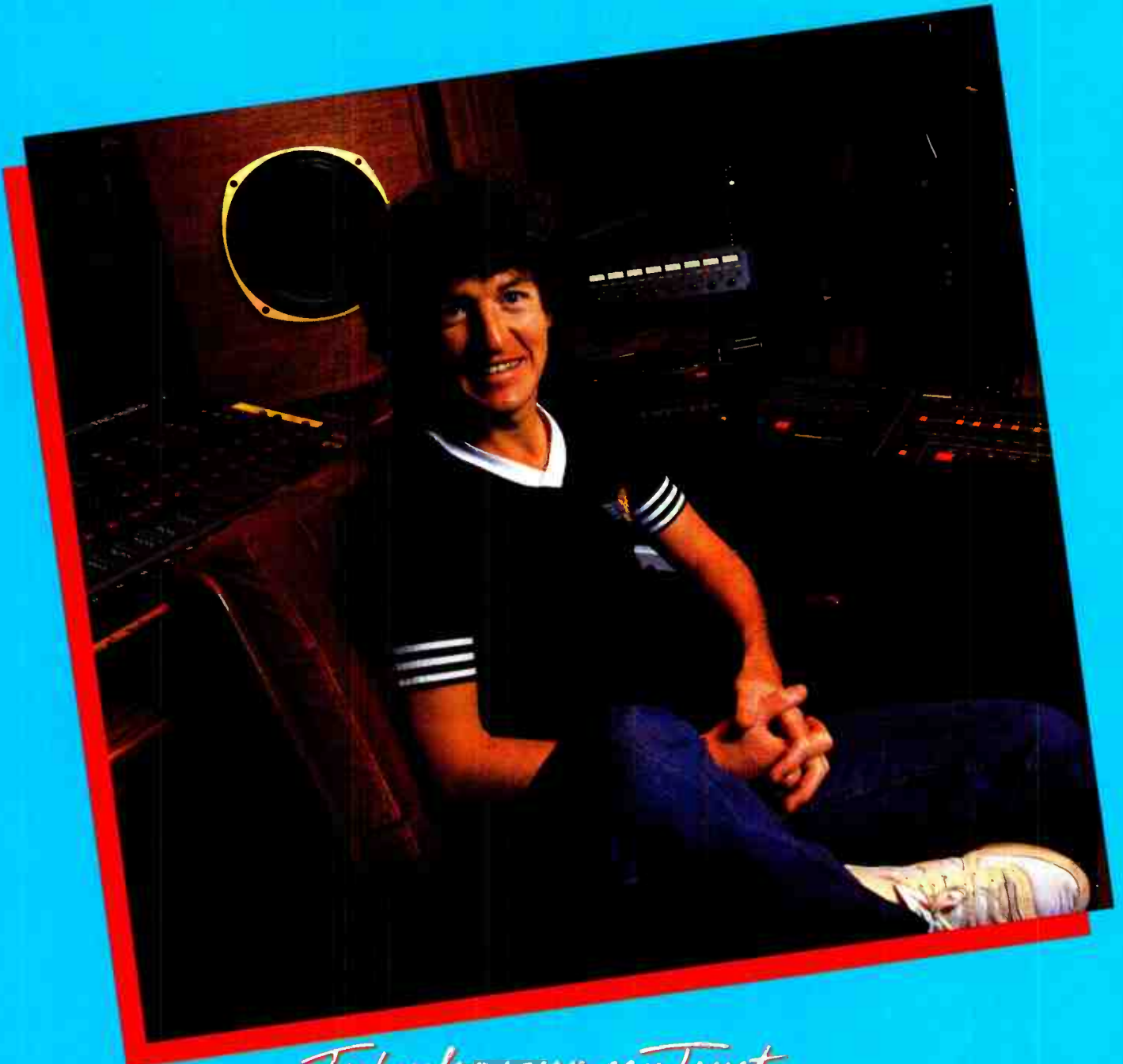
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depends on how generous I'm feeling. And I've made no sacrifices.

One of the unwritten rules of performance art is that the audience must become a part of the artwork. There are no observers allowed. To some degree, we all make performance art and we are all performance artists. (In American slang, an unpleasant confrontation is "a bad scene." In French slang, an individual's tendency to behave irrationally is called his "cinema," as in: "Oh, let him have his cinema.") In this sense, performance artists are direct descendants of the conceptual artists of the early-70s (like Christo), the Happenings artists of the mid-60s (like Allan Kaprow) and the Pop artists of the early-60s and late-50s (like Andy Warhol). The common thread is immediate impact: pop art, happenings, conceptual art and performance art all carry a kind of shock value, a charge that gets transmitted from artist to audience, thereby completing the circuit and making the work of art whole.

In 1974, as part of a piece entitled *Trans-fixed*, an artist named Chris Burden received a lot of attention from the New York art world when he had himself crucified to a Volkswagen. Burden is also well known for his landmark piece entitled *Shoot*. In *Shoot*, Burden and an accomplice stood fifteen feet away from each other in the F-Space Gallery. Then the accomplice pulled out a pistol and fired it, shooting Burden through the left arm. (Among the New York artists who had strong reactions to *Shoot* was Laurie Anderson, who, in 1975, wrote a song dedicated to Burden entitled "It's Not The Bullet That Kills You, It's The Hole.")

Laurie Anderson's first work of performance art premiered in 1972 at a town green in Rochester, Vermont. Entitled *Automotive*, the piece consisted of dozens of cars, trucks and motorcycles parked around a bandshell with the audience seated inside the bandshell. Using color-coded score sheets, the "orchestra" for *Automotive* beeped their horns in concert.

In the 1979 premiere issue of *Performance Art Magazine*, Laurie came as close as anyone has come to explaining performance art: "Traditional plays invent characters and predict their postplay lives. My approach leaves me freer to be disjunctive and jagged, and to focus on incidents, ideas, collisions. Personally I feel closer to the attitude of the stand-up comedian—not only because I believe that laughter is powerful, but because the comedian works in real time."

**MUSICIAN:** *In concert, and in photographs, your hair looks like it's pulling in transmissions from all over the world.*

**LAURIE:** Oh, yeah, it is.

**MUSICIAN:** *What do you do with your hair, or to yourself, to make it look that way?*

**LAURIE:** (laughs) I wish I could say that there're resistors and capacitors and that they're actually receiving signals, but it's nothing like that. It's just that it gets kind of greasy... (closes her eyes). Let's see, why do I cut my hair like this... (opens her eyes) I was in Munich for a couple of days, sort of waiting around for something. I can't remember what. And there was a guy there named Winston Tong, who was a performance artist, and he was bored. So he decided he would cut my hair. I said, "Great. Did you ever cut hair before?" He said, "Oh, lots of times." So I said, "Great, go ahead." So he gave me this haircut. (laughs) It turned out he'd only cut his own hair before. But it was fine with me. Now I cut it myself, usually when I'm on the phone, although a couple of times when I've been in strange conversations, I just keep cutting on one side (laughs), and a few times there've been these complete bald patches—you know, like about six—because I just keep cutting and talking and cutting. I forget what I'm doing.

**MUSICIAN:** *Whenever I tell someone that I like your music, they always say, "Laurie Anderson, isn't she that experimental artist?" It's like you work in a lab and perform experiments.*

**LAURIE:** (smiles) Yeah, I should. I wish I had a lab. Maybe I'll start wearing a white coat.

**MUSICIAN:** *People still wouldn't know what to call you. You've been labeled a "performance artist," a "minimalist," a "feminist musician," and, in Art In America magazine, a "radiant midwestern madonna transformed into a neuter punk." Now, labels are a necessary part of being famous—people need a vocabulary if they're going to appreciate you and discuss your work. What do you think you are?*

**LAURIE:** I think of myself as a storyteller. All the other stuff—the politics and the music and the pictures—are really just ways of expanding on the story and learning to tell it in different ways. I do think people need tags so they can arrange what they're doing. One of the tags people use is "performance artist" and I guess I use that too, because I don't know what it is and I don't think many people do, so it comes in handy. The main thing is that there really is a difference between the work I do and something by someone who deserves the name "experimental artist." Experimental art is usually boring.

**MUSICIAN:** *Your work doesn't strike me as experimental at all. In fact, I think it's pretty traditional.*

**LAURIE:** Well, I think so too. I'm working in the world's oldest art form: storytelling. That was the first thing ancient people did. Often my work is described as being futuristic—the use of language, for instance—but in a lot of ways it doesn't have anything to do with the future or with what's happening now. A lot of the songs on *Mr. Heartbreak* use very archaic American 40s-film language: "Hey sport" or "Hey pal"—nobody talks like that now. But I like films where people talk like that, and I like knowing that it's a shared history of a lot of people who've seen those films.

**MUSICIAN:** *In Provence, in the late middle ages, the troubadours used poetry to tell stories about love, politics and beauty. They also performed their ballads on stages with music and props. Do you feel any connection with them?*

**LAURIE:** I probably feel more in common with Mark Twain than with the troubadours. I don't really know that much about the troubadours. I don't know that much about Mark Twain either, except that he did go around reading his work and the reading of it gave it a totally different meaning.

**MUSICIAN:** *Here's a quote of yours: "Feminist ideas about the equality and ability of women are, to my mind, already beautiful and accurate. We don't have to dress them up and mock them up as art." What about equality and ability? Doesn't an artist—or any individual—do more for his or her world by being unique than by being able or equal?*

**LAURIE:** The comment about feminist ideas wasn't really trying to make a parallel between those ideas and ideas that are in art. It was to illustrate a point about the separation between art and ideas. I do think one of the important things about being an artist is the uniqueness of that vision. I suppose it's a Western idea of the new as opposed to maybe a Japanese brush painter's ideal, which is really not to do anything new but to achieve the perfection of the masters through imitation. But I would guess that every artist's goal is a kind of perfection rather than being unique; it doesn't matter if the work is astoundingly new, but more that it's astoundingly perfect.

**MUSICIAN:** *Jackson Pollock said that he didn't consider his paintings as completed works of art until they were hanging on someone else's wall. You work with a lot of fragments in your songs—inferences, suggestions, snatches of conversation. How do you know where to stop? What tells you to leave the song alone—that it's complete?*

**LAURIE:** I don't think of them as fragments. I think of them as parts of a picture. Jackson Pollock is a good way to think about it. I don't think a work of art is totally completed unless someone sees it and the transfer is made. As far as to when I stop working on a song, well, the cutoff point is always different. Sometimes it's as I'm running out the door to try and perform it. Sometimes I've just run out of money in the recording budget. Very, very occasionally, I think it's perfect. But usually I stop working on a song because I don't know how to fix it.

**MUSICIAN:** *I get the impression that you wouldn't make the*



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kind of music you make if there weren't people around to see and hear it.

**LAURIE:** I'd make it, but I'd just make it here. I wouldn't bother to get on a plane and go places. The same goes for the so-called messages in my work. People seem concerned: "But what does it mean?" "What are you saying?" "What does this come down to in the message category?" That's always a problem for me because, if I had a message, I would really write it on a piece of paper in the clearest way I could and hand it out. I wouldn't make slides or films or songs, because they're not very efficient. To me, that's the whole difference between art and ideas. Art is a sensual experience. I never check facts.

I remember reading a story in some magazine. The question was: are kids who see TV violence more likely to be able to pick up a gun and blow someone's head off? Or can they separate that fake world like a storybook that they might read and say, "That doesn't really happen"? The answer was very bizarre. It was: yes, usually kids are able to make that separation, with the exception of families in which the family members act like they're on TV. Now, you know exactly what they're talking about, but, as a statistic, it's preposterous!

**MUSICIAN:** *When you play the Synclavier, it sounds like you're standing underneath the song, holding it up with those deep rich waves that the Synclavier produces. But the moment you start playing the violin, everything changes. Your violin cuts across foreground and background. It belongs everywhere, because the sound you get out of it is both instrumental and vocal.*

**LAURIE:** I think the violin is the closest instrument to the human female voice. I've always wanted to make the violin sound like a voice. The violin really is an extension of my voice.

**MUSICIAN:** *After fifteen years of playing classical violin, you quit in 1969. You've been quoted as saying: "Giving up practicing the violin was one of the few things in my life that I'm really proud of. I was becoming a technocrat, and I'm not interested*

*in technical virtuosity. I like jagged music. I barely know my lines and I like to feel uncomfortable." I see that quote as part of your ongoing attempt to remain an enlightened amateur and avoid becoming a polished professional. Do you agree?*

**LAURIE:** An enlightened amateur.... Well, I wish I were enlightened and I'm definitely an amateur, I know that, rather than a polished professional. Well, no. I do try to polish things in a certain way, but it starts reminding me so much of TV that I suppose I try to throw a few wrenches into the works because it's just more human that way.

**MUSICIAN:** *You begin your concerts in a state of awkward blindness. You can't see through the glasses you're wearing because the lenses are made of paper, and the audience can see that you can't see. Your first moves onstage are hesitant, like a child's first steps. Is that awkward blindness a statement about your mistrust of technical virtuosity?*

**LAURIE:** Being blind and awkward are, I suppose, important to me. Again, it's sort of trying to be the opposite of a TV professional.

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you think that, if you got too good at performing or recording—too professional, let's say—you might lose some of the clarity and immediacy which give your work so much of its power?*

**LAURIE:** Yeah, I think that. If you're too good at something, you do lose a lot. What you gain is something else. It gets back to the question of virtuosity. You can practice something a lot in a room and then go out and show people that you really practiced it a lot. And that can be amazing. The people I worked with on *Mr. Heartbreak*—Peter Gabriel, Adrian Belew, Bill Laswell—were really inspiring musically and made me want to practice the violin again. But I do try to be innocent. I try to look at things as if I'm seeing them for the first time and also so that I can feel things that I haven't felt in a long time. I think most things are so weird that, if you can just describe them as they are, it's strange enough. You don't have to be a surrealist to think the world is strange. You can be an utter realist. ☐



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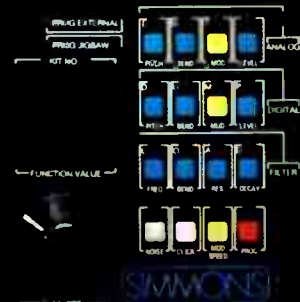
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# MUSICIAN

WORKING

It should've been expected. Heavy metal has long had its vociferous fans and secret admirers. But HM has recently become the guitar magazines' new obsession, what with Angus Young grimacing on two major covers this month, and the Van Halen blitz gearing up. As an antidote, this month's Working Musician presents four great guitarists who keep the distortion out (most of the time) and who make the guitar do some heavy-duty things.

## 70 CHRIS STAMEY

Live direct through heart, if a pop wizard who's at the CB's for a Wonder 500. He

## 76 TREVOR RABIN

Yes, there's a reason for the dramatic key revitalization and new hits.

## 78 ROBBIE BLUNT

The quiet pedigree of Robert Cray's late collaborator-overnight success at 75 years.

## 80 JOHN CIPOLLINA

The acid-guitar firehead of the epic Quicksilver Messenger Service.

## 82 CHEAP GUITARS

The bottom drops out of the guitar market, with six-string deals you can't refuse.

## 84 N.A.M.M.

The latest from the National Association of Music Merchants show in Anaheim.



BY ROY TRAKIN

# CHRIS STAMEY



PHIL MARINO

## THE WONDERFUL WACKY WORLD OF AN EX-dB

Some rockers start earlier than others. North Carolina native Chris Stamey, for example, was a mere nine years old when he got his first tape recorder on a trip to the 1964 New York World's Fair. With visions of the Unisphere and the General Motors pavilion dancing through his head, he assembled it from a kit on the train ride home. Even at that tender age, *wunderkind* Stamey was attempting unorthodox and potentially momentous experiments on his two-track Sony 660 with auto-reverse:

"I was determined to record myself saying the word 'radar,' and then have it come out the same when I played it backwards, but that never seemed to happen," recalls Chris. "It always came out 'narad' for some reason."

Meanwhile, back in Winston-Salem, Stamey's school chum Mitch Easter, better known today as leader of Let's Active and producer of R.E.M. and other Athens, Georgia upstarts, was experimenting with a primitive Sony by taping the theme from *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* off his television set. These precocious beginnings would be the start of a Stamey-Easter partnership that would later yield indie records by their local combo, the Sneakers, which in turn eventually metamorphosed into the dB's, a group regarded by many as New York's best pop band. That assessment may change in the wake of Stamey's surprising 1983 departure from the dB's.

The move appeared to come at a particularly inopportune time, considering the band had finally signed an American deal (with Bearsville) after a pair of critically acclaimed import releases, *Stands For Decibels* and *Repercussions*. The remaining members of the group—singer/songwriter/guitarist Peter Holsapple, bassist Gene Holder and drummer Will Rigby, all old-time buddies from Carolina—went into the studio

wentout him to record an album helmed by producer Chris Butler, former mastermind of the Waitresses.

For fans of the dB's tightly wound pop, with its jangly guitars, eccentric production techniques and left-field charm, the split between the songwriting team of Stamey and Holsapple was indeed a disappointment. "I thought the group was getting stagnant, so I left," explains Stamey tersely, still somewhat reticent to discuss his dB divorce. "I was having difficulty getting pleasure out of the same things the rest of them did, like a high hat, which drives me crazy, and ruins perfectly good records. I was also having a hard time understanding why we were trying to get the audience so worked up. Why be so agitating? It was a problem I was having with music in general. Besides, I felt the three of them could make a really great record by themselves."

With his choir-boy looks and articulate manner, Chris Stamey is not your typical rocker, and his musical resumé is also anything but typical, including collaborations with Alex Chilton, ex-Television guitarist Richard Lloyd, Eight Eyed Spy, Mofungo and Pylon. As a classically trained composer, Chris approached his first solo album, *It's A Wonderful Life*, with the zeal of a theorist. He drew on the talents of percussionist pal Ted Lyons and a cast of distinguished extras from Easter's Drive-In studios (including Let's Active's Faye Hunter) to make the record.

"The place was shrouded in fog the whole time I was there and nobody was around except these jumping rabbits," laughs Stamey. "It just made me think of 'Roadrunner' when the coyote would run a little ways over the cliff and then re-trace his steps in thin air. I kept putting in phrases a half-measure over just to push a little beyond the point where you thought it might end. Instead of compression, I aimed for elision, where events overlap. I wanted the texture to be like looking through a stereo microscope, which exaggerates depth.

"We took the pads off microphones, so we could record things which happened very quietly, and then mix them in really loud. We reversed dynamics. If you tap a tiny bell with your finger and amplify it, it sounds different than banging on a cowbell with a drumstick, even if it's played back at an equivalent volume."

These little touches, woven into the fabric of a pop record, have distinguished Stamey's output, from his earliest independently-made Sneakers' records to the rhythm-heavy DOR dub of Pylon's *Chomp* LP, a project he produced with Gene Holder. As teenagers growing up in Winston-Salem, Stamey and his buddies experimented with a variety of two- and later four-track recording techniques that were remarkably sophisticated and home-spun at the same time. Necessity was the mother of invention. The Sneakers' very first record, a 7-inch EP made in 1976 on Chris' four-track TEAC 2340 (which cost almost \$700), included sitars, toy pianos and sleigh bells.

"Mitch Easter and I had a group that was only for recording," says Stamey. "We tried to turn out what we called albums every three months. They were very overblown productions and we both played a lot of different instruments. I started on the cello and Mitch learned saxophone, recorder, flute, pedal steel guitar and drums, too."

The duo drew its inspiration from British eccentrics such as Roy Wood and American oddballs like Phil Spector, Brian Wilson and Alex Chilton, while Stamey still held tight to his own "classical aspirations," by penning the occasional chorale, brass piece or piano concerto. After a stint in a Chapel Hill music college, Stamey headed for New York, flush with some favorable reviews for the first Sneakers record.

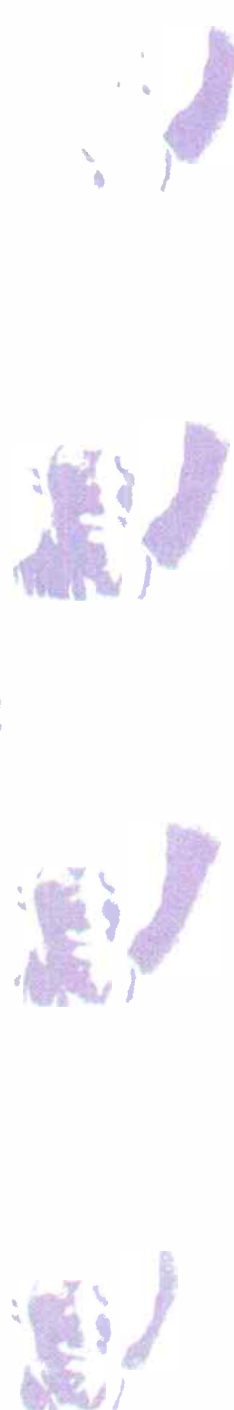
"I thought I was already famous," he says ruefully. He stumbled into punk mecca CBGB's one night and caught a set by Television, which reopened his ears to the possibilities of rock. "I thought every band in New York was like Television," he says, "but, in reality, there wasn't anybody else comparable."

A chance meeting brought him in contact with local entrepreneur Terry Ork, who had just put out Television's first single on his independent label. Seems Terry was looking for someone to play with another one of his acts who had just released a record on Ork: a Memphis wildman with a reputation as a pop genius for his work with a group called Big Star—one Alex Chilton. Which was how a braces-clad Stamey got to play bass in a hastily-assembled band backing up one of his idols.

"You've got to realize Big Star was a popular group in Winston-Salem," insists Stamey. "Big Star had hits on the radio. Where I came from, they were like the Grass Roots. I really liked those records, but for all the wrong reasons. I liked *Radio City* reasonably well, but it was the third Big Star album that was the revelation; stuff like 'Kanga Roo' was inspired."

While Chilton was in the process of going from a pop guru to

# S T A M E Y





a wasted shell, Stamey released another collection of Sneakers' material on his own Car Records, *In The Red*, and recorded "The Summer Sun," a single Alex himself produced. The single was a sprightly summer ditty that evoked the Beach Boys at their psychedelic apogee on records like *Friends* or the legendary *Smile*, and it, too, came out on the Ork label.

"Alex was just incredibly musical, a very talented guy. I learned a lot from him," says Stamey. "He was like a politician in that he enjoyed manipulating power and pulling psychological maneuvers. I saw him do things like Jerry Lee Lewis knew how to do to an audience, which had nothing to do with a minor seventh chord, that's for sure."

After the Chilton situation deteriorated, Stamey collaborated on a one-off single with Television guitarist Richard Lloyd, singing a tune he wrote, called "I Thought You Wanted

PHIL MARINO



Stamey forsook jangly guitar agitation for calming pastel wash.

To Know." The B-side, "If And When," marked the record debut of the dB's, featuring one-time Sneaker drummer Rigby and bassist Holder. Later, Peter Holsapple, who was living in Memphis and recording songs at the Sun studio, came up to play keyboards for the band.

"Peter had all these great songs he was writing, so we formed a band, even though I had had it with groups after the Sneakers," says Stamey. Chris disputes the claim that the two wrote individually as members of the dB's. "Peter helped me finish things off, and I think he would agree I edited his songs, helped him make them shorter," he says. "But everybody in the band did that. I had a lot more resistance to rearranging things that I brought in than he did, so it was harder for him to contribute to my stuff. But you wouldn't believe what an incredible democracy the dB's really were."

The dB's survived a rocky road to record two albums before breaking up last summer. Always admired for their intricate studio work, the band never lived up to its reputation live. Stamey, who started out recording bands in his living room, is more interested in performing now than producing.

"It just seems like a drag not to be in the house when someone puts on your record," he says. "I think some of the albums released independently these days are like vanity books... I'm confident of getting a deal with a major soon."

While *It's A Wonderful Life* certainly doesn't sound like a vanity release, it won't give Michael Jackson serious Grammy competition either. A difficult, experimental work, it reminds one that Chris has produced cassettes for no-wave outfits like Eight Eyed Spy and Mofungo. "There's something both ridiculous and sublime about what a fuzz guitar can do when you take it out of its normal context," says Stamey, who recently toured with Carolina psychedelic guitar legend Mike Greer. "This album seems fairly straightforward to me, compared to the dB's stuff, which I think jumps around a lot. The music I'm working on now is a lot more precise and exacting than the no-wave bands. *It's A Wonderful Life* was a bit of a washy, pastel record. I don't like things to be grating. I don't go for

anything that makes you clench your fist. I don't believe in giving the audience the bird. That album contained improvisations, but with patterns we established before recording.

"I hate revival stuff, it drives me crazy. I'd be glad to explain to Three O'Clock or anybody else that the psychedelic era was not all that wonderful. There were a few good tunes, but most of it was bad.

"I'm still writing pop songs. Maybe they're a little more like Cole Porter now. But I have other categories of material I do, also. I may not be a jazz musician, but there's an emotional vocabulary in that music which appeals to me. I like the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sun Ra. I like doing stuff like that live. And then there's another type of thing I do, which I call my 'Henry Miller' numbers, which are basically orgasmic in nature. What I've tried to do in the past year is take a beginner's course in rhythm to understand how it hits you, what it actually does to me and what I can do with it after that. There's a big gap in my knowledge in that area because my white symphonic tradition is more concerned with the area above the groin."

Looking towards a more perfect rhythmic understanding, Chris' latest studio concoction involves a system of electronic hook-ups he calls the "Groovegate" system, employing an Omnicraft GT-4 series of four noise gates, which allow the keyboards and guitars to be controlled by the actions of the drummer, who initiates the chain of musical events.

"Ted Lyons and I really like that meaty, disjunctive, aggressive rhythm feel the Meters and Allen Toussaint get," explains the sandy-haired Chris in his Carolina drawl. "We sort of went the long way around to get that sound by using guitar pickups (Barcus Berry "BB Juniors") caulked to drum heads with a bunch of noise gates attached to drone figures on the keyboards, which are held in place by fish weights. It was just driving me crazy that otherwise intelligent bass players and drummers had to waste all their time looking at each other's feet and fingers just in order to play on the beat. This eliminates that need. It syncs up the rhythm section automatically.

"The contact pickups on the drums open the particular noise gate, letting signals from various Casios or bass pedals through and allowing them to be heard. Ted controls it all by how he hits the drum, with the keyboard note sustaining for as long as the percussion vibrates. You can modify the output: the drum envelope determines the opening of the noise gate. It's really not an advance over a drum machine, but I like doing things that way; it seems like the right way to go about it."

Stamey has even been able to take the whole set-up on the road, where he duplicates studio conditions. In "Face Of The Crowd" on the LP, a crash cymbal muted manually results in a staccato Acetone organ line manipulated by the percussionist's touch. For the Pylon album, Chris explains how he connected a radio tuned to a local muzak station to a snare drum, that was hit to produce "some incredible random pitches. It's the kind of thing you can do on a Fairlight polyphonic digital synthesizer which allows you to sample other sound sources, but this way you can do it for less." In addition, Stamey deploys a battery of vintage Fenders, three Silvertone basses and a Roland June 60—all through an Ampeg Gemini V amp.

Whether Stamey aims above or below the groin, commercial success has been elusive. He plans another solo tour with Ted Lyons, Rick Brown and Cathy Harrington along the Atlantic seaboard before returning to Bearsville Studios with producer Marshall Crenshaw in February to record a second LP. Despite all his splendid accomplishments and hopes for a major-label signing, (A&R folks out there, are you listening?), making music is still a daily struggle for Stamey.

"What I think I do is put music out," he says. "I've stumbled upon various ways of pushing the sound out of me. And then I spend time with all the problems which arise when I do that. How do I make a living? I don't know. I just never think about it. Wasn't it Tom Verlaine who said that the music industry was run by women taking care of men? It's a matriarchy." ■

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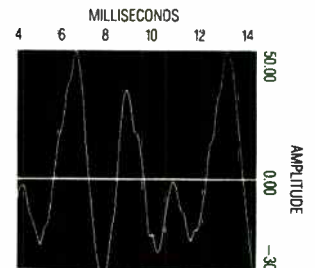
For example, a middle C on the piano activates a very different set of overtones than an F# two octaves above it. The Kurzweil 250 takes this into account and accurately duplicates this changing harmonic structure across its entire keyboard.

And unlike other electronic keyboards, which cut the duration of each note in half at each higher octave, the Kurzweil 250 has Independent Pitch Duration Control,<sup>™</sup> which controls independently the length of time each note is heard, regardless of its pitch.

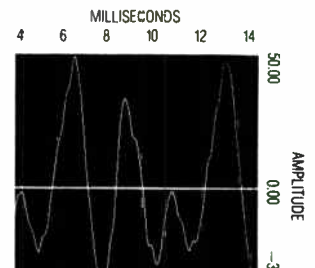
Also, through the use of Artificial Intelligence technology, the Kurzweil 250 "knows" that changes in loudness affect the timbre of a note. This means that notes played softly on the Model 250 sound mellow; the same notes played loudly sound bright. (And the Model 250's exclusive, velocity-sensitive keyboard action further helps you capture the feel and dynamic response of a grand piano.)

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Section of waveform produced at middle "C" by a \$35,000 concert grand piano.



Section of waveform produced at middle "C" by a Kurzweil 250.<sup>™</sup>

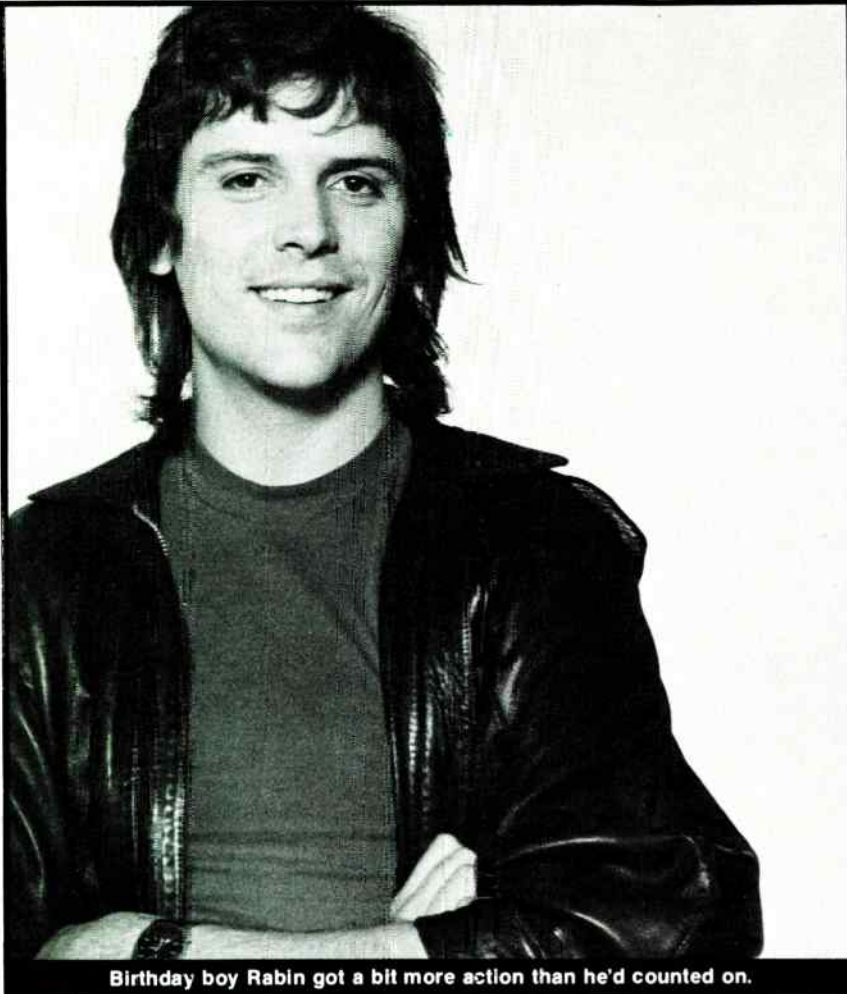


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EBET ROBERTS



Birthday boy Rabin got a bit more action than he'd counted on.

## TREVOR RABIN, INDEPENDENT YESMAN

The Guitar Behind Yes' Comeback Just Doesn't Know When to Stop.

By Freff

### Trevor Rabin's Tips for a Memorable 29th Birthday:

*Tip One:* while relaxing at the Fountainbleau Hilton in Miami Beach, soaking up some rays before traveling to frozen Pennsylvania to rehearse for the upcoming Yes tour; get a call from management telling you that "Owner Of A Lonely Heart," the band's new single, is number one on the American charts. Whoa!

*Tip Two:* twenty-four hours later,

damned near die from a ruptured spleen.

A bit extreme you say? True. But unquestionably memorable. Freak accidents make for great anecdotes, and like every really good freak accident this one has also got a freak punchline. Which I'm going to get to, I promise; but first let me introduce you to the tipster himself.

Odds are you never heard of Trevor Rabin before he appeared, seemingly from nowhere, to fill Steve Howe's shoes as the guitarist in the newest incarnation of Yes. That certainly wasn't for lack of Trevor's trying; it's just that his work as bandleader, solo artist and producer has somehow never clicked with the press or the public, leaving him deep in that vague, gray limbo that swallows up so

many gifted players. A few lucky ones get a break and rise into sunny visibility ... which is what finally happened for Trevor. Whether you love or hate Yes' amazingly successful new album, *90125* (and truth be told, I love it), you can't ignore his contributions. He wrote the majority of the album's music, played all the electric and acoustic guitars, sang a third of the leads and eighty percent of the backing vocals, played at least half the keyboard parts, and even had a hand—through sheer South African stubbornness—in the engineering and mixing.

So, at last: creative satisfaction, huge album sales, a new home studio, public attention and critical acclaim, the biggest tour of his life about to begin... Trevor Rabin was unquestionably and definitely *on a roll*, right up to the moment the fat lady came barreling down the slide of the Fountainbleau's pool and played human cueball off his abdomen.

Imagine, if you will, the management freakout. The sudden grinding halt of tour preparations. The consternation. The worry. And then imagine the poor boy by himself, lying in a Miami Beach hospital bed, bleeding internally, tubes up every orifice in his body, wrapped in a fog of pain and painkillers. Two or three times during the night the only thing between him and death was the life-support machinery.

I won't keep you in imaginary suspense. After surgery on his birthday—Friday the thirteenth—he made it through. (Spleenless, but through.) By the time you read this, the delayed-but-not-derailed Yes tour will be blasting across America, and a fully-recovered Trevor Rabin will be making his bid to fulfill bandmate Chris Squire's prediction that he's going to be *the* next Guitar Hero. And maybe Keyboard Hero. And Bass Hero. And Champion Singer/Songwriter. "The problem with Trevor," says Squire, "is that he can do *anything*."

Even grow another spleen.

I told you the freak accident had a freak punchline, and here it is. Nobody really knows what a spleen does, aside from some filtering of blood impurities. As internal organs go, it's apparently more important than an appendix, but not by much. People who lose them never seem to miss their company. But about one in a thousand folks are born with the standard issue spleen *and* a little nub of flesh called an auxiliary spleen, which takes over when the legit one craps out, and eventually grows over the space of several years into full spleenhood.

*continued on page 92*



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EBET ROBERTS



Blunt's distinctive playing draws on years of solid technique and rabid eclecticism.

# ROBBIE BLUNT & THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANT

## Robert Plant's Guitar Partner Uses the Whole Palette

By J.D. Considine

"A lot of people have asked, 'How do you feel replacing Jimmy Page?'" relates Robbie Blunt with a touch of irritation, and it's not hard to understand how he might find that question persistent and annoying. After all, Blunt isn't just the guitarist on the Robert Plant tour—he's the guitarist Robert Plant writes and records with, making him the alter ego of one of the best-known voices in rock. To many fans, that means filling Jimmy Page's shoes, though Blunt counters, "I

never felt that I *replaced* anybody. I'm just working with a singer.

"But I must admit," he adds, looking up with a hint of a smile on his face, "during the recording of the first album, I broke out in a nervous rash."

He laughs, as much at the ease with which that album, *Pictures At Eleven*, succeeded as at his initial nervousness. In truth, though, the laugh is more on those cynics who thought that Blunt, virtually unknown before teaming with Plant, would end up a stick-figure Jimmy Page in a hastily constructed rehash of Led Zeppelin. Instead, Blunt has more than proven himself his own man, with an utterly distinctive sound and approach as well as possessing a melodic instinct strong enough to generate something as haunting as the top-

ten single, "Big Log."

To get an idea of just how distinctive Blunt's playing is, perhaps a comparison with Jimmy Page would be in order. The most obvious difference is timbral; where Page prefers the muscular growl of the Les Paul and dresses his sound in a warm layer of distortion, Blunt typically emphasizes the tonal clarity of his Stratocaster, going for a clean, unadorned sound that doesn't dominate the instrumental balance but reinforces it. Stylistically, Page is famous for his almost orchestral approach to his instrument, and it wasn't unusual for his guitar parts to reach for the role of a brass section or solo violin. Blunt, on the other hand, generates his range of effects by dipping into the inner reaches of guitar technique, building his palette from a resourceful application of picking techniques, chordal voicings and idiomatic devices from a wide range of rock styles.

"I suppose it is an amalgamation of everything I've ever listened to," Blunt says of his current writing and playing. "I mean, I even like country & western things. Or the solo on 'Moonlight In Somoza'—that's probably a Spanish influence. Robert's got a lot of Arabic music, and when we did the first album, he sat me down and said, 'Listen to a bit of this.' And 'Slow Dancer,' was a main influence, obviously, in that song."

Robert Plant didn't teach Robbie Blunt *everything*, though. In the past thirty-three years, Blunt has had plenty of time to do some listening and playing on his own. So where did this guy come from, then? "Kidderminster—Center of the Universe," he laughs. Blunt's hometown, just west of Birmingham in Worcestershire, may not be well-known to the average American, or even the average Englishman, but living there had its advantages. One of them was the local blues scene, through which Blunt first met Plant. "I've known Robert for about fifteen years," he says, referring to a time when Plant was singing with the Band of Joy and Blunt was a comer on the local scene. "In fact," he adds, "we lived—we *did* live—about three miles from each other."

Blunt's first step into the big time came when he was eighteen. Gordon Jackson, a singer from Worcester, "was making an album, and he asked me to play on a couple of tracks. He used to work in this band called the Hellions, and Jim Capaldi used to play in there." Capaldi played on the album, *Thinking Back*, as well, and so did Steve Winwood, Dave Mason, Rick Grech, Julie Driscoll and Luther Grosvenor. "That was a great education," Blunt says, "to

*continued on page 90*

# How changing your pickup will improve your guitar's sound.

There's a frustrating time in a guitar player's development when you have the fingering right, you're bending the strings at the right time, but you still don't sound the way the record does.

It happened to me when I shared a bill once with Robbie Robertson. (Later he was in The Band.) When we played together between sets, trading off licks, I couldn't get close to

the sounds he was getting out of his Telecaster® guitar.

I thought it might be an effects box, but no: you can juggle the signal with effects boxes, but you can't improve the original sound except with a pickup. His pickups had more windings and bigger magnets than my stock pickups, and were more sensitive and responsive to hard or soft picking.

My own Telecaster guitar was so comfortable in my hands, I couldn't bear to play anything else. But it didn't have the professional sound I needed on stage. Putting in a new pickup was like getting a new guitar.

The pickup is the place where sound changes into electricity. The magnetic pole piece magnetizes the string, and when the string vibrates, it moves a magnetic field through wire wrapped around the magnet. The wire resists the field and sends electricity to the amplifier, where the signal is changed back into sound.

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RANDY MATUSOW



Holy thumbpick, Batman! Salty blues, flamenco stutter, jazzy stretch...

# JOHN CIPOLLINA'S PICTORIAL GUITAR

## A Seminal Psychedelic Axeman Trips On

By David Fricke

To really appreciate their exotic curvature, the colorful bursts of heated emotion and the defiant musical science of their construction, some guitar solos should definitely be seen as well as heard. For example, if you tried to put pen and paper to "The Fool," the 1967 acid-guitar centerpiece from the first Quicksilver Messenger Service album, it might look something like this:

Glassy electric chords, rippling with discreet echo and tremolo, twist around into graceful romantic curls, break into the faint rustle of trees in a light, refreshing breeze and then glide into long-reaching crescendos that suggest a bright morning sun breaking over the horizon. One guitar channeled through a burbling Leslie implies a cool mountain stream zig-zagging through the hills at strange raga-like angles. Another guitar, growling through a wah-wah in a low, serrated moan, could either be a snarling wolf ready to pounce on its dinner or the chaotic rumble of rush-hour traffic in the concrete jungle. By the time the sing-

er's high, prayer-like tenor humbly enters, the twelve-minute song's near-classical resolution, with its arching cathedral melody, resembles a holy, calming sanctuary, like the end of a trip only partly chemical in nature.

Laugh if you want; dismiss it as naive hippie drug ju-ju. But that portrait of "The Fool" is exactly the way John Cipollina, Quicksilver's principal guitarist and arranger, first imagined it. "I worked that arrangement out on a piece of butcher paper in a rehearsal studio," he recalls with a bemused smile in a Manhattan hotel room where he is resting up for the evening's shows with Nick/Silver, his ad hoc touring group with Chicago blues crusader Nick Gravenites. "I can remember saying to the other guys [singer/guitarist Gary Duncan, bassist David Freiberg, drummer Greg Elmore], 'Okay, here we'll get to some mountains and streams and then we need something to go over here...'" And I just drew a picture of the song. I could read music, but the others couldn't. Besides," he adds with an embarrassed chuckle, "I was so steeped in drugs at the time I didn't want to read anyway.

"In my solo, I simply wanted to create certain moods, like that scratchy growl effect. All I did was scrape the pick on the G string at the fourteenth fret through the wah-wah. It was just my way of inter-

preting how the fool got out of the forest and back into the city."

Over fifteen years later, Cipollina's unique interpretive flair and vivid integration of salty blues, flamenco stutter, proper classical posture and jazzy stretching remain the most enduring of the classic San Francisco sounds. His animated guitar conversations with Gary Duncan in eccentric Quicksilver excursions like "The Fool" and the blues overhauls "Who Do You Love" and "Mona" on 1968's *Happy Trails* were the model for the Allman Brothers' dual lead guitar attack. Tom Verlaine admits that the bizarre modal curves, rubbery vibrato and poised feedback of Cipollina's solos were major influences on his work with Television.

Yet Cipollina, now forty, can't understand what the fuss is about. An ex-real estate salesman raised in a family of accomplished musicians (his father sings opera, his mother is a concert pianist, brother Mario plays bass with Huey Lewis & the News), he insists "I'm the sloppiest musician in my family," and that, as guitar gods go, he is a mere mortal. "I don't know what influence I've had on other guitarists because I don't have any idea what I do. Anything I do, I stole from somebody else. I don't have an original bone in my body."

To prove it, he tells a story about the time Link Wray rented his Marin County recording studio for tour rehearsals. "Man, I was a real fan. The noise he made on 'Rumble' showed me that you could make four-letter words with your guitar, you know? Anyway, we were sitting around with our guitars and the first thing he said was, 'I really liked the things you did on "Who Do You Love" and he started playing my licks back at me. So I threw all my Link Wray licks back at him, 'Slinky,' parts of 'Rumble,' and told him, 'See? I stole all that stuff from you!'"

Cipollina's life of guitar crime began in the late 50s when he first heard Mickey Baker's guitar solo on "Love Is Strange" over his parents' car radio. With ten years of classical piano training already behind him, he started mixing his Bach and Prokofiev chops with licks from Chet Atkins, Merle Travis and Scotty Moore records, using a double pickup, single-cutaway Danelectro guitar that set his parents back all of thirty-one dollars. "I still have it," Cipollina adds proudly. "I started beating the hell out of it and when it started to get funky, I took it to an auto body shop and had them re-finish it."

By the time he was eighteen, he was playing Bay Area teen dances with a  
continued on page 92

# THE ARTIST'S PALETTE

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## NEW CHEAPOS BREAK THE PRICE BARRIER

### A Surprising Bumper Crop of Budget Playability

By Jock Baird

Cheap was never like this.

Sure, you know the prices of computers and other exotic electronic hardware have been plummeting lately, but you may have missed a less predictable related development: the sudden profusion of high-quality cheap electric solid-bodies. How cheap are we talking here? How about a near-perfect Strat copy (designed by the original manufacturer) listing for \$369? How about a roaring SG-type cousin of Yamaha's renown SBG3000—with double humbuckers—for three bills? How about the Tele bite and maple-necked fluidity of an Ibanez Roadstar for two-fifty? Not cheap enough, you say? How about a \$185 Peavey that'll stop you dead in your tracks, or a zippy Fender/Squier Bullet for \$169? That got you, didn't it? Hey, wake up and check your bank balance! Guitar-making has digitized and dieted itself in the last few years, and the result is a substantial consumer windfall, not only for younger guitarists buying their first axes but for seasoned vets who want a different sound.

This six-string bargain bonanza is primarily (but not exclusively) a result of the coming of age of the Japanese manufacturing genius. Intelligent investment in digital automation and the sublime relationship of the Japanese worker to his job are at the heart of the extraordinary playability of this new guitar generation (it's no coincidence that two of the best of the budget bumper crop, the Ibanezes and the Squiers, are both made by the respected Fuji Gen-Gakki plant, where the Roland GR guitar synth is also made). The 1980s wrinkle is that the major companies, Japanese and American, are themselves converting the specs of their own designs to digital manufacturing programs rather than having them bootlegged by enterprising underpricers.

Once you get over the across-the-board playability of the new econo-axes, the fine points of pricing come down to things like bridges, tuning pegs, pickups and volume pots/switching. For example, it's hard to mount a decent tremolo bar on a guitar without adding thirty dollars to the price. Inlay on the body, which has to be done by hand, creates another option price level, as does a smooth multi-layer finish coat of paint.

Remember above all, though, that the feel of the neck and the overall ease of string handling (*cheap* cheapos are stiff, stiff, stiff) are essential. In a year or so,

when the money is pouring in, you can upgrade the details with better hardware (you'll probably want to start with the tuning pegs), but there's no way to upgrade the basic guitar if you don't like to play it the way it comes off the shelf.

Are we ready for the awards? First off, let's point out that these are necessarily subjective judgments that should only suggest some models to look at, not ironclad evaluations. Play a lot of different ones when you buy, because, honestly, all the ones mentioned here (and some we probably missed) are damn good. All prices are suggested list; discount accordingly for maximum shock value. We should also add that virtually all these guitars have equally noteworthy bass cousins in the same price range. That said, may we have the envelopes, please?

Four companies seemed to rise just a tad above the pack on the playability factor; not surprisingly, they are all larger manufacturers with a lot of guitar-making experience. In no particular order, they are the Yamahas, the Ibanez Roadstars, the Fender Squiers and the Peavey Patriots and Milestones. Just behind the majors (but occasionally offering better options for a particular feature), are Washburn, Guild's Madeira, Aria, B.C. Rich, Hamer, and Saga.

Yes, we did give extra points to the Yamaha SC300T (a Strat with obverse, French-*Moderne*-Mosrite curves) and the Roadstars for their original, attractive body design. After all, it's not nice to nick Leo Fender forever. The Yamahas (and other cheapo overachievers like Washburn) are made of nato, an East Asian wood akin to maple. In addition to the rosewood-necked SC300T, Yamaha makes a stinging variation of their top-of-the-line SBG series, the SBG 200. Both go for \$295. The Ibanez Roadstars are actually good five- and six-hundred-dollar guitars stripped of the frills and, if need be, a pickup or two; they play substantially as well as their expensive older brothers. The Roadstar II prices run on a steady continuum, from the lowest Tele-styled RS130 at \$245, to the Stratty three-pickup RS205 at \$345, to the gorgeous Paul-like flame-maple-topped RS315 for \$395, up to a Steve Lukather-endorsed model that ain't cheap. Ibanez's hardware also seems a bit better than most in the \$200-\$300 range, and phasing controls can be easily added.

The Fender Squiers were originally not meant to be sold in the United States, but after phenomenal overseas demand confirmed their quality, Fender couldn't keep 'em out. The Strat and Telecaster Squiers do nick Leo Fender, but they are

*continued on page 114*



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# H

## HEAT WAVE IN ANAHEIM: THE BEST OF N.A.M.M.

by Jock Baird

It promised to be the year that N.A.M.M. would be overrun with computers and VDTs, and while MIDI wasn't quite as ubiquitous as anticipated, it still was the lead story at Anaheim this past January 20-22. The liberation of the keyboard player into pure orchestration and arrangement was won in a walk. Not all the action was where it was expected, however; in addition to exciting computer-run composer systems from Yamaha, Roland, Sequential Circuits and Moog, there were literally hundreds of independent software writers combing the hall and congregating at the booth of the International MIDI Association, a grass roots garage software information clearinghouse (8426 Vine Valley Dr., Sun Valley, CA 91352).

MIDI handicappers rated Yamaha's Personal Composer system for the IBM PC and the Apple II the most impressive. The IBM software was written by Jim Miller, and the Apple's was done by Passport Systems, a couple of those garage geniuses who made good; both programs have been licensed and modified by Yamaha to work at maximum efficiency with DX7 synths and Simmons electronic drums. The resulting Yamaha Personal Composer system can control up to *sixty-four* MIDI-equipped instruments (the DX7 is designed to play as many as sixteen voices simultaneously on one synth. That's, uh, 1024 parts). Even more incredibly, it plays and *transcribes* musical notation. Beethoven would've killed for this. The system should be available from Yamaha by late spring for between seven hundred and a thousand dollars (not counting the computer, of course). Roland offered

the less powerful but more affordable eight-instrument composition program for IBM PC and Apple IIe, which they unveiled last November. It consisted of a 6,500-note sequencer for \$200, the MSQ-700 and a \$175 MIDI interface, the MPU-401. Sequential Circuits opted for linkups to the less powerful but more accessible Commodore 64, beating everyone to market with their 4,000-note Model 64 sequencer for \$195 and introducing a terrific self-contained six-



Fender Masters and ginchy B.C. Rich N.J.

track, 800-note synth/recorder with a hundred sounds for \$1095, the Six-Trak. (Sequential also had one of the hottest performance booths of the show with Andy West, John Bowen and Bruce Bowers.) Moog, feeling more upbeat this year, also went the Commodore 64 route, adding the six-voice Memorymoog Plus sequencer for its popular Memorymoog.

The biggest single synth splash was made by Kurzweil and its fabled acoustic piano sound. An opportunity to play it



Roland GR-700 guitar synth.

at length revealed its strongest suit for the coming sampling wars may be its exceptional keyboard action. Two other less expensive new electronic keyboards also did a credible job imitating a pianoforte, the Korg SP-80 and the Suzuki (the latter gives new meaning to the term, "split keyboard": it pulls apart at the middle to travel more easily). The potent Korg Poly 800 created substantial midline excitement, as did the new Seiko Personal Keyboard System with its RAM sequencer modules, and drum and bass accompaniment. Show scuttlebutt told of big things brewing at no-show Oberheim, with an entirely new type of synthesis coming soon. Equally glowing predictions of the near-ready Emulator II were heard.

If you're a guitarist, you may have been passing quickly over the above digital developments, but consider for a moment the benefits of the new Roland guitar synth, the GR-700. MIDI-equipped, with a battery of twelve DCOs, six VCAs, six VHF's, LFO, a chorus and a programmer, a guitarist can now do most everything the keyboard people can do. Touch sensitive and with conversion kits available for Strats and Les Pauls, the updated system means less overhaul of your playing style to synthesize. And the new GR-700 guitar body is *truly* original, with an unusual Buck Rogers parallel neck stabilizer and/or handle cut from the same piece of graphite as the neck. Goodness, what will Robert Fripp do with this one? Especially if he gets the Synclavier option from New England Digital?

Though overshadowed by all the keyboard commotion, there was lots of gui-

Jakstan guitar holder for seven bucks.





**Sequential's Six-Trak synth/recorder.**

tar activity. In addition to the proliferation of extraordinary budget guitars mentioned elsewhere in this issue, there were some exciting new high-end axes. Fender sneak-previewed its Master Series, their first serious attempt to build a great Les Paul. The use of single-coil/double-coil switching for the humbuckers adds a bit of the classic Fender bite to the usual Paul P.A.F. density, and the hardware and neck are classy indeed. Now will Gibson start building Strats? No, they're too busy bringing out two new midlines, the Spirit and the Special, and a less expensive version of the Les Paul Studio model. (Gibson is also making up for time lost to Kahler and Bowen in the hunt for a great Paul whammy bar, bringing in budget and lux-

pickup magnate Seymour Duncan's first amp, a small high-quality studio job with—get this—replaceable electronic cartridges to exactly duplicate the sound of various classic amps. You want screaming Marshall on channel one and biting Twin on channel two? Pop in the right units and you're rolling. This could become an essential for the session journeyman at \$1250. Several major companies are making Scholz Rockman copies, right down to the same switching configuration, but none of them approach the original. The ever-popular Tom Scholz debuted his Bass Rockman and entertained a steady stream of distinguished guitar talent.

The big effects breakthrough came in the realm of digital delays. At the upper end, Lexicon added an RS-232 patch to their Prime Times for complete computer control. At the lower end, manufac-



**D.O.D. R-908 digital delay with 900 ms.**

urers dipped below the \$500 mark. Way below, D.O.D. offered 900 milliseconds (with ten to one sweep width) for \$400. Peavey offered 800 ms. for \$329. Ibanez offered 900 ms. with infinite hold for \$449. MXR, who also upgraded their effects pedals, came in with 1500 ms. for \$500. But DeltaLab may have made the kindest cut, with an Effectron Jr. that gave 1050 ms. for three bills. Other effects developments included a new budget line from Pearl.

Acoustic guitars were much in evidence, especially in the lower to middle price zones. Fender added the inexpensive Gemini to their successful California series even as Yamaha added the under-\$200 Eterna and collected a Ralph Towner endorsement for their fine classics. Martin's new Shenandoah Series made convincing inroads in the \$800 range. Adamas' new Larry Coryell-endorsed spruce-top Elite improved the view from the top. Steel-stringed, solid-body acoustic electric variations on the influential Gibson Chet Atkins were suddenly everywhere, with Guild's, Ibanez's

and Washburn's (recently purchased by Bob Dylan and James Burton) leading the chase. And for playing amplified acoustic onstage, Peavey has the perfect amp, set up for acoustic guitars and only acoustic guitars.

But the most provocative product in the guitar field had to be the Jakstan, a seven-dollar piece of plastic from Product Originators: plugged into your amp, it becomes a guitar stand between sets—it even holds your pick. Brilliant! (3600 S. Harbor Blvd., #147, Oxnard, CA 93030.)

The action in the pro audio field was among the hottest. Big names like Electro-Voice, TOA, Fender, Cervin-Vega and Yamaha knocked heads with exotic new speaker systems, mikes, and powered and non-powered mixers. Bose showed a beefy new bass reflex setup. TOA buttons championing the



**Son of Click: Garfield's Mini Doc.**

science of psychoacoustics were a cult item. Shure brought out two new stage mikes, the PE86 and PE66, and radio mike specialists Astatic introduced a new line of music mikes, including one that specializes in that classic Sonny Boy Williamson harp sound. But the most unusual pro sound system was EXR's Mobile Studio, built into Lee Iacocca's personal van and offered as an option on the new Chrysler vans. James Casily of EXR, maker of a psychoacoustical enhancer, put the system together with pedigree components: a Crown amp, JBL studio monitors (including a subwoofer in the back door), a Proton cassette deck and an EXR processor, all tailored to the specific car by legendary acoustic designer George Augsburg. Casily also has a

**John Simonton's SMPL System.**





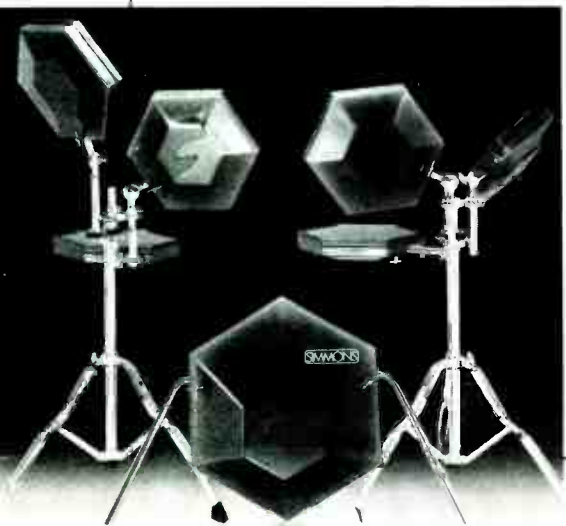
patch-bay option on the side and is trying to talk Soundcraft into building a two-foot-wide board to fit in the coffee table. Detroit-based Cars & Concept will also install and fine tune the system to any other car. Compared to the sound of a conventional Mercedes system costing a grand, this is a different universe altogether for only \$500 more.



**Fostex's 1/2-inch 16-track B-16.**

One of the most exciting of the computer developments was found at the videoactive Tascam booth. Dubbed the SMPL System, it's a software program and a modified Commodore VIC 20 made by an indie, Synchronous Technologies (P.O. Box 14467, Oklahoma City, OK 73113). Designed by John Simonton, the SMPL strips a drum machine or synth time track with both metronome and SMPTE code and executes up to six commands automatically. It's especially significant because now home tapes made on RS-232-equipped decks like Tascam, Otari and Fostex are usable in professional video mixing suites and state-of-the-art studios. The system performs complicated functions like half-measure punch-ins with digital precision, making it a one-man studio's best friend at around \$900 (not including VDT). Fostex debuted their new 1/2-inch 16-track deck, the B-16. Soundcraft introduced a new 2-track professional mixdown deck (as did

**Simmons' digital-analog SDS 7 kit.**



Otari) and added an "economy" mixer, the Series 200. Clarion, a respected car stereo maker, showed a new 3 3/4 IPS 4-track cassette recorder hot on the heels of last summer's Yamaha entry, the MT44.

All this computer activity was felt in the rhythm section. Digital drum machines kept getting more versatile. E-Mu's Drumulator and M.P.C.'s Kit added a detailed VDT readout, enabling one to compose the drum part off a computer screen. The Drumulator also showed an extended ROM chip library of different drum sounds made by a company called Digidrums, with a set of twelve sounds going for \$275, and a sensational external pad for \$400 called an E-Drum that features four sounds (with ROM options) and impact-sensitive pitch control. Sequential Circuits got into the digital drum action with its \$1300 Drumtraks machine, as did Roland with its TR-909. Linn added new replaceable sound modules for the LinnDrum (including a hilarious barking dog), double the memory and improved the trigger output to sync it with most of the popular sequencers. One of the best known of these sequencers, Garfield's Dr. Click, was brought closer to the average budget with a \$600 Mini Doc sequencer that

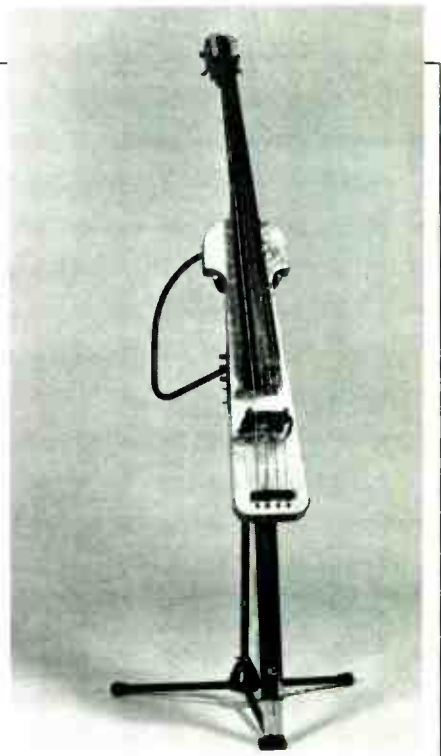


**Korg's PSS 50 Super Section.**

interfaces a stack of keyboards and drum machines as tightly as its \$2295 daddy, but without the good Doctor's more sophisticated functions.

Digital drums couldn't be kept off the Simmons drum set. The new (and higher priced) version, the SDS 7 can switch from analog "Simmons" sounds to sixteen sets of twelve digital drums (external memory adds a hundred more sets). The SDS 7's fancy memory has also been hybridized with the Simmons sequencer, the SDS 6. For those with less capital, Simmons has added a nice \$1500 kit, the five-piece SDS 8. In other electronic rhythm section developments, Korg came out with a multi-talented sequencer that is a combination digital drummer (forty patterns), bassist and keyboardist (one who can play diminisheds, augmenteds and sus 11ths). That's not a bad band for \$695.

In the midst of all the high tech rumble, though, two final instruments won our



**Clevinger electric upright bass.**

hearts, throwbacks to the low-tech era. One was a superb hammer dulcimer made by Dusty Strings (3406 Fremont Ave. No., Seattle, WA 98103). The other was the sudden profusion of fine stand-up electric double-basses, led by the Clevinger. A solid-body that recalls the hollow-body Zelinger (or Z-Bass) that's been so hard to find in America, the Clevinger uses an acoustic and a P-Bass pickup. Its ebony fingerboard and familiar reference points make it every bit as loose and playable as a full size acoustic. Definitely worth investigating at \$1600, or even at \$2600 with active electronics. (Ace Industries, 69 Bluxome St., San Francisco, CA 94107.)

The biggest hit of the show, though? Well, we all agreed it had to be the *Musician* concert with Allan Holdsworth's brilliant guitar sermon to the faithful (as well as Steve Morse in the front row) and a great set by local rockabilly favorites, the blistering Blasters. But we wouldn't be prejudiced, would we?

**Robbie Kreiger, Bernie Larsen, Phil Chen and David Lindley hobnob at Tom Scholz' booth.**



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from page 78  
play with those people. I mean, I loved Traffic, and it was a really good upbringing to be around people like that."

Following the date with Jackson, Blunt joined Bronco, a band fronted by Jess Roden, "who, incidentally, I think is a great singer." That gig lasted long enough for Blunt to do two albums with the band, *Country Home* and *Ace Of Sunlight*, before lying fallow for a few years. "Finally, I did an audition for this band called Silverhead, because," he laughs, "I was desperate to get on a stage again." Blunt played on *Sixteen And Savaged* with that band (which also featured Michel Des Barres and future Blondie bassist Nigel Harrison), before deflecting to Stan Webb's neo-blues burners Broken Glass. Blunt lasted out the mid-70s with Webb, cutting an eponymous album with Broken Glass and then recording *The Creeper* with Webb's reformed Chicken Shack. But five years of playing and replaying the blues took its toll; "That," says Blunt, "was when I really got the blues out of my system."

"After Chicken Shack, I went back home, just played in bars for a while, until Steve Gibbons asked me to play." *Street Parade*, the album that resulted from that venture, was the last recording Blunt worked on until *Pictures At Eleven*. Aside from a stint with a reggae band ("That was interesting," he says drily), Blunt's only other band was the Honeydrippers, the impromptu blues act he and Plant assembled after the demise of Led Zeppelin. "And that was it—overnight success in fifteen years."

Originally, the Honeydrippers weren't supposed to be Plant's post-Zep band; the group was just something to do. "I mean, if you're a player, singer, whatever, you have to go play," explains Blunt. "You can't just say, 'I'm not going to do that anymore. Robert was desperate to do something, so he said, 'Let's get a gig—get a blues band, get a few friends in, and just go do it.'"

That was the beginning of the Honeydrippers, "and it was great, great to hear him get up there. We were doing a lot of blues stuff and a little old rock 'n' roll, and we did a mini-tour of England, playing the clubs. The kids couldn't believe it."

Neither could the promoters. Despite the fact that the Honeydrippers were put together "to allow all these guys to enjoy themselves," as Plant later put it, the bookings offered steadily grew larger and larger. At the same time, Blunt says, "We were both getting bored with it, actually. It wasn't anything stupendous. I like to do the blues now and again, but it doesn't satisfy me completely, satisfy my writing, my creative instincts. So I said to Robert, 'Give me a chance to write and let's see what happens.'"

Writing with Plant turned out to be an

unusual experience for the guitarist, however. The songs began with an idea supplied by Blunt on guitar, to which Plant would react, adding a vocal line, making additional instrumental suggestions, and then working with Blunt to shape the final product. "I'd never written like that before," says Blunt, "but apparently that's how he's always done it. And in some respects he's right, because if the actual music, minus the melody line, isn't interesting, then maybe as a whole it won't be, either."

The initial writing sessions essentially generate blueprints for the songs, which are then fleshed out in the studio with the full band. Blunt remembers one transformation from idea to realization on the first album as a matter of chemistry: "We were doing 'Like I'd Never Been Gone.' I'd had that sequence in my brain for ages, but when I started playing with Cozy [Powell, the drummer], he said, 'Just push it there,' and suddenly we had this thing he called 'The Anthem.' Things just started popping out, slipping into place...*instinctively*."

Unfortunately, not everything happens so quickly and easily. "Through With The Two Step," from *The Principle Of Moments*, is perhaps the most keyboard-heavy number on that album, but it started out as a guitar piece. "I think it was one of those days of just sheer frustration," Blunt cracks. "Actually, that was a thing that Robert just came at, singing a melody, and I tried to make some chords around it. Then the thing got all chopped up and turned around. I had this solo thing which we were trying to use in another track, and I thought, 'Well, maybe we should put *this* in there and see what happens.'

"That's another thing, actually—having to sit down and discern where everything should be. That's the hardest part. I think, actually making a decision. Sometimes you go back to the original tapes, and they *feel* better."

Feel is such an important matter for Blunt and Plant that they will literally go back and rebuild a take from scratch if they feel there's enough in the first take to make the effort worthwhile. "There's one track on the last album, 'Horizontal Departure,' which we virtually rebuilt because it had a great drum track on it," Blunt recalls. "Because if the feeling's there initially, it'll work out; if it's not, you're wasting your time."

Feel may be the object, but there's an equal emphasis in the studio on getting the right sound, especially for Blunt. "Stranger Here (Than Over There)" from *The Principle Of Moments* is a case in point, because Blunt found that the sounds his guitar made inspired him to play in a different style. "That was an ideal situation for using silly effects," he says, "because if you've got a crazy sound coming through, then you do

come up with crazy things. Whereas if I had a standard guitar sound, like my usual clean sound, I wouldn't have been able to come up with anything. I think that's important if I have to overdub something."

Consequently, Pat Moran and Benji LeFevre, who respectively engineered and mixed the two Plant albums, go to some extremes to get the proper sounds for Blunt. "For some of the things we did at Rockfield [the Welsh studio where both albums were recorded], I set up two Boogie amps in a corridor, virtually flat out, with about seven mikes in between."

"I want to get even more amps," Blunt adds. "I used a really old Princeton amp on 'Big Log,' to get that sound."

In short, Blunt is eager to try almost anything, and feels that this, above all, is that advantage of working with Robert Plant. "We're absolutely wide-open, that's the object of this exercise," he says. "I remember driving back with Robert from somewhere, and we were talking about the first album; we wanted something that was going to be totally different for the next one. And I think every track on *The Principle Of Moments* is totally different. Texture, sound, feel—we've got it. I mean, even older people can identify with 'Big Log,' it's like a ballad. But if you played them 'Stranger Here' or something, they wouldn't identify the one with the other. It's great to encompass those things, because I get pretty bored laying down the same guitar sounds, rhythms, feel."

He smiles mischievously, and concludes, "I get bored very quickly." ❏

#### Blunt Instruments

Robbie Blunt's main guitar is a Stratocaster, with a '56 body and a '54 neck, which he rewired in order to get an out-of-phase sound on all pickups. Aside from a set of Grovers, the Strat is totally stock. Blunt also has a red Strat which guitar roadie Geoff Banks, on loan from Genesis, "made silly," and a third Strat for the road borrowed from Plant himself.

His other guitars include a '63 Telecaster with a B-Bender, two Gibson Melodymakers with humbuckers—one tuned to an open A, the other to an open A minor—for slide work, and a Gibson Chet Atkins for the acoustic passages. His strings for the electrics are all Dean Markley: .009, .011, .016, .028, .038, .048 for the Strats, and a finger-busting .012, .016, .028 plain, .036, .046, .056 for the Melodymakers. The Chet Atkins is played with GHS silk and steel strings. His picks are gray Herco Flex 75s, which he likes because he can use the grips to scrape his guitar strings.

His amps are Mesa Boogies, two of them, sent through a Roland stereo chorus, with all outboard effects going through the mixing board onstage and in the studio, "so I can get a really clean sound, up to eight on the Strat, and just whip it around the last notch to get all this distortion—not over the top, just sound quality. I do like a clean sound."

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from page 80  
band of local boogie toughs called the Deacons. He picked up jazz tips from a neighbor, pianist Vince Guaraldi, and took up finger-picking after seeing a picture of Leadbelly on the cover of *Life* magazine ("He had all these *things* on his fingers"). For a short time, Cipollina lived on an old ferryboat with a beatnik flamenco troupe who introduced him to the wonders of Spanish guitar.

Yet the original Quicksilver Messenger Service—formed by Cipollina and folkie David Freiberg with Gary Duncan and Greg Elmore, late of a San Jose garage band called the Brogues, and a short-lived singer named Jim Murray—was essentially a blues band with drastic psychedelic alterations. "Even though I wasn't a blues musician, a lot of my ideas and technique came from listening to blues records. When I got into Quicksilver, we threw some of the songs the Deacons were doing, like 'Mona' and 'Who Do You Love,' into the song-bag.

"It was a good thing, too, because Quicksilver was always bad at song-writing. We never had a wealth of original material, mainly because we were too introverted about our own stuff. So to alleviate boredom, to have something to improvise on, we'd play something we didn't care about like 'Who Do You Love.' And what's happier-go-lucky than Bo Diddley?"

That casual outlaw attitude, a flammable mixture of smart-ass hippie bliss and improvisational daring, was what made Quicksilver such a magical but precariously commercial band. On a recent two-record live bootleg set from England called *Maiden Of The Cancer Moon*, Cipollina and Duncan can be heard exchanging pastoral sitar inflections and whip-lash blues licks over the jazz-waltz locomotion of "Gold And Silver," locking into tight pop counterpoint for the short, bittersweet "Dino's Song," and turning "Smokestack Lightning" into a kind of acid-blues "Sister Ray." At the same time, Bill Graham once introduced Quicksilver at a Fillmore West gig by calling them "the oldest collection of living American juveniles."

"Oh, yeah," nods Cipollina, running a hand through the long black hair that still snakes halfway down his back. "We carried guns all the time. Freiberg did three days in jail once. We were going down to the old Fillmore to teach the Grateful Dead a lesson. They'd been messing with us a little too much and we were gonna get back at 'em. We were gonna go down there with masks and guns and hold them up at gunpoint right there onstage. Of course," he adds in his own defense, "they had done the same thing to us right in our house."

Quicksilver's guitar artillery was mostly Danelectro in the beginning.

David Freiberg's first bass was in fact a Danelectro guitar to which Cipollina added a new bridge and tuning nuts to accommodate the four bass strings. But until recently, Cipollina's workhorse guitar was a '61 mahogany Gibson SG that he had customized from top to bottom. The strings were spaced a little further apart, like a classical guitar; he had Martin acoustic frets put on it; and his trusty Bigsby tailpiece was shaved down to fit the bridge, which was itself cut almost in half. And the neck, well... "I lent the guitar to Hendrix once and I figured as long as I got it back with the neck broken off, I might as well put it on straight, *perfectly* straight, like a Fender."

The real secret of Cipollina's sound—the way he subtly combines and isolates echo, tremolo, wind-tunnel phasing, a moaning wah-wah and a brittle Leslie organ effect—is in the SG's stereo wiring, which was originally done by Dan Armstrong. "An outrageously loud guitarist as a rule," Cipollina still likes to run an old Standell solid-state amp through the bass pickup and an open-backed Fender Twin for the treble pickup.

His effects set-up also allows him to play bass and treble off one another. Through the treble he runs two Echoplexes (one tube, one solid-state), an Ampeg scrambler for fuzz, a Module which he describes as "a Standell imitation form of Leslie," and a Roland Biphase set at twice the speed of a Maestro phase-shifter running through the bass channel ("So I can play the two against each other"). In addition to the Maestro, Cipollina has an MXR Bluebox wired into an old Vox wah-wah on the bass side for dirty, growling fuzz. Add to that a candy store assortment of other quaint effects, new and used amps, and over forty guitars—including the new stereo Carvin that he's using on the Nick/Silver tours—that he keeps in his recording studio.

"I like things set up in stereo like that because, while neither channel sounds good by itself, it's like taking a shower. You've got hot water coming out one end and cold on the other and you mix them together. I've been doing it like this for sixteen years, all through Quicksilver, and all of a sudden you have this Van Halen school of thought which says you just get a knob and a pickup and that's it, you've got a hot signal coming in. Well, I've been doing that all along—two knobs, two pickups, running through two amplifiers. It's like having two different guitars in one body."

Yet the durable quality of Cipollina's work with Quicksilver Messenger Service has as much to do with his own eloquence as an instrumentalist as it does with electronics. During the sessions for the 1972 album he recorded with the San Francisco band Copper-

head, he remembers laying down as many as six guitars on a track. "I'd listen to it a couple of times and then go out and play all six parts myself onstage." To this day, he finds it easier to make steel sounds on the guitar with his Bigsby tailpiece than on a regulation pedal steel.

Why then isn't John Cipollina packing them in on the stadium circuit or going half blind from the glare of platinum records on his wall? Part of it is his own bohemian good nature. He's happy enough not to have a day job and his idea of a good time is a nice, long guitar "rap" ("They don't call me 'Captain Babble-On' for nothing," he grins). Cipollina has done sessions with Charles Lloyd and once did a rehearsal with Thelonious Monk—"Man, talk about charts that were *black*; he had us playing in 9/12." Still, Cipollina is quite content to tinker around in his studio and go out on casual tours with Gravenites, an old pal who co-produced the first Quicksilver LP.

At the risk of sounding overly modest, he insists that what he does is no big deal anyway. "Look, eight-five percent of the things I do come from three chords—B, A and D. And you can make those positions anywhere up and down the neck. I studied music theory for years to learn all that stuff only to discover that all you need is those three chords. Some wiseguy comes up to you and says, 'Okay, play F9 augmented plus 13.' Oh, you mean a B flat major 7th. Same thing.

"You can only get into music so much before it becomes real simple. There's a joke I heard about guitar players. There's this guy playing his guitar, just going 'ching, ching, ching,' and this other guy says, 'That's not how you play the guitar. I've seen Chet Atkins and those guys; you gotta move your hand up and down the neck.' And the guitar player says, 'Oh, those guys are still looking for it. I've found it.'" 📄

## RABIN

from page 76

The point of the freaky punchline is not that Trevor Rabin is one in a thousand. When the doctors opened him up, they did *not* discover that he had an auxiliary spleen.

They discovered that he had four of them. Some people just never know when to stop, you know?

Call it genetics, call it osmosis, call it whatever you like. Born in South Africa in 1955, Trevor can directly trace his talents to his roots. "My whole family is musical," he observes, rattling off the score. "My father was the lead violinist for the Johannesburg Symphony. He was an incredible musician, and not at all the kind with blinkers on, who wouldn't listen to anything but classical

# “For two years we’ve heard it all.”

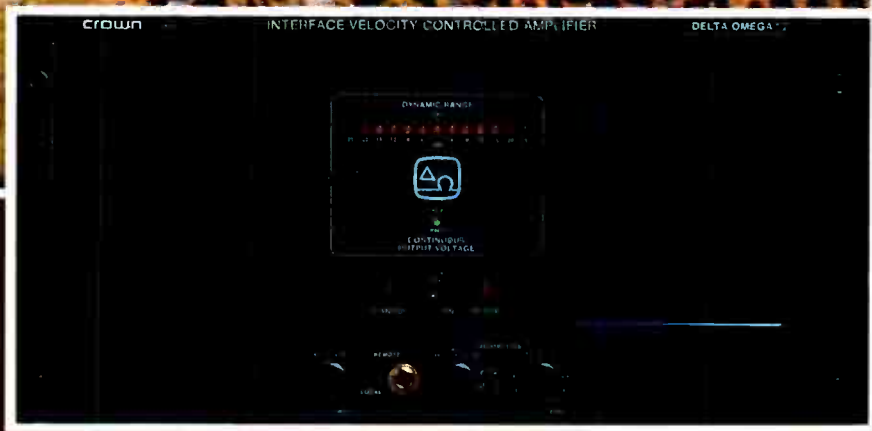


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music. I'd come home from school and find him listening to *Axis Bold As Love*, saying how great it was, and then he'd go straight from that to playing at night in the orchestra. My mother is a piano teacher. My sister is a piano player and ballet dancer. My brother won the South African scholarship on violin. And me, I took two classical piano lessons a week from the age of six. But I ended up being the black sheep of the family, going into rock 'n' roll."

Hooked. Hopelessly hooked. And also, at first, a little confused. "I had only two guitar lessons, and I just felt that what this man was telling me was very strange. Looking back now I know he was telling me the right things, but they

didn't relate to the piano, and that's all that was natural to me. So I stopped taking guitar lessons and would just try and work out on the guitar what I learned in my piano lessons. I play differently from most guitarists because the positioning and fingering are different on the piano."

Through his teen years he gigged as a guitarist, bassist and vocalist with a variety of bands around Johannesburg, some more political than others. Then, after a brief stint as an Army draftee in '71 and '72, he fell sideways into the world of the studio musician.

"A session producer heard me at a competition—one of those best-band-gets-fifty-dollars things—and phoned me up to do some guitar parts for him. I

was still absolutely adamant, then, that I was going to become a concert pianist some day. But one session led to another, and eventually I was doing bass and keyboard parts as well as guitar parts, and finally one of the producers asked me if I could write arrangements. It was a bit naughty of me to say, 'Yes, of course I can do that' as fast as I did, but it was a way to have some fun and start working with orchestras. I bought a book called *Teach Yourself Orchestration* and went to it." As his arranging work grew, Trevor launched into more detailed study with Walter Mony, head of the University of South Africa's music department, who taught him four full years of orchestration in only eighteen months. ("And that just proves he's a brilliant teacher," laughs Trevor, "because I'm a terrible student.")

Eventually he became quite competent, and while still only eighteen and nineteen years old was writing for and conducting full orchestras in commercial and movie soundtrack sessions. He also got more than a little bit blasé about it. "I'd have a jingle due on a Thursday, and Thursday morning I'd write the parts. Obviously, that wasn't very good. But the things I spent time on I was often very happy with."

Expertise as a musician and an arranger led to dissatisfaction with the way his work was being recorded, which led in turn to mastering the technical intricacies of the studio—skills which served him well when it came time for his last South African band, Rabbitt, to record. That group did two albums of progressive rock, *Boys Will Be Boys* and *A Croak And A Grunt In The Night*. They were released in the States by Capricorn and met with resounding critical acclaim and equally resounding sales failure. Plans for a '77 tour of America fell apart. Instead, Trevor found himself pursuing his muse to England.

Ah, England...where Chrysalis Records, over the span of three solo albums, made him play heavy metal. Oy. Not that he dislikes heavy metal *per se*. Far from it, as "City Of Love" from the new Yes album amply proves. But this is a man whose musical tastes jump from Wes Montgomery to Beethoven and Shostakovich and back to Oscar Peterson. Heavy metal, by itself, just wasn't enough. So when Geffen Records, sniffing around for the players who would eventually become Asia, suggested he finish up his job as Manfred Mann's latest producer and move to Los Angeles, Trevor was more than willing. Nothing came of that deal, in the end. But he found himself in a relaxed time, free of record company pressure to write only in one specific style, and a whole new batch of songs were incubating...the songs that eventually would provide the starting point for nearly all

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from previous page the material on 90125, including "Hearts," "Hold On," "Changes," and of course the hit single that Trevor had originally never intended to offer the band, "Owner Of A Lonely Heart."

"I was sort of running through stuff for Chris Squire and Tony Kaye after we'd decided to play together as Cinema," explains Trevor, "just going through my home demos, and by mistake I stopped on 'Owner.' They asked me what it was, and I said it was just this simple pop tune kind of thing, that we couldn't do anything like that. And they said, 'Well, maybe we can.' So we never even rehearsed it, just went into the studio and started to work. All the abrupt changes in

the tune were also in the demo, just done with things like Moog Opuses instead of Fairlights."

The guitar solo in "Owner" is like a mini-course in Trevor Rabin's current style. Strong, inventive, emotional and to the point. No excess flesh or baggage. And *efficient*. The take you hear on that disc was the first one laid down.

"I actually did five solos, but we used the first one. You know what it's like in the studio. You almost get *guilty* if it happened immediately. I mean, it couldn't be...I'd just been driving through the freezing cold of London, and putting meter money in, and my hands were cold and the guitar was cold and what do you mean, the first take was right?

Impossible! But it was... a lot of people think I used a Roland guitar synth on that. But it was just my Fender Strat through a Marshall, tweaked with an Eventide Harmonizer."

For someone so conservative about guitars—on the road with Yes he'll be carrying four Stratocasters, a couple of acoustics and nothing else—Trevor is positively radical when it comes to keyboards and recording equipment. The digital future can't come soon enough to please him. (Want to see his eyes put a wolf's to shame? Mention that you just read an article with all the latest dope on bubble memory.) On 90125 he got a taste, working with Fairlights and Synclaviers and PPG Wave 2.2s, and he's hellbent to go the rest of the way. In the meantime he's just upgraded his home demo facilities with the addition of a Fostex 16-track, a Ramsa mixing board from Panasonic, an Otari 2-track for mix-down, an Oberheim DMX, and what he calls his "baby," a Lexicon 200 digital reverb.

It's ever so slightly scary, this first Yes tour. When he'd started to play with Chris Squire, they'd intended to create a new band, Cinema. Instead, and quite by accident, they managed to breathe new life and vitality into a group that most of the world thought dead and gone. Most of the world, that is, except for Yes' die-hard fans.

"It's a little strange," Trevor explains, "having gone through all this with a band, writing and recording so much of the music, and then being perceived publicly as 'the new kid.' To be quite honest, I have something to prove. People will be coming to see whether or not the new guitarist in Yes can do what the old one did. But I want to show that I can contribute in a much broader sense than that. I went through all the old material we'll be playing, and learned all the guitar and keyboard parts. Not just by the numbers, but by breaking them down and writing them out in notation, seeing what new harmonic structures could go into the music. Rearranging structures. In fact, the whole band has an urge to reconstruct things so that even songs like 'Roundabout' sound new.

"The new Yes album isn't just another Yes album...and one of the major reasons for that is my influence on the band. I'd like that to be recognized more, even if it's an influence people *hate*."

In the meantime, while waiting for the verdict of history (record buyers and radio stations having already cast their overwhelmingly positive votes), there is plenty for Trevor Rabin to do: new audiences to thrill, new songs to write, new riffs and recording technologies to conquer. Not to mention a new spleen to grow, and lots of hotel swimming pools to stay out of. Amen! ☒

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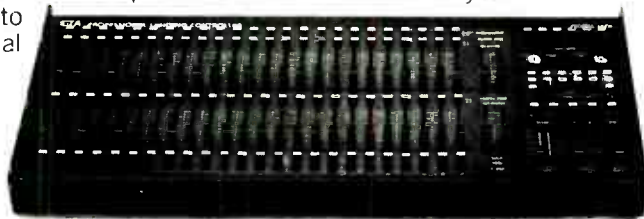
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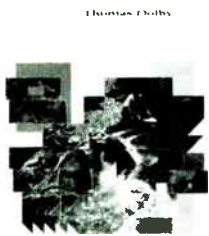
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# RECORD

R E V I E W S

**Thomas Dolby**  
**Flat Earth** (Harvest)  
**Art of Noise**  
**Into Battle With The Art Of Noise**  
(Columbia)



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*Flat Earth*, the second long-playing software from unit "Thomas Dolby," is a mixed success. Your files on "Thomas Dolby" show that his earlier software did not integrate with our aesthetic matrix. While singing very much like unit "David Bowie"—one of our most convincing androids—his rhythmic/melodic sense was corrupted by outmoded anti-mechanistic concepts. (FILE: Impressionism.)

Emboldened by output "She Blinded Me With Science," "Thomas Dolby" emphasizes rhythm on *Flat Earth's* "Hyperactive," "Dissidents" and "White City." But other developments offset these gains to our cause. "Dolby" sounds more human than ever on "Mulu The Rain Forest," "I Scare Myself" (written by unit "Dan Hicks") and the title track, an emotional ballad. And prominent backing vocals throughout by unit "Adele Bertei" have too much feeling to compute.

That leaves "Screen Kiss," falling between the above two poles. It's an anti-Los Angeles diatribe couched in metaphor and slippery vocal phrasing reminiscent of unit "Elvis Costello"—one of our less convincing androids. All songs on *Flat Earth* are open-ended forms of extended length—a promising

sign if "Thomas Dolby" is to join our league. His increasingly personal singing and lyrics, however, may doom him to the ranks of humanity.

There is no such problem with unit "Art of Noise." Although putatively composed of five individuals, including producer Trevor Horn and British rock writer Paul Morley, "Art of Noise" betrays few of the weaknesses we associate with humankind. Like all other British avant-pop trends, there is no creative groundbreaking here, only the extending of limits (FILES: Soviet constructivism, Bronx hip-hop).

"Beat Box" is the showpiece of the twenty-four-minute *Into Battle* EP. The track expands upon the scratching technique of "Malcolm McLaren's" "Buffalo Gals" (which "Horn" produced) with caliope vocals (FILE: Ajax radio commercials, 1950s), pulverized keyboard fanfares and other effects, all set to steam-drill electronic percussion. "Moments In Love," the record's other long cut, is slower (i.e., less industrial) and either adumbrates a relationship or is a cynical bit or word-association. Sterile and clanking, "Art of Noise" is a welcome addition to our brave new world of music-making—the correct way. —

**FILE 338579A537922 "Scott Isler"**

**Van Dyke Parks**  
**Jump!** (Warner Bros.)



An album like Van Dyke Parks' *Jump!* reminds one that the best quality that any form of entertainment, or art, can possess is mystique—the element of surprise, cultivated through creative self-absorption, and unleavened with the arrogance of its creator's wanting to appear smart, even cunning, in the marketplace. That so much of today's music is a mile wide and an inch deep has a lot to do with the way entertainment of any kind is now perceived—as a rarified contrivance in search of a target audience.

How jarringly satisfying it is, then, to encounter a crazy-brilliant talent in the

true rock tradition who is doing wonderful things that exist and succeed solely on their own terms. *Jump!* is keyboardist/composer/singer savant Van Dyke Parks' own interpretation of turn-of-the-century Southern journalist Joel Chandler Harris' *Tales of Uncle Remus*—yes, the grist for Walt Disney's *Song of the South*. And the album is a musical gem and an absolute must-hear for a generation unexposed to the awesomely melodic pastiche of Parks' 1968 *Song Cycle* LP, a moving, gently surreal homage to the mythic American experience as celebrated and codified in great cinema and show scores from Rodgers & Hammerstein and Alfred Newman (Randy's uncle) to Elmer Bernstein and Ennio Morricone. All those post-war aural sensibilities that honor the innocence that balances our ravenous nature: the articulate strings that educate our hearts, the synthesized clavinet that names our reflex nihilism, and the clipped French horns that somehow heighten our emotional dimensionality when the lights go down—Van Dyke Parks labors in the vineyard of this highly-charged theatrical vernacular.

Back in the mid-60s, he was predated and outflanking Taco's sarmy sendup of Cole Porter with his intelligently affectionate production of *Anything Goes* for Harper's Bizarre, and then lending an intentionally frail heroism to the Beach Boys when collaborating with Brian Wilson on the impressionistic "Heroes And Villains" and "Surf's Up." With *Discover America* (1972) and *Clang Of The Yankee Reaper* (1975) he used restless Trinidad steel pan idioms as a metaphor for the lack of historic perspective that cripples the American social laboratory.

*Jump!* is Parks' greatest work yet, gaining momentum from all that's gone before, but giving voice to a dramatic new strength of purpose. Rarely has a rock framework been expanded to such stunning effect, with eleven song set-pieces, steeped in shades of Aaron Copland, Gilbert & Sullivan, Jacques Brel and Stephen Sondheim, that brim with crisp rock percussion, English music hall brass, hobo harmonicas and minstrel banjos.

A word to the wary: this record is as accessible as it is delectable, and re-



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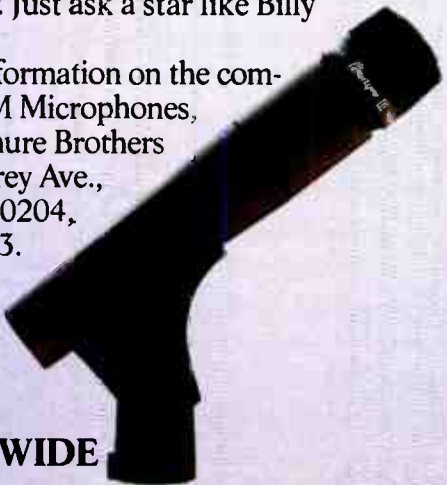
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**Wire Train**

**... In A Chamber** (415/ Columbia)

**Wang Chung**

**Points On A Curve** (Geffen)

**China Crisis**

**Working With Fire And Steel**

(Warner Bros. EP)

WIRE TRAIN



It wasn't too long ago that new wave partisans like myself (and most likely you, too) were sneering at mainstream rock for being predictable, un-

threatening and nearly comatose—everything that the music we loved wasn't. Then, when the "new music explosion" shook up corporate hegemony throughout the record industry, it looked as if we had won. Yet turn on the radio today and what you'll hear remains as predictable, unthreatening and comatose as what we railed against before—except that these days, the status quo is being upheld by "new wave" acts instead of the old roster of dinosaurs.

It's frustrating to have all the principles you fought for inverted with such cavalier disregard for anything but profits, to have what you took for a solid system of values sold back as product and pose on a wholesale level. But how else would you explain the rise of bands like Wire Train, Wang Chung, China Crisis and all the other Flock of Haircuts *wunderkinder*?

Wire Train, at least, is easy enough to dismiss because of the incredible amount of hype the band entails. I'm not talking about the way Columbia is trying to sell the band as the greatest thing since cheese food in a spray can: from the echo-laden jangle of the guitars to Federico Gil-Sola's impossible fast backbeat, this is music that oversells itself.

The musical territory Wire Train has staked out isn't all that distant from what Translator has claimed, except that where Translator uses Byrds-like guitar flourishes and British Invasion vocal arrangements to hearken back to the vitality of the original music, Wire Train

merely uses such devices as a quick means to familiarity. There's no depth to this music, no soul or personality; all it offers is well-manipulated form, which explains why program directors love it so much.

Wang Chung, on the other hand, is a little harder to refute. Unlike Wire Train, this group makes no pretensions to significance—all they're interested in is selling a few songs, and frankly, they do it very well. Lead singer Jack Hues has a tart British tenor reminiscent of Thomas Dolby, and given the effortless melodicism of Wang Chung's material and the slick efficiency of their arrangements, Hues has little difficulty in sinking at least one hook per song into the listener's memory. Nothing to argue with there, except that much the same could be said for the Oak Ridge Boys (overlooking the Dolby reference, of course) and that doesn't make *them* any more palatable, does it?

China Crisis, at least, retains the sort of studio adventurousness that makes their disco remix of "Working With Fire And Steel" as interesting as the song itself, and though that's hardly enough to make me want to toss out my hip-hop faves, it *is* enough to make me play and replay the EP. Such tiny pleasures hardly speak well of what new wave has become, though, and are unlikely to make any real difference in the long run. Which is, perhaps, the ultimate betrayal. — **J.D. Considine**

**Various Artists**

**Wild Style—Original Soundtrack**

(Animal)

**Jenny Burton**

**In Black And White** (Atlantic)



As hip-hop, the rapping and scratching music of the breakdancers, bounces out of the urban subculture and into the mainstream, it's reasonable enough to expect the music to suffer a certain amount of slickening up. But as these two albums so effortlessly demonstrate, that's okay, because hip-hop is such a flash-oriented aesthetic in the first place that "going commercial" seems likely only to sharpen its appeal.

*Wild Style* is about as unvarnished a version of hip-hop as you're likely to find, and given that it's the soundtrack to a movie with only passing intentions to documentary accuracy, that's not all that close. Certainly that's the case with the studio material, scratch mixes incorporating original music by former Blondie Chris Stein, and it's undoubtedly the case with at least part of the live ma-

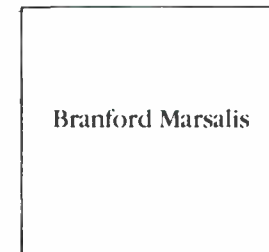
terial. But even if the "Basketball Throw-down" between the Cold Crush Brothers and the Fantastic Funks, a bit of rap braggadocio that finds the two groups claiming more court talent than the entire NBA, is more stage-business than real-life theater, it is no less exciting because of the illusion.

Mostly, what *Wild Style* bristles with is the energy of live raps and spontaneous scratch mixes, the sort of dancefloor risk-taking that is as exciting musically as break dancing is visually. But you don't have to have a live situation to generate that adrenal rush; as Jenny Burton's *In Black And White* demonstrates, all you need is imagination.

Although Burton is a good singer in the Donna Summer vein, with a sturdy vibrato and rubbery inflection, the real star of this album is John Robie, the multi-instrumentalist who put the synths into "Planet Rock." Here he unleashes every trick he knows, from multi-tracked synth boogie to distortion-wracked guitar raunch. It gets a bit rococo at times, but for sheer aural excitement, it's damned hard to top. — **J.D. Considine**

**Branford Marsalis**

**Scenes In The City** (Columbia)



On his first album as a leader, saxophonist Branford Marsalis shows that he is comfortable and confident in the spotlight—that he

is not just the brother and sideman of the most celebrated trumpet player of the past decade. He also shows that, like his brother Wynton (who, incidentally, is not to be heard on this album, which is mostly a quartet affair), he knows and feels the jazz tradition, particularly its post-bop aspects.

What is not clear on the evidence here is whether Marsalis is capable of extending that tradition rather than simply rehashing it. To be sure, his playing is powerful, passionate and extremely easy on the ears. But it's hard to listen to *Scenes In The City* without lapsing into a game of name-that-influence.

For example, "No Backstage Pass," a burner with neither head nor changes that features Marsalis' sax backed only by bass (Ron Carter) and drums (Marvin Smith), could be a Wayne Shorter solo from any of the great Miles Davis Quintet recordings of the mid-60s. "Solstice," with Mulgrew Miller on piano and Marsalis on both tenor and soprano, is a hypnotic modal number that could be the John Coltrane Quartet, circa 1962. And the title track, featuring the speaking voice of Wendell Pierce, is a reworking

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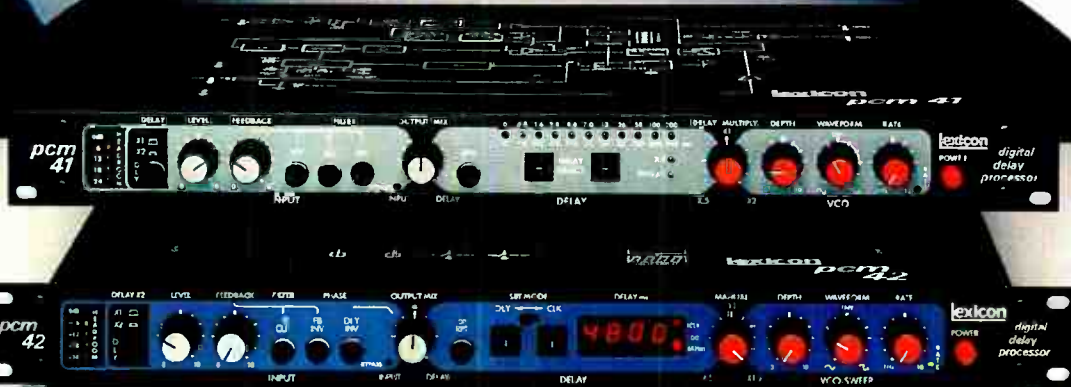
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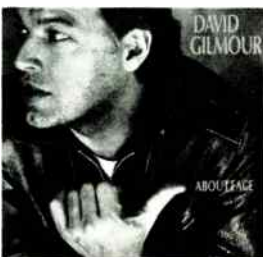
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of a Charles Mingus poetry-and-jazz melange first recorded in 1957. Choosing to record it was a savvy move on Marsalis' part—but he didn't create it.

Of course, it should be kept in mind that Branford Marsalis is still in his early twenties. If he has yet to find a voice all his own, neither had Shorter nor Coltrane when they were his age. It will probably take at least another couple of albums to determine how much Marsalis has to say; for now, the fact that he plays and writes with both intelligence and energy, and the fact that he can swing his ass off, are enough to ensure that whatever he records will be worth listening to.

But what does a promising, uncompromising young jazz musician whose last name isn't Marsalis have to do to get a deal with a major label? — **Peter Keepnews**

**David Gilmour**  
*About Face* (Columbia)



There is something strangely inconclusive about Pink Floyd solo albums. With every band record since *Animals*, the Floyd gradually be-

came a concept by which we measure Roger Waters' pain—and his alone. Meanwhile, busman's holidays like drummer Nick Mason's avant-jazz tangent *Fictitious Sports* and ex-keyboard player Rick Wright's 1978 collection of languorous tone poems *Wet Dream* have either been so self-effacing in tone or so predictable in scope that they never reveal more than the group's increasing acquiescence to Waters' vengeful will.

*About Face*, guitarist David Gilmour's second solo outing (and first since the Floyd's *de facto* breakup last year), is an admirable, often convincing attempt to walk tall after filling Syd Barrett's shoes and helping bear Waters' crosses for so long. The first track, "Until We Sleep," immediately obliterates any doubts about Gilmour's ability to take charge. To an arrogant locomotive grind sliced by metallic howls of guitar pain, he stacks vocal harmonies in glazed churchy spires and stares down the grim reaper ("What we sow we cannot reap or keep at all") with a bright choral hook glowing with celebration.

"Murder" is an unnerving sequel. A piece of amateur poetic psychology ("Did you get rid of all the voices in your head?/ Do you miss them and the things they said?"), it opens with folkie strumming and a ballad croon of the old "Granchester Meadows" variety. But Gilmour brings it to a dramatic climax

with a Floyd-like orchestral blast that, unlike those on *The Wall* or *The Final Cut*, is more inspirational than wrathful.

After that, Gilmour makes some strategic errors with the heaving but indistinct pop of "Love On The Air" (one of two songwriting collaborations here with Pete Townshend) and the gray martial funk of "Blue Light." But the new variations on the Floyd's trademark mix of dreamtime rhythms, space-metal guitar and acoustic gentility—the sleek FM rock kick of "All Lovers Are Deranged," the ironic classical gas of the symphonic-guitar instrumental "Let's Get Metaphysical"—suggest that the subtle thrust of old Floyd mind excursions like *More* and *Meddle* owed a lot to Gilmour's dramatic instincts. Although it's no grand dip into a saucerful of secrets and it lacks the ego boost of those trips into Roger Waters' inner space, *About Face* is a fascinating sideways glance at the man who put much of the heart into Pink Floyd. — **David Fricke**

**Miles Davis**  
*Heard Round The World* (Columbia)



Shortly before setting out to build the world's greatest rock band, Miles Davis convened the second of his great quintets. Even though

the electric Miles which followed garnered him a larger audience and redefined the direction of American electric music, the stuff from the mid-60s was equally hot. Now with Miles' visibility increasing, Columbia is digging deeper into its Miles Davis archives. Last year, they released *Live At The Plugged Nickel*, which was recorded in Chicago in 1965. *Heard Round The World*, a twofer with live recordings from Tokyo and Berlin, precedes the Chicago date by over a year and includes the first recordings of Wayne Shorter with the band, as well as an idiosyncratic, short-lived earlier edition of the group with Sam Rivers on tenor.

On both dates, Miles is in fine fettle, playing with fire and tenderness and a full range of purrs, blats and sharp triplets. With his mute, he cleverly carves notes to his liking before squeezing them out. Shorter provides a perfect foil with his elongated, unbalanced phrases, which are dreamy despite a harsh post-Coltrane tonality. Rivers is the odd duck on the Tokyo session, because his raw, robust sound is in such hard contrast to Davis' finesse.

Both quintets, the one with Shorter and the one with Rivers, are anchored by the rhythm section of Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams.

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And both rely on the familiar Miles book of standards from the 50s—the only stuff lots of folks are willing to call Real Jazz. But the familiarity of the material is a bonus, not a bane, because each player is fast and loose and uses rhythmic variations and little harmonic tricks to keep everybody on their toes. The dialogue is as free as any in free jazz, and the response as pithy as any in the blues. But never mind what I say; the best recommendation comes from an electric Miles funkateer who said when I played this for him, "I didn't know Real Jazz could sound this good!" — **Don Palmer**

**Laura Nyro**  
**Mother's Spiritual** (Columbia)



Laura Nyro's first album since 1978 sounds in fact like she never went away. The jazzy *Kind Of Blue* cool of her cozy melodies and

crystal piano arrangements still turns a warm earth-mother brown in the dusky glow of her lullaby alto. In new songs like the spunky feminist tract "The Right To Vote" and the lusty lover's proposition

"Melody In The Sky," with its tiptoe funk tensions, she continues to dance lightly along the thin line between the eccentric Brill Building high-step of "Stoney End" or "Wedding Bell Blues" and the Oriental folkie hush of her later *New York Tendrberry* meditations.

The timelessness of that sound is quaintly reassuring, too, even if Nyro's romantic caress is now more of a matriarchal hug than the brash tenement soul squeeze of her early records. But in a year when young America has funky punk and digital boogie on the brain, *Mother's Spiritual* is an eloquent whisper that may never be heard above the new wave din. These are songs about adult concerns—child-rearing (the hymn-like "To A Child..."), the daily strains of marriage ("Talk To A Green Tree" with its simmering anger and chilly Steely Dan jazz fuzak), the crucial difference between true love and emotional security (the bittersweet girl group harmonies and rippling guitar of "Late For Love"). And they are best understood by the ex-hippie audience now facing those middle-age realities, like Ann Beattie *New Yorker* stories set to a chamber pop soundtrack.

It's a shame because the desperation underlining many of these songs is universal, like the poignant moment in "A Wilderness" when Nyro sweetly con-

fesses to her young one, "I don't wanna crush/ The wilderness in you child/ Or the wildness in me." But the context is so familiar, the musical setting so polite that only people inside that kind of family circle will really understand. Nearly twenty years after her precocious 60s media splash, Laura Nyro remains one of pop's most articulate sirens. But here she's only singing for the converted. — **David Fricke**

**Native**  
**New World** (Jamaica Records/Roulette)



On sugar plantations in Jamaica there is an expression that describes the worth of a crop as well as the man who cuts it—"de answer inna

de pan." Tied to the refinement of cane, the maxim refers to the container in which crystallization ultimately takes place. Let's just say it's the island equivalent of "what you see is what you get."

Which brings us to the intriguing *New World* by Native, a band out of Ocho Rios—yes, on the less hectic and harassed north coast of the island—that has for some years aspired to a sturdy fusion of modern dance floor R&B, rock and reggae; sort of an inside-out Police approach with a worldly emphasis on the ethnic underpinnings. They released a promising LP on RCA and another on the British Arista label, and it was a welcome shift of the sluggish reggae industry's tradewinds that dropped the accomplished *New World* on our shores.

Despite a personal obsession with the delineation of reggae's storied past, I've never been a purist, having thoroughly enjoyed the hybrid best (however slim the pickings) of Third World and the 2-Tone acts, as well as the studied tough-mindedness of UB40—not to mention the California surf reggae of the late-1970's Shakers album on Elektra, and the delightful 1981 pressure-pop of *Jah Mallá* on Modern Records. Native plays things a bit broader than all of the above, however, pouring even Michael McDonald, Abba and Marshall Crenshaw into their darkly appealing brain pan, but the end result is not syrupy.

Lead vocalist Warren Mendes sounds like Simon Le Bon with his head screwed on, drummer Calvin "Rashied" McKenzie (formerly with the late Jacob Miller's fine Inner Circle) is a galloping, rock-wise reggae drummer with a sense of mission, and the Jobson brothers provide a neat rhythm and bass guitar layering that is nicely buffed by the keyboards of Peter Couch and the spunky leads of Peter Tole. This group is



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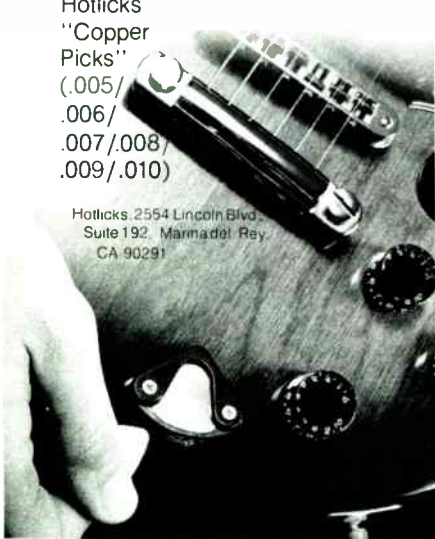
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trying to import the sensibilities and musical insights of a Jamaican generation that grew up on Toots, the Wailers, Deniece Williams (who appears on the LP), Earth, Wind & Fire and American pop, and their experimental efforts are to be commended. If "Anything Once" rocks a tad too soft in the direction of Toto, it's tempered by the ABC-like shadings of "Anywhere On Earth" and the unabashed Crenshaw-like allure of "Action," while "Take A Chance On Love" is a spare, pumping pop raveup of a hit that a certain contentious Swedish group would/should have journeyed down to Kingston to cut enroute to a new unity of purpose. Move over quasi-Pittsburgh flashdancers! The boys from Ocho Rios have something smartly sweet to say! And they're Native. Really. — **Timothy White**

### Anthony Davis *Hemispheres* (Gramavision)

Anthony Davis



Commissioned by Molissa Fenley to accompany her choreography for the Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, *Hemispheres* is a five-part suite with a ritual dance quality all its own. "Ifa: The Oracle—Esu The Trickster" even utilizes "the intricate counting system of the dance as a mathematical system for the movement's rhythmical structure," as pianist/composer Anthony Davis puts it in his liner note. Unlike some of Davis' earlier compositions, which at times had a tendency to get lost in their own mathematical puzzles of rhythm and harmony, *Hemispheres* reflects an artistic maturity that breathes fresh life, and Davis attains a level of intensity and warmth not always associated with him.

*Hemispheres* is probably also Davis' finest performance, and his current group (Leo Smith, trumpet; George Lewis, trombone; Dwight Andrews and J.D. Parran, woodwinds; Shem Guibory, violin; Eugene Friesen, cello; Rick Rozie, bass; Dave Samuels, vibes and marimbas; Pheeroan akLaff, percussion) delivers a virtuoso performance. Lewis, whose perfect balance of intellect and expression never ceases to amaze me, has a dazzling solo on "Little Richard's New Wave." "A Walk Through The Shadow," always a meditation in its earlier, colder versions, burgeons with the delights of a revelation here. Davis has been working with roughly this same configuration of strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion for some time now, but never has his understanding of how to orchestrate them been more refined yet powerful. Davis has received

some of the criticism leveled at all composers of modern Western repetition music: that his writing is cold and disembodied, only opaquely mirroring the Third World traditions from which it springs. There's never been any question of Davis' talent, but time has developed it into a more fully rounded artistic conception. There's more soul where there was always intellect, and Davis is a more complete composer for it. — **Cliff Tlinder**

### James Blood Ulmer *Odyssey* (Columbia)



Just when you thought Blood Ulmer was about to complete his transformation from hyperactive jazz guitarist to Hendrix-inspired singer/songwriter, *Odyssey* presents him in the new role of futuristic bluesman, in a no-frills trio with drums and electric violin.

The Lightnin' Hopkins-on-acid concept seems appropriate enough, given the rural blues trappings that have always been part of Ulmer's raw sound: the vaguely out-of-tune guitar, the loose time and passionately frayed chords, the lazy articulation as a singer.

His harmolodic training and occasionally elegant songwriting aside, Ulmer is a primitive whose range of feeling has never been bounded by the limits of his technique (a description which serves for backbeat-bashing drummer Warrner Benbow as well). Though his playing is characteristically urgent, Ulmer mostly assumes the rhythm chores here; he cuts loose on "Swing & Things," sounding at times eerily like Scotty Moore.

Wah-wah violinist Charles Burnham mixes backwoods sawing with sinewy, Hendrixian lead lines, yet he's mixed fairly low so neither he nor Ulmer dominates. The emphasis here is on ensemble cohesion, but the end results are at times somewhat sketchy. There are only three vocal numbers, including a loping, stripped-down reprise of "Are You Glad To Be In America?," and the violinist plays best when he has a strong vocal melody to react to—hear his loopy phrases in answer to Ulmer's happy moaning and dancing chords on "Little Red House"—or when he's given a hook of his own to work from, as on the "Frere Jacques" variant "Election."

Several of *Odyssey*'s jams have an unfinished quality, which reinforces the music's Delta-shack feel. But at least Ulmer hasn't become complacent. His search for new modes of expression suggests that Blood the bandleader is as restless as Blood the jittery guitarist. — **Kevin Whitehead**

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# ROCK

## S H O R T T A K E S

**Steve Bassett** — *Steve Bassett* (Columbia). This is blue-eyed soul in the grand tradition, from Bassett's gospel-cured croon right down to Jerry Wexler and Barry Beckett's patented Muscle Shoals groove. The latter isn't always an advantage, as at times the rhythm section seems polished to the verge of slickness, but Bassett's voice, which falls somewhere between Jimmy Buffett's drawl and Lee Dorsey's warble, rings true no matter what goes on behind him. In fact, he takes on the likes of General Johnson's "Only Love Can Mend A Broken Heart" and Chuck Jackson's "I Don't Want To Cry" and sings them as if he owned them—and how often do you get to hear any kind of soul singer with that much authority?

**The Everly Brothers** — *Reunion Concert* (Passport). Historic or not, the best thing about this reunion is it shows that some things never change, and the Everly Brothers' ability to harmonize is one of them. Sure, there aren't many surprises in the song selection, and the arrangements sound pretty much as you remember them, but if that didn't stop you from buying Simon & Garfunkel's reunion album, it certainly shouldn't keep you away from this.

**Bill Nelson** — *Vistamix* (Portrait). At once opulent and ascetic, Bill Nelson's music has the perfect angle on high-tech romanticism. It isn't that Nelson doesn't feel deeply, just that his emotions come across as clean, neat and totally contained, giving his studio constructions a sense of heart but keeping passion from gumming up the precision of his coolly clattering rhythm arrangements or warming up the frosty bite of his guitar and vocals. And because this collection culls the sharpest cuts from his last three solo albums, it's never less than dazzling.

**The LeRoi Brothers** — *Forget About The Danger... Think Of The Fun* (Columbia). Five Texans, none of whom are named LeRoi, playing the same sort of rock and blues as the Fabulous Thunderbirds but with even more reckless abandon, if that's possible. As for the six songs on this mini-LP, all I can say is that I wish there were six more just like 'em, and that "DWI" offers the best picture of Texas driving habits since

ZZ Top's "Arrested for Driving While Blind."

**The Speedboys** — *Look What Love's Done To Me Now* (I Like Mike). The Speedboys have a solid grip on rock 'n' roll basics, which you'd expect from an ace bar band, buttressed by an uncanny ability to refit the pieces so that you're faced with something simultaneously new and familiar. Throw in a songwriter as inventive as Robert Bobby, whose wordplay ranges from jokes as playful as "Anna," a lovesong to anabolic steroids (the weightlifter's friend), to metaphors as searing as "Hearts Like Atoms Split," and you're left with one of the best rock records you're likely to hear this year. (R.D. 2, Box 941, Holtwood, PA 17532)

**Various Artists** — *The Best Of Louie, Louie* (Rhino). If ten versions of the garage rock national anthem strikes you as redundant, you may be reading the wrong column. From the original Richard Berry, through the Kingsmen to Black Flag, this is everything you'll ever need to refute the argument that three-chord rock is artistically limiting. (1201 Olympic Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90404)

**Christine McVie** — *Christine McVie* (Warner Bros.). Less a solo album than a one-fifth scale rendering of Fleetwood Mac, this is eminently listenable, predictably safe. Given the ease with which McVie recapitulates the basics of SoCal soft rock, that's as it should be. But where Fleetwood Mac would transfigure that vocabulary through gut-level emotional involvement, *Christine McVie* remains content to flog those formulas all the way to the bank—which is much less than it ought to be.

**Mitchell Froom** — *The Key Of Cool* (Slash). This is "cool" on a lot of levels, from the chilly textures of Froom's electronics to the hipster appropriation of bebop harmonics in his writing. What's really cool, though, is the wit that animates this synthesis of aesthetics, keeping the music teetering on the brink between alienated *pathos* and cartoonish *bathos*. In short, the ideal record to play while waiting for them to drop the big one.

**Judas Priest** — *Defenders Of The Faith* (Columbia). The miracle of heavy metal

isn't that these guys can pound out the same riffs from album to album—it's that they can make those same riffs sound fiercer with each reiteration. Judas Priest may well be the best at this, for between the twin-guitar assault and Rob Halford's back-from-hell vocals, this is an album guaranteed to make you want to loot and pillage. Or just stand on your chair and scream, like everybody else at a heavy metal show.

**Musical Youth** — *Different Style* (MCA). The difference, in case you're wondering, is that in addition to the expected reggae bubblegum, we get an equal amount of Urban Contemporary bubblegum. But, in the interests of Truth in Packaging, the album has a comic inside, just like the Bazooka gum of your youth.

**Utopia** — *Oblivion* (Passport). Further proof that "Utopia" is derived from the Latin word for "nowhere."

**Dwight Twilley** — *Jungle* (EMI America). Between the effortless melodicism of the vocals and the electronic glaze of the backing tracks, this might easily be described as the Raspberries Go Synth-Crazy. Except that the 'Berries would tend to leave a soft core where Twilley hides his rock 'n' roll heart, and that difference is enough to raise *Jungle* above the pack and keep it in your active play pile for months to come.

**Richard Mazda** — *Hands Of Fate* (IRS). White-boy technofunk wears thin rather quickly, so perhaps it would be wiser not to lump Mazda in with the latest dance-floor wonders. Sure, you can shake it to what these lads are putting down, but where the usual rules suggest antiseptic textures and no sharp edges, Mazda goes in for brash bursts of trumpet, jagged guitar and an invigorating sense of clutter. As a result, there's enough to this music to bear up under heavy scrutiny and repeated listening—or a lot of dancing, if that's really all you're after.

**Gregory Isaacs** — *Out Deh!* (Mangc). As the reigning king of lover's rock, Isaacs boasts the sexiest croon this side of Marvin Gaye; but if you have any of his other albums, you probably know that already. What makes this one worthwhile, aside from the usual fine singing, is the imaginative backing by the Roots

*continued on page 114*

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# JAZZ

## S H O R T T A K E S

*Big Band Jazz* (Smithsonian Collection); **Duke Ellington** — *All Star Road Band* (Doctor Jazz/CBS). As you might expect from an anthology compiled by Martin Williams and Gunther Schuller, history rather than nostalgia governed the selections on the Smithsonian's six-record big band era retrospective, and the revisionist (but inarguable in most cases) point of view that emerges is one that values the contributions of composer/arrangers over those of soloists and singers. Along the way, Henderson, Moten, Hines, Webb, Lunceford, Goodman, Basie, Ellington, Herman, Gillespie and Thornhill are duly celebrated; Whiteman, Dorsey, Shaw and Kenton are at least partially vindicated by context; and tantalizing footnotes like Jessie Stone, the Missourians, and Elliot Lawrence are finally elevated to their rightful places within the main body of the narrative. Indispensable, and a sheer delight from start to finish. (Available for \$41.96 plus \$3.50 shipping and handling from Smithsonian Recordings, P.O. Box 10230, Des Moines, Iowa 50336.) The newly unearthed Ellington double—vibrantly recorded at a 1957 dance concert in the Alleghenies—is at once a revealing addition to the Ellington discography and a fortuitous companion volume to the Smithsonian box, offering the thrill of hearing the greatest and most durable of the big bands transcend such prohibitions to creativity as a largely stock repertoire, road fatigue and the social functions demanded of jazzmen by their audiences. If only more "live" records radiated so powerful a sense of lives well led!

*Classic Pianos* — (Doctor Jazz/CBS); **Earl Hines** — *The Legendary Little Theater Concert Of 1964, Volumes 1 & 2* (Muse). Drawing from the Signature catalog of the early-40s, *Classic Pianos* would be a welcome reissue if only for blowing the dust off four of Erroll Garner's first recordings and two of James P. Johnson's last. But it offers additional satisfactions in two cuts by the down-and-dirty Chicagoan Art Hodes and what amounts to a boisterous four-part tribute to Fats Waller by Earl Hines. Twenty years later, the semipiternal Hines was still playing Waller—and whatever else popped into his

head—with undiminished facility and imagination, and the Muse double collects the prodigious overflow from the landmark recital that vaulted him back into the spotlight after a decade or so of unaccountable neglect. (*More From The Little Theater Concert* might have been a better title; regrettably, a Focus LP issued in 1965 has long been out of print. But the music presented here is eminently worthy of preservation in its own right.)

**Sphere** — *Flight Path* (Elektra/Musican). Only one Monk tune this time around, beautifully played, of course, but the economy and cunning wit of the group's originals and its delicious arrangement of the standard "If I Should Lose You" confirm that Monk's dictums still apply. Charlie Rouse sounds as exuberant as ever, and the Kenny Barron/Buster Williams/Ben Riley rhythm section is surely one of the finest in contemporary jazz.

**Ricky Ford** — *Future's Gold* (Muse). Fine as all his Muse LPs have been (and this newest, with guitarist Larry Coryell impersonating a second horn, might be the finest of the bunch), none of them captures the power this gifted young tenorist generated with Mingus (and continues to generate live). Radicals who can shake you to your very foundations are becoming a dime a dozen; neo-traditionalists who can do it are indeed rare. So I'm not suggesting Ford march to a different drummer, but he might try recording with a drummer vastly different from the smooth old pro Jimmy Cobb.

**Chick Corea & Gary Burton** — *Lyric Suite For Sextet* (ECM). Basically a series of Burton/Corea duets accompanied by string quartet (and saccharine and anemic for all its Bartokian peasant bustle), this comes off as one more futile attempt to swing the classics, for which it would be easy to blame the string players. I blame composer Corea; swing is something you impart by example.

**Billy Bang** — *Untitled Gift* (Anima, from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012). Coming on the heels of Bang's brilliant writing for orchestra on *Outline No. 12*, the release of this vigorous quartet date recorded five months earlier seems a bit

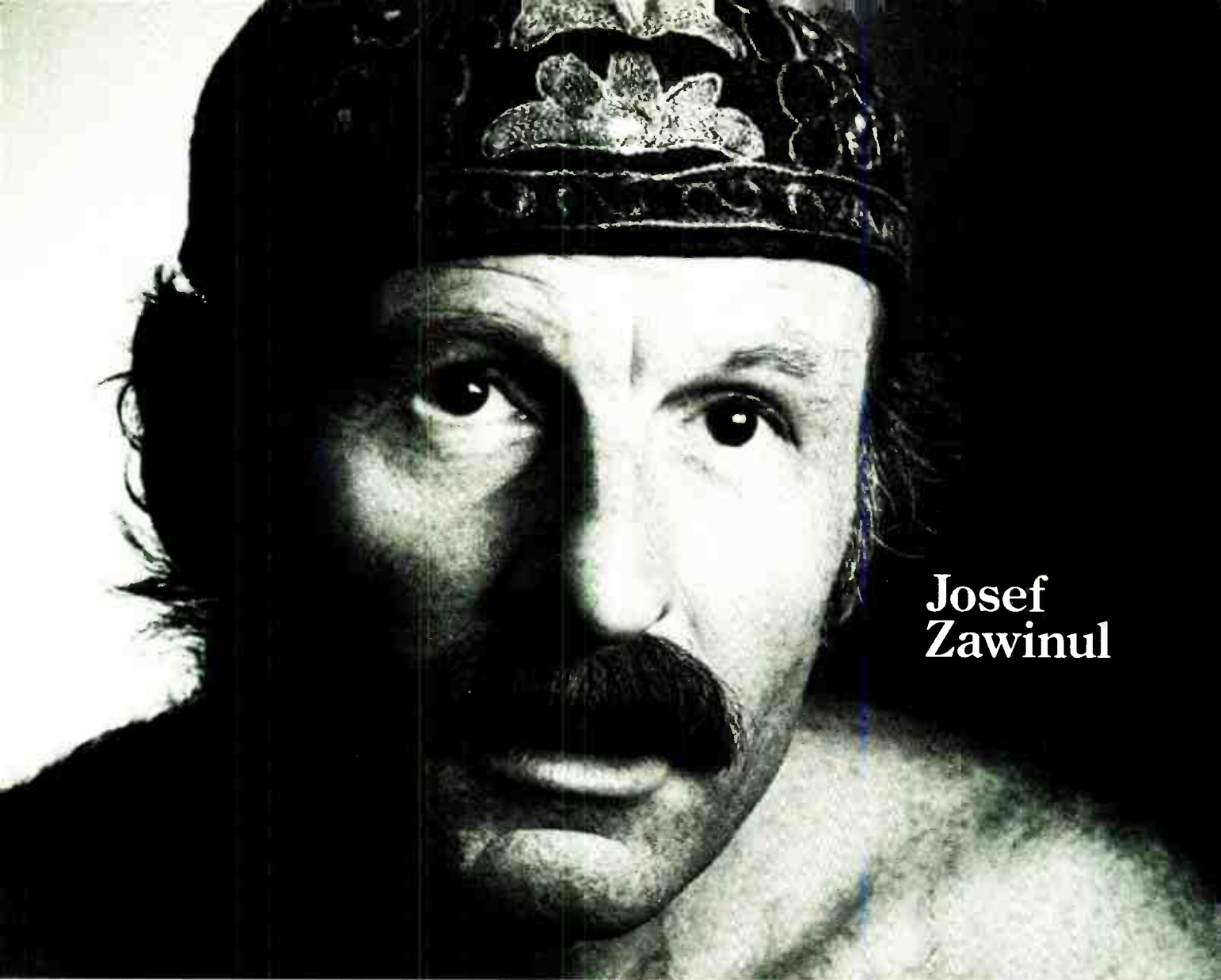
anticlimactic in terms of the violinist's burgeoning career. But like all of Bang's records so far, this one offers distinctive pleasures, not the least of them the scraping interplay between Bang and Don Cherry on two Ornette Coleman themes, and a Bang original rustic and cosmopolitan enough to pass as a Coleman homage.

**Joe McPhee** — *O/eo* (hat MUSICS/N.M.D.S.). Upstate New Yorker McPhee is the Ira Sullivan of the international post-Ayler underground; a multi-instrumentalist equally accomplished on trumpet and tenor saxophone. In his range of material, too, McPhee is bracingly eclectic, his idiosyncratic takes on Rollins and Golson conveying as much mulling disquiet as his free improvisations for quartet on what is probably the most consistently rewarding of the dozen or so albums he has released.

**Art Pepper & George Cables** — *Tete a Tete* (Galaxy); **Chet Baker** — *Someday My Prince Will Come* (SteepleChase); **Jimmy Raney & Doug Raney** — *Nardis* (SteepleChase). Dominated by ballads unflinching in their explorations of longing and despair, the second (and final?) volume of Pepper/Cables duets is a far more moving final testament than the volume issued following Pepper's death in 1982. Trumpeter Baker, Pepper's confederate from the halcyon days of West Coast jazz, is another to-hell-and-back survivor whose solos sting with details from that harrowing trip. *Someday My Prince...* upholds the high standards set by the three previous albums featuring Baker in a warm trio setting, with guitarist Doug Raney and bassist NHØP. Meanwhile, Raney joins his illustrious father on *Nardis*, which could serve as a primer for aspiring guitarists, both in terms of the technique both guitarists display in such generous abundance, and the gentle reminder they offer that lyricism is what you strive for once technique has become second nature.

**Hank Crawford** — *Indigo Blue* (Milestone). A worthy successor to last year's *Midnight Rambler*, this again spotlights the ex-Ray Charles altoist's rollicking little (studio only, so far) jump band, with Dr. John's sly piano, Pretty Purdie's invigorating drumming and Marvin Sparks'

*continued on page 114*



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### Rock Shorts from page 108

Radics, who seem determined to make Sly & Robbie sound old-fashioned in their approach to rhythm arranging.

**Pointer Sisters** — *Break Out* (Planet). Give these three a copy of last week's *Wall Street Journal* and it'll sound hit-bound, so there isn't much point in complaining about the unevenness of the material here. Rather, what bugs me is that as exciting as the contrast between the synth-based rhythm tracks and the Pointers' exquisitely human vocals is on the likes of "Automatic" and "Dance Electric," that same chemistry barely fizzles through at least half of the album. What broke?

### Jazz Shorts from page 110

blues buster guitar. And Crawford's soulful, cliché-free solos are again worth the price of admission all by themselves.

**Neil B. Rolnick** — *Solos* (1750 Arch/N.M.D.S.). All experimental music should be as vivacious as Rolnick's "Wonderous Love," a set of free variations upon a shape-note hymn for trombonist George Lewis and computer-generated tape, which is Coplandesque in its grandeur and Chaplinesque in its likeable blunder. Rolnick's other "solos" (for flutist Robert Dick, percussionist Gordon Gottlieb and the composer himself on Synclavier II) are equally engrossing, if slightly less charming.

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### CHEAPOS

from page 82

forgiven for that because they do it so remarkably well for \$369. Moreover, posting the lowest price in the whole new cheapo market, Fender offers a Squier Bullet with a maple neck and three single-coils for, gasp, \$169. It ain't the Strat, but it ain't bad. But if you want to talk raw, macho value, the Stratlike Peavey Patriot must be mentioned, because for \$185, this ash-bodied, maple-necked guitar plays wonderfully. The fact that it's made in Meridian, Mississippi, U.S.A. is all the more remarkable. In the three-hundred-dollar range, the Peavey Milestone is a Lincoln at a Falcon price; it offers the only standard phasing controls of the batch (controls which also turn double coil humbuckers into single coils). Peavey also uses a harder nut, made of a synthetic ebony called Graphon, (which is also available as a fingerboard option). The Milestone's hardware is particularly nice, including a new tremolo bar called the Octave Plus that completely relaxes the strings.

Washburn leads the next wave, with perhaps the most flexible under-\$400 line of the lot. Their Strattish Force Series checks in at three hundred dollars, while their Paul model, the T-Bird, starts at \$329, and the hybrid Stage Series begins at \$349. Washburn has been doing new things with neck attachment and has a good handle on options like phasing and artificial ebony fingerboards. Right behind is the Madeira, a Strat orphan in a mostly acoustic line that Guild has been quietly making for nearly a decade in Korea, one of the nations which replaced Japan as a cheap cheap manufacturing center. Why they're keeping quiet about it is a mystery; at \$219, with vibrato bar and three single-coils, it's a steal. (Add twenty bucks for humbuckers.) Aria, a Japanese company that has recently won some credibility for its fine Les Paul-type electric, is offering a Cat Series which includes the Stratly Bobcat V for \$229 and some Pauly variations around three hundred. If wild and crazy body types are your weakness, the B.C. Rich N.J. Series has good-playing Bich and Mockingbird models for four hundred. Hamer has also been doing fun things with bodies in this price range without sacrificing quality, and features the added expertise of whammy bar ringer Floyd Rose. Finally, consider Tele and Strat (and P-bass) kits from Saga. With all electronics pre-soldered, they're more or less idiot-proof, and for \$229, they play very well indeed. (P.O. Box 2841, So. San Francisco, CA 94080.)

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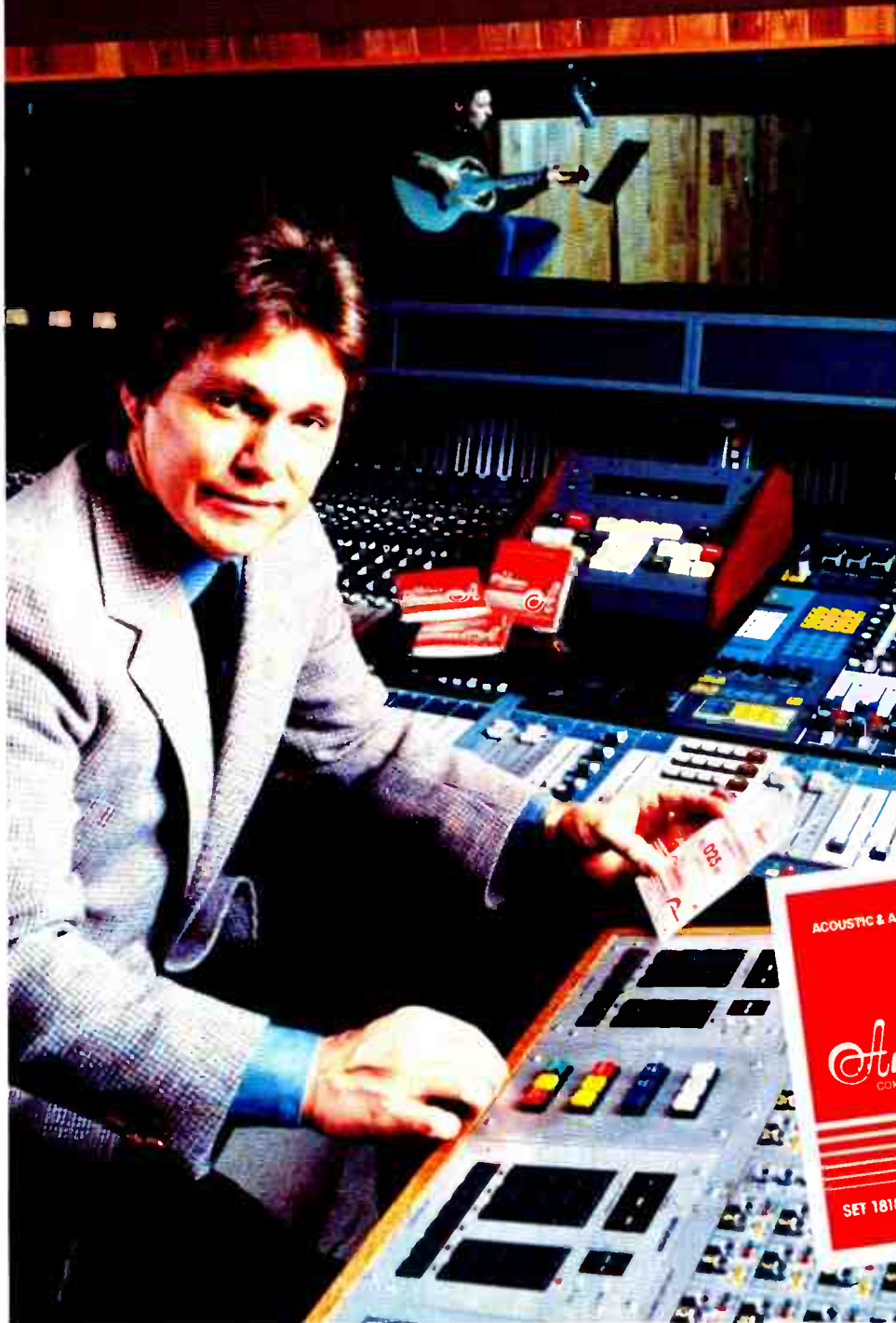


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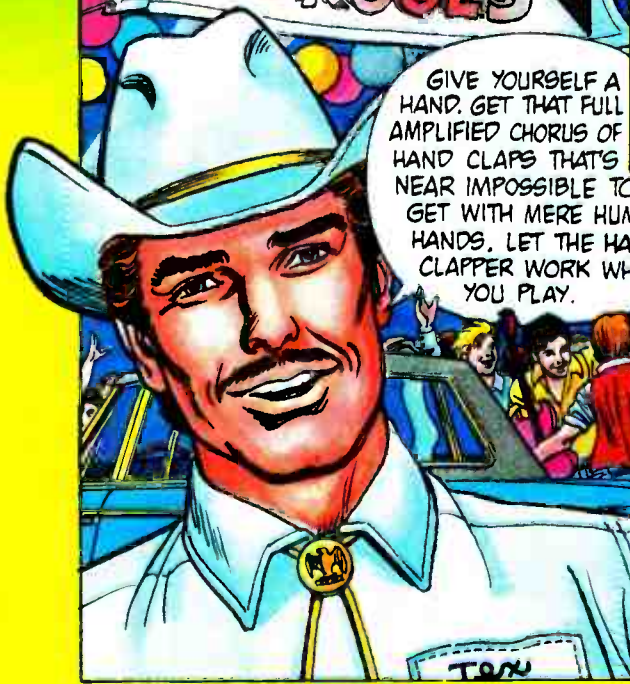
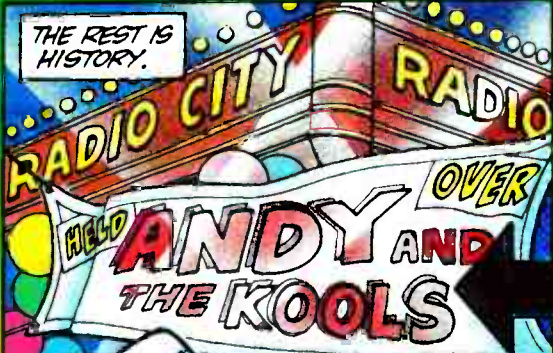
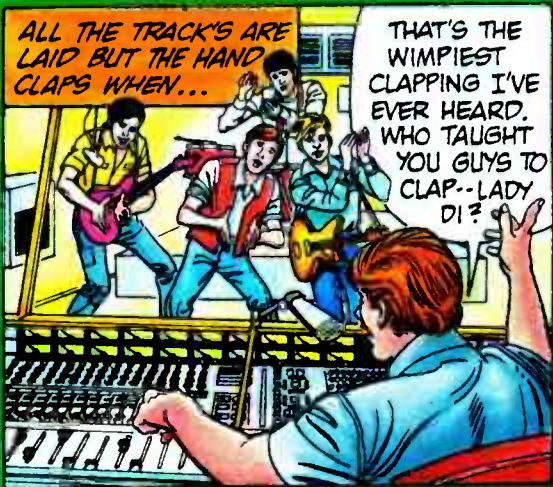


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