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# MUSICIAN

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L I V I N G L E G E N D S



# STEVIE WONDER

# SONNY



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## STIPE'S LAST STAND

I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT Bill Flanagan for his excellent article on R.E.M. (Jan. '88). For the record, I'd like to state once and for all that I do not hate Peter Buck. Bill does. It's Mike I can't stand. And Jefferson is the figment of a wildly overworked collective genius. Thank you.

*Michael Stipe  
Athens, GA*

## MCCARTNEY, PRO AND CON

GREAT PAUL MCCARTNEY INTERVIEW (Feb. '88)! He does know when he's laid an egg. He was honest and straightforward with all of his answers and he wasn't asked the same old questions. Now what's Ringo doing?

*Andrew Janz  
Westchester, IL*



THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I would anxiously look forward to Paul McCartney's latest release. I still look forward to Elvis Costello's latest. Does this mean I can now get excited with McCartney or do I dread Costello?

*Anthony Perry  
Decatur, IL*

MCCARTNEY SAYS HE IS troubled by the use of rock 'n' roll songs in commercials. He points out that he can't ask Buddy Holly how he feels about the use of "Oh, Boy!" in a Buick ad or "It's So Easy" in a Toyota ad. However, both of those songs were released under the name of the Crickets, not Holly's name. The musicians in the Crickets—Jerry Allison, Joe Maul-

din and Tommy Allsup—are still very much alive and could be consulted about the use of their songs.

*Tom Wilk  
Woodbury, NJ*

PAUL SAYS HIS NEW U.K. SINGLE "Once Upon a Long Ago" was not released here because Capitol didn't want it; says he, "Who am I to argue?" As the artist, Paulie, you have every damn right to argue—especially if you still care about your American fans who, since 1976, have watched our U.K. counterparts get all the goodies.

*Susan Ullenberg  
Brown Deer, WI*

IS THERE ANY WAY I CAN GET AN 11-month subscription to *Musician*, skipping the annual Paul McCartney "I wrote 'Yesterday'" interview? But thanks for making him rationalize about selling Buddy Holly's music, and not being able to sell his own.

*Hal Bogerd  
Chapel Hill, NC*

IT'S GREAT TO SEE AN UNBIASED article on McCartney. People tend to forget the wonderfully melodic songs he has written. That was always the appeal to me: melody! The beauty of most of his songs comes through when you play them on guitar or piano.

*Raymond Makutsa  
Wayne, NJ*

## THE LOWDOWN ON BASS

AS A BASS PLAYER, I WAS pleased to see the major part of your February issue devoted to talks and discussions with several different bassists, even if the articles were a little rife with hyperbole: Mike Watt is called an "unsung bass hero," John Patitucci is the "bass rookie of the year," etc.

There are amazingly creative bass players who are unable to gain any notice in the United States for the simple reason that they live and re-

# L·E·T·T·E·R·S

cord in countries not considered part of the "musical establishment." You could go a long way to open up vistas for your readers by educating them "beyond the pale."

*Dana Lawrence  
Lombard, IL*

JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO CONSIGN the mag to the pile next to the john (and not Patitucci), I found the stories on Tim Drummond and Mike Watt. Drummond is an unsung legend; thanks for giving him his long-overdue due. And Mike Watt is a monster, a real stylist who takes chances and comes from the wrong side of the musical tracks. You need more people like him in your magazine—real players who are real people too. Since when did *Musician* start getting cool?

*Lex Shepard  
Barrington, RI*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR WELL-WRITTEN article, "How to Think Like a Bass Player" (Feb. '88). It is indeed refreshing to hear artists like Alfonso Jackson and Marcus Miller expound the virtues of restraint.

*R. Shaw  
Warwick, RI*

## VIOLENT FEMME?

I'M THE LAST FEMALE YOU'D ever find in an ERA picket line, but it's finally dawned on a bimbo like myself what it is your articles are lacking: an occasional woman's touch.

*Jane Siemer  
Reno, NV*

## WENDY AND LISA...

THANKS FOR THE WENDY Melvoin/Lisa Coleman interview (Feb. '88). Lisa has stockpiles of soul, and Wendy has

at least twice her share of whatever it is that makes people alive. Their album may be a slow starter, but I've been listening to it for four months now, and it only improves with age.

*Tricia Eason  
Kilgore, TX*

## ...AND ANDY

YOUR ARTICLE ON WENDY AND Lisa was well done! However, we feel credit should be given where due: Wendy's guitar effects rack was built by Bob Bradshaw of Custom Audio Electronics, North Hollywood, CA—not "Andy Brower." The rack consists of the gear which you listed, as well as the Custom Audio effects switching system, designed by Bradshaw.

Our involvement with Wendy began by providing a consulting and rental service, which included introducing her to the merits of the Bradshaw system. We continue to provide storage facilities for Wendy & Lisa, as well as handling cartage and setup of their gear for their recording and rehearsal dates. They are a professional team, and we are happy to be associated with them.

*Andy Brauer  
Andy Brauer Studio Rentals  
North Hollywood, CA*

## TINKERED TAYLOR

IN OUR APRIL ISSUE'S JAMES Taylor interview, his marriage with Kathryn Walker was mistakenly noted to have been the 17th of December, 1986. Actually the nuptials took place on December 14th, 1985. Sorry!

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0

Neil

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THIS NOTES FOR YOU



# THE CHRISTIANS

## Light Harmonies on Heavy Themes

It is two a.m. in the southern part of Italy and Henry Priestman—keyboardist, guitarist and chief songwriter for the hot British group the Christians—is on the line to a reporter from the States. Even over an uncertain transatlantic connection, Priestman's unveiled disdain for modern pap—excuse, please...

pop—music comes through loud and clear. That disdain is especially loud and especially clear when he says of the Christians, "We don't write about 'luuv' and partying. We try to make the lyrics as intelligent as possible."

So what *do* the Christians write about? Alienation, racism, oppression, spiritual regeneration—big, ambitious themes wrapped in searching, involving lyrics and brought to life with low-key orchestration and feather-light harmonies. This is music that is about something. Music that gives a damn. Thus, music that may well languish at the bottom of the U.S. charts forever.

Priestman, a "born pessimist" who says the band's success at home caught him by surprise,

doesn't seem to be losing sleep worrying about that fate. He says he doesn't listen to much of what's on the charts anyway, and it certainly doesn't influence what he chooses to do.

"It's not like we're trying to sound like anything," he says. "If anything, we're looking further back or maybe broader, looking to other countries, back into musical heritage, be it R&B, or be it country and western, or be it opera or be it classical. I think that's helped us have a different sound than whatever else is going on."

The Christians (which, besides Priestman, includes brothers Garry and Russell Christian) sound like a rebirth of pop music's conscience, an entity dusted off and trotted out only sporadically these days. Priestman accepts that praise warily. He doesn't want to be tagged as a protest band, he says, "but it is par for what we do. We are thinking people and there are some things that we see as being wrong. We don't say that we have the answers, but we will at least raise the questions."

— Leonard Pitts, Jr.



IAN HOOTON

Oleh Witer has cut way back on his drum addiction. He tended to OD on drums in the earliest days of Big Pig—Witer's Australian outfit whose wonderfully refreshing debut LP, *Bonk*, is loaded with whining blues harp, gospel-oriented vocals and pure polyrhythms for now people.

"When I started the band up, I was working with a whole group of drummers, about eight or nine drummers—*just* drummers," Witer recalls. "We used to do jam sessions, virtually, and in the middle of that, I'd be standing there with a microphone, trying to sing over the top of it. After a while, I decided to cut back some



drummers and get some vocalists in, and eventually came up with the seven-piece line-up."

Yeah, cut back *some* drummers: The band still includes three, Witer among them. Indeed, as a skinsman, Witer felt the traditional role of drums in pop bands was too confining and not overly imaginative.

Some notions about how to expand that role started to come together in 1984 during an extended stay in London. And his pro-percussion stance grew more fervent after he attended a performance there by the Japanese Kodo drum ensemble.

"It showed me that I could actually carry my ideas off," Witer says of the troupe's drum-heavy approach. "When I was watching them I kept thinking, 'It would be great if people were actually singing on top of what they were doing.' The vocal idea, that sort of gospel idea, had been in my head already."

After that false start with too many drums and too few singers, he wedded the gospel idea to the drum idea. The marriage blossomed when Witer returned home (after his visa expired) and



## Three Drummers, Down from Eight

recruited Sherine, a Sri Lankan living in Australia whose soulful belting slices right through the percolating rhythms.

On *Bonk*, the Big Pig sound is at once foreign and familiar, past and present. Most of the modern-tribal tunes are earthy, melodic, busy and spirited; more so, one guesses, when the septet—all clad in black butcher aprons—delivers its feisty, fat chants onstage.

Asked whether the aprons are worn for reasons of style or comfort, Witer responds, "A bit of both, really." Then, with a hearty laugh he adds: "Actually, *that's* a big gimmick." — Duncan Strauss



**BIG PIG**

# ES



GREG ALLEN

## THE PONTIAC BROTHERS

Though a mere lad of 28, Ward Dotson reckons he's paid enough dues already. "I've been banging my head against the wall for a while now...I'm a little numb...definitely frustrated," moans the guitarist for the Pontiac Brothers, a high-octane, no-frills rock 'n' roll combo from Orange County, California.

Mind you, Dotson loves being a Pontiac; he's just anxious to make some cash. The Gun Club was another matter entirely.

Dotson did time in that infamous gang back in the early '80s, and regrets every minute. "I'm really embarrassed by that band. It represented everything I hate in music: people wearing black clothes, spiking their hair and playing out of tune. Jeffrey Lee Pierce was singing about hellhounds on his trail while he was living with his mom! I listen to those records now and they sound so stupid, 'cause they're not honest."

Dotson discovered more compatible types in 1984, hooking up with Matt Simon (vocals), Kurt Bauman (bass) and D.A. Valdez (drums) to form the Gallstones. Originally just an excuse to "screw around, get drunk and play Stones songs," the group somehow coalesced into a viable

concern and became the Pontiac Brothers in 1985.

Following two promising LPs, they've shifted into fourth gear with the new *Johnson*. The third Pontiac Brothers LP finds the quartet at peak power, recalling everyone from the Stones to the Replacements in freewheeling rave-ups like "Need My Head" and "Creep." Appropriately, guest Ian MacLagan of Faces fame contributes rollicking barrelhouse piano.

But Dotson frets about finding a niche in the marketplace. "We're not played on AOR stations, which is probably where we belong, next to Bryan Adams and other lame stuff. Instead we're heard on college radio, right alongside Scraping Foetus Off My Dad's Shoe, or whatever the name is, and all that industrial goof-off noise." And he worries about having to tone down their fast-and-loose approach. "The last time we played live, we actually wrote out a set list for the first time, because it was our first show promoting the new album. Then we got onstage and said, 'Fuck it. Let's just do what we want.'"

Almost apologetically, Dotson adds, "It's just not fun to practice every note. It's way too boring." — Jon Young

## Roll Over, Bryan Adams

Forget meeting and greeting. Forget pressing the flesh.

Andrew Eldritch, the British half of the newly-revamped Sisters of Mercy, has agreed to fly to New York to plug the duo's new album, *Floodland*, for only one reason: His long-distance girlfriend lives here. Even for a pallid, self-described ascetic, a free plane ticket was too good a deal to pass up.

As guiding light for the original Sisters of Mercy, Eldritch led his band from backroom obscurity to prominence as a main attraction on the British indie charts. But he shed no tears when they self-destructed two years ago, not long after playing London's Royal Albert Hall. "Ninety-five percent of the old stuff was pretty much a solo project anyway," he says. "When we weren't on tour, the rest of them used to sleep and let me get on with it."

With a grounding in German literature "like you wouldn't believe," Eldritch moved to Hamburg to distance himself from the noxious fumes of the British scene. The Sisters' other half, ex-Gun Club bassist Patricia Morrison, hails from L.A., but Teutonic gloom runs through the new album. Synthesized *angst*. Sonic *sturm und drang*. And be-

neath the lyrical references to Mother Russia and Lucretia Borga (with Jim "Meatloaf" Steinman lurking in the credits), that dance-crazy beat.

Eldritch admits he grew up on Gary Glitter's music, "that moron stomp, and I'm afraid it's still ingrained. That's why I use a drum machine. It's Gary Glitter in a box."

And what about the darkly mysterious Patricia? "She's my lieutenant," Eldritch says vaguely. "She happens to be a bass player, but that's not why she's around. She keeps me away from all that's bad for me. She's my guardian angel."

To the apparent irritation of Elektra Records, the Sisters of Mercy have no tour plans. "I don't have the physique for it," Eldritch explains. "I'm a very slightly-built baritone, and it takes great effort for me to sing." Along with his indifference to conquering America, this is what some record industry folk see as "just another example of my bloody-mindedness, or what Americans call 'my attitude problem.'" Sounds like they just don't understand.

"No," Eldritch says. "They haven't got the faintest idea."

— Dan Hedges



## The Price of Genius

## SISTERS OF MERCY

AUSTAIR THAIN

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TERI BLOOM

“Now this is a deep statement to make,” says Stevie Wonder, “but it’s true, it’s true.” He leans forward in his seat and peers out intently before continuing. “When I see Reagan on television, I like his speeches a lot. At least a lot of them I like *idealistically*. But then again, it doesn’t make any kind of sense. It’s wild. Because he talks about these various things, how we’ve got to free the peoples of the world. And he talks about all these different parts of the world, but he doesn’t mention South Africa. He doesn’t mention what’s happening to the Palestinians. And I think, ‘Why not?’” Wonder is expanding on the inspiration for “Skeletons,” his funk indictment of the administration’s moral lapses.

“Then I watched the Super Bowl last night, and I kept waiting for him to call up and say

congratulations. Is it coincidental that because the quarterback was black, he didn’t...” He pauses, turns his head a little. “I don’t want to think that, but it’s just amazing.”

Wonder reaches for the room service cart that’s just arrived, and sends a metal cover clanging to the floor. He laughs wickedly—no one, it is said, takes more delight in blind jokes than Stevie Wonder—and the cover is quickly retrieved by Teresa Cropper, Stevie’s attorney and friend. “I’m a very important *bidnusman*,” howls Wonder in mock-jive tones, “and I want my croissant!” Then he switches to an impeccably upper-crust British accent: “And could you put a pat of butter on it, please?” Cropper butters the croissant and guides Stevie’s hand toward it. She whispers to him and laughs.

by Steve Perry

# blind optimism

## Stevie Wonder Sees

## Only the Good

Between bites, he continues the thought. “I saw this guy on television who was being messed with. He’s a member of the FBI, a black guy with an interracial marriage. He comes to work, and he sees this picture, put up over his son’s picture, of a gorilla. Now that’s stupid. It’s just time for people to grow up. And to me, the place that has grown up the most is music, with all its different cultures and colors.”

It’s only fitting that the conversation has turned to the intersection of politics and music, since Stevie Wonder in the 1980s has poured at least as much time and energy into his political and charitable work as into his music. In the early part of the decade he almost single-handedly kept alive the struggle for a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday; he was also a key figure in the USA for Africa session and the Dionne Warwick AIDS benefit record, “That’s What Friends Are For.” Currently he’s planning a number of events, including a benefit for Baby Tabitha, an infant who recently underwent an astronomically expensive multi-organ transplant.

“Stevie’s always involved in a great many projects,” avers Angelia Bibbs-Sanders, an assistant to the president of Motown who’s currently doubling as publicity coordinator. “Sometimes you wish he’d do a little less of that, and record more. A record a year would be great. But that’s not Stevie.”

“I’ll be sitting at home,” says Teresa Cropper, “and Stevie will see something on TV that upsets him or moves him, and he’ll just call me up right then: ‘Are you watching TV? We gotta do something about this!’ He’s really a believer. He has this profound sense of faith. He believes he can accomplish anything just by believing hard enough. When it came time for the lobbying effort on the Hill to get the King holiday, Stevie hated that. He absolutely did not want to be involved in that. I’m like, ‘Stevie, this is politics, this is how it’s done.’ So we had a reception for the people on the Hill, and I had photographers there making sure to get photographs of all the politicians who came to meet him. And he had a great time. But that kind of politics is foreign to him.

“It’s really frustrating to me that Stevie just doesn’t believe in *quid pro quo*. If Stevie writes a song for someone or helps them out in the studio, I tell him, ‘Great. Now why don’t you tell them we could really use their support on this other project we’re working on?’ That happened a lot around the King holiday. But Stevie would never do that. It drives me crazy.”

As Cropper’s comments suggest, Stevie Wonder seems to possess an almost childlike sensibility about politics and processes of change: If he believes in something fervently enough and long enough, it must happen. This is driven home to me most forcefully when he’s discussing a Washington rally he organized to support the passage of the King holiday. “I

knew that—believed that—the holiday was going to be a reality from the moment I began to write the song [‘Happy Birthday’]. I imagined in my mind people marching into Washington with petitions. I imagined all of the various things—only thing I was off on was the weather. It was real cold. But then the sun came out. I just imagined it was going to be great, and it was really warm outside. In the spirit, you know.” What he’s really describing is the process by which he imagined the event into being.

If Wonder’s politics are characterized by a simplistic brand of faith, it’s remarkable in one sense that he ever became politicized at all. Growing up as a child star can be a pretty insulating experience, I suggest to him at one point; he responds by insisting that his political outlook began to take shape even before the days of the Twelve-Year-Old Genius. “It really probably started for me as far back as the mid-’50s,” he says, “when I was about five, and I began hearing all these different things—about this man who was fighting for equality in Alabama and Mississippi, and this woman who refused to get up and give her seat to a white passenger when, in fact, the bus wasn’t even full. I’m speaking of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. Those kinds of things for sure shaped my mind, and my feeling about wrong and right.”

Soon the conversation veers back toward music, and Wonder waxes enthusiastic about the positive musical signs he sees coming out of the late ’80s. “Rap music,” he volunteers immediately. What’s the appeal of rap? “Different artists feeling free to sing, to *express* themselves without limitations. Terence... what’s his name? Terence Trent D’Arby. I like him, too. I hear in him a marriage of the Sam Cooke thing, and maybe a little Stevie.” He grins slyly. “I like that song”—he hums a few bars of D’Arby’s “Let’s Go Forward”—“I like the energy of what that’s saying. I also like Heart.”

Heart?

“Why, do you think that’s strange?” A little, I admit. “I mean, but see, I like *music*, right? I also like that single—what’s the group from Australia? ‘Need You Tonight’ by INXS. Obviously I like the new Earth, Wind & Fire album. You know what I think happens, though? People get into such a time thing with musical artists. I don’t know, something happens.”

Wonder is quick to elaborate on the “time thing,” in terms that make it clear he’s thinking of the lukewarm reception given to some of his own recent work. “Music of the ’70s. Music of the ’60s. Music of the ’50s. Music of the ’30s. Music of the ’20s. Music of the ’80s. Music of the ’90s.” As he recites this litany, his voice rides up and down in sing-song fashion. Then he pauses. “It’s a shame for those artists of the ’80s, ’cause they’re gonna be swallowed up by the artists of the ’90s. Basically, that’s really not true. Music is music. People say, ‘How is it you’ve been here so long?’ It’s because I don’t allow people to put me into any time thing. Partially that’s why it’s not so important to me to rush another album out there and flood the market with a lot of stuff, because I have more to say than for one five-year period, or 10 years, or 15 minutes.”



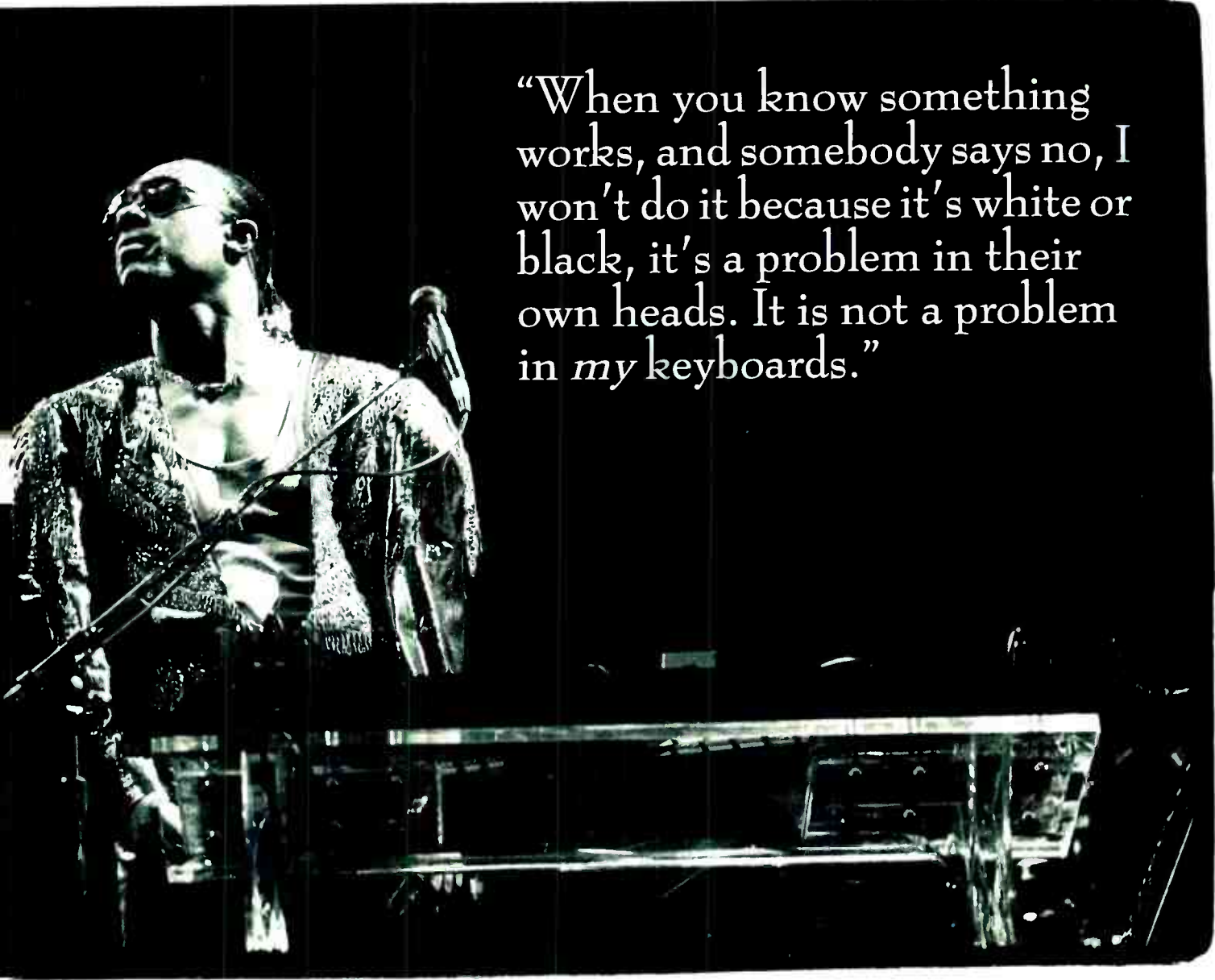
Wonder is wrapping up two or three days' worth of making the New York TV rounds. So far he's done "Good Morning America," "The Today Show" and the "CBS Morning Program"; after we talk he'll head off to tape segments for CNN and BET, the black video cable network. It's all in the name of promoting *Characters*, his twenty-eighth album for Motown in just over 25 years. The album is his strongest since *Hotter Than July* in 1980, which may be part of the reason Wonder is willing to grant a few of his rare interviews. Then again, it may just be because he has nothing better to do: Stevie recently underwent surgery to have a benign growth removed from his right index finger, and while he waits out the recuperation period (four weeks or so), he's unable to play keyboards for the first time in his life.

Like most artists who came up through the Motown system, Stevie Wonder possesses an ingrained diffidence toward the media. His penchant for "rescheduling" interviews at the last minute is legend, as are the caution and circumspection he uses in discussing his career. That caution no doubt stems in part from the culture of Motown Records in the 1960s. Motown had an entire division in those days (dubbed Artist Development)

whose mission was to groom artists for life in the public eye. It was, indeed, a charm school, as most accounts of the label have indicated, but it was more than that. Berry Gordy's vision of Motown as the Sound of Young America meant that he placed a priority on solid, popular entertainment—and in that setting, there was little room for young black artists to sound off on matters either political or personal. Discretion was deemed to be the better part of getting over, especially at a time when America's racial politics had grown hotter than ever before; consequently, Motown artists were schooled in dealing with the press by means of the Graceful Evasion.

So far as interviews go, Wonder learned his lesson well; when he deals with the press at all, the accent is on wariness and control. "Now tell me more about the angle of your story," says Angelia Sanders when we sit down in the suite at New York's Plaza Hotel where the interview is to happen. I've been invited to stop by a little early so that we can have a pre-interview "briefing" that turns into an hour of small talk. "Why do you think the magazine picked you to interview Stevie?" asks Teresa Cropper at one point. And later: "This isn't going to be a story just about his past, is it?" In between questions

GARY GERSHOFF/RETNA



"When you know something works, and somebody says no, I won't do it because it's white or black, it's a problem in their own heads. It is not a problem in *my* keyboards."

like these, Cropper regales me with stream-of-consciousness Stevie anecdotes in a not particularly veiled attempt to suggest a tone for the story. Finally, just before Stevie arrives, Sanders turns to Cropper and asks, "Now, are there any dos and don'ts for the interview that we should talk about?" This catches Cropper a little off guard. "Uh, not really," she says. I think Stevie can handle that." When Stevie and I first sit down, they gravitate to another part of the suite and talk. Within minutes, though, they're back in the sitting area, hovering around Stevie and listening in. (Later I'm told, "Concerning what Stevie said about the President and the Super Bowl, I think that last year NBC asked the President not to phone the locker room after the game, and what happened this year was probably a carry-over from that. So...you may not want to play that up too much, you know?")

But if Wonder assimilated the Motown line on media, he nonetheless has always been a wild card in Berry Gordy's deck. From the beginning, Little Stevie Wonder was an infamous practical joker (a gifted mimic, he used to call the Motown office imitating Gordy and tell the secretaries to let Stevie take home one of the office tape recorders; he'd gone through three before Gordy finally made him a gift of one). Cropper remembers that everyone around Stevie used to live in terror of April Fools' Day: "One time in particular, he called up this new woman in the office who had a crush on Eddie Murphy and told her that Eddie was stranded in Long Beach with no wallet and no money, and could she please drive down and get him? She almost *did* it, until I warned her. Then he called up somebody else in the office and said he'd been arrested with someone who turned out to be holding drugs, so could we come and bail him out? He called me to say all the furniture and equipment had been stolen from our office. You could never let down your guard." She pauses and sighs. "But you know, since Marvin passed on April 1, he's never pulled another April Fools' joke."

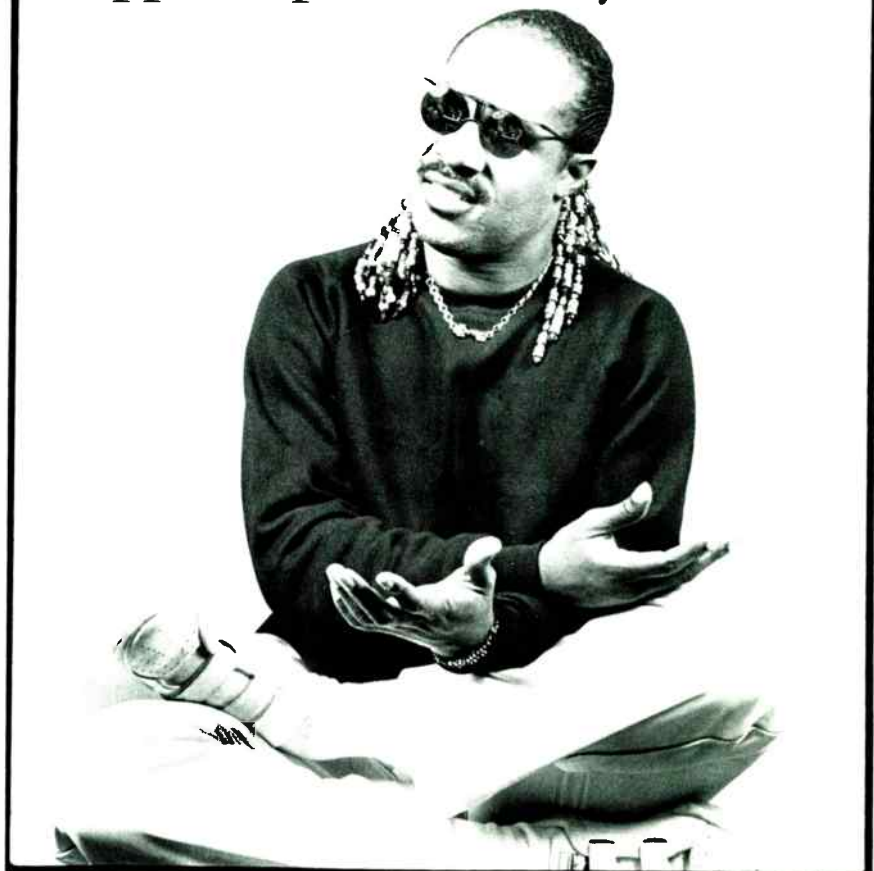
Along with Marvin Gaye, Wonder was one of the first artists to break rank with the highly-regimented Motown production line by demanding greater artistic independence. His original contract, which ran until his twenty-first birthday, gave the label full control of his publishing, management and production affairs, and placed all his earnings in a trust fund; in the meantime he was paid an allowance—starting at \$2.50 a week when he was 12—and his family was given a stipend for household expenses. On turning 21, Wonder shocked Motown by telling the label to void his contract, and demanding an independent audit of his royalty statements. He took the money from his trust fund (about \$1 million, which was quite a low figure considering Wonder's record sales, but hardly out of line with the stingy contracts Motown dispensed in the 1960s) and headed for New York, where he rented a room at

the Howard Johnson Motor Lodge and installed himself at Electric Lady Studios in Greenwich Village to begin the process of reinventing Stevie Wonder.

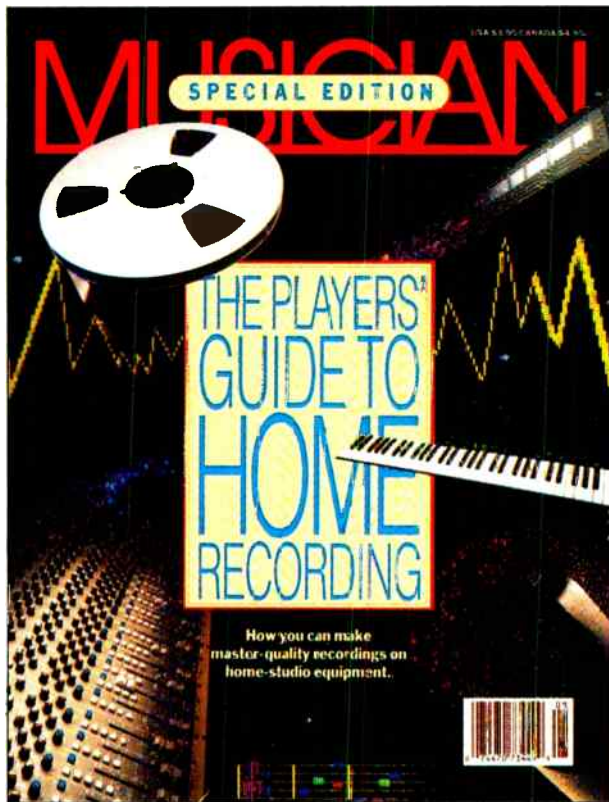
The declaration of independence was a long time coming; one former Wonder aide, Ira Tucker, has said, "I tend to believe he had it all figured out from the time he was 14." By most accounts, it was a time of considerable antagonism between Wonder and Motown, and it's probably not stretching too far to say that Stevie was fighting for his creative life. Consider this 1969 assessment by Gene Kee, his Motown musical director: "By the time he's 21, he will have become Stevie Wonder the entertainer, not just Stevie Wonder the maker of pop records. He has the potential to be another Sammy Davis." This was just two years before *Music of My Mind*.

Nowadays, however, Stevie prefers to minimize the friction of years gone by. When I ask whether being part of a prolonged struggle for artistic freedom helped shape his political awareness, he says simply, "No, because basically the time it took for me to become the producer for the first time was good. It ultimately helped me grow to be better, and to believe

"Real creativity is a combination of that which you imagine and plan in advance, and that which happens spontaneously."



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in myself more. So..." He pauses, selecting his words carefully. "So it wasn't a struggle. Not really. It was a growing up of individuals into understanding each other, into understanding what ultimately was going to be.

"Motown had a certain formula, of which I was not even really a part back then. I was not really part of the Holland-Dozier-Holland formula, I was not part of the Norman Whitfield formula. I was part of the Wonder-Moy-Cosby formula, which happened probably every other year with a big hit: 'Uptight' in '65, we had another one in '67 with 'I Was Made to Love Her,' and then we began to have even more hits." Consequently, says Wonder, when he released *Where I'm Coming From*, his first genuinely self-conceived album, he was ready and confident to step out in a new direction.

But what about now? Does he stay with Motown out of a sense of loyalty and shared history, or simply because the deals are right?

"Well," he replies, a wry smile spreading across his face, "the deals aren't bad. But historically it has meant a lot to me to be with Motown. Motown has gone through many changes; I learned a lot about how I've reacted and responded [to those changes] in my own personal life. When I do get married, I'm sure that me and my wife will go through ups and downs and ins and outs, as I've gone through with my family. But there has been a stick-to-it-iveness that has transcended any bad decisions or wrong moves. So I feel that way about Motown. I enjoy the fact we've had this relationship for the period of years we have. It probably would only be second [in duration] to that of Smokey or Berry himself."

Still, some of Wonder's observations about his relations with Motown through the years strain credibility. Here, for instance, is the most important artistic difference of opinion he'll confess to having with Berry Gordy: "I probably regret...the only thing Berry has been right about, and I'll admit it today without any question—I think—is that he always felt I should have released 'Isn't She Lovely' as a single, and I said no, let's just keep it on the album. I'm pretty sure I think he was right. Usually, we ultimately agree on almost everything else. But that one thing, you know, if he hears this or reads this, he'll probably laugh: 'I tried to tell him he was ridiculous!' Okay, Berry, you were right. I think."

It's hard to say whether Wonder's brand of round-off-the-edges revisionism is a product of his Motown-bred sense of decorum or his seemingly preternatural optimism, but most of the people I spoke to about Stevie agree on one thing: "Stevie," as Teresa Cropper put it, "is always able to find the most positive aspect of any situation, focus on it and turn it to his advantage. That's a real strength of his."

The records Wonder made in the first years after declaring his independence from the Motown system remain stunning—for their melodic range, their rhythmic complexity, their energy, their generosity of spirit. For their sheer *musicality*, in the fullest sense. Together with artists such as Marvin Gaye, Sly Stone and War, Wonder helped define the album as a meaningful unit within black music; in earlier days, most albums had consisted of a few hit singles padded with filler tracks. Wonder also helped expand the range of lyrical concerns in black pop; he had always made good—and sometimes great—records, but most had been fairly conventional songs of love and loss. Now, with records like the scathing "Living in the City," he proved he could sing "both sides," as writer Gerri Hirshey put it. Stevie Wonder had arrived.

Beginning with *Music of My Mind*, Wonder's early '70s albums marked a near-complete departure from the sound of his previous work, prompting many to wonder whether Stevie



Onstage at the Brooklyn Fox, 1963

had been working out these new sounds for a long time—or whether he was as surprised as everyone else at what emerged. "I think real creativity is a combination of that which you imagine and plan in advance, and also that which just happens spontaneously," he muses. "That period was really a combination of both. Sure, I had heard the Moog synthesizer. I had listened to *Switched-On Bach* by Carlos. There were small but significant featurings of the synthesizer by the Beatles, for instance. In 1971 I first worked with the Moog with Bob Margouleff and Malcolm Cecil. It was a combination of me wanting to hear different sounds, and also being impressed with the sounds made by Tonto's Expanding Headband, which Bob and Malcolm had formulated."

From 1971 through 1974, associate producers Margouleff and Cecil worked closely with Wonder, helping to create a body of work (*Music of My Mind*, *Talking Book*, *Innervisions*, *Fulfillingness' First Finale*) that many people still regard as his greatest sustained achievement. The threesome did virtually all the production and engineering on these records; Margouleff even shot the cover photographs for *Music of My Mind* and *Talking Book*. Margouleff and Cecil probably worked more closely with Stevie Wonder on a creative level than anyone before or since (with the possible exception of Stevie's early Motown mentor, Clarence Paul), and their recollections of the time are decidedly more loquacious and specific than Stevie's.

"What we did," recalls Margouleff, "was we worked constantly with him in the studio. Night and day, to his schedule—holidays, weekends. I think that was because Steve, being unsighted, had his own clock that obviously wasn't based on daytime and nighttime. It was just based on his needs and time. In the studio, we'd put all the instruments in a circle so he could move from one to another, and they were powered up all the time so he could work very quickly.

"So we worked very hard with him, and we concentrated on building a library's worth of material. Rather than cutting an album at a time, we really would cut for the library. And then when album time came around, we'd go through the library with Steve, pick the songs we wanted, and finish them. So it

*continued on page 112*

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Jan Hammer is in disarray. "We're in a battle zone here," he laughs. The studio where he's worked for the last 12 years is dismantled, but his new one, a six-figure complex in his barn, isn't ready. So he sits in the remnants of his old studio, his control room gutted, his Fairlight Series III and Macintosh computer on makeshift stands, boxes of new and old equipment scattered around him. But Jan Hammer, the synthesist behind the high-tech sound of television's "Miami Vice," is smiling, his pale blue eyes sparkling with mirth as he plants his stocky frame in front of his equipment. He can smile because he knows that his disarray is most musicians' nirvana.

The 40-year-old Czechoslovakian-born musician, who came to renown with the Mahavishnu Orchestra in the 1970s, is embarking on a new phase of his career after four years creating the sound design of "Miami Vice." The "Miami Vice Theme" was a number one hit and "Crockett's Theme" has been number one all over Europe. *Escape from Television*, his new album, was released in February in the U.S. after being out in Europe since last summer. The sarcasm of the title is fully intended. "I came up with the idea of calling it *Escape from Television* because that's what was on my mind," he says earnestly. "I was trying to get out."

# Jan Hammer's Onward Mobility

WITH "MIAMI VICE" IN THE  
REAR-VIEW MIRROR, A KEYBOARD STAR  
PONDERES HIS NEXT MOVE



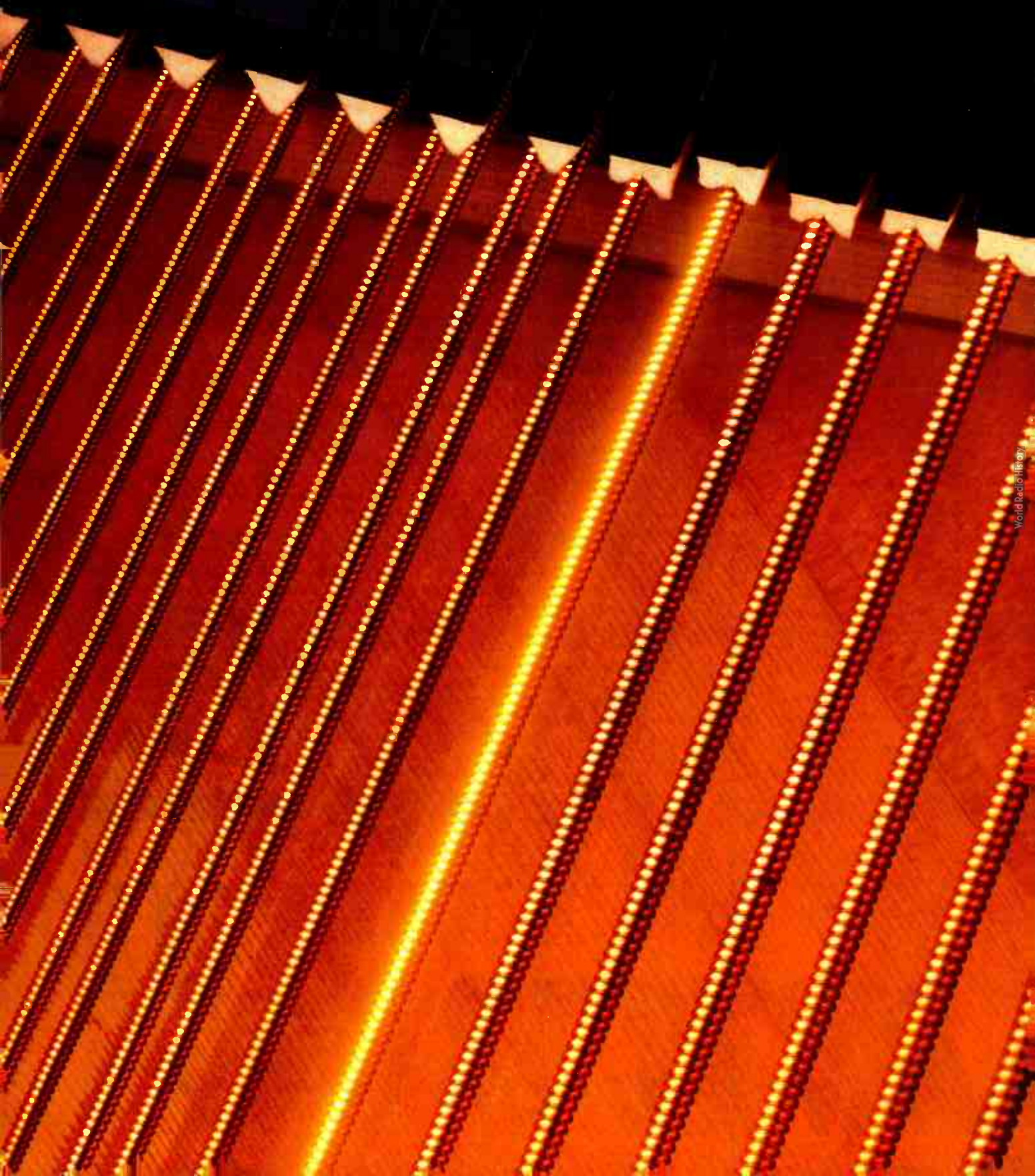
by John Diliberto



Not that working on one of the top shows in television, getting part of its over-one-million-dollars-per-episode budget, and having his first and only number one single ever ("Miami Vice Theme") was especially onerous, but he did reach a point where palm trees and cocaine began to lose their inspiration. "I've done 77 'Vice' shows," says Hammer. "I reached a wall three-quarters through the first season, when I felt I couldn't do anything else, and that was after 17, 18 shows. And all of a sudden I did 19, 20 and it got easier and easier. It just depends on how inspired and relaxed you are at the moment. Now, I'm not saying I couldn't do show 78 or 100. I probably could, but I didn't want to limit myself to that one locale, looking at the same pictures. After 70 it got hard."

At the end of the spring '87 season, Hammer turned in his badge, but after auditioning for a replacement, the "Vice" producers called him a few weeks before the fall season. "At the end of the summer, when my mind was completely divorced from doing "Miami Vice," I get a frantic

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The result is already making musical history as the most faithful digital re-creation of the acoustic keyboard experience: the RD-1000, RD-300S and RD-250S Digital Pianos and the MKS-20 Digital Piano module—three

keyboard instruments and one MIDI module that provide the fundamental sounds essential to any keyboard set-up.

Just sit down at one of these instruments and experience grand pianos that are truly grand, ringing with life, brilliance and clarity, but with simultaneous depth and fullness on the low end of the keyboard. Strike a note hard and actually hear the sound of the hammer hitting the string. Play it gradually softer, and feel the tone get rounder. Hold down the damper pedal and experience the sustain and natural decay. But Roland engineers didn't stop with pianos, in addition to the two grand pianos and one electric grand piano, we've

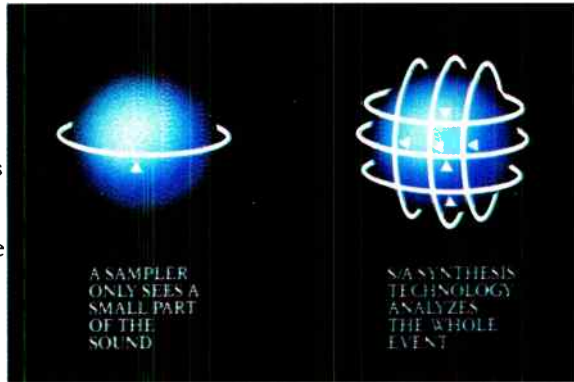
applied the same S/A Technology to create flawlessly realistic Vibes, two rich Electric Pianos as well as vibrant Harpsichord and Clavichord.

The three S/A keyboard instruments make great MIDI motherboards with their great action as well as their ability to be split and handle MIDI information to and from other equipment. The RD-1000 has 88 weighted wooden keys, and, like the MKS-20 Module, has the facility to store 56 edited equalization and effects settings of the digital sounds. The

88-key RD-300S and 76-key RD-250S incorporate the newly-developed SK-6 dynamic keyboard along with the same great S/A sounds.

If you haven't already experienced the breakthroughs of Roland's S/A Synthesis Technology, do it now. Play any one of these incredible instruments and compare them to any sampled piano—even those costing three times as much. Your ears will quickly tell you what thousands of musicians have been telling us—that our years of

exhaustive research were well worth the effort. *Roland Corp US, 7200 Dominion Circle, Los Angeles, CA 90040 (213) 685-5141.*



with a sneer. "What we did was write a killer rock 'n' roll AOR song, 'No More Lies.' It should have been promoted as a single and they totally blew it. So that was the last straw. It was a very frustrating period of my life and I'm glad it's all over. I turned around and said that's it, I'm not doing it anymore and I started scoring soundtracks."

After a few scores for the movies *My Secret Admirer*, *A Day in Heaven* and *Give Me an F*, Hammer hooked up with "Miami Vice" and his soundtrack immediately caught the ear of an America unaccustomed to TV music that drove a scene or was half a step ahead, rather than a decade behind, contemporary tastes. "I was on the same track as Phil [Collins] or Peter Gabriel," claims Hammer. "I was into the same, progressive modern rock 'n' roll, pretty much on the cutting edge of sound. But it's not just the sound. It's the concept of where modern music is going. So I didn't have to change directions at all. I could just step into that role of composing music for the show and not do any adjustments."

He sees no irony in the fact that his greatest renown has been in instrumental music. In the Mahavishnu Orchestra

and later with Jeff Beck, Hammer defined the single-line synthesizer style, replete with pitch-wheel bends and guitar-like phrasing. His first rock album, *Black Sheep*, even had a note for note, timbre for timbre replication of Hendrix's "Manic Depression." "I just love the sense of passion you get with the guitar, and it started when I heard Hendrix," says Hammer. "He was the one who played with the most abandon, just falling off into the unknown. You can never get out there with any sound other than one that sounds like that. There is a tremendous range of those sounds, from Beck to Clapton to Hendrix, but they all have a passionate feel. I've created a sound of my own that sounds like that. And I'd rather express myself that way than on a piano."

In fact, as a soloist, he seems to ignite with guitarists like McLaughlin, Beck, Al Dimeola and John Abercrombie. "The guitar is just such a perfect foil," asserts Hammer. "It's funny because I'm much closer to that than any other keyboard player. I'm not just a chordal envelope for their linear excursions. I'm willing to take whatever they throw at me and throw it right back and it becomes almost

a game of catch. Some guitar players can relate to it, some cannot. It got difficult with John [McLaughlin]. He just didn't like it. At the end of the Mahavishnu Orchestra he felt that what I was doing was encroaching on his sacred ground, ha-ha." Hammer gives a mock, sinister laugh at this.

He looks back on the Mahavishnu Orchestra like it was his Vietnam. I ask him to go back in his mind to a time before he soured on the band and within a few sentences he's lambasting McLaughlin again: "In the beginning it was like something that united. Something happened like a chemical reaction that was very volatile. The result was something nobody expected. It grew and grew and reached a peak and I'm sure that John assumed that it was all his doing and he neglected to give due credit and that was the downfall of the band."

"Of all the members of the band, I'm doing fine," he adds with a glint of vengeance. "I'm more visible than any of the other members of the band, so there's no sour grapes."

Despite his apparent disgust with the direction of fusion, Hammer kept playing it on *Like Children*, his duet album with

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'Vishnu violinist Jerry Goodman, in the Jan Hammer Group and then with Jeff Beck. It was a curious alliance at the time. Beck was a '60s icon of electric guitar who Hammer admired. Now the guitar hero, after recording the fusion-inspired album *Blow by Blow*, looked to Hammer for some jazz credibility.

"It was a little bit of that," admits Jan, "but I think the bottom line was simpler. I think it was just changing his inspirational base, where he draws from. He felt limited by the vocabulary of the music he was a part of for so many years, that he helped create between him and Eric and Jimmy Page. He felt that through my approach to linear playing, on the Mini Moog at the time, I was able to expand on that vocabulary and he wanted to pick up on that."

The exchange was mutual. Inspired by Beck, Hammer added to his repertoire of guitar phrasing and sensibility. "It's more a sense of tone," says Hammer. "There's a singing quality to his tone and I was able to imagine how I could utilize that sort of a vocal, singing, ringing thing that projects. So when you play a note, you play a very simple part, you can make it sing out to a huge space

just by a little expressive move."

The linear solos and power chords of Hammer's early music seem a long way from "Miami Vice," with its broad instrumental palette and reliance on atmospheres and sonic cues, rather than flash. There would seem to be too little of the immediacy Hammer craves, as he sits entering lines into his Fairlight, editing on his Macintosh and programming the sounds that make the show so distinctive. You have to go back to 1975 and Hammer's first solo album, *The First Seven Days*, to find a precedent. Hammer created a series of tone poems, using the Mini-Moog, Oberheim Xpander, Freeman String Ensemble, a Mellotron and "tons of percussion" to create electronic orchestras that moved from symphonic lushness to a sometimes primeval primitivism.

"That was classically flavored," agrees Hammer. "A lot of different orchestration and it was hard to pin down as far as the category. The Fairlight seemed to reawaken that in me. The Fairlight made it much easier. Before I had to use the Mellotron and hand percussion to create a sense of intimacy. With the Fairlight I was able to instantly

have all these acoustic sounds. It really is a digital recorder of snippets. You can create collages of acoustical sounds that, when combined, create sounds that would be unheard of or impossible until the Fairlight came along."

When the mix is right on "Miami Vice" and the music isn't buried under a confusion of screeching tires, bullets and dialogue, Hammer conjures up magic from his electronic palette. On *Escape from Television*, he orchestrates South American percussion choirs on "Columbia" and tense atmospheres on "The Trial and the Search," with its haunting, whispering organ voices, reedy Memory Moog touches and even a wah-wah guitar solo. Then it segues into an Afro-Cuban groove, with interlocking steel strings and percussive grunts. It was Hammer's combination of electronic textures with exotic percussion that really set the "Vice" music apart. "I know people who know a lot about rhythms like these," says Hammer. "People like Dave Johnson, who's a true student of the art of congas and percussion. I learned so much from him."

Hammer did more than learn. David  
*continued on page 126*



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# DIGITAL

*emotion*



MICHA RISS

*How the current crop of keyboard synthesizers came in from the cold.*



by Alan di Perna



**T**hey say God made man out of a lump of mud. And the Hindus tell us that Vishnu created the whole world from a sea of milk. Now, when you play Creator and try to build a killer synth sound, what kind of raw materials do you like to use? In the old days, you went to your Mini Moog or Prophet 5 and diddled with sine waves, sawtooths, LFOs, filters, etc., until you came up with something and Saw It Was Good.

But nowadays, admit it, what do you do? You take the hottest factory sample you can find in your deluxo MIDI sampler, locate a bright, plinkety preset on your FM or PD synth and maybe add a nice wobbly blat from your analog machine. You MIDI the lot together and pump it through a juicy wet digital reverb program. If you're feeling really ambitious, maybe you'll trim up a few decay times and filter cutoff frequencies on some of those presets. Before long... whap...you've got a state-of-the-art, late-'80s-style synth sound.



What could possibly come next? How about doing all this combining inside a *single* tone module or keyboard synth? That's the essential operating principle shared by a trinity of the coolest new synths around today: the Roland D-50, Ensoniq SQ-80 and the Kurzweil 1000 Series. Does this mean you can't program these machines? That you can only combine presets? Not in the least. They're all very programmable. It's just that you can use complex samples and synth sounds as a starting point, just as you once used simple sine, sawtooth and square waves as the starting points of your old Mini Moog programs. (And all three synths will also let you build with simple waveforms, if that's what really turns you on.)

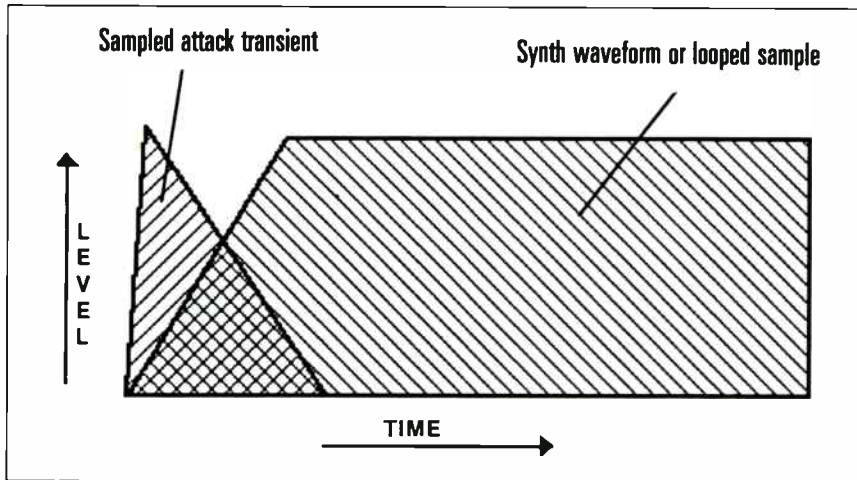
Ah yes, now you remember reading all those ads and interminable articles, right? Don't these new synths all have new-fangled Arithmetic Crosswave Kabalistic Triangulated Linear Calculus programming systems? Yeah, there *is* a lot of fancy terminology associated with these things, but don't let that scare you off. Scratch the surface of these forbiddingly-named parameters and you'll find a lot of the same old filters, envelopes, LFOs and other parameters you've been working

# The Hybrids: Samplid Synths

**REAL-WORLD SAMPLES IN ROM**

**FORTIFY THE D-50, THE SQ-80**

**AND 1000 SERIES**



“Cross Wave” synthesis, typical of the sample/synth hybrid.

with all along. Hey, this thing you’re reading right now could be called a LMLIT (Low-Mimetic Quasi-Literary Informational Text). Or it could be called a magazine article. If an exciting, revolutionary LMLIT would sell better than a plain old magazine article, you can guess what I’d call it.

#### Read It and Bleep

The D-50, SQ-80 and 1000 Series are all very different machines, mind you. The SQ-80 is the only one of the three that comes with a built-in eight-track sequencer, for example. And while the D-50 and SQ-80 are eight-voice instruments, each 1000 Series instrument gives you between 20 and 24 voices, depending on which module you buy. But at the heart of each synth you’ll find a bank of samples and complex synthesizer patches to use as the raw materials for sounds of your own creation. And how each machine creates sounds is what we’ll be looking at.

How can they get all these wonderful samples and patches into one box? Simple. They’re all encoded into ROM (Read Only Memory) microcircuitry. When you select a sound and press down a key, the synth reads the appropriate sound data from the microchip and plays it back.

The fact that the sounds come from ROM has several implications. First of all, you obviously can’t do any user-sampling of your own. Nor can you alter these basic building blocks themselves. This is *Read Only Memory* we’re talking about here. But what you *can* do is process the ROM sounds through various filters, envelopes, etc., and then put a number of them all together to form a brand-new sound, which can then be saved in RAM, or Random Access Memory, alongside the factory patches.

But what about the ROM sounds themselves? What are they like? Well, in

all the synths we’re discussing here, the ROM sounds fall into several basic categories. To begin with, you have your sampled waveforms. Some of these are what’re called attack transients. They’re samples of just the beginnings of sounds. The initial thump of a bass guitar. The first breathy “chiff” of a flute note. That first spray of spit into the mouthpiece of a trumpet (yeeech).

These attack transients are designed to be put in front of other ROM sounds in a patch. When the Ensoniq people say the SQ-80 employs Cross Wave Synthesis, they’re talking about using amplitude envelopes to crossfade between an attack transient like this and some other sustain/release waveform. Ensoniq coined the fancy term, but all the machines we’re discussing here will let you do the same thing. It’s all based on the wisdom that first impressions count most. The very first few milliseconds of a sound to reach your ear have a lot to do with whether your ear decides it likes or hates the entire sound.

Also in ROM, you have your looped samples. These are full-length sampled sounds with a loop built into the sustain portion of the wave—much like you’d find or create on any sampler. What kind of looped sounds you get depends on the unit you buy. In the Kurzweil 1000 Series, the 1000HX Horn Expander gives you a lot of horn loops, the 1000 GX Guitar Expander gives you a lot of... guess what? And so it goes with the other modules. The 1000PX Professional Expander and its keyboard brother, the K1000, give you a variety of keyboard and orchestral loops—all of uniformly high quality.

The D-50 is big on atmospheric loops. Lots of your breathy oohhs and ahhs, spectral calliopes and hissy steam escaping from a manhole stuff. This gives the

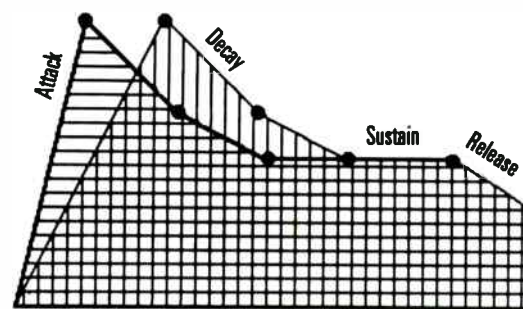
D-50 a very characteristic sound, which probably explains why it has become the successor to the very characteristic DX7. It sounds great. But what this means, of course—and a lot of the Very Important Synthesists I’ve spoken to recently agree with me on this—is that it’s hard to program a sound on the D-50 that doesn’t sound just like... well, a D-50 factory patch. The sort of people who just *had to have* those DX7 chimes and Rhodes patches in their music will no doubt *have to have* those distinctive D-50 timbres. But that huffing and panting can be like having some brazen hussy blowing in your ear all the time. At first it’s kind of exciting, but after a while you start thinking, “What else can you do?”

By contrast, the looped samples on the SQ-80 are fairly plain, as Ensoniq samples tend to be. But what may be a drawback in a stand-alone sampler can be an advantage in this case. The raw sounds provided by the SQ-80 tend to be very malleable, enabling you to put your own stamp on programs.

So what else do you get? Well, as we said, all three manufacturers provide a good selection of basic synthesizer waveforms. The SQ-80, in addition, gives you a number of waveforms created by additive synthesis and by something called Time-Domain Formant-Wave Function Synthesis. (Nope, I don’t know what it means either.) It even gives you a collection of drum samples. On the D-50, the programmer can select either a square or sawtooth wave as an alternative to a PCM sample. You can then do good old Roland Pulse Width Modulation on the square wave. (Remember the Jupiter 8 and Juno synths?) As always, these PWM capabilities make very thick, lush timbres.

#### I’ll Go with the Number 3 Combo....

The next question is: How do these basic ROM waveforms get combined when you program a patch? And how many of them can you put together in a single patch? Of the synths we’re discussing here, the D-50 has the most elaborate



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system for combining basic ROM sounds: the enigmatically named Linear Arithmetic Synthesis. In D-50 parlance, first of all, the basic ROM sounds are known as Partials (not to be confused with the harmonic sine waves called partials in additive synthesis). D-50 Partials are classified as either PCM Partials (i.e., sampled sounds) or synthesizer Partials (i.e., the synthesizer waveforms described above).

Any two Partials can be combined to make what's called a Tone. Also included in the Tone are a number of programming parameters. Now, the way in which the two Partials get combined is deter-

mined by a Structure. Structures are something like FM algorithms. They're "pathways" for combining things. Structure number three, for example, lets you combine one PCM Partial with one synthesizer Partial. Structure number one lets you combine two synthesizer Partials. There are seven structures in all, some of which let you add ring modulation to one of the Partials.

So in starting a program, you might say, "Gee, I'm in the mood for a hearty, downhome square wave combined with a nice, steamy PCM sample on the side. So I think I'll go for Structure Three. No...no; wait. That square wave sounds

a bit too plain. I better get some ring modulation on top of it. Make that a Number Five please."

You build two tones this way and then combine them to form the final patch. In all, then, you can have up to four Partials in a patch. One Tone in this patch is designated the Upper Tone and the other the Lower Tone. The Upper and Lower Tones can be processed through an internal digital reverb and sent out of the D-50's stereo outputs in one of four Output modes, depending on how you want the reverb to affect each Tone.

On the Kurzweil 1000PX, you can select any of the instrument's ROM sounds and make it the heart of what's called a Layer. Up to four Layers can be combined in a patch (unless the patch entails chorusing or other time-delay effects that require two identical layers to function as one). There are no special algorithms for combining Layers, but the 1000 Series' extensive modulation system makes it possible for layers to interact in a number of complex ways.

On the SQ-80, any ROM sound can be assigned to something the manual calls an oscillator. (An oscillator? An oscillator?? Not a Pan-Dimensional Frequency Dependent Stabilizer?) And up to three oscillators can be used in creating a patch. Here too, there are no algorithms for combining the three ROMs. Just set a relative amplitude level for each and modulate to taste.

**Goldilocks and the 3 Matrixes**

Modulation is what really enables you to turn a croaking frog of a ROM sound into a real prince of a patch, or vice versa. All three synths we're discussing here employ a matrix-style modulation scheme, something like the one first introduced on the old Oberheim Xpander. For the uninitiated, what basically happens is this: You get a pool of modulation sources—LFOs, envelope generators, etc. You draw from this pool and assign various modulation sources to some parameter or other, such as the pitch of an oscillator, the cutoff frequency of a filter and so forth. In addition to these modulation sources, you can also use things like key pressure and external MIDI controller commands. On our trio of synths, some of the modulation sources get applied to the individual Layers, Oscillators, Partials or Tones that make up a patch. Others get applied globally to the whole patch.

Which brings us to a cute little story. Once upon a time, there was a synth player named Goldilocks, curvaceous front person for an act called...you guessed it...the Three Bears. Now

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### SAMPLOID

when it came to programming, Goldie was very much your average synthesist: not one of those proverbial dullards who never get beyond the factory presets, nor was she one of your terminal propeller-heads who'll whip out a soldering iron onstage and rewire their entire synth with one hand while playing a solo with the other. No, like most of us, Goldilocks muddled along somewhere between these two extremes.

Now one day, Goldie came upon a deserted house in the woods. Inside, she found a triple-tier Ultimate Support stand with three synthesizers on it. She went up to the one marked D-50 and tried programming a sound. "These parameters aren't modulatable enough," she pouted, petulantly stamping a red stiletto heel on the floor. Then she tried programming the module marked 1000PX. Many hours later, her Revlon red lips pursed again. Large tears streaked her mascara. "This one is *too* modulatable!" she cried. "I could spent the rest of my life getting a simple bass sound." Then she tried the third machine—the one marked SQ-80. A beatific smile illuminated her face. The birds started to sing. "This one is just right," she sighed.

Which isn't to say that Goldie didn't dig the other two. In fact, she found some of those D-50 sounds irresistibly sweet. And she couldn't believe the realistic piano and strings she was getting from the Kurzweil. But it is true that these two machines represent opposite extremes of programmability. Take the D-50. You can modulate the pitch of a PCM Partial with an envelope or LFO, and modify its amplitude with a dedicated envelope. But that's it. Which tends to explain why it's hard to lose the instantly-recognizable characteristics that some of these samples impart to a patch.

If you select a synthesizer Partial, there's more to get your teeth into. In addition to modulating pitch and amplitude, you can use an LFO to modulate the pulse width of the selected waveform, and there's also a filter section which includes provision for modulating filter cutoff frequency with an LFO or envelope.

Roland, incidentally, has settled the lofty epithets Time Variant Filter (TVF) and Time Variant Amplifier (TVA) on the filters and amplifiers in the D-50. Again, don't let the high-flown verbiage scare you. Any filter or amplifier that gets modified by an envelope or LFO will vary over time and can thus get called "Time Variant." The D-50 envelopes are all good, straightforward five-segment

*continued on page 129*

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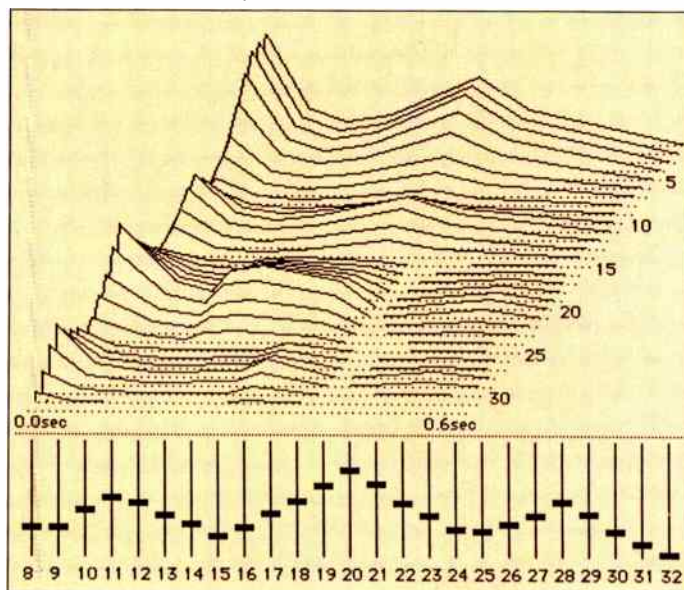
**OTARI**

There's something terribly Zen about the idea of using plain old sine waves to build up subtle, ingenious synth sounds. Everyone from Sumi-ye painters to celebrated chefs will attest that simple elements combine more readily than complex ones. And they're less likely to impose their own strong flavors and overbearing colors on your creations. If you're going for glitzy impact, it may be okay to start with a hot, spicy sample or some garishly contorted waveform. But many master programmers would rather follow the sine wave's gently curving path. After all, turn the ancient Yin/Yang symbol on its side and what've you got?

Programming schemes based on sine waves have, of course, long been popular. Additive synthesis is a system that's every bit as venerable as FM, and, in many cases, easier to manage. It's also becoming increasingly affordable and accessible as time goes on.

As you've no doubt heard, it all goes back to that acoustic sage Fourier, who figured out that every sound in creation can be analyzed down to a set of harmonically related sine waves known as **partials**. And what can be broken down—or analyzed—in this way can also be built up—or synthesized—by putting together the same combination of sine waves. This is

Digidesign's Softsynth screen



# Additive Synths: Sine of the Times

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by Alan di Perna



precisely what additive synthesis lets you do.

All additive devices, whether they be software programs or dedicated hardware units, have a few things in common. They all let you define a fundamental tone (or basic pitch) and then select a series of partials to add to the fundamental. You can also set the relative **amplitude** of each partial, i.e., how loud the partial is in relation to its fellow sine waves. By combining these partials in the right amounts, you can duplicate any waveform, or create new ones never before heard on earth. In many systems, partials are represented visually by a series of vertical "sticks." The harmonics get higher in frequency as you move from left to right. The height of each "stick" (or the position of a "fader" icon on the stick) tells you the amplitude level of that particular partial.

But here's where things start getting tricky: Additive synthesizers come in a variety of different packages, with different capabilities and design philosophies.

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- Sound sources include sampling, preset waveforms, additive synthesis, hand drawing of waveforms and cyclic waveforms made by cutting sample data.

- True 16 bit linear PCM sampling. Highest sampling rate of 36 kHz gives 14.5 sec of memory. Other sampling rates/memory offer 29.1 secs at 18 kHz and 58.2 secs at 9 kHz.

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- 25-pin parallel port for high-speed data transfer and communication with personal computers or other FZ-1s.

Perhaps the FZ-1's most impressive spec, however, is its spectacularly low price. Because after all, what good is great sound if you can't afford it?

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## ADDITIVE SYNTHESIS

By way of illustration, take three relatively well-known additive systems: the Kurzweil 150 Fourier Synthesizer with its dedicated Sound Modelling Program, the Kawai K5 and the Digidesign Softsynth program. The Kurzweil system is very much a serious, almost academic, additive synthesizer, which is pretty impressive in a unit that goes for under three grand. It does additive and nothing else. The Sound Modelling Program for Apple IIe and Mac comes free with the rack-mount 150 FS and gives you individual control over each of the 240 partials the 150 FS can generate.

With the Kawai K5, by way of contrast, additive synthesis facilities form the core of a package aimed more squarely at the under-\$2000 keyboard/synth market. It's a self-contained piece of hardware that doesn't go running to a computer to fight its battles for it. The Digidesign Softsynth is on the opposite extreme of the additive biosphere: a software program for the Mac which lets you load sound files from popular samplers like the Mirage, Pro 2000, DSS-1, S-50, E-II, E-max, etc.—and perform additive synthesis on them. But it goes beyond pure additive in several respects. For one, you can choose any of five different waveforms—rather than just sine waves—for each partial. And sine waves can also be combined in FM algorithms.

So how do all these systems differ? To begin with, they differ in the number of partials they'll let you combine to make a sound, and in the amount of control you can exert over each partial. The Kurzweil system lets you take up to 64 of those 240 partials and combine them in what's called a Model. Models are then combined to form voices, which are assigned to a MIDI keyboard controller. The K5 offers two basic modes of operation. In Twin mode, you can build two parallel sound sources, each with up to 62 partials. Full Mode lets you configure the two sound sources in series, giving you control of 126 consecutive partials. Softsynth, in contrast, gives you 32 partials with which to build a sound.

But the number of partials a system lets you combine isn't the only factor in additive synthesis. Things like the ability to control the pitch of each partial also come into play. In the Kurzweil and Softsynth systems, the frequency of each partial can be set individually. You can tune partials to regular harmonic intervals, or irregular ones for assorted ethno-microtonal timbres. With the K5, on the other hand, the partials are fixed at regular harmonic intervals—the stan-

*continued on page 130*

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admit it—I bought the myth. So many people told me that FM synths were “impossible” to program that I figured they probably were. Besides, I wasn’t all that interested in FM programming anyway, since the first generation of FM synths sounded kind of dirty and gritty to my ears. Then a funny thing happened: I was assigned to review the Yamaha DX100 and, of course, had to confirm how difficult it was to program. So I ventured into the “edit zone” and—surprise—had a ball, though I wasn’t always exactly sure what I was doing.

Then Yamaha came out with the TX81Z and TX802. Thanks to better quality sound, microtuning, and better MIDI implementation, I decided to add both FM synths to my studio...which meant I was going to have to learn to actually program the things. After a few days getting to know these instruments, revelation came in a flash: *There wasn’t anything inside an FM synth that I hadn’t already seen before with analog synths.*

Why do people think FM synths are hard to program? First, consider timing. The DX7 was one of the first hugely successful synths to use the “change-a-parameter-then-change-its-value” method of programming. The friendly knobs and switches we had used for years and years were replaced by *entering* (a computer hacker term, for chrissakes!) numbers and seeing

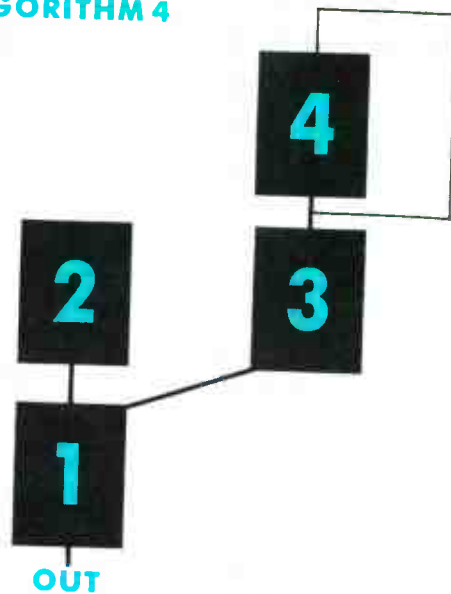
# FM for Idiots: The Analog View

HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ON  
LEARNING HOW TO PROGRAM YOUR DX,  
TX, FB OR DS? TRY AGAIN.



by Craig Anderton

## ALGORITHM 4



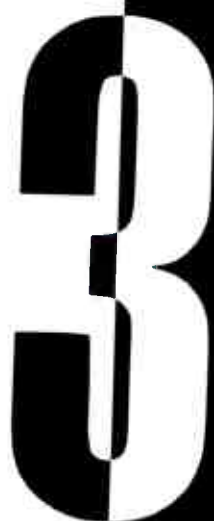
them flash by on an impersonal LCD. This made programming pretty tedious, so a lot of people simply lost patience before they reached The Good Stuff.

Second is language. All of a sudden we were dealing with algorithms, operators, modulators, carriers and rate/level envelopes. Gone were familiar terms like oscillator, patch and ADSR—and with them, the expertise acquired with subtractive synthesis. FM *seemed* like such a different animal that many musicians were totally intimidated.

But don’t let that digital facade fool you—FM synthesizers still use oscillators and envelope generators and patches; they just have different names. In fact, if you know analog synthesis, you have a head start on knowing FM.

### How FM Works

The basis of all FM synthesis is remarkable in its simplicity: a garden-variety sine wave oscillator, which we’ll represent as a circle and an output. A keyboard or other controller sets the oscillator’s pitch. However, we now need some way to





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gate this oscillator on and off, so we'll add a Voltage Controlled Amplifier (VCA) and an envelope generator.

Now would be a good time to mention that when we speak of a VCA, there isn't an actual VCA integrated circuit; volume changes are orchestrated digitally. Nor is there an envelope generator chip. But the circuit *behaves* as if there was a VCA connected to an envelope generator, so we can get away with using these familiar

Notice how the same operator structure can either provide an audio signal (Operator 1) or *modulate* that audio signal (Operator 2). Therefore, to keep things straight, we now need to differentiate between when an operator is providing our actual audio output and when it is providing the modulating signal for another operator. In figure 1, Operator 1 provides the audio we hear, and is called the *carrier*. We don't actually hear

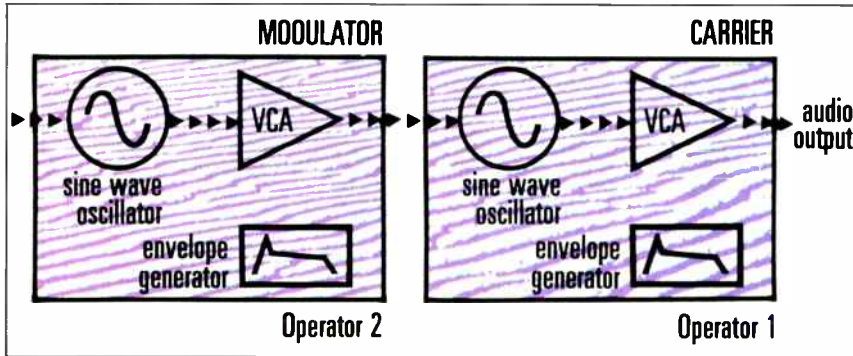


Figure 1: Feeding operator 2's output into operator 1's control voltage input modulates operator 1's timbre.

terms as long as we don't run into any digital nit-pickers.

This grouping of a sine wave oscillator, VCA and EG is so important that it has a specific name—an *Operator*. An Operator is nothing more than these three sub-modules. So far, so good. But unadulterated sine waving is pretty boring sonically—sort of like listening to tuned AC hum. And this is where we run into the clever aspect of FM synthesis. Suppose we take our operator and add a control voltage input (again, this is not a literal control voltage, but it serves as a useful and accurate analogy).

Now let's feed a sine wave into that voltage control input. If it's a low-frequency wave, we hear vibrato. But if it's an audio-range signal, we have two basic choices. If the signal is not harmonically related to the main oscillator, we get "clangorous," ring-modulator-type sounds. On the other hand, if we inject a *harmonically related* signal, this will modulate the main oscillator and generate harmonics that sound more "in tune." The *amount* of harmonics depends on the amount of signal injected into the main oscillator, and the harmonic *structure* depends on the frequency of the modulating oscillator. Since timbre is primarily affected by the amplitude of the injected signal, let's throw a VCA after the modulating oscillator (along with an envelope generator to control the VCA) so we can predictably control the signal, hence the overall timbre. Our 2-operator block diagram now looks like figure 1.

Operator 2's direct output, but we do hear its effect on Operator 1. Operator 2 is called the *modulator* because it modulates the carrier.

This two-operator structure can actually make some very nice brass timbres. Increasing the output of Op 2 creates a sound not unlike opening up a lowpass filter; decreasing the output is like closing the filter down. At this point, you

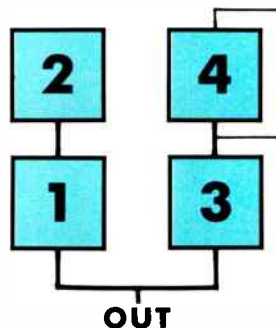


Figure 3: "Parallel" Algorithm 5

might wonder why people didn't use the sine wave oscillators found on modular synths to do FM synthesis. Well, they did; but analog VCOs tend to not track a keyboard perfectly. The frequency ratio between the carrier and its modulator must be totally consistent no matter what key you play, which is only possible with digital technology.

**Meet the Algorithm**

Say the word *algorithm* and a lot of musicians just plain tune out. But, really, it's just a fancy name for "patch."

There are two main types of FM synths in the world, four-operator and six-operator. The TX81Z is a four-op type, which means that it contains four of the operators described above; the DX7II is a six-op synth. We've already described one way to hook two operators together: "Patch" the output of one into the input of another. In the old days, you would have strung the four operators in a TX81Z together with patch cords. Nowadays, though, the computer does the patching for you in the form of algorithms.

Let's look at some of these patches—er, I mean algorithms—in detail. Algorithm 8 on the TX81Z (figure 2) has no modulators, only carriers. Actually, you can think of this as the "additive synthesis" algorithm. In additive synthesis, sine waves of varying frequency and amplitudes are summed together to create sounds. Any decent additive synthesis system will also have an envelope generator for each of the sine waves, and that's exactly what we have here. You can also think of this as the "Hammond Organ Drawbar" algorithm. With the Hammond organ, drawbars (which provide a function similar to a set of volume sliders) let you vary the amplitude of sine waves of various frequencies. Algorithm 8 gives you this same capability.

Algorithm 5 (figure 3) expands on our two-op algorithm mentioned above. Here you can combine two brass-like sounds. Or you can have one sound fade out as another fades in. Because of its configurations, I think of this as the "parallel" algorithm.

Now consider Algorithm 4 on page 42. Here we have a much more complex modulation scheme, which (not surprisingly) yields more complex sounds. After all, it stands to reason that if feeding one operator into another produces a complex sound, then feeding that complex sound into another operator will produce an even more complex sound. This algorithm is useful for nasty effects like fuzz guitars and mean-spirited clavichets. The other algorithms carve out their own sonic niches. After you play with them for a while, you'll find that some work better for brass, some for plucked strings, some for metallic sounds, etc.

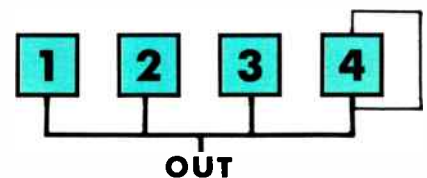


Figure 2: "Additive" Algorithm 8



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You may have observed that Op 4 feeds its output back into its input to produce *feedback*. In this case, the carrier becomes its own modulator (sort of like a *National Enquirer* headline—"Son gives Birth to Own Father"). Increasing feedback is the "wild card" in a patch, as it usually adds noise, bite, grittiness and other sounds Our Parents Warned Us About. In fact, with many of the brasher FM sounds, simply trimming the feedback will tame things quite a bit.

### The Envelope Generator

I'll assume you musicians have a pretty good idea of how an ADSR envelope, with its individual stages for Attack, Decay, Sustain and Release, works. The typical FM synth envelope is more complex, but there's no law that says you have to use all the stages (nor is there a law that says you have to use all the operators). First let's explain how multi-stage envelope generators work. Most modern envelope generators work on the rate/level principle, where you specify the *rate* at which the envelope goes from one *level* to another. The TX81Z envelopes are a less flexible version of the ones in the DX7, but based on the same principles.

The envelope level typically starts off at zero. To create an attack, you specify the *level* to be attained and the *rate* at which the envelope moves towards that level. The higher the number, the faster the rate or the higher the level. Therefore, to create an instant attack that goes up to the maximum envelope amplitude—assuming a scale of 00-99 for both parameters—you would enter 99 for both rate and level. To slow down the attack, lower the rate setting; to lower the level attained by the envelope, lower the level setting. The next stages of the envelope can be similarly set. Going from a higher level to a lower one produces a decay; going from a lower level to a higher one produces an attack.

With traditional ADSR envelope generators, we're used to not adjusting levels at all, except for the sustain level. So we fool around with the attack/decay/release times and that's that. But because of the rate/time dichotomy with rate/level envelope generators, we need a different approach. My solution is to first set the envelope levels I want, *then* adjust the rates for the correct amount of time changes between levels. You may have to go back and re-tweak the levels somewhat, but this way of setting envelopes works much better than trying to get the rates right first, and then adjusting the levels.

With ADSR envelopes, the *shape* of an envelope is constant. The attack will

always go from a minimum to a maximum value, the decay from the maximum value to some lower value, the sustain will remain at a specific value, and so on. Rate/level envelopes have no such constraints. For example, if the attack goes to less than the full envelope value, the second level can be set to create a decay or change the rate of attack: (figure 4).

As mentioned earlier, the TX81Z uses simpler envelopes. In fact, if you'd like some "training wheels," it is possible to limit the number of variables and simply treat the TX81Z's envelopes as ADSR types. Set rates and levels as follows:

AR Adjusts the Attack Rate  
D1R Adjusts the Initial Decay Rate  
D1L Adjusts the Sustain Level  
D2R Set to 0 (an Infinitely Long Decay) Holds the Sustain Level Set by D1L

RR Adjusts the Release Rate

Taking D2R out of the picture means you need only adjust four parameters. This will help you apply envelope shapes

*continued on page 130*

## ENVELOPE EXAMPLE

1. Pick a voice (any voice) and *initialize* it (this sets the voice to a default setting where only Operator 1 is on). Don't change voices during programming.
2. Select Algorithm 5. Play a keyboard connected to the TX81Z; you should hear a sine wave that sustains at a constant level as long as you hold the key.
3. Set DR2 on Op 1's envelope to 0 to create an ADSR response. Now experiment with the various envelope settings. Vary AR (Attack Rate) to change the attack, D1R (Decay 1 Rate) to vary initial decay, D1L (Decay 1 Level) to change the sustain level, and set release with RR (Release Rate).
4. After experimenting for a while, set the parameters as follows: AR = 12, D1R = 13, D2R = 0 and RR = 7.
5. Set Op 2's envelope parameters to AR = 31, D1R = 0, D1L = 0, D2R = 0 and RR = 2, then bring up Op 2's level. Notice how increasing the level influences the timbre of the sound, then set the output to 90.
6. To change Op 2's frequency, vary the Coarse Ratio setting while listening to the results.
7. When you're finished experimenting, set the Coarse ratio to 0.50, Op 2 output level to 94 and Op 2 envelope generator parameters as follows: AR = 5, D1R = 5, D1L = 0, D2R = 0 and RR = 2. This should produce a "swept-filter" effect. For kicks, set Op 3's parameters exactly like Op 1, and Op 4's parameters exactly like Op 2. Now change Op 4's Coarse ratio to 8.00 and you'll have a sound with the same kind of motion as analog filtering, but with that digital "clarity" associated with FM synths.

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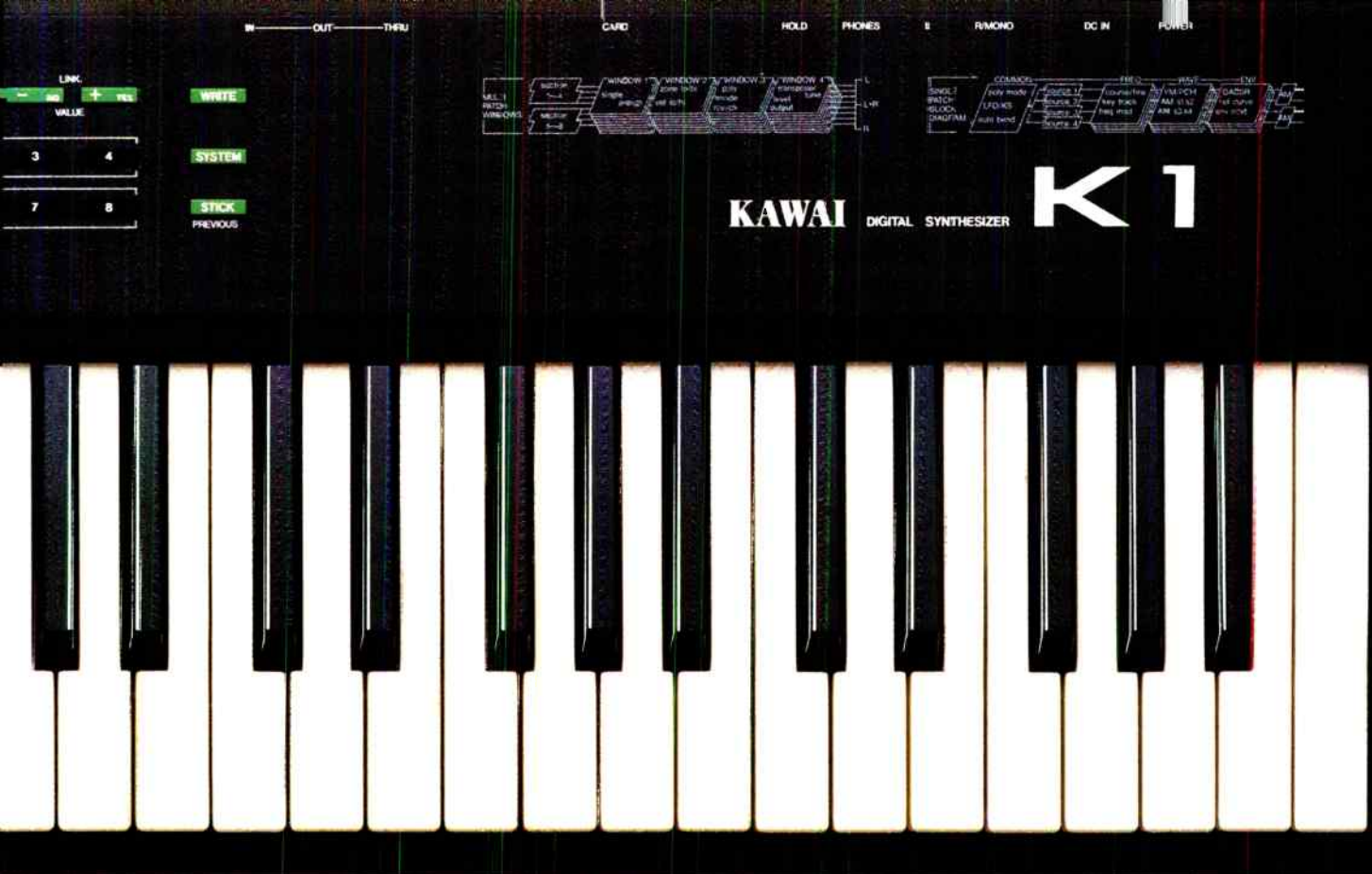
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**M**y music," says songwriter, singer and keyboardist David Sylvian, "provokes introspection, which allows individuals to find answers within. I think people who find my work uncomfortable or depressing are the kind who find it difficult to sit in a room alone, because there are elements within themselves that they are very uncomfortable with. For that reason, I think of my music as geared to very small pockets of people who are very comfortable with themselves.

"I can be a very easy target for any journalist who wants to take me up," he continues. "My work is very fragile, if you like. It can be ridiculed very easily, but it has an inner strength. A lot of people don't want to see that. Especially men, because there is a very feminine quality to my work that a lot of men feel uncomfortable being moved by. It's too delicate for them, too sensitive."

Obviously Sylvian's not the kind of guy who writes silly love songs. But rays of hope and redemption do shine through his cloudy, minor-key romanticism. His first band, the art-pop group Japan, was an eight-year exercise in self-discovery. Since its dissolution in 1982, Sylvian has slowly, and often painfully, continued to strip off the mask he'd fashioned for himself. In the course of three solo albums, he's neatly abandoned the

# David Sylvian: The Loner Emerges

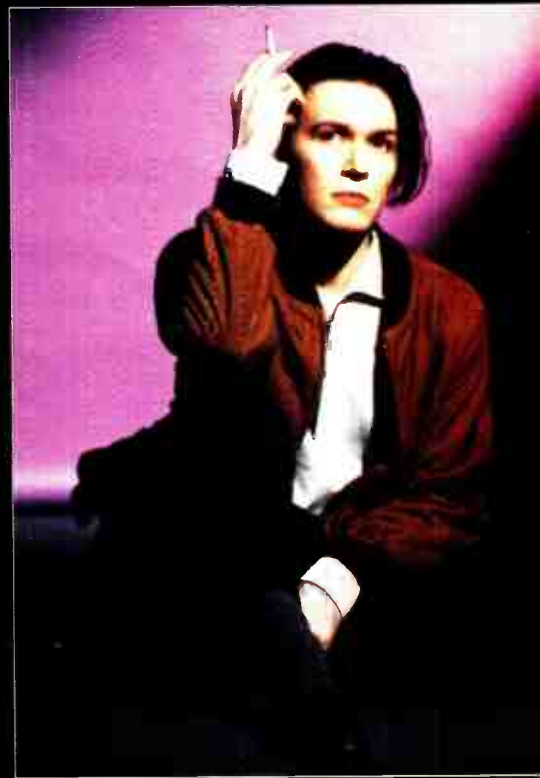
**JAPAN'S RECLUSIVE LEADER**

**FINDS TECHNO-POP MATURITY**

**IN A SOLO AFTERLIFE**



by Ted Drozdowski



conventions of techno-pop to make music that weds the raw elements of jazz, classicism and free expression with the hoariest and most honorable of song forms, the ballad. But he's one balladeer who'll never sound like Dylan. His songs are more like whisperings carried on a warm night wind that twists its way across the darkened Saharas of the soul.

Not easy stuff to convey, yet Sylvian's midnight messages reach their target. His 1986 solo album, *Gone to Earth*, which featured the blazing guitars of Robert Fripp and Bill Nelson, was such a success as an import that the Virgin label released the two-disc set domestically the moment it opened U.S. offices last year. Sylvian's recent *Secrets of the Beehive*, a quieter work, got a similar reception from fans and, like *Gone to Earth*, has begun the long trek from the underground via college, alternative and even new age radio play. But the most promising sign of Sylvian's increasing popularity is his recently completed tour of North America, the Far East and Europe, his first since Japan's final foray.

**DAVID SYLVIAN**

As a sensitive, working-class kid growing up in a rundown southeast London suburb, Sylvian "found the world a very insensitive place to be." At 29, he still paints his childhood as "a painful experience, with a lot of memories I've purposefully buried away." He was an aspiring hermit until Smokey Robinson, the Supremes and Marvin Gaye pried their way into his adolescent life, and he and his brother, Steve, started writing songs on guitars they'd gotten from their parents.

"Being the kind of kid that liked to spend a great deal of time alone, it was inevitable that I would find a kind of

companionship in music," he says. He also found new companions. The first was Anthony Michaelides, who picked up the bass to join the brothers' furtive jams. Then came Richard Barbieri, who'd had a few piano lessons and was therefore drafted to play keyboards. Thus, in 1974, the boys formed the nucleus of Japan.

The band went nameless while they learned to play, and was hastily baptized for their first gig. "The name Japan meant next to nothing to us. We figured, 'It'll do for tonight,'" Sylvian recalls. "And it just stuck. We tried to change it later on, but it was too late."

By 1977, when the band won a talent contest sponsored by the Hansa label, Sylvian had stopped using his given surname, Batt, and taken refuge beneath a nest of peroxide blonde hair and the trappings of glam-rock. His brother followed suit, switching his last name to Jansen and his instrument to drums. Bassist Michaelides metamorphosed into Mick Karn, Sylvian's main musical foil. "At the time," Sylvian explains, "I was trying to escape from myself, so the music and the look was something to hide behind, to give me the strength to go on performing in public.

"Our record company had signed the band solely on image, and we had a manager who was trying to mold us, who wanted creative input. He came from the '60s, and his idea was to shock people, to be as outrageous as possible. But that period was already gone."

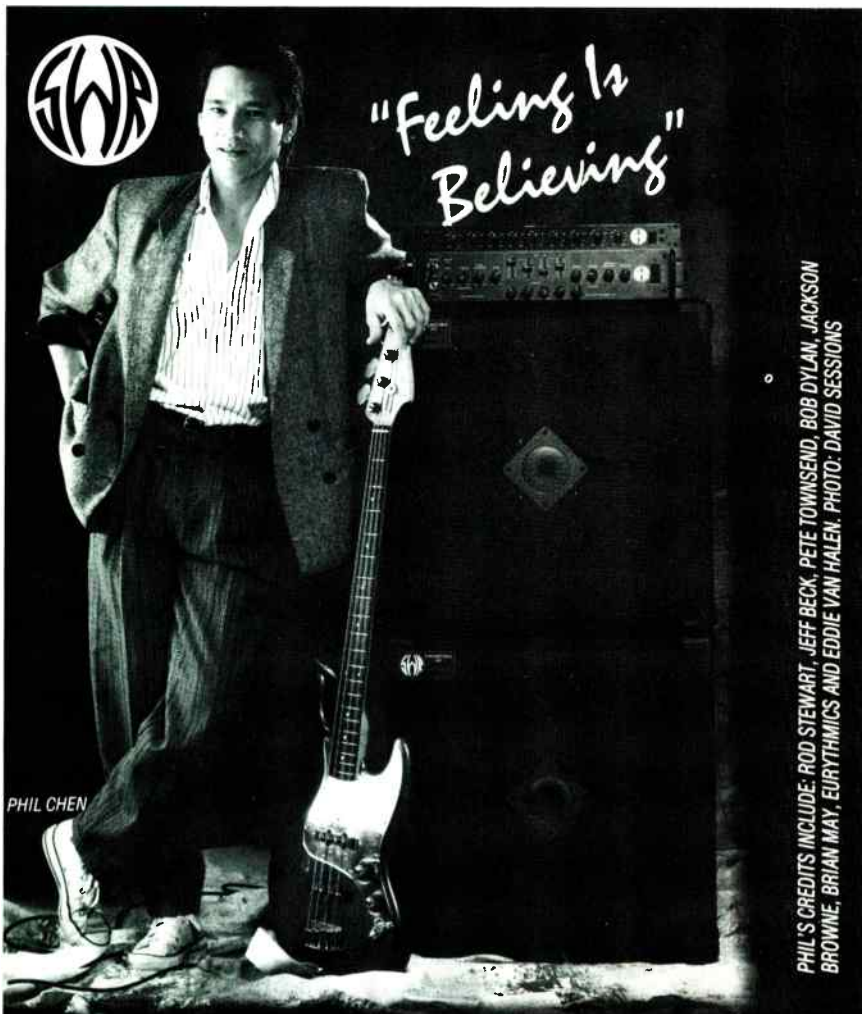
Japan's first albums, *Adolescent Sex* and *Obscure Alternatives*, were flung loose amidst a hurricane of hype in 1978. Today Sylvian cringes at their mention. "We were slagged off, quite rightly. It was bad music," he says, nervously twirling some stray shoulder-length strands of hair—now naturally brown.

Actually, those records weren't so bad. Sylvian's discordant, thrashy songs brimmed with strange, simmering passions, and he and Rob Dean managed some amiably scrappy guitar work. And there were signs of better things to come in "The Tenant," *Obscure Alternatives'* moody, piano-based closing track.

"That was the first time I'd sat down at a piano," he says. "I started writing on the keyboard after that, and it made a dramatic change in the music. Some of it became far more melodic, and I began to understand more about chord structures. The music took on a quieter side, but, nonetheless, I still don't think I was expressing myself. I don't think I found myself in music until I wrote 'Ghosts.'"

That would be three albums later. First the band had to work hard to reclaim its self-esteem. Most of 1979 was spent rethinking its musical approach and making *Quiet Life*, which had fewer rough edges, a newfound rhythmic flexibility and brought keyboards to the fore. Next came a change of labels, to Virgin, and *Gentlemen Take Polaroids*, whose title single and "Methods of Dance" were Japan's first successes at home.

Japan's mannered music became increasingly textural and complex as Sylvian and Barbieri delved deeper into technology, immersing themselves in synthesizer programming and mastering the secrets of the studio. Sylvian found a sympathetic ally in Ryuichi Sakamoto,



PHIL CHEN

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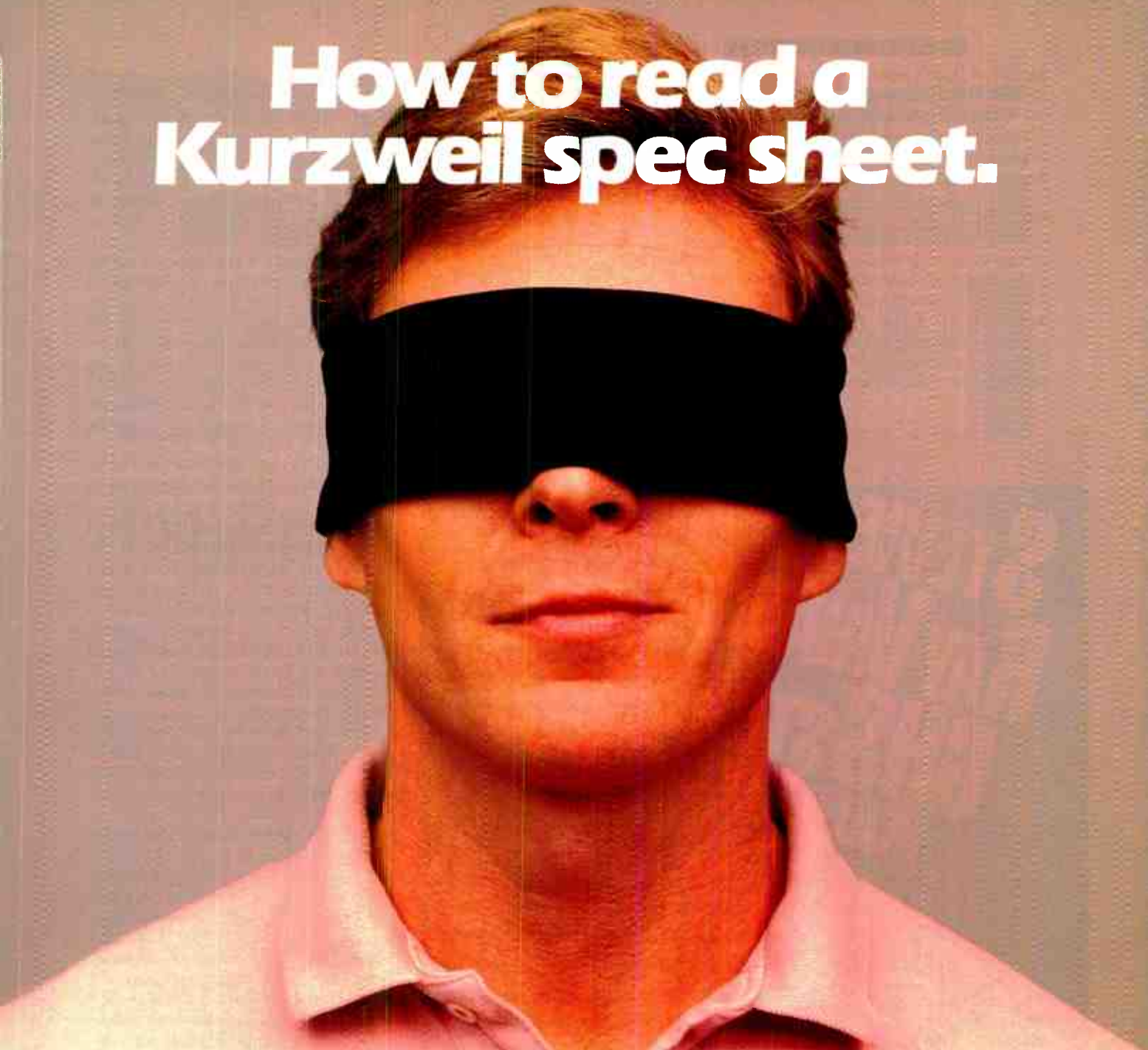
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## PAT LEONARD

proach. "I really believe that I've been fooling people, for years now, into thinking they're hearing pop music. 'Cause the stuff I do isn't really pop. The chord structures aren't, and the rhythm figures are much more Latin-oriented than they are R&B- or pop-oriented."

In this little deception, Leonard is often aided by his long-time cohort, Madonna. They've been collaborating since 1985, when Leonard signed on as musical director/keyboard player for the singer's "Virgin" tour. More recently, they co-wrote Marilyn Martin's new single, "Possessive Love," and they've begun laying the groundwork for Ma-

donna's new album. As a songwriting team, they've developed an effective one-two punch.

"Sometimes, I'll hear things in a much more complex way than she does," Leonard explains. "She'll sing a note and I'll say, 'That doesn't go with the chord there; it's completely wrong.' And she'll say, 'Tough. That's what makes it good.' There's this sort of semi-naive musicality there that you have to respect. If you correct the note, all of a sudden it sounds normal and boring. So you have to hand it to her. She finds these funny little things that work."

Another thing he admires is her ability

to work very quickly. "We usually just get in a room together and start with nothing. Five hours later, she leaves with a complete song. 'Who's That Girl?' was written and finished in one day. We mixed it in another day and that was it."

Leonard sets a great store by spontaneity and intuition. So—again, like a lot of people—he resents the way some new technology seems to inhibit those very qualities. "It used to be you'd say, 'I know what sound we need here,' and you'd zero the synthesizer and make the sound. That's not very easy anymore, because there are too many parameters. To make a good patch, you have to be able to identify with every single parameter—understand exactly what it's doing. And that's not really possible anymore. I think I know a few things about synthesizers. I mean, I've been farting around with them for 22 years now. I had an ARP 2600 when I was a kid, and a Moog Modular 5 system. When the DX7 came out, I delved into it and made a lot of sounds that are now Yamaha's factory presets. And whenever I bought a new synthesizer—the Prophet, the OBXa, the Jupiter 8—I'd always erase all the factory presets and develop my own sounds. But these new synthesizers leave me cold."

Pat says he's equally disenchanted with machines that are easier to program but commit you to sound-building elements that are so characteristic it becomes impossible to create a sound that *doesn't* sound like a factory patch. "You have a synthesizer that's a lot more powerful than the person working it. So who's gonna win? The synthesizer wins and its identity comes through more than your own. So, without even realizing it, I've begun to avoid the stuff. I'm just finishing up Peter Cetera's album now, and it's all guitars, acoustic piano, a little string patch here and there... We did a piece with percussionist Paulinho da Costa, bass player Abe Laboriel and myself on acoustic piano, and for me, it's the most exciting thing I've done in years. Because it's so real. There can be absolutely no question as to what you're hearing."

Looking back at *True Blue*, Leonard entertains the speculation that songs like the ballad "Live to Tell" and the soca-influenced "La Isla Bonita" will prove more enduring and "real" than comparatively calculated dance floor hits like "White Heat." The songs on Madonna's new album, he adds, will be even more of a departure. "We've written eight new songs so far. And they range from a string quartet to a shuffle. There's a couple of gospel things that we decided

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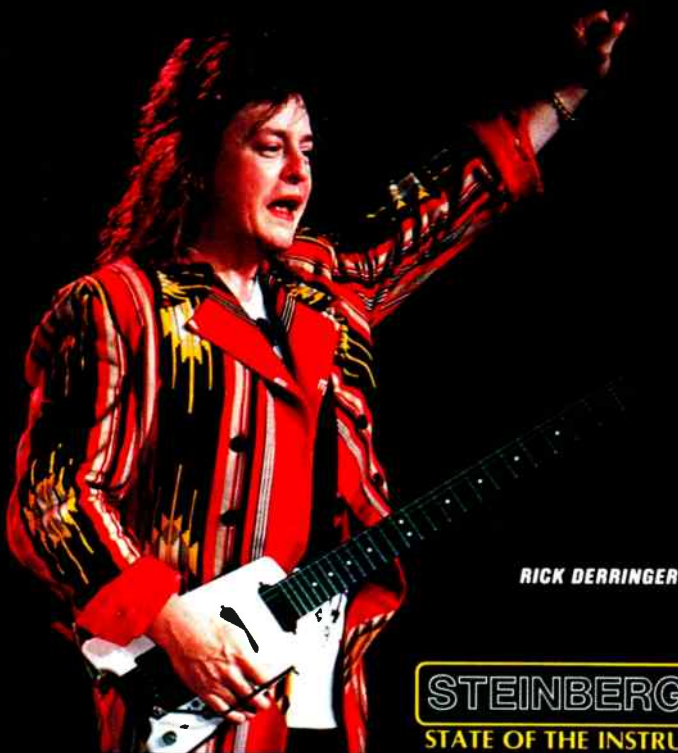


Photo: David Allen

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**LEONARD**  
to experiment with. And some things that sound very Manhattan Transfer. There's one that's very harmonically dense and much more jazz-oriented than anything you've heard from her before. So I think the new album is going to be quite different."

In Bryan Ferry, Leonard found an artist whose work habits differ radically from the spontaneous give-and-take of his records with Madonna. As a result, Leonard suggests, the *Bête Noire* project was not exactly smooth sailing.

"From my standpoint, I pretty much offered Bryan the same thing I offer Madonna," says Leonard. "But Bryan uses a different process to get where he wants to be. He takes a lot longer. With every note on the record, Bryan searched to make sure there wasn't another, better option. It's a perspective that I'd never really dealt with. And it wasn't easy at all. It was a long process with a lot of ups and downs. And a lot of real emotional incidents. But ultimately it's a great record. I'm real proud of it and I don't regret having gone through all we went through. I definitely have adapted some of Bryan's techniques and some of his approach to things."

Some songs took over a year to complete. On virtually every one, Leonard  
*continued on page 129*

### PAT'S PETS

**L**ike the TV character it's named for, Pat Leonard's Johnny Yuma studio is ready for any kind of action. A Yamaha KX88 MIDI keyboard acts as master controller to an army of synths and samplers (Confederate, of course) that includes a Yamaha DX7, DX7IIFD, TX802 and TX816, a heavily modified Mini Moog with a Roland MPU 101 CV/MIDI interface, Roland Jupiter 8 with MD-8 DCB/MIDI interface, D-550 with PG-1000 programmer, Super JX and Super Jupiter with MPG-80 and PG-800 programmers, E-mu Emulator II, Ensoniq ESQ-1, Oberheim Matrix 6, 6R and OBXa, Dynacord ADD1 and Akai S900 samplers.

So, you want drum machines? Johnny Yuma's got 'em on little shelves that slide out of the wall. Pat keeps Yamaha RX11, RX5 and RX21L, plus Roland TR-727 and TR-808 machines on hand. There's also a Dynacord Rhythm Stick MIDI percussion controller.

All of this artillery gets routed through a custom MIDI patching system that includes a JL Cooper 1620 and two 360 Systems MIDI Patchers. To sequence all of this, Leonard runs Mark of the Unicorn's Performer software on an Apple Macintosh. His other sequencer is a Yamaha QX1. The sequencers sync up to tape via a Roland SBX-80.



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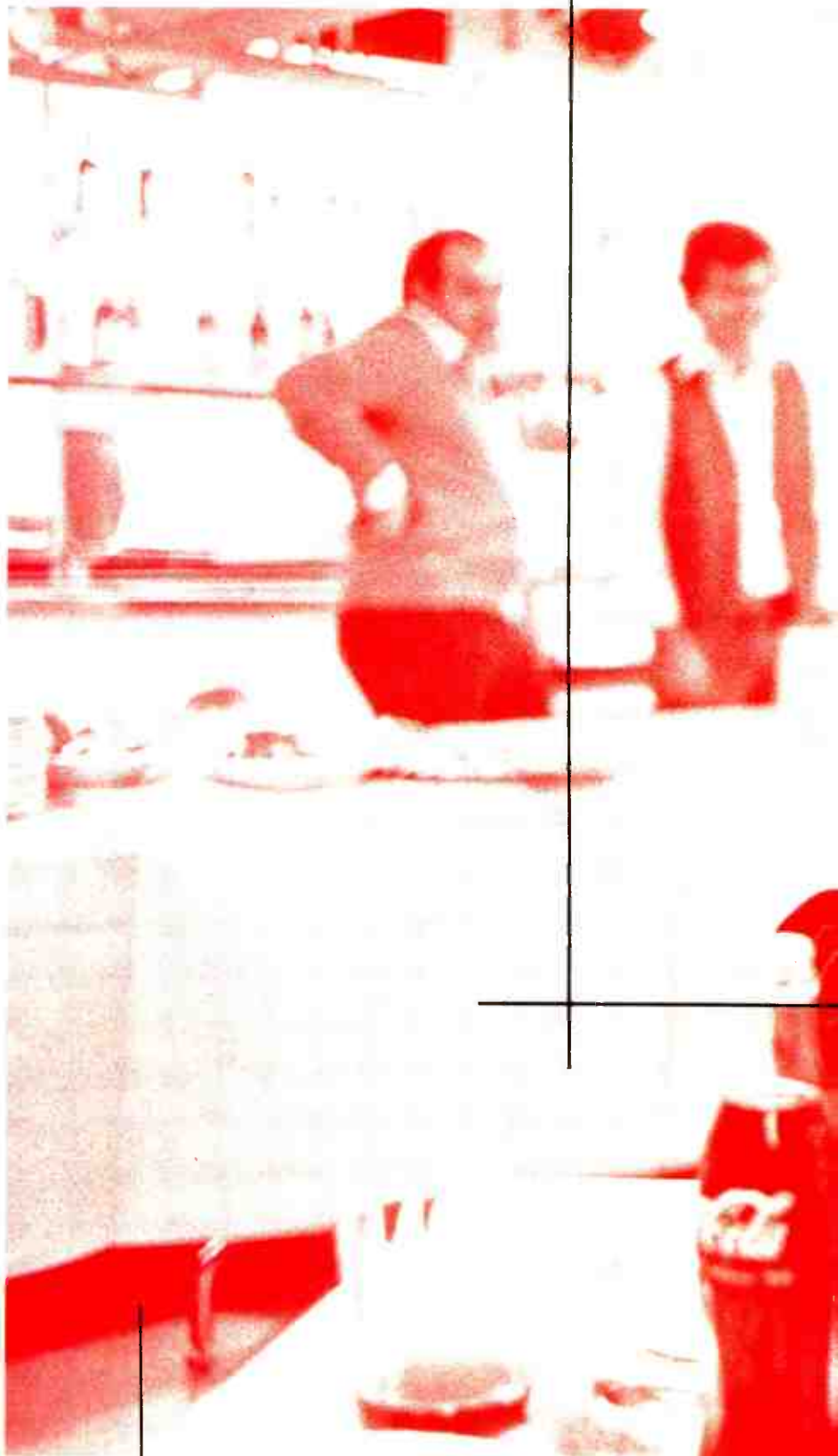
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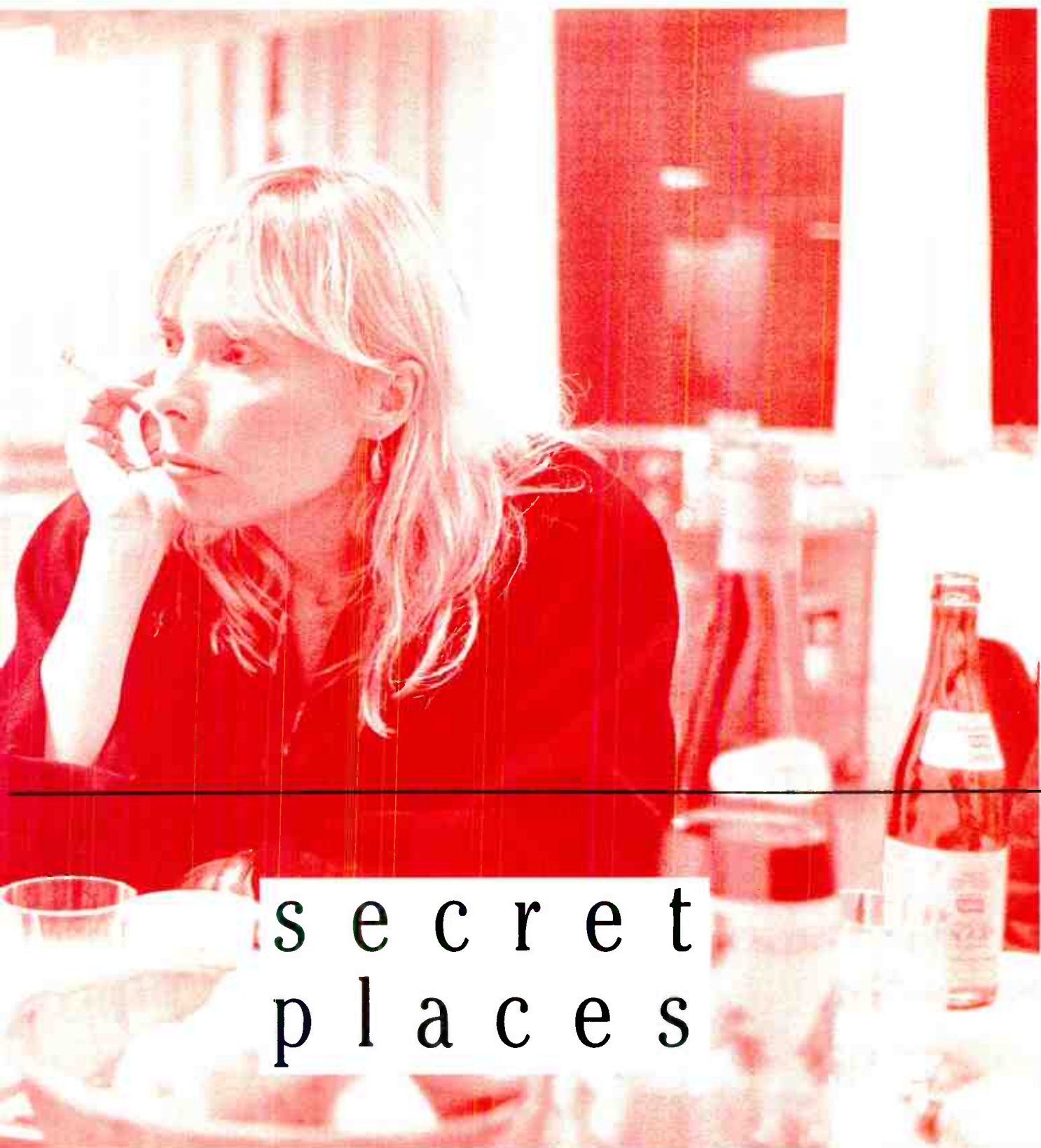
LARRY KLEIN WOULDN'T TAKE any money for his bass work on Peter Gabriel's album *So*. In that case, Gabriel said, why don't you use my recording studio while you're here? It was a thoughtful offer, as Klein's wife was staying with him in England. Klein's wife is Joni Mitchell. So in early 1986 in the British countryside, Mitchell and Klein set to work on what would emerge, two years and 6000 miles later, as *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm*. Gabriel's studio is perched on the crest of a valley. On the other side is the Air Force base from which the U.S. launched its attack on Libya. When Mitchell saw it, she was inspired to write a song called "The Beat of Black Wings," about a soldier called Killer Kyle. It was a song she'd been carrying unborn for 20 years.

"I started thinking about the days when I played in North Carolina," Mitchell said. "Which was 1965 to '67, when I played Fort Bragg for gung-ho boys going to Viet Nam. Although the song is not a literal portrait of him. Killer Kyle was a real person. His story was slightly different from the way I've told it in the song, because songs are fiction—they're full of details from all kinds of sources. He'd had some terrible war experiences and he confronted me in my dressing room. I came in and there was this kid, red in the face, angry.



by Bill Flanagan





s e c r e t  
p l a c e s

Joni Mitchell Builds Shelter from the Rainstorm

clenched fists, looking like he wanted to kill me. His opening line, in a Tennessee Williams drawl, was ‘You got a lot of *nerve*, sister, standing up there talkin’ about LOVE. There ain’t no love! I know there ain’t no love, there ain’t no love!’ He kept repeating that. He said, ‘Sit down, I’m gonna tell you where love went!’ So I sat down and he poured his poor little heart out to me. how the war had robbed him of his sensitivity because of the atrocities he’d experienced. Even the tender act of touching a woman, he felt, was beyond him. So I held him, I hugged him, I felt bad for him. All he wanted to do was go back over and kill a commie for God and be killed. He was going back for vengeance—as soon as he could stop shaking.”

“So why didn’t I write that song right then? Why did it take all those years to write part of his song?” Mitchell took a draw on a cigarette. “They go off at different times.”

Buried memories triggered a lot of songs on Mitchell’s thirteenth studio album. Although *Chalk Mark* is a state-of-the-modern-art recording, images from Mitchell’s whole life slipped into the lyrics. In “Beat of Black Wings,” the young soldier is bitter because of his being sent to war, and because his girlfriend has aborted their child. Mitchell ties the two actions together with one chilling line: “The old hate the young, that’s the whole heartless thing.”

“Unfortunately,” she said, “it’s really true in this culture at this time. It’s youth cultish, there’s tremendous jealousy about youth. There always is in decadent cultures. We’ve come so far from love of family.” Mitchell’s own family inspired “The Tea Leaf Prophecy,” a song that sounds like the woman’s answer to Killer Kyle’s lament. “Tea Leaf Prophecy” tells of a woman who falls in love with a soldier on leave, has his child, and then tells the little girl never to have children of her own—the world is doomed to war. In the song the woman’s name is Molly McGee—the name of an old radio character. But that’s not who Joni was thinking of.

“My mother’s maiden name was Myrtle McKee,” she explained. “‘The Tea Leaf Prophecy’ is based up to a certain point on my parents’ courtship. I mean, I use it as a vehicle for other statements at the end, because I would then be the child, and she never exactly said those words to me.” Joni laughed. “Although I was such a pain in the butt she might as well have. What happened was, during World War II my mother was working in a bank. Most of the available men had shipped out, so there were only kids, old men and cops left. She and a girlfriend went to this tea room in *the* first-class hotel in Regina, Saskatchewan. They had high tea there, from the English tradition. At the end the gypsy read her tea

“There are moments in my life when I think, ‘God, I don’t have a nationality, I don’t have a religion, I don’t *belong* to anything.’”

leaves. She said, ‘You will be married within the month, you will have a child within the year, and you will die a long and agonizing death.’ I didn’t put that last one in the song. My mother said, ‘Well, that’s ridiculous. Look at this town, there’s no one to pick from and I’m not going with anybody!’ Two weeks later she met my father, he had two weeks’ leave, they got married in that short space of time and I was born within a year. So now she’s a real scourer! No germs are going to get her, she’s not having the third one come true!”

That explains Mitchell’s description in 1972’s “Let the Wind Carry Me”: “Mama she believes in cleaning.”

“Yeah,” Joni smiled. “She’s unbelievably healthy. But the odds on it were so freaky that I don’t blame her for being psyched out. I sent her the tape and she said, ‘Is that about Pop and I?’ I said, ‘Part of it is.’ She didn’t really express anything about it. With ‘Let the Wind Carry Me’ she said, ‘Oh, you’re not going to start taking pot shots at me up there, are you?’ She didn’t like that one very much.” Mitchell laughed, and then sighed. “Writers are a cruel lot, aren’t they? They just raid life.”

### ROCK ‘N’ ROLL CHOIR BOYS

Joni Mitchell called me up,” says Tom Petty. “She said she had a song about two street toughs and she wanted me to play one of them. I said, ‘Hmm, that sounds interesting.’ Then she told me Billy Idol was the other one. I said, ‘That sounds *very* interesting.’ There’s a trio for ya! It was *casting*. I just had to learn really specific bits. I think she read the words to me—it’s a neat little story.”

The story was “Dancing Clown,” *Chalk Mark*’s most unusual track, recorded after the sessions moved home to Los Angeles in late ’86. Mitchell sings the narrator’s lines in a song about a bully called Rowdy Yates (Idol) picking on a victim named Jesse (Petty): Although Petty and Mitchell’s voices entwine comfortably, Idol’s rebel yell is as jarring in a Joni Mitchell song as a thug at a garden party. Which is the idea. “In terms of a Joni Mitchell record, it sounds quite funny,” Billy Idol chuckles. “My voice *sounds* like a bully compared to hers! I was in L.A. to do the Grammys a year ago. A day or two later she phoned me up at the hotel and explained the idea and I went straight down and did it. It was wild, really, because no one had ever asked me to do anything! The best thing was, she used some of my backing vocals on there. No one’s ever used my backing vocals before, either! I really just sang my bits. I put in a ‘Hot damn!’ somewhere and then I sort of did my Elvis Presley impersonation over the rest.” Mitchell also sampled some of Billy’s howls and shouts, and dropped them into the song’s fade. No opportunity wasted.

“It really was great to meet her, because I’d always liked things like *Blue* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, all that sort of stuff,” Idol continues. “I think she’s great. The wildest thing was, her and her husband really used all the sort of disco tricks, all the studio tricks, used sampling and all that stuff. I suppose for some reason or another it didn’t occur to me that everybody’s doing the same thing. You still have that Laurel Canyon idea of her, even in spite of all those jazz albums and stuff. It made me realize, yeah, we’re all doing the same things. She was really in command of the session. She knew exactly what she wanted, it was just a matter of getting it. I like people who know what they want to do, then you can both work at it.”

Idol and Petty both admit having to sweat to match Mitchell’s precise timing and odd vocal rhythms. “She’s a brilliant singer,” Petty says. “And a very capable producer. I was impressed by her. She and her husband Larry really



### **A Mitchell-retouched family portrait.**

know their way around the studio. I was having trouble with one bit of phrasing, I kept coming in wrong. She stopped the track and I tried it once and said, 'Is that it?' She said, 'That's it—we got it.' She taped me singing without the backing track and used that."

Idol had a similar experience. "She had to help me to sing it really," he admits. "She has a really particular way of singing things. It was making me laugh to try to do it sometimes. But once we'd done what we set out to do it was really good fun." At that point Idol suggested they get his guitarist, Steve Stevens, in on the action. At one a.m. Stevens was recruited to add guitar to what became an eccentric track even by Joni Mitchell standards.

"There's a very wide range of opinion on that song," says Larry Klein. "A lot of people love it—it's their favorite song on the record—and some people just hate it. I was just with Peter Gabriel. He loves the record, but hates 'Dancing Clown.' The people who can't quite get in on that song just need to think of it as a little play. It's like a short film."

"I'm singing all over the track," Petty says. "but you wouldn't necessarily hear it—a lot of it's harmonies, and through the whole album she's gotten other voices to sound like her own, to blend together. It's a brilliant record."

The most subtle—and perhaps most effective—vocal blending is on "Secret Place," a duet between Mitchell and Gabriel in which it's difficult to tell where her voice fades out and his fades in. The lyric is about someone from New York being swept away by someone from Colorado, and taken to

that person's secret place, a spiritual and sexual metaphor. The music is dreamlike, the gender ambiguity deliberate. "It's a love beginning song," Mitchell says at her manager's Los Angeles office in February. "The song's about the threshold of intimacy. It's a shared thing so I wanted it to be like the Song of Solomon, where you can't tell what gender it is. It's the uniting spirit of two people at the beginning of a relationship."

With "Secret Place" and "Dancing Clown" successfully executed as vocal collaborations, Mitchell stretched her imagination. She was fooling around with an odd, rhythmically staggered reinterpretation of the cowboy song "Cool Water" and thought, "Who'd make a better 'Old Dan' than Willie Nelson?" She called Willie and down he came. Again, Mitchell was drawing on youthful associations.

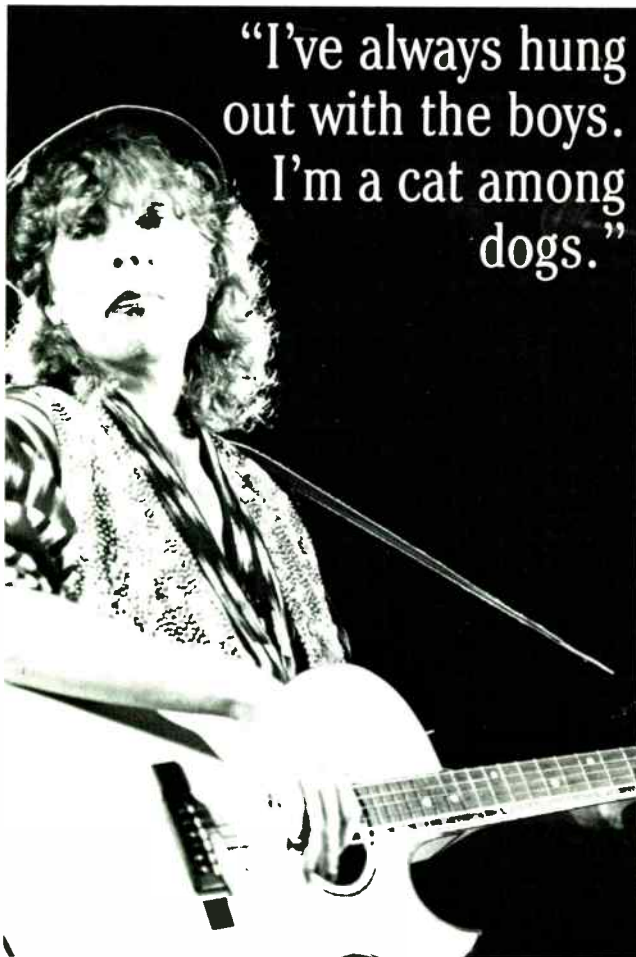
"'Cool Water' was a hit in my childhood," she explains. "My family, the Andersons, lived next door to the Moetts and the Milnes in what was called wartime housing. They put people coming out of the air force into these ticky-tack houses. They were slate-sided, had small rooms, with a tiny front porch. Our back stoop faced the Moetts, who had a penchant for the booze. One night they were really howling out on the back steps. 'Cool Clear Water,' singing this song loud and drunk. My bedroom window faced down on them and all of a sudden I hear Mr. Milne come around the corner saying, 'Cool water? You want some cool water? I'll give you some cool water!' And he turned their garden hose on them!" Mitchell cracks up. "That was my last memory of the song."

The album's other cover song, a lovely acoustic guitar and bass extrapolation of "Corrina Corrina" by Mitchell and

Klein, was cut on quarter-inch tape in the early '80s, when they had just met. It has a romantic resonance as breezy as "Secret Place"'s is profound. So there's logic in Joni's song selection, as well as in her casting of Billy Idol as a bully, Peter Gabriel as an ethereal romantic, Willie Nelson as an old cowboy. Her touchiest inspiration, though, was to ask Don Henley to sing the part of a smooth yuppie picking up an airbrushed young airhead at the shopping mall in "Snakes and Ladders," a bit of type-casting old Mister Life in the fast-lane might have resented.

"I thought about that," Mitchell admits. "He came in and heard the song and his brow kind of knit up. I said, 'Can you get into this?' He said, 'What are you talking about? This is my life!'"

"See, I had done something with Henley years before. For 'You Dream Flat Tires' on *Wild Things Run Fast*. I wanted a female/male contrast, but because of the register I had Henley sing it in, I didn't get any contrast. We were both singing lower than usual, and you'd be a long way into it before you realized that the voice changed. So I was dissatisfied with it and Lionel Richie was working across the hall, so I put Lionel on it. I forgot to tell Henley! Years went by and when I called him up to do this he said, 'You're not gonna take me off and replace me with a Negro this time, are you?' I said, 'Oh my God, did I ever explain to you what happened there?' And he said, 'No, I don't want to know.' God knows what he was thinking. He was insulted. I said, 'I had you in the wrong register!' This time I paid special attention to that: I knew it was up high enough that he'd get that certain timbre that's distinctively his. I owed him that. And he's perfect for that song."



"I've always hung out with the boys. I'm a cat among dogs."

Mitchell says she's not as tough in the studio as her rep suggests. "I'm not tough enough. In some ways I'm a bit of a free-school type. I'm tough on myself. I don't have to be tough on Henley 'cause he's a self-starter. If anything, with him I have to say, 'You've got it, leave it alone.' He knows right after he sang it if he needs to change it. I'm like that too. Willie doesn't know that. He's more easygoing. 'You like that? Oh, good.' If it was awful and you said you liked it he'd settle for it. He's not a spit polisher by nature. Petty's the same. They just go in and sing, they're not such perfectionists."

The "Barbie doll," the "airbrushed angel" Henley pursues in "Snakes and Ladders" is a stereotype who's appeared before in Joni Mitchell songs. Does Mitchell lack patience with women who overvalue glamor? "Well gee," she says. "I've *been* one of those women. If I'm knocking them I'm knocking myself. People tend to make generalities out of some of my specifics. I feel bad for the airbrushed girl, too. That's what society has done to us. I wept the first time I went to Hugh Hefner's. I went to Hefner's one night with Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty. The three of us had been out to dinner together. All these girls came up to me, and if their ass was their best feature they stuck it forward. 'Hi!' they said and they stuck their bum out. 'Hi!' they said and they stuck their tits out. I felt so bad for these girls. At a certain point I just decided to sneak away. And I ran out of gas in the driveway! They were running with jerry cans to get me out of there—I couldn't get out fast enough—and I burst into tears."

"The next time I went there I had adapted, but the first time I felt so sorry for women who would live the brief part of their life—cause old age is going to come on them all too soon and then what are they going to live their life for—for this one aspect of their physical contours. For many women the culture grooms this as all there is. A woman's power is her beauty, or the illusion of it. And that's tragic."

"I'm not a feminist, you know. I'm really not a feminist in any organized or traditional way. I've just always hung out with boys. All my life. I'm a cat among dogs. There are places I can't go with them, they wouldn't want me to go. If it's too raw or something, I can't get in on that. Some women can. Bonnie Raitt gets completely down and it suits her. They'd blush at those things if I were there. I can't go that far."

Some of rock's hip-thrustingest, guitar-poundingest, double-entendingest male sex symbols, from Led Zeppelin to Prince, have swooned before Mitchell's vulnerability. She shrugs it off. "There's not that much difference between men and women. It's not as much as they think, y'know? A lot of it is cultural imposition." No doubt. But rock is a bastion of sexism, and there's something lovely about the notion of those who exploit sexist clichés being filled with awe by a woman whose work has called those clichés into question. Open your copy of *Hammer of the Gods: the Led Zeppelin Saga*. Page 225: "In interviews that year [Plant and Page] spoke incessantly of their deep love for Joni Mitchell and her then-current record *Court and Spark*." Page 246: "Later Jimmy was aglow because he had been introduced to Joni Mitchell at a restaurant called the Greenhouse. It was just small talk, but Jimmy had at last met one of his true idols. Later Robert passed up an opportunity to meet La Mitchell at a party, saying he was too shy to talk to her."

Joni has nothing to say about that, but a few days later I mention it to her husband Larry, and he says, "I can believe that completely. Robert Plant came over to the house one day when we were in Britain to talk about some unfinished songs I had. He was really looking for songs at that time. We were talking about possibly writing together, so I played him some stuff. Then afterward Joni played him two of the first songs

she had written for the record, 'Secret Place' and 'Number One.' She sang them for Robert with just an acoustic guitar. You could have touched him and he would've tipped over. He was reverent. After she left the room he said, 'Tell her that a man should sing that second song'—'Number One.' He wanted the song! He's a rabid fan of hers."

Not only did he not get that song, but two instrumentals Klein wrote for Plant were hijacked by Mitchell and turned into "Snakes and Ladders" and her lament for native Americans, "Lakota." At the end Plant jokingly said to Mitchell, "Would you please stop nicking my songs?"

Mitchell doesn't figure there's anything unusual in machismo being intimidated or entranced by expressions of vulnerability. "Men are vulnerable," she says. "Somebody had to write about vulnerability. Thinking as a poet, forgetting 'pop,' what was left us? All that was left when I began to write, basically, was the internal landscape. We were coming through a psychological exploratory period. I hadn't read Sylvia Plath, but there were women who had done the pioneering already in poetry circles and taken a lot of flack for it. Pioneers take a lot of flack so that other people can do it. Not unlike Sting going over my turf after I took a lot of flack. It was still pretty shocking, especially in pop circles, to write about such intimate things in the song form. But that was the new territory. It hadn't been done there. Jazz had been done but it hadn't been brought into this tributary. I'm a freshness freak. I'm never bored because I'm always searching for something fresh. It's not that hard to find, but if it's too fresh people don't want to look at it just yet."

### I NEVER MET A MAN I TRUSTED... 'TIL I MET YOU

Joni Mitchell and Larry Klein first recorded together on *Wild Things Run Fast*, the 1982 album that celebrated their love and marriage. He became her co-producer with 1985's *Dog Eat Dog*, and continued sharing that job on *Chalk Mark*. Klein concedes that it's sometimes difficult to play with, produce with and sometimes compose with the person with whom you're also sharing bed and table. "It's difficult, and it's also a plus," he says. "If our vision of a song is different, we can go into a phase of semi-war for a little bit. But far more than that, I'd say it's a plus because when we're involved in a record, we're totally immersed in it. We talk about it constantly, about ideas for songs. Most of the time it's really fun. I think it enriches our relationship, for the most part. It's just the odd time here and there when someone steps on the other's toe. Esthetically, we're in agreement most of the time, so that minimizes the conflict."

Mitchell has produced her own records since her second album; it's sometimes hard for her to adjust to having a copilot. "Through the records we've worked on together," Klein says, "I've learned a lot about how to be a good producer. Joan's got very good musical intuition. On some of the previous things I would voice my disapproval of an idea before the idea had time to reach fruition, before it paid off. That really bothered her. She's not used to having someone present any kind of negativity at the birth of an idea. I've learned through the course of these records how to time my input. Because she has very good musical intuition. Many times she'll have the germ of an idea and at the beginning it'll sound like it's going down a wrong path, but it ends up coming around to a place that pays off. She warrants that kind of trust."

"Trust" is a word Mitchell and Klein both use when describing their relationship. Says Mitchell, "I trust my husband. I don't have to worry if he calls me up and says, 'I ran into this woman, I'm taking her out to lunch.' Do you



Southwest and northeast Joni

know what a burden off me that is? This is fantastic! Because I really believe I know and he knows what we've got."

One manifestation of that trust and love is that Mitchell is no longer pouring the state of her romantic life into her song lyrics. "Secret Place" is the only love song on the new album, and it's veiled. *Dog Eat Dog* had only the fey "Lucky Girl." Since *Wild Things*, the open-hearted wedding album, Joni Mitchell has closed that door to her fans.

"Yeah," she nods. "I don't want business on the street regarding us. I'm very happily married. With my early songs there was so much gossip concerning it! I wrote a song for James Taylor ['See You Sometime'] that mentioned his suspenders. And then on his next album he went and wore his bloody suspenders on the cover! Well, then the cat was completely out of the bag! You don't really want these things being focused back. I don't anyway. One of the reasons I never expected to be in show business on a large scale was because I used to think as a kid, 'God, it must be a nightmare for Sandra Dee and Bobby Darin to have all their crap on the street like that. I wouldn't want to be publicized like that if I was going steady with somebody.'"

Klein, though, says he would not mind if Joni used their marriage for raw material: "I look at the songs more like little short stories. I can't imagine anything she would write about that I would feel bothered by. Even if it was something I was touchy about for some reason. I would think of it as *my* problem to work out. I really think all that stuff—when it comes down to 'Who was the person the song was written about?'—is so unimportant. It is just nothing compared to this piece of art that all these people are going to be able to listen to and put *themselves* in."

Mitchell began redefining her view of love years ago. On her first album, in the song "Cactus Tree" she had portrayed herself as a woman who could not settle with one man because she loved so many. That theme was refined but not contradicted by the five or six albums that followed. But 1976's *Hejira*. Mitchell's contemplation of flight and rootlessness, exposed the darker side of her wanderlust. She described the handsome flirt in "Coyote" as trying to put a flame "in this Eskimo," and from there on the ice on Joni's wings was apparent. In "Amelia" the woman who once sang of looking at love and clouds from both sides now sang, "Maybe I've never really loved. I guess that is the truth. I've

spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes.” At the end of that song the singer turns off the highway into “the Cactus Tree Motel,” somewhere near the end of Lonely Street, last refuge of those who have loved too little.

Is this stretching particulars into generalities? Maybe not. After *Hejira* Mitchell rarely returned to love as a theme. (When she made an exception, in “Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter,” she was again looking down on love from high in the air.) The explosion of romance with Larry Klein that led to *Wild Things* and marriage seemed to catch Mitchell by surprise (“We got a break! Unbelievable!” she sang). Once she found her heart’s desire, once the fire was lit in the Eskimo, she shut up about it and moved on to other subjects.

“In the natural order of things,” Mitchell says, “your primary instinct as an animal is to find your mate. When you do and settle into your family, then you turn your attentions to the civic. You begin to expand. Love is taken care of. I’m a late bloomer—I didn’t find my mate till I was almost 40.

“It’s a good thing those anxieties are removed because I have new, adult anxieties. I’m surrounded by sharks. I made money. When you make money, even if you’re frugal, even if you don’t smoke it or stick it up your nose, there are a hundred and one ways they can take your marbles. I’m now in two litigations. I swore I’d never get into that. One is that the California government ripped me off. [Mitchell and other musicians were double-taxed retroactively on album profits after political opponents of rock star pal Gov. Jerry Brown took over the state government.] And my *housekeeper* is suing me, which is not uncommon out here. She cat-and-

relationship...I have that still to write, I guess. We’ll see what comes out of it. But basically I think my marriage is private, and it provides a climate for me to think about other things. That’s probably one of the things that’s hardest for people to adjust to—my desire to speak on other topics.”

### THE STAR MAKER MACHINERY

Joni Mitchell has a rocky, love-testing relationship with her fans, her critics and some of her musical disciples. Because Mitchell was at one time so lavishly praised, she is now thought of as bigger than life and lambasted when she doesn’t live up to expectations. What a critic does not expect is that Mitchell has never gotten used to the nastiness. She’s not thick-skinned. Her confidence has been bruised by bad reviews, even though those reviews are often recanted two albums later (in time to knock the latest work by comparison...). She mentions on two occasions that the first review of *Chalk Mark*, by *Billboard*’s Steve Gett, was a rave. “It gives me a tailwind,” she smiles. She sent Gett an elaborate floral arrangement to say thank you. She seems so sensitive to bad press, her ego so open, that finally even a critic has to say, “Joni, you shouldn’t take the reviewers so seriously.”

“The art is not affected by critics,” she replies. “It has its own course, and I just follow it. It doesn’t get affected. But *personally* you do get affected, because they have, unfortunately, an effect. Not as much as they would like to think they do. A lot of people being sheep and a lot of critics being lazy. If the first reviews come out with a certain tone, out of sheer laziness, they use that as a point of departure. Now luckily



“Somebody had to write about vulnerability. Thinking as a poet, forgetting pop, what was left us? All that was left was the internal landscape.”

moused me, but I can’t talk about it until after the trial. Anyway it’s a good thing I got love taken care of, ’cause I’ve got a lot of shit to deal with now—the ugly fruit of my labor.

“My first responsibility is to the arts, and they’re a heavy load. So I gave power of attorney. I let my housekeeper take over my house. I let my business people take over my business. I can’t do that anymore.” New concerns are reflected in more adult lyrics, but surely there are interesting things to say about mature love, about marriage.

“People don’t want to hear happy-in-love songs, anyway. People traditionally like their artists to suffer, because most of the world is suffering and artists can shed light on the suffering. I think I’ve written a real spectrum of the variations of love. I don’t know if I have anything more. I certainly am experiencing the ripening of love, but the things that I have to say about it now are pretty radical. I know just from table conversations that I’m in a pretty unique relationship. The making of a song about a good marital

with this one we have one really excellent opening review in *Billboard*. Maybe this bodes well, maybe this is good. ’Cause the first review to come out on *Dog Eat Dog* was in *Newsweek*, and they chose to pit James Taylor and me against each other, him favorably, me not so favorably.”

But the critics aren’t the ones giving Mitchell headaches right now. Joni says she’s having a tough time with her label, Geffen Records, who are worried about recouping the enormous costs of making her albums. Imagine the personal tensions involved in arguing business with a label owned by an old friend, David Geffen (the hero of “Free Man in Paris” no less). At one point the label reportedly attached Mitchell’s publishing royalties. Now the long-suffering label’s come up with another stick—they have told Mitchell that if *Chalk Mark* doesn’t earn back more than it cost they will issue a Joni Mitchell greatest hits album, something Mitchell has always fought against.

“To me the greatest hits is the kiss of death,” Mitchell says.

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"It will kill my catalog. All these years I've been trying to keep it at bay. But the coming of it will be inevitable. It's in my contract, they've got me this time. I don't sell a lot of records. You know that, right? And these records are expensive to make." An edge comes into Mitchell's voice. "I think of myself as a contemporary artist. I am! I'm as contemporary as anybody. But the public don't know that and much of the industry doesn't know that. They just don't recognize it. I think some young artists in England recognize it. Some do here, like Prince. I started minimal as you can get: I can't stay there. I have to continue exploration. And that's expensive. If I don't recoup at a certain point their ace in the hole is this greatest hits, which is the kiss of death to me. You watch the stands—they'll stock that and everything else will disappear."

Obviously it's not as easy being Joni Mitchell as we might expect. In spite of being an important figure in American popular music for 20 years, in spite of doing great and varied work and having the affection of thousands of people, even in spite of being rich, famous and happily married, the blues won't leave Joni alone. And if the critics, the public and her record label seem to swing from love to anger with stomach-churning unpredictability, what's really sharper than a

serpent's tooth is the public snottiness of other singer/songwriters who have been influenced by Mitchell.

Regular *Musician* readers may recall the sniping between Mitchell and Rickie Lee Jones in 1985. Finally Mitchell said that she figured Jones must have been subjected to constant Joni comparisons when she was starting, and had developed a psychological need to "kill Mommy." The *kill Mommy* syndrome reappeared in an interview with Suzanne Vega in the February issue of the Irish magazine *Hot Press*. Said Vega. "I think that I have a tendency to write about things that are difficult, y'know? I prefer to write about things that are realistic. Partly, in a way, it's a reaction against people who had come before me like Joni Mitchell or James Taylor, who I felt wrote about things on a more superficial level..." Ouch. Synchronicity can provide instant relief, though: Simultaneous with the *Hot Press* interview was a Sunday *New York Times* piece on '70s rock that noted, "Joni Mitchell, both successfully and unsuccessfully, looked into African music before Paul Simon and to jazz-inflected pop before Sting."

Joni Mitchell's shadow is so long, her effect on a certain school of pop songwriting so great, that she runs into the *kill Mommy* reflex all the time. Like Dylan, McCartney, Spring-

## INPUT, OUTPUT, ELECTRICITY

When Joni Mitchell went to England to stay with her husband Larry Klein in early 1986, Klein was producing and playing on Ben Orr's solo debut with one hand and adding bass to Peter Gabriel's *So* with the other. When Gabriel offered Mitchell the use of his studio, Klein found himself embarked on a third major project. "I don't think I've ever worked so hard in my life," Klein laughs. "I was falling apart at the end."

At first the Kleins had to get by with loaned equipment. "I borrowed Ben Orr's Stratocaster on 'Number One,'" Joni recalls. She also made use of Gabriel's old Fender Jaguar. "Whenever the acoustic comes up it's a Martin D28," Joni explains. "There's 20 Martins playing the same part on 'Secret Place.' We used up a whole roll to get that fat sound. I've stacked four acoustics before, but with this 48-track potential I wanted to stack until when I clicked one out, I couldn't hear it. You could still hear it fall out between 19 and 20, but I said, 'That's enough.'"

"'Cool Water' is electrics stacked. 'Number One' is a mix of one electric and one acoustic. I use an Ibanez George Benson model f-hole electric guitar. Onstage I have five of those set up in different tunings." In the studio Mitchell either plugged into the board or played through a Roland JC120 Jazz Chorus amp. Guitarist Michael Landau played Strats, through MESA/Boogie and Marshall amps.

For bass, Larry Klein says, "I played a Yamaha. There's two basses I use all the time now, both Yamaha five-strings they were nice enough to make up for me the way I wanted. One's fretless, one's fretted. They're the BB5000 model, but kind of customized. I use an AB power amp with the Yamaha PB1 preamp. I use Energy bass cabinets; they just have one 12-inch speaker, and I used a D.I. that I really like called a Simon Systems D.I. And I use an effects switching system built by Bob Bradshaw."

And what about those eccentric rhythms? "A lot of the drum sounds were done with a Fairlight Series III," Larry says. "We used it for a lot of different stuff including all the drum sequencing on 'Snakes and Ladders.' The conga part on 'Cool Water' is sampled from a little Roland TR-808 drum machine and then played on the Fairlight. We did a lot of sampling from the early Roland drum machines, because the sounds on them are really small and warm compared to the new stuff."

Geez, Larry, a nice way to make us feel really old is to wax nostalgic for the great warm sound of those old *drum machines*. Klein laughs. "It sounds funny, doesn't it? I even think that way about

the Series II Fairlight! When it came time to get the Series III you could do a deal trading them in, but I thought, 'Gee, the Series II really does have a sound to it.' Some of the airier sounds that you hear and there on the album are the Series II Fairlight."

Mitchell warns that there's no way to list all the keyboards on *Chalk Mark* without publishing a *Musician Special Edition*. So let's just look at the main 88s: "The piano on 'Beat of Black Wings' is Peter Gabriel's beautiful Yamaha CP80 electric," Joni says. "Because of that we used Yamaha electric on several things." "Joan and I played all the keyboards," Larry explains. "I really liked the PPG Wave 2.3. I also used this old—the first synthesizer that Yamaha brought out—it's called the CS80. That's on 'Beat of Black Wings' and 'Cool Water.' We used an old Prophet 5, a Roland Jupiter 6, the DX7 with the TX rack which is like eight DX7s. A few bits with the new Roland D-50s, and some stuff with the Roland JX10."

The track called "The Reoccurring Dream" is punctuated with voices Joni lifted from TV commercials ("Radiant!" "Glamor before your very eyes!" "Hollywood's greatest legends!") and dropped into the Fairlight. "We had racks of keyboards in there," Joni recalls. "Sometimes I'd say, 'Oh, that's a good sound! I'll take that!' The intro on 'Cool Water' has a sound that Klein distilled on some ax; he made it by hand as an exercise. I call it 'Presbyterian in Peru.' It's one of those sounds that's fantastic through the whole range of the keyboard. Up in the right hand, up high, it sounded like South American flutes, and below middle C it sounded like Gregorian voices. It made you want to play churchy chords. Even if you played weird chords with a lot of seconds and funny harmony, it still sounded like church music."

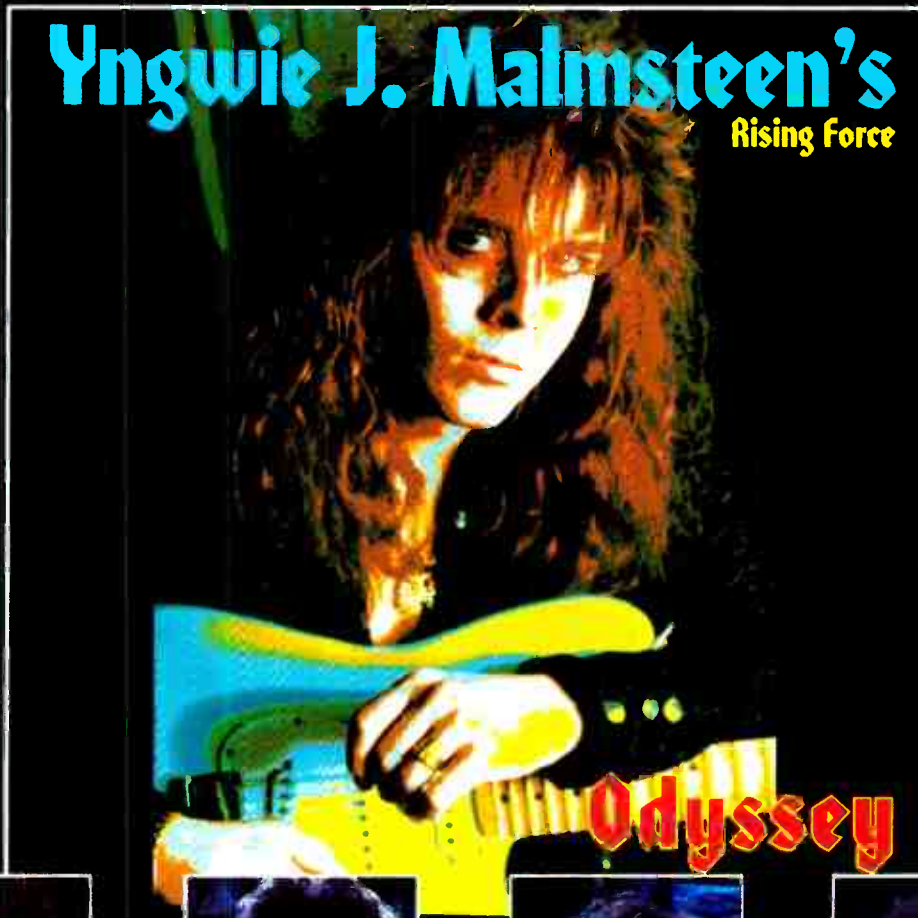
So how did Larry Klein create the P.I.P.? "There's a sound I had used on the Oberheim Xpander. As a programming exercise one day I sat down and tried to get the same sound using the DX7. I ended up with the 'Presbyterian in Peru.' It didn't end up like the sound I was going after, it took a couple of left turns. We ended up using it with a few modules of the TX rack. The *pulsing* in the sound is actually, in my exercise, what I couldn't get out—but it's what made it work really well for that part."

As we talk, electricians are wiring up a recording studio in what was a junk room in Mitchell and Klein's California home. Then Klein will move his current production sessions, for a British group called the Dare, into the house to finish an album they started in England. And from now on, he's going to try to do one thing at a time.



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**JONI MITCHELL**

steen and other pop icons, Mitchell has influenced a whole school of younger songwriters—who predictably pass from a period of childish imitation into a period of adolescent rejection. In particular, she seems hurt that Sting has been less vocal about her influence on his work in interviews than he has been in private. Larry Klein hopes she will agree to play at least a few concerts (she has not done a proper tour since 1979), perhaps with just him on bass and *Chalk Mark* drummer Manu Katche. But Mitchell's confidence seems to have been shaken by the indifferent reaction she got from some of the huge crowd at the Giants Stadium Amnesty International extravaganza in 1986. She went on, unrehearsed, as a last-minute substitute for Pete Townshend and faced a restless crowd who'd just tolerated six hours of support acts and were impatient to see U2 and the Police. A resurrected Elvis would have had trouble commanding that spot. But Mitchell took the crowd's disinterest to heart. It seems as if Joni Mitchell simply does not know how much respect and affection the public has for her. Without touring, her only barometers are record company audits and magazine reviews. Neither measures the importance of her music to the people who do listen.

"At a certain point," she says, "no matter what you do,



people just say, 'Oh yeah—her.' You've just been around too long. There's nothing you can do about that. You can't change into another being and get a fresh start. So that you must endure: you're dragging your past. People were annoyed with the kind of British sound of *Dog Eat Dog*. I like the mixes, I was crazy about the mixes when we did them, but I think we did make one mistake: my vocals have to be up high. It seems to really irritate people if they can't hear the words. We mixed the voice hotter on this one. One thing I must give my public." Joni laughs. "is the clarity of the lyric."

**SCALES TO FEATHERS, YOU AND I**

If you want a metaphysical symbol for Joni Mitchell's work (and who doesn't?) think of an eagle and a serpent, the bird representing distance, flight and perspective, the snake representing earthiness, funkiness. Snakes show up in Mitchell's work even more than flying, which is to say—all the time (Joni: "I've got snakes in my subconscious you wouldn't believe!"). "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" found the singer in an airplane, looking down on a slowly crawling train, and juxtaposing eagles and snakes, higher nature and lower, from that contrast. It's a good metaphor for the artist's dilemma—altitude gives her clear perspective, but she can't

AARON CHANG

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## JONI MITCHELL

get down on the ground and experience what she's observing.

"Okay," Mitchell says carefully, "now we get to philosophy, to an idea I've been playing with for some years. You'll find it in some Indian teachings as the medicine wheel, Carl Jung calls it something else, you'll find it in the I Ching as the north/south/east/west aspects, the vantage points. There are four primary ways of viewing: intellect to the north; emotion, heart and feeling south; clarity to the east; sensation, tactile intelligence to the west. If I'm in my north, intellectual mode on a night out? Very bad. I'll go to hear a band and apply all of my standards to it and won't be able to enjoy it at all. But there is another mode I can be in which is not unlike a small naive prairie girl. When I go into Joni-from-Saskatoon mode I can have fun. I'm operating basically out of southwest. If I run into intellectuals at that moment they'll be very disappointed in me. But I'll be truly capable of *enjoying*. I don't really like my intellect. It's not the most fun place to go. It's a great tool and you have to go there to write. Sometimes things just pour out in a sensual way, and I think some of your best writing does bypass the intellect, but you have to go in there and prime the pump, and certainly you have to use it to double-check things, to criticize your own work. And then you have to be able to switch out.

"I produce myself. I had to learn this mobility of perspective. You almost get the bends. I have to go out and sing, for which I have to go southwest; if I don't I get a chilly tone. Then I have to come in and go back into my head and adjudicate that performance. Then I have to switch back in to open up my heart and my senses, because it's very sensual to go singing, scalloping along a line—that's west. This is my

main life's work, the ability to float, to be able to analyze the appropriate place to be in at a given moment and to be able to get there quickly. The hardest thing is to get to the opposite.

"Applied to the arts, this concept is a valuable tool. A work of art should have something for the intellect; should certainly contain something for feeling people; it should contain some kind of brief clear insight—a turn of phrase so crunchy that a Clarity Primary listening will get something from it; and sensation will be either the elasticity of the groove, or a certain attention to sensual detail in the lyric—like, 'He picks up my scent on his fingers' from 'Coyote.' That's a west observation. West would appreciate that."

## ALL GOOD DREAMERS PASS THIS WAY

After leaving Joni Mitchell I visited the Hollywood recording studio where producer Peter Anderson was recording Michelle Shocked, the talented, Texas-bred singer/songwriter. When I mentioned Mitchell, Anderson said, "Oh, I used to live down the street from Joni Mitchell in Detroit in the late '60s. I used to see her all the time. She and her husband Chuck were part of the local folk scene. When Tom Rush came to town he'd invite Joni up onstage to sing with him. Everybody'd say, 'Wow, Joni knows Tom Rush!' I thought of 'The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in '68,' the first line of Mitchell's brilliant 1971 epitaph for her first marriage. It made me wonder about Chuck Mitchell, the mysterious musician husband who was portrayed in that song and in 'I Had a King' as a guy whose light went out early. 'Joni was always really good,' Anderson said. 'But



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## JONI MITCHELL

you know, Chuck was good, too.”

When I got back to New York Larry Klein called and said that he probably didn't have to say this, but he hoped *Musician* wouldn't make it sound like he, the husband, was the musical director and Joni, the wife, was somehow subordinate in the studio. I said, geez, no—Joni Mitchell has written, played and produced great albums for years: only a sexist idiot would assume she didn't know her way around a mixing board, fretboard or Fairlight. Larry laughed and said, yeah, that's right, but there are still people around who assume that *he* takes all the technical leads and she follows. I hope Larry won't mind my mentioning this; I do because it struck me as evidence of how generous and secure he must be. Many musicians want to grab all the credit they can, if only by implication and inference. And many men with wives who are more wealthy, more famous or more advanced in their shared profession get downright testy. So when Klein phoned to make sure we didn't give him too much credit, I thought that this was a great guy—a musician whose ego didn't need boosting and a husband who truly enjoyed his wife's success.

After we hung up I looked at the paper and guess who was playing at the Speakeasy, a bar down the street from my apartment? The mysterious Chuck Mitchell. Synchronicity for sure. I called the club and they said the first show was on now, the second show would start after 11. When I walked in at 11:15 the cafe's lights were going off. It was snowing and nobody had showed up. The second set was cancelled. Chuck Mitchell, a handsome man with gray in his hair, was putting on his coat and chatting with a very serious woman who

might have been a new fan or an old friend or his wife. And I thought, the guy's having a slow night, he's talking to this woman, the last thing he wants right now is for a writer who didn't even hear his music to stick a tape recorder in his face and ask about his famous ex-wife. So I went back outside. He followed a minute later, carrying his guitars across MacDougal Street. (We were at the corner of MacDougal and Bleecker, folkie heaven and site of two Joni Mitchell songs, "Tin Angel" and "Song for Sharon.") For the second time I stopped myself from speaking. After all, he was just one more working musician, slogging around playing gigs in bad places 20 years down the line. If he's still at it after all this time he can't be the cynic those old songs painted. He must have something going for him. It's just his misfortune that he was briefly married—and gave his name—to a woman who was the best.

He's just one more pop poet laboring in the same shadow as Suzanne Vega, Rickie Lee Jones, Sting and a thousand other talented singer/songwriters: He may be real good, but he's not Joni Mitchell.

Then I thought of what Mitchell said in California, as I was getting up to go. "Without credentials nobody takes you seriously. Anywhere. In my first marriage my first husband was well educated, he had degrees in literature. I'd never read anything. I used to do my book reports in high school from *Classic Comics* and *Readers' Digest* condensed books. I was very much an anti-intellectual. I was a doer and an experimenter. I was not embarrassed by things unhip. I used to go to polka dances. I absorbed a lot of my local culture. I was regional, I didn't belong to my high school. I didn't belong to

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my town. I didn't develop the chauvinism on a small scale that gives you limitations. There are moments in my life—but they are merely moments, down moments—when I think, 'God, I don't have a nationality, I don't have a religion. I don't belong to anything.' There are moments when I crave to belong to something. But on the other hand, there's a great freedom with not belonging to anything, there's an open-mindedness with not belonging to anything. Sharon Bell, in 'Song for Sharon,' was the singer. I was going to grow up and marry a farmer, she was going to grow up and be a singer. She married a farmer. That song has a little bit of nostalgia. Sometimes I think I'd be better suited to living on a farm..."

She put out her cigarette, stood up, and gathered her things to go meet the business, art and publicity people who were waiting for their conferences with her. Then, unexpectedly, she said, "I have no regrets. I've had a really peculiar life. I've had a very hard life and a very interesting life. My luck, my karma, or whatever you want to call it, moves in circles. I don't get burglarized once, I get a *rash* of burglaries all at once and they all have variations on them. It's almost as if, if you believe in external powers and the preprogramming of a life, I would not just be given the opportunity to experience *one* aspect of burglary, but many." She laughed. "After the last album we had a rash of car accidents. Your

*odds* start getting funny. The odds in my life are very funny. I have a lot of synchronicity, more than the average person. Things connect up exquisitely good and exquisitely bad. I have a certain amount of clairvoyance. According to Carl Jung the subconscious knows no concept of past/present/future: that's a conscious idea. As a poet you tap into your subconscious. I'm in touch with my subconscious a great deal in my dreaming and so on. So let's say I spaced out all through the school system. According to a hypnotist I kept the gap open to my subconscious, like a child. Usually there's a sealing-over in adults, because daydreaming is not encouraged. Well, I did it anyway. So maybe because of those things...who's to explain why?

"My father says, 'Well, you've had many lifetimes in one.' Well, I have. I've lived in tiny hamlets, I was raised in Saskatchewan, which was like a third-world country; our water was delivered in barrels drawn by horses, Indians came into town. I lived with one foot in the pioneering experience, all the way up to New York. Because of my work I was made wealthy, but I am not a natural wealthy type. I don't make my friends in wealthy circles, I don't seek society, although I find it fascinating to visit. I now have to contend with what it means to be wealthy. In the greedy '80s that means litigation. I have a lot of people trying to take my money. Now I have to grow teeth and protect it. I have to grow a kind of wildness that I don't really want, because I don't want to endanger my innocence. My innocence is regenerative in certain ways. By that I mean joy still comes to me, which I think is the main aspect of innocence. I think as a writer you want to hang onto that." ♫

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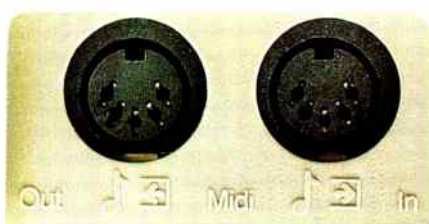
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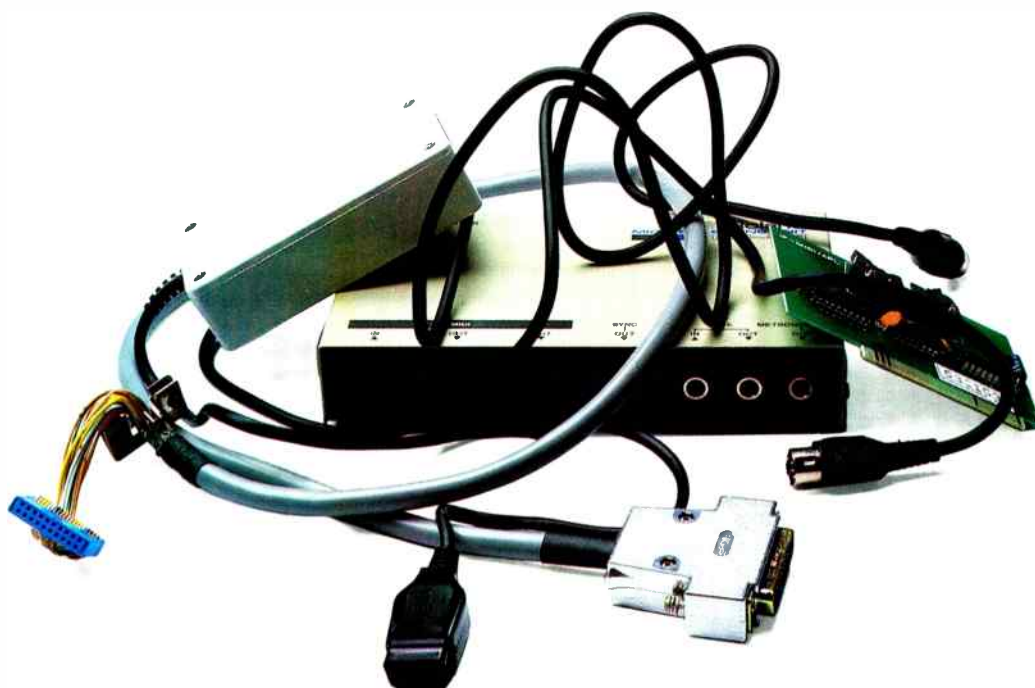
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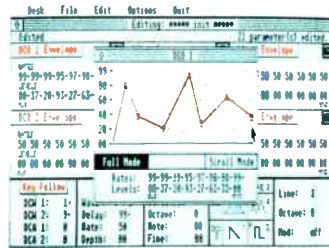
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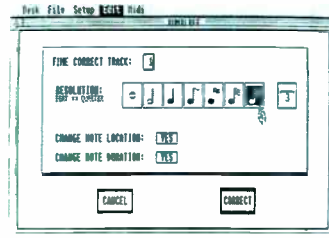
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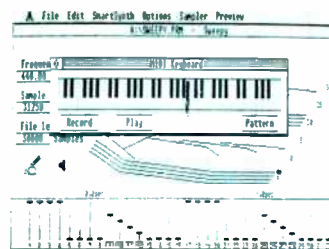
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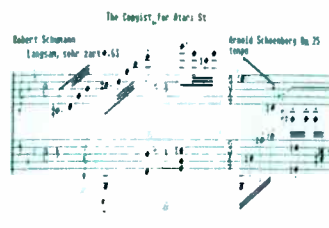
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# GONNY POLLINS

The  
Rose  
&  
the Cross



*"It's something falls us. First we feel. Then we fall."*  
James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

## I. You Don't Know What Love Is

The Manhattan workshop of Sonny Rollins—a tiny studio on the top floor of a Tribeca high-rise—seems to domicile an extremely studious NYU junior. To the left of his bed, a neat pyramid of books on Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity is crowned by a portrait of an African drummer dancing against a brooding russet sky (the painter: The Prophet). Across the room to the right, shelves spill over with manuscripts, cassettes and one of those silly back-window-of-a-car bobbing-head dolls that hypnotize you in traffic snarls—only this one is of a beaming Satchmo. An Indian tamboura and a disheveled African gut-string instrument peer shyly from their respective corners; a punch-drunk piano creaks under the weight of manuscript paper; through an adjacent picture window, Manhattan's northern boulevards veer off frostily in eerie diagonal lines of night and light. Stretched out on the bed in jogging sweats and a floppy wool cap, Sonny Rollins' gentle eyes dominate the powerful axis point of his patrician nose.

by chip  
stern



think my whole life has been a work in progress,” Rollins is reflecting. “I’ve had a beautiful life, and I’ve played with some of the most fantastic musicians. And I was accepted by all the older guys as well as the beboppers. I remember playing at the Village Vanguard, and Roy Eldridge and Papa Jo Jones came to see me; and Jo was hollering, ‘Yeah, Sonny! Sonny Rollins, alright...’ and that made me feel so proud, you know, like they were giving me the nod. I always had the rhythm thing, the placement of notes. I was always gifted with the ability to swing.

“The part of Sonny Rollins that is unfinished,” he goes on, “is that... well, I consider myself lucky that I’ve survived this far. A lot of cats withered away from all the pressures and pitfalls, but I changed my life around. It wasn’t just about music when I got away from that scene for the first time [in 1959]. I quit to do a total reconstruction on every level of my life. I married Lucille; I began getting seriously into physical culture and weight-lifting, which led me directly into the practice of yoga; I began reading a lot on metaphysics and philosophy. I turned around.

“Now when I look at myself there’s more that I want to do, but I can see where somebody could isolate a period in the ‘50s and say, ‘Well, he had it together and it was a whole story.’ I mean, I liked all of the good stuff. Like that trio album [*Live at the Village Vanguard*, Blue Note] with Wilbur Ware and Elvin [Jones]; I thought we had a nice free-swinging thing going. I liked *Way Out West* [Contemporary]—it was a nice idea and had some nice feeling on it. I dug *Freedom Suite* [Riverside], of course, because I had Max [Roach] and Oscar [Pettiford] on it, especially the concept of doing a whole piece of music as a suite—and the message of the music. I can appreciate all of that, but it’s not relevant to the fact that I still think my stuff is unfinished—as a whole.”

Therein lies the dilemma of *being* Sonny Rollins: No artist is more beloved by his audience, but then none inspires greater expectations than the saxophone colossus. At times Rollins must feel nearly cannibalized by this devotion. What’s next? What’s new? What have you done for me lately? Here is a musician, just shy of his nineteenth birthday, bouncing along with Fats Navarro and Bud Powell on that pianist’s seminal 1949 Blue Note session. Accepted and encouraged by the tribal elders of improvisation, Rollins (Newk to his friends, owing to his striking resemblance to then-Brooklyn Dodger

Even if Sonny Rollins’ ‘50s recordings were a ghost of what was going down live, I can sympathize with my elders. For beyond his extraordinary musicality—his mythic thematic intuition—there remains something surreal about that tone and groove; the bottomless brawn of the Rollins tenor, as notes blossom transparently in cubist shards and bulbous balloons of sound, the impudent grace of his swing, lines lazily coiling and uncoiling; improbable quotes and asides from his stream-of-consciousness; the deft way he builds anticipation with rhythm and melodic motifs, then suddenly exceeds all expectations in a harmonic spillover of emotions and ideas that render his drummer, the song—even his tenor—totally irrelevant. Yeah—play it again, Sonny.

Still, unless you went off to Gettysburg with Eisenhower in 1959, it’s worth noting that there have been some changes in music over the last 30 years, and in the way listeners perceive that music. Nowadays, kids of my daughter’s generation don’t really hear Tin Pan Alley melodies floating languidly above a set of moving changes in the treble clef—they hear melody coming out of the bass. The way songs are portrayed today is from the bottom up, out of the backbeat and the rhythms—all those rhythms. “Jazz” goes in one ear and out the other.

“Doesn’t that bother you?” Sonny inquires earnestly. “Wouldn’t that lack of communication be troubling? It concerns me—how do you connect with people when jazz as we understand it is not really in their environment? I mean, bebop never went away. It’s still a foundation of musical knowledge.

“But,” Sonny continues, “variety is an essential part of my presentation as well. I usually try and play a lot of styles. I hadn’t wanted to play ‘50s bebop in a long, long time—maybe since the ‘50s. You know, when more rhythms came to the forefront, and drummers began to play with more cross-rhythms; when different percussion instruments began to augment the rhythm section, and different sorts of grooves began to develop, that was very interesting to me. I’ve always loved rhythms as opposed to a band with piano, upright bass and a drummer going ching-chinkachink/chinka chink—I just hear too many rhythms to be satisfied with that. I haven’t maybe gotten my thing completely together yet, but I don’t ever want the music to come across as one-dimensional.”

This is a sore point with Sonny’s older fans, for whom the past 16 years have been a long, unsatisfying flirtation with the static rhythms of rock ‘n’ roll, redeemed only by the intermit-

**“A lot of guys say, ‘I don’t care about the people; I just play.’ But I never met a musician who didn’t want to reach people.”**

pitching ace, Don Newcombe) went on to become *the* icon of ‘50s hard-bop tenor, much as his soul-mate John Coltrane dominated the frenetic ‘60s. Rollins’ collaborations with Powell, Navarro, Benny Green, Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, the Modern Jazz Quartet, J.J. Johnson, Clifford Brown and Max Roach, as well as his own trend-setting work as a leader, froze the embryonic image of the young improviser for three generations.

For so prodigious a talent, the recordings from that era are at once a blessing and a curse. For younger fans, great Rollins performances like “Oleo,” “Pent-up House,” “Pannonica,” “Strode Road,” “Old Devil Moon,” “The Freedom Suite” and “Blessing in Disguise” have a life all their own. But for creative artists, recordings are also frozen time. Such moments shadow them wherever they try to grow, reminding listeners who were on *that* scene at *that* time, how much better things were. And nostalgia sets in.

tent transmogrifications of the “real” Sonny Rollins in concert situations or live recordings like *Don’t Stop the Carnival* (on Milestone). Without attempting to justify the moments of triviality which sometimes belabor his studio efforts, or explain his genial deference to sidemen who don’t deserve to lick his ligature, I think it’s superficial as hell to simply dismiss all of his studio work outright (dig *Horn Culture*, *Nucleus*, *Easy Living* and *Don’t Ask*)—because that misses the point. Which is that Sonny Rollins has always had an abiding affection for pop music in all forms.

During the sacred ‘50s, Newk developed a reputation for transforming the most out-of-left-field pop songs and show tunes into joyous parodies or compelling personal statements, from “Toot, Toot, Tootsie” and “Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody” from the lexicon of Al Jolson, to the hard swing and boyish affection with which he showers “Wagon Wheels” and “I’m An Old Cowhand” from *Way Out West*. Or listen how,

on 1966's *East Broadway Rundown*, his Latin airs and operatic bluesiness turn "We Kiss in the Shadows" (from *The King and I*) into the most sublime of jazz performances.

There you have the pop music of days long gone. So why should it be so surprising that Sonny Rollins is interested in the pop, dance and R&B forms of today? His first great influence was Louis Jordan, a connecting link between the urban and rural blues traditions that evolved into swing, R&B and rock 'n' roll; in conversation Rollins speaks admiringly about artists as diverse as Hank Williams, Robert Johnson, Frank Sinatra, Nat "King" Cole, Stevie Wonder and James Brown. ("I always dug James Brown a lot... I know that James Brown told a cat that he wanted to play with me one time.") Beneath him, you say? Hell, this is an artist who treats "Pop Goes the Weasel" to thematic variations worthy of Mozart at the opening of *The Solo Concert*.

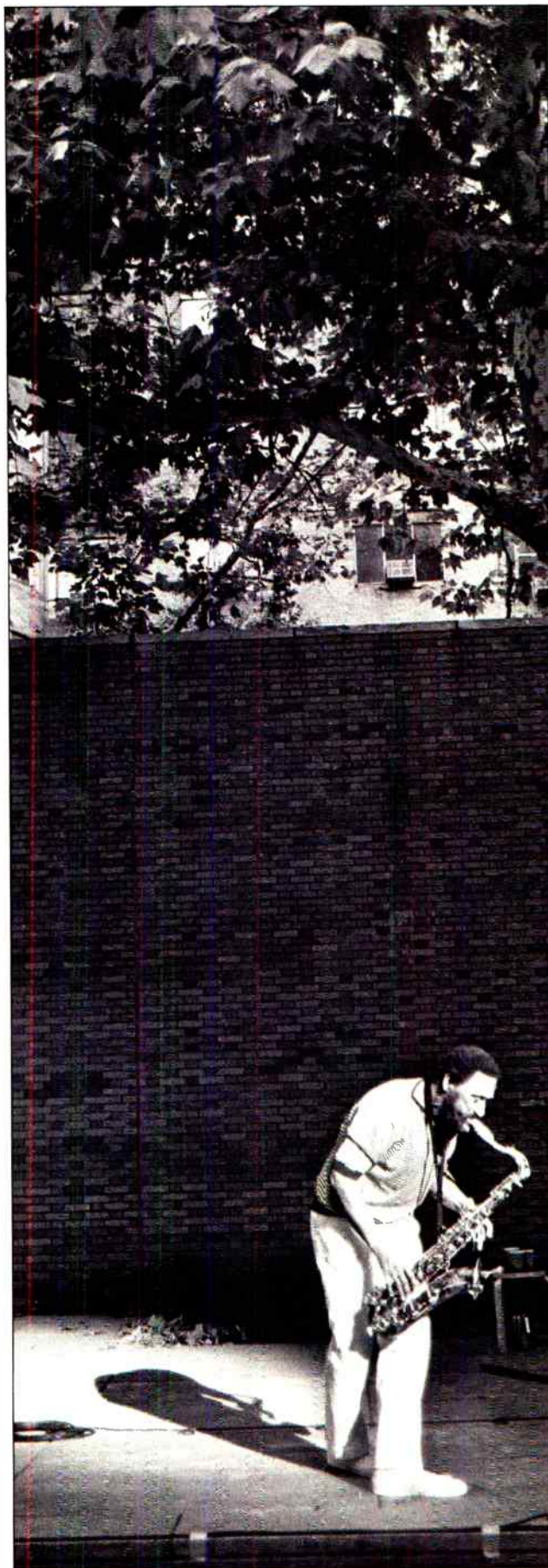
True, what's been a work in progress for Sonny has been a prolonged slump to others. But this time, instead of going to the bridge or the ashram, Rollins went home to an upstate farm—sort of an elongated working sabbatical—where he alternately emerges and recedes with new ideas and refinements, pausing to reflect and recharge. Those forays and experiments in Sonny Rollins' music—good, bad and indifferent—are symbolic of a life's search, a process that must be viewed holistically.

Understand, that where some life cycles simply cease, others grind and grow powerful slow. The fact is, Rollins has been on a roll since his Rolling Stones guest-shot on *Tattoo You* and his own production of *Sunny Days, Starry Nights* in 1984. Nor is the gusher of live, straight-no-chaser Sonny that fanatics found so exhilarating on *The Solo Album* and *G-Man* at all mitigated on his latest studio album, *Dancing in the Dark*, where Sonny and his band (trombonist Clifton Anderson, bass guitarist Jerome Harris, keyboardist Mark Soskin and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith) achieve the sort of collective chemistry, pacing and power we've come to expect from Newk in his best live shows. He's captured the loose spirit of a jazz band in the studio more effectively than at any point in the last 16 years. Including that most beloved of his aspects—Sonny Rollins: The Spontaneous Orchestra.

*Dancing's* title tune is the tour de force of a balanced, engaging session. Newk's unaccompanied opening cadenza sets up a spider's web of complexity. He basks in the glow of Anderson's trombone, before ripping off an astonishing series of variations, trampling bar lines and chord changes in his wake without negating his gruff, operatic lyricism. More to the point, Sonny Rollins sounds as if he's having a good time—he's not holding anything back, and that is unprecedented in his studio efforts since *Next Album*. Like so much of his work from the past 16 years, he doesn't achieve his effect simply through harmonic means, but through colorful manipulations of timbre and pitch. It's as if Sonny has been chipping away at the edge of his dark round sound over the years, revealing layers of color and a percussive edge. It is a very, well, grandfatherly kind of sound, that puts this writer in mind of the grandfather of the tenor, Mr. Coleman Hawkins. Additionally, "O. T. Y. O. G." chases the train at a brisk gallop, and "Allison" frames the lyrical side of Rollins' writing and improvising in a charming medium-up stroll that suggests Tadd Dameron to some well-traveled ears. So maybe entrenched jazzbos and critic types will finally find something to like in *Dancing in the Dark*.

"Well," Sonny says, "I try not to worry about the critics anymore. They can dislike you or like you depending on what the consensus is. I guess they all get together and form an opinion. Is that what you guys do?" he asks mischievously.

"It's a no-win situation," I reply. "Because you command the



## SONNY ROLLINS

greatest love, you create the greatest expectations. We're always wondering how come the Sonny Rollins we love and the Sonny Rollins you love are invariably so disparate. Like, I dig a lot of what you've done on records recently, but number one on my wish list... do you know what that is?"

"What."

"Trio," I say prayerfully.

"Oh, really," he replies quizzically. "Well, that's nice, but you know, that I think is very avant-garde. Maybe people would accept that—I don't know."

"Well," I press on insistently, "is it a question of people accepting it or you accepting it?"

"As far as my accepting it, it takes very good players—very



strong bassists and drummers. Anytime I had a combination where I could have done that, I already had a band—there were other guys involved. But I'm certainly not averse to the idea of playing with a trio again; in other words, that's a hint, right?" He smiles, then goes on to consider maybe doing it as part of a set, when the phone rings and he's saved by the bell.

"Anyway," I go on as he hangs up the phone, "no writers could possibly be harder critics on Sonny Rollins than Sonny Rollins."

"That's true," he agrees, "I'm a very tough critic of myself."

"When *G-Man* came out I was beside myself. Wow, they finally captured Sonny going berserk in a live situation. The way you twisted the harmony inside out, some of those incredible long-held tones, the multiphonics, that one high note at the beginning that sounds like an enraged Electrolux, just the unbelievable intensity of it. I thought, 'Gee, this is historic, this is a breakthrough, I want to go out in the street and yell hooray and walk through ground glass and hot coals in my bare feet.' Then when I came down I figured, 'Well, Sonny probably hates it, right?'"

Newk explodes in loud laughter. "Well, okay, that is true," he admits. "I'm glad that people liked it, but I didn't do what I wanted to do; plus I got a horn that I'd just gotten fixed, which meant that it was different than usual—it takes a while to break a horn in. So I was very frustrated on that; it was not what I wanted to do at all."

"My horn-player friends are always fidgeting to get the reeds and ligature and action together—horns are funny."

Newk chuckles. "Ha ha ha. Yeah, horns are funny—that's a good title for a tune," he says, then becomes distant. "No, you never get that stuff right. Making art is something that you never..." and his voice fades into an ellipse of thought, still trying to get it right—better, even better.

"You know," he continues, "I do care what people think about me; and I care what the so-called critics think, of course. It's a no-win situation because...how can you ever live up to everything a person might want you to be. There are things on some albums that I like, but I think there's a facet of me playing that hasn't been recorded yet. I definitely feel that way. So I'm not about to look back and say this was good and that was good. I'm still in the race actually, and there's still things I want to work on. So I just try and keep my own sights straight. But it certainly is a great feeling to know that you are loved and/or hated for your work."

"Oh, God, nobody hates you, Newk," I insist. "Why do you suppose that all of us were hollering for you to do a solo album all these years? Because we wanted to kill your bands; get rid of these chumps so that we can listen to Sonny."

"Right," he laughs, "instead of shoot the piano player, shoot the whole band. I am wont to play a lot of solos and take long cadenzas and so forth. Actually, I'm trying to express myself completely; present the Sonny Rollins everybody is expecting to hear, you know. The bands are there because it's a convention—you want to hear a band playing, have a good-sounding group. I might be able to play solo for the rest of my life, but that would be pretty energy-consuming—I don't know if I could handle that."

"I'm trying to reach a collective type of improvisational thing with the group—the basic spirit of jazz. I'm a jazz player and I want the band to sound like a real good jazz band. There was a period in my life when I used to fire piano players, so I have had periods when I couldn't get people to follow me, and I guess I was a little more volatile at that point. But everybody isn't the same. The very fact that I have a group of people accompanying me would tend to suggest that they are accompanists rather than leaders. But that's also an art, to follow people—and to follow me you have to have certain skills."

"Do you favor accompanists over collectivists?" I wonder.

"I've tried both," he replies. "I've tried a lot of different combinations during my life as a bandleader...I don't know...I'm not sure. I think as a bandleader you want to have people you can mold in a way that they get out the music that I want to portray. So I'm not looking for guys who have to express themselves *all* the time. I think that playing with me, the guys who are quote/unquote "accompanists" have a lot of room to express their emotions and feelings and get out their own music; playing with me I think is very easy, because they have a lot of space to express themselves within the context of the compositions. I don't tell them how to solo or what to play. I don't like to tell anybody anything; they should sort of know. So when I say mold, I mean I want to mold a group to present my picture: the picture I have in my mind of the sound I'm trying to project."

"Let me tell you something. There's a lot of guys who say, 'I don't care about the people—I just play.' But I have never met a musician who didn't want to reach the people. You don't dance onstage unless you feel like dancing; you don't do things that are completely repugnant to yourself. Now you're playing for yourself first, of course, but then you want to reach somebody. Because, well, you may be great but how do you know if nobody likes you? Maybe I'm a little sensitive about people thinking I'm playing music to reach people—I'm playing to reach myself."

"We're just instrumental musicians, and if I could sing like Louis Armstrong I would probably try to—the human voice is the first instrument, and that's really the greatest instrument if you can use it. You see, when you get up on that stand, it is a show, whether you're consciously entertaining or not. The curtain rises, the lights are out. But instrumental musicians

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don't have many tools—all we can do is use music. To me there is no real connection with entertainment as it's known in singing groups and dancing groups. So yes, I do want to communicate with people, but no, I'm not an entertainer. I still want them to have a positive experience, but not at the expense of music. I want them to think, also, and I want them to feel more optimistic when they leave a Sonny Rollins performance than when they came in—feel a little happier if that's possible in this fucked-up world.”

And they do, but then they're only digging Sonny Rollins, and when Saint Newk has packed up his horn and headed north again, the challenge remains—to *be* Sonny Rollins. To try and clear the vessel, to fine-tune it, to test it so that he can be a channel for his own emotions and longings and fantasies; more importantly, so that he can truly be the *new man*, be a channel for things older and stronger and more eternal than Sonny Rollins; so that all of this can come through him—in a pure gush of love and freedom sweet, oh so sweet.

Rollins looks out the window into the gusty winter night, and there's that faraway look in his eyes again, as we talk of things that guide us through time on our way to spaces unknown. There is death in the air, but it does not beckon as a threat, rather as a promise, a hint of something beyond us yet beside us all the while—a life's work just to prepare and move on. A Mozart, a Robert Johnson, a Jimmy Blanton, Charlie Christian, Clifford Brown, a Charlie Parker, a Hendrix. Walking among us for but an instant, no more, giving us a glimpse of something unimaginably beautiful, then having the bad luck or good sense to swoop the sphere before someone can ask them... *what's next?* Suddenly, what little they may have left behind is precious beyond compare; treasured, pored over and dissected and analyzed and worshiped until some begin to sense its meaning—its truth. No next album, just the living residue of legend and myth to guide us and beckon. And what of those left behind, the survivors, the disciples? What is left to discover, to reveal?

Sonny Rollins grows quiet. He's still dancing in the dark after all these years. “Chip,” he asks softly, “what do you suppose Coltrane would be playing now?”

## II. The Solo Concert

### morpheus

Who's to say what is real? I've had some real dreams in my life. I had a dream when my mother died; we weren't getting along at the time, and then she died suddenly. And after a while she came back to me in a dream, and I know it was real—a religious experience. I haven't dreamed about Coltrane in years and years, but I had a dream about him the other night—maybe because I was talking to you about him. It wasn't just a vision, it was very realistic. We were hanging out together, like back in the old days. We were talking, and he was telling me some of his stories with his wry sense of humor. It was very upbeat;

everything was harmony and love, you know, and when I woke up I was happy—smiling. I'm sure glad he came back.

### west end blues

When I think of the spiritual, I think of Louis Armstrong. I read where Django Reinhardt said that the first time he heard Louis Armstrong, he cried. Very spiritual. Very much beyond the physical, it's definitely beyond that—joy!

I remember with Miles, when we'd be breaking between sets, and Louis Armstrong would be up the street, and Miles'd say, “Hey, let's go dig Pops.” For me it was not so much hearing Louis Armstrong, although of course I used to listen to him—that '27-'28 music is some real bad stuff—but when I used to see Louis Armstrong, that did a lot for me... just like a picture I had in a book one time when I was in India... and this guy who knew nothing about jazz—he saw this picture of Charlie Parker, and he got something from the picture, you know what I mean? He could feel Bird's strength. So seeing Louis Armstrong, that gave me a feeling, made me feel uplifted. The music is great; man, Louis Armstrong did everything; but just being in his physical presence, you could feel the music and depth of his musical personality. I love him.



### duke of iron

When I was young, I mean really young, I did a lot of sketching and watercolors. I can paint, I just haven't gotten back into it since I've been in music—I'd like to, though, if I can find the time. I was always sketching. Someone told me that Wayne Shorter used to do comic books when he was a kid. I used to, too. I was into heroes: the original Blue Beetle, the Human Torch and Toro, Captain America

and Bucky, the Sub-Mariner. The Sub-Mariner was nasty, man; he could stay underwater and fly with these little wings on his ankles. I dug Captain America, and that cat who created him... Jack Kirby—he was my man! I couldn't draw hands; I never could draw hands, so I'd have to have the guy holding something...

I sort of remember trying to get this character called The Chain. He was a strong guy, and the biceps were bulging, and chains were breaking up all over him; I think I conceived of him having certain powers. I remember The Chain especially because I'd gotten a whole book together with the boxes and all; I'd written most of it out and gotten all of it drawn, and I put some staples in it, which was a big thing in those days—put some staples in it and it was just like a magazine. He was all ready to go. I reached my peak with The Chain, I think.

See, there were guys who were good and guys who were bad. So I prided myself on this kind of attitude, you know, like sticking up for poor people that couldn't take care of themselves against guys who would take advantage of them—I bought the whole thing. This is still the case. In fact, when we lived in Brooklyn, I used to go out at night and sort of patrol the area; I had two big Shepherds, and I thought of myself as being there to fight crime if we encountered anything on the streets.



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## harlem boys

It was just great to grow up in Harlem. I was born between Lenox and Seventh Avenues on 137th Street. Then we moved up economically, and my family moved from downtown Harlem to Sugar Hill... around 1939, when I was nine. 150th and Edgecombe, up by the Polo Grounds. I used to see Carl Hubbell and his funny left arm. At that time blacks were living up as far as maybe 165th Street; then you got to the Heights and there were certain streets you didn't venture beyond. There was a gang up there called the Rainbows, a bad Irish gang.

Above 145th Street, you were up on Sugar Hill, where the nicer brownstones and apartments were. All the top black musicians lived up on the hill, because that was the only good place they could live; *all* the cats—it was some neighborhood. Duke Ellington, Erskine Hawkins, Coleman Hawkins, Don Redman, Jimmy Lunceford, Sid Catlett and John Kirby—oh, man. Mary Lou Williams had an apartment up on Hamilton Terrace; I think it's a landmark site now. I grew up with people like Jackie McLean, Art Taylor and Kenny Drew, among those who made it to the big time. That whole area was great—it was the center of the Harlem cultural community.

At that time, most of the cats you'd want to see play, you had to come up to Harlem. Later there were clubs downtown on 52nd Street, like the Hurricane Club, where Duke Ellington used to play; once black musicians were able to go downtown to play, to me, that was the beginning of the end of Harlem. And drugs, of course. As soon as black people were able to live in different places, they dispersed, and there went the energy that was Harlem.

## school days (when we were kids)

My father was in the navy, so he was away when I was born, and I was conscious of meeting him. I must have been two or three. When I was small there was a xylophone I used to play around on. I was the baby of the family, and both my older

brother and sister were excellent musicians and went on to attend Music & Art High School in New York; Music & Art was a hell of a hard high school to get into in those days. My brother played a lot of violin, and piano, too; my sister played piano, and also majored in art—so we were all talented in those ways. I remember laying in bed and hearing my brother practicing; I really liked the sound of that violin. My dad said he played clarinet at one time, but I never saw it... and my mother was just a very special person.

I had an uncle who took me by his girlfriend's apartment, and she had all these records by guys like Lonnie Johnson, Big Boy Crudup and Tommy McClennan—these were *real* blues cats, man. Sometimes they'd leave me there, and I'd listen to all these records. She also had some Louis Jordan, who was like a bridge between the blues and jazz—he had a great big sound on the alto, and I just loved him. Later on, Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five got more showbizzy, and I followed everything they did really closely. They would be on all the jukeboxes in Harlem, and they used to play at a club—the Elks Rendezvous—right across the street from my elementary school, P.S. 89. They would have Louis Jordan's picture outside—one of those 8x10s. He had this great-looking horn, shiny like a samurai's sword, and these sharp ties and tails the cats used to wear. I said, "*Man*, this is it for me—I've got to go this way."

## tenor madness

Somewhere in that period after Louis Jordan I began to be more aware of big band music and radio jazz. I began to go to the Apollo Theatre and hear radio broadcasts from there; Benny Carter and Nat "King" Cole used to do shows together. Somewhere in there, I don't remember where, I began to hear Coleman Hawkins—maybe it was "Body and Soul." To me, he was a cat who played involved and sophisticated conceptions as distinct from Louis Jordan, who was more earthy and blues-oriented. I really dug the change as something deeper... well, I don't want to say that, but perhaps more difficult to get to; it would require a more serious attempt at playing.

I knew Coleman because he lived right around the corner from me; I used to see him a lot. He was always very well dressed, and he carried himself in a very sophisticated way; a very taciturn man, but that was sort of a mask. For me he was a role model, besides being a musical idol. I remember waiting for him outside his house one day with my 8x10 glossy of Coleman Hawkins, you know; and I waited and waited and waited; and finally he came and I said, "Oh, Mr. Hawkins, would you sign this for me?" I've still got that picture.

*Your tone always reminded me of Hawk, but the spaciousness of your line always suggested Prez. It's almost like subtractive improvising, where you airbrush away the extraneous notes, just to get to the meat of the melody—the core of the idea.*

It's very interesting that you should say that. I heard Coleman Hawkins one night, playing one of the last gigs he did before he died, and he



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## SONNY ROLLINS

was not well; he was not playing with all of the notes he usually used—maybe he was having trouble breathing. But his playing that night had a profound effect on me. Because in a way he had peeled away all these other notes, and it was fantastic. He was just playing the *essential notes*.

Lester was like that—Lester was something else. He used to room with some people we knew up on Hamilton Terrace, so I used to see him frequently, walking around with his porkpie hat on, the whole silhouette and everything, and we'd whisper, "Look, there's Lester Young, man." And he was very cool and all by himself in a world all his own.

I liked him when he came out of the army, when he was playing songs like "Up 'n' Adam." The late-'50s approach Lester had was real light and airy, real relaxed—he was so expressive. I dug that. And guys said, "Well, you should have heard him when he was out popping in front of the Basie band, that was the greatest!" But to me, he had gotten more introspective later and was really speaking more.

## misterioso

I got with Monk when my friend Lowell Lewis—a very fine trumpeter—got with the band. We were still in school, and after classes we'd go for rehearsals down at Monk's apartment. Somehow he worked it out so they finagled this other tenor player out of the band, and Monk hired me.

He was the type of guy who would never tell you what to play; if he liked you, here was the music, and that's that. A lot of his music was challenging, to say the least. I remember these trumpet players telling him, "Man, you can't play this

stuff; you can't make jumps like this." But eventually we would end up playing this unorthodox and hitherto unplayed material.

I looked up to him as a father figure—a guru, really. He was really into that music—that's all Monk cared about. One time he told me, "Man, if there wasn't music in this world, this world wouldn't be shit."

## un poco loco

Bud Powell was known in the neighborhood as a sort of mad-genius type. So it was really great in 1949 when he was making this record for Blue Note and he said, "Yeah, I want you." I remember on one of those dates I made a mistake on the music and Bud looked over at me...I mean, he really gave me a look. That was the last time I made that mistake. Though I don't know how I got it together after that look he shot me. He was very high-strung, man.

Bud used to take me around and we'd hang out. In my observing Bud, it seemed as if he was putting people on a lot, which is not to say that he didn't have real breakdowns at times or that being in and out of those hospitals didn't weaken him a lot. But it was also a way to keep people off him—like, "Boy, this cat is weird."

I felt very close to Bud, and Monk did, too, of course, and we'd go to visit him in the mental hospitals, several times. We used to go way the hell out to Central Islip, all the way out on Long Island, and one time we were in there...you've got to picture this. All the cats used to dress in street clothes; there were no uniforms or hospital outfits. And we went in to see Bud, trying to talk to him: "Well, how do you feel, man, how

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are you doing?" Suddenly I saw this guy closing the doors, and I said, "Whoa, man! We're just visiting."

## oleo

Miles is Miles. You can't destroy that kind of musician. He can't destroy himself. He's just there—always

## beware, brother, beware/paradox

I didn't have the average childhood. I didn't get a chance to go to schools where they really emphasized sports or scholastics. I feel very bad about this, because I know I have a good mind, and if I had been taken in tow by counselors and teachers, I think I could have had a different life in many ways. They gave you a smattering of academics—enough that it wouldn't do you any good—and kept you off the streets for a few years. Most of the guys didn't finish it, but I felt I had to. Still, I was involved with nothing in my school at all. I didn't even play with the band.

And we had to fight to get to school; they had all these race riots and stuff, you know, like "Oh, they're trying to send the blacks down in our neighborhood." We had fights every day with the Italian boys, and the neighbors in the houses would throw stuff out the windows as we were walking back across town—the same old shit.

I graduated from high school in 1948. Heroin was just getting out into the neighborhoods; it was cheap and it was plentiful. That's when I got hooked.

You see, Billie Holiday was using. And Charlie Parker. Those were really two powerful artists, and when we found out

that Billie Holiday used drugs, and Charlie Parker used drugs, we figured it can't be all bad—and maybe that's the key to creativity. Charlie Parker was a dream. He was such a leader for us, he did so much. We saw him as a Jesus Christ figure who got crucified for standing up for freedom, and even the fact that he used drugs—that was a sacrament of sorts.

The drugs were just a way to get into the music more, I believe—to shut out everything but the music. It wasn't just about getting off on a side trip; it was let's go, we'll get high, and we'll play—because that's all we did. It was about getting high and playing.

*What finally made you decide to quit?*

I didn't finally decide to quit—I had to quit, man. Because I had messed up that bad. I was over on Riker's Island—The Rock. I was in there twice, came out once, got hooked again, and went back in the joint for a parole violation. Came out and got hooked again. I was in bad shape. I had stolen from my best friends—I didn't have any friends. I had taken everything from my house. An old friend told me recently when he was coming to New York, Max Roach told him one thing: "Stay away from Charlie Parker, and stay away from Sonny Rollins." I didn't realize I was that bad at the time. But I was living like an animal, sleeping in parked cars, sleeping on the street, riding the subways all night long. I had no place to go.

Now I had some incentives. My mother stood by me all the way. She was really the only one—because I had burned everybody. I'll tell you one very scary thing that happened to me, which sort of brought it all home—one of the things that makes me believe in God, because you're talking about having to pray. Bud Powell came out of the hospital; he had been in for

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## SONNY ROLLINS

a period of time. And I met Bud, and he said, "Hey, man, how are you doing—let's get high." So...okay...we went, and I copped and everything, because he'd just got back and didn't know where to go. So we went up onto the top floor of some building around the 140s off of Seventh Avenue, and Bud took his stuff and passed out. And then it hit me—suppose Bud dies. Then I would in effect have killed him. I didn't shoot him up, but I bought the drugs, and we were together—we were together. And I said, "Please, God, don't let this happen." Then the seriousness of what we were doing struck home a little bit, and fortunately he came out of it. He'd been away for a long time, and his system was really clean, and it just knocked him out, but it could have killed him, too. Guys were dying of overdoses—that was nothing strange. And I realized: "This is the last time I'm going to do something stupid like that."

So that, and my Mom, and this incident with Charlie Parker sort of brought me around. It was the time of that record date of Miles', you know, with "Compulsion," where he had Bird and me on tenors. And Bird at that time was not a happy man. He was getting into all sorts of stupid things, like getting put out of Birdland, if you could imagine something as ridiculous as that. And I guess he was needing money, and he was in pretty bad shape during that entire period. And I perceived that one of his biggest problems was that all of these kids were getting high because of him, and there was nothing he could do about it—because he was hooked himself and couldn't stop, and all his disciples were using. That was one of the biggest hurts of his life. So he asked me, "Well, Sonny, how are you doing? Are you cool?" And I said, "Yeah, man I'm straight, now." So later on, Philly Joe told him, "Yeah, Sonny was over there getting

high." And Bird's whole attitude toward me changed; he never spoke to me again. So that was something. Then I went and said, "Well, I'm going to show Bird that I can be cool." That was a big incentive for me to stop. And that's when I ended up in Lexington. I wanted to straighten out for Bird and for my mother, because she was my last friend—but Bird died before I could show him that I'd really gotten his message...

## horn culture

Every horn gives you a different sound, really, and every mouthpiece gives you a different sound, and the reeds give you a different sound. In my case, they give you a new perspective. If I play a new horn, it gives me a whole new palette. It's as if I decided to play a euphonium or something, just a completely different instrument, except it's one I know and can deal with.

There are some horn players, like Illinois Jacquet, who play one horn and that's it. I'm the type of guy who likes to change every few years or so—it's like getting a new lease on life. But I still keep most of my old horns, because I never know when I'd like to go back. A lot of it has to do with the physical mechanisms, the way they react to your constant pounding. But I play so hard and I practice so long that I get to the point where I kind of wear out a horn...that's not exactly the right way to say it. You kind of get used to it and it's not giving you back enough.

Horns are very mysterious. There are certain parts of the room where the horn just projects better, where the sound is more friendly, you know. That's why I walk around the stage a

*continued on page 114*



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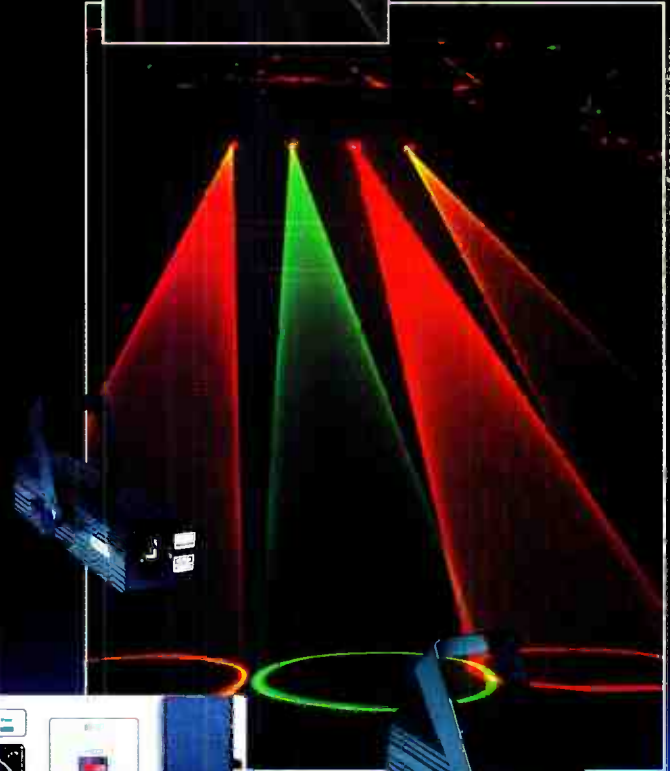
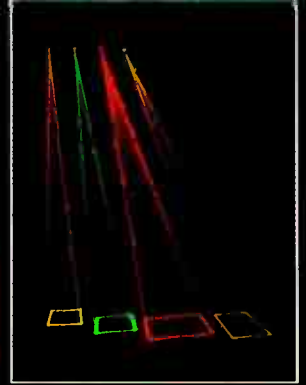
# Laser Chorus

## The New Standard In Programmable Laser Projection

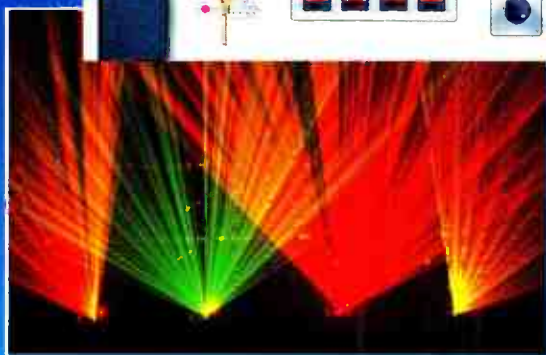
The LASER CHORUS system utilizes advancements in optical and computer technology to provide stunning synchronized projections of multi-colored laser light. With the controller at your fingertips you can direct, with a flick of your wrist or the beat of your music, a "chorus" of multiple laser beams—all moving in sync along vertical and horizontal planes.

Sixteen program keys located on the front panel of the controller allow you to instantly call up a variety of tunnel, plane, and beam effects. Each of these effects can then be controlled by your choice of an adjustable automatic rate, audio synchronization, or manual joystick operation. Find a combination you like . . . then store the sequence, up to 64 steps, in the controller memory.

LASER CHORUS scanner heads are available in four colors: red, yellow, orange, and green. Each control system can operate twelve laser heads, with power packs available to run unlimited numbers. The system is quickly and easily installed, requiring no line voltage at the laser heads. Low voltage lines feed power to each laser head from the controller.



Photography And Design: David Keene



### LASER CHORUS SCANNER HEAD

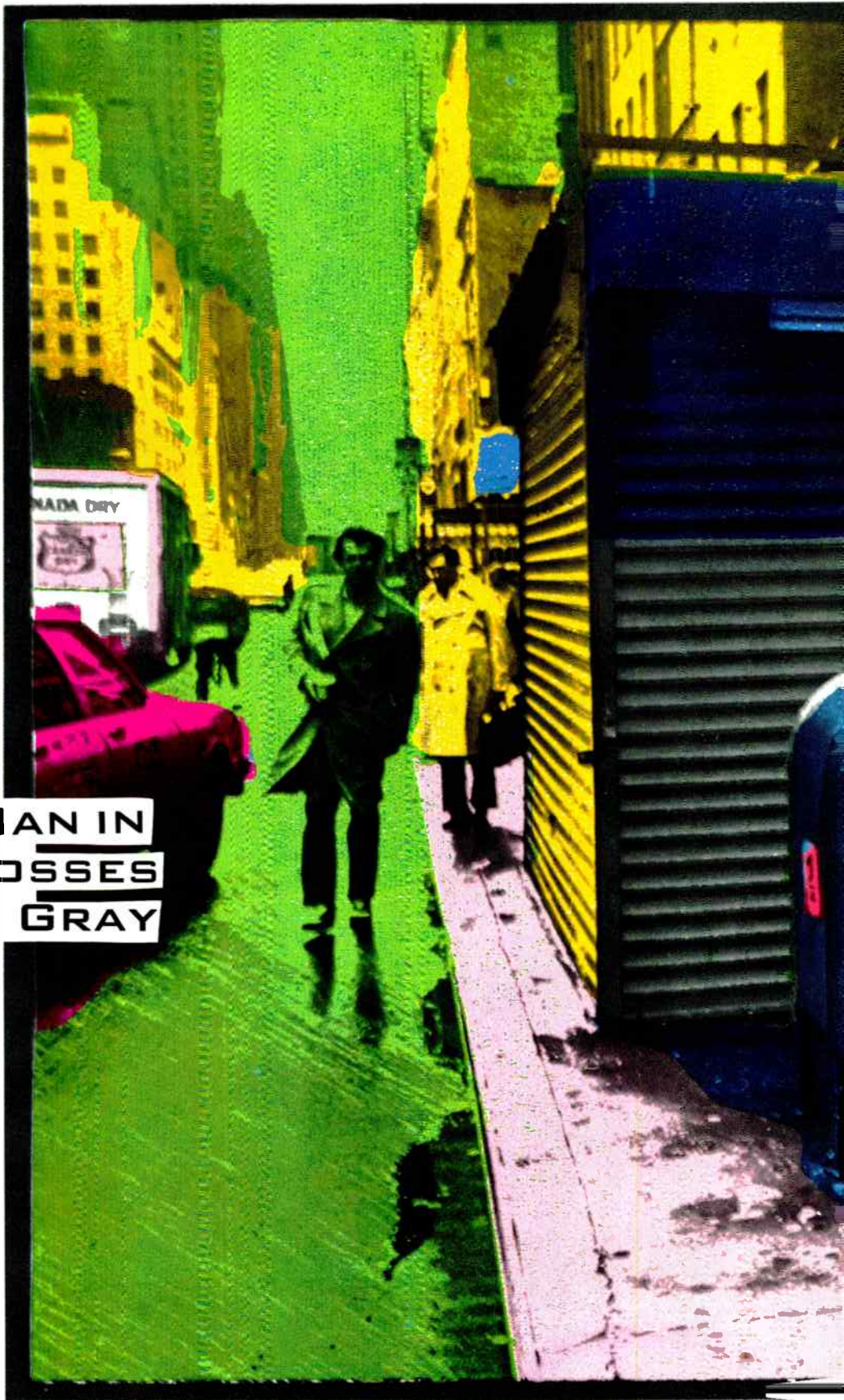
- Class IIIA Helium Neon Laser
- Available in red, yellow, orange, or green
- Laser emission, dark shutter, and logic voltage indicator LED's
- Image reverse switch for symmetrical applications

### CONTROLLER

- Three user memories each containing 64 steps
- Sixteen projection patterns
- Two types of audio response
- Inductive type Joystick
- Line voltage switchable, 240/120 VAC and 60/50 Hz.



**THE MAN IN  
BLACK CROSSES  
INTO THE GRAY**



**Photo: Alan Messer**





**J**ohnny Cash's voice is one of the most recognizable of the rock era. Just mention Cash's name and people do low, rumbling impressions of that basso coal-train-rumbling-over-a-shaky-trestle singing style. His voice is his signature, as mannered and recognizable as Presley's or Dylan's or Jagger's. But unlike those three singers, Cash's voice was not premeditated. Unlike Elvis or Dylan, or Frank Sinatra for that matter, Johnny Cash did not consciously invent his vocal style. He just opened his mouth and out it came. He sang like he talked. Of course, it happened that Johnny Cash talked like a mine caving in on Good Friday.

Is Johnny Cash a great vocalist? Of course not. He's been called the only man who can go off-key talking. Is Johnny Cash a great singer? You bet he is. His delivery is so compelling, so completely honest, that any song he throws his weight behind assumes the authority of truth carefully spoken.

# Johnny Cash, American

by Bill Flanagan



**"I've talked to those pills. I'd say, 'I'm just gonna take one of you today.' I could almost hear them sayin', 'No, you're gonna take all of us.' 'Cause when you're on that stuff one is too many and a thousand's not enough."**

**N**ashville got to watering down and slickin' up the country music," Cash says, "to pander to the citybillies that were buyin' the urban cowboy craze. For a while there, '81, '82, everybody in New York had a pair of cowboy boots. Then the urban cowboy craze died and cowboy boot sales dropped 70 percent, and the same happened with those country records that Nashville was grindin' out. A lot of producers and record companies made the fatal mistake of continuing to try to record that kind of syrupy country music."

Cash was shoved aside in the goldrush. He believes that Columbia, his label for nearly 30 years, started ignoring his albums in favor of various blow-dried flavors of the month. Maybe, he says, he just stayed in one place too long. So last year Cash left CBS and signed with PolyGram. His first album was a solid effort called *Johnny Cash Is Coming to Town*. His third will be an LP of collaborations with friends and family members on the general theme of *home*. But it's his second PolyGram album that has Cash excited here in Durham, North Carolina in December of 1987. Cash pulls out a cassette and puts on a rough mix of *Johnny Cash: Platinum and Gold*, newly recorded versions of his greatest hits.

And of course you think it's the classic crass commercial move—recut the old hits for the new label. Then "Get Rhythm" kicks in and, brother, Johnny Cash is singing better than he's sung on a record in years. The band is snapping but it's Cash himself who's bringing fire to the performance. Here's the sound of the man in black rocking out and enjoying himself. Cash grins, proud of what he and his road band have done. He punches up other selections: "Guess Things Happen That Way," "Hey! Porter," "Cry, Cry, Cry," "Tennessee Flat Top Box"—currently a number one country hit for Cash's daughter Rosanne—"Ring of Fire," "I Walk the Line," "Home of the Blues." Many of these songs were hits for Cash before he even signed to Columbia, when he was a star at Sun Records in the mid-'50s.

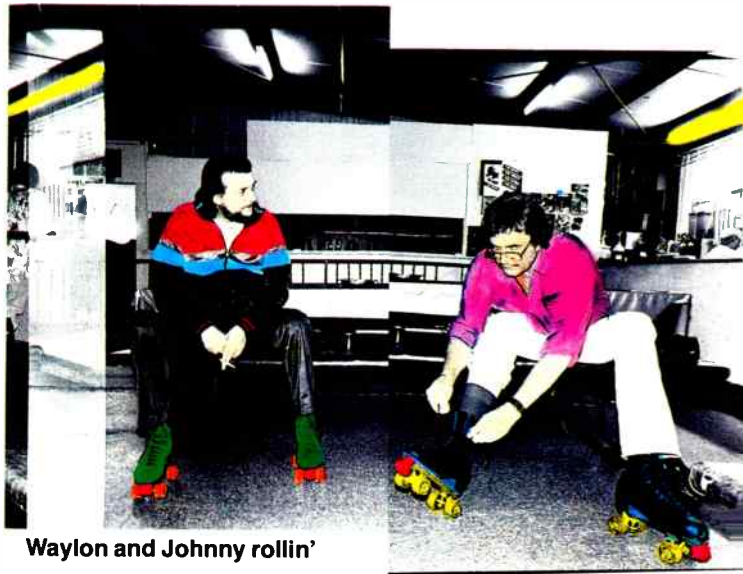
"I went in with a \$35,000 budget for a double album, produced it myself, and we're coming out under budget," he says. "That's the way country music ought to be recorded. If I spent more time or money I'd have done 'em wrong. One evening we did nine songs in six hours. I wanted to perform my own songs with my own particular kind of musical integrity. Without trying to appeal to a mass audience or make a crossover record. And it feels good to me."

Cash came to Sam Phillips' Sun Records in 1954 from a youth on an Arkansas farm, a brief post-high school stretch in Michigan's auto factories, and a stint in Germany with the Air Force. When he got to Memphis, Presley was ready to explode. "Elvis was really a nice man," Cash says. "He was very shy but he loved to perform and he knew that audience. He knew when he walked onstage that he had 'em. Very charismatic. Everybody that was backstage at our concerts—Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, all the guys in the bands, all the hangers-on—got as close to the curtain to watch Elvis as they could. They watched him every minute he was on. He had that

magnetism. He was always really nice to me. The first big show I played was opening for Elvis at the Overton Park shell in Memphis. It was Elvis' show but at the bottom of the ad it said, 'Extra—Johnny Cash sings "Cry, Cry, Cry."' I did that song and 'Hey! Porter' and then Elvis went on. Then he took me on tour to Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. It was the same everywhere. I'll never forget Amarillo, he had them climbing onto the stage. The security guards had to come and kick them off so Elvis could perform. They were trying to grab his feet and his pants. He had a magnetism he'd turn on with the willing. If he saw a girl he liked he'd give her the eye and she'd be backstage by the time he got off." Cash laughs. "He had lots of women and they loved him. Elvis was fabulous."

Cash smiles and looks out the bus window. Elvis came off the road a long time before he died. Cash went out on the road in 1954, and he's been out ever since. He's had periods when he was massively popular and periods when he was close to death, he's known everyone and done things we'll never know. But year in and year out, he's been on a bus, going from town to town, playing matinees, state fairs, concerts and charity broadcasts. He is 55 years old. He's been on this bus a lifetime.

Cash still travels with the Carter Family—his wife June, her sisters Anita and Helen, and lately June's daughter Carlene. Carlene was left behind in a hospital a couple of cities ago—nothing serious, just a little excess with the vodka. But that does cut one voice from the Carters' four-part harmonies. Tonight's show is a benefit in a gym for an eye bank in North Carolina. First the Durham Symphony will perform light classics and Christmas tunes, then they'll accompany Cash on a reading of a dramatic monolog. After intermission Cash and the Carters will give a full country concert. The first part of the show goes smoothly, but during the break June Carter runs down the backstage corridor looking for help: Anita's having a rheumatoid arthritis attack so severe that her throat's closed itself to breathing. An ambulance is called but can't get past the tour buses blocking the back doors. Pretty soon paramedics



Waylon and Johnny rollin'

are rushing through with oxygen and stretchers. Cash appears and surveys the chaos with no great show of anxiety. He says to his wife, "I'll go on first tonight, June," and a minute later he's greeting the crowd with "Ring of Fire" and the trademark "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash."

Backstage June tends to her stricken sister with firm concern until she hears John's voice on the PA introducing her. She shoots through the dark, up the stage stairs, and into the spotlight, whooping and greeting the roaring crowd. In the space of 60 seconds and 50 feet she's put a smile over her anxiety. She and John tear into "Jackson," a new song called "Where Did We Go Right" and "Wreck of the Old 97." Then Cash walks offstage and June tells the crowd, "Don't panic, old golden throat will be right back." June talks for a while, killing time and hoping that sister Helen, at least, will be able to join her for the Carter Family segment of the show. "This has been an unusual night," June smiles to the crowd. "It hasn't gone exactly the way we planned it. I don't know how to explain it except to say I have one daughter in the hospital and one sister who's fainted." The crowd laughs, June looks into the dark backstage and catches sight of Helen's dress. "I see one glittering—this is my sister Helen Carter, the star of the show!" The two remaining Carters harmonize on four lovely Appalachian ballads, stepping on each other's improvised parts here and there, but blending beautifully.

After the show Cash and the Carters sign autographs and climb aboard their bus. Nobody seems to consider tonight a tough performance. Helen Carter, a warm, outgoing woman, laughs about a Gulf coast shrimp festival the Carters played last summer with Leon Russell. Now *that* was a tough show. The stage collapsed and the promoters fled with the gate receipts. The Carters cut a hole in the fence and drove through it, but the angry audience gave chase. Russell helped avert violence by coming down the road in his bus, brandishing a pistol from the window.

Forget Def Leppard and Motley Crue: Here are musicians who truly live wild lives. And they're so used to it they don't even think it's unusual. The bus or the hotel is home, and if a family member gets left in a hospital along the road, they'll just have to catch up later.

The Country Music Foundation has just released a new version of *The Bristol Sessions*—the 1927 field recordings that brought country music out of the mountains and onto radios and phonograph records. Most important of the Bristol discoveries were Jimmie Rodgers and the original Carter Family featuring Maybelle Carter, mother of June, Helen and Anita. Now, switching gears from her story about escaping from the mad shrimpers with Leon Russell, Helen mentions that she always likes to say she was at the Bristol sessions—because they were recorded in August of '27 and Helen was born a month later. "So I *was* there," she laughs. You want to talk history? Here's a woman who was in the womb at the birth of country-and-western recording, and 61 years later she's still on the bus, playing one-night stands and laughing at the stories. Also on the bus are her sisters, and June's husband John—probably the most famous country singer who ever



**Cash: "It doesn't matter to Billy Graham what a man has done."**

lived, also the most important country music figure living. As they pull into the parking lot of tonight's hotel, Cash listens to the radio news and tells June that a Frank Sinatra/Liza Minelli concert in New Jersey was cancelled tonight because Frank's orchestra's sheet music didn't arrive. "Well," June says, "they should've just gone out with an autoharp."

June Carter is a gas, as outgoing and funny as her husband is somber. The next day at breakfast (Cash is one musician who likes to travel in the *early* morning) June says her friend Sandy will be joining us. Sandy turns out to be Sanford Meisner, the legendary acting teacher. The Cashes know everybody. And as June cheerfully compares the masters of the Method ("Lee Strasberg was great but he just ruined people's *lives*") you realize that this woman's folksy manner can't obscure a sophisticated mind.

The *Musician* interview rambles over a Sunday morning, from Durham, North Carolina to Richmond, Virginia, where the Cash clan will play a matinee at a downtown theater. During the night June has sent for her daughter Rosie to fly in and fill in for one of the missing Carters. But, as the Cashes pass through the Richmond hotel lobby, June is called to the phone. Rosie missed her plane. Now June is visibly disappointed. She catches up to John at the elevator. "Rosie's not coming," she sighs as the lift ascends. "Her alarm didn't go off. I don't know what we're going to do." Cash looks down at his worried wife and says softly, "Well, honey, we're just going to have to stop counting on the younger folk. They can't keep up this pace." She looks up at him and smiles. Two hours later they're onstage at the old Carpenter Theater, singing "We got married in a fever..." The show always goes on. So does the road.

**MUSICIAN:** *I think the reason your early records hold up so well is that the arrangements were so simple and pure. Many country records in the '50s had fiddles, steel guitars, background vocals. Yours were unusually stark: folk music with a beat.*

**CASH:** Yeah. Sam Phillips had a vision. He saw another direction for our music. Of course, I did too. I never liked fiddle and steel guitar on my records. Nashville in 1955 was grinding



Cash in the early '60s.

out all these country records. If you took the voice off, all the tracks sounded the same to me. Fiddle or piano would take the first half, the steel guitar would take the second half or vice versa. All the arrangements were calculated and predictable. Well, it's kind of that way with my music, but it's *my* music. It's not done to try to sound like somebody else in Nashville or in rock or whatever.

**MUSICIAN:** *Charly Records in England has released some of your early demos and first takes. They show that when you first recorded at Sun you tried different things with your voice: pitching it higher, Hank Williams mannerisms—yet by the time your first single came out you were singing in your natural voice.*

**CASH:** I was influenced by all these people, I didn't have a track record of my own. My formative years were when I was in the Air Force, when I started writing songs. I wrote "Folsom Prison Blues" in the Air Force in 1953. I played with a little group of musicians in my barracks. I was singing Hank Snow and Hank Williams songs with them before I ever tried to do my own songs. I was trying to sing like they were. This carried over to my first sessions. I was still hearing it their way. I guess I kind of found myself in those first months working in the studio at Sun. I discovered, *let it flow*. Don't ape anybody else. When I finally got around to doing it that way, when it dawned on me that I didn't sound like anybody else naturally, I let it come naturally. Of course, that was the secret of my success. It ain't no secret: Be yourself. I stopped trying to sound like other people after about two sessions.

**MUSICIAN:** *Let's talk about some of the songs. What do you remember about writing "Cry, Cry, Cry"?*

**CASH:** I had recorded "Hey! Porter" with Sam Phillips, which was one side of my first record. I'd also recorded "Wide Open Road" and "Folsom Prison Blues," which he didn't care all that much for. I saw a note on his desk, a memo to himself: "Send 'Folsom Prison Blues' to Tennessee Ernie Ford?" After I had recorded it, y'know? I challenged him on that. I said, "I saw the note on your desk! I like Tennessee Ernie Ford, he's hot with 'Sixteen Tons,' but I don't want him singing that song. I want to do it myself." Sam said, "Well, let's see what else you can come

up with. Go home and write me an uptempo weeper love song!" I went home and I heard a disc jockey, Eddie Hill, say, "We got some good songs, love songs, sweet songs, happy songs and sad songs that'll make you cry, cry, cry." I wrote "Cry, Cry, Cry" that night, called Sam the next day and said, "I got it." He said come on in, so I took the two musicians I had, Marshall Grant and Luther Perkins, and went in and recorded it. My first release was "Cry, Cry, Cry" and "Hey! Porter."

**MUSICIAN:** *Luther Perkins' leads with the Tennessee Two were interesting. He was a limited guitarist with a great sense of what he could do. He came up with simple little licks that people still copy. Did players at the time come up to you and say, "Hey, I can play great lead guitar, let me replace that guy"?*

**CASH:** Oh yeah, a lot of people. I didn't want a great guitar player, though. I wanted Luther. [smiles] And as it turns out he was the greatest of all.

**MUSICIAN:** *There's an old story that you stuck a piece of paper under the strings of your guitar.*

**CASH:** That's right. I didn't have a drummer and that was my snare drum. I still use that. On "I Walk the Line" on this tape.

**MUSICIAN:** *Compared to the style in country records of the same era, your voice was very low and your guitar playing really fast. Your voice never tried to keep up with that fast rhythm, it just sort of flowed slowly over it.*

**CASH:** You know who was a great rhythm guitar player? Elvis. You never saw him play much after the first years on Sun, but he was one of the best. He had a good hard driving rhythm on the bass strings in the key of E, a good solid rhythm. I could hear it onstage and I'd know it was Elvis. Maybe that's where I was influenced to play that kind of rhythm, I don't know. I always liked the way he played rhythm guitar.

**MUSICIAN:** *You intended "Get Rhythm" for Elvis?*

**CASH:** After Carl Perkins recorded "Blue Suede Shoes," Elvis asked me to write him a song. When I came home from the Air Force I stopped to get a shoe shine at the Memphis bus station. There was an old black man shinin' my shoes and he was takin' it real slow and easy. I said, "You don't do a lot of poppin' with that rag like most shoe shine men do." He said, "That's the trouble with the world now. There's too much poppin' and not enough shinin'." I tried to work that line into the song, but it didn't work out. I just told a story about a shoe shine boy. I put it down and Elvis loved it. But it came time for my next single release and Sam said, "Elvis can't have that! I'm gonna release it on you." Elvis had gone to RCA by then. So Sam released it with "Ballad of a Teenage Queen," which got the most play for a long time.

**MUSICIAN:** *Toward the end of your tenure at Sun the records got a very different sound, some had Charlie Rich on piano, legend says some had Jerry Lee Lewis. If Sun was trying to get as many records out of you as they could before you went to Columbia, why didn't they cut more records that sounded like Johnny Cash, instead of going for a different feel?*

**CASH:** Well, I probably recorded a few things I didn't want to record because I got an order from Sam Phillips when he found out I was going to Columbia in July of '58. I got a letter in April that I would go into the studio on such and such a day and record a certain number of songs. That really rankled me, I refused to do it for a long time. Then Jack Clement called me and said, "My job is on the line. I'm supposed to produce you. I think you have to do it, you owe Sam some sessions." I said, "I'm not going to sing anything I don't like." He said, "Well, will you come in? We'll go over songs and find ones you like."

So I liked the songs, but what I hated was that they overdubbed the vocal group on some of them. I *hated* that sound! Except for "Teenage Queen," which needed the singers, it called for it. After I recorded "I Guess Things

Happen That Way” they overdubbed that “ba dum ba doom,” overdubbed all that junk on it. That ruined it for me. I never saw the singing group. They overdubbed it after I thought the song was finished. I hated some of those productions that came out of there. But I tried to do what I had to do for Sam Phillips before I left him. I put down a few things that were all right, like “The Ways of a Woman in Love.” Charlie Rich played on some of those, “It’s Just About Time” was one. I don’t think Jerry Lee ever played piano for me on record. Even back then Jerry Lee was nobody’s sideman, you know? Nobody’s.

**MUSICIAN:** *What inspired “Home of the Blues”?*

**CASH:** I wrote “Home of the Blues,” by the way, before “Heartbreak Hotel.” Home of the Blues is the name of a record shop on Beale Street. I used to go there every time I was in town and buy records. They had a great collection of American folk and blues, Southern blues, black gospel, black blues, street songs. My favorite music—and I still play it, I played it last week—is people like Pink Anderson, Robert Johnson, the king of the delta blues singers, Howlin’ Wolf, Muddy Waters, Papa John Creach, Sister Rosetta Tharpe! I love her! I’ve recorded some of her songs. Mahalia Jackson. Black blues singers. I like black gospel quartets like the Golden Gate Quartet. Those are my influences in music, those are the ones I really loved. Because I’m a white man I don’t have the *feel* black musicians have for the music, but sometimes they come right down my street with it, and I’m comfortable doin’ it.

Some of those field recordings that Alan Lomax did! *Blues in the Mississippi Night* is my all-time favorite album. It was done on a wire recorder in the honky-tonks and the alleys of those little towns in Mississippi. That’s where I got the idea for “Goin’ to Memphis” and that’s where I found the song “Another Man Done Gone.” I got the idea for “Big River” from those recordings. That’s my roots. Black people in Mississippi and South Carolina sing *real* Southern blues, you know? Alan Lomax went into Angola Prison in the ’40s and recorded the black blues singers. There’s a wealth of material there. Some of it I can do, some I can’t.

**MUSICIAN:** *You told your guitarist Jim Soldi to play like Robert Johnson on the new version of “Get Rhythm.”*

**CASH:** Yeah, the Carter Family were playing at the Mean Fiddler in London. I walked in and Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello were there. I got up and did “The Big Light” with Elvis Costello and then Nick asked me to do “Get Rhythm.” He had a beat on that thing that I never had thought about. In all the sessions for this new album I kept tryin’ to get that sound that Nick had. We finally hooked it. Jim Soldi figured out Nick’s rhythm, then I said, “Play a little Robert Johnson delta blues



“A very shy” Bob Dylan on Cash’s TV show, 1969

slide guitar on that.” He got this bottleneck thing. My producer Don Law also produced Robert Johnson. He told me a story about that. He said that Robert Johnson had finished his sessions in a hotel room in Dallas. That week Don Law had recorded the Chuck Wagon Gang, Gene Autry and Robert Johnson. After Robert Johnson’s sessions were over one night he came to the room and woke Don Law up and asked him for some money to go downstairs—for liquor or a woman or whatever. That was the night he was killed. I don’t know all that much about him. I’ve worn his album out and talked to Don Law about him a little bit before Don Law died.

**MUSICIAN:** *You mentioned “The Big Light.” I got a kick out of your recording that, because the original sounded like Costello trying to write a Johnny Cash song.*

**CASH:** You know, I thought so too, but he didn’t intend it that way. He didn’t write it for me. It sounded like something I wish I’d written. I knew Elvis, he’d been out to my house when he played Nashville and I’ve seen him a couple of times and we got along just great. I saw him at Nick Lowe’s house in 1979 when I did Nick’s song “Without Love” in Nick’s basement. Elvis was there and Dave Edmunds and Martin Belmont. I always got along great with Elvis. That was really happening at the Mean Fiddler! Man, we had a time.

**MUSICIAN:** *Another case where you recorded songs that had been influenced by your songs was on your Johnny 99 album, where you did two from Bruce Springsteen’s Nebraska.*

**CASH:** I wish I’d written those two songs. Why didn’t I write “Johnny 99” and “Highway Patrolman”? Springsteen’s great.

**MUSICIAN:** *You made a nice change on the last line: “Shave off my hair and BURN Johnny 99.”*

**CASH:** [laughs] I was taking a big liberty, changing a Bruce Springsteen lyric—but he wasn’t there so I went ahead and did it. I had to fight to get to do “Johnny 99.” The record company people kept saying, “You don’t want to do a Springsteen song!” I said, Yeah, I do.” I even went to New York and talked to the president of the company about it. He said, “I don’t want to hear you do Springsteen, I want to hear you do Johnny Cash.” I said, “But I gotta do these two songs, they feel so right for me.” That album was produced in California by Brian Ahern. I didn’t have all that much control over the material on that album. He played producer with me, you know?

**MUSICIAN:** *That album felt like a tug of war. You’ve made some sharp shifts in approach in the ’80s. Rockabilly Blues was a terrific album, produced by your pianist, Earl Poole Ball. But you followed it with The Baron, which was pretty corny.*

**CASH:** Well, with *Rockabilly Blues* I was looking to my roots, if only briefly. I didn’t want one of those superproducers who slicks everything up. I wanted it a little grittier, back to the



The Highwaymen: Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Cash and Kris Kristofferson.

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very strong anti-Reagan songs about Central America: "You believe in justice, you believe in freedom, but not in Nicaragua." I've seen him do those songs when I thought the audience was going to kill him. That night in New York he did those songs, then he brought you out, the crowd went wild, and then the two of you did Dylan's anti-war song. As you went back to your seat he shouted, "We've got Johnny Cash on our side against the contras! Watch out, Reagan!"

**CASH:** That's fair. I'm totally against funding the contras' war in Nicaragua. I'm against any war, but that war is so terrible. We're not talking about just soldiers dying. The Contras—and the Sandinistas—are killing men, women and children, priests and nuns. It's awful. Kris has got household help who are Nicaraguan. He's very close to them, he's been down there twice and seen President Ortega. Kris is a man of peace and a man of love. You ever hear his song "Love Is the Way"? That's the Kris I know. I'm not a marcher or a picket-sign waver, but you asked me if I'm against the funding of the contras. Yes I am, totally against it. And these politicians standing up saying, "We don't want a communist country in the western hemisphere." That's a bunch of crap. People are going to go with anybody who'll feed 'em. When there are hungry people and you wave a biscuit in front of their nose, they'll follow you. They don't care what your political leanings are. And those people are hungry. The country's been devastated. I won't be a party to anything that advocates continuance of that fight. The contras are so disorganized and Ortega has a pretty strong government. It's a hopeless fight, a no-win situation.

**MUSICIAN:** Your discovery of Kristofferson is a legend; he was a janitor at the CBS studio in Nashville where you were recording.

**CASH:** I was always impressed with Kris' writing. I kept seeing him cleaning up in the studio, hanging as close as he could. They told him if he pitched his songs to me while I was recording they would fire him. And he needed the money. So he slipped 'em to June and she put 'em in her purse and after I got home she handed me the tape. I played them and I loved his writing. Then one Sunday he landed in my yard in a helicopter and brought me "Sunday Morning Coming Down." That's true. He fell out of that helicopter with a beer in one hand and a tape in the other and said, "By God, I'm gonna get a song to you one way or another." I said, "Well, you just did, let's go in and hear it." It was "Sunday Morning Coming Down," "Me and Bobby McGee," "To Beat the Devil" and "The Best of All Possible Worlds" on that tape. The night I did "Sunday Morning Coming Down" on network somebody called him and said I was singing his song and had mentioned his name. The next week he was at my house. June had some kind of dinner party or something, and Kris was dragging a big trash can full of ice for the cold drinks from out of the garage, helping June get ready. I said, "I'm playing the Newport Folk Festival next week. If you can get up there I'll put you on and you can sing 'Sunday Morning Comin' Down' and 'Me and Bobby McGee' for 'em." He said, "You're kiddin'!" I said, "No, can you make it to Newport?" He said, "Oh yeah, no problem." I found out when I got there he hitchhiked to Newport. He was so nervous that June said when I introduced him, when he heard his name over the loudspeaker, it stunned him and he just stood there. June got behind him and put her high heel right on his butt and pushed him out onstage. Next day on the *New York Times* front page: "Kris Kristofferson Steals the Show at Newport." He was on his way.

**MUSICIAN:** You've certainly known the range of public figures. It's a remarkable thing to have played with Bob Dylan and played for Richard Nixon, to know Billy Graham and Mick Jagger.

**CASH:** Yeah, people can't resolve that. My two best friends are Billy Graham and Waylon Jennings. Billy Graham's a good man,

a good friend, and he's real. He wears \$79 JC Penney suits and he'll show you the tag in a hot minute. I have seen his salary from his evangelistic association. At the time he showed it to me he was making \$43,000 a year. He drives a 1979 Chrysler station wagon. He is what he appears to be and I won't say that for any of the other TV preachers. He's not one of those TV preachers, he's Billy Graham, he's above all that. He has nothing to do with those people.

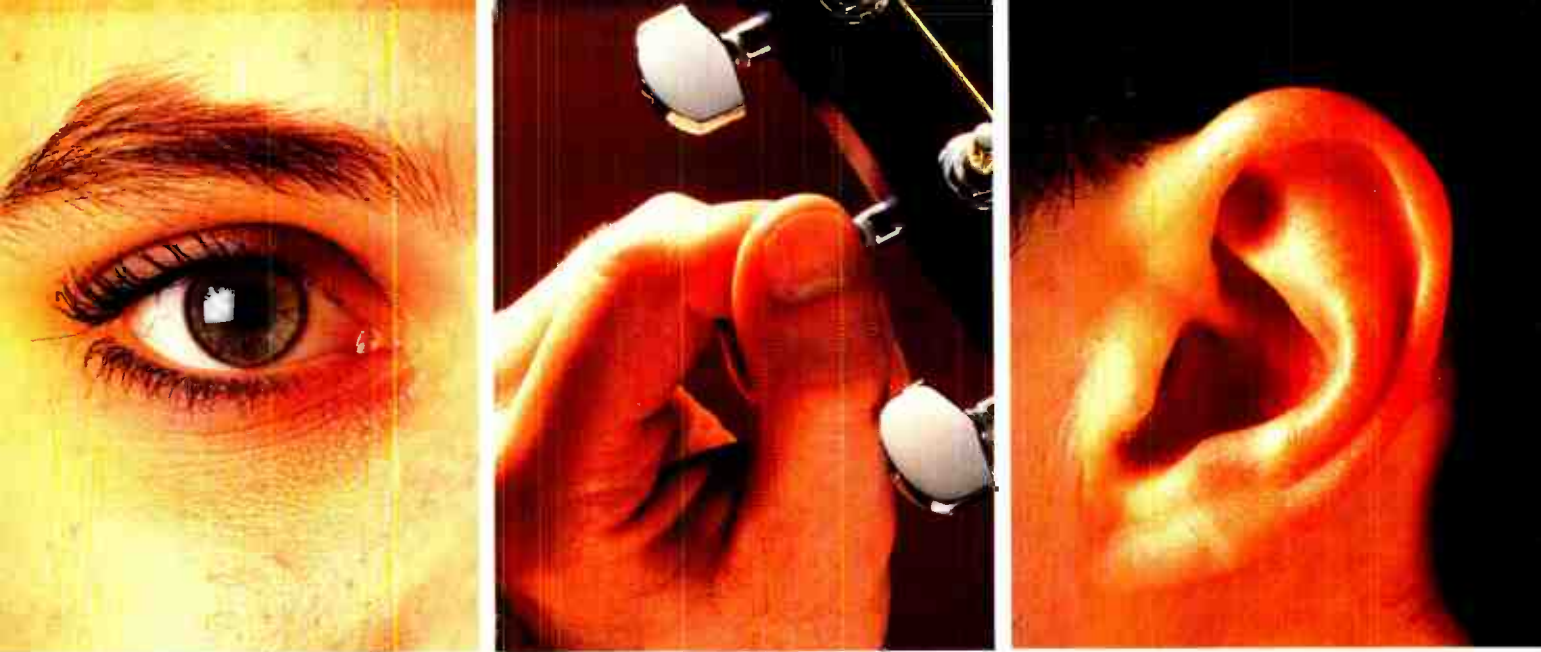
**MUSICIAN:** After Watergate, it seems he said maybe there's been too much flirtation with power and he stepped back.

**CASH:** I'll tell you what happened. We were together at my house in Jamaica when Watergate had full blown. Richard Nixon had called him every Sunday afternoon during his administration for counseling. When Nixon came back from China, Billy said something happened to him. I can't betray Billy Graham and quote directly, but something did happen to Nixon. And for a long time he wouldn't talk to Billy. So Billy gave up on that for a while. We were together in Jamaica the next year, not long after Nixon left office. Richard and Pat Nixon were at their place in California. Billy said, "Let's call Richard Nixon and wish him merry Christmas! Let's see if we can get through!"

I said, "You do it, I don't want to. He don't want to hear from me." He said, "Oh, he'd love to hear from you." He called up and got him right away. He said, "I want to wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year." Nixon was really nice to him. I was just sitting there saying, "I hope he don't put me on the phone." I kept going, "No, don't, don't." He said, "Johnny Cash wants to wish you a merry Christmas!" [laughter] I said, "Merry Christmas, Mr. President, how are you?" "Oh fine, nice, merry Christmas to you." He put his wife Pat on. I wished her a merry Christmas. I was a little nervous in that conversation, man. But Billy felt good that he had talked to him. It doesn't matter to Billy Graham what a man has done, it doesn't matter how rotten and low he's been. If he asks people to help him, if he asks for people to forgive him, Billy Graham will. He has me. Billy's been my friend through thick and thin, man. I've sat on the beach the whole afternoon with Billy Graham talking about life and women and sex and drugs. He likes to talk to people in my world to know what's really going on. He's really concerned about the country and the people. Billy's one man who sees music for what it is—it's a way to express ourselves, and whether you do it in rock 'n' roll or country or gospel or whatever, you do it.

Waylon's like a brother to me. I went through Betty Ford Center to get off amphetamines and morphine that I got hooked on in the hospital after I broke some ribs in 1979. I was already hooked on Percodan—which is synthetic morphine—when I went in the hospital. When I came out of Betty Ford Center after 43 days in there, I went to L.A. for two days to see Waylon. Waylon was his old self, he was doin' cocaine and was really wired up, really in bad shape. I said to him, "I just want you to see my bright brown eyes to show you what can happen. If you ever want help, I know now what to tell you to do." He'd been on cocaine 20 years, and he wouldn't mind me sayin' so. His habit cost him close to half a million dollars the last year he was doin' cocaine. He called me next morning and he said, "I'm going to quit, I'm going to do it myself." I said, "Boy, you have got a tough order. After 20 years on cocaine and amphetamines to quit like that? Will you promise you'll call me every day if I can't reach you?" And he did. He went to a ranch in Arizona, quit cold turkey, had his wife Jesse flush about \$20,000 worth of cocaine in the bus toilet. Now he won't even take a Tylenol. He's the straightest man in the music business and one of the sharpest. He and I have been like an anchor for each other. [pauses and lowers voice] I get shaky out here. I want to take amphetamines right now! Right now I want one.





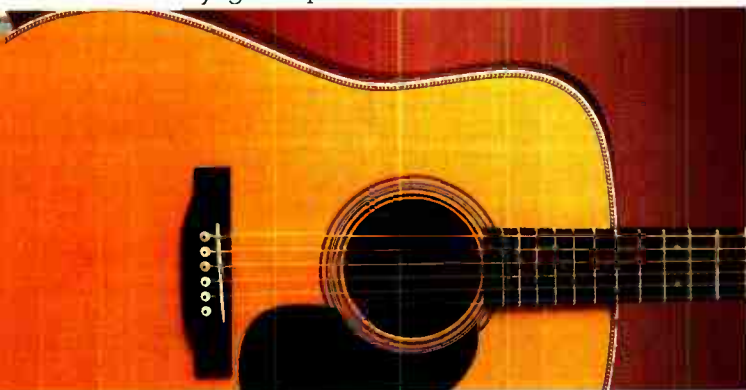
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But I talk to somebody every day that will inspire me and make me know I ought not to, if it's nobody but my wife June, who is superstraight. All I have to say to her is, "I'm havin' a rough time," and she knows what I mean. She'll put her arm around me. That's about all it takes sometimes, you know. I do that with Waylon. Keep him on the phone, talk him off.

When we're in Nashville we'll go to dinner, go to a movie, go to the circus. When Dan Rather anchored the news from Nashville we went down to the studio and watched. When we get craving, which happens just about every day, we figure out something to do to occupy our minds. So that's the kind of friend Waylon is to me. We go back over 20 years. He and I boarded together when he first came to Nashville. We were both doin' drugs and hidin' it from each other and lyin' to each other about it.

**MUSICIAN:** *You had a drug problem in the '60s, got off it and stayed off a real long time. When you slipped back into it, did you feel, "I beat it once, I can control it?"*

**CASH:** No, it slipped up on me. Before I realized it, I was back on. After I had been off drugs for 11 years, I went to a doctor who gave me demerol. Then I got the prescription refilled. Then I started taking Percodan. Then I remembered how much I liked speed, amphetamines. Then sleeping pills, placydil, anything to bring me down at night to get my rest. I'd take me an upper to get me goin'. Vicious cycle. On the tour of Europe in an October of '83 I was really heavily into Percodan, amphetamines and sleeping pills. We played 14 cities, and when I came back to Nashville I remembered four of them. I was bleeding internally. They put me in the hospital, operated, took out about half of what they could see of everything. My gall bladder, my spleen, half my stomach was full of holes from Percodan. The more it'd hurt the more I'd take, the more I took the more it burned. But I had total recovery. I went from Eisenhower Medical Center to Betty Ford Center. It just slipped back up on me, y'know? Drugs are so deceptive. It's like a demon that says, "Hey, I'm so pretty, look at me, I'll make you feel better! Take me." And I do. It's a battle. I've talked to those pills. There'd be six of 'em and I'd say, "I'm just gonna take one of you today," and I could almost hear them saying, "No, you're gonna take all of us." 'Cause when you're on that stuff one is too many and a thousand is not enough.

**MUSICIAN:** *That sounds like that wild rap you did on The Rambler, where you're stumbling up the stairs drunk, not sure if you've seen a hallucination of "the lady" or the real thing. That was a startling moment on that album.*

**CASH:** I'm glad you found that. I think you're the first person that ever commented on that album to me. It was one of my favorites, but it didn't sell anything. Some of my biggest successes have been concept albums, like *Ride This Train* and *Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indians*. *The Rambler* was a concept I really felt good about at the time, but the record company was just totally negative about it. I don't think they pressed enough to even distribute it.

**MUSICIAN:** *Many of the original rockers, from Little Richard to Jerry Lee Lewis, were torn up about playing the devil's music. Did you ever feel your music was sinful?*

**CASH:** No. No. Even back when they wouldn't shoot Elvis below the waist, I thought that was the silliest thing I ever saw. The preachers were saying, "It's devil's music! It's leading our kids astray!" Well, I've been to a lot of rock concerts with my son John Carter. I went to see Twisted Sister and Iron Maiden, I saw Metallica and Ozzy, AC/DC—and what I saw was a lot of kids letting off a lot of steam having a good time. And I had a good time, too. They talk about all the dope and the drugs and drinking and sex and all that. Sure, it went on. But the two hours I was at the concert I just shared a good time and saw a

great show. Iron Maiden and Twisted Sister had great sound and lights. I loved it. I think Metallica was my favorite group I saw. Dee Snider's a good man, I've talked to him a lot.

I never have had any trouble reconciling God and the devil, good and evil in the music business. All music comes from God, that's the source of it all. To reach different people, we do it different ways. It would be a bad world without music, man! [laughs] Terrible.

**MUSICIAN:** *Your novelty songs have come along pretty regularly. "Boy Named Sue," "One Piece at a Time." But I never understood "Chicken in Black."*

**CASH:** Me neither. That was awful. That was one of those things that I let a producer talk me into. The same producer who did *The Baron*. I hated it from the first day and I refuse to admit that I even know the words to it anymore. It was an embarrassment, you know? Every once in a while I'll do something that embarrasses me, like anybody. It's good to let the people know you have a sense of humor. Things like "Dirty Old Egg Suckin' Dog" and "Flushed from the Bathroom of Your Heart" are fun songs.

The week before I went to play San Quentin we had a party at my house, a guitar pull. One right after the other, Bob Dylan

## FLAT TOP BOXES

Onstage Johnny Cash plays a Guild D60 cherry sunburst with Guild electronics. When he gets home, he reaches for the old faithfuls—a Martin D28 or D45. "That's my favorite guitar," Cash says. "And I've got a sunburst D35 I really like. If you really want to be sure you've got a good guitar, make sure it says C.F. Martin on the head." Cash says Kramer also makes a great guitar: "He's a friend of mine in Asbury Park, New Jersey. He made all of my son John Carter's band's guitars, and he's sending me two Farrington models, auditorium size, with pickups in them. They're really good guitars." In concert Cash has also been known to play an Alvarez. Cash never plays electric guitar. "I can't pick it out," he smiles. "I'm a rhythm man."

Country music may be timeless, but Cash's band use '80s gear. Bob Lewin hits a Casio FZ1 16-bit sampler for everything from a B3 sound to samples of an ignition turning over (for "One Piece at a Time") and even Anita Carter's vocal harmony "Ooh"s and "Ahh"s (for the nights when Anita's health keep her offstage). For train whistles, strings, electric piano and fat synth pads, Lewin plays a Yamaha DX7-II-FD. The whole system is MIDIed together, and when that's not occupying Bob's time he picks up a Holton french horn or a Bach professional trumpet and blows his way into "Ring of Fire" and other Cash horn parts. Sharing brass duty is Jack Hale, Jr., the group's musical director. Ex-Memphis Horn Jack plays two specially made Bach #72 lightweight trumpets—gold for a thicker sound in the studio, silver to cut through on the road. Jack also plays Hohner Golden Melody harmonicas. Hale runs down the keyboards Cash's cohorts lug into the studio: a Yamaha TX816, an Emulator SP 12 Turbo, a Roland MKS 20 and the old faithful DX7, all MIDIed up with a Lexicon PCM 70 effects processor. This all goes right by pianist Earl Poole Ball, who doesn't touch any keyboard that plugs: Ball stays true to his Yamaha baby grand.

Jim Tittle plays a 1972 Fender Precision bass ("the greatest country and western instrument ever made") through an Ampeg V4B head, and Ampeg SVT bottom. Jim's spare bass is a Kramer fretless, and he uses Rotosound strings. Guitarist Jim Solti's electric is a Music Man Silhouette—a new model with 24 frets and a B-string bender installed by Joe Glasser of Nashville. He plugs into a 250-watt Music Man amp, and steps on a Roland GP80 foot pedal. Jim reaches for an Alvarez acoustic onstage, Martins at home, and he plays Ernie Ball strings. The Tennessee Three's Bob Wootton picks on a Kramer electric plugged into a Fender Twin Reverb. W.S. Holland plays Ludwig drums, Zildjian cymbals and doesn't give a damn what brand sticks.

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## JOHNNY CASH

sang "Lay, Lady, Lay," Graham Nash sang "Marrakesh Express," Joni Mitchell sang "Both Sides Now," Kris sang "Me and Bobby McGee," and Shel Silverstein sang "A Boy Named Sue." I asked Shel to write down the lyrics to it. When I went to San Quentin, June asked if I had it. I said, "Yeah, but I haven't had a chance to rehearse it, I can't do it." She said, "Take the lyrics, put it on the music stand and read it off as you sing it. They'll love it." That was the one and only recording of "A Boy Named Sue."

**MUSICIAN:** Live at Folsom Prison is the album everybody remembers, but San Quentin really walked the edge of chaos. It reminds me of the Clash driving punk crowds crazy playing "White Riot." Some of your songs articulate a prisoner's view so well that they are almost dangerous to sing in a prison: In "San Quentin" you say, this place will never reform me, will never change me, I hope San Quentin rots and burns in hell. The convicts go wild. Then you do the song again. You can hear the crowd going insane. Then you ask a guard to come up and bring you a drink of water! Clearly they're about ready to skin the poor guard. Then you turn around and say, "I want to thank all the guards and the warden."

**CASH:** The guards were scared to death. All the convicts were standing up on the dining tables. They were out of control, really. During the second rendition of that song all I would have had to do was say "Break!" and they were gone, man. They were ready! I've got a book called *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* that I've studied for years. I knew I had that prison audience where all I had to do was say, "Take over! Break!" and they would have. Those guards knew it, too. I was tempted. But I thought about June and the Carter Family—they were there with me, too—and I

controlled myself. [laughs] 'Cause I was really ready for some excitement. I tried to cool things off by asking for the drink of water and thanking the guards and the warden for letting me be there, 'cause the convicts wanted me to do something like that. That's the way I felt about the prisons when I played them, though: "May you rot and burn in hell!"—all you're doing is dealing misery. They're overcrowded, they don't have the money to hire proper officials and properly house prisoners. There's no rehabilitation. First of all, with a lot of them there was no habilitation in the first place.

**MUSICIAN:** When Peter Tosh was killed I remembered that a few years earlier your home in Jamaica was invaded by bandits who held you and your family at gunpoint.

**CASH:** The robbery didn't stop us from going back. We love Jamaica. We bought that house in 1974. The economy's bad, and of course there's a criminal element there like everywhere else. We just happened to be unlucky. We were sitting down to Christmas dinner and three guys came in three different doors and surrounded us with a pistol, a hatchet and a knife. They held the pistol to the back of my son's head for two hours while they ransacked the house and took everything we had. One of those guys is in prison, one of them was killed in another robbery, and one of them is free living in Kingston. The Christmas after that we went back and the prime minister sent the army on maneuvers in the fields around our house. We don't run scared in Jamaica. I love the Jamaican people. We've got a lot of friends there. We're involved with an orphanage right over the hill from us: SOS Children's Village. Every year June takes down clothes for the kids there. On Christmas day we do a fundraiser. We're really involved in Jamaica. I like it down there and I don't think it's any more dangerous than



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Broadway Street in Nashville on Saturday night. I like to sit on my porch of my house and listen to the reggae played from a place called the Concrete Jungle, a quarter of a mile away from us. On a clear night you can hear the reggae musicians real good. I didn't know Peter Tosh but that's really a tragedy. They've lost two great ones, Bob Marley and Peter Tosh.

**MUSICIAN:** *At breakfast this morning you were quoting Lincoln, who you've studied so much. You project a sort of abolitionist image. Even when you recorded "God Bless Robert E. Lee," you added a spoken intro saying that you blessed Lee for surrendering to Grant, for stopping the bloodshed. You obviously love the South, but I suspect your sympathies were with the Union.*

**CASH:** Hey, let's go back a few years before Lincoln. I mean like for almost a century the federal government sanctioned slavery. It wasn't just the South. The federal government let it happen until 1861. It's not the South that's guilty of slavery. It's the federal government of the United States. Hell, I'm an American. I happen to live in the South.

**MUSICIAN:** *You've gotten threats and hate mail from the Ku Klux Klan?*

**CASH:** Yeah, I do. I'm proud of that. It's good to know who hates you, and it's good to be hated by the right people. The Klan is despicable, filthy, dirty, unkind. It's a shame sometimes that we have all these freedoms, 'cause freedom allows them to exist. I'd love to see them all thrown in prison.

**MUSICIAN:** *You mean so many things to so many people. You must have people who you don't like or agree with come up and say, "You speak for me."*

**CASH:** Well, I try to stay true to myself and what I'm all about. I'm aware of the public figure image, the position of influence, but I'm also aware that I'm in it for the love of music. For songs

and performing and recording. That's really what I do. I've been used as a beacon for a lot of things, but the causes that are really close to my heart are the retarded citizens of our country, and the battered women's shelter in Nashville. And the children, the orphanages. You know, you can really get discouraged if you get involved in prison reform, the prison system is really not right. I do a *jailathon* for the American Cancer Society every year. They put me in jail; everybody makes donations to either keep me in or bail me out. Last year they raised \$42,000. My mother just had an operation for cancer so that's a thing close to my heart. These causes come and go. Like the tornado victims in Texas, or building a humane animal shelter in my county. But you know, I'm not pushing any causes or waving any flags right now.

**MUSICIAN:** *What's the song Johnny Cash hasn't been able to write?*

**CASH:** I always wanted to have a big spiritual song, like Kris had "Why Me, Lord" in 1970. All these years I've tried to record gospel and spiritual but I've never had a hit record with it. When I called Sam Phillips the first time, I told him I was a gospel singer.

Emotions are bared in my songs, and they're pretty well universal emotions. About pain, heartbreak, despair, disappointment, loneliness. That's not something really to sing about, but when you do, and communicate it to a person who's experienced that, they say, "Hey, he knows how I feel." As far as I'm concerned, that's what performing is—communicating those emotions. That's why I always wanted to have that big spiritual song. I'd like to share the uplifting of the spirit that I feel sometimes. 'Cause but for the grace of God I could be laying there beside Elvis. ♪



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# WONDER

from page 20

was a very different kind of approach to making records. It wasn't, 'We gotta make an album, so we're in for nine months of hell and we'll just have to see where it goes.' It was more of a constant process. We were together for four or five years, and we worked very steadily during that time. It was a time of tremendous creative outpouring by Stevie, and our real trick was to catch the performance. Like any production job, the object was to get the artist to perform to the limits of his potential—to do it on time, and on budget. So we used to say, every 10 or 11 months, 'Hey, Steve, it's time for a record. Let's put it together.'"

The trio's "library" approach to recording and cataloging new material very nearly made Margouleff and Cecil a political football at Motown after Stevie's near-fatal car accident in 1973. "He was in a coma for quite a while," Margouleff remembers. "Just before that happened, Steve and me and Malcolm were sitting in the office at Electric Lady, and he said, 'If anything ever happens to me, I want you to destroy all our tapes. I don't want anyone to have any of my work unfinished.' And we both thought that was pretty heavy. And then about four weeks later he had this monster automobile accident, where he was bashed in the head by this piece of timber that went through the windshield of his car. That's the only time I ever met Berry Gordy. We were taken to meet him, and he was sitting on the terrace at Motown Studios. We both felt like we were in the presence of some kind of God figure. And he said, 'In the event that something happens to Stevie, can you work with his tapes?' We sort of hemmed and hawed and said, 'Well, we don't know.' Stuff like that. In reality, of course, we had many, many songs in the can."

Margouleff and Cecil left Wonder by mutual consent in 1974, after *Fulfillingness' First Finale* was completed. The issue, they say, was too little money and too little credit. But Margouleff still counts Wonder as a friend, and harbors few ill feelings over the split. "Last year at the Grammys, I went to introduce him to my new wife, and he said, 'Bob! Bob!' I said, 'What, Steve?' He said, 'You know, there's no reason why we can't work together anymore.' I just said, 'Steve, you know where the phone is.' So now it's a year later, and there's been no phone call.

"I've never gone to Stevie to ask him for help, but I've always called him up two or three times a year and left a message on his answering machine: 'Steve, this is Bob. I still love you and care about you. And I'm available to work with you anytime you want.' And of course there's never a call back. And I'll probably do it for the next 15 years. That's okay, too. I mean, he did give us a tremendous gift.

"You have to understand that Steve, being an unsighted person, has always felt a need to prove to himself and to the world that he can do everything any sighted person could ever do. And that sort of spills into, 'Well, I can do everything myself. I can be my own producer, I can be my own engineer, I can do everything.'"

So, says Margouleff, "Steve calls *all* the shots, period. The rest of the people around him are purely to do Steve's bidding. So he's very much in control. But he's controlling his yes men, and they isolate him. It's like Elvis, same deal—that sort of Graceland syndrome, where he's got a retinue that he trusts surrounding him. But the thing with Elvis and with Stevie, like Marshall McLuhan or whomever said, is *You Are What You Eat*. And if you don't have anything tasty to eat, there's gonna be less output, because you have to put something in to get something out. I mean, it's not his choice, but I get the impression all he has are people who say, 'Yes, Steve.'"

Without the scheduling discipline Margouleff and Cecil helped to impose, Wonder continued to be prolific, but his output became more idiosyncratic, more attuned to Stevie's own private rhythms. Jane Friedman, Stevie's publicist throughout most of the '70s, describes his work habits this way: "When his attention had been pinpointed on something, he sort of inhaled all the information he needed, and acted on it. But when he got bored, his attention would wander, and you could be talking to him, even on the phone, and he'd suddenly start to sing. And he just wouldn't be there. He'd be composing some new tune, or thinking about something, and you'd completely lose him. I think that's probably the way he's lived a great deal of his life, just wrapped up in his own head, his own music, his own thoughts." During the remainder of the 1970s, Wonder released two albums that were long, dense and wildly inventive: *Songs in the Key of Life* (1976), a two-record (plus EP) summation and extension of the music he'd made in the previous six years, and *Journey Through the Secret Life Of Plants* (1979), a double-album soundtrack to a documentary on plant life that was actually Stevie's foray into the serious compositional tradition epitomized by Duke Ellington.

Since 1980, Stevie Wonder has cut an ironic figure—at once more of a public symbol (by virtue of his growing political and charitable work) and a private mystery (by virtue of fewer records and interviews) than ever before. Because of his reticence, a number of theories have inevitably sprung up to explain Wonder in the '80s. One holds that Stevie, embittered by the public and critical failure to understand the ambitions at the root of *Secret Life of Plants*, retreated into himself and simply stopped working as hard at his music.

Another speculates that he went through an early-'80s crisis of confidence, creatively paralyzed for a time by the sheer weight of his own past achievements. One rumor from that period had him asking Quincy Jones to produce his next record; around the same time, friend and former Wonderlove guitarist Ray Parker, Jr. told an interviewer, "It's the kind of thing with him where you get too big, you panic...He's a little scared. He's always going back to redo something."

A third and simpler theory says that if Stevie Wonder's musical output has slowed in recent years, it's because of his growing political involvement and the responsibilities of being a father—which Wonder takes very seriously: He's said more than once that it was his children that finally gave him a sense of "belonging." But it's probably best to let Stevie take on the various theories in his own terms.

When I bring up *Secret Life of Plants*, Wonder visibly perks up; with the possible exception of *Characters*, he seems more interested in discussing this project than any other. But he disavows any real disappointment with the album's reception. Or does he?

"Did it make me feel bad? No, it really didn't. People weren't ready for it. I understood the mistake, if you want to call it that, from a commercial standpoint. But I wasn't trying to be commercial anyway, so I didn't really care. I...cared, but I didn't care. I cared in the sense that you have to care about how many people will buy it, because that determines how many people will hear it. But you gotta then not care, because if it's something that you believe in creatively, and you feel that's the only way you can make that statement—then no, I didn't care. I don't care. I never will care.

"But of course I want my records to be successful," he adds later. "To say that I don't care is to say I don't care how many people hear it. It would be a lie to say that. It'd be like, my ego would be bruised."

However he feels in his heart of hearts, *Plants* still had its rewards as far as Wonder is concerned. "We went out [on tour]

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Which one will still have a career in 24 years?

right after that with this symphony orchestra of black classical musicians that we found. That *was* a statement. A lot of young kids who came to those concerts went away saying, 'I didn't know black people could play music like that.' I wanted to make that statement. Obviously I'm a person who can say I love everybody, so it wasn't any kind of racial thing. It was a cultural thing that I felt it'd be great to have said. Those young musicians would probably never get the chance to do that kind of thing again."

After *Plants*, Wonder was not heard from until *Original Musiquarium* (1982), a contract-time hits collection that featured four strong new tracks, including the searing "Front Line" and a lengthy closing jam, "Do I Do." He was working on his next project when old friend Dionne Warwick called to ask Stevie to work on the soundtrack of *Woman in Red*, a Gene Wilder film for which Warwick was musical director.

"After seeing the film," says Stevie, "I thought it was funny, and I knew I had a song I'd never really finished that could work in the movie. Even though it was just a skeleton, I knew it was right. That was 'I Just Called to Say I Love You.' We'd filmed the video for 'I Just Called' at a concert one night, and after the show I went in to record the vocal for 'Love Light in Flight.' At that time of night, to do a vocal like that was amazing. It reminded me of the old Motown days: 'Get off the stage! Go into the studio and do this vocal! Get to the next gig!' It was a challenge to achieve those things that fast."

Aside from *Woman in Red*, Stevie remembers that time being business as usual. "I had been writing songs, and obviously a majority of that time had been spent with my children—I had another boy around that time—and working on a lot of new material. At the time I was working on the next album, which was to be either *People Moves Human Plays* or *In Square Circle*. Originally, *In Square Circle* was to be a double album, but we decided to break it up into two different parts. I would have preferred that *In Square Circle* and *Characters* be one album, but even after both of them, there's still more material, you know. That's really what's been happening."

And what about Stevie Wonder Theorem #2—the crisis of confidence theory? "No, not really," he says. "Because I don't look at it like the challenge of what I did back in '76, '73, '74. I still feel the greatest achievement I have yet to make. I guess we all want to feel that, but I really do. I feel the greatest achievement of my *life*, obviously, is making the King holiday a national reality. Also, I feel the achievement of just being here, being in this profession—you know, I never thought it could happen for me, even as much as I always wanted to be in music. I love music, and I always wanted to be a musician. Yet I wanted to be a doctor. Yet I wanted to be a preacher."

But he is a bit of a preacher, isn't he? He wants to change people through his music, right? Wonder smiles. "Yeah. I

always have felt that the word of God... doesn't have to come from the pulpit. It doesn't have to come in a church, or synagogue, or temple. It can be anywhere, as long as it motivates a person to move to a better place."

Throughout his career, one value Stevie Wonder has preached is racial integration, be it a matter of music or social policy. How does he respond to the 1980s critics, black and white, who have revived the line that crossover amounts to selling out? "I don't respond to it," he says quickly, an icy edge creeping into his voice. "Who's to say what's in that writer's mind or that musician's mind? They say Prince is selling out, for instance? Well, I think Prince was raised in Minneapolis, right? Which is predominantly white surroundings, and lots of different influences. Turn the radio on, you might hear five hours of the Stones, or whatever. Five hours of acid rock. To say that he should not be influenced by that is saying..."

Wonder pulls up abruptly; extended polemics simply aren't the man's style. I try to draw him out further by observing that all these critics seem to start from a very parochial sense of what black music can be. Just as abruptly, he jumps back in: "Well, the reality is, black music is all of it. Because basically, you have black people who sing country, like Charley Pride, and in classical, like Wynton Marsalis. You've got Leontyne Price. You got Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, you've got—come on, what can I say? You've got the aborigines, who basically sing country as well. You've got *everything*. And it's only natural that it's that way, in that we are the first known civilization on earth. Black culture was the first.

"As long as a person respects and appreciates their culture, that's all you can ask of them. But when you know that something can work and feels right 'cause it's good, and somebody says no, I won't do it because it's white, or I won't do it because it's black, they got a problem in their own heads. It is not a problem in *my* keyboards."

Before Stevie arrived, Cropper let me know she'd give me hand signals to indicate when the time was up. Now Stevie's brother and right-hand man, Milton Hardaway, comes back in the room, and Cropper gives me the signal: one more question. "In your life," I say, "you've faced a number of conditions that are potentially pretty isolating—being sightless, being a major star virtually since childhood. I'm surprised you haven't written about isolation in the first person more often."

Stevie shakes his head and smiles. "See, my whole thing is that I have always been a person who loves people, so I have to go out and be with people. I won't allow myself to be stuck up in the hotel room, not knowing what's happening, not listening to the radio. I always check out what's happening in the various cities I go into. I have to go and do that, because that's how I get my energy and my music. Hey, who is so high and mighty they can't go out and check out what's happening?"

## ROLLINS from page 94

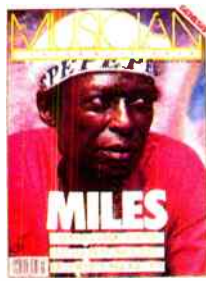
lot—I'm trying to find that sweet spot. That's very important. There are some parts of a given stage you can't use; but there are some spots you try and find where the horn speaks back to you—and you hear what they're hearing.

I think they've tried and tested all sorts of metals for saxophones, and they found that, for overall resonance and sound, brass is best. So now that's what I'm using—a straight brass Selmer tenor. I've tried everything else, too. Silver horns tend to be a little brighter to my ears, and the quality is a little more brittle and the sound more difficult to control. Their





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Drummers, Devo, Rossington Collins



41 **Miles**  
Genesis, Lowell George



77 **John Fogerty**  
Marsals/Hancock, Los Lobos



81 **John Cougar Mellencamp**  
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105 **John Coltrane**  
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69 **Michael Jackson**  
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## SONNY ROLLINS

tone is not quite as centered. The gold horn has what a lot of people refer to as a dark sound. Maybe more mellow or more focused might better describe the gold horn. The metal isn't always the determining factor—the shape of the horn is critical. For instance, I have one beautiful old gold Selmer Mark VI, and it has a gorgeous sound, but unfortunately the horn has never played completely in tune.

Lester Young played a silver Conn, but Lester Young was the exception in just about everything; and Chu Berry played a Conn. All of the guys played Conn early on. Even Charlie Parker made a lot of his breakthroughs on a Conn. Later on he went to a King. Alto players like Johnny Hodges used to play a Buescher. Bueschers are beautiful horns. As a matter of fact I went to a Buescher in the mid-'60s. I was overseas, and I had a Selmer, and I got the notion to take the horn apart one day, and I had a concert that night. So I ended up borrowing a Buescher from this guy in Holland, and I just loved it; later the poor fella died, and I went back and bought the horn from his wife. I think I played that horn on *Alfie's Theme*.

*I thought the most beautiful sound Bird got was on that cheesy plastic alto at Massey Hall.*

That's the way I felt when I played that guy's Buescher in Europe. It played so easy, and it sang, and it was just so easy to play compared to a Selmer, which is a little harder to hear. You see, the virtue of a Selmer is that right up close you might not be able to hear it, but in the back of the house you can hear it—that's the difference. Like I think the Yamaha tenor has it all except the metal, in my opinion. They are very good horns, and I endorse the Yamaha soprano, but on tenor it's hard to get away from the Selmer. It has more guts; and that's where you

get the real tenor sound. You can put more energy into it and it'll take more without going out of tune and losing its pitch—so you can simply ignore the horn and let the music come through you. I don't even want to know I have a horn there—I want the music to play itself.

## the cutting edge

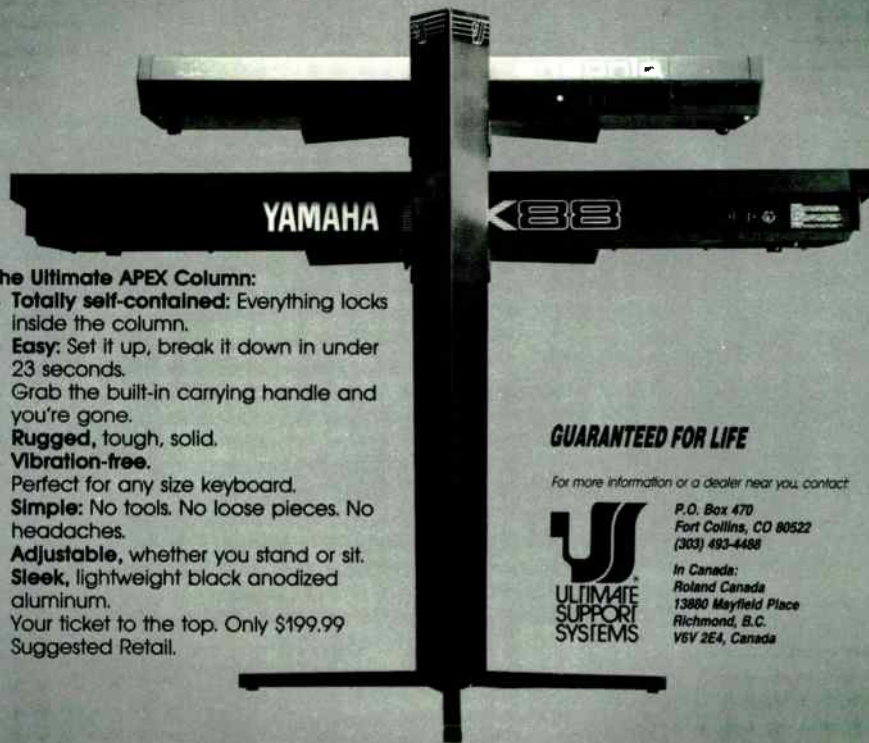
I'm not the kind of guy who puts himself up as being the greatest this or that, and I hate to say this—because I don't want it to sound like back-patting or whining—but there are so many things I came across over the years that I wanted to develop on the tenor that I had to sort of curtail because of dental problems and operations I've had over the years. I've just barely scratched the surface.

It's just a matter of what you want to do. Who would have thought years ago that guys would be playing wind instruments using all these circular breathing things, holding a tone indefinitely? There's all kinds of expressions that haven't been developed. With different mouthpieces, I've gotten enough notes that it sounds like chords; where you can play a note lower than the lowest note on the tenor, and not by slipping your hand over the bell either.

And guys say, "Oh Sonny, that's impossible." But I don't think there's anything that can't be done. Because music is such a spiritual thing, man.

There's a place where I believe you can transcend these metal instruments and go to another area where you can impose a spiritual reality on the music you are playing. If you have the determination, if you have the faith, if you have the ear of God, you can do any of these things. ♪

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# RECORDS



## THIS IS THE HEADLINE FOR THE TALKING HEADS REVIEW



### TALKING HEADS

*Naked*  
(Fly/Sire)

The canonization of David Byrne has been a mixed blessing for Talking Heads. You can hardly guess from the clippings anymore that it's a band at all; with so much attention lavished on Byrne, everyone

else is virtually faceless. You have to turn to the Tom Tom Club records or Jerry Harrison's *Casual Gods* to puzzle out what the *other* Heads might be contributing to the musical blend (respectively: a goodly portion of the band's rhythmic adventurism and pop hooks).

Byrnesia has also helped polarize Talking Heads fans. For one group they are (read "David Byrne is") the epitome of post-modern musical/intellectual practice, floating down a stream of cultural ephemera and plucking out the most useful materials—or as Byrne puts it on *Naked*, "I'm afraid God has no master plan/ He only takes what he can use." If you wrote, "Yes, how true" next to this couplet in the margins of the lyric sheet, you belong to this class of fan. In fact, if you spent more than five minutes looking at the lyric sheet, you belong to this class of fan. The opposing camp sees Talking Heads as a pretty great dance

band (e.g. *Speaking in Tongues*) and remarkable, if erratic, practitioners of pop craft (see *Little Creatures*, avoid *True Stories*). For this bunch, the Heads are a canny group whose music—including Byrne's lyrics and singing—matters more for sound than sense.

It would be less than fair if I didn't fess up to being in the latter camp. And as soundscapes go, *Naked* is anything but. Recorded in Paris, the album was built from grooves improvised by the band and then elaborated with polyglot international musicians ranging from Zouk players to *salseros*. "Blind" sounds like *Remain in Light*-era Afro-influenced dance music, with even broader ethnic antecedents. It doesn't matter what Byrne is singing; what's important is that his vocal attack complements the rhythmic accent of the groove.

The album is replete with such deft sonic touches. Eric Weisberg's mournful

SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY NEW



*green thoughts*

# THE SMITHEREENS

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# RECORDS

steel guitar is unreasonably, inexplicably right for the Brazilian-flavored "Totally Nude"; Tina Weymouth's short flute introduction offers a poignant textural counterpoint to the raw Cuban horns of "Mr. Jones." And yes, it is Bob Dylan's Mr. Jones, making the scene in '88; the point of the song is that he still doesn't know what's happening here, but now neither does anyone else.

So much for sound; what about sense? As always, the lyrics are shot through with frustration and confusion. For once, though, Byrne isn't just celebrating the lighter side of alienation. Side two, which consists mainly of moody, downbeat meditations on modernity, happily eschews the contempt for normalcy that's been Byrne's signature in the past. There's even compassion, or something like it, in "Mommy Daddy You and I," a sketch of a non-English-speaking family adrift in contemporary America. (Maybe Byrne learned something from the criticism leveled at his snotty tone in the film *True Stories*.) (Maybe.)

Side two's song cycle is the first sign in a while that the Heads are growing emotionally as well as musically. In that context it's probably uncharitable to suggest that Byrne's "vision" is still based on an extraordinarily naive kind of technophobia, a late-twentieth-century wish to return to a state of nobility in nature à la Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (Hence the monkey on the cover.) So don't get me wrong; *Naked* is a record of many pleasures. You just have to know how to use it. — Steve Perry

## IRMA THOMAS

*The Way I Feel*  
(Rounder)

## JOHNNY ADAMS

*A Room With a View of the Blues*  
(Rounder)

This is soul music, the kind Otis and Retha used to make: sweet, stormy, sophisticated stuff that only a handful of labels still record, and that really thrives in only a handful of places, notably New Orleans.

*The Way I Feel* sounds like nothing less than a late '60s Aretha Franklin album, but Thomas is a peer, not an imitator. At 47, her voice is big and saucy, subtle and sensual, as she leads her band and a studio posse through gentle lovers' funk, powerhouse gospel stylings, pop fluff and warm 'n' natural balladeering. Allen Toussaint penned "Old Records," the album's kicker; that, and the smartly

arranged "Baby I Love You," would have fit comfortably in (and improved considerably) the last volume of the Atlantic R&B boxed set.

But a pair of emotionally wrenching masterpieces are this record's real treasure. Thomas unleashes a floodtide of vocal dynamics on "Sorry Wrong Number," building to a climax of incendiary testification. Then she works the gospel roots of "Sit Down and Cry," a song about betrayal, into an undeniably great performance. If it takes Thomas' by-numbers version of the oldie "Dancing in the Street" to trick format-addled radio programmers into hearing these should-be hits, so be it.

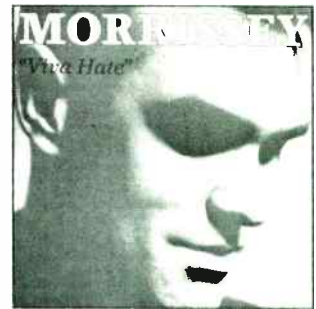
Lowell Fulsom and Billy Vera co-wrote "A Room With a View of the Blues," the title tune for Johnny Adams' bluesiest album. Adams also covers a pair of unusually playful Percy Mayfield songs, transforming the great mourner's "The Hunt Is On" into a showcase for his



own uncanny ability to mimic a trombone. The real goods, though, are in the homegrown numbers. Doc Pomus obviously relishes writing for the man he's acknowledged as his favorite singer, while Dr. John's arrangements, like the good doctor himself, are a mix of bumping New Orleans sass and deep, heartfelt blues. And ya gotta believe Adams as he bawls out "I Don't Want to Do Wrong," a cut that takes infidelity to church and brings guitarist Walter Washington's snappy, idiosyncratic playing to the fore.

It's harder to justify the singer's straight-faced reading of "Neither One of Us (Wants to Be the First to Say Goodbye)," as Adams—whose smooth loverman's croon and amazing on-demand falsetto have won him the appellation "the Tan Canary"—frequently mires himself in schlock. Overall, however, *Room With a View of the Blues* is a hallmark for the 55-year-old, jazz-inclined singer and three-decade veteran of Louisiana's bar circuit. Like Thomas' record, it's big, passionate fun and dew-eyed melodrama made for and by adults.

— Ted Drozdowski



## MORRISSEY

*Viva Hate*  
(Sire/Reprise)

In his long tenure as singer and lyricist for the Smiths, Morrissey became a hero of the repressed and the depressed. But while the Smiths' considerable contribution to, and influence on, the new pop music of the '80s has been largely ignored in this country, *Viva Hate*, Morrissey's first solo excursion, is a valiant bid for commercial success. For his part, producer and co-writer Stephen Street has erected a more polished and studio-conscious backdrop than Johnny Marr previously commissioned; Morrissey, meanwhile, here offers some of his most fetching—and melodic—observations, while downplaying the often anthemic, glorious gesture of self-flagellation that was the Smiths.

At first listen, the instrumentation sounds so technically smooth and inviting it seems to smother raw emotion; yet on deeper reflection, *Viva Hate* contains some of Morrissey's most personal writing, albeit in more pastoral settings. Stand-out cuts include the catchy, deceptively upbeat "Everyday Is Like Sunday," the signature melodic vocal of "I Don't Mind If You Forget Me," and "Angel, Angel, Down We Go Together," a lament of surrender draped in cello and pathos. "Dial a Cliché" and "Bengali in Platforms" serve notice that Morrissey knows how to do more than coin a snappy song title, though of that he is the undoubted master. But "Late Nite Maudlin Street" is his epic, a kind of "Desolation Row" for the emotionally as well as economically impoverished. Its stark black and white portraits of back streets, factories and scruffy, sad children is as bleak and poignant a rendering as anything the Smiths have ever conveyed.

Morrissey's mix of political outrage, seductive humor and coal-gray hopes lies well-entrenched in a long tradition of

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# RECORDS

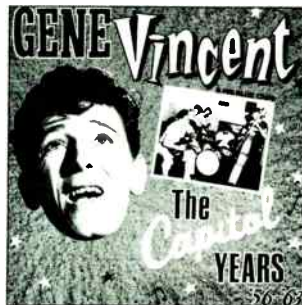
quasi-sexual angry young men and social outcasts, from Jean Genet to Dylan Thomas, even Oscar Wilde and Tennessee Williams. His music suggests a depth of connection with them all, and, perhaps, potential membership in their league. There is also the raw honesty here of a post-Beatle John Lennon fresh out of Primal. He seems to have stepped out of the closet on this album, not in a coy or snide way, but as a process of his growth—he's opening up. And as he's become less afraid of himself, Morrissey's visions are far less oblique. To hear such painful and awkward confessions is at times painful and awkward; as pop music, however, the results are unusually powerful. — **John Sutton-Smith**

## GENE VINCENT

*The Capitol Years*  
(Charly)

**Y**ou figure that rock 'n' roll lasted a few years on the outside, and even then it wasn't pure. Mediated, that's the word, and a

quick listen to this 10-album boxed set'll clue you in to exactly what was going on. Vincent, who gave good leer, dressed in black leather like James Dean and Lou Reed, and left a listener coated with the light sheen of used crankcase oil, started out singing on a country station in Virginia. He was influenced—now here's



something unusual—by the black and white music played around his family's gas station. Elvis was god, or money, to people who were looking for either, and Vincent's "Be-Bop-a-Lula" sold over 200,000 copies in the first two weeks of

its release.

So Capitol Records had to do something to fill the demand for new songs, and they gave the guys hardcore irrational material to deal with—"Peg o' My Heart," "Waltz of the Wind" and "Up a Lazy River," for starters. The tension here between this guy, who was definitely more at ease shouting his darn fool head off (his straight rockabilly stuff defines the genre), and the dreck tunes really creates power, and you can sense all sorts of class/aesthetic/financial/time frictions that signified a changing America, where past and present, black and white, young and old all seemed to be in flux—an era lacking absolutes.

One thing that is absolute is "Galloping" Cliff Gallup, the guitarist who plays on the first two albums' worth of material, and whose solos make the diminishing quality of the later volumes financially irrelevant. His power-pylon sound, combined with jazz and blues tendencies, summed up all the contradictions about trying to find a unified form. After he leaves, Vincent goes downhill: By the time this 10-record set ends in 1962, with strings and thickhead material, he's

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To a lot of people in our industry, the PMRC doesn't seem like a real threat. After all, we have a First Amendment. But pressure groups like the PMRC in 1921 mounted a headline-grabbing media campaign claiming that the film business was riddled with sex and perversion. The coverage crippled the film industry, cut boxoffice revenues in half, and forced the creation of the Hayes Board, which censored films for more than forty years. We had a First Amendment then too.

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*I may not like every form of music, but I believe it all has a right to exist. That freedom is what America is all about.*

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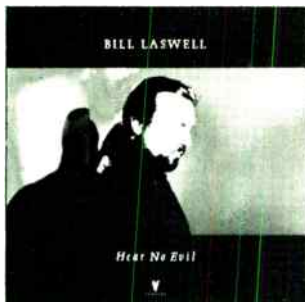


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lost it. As Vincent's flame shrinks, you hear the sound of America overwhelmed by everybody's rush for money. (Street-level, 1604 West 139 St., Gardena, CA 90249) — Peter Watrous



**B I L L L A S W E L L**

*Hear No Evil*  
(Virgin)

**S**ure, we could pretend Bill Laswell is best known for his very occasional solo instrumental albums. We could go on about the

contrasts between the last one—1982's *Baselines*—and *Hear No Evil*. *Baselines*, we'd note, was music for the proud-to-be-schizo, with Laswell's bass guitar leading a crack avant-jazz ensemble through a high-tension confection of noise and funk that was, if not danceable, at least fun to think about dancing to. *Hear No Evil*, on the other hand, brings Laswell together with Indian, Senegalese, Cuban and New York musicians for a sound that suggests a oneness with the universe: slow, harmonious, pleasant, even a little spacey. Then we could scratch our heads and wonder what in the world happened to the guy in the last six years.

But let's face it; we all know what Laswell's been up to. Credited as producer on records by the likes of aging icon Mick Jagger, artiste Laurie Anderson, metalists Motorhead, reggae masters Sly & Robbie, a slew of African stars, and more, Laswell has followed the demand for his hip sensibilities and icy precision at the boards all over the contemporary pop map. In the process he's made a bigger name for himself than any colleague since Phil Spector—or at

least Terry Lewis and Jimmy Jam.

Not that any of this experience explains the newfound serenity in Laswell's own music. But *Hear No Evil*'s pan-ethnic blend does seem to reflect the eclecticism of his production gigs. Using the basic elements of electric guitar, bass and the buzzy Indian violin, he moves from prog-rock thud ("Assassins") to Cooderesque blues ("Illinois Central") to twangy fake-rave ("Stations of the Cross") through a steady pitter-patter of Indo-African percussion.

You have to credit Laswell's studio-honed organizational skills for melding this hodge-podge into a relatively seamless flow. It's just too bad, then, that *Hear No Evil* succumbs to the very vices that are Laswell's principal virtues when working on other people's music. Lovely at times, it's also studied and a little cold. Scrub off the patina of downtown artiness, throw some passionate mess into the mix, and *Hear No Evil*'s lyricism and reach might make for the kind of film score that could stand on its own, like the lushest Nino Rota or the weirdest Ennio Morricone. As it is, I'll wait for the movie. — Julian Dibbell

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# ROCK

## SHORT TAKES

### MORRIS DAY

*Daydreaming* (Warner Bros.)

COULD IT BE THAT MORRIS DAY IS TURNING into the David Lee Roth of funk? Just as Diamond Dave squanders his commercial acumen on an ever-more-cartoonish persona, so too does Day waste some of his best post-Time grooves on unfunny fits of self-aggrandizement. (Is it any wonder the big love-ballad is called "A Man's Pride"?) Not that his big ego detracts from "Fishnet," which is funky in every sense of the word, or even danceable trifles like the title tune. But albums, like mailmen or obstetricians, ought to deliver more consistently.

### THE BEATLES

*Past Masters, Volume One* (Capitol CD)  
*Past Masters, Volume Two* (Capitol CD)

RATHER THAN RISK THE REDUNDANCIES OF hit-oriented compilations like the 1962-1966 and 1967-1970 albums, Capitol concludes its Beatles-on-CD series with a shameless appeal to the completist: All the non-LP tracks (singles, B-sides, etc.) spread across two discs. Because essential singles like "She Loves You" and "Hey Jude" are cheek-by-jowl with such ephemera as "Sie Liebt Dich" or the animal-noises version of "Across the Universe," dead spots are inescapable—how many times will you want to hear "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)"? Still, the discs' appeal to baby-boomer consumerism will be hard to deny, and anyone who already has most of the first 13 Beatles CDs will eventually succumb to these.

### THE WOODENTOPS

*Wooden Foot Cops on the Highway* (Columbia)

OKAY, SO THE TITLE MAKES NO SENSE, THE tempos sound like these guys drink entirely too much coffee—this is still an astonishingly seductive piece of work. Why? Because not only have the Woodentops regained the momentum of their earliest singles, but they've managed to do so without sacrificing the melodic accessibility of *Giant*. As the group's

giddy energy pulls you into the album, the catchy choruses to "Maybe It Won't Last," "Wheels Turning," "Stop This Car" and the like keep bringing you back.

### POINTER SISTERS

*Serious Slammin'* (RCA)

THIS IS THE POINTERS' MOST CONCERTED play for an R&B audience in ages, and while their vocal approach hasn't loosened up much from the professional cool of "Automatic," the backing tracks really go for the gusto. Whether aping Jam & Lewis with "Shut Up and Dance" and "He Turned Me Out," or assuming a Cameo appearance in the title tune, producer Richard Perry provides a surprisingly credible simulacrum of funk. Serious though the Pointers may be, however, there's just not enough slammin' to justify the effort.

### KINGDOM COME

*Kingdom Come* (Polydor)

SURE, "GET IT ON" IS TO "KASHMIR" WHAT Naugahyde is to leather, but so what? After Whitesnake's "In the Heat of the Night," Kingdom Come at least deserves credit for copping a better class of licks.

### NANCI GRIFFITH

*Little Love Affairs* (MCA)

AS THE COVER PHOTO ADMITS, GRIFFITH'S sources range from singer/songwriter John Stewart to Irish short-story writer Edna O'Brien—an eclectic bunch, to be sure. None of those influences pan out quite as expected; O'Brien, for instance, turns up as much in the Celtic cadences of "Anybody Can Be Somebody's Fool" as in the plot of "So Long Ago." But the most seductive aspect of this album is the disarming precocity of Griffith's voice, which sounds innocent even after convincing you she's seen it all.

### KEITH SWEAT

*Make It Last Forever* (Elektra)

THOUGH KEITH SWEAT IS B-BOY ENOUGH to relish the cheap-drum-machine clatter

of the classic hip-hop groove, he's also sufficiently soulful to keep that from crowding his vocal style. Which is why the best songs here, from "I Want Her" to "Something Just Ain't Right," sizzle with the sort of passion no amount of MIDI funk can disguise.

### MIKE OLDFIELD

*Islands* (Virgin)

OLDFIELD'S INSTRUMENTAL MARATHONS may be as pretentious and slow-moving as ever, but his pop songs still manage the unexpected gem or two. So, though side one creaks along like bad movie-of-the-week music, the flip reveals a sturdy melodic sense that at times ("North Point" and the title tune) recalls the stater side of ABBA. A mixed bag, but well worth rummaging through.

### LITA FORD

*Lita* (RCA)

FOR HER TEEN-MALE FOLLOWING, THE BEST thing about this album must be the way the cover shots showcase Ford's brand-new blonde-goddess look: The rest of us should simply be happy that, in Mike Chapman, she's found a producer capable of converting her Joan Jett-style grit into an approach that's as tough as it is slick. Which is why, from "Kiss Me Deadly" to "Close My Eyes Forever," *Lita* has the sort of sound that should let her have her hits and kick ass too.

### THE BYRDS

*Never Before* (Re-Flyte)

THIS MAY BE PACKAGED AS A FANATICS-only collection of out-takes and alternate versions, but it's hard to imagine the rock fan who wouldn't find it utterly captivating. In addition to offering history in the making (as in the revealing alternate take of "Eight Miles High") and a glimpse into the shape of garage-bands-to-come (the prescient "Never Before"), the album also reveals such long-rumored gems as David Crosby's ménage-à-trois classic, "Triad." Essential. (Murray Hill Records, 225 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10003)

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World Radio History

## HAMMER from page 29

Earle Johnson is the percussionist who in 1986 accused Hammer of stealing his conga sounds by sampling them into his Fairlight and using them on the "Miami Vice Theme." "You mean that whole, oh..." Hammer's voice trails off, just the way the case did after making a splash in all the news. "It was not resolved because there was nothing to resolve. There never were any grounds for suing. There was never even any discussion of a suit. His lawyer [Bill Krasilovsky] just opened his big fat mouth in the press and said we might consider doing something. There were no grounds. There was a complete understanding between Dave and I. He was just trying to get in between us and get his name in print. Let me tell you how it got blown out of proportion. I went to Europe and newspapers were asking me if it was true I didn't write the 'Miami Vice Theme.' This is how far out it gets."

"Oh no! Not that again," exclaims Johnson when I call him. I can tell it's about the only thing he's ever asked anymore, like George Bush trying to dodge the Iran-Contra affair. Johnson is a little-known musician, with a couple of albums out on small labels. He and Hammer have played on each other's records and they often worked together, Hammer trading out old equipment for Johnson's playing on sessions.

Johnson's version of the story is that he casually told his lawyer that his sampled congas were all over "Miami Vice." "He's a copyright lawyer," explains Johnson. "I told him about Jan using my samples and said, 'I don't want to shake my relationship with Jan but...' He decided to pursue it and the next thing I know it's all over the papers."

The musicians' union wouldn't act on Johnson's case, claiming that he knew what he was getting into, and he chose not to pursue it in the courts because the cost of litigation was prohibitive. Now he regrets ever making the claim, but stands by his original contention. "There should be a law covering it," he says, "and the union isn't doing anything. Basically the union sucks."

"Single individual sounds aren't ever gonna be copyrightable," counters Hammer emphatically. "If all your claim to fame is one sound you can make and anybody can steal it, then you shouldn't be in this business. Your contribution better go well beyond that. It's how you put your sounds together. That cannot be sampled and recreated by a sampler. Even if you get a multi-sample, it won't work. So you are protected by the qual-

ity of the work that you do. So it's all just a total nuisance. I get worked up about it, but this is where lawyers get their bad name and they deserve it."

Hammer is justifiably proud of the sounds that he's created. His Mini-Moog playing with the Mahavishnu Orchestra set the standard for fusion and progressive rock. The unique guitar timbres he gets from the Mini and Memory Moog are only distinguishable from a guitar when he wants them to be.

With "Miami Vice," Hammer got to explore all the music he felt was inside him, all the music that record companies had kept bottled up in a fusion chamber. "There are very few artists who are allowed to work in different mediums or different styles," claims Hammer. "It's difficult to convince record companies to let you do that. I kept insisting and I kept falling on my face with every record where I would try to straddle different styles. Then just the opposite happened with 'Miami Vice.' I was encouraged to do anything I wanted because I had absolute creative freedom, control over the musical score that was complete. I would decide where the music goes, what kind of music, how much, so I could pace the show dramatically. It stretched me and allowed me to work in all the styles I like at the same time and not be penalized for it."

The window is still open for Hammer to work on "Miami Vice" in the future, and that sound will certainly dominate his music for years to come. "I think even on the next album there will be a few pieces," predicts Hammer. "There is still a body of work that has to be heard. I can't just leave it on the shelf."

But the rock 'n' roll muse is still beckoning. "What I might try to do is include a few tracks with a guest vocalist. Because I have a lot of songs I've written and I want them heard as well." ❧

## SYLVIAN from page 54

means of songwriting that was more direct, and I found it very difficult. As a reaction to the frustration I felt, I went back to drawing, as I'd done when I was a child. I found a great deal of pleasure in that. It reminded me of how I used to feel about songwriting: a feeling of adventure, exploring ideas, which I'd somehow lost." Ironically, the gentleman also began taking Polaroids, which he assembled into a book and exhibited in London, Milan, Tokyo and Turin. Those exhibitions became the subject of a video documentary Sylvian made for Japanese television.

Ultimately, Ryuichi Sakamoto was the

catalyst for Sylvian's reemergence. Sakamoto was working on his soundtrack for the film *Merry Christmas*, Mr. Lawrence, and asked his London friend for lyrics. "That forced me to write, which I'd been avoiding for some time," Sylvian admits. He also sang on "Forbidden Colours," the soundtrack's single.

Sylvian returned to his piano and guitar, "just inventing chords, writing the way I used to as a kid." Those homemade chords begat songs like "The Ink in the Well" and "Red Guitar," and were the roots of *Brilliant Trees*, his first solo album, in 1984. "The best thing about those chords is you haven't a clue what they are," he offers. "It's like working in the dark. You just sit and listen, searching for what's correct."

"I must admit," says horn player/composer Mark Isham, who's worked with Sylvian since *Brilliant Trees*, "that there's been a couple of times when it's taken me a while to figure out what the hell he's doing. The changes on 'Red Guitar,' for example, are very complex and non-traditional. There are certain accepted orders of chord relationships that most all music has, but this piece goes against all of those, and that gives it a wonderful mood and sense. But it was very, very difficult to learn."

The drafting of players like Isham and Kenny Wheeler for *Brilliant Trees* was a mark of Sylvian's growing passion for jazz. "I'd been listening to a lot of the ECM artists for the first time, and had caught up on the Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Bill Evans thing, and wanted to bring some of that feeling of immediacy into my work," he says. "In Japan, we were self-taught, but none of us could really improvise. I still can't, which is why I tend to give soloists lots of room."

"I'm not a good keyboard player, or guitarist for that matter, and if I allow myself to play on my own records it's because there's a quality in my playing that I don't think can be produced by someone who's more technically proficient. I like the idea of being an eternal amateur and allowing that to show through. It's very direct, very honest."

*Brilliant Trees* was a cult smash in Britain, but was never released in the States. Still, it caused a buzz in the underground here that intensified as bootleg copies of Sylvian's documentary on the Polaroid exhibits began circulating. Sylvian decided to re-edit that film to release a shorter, authorized version in Britain. Unsatisfied with its original soundtrack, he took the master tapes into a studio to rework them.

"I was having a lot of trouble with 'On the Way,'" says Sylvian. "My main prob-



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lem was looking for an instrument to solo through the track. Suddenly I thought of Robert Fripp, and I could just hear him there." Coincidentally, Fripp was in London doing a renegade tour of local record shops. "He came in the next evening and it worked magically.

"Afterwards Robert said, 'This has been most interesting. Do you have anything else for me?' I said no, but I had already been working on another project with [former Be-Bop Deluxe leader/guitarist] Bill Nelson, so I started writing songs with the idea of two guitarists working against each other." The Fripp/Nelson dichotomy can be heard on the brilliant *Gone to Earth*, with results that range from evocative to eviscerating.

*Gone to Earth's* popularity prompted Sylvian's first press tour, not a promising prospect for the retiring artist. Yet he returned from weeks of stumping feeling surprisingly recharged. "As soon as I got back, I started writing, and it was very, very easy. In three months I had a wealth of material and was ready to go back into the studio to record *Secrets of the Beehive*, which was a surprise to me. Normally it takes weeks to write a single song. The idea germinates and develops

in my mind long before I'm ready to sit at a piano. But each of these songs came in one sitting."

The songs on *Secrets of the Beehive* are relatively unadorned, despite the distinctive colorations of players like Sakamoto, Isham and avant-guitarist/composer David Torn, and the album's bedrock is acoustic piano and guitar. "Due to the highly lyrical nature of these songs, I wanted to be very careful about the arrangements," Sylvian insists. "I wanted to be sure none of the tracks lost their intimacy."

Preparing for his first solo tour at the time of this interview, Sylvian was, not surprisingly, nervous. He joked about "sorting out which songs will really work well live, which means it could be a very brief program."

Then again, not much has been easy in Sylvian's career. "Really, it's been a process of becoming secure in myself and trying not to fool anybody," he says. "You finally say, 'This is me, this is the way I am, this is the way I play, the way I sing.' You have to accept it, and try to put that across as openly as possible." ❧

## LEONARD from page 60

and Ferry painted a broad stereo panorama of shifting textures and subtly interlocking rhythms, propelled by layers and layers of percussion, guitars and other instruments. "Sometimes there are five or six people playing guitar," Leonard notes. "But we'd find one phrase from this guy and one note from another guy and another thing from someone else and just use what we liked. Pretty soon you have this thing that's unidentifiable because it's really not one person playing. It's just what we felt was the best moment from each player."

At their best, these carefully-wrought tracks provide a mood-drenched, cinematic backdrop for Ferry's world-weary romanticism. At other times, they threaten to obscure the artist and his material. This, apparently, is a criticism Leonard is used to hearing. "There's a lot of information there. And sometimes it's conceived as 'there's too much going on here.' But I see that as a personal problem. You can't listen to that much information? I'm sorry for you. It's fun to listen to that much information."

But isn't it possible for a production to smother the artist? "Sure. You just have to be very careful not to. That's part of the job. How far can you take it before it's not his record anymore?"

"I don't like to mess with the players a lot," he muses. "And I think that gives my records a little bit of distinction. I do

things that are sometimes sloppy—looser. I accept them because they feel good. I'm not going to second-guess myself. I only care about whether it feels good at the moment. Because you can fix anything. Technology is our friend when it comes to that." ❧

## SAMPLOID from page 36

jobs, with Time and Level values for each segment. The LFOs have the usual selection of waveforms, rate and LFO delay time options plus several ways to synchronize the LFO to note events. At the Tone level, you can add EQ and chorus, and the D-50's built-in reverb is quite a decent one, with 32 programs providing the usual range of ambiances.

Like the D-50, the SQ-80 gives you a pool of three LFOs and four envelopes as modulators. But the modulators are more freely assignable here. Each of the three oscillators per voice has its own DCA (digitally controlled amplifier). Each oscillator and DCA can have up to two modulation sources, regardless of whether it's playing a sampled or a synth sound, and the LFO can have a modulation source of its own, too.

The SQ-80 has what are basically four-segment envelopes with some interesting variations. For example, the Time parameter for segment four can be programmed with a "secondary release" to create reverb-style effects. You can also make the initial attack Time and/or all four Level parameters dependent on keyboard velocity. The outputs of all three oscillators, with all their modulations, can then be processed through a filter and given an overall, global amplitude envelope.

If you're talking modulation schemes, though, the Immanuel Kant Memorial Prize for Mind-Boggling Complexity *must* go to the Kurzweil 1000 Series. Virtually every parameter in the thing—and there are zillions—can be modulated by virtually every other parameter. And/or by any external MIDI controller. But, recognizing that this can get a bit daunting for programmers like our friend Goldie, Kurzweil built two different programming levels into the 1000 Series: Compiled Effects and Modular. Either one can be used in any of the four Layers. Compiled is the E-Z option. You select an effect by name—Chorus, Vibrato, etc.—and the appropriate modulation preset kicks in. You can also, however, tweak the settings and save the whole thing as a new, user-defined preset. So Compiled Effects is more than just a Dunce Pacifier.

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more extensive. It gives you individual control over all the machine's modulation modules. And as we said, there's a ton of them. Some are familiar ones. For example, there are two LFOs for each Layer, plus two global LFOs; two ADSRs per Layer, plus two global LFOs; and there are two 14-segment amplitude envelope generators (seven attack and seven release segments). But even these familiar modulation sources pack a few surprises. For instance, where the LFOs on the D-50 and SQ-80 give you four waveshapes, the 1000 Series LFOs give you 20 of them—including such exotic items as white, red, green and blue noise.

Then we have the modulators that aren't so familiar. Things like Invertors, which reverse the amplitude of a waveshape signal while leaving its sign (+ or -, above or below the zero line) unchanged. And Negators, which do just the opposite: reverse the sign while leaving the amplitude unchanged. Then there are Mixers which let you take any two modulators, mush them together and route them to any destination. So while a parameter like pitch can nominally have two modulators, you can use the Mixers to get a total of four mod-

ulators all screwing around with the pitch. (And this is just in one of four Layers, remember.) Then each of these modulators can be modulated by other modulators, modulated in turn by yet other modulators... You get the idea.

So you see, programming these new machines can be as simple as layering up a few exciting sounds—much as you already do with MIDI. Or as complex as using a large modular synth. And even if you consider yourself a pretty godlike programmer, you have to admit that there are times when working with fully developed ROM sounds sure beats kneading the protean mud of those old, basic Mini Moog waveforms. **M**

## ADDITIVE from page 40

dard odd and even harmonics. What does all this mean? Know how your guitarist friend is always ranting about the inimitable odd-harmonic distortion he gets from his pre-CBS Fender Vibrolux amp? Or how that ethnomusicologist twit you met at your last bad cocktail party prattled on about the unique harmonic series found only in Micronesian temple bells? Well, additive synthesis makes it relatively easy to

reduplicate these once-in-a-lifetime aural experiences.

Now, in addition to letting you set a volume level for each partial, additive synth will also provide some facility for changing it over time. That is to say, they give you **amplitude envelopes** for the partials. Using these, you can make some partials swell gradually and majestically as others fade out. It's this ability to change the harmonics over time that gives additive synthesis much of its realism. Amplitude envelopes for partials are often charted on a visual display that looks something like a mountain range, with a series of sloped ridges receding into the background.

On the Kurzweil system, each partial has its own envelope generator, called a Contour. Here Kurzweil went all the way over the top, giving each Contour a possible total of 2700 segments! With Softsynth you can construct amplitude *and* pitch envelopes for each partial. These have a more down-to-earth, but still quite impressive, 40 segments for amplitude envelopes and 15 envelopes for pitch envelopes. On the K5, partials don't get their own amplitude EGs. Instead, partials can be routed to any of eight six-segment amplitude EGs (four per Sound Source) and/or to an LFO.

These additive systems may differ in details, but they're all united on one key point: Never underestimate the power of the humble sine wave. **M**

## FM from page 46

you already know and love to sounds created via FM. Tie this all together by doing the step-by-step example in the box on page 46.

Of course, that's just one possible avenue of exploration—each algorithm offers its own possibilities. Call up some patches on your FM synth and analyze how the parameters are set. Turn off each operator, one by one, to see how that operator affects the sound. Vary parameters with abandon, but take note of how each parameter changes the overall voice. This will teach you how to tweak voices for your own particular application. For example, if you want a mellower sound, you'll know to turn down the output levels of the modulators. And don't forget the overall operator amplitude can be tied to velocity, and adding some LFO in the right places can do wonders. Also check out keyboard rate and level tracking, both of which are helpful when trying to achieve sounds that resemble acoustic instruments. From this point, though, you're in the "edit zone." **M**

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