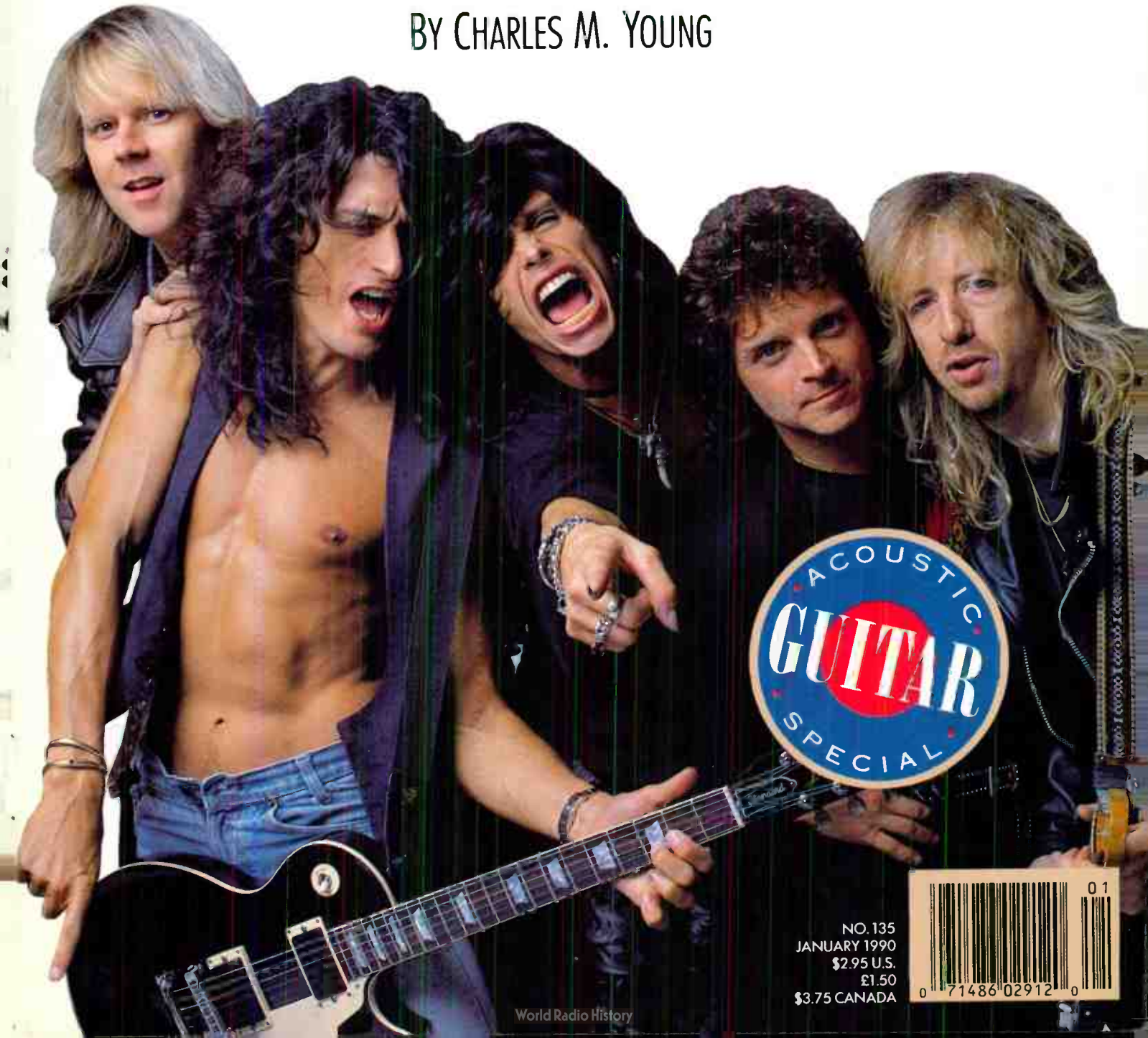
MICHAEL HUTCHENCE HEADS UNDERGROUND

MUSICIAN

THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF AEROSMITH

BY CHARLES M. YOUNG



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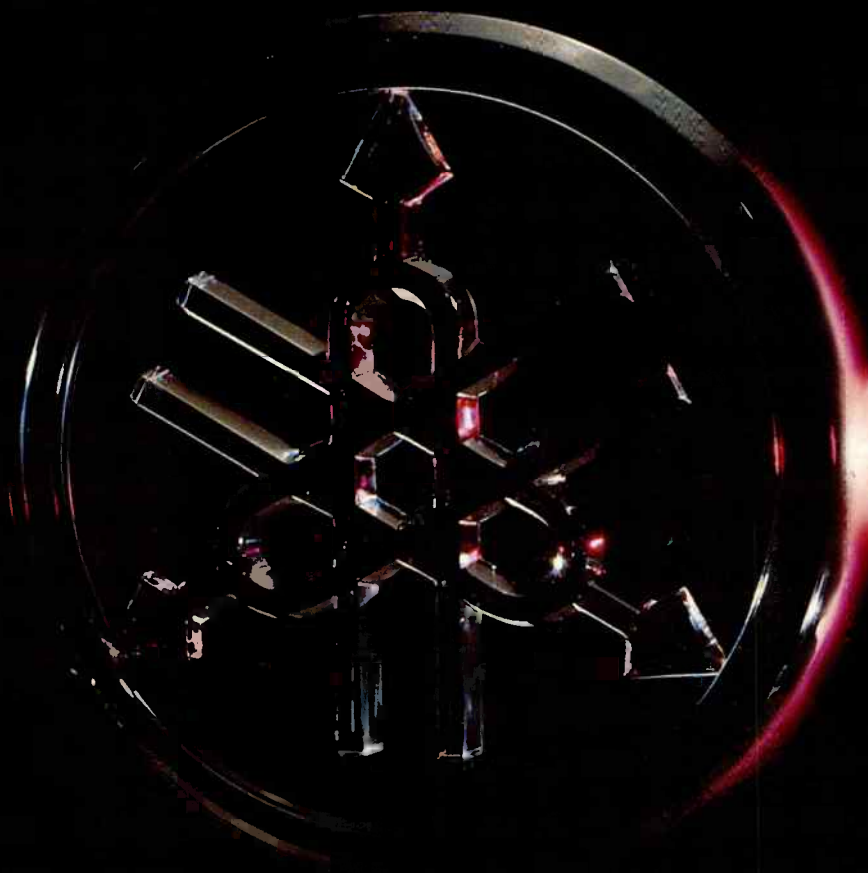

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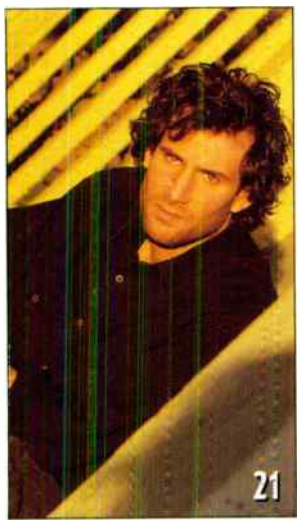

Working Musician

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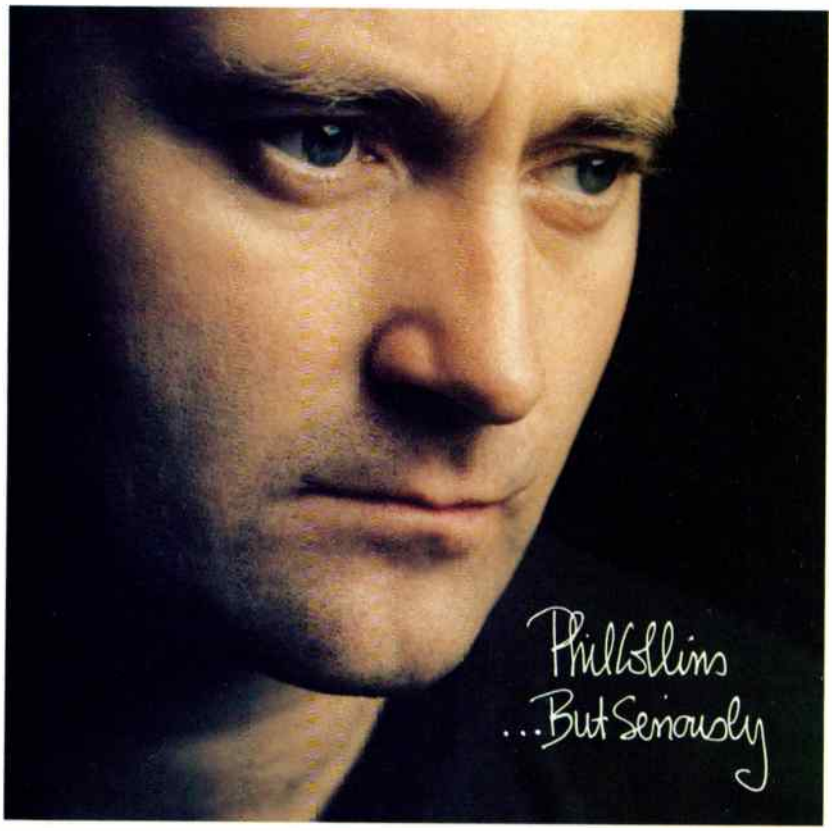

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PHOTO ASSOCIATE

MAIN OFFICE/PRODUCTION/RETAIL SALES
33 COMMERCIAL ST.
GLOUCESTER, MA 01930
(508) 281-3110

NEW YORK ADVERTISING/EDITORIAL
MUSICIAN, 1515 BROADWAY, 39TH FL.,
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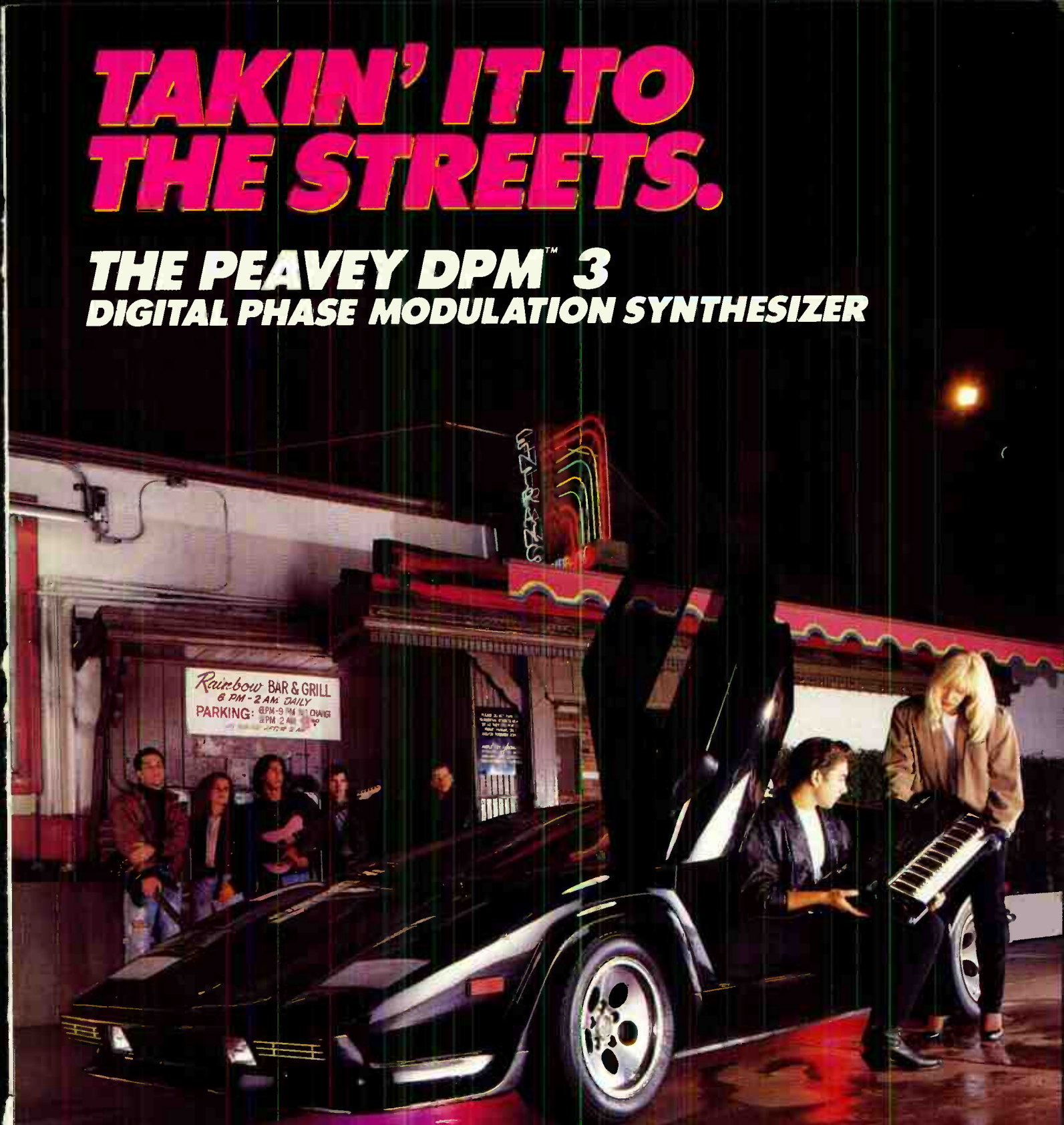

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LETTERS

Houses of the Henley

A MILLION THANKS to Bill Flanagan for a powerful, funny and insightful interview with Don Henley (Oct. '89). Kudos also to Messrs. Souther and Campbell for "The Heart of the Matter," which hits the nail on the head as far as the ends of relationships go.

And people ask me why I read *Musician* . . .

R. Diaz
Los Angeles, CA

THERE MAY BE something to Don Henley's theory that personal unhappiness can have a positive effect on one's music: As brilliant as *I Can't Stand Still* and *Building the Perfect Beast* are, they simply cannot touch *The End of the Innocence*, which I found to be scalding and touching, very mature, and even a little heartbreaking. Therefore, in a selfless one-woman effort to assure the future of the American Popular Song, I have reluctantly decided *not* to ask Henley to marry me. (He probably wouldn't agree to a haircut anyway.)

Jane O'Toole
Munhall, PA

I AM EXTREMELY offended by the comment made about Jennifer Condos in the sidebar article about the Don Henley band: "You're not interested in talking equipment? Okay, get back on the *girls*' bus, then."

I have known numerous male performers who were excellent songwriters and/or performers, but completely bewildered by, and had no desire to talk about, the specs of their instruments or equipment. Jennifer Condos has been playing on major tours for quite a while and deserves better from your writer. If Miles Davis didn't want to talk about the P.A. system he was playing his trumpet through, would you tell him to get back on the black persons' bus?

Mandy Mercier
Studio City, CA

I THOUGHT Peter Townshend was an asshole until I read Bill Flanagan's interview with Don Henley. Henley's assertion that adultery is a personality trait of great leaders has to be the dumbest shit I have ever read! Henley knows this from personal experience? Or was this something he learned from Gary Hart?

P.J. Bishop
New Haven, CT

Tough Love

WHEN I SAW that there was an article on Love and Rockets (Oct. '89), I thought, "Here we go again; another chance for Love and Rockets to write off their days with Bauhaus as a waste of time, and to slag off Peter Murphy." And that's just what they did, except this time writer Alan di Perna helped by making unqualified comments about Murphy's vocal abilities.

Chances are very good that di Perna has not listened to any of Murphy's solo material, so of course he wouldn't know that Murphy has one of the most expressive voices in music today. Perhaps he prefers the monotone melodies Love and Rockets are very adept at producing repeatedly. I have never read a Peter Murphy article where he discredits the abilities of his ex-Bauhaus bandmates. Learn some manners, Love and Rockets!

Jackie DeBeer
St. Petersburg, FL

No Cream Puff

YOUR INTERESTING article on Paul Jackson, Jr. (Oct. '89) was ruined by Alan di Perna's offensive postulation that Michael Jackson comes off publicly "like a lobotomized marshmallow." I think you owe Michael Jackson an apology.

Mary Coghlan
Warwick, NY

Nitty Scritti

PAUL JACKSON, JR. is a premiere guitarist. It was funny to read how everyone mentions Scritti Politti to him. I did the guitars on the original demos as well as half of *Cupid & Psyche 85*, and yes—I "kachanged" all over those demos! They knew *exactly* what they wanted.

Nicky Moroch
Yonkers, NY

Puns and Needles

WHY, OH *WHY* does Alan di Perna insist on saddling his technical articles with cheesy attempts at parody replete with clichéd gags and bad puns? Frankly, di Perna isn't the wit he might think himself to be, and his feeble humor serves only to frustrate readers looking for useful information about the often confusing developments in the music industry.

Wes King
Milton, VT

Living in Stereo

THE "GUIDE to Stereo Types" (Oct. '89) was the most baldfaced real commentary on musicians I've read since the Keith Richards interview—then you end it with Keith himself. So funny and so true!

Michael Mooney
Oakland, CA

It's Easy to Criticize

WITH REGARD TO Chris Morris' review of John Lee Hooker's new album *The Healer* (Oct. '89): As "the culprits involved," we did not "opt for the marquee glitter of big-name sideman" and it's unfortunate that Morris got so vehement without checking out the real story.

This album came about because Van Morrison, Carlos Santana and George Thorogood independently expressed a desire to work with John on a recording project. (Morrison's schedule precluded his appearance here although he just taped several songs with John for a BBC television special.) Bonnie Raitt, Robert Cray, Canned Heat, Los Lobos and Charlie Musselwhite, all long-time friends of John, were eager to join the project as well. These artists have all performed live with John Lee, in many cases prior to his association with his current band.

These collaborations were based on mutual admiration and what all parties involved felt was "sympathetic accompaniment." While writers frequently criticize new artists for not moving forward, it's unfortunate that some insist their legends remain in whatever happens to be their own favorite mold.

Roy Rogers
Mike Kappus
San Francisco, CA

IF CHARLES M. YOUNG would have bothered to do a bit of reading beforehand, he would have discovered that Latino Bugger Veil—referred to as "whoever and whatever" in his review of the Butthole Surfers' *Double Live* (Oct. '89)—are in fact the Surfers themselves!

His comment then that the band in question would have their "mystique" destroyed by releasing an album recorded on DAT that includes "a semi-historical booklet with recognizable photographs" only further illustrates his ignorance.

One would think that a music writer of such experience and repute would be more conscientious.

Peter Cady
Toronto, Canada

Charles M. Young replies: "It was an inside joke, not a mistake. Apologies to anyone who was misled."

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FACES

SOUL II SOUL

Roots of an evolution

HOWEVER INNOVATIVE his music might seem to American ears, Soul II Soul's Jazzie B figures he's just a product of his environment: London. "You get influenced by the things around you, and those things develop," he says. "I listened to a lot of reggae music in the early days, and that was the music I was brought up with; as I grew up I listened to other music. So it's a combination of all these different things that have been, I guess, part of our culture."

Although he feels "a lot of people in [Britain] would understand its musical background," the stylistic variety packed into Soul II Soul's *Keep On Movin'* took stateside listeners completely by surprise. Offering "a different type of groove in effect," the album juxtaposed reggae basslines with hip-hop beats, James Brown breakdowns, even African polyrhythms. It's an ambitious blend, but an intensely personal one, stemming, he says, "from the roles different things played at particular stages of my life."

Yet as personal as Soul II Soul's stylistic fusion might have been, Jazzie B found his audience almost immediately.

"For years I had my own sound system, my own clubs, and I had, at least in London, my own market. And they were looking for something fresh too. So it wasn't hard at all. This is something I've been involved in for 11 years now."

Despite Soul II Soul's success in America, Jazzie B isn't much interested in pandering to this (hugely profitable) market. "The problem with America is that they tend to formulate everything, and it does work like a conveyor-belt situation," he complains. So as he assembles Soul II Soul's second album, he'll be "putting back those diverse little plans where the sound is *not* the norm. The things that trigger me off are when I hear something completely different. So those moves are really important, especially to listeners who go out there and listen. They don't want to hear the normal thing either."

—J.D. Considine

BEATLES SUITS UNRAVEL

THE "ALL IN the Family" of music-biz lawsuits has come to an end. On November 8 a tersely-worded press release from EMI Music Worldwide announced simply that chairperson Bhaskar Menon and George Harrison, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and Yoko Ono Lennon—if not their lawyers—were "very pleased" to settle all their lawsuits.

The settlement stipulates that none of the parties involved, or their representatives or advisors, comment on the resolution—apart from a statement by Menon that EMI "look[s] forward to the continuation of our long standing and close relationship with the artists and Apple." The ex-Beatles and Capitol-EMI had been at each other's throats longer than the Beatles were together. Alleged unpaid royalties, the use of songs to promote beer and sneakers, compact-disc scheduling—you name it, the Fabs and their record company probably slugged it out on paper. More relevantly for music lovers, this sudden thaw means that Capitol will finally release previously unissued (except on bootlegs, of course) Beatles recordings. In the words of John Lennon: Happy Xmas (War Is Over).

—Scott Isler

Illustrations: Whitney Sherman; Photograph: L. Lacky/LFI

World Radio History

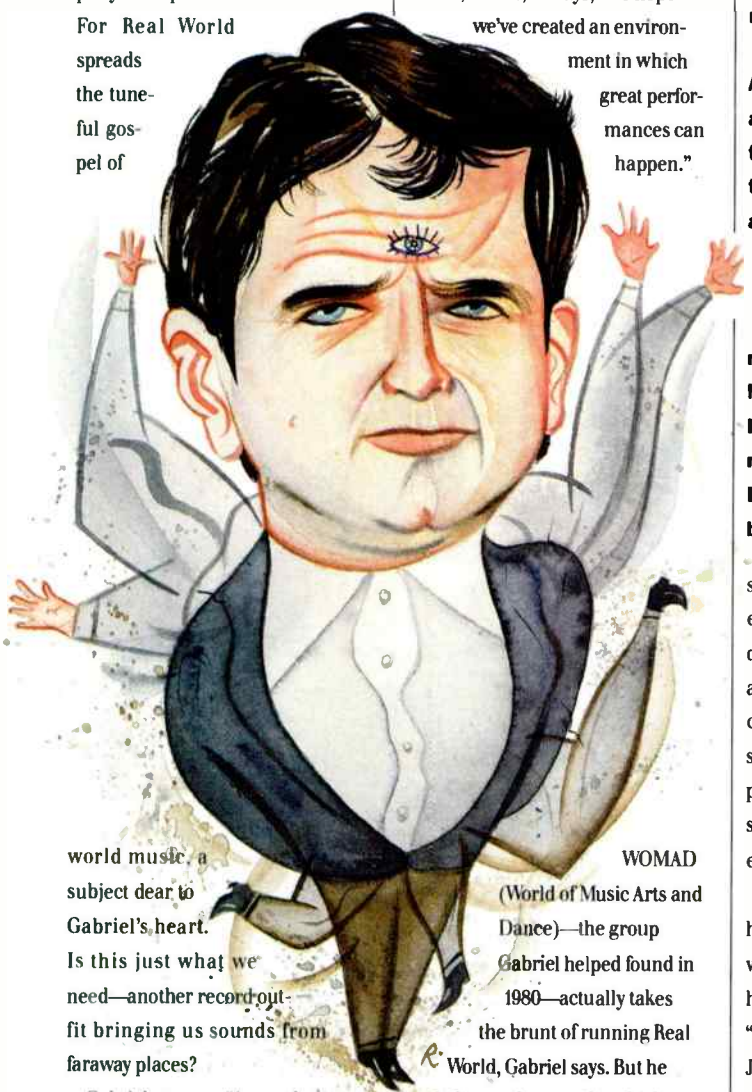
PETER GABRIEL DANCES CROSS-CULTURALLY

FIRST OF ALL, Real World Records is *not* Peter Gabriel's label. "It's a label in which I'm a participant," the singer declares in his soft-spoken manner. "I'm a part-timer. But I can get interviews more easily," he laughs.

Good as his word, Gabriel has been stumping for the young company with political fervor. For Real World spreads the tuneful gospel of world music, a subject dear to Gabriel's heart. Is this just what we need—another record outfit bringing us sounds from faraway places?

Gabriel says yes: "As much as world music/world beat has gained in popularity, there are still hundreds of thousands of really talented artists that can't make a living as international artists."

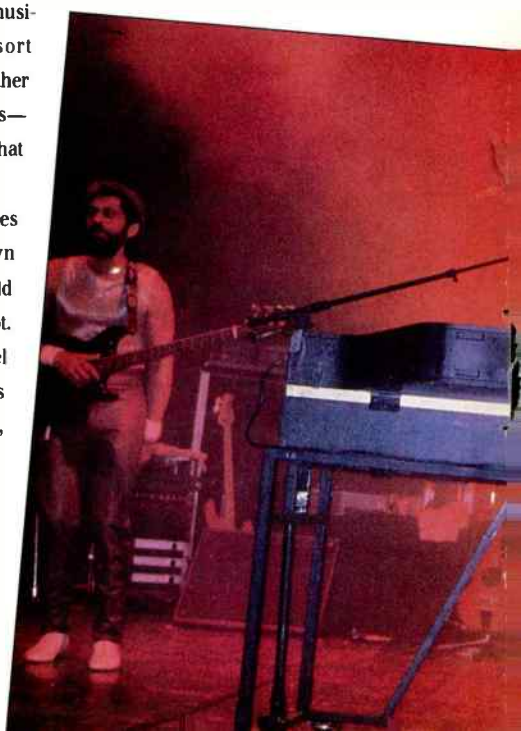
Real World will try to help at least some of them. The label's first batch of releases, distributed by Virgin, include such big names in the world-music scene as Cuba's Orquesta Revé, Pakistan's Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Zaire's Tabu Ley Rochereau. The last two were recorded in Gabriel's own Wiltshire, England studio, where, he says, "we hope we've created an environment in which great performances can happen."



WOMAD (World of Music Arts and Dance)—the group Gabriel helped found in 1980—actually takes the brunt of running Real World, Gabriel says. But he helps set the agenda, which includes a desire to throw musicians from different cultures together to see what happens.

"Most music is ethnic fusion," Gabriel says. "When one group sees someone else's culture they try to emulate bits of it. They don't get it quite right but end up generating another form. The idea that musicians or artists of any sort shouldn't take ideas from other people, places or cultures—shouldn't respond to things that excite them—is crazy."

Music from various cultures has enriched Gabriel's own work. Perhaps with Real World he can repay the artistic debt. "It's never gonna be Michael Jackson or Madonna," he says of the music's chances here, "but there is no reason at all why a lot of these artists shouldn't receive the stature of someone like Bob Marley. Reggae now has a foundation in our music culture. That's what I'd like to see with a lot of these artists."—*Scott Isler*



CANCELLED DATE

WELL, WE warned you not to expect a DAT recorder for Christmas (*Faces*, Oct. '89). The summer breakthrough between hardware and software manufacturers concerning an anti-copying device on home digital audio tape decks reckoned without other powerful parts of the music industry.

The National Music Publishers' Association, for one, immediately attacked the agreement between the Electronic Industries Association and Recording Industry Association of America that DAT machines employ the Serial Copy Management System. SCMS permits limited copying of copyrighted digital recordings. The NMPA, its music-licensing arm the Harry Fox Agency, and performing-rights organizations ASCAP and BMI have advocated a royalty on blank tape to counteract home taping of commercial recordings.

The most recent development in the continuing saga to introduce DAT machines in the U.S. has been: stalemate. On October 18 RIAA officials met with members of NMPA and the Songwriters Guild of America to iron out their differences. They didn't get very far. The RIAA—aware of an ambivalent Congressional report on home taping—refused to include a royalty provision in its proposed bill requiring the use of SCMS. The Senate Copyright Subcommittee rejected the RIAA draft anyway because it wasn't specific enough. The RIAA rewrote the bill and resubmitted it.

Don't throw out your cassette decks.—*Scott Isler*

World Radio History

HUGH MASEKELA

In and out of Africa

RECORDING DUETS with Herb Alpert, hitting the Top 10 with a breezy instrumental, exploring disco-jazz in the '70s—these are hardly some of the options listed in the Jazzman's Book of Appropriate Career Moves. And Hugh Masekela is the first to admit that his fascination with pop hasn't always worked to his satisfaction.

"There are some great rhythm & blues songs where you can still inflect the jazz and African feeling in there," the trumpeter says in his growl of a voice. "But on some past albums I would just float between all these musics and make it sound trite. With these songs, I didn't."

"These songs" are the sleek township jive and quiet-storm R&B covers that comprise the bandleader's first album for RCA's Novus label, *Uptownship*. Recorded with his year-old band, Kalahari, the album finds Masekela dispensing with his recent techno sheen in favor of stripped-down vamps highlighting his graceful flugelhorn and cornet lines.

While some may bristle at a plush "Ooh Baby Baby" alongside a freedom chant, the 50-year-old musician says it's perfectly natural for someone who spent his early years in South Africa listening to Bennie Moten and Cab Calloway 78s. "I grew up with a heavy traditional thing, but on an urban level," says Masekela, who currently divides his time between Botswana, London and Harlem. "The guys I grew up with in the early '40s were nicknamed Duke and Satch, and we were heavy movie fans. We had a lot of input from the West; it was forced upon you by the industrialized situation."

After leaving his native country at the dawn of the '60s, Masekela found mainstream success with his 1968 hit "Grazing in the Grass" and also played on the Byrds' "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star," a result of his friendship with David Crosby. He returned to Africa in the early '70s to begin a musical re-education that culminated in his participation in Paul Simon's *Graceland* tour and the hit musical *Sarafina!*

Still, don't count on Masekela staying put: He's already considering an album devoted to R&B covers in the mode of one of his favorite records, *Clifford Brown with Strings*. "When I was young, I almost lost focus," he reflects. "Now I can't afford to."

—David Browne

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MAZE

Doin' what comes naturally

THERE'S A VAGUE sheepishness in Frankie Beverly's voice as he defends the use of a drum machine on *Silky Soul*, the new album by his band Maze.

"Unlike what you hear on the radio today," he says, "where they just get a groove and add a synthesized bass and a synthesized guitar sound, I worked for *weeks* just getting it to sound and act like it was a real drummer playing." He notes that the rest of the instrumentation on the album is as wholesome and all-natural as oat bran. And like a kid caught with his fingers in the cookie jar, Beverly finishes with a promise that he won't do it anymore because "I do want to hear natural music and natural sounds."

Maze has a long track record of smooth, "natural" music, fronted by the silk-and-burlap dichotomy of Beverly's tenor. That's why his explanation of that drum machine is a little abashed: Beverly doesn't want anyone to think he's trying to become the next Bobby Brown, not after giving crossover commerciality the backside of his hand for better than 10 years. "There's a difference," he points out, "between makin' records and making music.

"It's just a question of being true to yourself. Some of us aren't meant to be number one and have multiple-platinum records and all that kind of stuff. I'm able to live with myself because I can accept that. A great artist doesn't follow trends. An artist *sets* trends."

In critical circles, much is made of an act's ability to move ahead, to foreshadow the future. But Frankie Beverly, the stubborn artiste, has spent the better part of his career standing still. Musically he remains what he always was—and he likes it like that.

"You can't change your shit up, man. You have one thing. You don't have three and four of 'em, you have one thing. You got to pace that and you got to be true to that, and it'll take care of you."

So far, so good.

—Leonard Pitts, Jr.

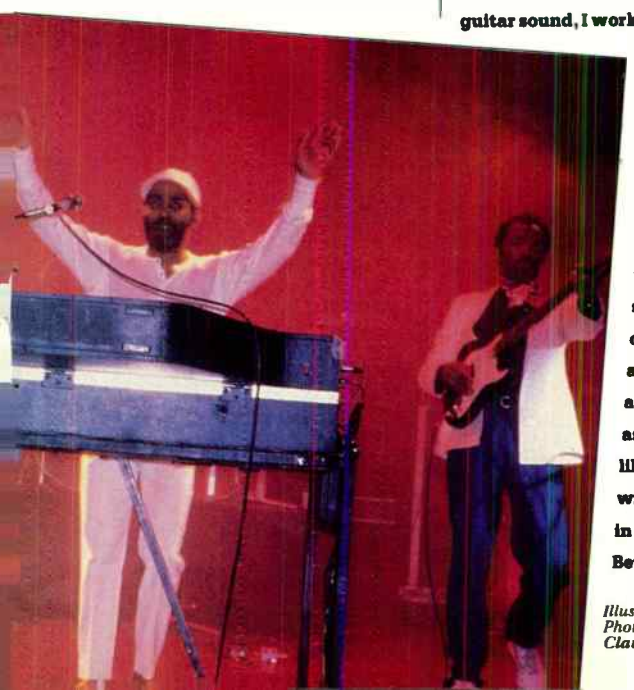


Illustration: Russell O. Jones; Photographs (l to r): Bliss Morris/LGI; Claudia Thompson

World Radio History

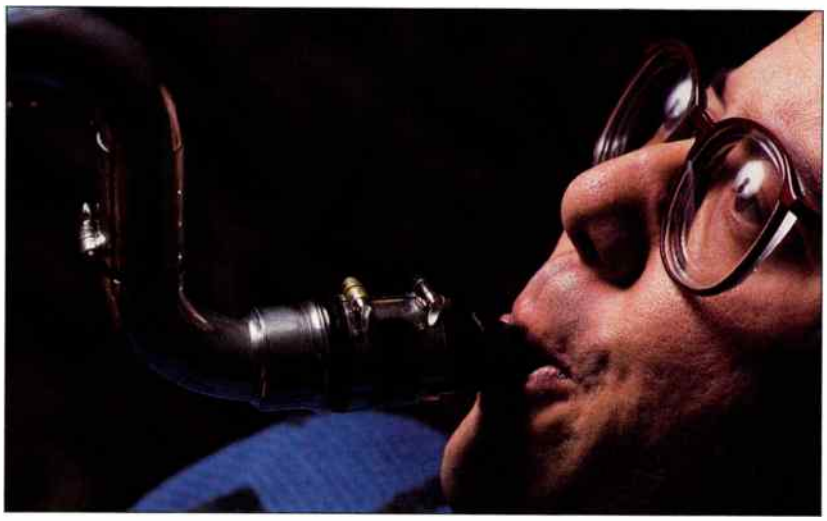
Marty Ehrlich's Delicate Balance

NYC's most underrated reedman walks a jazz tightrope

BY

Jim Macnie

"SWING IS NOT an anachronism," says Marty Ehrlich. "But remember, there are many, many different ways to swing." The 34-year-old multi-reedist/composer should know: He uses about a dozen of them. Parts of Ehrlich's language are cornerstones of the jazz vernacular, others are very much his own creation. Mixed as they are on his latest album *Traveler's Tale* (Enja), they reroute your expectations, generating profound excitement.



"There are many different ways to swing."

At a time when the jazz scene is somewhat compartmentalized—acousticlassicism, outfunk, repertory, spontaneous improv—Ehrlich comes off as a guy who not only gets the big picture, but has found a way to put it in focus. His quartet—which includes reedist Stan Strickland, bassist Lindsay Horner and percussionist Bobby Previte—has been working Ehrlich's combinations for a while now, but in the past year they've really figured out how to pick the locks. There's only one thing you can do when someone creates that kind of artistic breakthrough: Take him out and buy him a beer.

"Well, it's nice that it's being recognized a bit," Ehrlich says, sitting at a sidewalk cafe table on Manhattan's Lower East Side. "These days I do feel that I have enough experience with different musics to bring about my strongest stuff. I hate playing in any one style," he goes on. "You know, now I'm going to swing, now pretty, now noisy. That doesn't seem to be the point."

Ehrlich not only has respect for, but firsthand experience with, those various styles. Gleaning jazz history's most useful components—the exuberance of a free-jazz blowing match, the romantic expressiveness of a '40s ballad, the irresistibility of an R&B stomp, the structural integrity of the conservatory—he provides the kinds of insights that explain their interrelationship. There is nothing glib about their deployment either; Ehrlich's not a trendy or one who hears irony in traditional references. His music is earnest, and the power of its honesty knocks you back a step or two.

"I'd rather not worry about whether I'm being consciously traditional or consciously avant-garde," he says. "I have a lot of influences, and my biggest enemy would be the restriction of language. Over the years I've found myself playing the devil's advocate: the wild guy in the more traditional groups and the traditional guy in very avant-garde situations."

Ehrlich's résumé tells his story. For the last decade, he's been one of the most highly regarded players in New York, a regular in the large ensembles of Muhal Richard Abrams and Anthony Davis, a key member of John Carter's group. He functions differently within each, and, because he plays six different instruments (alto and tenor saxes, clarinet and bass clarinet, flute and alto flute), he commands a broad tonal palette as well. "I'm a good section player—I think that's why those kind of composers use me. But I was under pressure from the beginning to develop an individual voice, and I think they realize that."

The beginning was St. Louis, where Ehrlich was a high school band member with a yen for poetry. His exchange of ideas with the poet Malinke Elliott got him hooked up with members of the Black Artists Group, a collective with decidedly open methods of operation. Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake and Hamiet Bluiett were all participants, and Ehrlich picked up pointers. "I don't remember playing many compositions—extending into sound is what was going on," he recalls. "There were afternoons that we would spend just playing percussion and saxes in the park. In the same way there's a pressure to conform in your playing these days, there was the pressure *not* to conform in St. Louis. When I started improvising I was

Photograph: Russell Fine

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drawn to the high-energy players, John Gilmore, Pharoah Sanders; I wanted to get the same kind of visceralness, but obviously at the age of 16 that was impossible."

Ehrlich got something more precious: an open mind. His studies at the New England Conservatory in Boston ("immeasurably important seeing how people like Jaki Byard and George Russell put their music together") introduced him to a bop-smitten world. A lot of fine musicians go to school and become academic snobs, but Ehrlich's previous experiences gave him a better sense of balance. "One can make an argument that bebop has technically involved aspects that separates it from those who can't play," he notes. "But that doesn't invalidate another approach to music."

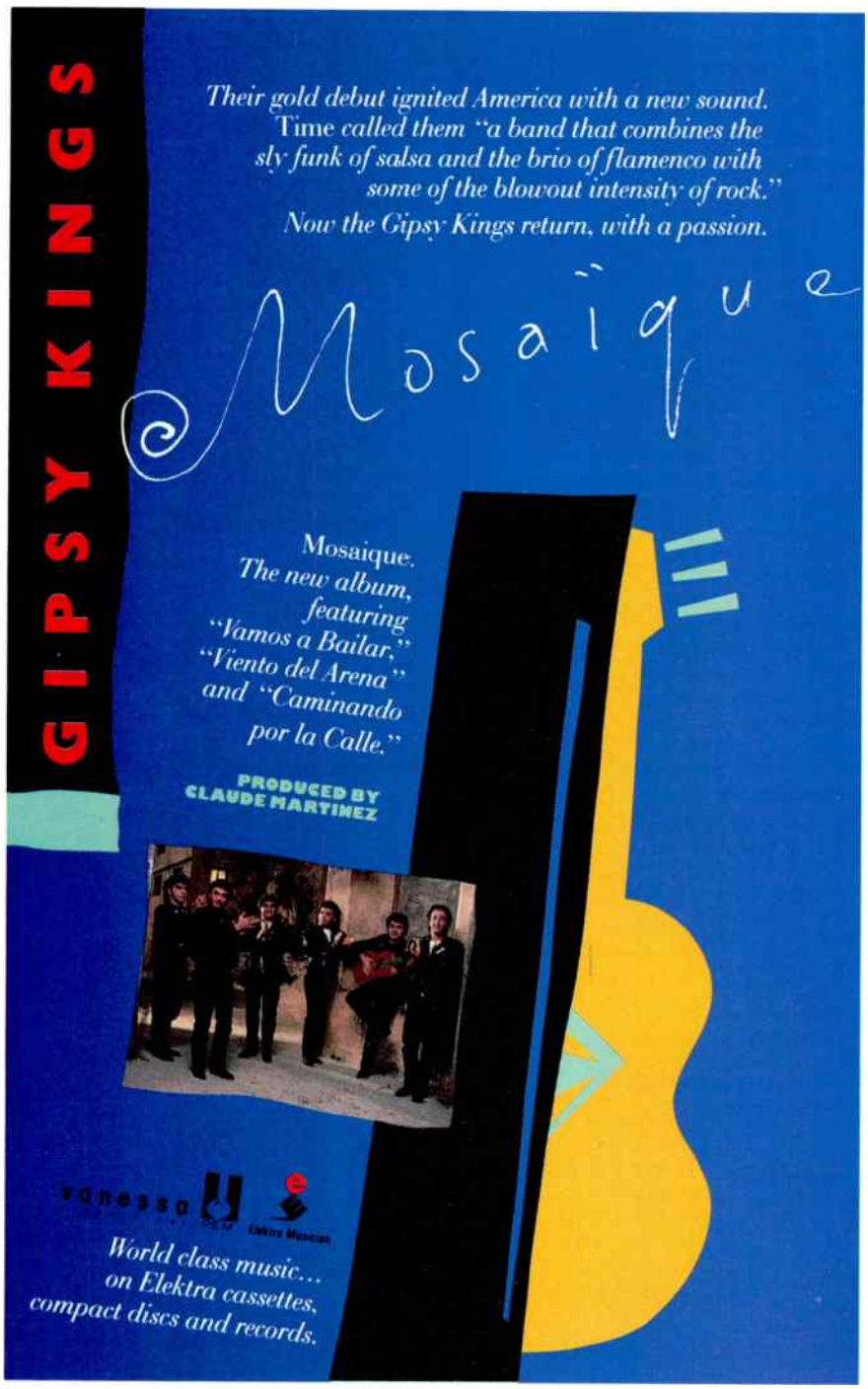
With some of those other approaches up his sleeve, he took off to New York and soon found his place in the scene, working with Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins and Leo Smith, among others. Better, he found like-minded cohorts to grow with. An early-'80s duet record with bassist John Lindberg proved that even in a bare-bones setting Ehrlich's improvising could be fascinating. "That's one of the most important aspects of development," he says. "You've got to have people to bounce ideas off of." By 1986 and *The Welcome*, his first record as a leader, he had a valise full of provocative compositions and a decidedly personal view on the way they should be played.

"Improvising is about the moment and self-revelation," he suggests. "I often think of Ornette's solos on *The Shape of Jazz to Come*: There's nothing prearranged, but they're ideal. In school they talk about a piece where you can't take any notes out—that's what happens in those solos, and that's what I strive for. I would much rather risk the solo not getting off the ground than resorting to licks. I'm turned off by players who have a certain thing they do no matter what. Every grouping of musicians should imply some adjustments in one's playing. Every piece sets up its own language."

That's a fair critique of what happens on the bandstand with the Ehrlich Quartet. Strickland, a Boston musician who should be better known, also plays a handful of woodwinds: "We share a strong lyrical sense, and phrase well together too," Ehrlich says. "The band is kind of defined by that." But the action comes from all four musicians playing the hand that Marty's tunes deal out. After everyone gets involved in the theme statement, there might be bass/flute passages, or solo tenor sax statements, or investigatory percussion forays, or two-horn swoops, or .... "Booker Little said the more dissonance, the more emotion. Which doesn't mean that you always go for the extremes. As an artist you should have some kind of intuition as to where the balance lies. That's why the transitions are crucial; they have a job to accomplish. When the band is familiar with the elements at hand, we can change them at will."

Despite his background, Ehrlich never bought into the reverse snobbery that sometimes surrounds the avant-garde. The band can bounce and swing. "To me there are a lot of ways more radical than just finding a language that's 'cutting edge.' I'm more interested in how people interact in their playing. The great improvisers have the ability to transform information, to take the littlest thing and run. At this point I can hear within 15 seconds whether someone can improvise or not, be it over the 'Honeysuckle Rose' changes or balloons on guitar strings.

"It's great when players [cont'd on page 35]



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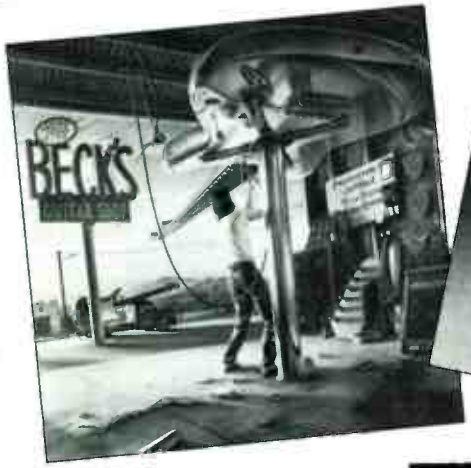

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NOISEMAKERS

Peter Himmelman's Quest for Fire

An unorthodox rocker gets his spiritual chops together

BY

Steve Perry

JOURNEYS—literal and figurative—have counted prominently in Peter Himmelman's life. There was his visit to Israel at the age of nine, where he felt the first stirrings of a life-long spiritual quest; later there was his move to the East Coast at 24 to pursue a record deal. But the journey that launched Himmelman toward his third Island album, *Synesthesia*, began in a car in New Jersey. It was 1984, and Himmelman's band, the power-poppish Sussman Lawrence, had recently relocated from its hometown of Minneapolis. They were gigging, they were hustling for a deal, and nothing much was happening. "We'd been slugging away," he remembers, "giving flowers to agents' secretaries, developing a little name for ourselves.

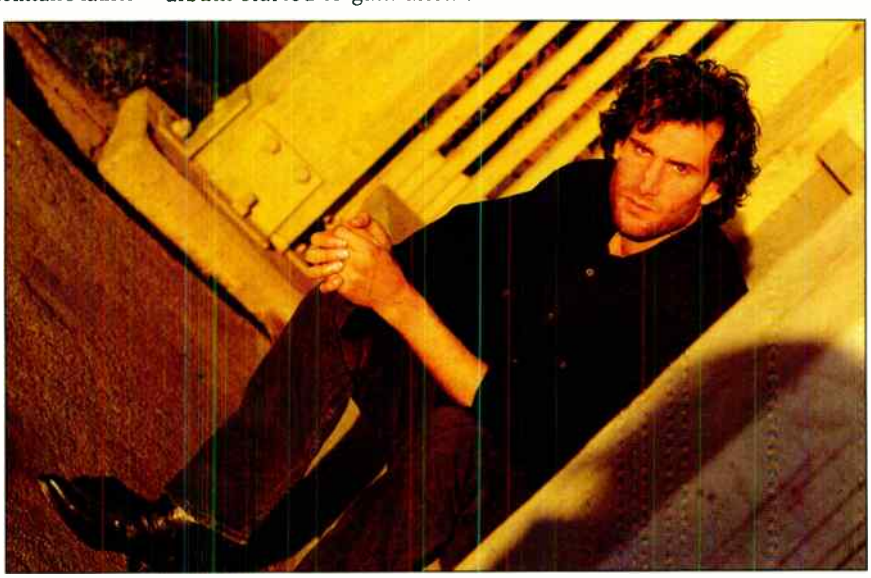
"And I remember one day as we were crossing the Tappan Zee Bridge, one of the guys in the band said to me, 'Why should we follow you? We don't have a record deal. Why should we accept your ideas?' As soon as he said that, I realized it was true. And by the same token, why should I hold myself back? That incident said to me, you better just get goin' and do what you have to do—whether it's getting a record deal or just doing what's on your mind and not stopping for other people."

The recent death of Himmelman's father after a long bout with lymphoma had been pushing him in the same direction. "We moved out to New York shortly after it happened," he says, "so in a physical sense I'd moved away from that experience. And maybe I thought that was a substitute for whatever moving on I needed to do. It probably took me three years to realize that wasn't enough. It wasn't a matter of getting over grief; it was realizing that you've got to move on, get out of these co-dependent relationships in your life. Your father is dead. You're a man now. You've got to be responsible for yourself. It took—well, it's gonna take me the rest of my life. That's an infinite process. But it took me three years to make a change in a musical context."

That change came with the 1986 release of *This Father's Day*, a stark yet lyrical song cycle dedicated to Himmelman's father and released under his own name. (The band, then as now, was the same aggregate of friends and relatives that had performed as Sussman Lawrence.) The title track was a love song for his father, but the whole record was a departure, shucking the pop mannerisms and facile wit that defined Himmelman's earlier music—at least the music he'd exposed publicly. "I had been going in that direction for some time," he admits now, "almost carrying on two parallel careers. One I just kept to myself, writing songs I really wouldn't play for anybody.

"Then one day somebody brought me to these psychics. I told 'em I had this song I'd written for my father. I knew it was great, because they played it at his funeral, and I had seen people who wouldn't even laugh in a realistic way—wouldn't even smile, had no reality to 'em at all—I saw them stripped down by this song, and crying. But I never played it for anybody else, really. These psychics said, 'Why don't you put it out?' And for some reason, the whole thing was clear. That in itself lifted me up and opened a gate, so that I had a future in a way. Not as a musician, just as a human."

Himmelman put out *This Father's Day* on his own label, but after MTV picked up the clip of the "Eleventh Confession" single, the album started to gain attention. Island signed him to a deal and promptly re-released the record. Himmelman was thrilled by the validation, but somehow it felt more like a departure than an arrival. And it felt bigger than music. He got on a plane and returned to Israel.



"You've got to be responsible for yourself."

Photograph: Lynn Goldsmith/LGI

World Radio History

"Everyone thought I'd blown my mind," he laughs ruefully. "To me it made sense. I'd been going for a record deal for about 15 years, and I'd finally reached this certain plateau. So I did the first thing I was compelled to do, which was to pick back up on this search that I'd dropped 10 years earlier." As a teenager Himmelman had briefly studied Jewish law under an Orthodox Lubavitcher rabbi from St. Paul; his regimen included wearing phylacteries—leather boxes containing handwritten passages from the Torah—on his head and arm during daily prayer sessions. At the time it felt illicit and a little silly.

"I was 14 or 15," he says, "and I used to go downstairs and smoke pot and blow it out the bathroom window. This felt the same way—sort of a covert operation, real weird. *Nobody* was doing it, and I didn't have the resolve to be completely independent and carve my own path. So I dropped it, but I never lost sight of the fact that it might be important: these laws, this study of a thing that millions of people have died for.

"At the point where I decided to put out this record, it wasn't so much that this new thing was manifest in my music specifically. It was manifest in all walks of my life. One of the things that was latent was this search; it wasn't new. It was a core issue inside me that merely found expression when I got confidence. When people put their stamp of approval on my music, that seemed to say in a symbolic sense, 'Well, jeez, why not just come out of the closet with all this?'"

The juxtaposing of Orthodox Judaism with near-celebrity in the ephemeral firmament of pop has struck some people as a contradiction, but not Himmelman. "The issue has been raised, how is it you could have any freedom as an artist with all these restrictions you place on yourself—about not playing on Friday nights, eating only kosher food, and so on? How does that jibe with rock 'n' roll? So I came up with this analogy:

"There's two musicians sitting at a table. One guy is this ultra-hipster from the East Village, and he's continually talking about the unfettered nature of his music. It breaks all conventions. It's boundless. It's so revolutionary and free that it's just mind-blowing.

"On the other side of the table is this 70-year-old man. He says to the hipster, 'That's an interesting concept you have. My concept is quite different. I have a set boundary for my music; it takes place on an instrument called the piano, which has a mere 88 keys. I play the same way people have been playing for 500 years. And what's more, I sit in a certain posture and do it religiously, six to eight hours a day since I was five years old.' The hipster is laughing now; how could the old guy's music be anything but conservative—or worse?

"So the old guy says, 'If you'd care to play me some music, I'd love to hear what you're all about.' The other guy stutters and stammers about how unbounded it is. He comes up with all these excuses, but he doesn't really have any music at all. Then the old guy sits down at the piano, and sure enough, he's a virtuoso. He burns the hipster's brains out. Because through that structure, and only through that, is he allowed a glimpse, a chance at creating the illusion of infinity."

So it is that Himmelman chases after that glimpse himself. His second Island album, *Gematria* (1987), was expressly involved with philosophical/spiritual themes; his latest, *Synesthesia*, is more interested in relationships between people, but it's unmistakably steeped in his renewed studies of Jewish law and spirituality, even if it never mentions them explicitly. The title cut, which counsels engagement both with one's own inner voice *and* with the world, sets the context for all that follows. It also speaks to a misconception toward Himmelman that he feels from some writers and fans.

"People talk about spirituality as if it's a thing apart from either reality or physicality," he complains, "and that's a very misbegotten notion. The truly Jewish notion is to come into the world—be in business, be a journalist—but imbue that with a certain spiritual intent. Don't have these things be hollow and devoid of purpose.

"Spirituality's like a hippie thing now, and it's just as bad, just as useless, as materialism. The fusion of this physical world and a world of spirit, that's just reality." Himmelman stops himself, chuckling with resignation. "Let's leave it at that," he adds finally. "I just would *not* call myself a spiritual type of guy." Ⓜ

JEW'S HARPS

HIMMELMAN plugs a '73 Les Paul Standard and a Fender Tele and Strat into a Marshall JCM 800 Lead Series amp, and uses a Roland GP-8 processor with an EC-100 MIDI foot controller. He also plays a Martin and a Vox 12-string.

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AEROSMITH

ROCK 'N' R

BY CHARLES M. YOUNG

These are the supplements here, and these are the vitamins here," says Joey Kramer, opening a plastic box subdivided into a dozen little cubicles filled with pills and capsules. "This is Immune System Formula One, this is B-5, this is evening primrose oil, this is C, this is an adrenal supplement, this is B-6 . . ."

Muscular and full of little twitches and sniffles, Kramer gives the impression he would tear his skin off if he weren't in Aerosmith and didn't have his drums to pound away all that nervous energy.

". . . These I take three times a day, plus the homeopathic stuff twice a day. My diet right now is 85 percent steamed vegetables and 15 percent fruit. I'm supposed to stay on it for three weeks and I've got three more days. I'm surprised I had the discipline to do it this long."

A doctor put you on this diet?

"I found him through my personal trainer. He's a naturopath and a homeopath. He promised I'd feel like a million bucks after three weeks. Since I already felt like a million bucks I figured great, I'll feel like two million bucks. The first nine days of the diet, it was real strange emotionally, made me realize all the ways I used food besides for nutrition. Unconsciously you're stuffing stuff all the time. And when you eliminate it you start bouncing off the walls. Right now I can't even look at steamed vegetables, I'm so sick of them. The whole thing started because I spent too much time in the gym. I wore down my adrenals. When you're using the adrenals for energy instead of the glucose in your body, it's like running an engine without oil. You wear out. If you work out and don't eat right, you blow it."

Sitting next to Kramer in the conference room of Aerosmith's P.R. agency in Hollywood is Brad Whitford, who looks like he's been irradiating all his important glands by watching television too close to the screen since 1952 or so. But in this band of legendary excess, Whitford is also changing.

"Yeah, I work with a trainer, too," he says. "I was never athletic when I grew up, but there are more things I want to do now. The payoff is in the work and performing. You just feel better and have more energy, so it's a big help."

A master of the slow-train-wreck drum fill, Kramer is influenced by just who you would expect him to be influenced by.

"John Bonham was the innovator of everything that everyone emulates today. There's not a lot you can say about it. He just had a touch, and very few drummers have a touch. A lot of drummers can play really good, run rings around me in soloing and technical stuff. For me, that's not what a drummer is about. A good drummer is the epitome of a team player. Of course Bonzo had more of an opportunity to stand out because he played in a trio. Whenever he did anything, it stuck out. I would compare his finesse on drums to Jeff Beck's guitar playing. He was the only guy who could do what he did.

"My golden rule has always been: Less Is More. More and more drummers have been picking up on that, but lately I've been going with even less. No one could accuse me of overplaying, and on this

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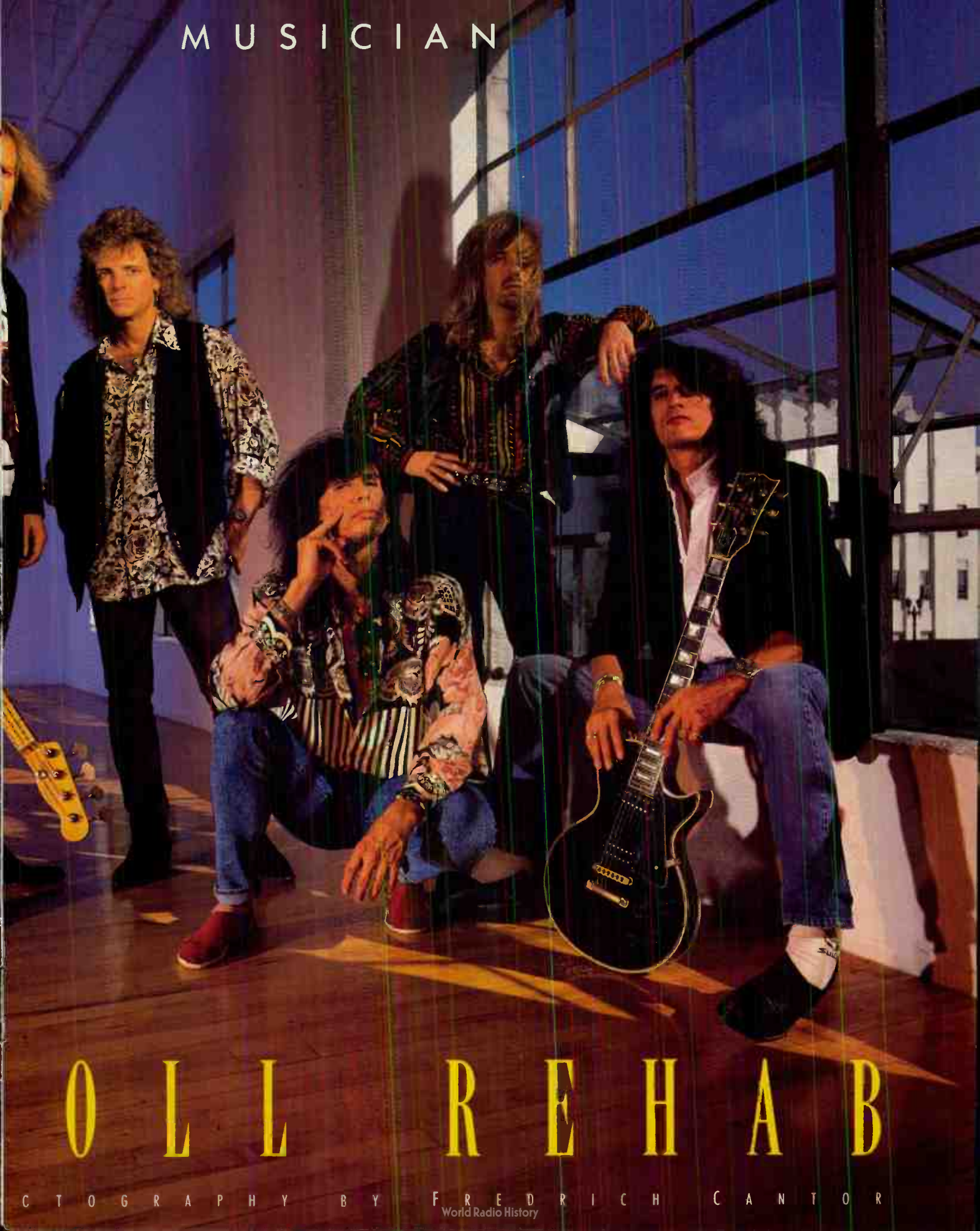
MUSICIAN



OLL REHAB

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDRICH CANTOR

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latest album I tried to make it even simpler, concentrate on making the grooves happen. I'm concerned with improving myself and making the band sound as good as it can sound. If I wanted the rest of it, I'd be a singer. So, yeah, Bonzo was one of my biggest influences. We're all products of our heroes. But you can't stray from your self."

Aerosmith did stray in the '80s and paid a stiff price. Then they figured out their addictions, sobered up and got back in touch with themselves as a group effort.

"It was a slow process," says Kramer. "One guy would get it and he'd work on another, and there would be two, then three, then four, then all five. Even before then we knew it could only work again if we were drug- and alcohol-free. The benefit now is the support we give to one another. It's a joy to function as a team. If I'm sitting in the back of a limousine twirling my hair and sniffling incessantly, like I do, it doesn't matter. I know those guys love me whatever bullshit comes along. And I feel the same way about them. Those feelings got us here. Everything works when we accept each other as who we are."

Steven Tyler: "I'm a miracle."

"We crawled out from under our problems and got in touch with ourselves," says Whitford. "It was a wonderful experience because after all that abuse you go dead inside. You go dead musically, too. Music is such a pure, pure energy. The drugs and alcohol poison your body and take you away from that. Whatever it was when I was a kid that got me so buzzed on music—on the Beatles, on Hendrix—I thought I'd lost that connection. One of the gifts of getting well was rediscovering the power of music, the joy it brings. It's a gift. And to mess with a gift isn't cool. I got a second chance, and it's great."

THE HISTORY OF AEROSMITH falls into three distinct phases: Rise, Fall and Rise II. From its genesis in Sunapee, New Hampshire and Boston in 1970, Aerosmith was pure rock 'n' roll archetype. That meant plenty of manic energy and plenty of difficulty discerning the five individuals lurking under the Dionysian role that had possessed them. But then, who cared who they were as long as their role fit so lucratively into a slot in the music industry? Certainly not their management, Leber & Krebs. Certainly not their record company, CBS. And certainly not singer Steven Tyler, guitarist Joe Perry (co-leaders of the band), guitarist Brad Whitford, bassist Tom Hamilton and drummer Joey Kramer (the three team players), who were having too much fun to think about who they were.

In the mid-'70s Led Zeppelin stood on the cusp of metal and hard rock, dominating both fields as the Yankees once dominated baseball. Zeppelin created so much money and turmoil, however, that they weren't touring that much. In the age of disco and punk, who would gather the tribe of American hard-rock fans in football stadiums when Zeppelin was grounded? There were three: Kiss, ZZ Top and Aerosmith. All made massive money. None ever transcended its slot. The subject of screaming features in every issue of *Circus* and only the occasional grudging nod from more respectable journals of popular culture, they appealed to the younger siblings of the Vietnam generation.

If you were too young or too old the first time around, the surprise is that all three bands left behind a substantial body of savage rock 'n' roll. Aerosmith in particular has a monster *Greatest Hits* collection and another anthology of only slightly lesser hits called *Gems* that will open the ears of any open-minded rock fan.

On the other hand, Aerosmith didn't have its own act together by the end of the '70s. Massive drug and alcohol consumption had given cirrhosis to their reputation as a great live act, and the quality of the albums had fallen off as well. Perry and Tyler couldn't stand each other anymore, and in December of 1979 Perry left to form the Joe Perry Project. Whitford left in 1981 for a stint with ex-Ted Nugent vocalist Derek St. Holmes. Horrible stories of lousy shows and personal turmoil circulated and it would have been no shock if someone had ended up dead in a motel room. The once mighty Aerosmith continued on as an object of contempt.

The hybrid bands all failed, and by the end of 1983 Perry and Tyler were making conciliatory noises at each other. In the spring of '84 they were officially a band again. After a flurry of lawsuits with their first management firm, they embarked on a well-received tour with new manager Tim Collins, signed with Geffen Records and settled in to record their first studio album as a complete band in six years. The resulting *Done with Mirrors*, produced by Ted Templeman of Van Halen fame, pretty much sucked. They were still dabbling with drugs, and the drugs just weren't having the same effect they'd had in 1975. The songwriting was weak. The tour fell apart. Tyler and Perry—the "Toxic Twins," they were called—went into rehab again and at last it stuck. They were clean and eager to see what they could do with their brains at full capacity.

Enlisting Bruce Fairbairn to produce and some outside songwriters (Jim Vallance, Desmond Child, Holly Knight) for new ideas, they recorded *Permanent Vacation*, which ranks up there with AC/DC's *Back in Black* for Most Impressive Comeback in the '80s. With hits like "Rag Doll" and "Dude (Looks Like a Lady)" plus megaton crunchers like "Heart's Done Time," Aerosmith broke with rock's elder tradition and didn't sound like a pale imitation of itself. They sounded more like themselves than they had at their manic peak. The archetype was still at work, but this time it was animated by personality, not cocaine. Even more amazing, they went on tour with Guns N' Roses and didn't relapse.

The next album, *Pump*, picked up where *Permanent Vacation* left off. A combination of '60s whimsy and late-'80s aggression, *Pump* bounded into the Top 10 quickly after its release and seems destined to stay there for a while. Full of intriguing detail that rewards a number of listenings, the album is a full-course meal, clearing the

Photography: Fredrich Cantor/Onyx

World Radio History

palate between songs with odd interludes of tribal chants, exotic instrumentals and suggestive playlets. The songs themselves are no departure from the Aerosmith tradition of getting to the hooky chorus fast and beating it to death, but Tyler's lyrics have taken on a new dimension as he's discovered more stuff to think about with a complete brain at his disposal. After 10 studio albums, Aerosmith is getting better. How many other bands with a comparable body of work can make that claim?

"I'M GETTING TIRED of recovery stories," says Steven Tyler, who has seen a lot of them.

On the other hand, it's a good story, and it remains *the* story.

"Yeah, I can look you in the eye and tell you I'm a miracle," says Tyler, doing just that. Sitting poolside at the Four Seasons Hotel in a black leotard, Tyler's mouth is just as wide and his body just as skinny as all the pictures would indicate. "I didn't have a drink today, and I did drink for 27 years. I shot coke and heroin, and for the last three years, I haven't had anything more powerful than an aspirin. I went to four rehabs before it took. And you can hear how it took. The great thing about Aerosmith is not only the instant gratification of going onstage, but you can see yourself get sober on the albums, the musical difference when we were using, when we were using just a little, when we first got sober, and now. You can chart it."

Ever try telling that to other bands?

"I don't push my shit on anybody. I don't say, 'You're an asshole for using drugs.' There's a time and a place for it. You don't go backstage and brag about your time. You just try to pass it on. Tell them how hard it is, how beautiful it is. I tell them there's a whole new world of music out there, and they're living in a cave with a boulder at the door, and the boulder is drugs. You kick the boulder out of the way, you can go in and out, invite your friends in."

Conversing with Tyler is like interviewing a volcano. He doesn't so much talk as erupt with a molten spew of extended and usually mixed metaphors, pungent homilies and physical observation of striking immediacy ("Look at those tits!"). He often speaks of the need to let the creative child inside him come out to play, while it seems vastly more probable that it is the adult who is chained and flogged in the dank recesses of his unconscious.

"We did a lot of albums fucked up. *Toys in the Attic* was great. *Rocks* was great. But you can listen to the progression there too. The body gets toxic and the drugs don't work the same way. Even heart patients on digitalis, there's a period after 10 or 15 years where the drug stops working. Same with heroin. The receptors don't get it anymore. It's like a guy at a club and the doorman doesn't recognize him anymore. You can hear that on those albums. We went to the mountain with this shit. We got up there with the false energy that cocaine gives you, and we got to the top and went [*pants*], and there was no guy for that stick to pass. What are those parades called where you got that stick?"

A baton in a relay race, you mean?

"There was no baton, no guy. No one up there. There was a cliff. They said, 'Trust me, jump.' We said, 'Fuck you, man.' Filled our noses again and climbed down and there was another cliff. That was sobriety, and that time we jumped."

Tyler started life as Steven Tallarico, son of a classical pianist father and "hellraiser" mother. The family spent summers running a resort in Sunapee, New Hampshire, and the rest of the year in the Bronx.

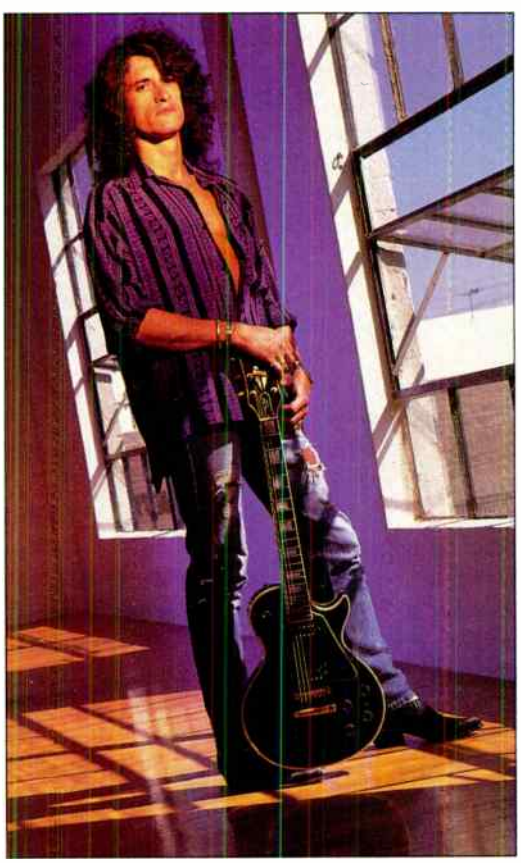
"I grew up under the piano," Tyler recalls. "My father talked to me with his fingers, playing Debussy and Beethoven. He didn't talk to me much one-to-one as a human being, but I'm glad he didn't. That's where my emotion comes from. When I got older, I played society music at the hotel with my father on piano, my uncle on saxophone and me on drums."

Tyler's experience in school is typical rock-star: high intelligence and high energy, low control and minimal social sense. He ate bugs, chewed other people's gum off the sidewalk, got called "niggerlips" a lot for his huge mouth. By his mid-teens he'd discovered alcohol as a useful and immediate painkiller. He also discovered a community of similarly sensitive, talented, drug-oriented people in Greenwich Village and spent all his spare time hanging out with musicians. He saw Tiny Tim open for the Doors at the Scene, rode the Palisades Park roller coaster with Jimi Hendrix, went to parties where he passed out from too many Placidyls and woke up to find all the girls with their clothes off and a couple of chimpanzees swinging from the light fixtures—all before he was old enough for a driver's license.

One of the bands he hung out with was the Left Banke, whose aesthetic influence far outstripped the actual sales of their hit "Walk Away Renee" and their semi-hit "Pretty Ballerina."

"I'll never forget being in their apartment one day and one of them saying, 'What's the date today? Are we recording tonight? What are we going to record?' It turned out they were: 'Don't worry. We'll come up with something.' I couldn't believe they were taking it so lightly. I remember thinking, 'There's got to be a better way of doing this.' But I was just so into those guys, Steve [Martin, not the comedian] and his voice. I sang backup on 'Dark Is the Bark,' the followup to 'Pretty Ballerina.'"

Joe Perry: "I'd drink to blackout . . . every night."



Didn't Aerosmith make all the same mistakes?

"Instead of doing it that way, we would make sure we had enough cocaine and do a lock-in for three or four days in Studio A at the Record Plant."

How has your songwriting changed since that period?

"I don't question it. It just flows. I work at it, and it flows. There isn't a day that goes by . . . I used to think, 'Well, I'll just snort some Xanax and write the lyrics.' Psychologically it was a wasteland. Now, it's like this book I was reading by Og Mandino. 'Persist,' he

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said. 'Persist until you drop, but persist.' He told this parable about a guy who had a tree in front of his house and a tiny hatchet. Every day he took one swipe. In a month that tree was down. Every day a swipe. But you can't see that unless you *do* it.

"So we didn't sit around and worry this time about how good the last album was, and how would we ever write anything as good as 'Angel' or 'Dude,' and how everything tied in. That sort of worry is the bullshit and denial that drugs brought. Now it's a matter of you set up a time and you be there. It's as simple as that. Joe and I keep the tape rolling and for six hours we pound away. Then we bring the tape home and mark it down. One-dash-one, that was 'Monkey on My Back.' I sat behind the drums, I got a good bass sound, and I let the kid out totally. I let my head fly. I sing what Joe tells me with his guitar. Music is a language. The sound is an afterproduct. Minor is sad, major is happy—that's the basis for a conversation, isn't it? If I listen closely, I hear Joe talking to me, and I sing. I don't know where it comes from. I like to think of myself as a channel."

Whitford: "After all that abuse you go dead inside."

The song "Janie's Got a Gun," for example, just popped out?

"They all do. I don't know anybody who sits down and says, 'I'm going to write a song about the Red Revolution, we'll do it in a minor key because revolutions ain't happy, and we'll paint red with all red notes.' With me so much pops out all the time. I'll dream something and wake up singing it—that's actually when I have to be careful, because that was probably something I heard on the radio yesterday. So I don't listen to stuff when I'm doing an album."

The second single from *Pump* (after "Love in an Elevator"), "Janie" has a haunting hook and a brutally candid lyric about father-daughter incest. Although Tyler takes umbrage at reviews that have suggested it's his only song about a serious subject (if you don't take sex seriously), seriousness of social purpose is certainly rare in the Aerosmith oeuvre. Surely child abuse had been on his mind from somewhere? "Somewhere. As soon as I wrote the line 'Janie's got a gun,' I asked myself, '*Why* does she have a gun? . . . Ah, perfect!' It's just a building process. Maybe it was on my mind because of that *Newsweek* cover about everyone who had been murdered in a week. What I know about child abuse is that we all go through three phases: 1) when you get shit from your parents, 2) when you realize you got shit from your parents and you swear you'll never do it to your own kids and 3) when you give shit to your own kids because you forgot what your parents did."

How does producer Bruce Fairbairn fit into the equation?

"On November 1 Joe and I went into preproduction together. Bruce came to our homes and said, 'What's this going to be about?' I made a list of all the instruments I ever wanted on an album but didn't have: tubas following the bassline, kazoos following the lead guitar lines, backwards drums—just weird ideas and instruments. And we just wanted to get some good songs. I put up a stink about getting to the chorus fast, as usual: 'Remember, that was great because it had a lot of chorus.' A good song will fly forever if it's said right. [*Starts singing the Beatles' 'Taxman' as an example of a great chorus.*] We went to Vancouver to record and Bruce put us onto this guy Randy Raine Reusch. He goes all over the world gathering and playing indigenous musical instruments. Joe and I went to his place and tried everything. Everything except the drum made out of a human skull. We didn't want the karma. I didn't want to be banging away on some P.O.W.

"We did try all the other instruments and used the good stuff. And I'd already put together the chant at the beginning of 'Voodoo Medicine Man.' That's Zulu virgin girls, hundreds of them, stomping their feet with bells on, doing their rites before they get poked by these guys. It all started to fit together, became thematic, became a thing of itself. And if people don't like the in between stuff, they can program it out on CD. The songs are great."

If some mother from the PMRC objected to her daughter hearing a song like "Young Lust" ("You better keep your daughter inside/Or she's gonna get a dose of my pride"), what would you tell her?

"Well, she's coming at her daughter's life from the wrong direction. How can you fight young lust? A) She's young, and B) she has lust. That's why people masturbate. I mean, what do you want to be telling your child? That lust is bad? Get outta here. That's the Holy Wars. That's what the song 'F.I.N.E.' is about: Fucked up, Insecure, Neurotic, Emotional."

TOM HAMILTON orders a vegeburger in the Four Seasons restaurant, but quickly apologizes. "I'm not a vegetarian. Now that we're straight, we gotta keep up some semblance of wrongdoing."

Steven seems to use sex to keep up his semblance of wrongdoing.

"His brain has much more capacity to be obsessed with sex now that he's not fucked up, yeah."

That one of the benefits for your brain, too?

"One of them. But to be perfectly serious, as the music bubbles up, I'm coming much closer to my musical potential. I think a lot of musicians start getting high because they think it enhances their creativity at first. After a while it just blows the rest of your brain out, so it doesn't matter."

You think it does enhance creativity for a while?

"I hate to say so, but when the bass line for 'Sweet Emotion' came into my brain, which was the basis for the song, I'm sure I'd smoked a joint beforehand. With a musician, anything that makes you approach your instrument differently from the day before can help you come up with new things. You can also do that just by playing a different guitar."

That bass line came out because of or in spite of the pot?

"It was just something that came out of the fog. I think I would have come up with it eventually anyway. I used a major third and minor seventh, and that's a pattern I use a lot. Steven's always yelling at me, 'No! No! Minor! Minor!' If there's anything he hates, it's a major third. Once I was playing the bass line to 'Funky Broadway' to warm up before a gig. It was a major third, and he goes, 'Minor! Minor!' at me. I said, 'Look, I'm just playing what's on the record. Not only that, I'm

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just warming up, so beat it.' But I know what was going through his mind: 'Well, it *should* have been a minor third.'"

Thoughtful of manner and sardonic at the corners of his mouth, Hamilton tends to proceed step by step in his conversation with the discernible logic of a graduate student who finds it all a bit absurd. Lately his object of study has been his own bass. He took lessons between *Permanent Vacation* and *Pump*, rediscovered John Paul Jones and through him the legendary James Jamerson who played bass on most of the Motown songs of the early '60s.

"In fact, I overdid it and wound up with an inflamed tendon in my ring finger. One doctor said to exercise it and it got worse. Another doctor said to rest and it's getting better. When I find something I can't play, I tend to practice it until there are flames in my forearms. I have to learn to pace myself."

You part of the Bruce Fairbairn Admiration Society?

"Yeah, he works you hard. And he makes hard decisions regarding material. That can be painful. I was really counting on doing some writing for this record."

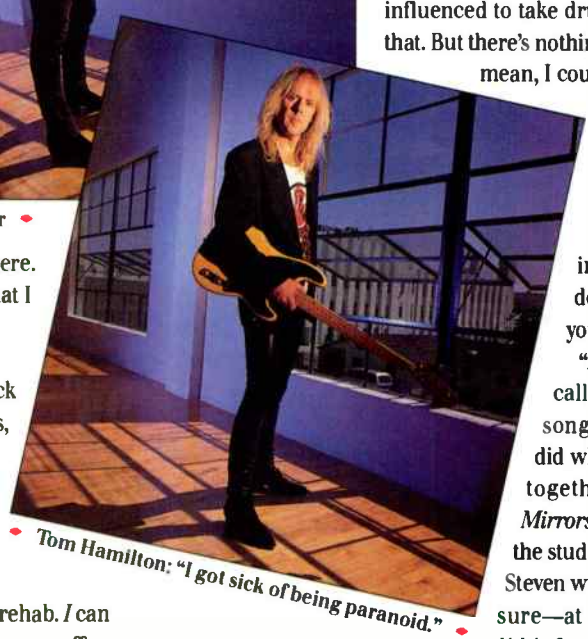
You co-wrote "Janie's Got a Gun."

"Yeah, I wrote the first eight bars of the song. It was from another song I wrote for the last album. Maybe by playing those chords, Steven got started toward the chords that make up the rest of the song. I had other stuff that didn't fit the tone of the album. When it didn't happen, I was able to take the emotion and put it into my playing and be more expressive that way. Joey and I ended up practicing a lot together to work out the details. That's something we always said we were going to do, but this time we actually did it."

Another benefit of sobriety?

"Yeah, I would say so. I was the last one in the band to get it. During *Permanent Vacation* I wasn't drinking but I was smoking a bowl of pot every day. I'd get to rehearsal and Steven would look me in the eyes and say, 'Hey!' It was stupid on my part. My mental energy was going into remembering the arrangements instead of playing what I felt like playing. Eventually I got sick of being paranoid, of being the only one out there. My priorities were wrong. On *Pump* I finally played what I felt because I had the arrangements down cold."

Joey Kramer



Tom Hamilton: "I got sick of being paranoid."

TYLER AND JOE PERRY have often been compared to Mick Jagger and Keith Richards for the role they play as leaders, chief songwriters in Aerosmith and their sheer physical resemblance. Perry in particular radiates a Richards-like smoldering authority, the will that can bend a guitar to a song's emotion, the will that can become dangerous when it gets wrapped around a drug.

"For years, I was thinking, 'Poor Steve, he has to go to rehab. *I* can control it,' and I'd be driving to my dealer," Perry recalls over coffee. "Or I'd say to my manager, 'Steven's terrible. He's got to go away. *I'm* going to the Cayman Islands to have a vacation to get away from my dealer.' That's what *I* was gonna do, 'cause I didn't have as bad a problem as Steven. But what you find out is, everyone's problem is just as bad, whether Brad with his alcohol, or Joe with his cocaine, or Steven with his pills. Everyone was fucked. The degree doesn't matter. Finally Steve and I made a pact. I'd never been to a rehab, and he'd been to three, I think. And it was like, 'Steve, you go and I'll go.' I waited for the birth of my son, and I went. Everyone else followed along in his own time. But it was really a trip. I didn't know if I would ever have fun again, or if I would like music again. I guess what proved it to me was *Permanent Vacation* and getting out there to play again. It started feeling like the old days."

Was there a particular incident that convinced you to stop?

"A lot of things. The *Done with Mirrors* tour, I remember not remembering anything from the night before. I used to drink to blackout, and it wouldn't be any big deal, but it got to be every night. I'd have a few beers while I was warming up and then wake up the next day. I'd have to call somebody to find out how I played. I'd think I should drink a little less the next night, which is impossible to do.

"At one point we were talking to Rick Rubin about doing *Permanent Vacation*. Steven and I were crazed at that point. We figured we'd go into the studio with him and record a song one night. I had methadone in one pocket, some blow in one pocket, some pills in another pocket and a bottle of rum. So I was set to record. It was so fucked. The next day we listened to the tape and I was just embarrassed about how we must have acted. And the song sucked. It was time for a major change. For me, and for everyone else in the band."

Any regrets?

"A lot of the time, I had fun. No doubt about it. Now I'm so stuck in today, it's hard for me to regret anything I've done. Sometimes I think I ought to be more bummed about what I did. But I wrote some great songs, had a great party in my 20s. I think my biggest regret is anyone I might have influenced to take drugs. I feel bad about that. But there's nothing I can do about it. I mean, I could blame all the jazz musicians in the '40s who made me think heroin was cool."

In terms of recording, what are you doing right now that you weren't before?

"A lot of things. Basically we're working the songs the same way we did when we got the band together. On *Done with Mirrors* we tried to write in the studio. We always felt that Steven wrote best under pressure—at least that's how we did it for years. But the best albums we had all the songs done before we went in and recorded them. If you leave some space, you can write in the studio, but you have to have the framework. *Done with Mirrors* we went in

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with some riffs and winged it."

When you write, it's you on guitar and Steven on drums?

"On 'My Girl' Steven played the drums when we were writing, but on 'Elevator' he played a keyboard. There's different things we do for inspiration. One night we saw Keith Richards play and he did 'Connection.' That got us thinking about all the classic English rock songs from the '60s, and the next day we wrote 'My Girl.' On 'Don't Get Mad, Get Even,' I wrote the music before Steven came in. Every day when we go in to write we try to get something on cassette. Just so we wrote something. So when I go home I can prove to my wife I've been at the studio playing. One of those days when I didn't have anything inspired, I took 'Rag Doll' and listened to it backwards. The chords just hit me and I started playing 'Don't Get Mad.' Steven heard it the next day and wrote the lyrics."

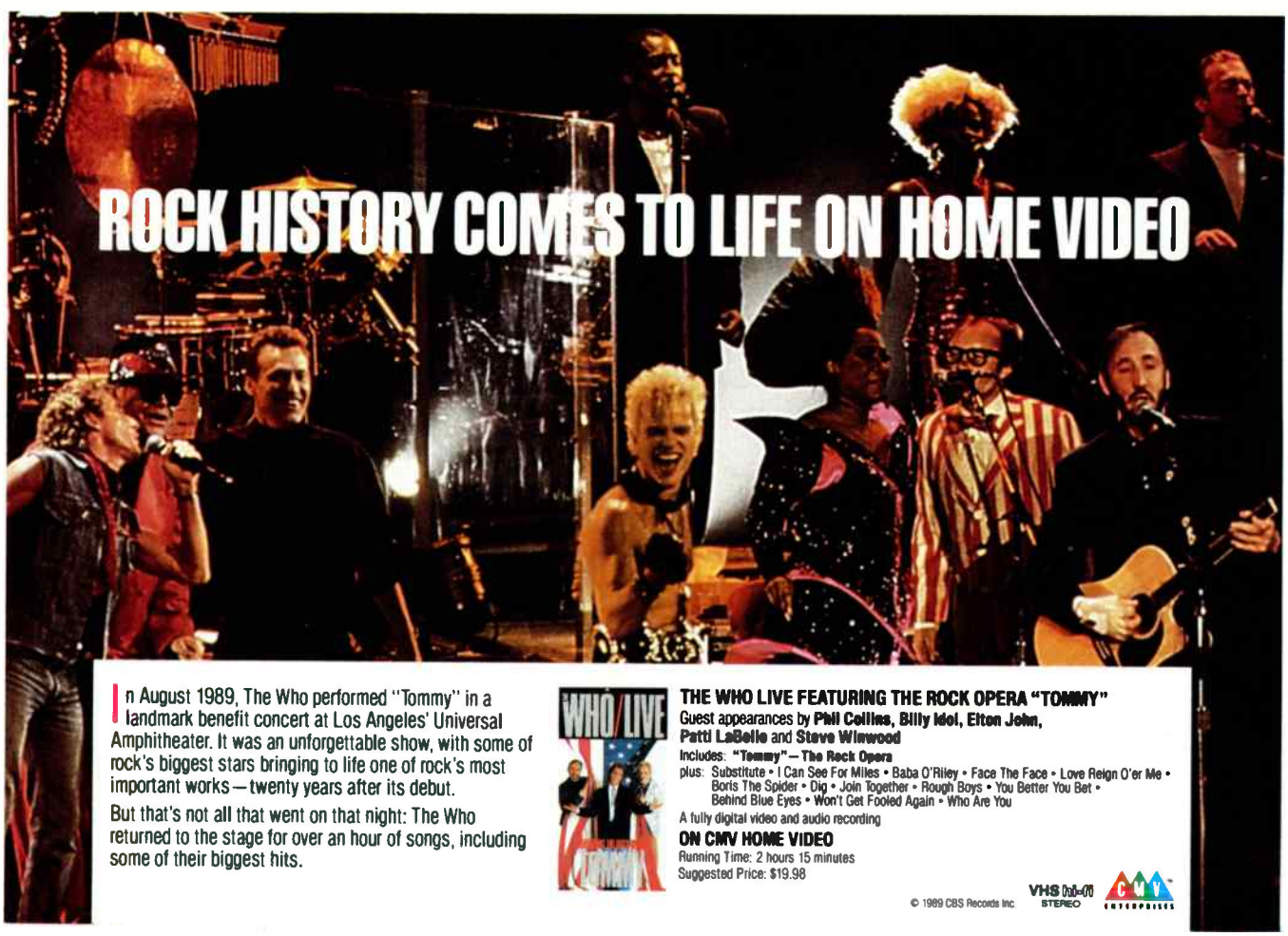
Would it be fair to say Steven's lyrical concerns have widened?

"Yeah, every year his lyrical concerns open up a little more. As we're getting sober, the windows open and you see other things out there. They say that whatever age you are when you first take a drink, that's the mental age you are when you stop. He's working on 22 right now. By the time he's 60, he might be almost normal."

It seems that whatever pops into his head pops out of his mouth in fairly short order. It must be a little wearing to be around someone that impulsive for long periods.

"Well, it is," Perry laughs. "But I also love being with him. We're spending more time together now than we ever spent. When we were doing the album, we took off with our families and rented a couple of cabins together for a break. There are times I don't see him for days, too. I think I make my boundaries better than he does, and that's why we work well together. He's putting out a stream of stuff, and the job becomes to steer it the right way. He's so intuitive that at first when we were using drugs it helped. You spend less time thinking, and it pours out. Then after a while it stifles you. The trick now is to keep it flowing whatever happens, then worry about what's good and bad after it's down on the tape. That's why when we write songs we know it's important to get something on tape every day. For years I thought he was at his wittiest just sitting around talking, and when he tried to write, the logjam started to build. He's one of the funniest people I know, and every album now he's getting closer to laying it down so we can use it."

RUMOR HAS IT that this dark, moldy, cavernous warehouse in East L.A. is a favorite haunt for Satanists given to disemboweling small animals in their rituals. Today, however, the main room is clogged with about 50 people, several video cameras, railroad tracks for the camera cart, a monstrous and rusting stage supporting colossal pillars of Marshall cabinets and a vicious R2-D2 device that blows nauseating smoke so everything looks properly mysterious. Over and over, they play "Janie's Got a Gun" while the band mimes the song on this set that is nicknamed the "Aerocave," a mythical rehearsal studio somewhere under the sewers of New York or Boston. Amidst the scurrying technicians, a rosy-looking, rather short woman of late middle age gazes unceasingly at the stage. She is Mary Perry, Joe's



World Radio History

mom, visiting from Sedona, Arizona (Joe still lives in Boston), where she teaches aerobics four days a week and has marketed aerobics videos under her own imprimatur, the Mary Perry Project.

"It's a chance for my daughter and myself to get together with Joe," she explains. "It's like a family gathering. I can't help but compare this to the first time I saw them when they had *one* roadie. I know they were dedicated, but not in my wildest dreams did I imagine this. My biggest thrill, though, is that they've all gone straight, so to speak."

You worried a lot before?

"Oh yes. Oh yes. I believe the Higher Power has some reason for giving them this second chance with success."

How did you accept Joe's wanting to be a musician as a child?

"I wanted him to be a doctor or a lawyer, just like any other mother, so I didn't accept it easily. Once we did accept it, we were behind him 100 percent. I always knew he was talented."

What did you think of *Pump*?

HUMP PUMPS

"WE'RE GETTING back to basics," says JOE PERRY. "That's something we've always known, but it's all Les Pauls and Strats again. For 'Monkey on My Back' I used a Supro Ozark Slide Guitar in an A-tuning. Most other tracks I used either a '57 Strat or a Guild T-250, which is a Telecaster knockoff, super clean, through Marshalls or Bedrocks. Any effects we put on afterwards through the board. Onstage we're using some of these new Fender amps, a bunch of Twins and a Roland JC-120, and a couple of Marshalls."

"On the road I'm taking four Les Pauls, a Stratocaster, a Telecaster and a Paul Reed Smith, which soundwise is a bit of the Tele, Strat and Les Paul. It's a superfine instrument, a pleasure to play," says BRAD WHITFORD. "Like everyone else, I think the best amplifiers are Marshalls, and older Fenders. But what I've stumbled across lately is the new Fender Super 60. So I'm using two of those through Marshall 4x12s." Both Whitford and Perry use Gibson strings on their guitar collections.

"On most of the record, I used an old single-pickup Music Man bass," says TOM HAMILTON. "On 'What It Takes' I used a classic old Hofner Beatle bass, but we put tons of EQ on it. On 'Janie's Got a Gun' I used a Fender Precision. On the road I'll be using some ESP basses and a Kubicki Ex-Factor bass, full of innovations that actually work and really practical. For amps I'm probably using the Mesa/Boogie 400 head, but when I get to Germany I'm going to try out the Hughes & Kettner."

"I've been with Tama for the last five years," says JOEY KRAMER. "After using a 24" kick drum forever, I recently went back to a 22"x16", a little deeper than the normal 22"x14". I'm using three rack power toms, 8", 10" and 12". And I'm using a 14"x14" and a 14"x15" floor tom. I'm taking two sets on the road, a lipstick red GrandStar and an ArtStar Two that's custom painted and airbrushed. My snare is a Tama bird's-eye maple, nine-ply, and I just switched to Pro Mark hickory sticks. My cymbals are all Zildjian Brilliants. The high-hat is 14" Quickbeat, and the bottom is a Rockbeat."

STEVEN TYLER uses Electro-Voice N/DYN 757 mikes.

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"From the standpoint of a classical music lover, I would say it sounds like art to me. It's different from anything I've heard them do before. Every album seems to get better now. 'Janie's Got a Gun' is a serious song about real life."

What about "Young Lust"?

"As an aerobics teacher, I love the rhythm. It makes me want to move. I'm just glad I can't understand the words."

NRBQ

[*cont'd from page 55*] night. There's a happy afterglow in the streets as the dancers stumble home.

On the way back to the airport I'm thinking about a conversation I once had with Keith Spring. Keith is a saxophonist who grew up with Terry in Louisville, and for many years comprised with Donn Adams NRBQ's traveling horn section, known as the Whole Wheat Horns. About 10 years ago we were driving to a gig talking about the same thing I'm wondering about now: Will this band ever get its due? Keith said he hoped so, for all the obvious reasons. "But if nothing else, I hope they make it big just to watch the record industry fall over themselves," he said. "Because you know how when one group makes it, they find five other bands that sound just like them? So if NRBQ gets big they'll be going, 'Let's get another NRBQ! How do we make another one?'

"And that'll be the real fun. Because it can't be done. You can't make another NRBQ."

It's past three in the morning when we look out the windows of the prop plane and see the landing lights of the airfield in New Haven. Once, while traveling with the band, a pilot let Terry sit in the cockpit. "He said I could do anything I wanted, that he'd fix it. So I took the wheel and yanked it all the way out," Terry laughs. "We went straight up in the air."

LORIMER

[*cont'd from page 76*] him for about six years after that. We never talked about technique—we talked about *music*. The idea about how chords were balanced was very important to him. See, he was a player trying to communicate with people in concert halls, and he learned to build on the strong points of the guitar. Essentially guitar doesn't have a wide dynamic range, but the variety of colors is very great; once I played a piece and handed him my guitar to hear how he sounded on it, and it was a revelation—it's beyond words."

But for listeners, until the release of *Remembranza*, the colorful sound of Segovia's favorite young guitarist was beyond ears, unless you heard him in concert. "Let's just say that I had a, uh, *curious* sort of 'We're going to make you a household word' experience with a major label when I was young, and I walked away from it," he says guardedly. "Let's leave it at that. It reinforced my antique notions about recordings. Real music is when you play for me or I play for you. Recordings are no substitute for that. Over the years people have tried to prevail upon me. Maybe 20 years ago I met this fellow at Van Dyke Parks' house, and he kept requesting me to play, and then sort of got me into a recording studio. He told me, 'Relax, Michael—the microphone is your friend.' Later I found out he wasn't an engineer, but a great guitarist in his own right—Ry Cooder. I'd love to be in

World Radio History

touch with him now. Over the years other people have tried to get me to record, but if it wasn't for George Winston—who I've known since he was living in a garage with little more than a piano and 20,000 records—nothing would have happened. In response to George's persistent requests I finally just asked Jude to go into the closet and dig out some tapes. She found one tape I made in a beautiful little church with engineer Mike Denecke; it was just me and Mike, a portable Nagra and a couple of mikes, very meticulously placed. The response has made me realize that recordings are simply a way of reaching people and touching them with your work."

Having accomplished the miracle of getting an album out of Lorimer for his Dancing Cat label, Winston knew enough not to rush him into another. Instead he dropped off a Sony TDC-10 DAT deck and a pair of Neumanns and left Lorimer to his own timetable and his pair of custom-made instruments (one made by Randy Angella, the other by Miguel Rodriguez). Lorimer's not really in any hurry—he readily admits he made enough money from his concert performances in the '70s and early '80s to now do what he wants, when he wants. Unfortunately, that includes few public performances—his last was a packed Segovia tribute at St. Patrick's Cathedral—but Lorimer is confident he'll have a new album out by the end of the year.

"I mean, I've got file drawers full of music I've been developing and publishing for 25 years," he laughs, "and it's time to get it out. All sorts of things. I've got an exact copy of a baroque guitar from 1687 that was owned by one of Louis XIV's daughters; if lute was the elite, classical instrument of that time, the baroque guitar was the pop instrument—you played *dance* music on it. And a brilliant engineer and luthier from California—John Gilbert—is building me a classical guitar with interchangeable fretboards, so I can explore all sorts of tuning systems other than the equal-tempered system used on guitars, pianos and other Western instruments. It will be a key towards unlocking all the beauty of world musics: oriental, carnatic, gamelan—you name it. And lately I've been listening to the music of American guitar masters like Robert Johnson and Charlie Christian, to see what I can get out of it, and possibly, what I could bring to it. You see, the classical guitar scene has never particularly interested me—music is what interests me."

EHRLICH

[*cont'd from page 18*] push themselves not to be pat, to get past gestures that sort of imply emotion and get to the emotion itself. That may mean playing simply and quietly rather than more intense. On the other hand, I never want to feel that I can't use jagged, vocalized ways of playing because they're passé, or worn out. I love the raw sound."

Given the conservative tinge of the jazz that has flourished for the last several years, Ehrlich's songbook sounds not only well-versed but stubbornly modern. Other players may claim to be historically cognizant but the low-key woodwind player knows chapter and verse from more than one book and holds none of them as the final word.

"There's not much that shocks anymore," he shakes his head, "so you try to come up with some stuff that will spontaneously combust onstage—the feeling that what you're doing hasn't ever happened before. People pick up on that. And it's not important if the vehicle that gets you there is a simple blues or just sounds."

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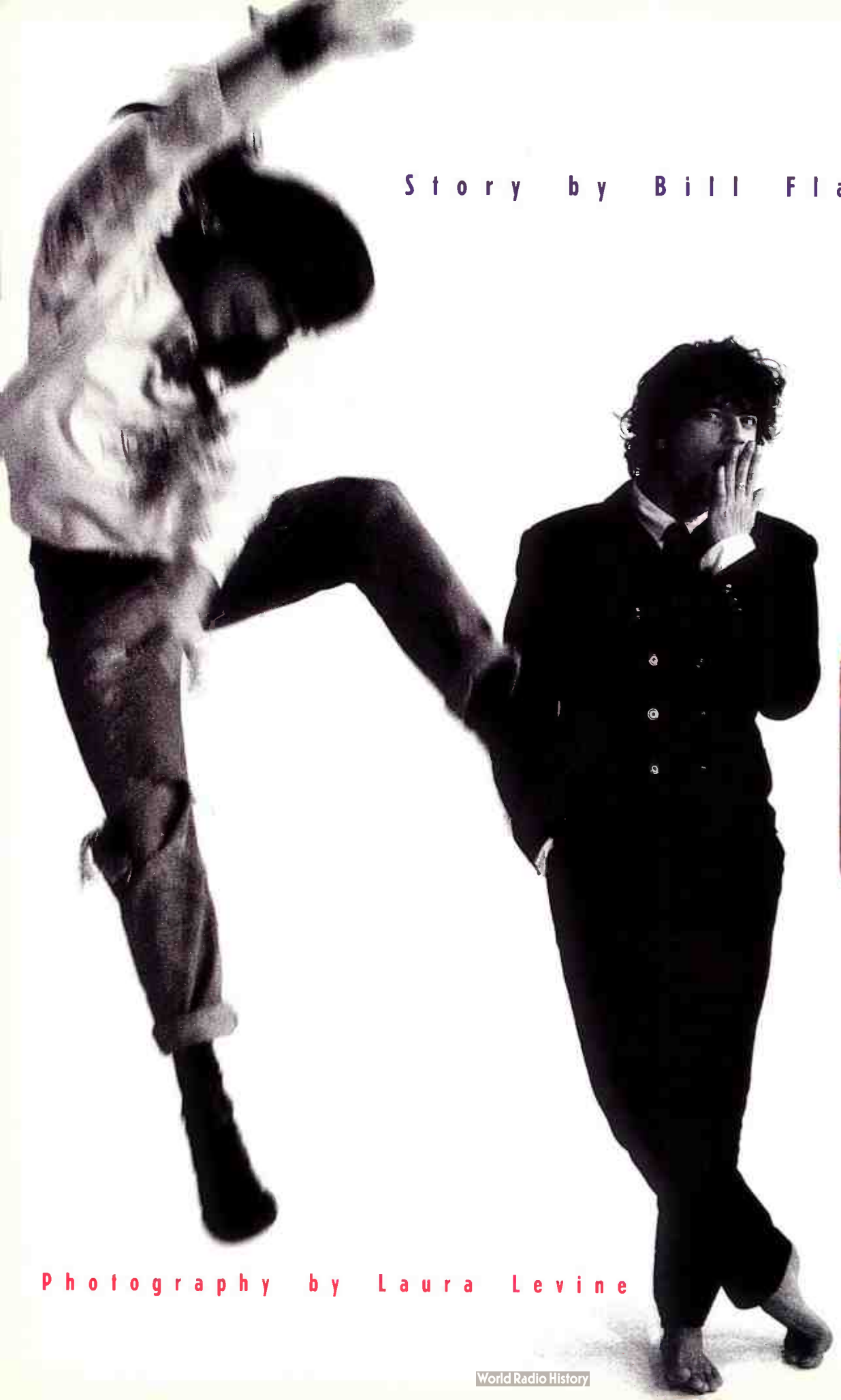
Story by Bill Flanagan



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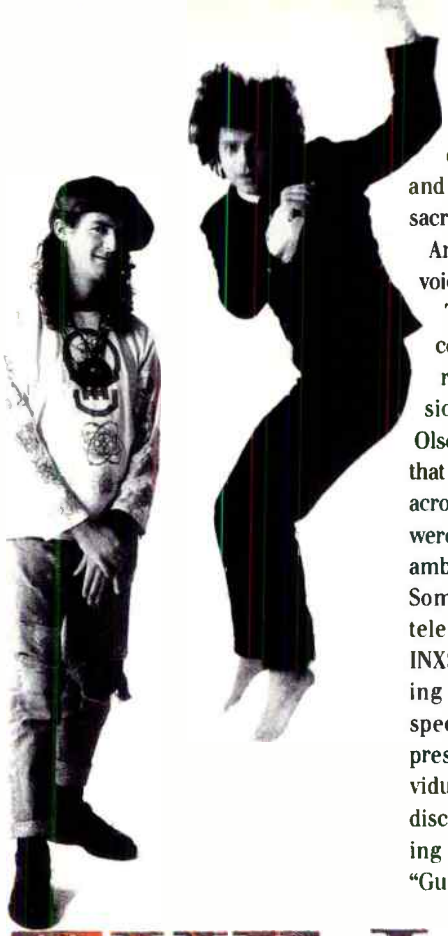
Photography by Laura Levine

World Radio History

STS OF THE YEAR



WHEN A MUSICIAN is struggling he figures that if he ever becomes a star he will be able to do whatever he pleases. INXS completed its long climb to the top two years ago. The sixth album, *Kick*, sold eight million copies, and the Australian sextet toured the world for 16 months. When that was done INXS took a sabbatical, to relax and work on outside projects. Singer/lyricist Michael Hutchence decided to collaborate on an album with fellow Australian Ollie Olsen, an underground musician Hutchence had met when Olsen was music director for *Dogs in Space*, the 1986 film about punk musicians in which Hutchence starred.

Olsen is a well-respected character in Australia's avant-garde rock community. He's led experimental groups like Hugo Kiang, Whirlywirld and the Orchestra of Skin and Bone. He's currently captain of an on-the-edge, hip-hop-influenced punk band called NO. Hutchence agreed to be the singer in Olsen's next project—an incredible blessing from so big a rock idol. In assembling the other musicians, Olsen picked pals from his circle of musical outsiders. Armed with the instrumental might of his companions and the commercial clout of one of the hottest rock singers in the world, Olsen was cocky. He wrote all the music for the Max Q album, and split the lyrics with Hutchence. They made a terrific team.

Last June they were in New York mixing the album. I was invited down to the studio to hear the material. Hutchence introduced me to Olsen, a tall, big-featured guy whose street slang doesn't disguise a quick mind, and whose punk demeanor can't hide a friendly nature. I expected the music to be difficult. It wasn't. It was smart, and there was a great deal going on, but it was immediately, viscerally appealing—solid dance music, some nice pop singing, and quirky enough to be interesting without sacrificing accessibility.

Among the quirks was a layer of electronic voices and imprints alongside the rhythms. The whole album had the feel of mass communication, of telephone voices and radio murmurs and satellite transmissions. Wealthy Hutchence and low-rent Olsen are both international vagabonds, so that sense of people trying to communicate across wires seemed appropriate. The lyrics were full of dreams, dreams in the sense of ambitions and in the sense of hallucinations. Sometimes the dreams were shattered by telephones. As with Hutchence's work in INXS, there was a political sensibility working in the songs that had less to do with specific government issues than with the pressures that living today dumps on individuals. Hutchence mentioned that he had discovered the CIA kept a file on him, labeling him a subversive for songs like INXS' "Guns in the Sky" (which has a companion in Max Q's "Way of the World").

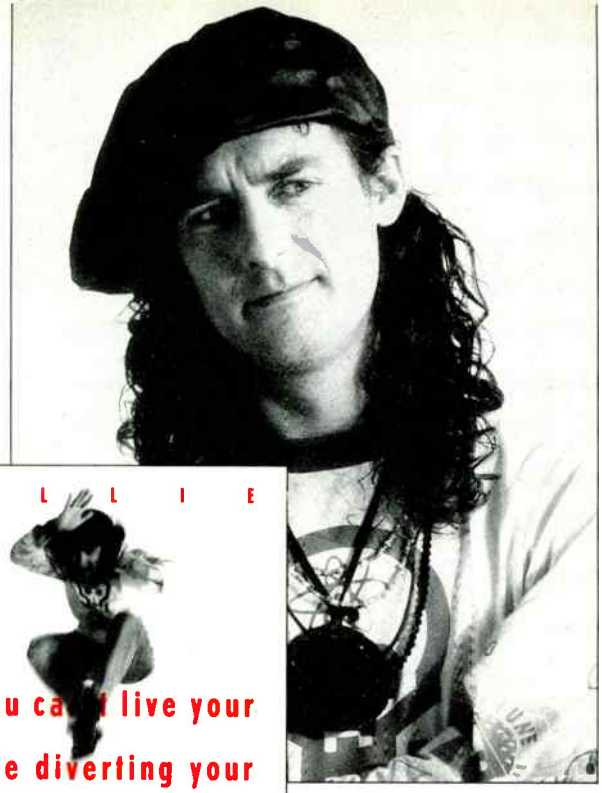
MICHAEL HUTCHENCE figured the popularity of INXS gave him the freedom to make an album with underground musician OLLIE OLSEN They created MAX Q—and learned that success builds walls of its own.

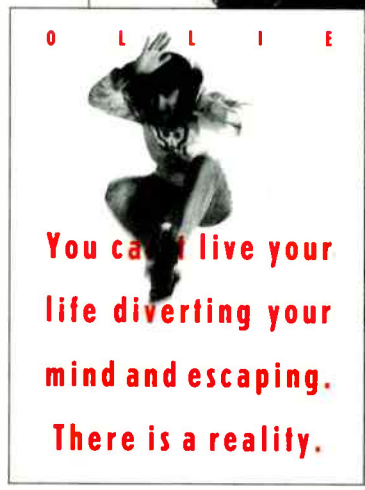
The other big theme was traps and freedom. Throughout *Max Q* people were trying to break out of different sorts of prisons, from their circumstances to their skin. In "Ghost of the Year" Hutchence sang in the voice of a man trying to count his blessings, even though he feels like he's drowning. He says, "I'm alive, I'm somebody today. There's a great deal of fear inside. That I'm right in my conclusions. A great deal of pain inside and I'm supposed to be all right. And now they want to crown me for the ghost of the year." Olsen admitted he wrote that song for his friend Hutchence, this year's rock superstar.

Like a Prince record, *Max Q* was a solid pop album that offered a lot to think about if you felt like thinking, but demanded no more

World Radio History

than a listener was willing to give. It sure seemed to have all the elements of a hit. But it didn't turn out to be a hit. It's hard to put a finger on exactly what went wrong, but a big part of it seems to be that, contrary to expectations, a rich, famous musician sometimes has less freedom to do what he wants than an unknown does. INXS spent 10 years getting to the top, and anyone with an investment in that band might be reluctant to see the group jeopardized by a successful Michael Hutchence project. INXS' manager Chris Murphy thought that Hutchence should keep his participation in Max Q a secret. He said it would be good fun to see if the record would be a hit with a mystery vocalist.





An executive at Atlantic Records, INXS' label, told me that they were getting mixed signals about how hard to promote Max Q. That may have been nothing more than confusion about whether they were supposed to use Hutchence's name. When I got a call in October asking if *Musician* was still interested in interviewing Hutchence and Olsen, I said sure. Whether the record was a slow starter or a no-starter, a victim of sabotage or camouflage, it was still real good.

MUSICIAN: *Michael, you've described yourself as a non-player. Ollie, you play a number of instruments. What are the disadvantages of the preconceptions that come with knowing an instrument?*

HUTCHENCE: Well, I can drive people mad by going [*hums*], "Dodododo, you can do that! Play it!" It's great, I don't have any concept that you can't play a note or go to somewhere. People have to work hard when I get an idea. But I have been practicing my guitar. And I do play around with melodies on the keyboards; I have to, to work things out sometimes. But I've been discovering that I have to be really careful it doesn't scare me away from my own ideas.

OLSEN: A lot of people suffer from academia when it comes to how to play your instrument. When you want to expand your musical language you've got to make sure you set yourself no rules. Music is organized sound. I love the Indian idea that once you start a sound it never ends, it goes on forever. There are infinite possibilities with sound. My first instrument was a tape recorder. I started out experimenting with tape loops and feedback. I learned to write by cutting up pieces of tape.

HUTCHENCE: That's really funny. That's how Andrew [Farriss of INXS] and I started.

OLSEN: You cross a bit of Pierre Schaeffer or Stockhausen with the Last Poets, chuck in a bit of Kraftwerk here and there and a big major dose of the old James Brown, and you've got rap music.

HUTCHENCE: One of the reasons working with Ollie was great was because, to be honest, I hate middle eights.

OLSEN: If you've got a good idea take it to its *Max* instead of wrecking it by throwing in these extraneous bits of bullshit.

MUSICIAN: *There are similarities between Michael's work in INXS and some of your stuff, Ollie. You both use voices very rhythmically—almost percussively. The singing on the first song on the red NO album is like Michael's style.*

OLSEN: "Skin." [*sings*] "Walking in this house of skin." Yeah, it is.

HUTCHENCE: Ripped me off, did ya!

OLSEN: Oh yeah, *sure*. I've always thought "Skin" is quite a pop tune in a way. But with the benefit of a $500 production [*laughter*] what do you expect? That's the whole thing about NO: Otherwise we have the potential to do hit-type records as well as weird shit. Any sort of music can become popular—it's just a matter of the audience having the chance to educate themselves to understand it. That's where a lot of record companies are very rotten.

The chart successes of rap and house are interesting. If I'd heard Public Enemy 10 years ago I'd have said, "Whoa, that's right out there!" It's right out there now, anyway . . . .

MUSICIAN: *But now you have a context. There was a time before radio decided people didn't like weird things when it was possible to have big hits with bizarre music, like "I Am the Walrus."*

OLSEN: Michael Gira from the Swans said something really true: If Jimi Hendrix turned up today they wouldn't play him on the radio.

HUTCHENCE: They wouldn't sign him, he wouldn't get a deal.

OLSEN: Hendrix is to me a total performer, like Iggy in the early days: somebody who lived for his art to a ridiculous degree. You can tell Hendrix was just totally, totally into it. He didn't give a damn what people thought. He was a great inspiration to me when I was a kid.

HUTCHENCE: It's such different circumstances now. To be an artist and live as an artist and just write your music so that your life becomes your art has been demoted into the *underground*. We've screwed ourselves up in a sense. It's almost patronizing. We say, "Oh yes, you be underground over there and we'll get on with the business of making lots of dosh over here. No, no, it's great, you're really cool—but just *don't* try to get on the fucking radio." That's really the system, and in a lot of ways that's why we got together. To say that's stupid.

MUSICIAN: *Do the mechanics of the industry allow a guy from the avant-garde underground side and a guy who's had big success to really collaborate? I get the impression that there've been forces that haven't been that anxious to see Max Q succeed.*

HUTCHENCE: Uhh, yeah.

OLSEN: I get that impression, too.

HUTCHENCE: We're fighting an upward . . . we're fighting a lot, in many ways. Yeah. But Max Q is successful on an art level.

MUSICIAN: *Yeah, it's a real good record.*

HUTCHENCE: So on that level we're very happy.

OLSEN: It would be nice to see it do really well, though.

World Radio History

HUTCHENCE: That would finish the equation.

OLSEN: 'Cause you do it so people can hear it.

MUSICIAN: *When I heard it in the studio I thought, "Oh, this has a lot of levels but it's also real accessible, it's going to sell." "Monday Night by Satellite" is a real good pop song.*

HUTCHENCE: It's whole-hearted. More so than INXS ever would be. I mean, I'd never speak French at the end of an INXS song!

MUSICIAN: *Do you think your manager—or perhaps Atlantic Records—does not want Max Q to succeed?*

HUTCHENCE: I don't think they want to get into a lot of sticky business. I don't think they want . . . initially anyway. I think now it's different. They're *having* to take it seriously. They're realizing it's not just some fucking weird . . . it's not like "Mike's got a bit of time off and he's gonna go jerk off with his mates for a while in the studio and put it out for a laugh." It's not like that, it's more serious than that. It's an important Australian album. It's a really important album. I think the record company's really enthusiastic about it now. The confusion's out of the way as well. It's just that we came at them with, "This is Max Q, this is a new band, don't use me, don't exploit me for it." We wanted to do that because otherwise it would be "Michael's solo album" the whole way—and that wouldn't be fair to Ollie.

So if all works out well, it'll work out fine. But yeah, I know. I think even subconsciously my manager . . . it would be a subconscious thing where he wouldn't want to do it. It's a rock and a hard place, isn't it? The stupid thing is, it really is endorsed by INXS! I've been joking about that, but it is. The band knows that if I'm not happy I'm not gonna want to be with INXS. I mean, INXS makes me happy, but there's other things in life than being lead singer for a pop group.

MUSICIAN: *The Max Q album is full of references to "golden cages," to trying not to be a prisoner of other people's image of you.*

OLSEN: Right, exactly. Freedom, courage!

MUSICIAN: *Yet it seems that this project . . .*

HUTCHENCE: Is coming up against all of that. Right [*laughs*]. Yeah, quite right, quite right.

OLSEN: Bit of irony there, that's for sure.

HUTCHENCE: There is, there is.

OLSEN: I'm an outsider to this world, as far as this music level goes. Especially in America. I'm quite naive about exactly how things work here. I'm sort of slowly picking it up. Michael's taught me a lot about how that works and stuff. But we've both always thought that the record was kind of a sleeper. I remember when we put out "Way of the World," Michael, you said it wasn't so important if it was a hit, but it was a really good song and it came out first, pointing the way to the rest of the record. "This is Max Q and this is what you can expect." I dunno, I tend to think the record could start to take off now. I think the new video will help. It's very colorful, all dancing, all singing.

HUTCHENCE: [*American accent*] "Magic! Magic! Lots of magic!"

MUSICIAN: *Well, you should. 'Cause for better or worse radio needs some proof that they can trust something. For some underground bands that means doing a cover song. For Max Q it probably means making a video that shows Michael Hutchence singing so radio can say, "Oh, it's the guy from INXS—okay!"*

HUTCHENCE: Oh, we're moving into Plan B on the exploitation level. It is important. That's part of the reason we got together. We should be able to use me as well. But it's moving into that now, which is good. It's a wild video.

OLSEN: I saw it at four o'clock this morning on MTV.

HUTCHENCE: Did they play it at four o'clock? Great.

MUSICIAN: *Ollie, did you write the songs you wrote alone before Michael got involved?*

OLSEN: Yeah, for the most part. This is the third album I've done "Sometimes" on! I did it first with the Orchestra of Skin and Bone, on a record which was inspired by Harry Partch. It used all acoustic instruments. The album got great reviews in magazines like *Forced Exposure*, but I was never happy with the version of "Sometimes." An Australian band called Psychic Cowboys did it last year and it was a *really* bad version. So when we came to do this record I thought Michael would sing it really well, and we could do a really funky house arrangement. I think it's a great version. "Way of the World" I wrote a few years ago. "Ghost of the Year" was written fairly recently.

HUTCHENCE: That was written for me.

OLSEN: But usually I just write songs. Sometimes I might say, "Gee, that one would be really good for Michael Hutchence." Other stuff I say, "That's for NO!" I write a lot of stuff.

MUSICIAN: *Michael, was there anything Ollie asked you to sing that you refused?*

HUTCHENCE: No, I don't think . . .

OLSEN: You wanted to say "shit" and I wouldn't let you!

HUTCHENCE: He wouldn't let me sing a few things!

OLSEN: He wanted to say shit and I wanted the airplay.

MUSICIAN: *This is like* Persona! *You two are switching personalities.*

OLSEN: I have a certain propensity to swear. My last album they could only play one track on the radio. "Ot-Ven-Rot" [on *Max Q*] had "fucking" and "shit" in it originally, and I removed it.

MUSICIAN: *What's "Ot-Ven-Rot" mean?*

OLSEN: It's slang, gobbledegook Norwegian for a "dead friend running through rivers of blood" sort of thing, you know?

MUSICIAN: *We needed a word for that. It's funny, through the whole album the voice and lyrics are used not in the usual way, but as part of the track. You jump on a phrase and hit it like a drum—"Everything everything everything"—letting other sounds move*

World Radio History

around it. Often the voice is interrupted, cut off by another instrument or a sample. It messes with our preconceptions of the role of the voice and the words. Until finally we get to "Ot-Vén-Rot," the last track, and it's very lyric-centered—but by now we're programmed to listen the other way! By then we've been taken in and cleaned out.

HUTCHENCE: Yeah, it's fun, though, isn't it? You keep having to reappraise the way you listen to things. And then you get it real easy, and it just sort of comes over you and it's really nice to your ears. It's demanding at first, and then it sort of lays you out and gives you a blow job. Then it's really demanding again.

OLSEN: Then it bites your dick off. Michael thought this record was gonna be a lot more aggro-rock music . . .

HUTCHENCE: I tried, I tried . . .

OLSEN: But I wanted to make a pop album that sneaked in all these ideas that weren't normal in pop music. The strings on the middle section of "Way of the World" are directly Steve Reich. Structural minimalism is not pop music.

HUTCHENCE: Not these days. The art is deep, the record is fun. Those that know pick it up, but everybody else just [*snaps his fingers*]. The art is sort of squeezed in and used for strange effect.

MUSICIAN: *Even though a lot of popular musicians will confess in private that they are very serious about what they're trying to do, if they say that out loud they get, "Ah, who do you think you are? Fix your makeup and get out there, it's only rock 'n' roll!"*

HUTCHENCE: There's a great guilt trip—you're not supposed to be really happy about success.

MAX FACTORS

AT FIRST OLLIE and Michael shrugged off Max Q tech questions by saying, "It's all listed on the album." But when pushed, they talked as they always talk—enthusiastically over, under and around each other. "Samplers were Akai S900s," Ollie said. "We used an Atari computer with a Passport Master Tracks program. For guitars I had a Gibson Explorer..."

"And [Les Paul] Customs," Hutchence cut in. "I had my Epiphone, a 1961 semi-acoustic. A Music Man bass..."

". . . and we had a string section all playing fine fiddles," Ollie smiled. "There were some extraneous sounds, like bowing a cymbal." Hutchence threw in a surprise. "I did the majority of my vocals on a hand-held stage mike, a Shure SM57, in the control room. You get distortion—it's a battle—but you get a real performance. I hate singing in the studio." Did you move around? "Oh yeah, I was all over the place, running around the room, performing."

"You can have any amount of production," Ollie philosophized, "but some of the grungiest recordings of all time have been some of the best ones."

"It's all turning around now," Hutchence said. "Recording studios fractionalize music—and then the ridiculous point is, you're supposed to go back and then put it together again like there was one mike in the room! This is a stupid thing. I'm going to try and get into this four-mikes-in-a-room recording."

"The other way, though, is using the studio as an instrument—that's where house music happens. You can set up a whole lot of cyclic patterns and grooves and stuff and then you play the desk. I love that—it's like conducting an orchestra."

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MUSICIAN: *Or admit to having serious ambitions.*

HUTCHENCE: Oh yeah, that's a dirty word. I think the music changed while the attitude remained the same. Even though Jimi Hendrix's life was his art and so on, those guys also wanted to be big fucking stars. They were rock stars in the purest sense! Jimi Hendrix onstage did not fit the English concept of what a serious musician is. That's where we've screwed up! We've relegated all that music to the inward tortured souls that play to 200 people a week.

OLSEN: That's the ultimate dilemma in Australia. In my town, Melbourne, any form of success is despised. You've got to be really broke and have a rotten time for people to talk to you. Australia is a nation of knockers.

HUTCHENCE: The last thing you're supposed to be is successful.

OLSEN: Michael really gets it! They don't let him into clubs!

HUTCHENCE: It's not worth being a star there, I'll tell you. It's fucked: "Yeah, right—who do you think you are? Sorry, mate."

OLSEN: We got in a cab in Sydney and the driver goes, "Ya got a million dollars yet?" really nastily. Michael's going, "What?"

HUTCHENCE: I gave him a couple of bucks' tip anyway—and you don't tip in Australia—and he said, "Well, why don't you give me the whole 10?" "Well, fuck you!" You can't win. It's either, "Why don't you be a big star and give me a big tip?" or "Who do you think you are, giving me a big tip? You think you can give me $10, do you?"

MUSICIAN: *The politics on the album are much more personal than global. Michael, even when you've written songs inspired by a concrete political situation you avoid spelling out specifics, the Clash approach, in favor of creating an atmosphere.*

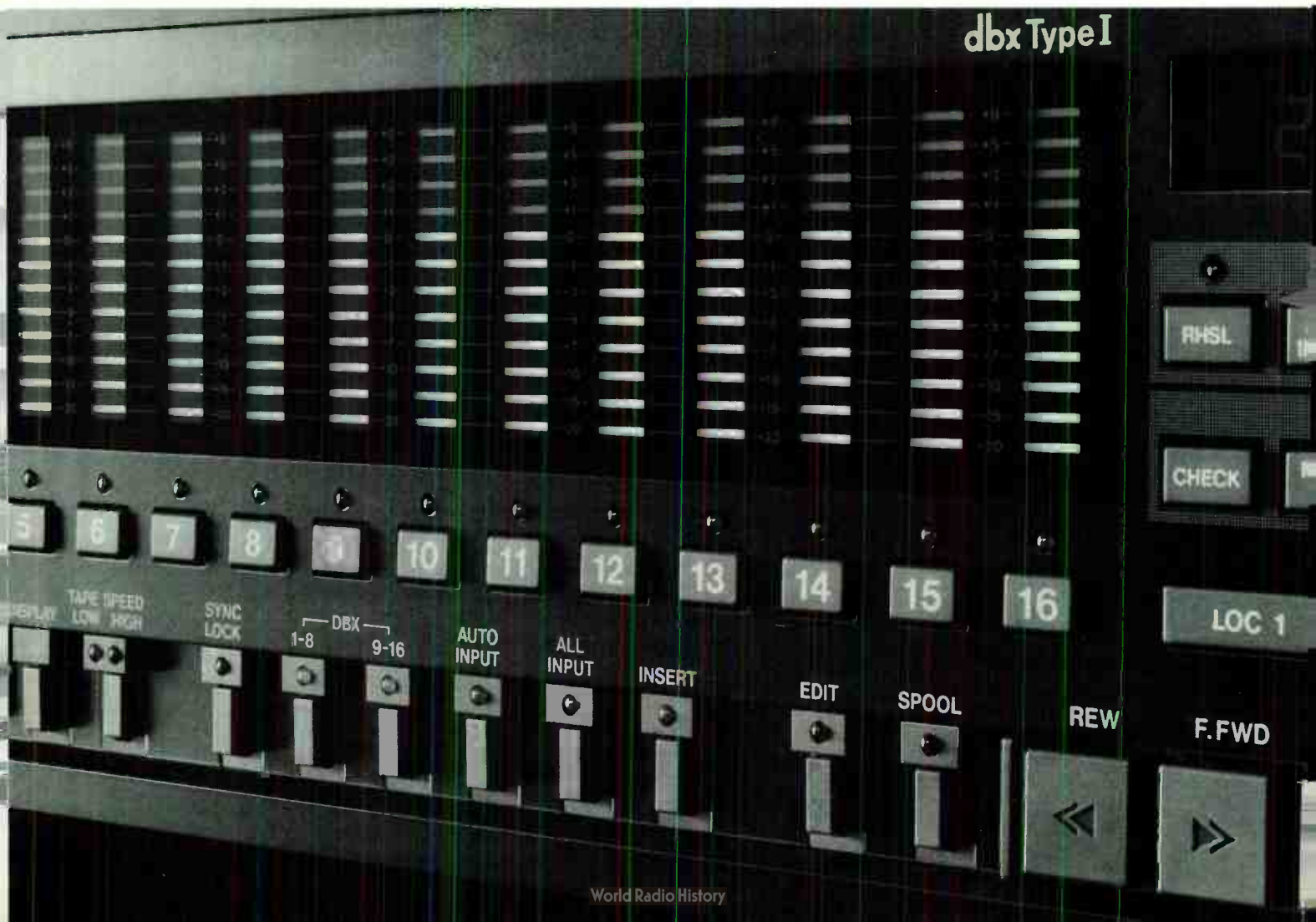
HUTCHENCE: Yeah. It's *people*, you know? People have got to sort themselves out. I really like that Michael Jackson song "Man in the Mirror": Start with yourself. I get the shits with Billy Bragg. Ollie and I were talking about this the other day: You've got to live those lyrics. You can be writing them for years and saying, "Yeah, that's really good." But do you take your own advice? Ollie and I have been going through this in our own lives. Yeah, I'm saying this but am I living it? We've both started living our lyrics recently. It takes courage.

OLSEN: It's a battle 'cause you have to constantly confront yourself. You've got to realize your mistakes and try to better them. It's difficult but that's what people have to do. You can't live your life diverting your mind and escaping. There is a reality.

HUTCHENCE: That's why, except for an occasional bout with this and that, we've become very pure on a drug level, too. They're all diversions. Purity is the future and the power.

MUSICIAN: *"Concrete" has that great line: "I know the smell of my prison . . . the smell of* me." *We're back to talking about cages. The album is full of references to traps and freedom. We all resist being defined by other people's perceptions of us. But it's hard to get past. And for a celebrity it's even more intense—because whatever piece of you is the part that sells becomes* all *of you to most people. That pressure comes through on the album. The listener bounces from thinking the songs describe the situation of a celebrity to thinking, "Wait a minute, this is just the condition of being human!"*

OLSEN: Another lyric of mine is "Mind is prison, body is soul, who



World Radio History

are the judges, who are the jailers, who are the prisoners, who are the victims?" Our whole organism is like some incredible, fucked-up legal system. We've been taught to disconnect our mind from our body, like the body is a fascist dictatorship. You gotta get the two things to work together. You're not a computer!

HUTCHENCE: Body and soul is a basic mistake that's been pushed on us. Energy is confined by reason. Energy is just pure delight.

OLSEN: Humans think they have to dominate everything. Michael and I both believe quality of life's more important than standard of living. You can be broke and have the greatest time of your life. It's nice to have money but it doesn't help you attain peace, or faith in yourself and people around you.

HUTCHENCE: A lot of successful people aren't happy because they thought they were going to get something tangible. Ah, success! Comes in a can! Great!

MUSICIAN: *It's especially weird in this business, 'cause you have to start driving for stardom when you're about 16. It requires great commitment. And if everything works out and you get it when you're 30, you're a 30-year-old man stuck living a 16-year-old's dream.*

HUTCHENCE: Exactly. Which is why you've got to laugh, you've got to take it all with a grain of salt. It's pretty funny.

OLSEN: Honestly, when this whole thing started it freaked me, caused me a lot of confusion.

HUTCHENCE: He spun out for a while.

OLSEN: I lost it a bit. It wasn't like your classic sort of heavy-metal rocker drinking himself to the Betty Ford clinic. It was more of a cosmic experience for me.

HUTCHENCE: Things appeared strange to you and the band that I take for granted. Like flying in a plane to Sydney, three meals a day, you can buy a new T-shirt.

OLSEN: "You mean we're staying in a *hotel?*" It was really funny. We were in New York mixing the album and I was staying in a nice apartment. Then I went home to my little room with the stink of dry rot and holes in the roof. I'm back there playing pubs with NO. It was back to normal, and it felt really strange. But also, it's been real therapeutic for the band, who're all friends of mine. It's been real good for them. Especially Arnie [Hanna], who's been in a wheelchair for the last couple of years. He'd been so withdrawn . . .

HUTCHENCE: The first day he came in we did "Buckethead" and he didn't say a thing.

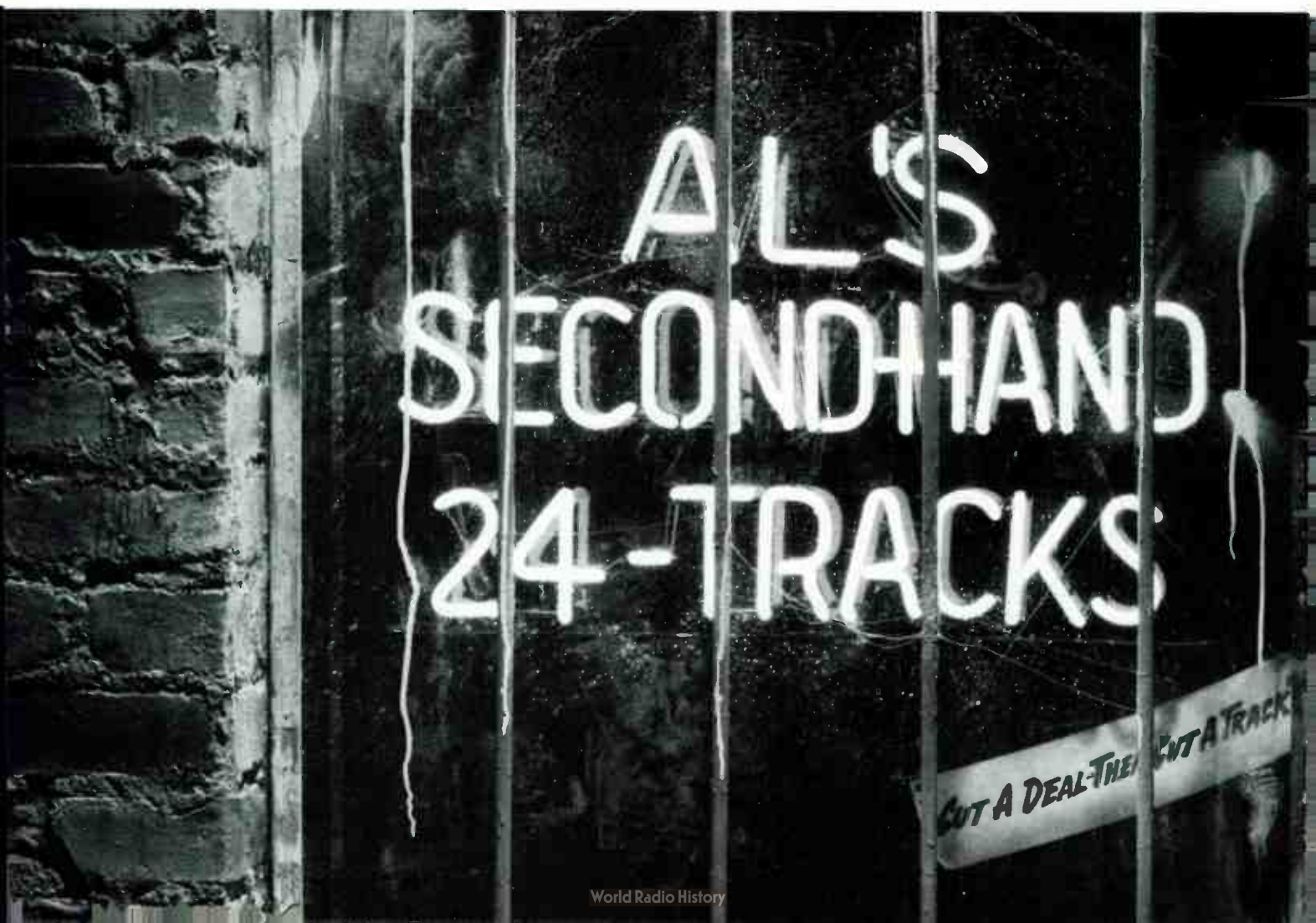
OLSEN: Now he's really happy, it's so good for him, he's such an amazing musician. We played in a band together. Me, him and Bill McDonald went to school together, started playing music together. He really needed to get his ego massaged, 'cause he's one fucking amazing guitar player. It's been really great for all of us to be accepted.

HUTCHENCE: John [Murphy] likes it, Bill loves it, Michael [Sheridan] has his doubts about it on occasion.

OLSEN: Yeah, but that's him. He loves it more than anybody!

HUTCHENCE: "Makeup!" It was funny doing the video with girls dancing and all.

OLSEN: [*laughing*] Michael Sheridan and John Murphy were right



World Radio History

into it. John used to be in Shriekback and the Associates. He's done fairly well over the years.

MUSICIAN: *You know, there's something that happens fairly often to big rock stars that never gets talked about. A rock star has an opening in his band—say he needs a new bass player. He says, "I'm going to hire Al, my old high school buddy." At first it's great. Al says, "You've made me a rock star! This is wonderful, you are the best friend I ever had!" Then, six months down the line, Al's saying, "Who the hell do you think you are? We're both rock stars here, buddy, you're no better than me, and by the way, I want a bigger dressing room." A year later the rock star's saying, "Oh no, why did I ever hire Al? He hates my guts, he's mean to the roadies and he's writing a tell-all book." Now Michael, when Max Q is over you can go back to INXS or make movies. Ollie, your profile has been raised, you can probably pick up your own career a bit ahead of where you left it—but what about the other members of Max Q?*

HUTCHENCE: Well, they're all involved in other things. Gus Till is involved with Ollie in other things. Bill and Michael are in NO. So really, what we're doing is shifting it around. Luckily it all works like a good puzzle, 'cause everybody does have a situation.

OLSEN: Their attitudes are not your normal musicians' attitudes. It sounds like cornball stuff, but really my friends and I are into music and we're obsessed with it. It's kind of like Max Q's an encore band. If Michael wants to do it, we want to do it. It could go on forever. There's no pretension when we're together. It was a bit tough for Michael at first 'cause he had to get to know the guys, but they're such great guys. We're all great friends, it's very equal. We were all in the studio all the time, really on the case. We're into the process of making music to the point of total obsession. Michael clicked with all of us 'cause he's got the same feeling.

MUSICIAN: *No one in the band's decided he's a rock star too?*

HUTCHENCE: I think we went through a little bit of that to begin with. If you've been sort of hanging around doing your thing and then move into *this* area, there's just more attention being paid to you. People who work with me are going to take care of them. So everybody's been taken care of at a level they've never in their lives been taken care of. That does something to a person anyway. So initially there was a week or so when people were probably surprising themselves, or saying things and then thinking, "Oh, did I say that? Did I *do* that?" It was very interesting for them to have to place themselves in it with us, or else engage in a big ideological struggle all day long. So you either let go a bit and relax and adapt and accept a little bit, or you spend your days going like this [*puts on desperate look*]. There was a bit of that for a few weeks, but I think everybody rode it out and is on a good level now. We have jokes now with each other. "Michael, massage now?"

OLSEN: Michael Sheridan, the guitarist, suffers the most. He once said, "I can't do this guitar solo now, I've got to wipe the caviar from my fingers." He's never gonna live that one down! Never, never.

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THE PARALLEL

BY MARK ROWLAND

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE MARSEL

World Radio History

UNIVERSE OF

SOME GREAT BANDS were at Woodstock, and many great bands were not. But chances are, NRBQ is the only great band that played near Woodstock. They gigged

that famous weekend at a bar about 40 miles away called the Airdrome, whose motif included parachutes suspended from the ceiling. "It was a place for army guys," Terry Adams recalls drily, "and that's who showed up. We were like Bob Hope—we entertained the troops."

Almost 20 years later to the day, the members of NRBQ—Adams on keyboards, bassist Joey Spampinato, guitarist Al Anderson, drummer Tom Ardolino—are again on the road, this time in New England for a string of one-night stands. In the interim they've played hundreds of clubs, thousands of tunes and proved themselves, for more than a few critics and fans, the finest American band of the last two decades.

But while the events at Woodstock have been all but commemorated on a postage stamp, NRBQ remains in some way that band at the Airdrome, largely unheard or overlooked by a generation weaned on corporate rock radio. They're like the kings of some parallel musical universe, a phantom legend, though a legend nonetheless.

For the story of NRBQ is a story that celebrates every virtue and defies every convention of rock 'n' roll. Their fans have included Jimi Hendrix and Carl Perkins, Elvis Costello and Professor Irwin Corey, Bonnie Raitt and Sun Ra. They've opened for Ike & Tina Turner, and Bruce Springsteen has opened for them. They've recorded for and been booted off labels large and small; the head of one company kept them from recording for six years. Still they've managed to put out 13 albums of original music, mostly gems; their latest effort, *Wild Weekend*, was recently released on Virgin.

> "WE'RE ALL IN AWE OF BIG AL. HE'S GOT PERFECT PITCH, AND HE SINGS AND PLAYS GUITAR BETTER THAN ANYBODY. I DON'T KNOW WHY WE'RE HANGING AROUND WITH HIM."

They are, in the broadest sense possible, an American band. Their style draws from black R&B, white honky-tonks, big-band swing, hard bop, avant-garde jazz, white noise, children's music, New Orleans blues, '60s pop, doo-wop, Thelonious Monk, Big Joe Turner, Sun Ra and the Beatles without ever seeming to strain continuity or sound like anyone except themselves. Their live performances, so hot they make your feet talk, have earned them a devoted following and enough press raves to wallpaper your house. And somehow, through all their journeys, they've combined a strict standard of artistry with an elaborate sense of fun. A few other bands have lasted this long, but only NRBQ sounds as fresh today as they did at their start.

The friendly teenager hired to drive the guys over to tonight's gig, however, has never heard of them. Innocently he asks, "What kind of music do you play?" There's an uneasy silence. It's a question no one has ever been able to answer.

So he tries another tack. "Where do you guys play?"

"All over," Joey Spampinato says, then laughs. "Wherever you've been, we were somewhere else."

CARMELLA'S BROAD STREET LOUNGE in Meriden, Connecticut is smack in the heart of 'Q country. The venue sits on one of those dilapidated state highways the interstate made obsolete; there's a cheap hotel next door, and no sign anywhere to announce the band or the price of admission. The stocky doorman, who's packing a rod, looks over each customer as if to decide how much they'll have to pay. There's no air conditioning, just a bar on each side so fans can run the gauntlet of thirst.

Miles Davis said that when he was a kid he could tell if the band passing through town was any good by the way the drummer set up his kit. There's some of that with NRBQ. The way they ascend the stage—the majestically rotund Anderson cradling his pink Tele like a toy ukelele, the slighter Spampinato smiling with totem-like serenity, Ardolino hidden behind an anarchic mass of curls as he bunkers behind his trap set, the impossibly blond Adams coolly surveying this evening's realm as he straddles the piano stool and leans back 45 degrees to call off the opening number—puts a charge into the air. Their collective mien, accented by bright, candy-colored clothing, suggests a cross between a magic show and a giant coaster ride, where the tricks and the thrills keep changing.

Maybe that's because NRBQ never plans a show or plays the same set twice. Even Adams, who calls the shots, has no idea what he'll select in advance. "Every night is different," he points out. "Every town and every moment. If you're sensitive and ready for it, you know you can do the songs that people need and want to hear—whether they realize it or not."

The crowd at Carmella's wants, needs and gets ferocious rock 'n' roll. It's just that kind of evening; murky amps at ear-shattering decibels for a happy, fetid, beer-stained mob. No sense trying on provocative Monk arrangements or exquisite balladry; deprived of a soundcheck, the band can't even hear themselves on monitors. So Terry calls for one rave-up after another, from "All Mama's Children" to "Get Rhythm" to "Want You Feel Good Too" to "Crazy Like a Fox," Joey and Tom building a hard swinging bottom as Al Anderson, his swampy tone slicing through the club like a razor, takes guitar choruses that drive nasty, insinuating blues figures into chordal sheets of sound. The fans crush around the bandstand and yell for more. Halfway through the set the bar runs out of beer bottles.

Connecticut is one of several sites along the East Coast, including Miami, Louisville and even Woodstock, whose fans consider NRBQ the hometown band—one more thing about the group you can't quite pin down. That they've always drawn well here, however, is directly attributable to the presence of Al Anderson, known to everyone, then and now, as "Big Al."

Big Al has been with NRBQ since 1971, but he was a star in these parts long before that. As leader of the Wildweeds, the best band to come out of Connecticut, he wrote and sang several R&B-inflected songs that became regional hits, including "No Good to Cry," which reached number one on local pop charts in 1967. He was 18 at the time. "I lived home with Mom, had a Corvette, owned a house on the best street in Windsor," he recalls in his characteristically sardonic manner. "I was rolling."

In some ways he's never gotten over it. Al is the self-professed "regular guy" in the band, the one who openly admires contemporary pop artists like Sting and Terence Trent D'Arby, who wants to write hits and expresses annoyance at the rest of the group's historic tendencies to "play over the audience's head."

"If it were up to me there wouldn't be any 'Bonanza,' you know what I mean?" he says, referring to a warped version of the TV theme that appears on the group's *All Hopped Up* LP. "But they always outvote me. I bring in stuff they hate."

How can you tell?

"You bring a song in, and if they go to the fridge and get a soda, you know you didn't do so good. If they go, 'Let's try it again,' you got 'em.

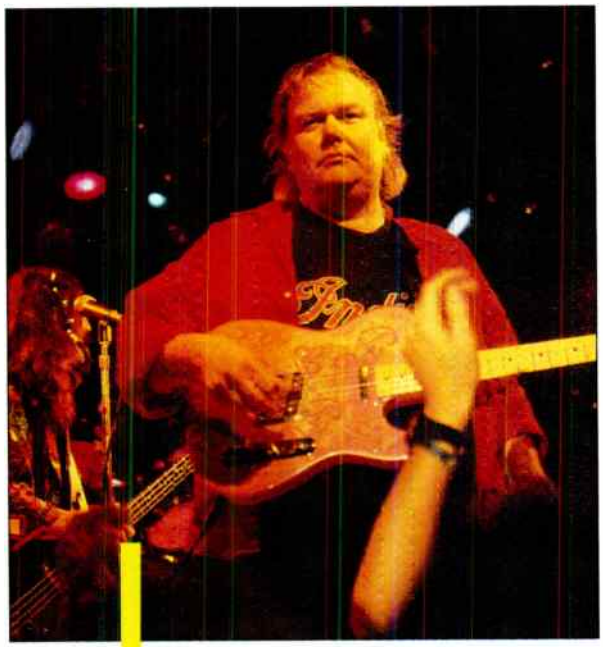
World Radio History

But if they start wandering around, opening up the *New York Post*, it's a bad review. I've had a few of those."

At six feet four and well over "300 pounds of Heavenly Joy," to quote the Willie Dixon song he's been performing of late, Big Al is a naturally formidable presence, which he likes to accent with a cynical or mock-menacing demeanor. "You have to know how to talk to him," explains Dennis Spring, a friend of Al's since high school who owns an area restaurant where "No Good to Cry" still reigns supreme on the jukebox. "He wants you to insult him back."

What's really intimidating about Al isn't his size or manner, it's his talent. He's the kind of musician whose voice is so distinct and so overwhelming he inspires you to pick up your own guitar . . . and sell it.

"We're all in awe of Big Al," Terry admits. "He's got perfect pitch, sings better than anybody I know. And he plays guitar better than anybody I know. He's amazing. I don't even know why we're hanging around with him."



IF IT WERE UP TO ME, THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY WARPED STUFF LIKE 'BONANZA.' BUT THEY ALWAYS OUTVOTE ME. I BRING IN THE STUFF THEY HATE."—AL ANDERSON

Big Al was always big—"right out of the oven," as he puts it. Growing up he was probably the only guy in Connecticut tuned into Southern music. "That's where everything starts, no matter what you say, from jazz to R&B, to rock 'n' roll, rockabilly. WWVA in West Virginia would come in at night. 'I Walk the Line' was the first thing that flipped me out. 'Hello Mary Lou' was the second, guitarwise. I didn't know you could bend strings. I didn't even know Chet Atkins was using his fingers. He's still my idol, Chet Atkins. I bought every album."

Al played in a succession of high school bands including the Visuals ("our motto was 'You have to see it to believe it'") and the Altones, "'cause we had three guys named Al." Next came the Six-Packs, "which was kind of a joke, but then it got serious with the 'Weeds."

While every other '60s band would cover the Beatles' "Paperback Writer," the Wildweeds would perform "I Am the Walrus." They went from an R&B band to a psychedelic pop band to a flat-out country band and were still doing well when Al joined NRBQ. "And that was the end of the Wildweeds," he admits. "Self-professed leader . . ."

Anderson was a fan of NRBQ before they met, crediting their first guitarist, Steve Ferguson, as another strong influence on his style. After Ferguson quit, Al was invited to play with the band without being told it was an audition. "When they first came over to my house I played them Joni Mitchell's 'Blue,'" Al recalls. "I'm probably lucky I got into the group at all." He was hired about a week before NRBQ went into the studio to record *Scraps*, one of the best albums of their career. "Their manager called me and said, 'You'll never have to worry about anything ever again.' Then I got my first week's pay—five dollars. I'd been doing great with the 'Weeds."

Still, Al says, "it wasn't that much of a struggle. There might have been a lack of money," he says, arching an eyebrow, "but we got everything else that we wanted."

So you consider the band a success?

"No," he decides. "More greatness than success. Success is seven figures."

NRBQ SPENDS the next day at a Holiday Inn in downtown New Haven—all but Big Al, who's home recovering from having some teeth pulled the day before. Last night's star of the show, he'd done it on a dose of painkillers.

Tom Ardolino makes a beeline for Cutler's, "New England's largest record store," a few blocks away. Tommy is the new kid in the band, having joined NRBQ when he was 19. Of course that was in 1974. But with his roly-poly physique and plumes of curls that fall into his face, he still looks like a kid, with a boyish enthusiasm to match. And nothing gets Tom more enthusiastic than expanding a record collection that's even stranger and more vast than his band's repertoire.

"Records are the first thing I remember," he explains. "From when I was two. Terry brought [avant-garde jazz drummer and composer] Sunny Murray over to my house once," he mentions proudly. "And he said to me, 'With all these records, you don't need friends.'"

That's how Tommy met the band. Growing up in Springfield, Massachusetts, he'd first seen NRBQ perform in 1970 and was wowed. The next day he bought their album—*Boppin' the Blues* had just come out—and noted the address on the back. He and Terry began corresponding by sending each other reel-to-reel tapes, everything from Nervous Norvus and the Davis Sisters to Lincoln Chase to David Rose's "Holiday for Strings," and discovered they shared unusual tastes. "Though Terry was much more advanced," Tom says. "It's like it was all there, waiting for me to hear."

A few years later, Ardolino was watching NRBQ perform at a local club. Returning for an encore, Terry discovered that their regular drummer, Tom Staley, was missing. "Get up there," he told Tom. It was the first time Ardolino had ever played in public. Intended as a joke, he put down the beat so well that Big Al, who'd been facing the audience the whole time, never knew the difference. When Staley left the band shortly thereafter, Ardolino was the only candidate to replace him. In fact, it's the only job he's ever had.

"It was a little crazy at first," he remembers. "I knew all the songs but I wasn't used to playing for sets. You know, when you play with records, you can't play too loud or you can't hear the record. But Terry said, 'Hit it as loud and as hard as you can.'" Tom complied, much to the road crew's chagrin. He didn't break just sticks, he ruined drum rims, an average of one a night. "Cymbals too," he adds cheerfully. "They'd crack on the sides."

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When he's not playing, Tom likes to hang out at home with his collections; not just records but video commercials, movie trailers and such choice morsels of the cinema as *Daughter of Horror* or *Five Minutes to Live*, which features Johnny Cash as a murderous psychopath. "It's harder to find old records these days, especially 45s," he observes. "Like they're almost all gone. I'm pretty happy with what I've gotten, so I'm not that worked up about it. But I like finding them. And I flipped over CDs. I'd buy the import of a CD I already had, hoping it would sound better." He looks guilty as he says it. "CDs . . . I'm in trouble."

After two hours in Cutler's one learns the difference between an amateur collector and a master; unhurried but methodically, Ardolino is examining every CD and vinyl product in the store. So far he's come up with three finds—a collection of music by the Dells, Perry Como's Greatest Hits and a British import of U.K. hits from 1963. "I like a lot of these songs," he says approvingly. "I guess I was pretty happy that year."

Tom isn't strictly an archivist. "I always try to like new stuff, I'm open to what's on the radio. I like De La Soul, Elvis Costello, Half Japanese"—he catches himself. "Well, I guess they're not on the radio yet. And Brian Wilson ain't making it on the radio now," he adds with disappointment. "They put 'Melt Away' out with a weird B-side but it didn't get any push."

Wilson owns a special place of honor in Tom's pantheon. "I got to meet him at the Warners office in Boston. I was never so nervous in my life! I couldn't stop my hand from shaking. I said, 'I'm sorry, I'm just so nervous.' And Brian said, 'That's all right. I'm nervous too.'"

"WE ALWAYS THOUGHT PRODUCERS WERE LIKE BEANBAGS IN CHAIRS, BUT WE DECIDED THIS TIME WE COULD USE—NEEDED—HELP. NOW IF WE CAN STAND IT, WE'LL DO IT."

"AREN'T WE GONNA change the name of the group?" Joey asks. We're back at the hotel, killing time. "I thought we were gonna do that."

"Yeah, we're changing our name. We want the *Musician* readers to send in suggestions," Terry says. "Whoever comes up with the best name gets a date with Big Al."

"If it's a girl it's a date with Big Al," Tommy corrects him. "If it's a guy, it's a day."

NRBQ has changed its name before. The Marlboro Men. Al Anderson & the Amazing Amateurs. And the most celebrated name change: Baby Macaroni.

For months NRBQ kept telling its audiences that the change was imminent. "The night we were going to officially change it, the audience brought these big banners: 'Welcome Baby Macaroni!'" Terry remembers. "The bass drum was made up and everything. It was really going over big. Then after the second song we told the crowd we were tired of 'Baby Macaroni' and everyone went 'ohhhh' and the banners came down and Phil Collison, our road guy, came out with a new bass drum head that said 'Billy the Kid.' The crowd got really mad," Terry laughs. "All the banners came down. That was our last name change."

NRBQ has more than a passing reputation for conceptual humor—for many fans their jokes are as memorable as their music: the time they had to play a gig at noon and showed up onstage wearing pajamas; the ritual beheading of Cabbage Patch dolls; the twisted versions of such pop kitsch as "People," "Just the Way You Are," "Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" . . . the list goes on.

"I think personalities and our sense of humor have helped keep the band together," Joey observes. "If you have those ingredients, and the rest is there, you can stay around a long time."

The jokes, while furthering their legend, probably haven't done a whole lot for NRBQ's career. Not that the guys care; they do what they want. But others in the record industry, including some critics, seem to suspect musicians with a sense of humor as somehow lacking purpose. In NRBQ's case, that prejudice gets fortified by the songwriting, whose lyrics are frequently about girls and romance, cruising around, the joys of living, etc., and not about global politics, life on the mean streets and how they still haven't found what they're looking for. Their refusal to take themselves seriously is proof to some that their music isn't worth taking seriously. That's not funny at all.

"As much as I believe in things like animal rights and the environment—nothing could be more important to me—if it's not effective music, I don't want to hear it," Terry declares. "In fact, to me depressing animal-rights music is as harmful to animal rights as Woodstock is to the memory of the '60s. You've got to know what the power of music is and how to handle it. Don't just put philosophies and lyrics to sound."

Adams has in fact written songs with nuanced social messages—"Down at the Zoo," "When Things Was Cheap," "The Dough Got Low"—but feels that the importance of lyrics has been inflated. It's one reason he never changes a line once he starts to write a song ("How do they describe Kerouac's method—spontaneous prose?" he laughs) and why the band has never printed lyric sheets on their records. "You've got to listen to music, you don't read to it."

"I always listen for the music first," Joey agrees. "If I like it I'll go further and listen to the lyrics. So when I write I'm actually writing music and hoping that the lyrics come up to that level."

It's an ingenuous approach that at times feels authentically poetic (Joey's "Boys in the City," Terry's "Things to You," Al's "Crazy Like a Fox") and other times is simply ingenuous. But the words aren't dumb, and, more important, they don't get in the way. For songs like "Me and the Boys" or "Like a Locomotive" or "It Comes to Me Naturally" they deftly evoke a sensation, a mood, that the rhythms drive home. NRBQ's real message is implicit in their sound—it's about the spiritual powers of music itself.

"We probably do stand for something," Joey ventures reluctantly. "But it's something that's hard to talk about. Maybe if you did it would sound corny, or lose its meaning."

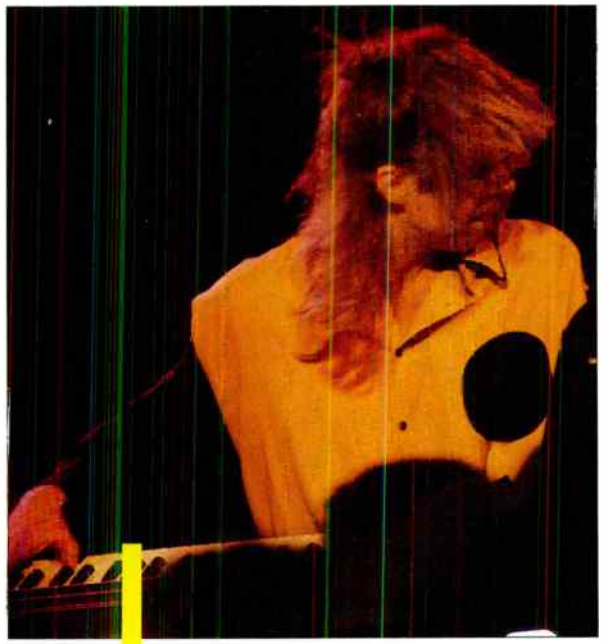
"If you can appreciate the thrill of life with yourself, then with just a little bit more imagination you can appreciate the thrill of everything else that's alive," Terry points out. "If you can just dig yourself for a second: 'Wait a minute, I'm having a good time, maybe these other things should have a good time too.' But you can't weigh down the music with this stuff."

The irony behind all this is that, unlike their music, NRBQ's humor is frequently pointed, even rude. I remember one show before a desultory crowd at the Palomino Club in L.A., where the band stopped playing and took a 15-minute cigarette break onstage, staring at the crowd and puffing away without comment. The audience stopped laughing well before the guys picked up their

World Radio History

instruments again, though after that they paid more attention, enough for two encores. Another time, in Florida, the band turned on the unappreciative locals with a dissonant free-jazz jam called "Welcome to Orlando." When they returned for their second set that night, the sign on the club's marquee had been altered to read "NRBQ SUCKS."

"At one time we made a living annoying audiences," Terry concedes. "We don't do that so much anymore."



THIS IS A GOOD TIME for NRBQ. *Wild Weekend*, their first studio album in over six years, is out on Virgin Records; more surprisingly, the label seems committed to getting it played on the radio. "It's a nice change," Joey says diplomatically. "A record company signing us that likes us for ourselves."

"I'VE NEVER BEEN HAPPY WITH OUR RECORDINGS UNLESS SOMETHING HAPPENS THAT I DIDN'T KNOW WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. I LIKE THAT CHANCE ELEMENT."—TERRY ADAMS

It hasn't always been that way. When it comes to getting jerked around by the business, NRBQ has a track record Graham Parker would admire. They've been hired and fired by Columbia, Kama Sutra and Mercury; consequently, a lot of their best work (the *Kick Me Hard*, *Tiddlywinks* and *All Hopped Up* LPs) arrived without benefit of major-league distribution on the band's Red Rooster label. In 1982 they signed with Albert Grossman's Bearsville Records and put together an utterly delightful record (*Grooves in Orbit*), after which Grossman refused to let the band either record or be released from their contract at less than a prohibitive cost. In other words, he tried to kill their career, a situation which was only resolved after Grossman himself died in 1986.

NRBQ's suspicions about the music business have been more or less reciprocated. The pop market thrives on new faces and established formulas, especially when they mix, and NRBQ boast neither. To a lot of bottom-line execs, breaking a band with 20 years in the biz and no hits is a prospect about as enticing as doing something creative for a living.

Not long after getting out of their Bearsville contract, for instance, the 'Q was set to sign with Island Records. To clinch the deal, they played a showcase at the Bottom Line, a Manhattan club a few blocks from this company's headquarters. Several executives showed up as part of the sold-out house, enough to fill three tables, and NRBQ responded with a monster set, drawing three encores. "And they all left shaking their heads," Terry remembers. "We never heard from them again."

But timing is everything. "I think we're conscious that there's a return right now to real rock, or roots rock—or maybe just real music," says Nancy Jeffries, the A&R rep who signed the band. "And NRBQ is pretty unrelenting about that." Still, she admits "it was a pretty hard sell" at Virgin. "There were other people who were pretty vocal about saying, 'If they've had so many chances and haven't happened yet there must be a reason.' Because of that we didn't have such a huge budget to work with.

"I also think that they are a little difficult to deal with if you come at them with a strictly businesslike approach," Jeffries observes. "But it's because they are real artists."

For their part, NRBQ displayed a kinder, gentler nature in the studio than they'd evidenced in the past, even inviting Virgin representatives to suggest what songs among their 30 or so demos they'd like to see on the album. "It didn't matter much to us," Joey notes. "After all, we liked all those songs too." They collaborated with producers Andy Paley (who produced Brian Wilson's LP) and long-term associate Bill Scheniman (who'd also produced Al Anderson's recent solo album, *Party Favors*). It was the first time in more than a decade NRBQ had let anyone outside the band produce their music.

"We always thought producers were like beanbags in chairs," Terry says. "We wouldn't even give ourselves credit on albums, because we didn't like what the word stood for. But we decided that this time we could use—needed—help. So we went with guys who knew us and respected us. We've got a new philosophy," he grins. "If we can stand it, we'll do it."

The result is an NRBQ album more cohesive and devoid of quirks than previous offerings, without compromising their sound or their attitude. There's still romantic balladry, nasty guitar licks, chiming pop harmonies and just enough sonic twists to make the hardcore Q-heads feel reassured that no one's gone too far uptown. The music, almost entirely penned by Terry or Joey ("I was asleep on the job," Al admits), includes a tribute to zydeco accordionist Boozoo Chavis, and a tune called "Fireworks" that was so evocative it literally burned up the tape machine in the studio where it was being recorded. "Wild Weekend," once a 1962 instrumental hit for the Rebels, has been retooled with lyrics, a new bridge and considerably more guitar crunch. It's the first single, though the poppy "Little Floater," the sweet Everly Brothers balladry of "This Love Is True" and the effervescent "If I Don't Have You" are as hooky a trio of tunes as you're likely to hear on the radio this year. Whether you will hear them on the radio is an open question, as always. "Though I guess it would be nice to have a hit record," Joey muses. "It's probably the only thing we haven't done."

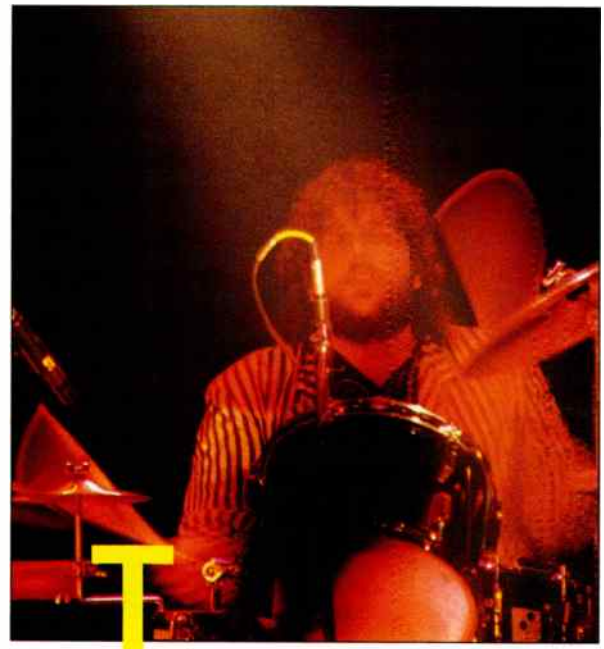
TERRY ADAMS IS CRUISING downtown New Haven looking for his favorite health food store. Pulling into the parking lot, a guy nearby honks his horn to prod him to move more quickly. Instead, Terry fixes him with a stare for what seems like minutes and glides by at a snail's

World Radio History

pace. Adams has almost shoulder-length blond hair, a slight Southern drawl and a wide, open smile. He's one of the friendliest guys you'll meet, which helps disguise an unusually strong-willed personality. You'd have as much luck pushing Madonna around.

If Terry isn't NRBQ's leader—it's not that kind of group—over the years he's become first among equals. He calls the sets, of course, but more importantly he's the one whose personality seems inextricable with the band's own. NRBQ's penchant for tossing off more ideas than most bands ride careers on has a lot to do with Terry's imagination and restlessness; he loves the sound of surprise.

"I don't want to hear things that sound the same one after another, even if it's good. Nobody's looking for the Singing Nun right now. If it was up to me, I'd be looking for the Singing Nun and throwing the other stuff out. I'm looking for something that's fun to hear."



"TERRY TOLD ME TO HIT AS LOUD AND AS HARD AS I COULD." TOM DIDN'T BREAK JUST STICKS—HE RUINED DRUM RIMS, ONE A NIGHT. "CYMBALS, TOO."—TOM ARDOLINO

That philosophy has often put NRBQ ahead of its time—maybe too far ahead. They recorded an album with Carl Perkins a decade or so before the rockabilly revival and wrote a "tribute" song to their pal, the pro wrestler "Captain" Lou Albano, years before MTV discovered the joys of mating rock and wrestling. When Captain Lou made ads to promote an NRBQ album in 1979 a lot of radio stations wouldn't even play them: "They called it 'offensive,'" Terry recalls. He shakes his head. "Now you see wrestlers doing computer ads."

On a happier note, Terry's devotion to the music of Thelonious Monk (he selected tracks and wrote liner notes for CBS' excellent *Always Know* reissue) resulted, a few years back, in NRBQ's version of "Little Rootie Tootie" appearing on the inventive Monk tribute LP put together by producer Hal Willner. More recently the band contributed an arrangement of "Whistle While You Work" for another Willner project, this a collection of songs from Walt Disney movies.

"I've never been happy with our recordings unless something happens that I didn't know was gonna happen," he explains. "I like that element of chance, a lot. You have to be shocked, that's my kick. I've been a fan of that since I was a kid."

Terry grew up in Louisville, a town where "I found out you could get in a lot of trouble just by being yourself. You didn't have to do anything malicious or naughty, just look like yourself and think like yourself and you were in trouble."

He began playing piano in the sixth grade after offering to play a tune for a talent show. "I'd never played piano before, I don't know what came over me. I think I played 'Sentimental Journey,' 'cause it's the only one you could play on the doorbell. Ding-a-ding, a dinga dinga dinga—you know? I used to drive my mother nuts with that." By the eighth grade he'd gravitated toward jazz. "My big brother Donn was playing trombone in a swing band and he had a big influence on me. I liked listening to stuff that was over my head. I liked the mystery of it."

Terry's flamboyant piano style has often drawn comparisons to Jerry Lee Lewis and Thelonious Monk. The Jerry Lee parallel is facile at best; Johnny Johnson, Lafayette Leake, Floyd Cramer and guitar players like Link Wray all had more influence, he says. But there's no denying Monk: "I'm probably always influenced by him, he's just a part of everything."

Terry's taste for modern jazz never cut much ice in Louisville, though: "I was playing trumpet in a marching band, and those guys were so out of it, I'd be trying to tell them about Miles Davis and they'd be telling me, 'No man, it's Al Hirt. Al Hirt's the king!' That's the kind of town it was. I knew I wasn't supposed to be there."

Around this time, Donn, Terry and guitarist Steve Ferguson formed the earliest edition of NRBQ. "Terry and Steve had been in another group," Donn recalls. "But Terry got fired for growing his hair long! So Steve quit in disgust and they tried to make NRBQ a going thing." Donn came up with the name, originally an acronym for New Rhythm and Blues Quartet as well as a parody of the Modern Jazz Quartet, or MJQ. No matter, Terry recalls, the band soon broke up. "One guy was in jail, another guy lived 'cross town, we didn't know who the drummer was. We had our own sound but we were too crazy to stay together."

Terry and Steve finally moved the band to Miami. Why Florida? "The bass player knew a go-go dancer there who said she could get them in with club owners," explains Donn, who became NRBQ's road manager and sometime trombonist. There they merged with another band called The Seven of Us, featuring a singer named Frankie Gadler and bassist Joey Spampinato, and gravitated north to New York.

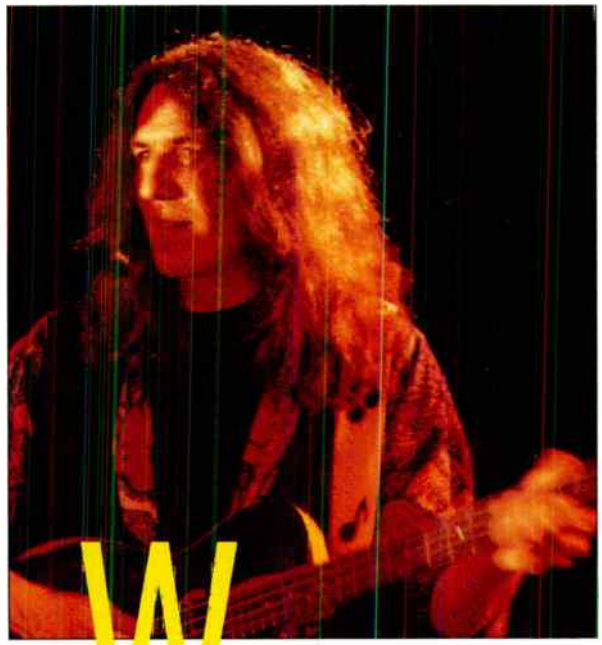
"It ended up being their two main guys and our two main guys," Joey explains. "But Terry had such a strong personality, it didn't take long for the group to start molding into something else really fast."

That's a typically self-effacing remark; probably few fans are even aware that the present edition of NRBQ began as Joey's band. But Spampinato, as soft-spoken as Terry is loquacious, is the glue that holds the current mesh of sounds and personalities together. In some ways he and Terry are alter egos: Joey's forte is melody, Terry's harmony; Spampinato's cleanly constructed romantic pop contrasts nicely with Adams' more experimental motifs. Terry, who grew up in Kentucky admiring the music of the singing Davis Sisters, lives in New York, while Joey, now married to Skeeter Davis and living in Nashville, grew up in the Bronx.

Joey began by singing doowop: "It's all over the place there, a

World Radio History

singing group in every doorway." With the British Invasion of the early '60s, the era of pure singing groups went into a fade. "You had to back yourself up, so I ended up playing bass. I'd write songs on a guitar but bass came easier to me. Everyone else had their parts and you just filled in what was left. I learned to write songs in that period when the Beatles came out, and their songs, even when they were doing something simple, there were clever things going on in the music. That always caught me."



Joey made the news last year when rumors spread that he'd be joining not the Beatles but the Rolling Stones. The story got started after Keith Richards invited him to join the band he put together for the Chuck Berry documentary film *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll.* A little later, when it appeared that Bill Wyman was balking at the idea of another Stones tour, the *Washington Post* reported that Joey was in the wings as a replacement. If he'd joined, there'd at least be more widespread agreement that Spampinato was a member of the world's best rock 'n' roll band.

"But no one asked me!" he says. "Anyway, I think it would be a bad idea in a way. When you have somebody that famous over such a period of time, you can't replace him. Well, they replaced Brian Jones, but for someone who didn't kick the bucket you can't. I want Wyman to stay there."

"WE PROBABLY DO STAND FOR SOMETHING, BUT IT'S HARD TO TALK ABOUT. MAYBE IF YOU DID, IT'D SOUND CORNY OR LOSE ITS MEANING."—JOEY SPAMPINATO

Unlike the Stones, Terry and Joey survived several personnel changes in NRBQ's first decade before Big Al and Tom locked the band's chemistry into place. But they established a tone early. Their first summer together, while still billed as The Seven of Us, the band got a summer job playing every night at a hotel in New Jersey. The only problem was the hotel's policy of having "gross nights," where customers could come up onstage and sing dirty songs. After one such experience, The Seven of Us showed up to play the next night clad only in their underwear. "We said, 'Hey, you want gross?'" Terry says. After three songs they were fired.

By 1969 they'd changed their name back to NRBQ and were performing at Steve Paul's Scene, a popular musicians' hangout in New York; guitarist Steve Ferguson's fans included Jimmy Page and Jimi Hendrix. They'd also spawned a roadie band led by Donn Adams called the Dickens, who played heavy-metal versions of songs like "Wake Up Little Susie." During one particularly noisome performance at the club, Donn spotted Jimi Hendrix waving a white tablecloth from the balcony in a gesture of surrender. Meanwhile, NRBQ signed to Columbia and released their debut album later that year, a record that included beat versions of tunes by Carla Bley, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Sun Ra.

NRBQ has made better records since then, but none more definitive—or at least none so adept at resisting definition. Though people never tire of trying. "Before that record, I never heard of the word 'eclectic,'" Joey says wryly. "I've never stopped hearing it since."

TONIGHT'S SHOW is at a private residence in Darien; after getting directions we hop in Terry's car and whisk across Connecticut's Interstate 95. "I could sure go for some grass," Tommy says wistfully. "I don't think you can get any around here," says Joey. "I could use about three ounces," says Terry.

It takes a few moments to figure out they're not talking about marijuana but wheatgrass juice. "We love that wheatgrass, it's the best," says Tom. "I have it almost every day. I was just reading this pamphlet where it says that Brian Wilson gets wheatgrass at this place in Malibu"—he smiles happily at the thought. "Great."

The guys play private events rarely and with reluctance, but the hosts are gracious and the pastoral setting—an expanse of lawns and meadows and, in the distance, swans nestling on a pond—is a pleasant change from the atmosphere at Carmella's. After a couple of numbers the gentility have abandoned their croquet mallets and are frugging on the grass in front of the patio. With few people around to please but themselves, Terry calls a set to delight the connoisseurs—the jump standard "Music Music Music," "Pretty Thing," a long piano intro for the rockin' "RC Cola and a Moon Pie," even a couple of old Wildweeds songs. The band digs a deceptively relaxed groove, particularly Al, who's playing his parts while reclining in a lounge chair. It's a technique he picked up in the studio while recording *Wild Weekend,* he says. "I sat on the couch for every solo. It was a breeze. I played 100 percent better."

In the past year Anderson released a solo record, *Party Favors,* and wrote songs in Nashville with John Hiatt, among others. "No Good to Cry" turned up on the Allman Brothers Band career retrospective box, albeit mistitled and credited to "writer unknown" ("My lawyers are working on it," Al smiles). Another composition turned up on Hank Williams Jr.'s platinum-selling *Wild Streak* LP, much to Al's surprise. "I must have had a quart of schnapps in me when I mixed that demo. I was going through a divorce at the time and feeling terrible. Naturally, that's the song he picked."

Between sets Terry and Joey take turns picking out show tunes on an old upright piano. Terry, who wrote 21 songs for *Wild Weekend,* says he did it by sleeping near the piano in his house with a tape recorder by the bed and getting ideas in his dreams—"usually at the worst times," he adds ruefully. "Then I'd be mad at myself for not being able to go back to sleep."

Back in New Haven, Terry, Joey and Tom cruise by Toad's Place; there's a rumor that the Rolling Stones, who've been rehearsing in

World Radio History

the area, may play a surprise show. NRBQ has been performing at Toad's for years, so they're escorted upstairs to seats in a deserted balcony section and staked to free beers. Hundreds of kids are dancing to Top 40 music on the floor, oblivious to the shadowed figures taking in the scene above them.

It doesn't take long to discern the Stones won't be here tonight (bad timing—they show up the following weekend). As we're leaving, there's an appreciative roar from the crowd as the sound system booms out the opening strains of Guns N' Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine." Terry and Joey exchange quizzical looks; they don't know the song. But as we're going out the door to Slash's flashy guitar solo Terry, ever the archeologist, hears something in the tune: "Hey Joey," he yells, "it's another 'Hey Jude' song!" Together they begin singing "Hey Jude"'s famous coda—"laaa la la laluhlalaaa . . ."—and sure enough, it runs parallel to the Guns N' Roses melody, fitting neatly within the chord changes.

Was a time, Terry says later, when he used to travel around to state fairs to save old records he loved from being destroyed. "They used to set 'em up on poles, and if you hit them with a baseball you'd win some horrible stuffed toy. So I'd stock up on Doris Day records and trade them two for one for what they had, which was like 78s by Sonny Boy Williamson. Got a lot of great records that way, saving them from the baseball. Isn't that weird?" he says, a little sadly. "That ought to be illegal."

THE NEXT NIGHT NRBQ is slated to play a show at the Atlantic Connection on Martha's Vineyard, about a five-hour drive and ferry from the hotel. Big Al meets us in front, stepping out of a white Cadillac and gesturing disdainfully at Terry's modest Oldsmobile. Of course the Cadillac really belongs to Al's friend Dennis. At the last

Q TIPS

TERRY ADAMS is one of the few pianists in pop who brings a grand piano to every gig, possibly the only keyboardist left who still carries a clavinet. The former is a 1963 model black Yamaha grand, the latter a Hohner Duo "pianet," a combination five-octave clavinet and electric piano that's no longer in production. Clavinets are themselves fast becoming obsolete, but Terry has others in stock, and Phil Collison, who's been tuning them since 1975, is also a Hohner repairman, "so we have an unlimited supply of parts." Terry also plays a DX7 and uses 12" Electro-Voice speakers.

AL ANDERSON's axe of choice is a paisley pink Fender Telecaster, though he's recently picked up a late-model Les Paul "light" guitar, and uses a Chet Atkins model Gretsch in the studio. Effects comprise an Ibanez digital delay and chorus. Al plays through a Fender Super Reverb with two 10" speakers for clubs, a Marshall with two 12" speakers for bigger venues.

JOEY SPAMPINATO uses a Silvertone bass along with a custom-built bass to replicate his trademark Danelectro "Longhorn" model that was stolen at a club gig. He plays through an Ampeg SVT combo (300 watts output, eight 10" speakers); no effects. TOM ARDOLINO pounds the beat on Sonar drums with Zildjian cymbals.

First we zigged. Then everybody zigged.

World Radio History

minute the band decides to stretch its budget and hire a charter plane instead of driving, a rare treat. "This is the way to go," Al chortles as we settle into a seven-seater prop plane.

Maybe Joey should have joined the Stones after all, I suggest. "Yeah," Al agrees, "and send us the money to stay home."

Over the years NRBQ has shared arena tours for any number of incongruous big-selling acts, so in that regard they've had a mole's-eye view of life at the top. In the '70s, they once opened for Deep Purple and Billy Preston. Entering an arena, they came upon a dressing room catered by chefs serving a sumptuous-looking buffet. This turned out to be Deep Purple's quarters. The next dressing room, suffused with the aroma of delicious fried chicken, was Billy Preston's. Finally NRBQ found their own dressing room. On the center table lay a warm six-pack of Diet-Rite cola.

It's a beautiful summer evening on the Vineyard; a balmy coastal breeze soothes the vacation crowds strolling past overpriced clothes and knickknack stores along Atlantic Avenue. Inside the cupola-shaped club fans have filled most of the available space in front of the stage. The guys kick things off in a hurry with "Twelve Bar Blues" and four explosive guitar choruses from Big Al—halfway through the first number people are screaming.

Having reached the proper plateau, the band picks through a representative grab bag of tunes and styles, including the pure pop joy of "Roller Coaster," the propulsive rockabilly "I Got a Rocket in My Pocket," an absurd but danceable version of "Michael Row the Boat Ashore," and "Green Lights" and "Me and the Boys," a couple of high-voltage favorites Bonnie Raitt covered a few years back. It's an assured, exciting performance, the best of the week. Well over an hour later there's a break, giving customers a chance to replenish their sweat at the bar.

Tom is cooling himself on the back stairwell when he's approached by a guy who plays in a band with Lou Christie. "I was totally blown away!" the guy exclaims. "Time's rock-solid, big swing backbeat. I haven't heard a drummer like you. You sound like"—he searches for the right accolade—"Tom Ardolino! I was really into it. Hey, I just wanted to say hi. If you see Lou again, just come around backstage."

"I'll be there!" Tom shouts back as the guy disappears around a corner. "I saw Lou Christie a few months ago at this high school," he explains. "Everything about it was great. I saw the Village People the same week. It was all the real Village People too, except for the first cop. They had the second cop though. It was wild."

You really have an insatiable appetite for music, someone says.

"I like to be entertained. I admit, I had second thoughts about seeing the Village People but I did it and I was really glad I went." He smiles—"And now I've got an in with Lou."

The second set of the night drives harder, and when Terry opens the throttle into a triptych of "Wild Weekend," Al's teen anthem "Goin' to a Party" and an unexpected but ferocious "Johnny B. Goode" (NRBQ covers tend toward the obscure or the obvious) you can feel the room tilt. Sensing that the collective energy of the place has more or less been tapped out, NRBQ softens the mood before wrapping things tight with "Ridin' in My Car" and calling it a [*contd on page 34*]

Zag.

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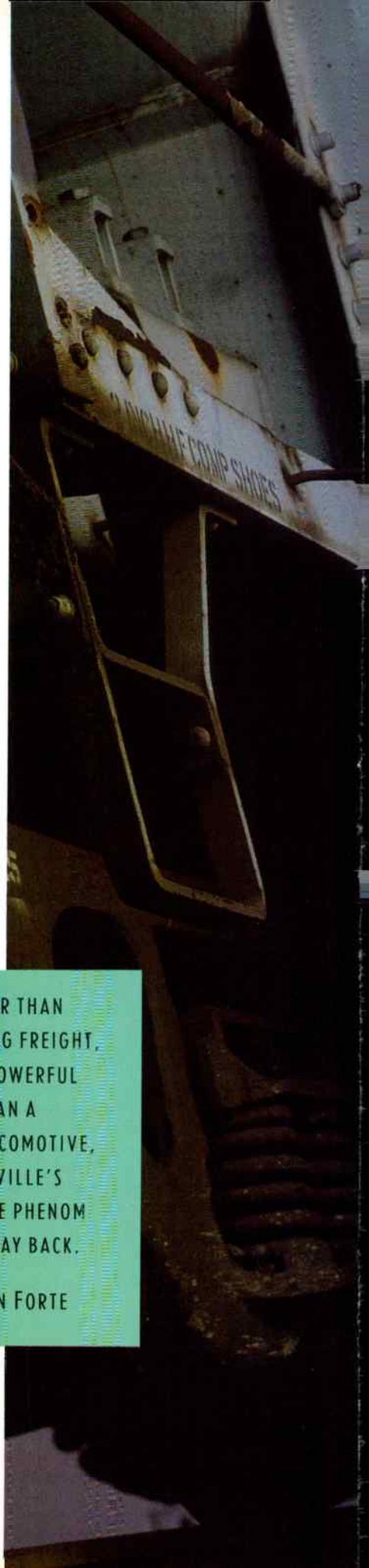
RICKY SKAGGS' MOONSHINE LIGHTNING

FASTER THAN A SPEEDING FREIGHT, MORE POWERFUL THAN A STEAM LOCOMOTIVE, NASHVILLE'S FAVORITE PHENOM GOES 'WAY BACK.

BY DAN FORTE



"ACOUSTIC music's in my bloodline," declares Ricky Skaggs. "Being raised in Kentucky, there's like coal dust in my blood. My family has been coal miners and farmers and musicians and drunks—moonshine makers. Emmylou [Harris, Skaggs' one-time employer] has had a very big impact on bringing acoustic music forward, but I wanted to get that banjo up in the mix a little more, you know."

Listening to Ricky Skaggs' first solo album, *That's It!*, from 1975, it's hard to believe that the veteran possessing that "high, lonesome sound" and already impressive multi-instrumental skills was barely 21 years old at the time. And today, hearing the award-winning country star reminisce about his influences, one has to continually remind oneself that this guiding light of Nashville's "back-to-basics" movement is only 35.

That tag, a.k.a. the "Roots Revival," has been conveniently used to describe everything from Dwight Yoakam's hard-edged honky-tonk to Ricky Van Shelton's comparatively limp country-pop. But without a doubt, Skaggs' roots go deeper than those of any country singer of his generation (including You-Know-Who, Jr.). Throughout his career—from his stint with Emmylou Harris' Hot Band to his latest bluegrass/country hybrid, *Kentucky Thunder*—he has remained truer to

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEE CRUM

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those roots than most of his Nashville peers.

Recalling 30 years of music making, Skaggs begins, "My dad bought me a mandolin when I was five years old and showed me the basic G, C and D chords with two fingers—the Mel Bay style. Much of my influences came through radio. We had an old 78 crank record player, so I would listen to a lot of Flatt & Scruggs and Bill Monroe and the Stanley Brothers on 78s, and I'd slow them down to learn the licks and transpose them up faster. But a lot of the stuff I grew up listening to was on WCKY in Cincinnati, a 50,000-watt AM station that just blasted all over the country. I heard Buck Owens, so obviously I was tuned in hearing Don Rich, and then George Jones, Ray Price and that early big-band 'Cherokee Cowboy' swing sound—that real tight, *integrity* sound. There was really some great music coming out in those days, because there was a lot of competition. The sky was the limit, and you really had to have a great band."

"It was a fresh, new sound. A fresh, new *old* sound."

Skaggs took his first turn towards eclecticism at age nine. "In '63, I heard the Beatles and the Stones and the Hollies and realized that there was a much bigger world out there, musically. It wasn't that I wanted to quit my roots and what I was doing, but it made me listen to other things, and that was one of the best things that could have ever happened to me. If I had just kept my ears closed and my eyes open in country, that's as far as I would have ever gotten. Instead, the wells are just full of different things that I can draw from."

At age 15 Skaggs almost simultaneously developed partnerships with the late Keith Whitley and the legendary Ralph Stanley of the Stanley Brothers. "I was playing fiddle with my dad," he says, "and we went to this talent show in Estill, Kentucky, where Keith and his brother and a little band were playing. Neither one of us won; some girl with a dog and pony did—whoever got the biggest applause. But we were practically the same age, and we met in the basement of this old high school, and we got to talking about who we liked and listened to. A lot of his past was like mine, so we just started singing something together, and it was really fun. Sounded like we'd been singing together forever. I invited him to my house the next week. The friendship and the music grew, and we started working with Ralph Stanley right after that. Ralph was late for a show one night, and the club owner asked Keith and me to get up and sing. People loved it, and then Ralph came walking in about midway through our show. He set his banjo down and just pulled up a stool and watched us! We were freakin' out. It was a real thrill to be touring with one of my idols—and people 30 and 40 years my senior. That was real different because you picked up on all the road talk real quick. 'Eat before you get hungry, take a shower before you get dirty, sleep before you get tired—because you may not get a chance to. Always be ahead of the game.' That was drilled into us."

By the time he reached his teens, Ricky had added acoustic guitar, fiddle and banjo to his arsenal. By 18 he had recorded a half dozen LPs with Stanley's Clinch Mountain Boys, as well as *2nd Generation Bluegrass* (on the Rebel label) with Whitley. By the time he stepped into (and helped pioneer) a more progressive brand of bluegrass with the Country Gentlemen, J.D. Crowe and the New South, and Boone Creek, he had already gotten his first taste of jazz. "When I was living in Washington, D.C., in '73, a friend gave me a double-album set of Django Reinhardt, and I started listening to Stephane Grappelli's violin. Here was another chapter in the book, you know, more stuff to learn. I was really working on the fiddle at that time, so I was learning all kinds of swing stuff from Grappelli, and of course that rhythm stuff from Django—that swing feel. It made me see where much of the western swing stuff had come from."

When the new generation of bluegrass prodigies expanded the genre into hybrid forms dubbed "newgrass," "space-grass," "new acoustic" and "dawg music," the native Kentuckian was a perennial in the studio, recording with former bandmates Tony Rice (from New South) and Jerry Douglas (from Boone Creek), as well as David Grisman, Bela Fleck, the Seldom Scene and others. But whereas flatpicker Rice and mandolinist Grisman fused bluegrass with jazz, rock and classical forms, Skaggs' Boone Creek leaned more towards western swing. (In 1980 Ricky and Tony also cut a tremendously pure, down-home Sugar Hill duo album, *Skaggs & Rice*, as a tribute to Monroe, the Stanleys and Flatt & Scruggs.)

"I think Boone Creek was probably headed for what I'm doing right now," he reflects. "I think my vision for what I'm doing now started in Boone Creek, because we cut some things with drums, electric guitar and piano. When I left Boone Creek to go with Emmylou Harris, I really needed to get out of bluegrass so that eventually I could do more for it someday. Emmylou had asked me to join two or three times before in the three years previous to that, but I wanted to stay in bluegrass and learn more about acoustic instruments—more ingredients. I wanted to get more in my noggin before I took off into something else. Plus I needed the experience of having my own band. I learned in Boone Creek that I'd never have partners. Nothing disrespectful to the guys, but I knew where my eye was focused, and it just wasn't with a four-way partnership."

When Ricky joined Emmylou's Hot Band in 1977, Harris, Parton and Ronstadt were actually working on their original, aborted trio album—an idea that wasn't revived until 1987's surprise smash *Trio*. Skaggs appeared on Harris' *Blue Kentucky Girl*, *Evangeline* and *Cimarron*, and played an important part in 1980's all-acoustic *Roses in the Snow* LP. During that stint, he also made his first crossover rumblings with *Sweet Temptation*, a solo effort on Sugar Hill. "I was working with Emmylou, and she was my first real band to work with, as far as electric stuff and drums and all that," he recounts.

"That gave me a taste of what it could be like. So when I went into the studio to cut *Sweet Temptation* I was going to do some of my roots, but I also wanted to venture out and mix the bluegrass stuff with the country.

Photography: (previous page) Lee Crum/Outline; (above) John Lee/Star File

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I felt like that wall had to be torn down. Who put it up there in the first place? Certainly the fans didn't put it there. What was the big deal? I felt that there was a way of mixing acoustic music and electric, and making it work. My experience in the studio with [producer] Brian Ahern for two and a half years, working with Emmylou, helped me a lot. I'd been very much involved with the production of the *Roses in the Snow* album."

Sugar Hill released Ricky's arrangement of the Stanley Brothers ballad "I'll Take the Blame" as a single, and suddenly the relative unknown playing mostly acoustic traditional country music had a regional hit. "It was a fresh, new sound—a fresh, new, *old* sound—and I think that got the ball rolling for me. It was the kind of country that people wanted to hear again. I thought, 'My God, if this had been on CBS or Warner Bros. or RCA, I would have really had a shot.' That's when I started to shop for a label.

"When I finally came to CBS, after getting turned down by every other record company in town for being too country, [A&R man] Rick Blackburn wanted to know who produced what I'd been doing. I said, 'I did, and by the way, that's kind of one of the bargaining deals. I produce my own records.' That's been the case all along. I told him, 'I want to do this my way for now, because I really feel like I have something that people want to hear.' I wasn't bragging or boastful; I just felt I knew more about Ricky Skaggs than any other producer in town knew, as far as my limits and what I do best. I said, 'If we don't have hit records, then by all means I want to get a co-producer or a producer. I'll just get in there and sing and pick.'"

Signing with Epic in 1981, Skaggs put together a band and a sound that owed more than a small debt to his tenure with Harris. "I just wanted to associate more acoustic music with it than Emmylou had, but it was definitely similar," he admits. "I did do a lot of study and trial and error in the studio. I have a collection of microphones that is incredible—just good old tube mikes. Very seldom do we use condensers; tube mikes bring a much more natural sound, especially when we're using digital audio. Most people would think, 'Well, Skaggs would have to stay analog if he wants traditional stuff.' I don't mind moving on with technology, as long as it sounds good. When it quits sounding like the real thing, we'll go back. And I use old guitars, but if I can find a new instrument that sounds great in the studio, I'll use it."

Ricky went from being a "harmony singer and handyman" with the Hot Band to bandleader with a national hit in less than a year, when "Don't Get Above Your Raising," from the first of his nine Epic LPs, *Waitin' for the Sun to Shine*, went to the top of the country charts. Shortly before the release of his follow-up, *Highways & Heartaches*, he was inducted as the Grand Ole Opry's sixty-first member—at 27 the youngest to that time.

Other accolades have been heaped on Skaggs and his band by *Playboy*, *Cashbox*, the Grammys, the Academy of Country Music and the Country Music Association, which named him Entertainer of the Year in 1985. He and his band consistently score high marks for their instrumental (in his case, *multi*-instrumental) talents. Of the differences and similarities between instruments, he says, "I play a lot of mandolin from a fiddle point of view, and since mandolin was my first instrument, I play a lot of fiddle with a mandolin left hand. I know I've caught myself playing acoustic guitar licks on the electric, but I've also caught myself playing

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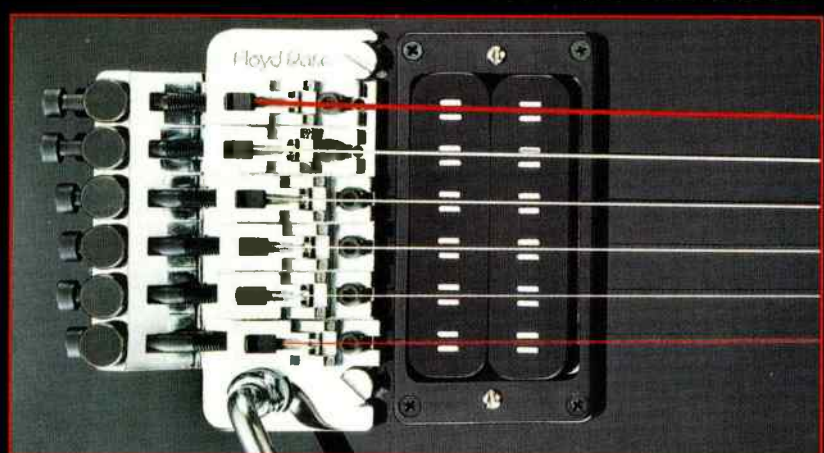

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electric guitar licks on the acoustic. And I play guitar licks on the Mandocaster [an electric mandolin], absolutely—especially electric guitar licks."

His most difficult transition was no doubt from acoustic to electric guitar, when Englishman Ray Flacke left the Skaggs band five years ago. "I was kind of forced into that. I couldn't afford who I wanted: Albert Lee. First choice every time. I don't know if he would have wanted to do it even if I could have afforded him because the Everly Brothers thing was really keeping him busy. I auditioned a couple of players, and I talked to Vince Gill, and then out of the blue Sharon, my wife, said, 'Why don't *you* play the lead?' I said, 'Because I can't. There's no way in the world. It's so different playing acoustic and electric, I'll rip the strings off an electric guitar.' I really fought it. I had such an *acoustic* knowledge about how to play certain licks and styles, I was afraid I'd come off sounding like an acoustic player playing an electric, and I didn't want that.

"So I sat down and learned Albert's solos in 'Honey' and 'Don't Cheat in Our Hometown,' and I learned as many of Ray's things as I possibly could. Ray Flacke is a real hard guy to learn from because he plays such a left-field kind of style, and he's so great. I didn't hear solos like he heard them; Albert's solos made more sense to me personally. I had about three days to woodshed before I started playing onstage in front of 15,000 people. I was scared to death when I walked onstage. But people were really encouraging, so I stayed with it."

The studio was equally intimidating. "It was kind of strange to be playing lead," he says, "but once I heard myself back, I thought, 'Well, that sounds pretty decent.' I just kept fine-tuning it, but it was a different instrument, totally. In fact, I went from medium-gauge strings on the acoustic down to light-gauge, so that when I did switch to electric, I wouldn't just pull them all out of tune. And by playing the electric the way I did, with a straight pick and my ring and middle fingers, it helped me to develop the acoustic guitar style I play now, so I could do things like 'Country Boy,' 'Wheel Hoss' and 'Uncle Pen' on acoustic guitar.

"Moving to electric was really one of the best things for me musically. Not only did I have the electric and the Mandocaster to move into, it gave me a different avenue other than just the cross-picking style with the acoustic." (Having already sewed up *Frets* magazine's readers' poll in the multi-instrumentalist category, Ricky won *Guitar Player*'s best country guitar classification in '87 and '88.)

Although he has used the cream of Nashville session men on the albums he cranks out with once-a-year regularity, Skaggs points out, "On most all the big hit records I've had, I used my road band"—highly unusual in Nashville. "'Heartbroke,' 'Country Boy,' 'Highway 40 Blues,' 'Uncle Pen'—that was all my band," he says proudly. "I use a lot of studio musicians as well. Because I co-produced *Kentucky Thunder* with Steve Buckingham, and he and I had never really worked together on a project before, I didn't want to go in with an attitude like, 'Hey, you've gotta use my band.' I had definite ideas about who I did want to use, though, and some of them were my band, along with a lot of different people I've never used before, like Barry Beckett and [Toto's] David Hungate."

While recording and co-producing 1989's *Kentucky Thunder*, Ricky also produced Dolly Parton's country [*cont'd on page 97*]

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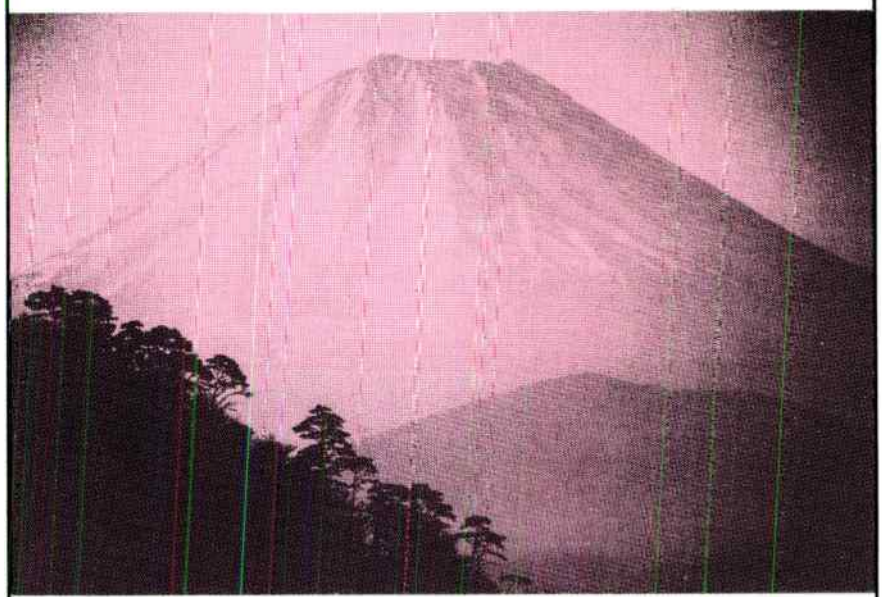

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RICHARD THOMPSON RINGS SOME CHANGES

The acoustic eclectic appreciates purists, but wouldn't want to be one

By Mark Rowland

RICHARD THOMPSON is an Englishman who became a Muslim, a songwriter whose roots draw equal nourishment from Scottish folk reels and American rockabilly. He's a guitarist who came to prominence playing electric versions of British folk songs and a serious student of that tradition whose only acoustic instrumental album, *Strict Tempo!*, was conceived as a satire. He's an artist, in other words, who delights in tweaking the expectations of his fans, who in turn enjoy hearing Thompson come up with ideas that are literally all over the map. "Like a madwoman's shit, as the expression goes," he cheerfully observes.

"It's nice to take risks," the lanky, bearded composer goes on with more typical understatement. "Then you can enjoy yourself. If you're reaching to do stuff that's slightly beyond you, that's far more exciting than playing cleanly what you know."

Thompson's conversational manner is like many of his songs, the words casually precise, droll, self-deprecating, deceptively reassuring. He's a likeable guy, the sort you might meet for lunch in a coffee shop like the one where we're sitting in Santa Monica, and without feeling like you're talking to one of the more rangy and critically acclaimed musicians exploring the near frontiers of popular music. For Thompson is one of the few plectrists around who draws admirers for both his electric (band) performances and his acoustic shows, which are usually solo affairs.

"He's hard to pigeonhole," notes Danny Ferrington, a guitar craftsman whose custom-built acoustic adorns the cover of Thompson's *Hand of Kindness* LP. "His electric solos can just take you away like the best stuff of the '60s. Then on acoustic I've heard him play the most amazing Gaelic stuff; the way he bends strings he makes it sound like an Irish harp. Most guitarists are limited on one instrument or the other; there's very few who can play anything they want. Richard is one of those guys. He's like an amazing sponge."

As a result Thompson's recording career—or as he puts it, "my careen"—is among the more prolific in the biz. Since cofounding Fairport Convention in the late '60s he's collaborated with artists as diverse as Sandy Denny and Henry Kaiser, and produced two LPs by Loudon Wainwright. But it's Thompson's own work, with and without ex-wife Linda, that's laid the cornerstone for his current critical standing.

Performing acoustically alters his approach to both these aspects of his music, albeit in different ways. "The acoustic guitar is a more successful solo instrument because it has a greater tonal range," he points out. "You can get real bass, real middle and real treble, whereas the electric guitar range is narrow and works better in the context of other instruments, where it can be used more like a horn. I see them as different instruments really, as different as the saxophone and clarinet."

Contributing to Thompson's "hornlike" sound on the electric guitar is his emphasis on melodic sustain. Playing with Fairport Convention, "I was trying to play more single-note stuff and match it to the fiddle, to get closer to the sound of other traditional instruments or the human voice." Sustain also enhances the fluidity of Thompson's electric solos, whose sense of abandon and discovery owes much to the spirit of '60s soloists from Coltrane to Hendrix.

Though Danny Ferrington says he's tried to customize a "bell-like, ringing quality" into the construction of Thompson's acoustic

Photograph: Peter Figen/Retna

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guitars, "there's a limit to my resources there," Thompson observes. "Besides, I can't invent something melodically and at the same time keep bass and rhythm going and be freshly innovative every night. And you have to get the song across, so instrumentally I'm a slave to that.

"But I enjoy playing acoustic guitar in shows because it *is* challenging. You have to stretch sometimes just to achieve what seems ordinary, some extraordinary kind of cross rhythm or fingering. And sometimes that takes a lot of work—it's one of the areas where I sweat."

Solo acoustic performance brings Thompson's songs more clearly into focus. "It puts you and the song on the spot. If the song is no good you find out very quickly, 'cause the audience won't like it. It's that simple—you know and they know."

The setting can also alter the impact of particular songs. "For instance, 'When the Spell Is Broken' has sort of a sub–Marvin Gaye groove when I play with a band," Thompson says. "Acoustically it's more exposed and without the rhythm stated so emphatically it requires the audience to come much closer. They have to lean in, it's more intimate. But if you can get them leaning in, metaphorically speaking, then you've created a musical setting where things can be communicated. I don't think you get that communication at a rock show."

Thompson's been mixing up his styles and genres from the time he got his first guitar: "I was listening to Buddy Holly and trying to play electric music on an acoustic instrument." He took classical lessons in his teens but got more hooked into the American blues and R&B scene swirling around London in the early '60s. By the time the members of the Fairport Convention came together, though, "we weren't satisfied with being imitators of American music. Traditional music from Britain seemed much closer to home, something we could excel in and be pioneers." Playing electric instruments "was a deliberate attempt to contemporize traditional music. Rock was the lingua franca of the day, so we tried to make a musical hybrid out of that."

By the time they recorded *Unhalfbricking* and *Liege and Lief* (arguably the band's finest LPs), Thompson's and Sandy Denny's songs were as much a part of Fairport Convention's repertoire as their haunting evocations of traditional folk hymns. One suspects part of the reason the blend worked so well is that, for all his electric innovations, Thompson's songwriting was strongly influ-

HAND OF KINDNESS

THOMPSON's acoustic guitars include six models built by Danny Ferrington, notably a baritone guitar that is tuned down a fourth from the traditional tuning (low is B). Ferrington's non-custom models are marketed as Kramer Ferringtons. "The guitars Danny builds are good for recording and using onstage with the acoustic guitar school of pickups so they're very well balanced, no peaks, very smooth." Onstage Thompson uses a Sunrise pickup through a Passac soundhole equalizer. Thompson's Martin 000-18 guitar has been recently "retired, due to the number of holes in it. It was destroyed by the airlines." Thompson has also begun using piano-wound strings by an English firm, Rotosound, because "they give you a more fundamental note at the bottom and less overtone, I think. Though it'll take another six months to convince myself."

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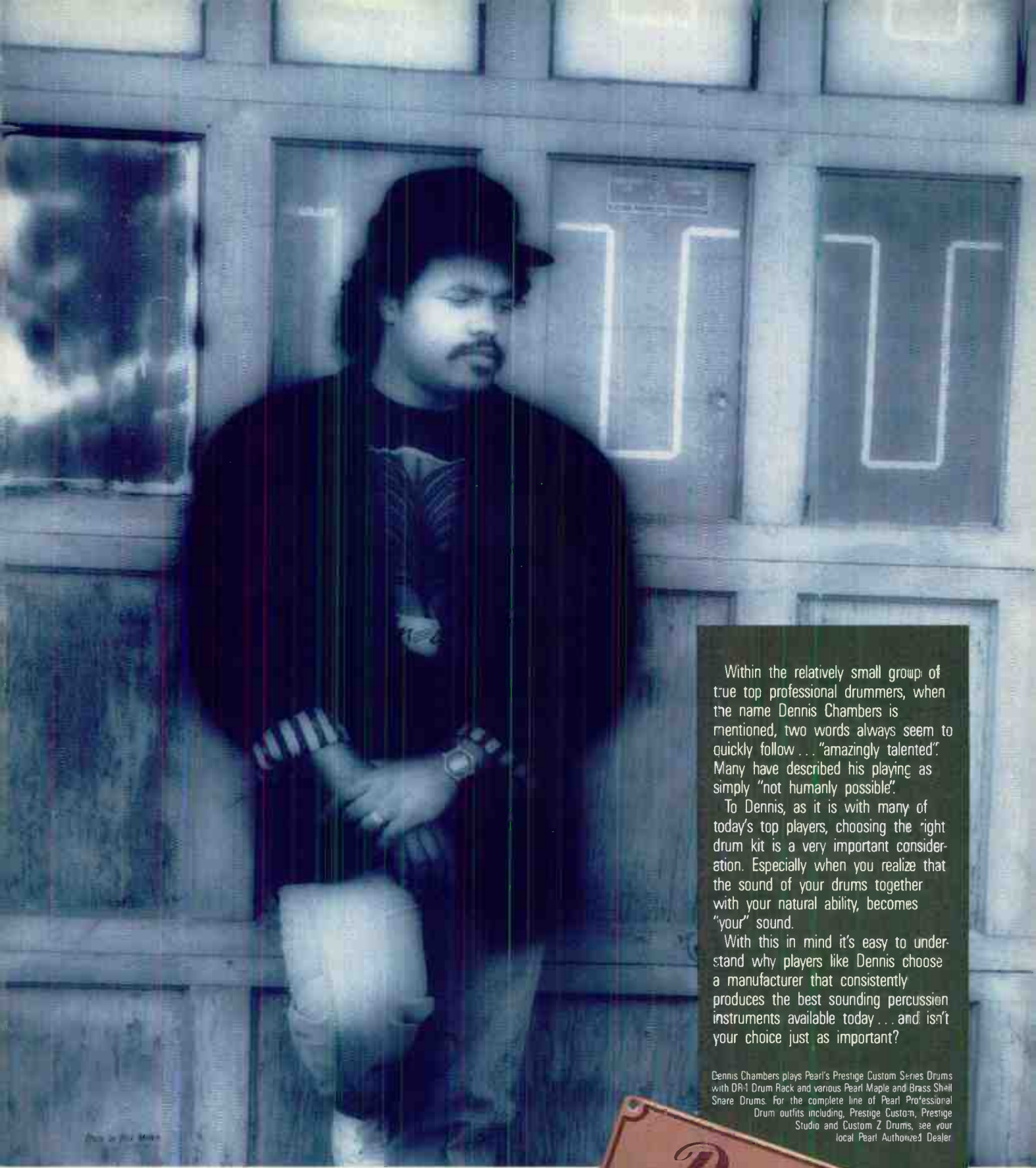

Within the relatively small group of true top professional drummers, when the name Dennis Chambers is mentioned, two words always seem to quickly follow . . . "amazingly talented". Many have described his playing as simply "not humanly possible".

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Dennis Chambers has performed with such diverse artists as; Parliament-Funkadelic, John Schofield, Special EFX, Bernard Wright, Thomas Dolby, Michael Brecker and David Sanborn.

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enced by those folk forms, their strong sense of melody as well as their darkly romantic, frequently tragic sense of human events.

"Yeah, absolutely," he says. "The traditional ballads were storytelling about famous murders, battles—it was like reading the newspapers to some extent. What we tried to do in Fairport was write contemporary songs in the same verse structure and meter, using a lot of the same imagery. But the twentieth century is a more psychological time, much more that goes on in the mind, and you have to reflect that. It's still storytelling but you leave out the vowels; it's more cryptic.

"I like to think that everything is based on or comes back to traditional music. That's the foundation of what I do," Thompson observes. "It is very important to be grounded in a tradition. I don't think it's fair to shit on purists because you need purists—they are the ones who preserve something intact. But, um . . ." he starts to smile. "We don't want to be like them really, do we?"

As a guitarist, Thompson expresses admiration for such modern masters of the folk genre as Bert Jansch, John Martyn and particularly Martin Carthy. Still, he points out, "it's the hybrids that excite—where African music meets European in New Orleans and it's jazz, or hillbilly music meets the blues in Memphis and it's rock 'n' roll. Cross-fertilization is the exciting stuff of music."

Thompson applies that philosophy to his own tunes, and occasionally to others'. On *Strict Tempo!* he rearranges Duke Ellington's "Rockin' in Rhythm" into a bluegrass fancy; on his solo/acoustic LP *Small Town Romance*, he sings Hank Williams' "Honky Tonk Blues" to a guitar accompaniment more suggestive of Mississippi John Hurt. "It's hard to do Hank Williams unless you plan to be a good country singer," Thompson avers, "so if I can bend it a bit then maybe no one will notice that I'm not."

Thompson isn't too excited by the latest wave of flashy country pickers anyway. "It's too many notes, too little emotion. It's the school of Ricky Skaggs—a brilliant player surrounded by other brilliant players but the emotion diminishes somehow. It's just not that interesting unless you're a musician. Hank Williams, I think that's the yardstick to go by—you have to compare it with that. I find it too slick. Though it's unfair as an outsider to comment on American form," Thompson adds, a little [cont'd on page 94]

HEAVY METAL GOES ACOUSTIC

The iron fist acquires a velvet glove: Why today's metal heroes are picking up acoustic axes

By J.D. Considine

THINK HARD-ROCK guitar, and what come to mind are high-output humbuckers and 100-watt stacks. This is electric guitar country, a land of screaming leads, thunderous power chords and feedback that could shatter glass.

Acoustic guitars? Naah, that's sissy stuff. Right?

Wrong. "One thing I can't stand is people saying how limited the instrument is," says White Lion guitarist Vito Bratta. "It's ridiculous. Anything can be done on acoustic guitar. An electric, to me, is just an electrified acoustic. I'm still trying to learn all the stuff that can be done on it."

Power chords to the contrary, a lot of hard-rockers do their writing on acoustic. Admittedly, that may be because it isn't always a good idea to fire up the amp stack when writing at home. "When I'm sitting around the house, it's hard to hear an [unplugged] electric guitar when the TV's going and stuff," laughs Great White's Mark Kendall. But it isn't just convenience; sometimes an acoustic rocks as effectively as an electric.

"Listen to 'Stairway to Heaven,'" says Kendall. "That's a perfect example of the way

Photograph: Ebet Roberts

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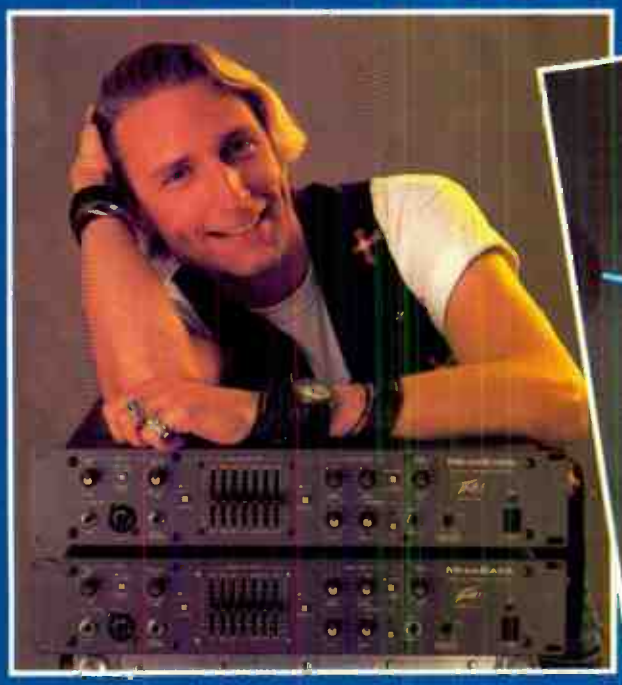
Late night BASSICS



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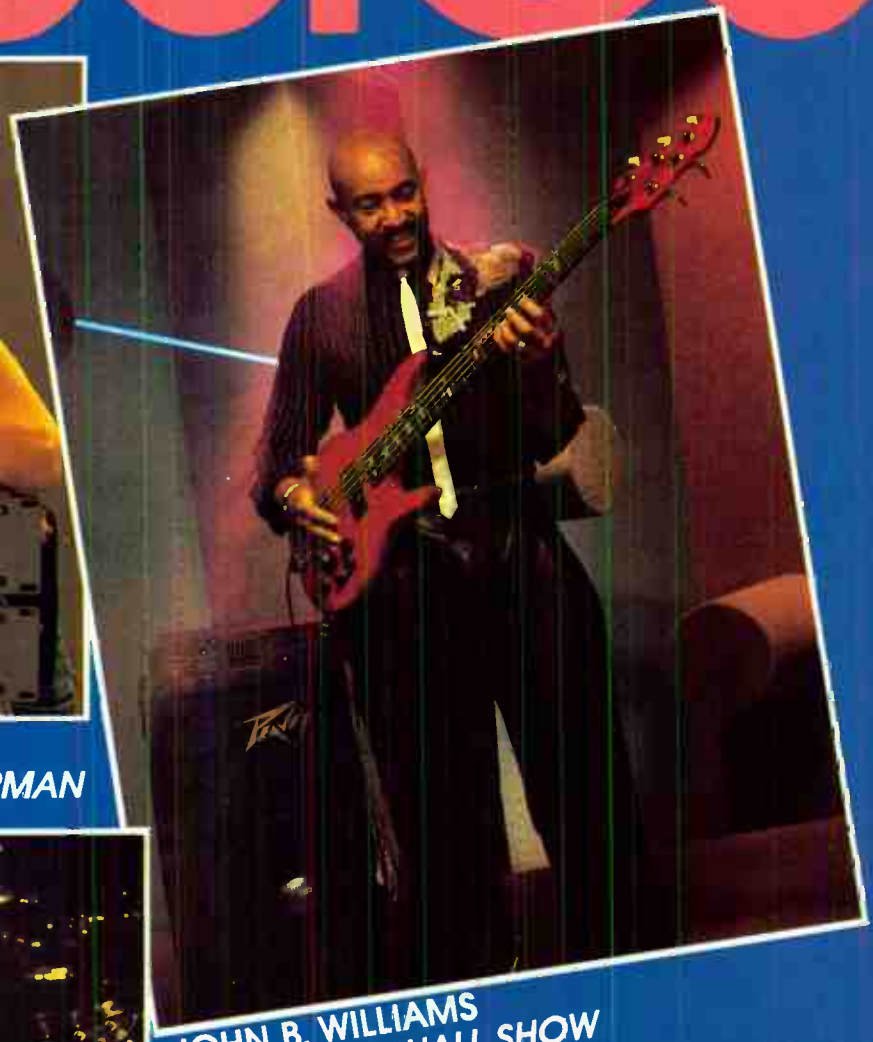

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you can play acoustic guitar and the song can still be heavy. It works into a part where the band kicks in, and it's heavy as hell. But you also have beautiful melodies, without losing the edge to the band or having people think you're wimps, you know what I mean?

"It adds a dimension to your sound, instead of the same-old same-old 'my amp's louder than your amp.' You're expanding your music, making it sound wider. There's nothing more that I like than when everything's on 10 and then suddenly there's nothing but space—maybe an acoustic. You get that dynamic. It makes people jump."

It also moves them in more subtle ways, for one of the great things about an acoustic guitar is the way its quiet sound makes it easier to convey complex emotions in a song. Bret Michaels of Poison, for instance, can hardly imagine having written "Every Rose Has Its Thorn" on anything *but* an acoustic guitar, because of the mixed feelings he was trying to get across with the tune.

Poison was out on the road behind its first album, *Look What the Cat Dragged In*, and it was a decidedly low-rent affair. "We were in Dallas, playing a club there called the Ritz," he recalls. "We were getting paid about $150 a night, and we were staying in a sleazy hotel—kind of a prostitute and junkie hotel.

"I wrote the song in the laundry room. It had a lot to do with missing someone. You know, having the tour and the chance to play music was great, but the feeling of being where we were at was just lonely. It was kind of like the rose and the thorn, both of them in one thing."

So Michaels wrote the song on his acoustic (the rose), and then in rehearsal, guitarist C.C. DeVille added his electric (the thorn). "And if it wasn't for his lead in there, that real country, sliding lead, I don't think the song would have come out as pretty as it did," says Michaels. "It took the combination of both in that one."

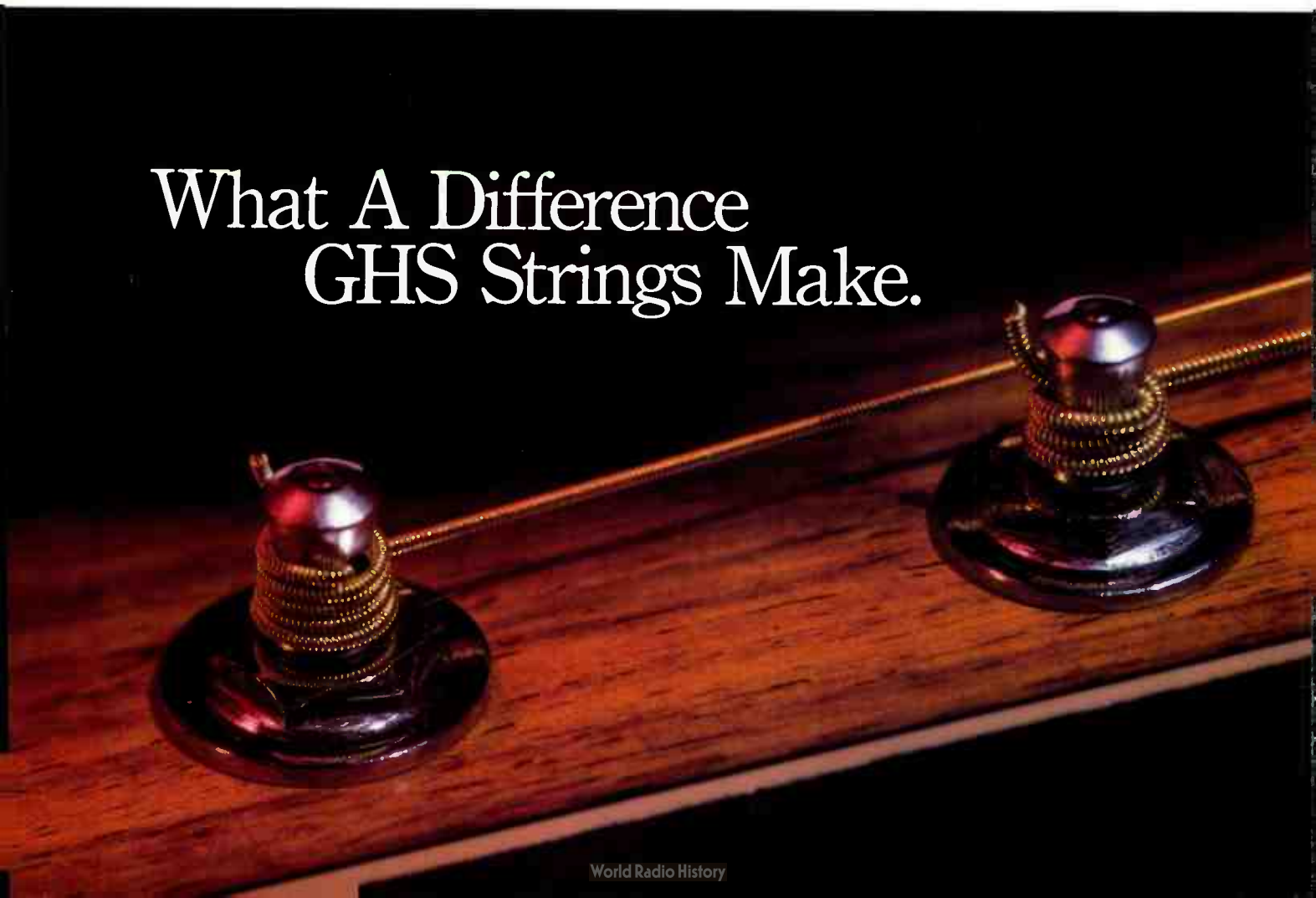
Ballads aren't the only place a hard-rock act should employ acoustic guitars, though. As Great White's Kendall points out, acoustics add color and definition wherever they're used: "You can have the hardest-rocking tune and blend in an acoustic, and it can enhance a part or make it sound heavier than other parts of the song, just because it'll make it stand out."

Adds Michaels, "On the next album, there's a song—there's no title for it yet—that has me playing acoustic heavy, and C.C. playing electric guitar real heavy, and it gives it a really uppity sound. It's almost Bob Segerish, when he used to combine the acoustic and the electric. Lynyrd Skynyrd used to do it a lot, too, and it just sounded really cool."

What is it about an acoustic guitar that gives it that edge? "A clean tone," answers White Lion's Bratta. "A clean acoustic tone is always going to be 10 times louder than a distorted guitar, no matter how many Marshalls you have. There's something about a clean tone that just cuts through. Even if I'm not doing an acoustic song, I still use an acoustic and an electric clean sound.

"Sometimes we record the sound of a pick strumming a guitar," he adds. "Not even notes—just the sound of the pick, for clarity."

No wonder none of these guys worry about boosting the EQ or otherwise altering the tone of an acoustic to give it an edge against the electric instruments. At best, they simply



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try to avoid acoustics with too much bass. As Great White's Michael Lardie explains, "When it's matched with an electric, there are certain frequencies in the lower end of the electric guitar and the bass guitar that would mask some of the resonances that are in a standard acoustic guitar."

But then, as with electrics, there will always be tonal considerations to be kept in mind. For instance, should you use a big-box Martin, or something with a shallower body? Do you go with a six-string, or opt for 12? Nylon or steel?

Naturally, the answer depends on the instrument's role in the song. "If you just want that strum sound, you might want a thinner acoustic that really cuts," says Kendall. "But if you're going to do a part that's really featured, you may want something really warm. You just kind of play with it."

"It all depends on what the song calls for," agrees Michael Lardie, who not only plays guitar and keyboards with Kendall in Great White, but also co-produces the band's albums. "It might need a little more thickness on some tunes, and not for others.

"Something that's a pure song, like 'She Only,' was pretty much one guitar part, and we did some rakes behind that. That way, I would put a little bit of chorus on it, so it would sound like it was in a concert hall. But I wanted to try and make it as pure as possible, because if you put too much chorus on it, things sound a little detuned.

"Now on 'Heart the Hunter,' where the rakes are in the breakdown, I just doubled it, and that's enough natural de-tuning to make it stand out."

Unlike Kendall and Lardie, both of whom prefer steel-string acoustics, Vito Bratta switches between a nylon-string classical guitar and a steel 12, depending on the sort of part he'll be playing. "If it's going to be something where I'm using a pick, I'll use a 12-string acoustic," he says. "If it's going to be something where I'm finger-picking, I use a classical guitar. I have no real use for a six-string acoustic."

Bratta, like most acoustic rockers, also uses different voicings on acoustic. "I try to think mostly about getting as many open strings as possible. I don't ever play barre chords on an acoustic guitar—I don't really play them on electric. I try to use, at the most, two- or three-note chords. I don't want to get my fingers totally caught up in the guitar—unless it's like classical guitar music. But if I'm improvising something, I try to keep everything open. And you want to use a certain string gauge on acoustic to make the guitar sound really good and not too clicky by using light strings."

Lardie, though strictly a steel player, has similar feelings about string thickness: "It's usually medium gauge on my guitars, because they seem to have a little more sustain," he says. "Most of it is picking or raking; it gives a little more body to the sound.

"One exception to that would be what I use on 'All Over Now,' which takes a very light gauge of string because the guitar is tuned up to an F-sharp, rather than the standard E tuning." Why? To get more open strings, of course. "The song is in B minor," he says. "But to play B minor on an acoustic guitar is a little difficult when you're trying to get those even eighth-note strokes. So I tune it up and play everything in A minor. The guitar

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is more open, and it rings out. I think it sings a little better."

Perhaps the biggest problem with playing acoustic guitar in a hard-rock format, though, isn't finding open-string voicings, but finding open-hole guitars that won't feed back onstage. That's why Bratta and the guys in Great White all use the solid-body Gibson Chet Atkins model F-15. (Michaels, by contrast, is a Yamaha man on both six- and 12-string, although he used a Guild acoustic in the studio for "Every Rose Has Its Thorn.")

Says Bratta, "It got down to practicality. When I decided I was going to use an acoustic, I went through a bunch of them onstage, just trying them out real quick. It just so happens that the Gibson Chet Atkins solid bodies worked at loud volumes. I'd walk away from it with the thing on 10, and it wouldn't feed back or any- [cont'd on page 94]

WORLD FOLKABILLY

From Texas through Nashville to Ireland, Nanci Griffith's breaking with tradition

By Peter Cronin

THE AUDIENCE at New York's Town Hall waits patiently as Nanci Griffith struggles to get yet another string in tune. Despite the best efforts of tour manager Bo Bres, who keeps bringing her freshly tuned guitars, the strings insist on going out. But, like the characters that populate her story-songs, Nanci Griffith does not shrink from adversity. Instead, just as the tension becomes palpable, she looks up and deadpans, "You know . . . I've had smoother shows on street corners." The audience breaks into big laughs as Griffith's Blue Moon Orchestra kicks off another tune—right in tune.

It's been quite a while since Nanci Griffith played street corners. Over the past 12 years she has released eight albums of some of the most literate songs to ever come out of big ol' Texas. Ranging from her earlier Rounder/Philo efforts in the folkie vein through her years with MCA Nashville's Tony Brown and finally to her latest with legendary British producer Glyn Johns, Griffith's songs are as catchy as they are insightful.

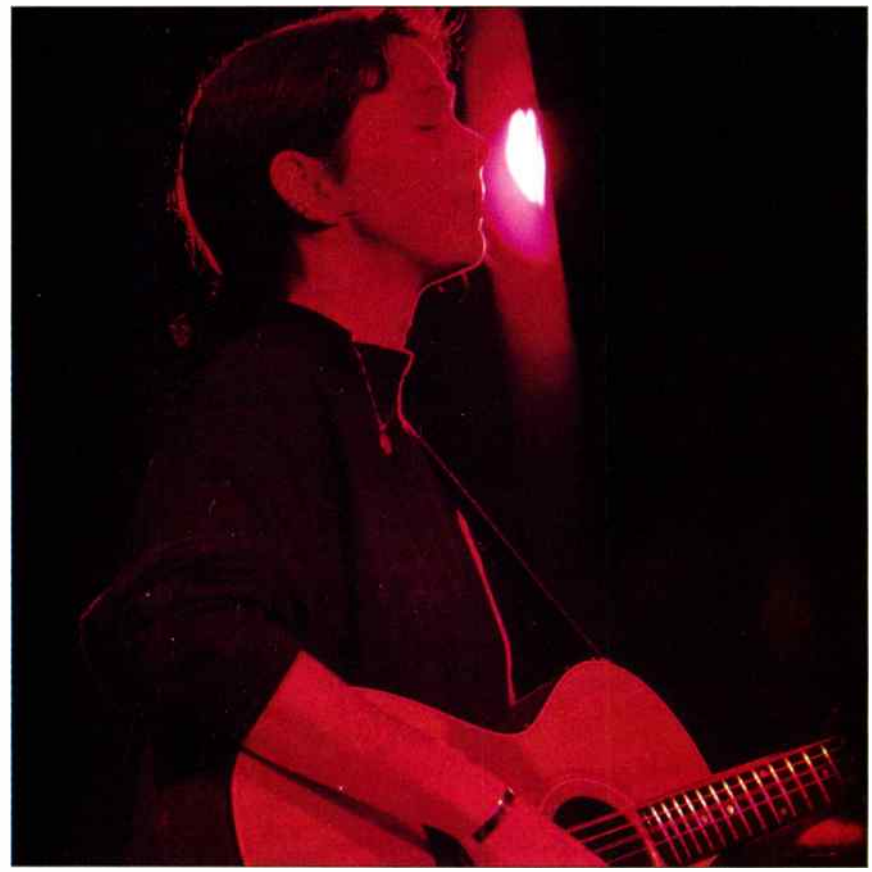
Working with Johns is a move accompanied by her shift to MCA's pop division and a renewed push to get Griffith the radio play she deserves. "Country radio has become almost like Muzak in the U.S.," she says. "It has nothing to do with country music. I think they thought of me as a folk artist, so therefore I didn't belong in country music. My records are rather raw and they have an edge to 'em, and my voice has an edge to it, so I don't fit in with their programming."

That could be changing. On *Storms,* the new LP, the rough country edges are sanded down. "I think the only difference is that there are no mandolins in there and no pedal steels or violins. It's just a difference in production. Basically it's an extension of the live album, *One Fair Summer Evening.*"

That album was a bare-bones production with sidekick James Hooker's piano and synthesizer and Griffith's acoustic guitar dominating the musical landscape. "I like hearing my guitar," says Griffith. "I like having it up front instead of buried beneath a lot of other instruments. And I really like hearing James' keyboards." Hooker's keyboards (and songwriting finesse) have become more and more prominent in Griffith's music over the last few albums. "I can't cowrite lyrics. I have a total mental block. James Hooker's influence on my music has brought in all these new melodic ideas."

These days Griffith is working out her melodies on a new guitar. "I was walking by Matt Umanov's Guitars in Greenwich Village and I saw it just sitting there in the window." "It" is a Taylor Grand Concert 512 cutaway with mahogany back and sides and a spruce top. Griffith loved its sound and small body. "It's the closest I've found to my 00-18 Martin," she says, "and I like the cutaway."

Griffith writes on the guitar, employing



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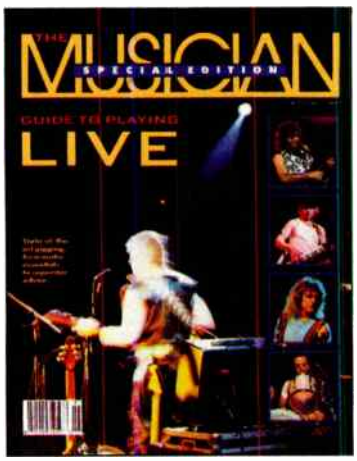

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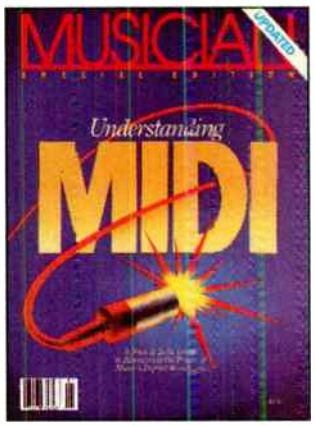

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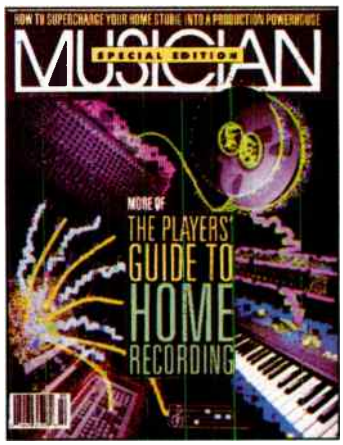

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alternate tunings to open up the creative floodgates ("Open tunings give me ideas"). Onstage, though, she prefers to play it straight. "Yeah, I transpose them for stage 'cause it's so difficult to get in and out with the whole band." And although she doesn't seem like the techie type Griffith has designed her own pick. "You gotta try one of these," she enthuses as she fishes one out of her pocket, "it's kind of a combination." Sure enough, Nanci's pick is kind of a Reese's Peanut-Butter-Cup collision of flatpick and thumbpick, joined so it swivels. She can use it as a standard thumbpick or play with the wider side for more subtle effect.

GRIFFITH'S WORLD VIEW has gotten wider in the past couple of years, largely the result of her moving to Ireland, where her records are selling like Guinness Stout and she has become a Bono-fied celebrity. Her songs are being covered by Mary Black and Maura O'Connell, she's selling out concerts all over the country and she has a real hard time just walking down the street. And the wave is moving across the water to England.

"In the U.K. I don't draw the traditional audience at all, but that's where I am in the record store so that's where I end up on the charts. The thing I like about not only Irish radio but European radio in general is that they're not on any particular format so that back to back you could hear U2 and Nanci Griffith and the Everly Brothers. That's the way radio used to be in the States, you heard everything on the same station."

Inspired by what she heard growing up in Texas, it wasn't long before Griffith was playing along. "I learned how to play from a PBS series that came on Saturday afternoons, and then the rest of it came from watching other players. My first guitar was a Yamaha 110. I got that when I was nine years old. I paid $11.00 a month on it. Up until then I'd been playing my sister's Silvertone."

Her sister eventually put down the Silvertone to become the homecoming queen while Nanci took the opposite path. "I was a real late bloomer. Going into my junior year in high school I was under five feet tall and weighed 75 pounds. I definitely wasn't a party girl. I read all the time."

Nanci kept reading, eventually finding inspiration in the writing of fellow Texans like Katherine Anne Porter and Larry McMurtry. "What Larry McMurtry did for me as a young college student was to write about Texas in modern terms. [cont'd on page 83]

MICHAEL LORIMER'S CLASSICAL GAS

Meet Segovia's favorite student, possibly America's greatest acoustic guitar virtuoso

By Chip Stern

YOU KNOW, we have to move forward, and there's no sense in getting mired in the heritage, but there's so much richness in the work of some of those old musicians who came before us," sighs Michael Lorimer wistfully. "Older people are generally undervalued in our society. They're made to retire just at the point when they really have the experience and sensitivity to teach us a lot. Maybe that's why there are actually young guitarists who don't realize what a radical, revolutionary step it was for Segovia to put the guitar out on the concert stage and to codify our modern repertoire for the instrument by doing arrangements and inspiring composers."

And much as Segovia forged links between nineteenth-century salon traditions and the twentieth-century concert stage, Michael Lorimer is extending Segovia's breakthroughs into contemporary forms. If we are to believe the maestro's own words of praise—and why not?—then the native Californian Lorimer is among the most gifted of all the young students the master has sent out into the world. Arguably America's greatest acoustic virtuoso of the

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past 20 years, Michael Lorimer reaches past the frozen beauty and insularity of the classical guitar into the variegated world of contemporary music—without undermining his lifelong commitment to the rich repertoire of his instrument. Tradition, not as past-present-future, but as a continuum of simple values that last because they work. Classicism, not as a negation of the new, but rather as a sweet embrace.

Lorimer's feeling for both was on display when I first encountered him and his wife Jude one afternoon in the Greenwich Village apartment of Lorimer's good friend, the Pulitzer Prize–winning composer William Bolcom. Freshly arrived from home-base California, Lorimer tended to his own arrangement of a turn-of-the-century Brazilian composition, the score for which resembled the residue of a military campaign between warring factions of ants. His arrangement, with its triplets and eighth-note figurations, shimmied and primped with the idiomatic luster of a tango on a Rio de Janeiro boulevard, every knotty rhythm tied to a knuckle-busting chord change (one per beat, it seemed). And though Lorimer was still in the process of working it all out, the rudiments of his quiet magic were much in evidence. The balanced clarity, rich colorations and noiseless, graceful technique of a master guitarist gradually bent the music to his will without breaking it.

Under the twin aegis of the apartment's patron saints—the Blake brothers, Eubie and William—Lorimer paused intermittently to reflect on his heritage: "For example, if you look at jazz, there are young horn players who develop all kinds of technique, but never stop to discover what guys were doing in the Ellington band just 50 years ago. Some of these old guys are still walking around among us right here in New York City; you can talk to them and play for them and learn from them. Of course, old people lose something, too, if they're not open to what young musicians have discovered—but we lose more. I'm ready to learn from anybody. Bill Bolcom once told me he learned so much from being around Eubie Blake, but I think Eubie was inspired by him as well. Eubie said to me once, 'You know, listening to Bill, I hear how much I *don't* know about the piano,' and he laughed. I mean, here was a man who *knew* Scott Joplin, and for me personally, Segovia was like a direct link to the nineteenth century—and that makes it so alive for me."

And for the listener. Despite a longstanding ennui about the joys of the music business in general and recording in particular ("For me, recordings have always been a pale imitation of live music," he says flatly), Lorimer's last offering—*Remembranza* (Dancing Cat/Windham Hill)—is imbued with a colorful, controlled momentum that is as spiritually in tune with the rhythmic whistlestops of Americana (both Northern *and* Southern hemispheres) as it is with the oaken harmonic milestones of Europe and the flamenco dances of Spain.

"The wall between classical music and jazz and pop is artificial. In the late '60s I remember playing a club in the Bay Area called the Family Dog, and I was on the bill in between the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead as a sort of intermission act, playing Bach and things like that, and every-

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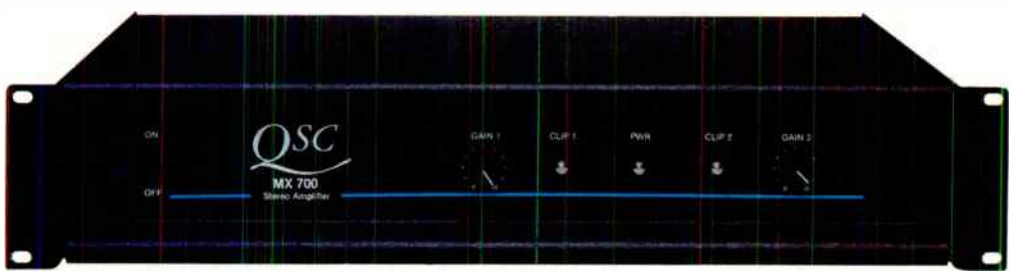

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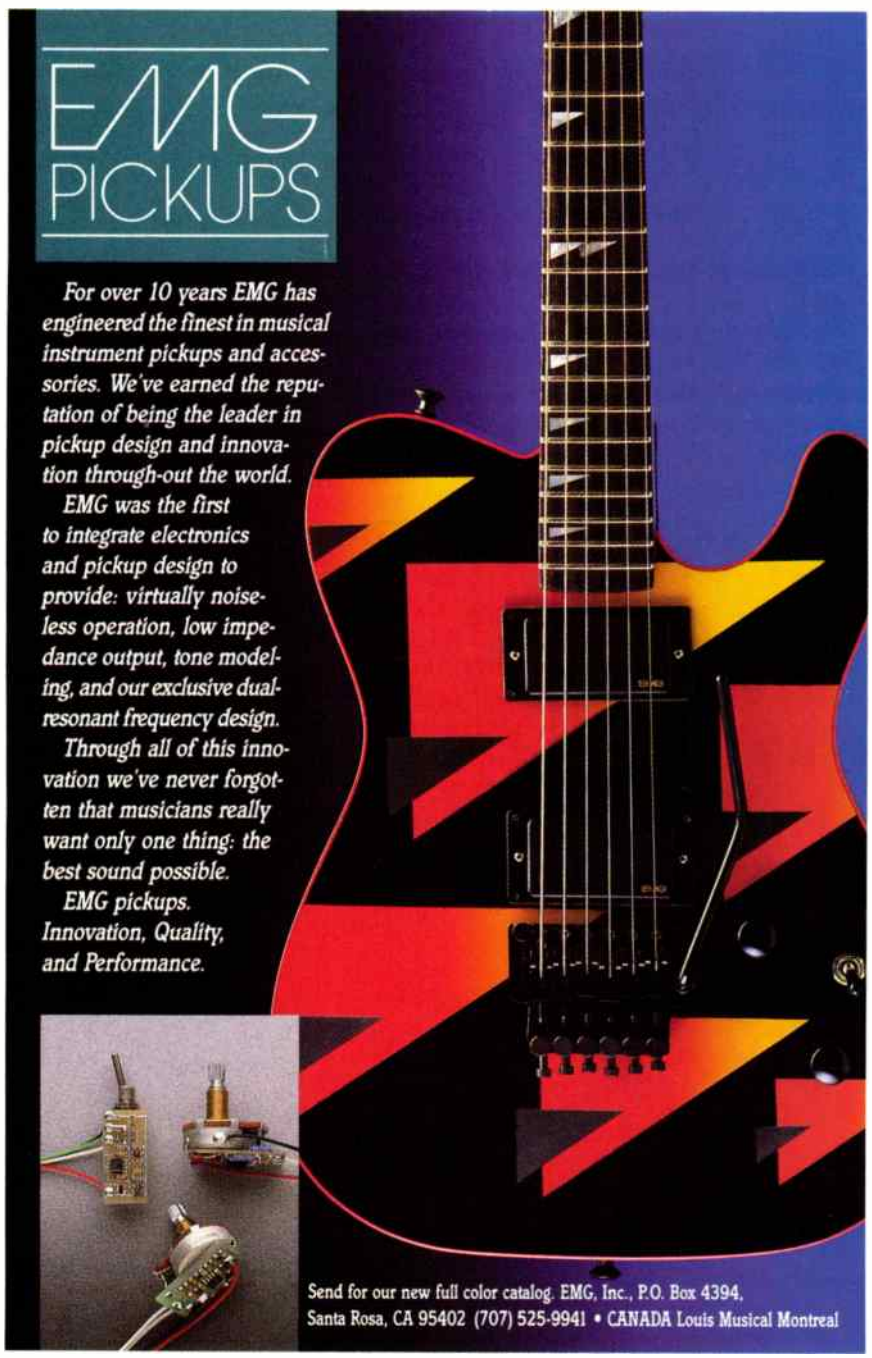
body liked it—it was music. When people hear good music, it doesn't matter what labels have been put on it—not when something moves them. For myself, when I was real small, before I knew about guitar, I heard Dixieland jazz on the radio, and I really liked that. And I also wanted to learn how to play boogie-woogie on the piano, but I was afraid if I asked my parents to play piano they'd have me in one of those wimpy little kids' books—and I wanted to learn boogie-woogie. Also, I always had a real strong affinity for plucked strings; I heard the harp around age five and I loved that. I also loved the sound of harpsichord and bluegrass banjo. Then when I was around 10, I heard Segovia for the first time, and all those plucked-string sounds were there—only better.

"It was an old Decca record with the famous Bach Chaconne on one side and Villa-Lobos and Sor on the other. And it really inspired me. I couldn't believe that this was actually a guitar, and I looked over the album real carefully, and it didn't say anything about any gimmickry or double tracking. My father already had this $35 Mexican guitar around, which today would be worth, oh, probably $35," Lorimer laughs. "My father was a lawyer, and he was the type to bring a plastic flute home one week, and then a mandolin the next, and he'd always try to learn these, but when it came down to the real work he'd invariably quit and move on to the next instrument. So I took one of my father's Mel Bay books and taught myself 'Little Brown Jug,' which seemed like a step forward. And at the end of the first weekend my dad was delighted that I'd accomplished so much and outstripped him—and disgusted, too. That nipped his guitar in the bud."

So in 1956, at the age of 10, Lorimer set out to pursue his singular vision, growing up listening to Segovia and flamenco rather than American pop. "At that age, listening to all this great Spanish music, I couldn't understand why someone would want to listen to Elvis Presley, though later on I realized he was a great artist, too, but it missed me as a kid. I would have heard Chuck Berry, too, but, you see, I grew up in Benedict Canyon, which was a real backwater in the '50s—three miles from the nearest cross-street—so when I went home, I was home. I might have heard pop music at a school dance, but I'd be playing my guitar on the bus to and from school, and I didn't really hear American pop music until I went to Spain after high school. Classical guitar and flamenco was *my* pop music."

So in his own little aesthetic Benedict Canyon, Lorimer found an instructor—Guy Horn—who held his hand, so to speak, and kept him focused on his goal. "The frustration of not getting to this music might have made me quit, but I was lucky—Guy taught only classical guitar. I had the exposure, but in the end, everyone is their own teacher. A good teacher should focus on your strengths, give you helpful hints, keep you from wandering down a blind alley, and then get out of the way—that's my approach to teaching."

At 16, Lorimer experienced Segovia's music first-hand, finagled an introduction and was rewarded with an invitation to go to Italy to study. "I'd been playing about six years. I don't think he was thrilled with my playing or anything. I think he thought, 'Well, the kid's worked hard, he can study with my assistant.' However, when I went over to Italy, he genuinely did like my playing and complimented me—a lot—which was important to me. And I worked with [*cont'd on page 34*]



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How to Buy a Great Acoustic

What to look for, what to avoid and whether you can afford it

By Alan di Perna

BUYING AN acoustic guitar is a lot like choosing a spouse. Select wisely and you'll have a partner for life—one that will mellow and improve with age. It's a far cry from the "one-night-stand" mindset of high-tech purchasing, where you're out shopping for your next synth or stereo component before you've barely learned the name of the one you've got. Which makes the job of choosing an acoustic all the more demanding. You may find a beauty. But how can you tell if it's built to last as long as you—through sickness and health, its tone growing richer rather than poorer down through the years?

Well, the acoustic guitar market breaks down much like the marriage market. Up on top, say in the over-$1500 price range, you've got your centuries-old aristocratic families: Martin, Gibson and (since the '50s, at least) Guild. It's pretty hard to go wrong if you buy into one of these clans. But are these the only top-quality guitars out there? By no means.

Photograph: Brian Barnaud

Taylor Guitars of California, for example, has been around only 15 years and already become a major contender in the high-end market.

At lower price points you'll find manufacturers implementing many of the same ideas in more affordable ways. And doing a good job of it, for the most part. The acoustic guitar market has become intensely competitive in recent years. Manufacturing standards are high—in the U.S. and in Japan and Korea, where some 90 percent of the world's acoustic guitars are made today. Which means there are plenty of respectable guitars in both the mid-price range ($500-$1500) and the affordable (under $500) zone. Whatever you've got to spend, you can take your choice from among a bevy of fine acoustics from companies like Yamaha, Ovation, Takamine, Fender, Washburn, Alvarez and others.

What is it about a good acoustic guitar that gives it that unmistakable sonic depth and character? The wood, for one. The wood for fine guitars is cut from logs using a process called quarter-sawing, which yields the straightest wood grains. It's then kiln-dried and aged—sometimes for years—to help keep it from warping. And of all the wood on an acoustic guitar, the most important piece is the soundboard or top. (That's the piece with the big round hole, or small f-holes, in it.) Often compared with a speaker cone, the soundboard is what resonates in direct response to the vibrating strings, producing much of the guitar's tone. The rest of the guitar body—the sides and back—is analogous to a speaker enclosure, then. They're important too, but since they're not in direct contact with the bridge and strings, they're not nearly as critical as the top.

Although you'll find some tops made of cedar, pine and even Hawaiian koa, they're most commonly made out of spruce, an easily identifiable, light-colored wood. Sitka and Engelmann are generally regarded as the best varieties of spruce. As for the rest of the body, rosewood, maple and mahogany are all common—rosewood generally enjoying the highest status. A mahogany-like wood called nato is sometimes used as a more affordable substitute for mahogany.

"Mahogany generally has a more mellow tone than the other common types of body wood," advises Guild plant manager William Fritscher. "If you want more of a treble tone, I would say go with maple or rosewood."

But now we come to an important distinction. No matter what type of wood they're

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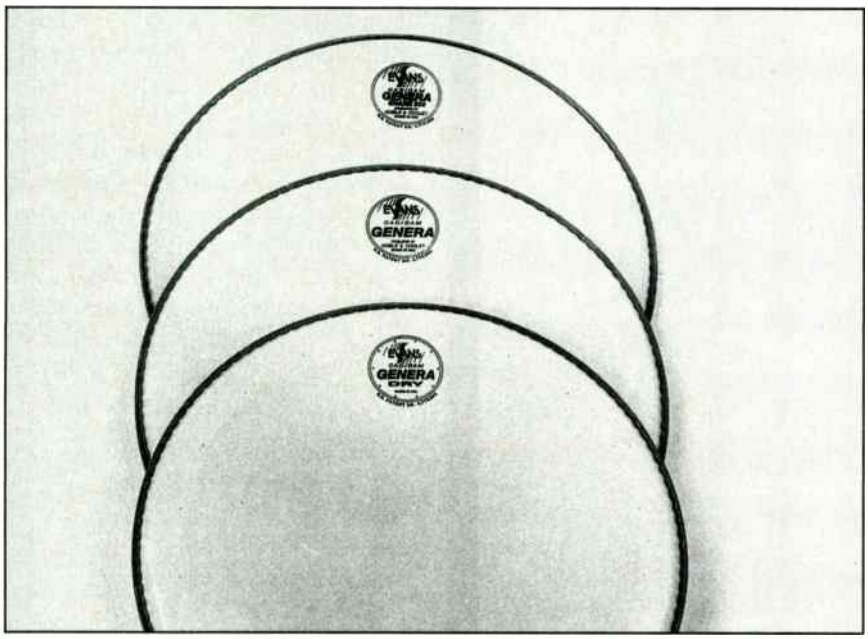

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made of, better guitars use *solid* pieces of it for the top, back and sides. Less expensive guitars use laminated wood—i.e., plywood: many thin layers instead of one solid piece. It's why cheaper guitars tend to sound bright and brittle, while better guitars have a more evenly balanced tone. Often, only the outermost layer, or veneer, will be the "prestige wood"—spruce, rosewood or whatever. All the other plies may come from some less noble denizen of the forest.

You can sometimes see if the soundboard of a guitar is solid or laminated by taking a sideways peek at it, through the soundhole, looking toward the neck or the bridge. You're now looking at a cross section of the soundboard. If the wood grain on the soundboard's top surface continues all the way down through the wood vertically, then you're looking at a solid piece of wood. If, on the other hand, you see a lot of horizontal layers running round and round the side surfaces of the soundhole, you're peering at plywood, Percy. Careful, though: The soundholes on some guitars are cleverly beveled to conceal the laminations. Spotting a laminated back or sides can be even tougher.

But then, lamination isn't entirely evil. Laminated wood has the advantage of being stronger than solid wood (which is precisely why it's less responsive). Moral: Suit your purchase to your purpose. You may need ruggedness more than subtle tonal nuances. In short, don't be unduly intimidated by wood snobbery. Consider the case of Ovation acoustics. The company struck off in a whole new direction during the mid-'60s, constructing guitar bodies out of bowl-shaped pieces of space-age plastic called Lyrachord. The guitars sound swell and have become a perennial favorite, particularly with rockers. They may not have that much harmonic complexity, but their more neutral, even tone makes them easier to mike up onstage.

Then there's the case of the lute-style back and sides used on some mid-market Alvarez Yairis. A solid piece is sliced into three layers, the grain of the center piece is placed at a 45-degree angle to the grains of the other two pieces and the three of them are bonded together without using glue. "The process gives the back and sides a little faster response," says Alvarez product manager Tom Presley. "They're more reflective than solid mahogany backs and sides."

Let's get back to the soundboard, though. Since it is so important, what should you be looking for when you check one out? When you're examining a flat-top acoustic, Yamaha guitar product manager Ken Dapron recommends that you make sure the top really *is* perfectly flat. "A common problem is that humidity factors, and/or stress on the bridge, will warp the top. If you see waves in the top—any kind of areas that are higher and lower—say within eight inches of the perimeter of the bridge, that's a sign that there's something wrong structurally. Any unevenness in the height of the wood should be taken as a warning sign."

Chris Martin, head of Martin Guitars and scion of America's foremost luthier family, suggests that you examine the soundboard's wood grain when selecting a premium-quality acoustic. "The top of a guitar should be straight-grained. If you look across it, the grain lines should run straight across the face." When looking at the soundboard in "cross-section," through the soundhole (as described above), "the grains should run perfectly straight from top to bottom. The more perpendicular they are to the plane of the face, the better the guitar top. Those little grain lines are like steel I-beams. The straighter they are, the more uniformly the top is going to vibrate. You don't want a top where the grain is too tight, because that will inhibit vibration. But if the grain is too wide, it becomes a structural problem."

Resonance vs. strength. That's also the question when it comes to bracing—the wooden beams inside the guitar that support the body, particularly the top. If they're too heavy they'll inhibit vibration and compromise the sound. If they're too light they won't do their job, which is to keep the top, back and sides from "pulling up" off the guitar due to string pressure or the wood's settling in. The most widely accepted solution to this bracing conundrum was invented by Chris Martin's great-great-great-grandfather C.F. Martin, Sr. It's called X or cross bracing, since its main feature is two lengthy braces that run diagonally underneath the top, crossing right beneath the soundhole on the bridge side of the guitar. If you peer through the soundhole of a cross-braced guitar, looking in the direction of the bridge, you can usually spy a v-shaped joint on the underside of the soundboard. That's one of the angles of the cross brace.

Scalloped bracing is a refinement of cross

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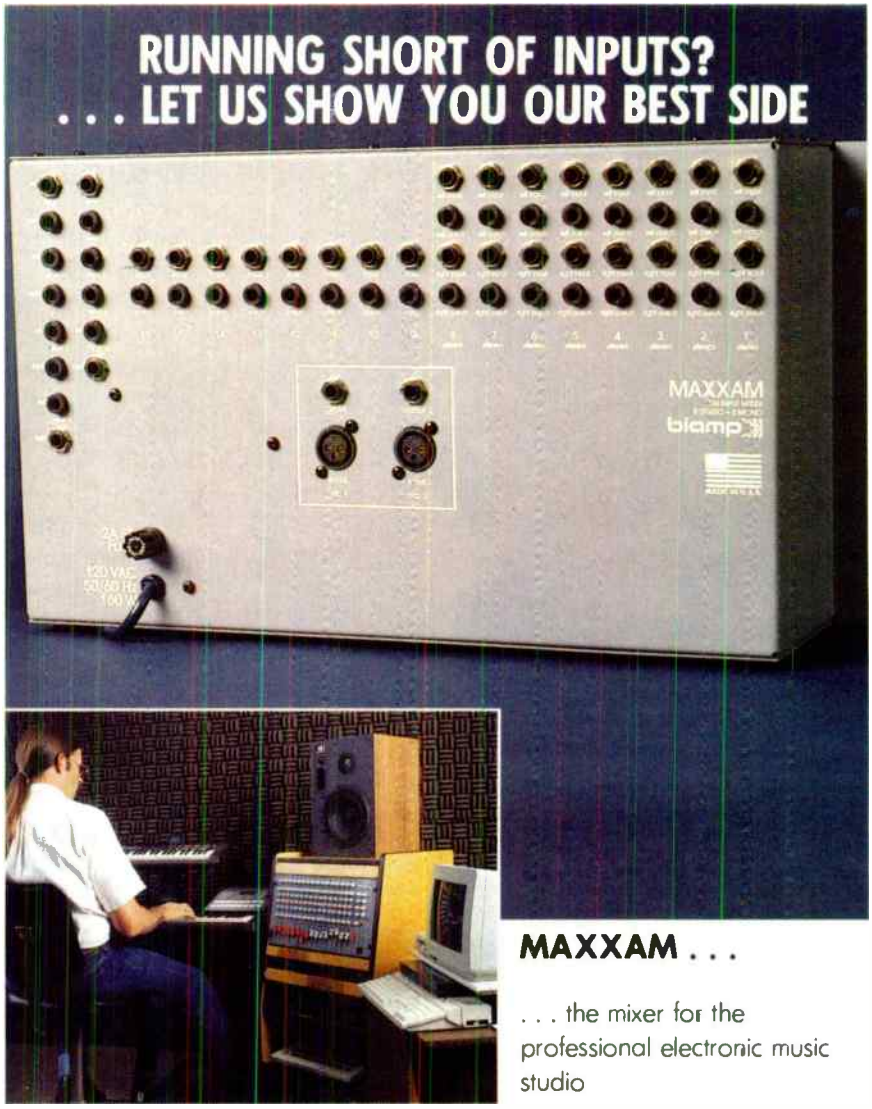
bracing that involves shaving away portions of the wood braces, which makes them lighter, thus allowing the top to vibrate more. Scalloped bracing is another one of those little amenities that start turning up after you pass the $500-$600 price point.

While cross and scalloped bracing are in the overwhelming majority, you may also run into one of several types of fan bracing (including kasha bracing), in which several braces radiate, or "fan out," from a central point somewhere beneath the bridge. This type of bracing, sometimes found on expensive handmade guitars, often requires the luthier to carefully "tune" the top in tandem with the bracing. Again, things like scalloped and fan bracing can sometimes be detected by having a peek through the soundhole, or reaching your hand inside the body and feeling around. (Obviously, you can feel a lot more with the strings loosened or removed—you can also use a flashlight and an angled dental mirror.) The main thing to beware of is loose bracing, especially if you hear any untoward rattling from the body.

In addition to wood type and bracing, the finish of an acoustic guitar affects its tonality. Thick, shiny polyurethane finishes provide excellent protection against nicks and scratches, but they actually inhibit the wood from vibrating. Thin, hand-rubbed lacquer finishes, on the other hand, allow the wood to "breathe." This, in turn, affects the way the guitar ages and mellows. "When you seal a wood in polyurethane, there are no pores in it," Yamaha's Ken Dapron explains. "It doesn't breathe and it doesn't respond to the climate, so it doesn't age at the same rate as a lacquer finish. The wood on the inside of the guitar still breathes, because that's not painted. But the exposure is mostly on the outside of the instrument."

So much for the body. We now come to the part of the guitar that calls for the closest examination before you buy: the neck. Look at it carefully. Play it even more carefully. You most emphatically don't want to get stuck with a bum neck.

Necks are generally made of either mahogany or maple, with either rosewood or ebony fingerboards. Ebony is harder than rosewood, so it tends to last longer, but it can also crack. Ebony is darker in color, and some guitar makers paint their rosewood fingerboards to look like ebony. You can still tell the difference, though: rosewood is visibly more porous. As for the neck itself, maple is more prone to warp than



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mahogany, which is why better maple necks are usually made of two separate pieces, often with a thin strip of mahogany in the middle. As the wood settles in, the two pieces of maple "work against" each other and the neck won't warp.

Warpage is the bête noire of any neck. Again, temperature and humidity really wreak havoc with wood; and even the finest guitar can have a warped neck if it has been improperly stored or handled. The traditional way to check for warpage is "sighting down the neck," where you tuck the body under your chin like a violin, hold the guitar horizontally and look across the top of the neck to make sure it's straight. It's the equivalent of kicking car tires, but can be misleading, as Yamaha's Ken Dapron cautions:

"Between shadows and the kind of lighting you have, you can start seeing things that aren't there. The manicure of fret edges, for example, is not always done perfectly. And when the lengths of fret edges vary, it can make the neck look warped. So a minor problem can look like a major one."

Many experts prefer the following method for checking the straightness of the neck. Just press down the low E string between the nut and first fret. With your other hand, press the string down again at the fret where the neck joins the body. Then look at the space between the bottom of the string and the tops of the frets all along the neck. Basically what you're doing is using the string as a straight edge. The neck should run along at a fairly uniform distance from the string.

The experts also tend to agree that the neck should ideally have a very slight convex warp—it should bend inward a little. Perfectly straight necks, or necks with a concave warp, will create problems with buzzing strings unless you keep the action very high.

Ah, the action . . . a *very* important consideration. Even if the neck isn't undesirably warped, you may find that the strings are uncomfortably high off the fretboard as you play up the neck. If that's so, there could be a problem with the way the neck is set. And this is what you should check for next. All acoustic guitar necks—from the cheapest to the most expensive—are set by hand, by sliding a "male" groove at the end of the neck into a "female" slot on a part of the body called the top block. This interface, known as a dovetail joint, is glued in—usually with the kind of animal glue violin makers have used for hundreds of years. (Some manufacturers add screws as well.) The dovetail joint is a time-honored and reliable method for setting the neck in place. But between human error and the natural propensity of wood to stretch and settle as time goes on, the neck could end up in a less-than-ideal position. If the neck is set too low in relation to the bridge, the action may be irreparably high.

The deuce of it all is that acoustic guitars, unlike their electric counterparts, usually don't have adjustable bridges. So the only real way to lower the action is to shave off some of the saddle, that off-white strip of bone or plastic that sits on the bridge right in front of the string pegs, and over which the strings are stretched. But sometimes there isn't enough saddle there to shave. Ken Dapron explains how to tell if there isn't:

"Look at the angle of the string as it bends over the saddle. If you've got a nice sharp angle, this tells you that you can bring the saddle down. If there's no angle, and the string action is real high, then the saddle can't be brought down."

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Other things to check for? Examine the heel of the neck: that block of wood that extends down from the neck and adjoins the side of the body. If there's any kind of gap between the heel and body, or if the finish is cracked, bubbled or milky in color, the position of the neck has probably shifted—perhaps enough to be a problem. Similarly, check the area where the bridge joins the soundboard. Any gaps or weirdness in the finish may indicate that the bridge has shifted or is being pulled up. Makers of inexpensive guitars sometimes finish the entire soundboard and then glue the bridge right onto the finish. This is a definite no-no. The bridge should be affixed to the raw, unfinished wood. Otherwise there'll be trouble when the strings are tuned up.

"A bridge that's glued to the finish is only going to stay on the guitar [*cont'd on page 94*]

GRIFFITH

[*cont'd from page 72*] People who have read McMurtry's books no longer think of Texas as a great prairie full of cowboys and Indians. They think of modern cities and modern problems. Real people. That hadn't been done by a Texas writer since Katherine Anne Porter. Texas *is* a pretty boring place and I think that instills a lot of creativity in young people—trying to get *out* of Texas."

Griffith now splits her time between her newfound home in Ireland and Nashville, where she has become fast friends with legendary songwriter Harlan Howard ("She's Got You," "Streets of Baltimore," "I Fall to Pieces"). "He's my running buddy," she says with obvious pride and affection; "has been for about four years. I used to feel guilty about being a writer who considered nothing sacred. I learned from Harlan that everything is territory. If you're going to come around me you have to realize that you may end up in a song somewhere."

"Drive-In Movies and Dashboard Lights," from the new record, explores some territory that may be a little too close to home. You see, it's about this homecoming queen .... "My sister took it very personally. I did catch a lot of flak, but I think she's convinced now that it was the subject I was writing about and not her."

Whatever she's writing about, Griffith cuts to the heart, and her best songs will transcend the whims of American radio programmers to become hit records, albeit by other artists. Kathy Mattea took her "Love at the Five and Dime" to number one on the country charts. Bruce Springsteen and Patty Scialfa have been dueting on her "Gulf Coast Highway" at his shows, and that song is being recorded by Willie Nelson and Emmylou Harris. But, as is too often the case, while European audiences are celebrating the real item, the artist is relegated to cult status here at home.

"I think that cult artists in general in American music have been the ones to change the sound of popular music," Griffith says. "I'm really proud of it. When I pick up a paper and I read an interview with Tanita Tikaram and she says Nanci Griffith was an influence, or I read something about the Indigo Girls and they mention that they were influenced by my writing—to me that's a great compliment."

And if it takes a while for her name to become a household word, well, Nanci Griffith is in no particular hurry. "I don't understand why people bow to the pressure of thinking they have to be young in order to be vital. I'm really proud of the little crow's feet that I'm getting now, and I'm gonna be around for a long time. I'm gonna be a mean old lady." Ⓜ

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Recombinant D'Arby

The Second Line According to Terence Trent

Neither Fish nor Flesh
(Columbia)

TO SAY THAT *Neither Fish nor Flesh* starts where *Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby* left off might seem perverse. They don't sound at all alike. The fascination with Brian Wilson is new; so is the neo-psychedelic sensibility of several songs. It also funks harder. But the biggest difference is the sense of freedom with which D'Arby deconstructs and recombines the same material as on *Hardline*: his gospel background, the Prince catalog, his idiosyncratic readings of major pop idioms. Where *Hardline* sounded a little contrived in its classicism—D'Arby wanted to prove he could write songs, and big songs at that—*Neither Fish nor Flesh* suggests the sheer joy of invention. Give or take *Lovesexy*, very few albums in the past five years have felt so heady or so generous in their breadth of musical ideas, or rendered pain and pleasure with such a regenerative sense of joy. There's no way I'm gonna say that a record I've only had a week is the equal of Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*, but it's that ambitious, that absorbed in matters of trial and redemption.

D'Arby's more than the latest in a line of gospel singers gone astray; he carries his gospel into the world as a ministry of carnal desire. The opening songs deal with love in its most innocent state, followed by a suite of songs about love in conflict, followed in turn by a resolution that sacrifices the seductive (and finally illusory) vision of the loved one for a more enlightened version of same. For D'Arby as for Jim Morrison, love and sex spell grace and redemption.

The record certainly isn't perfect. D'Arby's still prone to the painfully mannered gesture (he unfor-

Illustration: Patty Dryden

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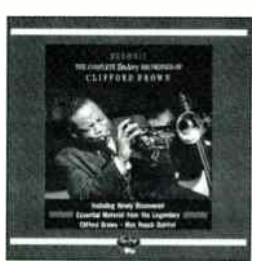
tunately closes with one, the stilted a cappella ballad "And I Need to Be with Someone Tonight"), and he still hedges his bets too much for my taste: The I'm-messing-with-you laughter that runs off the end of side two cheapens the record by suggesting the whole thing *might* be an ironic gesture, which it's not. But he doesn't sound overwrought or calculated to the extent he did on *Hardline*. He's present in the grooves, engaged in an act of discovery, and that's a rare thing.

The revelations that emerge don't just involve the obvious musical curiosities, like finding out what happens when you combine Brian Wilson's sense of musical space with Prince's approach to pop dissonance. They involve emotional truths too. It's summed up in a small way by "Attracted to You," a funky rocker that's lustful and beatific at the same time—a sublime connection, as natural in real life as it is inconceivable in most versions of pop music.

If that sounds like a mystical pronouncement, well . . . this is a record you have to approach with your heart as much as your head. And the payoff isn't really clear; it'll take a while to know whether it can deliver as much as it seems to promise. But it's not too soon to lay aside the cynicism and say that Terence Trent D'Arby looks like one of the great ones. This is how the '80s end: not with a whimper, but a bang.—Steve Perry



Clifford Brown

The Complete EmArcy Recordings of Clifford Brown
(EmArcy)

CLIFFORD BROWN remains the definitive trumpet soloist and hard bopper of his generation, a consummate musician, an enduring ideal of the dignified artist. Had his star not gone out over the Pennsylvania Turnpike back in 1956, the Clifford Brown–Max Roach group (with Sonny Rollins) in all likelihood would have evolved into *the* trendsetting star vehicle of the 1950s—a popular yet progressive musical force. In Clifford's place, Miles Davis filled the breach, and the rest is history. So, however, is this extraordinary retrospective of the legendary trumpeter's greatest work. I know many people prefer the emotive power of Clifford's earlier work (check out the magnificent *The Complete Blue Note/Pacific Jazz Recordings of Clifford Brown* on Mosaic), but the year-and-a-half's worth of musical achievements represented by *The Complete EmArcy Recordings of Clifford Brown* show an instrumentalist at the peak of his powers, fully committed to an ensemble style worthy of that talent.

It's been said that Clifford's great love was for the trumpet itself, and the sheer beauty of his tone and lyric conception animates every setting on these 10 CDs, a quality that made each note seem thoughtful and effortless. What better proof of his mastery than to observe how the timbral color of his horn bloomed to suit the nature of each session? In a live all-star jam with fellow horn men Maynard Ferguson and Clark Terry, Brown's tone and attack are sharp and cheerfully combative. When this group is joined by Dinah Washington, his tone ripens to match her sassy, brassy inflections. On his very underrated sessions with Helen Merrill his trumpet takes on a lighter, more muted timbre as counterpoint for the vocalist's airy, breathless melodies. When teamed with the divine Sarah Vaughan or a string section, the horn is dark and rich, each note like sculpted topaz, with a full-throated vocal throb that never descends into maudlin vibrato effects.

On the fully syncopated side of the ledger line, there's never been a more perfect jazz ensemble than that of Clifford and drum innovator Max Roach. Their breakthroughs take up four discs here, featuring some "newly discovered essential material" that will mainly be of interest to fanatics (and who else would be expected to purchase a 10-CD set?). There are serviceable alternate takes of Brown chestnuts like "Joy Spring" and "Daahoud," but most interesting are the six fragments and false starts that contribute to the final tape-splice edit of Max Roach's "Mildama," an orchestration of several distinctive drum themes that gives everyone else in the band a serious case of conniptions, even Clifford. The band repeatedly misses the cues or blows transitions, and to me this lends a certain element of humanity to the proceedings, to hear our champions revealed as mere mortals.

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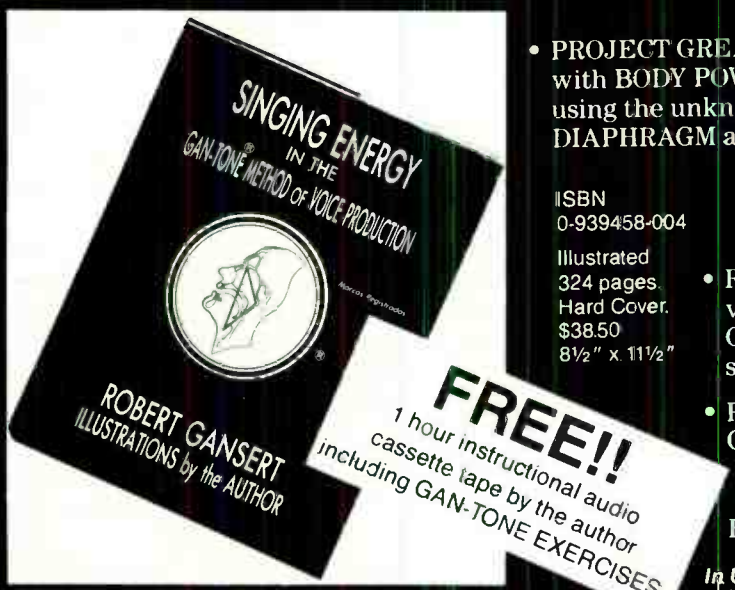

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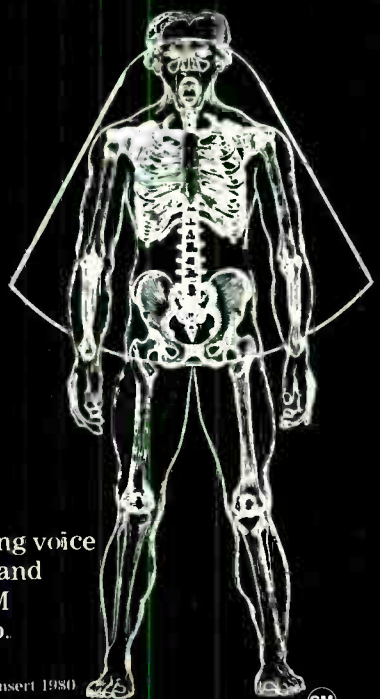

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Elsewhere, their divinity is justified. One of this band's main contributions to jazz was the manner in which they re-orchestrated popular standards along rhythmic lines, maintaining the essential harmonies but treating the "standard" melodic contour with Olympian contempt, as on Cole Porter's "I Get a Kick Out of You" and "What Is This Thing Called Love?" and that most unlikely of ballads, "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing." Here, and on my favorite, the Mid-Eastern-flavored "Sandu," Brown is showcased at his most combustible, his rhythmic figurations fluttering dangerously close to the precipice—supercharged by Max Roach's brisk, forceful tempos—yet never becoming empty exercises or feverish upper-register shrieks. Always in control, intelligent and tasteful, full of grace and fire, Brownie's fluid, fanciful choruses remain among the most perfect examples of trumpet in American history. Three decades after his death, Clifford Brown's trumpet conception remains more emotive and alive than . . . well, let's just say that he's missed.

—Chip Stern

Rickie Lee Jones

Flying Cowboys
(Geffen)

Shawn Colvin

Steady On
(Columbia)

RICKIE LEE JONES sees the purpose of her music as "making progress towards heaven." The courage in that childlike phrase is palpable in her best work but never more so than on *Flying Cowboys*. Throughout songs like "The Horses" and the title track, images of nursery toys and adolescent dreams are contrasted with those of wastelands and indifferent technologies. The ability of a youngster to romanticize life's brittle mercies is rendered to especially eerie effect on "Rodeo Girl," in which Social Security Insurance is turned into a mystical force: "Where the wild S.S.I./Whispers from these hills."

Producer Walter Becker takes these somber twists of narrative fate and employs all the studio finesse of his Steely Dan days to make them sparkle. Using acoustic guitar where cymbals might be, and bass where the snare drum is expected, he creates a glistening canvas against which Rickie Lee's rich vocals and melodies can work their sleight of hand. Coming of age in a world where everything is broken, from the wings of childhood to the spines of adult virtue, Jones suggests one must accept constant mending as an ingredient of growth. With *Flying Cowboys* she has mastered this thorny trick, even creating an unprecedented oasis of joy with "Satellites," the most incandescent track of her career.

While the spooky folk-rock of guitarist Shawn Colvin's *Steady On* is less stark than Jones' jazz-tinged piano parables, she has inherited Rickie Lee's knack for rendering harrowing tales with a chromatic paint box. Colvin's voice is a powerful instrument, reedy but iridescent. Where Rickie Lee uses innocent wonder to shrewd effect, Colvin plays off timeless myths of pastoral bliss and romantic surrender, cooing cool verities whose beauty conceals a jolt.

On tracks like "Diamond in the Rough" and "The Story" she mingles antique rituals of dating and mating with bygone social exercises like 1950s bomb shelter drills, making the case that all follies about survival will kill you long before the bogeyman can. In fact, each song on *Steady On* could be called a cunning ballad, using exquisitely pretty arrangements to show how easily the heart feeds lies to the soul. Shawn's peppery chords and chiming picking lull the ear on a lovely small-town lament like "Cry Like an Angel," but her tableaus of church ceremonies and high school dances are only phantoms, each symbolizing a dead zone: "It's not so you'd notice but it's a sinister thing/Like the wheels of ambition at the christening."

It's a painful thing to think out loud in public, and with *Steady On* Shawn Colvin has only begun the task of exorcizing her torments. Yet her shadowy hymns hold the authority of a major new voice. Meanwhile, Rickie Lee Jones' *Flying Cowboys* is a testament to the communicable strength one's solitary creative fight can foster.

—Timothy White

The Georgia Satellites

In the Land of Salvation and Sin
(Elektra)

IF YOU WERE to tell me 10 years ago I'd be spending my spare time in '89 tracking down mint used copies of records I used to hate, I'd have laughed in your face. If you told me they'd be by the Amazing Rhythm Aces, Atlanta Rhythm Section, Loggins & Messina and 80 percent of the Asylum Records roster, I'd have cried. If you told me that well-recorded albums featuring exceptionally skilled studio players would end up sounding a hell of a lot better than sloppy, well-intentioned rock 'n' rollers with *heart*, I'd have puked.

Well, ha-ha, boo-hoo, urgh. One listen to this third album by the Georgia Satellites and I'm dying to slap on the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band. Problem No. 1: The Georgia Satellites *are* well-intentioned rock 'n' rollers with heart. Problem No. 2: When I hear "Shake That Thing," this album's "raucous Lowell George tribute," or the cover of "Games People Play," I want to hear Little Feat or Joe South, not the Georgia Satellites. Problem No. 3: In their prime, .38 Special beat this undistinguished crap by a country mile. Problem No. 4: Everybody cuts slack for bands like this, and they shouldn't. Problem No. 5: In 10 years, no one's going to care about this music and books will be written about Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar and Danny Kortchmar.

This band, Green On Red and most other good-time–roots-rock boys always blow it on the two most basic levels: They can't write a good song, and they can't sing or play especially well, either. But they've got an *attitude*. Like the Satellites, these bands can go ahead and thank a bunch of names like Bob Seger, Hank Williams, Jr. and Tom Petty on the album cover, but the sad fact is those three stand head and shoulders above this and every other well-intentioned band who'd kill to write one decent song with a hook, but can't.

This music, so conspicuously filled with

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"feeling" and "heart," does nothing but evoke the music of other people who are so much better. You can dress it up, make it sound like the Stones or give it a searing Joe Hardy production. But there are certain things you can't shine and this band and too many others like them continue to reek of it. Give me Wet Willie any day.

—Dave DiMartino

Warren Zevon

Transverse City
(Virgin)

WARREN ZEVON'S new album isn't as sly or easygoing as *Sentimental Hygiene*, the record he made in 1987 after a five-year layoff, and it's not as directly confessional. With Zevon's keyboards circling Asian fifths and John Patitucci's bass playing melody during a bang-up prelude that drummer Richie Hayward eventually slams into rock time—and Jerry Garcia overloads with brilliant guitar—"Transverse City" opens the album with new sensations. In the song, a couple visits an awful urban future, where "everything exists at once" and "every weekend lasts for months." Zevon puts his rant across with the weird electricity of someone who gets started on something and can't stop.

The rest of *Transverse City*, with its bracing guitars and Zevon's dramatic voice, is anything but happy talk. Presenting songs that address environmental danger and international "Turbulence," wild traffic and "Networking," the LP turns into a harrowing, darkly humorous survival course. Zevon can write and sing with anyone anywhere, but *Transverse City* still risks excessiveness; all its chemical spills ("Run Straight Down," the current single), miserable shopping ("Down in the Mall") and self-interest ("Splendid Isolation," which ought to be a hit) add up to one big headache. "When I was young," a vet in "The Long Arm of the Law" who's on the run in the 2000s admits, "times were hard/ When I got older it was worse."

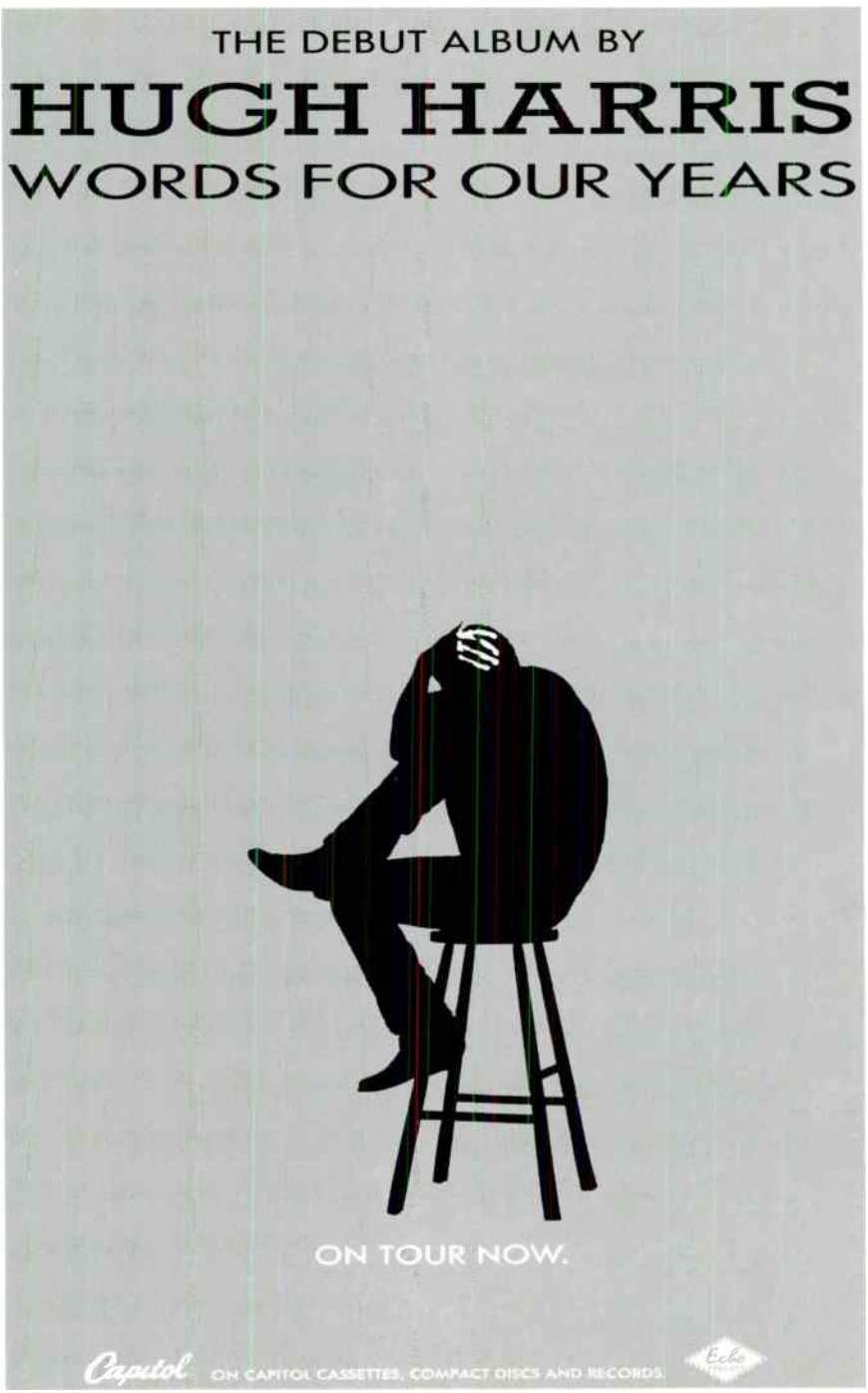
But then Zevon balances the LP's grimness with one beautiful song—a funny, disturbed, compassionate rock ballad called "Nobody's in Love This Year." Maybe it sounds odd that one song at the close of an album can change the way you end up hearing the whole. But that's what happens here. As Mark Isham's flugelhorn gathers strength behind him, Zevon sings about a world that's stopped striving for paradise. The song explains why, throughout this brilliant record, Zevon has painted such uncompromised portraits of everyday hell.

—James Hunter

David Byrne

Rei Momo
(Luaka Bop/Sire)

DAVID BYRNE has come a long way from the twitching psychotic of a dozen years ago. Throughout his multimedia career, the head Talking Head has gobbled up ideas and styles like an insatiable termite, even when inspiration seemed to flag. At the latest twist in his curious journey this restless innovator appears reincarnated as Mr. Natural, crooning [*cont'd on page 97*]



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SHORT TAKES

SO MUCH MUSIC, SO LITTLE TIME

ROCK

By J.D. Considine

Psychedelic Furs

Book of Days (Columbia)

THIS BAND sounds really down—Richard Butler in particular seems filled with a bitter melancholy, lending a curdled edge to his vocals—and frankly, I couldn't be happier. For all its sour sentiment and menacing mood, there's a vitality to this music that was lacking in the Furs' last few albums, something much more immediate than the dance beats and slick synths that were supposed to push this band into the mainstream. Now the sound is more primal, with the rhythm section generating an ominous throb beneath the glorious clangor of John Ashton's guitars. The result is the band's best album since *Talk, Talk, Talk.*

Jack Bruce

A Question of Time (Epic)

DESPITE THE FUSOID overtones of Bruce's all-star guest list, the consensus here is to let it rock. And rock it does, from Vernon Reid's splatter-note foray into "Life on Earth," through Albert Collins' gutsy "Blues You Can't Lose" and Allan Holdsworth's Creamy "Obsession" (a.k.a. "More Sunshine of Your Love"). That still leaves plenty of room for harmonically adventurous experiments like the title tune.

Les Negresses Vertes

Mlah (Sire/Warner Bros.)

SINCE THIS OCTET (plus dog) relies on traditional instrumentation, musical eclecticism and street-punk audacity, it's tempting to think of Les Negresses Vertes (the Green Negresses) as the French Pogues (as if the French needed their own Pogues). But after hearing them, comparisons seem beside the point. From the rai-flavored "Zobi la Mouche" to the Gallic funk of "Les yeux de ton père," the most exceptional thing about this band isn't its gimmick, but its gift for melody. Though the dog *is* a nice touch.

D.J. Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince

And in This Corner . . . (Relativity)

GUITARIST Harry K. Cody is quite a find—a fast, fluid soloist with a good sense of melodic structure and astonishing control over his instrument's harmonics. But if these guys want to be the next Van Halen, someone ought to explain to them that there's more to songwriting than wrapping a few rhymes around a riff.

Billy Joel

Storm Front (Columbia)

AN APT TITLE for such a blow-hard.

The Primitives

Pure (RCA)

THERE'S STILL a lot of bottled Blondie left in the Primitives' sound, though it's been considerably diluted by the pert psychedelia of "Dizzy Heights" and "Sick of It." It's when the sound turns all warm and Velvetsy that the Primitives really show their stuff, from "All the Way Down" to the CD-only cover of "I'll Be Your Mirror."

Melissa Etheridge

Brave and Crazy (Island)

LIKE MOST blues mamas, Etheridge has an ardent faith both in the power of love and the glory of self-destruction. Unfortunately, because her milieu is more reconstructed folkie than bar-band rocker, she tends to express these beliefs in the sort of hokey, emotion-baring poetry most folks grow out of with adulthood. Such as: "Shame, shame but I love your name/And the way you make the buffalo roam."

Don Dixon

E E E (Enigma)

THOUGH THE SOUND may be big-time pop music, replete with horn charts, funk licks and a full-blown gospel choir, the sensibility is still low-key rock 'n' roll. Which may seem odd in light of Dixon's reputation as a studio wizard, until you remember that the heart of his approach has always been catchy melodies and soulful singing—both of which this album has in abundance.

Various Artists

Gumby: The Green Album (Buena Vista)

IF THIS COMPILATION of Gumby tribute tunes by everybody from Dweezil Zappa to Frank Sinatra, Jr. seems like a real hoot, that's only because you haven't actually listened to it.

Lou Gramm

Long Hard Look (Atlantic)

NOBODY SINGS hard rock better than Lou Gramm. He's got the range, the power, the control . . . but not the material. Even with collaborators like Holly Knight and Peter "Not the Guy from Geils" Wolf, Gramm seems inordinately fond of cliché, leaving this album littered with heard-it-before lines from "Broken Dreams" to "True Blue Love."

The Smithereens

11 (Capitol)

AS "A GIRL LIKE YOU" demonstrates, nobody does Beatlesque melancholy better than this band. Unfortunately, the rest of the album stands as proof that one sound doesn't fit all.

JAZZ

By Peter Watrous

Rev. Lonnie Farris

Vocal and Steel Guitar (Eden)

THE STEEL GUITAR sneaks out through the band like a snake, shivering, glinting in the light. The good Rev. Farris sings away praising God, and there you have it, gospel steel guitar, yet another weird cultural hybrid. Unlike some combinations, Rev. Farris—who recorded the album "c. 1962" in Los Angeles—made music that can be listened to. His voice, big and burly, floats through "A Closer Walk to Thee" and a bunch of originals. He's joined by a couple of women singers and the good Rev. Elliott Keyes on crooning, sweet tenor saxophone. (Down Home Music, 10341 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530)

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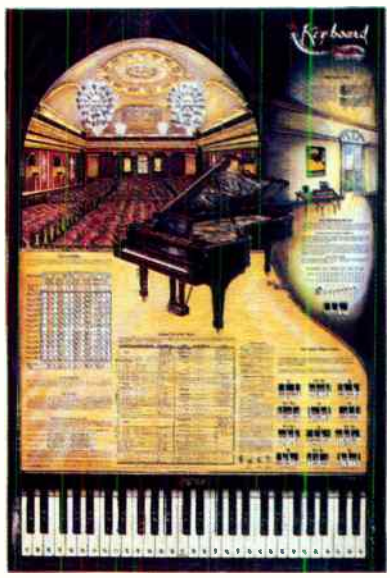

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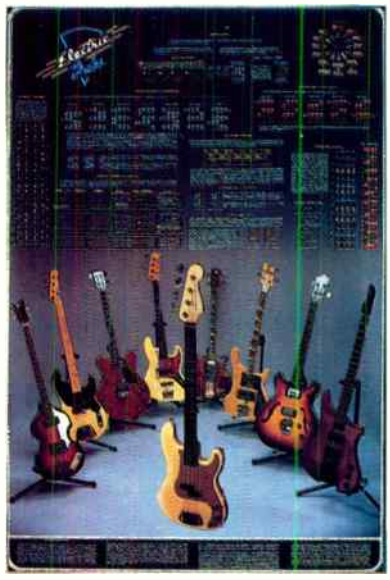

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Ralph Peterson

Triangular (Blue Note)

PETERSON IS the type of drummer that offends people. Playing loud, he'll fill all the cracks, goad soloists, push people around. That's the case here. Pianist Geri Allen, manhandled to the edge of the cliff and turning in her best playing on record, is extraordinary, shoving clusters and trills and clumping bass notes back at Peterson. It's empathetic, bravura music at its best, probing and serious, full of action, the sort of album that doesn't bog down in concept. It's about the excitement of playing, of swing and, ultimately, of on-the-spot creativity.

John Carter

Shadows on a Wall (Gramavision)

THE FIFTH AND FINAL album of a long piece, *Shadows on a Wall* is as problematic as the other four. Less written than stretched out, the suite, or whatever it should be called, ambles along at different tempos, letting occasional polyphony or indistinct riffs vaporize, then fade. Like Carter's fluid and elusive clarinet playing, his composing is indistinct, without much formal or melodic attack. In these corporate times, full of rushing around and getting things done, it's hard not to hear the elongated, empty character of these pieces as being somehow wasteful, which means that in a few years it might mean more than it does now.

Andrew Hill

Eternal Spirit (Blue Note)

ANOTHER BRILLIANT record. The band, which made its debut at the Knitting Factory last summer, combines the stately and precise rhythm section of Ben Riley and Rufus Reid with Bobby Hutcherson on vibes and Andrew Hill's own oblique, rainy-fall-afternoon playing and composing. But the story here is the group's saxophonist, Greg Osby: Rarely has a young player made such a vivid appearance in the company of his elders. Osby tears the stuff up. On a tune like "Pinnacle," with strange rhythmic stops and starts and odd chord changes, he carves out a melody, then flutters and charges and halts, takes care of another melody and juxtaposes abrupt phrasing with the steady swing of the rhythm section. There's an abstract beauty to his playing that's stunning, a new way of hearing the same old thing. Like the rest of the playing on the album, there isn't one cliché to be heard.

Kanda Bongo Man

Kwassa Kwassa (Hannibal)

PURE BLISS for those in love with the sound of guitars shivering and shimmying. With Ringo Star and Diblo on lead guitars, the lines wrap around each other tight. Flickering and repeating, the guitars drive the band, a display of the best of Zairian soukous musicianship. Kanda Bongo Man, nice soft voice, is no slouch either. The record is pure, non-stop dancing bliss, with choruses surrounding his voice and dancing bass lines lifting the band up, the drummer splattering sound in nicely rhythmic chunks.

REISSUE

Chet Baker

My Favorite Songs (Enja)

A COUPLE OF WEEKS before he bailed, Chet pulled himself together for a positively angelic performance with the Dutch Radio Orchestra. The recording quality itself is a technical marvel but Baker's flugelhorn has the tone of a polished pearl. Additional solos by altoist Herb Geller and pianist Walter Norris make this swan song the best of Chet's twilight years. It'll also make you forget *Let's Get Lost*.—*Kirk Silsbee*

Various Artists

Get with the Beat: The Mar-Vel' Masters (Rykodisc/Cowboy Carl)

THERE HAVE BEEN so many recent compilations of obscure but mediocre rockabilly (hi there, Marshall) that it's easy to bypass the class act of the bunch. Recorded in the late '50s and '60s in rural Indiana, almost every one of the 27 cuts apportioned to this CD is a flat-out gem. Harkening to western swing, the solos and rhythms have the fresh, singing quality that genre usually delivers, plus it rocks like crazy. One listen to Bobby Sisco's "Honky Tonkin' Rhythm" or Shorty Ashford's "Sweet Lucy" or Harry Carter's wild "Jump Baby Jump" and you'll believe.

—*Mark Rowland*

Richard Holmes & Gene Ammons

Groovin' with Jug (Pacific Jazz)

ONCE CONSIDERABLE stars, organist Holmes and saxophonist Ammons have become jazz footnotes, and their genre—small-combo lounge jazz drenched in oily blues—feels like an anachronism. Too bad, because it's gritty and swings harder than most of what's around today, a soulful brew meant to be performed in clubs like the one where this session came down in 1961. It's also the only session where Ammons' effortless melodicism locked into Holmes' fat Hammond rhythms—check out his solo on "Exactly Like You" and you'll understand how he got the name "Groove"—and that's too bad too. The good news is this CD reissue, preserving the fidelity of the occasion in sound and spirit.—*Mark Rowland*

INDIE

The Meat Puppets

Monsters (SST)

THEIR IDOLS? Billy Gibbons and Jerry Garcia. True emotional age of their voices? Prepubescent boys imitating Yes. (Guess they ditched their real flat voices, now that *this* record's songs lack tunes as counterpart to flatness.) The verdict? Ever since their masterpiece, *Mirage*, the Meat Puppets lost their musical oomph. If you don't own *Mirage*, buy it: "Love Our Children Forever" and "I Am a Machine" show what smart, heartfelt guys they can be. Or you could buy the recent SST reissue (SST 044 for lack of them inventing a title) of the Meat Puppets' first until-now-hard-to-get vinyl. A five-song single, its tangled-up punk howls and Minutemen-like brevity make up for their unfortunate decline.—*Jill Blardinelli*

Glass Eye

Hello Young Lovers (Bar/None)

THIS AUSTIN, Texas-based band's third album (not including EPs) confirms that Glass Eye is definitely an American original. The rhythms wobble and stutter without abandoning a 4/4 pulse; Brian Beattie's bass guitar often charges into the front; lyrics are merciless first-, second- and third-person examinations of states of mind. It adds up to a frontal assault musically. If you can stand it you'll probably love it.—*Scott Isler*

When People Were Shorter and Lived Near the Water

Bobby (Shimmy-Disc)

IN A YEAR in which the "tribute" album devolved from sincere homage to dubious intentions, *Bobby*—Goldsboro, that is—is refreshingly ambiguous. The raucous arrangements and casual vocals play up Goldsboro's neurotic motifs, making the LP hang together frighteningly well. And Goldsboro, by the way, is what the '60s were *really* like. (Jaf Box 1187, New York, NY 10116)—*Scott Isler*

David McKelvy

Hymns and Carols (Major Label)

THERE'S NO SHORTAGE of Xmas records to choose from, but chances are this is the best, perhaps only, collection of traditional tunes rendered on harmonica. McKelvy's tonal range is remarkable, his command tastefully lugubrious, and if the result occasionally resembles a soundtrack for "Little House on the Prairie," well, 'tis the season to let sentiment flow. (Box 661053, Los Angeles, CA 90066)—*Mark Rowland*

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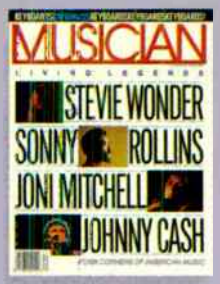
33
The Clash
Ronald Shannon Jackson

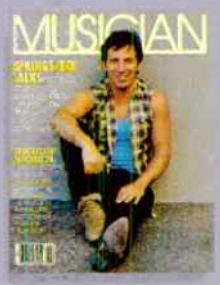


115
Stevie Wonder
Sonny Rollins, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Cash

99
Boston
Kinks, Year in Rock '86

84
John Cougar Mellencamp
Bryan Ferry, Maurice White

105
John Coltrane
Springsteen, Replacements



104
Springsteen
Progressive Percussion

109
George Harrison
Mick Jagger, Crazy Horse

71
Heavy Metal
Dream Syndicate, George Duke

118
Pink Floyd
New Order, Smithereens

BACK ISSUES

18...**Pat Metheny,** Dire Straits, Brian Eno
37...**Reggae,** The Rolling Stones, Rickie Lee Jones
45...**Willie Nelson,** John McLaughlin, the Motels
48...**Steve Winwood,** Steve Miller, Tom Scholz, Brian Eno
64...**Stevie Wonder,** Reggae 1984, Ornette Coleman
65...**The Pretenders,** Linda Ronstadt, Paul Simon, ABC
66...**Laurie Anderson,** Charlie Haden, Spinal Tap
67...**Thomas Dolby,** Chet Baker, Alarm, Marcus Miller
69...**Michael Jackson,** Charlie Watts, R.E.M., Rubber Radeo
70...**Peter Wolf,** King Crimson, Bass/Drum Special
71...**Heavy Metal,** Dream Syndicate, George Duke
74...**David Bowie,** Steve Marse, Sheila E, The Fixx
76...**Paul McCartney,** Rickie Lee Jones, Toto, Big Country
77...**John Fogerty,** Marsalis/Hancock, Los Lobos
80...**Phil Collins,** Joan Armatrading, Josef Zawinul
86...**Joni Mitchell,** Simple Minds, Hall & Oates
92...**Joe Jackson,** Bob Seger, John Lyndon, Chick Corea
93...**Peter Gabriel,** Steve Winwood, Lou Reed
97...**Eric Clapton,** Ric Ocasek, Paul Simon, Queen
98...**The Pretenders,** the Clash, Mick Janes
99...**Boston,** Kinks, Year in Rock '86
101...**Psychedelic Furs,** Elton John, Miles Davis
102...**Robert Cray,** Los Lobos, Simply Red
104...**Springsteen,** Progressive Percussion
106...**David Bowie,** Peter Wolf, Hüsker Dü
107...**Robbie Robertson,** Tom Petty, Big Guitar Special
108...**U2,** Tom Waits, Squeeze
109...**George Harrison,** Mick Jagger, Crazy Horse
112...**McCartney,** Bass Special, Buster Poindexter
113...**Robert Plant,** INXS, Wynton Marsalis
114...**John Lennon,** James Taylor, Robyn Hitchcock
115...**Stevie Wonder, Sonny Rollins, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Cash**
116...**Sinéad O'Connor,** Neil Young, Tracy Chapman
117...**Jimmy Page,** Leonard Cohen, Lloyd Cole
118...**Pink Floyd,** New Order, Smithereens
119...**Billy Gibbons,** Santana/Sharter, Vernan Reid
120...**Keith Richards,** Steve Forbert, Crawded House
121...**Prince,** Steve Winwood, Randy Newman
122...**Guns N' Roses,** Midnight Oil, Glyn Johns
123...**The Year in Music,** Metallica, Jack Bruce
124...**Replacements,** Fleetwood Mac, Lyle Lavett
125...**Elvis Costello,** Bobby Brown, Jeff Healey
126...**Lou Reed,** John Cale, Joe Satriani
127...**Miles Davis,** Fine Young Cannibals, XTC
128...**Peter Gabriel,** Charles Mingus, Drum Special
129...**The Who,** The Cure, Ziggy Marley
130...**10,000 Maniacs,** John Cougar Mellencamp, Jackson Browne
131...**Jeff Beck,** Laura Nyro, Billy Sheehan
133...**The '80s,** Studio Special
134...**The Grateful Dead,** Stevie Ray Vaughan, Paul Kelly

117
Jimmy Page
Leonard Cohen, Lloyd Cole

112
McCartney
Bass Special, Buster Poindexter

86
Joni Mitchell
Simple Minds, Hall & Oates

114
John Lennon
James Taylor, Robyn Hitchcock

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Sinéad O'Connor
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99 101 102 104
106 107 108 109
112 113 114 115
116 117 118 119
120 121 122 123
124 125 126 127
128 129 130 131
133 134

World Radio History

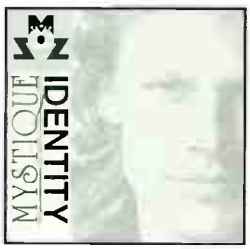
HOW TO BUY

[cont'd from page 83] as tightly as the finish bonds to the top," cautions Alvarez's Tom Presley. "The way a person should check for pulling up is to take a business card or a small piece of paper and slide it around the outer edge of the bridge. If the card doesn't slip under the bridge at any point, you should have a good bond there."

Also check the nut: that slotted piece up at the top of the fretboard that guides the strings over the fretboard as they come down from the tuning machines. The slots should be uniformly spaced and of uniform depth. See if the frets and tuning pegs are in good shape. The most desirable tuning machines are the closed-back or self-lubricating kind, where the gears aren't visible. Schaller, Grover and Gotoh are all good brands.

Whew, quite a lot to keep in mind, eh? Not to worry, though. Just remember that the process starts and ends with a very simple, fundamental attraction—just like marriage. The first thing you have to do is fall in love with the sound of a guitar. Ⓜ

SOUND SCULPTURE FOR THE 90'S



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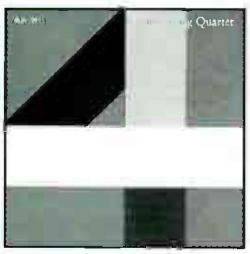

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ACOUSTIC METAL

[cont'd from page 70] thing."

"In a live situation," agrees Lardie, "a mike is very, very difficult. It kind of handcuffs you to sitting still." Consequently, he plans on using a transducer if he ever takes a big-box guitar—like the beloved Guild D-55 he uses in the studio—on the road. "I'll probably use the transducer with an L.R. Baggs pickup, which is connected to the bridge," he says. "It's a piece of foil that's connected to the bridge piece itself. There are no cuts in it, so it's a constant thing, very balanced." Even so, he figures he'll have to supplement the transducer with either an AKG C-451 or a Neumann KM-84 close mike to compensate for "the low-end resonance you really can't get out of a transducer."

Bratta, though, thinks it's silly even to attempt to approximate a studio-quality acoustic sound onstage. "If I sit down in the studio, maybe I'll bring a great-sounding Martin or something," he says. "But live, trying to get the sound of a really good Martin is useless. By the time we get through the pickups and the board and the P.A. system . . . with 20,000 people, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to get the sound." Ⓜ

THOMPSON

[cont'd from page 66] abashed, it seems. "Perhaps I'm wrong. I hope I am."

Not to worry: Thompson's practice regimen—or lack thereof—probably won't cut much ice with the Grand Ole Opry crowd either. "I'm quite lazy," he admits. "I sit in front of the TV and noodle and say, 'Aah, that's good.' I like sloppy guitar players. Occasionally I need guidance so I look at Ted Greene's *Arpeggios for Guitar* or something and work that in. I steal from jazz all the time; I can't play it but I borrow. Sometimes I get the craving for knowledge," he laughs. "But mostly I just play and see what happens.

"I do wish I was a cleaner player," he concedes. "I drop notes all the time. I have to convince myself that it's the style. But that's the great thing about the jazz and rock 'n' roll tradition—if you miss a note it's emotion. In classical music, if you miss a note, you've missed a note." Ⓜ

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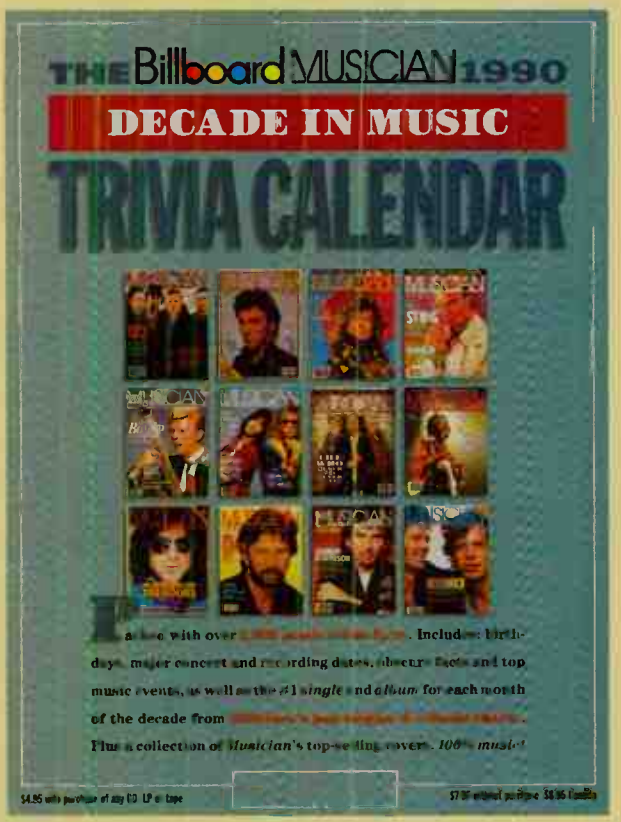

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AD INDEX

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SKAGGS

[cont'd from page 61] comeback, *White Limozeen*. "Ever since I'd worked with her on the original *Trio* project, I'd always wanted to work with her again, because there was something about Dolly's music that I wanted to hear a little more *guts* in it. Her country music has always been recorded kind of soft—that angelic, sad, broken-hearted woman. I wanted to hear her get in there and gut something out, like 'Why'd Ya Come In Here Lookin' Like That?' and 'Time for Me to Fly.' We originally thought about trying to do a bluegrass album—that was the word around town, which scared the record company to death—but we couldn't find the material we needed right now to do an all-acoustic or all-bluegrass album. And I felt that where she came from with the album previous to this to where she wanted to take it acoustically—very Smoky Mountain—would be too much of a leap."

Not for Skaggs, though. "I'll always love the rawness and purity of Appalachian music," he smiles. "An old man sitting on the back porch with two or three strings on a banjo—that's where it is."

BYRNE REVIEW

[cont'd from page 89] about Eternal Mysteries to a tropical beat.

Though ultimately disappointing, *Rei Momo* makes a logical progression after the Heads' African textures and Byrne's Brazilian compilations. Fifteen tracks spanning over an hour (on CD and cassette), it offers a generous survey of south-of-the-border rhythms, from samba and merengue to rumba and bolero. A massive supporting cast, including salsa faves Johnny Pacheco, Willie Colon and Celia Cruz, adds credibility, while the leading man displays respect and affection for his sources, incorporating tangy noises into his jumpy pop without stooping to wholesale Yankee pillaging. Restraint backfires, however. Missing both the celebratory spirit of the originals and the coiled tension of Byrne's best work, *Rei Momo* fails to generate many sparks.

Most of the cuts boast a bulky lineup that could have generated a big racket. "Don't Want to Be Part of Your World," for example, features 21 players, but you'd never guess it from the outcome. And Byrne sacrifices presence by curbing his anxious voice to fit lighter tempos. Gimme more yelps! Despite the subdued Steve Lillywhite–Byrne production, a few interludes of pleasure emerge, among them the swaggering brass fills of "Make Believe Mambo," the fiery Byrne-Cruz tradeoffs in "Loco de Amor" and Lewis Kahn's exuberant hoedown violin on "Independence Day."

Hot or cold, an often dour sensibility comes through. Pitting the artificial modern world against his beloved primal forces, "The Call of the Wild," "Good and Evil" et al. offer innocence, passion and dreams to ward off corrupt reality. The touching "Lie to Me" showcases Byrne's most heartfelt singing, as he pleads, "I wanna be happy, I can't stand the pain/I wanna believe, so tell me again." Elsewhere, alas, there's a nasty hint of contempt for the benighted, as "Dirty Old Town" and "Office Cowboy" suggest principle hardening into prejudice.

Not forgetting some striking melodies ("Carnival Eyes," "The Rose Tattoo"), *Rei Momo* mostly finds David Byrne pondering and pausing when he ought to be venting. Take that boy to the river, or wherever folks go to renew their creative juices these days.

—Jon Young

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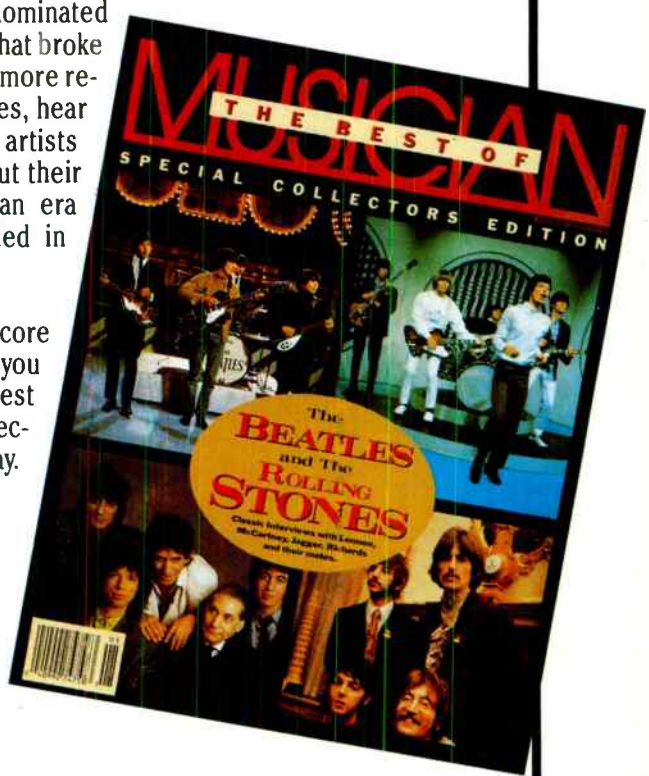

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BACKSIDE

1975—Carrack tries to help revive the career of the post–"Lucretia Mac Evil" Blood, Sweat & Tears. No David Clayton-Thomas, P.C. learned the hard way that what goes up must come down.

PAUL CARRACK—THE MISSING YEARS

If ever there was a journeyman pop singer, it's the regular guy of British rock: Paul Carrack. Yanks got their first dose of P.C. in 1974, when his song "How Long" was a big hit for Carrack's band Ace. Paul next popped up as Jools Holland's replacement in Squeeze. The album was 1981's *East Side Story*, and the song was "Tempted." It was all Squeeze ever let Paul sing, but it was enough. Another U.S. hit. Then he went underground again. When Carrack reappeared it was as a singer/keyboard player in Noise to Go, Nick Lowe's post-Rockpile group. Then came a Carrack solo album, and then—back to the big time in 1985 when Paul joined Mike Rutherford's Mike & the Mechanics. P.C. sang M & the Ms' several U.S. hits, including the number one single "The Living Years." Now Carrack's got a hot new, radio-ready LP called *Groove Approved*. But where was Carrack *in between* all these band gigs? *Musician* investigated and what we found wasn't pretty. It seems that Carrack never has been too particular about who he worked for—if a rock 'n' roll band was on the skids and needed a helping hand, chances were Paul Carrack was there with his fingers ready. Surprised? Don't be. Not every marriage is a success.

1977—After the Jackson Five had become the Jacksons, the hits stopped coming. Desperate, they recruited Carrack. Paul told them to forget about disco—the future was in jagged Pharoah Sanders-style Afro-jazz. It was a wrong move, and when Paul announced the band wasn't big enough for him *and* Michael, only Jermaine sided with the plucky Brit.

1982—Unable to express himself in a band dominated by Difford and Tilbrook, Carrack bolted Squeeze and brought his vision to something fresher than Beatlesque pub-rock. Carrack discovered A Flock of Seagulls—he was rumored to have named the band after nature's garbage collectors—and designed their whole image. He departed before the first album was released, though, when his thinning hair proved unequal to the task he had set for it.

1984—Get my dinner from a garbage can indeed! This trio of American greaseballs was taking London by storm when Paul offered to lend his famous Three K's—keyboards, kip and konnections—to the piano-less Stray Cats. Paul succeeded in soliciting the interest of pals Dave Edmunds and Keith Richards, but fell out with the other Cats in a dispute over the size of the synthesizer rigs he was using to sample those great old Carl Perkins sounds. Silver lining—it was through the Stray Cats that Carrack met Mike Rutherford, who was taking bass lessons from Lee Rocker.

Illustrations: Drew Friedman

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