

AL GREEN SAVES HIS SOUL • AFTER THE CLASH, MICK JONES GOES B.A.D.

MUSICIAN

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Declan McManus
recounts his career,
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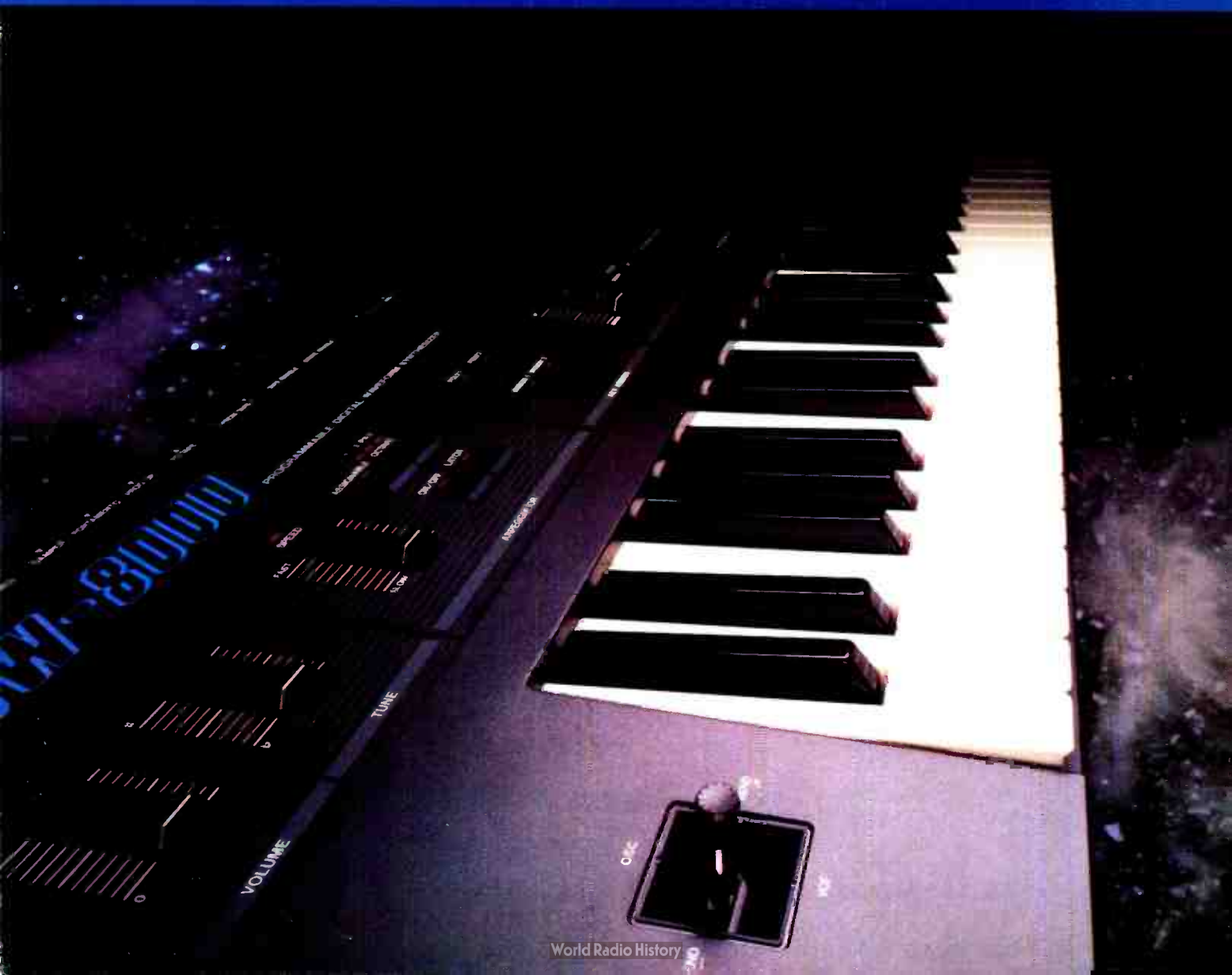
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CLOCKWISE LEFT TO RIGHT: DAVIES & STARR, B. C. KAGAN, EBET ROBERTS, CHRIS CUFFARO



Elvis Costello writes the book: In the definitive interview, Declan McManus recounts his entire career, from "Alison" to *Imperial Bedroom* to *King Of America* and his decision to stop being Elvis Costello.
By Bill Flanagan 36



Mick Jones' Big Audio Dynamite: The once (and future?) Clash guitarist finds rocking well is the best revenge.
By Scott Isler 11

Ian Stewart: Not fade away: He founded the Rolling Stones, he was pushed out of the picture, but Stu never left the band.
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Good Groove High: These two graduates of Springfield Garden High School in Queens, New York are now the dominant drum duo of pop music. Who, how, and other percussive mysteries revealed on page 59

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Al Green was the greatest soul singer of the seventies. But when the Lord calls, you ignore it at your peril. Al speaks to *Musician*, his congregation, and the animals.
By Stanley Booth 30



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First Impressions...

Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Censorship

The bias and impudent tone throughout "Parent Terror" were, of course, to be expected, since *Musician* promotes bands that would be likely to come under the PMRC's scrutiny. These bands, sadly, are giving rock 'n' roll a bad name, even among people, like myself, who grew up listening to it and loving it.

Grown up human beings, musicians or not, should not have to be reminded that freedoms are not without inherent responsibilities in exercising them.

Janet E. Tomey
Dover, DE

Those congressional housewives should stick to their tea parties and leave the politicking to their husbands. You stay-at-homes can have your Amy Grant; long live Prince, the Stones, Blue Oyster Cult, et al.

Jhaglan al-Zubril
Turlock, CA

Using rock 'n' roll as a scapegoat for your own failings and insecurities can only emphasize the larger problem in this country—the failure of the family institution. Why not hold hearings and conferences on things that are really relevant? It's time to take a good hard look at ourselves.

Cheryl Pawelski
Milwaukee, WI

I'm happy that people are finally standing up to rock musicians. We need a balance between individual freedom and social needs, and, although I can get off on rock, some of it trashes my environment.

Brenda Levy (Miss)
Richmond, VA

Yes, some murderers listen to rock 'n' roll before they kill, some read *Playboy*, some watch MTV, and some read the Bible or hear the voice of God. A murderer is a mur-

derer no matter what the influence, a troubled teen is a troubled teen, a rapist is a rapist, etc. Let's spend our time and money getting these people *help* instead of locking all of society in a closet.

M. Resh
Akron, OH



I was very upset to read Joni Mitchell's derogatory, vile comments about Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. She has no right to refer to him as a "demon." He is one man in our country today who cares where it's headed and speaks out against it. No longer will your magazine ever enter my home.

Ashamed to say
I ever read your
"magazine."

[Ashamed to sign your
name, too, huh?]

From the Zappa transcript to the Miller quote, "Parent Terror" was one of the most thoughtfully pissed-off articles I've read yet on the topic. I thought I'd pass this along: "There's not a piece of music written or recorded that can do to a child what the home has not already done." Senator Exon might be interested to know that trickled from the mouth of Mitch Miller in 1957.

Lauri Githens
WBAB
Babylon, NY

The PMRC points to rock as a cause of some great rebellion. What rebellion? Rock has just joined the mainstream. It has just entered the great *marketable majority*. Perhaps the PMRC is only upset because its members (husbands) are not getting a big enough cut.

Anthony Sokol
Cresskill, NJ

Every Dog has its Say

Thanks Bill Flanagan for a long-awaited interview with Joni Mitchell. It was a truly honest conversation with one of music's most talented artists. People should learn to listen, rather than say "What's Joni up to now? She changes her styles too often. What now, jazz, folk, pop, rock...or...or...etc.?"

Karen Morgan
Medfield, MA

My mouth fell open in shock and surprise at your beautiful photo of Joni Mitchell on the cover and the superb, objective article by Bill Flanagan inside. Joni is such a special recluse that any kind of information is hard to obtain aside from her albums and concert video. She taught me how the vulnerability of confession can humble and purge the soul in preparation for yet more *meaty* truths.

Aging Children, I am one!
Deb Thompson
Anchorage, AK

The Joni Mitchell interview was almost as classy as the lady herself. Despite the old comparison clichés, I think the references to Dylan were fitting. Someday critics are going to have to do a double think on the lambasting they gave Dylan's "gospel" stuff, the same as they've had to with Joni's "jazz" stuff. As Joni pointed out, artists should be able to create in all directions without everyone trying to push them back into their little boxes.

Laura Peters
Shawano, WI

Wonderful interview and also a real ironic touch with Joni "getting the last laugh" in the headline and also on the cover, dressed as Rickie Lee Jones.

Joni painted a picture of Jaco Pastorius which was half monster, half wonder. She speaks of his having been a friend of hers. The other night I was in Tribeca and I saw Jaco playing, quite

unexpectedly. The band he was playing in was not worthy of him. I don't say this out of disrespect for the band but rather out of respect for him. He was playing along on "Purple Haze" and seemed to be in a real haze himself. Joni, or whoever was close to this genius, don't allow him to pass the way of all gifted self-destructive geniuses. Someone invite him back into the fold where his music can speak to us out here. I miss his haunting voice.

Vike Savoth
Red Bank, NJ

Simply Maahvalus

Many thanks to Fred Schruers for his outstanding Simple Minds article. Finally the country will be made aware of what I've known for years; the Simple Minds are, quite simply, one of the best bands around today.

Julie Naujoles
Cedar Rapids, IA

Come on, you guys, be serious. The new Simple Minds LP merits more than two sentences tucked between Sheena Easton and James Taylor in Rock Shorts. Just because you featured Simple Minds in your last issue is no excuse not to do a serious review of *Once Upon A Time*. Didn't you know? All weird Ohio women love Jim Kerr.

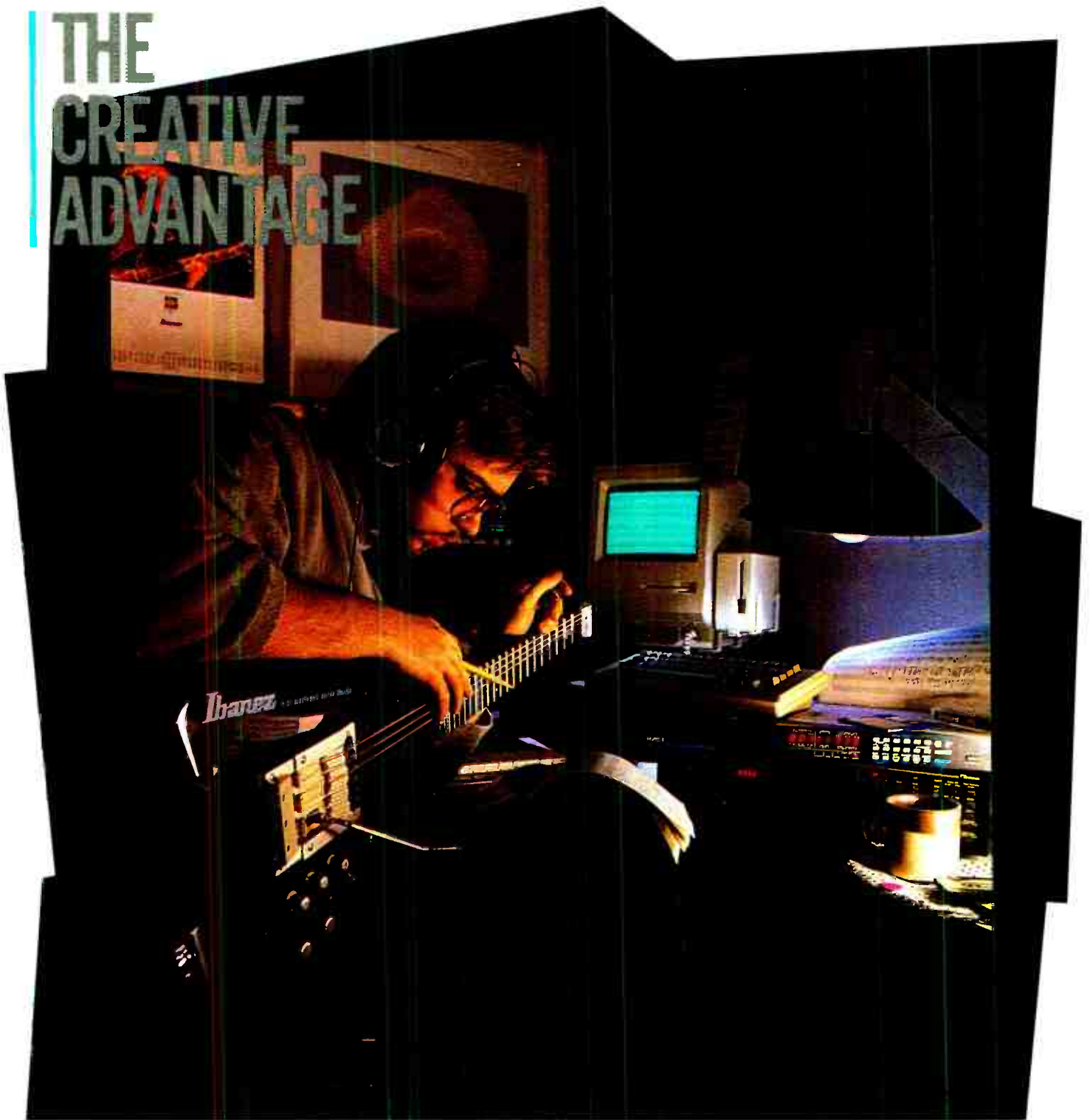
Julie Adams
Portsmouth, OH



As Simple as 1, 2, 3...

Our congratulations to Dexter from Westminster, CA, winners of round three in the *Musician/JBL* "Best Unsigned Band" contest. Like their predecessors, the band will be furnished with over \$6500 worth of JBL sound equipment. Nice Goin' Guys!

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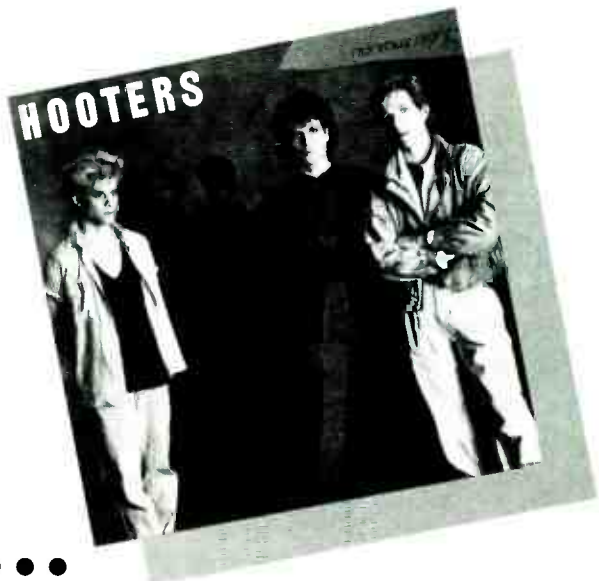
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World Radio History

BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE

BY SCOTT ISLER

EX-CLASH GUITARIST MICK JONES BOUNCES BACK

As you recall, in 1983 Clash guitarist Mick Jones was unceremoniously drummed out of the band he co-founded and named in 1976. The charge: "drift[ing] apart from the original idea of the Clash." Jones flatly denied the Clash press statement, but he was still out of a gig. While the Clash—reduced to a core of singer Joe Strummer and bassist Paul Simonon—reinvented themselves with a new drummer and two new guitarists, Jones spent most of 1984 on the sidelines.

"Play, goddammit!"

The shout cuts through the chattering packed haze of bodies and smoke cramming the World, a theater-turned-club on New York's fashionably scuzzy Lower East Side. It is even heard above the palpable throb of the Kurtis Blow bass line pummeled out by the p.a. But it does no good. Big Audio Dynamite has still not taken the stage.

Perhaps the hipper patrons are aware that the previous evening the band went on, minus opening act, at two a.m. Whatever, the atmosphere is more expectant than rebellious as the night wears on (or off). This is, after all, Big Audio Dynamite's first New York engagement. And Big Audio Dynamite, or B.A.D., is the group formed by Mick Jones: the rock 'n' roll face of the Clash's politically correct formula; the appealingly cracked voice of Clash hits "Train In Vain" and "Should I Stay Or Should I Go."

For Jones fans, Big Audio Dynamite has been a long time coming—and not just this evening. The band surfaced in late 1984 with a few unannounced, opening-act sets in Britain and France. Then they submerged until last Oc-

tober, when *This Is Big Audio Dynamite* appeared simultaneously with *Cut The Crap*, the Clash's long-awaited, oft-delayed album. The timing may have been fortuitous but it couldn't hurt the new group, with its adventurous music and witty lyrics.

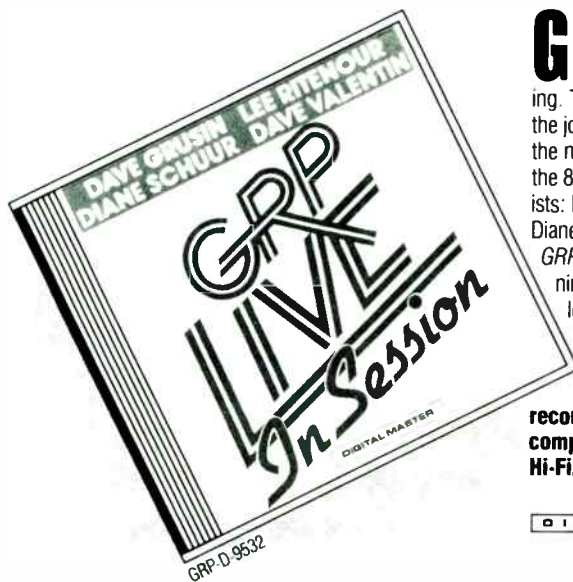
After a weekend at large in the Big Apple, Jones and B.A.D. singer/effects person Don Letts dutifully arrive late at Columbia Records' offices for a day of interviews. Letts, with no previous musical experience, is much better known as a film and video director. His involvement in B.A.D. stems from his friendship with Jones; Letts was deejaying at London's Roxy club, a maelstrom of late-70s punk activity, when he met the young Clash. After Jones was pushed out of his band, Letts introduced him to bassist Leo "E-Zee Kill" Williams, B.A.D.'s first recruit. A newspaper ad ("No bread-heads," Letts remembers) then attracted drummer Greg Roberts.

The trio asked Letts about a fourth member, and ended up with Letts himself. "The opportunity of a lifetime!" he crows, recounting the incident. Letts was ready for a change, having become "totally dissatisfied" with the rock

B.A.D to the bone: Donovan, Williams, MJ, Letts, Roberts



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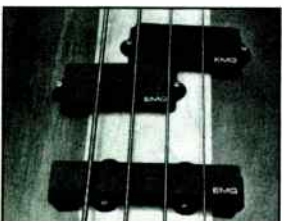
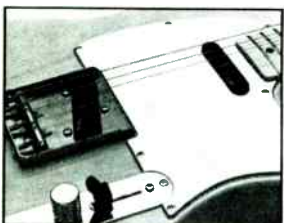
video scene: "Instead of being an artist I'm like a factory worker, making videos for groups I can't stand." "This man is responsible for Ratt breaking big in America," Jones deadpans solemnly. "He's got a lot to answer for." (Letts directed the Ratt "Round And Round" video.) After the still-unnamed band had given its maiden performances they did a photo shoot with Dan Donovan. The photographer turned out to be proficient behind a keyboard as well, and thus became the last B.A.D. man.

"I wanted people like Don and Dan," Jones says, "and not old, staid, boring-old-fart musicians. I was much more interested in new leads, new ideas. Musicians get in a rut easily. They rely on traditional methods of work. I'm trying to make the group more interesting by forcing experimentation.... You have to have some musicians but this is better—dealing with ideas."

They recorded *This Is Big Audio Dynamite* in London last summer. "Six weeks to make it, two and a half years in preparation," Jones quips. He describes the style as "dance rhythms with rock 'n' roll guitar on it and kinda quirky singing." Sound effects and spoken-word snippets (Clint Eastwood, Joe Strummer??) add an element of aural collage in keeping with the music's eclecticism. If Jones tried this approach in his earlier organization, the results here are more coherent than the Clash's occasional third-world rambles—testament to about a year of woodshedding. "We didn't want to come up with a studio album that was concept nonsense," Letts says. "We wanted to be able to play this shit." "It wasn't *Close To The Edge* or anything," Jones adds.

What it is is a striking blend of high tech, low funk and social concern. The last element isn't surprising, coming from a Clash alumnus; B.A.D.'s first album tackles such subjects as sexually transmitted diseases ("Stone Thames"), cultural and commercial imperialism ("A Party," "Sony") and teenage anomie ("Sudden Impact!"). But the band started out with an even heavier agenda. Their early sets included "Nation," a bitter anti-patriotic rant, and "Interaction," about the Bomb with a capital A. Indeed, "Stone Thames" evolved from "Strike," the identical tune with lyrics about the British miners' walkout of 1984. AIDS presumably has a longer shelf life.

At the same time, Jones is trying to avoid a downpressive reputation. The single "The Bottom Line" projects a self-help attitude that could apply to Jones himself. "Lots of times we dump stuff 'cause we don't think the ideas are strong enough: kind of dowdy stuff, or overly political stuff, or self-indulgent stuff—wrong-emphasis stuff. What I



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didn't want was to be kind of preachy on an unglamorous soapbox." Could he be thinking of...? "All this dowdy shit just makes you wanna top yourself."

Jones' scruffy accent is of a piece with his feisty demeanor. The thirty-year-old guitarist has been taken to task for surliness, but his bristly attitude is more defensive than meanspirited. Piercing brown eyes convey the impression that this is one guy who knows what he wants—which is not necessarily to sit in a record company office all day giving interviews.

His musical history reflects his singlemindedness. At age sixteen Jones was inspired to take up guitar by the examples of fellow countrymen Jimmy Page, Keith Richards, Jeff Beck, Mick Ronson, Mick Ralphs and Pete Townshend. "I spent two years listening to their records, learning all their licks," he recalls, "before I formed my own thing." His own thing included songwriting, which for Jones went hand in hand with his self-taught guitar playing. "It's just something I found out I'm good at. I figure everybody's good at something. Problem is they don't often find out what. I was lucky."

The luck continued after Jones left art school, co-founded the legendary proto-punk band London S.S., and then the Clash. Until the band switched to group attribution, virtually all Clash songs were credited to Strummer/Jones. Strummer, however—the next-to-last Clash enlistee—became that group's mouthpiece offstage as well as on. The ideological controversies sur-

Money for Nothing, Axe for Free

"Don't plug the equipment 'cos they don't plug us!" **Mick Jones** warns, upset about not getting free gear when Big Audio Dynamite started. He will admit, though, to alternating onstage between a Roland GR-707 guitar synthesizer and a gray Bond Electroglide, plugged into a MESA/Boogie amp and Marshall 4x12 speaker cabinet. B.A.D. "musical director" and keyboard player **Dan Donovan** has a Yamaha DX7 and Ensoniq Mirage. Bassist **Leo "E-Zee Kill" Williams** plays a Steinberger through an Ampeg; drummer **Greg Roberts'** tossed-together kit includes a Rogers bass, Ludwig snare, Simmons (electronic) toms and a Mark II LinnDrum. Self-confessed non-musician **Don Letts** does one-finger exercises on an Ensoniq Mirage and, for triggering effects, a "Heath Robinson": Electro-Harmonix Super Replays strung together through a Roland SH-101. The keyboard is customized, Letts says, with "little colored stickers on my keys telling me what to hit." ("The Paul Simonon school of music," Jones notes, referring to the Clash bassist.) "The only problem," Letts adds, "is when they do a lights change. I'm trying to find the keys!"

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rounding the Clash's personnel changes and recent (in)activity may never be resolved. ("I was set up," Jones charged in 1984.) *Cut The Crap's* songs are credited to Strummer and Clash manager Bernard Rhodes. Jones affirms he wasn't involved in the new Clash material, and furthermore, "I don't think the Clash was either. It was just their manager. I think it's his record."

Shortly after B.A.D. debuted in late '84, Jones publicly tweaked the Clash, saying in the last days they'd only been bound by money, and that his firing was engineered by Bernie Rhodes. He contrasted B.A.D.'s refusal to do old material with the Clash's willingness to have a Jones clone sing "Should I Stay Or Should I Go." Such teasing may have stung Strummer and his comrades, but what drove them around the bend was Jones' refusal to sign over to them ex-

clusive rights to the Clash name.

It appears Jones saw no reason to do so, at least until after B.A.D.'s album was released. And he was in no hurry. It's not hard to imagine Mick relishing the thought of Strummer pulling his hair in frustration, and only a saint could have resisted gloating a bit as old antagonist Rhodes was put in the position of courting Jones' signature. As the release of *Cut The Crap* was pushed back again and again, tensions mounted. Finally they exploded. Last autumn Strummer sacked Rhodes, fired long-time publicist/mouthpiece Kosmo Vinyl, and took off to Spain to calm himself (perhaps whistling "Spanish Bombs" as he touched shore). Cutting out Rhodes may have been on the surface an act of righteous fury, but it can also be seen as a ritual sacrifice by Strummer to Jones, clearing away the great obstacle to their

reconciliation.

Insiders report Strummer then approached Jones about a reunion, but was told that Mick was, for now, committed to B.A.D. Strummer said he planned to fire the three new Clash members. CBS, meanwhile, got sick of waiting for these characters to get organized. They decided to put out the Clash LP without the name-ownership resolved and let the chips fall where they might.

Cut the Crap was released, nobody sued, Strummer fired the new Clash and disappeared again. Mick Jones is keeping his options open, maintaining an official allegiance to B.A.D., but no longer saying a bad word about Strummer and Simonon. "I've spoken to Joe," Jones acknowledges, "and I don't talk about that stuff. Big Audio Dynamite—full up at the moment." He grins. "I'm not

continued on page 22



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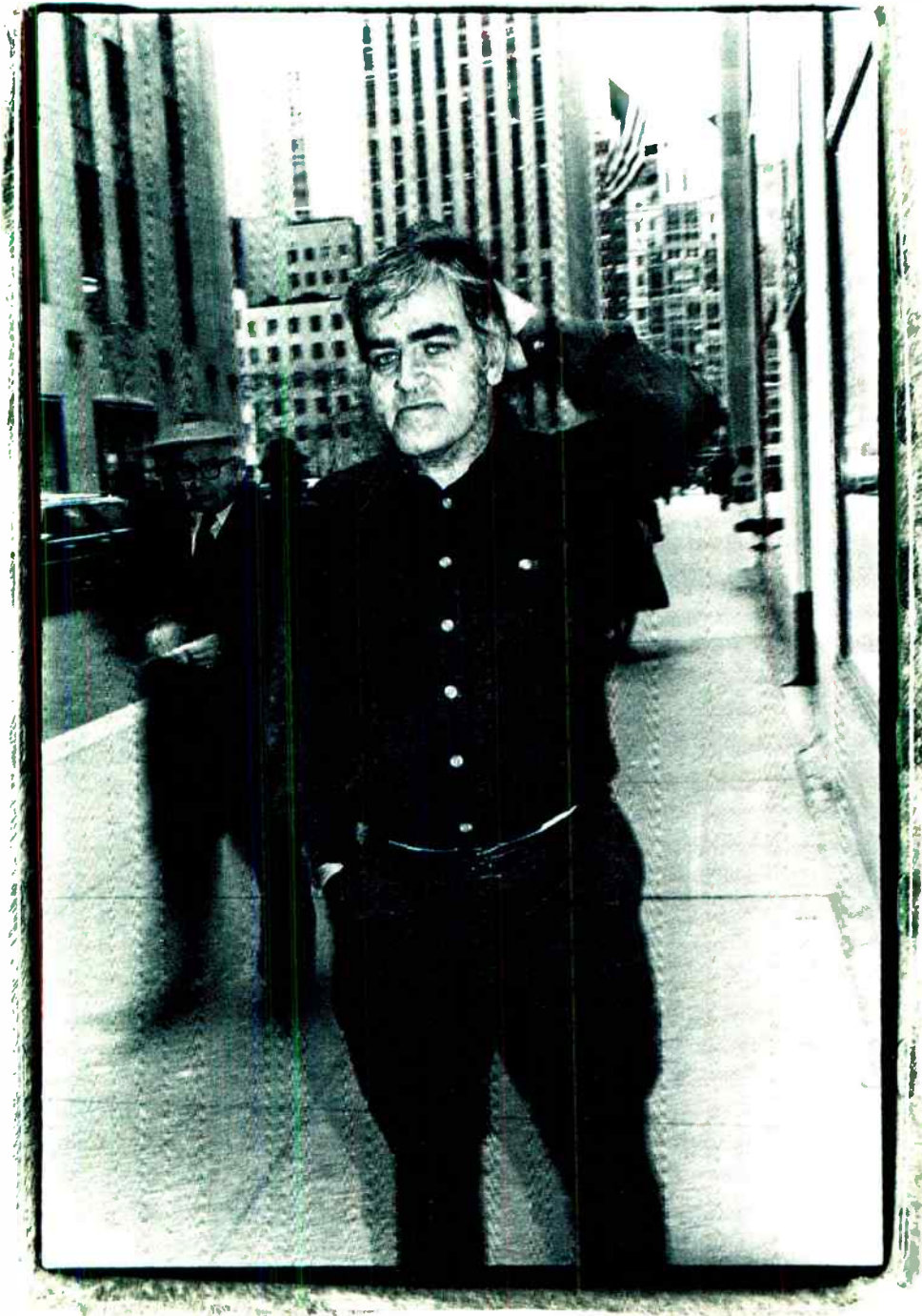
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ian stewart: like a rolling stone



Ian Stewart helped found the Rolling Stones, and he remained an integral member of that group until December 12, 1985, the day he died of a heart attack. Ian Stewart deserved to be called the "sixth Stone," yet it's safe to say that most fans still have no idea that he was ever in the band. For twenty years his role has been obscured. But to put it simply, as did Bill Wyman following his funeral, "without Ian Stewart there would have been no Rolling Stones."

"He was such an unlikely member,"

noted Jim Dickenson, a friend and like-minded boogie-woogie pianist. "Yet he fit in so naturally, in the middle of all the craziness. He wasn't even really a rock musician—he was more like a pre-rock player. He had kind of a contempt for rock musicians, actually. Big Joe Turner and Albert Ammons were the guys he loved. But he was a fabulous player. I mean, anybody who can sit down with the Rolling Stones has to play awfully aggressively, and if you listen to a track like 'Brown Sugar' you know he did. Ian

could just plow right through them."

Ian did not physically fit the part. He was stocky, with thick brows, short, graying hair and a lantern jaw. Except for the odd pint of beer, Stewart didn't drink. He never used drugs, or changed his blood. When he wasn't packing up the Stones' gear, driving them to a gig, or banging away on a piano once they arrived, his interests were studying British history and playing golf. He liked

by mark rowland

to wear polo shirts, even in the 60s. Ian Stewart's lifestyle probably had more in common with the Stones' parents.

"He was almost like a father figure," observed Shirley Arnold, who started the Stones' fan club and worked closely with the band for many years.

Ian Stewart's association with the Stones was no accident. Like the rest of the band, his musical roots were sunk deep in the fertile loam of 40s and early 50s American rhythm & blues. As the Stones evolved through the 60s and 70s, their music continued to parallel black pop innovations, from soul to disco to rap—all except Stu. Whether Ian deigned to play with the band or not was often predicated on what key a song was in. For Stewart, true to his tradition, simply would not play music in a minor key—not could not, *would not*.

"You will not find any more of a purist than Ian Stewart," notes an admiring Ronnie Lane. "He was what we call a one-off. Once they made him, they didn't make any more."

Ian Stewart was born forty-seven years ago in Pittenweem, Fife, a town in the south of Scotland. A piano player who first heard American blues and boogie-woogie listening to the BBC, the music became his lifelong passion. Such aficionados were in short supply in 1961 when Ian spotted Brian Jones' inquiry about starting an R&B ensemble. Their fledgling group soon recruited Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, then Bill Wyman and finally Charlie Watts, and called themselves the Rolling Stones. For two years they developed their craft, linked by love of music far more than by dreams of success. Nobody, in those days, had ever gotten rich playing the blues.

The general perception of the early Rolling Stones is of a talented trio of punks and pretty boys—Jagger, Jones and Richards—backed by the anonymous rhythm section of Watts and Wyman. Add Ian Stewart on piano, and the equation changes considerably. Wyman, Watts and Stewart, well-versed in classical, jazz and R&B traditions respectively, provided a psychological as well as musical foundation for the antics of their younger, more mercurial frontmen. Jones and Jagger had a menacing charisma, but Ian Stewart represented unflappable solidity. It was an image which would soon affect his fortunes with the band.

Glyn Johns, who recorded many of the Stones' early classics, first came to see them at Stewart's request. "When the band first formed I think they purely liked the idea of playing blues and R&B," he recalls. "The idea of being commercial didn't enter their minds."

The Beatles phenomenon changed

all that. Andrew Loog Oldham, a former aide to Beatles manager Brian Epstein, swung into the Stones orbit with definite ideas about marketing them as London's answer to the Fab Four—bad boys whose music and looks presented a contrast to Lennon and company's well-scrubbed pop. Jones, the Stones' titular leader, was by now open to any



"The man had no ego at all."

ploy that might result in Beatles-sized celebrity. A moment of reckoning arrived one night while the band was recording in Decca's studios. Johns was working in a room down the hall when Stewart came in and told him that he'd just been pushed out of the band because Andrew Oldham didn't think he looked right.

"And I quite understand," Stewart told the amazed Johns. "I don't mind one way or the other, and they've asked me to stay on as a roadie."

"You're mad," Johns replied.

"Well, I think they're going places," Stewart responded, "and I wouldn't mind being along, even if it's just as a roadie."

Johns went back to vent his anger at Oldham, while the rest of the Stones sat around mute.

"Charlie and Keith were always very loyal to Stu, but since Stu took the news the way he did, I don't think they saw it as their place to complain about it," Johns explains. "And I think in a way Stu was relieved. He was never one to push himself forward. He dealt with it very well. Andrew Oldham turns out to have been right, really. I don't think Stu *would* have fit in as an equal member of the band, in a commercial sense. He just wasn't that sort of chap."

So Stewart became the Rolling Stones' tour manager, a role which wasn't difficult to adopt—he was already driving them to gigs in his van. To the Stones' mammoth publicity machine he became an official non-person, and an unknown to casual fans. But he never really stopped playing with the band, appeared on several albums, and perhaps more significantly, performed with the Rolling Stones on nearly every concert tour. Even when the Stones hired other keyboardists like Nicky Hopkins or Ian McLaglin, Stu would still be along, frequently sequestered at his piano in some far corner of the stage.

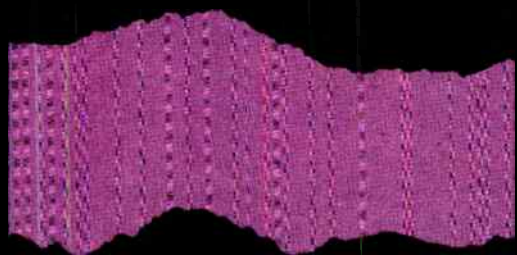
If Stewart harbored any anger toward his bandmates for allowing him to be shunted from the spotlight, he did a good job of keeping it under wraps. In a 1981 interview with journalist Bob Angell, Stewart actually credited Oldham for shaping his band's image: "The Stones are where they are now because in the early days he made sure he cut down [their] exposure. He cut down set times and organized the whole thing. Quite brilliant...Andrew only fell down when he tried to be a record producer. He knows nothing about music whatsoever." A backhanded tribute from a guy who cared nothing about image and everything about music.

Peter Swales, who worked for the Rolling Stones as a personal assistant beginning in 1968, suspects that Stewart may have held some bitterness. "He bore the grudge, but he did it in a way that didn't create friction. It would only be betrayed in the odd remark here and there. But it really did hurt him."

Stanley Booth, whose *Dance with the Devil* contains a comprehensive account of the band's early history—"largely due to the kindness of Ian Stewart," he reveals—thinks that Oldham's ruthless maneuver ultimately worked out for the best. "In the 60s, the world was different. Everybody was wearing velvet, Brian was brushing the hair out of his eyes twenty times a minute." Everyone was so effete, and so stoned. Stu couldn't have done that. What he wanted to do was play the music. He loved the music. It was never about fashion for him."

Indeed, the only regret Stewart ever expressed publicly over the entire turn of events was that it may have retarded his musical growth. "I hardly played for about four or five years," he said. "Then all of a sudden people like Leon Russell turned up. I thought, 'Well, they're great piano players, but if I'd had to play and worked at it....'"

Actually, Stewart was a fine piano player, just as Keith Richards was an exceptional guitarist and Charlie Watts a model drummer. None were ever great



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technicians, perhaps, but they always played with energy, intelligence and feeling; and as Dean Moriarty would put it, they knew time. If Ian had any shortcomings it was in being all too steady and self-effacing for his own good. But those same qualities which allowed him to become expendable as a band member helped make him indispensable as a road manager.

"It will take six people to replace what he did offstage, let alone on," declares Stanley Booth, who traveled with the Stones on tour.

"He was the most extraordinary character," said Ronnie Lane. "The man had no ego at all."

Jim Dickenson, who got to play on "Wild Horses" with the Stones in '69 simply because Ian was too busy packing up the band's equipment to do it himself, believes that "they just could not have gone out on the road without him. Ian dragged them along by the teeth back then, doing one impossible thing after another. By 1969 they were like a street band, hell-bent, but Ian was right there making sure everything worked."

Stewart had his own curmudgeonly style. He held a job that, as Dickenson points out, "most people would have given years of their lives to be in, and he always acted like it wasn't worth changing his shirt for. He always acted mildly

piSSed at everything."

"If Mick was in one of his prissy moods," Booth recalls, "you'd hear Stu on the phone going, 'Do you think we can get maracas for his ladyship?'"

During the '69 tour, Jagger decided that everyone in the band should wear white tuxedos onstage. Stewart's response was to demand that in return his performing salary be doubled (it was). Stewart's loyalty to the band was of course beyond question, but as a musician he took shit from no one, and no one tried to give it. Jagger, who does not defer easily to others, was never known to come down on Stewart. In rehearsals, Richards could be very demanding about what he wanted from other musicians, but he never told Stewart what to do. Ian simply played or he didn't.

The reason Ian enjoyed such esteem might be gleaned from a remark made by Charlie Watts following what Stanley Booth recalls as "a killing version of 'Little Queenie.'" "That Stu is a boogie king," Booth said to Watts.

"Yeah," Watts replied, "but he's not a modern jive boogie king. He's a real boogie king."

Following their 1969 tour, the Rolling Stones were recording secretly in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, their work permits in this country having lapsed. At the same time they were being courted ardently by Atlantic Records. At one point, Atlantic exec Jerry Wexler offered the band whatever they pleased from Atlantic's vast record catalog, a treasure trove of blues and R&B. Wexler was conferring on this subject with Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts, the Stones' archivists, when Stewart wandered by. Now it is quite probable that Wexler, like most rock fans, had no idea who Ian Stewart was. So when Stu began rattling off requests for some of the most obscure material in Atlantic's vaults, including *outtakes* from ancient Big Joe Turner sessions, and citing dates, places and tracks with casual authority, Wexler stood there dumbfounded.

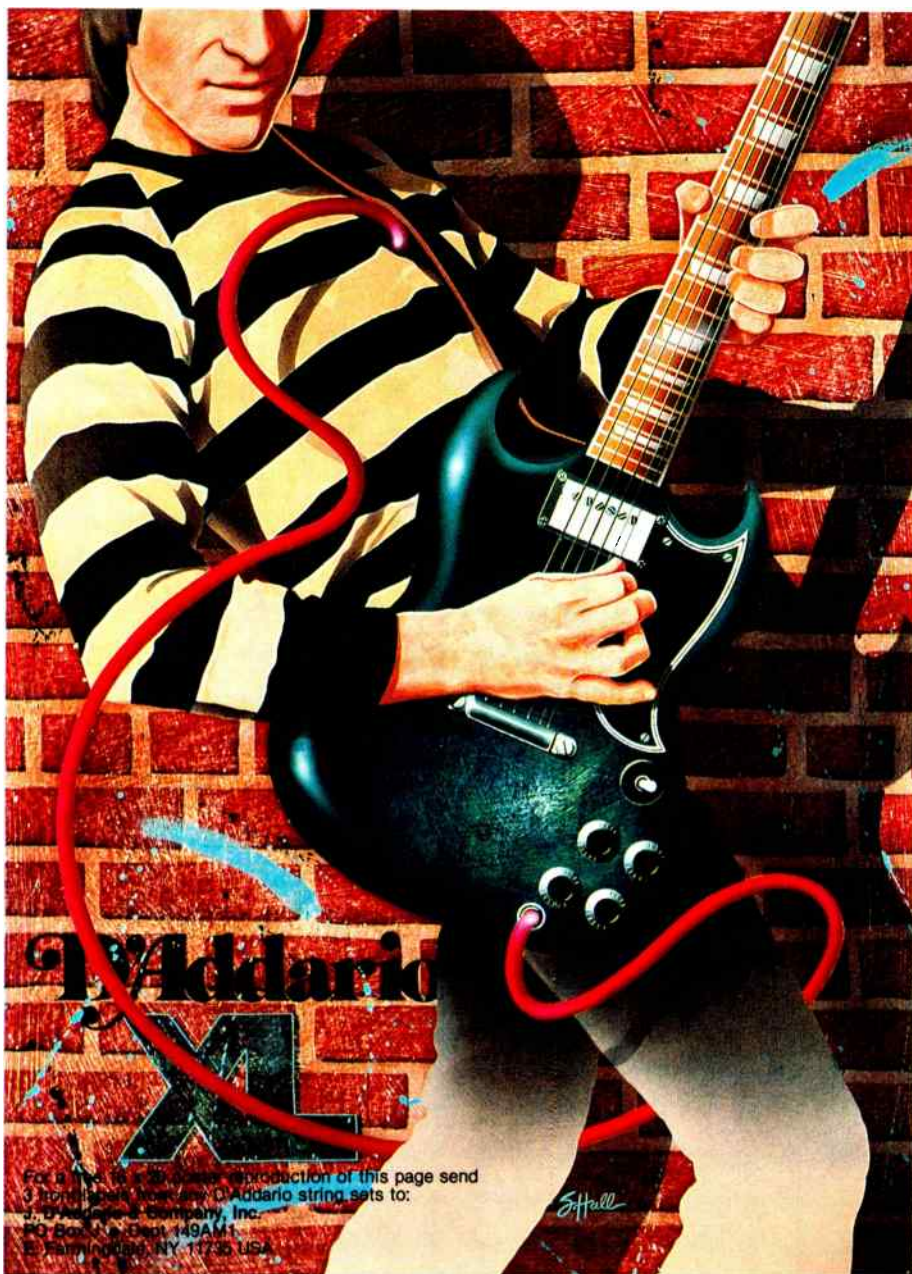
"Yes," he finally managed to reply. "Yes, those tracks *do* exist."

"Well then," said Charlie Watts, "let's have 'em."

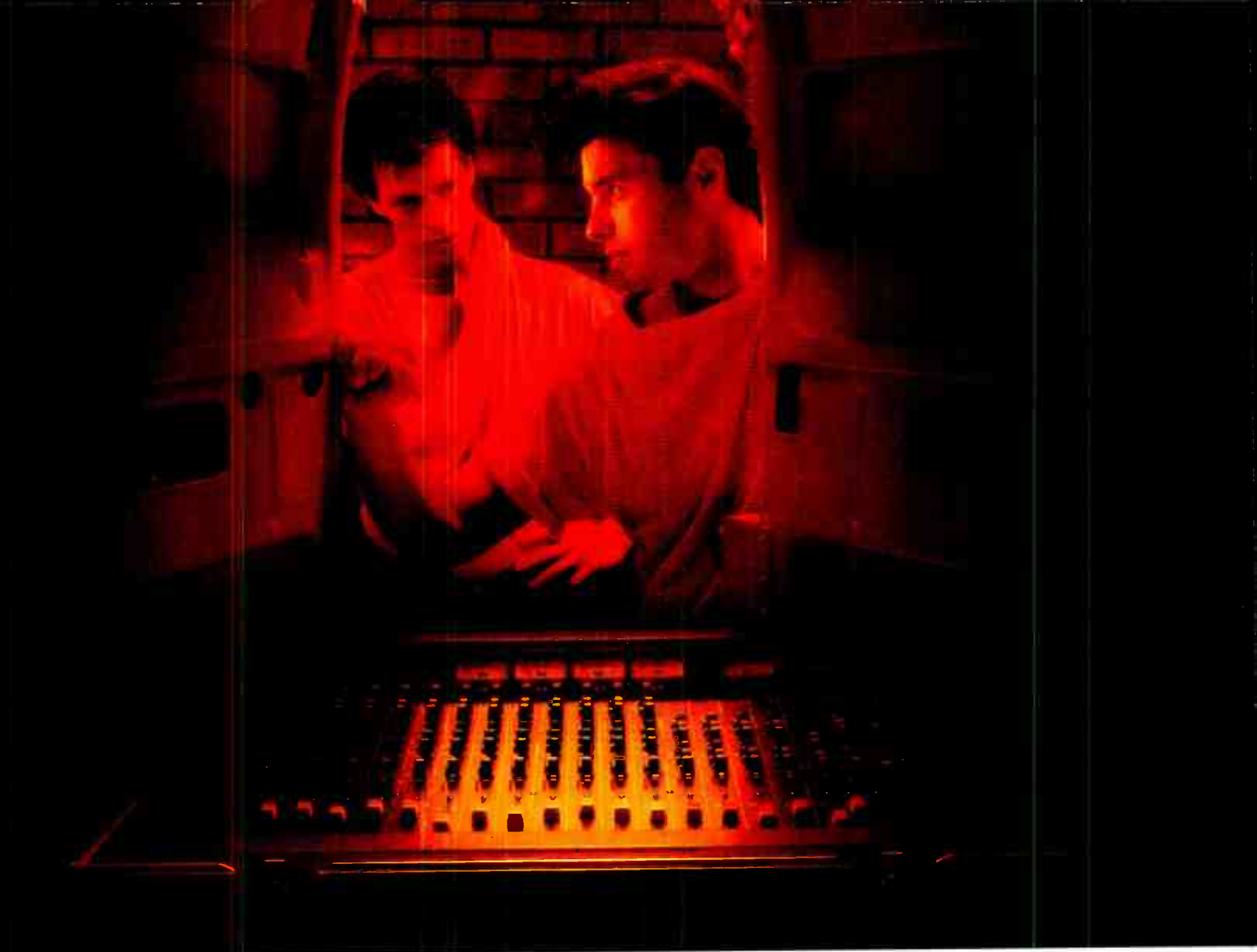
Many other musicians appreciated Stewart's R&B acumen, including Led Zeppelin, whose tribute "Boogie With Stu" appeared on *Physical Graffiti*. A few years later Ian put together his own rollicking ensemble, called Rocket 88, with Watts on drums and a horn section whose credits included albums with Wynonie Harris and Ray Charles. He even fashioned a dual piano attack in the manner of Pete Johnson and Albert Ammons, and then with typical reticence chose not to play with his own band! (On Rocket 88's self-titled *Atlantic* album.)

continued on next page

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tic LP he does appear on one cut and plays the hell out of it.)

When Ronnie Lane left the Faces during the mid-70s to form his own band, he asked Stewart to join him. Anyone who knew Ian could have predicted the rest: "He became the manager of the band," according to Lane, "and he'd drive us all around the country, and then sit down and play piano with us. Ian enjoyed the most simple things," Lane noticed. "I mean, he really *liked* driving us to the gigs. Sorry to say this, Stu, but you know, I really *relied* on him. If I had any kind of problem, I knew I could turn to him. And he did enjoy that kind of responsibility. He really liked playing in the band too, as long as I didn't do any numbers with minor chords."

The band broke up when Lane developed multiple sclerosis. A few years later, Stewart was instrumental in putting together a series of star-studded ARMS (Action for Research into MS) benefits with Glyn Johns to raise money for MS victims. Stewart's volunteer efforts ranged from pulling in friends like Wyman and Watts to play on the program, to writing out backstage passes. "I know they'll never find another one like him," Lane says quietly. "I'll miss his soft blue eyes."

"You could never pay him a compliment," says Shirley Arnold. "I hope the band doesn't feel like, 'Oh, we should have told him,' because if they had, he would have just walked out of the room. But they all absolutely adored him, without ever saying it."

"He was a perfectly ordinary, suburban, very uncomplicated person," said Glyn Johns. "One of the most genuine people I ever met. He never presumed that he was important, but if you ever needed anything, Stu was the person to call. He'd always quietly help you out, and in the most magnanimous manner."

"He was so totally unaffected by it all," remembers Shirley Arnold. "The razzmatazz backstage and all the chicks—he found it quite boring. He'd much rather read a comic in the corner. When we were into all the drugs years ago, Stu would put on a face or say, 'Oh, you silly.' He was telling me off three weeks ago for smoking cigarettes. Over the years there have been so many people around the Stones who have died one way or another. But you never thought it would happen to Stu."

"He was such a private guy. That funeral, and Mick with tears in his eyes. I'm sure if Stu had seen it, he would have found it all quite amusing." ☐

B.A.D. from page 14
grinning spitefully."

He is determined not to coast on his Clash credentials—"We're not into retrogressive revivalism," Jones states—and

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the World audience seems satisfied to forgo Clash greatest hits in favor of the latest B.A.D.ness. The band runs through its entire album, an unrecorded original and Prince's "1999" in a generous performance spiked with Jones' between-song banter. His bleached, shredded denim jacket right sleeve hangs over his guitar strings, but Jones uses the instrument for rhythmic punctuation, not the punk firefighting of old. He still prances like a guitar hero, but Letts and Williams, both with waist-length dreadlocks, provide considerable visual counterpoint. Letts especially, bouncing behind his keyboard and prescription shades ("that stops people from seeing I'm scared"), gives Jones some competition for the spotlight. "I'm catchin' up," Letts states. "I'm working on the pelvic thrust."

He is also Jones' songwriting partner. "Sometimes it starts with a rhythm," Letts says, "sometimes with a newspaper headline. There's no set pattern."

For Jones, the message is as important as the medium, and the singing on *This Is Big Audio Dynamite* stands out loud and clear. "You have to be able to hear the vocals," he affirms. "I wish you could hear them on *Cut The Crap*." He describes his debut-album songs as "stream-of-consciousness stuff. A lot of it is analogy....It's not supposed to be easy listening. It's not even easy reading on the lyric sheet!" (The words are hand-lettered in red over a black-and-white photograph.) "We're not looking for anything easy," Letts agrees, "or we'd have made an LP full of 'Train In Vains.'"

"I'm gonna write one, though, another one like that," Jones insists—perhaps on B.A.D.'s second album, which he says will consist of shorter songs, "simpler rhythmically—it's gonna have just as much meaning but it's gonna be simpler in the way we say it." On his new "Train In Vain," Jones hints, "I'll address myself to the politics of love."


For now, it's more like love of politics—he likes the U.S., for example, "but it's getting more brutal or something. There's a kind of underlying conservatism which is chilling. It reminds me of home. You've only gotta look in Mrs. Thatcher's eyes to see what I'm talking about. It's like opening the fridge. I don't know what you can do, but you can't moan about it. Whatever you do do should be encouraging, optimistic. People know how shitty it is and they don't want to be reminded about it, when it comes to listening to a record. The thing is to find another way of saying those things, 'cause those things are still important to be said; it's the way you say them now. Which is what we're trying to do with *Big Audio Dynamite*, which is the difference between them and my previous work." ☐



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RICHARD LLOYD

He's Back and He's Loud

Richard Lloyd seemed destined to be the Orson Welles of rock 'n' roll: a talented player who'd never live up to his earliest promise. That promise dates from the formative days of Television, when Lloyd's guitar helped establish the band's slash-and-soar sound. In 1979, after

Television broke up, Lloyd released *Alchemy*, an interesting but far from spectacular solo album, and promptly disappeared from the scene.

Last year he resurfaced with a series of live shows and a new LP. *Field Of Fire*, released on the Swedish Mistlur label, shows a harder edge—musically and spiritually—from a survivor of a four-year bout with drug addiction and alcoholism. "My life eventually reached a

point where the bleakness of it got to me," Lloyd remembers. "I just had a flash that if I didn't quit drugs and drinking I wouldn't have a chance. I realized that I wasn't going to die and go out in a blaze of glory, I would have just ended up being pathetic. It would have been years of misery, so I put myself in the hospital and got off of everything."

Clean and dry, he developed renewed confidence and put together a new band. Lloyd's current music rocks with more punch than anything he's done before, and eliminates the bland popisms that weighed down his first solo LP. "This is the record that *Alchemy* should have been," he says. "When I listen to an album my favorite numbers are always the hardest ones, and I tried to get a lot of those on here." *Field Of Fire*'s songs seem to exorcise Lloyd's dark years of drug addiction, exuding an anger and intensity played out with thick guitar riffs and climactically building leads.

Although he went close to two years without even picking up his axe, Lloyd's jagged playing is in top form. "Having not played for a lengthy period of time gave me extra fire to approach it with," he says, adding that he's now honing his skills with more diligence and discipline than ever before.

With his hellish past behind him, Lloyd views the future with cautious optimism. "When you get through [drug addiction], if you get through it, you develop a sense of quiet worth. That's the kind of space I'm in today. I'm grateful that the album came out and I hope, God willing, to do another one soon. Six years is too long a time between records." — *Michael Kaplan*

Three New Stars in Heaven

Lately it seems like open season on rock 'n' rollers. Bad enough that Big Joe Turner died last November 24, followed by Ian Stewart on December 12. But the last week of 1985 and the first days of 1986 brought three more to the rock death register.

The most startling, in terms of promise unfulfilled, was the death of Minutemen guitarist/singer **D(ennes) Boon**, twenty-seven, on December 23. Boon, his female friend and her sister were traveling in Arizona when their van's left rear axle broke and the van overturned; Boon was the only fatality. The prolific Minutemen recently released their fifth album. The remaining two-thirds of the band haven't announced their plans.

Ricky Nelson's death in a New Year's Eve plane crash received media coverage commensurate with his celebrity. His lasting importance, though, may have less to do with his 50s-sitcom fame—or his laid-back vocals—than his gourmet rockabilly taste in song selection and backing musicians (notably guitarist James Burton). Nelson proved Hollywood could breed a genuine rock 'n' roller.

Phil Lynott was no stranger to the excesses of his profession. With Thin Lizzy, and later on his own, the black Irish singer/bassist lived the way he played; he was rewarded with hepatitis and a 1976 hit single ("The Boys Are Back In Town"), among other vicissitudes. On Christmas day Lynott, thirty-five, collapsed at his home and was admitted to the hospital as suffering from blood poisoning. His kidneys gave way, but Lynott was rallying when he contracted pneumonia and died January 4 of heart failure.



MONICA STEVENSON



MIDNIGHT STAR

Getting Back on the Good Foot

It's not only new acts who have trouble following up a hot LP. Just ask Midnight Star: In 1983, after seven years and three unsuccessful LPs, the nine-piece techno-funk outfit hit it big with *No Parking On The Dance Floor*. Fueled by such hits as "Freak-A-Zoid," "Wet My Whistle" and "Slow Jam," the album quickly sold over a million copies, making the Cincinnati-based group the only black band of the year to go platinum.

Cut to 1985. As *No Parking* tops the two-and-a-half-million sales mark, Midnight Star releases its long-awaited follow-up LP. But after one number one single, "Operator," *Planetary Invasion* drops from sight.

"There were more good tunes than the country got to know about," Midnight Star's leader and producer, **Reggie Calloway**, says of the album. Calloway, who plays synthesizer, trumpet, flute, percussion and sings background vocals, blames his label, Solar Records. Instead of the band's choice for the follow-up single to "Operator"—the gospel-flavored ballad "Curious"—Solar released "Scientific Love," a funk-rocker that fell flat.

But there was a more serious problem with *Planetary Invasion*. While it featured Midnight Star's proven mix of classic soul and high-tech, Vocoder-based funk, the record just wasn't as good

as *No Parking On The Dance Floor*. The reason could have been that band members were preoccupied producing Klymaxx, the Deele, the Whispers and Carrie Lucas.

But as 1985 drew to a close, Midnight Star was back on track, spending up to seventy hours a week in Cincinnati's 5th Floor Studios. Calloway figures this sixth LP will be the jinx breaker. "We're doing a lot of different types of music, some ballads and some songs that are almost progressive jazz," he says of the sessions. "And of course, we're gonna rely a whole lot on the dance rhythms again, 'cause if you capture the feet, the head will follow."

Another thing Midnight Star won't be changing is their home base. Ohio's Cincinnati-Dayton-Columbus axis has long been a golden triangle of R&B, producing such acts as the Isley Brothers, the Ohio Players, Bootsy Collins, Zapp, Lakeside and the Deele. For Calloway and the other bandmembers who grew up in Cincinnati, James Brown (who recorded for the local King label) was an important part of those roots. But when Calloway talks about why Midnight Star stays in Cincinnati, he sounds less like the Godfather of Soul than John Cougar Mellencamp.

"What's happening here is generally happening most everywhere, whereas what's happening on either coast may not make it through to middle America. The Midwest, that's the heartbeat of the country." — *Larry Nager*

FEARGAL SHARKEY

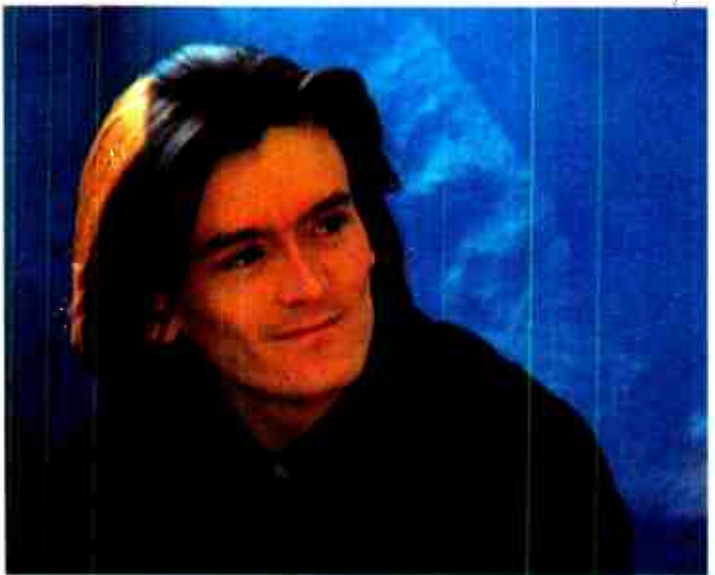
In Which He Copes with Success

Having outgrown the eternally youthful Undertones, Feargal Sharkey—he of the melodramatically tremulous tenor—left Ireland for London, declared himself an adult, and began a seemingly aimless solo career. He joined the Assembly, an ambitious but short-lived project whose sole issue was one slight if alluring single. Sharkey then fell in with Madness and, with the band's backing, recorded a forgettable 45. Queen drummer Roger Taylor produced a third single. Where was Sharkey heading?

To the top of the British charts, as it happens. Lacking experience as a tune-

Chrissie Hynde (whose "Made To Measure" was unexpectedly proffered during a social visit to the sessions), Heartbreaker Benmont Tench, and Maria McKee of Lone Justice. "When Dave was in Los Angeles finishing off the last Eurythmics album," Sharkey recalls, "he visited Maria, who played a new song for him to get a second opinion. Dave taped her on his Walkman and a few months later played it for me. It completely knocked me out. At one point we were going to chuck it off the album, because we didn't think we were doing it justice." Luckily, they kept at it; "A Good Heart"—simple, bouncy dance-rock with gospelly backing vocals and a crazed guitar solo—went straight to number one.

Feargal Sharkey (the album) has just been re-



smith, our hero needed a steady, strong collaborator, whom he found in Eurythmic Dave Stewart. The pair set about writing and recording an album in Eurythmics' London studio, supplementing their own compositional efforts with material from such eclectic contributors as

leased here. Feargal Sharkey (the man) begins a U.S. tour in March. Sharkey's unmistakable voice totally dominates the uneven LP, but then good singers are all the rage nowadays. America just might decide to make him a very big star in 1986.

— *Ira Robbins*

LOUP GAROU

Zydeco Out of Bounds



It isn't quite the Crusades, but **Jimmy Macdonell** is waging his own holy campaign to conquer the unenlightened. The Lafayette, Louisiana-bred singer/accordionist of the New York-based band Loup Garou (French for "werewolf") is determined to bring the pleasures of zydeco to mainstream audiences. "Loup Garou is here to make zydeco available to people, to give them something new," says the self-styled "ambassador." "It's American music for Americans to get hip to."

That'll take some doing. Apart from "My Toot Toot" or Queen Ida's appearance on *Saturday Night Live* last fall, the average listener has probably had zero contact with the joyous Cajun-Creole dance music known as zydeco. And to the uninitiated, it may well sound too old-fashioned, too ethnic and too repetitious.

Laura Weymouth can relate to that. The sister of Talking Heads' Tina and a veteran of Tom Tom Club albums, she didn't know zydeco from zucchini before Macdonell asked her to sing in the group in 1984. "He gave me two hours of cassettes to listen to," Weymouth says, "and all the songs sounded the same. I couldn't even tell where the one beat was."

It's all part of the strategy. In addition to George Recile's New Orleans drums

and Andrew "El Pantalones" Cader's washboard (or frottoir), Loup Garou's ever-changing crew tends to feature Yankee musicians with more enthusiasm than authenticity. The better to increase accessibility, according to Macdonell: "Working with New York players brings a different edge to the band. The tempos are a little brighter and the arrangements a little more daring than they would be back home in Louisiana."

"Punk zydeco," Weymouth laughs.

Slowly but surely, Loup Garou is spreading the bayou gospel. They used to serve gumbo to the audiences at club dates, before the crowds got too large. Last year, Macdonell and Cader appeared on Talking Heads' *Little Creatures LP*. Eric Thorngren, who recorded that opus, is slated to help Loup Garou edit and mix a self-produced album.

The goal, Macdonell says, is "zydeco that can be heard on the radio between Bruce Springsteen and Madonna. If Loup Garou's album has any impact, I'd like to follow it up by doing for zydeco what Sly and Robbie did for reggae. We could set up a studio and band down in Louisiana and walk through every young singer and accordion player there."

Adds the crusader with a smile, "That whole scene is ready to blow!"—*Jon Young*

STRYPER

Nearer, My God, to P.T. Barnum?

Stryper is one heavy metal band that escaped Hurricane Tipper (Gore) but has still drummed up its share of controversy—and has reams of press clippings to prove it. The L.A. quartet has built a career as born-again Christian headbangers, an approach many feel has a stronger spiritual connection to P.T. Barnum than to God.

Indeed, on the first leg of

its current tour to support the *Soldiers Under Command LP*, Stryper ran into considerable opposition from religious groups. "In one city—I think it was somewhere in the Carolinas—we had forty-eight churches boycotting the show," says soft-spoken drummer **Robert Sweet**. "That beats the record of Motley Crue or anyone else being picketed. They felt that we were being disrespectful to God, mocking God."

Of course, Sweet explains that the music—standard melodic metal laced with phrases like "Jesus is the

way!" or "Lift up your hearts to Jesus"—is actually a sincere effort to glorify God. "In the Old Testament," Sweet points out as if by rote, "it says, 'Make a loud and joyful noise unto the Lord,' and that's what we're here to do."

Whatever, it seems to be working: Stryper's debut EP was the fastest-selling record released by indie label Enigma (where heathen metal merchants Motley Crue and Ratt got their start). Last spring, only thirteen months after the band's first public performance, Stryper headlined a 10,000-seat

local arena. *Soldiers Under Command* climbed well into *Billboard's* Top 100 and is likely to get a boost from the video's addition to MTV, and from the second leg of the tour, whose props include an enormous cross purchased from Black Sabbath.

But how far could Stryper go without the Christian angle? "Well," Sweet says, "I think our music can stand by itself, I really do. But deep inside I know that we would never have achieved what we're achieving if we didn't, uh, take the stand we're taking." —*Duncan Strauss*



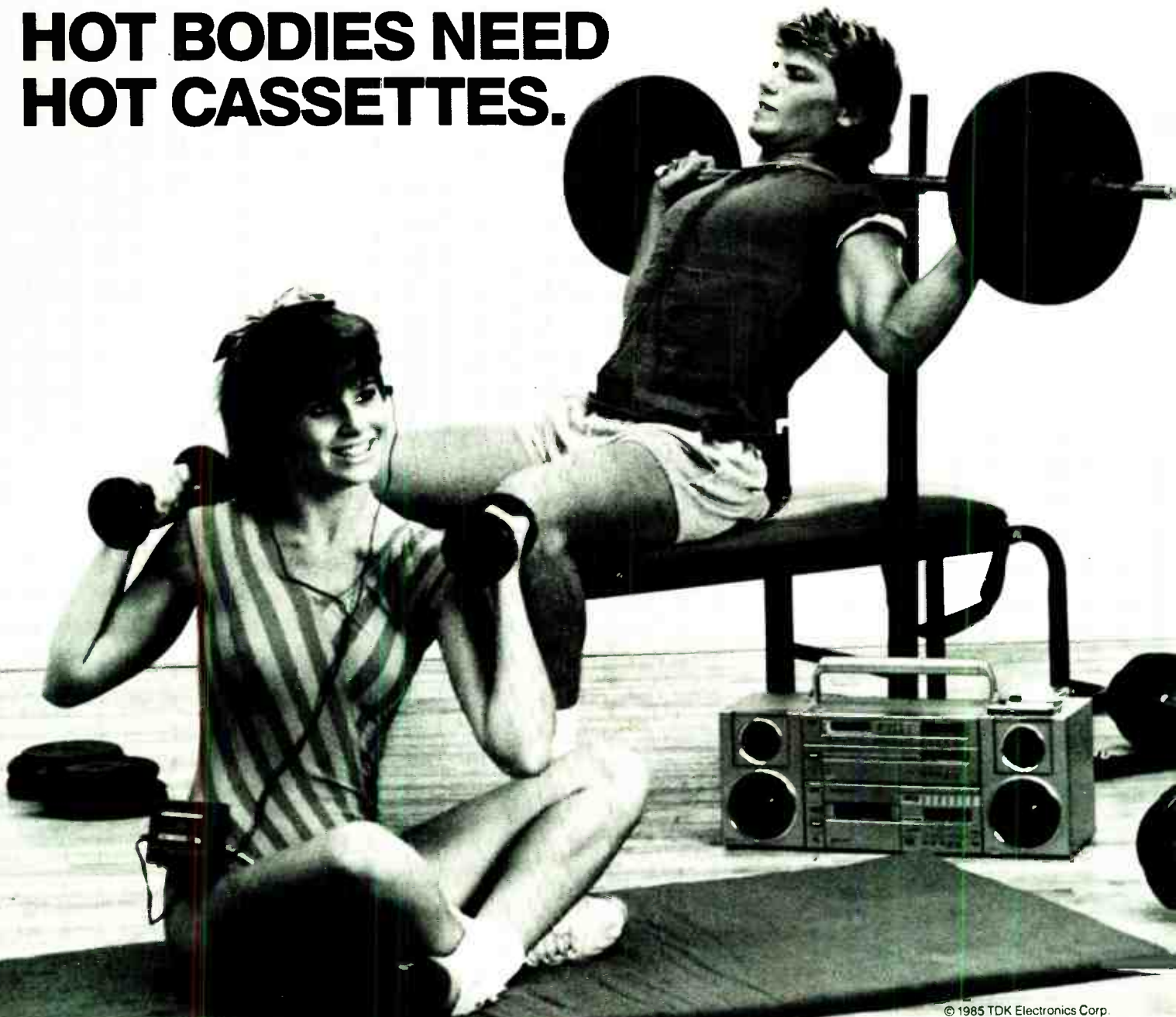
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RICKY SKAGGS
LIVE IN LONDON

P S A L M S V S. S O U L

The office of Al Green Inc. is in a one-story brick house, set well back from the four-lane that fronts the Memphis airport. Tina, Al's pretty niece, told me to sit down on the leather couch in the big reception area. "Merry Christmas," she said each time the phone rang. "Israelite Productions, Al Green Music Company." Her side of the phone dialogue was familiar music-business material: "Okay okay, he just got in, I can't do nothin' until he tells me to do something... Do you want me to forge his signature?... Okay. We'll do it now. Thanks, hon."

Thumbing a copy of *Ebony*, I mentally reviewed major events in Al Green's life. Born in Forrest City, Arkansas, in 1947, Green joined his father's gospel group when he was nine but was thrown out for listening to the worldly music of Jackie Wilson.

After his family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, Green and some high school friends formed a pop group called the Creations. Renamed Al Green & the Soul Mates, the group recorded a single, "Back Up Train." In 1969, Green was working small clubs—the "chitlin' circuit"—when he met Willie Mitchell, Memphis trumpet player and producer of hit rhythm & blues records, in Midland, Texas.

At Mitchell's invitation, Green came to Memphis. In 1970 Green and Mitchell made their first album, *Green Is Blues*, for Memphian Joe Cuoghi's Hi label. The next year they cut their first gold record, "Tired Of Being Alone," the beginning of a series of hits that would include "Let's Stay Together" and "I'm Still In Love With You"—seven top ten records in three years.

In October of 1974, with things going well for Green, a woman who'd asked him to marry her and been refused walked in on him in the bath and poured boiling grits (Memphis napalm) down his back. Green was hospital-

ized, but the woman had gone on to lock herself in a bedroom, write a suicide note and, with a pistol belonging to Green, kill herself. Green said that he had been through a religious conversion the year before, but after the grits and bullets episode he entered a period of deep spiritual study that continued even though, as Green admits, he tried for three years to deny his religious experience. In 1976 Green became a minister, but encountered so much opposition from professional clergy that he bought his own church, the Full Gospel Tabernacle in Memphis. The next year, he began recording some gospel songs and producing his own records.

In 1979, during a concert in Cincinnati, Green fell from the stage, hit a steel instrument case, and spent the next fifteen days in the hospital. "I was moving towards God, but I wasn't moving fast enough," Green said later. "It was God's way of say-

ing hurry up."

The Lord Will Make A Way, Green's first all-gospel album, was released in 1980 and won a Grammy for best gospel performance. In 1982 Green appeared on Broadway with Patti LaBelle in the acclaimed gospel musical *Your Arms Too Short To Box With God*. His most recent album, *He Is The Light*, is the first Green album produced by Willie Mitchell in nine years, and Mitchell's first-ever gospel recording. Some people say the album is Green's best since he and Mitchell parted.

Tina kept on answering the phone, throwing pink message slips on the red carpet. There was a little mound of them when, wearing a purple velvet jacket, the Reverend Mr. Green came in. We shook hands and went back to his office, where I took a seat in a leather chair beside his desk. "We'll only be ten or fifteen minutes," he said to Tina. "After all," he added to me, waving a hand at the gold records that ringed the room, "the handwriting is on the wall."

BY STANLEY BOOTH

*An Inspired Sermon
on the Mysteries of Shooting at Your
Raccoon and Seeing the Light
by the Reverend Al Green.*



"Do you remember that song?"

"What song?"

"'Handwriting On The Wall,' by the Trumpeteers."

"Yeah."

"They did 'Old Blind Barnabas.' Remember that?"

"Sure."

"Those were the first records I heard as a kid in Georgia. What was the first music that you responded to as a child?"

"Soul Stirrers."

"With Sam Cooke."

"And Reba Harris when he was with the group. Fantastic."

"When you met Willie Mitchell, he said, 'In a year and half you can be a star,' and you said 'I don't have that long. Why did you say that?'"

"At the time, I didn't feel like I wanted to take that kind of time; seemed like to me that was a long time to take. I thought it had taken too long already."

"Did you know Joe Cuoghi?"

"Papa Joe. Joe Cuoghi loaned me my first fifteen hundred dollars. Died seventy or seventy-one. Beautiful cat. He was a believer. You gotta be a believer. It's impossible to please God or anybody else without faith. Cuoghi had faith in me. I said, 'Joe, I want to, uh, sing some songs.' I was kind of shy or something, so he called Willie Mitchell and asked Willie about this kid named Al Green. So Willie says, 'Yeah, he's gonna be all right.' Joe says, 'He also wants about fifteen hundred dollars to get some lease sheets and some contracts and do some copying of something'—and also to pay his rent, by the way—and Willie says, 'Aw, give it to him, give it to him, he gone by fire.' And Joe gave me that fifteen hundred dollars, and never asked him for any since. Paid him back, too."

Our conversation touched on other greats of the Memphis music business—men like Sam Phillips, Furry Lewis, Rev. Herbert Brewster. Then to fallen disciples like Elvis Presley, and tragic figures like Otis Redding.

"So many tragedies," Al said. "So many great talents run into so many tragedies. So many obstacles. But when they are alive other people don't realize how great their talents are. All the honor and glory and magnificence comes after you're...deceased. It's a shame, that we've had so many prophets here—and when I say prophets, I mean prophets in music, prophets that play the organ, prophets that play stringed instruments. Prophets in words, prophets in deeds, prophets in many, many ways. Only to be neglected."

"Memphis is the home of the neglected artist."

"You know something? You are absolutely right. There are so many neglected people here—but you stay here and you stay here, and after a while, the thing that makes you so different and so gifted tends to wash away. Little by little, it begins to wear away into the common denominator, and people forget, and cause *you* to forget. Now if the person were to pass, oh, yeah, let's pull out all the old albums. Where before that, never. The recognition of man is very shallow. Beware when men speak well of you, my brother.

"It's so unfortunate, though. If a prophet could be taken—like Jimi Hendrix, so fabulous—I said a *prophet*, now. I hear the songs he played. That's fine, I hear what he's saying. I can just about perceive the influence. I can hear the songs Elvis sings, and I can just about perceive the influence, knowing his cook, and knowing the people around him very well, I can perceive that. And I still say, a fabulous prophet. Hendrix, Presley, Otis Redding, Sam Cooke—*what things happen to such people*. I knew Jackie Wilson, and as wild as Jackie was, I'm surprised it didn't happen twenty-five years earlier. But I myself was told to come away from that side of it.

"I met a painter, from Enid, Tennessee, named DeWitt Jordan. Brilliant. I bought two of his paintings. He don't even know, but he's a prophet. The next week, he gets himself shot and killed. And he never finishes my painting, called 'The Harvest.' He painted the mules, the cotton, the workers, the wagon, but he never got to draw the scales. I thought that was significant. He got snuffed away in a night. In a flicker of time, drunk, arguing with some guy about some girl, all of them drunk, washing themselves away in their troubles, you know? Once you're so talented, and people don't recognize it, you get a bit frustrated."

"When you wake up, do you think about God or mammon?"

"If you're called, you work to be chosen. Because many are called. So we're working now on our probation. Trying to be pleasing to God. Not boastful. Some people think I'm boastful when I drive a Rolls-Royce. But I bought my Rolls-Royce car when I was singin' the blues. And I figure, if I want to drive my car, I'll drive it. I want to live in peace, I want to write my songs, I want to minister to the needs of the people, and that's about it. Now, when I get up in the morning, whether I think of God or mammon, I think the basic question boils down to, 'Do I feel comfortable in singing rhythm & blues now, intermingled with gospel music?' To answer that question, I feel basically like David, I suppose, that I am called, I am chosen. I couldn't be honestly called and not be honestly serious. I hear the sound

of the money—jinglejingle-jinglejingle—I see the prosperity, I see the beauty, the glamour, the Grammys and the I-love-you taddadadadada. But it's hard—I mean, you can sing, 'I love you baby,' but when you're used to singing, 'Jesus Jesus Jesus' or 'Lord Lord Lord' and meaning it—it's hard to turn around and sing 'Baby baby baby, you've left me and I'm about to lose my mind.' It's trivial. It doesn't mean anything."

"You said in an interview that it was one thing to sing a song by Al Green, but 'Amazing Grace' is serious business."

"We were doing 'Amazing Grace' on this last tour. And there were people in the audience not only crying, taking a handkerchief and dabbing it to their eyes, but there were people beginning to—rejoice. And not be ashamed about it. To throw up both hands in the I Surrender position. And say Thank You. Thank you. Thank you. Now when you start getting a person in tears, then you know it's difficult to put your hand to the plow looking back. Pillar of salt, maybe.

"But there are different elevations. I'm working on my priesthood now. It's a lot of study, a lot of work. I'm glad about—several things. I'm so glad not to be one of these musicians that have been so overcome in the mind of life's up and downs as to be high and drunk on all sorts of pills and amphetamines. I'm happy about that. Because so many of my brothers and sisters have become so nauseated by the press of life until—'Gimme a Scotch and water. And another. And another.' I'm glad that my life is basic. My kids are six, five, and four, I've been married seven, eight years now—I really can't complain. I tried to complain the other day, and I got stopped."

"What did you try to complain about?"

"Everything. I really did. I woke up one morning and wanted to complain. I went to my study and wrote all the bad that had ever happened to me that I could remember. Then I thought, 'Now I'm gonna flip the page, I'm gonna write another page on the good things.' I wound up making a sermon titled 'Count Up The Cost.' What the Devil has done, compared to what God has done, can't be measured. It's not even to be mentioned. Sure, there have been some bad things, but I went to my wife, and I said, 'You know what? The cotton-pickin' good things outweigh the cotton-pickin' bad things.' And I went out and apologized to my raccoon."

"You did what?"

"Well, I had shot at my raccoon, because he keeps goin' in my incinerator, and he has cans all over my yard. He digs in there, and my wife puts biscuits and things in there—I kind of think she's putting them there on purpose, 'cause she knows he's been living out there three years. So I went out there with my pistol and went bang bang bang and he went drrdrdr toward a tree, and he finally made it. And my pet bull, Ralph—he weighs two thousand pounds, a big bull, black Angus and Brahma, with a big hump on his back—and all the animals were looking at me, they are so sensitive, they were looking at me like, 'What are you doing? Do you actually want to hurt the little raccoon?' The cows, the horses, the bull, they looked at me like, 'Thumbs down for Al.' I said, 'Will you guys just clear out of here?' Because I felt real bad, real corny about shootin' at the poor raccoon. So I called my horse, and he went the other way. I really got the cold shoulder from everybody. So I called out in the woods, I said, 'Hey raccoon! You can come back here now!' I heard him coming back to him favorite tree, and said, 'Are you people—excuse me, *animals*. satisfied now?'

"To change the subject, tell me about Willie Mitchell."

"He's like an older brother. Willie Mitchell is plain, not so sophisticated, not high and mighty. He has a Rolls Royce too, but he lets his wife drive that, he drives a '54 Chevy. You'd

Green Machines

"Once you start using a lot of gimmicks with Al Green, you lose Al Green," says producer **Willie Mitchell**. Mitchell keeps it simple, using a minimum of sound processing devices. On *He Is The Light* Al sings through the same mike he's always used: a twenty-year-old RCA DX 77. Keyboards include a Fender Rhodes, a Yamaha DX7, and a Hammond B3, miked with a Sennheiser 441 and a Telefunken U87. The album was mixed on an MCI deck using 456 Ampex tape and mixed on a 24-track MCI board.

When you're used to singing *Lord, Lord, Lord* it's hard to turn around and sing *'Baby, Baby, Baby.'* It's trivial."



never catch Willie Mitchell driving a Rolls Royce. It's not his thing. I didn't work with Willie Mitchell for nine years, because we sat down together and Willie said, 'Al, I don't know nothin' about gospel. I don't know how to cut it. I never cut gospel before.' I said, 'But Willie, I've got to cut gospel.' He said, 'Well, I don't know what to tell you. I just don't know how to deal with it.' Then when we were cutting this last LP, we did 'He Is The Light.' I'm not bragging, because I didn't write the song—Willie and Julius Bradley wrote the song—but I sang that song, and Willie said, 'Now. Now I understand what you are all about. Now I know what you're singin' about.' You need to talk with him. Good man. Sweetest man in the business."

As I was leaving his office, Al said, "What was that other song by the Trumpeteers?" "Yes, I'm Goin' To Walk..."

We finished the chorus together: "...on that milky white way, O Lord, some of these days."

After leaving Green, I stopped by the studio where Willie Mitchell was working. In that studio he had cut many great records, among them Ann Peebles' "I Can't Stand The Rain," Al Green's early hits, and the scorching blues songs of Lynn White. Mitchell, a tall, thin, dapper man, said, "I come to the studio every morning. I might stay till ten, I might stay till three o'clock in the morning. It's my life, I'm not gonna do anything else. Cutting the Al Green album was more fun than I've had in I don't know when. I never laughed so much, laughed at mistakes. But when it was over, and I put the tape on, it was a good feeling. There's no doubt about he can sing."

A few days later, I attended Sunday morning services at the Full Gospel Tabernacle. The church is not old and grand, but it was pleasant, eight-sided like a Navajo hogan, and it was filled with good spirit. In the course of his remarks that morning, Reverend Green said: "When you sing a song like 'He Cares' or 'His Eye Is On The Sparrow,' that speaks to your heart. Now I came here, an ex-blues singer—and I don't know what God needs with me. He could do very well without me. There are enough preachers in the city of Memphis alone to preach to the United States. Memphis is full of preachers, and full of little churches everywhere. And good churches and good preachers. But—'The hand of the Lord was upon me, and I couldn't help myself.' And carried me out into the midst of the church world. And set me down in the middle of the church world. And I've never seen such hatred—I've seen hatred out in the pop world, but boy, you haven't seen no hatred till you get in the church. That's what you call hating with perfect hatred. I've never been talked about so much until I came to church. When I was out doin' rhythm & blues, doin' my thing, nobody said nothing. You go to church, whoo."

The burden of the sermon was the question, "Can these bones live?" The answer was that they can live, our bones, through the resurrection of Christ. "You got that? All right.

So, you got it, I don't have to preach no mo'." At that point a woman with a clear, cutting, alto voice, seated in a pew to my right, began singing: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." I thought she was just a parishioner who had gotten into the spirit, but after one chorus she stood up, leaving three lovely little girls, and finished the song standing by the pulpit, singing with the minister. She was Shirley Green, the minister's wife, and the little girls were their daughters.

The service ended after the Reverend Mr. Green sang "Nearer My God To Thee." The last track on the latest album, it is about as fine a performance as he has ever recorded.

"Thanks for coming," he said when the service ended. "I hope this gave you something more."

"You gave me a lot already," I said. "But this morning you gave me more."



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THE LAST COSTELLO *Elvis* INTERVIEW

When Elvis Costello called his last album *Goodbye Cruel World* he wasn't kidding. After eight years he was sick of the whole pop star deal. For the rest of 1984 he played solo acoustic shows, turning his back on rock 'n' roll. 1985 was not easier. After a decade of ups and downs he and his wife Mary agreed to divorce. Relations with his non-working band, the Attractions, grew strained. It was just time to lay the whole Elvis Costello thing to rest. So he went and legally changed his name back to Declan Patrick McManus. He added one more name—Aloysius—in honor of the years lost to the character he'd created and who had taken over his life.

"I don't know why I ever changed it in the first place," Declan said. "Maybe it had something to do with actually believing the myth. It had something to do with actually believing I was *in* the wacky world of pop music. It happened too quickly to think of the implications. There was only my parents saying, 'That's a bit odd.' I can't see escaping it too easily. When people write about me there'll always be a dash between the names."

There were some positive signs. T-Bone Burnett, opening act on Costello's solo tours, became a good friend and the two songwriters collaborated on an exuberant 45 called "The People's Limousine." Better still, Declan fell in love with Cait O'Riordan of the Celtic punk group the Pogues.

I first caught up with Declan, Cait and T-Bone in London in mid-'85, where Costello and Burnett put on a two-man "Coward Brothers" show in a small theatre. Spirits were high early on, but crashed when the Attractions—alerted by sour Costello roadies—confronted Declan with the accusation that he planned to dump them and record his next (Burnett-produced) LP with American session musicians. As it turned out that

wasn't quite the case—the Attractions would be included among the players on the new record. But it would not be an Elvis Costello & the Attractions album.

"The record will come out under the name 'The Costello Show,'" Declan explained to me later. "It was almost 'The McManus Gang.' I tried to play down the whole thing. I want it to be gradually assimilated. Otherwise the trash press in England, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Sun*, will make a gimmick story out of it. I've been an oddball to them for ten years. I'll be even more of an oddball for changing from one stupid name back to the stupid name I was born with.

The morning after we met in London, history-buff Elvis/Declan and his ten-year-old son traveled to Russia for a short holiday. Unfortunately, Dad forgot about the American dollars he'd stuffed in the bottom of his bag during a U.S. visit. The Soviet customs commissars pulled out that wad and as quick as you could say "currency smuggler" yanked Declan off to an interrogation room. As the door closed the protesting songwriter saw his boy standing alone in the middle of the Ellis Island of the Evil Empire.

That mess got cleared up just in time for Declan to get back to Britain and sing "All You Need Is Love" at Live Aid.

A few months later Declan was in Hollywood. T-Bone and recording engineer Larry Hirsch came into the TV lounge at Sunset Sound to tell him they thought they had a final mix of "You're So Lovable," an uptempo number the former Costello co-wrote with new fiancée Cait. Heading for the mixing board, Declan displayed an impressive knowledge of the technical side of record making, pinpointing an elusive echo that seemed to be on the vocal track as the fall-out from an effect on the guitar. He wanted it all as dry as could be.

YOU'LL EVER NEED TO READ

BY BILL FLANAGAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVIES & STARR

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T-Bone said later, "I don't think anybody's realized yet how good he is. Because he came in on a trend that was part of a street movement in England. The guy can *really* sing, can *really* play, and can *really* write songs. For me one of the failings of his other records was that while the Attractions play the type of music they play brilliantly, to take them out of their idiom is really unfair to them. They end up sounding not as good as they really are. And most of this record was out of that idiom. This record is a break with his past. It's back to what he really cared about in music in the first place."

For the new album Declan and Burnett wrote up a wish list of perfect players, ignoring voodoo warnings about the alleged incompatibility of diverse styles. T-Bone knew his way around different music scenes, and had no regard for what NRBQ's Terry Adams calls the Musical Border Patrol. So the California Costello sessions mixed together jazz greats like Ray Brown and Earl Palmer, the core of Elvis Presley's TCB Band (James Burton, Jerry Scheff, Ron Tutt), the Hall & Oates rhythm section, Southern hotshot Mitchell Froom, L.A. session vet Jim Keltner, and those perennial Attractions, who rolled into town late in the project and played the pants off "Suit Of Lights"—a sort of requiem for Rhinestone Cowboys and other Last Year's Models. "That song's about the dubious embrace of celebrity," Declan explained. "The first verse came from seeing my father play to a very rude audience." Yes, the elder McManus was a musician, too.

The album Declan dubbed *King Of America* sounds so perfectly unified it would be easy to believe the same band played throughout. The tracks were cut live in the studio with Declan singing and playing acoustic guitar. And the players always focused on serving the songs.

Which is as it should be. Because these may be the best songs Elvis Costello—by any name—ever wrote. Declan stripped his work down to its emotional core, eschewing flashy chord structures and virtuosic wordplay. There is great delicacy in the composition, but not extravagance; skill and humor in the lyrics without showiness; deftness in the performances rather than flash. In its feeling of standing outside time and trends, *King Of America* recalls the first two LPs by the Band. Some of the album is concerned with a traveler arriving in America. This inspiration came from Declan's grandfather, a one-time ship's musician who regaled the family back in Britain with tales of New York. A less skillful writer might try to summon the disorientation of a British immigrant in the new world with images of skyscrapers or the Statue of Liberty. Declan accomplishes a lot more with the phrase, "new words for suspenders and young girls' backsides." Real funny, real evocative, and real true.

In the emotional intensity of its best songs, *King Of America* is a little like *Blood On The Tracks*. Like Dylan Declan seems to have used his recent emotional ups and downs to create extraordinary narratives. *King Of America* sounds like a record made by a man who's been through the darkest night and come out of it convinced that goodness is possible.

Which is exactly the sort of pretentious rock criticism Declan McManus hates. When we finally sat down in New York in early winter to start what became a series of interviews, the man the world still calls Elvis admitted, "Before you came over Cait said, 'Tell Bill that how you write songs is, I just say mad things and you put them down.'

"There comes a point," he said, "where you recognize one thing is what you do for a living. Then you play that game of musical chairs and charades for a while. It's sort of like, if *Goodbye Cruel World* was a fudged attempt at a full stop, this album is a colon." We both burst out laughing and he added, "How's *that* for pretentious?"

MUSICIAN: *There used to be a lot of one-upmanship in your writing. This album is a lot more generous.*

COSTELLO: *There's not an easy answer for that. I think a lot of*

the one-upmanship, a lot of the game-playing, was part of the persona. The reason I've changed my name back is to divorce myself from that. I mean, I'm always going to be known as Elvis Costello. Columbia is never going to stand for me abruptly abandoning the name. Also, I don't want it to become a *statement*, like becoming Robert Velline [Bobby Vee] or John Cougar Mellencamp. I mean, it's a simple thing. I want my life back. This Elvis Costello thing is a bit of a joke really. He doesn't exist. Except in the imaginations of people who've got the records and come to the concerts and wait for me to throw some stupid tantrum. It came out of insecurity. Some of it was real and some of it was playing with reality and some of it was *playful*.

But this record is more straightforward, there is more generosity. There's more love in this. My last couple of records were kind of dishonest, really. I think there is an honest person lurking in them somewhere. It's hard to talk about this without it coming out sounding pompous.

"Generosity" is a word that flew around a lot. It's something to do with T-Bone's influence. It's unusual to have a producer who prods at your *motive* in writing and singing the song, who keeps reminding you, "Think of the song!" Not in the sense of "Don't put strings on it" or "It'll be alright when we get the horns on." This was more like making a *method* record. There would be times in recording when we'd get stuck and no matter who we had in the studio, it would start to sound like a Tom Petty record or something: like a really good modern pop record with all the right sounds, but kind of flat. Those days when it went wrong we'd go back to the hotel and sometimes I'd suggest, "I'd better re-write it." T-Bone would go, "No, there's nothing wrong with the song. We agreed the song was good. You're not singing it right." It was always down to me. It's being generous with what you've got; giving the song enough space to actually be what you originally intended, instead of trying to turn it into something else. Which is what I used to do. With the Attractions, if we didn't get a song in four takes I'd twist a couple of things around at the last minute, and instead of it being a stroke of brilliance I'd completely fuck up.

Whereas T-Bone was saying, "Remember what the point was. Why did you write it?" People don't often do that. Producers obviously don't do that enough. It's an unusual kind of production in that sense.

Before we started, T-Bone and I would sit around and play songs, which is something you don't really do in England. His friends would come over and we'd play songs for each other. I realized that I had actually gotten away from ever sitting down like that with the Attractions. We'd known each other for so long and worked together so much I got inhibited. I got secretive about actually playing the songs. Maybe it was a lack of confidence, thinking I always had to do something better than the last record. When they're people you're always with, you wonder if they're thinking, "Oh, here he goes again, same old crap." I got to the point where I'd be mumbling the words until we got to the final takes of the songs.

But I got my confidence back through this process of playing them for new people. I read a biography of Hank Williams which said he used to go right up to people's faces and play them, like "Your Cheatin' Heart" and say, "That's a good one, isn't it?" That was an inspiration for me, that you could play a song like doing a card trick. Maybe I gained confidence from playing solo, where it became obvious that the way to record the songs was to try to make them as clear as possible.

And because I was recording with new people, when it came time to do the songs I had no way of masking it. I didn't have any mannerisms of the band to hide behind. Which I suppose is why the band didn't end up playing on much of the record. The only mannerisms were my own limitations of pitch, of voice, of technical ability. By the time we finished the record I felt more at ease with the strangers than with the Attractions. It was weird.



“I had the reputation of being able to spin a few words. So what?...It didn’t have any meaning, it didn’t communicate to people. It wasn’t how I felt.”

MUSICIAN: *How did you approach working with such a range of musicians?*

COSTELLO: We started off with the TCB Band, which was perhaps the most daunting. *Everybody* was daunting to play with, but because they were Elvis Presley’s band I wondered what they’d think of my using the name. But they were so easy-going and open-minded. It was very heart-warming. Ron Tutt made one little joke about it.

Perhaps the payoff to working with those guys—and with respect to any possible tension there might have been over the Elvis identity—was when I left the booth with only four strings left on my guitar while the band was still playing the

end of “Glitter Gulch.” As I passed Jerry Sheff he said, “That kind of reminded me of playing with Elvis.” My heart nearly stopped. I got just past him and he added, “Except with Elvis, the *ballads* were like that.”

T-Bone suggested that we don’t keep secret what the songs were about. If we were attempting to make emotionally involved records, we had to let the musicians in on the secret. So first off we’d gather the musicians in the center of the studio and I’d play them the song on acoustic guitar. I’d even explain anything that was a little guarded in the lyric. Perhaps it’s easier to talk openly to people who don’t know you well.

The Attractions played really good on “Suit Of Lights” and

we got some other things in the can that will come out as B-sides. The band that got the most tracks on the record, the TCB Band, were also the people who recorded in the first weeks, so I'm not saying any one group of musicians were better than any others. I'm finding it a lot more fun to go in and do it like this, and the results seem to be better. Next year I might do something completely different.

MUSICIAN: *When you sing "I was a fine idea"—or ideal—"at the time! Now I'm a brilliant mistake," it sounds like a sadder, wiser sequel to your old notion of "This year's model."*

COSTELLO: Yeah, it would be very arch not to have any recognition of mistakes. But not in the sackcloth and ashes sort of way that certain ex-members of the Beatles went through. You can do it with a little bit of humor. That song's an introduction to the record; a disclaimer, if you like, for everything else on there. It's not supposed to be some gigantic statement. It's not supposed to be confessional or anything, but there are things on the record that are quite true. There's no point in being coy and hiding behind a load of mannerisms any more. There's bits and pieces of a story going throughout which are not necessarily the pages of my life.

"Brilliant Mistake" is a sad song, but it's also sort of funny. It's about America and it's about lost ambition, not lack of inspiration. It's about a disappointed or frustrated belief. It's a song that people are going to read wrong. One line in it is, "There's a trick they do with mirrors and with chemicals." It means celluloid and mirrors, movie cameras. It occurred to me the other day that people will think it's a reference to cocaine. I could have written a big song about America, like Paul Simon's "American Tune." But I think "Brilliant Mistake" is more like "Peace Like A River," a personal thing in the face of a big disappointing artifice.

I've always tended to *qualify* in songs. I never wanted somebody to point and say, "What a naive position!" And I suppose in doing that I betrayed naivete in the long run. That's the irony of it in retrospect. It's only on the new record that I've written any songs that are completely straightforward. The older ones were always qualified, whether by the weight of songwriting technique necessary to write something like "The Only Flame In Town," or the obscurity, the con-

"Miracle Man" and some of the other songs that seemed to be making some sort of myth out of the wimp. It wasn't a conscious thing of me trying to make a myth out of what people took me to be; it was more an attempt to redress the balance against the weight of tasteless songs.

Two types of rock 'n' roll had become bankrupt to me. One was "Look at me, I've got a big hairy chest and a big willy!" and the other was the "Fuck me, I'm so sensitive" Jackson Browne school of seduction. They're both offensive and mawkish and neither has any real pride or confidence. Those songs on the first couple of records helped mold my *persona*, but to me there was a lot of *humor* in it. I was laughing at the alternatives. It was wanting to have another set of clichés because the old clichés were all worn out.

I had a lot of songs written before the first album came out. I wrote songs from the time I learned to play the guitar when I was about fifteen. I don't know why I did it; I didn't have any ambitions to be a professional musician. But I always wrote songs. I remember quite distinctly certain songs occurring to me when I was still working in a day job. I just wrote them down on the train on scraps of paper in my pocket—lines snatched out of nowhere. The first tape I touted around had about thirty songs on it. I think two of those songs ended up on the first album. All the rest were scrapped or remodeled. Once I had the opportunity to write an album I set about dismantling all the affected complexities of my songwriting.

When you're not working for any audience you experiment with different styles. You say, "Can I write a song like such and such?"

MUSICIAN: *"Blame It On Cain" sounds like the Band.*

COSTELLO: That was one of the ones from the time I was sitting around saying "Can I write one like this?" There was a real idea behind it, but it was very stylized, very much after the fashion of a Robbie Robertson song. In live versions I would even put in a guitar break with the same sort of modulations he would get into—like in "Just Another Whistle Stop" where Robertson goes through a lot of lower modulations. Of course, it wouldn't come out anything like I planned; it probably sounded like Bob Quine on a bad night.

A couple of the other songs on that album, like "Sneaky

"Often I wouldn't tell the Attractions what I was basing a song on. Because they'd balk and say, 'You want us to play like a band that can't play?'"

voluted writing of songs like "Kid About It" and "Man Out Of Time"—which are actually true songs.

MUSICIAN: *"Alison" stood apart from the rest of your early work. Was that an attempt to be confessional?*

COSTELLO: Well, it was as revealing as I was capable of being when I wrote it. It avoids mawkish first-person revelation. It's written into the technique of the song, the way it says, "I know this world is killing you." That ambiguity was something I used quite a lot to reinforce meaning way beyond what you'd get by saying something straight out. "Watching The Detectives" had the same ambiguous quality. I was conscious of a certain amount of lyrical technique, and one was the use of ambiguity to make a thing more potent than it would have been if I'd just said, "Look at me with all my wounds." Which makes people just go "Ugh!" and turn away.

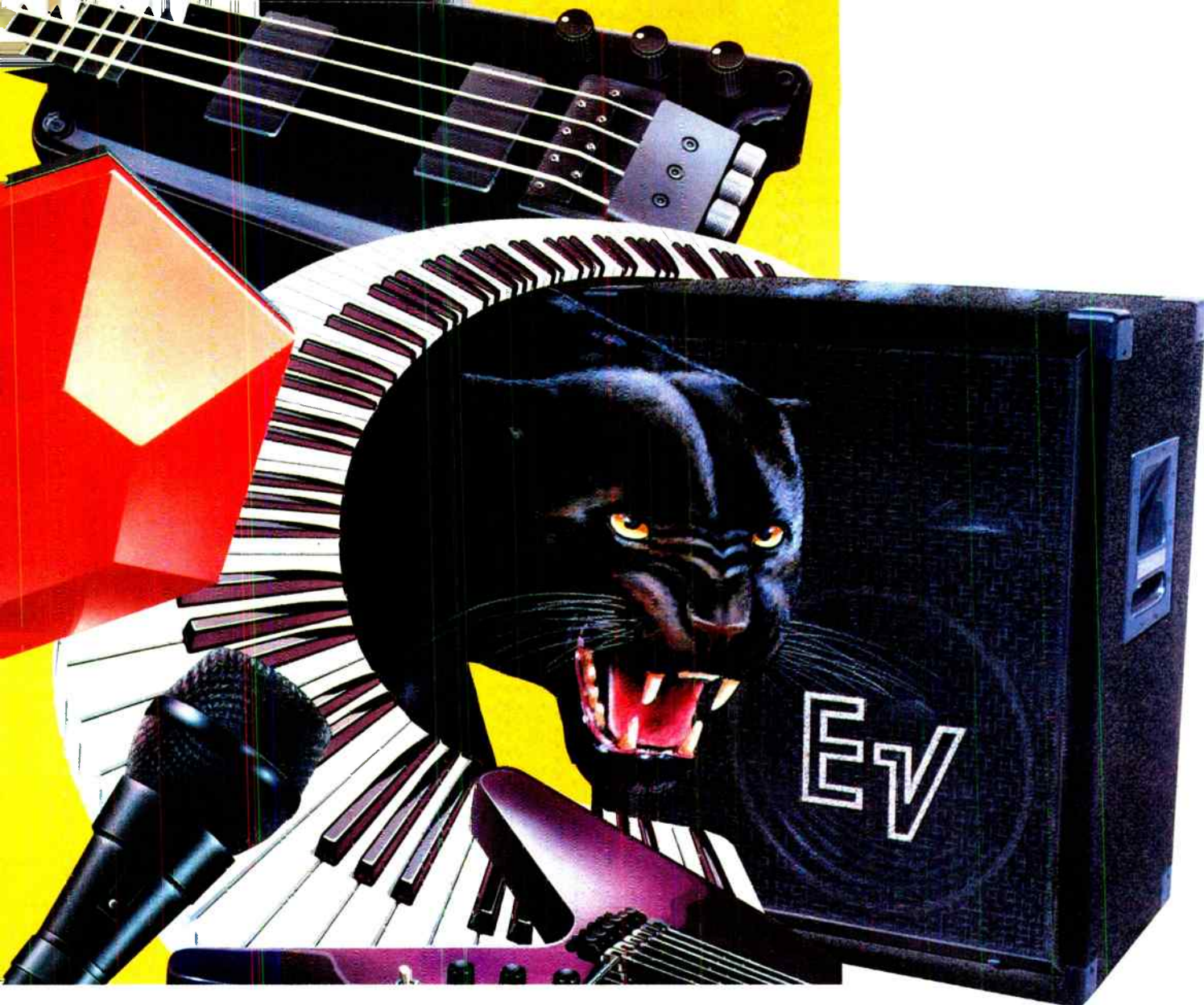
On the first two albums there's a lot of what people took to be the "wimp" and "loser" thing. Because I was really anti the posturing of rock 'n' roll, the crotch-thrusting element of it, I tried to write the opposite of that. I am really grossly offended by Led Zeppelin, not only because they're total charlatans and thieves, but because it actually embarrasses me. I grew up being bludgeoned with Deep Purple and all that heavy metal shit. That was uppermost in my mind when I wrote

Feelings," were arranged after the style of Tamla/Motown, but you couldn't tell because I recorded them with Clover, a California bar band.

We were learning a big stack of songs and they couldn't always remember the names. I wanted to do "Red Shoes" and they said, "Oh, you mean the one that sounds like the Byrds?" And I kind of blushed because it was obvious. As the song is about the compromise of age, I'd written it with something of "Turn! Turn! Turn!" in it. It needed that same kind of ringing sound. Whereas on "Waiting For The End Of The World" I had in mind the Velvet Underground. I don't think Clover had ever heard the Velvet Underground, so it came out sounding nothing like them, which was good.

I was using yesterday's records as blueprints, as all pop music is. All the good pop clichés had been written and there hadn't been any new ones for a while. I wanted to take some of the ready-made clichés that Goffin & King or Smokey Robinson would come up with and come up with my own photo-negative versions of them. Almost every song on my first album was an opposite—a diseased version—of another song. Like "No Dancing."

MUSICIAN: *When you say you dismantled the "affected complexities" of your songwriting for your first album, do you*



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Elvis the immigrant: from “New Amsterdam” to “American Without Tears”

mean because of the punk climate in England at the time?

COSTELLO: I went out and got those records, the Pistols album and the Clash records, and I thought, “This is what’s getting all the attention.” I knew that the songs I’d written would sound really precocious, I knew they had a lot of American influences and that was very out of fashion. I thought I would just get dismissed out of hand. My accent on the first record sounds much more American than it does now. I can’t get away from it; it’s just the way I learned to sing. I suppose it’s derived from the singers I really admired at the time—Rick Danko, Van Morrison, Randy Newman. It never occurred to me. That’s why Johnny Rotten was so great: he was the first actual English rock ‘n’ roll singer.

Given the opportunity to actually make a record and given the musical climate in England at the time, I thought my songs were going to sound very diffuse. So I scrapped most of the material, keeping only the songs that were the most jagged. Then I wrote a load more that were very concise. That’s where that first album came from. And that meant I was an album ahead, ‘cause I had songs that got dismantled or certain lyrics got used again. For about four years I was always an album ahead in terms of material. I always had a lot of songs on hand, which was quite useful because it meant I could discard a lot of things.

It sounds a little calculated in retrospect. But I’d been trying for three years, and I really did think I had some good songs. Some of them resurfaced later on. “King Horse” from *Get Happy* was a song I wrote when I was eighteen. “New Lace Sleeves” was written when I was nineteen. You can imagine if that song was on my first album? It’s a precocious melody. It would have sounded very precocious at the time. People would have overlooked or sneered at it.

I wanted to simplify it. I’d had the fantasy of being in a group. I really thought that I had something. I’d been banging

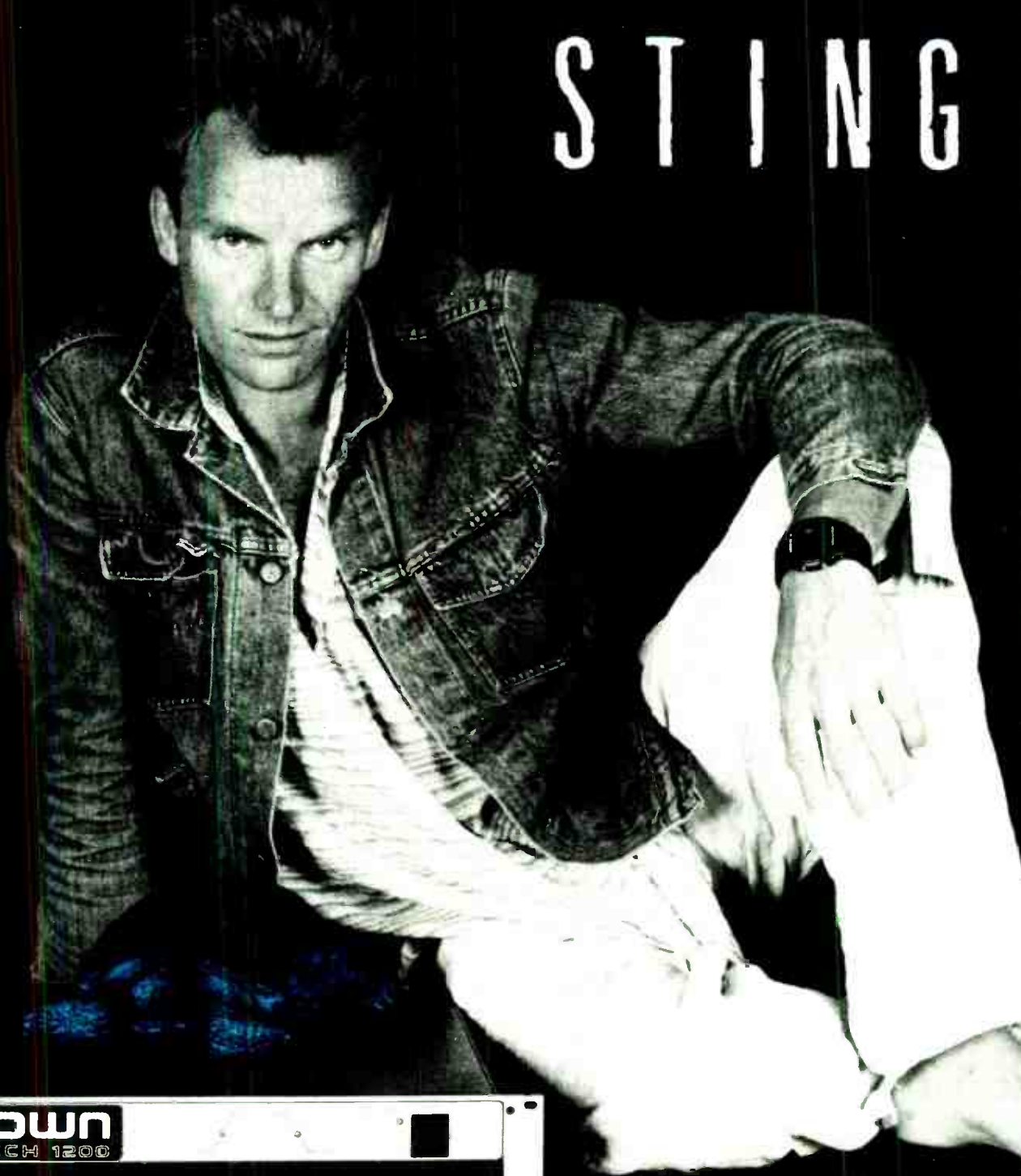
on the doors and being all self-righteous about it and obnoxious to A&R men and publishers. Then when I finally had a contract thrown in my lap by Stiff Records I figured, “Well, you better *do* something now. Better not make some gullible sounding records and let yourself down.” I was afraid it would just sound too *open*.

That self-made straitjacket became a real Frankenstein’s monster. Because along with it came that image. The image was slightly out of insecurity and self-defense and slightly manufactured by circumstances and timing and fortunate and unfortunate accidents. Public events and things that went on in my career just reinforced it and made people look at the songs in a different way. As things went rolling along it quickly got very stylized.

Suddenly you’ve got a contract and have to make a second album. I never felt pressured by deadlines, but they must be in the back of your mind. You have an audience and you have their expectations to dash or hold up or try to surpass. Also your experience gets broader through travel and experience. Where the first album came from jotting down bits of observation and fantasy on papers in my pocket, the first time I came to America I got a notebook and half the *Armed Forces* album came from just jotting down things that went past the bus window. That’s why a lot of the phrases on that album are all broken up. You could drive down Santa Monica Boulevard and five shop names could turn into a song. They were so alien, so different. It was like riding on the tube train to and from work, writing songs about the mundanities of daily life to the rhythm of the track, but on a completely different scale. It was really the same thing; it was still my job and I was still going to work. Only now I was going to work at the Whiskey A Go Go.

The songs were influenced by success, the change, the fact there was now an *audience*, and by the increasing ex-

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perimentation in my life, including drinking too much, taking drugs, and things that change the way you write only in that they slightly change the process of your *thinking*.

On the one hand I was looking out the window of a bus driving through America, going to Manhattan for the first time, absorbing all these things like a movie going by. At the same time there were the rigors of being in a professional band and working much harder than I'd ever imagined working.

I'd spent a lot of time when I was a computer operator, reading the music papers. I knew the traps of getting a mannered sound. On the musical side I was real conscious of breaking out. So the second album, *This Year's Model*, is harder than the first. That's also because it was English musicians and

On *Armed Forces* there's a contrast between the music and the lyrics. The lyrics were plucked out of things going by the window; the music reflected the monotonous, rootless music we were listening to: Abba, Kraftwerk, David Bowie.

MUSICIAN: What's an example of a phrase plucked from something going by the window?

COSTELLO: The "Quisling Clinic" in "Green Shirt." There's a Quisling Clinic in Madison, Wisconsin. Anything that sounds like it should be in quotes probably was. Those songs are actually not very well written. They're kind of fragmented. If you take the songs apart they don't actually make any sense. They don't say very much. It's more the intention with which they were said. That was my *moment* record. Probably the

"I started to deliberately do dangerous things just for the experience. I worried that I was toying with people, with myself, just so I'd have something to write about."

they played with a different attitude. The next album, *Armed Forces*, was much sweeter. As it worked out the style in itself and the *stance* became the straitjacket, not the music.

MUSICIAN: Yet the sound of the *Attractions* itself put a similar cast on the songs.

COSTELLO: I kind of liked that. Because the *Attractions* were really good musicians—a lot of the bands at the time had a lot more attitude than capability—there was the danger of it appearing to be just a super-cabaret band or something if we got too slick. So it wasn't bad. That's why I kept changing; I didn't want to refine the sound too much. We kind of filched the sound off a lot of styles to begin with. The second album is all complete rewrites. It seems a bit dispassionate to say so now. I don't want to belittle it, and equally I don't want to make it sound more important than it really was. But there were about three albums that made up the blueprint for *This Year's Model*: *Aftermath*, the first couple of Who albums and some Kinks records. It was written following the structures of those.

I liked the weirder, slightly arty punk groups, not the ones who sounded like speeded-up heavy metal. I liked early Talking Heads. I was never above nicking ideas. Because the structures of the songs—particularly on the first record—sounded sort of 60s, because of the image and the Elvis name, people never looked close enough to home to see where I was stealing ideas from. People were always looking in the back catalog of rock 'n' roll for my influences, when I was just as likely to be listening to Talking Heads. There were a lot of red herrings, a good smokescreen. We could listen to a current record, get a good idea from it, use it, and because the *Attractions* played it all differently anyway, nobody would ever detect it. Quite often I wouldn't even tell the band what I was basing a song on. Because they'd balk and say, "You want us to play like a band that can't play?" It always got warped.

The process of writing wasn't such an artistic endeavor as some of the more pompous critics would like to believe. Every record wasn't the bloody tablets of stone. In the construction it was a lot more of a hack job. But hopefully in the *heart* of the thing, in the good songs, was the true bit. I don't have any purist tradition to lean on. Every pop musician is a thief and a magpie. I have an emotional affinity for certain styles, but none of them belong to me.

Though I'd lift musical ideas from anywhere, I don't want to make it seem like the *content* of the thing was done with the same reckless abandon. There was a lot more feeling behind it, even if it wasn't pondered over. I never considered writing songs just a craft. It was like if you sat down at a desk and scrambled for a pencil and couldn't find one, you'd write in lipstick. The same thing happens with musical things. If I couldn't find a rhythm I'd borrow one and then change it.

only one I will have because that was my pop star record. That's when I was a pop star in England for about ten minutes. I was self-conscious of that. The record inevitably doesn't make any sense because we were all completely mad.

After making three records you realize you've sort of created your own tradition. Then the process becomes a little more difficult. When we got to the recording of *Get Happy* I'd written a lot of the songs on the road. We arranged them following the fashion of the previous record, except slightly more up-tempo—because things were getting more frantic. We were taking more drugs, drinking more, had a more manic attitude. That inevitably led to a more frenetic sound. We went in to record and it sounded *hideous*. Really hideous. It sounded crass, cute, everything I despised about a band with "a sound." I'd already seen a few people I admired fall into that trap and get stifled by it. So we went down to the pub and had a drink and said, "Let's do it like Booker T and the MGs." Then we went back upstairs again. It was a really crass, almost joking suggestion. But we made a whole record that was our soul album.

Again, everything was played too fast because of our attitude at the time. It wasn't in control, it was very maniacal and emotional. But somewhere in the heart of the better songs is some sort of purity.

I garbled the words and bellowed. Sometimes I was overbearing. Sometimes I got right to the point, other times I blew straight past it. "I Stand Accused" should have been a lot more from the heart, because it was the way I felt at that exact moment. But because of my condition I just bellowed it like some thug.

That album was demented, and the way it was recorded was crazy. We did it in Holland. We'd go to the cafe and see a beautiful waitress and say as a joke, "I want to possess her." "Possession? That's a good one!" I'd write a song about it on the way back to the studio, just to see if I could do it, then we'd record it. It got to be a game. It ran away with itself. Which is probably why a lot of those songs aren't very good. When you push yourself that hard, the songs come out overwrought. Yet sometimes when you're throwing things away like that, you'll write something really true to your secret feelings in spite of yourself.

Sometimes I'd exasperate the band by changing the arrangement every ten minutes. Then I'd start re-writing in the studio, saying, "What we need is a couple of extra chords here!" By the fourth and fifth albums a lot of our songs had irregular structures, so they were hard to learn. And I'd start knocking out bars and bits. We worked from very rough chord charts, and that makes it harder to adapt quickly. "King Horse" has three superficially similar-sounding verses which are all totally different in length and chordal structure. It would



(ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH SCHWARTZ)

be quite frustrating for the Attractions if I kept saying, "What we need to do is add an extra bit here!" Then I'd decide to change the whole rhythmic feel. By that point the bass parts, particularly, would be a problem. Some of the songs had too many chords for the bass player [Bruce Thomas] to get around fluidly, and then, once he'd found a bass pattern that would work around those changes, I'd halve the feel or something. Which made his job even more impossible. We'd quite frequently go through frustrating rounds of a couple of hours of finding a feel that felt right for me to sing it in, and then find that by playing it like that the song was now seven minutes long.

MUSICIAN: *When you were recording in this hyped-up state did you and the other musicians get into tugs of war over which way to pull a song?*

COSTELLO: People would get very intense about one particular thing. For instance, Steve Nieve would walk out of the studio because he thought we were playing a song too fast. Like calling time out in a football game. In retrospect, that was very effective, but at the time we weren't really aware of what was happening. It was just that suddenly one wheel had fallen off the wagon.

I probably wrote too many songs and made too many al-

bums. I think I've made twelve albums. Twelve albums is a lot in eight years. Inevitably a quarter of the songs must not be worth having *written*, let alone recorded. Just by the law of averages. [Laughs] Some people would tell you it's quite a bit more.

MUSICIAN: *Yet you have fans who hang on every word.*

COSTELLO: Yeah. In a nice way. It's obviously very satisfying to find somebody's invented their own complete meaning for a song. Some have their own personal, emotional interpretations. That's great. That's what I always wanted. Then there's the people who hunt for hidden meanings. If people are searching these songs it just shows how bad things are, 'cause some of them are just word games. Or they're really what they appear to be on the surface.

There's certain techniques of being clear or obscuring meaning or fragmenting images—just simple techniques of writing. I've got a mind for wordplay and punning. I tried to calm it down because I got a reputation for it and then every time I put one in I got criticized. Like the line in "Possession:" "You lack lust, you're so lackluster." People said, "That just proves how crass he is!" But that line made sense to me!

MUSICIAN: *T-Bone told me he's seen you knock off a lyric in minutes that looks as if it were slaved over.*

COSTELLO: Yeah, it's like some people can do crosswords, some people can do anagrams. It's just a short-circuit in the brain or something.

The only album with squandered images that could have been made more of if I'd been in a more ordered state of mind is *Trust*. There are things in there that do have a good ring to them that are not well placed in the song. By then I should have understood better how to weight the thing, how to measure it out. There are things in there I wish I could rescue. "Strict Time," which is one of those druggy, word-play songs has the line, "She was smoking the everlasting cigarette of chastity." That's about that moment when you want to kiss the girl but she won't put the cigarette down. A lot of people would have written a whole song on just that one thing, but I was trying to cram too much in. There are four or five lines that precede it that are just gibberish.

MUSICIAN: *If you'd saved that line for this album you'd have had a rhyme for the line about "the tag ends of the aristocracy."*

cracy." Do you think you've ever romanticized pain or anger in your life for the sake of your writing?

COSTELLO: Around the time I made *Trust* I felt I'd reached a cul-de-sac. I thought, "Maybe I'm living all these things out." It wasn't so much romanticizing as I thought I was starting to deliberately do dangerous things—physically and emotionally—just for the experience. I started to worry that maybe I was toying with people, with myself, just to see what happens, just so I'd have something to write about. I wrote one good line in "The Imposter," which otherwise isn't a very good song: "When I said that I was lying I might have been lying." The minute I wrote it it scared the hell out of me. It's like saying black is white. A very undermining thought, that. Doubting the things you know is the road to madness.

Rock 'n' roll has a potential for evil—far beyond any conception of it as "the Devil's music"—simply because it runs away, it belies any sort of responsibility. If you write from that perspective, you don't have any morality or responsibility.

I got frustrated at that time. After *Trust* came out I tried to take stock, take a bit more care of myself. A lot of the feeling of that album was defeated by the tenor of the record. It was very tense. It still puts me on edge to listen to it. If *Get Happy*

was manic and played too fast, *Trust* was made on the very ends of our nerves. We were completely worn out. When I pulled "New Lace Sleeves" and "Watch Your Step" out of the past I thought, "This may be the last record; I'm digging up the old stuff." I thought I was being cheap by recording them. In fact, they're two of the best songs on the record. When they came back through the speakers they made more sense, they *said* more than some of the others. They were written with a clearer head, four or five years before. Something like "Luxembourg" didn't make any sense at all. I sounded like a barking madman. It could be in Chinese! It wasn't 'til I did it solo last year that anybody knew it had words.

After a few months I got dissatisfied with *Trust*. I felt I wasn't actually speaking to anyone, I might as well have been talking to myself. I was just repeating this thing. I had the reputation of being able to spin a few words. So what? Anybody can spin a few phrases. I was given enough rope to tie myself up in knots. It didn't have any meaning, it didn't communicate to anybody, and it wasn't how I felt.

My five minutes of stardom was definitely up. I was staring at cultdom and thinking, "Is it worth wrecking my health and getting so upset for *this*?" If it wasn't important to anybody else, why should it be so important to me? I could see myself slipping into that rather pathetic, self-pitying stance.

I made the country record, *Almost Blue*, to get away from songwriting. I didn't anticipate the violent reaction some people would have to it. It became sort of a joke. We put a sticker on it saying, "This record may bring out a violent reaction in narrow-minded people." I'd completely underestimated the false and hypocritical way some people in America assume ownership of this music. People who couldn't give a damn about it actually, who couldn't name five country songs. It annoyed me because I probably cared more about the songs I was singing than all the bloody hacks in Nashville. Billy Sherrill, the guy who produced it, turns out yards of music every week. He's a complete and utter hack. Hasn't got an ounce of feeling in him.

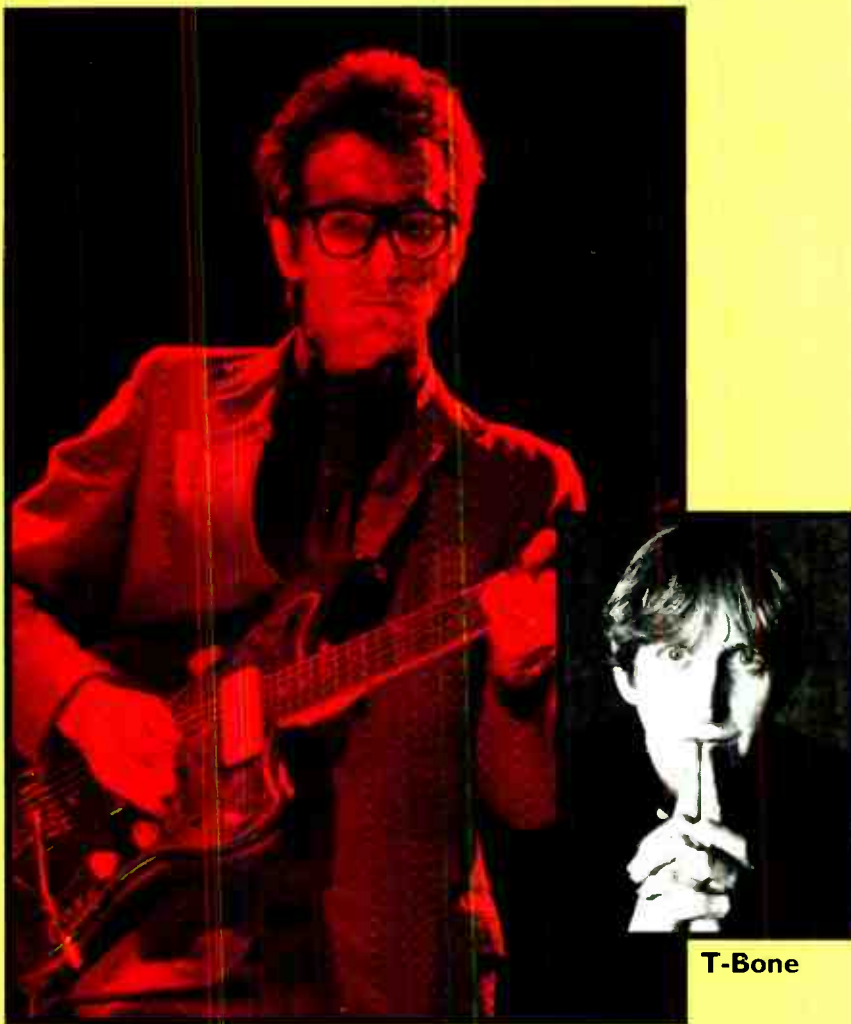
But in getting away from what I had been doing I realized it wasn't so bloody important. When I straightened up I had enough sense to say, "If you don't look after yourself a bit more you're going to be dead. Stop taking drugs, stop drink-

"I probably wrote too many songs and made too many albums. By the law of averages, a quarter of the songs must not be worth having *written*, let alone recorded."

ing so much, and behave a bit. You're really turning into a bore about being an *artist*. It's not important to anybody, and if you carry on like this you're not going to do anyone any good. You're just going to be a dead boy."

I wrote a load of songs during the time I was doing *Almost Blue*. I actually had time to consider things. I became conscious again of technique. I had a piano and I sat around and wrote almost all of *Imperial Bedroom* on the piano. Which I can't play! My father taught me a little bit when I was about seventeen. I would dance up and down the keyboard, learning chord shapes on the piano like people learn chord windows on the guitar. I developed a bit of this spidery technique and went off, making up a lot of chords that weren't strict majors and minors. I didn't even know the names of them. I'd show them to Steve Nieve and he'd interpret them, voice them better ways. I was bored with rock 'n' roll and conscious of the screaming *sound* being self-defeating. I thought maybe if I didn't scream and shout and whine so much, I might put it over a bit better. If it's right for the song, that's great. But I'd become aware of the pitfalls of bellowing beyond the point of feeling.

I'd been listening to a lot of standards, and thinking maybe



T-Bone

Playing With The Big Boys

T-BONE: There's so much prejudice about music on both sides. The English people think L.A. musicians are all phony, and the L.A. people think the English can't really play and sing. The young people think the old people can't play rock 'n' roll, and the old people think the young people don't know how to play music at all. But we've had all sorts of people working on this record and for me it abolishes a lot of the prejudices.

Ray Brown and Earl Palmer may be sixty years old, but they swing harder than any rhythm section playing rock 'n' roll today *anywhere*. And that's for real. Maybe Motley Crue pound more loudly, but if you're talking about real rock 'n' roll, swing, jump music, nobody can touch those old men.

ELVIS: There were moments of humor to keep me from getting too reverent. Once, James Burton was putting on a solo that had a lot of his ratatat. I just couldn't believe this was happening on my record. It was brilliant! Then Jerry Scheff comes by and goes, "Looks like we're goin' to dicky dicky heaven on this one." It reminded me—this was my record—stop being a fan!

The arrangements appeared out of thin air. Because the songs are written quite simply on

the guitar they fit into some quite traditional rhythm patterns. Yet because we were using acoustic bass, brushes on the drums, the touch of the thing didn't sound so stock. The way it was recorded gave it an intimacy I haven't had on record before. Even if we were playing what amounted to a country rhythm, it didn't come out sounding like Nashville. We tried to do "Indoor Fireworks" with Ron Tutt playing drums but it sounded too stock country, so we took the drum out and added an organ. Then we took out the one electric guitar we were going to have and had two acoustics. That got us closer to the song. The use of acoustic bass gave it a lot more warmth. Quite often the mood was set just by the tone of that instrument. Jerry Scheff's playing was very *emphatic* and made it very easy for me. Because it isn't a raucous album, there had to be a resolution to the playing or the whole thing would have caved in. It would have become boring and ground to a stop.

Some songs that weren't considered strong found their way onto the album because of the way they were played. When we started to record I tried to do a ballad, but I was a bit nervous. So I said, "Let's shake things up a bit," just to find our feet. So we did "The Big Light," which

is just a lightweight song about hangovers. And it was played so well! As the track on the album fades in we'd been playing the opening phrase for three minutes. I kept expecting the band to go into "Viva Las Vegas." That's one of their trademark sounds, and when they were playing that it gave me the greatest feeling. Those early sessions unbalanced my expectations of what would go on the record.

Then we had the session with Ray Brown and Earl Palmer to do "The Poison Rose." T-Bone said Ray Brown's technique of the bass would give the song a real depth. His quality of tone is so strong that you could base a tune on him.

T-BONE: That was one of the greatest sessions of my life. We were talking in between takes and I said to them, "On the plane coming here I was listening to this great Louis Armstrong/Ella Fitzgerald record. And they were just *singing* back and forth to each other. Blowing! He'd pick up his trumpet, it was just great. There was such joy in it, such courage and love. It was really heartening to hear."

And Earl said, "I don't mean to be talking out of turn, but I don't think I'd be saying anything wrong if I said that Ella was Ray's first wife." And Ray said, "Yeah, I played on those sessions." Suddenly my whole perspective on what I was doing changed. I mentioned four or five records I thought were really good and he'd played on all of them!

ELVIS: You start thinking, "How the hell am I going to impress these people?" The answer is you don't want to bother about that. After I got over my nerves I just enjoyed being in the studio playing with them. They put me at ease.

You start calling your own technique into question, but technique is the last thing you should think of. Being conscious of technique is the enemy of spontaneity for a singer. The antidote for that is a bottle of whiskey, which is how we cut "Eisenhower Blues." After we did "Poison Rose" we cracked open a bottle and everyone had a drink. That got us in the mood to do "Eisenhower Blues." On that cut we had a band that went from Ray Brown to Mitchell Froom to [Al Jarreau's] Tom Canning!

When T-Bone originally suggested using Jim Keltner on drums I balked. I regarded him as one of those names you read on California records. People get their names tainted by association. You can't help where you work. One of the problems with being the best session player is that the worst people can afford to pay you. Jim Keltner in fact had the most wild and open attitude of all the players on the record. Of all the drummers, he was the most unusual. Which really surprised me, really upset my expectations. I expected some very steady, one-style player and he was like a crazy beatnik. It was inspiring to watch. His way of playing is almost edible. You can taste it! He had a really good sense of humor.

Because the changes didn't have as many kinks in them, we'd sometimes fall into the obvious trap of grandstanding the choruses. On "I'll Wear It Proudly" I had to keep reminding myself of the reason for the song. It was Jim's idea to hold *back* on the feel—when he could be hammering it in—that made the song more believable.



“The grand hysterical gesture goes over a lot better live.”

I could write something styled after that, sort of crossed with baroque psychedelic records like the Left Banke. I had lots of piano meanderings. I sent one tune to Sammy Cahn to see if he could write lyrics for it! This sounds a bit pompous, but I had this mad notion that I wanted a link with that era. He's a bit of an old ham, but he wrote "All The Way"—and that's a pretty good song. I talked to him on the phone and he was a bit bemused by me, I think. But in the end the piece was far too meandering in structure for him to get an idea of and he sent it back. Chris Difford then wrote some lyrics for it and it became "Boy With A Problem."

I can't actually play any instrument properly. I can't read music. And here's the *New York Times* calling me the new George Gershwin. It was so ridiculous, really embarrassing. It was embarrassing to watch these people fall into the trap of their own critical conceits. And it tainted what I was doing, as if the conceits were my own! I simply liked those records. Like, "Almost Blue" is directly modeled on Bill Henderson's "The Thrill Is Gone." It's not close enough to be a plagiarism suit, but it's transparently modeled after it. I had Chet Baker in my head when I wrote it. But it's a sincere lyric, and if the tune's not totally original, there are millions of songs based on that kind of minor blues progression. You don't have to be a virtuoso to write those.

So I wrote all these songs, we rehearsed them, and when we went into the studio the ballads stayed more or less the same but the more up-tempo songs changed. Geoff Emerick, the producer, got a very different vocal sound from Nick Lowe's. I didn't change the keys, but I changed the register on about half the vocals on the record. After we recorded the backing tracks, three or four of the songs ended up being an octave lower than we'd rehearsed them. Then I started chopping up the structures of the songs. "Beyond Belief" became a different song completely. When the band came back the verse and chorus structure had disappeared and it was one continuous conversation with over-lapping vocals. *Imperial Bedroom* was the only time I ever used the studio as part of the writing process.

During the recording of *Imperial Bedroom*, Bruce Thomas of the Attractions thought I was being too obsessed with—that I couldn't write about anything but—domestic strife. But it wasn't that I was obsessed with it, it just made the strongest songs. It's not because of that subject; the saddest songs make the strongest songs. I always write better sad songs.

MUSICIAN: Do you sometimes reveal more of yourself than you intend?

COSTELLO: Sometimes when you're found out you run for cover. You don't want to admit it. There are certain songs I'd



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I’VE PLAYED IT ALL
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CHECK IT OUT.” — RAY

Gomez

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be fearful of when I sing them, either because I associated them with some time I didn't want to consider, or because they said something so bleakly personal that even the morbidity of the song didn't do justice to the darkness of the thought behind it. For "Man Out Of Time" I invented a series of stories to illustrate the point of the song. But it could have been just a simple country song based around the four lines of the chorus. When I consider what the words are and what made me think that way.... If somebody said, "I've got you now" and pinned you down and put a spotlight on what you felt at that moment, it gets embarrassing. It's too personal and it's too important to you. It's embarrassing to other people and it's just not polite. It's like farting at the table.

MUSICIAN: After the excursions of *Almost Blue* and *Imperial Bedroom*, *Punch The Clock* found you back in the pop/rock style. Why did you pick Clive Langer to produce that album?

COSTELLO: He was really hot at the time. He'd had these hits with Madness, whom I really liked: they were sort of carrying on the English pop tradition of the Beatles and the Kinks. He'd just done "Our House" and "Come On, Eileen." It didn't occur to me at the time that it wouldn't fit what we did very well.

"I did know these other chords, so I was being dishonest by not using them. 'I mustn't put a diminished chord in; people will think I've sold out!'"

We'd never gone in with a hit producer. Clive was really on me. It was the first time a producer said to me, "There's no point in me agreeing with you all the time." In a sense, Nick Lowe never really *produced* the records. He'd never question what I was singing about. With *Armed Forces* he got more involved with production *sounds*. He went with the mood of *Get Happy*; a mixing fader in one hand and a bottle of vodka in the other. We got a bit perplexed when we were doing *Trust* and it was quite obviously coming unglued. We were looking at each other in the studio like, "What are we *doing*?"

But *Imperial Bedroom* with Geoff Emerick had been an actual disciplined attempt to make a *record*, as opposed to just going in and recording songs. That's when I realized what I really did for a living. Then with *Punch The Clock* I promptly forgot it. I went back to making records like a pop singer. It was just dumb. It was daft. I had written some good songs that didn't make it on there because Clive said it would make the album too slow and morose. He said, quite rightly, that there was no sense in repeating *Imperial Bedroom*.

Punch The Clock was the first time the band did backing tracks and over-dubs. I don't think there were any live vocals on the record. It contradicted everything I'd believed about going in and playing your songs and getting performances. Some of the things worked within the framework of 1983 English pop music. Like "Every Day I Write The Book," which is kind of a hack pop song. It doesn't have any feeling behind it. It's just an exercise in writing that sort of bad Smokey Robinson song with all the tricks of the trade. And a few of the songs that were kind of heartfelt got steamrollered by the production juggernaut. Like "Mouth Almighty." When I did that solo people were amazed it actually sounded like a song instead of just the confection on the record.

MUSICIAN: "Mouth Almighty" appears to be a true, autobiographical song.

COSTELLO: Yes, but it was robbed—it doesn't have the sound of it because of the bad production. I followed all the worst musical aspects of it, trying to make it big and blown up when the song is quite confessional. After the critical conceits that greeted *Imperial Bedroom*—the stuff about George Gershwin—I thought, "This is stupid. I'll just write the first thing that comes into my head." So I wrote "The Element Within Her" which is just a complete load of gibberish that I wrote in three

minutes. It's like a Paul McCartney song—just a load of phrases that sound nice and make about as much sense as....

MUSICIAN: "The movement you need is on your shoulder."

COSTELLO: Yeah. There are little bits in a couple of the songs that make some sense, but over all they were molded into whatever we needed to make the album work as a pop record. "Let Them All Talk" doesn't mean anything at all. "The Greatest Thing" sort of means something, but the arrangement toppled it over.

MUSICIAN: "Love Field" is a good song, but as always you had to stick in a twist. The whole song's going in one, positive direction in its description of a couple and then you say, "She's so tense but it's never mentioned."

COSTELLO: I think that was an insecurity of mine. Somebody—I think it was Morrissey—said, "I could never write a love song without having a get-out clause in verse three." There was something of that in a lot of my writing. There was always the unwillingness to be vulnerable. There was a kind of perversity in the writing and also a lot of cloaked meaning around that time. I didn't want to say things any clearer for

personal reasons. And therefore they are actually bad songs in a sense, because they are guarded about things it would have been better to be overt about.

There's probably four real songs on that album. "Shipbuilding" which wasn't written for the album as such; Clive handed me the music and I went away and wrote that. "Pills And Soap" which I'd recorded the Christmas before but included on that album. "Mouth Almighty," which did have a real idea behind it. And "The World And His Wife."

It's inevitable you get more self-conscious as you go on. It's just not possible to go around pretending to be a primitive. I turned my back on writing rock 'n' roll songs for a couple of years because I thought it was false. I *did* know these other chords, so I was being dishonest by not playing them. "I mustn't put a diminished chord in, people will think I've sold out!" You know that kind of shit? The inverted snobbery of rock 'n' roll.

On *Goodbye Cruel World* I had another moment where I thought I wasn't going to do it much longer. That's the only time I ever wrote by going and sitting in an office. I put an electric grand piano and an amp and an acoustic guitar in there and deliberately didn't let myself write any place else. Usually I collect fragments of songs—verses, titles, lines—over a period of time. I might write a song in ten minutes, I might write it over two weeks. It's like a water tank filling up; enough time goes by collecting phrases and fragments and at some point songs start coming out. The only time I ever stopped the process was when *Goodbye Cruel World* was coming up. I didn't let the songs come out. I deliberately stopped myself. Just to see what would happen if I waited and then went and sat in a room and let it all come out in a rush. I didn't know if it would make it better or worse. Some of the songs on that record were pretty good. As songs they're much better than the ones on *Punch The Clock*. It's also the worst record I ever made. *Punch The Clock*, for all I don't like about it, is the record we went in to make. When we went in I was going to make *Goodbye Cruel World* almost a folk record. Clive and Alan really didn't want to do it. I said, "I don't really know who else I can ask. Will you do it anyway?" Clive said the songs didn't fit their style of production. I said, "I know that, but you do know how to put things on tape. Just sit there and do that."

But their production process is completely at odds with

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“There was a lot of the wimp or loser thing.”

Pump It Up

“Mostly I played a little Martin,” Elvis says, “number 00018. I also played a D28. I only played electric guitar on the bridge of one song, ‘Lovable.’ I played T-Bone’s modified National Electric. It’s a dirty-sounding guitar with a funny pick-up. The strings are so heavy it sounds like a six-string bass,” which saved Elvis going into the next room to grab the Fender six-string bass he’d been planning to use. For guitar strings E.C. used Martin Marquis mediums.

“The reason I didn’t play electric guitar on the album,” Costello fumes, “is because I had my ‘54 Telecaster stolen in Australia on the last solo tour! If anybody gets irate and feels cheated that I don’t play raucous rock ‘n’ roll on this album, get a gun and go shoot the guy who stole my Telecaster. It was a bit wasted on me. I hope whoever stole it is a better guitarist than I am. If he plays worse than I do I’ll feel *really* bad about it. It was stolen out of a hall in Melbourne. If anybody down there sees a ‘54 Tele with a notch out of the neck, it’s mine!”

But watch out, Chet, E.C. just got himself a Gretsch Country Gent. On “Little Palaces” Elvis finally got to play that Gibson F-5 mandolin he bought down in Nashville.

King Of America was recorded with Telefunken 251 microphones on the voices and guitars. Then things got really ecological: no synths, virtually no electric guitar, lots of acoustic bass.

that. We play live; but they assemble things. Halfway through they talked me into doing *some* songs their way. Clive said, “Well, there’ll be a contrast between the songs.” Then we started doing things like “I Wanna Be Loved” and “The Only Flame In Town,” which was a perfectly good 6/8 R&B ballad I’d written with Aaron Neville in mind that we jazzed up into a hyperactive pop record—a second division “Every Day I Write The Book.” It actually made the song sound less sincere. It was nice on the radio, but it didn’t have any feeling at all.

And I let the keyboard parts get disproportionate to the strengths of the melodies, the weightiness of the arrangements, because Clive’s production ethic leans heavily on keyboards. The actual nuts and bolts of recording became longer hours. Instead of doing it spontaneously it became a crafted thing. I was guilty of losing patience with being in the studio so long. A lot of strange sounds that I didn’t like crept onto that record. Some of the keyboard things didn’t make any sense at all. Like on “The Deportees Club,” a funny, ranty song that suddenly had all these serious synthesized keyboards. It was that problem of a sound being made obsolete by the next synthesizer to come out three months later. That record is identifiably the 1984 DX7 synthesizer. It gives a bit of a “flavor of the month” aftertaste to the whole record. You can’t hear any of the songs!

There are some good lyrics on that album but some of the songs aren’t well constructed and they’re very badly arranged. But I didn’t let Clive and Alan do their job and without wishing to, they obstructed me simply by being the wrong choice of producers. I should have been braver and done it myself. It was a loss of nerve.

One of the most disappointing things was that I knew about my failure of nerve on *Goodbye Cruel World* before it came out. Because immediately after recording it I went on the road solo and discovered exactly what was wrong with every track that failed on the album—which was almost every song on it. That made it even more disappointing ‘cause there was no way I could stop the record coming out. Before I recorded the new album I made sure I went out and did all the songs live, finding out how far I could push them and how much I could lean on them.

MUSICIAN: *The songs from Goodbye Cruel World that you introduced on your first solo tour went over great. “Peace In Our Time” was a big crowd-pleaser.*

COSTELLO: See, I don’t like that as a record and I don’t like that as a song. I wrote it sincerely, but it’s another of those things where I was susceptible to audience reaction. There were all these compliments handed out for “Shipbuilding” and “Pills And Soap” and it was like, “Well, here’s something I’ve got to continue to do.” That song is tainted for me by the presence of those two other much better songs.

Clive and I disagreed about what records are supposed to be. He doesn’t like things to be too personal and real. “Home Truth” is an unpleasant, uncomfortable song. It’s not written in any cute way; it’s quite straightforward and quite pathetic in the true sense of the word. He didn’t like that very much. He didn’t want me to record it. And of course I had to. I should have stood up for the songs more if they meant that much to me, and the simple truth is some of them are not that good. Some of them are a load of wank.

MUSICIAN: *People assumed “Worthless Thing” was an attack on MTV because of the line about shoving this cable down our throats. It seemed to me a lot bigger than that.*

COSTELLO: Yeah, that song’s about why I couldn’t write rock ‘n’ roll songs anymore. The opening line (“How many times can you jump out of the cupboard before someone gets suspicious or someone gets discovered”) is about the disproportionate importance placed on rock ‘n’ roll, particularly in America. It’s about the Elvis Presley industry, all that bloody nonsense, how it’s all blown up, including the stuff I’ve been



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party to. It's a bit of a write-off. "Sour Milk Cow Blues" is another one. It's a bit of an update (on Presley's "Milk Cow Blues Boogie"); that world has turned sour.

I said I used to write the songs from looking out a window. Now I was writing from looking at the television, the stupid things that jump out at you but aren't worth a whole song. You see a preacher with his hand up saying he'll heal you through the screen. You could write some witty singer/songwriter song about that. You could see some people I really like, like Randy Newman or Loudon Wainwright, doing that. But so what? That's a trap in itself. So I just dashed off a lot of these things, but in the end the record didn't cut it musically and the whole thing was a waste.

I always had this credo of simple performances; that a song that was a real *song* could be played on the piano or guitar and didn't need a symphonic production extravaganza to make it live. That really brings me to the current record. It's to T-Bone's credit as a producer that he pushed me toward thinking like that. We sat and prepared and talked a lot about those things. Not to get fraught about the artistic creation, but to keep reminding myself what records I really like, to not get too affected by pop.

I've lost interest in pop music. Most of it bores the pants off me. You get to the point where you're looking for something new to like and you convince yourself you love a record that's a load of crap. There's nothing wrong with listening to the same record twice, whether it's five minutes old or twenty years old. I've lost my love for the neurosis of the pop process. My new songs are clearly written; there are less obscure meanings in them. There's less trickery in the words. It's recorded and arranged in such a way as to put the voice and the song absolutely first. I just tried to talk more straight.

MUSICIAN: Certainly on "Indoor Fireworks" and "I'll Wear It Proudly" all artifice seems to have been scraped away.

COSTELUS: That's as clear as I'm capable of making it now.

Maybe I'll get more clear, but I think any more than that might put me in danger of becoming the very thing I said I abhorred: the "Fuck me, I'm sensitive" school.

Once I discovered ambiguity and irony could be strong techniques, I started thinking that *obscurity* was as well. You start kidding yourself that a song is really evocative, and it's just muddled. If the music isn't clear it *isn't* evocative.

I never thought of it like "This is my quest! I must be clearer!" But that's the way it came out and maybe it's time to stop messing about and hiding behind things. One of those two songs is very sad and one's very loving, and that's as clear as I could possibly make them now.

"Indoor Fireworks" has technique in it; it's almost one of those metaphor songs like "The Only Flame In Town." It's just technically better written, regardless of whether it's more important to me.

MUSICIAN: What makes "Indoor Fireworks" such a better song is that with "Only Flame"—as with Joni Mitchell songs like "Electricity" and "You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio"—the metaphor seemed more important than the content.

COSMANUS: By the middle of the second verse of "Only Flame in Town" you start to think, "Oh god, that's a good one," "Aw, that one's a bit dodgy!"

MUSICIAN: Whereas in "Indoor Fireworks" when you say, "I'll build a bonfire of my dreams and burn a broken effigy of me and you," the fact that it extends the fire metaphor is completely secondary to the emotion.

McMANUS: I tried to write one that had some chill in it. Like "May Ye Never Be Alone." I was aiming up *there*. Whereas when I wrote "The Only Flame In Town" I was trying to write like Allen Toussaint. I was thinking, "How tough does Hank Williams ever get?" He didn't ever shy away from the matter. If you're going to be true to yourself you've got to say, "Could I say it as cold as Hank Williams did?" You have to keep reminding yourself how strong the really strong songs are. ☐

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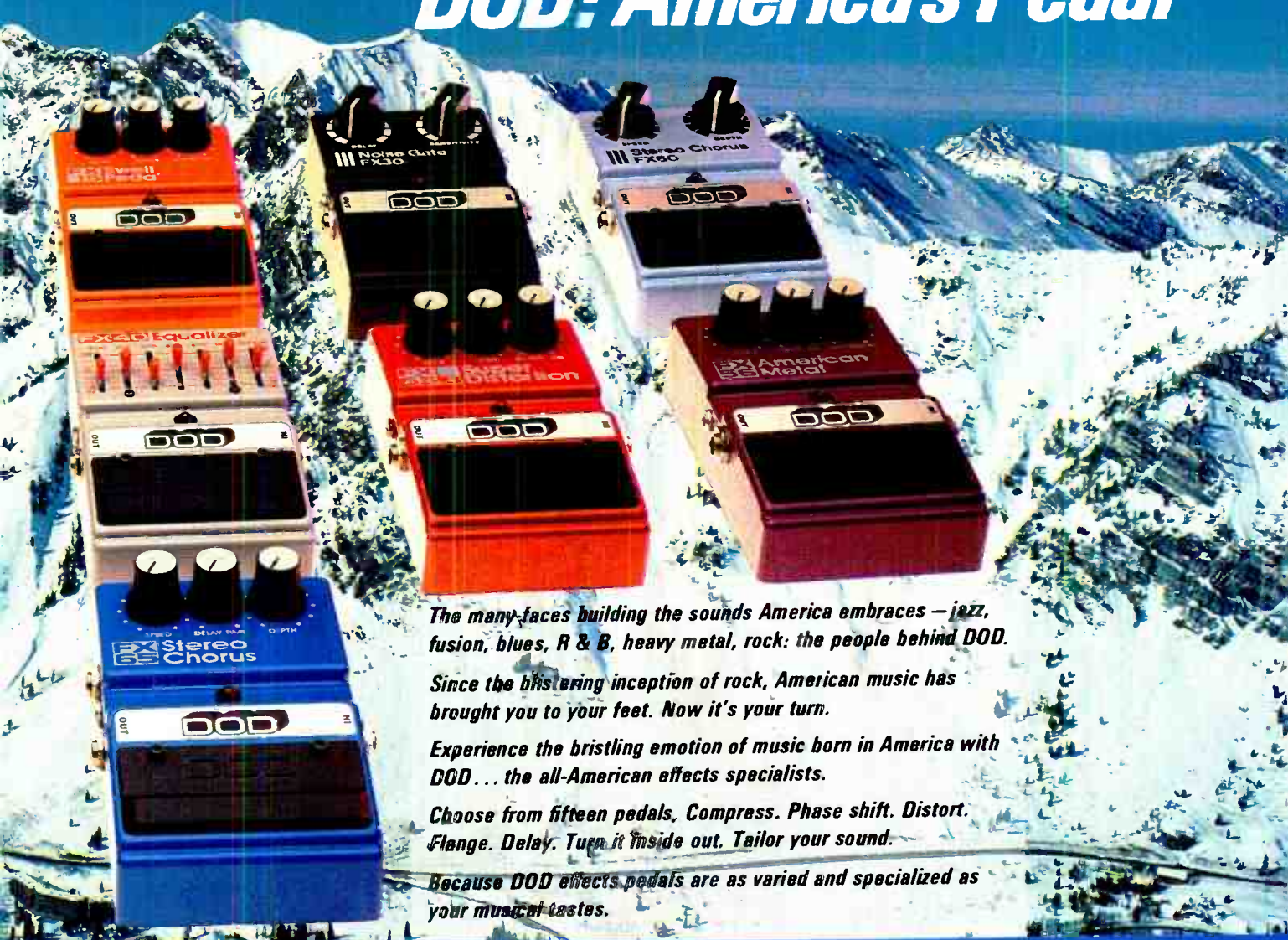




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Omar Hakim 60
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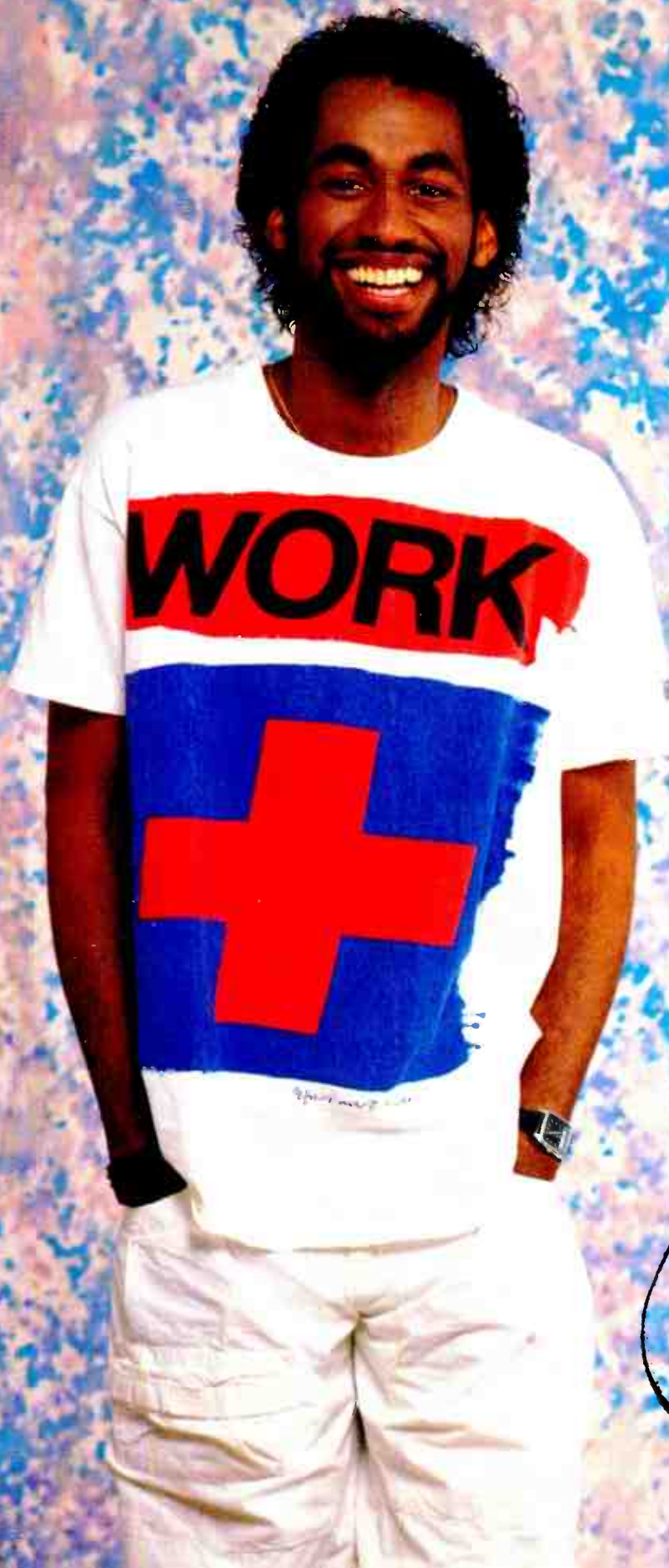
Electro-Drums '86 72
A consumer's guide to the second wave of electronic drums.


David Van Tieghem 76
Bopping whistles and whiffle bats, banging pots with a hip avant-gardist.

Richie Hayward 78
From Little Feat to Armatrading to Robert Plant, a kid from Iowa does good.

Jimmy Maelen 80
Who says throwing light bulbs into a bucket ain't real percussion?

MUSICIAN
WORKING





Omar Hakim. Perhaps—if you missed Sting's solo album and his movie, or if you stopped listening to Weather Report when Jaco Pastorius left—you don't recognize the name. But surely you know his drumming.

This tall, dark and handsome native of Queens, N.Y. only just turned twenty-five years old in February. And his credits in the past couple of years alone include Sting's *Dream Of The Blue Turtles*, Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms*, Bryan Ferry's *Boys And Girls*, and David Bowie's *Let's Dance* and *Tonight*. Not to mention Weather Report's *Procession*, *Domino Theory*, and *The Sportin' Life*. On top of all that, Omar won a Grammy in 1983 for composing George Benson's 1982 instrumental hit



"Being With You." More recently, he recorded several tunes on Philip Bailey's new album *In A Grand Manner*; one song on Weather Report's next; did entire LPs with John Scofield and Sergio Mendes; and has been working on his own debut album, due out in the fall—if the demand for his services lets him finish it already.

Through all those heavyweight, high-pressure gigs, Omar has met every challenge by consistently playing with power, finesse, taste, invention, distinction, and felicity, whatever the genre, whoever the boss. No wonder he's one of the most in-demand drummers in the world today.

But how does he do it? Well, he's a heckuva nice guy, as Sting's movie *Bring On the Night* indicates, and as an interview with him confirms—he's mellow, warm, good-humored, with a ready and winning smile. As the movie also shows, he's obviously a helluva drummer—a fact made overwhelmingly apparent in the live medley of "Bring On The Night" and "When The World Is Running Down." You know, that extended jam where the whole band becomes a sort of

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STAR BECAME POP'S HOTTEST STUDIO PROPERTY
WITH STING, BOWIE, FERRY AND STRAITS

BY MICHAEL SHORE

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS CUFFARO/VISAGE



furiously spinning catherine wheel with Omar at the heart of their centrifugal force, rolling all over his kit in a firestorm of impossibly accurate polyrhythmic ecstasy, somehow never missing a supersonic beat as he accelerates and accelerates past the breaking point—and then accelerates some *more*. Live, I've seen this section of Sting's show bring audience members to a screaming pitch of orgasmic fulfillment. Even in a movie theater, people hoot, holler and applaud.

But there are plenty of accomplished drummers and nice guys to go around, aren't there? So what's Omar's secret? Is he some sort of genius, or just incredibly lucky? Actually, it's a little of both. Omar's genius lies in his open-minded philosophy; and he's lucky enough to have been born into his life's work and have thus gotten a phenomenal head start at a very early age.

"It all goes way back to my childhood," says Omar of his open-mindedness, *and* his luck. "My dad used to play trom-

bone with Ellington, Basie, Lunceford. So there was always music around the house. But my dad *never* laid any of those jazzman trips on my head, like 'Don't you go listenin' to none of that rock 'n' roll.' My dad was always real open—if it was quality, he dug it. He loved to hear Marvin Gaye sing as much as I did. So I think I got my attitude from him. As far as listening and playing, whatever gig it happens to be—rock, funk, fusion, jazz, reggae, whatever—I'm gonna approach 'em all on the same level, with the same effort and concentration and preparation. That's important to me.

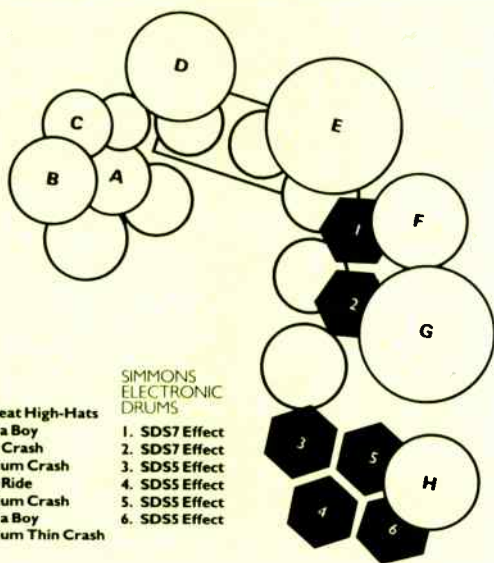
"It was also born out of necessity, of course—I could never afford to turn down a gig, for economic reasons and other reasons. There are so many great musicians on the New York scene, just to survive I had to take anything I could get. But then I found that the wider range of gigs I took, the wider range of stuff I was known for. It ended up building itself."

Growing up in the home of jazz trombonist Hasan Hakim, Omar was obviously destined to play music. But it wasn't until the five-year-old Omar's mischievous nature surfaced, at the home of neighborhood drummer Buck Jones, that he knew he'd be a drummer. "For whatever reason," Omar recalls with a slightly embarrassed grin, "the adults had to leave me and Buck's son Sal home alone. Before he left, Buck told us, 'Whatever you do, please leave the drums alone.' Now, you do *not* tell that to a couple of curious five-year-olds, right? I mean, I didn't know what drums *meant*. The minute he left I grabbed Sal and said, 'Where's these drums?' It wasn't long before we each had a stick and were banging away. Soon, Sal sat down and just watched *me* play—I guess that's when the drummer in me was really born. But I made such a godawful racket that we didn't hear his dad come back in the house downstairs. So he busted us, but he later said, 'Well, Omar, if you *must* play the drums, you'd better learn the right way.' He took out a pair of sticks and a practice pad, gave them to me, and explained some basic rudiments. From there, I've just kept at it."

For his sixth Christmas, Omar got his first drum, a black wooden Ludwig snare. He still has it today, and says it's the one he played on Sting's "Children's Crusade." He immediately began listening a lot more closely to his father's record collection—Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Elvin Jones with John Coltrane (in whose home young Omar also got into mischief), Philly Joe Jones with Miles, Max Roach with Clifford Brown—and picked up pointers and inspiration from occasional houseguest Blakey. Early in grade school, he took his first formal lessons from neighbor Walter Perkins (a sadly underrecognized player whom I once saw do ingenious things simply choking a single cymbal with Sun Ra's Arkestra in New York).

"But my most important teacher," he says, "had to be Clyde Lucas, another neighbor who played with my dad a lot. I didn't take many lessons from him, because what he showed me in three or four lessons was so potent. He taught me things like proper breathing and body posture, how to maximize body efficiency for endurance—concepts which, to me, can be applied to any instrument, and which are even more fundamentally important than any rudiments to a drummer."

By age nine, Omar had his first mongrel/Brand X kit, and had begun sitting in with his father's band, the Nomads, at neighborhood club the Village Door, playing bop and "hip versions of popular tunes of the day. We were billed as 'Hasan and the Nomads featuring Omar, the nine-year-old drum sensation.' My dad was really into it, he made up posters and everything, but I thought it was so corny and embarrassing!" Two years later, when Clyde Lucas had his own gigs at the Village Door, Omar sat in with his former teacher, too. At twelve he began playing rock and R&B covers in local bands with friends and neighbors—"and, just as my dad never told me not to listen to rock or soul, he never told me not to *play* them, either. I always think that if a jazz musician looks down



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Though he began a Ludwig man, these days Omar swears by his two Yamaha Recording Custom Series kits (one blue, one brown)—"They're *built*, and they sound great." His full kit (he only uses part of it with Sting) includes 10x7, 12x18, 13x9, and 14x10 double-headed mounted toms, 14x14, 16x16, and 18x16 floor toms, 22x14 bass drum, and one of a variety of snares—14x7 Yamaha Recording Custom wood, 14x5½ Gretsch wood, 14x6½ Yamaha Recording Custom brass, or a stock 14x5½ Ludwig Super 400 chrome. His cymbals are A. Zildjian, and with Sting they include, starting on the high-hat side: 14-inch Quick Beat High-hats, 16-inch China Boy, 13-inch Thin Crash, 19-inch Medium Thin, 22-inch Heavy Ride (or a 20-inch K. Zildjian Ride), 17-inch Medium-Thin Crash, and 22-inch China Boy. Heads are Remo's good ol' Ambassador, in clear or, lately, ebony or silver coat ("My roadie thinks they look mmmmmahvelous.") Sticks are all Vic Firth; 2B or 5B with Sting, 5A or 7A with Weather Report. All Omar's hardware is Yamaha 7-Series, although he also is using Drum Workshop DW 5002 and Tama double-bass pedals (to get twin-bass effects on a single snare drum; it's featured in that high-velocity jam between "Bring On The Night" and "When The World Is Running Down"). He also owns a Yamaha RX-11 drum machine: "I bring it to studio gigs to use instead of a boring old click-track for the sake of variety. I've never been afraid of drum machines, there is a place for them, and if they're used in a musical way, then fine. In fact, for awhile I was so happy they came along, because I'd always be getting frantic phone calls from engineers saying 'Come on over and overdub some tom and cymbal quick, these damn drum machines don't sound right!' The machines must be getting better, because I don't get many of those calls anymore."

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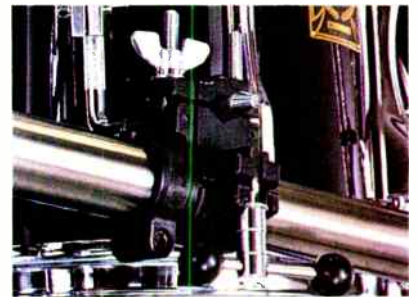
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his nose at more popular music, it's only because he can't play it and is afraid of it or something."

At age fifteen Omar went out on his first tour, along with another friend, guitarist Eddie Martinez, backing a singer named Jae Mason. After a summer on the road opening for the likes of Sly Stone ("At that time in one of his comeback periods, after the *Fresh* album") and Bruce Springsteen ("He was the same then as he is now—totally energetic, totally obsessed with what he's doing, a fantastic showman") they recorded an album that went nowhere (Omar doesn't even recall the title). But between his already near-legendary neighborhood rep (while he attended Manhattan's High School of Music and Art, the principal stopped him once and said "Well, if it isn't the drum sensation himself!"—he'd been at one of those Village Door gigs), and the further word-of-mouth spread by Mason's producers and managers, Omar landed lots more lower-level studio and road gigs. "I backed unknown female soul vocal trios who opened for the Commodores and stuff," he remembers, "but mostly, I learned the difference between playing live and in the studio. Mainly, you can't waste time in the studio, because there, time is money, and in the studio you don't have to play the drums for volume, you play 'em for tone. It took a while for me to get used to hearing myself on tape and through headphones, but it wasn't too long before I was getting everything down in three or four takes, which isn't too bad." Especially for a fifteen-year-old.

Omar also formed a band with some friends at age fifteen, called Harlem River Drive. They recorded one album for Arista with Eddie Martinez on guitar; later, the funk/jazz combo would be joined by bassist Marcus Miller. By 1975, the sixteen-year-old Hakim was playing around New York with flautist Bobbi Humphrey and keyboardist Weldon Irvine—whom Omar calls "a school unto himself. Players like Bernard Wright and Miller passed through his bands. That was when I began getting into fusion music—Mahavishnu, Weather Report, Return To Forever...Billy Cobham and Lenny White and Narada Michael Walden became my idols." It was after an Irvine gig at Manhattan's Village Gate that then-Weather Report drummer Walden came over to Omar and raved about the latter's drumming: "I tell you, I freaked."

Omar graduated High School of Music and Art in 1977. After more local gigs with Bobbi Humphrey, he spotted a *Village Voice* classified ad from Bruce Springsteen's former manager, Mike Appel, who had a singer, Arlen Gale, and a deal with ABC Records. "We toured with the Doobie Brothers and Rory Gallagher, but the LP went nowhere and they couldn't get a follow-up together. Appel wanted to groom Arlen as his new, high-tech Springsteen, and Arlen was talented, but it was just the wrong direction for him I guess. So I spent 1978 touring with Hugh Masekela."

In 1979 Omar began a two-year stint with funk trumpeter Tom Browne. While Omar shared the drumming on Browne's second album with Buddy Williams (Williams played on Browne's hit "Funkin' For Jamaica"), Browne did record Omar's first-ever copyrighted tune, "Dreams Of Loving You." As the B-side of "Funkin' For Jamaica," it enabled Omar to buy his first car. Omar became Browne's tour drummer, and played on all of his 1980 *Love Approach* LP. Then he drummed on the debut album of Browne's fellow GRP Records artist, guitarist Bobby Broom. Through GRP Omar met vibist Mike Mainieri, who landed Omar a tour of Japan with guitar whiz Kazumi Watanabe, and subsequent local and studio dates with Mainieri's own band.

In 1981 Omar met and played sessions with David Sanborn, who then introduced him to Gil Evans. "I toured Europe with Gil's big band," says Omar, "which at the time included Lou Soloff, Hiram Bullock, Howard Johnson, a lot of great people. It was a great band to work with before going to Weather Report. They were both very similar experiences: very avant-garde and free and covering a wide range of styles, but al-

ways with some sort of intuitive pulse to it, an organization, a flow. Never hectic, as free as it could get—always together, you know? Gil exerted a very *subtle* control on that band—he led without appearing to lead, if you know what I mean. It's hard to explain, but somehow he'd get us to just let the music come, and it worked."

Back in the USA in 1982, Omar recorded on Sanborn's *As We Speak* LP. Then came a tour with George Benson, who subsequently recorded Omar's "Being With You," something that prompted Omar to think seriously about polishing his guitar and keyboard skills and recording an album of his own already. He even landed a demo-recording deal with Warner Bros., and was midway through it when fate intervened in the form of a phone call.

"I got home one night," he remembers, "after finishing the final mixing on my demos. There was a note by the phone that said 'Some man with a strange name beginning with "Z" called from Los Angeles. Said something about a "Weather Report."'

"I freaked. After I calmed down and got the number from my mother, I called Zawinul. He ended up hiring me based on a forty-five minute phone conversation. And we didn't discuss music at all! We talked about family, about the gardens we had in our back yards...he was feeling out my character, I think. He might have asked me how long I'd been playing, but that was it as far as mentioning music went. But at the end of it, he just said, 'Well, look man, we want you in the band—you want the gig?' I said 'Yeah.' I hung up the phone, and flipped out."

While with Weather Report, Omar got a call from old onetime hippie pal Nile Rodgers (Omar was in fact the original Chic drummer, but balked at leaving high school to record in Europe) to play on Bowie's *Let's Dance*. "That made me really happy," says Omar, "because this was a 'rock' gig while Weather Report was a 'jazz' gig, and that's perfect for my philosophy because I'm not into being typecast as a musician. I played on the bulk of it, including the title cut, 'Modern Love' and 'China Girl.' Bowie's great to work with, he knows exactly what he wants, and we hit it off really well together from the moment we met." So well, in fact, that Bowie called him back to play on his next album, *Tonight*. Bowie wanted Omar to tour with him, too, but he was already committed to Weather Report sessions and touring.

After a long tour with Weather Report through much of 1984, Omar got the call from the U.K. to play on Bryan Ferry's *Boys And Girls*, to which he contributed both kit drumming and hand-percussion on Simmons pads ("I used my hands because they still had the hard surface, and in the booth you'd hear the stick sound over the sound of the pad itself"). Asked about Ferry's notorious rep as a fretful studio perfectionist who takes forever to record, Omar says, "I found him very easy, very open. I got there, we set up, Bryan played the music and just let me play, which is always the way I work best. Because often the moment will create something better than what anyone could think of consciously. I'd always prefer to just see the 'record' light on and just go play and fuck up or whatever, because even if you do fuck up you can always listen back and correct the mistakes, and in my experience you're just as likely to find something great and magical that came out intuitively and wouldn't have come out any other way. That's the way Weather Report and Sting work, too—let the instinctual stuff come out first, discuss it after."

Not long after he married his wife Deedee, Omar got a frantic call from Dire Straits' engineer, Neil Dorfman, who knew Omar from Weather Report sessions. "Neil was down at Air Studios in Montserrat, in the Caribbean, and for some reason they wanted me to come down and retrack all the drums on *Brothers In Arms*. Something must have gone wrong. I played the whole album, but I'm not sure what tracks of mine made it through the final cut." Omar *thinks* he's on "So Far Away,"

OMAR HAKIM

CHOOSING A MULTI-SOUND CYMBAL SET-UP

As a musician growing up in New York City, Omar Hakim was called upon to play *everything*: funk, rock 'n roll, bebop, salsa and all the variations in between. His diverse background is put to good use in Weather Report, where his powerful and supple drumming fuels the band's heady blend of exotic rhythms, electronic textures and shifting dynamic levels.

Omar's *multi-purpose* drum and cymbal set-up has been chosen with meticulous care to produce the extraordinary variety of sounds he needs for Weather Report and sessions with David Bowie, Dave Sanborn and others. How the cymbals are used and where they

are positioned around his kit has more to do with enhancing his musical possibilities than following the "rules."

"I've been changing *roles* with different cymbals. Since Weather Report is mostly electric, I've been balancing the 'wash' type sound with a more defined ride type of thing on the bell of the cymbal. I might be riding through Joe's solo passages or setting up a groove with the 22" Ping Ride on my right. So I'll keep the right hand going and do accents and other stuff with my left hand on the 19" Medium Thin Crash on the left. It's an excellent crash/ride cymbal and it gives me enough different sounds to free me up for this *ambidextrous* approach."

The innate ability to pick the right cymbal is an art that Hakim has refined by spending a lot of time in the city's music stores, playing and listening closely to cymbal after cymbal. "You should be patient. You've got to know how to really *listen* to the cymbal you're going to play for years. And when you pick a cymbal, you've

got to do it with the same sticks you intend to play it with.

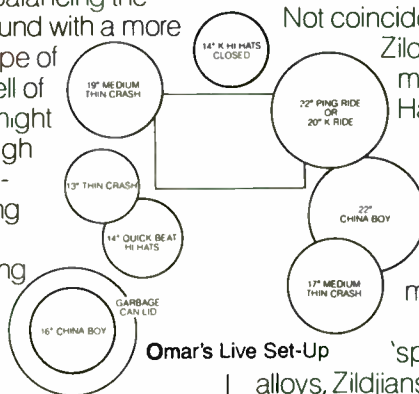
"First, I listen for the primary tone. You have to get close to the cymbal to hear it. I also listen to whether the harmonic overtones are coming out evenly. I like the bells to be clear without too many harmonic overtones."

Not coincidentally, only Zildjian cymbals meet Omar Hakim's exacting standards for tonal versatility, dynamic consistency and a natural, in-bred musicality.

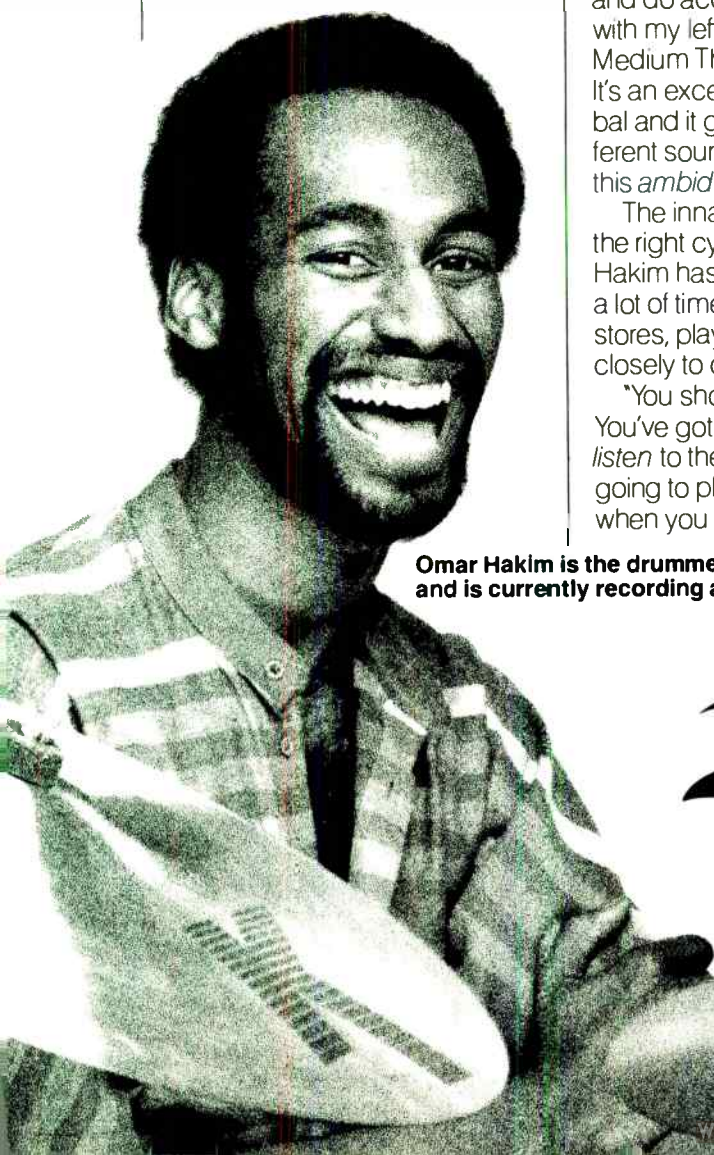
"Because of their 'special' blend of alloys, Zildjians have the most beautiful natural harmonic overtones. They give me the wide vocabulary of sounds I need. Other cymbals only sound good for one kind of thing. And you've got to *bash* them to get them to sound.

"The musicality of Zildjians makes each cymbal a complete, multi-tonal instrument. Depending on what part of the cymbal I choose to play, I have at least five or six sounds on my ride cymbal that I can use. We do a tune called 'Fast City' where I can smack my ride cymbal and get a crash you won't believe."

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Omar's Live Set-Up



Omar Hakim is the drummer for Weather Report and is currently recording and touring with Sting.

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"Money For Nothing," and the title cut; but it *sounds* like him on the title cut, "Your Last Trick," "Ride Across The River," and maybe "One World" and "Money For Nothing."

It was while recording "Money For Nothing" that Omar met Sting, who was singing his backup vocal at the same time. Later that night, Omar, Mark Knopfler, Sting and Trudy Styler went out to dinner together. Sting was telling Knopfler about his idea for a solo project.

"I was like the only black person in this restaurant aside from the cooks and waiters," says Omar, "so I was feeling a little weird, and Sting and I hadn't really been formally introduced, so I wasn't saying much. Then I heard Sting say he was talking to Branford Marsalis, and my ears perked right up—'What's *Sting* doing talking to *Branford*?' So I started cutting in on the conversation to find out more, and Sting kept giving me stranger and stranger looks, like 'Who is this guy?' Then Mark introduced us, and when Sting heard my name he perked right up. So finally I said, 'So, uh, have you found a drummer for your band yet?' He said, 'No, like I said, that's why I have to go to New York.' I said, 'Well, actually, you *have* found a drummer.' He stopped and said, 'Who?' I said, 'Me.' So he picked up his knife and fork and said 'Okay—play for me.' I began playing any old thing and he joined in, and we made more racket than I've heard since I got into Buck Jones' kit back when I was five years old."

Omar considers the Sting gig his most challenging yet: "Nothing against any of the other people I've ever worked with, but Sting's music is a very sophisticated form of *pop* music, and I think pop music uses more *other* kinds of music than any other genre does. Weather Report had some pretty complex, wide-ranging stuff in it, too, but with Sting we play virtually every kind of music there is. You have soul, rock, funk, reggae, a classical piece, a march with a Weather Report-progressive jazz middle section—that's 'Children's Cru-

sade'—and a jazz ballad where I play brushes, 'Moon Over Bourbon Street.' That's a very diverse range of material, and I'm not even counting the R&B covers we do live...."

"The thing is, I was more prepared for Weather Report in a way than I was for Sting. Weather Report, for me, was a jazzy gig I approached with the energy of a rock gig, whereas Sting is a rock gig I approach in a different way, not just in a jazzy way...I mean, I'm proud and happy to be grounded mainly in jazz. That improvisational, intuitive approach of jazz is something that I find applicable to any sort of music. But with Sting I had to fall back on my *entire* background, not just jazz. So I'm glad I've always tried to be open-minded about music."

Omar also finds working with Sting perhaps his most rewarding musical experience yet: "There are moments...like that live medley of 'Bring On The Night' and 'When The World Is Running Down,' when we all let go and cook and the music just flies, and then when you think we're all gonna collapse from the intensity it shifts *up* a gear for a few more minutes...personally, I'm lost in that section. It's like a meditation for me. It might sound corny, but to me it feels like it isn't even me up there. Like, the *music* takes over. With that kind of intensity, I don't think a musician has the physical strength to be able to sustain that by himself. Seriously, I think the actual power of music has almost nothing to do with the musician himself. It does, but—I'm talking on a spiritual level here."

"When you get right down to it your real instrument is yourself. Like I said before, musicians are *people* first. That's why when Zawinul called me to join Weather Report he didn't have to discuss music. In the same way I think any gig is a reflection of you, and your instrument is really just a vehicle for that. Like, if we have a nice day we always have a great gig. I truly believe that. People tell me 'Aw, gimme a break,' but I *mean* it. You learn technique, and then you forget it onstage. If you re-

continued on page 85

BON JOVI IGNITES WITH GHS STRINGS

Photo by Ross Marino

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In the Laboratory The Carver PM-1.5 was rigorously tested by Len Feldman for MODERN RECORDING (February 1985). His laboratory test results also prove that the PM-1.5 really delivers. The following quotes from the Lab Report are reprinted with permission of MODERN RECORDING & MUSIC:—

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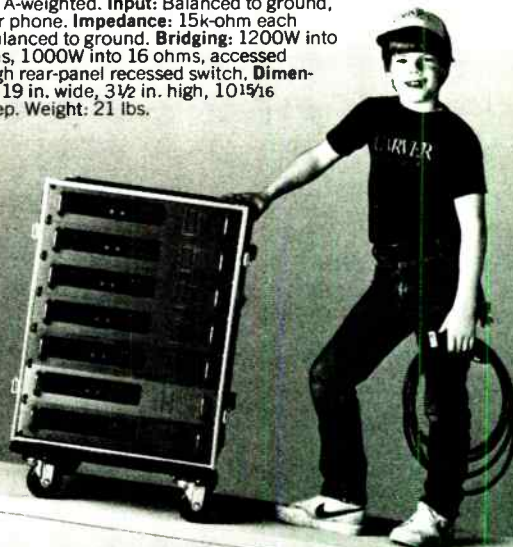
"The amplifier delivered a clean 480 watts per channel into 8-ohm loads with both channels driven for its rated harmonic distortion level of 0.5%. Even at the frequency extreme of 20 Hz, power output for rated THD was 470 watts as against 450 claimed by Carver. Furthermore, at rated power output, distortion decreased to an insignificant 0.015% at mid-frequencies and 0.007% at 20 Hz. When connected to 4-ohm loads, the PM-1.5 delivered 750 watts per channel for rated THD of 0.05%—far more than the 600 watts claimed by Carver. Clearly, when it comes to specs for a professional amplifier, Carver has taken a very conservative approach... All (manufacturer's claims) equaled or exceeded published specifications—usually by a wide margin."

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Designed primarily for use with Simmons electronic percussion synthesizers, the MTM enhances the dynamic range and performance of the SDS5 and SDS7 by placing a computer between the drum pads and drum brain. MTM will also act as a fully assignable MIDI interface that can produce unlimited melodic, harmonic, tonal and rhythmic effects via drum pad triggering when used in conjunction with MIDI sound generators.

MTM has many other applications as well. For example, it can be used as an interface between acoustic and electronic drums, acoustic drums and MIDI

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As the complete drum interface, MTM allows creative flexibility for programming several signal processing parameters, each of which is independently adjustable.

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PROCESSING

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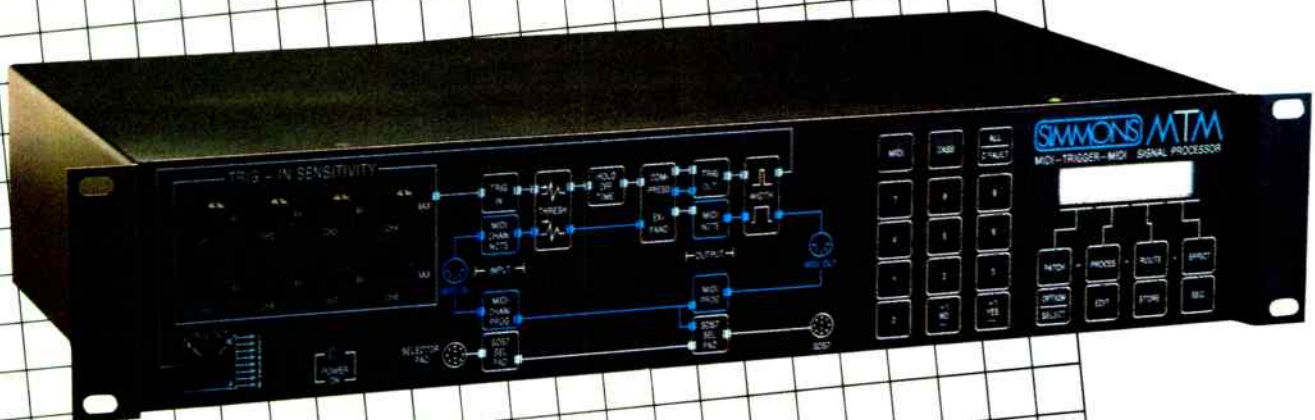
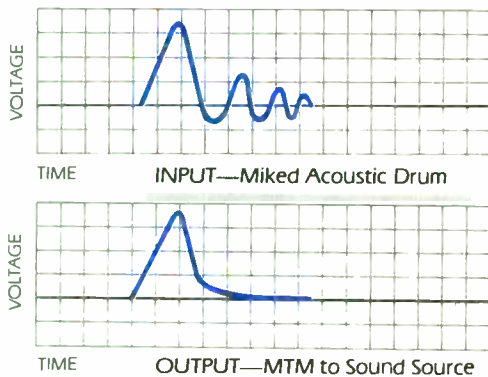
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*The Power, the Glory, and the Groove:
Our Man from Chic Hits Hard and Hits Big,
from Zep to Power Station to Madonna*

By J.D. Considine

TONY THOMPSON: IT AIN'T THE MEAT, IT'S THE EMOTION

When the first calls came, Tony Thompson had no idea what to make of them. "I was on the road with Power Station," he says, "and some people—mostly like roadies—kept calling me and my manager, saying Robert Plant was looking for me."

To an extent, Thompson shouldn't have been surprised. True, he'd never had any prior dealings with Plant, and therefore had a right to be taken aback. On the other hand, thanks to the thunderous propulsion he'd provided as the drummer with Power Station, he was by then at his most visible. Having started

off with Chic, for whom he powered such dancefloor classics as "Le Freak" and "Good Times," Thompson spread his percussive prowess through such Chic productions as Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" and Diana Ross' "Upside Down," and finally flowered with his work as a valued sideman on David Bowie's *Let's Dance* and Madonna's *Like A Virgin*.

Still, Thompson had his doubts. "I got kinda nervous," he admits. "I thought, what the hell does he want me for? I'm in the middle of a tour." Incredibly enough, what he wanted Thompson for was to

drum with Led Zeppelin at Live Aid. "He said that he and Jimmy Page were listening to the Power Station album. They thought it would be an honor if I would do Live Aid with them."

Considering the enormity of the drum sound on *33 1/3*, the Power Station album, Page and Plant's interest appears only natural. After all, even John Bonham's mighty thump seemed rather puny next to the drum sound delivered by Thompson and producer (and former Chic bassist) Bernard Edwards. But though such an invitation would be irresistible flattery to most drummers, "I was kinda leery about it," he says. "Number one, I told them right off the bat my first priority was doing Power Station, 'cause I was on the road with those guys. I said I would talk with the guys, and see if we could work it out."

"Robert said, 'Well, why?' He couldn't understand why I wouldn't jump into it right away. But, basically, the reason I was apprehensive was that they didn't mention rehearsals, and I was *not* going to go in front of billions of people and fuck up." He laughs. "Simple as that."

Fortunately, Phil Carson, Plant's manager, convinced Thompson that Plant, Page and John Paul Jones were serious about doing things right. "Power Station had to go to Sarasota, Florida," the drummer recalls, "and they were willing to come there to rehearse with me. But it worked out that we rehearsed the day of Live Aid at a recording studio, and it was the greatest rehearsal in the world. It really was, it was a gas." It was also slightly different from the performance that night in Philadelphia, because Phil Collins, who was to drum in tandem with Thompson, spent the early part of the day at Live Aid in London.

As such, the rehearsal ended up being "much better than Live Aid," Thompson says. "Mr. Collins, who I respect highly, just didn't go to rehearsal, and assumed pretty much that Led Zeppelin tunes were real easy to play." It was an easy mistake to make; Thompson admits to having made a



"It's not a fill; it's a feeling. My heart and soul go into it."

similar assumption. "I was in a lot of bands growing up where I played Led Zeppelin tunes," he says. "But now, playing with the real dudes, it was harder, and I found that I had played it all wrong previously."

What was the difference? "Bonham used to play little nuances, things that made it sound different. And [Plant and Page] just schooled me in the whole thing. Like time signatures, things like that. Things that sound like 4/4, but ain't, or things people might hear, and think, 'Oh, they must've made a mistake.'" Thompson chuckles. "C'mon, it was no mistake. There were things where it was, like, five instead of four, little things. The thing was, if you play four, you don't find the one."

Thompson found the one and then some. In fact, the reunion was so successful that the rock gossip columns were buzzing for weeks about a Led Zep tour featuring Our Man From Chic in the drummer's chair. Sadly, Thompson can neither confirm or deny the stories. "I don't know much about it," he confesses. "I mean, we talked about it briefly at Live Aid, because they were really up about the whole thing, and they hadn't played together in such a long time, and the rehearsal was a gas. But other than that, I don't know. And if I do, well," he chortles, "I guess the whole

world will know.

"I've been in touch with a bunch of people, and I might do a Honeydrippers album, with Brian Setzer and a bunch of people in London with Robert."

Nonetheless, even if the foursome never plays together again, Thompson's appearance with Plant, Page and Jones was an important breakthrough for rock 'n' roll. After all, back when Led Zeppelin was riding its last hurrah with *In Through The Out Door*, Tony Thompson was providing the backbeat for "Good Times"—exactly the sort of record most heavy rock fans had in mind when they chanted "Disco Sucks!" Yet there they were, millions strong, cheering on Thompson's pulse behind "Whole Lotta Love," "Rock And Roll" and "Stairway To Heaven."

Yet as Thompson tells it, the greatest irony of all was, "I grew up listening to Led Zeppelin. I mean, honestly! Jimi Hendrix and Cream—Ginger Baker was one of my idols—Jeff Beck's *Rough And Ready* album, things like that. They were idols, and when I would come home from school, I would just sit in my basement for hours, from two o'clock in the afternoon until two in the morning, and just play. Put headphones on and play with records. I just lived that music most of my life.

"In high school, I played rock 'n' roll

up the kazoo, in all kinds of bands. Then, finally, I got into different kinds of music, like funk. But my first job was with rock 'n' roll."

For that matter, it's worth remembering that Chic's original incarnation was as a rock power trio—Thompson, Edwards and guitarist Nile Rodgers—dubbed the Big Apple band. But, "No one would hear that," he says, adding pointedly, "because we didn't have spandex pants and blond hair."

Well, what has changed since then?

"Nothing." Thompson laughs hysterically. "No, basically, we changed a bit of it. I think Power Station really.... Well, with people like Michael Jackson, of course, Prince, people like that, it became more acceptable. It's more acceptable to have blacks play rock 'n' roll, or have that kind of image or what-have-you. But I think Power Station really opened the door a bit. Through working with [Duran Duran's] Andy [Taylor] and John [Taylor], and Robert [Palmer], just that collaboration, now I'm known as a rock drummer.

"Meanwhile, what tickles me is I've been playing the same way for years. Everyone thinks I just came out of my freakin' basement. They're saying, 'Wow, where did this guy come from?' I've been around for years, man, doing

continued on page 97

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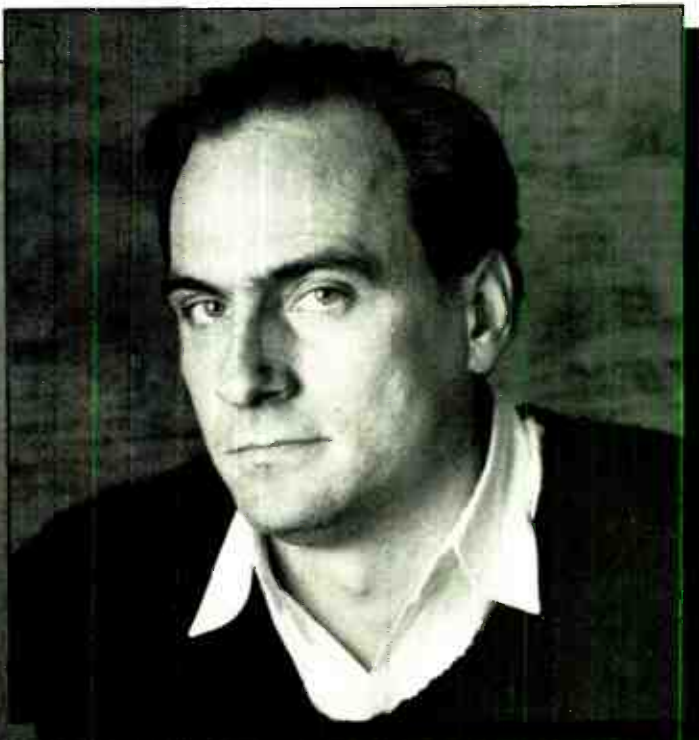
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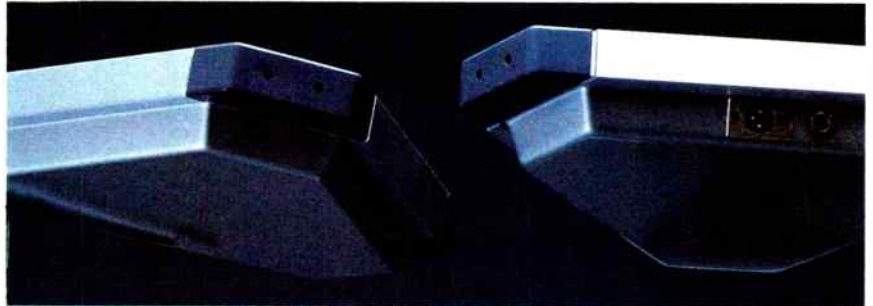
A Guide to Making the Big Leap Into Electronics, the Final Frontier of Modern Percussion.

By David Levine

CHARTING THE EXPLODING ELECTRONIC DRUM UNIVERSE

For those who have been sitting on their sticks, watching and waiting to see how quickly the "fad" would die out, the rampant proliferation of electronic drums over the past few months must seem downright mystifying. What began only two years ago as a crusade by a small British firm, Simmons, to create a U.S. electronic drum market has escalated into all-out war for a share of that market, with over fifteen "systems" from Roland, Pearl, Tama, Guild, Dynacord, Gretsch, and others now available. Factor in all those drummers and percussionists who will electrify their acoustic set, or at least add a few pads to it, and something big's going on here. Here's what to look for (and look out for) when you begin some hands-on investigation of your own.

Electronically speaking, these systems fall into four basic types. The first uses classic (SDS5) analog synthesis for tone generating. It's often characterized as "warmer, fatter, beefier," and other food-related adjectives, and is the prevalent source of sound in units under \$1500. A cousin of this uses digital synthesis like Roland's PCM system; it's digital, but the drum sounds are synthesized. The second type uses digitally



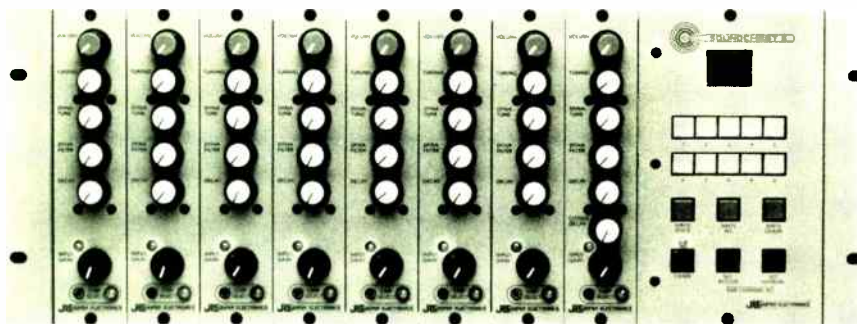
Roland DDR-30

either in the form of two types of sound generation for each voice like the Simmons SDS7, or in the split-kit approach like the SDS9, where the kick and snare are samples and the toms are analog. The fourth type is anything with MIDI implementation. By being able to trigger whatever you lack, any MIDI-based system is an automatic hybrid. For space reasons we'll be dealing here only with full electronic systems. For info on triggers, interfaces and brains for acoustic drums, talk to Märck, JL Cooper, Garfield, Barcus Berry, Simmons, MPC, Drum Ware and Drumfire.

The good news is that there are now decent kits at every price point, from

stantial information gap at the local dealer level.) Let's begin by roughly outlining the prominent contenders. Starting at the top, at \$4500, is the Guild ddrum; it's a Swedish digital-sample kit adapted from E-mu's ill-fated E-drum. At \$3700 is the Simmons SDS7, with full production-quality sound and twelve voices. At \$3000 is the JL Cooper Soundchest brain with MIDI (but no pads), which Jim Cooper developed with Terry Bozzio. A rumored \$3000 Pearl kit has yet to surface.

Now we're into the intermediate levels, led by the new \$2000 Roland DDR-30 and the \$2200 Simmons SDS9, both MIDI-equipped. The Dynacord kit, at the same price level, is a digital-sample job. At \$1400 the analog Pearl Drum-X kit is making big inroads. Tama's first Techstar kit fell into this price range, but the new edition, the Techstar II, is rumored to be under \$900. The CB700 series, licensed by Simmons to Kaman, is another good name under a grand—it includes a four-piece kit or two sets of tom add-ons. Then there's a host of Far East import beginner kits with names like the Gretsch Blackhawk (which they've licensed to Sears!), MPC, Ultimate, Cactus and Klone. Yamaha and Casio also both showed new digital synthesis drum kits at the recent Tokyo Fair but are going slow in the U.S. for now. As for single-pad add-ons, there are two sample/analog hybrids, the Simmons SDS1 at \$350, and the JTG Drum FX2 for \$269, and the digital-sample E-



JL Cooper Soundchest II

sampled live drum sounds, either blown onto EPROM chips or stored on floppy disk. Some systems then allow you to alter these further; many do not.

The third type is most exotic: the analog-digital hybrid. This can come

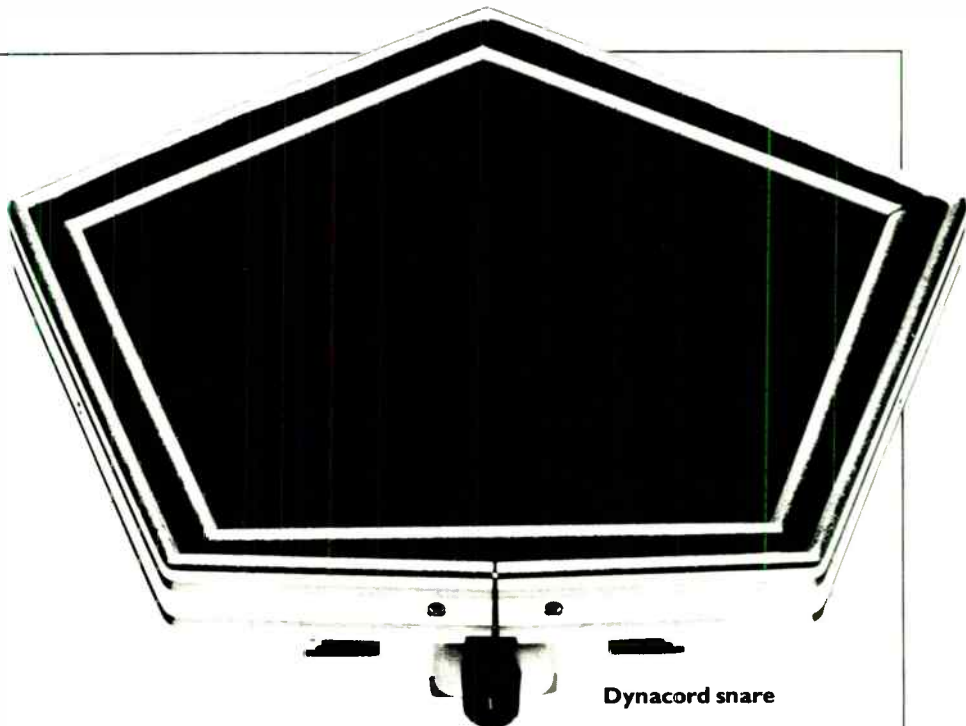
entry level on up. The bad news is that almost anyone can put a quartz pick-up on the back of a piece of rubber, build a simple analog sound source and sell it all to an unsuspecting music store owner. (Yes, like MIDI, there's still a sub-

mu E-Drum, still available here and there for \$250. And there's also the Roland Octapad, a \$550 MIDI controller with no tone generation of its own.

Now that you've had the quick tour, let's look more closely at how to shop for a kit. First the general factors. Try to deal with a company that's been around for a while, first and foremost for its service network and repair part availability. Setting up a service network is an expensive part of a company's coming of age—there's no direct profit at all. Until Simmons set up its 80-center network last year, for example, you'd have had to send your kit out to Los Angeles to get it repaired. Roland obviously has the biggest edge here, with imports like the Dynacord the most uncertain. And don't assume a reliable parent company like Pearl or Guild will send its import kits to its usual repair centers.

Another important factor is the ease of operation. Drummers don't take quickly to manuals and new terminology, and the same things that make a kit with a lot of features like the SDS9 a good buy also make it hard to learn. The Pearl, which has you simply punch in a numerical value for each of its eight parameters, is a good deal more straightforward. The Roland kit also requires a minimal learning commitment. (The manual for the new Simmons MTM interface, on the other hand....) The hard and fast rule is, don't pay for more technology than you really need. While some consider MIDI an essential requirement, my own feeling is that good sound quality and playing comfort should always be paramount. The last of these general factors is expandability. Many inexpensive kits are 5-piece, period. To add a tom, you've got to scrap the kit. Any kit with MIDI, of course, is by definition expandable.

Pearl Drum-X



Dynacord snare

The first component to scrutinize is the pad. Most important is the consistency of the trigger method. If it's significantly louder in the middle of the pad, nearest the trigger, then it's subpar. One way manufacturers improve consistency is to use a resistor on the ends of the pickup and then compensate by increasing the sensitivity of the tone generator. Another high-tech solution coming in the next twelve months is the use of a Mylar film that can be electrified and cut to any shape. Also listen for dynamics sensitivity—is there plenty of difference between a light hit and a good *thwack*, or does it tend to sameness? Like their keyboard cousins, electronic drums have made great strides in their expressive capabilities.

The pad surface and the playing feel

have also changed drastically since the old table-top SDS5 pads started complaints of "Simmons elbow." Now nearly all pads have a rubber surface, which "gives" a little bit on a foam bed. Two notable exceptions are the Tama and the Guild, which use real drum heads on a practice-pad type mount. Drummers having trouble adjusting to the feel of rubber pads will find these preferable, but don't forget they need to be maintained and replaced like real heads.

Addition any pad at length to determine how much rebound you get. Can you easily play doubles on a snare or will you be limited to a two and four? One new wrinkle on pads was the introduction of a snare on the SDS9 that also had a rim shot and a cross-stick. The ddrum and the Dynacord kits followed suit by adding a rim shot to their snares. But for many drummers this remains more of a "bell & whistle" feature; a \$600 stereo pad update to the SDS7, for instance, has not exactly started a stampede. The SDS9 also has a "double-head" feature using a second analog tom oscillator, but how much extra that's worth to you has to be measured.

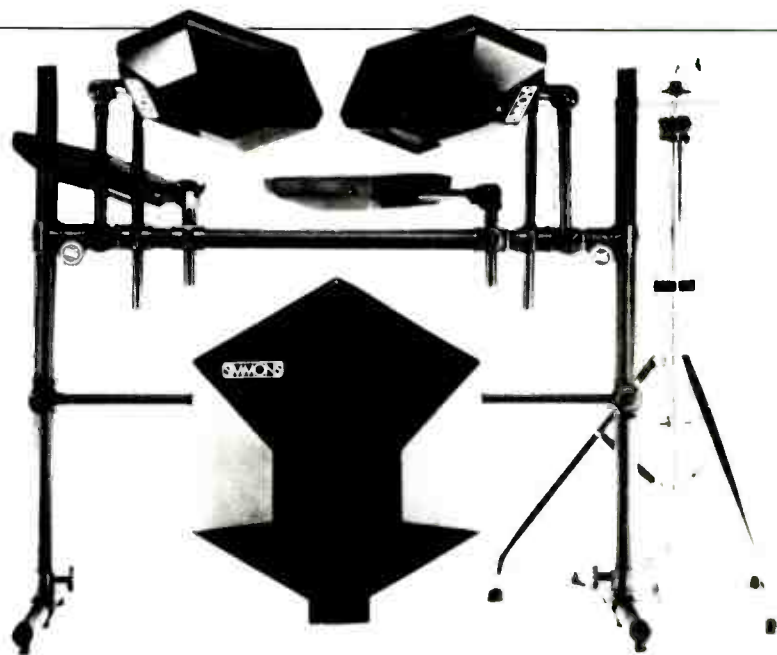
A short word on hardware. It has to be durable, versatile and look well, but it doesn't have to be heavy-duty, since electronic pads weigh substantially less. Most kits use a variation on either the 7/8-inch tubing type (Pearl, Simmons) or the 7/16-inch rod that goes into a bracket mounted on the drum (Tama/Ludwig). But electronic drums also lend themselves to keyboard-related single-frame systems like Ultimate Support's (for which new cymbal arms are available) or the Pearl rack that Jeff Porcaro helped design. Foot pedals for electronic kits are also still evolving; Drum

Workshop has a new chain-drive (the DW-EP1) that's worth a look. And the Guild ddrum has an unusual 45-degree angle pedal that may provoke even bolder redesigns.

Now let's look at the sound generation system. The following analog control features may seem like extras to many, but I consider them to be as essential to a decent system as a chassis and wheels are to a car. First, a *sensitivity* control, which regulates the pad dynamics, how hard or soft the triggers can be played at. Second is a *pitch* control, to change the highness or lowness of a sound. Third is a *pitch bend* control, which affects the rise or fall-off of a sound after the initial strike. Fourth is *decay*, which sets the length of the sound. Fifth are *level* controls for each separate voice. Sixth is the *click* control, which regulates the amount of stick or attack sound at the beginning of the sound. Seventh and finally is a *noise* control, which affects the amount of white noise in the overall sound.

Digital-sample kits should also have many of these controls to alter the samples. Otherwise you're basically playing straight live sounds, and the only real thing you've gained over an acoustic set is portability. Digital kits can also use some of these parameters interactively—you can set up the ddrum, for example, to be pitched higher or lower depending on how hard you hit it. Inquire about digital sound quality: Some models like the ddrum and the JTG Drum-FX2 go a step further than linear and use digital companding (similar to the LinnDrum's) to reduce sample noise. What format are the sounds recorded on? Is there a large library and an active user's network? The most common format is the EPROM chip, used by Simmons and many drum machine companies. This means more garage entrepreneurs to buy cheap chips from; you can also get your own sounds put on a chip, or go all the way and buy an \$800 Simmons EPROM blower of your own. The Guild ddrum uses a different format cartridge, larger but capable of holding four samples at once and therefore giving you four kits on call. Unfortunately you must buy the cartridges from them—at between \$110 and \$175 a pop!—and can't do your own samples, but the library, since it goes back two years, is a big one.

One of the quickest ways to tell the wimps from the heroes is the amount of program memory. Many entry level kits are adjustable but lack any method for storing your settings. Others may have a couple of factory presets but only one user-programmable one. Here are a few specs: the Tama Techstar II will have three factory presets and one user



Simmons SDS9

programmable; the Pearl Drum-X has eight user-programmable; the SDS9 has twenty preset and twenty user-programmable with external memory storage; the Roland DDR-30 has thirty-two user-programmable with an optional 64-kit RAM cartridge. The SDS7 has ninety-nine user-programmable. Just remember that there's a point of diminishing return; don't pay for more memory than you really need.

Other electronic features that, although not absolutely necessary, are still nice to have include a headphone jack for at-home practice (one of the hidden pay-offs of electronic drums is happy neighbors) and an auxiliary line in to play along with records, tapes and drum machines. A footswitch to change programs in the heat of onstage battle will also make life easier, as will an easily accessible master volume and panning control knob. Ah yes, infinite volume control brings with it a whole new element: amplification!

Your amp requirements will fall into three main categories: home, rehearsal and gigs. For the first, a 60-watt system with a single 12- or 15-inch speaker and a bit of eq will do nicely. For rehearsal with a full band, figure on something over 150 watt's, preferably with a three-way stereo speaker setup: a 15-inch woofer, 10-inch midrange and a horn. For big gigs you'll be using the main house P.A. and the stage monitor system. If you need to hear more drums in the mix than what the audience hears, you may want to also have the rehearsal amp system behind you. Sound companies have plunged into the electro-drum market, with Peavey's new ED-100 and ED-300 amps the latest arrivals joining a nice little 60-watt job from TOA

and a full-service system from Trace-Elit. A Massachusetts company called Eden has also created a small buzz. And Tama, JBL and Electro-Voice all offer viable reinforcement alternatives.

That's fine for a kit drummer, you say, but what about the percussionist? Well, it's more of a wide open field. No company has put anything more than marginal commitment into producing electronic instruments that reflect the special performance techniques most great percussionists use. But they're not waiting around. L.A. studio vet Emil Richards, for example, has begun sampling his collection of over six hundred instruments onto Emulator floppy disks. Right now he's accessing the sounds via MIDI drumpads and an E-mu SP-12, but he's looking for improvements: "I've talked to a lot of percussionists, and from what I hear, we'd all like to see more happen faster. We're optimistically anticipating that it should *start* to happen within the next months."

Deborah Dobkin, Don Henley's percussionist, took a Simmons SDS1 out on the road with her: "I had a good time with the '1, although I wished there were more to choose from. There aren't many electronic instruments available for the percussionist. I guess I've just been willing to adapt what there is to fit my needs. When I was in Japan, I got a ROM cartridge of great percussion sounds for my (Yamaha) DX7. Now I'll have to find a set of MIDI pads, or pads and a converter."

Mike Mainieri, vibist with Steps Ahead, has himself gone a step ahead and MIDI'd his acoustic vibraphone. Now an electric/acoustic hybrid, it can sound like anything he wants it to. Says

continued on page 98

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The Lighter Side of Avant-Garde Percussion with Laurie Anderson, Talking Heads, Steve Reich and Other Fringe Heroes

By Lou Papineau

DAVID VAN TIEGHEM: STOCKHAUSEN WILD IN A TOY STORE

David Van Tieghem is preparing to perform another installment of his one-man act entitled "Message Received...Proceed Accordingly (A Man And His Toys)." Collected in front of him on a pair of long tables is an incredible array of...*stuff*. To Van Tieghem's left is a small assortment of conventional percussive gear—Roto-toms, an electronic drum, sticks and mallets....

But the performer is far more concerned with arranging "his toys": wind-up dolls, mixing bowls, masking tape, pots and pans, large yellow balloons,

aural canvas, with bursts of static, crickets, some tech-chatter and synthesized patterns framing his unique rhythmic display. He occasionally addresses the audience, his voice an otherworldly transmission (sent through three guitar effects boxes). Clearly Van Tieghem revels in this nightly process of discovery, savoring the soothing tones of mallets on a milk bottle, caressing a balloon, manipulating a roll of masking tape and thwacking himself on the head and body with a whiffle bat. The overall impression is that of a slightly demented

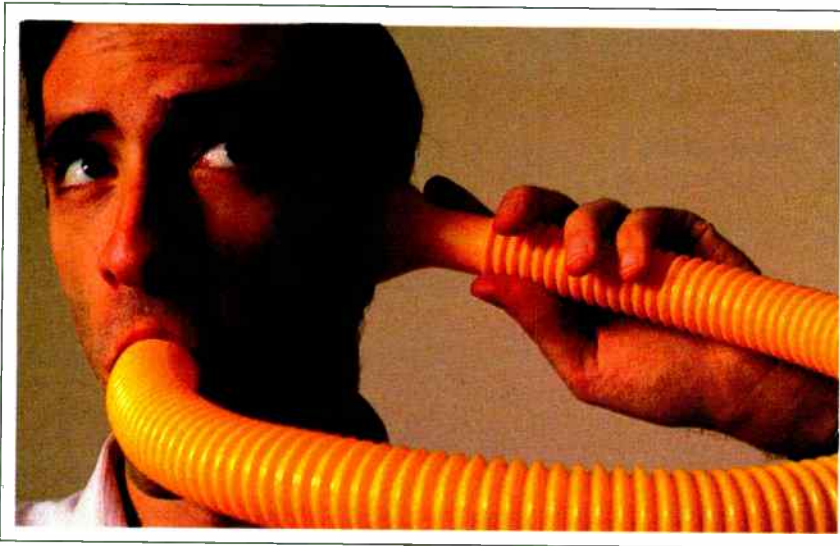
pans down and arrange them from big to small," Van Tieghem says of his earliest experimental endeavors, while sitting in the empty auditorium at the Rhode Island School of Design. "But the thing that made me aware of music in general was when the Beatles came over. That's when I started."

He had the usual experiences with teen bands. "We used to play Cream and Savoy Brown. There was one band whose drummer would let me sit in when they played 'In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida' because he didn't know how to play it." Van Tieghem's musical orientation began to change when he "was about sixteen. I started being aware of stuff like (Karlheinz) Stockhausen. My father got a job designing record covers for a company that did contemporary music, and he was bringing home all this electronic music. I started listening to it and liked it. And I learned about percussionist Max Neuhaus, who doesn't play percussion anymore but toured with Stockhausen. And I heard about a Steve Reich concert and went to see him—this was all in '71. This whole other world was opening up."

When Van Tieghem learned to play "other percussion, like xylophone and tympani," he realized that "people would actually go to school and study it—that it was more than just taking drum lessons in a music store basement." When did his penchant for using odd instruments begin to surface? "I started collecting brake drums and other automobile parts and went to my high school metal shop for some scrap. Then I started collecting some toys and wondering, 'What if everything was a potential instrument or mallet?' I started thinking more conceptually about it."

The young Van Tieghem attended the Manhattan School of Music and studied with Paul Preiss. He spent three years at the school. "I played with a brass ensemble, there was dictation, sight reading, some theory...." Then he worked with "some improvisational dancers,

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"I started wondering, 'What if everything was a potential instrument?'"

empty liquor bottles, combs, an oversized whiffle bat, breakaway bottles, sheet metal, long orange tubing, a spaceship, ping-pong balls in a steel drum, rayguns, plastic hand extensions, vibrators, water cooler jugs, bells, a telephone receiver, dinosaurs, ashtrays, dartguns....

Van Tieghem finally takes the stage bedecked in a NASA uniform, donning a headset and plunging into a conversation with his percussive menagerie. Prepared tapes provide a disorienting

air traffic controller trying to bring order to the random complexity and simplicity of everyday life.

Yes, David Van Tieghem is a different drummer, best known for his work with avant-pop artists Laurie Anderson and Talking Heads, as well as stints with "serious music" practitioners Steve Reich, Robert Ashley and Jon Gibson. Yet his unorthodox musical approach is rooted in the natural impulse to hit something to find out what kind of noise it will make. "I did take all the pots and



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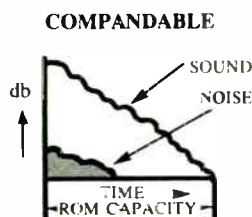
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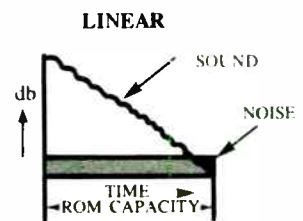
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Between Roles with Little Feat's Drummer, Who's Lately Been Working on Some Pretty Big Records

By Josef Woodard

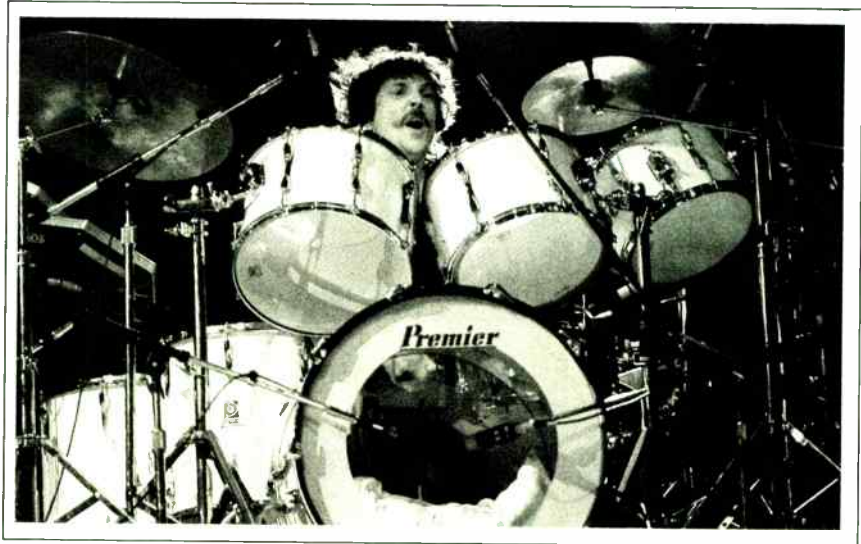
RICHIE HAYWARD: HAVE FEAT, WILL TRAVEL

The life of a drummer isn't the most secure pursuit in the music industry, particularly given the recent battle of the synthetic bulge. What to do, also, if your reputation sits at an odd juncture between the noble fringes of being a creative musician's player and being a rock 'n' roll thundermeister? What if you propelled an underdog supergroup of the 70s and have an aesthetic allergy to stock rock grooves? After having provided enigmatic backbeats for Little Feat, Joan Armatrading and Robert Plant, what next? In short, what happens if you're Richie Hayward in 1986? Where are you?

"I'm between roles," Hayward grins slyly from his mother-in-law's living room in the infamous San Fernando Valley. "I hope something comes soon. I'm getting tired of sitting around." Let it be known: One of rock's most intriguing drum conceptualists is for hire, to the right musical home. For maximum benefit, it should be a house of rhythmic flexibility. He operates best on a long leash.

Though he's been part and parcel of the infusion of second line feels and expansion of standard patterns in rock drumming, the subtlety and seamlessness of his experiments demand close scrutiny. With Little Feat, for instance, the rhythmic boil factor was too imperative to command attention on the fine, slippery details. But any concerned listener will be richly rewarded by tuning into his offset tom and cymbal work or that deceptive snare sniper fire. Hayward's true achievement, though, is a delicate balance, asserting his offbeat individuality while lending all-important slave service to the rhythm.

One conscientious listener of three years ago was Plant, who recognized the drummer's talents as being compatible with his own post-Zeppelin solo work. The call came at a similar slack point in Hayward's career. "I was sitting here, wondering if I was ever going to work again and he called me, asked me to come to London and check it out." Acing the audition, of course, Hayward



"I think tension actually helps the creative edge. People get complacent."

toured with the Plant unit and recorded the mesmerizing *Shaken 'n Stirred* of last year.

Richie recalls that the album's realization was anything but slam-dunk. "We rehearsed a lot before we went into the studio. We wrote all the stuff and worked it out on a 4-track machine. We used it, rehashed it, reworked it and changed it so that, by the time we went into the studio, it was all pretty pat." Did Plant have in mind to rewrite rock 'n' roll on the project, or was that a late development? "Robert said he wanted it *modern*," Hayward grins. "I got a lot of rope on that record. I enjoyed it a lot."

Having creative rope is only as valuable as the imagination that goes into it. Apart from being one of the most underrated albums of '85, *Shaken 'n Stirred* sports some of the most spellbinding drum work in recent memory. While nudging the momentum of tunes like "Doo Doo A Do Do" and "Kallalou Kallalou" (both titles sound like onomatopoeic impressions of Hayward's drumming), Hayward injects tension, drama-

tic variations and percussive economy that conspires with the spare arrangements and Robbie Blunt's restrained guitar parts to make for some highly evocative rock inventions. These are not rock songs for the faint-minded. Hayward gives his own, typically nonchalant analysis: "They're pretty strange, aren't they?"

Yet Hayward stops short of strangeness for its own crafty sake. Is he intent on avoiding the obvious path? "It's not so much avoiding the obvious. I like to keep the feel and the backbeat there, but I do like to introduce a little color to things to wake it up and keep it from being like everybody else. Otherwise, they could just *hire* everybody else. I think that comes from listening to a lot of jazz when I was a kid. It's interesting to me what you can do with the drums without sounding like you're being that strange. A good fill can *seem* like it's straight, but it doesn't have to be."

Growing up in Ames, Iowa, Hayward was playing jazz at age nine. He was, in
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Wherein a Nice Brooklyn Kid Learns to Play Great Latin Percussion and, After Only 15 Years, Gets Rich Making Hit Records

By Rob Tannenbaum

JIMMY MAELEN GOES FOR THE GOLD

The manager of a certain British rock group phoned Jimmy Maelen from London not too long ago and invited the percussionist to join the group on their upcoming tour. The manager said he'd be in New York City the next week, and Maelen invited him to his Upper West Side apartment to discuss the details.

"We were drinking some white wine in the living room," recalls the burly, vivacious forty-five-year-old Maelen, "and he took out the itinerary for the tour. I think he was impressed with the apartment. He walked into the hall where all my gold records are hung."

The gold discs catalog twenty years of successful percussing, from Kiss' "I Was Made For Loving Her" to the Jacksons' "Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground)", from Peter Gabriel and Dire Straits to Meat Loaf and Barry Manilow, Jimi Hendrix to Frank Sinatra. In 1985 alone, Maelen played on three #1 singles.

"He came back in from the hallway," Maelen continues, "and said, 'So, how much money would you want to do this tour?' I gave him a price, and he gagged a little bit. He said, 'There's no lower price than that, Jimmy?' I said, 'I'm sorry, but it has to be for that amount.'"

"He got up again and walked back into the hallway." There's very little room left on Maelen's record wall. On the other hand, the British band this manager represented could mount *their* American gold singles inside a medicine cabinet and still have room for their toothbrushes. Maelen knew he was in a good bargaining position. "He spent a lot of time reading the gold records. Finally he yelled from the hallway, 'Okay, we've got a deal.'"

For the first half of his career, Jimmy Maelen hung draperies during the day and played percussion at night. Back then, percussionists didn't dare ask for big touring salaries. But in the last few years, Maelen notes, "music has become very percussion-oriented. Look at Sting's 'If You Love Someone, Set Them Free,' which has a double-time tam-

bourine and a clave backbeat. A lot of producers and songwriters I work with now leave room for percussion as a standard procedure. It fills those empty holes that used to be plugged with a little guitar lick, just because they didn't know what to do with the extra track. Ninety-five percent of the pop records that are happening have some type of percussion, even if it's just basic stuff."

Of that ninety-five percent, Maelen probably does more banging and slapping than any other musician. In an av-



"The main thing is to support the song."

erage year, he does at least two hundred sessions. The key to success, he says, is to know the role of percussion: "It's a rhythm instrument, not a solo instrument, and your main function is to support the song. Simplicity is where it's at. I don't even listen to percussion that much; I'd rather listen to Motown."

Jimmy Maelen came to his philoso-

phy of professional restraint after extensive training in Latin music, where percussionists challenge one another in *mano a mano* slam-dunk contests. He grew up in a predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhood of Brooklyn, and sang in one of the borough's many doo-wop groups. As with much doo-wop, there was an underpinning of Latin rhythm to the band's songs, and after they had been together for several years, playing the same dance halls and youth centers dozens of times, Maelen began to pass the time by pounding on a cheap Mexican conga drum. "I was kind of pissing the guys in the band off, because they wanted to sing at rehearsals and I was banging away, making these *dumb* sounds on the conga. A Spanish friend gave me tips on how to play one drum, because playing two drums was way out of my league then."

Then Maelen told his friend that he planned to buy a good fiberglass drum. "He said, 'Don't spend the money. You really don't have it.' I think he meant that because I'm not Spanish or black, maybe I didn't have it in me. It wasn't part of my culture to know something like that. But I was really into it, so I decided to try it anyway."

Every chance he had, Maelen would jam in his Brooklyn basement with the best percussionists in the neighborhood. For hours at a time, they'd bang out mambos, meringues, cha-chas, pieñas and guaguancos. "I'd do anything to play, to get my chops going. They were very tolerant of me," Maelen laughs. "Then I got better and better, and I started playing in Latin groups."

Throughout the mid-60s, regular gigs at Corso's in New York grounded Maelen in Latin and Afro-Cuban rhythms. "But then I got frustrated. It's great music, but they're such traditionalists. I knew the possibilities that existed by blending Latin music and rock 'n' roll, but this was before Santana. They wouldn't even have an electric bass. You couldn't change the beat, or

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you'd get *dirty* looks and you wouldn't play."

In search of a more flexible format, Maelen joined Ambergris, a horn band similar to Chicago and Blood, Sweat & Tears, although much less successful. "Steve Cropper produced our one album. We turned down George Harrison for Cropper because we were such Otis Redding fans. Little did we know...."

Ambergris' album, Maelen admits, "bombed." With the encouragement of Hendrix/Led Zeppelin engineer Eddie Kramer, he began doing pop sessions. His first few jobs—with R&B singer Edwin Birdsong, Bulldog (the band formed by ex-Rascals Ger 9 Cornish and Dino Danelli) and Jobriath (a glam pixie worthy of an historical footnote as the first Bowie clone)—proved tricky, because "the Latin feel is just a hair behind the beat, whereas pop music is on the button." In those early days, most of Maelen's sessions were behind pop singers like B.J. Thomas and Barry Manilow—and Kiss. "There's a band you'd never think of as having percussion. They like big, fat cowbells. If I took out any bells, they'd probably get a shotgun. Although they did ask me to play a box of cornflakes once. I've done almost all their albums, I just never got credit for them. Then again, Anton Fig

never got credit for playing most of Peter Criss' drum parts. And Alan Schwartzberg never got credit for playing drums on Criss' solo album."

Percussion, Maelen explains, "was always associated with a Latin groove, instead of other possibilities like sound effects or any kind of sweetening or shimmers. 'A percussionist? But I don't really hear congas on this.' That's the kind of response you used to get." But the disco re-mix boom, he says, demonstrated the many possibilities of percussion in pop music. One of the most popular remixes was the Jacksons' "Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground)", which featured Maelen on eight wild tracks of congas, syndrums, cowbells and shakers.

These days, with an Emulator and a Linn 9000 in his arsenal, as well as African log drums, break drums and berimbau from Brazil, Maelen can play on an entire album and never need a conga. "Sometimes producers say, 'I want to hear something I've never heard before,' and I have to come up with new ideas." In addition to a box of cornflakes, Maelen has played a 75¢ plastic hose ("you can get harmonics and thirds out of it"), a mike stand on Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms*, boom-bams on Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill" (actually a Polymoog played like a

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conga) and an ashtray on Bryan Ferry's "Slave To Love" ("it has a nice tone and it resonates well, especially with an AMS on it"). And he fondly recalls the night he played a few dozen light bulbs. "There was this English dance band called the Real Thing. We took about fifty light bulbs, and on the chorus I'd throw them one by one into a metal bucket. Forty watt bulbs seemed to sound best. We had to stop to empty the bucket because the sound would get lower in pitch as the bulbs filled the bucket. I can guarantee you didn't hear that one on the radio." 📻

Beats Working

The equipment cases Jimmy Maelen lugs around include Paiste gongs, Rhythm-Tech tambourines, "some little toys" from Latin Percussion, and Gon Bops oak congas (12½ and 11½). "I like to experiment with a lot of electronics—AMS's and Marshall time modulators, outboard equipment like harmonizers." He prefers Shure SM57 mikes for sirens, Sennheiser 421s for congas, cowbells and woodblocks, and Neumann 87s for shakers and chimes. Maelen has no preference for light bulbs, although he says an endorsement contract with GE could be arranged.

Hayward from page 78
evolutionary parlance, a precocious squirt. "That's what they called me," he

laughs. "My parents tried to get me not to do it; they wanted me to have something to fall back on. It was just the only thing I liked to do. I knew I couldn't do it in Iowa, so I came here to L.A. I wanted to play in the big time in a song and dance band. It was either here or New York, but I'd already been converted to rock 'n' roll by then, so the jazz connection wasn't that important. It was Ray Charles that did it to me. When I heard his version of 'You Are My Sunshine,' it turned me around." Hayward is generous in accounting for his influences. Who else inspired his playing? "Oh, Jesus, just about everyone I've ever heard I've picked up something from. It's hard to point out any one guy. Elvin Jones, Tony Williams I loved, but I can't play like that—I'm not fast enough. I tried, but I never quite made it."

When Hayward made his way to the land of milk and honey in '65 at the age of nineteen, the Beach Boys and Buffalo Springfield were not his idea of a good time. He was out for a new, eclectic admix of music. As fate would have it, he met guitarist/singer/mojo man Lowell George, answering an ad in the *L.A. Free Press*; the two were partners in idiomatic extortion. "The first band I was in was the Factory with Lowell, and we were pretty much in bands together from there on out." Was it evident in the

beginning that the two harbored similar eccentric ambitions—a mutual musical wavelength? "It seemed that way. I don't know what it was exactly. We both liked New Orleans, second-line stuff."

The two parted company for a short spell, as Hayward went with the Fraternity of Man (of "Don't Bogart That Joint" fame) and George did a stint with Frank Zappa. Joining forces again the two set out to form Little Feat, in which they could, as Hayward recalls, "play music we liked." Along with classically-trained pianist Bill Payne and bassist Roy Estrada, they created a unique gumbo of Southern music, post-beat lyrics and sprinklings of jazz and avant garde. In the early 70s, the line-up stabilized with guitarist Paul Barrère, bassist Ken Gradney and percussionist Sam Clayton, but internal turbulence threatened the band, even through a series of still-inspiring albums. Hayward describes the group as "a bunch of volatile people you know wouldn't be together if it weren't for the music. I think that tension actually helps the creative edge. It keeps people from being complacent and playing the same. It was personality clashes more than musical ones."

Musically, the group machinated some intricate yet thoroughly engaging grooves, hybridizing elements of shuffles, lopes and other stray rhythmic in-

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redients. Spearheaded by Hayward's lead, rhythm was a malleable, fluid issue, and tunes such as "The Fan," "Down Below The Borderline" and especially the 6/4 semi-fusion sway of "Day At The Dog Races" veered close to a new jazz-rock crossover. Carefully woven though it sounds, Hayward recalls that spontaneity was the band's flagship. "That's the way we jammed a lot. We'd just jam around at a rehearsal or something and those things would just naturally be incorporated in what we did. Very little of what we did happened in overdubs."

After numerous false endings, the group came to an abrupt halt when Lowell George died while on a solo tour in 1979. "Down On The Farm" wasn't finished when he died, so we had to go in and wrap it up. That was pretty weird. But then none of the albums really came easy. I imagine the easiest one would have been *Feets Don't Fail Me Now*. That was pretty painless."

But Hayward doesn't seem to be after the painless gig. His experience with Armatrading was a logical matching of innovators. "She makes good music," he says, "that can be a challenge to play, in terms of dynamics and all that." The future with Zepward bound Plant is uncertain at this point, but Hayward is "pretty sure the band as it was won't

play together anymore." Life is tough when you're a discriminating musician in a field that too often frowns upon excessive creativity, especially from the drum chair. Asked what current music has grabbed his ear, he hedges. "A lot of it is just too clinical sounding now, but there are things that are really good." Such as? "I really like 'Boys Of Summer'; I thought that was exceptional. I'd like to play with him." Hayward smiles at the thought, eyes glinting. "Tell him that."

Paging Don Henley, you have a call from Reseda.... ☐

No Mean Feat

"Up until recently, I'd been using Premier, but I've just switched to Pearl. I use five toms—three up top and two floor toms—and a 24-inch kick drum. I have Zildjian cymbals—anything to add colors and sounds. I played electronic drums on the Plant album, Simmons SDS5s incorporated in the regular kit. Electronic drums are most interesting to me added into the kit, not replacing it."

Van Tieghem from page 76 moving and playing with them, joined Steve Reich's group in '75 and stayed with that until 1980." His tenure included the recording of the landmark minimalist pulse *Music For 18 Musicians* and extensive touring. As a sideline, he initiated an ongoing collab-

oration with saxophonist/composer Peter Gordon, called the Love of Life Orchestra.

Van Tieghem's first solo presentations were staged in '77 at the Kitchen, Carnegie Hall, the Mudd Club, the Guggenheim Museum, the Staten Island ferry and other diverse cultural centers. "They were very loose and mostly improvised," he recalls. "Each time I would set up different ways and that would determine what I would play." He had returned to the solo format between projects with a growing roster of form-bending artists. There was also work for rockers like Robert Gordon, Garland Jeffreys and Pink Floyd (as one of thirteen drummers on *The Wall*); he also participated in the Trio with guitarist Chris Spedding and bassist Busta Jones. "Nothing ever came of it," the drummer says. "It was a little bit like too many cooks."

Van Tieghem's avant-pop stock rose further when he worked on David Byrne and Brian Eno's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* and Talking Heads' *Speaking In Tongues*. "We recorded a lot of stuff," he says of Byrne and Eno's eclectic pan-ethnic collage. "We spent three days in the studio, but they didn't use very much of it. By the time they were through and they put the record out, it was vastly different from what we

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started out doing." As for "This Must Be The Place," *Speaking In Tongues'* subtitle highlight, the percussionist remembers, "David just asked me to bring a bunch of stuff down to the studio. I just played along."

Van Tieghem's most noteworthy collaboration, with Laurie Anderson, began in 1978. "I did a few sessions at her house," he says, "and then when she got the Warner Bros. thing I started working with her a lot more, on *Big Science* and then on tour." Van Tieghem's working relationship with Anderson varies from song to song. "She usually has some idea of the piece already, some tape loop that she's building into a song on the Synclavier. Sometimes she knows exactly what she wants me to do and sometimes she has me come in and try some things and we work together to find the right thing."

Van Tieghem's intuitive approach serves him well in the spontaneous environment he often finds himself in. Yet he had some adjustments to make when he was commissioned to write the score for the dance "Fait Accompli," choreographed and directed by Twyla Tharp, which evolved into *These Things Happen*, his 1984 Warner Bros. debut (he was dropped from the label in '85).

Lately Van Tieghem continues to juggle his varied means of expression. He

appeared on *So Red The Rose*, the album by Arcadia, the Duran Duran offshoot; worked on Peter Gordon's first album for CBS Masterworks; and performed in Laurie Anderson's concert film, *Home of the Brave*, a variation on '84's "Mr. Heartbreak" tour, which will soon be on the silver screen. He also began writing scores for ballet companies in Boston and Pennsylvania, and concocted a twelve-inch remake of his old favorite, "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" (Twin/Tone/Wide Angle).

Presently, David Van Tieghem is at a crossroads. "I want to think about how to combine all these different things that I've been doing—performance, the studio and video work, which have been totally separate from each other—how to put it all together a little bit more. I'm not sure what I'll hatch out of all that, but it's time to just think. I'm always writing

The Toy Box

In addition to found objects, Van Tieghem uses more familiar ware: a Synare electric drum, 6-, 8- and 10-inch Roto-toms, an Electro-Harmonix Super Replay echo unit and a handclap box. He hits things with Manny's 1A nylon tip drumsticks, Musser hard-woven yarn mallets and "some practically indestructible mallets, like those used for glockenspiel. Between the three of them I've got everything covered."

down ideas on little pieces of paper and I've got piles of them all over the house, so it's time to start going through them."

And there are always more toys to sort out. "I have a lot of stuff in a loft," Van Tieghem says, "where it's all a big mess. I forget some of these things I've collected along the way." □

Hakim from page 66

ally have learned it, it'll be there anyway, but beyond that you *have* to forget it and just *play*. It's definitely a spiritual thing.

"There's a lot more than just technique involved—you have to move the people, too. How do you do that? I'm not sure, but one thing I always try to do is, before every gig I like to walk around through the whole hall, vibe out the audience, and take their energy backstage with me and let it come out at them during the gig. It makes it easier for me to play for people. It's just like being a musician—like I said, we're people, and you have to play *with people* first and foremost. You have to relate to them as people first, not just as musicians. And you have to relate to the audience as people, too—not just as customers or something. I always know we're okay when I look up during a gig and see a girl in the balcony dancing and swaying. I know it's working; we're projecting ourselves properly, and the music's moving them." □

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Atlantic Rhythm and Blues, Volumes 1-7 (1947-1974)
(Atlantic)

We are talking about seven albums, fourteen records, twenty-eight years, one hundred and eighty-six songs featuring Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Big Joe Turner, Otis Redding, the Drifters, the Coasters, Wilson Pickett, Professor Longhair, Esther Phillips, Percy Sledge, Sam & Dave, Chuck Willis, King Curtis, and Booker T. & the MGs, among others. So what do you think—it's lousy?

Twas a time when Atlantic was the place for blues, R&B, soul and early rock 'n' roll. It's a legacy the label has

also been mining for the past two decades, with varying degrees of success. But even crassly constructed reissues—like the recent "Best" collections of Aretha, Otis, Joe Tex, et al, dumped on the market a mere three months ago—contain so much good music it's hard to resist them. This set, lovingly arranged with a keen ear for historical evolution, and alloyed by copious liner notes, is so much more than that it's damn near indispensable.

Serious collectors probably own most of the racks collected on these twofers. But part of their charm is sequencing: monster hits alternating with obscure nuggets, novelty tunes and poignant ballads in a way that actually fortifies the music's thematic unity, at length suggesting someone's dream of a great radio program. Of course any DJ hip enough to segue the Drifters pop 'n' jive rendition of "Ruby Ruby" to the Cookies' oddly-textured doo-wop "In Paradise" to Joe Turner's masterfully swinging "Chicken And The Hawk" is already too cool for school. For the rest of us though, these LPs provide an education about the roots and renaissance of black popular music through three decades, and suggest its uneasy role in the development of white pop superstars.

Typical cant presents Elvis Presley, for example, as the avatar of 50s rock 'n' roll. The first two volumes of this series makes a better case that the emergence of Elvis merely signaled its decline. Rock 'n' roll's true golden age (1947-55) is still best documented on small labels like Chess, Savoy and Ace; but tunes here like Joe Morris' "The Applejack," Frank Culley's "Cole Slaw" and Big Joe Turner classics like "Honey Hush" and "Flip Flop And Fly" show how the cropped backbeats and tenor sax growls of Kansas City jazz and R&B first set pelvises in motion, setting the stage for future rock cadences.

By Volume III (1955-58) that deep dance groove had begun to erode (even Joe Turner is saddled with Jordanaires-style singers on a poor remake of "Corrine Corrina") but elsewhere riches abound—doo-wop dukes the Drifters, subtly expressive singer-songwriter Chuck Willis, clever culture parodists the Coasters, and the maturation of the great Ray Charles. Volume IV (1958-62) adds the suave quasi-Latin stylings of Ben E. King, plus a handful of revealing early efforts by the Ikettes, William Bell and Solomon Burke. Volumes V (1962-66) and VI (1966-69) basically reprise the Stax glories of Otis,



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Wilson, Sam & Dave and Booker T, crowned by the majestic soul stylings of Queen Aretha. Only the closing Volume VII (1969-74) proves a disappointment (significantly there's only eighteen tracks on it, vs. twenty-eight on all the others) as Atlantic either lost its fix on black pop or relinquished the field to hunt bigger, (i.e. whiter) game. Well, it was a great era.

This is the best series of pop compilations to come along since Arista/Savoy's fabulous *Roots Of Rock 'n' Roll* set eight years ago, and will no doubt remain the series to beat for years to come. Maybe it's all too much for one checkbook to handle, but if your collection still doesn't know the difference between the Bar-Kays and the Mar-Kays, it's probably worth the plunge. Forced to choose (gun/head) I'd take Volume I over II (too much Clyde McPhatter), Volume IV over III (a very close call) and Volume VI over V (even closer). But even yuppies who'd rather get down with the Hooters ought to at least consider these LPs a sound market investment. After all, it's the kind of music that only grows richer with age.

— Mark Rowland



BANGLES

Different Light
(Columbia)

What a difference a reputation makes: Despite a perfectly likable EP for Faulty Products, the Bangles were essentially unknown when Columbia released *All Over The Place* in 1984, and that may have been why the album was such an unassuming delight. There were no great expectations for this Beatlesque girl group, no need for their pert four-part harmonies to be anything but charming.

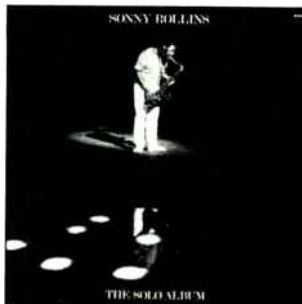
Different Light, though, comes loaded with industry anticipation—gotta break this group!—and the music feels weighed down by the demands of commerce. That's not to say it's a failure, for the Bangles are seldom at less than their best. But it does seem as if producer David Kahne doesn't think that's

quite good enough.

Take, for example, "Standing In The Hallway," a perky Brit-beat number that plays off sweet vocal harmonies against funky blues guitar fills. Or tries to; too bad the guitar is almost entirely drowned out by an inane organ part dubbed in to make the song more suitable for CHR radio play. Instead of helping the song, the organ's boorish blare overwhelms it, effectively unbalancing the performance.

The keyboards aren't always so intrusive—on Prince's "Manic Monday," they're a boon—but they are symptomatic of the unnecessary commercial gloss glopped over an album which should have left well enough alone. Michael Steele's "Following," a devastating bit of song craft, works quite nicely with little more than just voice and acoustic guitar. Similarly, "Walk Like An Egyptian" is utterly winning simply on the strength of the rhythm bed and the Bangles' exquisite singing. Why mess with success?

Well, look on the bright side. Despite all the superfluous synths, *Different Light* remains catchy as all get out, and may in fact give this band the boost it needs. If it does, perhaps the next album will be as perfect as this one could have been. — J.D. Considine



SONNY ROLLINS

The Solo Album
(Milestone)

A wondrous thing, like the peak of some inscrutable mountain parting through the clouds for the first time. The sheer clarity of hearing that sardonic, magisterial tenor free of all associations save his own; the grand boppish nostalgia that registers arrows in all pure of heart; the puns he be cracking on himself; and the many-hued Armstrongish coat of tones that charge each note with discovery—all this was overwhelming at first listen. (Some low register laser growls nearly irradiated my stylus into remission.) There's no place like home. Sonny Rollins is tenor saxophone.

Yet it's ironic that so many who pro-

less to be moved by these melodic episodes, wry asides and chromatic variations find no charm or growth in the tuneful vamps strolls and calypsos of Newk's relatively recent *Sunny Days*, *Starry Nights* (Milestone), as if that were the work of a totally different improviser. Minus tunes or tempos, *The Solo Album* favors melodic-rhythmic development over the harmonic, and Sonny modulates these ideas with a stately thematic inevitability that would do Mozart proud. On *Sunny Days*, group-leader (star) Rollins exhibits a willful, strategic indifference to his percolating rhythm section; he treats them like a contrapuntal DMX, or a Louis Armstrong big band—irritants which help beget pearls. In other words, Sonny doesn't want to front a group whose rhythm section actively engages him; he'd rather superimpose all the harmonic interest, while the band sketches engaging contrasts and hugs your hips. Thus "I'm Old Fashioned" on *Sunny Days* is as much a creed as an anthem, and Sonny's equestrian romp through its changes is as bold as anything on *The Solo Album*.

As Wilt Chamberlain had Bill Russell, Sonny had his Coltrane, and as much as we'd like to hear him with say, Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette (in the type of trio environment that he pioneered, and which Coltrane, Ornette, Ayler, Shorter and others extended), I suspect Rollins has abdicated that turf. *The Solo Album* offers hints as to why, and suggests that whatever the next step, the incomparable Sonny Rollins is still very much a work in progress. — Chip Stern



THE MINUTEMEN

3-Way Tie (For Last)
(SST)

The Minutemen's small circle of friends was finally beginning to widen when the trio's demonstrative guitarist, D. (Dennes) Boon, was killed in a car crash late last year. Thus *3-Way Tie (For Last)* will inevitably be heard as the final achievement of a vital, uncompromising band rather than simply their latest edition of impassioned musical broadsides.

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The 'Men—Boon, bassist Mike Watt and drummer George Hurley—had first lashed through streamlined fragments which averaged sixty seconds in length, detailing life's little moments rather than the big picture. Still they exhibited a remarkably wide range of expression through nearly one hundred and fifty songs recorded in a half-dozen years, notably on last year's *Double Nickels On The Dime*, an expansive forty-five-song set.

Boon's dizzying runs and jagged riffs, Watt's forceful, melodic bass and Hurley's explosive pulse are as well-represented on *3-Way Tie (For Last)*. The six songs on side A directly address the band's sociopolitical concerns, from the ironic and stately "The Price Of Paradise" to the jaunty "The Big Stick," a biting lampoon of the imposing presence of the U.S. in Central America. The side's closing troika—an unsettling "Political Nightmare," "Courage" and a spirited reading of Creedence's "Have You Ever Seen The Rain?"—will leave listeners pondering the potential for an apocalypse now.

A ten-song deluge on the second side showcases the 'Men's delightful musical diversity. It kicks off with a breakneck cover of Blue Oyster Cult's "The Red And The Black," one of the band's early inspirations. The elliptical "Stories," "What Is It?" and Boon's gentle acoustic reverie, "Hittin' The Bong," are balanced by "No One," "Situations At Hand" and the Urinals' "Ack Ack Ack," on which all hell breaks loose. Watt closes the LP with a phoned-in strum through Roky Erickson's "Bermuda."

The Minutemen's eclectic material was probably too disparate for its own good, at least in the view of marketing analysts. But their timely, matter-of-fact declarations and deft musicianship were a potent and adventurous combination. They'll be missed.— **Lou Papineau**



THE DON PULLEN QUINTET

The Sixth Sense (Black Saint)

I get letter bombs. Dogs bite me. My girlfriend won't return my calls. All because I think the excessively democratic George Adams-Don

Pullen quartet hasn't done Pullen any favors. But now there's proof: The debut LP by Pullen's new quintet, boasting Olu Dara, Donald Harrison, Fred Hopkins and Bobby Battle, exhibits fearsome promise and twice as much integrity. Promise because the five tunes here vary wildly, yet each is strong enough to support an album full of similar compositions. Promise because, in his weird, cross-generational and ideologically conflicting choices for a front line, Pullen's constructed a masterpiece of a horn section. And promise because he knows what to do with them. This is a band that's going places.

Any half-curious, upstart piano player has to deal with Don Pullen, one of the first jazz musicians to show how the techniques and temperatures of the 60s avant-garde could be sympathetically grafted onto the mainstream. It shows not only in the way he crafts unsentimental solos—which swirl from facile, single-note lines to wave-like two-handed crescendos of clusters—but in the way he shapes his soloists. Cornetist Olu Dara, for instance, can coast on mannerisms. But by setting him in a hard bop context one moment and a free situation the next, Pullen makes Dara sweat and shimmer through some of his best solos on record. Same goes for saxophonist Donald Harrison, who left to his own devices sometimes reflects the relaxed, unguent pastels of Wayne Shorter. Lots of labels can be applied to his playing here, but impressionistic or relaxed aren't two of them.

Taken as a whole, *Sixth Sense* provides a tasty menu of jazz courses to chew on in the 80s. The first tune, in 5/4, could fit on a Lee Morgan Blue Note, circa 1965. The second is a patented Pullen free piece, with the pianist hammering clusters under a melody played on cornet and alto. The third walks a slightly funky 4/4 path. A duet between Pullen and Harrison could as easily be sung by Whitney Houston as a pop ballad. The last piece, a New Orleans-ish second-line ditty less than two minutes long, sans solos and plus rhythm, makes me want to go out and bark at the moon. Yet the record remains consistent and identifiable throughout. That's one difference between a good band leader and a great one.—Peter Watrous

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Fairport Convention
Gladys' Leap (Varrick)

Doubtless there's an irony to finding that rock's foremost exponents of British traditionalism exist largely through the miracle of overdubbing, but unless you're a listener obsessed with personnel credits, it's not likely to bother you. In fact, Fairport's reigning triumvirate is accomplished enough to render Richard Thompson's "How Many Times" as convincingly without him as "Head In A Sack" is offered *with* him. And, frankly, that's the sort of traditionalism that deserves furthering. (Roundup Records, P.O. Box 154, N. Cambridge, MA 02140)

Teddy Pendergrass
Workin' It Back (Asylum)

It would be hard to imagine a more appropriate title. It isn't simply that this album realizes T.P.'s comeback beyond any reasonable doubt; the real genius here is in the way Pendergrass redefines his vocal style without compromising it. In other words, his new-found croon incorporates exactly the right elements of his older shout-based delivery to sound familiar, while avoiding his weaknesses enough to make him sound credible. Add in songs as sympathetic as "Love Emergency" and "Never Felt Like Dancin'," and it's as if his accident never happened.

The Icons
Art In The Dark (Press)

At this point, moody, tuneful Southern guitar bands have been so thoroughly celebrated the more media-saturated listener may end up shrugging off the latest rave with a muttered, "I have enough R.E.M. records." If such cynicism worries you, simply cue up "Lots Of Money," "Trouble In Havana" or most anything else off this album, and relax as your worries melt away in the warmth of the Icons' harmonies. Please note: Continued play may result in hopeless longing for more of the same. (262 Rio Circle, Decatur, GA 30030)

Stevie Nicks
Rocks A Little (Modern)

Rocks Very Little would have been

closer to it. Granted, "I Can't Wait" is a pretty good Arthur Baker rip, and "Talk To Me" is as likable a celebration of Nicks' mannerisms as you're likely to find, but on the whole, this is so self-indulgent she'd have been better off saving it for some fan club give-away.

Linton Kwesi Johnson
In Concert With The Dub Band (Shanachie)

Who could ask for a better introduction to LKJ's work? Not only does the selection skim the best of his poetry, but the Dub Band manages to serve up live backing that matches the studio originals both in insight and in groove. And, best of all, Johnson's introductions provide a perspective on each piece that makes every rhyme all the more reasonable. (Dalebrook Park, Dept. R, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423)

Arcadia
So Red The Rose (Capitol)

Quite a price to pay for the Durannies to learn that their appeal lies beyond the Rhodes/LeBon cheekbone axis (to compare Roger Taylor's drumming to Tony Thompson's big beat isn't worth even the effort). Granted, LeBon does a wicked Bryan Ferry impression, but for that you should pay eight bucks?

Midge Ure
The Gift (Chrysalis)

Pray you got an exchange slip.

Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers
Pack Up The Plantation: Live! (MCA)

Petty's Heartbreakers may not be *the* tightest road band in rock, but they're damned close. Here, in fact, they positively steal the show, outshining both their boss and his songs. Petty himself, though, seems all-too-shackled to his audience's expectations to breathe much life into his hits, which ends up making the carefully-chosen covers the real highlights here.

Yes
90125 Live: The Solos (Atco)

Recording Yes solos in place of the songs—isn't that like zapping the movie to tape the commercials?

Charlie Sexton
Pictures For Pleasure (MCA)

There's too much promise in this seventeen-year-old's debut to ignore it; too bad there's not enough content to make it worth considering. Granted Sexton's instrumental stylings are everything you could want in a post-new wave guitar hero, and there's no denying that his voice is tailor-made for the lead in the next production of "Bowiemania!" But shouldn't there be something more to teen pop than the predigested familiarity of Keith Forsey's heroes?

Gap Band
Gap Band VII (Total Experience)

Jeez, George Clinton wouldn't have bothered with the funk licks deployed here back when they were new. So why should anyone else bother?

The Who
Who's Missing (MCA)

Considering how genuinely awful some of these songs are (observe how "I Don't Even Know Myself" curdles both *Who's Next* and *Let It Bleed*), Pete Townshend deserves credit for standing by his awful progeny. But please, let's not encourage him to do it again.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti
Zombie (Celluloid)
No Agreement (Celluloid)
Shuffling And Shmiling (Celluloid)

Even though Fela still languishes in a Nigerian prison, Celluloid commendably continues to issue and re-issue the best of recent output. *Zombie* ought to be the most familiar title here, considering that it was released by Mercury in 1978, but given the album's domestic sales, that doesn't say much. *No Agreement* is a jazzier, though no less didactic workout, featuring Lester Bowie, who sounds more at home riffing across Afrika 70's polytonal polyrhythms than he has on his own albums, while *Shuffling And Shmiling* is potent enough lyrically and rhythmically to make any listener, no matter how anti-religious, feel guilty about African missionaries. In other words, FREE FELA NOW! (Celluloid Records, 155 W. 29th St. New York, N.Y. 10001)

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**Benny Wallace***Twilight Time* (Blue Note)

A fun record, the kind of music often named as a principal correspondent in steamy divorce trials. Adulterous, low-dive sentimentality that refuses to acknowledge a dichotomy between hard swinging modern jazz and pop. Indeed, this juke joint gumbo of second lines, guilty gospel, yakety sax and panhandle powderburns is the roots of top forty thirty years removed. What makes it all so satisfying is the complete absence of patronizing intellect. 'Course it don't hurt none to have Dr. John, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Ray Anderson, Chris Parker and Bernard Purdie howlin' at the moon, nor Jack DeJohnette, Eddie Gomez and John Scofield dancing the "Tennessee Waltz." Wallace's steamy evocations of Gonsalves, Lockjaw, Jug, Byas, Ben and Newk make it clear that the black-brown 'n' beige holler of the South and Southwest shall rise again.

Joe Bushkin*Play It Again, Joe* (Atlantic)**Mabel Mercer***Mabel Mercer Sings Cole Porter* (Atlantic)

Pianist Bushkin's chattering melodic swing is captured with surreal acoustic clarity via Les Paul's pre-revolutionary 1942 recording technology on this languid, occasionally bouncy makebelieve ballroom date. Mercer's romanticism is more charged. Her queenly theatrical portrayal of Cole Porter's witty, harmonically subversive show tunes (especially chestnuts like "Experiment," "I Am Ashamed That Women Are So Simple" and "Ace In The Hole") is the cabaret fare of the Gods and well worth the attention of recent Kurt Weill converts.

Mulgrew Miller*Keys To The City* (Landmark)

The mark of mature, evolving young improvisers is an ability to evoke particular styles without merely copying them. The clarion call of individuality rings through this beautifully recorded debut by Mississippi pianist Miller and his stellar trio mates Ira Coleman and Smitty Smith. Miller's feeling for the Wynton Kelly

suave swing reanimates his synthesis of early Tyner and Corea (and *their* roots), while his ballad work on Porter and Ellington is perfection.

Tony Williams*Foreign Intrigue* (Blue Note)

At last defused (but never diffuse), the master drummer reasserts his revolutionary way of driving an ensemble. Resilient cross-rhythms goad young Turks like Mulgrew Miller, Donald Harrison and Wallace Roney in the best tradition of Blakey's Messengers and the Max Roach groups (with Kenny Dorham or Booker Little). Williams' writing is fresh, his use of Simmons and DMX for percussion sections inventive (weird, edgy sound for a twenty-four inch bass drum, though), and the ride cymbal sound sublime...aye, very like a Blue Note date.

James Newton*The African Flower* (Blue Note)

The most mature, assured statement yet from this heraldic voice of modern flute, as filtered through the sepia colored glass of Ellington-Strayhorn. Newton plays Tricky Sam to Olu Dara's Bubber Miley on a Sugar Hillish "Black And Tan Fantasy," and discovers a beautiful new texture with violinist John Blake for the title track. Elsewhere, Newton and company effect a rich modernism that parallels Ellington's last blush in the 60s and early 70s (try Duke's *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* on Fantasy for starters).

Rochester/Veasley Band*One Minute Of Love* (Gramavision)**Billy Hart***Oshumare* (Gramavision)**Jay Hoggard***Riverside Dance* (Indian Navigation)

All panelists have jazz credentials in order; they're just trying to figure out how to incorporate "contemporary" elements. Rochester and Veasley (Odean Pope alumni) have the most genuine R&B roots, and *One Minute Of Love* is occasionally cute, invariably funky but only intermittently interesting. They lack a compelling vocalist or soloist (and

why bring in ringers like John Zorn and Blood Ulmer if you're going to mix them off the disc), and can't seem to decide if they're harmolodic, new wave (the wry "Give It To Me") or Grover W. ("The Art Of Seduction"). Focus needed.

Hart makes his lack of focus work by bringing in stellar sidemen and their tunes (Bill Frisell, Kenny Kirkland, Dave Holland, Kevin Eubanks), getting a rich David Baker mix, and animating the varied jazz-hyphen-two from column A moods with his unique disjunctive swing. Sounds at times like what I thought (innocently?) The Stingner might be going after. Hoggard's jazz-plus ruminations have the most direction: a hot coherent rhythm section, the semblance of poppish hooks (title tune), and an ambitious party mix of Ellington, Monk, third world and, uh, heavy metal (Vernon Reid's body surfing guitar). But without some heavy signal processing, the vibes sound kind of one-dimensional amidst the electricity.

Yusef Lateef*Yusef Lateef In Nigeria* (Landmark)**Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey & His Inter Reformers Band***Juju Jubilee* (Shanachie)

Lateef's gladiator tenor doesn't so much co-mingle with African sensibilities as co-exist with them. On the opening "Mu Omi" the expatriate reed master vamps with Rollinsesque fervor over a surging 4/4 rhythm (which emphasizes the American two and four beats) and even interpolates a little counter figure which sounds like a minor mode of "Cherokee." Elsewhere Lateef evokes the blues and the bush with flute, oboe and native instruments.

Ebenezer Obey is the godfather of juju and his American LP debut is the benchmark against which others must be judged. His talking drummers are more active than King Sunny's, his matrix of interlocking guitar riffs and vocal harmonies more rooted in African folk musics yet curiously in tune with American country, boogie and train whistle blues. Anyone who enjoys Sly and Robbie, Stevie Ray or the Allmans will be right at home here.

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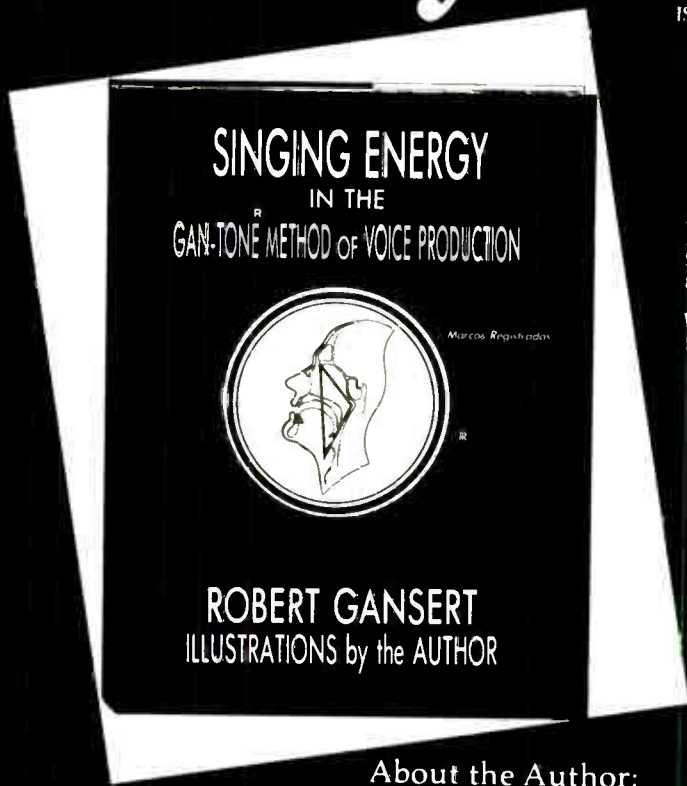
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Robert Gansert has been a performing vocalist for over twenty years, and has been featured in numerous concerts and recordings. His work has been internationally acclaimed. He is currently a noted instructor at the Carnegie Hall studios.

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Thompson from page 70 the same thing, basically. Maybe a little more subtle, but now they're listening".

Of course, the reason they're listening has less to do with Thompson's playmates than with his prowess. For one thing, Tony Thompson is a drummer who understands what it means to groove, and why there's more to time than merely keeping it.

"A lot of drummers get off into doing a lot of technique stuff, and they forget all about groove," he complains. "And how complicated is it to play on top, and to play behind? I mean, you've got drummers like Tony Williams—he's the master of time! That guy can play on top, in between, on the bottom, sideways...." Thompson lets loose an appreciative chuckle. "It's ridiculous! He does it whenever he wants to. And call. And that's really a lock, when you've got a control of time, man. A lot of these drummers—man! God bless 'em all, but a lot of these cats are off into some different stuff. I mean, I was like 'em a lot, I really was. But thank God, the schooling that Nile and Bernard gave me...."

Thompson's experience with Chic gave him his first glimpse at stardom, but it also gave him a tremendous musical base to work from. For starters, there

Chic Stiques

"I've been playing Yamahas, but now I think I'm branching out a bit to Tama. I played Tama on Live Aid, and liked the drums a lot. I haven't signed with Tama yet; I'm still testing the drums, so to speak. But Yamaha has been great, and most of the recordings I've done have all been Yamaha."

Thompson uses a 26-inch bass drum; 10-, 12- and 13-inch toms; and 16x16 and 16x18 floor toms. "There are a couple of snare drums I dig; I use the Yamaha 6½-inch wood—I have two of them—in the recording studio and onstage, but also I have a couple of 6½-inch Premier snare drums, metal. They're great." The heads are Ambassador tops and Diplomat bottoms, with a clear black dot on the snare, and the pinstripe for the back of the bass rim, and the hardware is all Yamaha. His pedal is the Camco chain-drive pedal, "which is the best. And now, Tama has bought over Camco, so it's their pedal." His sticks are Power Tips 2B. "They're made in Canada, and distributed by Bedo Products in Los Angeles."

For cymbals, he chooses Zildjian. "I use the 15-inch Quick Beats for my high-hats—those are the ones with the holes in the bottom—and right over my high-hat I have a 22-inch Pang, which I got when I was with Bowie. It's one of my favorites. In front of me, over my three ride toms, I use two twin 18-inch Paper Thins. For the ride, I like the Ping ride cymbals. Also, they have an Earth Ride I use now, a 20-inch in that. Over my floor toms, it varies—I have 19-inch Paper Thins; 17-inch, 16-inch splashes; things like that."

was the ease with which Rodgers, Edwards and Thompson played together. "It was almost like second nature," Thompson says. "Like, Nile would write a song, and he would only have one or two chords. He'd bring the chords in and say, 'Tony, what do you think? Bernard, what do you think?' And because we'd played together for all these years, we'd lock right in, and create songs. We did it right on the spot with 'Good Times.' Nile had two chords, Bernard has a bassline, and there it was."

Like Led Zeppelin, though, Chic's "simplicity" was anything but easy. "When we did 'Good Times,' now that was a hard tune to play," he says. "It was simple, it sounded simple, but it's not simple to play. I mean, there was sweat pouring on the floor from just locking in on that groove."

"It's just simple grooves like that, man, people have lost sight of. It sounds simple on record and they probably can say, 'Well, anybody can play that.' No it's not. People think, 'This is just a fill.' It's not a fill, it's a feeling. When I play my drums, I give it one hundred percent. It's like my heart and soul go into it. And you know something. It's like Wayne Shorter to me. When I watch him play, the cat can lay out for a whole tune, and just before the tune ends, he'll play a

note in the right place, and it'll blow you away! 'Cause his ears are open, he's listening.

"When I did Madonna, I just needed a little hook or something for me to play. I was building up a tune for myself, with a beginning, a middle and an end. And there were just these little fills that I would do there that weren't that complicated, but if in the right place, hey, they made sense."

To a certain extent, part of that feel is physical, which is why Thompson doesn't think much of electronic drums. "With real drums, there's a natural, warm sound. And it makes you work—it makes you work physically. While these drum pads do all the shit for you, man; you program a sound on that sucker, then just tap it, and you've got all hell breaking loose. That's bullshit, man. That's not really playing."

"I mean, they do have value. I even have a kit, but it's in my locker collecting dust. I got it because you never know, I might do a session where they want a Simmons sound. I'm not so far removed that I'd never play 'em, but if I can do without 'em I will, and I have so far."

"I like to play with power. A lot of cats, they've got technique, they're gliding all over the kit and they've got chops up the kazoo. Fine and Dandy. I don't play that

B A C K • I S S U E S

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way. I lock in, I'm *slapping* it. That's why I respect most rock drummers, because they do that, too. But," he laughs, "their groove leaves something to be desired."

Still, they'll have plenty of opportunity to learn from Thompson in the coming year. In the past six months, he's played with Edwards and guitarist Eddie Martinez behind Robert Palmer, Joe Cocker and Belouis Some. Currently, the trio is working with Air Supply (!?!), with ABC and the Jacksons to come. In between it all, the three of them are cutting their own album. "That's something I'm looking forward to, because it's going to be serious. That's going to be a serious *crunch* rock 'n' roll funk album."

And it that weren't enough on his plate, Thompson is topping it all off by working on a second career as an actor. "I'm in Los Angeles studying, and I've got an agent and I'm up for some movies." Oddly enough, the acting bug runs hand-in-hand with his playing. "When I was a kid, I remember I used to do my rudiments on the snare drum watching old movies with the sound off. So I got really attached to movies."

That naturally raises the question: Which will Tony Thompson do first, act with Sting, or play drums with him?

"I'd like to do both," he answers, not skipping a beat. "The guy's a monster." No doubt, it's just a matter of time. ☐

Electronic drums from page 74

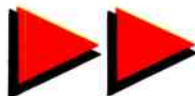
Mainieri bluntly, "You can't play today's music on yesterday's instruments."

Is it worth a drummer's while taking this leap into electronics, learning a strange new language of filters and oscillators and waveforms? After all, drummers are a different class of musician, as percussionist/programmer Jimmy Bralower, who's helped make hits for Hall & Oates, Madonna and Kurtis Blow, will happily attest to: "Being a drummer, I can say without hesitation that the drummer's mentality is geared toward convenience and not experimentation. Drummers want instant gratification from their instrument. That's why I get a lot of work. I'm not afraid to try things."

For percussionists like Bralower, Dobkin, Richards and Mainieri, as well as the dozens of top studio drummers who now regularly use electronic kits as part of their arsenal, the time for sitting on their sticks is over. You can continue to wait, bidding your time for less dramatic price drops and small technological improvements, but for many players, sitting on those sticks is going to become more and more uncomfortable. In a lot of ways. ☐

David Levine is the director of marketing and artist relations at Simmons.

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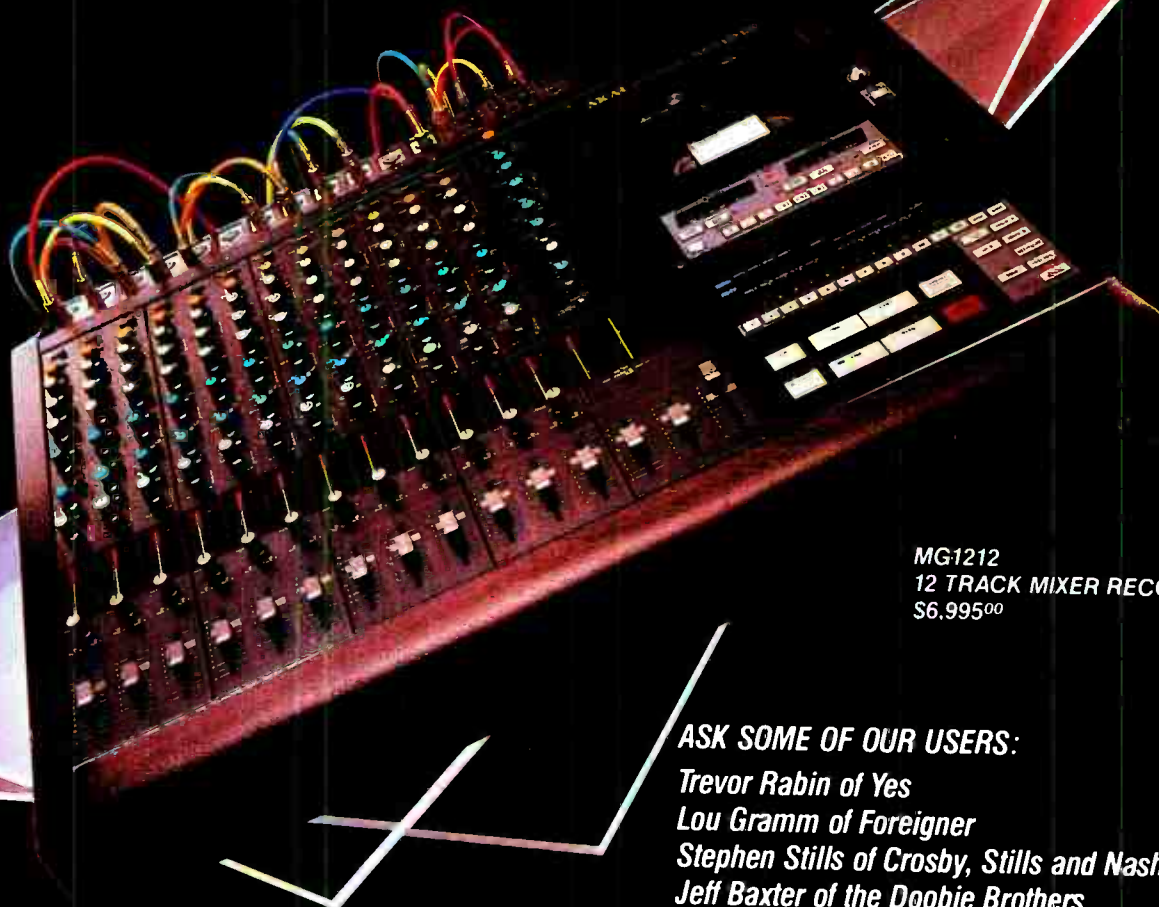
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